



# Land Use Decisions

A Non-planner Perspective





What are any  
Council's  
land use  
goals?

To make decisions that will:

- Reduce conflict
- Provide predictability
- Maximize the value of the land
- Ensure the use is sustainable
- Promote growth
- Get public support



## Pressures and Pitfalls

- Staff who want consistency with planning documents
- General reluctance on everyone's part to pay the cost of sustainability
- Concession demands from landowners and developers
- Faulty logic and incorrect assumptions
- Loud vested interests
- Taxpayers that are hard to engage and who are sometimes silent
- Too many Acronyms!



## The Process

How it works...

- Grand-daddy documents like your Inter-municipal Development Plans and Municipal Development Plan lay out Council's principles and vision.
- Area Structure Plans for large, defined areas say how the land will be used and how it will work with infrastructure and transportation systems.
- Detailed Outline Plans paint the full picture of a neighbourhood.
- Council approves a specific development after everyone has their say.



## The Reality

- It's very easy to set lofty aspirations and very hard to see, when doing higher level plans, how those principles will play out in real life.
- Vested interests have a lot at stake and Councils feel a lot of pressure.
  - Land owners and developers have their own goals.
  - NIMBY is a powerful force e.g. secondary suites!
  - Your municipal neighbours might have opinions that conflict with yours.
- Most of your residents won't pay attention until the building starts. That will be your fault.
- There are no do-overs and your decisions will likely outlive you.



## Your Political Tools

- Staff research and recommendations
- Existing planning framework and related studies
- The process itself...there is a lot of wisdom in the bureaucratic process we love to deride
- Communication Strategies
- Public Engagement/ upfront controversy is your friend
- The right to decide last i.e. resist the urge to take positions early in the process as backing up is hard to do



## Keep In Mind

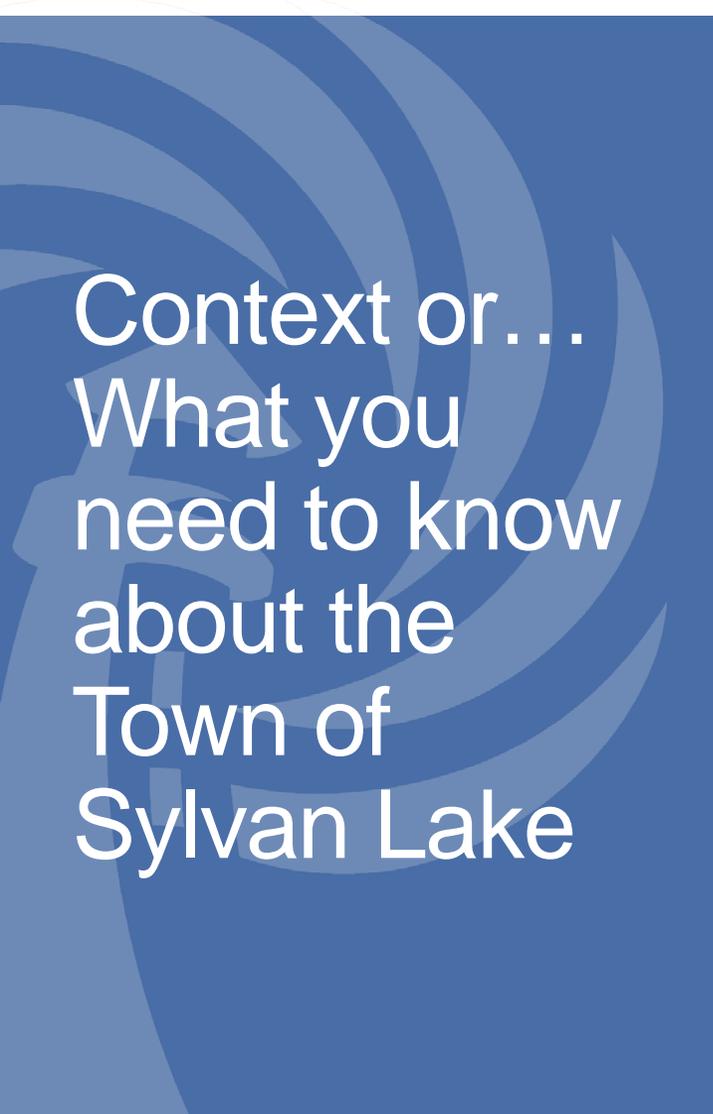
- Think beyond today. If you are not good at that find someone who is to help.
- Remember your mistakes, and your successes, will be around for a very long time.
- Pay now or pay later for poor environmental decisions. Later looks to be more expensive!
- Never make a decision before you get all the information.
- Debrief and learn from successes and mistakes, your own and those of others



What are  
some of the  
lessons from  
Sylvan Lake?

## Betty's Picks:

- Marina Bay
- Chateau Suites
- Lakeshore Drive Redevelopment
- SWARP



## Context or... What you need to know about the Town of Sylvan Lake

- Population of 14,816
- Located midway between Edmonton and Calgary, 16 km. west of Highway 2
- Fastest growing urban agglomerate in Canada
- Population younger than the Alberta average
- Main economic sectors are tourism and oilfield support services
- Social and cultural identity very focused on Sylvan Lake



# Marina Bay

Beautiful but was it a good decision?



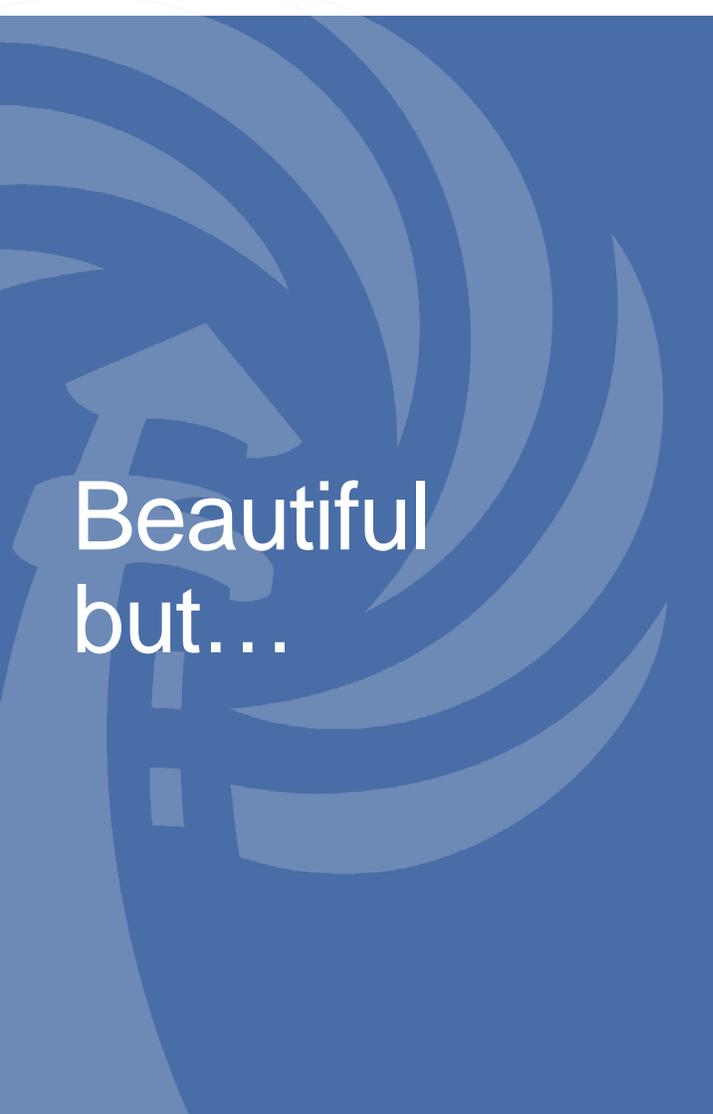
## MARINA BAY



- Residential Community
- Private Boat Launch & Docking Facilities
- Anchoring Prohibited
- No Trespassing or Fishing

*Thank You!*





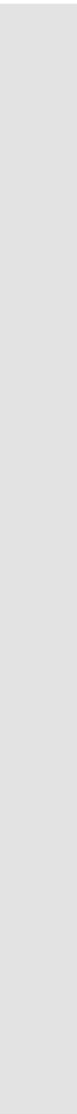
Beautiful  
but...

- Single residential Lakeshore community built surrounding a private marina
  - a significant development for the community at the time
  - homes with high assessment value
- Occupies a significant portion of the limited shoreline within the Town boundary
  - restricts public access to the lake
  - no added value to the tourism economy
- Build on the only inlet to Sylvan Lake
  - silt build up in the bay
  - warmer water/blue green algae risk
  - minimal set backs affecting shoreline vegetation and possibly water quality



# Chateau Suites

If we could turn back time...





CHATEAU SUITES

LAKEBOHIO  
SUNSET PLAZA  
CUSTOMER  
PARKING  
ONLY  
50 MIN. MAX.  
ALL OTHERS  
WILL BE TOWED  
AT OWNER'S  
EXPENSE

T-SHIRT TIME





## The facts...

- Built in 2003
- Under Council 'direct control'
- Public input process was held
- Site was adjacent to the old waterslides
- Originally proposed as part of a complex that included a restaurant, a marina and a convention centre
- Pedestrian access between the lake and the building was protected



## Regrets....

- No setback from the lake as lake protection was not a great issue at the time.
- Restricts public access to the lakeshore.
- Occupies space that could be part of a tourism attractor.
- Mass of building feels out of place, like a solid wall between pedestrians, motorists and the lake. This was more pronounced when the massive waterslides were adjacent to the building.



# Lakeshore Drive Redevelopment Phases 1-6

Even the die hard critics admit it's beautiful...

# Centennial Park

BEFORE PHOTOS









# Cottage and Lakeshore

BEFORE PHOTOS







# Centennial Park

AFTER PHOTOS







# Commercial Lakeshore

AFTER PHOTOS









# Cottage and Lakeshore

AFTER PHOTOS







# Improvements

- Changed a busy highway into a pedestrian friendly area.
- Created space for a new lakeshore park.
- Increased visitor amenities.
- Significantly ramped up the visual appeal.



# SWARP

Sustainable Waterfront Redevelopment Plan

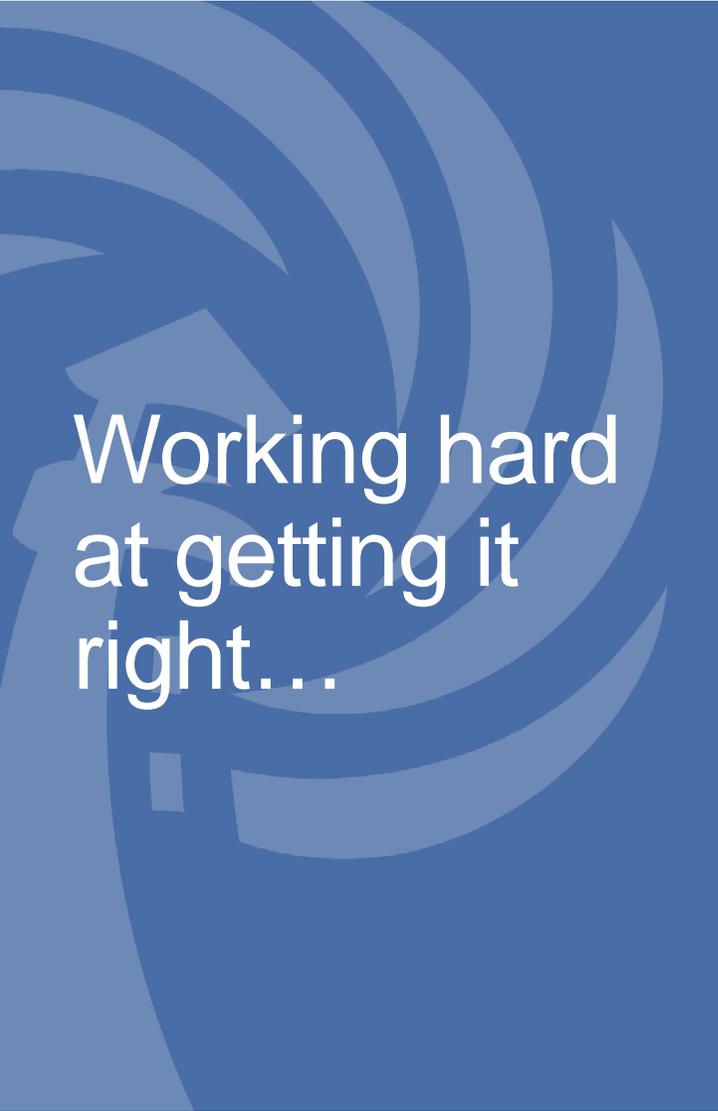












Working hard  
at getting it  
right...

- Finished the upgrades to Lakeshore Drive in 2017.
- Purchased the former waterslide site in 2016.
- Public interest is high and there are many ideas about future use.
- Council committed to an extensive public engagement session before making decisions on the property.
- The Town is also in the process of acquiring another lakeshore property, Sylvan Lake Provincial Park.



Working hard  
at getting it  
right...

- 2006 Waterfront Area Redevelopment Plan is outdated offering a good opportunity to re-vision how the lakeshore should evolve.
- SWARP is a joint Economic Development and Planning and Development initiative largely funded through federal and provincial grant dollars (Go staff!)
- The consultant led process will take several months and has many different aspects.
- Outcome is unknown but so far the public is on side with the process.



Land Use  
Planning is  
**not boring...**

The suspense mounts...

- Will our residents look at the economic development potential of the area or will they take a more personal perspective?
- Will the urgent needs and wants win out over long term vision and potential?
- Will we find, and commit to, a sustainable balance between optimum use and protection of the lake?
- Can we create a plan that will be supported by the public and Council?
- Can we make it come alive?



Like all land  
use planning  
decisions...

...only time will tell.

Good luck with your own local challenges!

Thank-you