

THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR  
MUNICIPAL PLANNING, SUBDIVISION, AND  
DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

Alberta Municipal Affairs  
February 1997  
Updated March 2002

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The authority for municipal planning, subdivision and development control is established in Part 17 of the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA). The purpose of this Part is set out in section 617 of the Act. To summarize, it means that municipalities may adopt plans and land use bylaws and make planning decisions to achieve the beneficial use of land without infringing on the rights of individuals except to the extent necessary for the greater public interest. In addition, the *Subdivision and Development Regulation* (AR 43/2002), authorized by s. 694(1) of the MGA provides for the administration of subdivision applications, subdivision and development conditions, registration and endorsements of subdivision and setbacks for provincial appeals.

This bulletin discusses the legislated municipal planning framework, outlines the legislated steps in the subdivision and development control process, and notes the statutory exemptions and limitations to municipal planning authority.

## 2.0 MUNICIPAL PLANNING OVERVIEW

The legislative framework for municipal planning includes policy, operations, and appeal components. Municipalities establish planning policy by adopting statutory plans and land use bylaws. Policies are put into operation by municipally appointed subdivision and development authorities which are responsible for receiving and deciding on subdivision and development permit applications. These administrative decisions may be appealed to the subdivision and development appeal board or, in certain instances, to the Municipal Government Board. The relationship of these components is illustrated in Figure 1 at the end of this document and discussed below.

### Statutory Plans - MGA Sections 631-638

Statutory plans allow municipal councils to establish general development policies for all or part of the municipality. Legislation provides for four types of statutory plans:

1. Two or more municipalities may adopt an **intermunicipal development plan** in respect of land where a consensus on use and development is desired. Such a plan typically relates to the fringe area of urban and rural municipalities or to shared natural features such as lakes.
2. The **municipal development plan** establishes policies for land use in the entire municipality. Municipalities with a population of 3500 or more are required to adopt a municipal development plan. Municipalities with a population of less than 3500 are encouraged to do so.
3. Municipalities may adopt **area structure plans** to establish the general land use, transportation, and servicing framework for specific areas undergoing substantial new development.
4. Municipalities may adopt **area redevelopment plans** to outline proposals for addressing planning issues when rejuvenating existing developed areas.

Statutory plans must be consistent with each other.

### **Land Use Bylaws - MGA Section 639-640**

The land use bylaw is the means of regulating the use and development of parcels of land. The Act defines "development" as an excavation or stockpile, construction, renovation or repairs to a building, a change in the use of land or intensity in the use of land.

All municipalities are required to adopt a land use bylaw. The land use bylaw divides the municipality into districts, prescribing permitted and/or discretionary uses for each district. The bylaw establishes development standards within each district and provides for a system for issuing development permits.

### **Subdivision Authority - MGA Section 623**

The MGA requires all municipalities to establish a subdivision authority to exercise powers and duties on behalf of the municipality. The subdivision authority is responsible for receiving, processing, and deciding on subdivision applications in accordance with the Act and regulations. A subdivision authority may include any or all members of council, a designated officer, a municipal planning commission, or any other person or organization.

### **Subdivision Control - MGA Sections 652-670**

Ordinarily, a person wishing to create one or more lots from a parcel of land must obtain subdivision approval from the municipal subdivision authority.<sup>1</sup> Conditions may be attached to a subdivision approval requiring the applicant to:

1. Provide land as environmental reserve in accordance with section 664 of the Act.
2. Provide up to 30 percent of the land, less any land taken for environmental reserve or environmental reserve easement, for roads and public utilities.
3. Provide up to 10 percent of the land or money in place of land, less any land taken for environmental reserve or environmental reserve easement, for municipal and/or school reserves. Additional reserves may be required by section 17 of the Subdivision and Development Regulation.
4. Enter into a development agreement to construct or pay for the construction of roads, walkways, public utilities, or off-street parking necessary to serve the development.
5. Pay an off-site levy for the capital cost of water, sanitary sewer, or drainage facilities. An off-site levy may be collected only once in respect of a parcel.
6. Ensure compliance with Part 17 of the Act or regulations under that Part, statutory plans, or land use bylaws.

### **Development Authority - MGA Section 624**

The MGA requires all municipalities to establish a development authority to exercise powers and duties on behalf of the municipality. The development authority is responsible for receiving, processing, and deciding on development permit applications. A development authority may include one or more of: a designated officer, a municipal planning commission, or any other person or organization. Most municipalities assign decision-making and administrative responsibilities to staff. In many municipalities, decisions involving discretionary authority are referred to a municipal planning commission (s. 626).

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<sup>1</sup> Separate title may be obtained for certain parcels without subdivision approval, for example, two quarter sections shown on the same title. See section 652 of the MGA.

## **Development Control - MGA Section 640**

The land use bylaw requires development permits for most developments.<sup>2</sup> Conditions may be attached to a development permit requiring the applicant to:

1. Enter into a development agreement to construct or pay for the construction of roads, walkways, public utilities, or off-street parking necessary to serve the development(s. 650).
2. Pay an off-site levy for the capital cost of water, sanitary sewer, or drainage facilities. An off-site levy may be collected only once in respect of a parcel(s. 648).
3. Comply with provisions specified in the land use bylaw (s. 640).

