

# Staff Report



---

To	<b>City Council</b>
Service Area	Infrastructure, Development and Environment
Date	Tuesday, February 11, 2025
Subject	<b>Downtown Heights Study Proposed Official Plan Amendment Statutory Public Meeting Report</b>

---

## Recommendation

1. That the report titled **Downtown Heights Study Proposed Official Plan Amendment Statutory Public Meeting Report** from Infrastructure, Development and Environment dated February 11, 2025 be received.
- 

## Executive Summary

### Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide information about the proposed City-initiated Official Plan Amendment (OPA) for the Downtown Heights Study. This report has been prepared in conjunction with the Statutory Public Meeting for the proposed Official Plan Amendment.

### Key Findings

The proposed OPA for the Downtown Heights Study:

- is informed by modelling, an updated land assessment and community engagement and provides additional flexibility in order for the current density target of 200 persons and jobs per hectare to be achieved.
- aims to allow taller buildings in locations where it will limit their direct impact on existing neighbourhoods and public spaces. Mid-rise and taller buildings are proposed to be permitted strategically throughout the Downtown so that new, context-sensitive higher-density development will be permitted while ensuring the protection of significant existing cultural heritage resources.
- balances opportunities for short-, medium- and long-term intensification, making efficient use of the planned infrastructure investment in our Downtown.
- recognizes that a Community Planning Permit By-law is proposed for Downtown and will consider the potential for additional height beyond what is currently proposed in this OPA (up to 20 storeys in various locations) through the future Community Planning Permit System process.
- recognizes that the Basilica of Our Lady Immaculate is a landmark and a signature building within the city. The proposed OPA states that Basilica of Our Lady Immaculate will continue to maintain visual prominence and its protected public view corridors, however, buildings will be permitted to exceed its height.

Additional key findings will be reported in the future Infrastructure, Development and Environment recommendation report to Council.

## **Strategic Plan Alignment**

The City’s Official Plan aligns with the City Building, Environment and People and Economy priority areas of the Strategic Plan. The Official Plan provides policies to support the provision of a full range and mix of housing options and densities; the protection of the natural environment; to grow Guelph’s economy; and support renewal of Downtown.

## **Future Guelph Theme**

City Building

## **Future Guelph Objectives**

City Building: Improve housing supply

## **Financial Implications**

The Downtown Heights Study and Built Form Standards for Tall Buildings is funded through the approved capital budget, Capital Account PL0078, for costs associated with consultant services and community engagement.

As the current Downtown Secondary Plan area density target of 200 people and jobs per hectare by 2051 is not being revised as part of this study, there are no anticipated fiscal impacts resulting from this study. However, the increased flexibility to achieve the current density targets may result in longer-term financial impacts beyond 2051 that will be further examined through future official plan reviews.

---

# **Report**

## **Project Background**

In December 2023, City Council directed that staff undertake a study for the Downtown area, which is also the Urban Growth Centre and Major Transit Station Area, to approve additional heights. Staff undertook some background work throughout 2024 in order to inform the project and ensure that it would be fully integrated with other Downtown Renewal projects. In December 2024, Council formally directed staff to commence the Official Plan Amendment portion of the Downtown Building Heights Study.

Working with a consultant, the purpose of this project is to undertake a review of permitted building heights in the Downtown Secondary Plan area and make recommendations for amendments to these permissions in the Official Plan, as well as develop built form standards for tall buildings city-wide.

The overall objective of the review is to identify areas in the Downtown Secondary Plan where additional heights can be considered and what actions (i.e., policy refinements, tools, and incentives), will best work to achieve the target of 150 people and jobs per hectare by 2031 and ultimately 200 people and jobs per hectare by 2051.

## **Location**

The proposed Official Plan Amendment applies to the Downtown Secondary Plan area, which is also the city's Urban Growth Centre and Major Transit Station Area.

The built-form standards that will be developed as part of this project will be applicable to tall buildings across the entire city.

## **Proposed Official Plan Amendment**

### **Existing Official Plan Policies**

The Downtown Secondary Plan was approved by Council in 2012 and subsequently approved by the Ontario Municipal Board (now known as the Ontario Land Tribunal) in 2015. It is comprised of multiple land use designations and a height schedule. The height schedule was established through modelling, land economic analysis and community engagement resulting in the tallest buildings, up to 18 storeys, being situated at the periphery of Downtown.

Through the City's most recent Official Plan update – Official Plan Amendment 80 (OPA 80), heights were increased by 2 storeys where density bonusing previously applied.

### **Overview and Description of Amendment**

The proposed Official Plan Amendment (OPA) is included as Attachment-1 and identifies areas with the Downtown Secondary Plan area where additional building height can be considered to provide additional flexibility in order for the current density target of 200 persons and jobs per hectare to be achieved. The proposed OPA is informed by modelling, an updated land assessment and community engagement. The proposed OPA aims to locate taller buildings in such a way that limits their direct impact on existing neighbourhoods and public spaces. Mid-rise and tall buildings are proposed to be permitted strategically throughout the Downtown, ensuring that new, context-sensitive higher-density development can be introduced to meet growing demand while ensuring the protection of significant existing cultural and heritage assets.

