

Just What Does Sustainable Development Really Mean?

By Rocky View Forward

Sustainable development has become a catch phrase – many who say they support “sustainable development” frequently provide no context or explanation. What do they really mean? To decide between candidates in the upcoming Rocky View election, knowing the answer to that question is critical if we are going to elect a council that truly represents residents’ interests.

To date, the County’s dartboard approach to development has resulted in more fragmented development than would have occurred if past councils had put a higher priority on development that was orderly and environmentally and fiscally responsible. Instead, residents have been left with many groundwater and stormwater problems.

Is development consistent with reasonable growth expectations?

Growth in Rocky View doesn’t just magically happen. It comes from the County’s share of regional and provincial growth, or it comes from grabbing market share from our neighbours. Dramatically accelerating growth almost always comes with a large price tag – there is a cost to “buying” market share.

Rocky View accounts for roughly 3% of the region’s population and is expected to maintain that share over the foreseeable future. That will require housing for about 800 new residents each year over the next decade – that’s 300 new homes per year, a number never reached during this council’s term.

In contrast, this council has approved many times that number. Just a few examples include 1,000 additional homes in Springbank’s Harmony, 1,100 in the Langdon’s Painted Sky community, 1,000 in West Balzac, and over 1,200 in Cochrane Lakes & Cochrane North. This doesn’t include the thousands of homes not yet built in developments approved by earlier councils.

Does development pay its own way?

Sustainable development ensures that new development pays 100% of its incremental costs. Existing ratepayers should not subsidize development through general tax revenue. Unfortunately, if Rocky View’s growth is going to match the level of development approved by the current council, it will have to be subsidized – how else will the County grow much faster than is forecasted?

There are innumerable examples of the County now having to spend ratepayers’ dollars to fix problems caused by earlier development not paying its way. For example, fixing all the stormwater problems in Bearspaw will cost tens of millions of dollars – this should have been dealt with by the developers when the communities were built. Ratepayers effectively subsidized initial developers – the exact

opposite of sustainable development. We can’t rewrite the past, but we can stop making the same mistakes moving forward.

What impact do new developments have on existing communities?

Sustainable development does not negatively affect existing communities – it strengthens them. Unfortunately, the majority on Rocky View’s current council has flagrantly refused to acknowledge the importance of impacts on existing communities when it considers development applications. They have repeatedly approved developments against unanimous or near unanimous opposition from affected residents. This isn’t a NIMBY issue – it is an issue of whether proposals follow policy and are consistent with the existing communities.

To approve commercial / light industrial development at the entranceway to the Cambridge Park community in Conrich, Jerry Gautreau led the council majority (Kim McKylor, Al Schule, Greg Boehlke, and Dan Henn) in bending the rules. Despite overwhelming local opposition, only Crystal Kissel, Samantha Wright, and Kevin Hanson supported the residents in opposing the application.

The same council majority approved the Ascension project in Bearspaw. Commercial and residential traffic from that development will overwhelm the long-established neighbouring country residential communities.

Can the development be effectively serviced?

Economical and environmentally-sensitive servicing is another key component of sustainable development. Inadequate servicing has serious detrimental environmental impacts and ends up costing ratepayers in the long run. This reality has surfaced repeatedly in Rocky View.

The importance of effective servicing was ignored in the revised South Springbank Area Structure Plan which proposed a full build-out population of 14,600 with no wastewater servicing beyond communal septic systems. Again, only Hanson, Kissel and Wright voted against the South Springbank ASP. In contrast, the council majority turned a blind eye to Springbank’s existing ground water problems. As noted above, we can’t change history, but we can avoid repeating it.

The majority on our current council have failed miserably on any measure of sustainable development. So, if a candidate talks about sustainable or responsible development, be sure to ask them what they actually mean.

ROCKY VIEW NEEDS CHANGE

We need to get County debt under control

Why Should You Care?

Because until that happens, ratepayers – you and me – are on the hook.

Rocky View’s long-term debt is \$1,197 per person – up from \$347 per person 15 years ago.

Future development in East Balzac must generate \$91 million in off-site levies for Rocky View to recoup the investment made in the early 2000s (plus the interest that has accumulated while past development hasn’t paid its share).

This Council made things worse by borrowing another \$20 million and taking \$12 million from ratepayer’s rainy-day fund (the Tax Stabilization Reserve) – all to finance “investments” in water/wastewater infrastructure with no coherent payback plan.

We deserve better.

Get Informed – Vote!

The election is October 18th
Together we can make a difference!

Rocky View Forward – your grassroots’ residents’ advocacy group
www.rockyviewforward.com