MODUS
planning design engagement

DECEMBER 2015

POLICY OPTIONS & TRADE-OFFS REPORT

MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE
SHAPING OUR FUTURE

STRATHCONA
COUNTY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

Over a 14 month period, we are asking residents, business owners, and community stakeholder groups to share what they value most about Strathcona County and to weigh in on how the County can build on our strengths while planning for the future.

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

These topics were selected based on input during Phase 1 and 2 of the project where it was indicated that these were topics in need of additional policies and direction in the MDP.

A detailed summary of community feedback is available in the Phase 3 Engagement Summary Report.

Community feedback, along with input from County staff, existing strategies, guiding principles and other plans have been used to refine initial policy directions. **This report identifies which policies may be included in the draft MDP update.**

For additional information, see the Policy Options Papers on each of these key topics.

SUMMARY OF TOPICS

These topics represent key themes from the MDP that are significant for the future of the County and were the focus of many comments raised by participants from earlier phases of engagement.

AGRICULTURE

Throughout the process, participants have emphasized the importance of agriculture to the County's identity and stressed the need to protect farmland and reduce the spread of urban development into prime farmlands. They also noted 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.

COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Community members have 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.

COMMUNITY HOUSING

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.

RURAL RESIDENTIAL

Many participants expressed concern about urban and rural sprawl and stressed that new 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. However, infrastructure and servicing can be a significant challenge for rural development.

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.

Participants noted the amazing assets that Strathcona County has but commented that not everyone knows about them. They suggested the County could be a leader in sustainable tourism by promoting existing natural areas, agri-tourism and heritage/cultural tourism and ensuring that any new tourist development is small-scale and carefully designed so it does not detract from the natural beauty of the area.

