



Sustainable Development



Land Use Planning



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Sustainable Development Land Use Planning

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DEFINITIONS:

Urban sprawl is defined as low density, vehicle-oriented portions of urban areas on the fringe of and within currently developed areas that are characteristically homogenous with respect to land use. Sprawl includes residential suburban and exurban development extending into the adjacent countryside.

Smart Growth aims to counter many aspects of urban sprawl and reflects a return to urban villages and neighbourhood retail districts, such as the Bay & Algoma Area and Westfort Village. Smart growth areas have an appropriate balance of land use types and housing choices and have almost everything you need on a daily basis within walking distance.

GOAL:

To include and implement concepts surrounding smart growth and sustainability into the planning and patterns of land use within the community and the Corporation. In particular, these concepts are to be incorporated into decision-making processes concerning the management of land use for new development and for the evolution and change of existing uses of land.

WHY IT MATTERS:

Land use planning plays a significant role in both defining built landscapes, and shaping the natural landscape. It can be used as a tool to limit the impact of human activities on the environment, as well as to enhance significant cultural aspects of human history.

From Thunder Bay's earliest beginnings on the shoreline of Lake Superior as a natural resource and transportation-based economy, to today's focus on learning, health care, service and retail, and providing for an aging and changing demographic, the City has continued to expand its geographic extent. Notwithstanding that the City's population base has remained virtually unchanged in the past two decades, this increase in the City's extent is continuing with significant impacts upon the City – positively for the growth seen in the Intercity area, but negatively on the two former downtown core areas and costs to deliver services.

Increasingly, smart growth and sustainable community values and considerations are being accepted by society as desirable and achievable elements of community decision making and visions. Careful land use planning can facilitate the livability and sustainability of our built environment. Beyond the original public health benefits, land use planning can protect forests, green spaces and waterways, and can encourage walkability, reduce GHG emissions, reduce the impact of the urban heat-island effect, and contribute to the overall aesthetics and well-being of the community.

Aspects within the community that can be addressed through a sustainable community approach to land use management include:

- Intensification and redevelopment,
- Concentration and increase in population density,
- Response to neighbourhood transition and downtown decline,
- Awareness and protection of sensitive community and ecological assets, and
- General betterment of the City's aesthetics and quality of life

Components of these approaches can be found in the City of Thunder Bay Official Plan (OP) and are integral components of Ontario's Provincial Policy Statement.

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OBJECTIVES and RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

A. By 2020, development activities that counter urban sprawl are promoted, providing net energy and land savings and conserving or enhancing ecological functions.

ACTIONS FOR CORPORATION

- a. Encourage land use patterns that optimize the use of existing and planned levels of infrastructure and public services
- b. Promote pedestrian-scaled and transit-oriented development in both residential neighbourhoods and commercial areas
- c. Strive to create residential neighbourhoods which are mixed use, contain a variety of housing forms and provide access to daily amenities within walking distance
- d. Strengthen Official Plan policies that encourage infill redevelopment including setting residential density targets, examining increasing residential dwelling densities along transit routes, and assessing reviewing existing Community Improvement Plans for effectiveness
- e. Establish and maintain linkages between neighbourhoods, with emphasis on walking and bicycling pathways, as part of the City's Active Transportation Plan and relating to the concept of "Complete Streets®"
- f. Strengthen the enforcement of site plan control and examine the feasibility of the application of City-wide universal site plan control
- g. Revise plan of subdivision requirements to require new streets to optimize solar potential for new buildings and dwellings

ACTIONS FOR COMMUNITY

- a. Continue to inventory and protect natural heritage assets and resources, such as floodplains and other hazard lands, parks, significant wetlands and lands managed by the Conservation Authority
- b. Encourage community awareness of such natural heritage features and their value to the community, via production of online maps and related documentation
- c. Explore issues and restraints that obstruct redevelopment and residential intensification in the historic downtown cores
- d. Measure the application of the City's urban design guidelines and image route guidelines that increase community aesthetics and liveability
- e. Investigate and develop neighbourhood and building design standards that optimize energy efficiency, reduce GHG emissions and prioritize the capture of renewable energy, for inclusion in the next OP review

B. Development activities that result in greater socio-economic and demographic diversity in new and existing neighbourhoods are promoted.

ACTIONS FOR CORPORATION

- a. Direct growth to optimize the use of existing infrastructure and public services which will reduce the need to construct new infrastructure or to extend public services, such as parks, schools and community centres
- b. Develop programs, incentives and bonuses targeted at supporting and achieving density increases, affordability, and land use diversity

ACTIONS FOR COMMUNITY

- a. Build upon the successes achieved in recent years with respect to the establishment of community gardens
- b. Research issues and other barriers to sustaining and expanding the number of community gardens and other communal green spaces
- c. Conduct research relating to the best types of and locations of housing to meet existing and growing demand from the City's aging population (in conjunction with Corporation)
- d. Research the distribution of existing and planned multi-unit housing across the City, to determine the overall equity in its distribution and its coordination with improvements to transit service

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C. Development activities are supported that optimize the use of existing infrastructure and are within developed areas, and any new expansions and developments do not compromise Thunder Bay's fiscal health.

ACTIONS FOR CORPORATION

- Promote development that maximizes the use of existing or planned utilities, infrastructure and/or public services
- Encourage infill, intensification and redevelopment of existing built areas (over greenfield development) and conduct research to monitor these initiatives in practice
- Identify areas of the City that are in transition or decline and research land use approaches that can help to reverse such trends
- Continue to identify and promote programs and incentives supporting downtown development or redevelopment
- Compile an inventory of City-owned brownfield properties and develop some incentives and best practices for their re-development

ACTIONS FOR COMMUNITY

- Research obstructions to the redevelopment of existing buildings
- Explore land use opportunities for the historic downtown areas and the satellite Westfort business area that can expand the level of activity in such areas

D. The public, City Administration and Council are engaged on the merits of land use policies that champion smart growth practices.

ACTIONS FOR CORPORATION

- Present planning and land use information sessions to new Council and at municipal ward meetings (at least twice annually)
- Employ various public workshops (such as design charrettes) to create development using the City's Urban Design Guidelines and to assist the development of energy-efficient building and neighbourhood design standards
- Explore opportunities to exchange ideas on best land use development and management practices with First Nations communities (in conjunction with Community)
- Expand the definition of "natural environment" within City planning to recognize the role of natural systems in climate adaptation
- Identify natural areas within City limits to manage, conserve and/or remediate in order to maintain or increase ecosystem health and ecological resilience

ACTIONS FOR COMMUNITY

- Synthesize updates to planning and land-use management in the City and submit for publication in the EcoSuperior newsletter and other local publications on a bi-annual basis
- Expand the exchange of potential research topics between City Departments, the community, and researchers at the College and University (in conjunction with Corporation)

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Participate in the yearly "Jane's Walk", or host a walk around your neighbourhood (see www.janeswalk.org)
- Advocate for walkable neighbourhoods and streets that focus on the person (not just cars)
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- Advocate to preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas