

Village of Cremona Viability Review

What We Have Heard: a summary of public input

August 2013

Village of Cremona Viability Review Team

Viability Review Team
Village of Cremona Viability Review
Alberta Municipal Affairs
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Introduction

The **What We Have Heard** report is intended to inform and support the Village of Cremona Viability Review Team's work in determining the viability of the Village of Cremona. The What We have Heard report contains a compilation of public input that was received by the Viability Review Team following the release of the Initial Findings Report in April 2013.

Input was gathered from a public meeting held in Cremona on May 22, 2013, and from written submissions received from May 3, 2013 to May 31, 2013. Written submissions were accepted by mail, fax and email.

This report is divided into four sections.

Section 1 – Input from public meeting

A summary of the input gathered from the participants at the public meeting held at the Cremona School on May 22, 2013.

Section 2 – Input from written submissions

A summary of the input received by the Village of Cremona Viability Review Team from written submissions and completed Stakeholder Input Forms.

Section 3 – Responses to stakeholder questions

Responses to questions from stakeholders from the public meeting and from written submissions.

Section 4 – Clarifications and corrections to Initial Findings Report

Responses to questions about the Initial Findings Report as well as clarifications and corrections to the report.

Section 5 – Next steps

How the public input will be used and next steps for the Village of Cremona Viability Review.

Please note that some comments may have been edited to improve clarity (e.g. spelling and grammar). References to specific persons and names may be edited to protect the anonymity or privacy of both the contributor and/or the named individual(s). Comments which are of a similar tone and message may be grouped together. The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times the comment was submitted.

Section 1 – Input from public meeting

The Village of Cremona Viability Review Team held a public meeting at the Cremona School on the evening of May 22, 2013 to present information from the Village of Cremona Viability Review Initial Findings Report and to gather input from the attendees on specific questions concerning the viability of the village. Approximately 50 members of the Cremona community attended the meeting and participated in the discussions.

A. Meeting Understandings

Description

At the May 22, 2013 public meeting, meeting participants were provided with a set of meeting understandings to help guide the discussion at the meeting. These meeting understandings were:

- Everyone has wisdom.
- We need everyone's wisdom for the wisest results.
- Everyone will hear and be heard.
- The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Everyone has the right to change their mind as often as they would like.
- Have fun.

Meeting participants were then asked: "Are there other guidelines for the discussion tonight that will make the discussion more productive and meaningful?" and "What do we need to understand from you?" prior to the start of the information presentations and the break-out group discussions at the public meeting.

What we heard

Additional guidelines for the meeting

- Be open to two-way communication.
- Involve the community – ask before now.
- Participants wanted to get to big picture issues at the start.
- Participants wanted to hear everyone's particular issue or point.
- Seriously listen.
- Show and be respectful of others.
- Show, not tell.

What the Viability Review Team needs to understand from the community

- Accountability and transparency are important.
- Be our own entity, but work together.
- Citizens want a voice/impact into decision making.
- Citizens want to see the community grow and become stronger.
- Council and administration need to get along.
- It is important to understand the history of the village.
- Must be a result or action that comes out of this.

- Residents want the village to be able to sustain itself.
- Tax base too low.
- That the village cannot survive without the help of the County. Understand how important the village and surrounding area is - we can't survive without each other.
- The community wants to build trust with council.
- The water quality is a concern.
- There is a lack of a strategic or business plan.
- There is a lack of communication between council, administration and residents.
- Viability is possible.

Desired meeting outcomes

- Participants want to see a common vision for the village (e.g. develop it bigger, or small community-oriented village).
- Participants wanted answers and information about the viability review.
- Participants wanted information on the events of the past month at the Village of Cremona.
- Participants wanted to know how to move forward from today.
- Participants wanted to know what is going to happen to the village after the review.
- Participants wanted to know what the timing of the viability review is in relation to the municipal elections in October.
- Participants wanted to know who they can talk to about the viability review and about the current status of the village. Participants wanted to know who to go to in order to get answers.

B. Viability issues in the Village of Cremona

Description

Highlights from the Initial Findings Report were presented during the meeting. Participants were then asked to break out into small group discussions to answer: "What other viability issues are there concerning..." with respect to each of the eight areas that were identified in the Initial Findings Report. The eight areas are:

1. sustainable governance
2. operational and administrative capacity
3. financial stability
4. service delivery
5. regional co-operation
6. infrastructure
7. community well-being
8. risk management

What we heard

What other viability issues are there concerning **sustainable governance:**

- Access to bylaws/policies so people are aware of what they can do – e.g. website
- Balanced decision-making so that the split decisions and voting pattern do not continue.
- Bylaws and policy review.
- We couldn't vote in three councillors and now there will be five. (2)

- Consult with stakeholders when doing planning.
- Council is “dysfunctional”. There is a dictatorship and bullying on council.
- Council that can work together in a positive manner.
- Council that moves Cremona forward and focuses on the betterment of Cremona.
- Decisions made outside of council meetings. (2)
- Identify future leaders and engage people with passion to be on council. (2)
- People need to go to Council meetings, and be respectful too.
- Summation (viable or not) of what needs to be addressed and in what order (ways to fix).
- There is also a concern about vote-splitting in the election if there will be five council members.
- Want council to communicate with public.
- Want to see transparent decisions.

What other viability issues are there concerning operational and administrative capacity:

- Administration expenses in terms of number of staff members and staff remuneration. (4)
- Bring back community spirit and community events.
- Cost effective operations and administration (skills, education, background).
- Development of job descriptions.
- Don’t need bylaw services or fees (use county services).
- Good leadership from top down.
- Meet your neighbour handshake.
- Partnerships.
- Professional practices – e.g. Backup of village data and information.
- Support of staff by council.
- Take help that is offered.
- The current bylaw officer is seen as abusive and biased.
- The number of hours the village office is open.
- Volunteer requirements – interviews and security screening may be excessive.

