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Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission

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[Judge Walter in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon. My name is Ernie Walter, and I am the chair of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission. With me here today are 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. We're here to listen and get your input and, hopefully, based on the submissions that we've already heard and received and on your submissions, make our final decision.

I should point out that the commission recognizes that there has been a shift in the wishes of city council to recommend an urban-only riding here in Grande Prairie. We've received, in addition to that change in city council's position, many submissions opposing the creation of a separate urban riding, and we are certainly taking account of that.

With that, if we could call our first presenter.

Ms Friesacher: Our first speaker is Mayor Leora MacKinnon, town of Fox Creek.

The Chair: Mrs. MacKinnon, since we are being recorded in *Hansard*, would you be so kind as to give your name and who you're representing for the record? Thank you.

Mrs. MacKinnon: Good afternoon. I'm Leora MacKinnon, mayor of the town of Fox Creek.

Thank you for giving me a chance to give you some of the points coming from the town of Fox Creek council and the residents of Fox Creek. I have speaking notes. I don't have a submission to hand in. I just have my own notes highlighted here so that I can make sure that I cover all of my points.

The Chair: Please do.

**Leora MacKinnon, Mayor
Town of Fox Creek**

Mrs. MacKinnon: I understand that you've been assigned a difficult task, and I'm grateful to be here for you to hear me. I wish I would have been here the first round. I wasn't up on the idea that something was going to be happening to Fox Creek, or I would have been here the first time to tell you that we would like to stay status quo. From my council's perspective, they've also written letters of support to stay status quo. Our standing is: why fix something that's working well? As far as the town of Fox Creek is concerned, having the two MLAs, one in the Grande Prairie-Smoky riding and one in the Grande Prairie-Wapiti riding, makes it a win-win for everyone. Having two voices at the table – one urban, one rural, both urban, both rural – they can answer questions. Most people don't get a chance to have that kind of luxury, to have two of them that represent the region.

This region is unique to us. We've worked very hard with the MD of Greenview, town of Valleyview, and town of Grande Cache to come up with what we feel is our community development agreement. We have intermunicipal development. We sit on the regional landfill commission of Fox Creek, Valleyview, the MD of Greenview. We have a medical clinic agreement. We have a fire services agreement with the MD. Fox Creek and Valleyview are all part of the same seniors' services foundation, which is Heart River. We're part of the same school district, Alberta Health Services north, the

regional EMS service. The town of Valleyview and the town of Fox Creek share a community peace officer as well as public works equipment; we've gotten grants together, and we share the equipment on a regular basis.

To us it's felt that moving the boundaries solely on population doesn't seem to be the answer. We're requesting that the commission consider the actual working agreements that we do have in this region. We have no similar agreements with the town of Whitecourt or Woodlands county, for that matter. We do sit on the Grande Alberta Economic Region as 12 different municipalities, and Fox Creek is the furthest north municipality that sits there. We do work as a regional board on economic diversification, but we don't have any concrete agreements with Whitecourt.

More and more people are coming to Grande Prairie and using Grande Prairie as a hub for shopping and medical, and we use their facilities here on a regular basis. Grande Prairie has asked for letters of support from the town of Fox Creek for the new proposed medical hospital, for their new recreation centre on the basis that the residents of Fox Creek do use the amenities up here. In that matter it's important that this area remains status quo as well. The way that we look at it, from our perspective, is that the county and the city of Grande Prairie have worked very hard over the years to evolve their working relationship to work well together, and it's our understanding that if the division was there, it would cause a lot of dissension amongst not only the two councils but also the residents.

You have said that the city of Grande Prairie has withdrawn their approval to have just an urban riding here. I've read many submissions on your website, which I'm sure you're all familiar with each one of them as well. I believe that the one from the mayor of Grande Prairie was the most important one that you received for this area. I really believe that in hearing a 7 to 2 vote from their council, their resolution to remain status quo, it's very important that the whole region understands that that's one of the most important letters that you've received, from my perspective.

The second one, I believe, is one that was signed through Doug Horner's office by five different MLAs in the region: Wayne Drysdale, Hector Goudreau, Mel Knight, Robin Campbell, and George VanderBurg. I believe that's the second most important one that you received because these MLAs were elected by the public to support majority. Their voice needs to be heard as well, that they would like this to remain status quo.

My colleague Tony Yelenik is in the audience, and we've worked hard together to make sure that we have a great working relationship up in this area. One of the statements that Tony has made: "It is imperative that the boundaries of the two constituencies remain essentially as at present, in order to maintain the current state of inter-municipal cooperation and established relationships." I can't emphasize enough that it is so important for the people of Fox Creek that we remain within the same constituency as the MD, as we work hand in hand with them on so many different levels.

1:30

The town of Onoway, the county of Yellowhead made solid recommendations to you as well that Fox Creek remain status quo. The town of Whitecourt, Woodlands county, and myself signed a letter stating that we would like to remain status quo. The reeve from Lac Ste. Anne county sent a letter stating that Fox Creek for economic and social reasons would like to stay within their same constituency.

One of the points that I don't think you've heard from Fox Creek is that at no time did anyone, to my knowledge, come forward and ask to be moved from this riding. I've heard from many of my colleagues that there was discussion that Fox Creek was in favour of

this move. To my knowledge, from my council there's never been any request to have us moved into the Whitecourt-Ste. Anne riding. As a region, as I said, we work very hard together. I can't emphasize enough how important that is for us to just remain status quo.

All we're asking is that you reconsider your proposal to have the boundary shifted not only for the Grande Prairie-Smoky and the Grande Prairie-Wapiti areas but also to leave Fox Creek to remain in the same constituency.

The Chair: Thank you. That was very well done.

Dr. Archer: Well, thanks, Mayor MacKinnon. We've certainly heard a number of presentations today and received a lot of written input to suggest that moving back to a situation closer to the status quo is consistent with the desires of a number of the representatives in this region. Your view is not new, right? It's not unique.

One of the issues we'll have to look at, of course, is the populations of the constituencies around the two Grande Prairie constituencies. I know that the Whitecourt-Ste. Anne riding, even with Fox Creek placed within it, is under the provincial average, not dramatically under; it's about 5 per cent under. But I'm not sure exactly what will happen. Peter is just saying it'll go to about 11 per cent under in the event that Fox Creek is removed from that constituency. That's probably a percentage that is something that this boundaries commission likely can live with.

My sense, though, is that as we look ahead to the next commission, there likely will be a need for that commission to rethink some of the constituency boundaries in this area of the province, particularly if the commission is not provided with additional seats to assign, given the differential growth that's taking place in Alberta at the moment. If that were the case and there was a need to look at putting Fox Creek, not in this redistribution but in a subsequent redistribution process, in a different riding, would there be an advantage over, let's say, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, for example, versus West Yellowhead as a possible future location?

Mrs. MacKinnon: That's a good question. I, too, looked at the numbers for if Fox Creek was to be removed out of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. It was, like, 33,000, I believe, and above with Fox Creek included in there.

To move Fox Creek to the West Yellowhead riding I don't see as being an advantage to Fox Creek as well. Remaining in the north, focused on what we do with the neighbouring communities – I'm not saying that it couldn't be done, that we wouldn't have a great working relationship with other communities as well, but for the future of Fox Creek right now it's imperative that we stay in this riding.

I believe Whitecourt is on your census count as going to go up quite a bit from the last time Whitecourt had done a census. There's a lot of growth that has been happening in the Whitecourt area. I believe that you're going to see that area keep growing. In the future your numbers are going to go up.

I also understand that there's been a recommendation that the village of Entwistle, which is not huge numbers, would also like to be in the Whitecourt-Ste. Anne riding with the village of Evansburg. They, too, share mutual agreements and share services. That, too, would help your numbers go up.

Some of the riding around the West Yellowhead to be put into Whitecourt-Ste. Anne: I can see that happening in the future but not Fox Creek.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Mayor. That's all I have.

Mrs. MacKinnon: Thank you.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mayor MacKinnon. You've done a very clear job outlining the existing relationships and stated why they are so important to you.

I'd like you to help us to answer the question that we will likely hear from people who don't live in this area. The question that we sometimes hear is: how can changing the constituency that the town is in affect the fact that it's got a working relationship with Grande Prairie? That will continue. The existing intermunicipal relationships are not dependent, in many people's views, on who your MLA is. Maybe it's even better to have an extra MLA that you're getting up to speed. I understand, again, the importance. How does having a different MLA from the two Grande Prairies negatively affect Fox Creek? I'd like your answer to that so we can have it on the record for others.

Mrs. MacKinnon: That's a good question, and I can answer it in a twofold part. If we were to move to the Whitecourt-Ste. Anne riding, we would work very hard with our neighbours and with the new MLA. I'm not saying that it couldn't be done. What I'm saying is that we have worked hard with the MD of Greenview. We go to the table as a region when we have issues. We don't go as just an individual municipality. If there are things that need to be done within our region, we go as more than one voice to our MLA: numbers and strength.

From the outside looking in, we've worked very hard to maintain this relationship. We have our MLA that drives right through Fox Creek on a regular basis, weekly drives through Fox Creek to his home. He's very familiar with Fox Creek. He's very familiar with the constituents in Fox Creek. I know he's not always going to be the one that's the MLA, but presently it works for us the best way.

Mr. Dobbie: Again, you know, the challenge we have is that if we are going to make a distinction among constituencies, one being at the provincial average, one being 10 or 11 or 12 per cent below, there has to be a principled basis for that. One of the issues that we're trying to minimize as much as possible this time is the argument that there is an urban-rural unfairness. Many of the rural municipalities might argue: it's better to keep us closer to the average so that we're not getting the complaint that the rural constituencies are favoured. To me that's a strong argument as well. Just so you understand that we are hearing it, but we have sort of a macro picture to look at as well in terms of trying to keep the constituencies balanced unless there's a really strong, compelling reason.

I think that your argument today – adding the fact that you are at the starting point of a constituency, and by moving you, we'd put you at the end; you would be the very last place that someone would go to as opposed to on the way – is something that I hadn't really addressed my mind to, and I think that's very helpful.

Thank you.

Mrs. MacKinnon: Thank you. It really does make a difference. Fox Creek is surrounded by 87 kilometres of bush on both sides of us. I know that in going north, there are a lot of other constituencies that are mainly all bush. The one thing that is important to us is that we've always been noted as being at the end of the line, so to say. You leave Whitecourt, and you're heading nowhere. Your point to me is that we are very important in this riding. We're not at the end; we're at the beginning.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you.

1:40

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much, Mayor MacKinnon, for a very eloquent case that you're making for Fox Creek. It puts us in a difficult position. Just a few comments about the relative populations. Unless we can capture some other population for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, if Fox Creek was restored to its current constituency, we would be looking at that constituency being about between 11 and 12 per cent below. Something that we hear a fair amount about is the difference between the urban constituencies, which tend to be above that average, versus the rural areas. Unfortunately, you're a little close to that boundary there in Fox Creek.

The other thing I would note is – and who knows what would ever happen in the future – I mean, the growth projections in the current Grande Prairie regional area suggest that those boundaries are going to move one way or another, whether this time or next time, I think, because they're going to have an increase in population. I realize that that may put some challenges on Fox Creek when you are working so hard with other communities in your region to provide a regional perspective.

I don't know that I have any questions for you. I would note that what we did hear a little further south in the Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills riding is there's quite a bit of co-operation between those centres and Sundre, and Sundre is actually over in Rocky Mountain House. So I think it can work, but we certainly appreciate that you don't want to have to start from scratch at this point. We'll certainly take you under consideration.

Mrs. MacKinnon: Thank you very much. I, too, have read as many submissions as I could read on the website so that I could explain my case. I hear it from a lot of them that they say that they – I mean, the province has come to us and said that regional co-operation is the way to be sustainable. So we jumped onboard, and we worked hard on being regionally sustainable.

Your point that the percentage is lower. Also, reading your interim report, I know there's a 25 per cent leeway, give or take, up or down. I've done the math myself and realized that I don't want Fox Creek to just become statistically labelled as population. I want us to be considered as the people that live there.

Thank you.

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

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Chairman, and thanks very much, Mayor MacKinnon. Your presentation is very clear.

In terms of the workforce in Fox Creek would I be accurate in saying that it's oil and gas and oil and gas services and that that's an orientation that leads you as well towards the Valleyview area as opposed to what I think of as Whitecourt as being more wood fibre as the basis of their economy? Would you agree with that?

Mrs. MacKinnon: Sure. I can answer that. About 80 per cent of the people that work in Fox Creek are oil and gas, and they work in the MD of Greenview. Within the boundaries there are some that work within the boundaries of Woodlands county, but 80 per cent of it is oil and gas. Millar Western, our lumber mill, burned down a few years ago. We did have the lumber mill there, and it employed about 65. They're not rebuilding at the time, so the majority of us are oil and gas, and, yes, we do come north for that.

Mr. Evans: Yeah. Millar Western headquarters is really in Whitecourt.

Mrs. MacKinnon: Is in Whitecourt, yes.

Mr. Evans: Right. Okay, that's very clear. Thank you for that. I have no further questions.

Mrs. MacKinnon: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

For all concerned, if you hear that beeping noise, we're having to limit presenters to 10 minutes of presentation, and we're limiting ourselves to 10 minutes of questions. We inevitably go by it, but that's what the noise is.

Mrs. MacKinnon: It's not in my head.

The Chair: No. Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Mayor Claude Lagace, town of Sexsmith.

Mr. Lagace: Thank you very much for allowing us to speak today.

The Chair: For *Hansard*, since we're being recorded, would you be so kind as to give your full name and the municipality or group that you're representing.

**Claude Lagace, Mayor
Town of Sexsmith**

Mr. Lagace: My name is Claude Lagace, mayor of the town of Sexsmith.

Sexsmith is a small community just 10 kilometres north of Grande Prairie, with about 2,500 people. We have some agreements with the city and the county for water and sewer services and stuff. Having two MLAs at present allows us to lobby both and works out well for us for that part. We'd like it to remain the way it is because we haven't seen any adverse effect of it. We've been well served. I just want to go on record to say that our council has discussed this, and we don't see any issues that are changing it. At the moment we see that Grande Prairie is a city but is not an entity of its own, and the chamber alluded to that in their letters, that it's a whole area and not just us, the city.

That's all I have. I didn't prepare anything else.

The Chair: Thank you.

Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Chairman, and thank you, Mayor. Your point is that two representatives are better than one, and that certainly is understandable. I have no further questions. Thank you.

Mr. Lagace: Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much. I appreciate your coming. I don't have any questions. I thank you for the clear and to-the-point submission. We certainly are aware that you're not alone in that feeling about the configuration around Grande Prairie.

Mr. Lagace: Thank you.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Mr. Chairman and Mayor, thank you. I take it your point is this: while your town is only within one constituency, the existing arrangement means that both MLAs are focused on both Grande Prairie and the surrounding areas. So both are up to speed on those issues, and that's what you like.

Mr. Lagace: That's right. Grande Prairie's issues are our issues as well. We do share problem solving, if you will, on those issues.

Mr. Dobbie: Great. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Keith.

Dr. Archer: Yeah. Thanks, Mayor. I have no further questions either.

Mr. Lagace: Thank you.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much. We certainly know, as many have told us, where we should be.

Mr. Lagace: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: Our next presenter is Tony Yelenik, reeve of the MD of Greenview.

The Chair: For the record, since we have *Hansard*, we have to ask that you would both identify yourselves and the municipality that you're representing.

Tony Yelenik, Mayor

**Jim Squire, Chief Administrative Officer
Municipal District of Greenview**

Mr. Yelenik: Okay. Thank you very much. Thanks for the opportunity to once again make a presentation to your committee. My name is Tony Yelenik. I'm the reeve of the MD of Greenview. With me is our CAO, Jim Squire. We did make a presentation at the initial hearing in Grande Prairie. Apparently, our views weren't received very well, so we brought along our CAO to maybe help along here because our recommendation from the first hearing wasn't adhered to by your committee. We would ask that you once again look at what the residents of the two constituencies actually want.

Council of the municipal district has received the interim report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, has a number of serious concerns regarding the probable negative impacts of the proposed electoral boundary revisions on the MD of Greenview, the city of Grande Prairie, and other municipalities, as you've heard, that surround the city of Grande Prairie and then throughout the whole area.

The province has historically recognized that there is basic, inherent interdependency between large urban centres and their surrounding rural municipalities. The proposed revision of the electoral boundaries to separate the constituency representing the city of Grande Prairie and that representing the surrounding rural and urban centres would suggest a separation of the interests of the city and the surrounding area, which would contradict the principle

of interdependency. The city of Grande Prairie is considered the hub of our region. Residents of surrounding municipalities rely on many of the services and businesses located in the city. Conversely, business interests of the city rely on service and sales to area residents to remain economically viable. Issues or decisions which affect the residents and business interests of one municipality will also engender significant impact on similar interests in surrounding municipalities.

1:50

As well, contrary to first impressions, the Grande Prairie constituency as outlined in the interim report would include most but not all areas of the city. As such, the proposal would create inequities in representation between the citizens and businesses within the city. While the majority would be represented by the Grande Prairie constituency, remaining portions of the city would be included with and outnumbered by rural and small urban populations and the interests across a large expanse. The end result will be significant discrepancy in representation among residents in the two areas of the city.

Under the incumbent electoral boundary division although the city is divided by the two constituencies, both constituencies have substantial Grande Prairie population numbers. As such, both constituencies have a large enough ratio of city residents and also residents of outlying areas to ensure city interests remain at the fore while also integrating those interests with related issues of the residents of the surrounding areas.

As such, pursuing the proposed boundary revision would therefore decrease the level of representation for residents of the city, create inequity in representation among areas of the city, and eliminate the current benefits realized through joint consideration of the interrelated and interdependent needs of business and residents of the city and the surrounding municipalities while, as indicated in the commission's report, not substantially changing the overall boundary to two existing constituencies.

The proposed transfer of the town of Fox Creek – and you've already heard from Mayor MacKinnon – from the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency to Whitecourt-Ste. Anne would have a negative impact on regional intermunicipal relationships. We have received correspondence indicating that the towns of Fox Creek and Whitecourt as well as Woodlands county feel that this boundary realignment would have a negative impact on those municipalities and the residents they serve. In particular, the town of Fox Creek works jointly and in partnership with the MD of Greenview on a number of area concerns and ventures, including mutual aid, emergency services, regional community development, and as partners in the Greenview regional waste commission, among others.

The city as well as the towns and rural municipalities included within the area have a working relationship with the MD of Greenview that we would like to ensure continues. The municipal district currently has operational agreements with the city of Grande Prairie as well as mutual aid agreements, community development agreements, and a variety of operational and funding agreements with the towns of Fox Creek, Grande Cache, and Valleyview, which reflect this intermunicipal dependency and need for co-operation. Area municipalities are jointly affected through common interests in areas such as ambulance service, seniors' services, health authority services, and a variety of other regional service authorities.

It is our position that it is imperative that the boundaries of the two constituencies remain essentially as at present in order to maintain the current state of intermunicipal co-operation and established relationships. The existing constituencies of GP-Smoky

and GP-Wapiti currently serve area residents very well. The constituencies as currently structured ensure that the MLAs are kept informed of the interests of both the city and the surrounding areas so that their representation can provide a full understanding of the impact on the area as a whole to the benefit of all citizens, both rural and urban.

Our council would ask that the commission revisit and reconsider the proposed boundary realignments in consideration of the potential negative impacts of the initial proposal to ensure that the existing relationships and working agreements are not impacted as well as that our representation in the province of Alberta is respected.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.
Keith.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks, Mr. Yelenik, Mr. Squire. I wonder if I could address the question of whether the configuration of provincial electoral constituencies has a positive or negative impact on regional co-operation. I think your point is that there are a number of agreements in place for regional co-operation and that these will be negatively impacted if the constituencies are aligned differently than they're aligned now, if there's one urban constituency and one mixed constituency.

The context that I'm thinking about is: are there other communities that have a population not unlike Grande Prairie that have opted for a different solution or for which an electoral boundaries commission has provided a different solution? St. Albert comes to mind as a community of similar size, and there's one constituency that's wholly urban and one part of St. Albert that's in a mixed constituency. We didn't hear from people in St. Albert that regional co-operation is not possible because of that configuration. So I wonder if you could elaborate a little bit. What specifically would change in your view with a change in electoral boundaries of the kind that were proposed in the interim report?

Mr. Yelenik: I think that in our current situation, where we have a mix of urban and rural, our representation is far greater than if we had purely urban and a purely rural. If you look at the map on the screen up there, the job of representing a constituency of that size by a member and still having to deal with all of the intermunicipal agreements in that region would be a real daunting task for any MLA to try and represent.

I'm not that familiar with St. Albert, but I think Grande Prairie is a unique place in that I think that we have probably taken regional co-operation to an extent that probably hasn't been experienced in the province of Alberta. I think we have regional agreements in the city of Edmonton. We realize, you know, that they have purely urban and purely rural constituencies in that area, but we think that we're unique in that we require from our representatives representation within the province of Alberta, and we think that it's more so than a regional government; I think that it's a better quality of life for all of Albertans if we have these types of situations.

Dr. Archer: Right.

Mr. Yelenik: I don't know if that answered your question or not.

Dr. Archer: Yeah. Again, it's an important issue as to which model we go with, but it seems as though there is an argument to be made for either of the models. We're hearing strong arguments today and, certainly, in the submissions to the boundaries commission that the

model that people would prefer in this area is a model in which both of the ridings have some urban and some rural.

Again, I'm just trying to understand what is unique here because we're not hearing this, for example, from people in Medicine Hat, who have a situation not unlike what we proposed in our report, or in St. Albert, who have a situation not unlike what we proposed in our report. Yeah. I'm not sure. I think we may leave this meeting still not knowing, having a sense that the status quo is the preference, but I'm still not entirely sure if I understand what the essence is of the difference here compared to other parts of Alberta.

Mr. Yelenik: Well, I guess I'd answer that question with another question. By isolating the city of Grande Prairie that has only a majority of the population in an only urban riding, what do you actually accomplish?

Dr. Archer: Well, at the time that we received the submission from the council from Grande Prairie, the argument was that there were some interests that were distinctive within the city. Certainly, we've heard this from the mayors of Calgary and Edmonton, too, and from people in Red Deer, that there are some interests that are distinctive to urban areas that are best captured by constituencies that are focused entirely within those urban districts.

Given the fact that the recommendation came from council, it seemed compelling to us. What we're hearing now is the counter-argument, that there is another way of doing it. I'm just trying to understand fully what the essence of that is.

Mr. Yelenik: Well, I think the city probably, in having a second look at that, has reversed their position by a significant majority of city aldermen in the city of Grande Prairie. I think that they have come to realize that we are probably unique in the amount of co-operation between outlying urban and rural municipalities with the city of Grande Prairie. With the representation they currently have now with two MLAs, the city is probably better represented than if they had their own individual MLA. The interaction between MLAs and communities is very important, and I think we have a very good working relationship now not only with the communities but with the chamber of commerce. Grande Prairie is one of the highest membership chambers of commerce in the province of Alberta, and they have a relationship with surrounding municipalities whereby they have meetings with both MLAs now. I think it's one good way to interchange ideas, and I think it leads to a better understanding of the region by both elected representatives.

2:00

Dr. Archer: All right. Thank you. That's all I have.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Reeve, for your comments. It's clear to me that in the Grande Prairie area the factors set out in section 14 of the act, including "the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries," one could argue that maintaining existing boundaries and keeping them understandable – you know, we're trying to build an argument here, that we conclude in our final report, that explains why we would be treating this area differently than we would other areas. That's part of the process that we're engaging in.

I know that you weren't here this morning. Again, we did receive a number of submissions that appear to have the tone that we were ignoring what we were told in Grande Prairie. I just wanted to be

clear for you – and we advised Mr. Simpson this morning – that we certainly heard and understood what you were saying. As a group we felt that it was important to listen to what the city of Grande Prairie had said in the initial representations. The phrase has been used: there was a conversation going on before we got here about whether there should be a city-only constituency. We put that in the report. There has been a lot more conversation about it, and it will likely continue in the future.

You did mention that you brought your CAO along because we might not have understood you last time. You did a great job last time. You were very clear, and we understood you. It's just that the issue was quite in play. So you weren't ignored, and it wasn't dismissed out of hand. It was something that we thought would generate a lot of controversy and feedback, and it has. I just wanted to be clear that we were certainly understanding the position that you and others took, but we were presented with a mixed message last time, and it's much less so this time. But I do understand now some of what you're saying, that there is a lot to be said about: the existing relationships work. There are some arguments under section 14 of the act that we can apply to that. So thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, gentlemen, for coming this afternoon. I guess I'm going to follow up a little bit with the theme on the issue with the strength and the regional co-operation. I think that's very positive. I'm not entirely clear on why, if there were a city MLA and an MLA representing the surrounding area, you still wouldn't have that regional co-operation. It seems to me that it would be in the interests of both MLAs to continue to co-operate because there is a very, very strong nexus between the city, from what I'm hearing, and the rural area around it. So I'm not sure why that is a complete barrier to that kind of co-operation. I don't know what you can add to what you've said.

Mr. Yelenik: Yeah. Ms Jeffs, I guess we have a hard time wrapping our heads around the idea that an MLA can't represent both the interests of the urban and the rural areas. I would hope that somebody that has gained the confidence of the majority of the electorate would have the intelligence and the wherewithal so that they can represent both issues in government. Really, it's difficult to understand why urban municipalities feel that they are underrepresented, and I don't think that the city of Grande Prairie is underrepresented. I think they have two very good representatives, both of whom maintain an office in the city of Grande Prairie so that all of the residents of the city of Grande Prairie have good access to their MLAs.

Ms Jeffs: Well, I was going to raise just more of a comment than a question. From the comments I've heard about having two MLAs right now from everyone in the surrounding area – and I think your larger city constituency cousins might be looking a little askance at that as well – it's clear that there's a sense that both MLAs represent the region. So thank you very much.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Reeve. Just to echo Peter's comments, your presentation was very clear and very well understood last time. I have, I guess, a microquestion. It relates to Fox Creek again. Both you and Mayor MacKinnon have

talked about the regional co-operation including Grande Cache. I look at the map. It's no big deal for the connection between Grande Cache and Grande Prairie; it's a pretty good road. And there's no big deal between Fox Creek and Valleyview and then into Grande Prairie. But how, from a practical point of view, has Grande Cache worked well with Greenview and Fox Creek? That one is a bit of a surprise to me because I don't see the road system that makes that possible.

Mr. Yelenik: The road system really isn't a detriment. As a municipality we work hard with the three urban municipalities within our boundaries. We have a large municipal district, about the size of Prince Edward Island. We work hard with the communities. We have a cost-sharing agreement with all three towns, where the municipality enters into cost sharing, where services provided by the urban municipalities are funded by the rural municipality. That's the relationship we have.

We realize that Grande Cache is quite a ways away. In fact, it's three hours' travel time from our office. But we do have a good working relationship with Grande Cache as well as with Fox Creek. Really, the issue of how we can do that, I guess, is that it takes a little more diligence and a little more hard work to do it.

Mr. Evans: I mean, that plays a little bit into the other camp, those who say: notwithstanding that there are great distances in the north, northerners seem to be able to overcome those disadvantages and seem to be able to work well together. When I say "the other camp," it's the camp that would say: "Well, thanks to technology you don't have to have face-to-face access to your MLA. Everybody knows what everybody else is doing, and we're all well connected."

Mr. Yelenik: Yeah. You know, Facebook and Twitter go a long way, but I think most residents I know in our area want to deal face to face with their representative in the provincial government. They don't want to deal on Facebook; they don't want to deal on Twitter. They want face-to-face representation.

I think the MLAs in this area do an excellent job, and they work hard at it. They spend four days in the city of Edmonton when the House is sitting, and Friday and Saturday and Sunday they spend in their constituencies. It's an onerous task for an MLA to try to represent all of the municipalities within their region in the city of Edmonton at the Legislature. It's a difficult task for them.

We've got a situation now that's working, and we really would like to see that situation continue. Just for the sake of change – I think change has to be justified.

Mr. Evans: Okay. Thank you for that. I don't have any further questions, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Well, thank you both. It's been a great presentation, and we're certainly going to take it into account.

Mr. Yelenik: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

All right. We'll have a short break, and then we'll resume with Mr. McDonald, the reeve of the county of Grande Prairie, unless there is someone else here who is ready to present at this point. All right. We'll take a short adjournment.

[The hearing adjourned from 2:09 p.m. to 2:24 p.m.]

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Ms Ruth Fortier.

Ms Fortier: I'm just an ordinary taxpayer.

The Chair: Ma'am, we're being recorded by *Hansard*.

Ruth Fortier
Private Citizen

Ms Fortier: That's fine. Okay. My name is Ruth Fortier, and I represent the ordinary taxpayer. I'm 59 years old. I was born and raised and have worked my entire life in this province. In this time of recession and high unemployment our own government should be fiscally responsible and also be implementing cutbacks instead of adding four MLA salaries and expense accounts to be paid by us, the taxpayers. Other companies are cutting back, adding extra workload to each employee's portfolio, and you are cutting workloads and adding more personnel.

I realize that we are supposed to base our representation on population, but this guideline was written by man and can be changed by man. If these changes had been implemented by the province in the boom times, you would probably not have met with such a resistance, but to do so now shows just how irresponsible I feel this governing body is. If these changes are implemented, I definitely will make sure that my opinion is known come the next election.

Do not tell me that the decision has already been made as nothing is written in blood. If this decision was made to expand, it can be unmade by the same board. If you feel there is a need to rearrange the boundaries, that is fine, but do not add another load to the taxpayers of this province. We cannot afford it.

That is just my opinion as a voting taxpayer.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Fortier. You, of course, realize that our commission is by law mandated to give the province 87 electoral divisions, and that is the law.

Ms Fortier: Who made the laws?

The Chair: The government of Alberta has made them.

Ms Fortier: Can the government of Alberta change those laws? They were made by man. Rearrange the boundaries. Do not add that tax load right now. People are losing their homes. I mean, I look at the price of mortgages in Fort McMurray. I'm not talking about the gentleman in the oil patch that's making \$200,000 a year; I'm talking about the fellow that's – I don't know – working in the restaurant, working at McDonald's, working in our hotels, the cooks in the camps. These are ordinary, tax-paying people, and that, believe it or not, is what the whole thing is based on, the tax dollar. There are more of us ordinary tax people than there are of the big oil boom people.

Do you realize what the price of a mortgage is up here in the north? You must. Most of you are from Edmonton. Most of you are carrying mortgages. You know what a house is worth. Do you think the person that's working at Tim Hortons can afford that mortgage? Now you're going to add four more salaries onto our tax base. I mean, I've been going through this, and I must have talked to a hundred people this morning. They're just ordinary people, and they're going, "You're kidding," and I go, "No, I'm not kidding."

You know, change the laws. You rewrote them; you can change them. Go back, rearrange the boundaries; do not add any more.

The Chair: Well, thank you, ma'am, for your comments.

Ms Fortier: You bet.

The Chair: Unfortunately, it's beyond our mandate, but we hear what you're saying. I'm sure your thoughts are such that others may share them, so we thank you.

Ms Fortier: Well, I'm sure there are a lot more people in this province that share exactly those feelings.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Brian, do you have any questions?

Mr. Evans: No, I don't, Mr. Chairman, but I thank you, Ms Fortier. Your position is very clear, and we have heard it from others. As the chair has indicated, however, when all of us on this commission agreed to be members of the commission, we agreed that we would carry out the commission's work based on the legislation that had been passed by the Legislature of the province of Alberta. Part of that was to rearrange the provincial constituencies by adding four constituencies, but it was also, under that legislation, to report back to the government, to report back to the Legislature, which is all parties represented there, the comments that we heard in the fall and the comments that we are now hearing in the spring.

You know, your message is not the first time we've heard this. Your message is now recorded, and we thank you for doing that.

Ms Fortier: Thank you.

The Chair: Just a second, Ms Fortier. I don't know if others may have questions of you here.

Ms Fortier: Oh, I'm sorry.

2:30

The Chair: Allyson, do you have any questions?

Ms Jeffs: Actually, I don't.

Thank you very much for coming this afternoon and for sharing your view on that.

That's all I have, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Evans: Mr. Chairman, just before we go on, I was trying to find the actual reference. Ms Fortier may not have read this, but I think it's important that she understand what is already in our report. I just refer you, Ms Fortier, to page 5 under Comments Received, Number of Electoral Divisions. "A significant number of submissions and presentations suggested that the number of electoral divisions should not be increased or should be decreased." You know, we did hear that message before, and we're certainly not avoiding it. We're certainly not pretending that we don't hear that comment from some Albertans.

Thank you again.

Ms Fortier: But you're not responding to it, and you're not going to act on it. You've heard it, but you're not going to respond on it. You've told me that it's a given; it's already passed by law. What you're telling me is that you've heard this comment before, but you have no intentions of responding to it or acting on it.

Mr. Evans: We don't have the authority to act on it, but we do have the authority to report on it to the Legislature.

Ms Fortier: Okay.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: No, nothing to add.

You understand that we are not the government.

Ms Fortier: No, I know.

Mr. Dobbie: I just wanted to make sure you understand that.

Ms Fortier: But you are taking my message back to the government. Without actually going and sitting in the Legislative Assembly, you know, at a meeting, this is my only way to communicate with them.

Mr. Dobbie: Part of your tax dollars has *Hansard* here recording every word, and it will be there for posterity.

Thank you.

Ms Fortier: Right. From all the people I talked to this morning, that was exactly it. I wasn't going to speak, but that was exactly what their response was.

The Chair: Keith.

Dr. Archer: Yeah. Ms Fortier, my comments are similar to those of others. We have our mandate that we are operating within. The question of how many seats are in the Legislature is something that the MLAs decide. It will be reflected in our report, as it was in the interim report, the fact that we've received a fair bit of commentary on the issue of the size of the Legislature. The other avenue that you have is to contact your MLA.

Ms Fortier: I most definitely will.

Dr. Archer: They're the ones who actually voted on that issue whereas, you know, we don't vote on that issue.

Ms Fortier: But you are the ones that are carrying my message back to that governing body.

Dr. Archer: Yes. Absolutely.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Just so you know, we will be carrying that message back, and by the way, we will be eating here tonight.

Ms Fortier: I do not cook. I don't cook at home. You sure wouldn't want me to cook here, let me tell you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Mr. Everett McDonald, reeve of the county of Grande Prairie.

The Chair: Good afternoon.

Mr. McDonald: Good afternoon, Your Worship.

The Chair: Since we're being recorded on *Hansard*, if you'd be so kind as to give your name and position for the record.

Mr. McDonald: Okay. Everett McDonald, reeve of the county of Grande Prairie.

The Chair: Please proceed.

**Everett McDonald, Reeve
County of Grande Prairie No. 1**

Mr. McDonald: I do have a submission here presented by the council for the county of Grande Prairie. I will read it, and you do have some attachments from our last presentation, I believe.

You'll understand that I find it somewhat strange to be here before you today to argue on behalf of the residents of the county of Grande Prairie for you to reconsider your preliminary report regarding the proposed boundary and name changes to the existing Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky ridings. It is strange because the county felt that it had put a very convincing case together during the first round of boundary review to maintain or to make only minor modifications to the riding boundaries. We were very surprised and disappointed to see the results of the preliminary report based, apparently, solely on the submissions of the city of Grande Prairie.

In our earlier presentation to the commission the county recognized your mandate to make modifications to the boundaries of all elected ridings in Alberta. The county provided a written report to the commission on October 7, '09, and we note that there is no reference to the written report provided to the commission on that date in schedule C of your interim report identifying written submissions. We are providing it again for the public record so that it is, indeed, part of the discussions on boundaries.

The county has studied the information provided on the existing population base within each of the constituencies and the variances of the proposed averages required by law. The population of the future riding must be plus or minus 25 per cent of the average population per riding. This average number was identified as 40,880 persons. The county noted that both Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky, the two districts that are within the county of Grande Prairie, are in line with the proposed provincial average of 40,880. Grande Prairie-Wapiti currently sits at 41,532 and Grande Prairie-Smoky at 40,690 without any boundary adjustments.

The proposal put forward by the commission for a Beaverlodge-Valleyview riding creates a riding of 43,427, or 6 per cent above the provincial average, and a Grande Prairie riding of 40,100, or 2 per cent below. The county contends that this is the start of creating a major imbalance in the population of the two ridings serving the area, and we will talk a little more about that later.

The commission recognizes that it is impossible to have a city-only riding. This is because the current population of the city sits at 50,200 and is, therefore, 22 per cent above the proposed provincial average population per riding. Growth will likely create the scenario that the Grande Prairie-only riding will extend the provincial average very soon. The commission is right to understand that the entire city cannot be contained within a single riding. It has therefore become important to understand the logical boundary to a portion of the city. However, by proposing the boundaries you have and by naming the one riding Grande Prairie, the commission is giving the impression that the city is a stand-alone riding, one riding serving the entire city. This, of course, is not the case.

Imagine the confusion at election time by telling some city residents that they must vote in a rural riding. Moreover, the

proposed boundaries dividing the city will create even further confusion. In the past, commissions understood this dichotomy and identified boundaries that reflected the urban-rural nature of the Grande Prairie area and provided a solution that created the least amount of confusion for voters. The current boundaries have served us well, and voters have become very used to them. Your proposal would create nothing but confusion, leading to future voter apathy and disillusionment.

The panel may have heard the issue before, but it is worth repeating. Electoral boundaries are more than just population. You must also consider the geography of the province, the quality and adequacy of transportation networks, weather, accessibility to the MLA in a timely manner, and communication linkages. To this end, rural Alberta is at a severe disadvantage compared to its urban neighbours. This is particularly true about northern Alberta, where weather plays a major role in its ability to service a riding, where airline transportation is virtually nonexistent, and where roads are in difficult shape after years of pounding by the resource industry. The access to basic services such as medical care, postsecondary education, and education is compromised by the continuing centralization of services to the large urban areas such as Edmonton and Calgary.

Specifically with respect to the two Grande Prairie ridings the county would like to make the point that the current boundaries work very well for the county and the region, including our smaller municipalities. Having two MLAs working on our behalf on the issues affecting the area is extremely important. We cannot emphasize this point enough. The current boundaries allow our MLAs to work on mutual issues affecting both the rural and urban areas. Their combined work on the mountain pine beetle is an example of an issue that transcends riding boundaries, affecting rural and urban municipalities alike. Other issues include policing, regional health care, transportation and highway improvements, and MSI funding. The list goes on.

Two MLAs working together on issues instead of one is important to moving our region ahead. The creation of a riding within Grande Prairie exclusively will eliminate a voice in these important issues. Generally, the current alignment of the boundaries is supported. Splitting the city on an east-west axis along 100th Avenue, creating a north side and south side, ensures a fairly even population distribution between the two ridings now and into the future. This is the point that we will expand upon.

The proposal to create a riding the size of Beaverlodge-Valleyview is unworkable in our opinion. Our economic development officer and former MLA, Walter Paszkowski, will have more to say. I understand he's already spoken.

2:40

Suffice it to say that your proposal will affect the quality of representation expected from our MLAs. The issues the region faces are intertwined. They are not urban or rural issues; they are regional issues. Because you cannot create a riding that contains the entire city, you have already acknowledged that part of the city must be part of a rural riding. Since this is a fact, the MLA for the proposed Beaverlodge-Valleyview riding must also attend requests for meetings in the city in addition to all the other demands on his time. City-based organizations and other regional bodies will want both MLAs to attend meetings and represent their interests in Edmonton. This situation creates a huge imbalance in the workload, which the commission needs to consider. One MLA in Grande Prairie, one municipality to deal with, the city; the other MLA must deal with eight municipalities, including the city, and travel extensively to do

so. You are effectively putting eight times the workload on one MLA.

The current boundaries provide more balance to this workload. Splitting the municipal workload: six municipalities for GP-Wapiti, five for GP-Smoky. This situation can be expanded to other organizations such as the chamber of commerce, school boards, seniors' housing, Indian bands, and so on. The commission's proposal puts all of the obligations for dealing with a multitude of organizations on the back of the Beaverlodge-Valleyview MLA. This is patently not fair.

The county has seen its fair share of growth in the past few years. As the area continues to grow, both ridings have shared and will continue to share in the growth. The obligations to deal with growth should be shared equally between two MLAs. At times, generally at election time, the location of certain electoral boundaries near and around the city of Grande Prairie does create an issue for some voters. To this end, some clarity to the riding boundaries near the city of Grande Prairie should be contemplated by the commission. The county made some recommendations earlier, and the commission should review that proposal. Both of the alternatives provided continue the division of the city between two ridings but provide clarity on the issues of how the city is divided on the east-west axis with the north side and the south side.

In summary, the county supports the current boundaries of Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky insofar as it affects the county of Grande Prairie. Major change is not supported. In our opinion your creation of a Beaverlodge-Valleyview riding is inconsistent with legislation, namely the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, and the proposed riding suggested by the commission failed to adequately take into consideration all of the requirements for effective representation.

A Beaverlodge-Valleyview MLA would be responsible versus a Grande Prairie MLA. The desirability of clear and understandable boundaries: there is nothing clear and understandable about the proposed boundaries for us. There may be some opportunity to tweak some of these current boundaries of the two ridings near the city of Grande Prairie to provide clarity to voters without unduly impacting the population base of each constituency.

The county trusts that the commission will give a full and complete consideration of our comments.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Reeve McDonald. There are a number of comments within your presentation I'd like to respond to. Your comment that the idea of creating two ridings, one in an urban area that has a population somewhere between 40,000 and 80,000, so it doesn't fit easily within one constituency wholly or two constituencies wholly: you suggest it's unworkable to have that scenario reflected in an urban riding and a mixed riding, yet in Alberta we have a number of those examples.

We have the example of Cypress-Medicine Hat and Medicine Hat, for example, and we have the example of St. Albert, which has a mix of a wholly urban and then a mixed riding. While it may not be desirable in an area – and I think that's an arguable point – to say it's not workable, I think, doesn't reflect the reality that exists in some ridings within Alberta. More of a comment back to you to suggest that it may be a less desirable option from your perspective, but to say that it's unworkable, I think, is inconsistent with the reality in some constituencies in the province. Consequently, there are models that the commission could look to in proposing a solution, particularly in a situation in which the council of the city of Grande Prairie explicitly made a recommendation to us to that effect. It doesn't

seem to me so unusual that a commission would make such a recommendation. There's precedent for it, and there was an explicit request by a city government that we go in that direction.

You also suggested the riding of Beaverlodge-Valleyview that we had proposed was inconsistent with the act. I'm not quite sure what you mean by that when you say that it's inconsistent with the act. The implication I would draw from a comment that it's inconsistent with the act is that it's breaching some provision of the act, presumably of which we're not aware. I know that at the time the ridings were being proposed, our understanding was that all 87 of the proposed constituencies that we were bringing forward were consistent with the act. If there's something in particular that you'd like to draw to our attention, that would be helpful.

The last comment I had is that you made reference to the fact that should the recommendation for the proposed boundaries proceed, the workload of an MLA would increase eight times. I have a hard time understanding how the workload could increase eight times. We've had lots of discussions, lots of presentations from MLAs from urban and rural and mixed constituencies. If there's a consistent message that we get from MLAs, it's that being an MLA is a time-consuming position. I certainly didn't leave any of those conversations with the sense that people see it as a relatively minor, part-time job that potentially could increase eight times. If you could elaborate on what was meant by that, that would be helpful.

Mr. McDonald: Most certainly. I'll start with the workload comment. As it is now, our two MLAs share not only the city of Grande Prairie, but they each have three urban municipalities as well as a couple rurals. By changing, you have one MLA that looks after a portion of the city of Grande Prairie, not all of it, just a portion. The other MLA will look after the six towns and villages amongst it as well as the three rural ridings as well as the city of Grande Prairie, although just a portion, but all of his duties will be in co-operation with the other MLA, virtually making the workload extremely difficult for one MLA who is in the rural riding. I think that's very, very apparent as you look back. Every meeting that the city MLA will be invited to, the rural one must also attend as he does represent 20 per cent of the city. So I think the workload would be extremely difficult in comparison to the city-only riding.

Dr. Archer: So the comment on eight times the workload was illustrative of an increase in workload I think is what you're saying.

Mr. McDonald: Okay. Yeah. I think it was just there figuratively to show that there is a tremendous difference in the workload expectations of a city-only MLA versus a rural MLA and the number of municipalities. Obviously, the rural MLA will be dealing with all the towns and village councils and must deal with their CEOs and administrations regularly as well as council, whereas the city MLA virtually only deals with nine people as a municipality, let alone the constituents, I guess.

On to the act, I think my reference there was towards the 25 per cent. Although it may not be in opposition to the act right now, with the future growth patterns that we have around the county of Grande Prairie and the city of Grande Prairie, these will quickly outbalance each other, and we'll be in a worse position than we are now. We actually are very close right now. This would really put the numbers disparately apart very quickly.

2:50

Dr. Archer: Are you saying that the population would be more than 25 per cent above the provincial average?

Mr. McDonald: The switch between the two MLAs' boundaries? In your proposal now you're already 6 per cent over on one of them. There's a proposed city annexation coming forward. Obviously, part of that new city, as their boundary expands, would be outside if you leave the axis the way you have in your proposed boundary. We're expecting the city to grow to the northwest. That would be in the rural riding, so the city would remain the same. The rural population would even further increase.

Dr. Archer: Oh, I see what you're saying. Yeah. I think from our discussions we haven't used future population projections to determine if a constituency exceeded 25 percentage points five or 10 years from now, which would just be a projection on our part. We wouldn't see that as being inconsistent with the act because we're dealing with the current population data.

Mr. McDonald: Okay. Fair enough.

In going back to the workable, you said that this would be different. I go back to the workload as to the workability of this project. Of course, transportation just for the MLA alone: the city MLA has access to air transport very readily. In this riding he can be in Edmonton, be very close to his constituents and the Legislature very quickly. A rural riding is much more difficult, especially when you go from the B.C. boundary to almost to Fox Creek, which is a tremendous distance by ground.

Dr. Archer: Thanks, Reeve McDonald.

Mr. McDonald: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks, Reeve McDonald. You use the eight times as an example, but the summary of your argument, though, is that effective representation requires some relative parity of ability to meet with different communities. I understand that you may have worded it one way to demonstrate the point, but the MLA in this large area would be much less likely to effectively meet with the various communities than the other one. I take that point.

The challenge that we have is that all of the comments and the letters and the e-mails form part of the public record. If they are left unquestioned and there's some hyperbole in them, you know, people reading in future might ask themselves: well, why wasn't that discussed or probed a little more? When we're asking some of these questions, it's to make sure that you and others understand that the thought process that has gone into this has not been casual, that we understand the issues before us.

When we're asked to give two different answers in an interim report, we can only give one. Again, that's part of the reason why we want to make sure that the statements that might have been made in the presentation today are questioned to make sure that everybody understands that we don't necessarily accept them on face value.

In terms of a specific suggestion – and I understood this was coming this afternoon – your map proposes what, in my view, is a very clear defining boundary. I understand that this proposal is supported by the city of Grande Prairie, but it is unusual that we don't have a letter from them along the same lines. It is interesting that it's coming from you when we are asked to change the boundaries within the city of Grande Prairie. Can you, for the record, tell us what your understanding is of the city council in Grande Prairie's position on the proposed boundary and whether there are any

resolutions or whether you are authorized to essentially make the representation on their behalf as well?

Mr. McDonald: Well, certainly, I hate to make representations on behalf of the city, but I did note that in the first round, they supported the new suggestions of the commission. They have since withdrawn that. Apparently, they're not here to make a presentation this time, but they have had a motion in council that they do not support the change, that they now support the county's position as a matter of record. Unfortunately, they're not here to speak on their behalf.

These boundaries were basically drawn by us but also in cooperation with the city of Grande Prairie as to our future annexation plans. We are working on an IDP right now which shows how the city will be growing for the next 50 years and how we'll be cooperating as a regional partner in many areas. This area, by splitting it in this manner, reflects some of those opportunities that exist for both of us and how we would share the population base as we expect it to grow.

Mr. Dobbie: Okay. Again, so they've actually seen this map? Are you saying that as far as you understand, city council itself supports this particular proposal to tweak the boundaries?

Mr. McDonald: That is correct.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Reeve McDonald. I don't have any questions. I thank you for your clear submission and for coming this afternoon. I understand you accommodated us a little bit by coming early, and we thank you for that as well.

Mr. McDonald: Thank you.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Reeve McDonald, as well. Just one question about, again, the map that you have presented. We are attempting to ensure that communities of interest are recognized, and that includes community associations. The map looks a little arbitrary in terms of road systems through Grande Prairie, so it just begs the question in my mind whether neighbourhoods and community associations have been respected. Would you have any knowledge of that and make any comments about it?

Mr. McDonald: Well, certainly, I really can't speak for the city itself, but I think it begs the question of simplicity: where do I vote? We see that on a constant basis at election time. Something along this line is extremely clear, easy to understand. You know: "I live on the north side of 100th Avenue. Hey, I know where I am. I know who my MLA is." Oftentimes for people who are close to these boundaries the way they are proposed to be, it can be very difficult. "Where do I go? Am I urban? Am I rural? I live in the city. I vote in the county." This is just very clear and matter of fact, and I think that's why it was chosen.

Mr. Evans: I see. Okay. Thanks for that explanation. If I heard you correctly, I heard you say that Grande Prairie supported the position of the commission. I don't know whether you really meant

that in absolute terms. It was the position that we heard from the city that we reflected in our interim report and specifically stated as such and indicated that we were interested in hearing back, and we certainly have heard back.

Thank you, again. I have no further questions.

The Chair: Well, thank you. We certainly have heard back, and we do have a written position from the city of Grande Prairie wherein they retract their original motion and are now in favour of two ridings as originally set out. So thank you so much. It's been very helpful, and we're listening.

Mr. McDonald: Just one comment if I could, Mr. Chairman. I think it's important to recognize that the Grande Prairie area really does work as a region, not only in the urbans and rurals, but we work well with all of our partners and MLAs, who are very close to all of us, whether it be the MD of Greenview, the city of Grande Prairie, the towns and villages in between. We all meet regularly as municipalities and in conjunction with our MLAs. We find that it works very, very well. We really have a fear here that we would really be losing a lot of opportunities to work together with our MLAs and together with our other municipal leaders because we do have so much in common with each other.

The Chair: Well, thank you. I really appreciate your comments.

Ms Friesacher: The next presenter is Mrs. April Weavell with Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce.

Mrs. Weavell: Good afternoon.

The Chair: Since we're being recorded by *Hansard*, could you give your name and position so it's a matter of record?

Mrs. Weavell: Yes. My name is April Weavell, and I am the policy and communications manager with the Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce.

3:00

The Chair: Thank you.

April Weavell
Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce

Mrs. Weavell: I'm here today to represent Alberta's third-largest chamber. Our chamber of commerce represents over 1,100 businesses and organizations. These members live and work and preside predominantly in the city and the county of Grande Prairie. Now, of course, as you know, our city is just over 50,000, but we serve a much larger population, a population of approximately 250,000. So we serve a very large area.

I would like to talk to you a little bit about what we've been hearing from our members. I think it's very important for you to understand that they do have some very strong concerns about what is being proposed. They have really urged the chamber to come forward to talk to the commission and express their concern about the changes and express the need to keep the existing boundaries as they are. I think there are a couple of reasons why. These boundaries really provide solid representation for our members at the Legislature. They also foster a really strong sense of urban-rural collaboration as well as intermunicipal co-operation throughout our region. I know that you've heard about that from Reeve McDonald.

I would like to talk a little bit about that collaboration because that is such a strong area in this region, in our northwestern region. We work as a partnership, and we speak as one voice whenever we are dealing with our provincial counterparts. This has been our strength, and we have been commended for this collaboration from the ministers. When we travel to Edmonton to meet with the ministers, we don't travel as a chamber. We travel with the county, with the city, with the MD of Greenview. We go as one voice, and we talk about concerns that affect all of us because, truly, those concerns really do affect all of us as one region.

Whether they're urban or rural, we are unique in the north. I think that we have to recognize that, that we're not the same as the south. We have different needs. We have transportation challenges. We have distance to market that we are facing and that our businesses are facing. We have the remoteness of some of our rural communities. We also have social issues unique to the north. These are all challenges that our urban and rural areas are facing. Our needs and our issues are intertwined, and we really believe at the chamber that our MLAs have done a tremendous job at effectively representing and balancing both the urban needs and the rural needs and working together. I can't stress that enough about the collaboration among our MLAs. They really do work together and work for us as one region. That's essential to the economic development in our region, and it's essential to the growth of our municipalities and to our communities.

Also, as we heard with the county, we are concerned with just a small portion of the city being represented in a rural riding. We are concerned as to how that small population will be adequately represented and the challenges for that MLA in representing that small population.

I would just like to close by saying that we do not believe that the proposed new boundaries will benefit our region as a whole, urban and rural, and the people who live and work in this region.

I would also just like to add with respect to the city that we certainly can't speak for the city, but we did speak to them after they had expressed initially what they had supported. They heard us, and they listened to us. Our understanding was that they had retracted their original motion.

The Chair: Yes, they did.

Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks very much, Mrs. Weavell. I only have one question, and that relates to the number of businesses that you have as members. This is just to really solidify the kind of support. Do you have statistics at your hand, percentage-wise, about how many of those businesses would be located within Grande Prairie or very close to Grande Prairie so that we would comfortably say that they are representing an urban kind of Grande Prairie mindset in being supportive of the chamber's position?

Mrs. Weavell: Well, I don't have those statistics at my hand, but certainly the majority of our members reside within the city. We also have a lot of our members that reside in the county within close proximity to the city. So they are not all urban. They are within the county as well. Those would largely be our forestry industrial members.

Mr. Evans: Okay. That's the only question I had. Your presentation is very clear. Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms. Jeffs: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for coming today. I have one question. I was very struck by your comment about the population that Grande Prairie serves, the 250,000. What is your catchment area for that? Is that for all of the industrial?

Mrs. Weavell: Well, essentially, we have people coming from the far north – Yukon, Northwest Territories, right through into British Columbia – and we serve those areas.

Ms. Jeffs: Okay. I was trying to look for some of that population in case it could help us with some of the boundaries. That's very impressive, actually, for a city of this size, and it's good to hear that as well.

Your presentation was very clear. We have heard more of this today. We've also acknowledged that the city of Grande Prairie has withdrawn its request for the urban riding, so that's been well noted as well. Thank you for that.

I don't have anything further, Mr. Chairman.

Mrs. Weavell: If I could just add to that, on the city making that retraction. Again, that goes back to that sense of collaboration that this region has. We met with the city, and we talked about our concerns with them, and they heard us. That's the co-operation that exists within our region.

The Chair: I can't help but make a comment about your trading area. I was sitting in court in Hay River, and some witnesses were late because they were shopping in Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Weavell: That's good news. We like to hear that.

The Chair: All right. Peter.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to again thank you for your presentation. I want to be clear. I was aware that the city had withdrawn its original. In fact, a vote was taken to change its position. My question was that I wanted to be sure that the proposed boundaries as presented by the county were in fact signed off on within the city, by the city itself. Since we didn't have anyone directly from the city here, I wanted to get that on the record. I think it's your understanding with the chamber of commerce that the suggestion to divide along 100th Avenue – was that something that was discussed by the chamber?

Mrs. Weavell: We, to my knowledge, were not involved in the map. We are just here representing what we've heard from our members.

Mr. Dobbie: But with your knowledge does that make sense to you? It is a clear understanding of the boundary?

Mrs. Weavell: Certainly. It certainly makes sense, yes.

Mr. Dobbie: Okay. The other suggestion I would have. The history on this interim report partly is driven by what we're told we "shall" take into account in section 14 of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. This may be something that you could, as an area, talk to your MLAs about and consider whether these factors in section 14 are appropriate. It tells us that we must, among other things, respect the existing municipal boundaries. The implication there is that we should, to the extent possible, not go outside of municipal boundaries unless we have to.

You're making a very strong case that it almost should start otherwise. I live in a constituency where there is no town over 10,000, so by default our MLA represents many municipalities and people in the country as well. It works well for us. Again, it may be that the chamber of commerce or this region might want to have a look at some suggestions to the MLAs on section 14 because the MLAs can amend that as well, which may open the options for future electoral boundary commissions.

3:10

Mrs. Weavell: Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Archer: Thanks for the presentation, Mrs. Weavell. The fact that we received a submission from the city and then that position was reversed is unusual. It hasn't happened much in this round. It's also a bit unusual that we don't have a lot of people from Grande Prairie who are here, particularly since our proposal represented such a significant change for Grande Prairie. We had a person who, while serving as an alderman, was speaking on his personal behalf rather than on behalf of the council today. I think you're only the second person, actually probably the first person, representing a Grande Prairie group, although since the chamber of commerce is Grande Prairie and district, it sounds like your association extends beyond the municipal boundaries as well.

Mrs. Weavell: That's right.

Dr. Archer: In trying to get a sense of the views of the people of Grande Prairie, we've heard quite a bit from people in the surrounding areas, people in Grande Prairie. I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about how the chamber engaged discussion or engaged somehow with your 1,100 members to arrive at your position in support of the status quo. Were there forums, or were there surveys or meetings? How did the chamber go about arriving at the position? How would you characterize the sentiment amongst those 1,100 businesses? If 1,100 agreed with the position, that would be pretty unusual, so I'm wondering if there was a division of opinion within your membership. What would be the weight of opinion on one side or the other?

Mrs. Weavell: Certainly. We meet regularly with our members through a number of forums, whether it just be one-on-one. We didn't hold a meeting on this issue per se, but our members through our member communication were aware that we were working on this issue. I cannot say that we heard support from our members for the change. The support was the real concern about the losses that we would experience with the change, and that was really the collaboration and the strong representation that we have existing already within our region. Because our city relies so much on the industry and the economic development around the city, they're intertwined.

People within the city seem to understand that and seem to understand that they're not a stand-alone entity but that we really are one, not only with the city and the county but the entire region. That was the strongest message that we were getting from our members, and that would be members right from the retailers to the oil and gas and forestry sectors, for example.

Dr. Archer: Thanks. Do you have any sense of the numbers? Of the 1,100 members of the chamber, how many would you say were communicating with you about this matter?

Mrs. Weavell: I couldn't give you an exact number, but I could say – boy, that would be difficult to give you. Probably of 1,100, maybe 10, 15 per cent that we vocally heard from through calls or through conversations would be what I could say specifically, also the fact that we were not hearing from the other side of the coin, where people were pro for the changes that were proposed.

Dr. Archer: None at all?

Mrs. Weavell: No. We didn't get any from our membership.

Dr. Archer: Thank you.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much. It's been most helpful, most clear, and most persuasive. Thank you.

Mrs. Weavell: Thank you.

The Chair: At this point we're going to adjourn. Thank you all for coming.

[The hearing adjourned from 3:15 p.m. to 3:38 p.m.]

Ms Friesacher: Our next presenter is Mayor Norm Adolphson with the town of Valleyview.

The Chair: Mr. Adolphson, we're being recorded by *Hansard* here, so we'd ask that you give your name and the municipality that you're representing.

Mr. Adolphson: Okay. My name is Norm Adolphson, mayor of Valleyview, Alberta.

The Chair: All right. We'd be delighted to hear what you have to say.

**Norm Adolphson, Mayor
Town of Valleyview**

Mr. Adolphson: Well, I haven't anything much to add except what we have here. We discussed the future recommendations for our constituency quite a bit, and we found that we couldn't find any reason to change it, especially when we looked at the population around Grande Prairie. It just seemed that there's a kind of a ring growing around Valleyview, the county. That ring is getting ever larger, so you'll never be able to capture Grande Prairie if you're going to include that in Grande Prairie, and I think it is. We felt that maybe just going with the same boundaries that we had before within the city of Grande Prairie would probably be the best for everybody. Now, we don't live in Grande Prairie, so it's maybe easier to judge that when you're in Grande Prairie.

The Chair: Well, you know that the city of Grande Prairie has retracted its motion where they asked for a separate urban riding and are now saying, in effect, to leave Grande Prairie in two ridings.

Mr. Adolphson: Okay. Well, that suits us just fine.

Now, the other thing that happened was that on the south end Fox Creek was left out, and my understanding is that Fox Creek wants in. From our standpoint we would like to see Fox Creek in because we have intermunicipal agreements with Fox Creek, MD 16, and Valleyview – several. By being in the same constituency, it just cuts

down the red tape a bit. We're not crossing borders and stuff like that. Looking at the overall population of Fox Creek, what it would bring to the constituency, I think I've worked it out to around 6 per cent or 5 per cent. It's a very minimal amount. We worked these numbers through here it must be about three weeks ago, so they're not as fresh in my mind as they were before.

I guess the thing that we would like to change would be the name of the constituency and call it Grande Prairie-Valleyview. The reason that we think it should be called Grande Prairie-Valleyview is that we're a region that's quite large. It runs actually very close to the Smoky River east down close to Fox Creek, and in that region we have a hospital that is a 60-bed hospital. It has people all the way from one end of our area, from DeBolt, for instance, all the way through the whole area. We have four schools that have over a thousand students, and they're drawn from 35 miles and more, particularly through the northeastern and the southern part of the area.

We also have a provincial building there that services the area out to DeBolt, Crooked Creek, north Fish Creek, Whitemud, and Little Smoky close to Fox Creek, and the health region has an office there that serves that same area pretty well identically.

We have several oil companies, many, many oil service companies that headquarter in Valleyview and work out well beyond our borders. We've had an oil field in our area from about 1951, and it's still active. So we've got a lot of people that are working in those oil fields and contributing to our economy.

There are several other things. We've got homes for the aged that draw from all over the area there, from DeBolt all the way to Fox Creek. Not so much from Fox Creek – they're a younger community – but mostly from DeBolt, Crooked Creek, Whitemud, and around. The Shepherd's Village draws people from all over western Canada, you might say.

We are a regional centre, and we feel for that reason that maybe they could consider just naming it Grande Prairie-Valleyview rather than Grande Prairie-Smoky. Mainly my big push is having Fox Creek in and renaming it Grande Prairie-Valleyview.

The Chair: All right. Well, thank you very much.

Dr. Archer: Well, Mayor Adolphson, thanks so much for the presentation. We have received a fair bit of feedback from people in this area about the issue of keeping the constituencies closer to the status quo versus the change that we had proposed in the interim report of having an urban constituency and then a mixed constituency. There has been quite a bit of consensus on that issue, but on the issue of changing the name, this is the first I've heard of it. My initial response is to wonder if that would be controversial amongst the people in the community. I wonder if you've had some discussions with some of your colleagues that you could share with us.

3:45

Mr. Adolphson: Well, I have. I've discussed it with the MD. The MD has indicated no problem with it. MD 16 has their offices in Valleyview, and they serve a large area. It goes down to Grande Cache, south of Grande Prairie, to the border, and takes in Fox Creek. They are centralized in Valleyview, and they have no problem with it. I've talked to some of our local people – they have no problem with it – but I have not really lobbied as such for it. You know, I haven't lobbied.

Now, I was talking with an MLA that has served in the area, and he said that the Smoky problem did cause him problems down in Calgary because apparently there's a Smoky down there as well. So

you have that one. Then you have the Smoky River municipality, and you have the old East Smoky school division. Well, that was named from just across the Smoky River. From the Smoky River to Grande Prairie is only 25 kilometres or 30 kilometres. It just covers a very short distance, so it doesn't represent the real large area of the constituency. I guess that's our concern. The thing is that I wouldn't want to cause a big kerfuffle over the thing. If you look at it, I think it looks fairly reasonable.

Dr. Archer: Right. I certainly wouldn't want to cause a kerfuffle by suggesting something that people aren't supportive of. Anyway, thanks for the suggestion. It's something that we'll certainly factor into our discussions.

Mr. Adolphson: Okay. Well, the thing is, I guess, that you're the one that sort of brought it up with the name of the new constituency, Beaverlodge-Valleyview. I sort of thought: well, that kind of makes sense. That's where we picked it up from. Thank you so much.

The Chair: There may be another question or two.

Mr. Dobbie: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks, Mr. Adolphson. One question I have for you. You mentioned that if we move Fox Creek out of the existing constituency, it would create red tape. Would that be associated with trying to schedule an extra MLA to these meetings? What kind of red tape would you expect to encounter?

Mr. Adolphson: Well, it's usually when, you know, you sign papers and whatnot. Every municipality seems to want to sign on the dotted line. They want to take part in this agreement, especially when you have the constituency, maybe the MLA involved or something like that. I don't think it's a big deal. No, it's not a big deal. But the thing is that we've been working well together, and with municipalities the government has been working to try and get us all to work together and to share. We're doing equipment sharing, we're sharing manpower and things like that, so it just, I think, encourages people to work together more.

Mr. Dobbie: Thank you.

The Chair: Allyson.

Ms Jeffs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Adolphson, for coming this afternoon and speaking to us. I just have one question. I was listening to your representations about Valleyview and the fact that it's a hub. I see it on the map here, just looking at the communities. I have the population of Valleyview at around 1,800, 1,900, but what's that service hub, if I can ask you that?

Mr. Adolphson: Service hub?

Ms Jeffs: What's the population of that kind of regional area with all those communities?

Mr. Adolphson: We haven't actually had a census these last four years. We've had a lot of houses come up, and we had apartments and even added onto our Shepherd's Village for seniors. I would think that we're right in the 2,000 people range. We've also brought in about 70 two-year work permit people from the Philippines and all these other countries.

Ms Jeffs: Temporary foreign workers?

Mr. Adolphson: Yeah. There are about 70 of them that have come in.

I think they're not far off the 2,000 level. We have quite a bit going on again this summer. There's more work again. The town is expanding, and we have things that are happening. We're working hard to try and become a reasonable hub. It's not easy for a small town to compete with these big guys because they tend to draw people, and we have to try and pull back. We find that sometimes a bit daunting. Anyway, that's the way it is.

Ms Jeffs: Well, in looking at where you're positioned on the map, you seem a bit strategically located, so perhaps that will help as well.

I don't have any other questions. Thank you very much.

Mr. Adolphson: Okay. I guess one other thing: the highways converge, so that's quite a thing for us, too.

The Chair: Brian.

Mr. Evans: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I don't have any questions. Thank you, Mayor Adolphson. In particular, thank you for traveling from Valleyview up here to Grande Prairie to make this presentation.

Mr. Adolphson: Well, I'm just glad you accommodated me because somehow or another there was a miscommunication here.

The Chair: Thank you very much for coming, and a safe trip home. We'll consider what you've told us.

Mr. Adolphson: I appreciate that so much. Thank you.

The Chair: At this point we're going to adjourn till 6.

[The hearing adjourned at 3:51 p.m.]