## **Appeal Boards - MGA Sections 627-630, 678-688**

Municipalities are required to establish a subdivision and development appeal board to hear appeals from the decision of the subdivision or development authority. Municipal employees, persons who carry out subdivision or development duties or who are members of the municipal planning commission, may not be appointed to the appeal board. In certain situations identified in the Act, subdivision appeals must be made to the Municipal Government Board. Planning and development bulletins contained in the Municipal Administrator's Handbook address specific situations in detail. Subdivision and development appeal board decisions and Municipal Government Board planning decisions may be in turn be appealed to the Court of Appeal but only on a question of law or jurisdiction(s. 688).

## **3.0 OBTAINING SUBDIVISION AND DEVELOPMENT APPROVAL**

All development must comply with the land use bylaw. Most development will require a development permit. In some cases, statutory plans and land use bylaws must be amended, or subdivision applications approved, before a development permit can be issued. Figures 2 to 7 at the end of this document outline the process discussed in the sections below.

### **Statutory Plan and Land Use Bylaw Amendments**

If a development proposal cannot be approved because it does not conform to the land use bylaw, a proponent may apply to the municipal council to amend the bylaw. A statutory plan amendment may also be necessary. Municipalities generally will coordinate these where required. A staff report and recommendation are usually prepared and forwarded to council. Notice must be given of an application for both a statutory plan and a land use bylaw amendment and council must hold a public hearing before giving second reading (s. 692).

Council's decision on proposed amendments to the land use bylaw or statutory plans is final. There is no legislated time frame within which council must consider applications for amendment. Ordinarily, the minimum time is that required for at least two meetings of council, during which period notice must be given and the public hearing held. Depending on the complexity of the amendment, additional time may be necessary to prepare more extensive staff reports and review.

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<sup>2</sup> A municipality may, in the land use-bylaw, exempt forms of development from the requirement for a development permit. Exempted in the Act from the provisions of the planning part are developments such as transmission lines, utilities, gas and oil wells and pipelines. See section 618 of the MGA and the planning exemption regulations adopted pursuant to that part.

## **Subdivision Application**

If a development proposal requires land to be subdivided, a subdivision application must be submitted to the municipal subdivision authority. The proposed subdivision must conform to any statutory plan and land use bylaw and with the Act and Subdivision and Development Regulation. Under s. 6 of the regulation, a subdivision authority must decide on an application within 60 days.<sup>3</sup> An applicant may consider a failure to make a decision within this 60-day period a "deemed refusal." The subdivision authority may refuse an application, approve it, or approve it with conditions. The written decision of the subdivision authority must include reasons for its decision under s. 8 of the regulation.

## **Subdivision Appeals**

The subdivision authority's decision or deemed refusal may be appealed to the subdivision and development appeal board. An appeal may be launched by the applicant, a provincial government department that was referred the application originally, or council of the municipality, if the decision was made by a party who was not an employee of the municipality or a council committee, or a school authority. Notice of the appeal must be filed with the subdivision and development appeal board within 14 days of receipt of the notice of the decision or the deemed refusal. If the notice was mailed, section 678(3) allows 5 days for the notice to be received. This means the appeal period extends to 19 days if the notice is mailed. If, based on the legislation, the application is determined to involve a provincial interest, the appeal must be to the Municipal Government Board. The subdivision and development appeal board must hold a hearing within 30 days and give a written decision with the reasons for the decision within 15 days of concluding the hearing. The Municipal Government Board must hold a hearing within 60 days and give a written decision with reasons for the decision within 15 days of concluding the hearing. Regardless of which board makes the decision, it can be further appealed to the Court of Appeal on a question of law or jurisdiction.

## **Development Permit Application**

After any required subdivision has been approved or statutory plan or land use bylaw amendments passed, a developer may apply for a development permit. An application for a permitted use that complies with the standards for a district must be approved, with or without conditions. Applications for discretionary uses or applications that do not meet all the standards set out for a district may be approved, conditionally approved, or refused. Applications for uses that are neither permitted nor discretionary within a district must be refused. The development authority must make a decision on a development permit within 40 days, unless the applicant and development authority agree to extend the time, and notify affected persons of the decision in accordance with the land use bylaw. An applicant may consider a failure to make a decision within this period a "deemed refusal."

## **Development Permit Appeals**

An appeal may be launched by the applicant or by other affected persons by filing a notice of appeal with the subdivision and development appeal board within 14 days of receiving notice of the decision or of the deemed refusal. If mailed, the Interpretation Act deems the notice delivered after 7 days have lapsed, bringing the appeal period to 21 days. Where the use is permitted under the land use bylaw, decisions may be appealed only if the appellant believes the provisions of the bylaw were relaxed, varied, or misinterpreted. The

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<sup>3</sup> An application for subdivision of a parcel of land described in section 652(4) of the Act must be decided on in 21 days if there are no referrals. The subdivision authority and an applicant may agree to a longer decision time on any application.

subdivision and development appeal board must hold a hearing within 30 days of receiving the notice of appeal and must give a written decision within 15 days of the conclusion of the hearing. The board's decision may be further appealed to the Court of Appeal on a question of law or jurisdiction.

