



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Electoral Boundaries Commission
Public Hearings

Red Deer

Thursday, June 19, 2025
6:31 p.m.

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Electoral Boundaries Commission

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Electoral Boundaries Commission Public Hearings – Red Deer

Public Participants

Laveryne Green
Heath Gudmundson
Bradley Hodcraft
Jody Mercier-Layden

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[Justice Miller in the chair]

The Chair: Good evening, everyone, and welcome to the public hearing for the Electoral Boundaries Commission of Alberta, the Red Deer date, Thursday evening.

First of all, thank you to those of you who are here. We are expecting a couple of other presenters that had put their names on the list. Thank you for coming and participating in this process.

By way of introduction, my name is Justice Dallas Miller. I'm the chairman of the commission, and I also serve as a justice of the Court of King's Bench in southern Alberta.

The other commissioners are, to my far right, Mr. Greg Clark, an entrepreneur and consultant focusing on information and knowledge management. Greg has served a term as a member of the Legislature of Alberta for Calgary-Elbow. He's also a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II jubilee medal. Currently Greg serves as chair of the Balancing Pool of Alberta and consults and advises widely with organizations and corporations relative to proper board governance.

To my immediate right is Dr. Julian Martin, a retired history professor from the University of Alberta with advanced degrees from Cambridge University. Dr. Martin has volunteered on many committees in the city of Edmonton and Sherwood Park and served on provincial quasi-judicial tribunals.

To my immediate left is Susan Samson, a long-time resident of Sylvan Lake, Alberta, and an experienced municipal councillor and mayor. Susan was named citizen of the year and received the Queen Elizabeth II diamond jubilee medal in 2012.

At the far end of the table is Mr. John Evans, KC, a lawyer with the province-wide firm known as Stringam. He works out of the Lethbridge office but conducts trials across the province, and his legal ability has been recognized by being the recipient of King's Counsel, or the KC award. John also volunteers as a member of the Alberta Judicial Nominating Committee.

We are your Electoral Boundaries Commission. If you have anything you want to leave with us in terms of written material, please leave it with Mr. Aaron Roth at the back – he'll wave – and he'll take that information for you.

We are an independent commission established by the Legislature of Alberta. We were appointed by the Speaker. Our task is relatively simple. We have to add two electoral divisions to the province of Alberta – legislation has moved from 87 electoral divisions to 89 for the next provincial election – and we must deal with the significant population growth that this province has experienced in the last several years.

To give you some perspective of our task, it's helpful to look at our timeline. We were appointed by the Speaker of the Legislature in late March of this year, and the clock starts ticking from the time of our appointment. In April we met as a commission on a couple of occasions to discuss process and dates and planning, and we commenced our public hearing process in late May. Since then we have been across the province. This is our last in-person public hearing of the first round. We will be receiving submissions on Monday virtually, and that day is filled up already. After we've completed receiving all the written submissions and all the public hearings and all the virtual hearings, we will begin deliberating on our report.

Our first task will be to have an interim report filed with the Speaker by late October. The legislation requires us to have that report in within seven months of our appointment. Then that will be released to the public, and the public will be able to respond to that, critique it, make suggestions, and we'll have another round of

public hearings. First of all, we'll have a round of written submissions throughout November and December, and then we will have hearings in January, hearing from the public and receiving further submissions. Based on that second round, if there are revisions required, we will make those revisions and complete a final report that must be registered and filed with the Speaker by late March of 2026. The Speaker receives that, it becomes public, and the Legislature will enact enabling legislation based on our recommendations.

Of course, if you're interested in the process and you know about what we're doing, you already know that each electoral division or riding or constituency – those terms are used interchangeably – has one Member of the Legislative Assembly. Individuals qualified to vote within that electoral division elect that particular MLA.

Again, by way of contrast, it's helpful to see what happened the last time around when Alberta had an Electoral Boundaries Commission report. Back in 2017 the Electoral Boundaries Commission provided a report to the Legislature based on a population of just over 4 million people, and at that time they had 87 electoral divisions to work with. The formula used by the previous commission: they took the population of Alberta at that time, 4,062,609, and came up with a mean average, after dividing the number of constituencies, of 46,697. That's not the target rate for each electoral division. The target is a range, and the range is outlined below, of anywhere down to minus 25 per cent or above up to plus 25 per cent, so a range of 35,023 to 58,371. That was what happened last Electoral Boundaries Commission in 2017.

