



Strathcona County

Living

Keeping you informed

February 2008

Seeking answers for our community

an open letter from County Council



Dear Strathcona County Resident:

Over the last months, you have likely heard and read about the Province's plan for the future of the Capital Region.

The process began last June, when Premier Stelmach announced he was bringing together the 25 Capital Region municipalities to develop a plan for the future.

Your local Council strongly supported the Premier's goal. We want to be good neighbours. More and better cooperation is always desirable.

With so much growth forecast for our region, we saw the need for municipalities and the Province to develop workable proposals on a number of issues.

We continue to believe this can best be achieved through collaboration and cooperation, respect for local autonomy, and accountability to taxpayers for decisions.

Throughout the summer and fall, Strathcona County participated at every opportunity in the regional review. We met with the Province's consultants, supplied information and put ideas forward for consideration.

All this work led up to December 17, 2007 and a much-anticipated announcement from the Province setting out the plans for a new regional Board and the future of the Capital Region.

This newsletter is intended to inform County residents about what we know, and the questions we feel need to be asked.

What does the future hold for our community under the new Board?

The new Board creates significant uncertainty for Strathcona County and the Capital Region as a whole. The Board has binding decision-making powers, and can requisition money through the Province from local municipalities. We also know that under the voting system, the City of Edmonton alone has the power to veto or control decisions for the region.

Seeking answers

After several weeks of analyzing the report released by the Province, requesting detail from the Province, and talking to other municipalities, we still have many questions.

- Under the new Board, how will we be protected against projects being imposed in our municipality against our will?
- What costs might Strathcona County be expected to pay toward regional projects? What are the tax implications for residents, business and industry?
- Will the new regional Board provide the stable environment needed for the industrial projects planned for our region?

These are important questions that can affect the quality of life we value in Strathcona County.

What we do know

So far, the information available to us is not detailed enough to determine the full impact on our municipality.

We do know:

- The processes used to develop the plan for the Capital Region and discuss recommendations with the Government of Alberta were completed within about six months, an extremely ambitious timetable given the complexity of the issues. As the Province resumes work on the regional plan after the election, Strathcona County hopes to have the opportunity for more in-depth discussion of options.
- The Province's report would appear to allocate a disproportionately high share of the costs for regional core infrastructure investment (38 per cent) to municipalities, given that the municipal portion of new taxation revenues may be much less. Some estimates indicate that the federal and provincial portion of new taxes may be as much as 90-95 per cent, leaving only five to 10 per cent available for municipalities.

It appears that the estimated cost of new capital investment indicated as the responsibility of municipalities may not be able to be fully offset by new municipal tax revenues. This means the provincial and federal governments need to assume more of the cost-sharing responsibility, or local municipal taxes may need to increase.

- Under the new regional Board, municipalities other than Edmonton may have reduced ability to shape policy for the region. Until now Strathcona County and its neighbours have been successful in shaping regional policy in a collaborative and cooperative manner that respects municipal autonomy. See *Frequently asked questions*, next page.
- The new Board could potentially delay the approval of parts, or all, of the County's Municipal Development Plan until a new regional plan is put in place—a time period with no certain end date. In the interim, this could hinder industry's development planning and municipal decision-making, and add a measure of uncertainty for developers and landowners.

Plans for the Capital Region and the new Board present the most significant issue to face our County in a number of years. Nevertheless, we are committed to building on the success of the Capital Region—whether through the extension of rapid transit, addressing housing needs within the region, or through effective land use planning that respects the needs of all parties.

Your Council continues to work with our regional neighbours and Provincial representatives as we strive to be an equal and effective partner in the Capital Region.

Cathy

Cathy Olesen, Mayor
on behalf of Strathcona County Council



What our community says

Throughout the regional discussions, Strathcona County's Council has listened to the community.

The County's approach to the regional discussions is based on cooperation and collaboration, respect for local autonomy and accountability for decisions—principles that have widespread support among residents and business people.