## **4.0 RELATIONSHIP OF MUNICIPAL PLANNING TO PROVINCIAL AUTHORITY**

The relationship between the municipal planning and development authority and provincial authority is considered here under four headings: exemptions, limitations, consistency, and provincial jurisdiction.

### **Exemptions**

Under section 14 of the *Interpretation Act*, the MGA is not binding on Her Majesty. Thus, where the province is undertaking development, it is not required to obtain subdivision or development approvals although, in fact, it often does. Where the province has leased or transferred title to another party, however, that party must comply with the requirements of the Act. The federal government and federal government agencies are also exempt.

Under section 618 of the MGA, subdivision or development for roads, wells, or batteries, pipelines, designated Crown lands, and the geographic area of Metis settlements is exempt from the provincial regulations and municipal bylaws under Part 17 of the Act. The Planning Exemption Regulation (AR 223/2000) exempts other developments such as hydro transmission and electric distribution lines and irrigation works undertaken by an irrigation district from the planning provisions. Section 618.1 exempts confined feeding operations and manure storage facilities as defined under the *Agricultural Operations Practices Act*.

### **Limitations**

Various sections of Part 17 and the Subdivision and Development Regulation establish rules or set limits on municipal planning authority. Examples include:

- Limitations on the membership of subdivision and development appeal boards - MGA section 627.
- Limitations on the content of off-site levy bylaws and development agreements - MGA sections 648-651.
- Limitations on land dedication for roads, municipal and school reserves - MGA sections 661-670.
- Requirements to make decisions on subdivision and development permit applications within the time specified in the Act.
- Requirements to notify the public of applications to amend statutory plans and bylaws, subdivision applications and development permit decisions.
- Subdivision processing requirements and setbacks and standards for subdivision and development contained in the Subdivision and Development Regulation.

### **Consistency**

Section 619 of the Act establishes that a license, permit, approval, or authorization granted by the Natural Resources Conservation Board, Energy Resources Conservation Board or Energy and Utilities Board prevails over any statutory plan, land use bylaw, subdivision decision, or development decision by a subdivision authority, development authority, subdivision and development appeal board or the Municipal Government Board.

Section 620 of the Act establishes that a condition of a provincial license, permit, approval, or authorization prevails over any condition of a development permit that conflicts with it.

Section 622 provides for the establishment of land use policies and requires that municipal statutory plans, land use bylaws, and planning decisions be consistent with these policies. The Provincial Land Use Policies were approved by the Lieutenant Governor in Council on November 6, 1996 (O/C 522/96).

Section 693 provides that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may establish Calgary and Edmonton International Airport vicinity protection area regulations. These regulations operate notwithstanding any statutory plan, land use bylaw or other regulations under the Planning and Development Part and are binding on a subdivision authority, development authority, subdivision and development appeal board, and the Municipal Government Board. A municipality must amend its statutory plans and land use bylaw to conform with the regulation.

There is no provincial review or approval of municipal plans or bylaws. Municipalities are entrusted to operate within the scope and requirements of the Act and regulations.

### **Provincial Jurisdiction**

Many developments will require provincial approval prior to construction. The following examples are not an exhaustive list:

- Development adjacent to provincial highways requires a development permit from Alberta Transportation.
- Certain developments identified in the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act* require an environmental impact assessment.
- Major projects identified in the *Natural Resources Conservation Act* require the approval of the Natural Resources Conservation Board.
- Energy and utility related projects require the approval of the Energy and Utilities Board.