What other viability issues are there concerning financial stability:

- 2009 government transfer - \$114,675, capital transfer (government) - \$802,424 missing.
- Breakdown of grant monies - \$1.6 million. (2)
- Bring back general information meeting – update of what has happened over the year.
- Infrastructure failing – need dollars to fix.
- Key Measure #1 – Yes, 2 years operation deficit due to lack of capital projects.
- Key Measure #5 - should be flagged.
- Maintain revenue sources.
- More development to increase assessment, grow and attract businesses. (2)
- Non-residential taxes are high and this will not attract new business to the area (want to attract business).

What other viability issues are there concerning service delivery:

- Both water and waste management should be break even.
- What are the financial advantages of different methods of service delivery.
- Garbage pickup - go back to user pays system. This will encourage people to recycle as well.
- Protective Services – village taxpayers are paying, but not seeing a presence in the community.

- It should be possible to share/cooperate regionally on the Peace Officer position. It should be only a part-time position in Cremona, and this would help to achieve money-savings and contribute to a spirit of regional cooperation. (3)
- Have an operational website that provides information about the village, gives information about village meetings, and provides minutes of council meetings.
- Residents would like a better understanding and improvement of village operations.
- Have the village office open five days a week.
- Talk to the business owners and find out what makes businesses not viable and what could make businesses viable – what can the village do to assist with this.
- Communication with the community before drafting bylaws. (3)
- Value of Central Alberta Economic Partnership (CAEP) Membership.

What other viability issues are there concerning regional co-operation:

- Cooperation and working with neighbours – e.g. Mountain View County. (2)
- Recognize and welcome benefits of future opportunities.
- Co-operation amongst the Chamber of Commerce and other local businesses with the region's cooperative initiatives.
- Residents welcome opportunities to work with the County on cooperative initiatives, but they also want to ensure that any initiatives/policies are "Made-In-Cremona".
- Work through differences for benefit of region.

What other viability issues are there concerning infrastructure:

- Follow through with infrastructure audit/plan. There are lots of emergency repairs and need for maintenance. (3)
- Need reserves set aside for future work.
- Need to ensure quality of water (e.g. sulphur issues).
- Paying for water/wastewater and road issues. (2)
- There is a concern about safety with respect to the condition and maintenance of sidewalks.

What other viability issues are there concerning community well-being:

- Create a community association to address the development of recreational opportunities and to act as a liaison amongst existing community groups.
- Acknowledgement and appreciation of community groups and events.
- Council needs to offer support and resources for community services and engage volunteers.
- Leave committees (volunteers) in place. This community was built by volunteers. A comment was made that the library volunteers were released and then told to reapply for their "jobs". (2)
- Listen to wishes of the community.
- Parks in the community are great.
- Recreation opportunities are lacking in Cremona. There is an interest amongst residents to develop tourism opportunities.
- Spirit of Cremona revitalize, positive outlook.
- The County's involvement with recreation is great.
- We want to be here, it's a good place to live. (2)
- Welcome new ideas from residents.

What other viability issues are there concerning risk management:

- Better communication regarding what services are available to Cremona.
- If this change or withdrawing from the partnership with the County for fire services goes forward, residents need more rationale for such a move.
- Concern with the uncertainty of the existence of Fire and Rescue Services for Cremona. (4)

C. Final message for the viability review team

Description

Meeting participants were asked **“What is your final message for the viability review team?”**

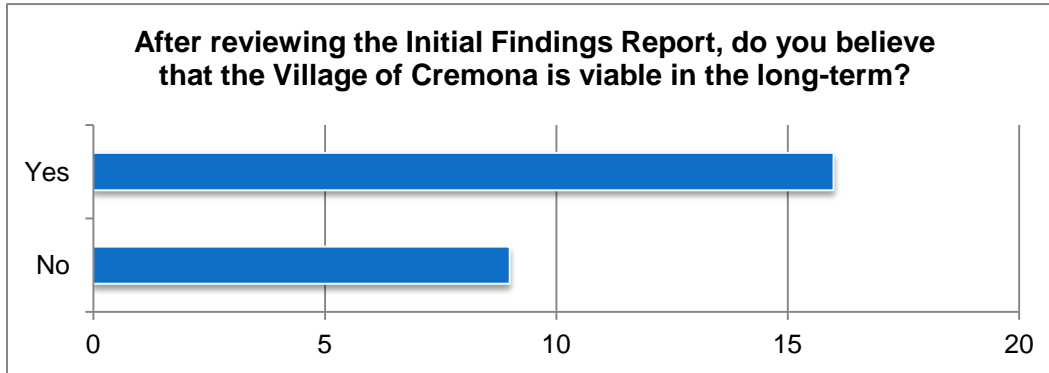
What we heard

- Encouragements to live here, stay, work-friendly, grow, families, employment, and industry/business.
- Go to community directly when they ask for help, sooner rather than later.
- Good communication and openness is needed.
- New Council members need to have guidance. Their ability to do well in their positions could be increased if they had clear policies and procedures to guide their actions. This should be developed before the next election so that they (council) have good, written guidance.
- Provide summary and recommendations in the Initial Findings Report.
- Regarding the process of public meetings (like this meeting), using the time to summarize the viability report is not the best use of the public’s time, as they had already read the report before the meeting. Use the meeting time more efficiently and effectively (more active engagement of the residents; more opportunity for questions to get answered).
- Residents feel strongly (expressed multiple times) that there is a need for accountability for council’s actions and decisions.
- Residents want to know how they can go back to a three member council, so that vote-splitting in the upcoming election can be avoided.
- Should have had this conversation sooner... right after petition was sent in.
- The residents want clarity on what the viability review process is accomplishing beyond what the dissolution study set out to accomplish.
- We can overcome our issues.
- We’re viable! But there is concern that the community is split into different factions. We need to get back together and work as a team, specifically Council. There is also a need to also work with the community.

