

Municipalities

Information and Ideas for
Saskatchewan Municipal Leaders

Today

Issue #8 November 2002

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Municipal Relations Division New Web Pages

We in Government Relations and Aboriginal Affairs recognize that the Internet has the potential to change the way the department delivers services and communicates with its stakeholders. The department's website can be a helpful tool for municipal leaders if it is functional and provides users with the applications they need. The redevelopment of the Municipal Relations Division pages on the website is one of the first steps in offering easier on-line access to information and services for municipal administrators.

The main focus of the new web pages is to provide municipalities with the most current information they need for daily operations, while still providing general data to the public who may be interested in municipal facts.

The redesigned area has more manuals, guides, sample bylaws and forms to help administrators do their job.

Improved menus and connections will also make finding information easier. Other enhancements include improved sections containing frequently asked questions, links to other municipal related websites, and Municipal Relations Division staff listings.

More improvements are coming. An improved and interactive on-line Municipal Directory will let municipalities update their details in the directory to keep the information more current. Copies of the directory will also be available for users to download and print if they prefer to have a paper copy in their offices.

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Municipal Relations Division Web Pages Continued

Financial statements will be another new and interactive item for municipal leaders. Once the feature is in place next year, administrators will be able to enter all of their financial information for the year on-line and send it electronically to the department.

These additional features will increase the accountability of the municipal sector to the public, and in turn give the public a better understanding of municipal work.

**Here is the link to the
Municipal Relations Division
new web pages:**
www.municipal.gov.sk.ca

Agricultural Land Assessment

The Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency (SAMA) has a new policy for the way agricultural land is valued.

The new formula returns to a productivity-based model similar to what was in place prior to 1997.

The productivity model bases agricultural land valuation on the characteristics of the soil and its ability to produce crops. This model is less reliant on land sales and is also less influenced by local market conditions such as proximity to oil and gas activity.

The exact effect of the change in methods will not be known until SAMA and other assessing authorities have prepared preliminary assessments for the 2005 reassessment.

However, SAMA's decision to change its method of valuations is expected to trigger regional shifts with agricultural values increasing in some areas and decreasing in others.

