

Ideas Group

Final Report

Prepared by: The Ideas Group



Ideas Group Summary

Introduction

Alberta has planning guides for two of its three environmental concerns: water (“Water for Life”) and air (“CASA”). The third, land, is of critical concern at a time when economic and social demands are increasing pressure on land use. The Land Use Framework Ideas Group was commissioned to provide a clear direction for going forward with a consultation process that will guide the final development of Alberta’s land use framework. As such, the Ideas Group has outlined:

- Vision
- Fundamental Principles
- Primary Objectives
- Background
- Implementation Challenges
- Questions

Together, these six components set the foundation for developing a comprehensive land use framework that accounts for all Albertans’ interests. By accounting for these interests, the province can maintain a balance between economic, environmental and social needs while preserving our unique Albertan way of life.

In its deliberations, the Ideas Group has met or addressed all the key deliverables it was assigned. The deliverables list below states how each deliverable was met and contains further advice on deliverables in progress.

Deliverables

1. Define scope: Ideas Group Summary document
2. Provide ideas on land related values, goals, issues and options: Land Use Framework Discussion Paper (in progress)
3. Identify additional consultation needs and discussion materials.

The Ideas Group stressed the education portion of the consultation as critical to the framework’s success. They suggested sending out an information piece first, followed up by a survey with direct questions on land use options. The group also emphasized that there must be proper time allotted to the education component if Albertans are to be expected to respond with useful comments.

Additional discussion materials: “Managing Prosperity: Developing a Land Use Framework for Alberta”, Canada West Foundation; “Alberta’s Land Uses: Looking Backward with Data”, B. Stelfox

Vision

As the leader in integrated, sustainable land use, Alberta balances economic, environmental and social interests to ensure the highest quality of life for all future Albertans.

Fundamental Principles

Sustainable Development

Alberta must balance its economy, environment and society such that all are healthy and sustainable. Albertans value the ability to earn a decent living without compromising this same ability for future generations. Alberta's sustainable ecosystems will be respectful of biodiversity and landscapes (visual aesthetics); different geographical regions require a different approach to sustainability. Alberta must allow for management of both public and private lands to allow Alberta communities to maintain their social cohesiveness and "shared population" experience.

Ethic of Stewardship

Alberta has "shared responsibility for a healthy environment". Stewardship is what we do in terms of using and conserving our environment. Both individuals and industry must contribute: individual Albertans should be encouraged to consume less, and industry will be expected to maintain and improve good sustainable practices.

Fairness and Equity

There are many different types of land uses, as well as different types of owners and stakeholders. As the framework will provide a foundation for decision-making, it must be unbiased and allow for equal consideration of all stakeholder issues. Participation by key stakeholders—First Nations, federal government, private landowners and other orders of government—is critical. We must make decisions on the best information available.

Balanced Use

Alberta has a responsibility to focus on a sustainable future, through the balanced use of land and resources, to provide continuous supply of energy and food. Alberta has two types of resources: sustainable and non-renewable resources. In our use of some resources, it must be recognized that they are finite and consumption guided accordingly. We must also retain some of our arable land so we can continue to produce necessities for others and for future generations. We need to look at our resources not just in terms of today's values but also the future value of these resources.

Primary Objectives

To Provide a Roadmap for Decision-Making

The framework must equip decision makers with the necessary tools for efficient consideration of issues, in order to reach quick but well-considered conclusions based on the fundamental principles. It must also be flexible to adapt to the changing circumstances in the province and allow for innovation.

To Support Strong Leadership

All levels of government must be able to use the framework to support decisions that will align with Alberta's vision of long-term sustainability. The framework must provide a comprehensive understanding of the current rules and regulations and the authorities involved in land use planning, and allow for localized decision making.

To Educate Albertans

Albertans must be aware of the issues the province faces in maintaining a balance between environmental, social and economic land uses. They must also have a clear understanding of the focus of the framework and its boundaries, so that they can contribute informed opinions on land use issues.

To Promote Unbiased, Evidence-Based Decisions on Land Use

Decisions on land use must be in Alberta's best interests; as such, the framework must encourage a process that welcomes all stakeholders equally and considers all input fairly. Decision makers, landowners and stakeholders must come to the table as Albertans first, with the preservation of our province and the Alberta way of life as shared values.

Background

There are three basic factors influencing the need for a land use management framework: economic, environmental and social demands.

Alberta's super-charged economy and the demand for resources is driving consumption faster than ever. The economy is also spurring accelerated population growth. We cannot let this growth outstrip our ability to plan for Alberta's future. If a comprehensive land use framework is not built quickly, we will lose the opportunity to balance the benefits of economic growth with social and environmental conservation needs. All three aspects are fundamental to the Alberta way of life.

To build a comprehensive land management framework for Alberta, we need to involve Albertans in a decision-making process that will consider all the impacts and issues around land use. First, we must engage Albertans in an educational dialogue to equip

them with the necessary understanding to participate in this process, as well as to gain further understanding of their expectations. They must be informed of land use challenges the province is facing, so they can provide informed opinions on these issues.

We'll need to have Albertans create a process based on evidence, long term planning, and transparency. As such, they will need to determine an appropriate planning horizon. There is the potential for our population to expand exponentially, to two or three times its current size, over this planning horizon.

We'll also need to pursue a leadership role with our neighbours and stakeholders. First Nations must be involved. Municipalities, who manage planning for large areas within the province, must participate as well. Our neighbour provinces should share an awareness of Alberta's initiative.

In addition, we recognize that water, land and air are all interconnected; we need to integrate "Water for Life" and the "Clean Air strategy" with the new land strategy. However, the land use framework cannot be idle while we work towards integration of all three strategies. For the framework to succeed, planning has to move forward; any delay in producing the framework will restricts our land use options.

Implementation Challenges

The challenge is to envision an Alberta 100 years from now that remains a great place to live, work and visit. However, we need to plan for a more realistic timeframe—20 or 30 years.

Shared leadership is a basic principle for how Alberta should move forward. It is not just up to governments (all three levels). Industry and individuals also have a responsibility.

It is critical that Alberta pursues a transparent, evidence-based decision process if individuals are to meet their responsibility. Informing Albertans will be critical to the success of the Land Use Framework; they need to know the long-term planning assumptions, as well as information on the future value of resources. This will help Albertans understand the context of decisions.

Questions

What are Albertans willing to accept?

The Government should ask Albertans if they are prepared to see growth managed:

- Are they ready to discuss the trade-offs between population growth, resource development and social responsibility?
- Are they willing to slow down growth if necessary to preserve social, economic and environmental sustainability?
- Are they prepared to accept a process to make trade-offs among ecological integrity, economic prosperity and quality of life?

For each issue, Albertans will need to weigh the costs and benefits, recognizing that their choices will have immediate as well as future consequences on their lifestyle and provincial land.

Furthermore, there are other, wider questions to answer regarding Alberta's role in the world:

- Does Alberta have a responsibility to other parts of Canada and the world to supply the energy they need for their own quality of life?
- Do we have a responsibility to supply food for the rest of the world?