

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION



# **PLANNING ISSUE #8: WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT**

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

The waterfront lands play a crucial role within the Town with respect to economic development, recreational opportunities and in defining the character and lifestyle that residents and visitors enjoy. Furthermore, there have been a number of recent development and planning activities centered on the waterfront lands which have already begun to shape how these lands will change going forward. Over the course of the Official Plan Review, it will be important to consider how to define the lands included within the waterfront, how these lands should change in the future and what role(s) they will play in various locations across Town.

This report will also review and summarize the relevant policies in Provincial planning, the Simcoe County Official Plan and the Town 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 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

### Growth Plan Policies

Policy Reference - Growth Plan, Office Consolidation, June 2013: Section 1.5 (Public Spaces, Recreation, Parks, Trails and Open Space).

- In consideration of water based resources and access to shorelines, Section 1.5.1 of the Growth Plan promotes healthy, active communities by:
  - “b) Planning and providing for a full range and equitable distribution of publicly-accessible built and natural settings for recreation, including facilities, parklands, public spaces, open space areas, trails and linkages, and, where practical, water-based resources
  - c) Providing opportunities for public access to shorelines”

### County Policies

Policy Reference - Simcoe County Official Plan, Modified as per Approval August 31st, 2015 (Updated March 10, 2016): Section 4.5 (Resource Conservation).

- The County OP includes policies on Watercourses, Shorelines, and Lake Management, under Section 4.5 Resource Conservation, but a number of the policies are still unapproved.
- The OP outlines that any development proposed near lakes and water bodies requires the following reports, where applicable:
  - Environmental Impact Statement
  - Slope Stability Report
  - Management Plan
  - Stormwater Management Report
  - Coastal Engineering Study

### Existing Midland OP Policies

Policy Reference - Town of Midland Official Plan (2002): Section 3.2 (Downtown District).

- Under Section 3.2 of the Town OP, an objective of the Town is to “enhance and promote the interconnection of the built core area with the waterfront area” (Policy 3.2.1c)).

- Further, under Section 3.2.3 Development Policies, the OP states that:
  - “h) The provision of Public Open Space within the District is recognized as an essential component for the enjoyment of workers, residents and visitors. Visual and pedestrian linkage between the downtown and the Town dock/waterfront is encouraged. This connection to the Town dock and associated waterfront and trail system is an extremely important component in regard to the long-term success of the District”

## Public Comments

- The Downtown and waterfront should be the focus for new intensified development with consideration for keeping it publicly accessible. Consideration should also be given to preserving green space by developing brownfields and existing buildings.
- To encourage additional development along Midland's waterfront, the following policies are needed:
  - Policies to maintain and enhance public access to the waterfront
  - Policies to promote the waterfront and to promote vendors/artisans
  - Policies to encourage mixed use
- The Town dock and harbour, as well as Midland Bay Landing, should be the focus for redevelopment and for new development.

## Discussion

### Enhance public access

- Provincial and County planning frameworks are less focused on Midland's waterfront than some of the other issues identified through the Official Plan Review process. Their requirements are very limited, and are related to providing opportunities for public access to shorelines, and ensuring that any development proposed near lakes and water bodies considers appropriate environmental issues through a number of technical studies.
- The consultation process has identified the following **Guiding Principle** related to the Midland Waterfront:
  - Encourage protection of the vistas and views to Midland Bay and improve pedestrian access and trail connections to the water's edge.

- Planning Issue #2: Growth Management includes an Urban Structure Map that identifies Midland's Waterfront as a key structuring element of the Town in support of the above **Guiding Principle**.
- The Town has recently adopted Official Plan Amendment 10 to establish the Waterfront Mixed-Use designation to guide the development of the mixed-use Midland Bay Landing community. A key element of the new designation is to improve public access to the waterfront.
- The waterfront park planned at the north end of King Street, adjacent to the Town Dock is to be completed in phases. This new park area will change the purpose of the downtown and waterfront from one that is dominated by parking and uses that serve boaters to one that has amenities and attracts more people downtown.
- The Town should include a policy framework that changes the nature, character and function of the waterfront, including identifying opportunities for cycling facilities, sidewalks, traffic calming, road narrowing and provisions for on-street parking in key locations where there is public access. Opportunities for public ownership should be a primary objective of the Town.

