

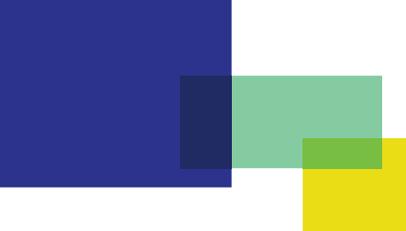
# REGIONAL GOVERNANCE STUDY



## Phase 2 Engagement Summary

September 2021





# Introduction

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The Village of Caroline, Clearwater County, and the Town of Rocky Mountain House secured Nichols Applied Management and ISL Engineering and Land Services Ltd. to undertake a Regional Governance Study (the Study). The purpose of the Study was to explore the most effective and efficient governance structure to support the region's growth and long-term prosperity for all citizens. The municipalities have been committed to searching for common goals and a common vision to best serve the region. Funding for the Study was provided by a grant from the Province of Alberta.

It is important to note that the Study was not an Amalgamation Study. Instead, the purpose of the Study was to review all options, including maintaining the status quo of keeping the three existing municipal government structures, to identify the potential benefits, disadvantages, and impacts of the different governance options being explored.

During the first phase of engagement for the Study, residents from all three municipalities had opportunities to learn more about the study process and provide their perspectives on what was important to consider and ask questions they had about the Study. Key themes that emerged from the first phase of engagement were used to inform the review and analysis of the different governance options.

This summary represents an overview of the feedback shared by residents and stakeholders only and does not represent views and perspectives of the project team or participating municipalities. It describes the engagement process and insight from the second phase of public engagement. Input received has been summarized and detailed below and is reflective of the diversity and frequency of comments received. The time spent by residents and stakeholders in reviewing information, attending the Information Sessions, providing input, and connecting with the project team throughout the entire Study process was greatly appreciated.

# Phase 2 Public Engagement

The purpose of the second phase of engagement was to share the key findings and recommendations of the completed Study and gather feedback from stakeholders and residents. The following is an overview of the engagement which was undertaken.

## Advertising

The project website which was first launched when the Study was initiated in early 2021, and was used as a central location for residents and stakeholders of all three municipalities to visit and learn more about the project. A media release for the second phase of engagement was shared on July 19/21 to announce the release of the draft Recommendations Report and upcoming engagement opportunities. Additional communications to promote the project and engagement included:

- Advertisements in the Western Star and Mountaineer newspapers (recurring over the course of engagement)
- Facebook and Twitter posts by the three municipalities
- Postcards handed out at in-person events advertising upcoming engagement and encouraging participants to complete the survey

## Engagement Opportunities

The second phase of engagement offered several opportunities for residents and stakeholders to learn more about the project and share their perspectives and concerns. These included:

| Engagement Type  | Purpose   | Dates   | Audience   |
|--|---|---|--|
| Project Website  | To share information about the study process and provide one location for residents of three municipalities to stay up to date on the project | February 8 to present   | 1933 unique visitors as of September 7   |
| In-person Information Sessions                               | To share key findings and recommendations of the Study and gather feedback from residents and stakeholders                                    | July 28, 2021 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caroline</li> <li>• Rocky Mountain House</li> </ul> August 23, 2021 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nordegg</li> <li>• Leslieville</li> </ul> | July 28, 2021 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caroline – 32 attendees</li> <li>• Rocky Mountain House – 29 attendees</li> </ul> August 23, 2021 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nordegg – 18 attendees</li> <li>• Leslieville – 3 attendees</li> </ul> |
| Survey (online, paper copies provided at in-person sessions) | To collect feedback and questions from residents, ratepayers, and stakeholders of all three municipalities                                    | July 28 – August 25, 2021   | 29 Responses   |