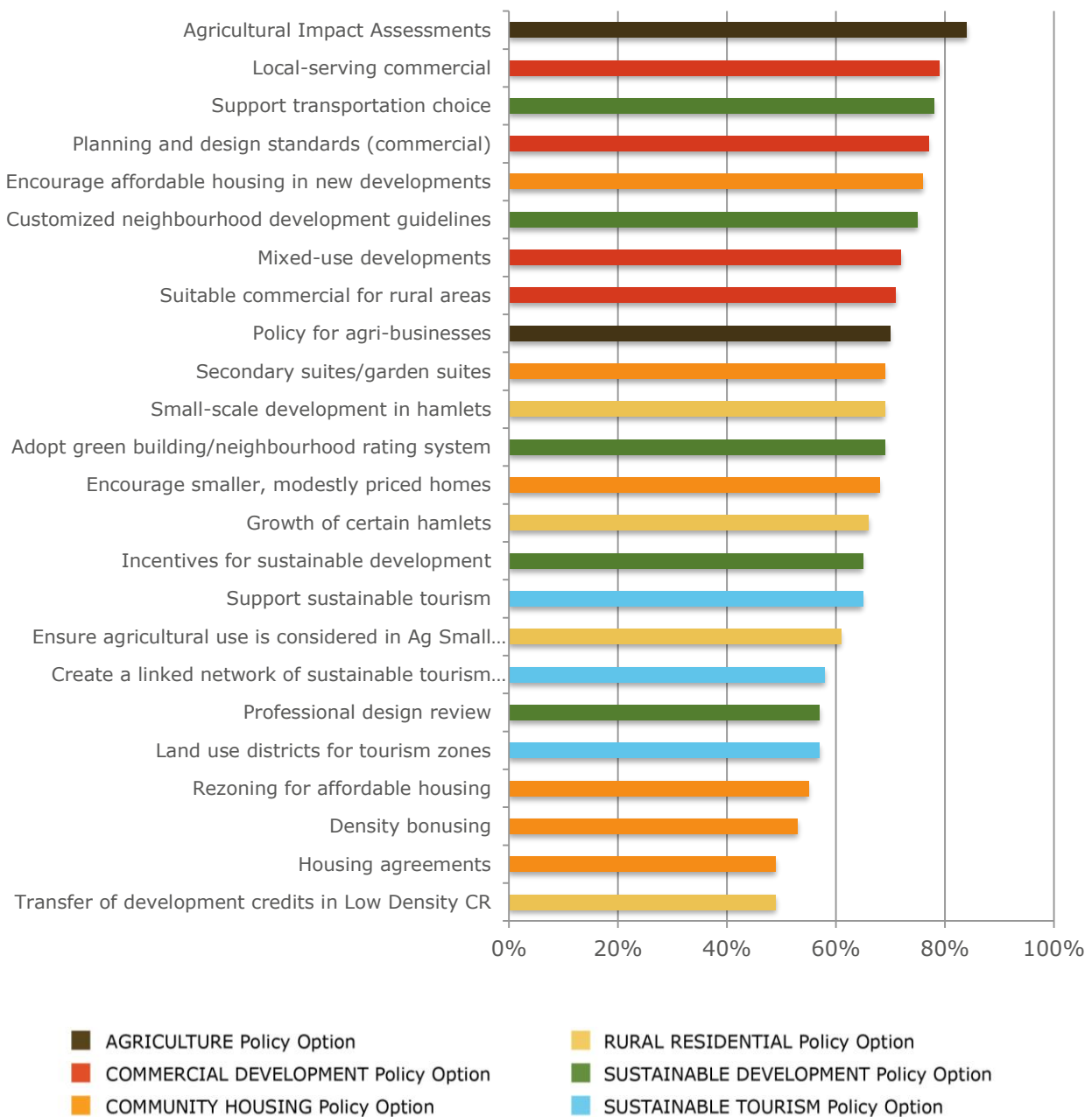# OVERVIEW OF FEEDBACK ON POLICY DIRECTIONS & OPTIONS

The following section provides an overview of stakeholder and community input on potential policy directions and options from the engagement activities in Phase 3:

- **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.

For a detailed summary, see the Phase 3 Engagement Summary Report.

MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE
SHAPING OUR FUTURE

The majority of questionnaire respondents supported the potential policy options presented for each key topic area.

The following chart shows the percentage of people who agreed or strongly agreed with each policy option.

Policy Option	
AGRICULTURE Policy Option	RURAL RESIDENTIAL Policy Option
COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT Policy Option	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT Policy Option
COMMUNITY HOUSING Policy Option	SUSTAINABLE TOURISM Policy Option

The three most supported policy directions were Agricultural Impact Assessments, local-serving commercial, and creating transportation choice through more focused development. Other popular topics included commercial and neighbourhood planning standards/design guidelines, affordable housing and mixed-use developments. These policies clearly reflect what we heard in earlier stages of the process, that residents want to protect agricultural lands and create more sustainable, attractive, walkable communities that are affordable and provide a range of shops and services.

Policies that received the least support included transfer of development credits as well as housing agreements and other strategies under the topic of Community Housing. However, it is important to note that many respondents for these 'less supported policies' were neutral and less than 25% disagreed or strongly disagreed with any policy option. Neutral responses may indicate a lack of understanding of certain concepts rather than a lack of support.

POLICY OPTIONS & TRADE-OFFS

The following section identifies which policy options may be included in the draft MDP update. These options will be refined further in Phase 4 and included in the first full draft Plan which will be brought back to the public for review and comment in Spring of 2016.

AGRICULTURAL IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Proposed Policy Option:

Introduce a requirement for an Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) to identify the direct/indirect impacts of a proposed development on the site and surrounding land uses.

This could be helpful in areas such as the Agri-Industrial Transition, Agricultural Small Holdings or Agricultural Large Holdings Policy Areas to help determine the best locations for development and what measures would be required to mitigate impacts.

Discussion:

This policy option received the strongest support out of any other proposed options (84%). Most participants stressed the importance of protecting the agricultural land base from development while a few questioned what type of development this would apply to and noted they were reluctant to add more assessment to the development process.

Recommendations:

- o Introduce a policy requiring Agricultural Impact Assessments for non-agricultural developments on Class 1 or 2 soils that are adjacent to existing or proposed agricultural land use to identify and mitigate any potential impacts to agricultural lands.

POLICY FOR AGRI-BUSINESSES

Proposed Policy Option:

There may be opportunities for agri-business (both agri-industrial and agri-commercial) within appropriate policy areas of the County. The updated MDP could establish policy to identify under which conditions this type of development would be considered.

The updated MDP could establish policy to allow for 'Agri-Business' to accommodate appropriate activities such as an agriculture supply business, equestrian supply business or food processing business.

Discussion:

There was generally strong support for this option and participants noted that this would be good for farmers and local employment but that the MDP needed to clearly identify what types of businesses would fall in this category and ensure they consider environmental impact and are not located on prime agricultural land.

The MDP currently allows agri-industrial businesses (such as seed cleaning plants, greenhouses and food processing plants) only in the Agri-Industrial Transition Policy Area. However, there are no current policies for agri-commercial. It has been identified that agri-business could be appropriate in other areas of the County.

The recently completed Agriculture Master Plan 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".

