
Peace Region Rural Dialogue

A Report on Public Consultations for Development of a

Rural Community Plan & Zoning Bylaw



Prepared for
The Peace River Regional District

by
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Peace Region Rural Dialogue – A Report on Consultations for Development of a Rural Community Plan & Zoning Bylaw

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Disclaimer: The information and recommendations provided in this report represent a preliminary exploration of rural community and First Nation issues and needs. While a considerable amount of useful input was received during the consultation process, it reflects a relatively small sample of the total rural population in the target areas and is intended to guide policy development of a draft Rural Community Plan & Zoning Bylaw. It is understood that follow-up consultations will be held upon completion of that draft report. While every effort was made to accurately record participant comments, any errors or omissions in this document are the responsibility of InterraPlan Inc. The views expressed in this report are also those of the author, and are not necessarily shared by the Peace River Regional District Directors or Staff.

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My sincere appreciation goes out to all the rural residents who took time to participate in the consultation activities, and to the individuals who contributed their expertise and insight as key informants. It was a challenging but rewarding effort to gather your concerns, ideas and aspirations. I trust this dialogue will result in a plan that will have lasting benefit in protecting important lifestyle, livelihood and landscape values long cherished, and shared by so many people throughout the Peace River region.

Reg C. Whiten, InterraPlan Inc. Moberly Lake 16-01-04



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Executive Summary

The Peace Region Rural Dialogue was a public consultation initiative of the Peace River Regional District that was implemented during the period April to December, 2003. Its objective was to gather the input of rural residents as a preliminary task in developing a Rural Community Plan and Zoning Bylaw for Electoral Areas B, D, and E. InterraPlan Inc. of Moberly Lake was retained to develop and implement a rural consultation plan that included community workshops, First Nation meetings, individual submissions, key informant interviews and rural community survey.

During the project, there were 109 registered participants in the 9 public workshops, 130 individuals who completed a rural community survey, and 24 people interviewed as key informants with specialized knowledge of 10 rural sectors. Delegates from 4 Treaty 8 First Nation communities also participated in the Dialogue, and another 7 individual submissions were received. We also note that the consultation process placed particular emphasis on the needs of the agricultural sector.

This report summarizes the many comments and responses that flowed from the Rural Dialogue process. Information has been presented in its raw form so as to capture the candid nature of the input received. The main body of the report consists of a record of rural community workshop discussions, the summaries of three focus group discussions, four First Nation meetings, and individual submissions. The detailed results of our rural community survey results are then presented, with graphic representations of the data to facilitate a sub-regional comparison of various land-use and community development issues. We conclude with a summary analysis of key issues, and recommendations for further work.

Overall, the Rural Dialogue can be regarded as a successful effort to gauge the concern and needs of rural communities and participating First Nations at this point in time. Through the public consultation and survey, rural residents were invited to:

- Identify the present strengths or values that rural residents consider important, and want to protect in their community;
- Reflect on the current, emerging and/or potential issues affecting their communities;
- Consider current, and future community needs or opportunities

Since the input received ranged in detail and geographical scope, an analytical framework was created with six general content themes to enable sub-regional and community comparison in the next phase of rural policy and plan development. They were as follows:

Agriculture (i.e. agriculture related land-use and management)

Rural Economic Diversification (i.e. industrial, commercial & retail, home-enterprise & related land-use)

Environment (i.e. protection and/or management of water, air, soil, & wildlife)

Social & Recreation (i.e. social, recreational, heritage etc.)

Community Facilities & Services (i.e. community institutional use, roads, services, utilities)

Quality of Life, Safety (i.e. rural lifestyle, health & well-being, aesthetics, physical hazards & governance)

Consultation Highlights

Several notable results and many common themes stand out in reviewing the various outputs of the Rural Dialogue process. When asked about what they valued or considered strengths of their communities, Peace Region rural residents expressed strong sentiment about many features they would like to see preserved:

- ✓ **Autonomy:** "...individual freedom ...freedom to raise family according to your own values and way ...less government & red-tape...Landowners' right to choose and determine the best use of their land"
- ✓ **Agriculture :** "...agricultural land reserve protects agriculture...available land for farming (cattle ranching, grain farming, community pastures)...ability to produce good food...right-to-farm legislation...ability to subdivide for family home sites...people usually responsible for caring for their land"
- ✓ **Lifestyle & amenities:** "...having my own land and space...quiet spaces...privacy ..low population density...room for new neighbours...recreational opportunities..parks
- ✓ **People:** "...hard working ... independence of the people ...good work ethic...self-reliant ...low crime rate... respect for private property"
- ✓ **Environment:** "...people appreciate the land ...attractiveness of wilderness...clean environment...healthy air quality...good ground and surface water"
- ✓ **Community Development:** "...simplicity of relationships...neighbourly care...strong community spirit...ability to get together...diversity or communities... cooperation...strong family ties...support for seniors...young families coming back....high rate of volunteerism"
- ✓ **Economy:** "...farming and rural way of life...affordable land and taxes...stability of agricultural livelihood...industry jobs...diverse economy...proximity to urban centres for shopping...land available for foreigners...source of skilled labourers and expert knowledge"
- ✓ **Services & facilities** "...post-office...churches...schools...garbage...telephone ...heritage buildings...community hall...fair grounds...road upgrades.

From the results of the Peace River rural survey and workshops, a set of issues that we found common around the region were as follows:

- Farm and rural water supplies:** - both quantity and quality to support agricultural enterprise, and rural communities; *related issues:* concern about competition with industry (e.g. coal-bed methane water extraction, produced water contamination, aquifer fracturing); lack of watershed-based land-use planning, water course diversion & flooding;
- Oil & gas industry impacts** – concern about threat on rural quality of life; lack of monitoring of environmental and health effects on both residents and livestock, and inadequate setbacks in locating oil & gas facilities/infrastructure (e.g. of sour gas flaring, fracturing of farm aquifers, excess noise, dust, land waste disposal); *related issues:*

quality of life infringement, level of advance communication on subsurface right sales, and environmental assessment; lack of effective emergency response plans;

- ❑ **Viability of agricultural enterprise** - particular concern about industry entry by young farmers, and viability of small farms versus corporate farm amalgamation; related issues: protection of right-to-farm, lack of public awareness; increasing regulation on farm environmental practices; supply of viable land-size units; support for agricultural enterprise diversification; cost of increased farm regulation & liability protection; support for supply management system and co-ops; need for more local food production & security;
- ❑ **Land-use management**: - land-use planning to protect agriculture and control infringement e.g. control of rural residential sprawl, industrial encroachment that conflicts with some types of farming; related issues: hunting & recreational user trespass, weak interagency communication and coordination on private/Crown land management; need for protection of small wetlands, lakes and shorelines
- ❑ **Agriculture Land Reserve boundaries** – review of boundaries, some flexibility for subdivision on marginally-productive lands, while protecting better productive land and considering impacts (fragmentation, land prices) resulting from residential subdivision;
- ❑ **Weed monitoring and control** - particularly on absentee land-owner lands; related issues: right-of-way maintenance by utilities and industry;
- ❑ **Wildlife & farming conflicts** - ineffective hunting regulations, need for local control options, compensation for crop damage & loss, control over trespass by hunters;
- ❑ **Rural roads** - construction standards, maintenance and improvements to support; concern for road safety, agricultural producers and rural residents; need for coordinated planning;
- ❑ **Rural recreation** - concern about closing of family recreation areas, or access; concern for lack of youth recreation facilities;
- ❑ **Rural representation/government regulations**- increasing rural taxes, rural political representation system not adequate due to large areas & urban area bias; more government regulations and regulations affecting rural lifestyle;
- ❑ **Rural economic diversification** – inadequate supply of rural acreages; lack of support for non-conventional rural economic development within ALR (e.g. agri-tourism, small-scale forestry, organic farming); concern about loss of resource revenues and employment out of region; industry not paying enough share on use of roads;
- ❑ **Community development & services** - concern about lack of young families in some areas, cutbacks on health-care system, loss of rural schools, quality of 9-1-1 service; high cost of new services/utilities; need for more heritage site protection; transient population not respecting private property, increasing vandalism;

Highlights of Consultation Process

The Rural Dialogue produced considerable input despite limited attendance at each community workshop. Some participants suggested that more advance notice, and use of local media and networking could have generated more involvement. It is also likely that greater interest will follow as the initiative progresses from the preliminary, conceptual consultation phase, to the draft plan review stage. At that point, rural communities will have opportunity to review specific draft policies and zoning proposals resulting from these initial discussions, and Regional District research and planning activities.

