

JANUARY 2017

TOPIC SUMMARIES



MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE
SHAPING OUR FUTURE





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INTRODUCTION

Strathcona County is updating its Municipal Development Plan (MDP) which is the County’s plan for the future. It sets out a clear vision for how Strathcona will grow and develop over the next 20 years or more, and guides decisions on key issues like conservation of the natural environment and investment in infrastructure and services.

Since the MDP was last updated in 2007, the County has added over 10,000 new residents. This growth means we need to ensure that development of urban and rural communities is sustainable and maintains a high quality of life for current and future residents. The updated MDP will also reflect recent studies, as well as key trends and best practices.

THE DRAFT MDP

Over a 7 month period, Strathcona County has drafted a new Municipal Development Plan for the County which incorporated the feedback heard at previous engagement sessions. The County is currently in the final phase of plan development. This report summarizes the direction of the new plan.



PREVIOUS ENGAGEMENT

In Phase 1 we engaged participants on their core values as well as a range of topics including agriculture, industry, environment, affordable housing, nature based and agri-tourism, sustainability, and urban design.

In Phase 2, we looked closer at some of these key topics to better understand why these topics are important to the future of the County, which topics align or clash with each other, and what other topics may be important for the MDP to address.



In Phase 3, we began looking at potential policy directions and options, engaging with residents and stakeholders to get their feedback on the following key topics:

- Agriculture
- Community Housing
- Rural Residential
- Sustainable Tourism
- Mixed Use Development
- Sustainable Development & Urban Design
- An 'other' topic was also added to ensure participants had a chance to discuss any additional topics they had an interest in.

To share information and gather feedback on the potential policy directions and options, the County hosted a series of engagement activities to hear from stakeholders and community members:

- **Stakeholder Sessions:** Held October 7th, 2015 (10 a.m. – noon and 6 – 8 p.m.) at the County Community Centre. Stakeholder representatives from a range of local organizations were invited to participate in discussions on the key topics. A total of 23 people attended these sessions including members from the Chamber of Commerce, Museum, Beaver Hills Initiative, County Committees, community groups and developers.
- **Public Open House:** Held October 8th, 2015 (drop-in 6 – 8 p.m.) at the Gibson Room in Millennium Place. Participants at this drop-in event reviewed the potential policy directions and options, talked to County staff and the consultant team, and provided feedback through questionnaires. Approximately 60 people attended this event.
- **Questionnaire:** Available from September 28th to October 23rd, 2015. The questionnaire was available online and paper copies were available at the Stakeholders Sessions and Public Open House. A total of 78 responses were received.

The feedback received through the public engagement process informed the policies of the draft MDP.

UPCOMING ENGAGEMENT

In this final phase the County will be hosting two engagement sessions to discuss the draft Municipal Development Plan including:

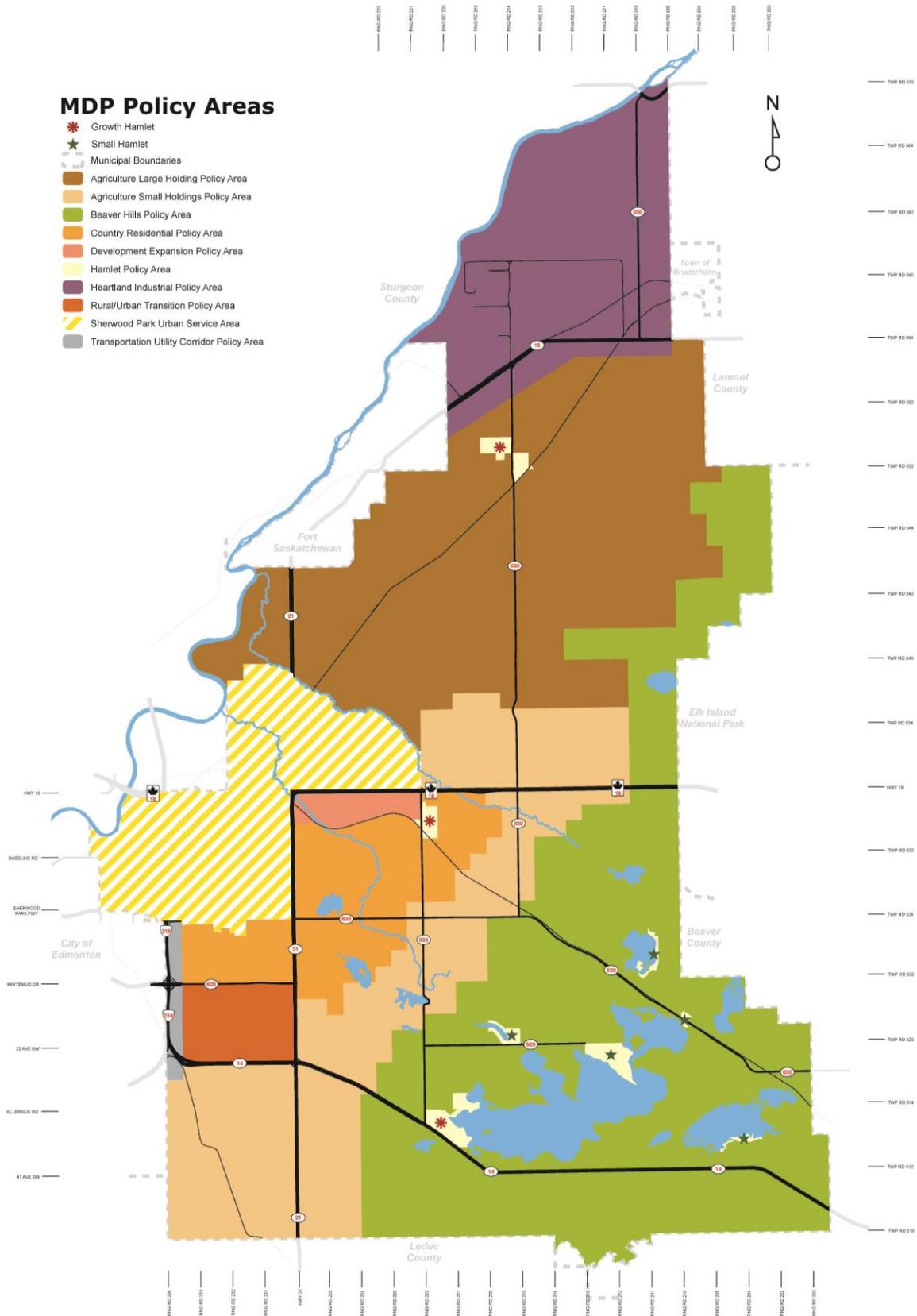
- January 25, 2017 (6:30- 8:30 p.m.) - Sherwood Park Community Centre
- January 30, 2017 (6:30- 8:30 p.m.) – Heartland Hall

Residents will be able to provide input on the draft plan. This feedback will be used to finalise the plan.

More information on upcoming engagements can be found at www.strathcona.ca/MDP.



MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE
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AGRICULTURE

In previous phases, participants emphasized the importance of agriculture to the County's identity and stressed the need to reduce the spread of urban development into prime farmlands. They also felt there was a need for more education and promotion of agriculture as well as promotion and development of agri-tourism, market gardens, community gardens and equestrian facilities.

In spring of 2015 the County approved an Agriculture Master Plan which recommends "policies that allow for and encourage a wide range of commercial agricultural activities on agricultural land to allow for on-farm sales and other activities that draw people (services, events) should be pursued by Strathcona County – particularly for sectors such as equine where there seems to be considerable promise."

DRAFT MDP POLICIES

The feedback from the public has been integrated into the draft MDP. The following is a summary of how the draft MDP reflects what we heard through the public engagement process.

