

# Municipal Planning Process

## Regulatory Structure

The regulatory structure governing planning comprises interrelated provincial legislation, including the Municipal Government Act (MGA), the Land Stewardship Act, and the Land Use Framework. These (among others) set out the responsibilities that the City of Calgary (and other Municipalities in Alberta) has with regard to planning, and set out a hierarchy of plans. The legislative powers assigned to municipalities charge them with certain powers such as the adoption of comprehensive municipal development plans (MDPs), zoning bylaws, subdivision regulations; the power to amend plans; the power to tax, spend and purchase property; the power to delegate some authority on planning and zoning decisions, etc.

## Municipal Process

In Alberta, the MDP is the central organizing umbrella under which other plans, regulations, and initiatives exist. The purpose of the MDP is to establish an overall vision for a municipality, and include a plan for physical growth, development, and preservation of land within the municipal district. The MGA allows municipalities to supplement the MDP with statutory plans such as Area Structure Plans (ASP) for new developments, or Area Redevelopment Plans (ARP) for established neighbourhoods. These plans add local (specific) detail to the MDP that enables a community to identify and pursue what the community aspires to become, and promotes investment in and stabilization of communities. Municipalities also develop a broad range of non-statutory special purpose plans that support the vision of the MDP. For example, *transportation* plans are prepared to accommodate and shape growth and development; *public facility* plans identify sewer and water infrastructure needs; *capital improvement* plans identify capital investment needs; *parks and recreation, trails, open space, and natural resource protection* plans identify and plan for recreational needs of communities as these are closely linked to a community's health and safety needs; *housing* plans ensure there are housing opportunities for a diverse population, etc.

These plans generally evolve according to the values, priorities, and circumstances of a community. While planning is often procedural, the process should remain flexible to allow disagreements that arise in the latter stages of planning to be addressed adequately. Figure 1 illustrates a typical planning process and demonstrates how these steps can work in relationship to one another. Strong citizen participation is important and necessary throughout the planning process —there is no point at which citizen participation ends.

To create plans there are a number of characteristics that should be considered during their development. The process must be **inclusive** meaning that all citizens have had and continue to have the opportunity to shape local plans; plans require an overarching **vision** that articulates the desires of the community; planning is **consensus-based**, so that it has deep roots in the community; the planning program should be

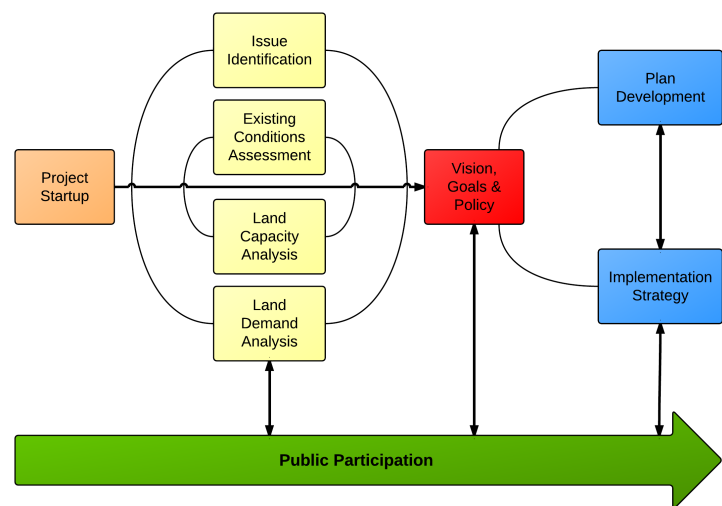


Figure 1: The planning process (adapted from Duerksen et al., 2009)



**integrated** such that individual plans form part of a larger whole; local planning efforts should be **continuing**, there is no end to community planning even in established communities. Community's must continue to engage in the planning process to promote desired redevelopment or an improved quality of life; local community programs should be **coordinated** with those of adjacent communities, and be cognisant of Provincial and Federal laws and programs; and community planning programs should promote a community that is **sustainable** in terms of the economy, the environment, social health, and energy.

When developing statutory plans municipalities are required to implement a public engagement process to inform citizens of plans, to enable citizens to influence the shape of plans, and to ensure the process results in consensus on and support for the plan. Engagement may be through workshops, focus group interviews, surveys, design workshops, etc. A key objective of engagement should be to build ownership of the plan. A factual foundation is also necessary to ensure that a plan is based in reality. Citizens need to have an understanding of the underlying forces that create both constraints and opportunities. There are a myriad of environmental, economic, social, demographic, and infrastructure forces at work, and it is important for participants in the planning process to understand them. Research topics, typically created by planners and municipalities, should be used to ensure that plans can be implemented. Topics may include demographic, housing, and economic analysis; growth forecasts; environmental analysis; public facility and infrastructure analysis; land use capacity; community character analysis; fiscal analysis, etc.

Planning should not be thought of as something that others do. Rather, it should be thought of as a broader-based continuous program that has an overall vision, individual elements that address various components of the vision, and a sense of how the plan gets funded.

## Resources

Federation of Calgary Communities Guide to the Planning Process:

<http://www.calgarycommunities.com/FCCServices/CommunityGuidetothePlanningProcess2012Update.pdf>

Smart Code v. 9.2 (<http://www.transect.org/docs/3000-BookletSC-pdf.zip>)

## Sources

Duerksen, C. J., Dale, G. G., & Elliott, D. L. (2009). *The citizen's guide to planning*. Chicago: American Planning Association Planners Press.



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