

Energy corridor plan: perfect example of true economic development

Advocate Staff

Even at the risk of sounding a little too optimistic, it wouldn't be at all surprising if the plan to develop the 75 km stretch of highway between Boyle and Wandering River into an 'energy corridor' is eventually included in an economics textbook.

It seems, at least in its infancy, to be an almost ideal example of everything economic development is supposed to be — and everything that it isn't.

You see, economic development is one of those phrases that gets thrown around loosely, particularly at election time. Politicians and governments tend to make lots of promises about how they're going to attract business and create jobs, but in reality, both of those objectives are almost entirely beyond their reach.

Businesses are attracted to but one thing: environments in which they can profit. Jobs are created not by governments, but by businesses that require employees to do the work that will earn profits.

More often than not, it's as simple as that.

What makes this 'energy corridor' plan unique is that it cuts to the chase; it helps create the environment to which businesses are attracted and, therefore, creates jobs.

By attempting to streamline the property development process along this corridor, the County of Athabasca, Village of Boyle and other partners are demonstrating a willingness to facilitate industrial development. Coupled with the advantages of location and existing infrastructure, it's a formula that should prove attractive to businesses with a stake in the lucrative Fort McMurray-to-Edmonton trade corridor.

As Village of Boyle chief administrative officer Ken Gwozdz pointed out, this isn't a five to 10-year plan, so don't waste your time driving Highway 63 every Sunday, looking for evidence of this plan's success. This is a long-term investment, and a process more accurately measured in decades than years.

And really, those sorts of timelines more closely resemble true economic development anyway. Lots of individual businesses and industries open to great fanfare, only to go belly-up a few years later (dot-com, anyone?).

True economic development stands the test of time, which is exactly what this plan is designed for.

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