

# RURAL LIVING

in Lethbridge County





# LIVING HERE

Lethbridge County is one of Canada's most productive agricultural communities. We are home to numerous farms and intensive livestock operations that produce some of the highest-quality foods you can find anywhere. We also have several small hamlets and grouped country residential communities where citizens enjoy quality country living. The County features vast stretches of prairie fields, the river valleys of the Oldman and Little Bow, as well as human-made lakes and reservoirs.

Rural living is rich and rewarding, but differs from life in an urban setting. Landowner responsibilities, availability of services, proximity to agricultural operations, and other considerations should be made when deciding to purchase or develop land in a rural area. This booklet is intended to provide information on what to expect when living in Lethbridge County.

# YOUR PROPERTY

Owning rural land comes with a responsibility of knowing how to care for it. Continual stewardship and land management are essential elements of rural life.

## Development and Land Use

- ***Do you need a permit?*** Lethbridge County's Land Use Bylaw divides the municipality into land use districts (zones). Know what uses are permitted or restricted on your property. If you plan to do any development (ie. an accessory building, new home, deck, signage for your business, etc.), or change the use of your property (i.e. run a business from the property, even a home-based one), you will likely need development and building permits before starting work on your project. Contact our Planning and Development department at 403-328-5525 to determine if your project requires permits.
- ***Consider drainage on your property.*** Irrigation ditches can raise groundwater levels and flowing water can be a hazard. Seasonal groundwater fluctuation that may affect your basement or water supply. Contact the closest irrigation district to your property for more information. Also, natural waterways and drainage cannot be altered without approval from Alberta Environment & Parks.
- ***Landowners are responsible for weed control on their property.*** Certain weeds and plants are invasive or harmful (even poisonous) to other plant life and animals. They can also threaten valuable crops in the area. You are responsible for controlling noxious weeds on your property. The County's Weed Inspector can assist you in identifying these weeds and determine the best plan for eliminating them.
- ***Landscaping is encouraged and can even protect your property.*** Adding a shelterbelt of trees around your property can protect your home and garden from the elements. Our Agricultural Services department can provide information on how to establish one. Locate trees, hedges, dugouts, etc. the proper distance from roads and property lines to avoid having to move them in the future. Always check with our Planning and Development department for the setbacks on your property prior to landscaping.





# AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is the economic driver of Lethbridge County and the area, contributing billions of dollars each year to the economy as well as many jobs. The County has the largest concentration of intensive livestock operations of any municipality in Alberta.

## Choosing to live near farming and intensive livestock operations

- ***Farms and confined feeding operations (feedlots) generate noise, traffic, dust, smoke, and odour that may disturb your peace and quiet.*** Farming is hard work, and farmers often work around the clock, especially during seeding and harvest times, creating noise and adding slow-moving vehicles and equipment on roads. Land preparations and other operations can cause dust, especially during dry or windy weather. Confined feeding operations can contain thousands of livestock that create noise and strong odours.
- ***Lethbridge County will not intervene on the day-to-day operations of your agri-business neighbours.*** Alberta's Agricultural Operations Protection Act governs livestock operations and limits ability to raise nuisance and liability claims. If you decide to build near a confined feeding operation, you will be required to get a waiver from the feedlot operation.
- ***Fertilizers and herbicides are often used in growing crops.*** Controlling invasive weeds is a priority for farmers, who may apply herbicides either on the ground or from the air.
- ***There are numerous irrigation canals in Lethbridge County.*** Minimum development setbacks exist near these canals. Contact Planning and Development at 403-328-5525 to determine the setbacks on your property.
- ***Be mindful of livestock and wildlife.*** All animals, whether wild or on a farm, can be dangerous. Do not feed wildlife or approach farm animals unless you have permission from the property owner.

# ROADS & ACCESS

Lethbridge County has an extensive road network utilized by citizens, producers, and businesses. The County is responsible for maintaining over 2,000 km of roads.

## Driving on or living near County-maintained roads

- ***Not all roads are maintained the same.*** Due to the number of roads in the County, each is prioritized for maintenance based on how it is used (i.e. school bus route, Haul Route Network) and how much traffic the it sees on a daily basis. Not all roads can be maintained to the same level due to budget constraints. Private roads are the responsibility of the landowner who use them.
- ***Unpaved roads are not always smooth and can washboard.*** They generate dust (especially in dry years), and are slippery when wet. Drive with caution in these conditions. You may notice an increase in vehicle maintenance costs when traveling regularly on rural roads.
- ***In extreme weather conditions some roads can become impassable.*** They may not be cleared for several days if they are not priority roads. Invest in winter tires or a four-wheel drive vehicle to travel safely.
- ***Some roads are considered Haul Routes.*** Large transport vehicles regularly travel them, so be mindful of heavy truck traffic and share the road.
- ***Road maintenance and repairs may be delayed in inclement weather.*** Roads must dry out before work can commence.
- ***Approval is required for driveway access onto County roads.*** Alberta Transportation approval is needed prior to constructing access onto numbered highways. Check with our Public Works department at 403-732-5333 to determine what permits, construction standards, and fees are required.





## UTILITY SERVICES

Water, natural gas, electricity, telephone, cable, sewer, and other services may not always be available or may not be equivalent to urban standards.

