

Compiled Discussion Points from the April 27th APPI Educational Workshop

What are the Roles of Planning & Planners in Future Inter-municipal Cooperation?

Considerations about Content of Required MDPs, IDPs, ICFS and GMB documents

What needs to be covered in a plan?

- Delineating where one plan ends and another one starts could be problematic. Upcoming provincial regulations could help clarify what needs to be addressed in the various plans. However, overlap and duplication are predicted between IDPs and ICFSs.
- More explicit direction could be provided via guidelines developed through the municipalities. It is assumed that AUMA and AAMDC working together on this.
- In the end, only those things that the municipalities want to pursue should be included. However, it is important to have a full and mandatory discussion about other things in order to determine what gets included.
- A process to transition from “current” to “future” state should be a key element in each plan.
- Governance needs to be included in each plan at time of approval.

Considerations about the Process to Develop Required MDPs, IDPs, ICFS and GMB documents

How to Start?

- Confirm the nature of the plan being prepared - Is it Urban/urban? Urban/rural? Rural/rural?
- Identification of / creating an inventory of current issues and existing relationships and processes is key. Air out assumptions at the beginning. Can past accomplishments between/amongst municipalities be built upon, especially in developing ICFSs? Is the existing level of trust between politicians and administration sufficient to move the process forward?
- Changing from a spirit of competitiveness to collaboration will be a challenge for municipalities. What is the scope of the history and relationships between the municipalities?
- Project management, facilitation and communication skills will be essential. Engaging a disinterested, third-party facilitator for the entire process from the beginning could be very useful. Mediation may be required at key points throughout the process.
- Councils will need to set the tone for effective plan preparation. They will need to identify where they want to be and what they want their role to be in achieving the vision for the plan.
- Plan development needs to start from a realistic base to move forward with future development, and process: needs to reflect “today” and to encompass a realistic planning horizon (2, 5, 50 years?).
- Leadership is needed to press the “start button” and persevere through the difficult stages.
- Municipalities that are involved in more than one ICFS or IDP will need to address how to coordinate documents / processes between plans.
- In the interest of efficient and effective use of resources, municipalities need to prioritize development of the required documents. A suggested process for IDPs / ICFSs provided by either AUMA/AAMDC or the Province would be useful, especially to smaller municipalities.

Who needs to be involved?

- There is a need to identify what stakeholders are in development of a document and at what level they are involved in the process, particularly for Administration and Council. Stakeholders need to be educated about process and potential outcomes.

- It is important for the CAO to own the process, rather than a planning director or consultant. However, there needs to be Council representation at some point.
- Existing relationships between / amongst participating municipalities are very important as there is a need to work with adjoining decision makers. There is a question of how to harmonize plan requirements between municipalities with a First Nation vs. municipality with another municipality. Logistical challenges can be expected, especially with regard to jurisdiction (e.g. Wheatland - ½ in and ½ out of a GMB).
- The role of technical experts needs to be determined – e.g. engineering, financial, etc. Additionally there needs to be effective participation by existing service providers in both negotiations and subsequent developments.
- Clear expectations and roles for public involvement need to be developed. Where necessary, it will be necessary to identify how public expectations related to future development could change.
- UDI and other developer organizations could have interests that are significantly different that “the public”. Perhaps there should be a voice for them throughout the process.

Economies of Scale?

- Determine if there is a possibility to combine processes among multiple municipalities, for there is likely to be overlap when one municipality has to address issues with multiple other municipalities.
- The possibility for municipalities to form a GMB provides the opportunity for them to be a lot stronger when they go to implement big items like transit and affordable housing. It can also provide a framework for better decision making around coordinating assets and dollars.

Process learnings from the Town of Olds (relative to development of an intermunicipal collaboration agreement)

- Top down preparation, not grassroots up. Councils coordinated first.
- High level financials were provided.
- Important for Administration to document official minutes of each meeting. This avoided duplication of issues already covered and helped to keep discussions on track.
- Rotating chairs during plan development was important. This helped to equal out the “power” distribution between municipalities.

Recommendations for a Provincial Role in Municipal Compliance with Development of MDPs, IDPs, ICFS and GMB documents

Provide:

- guidelines on how to implement processes.
- resources – especially to smaller municipalities.
- expertise.
- incentives for meeting the mandated timelines.
- templates for various plans (see additional comments on templates under “Tools”).

Clarify:

- timelines for proclaiming the changes to the MGA and attendant regulations.
- hierarchy of plans to enable municipalities to prioritize use of resources to produce them.
- scope of each plan – the possibility of duplication of content between plans is anticipated. Need to move forward on release of outstanding regulations.
- specific required content between IDPs and ICFS. Without more clarity, confusion exists and possible duplication and overlap is anticipated. While ICFS deal with cost sharing and services, land use doesn't come up until the IDP.
- provincial role for oversight of process and outcomes. What is the minimum level of effort required to meet the intent of the legislation?
- what provincial resources and expertise will be available to implement development of these documents?
- if Provincial agencies will be bound to mandated changes (e.g. Alberta Transportation., Alberta Environment - Will they buy into the collaboration/thinking outside of the box?).
- generally, the status of existing Calgary and Capital regional plans. More particularly, what impact will the existing Growth Plan have on the ICFS that need to be prepared between the 11 municipalities that were removed from the CRB and the remaining members of the CRB?
- how GMB agreements will affect municipalities that aren't in a GMB but need to create ICFS and IDPs with municipalities that are in a GMB.

