

Halkirk Open House Discussion Guide

November 27, 2024

GOVERNANCE

Elected Representation

Municipal Affairs typically places dissolved hamlets in an existing electoral division when drafting dissolution orders, and so Council anticipates Halkirk will be placed in Division 4. Residents in Halkirk will be able to run in their electoral division in the 2025 fall municipal election or vote for candidates in their electoral division based on the language used in the Ministry's Dissolution Order.

Q: Are there any reasons County Council should consider as to why Halkirk should not be included in Division 4 once it becomes a hamlet?

Comments: Ratepayers were given information on accessing administration and Council for meetings and needs including a laminated card with prominent-use phone numbers, social media contacts, and email. No objections to the anticipated electoral boundary changes were raised.

Q: Do Halkirk residents foresee any barriers to accessing County information that Council should be aware of?

Comments: Village newsletter continues to be an important regular source of info. It is the expectation of residents that their affairs be represented in County newsletters once Halkirk becomes a hamlet. The County will create a point of contact in Administration for Halkirk groups wishing to highlight their community events, and issue news items relevant to Halkirk citizens in the Bulletin and on social media and the website.

Development and Building Permits/Processes

All Development items will flow through the County Administration in line with the current County processes. At the time of dissolution, the Halkirk Land Use Bylaw will still be in effect until amended or repealed by County Council.

It is probable that the County will review and update it's own Land Use Bylaw to include components of the current Halkirk Land Use Bylaw during the course of the year in 2025, and subsequently repeal the Halkirk LUB.

Q: Are there any regulations within the current Halkirk Land Use Bylaw that residents feel need review by Council and Administration?

Comments: Residents were introduced to the County Development Officer, Todd Pawsey, who explained our general processes and requirements for development permits. Residents seeking information prior to starting a development on their property are encouraged to contact the County, via Mr. Pawsey, to understand the regulatory piece as it concerns their development.

Mill Rates and Cost Recovery for Services

The County Council understands that taxation for Halkirk should be handled reasonably, with clear rationales attributed to any Special Tax rates or Local Improvement Tax Rates *if* they are to be utilized.

County Council may, by Ministerial Order:

- Establish a special tax rate to recover the costs associated with certain projects or services applicable to Halkirk residents,
- Provide the same municipal tax rate to Halkirk hamlet residential properties as the rest of Paintearth County and set no separate taxes for Halkirk residents.

As a general rule in any municipality in Alberta, unreasonable utility rates are subject to appeal by users, by way of the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC), and at a ratepayers request the County can provide contact information for residents wishing to appeal their utility rates.

Q: What is the preference of Halkirk residents with respect to taxation?

Comments: Residents did not voice support for paying higher tax or utility rates, nor did they strongly object. The soft consensus was that residents would appreciate lower taxes the same as anyone else, however if there were to be increases it must be connected to a clear and rational purpose. There was mention of the fixed-income nature of many residents and how sharp increases in rates would negatively impact those households.

Bylaw changes (Process)

Residents are always welcome to share their thoughts on the structure, efficacy and practicality of County bylaws with their Councillors and the Administration. Feedback is typically given through emails and delegation presentations to Council at regular council meetings.

Every County resident is able to request a bylaw be amended or reviewed at any time once Halkirk becomes a hamlet of the County by phone, email or in person at the Administration Office, or by reaching out to an elected official of the County.

Bylaws of the Village of Halkirk will remain in effect after dissolution until such time as County of Paintearth Council chooses by resolution to alter, amend or repeal them. This is a standard component of Ministerial Dissolution Orders issued by Municipal Affairs.

Q: Are there any bylaws currently in effect in Halkirk that residents would want County Council to review once Halkirk is a hamlet?

Comments: Animal Control Bylaw regulations were cited as potentially onerous for a small town atmosphere. Administration indicated it could review the bylaw regulations as impacts arise on pet owners, however also indicated that community policing and common sense are the first tools used in Bylaw enforcement when a contravention has occurred. Residents understood that it is not the intention of the County to take a hard line on the enforcement regulations in bylaws unless necessary.

