



March 28, 2007

Report touts sustainability

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Scott Mitchell
 Echo Reporter
 Wednesday March 28, 2007

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Airdrie Echo — Help could be on the way for Airdrie and other Alberta municipalities if the minister's council on municipal sustainability (MCMS) has its druthers.

The council – comprising Calgary Mayor Dave Bronconnier, Edmonton Mayor Stephen Mandel, Alberta Urban Municipalities president Bob Hawkesworth and Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC) president Don Johnson – recently released its final report, which states: "Alberta's municipalities face significant funding shortfalls that threaten their ability to provide the infrastructure and services demanded by a rapidly growing economy and population."

This could mean additional funding for roads and anything else that has been affected by extreme growth in most municipalities over the last few years. The report also says the province and municipalities must strengthen partnerships in order to enhance long-term sustainability of municipal government.

Airdrie Mayor Linda Bruce sees the report as a step in the right direction.

"One of the ideas that I'm most intrigued by is supporting these regional agencies to deal with some of the regional planning issues," Bruce said.

As chair of the Calgary Regional Partnership, Bruce sees the problems the area is dealing with that extend far into the future. She believes the province should oversee some of the planning and development principles, pointing to the Calgary LRT system's possible expansion to Airdrie as an example.

"We all know at some point we have to connect certain things and transit is one of them," she said. "We have to start planning that now."

The report recommends the allocation of funding support for municipalities equivalent to the amount collected by the provincial government through the education property tax, which was approximately \$1.4 billion in 2006-07.

Extra money from the province would be welcomed with open arms, Bruce said.

"We could use a lot more money for policing," she said. "We're making sure our emergency services, in general, meet our growth. It is very difficult."

One of the concerns with the report is that the municipalities were not involved in the process, nor were they consulted.

"From a rural Alberta perspective, many of the recommendations within the MCMS report will require in-depth analysis and consultation with municipalities," Johnson said. "The fact that the majority of Alberta's municipalities have not been directly consulted with during the council's deliberations is a major concern for the Association. The AAMDC will concentrate its provincial advocacy efforts for this increased consultation over the next few months."

Bruce has seen an improvement with Premier Ed Stelmach's new government.

"I think they're new, they're energized and they want to make a difference. I'm just hoping they don't lose steam," she said.



Airdrie, AB

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