We've had two general elections since then, and time has come now to do an up-to-date Electoral Boundaries Commission. Population has increased significantly in the province. The population that we will be dealing with and relying on is 4,888,723. When that population is divided by the number of electoral divisions of 89, the mean average is 54,929, almost 55,000. Again, the target population range, then, for each electoral division is minus 25, of 41,197, to plus 25, of 68,661.

The huge population growth has not been spread evenly across all electoral divisions, so we have to come up with a plan and draw boundaries that provide for what the law requires both in terms of legislation and in terms of case law. We must come up with a report that provides for effective representation. How do we determine effective representation? We do that by looking at several factors. These are all enumerated in the legislation that guides our work. We have to take into consideration relative population sparsity and density. We then look at issues such as common community interests within an area. We also take into account geographic features that will be helpful in terms of determining electoral boundaries. As well, communication lines, transportation lines across the province will also be considered.

Our ultimate goal is to come up with a report that provides understandable and clear boundaries for Albertans. We are also allowed to take into consideration other appropriate factors. It is somewhat of an open-ended or vague term, but that allows us to take into consideration things that we've heard as a result of our public hearings and include those in our consideration for the final report.

6:40

At this stage of the hearing we now want to hear from Albertans, and we've heard from Albertans everywhere from Pincher Creek to Slave Lake, Fort McMurray to Peace River down to Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Calgary and Edmonton and parts in between. This is our last public hearing, as I said, so we've got lots of time, and we're prepared to hear from anyone who is registered or nonregistered to present.

By way of record, is Michelle Baer present? No.
Preston Hoff? Okay.

Jody Mercier-Layden? Do you want to come forward? Oh, okay.
Anybody want to make your presentation? The two that scheduled are not here.

Mr. Evans: We can do a Q and A if you'd like. If you have questions, we can do that.

The Chair: Ma'am, do you have a question? Just come forward so the mic picks up. By the way, the hearing is recorded, and the audio content will be on the website. As well, it will be transcribed and on the website as well.

Just identify yourself, tell us where you're from, and what your question is.

Ms Green: My name is Laveryne Green. I'm Red Deer-South. My first question, I guess, is: can it be as simple as the bulk of the influx and increase of population are the two largest cities, Calgary and Edmonton? Is there a possibility of that?

The Chair: Oh, of the ridings going into Calgary and Edmonton? I think there's a very strong possibility.

Ms Green: Okay. That eliminates one of my concerns, I suppose, because of the sparsity – and you take in all those factors as well – for the communities that are rural. Am I clear enough?

The Chair: Yeah.

Ms Green: Sorry for my voice.

I wouldn't want to mix the two. I don't want to water down the concerns of rural areas versus the city because it's quite different. Those are kind of my questions and concerns.

The Chair: We haven't . . .

Ms Green: Got that far?

The Chair: We haven't nearly got to the point of completing a first draft, but as long as you don't tell anybody, there's a pretty good chance that Edmonton will get a new riding and a pretty good chance that Calgary will get a new riding.

Ms Green: Yeah. I mean, it makes sense.

The Chair: Yeah. And there's going to be a lot of adjustments between them and throughout the province.

Sorry, you're in Red Deer-South?

Ms Green: Yes.

The Chair: The population, again, is?

Mr. Evans: Pretty close to average.

Mr. Roth: Fifty-eight five.

The Chair: Fifty-eight five. So if you saw the formula, you're well within the target range.

Ms Green: We wouldn't have to change that much.

The Chair: Probably not. Well, no guarantees.

Ms Green: I don't know exactly where ours is, even, but if we're only adding two more . . .

The Chair: Ridings.

Ms Green: Yes. Then that would likely be the cities.

The Chair: Yeah.

Ms Green: I guess it's great that you're looking at everything. Maybe all of a sudden in August everyone will move to the country, the rural.

The Chair: Would have made our job a little easier.
Okay. Anything else? Any other questions?

Ms Green: From me?

The Chair: Yeah, or anybody. The person you're with.

Ms Green: That's all for me for now.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks.

Ms Green: Thank you.

The Chair: At the risk of putting anybody on the spot, those who came to observe, any questions that you might have?

Mr. Gudmundson: It's over?

Mrs. Samson: It might be.

The Chair: It might be. Yeah.

Mr. Gudmundson: Sorry. I didn't know it had started. What was this all about, like, just in a general overview?

The Chair: You missed the first five minutes, sir.

Ms Green: Yeah. Let's do it again.

Mr. Gudmundson: No. You don't have to. I was just coming through the lobby, and they said that this was going on.

The Chair: Okay. Well, you know what? I do a lot of the talking here at the beginning. I wonder if somebody else wants to talk and just share, maybe in a different tone or a different way, what we're doing.

Greg.

Mr. Clark: Maybe, if anybody is willing, could you tell us a bit about Red Deer? What's happening? You know, part of our consideration is where the growth is happening.

Red Deer, as it stands now, both the constituencies – as Justice Miller said, our target average is 54,929. The 4.8 million number we are using divided by 89 constituencies is how you get that number, and both the Red Deer constituencies are right around that average. On one hand, good news. Well done, Red Deer. On the other hand, I'm curious where the growth is coming from. Are you seeing a lot of new residents moving in? Are people living in the county – you know, sort of what's the general kind of economic situation? How is it going? And where do you think it's going to go in the next seven to eight years, plus or minus .5 per cent?

Ms Mercier-Layden: I'm not a good person to ask. I'm from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

The Chair: Oh, okay.

Mr. Clark: Oh, great. Well, we're interested in the whole region. There you go. Okay. Talk to me about Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. That's a beautiful part of the world. Yeah. That one has grown but not – I've got a couple of different data sources here.

The interesting thing my data tells me – I'll just stall for time here while we do this – is that Rimbey is about 14 per cent under. It's grown: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. This is sort of a trend that we're seeing. It's not that it isn't growing. That constituency is growing marginally, about 2 per cent, give or take, in the last seven or eight years. It's not that it's not growing at all. It's growing slowly and, from our consideration here, not growing as quickly as the rest of the province. That creates a bit of a challenge. At the same time there are other considerations – large geographic areas, certain interests amongst rural communities – that we need to take into account and do.

Yeah. Anything specific you want to tell us about Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre?

Ms Mercier-Layden: Sorry. I'm completely on the spot. I would just be concerned that the larger space you are spreading to meet that growth, that you are seeing in other constituencies, will diminish the ability of your representative to get everywhere. There are larger ones in our province, but maybe they don't have the centres of population similar to the one that we have, with so many municipalities, school divisions.

Mr. Clark: Go ahead, Justice. Sorry.

The Chair: I'm curious. One of the tasks that we have as a commission is to name the electoral divisions as well. Is Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre a satisfactory name, as far as you are aware, to people who live there?

Ms Mercier-Layden: It certainly represents the larger centres of the riding, the kind of triangle of where people are located. It's long. It makes a heck of an e-mail address. Yeah. I mean, the name suits the riding. The mountain part is a descriptor of what you expect when you head to that west country. So if anything changed, you'd maybe want to see the mountains stay in there if you took away the municipality names.

Ms Green: In terms of Red Deer-South – we've just moved to Red Deer maybe five years ago.

6:50

The Chair: From?

Ms Green: I suppose Didsbury most recently. He's a pilot, so he can live anywhere, so we shouldn't have chosen Didsbury. Anyway, what I've observed in that time frame with the influx of newcomers, in particular right where we are, is naturally quite a few of the Ukrainian folks. That's some increase that I've noticed.

I volunteer with C.A.R.E. a little bit, central Alberta refugee effort. That's simply called newcomers, so I would say African, French-speaking people, a lot of unfortunate countries that are trying to go somewhere safer, I guess. We're now just in a condo, and one lady that just moved in is probably late 30s although it's hard for me to judge age for another nationality, and I don't know her well enough to ask. It's always hard to meet people in condo situations. The people in cities pretend no one else exists, but in asking her, you know, how it's going being new to Red Deer, she said to me, "I feel safe," which was such an unusual comment when you meet someone – right? – for us as western Canadians in particular.

So we've helped people move here in terms of refugees – some are in Didsbury – I mean, all my life. The boat people, if you're old enough to remember that.

The Chair: Yeah.

Ms Green: It's not easy for these people, but we have more than we can handle now. It's kind of like if I have 1,200 square feet in my house, and I had an open border, and I had a thousand people in there. Those are issues, too, but I'm getting off topic. That's what I have observed, mostly, at this point.

The Chair: I'd be curious to know, if you compared Red Deer-South to Red Deer-North, which has more population growth?

Ms Green: I have no idea and no opinion. I rarely even go to Red Deer-North.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Green: I have a sister there, but, yeah, I couldn't help you with that at all. Sorry.

Mr. Gudmundson: What is the population growth in Red Deer in the past year?

Mr. Clark: I happen to have that right here, and I can answer your question. Since 2016, when we last did this, the boundaries of Red Deer-North have grown 9 per cent and Red Deer-South have grown 7 per cent. Compared to the rest of the province, the province of Alberta has grown about 17 per cent in that time. So Red Deer is still growing in absolute terms, a little like Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, but just not quite as fast.

