

# Staff Report



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| To           | <b>City Council</b>   |
| Service Area | Infrastructure, Development and Environment                         |
| Date         | Wednesday, October 15, 2025   |
| Subject      | <b>Official Plan Update - Phase 1 Draft Official Plan Amendment</b> |

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## Recommendation

1. That the City-initiated Official Plan Amendment No. 110 to update the Official Plan be received in accordance with Attachment-1 of Report 2025-452, dated October 15, 2025.
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## Executive Summary

### Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information on proposed changes to the Official Plan as part of a multi-phase update. This phase of the update is Phase 1, called “laying the groundwork”. This proposed amendment involves provincial changes to the *Planning Act*, the Ontario Heritage Act, and the new Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 that do not require supporting work or further studies. In addition, staff are also proposing select amendments to implement the Transportation Master Plan, the Parks Plan, and the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

The objective of Phase 1: laying the groundwork is to provide certainty and clarity to the community on the planning policy framework in place for the City of Guelph following a series of provincial and municipal changes.

### Key Findings

In July 2022, City of Guelph Council adopted its last comprehensive review of the [Official Plan \(known as OPA 80\)](#) which was approved effective April 11, 2023, with modifications by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, taking effect on May 16, 2024. Since OPA 80, a number of changes have been made to the planning policy framework in the Province of Ontario and the City of Guelph.

The Planning Act and Ontario Heritage Act have been amended through various legislation including, but not limited to, the More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022 ([Bill 23](#)), Planning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2023 ([Bill 150](#)), Get It Done Act, 2024 ([Bill 162](#)), Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act, 2023 ([Bill 97](#)), Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024 ([Bill 185](#)), Homeowner Protection Act, 2024 ([Bill 200](#)), and Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, 2025 ([Bill 17](#)). As well, in October 2024, the Province of Ontario released a new [Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 \(PPS, 2024\)](#) which is a province-wide land use planning policy framework that replaces both the [Provincial Policy Statement, 2020](#) and [A Place to](#)

[Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2020](#). All planning decisions must be consistent with the PPS, 2024.

Finally, since the adoption of OPA 80 by Council, a number of City Master Plans have been approved and are now in place. The Official Plan must be updated to implement recommendations from those Master Plans, especially the [Transportation Master Plan](#), the [2022 Parks Plan](#) and the [Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#).

This City-initiated Official Plan Amendment is being brought forward to update the Official Plan to implement changes from legislation, be consistent with the PPS, 2024, and implement recommendations from updated and Council-approved Master Plans.

## **Strategic Plan Alignment**

This report and the draft Official Plan Amendment (Attachment-1) support the Future Guelph theme of City Building, the Future Guelph objective of improving housing supply, and the supporting action of implementing direction from the Province on Bill 23 and other legislation. Updating our Official Plan to have regard for provincial matters and to be consistent with the PPS, 2024 provides certainty for the community on the City's planning policy framework, given recent provincial changes.

As this meeting is the Statutory Public Meeting for the proposed City-initiated Official Plan Amendment, it gives the opportunity for City Council, residents, and community groups to learn more, ask questions and provide comments on the proposed Official Plan Amendment.

## **Future Guelph Theme**

City Building

## **Future Guelph Objectives**

City Building: Improve housing supply

## **Financial Implications**

As Phase 1 of the Official Plan Update is mostly administrative and aligns with provincial and existing municipal policy direction, no financial implications are expected because of this update. As the Official Plan Update moves forward into later phases, any anticipated financial implications will be identified in future staff reports.

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# **Report**

## **Background**

In July 2022, City of Guelph Council adopted its last comprehensive review of the [Official Plan \(known as OPA 80\)](#). Since OPA 80, a number of changes have been made to the planning policy framework in the Province of Ontario that affect the City of Guelph.

OPA 80 was approved by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing on April 11, 2023, initially imposing eighteen (18) modifications. After a change in Minister, the MMAH modifications were reversed and ten (10) modifications were subsequently revised and reinstated through Bill 150, and Bill 162. The modified version of OPA 80 has been in full force and effect since May 16, 2024. Attachment-3 to this staff

report outlines these modifications, which includes both modifications to policy text as well as schedules. Staff are not proposing changes related to these modifications, except for changing the definition of the term “Heritage Attributes” to align with the definition in the new PPS, 2024, following discussions with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Staff are including all modifications from Bill 162 for Council awareness as they will be included in the next consolidation of the Official Plan.