Prioritize:

- Provincial interests for municipal guidance.

Additional Tools that could assist in Development of MDPs, IDPs, ICFS and GMB documents

- Templates or manuals can be good examples for a starting point and can lead to efficiencies in determining what will be required content, particularly for an ICF or IDP and particularly useful for municipalities with limited resources. However, there is a fear that they can just be “name changes” and not adequately address the real issues.
- There would be value in development of process and administrative checklists to help in plan development.
- Generic terms of reference can help in assessing municipal capacity to develop documents.
 - Tools that can be used before arbitration such as intermunicipal planning commissions and SDABs
- Province-wide knowledge data base/tool kit containing, for example:
 - baseline data/information (e.g. census),
 - economic forecasts,
 - universal base map,
 - environmental data,
 - successful existing intermunicipal agreements across the province,
 - arbitrator/mediator roster and processes, and
 - tools/process for successfully engage First Nations, such as those that would help to understand cultural differences.
- Fiscal planning tools for realistic implementation of plans. The financial viability of new MGA provisions is untested.

Major Concerns regarding Legislated Requirement to Develop MDPs, IDPs, ICFS and GMB documents

Funding and Timelines

- Funding the process of development of these plans is of major concern. Money to hire consultants is key as municipal resources are stretched, particularly given the amount of work that needs to be completed in a short period of time. For smaller municipalities, people with expertise are required.
- Formation of a provincial agency to provide resources, especially to smaller municipalities, was suggested.
- It was generally felt that the timeline is too short. A sliding scale was suggested where municipalities who have capacity to develop documents should have a shorter timeline than those that do not have the expertise or resources. Will rushed documents be useful or harmful?
- Unrealistic timelines may encourage some municipalities to go straight to arbitration. The possibility of a per capita provincial grant or incentive to finish the four documents in two years was discussed, as was expanding eligibility of ACP funds to include development of IDPs and ICFS.
- Yet to be released regulations to implement new MGA provisions are seen as wildcard issues, creating more uncertainty for municipalities trying to understand the impacts. There is a need to move them forward.

Viability of Small Municipalities

- Geography will affect the complexity and viability of successful transitions required as a result of ICFS, particularly for smaller municipalities. Will this lead to amalgamations and are designated ACP funds adequate to address this?
- The financial and capacity burden of developing all four of these documents may also affect the viability of smaller municipalities.

Future Development / Planning Concerns

- Need to focus upstream development on downstream impacts, such as loss of agriculture / watersheds / sand & gravel. There is concern over how the development of these plans fit with water management / Land Use Regions / etc? Are there opportunities to combine lake management plans under one IDP/ICF? Is there a clash between the “provincial vision” and good planning?
- Economic opportunities and revenue sources for municipalities are very limited, breeding competition and imbalance. Does the “assessment grab” overshadow good planning?
- Residential development requires higher levels of hard and soft services, with attendant higher costs for the former. Does the location of future residential development become an issue?
- Municipalities currently clash regarding values, culture and expectations (e.g. servicing standards). How do these issues get resolved in a collaborative way that leads to effective cost and revenue sharing?

Preparing ourselves, our clients and the public for the coming changes

Preparing All

- provide information about what is being dealt with in the plans,
- manage expectation, and
- deal with questions and fears.

Preparing Ourselves

- stay informed,
- reach out to industry colleagues,
- encourage informal discussions amongst planning departments within neighbouring municipalities about what could be a workable process, even before formal negotiations begin,
- understand ground rules,
- enhance communication, participation and leadership skills, and
- identify how to move forward on agreed items

Preparing Clients

- identify how the process and contents will affect councillors and help them to understand the impacts, especially the new councils that will be in place after the election,
- identify and communicate the benefits of both the process and the plans, and
- development of a public participation policy.

Preparing the Public

- well managed engagement, recognizing that the public is overtaxed now,
- identify how the process and plans are relevant to them. Potential fundamental changes to service provision may be embraced or create pushback, and
- implement public participation policy, including appropriate stakeholder participation.

Advice to AMA / AUMA / AADMC

Advice to All

- Stay engaged with planners. Where required, they can provide a generalist approach and can provide insights about how the resulting document can be inclusive to the needs of all parties, recognizing stakeholder differences, while not losing sight of the ability of a document to be implemented.

Advice to AMA

- There is a real need to provide clarity where needed to successfully implement the new provisions of the MGA.
- It is suggested that the Province build in flexibility to encourage clustering of municipalities in the preparation of required documents, allowing more completion time where good faith is demonstrated.

Advice to AUMA and AAMDC

- Planners can offer realistic advice about how to encourage councillors to transition from competition to collaboration.