

THE RURAL MUNICIPALITY OF ARMSTRONG
MINUTES
PUBLIC HEARING
NOVEMBER 20, 2017
INWOOD MEMORIAL HALL

The Council of the Rural Municipality of Armstrong held a Public Hearing at 1:00 P.M. to receive representations and objections from any persons who may wish to make them in respect of Zoning By-law No. 6/04 amendment to add a definition for “Nature Retreat and/or Spiritual Centre” as a conditional use in the “AL” Agriculture Limited Zone.

Council Members in attendance were Reeve Jack Cruise and Councillors Allen Pfrimmer, Carol Lavallee, Ted Sumka, Adam Krochenski and Susan Smerchanski.

Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Corlie Larsen was also in attendance and acted as Recording Secretary.

Reeve Cruise called the hearing to order at 1:15 P.M.

Presenters in favour of the said amendment:

Susan Russell, McGowan Russell Group Inc. described the proposed project centred around an Indigenous Healing and Educational Lodge for women. She thanked Community Planning and the CAO for their work coming up with a definition to fit their project. She read the definition and reviewed the process of getting to this point of the public hearing and process required after the hearing. They have completed a feasibility study and have many eyes across Canada on the project. They are hoping to start project in the summer or fall of 2018. She feels the definition fits the project they are planning and that the definition is broad enough to allow for others with similar projects to apply for a Conditional Use as well within the Agricultural Limited Zones in Armstrong. The Conditional Use will be more project specific.

Jackie Wilkie, McGowan Russell Group Inc. with the use of display maps explained the conceptual plan of the project showing the location of the parking area, buildings, etc. The plan includes items conducive to healing such as building with round corners and people will use parking lot and no driving around the property. Geothermal will be used for heat. They will be working with Habitat for Humanity to build the yurts, cottages as well as design services. Campsites are for open ceremonies held 4 times per year and weekends. Right now there is no security plan but risk management will be part of the project.

Jamie Goulet, Clan Mothers Turtle Lodge and property owner described why this area is the perfect place for the retreat because the land is pristine and organic. She was told no one has lived on the property for 100 years. She has been running a retreat for 18 years in St. Laurent and wants to do one in Armstrong. Her and her sister plan on living on the property beside the retreat. The center is all about the empowerment of women and no men or children allowed. All women are welcome any one that choses to heal the pain in their lives. They plan to hire locals where they can. In addition to her current gardening plans in the future they would like to include bees and a few chickens. There will not be fires around the property the plans are for one fire pit. The road is not a through road so only those going to the retreat or live there will really be using the road. She is not sure were all the negative talk is coming from in regards to people breaking into properties near by. She is not asking the RM of Armstrong for any funding for the project. Funding is by private organizations and not funded by the government or tax payers.

May Loise Campbell, Clan Mothers Turtle Lodge grew up in Northern Manitoba with no electricity or running water. Her people are Metis and she has a reason and purpose of what she is doing. As an Elder she has much history and expertise to help people. She would like people to open their minds and hearts to Indigenous people. A lot of healing of their women needs to be done. People can stay as long as needed. This will be a first of its kind in Canada similar to ones they have in the States.

Kathleen Arnason submitted a letter of support for the hearing which was read out loud by Reeve Cruise. In her letter she states that this economic, cultural, environmental, creative and tourism opportunity will support the area by increasing the tax base and creating jobs for the RM of Armstrong and Interlake area. The design of the Spiritual Retreat Centre Project will provide women with a tranquil and peaceful place to indulge in writing, yoga, land based education, alternative food based way to support personal health. All this is done in an environmentally sustainability way utilizing alternative energy sources, solar, wind and bio diversity.

Carol Lambert of Fraserwood and long-time resident in the RM of Armstrong spoke in favour of the proposed project. She has worked for the government employment and income assistance program. Social assistance and EI in the region is very high. She stated the amount of funds was approximately 1 million in the Interlake Regions and Manitoba welfare rates are the lowest in the region. Biggest issue is no employment here and people have to go out West to oil lines or travel to Winnipeg. She sees this project as providing employment and economic viability to the area. She has received comments from others that are in support. She believes that all have friends that could support or be supported by the program. She submitted a petition of people in support of adding the definition to the By-law and the future project.

Reeve Cruise read the recommendation supplied by Community and Regional Planning Branch. They have no objections to the proposed amendment as it appears to be consistent with the Development Plan. However, should By-law 06-17 be approved they recommend Council direct non-resource uses away from prime agricultural land and viable lower class land, and to areas that minimize the potential for land use conflict as per Manitoba Agriculture advisement. It is also recommended that applications for conditional use approval of non-resource uses in the Agricultural Area be circulated to Manitoba Agriculture for review and comment.

Michelle Harrison, Clan Mothers Turtle Lodge spoke that the typical stay will be 3 to 6 months. There will be no sale of items in open market so no extra traffic for that. It is not a tourism aspect but if someone comes to learn at a workshop the tourism aspect comes from the people staying and eating at local businesses like in Gimli.

Patty Lambert of Fraserwood in favour of the project said would be happy to put money back into RM as a tax payer for such an important project.

Presenters opposed to the said amendment:

Amber Cherniak of Gimli and her young family lives neighbouring the proposed project property. She has concerns with traffic control, will there be security, concerned with men trying to get access on the property, how long the women will be staying, when is someone considered a permanent resident, are children allowed and where do they go while the mothers are staying at the retreat, what is the applicants commitment to the project, yurts are not listed in the definition, did not hear anything about hiring people within the municipality and who will be the women staying at the retreat.

Wendy Hudson of Gimli expressed concerns with there being no public transportation to the retreat creating excess traffic. A farmers market will increase traffic, create excess dust and increase garbage in the ditches. Definition doesn't include yurts, cottages or campsites. She wants to know who is paying for the road and who will build it.

Glen Hudson of Gimli lives near property and concerned with the road and how would the fire trucks get in if needed.

Cliff Cherniak of Gimli expressed worry regarding any chemicals being used at the retreat and the effects on his animals and his hunting. He submitted a petition of people opposed to the By-law amendment.

Grace Artishko of Gimli stated that her grandparents came from Europe with many hardships as well and a lot of Europeans had hardships. Social assistance will always be around and people will always be in need of it. She wants to know where the funding for the project comes from, partnerships, Winnipeg or personal. She has concerns that the RM of Armstrong will be putting money into the project.

Reeve Cruise asked if anyone else needed to speak or had any questions then adjourned the hearing at 3:00 P.M.

Reeve

CAO