

Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville **Comprehensive Zoning By-law Update & Town-wide Urban Design Guidelines**

Draft Discussion Paper #1: General Principles & Official
Plan Conformity

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Comprehensive Zoning By-law Update and Town-wide Urban Design Guidelines Project

The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Ontario and is projected to double its population by 2051. To manage this growth and efficiently plan for the future, the Town adopted a new Official Plan in 2024, which received Ministry approval in September 2025. Now that the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville's 2025 Official Plan: Re-Imagine Stouffville (the Official Plan) is adopted, the Town has retained WSP Canada Inc. to review and replace the Comprehensive Zoning By-law 2010-001 ZO with a new Zoning By-law that is built around the Town's updated Official Plan and complies with recent changes to Provincial plans and policies. In addition to being beneficial to the Town's vision, this update is also mandated by the Province of Ontario through Section 26 (9) of the *Planning Act*, which requires zoning by-laws to be updated within three years of an official plan amendment or update. To complement the Town's new Zoning By-law, the Town will also be developing Town-wide Urban Design Guidelines. Together, these documents will establish and communicate clear and consistent rules for development which implement the Town's new vision for the future.

The process of introducing the new Comprehensive Zoning By-law and Urban Design Guidelines begins with background research, a review of existing conditions in the Town, and policy analysis. This is achieved through a series of thematic Discussion Papers which set the stage for the drafting of these documents, including an analysis of updates needed to the current zoning to conform to the existing policy framework. Each discussion paper explores a different key topic and communicates what the key directions of the new documents will be. Other topics and matters may be further identified through consultation. The function of the Discussion Papers is in part to document the team's analysis and establish the basis for next steps and also to facilitate input from a wide range of stakeholders. The topics of the Discussion Papers are as follows.

1. General Principles and Official Plan Conformity (This paper)
2. Rural, Environmental, and Agricultural Areas
3. Commercial and Mixed Use Areas
4. Employment Areas
5. Residential Areas
6. Parking and Transportation
7. Minor Variances, Zoning By-law Amendments, Ontario Land Tribunal Decisions, and Transitions
8. Missing Middle Housing & Infill Development
9. Mid- and High-rise Buildings

In addition to the Discussion Papers, the project team has produced two focused Issue Papers to address specific topics in a shorter format than the Discussion Papers. The topics of the Issue Papers are as follows:

1. Common Amenity Areas
2. Residential Driveways

1.2 Purpose of this Discussion Paper

The purpose of this Discussion Paper is to introduce concepts and ideas which set the stage for an informed discussion on the fundamental principles of the new Whitchurch-Stouffville Zoning By-law and Urban Design Guidelines. This Discussion Paper serves as the introduction section to the suite of topics which will be examined throughout the project and will introduce the guiding principles which will inform the creation of the new Zoning By-law and Urban Design Guidelines for the Town.

1.3 Introduction to Zoning

Zoning refers to the practice of guiding land use within a municipality by dividing the land into “zones” with different rules for what can happen on those lands. In its most basic form, zoning is meant to separate land uses and activities which may be disruptive, unsafe, or otherwise obnoxious from where people live. For example, zoning could be used to prevent a landfill from opening next to your home.

Traditionally, zoning has been used to cluster similar uses and organize towns and cities according to the basic uses permitted in each zone. For example, all the commercial properties may be clustered together in one area and kept out of the residential areas. However, zoning has evolved over the years to consider far more than just the separation of uses. Contemporary zoning has evolved to consider many aspects of human settlement, such as infrastructure capacity, traffic impacts, city service provision, architectural styling, and even mitigating risks of natural disasters. As such, zoning has become a complex system of land use regulation which touches nearly every aspect of life in cities, towns, and even rural communities.

In land use planning, these zones are described in a zoning by-law, which is a local ordinance endorsed by local authorities and elected officials. In Ontario, a zoning by-law explicitly controls the use of land in communities by stating how land may be used, where buildings and other structures can be located, the types of buildings permitted, lot size and dimensions, parking requirements, building heights, and densities. These factors help define the character and composition of communities, and help to usher in change in a controlled manner.

1.3.1 Land-use Planning in Ontario

The regulations and standards in a Zoning By-law are the end result of a comprehensive and provincial-policy led land use planning system, described in **Figure 1-1**. In Ontario, the *Planning Act* is the

cornerstone provincial legislation pertaining to land-use planning in Ontario. The *Act* can be considered a “how to” guide for land-use planning in the Province, and outlines the rules, requirements, and processes that municipalities, agencies, and planners must follow. As municipalities do not have constitutional authority over land-use, they rely on the authority and powers delegated from the Province through the *Planning Act* to shape their communities. All planning documents must follow the prescribed rules, regulations, and powers described in the *Planning Act*.



Figure 1-1: Ontario Planning Framework

The Province of Ontario further expands upon the intentions and policies in the *Planning Act* by releasing consolidated statements of planning policy which contain matters of provincial interest. The current version of this document is called the Provincial Planning Statement 2024 (PPS, 2024), which replaces the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020, and A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2019). Like the *Planning Act*, all Regional and Municipal planning documents must be consistent with the PPS, 2024, including zoning by-laws.

The Province of Ontario also has provincial plans, which are enabled by the *Planning Act*, and supersede local planning documents. Provincial plans advance specific land-use objectives across large portions of the province, impacting multiple jurisdictions at once. The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP) is a provincial land-use plan with broad impacts on the Town. Enabled by the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001*, the ORMCP establishes a policy framework for protecting the Oak Ridges Moraine, which almost entirely engulfs the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville. The Oak Ridges Moraine is a significant landform located within southern Ontario, extending from the Trent River to the Niagara Escarpment. This plan dictates the extent, intensity, and types of development which can occur within the vicinity of the Moraine, and all regional and municipal planning documents must abide by the regulations set out in the plan.

Significant portions of the Town are also within Greenbelt Areas under the provincial Greenbelt Plan. This plan is enabled by the *Greenbelt Act, 2005*, and expands the protections of the ORMCP and the Niagara Escarpment Plan to include a larger portion of the lands surrounding the Greater Golden Horseshoe region. The objectives of this plan are to provide permanent protection against the fragmentation of agricultural lands, prevent the degradation of the natural heritage and water resource systems, and to build resilience and help with climate change mitigation. Much of the lands in the Town’s northwest are designated either Protected Countryside or Natural Heritage System. As Provincial plans,

the policies of both the Greenbelt Plan and the ORMCP have been reflected in the Town's planning documents.

Building on Provincial policies, regional official plans set the growth management and general policies for planning and development which would be applied to all lower-tier official plans. The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville is a lower-tier municipality within the upper-tier Regional Municipality of York. Prior to 2025, many upper-tier municipalities held planning authority to conduct regional planning on behalf of the lower-tier municipalities and adopt official plans. Lower-tier municipalities would also submit their official plans to the upper-tier municipality for approval. The Province of Ontario, through the *Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024*, redesignated York Region as an upper-tier municipality without planning authority. The 2025 Whitchurch-Stouffville Official Plan was written with the guidance of the 2022 York Region Official Plan, and therefore still carries forward the policies of the upper-tier municipality.

At the local level, lower and single-tier municipalities work within the previously described framework to tailor their local planning documents and shape their communities. The official plan is the document which describes the specific vision that the local council has for the community.

In addition to complying with, communicating, and enforcing the policies and regulations from all the documents above it in the hierarchy, the official plan deals directly with issues such as:

- Where new housing, industry, and commercial spaces will be located;
- What infrastructure is needed to support the future of the community, such as roads, watermains, and parks; and
- When parts of the local community will grow or intensify.

1.3.2 Zoning and the Official Plan

The zoning by-law is the final piece in the planning framework puzzle. An official plan is a statutory document, but in itself holds no authority to enforce any of the policies within. This is the role of the zoning by-law, which implements the vision of the official plan in specific, measurable, and legally binding ways. In addition to describing the specific indicators and items that the municipality will regulate to fulfill the vision of the official plan, zoning by-laws also contain enforcement mechanisms as enabled by the *Planning Act* to ensure that development follows all applicable rules and regulations set out within the by-law. The primary enforcement mechanism within zoning by-laws is through development applications, where the onus is on the applicant to prove to the municipality that they are meeting all the requirements in the zoning by-law before a building permit can be issued. To handle complicated applications, many municipalities in Ontario go a step further and pass a site control by-law, which adds requirements for thorough review of all aspects of the development, and adds a public consultation component to the application process. **Figure 1-2** illustrates how policies in an official plan are translated into zoning by-laws. **Table 1-1** provides an example of how a policy from the 2004 Official Plan was implemented in both the Zoning By-law and the area-specific Urban Design Guidelines for downtown

Stouffville. This example highlights the difference between the strict, measurable requirements in the Zoning By-law, and the non-binding yet clearly articulated urban design guidance.

