MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE
SHAPING OUR FUTURE

INTRODUCTION

Strathcona County is committed to sustainable development. The County has adopted three sustainability frameworks (Environmental, Economic, Social) which describe the County's overall approach and commitment to sustainability. To achieve a sustainable community, Strathcona County has adopted a process defined by four science-based sustainability principles adapted from the Natural Step Framework.

- **Principle 1:** Move toward and ultimately achieve... solutions and activities that conserve, enhance and regenerate nature and life-sustaining ecosystems.

- **Principle 2:** Move toward and ultimately achieve... solutions and activities that free us from our dependence on substances that are extracted from the earth's crust and accumulate in nature.

- **Principle 3:** Move toward and ultimately achieve... cradle-to-cradle solutions and activities in design, manufacturing and consumption such that substances produced by society do not accumulate in nature.

- **Principle 4:** Move toward and ultimately achieve... social solutions and activities that allow every person to meet basic human needs and achieve their potential in life, now and in the future.

These principles are included in the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) along with twelve themes which must be addressed by proponents of new area structure plans.

The MDP is one of the County's most important tools for achieving more sustainable forms of development because the location, form, patterns and quality of development (urban and rural) have a big influence on the sustainability of the County i.e. on the environmental, social and economic performance of the County.

As a fast growing municipality, the performance and quality of new development can make a big difference to the sustainability of the County. New development in urban, hamlet, and country residential locations can have a positive or negative effect on the local environment, energy consumption, water use, liveability and health, as well as impacts on the fiscal health of the County.

WHAT DOES THE 2007 MDP SAY?

The MDP sees the neighbourhood as the key unit of development for applying more sustainable forms of development and the MDP lists 4 basic types of practice:

1. Redevelop existing sites and buildings before constructing new ones; integrate ecological features to serve as green infrastructure elements; create a well-defined "edge" of natural space and agricultural lands; reduce water use and recycle waste water; utilize biological sewage treatment, etc.

2. Develop pedestrian & bicycle oriented communities; encourage development that is heated and powered by renewable energy; intensification; mixed-use development; public transit; alternatively fueled fleets; incentives for organic agriculture that minimizes phosphorus and petrochemical fertilizers and herbicides, etc.

3. Incorporate healthy building design and construction techniques that reduce or eliminate the use of toxic building materials; landscape design and maintenance that use alternatives to chemical pesticides and herbicides; adopt purchasing guidelines that encourage low or non-chemical product use; utilize waste as a resource, etc.

4. Create a diversity of housing types; develop affordable housing for a diversity of residents; support locally based business and food production; encourage eco-industrial development, participatory community planning and decision making; celebrate cultural heritage; design buildings and amenities to promote social interaction, etc.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

- Strathcona County has a policy to develop all new municipal buildings or renovations over 500m² as green buildings.

- Strathcona has a dark skies policy that is designed to prevent unnecessary light pollution.

- Working with NRCan, UBC Design Centre and local developers, the County has developed and applied the Sustainable Urban Neighbourhoods (SuN) Living process to the development of new neighbourhoods in the County including Emerald Hills.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

While the current MDP policies are progressive and point in the right direction, there are challenges implementing them and success achieving sustainable new development has been uneven in the County. Specific challenges include:

- How to measure or predict the performance of new development during the approvals process?

- Providing a set of clear, unambiguous set of standards that apply to all new development.

- Providing clarity to developers and planning & development staff about what is acceptable and not acceptable.

- Giving policies some teeth – i.e. making the standards mandatory rather than voluntary.

This suggests there is room to strengthen the MDP policies and perhaps supplement them with specific guidelines and standards that clearly translate the policies into very specific practices and standards that can be applied to new development without ambiguity.

In part, this is a question of improving the practice of urban design. The practice of urban design focuses on the form of buildings, design of streets and open spaces and the relationship between the two. Good urban design can affect how residents and others use and interact with our urban environment and, in doing so, can shape communities that are more livable, prosperous and sustainable.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

The updated MDP can guide Strathcona County to a future that is more sustainable than today through policies, standards and land use plans that provide stronger direction for sustainable development.

- Do you think Strathcona County is doing enough to ensure sustainable development? Why or why not?

- Would you describe your neighbourhood as sustainable? Why or why not?

- What would you change about Strathcona's policies to create more sustainable development?

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Strathcona County Social Sustainability Framework
- Strathcona County Economic Sustainability Framework
- Strathcona County Environmental Sustainability Framework
- SuN Living Process
- Strathcona County MDP
- Municipal Sustainable Buildings Policy
- Light Efficient Community Policy