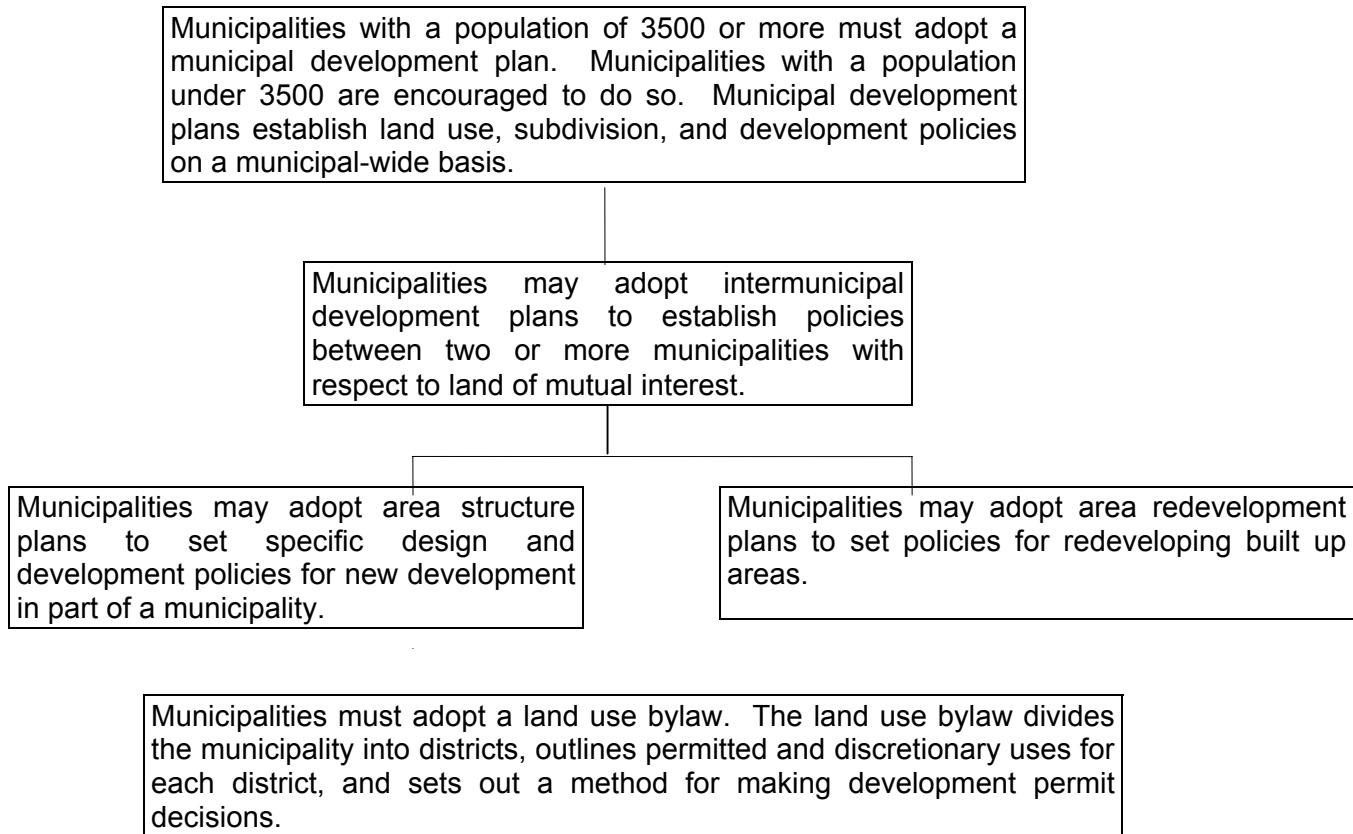
It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure any other necessary approvals have been obtained before proceeding with development.

## **5.0 CONCLUSIONS**

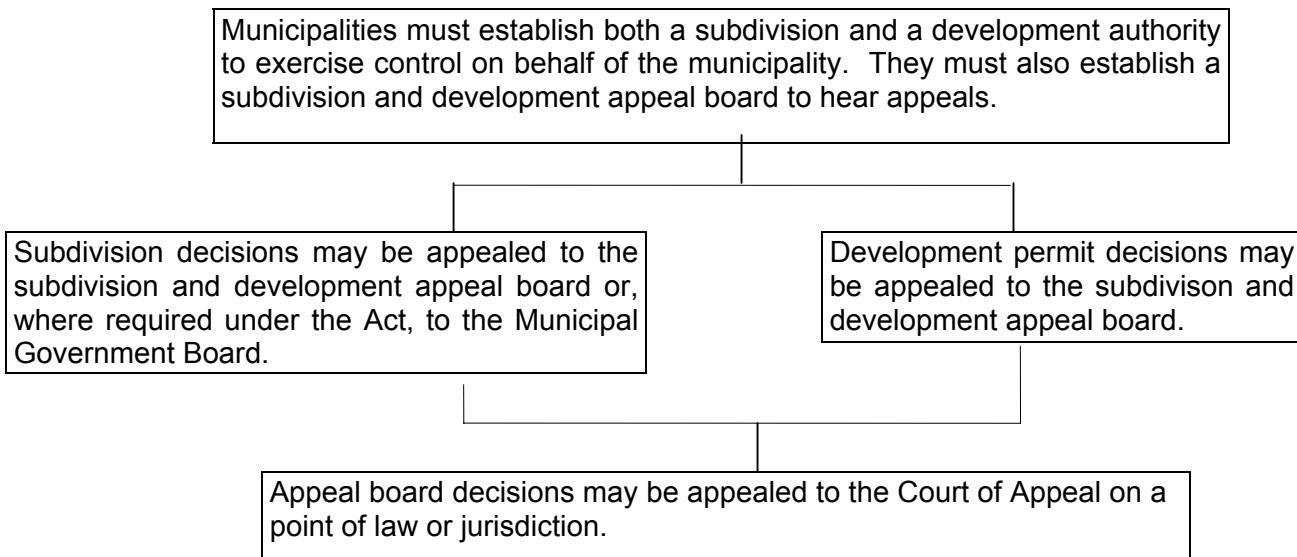
This document is prepared as an overview of the legislative framework for municipal planning, subdivision and development control. It is not a legal interpretation. Interested parties are encouraged to review the appropriate sections of the *Municipal Government Act* and should always refer to the Act when quoting. Further detailed bulletins are contained in the planning section of the Municipal Administrators Handbook. Additional bulletins will be added as the need arises. Persons wishing to develop or subdivide land should discuss specific municipal approval requirements with municipal staff at the earliest opportunity. Questions on this document or the legislative framework for municipal planning, subdivision and development control generally can be directed to the Municipal Services Branch of Alberta Municipal Affairs, Edmonton, telephone (780) 427-2225. To dial toll free outside of Edmonton, dial 310-0000 and ask to be connected to 427-2225.

