

Strathcona County is a unique municipality that maintains administrative authority over the urban area of Sherwood Park as well as a large rural area made up of country residential development, farms, hamlets, agriculture and industry. Strathcona County is classified as a “Specialized Municipality” under provincial legislation. The challenge facing the community is to blend the diverse manmade and natural landscapes found within Strathcona County and lay out a framework for decision making that will meet the needs of the citizens of today and upcoming generations of County stakeholders.

Strathcona County contains some of the highest quality and most productive agricultural land in the Province. A large portion of the County is within the Beaver Hills Moraine which is considered an environmentally sensitive area. Important considerations in the preparation of this Bylaw are the conservation of both the natural environment and agricultural lands.

Taking into account the needs of future generations, Strathcona County wishes to continue being proactive in its economic development efforts. Industrial and commercial development will continue to play an important role in the economic health and vitality of the community. The Municipal Development Plan policies continue to promote an attractive business climate for our community, now and in the long term.

## Strategic Planning

County Council, in consultation with the public, has established a Strategic Plan for Strathcona County which identifies the values held by stakeholders within the community.

The Municipal Development Plan is the next step in creating a tool for Council, the public and administration to establish policies to aid in making decisions pertaining to growth and development in an orderly manner over the next 20 years and beyond. The Municipal Development Plan, therefore, presents not only a vision of what the landscape could look like in the future, but also the means by which the long-term goals can be achieved through the day-to-day decision making process. Decisions rendered at the policy or Municipal Development Plan level need to meet the challenges represented by an integrated, community-wide plan for sustainable decision making or the **triple bottom line**.

The triple bottom line or “three pillars”, approach to assessment of our community’s sustainability focuses on the social, economic and environmental elements of the community:

- 1. Social/ Community Sustainability** – Our community is designed to be socially diverse and adaptable to changing lifestyles. Individuals are provided with access to affordable housing, education, health care, essential goods, public amenities and services, so that their basic needs are met;
- 2. Economic Sustainability** - Our community is designed in a manner such that the costs of building, operating and maintaining it and its supportive infrastructure and services are affordable and will not become a burden on future generations; and
- 3. Environmental Sustainability** - Our community is designed to minimize air, water, and soil pollution, reduce resource consumption and waste, and protect natural systems that support life.

Decisions regarding growth and development within our community are generally based on the premise that there is a finite amount of land within the boundaries of the municipality and that a variety of land uses compete for this limited land base. It is important therefore, that the social, economic and environmental needs of the community are being met when decisions are made involving future growth and development.

Planning involves the analysis of current land uses as well as the development of goals and/or a “vision” for the community which in turn directs the future growth and development of land uses. A Municipal Development Plan must reflect the goals and aspirations of the residents for whom it was prepared. Opportunities for meaningful public involvement were provided in the preparation of this Bylaw and therefore, this Bylaw reflects the public’s vision for Strathcona County.

## **Administration – Legislative Requirements**

The Municipal Government Act, Section 632, provides the legislative framework under which Strathcona County’s Municipal Development Plan has been prepared. The Municipal Government Act lists both the required and optional contents of a Municipal Development Plan.

Section 632(3) (a) identifies the required content of a Municipal Development Plan as follows:

1. The future land use within the municipality;
2. The manner of and the proposals for future development;
3. The co-ordination of land use, future growth patterns and other infrastructure with adjacent municipalities if there is no intermunicipal development plan with respect to those matters in those municipalities;
4. The provision of the required transportation systems, either generally or specifically, within the municipality and in relation to adjacent municipalities; and
5. The provision of municipal services and facilities either generally or specifically.

Section 632(3) (b) outlines optional policies which may also be included in a Municipal Development Plan:

1. Proposals for the financing and programming of municipal infrastructure;
2. The co-ordination of municipal programs relating to the physical, social and economic development of the municipality;
3. Environmental matters within the municipality;
4. The financial resources of the municipality;
5. The economic development of the municipality; and
6. Any other matter relating to the physical, social or economic development of the municipality.

Section 632(3) (c), (d), (e) and (f) continue with identification of additional policies to be included in the Municipal Development Plan:

1. May contain statements regarding the municipality’s development constraints, including the results of any development studies and impact analysis, and goals, objectives, targets, planning policies and corporate strategies;
2. Must contain policies compatible with the subdivision and development regulations to provide guidance on the type and location of land uses adjacent to sour gas facilities;
3. Must contain 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 identification of school requirements in consultation with affected school authorities; and
4. Must contain policies respecting the protection of agricultural operations.

