

Speaking notes from Mayor Ireland  
Jasper Park Chamber of Commerce meeting, May 7, 2019



## **State of the Municipality 2019**

July 20 will mark the 18th anniversary of the Order in Council which created Jasper as a Specialized Municipality.

Now seems a great time to reflect on the State of the Municipality in terms of where we've been, how far we've come, where we expect to go.

People who were not yet born at the time of our incorporation will be able to vote in the fall election.

We achieved status first; the existing elected people, members of the Jasper Improvement District and the Jasper Town Committee, served as Jasper's first municipal council until municipal elections in October of 2001.

April 1st, 2002 saw the transfer of jurisdictional authorities as prescribed by the Order in Council and as contained in the Agreement for the Establishment of Local Government in the Town of Jasper.

Those jurisdictional authorities did not include land use planning and development, or matters pertaining to the environment.

Over the years, we acquired the transfer of business licensing, although it remains an area of joint jurisdiction with Parks Canada, and despite continuing efforts, general jurisdiction over land use planning and development, also remains with Parks Canada.

Our first major project was the Waste Water Treatment Plant, followed closely by the Emergency Services Building.

We constructed our own Municipal compound building and yard; we built a pedestrian underpass; public washrooms; the Discovery Trail.

We have new water wells, pumping from an aquifer up to the old, but improved reservoir, to avoid the risk of contamination from ground water. At the same time, we have re-equipped the old wells at Old Fort Point so we can charge our system from the bottom up in the event our reservoir runs dry during a major fire event.

We purchased new equipment for our volunteer fire brigade, including another response trailer with hoses and sprinklers to better protect your homes and properties.

We have a new fitness center; new and expanded daycare facilities.

Renovations at the Recreation Centre including room for gymnastics, revised offices, and renovations to the main foyer area have all been undertaken.

We've added space for CFS at the new Provincial Building on Patricia Street and added outdoor space for children. We've permitted a community garden on Connaught Drive.

We've completely re-done the soccer pitch at Centennial Field – twice actually - and we have upgraded the playground.

We have a new green space: Commemoration Park; soon to have a new outdoor stage to augment our cultural offering.

Of course, we have the new Library and Cultural Centre.

We saw the completion of Street Works Phase 2 - Turret, Tonquin and Miette. Patricia Circle has been redeveloped.

We've got new street lights, new sidewalks in some areas, some paved lanes and new pavement on some streets.

We've got Alpine Summit Seniors Lodge.

And have a new hostel downtown, and soon, a new hostel at the edge of town.

In housing, not that they are ours or were built by us, but we have presided during the addition to the community of multiple housing projects: we've seen Mountain Park Condominiums phase 2; MPL Place; new condominiums at each end of the 100 block of Connaught. Caribou Creek was developed. Now Aspen Gardens. That doesn't include any of the small, infill development or redevelopment of single or duplex lots or the additional units on the second floor of downtown commercial premises.

Our housing stock has seen a significant increase over the years.

We have been a busy town.

Just prior to incorporation, the then Federal Minister responsible for Parks Canada, the Honourable Sheila Copps, signed our first Community Plan. That document contained the 'commercial cap' and, although it has taken longer than expected, we have now, essentially reached build-out. That will have consequences in coming years. And, of course, our town boundary is prescribed in federal legislation and will take an Act of Parliament to change.

Within the confines of the commercial cap, and the zoning allocations, our town has seen some significant commercial redevelopment over the years, but, from both a local perspective and, I think, from the visitor's perspective, the pace has been slow enough and the overall impact gentle enough that the look and the feel of the community as a warm and welcoming small town has been retained, perhaps enhanced.

It would be hard to argue, for example, that the new build beside the SERVUS Credit Union is not an improvement over the old building that housed Any Thing But on the main floor, and where I used to climb the stairs to get my hair cut by Cliff, when I still had hair that needed cutting. Or that the new

Crimson is not more aesthetically pleasing than its predecessor, as are so many other examples throughout the community.

The face of our town is being refreshed, but it remains a friendly face; an inviting face.

And that invitation is working: we are certainly busier.

Our local tourism industry is, for the most part, strong and sustained.

We've come a very long way in our first 18 years.

Even for those who have been here for all of those years, I think it's sometimes astonishing to stop and reflect just how much has been done, how much has changed, but even more importantly, how we have managed that change to remain so unchanged in lifestyle, in attitude, in atmosphere, in attractiveness, in quality of life; how we have remained a home and a refuge for our residents, and at the same time, a welcoming and inclusive destination for our visitors.

So where to from here?

Well, there is always a degree of uncertainty in the market place, but despite sometimes rather public disagreements between more senior levels of governments, Canada remains, I believe, a desirable visitor destination internationally. And all of our elected officials should be saying so, always.

Our regional visitation appears to have been very supportive over the years: that may be impacted by events in the energy sector over the short term, but overall, trends are likely to continue.

The past two years have shown tremendous growth in visitor numbers as reflected by entrants at the National Park gates - not necessarily a precise measure of local visitation numbers - but still a useful guide. Those numbers may not be fully sustained, but a general trend towards increased visitation has certainly been established.

For the Municipality that means our facilities, our infrastructure and our staff will continue to be stressed.

We are currently undertaking some facility upgrades and improvements at the arena and aquatic centre, for example, and contemplating many more. Safety, is of course, paramount. So the ammonia plant will be moving: 55 years ago it was in the right spot, not so much now.

We have recently selected a consultant to engage in a fulsome review of our recreational and cultural facilities and services. Through that process we will determine, with the community, what changes to existing and what new facilities may be required to meet the evolving demands of residents and visitors. We are already looking at a new skate park and a new cycle skills park.

Council recently confirmed and revealed its Strategic Priorities which will guide us through the remaining two and a-half years of this term and through the first year of the next council term.

Council continues to view political direction and administrative decision making through the broad lens of Community Health.

Within a framework of the effective, efficient and fiscally responsible provision of municipal services, Council has identified six priority areas of focus:

Governance and Social Equity; Housing; Organizational Health; Economic and Fiscal Equity; Environmental Responsibility; and Public and Community Safety.

Within those areas you will see Council continue to pursue alternate sources of revenue and to more equitably allocate expenses among and between taxpayers, service users, and visitors.

That may mean confirming or generating greater equity and transparency in assessments; it may mean reviewing the tax rate split; potentially pursuing contributions from visitors, whether through a share of gate fees or some independent mechanism.

Our waste water treatment plant is but one example: built, operated and maintained by property taxes and provincial grants appropriate to a municipality of 5,000 residents, it is designed and required to accommodate the flushes and showers of thousands of additional visitors on a daily basis.

Our solid waste management is no different: whether it's garbage or recycling, our crews cannot keep pace with the ever-increasing volume. And with the limited space in a national park community, we have no room for collection or for storage.

You know what our commercial lanes look like in summer. You will continue to see cardboard collect in the lanes behind your businesses as we deal first - as we must - with garbage. We urge you to assist by at least breaking it down; flattening it out so we don't have boxes blowing up and down the lanes, or even the huge piles which look so unsightly.

Housing will, of course, continue to be an area of focus. Council is committed to seeing sod turned on at least one community housing project within this term of office. And we will investigate the acquisition or development of housing for our own municipal staff; like other employers, we often cannot effectively retain or recruit staff without some housing options.

And we will continue to pursue the acquisition of jurisdiction over land use planning and development with the goal of creating a Municipal Development Plan to encourage densification, infill and staff housing.

You are seeing some effort now in that direction through the Accessory Dwelling Unit initiative undertaken by Parks Canada; we support and applaud that effort.

From an organizational perspective, you will see Council review and evaluate all of its existing boards and committees to more effectively engage residents within defined roles and structures and to help harness some of the abundant energy, enthusiasm and expertise which resides within our community members.

We will continue to adjust our budget process to better manage costs and expectations, and in the process, to hopefully find ways to entice a broader range of community interest and participation.

The previous Council committed to an Asset Management Plan; that commitment will continue as we strive to ensure that with all of our assets we do the right thing to the right asset at the right time.

That means, for example, having a plan to replace or repair valves and pipes before paving streets or lanes.

No plan will eliminate the need for emergency repairs, and we recognize that we have some very old infrastructure which has already, in some cases, exceeded its life expectancy. Our municipality may only be approaching its 18th birthday; some of our infrastructure has seen 80 years or more. But Council and staff are committed to our Asset Management Plan.

We will continue to support our tourism economy generally, and more specifically, with support for the establishment of a culinary school, for example.

