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# Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

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## DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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### **Bill No. 74 – *The Cities Amendment Act, 2013***

**Mr. Forbes:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise again today to enter into the debate on Bill No. 74, *An Act to amend The Cities Act*. And I feel like, as I said earlier, it's like déjà vu all over again. In fact this is apparently another part of the tool kit, how this government is dealing with the rapid growth of development around our cities, and how do we plan for that? How do we plan for those changes? And this is an important part of that.

Last night I was talking about *The Municipalities Amendment Act* . . . Because when I read the minister's speech, it's almost identical. It's almost identical. And I guess that makes sense because he's just talking about the other partners, talking about the cities aspect. Last night I was talking about the municipalities aspect. So it fits together really well.

And so we'll take some time before the end of the day to review this, and I think it's important. Clearly this is an issue, and it needs to be talked about, that he wanted to note that Saskatchewan now has 16 cities. And Warman became the 16th just in October. So congratulations to the folks in Warman, the 16th city. This is exciting news as our communities are growing, and this is good news for our province.

And of course this is one that we have to make sure, when we have our communities growing at such a rate, that there is appropriate planning and there's appropriate mechanisms to make sure that the kind of lifestyle and kind of communities that we've grown used to in Saskatchewan continue to be that case, continue to be that case to make sure that we have excellent roads, we have excellent water, we have excellent waste management systems, excellent police and security systems — all the things that make our communities strong. And at the same time we make sure that we honour and respect the challenges that are happening in rural Saskatchewan. And when this kind of growth happens, it puts pressures on all of us in many unintended ways. And so when we have this kind of legislation come forward, we want to make sure that it's done in the

appropriate manner.

And so this is what the minister brings forward, *The Cities Amendment Act*, and it talks about how we're going to as a province deal with the rapid growth, the extreme pressures that we are seeing on the edge of our cities. And of course we want to make sure that when we do this — it's like planning for sustainable growth — that we're also talking about all areas of growth, whether it's in the inner cities, infill, how can we make the most . . . And I know in Saskatoon we're talking about how do we plan for growth with the brownfield developments that are downtown.

And I know the city has been talking, and it ranges somewhere I think between 5 and 10,000 people that they would like to see downtown between Idylwyld and 1st and the old city yards, as they move out to the edge of the city, because we want to make sure our downtown areas are vibrant as well. And I do want to highlight that, and we'll be talking about that in terms of when we do our planning to make sure our core community's as strong as possible, that our cities are both compact, that we have vibrant downtowns and people are feeling safe and secure there, and they receive the services. And we see — and this is a challenge even within our school systems where we see the challenges of new communities being built on the edge of the city demanding new schools — where downtown, some of the schools are underutilized, but they can't be forgotten. They have their own challenges, and they have building needs and repairs and that type of thing.

And so clearly these are the challenges of growth, and we have to make sure that our plans and our supports and resources are there and that we don't take it for granted or that we create what they call the doughnut effect in our cities — that everything happens on the edge of the cities, and then you're left with a hollowing-out effect in our downtown communities, our core communities. That's a real shame because in many ways that's where the true beauty of our cities are, from my perspective anyways.

My home is in downtown Saskatoon in Caswell community, but I spend a lot of time downtown here when we're in the city doing our provincial work. And so I think it's an important aspect. So I'm going to have questions about that I think in committee, that we talk about not only the growth in the edges of our cities but how can we also help mitigate that by planning for growth downtown. But there are challenges and particularly when it comes to infrastructure. That's a huge, huge issue.

So the minister talks about the bill wants to do four things. First, they want to talk about how to improve the processes related to boundary alterations or annexations to make it work better for both the cities and the municipalities that are involved, and how they would incorporate using the Saskatchewan Municipal Board to do that growth strategy. And I talked at length about that in terms of some of the issues, some of the changes to the Municipal Board and what they can do or can't do. And I think that's important that they're utilized in a fair and appropriate fashion.

Second, they want to respond to requests for amendments for consistent authorities and treatments regarding such things, matters as unpaid utility charges and trailer home permitting — very interesting challenges. And when you got *The Cities Act* up, you've

opened, you might as well be dealing with some of these other issues, and I think that they're important.

Third, how they can support the intent of agreements of New West Partnership and the Agreement on Internal Trade in areas such as businesses, business licensing, and municipal procurement.