**FIGURE 1**  
**MUNICIPAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK**

**POLICY**

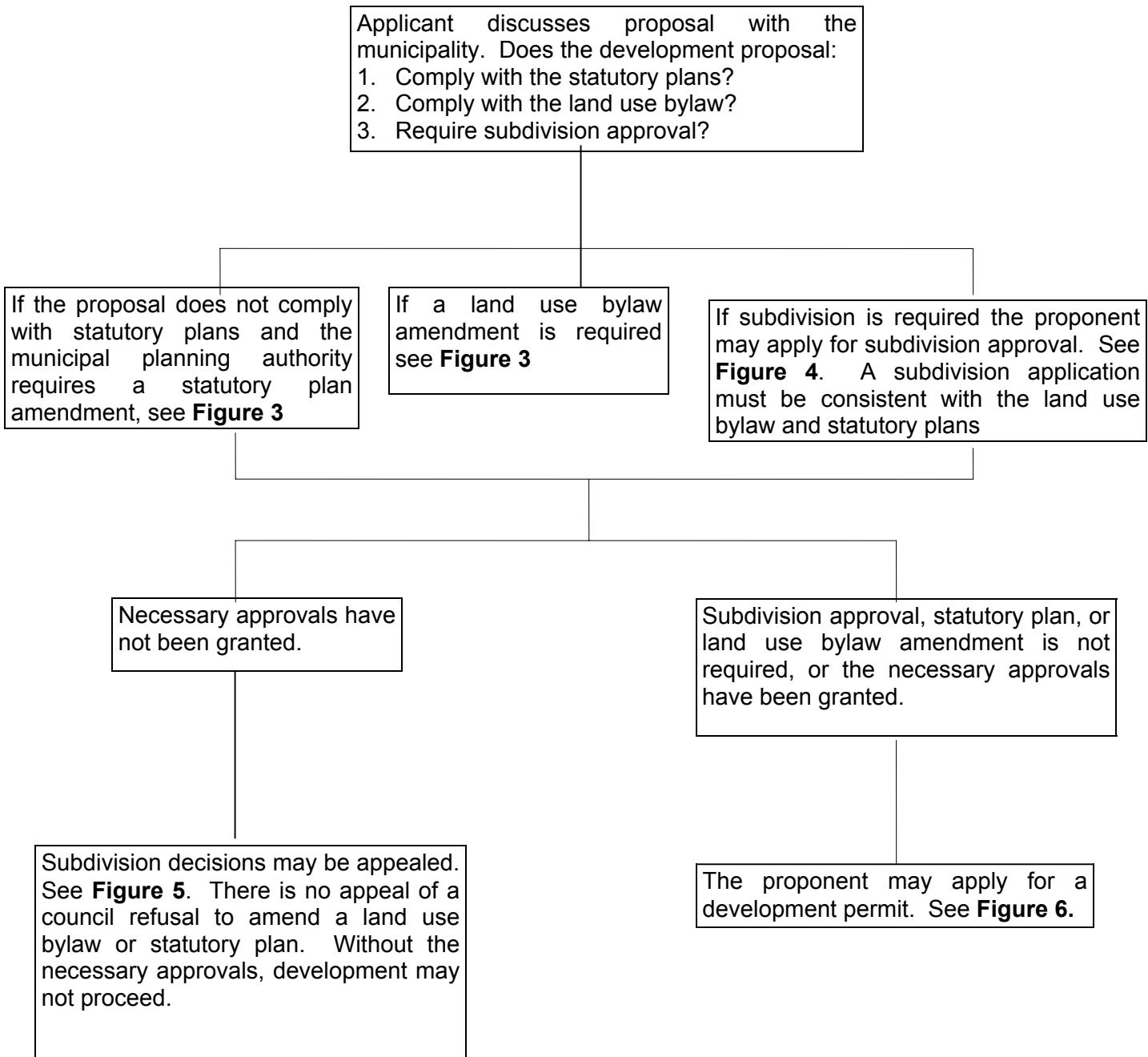


**OPERATIONS AND APPEALS**