Agricultural Impact Assessments: We heard that the MDP should require an agricultural impact assessment for certain development proposals on agricultural lands to identify and reduce any potential impact on surrounding agriculture. This requirement would depend on the type of development, policy area, zoning and soil classification.

The draft MDP requires that an Agricultural Impact Assessment be completed for new growth areas.

The draft MDP also proposes an implementation item to complete guidelines for Agricultural Impact Assessments within the County. These guidelines will define the contents of an Agricultural Impact Assessment and investigate other potential uses for these studies.

Agri-business/Commercial for rural areas: We heard that the MDP should create a policy for agri-businesses such as agriculture support services, equestrian facilities, or food processing. Also, the MDP should specify the appropriate type and scale of commercial development for different rural areas to ensure developments 'fit' with their surroundings.

The draft MDP considers different scales of commercial developments, known as agricultural support services, which core functions support or aid agricultural producers in their operations throughout the different rural policy areas. Small scale agricultural support services may include uses similar to a local agricultural equipment repair shop.

Within the Agriculture Large Holdings Policy Area small scale agriculture support services will be considered where the development is directed to lower class soils and has appropriate level of infrastructure. Equestrian facilities are encouraged within this policy area.

Agri-business and live-work opportunities are a few of the main focuses of the Agricultural Small Holdings Policy Area. It has considerations for several different types of live-work agri-business including:

- small scale agriculture support services such as a local agricultural equipment repair shop;
- small scale product processing such as a cannery or bakery;
- small scale retail location for the sale of agricultural products; and
- equestrian facilities.

Large and medium scale, commercial activities and agricultural support services such as farm equipment sales, or meat packing plants will be directed to the Heartland Policy Area or Local Employment Policy Area (previously Development Expansion Policy Area).

Ensure agricultural uses are being considered in the Agricultural Small Holdings Policy Area: We heard that the MDP should require landowners looking to subdivide in this policy area to consider different forms and scales of agricultural uses on their lands.

Traditional farms and smaller scale agricultural uses are encouraged within the Agriculture Small Holdings Policy Area such as livestock facilities, equestrian facilities, you-picks and intensive horticulture uses. In order to increase opportunities for agricultural uses the minimum parcel size within this district is proposed at 20 acres.

Limit the Fragmentation of Agricultural Land: We heard that the MDP should limit the fragmentation of lands with prime agricultural soils.

The draft MDP proposes to limit the fragmentation of prime agricultural lands by limiting subdivision within the Agriculture Large Holdings Policy Area to a single residential parcel per quarter section. This will eliminate the potential for 80 acre splits within this area.



HOUSING

COMMUNITY HOUSING

In previous phases, we heard that affordable housing is a key issue for the County, particularly for seniors, youth and young families. Participants suggested a greater variety of housing such as smaller homes, suites, rental housing, seniors housing, and denser housing (smaller lots, apartments) would help to provide options for people to stay in their community or neighbourhood as they get older and more affordable entry-level homes for young people/families.

Residents suggested that creative and innovative solutions would be needed to address the significant gap in both urban and rural areas. Suggestions included County policies, density transfers, incentives, subsidies and provincial grants/funding.

DRAFT MDP POLICIES

The feedback from the public has been integrated into the draft MDP. The following is a summary of how the draft MDP reflects what we heard through the public engagement process.

Encourage smaller, modestly-priced homes: We heard that the MDP should require a specific mix of housing types and lot sizes to allow for more affordable homes in new developments and subdivisions.

The draft MDP requires a mixture of housing types within new urban and hamlet neighbourhoods and encourages mixed use redevelopment within existing commercial areas such as Emerald Hills Shopping Centre and Wye Road as well as in Centre in the Park to promote housing diversify and walkability.



Encourage community housing in new developments (inclusionary housing): We heard that the MDP should require a certain amount of community housing in new developments.

The draft MDP encourages new urban and hamlet development to include a variety of community housing types along the housing continuum. It also encourages redevelopment within existing commercial areas such as Emerald Hills Shopping Centre and Wye Road as well as in Centre in the Park which have significant access to services to increase the availability of community housing.



