

January 24, 2017

The Honorable Danielle Larivee
Minister of Municipal Affairs
204 Legislature Building
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Edmonton, AB
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VIA EMAIL

Email to: minister.municipalaffairs@gov.ab.ca

Subject: Growth Management Board (GMB) Regulation Discussion Guide

Minister Larivee:

Thank you once again for meeting with the Capital Region Board on December 8, 2016, to provide an update on the proposed revisions to the Board's mandate and membership.

Per the discussion guide that was released later that day, please consider this letter Sturgeon County's official response to the proposal. At a high-level, we wish to see the Growth Management Board for the Edmonton Metropolitan Region succeed, given the increased demand for services and infrastructure based on our population growth, inherent pressure on our natural and built environments, and increased opportunities for economic prosperity within the Edmonton Metropolitan Region. To ensure this, the Board must respond to the needs of its members to the fullest and most equitable extent possible.

The proposal in the discussion guideline provides a good foundation for this, but some further refinement is necessary. Please consider our comments as potential solutions; Sturgeon County Council looks forward to working with the Government in the coming months to further refine the Regulation, as does our Administration in the development of the draft in the coming weeks, through participation on the Working Committee led by your Ministry.

Mandate

Sturgeon County is supportive of the revised mandate, but suggests that geospatial services should be removed, given the membership reduction to 13 (we each maintain our own GIS staff and have administrative working groups outside of the GMB), and since municipalities within the region partner on these matters outside of the GMB already. Keeping this a part of the mandate represents a duplication of efforts and increased cost to Albertans.

Membership and Related Duties

Further clarification is required regarding the expectation that rural municipalities bring forward the perspectives of the non-member Towns/Villages within their boundaries. Despite being a non-voting municipality represented on the Board, non-member Towns and Villages are still active municipalities within the Edmonton Metropolitan Region and are accountable to their residents. These communities need

a mechanism to have input into Board decisions that impact them. An ICF may not be the best mechanism to achieve this, as it could place the neighbouring County in an awkward position of both advocating on behalf of the Town/Village, while simultaneously having to enforce a Board decision. This could inadvertently negatively impact inter-municipal relationships, which is not the intent of an ICF or the GMB.

Therefore, we would appreciate further clarity from the Minister on how this ICF mechanism would look and how accountability would be maintained; we remain open to discussing other potential mechanisms if it is believed an ICF is not the most effective, efficient, or accountable.

Voting Structure

To establish greater equity on the Board, and to complete the desired outcome of the Board—land mass should be a consideration in the voting structure, in addition to population and membership majority. This especially considers the desired outcomes of economic prosperity and addressing pressures on natural environments (i.e. protection of agricultural lands, growth of agricultural industry and reduction of costly urban sprawl). It also alleviates some major potential ironies with the current voting structure—with a membership of 13, a Regional Agriculture Master Plan could be passed by the Board without a single vote of support from a County.

Therefore, we suggest the implementation of an innovative ‘Triple Majority’ voting structure. The existing two requirements would still apply—that being 67% of the population and not fewer than 9 members of the GMB voting in support; and that 67% of the land mass vote in support. This ‘Triple Majority’ model may even be temporary as perhaps the Board transitions to a simple 67% majority, or consensus-based model.

However, in the meantime, population is not the only determinant of infrastructure and servicing costs, nor of economic growth or smart land-use planning. The ‘Triple Majority’ model would ensure more collaboration and consensus-building is achieved moving forward, and that the Board works in the greater interests of all its members.

Thank you again Minister Larivee, for the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed GMB. Sturgeon County Council remains committed to being a strong regional partner and wishes to work with the Provincial Government to come up with a model that works for all partners involved. We look forward to continued dialogue on the GMB Regulation as it is developed.

Warm Regards,

Tom Flynn
Mayor, Sturgeon County

cc.

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