COMMUNITY SPACES

Bank/Post Office building

County Council understands the need for Halkirk residents to continue to send and receive mail and make payments at a Halkirk location. Council does not have plans to alter the current arrangements between the Village and Canada Post or ATB.

Q: Do Halkirk residents have any needs with respect to Canada Post and ATB that are not presently being met that the County should be aware of?

Comments: Facility needs for the Canada Post and ATB building were brought forward for an air conditioning system and a new paint job. Service in these facilities has met residential needs thus far, and the County was encouraged to look at ways to continue to support the operation of these facilities.

Municipal Office Accessibility

County Council must assess the need of residents in Halkirk to have in-person service at the Halkirk office and also consider keeping costs low for Halkirk residents, with a desire to find balance between the two.

Q: What are the advantages to residents in continuing to keep the Halkirk office open on a regular basis?

Comments: Residents can understand the eventual closure of the Village municipal office as a contact point for County services, however indicated a period of a few months for at least a day per week is strongly preferred as a transition period.

Q: Can residents accept using the Halkirk ATB and Canada Post to remit payments to the County for utilities and taxes etc. if the municipal office is closed to the public?

Comments: Residents indicated this was the logical alternative for those accustomed to paying at the Village office.

Seniors Center

It is understood by the County that there is an application in queue for the New Horizons Grant to assist in costs associated with the roof repair valued at \$25K. Additional repairs are needed respecting the foundation, and so on. The County is willing to include feedback from the community when developing a plan to address both building and group needs.

Q: How would Halkirk residents/service clubs like to see the facility used in future years, once repairs have been addressed?

Comments: Residents indicated a high value towards the Seniors Center, as it is used frequently for bridal showers, weddings, community gatherings and leisure. Residents would like to see the facility maintained for many future years of use.

Halkirk Community Hall

After dissolution, the County will own the hall. It is understood by the County that the Hall Association operates and collects revenues and the village pays the insurance and contributes for larger capital expenses.

It is understood by the County that the Hall Association also does its own fundraising at present, and that there are no annual municipal grants to the Association for operating expenses.

Comments: The Association attends fundraising casinos every three years. Elks club are big volunteer support base. Operating expenses are covered by the hall Board at present. Residents highlighted future maintenance needs such as a new stove in the kitchen, and expect to continue the current arrangement, working with County staff as required. Rent does not cover operating expenses. Between hosting community bingo and casinos the association raises funds of \$5-7K per year. The Municipality pays insurance, and it was discussed that this arrangement, at minimum, would continue. Possible community grants were discussed under the County, similar to arrangements made for current County recreation boards and hall associations.

Mini Arena

At present, it is not used for public ice-related activities. The County would like to hear from residents on how they would want to see the facility be used, if different from the current practice.

Q: How would Halkirk residents like to see the mini arena utilized?

Comments: Has power, no heater working in winter but gas service active (?)

There is a small demand to see either the mini arena or an alternate location selected for winter outdoor skating activities for families and general adult use in the future as a possible rec service upgrade for Halkirk.

Rodeo/Fair Grounds

It is understood by the County that ownership of the Rodeo/Fair grounds must continue to be held by the Municipality. Council has not indicated that they would divest this asset and will be adding a fiber drop point for broadband servicing of the grounds, which may expand the types of events that can be held or enhance the visitor experience/convenience such as being able to connect ATMS during events for the convenience of attendees.

It is understood that the Halkirk Elks Service Club operates the grounds during their event, but the Village is still maintaining it.

Comments: Occasional beer garden rentals for family gatherings, 4-H Rodeo Events also take place there. Usage levels are expected to remain about the same at the present. Residents were informed that there is now a fiber drop to the property which expands possible event hosting.

Church

It is understood by County Council that this space continues to have historic value for Halkirk and area and that residents would welcome upgrades to the building to allow for use in ceremonies and social events.

