

# W Rocky View WEEKLY Y

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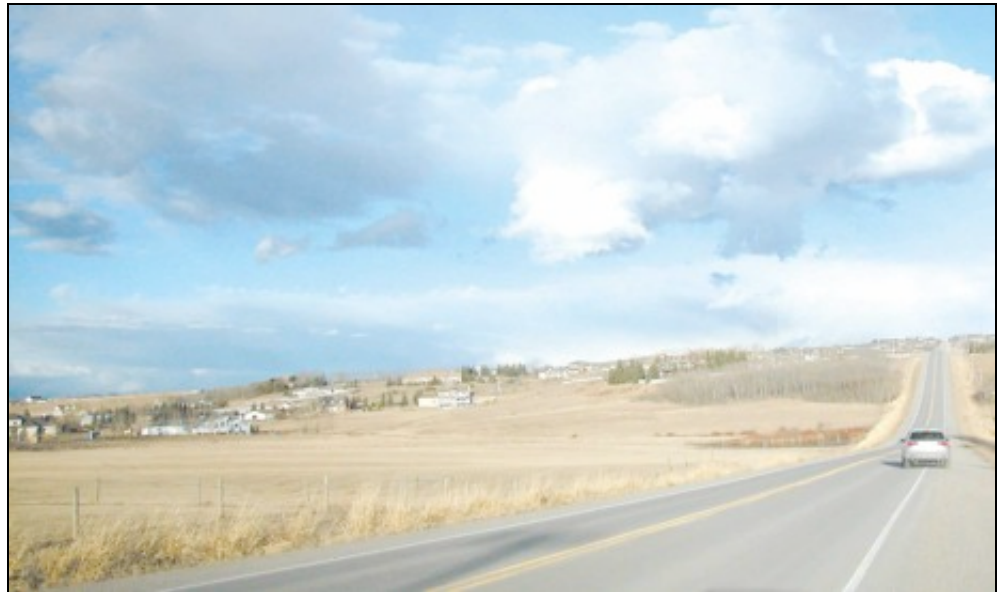
## Calgary region targeted for mandatory regional planning

*Enrique Massot*

Mandatory regional planning could be implemented in areas including the Municipal District of Rocky View if recommendations submitted by representatives of rural and urban municipalities are adopted by the provincial government.

"It is quite likely that the Calgary region ... will also require a more structured regional approach," reads a

report presented to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Ray Daniluk and released on Monday, March 19.



Such approach, the report continues, should be implemented in high growth areas where conflicts between jurisdictions have occurred.

After quietly working for just over a year, the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability produced ground-breaking recommendations that could mean the return of regional planning that was terminated by the Klein government in 1995. It also contains recommendations for increased funding for infrastructure and for revenue sharing among municipalities.

"These agencies would ... co-ordinate planning, land use and service delivery," reads the report.

Municipalities' development plans would need to conform to regional plans instrumented by such agencies, and the province would weigh in in cases of unsolved disputes, the report continues.

"In the absence of agreements, provincial direction would be provided," the report states.

If implemented, the recommendations could introduce uncertainty on dozens of development projects and area structure plans proposing densities akin to urban in rural areas of Rocky View.

Many of such plans have been designed to be serviced with piped water and sewer, but has yet to obtain approval for necessary water licenses.

On Friday, Rocky View Reeve Al Schule did not want to comment on the report's recommendations as he said he had only barely read them.

Rocky View, which was one of the rural municipalities lobbying the provincial government against the now defunct regional planning commissions in the early 1990s recently bristled when a vision and mission statement of the Calgary Regional Partnership that mentioned co-ordination of land use at the regional level was submitted for its approval and support.

However, the Mayor of the City of Calgary, who has had several run-ins with M.D. on servicing and land annexation, was visibly pleased with the recommendations and aimed a shot to area jurisdictions without naming them.

"There are municipalities adjacent to Calgary that are trying to duplicate Calgary," said Dave Bronconnier. "That would be a guaranteed road to bankruptcy."

The association representing Alberta's rural municipalities was less enthusiastic.

"From a rural Alberta perspective, many of the recommendations within the Minister's Council report will require in depth analysis and consultation with municipalities," stated Donald Johnson, president of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties in a communication released last week.

"The fact that the majority of Alberta's municipalities have not been directly consulted with during the Council's deliberations is a major concern for the Association. The AAMDC will concentrate its provincial advocacy efforts for this increased consultation over the next few months."

