

ST. ALBERT MUNICIPAL PLANNING COMMISSION 360° REVIEW



WHAT WE HEARD



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	This section provides a summary of emerging themes relevant to a Municipal Planning Commission in the City of St. Albert. The impact of adding a Municipal Planning Commission on the overall development approval process, approval timelines, staffing resources, cost implications and planning value is considered in detail from the perspective of the stakeholders involved in this review.	

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1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

1.1 MUNICIPAL PLANNING COMMISSION IN ALBERTA

1.2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE ST. ALBERT MPC

1.3 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

1.4 PROJECT TIMELINE



1.1

MUNICIPAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS IN ALBERTA

A Municipal Planning Commission (MPC) exercises subdivision and development powers and performs duties on behalf of the municipality. These duties must be outlined in a bylaw, and all decisions by the MPC must consider the land use policies contained within statutory documents and a municipality's Land Use Bylaw.

Sections 623, 624 and 626 of the Municipal Government Act (MGA) enable municipalities to establish a Municipal Planning Commission to act as a Subdivision Authority or a Development Authority or both. While many municipalities in Alberta have opted to establish MPCs, many have not.

1.1.1 ROLE AND COMPOSITION

MPCs generally exist to provide advice to the municipality's council and/or make decisions on certain development and/or subdivision applications as the municipality's Development Authority and/or Subdivision Authority. If a municipality does not have a specific person designated as their Subdivision or Development Authority, this role is often delegated to an MPC.

The composition of an MPC varies widely across municipalities in Alberta that have MPCs. On average, MPCs are composed of 5 to 10 members including representation from public at large, municipal administrative staff, and council members. The exact composition varies subject to council preferences.

1.2

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE ST. ALBERT MPC

The City of St. Albert had an MPC that acted as subdivision and development authorities, and as an advisory body, until 2005 when it was no longer needed under updated municipal bylaws. It provided advice on the City of St. Albert's Municipal Development Plan prior to its formal elimination in 2008.

1.2.1 HISTORICAL COMPOSITION

The composition of the pre-2005 MPC included seven members including the Mayor, two Councillors, a resident, the City Manager, the City Engineer, and the Director of Planning and Development. The MPC meetings were scheduled twice a month subject to the number of applications eligible for the MPC review.



1.2.2 HISTORICAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In accordance with the MGA, all MPC decisions and advice were required to have regard to the approved City of St. Albert statutory plans, policies, and the Land Use Bylaw. The pre-2005 MPC had the following roles and responsibilities:

SERVE AS A DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Responsible for making development permit decisions on:

- Home occupations (R1 District, uses garage or more than 2 customers in a 7 day period);
- Day care facilities in R3 district;
- Bingo halls, churches, day care and day homes, warehouse stores in CC district;
- Community hall, hotel, shopping centre, day care facility in MC district; and
- Casinos, bingo halls, drinking establishment, pool hall, chemical processing, light industrial land uses in IB1 and IB2 districts (now CIS).

SERVE AS SUBDIVISION AUTHORITY

- The MPC was responsible for conditional subdivision approvals for any subdivisions of 10 lots or more; and
- Prior to 2005, Administration was the Development and Subdivision Authority for all other development permit applications not included under the MPC's responsibilities.

PROVIDE ADVICE TO COUNCIL

Provide advice to Council with respect to:

- The orderly, economical and beneficial development, use of land, and patterns of human settlement in the City of St. Albert;
- The maintenance and improvement of the quality of the physical environment within which patterns of settlement are situated in the City of St. Albert; and
- Providing advice to Council on statutory plans and Land Use Bylaw text amendments, redistricting, and road closures.



1.3

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The following objectives were outlined by the City of St. Albert for the MPC 360° Review:

- Conduct consultation, engagement, and outreach with Council members, residents, the development industry, and City of St. Albert administration;
- Provide Council members, residents, the development industry and City of St. Albert administration with an impartial and detailed summary of their collective thoughts on the strengths, weaknesses and implications of an MPC; and
- Note any identified alternatives to an MPC and/or improvements and efficiencies that could be made to existing planning processes.

The key objective of this report is to provide a comprehensive 360° review of the idea of Municipal Planning Commission (MPC) in the City of St. Albert. This report does not provide recommendations regarding the viability of reinstating an MPC in the City of St. Albert.

It is anticipated that the summary of stakeholder engagement outlined in Section 4 and the emerging themes outlined in Section 5 will assist Council with its decision-making about an MPC in the City St. Albert and its impacts within the subdivision and development process.



1.4

PROJECT TIMELINE

The MPC 360° review was initiated in August 2016. Stakeholder engagement and outreach initiatives were organized from September to December 2016 as outlined in Section 3 of this report.

A Steering Committee, composed of the following members, provided advice at the outset of the project:

- Yuli Siao, Senior Planner, City of St. Albert
- Paul Edginton - Corporate Planning Manager, City of St. Albert Strategic Services
- Jeff Battigelli - City of St. Albert Subdivision Development and Appeal Board
- Mitch Stolarchuk - City of St. Albert Economic Development Advisory Board
- Chelsea Thompson - City of St. Albert Development Branch



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2

CITY OF ST. ALBERT PLANNING APPROVAL PROCESS

The current state of the City of St. Albert's development permit, subdivision, rezoning and appeal processes is outlined in this section. The understanding of the current processes in the City of St. Albert provides a benchmark for a comparison with other similar municipalities with or without an MPC.

2.1 DEVELOPMENT PERMIT APPROVAL PROCESS

2.2 SUBDIVISION APPROVAL PROCESS

2.3 SUBDIVISION AND DEVELOPMENT APPEAL BOARD APPEALS

2.4 REDISTRICTING APPLICATIONS

2.5 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

2.1

DEVELOPMENT PERMIT APPROVAL PROCESS

2.1.1 DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

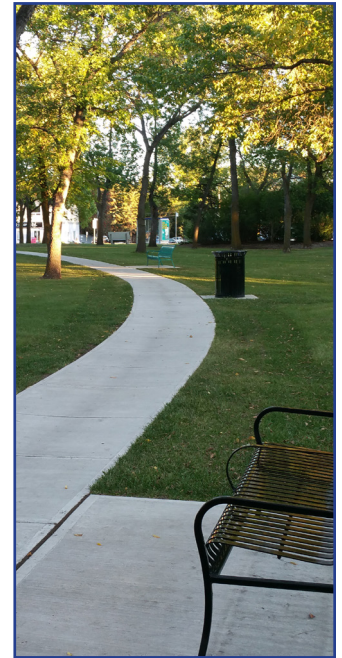
In accordance with the MGA, the current development authority for the City of St. Albert is established in the St. Albert Land Use Bylaw 9/2005 (Consolidated Bylaw 6/2016). The Bylaw delegates powers to administration, including:

- The Development Authority, which includes a person or persons appointed by the City Manager, takes decisions on all permitted and discretionary use applications; and
- Authority to take decisions on variance applications up to a maximum of 25% relaxation to certain development regulations.

2.1.2 DEVELOPMENT PERMIT APPLICATION TRENDS

The average number of development permit applications between 2008 and 2016 was approximately 1300 applications per year, however in 2014-2016 this average increased to just over 1700 applications. The total number of development permit applications presented on the next page includes applications for permitted uses, discretionary uses and variances for a variety of small scale as well as large scale projects.

The data received from the City of St. Albert is summarized in Figure 2a.



