

Flood Hazard Policy Updates



October 2026



**WHAT
WE
LEARNED**

Background

The Town of Okotoks (Town) is updating the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) and Land Use Bylaw (LUB) to reflect updated flood hazard mapping for the Sheep River.

In 2025, the Government of Alberta completed the Sheep River Flood Study, which includes new flood hazard maps for lands along the Sheep River. These maps replace previous flood hazard mapping and provide more detailed information about areas that may be affected during flooding events.

The Town has been working together with the project team from Onterris and Urban Systems Ltd. on reviewing its policies and regulations to ensure they align with the updated provincial mapping and provide clear direction for future development in areas that may be at risk of flooding.

As part of the update to the flood hazard mapping, the Town wanted to understand community priorities and improve how policies are communicated and implemented.

2026

TIMELINE

2026

AUG

Project materials available online.

2026

AUG

Letter mailed to affected landowners.

AUG

SEPT

31 TO 18

In-person and online engagement opportunities.

SEPT

28

First Reading of MDP & LUB amendments at regular Council meeting.

OCT

26

Public hearing on MDP & LUB amendments.

Community Engagement

We are committed (through the Town's Community Engagement Policy) to give the community an opportunity for input into decisions that will affect residents and businesses.

Who did we engage?

Okotoks residents were engaged online and in person. A significant number of people who participated in the engagement were considered 'affected landowners' meaning those whose property falls within one of four flood hazard categories.

LEVEL OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This project falls within the **INFORM** and **CONSULT** level.



30

In person attendees at the Open House



5

Comments received both in person and online



	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
GOAL	To provide balance and objective information in a timely manner.	To obtain feedback on analysis, issues, alternatives and decisions.	To work with public to make sure concerns and aspirations are considered and understood.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision-making.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE	"We will keep you informed."	"We will listen to and acknowledge your concerns."	"We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the decisions made."	"We will look to you for advice and innovation and incorporate this in decisions as much as possible."	"We will implement what you decide."
INPUT ZONE			ENGAGEMENT ZONE		

Engagement Opportunities

In-Person Open House

The primary in-person engagement opportunity was the Affected Landowner Meeting/Open House, held on August 31 and open to all members of the public. The event followed a self-guided open house format, featuring information boards, project team members available to answer questions, opportunities for small-group conversations and several ways for attendees to provide feedback.

The team included representatives from the Town of Okotoks Planning & Urban Design and Engineering departments, as well as consultants from Onterris and Urban Systems Ltd.

Attendees were encouraged to share their questions and input verbally, or by filling out the provided feedback forms. Only one attendee provided written feedback.

Most attendees identified as property owners whose property fell within one of the four flood hazard categories.

Online Participation

A dedicated project webpage on the Town's Shape Our Town community engagement platform was launched in August 2026: shapeourtown.okotoks.ca/flood-hazard-policy-updates. The webpage served as a central hub for project information, provincial flood mapping updates, engagement opportunities and contact information for residents wishing to share questions or comments with the project team.

Engagement materials, including the Open House information boards and online feedback form, were made available through the project webpage. This What We Learned Report will also be made publicly available on the project webpage.

Advertising Summary

To connect directly with residents, the Town mailed 576 letters to affected landowners (anyone whose property fell within one of the four flood hazard categories), providing an overview of the project and information about the upcoming Open House.

Other forms of advertising for the Open House included social media and newspaper ads in the Western Wheel.

Analytics



527

Project page views



297

Email campaign reach (from Shape Our Town subscribers interested in Planning projects)



82

Views of Flood Hazard Policy Overview



114

New flood hazard mapping downloads

What We Learned

In-Person Open House

The following table summarizes the key comments, questions, and themes shared by attendees during the Open House.

Flood Protection Levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty around differences between flood protection, flood mitigation and flood resiliency • Confusion about the relationship between flood protection works (raising/protection) and riprap, with a need to clarify that riprap primarily addresses erosion rather than flood protection.
Floodway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants supported preserving floodway areas for functions that are compatible with periodic flooding and river processes. • Interest in being clear about what constitutes redevelopment versus new development. • Also be clear on what “development” is allowed – will the Town permit temporary structures, trailers, vehicles, etc.
Flood Fringe and High Hazard Flood Fringe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure clarity on the difference between the two – clear definitions • Questions around what is applied when more than one hazard area is designated to a single property
Protected Flood Fringe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many questions centered around whether the railway embankment eliminates flood risk or simply reduces flood risk. • Landowners wanted to understand why properties behind the embankment remain subject to flood-related regulations if the embankment is intended to provide protection.



What We Learned

Written Comments from Open House

The following is transcribed written feedback received at the Open House:

East Lineham resident concerns:

- How is the berm going South Railway going to be? Concerned will send water into Lineham.
- Where are the condo people going to park? Why letting condos to be built in the area?

What We Learned

Feedback Received

The following letter was submitted during the engagement period and has been included as part of the feedback received.

