

## SMART GROWTH WORKSHOP SUMMARY

*“Walking is the exercise that does not need a gym. It is the prescription without medicine, the weight control without diet, and the cosmetic that can’t be found in a drugstore. It is the tranquilizer without a pill, the therapy without a psychoanalyst, and the holiday that does not cost a penny. What’s more, it does not pollute, consumes few natural resources and is highly efficient. Walking is convenient, it needs no special equipment, is self-regulating and inherently safe.”*

Dan Burden

### SUMMARY

The City’s Planning and Development Department is proposing Smart Growth Regulations to maximize land and resources, while preserving the high quality of life that defines St. Albert. From September 15-17, consultants from the internationally recognized firm Glatting Jackson Anglin Kercher spent time in St. Albert working with the public, staff, landowners and Council. The purpose of this week was to conduct a series of workshops and “audits” over three days to explore smart growth principles for transportation and design and how it can be applied in the City of St. Albert.

Activities included:

- Walkability audit
- Public presentation on walkability and livable transportation
- Design charrette with landowners and developers from the annexed lands
- Walking workshop on Form-based Zoning
- Workshop with council and senior leadership team

The consultants’ work did not include a final report, rather they developed specialized presentations, provided information, and left behind the work developed in the design charrette. The goal of the Smart Growth workshops was to empower staff, Council, and residents to move forward on Smart Growth with more knowledge. This summary provides some of the highlights from the week.

*“Where St. Albert should be going now and for the next generation”*

Participant

*“These ideas are needed in St. Albert.”*

Participant



## WALKABILITY AUDIT (Mobile Workshop)

At least 30 people took part in the Walkability Audit with walkability expert Dan Burden. Dan led the group on a walking audit through St. Albert's downtown into Sturgeon, Braeside and through the Red Willow Park to St. Albert Centre. The purpose of the walking audit was to learn about the elements, design features and standards that encourage walkable places. Dan scrutinized every detail of the pedestrian environment, from crosswalk markings, pedestrian visibility, driveway cuts and locations, to lane widths.

The group then went on to Erin Ridge and finished with a quick stop at the big box development at the north end of the City.

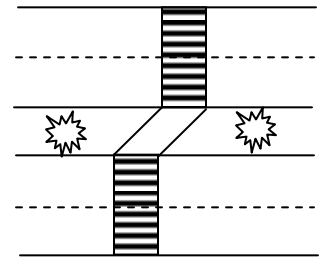


*"There's something new in every city that surprises me."*  
Dan Burden

### **Key Points:**

- Narrowing streets to 2 lanes can result in more efficient traffic flow due to decreased walk signal times (less distance for the pedestrian to travel).
- Wider roads encourage faster vehicle speed.
- People will walk where they feel safe and watched over. Buildings must have sufficient windows to create this comfort factor for pedestrians.
- Reconfigure crosswalks to promote pedestrian eye contact & visibility, such as angling pedestrian crossings over the median for improved visibility and greater safety, see diagram at right.
- Allow sufficient room in each zone of the walkway to comfortably accommodate pedestrians and furnishings (benches, garbage cans).
- Placement and types of fences can promote or deny social interaction.
- Increasing the walk score of a property increases the value of the property. <http://www.walkscore.com/>
- Boulevards separate the road from the sidewalk, creating a safer and more protected walking environment.
- Trails should be easy to locate, and watched over by homes or businesses. Transparent fences are preferred adjacent to trails to improve safety of the trails.
- Small traffic circles at neighbourhood intersections can reduce vehicle speeds while moving them more efficiently.
- Street trees have been found to slow traffic.
- Lack of sidewalks discourages walking.
- On-street parking reduces vehicle speeds.
- Alleys provide a suitable space for garbage, utilities, old vehicles etc. and allow the front streets to be a welcoming public space.
- Cul-de-sacs provide poor street connectivity.
- Front porches are encouraged for neighbourhood interaction.
- Houses with attached garages in front discourage neighbourhood interaction.

*"It's not about giving up your car, it's about giving an opportunity for those who can't drive or don't have a car."*  
Participant



*Angling the crosswalk at the median improves visibility and safety.*



## PUBLIC PRESENTATION

Approximately 50 people from our community attended a presentation and discussion led by Dan Burden and transportation engineer Ian Lockwood. The purpose of the presentation was to identify what makes a city walkable, how walkable St. Albert is, and what could be done to improve walkability in our community.

Prior to the presentation, attendees were provided with five sticky notes. On each sticky note, they were asked to put one word describing what was important about St. Albert, what they liked best and why they chose to live here (See Appendix 1 for a full listing). The top two community values were community/family-friendly and trees/parks/green. A presentation slideshow and discussion followed, identifying specific issues that make a community walkable. Best practices from other communities were highlighted, as well as some key points from the morning's walkability audit.

Land use and transportation planning need to be integrated to provide effective community planning, see diagram at right.



*“New ideas are good for a healthier life that we have forgotten.”*

*Participant*

*“Valuable, wouldn’t see their viewpoint on my own.”*

*Participant*

*“Extremely valuable. It was nice to see principles in action in other places, and the possibility that our city could achieve the same.”*

*Participant*

*“It was a little disheartening to realize how bad things have become in St. Albert, even though, subconsciously, we knew that something was not right.”*

*Participant*

*“Hopeful.”*

*Participant*

### **Key Points:**

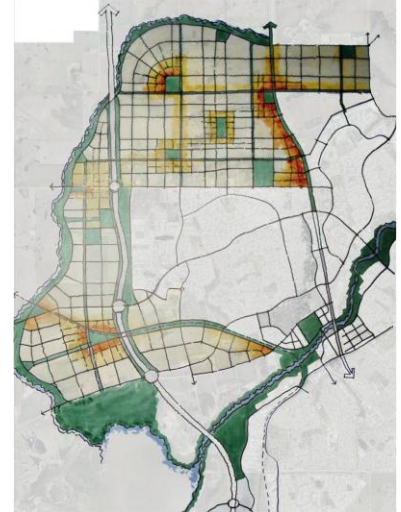
- Walkable/age-in-place communities promote a healthier lifestyle.
- We have built cities to accommodate cars rather than people since the invention of the automobile.
- Communities need to give residents alternative transportation choices so they may age in place.
- Improve street design that considers the pedestrian first and foremost.
- Include traffic calming measures to slow vehicle speeds.
- Sustainable communities are successful communities.
- Street connectivity can be achieved with many different patterns, including grid, radial and web.
- Cities exist to bring people together for effective exchange. Cities that are spread out discourage these exchanges.
- Two types of exchanges:
  - Planned* - If you drive to the drugstore to buy toothpaste.
  - Unplanned* - If you walk to the drugstore you could have many unplanned exchanges such as chatting with a neighbor, patting an animal, stopping for ice cream. More unplanned exchanges can make the experience more enriching.
- Transportation has always helped us build our economy. Sadly, the reverse is also true.



## LANDOWNERS' DESIGN CHARRETTE

About a dozen landowners and their representatives spent the day learning about smart growth concepts and form-based zoning, and how they could provide the framework for development in the annexed lands. The purpose of the charrette was to provide information, practice the application of the regulations, and reflect on the opportunities and challenges presented with Smart Growth.

The day began with a review of the issues and constraints in the annexed lands, and a presentation by Ian Lockwood. Afterwards, participants broke into two groups and developed potential designs for the annexed lands with Ian and urban designer J.P. Weesner. For ease of overall development, land outside the city was included to show the overall potential of development, for the future. Later, the two designs, which were very similar, were put together into one Concept Plan, see diagram to the right. More details of the concept plan are included in Appendix 2.



*The development concept created by participants that included both landowners and developers.*

*It includes primarily low-density residential with nodes of higher intensity uses around civic space.*

### **Key Points:**

- The street framework for a connected street network should be developed first, with building placement and orientation adapting to the stage of development and market. This works extremely well for big box supercentres, ensuring when these buildings have outlived their need, the site is easier and more economical to redevelop incrementally. See Appendix 3 for an outline of how a street framework could have been used as the basis for St. Albert's big box development.
- Consider how highway access should be developed with Ray Gibbon Drive, which divides St. Albert from the annexed land.
- Shopping centres should be more pedestrian-oriented, with a park-once approach and amenities.
- Multiple uses in buildings are a good thing. This could include different compatible uses together, or it could allow for changing uses over time.



## FORM-BASED ZONING MOBILE WORKSHOP

Form-based code specialist Tara Salmieri took a group of 12 staff and other planning professionals on a walking workshop throughout the downtown discussing a wide variety of aspects of St. Albert's downtown. The purpose was to look at practical local examples of how form-based zoning could be used to ensure a more comfortable, viable and pedestrian friendly environment.

Form-based codes are simple, they're clear and easy to understand. They streamline the process of development and redevelopment and ensure it is in keeping with the community's values and aspirations.

*Avoid dead space like an opening between two buildings or parking between the building and sidewalk. Maximize the continuity of the street frontage, even if it means shallower buildings.*

*"I learned that similar businesses are too spread out in our downtown, they need to be grouped together to create greater synergies and increase activity."*  
Participant

### **Key Points:**

- Design buildings with relationships to the streets, keeping pedestrians in mind.
- Make transitions/walkways between private and public spaces comfortable, enjoyable and interesting.
- Use 90-100% building frontage requirements to avoid dead zones on main streets.
- Varying a build-to line up to 5 feet can add visual interest and protect pedestrians in harsher climates.
- Create visual interest by changing architectural elements and proper scale for pedestrians.
- Think about corners. Buildings should frame the corner, ensure they front both streets. Height helps define the intersection.
- Think about how the street performs, how does the building relate to the street and to parks and open space.
- Use minimum heights as well as maximums to ensure streetscapes are balanced and flow well.
- Parking should be secondary to buildings and not be placed between the building and the street.
- Need a mix of residential and commercial to ensure 24 hour uses.
- Think about your views, put benches or create spaces where people can enjoy the vistas.

*"The highlight for me was the sidewalk discussion . . . a minimum 4 foot furnishing zone (next to the street for mailboxes, garbage cans, signs, etc), the 8 foot Walk 'n' Talk or pedestrian traffic zone, shy zone (the 2 feet closest to the building for planters or benches)."*  
Participant

*The "bump" on St. Thomas street impedes business. A suggestion is that is be redeveloped with angle parking, a smaller median between...and the possibility of a fountain (civic space) at the intersection...*



## WORKSHOP FOR COUNCIL AND SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM

Three Councillors, the City Manager and four General Managers attended a three-hour workshop where the consultants presented best practices for Smart Growth and incorporated some of the results of the other activities from the week. Participants had an opportunity to ask questions.

The consultant's presentation included:

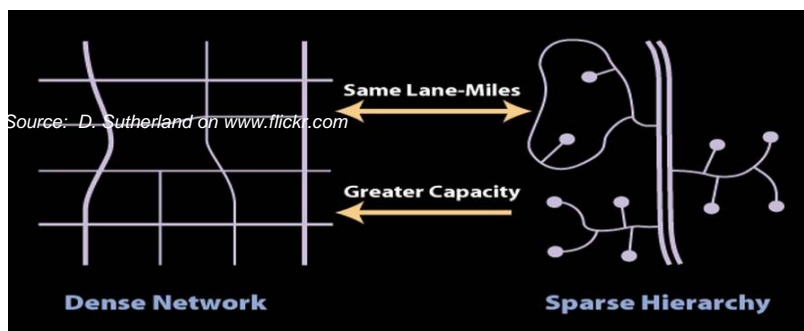
- A review of the Week's Events
- History of Land Development and the City
- City Making and Real Examples
- What is Form Based Code
- Things to Consider for St. Albert



*St. Anne Street in front of St. Albert Place is much wider than required for traffic flow levels. Removing the lights and adding a median would actually improve both traffic and pedestrian flow.*

### **Key Points:**

- The City is a place where exchange needs to happen. How our cities are designed determines whether or not that exchange can happen.
- A well-connected network of streets can facilitate a greater capacity of traffic.
- The outcomes of conventional development are: isolated neighbourhoods, multiple automobile trips, poor mobility, difficult walking, health problems, wider roads, induced traffic, more traffic, high energy use.
- The outcomes of a healthy development cycle integrates land use and transportation planning, creating community planning or Smart Growth. The outcomes are: healthier neighbourhoods, choices of transportation, more open space, sense of place and community, more walking and bicycling, increased access.
- Form-based zoning is a method of regulating the physical aspect of our city to achieve better commerce, healthier people, less resource consumption, context-oriented character.
- Form-based zoning focuses on compatibility of buildings, streets, open spaces and corridors and the edges and transitions between them to create a complete public realm.
- People once fled the cities for their health. Today people are returning to cities . . . for their health.
- Real centres are walkable and focus around primary public and civic spaces.
- We cannot build our way out of traffic. Vehicle miles travelled in the US increased 70% over the last 20 years. Highway construction increased 2 percent.



Is this the landscape we want to leave our children?



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APPENDIX ONE: SUMMARY OF VISION STATEMENTS

*Community/Family/Friendly (58)*

Friendly/Neighbourliness (9)  
 Small community/city,  
 Small-scale (8)  
 Family (6)  
 Sporting/recreation (4)  
 Community (3)  
 Neighbours (3)  
 People (2)  
 Children/Child-friendly (2)  
 Historic/Heritage (2)  
 Mature neighbourhoods

Neighbourhoods  
 Senior-friendly  
 Supportive  
 Friends  
 Home  
 Warm  
 Stress-free  
 Suburban  
 Community services  
 Library  
 Arden

Culture  
 Housing quality  
 Resalability  
 Vivid  
 Engaging  
 Spiritual  
 Freedom

*Trees/Parks/Green (48)*

Trees (7)  
 Green (7)  
 Quiet (6)  
 Natural (4)  
 Parks (4)

Boulevards/streetscapes (4)  
 Beautiful (3)  
 Lake, Big Lake, Lacombe  
 Lake (3)  
 River (3)

Space/Open space (2)  
 Sunsets  
 Dry climate  
 Seasons of Weather  
 Wildlife  
 Foraging

*Safe (10)*

Safe (9)

Clean (1)

*Walkable/Trails (10)*

Trails/Walkways (8)  
 Interconnected  
 Walkable

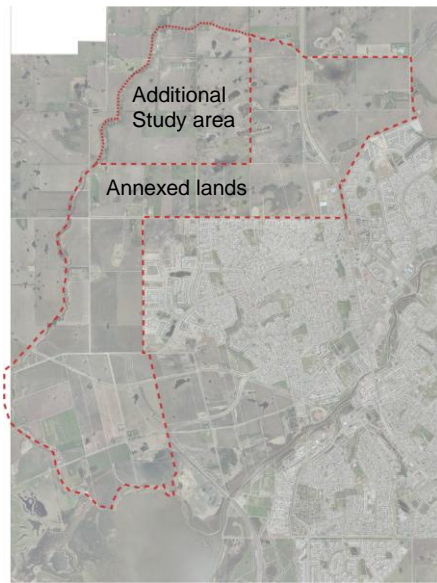
*Jobs/Convenient (12)*

Work (3)  
 Transit (2)  
 Commutability

Convenience  
 Proximity  
 Location

Accessible  
 Short distances to services  
 All amenities available

APPENDIX TWO: STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP CONCEPT PLAN



Annexed area + additional study area



Stakeholder workshop concept plan

*To create a full concept plan, it was decided to include the annexed lands and the additional study area, thinking to the long-term future of St. Albert.*

*The combined concept plan of the working groups.*



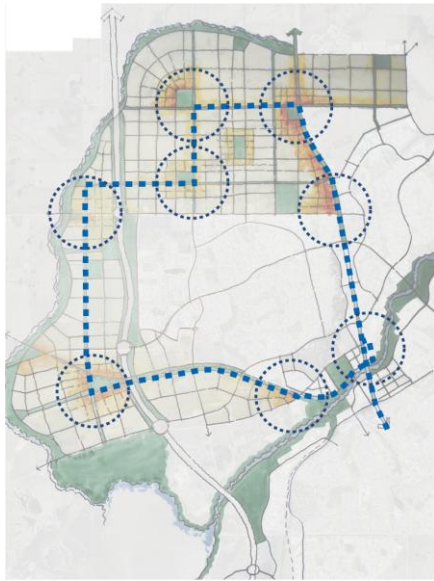
Access points to & across highways



Transit route

*St. Albert Trail and Ray Gibbon Drive act as significant barriers between different sections of the City. It was important to ensure access points both to and across the highways.*

*A circular transit route links the new areas to the downtown.*



Transit nodes



Neighbourhoods

*Transit nodes include concentrations of higher intensity residential, commercial, institutional and parks or squares to create a destination and support transit.*

*Many smaller residential neighbourhoods would fill in the area between the transit nodes.*

APPENDIX THREE: CONFIGURING A BIG BOX SITE



*The Challenge: How could this site have been designed to make it easier to negotiate around it, to enable this type of big box development and facilitate future redevelopment of the site?*

*The Solution: Street Framework first*



*The current 'street framework' of the site makes it awkward for additional development or redevelopment and makes it challenging for customers to get around the site.*



*With only a few adjustments from the current layout, a more logical 'street framework' would still allow the same developments and parking areas. Buildings would frame the 'streets.' Utilities would run in the 'streets' ensuring logical parcels for future development.*



*New mixed used development can fit easily into the street framework. There is still surface parking and it's now feasible to include some structured parking.*



*As demands and the market changes and big box stores are beyond their usable life, more mixed use development can easily fit into the street structure.*