



Calgary River Communities Action Group

May 21, 2019

Hon. Rick McIver
Alberta Minister of Transportation
320 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Mr. McIver,

CRCAG is a non-partisan advocacy organization of approximately 1,000 members, whose families and businesses were impacted by the June 2013 flood that devastated the City of Calgary and southern Alberta. CRCAG's mandate and information about its efforts to advocate for upstream flood mitigation can be found at www.protectcalgary.com. Since its inaugural meeting in July, 2013, CRCAG has worked collaboratively with the municipal, provincial and federal governments to maintain awareness of flood related issues and to advocate for the protection of Calgary and southern Alberta from flooding through flood mitigation infrastructure.

Congratulations to you and your United Conservative Party colleagues on last month's provincial election victory. We were heartened to see your appointment as Transportation Minister given your previous work in the portfolio, your long relationships with First Nations communities and your understanding of the need for comprehensive and prompt flood protection for Calgary and southern Alberta communities all along the Bow, Elbow, Highwood and other watersheds impacted in 2013.

We are writing you directly in response to media reports that cite vocal opposition from members of the UCP Caucus, the Tsuu t'ina Nation and the Springbank Community Association, to ensure that you are aware of our position on key issues covering flood mitigation and the protection of lives, livelihoods and property from the next inevitable devastating flood.

To put the impact to Calgary of the 2013 floods into perspective: City Hall was severely flooded and not re-opened for several months; the Saddledome and the Stampede grounds were devastated as the entirety of the East Village was deluged; the Zoo was underwater; large swathes of the downtown core were flooded or rendered inaccessible; 32 communities in Calgary were evacuated, which affected about 80,000 people and thousands of homes were flooded or destroyed; 4000 businesses were impacted; and approximately 5.1 million work hours were lost in the private sector. Tragically, one person in Calgary lost her life and four more in southern Alberta were killed. The Provincial Flood Damage Assessment Study (2015) for the City of Calgary estimated \$1.8 billion in direct damages alone and Alberta-wide the recovery has cost upwards of \$6 billion.

Perhaps even more shocking: **this was not the largest flood to hit Calgary.** In the past 140 years, there have been two floods that were more than 30% larger, which when repeated will result in the loss of the entire downtown core. Failing to implement timely upstream mitigation is not an option for a city of this sophistication

and size – the economic and public safety implications are far too profound. This city will experience a major flood again. The only question is how prepared it will be.

With the sixth anniversary of the flood next month, the fact that Calgary is still without critical flood mitigation infrastructure is quite outrageous. Yes, our municipal government has committed \$150 million to flood mitigation and resilience, and mitigation work within the City has reduced Calgary's exposure to flood damage by about 30 per cent compared to 2013. But we still have a long way to go, and the science clearly shows that the only effective flood mitigation, particularly with respect to groundwater plumes, is upstream.

Reducing the profound environmental, financial and social impact of another catastrophic flood requires comprehensive solutions on both the Elbow and Bow rivers. A study published by the Bow River Working Group (BRWG) in May 2017 outlines three options for the Bow River and the project selected for the Elbow River, the Springbank Off-stream Reservoir Project, is currently progressing through federal and provincial regulatory reviews.

The Springbank Project has undergone extensive study and review, all of which is publically available, that has concluded it **is the best first option for upstream mitigation on the Elbow River**. As this research has shown, compared to the McLean Creek Project or other solutions proposed, the Springbank Project is significantly less expensive (and thus has a higher cost/benefit ratio and higher return for Alberta taxpayers); has a less environmental impact on the project area; is anticipated to have a shorter environmental review process with fewer stakeholders and opponents; has a larger overall catchment area for retaining floodwaters; is less susceptible to sedimentation build up; has a shorter construction timeline; and, being an off-stream reservoir, has less risk of a catastrophic failure if hit by a flood during the construction process. And to clarify an important point, local mitigation projects are now underway in Bragg Creek and Redwood Meadows that will see those upstream communities protected to a 1-100 year level years before the Springbank Project protects Calgary. No upstream communities have been forgotten and that work is well underway.

