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Destination Cochrane: Why it's Alberta's fastest growing municipality

The town is ready for future growth with new infrastructure projects, new recreation facilities and plenty of new residential development.

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"Cochrane is an extremely attractive place to live and work," says Cochrane's Mayor Jeff Genung. PHOTO BY CHRISTINA RYAN /Postmedia

"It means great things for Cochrane," says Cochrane Mayor Jeff Genung.

He says the Garmin expansion story garnered worldwide attention.

"People are watching. I think that it will only be a matter of time and we will see some complementary tech companies wanting to situate themselves here in Cochrane. The real job for us as a council and as a community is to ensure that we have land use in place and that we have the space available and policies in place that will streamline the process when they come online."

Currently, Cochrane's population sits at around 35,000 and is the fastest growing municipality in Alberta. It doesn't appear to be slowing.

"Cochrane is an extremely attractive place to live and work — it's got the natural environment, the proximity to the mountains and to the city of Calgary. It's all location, location, location," says Genung.

That said, the town is proactively planning for future growth with new infrastructure projects, new recreation facilities and plenty of new residential development.

"To be clear, we aren't chasing growth. It's coming, and we want to be ahead of the game," he says.

To that end, the town recently completed the new \$53 million Jack Tennant Memorial Bridge, a second link across the Bow River, joining the north and south sides of Cochrane. The Highway 1A Improvement Project is winding to a close, resulting in the widening of Highway 1A along the expanse of the Cochrane corridor to four lanes from two and adding an improved pedestrian network, while the Highway 1A/22 Interchange project has begun in earnest, tying into Cochrane's 1A Improvement project.

Situated in the community of Heartland, in west Cochrane, a new \$23 million RCMP and municipal enforcement detachment will open its doors mid-June, housing more than 100 members and support staff who will service the Town of Cochrane and Rocky View County.

The new infrastructure provides a solid platform for population growth and for several new communities coming online. In particular, Greystone, situated on 150 acres along the river and adjacent to the Spray Lake Sawmills Family Sports Centre, will drive traffic from the town's central core across the Jack Tennant Memorial Bridge, while Southbow Landing, located just east of Highway 22 on the south edge of Cochrane, will provide the missing thoroughfare links from the south side of the bridge to Highway 22.

"We've been really busy the past few years developing our initial six phases and we're introducing every type of home style — duplex, front-attached, laned, high density stacked townhomes and street townhomes," says Josh Hagen, vice-president of development for Burnswest Properties Ltd., the developer behind Greystone. The builder group includes Douglas Homes, Rohit Communities, Green Cedar Homes, Avalon Master Builder and Ocgrow Group of Companies, which in addition to developing Vertos, a collection of 150 luxury one- and two-storey townhomes with rooftop gardens, is also developing more than 300,000 square feet of commercial space.

"Greystone is a complete live, work, play community, from the ground up," says Harish Consul, president and CEO of Ocgrow Group of Companies.

"We've had so much interest and are hand-picking the tenants. They've all done their research in terms of demographics and metrics of growth and Cochrane is on their list," he says.

Ocgrow Group of Companies is also building Terez, a collection of luxury rental stacked townhomes, to meet the demand for the "missing middle" in Cochrane's housing mix.

Located on the former Burnco gravel pit, Greystone will pivot around a central amenity pond with walking paths down to the river, as well as a 10-acre Central Park boasting 20 pickleball courts, two baseball diamonds and a basketball court. Jefferson Plaza, a memorial tribute space to Jeff Burns, the former president of Burnswest Properties Ltd., who died in 2021, overlooks the pond, as does Ocgrow Place, a retail and commercial space brimming with restaurants, cafes and exciting retail. A Co-op grocery store wraps around to the south, while a hotel offering (yet to be named) will sit prominently in the mix. The Greystone Discovery Centre (highlighting the commercial component) will open in early August, while the community's residential grand opening is slated for Sept. 23.

"It will be a mature opening," says Hagen with a laugh. "We have homes under construction in all six phases."

Meanwhile, across the bridge on the south side of the river, Southbow Landing, developed by Qualico Communities, is set to break ground.

"There's going to be something for everyone here," says Cary Kienitz, general manager, acquisitions and development for Qualico Communities. "We'll be able to offer a large variety of housing and commercial options for all demographics. In Cochrane, there hasn't been a huge amount of larger master-planned communities that incorporate school sites, commercial, high-density housing and green space."

Southbow Landing will enjoy easy access to both Highway 22 and to Cochrane's downtown. The 545-acre community will embrace extensive environmental reserve areas, will feature five kilometres of pathways, three future school sites and four parks.

"One of the great attributes of the community is the integration of the walking paths and linear paths that will wind through the community and connect with the environmental reserve on the ridge and go right down to the Bow River," says Kienitz, adding that the addition of high-density housing will also be a big draw.

Qualico Communities will also be breaking ground on Rivercrest this summer, a boutique 20-acre community, just north of Southbow Landing.

"The entire parcel slopes to the north, so there are beautiful views of the river valley and some of the lots are on the ridge," says Kienitz, adding that the community will offer single-family and duplex product.

