

## **Priorities Committee Meeting\_Jul13\_2021**

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### **STRATEGIC INITIATIVE AND UPDATE**

#### **COVID 19 Recovery Task Forces Quarterly Update**

##### **Report Purpose**

To provide the Priorities Committee a quarterly update on the County's COVID 19 recovery efforts as well as to provide the interim Communications framework report.

##### **Our Prioritized Strategic Goals**

Goal 1 - Build strong communities to support the diverse needs of residents

Goal 5 - Foster collaboration through regional, community and governmental partnerships

Goal 6 - Provide facilities and services that are available and accessible to residents

##### **Report**

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every part of our community, from the way we live, play, learn and work to the way we interact, do business and access resources. Impacts have been far-reaching, closing facilities, schools and businesses, and causing layoffs, economic and financial instability, and mental, emotional and physical health challenges.

The health and safety of our community remains our top priority and guides the County's response and planning. As we adapt to the pandemic's challenges, we incorporate our learnings and innovation for both short- and long-term recovery and growth as a government and community.

These learnings, responses and innovation help the County remain a community of choice where residents can live, work and play, and businesses can establish themselves and grow with our community.

County Council and Administration have worked collaboratively to ensure that there is a coordinated, complete, and thoughtful approach to all facets of COVID recovery.

Following the final report of the three COVID Recovery Task Forces in April, Administration was directed to provide quarterly updates on the County's recovery efforts. Council also directed that Administration report on communication priorities that address the learnings from the pandemic, promote the County's ongoing recovery, and specifically include encouragement for new residents and businesses to locate in the County. This report addresses these matters as directed by Council.

##### **Communication plan**

Over the last 16 months, the County has continued to adapt its programs and services to meet the ongoing needs of our community while adhering to strict COVID restrictions and guidelines. Communications is the link between the community and the County, showcasing our departments' innovation and excellence and the best our community has to offer for residents, businesses and tourists.

Over the last year, we have upheld transparent and timely communication between the organization and the community, maintaining our reputation as a source of trust and truth in a dynamic and challenging time.

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Communications amplified provincial and municipal health and safety messaging to keep our residents safe, informed and supported. This was achieved through extensive, corporate-wide campaigns executed through digital and print mediums across the County, providing residents with information, tools and direction.

### **Pandemic impacts and learnings**

As the pandemic evolved, the County tailored campaigns and services to provide the community with information and direction on ways to support their physical health and mental health, local businesses and economy, and stay connected to each other.

### **Supporting the County's ongoing recovery**

Accessible programs and services provide residents of all ages, abilities and incomes with opportunities to stay connected and healthy through virtual, cultural, arts, mental health and fitness and wellness offerings. Counselling, mental health and navigation services adapted for online and telephone environments in order to continue supporting residents and meeting their needs, and programs and grants provide additional support including for those who have never faced exceptional circumstances like this before.

Maintaining outdoor spaces and increasing opportunities and access to recreation and outdoor activities for all ages and abilities provide additional mental and physical health supports, while adapting events like Canada Day and Celebration of Lights create hope, support and cultural and community connections.

Ongoing outreach with existing and potential business owners and monthly business-focused webinars have connected owners to provincial grants and helped them adapt and pivot their services.

The County's online business directory and support local campaigns executed through digital and print mediums provide local support and enhance awareness of local businesses for residents and tourists. The County's Activity and Travel Guide and weekend tourism itineraries not only support the County as a compelling destination to visit but highlight local businesses to strengthen our economy and increase consumers awareness.

### **Looking ahead**

The work of County staff to support residents, businesses and tourists and promote the County as a great place to visit, live and do business is extensive and ongoing, anchored in departmental strategies and goal such as those through the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy and the Recreation and Culture Strategy.

Campaigns, programs and services to help our community recover and adapt mentally, emotionally, financially and physically are underway and will continue through the summer and into the fall. In addition, the Community Safety and Well-Being Strategy is also being developed in consultation with community partners.

The current communications review and review of the County's strategic plan, as well as reviews of the County's response to the incident, will help the County and Communications narrow our goals and direction going forward. This alignment will best serve the County and its departments as well as the County's residents, businesses and tourists now and in the future.

