



THE COMMUNICATOR

Alberta Development Officers Association (AdoA)

February
2026

Winter Issue

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Darla Weibe

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Words from the Editor

Letter from the Editor

Well, this is the craziest winter I have experienced in Southern Alberta. I have lived here my whole life so that's a few winters. We have had very little snow and the temperature is almost flip flop weather. You certainly don't need to warm up your vehicle on most days. Fingers crossed we get a wet Spring!

Word on the street is that Alberta has another Data Centre on its way in after the one up north didn't pan out. That's very exciting news. Lets get this economy moving! I personally, would love a field trip to a data centre, maybe we can make that work with the association.

Thinking of field trips, when I was in grade school we had a field trip to a Hutterite Colony and it was the most memorable field trip for me. It's a very interesting way of life and I'm envious of their ways of keeping family together. Now that I'm working with the municipality I do business with many of the colonies in the area and its always a pleasure.

Its almost half way through the year to the next conference, we should have some updates for you very soon, stay tuned!

ShannaLee Simpson



Photo from Diane Burtnick

Municipal Housing Strategy-Jenny Bruns

The Benefits of Completing a Municipal Housing Strategy: Building Foundations for Growth

Across Alberta, housing has become one of the most pressing issues impacting community growth, workforce attraction, and economic stability. From rural towns to growing urban centers, local governments are being challenged to plan proactively for the future of housing - not only to meet immediate needs, but to ensure that communities remain vibrant and sustainable for generations to come.

Completing a Housing Strategy is one of the most effective tools municipalities can use to understand their local housing landscape, identify gaps, and take informed, actionable steps to support housing development. It transforms “we need more housing” from a common refrain into a coordinated roadmap for action. It also provides community input and buy-in for any future land use changes required.

Why a Housing Strategy Matters

A housing strategy provides clear economic and social value for municipalities. It can:

- **Support Economic Development:** Communities cannot grow their workforce, attract investment, or retain young families without a diverse range of housing options. Employers consistently report that housing availability is a key factor in recruitment and retention.
- **Strengthen Community Vitality:** When residents have stable, affordable, and suitable housing, and can age in place, they are more likely to engage in their community, volunteer, and spend locally, contributing to the overall social fabric.
- **Leverage Funding Opportunities:** Many provincial and federal grants, as well as partnerships with housing providers, require data and direction that come directly from a completed strategy.

Guide Decision-Making: A housing strategy helps councils and administrations make informed land use, infrastructure, and investment decisions that align with real community needs.

How to Get Started

Developing a housing strategy doesn't have to be overwhelming. It's about building partnerships, gathering local data, and creating a shared vision. Here are a few key steps and local resources that can help:

1. Gather Local Data and Insights

- Work with your Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) office to understand social and demographic trends. FCSS can often provide insight into vulnerable populations, seniors, and families experiencing housing insecurity.
- Connect with your local Social Housing Association or Housing Management Body for data on waitlists, vacancy rates, and the condition of existing housing stock.
- Partner with organizations such as the Rural Development Network (RDN), which offers housing needs assessment tools and can help smaller communities collect and analyze data to inform strategy development.

2. Engage the Community and Stakeholders

- Host workshops, surveys, or focus groups with residents, local builders, developers, and major employers to understand their perspectives.
- Collaborate with regional partners and neighboring municipalities — housing challenges rarely stop at municipal boundaries.

1. Develop the Strategy and Action Plan

- o Outline key goals such as increasing rental options, developing attainable housing, or supporting seniors' housing.
- o Identify barriers to development (e.g., servicing, zoning, land availability) and propose solutions.

Include a clear implementation framework: who does what, when, and how progress will be measured.

Turning Strategy into Action:

Once the strategy is complete, municipalities can use it to incentivize and support housing development. Examples include:

- **Land Use and Servicing Readiness:** Zoning land for residential use, especially multi-unit uses, ensuring utilities are in place.
- **Incentives:** Offering tax incentives, fee reductions, or fast-tracked permitting for projects that meet community goals.

- **Partnerships:** Collaborating with

developers, non-profits, or housing cooperatives to deliver mixed-income or specialized housing projects.

Advocacy: Using the strategy to advocate for funding and to align with other strategic plans for Economic Development.

The Broader Impact:

Communities that take a proactive approach to housing planning are better positioned to manage growth, attract workers, and strengthen their communities. A completed housing strategy signals to investors, government agencies, and residents that your municipality is ready for opportunity - with a plan grounded in evidence and collaboration.



Responding to Data Centre Proposals in your Community - Part 1: Who is in charge of what

As the use of artificial intelligence (AI) expands, so do the demands on the systems that power its operations. Typing a question into AI systems like ChatGPT, Grok, or Copilot results in getting an answer in a quick turnaround. But the deeper processing of information to respond to the question occurs at sites called data centres.

Like any new technology, municipalities face a learning curve in determining how to respond to such development applications. Not long ago, wind turbines, cannabis stores, or battery charging stations were novel concepts. Now they are everyday parts of many communities. Municipalities across Alberta are increasingly seeing applications to develop data centres and need to prepare to respond to these proposals.

This is the first in a series of articles in the ADOA Communicator where we will be providing a high-level overview respecting the complex jurisdiction over data centres, including the interplay between authority over the 3 components required for data centres, namely:

1. the fuel component (Alberta Energy Regulator);
2. the power plant component (both Alberta Utilities Commission and municipal jurisdiction); and
3. the actual computing or data processing centre component (sole municipal jurisdiction).

Background on Data Centres in Alberta

Data centres are often proposed in rural municipalities or urban fringe areas because the sites can be operated remotely (or relatively remotely) as long as there is a reliable supply of internet and power. They come in a range of sizes. Data centres focused only on processing crypto-currency transactions can be so small that they fit within a former wellhead site. Large-scale data processing centres used by global AI systems can take up several quarter-sections of land.

The provincial government has set an ambitious agenda to attract the development of data centres across Alberta through the *Artificial Intelligence Data Centres Strategy*, released in December 2024, and the *Canada-Alberta Memorandum of Understanding*, signed in November 2025. Reports from the Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO) indicate that these efforts are already bearing fruit, with 231 data centre applications submitted before October 25, 2025. And this growth may not slow over the coming years, since the global demand for data centre capacity could more than triple by 2030.

A map made available by the AESO shows where Data Centres have been proposed or are operating so far. A link is available here - <https://aeso.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=9320089ec6b54402b83e7bf1288b9a0a>. Below is an excerpted version of the Map.

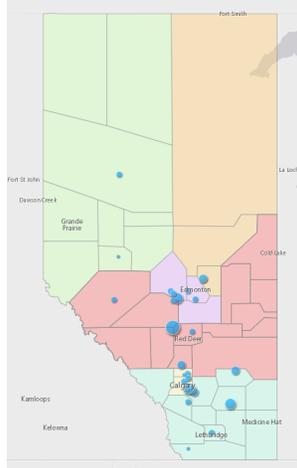


Figure 1 - AESO Map depicting Data Centre proposals

The province has also amended legislation to further support data centre development. In late 2025, the provincial government passed Bill 8, the *Utilities Statutes Amendment Act*. This act amends several pieces of legislation that impact the power grid and, by extension, data centre proposals. These changes are meant to support the development of data centres that meet their own power needs and pay for their own transmission upgrades. The province has stated that they intend for these legislative changes to mitigate any potential affordability and reliability impacts data centres may have on other electricity users.

Jurisdiction overview

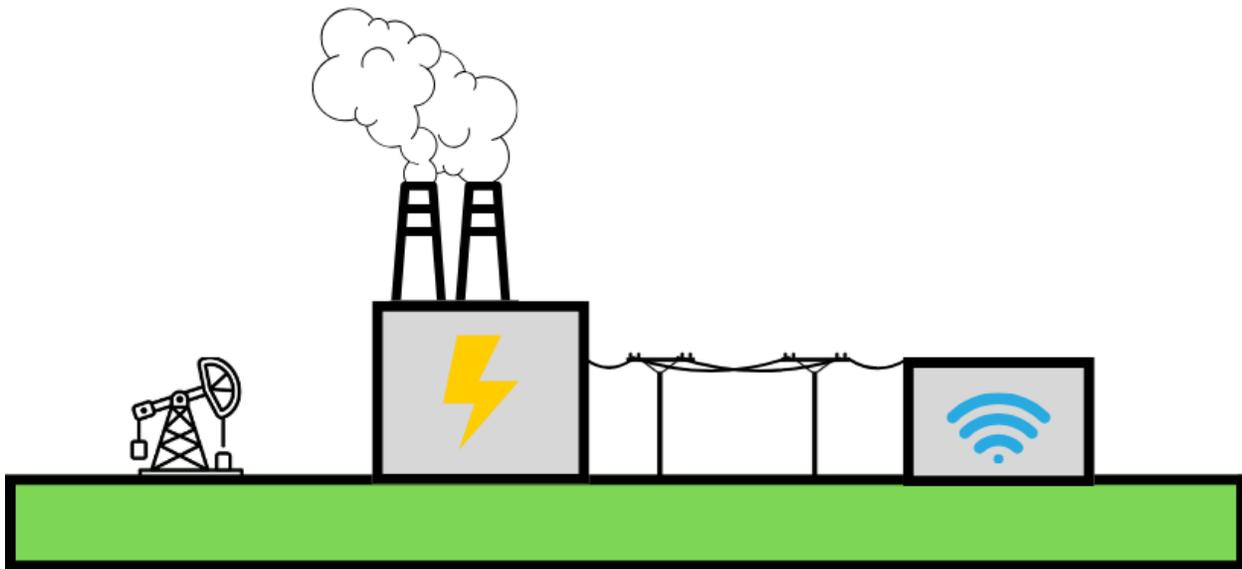


Figure 2 - Side view example of a Data Centre

There are three components to a typical data centre - the fuel source, the power system, and the computing facilities. AI computing systems require large volumes of electrical power. A fuel source is required to create this power. The diagram above outlines each of these facilities.