Section 2 – Input from written submissions

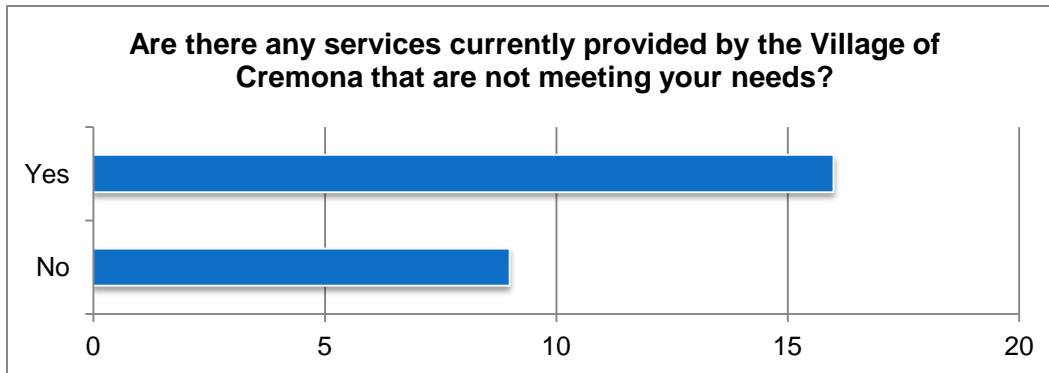
Residents and property owners of the Village of Cremona were mailed copies of the Village of Cremona Viability Review Initial Findings Report and a copy of the stakeholder input form which they could send back to the Viability Review Team. The stakeholder input forms, along with any other written submissions have been compiled in this section and are shown below. A total of 25 written submissions were received by the Viability Review Team.

Question 1



Choices	Number of responses	%
Yes	16	64
No	9	36
Total	25	100

Question 2



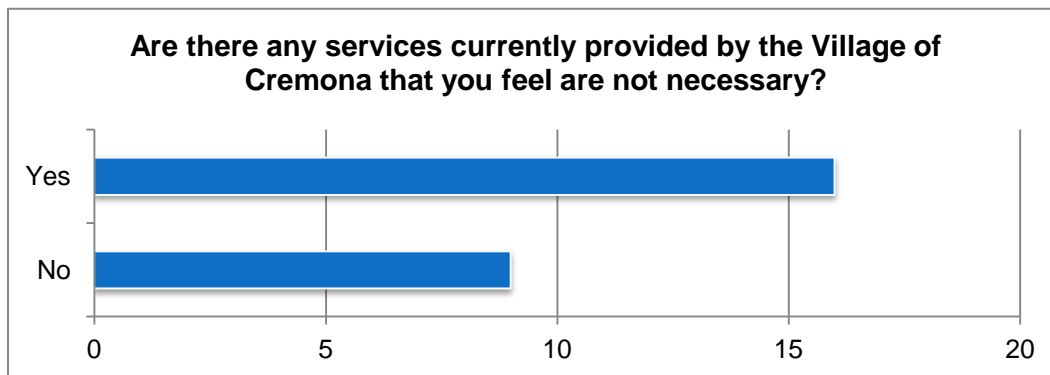
Choices	Number of responses	%
Yes	18	72
No	7	28
Total	25	100

Comments submitted for this question:

* Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times the comment was submitted.

- Accountability of council.
- Affordable and easy access to bylaws and council meeting minutes.
- Commercial development of land.
- Council didn't promote businesses to invite more people to come here.
- High cost of administration (2)
- I don't see the need of a bylaw officer.
- Recent annexation proposals for residential properties should be second to development of business opportunities - the village has commercial lots available as well as several residential properties for sale.
- Road and sidewalk infrastructure maintenance and upgrading/replacement. (6)
- Snow plowing when not necessary. Village should not plow when there is less than a 4" snow pack. (2)
- Staff is abusive, uninformed and hide behind FOIP for any request including bylaws. No response or acknowledgement ever received from CAO, staff or council.
- The bylaw officer is focused on traffic violations and nothing is done about unsightly properties.
- The public works is not equipped to do anything other than mow a little grass, fill a few holes in the road with a shovel or push a little snow.
- The service of treating residents like they matter; like they have value. We pay the bills so we should be part of the discussion.
- The village website.
- Today is the first time we have seen a grader on Edey Close since May 2005.No public works person permanently since the last public works foreman was forced out several years ago.
- Village office hours are inadequate. Office should be open during lunch hour and on Fridays. (4)
- Water quality. (3)

Question 3



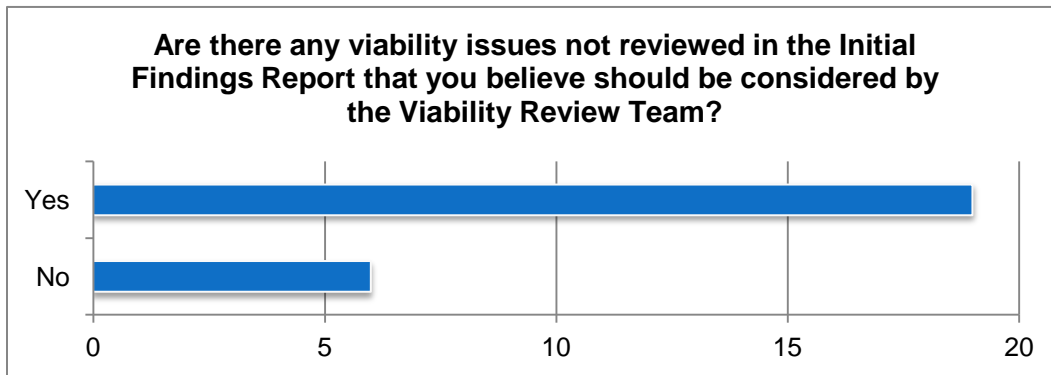
Choices	Number of responses	%
Yes	16	64
No	9	36
Total	25	100

Comments submitted for this question:

* Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times the comment was submitted.

