

# Report of the Reeve's Task Force on Growth Planning

Submitted to the Reeve and Council,  
Rocky View County  
January 1, 2011

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## A. Executive Summary

The Reeve's Task Force on Growth Planning was formed in July, 2010 by Rocky View County Council to help define the direction of growth and related planning in Rocky View County. The 17 members of the Task Force were drawn from all areas of the County and brought a diverse set of viewpoints, expertise and experience to the table.

The Task Force began its work in a climate of unrest and concern among some Rocky View residents. Recent planning initiatives put forth by Rocky View Council and administration, the role of Rocky View in the greater Calgary region, and the opportunities for resident and stakeholder input into decision-making processes were some of the issues of concern in the County.

From the outset, the Task Force made citizen engagement and listening to the voices of Rocky View residents the focal point of their process. To provide the maximum opportunity for public input within their 5-month mandate, the Task Force held 6 public engagement meetings across the County in September, 2010. In addition, residents and stakeholders were encouraged to submit responses to a written questionnaire or to provide written submissions to the Task Force prior to October 20, 2010.

The Task Force had an enthusiastic response at their public engagement sessions, with over 1,000 people attending the 6 meetings, and 205 verbal presentations on various growth related issues made. In addition, the Task Force received close to 100 questionnaires and over 40 written submissions from individuals and stakeholder groups.

The Task Force met and deliberated for over 40 hours during the course of its mandate. They carefully reviewed and considered all public input, educated themselves on provincial and regional planning requirements and pressures, and consulted expert and written resources to carry out their mandate. The Task Force focused their deliberations on 10 key issue areas related to growth management in Rocky View County. In each of the key issue areas, the Task Force has: defined the issue, summarized the public input on the issue, set out their observations, and made specific recommendations for the Reeve and Council to consider. The Task Force came up with 43 recommendations for consideration.

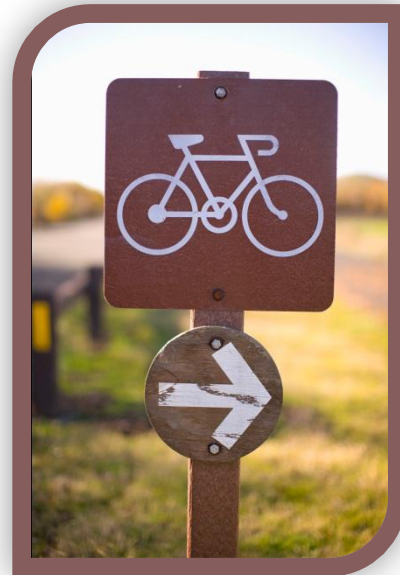
In framing their report, the Task Force recognizes that growth is an inevitable reality as Rocky View County looks to its future. How that growth is managed and planned for is within our collective control. Clearly, Rocky View County residents and stakeholders want to maintain the rural attitudes, culture and character that distinguishes Rocky View from its urban neighbours. Rocky View County Council and administration have a very difficult task to try to balance the needs and wants of its residents and communities with the growth and inter-regional pressures it faces. The recommendations put forward by the Task Force are intended to assist Rocky View County to provide an effective "balance" between growth pressures and maintaining the character and culture Rocky View's residents desire going forward.

## B. Chairman's Remarks

As Chairman of the Task Force, may I express my appreciation of the contribution of each member of this Task Force. The members were knowledgeable and respectful and it was a pleasure to be part of this team.

The process was comprehensive with:

- 1) 6 public, open meetings;
- 2) Written submissions received and reviewed;
- 3) Detailed discussions among the Task Force members, reaching the recommendations included in this report.



The report within represents a conclusion of a majority of the Task Force members. Rather than try to gain a consensus on every issue, we have provided any Task Force member the right to set out their opinion on any given topic, where it differed from the majority opinion. In Section G of this report, you will find the minority positions which some Task Force members wished to express on certain issues.

We sincerely trust that our report will be of assistance to Rocky View County Council in reaching future decisions on growth planning.

Respectfully yours,

Stanley A. Church  
Chair

## C. Our Recommendations

### 1. Communications and Public Engagement

- a) To ensure there is openness and transparency surrounding the work of the Reeve's Task Force on Growth Planning, Rocky View Council should release the Task Force's Final Report to the public in a timely manner.
  - b) To place a renewed emphasis on communication and citizen engagement, Rocky View should revise its Mission Statement Goals by adding "The County shall place a high priority on communication and public engagement on all matters".
  - c) To enhance citizen engagement, Rocky View should encourage all Councillors to hold public engagement meetings in their respective divisions at least once a year, to formalize a structure for listening to residents about their issues and needs.
  - d) To streamline the development and citizen engagement processes, Rocky View County should establish Planning Advisory Committees (PACs) in each major area of the County. The PAC's should be made up of representative community members who, in accordance with a set Terms of Reference, would provide Rocky View County with feedback, facilitate communication and public engagement, and provide a link between the developer and the community for major development applications. The PACs are not intended to be a mechanism that can be used to delay the decision.
  - e) To ensure there is an onus on the proponents of development to engage the public, for these proposals, the proponent should be required to outline a comprehensive plan for a public engagement process and to indicate how that process will be communicated to the public.
  - f) To promote effective communications, transparency and accountability, Rocky View County should:
    - i. Ensure that information regarding County finances, debt limits and net debt are routinely and effectively communicated to the public.
    - ii. Review the structure and management of the Rocky View County website to ensure it is: user friendly, is updated in real time with the most current information, and the links to materials are functional and correct.
    - iii. Reformat the traditional open house-type public information session to a model that is more interactive and provides meaningful opportunities for public input and engagement.
    - iv. Make Council agendas available, in a visible location, so that any interested parties attending Rocky View Council meetings are able to follow along with Council's deliberations.
    - v. Provide an opportunity via its website for residents and other interested parties to "sign up" for updates or information distribution on specific issues or initiatives.
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## 2. Residential Development:

- a) All residential development should be subject to proven:
    - i. Sufficiency of water resources.
    - ii. Wastewater treatment capacity.
    - iii. Legal means of access.
  - b) Rocky View should strive to bring its policies regarding residential development in closer alignment with surrounding rural municipalities and to create greater flexibility for landowners wishing to develop their land.
  - c) In areas where there is an existing Area Structure Plan, future country residential development may continue to occur, provided:
    - i. The development is in accordance with the existing planning documents.
    - ii. The development is of a similar density and scale to the surrounding area.
    - iii. Wastewater treatment capacity complies with the provincial Standard of Practice.
    - iv. There is an adequate supply of potable water.
  - d) The owners of a quarter section of land should be allowed to subdivide it into a maximum of 4 parcels provided other requirements for residential subdivision are met or proven out. If a quarter section is subdivided into less than 4 parcels:
    - i. The subdivision application should set out where the additional parcels will be sited in the future, or
    - ii. Be two 80-acre parcels, or
    - iii. Be one first parcel out that cannot be further subdivided.
  - e) All other residential development proposals should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The proponent (developer) should show:
    - i. The development will maintain a country residential density and flavor.
    - ii. All necessary infrastructure(including, but not limited to: water, sanitary sewer, transportation, regional drainage, and open spaces) will be provided at no net cost to Rocky View County.
    - iii. The future tax revenue to be received from the development should be at a sufficient level to cover future servicing and operating costs.
    - iv. The development should comply with planning regulations, guidelines and documents.
    - v. The developer must consult with and make a reasonable effort to address any surrounding or impacted landowner concerns.
    - vi. A plan for dedicating additional open/green space (beyond legislated requirements for municipal and environmental reserve) to be owned/managed collectively by the landowners in the development area.
- .....

### 3. Commercial/Industrial Development:

- a) Rocky View County should devise a commercial/industrial development strategy to promote appropriate commercial/industrial development in the County (where the marketplace is the primary driver of such development). The Strategy should:
    - i. encourage small business growth and development.
    - ii. include criteria for commercial/industrial development with limited servicing/infrastructure needs.
    - iii. address the infrastructure and servicing needs of any commercial/industrial development.
    - iv. promote the success and growth of small commercial/industrial developments by providing flexibility for growth and expansion on existing sites.
  - b) Inside an Area Structure Plan, commercial/industrial development should only be approved in accordance with the plan.
  - c) Outside of an Area Structure Plan, commercial/industrial development proposals should be considered on a case by case basis; with special consideration given to their impact on neighbouring landowners and/or businesses.
  - d) Commercial/industrial developments should only be approved if they provide a net cost-benefit to the County.
- .....

### 4. Water and Development:

- a) Rocky View County should develop a comprehensive Water Management Strategy that promotes and encourages water conservation and clearly communicate that strategy to the public.
- b) When considering the approval of new development, Rocky View County must ensure there is a sufficient, sustainable water supply that is proven out as a condition of development approval.
  - i. Intensive multi-home or commercial developments relying upon ground water should be directed to use an off-site water supply as part of their development approval .
  - ii. For smaller, less intensive multi-home developments, if Rocky View County has granted subdivision and development approval based on proven groundwater supply, the onus for any failure or change in groundwater supply should be placed upon the developer/landowner.
  - iii. The public must be meaningfully engaged in current and future development approval processes in order to address the significant concerns that have been raised regarding the impacts of development on water supply and demand.

