

Chapter 3.0 Highlights of Rural Dialogue & Recommendations

3.1 Analysis of Rural Dialogue

The Rural Dialogue Initiative represented a significant initial effort to develop a baseline understanding of rural communities throughout the Peace River region. In this project, input was received from approximately 239 individuals through a combination of the community workshops (109 participants) and rural surveys (130 participants). The responses were categorized according to the strengths/values that rural landowners and residents consider important to maintain, the challenges or obstacles they would like to overcome, and the issues they would like to see managed through the policies, plans and zoning bylaws being proposed by the Regional District. A further seven submissions from the public were also obtained with specific comments from those individuals.

The representatives of First Nation governments (18 participants) in the Treaty 8 region provided well informed and concrete input regarding their communities' needs, objectives and concerns. The Rural Dialogue presented an opportunity to exchange information; that is, for First Nation's staff and leadership to learn more about B.C. regional districts, the PRRD and the Rural Plan in particular, and in turn for the PRRD planning staff to learn about the functions of the participating Treaty 8 First Nation communities. While making clear an understanding of the PRRD's limited ability to address off-reserve land-use issues, the First Nation meetings provided guidance for addressing various community service objectives, and ways of strengthening working relationships between the two levels of government.

Focus groups and key informant interviews provided important insight into specific sectors of interest for development of the rural community plan. They were particularly helpful in providing background on the sectors, understanding of current situation and emerging trends in those sectors, and suggestions for how the PRRD might better accommodate their interests in the formulation of rural regional policy.

The information from the rural and First Nation communities covered a range of relevant topics - from site-specific to region-wide. Detailed review and analysis of the input will be required in the policy and plan development stage to determine how best to accommodate both present, and long-term concerns, interests and needs of rural landowners. Given the range of response, the magnitude of input received and geographic scope of the rural dialogue, we have not attempted to distill the findings into a comprehensive set of findings and recommendations. Rather, in the following set of tables we have undertaken a review of all rural dialogue inputs, and summarized key response categories according to the following three framework objectives:

- to highlight rural community land-use & development priorities that appear common to the target rural areas;
- to present the range of policy emphases that were stated, implied or recommended in the dialogue process, and suggested strategic objectives for addressing those policies;
- to identify key information needs or indicators requiring further examination or verification to support proposed planning objectives.

In presenting this framework (Table 3.1), our objective is to present a non-exhaustive checklist of rural public priorities, possible policy options and monitoring measures in response to issues they now consider important, or that they perceive as emerging issues that need to be managed on a local or regional basis. The challenge, of course, in the next stage of plan development is determining and substantiating which issues are most likely to impact – either alone or in concert - on the quality of life and livelihoods of rural residents and First Nations people while managing for ongoing economic growth, and industrial expansion throughout the rural Peace region.

There are various statistical parameters that can be examined to verify, or at least indicate long term land-use and community development pressures. For example:

- rural population characteristics by age, household size can determine demands for institutional uses and community facilities;
- changing levels of gross-farm receipts by no. of farms suggest possible changing demand for various types and sizes of agricultural land holdings;
- levels of farm capitalization can predict degree of land consolidation;
- spatial density of oil & gas activity in relation to populated rural areas can indicate for the extent of potential environmental conflicts;
- trends in off-farm employment, new rural business starts, or changing forms of agricultural production may suggest demand for expansion, or creation of new types of rural land-use zones.

More in depth analysis through in-house, subcontracted or student research, could also be undertaken using statistical trend data to project how the impacts of various issues may be lessened, or exacerbated over time.

In presenting this summary analysis we have not investigated how the PRRD may be already addressing the listed community priority, nor have we conducted a detailed review of land-use policies and objectives to determine what changes might now be required to address new or emerging issues. That will form part of the next phase of work in the Rural Plan development process. It is also likely that many of the suggested policy initiatives and monitoring measures have been practiced by the PRRD for several years without any need for change based given the rural public's continuing priorities (e.g. regarding quality of life, community service objectives). Still, upon closer examination, the Dialogue findings combined with supplementary community and land-use research may reveal the need for wholesale revisions to policies and objectives that may be now leading to increasing conflict (e.g. non-agricultural uses or environmental "enhancement" objectives that impede agricultural operations).

TABLE 3.1 Analysis of Rural Dialogue Response		
Key Response Category	Recommended Policy Thrusts & Strategic Objectives	Information Needs and Possible Indicators
Agriculture		
Agricultural land preservation	- develop position on highest and best use of agricultural land	- rates of land conversion (acreage) to other uses (industrial, settlement)
	- review agricultural land zoning to ensure all agricultural uses are allowable within the ALR - review of ALR boundaries and reclassify if necessary - identify areas of marginal agricultural land for rural subdivision - potential for urban/rural buffer zone	- trends in no. of residential lot & subdivision applications per 1000 acres of agricultural land - aerial extent of marginal agricultural land in urban-fringe areas selected by severe limiting factors (e.g. steep slope, erodibility)
Right-to-farm	- reaffirm policies on protection of agricultural enterprise in rural areas	- number of annual complaints for infringement of Agricultural Practices Code
	- consider value of full-time "agriculture advocate" position for improved enforcement - policies and programs to increase public understanding, awareness & respect for Peace region agriculture	
Economic viability	Policies to promote viability of agricultural enterprise (balance of both family & corporate farms)	- document extent of agricultural land intensification in terms of size, capitalization, livestock no.'s per farm - extent of demand and prices paid for range of agricultural land-use zones in rural commuting area - number and extent of new Crown grazing tenures - rate of land conversion at forestry-private land interface
	- facilitate access to land for agricultural expansion (both crop and grazing lands) - facilitation of value-added diversification with minimum levels of income from agriculture production - support for supply management systems, and rural co-operatives - facilitation of local food production, and processing - review of secondary road planning to facilitate coordinated access into interface lands - review of land-owner liability for moving stock off Crown pasture0	
Agricultural land resource mgt.	- review of resource mgt. policies to assess compatibility with agricultural production (e.g. wildlife mgt., wetland development, waste disposal)	- determine aerial extent of vacant agriculture land by land-use, tenure and land management practices
	- regular review of agricultural sector needs in provincial resource-use plans - support for adequate enforcement of weed control practices in rural areas by both land-owners, and industrial users - support for protection of farm water supplies from upstream industrial activities - encourage adoption of soil and water conservation practices	
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Key Response Category	Recommended Policy Thrusts & Strategic Objectives	Information Needs and Possible Indicators
<i>Rural Economic Diversification</i>		
Land-owner rights	Support for rural land-owners surface rights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - equitable treatment of surface and sub-surface rights - advocate principle of landowner notification of pre-tenure land sales - annual monitoring of rural Oil & Gas Liaison position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - document & monitor no. of rural complaints regarding oil & gas developments, - success in issue resolution & improved decision-making, etc.
Rural diversification	Support for compatible forms of rural economic development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensure protection and freedom to pursue home-based businesses - facilitate expansion of value-added rural enterprise e.g. tourism, small-scale forestry, retail/processing/services - support rural diversification and marketing strategies - promote strategies for cross-border business competitiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - investigate levels of rural income and regional expenditures - determine growth in secondary incomes
Rural industrial & commercial development	Recognize community need to understand cost & benefits of industrial & commercial development proposals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensure effective communication with rural communities on diversification proposals - ensure adequate technical capacity for undertaking project impact assessments - appropriate zoning & setbacks for rural industrial/commercial development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5 yr trends in demand for commercial & industrial lots by electoral area
Rural tourism	Recognize importance of rural 'front-country' tourism industry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - facilitate development of rural tourism: infrastructure, zoning, support services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - examine trends in new rural business start-ups & potential growth
Land-Use Compatibility	Promote forms of land-use that protect adjacent property values <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - review set-backs for industrial land-uses to minimize externalities (i.e. aesthetics, environmental, health) 	
Rural infrastructure	Commitments to maintenance and investment in rural economic infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - annual reviews of rural road maintenance/development needs - annual reviews of community infrastructure needs (communications, power, gas, water) 	

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Key Response Category	Proposed Policy Emphasis & Strategic Objectives	Information Gaps and Possible Indicators
<i>Environment</i>		
Industrial development impacts (odours, noise, water)	Commitment to protect rural environmental values	- mapping of H ₂ S well locations in relation to residential areas
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensure adequate monitoring & reporting to rural communities on environmental compliance of O/G industry - improved planning to avoid duplication of infrastructure - facilitative role in project-specific, & cumulative environmental assessments where required - establish minimum setbacks (e.g. 1 km) of H₂S wells from residential areas - advocate for highest standard of environmental technology by industry 	
Protection of environmentally-sensitive areas	Support for designation of new local ESA's	- map of all local ESA's within PRRD
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seek protection of key local ESA's through zoning, guidelines & community mgt. - actively promote adoption of Lakeshore Development Guidelines 	
Rural water quality	Commitment to protect rural water supplies	- mapping of community water sources & rural community watersheds
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - advocate for 'watershed-based' rural land-use planning - designate community watersheds & water source protection where required - review consistency of set-back provisions between current zoning & environmental farm planning practices - facilitate reporting on annual testing of rural water supplies (surface & ground surfaces) 	
Problem wildlife	Consider policies to promote intensive wildlife management	- trends in ungulate populations, harvesting rates in rural WMA's
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - review LRMP objectives to manage wildlife populations - facilitate wildlife corridor planning along key drainages - review regulations to preserve opportunity to hunt, implement culling programs - advocate for more conservation officers in PRRD - increase service for wildlife carcass removal on roads and dumps 	