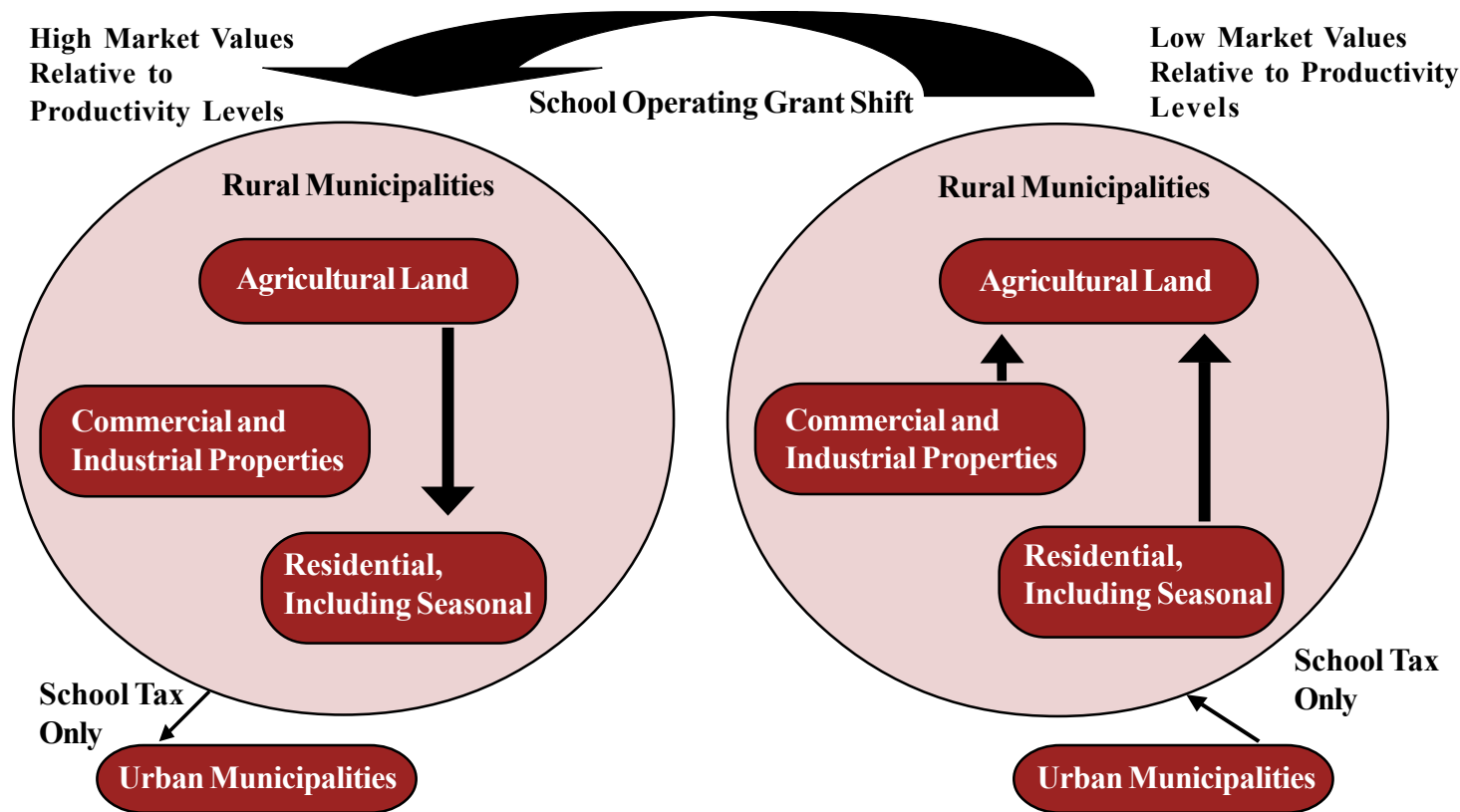
The provincial government establishes the property classes and the percentage of values, which are set on a province-wide basis. The provincial decision on province-wide percentages of value cannot effectively manage the expected regional tax and school grant shifts triggered by the change in agricultural land valuation methods made by SAMA.

SAMA is an independent agency with responsibilities to the province, local government and property owners. The authority for assessment methods used for agriculture land is not a provincial government decision, but one delegated by the legislation to the SAMA Board.

With the allotment of \$990,000 announced in this year's provincial budget, SAMA will begin phase one of the Saskatchewan Property Assessment Network (SPAN), replacing the current computer system designed in the 1970s.

With the new system SAMA will be able to provide property assessment information on a more timely basis to government and customers. SPAN is expected to be fully deployed in early 2004 and ready for use in the next provincial revaluation scheduled for 2005.

The diagram on the next page shows the expected general property tax and school operating shifts. The left side of the diagram represents an area that has a relative decrease in agricultural assessment. The right side shows a region that has a relative increase. The arrows show the tax shifts among property classes, due to relative changes in agricultural land assessments, within each municipal and school jurisdiction. The large arrow between the two areas shows that there will also be shifts in Learning's foundation operating grants to school divisions due to the relative changes in assessment among school divisions.



Projected tax and school grant shifts due to agricultural land valuation decision

Preparation for the 2005 Reassessment

Government Relations and Aboriginal Affairs (GRAA), together with the Department of Learning, have begun preparing for the 2005 reassessment.

The Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency (SAMA) and municipalities that provide their own assessment service have received an outline of the government's timeline for setting the 2005 percentages of value and associated assessment data format requirements in the mail.

The most critical requirement in the timeline is the delivery of accurate preliminary assessed values from the assessment authorities. To ensure timely

delivery, government has established regulations that require submission of these values by January 1, 2004.

The process needs to be manageable with new computer systems being utilized by most parties involved, new approaches to value being available, and for requirements for conversion of data.

GRAA and Learning need six to eight months to complete the required analysis for percentages of value, undertake internal and external consultations, and for government to make provincial tax policy decisions. The assessing

authorities will need time to apply these decisions in determining taxable assessments. Local governments will then use the remaining time for local tax policy decisions.