September 18, 2026

Attention: **Town of Okotoks Administration**

Re: **Flood Hazard Policies Update Feedback/Support Letter**

██████████ is an Alberta based land developer creating residential communities across Alberta and British Columbia. We transform raw land into thoughtfully planned neighbourhoods shaped around how people live, move and connect. We understand that any new neighbourhood requires and understanding of, and building with the land first, as well as intention with how that neighbourhood will fit into the wider community. We have been proud to contribute to the growth of Okotoks, and to collaborate with Town Administration and Council in building unique places that more Okotokians can call home.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Town's proposed updates to the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) and Land Use Bylaw (LUB) flood hazard policies and regulations in response to the updated provincial flood maps. We recognize the importance of protecting public safety, property and infrastructure while ensuring that MDP and LUB appropriately reflects the range of flood conditions that may occur along the Sheep River corridor. We are encouraged by an approach that establishes clear expectations for safe development while retaining appropriate levels of flexibility to respond to site-specific conditions. The updated provincial mapping introduces greater detail and new hazard categories, including the High Hazard Flood Fringe and Protected Flood Fringe. As the Town's engagement materials acknowledge, flood conditions can vary significantly between properties, and High Hazard Flood Fringe areas may be identified due to water depth, flow, velocity, or both. The Protected Flood Fringe category also recognizes that grading, building design and other site improvements can change the conditions contributing to that designation.

Flood Fringe and High Hazard Flood Fringe

We are supportive of the approach to continue allowing development to be considered within both the Flood Fringe and High Hazard Flood Fringe where landowners/developers can demonstrate that flood risks can be appropriately addressed.

This approach recognizes that a mapped hazard category is an important starting point for development review, but that the actual suitability of development should be informed by detailed engineering and site-specific analysis. A planning and regulatory framework that allows qualified professionals to assess conditions and mitigation measures provides an opportunity for development decisions to be both thoughtful and realistic.

Setbacks and Professional Assessment

At the Landowner Session on August 31st, we noted that the LUB policy specifying a 60m setback from the Sheep River will be retained while allowing flexibility where a qualified assessment demonstrates that a reduced setback can be safely accommodate, and that a 6m setback from the floodway will be added. The engagement boards specify that "Where the 60 metre setback lies outside the Floodway, development is restricted as if it were inside the Floodway." Although the policy does allow for flexibility pending a qualified assessment, we feel that the 60m setback should not supersede the provincially identified floodway in this way, and that the policy should instead require technical justification for the implementation of either setback. Allowing site-specific technical evidence to inform the final development response, is a practical approach to planning in flood hazard areas.

Conclusion

We are supportive of a policy framework that establishes a balance between public safety, regulatory certainty and site-specific flexibility. Provincial flood data provides important input for land use planning. The detailed design and development process should take the next step to better understand local conditions and determine appropriate responses.

Considering development along the Sheep River based on site-specific technical analysis and appropriate flood mitigation measures provides a clear, consistent, and technically defensible basis for land use decision-making. This approach recognizes unique conditions while maintaining public safety as the central consideration.

We trust that the specific policy updates for the MDP and LUB will integrate the language suggested in the public engagement boards with fewer "shall", "must", "will" or "require" statements restricting development without allowance for technical justification. In addition, we trust that the policy update will permit and facilitate the implementation of floodproofing or mitigative measures for new developments (i.e. The removal or revision of MDP Policy 1.4.1(f)), supporting innovative, unique, and safe development in proximity to this natural asset.

We recognize the importance of protecting public safety, property and infrastructure, and feel that many of the proposed policy revisions provide greater opportunity to do just that.

As an active community builder within the Town, we would appreciate the opportunity to continue to be informed about and provide input on Town policy updates.

Online Participation

The engagement webpage offered opportunities for community members to ask questions and provide feedback on the project. A total of three comments were received through the “Share Your Thoughts” section.

Verbatim comments:

Comment #1	Proposed policy changes look good. With new mapping more bank stabilization/flood proofing should be done to protect erosion and properties.
Comment #2	<p>Excellent video above thanks! I spend many hours enjoying nature along the Sheep River. Water is life and it must be protected all the way upstream at its headwaters and downstream to our neighbours.</p> <p>I agree 100% that no development should be allowed, even in the fringe areas. Besides, why would any insurance company take that risk?</p> <p>I also want to see no damage done to the river and the ecosystems around it, if and when a new TUC e.g. bridge is required over this pristine river.</p> <p>It's important to keep the focus on people and nature over profits during every part of the planning process.</p> <p>For my kids and all kids and all animals.</p> <p>PS – do not shy away from using the scientific term of CLIMATE CHANGE and do not ever bow to populist pressure to defund or otherwise neutralize the Town's climate action plan and its essential goals; delaying action now will only serve to further destabilize the climate thereby jeopardizing the future welfare of every living thing.</p>
Comment #3	No more development by the river! There is almost no nature left. Protect what little we have.



Next Steps



OCT

26

This What We Learned Report will be shared at the October 26 Public Hearing. Residents will have an additional opportunity to provide input at that time.

If no amendments are required to the proposed updates, Council will adopt the changes to the Land Use Bylaw (LUB) and Municipal Development Plan (MDP).