We will maintain a focus on the visitor experience, recognizing that our community is a core component of our local tourism product, and must rise to the level of expectation of an international market which is both very discerning and very mobile. And recognizing also that we must engage other levels of government to more equitably and appropriately share revenues and expenses related to servicing our visitors.

Fairness matters in all things: we will work with Alberta's new government to try and achieve greater fairness to Jasper taxpayers in respect to the Alberta School Foundation Fee.

With respect to local taxation, so long as there is relative equality of assessments both within and between property classes, relative balance can be achieved. But there is no relative equality of residential assessments in Jasper as compared to other communities: our assessments are generally much higher, so homeowners here pay much more in school taxes than do residents with comparable properties in other Alberta communities.

Much has been written and discussed recently concerning environmental stewardship. Council is committed to having all municipal operations, services and facilities adopt, where feasible, best environmental stewardship values and practices.

Waste reduction and diversion, generally and with respect to specific items is a priority. And it's everybody's job; every day. Just as our municipal job descriptions all now contain a reference to every one of our employees being a community ambassador, I will encourage the addition of a reference to every employee also being an environmental steward.

We will continue to be engaged through the West Yellowhead Regional Waste Management Authority in respect to solid waste. We recently had an audit done through that Board: you will be interested to know that Jasper has the distinction of having, by far, the largest number of mattresses shipped to our regional landfill. It is, of course, a reflection of our industry.

For public events, we are committed to include "Towards Zero Waste" as a requirement for organizers of all events.

As you are undoubtedly aware, we are currently considering a single use plastic item reduction by-law and are now receiving public input. There's been quite a bit.

In the realm of public safety, we are considering an amendment to our traffic by law to reduce speed limits in town. That, too, is in the public consultation phase and it too has generated much discussion.

Plastic bags and speed limits seem to engage citizens; if only budgets had the same affect.

And perhaps speeches by the Mayor.

Public and Community Safety in Jasper is perhaps best defined by our preparations for wildfire.

We have built on our positive relationship with Parks Canada to achieve remarkable results, most notably over the past winter season, but really dating back over several years. And CN has also stepped up with valuable assistance and is deserving of great credit and appreciation.

Firesmart is not new to our community: firesmart and forest fuel reduction efforts still continue, but much has already been achieved. And not just physically, on the ground, in the forest surrounding and encroaching on the town. We have also committed to providing staff and Council with training, resources and equipment for enhanced emergency readiness.

Our Director of Emergency Management, Chief Van Tighem, has organized and held table top exercises to familiarize people with the roles and requirements of their positions in the event of an emergency. Council has recently taken a half day course offered by Alberta Emergency Management Association to better understand its role in the event of an emergency. Other courses will continue to be offered.

We have a thorough Emergency Response Plan; some of you will have seen it, and components of it, last spring and summer, including an evacuation plan. It is an ever-evolving document, subject to constant improvement and upgrade as more subject matter information is developed and learnings from other communities and other emergencies are incorporated.

As part of the emergency response plan we will also work to improve our local emergency communications system. Be on the alert.

In addition, we will be developing a recovery framework, recognizing that significant work will begin once an emergency has abated.

There will be an open house on May 23; I encourage you all to attend.

Council has set its priorities through to 2022 in a Strategic Priorities document.

I invite you to get a copy and read it through.

Council recognizes, as will you, that other things will arise. While focused on these priorities, we will be alert and responsive to new challenges as they come.

The State of the Municipality is sound.

We face challenges for sure: challenges from the natural environment, but much mitigation has been achieved and more will come; housing challenges, as perennial as snow in May, will persist, but action will continue. I recognize that often people believe that nothing is ever done; on the contrary, try and count the number of housing units which have been added to our community during the past 18 years;

fiscal challenges, particularly based on aging infrastructure and facilities, will be daunting, but again, the review process about to begin, coupled with the Asset Management Plan, will allow us to face those challenges with a high degree of confidence;

we face other environmental challenges – not from, but to the environment: the world has changed, is changing, and we must do more - as municipalities and as individuals - to reduce our impact, but we are encouraged that our citizens - those who chose to live in this incredible, protected, natural environment - are already so closely aligned with the steps which must be undertaken.

The State of the Municipality is Sound: not because of Council or the Municipal organization, but because our community - our residents and our business community - has demonstrated, ample times, over a long time, that it can and it will, surmount the changing challenges we have and will always face.

Together we will continue to Venture Beyond, to a future, I think, rich with promise and prosperity; rich in community health.

Richard Ireland