Recommendations:

- o Include policies to allow a range of agri-businesses and activities to strengthen and support the local agricultural sector.

COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT

Proposed Policy Option:

The MDP should place greater emphasis on mixed-use development in commercial areas.

With the exception of the "Urban Villages" commercial designation, the existing commercial designations in the MDP are exclusively "commercial" and do not emphasize complementary uses such as residential. This results in areas that are mostly single use and less attractive and less walkable than they could be.

The updated MDP could support mixed-use development in commercial areas by:

o   Amending the intent and definition of appropriate commercial designations to allow and encourage mixed-use development that mixes commercial development with other uses such as residential, office, or institutional either above or beside the commercial uses.

o   Introducing more explicit policies to encourage existing commercial areas to redevelop as mixed-use neighbourhoods.

o   Allowing complementary uses to share parking with commercial uses to reduce overall parking needs and use land more efficiently.

o   Requiring new residential developments (in urban and hamlet areas) to incorporate local-serving commercial development.

o   Considering allowing residential uses as a temporary use until such time as the neighbourhood has developed to a sufficient extent that there is a market for the commercial uses.

o   Reducing parking requirements for mixed-use areas/buildings because people living in these areas are likely to drive less and own fewer vehicles.

Discussion:

There was very strong support (72% either agree or strongly agree) for this policy, only 13% disagree or strongly disagree with the remainder being neutral. Respondents clearly see the value of and need for mixed-use development to support more livable, walkable, healthy communities.

There were some concerns about the impact of introducing commercial development into existing residential areas, oversupplying certain types of commercial as well as the risk of imposing too many requirements on commercial developers.

Recommendations:

- o Introduce policies to encourage existing commercial areas to redevelop as mixed-use neighbourhoods.

- o Introduce policies that require mixed-use development in new Area Structure Plans (ASPs).

- o Introduce policies that make it attainable for developers to create mixed-use areas.

LOCAL SERVING COMMERCIAL

Proposed Policy Option:

The MDP should require new residential developments (in urban areas and hamlets) to incorporate local-serving shops and services.

Discussion:

There was very strong support (79% agreed or strongly agreed) for this policy direction with only 7% disagreeing. Comments emphasized the importance of providing shops and services as part of new developments to enhance the livability and health for residents. Other comments emphasized the importance of creating economically-viable hamlets with a more complete range of shops and services.

Others cautioned that the County should 'encourage and support' but not 'require' commercial development (let the market decide) and that commercial development can also include resort type development. One asked, "what is considered "local-serving, would this involve larger national chains"?

Stakeholders highlighted some of the challenges and requirements for successful commercial development such as good visibility and pedestrian connections. They also suggested that a commercial needs assessment study should be integrated into the planning process to ensure the right type and amount of commercial development is incorporated.

Recommendations:

- o Require new residential ASPs (in Urban and Hamlet areas) to incorporate local-serving commercial development as a general rule with some exceptions for smaller developments or developments close to existing commercial development and amenities.

- o May require applicants to include a commercial assessment study for new ASPs.

CLARIFY SCALE AND TYPE OF RURAL COMMERCIAL

Proposed Policy Options:

The current MDP provides little guidance as to the type and scale of commercial development suitable for different rural areas within the County. This can result in commercial developments that are a poor "fit" with their context and surroundings.

The MDP could create new policy for each of the major rural policy areas to specify the appropriate scale and type of commercial development for that area.

Discussion:

There was very strong support (71% agreed or strongly agreed) for this policy direction with only 8% disagreeing. Comments emphasized the importance ensuring the proper size/ratio of development, and ensuring that commercial/services are actually needed.

Recommendations:

- o Include a new objective "Encourage commercial developments that fit the scale and character of rural areas of the County."

- o The MDP should specify criteria for the appropriate type and scale of commercial development for each of the rural policy areas to ensure development fits the surroundings and context.

- o Develop a commercial needs study and Hamlet Revitalization Strategy for specific hamlets to determine the amount and type of commercial development needed.

COMMERCIAL PLANNING STANDARDS & DESIGN GUIDELINES

Proposed Policy Options:

Strathcona County does not have design guidelines that can help developers understand the County's vision for commercial and mixed-use development and help approving officers review commercial proposals.

The MDP could introduce a new policy to create and apply a set of detailed, illustrated planning and design guidelines for commercial and mixed-use development that describes desired building forms, mix of uses, building orientation, public (and semi-private) realm design, parking lot design and green development standards.

