

Village of Bittern Lake

Viability Review

Additional Information – May 13, 2024

The Minister of Municipal Affairs initiated a viability review for the Village of Bittern Lake in October 2023 following receipt of a petition from residents. This viability review will result in a report that informs electors and enables them to make an informed decision on whether the village is viable, and vote on whether it should remain or dissolve and become a hamlet in Camrose County.

The viability report summarises information collected from the municipality and residents and provides recommendations for the long-term sustainability of Bittern Lake.

To ensure residents are informed on the viability review and to collect public feedback for the report, Municipal Affairs organized several engagement activities, including an initial public information session and an online survey.

This information sheet provides additional information in response to resident questions from the initial information session and online survey.

Municipal Viability

If you have any questions about the viability review, please contact:

780-427-2225 or toll-free by first dialing 310-0000 or email viabilityreview@gov.ab.ca

Community After Dissolution

If village residents vote to dissolve, the Minister must recommend dissolution to cabinet. If cabinet supports the recommendation, the Lieutenant Governor in Council will sign an order dissolving the village.

While the municipal entity would dissolve, the community of Bittern Lake would remain as a hamlet in Camrose County. Residents can continue organizing social events and contributing to the community's unique identity. Camrose County council and administration would provide municipal governance, operations, and services to the hamlet. The county would consider the community's needs alongside those of all areas of Camrose County.

Village Council Roles and Responsibilities

During the viability review process, village council, along with administration, are responsible for providing information on the municipality's operations and any other issues affecting its viability. Councillors also sit on a viability review support group that reviews the viability report and makes recommendations for long-term sustainability.

County Council Roles and Responsibilities

Through the viability review process, county council and administration provides information to Municipal Affairs. This includes information on municipal services and governance. County council and administration also sit on a viability review support group that reviews the viability report and recommendations.

Administration and Services

During the viability review process, the village operates as usual. The village continues to collect property taxes, provide services to residents, and make municipal decisions through policy, bylaw, or council resolution.

Following the viability review, and if residents vote to dissolve, the new hamlet would receive services from the county. The viability report will provide a list of services in the village and will also discuss, in good faith, how the county proposes to provide services moving forward.

Municipal Finances

To learn more about the village's financial information, please access the village's audited financial statements on the Government of Alberta website at www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/mc_financial_tax_by_laws

Regarding property taxes and utility rates, if residents vote to dissolve, the county would set property taxes and utility rates. The viability report will provide a general sense of what these rates may be, but ultimately the authority to set these annual rates would rest with county council.

Village assets would also become the property of the county. The county may integrate these assets into their operations, or sell assets that are no longer needed. Profits from sold assets must be invested into the hamlet.

Financial Supports

If residents vote to remain, the village would receive no additional funding over and above what it currently receives.

If residents vote to dissolve, the county could apply for post-restructuring funding to integrate the village's governance and administration into those of the county and upgrade existing infrastructure. The viability review report will provide more information on eligible funding amounts.

Viability Review Report

The viability report will compare the effects of remaining or dissolving and will focus on 6 themes. These will include community, governance, administration and operations, services, finances, and infrastructure.

The report will not say whether remaining or dissolving is better for the community. Village residents are responsible for reading the report and making their own informed decision on whether to remain or dissolve.

Voting

Once a voting date has been set, this information will be sent to residents by mail. Voting information will also be posted on the Government of Alberta website. Eligible electors will vote on a question of whether the village should dissolve or remain and implement an action plan to improve its viability.

To vote, electors must be 18, a Canadian citizen, and be a resident of the village on election day.

Next Steps

Residents will be able to provide additional input at the mid-point public information session, tentatively scheduled for June 2024. Residents will receive a letter with more information about this session.

Session information will also be posted on the Government of Alberta website at www.alberta.ca/viability-reviews-for-municipalities