

# GUIDEBOOK FOR PREPARING A MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

*EXCERPTS FROM THE GUIDEBOOK  
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# Introduction

As of 2017, approximately 125 of Alberta's smaller municipalities who have never had a comprehensive community plan or municipal development plan (MDP) will be preparing one for the first time.

Regardless of population size, Council is responsible for managing the community's land base. A future plan that is supported by the community benefits all. This guidebook has been written for municipalities who will be preparing their first municipal development plan. It is meant to aid the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and Council in ensuring that the municipality meets the obligations of provincial legislation and creates a plan that benefits the community.

This guidebook reflects advice from Registered Professional Planners (RPP) from across Alberta. These individuals have many years of experience advising and working with municipalities of many sizes to meet their planning responsibilities and needs. This guidebook is meant to:

- Create understanding and appreciation of the value that a well prepared MDP brings to a community;
- Communicate the role and purpose of an MDP;
- Provide guidance on the content and information needed to prepare a plan;
- Provide advice on the process to prepare an MDP.

To this end, the guidebook consists of three main components. These are:

- An overview of an MDP in terms of topics such as its benefits, contents, information needs, and process to prepare;
- A series of sample MDPs (contained in Appendix A) for municipalities of different types with smaller populations; and
- A set of topic papers spanning a range of issues commonly addressed in an MDP, and potential linkages with capital planning and municipal asset management (contained in Appendix B).

This guidebook does not promote a "one size fits all" approach to community planning. The Alberta planning system has long recognized the unique settings and aspirations of individual communities. While municipalities can and do learn from each other's experiences, adopted land use planning policies need to reflect their individual needs and circumstances.

## What is a Municipal Development Plan?

A municipal development plan (MDP) is a key policy plan that communicates the long term desired land use for your community. It is a high-level blueprint that shows how your community is expected to change over time and the shape it will take in the future. It is often described as the “view from 30,000 feet” to reflect the conceptual, big picture role of the plan.

Much like a blueprint that guides the construction of a house, an MDP helps many decision makers collectively build their shared and desired physical setting. The resource that is being managed is the land base that is occupied by all members of the municipality. This land base is typically limited and is expected to accommodate many activities and functions. This means that choices have to be made. Creating an MDP involves a process to help make these decisions, and serves as a record of the choices that have been made for the community’s benefit.

The assignment of uses or activities to specific lands influences the use of other resources and the daily lives of community members. It has an effect on:

- **Economic** considerations such as the opportunity for commercial services to set up at locations where they can succeed, and space for local industries and businesses to provide employment opportunities;
- **Social** considerations such as the ability of community members to interact on a regular basis, to access services, and the ability to meet the variety of needs within the community;
- **Environmental** considerations such as the preservation of valued natural features and the impact of human activities on the natural environment (e.g. contamination of lands), and preparedness for extreme weather related events;
- **Cultural** considerations such as setting aside space for recreational, artistic, and community gathering or assembly activities; and
- **Governance** considerations such as locations for critical services like fire and emergency response, water treatment and wastewater treatment plants, and the process for making decisions about the future use of land.

The MDP serves as a guiding policy document for future decisions regarding the use of publicly owned and privately owned land, and the infrastructure and services that are needed to support the intended uses. It is a statutory document, meaning it is adopted by bylaw and the direction it sets should be followed.

Key attributes of a well thought out and prepared MDP include:

- A long term, strategic focus on what the community wants to be like 20 or 30 years into the future; for example a desire to have a healthier commercial land base;
- Clear communication of the desired physical layout of activities and features that will be accommodated within the community’s land base; for example, Confined Feeding

Operations (CFOs), residential areas, and open space areas;

- Guidance on how to achieve the desired long term vision and the decisions that will need to be made to implement the direction contained in the MDP, such as land use bylaw designations and subdivision decisions;
- Consideration of the draw on community resources to support the land use activities and form of

development that the plan allows; and

- Decisions and directions that reflect a high degree of community consensus that balances the interests of individuals and groups with the needs of the community at large. For example, finding space for affordable housing.

## What are the Benefits of a Municipal Development Plan?

The formal, legislated land use planning system has been in place in Alberta since the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rail expansion, and later, the creation of extensive highway systems in response to increased rates of economic expansion, fueled the need to address haphazard land development and speculation throughout the Province.

