

Following are presentations by BLESS President Al Henry and Vice-president Pat Collins speaking to issues within the City of St. Albert's new Municipal Development Plan.

BLESS is concerned that the City of St. Albert has designated three parcels of land adjacent to Lois Hole Provincial Park and the Big Lake natural area as "Employment Lands" in the MDP, meaning the land will be developed for commercial and industrial uses.

Both presentations were made to St. Albert City Council at the public hearing for the new MDP on April 19th, 2021.

### **Al Henry's Presentation**

Good Afternoon Mayor and Councillors. I am Al Henry President of the Big Lake Environment Support Society.

I am here to speak to the Economic Benefits of Lois Hole Provincial Park.

St Albert is only one of two Alberta Cities with a Major Provincial Park on it's boundaries. It is within a one-hour drive of a million people and this asset has largely been ignored as major economic stimulus for St Albert.

Parks attract a significant number of tourists. This contributes to local businesses and economies. Tourists have an increased interest in the outdoors and nature-based activities, and they are willing to travel to pursue special interests and experiences. Not only do Parks attract new businesses, but they also provide job opportunities and life-style benefits that hold residents in the area, resulting in dynamic changes that support sustainable local economies. In addition, parks generate part-time and full-time employment in the respective areas through construction workers and laborers, and ongoing maintenance of the trails. According to a report by the U.S. National Parks Service, increases in property values range from 5% to 32%.

Lois Hole Provincial Park is the 5th most important Birding Area in the Province. It is a major stop over for Migratory Birds. It has been designated an IBA ( Important Bird Area) with only 200 other locations world wide having this designation. Birders world wide search out these special area. Thousands of birds visited the Big Lake this year and this provided wonderful experiences to the Birders and Nature lovers. This is a unique ecosystem and very very fragile.

Provincial Parks generate a province wide impact of \$1.2 Billion Dollars and more than 23,480 person years of employment. Lois Hole Provincial Park will produce more revenue and spin off revenue from tourism than can be generated from any other source.

The City is now in the midst of some major changes for Lois Hole Provincial Park. I would hate to see this unique gem destroyed for the short term gain of a few development dollars when this opportunity for LHPP is waiting for Economic Planning from St Albert to develop the Tourist potential..

This is your Legacy. Without your help this unique area could easily be destroyed. It is the only area left for the wildlife and without it we become poorer. Thank you.

Al Henry  
BLESS President

## Pat Collins' Presentation

Madame Mayor and Councillors

It has been some time since I last presented here, in fact I think Nolan Crouse was Mayor. I always appreciate this opportunity to present because it is true democracy, the only level of government where a citizen can speak to a gathering of their elected representatives.

My colleagues at BLESS have presented wonderful ideas about why areas A, B and C should remain free from Employment Lands. Even to the point of saying that more land is not necessary because our city has already provided Employment Land almost to the year 2050. This presentation has to do with quality of life in St. Albert as opposed to facts and figures.

As stated in the presentation by city developers at the March 15th, 2021 council meeting, a green environment is one of the goals of the flourish development plan. More specifically it was stated: "St Albert values and protects the natural environment, conserving and enhancing its features and functions for the well-being of our community and planet". We believe converting land adjacent to Big Lake is in direct contradiction to the city goals stated in this presentation. Converting sensitive migratory bird habitat and nesting areas does not 'protect' or 'enhance' the natural environment in any way. Further one of the "policy highlights" outlined in the presentation includes "protecting and conserving natural features in St. Albert". The flourish plan includes a map of Natural Features around St. Albert, marking natural areas, uncategorized natural areas and specifically marks 'sensitive environmental areas'. When comparing this with the Urban Structure and general land use map, it suggests employment lands will directly cover these Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) marked by the city (Figure 1) . We do not see how developing such areas aligns with the goals of flourish as outlined in the presentation given March 15th. To reiterate, developing an ESA will not protect or enhance the natural environment. Even developing adjacent to these sensitive areas would severely impact their ecological function. The city stated flourish represents a balance between competing priorities and interests of different stakeholders. We do not believe the natural environment around big lake is seriously being considered if these areas are to be developed.

