

Regionalization Framework

Lac Ste Anne Summer Village Regionalization Study (SVRS)

April 2022



1 Purpose

The Regionalization Framework's purpose is to serve as a guide for identifying and pursuing opportunities of increased intermunicipal collaboration between the Summer Villages on Lac Ste. Anne. As the culmination of the Lac Ste. Anne Summer Villages Regionalization Study, this framework provides the Project Municipalities with a foundation of recommendations and tangible action on the path to increased collaboration.

2 Participation

The framework is designed for the Project Municipalities including the Summer Villages of:

- Castle Island
- Ross Haven
- Sunset Point
- Val Quentin
- West Cove
- Yellowstone

Through project analysis and discussion with the Summer Village of Castle Island, it is clear that community culture, governance, and servicing models operate very differently from the other Summer Villages and are largely volunteer based. As a result, it may not be beneficial for Castle Island to take part in all collaboration or regionalization initiatives. The Summer Village of Castle Island is included in the Framework to invite them to participate in discussions and efforts for regional collaboration, knowing that they may opt in or out of portions at their discretion.

3 Background

The Project Municipalities began the Lac Ste. Anne Summer Village Regionalization Study (SVRS) in August, 2021 to understand potential regionalization options. The intent of the project was to explore regionalization options that would ultimately improve partnerships, cost sharing, and other efficiencies between their communities.

Early on, the summer villages set a high-level vision for the project:

Creation of a Regionalization Framework that serves as a foundation for effective and efficient governance across the Lac Ste. Anne Summer Villages while supporting the autonomy and unique identities of each.

And shared values for working together:

- Transparency
- Respectful communication
- Idea sharing and ongoing dialogue
- Ensure every member is heard
- Autonomy is respected

3.1 Regionalization Options

Four distinct regionalization options were analyzed by the Summer Villages including:

- **Business as Usual**
Continuing informal collaborations between various Project Municipalities is the baseline option considered. 'Business as usual' maintains the existing conditions of the Project Municipalities without change.
- **Intermunicipal Collaboration**
The intermunicipal collaboration option provides a flexible way for the Project Municipalities to work together to address efficient service delivery, strategic planning, and other regional issues. This option may consist of bilateral or multilateral intermunicipal collaboration frameworks (ICFs) for services across the region, or more informal intermunicipal collaboration depending on the unique situations of each partner.
- **Shared Administration**
The shared administration option looks at coordinated procurement of administrative infrastructure and services by the Project Municipalities. This model includes shared office space and equipment, administrative staff, digital systems, and potentially other shared service delivery such as public works, development, and specific service contract procurement.
- **Amalgamation**
Amalgamation is the formal restructuring process of two or more municipalities joining to become one. Amalgamating municipalities must share a contiguous border; however, in the Province of Alberta, summer villages with a non-contiguous border may also pursue amalgamation if they share a common body of water (MGA s.101.1(2)). Summer village municipal status would be maintained in amalgamation.

3.2 Project Overview

The Lac Ste. Anne Summer Village Regionalization Study took the following steps to develop the preferred regionalization option:

- **Background research** was conducted to inventory current municipal policy and governance structures, collaborative initiatives, and finances.
- **Internal municipal workshops** were held with administration and elected officials to gain a greater understanding of current servicing, municipal and intermunicipal dynamics, as well as challenges and opportunities for regionalization.
- **A public engagement** event was held online to inform community members of the project process and get feedback on community service levels, gaps and opportunities in servicing, as well as public hopes and concerns for the project. An online survey provided additional opportunity for public feedback for those unable to attend the event, and all public input was captured and summarized in the What We Heard Report.

- **The Technical Analysis Report** was prepared based on all data gathered throughout the above steps to provide an inventory and assessment of:
 - current service delivery;
 - comparison of service delivery by overall cost, per-capita costs, and per-lot costs;
 - comparison of municipal finance; and
 - overview of local governance, policy, and initiatives.
- **Governance options** were discussed with the Steering Committee to assess how well they met the project's criteria.
- **The draft Regionalization Framework** was developed based on outcomes of the Technical Analysis Report and Steering Committee discussion of regionalization options.
- **A final online public engagement** event and online survey was held to provide an overview of the draft Regionalization Framework and get feedback. All public input was captured and summarized in the What We Heard Report 2.

3.3 Outcomes

The four regionalization options were generally assessed against the project's criteria developed by the summer villages including:

- Reduction of costs and taxes;
- Efficiency of service delivery;
- Sense of place and identity;
- Ability to leverage increased buying power;
- Increased access to grants and funding; and
- Ability to maintain summer village status.