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Key Response Category	Proposed Policy Emphasis & Strategic Objectives	Information Needs & Possible Indicators
<i>Social & Recreation</i>		
Rural community population trends	Maintain up-to-date demographic profiles of community for regional & local planning purposes - provide demographic profiles & trend analysis to assist rural community groups in local planning	- document changes and trends in rural community migration by age group
Family recreation opportunities	Commitment to maintain range of family recreation opportunities - designation of green-space for family use (trails, parks, camping, etc.) - maintain existing regional parks - maximize use of existing social & recreational facilities	- rural recreational use, and out-of-region recreational travel patterns
Need for control of off-road vehicles	Facilitating off-road recreational vehicle use - identify areas for off-road use where required	
Control on trespass by recreational users	Promote awareness of need for respect of rural properties - work with AAC to develop awareness campaign	
Maintain use of existing institutional uses	Ensure provision of adequate land for community institutional uses - identify long-term needs for institutional use in association with representative community groups	- analyze demographic trend data on family structure to anticipate future institutional use demand
<i>Community Facilities & Services</i>		
Residential land	Ensure sufficient supply of new residential land where required - determine demand for new residential land	- establish regional & local trends in real-estate unit sales & demand
Residential services (e.g. gas, fire, hydro, cellular telephone, water)	Commitment to provide cost-effective utilities/services as agreed by community - complete inventory of community service needs and priorities - communicate utility service plans to representative rural organizations	- compile utility service expansion plans
Loss of rural schools	Support for maintenance of rural schools based on feasibility & community demographics - maintain information-sharing with School Boards on rural school use and long-term needs - facilitate access to information on alternative solutions for maintaining rural schools	- maintain data on rural school student populations & projected demand
Solid waste disposal & recycling	Provide cost-effective solid waste disposal & recycling services as agreed by community - monitor use & effectiveness of solid waste facilities (e.g. # /type of bins, fees, maintenance) - facilitate development of rural recycling programs	- monitor numbers of complaints regarding waste disposal facilities - monitor participation level of rural recycling facility use
Rural policing	Commitment to meet rural community policing needs - identify problem areas for policy (e.g. traffic speeding) and request periodic patrols	- review rural policing response data in rural areas

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Key Response Category	Proposed Policy Emphasis & Strategic Objectives	Information Needs & Indicators
Community Facilities & Services (cont'd)		
Senior's care	Support for adequate rural senior's health care (facilities, programs) - facilitate communication between responsible agencies on long-term facility/program planning	- review demographic profile to determine long-term demand for senior's care
Cemeteries	Commitment to ensure all rural communities have access to local cemetery - complete inventory of cemeteries, current conditions & need for new sites	- investigate long-term demand for rural cemeteries
Roads & Infrastructure		
Rural Roads	Commitment to maintain rural roads & economic infrastructure - communicate annual road, and road-side maintenance plans to rural communities - facilitate access to gravel for local/domestic use - advocate for coordinate industry access planning in consultation with rural communities - advocate for highest standards of rural road improvement/new construction (e.g. width, grade) - review rural road dust control program to ensure priority situations addressed	- maintain regional profile of rural road improvements & new construction to determine gaps in service
Railway	Commitment to maintain railway service for rural communities - advocate for maintenance of rural rail lines from Peace region to major ports	- monitor annual railway shipment levels, and value
Quality of Life & Safety		
Right to maintain quality of life	Commitment to preventing rural quality of life values from being irreversibly degraded by industrial encroachment - implementation of appropriate set-backs & sighting of oil & gas activities in consultation with rural communities - develop requirements for industrial use of noise, odour, air dust emission reduction technologies	- trends in real-estate sales in areas affected by industrial encroachment
Minimization of safety & health hazards	Commitment to provide adequate rural health & safety measures (industrial, recreational users) - ensure completion and regular reviews of local emergency response plans - annual reviews of rural public safety & hazard issues for both rural residents and livestock - facilitating appropriate rural road speed signage & police patrols where required - enforced controls of off-road recreational vehicles (noise, excessive speed, damage to property) - posting of littering laws - increased rural policing patrols - conduct annual review of 911 system effectiveness	- reported incidences of safety hazards (e.g. spills, emissions, rural traffic and off-road vehicle accidents)

