

Hybrid Codes

The following excerpt is the executive summary from a full report that was commissioned in 2019 August, for Administration to provide an overview of the emerging best practice in zoning – the hybrid code. The report provides an overview of what a hybrid code is, why they are important, who is doing them, and what can be learned for The City of Calgary in the consideration of a new land use bylaw. The full report titled *Hybrid Codes: A Best Practice for Land Use Planning* can be found online [here](#).

Executive Summary

The land use bylaw is the only regulatory tool for municipalities in Alberta to regulate the use and development of land and are critically important in affecting how a city evolves over time. Most bylaws are based on a primarily use-based approach developed in the early twentieth century. While attempts have been made to better align bylaw regulations with a city's strategic direction, the approach is fundamentally flawed. As many municipalities are grappling with a better way to implement the policies of their comprehensive plans, hybrid codes are emerging as the best practice.

A hybrid code is an adaptation of the use-based regulations with a newer form-based approach. This approach balances these two types of development standards while uniquely focusing on a more predictable, outcome-based application process. A hybrid code is the outcome in the creation of clear, quantifiable standards expressing the 3-dimensional vision for a city. It respects a community's current state while accommodating future growth. When planning policy is implemented through use of a hybrid code and clearly defined application process:

- The user experience is elevated;
- Processing times are reduced; and,
- Expectations set with community members and stakeholders are respected.

The use of a hybrid code becomes a key tool for delivering the vision of the Municipal Development Plan.

An integration of form and use standards in a bylaw is not new. Most have traditionally included both elements. However, what is unique about a hybrid code is the relationship between form, use and the application process. Instead of use over form, or form over use, a hybrid code balances the two equally to be organized by the application process. Three of the most prominent hybrid code examples in North America are High River, Alberta; Halifax, Nova Scotia; and Denver, Colorado. These examples show:

- The ability to adopt a municipal-wide hybrid code in Alberta with recognized success in strengthening relationships with community and stakeholders;
- How a larger Canadian municipality's use of a hybrid code permitted an overwhelming success of new development and expansion of the approach to established communities; and
- How adopting a hybrid code through an incremental progression encourages the integration of context-sensitive design through a layered approach.

For Calgary to deliver a new hybrid code, key considerations recommended include:

1. Building on the learnings and success of the mixed-use main street districts and the Guidebook for Great Communities as the foundation for creating a made-in-Calgary code;
2. Re-focusing the code on form to provide more clarity on the strategic implementation of the Municipal Development Plan;
3. Defining clear and predictable outcome-based standards so as not to burden individual applications with strategic decisions;
4. Developing clear application processes that reinforce quantitative regulations; and,
5. Elevating the user experience of the bylaw to reduce cross-referencing and confusion of interpretation.

Together, these recommendations would result in a predictable application process with quantified design standards that allow for a mix of uses appropriate to different areas of the city. The various elements of a complete community are defined and known to all users and stakeholders, conveyed in a bylaw that first and foremost is easy to understand.