

# SMART GROWTH

St. Albert

## **PUBLIC CONSULTATION SUMMARY**

### Overview

Smart Growth St. Albert is an initiative undertaken at the direction of Council to look at facilitating development in the annexed lands using Smart Growth principles. There are four guiding Smart Growth principles: Walkability, Livability, Connectivity and Sustainability and the proposed means of implementing these principles is form-based zoning.

### How you participated

A two-phase public consultation program was developed. The first phase of the public consultation for the Smart Growth St. Albert initiative was a series of public orientation sessions. The intent was to provide information and solicit feedback on the concepts of Smart Growth St. Albert and the Form-based zoning approach.

The second phase focused on the Form-based zoning regulations and involved the opportunity of testing the regulations and providing information to the public on how they work, while giving the public and stakeholders the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed zoning regulations.

This document summarizes the comments and questions received. Over 150 people took part in the various sessions that were held. This included the public, representatives from various stakeholder groups, planning and engineering consultants, and City staff. It included six orientation sessions and an open house on the Smart Growth concept, and a workshop and open house on the regulations.



*Workshop participants created Regulating Plan maps using the proposed Form-based zoning regulations.*

### What you said – the Orientation

Orientation sessions were held for city staff, key stakeholder groups and the public. There were 17 different stakeholder groups involved in the orientations, in addition to staff and the public.

*“The areas we love are these kinds of places.”*

The orientation sessions consisted of a presentation on Smart Growth St. Albert and an overview of the proposed Form-based zoning regulations. Following the presentation, participants had the opportunity to ask questions and gain clarity around the concept. A court reporter transcribed a number of the sessions, and handwritten notes were also used to record comments and questions.

#### The Opportunities

☆☆☆ *Creates a stronger community* - People saw Smart Growth as an opportunity to do something different, unique and positive that would give St. Albert an edge. They suggested this would create better communities allowing people to better connect with each other and the community. They see this as a better use of our land and promoting a healthier population.

People suggested Smart Growth allows St. Albert to evolve to something better. It's a great concept and appropriate. One participant suggested two very critical things are required for the successful adoption of this concept – partners who believe in smart growth and are willing to invest in smart growth and convincing people to change past behaviours.

“The areas we love are these kinds of places.”

“Nice to see the thought processes being developed into a long-range plan.”

“I love the initiatives and believe it will help keep our youth and seniors in St. Albert.”

“Hopefully will foster the sense of community and neighbourhood which have been discouraged by the double-garage front on to the street.”

★ ★ ★ *Transit, Walkability & Density* – Participants were pleased with the focus on transit and other active modes of transportation such as walking and cycling. They recognized higher densities are necessary to improve transit efficiency and ridership. They liked the streetscapes with storefronts facing the street.

“...we’ve been contradictory as a community. We want to have our transit system busses full all day every day, but we want to have low density suburbs which do not support transit. We can’t have it both ways. We have to make a choice one way or the other.”

“Walkability is important.”

★ ★ *Housing* – People appreciated the mix of housing types in the same area and recognized the opportunities for more affordable housing opportunities.

“I like the idea of having all types of housing in one walking area.”

★ ★ *Flexibility & Diversity* – People appreciated the opportunities for flexibility and diversity within the proposal. Need a diverse business base to make it work.

★ *Commercial uses* – Participants saw Smart Growth increasing opportunities for small and medium businesses and live-work and will bring more and different types of business to St. Albert.

“I love mixed use”

*Commitment* – The Smart Growth concept is appropriate if guidelines are provided, but landowners need to be onside.

*Sustainability* – The focus should be on sustainability rather than Smart Growth.



*A Workshop participant studies a model neighbourhood built with blocks as an exercise to understand the regulations.*

### The Questions

★ ★ ★ *Costs* – There were many questions about the cost differences between Smart Growth and the conventional approach.

“I’m 90% onside, but it needs to be pragmatic.”

*“In a nutshell it is about changing how we live and how we consume.”*

★ ★ ★ *Commercial development* – There was concern expressed about the support for, and potential success of, local retail within the neighbourhoods. As well, people wondered if non-residents would still be able to access shopping without having to go into the centre of the neighbourhoods. There was a suggestion retailers may not be willing to consider a local design over a standard one.

“Will this not over retail more of a city that is already over-retailed?”

“To create opportunities for small business you will have to get rid of some big box stores. Don’t think the City can, but it is something that would determine success or failure of the small businesses you need to make Smart Growth work.”

★ ★ *Market demand* – Market acceptance for this type of development was questioned by a number of participants. How such a change would position St. Albert competitively within the region was another issue. One respondent suggested the city dictating to consumers, while another questioned if this is what 20-somethings are looking for.

“I’m nervous about market acceptance of this proposal in a suburban community and a new suburban area.”

“Getting rid of a front garage doesn’t make better neighbours.”

★ ★ *Industrial* – People felt there should be more consideration for non-residential and economic growth, and that it focused on business park development rather than industrial.

“We need to welcome clean industry, not small business or offices, by ensuring that large tracts of land are set aside for only this sector of business that we have had to turn away.”

“Developers tend to prefer residential development, this needs to provide teeth for priority land to non-residential use.”

★★ Winter – People wondered if this concept could work in a winter city and whether or not people would walk in the winter.

★ *Commitment* – Participants recognized a strong commitment is necessary, but wondered if the City and Council had the strong commitment to ‘force’ adherence to the new rules. Does a commitment to live within current St. Albert boundaries come with this? Has current council bought into this?

“What resolve is there to uphold this?”

*Environmental* – A couple of participants asked if there were opportunities for more energy efficient ways to develop eg. renewable energy, or for more innovative conservation systems

*Feasibility* – A couple of people asked about the feasibility of Smart Growth in a suburban setting.

“The concept requires a behaviour change and this is a challenge.”

“It is not appropriate.”

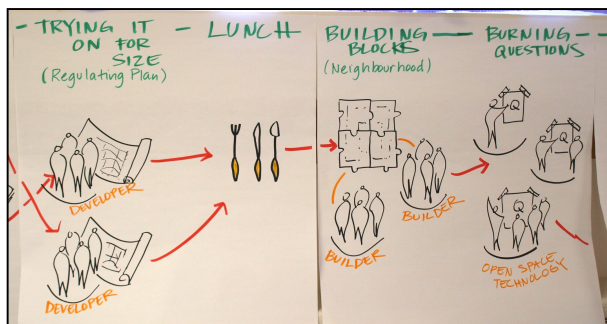
*Neighbourhood Leisure opportunities* – One participant requested more details on recreation facilities in each neighbourhood.

*Modified Grid* – One participant questioned the modified grid street system, wondering about safety and shortcutting issues.

“This is going backwards to 50’s and 60’s with large squares of identical housing.”

## What you said - the Workshop

A key element of the public consultation for the form-based zoning was a workshop with planning and engineering consultants, the people most likely to work closely with the regulations once they are in place.



Part of the workshop agenda.

The intent was to work through and test the regulations with them. This enabled them to get a better understanding of the regulations and their intent, and then to practically use the regulations to create neighbourhoods.

Because the city’s proposed approach to implementing Smart Growth is new and different for our community, this was a unique opportunity to put the proposed regulations to the test with stakeholders to gain meaningful input to improve and strengthen the document prior to taking it to Council.

The response to this approach was very positive and both participants and city staff came away with plenty of food for thought and new directions in which to go.

*“[Smart Growth] puts St. Albert in the vanguard of progressive communities.”*

### The Opportunities

#### *What they liked:*

“The illustrations and graphics clearly illustrated concepts and made it easier to see the built environment in the regulations.”

“It’s neighbourhood oriented, not lot-oriented.”

“The lot lines are incidental and it’s more about how different buildings interrelate.”

“Neighbourhoods are connected and roadways offer new opportunities for development so road is not just a cost.”

“This takes a good idea and makes it work with our legislation.”

“This is logical for St. Albert, it builds on what is already here – green, trails.”

“There is value in going in this direction, it can work.”

“I like density on corridors, at-grade boutiques, eats, drinks, multi-use buildings.”

### The Suggestions

★★★ *Municipal reserve, parks, schools, stormwater facilities* – More clarity is required around the various civic spaces and how these relate to municipal and school reserves and stormwater management requirements.

★ ★ ★ *Back lanes* – These should be encouraged and permitted in more areas like the Neighbourhood Activity Centres. Suggestions included treating them as part of the public realm and using them for walking, gardens or other activities. They should be designed for safety through such measures as fence heights, lighting or over garage suites.

Some suggestions the City will be considering include the fiscal benefit of lanes versus no lanes, ensuring back lanes do not connect to arterials and looking at other similarly designed areas to see if they have met or exceeded the maximum road dedication as outlined in the Municipal Government Act.

★ ★ ★ *Process & document* – The City should consider a design review element in the process, ensure all City documents eg. TMP, MDP are all consistent, more clarity for the ASP process and amendments, and how much discretionary power, assurance for developers before public hearing.

Suggestions the City will be considering include providing a list of acronyms and guidelines to help developers get started on a regulating plan map eg. organizing principles, key concepts, design objectives or a cheat sheet for each zone with quick reference notes.

★ ★ ★ *Engineering Standards* – A number of people questioned the status of the engineering standards related to Smart Growth. Currently the City is undertaking an update of engineering standards based on Smart Growth street corridors and utility placement, a study to address the alignment of the major northern arterial and access management guidelines for St. Albert Trail north. In addition, off-site levies are being reviewed. All of these will serve to define more of the major roads, outline the costs and servicing issues.

The city will continue to consider the impact on snow removal, safety, short-cutting and on-street parking. These have all been part of the discussions with Engineering, Transit and Public Works.

★ ★ *Transitions* – More clarity is needed around transitions regarding height, intensity of use, transit waiting areas incorporated into the built form, and how the transition between industrial and residential uses is dealt with under a form-based approach.

★ ★ *Blocks and Modified Grid Street System* – Participants questioned if the modified grid is the only street system that will be permitted.

Some suggestions the City will be considering include block sizes and depths with regard to large-format commercial and large business park buildings, whether cul-de-sacs can effectively be incorporated into a modified grid, and the maximum block length

compared to the minimum access distance for Community Connector street corridors.

★ *Density and Transit-oriented development* – Participants questioned whether the size and density of the TODs are practical and realistic in a suburban context.

★ *Parking* – Suggestions the City will continue to consider include parkades, traffic jams for park and ride at peak times, on-street commercial and residential visitor parking, drive-way access and visitor parking.

*Other considerations* – A couple of suggestions the City will consider include whether all the uses in existing Land Use Bylaw are still relevant for Smart Growth, and ensuring there is sufficient amenity space on each lot.

*“It is not about stopping consumption or not visiting friends or not going grocery shopping, but it is about doing it differently.”*

## Next Steps

The City is now compiling comments received about the Form-based Regulations.

Council has now extended the timeline for completion of the Smart Growth initiative to allow for the development of some additional supporting information.

A Fiscal Impact Analysis will be conducted.

Additional consultation will be undertaken with Council, staff and stakeholders to strengthen the understanding of the Smart Growth concepts and the Form-based zoning approach. Council feels it is imperative that a full understanding is necessary to ensure a well-informed final decision is made.

It is expected this additional work will continue in the fall of 2009, and the Form-based regulations will proceed to public hearing in early 2010.

If you would like additional information on the public consultation, go to [www.stalbert.ca/smart-growth-documents](http://www.stalbert.ca/smart-growth-documents) Full transcripts or notes are available for the different sessions.

Or contact [smartgrowth@st-albert.net](mailto:smartgrowth@st-albert.net) or 780-459-1642.