

## Ag Society Expansion Waiting for Town funds

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Todd W. Hurman, Olds Albertan

Town Council already passed its proposed 2006 budget and chose not to commit any funds to the Ag Society, but that didn't stop members from asking town council on Dec. 12 for financial support towards its \$11-million expansion initiative.

"Hopefully we've planted the seed that we do require more funding and we are looking for any help we can get," said Eric Iversen, president of the Ag Society's board of directors.

With the Cow Palace nearly 30-years-old and events being split between facilities on either side of 54 St., the Ag Society is planning to add 40,000 sq. ft. split between two new facilities on its land south of 54 St. - a \$6.5 million community convention centre capable of holding up to 800 people and a \$4.5 million premier livestock facility.

The Ag Society already received a \$3.7-million grant from Alberta Lotteries earlier this year and the Rotary Club officials say there is enough money to begin construction on the livestock facility possibly as early as next fall. Tami Gardner, Ag Society general Manager, said that both buildings are necessary for the events the Ag. Society hopes to attract.

"It's important for us to see the project in its entirety. I truly believe that the process we have undertaken has absolutely confirmed that both of these components are important," Gardner said.

Iversen said the Ag Society would consider beginning construction if the town could guarantee funds at a later date or over a number of years.

The idea of conducting a land swap with the town to eventually relocate the entire grounds south of 54 St. was also brought up, but Iversen said that was still 10 or 15 years away and that all depends if the Ag Society can secure the land necessary to move the grounds.

"Cash is probably our first preference, the land isn't going to go anywhere," he said.

One issue raised during the presentation was accommodations. Motel rooms are already a commodity in Olds during most events and with the Ag Society planning to build a bigger venue, finding rooms in town will be even more difficult.

Iversen told the Albertan that the Ag Society has looked at possibly building a hotel directly adjacent to the new buildings, but said plans are still in the primary phases.

Even though the Ag Society won't be seeing any money this year from the town, Mayor Judy Dahl said their request hasn't fallen on deaf ears either.

"I think town council showed a great interest in pursuing further communication with the Ag Society for sure. It is something that impacts the whole town of Olds - it impacts the businesses, it impacts all the economic development in the town of Olds," she said.

"And we will be looking at it in the future. I can't say what council will want to do as far as funding and dollars go, but it is not a closed door."

The Ag Society also plans to further pursue more funding from the province and is scheduled to meet with Mountain View County council on Jan. 4 to request funding as well.

"We are committed to the successful securement of the funds and we feel very confident that it will come together," Gardner said.