### Manage land uses

- Midland's waterfronts are the recognized gems of the community and are fundamental to the Town's attractiveness and, ultimately the desirable quality of life/quality of place. Historically, the Georgian Bay waterfront was a source of economic development and prosperity. Now it is a major attraction for residents and tourists as a mixed-function resource, focusing on recreation and, to a lesser extent, industry. Today, the Little Lake waterfront is not as prominent a feature, but is certainly integrated with the Town's Natural Heritage System, and has potential for enhanced future use as development occurs in proximity over time.
- The recently adopted Official Plan Amendment 10 is intended to facilitate a major redevelopment for intensified, mixed-use development adjacent to the Downtown and to Georgian Bay – Midland Bay Landing. This Plan incorporates public access to the shoreline, as well as a number of public parks and trail networks. The new land use designation established by this amendment – Waterfront Mixed-Use – includes detailed design standards, street cross-sections, a noise policy framework and encourages the use of alternative development standards. The policy framework to support a Development Permit System was also included in the amendment. The Midland Bay Landing is intended to support the vitality of the Downtown, contribute to the Town's future growth requirements and act as a model for future waterfront redevelopment.
- The Midland waterfronts incorporate a lot of territory, but, with the exception of Midland Bay Landing, they are not identified by a specific land use designation. Rather, the waterfronts incorporate, and their ongoing evolutions are managed by,

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a number of land use designations within the existing Official Plan. From a planning perspective, this is an appropriate approach, notwithstanding that, like the Midland Bay Landing process, significant redevelopment on either of the waterfronts may require site specific planning approvals, including the need for site specific land use designations.

- However, the Town should further explore options for better defining the waterfront areas, either through a waterfront overlay approach or through a waterfront policy section. The lands surrounding Little Lake should also be included in any waterfront discussion to determine how they would fit within the framework.
- Include policies for a vision for redevelopment, such as:
  - A specific list of permitted uses that are focused on creating an animated, pedestrian-friendly area for local residents and tourists. Discourage or prohibit auto-oriented uses and built forms, while permitting new appropriately scaled, higher density residential uses as part of the land use mix; and
  - Recognize the waterfront as a major destination with direction for enhanced year-round programming, design, interpretive features that reference the area's history, and permissions for marine-oriented commercial uses, such as restaurants, sports equipment rentals and watercraft rentals.
- The new Official Plan should identify a Waterfront Focus Area (or focus areas) for revitalizing the waterfront. The idea here is to focus attention and resources geographically.
- The Town should also explore the opportunities presented by the introduction of Great Lakes cruise ships, including the facilitation of economic spin-offs.

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

### Directions:

1. The Town should continue to expand and enhance public access to its waterfronts.
2. It is important to carefully plan for an appropriate land use policy framework to support successful waterfronts.

## Directions + Recommendations

**Direction #1:** The Town should continue to expand and enhance public access to its waterfronts.

It is recommended that:

- a) Section 2.5 “The Waterfront” recognize that it is the intent of the Town to keep the **waterfront publicly accessible**.

**Direction #2:** It is important to carefully plan for an appropriate land use policy framework to support successful waterfronts.

It is recommended that:

- a) Section 2.5 “The Waterfront” recognize that it is the intent of the Town that the Downtown and waterfront should be the **focus for new intensified development**.
- b) The **waterfront be recognized as a major destination** with direction for enhanced year-round programming, design, interpretive features that reference the area’s history, and permissions for marine-oriented commercial uses, such as restaurants, sports equipment rentals and watercraft rentals.
- c) Policies are included to explore the **opportunities presented by the introduction of Great Lakes cruise ships**, including the facilitation of economic spin-offs.
- d) The Official Plan Amendment for **Midland Bay Landing** be incorporated into Section 3 “Land Use Designations” of the Official Plan, and that the new land use designation Waterfront Mixed-Use be added to Schedule “A”. No changes to OPA 10 are anticipated through this Official Plan Review process.

This is considered a significant change to the existing OP, notwithstanding there are no requirements for conformity with Provincial or County planning frameworks with respect to this issue.