The fuel used to power data centres can be provided by oil and gas facilities. Per section 618 of the *MGA*, the Alberta Energy Regulatory (AER) has exclusive jurisdiction if wells or pipelines are the fuel source (*MGA*, s 618(1)). The municipality has no say over what is approved regarding the fuel source and cannot require that a development permit be applied for to oversee this part of the development.

The power component of a data centre is usually an electrical system that operates on the site. Electrical systems, like power plants, transmission lines, or distribution facilities, are regulated by the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC). Per section 619 of the *MGA*, the AUC's approval prevails over any statutory plan, land use bylaw, subdivision or development decision by a subdivision or development authority, a SDAB, or the LPRT. This means that if the AUC approves a power plant, essentially the municipality must do so as well by redistricting the lands to allow the use and by providing a development permit (provided that both the redistricting and development applications made by the proponent comply with the AUC approval). Municipalities must exercise their decision-making authority in a way that is consistent with AUC-issued licences, permits, approvals and other authorizations and cannot consider any issues that were already decided by the AUC.

Finally, the computing system portion of the development is exclusively within the municipality's jurisdiction. This means that they are the sole decision-maker when it comes to approving any portion of the facility associated with the computing system. The facilities would be treated like any other form of development under the land use bylaw (though any component of the development that relates to the AER or AUC approval cannot be altered).