# Overall Themes

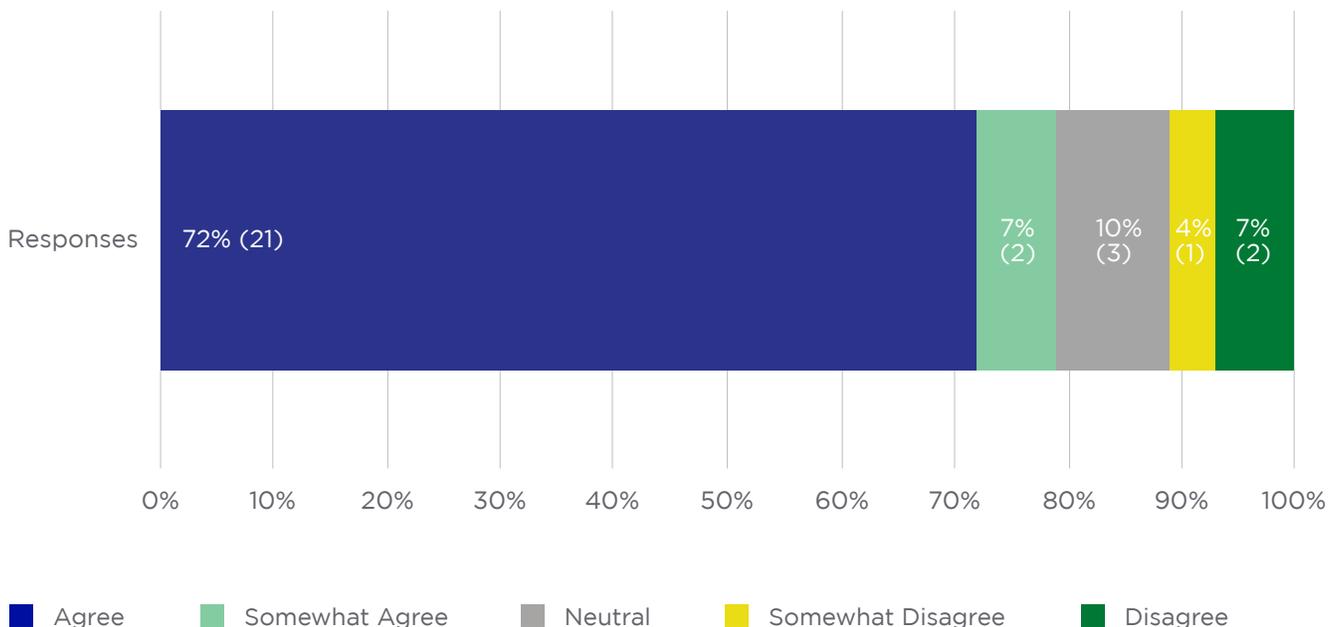
The following are key themes that emerged based on the feedback provided by residents and stakeholders during the second phase of engagement:

- The amalgamation of the Village and County has the potential to have positive impacts by reducing duplication of services and making operations more cost effective.
- Some respondents were unsure/hesitant about how this change could impact their communities in the long term, and felt they needed more information.
- A few respondents were worried about the amalgamation negatively impacting taxes, level of service, and job security.

# Detailed Feedback

## Level of Agreement for Amalgamation between the Village of Caroline and Clearwater County

Total Responses: 29



## Explain your answer

Total Responses: 28

### Agree/Somewhat Agree

- Those who agreed (72%) or somewhat agreed (7%) that the Village and County should amalgamate shared the following:
  - The amalgamation of the Village and County has the potential to make delivery of public services more efficient by avoiding the unnecessary duplication of services.
  - The Village has experienced high taxes relative to the services and amenities available, infrastructure is in need of costly upgrades, and there are financial concerns in general. Amalgamating with the County could help to alleviate some of these stresses and make operations and upgrades more financially viable.
  - Amalgamation could have positive impacts on Caroline given its small population.
  - There are still things that need to be negotiated/explored further, but this would be a positive step.

### Neutral

- Those who were neutral about the amalgamation (10%) indicated that they were unsure of how these changes might impact their communities in the long-term.

### Somewhat Disagree/Disagree

- Those who indicated that they somewhat disagreed (4%) or disagreed (7%) that the Village and County should amalgamate felt that it was not the best decision for the Village and County, and that amalgamation could negatively impact taxes, level of service, and connectivity to citizens.