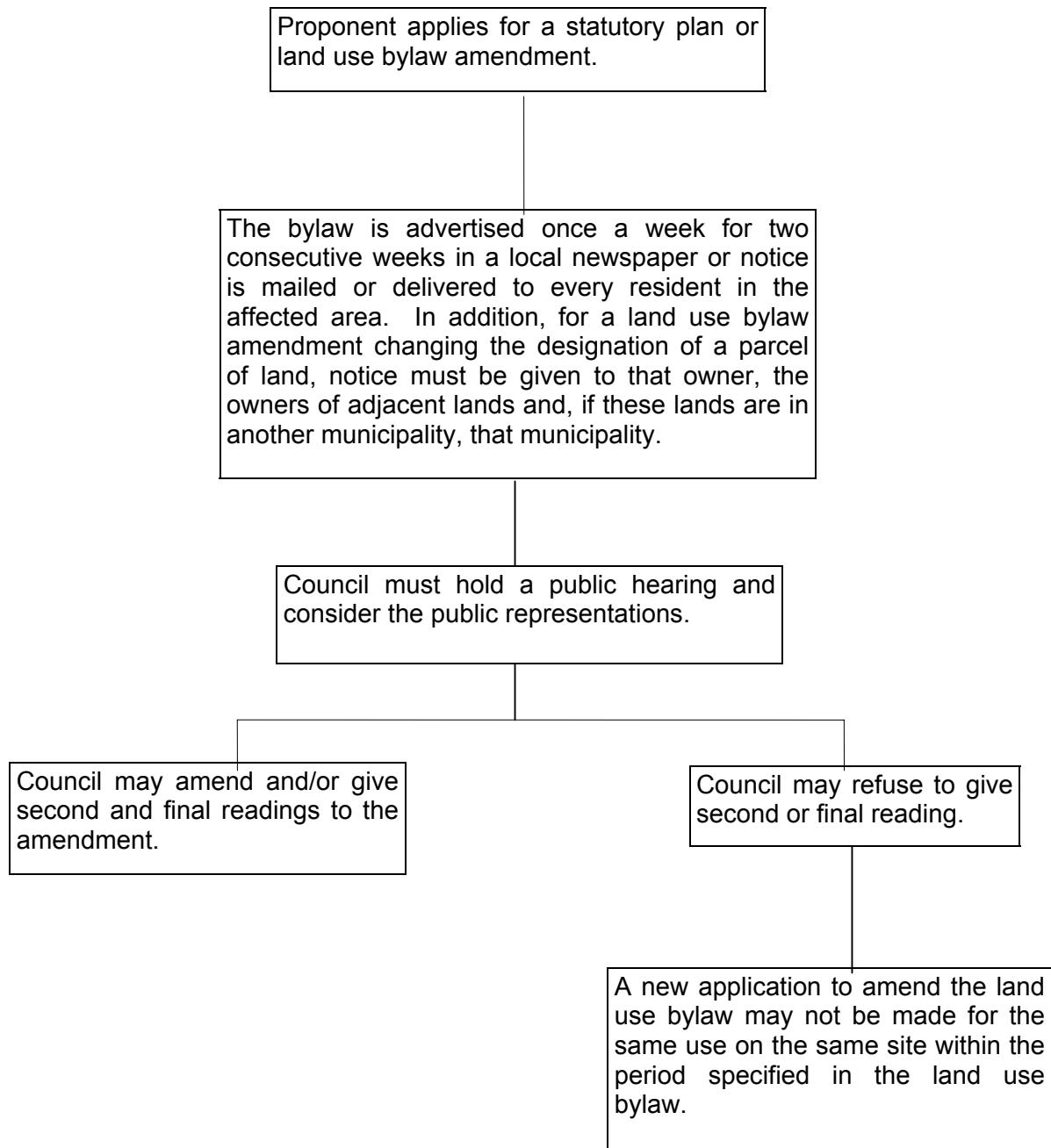
**FIGURE 2**

**MUNICIPAL PLANNING APPROVAL PROCESS OVERVIEW**

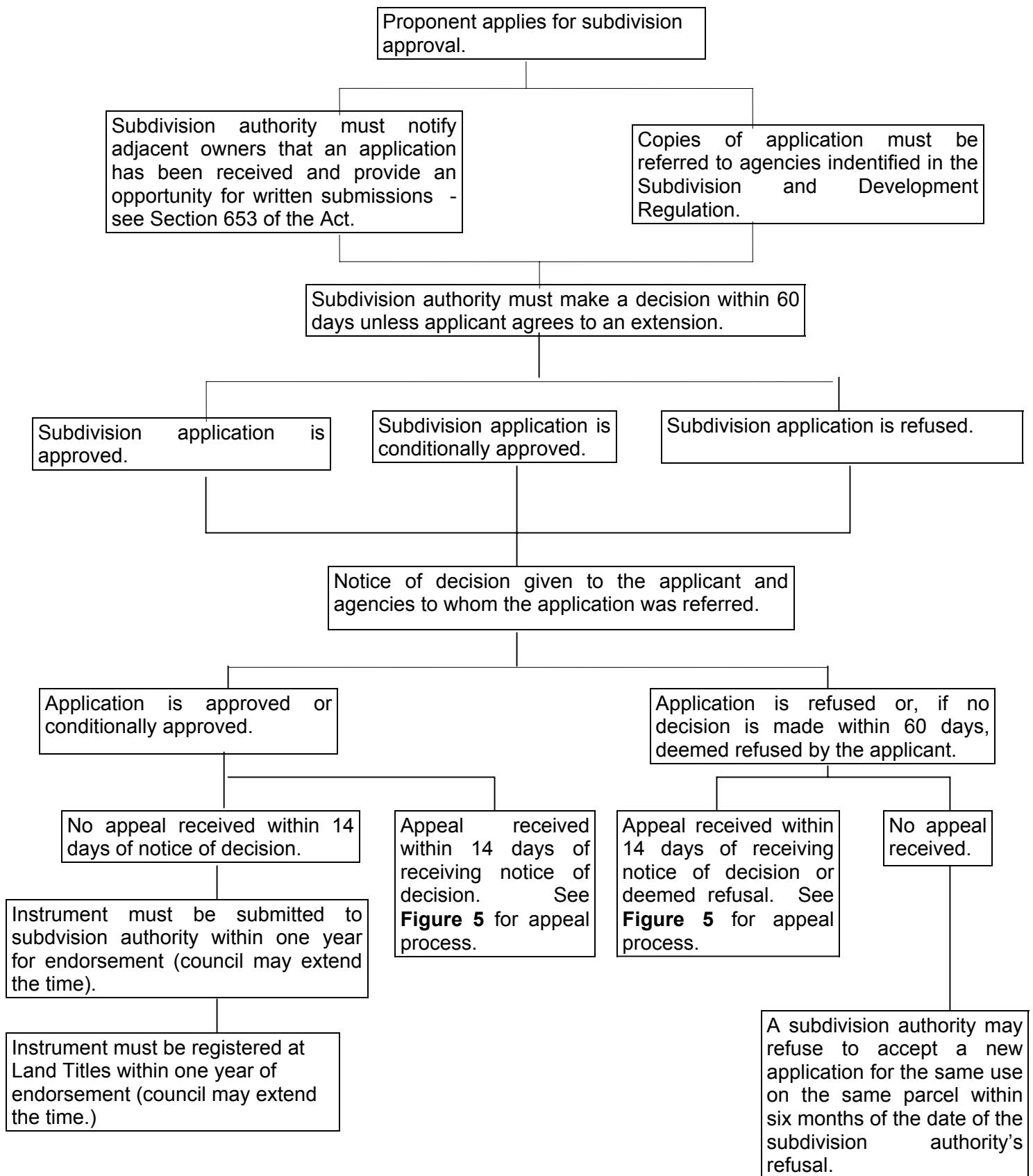