Mr. Gudmundson: Can you track where the growth is coming from? Like, it is from population increase through babies in Canada?

The Chair: Largely immigration into the province; immigration from other Canadians, from outside of Canada.

Mr. Gudmundson: Even Red Deer itself, right? The same: 13 per cent. Now, what's the population of Red Deer again?

Mr. Clark: Well, between the two constituencies it looks like it's about 110,000, give or take. So between the two constituencies, which make up the entire area, it's about 112,000, what I've got on mine. This is as of July 1, 2024. That's the last clean data that we have.

Mr. Gudmundson: When you're bringing immigration in, is it tracked to employment and unemployment, how it increases and decreases throughout that time?

Mr. Clark: No.

The Chair: I'm sure that data is available. It's not a factor for us.

Mr. Gudmundson: Because you guys are asking, what I heard there was: where you're seeing the job growth. Is it job growth or is it just population growth that you're looking at?

The Chair: Population growth.

Mr. Gudmundson: Oh. So you're not looking at the job growth side of it?

Mrs. Samson: No.

Mr. Gudmundson: Okay. That's all I got.

Ms Green: This just crossed my mind. Most of these people that I spoke of . . .

The Chair: Newcomers aren't yet voters?

Ms Green: They aren't able to vote for probably quite a while.

The Chair: But they're entitled . . .

Mr. Clark: We don't know that based on population.

Ms Green: No, but I'm just mentioning that that is true for what I've observed as the newcomers to Red Deer. I mean, we've met quite a few people who have moved here from Ontario, too. That was the other big influx.

The Chair: Right. But they're entitled to representation, and we need to make sure that any representation is effective. So the numbers irrespective of . . .

Ms Green: So you have your MLA, but if they aren't able to vote, how do they get representation?

The Chair: Susan.

Mrs. Samson: I can answer that. The MLA's job is to represent all the people who live in the constituency, whether they vote for him or whether they even vote, because people who are new, like your neighbour from Africa, might need health care services, might need to figure out where she can get English. It's a variety. So all the people are involved in the population count because those people will either be underaged and sooner or later they will be 18 and be able to vote; some people will die; other people will be not Canadians and during the time, in the next election, maybe they will become Canadians and eligible to vote. So we try to pick something that is not the voters to measure how big the province is growing, so they pick people and we pick all the people. It comes from the Canada federal census. That's where the number comes from. Everybody is in it, and it's just a snapshot in time.

Ms Green: Makes sense. Yeah.

Mrs. Samson: Thank you.

Ms Green: We work on a couple of CAs, so we represent them all. Yes. Thank you.

Do you have a question?

Mr. Hodcraft: All I was going to say is, like, you mentioned that Red Deer-North has grown more rapidly than Red Deer-South. I find that astonishing. Mind you, maybe I don't travel around town enough, but I see a lot of building in the south, and I haven't seen it in the north, but maybe I don't get out much.

Mr. Clark: Well, and where the line is drawn is not probably what you would naturally consider north and south.

Mr. Hodcraft: Right.

Mr. Clark: It's drawn at – what is that? – 50th Street. Geographically the Red Deer-North constituency is quite a bit bigger. You see it on the map there.

The Chair: Maybe, just as we wrap up here, keep in mind – and feel free to spread the word. I know there's a lot of social media advertisement about the commission and its work, but if you want to keep those dates in mind, there will be a report, as I said, coming out in October that will be called the interim report. The public will certainly have access to it and have an opportunity to respond to that in relation to any and all ridings. If people are concerned about that, that's the time for them to reach out again to the commission.

The website: you probably had access to it. By virtue of coming here, you've probably seen the website. It's abebc.ca.

Ms Green: Sorry?

The Chair: It's abebc.ca.

Mrs. Samson: On the back of the card.

The Chair: If you received it.

Okay. Well, if there are no more questions, no more presentations – we've heard from one of the scheduled presenters that she's had to cancel – I'll adjourn the public hearing.

We will have our last day on Monday.

By the way, Mr. Roth, can members of the public observe our virtual hearings?

7:00

Mr. Roth: Yeah. The YouTube channel.

The Chair: Okay. If you go to the website via the YouTube link on the website, you will be able to observe our final day on Monday, which is both the morning and the evening, of several presentations.

Mr. Roth: I'll add that the YouTube channel has the audio of all the meetings that are available as well.

The Chair: That have transpired already.

Mr. Roth: And all the transcripts are posted to the website as well.

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you very much. Thank you for coming out, and keep your eyes open for the report in October.

[The hearing adjourned at 7 p.m.]