The opposition to the Springbank Project is relatively small but well-funded, and has received disproportionate media attention compared to the hundreds of thousands of people downstream who would be directly affected by the next flood. While Calgary has seen the removal of 17 homes through the quasi-expropriation floodway buyout program, only 5 homes will be directly impacted by the Springbank Project. The only landowner whose home would be completely inundated if the Project was at full water capacity has recently agreed to sell his property to the Province, following extensive negotiation. To date, the Province has chosen not to expropriate any affected lands, instead putting forth generous buy-out offers that, if accepted by all, would convey 22 residences to the Province. While the expropriation option is much cheaper to the taxpayer, we believe the buy-out option is most fair, and have to date supported this approach. Unfortunately, the opposition has characterized this generosity as planning incompetence by the government leading to escalating cost, which is both inappropriate and deceptive. This opposition has certainly resulted in Calgary and southern Alberta remaining at significant flood risk for much longer than first anticipated when the Springbank Project was first selected as the optimal first mitigation project, with its in-service date originally anticipated to be 2018.

Further, the Springbank Project has been supported by the City of Calgary, the federal government, and two successive (and ideologically distinct) provincial governments, the latter two of which have already committed the funds necessary to see it completed. It was selected through the extensive research undertaken as the project of choice, and is now in-flight and under assessment by the federal and provincial regulators, and well along in the process of completion at significant taxpayer expense to date. If the Springbank Project experiences no further delays, it is projected to be fully operational in 2023 – a full decade after the 2013 disaster. Having come this far and spending this much, we believe that **any deviation from the current path will very likely**

result in no mitigation on the Elbow River at all. This cannot happen.

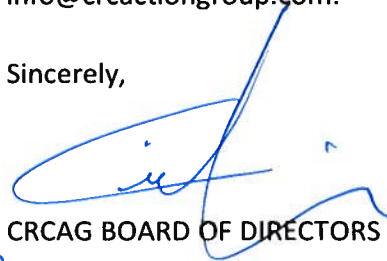
We are genuinely concerned that the momentum built up over the past years to move the Springbank Project along could be lost. Flood protection for Calgary and southern Alberta cannot be a political issue – it is a matter of protecting the economic viability of this City and southern Alberta, and the safety of its citizens.

The UCP issued its clear statement of support for the Springbank Project in a March 19 press release following vague and inconsistent statements on the matter by various UCP candidates. This statement was very important and was a key platform plank for many, many voters during the election. Unfortunately, it appears that the full UCP Caucus is not aligned, and this is troublesome and frustrating. As you know, you as Transportation Minister must advance this file through the regulatory process. Any further delay in submitting responses to the regulators' many questions, advancing the ongoing consultation process or questioning key decisions of prior administrations, is not acceptable to us or Calgarians.

Your voice of leadership in this matter is of critical importance. We ask you to proceed as quickly as possible down the current path chosen by two previous provincial governments, and by the UCP prior to the last election, as quickly as possible. Given all the study, work, commitment, expense and decisions taken over the past six years, we need to see the completion of the Springbank Project without further delay.

We would be pleased to speak with you at any time about this matter. To connect, please email us at info@crcactiongroup.com.

Sincerely,



CRCAG BOARD OF DIRECTORS

cc: Hon. Jason Kenney, Premier of Alberta
Hon. Doug Schweitzer, Solicitor General and Minister of Justice
Hon. Travis Toews, Minister of Finance
Hon. Jason Nixon, Minister of Environment and Parks
Hon. Kaycee Madu, Minister of Municipal Affairs
His Worship Mayor Naheed Nenshi
Mark Cameron, Deputy Minister, Policy Coordination Office, Executive Council
Bev Yee, Deputy Minister, Environment and Parks
Andre Tremblay, Deputy Minister, Transportation
Crystal Damer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Transportation
Meryl Whittaker, Deputy Minister, Municipal Affairs
Jamie Huckabay, Chief of Staff to the Premier
Howard Anglin, Principal Secretary to the Premier
Martin Ignasiak, Special Advisor, Osler

