

A Report to Council
Clarification on the Multi Purpose Agricultural Facility
Features and the Ramifications of many of Council's decisions

Presented by: Advisory Board Members (livestock breeders and exhibitors only)
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As the Multi Purpose Agricultural Facility moves forward it has become apparent that clarity on some components of the development will be useful, and necessary, for County Council. Council has specified certain criteria and it is, perhaps, without a full understanding of all the ramifications that will affect the ongoing and long term operation of this facility as a premier Ag Event Centre in Alberta and Western Canada.

As livestock industry experts, each in our own field of showing and exhibiting animals, specifically horses and cattle, we feel this facility can have a major impact on the agriculture industry, the community in the county, both from a huge economic driver and a robust and active centre which will serve to bring our urban and rural cultures together. This facility is certain to be a premier Ag Event Centre in Western Canada.

Following, are items to be discussed and some of the ramifications with each item ...

- **The concept of a year-round facility is outstanding.** This means the barns are connected to the main ring, which will offer safe and efficient flow of people and animals in all types of weather and in all seasons.

- **The overall size of the main ring is also outstanding.** It is a good size (135 x 360' approx.) This size of arena is large enough to facilitate excellent showing conditions for all livestock needs.

- **A concrete floor in the main indoor building.** While a concrete slab floor can be useful to facilitate events other than livestock events, there are some drawbacks.

- *the huge cost of that much concrete.* With the high costs of construction there would be a significant savings to have a dirt floor for the showing area and have concrete along one side in the area where there would be spectator traffic and where portable bleachers can be constructed.

- *for the non-livestock events laying down a subfloor over the packed dirt would provide versatility at a much lower cost.* The only downside would be that some large equipment coming in for trade shows (ie, some RV vehicles, tractors and pieces of heavy duty machinery) would be restricted to the large barn areas where there is a concrete floor. Further, since the barns will have portable stalls, which can be dismantled and removed, both barns could be rented out as separate spaces for other events.

- with a concrete floor, the cost of moving dirt in and out for livestock events is a messy and costly exercise.

- **a side note** ... even with the size of the workable space in the indoor arena, there will be limited space for seating. Livestock events are not typically spectator events and the amount of seating needs only to be around 500. We should not plan for events that will need to seat more than 1000, as the useable event space will simply not allow for it.

Important side note: There has been discussion about the many different events that could be held in this facility. It is important to understand that with livestock events there is dirt, dust and smell. The dirt can be removed at a cost. The dust and smell; not so much. One only needs to talk to Northlands about the issues they dealt with when trade shows or other non ag events followed livestock events when they ran the Agricom and other exhibition halls. Dust and Smell could curtail some other community events.

Another important side note: There is significant interest from the horse and cattle industry and the potential of this facility in Strathcona County. When Ponoka's Calnash Centre opened, they were booked 46 weekends of the year in their first year of operation with revenues after expenses of approx. \$17,000-\$20,000 per weekend. We need to be prepared that the same scenario is likely to play out here. There may not be many vacant days (weekends) ... branding this facility as one of the best Ag facilities in Western Canada.

Making the Event Centre RIGHT, right from the start:

- Council voted recently to adopt a conservative plan when more funds were requested. The idea which was accepted was for only one barn (150 stalls) and a campground, instead of a second barn (offering a total of 300 stalls). A facility with only 150 available indoor stalls is considered "below industry standards," even with the provision of setting up more stalls outside it would not be considered suitable for some groups currently considering the use of this facility. Stabling to accommodate 300 stalls should be considered a minimum number of stalls.
- The campground, without some kind of facility or centre to tie into it is not practical, particularly when you consider the enormous cost of grading, site preparation, new roads and servicing ... and we are told the camping area would be similar to the grass area at Calmar's centre. This is certainly NOT a campground travellers and visitors are going to be comfortable staying at for any length of time. It runs the risk of becoming "party central" for every young person in the Sherwood Park and Fort Saskatchewan area looking for a good place to congregate away from everyone. There is a reason why there are no campgrounds in Strathcona County.
- It is the recommendation of the livestock representatives of the Advisory Board that the event centre be made RIGHT and complete before developing the amenities, like the camping area. Let's do this one thing right, then, build on it. And, the second barn should

be able to be built for the same or fewer numbers of dollars as what would be spent on developing the campground (roads and grading etc.).

Layout of the Indoor and Outdoor Rings

- The current layout, as done by the county staff team, disregards the strong suggestions made by industry experts and is considered “below industry standards” for the following reasons ...

- currently, the unloading and loading of livestock has been allocated to one side of the barn(s), using three lanes for the vehicles and trailers to stop, line up and unload/load. Only accessing one side of the barns is impractical, unsafe and has the potential for serious traffic congestion. We are told the reason for this action is “esthetics” ... no visual distractions to the building from the public view in the parking lot out front of the building. There needs to be access to three sides of the barns for efficient and safe unloading and loading of animals. The concept of a circular drive on one side of the barns to deal with potential traffic and safety issues has been shared (a circular drive approach as in a major facility in Nampa Idaho).