Generally we plan:

- To make the most efficient use of limited resources with the primary resource being our land base;
- To minimize conflict between differing types of land uses and associated users;
- To ensure that growth and development occurs in the most efficient and effective manner;
- To preserve those features in a community which may have important environmental, social, or cultural significance;
- To acknowledge not only physical and economic factors, but social needs within a community;
- To create certainty between neighbouring municipalities and community members about what will develop and where growth will occur; and
- To become more resilient and able to respond to changing circumstances and emerging challenges.

We also plan so our future generations will have the same opportunities that we enjoy now. This is commonly referred to as promoting sustainable development

and settlement patterns that meet the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It includes such things as:

- Creating and maintaining aesthetically appealing, orderly and comfortable communities containing the amenities desired by the public;
- Considering ecological and environmental impacts of proposals in an effort to maintain a clean and healthy environment;
- Protecting and promoting the health, safety, and welfare of the public at large through the provision of key facilities and services and avoiding hazardous situations and undue risk;
- Considering development impacts on culture and heritage resources valued by the community;
- Building an inclusive community able to accommodate and respond to the needs of individuals and a variety of household types; and
- Creating confidence for private investors in knowing what the community is prepared to accept and where to confidently invest.

Finally, an MDP can benefit the community by clarifying and communicating how it approaches planning issues and what the community may see in the future. This means:

- Maintaining fair planning decision making processes in which good development can flourish and all parties can participate;

- Promoting the public interest when managing growth and development, including efficiency in the development, delivery and use of infrastructure;
- Respecting the landowner's right to the use and enjoyment of their land and restricting those rights only to the extent necessary for the greater public good and public health;
- Managing change in the community's landscape through appropriate allocation of resources for the maintenance, upgrading and replacement of infrastructure; and
- Proactively identifying areas for investment opportunities that may economically and socially benefit the entire community.

## What Topics are Covered by the Municipal Development Plan?

The topics or subject matter contained in a municipal development plan are determined by the minimum legislative requirements and direction provided by your community.

Under Section 632 of the *Municipal Government Act*, a municipal development plan **must address**:

- (a) the future land use within the municipality;
- (b) the manner of, and the proposals for, future development in the municipality;
- (c) the co-ordination of land use, future growth patterns, and other infrastructure with adjacent municipalities, if not addressed in an intermunicipal development plan;
- (d) the provision of the required transportation systems, either generally or specifically, within the municipality, and in relation to adjacent municipalities; and
- (e) the provision of municipal services and facilities either generally or specifically

as well as the following provisions:

- (f) policies compatible with the Subdivision and Development Regulation to provide guidance on the type and location of land uses adjacent to sour gas facilities;
- (g) policies respecting the provision of municipal, school, or municipal and school reserves, including but not limited to, the need for, amount of, and allocation of those reserves and the identification of

school requirements in consultation with affected school authorities;

- (h) policies respecting the creation of joint use agreements;
- (i) policies respecting the protection of agricultural operations.

Section 632 also provides that a municipal development plan **may address**:

- (a) proposals for the financing and programming of municipal infrastructure;
- (b) the co-ordination of municipal programs relating to the physical, social and economic development of the municipality;
- (c) environmental matters within the municipality;
- (d) the financial resources of the municipality;
- (e) the economic development of the municipality; and
- (f) any other matter relating to the physical, social or economic development of the municipality.

Finally, Section 632 also states a municipal development plan **may contain** statements regarding the municipality's development constraints (e.g. steep slopes), including the results of any development studies and impact analysis, as well as goals, objectives, targets, planning policies and corporate strategies.

While there is a basic minimum of topics that must be covered, a municipality has a fair degree of latitude on what to include. Most land use decisions affect people in a limited, local area, so it makes sense that land use planning regulations should be created at the local level.

In practice the list of typical topics **may** include:

- *Future Land Use Patterns* - addressing the major land use or activity assigned to an area when development occurs, such as new residential neighbourhoods and new commercial development or industrial districts;
- *Growth Management* - addressing overall available land supply and amount of serviced lands available for short term growth; addressing the expected phasing of growth; addressing monitoring of development activity, and expectations about funding new development;
- *Urban Form and Design* - addressing the overall appearance of the community and its buildings and spaces;
- *Economic Development and Tourism* - addressing efforts to develop commercial and industrial activities, employment related activities, and prosperity for residents;
- *Heritage Preservation* - addressing the identification of buildings and sites related to the history of the community, and efforts to preserve and celebrate these as new development occurs;
- *Environmental Management and Community Resilience* - addressing natural areas to be preserved, use of conservation reserve, avoiding development on hazardous lands such as floodplains, and managing the impact of human activities on the environment;
- *Housing and Neighbourhood Design* - addressing the types of residential development needed for the current and future population, and the look and layout of new residential areas;
- *Commercial Development* - addressing the location and type of commercial development desired and policies to create new commercial areas. You may also address the needs of the downtown area;
- *Industrial Development* - addressing the location and type of industrial activities to be accommodated, and means to ensure these activities can avoid negative impacts on other uses;
- *Parks, Recreation and Culture* - addressing the locations and types of open space to be provided, and sites for community facilities like schools and indoor recreation venues;
- *Community and Protective Services* - addresses the provision of health and safety services for residents, as well as disaster response planning for unforeseen events;
- *Transportation* - addressing major road and transportation corridors for a variety of forms of transportation needs (vehicular, pedestrian and cycling) to ensure land is available for these functions;
- *Utilities* - addressing issues of capacity for water, waste water and landfills; and
- *Intermunicipal Planning and Regional Cooperation* - addressing matters of shared service delivery and ensuring consistency with the intermunicipal development plan.



Meeting the legislated minimums for topics does not necessarily result in a good plan. The topics to be addressed in your plan should reflect the needs of your community. This may result in different topics than those presented.

## Who Uses the Municipal Development Plan?

As the main blueprint for the development and growth of the community, the municipal development plan should be targeted to many users, not just land use planners. Some users of the plan are mandated through legislation. An example is the decisions made on the subdivision of land which must comply with the direction of the MDP. Other users may not be required to follow the MDP by legislation but may benefit from being able to align their efforts with the community's long term desired future. For example, an affordable housing provider or funding agency may seek to work with the community on achieving their housing goals.

The following users of the MDP should be considered:

### **Community Members**

Residents, property owners, and business owners should be able to consult the MDP and determine what could be happening around them and their property in the long term.

### **Development Community**

Those wishing to subdivide and develop property should be able to determine if their plans match up with the desires of the community in terms of the types of land use activities and the intensity of development.

### **Council**

Decisions on more detailed plans such as area structure plans, area redevelopment plans and non-statutory concept plans should be gauged against the direction of the MDP. Land use bylaw designations should reflect the long term intended use based on the MDP. The desire to make changes in the

MDP should be a discussion point during annual operating and capital budgeting. Council may also use the MDP as a corporate strategy for the planning of other municipal activities (e.g. how solid waste services will be provided).

### **Subdivision/Development Authority**

Decisions on development permits or on subdivision approval should conform to the policy direction contained in the MDP.

### **Subdivision and Development Appeal Board**

On appeal of a development permit or subdivision decision, the appeal board must consider the policy direction contained in the MDP. The MDP is the guiding document which provides the context for determining the appropriate course of action in reviewing the appeal.

### **Municipal Government Board**

On appeal of a subdivision decision involving a provincial interest, the Municipal Government Board (MGB), should consult the policies contained in the MDP. Like the local Subdivision and Development Appeal Board, this group can set aside the policies if they feel it is warranted. The MGB will also consult the MDP on determining the appropriateness of proposed annexation of land and expansion of municipal boundaries. The MDP can be a key document in communicating a well thought out pattern of human settlement for your community.

### **Engineers and Development Professionals**

The starting point for all plans involving municipal infrastructure (roads, water, wastewater, parks and recreation

facilities, etc.) is the expected nature, intensity, and location of land use activities. The MDP should provide this context for assessments of existing capacity and master plans for future upgrades and expansions.

### **Neighbouring Municipalities**

Abutting and nearby municipalities may refer to the MDP to understand how your community's plans will interact with theirs. The MDP may also form the basis for what lands to set aside for future expansion and the land use patterns identified in an intermunicipal development plan, relative to transportation and the extension of municipal services.

### **Provincial Government Departments**

The information included within an MDP may be of value to provincial authorities and departments that deliver or fund services to the community. In some cases the MDP may assist with obtaining provincial financial support in the implementation of the plan. For example, a regional housing authority may use the plan to build a case for funding or to select a suitable location for a housing project.

### **Municipal Administration**

The MDP is for the entire municipal corporation; it is not just for the planning department. Implementation is a corporate wide endeavour. It can be used in a variety of functions such as recreation facility planning, subdivision approval, economic development, and planning for the delivery of municipal services (e.g. location of a new fire hall). The MDP does not replace service delivery plans or more targeted short term operational plans; rather, it informs these plans about what the future may hold.

