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# Urban Land Development Process in Saskatoon

## Recommendation

That the report of the Acting General Manager, Community Services Department, dated March 11, 2019, be received as information.

## Topic and Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the policy and process framework that is used to guide the development of land for new areas within Saskatoon.

## Report Highlights

1. The City's land development process is built on a solid foundation that has served the City of Saskatoon and the community well. Recent discussions have focused on enhancing the overall process with logistical, technical, and technological improvements and these are a key focus moving forward.
2. Bylaw No. 8769, The Official Community Plan, 2009 (OCP), plays a key role as the City's legislated document outlining its long-term goals and vision, but also in its policies that speak to how growth and development should occur to achieve the community's goals. The OCP is currently being updated.
3. Planning is an important function that provides a framework for growth and development to help the City of Saskatoon (City) achieve its long-term vision.
4. Planning contributes to a strong foundation for financial sustainability by allowing for orderly and phased growth, limiting the number of new areas where capital intensive development is underway at any one time.
5. The overall land development process occurs in stages that build from the OCP to Sector Plans that guide high-level infrastructure development to Area Concept Plans that build out a cohesive neighbourhood or employment area.

## Strategic Goals

This report supports the City's Strategic Goals of Asset and Financial Sustainability, Sustainable Growth, Quality of Life, and Moving Around by providing background on the Planning process and the role of bylaws and approved plans, such as the OCP and the Plan for Growth, in guiding growth, development, and the efficient use of infrastructure.

## Background

Saskatoon has a strong history of Planning, going back to the early years of the City. In response to rapid growth experienced in Saskatoon, as well as knowledge of what had occurred in other rapidly growing cities, Town Planning was identified as a key priority for City Council. Then City Commissioner, Christopher J. Yorath, launched the first planning efforts in 1913. The intent was to try to organize all of the "boom era" subdivisions that had occurred within the area, into a unified community. In the early

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years of Saskatoon, many subdivisions had been plotted, both within and outside the City boundaries. Many of these areas would have been far removed from the existing areas where people lived.

The documentation to City Council in 1913 outlined the rationale for undertaking the Town Planning that Commissioner Yorath proposed. It included:

- “1. The classification, planning and design of roads under three headings (a) Main Traffic Roads, (b) Through Traffic Streets, (c) Local Traffic Streets; by this means unnecessary expenditure in the paving of streets which can only be used by a limited amount of traffic is obviated.
2. The suitable placing of open spaces, recreation grounds, children's playgrounds, parks, etc.
3. The preservation of places of beauty.
4. The prevention of overcrowding.
5. The distribution of residential, shopping and industrial areas, in this way protecting the different property interests.
6. The fixing of centres for Institutes, Churches and other public buildings so that their architecture can be seen to best advantage.
7. The design of a complete system of water and sewerage which can be built up in units with the growth of the City. This will prevent what often occurs, the discarding of previous works at appalling loss.
8. The design of a tramway system which can be extended as the growth of the City should warrant, but which will ultimately become a complete circuitous system.”

These eight points laid the foundation for a framework meant to ensure development occurred in a thoughtful, deliberate way in order to provide the best quality of life for the residents of Saskatoon, in a financially sustainable way. In years afterward, a Town Planning Commission was established and was recognized as a key element of foresight for a growing city. The Planning Scheme of 1966, the Core Neighbourhood Studies of 1978, and the Future Growth Study of 1999 continued to provide a strong foundation of technical analysis, vision, and policy guidance for the growth of Saskatoon. With the Plan Saskatoon process in 1996 to 1999, the City began a more comprehensive engagement process for future Planning that continues to be a key element of Planning today.

