

Ponoka partners stampede toward new exposition building project

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Ponoka awarded grant for new agricultural centre

Construction will get underway in the spring on a new agricultural centre in Ponoka with the announcement of \$3.2 million in funding from the provincial government. The \$8.5-million Ag-Event Centre is a joint project of the Town of Ponoka, Ponoka County, the Ponoka Agricultural Society and the Ponoka Stampede Association.

Located on the south side of the Town of Ponoka, the project will provide a multi-use building similar to the Agricentre at Westerner Park in Red Deer, along with two livestock barns with at least 200 stalls. The facility is expected to have seating initially for 1,500 and will be able to be used for conferences, horse shows, agricultural based trade shows and RV shows. There will be classrooms and a banquet room that could seat 500 upstairs.

Ponoka County Reeve Gordon Svenningsen said the new facility will assist 4-H Clubs and the livestock industry, giving them the facilities for shows and sales. He said it will also be used by the Ponoka High School's rodeo and equine education program.

"So it will be a definite plus for the whole community," Svenningsen said. "It will bring a lot of people to town and when people come to town they spend money, so there are economic spinoffs."

Sherry Gummow, president of the Ponoka Agricultural Society and fundraising chair for the facility, said they are ecstatic about the funding they've received from the provincial government and hope that now other corporate partners will come forward with funding. Encana has given \$500,000 to the project, with other government grants and contributions from the four partners.

Gummow didn't say exactly how much more money they'd like to raise, but she said with the funding from the government they will be able to put a spade into the ground in the spring, with hopes to complete the project by the fall of 2010.

Svenningsen said the community would have a hard time fundraising all the money that is needed for the project so he is excited about the provincial government funding they've received.

In 2008 the project originally looked like it would cost \$11 million to build, but now with the current economic downturn the facility may be able to be built for around 30 per cent less and be more in the \$8 million or \$8.5 million range.

Engineering reports are being done on storm water and local officials will meet with Alberta Transportation this week to discuss access onto Hwy 2A. The project hasn't yet gone to tender.

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