• InfoSheet •
Planning for Intensification

Ontario

Did you know?

Some of the benefits associated with more compact and intensified built environments include:

- reducing carbon footprints
- improving access to public transit
- using resources such as lands, buildings and infrastructure more effectively
- protecting the natural environment and biodiversity by limiting urban expansion
- enhancing community identity
- incorporating green features that offset and support new development
- creating active streets that promote healthier patterns of human activity
- creating economic opportunities
- improving municipal fiscal performance

This InfoSheet provides an overview of key Planning Act tools that municipalities can use to facilitate and direct land use intensification through compact form, increased density, redevelopment and infill.

The Provincial Planning Framework

Ontario's Provincial Policy Statement, 2005 supports land use intensification by encouraging more optimal use of land, infrastructure, resources and services. Intensification is also a key policy of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2006 and the Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.

Municipalities have been provided with several tools under the Planning Act that can be used to achieve more compact and intensified communities.

Intensification and Compact Form

Intensification means the development of a property, site or area at a higher density than currently exists, through development, redevelopment, infill and expansion or conversion of existing buildings. Each community's form and level of intensification will differ, based on their specific characteristics such as location, history, community strengths and preferences.

Planning and design features that support intensification may include:

- street-level awnings for shade
- wide sidewalks and street furniture for pedestrian comfort
- mobility-friendly curb cuts
- light coloured surfaces for pavement, roads and buildings
- energy-efficient lighting to increase safety
- human-scale designs that create active streets and promote physical activity
- adaptive reuse of heritage buildings
- transit stops and stations
- permeable pavement
- smaller lot sizes
- pedestrian and bicycle pathways.

Hypothetical Scenarios

Photo source: Ontario Growth Secretariat, Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure

Key Planning Act Tools to Support Intensification

Protection of Settlement Area Boundaries – Sections 22, 34
A council refusal or non-decision regarding proposals to expand a settlement boundary or establish a new settlement area cannot be appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board. As a result, municipalities can plan with more certainty for more compact and intensified communities within existing settlement areas. Municipalities can also direct growth to appropriate areas (e.g., outside of hazard areas and around transit nodes) to create more compact built environments and to reduce greenhouse gases associated with auto-dependent commutes between work and home.

Community Improvement Planning – Section 28
Community improvement plans (CIPs) can support intensification by encouraging and directing rehabilitation, (re)development and infill activities within designated improvement areas. Municipalities can set the development stage through municipally-driven programs focused on land assembly and clearance, infrastructure provision and public space improvements. They may also provide for grant or loan programs that direct the private sector towards sustainable development activities that support intensification and compact form (e.g., brownfields assessment and cleanup, building rehabilitation and retrofitting, green building construction, adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, district energy systems, low impact storm water systems and renewable energy technology such as solar panels).

In addition, prescribed upper-tier municipalities can plan for affordable housing, infrastructure and transit corridors, and intra-municipal intensification strategies can be accomplished through upper and lower-tier participation in each other's CIP programs (O. Reg. 221/07 and O. Reg. 550/06).

Minimum and Maximum Standards – Subsection 34(3)
Municipalities can promote intensification through zoning by-laws that establish minimum and maximum building heights and densities and minimum lot area. Regulation of heights and densities for more compact and intensified built environments can result in better use of infrastructure and nearby services and facilities.

Second Units - Sections 17, 22 and 34
Intensification can be promoted through official plan policies and zoning by-law provisions that permit as-of-right second units in detached, semi-detached and row houses. Second units serve to increase densities within existing housing stock while creating opportunities for increased affordable rental housing stock and accommodating aging in place.