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### **Updates on Various COVID Recovery Topics**

#### **Community Safety and Well-being Strategy**

Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Planning aims to increase crime prevention efforts, support COVID recovery and enhance well-being in Strathcona County. The RCMP and FCS presented to Priorities Committee earlier this year on options and possible next steps for developing a Community Safety and Well-Being Strategy for Strathcona County. The project is led by the CSWB Planning Steering Committee and partners expressed a strong commitment to the work and explored systems impacting safety and well-being. An update on the CSWB strategy was provided to the Priorities Committee on June 22, 2021.

#### **Violence, Trauma, and Suicide Prevention: A Community Response Protocol**

We continue the development of a community response protocol that guides how organizations will come together, increasing community safety, in prevention of and response to the threat of violence and instances of traumatic events, including suicide. Administration is working collaboratively with partners coming together to test protocol processes through table top exercises that mirror actual scenarios. The Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) level one training is scheduled in the fall and registration will be accessible to both staff and community partners.

#### **Strathcona County Community Trends Report, 2021**

The 2021 Community Trends report provides a demographic profile of Strathcona County based on available data. The Strathcona County Community Trends 2021 report was compiled by FCS to:

- Paint a data-driven picture of Strathcona County from a social sector perspective,
- Provide a data-driven profile of some County subpopulations and their experiences and needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and
- Outline and interpret available data to support assessment of community safety and well-being in Strathcona County.

The report was shared with Priorities Committee as part of the FCS business plan update on June 22, 2021.

#### **Community Recovery Vignettes**

As part of Emergency Social Services' COVID-19 response, this series of short, animated videos featured relatable characters experiencing psychosocial impacts of the pandemic, with the goal of cultivating viewers' empathy and destigmatizing the need for support. The vignettes highlighted simple yet effective ways we can support each other and ourselves through challenging times, as well as connection back to FCS services and supports, with almost 3800 link clicks where viewers chose to "learn more". Through Strathcona County social media platforms, these videos and campaign materials were viewed more than 500,000 times. Additionally, these videos were shared by community and provincial partners.

#### **Food Gift Card and Community Cares Program**

A Community COVID-19 grant from the Government of Alberta and Family and Community Support Services of Alberta was utilized to create a food gifts cards program. The Food Gift Cards program has now supported 159 families with \$38,475 in grocery gift cards since start of program in Oct 2020, with \$30,025 has been handed out since Jan 1, 2021. FCS is

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seeing a growing demand for the food gift cards and with \$10,000 remaining, at the current trajectory funds will be expended in 3-4 weeks. FCS is in contact with the province about any plans to renew the grant.

Alongside the food gift cards, the Community Cares Program provides funds for utilities and other essential expenses to support basic needs and has supported 27 families since January 1, 2021 for a total of \$13,375.

### **Bridging the Gap**

Bridging the Gap partners are exploring ways to this rent/mortgage supplement program to address the needs of more residents. The rent/mortgage supplement will help individuals and families sustain appropriate housing through temporary rental/mortgage assistance. Partners have learned from two years of experience and will incorporate best practices from St. Albert's model to inform program development.

### **Compassion Fatigue**

Addressing compassion fatigue is a priority to support staff who regularly experience exposure to community member's stories of hurt, pain and suffering. FCS will deliver a series of sessions on compassion fatigue to department staff and community partners. Municipal Enforcement and FCS are collaborating on the topic of compassion fatigue and supporting staff with vicarious trauma.

### **Community Connections**

The pandemic caused a significant shift in the everyday lives of County residents. The County recognized the need to promote a sense of community and connection through recreation and cultural programs. Efforts to adapt programming and provide new opportunities to help the community stay active and connected, included:

- supporting or hosting a series of events in alignment with gathering restrictions, such as Winter Freeze Festival, Family Day, Active School Challenge, Mayors Walk Run, virtual Arbor Day, modified summer events, and Seniors Wellness Day;
- increasing the availability of inclusive outdoor winter activities with access to equipment and adding more locations for skating, walking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing;
- creating and distributing ChooseWell kits containing materials and information to support recreation and mental health, as well as reduce barriers to recreate;
- delivering virtual programming and outdoor programming to residents; and
- supporting community organizations and partners to adapt to, and adhere with, Alberta Health guidelines.

### **Regional Session on COVID Recovery**

In February 2021, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Big City Mayors Caucus affirmed that municipalities will continue to be a central actor in future recovery efforts. With a municipal election this fall, it is critical to ensure that elected officials are well positioned to continue in their governance role when it comes to addressing COVID recovery. Strathcona County will be including a regional session on COVID recovery as part of its orientation plan. The session will focus on sharing information, leveraging regional learnings, and exploring opportunities to advance regional interests related to COVID recovery. A regional session would be open to elected officials from the 13 municipalities that participate as members of the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board. It is scheduled for November 10, 2021.

