

Town of Huntsville Official Plan Review - POLICY BACKGROUND PAPER

Healthy Community – Human Health & Well Being

BACKGROUND:

- The definition of a healthy community as adopted by the World Health Organization is “one that is continually creating and improving those physical and social environments and expanding those community resources which enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life and developing to their maximum potential”.
- Healthy communities are places where people can live, work, play and learn in an accessible and safe environment. Communities that provide a strong sense of belonging and identity contribute to a high-quality of life, health and well-being.
- Healthy communities provide their residents access to local food, affordable housing choices, a good transportation network including transit and active transportation routes, health care and other human services, schools, recreation opportunities, public spaces and local amenities.
- A biodiverse natural environment, including clean air, land and water, is an essential component of a healthy community. A vibrant economy, which is based on the natural environment, offers meaningful employment and opportunities for local business to thrive.
- Healthy communities are sustainable and resilient in the long-term through diversity in their natural, social, and built environments.
- The Town of Huntsville has a vibrant Urban Centre, a number of smaller unserved communities, Waterfront and Rural areas. As the Town continues to grow there is an opportunity to ensure the continued creation of a healthier, more resilient and compact community.

POLICY CONTEXT:

Provincial Policy Statement (2014):

- 1.0 Efficient land use and development patterns support sustainability by promoting strong, liveable, healthy and resilient communities, protecting the environment and public health and safety, and facilitating economic growth.
 - 1.1.1 Identifies that healthy, livable and safe communities are sustained by efficient land use patterns; accommodating a mix of affordable residential , institutional, recreational and other uses; avoiding land use patterns which cause environmental, public health and safety concerns and settlement area expansions; promoting land use patterns which minimize land consumption and servicing costs; improving accessibility for persons with disabilities and older persons; ensuring the necessary infrastructure and public services facilities will be available for future needs; and promoting land use patterns that protect biodiversity and consider the impacts of climate change.
 - 1.1.4.1 Identifies that healthy, integrated and viable *rural areas* should be supported by accommodating a mix and range of housing in rural settlement areas; using rural

infrastructure and public service facilities efficiently; promoting diversification of the economic base and employment opportunities through goods and services, including value-added products and the sustainable management or use of resources; providing opportunities for sustainable and diversified tourism; and conserving biodiversity and considering the ecological benefits provided by nature.

- 1.5.1 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 ; 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; providing opportunities for public access to shorelines; and recognizing provincial parks, conservation reserves, and other protected areas, and minimizing negative impacts on these areas.
- 1.7 Long term economic prosperity should be supported by promoting opportunities for economic development and community investment readiness; optimizing the long term availability of land, resources and infrastructure; maintaining and enhancing the viability of downtown and main street; encourage sense of place by promoting well designed built form and conserving cultural and heritage features; promoting redevelopment of brownfield sites; providing opportunities for sustainable tourism development; providing opportunities to support local food; promoting energy conservation; minimizing the impacts of climate change; and encouraging efficient and coordinated communication and telecommunication infrastructure.
- 2 Contains policies which address the wise use and management of natural resources as well as cultural heritage and archaeology.

Muskoka Official Plan (MOP):

- Vision B.1 Muskoka will be a place where people can live, work, and play. The overall prosperity of Muskoka will rely on the integration of a vibrant economy and a healthy natural environment along with a caring community that fosters a sense of belonging and supports those in need. Sustainable development will allow for desirable growth and change that respects the small-town, rural and waterfront character of Muskoka. All residents will be valued and community well-being will be promoted.

Provides several principles which are consistent with those contained in Subsections 1.1.1 and 1.1.4.1. of the PPS.
- Goal B.2 To protect the quality of the cultural and natural environments of Muskoka and accommodate sustainable growth by facilitating development that supports healthy communities and recognizes the character of Muskoka.
- C-14-31 Outlines various policies that address economic development and more specifically, tourism.

- E Outlines policies to guide natural resource exploitation and management.
- F Outlines policies for the protection of recreational water quality, as well as natural heritage features.
- G Outlines policies related to roads, rail and air transport. G.46-G.54 specifically refer to active transportation.
- H.54-H58 These policies address energy and communication facilities.
- I These policies address the development of community based services including recreation and leisure, educational facilities and health and social services.

