

August 27, 2014

His Worship Mayor Naheed K. Nenshi
Historic City Hall
700 Macleod Trail S
Calgary, AB T2P 2M5

Via email: themayor@calgary.ca

Your Worship,

Thank you for contacting me and requesting my views on how I, as Premier, would work with Alberta's major cities to ensure the continued prosperity of our province. This has certainly been an exciting time for me since the launch of my campaign last May, as I've had the opportunity to travel across our province and connect with the people who make it great.

I am hearing from Albertans that the Province's relationship with cities must evolve and recognize the governance and operational sophistication of individual municipalities. I know that significant work needs to be done in advancing our major urban centres' ability to have the tools and flexibility required to keep pace with their growth, service and renewal needs. The two major cities' budgets have large-scale capital and operational requirements for essential priorities like LRT, which they must be able to meet.

I support moving forward with City Charter discussions based on recognition of some key principles, such as recognizing the need for flexible and predictable funding to ensure cities can respond to and plan for growth. And, while I am supportive of Charters, I will add that a major challenge of the process to date has been the lack of public input into this major policy initiative. Noting that significant input is being gathered into the Municipal Government Act review, a more focused public discussion on Charters, their form and impact, is desirable.

On the question of municipal funding, I know that municipalities need financial certainty and I am willing to look at and consult on different options – including user fees, shared service agreements, the Education portion of property tax, bonds, infrastructure pricing, as well as to look at the benefits and challenges associated with existing grant programs – both operational and capital.

I understand the MGA review is looking at some of these options. I also expect this question to be a major focus of discussion in terms of City Charter discussions. I have been hearing many comments about property assessment processes and property taxation tools. I am open to consulting with you on different options, as outlined above. I have also been clear however, that I am not in support of developing new taxes; I believe we have lots of options to review without heading down this path.

Our major cities are much more than collections of buildings, roads and pipes – they are centres of learning, culture and community. Working with municipalities to support their efforts to invest in the quality of life assets such as the arts and higher education is an important part of attracting and retaining global talent needed to drive our economic engine.

On the 911 ambulance dispatch question, I am open to reviewing this with the City. If changing the current system will drive up cost and increase response times as you suggest, then a continuation of the integrated service in Calgary may make the most sense.

You also asked about municipal election finance reform. I would like to learn more about this issue and understand where the recent review process may have fallen short. In general, I believe that our provincial processes work well and that municipal finance and disclosure rules should meet the same standards as the Provincial system. I am quite open to hearing Calgary's position as well as those of Edmonton and the major municipal organizations.

Finally, you asked me about my views on regional planning: I strongly believe that frameworks that enable regional cooperation are essential. I look forward to having the opportunity to engage with the Calgary Regional Partnership as well as the Capital Region Board to ensure these plans move forward. One of the major components that the Province can provide to ensuring the success of these agreements is to ensure all parts of the Alberta Government – not just municipal affairs – seek to align policies that support the evolving roles that our major regional bodies play in attracting and coordinating our economic success.

I hope that these answers provide you with the comfort and knowledge that I will be an engaged and constructive Premier if become the successful candidate on September 6th. I look forward to working with you and all the Mayors and Reeves in Alberta to continue making our province the best place to work and live in Canada.

Yours respectfully,

Jim Prentice