Table 1-1: Example of how Official Plan Policies Translate into the Zoning By-law and Urban Design Guidelines

2004 Official Plan	Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO	Community of Stouffville Main Street Built Form and Urban Design Guidelines (2020)
<p>Policy 12.4.4:</p> <p>Where intensification is proposed, such applications shall conform to the policies of this Plan and the Community of Stouffville Residential Intensification Urban Design Guidelines to ensure that the development reinforces the current heritage character with high quality design, and reflects an appropriate scale and transition to abutting uses and adjacent residential areas, while ensuring a strong street edge and active at-grade uses.</p>	<p>Section 6.2, CM-1 Zone:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Minimum front yard setback: 0 m ■ Maximum front yard setback: 2 m ■ Maximum building height: 14 m ■ Front and exterior side yard parking: Prohibited ■ Buildings taller than 10 m must abide by a 45% angle extending from the centre line of a street across a property 	<p>Guideline 3.2.1.2(f):</p> <p>New low- to mid-rise buildings should be modern, but should respect existing setbacks, historic rhythms and façade treatments (i.e. articulation, signage, etc.), and natural materials (i.e. brick and wood) that are predominant in the Downtown Main Street Character Area. New buildings should not try to mimic historic buildings.</p>

Just as an official plan is ineffective without a zoning by-law, the zoning by-law relies on the policies within the official plan to have the desired impact that land use planning aims to achieve in communities. In Ontario, zoning by-laws and official plans are not required to be published together. Section 26 of the *Planning Act* requires that official plans be updated every five years, or entirely replaced every 10 years. This frequency is important, because planning and other issues evolve over time, and an out-of-date plan may not adequately address changes in technology, economic context, or legislation. Following the update or replacement of an official plan, subsection 26(9) of the *Planning Act* dictates that a municipality must update the accompanying zoning by-law within three years. A new Official Plan for Whitchurch-Stouffville was recently approved by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in September 2025, which means that this Comprehensive Zoning By-law project is required under subsection 26(9) of the *Act*.



Figure 1-2: Comparison of the Official Plan and Zoning By-law

1.3.3 Enforcement of a Zoning By-law

To be effective, zoning by-laws must be enforced by the municipality. The key process for enforcing Zoning By-laws is proactive enforcement through the building permit application process. The Ontario Building Code, as enabled by the *Ontario Building Code Act*, and the Town's Building By-law 2012-004-BU describe the types of building activities which require a building permit issued by the Town before construction can begin. For most new structures, renovations, changes in use, or demolitions, property owners must apply for and receive a building permit before work can begin. The building permit process requires detailed descriptions of the work to be done on a property for the Town to review the application to ensure the proposed activities comply with the Building Code and Zoning By-law, as well as any other applicable by-laws or legislation. Many Ontario municipalities employ a site plan approval process, where the municipality is granted authority to scrutinize certain aspects of a proposed development. Site plan approval must be enabled by by-law, and may only comment on a specific list of topics as defined in section 41 of the *Planning Act*. This list includes:

- The massing and conceptual design of the proposed building;
- The relationship of the proposed building to adjacent buildings, streets, and exterior areas to which members of the public have access;
- The provision of interior walkways, stairs, elevators and escalators to which members of the public have access from streets, open spaces and interior walkways in adjacent buildings;
- Environmental protection and green building standards (if enabled by by-law);
- Exterior access for affordable housing units (if enabled in official plan);
- Landscaping and waste receptacles; and
- Facilities designed to have regard for accessibility for persons with disabilities.

In recent years, the Province has placed restrictions on the powers municipalities have to implement site plan control through the *More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022*, and the *Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act, 2023*. These restrictions took the form of changes to the *Planning Act* which introduced exclusions from site plan control, and exempted residential developments with 10 or fewer dwelling units from site plan control entirely. These changes also prohibited the following matters from being considered through the site plan control process:

- Exterior design (except exterior access for affordable housing units);
- The layout of interior areas (except interior walkways with public access); and
- The manner of construction and standards for construction.

A building permit cannot be issued unless the application meets the requirements of the zoning by-law. If a development or change of use does not comply with the zoning by-law, the applicant has the option to apply for a change to the zoning by-law, known as a zoning by-law amendment, or a relaxation of the requirements, known as a minor variance. A Zoning By-law Amendment is a material change to the

provisions of the by-law, and is required for applications which have no path forward under the existing zoning. For example, a property owner who owns a lot zoned for only residential uses and wishes to build a commercial building would need to apply for a change in either the zoning applied to the property, or the provisions of the existing zoning to proceed. Zoning By-law Amendments must be heard and voted on by Council, who will weigh the proposed change against the policies outlined in the official plan.

A Minor Variance is a minor deviation from the by-law, such as requiring slightly reduced setbacks from a property line. Minor Variances are heard by the Town's Committee of Adjustment, which is a quasi-judicial administrative tribunal comprised of members of the public appointed by Council. Minor Variance applications are reviewed against the requirements in the *Planning Act*. In both minor variances and zoning by-law amendments, municipal planning staff review the application and provide a recommendation to the approval body, though they are not the decision makers. However, section 39.2 of the *Planning Act* does permit municipalities to delegate approval of minor by-laws to staff, including Zoning By-law Amendments if the official plan contains enabling policies. Once a minor variance or Zoning By-law Amendment is approved, a building permit may be issued.

Municipalities also have the authority to conduct active enforcement of a zoning by-law through the use of by-law enforcement officers. These officers can investigate compliance issues which arise based on inspections or complaints by other residents, and will work with the property owner to resolve non-compliance with the zoning by-law requirements. Avenues to compliance can include applying for building permits, Minor Variances, Zoning By-law Amendments, or the demolition of non-compliant structures. Failure to comply may result in prosecution with fines upon conviction.

1.3.4 Zoning and the Urban Design Guidelines

Unlike official plans or zoning by-laws, urban design guidelines are not statutory documents, meaning they are not required by any legislation or regulation in the Province of Ontario. Urban design guidelines exist outside of the planning policy framework, but serve as an important interpretive guide for city officials, developers, and the public to understand the intention of the policies in the official plan. While the zoning by-law will contain a list of prescriptive measures which must be met in order to start construction, the urban design guidelines go beyond what is required and provide examples of ways to reach the intention of the plan in different contexts. Urban design guidelines are far more flexible than zoning by-laws, and can be used as illustrative guidelines on how to meet or exceed the requirements of a zoning by-law.

Despite not constituting official regulations, urban design guidelines are effective and influential documents which play an important role in the development process through other planning processes. As discussed above, Section 41 of the *Planning Act* enables municipalities to enact site plan control by-laws, which add a layer of discretion and negotiation to the planning framework. This process can be heavily influenced by urban design guidelines, which serve as a visual tool which can be referenced by developers, municipal staff, and approval bodies. This relationship is most useful when the zoning by-law and urban design guidelines are aligned.

2. Current Zoning and Policies

A key step in a Zoning By-law Review project is a thorough review of the existing documents to develop an understanding of what needs to be addressed, modernized, and brought into compliance. This section examines the current policies existing format, layout, and structure of the existing Zoning By-law, as well as the key changes brought in by the 2025 Official Plan.

Key Statistics



Figure 2-1: Key Statistics from the Existing Zoning By-law

2.1 Existing Zoning By-law

The current Zoning By-law for the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville was passed by the Town Council on March 2, 2010, and currently exists as passed by the Ontario Municipal Board on January 13, 2011. Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO was introduced to implement the policies of the 2004 Town Official Plan. Since adoption, the by-law has been amended a total of 216 times, all of which are listed individually in a table at the start of the document. As shown in **Figure 2-1**, the July 2025 Consolidation of Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO is 358 pages in length, includes 70 mapping schedules, and includes 10 illustrations to visually communicate the provisions of the by-law. The organization of the by-law can be described as traditional and similar to many other zoning by-laws in Ontario, with the text being broken into 12 sections, as follows:

1. **Administration:** Provides a legal description of the By-law title, area affected, relationship to existing By-laws and legislation, and enforcement.
2. **Zone Descriptions and Regulations:** Describes all the zones contained within the By-law, along with provisions around interpretation of zoning boundaries, exception zones, and holding zones.
3. **General Provisions:** This section outlines specific and technical policies which apply to all properties within the Town. This includes broad requirements around minimum lot sizes, protections for existing uses, parking requirements, and rules around home occupations, among many others.
4. **Rural & Environmental Zones:**
5. **Traditional Residential Zones:**
- 5A. **New residential Zones:**
6. **Commercial Zones:**
7. **Employment Zones:**
8. **Other Zones:**
9. **Definitions:** Section 9 of the Zoning By-law contains a list of all terms which are defined within the document. These definitions are critical to the interpretation of the provisions in the by-law, as they provide a clear picture of exactly what is being regulated.
10. **Appendices:** Appended to the end of the Zoning By-law is a list of 10 illustrations which provide greater clarity of some of the provisions within the By-law, but are provided for convenience only.
11. **Schedules:** A series of schedules are attached at the end of the By-law which communicate regulations alongside the text of the By-law. Just as the text of a Zoning By-law, the schedules are legal descriptions of land which must be accurate representations of the policies described in the Official Plan. These schedules include 57 zoning maps, 4 wellhead protection area maps, a

Sections 4 through 8 of the Zoning By-law list all permitted uses and regulations for each zone, and are categorized by zone type. The types of buildings, uses, and activities allowed in each zone are contained in a “use matrix” that shows if a use is permitted in the zone. Each section also contains a table which details the specific lot provisions for each zone, such as minimum size and maximum building height. Lastly, each section contains a list of exception zones, which are modified zones created through a Zoning By-law Amendment.

landform conservation area map, an aquifer vulnerability map, and a map of the downtown parking reduction area.