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### **Council and Committee History**

- June 22, 2021 Priorities Committee received an update on the Community Wellbeing and Safety Strategy.
- April 27, 2021 Council approved the following motion:
- THAT Administration provide quarterly updates to the Priorities Committee on the County's COVID-19 recovery efforts, including updates on programing and services, community supports, legislative changes, economic supports, and communications efforts.
- February 23, 2021 Council approved the following motions:
- THAT Administration provide a report in the third quarter of 2021, with an interim report in the second quarter, on a possible Communication Framework to focus on communication priorities that address the learnings from the pandemic, promote the County's ongoing recovery, and specifically include encouragement for new residents and businesses to locate in the County.
- THAT Administration conduct a regional and provincial scan to explore the measures taken in other municipalities related to governance and recovery related to the COVID-19 Pandemic and report to the appropriate Task Force by end of the first quarter, the report to include:
- Legislative and policy changes made, and measures taken, across the province, the region and beyond, including any pertinent examples from similar-sized municipalities; and
  - An assessment of interest in a regional conversation on sharing learnings in the response to COVID 19.
- November 24, 2020 Council received a progress report from the three Task Forces and approved "THAT by the end of the first quarter of 2021, Administration provide a report on options and possible next steps for developing a Community Safety and Wellbeing strategy for Strathcona County."
- July 14, 2020 Council approved the workplan for each of the three task forces.
- May 26, 2020 THAT Administration negotiate a contract on behalf of each of the three COVID-19 Recovery Task Forces for consultancy to develop workplans.
- May 12, 2020 THAT Councillors Tonita, Parks, and Botterill be appointed as Members to the Economic Resilience and Vision Task Force for a term commencing May 12, 2020 and continuing throughout the term of the task force, provided they continue to serve as a Councillor throughout the term of the appointment.
- THAT Councillors Delainey, Berghofer, and Lawrence be appointed as Members to the Citizen and Community Support Task Force for a term commencing May 12, 2020 and continuing throughout the term of the task force, provided they continue to serve as a Councillor throughout the term of the appointment.

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THAT Councillors Smith, Parks, and Anderson be appointed as Members to the Governance Advisory Recovery Task Force for a term commencing May 12, 2020 and continuing throughout the term of the task force, provided they continue to serve as a Councillor throughout the term of the appointment.

THAT Administration provide information to each of the three Task Forces on potential facilitators that could be available to support the Task Forces in preparation of initial workplans for Council's approval.

- May 5, 2020 Council gave three readings to:  
Bylaw 31-2020, COVID-19 Economic Resilience and Vision Task Force  
Bylaw 32-2020, COVID-19 Citizen and Community Support Task Force  
Bylaw 33-2020, COVID-19 Recovery Governance Task Force
- April 21, 2020 THAT by May 5, 2020 Administration provide bylaws and any necessary documents for the establishment of three Council Advisory Task Forces, with a proposed membership of three councillors and the Mayor as an ex-officio member on each of the three, for the following purposes:
- The Strathcona County COVID-19 Response Governance Advisory Recovery Task Force in order to provide strategic advice to council to ensure Strathcona County's coordinated response, recovery, and resilience during and after the COVID19 Pandemic event;
  - The Strathcona County COVID-19 Response Economic Resilience and Vision Task Force in order to will provide governance recommendations and advice to Council on economic resilience and vision in the context of the COVID – 19 Pandemic, support for business and industry, and support for the local economy generally; and
  - The Strathcona County COVID-19 Response Citizen and Community Support Task Force in order to provide advice to Council related to supporting the wellbeing of citizens and community groups and provide information to ensure Strathcona County's coordinated response, recovery and resilience during and after the COVID – 19 Pandemic.

### **Other Impacts**

**Policy:** n/a

**Legislative/Legal:** Council struck the Task Forces as Council Committees in accordance with section 145 of the Municipal Government Act.

**Interdepartmental:** The Task Forces are supported by several departments including Family and Community Services; Recreation, Parks and Culture; Communications; Corporate Planning; Legislative and Legal Services; and Intergovernmental Affairs

**Master Plan/Framework:** Social Policy Framework and Communications Framework

### **Enclosure**

- 1 COVID Update – Quarterly Report and Communications Framework Presentation