

Mayor Stephen Mandel
Comments to Council re ACRA
September 12, 2006
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Last week I went to ACRA to make a proposal that would reform the way we make decisions together about Growth and about sharing infrastructure costs.

- As you have seen reported in the press, we have a debate ahead of us.
- I want to report to you on what I said, and what the reaction was.
- I told them that the context is about growth
- We all see the boom around us. We all know the urgency is there.

I told them what is at stake

- The oil companies go to Fort McMurray because that's where the oil is. But why would they come to the Edmonton region? Why are we so sure that our region will be the place for value added upgrading and refining – when it could just as easily take place in Chicago, or Houston or Toronto where infrastructure, and more importantly, potential employees are already in place?
- We not only want to secure this value added industry but we want to see other spin off industry take root here on a scale that will transform our resource-based economy into one of North America's leading manufacturing hubs. It's a picture of a future that is possible if we do our part.
- That means putting in place the electricity, water, waste management, roads, public transit and environmental systems to service business. **And** green spaces, recreation and cultural facilities, schools and hospitals that make families want to live in a community, not just work.

I pointed out what's wrong with the current situation

- To do it, we have to think much more regionally and have answers to the problems that are growing around us:
 - How are we going to deal with the gridlock on our roads?
 - How are we going to meet the enormous water needs of 8 new upgraders without using too much of a valuable water resource?
 - How do we to collect and dispose of the CO2 gases this level of industrial activity will generate?
 - How are we going to manage solid waste and waste water?
 - How are we going to work with business to attract the tens of thousands of new people this scale of business needs to attract?
 - When new people get here....where will their children go to school?
 - How can we pay for all these things?

- And how do we convince our existing residents that this scale of development will not be too much?
- We have too few answers for too many good questions. And we are running out of time to get ahead of these issues.

I argued that ACRA had drifted from the Hyndman report

- It recommended that we create a growth management plan. It concluded that cost and revenue sharing arrangements were essential in the region, and that we address inter-municipal spillover costs.
- It recommended that we strengthen and formalize decision-making on a regional basis – including a new voting formula that allows formal votes where consensus is not possible.
- But we have failed in the follow-through.
- ACRA was supposed to bring us together – but it's become a barrier instead.
- I set out three proposals to get us back on track:
 1. A real solution to the challenges of growth, in the form of a regional growth management plan
 2. A formula to ensure that there is a fair share of the costs and benefits of growth
 3. A voting mechanism that will allow us to make decisions and get things done

I explained that there was a clear choice between our proposal and the status quo proposal put forward by the counties

- It would create a new regional growth plan. The status quo approach would bring together a collection of local plans – and propose some sort of dispute resolution approach where they conflict. It's not an acceptable way to deal with a \$30 Billion boom.
- The new approach would create a true revenue sharing mechanism to ensure all communities get a fair share of the benefits and costs of growth. The status quo is silent on this crucial issue.
- ACRA would make real decisions with the new approach. The status quo proposal leaves the consensus model in place. With all due respect, there are decisions that need to be made for the good of the entire region. We cannot defer every decision just because we cannot find 100% agreement.

I also underscored several key points that would not change.

- First, it would keep control of local planning at the municipal level. If we don't get on with planning our own future, the province may have to do it for us. If we show leadership now, we can keep that from happening.
- Second, it would keep control of local communities in the hands of local councils. A regional growth plan would be a strategic level plan – not an exercise in micromanagement.

I stressed that Edmonton is not interested in amalgamation.

- Not region wide. Not with its immediate neighbours.

Basically, I heard four arguments back from

- Strathcona,
- Sturgeon,
- Town of Redwater and
- the City of Fort Saskatchewan
- (Parkland did not voice a position as the Reeve was representing ACRA as the chair but clearly would have sided with these four)

1. ACRA is working just fine as it currently is composed.
2. The City is only interested in the money they will get from the region.
3. The City is only interested in the power that will come by changing the current consensus model in ACRA
4. The City is ignorant about the facts with respect to the current planning that is going on in the region (the Counties).

Our position on each of the above:

1. ACRA is working just fine as it currently is composed
 - I think we all know ACRA is not working.
 - Unfortunately ACRA is just a debating society.
 - There is no true regional perspective in planning.
 - Essentially each municipality is doing its own planning.
 - That's no way to plan for a boom.
 - There is no revenue sharing
2. The City is only interested in the money they will get from the region.
 - I have been totally clear on this: We don't need their money. We are prepared to share in the costs of growth.
 - Period.

3. The City is only interested in the power that will come by changing the current consensus model in ACRA
 - Again, this is not about power.
 - It's about making decisions from a regional perspective.
 - We have to start acting like we have a common purpose.

4. The City is ignorant about the facts with respect to the current planning that is going on in the region (the Counties).
 - There is plenty of good planning that is currently taking place in municipalities.
 - The facts are that the region is not planning together.

We have a lot of support out there.

- I spoke with many colleagues (list where appropriate)
- I am hopeful that they will agree
- If not we will have to consider other options.
- In the meantime we have to keep making our case for actual regional planning and resource sharing.

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