



Town Council

Sustainable Okotoks – What Now?

To the residents of Okotoks:

Our town is once again at a crossroads, where we as a community need to make a decision on the path we choose to travel. Today at 21,000 people, we are approaching our population cap with new forces at play in our region that have a number of implications on the future of our home.

In 1998, Okotoks made a decision about its future – one that capped population (approx. 30,000) at the licensed limits of the Sheep River aquifer. That decision was based on extensive public consultation, the high cost (a regional pipeline) of exceeding carrying capacity, and preservation of a small town atmosphere value system that was expressed in several community surveys.


The road Okotoks chose to travel was pragmatic, unique and daring – and about much more than just a population cap. Today, whether it's a more balanced tax base, broader housing choice, a composting sewage treatment plant, a reduction in water use or the Drake Landing solar neighbourhood, we can all be proud of our collective accomplishments to become 'better' not just 'bigger'. While we've had our challenges with meeting the demands of rapid growth and recent flood events, we've also received many accolades, including local, national and international awards. The sustainability torch we have carried with ambition and purpose has become an example used by others as a community to follow.

Our past can serve as a guidepost for the future, but it may or may not be the horizon we should move toward. Okotoks sits at an intersection created by our impending arrival at carrying capacity, rapid population growth and associated challenges in the Calgary Region, and consideration of our common future as residents in this Region. Three options present us with choices that will have a profound impact on the development direction and size of our community:

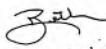
- We can adopt a regional land use framework currently being developed by the Calgary Regional Partnership that envisions potentially 80,000-100,000 people living in Okotoks within the next 50-75 years.
- We can maintain the status quo – capping population at carrying capacity of the Sheep River aquifer.
- We can modify Sustainable Okotoks to sit somewhere between status quo and a regional land use framework – a sub-regional option that would require changes to utility management, land use, and municipal working relationships within the Foothills Region.


Perhaps once a decade this important comes along – one that impacts future generations. Okotoks Council will therefore seek a mandate from the community by conducting an extensive public consultation program exploring the pros and cons of each option, starting with a series of weekly informational articles in the Western Wheel to help you gather your own thoughts about Okotoks' future. For additional information, resident feedback, and details of the upcoming public consultation process please visit www.okotoks.ca and "click" on "Sustainable Okotoks".

We're confident that with your help and input, our path forward can be as ambitious as the path we have traveled. We look forward to hearing from you.



Mayor Bill McAlpine



Councillor Stephen Clark


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Sustainable Okotoks – What Now?

To the residents of Okotoks:

'Bigger and More Regional' Council Considers the 1st of 3 Development Options for Okotoks

The year is 2070. There is between 80,000 and 100,000 people living in Okotoks – and 3 million in the Calgary Region. This is the future envisioned by a draft of a Regional Land Use Plan (RLUP) being created by the Calgary Regional Partnership (19 municipal members). What's driving the plan? Topping the list are: rapid population growth; a desire to modify the commuting pattern to reduce climate change; the natural friction that occurs as municipalities grow closer to each other; and discussion of regional services that may be more economical or offer quality of life advantages.

The RLUP focuses on population intensification in existing urban communities in an effort to restrict development on environmentally sensitive lands and to economize regional service provision.

Key implications for Okotoks could include:

- the principle of living within the carrying capacity of the Sheep River aquifer is removed
- perception of compromised small town atmosphere/social structure
- regional utility and transit services being provided
- expanded sphere of influence for Okotoks in the region
- potential for more local employment
- solidification of a regional service centre role
- some loss of independence and autonomy for decision making
- a possible taxpayer burden attached to regional servicing


Urban growth would expand significantly around the current growth boundary and urban areas would be denser than current development patterns.


Sustainable Okotoks was created as a legacy for our children and grandchildren. Within a regional plan it may be possible to offer the potential to expand the legacy to the region's children and grandchildren. We may therefore collectively choose to further negotiate for sustainability policies that we consider to be important (e.g. while requiring a regional water supply, other environmental sustainability aspects could be maintained at a larger scale).


This RLUP and the anticipated regional growth are the catalysts for our requirement to make a decision about Okotoks' future – whether we pursue this direction or not and will need to be ratified in the Spring of 2009 pending further consultation and input from the member municipalities.


Be in the know ... so we can choose wisely now:
For more information on this matter see - www.okotoks.ca/sustainableokotoks where previous letters to residents, links to the Calgary Regional Partnership, etc. can be found.

Stay tuned for next week's article: **Development Option #2 – The Status Quo**



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

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Town Council

Sustainable Okotoks – What Now?

To the residents of Okotoks:

Sustainable Okotoks (The Status Quo) Council Considers the 2nd of 3 Development Options for Okotoks

This option considers history to be a guide for the future. A community survey in 1997 articulated a strong set of community values. The limits of the Sheep River were well known. The cost to exceed carrying capacity was going to be significant. People wanted to be more than Anywhere, Alberta – to find community life that was vibrant, distinct, and quality of life driven. The translation of these desires was Sustainable Okotoks - a balanced approach to development that recognized trade-offs between environmental stewardship, economic opportunity, social conscience, and fiscal responsibility - and a community that saw the world through the eyes of its children and grandchildren.

Key principles included: growth to, but not beyond carrying capacity of the Sheep River (approx. 30,000 residents); an urban boundary at carrying capacity; no developer over-sizing of infrastructure to service beyond carrying capacity; density targets for new development; three key planning documents emphasizing sustainability; urban design to reduce car use and improve social connectivity; and diverse and extensive action – from recycling to heritage preservation.

Over the years, support for a population limit based on carrying capacity has continued to be strongly supported in community surveys: 75% in 1998; 84% in 2000; and 73% in 2006.

Today, at 21,000 people, we are quickly approaching our population cap with new forces at play in our Region which have a number of implications if we maintain the status quo and do indeed cap our population:

- the cost of regional utilities is avoided
- the population will age and facilities (including schools) may have to adjust their function
- while independent decision making is maintained we lose influence in the Region as our proportionate population decreases
- the community remains highly desirable due to local sustainability initiatives, local amenities and strong social connectivity
- there is some modest employment growth as industrial lands are built out
- the tax situation is affordable and sustainable

Two critical issues are the acceleration of growth around our borders – including the potential stressing of the watershed given the independence of acreage utilities and intensification of development upstream.

Be in the know ... so we can choose wisely now:

For more information on this matter see - www.okotoks.ca/sustainableokotoks where previous letters to residents, resident feedback and links to the Municipal Development Plan that is the framework for Sustainable Okotoks, etc.

Stay tuned for next week's article: Development Option #3 – Sustainable Okotoks - Tweaked

Regards,

Mayor Bill McAlpine

Councillor Naydene Lewis

Councillor Stephen Clark

Councillor Bill Robertson

Councillor Beth Kish

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Councillor Ralph Wilson



Town Council

Sustainable Okotoks – What Now?

To the residents of Okotoks:

'Sustainable Okotoks – Tweaked' Council Considers the 3rd of 3 Development Options for Okotoks

You're sitting at the stop light and start to think about the future of Okotoks. The status quo – the finite growth model – is the red light. A regional land use plan – a full growth option – is the green light. The subject of this article is the yellow light – the measured growth option.

As a Council we've wondered if there is a way to acknowledge the changing world and region we live in while adhering to long-established, well-supported sustainability principles in Okotoks. Enter a novel concept – a development model we call 'The Foothills Watershed Sub-Region' that has a central philosophy: we can, as Foothills communities (Okotoks, High River, Black Diamond, Turner Valley, M.D. of Foothills), band together to create autonomy we might not have as much of under a regional plan, while maintaining a principle of growth to but not beyond carrying capacity that includes the Sheep and Highwood River watersheds.

This model has several key features:

- A Foothills Region utility infrastructure co-managed by the Foothills communities
- Additional water licensing for the sub-region negotiated with the City of Calgary and the Province of Alberta
- The creation of a Foothills Region Plan framework to address commercial, transportation, residential, recreation, and infrastructure (e.g. firefighting/pipeline) service needs while maintaining individual decision making autonomy.

This scenario offers a number of trade-offs that generate 'wins' for multiple interests in the Foothills Region, including:

- accommodation of modest population growth in the Foothills Region, including Okotoks; addressing of servicing issues in the Aldersyde corridor to create a significant employment centre
- identification and preservation of environmentally sensitive lands
- addressing urban-rural interface challenges; an orderly and attractive development pattern; general improvement and extension of utility infrastructure.

It is envisioned under this scenario that Okotoks would have a population of 40,000 to 45,000 people by 2050.

Is this road challenging? Sure it is. Negotiations with our neighbouring communities may encounter road bumps. But Council is prepared to advocate this option because we believe it best represents the highest hopes and aspirations of our residents. This option may appeal to Foothills Region residents compared to alternatives, and will still work well with a regional land use framework and broader Calgary Region considerations.

Be in the know ... so we can choose wisely now:

For more details about the 3 options and to provide feedback, visit www.okotoks.ca/sustainableokotoks

Regards,

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Sustainable Okotoks – What Now?

To the residents of Okotoks:

'Our Choice – Our Future' Public Consultation Process to Determine Okotoks' Direction

It's been said that the future isn't something we enter, it's something we create. It's a philosophy that has guided the spirit of Okotoks' municipal decision makers for the last decade. We have presented some articles in recent weeks to talk about a choice we need to make that will fundamentally influence our common future, and the three options we feel best represent a range of alternatives for Okotoks.

We will be initiating a public consultation process with full belief in the value of honest conversation about the pros and cons of choices, and the generation of a mandate for Council based on a preference indicated by the community.

We want to advise you of the following opportunities to become informed about Okotoks' development options, and to voice your opinion:

- Information about development options are at: www.okotoks.ca/sustainableokotoks along with an online 'Sustainable Okotoks – What Now?' comment & discussion forum
- A Calgary Regional Partnership presentation regarding the regional land use framework (requested for late January/early February 2009)
- February 11 and 17, 2009 public information sessions to summarize and present all options and information to date, answer resident's questions and gather feedback
- March 4, 2009 - a household survey that will allow residents to make a choice regarding a preferred development option.
- June, 2009 - feedback regarding Town direction provided to the Calgary Regional Partnership
- a revision process for the Municipal Development Plan, Intermunicipal Development Plan, and Land Use Bylaw will begin.

It's critical for our community to remember that while this process generates a decision about our community's future size, Okotoks has 12 years of internationally acclaimed effort under its belt, **implementing more than 100 sustainability initiatives**. In other words, the population cap is just one component of a very broad initiative that as a community have worked very hard at over past decade. In tandem with dialogue about Okotoks' development direction, Council is committed to working with the community to strengthen an already ambitious sustainability mandate.

Let us walk together with purpose, and resolve – and together lay an ambitious new set of stepping stones that will guide our way forward. We encourage you to plan to attend one of the public information sessions to help you make an informed decision about our community's future.

Regards,

Bill
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Councillor Naydene Lewis

Stephen
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Beth
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