Various provincial legislative changes have also been made since OPA 80. This includes, but is not limited to, the following bills:

- Bill 23, More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022;
- Bill 97, Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act, 2023;
- Bill 185, Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024;
- Bill 200, Homeowner Protection Act, 2024; and
- Bill 17, Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, 2025.

These legislative changes affected the Planning Act, 1990 and the Ontario Heritage Act, among others.

As well, in October 2024, a new Provincial Planning Statement came into full force and effect. The Provincial Planning Statement (PPS, 2024) is province-wide land use planning policy framework that replaces both the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020 and A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2020 (on which OPA 80 was predicated). The PPS, 2024 provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development. The PPS, 2024 continues to recognize municipal official plans as the most important vehicle for implementing the PPS, 2024 and for achieving comprehensive, integrated, and long-term planning. The PPS, 2024 requires that all land use planning decisions be consistent with the PPS, 2024.

As such, to provide certainty and clarity on the planning policy framework in place for the City of Guelph, planning staff are recommending an update to Official Plan policies to have regard for the current Planning Act, 1990 and the Ontario Heritage Act, and to be consistent with the PPS, 2024.

Finally, planning staff are also recommending amendments to Official Plan policies to implement recommendations from recently approved City Master Plans, including the Transportation Master Plan, the 2022 Parks Plan, and the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

These amendments are to implement Council-approved recommendations in Official Plan policy to also provide certainty and clarity on objectives and policies related to the City’s transportation system and parks and open space system.

These proposed amendments are Phase 1 of what is expected to be a multi-phase update of the Official Plan. Attachment-1 contains the entire draft of Phase 1 of the Official Plan Amendment.

The next section of the staff report describes changes through identifiable themes of Phase 1 of the draft Official Plan Amendment.

## **Cultural Heritage**

Changes are proposed to the City of Guelph’s Cultural Heritage policies in the Official Plan to implement recent changes to the Ontario Heritage Act, to be consistent with the PPS, 2024, and to re-organize the section to improve readability

and functionality of the policies. The Ontario Heritage Act creates a legislative framework for the conservation of heritage attributes, as defined, on designated heritage properties. The Ontario Heritage Act permits municipalities to list properties on a Municipal Heritage Register, either properties that are designated through a designating by-law, or properties listed as non-designated.

Previously under the Ontario Heritage Act, properties that were not designated could remain listed on the municipal heritage register indefinitely, which enabled the City to designate and conserve those properties if an application were made to develop the site. The City currently has many properties in this category for this purpose. Following changes to the Ontario Heritage Act through Bill 23 and Bill 200, however, non-designated properties may only remain on the Municipal Heritage Register for two years if they are not designated and those properties which were listed as of the enactment of Bill 23 must be designated by the end of 2027 or they will be deemed to be removed. As well, if a property is removed from the municipal heritage register (either by the City or by operation of the statute), it cannot be re-listed for five years.

Staff are proposing Official Plan policy changes in response to provincial changes, to reflect the new requirements for the heritage register, and to improve the overall clarity of the cultural heritage policies. We are recommending updates to the definitions of key terms in the glossary related to cultural heritage, and how those terms are used in the policy, to ensure clarity, consistency and conformity with provincial legislation and policies. This includes introducing a new defined term, "listed non-designated heritage property" to describe property that is listed under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act, but is not yet designated, to describe what policies apply to different heritage property types.

## **Employment**

Employment policies are proposed to be addressed in two phases. Some definitional changes are proposed in Phase 1, but with additional changes recommended to be made through Phase 2. Through Bill 97 and the new PPS, 2024, the Province has amended the definition of an "Employment Area". Table 1 below compares the current and new definition:

Table 1: Previous and New Definition of an Employment Area in the PPS, 2024

| Previous Definition of Employment Area  | New Definition of Employment Area   |
|---|---|
| <p>Those areas designated in the Official Plan for clusters of businesses and economic activities including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) manufacturing uses;</li> <li>ii) warehousing uses;</li> <li>iii) office uses;</li> <li>iv) retail uses that are associated with the uses mentioned in clauses i) to iii); and</li> <li>v) facilities that are ancillary to the uses mentioned in clauses i) to iv).</li> </ul> | <p>Those areas designated in the Official Plan for clusters of businesses and economic activities including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) manufacturing uses;</li> <li>ii) warehousing uses, including uses related to the movement of goods;</li> <li>iii) uses related to research and development in connection with manufacturing anything;</li> <li>iv) retail uses and office uses that are associated with the uses mentioned in clauses i) to iii); and</li> <li>v) facilities that are ancillary to the uses mentioned in clauses i) to iv).</li> </ul> <p>Employment area uses are not any of the following uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) institutional uses.</li> <li>ii) commercial uses, including retail and office uses not referred to in clauses i) to v) above.</li> </ul> |

This definition change has the effect of:

- Removing “office uses” as a stand-alone permitted use;
- Explicitly removing “institutional uses” such as places of worship and stand-alone commercial uses, such as a retail establishment, as a permitted use; and
- Permitting “uses related to research and development in connection with manufacturing anything” as a permitted use.