MOP Policy Directions Report:

- 39 MOP should include a definition of healthy and complete community which includes:
 - Residents have choices and opportunities relating to a range of housing types, transportation modes, employment options, and recreation and leisure activities
 - Balances character and natural environment with economic development and growth
 - Efficiently manages the natural and social resources of the community to achieve optimal benefits for all residents.
- 40 MOP should contain policies that address the goals identified in the [Ryerson \(April 2016\) report](#) on healthy and complete communities.

Excerpt:
A healthy and complete community:

 - *Provides choices and opportunities for all residents, by providing a diverse range of housing types, transportation modes, employment options, and recreation or leisure activities.*
 - *Balances the defining characteristics of the identity such as rural character and natural environment, with economic development and growth.*
 - *Efficiently manages the natural and social resources of the community to achieve the optimal benefits for all residents.*

Town Strategic Documents:

Strategic Plan

Economic Development
Goal 1

- Partner in regional affordable housing strategies to address housing barriers.

Goal 2

- Work with local and regional partners to increase high speed internet connectivity within Huntsville.

Health and Wellness

Goal 1

- Ensure that adequate Health Care is in place to service the needs of all residents of

and visitors to Huntsville.

Goal 2 ◦ Create a comprehensive Community Master Plan that promotes long term strategies for healthy and active living in Huntsville.

Goal 3 ◦ Ensure that Huntsville is seen as a safe, welcoming and inclusive community.

Natural Environment
Goal 1 ◦ Demonstrate the Town’s commitment to protecting the quality and character of the natural environment.

Roads and Infrastructure
Goal 2 ◦ Ensure that Town infrastructure and service levels respond to the needs of a prosperous and progressive community.

Unity Plan
Goal 5 ◦ Land Use Planning: Huntsville will become a model of sustainable community development, by incorporating the principles of smart growth, sustainable design and green buildings into all land use planning decisions. This will include a commitment to the protection and maintenance of Huntsville’s rural small town character and vibrant downtown, both of which are valued by the community.

Huntsville Official Plan:

2.1.3 Official Plan intended to bring balance to competing economic, social and environmental factors and introduces sustainability principles which should be reflected in development and redevelopment. These principles include promoting a good quality of life; achieving a strong and resilient economy and thriving social environment; protecting and restoring the biodiversity and natural ecosystems and build upon the positive cultural and human and cultural values.

2.1.4 and 2.1.5 These policies recognize that Huntsville will grow and prosper as well as the need to protect the natural environment.

2.4 Contains a series of objectives that provide general direction on economic development, environment, employment, tourism, culture and heritage, open space and recreation, housing, municipal infrastructure, resource development and universally accessible environment.

2.4.8.6 The Town encourages the development and expansion of non-motorized corridors (e.g. paths, trails, sidewalks, bike lanes and portages) throughout the municipality.

3 Outlines various policies for the protection of environmental and landscape conservation.

10.2.2.3 The Town will endeavour to provide an efficient system of pathways for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles in appropriate locations in the Town. The Town supports these facilities

within multi-use road right-of-way, including Provincial or District rights-of-way.

- 10.2.2.4 Where roads are being reconstructed, and where feasible, paved shoulders or trails shall be provided to allow for non-motorized vehicles.
- 10.4 The policies of this section recognize the municipal transit system and provide guidance for the location of development in proximity to transit routes.
- 11.2 This section promotes the preparation of design guidelines for specific uses in specific locations in the Town.
- 11.4 This section promotes energy conservation measures (ie compact development design to reduce automobile trips) and sensitive lighting through the development approvals process.
- 11.7 Outlines various policies related to the dedication of land for public open space uses and permits parks and recreational trail uses in any land use designation. Section 11.8.7 indicates that municipal road allowances which could become a link in a trail system will not be conveyed out of public ownership.
- 12 Provides policies for community improvement areas.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Subsection 2.4.7.2 of the Official Plan currently identifies that developing more affordable housing development opportunities is an important component of the Town's economic development strategy. However, the policies of Subsection 4.4 typically "encourage", or "promote" its development. The policies also identify the use of municipal incentives to promote this type of development. The policies also identify the use of municipal incentives to encourage this type of development.
- While intensification and infilling has occurred in the Urban Settlement Area, there is still a need for affordable housing in the community.
- The identification of this issue in the Economic Development Goal in the Town's new Strategic Plan, the issuance of a request for Proposal in search of a private sector partner to build an attainable housing development on Town owned land, as well as the recent appointment of an Affordable Housing Advisory Group indicate Town Council's commitment to resolving this issue.
- Access to local food is another important consideration of a healthy community. Currently the Official Plan only contemplates agricultural uses in Subsection 9.12 of the "Rural" designation.
- At present, although Subsection 10.4 addresses municipal transit, the focus of the Official Plan transportation policies is on the road network (10.2). Although Sections 10.2.2.3 and 10.2.2.4 have consideration for active transportation through municipal road reconstruction projects, there is a reference to feasibility. Subsection 10.3 provides direction for road widenings. Further, Subsection 11.7 provides general policies that permit open space, park and trail uses, along with related land dedication. However, there are no policies within Sections 10.2 or 11.7 which, (or link them together to), recognize the existing

trail network within the Town and the desire to expand it to provide increased non-motorized connectivity.

- The current policies do not recognize existing recreational facilities and trail network, how they contribute to community's identity as a healthy and active lifestyle community, as well as support their enhancement.
- The current Official Plan environmental policies are based on sustainability principles to ensure that environmental features are protected. Subsection 3.1 contains general policies which encourage that development be located away from identified environmental features, however other Subsections are more directive. For example, the terms "shall" and "will" are used in some sections of the Plan, as compared to "encourage" and "should generally". The difference in approaches within this section may cause confusion.
- Climate change is a critical issue for all of Muskoka and will likely manifest itself in more extreme weather events that will result in more intense impacts on hazard lands (ie flooding and wildland fires). The Muskoka Watershed Council has written a [background paper](#) on how climate change is anticipated to impact Muskoka. This paper recommends that through Official Plan Review processes, and in consultation with MNRF, DMM, area municipalities should ensure that regulations and advice governing built structures in floodplains are appropriate, and based on accurate, up-to-date information on likely patterns of water level fluctuations on our lakes and waterways in coming years. At present the Official Plan does not contain policies respecting climate change adaptation.
- Our population is aging, and there is an increased need for seniors to age in place and in their community. Mixed use, connected neighbourhoods and policies to address potential for flexible and alternative housing arrangements are needed.
- The Planning Act was amended to facilitate the creation of secondary dwelling units in both existing dwellings and accessory structures, with no appeal permitted on implementing related Official Plan policies.

SUMMARY:

A review of best practices from other municipalities across Muskoka has revealed that the following policy approaches may assist in addressing some of the considerations:

- The introduction and context section of the Official Plan should be based upon principles which ensure that Huntsville continues to be a healthy and resilient community.
- To increase the supply of affordable housing units, pursuit of policy options which include, but are not limited to permitting secondary dwelling units, infill and intensification, enable the consideration of use of a community planning or other by-laws (inclusionary zoning), clarification of how affordable housing can be achieved through the community improvement plan process, require a percentage of new development and redevelopment to include affordable housing and minimum densities should be explored. The Attainable Housing Policy Background paper contains an analysis of current policies and potential changes to increase the supply of attainable housing.

- Policies which permit and promote an appropriate level and scale of agriculture uses such as private and community gardens in appropriate locations should be considered.
- Environmental policies should be updated to ensure that they afford a level of protection envisioned in the Town's Strategic Plan, as well as to address potential impacts of, and adaptation to climate change.
- To ensure that the active transportation network envisioned in the Huntsville Active Transportation Strategy and identified in a Community Master Plan is built out over time, the infrastructure and transportation policies must recognize the benefits and support the concept of active transportation and enable the acquisition of desirable lands through the development approvals and other processes for this purpose.

DRAFT