## How is a Municipal Development Plan Structured?

As a publication that will be used by many different audiences, it is important that your municipal development plan is well structured. The following sections represent the minimum topics to cover the mandatory requirements of the *Municipal Government Act* and good planning practice.

### **Introductory Section**

This section provides a brief overview of the function of the MDP. This includes noting which parts of the document are intended to be applied as policy and which parts are intended as information or for background context.

### **Background and Context Section**

A high level overview of the major issues and trends facing the community and providing context for the policies of the MDP should be included. This may include the physical setting of the community and key demographic information such as current and projected population. A summary of factors influencing the proposed development patterns, (e.g. a large river forming a barrier to west, sour gas facilities nearby, or a waterbody shared with another municipality), should be included.

### **Significant Features Map**

This map highlights the main features, natural and man-made, within and surrounding the community. It helps provide further context to the choices made in terms of future land use patterns and directions of growth. It should be noted that these features can be either opportunities or constraints.

### **Vision and Principles**

A vision is an overarching statement to guide growth and development within a municipality. It states what the community wishes to be like in 20 to 30 years. Determining your community's vision will help focus where you are and where you want to be in the future. It provides a reference point for the choices in policies and future land use patterns.

### **Land Use Concept Map**

The future land use concept map is the most frequently referenced drawing in the document. It communicates the desired location of future residential, commercial, institutional, industrial and open space areas. Major roadways and transportation features are included, as are sites for key public facilities. The map is often supported by a written explanation of the major land use categories and what each entails.

### **Topic and Policy Sections**

A series of sections are used to address the various topics the community wishes to cover in their MDP. Each section tends to start with one or more goal statements connecting the specific topic to the vision and principles. A goal statement provides more insight on the desired outcome. A series of objectives are usually added to give more focused direction to the goal(s). These are then followed by specific policy statements on individual considerations linked to the overall topic. Policies are typically structured as “shall”, “should” or “may” statements.

### **Implementation Section**

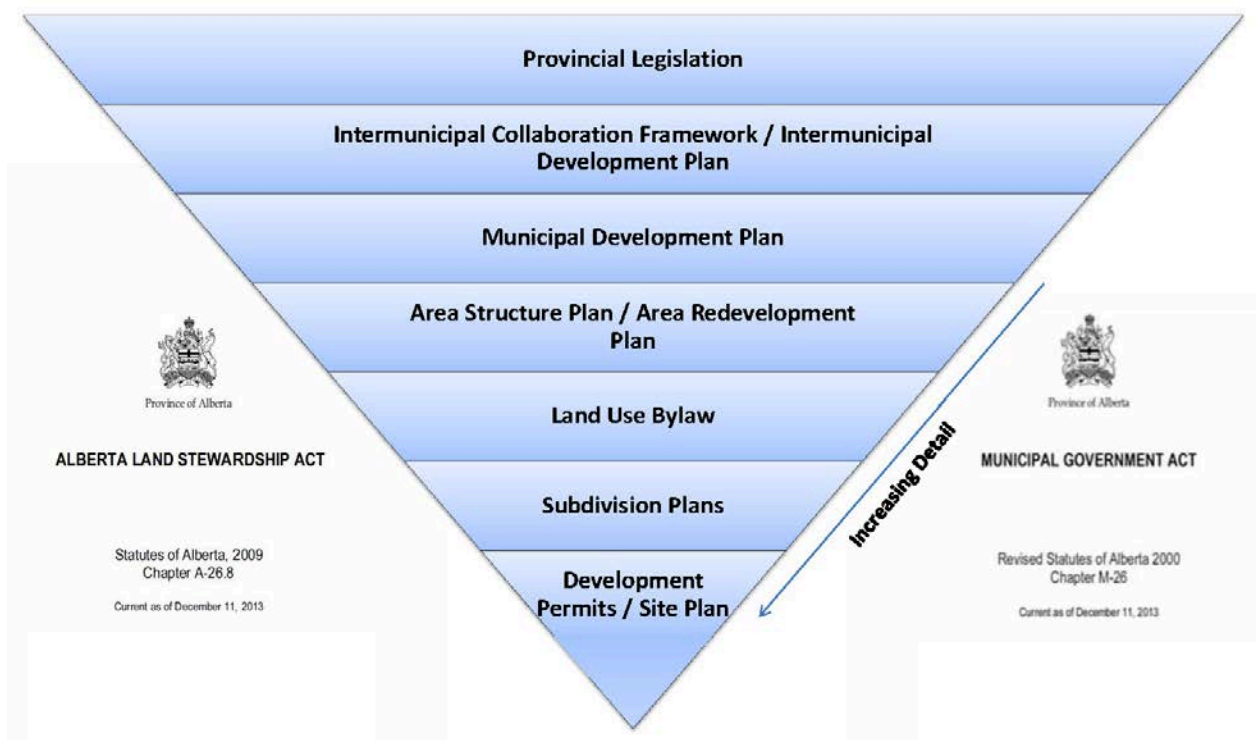
This section addresses processes and mechanisms that will be used to make the vision contained in the MDP become a reality. It may include requiring more

