

Attachment 1 – Provincial Land Use Planning Context

Provincial legislation is designed to ensure that land use aligns with both provincial and regional objectives. The reasons for their importance can be categorized into several key areas.

1. Legislative Compliance and Implementation

The Municipal Government Act (MGA) provides the legislative framework for municipal planning, subdivision, and development control in Alberta. Under the provincial Land Use Framework, the Province designed Advisory committees at the time to play a role in developing regional plans.

2. Regional Coordination and Integration

Alberta's approach to land use planning utilizes regional plans (2 of 7 which have been approved) that encompass broader geographic areas beyond individual municipalities. This ensures that planning responds not only to local needs but also to regional and provincial objectives. Advisory committees contributed to this process.

The use of regional planning commissions in Alberta also spanned several decades, with significant developments occurring from the 1950s through the 1990s. These commissions played a role in managing growth, regional planning, and development across the province.

Background: The Early Years: 1950s to 1970s

The roots of Alberta's planning commissions trace back to the *Town and Rural Planning Act* of 1950, which laid the foundation for their establishment and strengthened their influence and legislative abilities through subsequent amendments in 1957, 1963, and 1977.

The Edmonton District Planning Commission, established in 1950, was one of several district planning commissions created to manage urban growth in areas in and around Edmonton. Planning commissions had the responsibility for preparing regional and municipal planning documents as well as being the approval authority for subdivisions for member municipalities.

The 1977 *Planning Act* marked a significant shift, putting regional plans at the top of the hierarchy of planning documents and requiring municipalities to appoint representatives to planning commissions. This Act aimed to support thoughtful development, with the participation of municipalities, without causing significant approval delays or burdens.

By 1981, there were nine planning commissions covering almost the entire province, except for the northeastern corner.

These commissions were tasked with preparing municipal and regional plans. However, local cooperation was not always smooth, with conflicts often arising when municipalities disagreed with planning commission objectives / policy or at borders between urban and rural municipalities.

Economic Challenges and Changes: 1980s to 1990s

The late 1980s and 1990s brought economic challenges that impacted the focus and resources available for regional planning. The global oil crises of the 1960s and 1970s had initially benefited Alberta's economy, but the subsequent economic downturn led to a reduction in municipal contributions to planning commissions, with some being cut completely.

The repeal of the guiding provincial *Planning Act* and the inclusion of Land Use Planning regulations within the *Municipal Government Act* of 1995 represented a turn away from mandatory regional planning, leading to the disbandment of Alberta's planning commissions, which numbered 10 at the time. This Act removed the requirement for regional planning, halted funding for the planning commissions, and placed the responsibility for plans, subdivisions, and intermunicipal discussions onto individual municipalities (most of which had never held planning/subdivision autonomy prior to this).

Specific Commissions and Their Evolution

The history of planning commissions in Alberta reflects a journey of adaptation to changing economic conditions, legislative frameworks, and planning philosophies. From their establishment in the 1950s to their disbandment in the 1990s, these commissions played a role in shaping the province's approach to urban growth and regional planning. The shift away from mandatory regional planning in 1994 marked the end of an era, leading to a new phase where municipalities regained individual responsibility for planning and development.

In 2008, the Province, however, returned to regional planning with the creation of Growth Management Boards. In the Edmonton area, the Capital Region Board (CRB) was established to prepare a regional growth plan by 2010, among other activities. In 2017, the CRB was transitioned to become the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board (EMRB) and to approve an updated plan.

3. Sustainable Development and Environmental Stewardship

The Alberta Land Use Framework (LUF) outlines strategies for managing Alberta's land and natural resources to support sustainable development and environmental stewardship.

Regional Advisory Committees were used to provide input into these strategies, promoting efficient land use, conservation, and stewardship on both private and public lands. They helped to reduce the human footprint on Alberta's landscape and manage the cumulative effects of development on land, water, and air. The North Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Committee had 27 members before its dissolution.

Background

The Alberta Land Use Framework (LUF) seeks to manage land and natural resources in the province to address growth pressures and achieve environmental, economic, and social goals. Launched in 2008, the LUF marked a shift in how Alberta approaches land use, aiming to balance the diverse interests of a rapidly growing province.

History and Rationale

Alberta's history of land use planning dates to the early 20th century, with Calgary and Edmonton implementing development restrictions as early as 1904 and 1906. Over the decades, the province saw various legislative efforts to control land subdivision and development, culminating in more structured regional planning by the mid-20th century.

However, by the late 2000s, the need for a more unified and comprehensive approach became evident as Alberta faced increasing growth pressures and the challenge of balancing economic development with environmental conservation. The LUF was introduced to address these challenges by establishing a framework for sustainable land use and decision-making across the province.

Opposition

The LUF itself was a policy initiative set out to manage public and private lands and natural resources to achieve Alberta's long-term economic, environmental, and social goals. It was introduced to address Alberta's growth pressures and complement the province's water and air policies, as well as the 2008 Climate Change Strategy.

The LUF aimed to divide the province into seven regions and develop land-use plans for each, supported by a Land-Use Secretariat to lead the development of regional plans, implement cumulative effects management at the regional level, and include Indigenous Peoples in land-use planning. The *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*, passed in 2009, provided a legal foundation for the LUF but was discretionary in nature, meaning it did not explicitly require the development and enforcement of regional plans. Only two of the seven regional plans were adopted. The third, the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan, remains in Draft form and the remaining regional plans have not been commenced. The Land Use Secretariat has also since been disbanded.

The LUF and its implementation have not been without controversy. For example:

- Opposition parties in Alberta have played a role in shaping the public perception of the Land Use Framework (LUF) in Alberta through various campaigns that turned the LUF into a liability for the government rather than an asset.
- These campaigns have been effective in convincing many Albertans that the government's intentions were not in their best interest.
- Political changes have impacted overall support and political champions for the initiative including managing biodiversity and cumulative effects.
- The decision to rescind the 1976 Coal Development Policy in 2020, which was part of Alberta's broader land use and environmental policy framework, sparked significant opposition. This decision, made without consultation, led to heated debates and criticism from environmental organizations, municipal governments, and the public. Concerns ranged from environmental damage, such as the risk of selenium poisoning, to the broader implications for land use and conservation in the province.

- Although the policy was later reinstated in response to the backlash, this example highlights the tensions and challenges in balancing economic development with environmental and social goals within the context of land use planning in Alberta.

4. Stakeholder Engagement and Public Consultation

Advisory committees facilitated stakeholder engagement and public consultation in the planning process.

They compiled the views and needs of various stakeholders, including local communities, businesses, and Indigenous Peoples, to be considered in land use decisions. This inclusive approach helped to build consensus and address potential conflicts, leading to more effective and acceptable regional land use plans.

5. Information, Monitoring, and Continuous Improvement

The Government of Alberta is developing an integrated information system to support land-use decision-making. This would support continuous improvement in land-use planning and decision-making, ensuring that policies and practices adapt to changing conditions and emerging challenges.

Current Provincial Direction

Comprehensive regional land-use plans have been submitted and approved for only two of the seven regions, and no indication of recent progress on other regions has been noted. The Land Use Secretariat has also since been disbanded.

The Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board and the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board remain in place and functioning.