

## **MEDICINE LODGE SKI HILL**

### **Masterplan and Asset Utilization Study**

#### **Project Overview**



#### **The Project**

The Town of Bentley and Central Alberta Economic Partnership in collaboration with our funding partner Lacombe County issued a competitive Request for Proposal QU 20231, seeking out qualified firms to undertake a masterplan and asset utilization study for the Medicine Lodge Ski Hill. The RFP closed on January 17, 2023, at 3:00pm mountain time. A fair evaluation was undertaken of proposals received and a contract was awarded to McElhanney to complete the study.

The hill is in Lacombe County along highway 12 in the quarter section (S.W.-20-40-2-W5M) and has been operated as a ski hill since the early 1950's. The Medicine Lodge Ski Club, who operates the hill, officially became a society in 1962. The club has successfully operated the hill for many years and is run by volunteers, including an active volunteer ski patrol.

Over the last several years, there has been interest from outside clubs and investors to further develop the areas of the hill for other recreational activities such as mountain biking, cross country skiing and hiking. This interest has been directed to the Medicine Lodge Ski club and has led to conversations between those interested parties and the Ski Club.

It has become evident to Mayor and Council and administration for the Town of Bentley, that a formalized planning process needed to be undertaken to better understand the types of requests that are being made. The masterplan will help to clarify if proposed other activities can be considered as viable options, what the impact would be of such activities on a multitude of stakeholders and how they could be considered in a respectful and equitable way that considers the unique perspectives of those stakeholders.

In the summer of 2022, Central Alberta Economic Partnership (CAEP) undertook a tourism opportunity assessment of existing and potential tourism assets within central Alberta. In this assessment Medicine Lodge Ski Hill was identified as having a potentially strong tourism growth as a hill and in diversification and expansion into other seasons. The report indicates that there is a strong potential to grow the site for skiing, building on what has been done for more than 60 years. The site has additional room to potentially host an area for biking and hiking and cross-country skiing. However the report also recommends that a comprehensive asset utilization plan a master plan be undertaken to further refine the site plan and strategic and tactical directions.

The Masterplan was initiated and began early February 2023 once the contract was finalized with the successful proponent. Public engagement activity included the following:

Medicine Lodge Ski Club Board Engagement	February 7, 2023
Adjacent Landowner Engagement	February 15, 2023
Public Open Engagement	February 22, 2023
Meeting with Grand Chief Standingontheroad	February 22, 2023
Indigenous Stakeholders Conversation	March 8, 2023
Mountain Bike Clubs & Ski Club Trails Conversation	March 23, 2023

### **Surveys Issued**

A general survey was also issued publicly and ran from February 17, 2023, to March 15, 2023. In addition, a specific survey was available to the Ski Club, which focused more on hill operations and ran from February 14, 2023, to February 24, 2023.

### **Other aspects of the Masterplan**

In addition to the engagements, an analysis of the operations of the hill is being undertaken and included inspections of the facilities, equipment, and operations. The intention is to undertake a gap analysis of existing assets and necessary improvements to support long term multi-sport recreation. This includes a general understanding of the strength of existing operations and also gaps in current assets and operations that could be rectified to extend the season for existing and other new uses.

The overall goal of the project is to assist stakeholders to refine and create a strategic long term vision for the Medicine Lodge Ski Hill and Recreation area that considers the impact on existing landowners, pays tribute to cultural and historical uses including indigenous history and diversifies recreation opportunities. The plan will look to include:

- Phased approach that looks at opportunities to mitigate risk, while effectively utilizing the land to create a recreation area, which is manageable through a volunteer base. The plan may also provide recommendations to supplement volunteer base through other operations including permanent staffing options or other land lease options to third parties.
- Provide alternative uses and recommendations with an order of magnitude cost estimate for improvements to facilitate those alternatives

- Prioritize options and alternatives based on data and feedback gathered through stakeholder engagement.
- Determine barriers to development and provide recommended risk mitigation strategies.
- Provide an analysis of the feasibility of the various recreation options being proposed including a summary of the potential impacts of those options on existing operations, adjacent landowners, traffic patterns, water quality and other environmental factors (for example for snowmaking activities)
- Provide a summary of current funding opportunities and grant opportunities to help move the long-term vision forward. This should include an analysis of existing grant opportunities that could be sought by the Town of Bentley, CAEP, Lacombe Tourism, Medicine Lodge Ski Hill or other not for profits
- Include formal presentations regarding the findings and outcomes along with recommendations and learnings to the Town of Bentley and the CAEP community.
- It is anticipated that the project will be completed by March 31, 2023, with reports and presentations being finalized in April.

### **History Recap**

- **In the original Bentley History Book pg. 231 it states:**  
 “The young people were very interested in skiing so with advice from Bill Holmes and a few other fathers, the ski hill began to take shape. A quarter section of land, eight miles west of Bentley was for sale for taxes, so the ski club decided to buy it. Lloyd Holmes and Orval Wilton signed the cheque. The late Victor Johannsen thought there should be a ski cabin built and offered to supervise construction. Clearing was done, logs peeled and some cut for lumber for the floor and roof and with the help of Lloyd and Orval and many others the cabin was soon built. A stove was put in and lunches were served by the mothers of the young people. Ski runs were cleared and later the Ski Club turned the property over to the Village of Bentley in 1958. The highest range of the hills until you get to the mountains, fifty miles away, two large lakes and four towns can be seen from the top of the ski hill. (This was recorded from Mary Holmes (Bresdon) born in 1903 at Wilton N. Dakota and she was 77 when they documented this)
- Lacombe ski club started around 1936 – the members at the time used the small hills around Canadian Union College north of Lacombe and they climbed there on foot.
- In 1946 they moved to the Winslow Farm 8 miles north of Lacombe and continued to climb on foot
- Around 1946 the Bentley Ski Club Formed
- In 1948 with much hard work, they built their first tow on the Winslow property consisting of car chassis, rear axle, multiple wheels and powered it with Mr. Winslow’s tractor. This was the first ski tow in Alberta east of the mountains. The club at this time consisted of about 20 members.