detailed planning prior to development, such as an area structure plan or area redevelopment plan or shared service through the intermunicipal collaboration framework. It may also set out minimum expectations around public engagement efforts on key planning decisions and the funding/budgeting implications for your municipality's 3 year financial planning cycle. The timing for periodic review/update/status check of the MDP is also addressed.

## Where Does the Municipal Development Plan Fit In?

A community's municipal development plan is not an isolated, one off document. It forms part of the planning system that applies across the Province. This means the MDP must be written to properly fit within this larger system which is referred to as the "planning hierarchy".

There are several layers of plans that serve to articulate policy from the provincial government down to the local, municipal authorities. Each plan must "fit in" with the vision and direction outlined in the higher level document(s) above it. Generally, the level of detail presented in any plan increases as you move down the chart or inverted pyramid.



### Provincial Legislation (Land Use Framework or 1996 Land Use Policy)

The highest level provincial document, the Land Use Framework, will create regional plans for the 7 different watersheds in the Province. In the absence of a regional plan under the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, the 1996 Land Use Policies will apply. Regional plans are managed and prepared by the Land Use Secretariat.

### Intermunicipal Collaboration Framework

An intermunicipal collaboration framework (ICF) is a formal regional planning initiative which requires municipalities to work together regarding growth management, delivery of municipal services and cost sharing. The goal of an ICF is to limit duplication of services and increase cost efficiencies.

### **Intermunicipal Development Plan**

An intermunicipal development plan, (IDP), is a plan adopted by two or more councils. An IDP acknowledges that land use decisions can often have significant impacts outside of one municipality's legal boundary. An IDP is a tool which will help identify the positives of joint planning and address the potential challenges associated with growth and development.

### **Municipal Development Plan**

Under updated Provincial legislation, all municipalities are required to adopt a municipal development plan. An MDP is a long range, statutory document that is required to be adopted by bylaw by every municipality, no matter how large or small the population.

### **Area Structure Plans and Area Redevelopment Plans**

Area Structure Plans and Area Redevelopment Plans are considered intermediate or secondary plans which will identify in detail: land use, servicing requirements, and infrastructure needs within a portion of the community. Plans of this level also need to provide information regarding the proposed sequence and density of development within a given area.

### **Land Use Bylaw**

A Land Use Bylaw (LUB) is the primary tool that is used to make "every day" decisions regarding applications such as redistricting and development permits. Although approved by bylaw, it is not a statutory document. A change in land

use or redistricting a piece of property should conform to the vision contained in the MDP, or other higher level documents, if the long term vision is to be achieved. For example, if a piece of property is currently designated (zoned) as agricultural or urban reserve and the MDP identifies the future use as industrial, the local Council should not redistrict the property to residential.

### **Subdivision**

The subdivision of land is accommodated by compliance with the Subdivision and Development Regulation, which is a specific implementation tool under the *Municipal Government Act*. The Subdivision and Development Regulation, amongst other things, identifies setback requirements for proposed development from landfill operations, sewage lagoons and oil and gas facilities. The Regulation also outlines when input is required by other authorities such as School Boards, Alberta Transportation for highway proximity/access, and the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) for potential development/expansion of a confined feeding operation.

### **Development Permits/Site Plans**

The submission of a development permit/site plan is the most detailed level of information generally approved by a Development Authority, whether the Authority is a Development Officer, Municipal Planning Commission, or Council. The information contained in a Development Permit application or drawn on a site plan is used to assess conformity with the Land Use Bylaw.