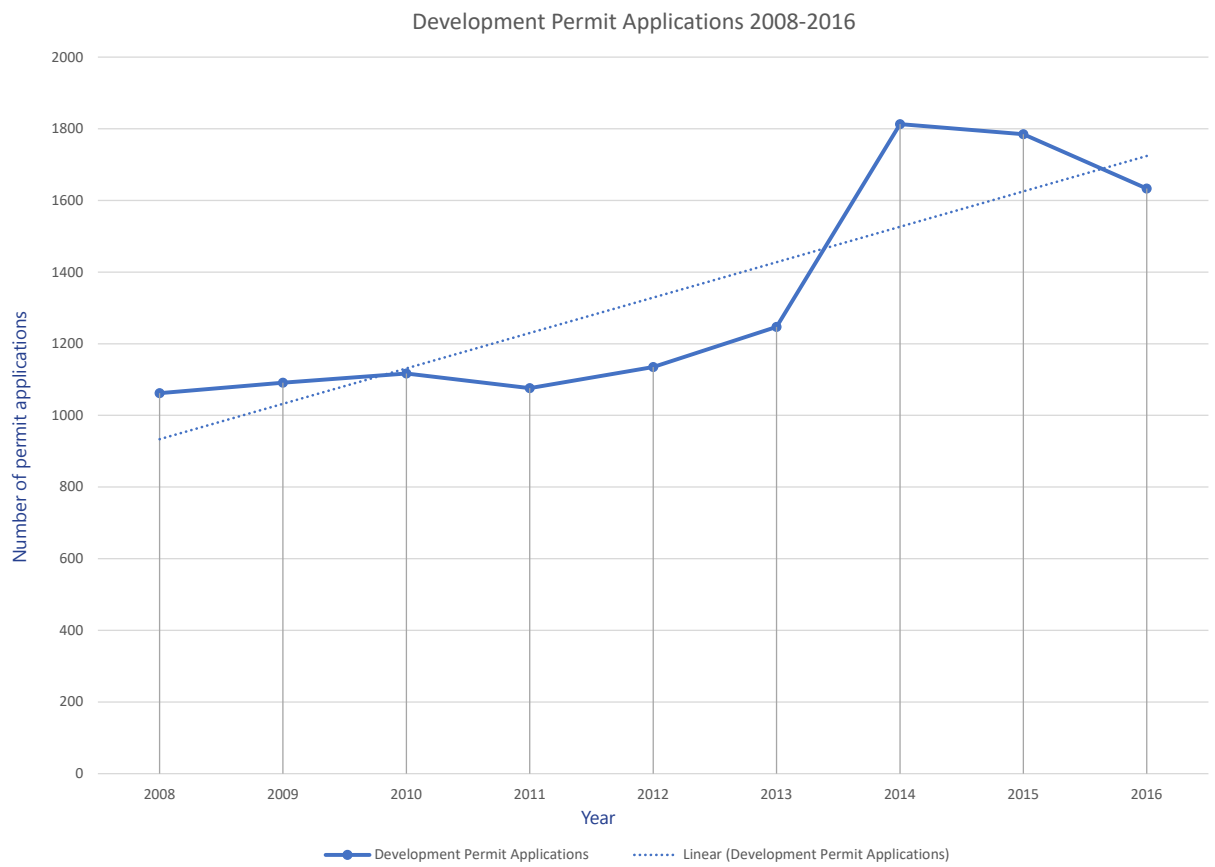


Figure 2a. Development Trends Charts

2.1.3 AVERAGE PROCESSING TIMES

The average time for processing low density residential development permit applications in the City of St. Albert is approximately 2 weeks, which includes application review, circulation to internal departments and final decision. Larger projects, including commercial and industrial development applications, can take between 5-7 weeks. An application can take up to 40 days or longer to process depending on the type of development and whether extensions are granted.

2.1.4 STAFFING

The Development Branch in the City of St. Albert is led by the Manager, Development Branch and is supported by four Development Officers. Each Development Officer has a signing authority, though their decisions must be consistent with statutory and regulatory documents approved by Council. The final decision on each Development Permit application is rendered after appropriate level of circulation and input from internal and external agencies having consideration for statutory documents as required.

Figure 2b provides an overview of the typical development permit approval process in the City of St. Albert.

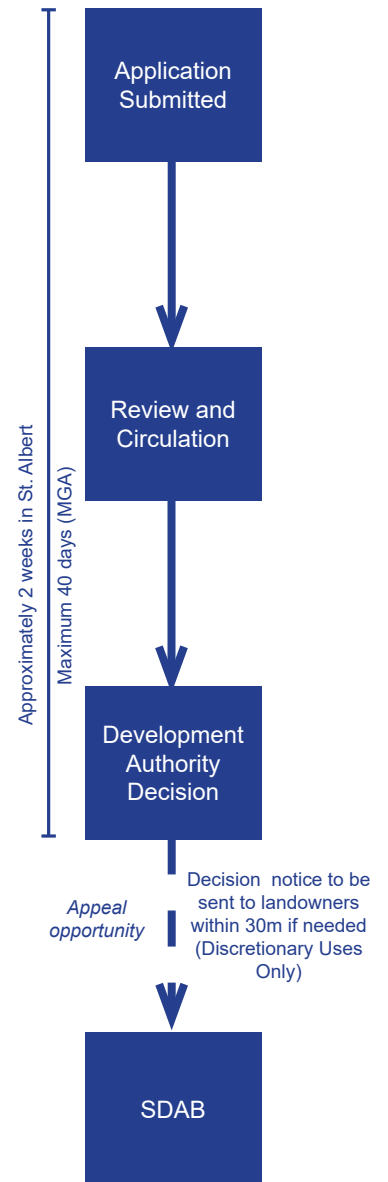


Figure 2b. Development Permit Approval Process

2.2

SUBDIVISION APPROVAL PROCESS

2.2.1 SUBDIVISION AUTHORITY

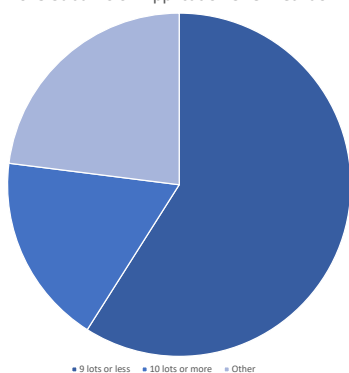
The Subdivision Authority in the City of St. Albert is established in the Subdivision Authority Bylaw No. 19/95, which designates the Director of Planning and Development as the Subdivision Authority. The Director of Planning and Development acts as the final signing authority on the subdivision applications

2.2.2 SUBDIVISION APPLICATION TRENDS

In the years 2010, 2014 and 2015, the City of St. Albert experienced high volumes of subdivision applications (19 in 2014, 18 in 2015). In 2016 only 13 subdivision applications were processed. Few applications create more than 10 lots, the kind of application considered by the previous MPC: 3 in 2015, 2 in 2016.

The data received from the City of St. Albert for subdivision applications is summarized in Figure 2c.

