

# PRESS RELEASE

## Facts on Lac Ste. Anne Mediation

**April 13, 2016 – Mayor Kate Patrick, Mayor Jim Benedict, Mayor Dale Krasnow, and Mayor Bernie Poulin**

For several years now the relationship between Lac Ste. Anne County and the urban municipalities within the County's boundaries has been deteriorating to the point where we believe there are detrimental and negative impacts, including but not limited to, safety and emergency response. This includes over two years of trying to negotiate on fire services itself, and over a year since mediation was first mentioned by Alberta Municipal Affairs.

Our relationship has deteriorated to the point where Alberta Municipal Affairs recognized these municipalities needed some intervention and assistance through mediation. The Minister of Alberta Municipal Affairs has provided \$50,000 in funding to cover the costs of two mediators to work with all 16 municipalities within Lac Ste. Anne County boundaries, including Lac Ste. Anne County.

These two mediators had phone discussions with these municipalities, and then had a meeting with each individual municipality's Council and Administration (the Summer Villages were a combined meeting as opposed to 12 individual meetings).

From these discussions, a meeting was scheduled for Monday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., whereby a quorum of Council from each municipality and each CAO would be participating to review key protocols and agree to the immediate and long term mediation process going forward.

On Wednesday, March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016 our municipalities received an email from one of the mediators advising that they had received notice on Tuesday, March 29, 2016 that Lac Ste. Anne County had passed a motion to postpone their involvement in the mediation process. This postponement was to allow involved parties to sort out issues relating to fire services. As a result, this April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016 mediation meeting was cancelled by the mediators. As a matter of process, the tentative meeting dates of April 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> were also cancelled.

As April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016 was a date already in the calendars of elected officials from each municipality, the elected officials of the 15 urban municipalities decided to go forth with a meeting and assess this latest development and the mediation process itself.

At this April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016 Special meeting, 11 of the urban municipality Mayors signed, on behalf of their respective municipalities, a letter to the Minister of Alberta Municipal Affairs stating as follows: "Upon reflecting on discussions held during meetings with selected mediators, and now their March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016 email cancelling upcoming meeting dates because of Lac Ste. Anne County's participation postponement, our communities respectfully request a full withdrawal from this mediation process. Our communities' further request that Alberta Municipal Affairs conduct a corporate and governance review of Lac Ste. Anne County, and we suggest the unspent funds from this mediation process could be redirected to this corporate and governance review".

It is important to note that it was in fact Lac Ste. Anne County who initially pulled out of mediation, and while their words were “postponed” this “postponement” resulted in the cancelling of 3 scheduled mediation meetings. Given Lac Ste. Anne County’s reason for postponement, the reality is that their postponement was indefinite - if not a complete withdrawal – as one of the core issues for many municipalities is the topic of fire services.

Would Lac Ste. Anne County come back to the mediation table, perhaps, who is to know? Would we as a group of 16 municipalities and 2 mediators book another round of 3 meetings, just to have Lac Ste. Anne County back out at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour again, perhaps? Would Lac Ste. Anne County have shown up at future mediation meetings, perhaps? Can we still have mediation meetings, perhaps? If all 16 municipalities are willing to participate.

Interesting thing about this mediation process: there is nothing binding motions or recorded minutes at any of these mediation meetings. The mediators do not take notes or minutes, there is no report that goes back to the Minister, and as a result there is no assurance for transparency or clear directives to emerge from this process.

The \$50,000 in funding is to cover the mediator’s costs only. There is no coverage for hall rental or municipal representative expenses to participate, these costs are borne by each municipality. At the initial meetings it was noted by the mediators that this process could take several months, so obviously that would come with a fairly significant cost to each municipality to participate. While costs for all services must be a consideration of every municipality, we believe we all recognize the urgency and severity of our regional crisis. Unfortunately, the costs to participate in this mediation process when there is no guarantee that the Lac Ste. Anne County will even participate, or that a binding or measurable outcome will result, become inhibitive and are a factor we had to consider.

Also of note, the participating municipalities were advised by the mediators that key municipal representatives from Lac Ste. Anne County may not be participating in the process.

On April 12 the Mayors of the municipalities participated in a conference call with the Minister of Alberta Municipal Affairs whereby we heard that there is a public safety issue and a critical need for consensus on fire services for the region and that as municipalities we must reach an interim understanding of fire services. The Minister is appointing an Assistant Deputy Minister and the Fire Commissioner to work with us and participate in upcoming meetings which are anticipated to commence within the next 10 days.

While the fire situation is urgent, there are many more issues between Lac Ste. Anne County and its urban neighbors that are detrimental to all our communities including but not limited to: policing, emergency management/disaster services, Family & Community Support Service, recreation, library, physician recruitment, economic development, and Inter-Municipal Development Plan. Lac Ste. Anne County ratepayers themselves have concerns with their Council and Administration as they have collected and submitted several petitions in the past

year or so. It is all of these factors and considerations combined that lead the 11 Mayors to sign this letter requesting a corporate and governance review of Lac Ste. Anne County.

Jim Benedict  
Mayor  
Alberta Beach

Kate Patrick  
Mayor  
Town of Mayerthorpe

Dale Krasnow  
Mayor  
Town of Onoway

Bernie Poulin  
Mayor  
S.V. of Silver Sands  
(S.V.'s Representative)