

**SADDLE HILLS COUNTY
FACILITY UTILIZATION STUDY AND
REVIEW OF STAFFING REQUIREMENTS**

F. **Conclusion**

This report was prepared to assist Saddle Hills County Council in answering three questions. The results of the review are as follows:

1. Are current staff levels appropriate for the services being delivered?

The current staff levels are appropriate to provide the current municipal services as directed by Council and included in the annual budget.

2. Is the current Administration Building being properly utilized and does it meet the needs of current staff components? Is the current Public Works shop and offices arrangement appropriate?

The current Administration Building no longer meets the needs of Saddle Hills County. The building is well-utilized, but is too small to meet the current and future needs of the County.

The Public Works Shop should eventually be relocated to lands adjacent to the current Administration Building.

3. Where would the municipal services facility best be located from a functional and economic perspective?

An addition to the existing Administration Building should be designed and constructed as soon as possible. The Saddle Hills County municipal services buildings should remain in the Town of Spirit River.

Observations and Findings

- The majority of those interviewed were of the opinion that timely and effective service delivery was being achieved with the current staff levels. Elected officials reported almost no negative feedback from ratepayers with respect to the timeliness of obtaining service from the administrative office and the public works department.
- The amount of overtime paid to County staff is not excessive, and is reasonable given the nature of tasks performed.
- The comparative analysis with other rural municipalities confirms that staff levels are reasonable and consistent with levels in the control group of municipalities. Many variables exist which can impact calculations significantly. The degree to which services are contracted out, numbers of part-time and seasonal positions and the type and levels of service provided will affect survey results. Clear Hills County contracts out all assessment services, grader services and outside worker functions. It did not, therefore, form part of the study group. Birch Hills County contracts out assessment functions and also employs a number of part-time and half-time staff, which do not appear as full-time positions in the data. The numbers for Birch Hills County are, therefore the highest values in each of the 3 calculations.
- It should also be noted that most municipalities in the control group contract out assessment functions while Saddle Hills County has a four person assessment department which provides services to four other municipalities in the region. While the assessment staff increase the overall staff component by about 10%, Saddle Hills County still compares very favorably to the control group.
- Several staff members have responsibilities which include more than one function or service area. The Manager of Planning and IT Services oversees Planning and Development functions and is responsible for the computer, GIS and GPS functions. Other examples include the Technical Services Coordinator and the Manager of Rural Development sharing responsibility for the Safety Officer position. The practice of assigning more than one major job responsibility to staff members promotes appropriate service provision while keeping overall staff numbers within reasonable limits.
- Suggestions for future growth and new positions mentioned during interviews included an Economic Development Officer, a Facilities Manager to handle operations and maintenance of all County facilities, a Communications Officer and a Recreation Services position.
- The current staffing level for Saddle Hills County is appropriate and reasonable to provide services and programs as directed by County Council and identified in the annual budget of the County. Any new initiatives approved by Council or additional responsibilities will require new positions to be created.

Observations and Findings

- The majority of those interviewed felt the existing Administration Building is too small to meet the current administrative and governance requirements of the County.
- Some staff members in the 'open area' may be dealing with confidential or sensitive matters in a location where casual observers or members of the public at the front counter could overhear conversations.
- Office space sharing is occurring in at least two instances and does not promote maximizing professionalism, concentration or productivity.
- File storage, particularly in the assessment department, is cluttering the hallways and creating potential workplace safety issues.
- Secure file storage, both from restricted access and fire protection requirements, is non-existent. Many of the files being stored are records owned by other municipalities served by the assessment department.
- The Reeve's office is located within the administrative office area. This may result in a lack of separation of governance functions from administrative functions. A more suitable location for the Reeve's office would be near the Council chambers and the Councilors' lounge or meeting room.
- There is no space available to create an office or work station for any new or additional staff positions being contemplated by Council.
- The County is currently unable to participate in the Municipal Internship Program or the high school Work Experience Program due to program work space requirements.