Discussion:

There was very strong support (77% agreed or strongly agreed) for this policy direction with only 7% disagreeing. Comments encouraged incorporating winter city design guidelines, looking at other jurisdictions for inspiration, incorporating public realm and green space design guidelines as well as building guidelines, including energy/green efficient building guidelines and parking guidelines including on-street parking.

Other comments cautioned about having too stringent guidelines that can produce uniformity and discourage development and local character.

Recommendations:

- o Introduce a new MDP policy to create and apply a set of detailed, illustrated planning and design guidelines for commercial and mixed-use development that describes desired building forms, mix of uses, building orientation, public realm design, parking lot design, off street parking and green development standards.

- o Make sure the guidelines strike the right balance of enough direction to create high quality environments without stifling creativity and local character.

- o Create different guidelines for different types and contexts of development.

COMMUNITY HOUSING

Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing Report

In early 2015, Strathcona County Council appointed an 11 person Task Force to review the current state of 'community' housing in Strathcona County and provide recommendations to Council regarding how the County might address gaps that the Task Force identifies.

Many of the policies for Community Housing will depend on the information in the Task Force Report and will be determined once the report is released.

ENCOURAGE SMALLER, MODESTLY-PRICED MARKET HOUSING

Proposed Policy Options:

The County can require a specific mix of housing types and lot sizes as part of the MDP. The County may go further and require that these specific housing types be built in a particular phase of development.

Discussion:

There was good support for this option with most comments supporting a mix of housing to avoid "rich" and "poor" areas. Some stakeholders suggested a more flexible regulatory environment to allow for greater innovation and several comments suggested parking requirements could be an issue.

Recommendations:

- o Require certain housing forms to be a mix with minimum and or maximum percentages of varying densities.

INCLUSIONARY ZONING

At the present time, the Alberta Municipal Government Act (MGA) does not allow inclusionary zoning but the provincial government is considering amending the MGA to allow municipalities to adopt this tool. Therefore, this policy option would only be applicable if such changes were made to the MGA.

Review the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing Report:

Depending on the information in the Task Force Report (as well as the provincial government decision to amend the MGA), inclusionary zoning may be considered in order to require a certain percentage of developed units (10-20%) or a specific number and type of units in a given project to be "affordable" (with the term "affordable" clearly defined in policy). Inclusionary zoning provisions could be set out in the MDP as a policy for re-zonings, or embedded in a specific land use bylaw regulation. Inclusionary zoning could apply to new residential development in all areas of the County or may be applied to specific locations where affordable housing is most needed.

Discussion:

There was strong support for this concept from questionnaire respondents (76%) as well as from stakeholders and participants generally liked the idea of inclusive developments that incorporated affordable housing, rental units and seniors housing. Some stakeholders were concerned that this approach would place the cost of affordable housing on new homebuyers when it should be the responsibility of provincial/federal governments.

Recommendation:

- o Review the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing Report.

DENSITY BONUSING

Review the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing Report:

Depending on the information in the Task Force Report, the MDP could consider establishing a set of zoning provisions to allow landowners to develop land at a higher density (than would otherwise be allowed) in return for specific community amenities, which can include affordable housing. This could include:

- Establishing "base" and "bonus" densities in specific land use zones
- Establishing locations where affordable housing is desired and additional density is considered appropriate
- Specifying the requirement for developing affordable housing in order to achieve the bonus density.
- Requiring a Housing Agreement to be in place with any developer proposing re-zoning for affordable housing.

Discussion:

There was less support for this idea from questionnaire respondents (53%) with stakeholders suggesting that density targets in the region are already too high and this would likely not be a good incentive for developers. Some residents supported density bonusing while others raised concerns that density should be allocated to appropriate areas and be matched with increases in community amenities like green/open space.

The current MDP includes a policy to "Incorporate provisions in the Land Use Bylaw to allow density bonusing for multiple unit developments on a site specific basis, in return for developers providing affordable, rental, senior citizen or special needs housing within the Urban Service Area or hamlets where deemed appropriate"

Recommendations:

- o Modify current policy to allow developers to build specific products. See recommendations for 'Encouraging smaller, modestly-priced market housing.'
- o Identify locations where affordable housing is desired and additional density is appropriate. Review the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing Report.

RE-ZONING FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Review the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing Report:

Depending on the information in the Mayor's Task Force Report, the County could encourage affordable housing projects by allowing re-zoning of specific parcels (or types) of land only if development specifically for affordable housing. The MDP could specify where and/or under what circumstances the County would approve a re-zoning for affordable housing.