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Key Response Category	Proposed Policy Emphasis & Strategic Objectives	Information Needs & Indicators
Quality of Life (cont'd)		
Aesthetics	Commitment to protect rural quality of sight - use of guidelines and/or bylaws to control unsightly properties as required - facilitate implementation of view-shed protection planning by industry	- monitor no. of complaints regarding visual quality by area
Impacts from recreational users	Support for pursuit of rural recreation that respects community values & the rights of private property owners - controls of off-road recreational vehicles (noise, speed, land damage) - posting of littering laws - increased rural policing patrols	- monitor no. of complaints of off-road vehicle trespass, property damage and other disturbances
Governance		
Local autonomy	Support and resources to enable increased local decision-making for community development - undertake annual reviews to determine level of satisfaction in rural representation	- conduct and evaluate periodic rural service satisfaction survey
Public consultation	Commitment to ensure adequate public consultation on all regional district matters - ensure adequate notice, and awareness of public consultation functions	- monitor levels of public participation in response to changing notification methods

3.2 Reflections and Recommendations

In reviewing the issues and objectives of rural people in the Peace region, it is clear that many external forces are shaping their quality of life, natural surroundings, and the built form of their communities. Managing regional change will continue to become even more challenging as it's long-held "sense of frontier" merges with the complex demands of global trade and external decision-making. This can be readily seen as the region's gas resources are developed, its population expands, farmland consolidation and vertical integration continues, and international market forces impact upon local resource enterprise – just to name a few of the obvious factors currently at play. Tracking such a range of indicators for the entire rural region is a daunting task and may require greater internal capacity, or a new alignment of regional government resources. The shift in approach towards 'strategic thinking and planning' that is being cultivated within the region, in effect replaces the historical, comprehensive-based planning model that tries to fully capture and manage the "present" but often fails to adequately consider and manage for possible "future" development scenarios. The strategic planning model which has informed the design and delivery of this Rural Dialogue and Plan Initiative should have lasting benefit by enhancing the ability of decision-makers and managers to address evolving community issues and service needs.

Implicit in the results of our Dialogue is the need for ongoing monitoring of social, economic, and environmental impacts upon rural and First Nation communities. Considerable emphasis in the consultation process was placed on the need for management of the natural resources upon which the region's population depends. Particular concern was expressed about the need to ensure adequate supply of quality water. Concern for watersheds, country food areas, and air-sheds will require a much greater level of interagency co-operation than may be currently possible through narrow legislative mandates. In continuing to strengthen its role in supporting rural community development, we suggest there will be a need for:

- extended in-house 'intelligence-gathering' capacity to effectively research and monitor key trends, track sectoral developments, etc.;
- increased intergovernmental communication mechanisms to monitor regulatory and public service initiatives;
- expanded rural and First Nation community liaison to strengthen working relationships and promote increased local decision-making.

One key informant interview illustrated this point well, when he pointed to the fact that the introduction of coal-bed drilling, and year-round oil & gas drilling operations were not even considered a few years ago when regional Land & Resource Management Plans were developed. The same, of course, can be said about existing rural Official Community Plans and Zoning Bylaws, thus giving further example of the need for the new planning initiative.

The Rural Dialogue yielded a tremendous amount of information, and was generally successful in enabling the participation of rural residents. The process provided an opportunity for many to vent their concerns, express their fears and hopes, and articulate their needs. While we found many participants who questioned the value of long-term planning for fear of being even more regulated, they were generally willing to give this initiative a chance to demonstrate its benefit. We are confident, that the extent and quality of public inputs presents an accurate reflection of the values, priorities, challenges and

anticipated needs for a representative cross-section of the rural population. We are confident that this Dialogue will enable the next stage of policy and plan development to proceed on a solid foundation of public participation and understanding.

For follow-up analyses and further public dialogue, we offer the following suggestions to ensure even greater participation, and more importantly, effective feedback on draft planning outputs:

1. Maintain use of the Rural Newsletter to update citizens on work being done by the PRRD in relation to the Rural Community Plan;
2. Increase involvement of local media (radio, television, print) to communicate the results of the Rural Dialogue, solicit further participation, and ensuring ongoing public feedback;
3. Consider inviting a few rural residents from each of the three electoral areas to form, or join an existing PRRD Advisory Committee to counsel development of the Plan;
4. Clarify and articulate goals concerning “growth management” for the Rural Community Plan.
5. Undertake a comparative analysis of the “anecdotal” results with the Data Collection component that has been pursued in tandem with this consultation (e.g. community profiles, statistical analyses, GIS mapping activities) to determine any additional information gaps or topics of enquiry that might be addressed through supplementary investigations or public consultations;
6. Implement a workshop with provincial government agencies to consider key agency developments (policies, programs, initiatives) that are relevant to the design of the Rural Plan and Zoning Bylaw, and maintain a “Working Group” for ongoing input;
7. As part of the next phase of community and First Nations meetings to review draft Plan documents, provide opportunity for “hands-on” mapping exercises that can be used to delineate the various forms of land-use designations considered by rural residents.

It was indeed a challenge in gathering, and presenting the rural public’s “message” concerning the future of their communities. We trust that this work will represent an important new plateau in rural community relations, and in achieving sustainable rural community development.