Inclusionary housing programs are also being considered within the Urban Service Area and Hamlets. The potential for these programs will be assessed as an implementation item separate from the MDP.

Secondary suites / Garage suites: We heard that the MDP should support suites (in appropriate urban areas or hamlets where adequate servicing is in place) and encourage homeowners to create suites to increase the supply of affordable rental housing.

The draft MDP encourages discussion with area residents regarding housing choice through the completion of Area Redevelopment Plans.

RURAL RESIDENTIAL

In previous phases many participants expressed concern about urban and rural sprawl and stressed that development should be concentrated in existing areas such as urban areas or hamlets to limit the fragmentation of farmlands and natural areas. Participants also identified the need for more complete rural communities with small-scale local amenities where residents can meet their day-to-day needs.

Servicing was raised as one of the biggest challenges with rural development. Participants noted that the cost of connecting to municipal water and sewer systems is a significant issue. Some suggested rural development did not necessarily require piped water or sewer, while others pointed out that most rural wells are not safe for drinking and individual septic systems have their own challenges such as leaks, odours and maintenance. Also, the cost of running water and wastewater trucks and wear and tear on rural roads was seen as being unsustainable.

DRAFT MDP POLICIES

The feedback from the public has been integrated into the draft MDP. The following is a summary of how the draft MDP reflects what we heard through the public engagement process.

Growth of certain hamlets: We heard that the MDP should allow certain hamlets to expand their boundaries to enable further urban development.

The draft MDP has identified Ardrossan, Josephburg and South Cooking Lake as growth hamlets. Of these growth hamlets Ardrossan has been prioritized for future growth. The MDP has established criteria for evaluating when a growth hamlet may be able to expand their boundaries.

Small scale development in hamlets: We heard that the MDP should enable small-scale development that caters to the local community in appropriate locations.

The draft MDP focuses hamlet development within the growth hamlets while allowing for the buildout of small hamlets. The proposed policies encourage a mix of housing types and a mixture of services to meet the local needs.

Servicing of Country Residential: We had discussion on the current MDP's requirements in the Country Residential Policy Area to connect to municipal piped water and sewer systems. The MDP does allow for on-site private systems for rural residences in the Agricultural Small Holdings Policy Area as long as environmental conditions are suitable.

The draft MDP proposed to continue to require full servicing for the Country Residential Policy Area and on-site private systems for rural residences in the Agricultural Small Holdings Policy Area.



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

In previous phases, participants talked about the amazing assets that Strathcona County has but noted that not everyone knows about them. They suggested the County could be a leader in sustainable tourism and should promote existing natural areas, agri-tourism and heritage/cultural tourism to celebrate what we have, share our history, raise awareness about environmental/agricultural protection, and re-connect people with nature.

Participants noted the delicate balance of sustainable tourism, suggesting that we should build off what we have already and that any new tourist development should be small-scale and carefully designed so it does not detract from the natural beauty of the area.

Most of the policies in the existing MDP are high-level and focus on promotion, general support and partnership efforts but do not deal directly with land use and development issues.

In 2012, partners from government, industry and environmental groups came together to complete a Tourism Development Opportunity Assessment for the Beaver Hills Moraine area. This comprehensive study identified several opportunities for building the region as a sustainable tourism destination focusing on three distinct categories:

- **Agri-tourism:** direct involvement between the tourist/consumer and the agricultural community.
- **Nature-based tourism:** any tourism activity/experience directly related to natural attractions or the natural environment whether for relaxation, discovery or adventure.
- **Heritage/Cultural tourism:** involves places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present, including historic, cultural and natural attractions.



DRAFT MDP POLICIES

The feedback from the public has been integrated into the draft MDP. The following is a summary of how the draft MDP reflects what we heard through the public engagement process.

Support sustainable tourism: We heard that the MDP should include policy and direction for sustainable tourism such as agri-tourism, nature-based tourism and heritage/cultural tourism.