In general, we found that the rural residents at the table represented a good cross-section of the community. These included rural landowners, agricultural producers and rural enterprise owners, service club members, and community association representatives. They provided a range of viewpoints, insight and expertise on various aspects related to their community. The willingness of people to articulate local issues, and specific service needs appeared to reflect a measure of confidence in the potential of the Rural Plan to succeed as an instrument in preserving local values, rural quality-of-life and livelihoods amidst increasing industrial land-use activity and development pressures.

First Nations involvement in the process was valuable, not only from the standpoint of information-sharing, but also in strengthening working relationships, and identifying possible collaborative projects with neighboring rural communities. Some interest was even expressed by one Chief and Council in the possibility of representation on the Regional District Board, and protocols for enabling shared undertakings. Only one First Nation community declined to participate in our process, citing potential conflict of interest due to a Court challenge concerning industrial land-use issues on adjacent private lands surrounding their Reserve.

Further public commentary was garnered through individual written and verbal submissions regarding the Rural Plan. While only a small number of submissions were received, they did provide well-informed insight on specific issues and land-use policy objectives that need to be carefully considered. It is expected that more submissions will follow through the ongoing invitation of the Regional District staff and the Rural Plan WEB-page.

The key-informant interview process revealed important insights and background on the trends, issues, needs and opportunities presented by various economic and community development sectors of interest through out the Peace region. This phase of consultation also produced several recommendations whether that may be to achieve improved land-use policy, identify sector needs, promote resource protection, facilitate community development, capture new economic opportunities or other such possibilities. It was apparent from these interviews that strong organizational capacity exists to enable ongoing input on the needs and objectives of key economic development sectors (e.g. resource industry, transportation, rural diversification). For other sectors, however, further research may be required to better understand how the Rural Plan will address other community development and land-use issues (e.g. heritage, education, environmental stewardship).

Finally, the Rural Community Survey provided another important mechanism for gathering public input. Using both an open-, and closed-ended questionnaire, we were able to assess and identify land-use and community development issues based upon relative importance. While the survey results are based upon a very limited representation or 'snapshot' of the rural Peace region population, it was nonetheless a worthwhile exercise that can be further enhanced and supplemented in the future. The survey provided opportunity for identifying priority concerns and suggested specific actions and policy initiatives that can help to guide the Rural Plan. The results indicated a strong interest in ensuring minimal government involvement or infringement on private property rights and livelihood activities. Still, there was clear support for policies or plans that address collective or social objectives at the scale of the local community and/or the Peace River rural region.

ACRONYMS

AAC – Agriculture Advisory Committee
 ACCI – Area of Critical Community Interest
 ACHOTE – Alaska Highway Consortium on Teacher Education
 ALR – Agricultural Land Reserve
 ALC – Agricultural Land Commission
 APC – Agricultural Practices Code
 ATV- All terrain vehicle
 BCAC – British Columbia Agricultural Council
 BCTSP – British Columbia Timber Sales Program
 BRFN – Blueberry River First Nation
 B&B – Bed and Breakfast
 BTEX – Benzene, Toluene, Ethylene, and Xylene (chemicals)
 CBM – Coal Bed Methane
 CIA – Cumulative Impact Assessment
 CRMP – Crown Range Management Plan
 CSA – Canadian Standards Agency
 DRFN – Doig River First Nation
 EFP – Environmental Farm Planning
 FSC – Forest Stewardship Council
 GIS – Geographic Information System
 HRFN – Halfway River First Nation
 H₂S – Hydrogen Sulphide gas
 ICBC – Insurance Corporation of British Columbia
 INAC – Indian and Northern Affairs
 ISO – International Standards Organization
 LRMP – Land & Resource Management Plan
 MEM – Ministry of Energy Mines
 MOT – Ministry of Transportation (B.C.)
 MWLAP- Ministry of Water Land & Air Protection (B.C.)
 NAFTA – North American Free Trade Agreement (B.C.)
 NAHRTA – Northern Rockies Alaska Highway Tourism Association
 NPEC – North Peace Economic Commission
 OCP – Official Community Plan
 OGC – Oil and Gas Commission (B.C.)
 O/G - Oil and gas
 OSB – Oriented Strand Board
 PFRA – Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration
 PREDA – Peace River Economic Development Association
 PRRD – Peace River Regional District
 SPEC – South Peace Economic Commission
 TLUS – Traditional Land Use Study
 WCB – Workman’s Compensation Board (B.C.)