2015 Subdivision Application Size Breakdown



2016 Subdivision Application Size Breakdown

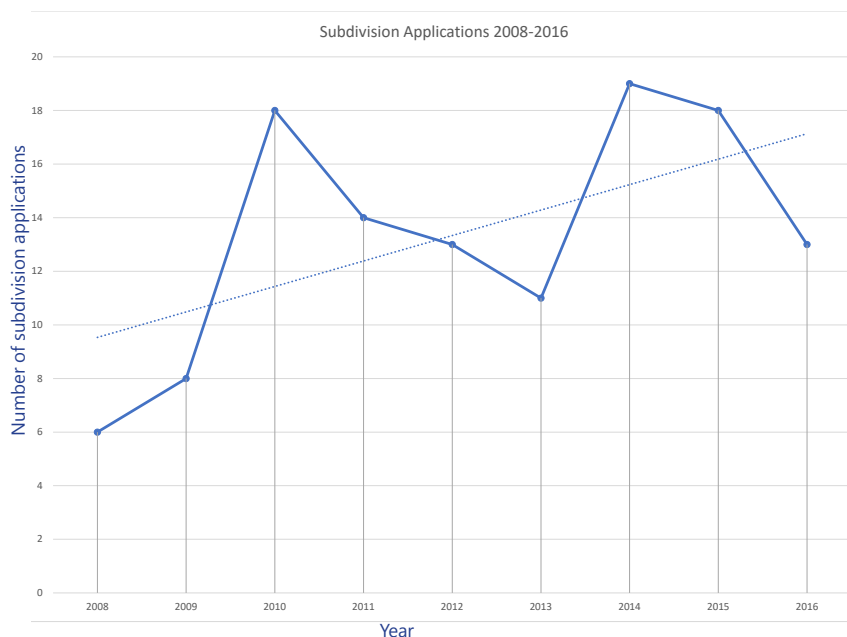
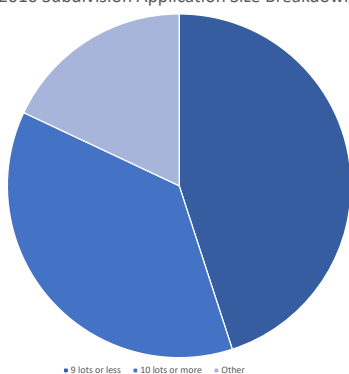


Figure 2c. Subdivision Trends Charts

2.2.3 PROCESSING TIME

The average time for processing a subdivision application in the City of St. Albert is about 60 days. An application can take longer to process depending on the type of subdivision and whether extensions are granted.

Figure 2d provides an overview of the typical subdivision approval process in the City of St. Albert.

2.2.4 STAFFING

The Director of Planning and Development is supported by one Senior Planner who reviews and sets up the file, and assigns it to one of three planners in the planning branch. The Senior Planner also reviews the Director's Report prior to the decision by the Director.



Figure 2d. Subdivision Approval Process

2.3

SUBDIVISION AND DEVELOPMENT APPEAL BOARD (SDAB) APPEALS

2.3.1 SDAB AUTHORITY AND ROLE

In accordance with the MGA, the decision of the development authority or the subdivision authority may be appealed to the Subdivision and Development Appeal Board. The SDAB at the City of St. Albert is established by the Subdivision and Development Appeal Board Bylaw No. 20/95 under the authority of the MGA. The SDAB's decisions may be appealed to the Court of Appeal of Alberta on matters of procedure.

If the applicant or any other person/organization affected by the development chooses to appeal the decision of the Development or Subdivision Authority, it is reviewed by the SDAB. The SDAB must have regard to the statutory plans, policies, and the Land Use Bylaw approved by the City of St. Albert Council.

2.3.2 SDAB COMPOSITION

The SDAB at the City of St. Albert is composed of seven members including one Council representative and six citizen members. The Board meetings are currently scheduled bi-weekly on Wednesday evenings.

2.3.3 APPEAL PROCESS AND TIMELINE

As per the MGA, an appeal must be filed within 14 days of the decision of the development authority or subdivision authority as appropriate.

The Typical SDAB appeal process in the City of St. Albert is explained in Figure 2e.

2.3.4 WHAT THE MGA ALLOWS

The MGA requires municipalities to establish a subdivision and development appeal board or to authorize the municipality to enter into an agreement to establish and intermunicipal subdivision or development appeal board, or both. The City of St. Albert must have a Subdivision and Development Appeal Board.

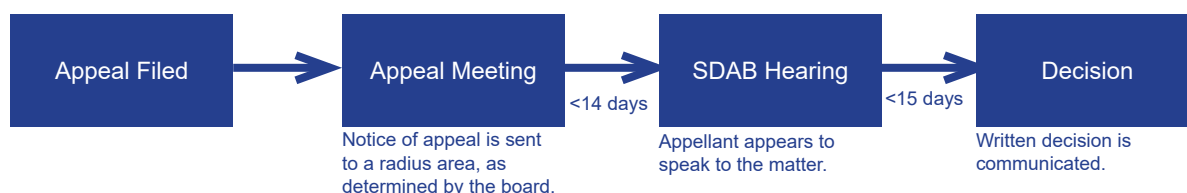


Figure 2e. SDAB Appeal Process

2.4

REDISTRICTING APPLICATIONS

Redistricting is the process of changing the land use district that applies to a particular parcel of land. It is commonly referred to as “rezoning”. A typical redistricting application may include text and/or mapping updates to the Land Use Bylaw.

2.4.1 AUTHORITY

In accordance with the MGA, Council is the final decision-making authority for all Land Use Bylaw amendment applications.

2.4.2 PROCESSING TIMES

The time for processing and decision on a typical redistricting application in the City of St. Albert is from 3-6 months subject to complexity of the application. At present, citizens get an opportunity to provide their input to Council at the public hearing. In accordance with City Council Policy C-CC-10, each citizen has five minutes to provide their input. The Planning and Development Department provides an official recommendation of support/non-support through a Council report, which is available in public domain approximately two weeks prior to first reading/public hearing.

A typical redistricting application process in the City of St. Albert is summarized in Figure 2f.

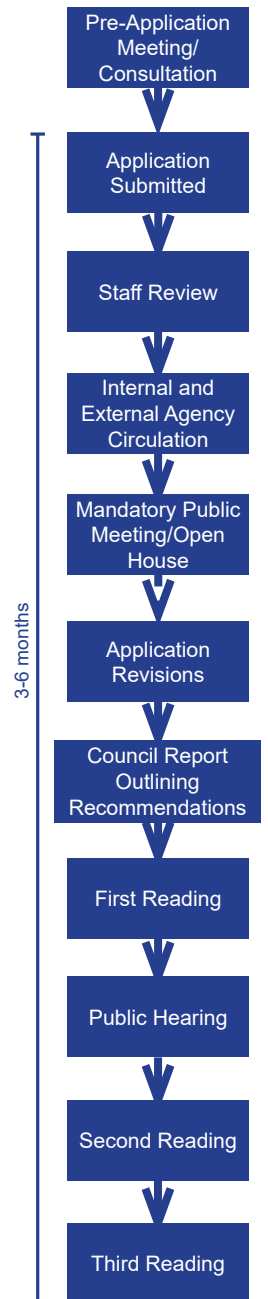


Figure 2f. Rezoning Process

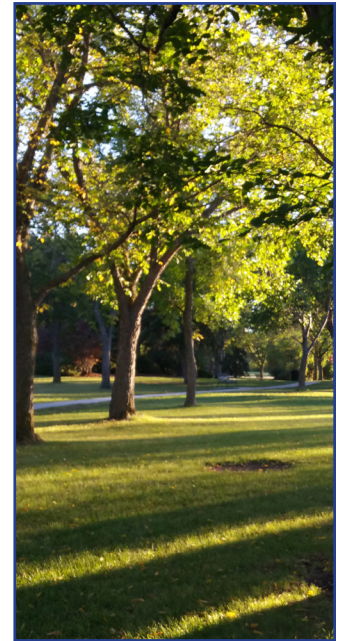
2.5

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

After dissolving the development and subdivision authority of the MPC in 2005, the City of St. Albert established a policy to outline public consultation requirements for planning and development processes (C-P&E-01). The purpose of this policy was to “increase public involvement in planning and development decisions in order to result in more informed decisions, greater public understanding, acceptance, and more enduring solutions.” Further, the intent of the policy was to standardize the processes used to inform and consult the public.