If preliminary assessments are not delivered on a timely basis, schedules will be compressed and the 2005 reassessment may have to be delayed.

Assessing authorities and municipalities are being encouraged to meet the target deadlines for work needing completion before the next reassessment. By meeting the deadlines we will ensure a cooperative and successful reassessment in 2005.

Municipal Zoning and Intensive Livestock Operations

Livestock production in Saskatchewan generates approximately \$1.5 billion annually in farm cash receipts, accounting for approximately 28 per cent of the province's total farm cash receipts (Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization website). As Intensive Livestock Operations (ILO) expand and develop, municipalities may wish to consider amending or adopting zoning bylaws to clearly identify the municipal interest to support diversification and intensification of agricultural opportunities.

To assist municipalities in the preparation of appropriate planning tools, SARM invited the Community Planning Branch to participate on a committee with representatives from the beef, pork and poultry industry, Agrivision Corporation and Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization. Committee discussions have led to the preparation of two draft bylaws for consideration by municipal councils. The model bylaws, one for use with zoning under *The Planning and Development Act*, and one for Section 215 of *The Rural Municipality Act, 1989* include:

- the addition of location criteria for determining site suitability;
- the opportunity for public consultation;
- the type of ILO that requires a municipal decision; and

- a set of development standards which council may consider for the development or expansion of an ILO.

These model bylaws provide councils with a balanced approach to facilitate and promote the development of intensive livestock operations in locations acceptable to the municipality, the ratepayers and industry. Most importantly, the draft bylaws establish the rural municipality's authority for local land use decisions that coordinate with and complement the provincial procedures for ILOs.

Those rural municipalities that have not adopted a zoning bylaw should be aware that development could occur without municipal approval.

Consideration should be given to the adoption of planning bylaws that will:

- assist a rural municipality to effectively encourage and manage local development issues;
- encourage development by establishing council's authority to enhance community resources and promote diversification;
- empower a rural municipality to effectively deal with changing needs;
- provide a rural municipality with a mechanism to manage community land use, social and economic interests;

- provide a proven process for a rural municipality to incorporate development and servicing needs into the project.

The Community Planning Branch is looking forward to assisting SARM's committee in facilitating a pilot project with municipalities that are interested in establishing bylaws. The department appreciates the chance to work with municipalities to develop clear policy and procedures that may enhance community opportunities.

For general information regarding land use bylaws check out our website www.municipal.gov.sk.ca/cpb/cpbplanningbylaws.shtml or contact the Community Planning Branch, Municipal Relations Division in Regina at 787-2725 or in Saskatoon at 933-6937.

For information regarding participation in the pilot project initiative, contact the SARM office at 757-3577.

Northern By-elections

Recent by-elections have occurred in the Northern Village of Cole Bay, the Northern Hamlets of Timber Bay and Turnor Lake, and the Northern Settlements of Southend and Uranium City. The following individuals have been elected:

Cole Bay: Mayor Ron Bouvier; aldermen: Harold Aubichon, Aldina Bouvier, Olene Couillonneur, and Kenneth Bouvier. (Vacancies created by resignation of whole council).

Timber Bay: Sylvia LaVallee resigned as alderwoman and is now the clerk; aldermen elected: Ken Mahood, Glenda Henderson.

Turnor Lake: aldermen: Alfred Morin, Bruce Morin and Floyd Morin fill vacancies created by the resignations of Jean Daigneault, Kelly Kwan and Ann Sylvestre.

Southend: chairman: Werner Carlson fills vacancy created by the resignation of Zolton Molnar; committee member: Wesley E. Boehr; one vacancy remains.

Uranium City: chairman: Kevin Lewandoski fills vacancy created by the resignation of Glenn Thompson; committee member: Sandra Abraham fills the vacancy created by the resignation of Terry Rushing.

Rural Revitalization

Submitted by Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization

The Action Committee on the Rural Economy (ACRE) tabled its Final Report on April 29, 2002.

The Saskatchewan Legislature's Standing Committee on Agriculture invited ACRE members to present their Final Report in the legislative chamber, only the second time in the province's history such a presentation has occurred.