It is understood by the County that recently, the Church windows have been replaced. Any plans to upgrade/repair other components of the structure will be based on the information contained in the Infrastructure Audit. It is understood that there is no water, heat or sewer to the building, and that power has been deactivated at the site.

Q: Are residents in favour of plans to make/keep the Church available for use, with the Municipality taking bookings from users?

Comments: There is an informal volunteer group that keeps it in shape, ie painting, new windows and doors etc. The interior is well kept. Was put onto a new foundation several years ago.

No major drive to see it upgraded and serviced in comparison other needs at the moment more critical. Residents would ask it be maintained to an open-air seasonal use standard to continue to be used during warmer months for private or public events/bookings.

Curling Rink

It is understood by the County that the curling facility is used annually for bonspiels by the Halkirk Curling Club. It has been suggested that there is a higher proportion of County residents that comprise the Halkirk Curling Club.

Comments: Village covers insurance, club goes to casinos every 3 years. Residents indicated that younger members are coming in, which may or may not expand scope of events in the future. A new compressor was added 10 years ago, and the club feels they can operate the ice plant for another season or two without major issues, but contend that long-term needs should be discussed and planned for. The Curling Club has kept good maintenance records of work done to support the planning process.

Campgrounds

It is understood that the Municipality operates the campground adjoining the Rodeo/Fair grounds, and behind the Community Hall.

Q: Would residents like to see any improvements made to Halkirk campgrounds that Council should consider in subsequent years?

Comments: Stalls will require electrical service upgrades for new capacity of motorhomes that frequent the campground in the summer, and considerations about a new water hydrant and increases to stall sizes to accommodate larger/longer units would increase ease of access and quality of user experience. The RV campground behind the community hall has been very helpful for booking weddings and family events during the summer, and would like to see operation of the site continue.

MUNICIPALLY OWNED BUILDINGS

Municipally Owned Facilities in Halkirk

Facilities of the Village will become property of the County and must be reviewed by Council and Administration to create a workplan to address building deficiencies in each location. Residents must consider competing priorities in terms of which buildings are addressed first.

Q: In the opinion of Halkirk residents, which buildings do they feel need immediate attention?

Comments: Residents felt it would be wise to address any and all the safety code requirements in buildings used by the public as soon as possible. Residents understood structural issues also bear consideration and acknowledged costs dictated that priorities would have to be established in the repair schedule. It was said that the curling rink has had some of its issues fixed by volunteers and the County will speak to the curling club to determine what issues identified in the 2021 Infrastructure Audit have since been completed.

CAPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

Water, Sewer and Road Infrastructure

Based on critical priority, Council will create a construction plan that strikes a balance between reasonable costs to beneficiaries of the water/sanitary sewer system and expected end of functionality of the system. The 2021 estimated cost¹ to repair/replace water and sewer infrastructure exceeds \$4.1M.

Council appreciates the best practice is to repave each block of road once infrastructure work is done, however road repaving costs are estimated in the Infrastructure Audit to be around the \$4.7M mark, which impacts either costs to taxpayers or timelines to taxpayers to have fully replaced blocks of water, sewer and roads throughout the hamlet.

Council may establish a special rate class for Halkirk utility account holders associated with Capital Infrastructure costs for water and sewer etc., however understands that rates must be reasonable and tied to a clear and rational purpose such as cost-recovery over time for major water and sewer repairs.

¹ MPE Engineering Report “Village of Halkirk Infrastructure Assessment and 10-year Capital Plan” Project Number: 4460-005-00 Release Date: September 30, 2021

Q: How would residents prefer to address the requirement to repair/replace water and sewer infrastructure in Halkirk? Ie: Multi-year approach vs ASAP approach?

Comments: Residents would like an approach that maintains or improves their service, such as better water pressure, relined sewers or replaced pipe and valves. It was explained that some homes along a main sewer line that were built in the 1960's may have tarpaper sewer connections and the owners may need to replace their tarpaper connection from their property line to their residents once the ground has been disturbed by construction repairs.