Bronconnier, however, said the city fully supports the report's recommendations, "to ensure there is no duplication nor an ad-hoc approach to planning".

"We are committed ... to moving forward with a comprehensive approach to planning," he told the Rocky View Weekly on Saturday.

Schule would not elaborate on potential implications for Rocky View if the recommendations were adopted by the provincial government.

"I do not want to comment on that till we have a chance to review it properly," Schule said. "I do not want to condemn something that (could undergo) some tweaking."

However, Tracy Balash, spokesperson for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing did not advance much hope for individual municipalities' direct input, as consultation has already taken place within the associations representing urban and rural municipalities.

"The minister won't be consulting with the members," she said. "The Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties is Rocky View's representative on this minister's council."

Danyluk, said Balash, has given the item a high-priority category and will submit the report to a policy committee on growth management, then to cabinet and finally to caucus for final approval.

Balash noted that new Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach, in his mandate letter to Danyluk, had directed the minister to consult with municipal governments on regional planning issues and a dispute resolution mechanism. Several disagreements over development in the fringe of urban lands around several cities have taken place last year, involving jurisdictions in the Grande Prairie, Red Deer and Calgary areas.

"Regional planning certainly is a priority for this minister," Balash said.

In December 2005, then Minister of Municipal Affairs Rob Renner invited Don Johnson, president of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties; Bob Hawkesworth, president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, and the mayors of Cities of Calgary and Edmonton to join the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability.

Several working groups were established, with the outcome being contained in the report released last week.

On Thursday morning, all nine members of the M.D. of Rocky View council gathered for a special meeting, most of which took place behind closed doors. The councillors deliberated for nearly three hours, after which, in a six-three vote, they agreed to send a confidential letter to Minister Ray Danyluk.

The letter, the motion said, would address "questions related to short-term and long-term growth and servicing solutions for the M.D. of Rocky View".

Clr. Gordon Branson requested that his opposing vote be recorded in the minutes. Councillors Brenda (Young) Goode and Earl Solberg also opposed the motion to send the letter.

On Friday, the Rocky View Weekly asked Schule whether the Thursday three-hour meeting was related to the release of the minister's council report.

"It had nothing to do with it," Schule said. "There may be some parts (but) put it this way: it was not initiated because of that."

Meanwhile, Bronconnier said he had been invited to a Friday meeting with Minister Danyluk and Rocky View representatives, with the goal of furthering the goals of the report.

"(Danyluk) did say at the meeting that this was the foundational work to start the process moving forward," Bronconnier said.

The report specifically names areas around the cities of Calgary and Edmonton as examples of high-growth areas ideally suited for regional planning. Rocky View Clr. Gordon Branson, who brought the Minister's Council report to the attention of the Rocky View, was concerned by the relative weight of the players who drafted the recommendations.

"I found the structuring of the four contributing 'work groups' selected to write the report to have a fascinating composition," he said on Sunday. "Those being the City of Edmonton, the City of Calgary, and the AUMA - with the role of the AAMDC's engagement restricted to that of 'a review' of the other's reports."

Branson expressed doubts about the potential for such players to provide a truly representative and inclusive perspective on "rural and urban" interests and needs.

"The extent to which a wide range of jurisdictions were effectively consulted for their input and comment prior to the finalization of the 'draft' report by their respective provincial organizations remain unstated and is unclear," he said.

Geoff Ghitter, a lecturer with the University of Calgary with focus on urban and regional systems and sustainable development, said the deletion of regional planning brought about by the Klein government combined with a hot economy caused a race to increase rural tax revenue lost to cities through annexation and pro-urban taxation policy practiced before 1995.

"Rural municipalities declared themselves 'open for business,'" he noted.

The result of these changes in urban centres' fringe areas was an exponential increase in development pressures.

"As a consequence of rising land prices and development fees inside cities, developers of residential, commercial and industrial properties searched for more affordable options," Ghitter said. "In what seemed a maniacal development frenzy, the M.D. of Rocky View and other high-growth locations like Red Deer County and the M.D. of Grande Prairie have provided developers with low-tax environments and cheap land to entice them to develop outside the city."

The resulting development forms were criticized by urbanites, environmentalists and smart growth advocates, who see 'rural' sprawl as not only inefficient and wasteful, but also as contributing to fragmentation of viable agricultural land and rare natural habitats, Ghitter said.

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