Discussion:

There was less support for this idea from questionnaire respondents (55%) with participants raising issues about neighbours, parking/traffic/crowding, and quality construction. Stakeholders were more supportive but also raised issues about infill development and stressed the importance of transit and amenities for lower income residents (suggesting this policy would not be appropriate for hamlets or rural areas).

In early 2015, the County appointed an 11 person Task Force on Community Housing to review the current state of housing in Strathcona County and provide recommendations for addressing any gaps. The Task Force will be completing their report in early 2016 and their recommendations will be used to direct certain policies in the MDP, such as the potential for re-zoning for affordable housing.

Recommendation:

- o Review the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing Report.

REDUCE THE COST OF DEVELOPING COMMUNITY HOUSING

Review the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing Report:

Depending on the information in the Mayor's Task Force Report, the County could help to reduce the cost of developing community housing by expediting approvals, reducing applications fees or reducing amenity requirements for affordable housing.

Discussion:

This idea was not raised during engagement as a similar question was asked in the Sustainable Development and Urban Design topic (incentives for developers of sustainable development). Under this topic public support was quite high but stakeholders cautioned that certain incentives (such as expedited approvals) may cause controversy along developers and be difficult to implement.

Recommendation:

o   Review the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing Report.

ASSIST COMMUNITY HOUSING PROVIDERS

Review the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing Report:

Depending on the information in the Mayor's Task Force Report, the County could assist housing providers by clarifying requirements early on, and possibly providing land and other resources (e.g., money from cash-in-lieu contributions) to enable housing to be developed at below market cost.

Discussion:

This idea was also not raised during engagement as it is more internally focused although in other topics participants suggested the County use Municipal Reserve lands for affordable housing.

The current MDP includes policies to:

> "Review municipal land banking as an option for providing land for the development of social housing" and

> "Work with the development industry and various agencies to help provide land for the purpose of developing social housing"

Recommendations:

o   Review the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing Report.

ENCOURAGE SECONDARY SUITES AND GARDEN SUITES

Proposed Policy Option:

The County can encourage suites to increase the supply of affordable rental housing. Amend the MDP to support suites in appropriate urban neighbourhoods/hamlets where adequate servicing is in place and develop a package of education/incentives to encourage homeowners to create suites.

Discussion:

There was strong support from questionnaire respondents and stakeholders. Participants suggested this was a good way to integrate affordable housing, allow families to stay together and help homeowners to offset their mortgages. A few participants raised issues about parking and neighbourhood character and noted that cost can be an issue for homeowners to create suites due to building code regulations.

Recommendations:

- o Include policies to allow/encourage suites in residential areas to increase the supply of affordable/rental housing throughout the County.

- o Include policies to support homeowners to create suites or bring existing suites up to code.

- o Address impacts to neighbourhood character through neighbourhood planning and design standards.

HOUSING AGREEMENTS

Review the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing Report:

Depending on the information in the Mayor's Task Force Report, the County could enter into a Housing Agreement with developers of affordable housing or any organization that manages such housing stock. The agreement would specify the type and price of housing to be delivered and control the re-selling price/rental cost of housing. The agreement may also specify the eligibility of occupants including the income level of owners/tenants as well as how any payment defaults may be handled.

Discussion:

There was less support from questionnaire respondents for this idea (49%) with some participants raising concerns about enforcement and suggesting housing should be left to the market.

Housing agreements are another option being reviewed by the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing.

Recommendation:

- o Review the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing Report.

RURAL RESIDENTIAL

Capital Region Growth Plan Update (to be released around the end of 2016)

The Capital Region Board represents 24 member municipalities from within the Greater Edmonton Metropolitan Region, including Strathcona County. The Board is currently undertaking a comprehensive five-year review and update to the region's Growth Plan. Once complete, this integrated plan will set a sustainable course for the region's future and provide guidance for efficient growth, development and infrastructure among other topics.

Municipalities will be responsible for implementing the plan by ensuring their plans align with regional goals.

Many of the policies for Rural Residential will depend on the updated Growth Plan and will be determined once the report is released around the end of 2016.

ENSURE AGRICULTURE USES ARE CONSIDERED IN THE AGRICULTURE SMALL HOLDINGS POLICY AREA

Proposed Policy Option:

To ensure lands in Agriculture Small Holdings Policy Area are used for agriculture as intended, the MDP could require proponents of residential development in this policy area to prepare a report to explain the potential future agriculture use. The report could contain a checklist with options provided for different forms and scales of agriculture use of their lands – this would highlight the need for applicants to seriously consider and justify agriculture use on their lands.

