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Municipalities look to future

Karen Lazaruk
Senior Reporter
Wednesday May 31, 2006

Airdrie Echo — Representatives from 19 municipalities and First Nations gathered at Priddis Friday to decide how they can work together on such issues as regional growth and sustainability; specialized transportation; wastewater servicing; and economic development.

All of this and more was discussed at the general assembly of Calgary Regional Partnership (CRP), an organization currently headed up by Airdrie Mayor Linda Bruce. CRP includes such communities as Airdrie, Calgary, Nanton, Okotoks, Strathmore, Banff, Tsuu T'ina Nation and the municipal districts of Bighorn, Rocky View and Foothills.

For Bruce, one of the most important agenda items was the regional growth and sustainability framework, which was accepted unanimously during Friday's meeting. Determining a plan for how communities will transition into one another in the future – for instance, taking into account how one city's pathway or road system will butt up against another or planning for a high-speed commuter train – is key, Bruce said.

"So in 20 years, if a train comes in, what we want is to make sure that we know where it will go and preserve the right-of-ways," she said, adding that the plan is very "high level" at this point.

Such forward-thinking, Bruce added, helps to avoid future problems, and looking beyond the traditional 30 to 100 years in the future is what the partnership is trying to do.

"You know how people say, 'What were they thinking when they built that?'" she said, giving the example of the 'rathole' at Airdrie's south interchange, which was built to rural standard at the time. "That's what we're trying to avoid."

The regional growth sustainability framework, as accepted, calls for the following to be completed by December: a baseline-growth scenario modelling system; regional growth scenarios based on regional servicing alternatives in one of the partnership's watershed sub-regions; maps detailing broad land-use plans, environmental assets and growth patterns as they relate to regional servicing; and the ratification of 2105 vision and principles for the region.

Another CRP program that took a further step toward realization Friday was the specialized transportation project. It's a plan to connect the various special needs transit service providers among the partnership members, but one for which project head, M.D. of Bighorn councillor Paul Ryan, doesn't want to generate "unrealistic expectations". The project is not aimed at creating a region-wide special needs transit service, Ryan said, but aims to make better use of the assets and provide a link between them using a hub.

"This is not intended to compete with or replace an existing service," he added.

The project was made a CRP priority in 2004. Since then IBI Consultants has completed a contracted study on the issue, which stated that the need

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for special needs transit is growing, since there are currently more than 42,000 trips made from outside Calgary each year; and that an increase in infrastructure and capacity, coordination of resources, and attraction and retention of volunteers are equally important. A demonstration project was recommended and Ryan said a lead agency to oversee the project and act as its initial facilitator will be announced shortly.

During Friday's meeting, CRP members ratified the recommendation to allocate up to \$200,000 from its 2004-07 implementation grant to the specialized transportation project.

For more information on CRP, visit: www.calgaryregion.ca

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