Outdoor Rings

- the current layout of the outdoor rings has one large ring outside the backdoor of the main building. This is excellent! We have requested the second covered outdoor ring be moved from a location to the south, far away from the main arena, to up beside the outdoor ring by the main arena ... and have the two outdoor rings side by side. Most user groups will want to rent both outdoor rings and the main indoor arena. Having the two outdoor ring side by side and adjacent to the main indoor arena will allow for the efficient movement of livestock and people, to and from the barns to the outdoor arena arenas and to the various show rings being used at any time.

As well, having the outdoor covered ring closer to the barns provides the cattle people with a place to tie their animals outside at certain times. They have specific rules about their animals being outside for a number of hours per day and this arrangement of outdoor rings, particularly the covered outdoor ring, will facilitate this need.

- The county team feels that placing the covered outdoor ring away from the main arena, with it's own parking lot will somehow offer “local horse people” their own space. The main problem with this idea is that it runs the risk of discriminating against the “local horse person.” We feel strongly that ALL horse owners in Strathcona County need to given access to the complete facility. This can be easily accomplished through the operation, planning and scheduling of events, rather that trying to build something with the hope is satisfies the needs of a small group of potential users. The one aspect that the county team completely overlooked when analyzing “user” information early in the process is that there is a much larger “local” user group (information gathered in Horse Count 1998, 2004 and 2011). This is the group of local horse people who are more competitive and active in exhibiting their animals. This group was overlooked completely. For clarification, the advisory board will refer to the user groups as “local recreational users” and “local competitive users.” The larger “local competitive users”

would be elated with both outdoor rings being adjacent to the main arena and access to both sides of the barns for unloading and loading of animals and equipment.

- this layout will ensure a facility that is FUNCTIONAL, VERSATILE and ECONOMICAL and one that can be easily expanded as future needs may dictate. While there is some animosity towards the “local competitive user” it is a fact that if the facility works efficiently for this user group it will also work efficiently for any other user group. - the “local recreational user” would still have access to the outdoor covered ring with it up beside the other outdoor ring and adjacent to the main indoor ring, with parking directly beside/behind the ring ... all the same features as if was located out in the south pasture. This way they can feel a part of the facility and user community.

Closing thoughts

- there have been some questions about an adequate water supply. We understand it will be a trickle system – a horse show with 300 horses could consume as much as 10 gallons per horse per day ... 3000 gallons per day ... more than that for cattle.
- There has been no discussion about manure management and handling. The idea of only one side of barns having doors or access points for handling manure totally overlooks the locations for manure dumping.
- Overall communication between the county team and the advisory board remains sluggish. We were originally told we'd have a say in everything including what kind of door-knobs were to be used. Such has not been the case. This has many members of the board feeling the board exists merely for public perception. An effective advisory group would consist of experts being brought in prior to each stage for their input based on their expertise, rather than having a large committee commenting on all aspects of the project, particularly when they have no experience or knowledge for valuable contributions. And, their expertise would be honoured where ever possible.
- The county team continues to resist advice from industry experts, seemingly, to focus on esthetics of the buildings, rather than on the functionality of the whole facility. In fairness to the county team, livestock exhibitors would be happy to show their animals in a square box of a building as long as the footing is good, the ventilation is good and the stabling is safe and comfortable for the livestock. We have learned the county will always build what is “Big and Beautiful.” Big and Beautiful can consume large volumes of dollars that could be well spent on improved amenities for the facility as a whole.
- We believe consideration should be given to hiring a consultant who has the necessary Ag industry experience to oversee the development and construction of the event centre. The county team lacks the livestock experience to be effective in developing a facility that will meet the needs of livestock exhibitions and other multi purpose events.

THE CHALLENGE

With the county focus on Big and Beautiful, this facility becomes expensive. We believe this, in itself, causes the county team to focus on esthetics as a mandate from council rather than the functionality as a Multi Purpose Agricultural Centre to serve the Ag community.

- The existing layout the county team seems adamant on developing does not meet livestock industry standards (cattle and horse).

It is DECISION TIME ... Does the county desire a highly functional Multi Purpose Agricultural facility or a versatile shell demonstrating beautiful architecture to host public events and replace the Ag focus.

- The four of us, all livestock exhibitors with over 100 years of combined showing experience, believe in the concept of an Ag facility that is amazing and will put Strathcona County on the map. We have shared our passion for the concept of a truly functional Ag facility with the industry groups we represent. Should the county decide to continue with the county team's current plan it is important for our advisory board livestock members to receive a statement in writing explaining the reasons for discarding industry advice so that it can be shared with our respective industry groups. Our reputations are at stake.