



Olds getting close to Main Street accreditation

Paul Frey, Olds Albertan

The community of Olds is getting close to being an accredited member of the Main Street Alberta program.

That news was delivered by staff of the Alberta Municipal Heritage Partnership Program (MHPP) who met with members of the Uptowne Olds committee on Thursday afternoon to outline how the group can proceed now that it has been accepted as a member.

Matthew Francis, an outreach officer with the MHPP, explained that being an accredited member provides an advantage over a basic member in accessing program funding to help with a community's revitalization plan. There are 10 standards for accreditation that members must meet and the Uptowne group meets most of those standards.

Leon Durand, chair of Uptowne Olds, said he was pleased the MHPP has recognized all the work the group has done and he hopes that Olds is one of the first communities to receive accreditation under the revamped system.

There are four broad areas that the group could use to leverage Alberta Main Street funding on a project-by-project basis including design, marketing, organization and economic development.

Francis said the community can apply for grants related to any of the four areas through the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation. The amount that would be granted is based in part on the total budget allocated to the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation from year to year.

Francis told the group that the most significant change to the renewed Alberta Main Street Program was to change the program from being a set three-year time period in which a community could participate to an ongoing membership.

He said part of the reason for the change was the recognition by the provincial government that after communities' participation in the program expired, momentum that had built up for revitalization slowly dissipated over time and that the new program seeks to remedy that situation.

Francis said when communities enter the program, it's important they stay authentic to their own identity rather than developing a "theme."

Durand said the group would like to see either provincial or federal tax incentives for improving heritage buildings, similar to the 20 per cent available to owners in the U.S. that improve their properties. Durand said that while the group has spoken to Richard Marz, MLA for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills about the issue, it would like to speak to him again as well as Wild Rose MP Blake Richards about the topic.

"When you start (taking advantage of tax incentives) then suddenly we have the ability to make it a lot more viable for ... businesses to upgrade their historic resources and maintain them for the future," he said.