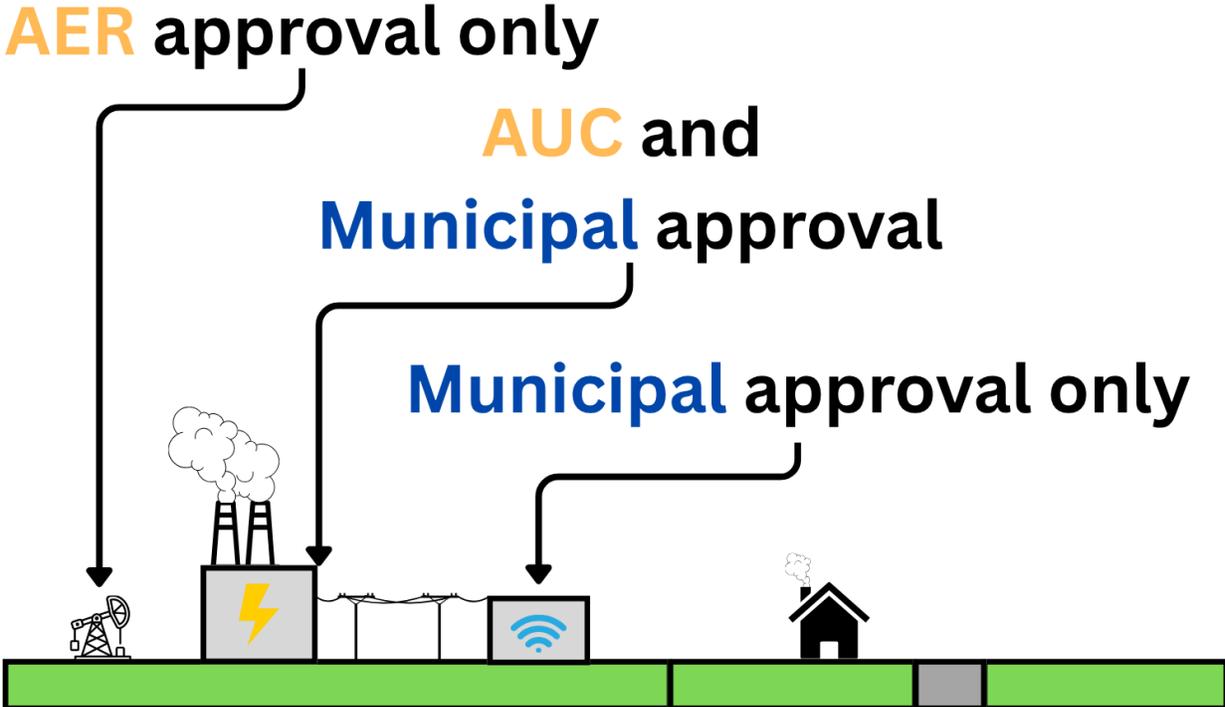


Figure 3 - Overhead and side view of Data Centre near Acreage Subdivision

Case Study - Data Centre Proposal near Country Residential Development

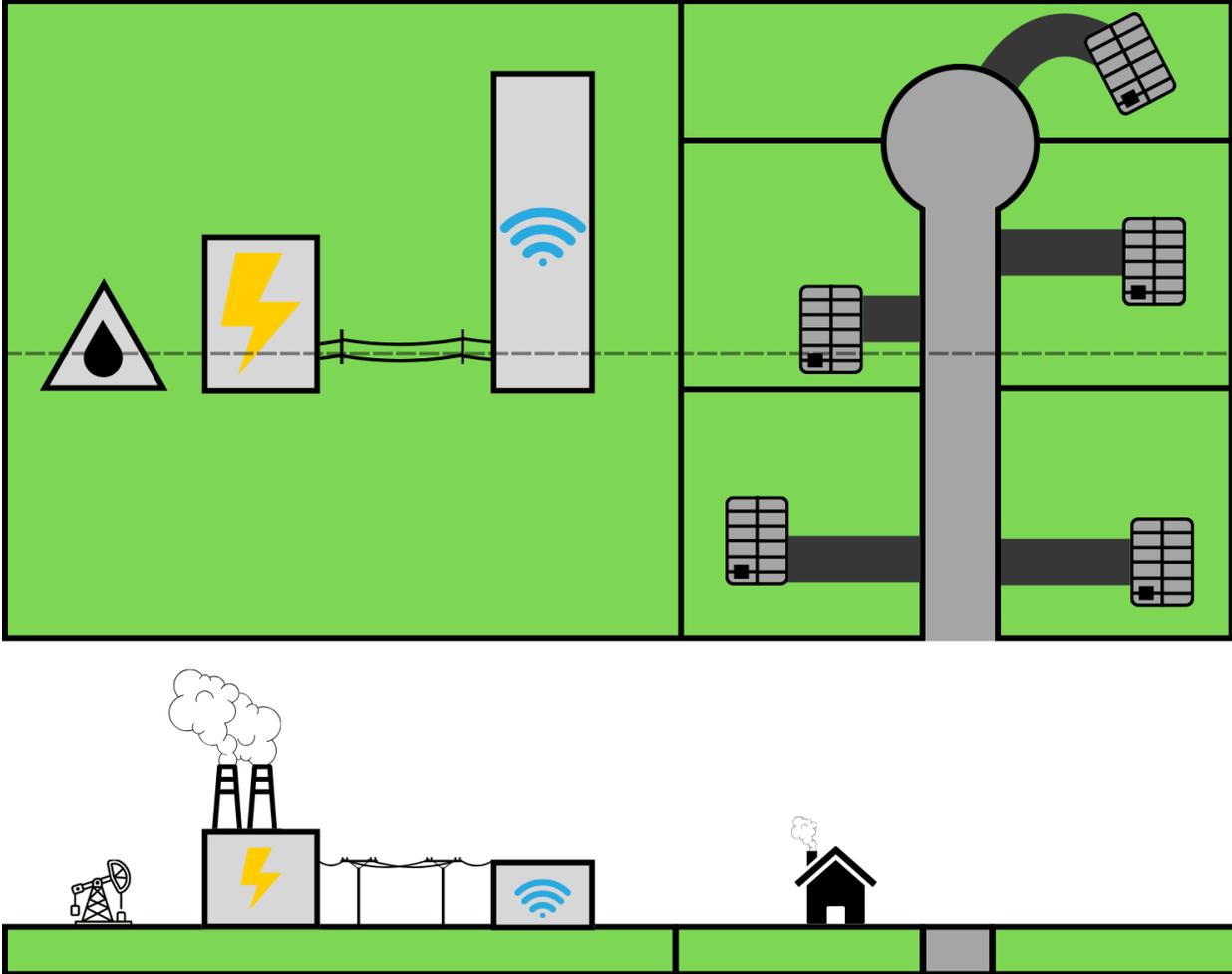


Figure 4 - Overhead and side view of Data Centre near Acreage Subdivision

Consider the following situation: a data centre is proposed on a rural parcel that abuts a country residential subdivision. It includes a pumpjack, a power plant, and a data centre.

Oil and Gas Facilities - AER Approval Only

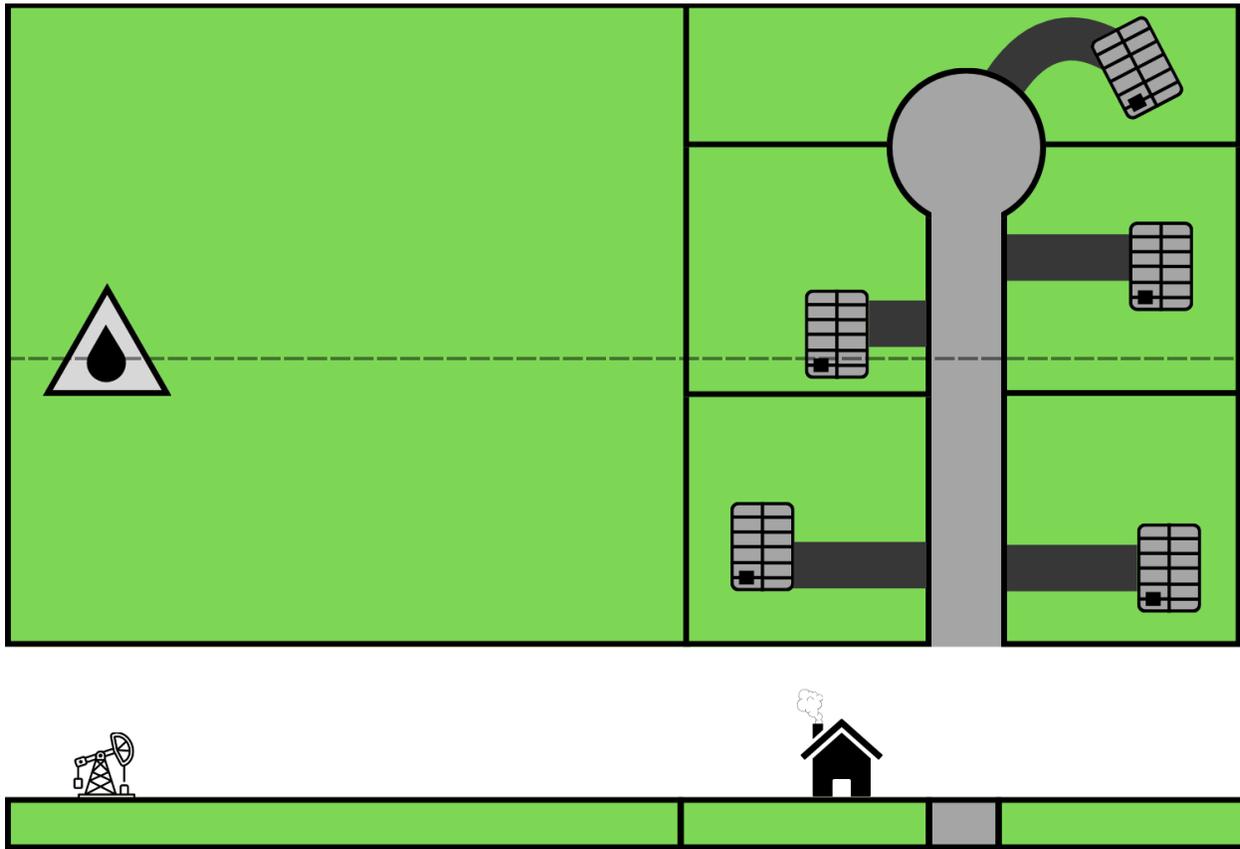


Figure 5 - Overhead and side view of Oil and Gas component to Data Centre

The AER has exclusive jurisdiction over approving the pumpjack to extract oil out of the ground to provide the fuel. The municipality has no say over the placement or features of the pumpjack.

Power Plant - AUC and Municipal Approvals

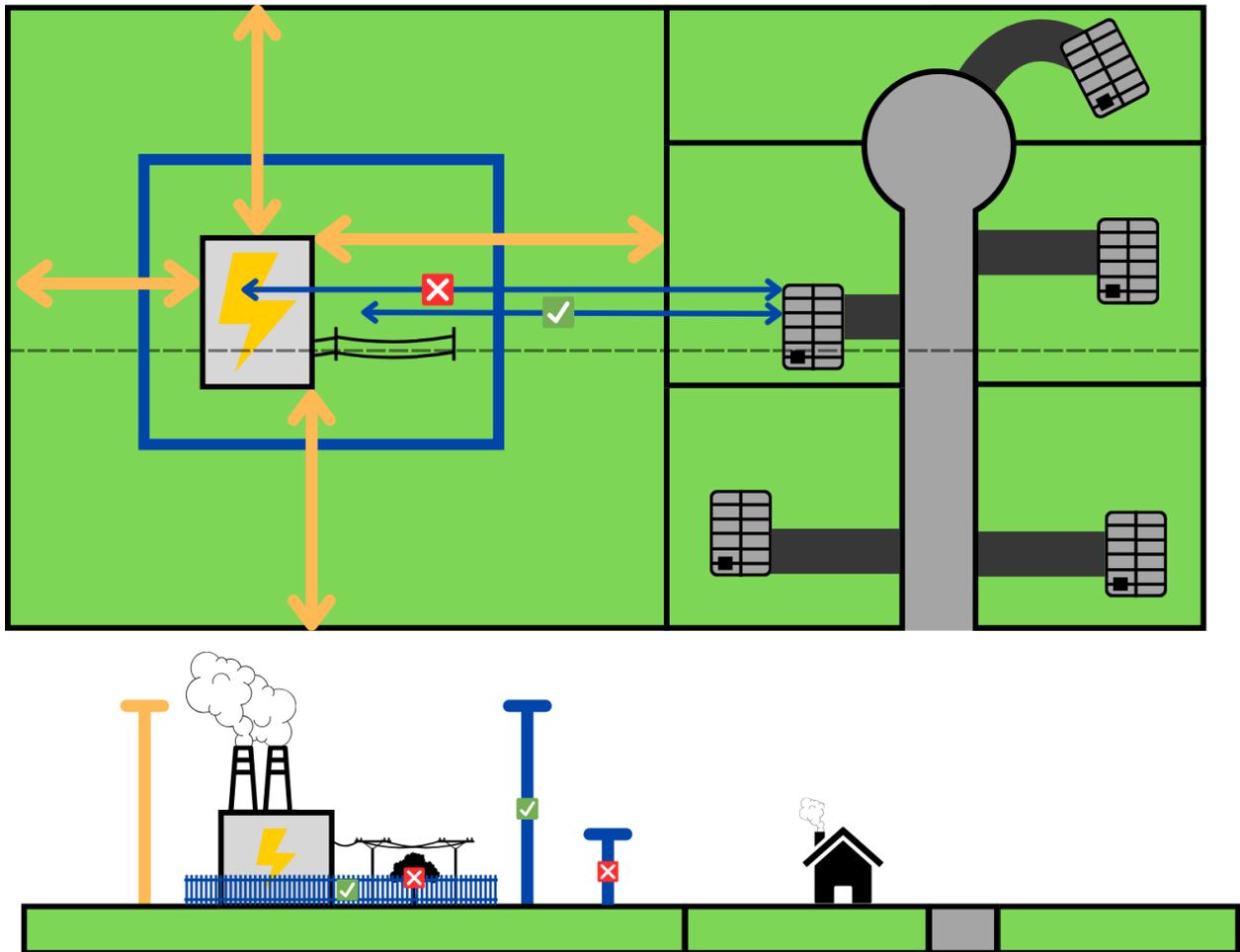


Figure 6 - Overhead and side view of Power Plant component to Data Centre

The AUC provides approval for the power plant. They approve the location of the plant and its overall structure. Therefore, it has established the power plant's height and setback expectations already (as outlined by the yellow arrows in the diagram). The development permit approval granted by the Development Authority cannot conflict with any AUC approval, but could set additional development requirements (as outlined by the blue arrows in the diagram).

- Regarding height and setbacks
 - The Development Authority can set maximum height and minimum setback requirements that align with what the AUC has approved (as demonstrated by the lines with the green checkmarks).
 - The Development Authority cannot set a lower maximum height or a longer minimum setback requirement, because this would conflict with the AUC approval (as depicted by the lines with the red X's).

- Note: The AUC will be engaging municipalities setbacks standards for renewable energy facilities with a goal to collaboratively consider default setback standards for these kinds of projects. These kinds of facilities could be the power source for data centre proposals as well. Engagement will take place in the first half of 2026, with an aim to have standard setbacks in place by the summer of 2026. Kim Macnab, Executive Director of Facilities with the AUC, is listed as the primary contact for questions about this engagement (kim.macnab@auc.ab.ca).
- Regarding other features
 - The AUC may deal with landscaping and fencing requirements within its approval. If the AUC does set these requirements, the Municipality cannot interfere with them.
 - If the AUC does not impose any requirements, then the Development Authority could require additional landscaping or buffering features, so long as it does not interfere with the proposed development's location as approved by the AUC. For instance, the Development Authority could require a perimeter fence around the power plant (as noted by the fence with the checkmark). However, the Development Authority cannot require that landscaping features, like trees, to be placed in locations that interfere with the AUC-approved facilities (such as the tree under the power lines).

Data Centre - Municipal Approval Only

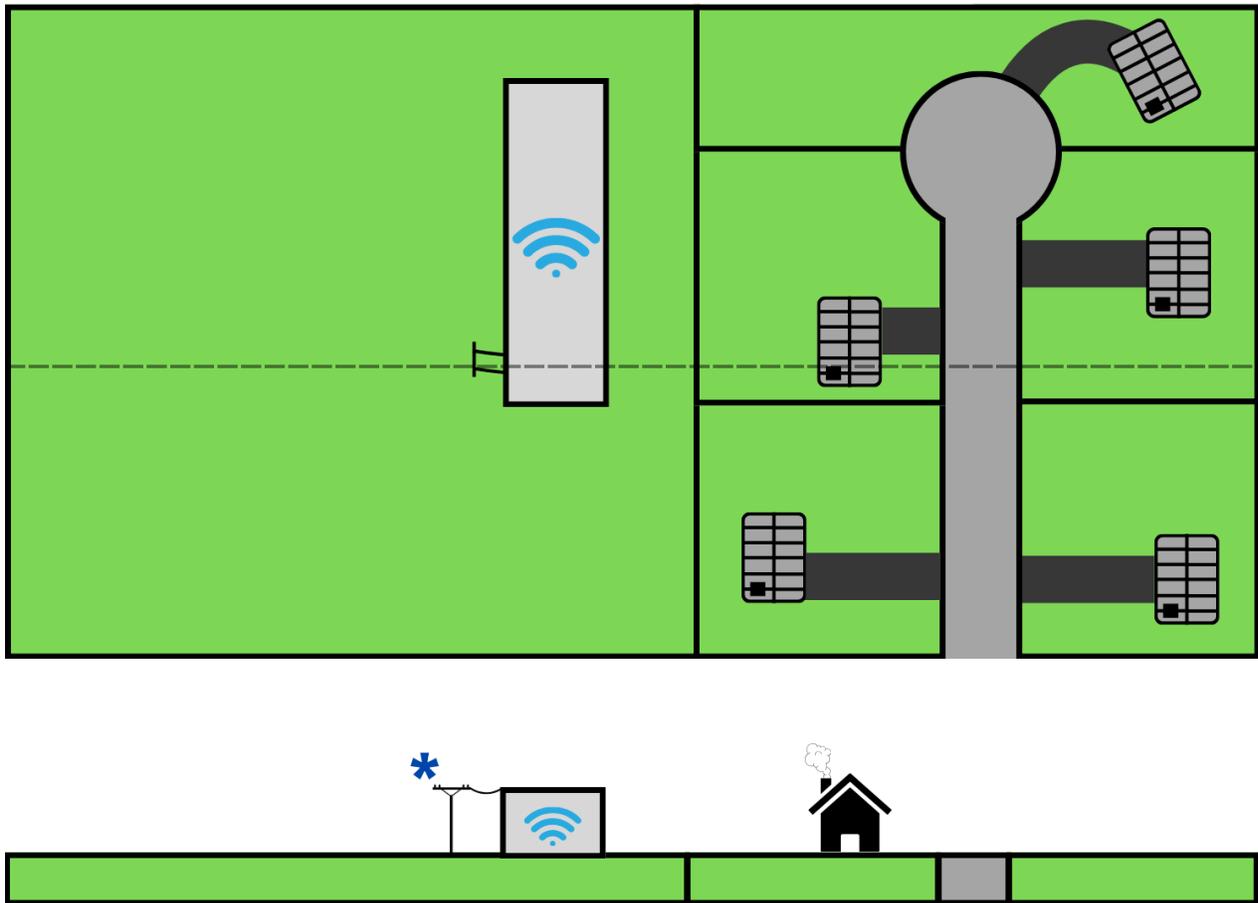


Figure 7 - Overhead and side elevation of Data Centre

The Development Authority has sole jurisdiction over the data processing centre. The Development Authority can determine where this use can be located through listing it in specific land use districts and can set requirements regarding the scale, design features, and placement of the data centre.

The province has no say over the data processing centre. However, the portions of the data processing centre that connect to either the pumpjack or the power plant cannot be restricted by the development permit because the Development Authority cannot make a decision that would alter or conflict with what has been approved by the AER and AUC. For instance, the power lines leading into the data processing centre could not be rerouted under the development permit, if the location of the power lines was already established under the AUC approval.

Conclusion

With data centres being built across Alberta, Development Authorities should ready themselves to respond to inquiries coming in from applicants, residents, and Council regarding the municipality's jurisdiction over these facilities.

In future articles, we will explain some of the practical implications of developing data centres, including anticipated locations of data centres, ways to regulate impacts on neighbouring property, engagement tips, and property tax assessment considerations.

Should you have any general questions that you would like answered, please submit questions to sraitz@brownleelaw.com. We will ensure future articles in this series respond to the common questions that come up. For more information generally, please contact a member of the Brownlee LLP Municipal Team on our Municipal Helpline at 1-800-661-9069 (Edmonton) or 1-877-232-8303 (Calgary).

ADOA Newsletter – February 2026

Secondary Suites – What do you need to know?

Many communities across Alberta are experiencing a housing shortage. Considering the rising cost of living, many individuals are exploring alternative options to provide financial support and make better use of existing space. One way this is being achieved is through the development of secondary suites.

The Alberta building code requirements for secondary suites came into force on December 31, 2006. The objective for these requirements was to establish standards for secondary suites. A secondary suite is a self-contained dwelling unit located in a building or portion thereof where a one other residential occupancy exists and where both dwelling units would constitute a single real estate entity. A residence with more than one main dwelling and one secondary suite is considered a multi-family dwelling. Typically, secondary suites are created within an existing single-family dwelling or constructed as an addition to an existing house or part of the new construction of a home. The location of a secondary suite within a residence is flexible; it may be situated in a basement; more than one storey, above an attached garage and may even be on the same level as the principle dwelling unit or above it.

If a structure is constructed or converted that is to be used as an independent dwelling space separate from the main residence with separate services, then it is considered a suite of residential occupancy (not a secondary suite) and would be required to meet code requirements for residential occupancy.

In addition to approval from the development authority, below are some key considerations and typical code requirements when developing a secondary suite. These should be reviewed carefully when proposing or planning such a project. Please note that these are general guidelines; specific project details may vary. It is essential to consult with a Safety Codes Officer and undergo plan review prior to commencing any construction or conversion activities.

- Minimum ceiling height for living spaces in a secondary suite is 1.95m (78"). This is also the minimum requirement for undeveloped basements which provides the opportunity for future development of a secondary suite. This height may be reduced under beams and ducting.
- Smoke tight walls, ceiling, and exits are required to provide a barrier between suites, allowing occupants of either units to evacuate the spread of fire between units. This is achieved by using ½" drywall and finished to one of the methods in Article 9.10.9.2
- A direct exit to the exterior is required. This can be provided by stairs from a basement suite leading to a main floor vestibule with a doorway to the outside. In this case, the walls and ceilings for this exit would require fire protection to allow time to evacuation. This can be provided by using ½" drywall.
- Bedrooms must provide an alternate means for egress during emergency. Each bedroom must have at least one window with an unobstructed opening of not less than .35m² / 543in² and no dimension less than 380mm/15". If the window opens into a window-well, the must be a minimum clearance of 760mm / 30" between the window and the wall of the window-well.
- Smoke alarms in a home with a secondary suite must be interconnected between the main dwelling and secondary suite. They must be wired to power but may be interconnected between units through bluetooth or other technology. The activation of any one smoke alarm will cause all smoke alarms within the home and secondary suite to sound. Smoke alarms are required in each bedroom and hallway. Carbon monoxide alarms must also be installed in each bedroom or outside each bedroom within 5m.
- Gas-fired furnaces and water heaters must be enclosed in a room with fire protected walls and ceilings (1/2" drywall) and finished according to methods acceptable within the building code (NBC-AE). When these appliances are in an open living space, it creates hazards for fire and carbon monoxide poisoning. Additional code requirements apply such as sealing all penetrations.
- Shared heating is acceptable (ie: hydronic) however separate zone controls are required. However, a secondary suite must have independent ventilation systems. Research has proven that smoke migration between a primary and secondary suite can occur quickly when the ductwork system serves both units. This also includes the transfer of smoke or cooking fumes through shared ductwork.
- Doors in smoke-tight barriers shall be at least a solid core wood 45mm (1-3/4") thick and have a self closing device.

- Sound attenuation requirements to provide protection from airborne noise between each dwelling unit.

Some jurisdictions have established additional criteria limiting a development. These criteria may specify certain features, such as a cooking appliance (stove, cooktop, oven, toaster oven, microwave, hotplate), presence of a sink, sanitary facilities, hood fans, or 220V outlets. An accredited municipality may set parameters and requirements for such developments and collaborate with your safety codes provider or officials to implement these standards. However, according to the National Building Code - Alberta Edition, a basement equipped with a full kitchen can be permissible as long as it is not intended to function as an independent rental unit separate from the primary residence. If the space is intended to serve as a self-contained dwelling separate from the main residence, and development approval is provided, then the code requirements highlighted above for secondary suites will apply.

As the demand for affordable housing increases, many municipalities are seeing a rise in the development and construction of secondary suites. Understanding the relevant code requirements and their purpose can help guide property owners to consult with safety codes officials beforehand, ensuring they are informed, aware, and able to comply with the specific standards of their project. Collaboration between planning, development, and safety codes can facilitate smoother approval processes, reduce delays for applicants, and promote the successful and compliant completion of projects.

For additional resources and specifics reference:

- STANDATA 23-BCB-007-Houses with a secondary suite
- STANDATA 23-BCI-035-Attached garage separation serving a house with a secondary suite



Nicole Paggett – Contract Coordinator



Deciphering your insurance policy

Reviewing and understanding an insurance contract is very important. As an insured, you should have a clear grasp on how your insurance policies work and what they contain. Whether you're buying personal or business insurance, there are a few key reasons why understanding your policy is necessary.



- **Your insurance policy's key dates.** As a policyholder, it's your responsibility to know the key dates relevant to your policy. One important date to keep track of is when your policy expires. This is good to know as it allows you to cancel your insurance policy on or before this date, if you wish, or renew your insurance policy, if your provider allows it. This will also let you know when it's time to update your documents and personal files to reflect your current insurance policies. In addition, your insurance policy will list the maximum time frame you have to file a claim following an incident. If you fail to read your policy, you won't be aware of these vital dates and timelines, which could cause problems down the road.
- **Your payment schedule.** Review your payment schedule to ensure it's a payment plan that works for you. Members are eligible for no service or interest charges on monthly payment plans.* Missing a payment can happen to anyone, unfortunately however, this could have repercussions on your coverage. Always ensure you have funds available when your premium is due. Contact your advisor if you need assistance or to discuss your options.
- **Your deductible.** Your deductible is the amount you'll need to pay if you make a claim. You can increase the deductible amount to help reduce your premium. **WARNING:** Carefully consider this option and make sure you can afford to pay your deductible amount out-of-pocket if you need to make an insurance claim. Be sure to speak with your advisor to discuss the various deductible options available and the impact they'll have on your premium.
- **The definitions section.** Your insurance policy includes a definitions section to help you understand insurance better. As the name suggests, this portion of your policy will provide clear explanations and definitions for some of the complex industry jargon you'll find throughout the contract. Thus, reading through this section will help you understand the rest of your policy and what you are, and are not, covered for.
- **Your coverage.** Your policy will confirm your coverages and what it can protect you against. Similarly, it'll also outline what it doesn't cover via the exclusions section which explains the risks or instances your insurance providers won't cover.
- **Any changes.** Understanding your policy will allow you to keep track of any changes to your insurance coverage. Remember that many types of insurance coverages are optional, meaning that policyholders can choose to add or remove them as they see fit. In addition, policyholders can change their deductibles or coverage limits. By reviewing your policy regularly, you can keep track of these critical changes, ensuring you're aware of how they impact your premium.
- **Current lienholder or mortgage listed.** Confirm the lienholder or mortgage company listed is still correct on your auto or home insurance. If your home mortgage is paid off, you may qualify for a discount.

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MUNICIPAL WEBINAR



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Speaker
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Contact us

Send us an email or give us a call for more information about our membership and our non-profit group.

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