

Minister nixes Corman Park split

Reiter makes tough call

BY JEFF DAVIS, THE STARPHOENIX DECEMBER 21, 2012

After months of wrangling and acrimonious debate, the government has dropped the hammer on a scheme to split the RM of Corman Park in two.

"I sent a letter to the reeve and council today telling them that I've rejected the notion of splitting the RM into two municipalities," Government Relations Minister Jim Reiter said Tuesday.

The idea of splitting the RM was forwarded by former reeve Mel Henry, who was ousted in municipal elections in October. His plan to split the RM became a key ballot box issue in the election, in which he received 29 per cent of the votes.

The plan was submitted to the government after 15 per cent of the population of Corman Park signed a petition endorsing the plan. After receiving this, Reiter instructed the RM submit a comprehensive business plan outlining how the split would be done, how municipal assets would be divided and how services would be divided.

A referendum would be needed to vote on the split the RM, although a date was never set for one.

Following the election, the Corman Park council requested the deadline for the business plan - initially set for the end of 2012 - be pushed back. In the end, it was never submitted to the government.

Reiter said while he respects the opinions of a "significant number of ratepayers" of Corman Park who endorsed the idea, it was just not the way to go.

"This is a very serious matter and it's not my inclination to be arbitrarily splitting RMs in two," he said. "This is the best decision for all concerned."

Taking the option of splitting the RM off the table frees up Cor-man Park's councillors and staff to turn their attention to other issues, Reiter said.

"Corman Park until recently functioned very, very well," he said. "I just felt it was in the best interest of all involved to make the decision now to clarify it for the future."

The newly elected reeve of Corman Park, Judy Harwood, said she was "thrilled" to receive word the plan has been squashed once and for all.

Harwood campaigned hard against Henry's plan to split the RM and said this resonated with voters.

"When I campaigned in all four corners of the RM, not one person in the RM wanted to split," she said. "It was a non-issue for most people."

Harwood said the trend in Saskatchewan is toward consolidating RMs, not splitting them up.

"There's a small faction that thought this was the right thing to do, and it's not," Harwood said. "It would have been a very expensive thing for the RM and its ratepayers, and just makes no sense."

Harwood said she's relieved the whole issue is shelved.

"This a great Christmas gift to the ratepayers of Corman Park," she said.

Henry lives in Martensville on the northwest side of the river and told The StarPhoenix in October that his neighbours want to see more money spent on gravel and graders to maintain grid roads used by farmers. Residents of the more densely populated southeast side, he said, want more expensive paved roads running between their acreages.

"Basically a lot of the ratepayers over here feel the RM is too big, too awkward and should be split," he said. "This movement to divide the RM is driven by taxpayers west of the river."

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