2.2 Official Plan Policies

The 2025 Official Plan is a complete renewal of the Town's planning policies, and contains an entirely new vision for the Town. This new Official Plan provides refreshed direction on the location of housing and the types of development permitted in the Town, but these policies have not yet been implemented in the Zoning By-law.

The 2025 Official Plan introduces a broad range of detailed changes to both the land use structure of the Town, but also the urban design and built form of future development. One such change related to affordable housing, which has become a major topic in land use planning and has been identified as a matter of provincial interest in the *Planning Act*. While the 2004 Official Plan acknowledged the need for affordable, secure, and adequate housing, it contained no universal requirements for new developments to provide affordable housing. The 2025 Official Plan attempts to bolster the supply of affordable housing through a series of policies around the creation and retention of existing rental stock, while also setting a minimum target for affordable units in new developments of 35% within Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs), and 25% everywhere else (policy 3.2.1.1(p)). The Official Plan also identifies new intensification targets which acknowledge the Town's constrained urban footprint. Section 3.2.1.1(b) of the plan indicates that of the 18,020 housing units which are projected to be built by 2051, 41% should be low-density, 27% should be medium density, and 32% should be high-density.

The ORMCP and Greenbelt plan significantly constrain the Town's ability to expand with greenfield development, though the new Official Plan has responded by designating more land for urban expansion. The "whitebelt" lands encompass roughly 375 hectares of land along the Town's southern border which are not a part of the ORMCP or the Greenbelt Area. The York Region's land forecasting indicated that these lands will be key to meeting the proposed population targets for 2051. The 2025 Official Plan acknowledges the need for new greenfield development and has designated the whitebelt lands as "New Urban Area" in the plan's Town structure map. These areas will need zoning changes to enable the development and intensification called for by the Official Plan.

Not all of the Town's projected growth can be accommodated in the new urban areas. The new Official Plan also responds to changes mandated by section 16.16 of the *Planning Act*, and designates two MTSAs around the Old Elm (formerly Lincolnville) and Stouffville GO train stations. Policy 2.2.2.4(d) of the Official Plan directs that the majority of projected population growth in the Town be directed to these two MTSAs, while policy 2.2.2.5 requires that the minimum density within the MTSAs will be 150 persons and jobs per hectare.

While the Official Plan is responsible for guiding the structure and organization of the Town, it also communicates policies around urban design which are less tangible and measurable. Many topics call

for the Town to encourage, guide, or support design practices which are more subjective and cannot be codified in a zoning by-law.

The density targets and concentration of development mentioned above align with the Town's new transit-oriented development policies as set out in section 2.9.2. This section introduces a compact, walkable, pedestrian-oriented, and mixed use vision for the areas of the Town which have adequate transit service, and will be supported by the Town-wide Urban Design Guidelines. Section 2.9.3 of the plan speaks to the creation of complete streets. This is an urban design concept which frames the design of public streets with all users in mind, as opposed to only considering the needs of cars. While these requirements mostly speak to municipal investment in public infrastructure, the surrounding land uses can be designed to help support the goal of complete streets, which can be communicated through the urban design guidelines. Guidelines for urban design can go beyond the creation of attractive pedestrian environments. Section 2.10.5 encourages the use of low-impact development, which is a design approach that seeks to reduce the off-site impacts of stormwater. This is accomplished through thoughtful site design and architectural interventions which mimic natural hydrology, reducing the amount of stormwater runoff generated by the built environment.

The preamble to section 7 of the Official Plan acknowledges that the implementation of the plan relies upon the specific provisions of the Town's Zoning By-law and the direction in urban design guidelines to successfully implement the vision of the plan. This implementation is guided by dozens of clear directions which will translate directly into the Zoning By-law. One such directive is shown in policy 4.3.2.1(j), which states that the Town shall update the Zoning By-law to restrict development of new uses or new or enlarged buildings or structures on lands within the Waste Disposal Area of Influence. As a major update to the Town's planning framework, the Official Plan contains numerous new policies Land Use Designations, and Provincial directives which need to be carefully reviewed and implemented in the new Zoning By-law.

There are also omissions from the new Official Plan which must be considered. The 2025 Official Plan does not include Land Use Designations or specific policies for the Community of Ballantrae and the Hamlet of Musselman's Lake. Instead, the Land Use Designations and community-specific policies are still contained in the 2004 Official Plan, as amended by the Ontario Land Tribunal ("OLT") in January, 2025. This OLT decision was the approval of an Official Plan amendment and Zoning By-law amendment from 2014, which the York Region had failed to approve within the legislative timeline. The purpose of the amendment was to bring the Ballantrae-Musselman's Lake and Environs Secondary Plan into conformity with the 2004 Official Plan, and to update the Zoning By-law accordingly. Due to the ongoing appeal, the 2025 Official Plan excluded the Ballantrae-Musselman's Lake secondary plan, leaving it in effect through the 2004 Official Plan. With the approval of both the official plan amendment and zoning by-law amendment in January 2025, the Zoning By-law is now in conformity with the 2004 Official Plan, which remains in effect for this area. As such, no conformity issues exist between the zoning for this area and the Official Plan's Land Use Designations. However, the Official Plan does include high-level guiding principles and policy directions for Ballantrae and Musselman's Lake which will need to be considered when developing new zoning for these areas.

The new Comprehensive Zoning By-law and Town-wide Urban Design Guidelines project explores all of these topics in detail through the Discussion Papers, focused issue briefings, and the Zoning Strategy Report.

2.3 Official Plan Conformity

While the 2025 Official Plan introduces a new vision for the Town, much of the existing urban structure and organization has remained constant between the new and old plans. One of the main changes in the structure of the new Official Plan is the consolidation of most community-specific secondary plans into a single Official Plan. This has translated into the consolidation, addition, and modification of many of the Land Use Designations in the plan areas. Similar to zones, Land Use Designations set high-level policies which translate into broad visions for the areas which they are applied, as well as specific guidance around permitted uses and density. While the Land Use Designations cannot be directly implemented by the Official Plan, the zoning applied by the Zoning By-law must be consistent with the uses prescribed by the Land Use Designations. Within the Official Plan, 29 distinct Land Use Designations are applied to lands throughout the Town, with some Land Use Designations having community-specific rules and regulations. To understand what changes need to be considered through the Zoning By-law Review, the project team conducted a conformity exercise which overlaid the Land Use Designations of the 2025 Official Plan over the existing zoning from the 2010 Zoning By-law. It is expected that each of the Land Use Designations will be implemented through one or more zones, and an understanding how the current zoning lines up with the new vision could indicate which areas need to be updated. The conformity exercise resulted in a dataset of all the zones within each designation, excluding zones which have an overlap of less than 10 square meters.

This dataset was used to conduct an initial analysis on the extent of the existing Zoning By-law's non-conformity within the Official Plan's Land Use Designations. This analysis showed that the existing Zoning By-law contains several areas of alignment, as well as a number of potential conformity issues which will require further investigation. In general, zoning within Land Use Designations intended to protect or accommodate environmental systems, such as Parks and Open Space, Regional Greenlands System, Public Uses and Utilities are largely consistent with the intended function within the Official Plan, with only minor instances of mismatched zoning. Conversely, several rural, employment, mixed use, and urban growth Land Use Designations contain a wide range of zones that may not fully align with the intended function within the Official Plan.

The Agricultural Area and Rural Area Land Use Designations account for the majority of the Town's landmass, which explains the broad diversity of zones observed. Within the Agricultural Area designation only a small portion of lands are zoned for agricultural uses, with the majority zoned for environmental protection or one of the ORMCP zones, with a notable portion of land zoned for residential and employment zones. Similarly, the Rural Area designation is dominated by environmental zoning, but also contains agricultural, residential, employment and institutional zones. These Land Use Designations are

intended to be applied to portions of lands which support diverse uses, so the wide range of zones may not represent non-conformity with the Official Plan, but a detailed review is necessary.

The Significant environmental Area designation is largely zoned for environmental and flood hazard protections. However, the designation does include a range of other zoning, both employment zoning being the most significant. It is possible that this zoning represents legacy permissions applied before the protections came into force, though the inconsistency needs to be reviewed further due to its contrast against the intention of the designation.

Urban and settlement area Land Use Designations demonstrate the most pronounced zoning misalignments. Several of the mixed use Land Use Designations, such as the gateway Mixed Use area, Highway 48 Mixed Use Area, Neighbourhood Retail Area, and Mixed Use Area in Vandorf contain significant portions of development reserve, agricultural, or residential zoning which contradict the vision for these areas. In particular, the Neighbourhood Retail designation sticks out as the current zoning does not correspond with the Official Plan's vision of a neighbourhood-focused commercial mixed use node.

The Growth-oriented Land Use Designations in Old Elm and Stouffville Gateway, such as Medium and High-Density Residential Areas, as well as Mixed Use Areas remain predominantly zoned for agricultural and development reserve uses. While the Official Plan identified the Old Elm areas as requiring additional studies before development is enabled, the density increased within established areas need to be enabled through the Zoning By-law in order to implement the Official Plan.

The employment-related Land Use Designations, such as Business Park and Industrial Areas are generally zoned for employment uses, but are also applied to many greenfield areas which have not had zoning applied yet. It is not possible to conduct a full conformity assessment on these areas, as the policies related to Employment Areas have been deferred from the Official Plan's approval by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and are not currently in effect. This deferral stems from Provincial policy and legislative changes made to the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024, and the *Planning Act*. These have modified the definition of "Areas of Employment" and "Employment Areas" to include a narrower band of uses which were not addressed by the Official Plan at the time of Council approval. Discussion Paper #4: Employment Areas conducts a thorough analysis of the Employment Areas in the Town, and recommends strategies to bring both the Official Plan and the Zoning By-law into compliance with Provincial policy and legislation.

Through this analysis, the study team can draw the conclusion that much of the zoning within the Town will need a thorough review to align with the new vision presented by the 2025 Official Plan. This new vision marks a significant departure from the existing conditions in the Town in regard to urban development. The designation of new urban areas, along with targets to intensify the town, are transformational policies which have not been enabled by the Zoning By-law. The Official Plan also contains changes which were mandated through successive changes to Provincial planning policy and legislation which will need to be addressed through this project. A full investigation into conformity with the Official Plan's Land Use Designations will be conducted during the technical preparation of the new

Zoning By-law, but this initial analysis shows that the scale of the changes brought in by the 2025 Official Plan will require significant changes to the Town's zoning.

DRAFT

3. Approaches and Trends in Zoning

Approaches to zoning are constantly evolving as jurisdictions across North America amend their planning documents and try to bring innovation to the forefront of their by-laws. This section explores various different broad approaches to zoning and provide a brief assessment of the relevance of each approach. These trends will help inform the key principles for the Zoning By-law Review and Urban Design Guidelines project.

3.1 Euclidean and Form-based Zoning

Euclidean zoning is based on the concept of managing the impacts of land uses that are determined to be incompatible by separating land uses appropriately. As a result, the distance would mitigate certain impacts such as noise, privacy, shadowing, pollution or odour. Urban design and built form are secondary in the Euclidean zoning approach.

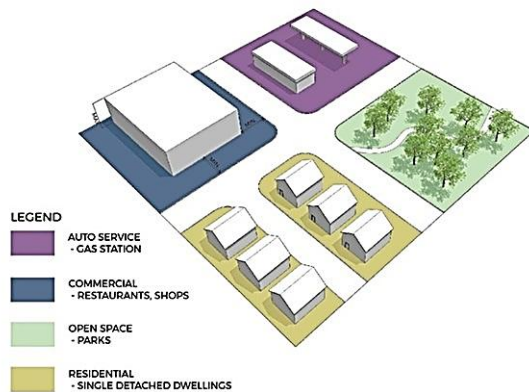
This approach to land use control is based on a system of “zones” which dictate the permitted uses and requirements for buildings and lot characteristics, as shown in **Figure 3-1**. With the goal of separating uses which are incompatible, Euclidean zones are typically categorized according to the dominant land uses permitted, such as residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, agricultural or park/open space. Tools which are used to regulate built form in traditional zoning by-laws are typically abstract and uncoordinated, such as floor area ratios to determine building size, density caps per acre, angular plane to regulate building height, and roadway engineering standards to determine the amount of parking that should be required.

The “Euclidean” name comes from the Town of Euclid, Ohio, for its role in affirming the rights of municipalities to control land uses through zoning in the early 20th century court case in Euclid, Ohio, where a property owner took the Town to court for zoning his property in a manner that prevented industrial uses. At the time, zoning was a relatively new concept, but as the court sided with the local government, maintaining that they have a valid interest in maintaining the character of a neighbourhood and regulating where certain land uses should occur. This case set a precedent for towns across the United States and the world. This began the implementation of Euclidean zoning, where land uses were separated to regulate where certain uses should occur to ensure compatibility.

Throughout the rest of the 20th century, this separation of uses became collectively more restrictive, reaching a form of land use control sometimes referred to as “Exclusionary Zoning”. This is a form of zoning where permitted uses are so tightly controlled that specific uses are ascribed their own zone and require lengthy administrative processes that differ from the prevailing single-use zoning. This form of zoning is still dominant in Canadian municipalities, though incremental changes have been made over the years to better support communities.

Euclidean Zoning

Euclidean Zoning traditionally focuses on **establishing minimum standards (setbacks), maximum height and on distinctly separating permitted land uses**. The main objective of this approach is to ensure land use compatibility by minimizing noise and other potential land use impacts and to create opportunity for landscaping and green space. The outcome of this approach is often to create a very automobile-oriented built form.



Form-Based Zoning

Form-Based Zoning is an approach where **multiple land uses are permitted and development is subject to very detailed requirements**. This includes both minimum and maximum setbacks (build-to lines), minimum and maximum height, and many other types of requirements.

The result of form-based zoning is to create a great deal of certainty around how a community is going to look and feel. The approach is often used in the context of more dense, mixed-use and transit-oriented communities.



Figure 3-1: Description of Euclidean Zoning (left) and Form-Based Zoning (Right)

Euclidean zoning is inherently inflexible and prescriptive by nature of listing the exact land uses and requirements for each zone. As such, it does not leave room for discretion and ensures predictability and consistency with the intention of creating stable communities. If a proposed development is not compliant with the zoning by-law, there are opportunities to vary the standards through a formalized process (Minor Variance application or Zoning By-law Amendment).

In response to the challenges posed by Euclidean zoning, many municipalities in North America have begun to implement a new type of land-use regulation known as Form-based Zoning, which is described in **Figure 3-1**. Form-based zoning is a form of development regulation which shifts the focus away from uses towards the physical form of the buildings. By focusing on the size, shape, and architectural styling of the building rather than the use, form-based zoning can create predictable, prescriptive urban form. Many Canadian jurisdictions are moving towards form-based zoning to regulate their urban development.

Form-based zoning can also help cities respond to contemporary issues facing all jurisdictions. Decades of traditional, single-use zoning has contributed to a pattern of urban expansion which has out-paced municipal infrastructure provision and resulted in very low-density urban form in most Canadian cities and towns. To help address this, many jurisdictions are moving towards the removal of strict residential

zoning, and allowing multiple units on urban lots previously zoned only for single-detached dwellings. The City of Cambridge, ON is in the process of introducing a new Comprehensive Zoning By-law which incorporates form-based residential zoning. Cambridge’s April 2025 draft Zoning By-law replaces Cambridge’s existing 16 use-specific residential zones with 4 form-based zones which regulate built-form and intensity through building dimensions. Within the portions of the city where properties have full municipal servicing, all residential zoned allow single-detached dwellings, duplexes, row houses, and apartment buildings with no cap on density. Instead, the zones dictate a “zoning envelope” (Figure 3-2) which dictates the maximum building dimensions for each zone, which has been set to match the existing context of each area. To allow more density, the zoning envelope is expanded. By setting regulations which control maximum building dimensions instead of the specific uses or densities, the City of Cambridge is codifying the existing urban form of its neighbourhoods while allowing greater density.

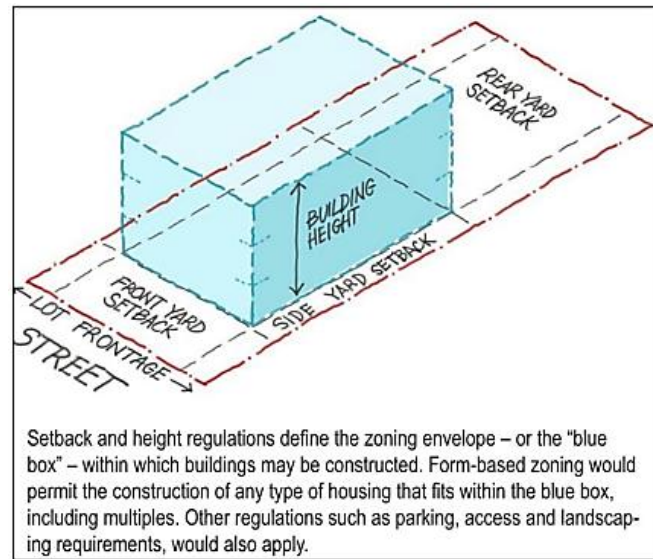


Figure 3-2: Visualizing Form-based Zoning (City of Cambridge)

3.2 Pre-zoning

One approach to implementation of planning policy is pre-zoning. Pre-zoning refers to expanding the zoning permissions for an area to allow for the desired conditions through as-of-right development, as opposed to requiring amendments to the official plan or a zoning by-law amendment before a site plan application can be submitted. Normally, when an existing built-up area is planned to evolve or transform, the existing zoning will simply reflect the previously built uses, and a zoning amendment is often required to permit redevelopment to occur in accordance with the official plan. Pre-zoning applies the Official Plan’s requirements directly as-of-right and eliminates the need for an owner to change the zoning in order to permit what is contemplated by the official plan, as shown in Figure 3-3. For example, if a municipality is designating a new intensification corridor, they can change the zoning permissions to allow for taller, denser buildings with a mix of uses. This would allow developers to simply apply for site plan approval on the structure, as opposed to having to go through a lengthy Zoning By-law amendment process. It should be noted that many Land Use Designations in the Official Plan should not be pre-zoned for immediate development, particularly around future growth centres or greenfield areas. These areas typically require more detailed planning or consideration of local constraints, and instead are directed to follow a Secondary Plan or other prescribed process to enable development.

Many municipalities have pre-zoned specific areas to help facilitate and direct intensification to those areas. Pre-zoning helps to reduce uncertainty and risk in development by removing the requirement to

go through a discretionary application process. For the greatest impact, pre-zoning must provide a detailed description of the desired outcome to encourage development in a structured but flexible manner. There are risks associated with pre-zoning, including lessened municipal control over the development process, and the removal of the site-specific public engagement required through a Zoning By-law Amendment process. Municipalities can address these risks by applying holding symbols to the pre-zoned areas, which prevents development until a pre-defined set of criteria are met. Under the *Planning Act*, municipalities may apply holding symbols to zoned areas which can require conditions such as studies to be met before the holding symbol is removed.

This is the process that many municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area, such as Markham and Vaughan, have taken to encourage development in specific areas. Many municipalities in Canada have also used pre-zoning to change the permissions of large swaths of their jurisdictions to allow for more housing units in established residential neighbourhoods. As part of the Federal Housing Accelerator Fund, cities such as Calgary, London, Halifax, Saskatoon and many others have moved to pre-zone all residential properties to allow up to 4 dwelling units as-of-right.

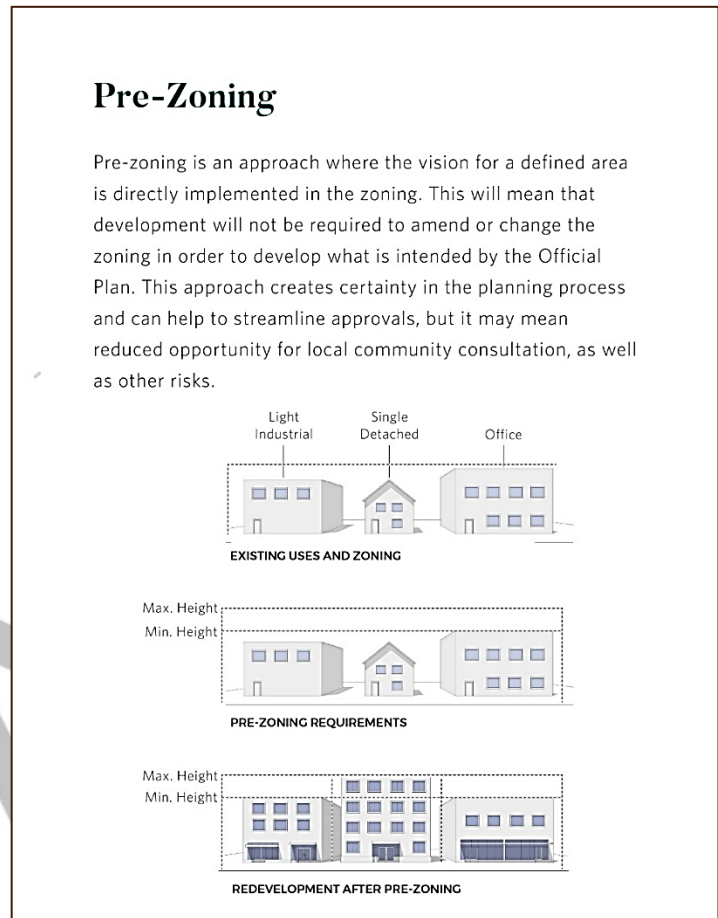


Figure 3-3: Description of Pre-zoning

3.3 Transitioning to a New Zoning By-law

When updating a zoning by-law, consideration must be made for projects already underway. Construction projects can take years to plan and design, and developers can spend thousands of dollars on a project before an application for a site plan approval or building permit is submitted. When the zoning rules change suddenly, projects already in the pipeline could suddenly become non-compliant with the zoning rules, requiring costly zoning by-law amendments or minor variances to proceed. To prevent this, many municipalities include transition clauses which allow active applications submitted before the enactment date to be considered under the previous by-law. Transition clauses have been applied by Ontario municipalities for a variety of application types, including:

- Building Permits
- Minor Variances
- Site Plan Approvals
- Zoning by-law Amendments

- Consents
- Plans of Subdivision
- Plans of Condominium

In addition to specifying the types of applications which are subject to a transition clause, it is common for the Zoning By-law to specify a timeframe in which an application can be subject to the clause. When setting the provisions of a transition clause, many factors must be considered by the Town, which is explored in detail in Discussion Paper 7.

3.4 Increased Flexibility

Traditional Ontario Zoning By-laws have endeavoured to create urban environments according to strict, prescriptive regulations that dictate all aspects of land use. This results in lengthy zoning by-laws with extensive lists of regulated uses, defined terms, and use-specific zoning. The resulting exclusionary zoning has created an inflexible planning framework in many jurisdictions which require nearly all developments to go through a discretionary process such as a minor variance or Zoning By-law Amendments in order to proceed with their developments. This is true for Whitchurch-Stouffville as well, as evidenced by the Town’s 213 exception zones. This strict control of uses often results in an arbitrary separation of uses which do not serve the intended goal of separating obnoxious uses from residential areas. Regulating the land uses in the Zoning By-law through strict, closed-ended use definitions also disadvantages new and innovative businesses from opening in the municipality because they may not fall within the prescribed list of permitted uses.

Much like form-based zoning seeks to reduce the tight control of uses within structures, many Canadian jurisdictions are encouraging a relaxation of control in the list of regulated uses as well. In Edmonton, Alberta, their Zoning By-law 20001 was introduced in 2024, and reduced the number of regulated uses significantly. One of the guiding principles for the Edmonton Zoning By-law was a realignment of the regulations to control what matters most to the residents, while offering flexibility on matters which are less impactful, such as the impact that a flower shop has on a neighbourhood compared to a shoe-repair store. One such innovative use definition from the Edmonton by-law is “indoor sales and service”, which refers to any development where a business offers sales and services entirely within a building. When compared to the Whitchurch-Stouffville Zoning By-law, **Table 3-1** shows the definition for indoor sales and service would encompass 13 different regulated uses. While this level of simplification may not be the right solution for Whitchurch-Stouffville, the broader trend of increased flexibility in use permissions must be considered when developing the new Zoning By-law.

Table 3-1: Comparison of Definitions between Whitchurch-Stouffville and Edmonton

Whitchurch-Stouffville, ON		Edmonton, AB
■ Animal Grooming Centre	■ Business Services	■ Indoor Sales & Service
■ Convenience Store	■ Commercial School	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dry Cleaning Establishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Daycare Centre
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Personal Service Establishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Equipment Sales & Rental
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Service Establishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Funeral Home
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Studio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Retail Store
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Shopping Centre 	

3.5 Mobility and Transportation

Transportation planning and land-use planning are deeply integrated, though traditional Euclidean Zoning By-laws rarely address the impacts that land-use can have on the transportation network. As such, many municipalities are taking a more thoughtful approach to meeting their mobility needs through contemporary approaches to zoning.

Many municipalities in the 21st century have begun to require bicycle parking on-site for multi-unit buildings, with some municipalities even going so far as to require both indoor and outdoor bicycle parking facilities. In the Zoning By-law, this would take the form of a ratioed requirement for a certain class of bicycle parking facility per dwelling unit. As municipalities move closer to active transportation networks connecting their urban form, requiring protected bicycle parking is one of the ways that land-use planning can support the transportation transformation.

Another trend that transportation networks are contending with is the increased popularity of electric vehicles (EVs). While EVs are typically still single-occupant vehicles, they do require a transformation in the infrastructure provided. The most notable shift in accommodating EVs is through at-home charging equipment, which can be a challenge for residents in multi-unit dwellings, especially tenants who have little ability to modify their landlord’s property. Many Canadian cities and Towns have begun to include requirements for EV-ready parking stalls, which feature the electrical connections to install an EV charger. While municipalities in British Columbia lead the way in requiring 100% of residential parking spaces to be EV-ready, the City of Toronto has also incorporated this requirement into their Zoning By-law as of 2022.

Many newer Zoning By-laws in Canada have begun to recognize the role that required parking minimums have played in the increasingly car-oriented urban form that Cities are taking. The result is a broad reduction of required parking rates, with cities such as Ottawa and Toronto moving to remove required parking spaces entirely, instead opting for parking maximums. Cities must also acknowledge that parking is a reality that we must accept, and that some areas do not have the infrastructure in place to move away from cars. As such, many municipalities have introduced precinct-based parking rates, which accept the different contexts of the city and provide parking requirements accordingly.

Municipalities with precinct-based parking requirements include Ottawa, Toronto, Guelph, Richmond Hill, and Mississauga.

There are also broad changes in the ways in which our transportation networks are being used. Disruptive services such as ride-sharing (Uber) and micromobility rentals (e-scooters) have upended the traditional transportation hierarchy, and are beginning to adopt a larger mode-share in urban communities. The COVID-19 pandemic also changed our transportation patterns, with the rising popularity of remote and hybrid work arrangements retaining some popularity in the private-sector to this day. The pandemic also saw the expansion of food delivery and e-commerce to near ubiquitous levels, highlighting the need for more dedicated loading spaces for delivery drivers on city streets. These topics are explored further in Discussion Paper 6 – Parking and Transportation.

3.6 Accessibility, Clarity, and Technology

A common critique of zoning by-laws and urban design guidelines is that the documents are dense, technical, and difficult to read and understand. While zoning by-laws are legal documents, municipalities are beginning to question who the target audience is for these documents. While the target audience for a Zoning By-law will primarily be those involved in planning, development, or real estate, the rules described in the by-law have far-reaching impacts for all residents of a city. Many municipalities are recognizing that in order to increase public engagement with the planning process, we must first remove the barrier of understanding and make these documents accessible to everyone, not just professionals. Common techniques used to increase clarity and accessibility include writing with plain language, creating interactive, web-based by-laws, and incorporating wayfinding elements such as hyperlinks to referred sections within the documents to assist the reader.

The City of Edmonton, while also implementing a web-based Zoning By-law, also published an accompanying guidebook which explains what a zoning by-law is, how it regulates land use, and how to find the zoning for your property. Edmonton also published a video which walks through the use of the web-based by-law, and the accompanying mapping application. Providing interpretive resources which help the public digest the zoning by-law, and can help in getting more residents involved in the planning process.

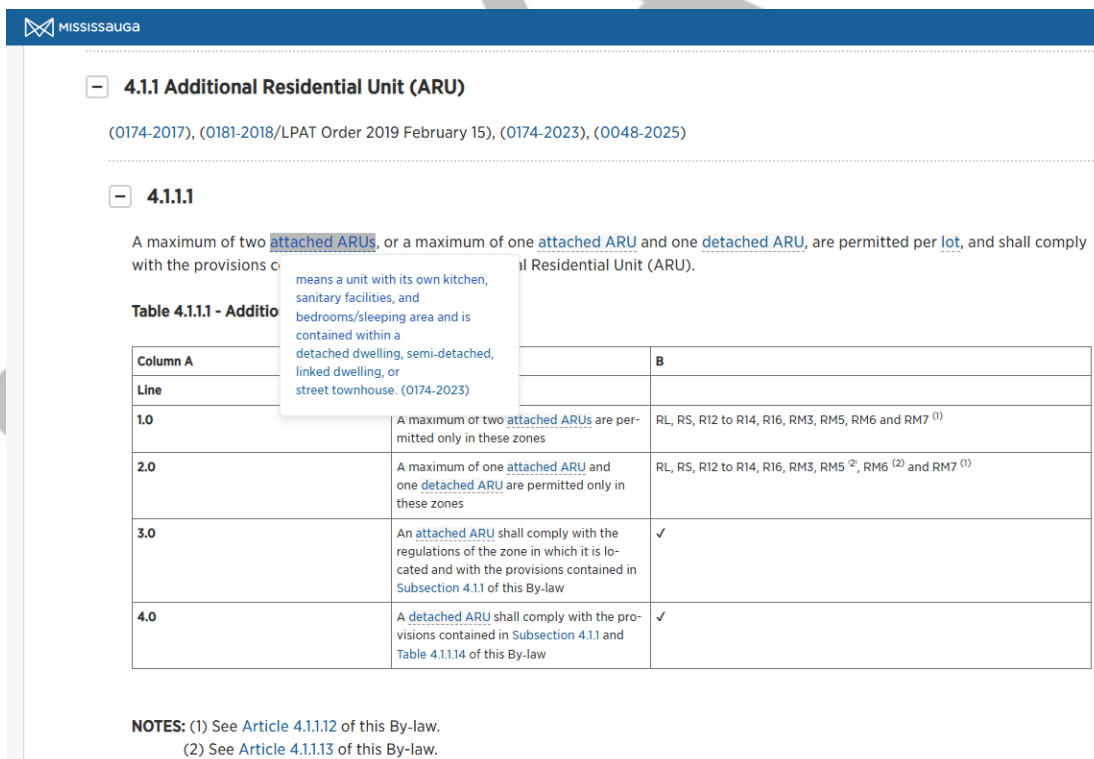
Table 4.1. Site and Building Regulations			
Subsection	Regulation	Value	Symbol
Site Dimensions			
4.1.1.	Minimum Site area per Dwelling	75.0 m ²	-
4.1.2.	Minimum Site Depth	30.0 m	A
4.1.3.	Minimum Site Width	7.5 m	B
Lot Width for Attached Principal Dwellings			
4.1.4.	Minimum Lot Width where the Dwellings are developed on separate Lots not Abutting an Alley	5.0 m	C
4.1.5.	Minimum Lot Width where the Dwellings are developed on separate Lots Abutting an Alley	4.0 m	D
Diagram for Subsections 4.1.2, 4.1.3, 4.1.4, and 4.1.5			
			

Figure 3-4: Diagram within a Zoning By-law

The Town’s current Zoning By-law has one feature which puts it ahead of many other jurisdictions: A set of diagrams which help explain the provisions in the by-law. Unfortunately, these illustrations are buried in the appendix of the 358-page document. To complement the often complex and nuanced provisions in the zoning by-law, many municipalities have begun adding diagrams directly within the document to explain topics visually and textually. **Figure 3-4** shows the City of Edmonton’s setback regulation table, which incorporates diagrams directly into a table of provisions.

While traditional zoning by-laws, such as the Town’s, exist as large PDF files posted on a website, many jurisdictions in Canada are moving towards web-based by-laws which exist as interactive websites with wayfinding features built in. Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton, Mississauga, and many other Canadian cities have implemented interactive zoning by-laws. These by-laws exist as HTML-coded webpages which allow for creative integration of features which go far beyond what a static PDF can provide.

Figure 3-5 shows a screenshot of Mississauga’s web-based Zoning By-law, which highlights all defined terms blue, and displays the definition when the cursor is hovered over it. The by-law also includes direct links to other sections which apply to the topic, and open that section in a new tab when clicked. This makes the by-law easier to navigate by allowing the user to read multiple sections without having to scroll back and forth, and therefore reduces the complexity of the document without sacrificing detail.



