SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & URBAN DESIGN

POLICY OPTIONS PAPER | 5 OF 6

INTRODUCTION

Strathcona County is committed to sustainable development and a high quality of life for its residents. The County has adopted three sustainability frameworks (Environmental, Economic, Social), which describe the County's overall approach and commitment to sustainability.

The MDP is one of the County's most important tools for achieving more sustainable forms of development because the location, form, patterns, and design 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. Development can have a positive or negative effect on the local environment, energy consumption, water use, livability and health, as well as impacts on the fiscal health of the County.

WHAT DOES THE 2007 MDP SAY?

The objectives for Sustainable Development are well articulated in the current MDP and include:

- Protect valued natural systems.
- Create more compact, complete, walkable communities.
- Improve transit and cycling connections.
- Create attractive, unique neighbourhoods that have a "sense of place."
- Create buildings that are more efficient (use less energy, less water, less materials, less waste) and more healthy.
- Create access to parks and green space.

ISSUES RAISED DURING THE MDP ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Consultation with the public during the MDP engagement process indicated the following key issues related this topic:

- *Creating Compact, Complete, Multi-generational Communities*:

  Residents of the County want a greater choice and variety of local amenities in their communities. In addition, residents want to be able to live out their whole lives in their community or neighbourhood of choice. At the moment, residents feel they have to leave their community, or even the County, to find suitable accommodation as they get older.

- *Supporting Transit:*

  Residents have expressed a desire for greater transportation choice including transit. At the moment, the dispersed geography of the County make it difficult to provide an effective, frequent transit system to most areas meaning that residents are generally dependent on private automobiles. This is a challenge for youth, elderly citizens and others who can't drive or would prefer not to.

- *Improving Urban Design:*

  Residents want attractive, liveable, sustainable neighbourhoods. However, the role of urban design in achieving sustainable development and livability is not well defined in the current MDP and there are no clear guidelines for what constitutes good urban design.

POTENTIAL POLICY OPTIONS

This section introduces some potential new policy options and expands on others already included in the MDP. These policy options can help the Municipality (and partners) to deliver the type of sustainable development and urban design described above. These options are intended to promote discussion about the best options for Strathcona County and may eventually guide new or refined MDP policy and land use bylaw changes.

These policy options focus on the performance and design of buildings and the sites they occupy as well as the relationship of buildings to the public realm. It is acknowledged that sustainability and sustainable development also require policies that relate to a much wider range of topics including growth management, affordable housing and conservation. However, these are the subject of other County initiatives or other policy options papers in this series.

1. **Increase the range of housing options in hamlets and new developments.**

   These policy options are included in the *Community Housing Options Paper.*

2. **Adopt an Existing Green Building/Neighbourhood Rating System.**

   The County has a commitment to green buildings. There are a number of green building rating systems designed to be used voluntarily by developers to improve the environmental performance of buildings. The County should explore these rating systems to determine if inclusion in the MDP is warranted.

3. **Develop a Set of Customized Development Guidelines and Standards for Neighbourhood Development**

   To complement the MDP policies, the County could develop a custom set of development guidelines and standards that apply to all new development at the ACP, ASP, re-zoning and subdivision stage. Developers would be required to demonstrate how their development proposals meet these requirements. The document would likely include both required elements as well as voluntary elements that could involve a points system.

4. **Adopt Incentives for Sustainable Development**

   Instead of (or perhaps as well as) trying to regulate the quality and sustainability of new development, the County may be able to provide incentives to developers for providing certain land uses and housing types desired by the community and for delivering high quality sustainable development. This could be in the form of:

   - Awards
   - Reduced County fees
   - Density bonuses
   - Expedited Approvals

   The use of incentives still requires a rigorous system of evaluation in order to test whether or not the proposed development meets the desired standards in order to warrant the incentive.

5. **Supporting Transportation Choice**

The County can support transportation choices in urban areas by developing and intensifying urban nodes at transit supportive densities and enhancing pedestrian and cycling environments for safety and comfort. In rural areas, options will always be more limited but there is potential to accommodate rural residents' needs through policy changes within the MDP. Much of this is articulated in the County's Master Transportation Plan but it is worth emphasizing the relationship of land use, density and the transportation system in the MDP as well. The following principles could be incorporated into the MDP:

1. *Reducing travel distance* – locating shopping and key amenities close to where people live can reduce the distance that people need to travel in order to access their daily/weekly needs.

2. *Increasing density* - Develop transit-supportive densities in key nodes. Transit can only be viably provided to communities where there are an adequate number of riders relatively close together.

3. *Increasing diversity* – a diversity of land uses make transit more viable because rides can be bi-directional i.e. not just in a single direction in the morning and back in the evening. In addition, connecting various transportation modes to create seamless trips is important.

4. *Improving design* – the design of bus shelters and the pedestrian realm around transit stops can encourage people to take transit because they feel safer and the pedestrian environment is more interesting and comfortable.

6. **Design Review**

Achieving a consistently high standard of urban design throughout the County needs strong leadership and design review by the County. Alternatively, the County could introduce an Advisory Design Review Panel made up of design professionals such as urban designers, architects and landscape architects and planners to advise the County on the quality of urban design components related to ASP, subdivision and development submissions.