



Strathcona County

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Keeping you informed

December 2007

Our future within the Capital Region – *a slippery slope?* an open letter to our community from County Council

Dear Strathcona County Resident:



Mayor Cathy Olesen

There is a great deal of pride and sense of community within our municipality.

Both long-time residents and newcomers enjoy the friendly people and special places that make up this urban and rural municipality.

However, as your elected officials, we are increasingly concerned about the direction we're seeing in regard to the future of Strathcona County within the Capital Region.

The issue centres on a proposal nearing completion for the Government of Alberta. It is called the Capital Region Integrated Growth Management Plan, and you might also hear it referred to as the 'Radke report.' This project was announced in June by Premier Ed Stelmach.

We fully support his intent. With so much growth ahead, we recognize the need for all municipalities and the Province to improve on the planning that is already in place.

We were also encouraged by the Premier's approach to the regional plan. When announcing the Terms of Reference, he said community identities would be respected, and that no new level of government would be added.

Over the past few months, Strathcona County

has participated actively in all the regional discussions, and in supplying information to provincial consultants.

Widespread support for cooperation and respect

As you would expect, the regional plan has been discussed extensively whenever elected officials get together. It's encouraging to see there is strong support for inter-municipal cooperation and collaboration, and respect for local autonomy.

In keeping with those themes, in July Strathcona County and five other municipalities got together and put forward some ideas for consideration. We summarized these in a Position Paper and made it available on the County website, www.strathcona.ab.ca.

Another indication of support came in November, when municipalities from across Alberta attending the convention of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties passed two resolutions.

Both resolutions were requests to the Province—one, to apply the principles of cooperation and collaboration, local autonomy and accountability to the Capital Region review. The second asked that more time be taken so the Capital Region review could include open and transparent consultation with stakeholders.

Why are we concerned?

Simply, because the draft proposal recently released by the Province's consultant suggests a very different future.

What is being proposed?

A regional 'super board' would be established. It could have authority over municipalities, including the ability to requisition funds to pay for its operations.

The draft proposal differs from the intent outlined by Premier Stelmach

Land use planning decisions would be removed from local municipalities and placed under the authority of the regional board.

In time, other services might also become regionalized. Among the services suggested for possible regional delivery are inter-municipal transit, information services and housing; and policing, fire and ambulance, recreation, economic development, solid waste management, wastewater and potable water. What is left?

Who pays for these regional services?

The Radke committee has identified only two municipalities in its review of potential municipal tax revenues that may be available in future: Strathcona County and Sturgeon County.

The proposal goes beyond coordinating the work and decisions of individual municipalities. It has the potential to remove our ability to decide what is right for our citizens.

Everyone in our community—acreage owners, families, farmers, business people and industry—could be affected if the Province adopts this proposal.

Is this the start of a slippery slope?

We cannot say for certain. All we know is what is in the Capital Region Integrated Growth Management Plan. The final decision will be made by the Province.

If you care about the future of Strathcona County, please review the proposal. It is possible that new developments may occur within the next few weeks. Please watch our website and the local newspaper—and let us know what you think.

Cathy Olesen, Mayor

Cathy

on behalf of Strathcona County Council

For more information including the proposal for the Capital Region, visit www.strathcona.ab.ca and click on *Regional matters*.

Copies of the proposal are also available at the Strathcona County Library, the Contact Office at Heartland Hall, or by calling 464-8230.



Land use planning could become the responsibility of a regional board under a current proposal.

The proposed regional board

What we know

The proposal would create a regional board with authority over local municipalities including land use planning decisions.

The board could have the authority to make binding decisions about:

- Inter-municipal transit
 - Information services
 - Housing
 - Potentially: policing, emergency medical services (fire and ambulance), recreation, economic development, solid waste management, wastewater and potable water
- The Government of Alberta has reserved the right to add or remove responsibilities from the board.

What we do not know

One of the difficult aspects of proposed Capital Region Integrated Growth Management Plan are the questions it does not answer.

It is unclear as to:

- The extent of services that would eventually come under regional control
- The additional cost to County ratepayers for the operation of the board
- How decisions would be made by the regional board—the voting structure that would determine whether municipalities' wishes would be respected, or whether a few could overrule the majority

Three questions to ask yourself

1. Do you want a regional board to have the power to decide how your community grows, develops and prospers?
2. Do you want the additional cost of what amounts to another layer of government?
3. Do you want important decisions made regionally rather than locally?

What others are saying

"This is government of people, by other people, for other people... we have some real concerns that we'll lose control of our destiny."

— Mayor Don Rigney, Sturgeon County

"...partnerships are the best option... the old style, centralized approach is not the way to govern"

—Hyndman Report, 2000, after an extensive two-year consultation with municipalities

"I'm worried about a wave of unwieldy, Ontario-style agencies that would concentrate power in a handful of super-governments. What we really don't need is another metropolitan Toronto. There's a lot of good cooperation going on among us right now."

— Councillor Raymond Skrepnek, Municipal District of Fairview

"The net effect of these proposals is a new level of government (Super Board) having authority over local municipalities has been established. It may have extensive taxing powers and undermines local autonomy and accountability."

—Resolution passed by rural municipalities belonging to the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties

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County

Frequently asked questions

about the regional proposal

Is Strathcona County willing to share in the cost of regional projects?

Yes. We have always been willing to pay our fair share of costs. For example, we—along with other municipalities in the region—contributed to the cost of Anthony Henday Drive, because of the benefit to all of us.

In considering decisions like this, your local Council remains accountable to you for how we spend your tax dollars.

What we do not support is revenue sharing. By this, we mean the transfer of resources from one municipality to another without a clear business case or reason.

Revenue sharing removes the accountability of Councils to the ratepayers who contribute tax dollars, and leads to inter-municipal conflict.

What is wrong with regional land use planning?

It comes down to the difference between coordinating plans and imposing plans.

We agree completely that plans should be well coordinated. Alberta's Industrial Heartland is an example of how this can be done by independent municipalities working collaboratively.

Think about our Municipal Development Plan. We just spent three years, over 30 open houses and workshops, and gathered input from hundreds of residents to come up with a plan. It doesn't make sense to turn over such important decisions to an outside agency that doesn't understand local needs.

How much would the regional board cost us?

This is one of the gaps in the information we have. Currently it appears the board would be

approved before we see the total costs, or even the formula that would be used to calculate them.

How would a regional board affect my day-to-day services like fire and ambulance service?

We do not know at this point. We do believe that decisions about such services are best made

at a local level by people who understand local needs and wants.

Is industrial investment at risk?

Alberta's Industrial Heartland is proof that cooperation and collaboration works—it is one of Alberta's success stories.

This industrial development will be a catalyst for spin-off industries, businesses and services

that benefit our region, Alberta and Canada.

This tells us we need to enhance what is being done to continue to provide industry with certainty—not cast aside years of good work and take an entirely new approach.

Contact information for your elected officials

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Top row: Councillor Peter Wlodarczak, Councillor Jason Gariepy, Councillor Glen Lawrence
Middle row: Councillor Jacque Fenske, Councillor Vic Bidzinski, Councillor Alan Dunn
Bottom row: Councillor Linda Osinchuk, Councillor Roxanne Carr, Mayor Cathy Olesen

Questions or concerns about regional matters?

Visit www.strathcona.ab.ca or contact the Mayor or your Councillor.