## Creating a Municipal Development Plan

The process used to create the municipal development plan is as important as the content and policy direction of the final adopted plan. The MDP aims to build consensus around how the community chooses to change. The opportunity to discuss various points of view and gain appreciation for different opinions should be a goal of a good, well-structured planning process. Participants should be able to recognize their contributions and acknowledge that they were listened to and that their perspective was taken into account.

Good, participatory process help build the consensus the community needs on the major topics covered by the MDP. A comprehensive appreciation of the perspectives of the community ensures that Council can create a plan that will stand the test of time.

### Legislated Process Requirements

The *Municipal Government Act* provides limited guidance on the overall process to prepare an MDP. Section 632(1) requires that an MDP be adopted by bylaw. Section 636 outlines the basic expectations around the process to create and adopt an MDP. This includes:

- Providing an opportunity and means for any person who may be affected by the plan to make suggestions and representations to those preparing the plan;
- Notifying the public about the planning process and their opportunities to make suggestions and representations;
- Notifying school authorities that serve the area and providing them with opportunities to provide input;

- Notifying adjacent municipalities, being those with a shared boundary with the municipality preparing the MDP, about the plan process and opportunities for their input and review; and
- Notifying the Indian band of any adjacent Indian reserve, or any adjacent Metis settlement.

Section 692 sets out requirements for the process to pass a bylaw that adopts an MDP. Before second reading is given to the bylaw, Council must hold a public hearing. The public hearing is held as part of a regular or special meeting of Council. During the public hearing Council:

- Must hear any person or group who claims to be affected and has followed the procedures for a participant that may be set out by Council (e.g. any resident or property owner in the municipality); and
- May hear from any other person or group who wishes to speak and Council agrees to hear (e.g. a national environmental organization like the Sierra Club of Canada).

It is equally important that the proposed MDP be presented, typically in a summarized fashion, at the public hearing. Council is expected to make their decision on the bylaw or any amendments to the bylaw based on the information that they have presented to them as part of the hearing process.



## Context: The General Planning Process

The preparation of a municipal development plan needs to be viewed in the context of a broader planning system. As a community evolves its plans need to adapt and be kept up to date to address changing circumstances. The plan should serve as a living guide that is periodically revisited and updated.

The process starts at **Stage 1** with a “challenge” (e.g. upgrading municipal water line) to be solved or “opportunity” (e.g. new industrial business) to be explored.

In **Stage 2** information is collected and the current situation is assessed. At this point the process moves into setting a vision and supporting goals.

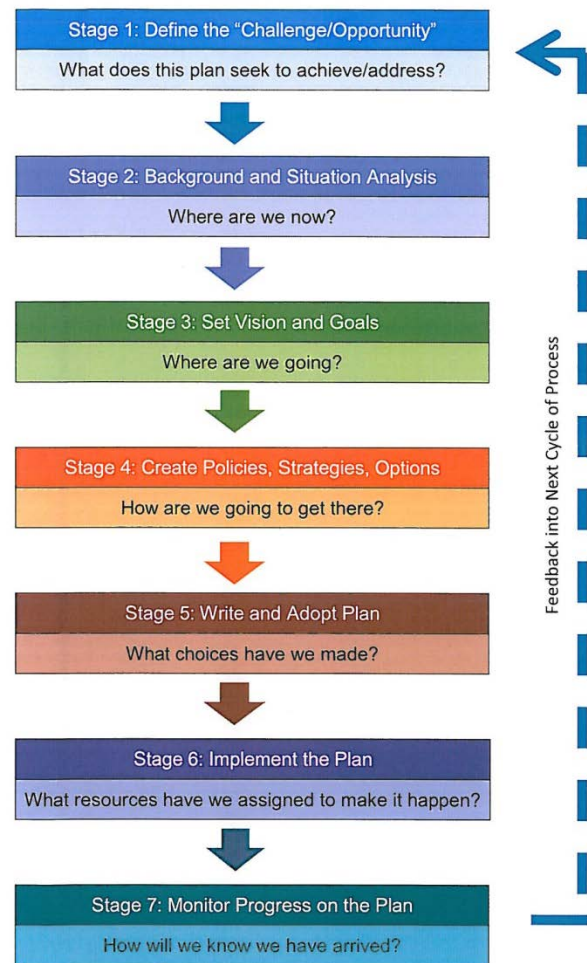
**Stage 3** seeks to answer “where we are going/wish to go?”

**Stage 4** involves building policies and strategies that will move the vision towards reality. These are typically actions and responses to a variety of items that may be encountered over the life of the plan. It addresses the “how are we going to get there” type questions.