Discussion:

There was relatively strong support (61%) for this idea and participants generally agreed that the County should focus rural development in hamlets and protect agricultural lands, particularly in policy areas intended for agriculture. A few people noted that there should be a way to track small holdings that are rented to larger agricultural operations.

Recommendation:

o Introduce a policy to require landowners looking to subdivide lands in the Agriculture Small Holdings Policy Area to prepare a report to explain future agriculture use of the lands and detail the proposed forms and scales of agriculture.

TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT CREDITS

Review the Capital Region Growth Plan Update:

Depending on the information in the Capital Region Growth Plan Update, the County could maximize rural residential development on less sensitive lands by introducing a Transfer of Development Credits program. Options include:

- Allowing an additional allocation of lots per quarter section (up to a maximum of 65) in a 'receiving area,' provided that the 'sending area' would only be allowed to develop to a maximum of 35 lots per quarter section.

- Achieving an average density of 50 lots per quarter section in the Low Density Country Residential Area.

- Transferring density from Agriculture Small Holdings Policy Areas to Country Residential Policy Areas.

Discussion

Support was lower for this concept from questionnaire respondents (49%), although a significant proportion (40%) were neutral, suggesting there may be a lack of understanding for this policy option. Stakeholders were strongly in favour and some suggested this policy shouldn't be limited to rural residential but should apply to all policy areas. Participants generally appreciated that this program would allow for more protection of sensitive areas/productive farmlands but cautioned that the purpose should be clearly defined and the receiving areas should have sufficient capacity to accept the additional density.

Policy options for a Transfer of Development Credits programs are subject to the completion of the review and update of the Capital Region Growth Plan. The regional plan identifies priority growth areas as well as specific criteria for the type of development that occurs outside of these areas.

Recommendations:

o Wait until the Capital Regional Growth Plan Update is complete and use this to help determine if a Transfer of Development Credits program is feasible for the County.

SMALL-SCALE DEVELOPMENT IN HAMLETS

Proposed Policy Option:

The MDP currently identifies the hamlets of Ardrossan, Josephburg and South Cooking Lake as growth hamlets.

To provide more small shops and services that cater to hamlet communities, the MDP could enable certain forms of small-scale development in certain hamlets (in appropriate locations) without requiring the completion of a new Area Structure Plan.

Discussion:

There was generally strong support from participants (69%) for this concept. A few comments questioned how appropriate development and locations would be determined and noted that new development/architecture should reflect hamlet's unique character and history. Others stressed that the County should allow/encourage development in hamlets but not subsidize development and allow the market to determine what is built.

The MDP currently allows infill and development within hamlets (that have adequate sanitary and water service capacity and community facilities) in accordance with an approved Area Structure Plan (ASP). However, if a proposed development does not align with a hamlet's existing ASP (which may be old and out-dated), they are required to go through an amendment process which may deter small-scale developments that could contribute to rural communities.

Recommendations:

- o Allow small-scale developments that cater to the local community, (definition to be determined prior to MDP completion) to proceed without a new or revised Area Structure Plan, subject to the existing development review processes.

    See Sustainable Development topic for recommendations regarding development guidelines and standards for new development in hamlets

GROWTH OF CERTAIN HAMLETS

Proposed Policy Option:

The MDP currently identifies the hamlets of Ardrossan, Josephburg and South Cooking Lake as growth hamlets.

The MDP could allow certain hamlets to expand their boundaries to enable further development.

Discussion:

This concept received fairly strong support (66%) and participants noted that new development should be focused in existing areas and hamlets (rather than creating new communities) to avoid sprawl and preserve agricultural lands. Participants also noted that

new development areas must have sufficient servicing and infrastructure capacity and should integrate affordable housing options.

Policy options for hamlet expansion are subject to the completion of the review and update of the Capital Region Growth Plan. The regional plan identifies priority growth areas as well as direction for growth outside of priority areas.

Recommendations:

Upon completion of the Capital Region Growth Plan Update:

- o Consider allowing identified growth hamlets to expand their boundaries to enable further development in accordance with a new or revised Area Structure Plan.

- o Identify areas that are appropriate for hamlet expansion while having regard for areas with high environmental or agricultural value.

   See Community Housing topic for policies regarding housing options (multi-family and affordable housing) in hamlets.

RURAL RESIDENTIAL SERVICING

Proposed Policy Options:

The MDP currently requires rural residential development within the Country Residential Policy Area to connect to the County's municipal piped water and sanitary sewer systems. The MDP does allow consideration for on-site private servicing of rural residential developments within the Agricultural Small Holdings Policy Area, on the condition that suitable environmental conditions exist for on-site water supply and on-site sewage disposal. However, the MDP could also allow/consider more flexible standards in all rural residential areas.

Options for rural residential servicing could include:

- Maintaining current requirements;
- Consideration for on-site water and sewer systems for <u>all</u> rural residential development; or
- Modifying current requirements and providing for a variety of water and sewer systems depending on the form and scale of development, soil conditions and location, etc.

Discussion:

The strongest support from participants (67%) was for a variety of systems depending on the type/location of development although some stakeholders noted that if standards were more flexible, there would need to be clear guidelines for specific areas or types of

development to reduce uncertainty for developers. There is a need to find a balance between cost/affordability and environmental impact.

Policy options for rural residential servicing are subject to the completion of the review and update of the Capital Region Growth Plan. The Capital Region Board has committed to identifying and mapping designated areas for country residential land use and review the issues of sewer servicing standards.

Recommendations:

- o Wait until the Capital Regional Growth Plan Update is complete and use this to help determine appropriate servicing options for rural residential areas.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & URBAN DESIGN

GREEN BUILDING/NEIGHBOURHOOD RATING SYSTEM

Proposed Policy Option:

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.

Discussion:

The majority supported this proposed policy direction. However, some stakeholders pointed out that green building rating systems are hard to "require" by a municipality because the assessment is only completed after the building is built. In addition, they pointed out that the building code has improved the energy efficiency of new buildings dramatically in the last twenty years so the focus should be on improving the energy efficiency of older buildings.

Recommendations:

o   Include a general statement encouraging the voluntary use of third party building rating systems by developers. However, focus instead on a customized set of Development Guidelines and Standards (see policy option below).

o   Continue to support the application of green building systems to the development of County buildings and facilities as a demonstration of commitment and leadership.

NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES & STANDARDS

Proposed Policy Option:

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.

Discussion:

There was good support (75%) for this option with some stakeholders expressing caution that it could lead to standardization and lack of unique, innovative neighbourhoods. However, this can be addressed through the design of the guidelines and any accompanying rating/evaluation system.

Recommendations:

- Include a policy in the MDP that supports the development of a set of customized Neighbourhood Planning and Design Standards.

- Integrate the SuN Living Guidelines and Process into the new guidelines and standards.

INCENTIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Proposed Policy Options:

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
- Density bonuses
- Reduced County fee
- 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.

Discussion:

There was general support for this idea but also several cautionary comments about how such a program would be administered and whether it would really achieve the goals. Expedited approvals and density bonusing were thought to be good concepts but difficult to implement in practice.

Recommendations:

- Include a more limited set of incentives for new development.

- Work with other partners to offer subsidized energy efficiency retrofits for existing buildings.

SUPPORT TRANSPORTATION CHOICE

Proposed Policy Options:

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:

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

Discussion:

There was very strong support for this policy option (78%). Comments noted that transit and active transportation are not currently well provided for in Strathcona County and the County land uses are strongly separated which makes a sustainable transportation system difficult to achieve. Stronger policies will enable developers to make more sustainable land use decisions, develop walkable communities. Other expressed concern about bike lanes, density and parking and recommended embracing new and evolving technologies like ridesharing apps and commuter vans.

Recommendations:

- o Include support in the MDP for transit-supportive densities in key urban nodes that align with the proposed transit network in the Integrated Transportation Master Plan and Transit Master Plan

- o Recognize the strong relationship between land use patterns and sustainable transportation.

PROFESSIONAL DESIGN REVIEW

Proposed Policy Option:

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.

Discussion:

There was public support for this idea but quite a lot of concern from some stakeholders who felt that this would make things more bureaucratic, delay projects and may involve professionals/community members without adequate development expertise.

Recommendation:

- o Create an Advisory Design Panel made up of experienced design professionals to review and advise on large, complex projects.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Proposed Policy Option:

The MDP should include policy and direction for sustainable tourism such as agri-tourism, nature-based tourism and heritage/cultural tourism.

Discussion:

There was strong support from survey respondents (65%) for including policy on sustainable tourism. Respondents were in favour of sustainable tourism, as long as it was allowed to develop organically, being conscious of scale and environmental impact, and ensure authentic experiences. They felt it was important to clearly define the different forms and scales of nature-based, agri-tourism and heritage/culture tourism. Some suggested the current zoning for tourism development (C6 – Recreation Commercial) was too limited and needed to be changed.

