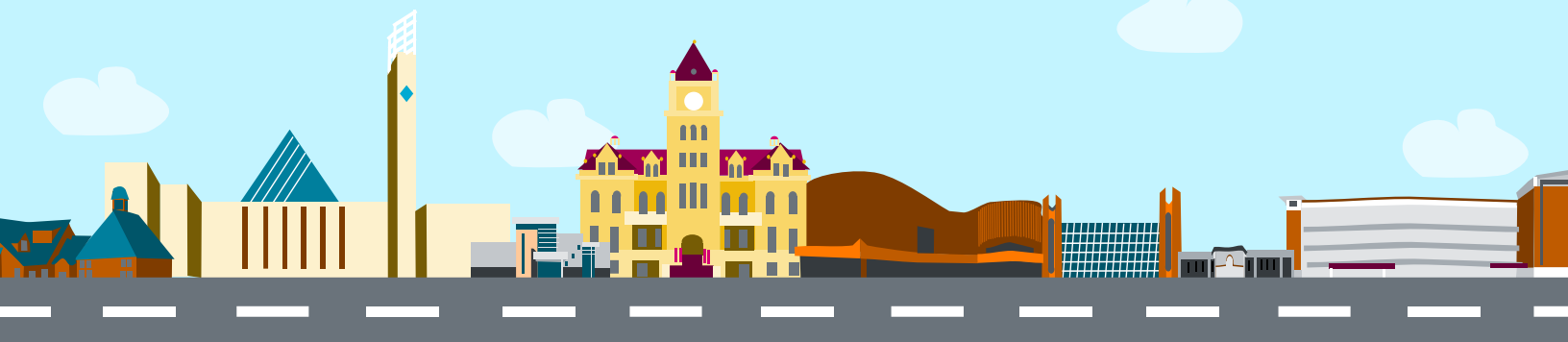




Village of Donalda Viability Review

Initial Public Information Session Summary

Municipal Affairs | June 2026

Overview

The Minister of Municipal Affairs initiated a viability review for the Village of Donalda in July 2025. The Minister initiated this review based on the results of a viability screening which was ordered after resignations of councillors caused a loss of council quorum twice in a 12-month period, in addition to governance and operational concerns.

During the viability review process, the ministry organizes several engagement activities, including holding initial and mid-review public information sessions. The input collected at these sessions will help to inform the development of the village's viability review report, along with the information collected from the village, the county, and other sources.

The report will include a summary of the current state of the village, what residents might expect if the village dissolves and becomes a hamlet, and what changes may be necessary to support long-term sustainability if the village remains. This viability review report helps inform electors prior to voting on the question of dissolution.

This summary document shares initial input collected from the public during the initial public information session and associated survey.

Initial Public Information Session

Ministry staff hosted a public information session in the village on January 21, 2026, from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. This session included a table-top exercise to gather initial input from the participants.

Alongside this session, the ministry also published a survey which included 32 questions divided into six sections. These sections correspond with the following six themes discussed in the viability review report:

- Community
- Governance
- Administration
- Services
- Infrastructure
- Finances

The survey took 10 to 15 minutes to complete and was open for 38 days, from January 21, 2026, to February 27, 2026. Participants submitted 45 survey responses.

The ministry promoted the initial public information session and survey on the Government of Alberta website, in a letter mailed to residents and property owners, and on the village website. The session was also advertised in the local newspaper, with the survey information shared again at the session.

Community

Overall, participants value Donalda's small-town atmosphere, described as a peaceful rural setting with beautiful natural landscaping. The coulees, trails, and scenery feature prominently as unique strengths. Many appreciate the strong sense of community, knowing who their neighbours are, and the willingness of people to help each other.

Participants noted appreciation for cultural, recreational, and tourism-related activities that support community identity and bring people together, which often rely on volunteer-driven local organizations. Additionally, many participants noted the community is supportive, cooperative, and has good collaboration between the village and local groups.

Participants also value programs and events that strengthen social connections, especially for children, families, and seniors. Also highlighted is the ability to walk to amenities such as the school, post office, library, museum, tea house, and church. Affordability, safety, and proximity to larger centres were noted to also enhance the village's appeal.

Identified community challenges included interpersonal conflict, lack of inclusivity, community division, and lack of supports and services—particularly for children and youth—along with limited health care access. A small number of participants expressed concerns about communication among community groups, indicating missed opportunities to strengthen cohesion and community engagement.

Many also had concerns surrounding the future of key institutions such as the library, museum, Lamp Centre, and fire hall, as well as the potential loss of local jobs. Increasing crime and safety issues, limited RCMP presence, and a lack of amenities and businesses were also mentioned.

Participants noted fear of potential dissolution, questioning whether becoming a hamlet could lead to fewer resources dedicated to Donalda's facilities and community programs. Some also feared being "forgotten" with the loss of the village's distinct

identity, although some participants see hamlet status as a positive reset.