- c) Rocky View County needs to take a proactive, cooperative, and solution-driven role in working with the Province, other municipalities, watershed groups, and other stakeholders on water-related strategies and initiatives.
  - d) Rocky View County should avoid taking ownership of or responsibility for any new or existing water co-ops or companies.
- 

## **5. Agriculture:**

- a) The development process for Rocky View County's Agricultural Master Plan must include significant opportunities for agricultural landowners to have undiluted input to Rocky View Council.
  - b) Where different land uses such as agricultural operations and country residential development abut, the onus should be on the developing party to create a natural/ecological buffer area/space between the two different land use types.
  - c) Rocky View County should review its policies, regulations and permitting systems to facilitate enhanced on-farm development opportunities, value-added initiatives, and small business generation.
  - d) The onus must not be on agricultural operators to provide "open spaces" for the benefit of their country-residential or urban neighbours.
  - e) To support and facilitate ongoing agricultural operations in Rocky View County, road infrastructure should be built to a level that will support the safe and timely movement of agricultural equipment and loads.
  - f) An education program should be developed for members of the public moving into agrarian areas of the County on "what to expect" when living next to an agricultural operation and promoting the importance of Rocky View's agricultural base.
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## **6. Financial Sustainability:**

- a) Due to the level of public concern expressed about Rocky View County indebtedness, the County should make every effort to avoid an increase of current indebtedness for projects similar to and including the East Rocky View waste/wastewater project.
- b) Rocky View County should retain operational control and majority ownership of Aqueduct and the East Rocky View water project.
- c) Rocky View Council should direct administration to prepare a cost/benefit analysis for development projects currently in the planning, development and approval process. The cost/benefit analysis should align with the Cost of Services Study and weigh the lifetime servicing/operational cost of the development to the County versus the projected revenue to the County from the development. Developments with a potential net servicing cost to the County should not be approved.
- d) Rocky View Council should appoint a panel to investigate the status of the infrastructure deficit in Rocky View County, to determine whether current spending on maintenance of

infrastructure assets is in line with the depreciation of these assets, and to develop a strategy for addressing the infrastructure and/or maintenance deficits.

- e) In the event the provincial government chooses not to allow rural municipalities to levy developers for amenities (i.e. social services, protective services, parks, recreation, transit, recycling, etc.), Rocky View County should research and explore other mechanisms that could be used to achieve the same purpose.

## 7. Infrastructure Other than Water:

- a) Rocky View County should avoid becoming like a metropolitan center that is responsible for providing a full spectrum of infrastructure, except in very specific/unique areas.
- b) Rocky View County should create methods whereby landowners can develop their lands in ways that are self sustaining and respectful of adjacent landowners, while providing overall “big picture” direction to development proposals to coordinate infrastructure requirements and sound engineering practices.

## 8. Open Spaces

- a) Rocky View County should complete an inventory of all open space/parks/municipal reserve under their ownership or control and determine the classification of the various types of open space (this recommendation is currently being carried out as part of the County's Open Spaces initiative).
- b) Rocky View County should prepare a report on the amount of funds in the cash in lieu of reserve account, set priorities for utilizing these funds, and develop a decision-making framework to meet those priorities.
- c) As part of its Open Spaces Review, Rocky View County should prepare a report on the function and type of open space in the County, establish criteria for where open space is desired, and specifically set out criteria for when cash in lieu of reserve is a preferred option for meeting the requirements of the Municipal Government Act.

## 9. Calgary Regional Partnership:

- a) Given the current framework of the Calgary Regional Partnership, the Task Force supports the stand taken by Rocky View County to withdraw from the partnership.
- b) Rocky View County should initiate a dialogue and form a co-operative alliance with its rural counterparts in the region to form a “rural coalition” that could advocate for rural priorities and interests in any future participation in the Calgary Regional Partnership or other regional planning frameworks.
- c) Rocky View should only consider returning to the Calgary Regional Partnership table if the terms of reference are re-constituted to provide the necessary balance and weighting of votes to better protect Rocky View's interests and if there is some modification of the density requirements linked to the provision of urban servicing.

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## **10. Natural Resources:**

Rocky View should develop a comprehensive plan and policy on how to deal with gravel resources in the County, the siting and approval of gravel operations, and the mitigation of impacts on surrounding land uses, groundwater resources and residents.

## D. Task Force Members, Mandate and Process

### 1. Task Force Members

The Reeve's Task Force on Growth Planning consists of fifteen people who represent a cross-section of all Rocky View County communities. They were brought together to face head-on the issues of growth, planning and change in the County.

*Stan Church (Chair), Bearspaw*

*Liz Breakey, West Bragg Creek*

*Gordon Bussey, East of Airdrie*

*Helen Clease, Hamlet of Bragg Creek*

*Mike Edwards, Bearspaw*

*Syd Hartley, Balzac*

*Pam Janzen, Springbank*

*Joe Zink, Springbank*

*JoAnn Jones, Symons Valley*

*Bruce Kendall, Northwest/Cochrane*

*Cheryl Wilson (Langdon)*

*Dermot Lane, Bearspaw*

*Doug McIntosh, Delacour/Chestermere*

*Wendy Metzger, Kathryn/Beiseker*

*Cameron Wallace, Springbank*

The Task Force wishes to thank Kim Magnuson and Eamonn Brosnan for their contributions to the work of the Task Force. Both Kim and Eamonn resigned from their appointments to the Task Force for personal reasons before the end of their term.

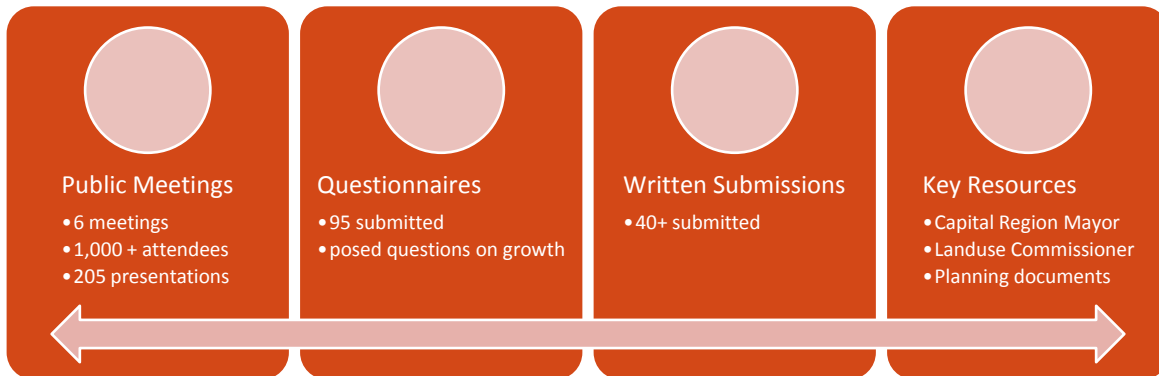
### 2. Task Force Mandate

The Terms of Reference for the formation of the Reeve's Task Force on Growth Planning was approved by Rocky View Council in July, 2010. The Task Force was formed to consider matters related to planning, the growth pressures faced by Rocky View County, and the potential associated impacts on communities and service delivery. The Task Force was mandated to conduct its work within a local, regional and sub-regional context by holding at least 3 town hall meetings to gather community input. A timeline of approximately 5 months was set for the Task Force to complete its mandate and to prepare a final report on its findings and recommendations to the Reeve and Council. For a complete version of the Terms of Reference for the Reeve's Task Force on Growth Planning please refer to Appendix A.

## E. Consultations, Inputs and Resources

### 1. Task Force Process Pillars

The Reeve's Task Force on Growth Planning developed a process map for carrying out its mandate that consisted of four main pillars: (1) public engagement meetings (2) written questionnaires (3) public written submissions, and (4) consulting key resources, which included meeting with key resource persons and a review of planning processes, initiatives and documents.



Task Force Process Pillars, 2010

### 2. Public Meetings

Throughout the month of September 2010, the Reeve's Task Force on Growth Planning hosted six public engagement forums in different parts of Rocky View County. The goal of these events was to provide an open forum for the public to express their views on issues related to growth management and planning in Rocky View County. Underlying a series of more specific questions to guide discussions at the public engagement forums were these fundamental queries posed by the Task Force Chairman in his opening remarks:

What do you want to preserve and protect in Rocky View County?

What do you want to change or avoid in Rocky View County?

What do you want to achieve for the future of Rocky View County?