4.1.1 Additional Residential Unit (ARU)
(0174-2017), (0181-2018/LPAT Order 2019 February 15), (0174-2023), (0048-2025)

4.1.1.1
A maximum of two **attached ARUs**, or a maximum of one **attached ARU** and one **detached ARU**, are permitted per lot, and shall comply with the provisions contained in Table 4.1.1.1.

Table 4.1.1.1 - Additional Residential Unit (ARU)

Column A		Column B
Line		
1.0	A maximum of two attached ARUs are permitted only in these zones	RL, RS, R12 to R14, R16, RM3, RM5, RM6 and RM7 ⁽¹⁾
2.0	A maximum of one attached ARU and one detached ARU are permitted only in these zones	RL, RS, R12 to R14, R16, RM3, RM5 ⁽²⁾ , RM6 ⁽²⁾ and RM7 ⁽¹⁾
3.0	An attached ARU shall comply with the regulations of the zone in which it is located and with the provisions contained in Subsection 4.1.1 of this By-law	✓
4.0	A detached ARU shall comply with the provisions contained in Subsection 4.1.1 and Table 4.1.1.14 of this By-law	✓

NOTES: (1) See Article 4.1.1.12 of this By-law.
(2) See Article 4.1.1.13 of this By-law.

Figure 3-5: Definitions and Wayfinding features within a web-based Zoning By-law

Municipalities are also beginning to explore more advanced ways to communicate zoning through mapping improvements. The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville currently uses an industry-standard interactive zoning map based on ESRI’s ArcGIS platform. This web-based application is a much better

alternative to static PDF maps, which are a legislative requirement for zoning by-laws, but fail to capture enough detail to be useful in amalgamated municipalities like Whitchurch-Stouffville. As such, municipalities are forced to “tile” their zoning maps, which is where the municipality is split into a series of “tiles” which represent an individual map, and the collection of maps cover the entire municipality. **Figure 3-6** shows the Town’s existing tiling system, which breaks the zoning map into 57 different maps, and requires an index map to give context.

In contrast to the tile system, the Town’s interactive zoning map provides much easier access to the complicated zoning map. This system shows the entire municipality on a colour-coded web-based map which allows the user to zoom in as required. The interface also allows the user to search an address and click on the desired parcel.

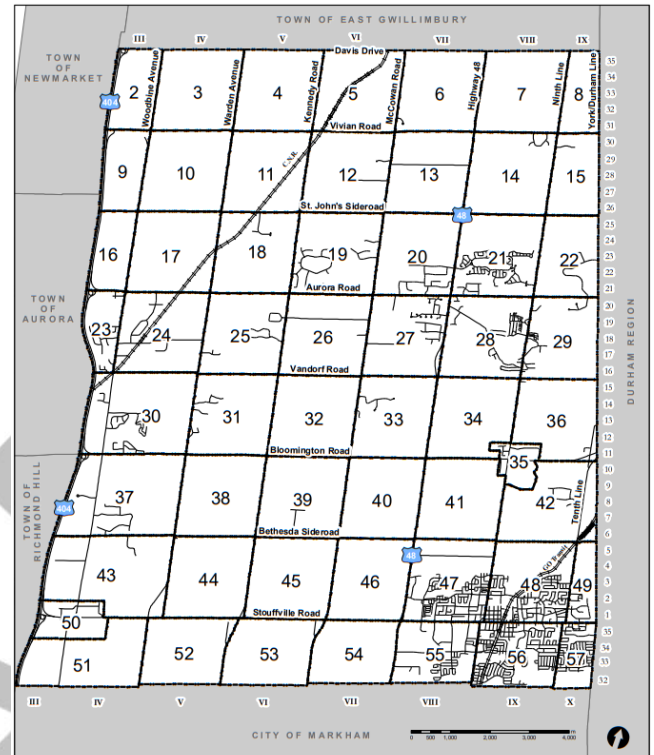


Figure 3-6: Whitchurch-Stouffville's Tiled Zoning Index Map

As shown in **Figure 3-7**, when a parcel is selected, the system then displays the exact zoning applied to that parcel, and provides a link to the section of the zoning by-law that pertains to that zone, as well as a link to the static tile map PDF. The interactive mapping system also allows the user to toggle additional layers of information, such as boundary layers for the Community of Stouffville, secondary plan areas, and any overlay maps which are present in the plan. The interactive map also allows the user to switch to a different basemap for better site context.

The ESRI platform allows for a fair amount of detail to be added to the zoning map, but other municipalities have begun using more advanced systems to convey zoning

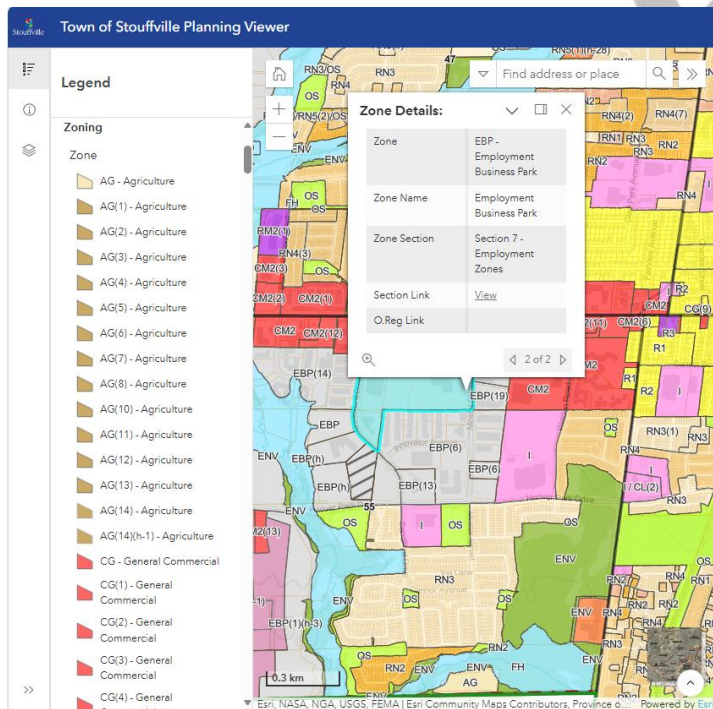


Figure 3-7: Whitchurch-Stouffville's Existing Interactive Zoning Map Application

information. In the United States, municipalities such as Miami, Florida and Hollywood, California have begun to use a platform developed by Gridics which incorporates advanced features such as 3D

mapping of existing structures and embedded zoning provisions within their interactive zoning map platforms, as shown in **Figure 3-8**. This expanded platform allows for far greater levels of detail in communicating zoning provisions, and moves towards a one-stop solution for zoning information.

Some municipalities have also begun exploring integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to improve not only municipal review of applications, but also improve communication of zoning provisions through chatbots. In 2024, the City of Burlington pilot-tested an assistive AI tool which assessed applications for modifications to industrial and commercial buildings against the applicable Zoning By-laws to speed up staff reviews¹. In 2023, the City of Kelowna tested the use of an AI chatbot to assist with development reviews, but also to support developers and residents by making the chatbot publicly accessible². Kelowna’s AI model was developed to only draw information from the City’s website in order to prevent inaccuracies, and was pilot tested for minor applications such as Additional Dwelling Units or swimming pools. The application of AI tools for zoning review and communication is gaining traction among municipalities, but the technology remains in its infancy, and few market-ready solutions exist for municipalities who hope to implement an AI tool without having to develop it. The benefits of large-language model AI systems is the ability to adapt to inputs that are not tailored to be machine-readable. This means that if the Town decides to pursue an AI assistive system in the future, the existing Zoning By-law documents should be sufficient to be readable by an AI model. Regardless, a well-written, easily understandable zoning by-law will benefit all users in the immediate term.

