

Has the City-Rural Tax Base and Land-Use Balance Changed in Alberta? New Policy School Report

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Calgary – Alberta’s population has grown dramatically over the past two decades. Accommodating that growth has put exceptional pressures on provincial and local governments and on the private sector. Nowhere are the growth pressures more obvious than in land use as people, business and industry require space. The escalating pressures on land, especially in the major urban regions, have raised concern that land is perhaps not being used in society’s best interests.

Today, The School of Public Policy with author Melville McMillan released a report that examines shifting city-rural tax base/land-use patterns as well as trends in the distribution of residential and business equalized assessments among the types of municipalities in the province.

According to McMillan, “Alberta ended its regional planning commissions in 1996. They were replaced by voluntary inter-municipal negotiation, but this has raised concerns about adverse effects on land use. Pressure to terminate the commissions came largely from the rural municipalities. Some of them felt the commissions retarded their economic development. They believed that in a less restrictive planning environment, they would be able to attract a greater share of development, especially business.”

The report concludes that there has been no notable or general shift of land development away from cities and to rural areas. Despite the rapid growth and the devolved planning environment, the city-versus-rural distribution of tax base and land use has, overall, been remarkably constant although development was definitely not uniform across Alberta cities. If anything, the cities’ shares of residential development may have increased while their shares of business development have been more uneven. For both types of property, however, the development patterns have varied across both city and rural municipalities. Concern that the changed planning environment might have shifted property development towards the rural municipalities does not appear to have been justified.

The paper can be downloaded at <https://www.policyschool.ca/publications/>

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