

Preparation of an Official Community Plan

April 2025

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Introduction

This guide is intended to provide information regarding the creation of an official community plan and the tools available under *The Planning and Development Act, 2007* (PDA). The PDA is available from Publications Saskatchewan, should be referred to for details, and supersedes this handbook.

For more information about community planning and land use or the PDA, visit saskatchewan.ca or contact the Ministry of Government Relations, Community Planning branch via email at communityplanning@gov.sk.ca, or:

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Official Community Plans

An Official Community Plan (OCP) is a statutory document for providing a comprehensive policy framework to guide the physical, environmental, economic, social and cultural development of a municipality. Whether you are a large or small municipality or district, your OCP expresses your municipality's vision and provides a blueprint for future development.

An OCP gives residents and investors a clear indication of the community's vision, council's goals and objective and, together with a zoning bylaw, outlines the legal framework for implementing land use controls. It may be visual, attractive and thorough in its presentation of goals, objectives and policies and must align with provincial interests to foster responsible growth in Saskatchewan. The OCP should respect and highlight existing land uses while being dynamic as the municipality develops. It must be detailed enough to guide day-to-day decisions yet general enough to allow for some flexibility.

The PDA requires an OCP to be prepared in consultation with a Registered Professional Planner (RPP). A municipality can contract an RPP to work with them through a request for proposals or by contacting a planning firm directly for quotes. A list of planning firms in Saskatchewan can be found on the Saskatchewan Professional Planners Institute website at www.sppi.ca. When analyzing consultant proposals for the OCP preparation, it is important to request samples of past work to determine if the consultant will deliver a document that the municipality can use to showcase the community. The consultant's job is to work with the community to articulate a vision grounded in the community's values and reflective of emerging area trends.

Regional issues may also be addressed in the OCP. Municipalities with a common interest in a region may wish to form a regional partnership to effectively address intermunicipal issues. The regional planning handbook is available on saskatchewan.ca.

Official Community Plans and Zoning Bylaws

An OCP establishes council's long-term goals, objectives and policies for the municipality's future development. It must state objectives to be accomplished by the zoning bylaw and should contain policies specific to different types of land uses and guide when, and under what conditions, amendments to a zoning bylaw are appropriate.

The OCP may contain guidelines allowing for the use of special zoning tools within a zoning bylaw such as direct control districts, contract zoning, provisions for the use of exceptions to development standards, demolition control districts, and architectural control districts.

The zoning bylaw functions as a tool to accomplish the long-term goals prescribed within the OCP. For example, an OCP policy statement and future land use map may indicate whether an area zoned for "future urban development" would be most suitable for residential or commercial use in the future. When a landowner initiates a proposal requiring a zoning amendment and/or subdivision, the OCP provides policies for council to follow when considering the proposal in alignment with the community's future growth plans.

A zoning bylaw must align with the policies within an OCP, and provincial priorities identified in *The Statements of Provincial Interest Regulations* (SPI). All new zoning bylaws and OCPs must address the SPIs where applicable. This is also a requirement for existing OCP and zoning bylaws and any

amendments made, regardless of original adoption date of the bylaws.

For more information on the SPI, please refer to [*The Statements of Provincial Interest Regulations*](#) page on saskatchewan.ca.

Municipal Authority

Once a municipality has adopted an OCP and received ministerial approval, they are bound by the plan and no development can occur that is contrary to the plan.

A municipality must also ensure that its zoning bylaw is consistent with its OCP. Any part of a zoning bylaw that is inconsistent with the OCP has no effect insofar as it is inconsistent.

Development plans and basic planning statements adopted under a former version of the PDA continue in force. Provisions of any bylaw that are inconsistent with the PDA and SPI are considered null and void insofar as it is inconsistent. If you have any questions about the applicability of your bylaws, contact the Ministry of Government Relations.

Municipalities can use an OCP and zoning bylaw to:

- Set out a desired framework for development by defining goals, objectives and policies.
- Inform residents of a community about how council intends to direct and manage community needs and expectations.
- Help clarify the municipal role in the development process.
- Guide current and future councils in making municipal decisions.
- Enforce land use decisions.
- Reduce land use conflicts.
- Provide opportunities for public participation in community planning.
- Establish a framework for land use, growth and development, inform the public and create certainty for developers.

Creation of an Official Community Plan

Registered Professional Planner

As per subsection 29(3) of the PDA, an OCP must be prepared in consultation with a Registered Professional Planner. The planner guides the council and community through the OCP development process to the final version for adoption. A key component in developing the OCP is public consultation. Consultation should involve (at minimum) residents, business owners, staff and council. Consultation with neighbouring municipalities and First Nation communities should also be considered. The creation of an OCP should include:

- Background research (baseline studies, historical data, statistics, past studies, infrastructure assessment, asset management, etc.)
- Public consultation (presentations, open houses, workshops, meetings, surveys, etc.)
- The formation of a steering group
- Analysis of the current conditions
- Helping to develop the community's vision
- Articulating the goals, objectives and policies of council
- Any amendments to drafts resulting from feedback received during consultation

- The final OCP, including written text, appropriate formatting and illustrations

A list of planning firms that prepare OCPs and zoning bylaws can be found on the Saskatchewan Professional Planners Institute website at www.sppi.ca.

Contents of an Official Community Plan

Principles

General rules and guidelines intended to inform and support the overall vision should be outlined as principles. These broad statements will set the stage for the goals, objectives and policies to be developed in the OCP. Some examples of principles are environmental integrity in both the natural and built environments and social well-being to meet basic needs and strengthen the community.

Vision

The vision is the focal point of the plan. All goals, objectives and policies stem from this vision. Both inspirational and achievable, it needs to challenge the existing situation and be ambitious. The vision can be the target for a municipality from 10 to 50 years into the future, depending on the circumstances and anticipated growth. The community must be fully involved in formulating the vision.

Planning Context

The planning context is not intended to be a lengthy history of the municipality. Its purpose is to set the stage and present the current situation to justify the plan for the future. It should include anything relevant to the goals, objectives and policies. It should address the physical setting, demographics, planning framework and regional context.

Policies

Policies are statements that guide actions toward achieving a specific objective and a more general goal. By achieving the goals in the OCP, the community vision should be realized.

Policies, which make up the majority of the plan, can be organized in different ways. An effective method is to create sections based on physical, environmental, economic, social and cultural development. This responds to the PDA's purpose and provides an opportunity to include issues within each section.

Each section should contain the following:

- **Discussion:** providing a brief context by explaining the current situation
- **Goals:** addressing each section's broader long-term intent
- **Objectives:** mitigating or enhancing the specific issues and opportunities described
- **Policy:** statements to help achieve the goals and objectives and meet the PDA's intent

Legislative Requirements

As per section 8 of the PDA, all district plans, OCPs, regional plans, subdivision bylaws or zoning bylaws must be consistent with SPI. Adhering to these regulations can help guide municipalities on a variety of land use and development issues, enabling them to help develop vibrant, safe, self-reliant and sustainable municipalities.

For more information on the SPI, please refer to [The Statements of Provincial Interest Regulations](#) page on saskatchewan.ca.

