

Rocky View

# Committee recommends support for land conservation initiative

## Enrique Massot

A Calgary group striving to enhance and increase natural spaces has received an initial nod from the Municipal District of Rocky View for a project to establish a regional mechanism to landowners willing to make their land part of a natural heritage.

"We need to have a mechanism for people who want to donate their land for conser-

vation," said Tracy Tarves, senior program manager with Parks Foundation Calgary, who presented the initiative to Rocky View's Public Services Committee last Tuesday.

The ways to put that into practice would be through transfer of development rights, limited development agreements, or through restrictive covenants, she said.

Tarves said the Parks Foundation conceived the idea after several landowners

wanted to put land into conservation. Tarves approached her organization. Those landowners had previously contacted organizations working on land conservation, but their project did not fit within those organizations' mandates.

"The lands in question fell outside of those mandates, which are fairly specific, and could not be accepted," she said.

Tarves said her group

wants to investigate the feasibility of forming a regional land trust for the region, with representation of the Municipal Districts of Rocky View and Foothills and the City of Calgary. The organization would have the mission of promoting the creation of natural areas in the area encompassed by the three jurisdictions, to protect wetlands and other natural areas.

Tarves told the committee the Parks Foundation operates

at arms length of the City of Calgary's government, after chair Brenda (Young) Goode asked whether the initiative had links with a recently announced idea of Mayor Dave Bronconnier to create several natural spaces in the city's periphery, some of which would be located within Rocky View.

"Usually, land trusts are approached by landowners who want to donate their land for a particular purpose," Tarves said.

"And surely, their wishes are taken into consideration." She said many land trusts in the United States and Canada operate with little or no taxpayers' money, as they generate their own revenue.

"Ideally, we would be autonomous and self-sustained," said Chris Davis, a volunteer with the Parks Foundation.

Clr. Larry Korschuk wanted to know whether the group would favour encroaching rural spaces with urban type of recreation spaces.

"I would hate to see cows and deer replaced by people and dogs," he said.

Davies said any initiative would take into account the particular configuration of each municipality.

"The M.D. of Foothills and Rocky View have a different view of that of the City of Calgary, and we will respect

that different vision," he said. Tarves said the goal is not to overlap with organizations such as Nature Conservancy of Canada or the Southern Alberta Land Trust Society, but rather to actively work in the region to offer an outlet for those who could become interested in land conservation.

"SALTS and Nature Conservancy are not operating as actively in the region, and that is why we are saying there is a niche," she said.

"We want to provide landowners with another option...if their lands qualify maybe we can help them out.

"It is providing them with another tool in the toolbox."

Approved societies issue tax receipts for land donations, while conservation easements allow landowners to maintain the environmental value of the land while retaining ownership and use of the land. When they place a conservation easement on their land, owners receive a tax receipt for the difference between the appraised fair-market value of the land and the newly-assessed value based on the environmental restrictions.

Rocky View's Public Services Committee is recommending a \$5,000 contribution to the investigation, subject to council's approval and inclusion in the 2004 budget.