The Task Force was impressed by the number of attendees at the public meetings, the knowledge, passion and input from the various speakers and the undeniable evidence that Rocky View's citizens care deeply about their communities and the future of Rocky View. Over 1,000 people attended the six public engagement forums, and more than 200 individuals rose to speak and provide verbal input at the forums. Those who chose not to speak were encouraged to provide their input in writing on questionnaire/discussion forms available at each of the public meetings.

Members of the Reeve's Task Force also conducted a short exit poll at each of the public engagement sessions to make sure the process, the meeting format and the questions being

posed were appropriate and addressed the needs and expectations of the public. The Exit Polls overwhelmingly affirmed the process the Reeve's Task Force followed to solicit public input and feedback.

### 3. Questionnaires

The Reeve's Task Force was committed to providing a variety of options for the public to provide their feedback. If members of the public were unable to attend or chose not to speak at one of the public engagement forums, but still wanted to have their voice heard on matters concerning the management of County growth, they were encouraged to submit a written questionnaire. The questionnaires were available on the Task Force website for downloading or they could be picked up at one of the public engagement meetings from a friendly Task Force member. The public were encouraged to submit their completed questionnaires by email, by mail or by dropping them off for the Task Force at the Rocky View County offices. Close to 100 questionnaires were completed and submitted to the Task Force.

### 4. Written Submissions

The Reeve's Task Force made an effort to effectively communicate with the public about its process and mandate through posters, the print media, and its website. The Task Force emphasized that they were "here to listen" and would welcome the insights and opinions of every citizen and stakeholder within Rocky View County on growth and planning issues. In addition to the public engagement meetings and the questionnaires, the Task Force also invited Rocky View County residents, business owners and stakeholders to submit comments or feedback to them at any time via email at [feedback@reevestaskforce.ca](mailto:feedback@reevestaskforce.ca) or by regular mail. As a result, over 40 formal written submissions were submitted to the Task Force for their review and consideration prior to the October 20<sup>th</sup> deadline for written submissions.

### 5. Resources and Experts

The Task Force recognized that Rocky View County does not exist in isolation. Municipalities are required to adhere to certain provincial legislation and regulations and also must work within the regional context within which they are located through inter-municipal development plans and other provincially-mandated planning vehicles. As part of their process planning, Task Force members identified a lengthy list of documents, resources and experts they wanted to review and consult with as part of educating themselves on the environment in which Rocky View must operate to plan and accommodate for growth pressures. Some of the key components of the comprehensive environmental scan conducted by the Task Force are summarized below.

#### a) Legislative/Regulatory Environment

The Task Force reviewed, consulted or were briefed on relevant aspects of the following legislative and regulatory documents/processes:

- i. **Alberta Municipal Government Act** - portions of which govern municipal planning in Alberta.
- ii. **Alberta Land Stewardship Act/Alberta Land Use Framework** - the Task Force received a personal briefing from the Stewardship Commissioner of the Alberta Land Use Secretariat, Mr. Morris Seiferling. This Act is paramount to most other provincial and municipal legislation and governs provincial land use regions, regional plans such as the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, and provides for various conservation and stewardship tools such as:

- 1) conservation easements.
- 2) conservation offsets and directives.
- 3) the transfer of development credits.

More information on the Alberta Land Stewardship Act and the provincial Land-use Framework are available at [www.landuse.alberta.ca](http://www.landuse.alberta.ca).

- iii. **The Capital Region Board Regulation** - the Task Force received a personal briefing from a member of the Capital Region Board – Mayor Don Rigney of Sturgeon County -- on the regulation and its impact in the Capital Region of Alberta. The Capital Region Board Regulation provides the mandate for Land Use in the Capital Region Growth Plan. It requires a comprehensive, integrated regional land use plan for the Capital Region that includes the following:
  - 1) Population and Employment Projections
  - 2) Priority growth areas
  - 3) Land supply for residential, commercial and industrial purposes
  - 4) Agricultural lands
  - 5) Buffer areas
  - 6) Thresholds for the density of development
  - 7) Development and location of infrastructure
  - 8) Corridors for recreation, transportation, utilities and inter-municipal transit
  - 9) Policies regarding environmentally sensitive areas
  - 10) Policies for the co-ordination of planning and development among the participating municipalities.
- iv. Rocky View's **Land Use Plan, Municipal Development Plan, Inter-municipal Development Plan (now in consultation stage), and Area Structure Plans.**
- v. The ongoing processes the County is undertaking to develop an **Open Spaces Master Plan** and an **Agriculture Master Plan**.

#### **b) Municipal and Regional Planning Influences**

The Task Force spent time reviewing the Rocky View **Growth Management Strategy 2060** and its supporting reports and background documents. Special attention was paid to two key studies: the **Cost of Services Study** completed by Nichols Applied Management and the **Amenities Study (Phases I and II)**.

The Task Force also looked at the **Calgary Regional Partnership** and the history of the involvement of Rocky View County and other surrounding rural municipalities in regional discussions, partnerships and initiatives. It became clear during this investigative process that aspects of Rocky View's **Growth Management Study** were developed in response to the regional pressures the County faces from abutting a large urban center. The density levels for the proposed growth nodes in Rocky View County aligned with City of Calgary density requirements for servicing nodal development. The Growth Management Study was also based on certain population and growth assumptions/projections made prior to the economic downturn. The underlying population assumptions, that the Calgary region will have a population of 2.8 million people in 60 – 70 years, may no longer be valid. Indeed, the Task Force is of the general opinion that these population projection numbers should be re-evaluated.

## F. Task Force Reports on Key Issue Areas

After an exhaustive review of input and feedback from the public engagement sessions, the written questionnaire and written/email submissions, the Task Force agreed to focus their deliberations on 10 primary issues related to growth management in Rocky View County:

1. Communications and Public Engagement
2. Residential Development
3. Commercial/Industrial Development
4. Water and Development
5. Agriculture
6. Financial Sustainability
7. Infrastructure Other Than Water
8. Open Spaces
9. Calgary Regional Partnership
10. Natural Resources

Each issue was considered within the following framework of questions:

- ❖ What was the collective public input on the issue?
- ❖ What were the Task Force observations on the issue based on what they heard, the research they carried out, and the expertise and knowledge they brought to the table?
- ❖ What are the recommendations for the issue area going forward?

## 1. Communications and Public Engagement

### a) Definition of the Issue

To define the communications and public engagement issue, the Task Force looked at how Rocky View County currently communicates with and engages its residents as well as the perceptions residents have of the County's communications/public engagement record.

**Communications** refers to all the ways and means in which Rocky View County publishes, distributes or makes information available about its initiatives, decisions and operational activities. Communications also refers to the verbal and written responses of Rocky View County to inquiries made by residents. **Community Engagement** refers to the methods and mediums Rocky View County uses to inform residents of matters that may impact their lifestyle, property, finances, and community and to invite feedback, involvement and input from its citizens, either individually or collectively.

### b) Public Input

- i. The people who spoke at the six (6) Public Open Houses on the Task Force on Growth Planning (held in September, 2010) were grateful for the opportunity to provide their input and feedback and were supportive of the process the Task Force was undertaking.
- ii. It was evident that residents care deeply about the communities they live in and they expressed their opinions in a clear and passionate manner.
- iii. Some of the clear messages that emerged were:
  - a. People do not want to stop growth, but they want balanced, managed and sensitive growth that is not done on a piecemeal or patchwork basis.
  - b. People want to retain the rural/country residential character of their communities which distinguishes Rocky View's lifestyle from the City of Calgary and other urban centers.
  - c. One size does not fit all as Rocky View County is a very diverse and vibrant municipality in which communities and areas have distinct characters and priorities.
- iv. Historically, residents feel they have often spent their valuable time attending public open houses, provided feedback and sharing their opinions only to come away feeling that their time was wasted and their voices were either not heard or did not make a difference.
- v. The public want a two-way flow of information and to feel they have an opportunity to influence the process. If they perceive they are not given a voice and choices are pre-determined for them (ie. lines are drawn for them), they are offended and disillusioned with the process.
- vi. Many perceive that Rocky View County gives more weight to the views of small-acreage landowners than the larger landowners who have a long history of land stewardship and management.
- vii. If a community works together to develop an Area Structure Plan and/or clearly states they are happy with the current/approved plans for their area, they do not want Rocky

- View County to initiate additional studies, open houses, or to introduce variances that interfere with the current status of their community.
- viii. Residents become frustrated, disillusioned, and distrustful when growth/planning initiatives (such as concept plans) are approved by the County, and then left in limbo with no apparent status reports or follow-up action.