Through the analysis, the overall assessment for each regionalization option was:

- **Business As Usual:** does not offer the municipalities the opportunity to meet the criteria
- **Amalgamation:** does not guarantee reduction in costs/taxes, and does not support the desired sense of place and identity expected by the municipalities
- **Shared Administration:** offers potential cost reductions and efficiency of services as well as the other criteria, but the municipalities' data is not aligned sufficiently at this time to directly compare value for service delivery
- **Intermunicipal Collaboration:** has the potential to reduce costs and taxes, as well as efficiency of services and all other criteria on specific services. The scope of intermunicipal collaboration can be tailored to address services where current efficiencies can be enhanced in the short term, while ongoing collaboration efforts can work to align municipal data to better understand additional collaboration options.

The Steering Committee reviewed all the options and determined that intermunicipal collaboration is the best fit at this time based on additional factors such as:

- the Project Municipalities' desire for further collaboration;
- considering the recent election, councils are at an early stage of collaboration relationships;
- elected officials want to better understand the different municipal approaches in how data is tracked when making decisions about service delivery and cost;
- the current contractual agreements in place, and recently negotiated; and
- elected officials want to focus on planning long-term collaboration together over the next few years.

4 Summer Villages on Lac Ste Anne Intermunicipal Collaboration

The most suitable approach, at this time, for the summer villages is intermunicipal collaboration. Intermunicipal collaboration would include an ongoing intermunicipal committee structure and long-term strategic planning to optimize efficiencies and further explore increased collaboration. This approach will focus on specific, potentially beneficial services that have been identified. Through long-term planning and a commitment to continued exploration of opportunities, the Project Municipalities may choose to work toward future higher levels of collaboration including potential shared administration if deemed useful.

The summer villages have acknowledged a sense of urgency for collaboration. Some new councils are reviewing servicing contracts, and collaboration at this time may enable the maximization of efficiencies and potentially leverage buying power. Efforts on coordinated tendering are an immediate next step.

Developing a long-term strategic plan will be priority, and will require a longer term work plan. To create this plan, the Project Municipalities will develop a fulsome understanding of all data, and understand the potential for alignment of municipal considerations such as accounting practices, service delivery expectations, and ongoing contracts.

Taking a phased approach to long-term collaboration ensures Project Municipalities work toward larger collaborative goals while being able to act quickly on current opportunities in tendering for contracts and other opportunities.

Therefore, the Project Municipalities should establish a dedicated intermunicipal committee upon completion of the Summer Villages Regionalization Study to continue moving forward with intermunicipal collaboration and address current opportunities as quickly as possible.

4.1 Intermunicipal Committee

A standing intermunicipal committee consisting of representatives from each of the Project Municipalities should be created to undertake items such as:

- intermunicipal strategic planning;
- potential development of intermunicipal collaboration agreements (and intermunicipal collaboration frameworks, if desired); and
- committing resources to continued collaborative development.

There is an option for the SVRS Steering Committee to continue their discussion and momentum from the project as the new intermunicipal committee.

4.2 Committee Expectations

Timelines:

- The Intermunicipal Committee should be formed and meet in Q2 2022.
- The intent is to meet as soon as possible after the completion of the Regionalization Framework because the Project Municipalities expressed urgency in moving forward with collaborative efforts.

Clear Process:

The committee should establish Terms of Reference to set clear expectations for the committee and process including defining:

- roles and responsibilities;
- resources dedicated;
- scheduling;
- detailed scope; and
- process for the working committee including:
 - Decision-making process
The Intermunicipal Committee may adopt the decision making process of SVRS Steering Committee. The newly formed committee should review the decision-making model and clearly outline processes in the Terms of Reference.
 - Prepare dispute resolution process
As the municipalities pursue increased collaboration, having a process in place for intermunicipal dispute resolution is both critical and a requirement for all ICFs, (MGA s708.29(3.1)). Whether this intermunicipal committee decides to pursue an ICF, the dispute resolution guidance is best practice and is highly recommended.

4.3 Committee Scope

The Intermunicipal Committee will be responsible for intermunicipal collaboration in pursuit of service delivery efficiencies; costs/tax reduction; and the ability to leverage buying power.

