Sturgeon County
Agribusiness and Agritourism Review Task Force
Minutes
July 6, 2021 6:00 p.m.
Through Electronic Communications

Task Force members in attendance:
Councillor Patrick D. Tighe, Councillor Wayne Bokenfohr (V. Chair), Tam Andersen, David Benjestorf, Andrew Rosychuk, Richard Boissonneault, Deb Foisy, Cathy Gilbert (Chair).

Unable to attend:
Mark Chuiko; Mayor Alanna Hnatiw (ex-officio

Sturgeon County Administration in attendance:
Natasha De Sandi, Planning and Engagement Officer; Jackie Sargent, Senior Communications Officer, Corporate Communications.

Consultants in attendance:
Courtney Laurence, Community Planner / Engagement Strategist, ISL Engineering; Hawley Campbell, Senior Consultant, Nichols Applied Management Inc.; Darrell Toma, Toma Consulting.

1. **Welcome and Introductions**
   - V. Chair called meeting order at 6:10 pm.
   - V. Chair placed a motion on the floor to adopt the agenda. Clr Tighe moved the agenda and D. Boissinneault seconded that motion.

2. **AARTF Process Update**
   - H. Campbell provided an update on work completed thus far by the consultant.

3. **Defining Agribusiness and Agritourism/Group Discussion**
   - D. Toma provided an overview of Agribusiness and Agritourism within the County and provided some background historically on agribusiness and agritourism within the region.

Opportunity for certifying agribusiness/agritourism operations

- Discussion brought forward regarding defining agribusinesses and agritourism activities and overall discussion regarding defining certification for each category of business.
  - Focused discussion on narrowing down what classifies agribusinesses with a standard which can be measured.
  - Opportunity to mimic existing programs, definitions, and approaches for defining agribusiness/agritourism within the County from areas in Alberta and other jurisdictions in North America.
  - Flexibility on criteria for classifying and defining agribusiness and agritourism practices should be considered to allow for both small and large agribusiness and agritourism operations.

What typical activities are part of Agribusiness and Agritourism uses?

- The selling of a product through production/ producer could be considered as agribusiness; selling an experience/ tourism activity would be considered agritourism.
- Delineating between both forms of operations is important for future certification and permitting.

Are Agribusiness and Agritourism activities similar to other land uses in the County? Which ones? Provide specific examples.

- Flexibility required on what land uses can be defined under agritourism and agribusiness should be considered as previously noted to incorporate all operation sizes.
- Discussion regarding the defining of agribusiness/ agritourism to be a permitted use under the current land use would be beneficial to help support how and where this may be implemented into land use.
- Discussion on location and permitting for agribusiness/agritourism operations should be considered.
    - Question posed to the group regarding potential agribusiness/agritourism park. Task Force noted the implementation of a park would defeat the purpose of visitors seeing the entire County (not just the park) and for existing farmers diversifying their company and tax base.

What type of contributions would agribusiness and agritourism operations bring to the County?

- Task Force discussed the contributions of value-added businesses within the agricultural sector and opportunities for diversifying tax base and bringing more foot traffic into the County.

4. **Opportunities and Challenges with Agribusiness and Agritourism/Group Discussion**

What are the challenges with attracting investment and developing Agribusiness and Agritourism in the County?

- Task Force discussed benefit to have a clear definition for both agribusiness and agritourism to help provide clarity for future funding and investment on a provincial, municipal, and private level.
- Challenges noted by the Task Force:
    - Internet
    - Unpaved roads (dust control, allergies, etc.)
    - Logistics
    - Cost of land
    - Access to good soil
    - Access to larger markets
    - Access to water and infrastructure
    - Access to capital funding
    - Building code challenges
    - Seasonality
    - Lack of access to experts or consultants in the field of agribusiness and agritourism operations

Are the current challenges for the sector specific to Sturgeon County or the Region?

- In response to the question posed by the consultant, the Task force provided the following comments:

- Challenges are not specific to Sturgeon County or the Edmonton Region.
- Sturgeon County has great opportunities for supporting youth in the labour force but may show challenges when looking for specific skilled labour.
- The lack of provincial services has created an impact on the sector.
- Connection to the larger market to put consumers and producers together. Task Force noted the importance and roll of AG societies and their roll in connecting producers and consumers to the market.

5. Comparator Jurisdictions

- The Task Force provided the following comparators for the consultant to consider when completing the review:
    - **Italy red rooster program**
    - **Quebec**
    - **Ontario (Prince Edward and Oxford Counties)**
    - **BC (Agricultural Land Reserve – Agricultural Land Commission)**
    - **Fraser Valley**
    - **Annapolis Valley**
    - **Lacombe County**
    - **Smoky Lake (pumpkin festival)**
    - **Consider comparisons that include both small and large scale operations**

6. Engagement Plan

- C. Laurence posed a question to the Task Force regarding some key stakeholders to speak to during the engagement sessions and comments on the overall approach.
    - September was identified as a less desirable time to do engagement.
    - Some initial stakeholders indicated by the Task Force are as follows:
        - 4 H clubs
        - Equestrian Community
        - Residents of Sturgeon County
        - Indigenous community
        - Destination Market Organizations
        - Young agrarians
        - Large scale farming
        - Associated Organizations related to agribusiness and agritourism
        - Youth community
        - High school/university/college students (Olds, Lakeland, NAIT) for future business operators, trade schools
        - Vendor/market organizers who can identify gaps/needs for their vendors
        - Regional neighbours

C. Gilbert put forward a motion to adjourn 7:52. A. Rosychuk moved that motion and D. Benjestorf seconded the motion.