In order to protect existing Employment Areas, planning staff are recommending that this new definition be implemented into the Official Plan. Through Bill 97, the Planning Act allows municipalities to put in place a transition provision that would allow the continuation of uses that were lawfully established prior to this definition coming into full force and effect (October 20, 2024) that are now excluded from the new definition (i.e. institutional, commercial, retail and office uses). City staff are recommending that this transition provision be included so that these uses would continue to be considered as within an “Employment Area” and Employment Area policies and protections would continue to apply.

In addition, owners of properties within Employment Areas are now permitted to apply for a “conversion” or removal to a non-employment designation at any time, when previously conversions were only allowed through a municipal comprehensive review which generally occurred during an Official Plan review process. Removal requests are still required to demonstrate consistency with a number of criteria in the PPS, 2024 including:

- an identified need for the removal and the land is not required for employment area uses over the long term;
- the proposed use would not negatively impact the overall viability of the employment area;
- infrastructure and public service facilities are available to accommodate the proposed use; and
- the municipality has sufficient employment lands to accommodate projected employment growth to the horizon of the approved official plan.

Planning staff will be undertaking Phase 2 of the Official Plan Update, anticipated to start in late 2025, to understand the effects these changes will have on employment policy in the City of Guelph, our Employment Land needs, and our ability to achieve our provincial target of 116,000 jobs by 2051, and to recommend to Council any additional changes that further study suggests are warranted.

## **Environment**

Changes related to the theme of Environment are recommended as administrative updates to objectives, policies, and definitions. This includes proposed amendments to stormwater management objectives and policies to match language used in the PPS, 2024, changes for federal and provincial ministry names such as changing Ministry of Environment to MECP, and changes to regulatory documents, such as updating the date references for the Stormwater Management Master Plan.

In addition, amendments are also proposed to source water protection policies to better align with the Grand River Source Protection Plan, which include language in the Official Plan to incorporate the prohibition of uses in Wellhead Protection Areas. Mapping amendments are also proposed to Schedule 7a: Wellhead Protection Areas and Schedule 7b: Issue Contributing Areas to improve policy interpretation when reading those maps.

Lastly, staff propose the inclusion of new policy language on climate change, directing the City to incorporate climate change considerations for infrastructure and directing the City to promote green infrastructure, low impact development, active transportation, and investigate additional approaches that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. While much of this work is already underway across the City, we can take the opportunity now to formalize that direction in Official Plan policy while using language that is consistent with the direction in the PPS, 2024.

## **Complete Community**

The Complete Community theme includes administrative and language amendments to better recognize and implement all the different components that make up a complete community and is driven by new terms or changes to terms used in the PPS, 2024. Planning staff do not have significant comments on or concerns with these changes as they align with current community planning language and expectations. These terms provide broad policy direction for the overall urban structure of the City of Guelph and assist in evaluating development application conformity against that urban structure.

For example, some terms proposed for change include revising the current definition of the term “complete communities” to include language on equitable access to necessities for daily living and meeting the diverse needs of different populations. Another example involves changing the defined term “compact urban

form” to “compact built form,” which better describes a land use pattern that can apply to a variety of neighbourhoods, not just traditionally urban neighbourhoods.

In addition, staff are also proposing policy amendments to make stronger references to the Agri-Food Network and Agricultural System. Although the Agri-Food Network and Agricultural System, as defined, is largely found outside of the City of Guelph boundaries, the food system and economic system, including Urban Agriculture efforts are important to continue to reference and protect, as appropriate.

Staff propose changes under this theme to make a commitment to engage early with Indigenous governments and communities on land use planning matters. Indigenous engagement determination is a key part of the project initiation process for many projects at the City of Guelph and this language is consistent with the Vision Statement in the PPS, 2024, and direction in the City of Guelph Indigenous Relations Framework. As City staff meet and engage with surrounding Indigenous nations, there may be changes proposed that are beyond the scope of Phase 1 but may fit into a future phase of the Official Plan Update.

