

# Dark-sky lights sought for Calgary ring road

## *Foothills: Province says safety top priority*

By Roxanne Blackwell

Staff Reporter

Options are being explored to balance safety with efficiency and hopefully reduce light pollution with the new southwest Calgary ring road as it runs through the MD of Foothills.

In October, the MD wrote a letter to the provincial government requesting that they comply with the MD's dark sky bylaw, which restricts the hours and types of lighting that can be used in the foothills in an effort to maintain dark night skies.

Since the provincial government is a higher authority than MD, it is exempt from the bylaw, but coun. Suzanne Oel said they're hoping to find a compromise in an effort to protect the assets in the MD that rely on a dark sky.

"We have a really interesting area with the Ann and Sandy Cross Conservation area there and also the Rothney observatory which are in division four which are significant to the MD of foothills," she said. "We would like to preserve what a lot of folks in the country appreciate about country living, which is having dark skies at night."

In addition to being able to view a starry sky at night, reducing light pollution has shown to have significant benefits on plant and animal cycles, and reduced glaring light can also benefit human's natural cycles as well.

Oel said since the road is still in planning stages, they wanted to make sure to raise the issue now before it's too late.

"This is an important issue and if we don't think about it, it's something that will just creep in on us like a lot of stuff happens where you don't put that effort into it and there it is in your face," she said. "And you wonder how you lost it and you don't know how to get it back, so this is an effort to step back a bit and take a look at it."

The northwest section of Stoney Trail, the first leg to be built, used different lighting than the second, north/southeast portion. Oel said she's hoping the Province can go back to using the first type of lighting which she said is less invasive.

"The first section of it seemed to be lit fairly well, and the second you can probably see from outer space," Oel said.

"So what we were hoping to do was just put it out there, had anybody even requested that you consider dark sky compliant lighting?"

The MD received an open-ended letter Dec. 3 from the minister of transportation Wayne Drysdale who said they would continue to research new technologies, but that highway safety is the top priority.

Garry Lamb who is the project manager for the ring road said the first strip used light standards on the outside of the road, and

while the lighting may be more dark-sky friendly, it has other cons.

"You have more light standards so there's more things for people to run into, so there's more roadside hazards which is not a good thing in some respect," he said.

Lamb said they also realize that the bright lights on the second strip are not an ideal alternative either.

"Maybe we could find a way of doing it better and still meet the contractual requirements," Lamb said, "But not end up with such a bright strip of white light around the edge of Calgary."

He said the City of Calgary is coincidentally exploring new LED street light solutions, and Alberta Transportation has been included in those conversations and may be able to use the new technology on the ring road.

"We are looking at new lighting technology that does minimize light spill from the roadway... we actually had a recent meeting with (Calgary) to have a look at what they're doing and get a better understanding of where they're going with that type of technology," Lamb said. "So I can't say that we've made any big changes yet but we are looking at what we can do to try and keep the ring road, which will be an illuminated road, from causing problems for the neighbours."