

# Lumby residents split on prison referendum

By Andy Ivens,  
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Lumby elected officials will have a tough decision to make at Monday's council meeting following a non-binding referendum on a provincial jail for the area.

The provincial government wants to build a 360-cell minimum-security correctional centre somewhere in the Okanagan in the next four years.

Results of Saturday's referendums for residents of Lumby and the surrounding Electoral Area D (Rural Lumby) — which asked whether the village should lobby the province for the prison — show a fairly even split in the wider community.

The village voted 56 per cent in favour of the idea — 494 votes in favour versus 381 against.

But Area D voters were two-to-one against it — 727 to 374.

The combined tally was 56 per cent against the prison, with 44 per cent in favour.

“It was pretty split down the middle,” Lumby Mayor Kevin Acton told The Province on Sunday.

“It sure doesn't make it easy for me.”

Acton said he was hoping to receive a clear indication to pursue the new prison in Lumby, about 20 kilometres east of Vernon, but now has to reconsider.

The financial spinoffs and 280 jobs at the prison would help the village rebound from the economic hardship caused by the closure of five sawmills, he said.

“I know the province was looking for community support, and I'm not sure they would call [44 per cent in favour] good community support.”

He said a decision should be made at Monday's meeting “for Lumby's sake.”

“We've been going through this contentious issue for quite some time now, so we need to bury the hatchet,” said Acton.

“A \$17-million payroll would be a boost to the economy,” he added. “We've gone from a five-mill sawmill town down to almost nothing.”

Opponents of the prison say they are doubtful all the economic spinoffs will materialize, a large prison would change the flavour of the small community and they are worried about the inmates who would settle in town after their release from jail and their associates.

Other Okanagan municipalities are examining whether to pursue the \$200-million correctional facility, notably Penticton and Summerland, according to media reports.

One Lumby councillor remains in the pro-prison camp.

“This facility, from an economic perspective, will be a godsend for this community,” said Coun. Janet Green.

“We have a lot of poverty and a lot of unemployed.”

She added, “The residents of [the village of] Lumby clearly indicated 56 per cent want this facility. I will continue to strongly support it very strongly.”

She said she would side with the majority of the village’s electors.

“We’re the ones who are facing increasing property taxes every year because we have no business base, so it’s huge,” said Green.

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