Other concerns if the village were to dissolve focused on loss of representation and voice, community cohesion, and low morale. Many noted apprehension around uncertain long-term community investment and support, including control over the community's future.

Participants also expressed concerns in this section regarding local governance, administrative capacity, and aging infrastructure. These are captured as input in the related sections. However, it is important to note that many of the concerns or issues mentioned later in this summary may have overarching impact on the participant's confidence in their community.

Governance

Participants had mixed responses when asked if they would be interested in running for municipal council. Some expressed willingness or openness to serving on council, while many stated they are unwilling due to perceptions of bias, lack of transparency, poor administration, or previous negative experiences. Several feel meaningful participation would only be possible if governance and administrative practices improved.

Participants who felt heard describe consistent and timely communication, easy access to council, multiple channels for staying informed, and positive experiences when raising concerns or engaging in community decision-making.

Others did not feel the same, citing poor communication, inconsistent response to concerns, inconsistent or biased decision-making, diminished accountability, and council inaction. Participants also had concerns about meeting conduct and accessibility.

Some participants also felt local governance lacked strategic focus, had unclear decision-making processes, provided limited opportunities for public engagement, and expressed concerns that decisions were being made without community input. Also noted in responses were high taxes, limited economic

growth, lack of confidence in municipal council, and limited checks and balances.

Apprehension regarding the village becoming a hamlet focused on losing local leadership and representation, reduced accessibility to decision-makers, and uncertainty over how responsive and attentive the county would be to Donalda's unique needs.

Many had concerns over whether the hamlet would receive adequate priority for decisions on service delivery, and how those decisions would affect services such as snowplowing, bylaw enforcement, and infrastructure improvements.

Additionally, participants were concerned about local administrative presence and needing to travel outside the community for meetings or services.

Some participants expressed no concerns and believe county governance could offer improved stability and expertise.

Administration

Participants' experiences with administration were varied with limited office hours cited as both adequate by some and insufficient by others. Some believe the village successfully manages day-to-day operations, while others expressed a lack of confidence in municipal administration and capacity to complete basic administrative functions such as financial reconciliation and reporting.

Some participants described staff as approachable, helpful, and responsive through phone, email, and posted office hours, with some emphasizing positive customer service experiences and improvements in communication compared to past years.

Other participants expressed unhappiness with administration, citing instances of unprofessional conduct, unfair administrative processes, lack of transparency, and concerns with bylaw implementation and enforcement.

Participants were also divided on expectations for communication and engagement, reflecting a community with both strong confidence and strong distrust present in their responses.

Some participants acknowledged efforts by staff but feel there is significant room for improvement. Many felt there are reasonable communication channels, appreciate the newsletters, website updates, social media posts, and opportunities to attend council meetings or speak with staff. Communication through tools like the Donalda Lite and post office board was also appreciated.

Other participants felt communication was insufficient, inconsistent, or exclusionary, reporting an over-reliance on social media, inconsistent posting of agendas and minutes, a lack of responsiveness and transparency, poor follow-through, and limited opportunities for meaningful engagement.

Participants' apprehension surrounding becoming a hamlet focused primarily on losing locally accessible administrative services and face-to-face support. Many cited concerns around needing to travel to Stettler for administrative services and whether county administrators would understand Donalda's needs or prioritize local issues. Others also noted concerns over reduced transparency, slower responses, and loss of local jobs.

Alternatively, others wondered if county administration could improve professional standards and support more consistent governance.

Overall, participants express a strong desire to maintain responsiveness through some form of locally accessible administrative presence.

Services

Participants identified potable water, wastewater, snow clearing, and fire and emergency services as primary core services that need to be prioritized. Listed as secondary core services were solid waste disposal, roads and public works, bylaw enforcement, and Family and Community Support Services. Community-enhancing services, such as park maintenance, recreation, and seasonal needs were ranked below core services provided by the village. Housing supports and affordability were also highlighted as important.

Participants who feel the village meets service expectations highlighted reliable service delivery such

as clean water, garbage pickup, basic maintenance, snow clearing, and a strong volunteer emergency response. Many praised village staff for working hard, being responsive, and going above and beyond in day-to-day operations and view the village as consistent, dependable, and community-focused in delivering essential services.

However, other participants felt the village does not meet their expectations, citing inconsistent service delivery and the need for more reliable water, wastewater, and snow-clearing services. Others noted significant gaps such as a lack of policing, bylaw enforcement, park maintenance, and solid waste management. Several residents felt resources are unevenly allocated, with some services overfunded and others underfunded.

Common issues included weak follow-through and perceived favouritism. Many pointed to the need for trained staff, stronger responsiveness, clear communication, and better visibility into operations, citing limited information and concerns about how core services are managed.

