



Office of the Reeve

October 6, 2020

The Honourable Tracy Allard
Minister of Municipal Affairs
132 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue NW
Edmonton, AV T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Allard,

Re: Congratulations and Request for Meeting

On behalf of Wheatland County, I am delighted to congratulate you on your appointment as Minister of Municipal Affairs. Wheatland County Council looks forward to a constructive and collaborative working relationship with you.

I am writing to request a meeting to discuss our concerns with the Calgary Metropolitan Regional Board (CMRB). Wheatland County recognizes the importance of collaboration and is committed to working together with our regional neighbours. However, the CMRB represents an undemocratic fourth level of government imposed upon rural municipalities, our ratepayers, and our developers. It has added red tape, which has resulted in stifling economic freedom and power to dictate where development takes place. Quite simply, it takes away autonomy from rural municipalities. Furthermore, we believe the CMRB contravenes the mandate of the Board under the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board Regulation section 3(1)(e).

A thriving Alberta is directly related to thriving municipalities, and Wheatland County is committed to doing our part in building a strong, economically viable Alberta. We continue to invest in strategic infrastructure to support investment attraction. We constantly review processes to ensure we are fostering a pro-development regulatory environment.

We also recognize the fiscal realities that all levels of government are facing and that difficult decisions will need to be made in order to stay sustainable. While CMRB funding may not be a substantial part of the provincial budget we are going to need to review every dollar we are spending and analyze where we can find efficiencies. Our Council has been doing this and is firmly committed to fiscal responsibility as we steward tax dollars and focus on keeping taxes as low as possible. Wheatland County incurs substantial costs through our involvement in the CMRB, spending that demonstrates no return on investment to our taxpayers.

Wheatland County and its' rural neighbours are hoping that a solution is forthcoming that will eliminate the additional red tape imposed by the CMRB, and increase economic development potential in the Calgary Metropolitan Region of Wheatland County. The appendix to this letter outlines some of the concerns from Wheatland County and our rural neighbours in the Calgary Metropolitan Region (CMR) for your review.

We look forward to working alongside you and your government in achieving our common goals of strengthening Alberta's economy and bringing jobs back to our province. Essential components of this economic success include a reduction of red tape and democratic accountability to voters. We implore you to consider how the CMRB impacts the economics of Alberta, and to reconsider the boundaries of the Calgary Metropolitan Region and mandatory participation of Wheatland County in the CMRB. We are looking forward to our discussions surrounding this issue, as well as the exciting developments taking place in Wheatland County.

Sincerely,

Amber Link
Reeve – Wheatland County

Cc: Wheatland County Council
Jonathan Koehli, Chief of Staff, Office of the Minister
Brian Henderson, Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix A: Wheatland County - Calgary Metropolitan Regional Board (CMRB) Concerns

1. The governance structure of the CMRB has given Calgary a veto over County statutory plans (all CMRB decisions require the City of Calgary's support due to the double-majority voting model), which is why rural municipalities left the Calgary Regional Partnership in 2009.
2. The City of Calgary has a recent history of appealing various development plans that have raised concerns with rural neighbours.
 - a. The City of Calgary no longer needs to launch appeals but can block all new statutory plans through the CMRB's Regional Evaluation Framework process.
3. The CMRB constitutes forced regionalization, where Calgary and other urban municipalities attempt to control and limit development outside of urban boundaries. This approach assumes that limiting development in rural areas will force businesses to locate in urban centres. However, it is just as likely that this bureaucratic approach will drive businesses out of the region altogether.
4. The CMRB presents an increase in red tape and create uncertainty for investors because:
 - a. Area Structure Plans and other statutory plans must now be approved by both the local municipality and the CMRB, consisting of ten member municipalities. This increases investor uncertainty due to the political nature of the CMRB.
 - b. For non-controversial (rubber-stamp) approvals, the Regional Evaluation Framework process adds a minimum of 58 days to the process. For approvals which are disputed, the CMRB adds upward of 96 days to the process. This may be extended greatly once a dispute resolution mechanism for CMRB decisions is added.
 - c. Member municipalities face significant costs to comply with CMRB requirements. The County has seen little to no return on investment from the CMRB and has spent upwards of \$140,000.00 of its' staff time in 2019 on CMRB efforts. In 2018, the County spent upwards of \$100,000.00 of staff time towards the same organization. To put this into perspective, this is a \$262.00 expense to the approximately 897 residents that live in the zone, or a \$26.75 cost for each of the 8,788 residents of Wheatland County; most of them not living within the CMR zone. The CMRB itself received \$2 million annually from the Government of Alberta.
5. Alberta is experiencing economic uncertainty, including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We cannot risk driving investment away due to centralized control mechanisms, fear of competition, and bureaucratic red tape.

Alternative Regional Collaboration Mechanisms

There is common consensus amongst our rural municipal partners currently in the CMR zone on tools for regional collaboration that are currently established that assist in facilitating intermunicipal dialogue. Intermunicipal Development Plans (land use), Intermunicipal Collaboration Frameworks (shared services), routine circulations of planning documents to neighbours for comment throughout the planning process, and the Municipal Government Board (MGB). The MGB has historically provided a useful mechanism for resolving intermunicipal disputes with respect to land-use planning in an impartial, apolitical manner.