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County to continue discussions with Clairmont and District Agricultural Society on future of arena and community hall

After reviewing the results of the Clairmont Facility Needs Assessment Report at the Monday, September 28 Council Meeting, County of Grande Prairie Council has determined more discussions are required before making any decisions regarding the future of the Clairmont Arena and Community Hall.

“The County respects that the Clairmont Arena and Community Hall have historically been viewed as important facilities in the community and that some people may be frustrated by a continued delay in making a decision on how to proceed,” said Reeve Leanne Beaupre. “Council needs more time to evaluate the report and potential options regarding operation and repairs or replacement of the arena and hall before we can make a funding decision.”

The Grande Prairie Regional Recreation Committee will also continue work on this area to verify ice utilization statistics, and possibly the development of a regional ice allocation policy to help free up vacant ice in the region and reduce the impact should the arena remain closed.

Another significant factor is that the Clairmont & District Agricultural Society has indicated that it no longer wishes to operate the Clairmont Arena in the future. This will require determination of a new operating model and potential operational and capital investments should the County or another party enter into an agreement with the Ag Society to manage the facility.

The report noted the Ag Society is not required to have a designated space in order to receive funding from the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies and suggested the potential of exploring options with the School Board, along with the Seniors Centre and German Canadian Hall to meet their space needs. Ultimately, Council has decided to table financial decisions regarding the Clairmont Community as part of the 2021 Major Capital and Capital Assistance grant deliberations in November 2020. As part of grant application requirements, the Ag Society is to provide a multi-year operating budget and business plan for the hall, which will help the County determine viability of the space and whether it warrants capital investment for repairs.

“While the Needs Assessment has helped provide some direction for Council, there are still many questions to be answered,” said Beaupre. “Things have changed significantly since last December and with so much uncertainty about the economy, we need to make sure we make the right decisions in the best interests of the community, now and into the future, and we are committed to ongoing conversations with the Ag Society before making any funding conclusions.”

On December 3, 2019, the County of Grande Prairie was notified by the Clairmont & District Agricultural Society, which owns and operates the facility, that they had to close their arena until further notice due to potential safety concerns.

To date, Council has approved funding in the sum of \$22,366 for engineering and environmental studies for the hall and arena. The cost of the Needs Assessment was \$26,250, which was paid out of the \$50,000 originally allocated to the Society as part of the 2020 Capital Assistance funds. The Society has received



their 2020 Operating grant of \$43,300 for the arena and to help offset fixed costs despite the arena being closed.

Estimated costs to bring the hall up to safety standards are \$99,800. Estimated costs to address immediate building needs in the arena and ensure user demand is completely met for the next 4-5 years is approximately \$770,000, but functional deficiencies within the building would still exist. To keep the arena operational beyond five years would require an additional investment of \$3.7M.

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