Participants' key concerns over becoming a hamlet centered on reduced service quality and slower response times if services are delivered from the county rather than locally. Many worry about prioritization of water and wastewater services, aging infrastructure, timely road maintenance and snow removal, and emergency services such as fire protection, citing a fear of being a lower priority or "last on the list" for essential services.

Also noted were concerns around losing the personalized community-based service provided by local staff and whether there would be higher costs for utilities and services. However, some participants expressed belief that services might improve under county management.

Infrastructure

Participants reported that essential infrastructure, such as water, wastewater, roads, and basic community facilities, are reliable and meet day-to-day needs of the community. They noted few or no service interruptions, viewed roads and utilities as

generally adequate, and feel that council and staff are addressing priorities proactively.

While some acknowledged aging components that will eventually need upgrades, they believe the current systems are sufficient for the community's present needs.

Others believe the village's infrastructure is aging and poorly maintained, citing a lack of capacity to effectively manage the village's infrastructure inventory. Participants cited chronic issues with water lines including pressure and fire-flow, wastewater systems and drainage, deteriorating roads and sidewalks, and derelict buildings.

While some participants feel infrastructure is adequate, overall sentiment leaned strongly toward having some level of concern about village infrastructure. Many participants emphasized information gaps, unclear conditions, and outdated assessments, and are unaware of any existing infrastructure plan. Participants also emphasized the need for transparency regarding current and future projects.

Most participants identified water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure as the top long-term priorities essential for Donalda's long-term success, with secondary priorities listed as road and sidewalk repairs, fire protection, addressing derelict buildings, and main street renewal.

Similar to other sections, participants fear the community may be overlooked or "forgotten" under county management and receive lower priority service, worsening existing issues. Cited concerns were delayed or cancelled infrastructure projects, reduced attention to water, sewer, road, or sidewalk maintenance, and slower snow removal. Other concerns focused on losing local input on infrastructure decisions and slower response times to emergencies.

Some participants noted no concerns, believing the county has the capacity to manage infrastructure effectively due to greater expertise and resources.

Finances

Overall, participants expressed belief that the village has unclear financial management practices, citing weak financial controls, overspending, and limited value for money given aging infrastructure and minimal services. Several noted concerns around limited revenue, reliance on grants, and unclear budgeting. Others felt the village appears to operate within its means and carries no debt, but overall, still had concerns on spending priorities and accountability, little transparency, high costs, and long-term financial sustainability.

Participants' concerns focused on uncertainty around taxes and utility rates. Participants appeared somewhat divided regarding taxes; some feel taxes are reasonable, and others feel taxes and fees are too high for limited services provided which are not in alignment with service level expectations. Participants also feel that more non-residential properties would reduce the residential tax burden.

Other participants viewed water distribution fees as especially high, while others feel utility fees are okay or may actually be too low. A smaller group feels fees are reasonable or affordable, though often with the caveat that better value is needed. Additionally, participants mentioned concerns over rising costs, water quality issues, and lack of visible improvements.

Many expressed concerns about Donalda dissolving into the county and whether the community might receive less financial priority or allocations for local initiatives. There were concerns noted around how services would be funded under county management including if insufficient county investment would stall infrastructure projects. Several fear losing access to grants, loss of local control, and loss of accountability and transparency on how Donalda's tax dollars are spent. Other key concerns were around higher taxes, declining property values, and concern of Donalda being "overlooked" in broader budget decisions. Uncertainty about whether taxes would increase or decrease was common.

Some participants expressed no concerns, believing the county has stronger financial capacity and

governance. Others trust the county's financial management due to having proper structure for spending accountability.

Additional Comments

Participants requested clear, factual comparisons between remaining a village and becoming a hamlet, including impacts on taxes and service levels. Others requested plain language pros and cons.

Also emphasized was the need to understand how current service levels, infrastructure condition, asset management, and the ability to fund infrastructure costs would affect the village's long-term viability.

Other requested comparative outcomes were impacts on representation, financial capacity, community identity, and resident well being. Some were also looking for case studies and statistics, with a few highlighting addressing broader regional issues such as unpaid oil and gas taxes.

Some participants requested transition plans, policing arrangements, and clarity on county commitments such as administrative access, road maintenance, libraries, schools, community groups, and long-term quality of life outcomes.

Some participants feel no additional considerations are needed, require no further information, or already prefer one option.

Furthermore, participants urge the province to consider addressing governance stability and administrative oversight to address concerns about financial management, accountability, and community division. Also expressed was the need for new compliance requirements and ability to address bylaw concerns.

Overall, participants emphasize the importance of responsive, respectful, and engaged leadership that reflects Donalda's unique needs. Many stressed the need for stronger relationships between council, administration, and residents, and for decisions to be driven by community input.