



Land use: We're doing it our way

Linda Bruce

For The Calgary Herald

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This weekend's headlines in the Herald's two-part series, The Land Plan, expressed justified concern over the Calgary region's growth -- Growing pains flare, Urban-rural feuds erupt over expansion proposals, Growing: It's becoming a mess; A void in regional planning.

These headlines raise complex questions around four words: regional land use planning.

Local leaders, representing 19 communities in the Calgary region, have recently agreed to work together where others have feared to tread. They have agreed to deal with the tough and complex issues around those four simple words.

Our approach will have to be unique. We must continue to move forward from 1995 when provincially regulated regional land use planning ended. At that time, land use powers were devolved from regional planning commissions to autonomous and more empowered municipalities. Municipalities were encouraged to address regional land use issues through voluntary planning processes and agreements. These efforts have had some success over the last decade and need to be improved upon. For example, intermunicipal plans and agreements have proven to be a way of dealing with some issues that transcend municipal boundaries, but these plans have not resolved issues of a broader regional perspective.

A regional focus is needed, but the Calgary region has few Canadian models to look to. Ours will be a voluntary approach, not legislated by the province. For example, we will not be following our neighbours in B.C., who are governed by an additional level of regional government. Nor will we follow the Toronto region where provincially legislated restructuring created big bureaucracy to replace local autonomy. One huge municipality grew out of many smaller amalgamated municipalities.

Rather, the Calgary region has chosen relationships and partnership over additional levels of government or bureaucracy. We have opted for what we have incorporated as the Calgary Regional Partnership. We have gathered some of North America's best academics, planners, engineers and municipal experts to help us develop a new way forward.

As a first step, 50 mayors, councillors and officials recently met to finalize a vision for the region. The regional vision culminated months of discussion and

consultation. The vision speaks passionately of finding a regional balance. It speaks of the region working together to create enriching communities and healthy environments from a foundation of sustainable development and prosperity.

Our partnership is working with the University of Calgary and leading planning institutes to develop innovative decision-making tools. Analytical models and interactive maps will provide decision-makers with the expected consequences of development decisions. We are creating a new way for municipalities to work together and plan more effectively. We plan to tackle some complex issues to help municipalities make tough decisions to keep our region strong and healthy.

Our partnership has contracted expert water and wastewater engineers to help create a regional servicing plan for the region. The plan will create integrated and sustainable infrastructure and foster thoughtful, planned development.

We have assembled some of the best economic development minds in North America to develop sustainable business attraction, growth and retention strategies. We are developing waste recycling projects that will reduce our dependence on landfills. We expect to turn waste into resources with new compost products for market. Over the next several months, we will create new tools for the mapping and planning of our region and a new regional support system for specialized transportation. We are thinking more regionally about transportation initiatives. We expect to invent and incubate new regional thinking and better land use, transportation and infrastructure planning. Most importantly, we are working together.

All of this is aimed to create the kind of region envisaged by one young resident of the region who said this in a recent survey: "Please, work together to keep our air and water clean, our communities strong and our land beautiful."

Linda Bruce is mayor of the City of Airdrie and chairs the Calgary Regional Partnership Incorporated. CRP is an association of 19 communities from Banff to Strathmore, Crossfield to Nanton, with Calgary and 13 other municipalities.

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