- Administrative costs are completely out of proportion and control.
- Commercial and annexation expansion should not be promoted.
- Extra staff. (4)
- FCSS paid for July 1st organizer when this was always done well by volunteers. Paid positions have been forced on us by 2 councillors and this has effectively sapped the volunteer spirit the village was built on.
- Peace officer/Bylaw enforcement officer. (12)
- The Community Access Program (CAP) computers should not be in Village Office.
- The Library.
- The Village should not provide FCSS with free administration and credit cards.
- The Village should not provide subsidized water and sewage dump for trailers.

Question 4



Choices	Number of responses	%
Yes	19	76
No	6	24
Total	25	100

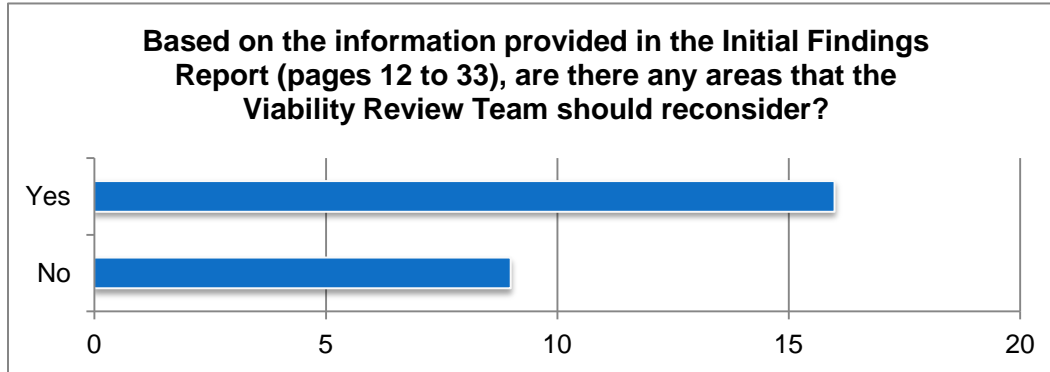
Comments submitted for this question:

* Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times the comment was submitted.

- All of this bureaucracy needs to be removed and handled case by case, with common sense until a core base of business is attracted to develop and becomes well established.
- Find someone that is trained in water operations to work in the village instead of contracting it out.
- I wish the school buses were still allowed to drive on village roads.
- Impact of smaller families and families with no children on the future of Cremona School.
- More resident input.

- Naming an assistant CAO amazing for 475 people.
- Open communication between council and tax payers - an item not easily put into % or tables such as the report favours.
- Operating budget.
- Secret RSP funding of CAO not on books.
- The cost of administration in comparison with other municipalities.
- The lack of councillor education on their mandate/what's required.
- The Municipal Development Plan, Area Structure Plans that are not required are road blocks and destructive for any future development. Development planning and subdivision needs to be removed from Parkland Regional Planning Services.
- The salary and expenses of the CAO in comparison with other municipalities. (3)
- The three previous councils were dysfunctional - not enough competent people with business experience willing to run. The last council wanted no input from residents, dismissed efficient volunteers and replaced them with friends. (3)
- There are many restrictive, anti business and development bylaws that have been put in place that need to be removed.
- Viability Review Team should take into consideration that our community was built on the backs of volunteers and that dissolving our community throws all the volunteerism back at all the volunteers. A village isn't an office, it's a community working together to accomplish and succeed.
- Water and sewer lines in older part of town need replacement before road/streets can be paved.

Question 5



Choices	Number of responses	%
Yes	16	64
No	9	36
Total	25	100

Comments submitted for this question:

* Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times the comment was submitted.

- Accuracy of financial statements.
- Age of water and sewage line in the village. These need to be replaced, then paving could be done.

- As 80% of people using the village are from the county it would be best if the county would take us over. As they have equipment and manpower to do repairs and county peace officers could fill in if necessary but RCMP are adequate.
- Bylaws - need review.
- Check with Chamber of Commerce for its input.
- Cremona's school, arena, curling rink, hall, 5-0, churches, Legion, Lions, sports teams, etc. - all a combination of rural - 80% and town 20% and all work wonderfully together. County residents surrounding Cremona - approximately 2,400 population Village 457 population. Cremona is very different from other towns in County because we have such a high percentage of rural residents using Cremona's facilities and taking part in Cremona activities.
- Cut down expenses in administration. (2)
- Get rid of county inference so we can grow without them trying to enlarge Water Valley first.
- Lack of a vote to let the mayor participate in parades and collect remuneration.
- Let the people express their opinions. Please answer our questions. (2)
- Page 18 - 37% general administration expense needs clarification.
- Pg. 15 - Human Resources Policy. Abuse is to be reported to CAO. There are no provisions if CAO is the abuser.
- Pg. 29 - Besides metered water and 'bulk sales' there is also unlimited free water (unmetered also) at trailer dump.
- Salaries of CAO and paid staff being so high is not mentioned. (2)
- Should reconsider giving us what we wanted a dissolution study. Just another example of democracy.
- Source of dollar figure in your tables.
- The report looks good, but still not all the information is there.
- The reports are full of mistakes and manipulated to detract from the actual truth. It has definitely been written with bias. The whole report, but especially the Analysis of the Village needs to be investigated by an 'arms length' third party. It is very obvious the CAO contributed most of the direction and compiling of facts (interpretations) and figures for the report.
- Village population.

Question 6

a) In your opinion, what is the most significant viability issue in the Village of Cremona?

Comments submitted for this question (6a):

* Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times the comment was submitted.

- A few very negative people who want everyone to be as unhappy as they are.
- Be positive with everyone.
- Failure to attract more business and residences. (3)
- Finances - salaries paid to administer village of 500 people. (5)
- Governance, both council and administration are broken. (2)
- Ignorance of facts/what is in it for me idea.
- Infrastructure.
- Lack of qualified people running for council.
- Low tax base - taxes are too high for what we get.
- Money is being wasted.

- Road infrastructure.
- Sustainable governance. (6)
- Wastewater lagoon and storm water drainage (p.29). These issues have serious effect on health, safety & environment, and limits potential development of the village.

b) How could this issue be corrected?

Comments submitted for this question (6b):

* Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times the comment was submitted.

- 5-member council. (2)
- A repeal process for elected councillors.
- Be open to listen to the taxpayers and communicate with them. (3)
- Besides a public lynching, I don't feel anyone can remove naysayers.
- By changing back to a 3-member council, or going to the county.
- Change in council. (3)
- Change of CAO.
- Contacting qualified people and convince them to run for office. We have people now who have moved here, who don't understand village life. This is not a city.
- Continue accumulating surplus & borrow funds as according to *Municipal Government Act*.
- Co-operation between Village Council and the Chamber of Commerce. Ex-mayor openly stated that she hated the Chamber of Commerce.
- Encourage volunteers, don't fire them. The parks in the village were built with volunteers.
- Expose the truth - change of attitude from self centeredness to what can I do to serve others.
- Get rid of County interference.
- I think there needs to be a guide/procedure to educate new councils on what their mandate is and how they should be conducting business. (2)
- Increased businesses to carry tax burdens.
- Keep the village friendly and keep encouraging more businesses.
- Less administrative costs and redirect finances to improving town infrastructure.
- Reduce number of admin staff and adjust salaries to be comparable with similar size municipality. (4)
- Stop unnecessary meetings of council.
- The Village should be governed by the Mountain View County that has the expertise, administration and resources to make Cremona become a great community. With the dynamics of today's society, and the location and present size of just 457 residents with basically no viable business community, it is not possible to attract, support, or maintain a viable government in Cremona. (2)

Question 7

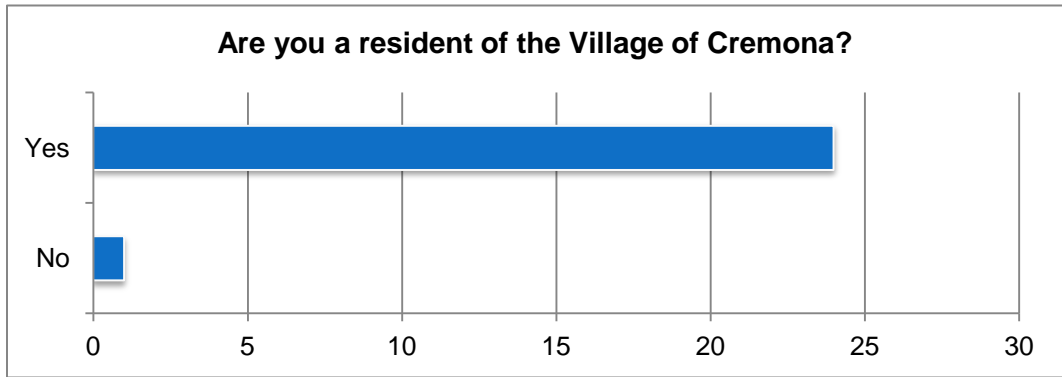
What do you believe is the main reason for the petition submitted by village residents that requested a dissolution study?

Comments submitted for this question:

* Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times the comment was submitted.

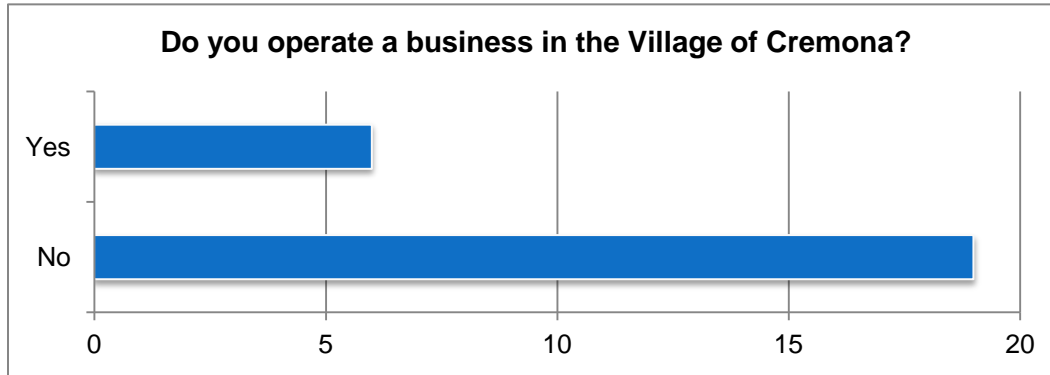
- Because we wanted a dissolution study! We wanted to know how we would be run by the county. (2)
- Council dismissed many volunteers and put their friends on village committees.
- Council was dysfunctional and not accountable. There was no transparency, council did not listen to residents nor allowed their input. (15)
- I believe several residents were told falsifications to be tricked into signing and that others signed to show the naysayers they have nothing to complain about.
- Ignorance and a misrepresentation of facts I know of at least 40 people who have said 'If I knew what would happen I would not have signed'
- Lack of communication. Residents were not clearly informed of the village's plans, budget, bylaws, etc. and the website does not work. (3)
- Many candidates engage in fear mongering and innuendos to attack other candidates rather than campaign on their own platforms.
- Not happy with management/CAO. (3)
- Now is a fine time to ask this - a whole year after the petition was submitted!! (2)
- Paying CAO and staff too much. (3)
- Tax base is just too low to provide for services.
- The 'economies of scale' suggest that Cremona would be better served by the county's public works, administration, policing, etc.
- The main reason I believe this study was requested was to have some accountability brought to the council and have a unbiased opinion on village operation.
- The same ten people are trouble makers.
- They felt tax money was going to town employees.
- This was started by three individuals that were upset with Council. They requested these 3 members to run for Council as they thought they would have control. After the 3rd meeting they found out that wasn't going to be the case.

Question 8



Choices	Number of responses	%
Yes	24	96
No	1	4
Total	25	100

Question 9



Choices	Number of responses	%
Yes	6	24
No	19	76
Total	25	100

Question 10

Do you wish to provide any additional comments about the Village of Cremona to the viability review team?

Comments submitted for this question:

* Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times the comment was submitted.

- 80% of the people using Cremona are from the county. In regards to the fire agreement with county. The village has a deal that any village would be pleased to have - 80% county, 20% village, and equipment cost is 75% county, 25% village.
- All recent grants have been spent for future development improvements – the improvements are probably needed in the long run but present residents are not seeing any improvements to living here now and are becoming frustrated.
- An active and informative village website could attract businesses to increase tax base of the village.
- We can't get a business in 2000 to operate a mechanic shop. Now the village has no mechanic shop and six other businesses have closed since 2000. Other businesses are also considering closing. (3)
- We are a bedroom community because people don't want to change.
- The CAO and two councillors consistently bullied the third councillor. OH&S was informed but did nothing and it continued.
- Council requires five members that receive training and support. (2)
- Cremona has great potential. It just requires a vision for growth, but a group of 'rednecks' are self centered and opposed to grow, but like to complain! (2)
- East area development will need help to co-ordinate, as the plan involves so many different land owners.

- For two councils, the CAO has pitted and manipulated the two weakest councillors against the third one to the detriment of Cremona.
- Hopefully we can adopt the Fire Agreement with the County now!
- I believe the stakeholders would like to hear a summary and recommendation.
- I feel the village can survive this however I think Municipal Affairs needs to give some guidance on how to get to a productive municipality with positive reaction from community.
- I have been an active participant in trying to communicate constructive and positive plans and ideas in the development of bylaws from traffic to land use, to Peace Officers to fire authority, to development and subdivision planning and to try to hold the governance to be accountable and transparent. I have written many letters and emails to the Village and council and have NEVER been acknowledged or responded to. I have written letters to local newspapers with the encouragement from many residents and still never any response or acknowledgement from the Village, except for the one councillor Karel Beckman who did a valiant effort to represent the voice of the residents and businesses.
- If streets were finished with chip and seal they would save considerable cost in maintenance.
- In talking to many of the individuals that signed the petition, they said if they had known this was going to happen, they would have never signed it. Others just wanted it over and done with to shut these people up. Some even said if they don't like our village, MOVE. I can only say these few people are just trouble makers.
- Low tax base.
- Mayor should not be allowed to communicate 'spin' in the 'Village Voice' newsletter.
- Never in my life have I seen a calamity like this one. No fairness in decisions, no democracy, no transparency. To sum up: I have absolutely no confidence in council to be a responsible government.
- Our village is a welcoming, pleasant place and a few 'bad eggs' have dragged our community through a very unpleasant year. (3)
- Page 31 - There are three churches, not two.
- Reduce the level of dust along Main St. so visitors can say this is a nice place to live.
- Roads and infrastructure costs will be too much for the small number of village taxpayers.
- Some people are afraid to attend council meeting or voice their opinions on account of (a village councillor). There is a couple in this town that almost lost their jobs because of these people because they disagreed.
- The county has a hidden agenda and have made some very detrimental decisions about our community.
- The county has always been helpful to the village and did help in many ways. (2)
- The residents signed a petition for a VOTE to dissolve. This petition demand (March 2012) was put forward well before any idea of a Municipal Sustainability Strategy was brought forward (June 2012). A viability review (September 2012) does not and cannot address the root cause for Cremona's situation.
- The vacancy of several main street business properties suggests concern to me.
- The Viability Review Team should not have included the Mayor and CAO. As they were against the study from the beginning and many concerns were related directly to them. (2)
- The village council really needs to be able to function properly.
- There are many houses for sale in Cremona. They have been on the market for a long time. I fear the town is in trouble due to poor management.
- There would be greater synergies between Water Valley and Cremona if Cremona was a hamlet (i.e. fire service, public works, waste, planning, etc.).

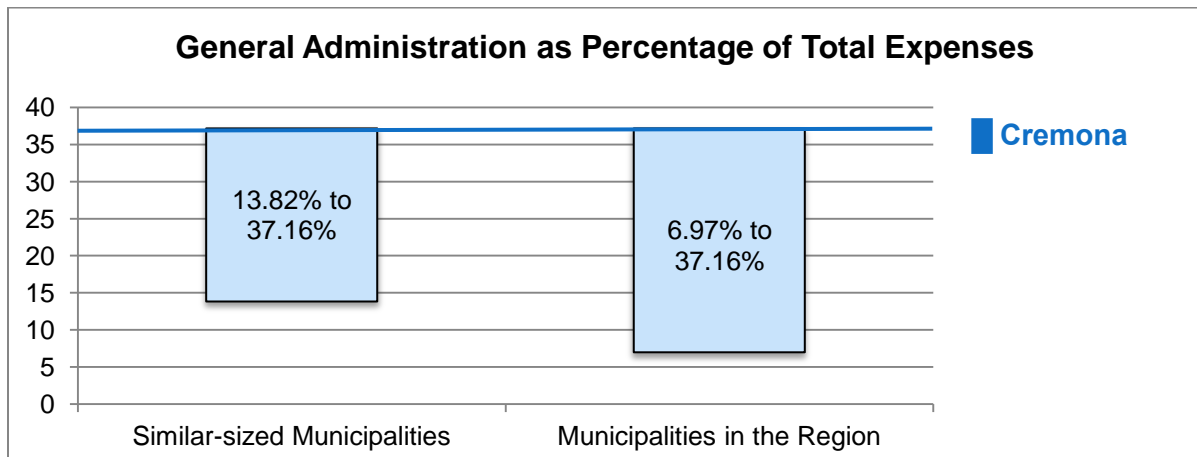
- Two councillors took all committee and board positions except 1, then they stripped the third councillor of that one out of spite - he did a good job.
- The village spends too much money on wages and administration. (2)
- We were denied the mandate for a by-election (March 2013). Our disappointment of the Minister's failure to uphold the mandates of MGA from dissolution to the holding of by-elections is overwhelming. No decision till long after the general election. Shameful!
- You people would not have had this problem if it were not for (a certain councillor).