The draft MDP considers different scales of agri-tourism, nature-based tourism, heritage/cultural tourism and commercial outdoor recreation within multiple policy areas. The draft MDP defines these uses as follows:

- **Tourism, Agri:** Tourism with direct involvement between the consumer and the agricultural community such as a corn maze.
- **Tourism, Nature-based:** Any tourism activity directly related to natural attractions or the natural environment such as an eco-interpretive centre.
- **Tourism, Heritage/Cultural:** Tourism involving places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present such as historic sites.
- **Commercial, Outdoor Recreation:** Recreational activities that occur primarily outdoors and operate as a business such as outdoor paintball.

Heritage/Cultural tourism is encouraged County wide where historical sites exist. Portions of Heritage/Cultural tourism have been integrated into other tourism types. The policy area with the largest focus on tourism is the Beaver Hills Policy Area. Its natural features create an ideal area for tourists to interact with the landscape.



Land use districts for tourism: We heard that the MDP should support the creation of a new land use district for sustainable tourism activities and develop design standards, guidelines and location criteria to ensure new developments are a good fit for the area and environment.

The draft MDP proposes that small scale tourism such as a kayak rental stand could be considered in appropriate locations throughout the rural service area without requiring rezoning. Medium and large scale tourism such as zip line parks would require rezoning to a specific tourism district.



Seasonal recreational resorts are proposed to be considered within the Beaver Hills Policy Area only. These developments could include campgrounds or privately owned condominium lots and communal property. Seasonal Recreational Resorts require an Area Structure Plan and rezoning to a Seasonal Recreational Resort District. They are required to be seasonal only with the primary uses being recreational vehicles and park models.

Prior to the development of a seasonal recreational resort, medium scale tourism use or large scale tourism use, appropriate land use districts will need to be created and a landowner would be required to undergo the rezoning process which includes public consultation. These land use districts along with appropriate standards and guidelines will be created as an implementation item separate from the MDP.

Create a linked network of sustainable tourism activities: We heard that the MDP should recommend a strategy for creating a county-wide network of agri-tourism, nature-based tourism and heritage/cultural tourism activities that are linked through a designated rural trail system.

The draft MDP provides opportunities for tourism throughout the County. As tourism opportunities emerge throughout the rural area the County will explore opportunities to link them through projects separate from the MDP.



COMPLETE COMMUNITIES

MIXED USE

In previous phases, many participants expressed the need for a greater variety of shopping and local services close to where they live. Urban residents suggested increasing density to create “European village-style” walkable neighbourhoods while rural residents suggested more small local amenities where residents could walk to meet their day-to-day needs and socialize with their neighbours.

Residents in both urban and rural communities noted they would like to see more small, locally- owned shops that fit with the character of the area rather than “big box” retailers or strip malls.

DRAFT MDP POLICIES

The feedback from the public has been integrated into the draft MDP. The following is a summary of how the draft MDP reflects what we heard through the public engagement process.

Mixed-use developments: We heard that the MDP should encourage development that mixes commercial shops and services with residential, office or institutional uses and encourage existing commercial areas to redevelop as mixed-use neighbourhoods to meet a greater variety of needs.

The draft MDP focuses Sherwood Park’s mixed-use and higher density developments in existing commercial areas such as Emerald Hills Shopping Centre and Wye Road, Centre in the Park and new urban areas. Mixed-use developments will aid the County in achieving the density requirements of the Capital Region Board. Mixed-use developments are encouraged to include an integration of schools, community services, commercial, offices, residential and major public facilities within or in close proximity to each other.

Redevelopment which diversifies the uses of a particular site or development is encouraged within the existing commercial areas such as Emerald Hills Shopping Centre and Wye Road as well as in Centre in the Park. These areas have been identified as those that have the potential to densify over time. They will create ideal locations for community housing and transit infrastructure due to the close proximity of services and employment.



