

Best Practice

CAMPAIGN NAME

CONTACT

Municipalities:

Saskatoon North Partnership for Growth (P4G) Planning District including:

- R.M. of Corman Park
- City of Martensville
- Town of Osler
- City of Saskatoon
- City of Warman

Phone number: 306-242-9303

Project Date: 2014 to present

Project video: <https://youtu.be/yHAJMJGUmxU>

THE PRACTICE

What was the issue?

Given the unprecedented growth rates over the past two decades, the municipalities wanted to ensure the P4G region was prepared for growth and economic prosperity for all. This reinforced the need for a coordinated approach to regional planning and servicing. The partnering municipalities agreed that they needed to develop and adopt a long term view and plan for land use and servicing that was regional in scope.

What was the project?

The approved P4G Planning District bylaws and the Regional Plan process that led to them can easily be considered one of the most, if not the most extensive, collaborative regional planning exercise to occur in Saskatchewan. The establishment of the new P4G Planning District on January 1, 2022.

THE PROCESS

Building on the success of the 2013 Regional Summit, the five P4G municipalities formalized their relationship through a set of foundational documents which were drafted by planning administrations and endorsed by each member in the spring 2014. The foundational documents included:

1. A terms of reference (TOR) which set out guiding principles for the members, who was included in the membership, how decision making would be done during plan development and the main committee structures. This also outlined the scope and mandate for the committees and the reporting structures within and external to municipal Councils. The TOR also included the main components of the Regional Plan project including a state of the region background report; an interim development strategy to allow some R.M. development projects to proceed while we were drafting the regional plan; a regional land use map and servicing schemes; and implementation strategies including potential changes in regional governance and administrative structures.
2. We also created a work plan and task breakdown for the development of the Regional Plan, including the hiring of a consultant and project manager.
3. Our foundational documents also included a high level communications and engagement strategy to provide guidance on how and when the information should be shared with stakeholders, rights holders and the public.
4. A budget for the development of the Regional Plan, including a percentage breakdown of the funding. Of note is that the five municipalities funded the entire Regional Plan project over the years without external funding.

It was important at the very start for the partners to recognize the need to set up a framework for how they would work together. Moving from one-on-one inter-jurisdictional conversations to include multiple parties took everyone a moment to get used to. These documents also provided good reference documents during the release of the RFP for the regional plan consultant.

We hired a consultant to assist in getting the work complete. O2 Planning & Design, our consultant, knew that we were five municipalities who may have had different perspectives and priorities. To create a Regional Plan, we needed to start off by agreeing on a vision and a set of guiding principles. We used a principle-based approach, not a position-based approach. In other words, instead of coming to the table with an individual mentality of “I want”, we came to it using agreed to principles for what’s best for the region. By using these principles as a guide, it was helpful when we got stuck at working through issues, we went back and asked ourselves what was being proposed – e.g. a land use designation on the map, the wording of a draft policy – how does it meet these regional principles or does it?

After 3 years of listening to feedback and working with our partners, on June 1, 2017, we publicly released the draft Regional Plan as well as the regional servicing strategy and the regional governance and implementation strategy. This was followed by all five municipal Council endorsements in fall 2017. The documents were filed with the province so development proposals in the region could be evaluated on the draft

policies as over the years the Regional Plan was being developed, Corman Park had certain areas restricted by the province from developing.

Our consultant also drafted a servicing strategy to provide high level guidance on how to approach regional water, wastewater, drainage and infrastructure corridors as servicing is a critical component to consider and was the topic of many discussions as we worked through the land use map. Servicing issues continue to dominate current P4G discussions such as regional levies, utility rates, provision of regional servicing and plant expansions.

A governance and implementation strategy was also drafted to provide guidance on how to make it work going forward including a recommended work plan and time line for future studies as we developed P4G business plans and budgets. While some components of this strategy got refined as we developed the P4G Planning District, it outlined initial processes for development application referrals and amending the land use map, particularly prior to it being part of a Ministerial approved document.

Following municipal approval of the regional plan in 2017, P4G decided to formalize the policies of the regional plan into a new Planning District via a new District agreement, Official Community Plan (OCP) and Zoning Bylaw. We took the regional plan as a foundation for the District OCP but reworded into policy and bylaw language which underwent legal review afterwards. Zoning Bylaw work happened simultaneously with drafting the OCP. One of our strategies was for the urban municipalities to prioritize regulations needing all municipal review vs the ones that the only impacted Corman Park and they were looking to modernize or better enforce.

The P4G District OCP and Zoning Bylaw were approved by the municipalities in 2021. The province created the P4G Planning District for establishment on January 1, 2022.

During development of the Regional Plan it was important to use a number of committees to get the work done. The Regional Oversight Committee, otherwise known as the ROC, consisted of three elected officials from each of the municipalities. This strategic steering committee provided direction and feedback during creation of the P4G Regional Plan and beyond. Municipal Council endorsement or approvals of any major decisions coming out of ROC are required, however for the purposes of decision making to move the project along, having a small group of elected officials at the table was critical. We decided ROC would meet quarterly at a minimum but at important stages of plan development the frequency was increased.

The Regional Oversight Executive Committee, or REC, consisted of the Mayors & Reeve along with the P4G Director. This group provided human resource direction to the director and reported to ROC. Since it was a smaller group, there were times when REC checks ins were leveraged in between ROC meetings on a strategic issue. PAC or the Planning and Administrative Committee, consists of planning directors, senior planners and other senior administrators from each municipality. PAC typically met monthly or more often, as needed to provide administrative guidance to the ROC.

PAC was essentially a working group along with the project manager and consultant in the development of the regional plan.

SuperPAC included PAC and other top administrators, that met as needed on strategic policy issues to resolve them or provide options leading into ROC meetings. These were held irregularly but were useful in ensuring that senior advice and directions on municipal and regional issues was resolved, especially those that transcended planning issues.

Some of these committee no longer meet, while others are going through a transformation now that the P4G Planning District is in place. However for the purposes of the work over the past 8 years, these were the four main committees, along side the previous District Planning Commission and other informal relationships, that provided the main drive force behind P4G.

P4G has been engaging the public for a decade. Following the Regional Summit in 2013, work began on the P4G Regional Plan including an extensive public, rightsholder and stakeholder engagement program. Following completion of the Regional Plan in 2017, this engagement was carried through into the development of the P4G Planning District Official Community Plan and Zoning Bylaw.

Some of the parties included in engagement were:

- Citizens, Landowners, Community Associations and Hamlet Boards
- First Nations and Metis communities
- Saskatoon Public Health Region/Saskatchewan Health Authority
- Public and Separate School Divisions
- Police, Emergency and Protective Services
- Meewasin Valley Authority
- Saskatoon Airport Authority
- Special Interest Groups
- Business Associations, Chamber of Commerce, etc.
- Community Service and Utility Providers
- Septic Haulers and Solid Waste Companies
- Home Builders Associations and Developers
- Educational Partners
- Non-Profit Organizations
- Provincial Ministries and Crown Corporations
- Transportation Providers and Rail Companies
- Federal and Provincial Agencies

Engagements included four public open house events, seven targeted information sessions, one-on-one meetings, an online survey and many opportunities for feedback through social media channels.

Additionally, the project team worked closely with representatives from all of the First Nations with reserves or land holdings within or near the P4G study area including:

- Cowessess First Nation
- English River First Nation
- Lac La Ronge Indian Band
- Little Pine First Nation
- Moosomin First Nation
- Muskoday First Nation
- Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation
- Saulteaux First Nation
- Yellow Quill First Nation

Staff resources were provided by all municipalities as required, including dedicated staff on PAC. A consultant and project manager were hired in 2014-2017 to complete the Regional Plan work. Since the P4G Planning District bylaw work was being done concurrently, staff resources were pulled then and more resources were needed to get the documents across the goal line. The Regional Oversight Committee hired a P4G Director to assist in completing the work in 2019.

THE RESULTS

Through the process of creating the new planning district we still faced a number of pressing issues in the region. The municipalities knew drainage issues weren't going away and the new planning district wasn't going to solve that just by creating an OCP. On top of the other planning work, P4G also prioritized and budgeted for the completion of environmental and natural areas screenings, drainage studies and concept plans in strategic growth areas in the region.

Continuing to deliver on these small wins for P4G allowed us to keep momentum throughout the years and highlight the importance of working together on inter-municipal issues. Now that the Planning District is in place we are prioritizing the next levels of work and finalizing work underway. Some of this work includes:

- A regional market study;
- A number of regional servicing plans such as a regional wastewater and potable water strategy;
- Some longer term studies include a wetlands inventory and policy, natural and heritage resource inventory and a natural areas strategy.

We also want to undertake further concept plan work as there is a lot of development pressures in the region and there is benefit to completing that work together as municipalities to be ready for growth.

This cooperative spirit continues to drive us towards our vision for the future which is a vibrant, prosperous, and internationally competitive region. We want to be known for a high quality of life; a thriving and diverse economy; healthy and connected ecosystems; and efficient infrastructure supporting sustainable growth and development. We know

the aesthetic beauty and ecological values of the region's prairie landscapes are key components to our quality of life. P4G works in partnership on issues of common interest through integrated, coordinated efforts that support our success while respecting the individual aspirations of all partners.

LESSONS LEARNED

Regional or inter-municipal planning provides greater certainty for investors, businesses, residents; overlaid with challenges associated with understanding where there may be competing interests. We know that municipalities are not always politically ready to plan together – we're used to making decisions independently, and to plan for the good of the region means we need to surrender some of that autonomy. The challenges can go beyond just funding or who pays for what. Some of the advice we would have includes:

- Focus on principles not positions: We would recommend taking time early in the process to define your principles and regularly commit to checking back in on them both in good times and in bad.
- Capitalize on small wins, find ways to build momentum such as completion of drainage studies as that was a regional issue identified. However one of the challenges was celebrating successes more often for us, especially in the end as the project wrapped up.
- Have the right people at the table, bring in senior administration when needed to give direction or make a decision if you are not provided that direction going into a meeting.
- Create regular check ins for strategic direction to ensure you get political buy-in throughout the process. As long as things took, it would have been more challenging trying to explain everything P4G related during the decision making process in the end.
- Invite feedback into the process and be willing to sit, listen and learn to those who have something to share. Build local support for change.
- Flexibility is key, if you are only coming to the table to get your way, it's a waste of time. You need to be able to negotiate and find principle based solutions.
- Flexibility also involved recognizing that regional planning can take time, even with the best of intentions, what you think will be a two year process is likely to exceed that, but take it from us the outcome is worth the efforts.
- A more efficient use of time would have been to do legal review while documents being drafted rather than after the fact.
- Enjoy the process and try to have fun as much as you can!