### **Supporting Growth**

As described earlier in this report, OPA 80 was the City’s latest Growth Management Strategy to 2051, as mandated by the previous Growth Plan. While the PPS, 2024, allows municipalities to continue to use the 2051 population and employment forecasts until our next Growth Management Strategy, some growth-related concepts and terms have been added, changed, or removed from the PPS, 2024. City staff are recommending incremental updates that will not significantly change the City’s overall Growth Management Strategy.

For example, some terms proposed for removal include “Urban Growth Centre” which describes Downtown Guelph. This area will continue to be referred to as a Major Transit Station Area or MTSA which is a term that remains in the PPS, 2024. All growth-related policies that apply to the Downtown area will continue to apply. In addition, another term proposed for removal is “Provincially Significant Employment Zones.” Provincially Significant Employment Zones or PSEZs are employment areas designated by the Province of Ontario to support long-term job creation and economic development across the larger Greater Golden Horseshoe Region. The City of Guelph’s only designated PSEZ was the Hanlon Creek Business Park. This term has now been removed from provincial policy. The Hanlon Creek Business Park will continue to be protected as an Employment Area in the City of Guelph.

A term proposed to be added to the Official Plan is recognizing the City of Guelph as a “Large and Fast-growing Municipality.” These municipalities are subject to specific planning policies aimed at managing growth and development, including specific density targets. Most of the 29 municipalities identified as large and fast-growing municipalities by the Province of Ontario were the same municipalities that were assigned housing targets and signed housing pledges.

In addition, there are a number of administrative changes proposed, including removing reference to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2020 and the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020 and to replace this with reference to the PPS, 2024.

## **Transportation**

In January 2022, Council approved a new Transportation Master Plan (TMP) update. The TMP is a long-range plan that directs how Guelph's future transportation system will be built and operated to 2051. The TMP update includes a number of policy recommendations for the Official Plan. As part of this Phase 1 Update to the Official Plan, a number of these policy recommendations are being brought forward to be reflected in updated policy language in the Official Plan.

This includes updating ultimate right-of-way widths for Gordon Street, Victoria Road, and Clair Road, which have planned Environmental Assessments ("EAs") either ongoing or in the near future. Right-of-way widths are the total width of land dedicated for a road, including the road surface, sidewalks, boulevards, space for utilities and future expansion. The right-of-way widths listed in the Official Plan (Table 5.1 of the Official Plan) are the ultimate widths that a road can be designed to. As development unfolds along these roadways, portions of private land can be dedicated to the City for future road expansion. The EA process will determine the exact design and width of the road to accommodate all required features. More right-of-way width expansions are listed in the TMP update but these will be included as part of Phase 2 of the Official Plan Update.

In addition to the right-of-way widths, the TMP update also includes a recommendation to identify intersections for improvement. Table 5.2 of the Official Plan lists the current intersections for improvement. These intersections have been identified as one or both of the intersecting streets on the Cycling Spine Network, meaning more space is required for a protected intersection design. Similar to right-of-way widths, as a condition of development approval, a portion of private land may be required to facilitate these improvements.

Finally, we are updating Schedule 5: Road & Rail Network of the Official Plan to be consistent with the mapping in the TMP update. This includes accurately identifying the classification of each road based on the City's road classification system which includes provincial highways, arterial roads, collector roads, and local roads. Each of these road classifications also has corresponding policies in the Official Plan.

## **Parks**

In April 2022 and October 2023, the Park Plan and Parks and Recreation Master Plan were approved by Council, respectively. The Park Plan is a parkland needs assessment that was initiated to address time-sensitive legislative changes to the Parkland Dedication By-law before September 2022. The Parks and Recreation Master Plan is a strategy that guides how the City of Guelph plans, designs, funds, builds, and maintains Guelph's parks and recreation system to 2051.

The 2022 Park Plan redefined the types of parks in Guelph's park classification system. Guelph's park types are urban squares, neighbourhood parks, community parks, and regional parks. City staff are proposing amendments to the Official Plan to align these definitions in the 2022 Park Plan as well as to incorporate the criteria for each park type.

City staff are also proposing amendments to update the criteria for what is acceptable for parkland dedication to match the 2022 Park Plan criteria. This also provides clarity when parkland dedication is developer-initiated so that parkland is appropriate and meets the City's criteria. Examples of Park Plan criteria proposed for inclusion in the Official Plan include specifying that the land for parks must

contain adequate street frontage and contain sufficient table land. Examples of land that is not acceptable for parkland dedication is if the land is identified as part of the City's Natural Heritage System, the land is required to accommodate stormwater management facilities, or if the land is used or proposed to be used for utility corridors.