Your feedback—whether through e-mail, phone calls or in conversation with your elected representatives—has been extremely helpful.

As we do with many issues, the County took the additional step of surveying residents in November 2007. This random telephone survey helped to ensure we understood the full range of community opinion, in addition to the perspective gained from residents who contacted us directly.

The results of the survey confirmed that Strathcona County residents are:

- **In favour of the County's remaining autonomous** with the ability to make decisions on the quality of services for its residents. **(87% strongly support or somewhat support)**
- **Willing to participate in cost sharing of regional projects** that benefit the entire region. An example was the County's contribution to the completion of Anthony Henday Drive. **(72% strongly in favour or somewhat in favour)**
- **Opposed to revenue sharing**, meaning the reallocation of municipal tax revenues to outside municipalities to be used as they see fit. **(76% somewhat opposed or strongly opposed)**
- **Opposed to a regional board that would have the ability to direct** a municipal government such as Strathcona County on how to deliver services to its residents. **(67% somewhat opposed or strongly opposed)**

Through the survey and informally, taxpayers have indicated that like Council, they too want more information about the regional Board—the benefits to our community, the scope of projects the Board will undertake, what these projects will cost, and how much our community will be expected to pay for them.

Similarly, representatives of the County's business community have raised a number of questions, in particular, the need for certainty in light of the announcement of the new Board.

Thank you to the many residents who have shown continued interest in plans for the future of the Capital Region. We encourage you to follow new developments and let us know your thoughts.

Strathcona
County

Strathcona County

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Frequently asked questions

How will the new Board make decisions?

The new Board will be able to approve any motion that has the support of 17 of 25 municipalities, representing at least 75 per cent of the region's population. With 71 per cent of the region's population, Edmonton has a veto and can control all decisions of the Board.

This means the Board could potentially impose a regional project (e.g. power line,

landfill, rail yard) in any municipality, with the exception of Edmonton, without regard for local wishes or circumstances.

Strathcona County believes every municipality, large or small, rural or urban, should have the ability to veto regional projects proposed within its boundaries.

How does the regional Board affect Strathcona County's Municipal Development Plan?

The Municipal Development Plan (MDP) is a legal document that sets out guidelines for growth and development in the municipality for the next 20 years and beyond.

Currently we do not know whether or how the Board will affect Strathcona's MDP. Under the new Board, decisions about land use within municipalities will continue to be made by the individual municipality. However, land use planning that affects the region will need to be reviewed and approved by the Board.

Many important decisions hinge on the MDP, examples being how the community grows, where it grows, and how the environment is protected. Any delay in its implementation presents difficulty both to individual landowners and the County.

Strathcona's MDP was approved in May 2007 by County Council, and portions of the MDP are being appealed by the City of Edmonton, with the next hearing scheduled for March 17–20, 2008.

What does the regional Board mean for industry?

Among other options, the Province has identified municipal tax revenue from Alberta's Industrial Heartland as a significant source of funding for regional projects. However, detail on the funding formula has yet to be released.

The billions in investment announced for the Capital Region by industry were based on

stability in governance, planning, infrastructure and utility investments, and predictable processes for addressing taxation. The present lack of detail about what possible changes may result from the Province's plan for the Capital Region, has created some measure of uncertainty.

Is Strathcona County the only municipality with questions about the Board?

No. A number of other municipalities have many of the same questions and concerns that we do. They include Sturgeon County, Leduc

County, Parkland County, Lamont County and the Town of Bruderheim.

Who will chair this new Board?

Initially, the Province will appoint an interim chair for the Board; thereafter, the Board will select a chair from among the municipal

representatives. Strathcona County believes the chair must be knowledgeable, independent and competent regarding municipal affairs.

For more information on the new regional Board, visit www.strathcona.ab.ca and click on *The future of the Capital Region*.

Listening to our Community

Let us know what you think about the plans for the future of the Capital Region. Your comments and questions will help to ensure the interests of our community are well represented.

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