**FIGURE 3**

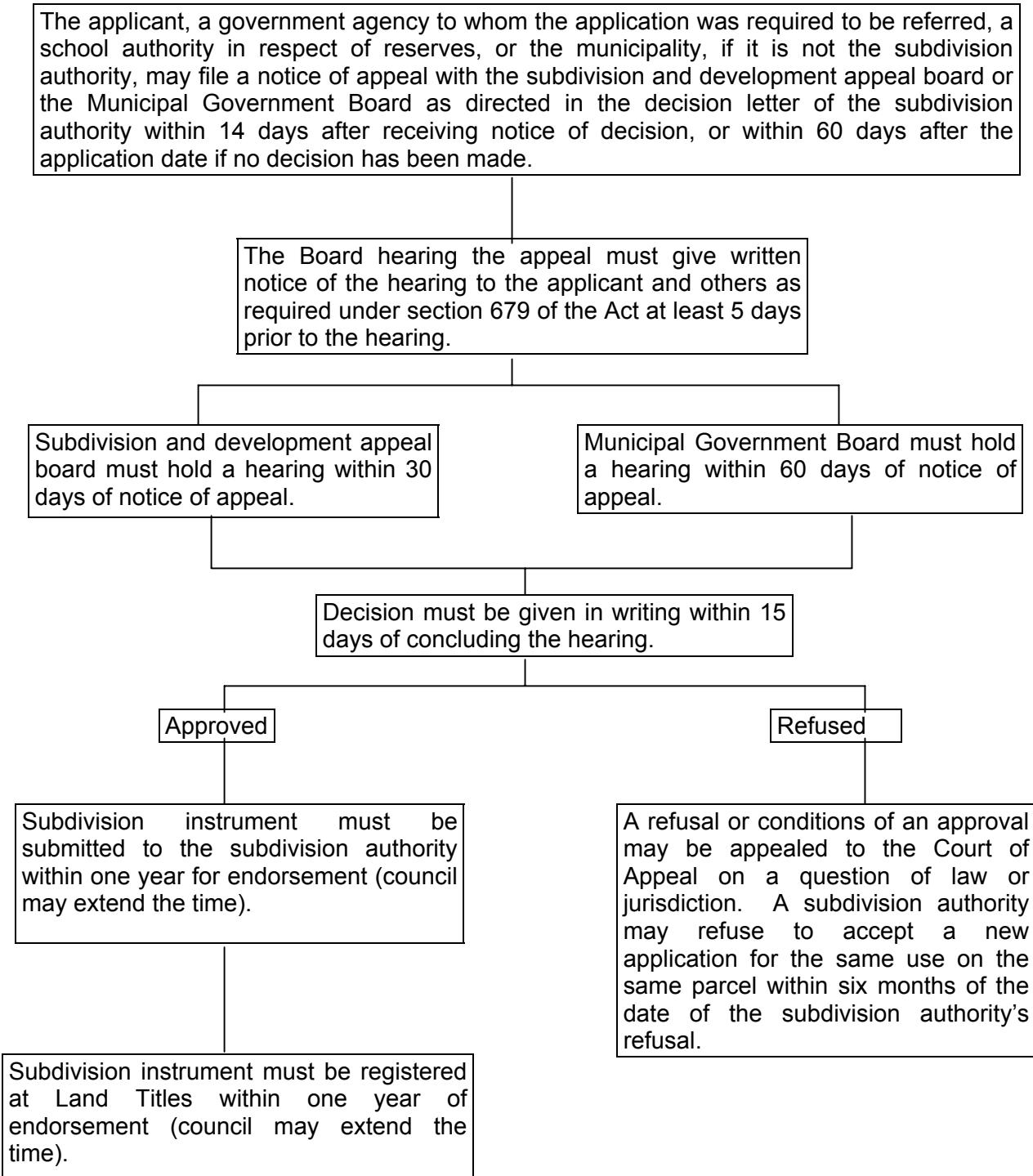
**STATUTORY PLAN AND LAND USE BYLAW AMENDMENT PROCESS**



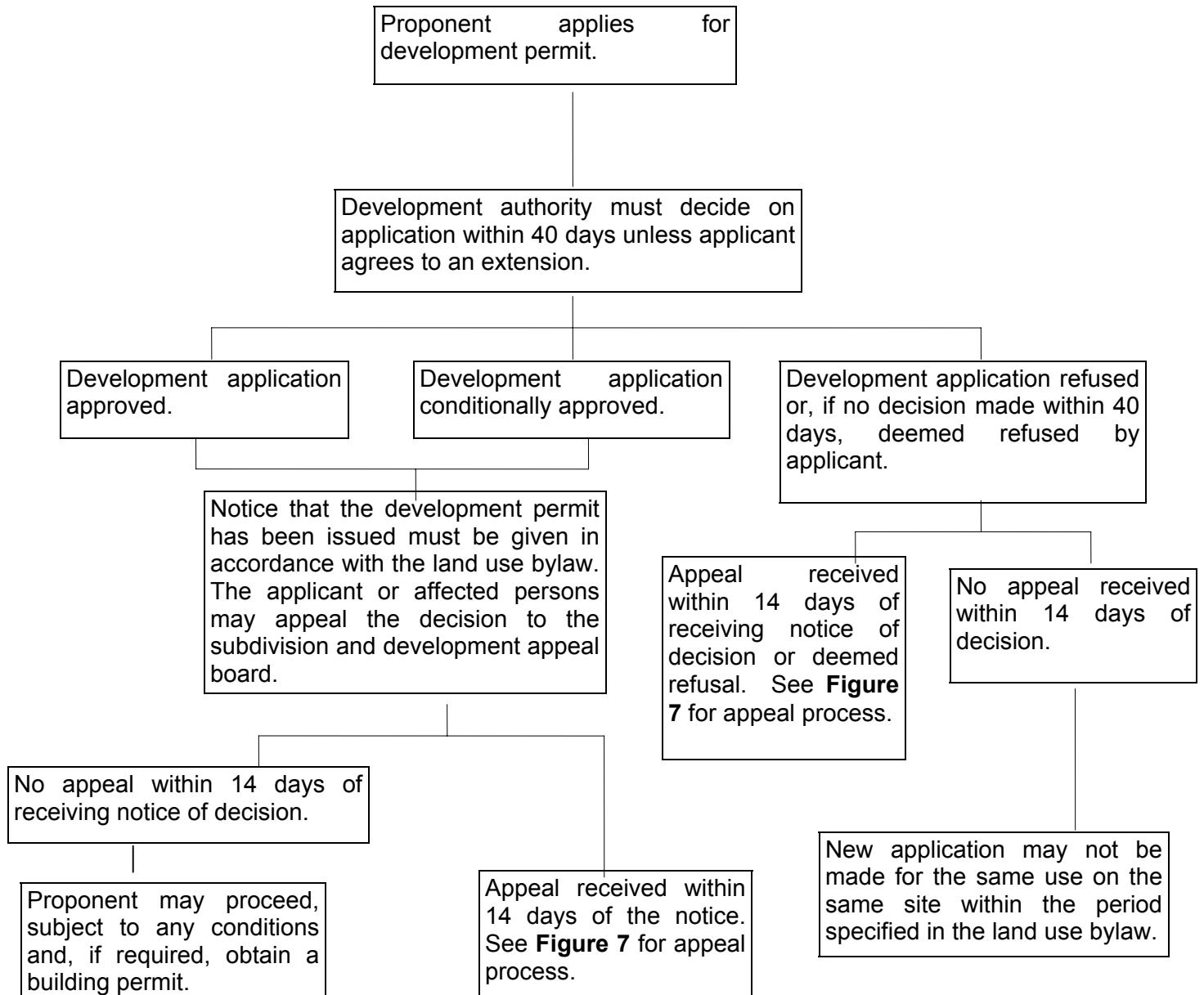
**FIGURE 4**  
**SUBDIVISION APPROVAL PROCESS**



**FIGURE 5**  
**SUBDIVISION APPEALS**



**FIGURE 6**  
**DEVELOPMENT PERMIT APPROVAL PROCESS**



**FIGURE 7**  
**DEVELOPMENT PERMIT APPEALS**

