

# W Rocky View WEEKLY Y

FORMERLY THE ROCKY VIEW FIVE VILLAGE WEEKLY

Volume 34, Number 5

OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER FOR THE MD OF ROCKY VIEW #44

Tuesday, February 6, 2007

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SPRING HAS SPRUNG? - Balzac Billy, his friend from the M.D of Rocky View Hawksley the Hawk and some young fans give a thumbs up on the snowy morning of Groundhog day for an early spring.

Photo By Alison Taylor

## Regional collaboration possible, experts say

### Water, transportation, land issues spill over boundaries

*Enrique Massot*

An M.D. of Rocky View councillor was beaming after a two-day course on regionalism in which experts displayed cases in which municipalities joined forces with neighbours to address challenging issues far exceeding their individual boundaries.

"The past two days have proven to be an exceptional investment," said Clr. Gordon Branson. "Solutions can no longer be achieved without looking beyond one's own political boundaries."

As many as 120 elected officials, senior administration and municipal planners heard Canada and U.S. experts talking about their experiences as members of their own regional organizations, at the University of Calgary.

Organized by the Public Policy Research Institute of the University of Montana, the event was intended to provide members of the Calgary Regional Partnership with valuable information and resources available across North America.

The Mayor of the City of Airdrie and CRP Chair Linda Bruce said learning about experiences in other regions was the most uplifting result of the session.

"This information will help us in making our partnership successful," she said. "It will make our quality of life much better by having good, sustainable growth."

Bruce also said it was encouraging to see support from the provincial government, shown by attendance of members of different ministries including Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Alberta Environment.

Created in 2002, the CRP has grown to 19 members that include Banff to the west to the Wheatland County to the east; from Crossfield to the north to Nanton to the south.

Among several projects initiated by the partnership, a regional water and wastewater servicing study is scheduled for completion early this year.

The CRP is also conducting a study on the needs for specialized transportation in the area.

Those municipalities wanted to take a step beyond their own boundaries to better tackle problems such as regional planning, transportation or water and wastewater infrastructure.

Mayor Dave Bronconnier attended the course on Friday, and had words of support for the organization.

Bronconnier hopes that with the support of studies presented, the partnership will move forward.

"We are moving forward as a region."

Ron Thomas, Executive Director of the Illinois Planning Commission, said six counties and communities are developing a comprehensive plan in a large region, under an initiative titled Common Ground. The initiative, Thomas said, has been fostering a common ground vision across boundaries to address issues such as land use, transportation, open space and planning, with the goal of developing a region known for its global competitiveness and its healthy natural environment.

Leona Stoecker, former Mayor of the City of Longmont, Colorado, said the Denver Regional Council of Governments, encompassing 50 communities on a 5,000 square-mile territory, said the most controversial topic for the council had been to decide on the desired extent of development.

"The establishment of an urban growth boundary was the most controversial we had to face," Stoecker told the audience.

The implementation of regional policies was voluntary.

Most of those attending were representatives or supporters of the Calgary Regional Partnership, a gathering of 19 jurisdictions in the Calgary Region.

Michael Quinn, of the University of Calgary's Miistakis Institute said the cumulative effects of those

decisions on the landscape and their interaction with one another are difficult to evaluate.

"We have a history of incremental decision-making that we do not necessarily plan for," he said. "We make individual land use decisions, each one on its own merits."

Red Deer County Clr. Stan Bell said the course had been an eye-opener.

Bell said the two-day conference had enlightened him in relation to issues his county is facing in the application of a new long-term growth management plan in relation to the City of Red Deer.

"This has opened my eyes," he said.

Bell said there are inherent difficulties in beginning a large-scale, long-term encompassing plan, because members of the public or even councillors would not see the need for action now for items that are long-term.

"They say, 'right now we have lots of open space; we have lots of water; we need more people,'" said Bell. "Just attract development and make sure they come at all costs."

However, Bell said, if regions have not planned for balanced growth now, it will be hard to look back in 30 or 50 years and look at lost opportunities.

"We are going to look backwards and say, 'do you know what?'" he said. "I do not think we made the right decision 30 years ago."

"That is my concern."

Branson believes that the course, which focused on water resources as one of the priority issues, was better because of that.

"I leave the course with a rejuvenated sense of optimism for the potential of the CRP," he said. "It was interesting to see that the sharing, sourcing, conserving, and treating of water was a prime driver and motivator in most regional collaboration initiatives cited."

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## ROCKY VIEW WEEKLY

Published by Tall Taylor Publishing Ltd

Box 40, Irricana, AB T0M 1B0

Phone: 403-935-4221 ... Fax: 403-935-4981



Proud Publishers of the Carstairs Courier, Rocky View Weekly, Alberta Wheel & Deal, Prairie Central Wheel & Deal

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