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Electoral Boundaries Commission
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Electoral Boundaries Commission

Judge Ernest J.M. Walter, Chairman

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[Judge Walter in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning. My name is Ernie Walter, and I'm the chair of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. I'd like to introduce you to the other members of the commission here with me today: Dr. Keith Archer of Banff on my far right, next to him Peter Dobbie of Vegreville, then on my left Allyson Jeffs of Edmonton, and next to her Brian Evans of Calgary.

As you are aware, the five of us have spent the last seven months reviewing the electoral boundaries of our province, and I can tell you that we've examined every square inch of the map. I know I speak for all of us when I say that the commission has found it both very interesting and challenging to weigh the concerns and relevant factors put before it during the preparation of the interim report. I would like to note that we are very pleased with the large amount of public feedback received. We have read very near to 500 submissions, and we're looking forward to the additional feedback during this hearing. Once we've considered this feedback, the commission will issue its final report by July of this year.

With that, I am pleased to touch on a few of our findings and recommendations setting out the areas, boundaries, and names of the 87 electoral divisions we propose for Alberta together with our reasons for the proposals as outlined in the interim report you have hopefully all had a chance to read. I can tell you that the foundation of our decisions has been effective representation for all Albertans. In undertaking its work, the commission has been guided by the requirements of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, relevant decisions of the courts, advice received at the first round of public hearings and in written submissions as well as the latest census information available to us.

When I speak of the census information, the 2009 municipal census data for Alberta's cities shows there has been a consistent pattern of growth since the 2001 census. Fifty-two per cent of Albertans currently reside in Edmonton and Calgary. Using the 2009 official population list, the total population being considered by the commission is 3,556,583. Given this pattern of growth this means the quotient, or provincial average population, has grown by 10,100 since the 1995-96 commission and is now at 40,880. So, essentially, the act directs the commission to divide the province into 87 electoral divisions with a population within 25 per cent of the provincial average in a way that will ensure effective representation for Albertans.

Taking into account available population information and factors respecting effective representation, the majority of the commission concluded that the redistribution of the 87 divisions should allow for the following increases: Calgary by two additional divisions, bringing it to 25; Edmonton by one additional division, bringing it to 19; and the rest of Alberta by one, providing it with 43 divisions. This, we felt, would ensure effective representation across the province.

Now, the commission is required by law to divide the existing Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo division. Its population is more than 88 per cent higher than the quotient, and the law prohibits the commission from recommending a division that's more than 25 per cent over the quotient.

Now we come to the recommendations outlined in the interim report. In our efforts to respect the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the primary principles and factors which have guided the commission's recommendations are:

Population. The commission has attempted to limit the variations

in the average population per division. The average population per electoral division from the quotient is from plus 4.3 per cent in Calgary, 0.7 per cent in Edmonton, and minus 2.8 per cent in the rest of Alberta.

Scarcity of population. The commission recognizes scarcity of population in the two proposed special divisions of Dunvegan-Central Peace and Lesser Slave Lake. Dunvegan-Central Peace meets all five criteria for a special division, and Lesser Slave Lake meets four of the five criteria.

Community interests. The commission has taken into consideration community interests of which it is aware.

Community boundaries. The commission has attempted, as requested by the municipalities, to respect community boundaries in Calgary, Edmonton, and other areas.

Municipal boundaries. The commission has made every attempt to respect municipal boundaries. This has not been possible in all cases, but where it could, the commission has attempted to reduce the fragmentation of municipal boundaries resulting from the existing divisions.

Geographical features. The commission has considered geographical features, including roads, which provide natural barriers between communities of interest.

Understandable and clear boundaries. The commission has attempted to recommend boundaries which are clear and easy to understand for the residents of the areas. In addition, the commission is using digital mapping technology to describe the boundaries rather than the extensive written legal descriptions previously used.

Distance and area. This is primarily an issue in the rest of Alberta. In recommending those divisions and boundaries, the commission has considered the area of the proposed electoral divisions and the travel distances involved both within the division and between the division and the Legislature. In addition, MLAs have to maintain relations with more than one school board, more than one municipal council, and several community and business organizations.

Inner-city urban issues. The commission acknowledges the submissions stressing the inner-city urban issues. Generally, they have their own challenges such as a large number of linguistic and cultural communities, a disproportionate number of people dependent on social programs, increasing numbers of new immigrants and aboriginal people, and other urban issues.

10:00

Other Calgary and Edmonton issues. The commission also acknowledges that while there may only be one council and one school authority, maintaining relations with a number of community leagues or associations, business revitalization zones, and other identifiable organizations places demands on the time of an MLA.

Now that I've briefly reviewed our recommendations, we want to hear your views. We believe that what we hear from you, the people who will be affected by these boundary changes, is critical to recommending a new electoral map that will ensure fair and effective representation for all Albertans. Each speaker will have 10 minutes to present and then 10 minutes for questions and answers with the commission.

The commission's public hearings are being recorded by *Alberta Hansard*, and the audio recordings will be posted to the commission website; transcripts of these proceedings will also be available online.

I should say that the commission recognizes that there has been a change in the wishes of city council to recommend an urban-only riding here in Grande Prairie. In addition, we've received many submissions opposing the creation of the separate urban and rural

ridings. It's clear we have to respect the suggestions and positions that have changed and are in a different perspective from that which was in our interim report.

Having said that, our first presenter is here. For the record for *Hansard* would you be so kind as to give your name and if you're representing a community or are here privately, whichever.

Hywel Williams

Mr. Williams: Good morning. My name is Hywel Williams. I'm not representing any particular other community interests. My occupation is that I'm the executive director for the Canadian Mental Health Association, a not-for-profit organization here in town. I'd like to state a disclaimer or declaration of sort of not so much a conflict of interest. I'm not a member of any particular political party at this point, though I have been involved in the Official Opposition in the past. I think that that is central to a lot of presentations, you know: where your current political affiliations lie.

I'll just be very brief. I have three points that I'd like to raise and just have recorded for *Hansard*. Firstly, I believe that electoral boundaries must change from time to time to reflect the change in population density through the province. Secondly, the allowable deviation from the provincial quotient should be used only in exceptional circumstances, particularly the special consideration component. Thirdly, with the use of better communication strategies that exist today, technology, et cetera, we should actually be reducing the number of MLAs not increasing them, realizing that the commission is mandated to consider 87. That's your job. Nonetheless, I did want to raise that.

In support of point 1, that boundaries must change from time to time and the status quo must be upset from time to time for good reason, it is my contention that much has been made about the split between the urban and rural voters. I think that's a dichotomy created to support views of people that benefit and are comfortable with the way things are and that the line between urban and rural, in this area particularly, should not necessarily coincide with municipal boundaries because municipal boundaries fail to reflect urban development. There has been considerable growth in the city of Grande Prairie in the last 10 years, and I'd suggest that the county of Grande Prairie and the city of Grande Prairie have a lot of commonalities and that most of the population of the county of Grande Prairie lies within very close proximity to the city of Grande Prairie. So suggesting that the county of Grande Prairie is a rural jurisdiction, I'd suggest, is not entirely true.

I believe that there's an ongoing movement of people from rural areas to urban centres and, therefore, a steadily growing need for fair representation of the urban resident. The challenge, then, is to interfere in the least amount of ways with the rights of the urban voters to address the geographical issue. So we've got both density of population and scarcity of population and how we best address that.

My last point in support of the fact that things must change is that one thing I've read about with regard to support of the maintenance of the status quo is the substantial amount of co-operation that occurs in interregional, intermunicipal co-operation and commonality. But I find that is sometimes undermined by the fact that when the two or three jurisdictions talk about amalgamation and annexation and greater co-operation, that actually costs money and perhaps reduces the area or the taxation base so that those ideas are soon left off. You know, terms like "tax grab" and those sorts of things are flung around. Certainly, it works at a certain level but not on other levels when we talk about intermunicipal co-ordination and commonality.

My second point being that the allowable deviation should be used sparingly, and Judge Walter has referred to it already about the Supreme Court of Canada. Just to quote a couple of points from that decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in the provincial electoral boundaries Saskatchewan case.

Relative parity of voting power is a prime condition of effective representation. . . . Factors like geography, community history, community interests and minority representation may need to be taken into account to ensure that our legislative assemblies effectively represent the diversity of our social mosaic. Beyond this, dilution of one citizen's vote as compared with another should not be countenanced.

Justice Cory wrote that a further, equally important aspect to the right is, namely, that "each vote must be relatively equal to every other vote." Further, that "any significant diminution of the right to relative equality of voting power can only lead to voter frustration and to a lack of confidence in the electoral process." Two further points from that case from Justice McLachlin: "Representation comprehends the idea of having a voice in the deliberations of government as well as the idea of the right to bring one's grievances and concerns to the attention of one's government representative." Regarding the question of voter parity, she wrote – and this was particularly of interest to me – about the intervenors in a case. She wrote that "the Attorney General for Alberta went so far as to deny equality's place as a 'core' or 'fundamental' value in assessing the right to vote."

My comments generally with that are that I'm very concerned about the confidence in the electoral process and that any time that we have huge disparities – and I was surprised to hear of the narrowness of the disparities as you've recreated them, which I think is great. I think that any time we draw the equality of voting into question is when we have issues with the process, and we create more cynicism and less voter participation.

10:10

My last point is regarding the number of MLAs. Again realizing that it's not a subject for discussion, I find it troubling that we're creating more MLAs in this province instead of creating less MLAs. We've got all sorts of good technology. We've got improved communication, transit, transportation. Certainly, the road from Grande Prairie to Edmonton is significantly different today than it was 15 years ago, when it was a single-lane highway. That's made that trip a whole lot easier. I think that those kinds of improvements in transportation and that the ease of going up and down the highway is a lot better, it's a lot easier to travel this province than it was 20 years ago. Again, moving towards urbanization, it's easier to travel in Calgary or Edmonton than it used to be, so that's not an issue.

We know that more does not mean better, but we do know that more means more expensive. I just think we should be moving the other way.

The Chair: Thank you.
Keith, any questions?

Dr. Archer: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Williams. I appreciate your coming this morning and your contribution to our discussion. I note your comment that the boundaries commission should try to move towards a relative degree of equality amongst ridings. My observation on that is that when we look at the overall variation from different parts of Alberta – and the way that we've identified the province is to look at the city of Calgary, the city of Edmonton, and the rest of Alberta – our recommendation for the interim report was that the variation within Edmonton was less than 1 per cent away from the provincial average in seats, in Calgary it was just over 4 per

cent, and in the rest of Alberta less than 3 per cent below the average. So my sense is that the commission has tried to be mindful of that principle in our recommendations the first time out.

While the legislation provided us with an opportunity to create up to four special districts, the interim report led to a recommendation for the creation of two special districts. Of those, one of them met all five criteria that were outlined in the legislation for the creation of special districts. The other met four of those five, and the one it didn't meet is that it doesn't have a boundary that's coterminous with the provincial boundary.

My sense is that some of the principles that you're articulating in your presentation are some of the principles as well that we've tried to be mindful of in our report. Again, I appreciate your coming here and speaking to those this morning. So more of a comment than a question.

Thanks.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks, Mr. Williams, for your comments. You've read our report, obviously. Did you have any specific comments on the two special consideration ridings that we made?

Mr. Williams: I guess the short answer is no.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much for coming, Mr. Williams. If you've read our report, you know that I think we could go a little further in the parity with the ridings. That average across Alberta contains still some variations, but we've certainly tried to bring things much, much closer than they were. Do I take it from your comments that you regard as positive the riding as it's been proposed by the commission, the urban riding? I know that we've had sort of a lot of feedback suggesting that that wasn't the way to go, but I'm just wondering how I should take your comments on the urbanization issue. I mean, even if it's for a future commission, is it becoming time for Grande Prairie to have an urban riding?

Mr. Williams: One of the problems with my new way of thinking is that I'm not particularly – I failed to make my point clear, and thank you for the opportunity to do that. Yes, it is my contention that Grande Prairie would be well served by an urban riding. That would be my point. It's not whether or not we're being well served now or whatever. I think it would be better served, best served, more appropriately served by an urban riding.

Ms Jeffs: Just a brief follow-up. One of the issues that's been raised about the proposal is that to create the urban riding, there was a fairly large rural or semirural riding created around that. I don't know how much you've been involved in discussions in the community, but a question I had was whether or not the proposal might have been more palatable if that had been pared down in size.

Mr. Williams: I read the local newspaper clippings and some of the comments that appear on your website with regard to the comments subsequent to your preliminary report. One fact that was raised, you know, was that the riding stretches from Fox Creek to Beaverlodge and Hythe and that that's a three-hour drive. That is a sizable riding, without a doubt. But I guess when we're talking about effective representation and the various considerations that go into effective representation, it has to be balanced against commonality of interest.

I would suggest to you that the residents of the community of Fox Creek have more in common with the residents of the community of Beaverlodge than they do with the residents of the city of Grande Prairie.

It is a long way between Fox Creek and Beaverlodge, but I'd suggest to you that, again, the representative wouldn't be travelling from Fox Creek to Beaverlodge on any kind of regular basis. You know, you're creating the two ends of the spectrum, and they're not often joined together. You'd stop in Fox Creek, obviously, on the way up or way down or make a special trip there, and the road is a whole lot better than it used to be. It's still a burden but not the burden that it used to be.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

That's all I have, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks very much for your presentation, Mr. Williams. I just have one question, and it relates to what I understood your comment to be about the county of Grande Prairie. As I heard your comment, it was that considering the county of Grande Prairie as strictly rural is not true because of, presumably, the fact that it surrounds the city of Grande Prairie. The further away you get from the city of Grande Prairie, the more rural it's going to be. Have you had any opportunity to have a discussion with representatives from the county to determine what their view is of their rural or 'rurban' environment and where they feel they are and whether they consider themselves to be a rural county or a mixture? Having said that, we are going to hear from somebody from the county later on this morning.

10:20

Mr. Williams: No, I've not talked to them about that. I haven't had any communications with the county of Grande Prairie about that.

Mr. Evans: Am I correct that your comment was really just to indicate that the county itself is not strictly a rural county?

Mr. Williams: Yeah. My comment is exactly as you said. You know, within the county, if I can just go further to that point for a second, although I don't know exactly the electoral boundaries within the county of Grande Prairie, it seems to me – and I may well be wrong – that most of the electoral areas are disparate from Grande Prairie. They're further away from Grande Prairie, and most of the voices on the county, appropriately or not – I offer no judgment about that – are rural people.

Mr. Evans: So physically and intellectually are two different things, really.

Mr. Williams: Yeah.

Mr. Evans: Yeah. Okay. Thanks for that clarification.

I have no further questions, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. Williams: Thank you for the opportunity. I certainly appreciate that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: Our next presenter is Mr. Walter Paszkowski.

The Chair: Since we're being recorded by *Hansard*, we'd ask you, if you wouldn't mind, to give your name again and any group that you might be representing.

Mr. Paszkowski: Thank you very much, Your Honour. Certainly, welcome to panel members and yourself as well to Grande Prairie. My name is Walter Paszkowski. I'm here representing myself in the capacity as a former MLA for the region.

The Chair: Please go ahead.

Walter Paszkowski

Mr. Paszkowski: Okay. Thank you. First, I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the work that you're doing in developing an electoral structure, which, when completed, will incorporate the basic democratic principles of equality, fairness, and participation. These are important, and I'll be referring to them later in my presentation.

Thank you also for taking the time to meet with us so that we can all better understand the significance of how the constituency boundaries of our region may be structured in the future. We realize that you've been here once before, and we very much appreciate the fact that you are coming back to hear us regarding the original outcome of your meeting.

Since the boundaries that result from your direction will remain in place for the next two or three elections, it'll be important to recognize the needs of the region's electorate not only for the immediate needs but for those of the future years to come. The Grande Prairie region, like much of the rest of the province, has been a part of recent continued growth and, more particularly, a key part of Alberta's northern economic engine.

Here I think it's appropriate to refer to a study that was completed by the Northern Alberta Development Council first in 2003, then was updated in 2006, and is again being updated in 2009 and which identified the NADC region as providing the province with over 34 per cent of the province's total economy. The total economy. The point that I'm trying to make is that though we only have a relatively smaller percentage of the provincial population, we contribute a disproportionate amount of the economy of the province, with 9 per cent of the population generating 34.7 per cent of all of the provincial revenue.

I'd like to take this opportunity to share a bit of a different perspective regarding the process of structuring boundaries, and that is from that of an MLA. I was privileged with the opportunity to represent first the constituents of Smoky River and then the constituents of Grande Prairie-Smoky for an additional two terms after that. The electoral boundaries of Grande Prairie-Smoky were, really, very much as they are today. I'd like to share a few observations resulting from those experiences which I feel would be helpful for the work that you are doing here today.

When I represented Smoky River, it primarily went to the boundaries of the city of Grande Prairie. None of the city itself was included, yet I was continuously expected to attend every city meeting where major issues affecting the city and the province were discussed. The reason given was that so many of the Smoky River constituents worked in the city, it was important that I attend. Both MLAs would be expected to attend all city meetings. I don't consider that as unfair. I think that would be the proper way to represent.

What I would consider unfair is that one of those MLAs would be expected to carry the additional burden of serving eight municipali-

ties, two reservations, several school boards, senior facilities, ag societies, social networks, and so on, covering an area of up to 272 kilometres east and west and 170 kilometres north and south while the other MLA works with one jurisdiction with common goals and objectives, yet the populations are almost equal.

The proposed boundaries do not take into consideration the ability of the MLA to provide a fair and equal opportunity to the residents of the two constituencies. I think that from my perspective as having been an MLA, with Smoky River it was even more of an anomaly as far as boundaries were concerned. Your driving time has to be considered part of your allocated day's exercises. Certainly, there doesn't seem to be any fairness of allocation of time so that people can be fairly and equally represented in the structure of the boundaries the way they sit today.

Another interesting point – and this is more personal as far as sitting MLAs are concerned – is that each year the Legislature publishes the costs of government for each MLA's operations. The MLAs are ranked in order of expenditure. It seems unfair to burden one with more of a workload and then identify them as a high cost to government. I know that isn't within your jurisdiction, but it is in part because the way you structure the workload certainly is part of that. But every year there is a document that's published that defines the costs. Everything is included in the costs, of course, yet the reporting does not provide any explanation of the circumstances of those costs.

Leaving the boundaries the way they were would go a long way to sharing the workload that's provided for each representative. Leaving the boundaries as they are now will simplify the challenges of setting up polling stations, especially around the city. The way the proposed structure is, it's going to be an extremely complex situation developing polling stations for the one riding, which is the city, and the other riding, which is being called the rural riding, largely because the major centre of population in both the constituencies is in the immediate area of the city. There are going to have to be polling stations that represent the city riding, and all four sides of the city are going to have to have polling stations as well to represent the second constituency. It just doesn't seem a practical way or an efficient way or, most of all, a way that isn't confusing. I consider that as a very important part of providing government services.

10:30

Also, the role and responsibilities of voters. Voters' attendance seems to be dropping, and I think there's a reason for it in that we confuse them. Certainly, much of this would lead to great confusion as far as setting up polling stations. I wouldn't want to be the one that would be doing that. I know that that is not in your jurisdiction, but it is a fallout of what would be done here. I know that the MLA is certainly not responsible for establishing either the boundaries or polling stations. He bears the brunt of the complaints because people are frustrated. Really, when they come to vote and they find that they're at the wrong polling station and in rural ridings the next closest one is 25, 30 miles away, there's a lot of frustration. In this case you're going to have to have polling stations right within the immediate area because of the population volumes and polling stations very nearby which would be representing another constituency.

As an MLA I've always found that the most effective way to lobby a cause was to have the support of a group of MLAs. Obviously, I think there are those that can really appreciate the value of having a group coming in, really, with just common goals and common objectives. It's far more effective to have a group coming in, really key in finding their cause and having the group lobbying

for that rather than a single MLA representing one area as a sole spokesperson for that particular cause. To have a sole MLA for the urban area of Grande Prairie I think would be counter to a process that is indeed designed to serve the majority of people rather than the individual.

The boundaries the way they are today are for the most part natural boundaries, and that's probably as voter friendly as you're possibly going to get. That is something that I would really stress: try to make them as simple as possible and user friendly, voter friendly. That is also part of the responsibility, I feel, of a boundary review commission.

The relationship that Fox Creek has with the municipality and other organizations within Greenview should be recognized. Certainly, this is an important consideration that should remain as the boundaries are under review. Fox Creek would be much better served with the rest of the Peace region rather than being moved to a constituency to the south where there are few issues in commonality. I was an MLA when Fox Creek was moved to the constituency at present, and certainly in discussions with the residents there they found it a lot simpler and a lot easier to work as far as the Alberta political process was concerned.

The following I've got is a list of issues that I think are items that should be considered. Irregular boundaries create challenges for voters. Keep it simple; we should try to simplify the process rather than complicate it. For polling stations in rural ridings it will be very difficult to meet the needs of voters under the proposed changes. Maximum population base surrounds the city, where the boundaries would be most confusing, and your boundaries of the city are irregular, which indeed are most confusing. One MLA will be tasked with the burden of enormous travel, multiple meetings, and still have to meet with all city meetings as well. The present circumstances work very well for both urban and rural residents. With the political process it is much more important to have several speak for the same subject than a lone spokesperson. Fox Creek has direct municipal ties with Greenview, which would tie into the constituency as it's structured today. Equal population distribution should not be an issue by leaving the boundaries the way they are now and in the future.

I think that is a critical element, that this area is rapidly growing, and indeed the urban area as it is today is really not going to be subject to much infill. It's more or less achieved its capacity, so any expansion is going to have to be through adjustment of boundaries. Your changes in your boundaries really aren't going to be taking any effect until, very likely, the boundaries between the city and the county have changed, and there's going to be a huge population anomaly develop as the major areas of settlement will be areas that are county today, and they'll all be in one area. The urban area as it sits today doesn't have a lot of room for infill, and that's why they have to expand their boundaries. That isn't taken into consideration at all with this thought process.

I think it's critical and important that you're doing a project that's going to be 10 years, probably two years before it takes effect, so you really have to look into the future and determine just what is happening in the area. John Simpson, the planner, will be addressing that later and speaking to you on that. I think it's probably one of the most serious considerations that has to be taken into consideration that has not been with the proposal here.

We want to make the election process friendly rather than a complicated process. By that, I'm referring to boundaries and trying to keep the boundaries as simple as possible. It would balance the workload for the MLAs. If the boundary remains unchanged, MLAs and staff would be familiar with the process. The MLAs certainly are familiar. It's important that voters feel included in the election

process rather than create an atmosphere foreign to them. Previous boundaries were all natural boundaries and, therefore, were relatively easy to follow. The proposed annexation of county land, as I've already talked about, will really confuse the boundaries and significantly distort the population totals in the future. All the municipalities within the boundaries of their two constituencies support leaving the boundaries the way they are, and they represent their people. I think they've talked to their people, and by and large that's what the people have told them. So I do hope that that message gets through here today as well.

Suggesting that MLAs should represent urban ridings or rural constituencies is a flawed process. When you're elected an MLA, you're voting on every issue as an MLA. You're not voting on urban issues because you're an urban MLA and on rural issues because you're a rural MLA. You vote on every issue. So I don't understand the logic of having simply an urban riding other than the convenience of dealing with commonality of issues.

In closing, I urge the committee to seriously consider leaving the boundaries of Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky as they are for all those reasons listed above. I'd also suggest that the names are quite satisfactory the way they are because people have the history of understanding Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti and where they're located.

Thank you for your interest and for your attention, and most of all thank you for coming back to hear us.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paszkowski. I think you were here when I did mention that the primary factor in our changing of the ridings was the city of Grande Prairie's request that we change them. Their position has now changed, saying: leave them the same.

Mr. Paszkowski: I guess that creates a bit of a concern for me as well. What happened to all the other representations that said: don't change it? Does that mean that urban supersedes rural? Really, that's the interpretation that I would get out of that type of a decision. I think it's so important at the end of the day to realize that every MLA, no matter what district they're representing, has equal vote. When the hand goes up, it's one vote regardless of whether they're rural or whether they're urban. The issues are all voted on by a group of people that represent all of the people of Alberta.

10:40

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Paszkowski: I find it somewhat bothersome when we're talking about urbanizing an MLA because I don't think that's really what democracy is totally about.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks very much, Walter, for your presentation. I haven't had an opportunity to listen to you elucidate positions for quite some time, and I miss that, Walter.

In terms of why the recommendation in the interim report came about, I'd just refer you to page 18 in our interim report. I'm just going to read the two sentences that, I think, are the most critical to that analysis.

The creation of a pure urban division was proposed by the City of Grande Prairie and mirrors the division alignments in St. Albert and Medicine Hat. The Commission looks forward to the comments of the people affected by this interim proposal.

Because we did have that presentation from the city, the commission felt that the best way to have a fulsome and robust discussion about that recommendation was to include it in the report and to

highlight where it came from, which we did, Walter. In fact, we've had a very robust and fulsome number of submissions, the vast majority of which, of course, as you're aware, have suggested that the current alignment, with Grande Prairie-Smoky and Grande Prairie-Wapiti continuing in much the way that they have in the past, would be the best alignment to continue going forward. I'm sure that that had some influence on the city in rescinding its earlier motion that they put in front of us.

I think that's a very good example of democracy working, and I'm pleased that we were able to get that kind of input. I'm very happy with the recommendations that you've made and with your analysis of how you represented your constituency, and you did it very well.

Mr. Chairman, if I might, just a short anecdote about Mr. Paszkowski. He does mention here about lobbying the support of a group of MLAs. Well, I can tell you that Mr. Paszkowski lobbied me and a number of other MLAs for beekeeper legislation, and for the life of me I could never understand why I was such a great supporter of beekeeper legislation, being from Banff-Cochrane. It was because of Mr. Paszkowski and his effective lobbying. So he does mean what he says, and he does what he means.

Mr. Paszkowski: Thank you very much, Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Those are all my comments.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much for coming this morning, Mr. Paszkowski. One thing that I think we have sort of observed and was a factor in the interim report is that there does seem to be a point at which, certainly, some cities and urban centres do see a divergence between their interests and the interests of the rurals. We've heard it from areas outside some of the major cities, too, that they feel that their interests lie differently. We were certainly open to hearing what Grande Prairie would have to say about the recommendation that we'd followed from the city. Really, more of a comment.

I appreciate seeing you here this morning. Thank you.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks, Mr. Paszkowski. One interpretation of why we made that proposal was that we were treated so well last time we were here, we wanted to ensure we'd be invited back. By creating the controversy, it certainly has sparked a number of presentations.

I hear you on the general perspective. I reside in a county myself; I work in a town. I'm of the same view that you are, that these interests are broader.

My particular question is in relation to Fox Creek. We are trying to do our job in light of the legislation and the court decisions. One of the challenges we have is the trade-offs. At what point can we justify having an adjacent constituency, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, be below the average by some 11 per cent? That becomes a significant deviation from the provincial average when we could have it closer to the average by moving the population of Fox Creek.

Really, we have these competing interests that we're trying to balance, and we're certainly mindful of what we're hearing from you and also Fox Creek about a preference. What we have to do is determine whether the benefits that accrue to a community like Fox Creek in staying in its existing constituency outweigh the costs associated with having more and more deviations from the average. Part of the result of that would be to foster what in many ways is the myth of the urban-rural divide.

Again, we appreciate your comments. We really are, you know, grappling with that issue on Fox Creek. It was an issue that really had some discussion and will continue to do so because the challenges that we face, again, have a 30,000 level as well within each municipality. It is helpful to hear from you, and I do appreciate everything you've said today.

Mr. Paszkowski: I do understand the issue that you're dealing with here. Certainly, it has to be put into the bigger picture, and I understand that as well. I think that if I was going to err, I'd err on the side of the people of Fox Creek, what their wishes are, largely because their major business is with Greenview. Greenview, of course is north. Work and other issues going south just don't apply. They're 50 miles one way, 50 miles another way. Going 50 miles away from where you do most of your other business just is not convenient.

Mr. Dobbie: The only response is that they would have a chance to better train another MLA. Again, the argument can be made that they're going to have more influence because of the dual MLA role. But I hear you.

Thank you.

The Chair: Keith.

Dr. Archer: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Paszkowski. I'd like to discuss a couple of things with you. I guess the first is the question of why the boundaries commission in its interim report made the recommendation that it did, and in looking to the future as well, I think this issue is not going to go away for Grande Prairie or for electoral boundary commissions. The size of the community is such that one can easily make a full constituency that's consistent with the average size of constituencies across the province and have some left over.

I think one of the issues that our commission has faced and that other commissions will face is applying a consistent set of principles and using those as much as possible across the province. When we look at communities that have that characteristic, that have a population in this instance somewhere between 40,000 and 80,000 – St. Albert comes to mind; Medicine Hat comes to mind – you see constituencies that are entirely urban, and the remainder of the urban area is embedded in a constituency that includes a rural area.

In looking at a principle being consistent across Alberta, it's not unusual for a boundaries commission to look at Grande Prairie and say: well, if we're going to be consistent, that same model can apply in Grande Prairie as well. Then if a commission receives a presentation by a city council that has explicitly put that resolution before the council and passed it, it becomes a pretty compelling argument for a boundaries commission. I think the idea of having some consistency across the province to work with on the basis of principles and to be responsive to communities are all things that drove that recommendation.

I think the purpose of meetings like this, these public hearings, is to provide the broader community with an opportunity to respond to the commission. In communities in which there is not a single view – and my sense is that in Grande Prairie, certainly back in the fall, there wasn't a single view on this issue – it leaves the boundaries commission to make a choice that some people will agree with and some people won't. No matter which way we had gone in the fall, there was going to be a group, either the city of Grande Prairie or some of the communities outside Grande Prairie, the city itself, that would say: well, you didn't listen to me. That's the nature of the work of boundary commissions.

10:50

Mr. Paszkowski: I hear your dilemma, certainly, but to my mind the most important elements are ones that I mentioned earlier: equality, fairness, and participation in outcomes. It's the outcome that really is going to matter. I think you're providing the proper format to achieve a proper outcome, and for that I commend you.

Dr. Archer: There was just one other thing I wanted to respond to, partly because I'm not sure that I fully understand the point that you were making to the commission on the issue of voter turnout. You had mentioned that voter turnout has been declining, and I didn't know if you were saying that voter turnout would decline more if there was an urban constituency and a mixed constituency or not. I'm not sure that the data across the province, if we look at the most recent elections, corroborates that. I wanted to, for my part, put it on the record that I'm not sure that our decisions on electoral boundaries in this round are the critical factor that is going to ensure that voter participation increases in Alberta from a level that I think all of us find at the moment to be unacceptable.

Mr. Paszkowski: I was referring to comments that I as an MLA was receiving from the people in one particular election. There was a lower voter turnout. There were some issues with particular polling stations, some significant issues as a matter of fact. It was a situation where the polling stations were not very easily definable. To my mind, I think we have an obligation to make things as user friendly as is possible. As perhaps more of a general point, we had declining voter turnout in I believe it was the last one, so I was referring to our particular circumstances.

I really do believe that simplifying boundaries may actually be more effective for many, many needs, including the MLA's workload. When he has to look at a boundary, when it's totally irregular – natural boundaries are great. Straight boundaries are great. We're kind of simple people up north here, I guess, so the simpler you can make it, the better off we are.

Dr. Archer: I have no further questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Paszkowski. We'll certainly take into account what you've given us here. Again, thank you for coming.

Mr. Paszkowski: Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Dr. Elroy Deimert.

The Chair: Sir, since we're being recorded by *Hansard*, could you please give your full name and any particular group you might be representing if you are.

Dr. Deimert: Yes. My name is Elroy Deimert. I am not representing the city although I'm an alderman. I'm representing myself and views that I've heard.

The Chair: Please go ahead.

Elroy Deimert

Dr. Deimert: Yes. On the back, the more cluttered side of that page, is the main submission.

I'd like to congratulate the commission on the principled recommendation in your interim report on a new Grande Prairie riding wholly within the municipal boundaries. The commission no doubt

knew the kind of reaction and lobbying that are normally triggered by such recommendations. However, you chose to act on the principles outlined in your mandate, and that takes courage. I believe you should stick to your principles and maintain the recommendation in the interim report.

I would like to offer some personal insight into why the city withdrew from the position that they had me present on their behalf in that original motion and why I think they won't be presenting here today.

As you're aware, there's a strong lobby from the county and the chamber, which is a city and county organization, to return to the status quo on boundaries. The mayor has a good relationship with the reeve, for which we are all grateful. It hasn't always been that way in this area. However, in this case, no doubt, we know that some pressure was brought to bear on that relationship. The mayor for many years, ever since he ran in this riding, has been in support of a riding wholly within the city.

We were in the middle of negotiations on a new IDP, which included a huge consensual annexation to address 30- and 50-year needs for the city expansion. This is, I believe, to be a crowning achievement for the city council and administration for this term in view of the mayor. The mayor made it clear to me that he did not want this agreement jeopardized since it had not yet been signed. Thus, he encouraged several aldermen to consider a change of heart in this request for a city riding. All of these things I'm sure you're aware of.

The only presentation to city council from the public was in favour of a city constituency within city boundaries. We also received letters of support for that position for a city constituency. The principle of natural communities needs to be honoured in the division of Grande Prairie. Our urban issues need a mandate to be represented in the provincial Legislature and the present constituency divisions.

The following urban issues are not represented well because of conflicting rural-urban interests. I'll just mention a few things that I know you know from other cities that have gone through this: affordable housing and homeless initiative funding; smart growth, sustainable urban development issues; inner-city social issues and crime prevention initiatives in the inner city; priorities and promotion of advanced education opportunities – this is a big one here, with much discussion on it – cultural and recreational priorities; equitable funding for cities versus rural municipalities. The AUMA often brings this up, and this is a huge issue that the city must represent. There is not equitable funding at the moment, in the view of most cities. Community development services funding and issues; intermunicipal relationships, like regional planning: there are very divergent positions, and ours is very divergent from the county on these things. The Peace River Regional Planning Commission was something that we much supported and has a lot of support on the city council but not outside the city, for example.

Then, of course, equality of the individual vote. Now, I know that that can never be wholly achieved, but in Alberta it is something that we are beginning to take note of and in other areas around Canada, especially in rural areas like Saskatchewan, et cetera. Equality of the individual vote between the rural citizen and the urban citizen in Alberta: we know that the urban vote counts for much less than the rural vote does in this province. I'm sure you folks are aware of that.

In summary, we appreciate our intermunicipal progress in this region, the many areas of co-operation and synergies between the county and the city. There's no suggestion that a rural MLA does not represent the city. Of course, we've had many situations where the MLAs also were residing outside of those boundaries and did a

fabulous job, right? But we do believe that a city riding would have a mandate, then, to be represented on those issues.

This kind of solution has been of course granted to other mid-sized urban cities, and we believe that we should be looking ahead. Population growth statistics suggest that, you know, within eight years, by the next time you're meeting on this, we might well be at 80,000 or somewhere if growth trends continue as they have since 2000. What do we do, then, with a city of 80,000, where there's room for two ridings?

11:00

Of course, we have the issue of Dunvegan-Central Peace. I believe that your recommendation in the interim report was looking ahead, trying to figure out: how long do we allow Dunvegan-Central Peace to be one of those two exceptions? There's going to be lots of demand from other areas, and there are only to be two exceptions, I believe. The riding north of Grande Prairie as you had drawn was growing as well, and obviously within eight years – it would have been quite easy, then, to just extend Dunvegan-Central Peace down to take Valleyview or some of that area, which would have been a much more natural constituency and would solve that problem of what happens to Dunvegan-Central Peace.

We're not speaking for other ridings but speaking for many of the citizens of Grande Prairie that have talked to me and told us how much they appreciated our position. I know this is a hard decision for you. I'm afraid, you know, we're not as well organized in lobby as the county, but I hope that you'll pay attention to where the voices are coming from, whether they are coming from outside the city or whether they are coming from inside the city.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Again, you've said that you're not speaking for the city of Grande Prairie.

Dr. Deimert: Absolutely not. Yes.

The Chair: I see we have the Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce, that says that they have 1,100 businesses who are not happy with the change we made and are suggesting it should stay as the two ridings that it now is, and you're not speaking for them either.

Dr. Deimert: I'm not speaking for the chamber of commerce. I would be interested in talking to those individuals. Of course, they're in a hard position. They represent both the city and the county in those businesses, and they want to be very careful in that relationship.

The Chair: Keith.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Dr. Deimert. I certainly remember your presentation in our first round of discussions, when you were here presenting the position of city council. I was hoping we would have someone come by this time to give us a sense as to what happened. It was a little bit of a surprise, I must say, to see a city reverse itself on a decision. I think this is the only instance in which a city took a position to the boundaries commission at one point in our process and took another position later in our process. So it was certainly good of you to come and to share that perspective.

You know, my sense is that we're coming in on the middle of a conversation within Grande Prairie. I suspect the conversation is not going to stop after this boundaries commission has done its work. I don't know when a city reaches a tipping point, where it's

important to have an entirely urban constituency. We've heard lots across Alberta about the need for communities that reside entirely within urban areas. The presentation from Edmonton: absolutely unambiguous on that issue of not having ridings that are split between part of the city and outside the city. We have heard the same from Calgary. So it's certainly a view that exists within the province. There may be a time when that view is more widely shared amongst governance groups within Grande Prairie, but I don't think that at the moment, based upon what we've heard as a commission, we would be in a position to comfortably conclude that there is sufficient consensus on that issue to enable us to move forward.

Again, I appreciate your coming and sharing your perspective, but it does seem to me, just to be entirely frank with you, that at this stage in the conversation in Grande Prairie we're probably not at a point that we would comfortably be able to create a single urban constituency.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Deimert, I think that Dr. Archer has summarized well the challenge that we have. I would point out to you that another of our recommendations in the interim report dealt with the city of Red Deer, and our proposal there was to have two municipal constituencies and then have the extra 10,000 people outside of the city. For reasons very much along the same lines as you've articulated today, we've heard from many people in Red Deer and representatives of Red Deer that their preference would be to not have part of the population as part of a 'rurban' riding. So this conversation that Dr. Archer talks about is going on in a number of locations.

Frankly, I certainly respect what you've given us, and I think it's very helpful that this is on the record. This is an unusual situation, where we have had this reversal. In some ways it apparently makes it easier to make a decision, but there will still be a discussion and a debate in this commission. Getting back up here I think is helpful for all of you as well to move this discussion along. I appreciate the fact that while you may be disappointed with the change in the council's opinion, you've laid out some very clear arguments for us to consider in favour of the single urban constituency here, and I think that's helpful and appreciated.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much. Thank you, Dr. Deimert, for coming. I appreciated your comments regarding the issues that urban centres deal with as they're growing, as Grande Prairie is. There does seem to be I think Keith Archer called it a tipping point at which cities really do see a divergence of interests between their residents and the residents of the surrounding areas. So I do appreciate your coming with that.

Also, I do appreciate your insight into what may have been happening locally to have, you know, contributed to the reversal. I did have one question. I was wondering – and perhaps in light of your submission this isn't the issue – whether the proposal as it is in the interim report might have been more palatable if there had been a way to shrink that rural riding surrounding Grande Prairie, whether that might have been a tipping point as well. This may well be input for a future commission as well as us.

Dr. Deimert: I certainly agree with that. You know, we have a hard time speaking for Dunvegan-Central Peace, which we don't even have a border with. It seems to me that the vast east-west travel is

certainly taken care of by taking Valleyview and that highway, which is naturally connected to Falher and the area to the north, and making that a riding that will survive. I mean, you're not going to be able to do what we're doing with Dunvegan-Central Peace for very many more go-rounds.

You all are familiar with Regina. I don't believe that they have quite the principled mandate federally. They managed to take Regina and put it into four or five different ridings, to take little pieces out of it here. You know, it's terribly alienating to the Regina population. They know what's going on, and they call it by a certain name, which we don't bring up in this commission because I believe the principles here are firm in trying to avoid that kind of thing in Alberta.

Ms Jeffs: I appreciate that because, actually, it had struck us when we made the recommendation in the interim report that the request was not that different than what had been requested in Medicine Hat and other constituencies, to have that. Again, thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, I have nothing further.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Dr. Deimert. It's really important to have you here to explain from your perspective what has happened since we were here and heard from you the last time. As Keith Archer said, there is a tipping point; we've heard that in various places in Alberta. The voters' and the citizens' positions are constantly in transition as to what they feel will give them the most effective representation.

11:10

I believe at this point in time that staying with the mixed constituencies, from what we've heard thus far – we'll see what comes from the rest of the day and thereafter – appears to be the majority opinion at this point in time, but that's not to say that it will continue to be the majority opinion. You've given us some very good information to have. As my colleagues have said, it's very beneficial to us and to future commissions to have that information on record, so thank you for that.

I have no further comments, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Deimert: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for your input.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Mr. John Simpson with the county of Grande Prairie.

The Chair: Since we're being recorded by *Hansard*, if you'd be so kind as to give your full name and the group that you are representing.

**John Simpson, Director of Planning
County of Grande Prairie**

Mr. Simpson: Sure. Thanks, Mr. Chairman and members of the commission. I'm John Simpson, and I'm with the county of Grande Prairie. I'm part of a triple header here today. You've heard from Walter, you're going to hear from me, and you're going to hear from our reeve a little later on. Obviously, this sort of underlines the importance of this issue to the county of Grande Prairie.

My presentation today will outline some of the issues around, I guess, what we perceive as the potential imbalance that exists with the proposed alignments, not only as it exists today but how it's

going to be exacerbated in the future. I think we tried at the first meeting in October to suggest that boundaries were working well, that a little bit of tweaking would work well, and so on. We were obviously fairly surprised and a little disappointed, I think, at the position that came out. Now, I've heard that it was there for discussion. I think you've generated a fair bit of discussion on that.

I've provided the commission with some maps which, hopefully, will help illustrate the points I'm making here. I would have liked to have had a PowerPoint so that everybody could see it and so on and so forth. However, we were told that there weren't any PowerPoints allowed.

The Chair: We have PowerPoints there.

Mr. Simpson: I didn't make one.

The Chair: But there are the maps up there.

Mr. Simpson: Right. But you've got the maps in front of you as it relates to the position.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Simpson: The first map there in front of you just basically outlines what we understand are the proposed electoral boundaries of the Grande Prairie riding. Of course, everything outside of that is the Beaverlodge-Valleyview riding. We've also put on there the existing electoral boundaries showing Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky and how the city is currently divided, probably information that you already know.

The second map starts to deal with the proposed electoral boundaries of the two ridings in the context of the land in the city of Grande Prairie that is not within the city boundary. Now, I missed my colleague Walter's presentation this morning, but obviously we've talked a little bit about the whole issue that, you know, when you're creating the Grande Prairie riding, the first thing we note is that not all of the city is within that riding. Quite clearly, I think we understand that you couldn't probably put the entire city in the riding because with a city of 50,000-plus people and the projected average of populations for a riding of 40,000 or thereabouts, you know, you'd have about a 20 to 25 per cent swing in terms of the average, so it didn't make sense.

But here you can see that in terms of the cookie-cutter approach that was taken or that has been proposed, I guess, it leaves sizable chunks of the city outside of a, quote, city riding. There are other little pieces and parcels around that are also outside. I think that what I did hear of Walter's presentation, it speaks to the whole issue of confusion amongst voters about where they're supposed to be voting. The idea, I think, that's out there in the community is: oh, the whole city is one big riding. Well, in fact, it's not one big riding. In fact, there are parts of the city that are outside.

I've provided, hopefully, in this piece of paper to you a couple of pages here which talk about the populations. This is where the imbalance starts to come in and where I'd like to focus the presentation.

What I've done for the commission is taken a look at the current population of the two ridings – Grande Prairie-Wapiti, Grande Prairie-Smoky – in the context of the variance from the projected population. You can see, I think – and you know this, but I'm going to reiterate it for the record – that the variance between Grande Prairie-Wapiti with the proposed average is 1.6 per cent, and Grande Prairie-Smoky is just under the average. So it's about half a per cent out of where they're supposed to be in accordance with your mandate.

I took a look at the commission-recommended ridings. What would happen if it went into effect tomorrow, and how would it shake out populationwise? Already we see this imbalance start to be created. We note that the Grande Prairie riding is 40,137 persons, so it's below the average by 743, or almost 2 per cent below the average. Beaverlodge-Valleyview, on the other hand, has a variance of 2,547 above the provincial average, or 6.23 per cent above the average. So you've already started to look at a bigger geographical area, more population, and so on.

Moving forward, what do these boundaries mean over the next 10 years, till the next time an Electoral Boundaries Commission comes forward? What we've provided to you and where I'm going to spend a fair bit of my presentation is on where we expect growth patterns to be and what's going to happen with the population within those ridings. We've provided to you a projected population to 2020, which is approximately when the next review would likely take place. The proposed Grande Prairie riding would see an increase in population of about 2,300 people, or an increase of about 5 per cent. The Beaverlodge-Valleyview riding would have an increase of about 13,000 people, or 31.9, almost 32 per cent.

Where do we get those numbers? Well, the growth rates that we used we got from the city's presentation from October. They talked about a 3 per cent per annum growth rate. I'm not going to argue whether that's high or low or whatever. Let's just assume that, you know, we'll take that as a fact.

On map 3 what you'll see are the future residential growth areas within the city of Grande Prairie. Now, you know, it's kind of funny that I as a county planner talk about growth areas in the city, but we do think regionally here. What we're trying to show here is: where are those future growth areas? Those are current vacant lands or lands that are currently looking at being developed. Where are those lands relative to the proposed boundaries?

The blue areas are the areas that are in the proposed Beaverlodge-Valleyview area. You can see the majority of land that would be future growth areas for residential purposes being in the proposed Beaverlodge-Valleyview area. It works out to about 3,422 acres of growth area. If you extrapolated that out to full growth at the current city MDP growth or expectations for density, you're looking at between 54,000 and 68,000 new persons in those areas alone. Conversely, if you take a look at the Grande Prairie riding that's been proposed, the amount of growth area, the vacant residential area in there is about 519 acres. Based around the same density, 16 to 20 persons per acre, you're looking at 8,300 to 10,000. The ratio of growth areas: in the Beaverlodge-Valleyview riding they have about 85 per cent of future residential growth areas versus about 15 per cent in the Grande Prairie riding. So you can see that over time, especially in the next 10 years, not only will an MLA have to look at a great big huge area; he's going to have to look at a significantly larger population than just simply the Grande Prairie area.

The second page of the charts talks about the ratios of growth and so on. If we left the boundaries alone and didn't do anything with them, the shift in terms of ratios changes from 69 per cent in Grande Prairie-Smoky to 31 per cent in Grande Prairie-Wapiti. In other words, Grande Prairie-Wapiti would have about 31 per cent of the growth areas with 1,222 acres, and Grande Prairie-Smoky would still have the lion's share.

Now, you'll recall that in our October meeting the county did suggest that perhaps some tweaking should take place, that we could adjust the boundaries a little bit for future growth and so on. If you looked at the county's position back in October, the ratio of residential growth areas shifts again a little bit to balance it out to about 47 per cent within Grande Prairie-Wapiti and 53 per cent within Grande Prairie-Smoky. So we were looking ahead to, you

know, not only today's issues but down the road in terms of how the population could be adjusted, again with the idea of maintaining the population consistency or ratios within the area. I think we've already talked about the regional issues, and we see them as being intertwined.

11:20

The last map that I've got for you is just to illustrate where we're going long term. Dr. Deimert talked about the IDP between the city and the county. Of course, I'm intimately involved in that. We know where the city is proposed to grow. We know where the growth areas are for the county and so on. If you look at map 4, it shows where the future growth areas are in the area around the city of Grande Prairie.

Now, mind you, we haven't even talked about Beaverlodge or Valleyview or any of the other communities within the proposed Beaverlodge-Valleyview constituency. What it's intended to show here is that all the growth, all the future growth, is within that proposed Beaverlodge-Valleyview riding – all the growth. You know, if you look particularly in the county and you add that to the future city and you look at the future annexation boundaries and so on and so forth, it's huge.

We've also, again, shown the green line of the existing boundaries between Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky as it runs through the city and so on, the idea being that you can see that the current boundaries start to again provide a bit more of a balance between the future growth areas between the two communities.

In summary, in our opinion, it's all about the balance between the two ridings, trying to do it. We understand the geography issues, and I think Walter has pointed those out very, very well. Certainly, he was there. He knows. But as we move forward, we know the workloads of the MLAs. We know the issues – I would disagree with Dr. Deimert – around regional planning and transportation, advanced education. All those issues come to the county of Grande Prairie as well. We had the president of the GPRC out talking to us the other day about where they're growing, how they're growing because they want county support for these things.

You know, although he talks about urban issues – and he listed a whole bunch – I can tell you that those are on our table, too. They're not exclusively urban/rural types of issues. Any MLA from both the city and the rural areas is going to have to deal with all those issues together.

If you look at where the population is growing, how we're growing, and everything else, the proposed boundaries, I think, create a huge imbalance going forward. It makes the case for at least keeping them the same or perhaps tweaking them, as we talked about before.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Mr. Simpson. I guess most of my comments relate to the letter that we've received – it's under the title EBC-SPR-060 – from you. I'm not sure what the date is on it. There are a number of statements in the letter that I find in some cases objectionable and in some cases offensive.

Mr. Simpson: Was that my e-mail?

Dr. Archer: It's entitled "To whom it may concern." It says, for example, "The Commission has completely disregarded the will of the public by choosing to follow the recommendations of a single individual, speaking on behalf of the NDP party and philosophy he embraces." I'm not sure if you were at our public session in

October, but at that public session we had a presentation by the city council of the city of Grande Prairie. I believe the written submission accompanying that presentation identified clearly on city of Grande Prairie letterhead that it was the position of the mayor and council of Grande Prairie. So the statement that the recommendation of the commission was based upon the view of a single individual and a person with a party attachment is completely inconsistent with the experience that I had as a commission member. I found that comment objectionable and inconsistent with the reality that we experienced in the fall.

Mr. Simpson: Well, can I apologize for that comment to the commission? It was perhaps done under a little bit more emotion, but I was there. I was at the hearing, too.

Dr. Archer: Well, then you would know that the submission that the commission received – and it's on our website – was on city of Grande Prairie letterhead.

Mr. Simpson: Correct. Let's remember back that there was no written submission that day. You know, there was a verbal submission, but the written submission came later. You know, there was no opportunity to comment or to provide the kind of comment we're making today to the commission. It was a verbal thing. When I sat there, we thought we'd put together a pretty good argument in terms of why we wanted to keep the boundaries the same. When it came out and it was portrayed as, "Well, you know, we just took the city position," you can understand that we were a little bit disappointed that it seemed to us that the rest of the presentations didn't seem to matter. That was the impression.

Dr. Archer: But that's not what you've written in this letter.

Mr. Simpson: I don't want to belabour that point. I apologize to the commission for the offensive nature of the e-mail.

Dr. Archer: I'm not sure how much more I want to go into this letter, but you note, for example, in the third full paragraph that the commission should be invited here to explain "the error of their ways. And they need to drive to Grande Prairie, not just drop in by virtue of a ride in a government aircraft."

Well, I guess in the interest of full disclosure, we did fly here this morning. We left Peace River. We all had to get up at 6 to leave Peace River to arrive at this meeting. We'll be here for three public sessions today, one fewer public session than we held in the city of Edmonton. I think the plane is scheduled to leave at 10 o'clock tonight. We'll probably get into Edmonton at about 11, and that, from the commission's perspective, is a fairly long day for us, from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. Adding the driving time from Peace River to Grande Prairie and then driving time from Grande Prairie to Edmonton on either side of that meeting strikes me as not reasonable. So we did fly today, and I think the flight was a reasonable accommodation to the needs of the commission because, as you can imagine, we all have day jobs in addition to the work that we're doing on the commission.

Those are the only comments that I have.

Mr. Simpson: Is there anything in the presentation today you'd like to ask about?

Dr. Archer: No, thank you.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Simpson, I'll accept your apology. Again, the comment on that would be that it does detract from the strength of your position when you personalize the position, but I do accept your apology. My question to you is: can you briefly restate for the record the tweaking that was recommended by the county last time just so we capture it? I'm not certain from looking at the existing boundaries. One position to take is that the yellow and the burnt orange areas are divided relatively equally, and there's something to be said for leaving the boundary as is for reasons we've heard otherwise: consistency, why make a change if we don't have to? Are you in a position to just summarize the recommendations you'd have for the tweaking you mentioned?

Mr. Simpson: Well, Mr. Chairman, I don't want to steal the thunder of the reeve, who will be here this afternoon. That will be a part of our presentation this afternoon. We are reintroducing, I guess, our position from October.

Mr. Dobbie: That answers my question. Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Simpson, for your apology. I won't deal with the letter at all.

With regard to the presentation today, I guess a couple of comments. I mean, if these growth projections hold, it would seem to me that it's going to make a future commission's job a little easier because it will be a little easier to deal with that population and distribute it around some ridings in this area that, you know, perhaps will need that at a future boundary distribution.

I have to say that I realize the proposal from the city of Grande Prairie and the notion of having an urban riding surrounded by a county and so on seems to be very controversial here, but, just as a comment, it's not novel in the other areas of the province. This is not an issue, I think, that is going to go away, and it will be interesting for all of us to follow and see how that will turn out.

11:30

I did wonder when we initially did this as to whether the proposal as it is in the interim report would have been more palatable if we could have shrunk that rural riding a little more. As I say, if the growth projections hold, that may be something a little more plausible for a future redistribution. I'm just wondering if you can address that, if that would have been more palatable to have the urban and to have the rural surrounding riding a little bit smaller with a little less distance.

Mr. Simpson: When we talk about that, are you talking about reducing the size of Grande Prairie-Wapiti or Grand Prairie-Smoky?

Ms Jeffs: Well, I think if there was a purely urban riding, then it would be more of a configuration like we have in other cities. Rather than dividing the city down the centre, it would be more of an issue with respect to perhaps taking a remaining piece of that city, if that made sense, to combine it with a rural area or to have a surrounding rural area. But it seemed to me that some of the proposals that were really of concern from the rural area were the physical size of the riding. I just wondered if that was, you know, maybe a direction, that it wasn't so offensive to have urban and rural constituencies so much as some problem with the distance of the one we created.

Mr. Simpson: Well, the distance is huge. The nature of the rural

communities, I think, probably as Walter has pointed out, in terms of numbers of smaller communities, numbers of boards, commissions, and so on: they all demand your time. You know, an MLA gets split a whole bunch of different ways. I guess my experience in terms of how these two ridings have worked is that the issues get split very evenly, very well.

The other thing I look at is in terms of – and this is my personal opinion, of course – what are the core or some of the key issues, provincial issues, that the MLA should be addressing? Things like energy policy, forestry policy, agricultural policy, transportation issues, and so on and so forth: they're not urban-rural. They're provincial in nature, but they benefit the region. You know, we've had some excellent, excellent MLAs from this area who seem to be able to balance those things. It's worked well, so it's the old story of if it ain't broke, why fix it?

We do recognize, you know, as we move forward that, yeah, changes are going to have to occur. How are they going to change and so on and so forth? So on one of the mandates, populationwise, we tried to just put it out there that here is how the area is going to grow.

Ms Jeffs: All right. Okay. That's all I have, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.
Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for your analysis and maps today, Mr. Simpson. I just have one question, and that's regarding the percentages that you have here under existing boundaries modified as per county recommendation. Certainly, looking at your maps, it did appear to me as you were making your presentation that without making some changes to the alignment, we would end up with an unbalanced growth with these new areas that are slated for development of residential areas in and around Grande Prairie.

The obvious question that I don't believe I have an answer for is:

have you discussed, has the county discussed this proposed recommendation that would see 47 per cent of the estimated growth going to Grande Prairie-Wapiti and 53 per cent going to Grande Prairie-Smoky? Have you discussed that with the city, and if so, what is their take on that recommendation? If you haven't, why haven't you?

Mr. Simpson: Well, a couple of comments. I can tell you where it came from. We worked with a baseline number of about 3,900 acres, which are the total growth areas that we've identified. Then we looked at the boundaries. How we arrived at the ratios is that we just basically counted up the number of acres within each and, you know, obviously, divided by the total, and there was a ratio. Then we just analyzed sort of the impact on each, proposed boundaries and existing boundaries, based around the county position from last October. That's how we came up with the different ratios.

We haven't really shared it with the city, per se, because this came together sort of in the last week. What I can say, you know, is that the city and the county worked hard at putting a proposed IDP together – our public hearing is coming up May 4 – and we've looked at how the area should develop or could develop. That's really reflected, I think, in proposed map 4. To the extent that our positions are aligned in terms of growth areas, that's really reflected in map 4.

I'm not sure if that answers the question entirely.

Mr. Evans: Well, yeah, it does. Thank you for that.
I have no further questions, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, Mr. Simpson.

We're off to our next presenter at this time. I know we have a full afternoon, so I think we're going to take a short break now. We will be reconvening at 1:30.

Thank you all.

[The hearing adjourned at 11:36 a.m.]

