

Request for Decision

Title	Rural Extension and Environmental Conservation Program Resource Adjustments
Proposed Motion	That Council approve the addition of 0.62 FTE in staff resources to support Rural Extension and Environmental Conservation Programs, to be funded at no additional cost through the reallocation of existing operating budget and Provincial ASB Grant dollars.
Administrative Recommendation	That Council approve the motion as proposed.
Previous Council Direction	None.
Report	<p><u>Background Information</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents frequently access the Rural Extension and Environmental Conservation Programs offered by Sturgeon County. Through these programs, a variety of extension events including workshops, demonstrations and tours are offered to residents. The Sturgeon County Tree Program promotes the establishment of shelterbelts and trees by offering technical support and incentives to participating landowners. Additionally, support is available to producers interested in completing Environmental Farm Plans, which enables them to access financial incentive programs such as Growing Forward. The focus of this programming has evolved to address the needs of both the residential population and the agricultural community to ensure that relevant programming is available to all Sturgeon County residents. Prior to 2011, Sturgeon County had 2.0 FTEs dedicated to supporting the Rural Extension and Environmental Programs of Sturgeon County and 6 partnering municipalities. These positions were funded by both municipal funds and by a grant received from AESA (Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture). In 2011, the Government of Alberta restructured the AESA program and combined it with the provincial Agricultural Service Board (ASB) Grant as an additional Program called the 'Environmental Stream' Grant. From 2011- 2016, Sturgeon County has jointly participated in this grant program with the Counties of Westlock, Athabasca and Barrhead. This

grant has been used to fund joint staff resources, who facilitate extension and environmental programs within the four partnering municipalities and serve as a technical resource on environmental matters. Employees hired by this partnership have been managed and housed in both Westlock County and County of Barrhead.

- Sturgeon County contributes \$16,500 in municipal dollars annually to this partnership. Sturgeon County's portion of the ASB-Environmental Stream Grant is approximately \$21,750 annually, which is remitted directly to the partnership from the Government of Alberta, bringing Sturgeon County's total contributions up to \$38,250. Sturgeon County's municipal contributions have accounted for approximately 55% of the total cash contributions.
- A review of the cost-benefits of this arrangement has determined that Sturgeon County could significantly benefit from internalizing these program resources. For no additional cost, Sturgeon County could have its own internal staff resources to deliver its Rural Extension and Environmental Conservation Programs. This would ensure sufficient focus and continuous improvement on Sturgeon County's program development and delivery. It would also ensure that a technical resource is readily available to Sturgeon County residents.
- To ensure that Sturgeon County's unique programming requirements are met and the most value is achieved from Sturgeon County's municipal and grant funds, an individual Grant Application was submitted for the 2017-2019 cycle. Sturgeon County is guaranteed to receive a minimum of \$15,000 in Basic Environmental Stream Grant Funding and could receive as much as \$49,000 to fund its Rural Extension and Environmental Conservation Programs. The proposed 0.62 FTE increase will be completely 'self-funded', provided the current amount of grant funding (\$21,750) is maintained. Final approval confirmation is expected to be received in March.
- Updates on the status of these programs have been provided regularly to the Agricultural Service Board. At the February 8, 0217 Agricultural Service Board Meeting, Motion 022/17 was carried unanimously:

That the Agricultural Service Board recommends that County Council approve the resource restructuring proposed by Agriculture Services to ensure that Sturgeon County's Environmental and Extension Programs are adequately resourced and that maximum value is achieved for Sturgeon County residents and producers.

- The request for this FTE approval is brought to council prior to confirmation of the final grant amount to ensure continuity in service delivery in 2017 with the departure of key department staff. The recruitment and training of any new team members will be most successful (and have the lowest impact to service delivery) if completed prior to March 30, 2017.