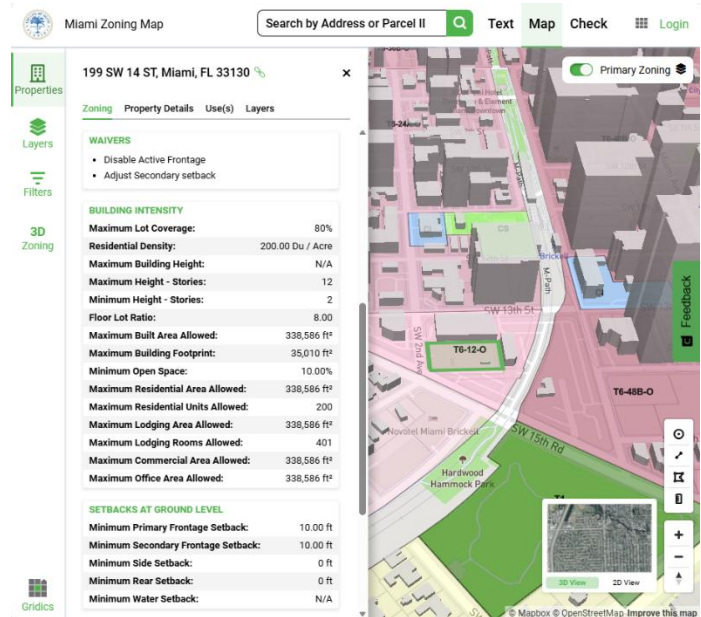


Figure 3-8: Miami, Florida’s Interactive Zoning Map

¹ <https://www.burlington.ca/en/news/city-of-burlington-enabling-more-homes-through-technology.aspx>

² https://www.kelownanow.com/watercooler/news/news/Kelowna/VIDEO_City_of_Kelowna_first_in_the_country_to_embrace_AI_for_permit_applications/

4. Approaches and Trends in Urban Design

Urban design is the art and science of shaping cities to create functional, attractive, and sustainable environments. It focuses on the overall experience of places, identifying key factors that contribute to function, aesthetics, and sustainability. It looks at how individual components come together to influence the impression and quality of a place, neighbourhood, or town as a whole. This section is meant to provide a primer to support the development for the Town-wide Urban Design Guidelines. The following segments review key issues, new innovations or current industry best practices in urban design, and provide recommendations for the new Urban Design Guidelines.

4.1 Built Form

Built form is the physical appearance of buildings including shape, size, height, and relationship to other structures and the streetscape. It defines the physical structure and character of urban areas and impacts the relationship with the streetscape and public areas through the siting and sizing of buildings. Built form is a key topic in Urban Design Guidelines as it guides how new or redeveloped buildings will fit into the surrounding context, which influences the character, quality and appearance of an area.

4.1.1 Typologies

Built form is often divided into different types of buildings (called typologies), based on their height, size and to some extent, function. Built-form typologies that exist within Whitchurch-Stouffville include:

- **Low-rise:** Low-rise forms generally encompass those that are 1-4 storeys in height, and include building forms such as single- and semi-detached homes, duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, townhouses (including row, stacked, and back-to-back units) and low-rise apartment buildings. Many of these forms can have additional or multiple units (e.g. basement, garden or garage suites).
- **Mid-rise:** Mid-rise forms are generally 5-9 storey buildings, though some municipalities consider up to 12 storeys to be mid-rise. These buildings will often incorporate a stepback on storeys above an established streetwall height, to maintain human-scale and pedestrian friendly environments at street-level.
- **High-rise:** High-rise forms capture all taller building forms, generally those that are 9 storeys or taller. For buildings that exceed 10-20 storeys, depending on the municipality, a podium and tower approach is often encouraged, which creates a streetwall-height podium, and then taller tower(s) with a restricted floorplate size and required setbacks from other towers and property lines to ensure appropriate separation for privacy, light penetration and wind reduction.

Urban Design Guidelines utilize typologies to define what is appropriate for different types of built form, in terms of appearance, massing (height and size) and siting (location within a property). Defining these different types of built form and what is appropriate in each case is important to both the zoning by-law and Urban Design Guidelines in encouraging attractive, functional buildings that are well-suited to their surrounding context.

4.1.2 Current Issues, Trends and Best Practices

Several current issues, trends and best practices will impact the development of the Town-wide Urban Design Guidelines, including:

- Transition / Integration of Tall Buildings:** Transitioning between different built form typologies (e.g. high- or mid-rise development to low-rise neighbourhoods) is essential to reduce negative impacts such as shadow, wind and loss of privacy. Gradual changes in building height are preferred, where feasible, allowing for a ‘stepping’ of building heights and avoiding abrupt changes that can compromise neighbourhood character. Most commonly, *setbacks* (distances between buildings) and *stepbacks* (setting back of the building face above a pre-determined height or storey) are used to mitigate potential negative impacts. Thoughtful *massing* (building size, shape and height) and *articulation* (see Built Form Design, below) can also be utilized to reduce adjacent impacts and create human-scale components of a larger building.



Figure 4-1: Demonstration of Transition Options from Mid-rise to Low-rise

- Angular Plane vs. Stepbacks and Setbacks:** Angular plane is no longer considered a best practice as it has been critiqued for placing undue strain on building architecture and form, contributing to a loss of units, without reaping significant benefits of downwash wind reduction and minimizing

shadowing on surrounding areas (residential or public realm). A more fine-tuned approach is needed to optimize built form / units with minimized shadow and wind impacts. Stepbacks and setbacks are being used in lieu of angular plane to still achieve wind and solar objectives, while balancing the need for units and simplified construction. Stepbacks and setbacks can be applied in a broad or general manner (e.g. ‘all tall buildings to have a stepback of 3 m at the 3rd storey’) or area-specific, for example, along Main streets to establish a consistent streetwall height.

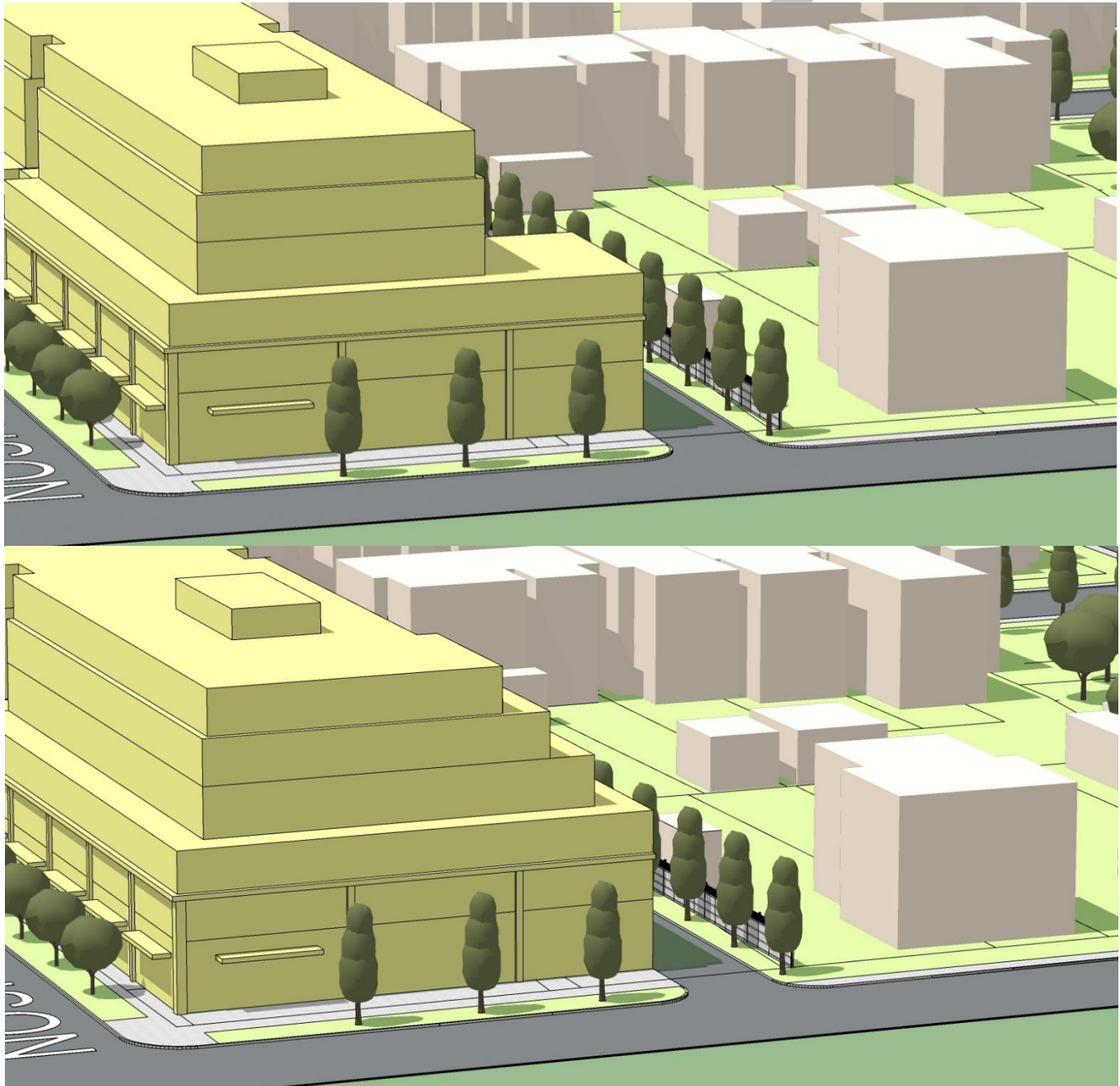


Figure 4-2: Stepback (top image) vs. Angular Plane (bottom image)

- