

The County System



A REPORT
OF A
JOINT MEETING

OF

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
OLDS SCHOOL DIVISION No. 31

AND

THE COUNCIL
M. D. OF MT. VIEW No. 49

Saturday, September 19th, 1959

DIDSBURY, ALBERTA

Attended by

HON. A. O. AALBORG, Minister of Education
ANGUS MORRISON, Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs

Reprinted from The Olds Gazette of Sept. 24, 1959

B. E. Bunson

Joint Meeting Airs Views On Proposed Area County

"Before a County will be established in the Olds Co-terminus area, we want a pretty definite commitment from the M.D. and the School Division that there is some general agreement," said Hon. A. O. Aalborg, Alberta Minister of Education at the close of a lengthy meeting called to discuss the issue. He told the members of the M. D. of Mountain View Council and the Board of Trustees at the joint meeting in Didsbury Saturday that "This (the County set-up) is worthy of your earnest consideration because it might provide something better at the level of local government."

Early in the meeting Mr. Aalborg had outlined the formation of the early counties, the revisions which had been injected into the County Act and that there was not one instance of failure but rather the County form of government where established now seems well accepted.

While the County Act in language requires only an application from one of the bodies, council or school trustees, as a matter of policy no county will be established unless there is substantial concurrence between the two bodies.

Angus Morrison, Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs, explained the ramifications of the County Act, its application, and the position of towns such as Olds, Didsbury, Carstairs, Cremona and Sundre in the operation of the County system. Because Olds and Didsbury are separate sub-divisions of the present school set-up, each would have one representative on the school committee of the County Council. The town of Sundre,

and the villages of Carstairs and Cremona, would have one representative between them, alternating each year between the towns. On matters of school, these town representatives would have the same rights and voting powers as members of the County Council of the school committee at the time budgets are prepared and although the County Council may raise or lower or return this budget, once accepted, the school committee of the County operates and administers education under the terms of the Municipal Act.

In the present situation where there are two Municipal Hospital Districts in the proposed County there would be two hospital committees with the towns and villages enjoying the same representation as at present and having the same rights at meetings of the County Council as those enjoyed by town elected school trustees.

Following these explanations the meeting entered a period of questions and answers with Tom Morris of Didsbury as Chairman.

E. G. Turner of Carstairs asked about the representation for that town on the County Council and was told by Mr. Morrison that every third year Carstairs would be represented. Mr. Aalborg said that this matter was one for serious consideration and a valid argument against a County but the administration problem prevents all towns being represented on the County Council while at the same time the rotating system assures Carstairs a representative once every three years. The point, said Mr. Aalborg, is one that has been raised before and successfully overcome.

R. Rankin, school trustee of Sundre asked whether a prior vote of ratepayers should be taken and was told that there was no objection to an informal vote other than the ratepayers know the workings of the present municipal government and not too much about a County.

Tom Morris, Chairman of the Olds School Division, asked why the town representatives were elected each year. Mr. Morrison suggested the circumstances here were different than those encountered in any of the 12 counties already established.

R. Rankin of Sundre asked whether they (the M. D. Council) have made application for the formation of a County. He was told the application was received Feb. 10, 1959. The question as to why there was no prior discussion was unanswered.

Alex Hogg, a Municipal Councillor said that everybody (meaning the other municipal districts) was considering the County set-up and for this reason Mt. View had made the application. There are now 12 counties and 30 municipal districts in the province.

V. J. Van Haften directed four questions to Hon. A. O. Aalborg.

Q. Will County system give better education?

A. No evidence school system is worse, but there seems to be a fuller appreciation by Municipal authorities as to the problem facing educational bodies.

Q. Will we have better trustees?

A. The county form of government will demand a better standard of performance and there has been no expression from teachers or school trustees in any of the counties asking to go back to the dual form of municipal government.

Q. Will elections be satisfactory to ratepayers?

A. There are advantages in either a ward system or in elections at large but this is a local problem.

Q. Why is the County set-up not part of the city government?

A. There is a very important fundamental difference, that of transportation especially of school children. The County Council and Committee set-up offers a much more amicable appreciation of this problem.

At this time too the Minister categorically denied any charges that the government was trying to force the County System on anyone. Later in the meeting after hearing several charges that the government was trying to force the system on municipal bodies he said this was an erroneous impression and that no single individual could speak for the government. "Up to this point," he said, "the government has argued the County System on its own merits." The Municipal Finance Corporation was never set up to promote the County system, said Mr. Aalborg.

Mr. Morrison, Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs, also took part in the discussion at this point saying that the County System was proposed basically on the principal that the body charged with raising the money should also spend the money, and he referred to a government publication containing many unsolicited statements on the County System.

Ellis Turner, Carstairs, raised the issue that taxing authorities in the towns of the Olds School Division would really have no authority as the County Council could veto the school committee budget and recommendations. He was told that the school committee operates and has all the powers designated by the school act which clearly

lays out the duties of a school trustee.

Bob Rankin, Sundre, raised the issue of hospital boards which was answered earlier in this report. He was told that centralization of authority might produce a better form of local government.

Alex Weir, Olds, disputed this point with figures on the success of the Olds School District before entry into the Olds School Division. There is a lot to be said, Mr. Weir added, for the good work of both the local school trustee and Municipal Councillor. Mr. A. L. Hogg agreed with this statement.

Tom Morris, Didsbury, told the Municipal Council that the members of his board had come to the meeting to find out why the application had been made and whether the Council were satisfied with the actions of the Board of Trustees.

It was at this time that W. Bagnall, reeve of the M.D. of Mt. View rose to read into the records of the meeting, a brief proposed by the Council for transmission to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

The reading of this brief was followed by a cross-fire of opinions between Mr. Van Haften and Mr. Bagnall and it was then that Mr. Aalborg made the statement in regard government policy.

Mr. Aalborg asked the members of both Council and Divisional Board to carefully weigh the County form of government on its own merits. He again outlined procedures and government policy and assured them that the matter was worthy of earnest consideration.

Reeve Bagnall expressed his thanks to the Minister for his impartial review of the County set-up and took full responsibility for himself and his Council for forwarding the application with-

out prior consultation with the school trustees. "But" he said, "we took the act at face value," which allows either of our groups to make the application. He also extended his thanks to the school trustees and Mr. Morrison for attending the meeting.

Tom Morris said that if the meeting had been held 10 months ago it might have been easier for the Council and school trustees to find points of agreement. He also extended his thanks to Mr. Aalborg, Mr. Morrison and the M.D. Council.

There was general agreement at the meeting that the County System needed full study and that more information needed to be passed on to ratepayers.

The meeting concluded on a harmonious note as the school board and Council agreed to appoint committees which will meet and work together in an effort to reach some general agreement on the matter of the County System.

Attending the lengthy meeting were Hon. A. O. Aalborg, Minister of Education; Angus Morrison, Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs; R. A. Macleod, M.L.A. for Olds; W. R. Owens, M.L.A. for Didsbury; U. Shogren, Field Representative Administration Branch Alberta Department of Education; S. A. Hooper, Superintendent of Schools, Olds School Division; J. B. Ludwig, secretary, Olds School Division; R. Rankin, Trustee; Ellis Turner, Trustee; Tom Morris, chairman Olds School Division; A. Weir, Trustee; V. J. Van Haften, Trustee; W. Richards, Trustee; J. D. Thomas, Councillor; Ed Miller, Councillor; E. B. Dodd, Councillor; Herman Roedler, Councillor; Alex Hogg, Councillor; J. Riddock, Secretary, M. D. of Mt. View No. 49; Art Eskesen, Councillor; and W. J. Bagnall, Reeve of the M.D. of Mt. View, No. 49.

The M. D. Brief

The following is the complete text of the brief submitted by the Council of the M. D. of Mt. View No. 49 at the joint meeting between the council and the school trustees Saturday in Didsbury.

The brief, dated Sept. 18, 1959 has been forwarded to the Hon. A. J. Hooke, Minister of Municipal Affairs. The original application by the M. D. Council for the formation of a County was dated February 10th, 1959.

1. The Council of The Municipal District of Mountain View No. 49 believes that it is Provincial Government policy to encourage and establish the formation of the County system of Municipal Government as soon as applied for.

2. The Municipal Council believes that with the accelerated consolidation of rural schools and the consequent tremendous capital outlays necessary for the new school buildings and the complete inability of the Council to keep pace with the construction and maintenance of school bus routes necessary to service this development, that the interest of the taxpayers as a whole can be best served by one governing body, empowered not to only levy and collect revenues but control its disbursement.

3. The Council feel that the independent authorities for school and municipal administration are unwilling to accept responsibility for high costs, waste, lack of services, increased debt or rising mill rates. As a result taxpayers are generally misinformed or completely confused. The County system with its single authority should to a large extent ameliorate this condition.

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4. The question of borrowing under existing conditions leaves room for improvement which the Council believes would be rectified by the establishment of a County system. Where the two authorities are separate the School Board must borrow money to carry it over until it receives its next requisition, while at the same time, under certain conditions, the Municipal Council may be building up a surplus. Under recent legislation the schools are permitted to borrow funds from The Alberta Finance Corporation without reference to the Municipal Council who in the final analysis must pay off the debentures.

5. At the present time the Municipal Council makes its plans, passes its budget, builds and improves roads where they think best, and generally speaking the School Board knows little about and indeed can give very little help or information prior to the opening of schools in the Fall. The improvements are often made in the wrong places and as most of the allocation has been spent during the summer. Little help can be given school van routes until the following year. This complete lack of a co-ordinated program, the Council believes would be impossible under the Alberta County System.

6. The Council has made on the spot checks of the operation of some of the existing Counties and as a result feel that this system is undoubtedly a great improvement over the existing separate authority form of Municipal Government.

7. It should be noted that the Co-terminus Boundary Commission spent two years setting boundaries common to both School and

Municipal Districts. While much of the confusion caused by overlapping boundaries was removed, this Municipality is still faced with the removal of a certain lands from its East and South boundaries. This situation, the Municipal

Council believes, can best be handled in the interests of all ratepayers by a County Council.

Respectfully submitted,
Reeve and Council,
M. D. of Mt. View No. 49,
Didsbury, Alta.

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