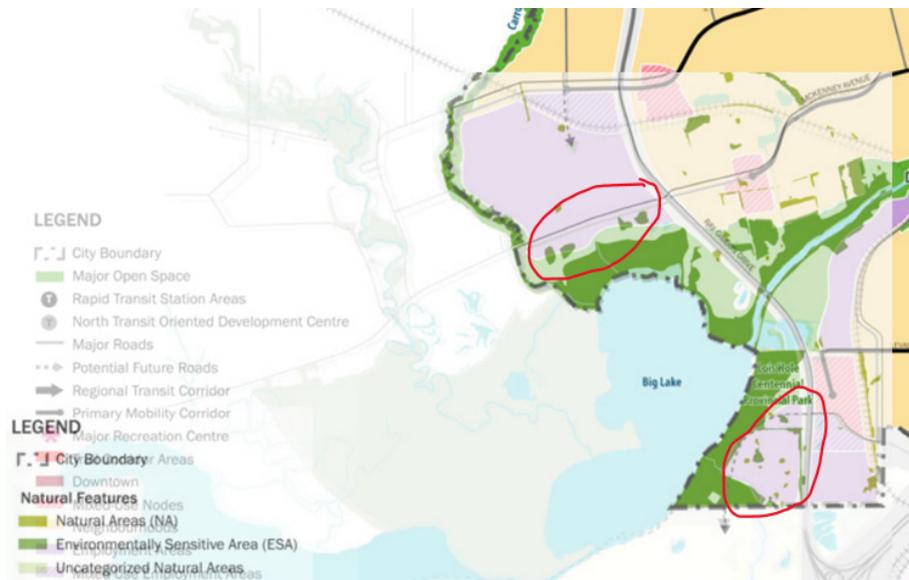


Figure 1 Urban Structure and General Land use map overlaid on the natural features map taken from [Flourish – Growing to 100K | Cultivate the Conversation \(stalbert.ca\)](https://www.stalbert.ca/flourish) April 11, 2021 .

Henry David Thoreau, the great American naturalist said: "I come to my solitary woodland walk as the homesick go home. I thus dispose of all that is superfluous and see things as they truly are grand and beautiful". We believe that statement to be true. What is Thoreau saying? Perhaps first he says he loves his walks in the woods. Why? He leaves behind the superfluous like roads, business, industry. Thoreau sees things like trees, birds, wildlife, that which is truly grand and beautiful. All of us need the natural world. Just to put this in context, many of you, I'm sure, walk in Red Willow Park and LHCPP and over the last year or so have seen more and more people using the trails for exercise and to enjoy nature. They bring their children and grandchildren. They leave behind the superfluous, like phones and TV's, and walk in the beauty of nature. Thoreau talks about the woods in Maine. Different climatically, but the message is the same. "The mission of people there seems to be like so many demons, to drive the forests out of the country." This message is unmistakable: Let's not cut down all the forests and fill the open spaces with Employment Lands.

Our actions of yesterday, today, and tomorrow will either provide benefits or consequences for future generations. We believe there will be unintended consequences if council accepts this plan as it is. If it is to be accepted, it will create irreversible effects to the surrounding environment. Although the goal is for the city to grow to 100,000 people, we must not get ahead of ourselves and forget what makes St. Albert such a valued place to live. We are so lucky to have a provincial park and wetland so close to a major city. Developing land that close to the lake will have dramatic impacts on wildlife and the functioning of big lake and we will NEVER be able to reverse this decision and return it to the way it once was. We really need to protect the area we have left. To you it may be an empty lot but to hundreds of flora and fauna it is home that is becoming more and more endangered due to urban sprawl. Lets be part of protecting this area instead of once again being part of the problem. Ray Gibbon already creates enough disturbance and as it is and widening it will occupy even more area. We do not wish to see more wildlife displaced from their homes. Therefore, can we not commit to at least trying to buffer area around big lake as much as we can? We are dedicated to protecting Big Lake and the surrounding area for generations to come and enjoy. What will citizens who regularly utilize the Big Lake area to escape the city and head into nature think of this industrial intrusion mere metres from Big Lake? We do not think developing land especially on the west side of Ray Gibbon is worth the economic benefits that may be gained as you can not put a price on the irreversible damage that would be caused to this environmentally sensitive area.

The city really needs to consider what this development plan means for Big Lake - and the future of the St. Albert. Does this decision support the botanical arts city? At what point is enough, enough? Big Lake is a treasured landscape that provides a number of ecological services. We must realize that we can't keep developing all of our natural areas, instead we need to be innovative (which is a pillar of the city) and challenge ourselves to make sustainable decisions. Instead of growing outward and contributing to urban sprawl - let's consider how we can revitalize our inner city and cultivate a life that would make future generations proud. We want the future citizens of St. Albert to know that we didn't take the easy way out, we didn't just do what has been done before - we did the right thing.

Thank you for accepting this presentation. Our health involves physical and mental health. Thoreau would argue that spending time in nature helps both. We have spent a great deal of time, since COVID, dealing with physical health. At this time, we also need to focus on mental health. Our challenge is to preserve, protect, and enhance environments in and around St. Albert. Let us look at these places as they really are--grand and beautiful.