Section 3 – Responses to stakeholder questions

A number of questions were received during the break-out groups at the public meeting and through the written submissions. In this section, answers to some of these questions are provided.

Q1: Is it necessary to spend \$300,000+ (37% of the operating budget) for administration?

Answer: Each municipal council has the authority to set its operating budget and determine how municipal funds are spent. Spending on general administration in 2011 by municipalities in the region ranged from 6.97% to 37.16% of total expenses. For municipalities of a similar size to the Village of Cremona, spending on general administration ranged from 13.82% to 37.16% of total expenses.



Q2: Are we viable? Are there other municipalities in the same situation?

Answer: The viability of the Village of Cremona will be determined by the Viability Review Team. At this time, there are four other municipalities undergoing viability reviews in Alberta.

Q3: Do we need a chief administrative officer and two assistants in the village office? What is the need for so many employees?

Answer: Under Section 205 of the *Municipal Government Act (MGA)*, every council must establish by bylaw a position of chief administrative officer (CAO). All other positions are determined by the needs of the municipality. Staffing requirements are determined by the chief administrative officer in consultation with village council. Council approves the budget that would support administrative costs.

Q4: What are the implications of the switch to a five-member council? What is the value added or benefit of going to five? Will it be a problem to get five people in terms of quality? What is the cost of a five-member village council?

Answer: Of the ten comparison municipalities of similar population to Cremona, only two municipalities had three council members. Based on records from the 2004, 2007 and 2010 general municipal elections, there are sufficient numbers of candidates that run to fill a five-member council.

The costs of a five-member village council will depend on the activities undertaken by village council. Village councillors are remunerated according to the Village's Remuneration & Expenses Policy (Policy 03-2005).

Q5: How do we get answers tonight and in the future to our questions about the viability review process?

Answer: Answers to questions from the public meeting are contained in this report. If there are further questions about the viability review process, those questions can be sent via email to viabilityreview@gov.ab.ca. Alternatively, members of the Cremona community may call Municipal Affairs toll-free at 310-0000, then 780-427-2225 to speak with an advisor about viability reviews.

Q6: How do we get village residents more actively involved in this process?

Answer: The Viability Review Team has made several attempts to get feedback from the Cremona community. At anytime during this process, information can be sent via email to viabilityreview@gov.ab.ca.

Q7: How will the infrastructure shortfall be dealt with? Who will pay? How will the community meet those costs?

Answer: The Village of Cremona has indicated that it is addressing the infrastructure issues identified in the 2005 infrastructure study as capital funds (e.g. grants) are found. In recent years, infrastructure projects have been funded by grants from the federal and provincial governments.

In the future, the village has a number of options to pay for infrastructure projects. These include: grants from the federal or provincial government, use of the village's financial reserves, municipal borrowing, higher property taxes, local improvement taxes, special taxes, and/or cost-sharing with neighbouring municipalities or community organizations.

Q8: If the village is dissolved, what services and what budget can be provided by Mountain View County?

Answer: Proposed changes to municipal services if the Village of Cremona dissolved will be explored if the Viability Review Team determines the Village of Cremona to be trending towards non-viability. At this time, the focus of the Viability Review Team is to determine the viability of the village.

Q9: Is the Viability Review Team going to make recommendations for change?

Answer: Depending on the determination of the village's viability, the Viability Review Team will make recommendations to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The public will be informed of the outcome of the viability review process.

Q10: How active is the Central Alberta Economic Partnership (CAEP)? Are we using it to its full potential?

Answer: CAEP is a regional economic development alliance that is active in its operations. To find out more about CAEP, its mandate and its activities, visit CAEP's website at www.centralalberta.ab.ca.

Q11: What is the outcome of the Municipal Sustainability Plan?

Answer: The Village of Cremona 2009-2012 Municipal Sustainability Plan was intended to provide direction in planning future capital projects and operational programs.

Q12: What is taking place at the Municipal Area Partnership?

Answer: The purpose and status of the Municipal Area Partnership has not been a part of the discussions of the Viability Review Team.

Q13: Where is the Peace Officer in the organizational chart? The position is not shown on page 15.

Answer: The Peace Officer position does not appear in the organizational chart because it is a contracted position and is not a regular village employee. This is similar to the contracted water system operator which is also not shown on the organizational chart.

Q14: Where is the revenue generated from protective services and how does it come back to the community?

Answer: Revenue that is generated from the provision of fire services by the Cremona & District Fire and Emergency Services Authority are allocated based on the Fire Services Agreement that is still in effect between the Village of Cremona and Mountain View County. According to the agreement, 25% of the revenue is allocated to cover expenses incurred from responding to fire calls and the remaining 75% of the revenue is allocated to a Small Capital Equipment Plan to a maximum reserve equivalent to the following year's small equipment budget. Any excess funds will be returned equally to the Village of Cremona and Mountain View County.

Q15: Residents expressed concerns about the uncertainty of the fire and rescue services for Cremona. Do these services still exist, will they exist in the future, and what will this service consist of?

Answer: The village had previously served notice to Mountain View County to withdraw from the Fire Services Agreement between the two municipalities effective January 2014. In the meantime, fire and rescue services for Cremona will continue to be provided by the Cremona & District Fire and Emergency Services Authority as outlined in the Fire Services Agreement. Discussions are underway between the Village of Cremona and Mountain View County to develop a new fire services agreement.