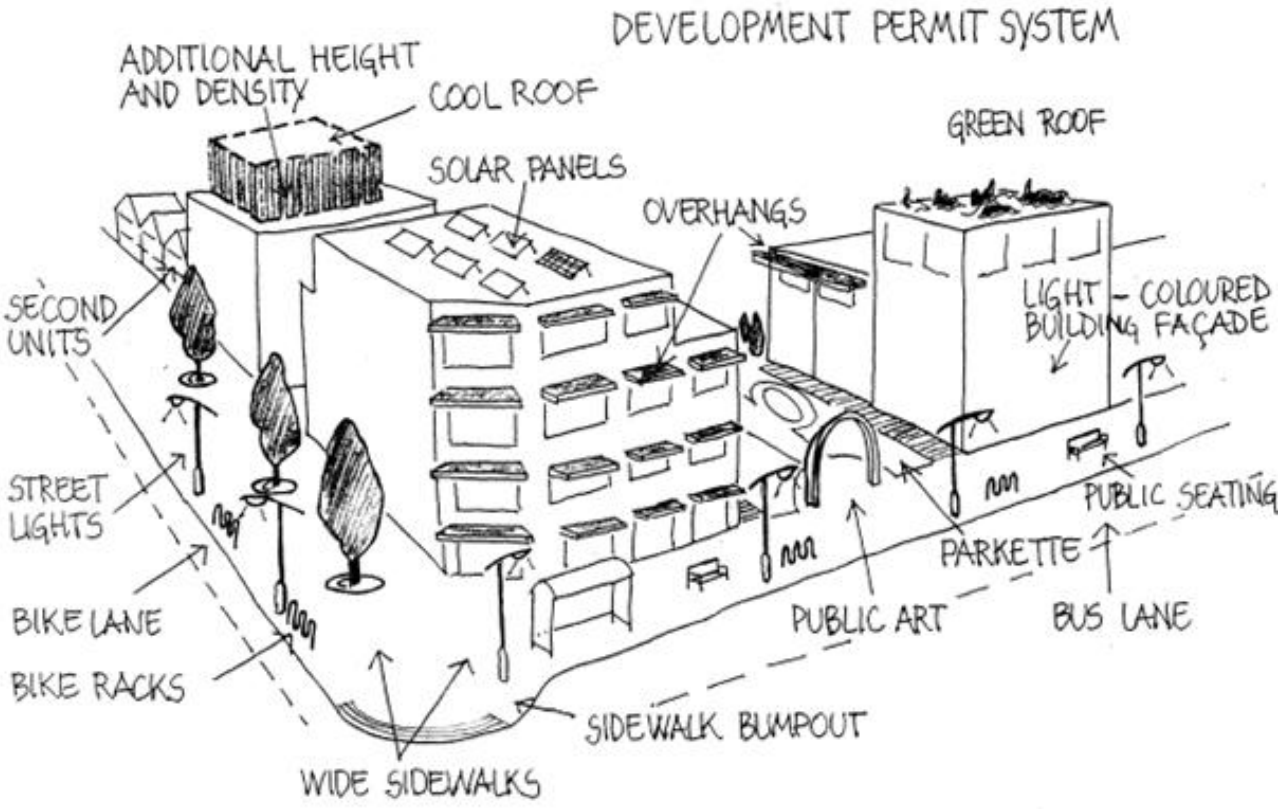
Increased Height and Density – Section 37
Municipalities may authorize additional building height and density in exchange for specified facilities, services or matters set out in a by-law. This exchange can address the potential impacts of intensification (e.g., localized heat island effects and increased pedestrian and vehicular traffic) through sustainability elements such as trees and curbside drought-resistant plantings, green/cool roofs, high albedo exterior building materials, street furniture, transit stop shelters and bicycle parking.

Site Plan Control – Subsection 41(4)
Site plan control can regulate external building design, site and boulevard matters such as character, scale, appearance and sustainable streetscape design. Sustainable design elements that support compact and more intensified forms of development may include street level awnings for shade, wide sidewalks and street furniture for pedestrian comfort, mobility-friendly curb cuts, bicycle parking, light-coloured paving surfaces, energy efficient lighting to increase safety and green roofs for reduced stormwater runoff and improved energy efficiency.

Parkland Dedication - Subsection 42(6.2)
Where on-site parkland dedication cannot be accommodated, municipalities may provide for a reduction in cash-in-lieu requirements in exchange for sustainability features such as permeable surfaces, water-efficient landscaping, low-impact stormwater design and energy efficiency elements such as solar panels. This way, intensification efforts are complemented through green infrastructure and low impact development features.

Plan of Subdivision - Section 51
Approval authorities may review plans of subdivision to assess aspects of design and layout that support more sustainable, higher density proposals, including: smaller lot sizes, pedestrian and bicycling pathways and trails for increased non-motorized transportation options; optimized lot layout for energy efficiency; road connectivity to support efficient transit services; and green spaces to offset heat island effect and rainwater runoff.

Development Permit System (DPS) - Section 70.2 and O. Reg. 608/06
The DPS is a streamlining tool that combines zoning, site plan control and minor variance into a single-application process. More compact and denser forms of development are achievable through the establishment of minimum and maximum height, density and lot sizes, while conditions for a development permit may require sustainability elements to support development practices that produce lower carbon footprints (e.g., preserving trees and vegetation for carbon uptake, green building requirements to decrease greenhouse gas emissions and solar panels on building exteriors for clean energy).



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Toll Free: 800-465-5027

Western (London)
(519) 873-4020
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Other Resources

Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure
Places to Grow initiative
ontario.ca/placestogrow

Ministry of Transportation
Transit Supportive Land use Planning Guidelines
ontario.ca/mto

Policy Connections

Municipal official plan policies articulate a community's vision for a well-planned and designed built environment that can include:

- target areas for intensification
- effective infrastructure use through increased densities
- mixed-use neighbourhoods
- increased height and density near transit facilities, nodes and corridors
- design standards for road and sidewalk widths, lot sizes, and exterior building design features
- public spaces, recreational areas and walking and cycling paths that enhance street presence, pedestrian activity, social interaction and public safety
- street layout and design that facilitates mobility for all modes of transportation
- barrier-free development to ensure accessibility for seniors and people with disabilities
- redevelopment of areas in decline
- green development including energy-efficient street and site layout
- heritage preservation and adaptive reuse of heritage buildings.

Places to Grow

The Greater Golden Horseshoe is facing increased growth pressures. In response, the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2006 was released under the Places to Grow Act, 2005. This Plan provides policies that promote intensification and revitalization and directs growth to built-up areas through a comprehensive 25-year vision designed to:

- revitalize downtowns to become vibrant and convenient centres
- create complete communities that offer options for living, working, shopping and playing
- provide greater housing choices to meet people's needs at all stages of life
- curb sprawl and protect farmland and green spaces
- reduce traffic gridlock by improving access to a greater range of transportation options

Note to User: This InfoSheet deals in a summarized fashion with complex matters and reflects legislation, policies and practices that are subject to change. It should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialized legal or professional advice in connection with any particular matter and should not be construed as legal advice by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The user is solely responsible for any use or the application of this information. As such, this Ministry does not accept any legal responsibility for the contents of this InfoSheet or for any consequences, including direct or indirect liability, arising from its use.

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