## The MDP Review Process

The Municipal Development Plan review process has occurred in three distinct phases. The project was initiated in December of 2004 with a “Kick-Off” session which featured a workshop focussing on issue identification and guest speakers of national and international renown. A 12 member Municipal Development Plan steering committee was appointed to provide input throughout the review process. The steering committee consists of members from internal departments within the County.

Prior to, and during the review of the Municipal Development Plan, a number of studies were undertaken, (the majority by outside agencies), and have contributed to the direction taken in this Bylaw. These studies include:

- Beaver Hills Initiative and Environmental Mapping;
- The West of 21 Area Concept Plan;
- Country Residential Area Concept Plan;
- Country Residential Water/Sewer Capacity;
- Competing Land Use Statistics and Projections;
- The Future of Agriculture;
- Financial Impact Analysis and Modeling;
- Social Sustainability Framework;
- Transportation Master Plan/Model Update;
- Future Urban Areas Feasibility Study;
- Evaluation of Urban Growth Options;
- Industrial Risk Management;
- Fire Risk Analysis and Mapping;
- Pipeline Corridor Study; and
- Housing Inventory.

Phase I of the Municipal Development review focussed on gathering input from community stakeholders on what “was or wasn’t working” relative to the existing Municipal Development Plan. Twelve open houses were held between March and May of 2005, at a number of different locations throughout the County, where a total of 211 members of the public attended. Questionnaires and comment sheets were provided at the open houses as a means of gathering input. Questionnaires were also available on the County’s website and could be answered online. Residents were encouraged to submit written comments regarding the Municipal Development Plan through email and letters to the County. In Phase I, a total of 201 written responses were received.

In conjunction with Phase I, there were also open houses that focused on specific studies related to the Municipal Development Plan. The open houses and studies were for the West of 21 Area Concept Plan and the Country Residential Area Concept Plan. Both the open houses and studies were completed by outside agencies.

Phase II consisted of preparing and presenting discussion papers. Discussion papers were developed for each topic area or chapter of the draft Municipal Development Plan and included the issues and the proposed policy direction for each topic area. There were five open houses for Phase II held in November of 2005. There were a total of 106 attendees at these open houses. Blank comment sheets were provided to gather input from the public. They were also encouraged to submit comments regarding the discussion papers or the Municipal Development Plan review through letters and emails. A total of 28 written responses were received during this Phase.

In November of 2005, an additional workshop was provided which offered residents an opportunity to hear two experts discuss possible future growth scenarios for Strathcona County. Dr. Brad Stelfox and Dr. Dan Farr presented a computer based modeling process entitled ALCES (A Landscape Cumulative Effects Simulator), which helps stakeholders understand the influence of natural resource management on a range of environmental and economic indicators.

Phase III was initiated with the release of the Draft 1 of the Municipal Development Plan in February of 2006. The draft plan was made available for viewing on the County's website, at County Hall, the North Strathcona Contact Office and Strathcona County Library at Sherwood Park Mall and was also available for purchase at County Hall in a paper copy or cd format.

There were a total of five open houses during Phase III that took place between March and April of 2006. There were a total of 452 attendees and 128 written responses provided by the public via comment sheets, letters and email submissions. In addition to the draft being presented, an overview of the studies that were conducted in conjunction with the Municipal Development Plan was displayed as well.

Draft 2 of the plan was released in August of 2006, with five open houses held in various locations throughout September. A total of 321 individuals attended these sessions with over 120 pieces of correspondence received between August and October of 2006.

Strathcona County has incorporated a strong emphasis on public awareness and communication throughout the review of the Municipal Development Plan. In preparing for an open house or workshop, several advertisements were displayed in three newspapers: Strathcona County This Week, the Sherwood Park News; and the Fort Saskatchewan Record. Newspaper articles were also used to communicate various topic areas that the Municipal Development Plan review process addressed. Advertisements for open houses and workshops were displayed on community signs in Sherwood Park, the hamlets and adjacent to rural facilities. Posters and pamphlets were also distributed to a number of locations throughout the County. Strathcona County conducted mail-outs to stakeholder groups in the community, during the three phases of the project and produced an addressed brochure which was mailed to every property owner in the community in September of 2006.

At the beginning of the Municipal Development Plan review process, a section on the Municipal Development Plan was added to Strathcona County's website. The webpage was used to update residents on open house locations, dates and times, and general updates of the Municipal Development Plan process such as studies that were conducted. It also displayed all the public comments which were received as a result of the open houses and general information on the Municipal Development Plan review.