The Committee will:

- develop a long-term collaboration strategy;
- set priorities for topics important to the Project Municipalities;
- understand how each municipality tracks data and costs in an effort to align data sets;
- explore and build consensus on collaboration agreements or intermunicipal collaboration frameworks, as appropriate; and
- establish phasing for collaborative efforts over time as priorities and regional relationships evolve.

Immediate Collaboration Opportunities:

There are a few topics identified through the Lac Ste. Anne Summer Village Regionalization Study that are likely to result in greater service delivery efficiency or cost reductions, and should be a high priority for the Intermunicipal Committee to explore. The final engagement feedback indicated that each initiative should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

- **Coordinated Tendering**

The Partner Municipalities have identified that one of the most immediate and effective collaboration opportunities is to work together on tendering initiatives. The ability to coordinate service requests into a larger tendering process should leverage buying power, and reduce administrative efforts. This approach to tendering can occur for any service. Ideas for coordinated tendering via a common website were provided through the final public engagement.

- **Community Peace Officer / Policing**

Collaboration for regional community peace officer services managed by the Project Municipalities would greatly improve service delivery. This initiative may be cost effective for some communities and costly to others. Notably, during the study's public engagement, bylaw enforcement and policing were the most common services the public indicated they would be willing to pay more for. The Project Municipalities also wish to explore how to work together on the future of policing in the area.

- **Public Works / Parks and Recreation**

Public works and parks and recreation were another area identified for possible service improvements through collaboration. Efficiencies could be realized through combined buying power in attracting contractors for larger scopes of work across the Project Municipalities and having a full-time employee to oversee regional contracts and maintenance duties would improve service levels in most of the summer villages. This structure may provide further benefit in that a full-time employee could also oversee capital projects which would coordinate opportunities and increase efficiency and buying power. Final public engagement suggested exploring road maintenance as a possible service collaboration.

- **Solid Waste**

Solid waste services could be coordinated among municipalities as a shared service to reduce overhead and increase efficiency.

Additional services may provide some benefit, but would not reduce costs significantly:

- **Water and Wastewater**

Structured regional collaboration may give the municipalities negotiating power on water and wastewater contracts and stronger leverage with commissions such as West Interlake District.

- **Planning and Development & Assessment**

There is opportunity for collaboration in areas such as planning and assessment; however, this would not likely lead to cost savings, but could increase the level of service. The final public engagement resulted in suggestions of exploring development officers, economic investment initiatives and coordinated land use bylaws.

4.4 Commitment to Collaboration

To promote and pursue intermunicipal collaboration, the Project Municipalities commit to:

- **Address inconsistent data:** Before embarking on specific sharing agreements, the Project Municipalities commit to reviewing in detail their service delivery and associated costs, municipal finance, and any other relevant information to fully understand cost comparisons and opportunities among the municipalities. The Intermunicipal Committee will be supported by each municipality's administration in collaborating on detailed financial analysis to understand how each municipality tracks information; the current state of services; and potential opportunities.
- **Ensure funding for collaboration:** The Project Municipalities will budget a nominal fee for collaboration (~\$2,000/year) to cover the cost of committee meetings; potential additional expenses such as drafting of shared tender documents etc.; and long-term efforts in pursuit of regional collaboration.
- **Plan strategically:** The summer villages commit to developing a long-term (i.e., 10-year) strategic plan to explore increasing collaboration. This strategic plan would offer the Project Municipalities a phased approach to address key priorities quickly while building a sustainable long-term strategy for service delivery and other regional concerns.

Strategic planning should set a clear vision, values, and priorities for the summer villages' long-term collaboration. Current priorities such as shared servicing for a community peace officer and public works have been identified through technical analysis and long term opportunities of future shared administration have been discussed as showing potential benefit for some or all of the Project Municipalities. By committing to shared priorities and clear strategic approach, the summer villages can build on momentum gained in the Regionalization Study to make the most of current opportunities and set a clear path for the future.

5 Closing

There is potential for efficiencies and cost savings to be found for the Summer Villages on Lac Ste. Anne with coordination and collaboration. By taking a strategic approach to working together and actively pursuing increased collaboration through the Intermunicipal Committee structure, prioritizing timely opportunities like contract tendering, and other tools laid out in this framework, the Summer Villages can potentially realize these efficiencies.

As the culmination of research, analysis, and engagement throughout the Summer Village Regionalization Study, this framework guides next steps in collaboration. Moving forward, the Project Municipalities commit to pursue collaboration and will identify new opportunities; build intermunicipal relationships and trust; and establish long-term strategy for addressing evolving regional priorities.