**c) Task Force Observations**

- i. Communication and public engagement process are both very important to the residents of Rocky View County. They want to be involved at the start of the process and they want to be partners in the future growth and planning of the County.
- ii. Generally speaking, Rocky View County does a good job of communicating information to its residents. The six (6) main methods of communication currently employed by Rocky View County are:
  - a. the web site
  - b. the newspaper/Rocky View Weekly
  - c. letters/notices
  - d. public open houses
  - e. the Vantage Point magazine
  - f. the business office located at 911-32 Avenue NE Calgary
- iii. However, there is room for improvement in engaging residents in a two-way dialogue on key issues. People not only need more frequent forums in which to express their opinions, they need to feel they have been heard, understood and have had a voice.
- iv. There was evidence of public confusion on key information related to Rocky View County operations, which points to a need for more effective communications. For example, various individuals at the Task Force public engagement sessions provided vastly different figures and understandings regarding the level of debt currently carried by Rocky View County. In addition, although 4 public open houses were held on the Growth Management Strategy initiative, there were a significant number of attendees at the Task Force public meetings who were not aware of the Growth Management Strategy and its recommended framework for growth management.
- v. Going forward, complete and effective public engagement processes on growth, planning and development initiatives will be essential to avoid disengagement, suspicion and criticism from Rocky View residents. For example, the current public open house format used in the development/planning process does not effectively engage residents in the process. As evidenced by the response to the Task Force public engagement sessions, there is an appetite for a more interactive engagement of citizens on key issues. Rocky View County has an opportunity to take a leadership role in creating more effective communication and public engagement processes related to development and growth management.
- vi. It is the responsibility of every citizen of Rocky View County to make a concerted effort to remain informed through reading the newspaper, visiting the County website, talking to their local Councillor, attending public open houses and engagement sessions, and becoming engaged in their community.

### Recommendations – Communications and Public Engagement

- a) To ensure there is openness and transparency surrounding the work of the Reeve's Task Force on Growth Planning, Rocky View Council should release the Task Force's Final Report to the public in a timely manner.
- b) To place a renewed emphasis on communication and citizen engagement, Rocky View County should revise its Mission Statement Goals by adding "The County shall place a high priority on communication and public engagement on all matters".
- c) To enhance citizen engagement, Rocky View County should encourage all Councillors to hold public engagement meetings in their respective divisions at least once a year, to formalize a structure for listening to residents about their issues and needs.
- d) To streamline the development and citizen engagement processes, Rocky View County should establish Planning Advisory Committees (PACs) in each major area of the County. The PAC's should be made up of representative community members who, in accordance with a set Terms of Reference, would provide Rocky View County with feedback, facilitate communication and public engagement, and provide a link between the developer and the community for major development applications. The PACs are not intended to be a mechanism that can be used to delay the decision.
- e) To ensure there is an onus on the proponents of development to engage the public, for these proposals, the proponent should be required to outline a comprehensive plan for a public engagement process and to indicate how that process will be communicated to the public.
- f) To promote effective communications, transparency and accountability, Rocky View County should:
  - i. Ensure that information regarding County finances, debt limits and net debt are routinely and effectively communicated to the public.
  - ii. Review the structure and management of the Rocky View County website to ensure it is: user friendly, is updated in real time with the most current information, and the links to materials are functional and correct.
  - iii. Reformat the traditional open house-type public information session to a model that is more interactive and provides meaningful opportunities for public input and engagement.
  - iv. Make Council agendas available, in a visible location, so that any interested parties attending Rocky View Council meetings are able to follow along with Council's deliberations.
  - v. Provide an opportunity via its website for residents and other interested parties to "sign up" for updates or information distribution on specific issues or initiatives.

## 2. Residential Development

### a) Definition of the Issue

To define the residential development issue, the Task Force explored what type of residential growth should be allowed in Rocky View County and whether the *growth nodes* and *community cores* referred to in the *Rocky View Growth Management Strategy* are acceptable to the public.

### b) Majority-held Public Input and Task Force Observations

- i. A majority of those who provided input to the Task Force expressed opposition to the “drawing of lines”, where the County decides through a Growth Management Strategy, or some other policy or regulatory mechanism where development will be allowed (or not allowed) to occur.
- ii. The majority also indicated they are not in favour of high density urban development within Rocky View County boundaries (growth nodes). This opposition to nodal development was primarily based on concerns related to core infrastructure needs, servicing demands and costs, as well as the potential to shift the political balance of power in the County.
- iii. The most common reasons cited for opposing high density urban development in Rocky View were:
  - a. Rocky View is a rural municipality and should maintain its rural character. Further urban-type, high density development should only occur within established urban centers, namely: the City of Calgary, the City of Airdrie, the Town of Cochrane and the Town of Chestermere.
  - b. There is no demand for urban-type servicing levels in Rocky View County.
  - c. A shortage of water resources should preclude high density development in the County.
  - d. The costs of servicing nodal development (with urban-level servicing) would ultimately be borne by all taxpayers in the County.
- iv. A majority of the landowners (both farmers and acreage holders) the Task Force heard from are not opposed to reasonable levels of further country residential development (even at densities greater than 2-acre parcels), provided that:
  - a. The development has a country-residential flavor.
  - b. The County is not involved in providing services.
  - c. The development is consistent with the character of the existing community and its existing densities.
  - d. Infrastructure is upgraded on a proactive basis to sustain existing development and to handle any increase in population.
  - e. The marketplace is the main driver of development.

### c) Minority-Held Public Input and Task Force Observations

- i. Opinions on key issues regarding residential development varied across the regions of the County. The Task Force also heard the following, minority-held opinions and inputs :

- a. The County does not exist in isolation and must work within other provincial and municipal land use planning frameworks (Alberta Land use Framework, the Calgary Regional Plan, the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, etc.).
- b. The Growth Management Strategy was a well-thought out document that provides real guidance for rational development.
- c. Questions on the future of residential development are premature until studies on the availability of ground and surface water resources have been completed.
- d. Growth nodes are a viable mechanism for concentrating expected growth pressures and protecting farmland, low density development areas and open spaces. They should be supported in certain areas of the County.

### **Recommendations – Residential Development**

- a) All residential development should be subject to proven:
  - i. Sufficiency of water resources.
  - ii. Wastewater treatment capacity.
  - iii. Legal means of access.
- b) Rocky View should strive to bring its policies regarding residential development in closer alignment with surrounding rural municipalities and to create greater flexibility for landowners wishing to develop their land.
- c) In areas where there is an existing Area Structure Plan, future country residential development may continue to occur, provided:
  - i. The development is in accordance with the existing planning documents.
  - ii. The development is of a similar density and scale to the surrounding area.
  - iii. Wastewater treatment capacity complies with the provincial Standard of Practice.
  - iv. There is an adequate supply of potable water.
- d) The owners of a quarter section of land should be allowed to subdivide it into a maximum of 4 parcels provided other requirements for residential subdivision are met or proven out. If a quarter section is subdivided into less than 4 parcels:
  - i. The subdivision application should set out where the additional parcels will be sited in the future, or
  - ii. Be two 80-acre parcels, or
  - iii. Be one first parcel out that cannot be further subdivided.

- e) All other residential development proposals should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The proponent (developer) should show:
- i. The development will maintain a country residential<sup>1</sup> density and flavor.
  - ii. All necessary infrastructure (including, but not limited to: water, sanitary sewer, transportation, regional drainage, and open spaces) will be provided at no net cost to Rocky View County.
  - iii. The future tax revenue to be received from the development should be at a sufficient level to cover future servicing and operating costs.
  - iv. The development should comply with planning regulations, guidelines and documents.
  - v. The developer must consult with and make a reasonable effort to address any surrounding or impacted landowner concerns.
  - vi. A plan for dedicating additional open/green space (beyond legislated requirements for municipal and environmental reserve) to be owned/managed collectively by the landowners in the development area.

1 "Country Residential" **means** development on a relatively small area of land intended as a site for private detached single family dwellings in a rural surrounding. It is NOT a high density node as described in the Growth Management Strategy or the Calgary Regional Partnership.

"Country residential flavor" refers to attributes such as:

- Low density housing (density will vary depending on the area/region)
- Limited servicing requirements
- Significant green/open space
- Limited commercial development

### 3. Commercial/Industrial Development

#### a) Definition of the Issue

To define the commercial/industrial development issue, the Task Force explored what type of commercial/industrial growth should be allowed in Rocky View County. They asked whether growth should be restricted to the areas defined in the Growth Management Strategy (GMS) or if there should be more flexibility as to where commercial/industrial growth is located.

#### b) Public Input

- i. Opinions on key issues regarding commercial/industrial development varied across the regions of the County.
- ii. There was clear opposition to Rocky View County “upfronting” infrastructure costs for commercial/industrial development.
- iii. A majority of those who provided input to the Task Force expressed opposition to the “drawing of lines”, where the County decides through a Growth Management Strategy or some other policy or regulatory mechanism where development will be allowed (or not allowed) to occur.
- iv. A majority of respondents to the written survey supported additional commercial/light industrial development with limited servicing needs.
- v. The Task Force also heard the following minority-held opinions and inputs, many of which cross lines from residential to commercial/industrial development, and some of which are opposite to the majority-held opinions and inputs:
  - a. The County does not exist in isolation and must work within other provincial and municipal land use planning frameworks (Alberta Land use Framework, the Calgary Regional Plan, the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, etc.).
  - b. Increased levels of commercial/industrial development keep jobs within the community and helps build cohesion.
  - c. The Growth Management Strategy was a well-intended document. Growth nodes and business corridors are viable mechanisms for concentrating commercial/industrial development and protecting farmland. They should be encouraged in certain areas of the County.