### Know what utility services you have access to

- **Potable water is available in some areas.** Hamlets and other parts of the County receive potable water through a system of regional water lines and co-ops. There are few areas of the County where water wells are feasible, so you may need to have potable water delivered to your home. If you intend on treating irrigation or surface water for human consumption, contact the Lethbridge Community Health Centre for testing.
- **Sanitary sewer service is only available in some hamlets.** In other areas, you will need to use an approved septic system or other treatment process. Soil type, setbacks, slopes, and the size of your house will determine the size, cost and function of your system. Have your system designed and installed by a reliable sanitation firm. Maintenance of private septic systems are the responsibility of the landowner.
- **Household refuse is picked up weekly in hamlets.** If you do not live in a hamlet, you must take waste to a County transfer or recycling facility. Household garbage cannot be burned (only untreated wood and yard waste like leaves, branches, etc. can be burned). Prior to burning, you must get a fire permit and check the fire ban status.
- **Electricity, natural gas, TV, and internet are supplied by private utility companies.** Cell phone and internet service may be unreliable in some areas.
- **Direct mail delivery is not available to most areas of the County.** Contact Canada Post to find out how your mail will be delivered.
- **Repairs to utility systems can often take longer than in an urban setting.**

# CLIMATE & WEATHER

Mother Nature is unpredictable and affects rural landowners much differently than those who live in the city.

## Know what to do when severe weather comes

- **Expect seasonal fluctuations to be harsher than those you may experience in an urban area.** Weather can be unpredictable, with temperature, snow, wind, rain, fog, etc. changing with a moment's notice.
- **The topography of your land will dictate where water will flow during heavy precipitation.** A flash flood may occur (especially in the spring), and steep slopes can slide in wet weather. Pay close attention to these areas to determine how water will flow and plan to develop your land accordingly. You will be required to obtain a geotechnical study prior to locating structures near the top or bottom of a bank or slope (ie. coulees).
- **During a storm, you may experience a loss of power, and it may take some time for repairs.** It is recommended that you have a generator to provide power to your home if this occurs.
- **In severe weather, you may not be able to leave or enter your property due to snowstorms, fires, or floods.** It may also take emergency or utility services longer to reach you than in a city. Be aware of the potential risks on your property and be prepared for these situations. Prepare a 72-hour emergency kit and create a household emergency plan to ensure you and your family are well-prepared in an emergency or disaster.



# EMERGENCY SERVICES

Fire and ambulance services in Lethbridge County are primarily volunteer-based.

Emergency service response times are not the same as in an urban setting.

- **Emergency service response times may be slower** due to travel distances, road and weather conditions, emergency call volumes and the availability of emergency service personnel and equipment.
- **Know your rural address (blue sign number) in case of an emergency.** This will help 911 dispatchers ensure emergency responders can get to you.
- **You are responsible for preventing fires on your property.** The physical characteristics of the property may be a detriment as trees, shrubs, and grass can provide fuel to a fire. Ensure a defensible perimeter around your buildings and consider on-site reservoirs on your property as rural water supplies are often inadequate for fighting fires.
- **Lethbridge County bills for fire service responses.** If the fire department is called to your property, or you are responsible for setting a fire on another property, you will be billed for those services. Ensure your insurance policy covers the cost of fire-fighting expenses.
- **Make sure all your vehicles and equipment are insured for fire and theft, even if they aren't being used.**



Example of a Rural Address Sign  
(also known as a Blue Sign)

# BYLAWS

Bylaws in a rural setting may be different than what you are used to if you come from a town or city.

Learn about bylaws around burning, pets, firearms, and more

- **Recreational fire pits and incinerators that meet the County's bylaws do not require a permit, but other fires likely do.** Visit our website to learn what's allowed and what isn't under bylaw.
- **Moving to a rural area is not a license to let pets roam.** Your family pet can become a nuisance to neighbours or prey to wild animals. The County's Dog Regulations and Control, and Animal Control Bylaws provide more information on animal regulations in the County. If you own livestock, it is your responsibility to fence them in, not your neighbour's responsibility to fence them out.
- **Different parcels of land can accommodate differing numbers of livestock.** Often those who move to the County wish to start a "hobby farm", or own animals not permitted in an urban setting. Consult the County's Animal Control Bylaw to determine the type and number of animals permitted on your property.
- **Federal, Provincial, and Municipal laws and bylaws regulate firearms.** The County's Firearms Bylaw prohibits the discharge of a firearm in hamlets, parks, golf courses, public playgrounds, light industrial subdivisions, and all country residential subdivisions. The *Wildlife Act* prohibits firearms being discharged from or across a highway or publicly maintained roadway, or within 200 yards of any occupied building unless the owner or occupier consents.
- **There are many parcels of land in the County that belong to various levels of government (Federal, Provincial, or County).** Some may be adjacent to water bodies or on undeveloped road allowances. These lands may be leased to neighbouring farmers, so be sure to check before entering onto the land. If you witness misuse or vandalism on these lands, please contact the RCMP.



## The information presented here is intended as a guideline and introduction to some of the aspects of rural living.

You may discover other topics that have not been covered. We encourage you to research and examine all aspects of country living so that you will enjoy Lethbridge County to the fullest.

For questions or more information on living in Lethbridge County, please contact us at 403-328-5525.



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