



## Official Community Plans

An official community plan (OCP) is a statement of objectives and policies to guide decisions on planning and land use management. It is adopted by a local government as a bylaw, and sets out the form and character of existing and proposed land use and servicing requirements. It is a vision statement for how the community will grow.

An OCP *must* contain map designations and policy statements on some specific issues, such as:

- residential housing;
- commercial, industrial, institutional, agricultural, recreational and public utility land uses;
- location and area suitable for future sand and gravel extraction;
- restrictions on the use of land subject to hazardous conditions or environmentally sensitive to development;
- location and phasing of major road, sewer and water systems;
- location and type of public facilities such as school, parks and waste treatment and disposal sites;
- policies for affordable housing, rental housing and special needs housing.

OCP's can also include policies relating to other matters within a local governments jurisdiction.

However, an OCP cannot regulate developments outside a municipality's boundaries, or on land it does not control, such as land in the Agricultural Land Reserve, First Nations land, or Crown land. OCP's must be consistent with [regional growth strategies](#), and may be [coordinated](#) with other plans.

### Developing an OCP

Before the public hearing on a new OCP or OCP amendment, the council or board must consult with "persons, organizations and authorities it considers will be affected." This authority is very broad and allows councils and boards to decide what level of consultation is needed.

Prior to the adoption or amendment of an OCP, a [public hearing](#) must be held, giving all persons who believe that their interests in property are affected the right to be heard.

Many local governments also develop **local area plans** or neighbourhood plans, to state in more detail specific requirements for a defined area. This allows consultation to focus on the needs of a particular neighbourhood.

## Effect of an OCP

OCPs do not directly regulate the specifics of land development and do not authorize capital expenditures (e.g. just because a park is shown in an OCP doesn't mean that the Local Government has committed the money to purchase the land for it). However, they set the overall development context for a community and all bylaws and works must be consistent with them. This includes [zoning bylaws](#), [capital expenditures](#), and [development permits](#). OCP's also provide direction to subdivision approving officers and councilors. It is important that OCPs include precise policy statements and guidelines that will provide more precise standards for land use decisions.

In practice, bylaws and works are seldom invalidated because of inconsistency with an OCP. Courts require that there be a "direct conflict" between the OCP provision and a bylaw provision – rather than merely a tension – before they will strike down a law. In practice, if a local government wants to amend a zoning bylaw that would make it inconsistent with the OCP, both the OCP and the zoning bylaw will be amended at the same time. These minor amendments, over time, result in significant changes to the OCP and development direction for the community.

While the objectives and policies in an OCP will rarely result in a bylaw or work being struck down, sections of an OCP that require permits can give an OCP teeth. The OCP may set out areas in which:

- [development permits](#) will be required, as well as specifying guidelines as to when council should issue a permit;
- Special information (known as [development approval information](#)) may be required before development can proceed; or
- [temporary commercial and industrial use permits](#) can be required under the OCP.

## Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA)

While ESAs may be designated in an OCP, there is no further requirement that a local government impose restrictions on land use once the ESA has been identified for the council or board. It is only when restrictions on the development of ESA land are imposed, they must be included in the OCP as statements and map designations.

### *Related Guide Pages:*

- [Local Government Act](#)
- [Local Government Planning](#)
- [Development Permits](#)
- [Local Government Act – Miscellaneous Tools](#)

### *For more information on official community plans:*

- West Coast Environmental Law's [The Smart Growth Guide to Local Government Law and Advocacy](#) (2001).
- [OCP Purpose and Content](#) and [OCP Process and Consultation](#) – Two October 2000 Bulletin of the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services.
- "Official Community Plans" from the Successful Communities Forum's [Citizen's Guide to Development Planning](#).



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