

## Ready for Growth

*Published by the Calgary Herald*  
By Shelley Knapp

When Alex Cummings gazed out his wall of windows 31 years ago, he saw a vast expanse of rolling prairie with the mountains looming on the horizon.

It's not like that anymore.

"We were the first ones here. Now there are houses everywhere," says Cummings, pointing out a mound of dirt marking the spot where a new Catholic church is to be built.

Cochrane – already labelled one of Canada's fastest-growing communities – should triple in size in the next two decades.

"We are ready for the growth that is coming," said Mayor Ken Bech.

Last fall, the town about 50 kilometres west of Calgary, annexed 1,320 hectares of land, currently six developers are vying to build on the property. In the first subdivision alone, 500 houses are planned in the area.

When the developments go ahead, Bech estimates Cochrane's population could go from 13,000 to more than 40,000 by 2025.

Cummings, owner of 20 of the acres recently annexed, reasons the growth is a good thing.

"Heck, if I was younger I would get in on the action," he says.

"I could put 100 houses up here," Cummings says with a laugh as he surveys the land he's dubbed Cummings Ridge.

"All kidding aside, I think all this growth is pretty logical. As Cochrane continues to grow, more services will come here. We now go to the dentist, the optometrist, the doctor here. We do all of our shopping here. It's been good."

Cummings who has lived there since 1974 is quick to note, that with the influx of people, comes growing pains.

Bow Valley High School is a short jaunt down River Heights Drive from his old farm home. When students are travelling down the narrow country road to and from the public high school, Cummings can be stuck in his driveway for upwards of 15 minutes.

The problem is compounded by the water and sewage trucks that trundle every day to the school which is without services.

Bech said plans are underway to fix the issues.

“It’s one of the top five issues on our plate for this year.”

For former mayor Judy Stewart the concern is these types of problems will be exacerbated if far more planning and infrastructure isn’t done before the aggressive growth.

“Growth is possible in a sustained way, but right now there is lots of infrastructure not in place,” said Stewart. “We still need a medical/health centre, a recycling facility, a humane society, a performing arts centre. There is so much we still have to accomplish.”

Those apparent facility deficits didn’t stop Ted and Barbara Voysey from leaving Calgary a month ago for Cochrane.

“We wanted to leave the big city behind. We love the small town feel here,” said Ted.

A walk down the town’s main street known for its historic feel demonstrates their point. Couples linger in the sun on benches slurping on their ice cream cones. Others trundle into the quaint shops.

“We don’t intend to let growth impact what makes Cochrane special,” added Bech. “We as a council will continue to balance the needs of the community with the planned growth.”

Several studies are underway to make sure the growth proceeds in a logical fashion including a municipal development plan and a community needs survey.

Recently, the town also got federal funding to study Cochrane’s economy and how it will be affected by new development. The study is scheduled to be completed by the end of the month.

“I really believe this council has a rather positive handle on growth,” added Cummings. “I think that nothing but good can come of all of this.”