

REF Interpretation Guide

Growth Outside of Priority Growth Areas Policy Clarification

Introduction

On June 14, 2012, the Capital Region Board approved the Report: A Review of the Administration of the Regional Evaluation Framework. The Report included the following recommendation regarding interpretation of the Capital Region Growth Plan and the evaluation criteria in the REF:

- 7. Develop a comprehensive guide that will assist municipalities, Third Party Consultants, and CRB administration in the interpretation of the principles and policies of the Growth Plan and the evaluation criteria in the Regional Evaluation Framework.**

Work on the development of the guide was still in the preparation stages when Strathcona County introduced a notice of motion at the August 9, 2012 Board meeting that would direct the Capital Region Board to prioritize a process to clarify the criterion, principles and policies used to evaluate planning documents through the Regional Evaluation Framework (REF).

The motion was put forward as a result of 2 REF applications that were considered and rejected at the August 9, 2012 Board meeting. One application was for a cluster country residential development and the other for an expansion to an existing Hamlet.

A backgrounder provided by Strathcona County indicated that “there is an urgent need for clarification of interpretation of the Capital Region Growth Plan’s principles and policies that are used to evaluate planning proposals submitted by member municipalities.” Strathcona County provided three areas of prioritization:

1. Cluster Country Residential
2. Growth outside the Priority Growth Areas
3. Industrial and commercial development

On September 13, 2012, an amended motion, that aligned Strathcona’s motion with the REF Administration Report recommendations work, was presented and approved by the Board.

Amended Motion: That the Capital Region Board directs the Land Use Committee and Planning Advisory Group to give priority to developing an interpretive guide to the policies in the Growth Plan and criteria in the Regional Evaluation Framework related to Cluster Country Residential Areas and Areas Outside of Priority Growth Areas as part of the current REF Administration Review Implementation project.

Growth Outside the Priority Growth Areas

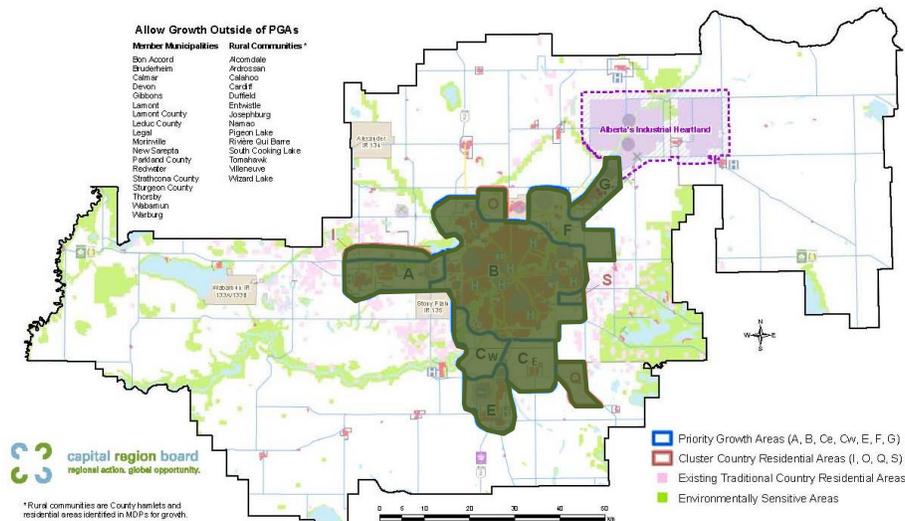
This particular policy clarification document is focused on the Growth Outside the Priority Growth Areas (Non-PGA) part of the motion.

Strathcona County’s backgrounder included the following examples of the interpretive issues facing municipalities when preparing planning documents that are subject to CRB approval:

3. **There is limited guidance for areas identified for growth outside the Priority Growth Areas** as identified in the Priority Growth Areas and Cluster Country Residential Areas map. For instance, what is the Growth Plan’s intent for growth distribution or expansion of these areas? Currently the Growth Plan simply states that areas allowed for growth outside of Priority Growth Areas are to be ‘appropriate to their size’ which has been interpreted differently.

Planning Advisory Group

Pursuant to the direction in the Motion the Planning Advisory Group (PAG) members discussed the challenges of applying the Non-PGA policies at their September 17, 2012 meeting. There is a lack of direction and clarity in the policies of the Growth Plan for areas outside of PGA’s and CCRA’s.



At the October 15, 2012 PAG meeting a Non-PGA Subcommittee of PAG was established to review the matter further and report back to the rest of the Group.

The Non-PGA Subcommittee, together with the CCRA Subcommittee, established the following approach to reviewing the policies that were the subject of the Strathcona County Motion:

Subcommittee Approach

- a. **Research** - Research legislative context and decision making process resulting in existing policies in the Growth Plan for Growth Areas Outside PGAs and CCRAs
- b. **Issue Identification** - Identify current “Red Flag” issues relating to interpretation of Growth Areas Outside of PGAs and existing CCRA policies
- c. **Policy Clarification Recommendations** - Recommend clarifications to be included in an interpretive guide to the policies in the Growth Plan and criteria in the Regional Evaluation Framework
- d. **5 Year Update Issues** - Identify implementation issues related to Growth Areas Outside of PGAs and CCRA policies for consideration in the 5 Year Land Use Plan Review

a. Research

With the assistance of ISL Consulting, the Subcommittees researched the establishment of the current growth plan policies related to CCRAs and Non-PGA areas. The Subcommittees’ research is summarized in Appendix 1.

b. Issue Identification

Following the review of the research and the backgrounder provided by Strathcona County the Non-PGA Subcommittee identified the following issues related to the application of the policies in the Growth Plan:

1. **Population Forecasts** - Forecasts are being interpreted and used as caps in REF applications with the effect of limiting growth potential of Areas Outside of PGAs. The intent of the Principles and Policies of the Growth Plan is that all municipalities be allowed to have growth, appropriate to their size, as long as the cumulative amount and impact of such growth does not compromise growth occurring in PGAs and regional infrastructure investments required to service PGAs.
2. **Infrastructure Funding** - In Recommendations to Other Orders of Government contained in the October 2009 Addendum there is a specific recommendation supportive of Growth Areas Outside of PGAs stating “That the Government of Alberta support continued access to provincial infrastructure funding for municipalities located outside of PGAs and for Alberta’s Industrial Heartland”.
3. **Growth appropriate to size** - The preamble to Principal C of the Growth Plan (March 2009) states that “all municipalities should be allowed to have growth, appropriate to their size”. No definition or interpretation of ‘appropriate’ is provided; and its interpretation is therefore subjective.
4. **Servicing appropriate to the form of development** - The policies under Principle C state that development is allowed outside of PGAs if “the level of services provided is appropriate to the form of development”. As with the above, no definition or interpretation of ‘appropriate’ is provided.

c. Policy Clarification Recommendations

1. Population Forecasts

The REF evaluation criteria includes the following:

- 5.4 When evaluating a statutory plan or statutory plan amendment under this section, the Board must consider:
- b) Whether approval and full implementation of the statutory plan or statutory plan amendment would result in development that is consistent with all of the following:
 - (ii) The regional population and employment forecasts in the Capital Region Growth Plan.

The CRB is currently looking at the use of population and employment forecasts in the evaluation of REF applications through a separate process that is running parallel to the update to the forecasts. The most recent information indicates that the new forecast will be based on a range rather than a single line forecast that will introduce some flexibility to the evaluation of REF applications.

2. Infrastructure Funding

It is recommended that the CRB continue to support continued access to provincial infrastructure funding for municipalities located outside of PGAs.

3. Growth appropriate to size & 4. Servicing appropriate to the form of development

The Capital Region Growth Plan guides future growth and development through the application of Land Use Principles and Policies. The Minimize Regional Footprint principle includes the following policies for growth outside of Priority Growth Areas:

C. Allow Growth Outside of Priority Growth Areas

Preamble

All municipalities should be allowed to have growth, appropriate to their size and as per the Principles and Policies of the Plan. However, it shall be addressed on a comprehensive basis to ensure that the collective impact of such growth does not compromise growth occurring within the priority growth areas, thereby compromising regional infrastructure investments and the intent of the Plan as defined by the other policies.

Policies

- (i) Allow development outside of the priority growth areas if the following criteria are met:
 - a. It is contiguous to existing development;
 - b. It follows the Principles and Policies of this Plan related to the form of development;
 - c. The level of services provided is appropriate to the form of development; and
 - d. Development in this area will not adversely impact the provision of regional infrastructure required to service the priority growth areas.
- (ii) Growth generated by new development should conform to the Principles and Policies of the Capital Region Growth Plan.
- (iii) All municipalities shall be allowed to grow. The cumulative amount and impact of growth outside of the priority growth areas shall be monitored by the CRB.
- (iv) Development on or near municipal boundaries shall be compatible and consistent with the policies of the Plan and shall not impede the sustainable delivery of infrastructure.

Currently there is no definition or interpretation of ‘appropriate to their size’ or ‘appropriate to form of development’ in the Growth Plan.

Notwithstanding the requirement for growth to be consistent with the Principles and Policies of the Plan, it is proposed that **‘appropriate to their size’ and ‘appropriate to form of development’, with respect to planning residential growth, means....**

Towns and Villages outside of PGAs (see list below)

1. Planning for up to a maximum of double the current population (based on 2011 Alberta Municipal Affairs Official Population List) over the forecast period of the Growth Plan (to 2044) within current boundaries.
2. New infrastructure to support the increase in population is only allowed after all efforts to maximize the use and efficiency of existing infrastructure has been exhausted.

Towns and Villages

Town or Village	2011 MA Population	Double Population to 2044	GP Pop Forecast to 2044
Bon Accord	1534	3068	2549
Bruderheim	1298*	2596	2019
Calmar	2033	4066	3244
Devon	6534	13068	10427
Gibbons	2848	5696	4656
Lamont	1664	3328	2765
Legal	1192	2384	1980
Morinville	8504	17008	12186
Redwater	2192	4384	3642
Thorsby	988	1976	1570
Wabamun	662	1324	999
Warburg	696	1392	1111
Total	30145	60290	47148

*April 2012 Census

In 2044 the Growth Plan Forecast for the entire Capital Region is 1,734,495. The “appropriate to size” doubling of population growth potential of town and villages (12 of 24 communities on the CRB) based on above represents approx. 4.9% of the projected population growth in the Region to 2044.

d. 5 Year Update Issues

Counties

All of the Counties include lands outside of Priority Growth Areas. The nature of development on these lands can take on many forms. They range from agricultural subdivisions to major



industrial parks and from lakefront subdivisions to hamlet communities. Some developments are fully serviced, others unserved, and still others only partially serviced. Some Counties define the boundaries of these developments, others do not. Each of the Counties designates and treats these developments using a variety of different planning approaches and mechanisms to plan and support growth. This makes it difficult to adopt a single equitable policy clarification for the areas within Counties that are outside of the PGAs.

It is recommended that growth within Counties, outside of PGAs, CCRA's, Towns and Villages, be further reviewed as part of the Growth Plan Update.