**Stage 5** is the formalization of the plan in a written document. The main intent is to communicate the choices that have been made and the desired directions.

**Stage 6** is where resources are committed to making the plan’s directions take place. If the plan calls for public acquisition of a park, the implementation stage consists of activities to secure a site.

Finally, in **Stage 7**, the plan is monitored for effectiveness. The experience with the plan’s successes and shortcomings is used to inform the definition of the “challenge or opportunity” going into the



next planning cycle, typically over a period of five to ten years.

There may be many activities occurring within each of the stages described above. There are also many stakeholders to be considered throughout each stage of the process. It is important to consider how best to ensure participation opportunities for all.

A plan should not be an end product. Planning is an on-going feedback process, which requires constant re-evaluation, relative to how the community is moving forward in a positive manner; or a realistic evaluation of what challenges have arisen that prevent reaching a goal. A plan is only effective if

initiatives are created and acted upon which are necessary to achieve the desired outcome.

## Stakeholders in the Municipal Development Plan Preparation Process

The roles of various stakeholders in the planning process should be defined and reflected in the selection of activities. This includes consideration of the citizens/public, Council, municipal staff, and consultants brought in to assist with the process. The list of stakeholders may be longer based on the size of your community or the number and type of organizations that are present.

### **Steering Committee**

The Steering Committee is the group tasked with overseeing the planning process, providing input and feedback, reviewing drafts of the plan, and making a recommendation to the Council on the plan to adopt. The membership of the committee can be all or several members of Council and can include members of the community at-large.

Committee members are often called upon to directly assist with hosting public participation events and communicating to the community about the plan and planning process. This means the Steering Committee is a critical component of the process.

### **Council**

While some or all members of Council may form the Steering Committee, the final adoption of the plan is a decision rendered by all of Council. Starting with first reading of the bylaw to adopt the proposed MDP, Council assumes their role as decision maker for the benefit of the entire community.

### **Municipal Administration**

Municipal staff can provide background information about the community and about possible challenges and

opportunities. The CAO is typically a participant in Steering Committee meetings to provide the administrative perspective. This includes process advice and input on proposed plan directions and policies. Municipal staff also support the plan preparation process by providing communication support and helping with public participation efforts.

### **Municipal Planner or Planning Consultant**

A planner, planning consultant, or planning team, can assist with the majority of the activities needed to successfully prepare the plan. This includes:

- Helping to structure the plan process and guide the Steering Committee through the various stages;
- Preparing research and background materials for review by other participants;
- Identifying and providing an evaluation of alternative courses of action such as land use pattern scenarios;
- Drafting plan policies and directions and writing the plan; and
- Facilitating public review and input on draft and proposed materials.

### **Agencies and Other Local Authorities**

This group includes various Provincial Government departments and agencies that have a direct or indirect role in community planning. Examples are Alberta Transportation and Alberta Environment and Parks. The group also

includes local school authorities and housing authorities that serve the community and various private and public utility providers.

Referral agencies and other local authorities can provide useful background information related to their areas of expertise and interests regarding future development of your community. Some, such as school authorities, have specific interest in planning areas of land for their future needs and use as the community grows.

### **Adjacent Municipalities and Indigenous Communities**

Neighbouring municipalities and adjacent or close by indigenous communities should be consulted. This ensures opportunity for the coordination of land use patterns and major infrastructure systems such as connecting roadways. It also allows sharing of perspectives on the nature of the economic, social, and cultural issues that the plan should take into account. For example, changing demographic trends in the nearby communities may have an impact on your community.

### **Interest and Stakeholder Groups**

Organized groups may offer information and perspective about particular topics that are covered in the MDP. For example, conservation groups may be interested in the environmentally related policies. Developers and other groups may be interested in the planned future for a specific property. Economic development agencies may have information regarding future possibilities.

### **Members of the Public**

The citizens of the community are interested in the outcome of the plan process and should be afforded ample opportunity to participate. Some may have ideas about the future of their own lands; others may have concerns about the environment being created for future residents. Citizen support for the direction coming out of the plan will be a crucial element in the successful implementation of the plan – it is their community.

## Public Engagement in the Process

The process to create a municipal development plan must include opportunity to provide input as the plan is prepared, not simply react to a draft plan. This can take the form of notifying the general public, stakeholders, and referral agencies about the intent to prepare the plan, the process to be undertaken, and the ways they can participate.

The *Municipal Government Act* sets out the minimum legal requirements for the amount of public engagement to be used in a preparing an MDP as:

- Opportunity for initial input while the plan is being prepared; and
- Participation in the public hearing to consider adoption of the plan.

Most communities will likely find these minimum levels insufficient to achieve the desired degree of consensus. The minimal level of engagement may also result in a plan and a process that may not be able to withstand criticism.

The amount of public engagement to be built into a process can vary. There are many techniques that can be employed to provide opportunities for participation. The challenge is finding and using the ones that will prove useful in your community. Your community's public participation bylaw should give a starting point for the desired approach.

One of the common frustrations in this process is measuring the degree of actual participation by the public and citizens. The tendency is to score success or failure by the number of participants, rather than the significance and thoughtfulness of the collected input. It is important to remember that the municipality is required to provide meaningful, accessible opportunities for community participation and to communicate these opportunities to

community members. It then falls on the individual community members to choose whether or not to make time in their schedules to participate and engage in the process. Anticipating low levels of participation is not a justification for not putting forward the effort. Different techniques may have to be tried.

Consultation is not only about informing individuals or groups where a meeting will be held. Be creative in terms of how you go about gathering ideas and input. Why not meet in a senior's facility so that those individuals who may have challenges attending a meeting have the opportunity to share their wisdom? Why not set up a booth/table in the entrance to the local grocery store on a Saturday morning to hand out surveys and answer any questions? Could you meet a local class of school children to ask their opinion of what they see as desirable or necessary for the community? Remember, that it is likely that these children will be living with the benefits or consequences of the policy direction contained in the document as they grow up – their insights may prove invaluable.

Share the information provided and collected throughout the process; seek out opportunities for feedback or to "confirm what you heard". More meaningful and creative opportunities for participation result in a better end product.

There are several toolkits available through the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities on public engagement tips and techniques. This section describes some of the most common approaches used in preparing a MDP.

### **Survey and Opinion Poll**

Survey questionnaires can be useful in getting input on key issues and perspectives about the desired future of the community. In a small community with a population of less than 10,000 these surveys are rarely statistically accurate or reliable. For a limited number of straightforward questions (e.g. yes-no, circle preference) a properly structured survey can provide some general sense of the public view. Delivery of a survey can be through mail out, website, or hand out.

### **Website and Social Media**

A project website or page can be used to keep your community up to date on the project and can be a means of gathering input. This can include:

- Interactive chat pages;
- Commenting through email; and
- Commenting through other social media methods such as Twitter or Facebook.

### **Open House**

An open house is an informal event that allows for information using text, drawings, and visual aids, to be presented and for individual dialogue between a project team and members of the public. Static display boards summarizing key points of information are typically used. Open houses are run over a set period of time to allow participants to fit in attendance with their personal schedules.

### **Public Meeting**

Public meetings are often used for two way information exchange between presenters and a large number of participants. A presentation is usually made at the beginning of the meeting. This is followed by a facilitated question or discussion period where all participants can hear answers to all questions and hear from their fellow

community members, as well as the presenters.

### **Public Hearing**

A public hearing and an open house/public meeting are not the same thing. A public hearing is a regulatory requirement and comes with a higher degree of formality. Presenters speak to Council, about their concerns about all or part of a proposed course of action. While a presentation about the plan or proposal is usually made, two way information exchange and discussion is limited. The process should follow your public hearing procedures bylaw.

### **Focus Group Session**

A focus group session is a conversation with a small, invited group of participants. Participants are usually selected to achieve a cross section of the community members or based on their expertise in a particular area. Exchange of information through text, drawings and discussion, feedback on proposals and suggestions are collected through a facilitated conversation.

### **Workshop**

A workshop is meant to solicit suggestions and ideas from participants to help craft the plan. It involves two way dialogues through general discussion, usually with a facilitator who directs small group and large group assignments. Workshops are commonly used to help create a vision statement and key planning principles.

### **Design Charrette**

Similar to a workshop, a design charrette involves active participation and contribution by participants. The main difference is the emphasis on drawing as the technique to communicate ideas and suggestions such as options for future land use patterns.

### **Key Person Interview**

This is a one to one conversation between a participant and a member of the project team. It can be based on the expertise and knowledge of the individual or a series of interviews can be conducted to obtain a cross section of community members. Interviews are typically scheduled around the needs and availability of the interviewee.