Residents understood that replacements to infrastructure on their private property will be their cost to bear. The Municipality cannot force homeowners to replace connections on private property during the project.

Q: What is the level of support from Halkirk residents to be subjected to specialized utility rates to recover water and sewer reconstruction costs in Halkirk's boundaries identified in the Infrastructure Audit?

Comments: Residents indicated they understood that this mechanism is legitimate for a Council to enact, but stressed to Council that increases must be related to water and sewer replacement costs, and asked that if there are to be higher rates, that they be reasonable for those living on fixed incomes.

The County indicated they understood this line of thinking and would keep this point in mind when reviewing utility rates in the future. At present, current rates will remain in place until changed by Council.

MUNICIPAL SERVICES

Garbage Pickup

The County understands there are residents with personal mobility issues that prevent them from bringing household garbage to the transfer station. Council has no plans to change frequency of pickups for residents in Halkirk, and that service as usual is the preference of the community.

Comments: Residents are happy with their service level and do not want changes made to this. Council indicated they would make no changes to service levels in this area.

Cemetery

Current practice is the municipality notifies the Cemetery Association contact when a burial site needs preparation, and volunteers from the Association make arrangements for the equipment to bore/dig holes and then mark the burial plot to be excavated.

Q: What is the opinion of the Halkirk Cemetery Association regarding long-term operation of the cemetery - business as usual or have a discussion regarding delivering the services in a different fashion?

Comments: The municipality will retain control of cemetery records, and the current process used by the Cemetery Association will continue. The Public Works director will be the point of contact for the Cemetery Association.

Bylaw Enforcement

Q: What are the most prevalent issues that residents feel need to be addressed in the community in terms of Bylaw Enforcement?

Comments: Animal Control Regulations and Land use Bylaw zoning regulations were mentioned as being unclear at times to residents, or too heavy handed (Animal Control regulations especially) and that residents simply wanted reasonable rules to follow without high-levels of municipal interference.

Street Cleaning/Maintenance

County employees currently provide road clearing during the winter at no cost to the Village.

Q: How satisfied are Halkirk residents with the current level of street/alley cleaning and snow clearing service currently provided by the County?

Comments: Residents are accustomed to the current practice of snow clearing but requested during major snowfall events that the crews be working to open roads as soon as possible. The County will consider how to meet this request with manpower and equipment on hand. Some residents voiced concerns about seniors who get stuck and can't push their vehicle out as a barrier under the current service standard. Consideration was requested also for ambulance access in heavy snowfall events.

Residents don't want to see vehicles stuck in intersections, as has been the case in the past since the County has delivered the service on the Village's behalf.

There is no current sidewalk winter maintenance plan in place. There are some gaps in the sidewalk, however many were recently redone. The County will review the state of sidewalks as compared to the 2021 report to update the sidewalk study data and create a future plan to pour new sidewalks on a rotating basis annually during summer months once more pressing needs have been addressed.

Residents understand sidewalks take a secondary priority to roads cleared and that funding for water and sewer before sidewalk repair is reasonable.

Grass Mowing/Landscaping of public spaces

County Council understands that residents take pride in Halkirk's appearance as an orderly, tidy community.

Q: Do Halkirk residents wish to maintain the current service levels for mowing and landscaping?

Comments: A cemetery association member pointed out that mowing in the cemetery in the early part of the season seems like every ten days is necessary. Funerals can also drive the schedule, as can mother's day and father's day when the cemetery may see more visitors. In general, residents are proud of their cemetery and wish the current standard to be maintained once the County assumes ownership of the property from the Village.

Community festive decorations etc.

Q: Are Halkirk residents satisfied with the current level of festive décor around the community?

Comments: Winter – Xmas lighting would like to keep, may need to replace some festive lighting decorations due to age. Council will consider this.

Summer – residents enjoy the flower pots/ floral displays during the warm months would like to keep those. Council will consider this.