

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION

**PLANNING ISSUE #10:
SUSTAINABLE DESIGN +
HEALTHY COMMUNITIES**

DISCUSSION, DIRECTIONS + RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
REVISIONS TO THE OFFICIAL PLAN



MIDLAND OFFICIAL PLAN REVIEW

The Planning Partnership
Municipal Planning Services
Plan B Natural Heritage
urbanMetrics
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Purpose

A high quality, well-designed built environment is valued within the Town. To support this environment the Town needs to promote the creation of “complete communities” that include a diverse mix of land uses, a range and mix of housing types and tenures, employment opportunities, high quality public open spaces, amenities and services, and active transportation options. Complete communities create healthier, more desirable, and sustainable environments to live in, while also minimizing land consumption and negative impacts to the natural environment.

Energy and water conservation, waste reduction, and improved air quality are also components of sustainable design and healthy living environments. Introducing sustainability as a lens for future development will lead to communities that are safer, more active, healthier, financially prosperous, and more resource conscious.

This report will review and summarize the relevant policies in Provincial planning and the Simcoe County Official Plan to guide the development of Directions and recommendations for policies to be included in the new Official Plan.

How this report is laid out

This report, and all “planning issue” reports for this phase of the Midland Official Plan Review (OPR), are structured to provide a clear understanding of the policy background and basis for the various matters to be addressed in the OPR.

The reports begin with the policy background consisting of the relevant definitions in a grey inset box, and the applicable Provincial, County and municipal policies and reports in a blue inset box. The policy background is followed by the public comments received on each planning issue. These sections then feed into a discussion of the issues, through which guiding Directions are identified, and the consultant recommendations for the OPR based on these Directions.

Policy Background

Definitions

COMPLETE COMMUNITIES meet people's needs for daily living throughout an entire lifetime by providing convenient access to an appropriate mix of jobs, local services, a full range of housing, and community infrastructure including affordable housing, schools, recreation and open space for their residents, convenient access to public transportation and options for safe, non-motorized travel is also provided. (County OP)

Provincial Policies

Policy Reference - Provincial Policy Statement (2014): Section 1.0 (Building Strong Healthy Communities); Section 1.5 (Infrastructure and Public Service Facilities); and Section 1.8 (Energy Conservation, Air Quality and Climate Change).

- The PPS provides a substantial policy framework aimed at building strong and healthy communities. Section 1.1.1 of the PPS states:
 - “1.1.1 Healthy, liveable and safe communities are sustained by:
 - a) Promoting efficient development and land use patterns which sustain the financial well-being of the Province and municipalities over the long term
 - b) Accommodating an appropriate range and mix of residential (including second units, affordable housing and housing for older persons), employment (including industrial and commercial), institutional (including places of worship, cemeteries and long-term care homes), recreation, park and open space, and other uses to meet long-term needs
 - d) Avoiding development and land use patterns that would prevent the efficient expansion of settlement areas in those areas which are adjacent or close to settlement areas
 - e) Promoting cost-effective development patterns and standards to minimize land consumption and servicing costs
 - h) Promoting development and land use patterns that conserve biodiversity and consider the impacts of a changing climate”
- Further, the PPS states “healthy, active communities should be promoted by planning public streets, spaces and facilities to be safe, meet the needs of pedestrians, foster social interaction and facilitate active transportation and community connectivity” (Section 1.5.1 a)).

- Under the PPS "Planning authorities shall support energy conservation and efficiency, improved air quality, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and climate change adaptation through land use and development patterns" (Section 1.8).
- In the context of new Provincial Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities (AODA) legislation and an aging population, accessible/universal design also needs to be considered.

Growth Plan Policies

Policy Reference - Growth Plan, Office Consolidation, June 2013: Section 2.22 (Managing Growth); and Section 2.2.3 (General Intensification).

