

Mayor expects regional group will be helpful

By Shawn Logan

The Eagle

With municipal leaders converging on Cochrane last week, Mayor Ken Bech said the Dec. 3 general assembly of the Calgary Regional Partnership will pave the way for civic partnerships that will benefit the town.

“What (our citizens) get out of it is a coalition with 15 communities working together to address situations that impact each community,” Bech said. “It’s always best to take a regional approach.”

Cochrane is one of 15 communities that are full members of the Calgary Regional Partnership, which includes communities surrounding Calgary as well as the Municipal Districts of Rocky View and Bighorn.

The town’s membership dues are 40 cents per capita, or \$4,719. The dues will rise in 2005 with the addition of residents now part of Cochrane due to the recent annexation.

In 2004 the partnership had a budget of \$339,750. That will see that increase to \$577,250 next year.

The partnership will receive \$180,000 over the next three years from Alberta Economic Development and another \$700,000 over the same period from Alberta Municipal Affairs.

The coalition, which focuses on economic development and shared interests, convened at the Cochrane RancheHouse last week to elect its new executive committee and approve a business plan and budget for 2005.

According to Bech, the partnership will tackle a number of crucial issues in the next year.

He is working on a project with other communities with the aim of creating a regional transportation model.

“Let’s fast forward a year and I imagine you’ll see some very positive outcomes from the transportation study and maybe we’ll get closer to a model,” Bech said. “We’re looking to expand the Calgary (transportation) study regionally and see how it affects all municipalities.”

The coming year will also see work on geographic information system mapping of regional watersheds and for regional agencies that will make emergency services more efficient.

Bech called the watershed mapping a “critical element” when coupled with the province’s Water For Life strategy.

Initiatives surrounding environmental issues, such as solid waste management, are also on the table and could reap benefits for Cochrane. Calgary Mayor Dave Bronconnier reaffirmed his city’s commitment to the partnership with one “caveat.”

“It’s critical for my continued support that we can’t have three or four bodies out speaking to provincial and federal representatives without it first being approved by the partnership,” Bronconnier told a packed hall at the RancheHouse, adding the partnership is “alive and well.”

Bech said he agrees with Bronconnier’s stance, noting individual municipalities and bodies such as the Alberta Urban Municipalities



LEADERS OF THE PACK

Ali Anderson, on the left, and Allie Pearce set the pace across Cochrane’s River Avenue bridge in a three kilometre jaunt that was part of the Red Rock Runners and Tri Club’s Light Up Fun Run Dec. 4. These two youngsters finished their race just five seconds apart. The event, which included an eight km run, attracted a number of families despite chilly weather.

Photo by Patrick Price

Association should lobby different levels of government, leaving the partnership to focus on areas of mutual benefit.

“I think we have to realize that’s a strong statement he made and it’s a statement I support,” Bech said. “We would not want to have Cochrane’s governance mandated by another group. It’s just providing another level of service but not another level of government.”

The partnership is beginning to attract interest from other communities, including Nanton, Crossfield and the County of Wheat-land. Banff has also considered joining.

Bech said it would be difficult to accommodate more members but specific project partnerships may be considered.

“I believe that’s a question the membership and the executive have to ponder,” he said. “We don’t want to dilute the process too much or we are ineffective.”

Airdrie Mayor Linda Bruce was elected chair of the regional partnership group. M.D. of Foothills Coun. Ron Laycraft was elected vice-chair while Red-wood Meadows Mayor Tim Anderson is the secretary-treasurer.

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