The key highlights of the public involvement and engagement process include:

- The time invested in respectful and meaningful consultation up front will minimize adversity and expense in the long run;
- The City of St. Albert shall conduct public consultation processes as part of proposed intermunicipal and municipal development plans, area structure plans initiative by the City and other special planning studies;
- Developer/applicants shall pro-actively seek public input to minimize the potential impacts and opposition from the community through effective consultation for proposed area structure or redevelopment plan technical reports and redistricting applications as well as development permit applications as deemed necessary by the Development Officer;
- The roles and expectations for City Council, developers/applicants, Administration, citizens are articulated; and
- The minimum public consultation requirements are defined, as well as the standards for notification.



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3 PRECEDENT MUNICIPALITY INTERVIEWS

Six Alberta municipalities, including three with MPCs and three without MPCs, were interviewed by the consultant team. The interviews focused on understanding their existing development permit process, subdivision approval process, overall processing times and related resourcing. This information provides background information on how MPCs may impact development approval processes. Representatives from the following municipalities were interviewed:

PARTICIPANTS

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DATE

DECEMBER 2016

With MPC

- City of Medicine Hat
- City of Airdrie
- City of Red Deer

Without MPC

- City of Leduc
- City of Grande Prairie
- Strathcona County

3.1 MUNICIPALITIES WITH AN MPC

3.2 MUNICIPALITIES WITHOUT AN MPC

3.1

MUNICIPALITIES WITH AN MPC

The following is a summary of the major topics covered in precedent municipality interviews for municipalities that have an MPC.

PARTICIPANTS

 6

DATE

DECEMBER 2016

3.1.1 ROLE OF THE MPC

MPCs in each municipality interviewed by the consultant had the role of providing advice to Council, and would provide decisions on certain development permit and subdivision applications. The MPCs varied in whether or not they provided advice on, or review, land use bylaw amendments. For example:

- Medicine Hat's MPC provides advice to Council, decides on certain development permit applications, and all subdivision applications greater than 10 lots. The MPC provides a recommendation to Council on all land use bylaw amendments and statutory planning bylaws;
- Airdrie's MPC provides advice to Council for rezoning applications, Area Structure Plans, Neighbourhood Structure Plans, and Master Site Plans. In addition, the MPC makes decisions on certain development permit applications and subdivision applications that occur outside of an approved Area Structure Plan or Neighbourhood Structure Plan; and
- Red Deer's MPC provides advice to Council from time to time and makes decisions on certain development permit applications. The MPC generally is not involved in the subdivision process though may be asked, at the discretion of the subdivision officer.



Summary of Roles

Medicine Hat

- Advice to Council
- Decisions on development permit applications
- Decisions on subdivision applications
- Recommendations to Council

Airdrie

- Advice to Council
- Decisions on certain development permit applications
- Decisions on subdivision applications

Red Deer

- Advice to Council
- Decisions on certain development permit applications

3.1.2 AVERAGE DEVELOPMENT PERMIT APPLICATION PROCESSING TIMES

Average processing times for development permit applications ranged from forty to ninety days, however this can vary greatly based on the complexity of different applications. For example:

- Medicine Hat: 5 calendar days for low density residential and 24 calendar days for major projects;
- Airdrie: From complete application submission to decision takes approximately 90 days for multi-family, commercial, and industrial development applications. Direction is given within 40 days; and
- Red Deer: Development permit applications typically take between 40 to 60 days to process.

3.1.3 AVERAGE SUBDIVISION APPLICATION PROCESSING TIMES

Average processing times for subdivision applications averaged between 45 and 60 days for all municipalities interviewed. Depending on how complex applications are (how many lots per application) the processing times can be less or greater.

3.1.4 ADDITIONAL PROCESSING TIME FOR MPC MEETINGS

An additional processing time of two weeks, on average, was reported by each municipality to undertake additional administrative processes related to MPC including preparation of meeting agenda, preparation of MPC presentation, organizing the MPC meeting and confirmation of final decision. The two week additional time frame was based on the assumption that MPC meetings are scheduled bi-weekly. This timeline is extended to 4 or 5 weeks if only one MPC meeting is scheduled per month. The average processing times for development permit and subdivision approvals are illustrated in Figure 3d and 3e.

3.1.5 MPC COMPOSITION

The municipalities with an MPC interviewed by the consultant team had council members on the board, with the majority of members representing the public at large. The number of members ranged from seven to nine members.

3.1.6 ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS

Medicine Hat and Red Deer's MPC meetings occur during business hours, and Airdrie's MPC meets in the evenings. Generally staff were not paid overtime because meetings often occurred during business hours, and members participated voluntarily without compensation. Legislative Services preparation time ranged between four and nine hours of work involving preparing agendas, meeting minutes, distributing information, and attending the meeting.

3.2

MUNICIPALITIES WITHOUT AN MPC

The following is a summary of the major topics covered in precedent municipality interviews for municipalities that do not have an MPC.

The interview questions focused on understanding typical trends related to composition and responsibilities of their development and subdivision authorities, typical application processing timelines, staffing needs, key steps involved in their development approval process and types of applications going to the SDAB.

Interviewees were also asked about their municipality's general level of satisfaction with the stakeholder consultation practices and potentially understand any alternative approaches used by them to ensure citizen satisfaction and outreach. A special emphasis was placed on understanding each municipality's internal circulation process to get a comparative understanding of average internal timelines necessary to process any development permit or subdivision application.

The following is a brief summary of the themes that emerged:

3.2.1 AVERAGE DEVELOPMENT PERMIT APPLICATION PROCESSING TIMES

For municipalities without an MPC, development authority is generally delegated to development officers for permitted uses and discretionary uses. The average processing time for a typical small scale development permit applications for a permitted use is 7 to 14 days and increases significantly for more complex applications involving multifamily, commercial or industrial developments. Development permit applications for discretionary uses typically takes an additional 7 to 14 days for internal review and 14 to 21 days for the official appeal period.

3.2.2 AVERAGE SUBDIVISION APPLICATION PROCESSING TIMES

For municipalities without an MPC, subdivision authority is generally delegated to either a subdivision officer or director of the planning department. No specific trends were observed regarding typical application processing times or staffing.



3.2.3 CIRCULATION PROCESS

Prior to the submission of an application for a major development, municipalities generally encourage applicants to meet with staff to ensure applications are complete. Once accepted, all applications are circulated to other internal departments for further review. Any comments or revisions required are usually forwarded to the development officer and to the applicant. Once all comments and revisions are addressed, the application will be reviewed to identify any conditions that need to be made prior to issuance. One municipality had a “community growth committee” which makes decisions on applications for discretionary uses or contain variances over 50%. Such committees play a similar role to a typical MPC, but also perform other advisory duties on other city building issues.

Similarly to development permit applications, subdivision applications may include a pre-application meeting with municipal staff prior to submission. The application is circulated to internal departments for comments and the applicant is notified. An initial response is usually expected within 14-21 days.

3.2.4 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

The municipalities without MPCs that were interviewed were generally satisfied with their stakeholder consultation processes. These municipalities endeavour to engage stakeholders and the public beyond the minimum requirements as set out in the Municipal Government Act (MGA).

3.2.5 SUBDIVISION AND DEVELOPMENT APPEAL BOARD

No specific trends were observed related to any particular type of applications going to the SDAB. In precedent municipalities, applications going to SDAB typically included projects with significant impact on neighbouring properties.