The proposed OPA envisions a peak height of tall buildings (up to 20 storeys) in the area south of Guelph Central Station, bringing people and jobs closer to higher-order transit and helping to support transit ridership and active transportation. Peak heights are also proposed at the eastern gateway of the Downtown, at the intersection of the rail corridor and Woolwich Street, and at the site of the existing shopping area north of Macdonell Street. The proposed OPA balances opportunities for short-, medium- and long-term intensification, making efficient use of the planned infrastructure investment in our Downtown.

Understanding that the City will be developing a Community Planning Permit By-law for Downtown, the proposed building height permissions (up to 20 storeys in various locations) recognize the potential for additional height beyond what is currently proposed in this OPA.

Minor policy amendments are also proposed to ensure that definitions of tall and mid-rise buildings reflect the proposed height permissions. Through the development of the Built Form Standards for Tall Buildings, it is possible that further policy refinements may be proposed before the OPA is finalized and brought forward for approval.

The proposed OPA continues to recognize that Basilica of Our Lady Immaculate is a landmark and a signature building within the city. The Basilica should continue to maintain visual prominence from public viewpoints; however, it is proposed that buildings will be permitted to exceed the height of the Basilica, provided that identified public view corridors are protected.

The proposed OPA also recognizes the importance of the view of the Basilica along Macdonell Street. Accordingly, the OPA proposes to shift one of the protected public view corridors from the intersection of Grange Street and Stuart Street to the intersection of Macdonell Street / Woolwich Street / Wellington Street East in recognition of that importance. See Attachment 2 which includes the existing and proposed Schedule D for the Downtown Secondary Plan. Schedule D shows the permitted buildings heights and the protected public view corridors.

## **Next Steps**

The project team will continue to gather feedback from the community on the proposed OPA through Have Your Say, focus group meetings and Council Advisory Committees.

The project team will also be working on preparing the Built Form Standards for Tall Buildings which will apply city-wide.

In response to the comments received from the community, as well as, through the development of the Built Form Standards for Tall Buildings, the proposed OPA will be refined and updated.

It is anticipated that in April 2025 a recommended OPA will be brought forward for Council approval and the Built Form Standards for Tall Buildings will be brought forward for consideration.

## **Financial Implications**

The Downtown Heights Study and Built Form Standards for Tall Buildings is funded through the approved capital budget, Capital Account PL0078, for costs associated with consultant services and community engagement.

As the current Downtown Secondary Plan area density target of 200 people and jobs per hectare by 2051 is not being revised as part of this study, there are no anticipated fiscal impacts resulting from this study. However, the increased flexibility to achieve the current density targets may result in longer-term financial impacts beyond 2051 that will be further examined through future official plan reviews.

## **Consultations and Engagement**

### **Internal Consultations and Engagement**

Internal consultations with staff from other City departments and service areas have taken place and will continue to occur throughout this process. An internal technical team has been established in order for this study to be informed by and integrated with other ongoing Downtown projects and servicing capacity work.

## **External Circulation of the draft Official Plan Amendment**

The draft Official Plan Amendment was circulated to several external agencies as well as the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation and the Métis Nation of Ontario on January 20, 2025.

## **External Consultations and Engagement**

Staff have engaged with the community on the topic of Downtown building heights at several 'pop-up' and other engagement events including:

- October 2 – Public Open House for Downtown Infrastructure Renewal
- October 17 – HAS Open House
- October 26 – Guelph Farmers Market
- November 19-22 – Focus Group Meetings (Downtown Guelph Business Association, Chamber of Commerce, development community representatives)
- December 9, 2024 – Downtown Renewal Open House
- February 4, 2024 – Statutory Open House
- February 6, 2024 – Heritage Guelph

Further engagement with the community will continue on the proposed OPA before a recommended OPA is brought forward to Council for approval.

## **Notice for Statutory Public Meeting**

The Notice of Statutory Public Meeting was advertised in CityNews and mailed out to property owners within the study area on January 16, 2025. Information on this project continues to be updated on the City's website, [guelph.ca](http://guelph.ca).

## **Attachments**

Attachment-1 Draft Official Plan Amendment Downtown Building Heights Study

Attachment-2 Existing and Proposed Schedule D Downtown Secondary Plan Maximum and Minimum Building Heights

Attachment-3 Staff Presentation Downtown Building Heights Study

## **Departmental Approval**

James Goodram, MCIP, RPP, General Manager, Economic Development and Tourism

Terry Gayman, P.Eng., General Manager/City Engineer, Engineering and Transportation Services

Nectar Tampacopoulos, General Manager, Environmental Services

## **Report Authors**

Brenna MacKinnon, MCIP, RPP, Project Manager, Policy Planning

Stacey Laughlin, MCIP, RPP, Downtown Revitalization Advisor

**This report was approved by:**

Krista Walkey, MCIP, RPP  
General Manager, Planning and Building Services  
Infrastructure, Development and Environment  
519-822-1260 extension 2395  
krista.walkey@guelph.ca

**This report was recommended by:**

Jayne Holmes, P.Eng, PMP  
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer  
Infrastructure, Development and Environment  
519-822-1260 extension 2248  
jayne.holmes@guelph.ca