- The current Administration Building no longer serves the needs of Saddle Hills County. Staff are doing their best to work in a less than ideal space, and no new staff can be reasonably accommodated. More space is needed, and Council should consider either a major addition to the existing Administration Building or reconstruction in the very near future.
- The current arrangement with the Public Works Shop, and offices at a separate location from the Administration Building, causes functional and operational problems.
- Council should consider relocating several offices to the Administration Building when new space is available. Constructing a new Public Works Shop adjacent to the Administration Building would centralize Saddle Hills County operations at a single site, enhancing communication and creating a sense of belonging to a team for all County staff.
- Any new construction should provide for:
 - Offices for Public Works Office staff,
 - Offices for potential new positions in Economic Development, Communications, Recreation Services etc.,
 - A larger and improved secure file storage area,
 - Consideration that were an amalgamation to occur (in any way), the Administration Building and Public Works Shop can handle future needs.

Observations and Findings

- There is some support for the relocation of municipal facilities to a location in Saddle Hills County. Possible sites included:
 - Just inside the east boundary of Saddle Hills County near highway 49 and Devale Road,
 - A location approximately central in Saddle Hills County, perhaps near Moonshine Lake road or further west,
 - Towards the west end of the County near the community of Bay Tree,
 - In the Hamlet of Woking.

- Factors supporting relocation of municipal offices to Saddle Hills County:
 - An enhanced sense of identity may be achieved if the Administration Building and Public Works Shop were actually located in Saddle Hills County,
 - A more central location would shorten the travel distance from many County residences to the office complex,
 - Locating the office in a Saddle Hills County community may act as a catalyst in encouraging economic development in adjacent areas,
 - A more central office location may make it reasonable for more Saddle Hills County residents to seek employment with the County.

- Functional consideration
 - The County has in place draft plan dated August 22, 2008 which consists of preliminary architectural drawings for an addition and renovation to the existing Administration Building, and plans for a new Public Works Shop and storage shed adjacent to the existing Administration Building.
 - The County grader fleet is provided with warranty work from Grande Prairie.
 - Public Works staff purchase the majority of their supplies and parts from vendors in Spirit River.
 - Virtually all of Saddle Hills County's current staff were hired with the understanding that the Administrative Building and Public Works Shop were located in the Town of Spirit River. Staff living in or near Spirit River would lose conveniences such as short commutes, going home for lunch, being close to their children's schools or their spouses workplaces.
 - Hiring of new and qualified staff may be an increased challenge if municipal offices were relocated. The opportunity for spousal employment in Spirit River is greatly enhanced by the existence of schools, the School Division office, the hospital, the RCMP, Alberta Fish and Wildlife, the Town offices, the Municipal District of Spirit River offices and local businesses in close proximity to the Saddle Hills County office.
 - The availability of municipal and other services in the Town of Spirit River enhances the functionality of administrative work. Mail is picked up daily at the Spirit River post office and staff make a daily trip to the bank in Spirit River for deposits and documentation. Water and sewer services are provided by the Town of Spirit River and reliable high-speed internet is available at the existing office. The current office is established as a point of presence for the Alberta SuperNet as the connection point was installed several years ago. The SuperNet is not currently being used but video conferencing and e-learning would be available at the present location to serve the County's future needs.
 - Many residents attending the County office combine their trip to Spirit River with other tasks and errands such as shopping, banking, school functions and others. County office staff are of the opinion that almost no one makes a special trip to town only to deal with County business.
 - The population in and around the Town of Spirit River and the Town of Rycroft provide an important pool of seasonal workers for the Saddle Hills County Public Works department.

- From both a functional and economic perspective, moving the Saddle Hills County Administration Building and Public Works Shop out of Sprit River is not in the County's best interests.
- To abandon the current Administration Building and relocate to an alternate site (new construction, land acquisition and servicing a new site) would cost approximately \$3.0 million more than constructing an addition to the existing building.