3.2.6 SUMMARY OF AVERAGE PROCESSING TIMES

WITH AN MPC

	Development Permit Applications	Subdivision Applications
Medicine Hat	24 days	30-45 days
Airdrie	40 days	45-60 days
Red Deer	35-56 days	45 days

WITHOUT AN MPC

	Development Permit Applications (discretionary use)	Subdivision Applications
Strathcona County	17-21 days	n/a
Grande Prairie	28-40 days	40-50 days
Leduc	35 days	28-40 days

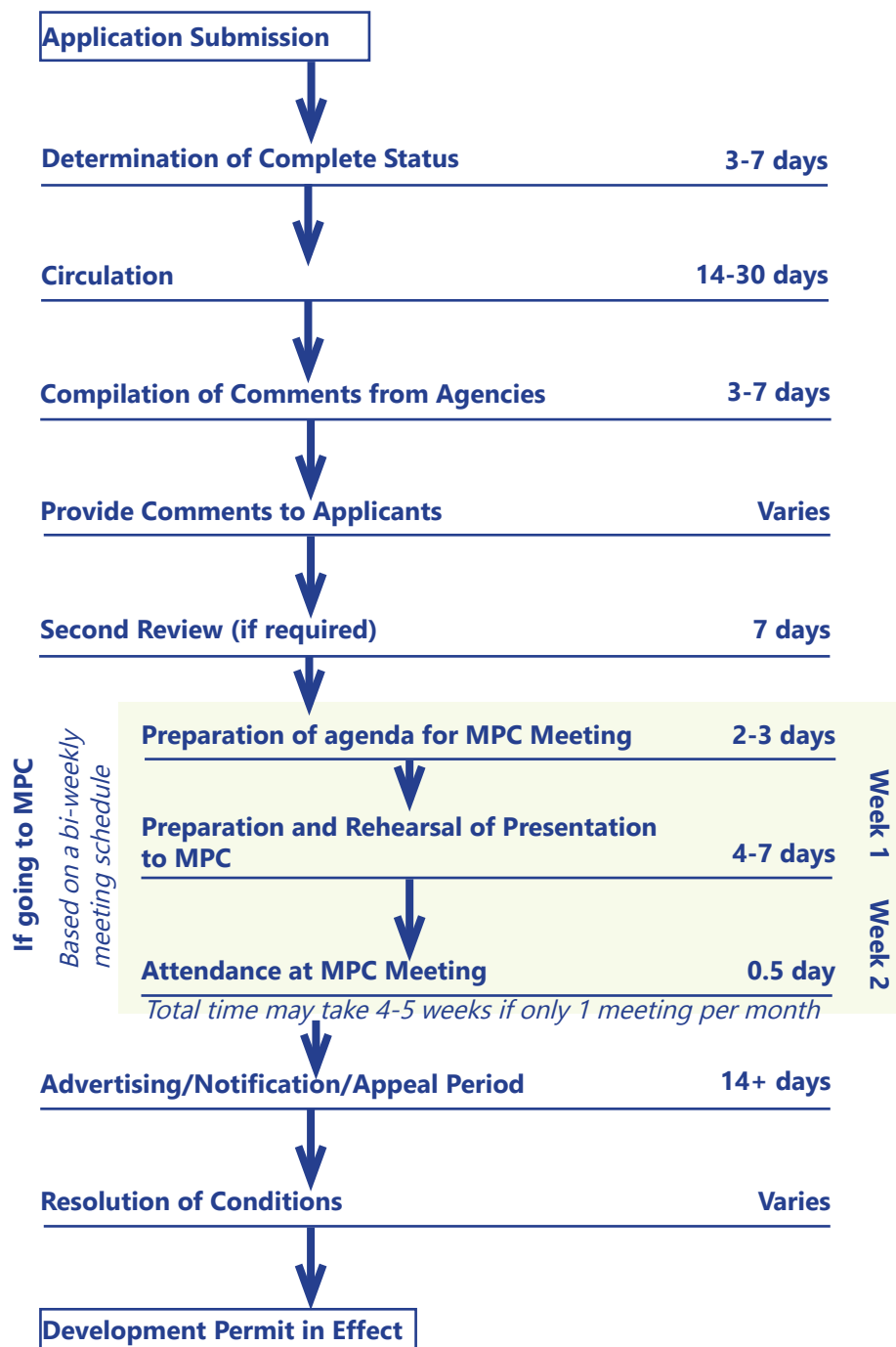


Figure 3d. Average Development Permit Processing Timelines for Precedent Municipalities

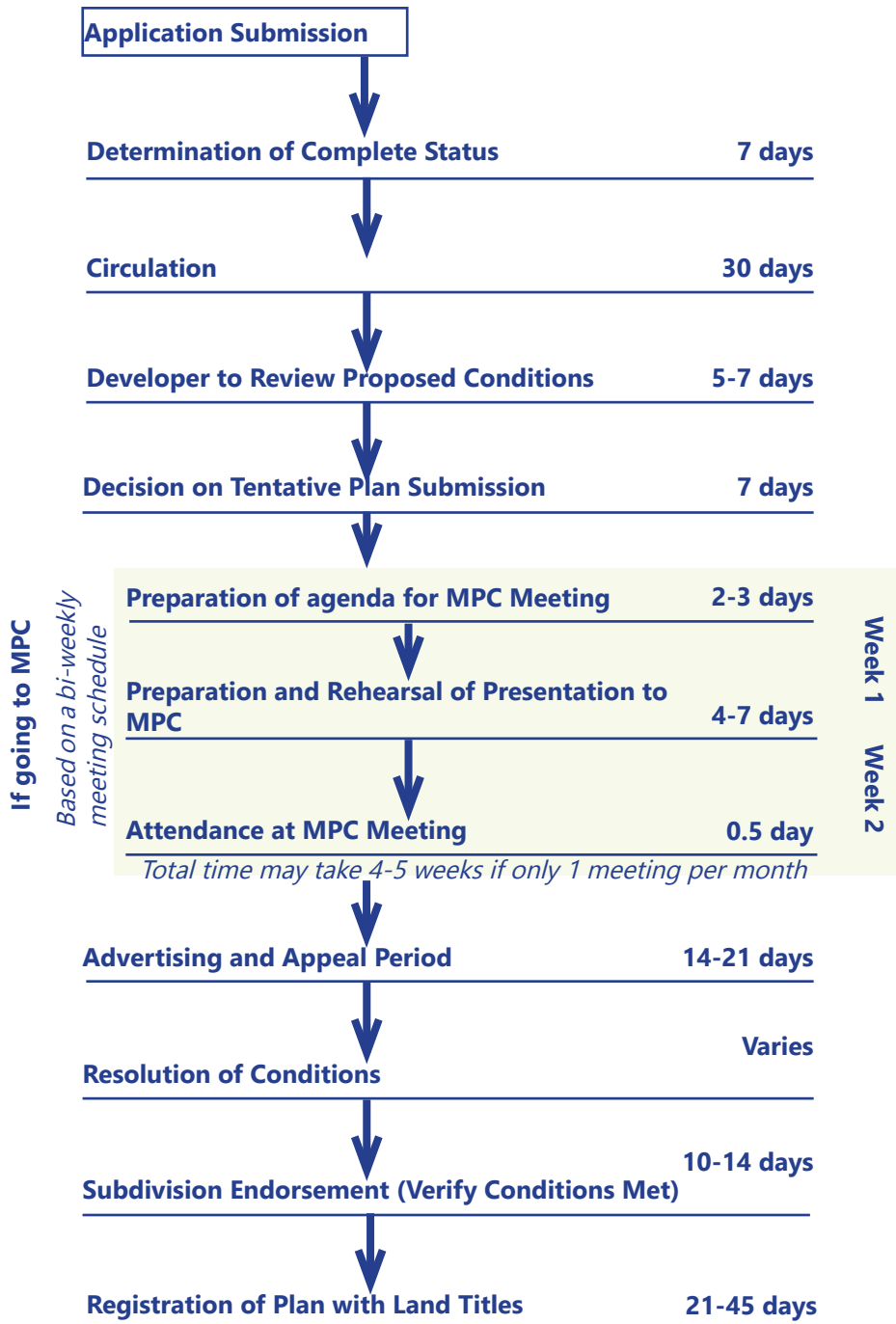


Figure 3e. Average Subdivision Processing Timelines for Precedent Municipalities



4 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION AND OUTREACH

In order to seek diverse perspectives and understand the level of satisfaction with the current development approval process, the following groups were engaged to receive feedback on the City of St. Albert's planning processes, MPCs in general, and the relevance of an MPC to City of St. Albert:

- Councillors
- Development Industry
- City of St. Albert Administrative Staff
- Citizens
- Precedent Municipalities with or without MPCs (Section 3)

NOTE: The text in this section represents the views of the people who were engaged in the review, not the view of the consultant team.