- The Growth Plan is based on the need to develop healthy, safe, and balanced communities.
- Under Section 2.2.2 Managing Growth, the Growth Plan states that population and employment growth will be accommodated by:
 - “d) Reducing dependence on the automobile through the development of mixed-use, transit-supportive, pedestrian-friendly urban environments
 - h) Encouraging cities and towns to develop as complete communities with a diverse mix of land uses, a range and mix of employment and housing types, high quality public open space and easy access to local stores and services”
- Further under Section 2.2.3 General Intensification, all intensification areas will be planned and designed to:
 - a) Cumulatively attract a significant portion of population and employment growth
 - b) Provide a diverse and compatible mix of land uses, including residential and employment uses, to support vibrant neighbourhoods
 - c) Provide high quality public open spaces with site design and urban design standards that create attractive and vibrant places
 - d) Support transit, walking and cycling for everyday activities”

County Policies

Policy Reference - Simcoe County Official Plan, Modified as per Approval August 31st, 2015 (Updated March 10, 2016): Section 3.5 (Settlements); and Section 4.1 (Healthy Communities and Housing Development).

- A number of objectives of the County OP, under Section 3.5, promote sustainable and healthy community design through compact urban form that promotes the efficient use of land and provision of water, sewer, transportation, and other services; develop mixed use settlements to create healthy settlements and communities that are sustainable; and promote development forms and patterns which minimize land consumption and servicing costs.
- Policy 3.5.28, under Settlement Form, states that “Settlement form and building design shall consider conservation in energy, water and wastewater management, the current use or eventual introduction of public transit, the integration of paths and trails, bicycle routes, a compact and convenient design which encourages walking, the incorporation of natural heritage features, public safety including the impact on policing services, and the preservation of public access to shorelines.”
- Under Section 4.1, the development of complete and healthy communities is a priority for Simcoe County. A number of policies are provided to assist with achieving this priority:
 - Integration of arts, cultural, and recreational facilities with local business, health and social services, schools, parks, and civic buildings
 - Accessibility of services, culture, and recreation facilities by walking, cycling, or transit
 - Provision of a full range and equitable distribution of publicly accessible built and natural settings for recreation facilities
 - Facilitate accessibility for persons with disabilities and older persons
 - Design streetscapes, building orientation, and traffic flow to provide safe pedestrian and cycling movement in downtowns, main streets, and other activity areas
 - Provide for an appropriate range of housing types and densities in local municipalities to meet projected needs of current and future residents
 - Local municipalities shall make available: sufficient quantity of housing, in suitable locations in proximity to jobs, key services, and infrastructure

Existing Midland OP Policies

The Town OP does not have direct reference to healthy sustainable communities. The County policies that promote complete sustainable communities should be used to assist with developing this priority for the Town.

Public Comments

- Policies related to sustainable design and/or healthy communities are necessary in Midland.
- Energy efficiency and other conservation strategies should be encouraged.
- Design policies are required in the Town.
- Design guidelines support a healthy community.
- Stronger design policy is required such as architectural control. Introduce taxes for buildings that do not meet design guidelines.

Discussion

Healthy, sustainable communities are related to active transportation and climate change adaptation and mitigation. The points for discussion raised under the green infrastructure and active transportation reports also apply to this issue.

Healthy and complete communities

- Provincial and County planning frameworks provide some direction for healthy communities. However, it is not one single action or policy topic that will define or lead to the achievement of a healthy community, but rather an approach to implementation that considers all of the policy sections of the Official Plan comprehensively.
- A high quality, well-designed built environment is valued within the Town. To support this environment the Town continues to promote Midland as a “complete community” that includes a diverse mix of land uses, a range and mix of housing types and tenures, employment opportunities, high quality public open spaces, amenities and services, and active transportation options. Complete communities create healthier, more desirable, and sustainable environments to live in while also minimizing land consumption and negative impacts to the natural environment.
- Key considerations for good community design include community structure, street connectivity, streetscaping, building orientation, how parking is provided, land use mix, variety of parks, and access to services and amenities. Other considerations may include sustainable design (e.g. passive solar orientation, Low Impact

Development), active transportation, and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

- With respect to healthy communities, the Town should introduce policies and/or community design standards applicable to new development that implement:
 - The AODA: as of January 1, 2016 the design of all new public spaces/facilities are required to meet *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* standards;
 - Healthy community and active transportation criteria, including walking and cycling as viable modes of transportation for a variety of trips;
 - CPTED principles;
 - Green building targets; and
 - Public art requirements.
- In support of healthy communities, the Simcoe Muskoka Health Unit provides some specific advice to the Town through their document: *Healthy Community Design – Policy Statements for Official Plans (April, 2014)*. This document covers a lot of ground, much of which is included in other policy sections, both within the existing Official Plan, and within this report. While these are not mandatory requirements, they provide advice to the Town with respect to this topic.

