

The Communicator

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Words from the Editor

Whew! It has been hot! It's terrible to complain about summer weather but we hit 38 degrees last week and that is a warm day.

Permits have been busy. Like everywhere else, the hot topic is the Data Centres. Our municipality hasn't had an application come through but there has been much chatter and a few petitions against the project. I'm very interested in learning more about Data Centres and am excited for the speaker at the conference.

The board has our last meeting in Olds, at the Pomroy hotel where the conference will be held and I think you will all be impressed. Not only are the conference and hotel staff amazing, the town is lovely. I have never been to Olds and was expecting a much smaller municipality but its very large with lots of shops and services.

The moving of locations for the conference is a highlight of the ADOA. I have been to places that I would never have been without a conference being held at that location and I've never been disappointed with the great things that our Alberta towns and cities offer.

Looking forward to seeing you all next month!

President's Message

As we move through another busy and rewarding year for the Alberta Development Officers' Association (ADOA), I want to take a moment to reflect on some recent accomplishments, recognize those who make our Association successful, and look ahead to the exciting months before us.

In June, we had the pleasure of hosting another successful **Lunch and Learn** in the Town of Olds. These professional development sessions continue to be an excellent opportunity for members to connect, exchange ideas, and discuss emerging issues affecting planning and development across Alberta. The interactive discussions and willingness of members to share their knowledge are what make these events so valuable. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank everyone who attended, participated, and helped make the event such a success. A special thank you also goes to the Town of Olds for hosting us and providing such a welcoming venue.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to all of our new members who have joined the Association in recent months. Whether you are new to the planning and development profession or a seasoned practitioner joining ADOA for the first time, we are pleased to have you as part of our professional community. Our Association continues to grow because of the dedication and expertise of its members, and we encourage you to become involved by attending events, participating in discussions, and sharing your experiences with your colleagues from across the province.

Looking ahead, one of the highlights of the year is quickly approaching. Our **2026 Annual Conference**, taking place **September 15–18, 2026**, will be co-hosted by the **Town of Olds** and **Mountain View County**. The Conference Planning Committee has been working diligently to develop a program that offers relevant educational sessions, practical learning opportunities, engaging speakers, and valuable networking events. Annual Conference is always one of the most anticipated events on our calendar, providing members with an opportunity to expand their knowledge, reconnect with colleagues, and strengthen the relationships that make ADOA such a vibrant organization. I encourage everyone to register and join us for what promises to be an outstanding conference.

The Board of Directors is also excited to begin work on a comprehensive redesign of the Association's website. Our current website has served the Association well for many years, but it is time to modernize our online presence to better support the needs of our members. The redesigned website will focus on improving navigation, enhancing accessibility, streamlining access to professional development resources, and creating a more user-friendly experience. As this project progresses, we look forward to sharing updates and gathering member feedback to help ensure the new website meets the evolving needs of our profession.

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President's Message

Finally, I would like to recognize someone whose contributions to ADOA have been truly exceptional.

After more than a decade of dedicated service, our Executive Assistant, **Diane Burtnick**, has announced her retirement. Diane has been the steady and dependable force behind so much of what our Association accomplishes. From coordinating conferences and meetings to supporting the Board of Directors, managing countless administrative responsibilities, and serving as a welcoming first point of contact for our members, Diane has consistently demonstrated professionalism, commitment, and genuine care for the Association and its membership.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the entire ADOA membership, I extend our sincere appreciation to Diane for her many years of outstanding service. Her dedication has helped strengthen our Association, and her contributions have left a lasting impact that will be appreciated for many years to come. We wish Diane every happiness and success in her well-earned retirement and thank her for everything she has done for ADOA.

As always, thank you for your continued support of the Alberta Development Officers' Association. The strength of our organization comes from the engagement, professionalism, and collaboration of our members. I look forward to seeing many of you in Olds this September as we continue working together to support excellence in planning and development throughout Alberta.

Jordan Ruegg

President

Alberta Development Officers' Association



Conference 2026 Update – Nate Hill

We're coming up on a month away from the 2026 ADOA Annual conference co-hosted by Mountain View County and the Town of Olds! We're getting as excited to have you as we hope you are to join us, we've got lots in store for you and we're so excited to show you all the region has to offer!

From phenomenal keynotes and tour options to educational content from field safety to legislation, the 2026 ADOA conference will be your one-stop shop for everything ADOA! On top of our programming and networking opportunities, new ADOA board members will be chosen during the annual board meeting. Don't be afraid to throw your hat in the ring and keep our organization moving the right direction.

As we get ready for the conference, please don't forget to join the ADOA Discord group to engage with your fellow ADOA members and keep the excitement building! Lastly, don't forget your silent auction items in support of the Logan Boulet Foundation!



The Alberta Development Officers' Association (ADOA) is a non-profit professional association that supports development officers and others involved in municipal planning and development across Alberta. Its main purpose is to provide education, networking, resources, and advocacy for people working in development and planning roles.

Serving on the ADOA Board for a 2 year term is a rewarding volunteer opportunity that allows you to make a meaningful impact on the profession while expanding your professional network and leadership skills. Although the time commitment varies based on current projects and initiatives, the maximum estimated commitment is approximately 10–15 hours per month and the experience comes with many valuable perks!



Networking & Community

- Expanded professional network
- Peer support
- Friendships
- Socializing

Professional Development

- Leadership experience
- Professional growth
- Industry visibility
- Mentorship

Member Benefits

- Expense reimbursement
- Complimentary conference registration

Eligibility

A Member in Good Standing

Active Members-municipal employees or planning commission members

Associate Members -municipal or government employees

<https://adoc.net/>

Beyond the Permit: Why Planning and Development is Becoming a Competitive Advantage for Our Communities

Submitted by Jenny Bruns, Town of Barrhead

For many years, municipal planning and development departments were viewed primarily as regulators. Their role was to administer legislation, process development permits, enforce land use bylaws, and ensure communities grew in an orderly and compliant manner. While those responsibilities remain fundamental, the expectations placed on municipal professionals are changing.

Today, municipalities of every size are competing, not only with neighboring communities, but with regions across Alberta and beyond for investment, businesses, housing, skilled workers, and residents. Population growth is slowing in many rural areas, and labor shortages continue to challenge employers, and development decisions are increasingly influenced by how easy a municipality is to work with.

In this environment, planning and development professionals have become much more than administrators. They have become facilitators of growth.

Every interaction with a developer, entrepreneur, resident, or investor helps shape the reputation of a community. A timely response to an inquiry, a willingness to explain the approval process, or working collaboratively to find solutions within legislation can leave a lasting impression. While legislation and municipal bylaws establish the framework, how municipalities deliver those services can become a competitive advantage.

At the Town of Barrhead, this perspective has influenced many of our recent initiatives. Planning, legislative services, and economic development work together to remove barriers, improve customer service, and support Council's long-term vision for growth. Whether reviewing development processes, implementing residential and non-residential tax incentive programs, exploring housing opportunities, or collaborating regionally through investment attraction initiatives, the objective remains the same: create an environment where responsible development can happen with confidence.

This approach recognizes that economic development is not solely the responsibility of an economic development officer. It is reflected in land use policies that encourage investment, development processes that are clear and predictable, infrastructure planning that supports future growth, and legislative services that provide transparent governance. Every municipal department contributes to the investment climate.

For development professionals, this shift does not mean compromising legislative requirements or lowering standards. In fact, consistency, fairness, and compliance remain essential. Rather, it means recognizing that municipalities can be both regulators and partners. By helping applicants understand requirements early, identifying solutions instead of obstacles, and fostering positive relationships, planning professionals play an important role in community prosperity.

Across Alberta, municipalities are asking similar questions. How do we attract investment? How do we create housing? How do we retain businesses and grow our tax base? Increasingly, the answers involve collaboration across departments and a recognition that planning and development is not simply about regulating change, it is about enabling it.

As development professionals, we have a unique opportunity to influence how our communities grow. Every permit, policy, and conversation contributes to a municipality's reputation. In an increasingly competitive environment, communities that are responsive, collaborative, and solution-oriented will be well positioned to attract the people and investment needed for long-term success.

Perhaps the greatest shift is not in legislation or policy, but in mindset. Planning and development has always shaped communities. Today, it also helps shape their competitiveness.

Responding to Data Centre Proposals in your Community - Part 4: Comments on Statutory plans and engaging before the AUC

The influx of a new kind of land use introduces something that is unknown within a community, often stoking fears and consternation for residents and businesses. New land uses may also introduce fresh industry and business potential within a municipality, supporting economic development. Technologies like data centres create these kinds of impacts on a community. Though the province has much greater control over the power plants and fuel sources (particularly for natural gas generated power), the municipality can still influence this process. The municipality will control where the computing component will be located.

This article is the fourth and final part in a series of articles for the ADOA regarding the increased demand for data centers that are being developed across the province. In the first three parts, we explained jurisdictional issues and how to incorporate the uses (both power plant and computing component) within a municipality's Land Use Bylaw. Now we will focus on how other parts of the planning framework can shape these developments within a municipality.

The kinds of plans to consider

Statutory plans set long-term vision for development within a municipality. An Intermunicipal Development Plan ("IDP") helps shape development in boundary of fringe areas between different municipalities, while the Municipal Development Plan ("MDP") establishes the land use, transportation and utility planning direction across an entire municipality. An Area Structure Plan ("ASP") sets the sequence of development in a sub-area of the municipality, while an Area Redevelopment Plan ("ARP") provides specific tools that can be used to shape how a built area changes over time.

Any and all of these plans could be used to help shape how data centre development occurs within a community. Ultimately, the unique context of each municipality and its statutory planning framework will determine which plans should be reviewed, updated, and/or developed to respond to the potential for data centres. Should data centre development appear poised for explosive growth in a boundary region of the municipality, an IDP review and update could be necessitated. If a massive data centre project has the potential to shape development across the municipality, then the municipality may want to ensure its MDP speaks to this level of change. If data centres begin to co-locate within a specific area of the municipality, the creation and/or update to ASPs and ARPs may be required.

Even if the municipality chooses to focus its efforts on creating or altering an ASP to adjust for power plant or computing component concerns, the municipality will still want to ensure the higher-level plans are current and consistent with any proposed changes at the lower level ASP. Furthermore, the Land Use Bylaw should similarly be adjusted once planning direction is set to reflect this direction and ensure it is implemented through current planning applications (subdivision and development permit).

Identifying areas to encourage or discourage power plants or computing components

Statutory planning documents can help in setting direction for where the components should be located, or where they should be avoided. Factors will include compatibility with neighbouring uses (existing or proposed) as well as assessing servicing and infrastructure capacity. Statutory plans can also prioritize certain areas for specific types of development in order to reduce the potential for conflict with existing or planned development.

In order to either prioritize or discourage specific types of development in certain areas, municipalities should ensure they have the information and studies to support them. Policy direction, setbacks, or other forms of regulatory measures are easier to impose and defend if they are grounded in rigorous analysis and studies. Existing studies respecting high quality agricultural lands, power and water availability, as well as transportation requirements and capacity can be considered. But, the municipality may need to update these studies if they are out of date or if they do not consider unique aspects of the power plant and computing components.

Of course, the municipality can also set policy direction on general principles of land use planning as well. Discouraging large-scale power plant and computing components from locating near current urban development (such as residential or commercial) is a valid approach to achieve the orderly, economical and beneficial development, use of land and patterns of human settlement. Similarly, finding ways to locate power plants or computing components near compatible and supportive land uses may make sense. Redevelopment opportunities may be appropriate; for example, citing power plants or computing components on former industrial areas would be appropriate and likely desirable. Even geographic features, like natural shading during summertime or nearby water sources could be prominent reasons to encourage power plants or computing component development in a particular location as that can mitigate overheating concerns.

The statutory planning framework has the opportunity to integrate all these kinds of considerations and then establish a general direction for the municipality. Not only does this provide clarity for the community over where there may be pressures for power plants or computing components, statutory plan references can act as a powerful signal to industry proponents that the municipality is ready and poised for investment in certain targeted locations.

Opportunity for Influence at the AUC

Once statutory plans and Land Use Bylaws are updated, the municipality is best positioned to regulate both power plants and computing centres. Given the paramountcy afforded to AUC decisions over power plants with 1 megawatt of generating capacity (MGA s 619), a municipality can best position itself to influence these decisions if they have a clear framework in statutory plans and the land use bylaw that either supports or disincentivizes power plants in particular areas.

The AUC will consider many different stakeholders' positions in its decision-making. They also actively seek out feedback on their own rules and regulations for the different kinds of approvals they provide. So long as the municipality presents a strong case within engagement and decision-making processes, they may have the opportunity to shape the outcome of data centre development. Statutory plans and Land Use Bylaws that are supported by technical studies can be persuasive to the AUC as they make the ultimate decision over whether a power plant with over 1 megawatt of generating capacity is approved at a particular location. Though municipalities do not have control, they have a voice. There are three key ways municipalities influence AUC approvals: opposition; deferral; secure commitments. Here are some recent examples:

a) **Opposition** – in two relatively recent decisions, municipal opposition has resulted in the AUC rejecting approval of the power plant applications outright.

i) **PACE's solar power plant application in the Town of Hanna (AUC Decision 29274-D012025)** – The AUC rejected an application for a 15-M solar project based on opposition from the Town of Hanna. The proponent (PACE Canada Development LP) proposed to build a solar power plant project; panels would have flanked the Municipality's uncontrolled airport. Some of the panels would have been located as close as 120 m from the centerline of the runway. The Municipality had concerns regarding the close proximity of the Project to the airport. The Municipality retained Brownlee LLP to intervene before the AUC.

The AUC rejected the application citing safety concerns arising from the power plants location. The AUC confirmed the proponent has the burden of establishing to the AUC that the project will be in the public interest and reasonably safe. The AUC found that the proponent's application and witnesses did not adequately address various safety risks:

- The proximity of the Project reduced landing options a plane would have in emergency situations;
- If a crash occurred near or in the solar project, emergency response could be hindered by energized solar arrays;
- There was uncertainty caused by the possible increased turbulence over the runway;
- There was no air traffic controller available to warn pilots of dangerous situations.

Therefore, the AUC determined the proponent had not met its burden to establish that the project was in the 'public interest'.

ii) **2569059 Alberta Inc.'s Laramide Battery Energy Storage Facility and Connection in Foothills County (AUC Decision 28906-D01-2026)** – as set out in more detail in

Article 3 (in this series of articles) the AUC rejected the application, again, based on the Municipality's concerns respecting safety and in particular, emergency management. The Municipality's Council had, through its planning bylaws, adopted a comprehensive planning framework directing power plants away from the proposed area and instead, to an area where there was established infrastructure for fire suppression. The AUC therefore found that the proposed project was not in the 'public interest'.

- b) **Deferral to Development Permit – Aira Solar GP Ltd. solar power plant in County of Forty Mile (AUC Decision 27842-D02-2024)** in one of the first decisions issued post pause, the AUC heeded the Municipality's submissions making it clear that the AUC would not embark on considering key areas of municipal authority. The AUC declined to decide on the following issues and instead deferred these to be addressed at the municipal development permit stage, namely: transportation conditions respecting a road use agreement, development agreement and crossing agreement, and waste management (approval and implementation). Given the framework in the MGA s 619, the Municipality would be obliged to issue the development permit (provided the development permit application was "consistent" with and "complies" with the AUC approval). However, the AUC has made it clear that at least some concerns should be addressed at the local level.
- c) **Negotiate Commitments – TransAlta Corporation Flipi Gas-Fired Generation Project in Clearwater County (AUC Decision 29810-01-2026)** The AUC takes a specific approach to commitments; they perform a very important function in the AUC regulatory process. Commitments are binding and enforceable by the AUC the same way as conditions imposed through an AUC approval. Securing commitments with the proponent is a way to address municipal concerns and either eliminate or reduce the number of issues the municipality addresses at the AUC hearing.

Proponents will, to varying degrees, be motivated to negotiate commitments. Certain proponents realize it is desirable to go into any hearing demonstrating that all municipal concerns have been addressed. The AUC has in certain decisions (such as the TransAlta Flipi project in Clearwater County) referenced the Proponent's willingness to negotiate commitments with the municipality positively. Commitments negotiated in this scenario contemplated that certain matters would be deferred to the municipal development permit stage (if the AUC ultimately approved the project). Commitments to the municipality included: traffic impacts (development agreement and road use agreement); emergency response, visual screening and fencing, and communicating municipal requirements to personnel working on the power plant. In other scenarios, municipalities have also negotiated commitments for approval and implementation of Soil Management Plans as well as Dust, Weed, and Pest Control Management Plans.

If your municipality:

- is considering changes to its planning bylaws to incorporate additional measures addressing the location of or operation of data centres (i.e. their related components namely the power plant and computing components); or
- has concerns respecting a proposed power plant within its boundaries,

it would be well served to retain legal counsel with experience in addressing these issues. Legal support will be far more effective if engaged sooner rather than late into the AUC process.

Conclusion

Should you have any questions on data centre developments that you would like answered, please reach out to the following members of Brownlee LLP's planning and development team; Jeneane Grundberg, KC (jgrundberg@brownleelaw.com), Alifeyah Gulamhusein (agulamhusein@brownleelaw.com), Brendan Dzioba (bdzioba@brownleelaw.com), and Jack Stout (jstout@brownleelaw.com). For more information on general municipal matters, 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).

2025-2026 Board of Directors

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Jordan Reugg	President	Smoky Lake County	jruegg@smokylakecounty.ab.ca	780-650-5207
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Nathan Hill	Education Chair	Town of Olds	nhill@olds.ca	403-507-4863

Diane Burtnick	Executive Assistant	admin@adoa.ca
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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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