#### c) Task Force Observations

- i. The marketplace should be the primary driver of future commercial/industrial development in Rocky View.
- ii. Rocky View currently has a lower than average amount of commercial/industrial assessment (see Financial Sustainability section) compared to other rural municipalities.
- iii. The provision of infrastructure within a commercial/industrial development should be the responsibility of the developer.
- iv. Municipal transportation infrastructure that links commercial/industrial development to the larger community needs to be planned and upgraded by the County on a proactive basis to sustain existing development and to handle any increase in intensity of development.

### Recommendations – Commercial/Industrial Development

- a) Rocky View County should devise a commercial/industrial development strategy to promote appropriate commercial/industrial development in the County (where the marketplace is the primary driver of such development). The Strategy should:
  - i. encourage small business growth and development.
  - ii. include criteria for commercial/industrial development with limited servicing/infrastructure needs.
  - iii. address the infrastructure and servicing needs of any commercial/industrial development.
  - iv. promote the success and growth of small commercial/industrial developments by providing flexibility for growth and expansion on existing sites.
- b) Inside an Area Structure Plan, commercial/industrial development should only be approved in accordance with the plan.
- c) Outside of an Area Structure Plan, commercial/industrial development proposals should be considered on a case by case basis; with special consideration given to their impact on neighbouring landowners and/or businesses.
- d) Commercial/industrial developments should only be approved if they provide a net cost-benefit to the County.

## 4. Water and Development

### a) Definition of Issue:

Rocky View County residents are united in their concern for the quality and quantity of water resources available for future development. How is Rocky View County to deal with that concern and the uncertainties associated with water demand and supply in the South Saskatchewan River Basin?

### b) Public Inputs:

- i. Concerns regarding sustained availability of water supply were brought forward by many residents. We heard comments such as “water is the crux of development decisions” and “we need a comprehensive, regional plan for water.”
- ii. Ground water studies have not been completed, so the capacity of wells to sustain new development is not clearly understood. Also, the effect on surface water, of increasing groundwater withdrawals is not known with certainty.
- iii. Development should not be allowed to proceed unless proof is provided of an adequate and sustainable water supply.

### c) Task Force Observations:

- i. The Province has said it will honour the “First in time, first in right” principle, but it is also considering re-allocation of water licenses (for surface water). Currently, the ability to buy, sell and trade water licenses is not completely clear.
- ii. Residents and businesses in Rocky View County are currently supplied with water via: Co-ops, wells, cisterns (haul-in), private utilities or the City. They may be supplied in the future by a Rocky View utility (such as Aqueduct).
- iii. The Province is taking a lead role in managing water resources. Many groups are participating in water study and discussion. Interprovincial as well as inter-municipal issues exist.
- iv. A moratorium exists on new water licenses on the Bow and Elbow Rivers.
- v. The City of Calgary may be prepared to supply water service to future development in Rocky View County, provided such development meets City of Calgary density requirements (urban density).

### Recommendations – Water and Development:

- a) Rocky View County should develop a comprehensive Water Management Strategy that promotes and encourages water conservation and clearly communicate that strategy to the public.
- b) When considering the approval of new development, Rocky View County must ensure there is a sufficient, sustainable water supply that is proven out as a condition of development approval.
  - i. Intensive multi-home or commercial developments relying upon ground water should be directed to use an off-site water supply as part of their development approval .

- ii. For smaller, less intensive multi-home developments, if Rocky View County has granted subdivision and development approval based on proven groundwater supply, the onus for any failure or change in groundwater supply should be placed upon the developer/landowner.
  - iii. The public must be meaningfully engaged in current and future development approval processes in order to address the significant concerns that have been raised regarding the impacts of development on water supply and demand.
- c) Rocky View County needs to take a proactive, cooperative, and solution-driven role in working with the Province, other municipalities, watershed groups, and other stakeholders on water-related strategies and initiatives.
- d) Rocky View County should avoid taking ownership of or responsibility for any new or existing water co-ops or companies.

#### References for Water and Development Issue:

Water for Life	Government of Alberta	2003
Water for Life, Renewal	Government of Alberta	2008
Water Management Plan for SSRB	Government of Alberta	2006
Future Planning Priorities for BRBC	BRBC Team	2009
State of Watershed (WSOW)	BRBC	2010
From the Mountains to the Sea	Partners for SRB	2009
Elbow River Basin Water Management Plan	ERWP	2008
Recommendations for Improving AB's Water Allocation Transfer System	Alberta Water Council	
Where Ideas Flow	Alberta Water Research Institute.	
Source of Opportunity	Water Matters Society of AB	
Upper Bow Basin Cumulative Effects Study		2010

## 5. Agriculture

### a) Definition of Issue:

To define the agriculture issue, the Task Force explored the role of agriculture in Rocky View County and questioned how agriculture is defined in the County. They also asked if agricultural land should be preserved and, if so, how that could best be accomplished.

### b) Public Input

- i. Although there was significant support for the preservation of the agrarian lifestyle in Rocky View County, most clearly do not want this imposed on landowners at the expense of their right to determine how their land should be used.
- ii. The majority of respondents were opposed to the “drawing of lines” and “growth nodes” as a means of preserving agricultural land or controlling development. Most supported an “organic process” that lets the market decide where growth and development occurs in the future.
- iii. Agricultural operators will continue to farm as long as they can manage the lifestyle financially. They do not want to “pave paradise”, they just want options, opportunities and self-determination for their land.
- iv. The desire for a greater respect for property rights and the reality that “land” is often a succession/estate planning commodity for landowners was stressed.
- v. One overall rule for development, or preservation, of agricultural land cannot fit all of Rocky View County.
- vi. It is increasingly difficult to maintain a viable agricultural operation in close proximity to an urban center (due to land values, rural/urban interface issues, etc.).
- vii. There is evidence of friction between country residential landowners and agricultural landowners regarding the right to develop lands, the by-products of agricultural operations, and open space preservation among other issues. This reality requires enhanced opportunities for communication and dialogue in affected communities, where both parties can achieve more common ground.
- viii. Agricultural landowners do not want to be asked or required to preserve their land as “open space” for the benefit of others.
- ix. An ability to effectively move agricultural machinery on well constructed and maintained County roads is essential to maintaining viable agricultural operations in the County.

### c) Task Force Observations

- i. Agricultural operators should not be viewed as regular property owners. They deserve special consideration due to their life-style and long-standing stewardship and attachment to the land.
- ii. Increased urbanization and growth pressures are having a profound impact on the future of agricultural land and operations in rural/urban interface areas surrounding urban centers. The most serious impact is a financial one, where the escalating price of land in the urban fringe area makes agricultural operations cost prohibitive.
- iii. Although there are no legal “property rights” in Canada, the land belongs to the person holding the land title which should afford certain privileges.

- iv. It is important to avoid the “drawing of lines” that takes away the inherent right of a landowner to determine how his or her land should best be used going forward. Agricultural landowners require greater flexibility around determining how their land is used or developed.
- v. The current County process to develop an Agriculture Master Plan is a welcome initiative. The Agriculture Master Plan should promote the diversification of agriculture in Rocky View County.

### **Recommendations – Agriculture**

- a) The development process for Rocky View County's Agricultural Master Plan must include significant opportunities for agricultural landowners to have undiluted input to Rocky View Council.
- b) Where different land uses such as agricultural operations and country residential development abut, the onus should be on the developing party to create a natural/ecological buffer area/space between the two different land use types.
- c) Rocky View County should review its policies, regulations and permitting systems with a view to facilitating enhanced on-farm development opportunities, value-added initiatives, and small business generation.
- d) The onus must not be on agricultural operators to provide “open spaces” for the benefit of their country-residential or urban neighbours.
- e) To support and facilitate ongoing agricultural operations in Rocky View County, road infrastructure should be built and maintained to a level that will support the safe and timely movement of agricultural equipment and loads.
- f) An education program should be developed for members of the public moving into agrarian areas of the County on “what to expect” when living next to an agricultural operation and promoting the importance of Rocky View County's agricultural base.

## 6. Financial Sustainability

### a) Definition of Issue:

The Task Force only looked at the financial aspects of Rocky View County operations related to growth; primarily the level of debt the County currently carries and the source of that debt – the “up-fronting” of infrastructure for a major development.

### b) Public Input:

- i. Concern was expressed about the high debt level; quoting figures ranging from \$60 million to \$100 million.
- ii. Doubts were expressed about the ability to repay this debt and the associated interest costs.
- iii. Citizens did not support county funding for infrastructure in advance of developments; preferring that these costs be financed by the developers.