Q16: Where is the money that is supposed to be put towards infrastructure? There is a concern that the viability report doesn't fully answer this question. Residents want a more complete accounting of how the money was spent.

Answer: The village's auditor undertakes a close review of the accounting practices and finances when preparing the annual audited financial statements. In addition, municipalities are required to complete an annual financial information return. The village complies with all the mandatory financial reporting requirements. In addition, council now receives quarterly financial variance reports that are presented in a public council meeting.

Q17: Who is taking care of the positions of mayor and chief administrative officer?

Answer: With the resignation of two council members, resulting in the loss of quorum on the Village of Cremona council, the Minister of Municipal Affairs appointed Mr. Eric McGhan to be the official administrator of the Village of Cremona. As official administrator, Mr. McGhan has all of the powers and duties of the village council. Mr. McGhan's appointment is anticipated to conclude in November 2013, following the municipal election.

Terry Lofstrom has been retained as the chief administrative officer for the Village of Cremona on an interim basis.

Q18: What is the viability review process accomplishing beyond what the dissolution study set out to accomplish? What is the added value of this process?

Answer: With the introduction of the Municipal Sustainability Strategy in 2012, the viability review process replaced the dissolution study process previously used by Alberta Municipal Affairs. The working group that developed the Municipal Sustainability Strategy identified a number of concerns with the dissolution study process (the report can be found at: www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/documents/msb/1104_MSS_Report_June_14.pdf) . These concerns are:

- the legislative requirement that a dissolution study must occur when requested means that the process may be used in instances where the viability of the municipality is not in question;
- the process is reactive rather than proactive, and thus provides minimal opportunity to address the municipality's challenges before viability is threatened;
- the process is not well understood by municipalities or their residents, and often results in uncertainty and division within the community;
- the potential receiving municipality is not involved in the initial start of the process when a municipality is considering dissolution; and
- the name itself, dissolution, is viewed by some as having negative undertones.

As such, the viability review process was developed to focus on:

- finding solutions through a strong partnership of neighbouring municipalities, municipal associations and Municipal Affairs;
- more community engagement and involvement, including neighbouring municipalities;
- community development and community identity; and
- developing a suite of solution-focused options including, but not limited to restructuring, for a municipality whose sustainability and/or viability is in jeopardy.

Q19: What are the expenditures for waste management and how can the shortfalls be addressed?

Answer: The village's waste management expenditures include any fees incurred from the provision of waste management services or the contracting of waste management services to other service providers. Shortfalls in revenue for waste management services may be corrected by an adjustment of fees charged to residents and customers for waste management services.

Q20: What did the Viability Review Team see as obstacles to make the village run and be accountable to taxpayers?

Answer: The Viability Review Team is still taking into consideration all the research and input before making any conclusions, recommendations or decisions on viability.

Q22: Where is our water system at?

Answer: The water system is one of several infrastructure systems that was reviewed on pages 28 and 29 of the Village of Cremona Viability Review Initial Findings Report. Since the completion of the village's infrastructure study in 2005, the village has completed a number of projects related to the water system.

The village has decommissioned a few water wells as well as drilled a new water well for the village's water supply. A new treated water storage reservoir and the water treatment plant were also built from 2009 to 2012.

Q23: Why did we (the village) annex land if we cannot take care of our existing infrastructure?

Answer: The village indicated that it annexed land in 2008 from Mountain View County in order to accommodate residential, commercial, and industrial growth. The annexation was completed in accordance with the Intermunicipal Development Plan (IDP) that was approved by both the Village of Cremona and Mountain View County. The IDP can be found on the Mountain View County website at: www.mountainviewcounty.com/media/docs/Bylaw%2013-07%20Cremona%20IDP.pdf.

Section 4 - Clarifications and Corrections to Initial Findings Report

Some concerns were raised by members of the Cremona community about the accuracy of the information and the source of the information that was used in the Initial Findings Report. This section addresses these concerns.

Concern: The financial figures used for key measure #1 are incorrect as capital items were included in the calculations.

Response: The current interpretation of the Municipal Sustainability Strategy Working Group's intent is that measures be relatively simple and able to be calculated in a timely manner. Consequently, the net revenue (expense) was used as the underlying data for this measure. This information is found in the financial information return that each municipality submits to Municipal Affairs on an annual basis and is easily accessible from our Municipal Financial Information System and relates well to the increase/decrease in the accumulated surplus.

Alberta municipalities transitioned to the net financial assets (debt) reporting model and started to record tangible capital assets and amortization expense in 2009. This change in accounting practice means that the capital revenues are correctly reported as revenue in the year received, and expense amounts only include amortization, rather than any cash outlay for capital asset additions. We view net revenue (expense) as the best and most comparable representation of annual results based on current accounting practice.

Concern: The Village of Cremona received substantial (\$1,000,000+) grants in 2009 which would have triggered key measure #5. Why was this key measure not triggered?

Response: The key measure is based on information from the most recent financial information return. At the time when this key measure was analyzed in 2012, the most recent financial information available was from the 2011 financial year. As such, the data used to calculate key measure #5 as found on page 10 of the Initial Findings Report is correct.

Correction: Seniors Busing (Page 32 of Initial Findings Report)

An error was made regarding the funding of the Tri-Community Transportation Committee. The Village of Cremona does not provide funding to this committee.

Next Steps

The What We Have Heard Report is meant to provide members of the Cremona community with information on the public input collected to date. The information gathered will be analyzed and will be used by the Viability Review Team's determination of the Village of Cremona's viability.

Due to the loss of elected representation from the Village of Cremona on the Viability Review Team, the Viability Review Team will not make a viability determination until following the October 2013 municipal elections when an elected official can be appointed to represent the village on the Viability Review Team.

For further information, please contact:

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