

The Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC) met in Whitecourt, AB, February 5 and 6, 2009 for its regular administration meeting and Regional Stakeholders Forum.

Tour and Dinner Meeting

Council was given a guided bus tour of the Town of Whitecourt and viewed several new and ongoing infrastructure developments. Among these were the Rotary Club Park, new housing developments and the Allan and Jean Millar Center, Whitecourt's new recreational facility.

Whitecourt Mayor Trevor Thain and Woodlands County's Deputy-Mayor Daniel Pritchard warmly welcomed the Council to a dinner meeting hosted by the town, and spoke briefly on co-operative initiatives within the region.

George VanderBurg, MLA for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne attended the Regional Stakeholders forum and welcomed the Council and guests to his constituency. As Chair of the Seniors Advisory Council, Mr. VanderBurg spoke about the value of Alberta's seniors and the need to plan for their future. New facilities are needed and Mr. VanderBurg praised the efforts of his constituents in raising funds for local projects and the Province's efforts to match those funds.

Regional stakeholders presented on a variety of topics: (Tourism, Forestry, Rural Dev't. & Education)

Tourism and Recreation: Council heard about the many opportunities for northern tourism. The Whitecourt area is capitalizing on their geographic location and developing local snowmobiling and quad trails. Regional economic benefits brought in by local tourism initiatives such as *Sled Invasion*, an annual snowmobiling event, are in the millions. Support for a proposal from the Alberta Recreation Corridors Coordinating Committee was also discussed. The proposal suggests that a portion of registration fees of all-terrain vehicles be returned to local organizations for trail maintenance and safety initiatives. The proposal will be brought to Caucus this spring for discussion.

Forestry: Local industry brought several issues to the table. Among them were concerns with transportation costs, road maintenance, access to credit, mountain pine beetle suppression, and industry diversification and greening through governmental incentives. Changes to Provincial regulations are required as current red tape surrounding approvals and regulations are making it difficult to do business in the north.

Rural Development: GROWTH Alberta, a central Alberta Regional Economic Development Alliance (REDA) operating in part within the NADC's boundary, discussed potential areas for partnerships. The group is currently focusing on youth engagement, tourism and training for agricultural diversification. Limited access to internet in rural areas continues to be a challenge. The NADC will be investigating rural access to the internet this spring.

Education: Council heard about the struggles of rural schools facing sharply declining enrollments. Council suggested that a focus on development of more employment opportunities and youth programs is needed to help keep families in rural areas. Local and regional partnerships between post-secondary institutions continue to positively enhance the delivery of training programs and services to local adults in rural areas in the wake of industry diversification.

NADC Updates/ Upcoming Events

- The LINKS Selection Committee has reviewed 09/10 project proposals. Applicants will be notified regarding the status of their application in a few weeks. Funded programs must show direct benefit to Jr./ Sr. High students with measurable results.
- The NADC Bursary application deadline is May 15th. Visit benorth.ca for more information on bursaries.
- NADC and the Cold Lake Affordable Housing Society (CLAHS) to host an *Affordable Housing Workshop*, March 24, 2009 in Cold Lake. Share ideas, best practices and network with other communities. For more information contact Michelle Bourdon at 780-812-4403.
- *Provincial Physician Recruitment and Retention Workshop, May 6 & 7, Nisku, AB.* To receive information on this workshop, please forward your e-mail address to Rebakah Seidel, Rural Physician Action Plan (rebakah.seidel@rpap.ab.ca).
- The NADC welcomes Research Officer, Natalie Butler to the Peace River office. Natalie comes to us from ASRD and has an extensive background in natural resource management and research.

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