

Rocky View Needs a Coherent Gravel Policy

By: Rocky View Forward

Everyone knows that gravel is essential to our economy. They also know that gravel extraction has unavoidable harmful impacts on air quality, water quality, road safety, noise levels, and wildlife habitat.

Gravel is not a scarce commodity in Rocky View. Its abundance in the County means that we can easily have good policy to ensure that gravel pits are located and operated in a responsible manner that minimizes negative impacts. Unfortunately, Rocky View's current council majority has failed miserably to address the issue.

If you'd like to see better gravel policy, here are some key questions you should ask candidates:

Do they support an Aggregate Resource Plan (ARP)?

In 2013 when the County Plan was approved, council recognized the importance of developing policy to guide aggregate extraction. As a stop-gap measure, the County Plan included extensive requirements for technical studies for gravel applications and direction to move forward on an ARP.

The next Council undertook one of the most extensive public consultation processes in Rocky View's history; but ran out of time to implement anything. More residents participated than in any other County public engagement activity. In conjunction with Rocky View Gravel Watch, residents provided detailed input to help craft a County-wide gravel policy.

The current Council initially promised to continue work on the ARP. In fact, Councillor Gautreau went so far as to publicly promise that residents "had his word" that he would move the ARP forward. Instead, Gautreau led this council's majority in killing the initiative.

How did current councillors vote on the ARP?

This is a reality check for answers to the former question. Kevin Hanson, Crystal Kissel, and Samantha Wright were the only ones who supported continuing work on the ARP. Kim McKylor, Al Schule, Jerry Gautreau, Greg Boehlke, and Dan Henn all voted to kill it.

Why is it important to have an ARP?

This council's gravel decisions have been mixed, at best. They rejected Lehigh Hanson's third attempt at a gravel pit in Bearspaw. However, McKylor and Boehlke indicated that, if the application had been smaller, they would have approved it. This council did scale back Burnco's outrageous request to redesignate almost 2,000 acres along the Bow River, west of Cochrane. However, the council majority, McKylor, Schule, Gautreau, Boehlke, and Henn, approved gravel extraction on top of the aquifer that feeds Big Hill Springs, the heart of Big Hill Springs Provincial Park, despite a request from Alberta Parks not to do so and solid opposition from local residents.

How did current councillors vote on removing technical requirements for gravel applications from the Municipal Development Plan?

In their efforts to replace the County Plan with a revised Municipal Development Plan, the council majority removed all gravel-specific provisions from the County Plan. Only Kissel, Wright and Hanson supported leaving them in. This left no specialized requirements for assessing future gravel applications.

Do they support requiring gravel companies to fund independent third-party assessments of their technical studies?

Serious flaws in Rocky View's approach to evaluating proposed new gravel pits became unambiguously clear in the public hearings for gravel applications during this council's term. There were three major gravel applications. For each application, residents financed independent technical studies that refuted or raised serious doubts about the gravel companies' technical studies.

If council had exercised due diligence, they would have resolved the glaring discrepancies before making any decisions. Instead, it was made clear that no one in Administration had read the technical studies submitted by residents. Worse, the council majority ignored them altogether and instead took the gravel companies' assertions at face value.

At the Summit pit public hearing, McKylor blamed residents for not working with the applicant in advance of the hearing. Resolving differences is council's job - not residents. When Wright attempted to have a third-party review of the contradictory studies at the Burnco public hearing, only Hanson and Kissel supported her. The majority refused even though Burnco's representatives had indicated a willingness to resolve the issues.

What involvement have candidates had in gravel issues in the past?

All candidates in divisions where gravel is a controversial issue are claiming they will protect residents from future gravel operations. However, it is important to judge candidates by their records - not just by what they are saying now.

While we work towards getting a better council elected on October 18th, residents need to ensure that their councillors are committed to putting solid rules for gravel extraction in place to protect both ourselves and our irreplaceable environment. If the candidates haven't been vocal on gravel issues in the past, can you rely on their convenient newly discovered concern going forward? We think not.

ROCKY VIEW NEEDS CHANGE

We need a Council committed to strengthening our communities

Why should you care?

Because this council majority - McKylor, Schule, Gautreau, Boehlke and Henn - have moved further and further away from meaningful public input.

And, they have approved multiple new developments against loud and uniform opposition from affected residents.

How does this strengthen our existing communities?

Change is inevitable, but it must be sustainable and reflect residents' input.

Get Informed - Vote!

The election is October 18th Together we can make a difference!

Rocky View Forward - your grassroots' residents' advocacy group www.rockyviewforward.com