### c) Task Force Observations:

- i. An external Financial Study reports Rocky View County is in “good financial health” with “favourable tax and expenditure levels”.<sup>3</sup>
- ii. The Rocky View County balance sheet (audited by PriceWaterhouse) is strong with a balanced income statement for 2008 and 2009.<sup>1</sup>
- iii. To expand our non-residential tax base (which is much lower than average)<sup>3 6</sup>, previous councils decided to incur a \$57 million debt to deliver water (\$7 million) and sewer (\$5 million) services to Balzac and other areas in east Rocky View County. That debt is financed at about 2.75%<sup>5</sup>. The history of this expansion began with the Ranchers Beef project and the ensuing conflict with the City of Calgary.
- iv. Assets corresponding to that debt have a book value of about \$103 million; plus there is a water license of \$15 million. Combined with other tangible capital assets, the total assets amount to \$355 million<sup>1</sup>. Their current market value is under review. Rocky View County has also recently commissioned an external audit to assess the debt in the context of current market conditions.
- v. The net debt level has not increased significantly this year and is not projected to do so in the budgets of 2011 or 2012. To date, \$18 million has been repaid – including payments for both principal and interest charges.<sup>2 5</sup>
- vi. Rocky View County debt per capita is significantly higher than comparable rural municipalities and reserves per capita are less than average; but well within provincial guidelines (see Note on Municipal Debt Limits in this section).
- vii. It is not the mandate of the Task Force to use the benefit of hindsight and pass judgment on past decisions by Council. However with the current economic condition, there is the risk that non-residential growth will not happen quickly to pay down the debt. It would require 1,400 acres to be developed to pay off the water debt and 3,800 acres for the sewer debt; because the wastewater system was “over-sized”.<sup>5</sup>
- viii. Developers pay the interest costs of the water and wastewater system by levy payments.<sup>5</sup>

- ix. Unlike Calgary, Rocky View County cannot charge a levy to developers for services such as recreation, policing, fire and social services. Council has joined with other municipalities to ask the provincial government to change this.<sup>5 7 8</sup>
- x. Rocky View County could sell off its waste and water assets to Aqueduct and pay down or eliminate the debt. Also, any debt incurred by Aqueduct would be outside the provincial debt limits on Rocky View County, which at present are 1.5 times revenue (see note on Municipal Debt Limits below)<sup>9</sup>  
  
( Note: Aqueduct is a municipal utility corporation owned by the County which has received legislative approval. In the future, the intent is for Aqueduct to own and operate water, wastewater and stormwater assets currently owned or to be acquired by the County).
- xi. As with any municipality, Rocky View County has an infrastructure liability because spending on road maintenance and the repair of other assets is about half the rate of depreciation.<sup>1 2 3 5</sup> This situation would be exacerbated by further growth.
- xii. The Cost of Services Study<sup>4</sup> shows that the maintenance costs of high density urban residential developments are far less than a “break even” level. Conversely, agricultural operations and low density residential developments produce tax revenue roughly on par with the cost of delivering services. If Rocky View County is required to accommodate “nodes” and “cores” as proposed in the Growth Management Strategy (GMS)<sup>10</sup> then tax revenues must grow either by increasing the residential mill rate or by expanding the non-residential assessment base. Alternatively other revenues must be secured if there is to be a balance of income and expenses.<sup>3</sup>
- xiii. The current residential mill rate for Rocky View County is 34% lower than comparable rural municipalities. Our industrial tax rates are 37% lower than comparable rural municipalities. Our tax rates on farmland are 34% less than comparable municipalities.

#### **Note on Municipal Debt Limits:**

*Section 276(2) of the Municipal Government Act and related provincial regulations require that the debt and debt limits, as defined by Alberta Regulation 255/00 for the County, be disclosed as follows:*

	2009	2008
Total Debt Limit	\$106,544,831	\$114,879,069
Total Debt	( 60,869,049)	( 54,528,437)
Total Amount of Debt Limit Available	\$ 45,675,782	\$ 60,350,632
Service on Debt Limit	\$ 17,757,472	\$ 19,146,512
Service on Debt	\$ (6,123,640)	\$ (5,013,181)
Amount of Service on Debt Limit Available	\$ 11,633,832	\$ 14,133,331

*The municipal debt limit is calculated at 1.5 times revenue of the municipality. The debt service limit is calculated at .025 times such revenue. Incurring debt beyond these limitations requires approval by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. These thresholds are guidelines used by Alberta Municipal Affairs to identify municipalities that could be at financial risk if further debt is required. It should be noted the calculation of debt limit alone does not represent the financial stability of the County, rather the financial statements must be interpreted as a whole.*

## Recommendations – Financial Sustainability

- a) Due to the level of public concern expressed about Rocky View County indebtedness, the County should make every effort to avoid an increase of current indebtedness for projects similar to and including the East Rocky View waste/wastewater project.
- b) Rocky View County should retain operational control and majority ownership of Aqueduct and the East Rocky View water project.
- c) Rocky View Council should direct administration to prepare a cost/benefit analysis for development projects currently in the planning, development and approval process. The cost/benefit analysis should align with the Cost of Services Study and weigh the lifetime servicing/operational cost of the development to the County versus the projected revenue to the County from the development. Developments with a potential net servicing cost to the County should not be approved.
- d) Rocky View Council should appoint a panel to investigate the status of the infrastructure deficit in Rocky View County, to determine whether current spending on maintenance of infrastructure assets is in line with the depreciation of these assets, and to develop a strategy for addressing the infrastructure and/or maintenance deficits.
- e) In the event the provincial government chooses not to allow rural municipalities to levy developers for amenities (i.e. social services, protective services, parks, recreation, transit, recycling, etc.), Rocky View County should research and explore other mechanisms that could be used to achieve the same purpose.

### References for Financial Sustainability Issue:

- 1 Rocky View County Audited Financial Statements 2009
- 2 Rocky View County Draft Budget 2010 – 2012
- 3 Background Financial Planning Study by Nichols Applied Management 2009
- 4 Cost of Services Study by Nichols Applied Management 2009
- 5 Kent Robinson, Director of Business Services, Rocky View County
- 6 Ted Boyda, Assessment Services Manager, Rocky View County
- 7 Rocky View Weekly, 12 Oct 2010
- 8 Gordon Branson, former Councillor, personal communication, August 2010
- 9 Potable Water Strategic Discussion Paper RVC File 170-1, 26 Jan 2010
- 10 Growth Management Strategy, Rocky View 2060

## 7. Infrastructure Other Than Water

### a) Definition of Issue

**Infrastructure (other than water) and amenities** are the basic physical and organizational structures needed for the operation of the County. This may include such things as: roads, sewer, water, garbage, recycling, police, health care, day care, community halls, fire, ambulance, environmental standards, planning, energy, regulations and permitting, communications, parks, education, public transportation, recreation, senior's housing, culture and administration.

### b) Public Input

A review of the comments received from the public meetings and written submissions reveals many different points of view. There were some recurring opinions and concerns expressed, which are listed in the order of the frequency they arose below:

- i. Concerns over the cost of providing services.
- ii. Community planning (Area structure Plans) provide the best solutions.
- iii. Septic fields and wastewater/sewer treatment systems must be properly designed.
- iv. Recreation and schools must be provided.
- v. Better roads and transportation plans are required.
- vi. Other comments related to: security, the permit process, open spaces, health care, and pollution issues.

### c) Task Force Observations

- i. What is not in the comments may be as telling as what was there. There is no sense of any major demand for the County to provide additional infrastructure.
- ii. The overwhelming number of comments regarding infrastructure related to taxpayer concerns over being burdened with the cost of providing infrastructure and wanting more control over who is deciding how and where infrastructure is needed.
- iii. The two observations above provide an indicator that residents do not want Rocky View to be like an urban center that is expected to provide a full spectrum of infrastructure across its boundaries. Instead, they reveal the more rural attitude of "let me look after myself" and the desire for a means of managing development to ensure there is respect for neighbours/community, the environment and long-term sustainability.

### Recommendations – Infrastructure Other Than Water (Amenities)

- a. Rocky View should avoid becoming like a metropolitan center that is responsible for providing a full spectrum of infrastructure, except in very specific/unique areas.
- b. Rocky View should create methods whereby landowners can develop their lands in ways that are self sustaining and respectful of adjacent landowners, while providing overall "big picture" direction to development proposals to coordinate infrastructure requirements and sound engineering practices.

## 8. Open Spaces

### a) Definition of Issue

Most residents have a desire for open space in their communities, but there is a great deal of variance around what people define as open space. There are also issues around how open space should be owned, managed and maintained.

**Open Space**, in its broadest sense, includes all land or water areas, either publicly owned or offering public access, that are not covered by structures. Open space includes current and potential future parks, pathways, roadway greens, land for parks and recreation facilities, golf courses, cemeteries, and other types of alternative use open space (this definition is drawn from the current Rocky View consultation on open spaces).

