

Heritage Key to Sustainability in Olds

The role of heritage in balancing growth and economic development is seldom heralded in these booming times. Yet for the town of Olds, it is set to become an integral part of the municipal development plan. Since early 2007, Olds has chart a course for achieving municipal sustainability with a key element being to “preserve and interpret heritage resources as an expression of community pride and to encourage the preservation of significant sites and buildings.”

Olds is not doing this alone. The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Alberta Environment and the Natural Step Canada are working with Olds, as well as with Thorhild, Chauvin, Pincher Creek and Claresholm as part of a pilot project to create sustainable communities. The project is based on The Natural Step’s award –winning framework for strategic decision making that allows “systematic step-by-step approaches towards a clear picture of sustainability, while reducing financial risk and supporting design and innovative decisions in business and government.”

The move for municipalities to create sustainable development plans to supplement the municipal development plans comes as communities across the province are seeking ways to balance growth along with quality of life. Sustainability plans are based on values derived from economic, environmental, and social/cultural benefits. They provide a forum for community participation that allows innovative solutions to address these aspects with a vision towards the future.

Historic building preservation fits within the Town’s vision of sustainable planning. Fewer new resources will be used and there is an increased emphasis on reuse of existing materials with the benefit that valuable farmland is retained as the Town supports the sustainability of the downtown. This leads to increased social, economic and cultural benefits as a vibrant centre contributes to a stronger social network and greater community satisfaction.

So when the town of Olds, along with the Olds Institute for Community and Regional Development - Uptowne Committee, wanted to enhance the Uptowne core for the benefit of the future, they looked to their past. Olds is home to the renowned Olds College, established in 1913, and the town has a diverse range of architectural structures throughout the downtown core as well. Yet with the exception of the Brown residence, no sites in Olds have yet been designated as heritage resources.

To gain a better understanding of the scope of heritage resources within the municipality the town of Olds applied to the MHPP for a Municipal Heritage Survey grant in June, 2007. The Town’s commitment of \$20,000 to the project was matched by MHPP and the Survey is anticipated to be complete by this autumn.

The completed survey marks the first step for Olds. Upon its completion, Olds proposes to begin a Municipal Heritage Inventory to evaluate sites for historic significance, followed by the creation of a comprehensive Heritage Management Plan. These steps will allow the Town to apply to the Main Street Program that will allow them further support to enhance the heritage plank in their sustainability plan. The result anticipated - a renewed downtown that reflects the Town’s proud past while looking towards a continued bright future.

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