	<p><u>External Communication</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None. <p><u>Relevant Policy/Legislation/Practices:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff resource (FTE) increases, regardless of whether they require additional funds, are brought to Council for approval
<p>Implication of Administrative Recommendation</p>	<p><u>Strategic Alignment:</u></p> <p>Consistent with Strategic Focus Areas including Respect the Natural Environment, Operational Excellence, Planned Growth and Prosperity, Strong Local Government and Regional Leadership, and Maintain and Enhance Strong Communities.</p> <p>While Sturgeon County would no longer be formally involved with an existing Municipal Partnership, it would likely have a positive impact on Sturgeon County’s ability to collaborate regionally with other municipalities (in addition to those who remain participants in the Environmental Program Partnership).</p> <p>During Rural Extension and Environmental Program planning and implementation, Sturgeon County regularly collaborates with regional municipalities and both provincial and federal government departments. Collaboration with external organizations has been vital to Sturgeon County programs in the past. Maintaining these relationships is important in ensuring future program success.</p> <p><u>Organizational:</u></p> <p>Approval of the additional 0.62 FTE will ensure that adequate focus can be placed on planning and delivering current Rural Extension and Environmental Conservation Programs without compromising the operational functions of the Agriculture Services Department. It will also allow for continuous improvement and the pursuit of opportunities for program enhancement and expansion.</p> <p><u>Financial:</u></p> <p>The financial impact of this decision is anticipated to be \$0. This will be confirmed when the final ASB-Environmental Stream Grant Approval is received in March.</p>
<p>Alternatives Considered</p>	<p>1. Continue program delivery without the addition of 0.62 FTE</p>
<p>Implications of Alternatives</p>	<p><u>Strategic Alignment:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Agriculture Services Department would not be able to successfully deliver its currently planned extension and environmental programs. The programs would need to be reduced substantially to ensure that the department’s operational programs are not affected. Areas most likely

to be impacted would be the County Tree Program, the ASB Tour and the quantity and quality of workshops and demonstrations facilitated by the department.

Organizational:

- None.

Financial:

- While there would be a direct surplus of \$16,500, Sturgeon County would be forced to make decisions how to reduce programming due to inadequate staff resources. There would also be a missed opportunity to receive Environmental Stream Grant Funding, as the grant's eligibility is structured on a cost-share basis. Additionally, that portion of the ASB grant funding is only to be used specifically for Extension and Environmental Programming.

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- Follow up Action**
1. Revise 2017 Operating Budget to reflect changes in funding allocations (Financial Services, February 2017)
 2. Update Department Organizational Chart and Job Descriptions to reflect adjustments (Agriculture Services, February 2017)
 3. Position Recruitment (Agriculture Services, March 2017)

Attachment(s) None.

**Report Reviewed
by:**



Angela Veenstra, Agriculture Services Manager



Ian McKay, P. Eng., GM Municipal Services



Peter Tarnawsky, County Commissioner – CAO

Strategic Alignment Checklist

Vision: Sturgeon County: a diverse, active community that pioneers opportunities and promotes initiative while embracing rural lifestyles.

Mission: Provide quality, cost effective services and infrastructure to meet the diverse needs of the Sturgeon County community, while improving competitiveness and sustainability.

Focus Areas	Not consistent	N/A	Consistent
Strong Local Governance and Regional Leadership			
<i>We promote consistent and accountable leadership through collaborative and transparent processes (Strategic Plan, pg. 27 MDP)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Consistent with neighborhood role (see MDP), master plans, policies</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Considers fiscal stability and sustainability</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Has a positive impact on regional and sub-regional cooperation</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Respect the Natural Environment			
<i>We acknowledge the importance of a healthy environment and will minimize and monitor our impact on ecosystems (Strategic Plan, pg. 27 MDP)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Compliance with Provincial and Federal regulations and/or legislation</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ensure effective environmental risk management</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Community Identity & Spirit			
<i>We will build upon our strengths, where together we will create an inclusive, caring community (Strategic Plan, (Strategic Plan, pg. 27 MDP)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Promotes and/or enhances residents' identification with Sturgeon County</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Enhances service provision through community partnerships</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Supports Sturgeon County's cultural history</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planned Growth and Prosperity			
<i>We encourage varied and integrated enterprises that enhance our strong economic base, while balancing the needs of the community and natural environment. (Strategic Plan, pg. 27 MDP)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Does the proposal align with the Integrated Regional Growth Strategy (map/policies) pg. 26 MDP</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Considers cumulative costs and long-term funding implications</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Targets growth around current or planned infrastructure</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintain and Enhance Strong Communities			
<i>We are committed to a safe, secure community, where our residents are respected and provided with access to opportunities. (Strategic Plan, pg. 27 MDP)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Positive impact on residents' quality of life</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Supports and promotes volunteer efforts</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Provides programs and services that are accessible to all residents</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Operational Excellence			
<i>We have the organizational capability to deliver consistent and defined levels of service to all stakeholders in a professional, efficient, and cost effective manner</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Staff have the knowledge, skills and capability to perform their jobs</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Streamlines operational processes and policies</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Promotes engagement and professional interaction with stakeholders</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Considers a cost-structure which allows Sturgeon County to remain competitive within a regional, national and global context</i> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>