**Perceived Open Space** is a vast area of undeveloped land that is under private ownership but has been left undeveloped.

### b) Public Input

Many views were expressed on the importance of open spaces, what constitutes open spaces, and how these spaces should be managed for the benefit of Rocky View County and its residents. The most commonly expressed views are outlined below:

- i. Open spaces are extremely important in Rocky View and they should be spread across the County and not concentrated in any one area.
- ii. To achieve the optimum use of open spaces, they should be located close to residential development.
- iii. There should be a variety of open space types, varying in size, shape and intended use.
- iv. Open spaces should be as natural as possible to decrease maintenance needs.
- v. The community and/or the people that use the open spaces should be responsible for maintaining them.
- vi. The land dedicated as open space should be useable land, not unusable land.
- vii. Rocky View County should own all open spaces, and create a "Green Plan" to guide their management and development. The plan should include consideration of the development of a linear parks system along the Trans Canada Highway that connects to the Trans Canada Trail system and other communities and strategies for "linking" existing open space to make them more user-friendly.
- viii. The local communities should decide the type of open space needed and the type of amenities to be provided by the developer.
- ix. Cash in lieu funds should not be used to buy up open spaces in the County, rather the cash in lieu funds should be used to develop and maintain existing open spaces and natural areas.
- x. Country residential acreages already supply open spaces.
- xi. It is better to have a few well maintained open space areas than a lot that have no maintenance.
- xii. Open spaces should be neat, tidy and well-maintained.
- xiii. Landowners should be provided with property tax incentives to keep their land as open space.

**c) Task Force Observations**

- i. Having a variety of open spaces is very important to residents of Rocky View.
- ii. Open spaces should be provided where there is housing but not necessarily where people are working.
- iii. Agricultural operators are not willing to preserve their land as open spaces for other peoples' benefit unless they are compensated for the land area left as open space.
- iv. Rocky View County does not currently have a Parks Department. The seven County Recreation Boards are responsible for the determination of open spaces, whether it is dedicated as land or cash in lieu is paid, and these Boards are also responsible for the management of open spaces under their purview. The Recreation Boards need to educate residents on the role they play in managing open space.
- v. The Municipal Government Act in the Province of Alberta compels a person/company subdividing any land over 2 acres to dedicate 10% of the land area being subdivided as municipal reserve/open space or pay cash \$ in lieu of dedicating the land. Careful consideration should be given to using the cash in lieu option.
- vi. Ownership of the open space should be in the name of the party or parties maintaining it.
- vii. The maintenance of open space should be paid for by the communities/people that use that open space.

**Recommendations – Open Spaces**

- a. Rocky View County should complete an inventory of all open space/parks/municipal reserve under their ownership or control and determine the classification of the various types of open space (this recommendation is currently being carried out as part of the County's Open Spaces initiative).
- b. Rocky View County should prepare a report on the amount of funds in the cash in lieu of reserve account, set priorities for utilizing these funds, and develop a decision-making framework to meet those priorities.
- c. As part of its Open Spaces Review, Rocky View County should prepare a report on the function and type of open space in the County, establish criteria for where open space is desired, and specifically set out criteria for when cash in lieu of reserve is a preferred option for meeting the requirements of the Municipal Government Act.

## 9. Calgary Regional Partnership and Regional Planning

### a) Definition of Issue

The Calgary Regional Partnership (CRP) is a regional partnership of eighteen municipalities and one First Nation in the Calgary area. After years of inter-jurisdictional challenges these municipalities decided to undertake land-use planning within a regional partnership and in accordance with provincial expectations. The province recognized this partnership formally by stating the partnership plan would be adopted as a binding part of the provincial land-use framework.

The partnership encompassed the cities of Calgary and Airdrie; the towns of Banff, Black Diamond, Canmore, Chestermere, Cochrane, Crossfield, High River, Irricana, Nanton, Okotoks, Redwood Meadows, Strathmore and Turner Valley; the Village of Beiseker; and Tsuu T'ina First Nations. The region's rural municipalities of Bighorn (withdrew earlier from discussions), Foothills, Wheatland and Rocky View County formally withdrew from the partnership.

Rocky View County officially withdrew their support on June 19, 2009 and did not participate in the ratification of the partnership; citing several concerns in regards to committee Terms of Reference (specifically voting processes and member requirements). The Task Force explored the issue of how Rocky View County should move forward within the existing regional and provincial planning environment.

### b) Public Input

- i. The majority of respondents support the County's decision to withdraw from the Calgary Regional Partnership based on concerns with veto power to the City of Calgary and the voting structure on key issues.
- ii. A minority of respondents advocated for Rocky View to return to the CRP table and to embrace a spirit of regional cooperation.
- iii. Views regarding regional planning and Rocky View's involvement in the CRP varied depending on the area of the County being consulted.
- iv. A majority of residents expressed opposition to nodal development (urban-type density) in Rocky View County.
- v. Growth is inevitable, but needs to be managed in a proactive and balanced manner.
- vi. The change of "players" in the recent municipal elections may create a better environment for regional cooperation.

### c) Task Force Observations

- i. The provincial government has clearly stated its intention to require municipalities in the Calgary region to engage in regional planning initiatives. In the Capital Region, regional cooperation has been legislated via the formation of the Capital Region Board.
- ii. The CRP was a key driver of the "growth nodes" concept and the high urban density thresholds contained in the Growth Management Strategy. City of Calgary servicing of the proposed growth nodes hinged on adhering to high urban density thresholds.
- iii. If Rocky View County is to prosper in the future, it needs to hold onto its land base and resist urban annexations. It cannot continue to be a land-bank for its urban neighbours.
- iv. Projections have been made that the Calgary Region will have a population of 2.8 million people in 60-70 years. The Task Force is of the general opinion that these population projection numbers should be re-evaluated.

**Recommendations – Calgary Regional Partnership**

- a. Given the current framework of the CRP, the Task Force supports the stand taken by Rocky View County to withdraw from the partnership.
- b. Rocky View County should initiate a dialogue and cooperation with its rural counterparts in the region to form a “rural bloc” that could counter-act the unacceptable aspects of the current CRP and regional planning frameworks.
- c. Rocky View should only consider returning to the Calgary Regional Partnership table if the terms of reference are re-constituted to provide the necessary balance and weighting of votes to better protect Rocky View's interests and if there is some modification of the density requirements linked to the provision of urban servicing.

## 10. Natural Resources

### a) Definition of Issue

Rocky View County has gravel deposits in many areas of the County. The Calgary region is one of the best endowed in terms of gravel resources in North America. Gravel, in Alberta, is viewed as a surface resource, and, as such, its regulation lies with municipal governments. Gravel is an important resource for infrastructure development and maintenance. However, the siting of gravel extraction operations often creates controversy and friction with surrounding residential development. As gravel operations have been a flashpoint for controversy in some areas of the County, the Task Force considered the value and importance of these operations versus their impact on communities and infrastructure.

### b) Public Input

- i. In terms of the issues raised at the six community meetings, the gravel, and gravel revenue issue did not seem to be a high priority.
- ii. One speaker noted the importance of gravel to infrastructure and County operations.
- iii. Gravel companies want more specific policy guidance from the County on approvals for gravel operations. The Calahoo-Villeneuve Area Structure Plan in Sturgeon County was cited as an example of a plan that deals with groundwater, the quality of life in an extraction area, and contains provisions to minimize the impacts of sand and gravel extraction on neighbouring properties.
- iv. The Bearspaw Area Structure Plan provides policy guidance for the siting and approval of gravel operations.
- v. There are new and more stringent air quality guidelines emerging at the federal level for industrial activities such as gravel.

### c) Task Force Observations

- i. There is a need for more certainty around the approval and siting of gravel operations in the County.
- ii. If there is an existing Area Structure Plan that deals with gravel operations or other natural resource extraction, it should be given due consideration.
- iii. The municipal aggregate levy allows Rocky View County to collect \$.25 per tonne for gravel produced in a municipality.
- iv. Rocky View County should continue to work towards obtaining compensation from all types of industry (gravel operators, oil and gas operators etc.) to mitigate the impact of heavy industrial traffic on municipally-owned infrastructure.

### Recommendation – Natural Resources

Rocky View should develop a comprehensive plan and policy on how to deal with gravel resources in the County, the siting and approval of gravel operations, and the mitigation of impacts on surrounding land uses, groundwater resources and residents.