Now one that they haven't talked about and we would have questions about is CETA [Canada-European Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement], C-E-T-A. And I think that's the European trade agreement. And what are the impacts on this as well? I know there's been a lot of questions raised around CETA and what might be the impacts of that. So we would have questions around that. Clearly that's important. It's important that we talk.

And we know that there was some questions, and many of us received emails last week from a steel company when they felt that they were unfairly treated because they missed out on a major contract on a project in Saskatoon. And it was basically because when we enter into these agreements that it's a level playing field across Canada. But some provinces haven't entered into them so they can then have preferential treatment within their own province but then take advantage of the level playing field in the other provinces. That does seem unfair, but I guess when we sign the agreements that this is what we're talking about. This is what we have.

And fourthly, address other issue requests from the municipal sector to clarify wording and improve consistency in municipal administrative matters. And that could talk about education property tax reporting, licence fees, and purchasing policies. And so as I talked about earlier in terms of The Municipalities Act, that there is a process for dealing with boundary issues and particularly when one party to the discussion is uncooperative and is in fact causing problems just by not dealing with the problems at hand. And you know, at one point we do have to, we have to come to terms with this. But we do have to make sure that we're not bullying or intimidating; we're making sure that voices are being heard, that they're being treated with respect.

And in this process of having a new time limit on how long a municipality must wait for a response on a proposed annexation application is a suitable one, and we will have more questions on it. So what happens when they respond? Or what happens in terms of, is there a process of binding arbitration? We're not sure about that, and we'll have many questions about that. But the idea of requiring mediation before the SMB, the Saskatchewan Municipal Board, makes a lot of sense and so that's very good. And it talks about how the . . . And this is in the legislation that's before the House, clarifying that an application may be amended, withdrawn, and all of that type of thing. So the SMB becomes much more active. And of course it only makes sense because we're seeing a growth around our cities that we haven't seen in many, many years and so we have to be ready for this. So we're seeing much more of this type of thing.

And I think that it is interesting that the issue around city utility charges and permitting for trailer homes, something that SUMA brought forward so clearly, you know, and I

haven't seen here. And it was interesting that the minister, here is what he said:

Mr. Speaker, the ministry consulted extensively on these amendments with the city sector, including individual cities and city officials as well as with SUMA and the Saskatchewan Association of City Clerks [and] other stakeholder groups .

You know, earlier today we were debating the planning amendment Act, that Bill 90 that just came out, and he didn't use that phrase. And this government is often very proud of its consultation. In fact if they consult — now this is what I said earlier but many of you may not have heard this — but if they consult with one or just a few, they often use the fact that they've consulted extensively and we, on this side of the House, have come to hear that that's maybe a bit of a stretch.

And so here they're talking about that but this is a question we'll have, I know, about Bill 90, one of the tools in this tool kit about how to deal with this issue that's happening on the outskirts of our cities and our RMs about how do we make this happen. Did they do consultation? But here on this one they did, and that's very, very interesting. But on the other one, they were silent and that to me creates a lot of problems, a lot of room for some questions.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I think that that's questions about consultations. But I do want to take a minute to really also underline that we are going to be asking questions about what does it mean to support the intent of the agreements of New West Partnership and Agreement on Internal Trade when it comes to municipal procurement, and what are the limits around that, particularly when it comes to we've heard a lot of discussion around water, waste management, that type of thing. So what is the limitations, parameters around in municipal procurement? That will be I know of interest to many of my constituents because obviously they're hearing a lot of discussions about the many trade agreements that this government is interested in getting involved in. What are the real implications, and is it wise to do that? And do we at the end of the day become in an unfortunate circumstance that we wish we hadn't, where we would like to support more of our own local businesses but we can't because we've signed on to these agreements? That's really a challenge for all of us.

And so I think that we'll be having many questions on that and we would hope that the minister would be prepared to answer those questions because when we go down that line — and this has been many years from different agreements, whether it's NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] or the free trade agreements — what has been the implication for us?

And so while this seems really straightforward, I think it's going to be an interesting evening when we talk about these all together with questions. But I know many of my colleagues have comments they want to get on the record. And so with that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move adjournment of Bill No. 74, *An Act to amend The Cities Act*. Thank you very much.