Local-serving commercial: We heard that the MDP should require new residential developments in urban areas and hamlets to incorporate local-serving shops and services.

The draft MDP requires a variety of community commercial opportunities within hamlets and new urban developments. It also requires that Area Redevelopment Plans address needs and opportunities for these local commercial uses.

Planning and design guidelines: We heard that the MDP should provide direction for the development of detailed design guidelines for commercial and mixed-use developments to describe desired building forms, mix of uses, building orientation, public realm design, parking and green development standards.

The draft MDP encourages the use of urban design guidelines within urban areas and hamlets. The plan proposes to complete design guidelines for urban areas and hamlets as an implementation item separate from the MDP.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN

In previous phases participants stressed the need for more sustainable, walkable and connected communities. Residents expressed concern about urban and rural sprawl and the impact of a “bigger is better” approach to growth and development. Residents noted they want a greater choice and variety of local amenities in their communities, greater transportation choice (including transit), more sustainable buildings, and more attractive and livable neighbourhoods.

Some participants also emphasized the need for to avoid the “cookie cutter” look of new subdivisions that takes away from neighbourhood character.

DRAFT MDP POLICIES

The feedback from the public has been integrated into the draft MDP. The following is a summary of how the draft MDP reflects what we heard through the public engagement process.

Provide incentives for sustainable development: We heard that the County should provide incentives for developers who provide certain land uses / housing types and high quality sustainable development such as a rating system for interested developers to help improve environmental performance of buildings/neighbourhoods or awards.

The draft MDP encourages the use of green building, green infrastructure and community housing within new developments. The plan proposes to review the need for an incentive program for green building and an inclusionary housing program as implementation items separate from the MDP.

Develop customized guidelines/standards for neighbourhood development: We heard that the MDP should develop a custom set of guidelines for all new development to ensure new neighbourhoods are sustainable and provide a high quality of life for residents.

The draft MDP proposes to complete design guidelines for urban areas and hamlets as an implementation item separate from the MDP. The plan also proposed to review the County’s existing engineering standards for urban areas, hamlets and seasonal recreational resorts as an implementation item separate from the MDP.

Professional design review: We heard that the County should introduce an Advisory Design Review Panel (made up of urban designers, architects, landscape architects and planners) to advise the County on the quality of urban design for proposed developments.

The need for an advisory design review panel will be reviewed through the design guidelines project separate from the MDP.

Support transportation choice: We heard that the MDP should emphasize the relationship between land use, density and transportation. This could include developing higher density urban nodes to support better transit service, locating shops and amenities close to where people live, and enhancing pedestrian and cyclist environments and bus stops.

The draft MDP focuses Sherwood Park’s mixed-use and higher density developments in existing commercial areas such as Emerald Hills Shopping Centre and Wye Road, Centre in the Park and new urban areas. Within these areas, transit oriented development is encouraged. Transit oriented development is achieved by increasing transportation choice within neighbourhoods through the availability of cycling, pedestrian, transit, ride share and other transportation infrastructure as well as creating complete communities that provide opportunities for people to work, shop and recreate close to home.



NEXT STEPS

Strathcona County will be presenting the draft MDP topics and gathering feedback from the public on the following dates:

- January 25, Strathcona County Community Centre, 6:30p.m.-8:30p.m.
- January 30, Heartland Hall, 6:30p.m.-8:30p.m.

The timing of this Municipal Development Plan Update is aligned with updates to the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Growth Plan and the Municipal Government Act. These plans lay out framework for land use planning within the region and for the Province of Alberta.

Following the Phase 4 public engagement sessions for the MDP, County administration will prepare a finalized draft plan. The County hopes to bring the final draft plan forward for approval in the spring of 2017 however the ongoing Edmonton Metropolitan Region Growth Plan and the Municipal Government Act updates may affect timelines. Residents will have an opportunity to speak to Council directly regarding the plan at the public hearing.



For the most up to date information please see the MDP Update website:

www.strathcona.ca/MDP