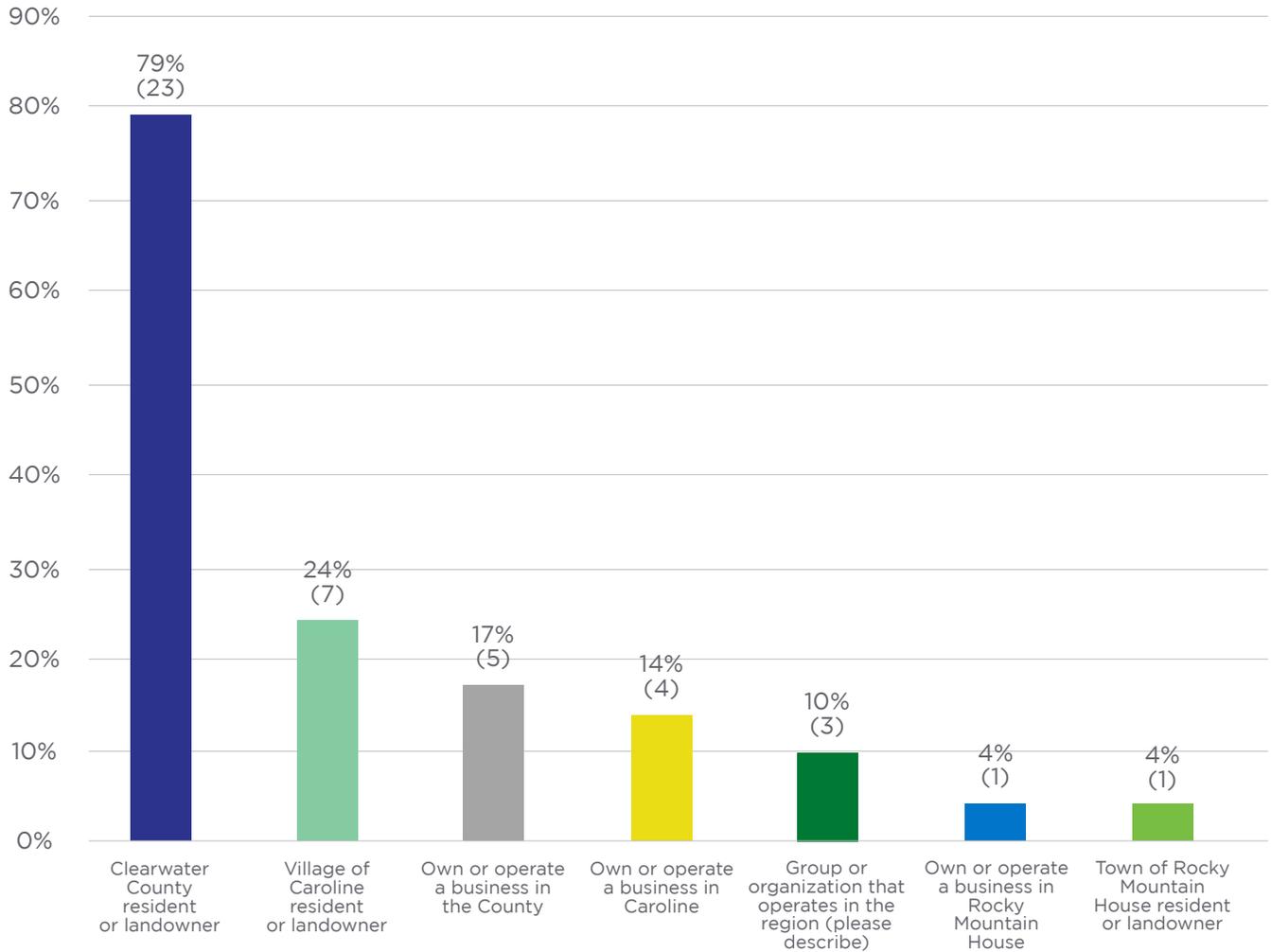
## Additional Comments

Total Responses: 18

- Disagreements between the municipal governments have negative impacts on the region; cooperation and amalgamation will have a positive impact.
- It will be important to share a detailed breakdown of cost savings as the report doesn't outline the actual long-term changes to costs, as savings have not yet been determined.
- Amalgamation has the potential for many positive benefits, helps the Village and County to plan for the future, and will create efficiencies.
- There are concerns that amalgamation could result in job-losses.

## About You

Total Responses: 29



### Group or organization that operations in the region or other:

- Members of community associations.

# Next Steps

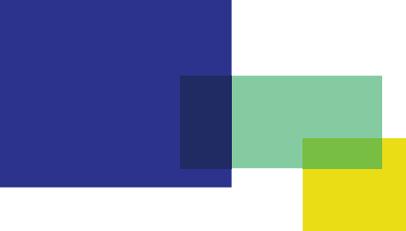
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The feedback received as part of the Online Survey and In-Person Information Sessions will be provided to the Study Steering Committee, which will then be shared with each Council. After the Steering Committee concludes that the Study is ready to be presented for approvals a vote by each Council will take place (i.e., a vote to accept the report and its recommendation or a vote accept the report but reject the recommendation etc.). Should the Village and County decide to pursue amalgamation, the Municipal Government Act sets out the next steps that both municipalities need to undertake, which would include additional technical studies and engagement with residents.



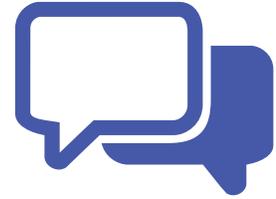
# APPENDIX A

Verbatim Feedback



# Regional Governance Study Recommendations Report Survey

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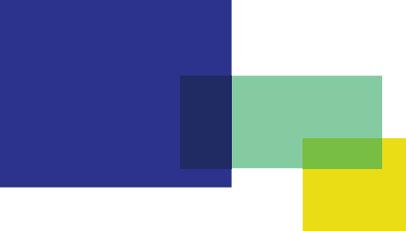


The following section includes the feedback received through the survey (both through hard copies in-person and online). All submissions are presented as shared; they have not been corrected for spelling, grammar, or fact checking.

