



Saskatchewan
Ministry of
Municipal
Affairs

OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLANS

- Preparation of an OCP

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A community must have the
capacity to envision a future
they want, and not just the
one they are likely to get.

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1. Introduction

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

The OCP should showcase the municipality, encouraging investors to invest, visitors to visit, and non-residents to relocate. It should be visual, attractive, and thorough in its presentation of goals, objectives and policies and should align with provincial interests to foster responsible growth in Saskatchewan. The OCP should respect and highlight existing land uses while being dynamic and able to evolve with updates occurring as the municipality develops. It must be detailed enough to guide day-to-day decision making yet general enough to allow for some flexibility. Plans should meet the administrative needs of a municipality. Plans which are overly complex or excessive in length may not provide the municipality with a useable tool.

If a Zoning Bylaw (ZB) is not in effect, this process will need to be completed with the OCP. *The Planning and Development Act, 2007 (PDA)* requires that the OCP is prepared in consultation with a professional community planner. A joint contract to prepare both bylaws will ensure consistency. A municipality can contract a professional community planner to work with them by a Request for Proposals (RFP). 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 planning district. Regional approaches can be an effective way to address infrastructure, source water protection or other intermunicipal issues. This document outlines the requirements for a municipality's OCP, which are also relevant to planning districts.



A plan is a list of actions arranged in whatever sequence is thought likely to achieve the objective. - John Argenti

2. Benefits to Implementing an OCP

The benefits of a well written OCP are endless. An OCP allows a municipality to be proactive. It provides a policy framework and guidance to assess issues and opportunities allowing for a more considered response to unexpected situations and scenarios. An OCP formulates a consistent approach that fosters effective and planned growth. A good OCP is a tool developers can use to create proposals that align with the community's vision.

The process of preparing an OCP helps develop community capacity and support through presentations and education, fostering relationships between council and the community. By bringing people together to create a plan, a better understanding for future decision-making will occur.

The most important benefit of an OCP is the certainty it provides for residents, landowners, and the municipality regarding the future. Also, residents, land owners, community groups, developers, and investors can use the OCP as a tool to understand where and how future growth may occur.



Photo Credit: Molly Jordan

3. What an OCP Should Address

Key Policy Areas (required)

- *Current and future land use/development*
- *Economic development*
- *Public works*
- *Hazard lands*
- *Environmentally sensitive lands*
- *Source water protection*
- *Implementation*

Secondary Policy Areas (recommended)

- *Coordination of municipal programs*
- *Dedicated lands*
- *Concept plans*
- *Mapping to identify specific areas*
- *Site plan control*
- *Physical, environmental, economic, social, or cultural development*
- *Coordination of land use, future growth patterns, and adjacent public works*



4. What to Expect from a Consultant

A consultant should be well versed in provincial legislation and should guide the council and community through the OCP process to the final version for adoption. A key component in developing the OCP is public consultation. It is important to request a consultation plan when engaging a consultant. Consultation should involve residents, business owners, staff and council. The services a consultant should provide 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; and
- The final OCP, including written text, appropriate formatting and illustrations.



5. The Difference Between an OCP and ZB

OCP

- the municipality's vision for the future
- outlines a timeframe for the achievement of the vision
- establishes the policies that council will apply to guide physical, environmental, economic, social and cultural development

ZB

- establishes the regulations needed to achieve the policies of the OCP pertaining to land development
- provides direction on how a property can be used now, which can include land use, density, building height and setbacks.

Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will not die.
- Daniel H. Burnham

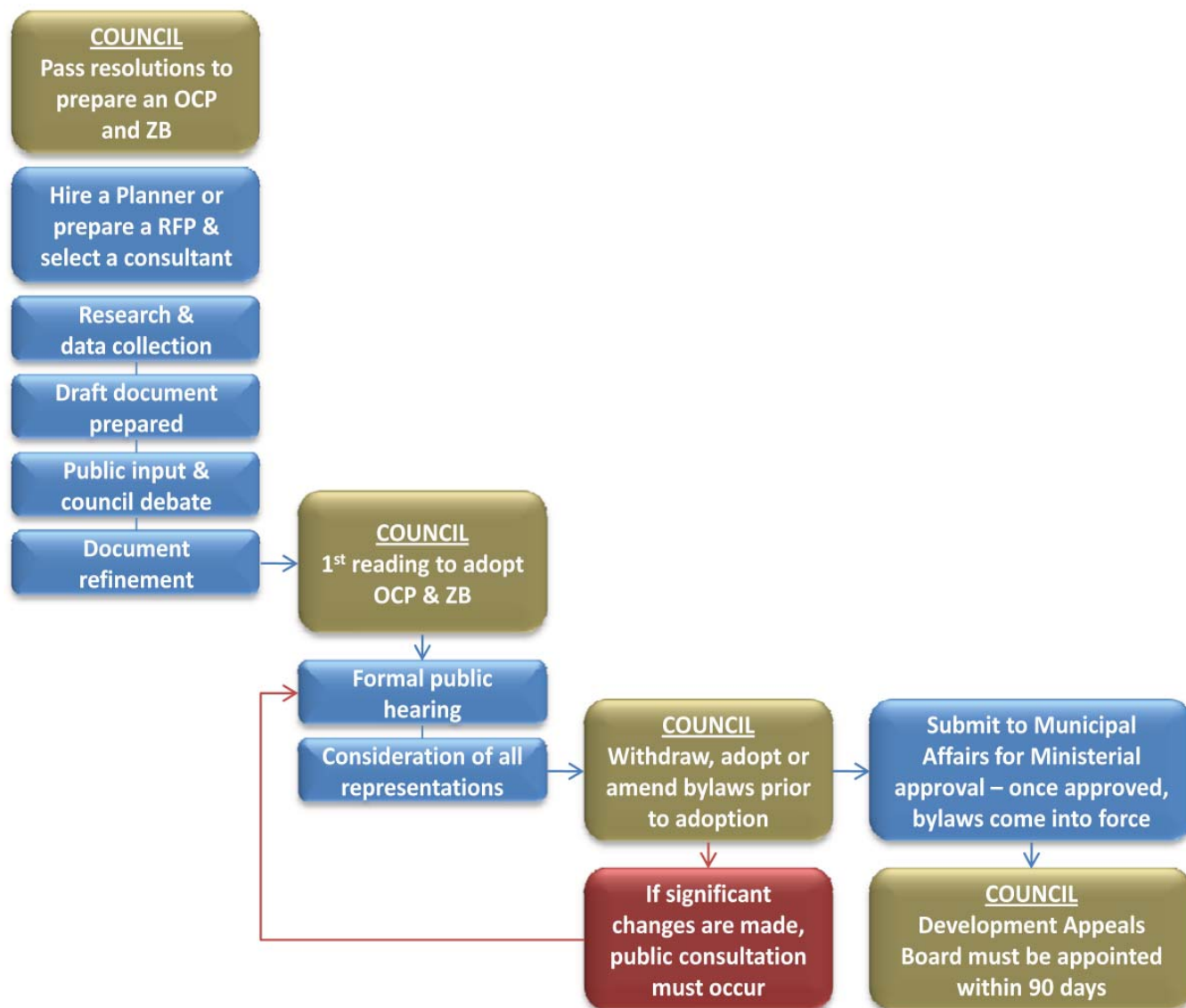


Photo Credit: Greg Johnson Photography

6. Implementation of an OCP and ZB

A summary of the implementation process for an OCP and ZB is provided below.

A council may adopt an interim development control bylaw to manage new development in the municipality until the planning documents are ready. Ministerial approval is required for all interim development control bylaws unless the municipality is an approving authority.



Detailed information on implementation is available online in the Community Planning resource section.
www.municipal.gov.sk.ca/Community-Planning/Official-Community-Plan-Zoning-bylaw

7. Legislative Requirements

The OCP must be prepared in consultation with a professional community planner and incorporate any applicable provincial land use policies and statements of provincial interest. The content of the plan should adhere to the PDA. A list of requirements and recommendations are listed on page 7 as well. Public participation requirements must be met between the first and second readings of the bylaw and meet the requirements of Part X of the PDA. If council has not previously passed a ZB, council must pass a ZB by separate bylaw (PDA, s. 34). Existing ZBs may need to be revised in order to properly implement the new OCP; any amendments should be submitted with the OCP.

8. Background Research

It is essential to understand as much about a community as possible, prior to 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. The 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 both hard copy and electronically. This will ensure that the OCP can be easily updated in the future and background data can be used to inform other projects within the community.

9. Public Consultation

Public consultation is an important element of the preparation process. Various participatory tools should be used to build capacity and provide a venue for a wide variety of stakeholders to get together, 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 in the form of presentations, workshops, small meetings, surveys, etc. The purpose of this is to allow stakeholders 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 Nations and Métis Consultation Policy 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 Aboriginal rights.

10. Formation of a Steering Group

The formation of a steering group will greatly assist 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.





11. Content

Principles

General rules and guidelines that are 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 the municipality anywhere from 10 to 50 years into the future, depending on the circumstances and anticipated growth. The community needs to 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 more general goal. By achieving the goals set out in the OCP, the vision for the community should be realized.

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

Each section should contain the following:

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

As outlined in the PDA, s.32, an OCP must contain statements of policy with respect to:

- sustainable current and future land use and development;
- current and future economic development;
- the general provision of public works;
- the management of lands that are subject to natural hazards, including flooding, slumping and slope instability;
- the management of environmentally sensitive lands;
- source water protection; and
- the means of implementing the OCP.

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 (PDA s.44);
- contain maps that denote current or future land use or policy areas;
- contain policies respecting site plan control for specific commercial or industrial development (PDA s.19);
- contain policies relating to the physical, environmental, economic, social, or cultural development of the municipality; and
- address the coordination of land use and development, future growth patterns and public works with adjacent municipalities.





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 should include the tools required to accomplish this. The ZB 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 ZB. Approving authorities may also use a Subdivision Bylaw to regulate planned growth.

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 as set out in the plan are not being met, updates to the plan may be required. A course correction may be necessary at some point, and policy changes may be warranted from time to time. It is recommended that the OCP be monitored frequently and reviewed every 5 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 followup with the public as well to determine if the OCP is meeting the goals of the community.

Tables and Maps

Tables can be provided to illustrate any demographics or trends that are part of 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 referencing throughout the text.





Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now. - Alan Lakein

12. Final Document

The final document should be a well written and visually appealing document that showcases the municipality. The municipality should be able to use the OCP to promote their community and market it to investors, visitors, and future residents. The OCP should tell the story of where the community is now and where it intends to be in the future.

A well organized document will be easy to read, use plain language, have a logical flow and be 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 rejection of an application.

A few very effective OCPs are linked below. Though the content will vary, the layouts and visual presentations are very effective.

- District of Saanich Official Community Plan
- City of Toronto Official Plan
- RM of Edenwold No. 158 Official Community Plan

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