Sustainable design

- While the Provincial and County planning frameworks identify generally the objectives for sustainable design, there are no specific requirements or policy directions that must be included in the Town's Official Plan, except for those policies that are also related to other policy topics.
- Energy and water conservation, waste reduction, and improved air quality are important components of sustainable design. Introducing sustainability as a lens for future development will lead to communities that are safer, more active, healthier, financially prosperous, and more resource conscious.
- The Town should consider including policies which enhance the sustainable design of new development and buildings, including:
 - Promoting energy conservation (geo exchange, solar thermal);
 - Minimizing air quality and climate change impacts through complete communities, active transportation, reduced parking strategy, separation of sensitive land uses, etc.; and

- Promoting innovative residential and public building designs that contribute to energy reduction and natural resource conservation, green roofs, synergies between buildings and site management practices.
- The Town should include Urban Forest System policies that speak to the benefits of the urban forest such as reduction in air pollution, urban heat island effect, energy savings, habitat for urban wildlife, biodiversity, and opportunities for recreation and physical activity.

Stemming from these discussion points are two **Directions** which frame the policy recommendations below.

Directions:

1. The Town should promote the creation of complete communities and healthy living initiatives.
2. Sustainable design should be incorporated in new development, infrastructure projects and buildings.

Directions + Recommendations

Direction #1: The Town should promote the creation of complete communities and healthy living initiatives.

It is recommended that:

- a) Section 4 “Amenity and Design” be changed to include a new section on **healthy communities**. Wording would suggest that healthy, liveable and safe communities are sustained by:
 - Promoting **efficient development and land use patterns** which sustain the financial well-being of the Province and municipalities over the long term;
 - Accommodating an appropriate **range and mix of residential, employment, institutional, recreation, park and open space, and other uses** to meet long-term needs;
 - Providing for an appropriate **range of housing types and densities** to meet projected needs of current and future residents;
 - Promoting development and land use patterns that **conserve biodiversity** and consider the impacts of a changing climate;

- Planning public streets, spaces and facilities to be safe, meet the needs of pedestrians, foster social interaction and **facilitate active transportation** and community connectivity;
- Integrating arts, cultural, and recreational facilities with local business, health and social services, schools, parks, and civic buildings;
- Promoting the **accessibility of services**, culture, and recreation facilities by walking, cycling, or transit;
- Providing a full range and equitable distribution of publicly accessible built and natural settings for **recreation facilities**;
- **Facilitating accessibility** for persons with disabilities and older persons; and
- Promoting **conservation** in energy, water and wastewater management.

b) A specific policy section on accessibility be included in Section 4 “Amenity and Design”. It is a requirement of the **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act** to include an appropriate implementing policy framework into the Town’s Official Plan.

Direction #2: Sustainable design should be incorporated in new development, infrastructure projects and buildings.

It is recommended that:

- a)** Section 4 “Amenity and Design” be changed to include a new section on **sustainable design** that could include:
- The Town, in order to reduce energy consumption, shall encourage **energy efficient building design** including passive solar energy gain, increased building insulation, R-2000 Standard performance, Energy Star rated appliances and mechanicals, alternative energy systems, and conformity with LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design – Canada) standards, in all new buildings;
 - The Town shall also encourage **green building design and practices** in significant building renovations and redevelopments where Site Plan Approval is required;
 - The Town shall provide **leadership in sustainable built form design** by ensuring that all new civic buildings constructed within Midland are designed to meet at least the ‘Certified’ performance level of the LEED building rating system and, where possible, shall consider higher LEED ratings for its new buildings (or equivalent standard);

- The Town shall encourage that plans and building designs submitted for approval provide opportunities for south facing windows and building orientation to maximize potential for **passive and active solar energy**;
- The Town shall encourage the use of advanced energy efficient technologies and processes, construction practices and design features such as green/white roofs;
- Where appropriate, the Town shall permit the use of **individual generating systems** such as small scale wind turbines to generate energy for domestic use, subject to any applicable Zoning By-law requirements and Town review with respect to setbacks, location and height; and
- The use of **permeable paving** is encouraged for use on sidewalks driveways and parking areas throughout Midland.

These changes are considered modest additions to the existing Official Plan and, although not requirements of Provincial or County planning frameworks, certainly raise the profile of these concepts within Midland.