

July 3, 2021

Re: Public Hearing Bylaw 33-2021 and Bylaw 34-2021

Members of Council,

As landowners whose agricultural property will abut Bremner Community 4, we wish to register our strong opposition to proposed By-laws 33-2021 and 34-2021. These bylaws will make possible the destruction of large tracts of the best farmland in Strathcona County and make farming on the adjacent lands more challenging.

Climate Crisis

At a time of climate crisis, that the county is choosing to destroy irreplaceable farmland that will only become more rare, is unconscionable. Also at risk are the livelihoods of farmers who depend on the land and who see their crop yields impacted by severe weather. Alberta is warming faster than other parts of the country (See the provincial government report, "Alberta's Climate Future.") We have witnessed startling proof of this in the recent blistering temperatures, water restrictions, and the destructive wild fires ravaging parts of the province. Strathcona County has a responsibility to take these dire circumstances into consideration when planning new development and to protect its irreplaceable farmland. We find it difficult to understand how the county can reconcile its actions with its own Agriculture Master Plan which states, "The conversion or fragmentation of large tracts of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses to accommodate growth will only be done as a last resort." This is not a "last resort" – this is a deliberate and reckless choice.

Population

There is no urgent need for a new community in Strathcona County. According to Stats Canada, "More residents left Alberta for other provinces than moved here in 2020. Alberta lost more than 2000 residents to other part of Canada in 2020. The final three months of 2020 marked the third consecutive quarter in which the number of people who left Alberta outpaced the total newcomers from elsewhere in the country. Since 2014, Alberta has experienced a net loss of 23,147 residents to the rest of Canada." ~ Calgary Herald, March 19, 2021

Where is the justification for pushing forward with new communities at the cost of irreplaceable farmland? It would appear that development is being led by developers who, having witnessed the downturn in the economy, see advantage in pushing forward with Bremner before the next municipal election. They see a chance to move forward while they still have a council friendly to their cause, and in several cases, councillors happy to accept their financial support. One need only study campaign disclosure statements to see how some campaigns were financed.

Agriculture Impact Assessment

It is our contention that council gave no credence to the findings of the Bremner Agriculture Impact Assessment when the areas of Bremner in question were targeted for growth. In fact, it

appears that many on council have not read the findings. Therefore, we'll provide some of the most crucial conclusions here:

“A broader regional discussion may be needed to address **the long term costs of lost ecosystem services provided by agricultural land** such as flood and drought mitigation, water and air quality regulation, wildlife habitat services and pollination. In cases where agricultural lands are converted due to low servicing costs for urban development, a cost analysis that looks at ecosystem services losses may change the overall cost of development in the long term. **What seems like a smart economic decision might not be.**

Ideally, the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Growth Plan would identify natural and agricultural lands for conservation, taking all factors into consideration so that firm direction on where growth should or should not occur, based on long term environmental, economic and social sustainability is provided. **Further work should also be completed** to determine the critical mass of agricultural land needed to sustain the agricultural industry in the region.”

Strathcona County has made unilateral decisions without taking into consideration the larger regional picture and the current climate crisis.

Specialized Municipality

Strathcona County's status as a specialized municipality is seen as a disadvantage by many rural county residents. “The coexistence of urban and rural areas within the jurisdiction of a single **municipal** government” simply means that rural areas provide a convenient land bank for the urban centre of Sherwood Park. Rural residents should not have to live under the constant, exhausting threat of unchecked, unwarranted, and unwanted development infringing on their right to peace, their livelihoods, and their choice to live in a rural area.

Conclusion

With a decision to approve these By-laws and move ahead with development on prime farmland, council will do irreparable harm to the current farm families of Bremner. Such a decision would also disrespect the generations who came before them and change forever the farming community they established. We ask that you do further research, that you recognize that much has changed since Bremner was first proposed some 15 years ago, and that you do **not** pass these By-laws.

One constant remains: The rich farmland of Bremner is still invaluable and still irreplaceable. Please do all you can to protect it.

W.H (Skip) & Lois Gordon

Sherwood Park, Alberta