## G. Minority Positions of Task Force Members

### Liz Breakey (Division 1)

The Need for a Strategic Plan - A corporate entity, with assets of \$375,000,000 such as Rocky View County, cannot manage effectively for future growth without a plan. Concerns are as follows:

1. Advocacy of case-by-case subdivision, in absence of a Strategic Plan, will not protect watersheds, nor will it provide for financially sustainable infrastructure such as roads and schools.
2. Fragmentation of agricultural-zoned land into four parcels will result in ad hoc development and conflict with property rights of neighbouring parcels.
3. Non-advocacy of Alberta Land Stewardship Act and Conservation Easement tools, as an option for landowners, will cause discordance with the Province, the Region and adjacent Municipalities.
4. Through a modified Growth Management Strategy, the County can display planning leadership, in preservation of watersheds and working landscapes as well as in economic initiatives and core community values.

### Mike Edwards

The Task Force is charged with listening to the views of the people and bringing those views into a vision of the future for Rocky View Council. This is the primary job of the Task Force and should take precedence over the personal views of Task Force members. Much was learned. Observations:

1. A number of residents indicated that they chose to live in Rocky View or liked living in Rocky View. There is information about the way Rocky View is, here.
2. A number of stakeholders thought the population forecast underpinning the 50 year plan was too exuberant. In probability terms, it was an "outlier" – unlikely to occur. It is difficult to formulate an effective set of strategies around a basic premise that is fundamentally flawed. Therefore the whole exercise should be abandoned and another, with more realistic and acceptable premises, should be initiated. Fifty years is too long – within that time period, most of us will be dead.
3. Debt – The level of municipal debt, and its ten-fold or so increase in the past five or so years, was a frequently raised issue. It must be reported. It is not, however, the responsibility of the Task Force to explain how it was incurred or to attempt to justify its presence (as seems to occur in Section 6 – Financial Sustainability). Parts of the "Observations" portion of that section, to some extent, are Task Force "Opinion" – nothing more.
4. It was most unfortunate that a document entitled "Straight Talk About County Debt" was placed on every chair at the Springbank meeting (and made available at subsequent meetings). Views about Task Force independence and integrity were compromised in some people's minds from that point forward – despite the Chair's repeated statements about this document having nothing to do with the Task Force.

5. The need for buffer areas between incompatible land uses is recognized in the agricultural discussion. It should also be recognized as a component of good land use planning in the Industrial/Commercial and Natural Resources (i.e. Gravel) discussions.
6. When dealing with subdivision within an “estate planning” context, Rocky View needs to be cognizant of what may happen when the next generation wishes to do its “estate planning”?
7. Better information needed to be provided by staff respecting gravel production.

### **Pam Janzen**

Anytime a large group attempts to write a report there is no way everyone will walk away completely satisfied that his/her opinion has been expressed. While I can agree with a lot of the work presented in this report, I think what it fails to accurately capture is the public sentiment regarding a plan for growth. Our report seems to favour a continuation of the status quo style of development – which means ad hoc approvals, fragmentation of agricultural lands, and expensive infrastructure demands. Rocky View's Growth Management Strategy, as is now stands, is not widely accepted by the public, but, there is a desire for planning from many residents. This means not just restrictions on growth, but a plan to manage growth.

In addition, some of the Residential Growth recommendations in this report are drawn from input by Task Force members, not directed by what we heard from the Public. In hindsight, I wish we had asked the public for specific input on the issues of the subdivision of an undeveloped quarter or even larger parcels of land. Finally, concern for the environment was not an integral part of this process. A number of respondents brought the topic forth, but the Task Force did not pursue this area of concern.

### **Doug McIntosh**

I do not support the Planning Advisory Committees (PACs) the Task Force has recommended under Communications and Public Engagement. In my view, they have the ability to create biased feedback from non-elected persons.

The Cost of Services Study completed by Nichols Applied Management does not reflect what is taking place in current development applications. The data in this report should also be reviewed and confirmed if it is being used to make decisions.

### **Joe Zink**

I was quite impressed with the attendance and contributions of Rocky View residents at our six public engagement meetings. Their sincere interest in the welfare of our county was evident regardless of any political opinions. I have no reservations in endorsing the summary of public opinion that is presented in this report. For the most part I also support the ancillary observations compiled by the Task Force.

However, considering the overwhelming scientific evidence of climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions, I consider it the foremost imperative of every level of government to

take extreme measures to reduce the environmental impact of human activity. For our county this must include some limits to growth but there was no support for this view from the Task Force.

As a farmer, I am very much aware that any conventional agricultural activity is made much more difficult and unprofitable in those parts of Rocky View that have been settled with suburban development. I wanted to offer 'agricultural operators' economic alternatives that could allow them to continue their rural practices. However the majority view was that all the new citizens of Rocky View could offer is a share of forthcoming real estate opportunities. I regret that and respectfully disagreed.

## H. Appendix A - Task Force Terms of Reference

### TERMS OF REFERENCE



**ROCKY VIEW COUNTY**  
Cultivating Communities

	<b>Title:</b> The Reeve's Task Force on Growth Planning
<b>Committee Classification:</b>  Advisory	<b>Establishment:</b> July, 2010  Duration: 5 Months (Maximum)
<b>Authority:</b>  Council Resolution	<b>Adoption Date:</b>  July 6, 2010

#### Preamble:

Over the last number of years, growth pressures faced by municipalities within the Metropolitan Calgary Region have identified, among other things, points of friction at many different levels. Rocky View County is one of these municipalities. Factors that contribute to this include, but are not limited to, policy changes at the Provincial and Regional level, speed, diversity and complexity of development proposals, diverseness of community, changing demographics and expectations and of course, past practice. As a result, the County has identified the need to gain further insight into perspectives from within our own broader community relating to growth. *The Reeve's Task Force on Growth Planning* is intended to help accomplish this through the assistance of people who call Rocky View County home.

#### 1. Function and Responsibilities:

To consider matters related to growth and growth pressures faced by Rocky View County and potential associated impacts on community and community service delivery – all within a local, regional and sub-regional context. In fulfilling their mandate the Task Force will host at least three "Town Hall Meetings" to gather community input into issue identification and community perspectives related to growth. The Task Force shall prepare a final report to the Office of the Reeve outlining matters considered, findings and recommendations.

Specific matters to consider will be (but not necessarily limited to):

- a) Traditional Rocky View County growth vs. new trends in community planning.
- b) The County within the Calgary Regional context – what role should we play?
- c) Limits on growth – a good idea? If yes, how could/should limits be established? Can they be attained?
- d) Should the County strive for a development mix? (local/sub-regional)
- e) Market vs. community based planning.
- f) Open spaces – whose land is it anyway?
- g) Planning for growth or planning for annexation – are they one and the same?
- h) Services – what is the local mix and who pays?
- i) Infrastructure – (roads, water, sewer, trails, etc.)
- j) What does the community want?
- k) How does the County meet expectations?
- l) How does the County engage the community – and keep them engaged?

#### 2. Resource / Budget:

- The County will retain external support services to work with/for the Task Force to meet the objectives and timeline.

- County staff across all departments will be available upon request of the Task Force to act as a resource but will **not** actively participate in regular meetings.
- Other external resources which can be requested by the Task Force.
- Budget: \$85,000 (est.)

3. **Definitions:**

- None at this time.

4. **Membership:**

- Membership is limited to residents or business owners of Rocky View County.
- 17 individuals will be selected from a recommended list of Council that represents a broad cross section of interests from across the County.
- Selection will be made by the Reeve and Deputy Reeve.
- One member will be selected by the Reeve as Chair who will then preside over all meetings and agenda preparations.
- Decisions will be by a vote of those present. Any dissenting votes will also be recorded noting the nature of the objections.

5. **Officers**

- The Task Force will be administered through the CAO's office.
- Day to day activities will be supported through the Planning Policy Manager.

6. **Quorum:**

- Each meeting requires a minimum of 11 members including the Chair.
- For efficiency purposes the Task Force can form a maximum of 2 sub-committees to address any specific topic under consideration.
- Sub-committees must report back to the Task Force on their findings.

7. **Reporting:**

A final report will be prepared by the retained resource person, approved by the Task Force and signed by the Chair. The final report will be presented to the Reeve.

8. **Meetings:**

- At the first meeting of the Task Force a *Meeting Protocol* to guide the operation of meetings and also establish the collective expectations of each member will be developed and approved by the Task Force, signed by each member, and submitted to the Reeve for final endorsement.
- Meetings will be scheduled by the Task Force Chair.
- Location of the meetings will typically be at the County office and booked through the CAO's Executive Assistant.
- Town Hall Meetings must be in three different locations around the County.

**Committees created by Council to be signed by:**

  
Reeve / Deputy Reeve

  
Chief Administrative Officer

## **I. Background Information:**

A Backgrounder containing the summaries of all inputs to the Task Force has been prepared in electronic form as a companion to this report. The background information contains:

- a) A copy of the written questionnaire form
- b) A copy of the exit poll form (from the public engagement meetings)
- c) Summaries of what the Task Force heard at the public engagement meetings
- d) Tabulation of data from questionnaires submitted
- e) Copies of questionnaires submitted
- f) Summaries of written submissions submitted
- g) Copies of written submissions submitted
- h) Summary of exit poll data