

Land Use Bylaw Rewrite: What We Heard Summary

What is the Land Use Bylaw?

The Land Use Bylaw regulates the use and development of land and buildings within the Town of Okotoks. The Land Use Bylaw is the guiding document for Council and staff when making decisions about land use and development, and is used to carry out the vision and policies of the Municipal Development Plan, which is the primary long range planning document that establishes a holistic vision and guides overall growth and development of the Town.



How We Engaged

From **November 17 to December 8, 2020** the Okotoks Land Use Bylaw Re-Write project received insights and feedback from **138 residents and stakeholders**. The engagement process was implemented to gather input on the Draft Land Use Bylaw and to highlight major shifts and changes.

The engagement process used three distinct tactics for connecting with it's audience, these included: an online survey, a community webinar and targeted stakeholder interviews.

Online Survey: 65 participants, live for over 3 weeks

Community Bylaw Webinar: 5 participants via Zoom

Community workshops: 68 participants representing nine distinct groups and organizations

What We Heard

Participants were invited to provide their insights and comments on six sections of the updated Bylaw, including:

OPEN SPACE

TRANSPORTATION

LOCAL EMPLOYMENT

HOUSING

DISTRICTS AND USES

A MORE STREAMLINED BYLAW

For each section there was a written explanation of the changes made and the feedback we heard from folks in the first engagement phase. Each section asked two or three closed ended questions that sought to understand respondents' level of support for specific changes to the Bylaw. Each section also had a comment area. The following summarizes what we heard about the draft Bylaw.

OPEN SPACE

The open space options were highly supported in this engagement phase, with just 4% of respondents being opposed to the change. The proposed open space changes are also in line with the Town's planning direction, thus no significant revisions have been made to this segment of the land use bylaw. The addition of two open space districts will protect natural spaces with opportunities for passive recreation such as pathways and natural areas as well as allow for more active forms of recreation such as playgrounds, sports fields, and indoor recreation.

Community comments

"It is critically important that the river and escarpments are preserved and set aside from development."

"Keeping these [Natural] areas maintained keeps them used by and valuable to the community so reducing the risk of them being considered available for alternative use"

TRANSPORTATION

The draft Bylaw has shifted the focus of transportation to a variety of modes rather than just driving. While most respondents were in support of the moves, some were still opposed. To address these concerns, the Bylaw now provides more clarity through the Active Transportation Standards relevant to each district.

Community comments

"I like more options for pedestrians and bicycles but don't forget we live in a winter climate and cars are not going away tomorrow - it is all about change and balance"

"The emphasis on bicycle use is I think overrated, particularly in winter, although it does encourage healthy activity"

"Expanding the pathways and supporting pedestrian friendly infrastructure is a good idea"

LOCAL EMPLOYMENT

While the vast majority of participants support the growth of small and medium-sized commercial developments, there was less support for home based business and signage regulations, each with about 60% support from engagement participants. For clarity, the proposed Bylaw simply clarified regulations of the existing home-base business standards. This includes more detail on impacts to neighbours and the types of uses that are allowed. The addition of the 'missing middle' building options means allowing for small and medium-sized commercial developments to better suit unique neighbourhood context.

Community comments

"Covid-19 has accelerated the trend of working from home so the Bylaw should anticipate this and allow for it. Increased flexibility is good in general."

"If home based business includes storage of materials/client meetings the problems are just beginning."

"I like enabling more home based businesses and removing the red tape ... but also ensure that the homes beside the businesses are not unfairly compromised."

HOUSING

A variety of housing is generally supported by the community; with the Neighbourhood Core District seeing more support than the Traditional Neighbourhood District. Minor adjustments to these districts have been made to setbacks and frontage standards to better reflect the character of each and further clarify where and how design standards would be applied. It also refined standards for multi-unit buildings that resulted from testing the bylaw.

In the proposed Land Use Bylaw residential districts are more enabled to allow a variety of housing forms on the same street. The Draft Bylaw is focused on the location, appearance, and shape of buildings rather than how they are used. Maximum density requirements and design standards have been added for clarity.

Note that the Bylaw does not dictate sustainable building forms and technologies, there are other Town policies and plans that dictate these initiatives. Architectural requirements, for instance, are part of Neighbourhood Structure Plans for new developments.

Community comments

"I support a housing mix. However new developments should be required to supply off-street parking. Housing density should also increase. Existing green spaces should be maintained."

"I like variety of housing in neighbourhoods; just being careful with transitions and allowing infills that match so as not to destroy neighbourhood value."

DISTRICTS AND USES

There was support for reducing the number of districts and incorporating a greater mix of uses within each district, meaning more opportunities for housing variety and the disbursement of employment and commerce activities in the Town for the future. Minor changes were made to the use types within each district to ensure uses were compatible and permissive based on comments collected from the engagement session and legal considerations.

Community comments

"Work to combine more districts as true Multi use to encourage development of combined commercial and residential uses, while not giving up on true residential districts. Allowing business owners the flexibility of living close to their work."

"Ensure parks and greenspace areas stay at current levels and cannot be re-zoned for retail/business development."

"I would like to see some smaller commercial lots made available for purchase so business people can own their property without it having to be a condo."

STREAMLINE BYLAW

The draft bylaw has also been modernized in its look and feel, providing more graphics, visuals, and tables in support of a more user friendly experience. This was almost entirely supported by participants, as respondents see the value in making the document more approachable to a wider audience.

Community comments

"It's not colour blind accessible. The maps need numbers or letters to make it easier to recognize them."

"Needs to be tested in practice. It's not the theory but the execution that determines how successful it will be and whether developers embrace the changes."

"Plain language is important for ease of understanding."

Next Steps

The Bylaw development team will continue to revise the draft Bylaw to reflect the major issues and insights that were raised by the community and stakeholders. The final Bylaw will be presented to Town Council later this Spring for adoption into the planning framework for Okotoks.

Thank you to those who participated! For more details on the project and to get involved visit www.okotoks.ca/LUB2020.