4.1 COUNCILLOR INTERVIEWS

4.2 DEVELOPMENT INDUSTRY WORKSHOP

4.3 ADMINISTRATION INTERVIEWS

4.4 PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

4.1

COUNCILLOR INTERVIEWS

Each member of Council was interviewed individually, in September, to gain a better understanding of their perspective on the development approval process in the City of St. Albert and perceived gaps and/or weaknesses associated with it.

PARTICIPANTS

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DATE

SEPTEMBER 2016

Prior to holding the one-on-one interviews, the interviewees were asked to complete a questionnaire where the responses would be discussed during the interview, along with additional questions from the interviewers.

4.1.1 TOPICS

The following topics were discussed during each interview:

- Perceptions of the current development permit process in the City of St. Albert;
- Perceptions of the current subdivision approval process in the City of St. Albert;
- General understanding of MPCs;
- Role of an MPC in the City of St. Albert;
- What is being heard from colleagues and councillors from other municipalities; and
- Additional information regarding an MPC in the City of St. Albert.



4.1.2 COUNCIL'S EMERGING THEMES

Summaries of the themes that emerged for each question are presented in this section.

4.1.2.1 Summary of Council's Input on the Development Permit Approval Process

Interviewees felt the development permit process in the City of St. Albert is responsive to the needs of the industry and is generally working well. The Planning and Development department has been running efficiently with the current development process in place. It was noted that citizens do not have much of a voice in the current process when redistricting applications go to Council; the public does not have as much of a say as they should. The limited speaking time for citizens at Council meetings was frequently raised.

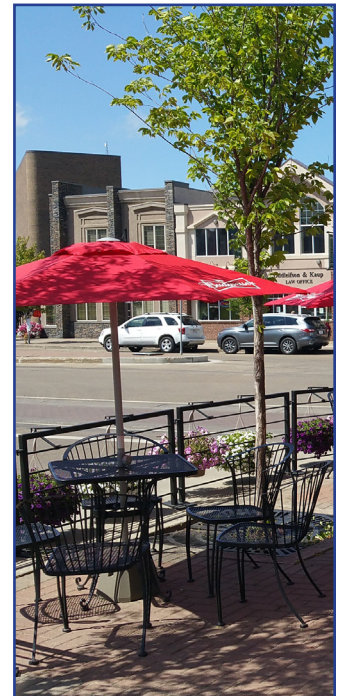
4.1.2.2 Summary of Council's Input on the Subdivision Approval Process

The subdivision approval process works well at this time and there are no major issues.

4.1.2.3 Comments

Interviewees made the following overall remarks regarding development permit and subdivision approval processes:

- The development process is fairly responsive to the needs of developers;
- Speaking time for citizens should be increased at Council meetings;
- A better communication process is needed with Council;
- Additional opportunities for meaningful public input should be considered;
- Additional decision-making authority should be delegated to Administration; and
- The subdivision process is effective and does not need improvement.



4.1.2.4 Summary of Council's Understanding of MPCs

Interviewees felt that the key role of an MPC is to advise Council on planning issues, as well as better involve the public to ensure their voices are heard. The majority of councillors felt that an MPC should not overly politicize the process and cause significant delays in processing time. A number of councillors believed that MPCs may be able to resolve the key issue of a lack of public input on significant planning projects.

4.1.2.5 Summary of Council's View of an MPC in St. Albert

While the previous MPC may have helped the planning process with greater public involvement, in general it was viewed to not be a very efficient process by the interviewees. Some councillors felt that an MPC would be beneficial for major applications going to Council to receive additional advice and public input, while others felt that an MPC would do little to influence the major applications and would add delays to the process.

4.1.2.6 Comments

Interviewees made the following overall remarks regarding an MPC in St. Albert:

- The MPC should provide advice to Council;
- The MPC provides an additional consultation opportunity by involving the public;
- Additional staff resources are required to run an MPC;
- The MPC would result in increased processing times;
- The development process could become overly politicized if an MPC is in place; and
- The MPC provides increased opportunities for public input.



4.1.2.7 What Was Heard from Colleagues, Constituents, Administration, and Councillors from other Municipalities

Overall, Councillors hear mixed reviews from others on the role or overall value of an MPC. Residents that support an MPC feel it can impact major planning projects that go to Council. Those not in favour of an MPC feel that it is unnecessary for modern St. Albert. While elected officials from other municipalities seem to like having an MPC, many Councillors felt that these other municipalities are quite different from the City of St. Albert and do not have the same type of issues or processes as the City of St. Albert. Councillors felt that Administration is neutral at this time and willing to hear more information about pros and cons to establishing an MPC.

4.1.2.8 Additional Comments on MPC

The majority of Councillors felt that an MPC should be composed of mainly citizens – ideally with professional experience and a good understanding of the planning process – as well as a planning or engineering representative from Administration. There was no consensus on whether or not to have many Councillors serve on an MPC. Overall it was felt that the number of political representatives should be restricted to a maximum of one or two; elected officials should not be the majority of an MPC's membership.

4.1.2.9 Comments

Interviewees made the following additional remarks regarding MPCs:

- There are mixed views on MPCs within Council and Administration;
- Need to evaluate pros and cons of MPCs in Alberta; and
- Research methods to streamline MPC processes to make the process more feasible.



4.2

DEVELOPMENT INDUSTRY WORKSHOP

The Development Industry Workshop took place in October at St. Albert Place. Over 100 stakeholders from the development industry in and around the City of St. Albert were invited to this workshop; 16 participated. The following topics were discussed:

PARTICIPANTS

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DATE

OCTOBER 2016

- The history of the MPC in the City of St. Albert;
- What an MPC can be in Alberta;
- The development approval process in general in the City of St. Albert:
 - o What works well;
 - o Areas for improvement; and
 - o The pros and cons of an MPC in the City of St. Albert.

After a brief presentation, attendees entered into a series of conversations in small groups to discern what is working well and what is not working well with the development approval process in the City of St. Albert from the development industry perspective. A discussion as a large group in the last portion of the workshop allowed the attendees to summarize key themes of their conversations. The world café format allowed each participant to interact with everyone else who attended the workshop. The following is a summary of themes that emerged in each layer of conversation.



1

WHAT IS WORKING WELL IN THE ST. ALBERT DEVELOPMENT APPROVAL PROCESS?

Attendees generally felt positive about the current timelines for planning and development approvals. Delays with servicing agreements and engineering reviews were identified as the main factors currently slowing down the process.

Overall, the following aspects are viewed to be working well in the City of St. Albert:

- Approval timelines;
- Administration staff's work ethic, process, and time management; and
- Building/development permits and inspections.



2

WHERE IS THERE ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE ST. ALBERT DEVELOPMENT APPROVAL PROCESS?

In general, representatives from the development industry felt that planning-related issues are addressed efficiently at the administrative level, but the process may be improved when it comes to engineering approvals. It was also noted that there needs to be better consistency between various council decisions on a variety of applications that are referred to them.

Overall, the following aspects of the approval process could be improved in the City of St. Albert:

- Level of consistency for ongoing Council decisions;
- Variance powers delegated to the administrative staff;
- Level of trust/confidence between Council and Administration; and
- Length of time required for engineering review.



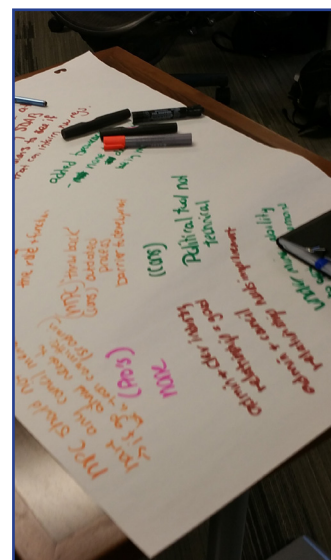
3

WHAT ARE THE PROS AND CONS OF AN MPC IN ST. ALBERT?

Attendees provided feedback on the pros and cons of re-establishing an MPC in the City of St. Albert. There was a general consensus that there are no advantages to reinstating an MPC in the City of St. Albert. The following disadvantages were identified:

- Additional time to process applications where an MPC exists;
- Lengthy timelines are a barrier to development; and
- Confusion around Council/MPC/Administration roles and responsibilities in decision-making.

It was noted that MPCs are more common in smaller municipalities that do not have as much planning staff as in the City of St. Albert, if any at all, to provide proper advice and make decisions on applications.



4.3

ADMINISTRATION INTERVIEWS

In September and October 2016 members from Administration were interviewed individually to gain a better understanding of the subdivision and development approval processes in the City of St. Albert. Interviewees provided some background on these processes as well as comments with regards to MPCs.

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Prior to undertaking the one-on-one interviews, interviewees were asked to complete a questionnaire where the responses would be discussed in the interview, along with additional questions from the interviewers. The interviewees were asked about the state of the subdivision and development process in the City of St. Albert, and to share their thoughts on MPCs as well as implications of having an MPC established in the City of St. Albert.

The text below summarizes the feedback from Administration.

4.3.1 DELEGATION OF WORK

Administration estimated that within the Subdivision and Development Approval process that the majority of the work (approximately 95%) is an administrative exercise that requires little input by Council. Council establishes direction in the Land Use Bylaw. Administration takes development and subdivision approval decisions based on the regulations established in the Land Use Bylaw and other statutory plans.

If an MPC was reinstated, the additional work load for the administrative staff would depend upon the types of applications that would or would not go to the MPC. An additional 20% of time would be required as identified by one interviewee. In terms of applications that would have to go to Council as well, it was stated that only Direct Control Development Permit applications currently go to Council; a mere 1% of applications, and Administration believes this should not change with an MPC.



4.3.2 STAFF RESOURCES

For processing development applications, there is one manager and four development officers. In order to review and approve applications of these types however, it often involves additional staff from other departments. Processing subdivision applications falls under the Planning Branch's mandate. Within the Planning Branch, this mandate is supported by one Senior Planner and the equivalent of three Planner positions. Additional administrative support resources are required to ensure effective delivery of the Planning Branch's mandate including Planning Technicians, the Branch Manager of Planning and the Director of Planning and Development.

Over the past five years, one additional development officer position has been added to the Development Branch for processing development applications. No additional resources have been added to the Planning Branch over the past five years for the processing of subdivision applications, land use bylaw amendments, and statutory plans.

When asked if additional resources are needed in the future, interviewees felt that the rapid growth in the City of St. Albert creates new applications and new compliance jobs putting more stress on existing staff. Drafting land use bylaw amendments could also use more staff, however it is not anticipated that subdivision applications or statutory plans require additional staff. If an MPC is reinstated, additional staff will be needed.



4.3.2.1 Resources Needed to Support an MPC

In general, interviewees felt that the amount of additional resources needed to support an MPC would vary depending on what applications would go to the MPC. However, it is anticipated there would be an increased workload for staff and therefore more staff would be required in order to prepare reports specifically for MPC, attend the MPC meeting, take meeting notes, and prepare presentations.

4.3.2.2 MPC Processing Times

Interviewees stated that an application going to MPC would add approximately 4-6 weeks of additional time to an application where there is currently no requirement of an MPC decision. With an MPC there is an additional 2 weeks of estimated development permit application processing time which is necessary for radius notification, completion of an MPC report, and scheduling of the MPC meeting. In addition, an MPC would then have a certain time frame following the meeting for a decision to be made.

It was noted that the average amount of time to prepare for and attend a potential MPC meeting would be similar to time spent for typical applications that go to the SDAB. Interviewees felt that the additional time with the MPC process directly impacts customer service delivery standards and would slow down decision-making timelines.



4.3.2.3 Alternatives to an MPC

The general consensus from the administrative interviews was that an additional body is not required to further process development applications in the City of St. Albert. Administration interviewees felt that there have been several initiatives to streamline the City's planning and public consultation process; an MPC would counteract these existing initiatives.

Interviewees frequently mentioned that there may be a lack of trust that Council has with Administration. Staff members felt that the department is well qualified to make decisions on permitted uses, discretionary uses and variances. Adding an MPC is not necessarily advantageous. Staff are trained and experienced in evaluating development proposals; the client, the City of St. Albert and residents are well served in accordance with the policies established by Council.



4.4

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

A Public Open House took place on November 22, 2016 at the St. Albert Legion. Citizens of St. Albert were invited to share any comments and ideas they might have about an MPC in St. Albert or provide feedback on St. Albert's development permit approval and subdivision approval processes.

PARTICIPANTS

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NOVEMBER 2016

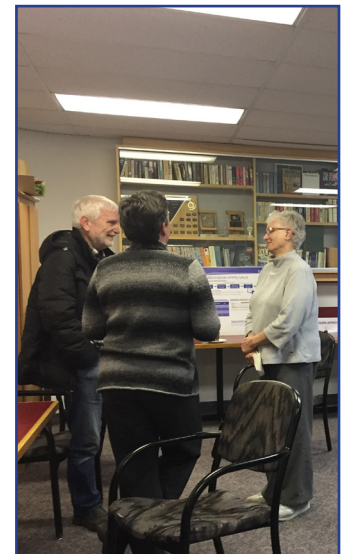
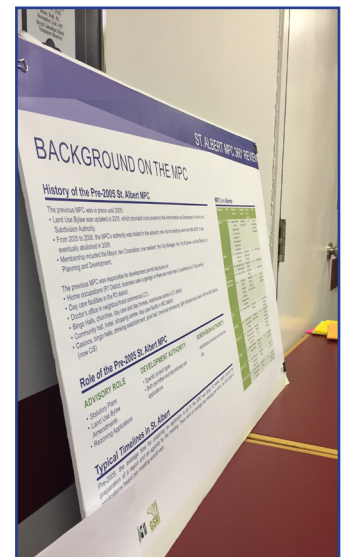
Background information was available for attendees on this study, MPCs in general and the pre-2005 MPC in the City of St. Albert, the current Development Permit Approval Process, and the current Subdivision Approval Process. Large sheets of paper were posted on the wall for members of the public to leave any feedback they might have. In addition, each attendee was given a package with paper copies of the background material as well as a feedback form and exit survey to be submitted before they left or emailed in the future. A brief summary of emerging themes from the open house is presented below.

Various representatives from administration and the consultant team were present to discuss aspects of the project with participants as well as to listen to any feedback or opinions related to the MPC 360° Review. Seven people attended the open house and provided verbal as well as written feedback on the survey questions.

4.4.1 WHAT WE HEARD

The following major themes were identified by participants from the open house:

- An MPC would encourage transparency in the planning process and allow more involvement by the public;
- An MPC would add more time to the development process;
- An MPC would add to Administration's workload;
- Having the mayor and council members on an MPC would increase their knowledge (and Council's) on planning issues; and
- The time and effort an MPC adds to the development process would be offset by:
 - o The time saved by resolving conflict up-front; and
 - o Better decision-making.





5 CONCLUSION

This 360° review of MPC-related issues in the City of St. Albert provides a unique perspective on various factors involved in the decision-making processes in municipalities. The administrative structure of approval authorities has a significant impact on timeliness, efficiency, and overall quality of the final decision.

The following pages summarize the themes that emerged from all stakeholders engaged during the 360° review.

5.1 KEY THEMES

5.2 FACTORS TO CONSIDER

5.1

KEY THEMES

5.1.1 COUNCILLOR INTERVIEWS

- The current development and subdivision approval processes work fairly well;
- There is room for public consultation processes to be improved to ensure Council makes more informed decisions; and
- There are two views on the value of an MPC:
 - It is an additional opportunity for public consultation and will help Council by providing advice from a citizen-dominant body; and
 - There are sufficient public consultation policies in place and an MPC will add delays in the development process without adding significant value.

5.1.2 DEVELOPMENT INDUSTRY

- The current development and subdivision approval processes work fairly well;
- The level of service provided by Administration is good;
- An MPC will delay development approval processes and this is a barrier to development; and
- There are no advantages in having an MPC.

5.1.3 CITIZENS

- The current development and subdivision approval processes work fairly well;
- An MPC is a good tool for a more meaningful public involvement;
- An MPC will provide additional transparency in decision-making; and
- The advantages of an MPC outweigh the challenges of having an MPC (additional time in the process, workload for administration).

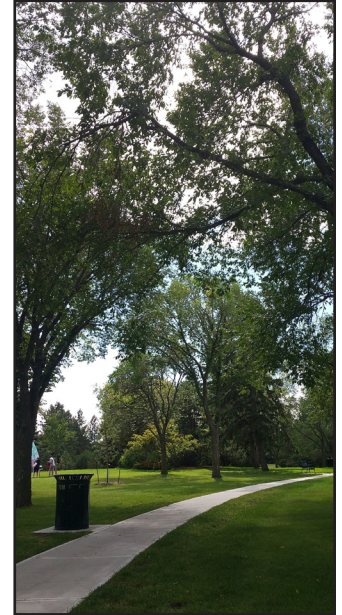


5.1.4 ADMINISTRATION

- Administration staff has technical expertise to serve as the Development Authority and Subdivision Authority as defined in the St. Albert Land Use Bylaw;
- An MPC will not add any significant value and will add delays to the process;
- Additional staff and processing times will be incurred with an MPC. One additional employee may be required if there is a significant number of applications that would go to an MPC; and
- Mechanisms to engage the public are in place through the City Public Involvement Policy and other actions are also being taken to improve the public involvement process and overall transparency.

5.1.5 PRECEDENT MUNICIPALITIES

- Alberta municipalities choose to establish an MPC, or not, in accordance with their development and subdivision approval culture;
- An MPC is an opportunity to involve citizens in the development and subdivision approval process; and
- An MPC increases application processing times and increase administrative costs.



5.2

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

The 360° review revealed the following themes to take into consideration in discerning the right approach of whether or not to have an MPC in the City of St. Albert.

5.2.1 INCREASE IN PROCESSING TIMES FOR MPC FILES

For municipalities with an MPC, the majority of development permit and subdivision application processes experience the same timelines as other municipalities without an MPC because most applications do not go to the MPC. The typical processes and additional timelines for applications that do go to the MPC are highlighted in Figure 3d and Figure 3e. The following is a summary of the average time required by Legislative and Planning staff members to prepare for and attend an MPC meeting for a typical development permit or subdivision application:

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

~4-9 hours

- Prepare meeting agendas
- Schedule MPC meetings and inform Board members
- Attend meeting
- Inform decision to applicant/notifications

PLANNING STAFF

~8-16 hours

- Prepare a separate report and presentation
- Rehearse presentation
- Attend meeting

In general, after completion of Administration's report, an average of one week of responding to MPC's requests for information is necessary to undertake administrative and planning work and an additional week for the MPC meeting itself. Thus, a minimum of two additional weeks are required to organize an MPC meeting, assuming the timing aligns with the MPC's meeting schedule. As discussed in previous sections, if the MPC meetings are not scheduled every two weeks, this timeline adds a minimum of 4 to 5 additional weeks to the development approval process.



5.2.2 INCREASE IN STAFF RESOURCING FOR MPC FILES

Additional tasks will be required of Administration to establish and operate an MPC. To provide ongoing operational support to the MPC, it is anticipated that a 20% increase in workload may be added to the development approval process. This additional time (approximately 8-16 hours depending on type and number of applications), is similar to the time spent by municipal staff in organizing, preparing for and attending SDAB hearings.

5.2.3 INCREASE IN ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS FOR MPC FILES

The consulting team set out to ascertain whether the overall costs to the City of St. Albert of delivering planning services such as the review and approval of subdivision applications and development permits would increase substantively with the reinstatement of an MPC.

The following four observations were made during the course of the project:

1. An additional two weeks of processing time does not equate to an additional two weeks of staff time. Administrative reports to Council combine estimates of processing and staff time savings associated with the elimination of the City of St. Albert's MPC in 2005. Given that delays in processing times do not necessarily equate to additional demands on staff time, addressing the two simultaneously is misleading.
2. The Planning Branch has the expertise and capacity to meet the current needs and expectations of Council, stakeholders and the community and would not require additional staff to accommodate the reinstatement of an MPC. While additional demands would be placed on the Planning Branch to attend MPC, Planning currently creates a subdivision report as part of the recommendation to the Subdivision Authority. In turn, the subdivision report would be provided to the MPC to assist in their decision. The time required by staff to complete their necessary review and to engage with applicants and stakeholders would likely remain the same with or without an MPC.
3. Additional demands would be placed on the Development Branch to develop MPC reports and attend MPC meetings. Currently it is not standard practice for the Development Branch to develop a report on the majority of permit applications. The processing time for Development Permit applications going to an MPC would



increase.

4. The reinstatement of an MPC would place additional demands on the Legislative Services Department. The Department's workloads have increased over the past few years and it is currently using external resources to augment its operational capacity. It is likely that the Department would need to engage – at least on a short-term basis – external consulting services to support the establishment of a new MPC.
5. Our analysis of other jurisdictions does not demonstrate a direct relationship between the number of planning staff in a municipality and the existence of an MPC. In fact, comparable municipalities (in terms of demographic and economic growth) tend to have similar sized planning and development departments, regardless of whether an MPC is in place.

The consulting team concludes that administrative costs are unlikely to be a significant decision-making factor with respect to the reinstatement of an MPC in the City of St. Albert. While the reinstatement of an MPC would add to the overall administrative workload of the municipality, it is unlikely that additional staff would be required, especially if the





GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Planning authorities in Alberta municipalities are established under Part 17, Division 3 of the Municipal Government Act. The following terms are used in this document:

- **Development authority** means a development authority established under Division 3 of the Municipal Government Act. In St. Albert this is established with St. Albert Land Use Bylaw 9/2005 (Consolidated Bylaw 6/2016) which provides powers to municipal administration and the Office of Development Officer.
- **Municipal planning commission** means a municipal planning commission established under Division 3 of the Municipal Government Act. This requires a municipality to establish an MPC by bylaw. No such bylaw is in place in the City of St. Albert.
- **Subdivision and development appeal board** means a subdivision and development appeal board established pursuant to Division 3 of the Municipal Government Act. St. Albert's SDAB is established by the Subdivision and Development Appeal Board Bylaw No. 20/95.
- **Subdivision authority** means a subdivision authority established under Division 3 of the Municipal Government Act. In the City of St. Albert this is the Subdivision Officer established by Subdivision Authority Bylaw No. 19/95, which designates the Director of Planning and Development as the Subdivision Authority.