



## Planning for Growth

This is an exciting time for Saskatchewan. The economy is strong; everywhere we look construction is underway; housing, malls, commercial buildings. More people are making Saskatchewan their home. This wealth of human and financial investment is strengthening rural and urban communities and providing a solid foundation for growth.

Are we ready for growth? Municipal responsibility to create vibrant, healthy, well serviced communities is challenging. Some municipalities may not have resources and access to professional advice to manage and facilitate new development opportunities on their own.

A Planning District can provide the forum to connect with our neighbours and build on regional strengths. Planning Districts can serve urban and rural neighbours or groups of communities to guide the development process by identifying solutions to problems, providing advice and services, becoming a catalyst for development, or leveraging funding for joint infrastructure projects.

## How does a Planning District work?

Planning Districts are governed by an advisory District Planning Commission (DPC). The DPC is composed of representatives from each of the participating members of the Planning District. It may also include jointly appointed representatives from the

community, a government agency, neighbouring First Nation or Métis communities, or other interest groups.

The DPC is responsible to:

- prepare the district official community plan and amendments for each councils' consideration;
- review and advise each council on zoning bylaw amendments and development proposals.

The DPC can:

- appoint subcommittees to conduct studies or provide advice;
- hold joint public hearings;
- employ staff; and
- provide services to the municipalities and the public;
- address any intermunicipal or regional issue affecting the economic, environmental or social well being of the member municipalities.

The scope and function of the planning district and the responsibilities of the DPC is set out in the district planning agreement prepared by the member municipalities. Based on this agreement, a Ministerial order is issued establishing a formal Planning District.

The area of a district is agreed to by the member municipalities and is often determined by common interests, like:

- topography, watershed or other physical features;
- planning/environmental issues;
- existing or future development;

- facilities or services; or
- an industry (agriculture, natural resources, recreation, etc).

Identifying the issues affecting a municipality's geographic area often helps determine who the regional partners should be. These considerations will also help in preparing the joint district official community plan to facilitate orderly and mutually beneficial growth.

### **What can a Planning District Achieve?**

Planning Districts are a tool for managing the growth of a region using intermunicipal communication, collaboration, capacity building and dispute resolution.

By utilizing the strengths of the region, a Planning District can improve the quality of service to its residents.

Benefits include:

- a proactive and collaborative approach to support growth;
- consistent decision making that creates certainty for investment;
- intermunicipal dispute resolution;
- identification and protection of growth corridors;
- management of integrated infrastructure and services;
- leverage of government funding;
- more efficient use of municipal, professional and financial resources; and
- ability to retain professionals to provide planning, economic development, engineering, building inspections or other development related services.

If demand for service increases consideration can be given to forming a District Planning Authority (DPA), which is a corporate body. A DPA can be delegated authority by the member councils for certain decisions on planning, zoning and development permits. A DPA that retains a professional planner may apply to become an Approving Authority which has autonomy for approval of subdivisions.

### **Factors to Achieve Success**

As with any relationship, there are critical factors associated with achieving strong intermunicipal partnerships:

- dedication towards open and continued communication;
- firm political commitment from the partner municipalities; and
- jointly established dispute resolution mechanism to bring any conflicting parties through and beyond disagreements.

### **Steps to Form a Planning District**

1. *Identify your concerns*
  - Know what you are concerned about and your regional objectives.
2. *Identify the area or region*
  - Determine how far your concerns reach, who they affect and who affects you (e.g. neighbouring municipalities, watershed, commutersheds, economics, recreational district).

3. *Identify your partners*
  - Look at who might share your concerns, who directly concerns you and who can help you achieve your objectives.
4. *Initiate communications*  
Invite potential partners to a joint meeting(s) to discuss:
  - common interests and opportunities;
  - interest in establishing a working group.
5. *Establish a working group(s)*
  - A working group is usually made up of council representatives and staff. They provide organizational structure and administrative support to the process (e.g. setting meetings, schedules, agendas, investigating funding, inviting speakers, etc.)
6. *Appoint a Working Group Chair*
  - The members of the working group should appoint a chair. The chair is responsible to ensure order and respectful communications, and provide leadership to the process.
7. *Find a local champion*
  - A local champion is the liaison between the public and the working group.
  - They help to build community support, facilitate the process, and maintain momentum and enthusiasm. Local champions may be local business leaders, retired professionals, or anyone with a strong commitment to improving the quality of life in the region.
8. *Create a vision, goals and objectives*
  - A vision acknowledges the legacy of the district and identifies a desirable future and the values of its members. Goals and objectives typically center on the character of the area, the economic future, expectations for growth and settlement.
9. *Develop a planning district agreement addressing:*
  - Scope
  - Intention
  - Membership
  - Finances
  - Dispute Resolution
10. *Apply to the minister for approval of the agreement and the establishment of the district planning commission*
11. *The DPC begins operation, including:*
  - Logistical arrangements for staffing, office and meeting space
  - Establishing subcommittees
  - Undertaking studies
  - Financial management
12. *Establish planning and policy tools*
  - Interim development control may be put in place until a district official community plan is prepared and adopted.
  - A work schedule should be developed to complete and adopt the district official community plan within two years (e.g. hiring the services of a professional planner, undertaking any necessary studies).

## **The District Official Community Plan (OCP)**

Under *The Planning and Development Act, 2007*, a District OCP is required for the area defined as the Planning District. The District OCP only applies to land within the area of the District. Where only a portion of a municipality is in the Planning District boundary, the remainder may be governed by a separate local OCP.

The District OCP is adopted by each participating municipality as the guiding document for land in the District. Each municipality is able to adopt, apply and manage their own zoning bylaw and permit development.

### **Alternatives to a Planning District**

The province strongly supports a collaborative and integrated approach to municipal planning that is voluntary. It is recognized that not all municipalities are ready to establish a planning district. In many cases this may be because they only wish to discuss specific issues and do not feel that entering into a district agreement is necessary at this time.

Municipalities that want to discuss and address specific issues (e.g. watershed management, protection of an urban growth corridor, a recreation facility, etc.) can consider negotiating individual agreements.

Municipalities have natural person powers enabling them to enter into agreements. These intermunicipal agreements can provide a framework to address and manage specific planning

issues, growth areas or standards for development in a watershed area. The policy objectives of these agreements should be reflected in policies like the official community plans and zoning bylaws. Over time, intermunicipal agreements addressing development issues may help to enhance relationships between municipalities that can lead to collaborative approaches to facilitating development, infrastructure and possibly the establishment of a planning district.

Another alternative to a formal planning partnership is a regional growth management strategy. Municipalities with a common interest (tourism, resource development, environment, etc) may consider preparing a non-binding policy document to guide councils in preparing and amending local plans or considering zoning and development proposals. Regional policies need to be incorporated within OCPs to support local decision making aligned with regional objectives.

### **Contact Information**

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For more information contact the Community Planning Branch of Saskatchewan Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

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