**No decisions have been made and prior to moving forward with any changes, additional studies, analyses, and negotiations would be required. Based on the information that is currently known and available, what is your level of support for the recommendation that the Village and County amalgamate? Please explain your answer.**

- The long term impacts are difficult to know. The province seems to place low income people in Caroline. That is not a good population base to support the Village. Should CWC residents support that? What are the potential general upside to amalgamation.
- Over time, it would be better to have single entity. It will help eliminate duplicate, committees, services etc., Would make it simpler as a single entity to deal with provincial government.
- Don't see the benefit to the Country.
- Need more information, seems a bit empty on future plans and growth.
- It would be advantageous to amalgamate the Village into the County prior to the Village getting into financial trouble or lose good governance.
- The economic analysis by the consultants supports this, but it seems an amalgamation is essential to prevent further degradation of facilities and services in Caroline.
- Pros 1. Avoid bureaucratic duplication 2. Optimize services Cons: 1. Improper centralization could result in an administration that loses contact with the citizens 2. Challenge to balance equity in spending.
- How will this Nordegg?
- Caroline does not have the population so sustain an independent governance, it makes more sense to be part of the county such as Leslieville and Condor etc
- Would love to see the Village grow even at a small cost to county residence. If our village grows we all benefit from it.

- Many changes and upgrades are required with town residents not being able to support capital costs, taxes are high now.
- The Village needs help financially.
- Shared resources would benefit both municipalities.
- Time to move forward.
- There are and have been many partnership opportunities enjoyed by CC & VR over many years. Upon review of the findings, it would appear to be the next logical step to see CC & VC amalgamate.
- Nil
- The sooner the better for the Village.
- Many services are already done in collaboration. There is an opportunity for continued & better support if Clearwater & Village amalgamate.
- The Village cannot afford to pay for upgrades. Dissolution seems inevitable - voluntary amalgamation will be win/win.
  - The infrastructure advantages.
  - The possibilities for expansion of facilities.
- There are numerous issues that will have to be negotiated to the liking of the County & Village.
- The Village is no longer financially sustainable.
- Caroline has struggled for many years with the upkeep and maintenance of its infrastructure and has incredibly high taxes for the amenities that are available.
- Better stewardship of citizen taxes and time will result from integrated services under one governance umbrella.
- Amalgamating as I understand what has been submitted would help the communities involved in a planned growth path
- From my research on other areas it would result in higher taxes, lower rates of service, lower staff morale
- The Village and its residents will have better advantages with the amalgamation.
- There is no need for three bodies of governance with today's technology. It's a waste of energy, time and money
- It's a good fit for each other



**Do you have any comments on the contents of the Recommendations Report or additional information that would help the municipalities in making decisions about the next steps?**

- Some missing information on the boards that I got answers from a private individual.
- Slow down online is not effective.
- If the majority of participants recommend one of the r options. Proceed with the recommendation
- Caroline municipal staff should for the most part be given assurances of continued employment after amalgamation. Caroline’s municipal leadership should be lauded for the difficult job of maintaining this small municipality as the population has shrunk a bit and costs have risen.
- “The devil is in the details” It is reasonable to expect cost savings however these need to be identified in as real numbers as possible and stewarded too. I have seen corporate amalgamations and the savings are often short term. Ok. Mea Culpe. It is in the detailed report.
- No
- Make amalgamation happen, larger base for forward advancement for all, at hopefully economic positive benefits to all involved.
- CC & VC should start the next steps in amalgamation as soon as possible with the intent to complete the process prior to the 2025 municipal election.
- Nil
- With duplication of services and cost of governance amalgamation makes the most sense.
- Very well executed.
- Forward thinking, open minded & willing to compromise.
- It’s about time.
- Caroline has so much potential to expand and grow in ways like Canmore as the last stop before the west country. With the proper leadership and guidance, Caroline will have its chance again to grow into the unique place it was meant to. This brings many desired amenities and employment opportunities to the area, as well as students, teachers and professionals.
- The paralyzing rift between Clearwater County and the Town of RMH must be addressed. Time and taxes are wasted through duplications and overlaps and mediating the ongoing disagreements. This region will only truly be stronger, efficient and productive with one governance council for all three jurisdictions.
- None at this time
- No
- As a county resident near Caroline I’m a supporter of amalgamation