### **Report**

#### Reviewing Current Practices

In the past few years, through various activities, the Administration and the building and development industry have identified the need for some technical and logistical process improvements, as well as some policy clarifications to enhance the overall goals of development in Saskatoon. Of note, the following list identifies some of the activities that are currently being pursued to support this:

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- a) renewal of the OCP;
- b) comprehensive review of Bylaw No. 8770, Zoning Bylaw;
- c) audit of Saskatoon's development levy system;
- d) review of Area Concept Plan guidelines;
- e) creation of Natural Areas Standards;
- f) implementation of the Development Civic Service Review; and
- g) Infill Roundtable topic discussions.

Process improvements can and should always occur, especially as new standards, requirements, and expectations come into effect in response to identified issues. The Administration believes the fundamental building blocks of the urban land development process are the solid foundation from which to move forward from and the City has been well served by the process. In response to the variety of discussions that have taken place to date, an overview of the various processes that serve as the foundation for the City of Saskatoon are provided below.

### What is the Role of the Official Community Plan?

The OCP is the collective vision for Saskatoon. The direction and goals outlined in the OCP are entrenched in law and recognized by the Province of Saskatchewan as a statement of Saskatoon's long-term vision. It provides both inspiration and direction, ensuring that the community's vision for Saskatoon is integrated into all aspects of planning, priority setting, and development. Therefore, the OCP is the most critical document in providing the framework to guide long-term planning and development across the city. Every policy, bylaw, and standard for development aligns and reflects the community's vision as outlined in the OCP. Attachment 1 provides a diagram of the hierarchy of each layer of Planning. The OCP, as the vision, sets out the principles and policies that aim to build a city to meet the expectations of residents. The current review of the OCP will update it to reflect recent planning initiatives that have taken place and ensure this foundational document reflects current needs and aspirations.

### Why is Planning an Important Function of the City of Saskatoon?

Planning provides certainty for all parties, including the City, the development industry, land owners, and residents. For the City, it allows for the provision of infrastructure in a phased, strategic manner to meet anticipated growth needs. For a developer, it provides predictable timing for when development lands will be serviced and ready, as well as known servicing standards. This allows the industry to know what it will be receiving and what will have to be provided, which also allows for the cost of the services for development to be budgeted.

The urban land development process also serves to provide consistency. New neighbourhoods receive standard utility services and a range of amenities that are expected and desired by residents, such as parks, playgrounds, trails, and sidewalks.

The Planning that goes into the urban land development process looks beyond the servicing and infrastructure needs and considers what type of city the community is

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trying to build. This city-building lens is an important one that incorporates cultural, environmental, heritage, mobility, equity, and many other characteristics that go into building a city as a whole. Building a great city is not limited to just providing a serviced lot, so applying a lens that looks at the wider picture, including the impacts on the overall function of the city, is an important component of the work that is done in the Planning and Development Division, and through collaboration with other civic work units.

### What Does Planning Mean for the City's Financial Sustainability?

A key benefit of the City's Planning framework is that it allows the City to provide essential services to new areas over time. This allows the large capital costs of new development to not only be strategically phased, but also focused in limited areas. This was a benefit that was identified even in the 1913 Planning efforts.

The City has been successful in its past use of appropriate policies to ensure that the City's ability to grow was done in connection with its ability to pay for that growth. This has been done in part through a key policy element in the OCP, which allows for only one neighbourhood in a Suburban Development Area to proceed at a time. Substantial completion of each neighbourhood is required before the following neighbourhood may begin development. This ensures the capital intensive period for each neighbourhood, where the new services and amenities are added, are phased across an area. It also ensures sufficient development occurs in a focused area to support the provision of infrastructure and amenities in the short to medium term (i.e. the extension of transit, or development of parks, schools, and commercial areas). This method, along with the other policies of the OCP, ensures that each area is developed in a contiguous manner, without leap-frogging or out-of-sequence development. In addition, this approach allows for a relatively consistent capital program.

In other urban centres that have not followed a system of phased growth, expansion in many areas at the same time has caused significant financial issues and created issues where resident's expectations are not able to be met. The cities of Edmonton and Calgary, have both experienced this issue, which continues today.

### What does the Urban Land Development Process Typically Look Like?

In general, the urban land development process moves from a high-level analysis for a large area through successive steps until reaching the final development of a particular site. Attachment 2 provides a summary of the various steps. Each step in the process provides a new level of detail and the background analysis to support it.

The City's most recent future growth studies include the 1999 Future Growth Study, 2016 Growth Plan to Half a Million, and Saskatoon North Partnership for Growth Regional Plan. These plans prepare the City for more detailed Planning that occurs at the Sector Plan level for new greenfield development and large-scale infill development areas (i.e. containing multiple neighbourhoods) such as the University of Saskatchewan lands.

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Sector planning brings together key technical studies and allows the development of servicing plans and overall layout for an entire area of usually eight to ten neighbourhoods. At this level of Planning, land ownership is a consideration in terms of engaging with the landowners, but it is not a determining factor in overall design. Key assumptions that feed into sector planning include typical school populations, park requirements, the location of existing natural areas, and arterial road networks. The deep services, like sanitary sewer, are determined at this level based on expected sector populations, and in line with the Water and Sewer Master Plan. A report on the Water and Sewer Master Plan was presented to the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services on March 4, 2019. It should be considered in conjunction with this report.

Moving to the Area Concept Plan level, land ownership does not determine the future layout of neighbourhoods or areas. However, at this stage, it is assumed that a lead developer will take forward the negotiations and preparation for the Area Concept Plan. The developer will lead negotiations with other land owners, conduct the background studies, engage in review and discussion with the Administration, and other negotiations as required. From this stage, once approved by City Council, individual developers may then lead applications for OCP and zoning amendments, as well as servicing agreement negotiations for their specific components of the area. Phasing is determined by the Area Concept Plan, so development lands come on stream as servicing proceeds in a particular area.

### The Benefits of a Strong Foundation

The process described allows for the consideration of new innovations in servicing or design trends. Servicing for homes and neighbourhoods, meaning providing the essential services of water, sanitary sewer, and storm sewer, is something that requires careful planning and attention. For this reason, the technical review process occurs in an integrated manner which allows for new technologies to be considered, while understanding that there is a low appetite for risk when providing these essential services. Therefore, it is important that time is taken to identify how new technologies and innovations can be incorporated in a low-risk method, such as a limited testing area, or pilot project, before building on a larger scale.

A consistent process to work through the complexities of urban land development establishes a method that can be predicted by all involved and allows consideration of new innovations and different desired outcomes. This also allows for decision making that is predictable, which has proven successful over the years. For example, when the last economic boom hit Saskatoon, the City had to rapidly advance development to meet housing needs, and having a standard and predictable process allowed it to be ramped up with the addition of funding and positions.

Given the growth and change in Saskatoon, the benefits of successful planning in the past needs to be built upon with thorough review and improvements to policies,

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standards and practices to meet current and future needs. Implementing these types of changes are a high priority for the Administration.

### **Public and/or Stakeholder Involvement**

There is no public/stakeholder involvement.

### **Other Considerations/Implications**

As noted, the report to the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services regarding the Water and Sewer Master Plan, dated March 4, 2019, includes other considerations related to the urban land development process.

There are no options, financial, environmental, privacy or CPTED implications; a communication plan is not required at this time.

### **Due Date for Follow-up and/or Project Completion**

Follow up will be provided in the form of reports on the various projects underway by the Planning and Development Division, as well as future reporting related to the renewal of the OCP throughout 2019.

### **Public Notice**

Public notice, pursuant to Section 3 of Policy No. C01-021, Public Notice Policy, is not required.

### **Attachments**

1. Planning and Development Hierarchy of Plans
2. General Urban Land Development Process

### **Report Approval**

Written by: Lesley Anderson, Director of Planning and Development

Reviewed and

Approved by: Lynne Lacroix, Acting General Manager, Community Services Department

SP/2019/PD/PDCS – Urban Land Development Process/lc/df