"It was an historical event for ACRE to present our final report, containing 47 priority recommendations, to government and opposition MLAs in the Legislative Assembly chambers. They discussed our report with us, and also committed to following through on the recommendations we presented," said Audrey Horkoff, who co-chairs ACRE along with Clay Serby, Deputy Premier and Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization.

ACRE's work did not end with the release of their Final Report. The committee will meet in November to prioritize over 100 additional recommendations that have been developed by ACRE subcommittees.

Upon receiving ACRE's Final Report, the province began work on a rural strategy, to be released later this year.

"The provincial government's rural strategy will build on ACRE's excellent work and provide the province with a long-term plan for addressing the opportunities and challenges that exist in rural Saskatchewan," said Louise Greenberg, Assistant Deputy Minister for Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization.

"ACRE's final report and recommendations provide industry, government and communities with the tools to begin strengthening and diversifying the rural economy," added Greenberg. "ACRE's recommendations affect virtually all of government. Departments and agencies are working together to respond to ACRE's recommendations and develop the rural strategy."

The provincial government will release its rural strategy later this fall.

The ACRE Final Report and reports from the ACRE subcommittees are available on the web at www.agr.gov.sk.ca/acre. Printed copies are available by calling 306-787-4484.

Northern Water and Sewer

In 1999, more than 100 water and sewer projects were identified as being needed in northern Saskatchewan. The projects were prioritized and a budget of \$24.9 million was allocated through a Northern Water and Sewer Program to help provide northern residents with access to safe drinking water and suitable methods of sewage disposal.

In cooperation with the Northern Revenue Sharing Trust Account Management Board, Sask Water and the northern communities themselves, six projects have been completed.

Another 24 projects are currently under construction or have been awarded tender. Several of these projects should be completed within the year.

There are also 38 projects that are in the design or pre-design stages and 25 future projects that still remain to be done over the next two or three years.

The development of water and wastewater systems are important elements in the ongoing support for northern economic and growth opportunities. The program is expected to create seasonal jobs during the construction of the projects. There will also be a number of long-term jobs created for qualified operators to maintain and operate the new systems.

Our Water--Source To Tap

Over the last year, government departments and agencies have examined the province's drinking water issues and developed a long-term drinking water strategy.

Accountability, transparency and understanding are the basis of the three-point strategy to secure safe drinking water from source to tap. It includes:

1. A clear and effective regulatory system;
2. Watershed protection; and
3. Better water treatment to provide safe and sustainable drinking water.

In creating a clear and efficient regulatory system there will be an increase in the number of treatment plant inspections. Most municipal waterworks will be inspected twice per year and there will be an annual inspection of other regulated waterworks and sewage treatment plants.

Saskatchewan Environment uses the Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality as the provincial criteria for public systems. As part of government's long-term strategy all public waterworks will be required to meet the full list of criteria for chemical constituents in the Canadian guidelines. In existing waterworks, some criteria will be phased in as treatment systems are upgraded. Sask Health will use the national standards as a reference for water systems under its jurisdiction.

One of the changes the average municipal water user will notice is that through the Internet they will be able to see just how often their local

water treatment plant is testing their water and what the results of those tests are.

In 2003, GRAA will begin drafting regulations that will increase budgetary reporting and transparency requirements for municipal water and sewer operations. It is expected that the regulations will be passed in 2004 with implementation to begin in 2005. Municipalities will then be required to publicly disclose their utility rate and capital investment strategies that ensure long-term sustainability of the municipal water systems. GRAA is also looking to consult with the federal government possible changes to the Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program to meet the objectives under the long-term drinking water strategy. In addition, amendments to *The Planning and Development Act* will be made that require municipalities to have bylaws and plans in place to protect their water supply by 2007.

In terms of source water protection the newly created Saskatchewan Watershed Authority will oversee watershed and source water protection. This authority will manage all surface and groundwater supplies. Sask Water's responsibilities will now involve working with communities and the private sector to ensure the supply, operation and maintenance of water works.

Water is a basic requirement in all our daily lives and together we must protect our drinking water sources now and into the future.