- In 1956 the Bentley Ski Club and Lacombe Ski Club joined together to use the hill
- In 1959 the club expanded the hill and ski area and improved the runs adding the first tow
- Ponoka enthusiasts also joined the club in 1959.
- The club was formally incorporated under the societies act in 1963 and changed their name from the Lacombe Bentley Ponoka Ski Club to the Medicine Lodge Ski Club and has operated under this name ever since.
- 1958 The Village of Bentley purchased the Ski Hill 160 acre quarter section (more or less) from the owners at the time, namely Edward Olaf Ree, Orville Percy Wilton and Lloyd L Homes all of Bentley AB (Land acquired South West quarter of Section Twenty (20), Township Forty (40), Range Two (2), West of the Fifth Meridian, in the Province of Alberta containing One Hundred and Sixty (160) acres more or less.
- Authorization for the acquisition was through Bylaw 202/58 for the sum of One (1) Dollars and the bylaw was read three times on Feb 3, 1958, and was signed by Mayor BF Hicks and Secretary Treasurer Claude Summers
- I have a sublease signed by the Village of Bentley, Medicine Lodge Ski Club and the tenant Marilyn Lutwick that provides the guidelines for the sublease including no subletting of any portion and no transferring of the agreement to a third party and that the Club will not reimburse the tenant for any monies expended on improving or maintaining the property including the sewer system, utility installation, residences or out buildings. The lease also states if the tenant vacates the property the club may at the discretion of the club negotiate to purchase the assets of the tenant.

### **Indigenous History**

- 2008 The Town received a letter in June from J Fromhold regarding work he had undertaken in the Medicine Hills Area with a recommendation to consider the area should be given protection as both a Natural Area and a Cultural Heritage Area and that this could be of considerable benefit to the Town of Bentley.
  - The letter mentions a proposal before the EUP to approve a drilling program in the Sunset Hill south of Hwy 51 in the Medicine Hills
  - The letter also mentions historical significance and cultural importance to be considered for some of the sites.
  - Mentions home to wildlife deer, bear, bald eagles, elk and unique plants.

- Also features a number of all season springs of sizeable proportions and an underground lake, presumably aquifer, underlying the hills
- The intention of the letter was to state that drilling would adversely affect the springs
- Mentions the medicine hills as being a site of particular importance to the aboriginal peoples of the region. One of three most significant areas in west central Alberta
- Historically the Medicine Hills lies within the territory of the Asini Wachi Wi Iniwak, the “Mountain People” division of the western Cree consisting of a number of Cree and Nakoda bands. Cree occupancy of the area can be documented to have existed by 1730 and likely as early as 1650. The names of the bands and chiefs are known for this time period and the history of the bands and bend members are known in detail from 1750 on.
- States that The Medicine Hills were considered of special interest to the Asini Wachi for several reasons:
  - They have important religious association.
    - Provided a height of land where religious fasts, meditation and Vision quests were undertaken.
    - Location for religious events and undertakings
    - Contain a number of locations that were thought to have special religious significance. It is believed this includes at least one APISCHIW IYINEWSAK site (referring to the spring) and at least one PAKAKOS site
    - They stand out as a lone outcrop which gave them uniqueness recognized by the aboriginal peoples, and comparable to that of Antler Hill, which was known to have had a place of worship at its peak.
    - The area reputedly contains a number of burials. Two chiefs are known to have died in this area; it is not inconceivable that they were buried in these hills.
- October 16, 2008 a letter was sent by the Town of Bentley regarding the Omers Energy proposal to drill sweet gas wells on the S.W. 20-40-2 W5M quarter section.
  - The letter stated that Town Council at their meeting held October 14, 2008 considered the proposal from Omers Energy and considered the Medicine Lodge Ski Club’s opposition to the drilling of a well, the proximity of the proposed well to the ski lodge and the historical use of the property for more than 60 years as a community ski and recreation area.
  - This property was gifted to the Town for the purpose of a recreation area and council wishes to honor the spirit and intent of this gift
  - A motion was unanimously passed to decline the offer to lease the S.W. 20-40-2 W5M for the purpose of drilling a sweet gas well.

### **Current Situation**

- Since this time, the town has been approached numerous times from interested parties for a variety of reasons, mainly to do with further development of the area.
- The Town has held strong and has not considered moving forward on any development that would jeopardize or endanger the area as a recreation area to be enjoyed for many generations to come.
- The Town and club was also approached by the Red Deer Mountain Bike club regarding building MTB trail. Again, no decision has been made at this time
- The interest in the Hill has lead Town Administration and Council to consider how to ensure the long-term sustainability of the hill. That is when conversations began to happen, between the Town and the medicine lodge ski club to obtain a better understanding of the long-term vision for the area, that balances recreation opportunity with ensuring the sustainability of the area for generations to come.
- We know there is opportunity to ensure that the area stays amazing, while balancing the growing needs of the region to provide opportunities for recreation and respecting the potentially cultural significance of the area to indigenous peoples as well.

