

Subject: Re: Urgent Request for Intervention to Overrule AUC Decision 29924-D01-2025 on Caroline Solar Project and Protect Rural Municipal Interests

From: rjb@russellbarnett.ca

To: Minister.MunicipalAffairs@gov.ab.ca; Peace.River@assembly.ab.ca

Cc: AU.Minister@gov.ab.ca

Date: October 11, 2025

Dear Minister Williams,

Thank you for your email dated October 6, 2025, responding to my September 1, 2025, correspondence regarding the Caroline Solar Project and AUC Decision 29924-D01-2025. I appreciate the time you and Minister Neudorf took to review this matter, as well as the clarification on the limitations of your authority under current provincial legislation.

While I understand your position that the Minister of Municipal Affairs lacks the resolve to directly overrule AUC decisions, I remain deeply disappointed by the outcome, which continues to impose significant hardship on our rural community. As outlined in my previous letter, this project—located just 21 meters from residences on land zoned for future residential development—threatens Caroline's agricultural heritage, residential integrity, and local autonomy. It directly contradicts the UCP's "agriculture first" policies, including the Electric Energy Land Use and Visual Assessment (EELUVA) Regulation, by occupying prime lands without proven agrivoltaics, adequate visual or environmental mitigations, or upfront reclamation security. Clearwater County's post-amalgamation opposition, supported by our Rural Alberta Concerned Communities Group (RACCG), has been effectively sidelined, eroding trust in the process.

Regarding your suggestion to appeal to the Court of Appeal of Alberta, the 30-day window from the August 27, 2025, decision has unfortunately closed. As a resident-led group without substantial resources, pursuing independent legal advice—as you recommended—presents a significant barrier. In the interim, this leaves our community vulnerable to construction, with families stressed about potential home value losses, health risks, and environmental impacts.

I must respectfully refute your statement that AUC decisions are "made in the provincial interest" and must be respected by municipalities under Section 619 of the Municipal Government Act (MGA). In this case, **the Caroline Solar Project itself is demonstrably not in Alberta's best interest.** It undermines the province's agricultural priorities by converting 57 acres of cultivated land—zoned "Reserved for Future Residential Development" under the Caroline Land Use Bylaw—into an industrial site that conflicts with the Municipal Development Plan and Intermunicipal Development Plan (Decision 28295-D01-2025, para. 17). The project, situated on rolling hills that overlook Caroline, poses unmitigated risks, including proximity to homes (as close as 21 meters), visual blight where mitigation is impossible due to the elevated terrain, noise, stormwater drainage issues, soil erosion, wetland impacts, and fire hazards (paras. 6, 14-18). Far from advancing provincial goals, it burdens taxpayers with potential reclamation costs, diminishes rural quality of life, and prioritizes developer profits over community well-being and UCP-mandated "agriculture first" principles. **How can this be defended as serving Alberta's broader interests when it erodes the very rural foundations your government champions?** I urge you to explain and defend this position in light of these contradictions.

Furthermore, amending Section 619 is not required to resolve these issues if the AUC simply enforced existing provincial mandates, such as EELUVA requirements for agricultural impact assessments, visual protections, and upfront reclamation security. Instead, the AUC is working with and coaching developers on what to say to secure approvals, accepting the most ridiculous and nonsensical responses as fact without scrutiny. For example:

- The developer's superficial "agrivoltaics" plan—merely sheep grazing under panels—was accepted despite lacking any protocols for predator control, sheep health, or long-term feasibility, and was dismissed as "uncertain" yet deemed sufficient mitigation (Decision 28295-D01-2025, para. 78). This ignores real risks like attracting predators and fails to prove true agricultural coexistence.
- Delayed reclamation security starting in Year 2 was approved, risking taxpayer liability without upfront bonds as required by UCP policy, based on a developer estimate that conveniently nets low after inflated salvage values (para. 88).

- Clearwater County's explicit post-amalgamation opposition—via its Statement of Intent to Participate, council resolution (April 7, 2025), and reply submissions (Exhibit 29924-X0081)—was ignored, with the AUC falsely claiming "no municipal opposition" in a palpable error of fact (Decision 29924-D01-2025, para. 10).

These examples illustrate a flawed self-review process that favors developers over evidence-based scrutiny, perpetuating distrust in rural energy approvals.

Given your commitment to rural Alberta and municipal empowerment, as evidenced by your recent tours and mandate to support collaborative local governance, I respectfully renew my request for alternative intervention, **with the primary ask being for you to visit Caroline in person to see the impacts for yourself**—our community is in dire straits, and many residents are stressed about losing their homes:

1. Facilitate a Provincial Reassessment: Advocate within government for a pause on construction pending a retroactive application of EELUVA requirements or an independent review, ensuring compliance with agricultural coexistence, viewscape protections, and municipal input.

2. Empower Municipalities: While you noted no current intent to amend Section 619, I urge you to reconsider empowering counties like Clearwater with veto rights or automatic standing in proceedings, especially when AUC enforcement of mandates falls short.

3. Convene a Meeting: I would greatly value a virtual or in-person discussion with you, Minister Neudorf, Clearwater County representatives, and RACCG members to explore practical solutions. This could restore faith in rural energy development and address the broader implications for communities like Peace River. I am available at your earliest convenience—please let me know a suitable time.

Caroline residents are not opposed to renewables in principle, but we seek balanced growth that respects local voices and protects our way of life. Your leadership in this area could set a positive precedent for rural Alberta. Attached for reference are the original AUC decisions (28295-D01-2025 and 29924-D01-2025), Clearwater County's submissions, and related correspondence.

Thank you again for your attention. I look forward to your response and any actions you can take to support us. Please contact me at 403-888-6346 or rjb@russellbarnett.ca.

Sincerely,

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