Finally, staff are also proposing amendments to Schedule 6: Open Space System of the Official Plan to be consistent with the mapping in the Guelph Trails Master Plan. These amendments include adding in new trails and parks that connect with the trail network, removing trails shown on city sidewalks, and removing trails in Secondary Plan areas.

### **Structure of the Amendment**

To improve the readability, the proposed amendment is presented in a table format in Attachment-1. Attachment-1 is made up of three (3) tables: amendments to policy, amendments to definitions, and text descriptions of amendments to mapping. Sections of the Official Plan that are proposed to be added or changed are referred to as items in the three tables.

For accessibility purposes, text that is proposed to be amended has the strong (or bold) styling applied. All other unmodified (i.e. not strong or bold) text represents existing Official Plan policy that is being carried forward and which has been included for context and does not constitute part of the Amendment. In the third column of the first two tables, titled "Current Policy" for Table 1 or "Current Definition" for Table 2, text proposed for removal has had the strong style applied to it. In the fourth column of the tables, titled "Draft Amendment" for both Table 1 and Table 2, text proposed for addition has had the strong style applied to it.

Italics are used in the Official Plan to indicate that a term is defined within the document; for accessibility purposes, italics are not used in Attachment-1. However, the absence of italics to depict existing defined terms or terms proposed to be defined through this amendment does not remove the effect of these terms being defined or proposed to be defined. Terms to be defined through this amendment have been specifically noted in the 5<sup>th</sup> column of the first two tables, titled "Staff Comments". Unless otherwise noted, terms that are already defined will use the definitions already included in the glossary. The 5<sup>th</sup> column of the first two tables, titled "Staff Comments", also note terms that are proposed to no longer be defined through this amendment. Text descriptions of amendments proposed to mapping are located within the third table of Attachment-1 and are in plain text with normal styling.

### **Next Steps**

Following the Statutory Public Meeting, City staff will be hosting further engagement opportunities, including presenting the entirety of the draft amendment to the Heritage Advisory Committee and the Planning, Environment, and Water Advisory Committee in November. As well, the draft amendment will be posted online via HaveYourSay for comment. Any comments received during this period will be compiled into a comment response matrix that will be presented along with the final recommended amendment, anticipated for January 2026.

## **Financial Implications**

As Phase 1 of the Official Plan Update is mostly administrative and aligns with provincial and existing municipal policy direction, no financial implications are expected as a result of this update. As the Official Plan Update moves forward into later phases, any anticipated financial implications will be identified in future staff reports.

## **Consultations and Engagement**

There have been a number of public engagement touchpoints since this project was initiated. This includes a presentation to the Guelph-Wellington Developers Association and Guelph & District Homebuilders Association on May 7, 2025, a presentation to the Heritage Advisory Committee on July 3, an in-person Information Session and a virtual Information Session on July 7 and July 8 respectively, and a presentation to the Planning, Environment and Water Advisory Committee on September 8. In addition, a HaveYourSay page was also created and launched in June 2025 where materials have been posted. Materials presented focused on the scope of this phase of the Official Plan Update and the themes of this update.

The Notice of Public Meeting was mailed to local boards and agencies and city service areas on September 17, 2025. Notice of the Public Meeting was advertised in Guelph Today (City Information section) on September 24, 2025 and on the City's website.

With the entire draft Official Plan Amendment now available for review, the HaveYourSay page will be hosting a commenting forum where comments can be provided on specific amendments. Staff will also be presenting again to the Heritage Advisory Committee and the Planning, Environment, and Water Advisory Committee in November. Staff will be preparing a comment response matrix that will be attached to the staff report when this amendment returns for approval, anticipated to be in January 2026.

City staff have also been engaging with Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (MCFN) and Six Nations of the Grand River (SNGR). City staff have sent the draft Official Plan Amendment to staff at MCFN and SNGR for their review and comment. Staff are also available to meet with MCFN and SNGR to discuss the purpose of Phase 1 and the amendments included within.

## **Attachments**

Attachment-1 Draft Official Plan Amendment No. 110

Attachment-2 Official Plan Update Phase 1 – Council Presentation

Attachment-3 Official Plan Modifications from Bill 162, Get It Done Act, 2024

## **Departmental Approval**

Emily Irvine, MCIP, RPP, AMP Manager, Policy Planning

## **Report Author**

Lucas Mollame, MCIP, RPP Project Manager, Policy Planning

Brittany Manley, Policy Planner I

**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