The current MDP policies relating to tourism focus on supporting the development of low impact recreation and tourism activities that have minimal disturbance on the environment. The MDP encourages the development of tourism areas that are "complementary to our natural resources and incorporate the natural environment into the project', and are "strategically located within close proximity to other existing complementary commercial, recreation or other tourism enterprises".

The Beaver Hills Initiative (TDOA) report completed in 2012 identified several options for developing sustainable tourism in the region and defined the three sub-sets of sustainable tourism as: nature based tourism, agri-tourism, and heritage/culture tourism. The report contained a wealth of data and insight as to how the County may strengthen tourism policies, programs, funding opportunities, partnerships, and other implementation initiatives.

Recommendations:

o Build on the existing tourism policy in the MDP encouraging low impact, small-scale tourism development by identifying how the County intends to support and promote each specific type of sustainable tourism.

o Include policy that identifies the process for collaborating with the Beaver Hills Initiative, other tourism interest groups, government agencies and neighbouring Counties and municipalities to ensure sustainable tourism proposals are reviewed in accordance with strict environmental standards and guidelines.

o Include definitions of nature based tourism, agri-tourism, and heritage/culture tourism in the definitions section of the MDP.

NEW LAND USE DISTRICTS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Proposed Policy Option:

The MDP should support the creation of new land use district(s) 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.

Discussion:

While over half of respondents were in favour of tourism districts for sustainable tourism activities, and only 7% disagreed, there were a number of comments calling for more detail on what this would entail. It was suggested that the County work closely with the Beaver Hills Initiative in developing standards and guidelines, that development should not impact the environment, and large developments around lakes and parks should not be allowed. Stakeholders suggested that tourism districts should not be imposed on existing landowners.

The Land Use Bylaw contains a zoning district – C6: Recreation Commercial that provides for "a range of seasonal commercial recreation and tourist uses and other recreational activities". Its permitted uses include: minor campground, laundromat, office, and residential security/operator unit. Its discretionary uses include such uses as: major campground, cabin, food service, hotel, motel, library, marina, recreation, convenience and retail.

Recommendations:

o Establish new land use district(s) for different types and scales of sustainable tourism development in the rural area, and develop design standards, guidelines, parameters, and location criteria to ensure developments are a good fit for the area and environment. Include a review of the C6 district through this process of developing the new districts.

o Establish development review processes for sustainable tourism projects to ensure a careful case-by-case approach to ensuring a project meets the design standards,

guidelines, parameters, and location criteria for that scale of development.

- o Include definitions of low and medium-scale sustainable tourism development, providing examples of what types of facilities, location factors, environmental conditions, and other potential impact conditions would constitute each scale of development.

- o Consider larger scale tourism facilities to locate in the Urban Service Area, or under certain conditions, within hamlets with adequate existing services and support services.

LINKED NETWORK OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ACTIVITIES

Proposed Policy Option:

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.

Discussion:

Over half of the respondents supported this option. Respondents wanted to see a trail network implemented strategically; building on existing trails, linking not only tourism venues but natural areas, acreage developments and rural communities. Some were concerned the network of tourism zones may be too widespread, too expensive to maintain. Stakeholders suggested the County work with other government agencies and municipalities to create a region-wide tourism network.

The Beaver Hills Initiative study suggested the County identify special areas to accommodate specific sustainable tourism uses. It identified and mapped (figures 3, 4 & 5) several agri-tourism, nature based, and heritage/culture assets available in the County, and thus provided a vision and a starting point for the consideration of a series of sustainable tourism zones within the region.

While the sustainable tourism facilities, attractions and accommodations are spread widely across the County, the establishment of 'hospitality/tourism zones' would highlight the benefits of further developing these assets. It would provide the rationale for establishing plans to improve the County's sustainable tourism.

Recommendations:

- o Include policy in the MDP that acknowledges the clusters of nature-based, agri-tourism and heritage/culture tourism identified in the BHI study. The study data should be used by the County, BHI and other interest groups when developing reviewing tourism facility proposals and trail network extensions in the rural area.

- o Develop a County-wide network of rural trails linking strategic area clusters of nature-based, agri-tourism and heritage/culture tourism.

- o Outline the general implementation approaches for the long-term development of these trails, recommending roles for collaborating partners, such as the County, Beaver Hills Initiative, tourism interest groups, and neighbouring Counties and municipalities.

NEXT STEPS

Following completion of this Policy Options and Trade-offs report, the policy options will be refined and incorporated as comprehensive policies into the draft MDP update which is anticipated to be released for public review in March 2016. There will opportunities for the public and stakeholders to review and comment on the draft MDP update before it is finalized and presented to Council for consideration.