



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission  
Public Hearings

Fort McMurray

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## **Legislative Assembly of Alberta**

### **Electoral Boundaries Commission**

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[Judge Walter in the chair]

**The Chair:** Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to come out and share your views with us today. I know I speak for all of the committee, that we're happy to see and hear from everyone who's interested in making a presentation.

My name is Ernie Walter. I'm the chairman of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. I'd like to introduce also the members of the commission here today with me: Dr. Keith Archer of Banff to my far right; Peter Dobbie of Vegreville, who is on my right also; Allyson Jeffs, who is on my left; and Brian Evans of Calgary on my far left.

Our task here today has been directed by legislation: to make recommendations to the Legislative Assembly on the areas, boundaries, and names for 87 electoral divisions based on the latest census and population information. In other words, our job is to determine where to divide Alberta into 87 areas so each Albertan receives effective representation by a Member of the Legislative Assembly. Over the next few months we will seek community input through a province-wide consultation before developing our recommendations. Through public hearings such as our first one here today we want to hear what you have to say about the representation you are receiving in your community.

In carrying out this work, we have to follow the provisions of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. It says that we are to make proposals to the Legislative Assembly regarding the areas, boundaries, and names of 87 electoral divisions. You will recognize that that means we are mandated to propose four additional electoral divisions in Alberta, which will come into effect at the next provincial general election. We'll also be reviewing the law and what the courts have said about electoral boundaries in the province of Alberta and in Canada, the work of previous commissions and committees which have studied the boundaries in Alberta, and the population information which is available to us.

A brief summary of the electoral boundaries law. Number one, our function is to make proposals to the Legislative Assembly for 87 electoral divisions. We have a limited time to accomplish this task. We are required, after consideration of representations made at these public hearings, to submit an interim report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in February 2010 that sets out the areas, boundaries, and names of the 87 proposed electoral divisions and reasons for the proposed boundaries. Following publication of the interim report a second round of public hearings will be held to receive input on the proposed 87 boundaries. After consideration of the input the commission must submit a final report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly by July 2010. Then it is up to the Legislative Assembly by resolution to approve or to approve with alterations the proposals of the commission and to introduce a bill to establish new electoral divisions for Alberta in accordance with the resolution. The law would then come into force when proclaimed, before the holding of the next general election.

One way to ensure effective representation is by developing electoral divisions which have similar populations, especially where population density is similar. The law directs us to use the populations set out in the most recent census of Alberta as provided by Statistics Canada, the 2006 census, but if the commission believes there is population information that is more recent than the federal census compiled by Statistics Canada, then the commission may use this data in conjunction with the census information. Here in Fort McMurray we were able to use more recent population information. As of 2008 the population was listed as 67,910. This puts the region

at 67.8 per cent above the provincial average population of 40,466. I note that we are also required to add the population of Indian reserves that were not included in the census, as provided by the department of Indian and northern affairs.

In dividing Alberta into 87 proposed electoral divisions, the commission will take into consideration any factors it considers appropriate but must and shall take into consideration the following:

- (a) the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,
- (b) sparsity and density of population,
- (c) common community interests and community organizations, including those of [First Nations] reserves and Metis settlements,
- (d) wherever possible, the existing community boundaries within the cities of Edmonton and Calgary,
- (e) wherever possible, the existing municipal boundaries,
- (f) the number of municipalities and other local authorities,
- (g) geographical features, including existing road systems, and
- (h) the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries.

The population rule in the act states that a proposed electoral division must not be more than 25 per cent above or below the average population for all 87 electoral divisions. There is one exception. Up to four proposed electoral divisions may have a population that is as much as 50 per cent below the average population of the electoral divisions of Alberta if three of the following five criteria are met:

- (a) the area . . . exceeds 20 000 square kilometres or the total surveyed area of the proposed electoral division exceeds 15 000 square kilometres;
- (b) the distance from the Legislature Building in Edmonton to the nearest boundary of the proposed electoral division by the most direct highway route is more than 150 kilometres;
- (c) there is no town in the proposed electoral division that has a population exceeding 8000 people;
- (d) the area of the proposed electoral division contains an Indian reserve or a Metis settlement;
- (e) the proposed electoral division has a portion of its boundary coterminous with a boundary of the Province of Alberta.

It says that for these purposes the municipality of Crowsnest Pass is not a town.

That's a very general overview of the legislation, but the Alberta Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada have also provided guidance. In rulings they have agreed that under the Charter the rights of Albertans include the right to vote; the right to have the political strength or value or force of the vote an elector casts not unduly diluted; the right to effective representation; the right to have the parity of the votes of others diluted, but not unduly, in order to gain effective representation or as a matter of practical necessity. These rulings as well as the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act must guide our decisions and, ultimately, the proposals that we make to the Legislative Assembly.

Now that I've explained the law that we are guided by, we want to receive the most important input, and that's 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 Alberta.

Again, on behalf of the commission let me welcome you here today. Those of you who will not be speaking can make your views known through written submissions by e-mail or fax.

2:10

That's the background, and I'll now call on our staff to call the first speaker. Each speaker will have 10 minutes to present and then five minutes for questions and answers with the commission. The commission's public meetings are being recorded by *Alberta*

*Hansard*, and the audio recording will be posted on the commission website. Transcripts of these proceedings will also be available. If you have registered as a presenter or choose to participate in this evening's meeting, we ask that you identify yourself for the record prior to starting your presentation.

Now, are we ready?

**Ms Friesacher:** Yes. Our first presenter is Mr. Guy Boutilier.

**The Chair:** Mr. Boutilier, welcome.

**Guy Boutilier, MLA**  
**Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo**

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, distinguished panel guests. Welcome. Bienvenue à la ville de Fort McMurray. Welcome to the oil sands capital of the world. We have something that the rest of the world wants.

I just want to first say that it's my understanding that there was some technical confusion on the fact that it has always been my intention to present in my constituency, and it's my understanding that there was an expectation by the panel that I was going to be speaking in Edmonton last week or so. I just wanted to say that it's always been my intention to speak in my constituency, which I call my home, and that's why I had chosen to speak here in Fort McMurray as opposed to in Edmonton. I apologize to those who organized the meetings if there was some confusion, but I can say that this is my home, and this is where I think it's important to speak and to address such an important topic as electoral boundaries.

I today speak from the perspective of an MLA for the past over 12 years and prior to that as mayor and as a member of city council. I'm very proud to say that the city of Fort McMurray amalgamated during my time as mayor to become Wood Buffalo, which spans, as you are very familiar, an electoral boundary of 68,000 square kilometres, the largest in our province. It spans, of course, from the Northwest Territories border to the Saskatchewan border and splits the half of the province and almost down past Conklin, which is quite a geographically large size. It remains an honour and a privilege to represent the people of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo in terms of our community as their elected official. I speak today, though, as the MLA and also as a citizen relative to what I have observed.

As a point of clarity, I would first of all indicate that I thank you for the information that was sent to homes relative to the current electoral divisions and also the comparison to population. As our mayor in the regional municipality has indicated to the government and to officials within the government, the number that is being used for electoral district 54 under the census – the census was completed by the municipality, which indicated a population of 103,000. If you note, the number that is being used under electoral district 54, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, is being quoted as 52,658. I am presenting today based on what we believe to be the census, that was done by the municipality, of 103,000 people, making Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo the third-largest city, next to Calgary and Edmonton, in the entire province of Alberta. It does therefore indicate that the 39.2 would be, clearly, closer to 70 per cent in terms of the number.

This region has experienced tremendous growth over the past five years, the investment dollars in oil sands and the population move. The jobs that have been created in the oil sands over the past five years has been unprecedented, no single comparison with any other city in the entire province of Alberta. Having said that, there appears to be a dispute over the electoral number of population here, but I am presenting under the 103,000 that Mayor Blake had made

reference to in terms of the census that was completed by the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo.

I operate under that basis when I say that, obviously putting us at about plus 70 per cent, over 70 per cent, in terms of the deviation from what is considered to be a norm within an electoral boundary. The past five years since the last review – the last review, in fact, had this district and regional boundary division above the average then, and the unprecedented growth in the past five years supersedes that by almost double the percentage of anywhere else in the province.

Consequently, the result of that would require, without question, in meeting, I believe, the average of 37,820 – operating under the premise of our population at 103,000, it could almost border on three MLAs. I understand the instruction that we as a Legislature had given relative to the direction of the 87 electoral divisions. I do want to say that certainly it will be welcome news that the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo will in fact enjoy, hopefully, on the recommendations from citizens and for people involved – it is my hope that there will be a minimum, keeping with the average of 37,000, of two MLAs in this region.

In terms of that premise of 103,000, also under the premise of there being two MLAs in this region, the question then would be: how does one divide the electoral boundaries to show a sense of fairness, a sense of balance, and a measurement of what is reasonable based on other electoral divisions within the province?

Our history in this region had, first, the city of Fort McMurray, which at the time had over 40,000. I served as the MLA in '97 under that amount of population. Then the division, not including Fort Chipewyan, Fort MacKay, Janvier, Conklin, Anzac, Sapræ Creek, some of the other communities with a variety of population, including Fort Fitzgerald, where I am pleased to say that as a voting population there are two people available, two. It's not often you get a hundred per cent of the vote. I was very pleased as MLA to be able to visit Fort Fitzgerald, which is part of the boundary, and obtain that objective.

Now, having said that, I believe that the population as well as the geographics should also consider the natural trading areas, and I believe the Athabasca River is a defining point in our regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. Therefore, I suggest under the criteria of 37,820 per electoral district, that north of the Athabasca, which would include Thickwood and Timberlea, including Fort MacKay, including Fort Chipewyan, the oldest settlement in Alberta, as well as Fort Fitzgerald going to the Northwest Territories, would be one electoral division, and south of the Athabasca River would include the other. That would include the downtown core of the city of Fort McMurray, the regional municipality; it would also include Sapræ Creek; it would include Anzac; it would include Conklin; it would include Janvier, Chard, and the communities south of the Athabasca River.

My humble recommendation would be that, based on population, the northern part would still have a greater population above the average of 37,820. The lower would be about the average of the recommended electoral boundary. But I do believe that the Athabasca River is a defining point.

**2:20**

Not only that, but there are five First Nations in my regional municipality of Wood Buffalo and as the MLA. Three First Nations bands would be north of the river: the Fort Chipewyan band and the Mikisew band as well as the Fort MacKay band. The southern part would include the Janvier band and the Gregoire band. I think it is an even distribution of our aboriginal communities based on their natural historic trading, shall I say, that has taken place on the rivers,

yet it would include both urban and rural. At one point the electoral district I represented in '97 was purely urban, which included the city of Fort McMurray. The rural area, in fact, was held by the Athabasca MLA at the time. The electoral district was Athabasca, and it was then held by the hon. Mike Cardinal.

Obviously, Fort McMurray, you know, was somewhat closer to Fort Chipewyan, Fort MacKay than Athabasca riding at the time. Much of those, again, were decisions I can't really explain, but I believe that north of the river and south of the river, including both urban and rural communities and First Nation communities north and urban and rural and aboriginal communities south, is, in my judgment, a reasonable, measured approach to the electoral boundaries based on our populations.

I thank you for my presentation.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Boutilier. Just a couple of things here. We had sent you a letter originally as an independent member of the Legislature to appear before the commission, just as we had sent to each party.

**Mr. Boutilier:** And I thank you.

**The Chair:** In no sense was that to replace your presentation here; there were to be two. Just so you know.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you. It was somewhat new terrain for me. Obviously, I've chosen to represent it, but I apologize if the commission members had an expectation of me. I understood that there was an expectation for me to present in Edmonton, but I thank you for the invitation like the other parties that were involved. Obviously, I'm here today.

**The Chair:** The second thing I just wanted to point out is that with the new numbers we're getting in terms of population from 2008, which are now reflecting in 2009, our average population is 40,466, and we have the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo population listed at 67,910, 68,000. A significant population above that, that is for census purposes, isn't regarded as being applicable in terms of voting, and these are the best numbers we have at this point. I know we're going to have a number of questions of you because we can't leave Wood Buffalo-Fort McMurray as one municipality. I believe it was the request at the last commission that it be left as one, but at this commission we can't fit it into one electoral division at this point. We have to have at least the two.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you for that, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Now, I'm sure there are members of the panel that have questions.

Dr. Archer?

**Dr. Archer:** Sure. Well, thanks for that presentation. It was quite helpful. I wonder if we could just talk for a moment about the population figures that you were citing of 103,000 and the comment by the chairman but that the data that we're looking at shows the population of the district at about 67,000. Do you know what accounts for that gap? It's a pretty substantial gap.

**Mr. Boutilier:** It is.

**Dr. Archer:** My sense is that one of the things that may account for it is the so-called shadow population, or population of people who are temporarily residing in the district but who likely have an

opportunity to vote in a different riding, possibly in a different province. Are there other factors that are accounting for that gap between the data that we're using and the data that you cited?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Well, it's a very good question, and this would be my opinion of what I believe speaks to the variance that you speak of. I believe the number is around – 66,000, I believe, is the new number.

**The Chair:** Just about 68,000.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Just say 68,000 versus the 103,000. I've received that number from the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, from the mayor and council, who in fact have completed their census. I might add as the MLA and as a former Minister of Municipal Affairs for four years that it is also based on methodology relative to the determination of population because, obviously, population is a determining factor for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo in terms of the grants they receive from the Municipal Affairs ministry. In doing so, there has been somewhat of a dispute relative to the methodology that was used by the regional municipality and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. I'm very pleased to say, though, that the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the hon. Ray Danyluk, met both with me in the last month as well as with the mayor relative to determining what he viewed as somewhat of a middle ground relative to the methodology that was used.

If I could elaborate on methodology just for a moment, the methodology was that . . .

**The Chair:** Could I just stop you for one minute? We have a limit of five minutes on questioning. Do we have other presenters who are waiting? If not, I'm going to suggest that we go ahead and finish these questions.

Go ahead.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Can I continue?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Well, very briefly, the methodology that was used. In Fort McMurray it has been explained – there are many people if you travel on a residential street, determining the number of cars that are on the street – that people are trying to assist with the chronic housing problem that we have by accommodating people in their homes, be it in basement suites and so on and so forth. It's often indicated that sometimes they are not wanting to – in fact, the resident is the resident, but how do you get to the real number of what's there if there's a basement suite, a legal basement suite? It's my understanding, based on previous presentations, that capturing the number of people that are staying, to help with the chronic housing problem, in other homes – the numbers are larger in some of the residential homes because they are attempting to, in fact, accommodate some of the chronic housing problem that is taking place here.

I might also add that for the postal codes that are used in the shadow population, the province now uses them as a part of funding for the municipality, which they never did before. At one point there were almost 25,000 to 30,000 people in camps that had postal codes in other parts of the province, which in my understanding is determining where they vote. Yet they are the same people that are showing up at a hospital ward; they are the same people that are travelling on our highways each and every day. I don't have the simple answer to: how do they get to vote? There have been many

complaints received in my office saying, “We didn’t get to vote for our MLA” because they said their postal code, and that’s after living here for a year based on, perhaps, living in a camp.

They’ve indicated that they feel that right now this is their home, and they should be able to exercise that right in terms of the health services they receive, the infrastructure they use. They also, then, have a right to be able to launch their complaint to their MLA in this region. I can repeat numerous occasions of those presentations that I’ve heard as well. What their actual number is: based on what I’ve observed, based on the regional municipality’s input, I would venture to guess that the population in this region right now, with the slowdown in the economy, based on the camp numbers that are there today, which should not be included under existing legislation, would be somewhere in, I believe, 90,000 to 95,000 population. That’s what my humble opinion is from speaking to leaders in the community. The municipality has a census that says 103,000.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Evans:** Thanks, Chairman. Good afternoon, Mr. Boutilier, and welcome. Thanks for your presentation. I have one question, and that’s related to whether you’ve had an opportunity to discuss your proposed division with municipalities and individuals in your constituency.

2:30

**Mr. Boutilier:** Yes, I have.

**Mr. Evans:** Okay. Has that been fairly extensive, and can you give us a sense of what the positive, negative, or neutral reaction of your constituents has been?

**Mr. Boutilier:** That’s a very good question, Mr. Evans. I can say that in my meeting with my board as well as with chambers of commerce and the municipality – I’m trying to think of how to say this gently. Most people don’t wake up in the morning thinking about what the electoral boundaries are in Alberta. Having said that, I can say that it has not been met with any negative response or feedback based on my suggestion of north of the river and south of the river. It was observed that south of the river would have a lower population than north of the river but certainly fit within the boundary. Now, I was using 37,000, but I believe quoted now as 40,666. Based on population, even if our population was over 80,000, certainly that would still, I believe, fit into the framework of what this commission has set out to do.

**Mr. Evans:** Okay. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Dobbie:** Mr. Boutilier, I would be interested in hearing from you as to your prediction of where future population growth will be in Fort McMurray itself. The concern we talked about is that we are setting boundaries that will apply for in the range of eight years plus. We are hoping to avoid a situation where we are creating a problem right away that in two years will put one particular riding significantly over the 25 per cent figure. Do you have any direction or input for us as to where you see the population growth in the city of Fort McMurray?

**Mr. Boutilier:** What I have seen – I think I know my community pretty well after 31 years of living here – is that there is going to be housing development in the southern part of the region, heading south towards the Anzac area. Development is going on there now.

There’s also development going on in Saline Creek, North Parsons Creek, which is in the Timberlea area, and that development is carrying forward as well. I might say that the government of Alberta, in fact, are working in partnership relative to a big housing development on the southern part of the campus of Keyano College, which I believe could literally be a community in itself, which on my suggestion would be in the south part of the city. So I am expecting growth in the southern part of the city and also growth in the northern part.

Pertaining to a decision you make as a panel recommending to the Legislature, I can only say that the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo region has been a region, you know, having spoken with former Premier Lougheed, that the direct involvement of the province in the city is something that’s unprecedented. The province literally built a good portion of the city because it can never keep up with the rapid growth of what is taking place. If I can put it in perspective, the generic fiscal regime in 1997 that was announced – I had just become the new MLA for this region, leaving as mayor – predicted \$20 billion of investment over 20 years. Well, as we all witnessed, the bottom line is that \$20 billion went to over \$80 billion, and it just happened 10 years ahead of any expectation of any planner or any businessperson. The bottom line is that no one could have ever predicted the tremendous growth that has taken place in this community.

I believe that it’s a very different electoral boundary area than any other place in the province, and I’m very pleased to say that the government of Alberta has recognized that by, in fact, providing some special, unique circumstances under the Radke report, which I would encourage all members to avail themselves of. The Radke report basically says that one size does not fit all and that the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, based on the investment of billions of dollars, is very different from other parts of this province.

**The Chair:** I know we’re running short of time here, but could I just ask you if you would go over to the map and indicate on the map where you would suggest breaking the city of Fort McMurray down.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Oh, okay. It actually is the river.

**The Chair:** There’s a mike that will go with you.

**Mr. Boutilier:** I want to say that I’ve always wanted to be a weatherman.

**The Chair:** Just the one to your left over there, if you could, the bigger map.

**Mr. Boutilier:** This one here?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Boutilier:** This is the Athabasca River; this is the Clearwater River. I’m suggesting that the Athabasca River would be the southern part, which is the urban centre; it also includes the downtown. It would include Sapræ Creek. It would also include the new development that’s going on. As well, Janvier, Conklin, Sapræ Creek, and Anzac would all be part of this region.

Then north of the city would be the new development in Saline Creek, which is in this area, as well as North Parsons Creek. The oil sands plants are north of there, but then further is Fort MacKay as well as Fort Chipewyan and, of course, finally, Fort Fitzgerald. This is also an urban area, but it is also a rural area, which includes Fort MacKay and Fort Chipewyan as well as Fort Fitzgerald.

South is the urban area, the downtown core of the city, which would be where we are right now. Also, it would go farther south down here to Janvier and Conklin. As you know, the electoral division right now borders on the Lac La Biche-St. Paul riding just south of Conklin. Conklin and that would remain in that area to be able to keep the balance of, I think, about 40,000 here, and it would be closer to 50,000 in this area here, based on the river splitting. I hope that answers your question.

**The Chair:** It does. Thank you very much. There being no further questions, thank you very much for giving us the input. We very much appreciate it.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much.

**Ms Friesacher:** Our next presenter is Veronique Rensonnet.

**Veronique Rensonnet**  
**Private Citizen**

**Ms Rensonnet:** Thank you. I'm glad I got here just in time to hear that. Can I comment on something he said, just part of it?

**The Chair:** Well, if it's part of your submission, certainly.

**Ms Rensonnet:** I would be concerned about splitting it down the river north and south for the simple reason that if you were to look at the average square footage of a home north of the river as opposed to south of the river, you would find that there is probably a big difference, that people with a higher income tend to live north of the river, and those with a lower income tend to live south. I don't know if that's going to change with the new developments. With what he's proposing you'd basically have the higher income portion of the population in the electoral division in which the oil sands are. I see that as being kind of disparate in who gets the say on the oil sands. Like, half the city of Fort McMurray would not really have any say in the district that still supports them as would everybody else north of the river. That's what I'd be concerned about.

I don't know if it's possible within the rules of the legislation, but what I see when I think about electoral districts is that people in rural areas tend to have very little real representation because if you have a huge district with a big city, you have 90 per cent of your population all in one, like in the urban service area, and then you have 10 per cent of the population in rural areas. Then that rural population, who has very different interests and needs than the urban service area, doesn't really get any real representation when the politician who's looking for votes is going to go to the urban service area, where 90 per cent of the people are. So I came to suggest – and I don't know if it's possible – if it would be possible, to make, like, the urban service area an electoral district in itself and then have all of the rural area surrounding it an electoral district, kind of like a little island, you know, in the middle. Then you end up with the rural population actually having a real say.

I can see where the issue would be that you would say: okay, well, if you do that, then the politician who's trying to address the rural area has to travel a lot more, and it's much more difficult to reach everybody. But at the same time, he's addressing a lot more similar needs. That's what I came to suggest. I think Fort McMurray is actually probably too big to do that, like, just in one node. I guess it might even have to be two.

2:40

As far as the future development of the city goes, though, it's not a mystery or a matter of opinion. The maps for the development for

the next 20 years are already online with the city. You can see where all the developments are. I can show you if you want.

That's what I came to suggest.

**The Chair:** All right.

Ms Jeffs, do you have some questions?

**Ms Jeffs:** Just one question regarding the suggestion about having a rural, almost sort of a doughnut riding around the city of Fort McMurray. Do you have any sense as to how that would impact in terms of the connections to the city? I understand what you're saying in terms of rural and urban voters perhaps having different interests, but do you have a sense as to whether it would break that sort of connection to the city and the interest that they may very well have in the development of the city?

**Ms Rensonnet:** Yeah. I think that would be a good thing. I think the idea is that having that – it's almost too connected. It's like basically all of the rural development is reliant just upon what the urban service centre wants, so this would be a chance to disconnect a little bit and say: hey, wait a minute. I mean, who's the most affected by the oil sands development? Economically it would be the urban service area, but physically in their daily lives in every way, like, it's the people in the rural areas that are most affected, I think. It's their lands that are being developed, that are being strip-mined, and they're the ones who drink the water downstream. You know what I mean? I just think they have different interests, and that would be the point: to give them a chance to separate their interests from the people that live in the city.

**Dr. Archer:** Thanks for your proposal. One of the challenges, I think, that the commission would face if we adopted that approach would be to find a population base large enough in this area that is only rural or primarily rural that would be sufficient on its own to constitute an electoral division. All divisions have to be within, you know, a given variance, and even with the special districts that can vary by up to 50 per cent below the average, that's still a population of over 20,000 given the electoral quotient that we're currently working with. If we were to go in that direction, it strikes me that there may not be enough population base within the current riding.

**Ms Rensonnet:** I thought of that. If I could show you something.

**Dr. Archer:** Yes. Sure. If you could point out where you would suggest the rural riding would end up, that would be helpful.

**Ms Rensonnet:** I would also like to add – I forgot to say it – that I think it would be more than fair. When you consider the plus or minus, it would be a lot more reasonable to consider a plus in an urban area and a minus in a rural area simply because of that reason: they're so far apart, and that candidate has to travel a lot more to get to their population.

I'll show you what I was thinking. What I was thinking was that the entire north part of Alberta, rurally speaking, has common interests. They're in the same kind of common industry. If you look anywhere north of the Lac La Biche area down here, there's no agriculture north of here. It's all basically oil and forestry, right? It's the same kind of purpose. So I was thinking that you could actually make – if it was to give rural people a bigger voice, right? – a big huge square and not necessarily have to divide it east and west, and then you'd have the little island with Fort McMurray and then another little island with Peace River, Grande Prairie, and Grandview. You know, the little triangle there. You know what I'm

talking about? You could have two little islands in a big huge square. Then the rural population gets a voice, and you get enough population.

I don't have the statistics or know how to calculate it. I don't know if that would still give you enough population or not, but it's an idea I wanted to bring forward.

And the new developments here. There's not only going to be a big new development being built here and here, but they're also looking at one across the Clearwater River as well as up here.

**Mr. Evans:** Well, thank you for your presentation. The real problem, of course, for us is trying to ensure that we do give every Albertan effective representation. I certainly hear what you're saying about common interests in the rural areas, but if you look at the map and just take a look at, for example, the map on the far right and take a look at the existing electoral division and how much area that is relative to the entire area of Alberta with a very small population, I'm just really fearful that expanding out that rural area in the north, where it's so difficult to get from point A to point B, as you've correctly observed, would make it extremely difficult for the citizens in that area to be effectively represented and, you know, the flip side of that coin, very difficult for an MLA or the MLAs who would take on those exceptionally large areas to do a proper job for their constituents.

**Ms Rensonnet:** Yeah. I could definitely see that that would be the other side of the argument. I'd be curious to see statistics on how many of these rural communities actually get visits by candidates in person at all in any election. With the technology that's done today, almost everything is done online anyway. You know what I mean?

I do think that that would have to probably be accompanied by the idea that candidates in large rural areas should receive some additional financial support to be able to visit the outlying communities, but I guess that's a different issue altogether, right?

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you very much for your presentation. It was very interesting. Again, thank you.

**Ms Rensonnet:** Thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms Friesacher:** Our next presenter is Mr. Don Reimer.

**Don Reimer**  
**Private Citizen**

**Mr. Reimer:** Well, thank you very much. I didn't expect to have the opportunity to speak to the commission today, but since it appears you have a little bit of time, I'll just confirm a couple of things for you. I'm the president of SeventhHaven Group in Fort McMurray. We're a business, public affairs, and communications consulting group based here. I'm speaking to you today as a citizen and not in any official context with respect to an organization or a constituency that's here although I know a lot about many of those organizations' thinking on the subject that you're here to discuss.

I have a submission which is in the process of being developed, and you will be getting that in due course, prior to your deadline, but I think it would be worth spending a few moments reflecting on both some of the population figures you've heard today but more so the growth rate that I think your commission and Dr. Archer have already put your finger on with respect to how you go forward. If you look at the population numbers for Fort McMurray just as an urban centre, between 1996 and 2007 the population of the city

doubled. What you're going to see there is seven consecutive years of an average of 9 per cent population growth for the municipality in that time frame.

As you look forward over the eight-year horizon of your commission's recommendations for this riding and for the province, we reflect on what we've seen as a deferral of capital by the oil sands development industry in the current recession. Prior to 2008 there was \$120 billion of capital committed to come here in the next five years between 2008 and 2013. A number of those projects have been deferred; a number have not and have gone forward. If you look at, for example, Imperial Oil's Kearl Lake project, you'll recognize that they are going full speed ahead and have not deferred any capital investment whatsoever.

2:50

If the accelerated pace for oil sands development picks up in 2009 and we see that level of capital commitment brought to fruition here in that next period of five to seven years, we could conceivably see the same level of growth in Fort McMurray in that seven-year time frame that we saw between 1996 and 2007 in the city, meaning that the city's population is going to double. That's, I think, a consciousness the commission will want to keep in mind just with respect to how you forecast the impact on ridings in this region.

The local MLA has given you an indication of the fact that there is going to be, I think, a fairly consistent theme you're going to hear about, not just two ridings for this region but in light of that kind of potential growth three ridings for this region. As soon as you get into that kind of discussion and debate, then how you start to carve up the population centre takes on a much, much different configuration as you go forward. I think I would just leave it at that.

There are several other themes that you're going to see in the submission that you'll be getting from me, including some of the arguments around reflecting this region as the economic engine for the entire province. That doesn't fit inside the criteria for your deliberations, but there's still a significant business case to be made there as well. I would just halt at this point, sir.

**The Chair:** Peter, do you have any questions?

**Mr. Dobbie:** No. As I understand it, you'll be making a written presentation. Frankly, the more information we have, the better recommendations we can come to. So we look forward to it.

**Ms Jeffs:** Again, thank you for what you've provided, but I'm a bit tantalized. Perhaps if you don't want to talk a little bit more about the presentation you're going to make, do you have any comments on the suggestion of one of the previous speakers of the division at the river north and south vis-à-vis Fort McMurray?

**Mr. Reimer:** Well, if we were to look at a three-riding scenario, you know, I think you would end up in a position where we'd see a similar kind of division that we have in other urban centres in Alberta, where you'd have a north, a central, and a south riding, so that what you'd be looking at would be a Wood Buffalo north riding, including part of the northern population base in Fort McMurray; a Fort McMurray centre riding, which would include population from both the north and the south side of the river, the downtown core, the lower townsite as well as Thickwood, for example, perhaps parts of Timberlea; and then a Wood Buffalo south riding, which would include Saline Creek in the south, which is a 20,000-resident subdivision that's on the development books and also the Hangingstone development on the south side of the river. So you'd be in a position where you'd have population on both sides of the



river in a Fort McMurray centre riding in addition to what you'd have in Wood Buffalo south.

Now, in the two-riding scenario I think you'd find a significant level of both support and understanding for using the Athabasca River as a dividing line. It's a natural geographic division that makes a significant amount of sense. There are arguments both pro and con for a different look at that, but I think many people would favour that.

Does that help?

**Ms Jeffs:** It does a little bit. Thank you.

**Mr. Evans:** Thanks for your presentation. Do you see any rationale for considering the likelihood of a population increase outside of the metropolitan area of Fort McMurray as it now stands? You've indicated some very large plans that are already approved and are probably undergoing some infrastructure at this point in time. Is there any reason from your perspective to believe that a larger population might come to pass in the next eight years further afield from downtown Fort McMurray?

**Mr. Reimer:** There are several reasons for that, and they're all tied to oil sands development dynamics in the region. Just thinking back to Imperial Oil's Kearl Lake presentation in front of the Energy and Utilities Board, at the point that hearing went forward, Imperial Oil made it very clear that they were going to be a fly-in, fly-out operation because their labour base was too far away on-site from Fort McMurray to live here.

As a result, what we've seen with that kind of development north of the river in the mining sites – there is significant interest in a new town in the mining centres north of Fort McMurray, and that has been centred around Fort MacKay. So you'd be well served to spend a little bit of time to look at what those plans look like based on the Fort McKay First Nations planning at this point.

On the south side of the river in the SAGD lands, where we're dealing with steam-assisted gravity drainage and in situ kinds of processing, you could also make a substantial case that there should be another Fort McMurray in the south part of Wood Buffalo; in other words, another large urban centre. The planning hasn't proceeded too far on that, but there's been quite a bit of discussion about that kind of a centre and a need in those SAGD development areas in that Conklin, Janvier corridor as well.

The answer to your question, I believe, is yes. There are a number of factors that would drive population centres developed outside of Fort McMurray.

**Mr. Evans:** Okay. Thanks very much.

**Dr. Archer:** Yeah. Mr. Reimer, thanks for your presentation and your comments. One of the things that will be especially useful to

us as we go forward is to try to get a good handle on where the growth is likely to be over the period in which these boundaries are in effect. So if in your presentation that you're preparing you can provide as much information on the developments that you've referred to here, that would be really helpful to us and to give some indication as to where those various developments are in the planning, approval, implementation stages. It allows us to better understand the nature of the growth patterns in each of the areas of the province and in particular the area around here, that has seen substantial growth over the period since the last boundary commission did its work. It's more a comment than a question.

**Mr. Reimer:** Well, thank you. I would just refer you back to the previous presenter and her direction for you to perhaps look at the planning and development department's work on the municipal website for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. You're going to see there something called the fringe areas study, which are all the new development areas around the population base of Fort McMurray. It includes a 20,000-plus resident subdivision in Saline Creek south of the river. It includes a 15,000- or 10,000-plus subdivision between the Hangingstone River and the Horse River on the south side of the Athabasca. It includes North Parsons Creek, which is another 15,000-plus subdivision north of the river. There is also development proposed on the east side of the Clearwater just before the confluence of the Athabasca, which has longer term development potential as well.

The difficulty in Fort McMurray is that when you look at development dynamics here for new population subdivisions, most of the easily serviceable land is now inhabited, and we get into different dynamics and more expensive servicing when we get into the softer areas for new subdivision development, which all these fringe area subdivisions are contained in.

So you'd be well served to have a look at the fringe areas study from the municipality, which has been done in significant detail to this point.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you very much for your presentation. We look forward to receiving your written submissions, and I'm sure they'll be very helpful. Thank you.

**Mr. Reimer:** Thank you, sir. Thank you, panel.

**Ms Friesacher:** Are there any other presenters?

**The Chair:** Do we want, then, to take a short adjournment? We'll reconvene when the next presenter arrives.

We'll adjourn now.

[The hearing adjourned at 3 p.m.]





