

Spruce Grove Rotary Club
Thursday, November 23, 2006 at 12:45pm
Mayor Mandel Speaking Notes
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you for inviting me here today.

Insert personal greetings if required

(Mayors Kobasiuk, Donna Cowen and hopefully Ken Scott will be in attendance)

Regional Relationships are getting a lot of attention these days.

And I appreciate your interest in these issues as well as the invitation to come to Spruce Grove to discuss the state of the region.

For those of you who have followed the press recently, it may not be surprising to hear me say that our region is a little bit like a dysfunctional family sitting down to Thanksgiving dinner.

There are so many big issues bubbling below the surface, but in order to keep up appearances, but the conversation is all about the weather.

Well, we've spent way too much time talking about the weather in this region.

And given what's on the table, it's time to expand our repertoire.

For local Mayors, like me and my regional colleagues in the room today, the challenge is in being able to balance local interest and regional interest at the same time.

It looks tough on the surface but in truth, we only really need to keep one thing in mind;

It is in the best interest of our citizens, whether in Edmonton, Spruce Grove, Stony Plain or Leduc, if we all live in a region where everybody has a fair share of the costs and benefits of growth and opportunity in the region.

I for one have been grateful for the opportunity that this new discussion has brought, as clumsy as it may occasionally seem.

Because there's a lot at stake. We're looking at literally doubling the industrial base of our region in the next 15 years. Population forecasts have us growing by almost 40% region-wide by 2026.

That's an incredible amount of growth and it's the most fortunate situation possible.....but only if we manage it well.

We are all seeing the symptoms of growth in our region – rising house prices, rising social costs, increased crime, and congested streets.

And we all know how stretched municipalities all across Alberta are.

And while there is much that needs to be dealt with in terms of infrastructure deficits and how municipalities are funded by the province, there is so much that is within our power to change.

Now there is no question that tackling these issues will change some things about how we function.

But we are **not** a status quo kind of place.

Change has to occur to the way some things work in this region, but it does not – and is not designed to - change the fact that many issues are local and are best dealt with locally.

This just makes sense, and it's never been a point that I or my Council have questioned.

One of the early frustrations I've had with this issue is in hearing that my city is using regional dysfunction to make a power play. That we've got one of those infamous "hidden agendas", when we've probably never been more clear.

I think it's a convenient distraction for those who don't want to see change occur to use this accusation as cover.

I'm hopeful that by continuing to deal with my regional colleagues honestly and directly and by engaging citizens like you in this discussion that we can move forward.

And here's what needs to be discussed.

We all know that in between jurisdictions there is overlap. We know that Spruce Grove's issues impact Edmonton and Edmonton's impact Spruce Grove. Many of your citizens live here but work in Edmonton, or vice versa.

We know that some issues transcend local focus. They cross borders and jurisdictions and impact people all across the region.

But because there is no formal mechanism to compel us to work together on these issues, they fall between the cracks, and are addressed by a piecemeal approach.

We each act individually on all issues creating repetition and inefficiency and competitiveness.

So when we start to look at the growth and the opportunity that we are facing, and people ask if we are planning to manage that growth we can say:

“Yes – we have 23 plans”

“We have 23 different approaches to air, land and water quality.”

We have 23 different workforce attraction strategies

23 different transportation strategies and priorities

23 different efforts to attract new businesses into our communities – often away from our closest neighbours.

23 different sets of priorities for infrastructure

23 different decision-making bodies

23 municipalities individually making their way to the province, hoping the Legislature will bail us out of our problems – and when the Province does step up for this region, the money is divided 23 different ways.

There has to be a better way.

Because in five years, or maybe in 10, or maybe much sooner, we'll have to answer to our citizens about how well our 23 plans worked out, and about what we've done with this time of good fortune.

Remember the bumper sticker? The one from just after the last time, that said *“God grant me another oil boom; I promise I won't [bleep] it away this time.”*

Well, what's the next bumper sticker going to say?

With 23 different approaches it's not hard to imagine the outcome.

Or can we be smart enough this time, to apply some creative thinking, some foresight and some smart investments today, to ensure that this growth is sustainable for the long-term?

Boom times are great – but growth needs to be managed.

We all need to be proactive about opportunities and challenges of sustained growth.

There's a lot at stake and we have a lot to gain in doing things right.

From a planning and growth perspective we need to ask:

- How much the quality of regional infrastructure does provided matter in attracting and retaining business?
- Does the way we plan impact your daily lives? What about how much you'll pay for your next house? Or whether your children can afford their first?
- Are parks and facilities, arts and culture just "nice to have" or do they make a difference to the young talent we are trying to attract to help drive new economic growth?

Every community in this region needs to strike natural balances.

People won't live where there isn't work,

But they also won't stay if the place where they work offers no meaningful life.

Some of those questions can be answered at the local level

But to find the answers for many of these issues we need search beyond simple local answers.

That is common sense.

But it's sad to admit, that politics is not always a safe haven for common sense.

And in this region, where 23 different Councils have to be involved in every issue of regional significance, politics stalls progress far too often.

If we set our goals, and plan for our futures at a completely different pace than our neighbours – and completely apart from each other, then we will not be ready for the kind of impact that comes from that kind of intensive development

We have to do better.

To manage conditions to ensure that the growth does come here and that these major projects don't find other, more favourable environments to locate in.

Remember the bumper sticker?

Well there's an alternative to that.

Our City has proposed, and I am pleased to say with the support of many of our regional partners, three basic steps to get us started in a new direction;

We've asked that we get to work on a Regional Growth Management Plan – not that we just compile 23 plans in a single document – but that we all be part of a common plan for our region that starts from a macro view of the region as a whole and decides how we're going to deliver programs and services across our entire region for the long-term.

Doing this means we can think properly about things like:

- how to move people from Spruce Grove to work at upgraders in Sturgeon; or
- how to use grey water from the Edmonton system in upgraders so that the drain on water right out of the river is lessened;
- or how we can extend Edmonton's light-rail transit not only to Spruce Grove but to the airport, or Beaumont, or into Sherwood Park;
- And how we'll manage the environment so that by doubling the amount of industry in the region does not diminish the quality of our natural resources and quality of life;
- and how we'll move goods and people from all parts of the region to where the work is;

That's what a real growth management plan will accomplish.

We've also asked that we develop a revenue-sharing arrangement for the entire region that will help to balance the costs and benefits of growth – not that we just run to the Province and ask them to solve our money issues, but that we look at all the money on the table that will come from growth and decide how it can pay for all the work needed across the Region on an ongoing basis.

And let me tell you one thing I do understand about such a model – as the biggest player with the biggest budget, Edmonton will always pay the biggest share.

And finally we've asked that we give these efforts some real teeth by empowering a new governance structure that does not rely on 100% agreement to move every single thing forward. There is no effective structure in any democratic region anywhere that operates on consensus.

And let's look at what we're really talking about. We're asking the Edmonton Region to finally join every other major municipal area in the country in deciding on some formal mechanisms to work together in a regional interest. Vancouver, Calgary, Halifax, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal – every other major Canadian jurisdiction has found a way.

And we can too.

Our solution has to suit the unique nature of our region – but every other municipal area has found a way to work across local interests and bring a greater level of efficiency and effectiveness to their areas.

And we can too.

And there is so much opportunity to do so.

Each community in this region benefits from growth and each feels its impact. We are so interdependent one part of our region simply cannot succeed if another is failing.

But if we establish a fair share framework for our region, then we can make some really important progress and we can build some really important success for our entire region.

And just imagine how well we can all succeed if we do.

Here are just a few pieces of the vision we can see:

Imagine our northeast as one of the world's leading petrochemical developments with important refining and value-added manufacturing capacity built into our Region to the benefit of Alberta as a whole. I'm not talking about just a few upgraders, but actual spin-off petrochemical-based manufacturing. I'm talking

about an energy industry that does not just export its most valued resource outside of our border bit by bit by bitumen.

And imagine Leduc and Leduc County which have developed excellence in agricultural value-added manufacturing and research as well as manufacturing in support of our energy industry. Imagine if we actually made an effort to link this area to activities in Parkland and Sturgeon, and built the infrastructure needed to flow people and goods efficiently throughout our region – imagine how much more they could do.

And imagine Parkland County and Spruce Grove and Stony Plain which are directly in the path of what is going to be the most important future trade route in our country – the port of Prince Rupert and its link to China. There is so much potential to expand the role we play as a central manufacturing, transportation and logistics hub – that again will build upon the incredible potential of the region's whole manufacturing sector – and move our region's goods to the growing Chinese market, and all around the world. Imagine if we built the infrastructure necessary link all of our regions transportation assets into a hub right here. Imagine how integral this area would be to everything happening in this region.

And imagine Edmonton as the health, research and education capital of western Canada – the world-leading institutions that sit within our boundary, with the assets that will empower our youth for generations, attracting talent, and sparking innovation in TEC Edmonton or the National Institute for Nanotechnology that our next generation economy will be built upon.

These are achievable goals we should all share.

But we have to share challenges too. Homeless persons may congregate in Edmonton but our entire region has a homeless problem.

Crime may spike on Whyte Avenue, but young people from across the region head there every Saturday night to party.

We all have a stake in seeing each other succeed, in sharing issues and challenges and in building common solutions.

There is a greater good.

And we have been putting a lot of thought and effort into our efforts to transcend local interest and find meaningful, regional solutions on the bigger issues.

And it may be ironic, but one of the important steps our Council felt we had to take to advance the cause of the region, was to leave the Alberta Capital Region Alliance.

It was a very loose coalition between the 23 municipalities in the region – one that has never really faced up to the challenges we are all facing. One where consensus stalled every single good idea.

In our view, ACRA had become a status quo organization. And the status quo is not enough for a dynamic, aggressively developing region.

My colleagues in other municipalities will make their own decisions about ACRA – it's not for me to say, but from our perspective, we've moved on.

We took a risk in taking this action because the stakes are so high, we had no choice.

Our citizens know what's at stake and they are waiting for us all to get together and deliver.

There has to be a way to bridge differences and start to build stronger regional structures into our community, without sacrificing the local character of our distinct communities.

Because the risk of erosion of our overall quality of life by poorly managed growth is something that should bring us all together.

If we won't manage growth, it will manage us, and each of us will be out there alone to face each new crisis that comes.

We need to find a balance between that which represents each of us, and that which benefits all of us.

And in doing so, we can all enjoy the benefits of foresight and good planning.

Through finding and achieving that balance we will begin to find a way forward.

Thank you.