As per subsection 32(2) of the PDA, an OCP **must** contain policies that address the following:

- Sustainable current and future land use and development in a municipality
- Current and future economic development
- The general provision of public works
- The management of lands that are subject to natural hazards including flooding, slope and instability
- The management of environmentally sensitive lands
- Source water protection
- Implementation of an OCP;
- Co-ordination of land use, future growth patterns and public works with adjacent municipalities
- The implementation of any intermunicipal development agreement entered into under section 32.1 of the PDA
- The provision of municipal reserve for school purposes, including policies that:
 - Ensure the creation of municipal reserve sites suitable in size to be used for school purposes
 - Designate the locations of municipal reserve sites to be used for school purposes
 - Provide for the dedication of land or money-in-lieu of land through the subdivision process that supports equity for all subdivision applicants and municipalities within the region
- The management of lands close to existing or proposed railway operations

As per subsection 32(3) of the PDA, an OCP **may**:

- Address the coordination of municipal programs relating to development
- Contain statements of policy regarding the use of dedicated lands
- Contain concept plans for future development planning
- Contain a map or series of maps that denote current or future land use or policy areas
- If a council has been declared an approving authority, contain policies respecting site plan control for specific commercial or industrial development
- Contain any other statements of policy relating to the physical, environmental, economic, social or cultural development of the municipality that the council considers advisable

Municipal Reserve for School Purposes

As noted above, an OCP must include policies that address municipal reserve dedication (or cash-in-lieu of dedication) for school purposes and the location of those school sites. These policies must be developed in consultation with the Ministry of Education, any school divisions within the municipalities boundaries (i.e. public, separate, and/or francophone school divisions), and any other municipality that may be affected by the policies (e.g. a neighbouring municipality if residents of the neighbouring municipality may attend the school).

A concept plan will establish a future development plan for a specific area of a municipality, including the land use, density and phasing of development. School divisions must be consulted during the development of a concept plan so they can determine if land will need to be set aside for school purposes.

Concept plans are focused on in greater detail later in this guide.

Tables and Maps

Tables can show any demographics or trends in the relevant background information. Land use maps are typically included identifying future land use or policy areas. These should be easy to read and should follow the body of the OCP as a separate appendix with appropriate references throughout the text.

Hazard Mapping

Section 6.7 on Public Safety within SPI requires available flood mapping to be included in land use planning documents through policy development and mapping. Maps can be created using historical knowledge, photos, evidence (high water marks/monuments) or specific mapping of flood events. The Water Security Agency should also be consulted for data or flood mapping for the area. Developing policy and regulations for development on flood hazard lands and providing a spatial and geographical representation assists the community, future investors, developers, landowners and councils in reducing future disaster risks and costs to the community. It delineates specific lands within the municipality that require a particular procedure to ensure safe and sustainable development.

Background Research

It is essential to understand as much about a community as possible before engaging the public and formulating the plan. Historical data, asset inventories, statistics, environmental baseline studies, hazard areas, demographics, trends, local and regional economic drivers and past community/regional studies are just some of the tools that will help to identify community issues and opportunities. A municipality should be able to assist with information on background studies.

Any background research compiled by the consultant should be provided to the municipality at the end of the project in hard copy and electronically. This will ensure that the OCP can be easily updated and that background data can be used to inform other community projects.

Public Consultation

Public consultation is important in the preparation process. Various participatory tools should be used to build capacity and provide a venue for stakeholders to gather, share ideas and hear different perspectives. This process is also beneficial in the future when council supports, modifies or rejects an application that is inconsistent with the policies of their OCP using the OCP as the basis for their decision.

Community and public consultation can be presentations, workshops, small meetings, surveys, etc. This is to ensure stakeholders have an opportunity to have their voices heard. Listening and responding to concerns and ideas is essential to the process. This will speed up the adoption of the bylaw by building support and streamlining the public hearing process.

The First Nation and Métis Consultation Policy Framework should also be used, when appropriate, to consult with and accommodate First Nations and rights-bearing Métis communities in advance of decisions or actions which may adversely impact Treaty and Indigenous rights.

Forming a steering group will greatly help with the OCP preparation. Having representation from various stakeholder groups, industry or age groups will provide the support needed to answer important questions in a timely manner and will assist with the general acceptance of the bylaw throughout the community.

Concept Plan

Section 44 of the PDA authorizes a municipality to adopt a concept plan as an amendment to their OCP. As a part of a municipality's OCP, a concept plan is intended to establish a future development plan for a specific area of a municipality. The adoption of a concept plan will ensure that the development of the area is consistent with the goals, objectives and policies of the municipality. Defining these future development plans informs potential developers and future/potential landowners about the future land uses of the area. Without a concept plan, development in an area may occur on an ad hoc basis, resulting in unexpected infrastructure issues and land use conflicts.

A municipality may engage professionals to prepare a concept plan. A private developer may also prepare a concept plan on their own initiative. If the concept plan process is developer-lead, it is important that the developer work closely with the municipality as the concept plan will ultimately need to be adopted by bylaw.

A concept plan may be undertaken when a new development may:

- Have an impact on adjacent lands or the larger community
- Require upgrades to infrastructure, such as roads, water, or sanitary or storm sewer
- Impact environmental features
- Be built in phases over a longer period of time

Contents of a Concept Plan

Section 44(2) of the Act defines what may be addressed in a concept plan, including:

- The future land use of the area
- The density of development
- The general location of services proposed for the area
- The phasing of development

A municipality may find it useful to undertake other studies to inform a concept plan, such as an infrastructure study and/or market analysis. An infrastructure study would determine how the traffic network for the proposed area will connect to the rest of the municipality. The infrastructure study would also identify how water, sanitary and/or storm sewer services will be extended to the proposed area and the feasibility of extending these services.

A market analysis may be undertaken to inform future land use and the potential density of the area (e.g. is there more demand for high-density condominium development, low-density residential or medium-density townhouses). The market analysis may also inform the phasing of the area. Oversaturating the market could lengthen the time that a parcel sits vacant.

A concept plan must be consistent with a municipality's OCP and any part that is inconsistent does not have an effect. For example, if a concept plan identifies an area for future commercial development, but

the future land use map in the OCP identifies the same area for future residential development, the future land use map would take precedence and an amendment to the OCP should also be made so both documents align.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Section 39 of the Act authorizes the minister to require the submission of a cost-benefit analysis as part of an amendment to a municipality's OCP. As a concept plan is an amendment to an OCP, a cost-benefit analysis may be required by the ministry as a part of a review of the bylaw.

A cost-benefit analysis must demonstrate that a municipality has considered the following:

- (a) The provision of services to the area affected by the amendment
- (b) The financial impacts on the municipality and its ratepayers
- (c) The economic impacts to the municipality and surrounding region
- (d) The environmental impacts on the municipality and surrounding region
- (e) The social impacts on the municipality and surrounding region
- (f) Any other impacts on surrounding communities

Depending on the context, the term "surrounding region" may refer to adjacent municipalities, watersheds or ecological regions, market areas or any other area.

All these items should be considered when developing a concept plan as they will inform council on how the development of the area will impact the larger community.

Final Document

The final document should be well-written and visually appealing, showing the municipality. A municipality should be able to use the OCP to promote their community to investors, visitors and future residents. The OCP should tell the story of where the community is now and intends to be.

A well-organized document is easy to read, uses plain language, has a logical flow and is visually representative of the community. A proper table of contents should be developed that clearly lists what is contained in the plan for ease of reference and review. Page numbers should also be included and a glossary of terms should be attached at the end for clarification on terminology.

Proper sections and subsections make it easy for developers and citizens to read the plan. Subsection numbers make it easier to reference a specific subsection or policy. For example, Section 3.2.3 clearly states an exact area in the plan and could be used in reports to council or feedback to applicants for justification on the review of an application.

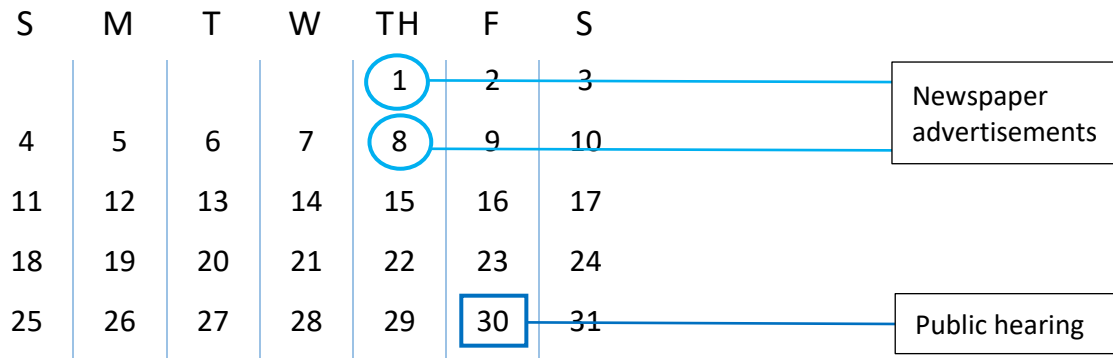
Plan Adoption Process

Once a council is satisfied with the documents, it may give **only** first reading to a bylaw adopting the official community plan and the zoning bylaw. Council must also determine when to hold a formal public hearing about the plan and bylaw. The hearing must be concluded **after** the first reading and before the second and third readings.

Council must give notice of its intention to adopt the bylaws and hold the hearing by placing an

advertisement in a local newspaper once a week for two consecutive weeks. The first notice must be published at least four clear weeks before the hearing. When calculating time using “clear” weeks, the first and the last day are excluded. See Figure 2 below for more information.

Figure 2 – Adoption of a **new OCP**.



At the hearing, council must hear all who wish to make a representation about the proposed OCP and zoning bylaw. A council must listen to all parties wishing to speak to a proposed bylaw and consider the comments made. If a hearing is to be held during a council meeting, it must be resolved to suspend the meeting and open a hearing. If objections are received, council may withdraw, adopt or alter the bylaw.

For major alterations such as new text, council must publicize the proposed changes and hold another hearing at which representations can be made only about the alterations. For minor corrections such as typos that do not distort the bylaw's intent, council may consult the Ministry of Government Relations about the need to advertise the alterations.

Ministerial approval is required for all new OCPs and zoning bylaws. Municipalities must submit two certified copies of the new planning bylaws to the Ministry of Government Relations, as well as documents showing that the bylaw was advertised and the hearings were conducted, the minutes of representations or certified copies of all submissions. As per section 38 of the PDA, the timeframe for a ministerial decision on the OCP is 90 days. In some cases, additional time may be required to determine that all legislative requirements have been met. The bylaw is not in effect until the minister approves it.

Implementation

For an OCP to be effective, its policies must be implemented. Achieving the vision will be determined by future decisions of the council and municipal officials.

The implementation section should discuss how the vision is to be accomplished and include the tools required. The zoning bylaw controls the use of the land and is fundamental to the decision-making process. Concept plans and direct control districts can contribute to development control within the zoning bylaw. Approving authorities may also adopt and utilize a subdivision bylaw to manage subdivisions in the community.

Measurable indicators serve as a basis for assessing progress toward achieving the objectives. Indicators can include specific information such as the local residential vacancy rate, unemployment rate, addition or removal of recreation facilities, quantity of open space, number of homes serviced by water and/or sewer, number of new residential builds, addition of new businesses, etc. To be effective, indicators

should be simple and easy to continually measure. Continual monitoring will begin to show trends that illustrate issues or challenges in the municipality.

Monitoring

The goal of monitoring is to be responsive, adaptable and strive for continuous improvement. Therefore, if the indicators in the plan are not met, updates may be required. A course correction may be necessary at some point, and policy changes may be warranted. It is recommended that the OCP be monitored frequently and reviewed every five to 10 years unless rapid growth or unanticipated issues develop that need to be addressed, which may precipitate an early review. An effort should be made to follow up with the public to determine if the OCP is meeting the community's goals.