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Disputes has province reviewing regional planning

By Andrea Barber
Staff Reporter

Land use disputes may lead to government intervention.

Mandatory regional planning, dismantled in the 1990s by the Klein government, might be resurrected, according to a report prepared by the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability.

Representatives of rural and urban municipalities developed a series of recommendations and submitted the list to the provincial government for consideration.

The report is the result of increased pressure on municipalities to allow more development in their regions due to population increases.

The report states that agencies would coordinate planning, land use and service delivery and that municipalities' development plans would need to conform to regional plans.

Both the mayor of Okotoks and the reeve for the MD of Foothills – two of the fastest growing areas in Alberta – commented that although there were some disputes about land use, they were always solved amicably.

"Certainly there are differences in opinion (but) we have a good working relationship," said Okotoks Mayor Bill McAlpine.

McAlpine also stated that he's happy with the job the Calgary Regional Partnership is doing.

Calgary, Okotoks and other surrounding communities have formed the Calgary regional partnership to address Calgary's expansion into rural territory.

"We strongly feel that we are going to stay a regional partnership — thinking regionally, acting locally," he said. "We are definitely not in tune with (this plan). It's been a wonderful organization. We're addressing all the issues (such as) land use planning, runoff and sewage and this idea of a planning commission is totally somebody's pipe dream," he said.

The MD of Foothills wasn't completely against the idea but they had their own reservations.

"There are some major disputes in rural municipalities across the province that a little more structured approach would help. But if you're going to have 10 urbans telling four rurals what to do, then we have problems," said MD of Foothills Municipal Manager, Harry Riva Cambrin.

Riva Cambrin also added that he is happy with Calgary Regional Partnership and he was somewhat critical of the report.

As it sits, both the MD of Foothills and the Town of Okotoks seem to be happy with the system.

However, Calgary's Mayor Dave Bronconnier, who's had several run-ins with the M.D. of Rocky View on servicing land annexation, was pleased with the recommendations. He stated the city fully supports the recommendations as they would "ensure there is no duplication nor ad-hoc approach to planning."

The report is being reviewed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ray Daniluk. According to the spokesperson for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Tracy Balash, the minister will not be consulting with individual municipalities.

As for the fate of these recommendations, Balash said the minister has given it high-priority status and will submit the report to a policy committee on growth management, then to cabinet and then to caucus for final approval.

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Published Wednesdays at Okotoks, Alberta, Canada. Serving the communities of Okotoks, Aldersyde, Black Diamond, DeWinton, Longview, Millarville, Priddis, Turner Valley, Bragg Creek, and the rural ratepayers of the M.D. of Foothills. And now the World. Established August 3, 1976.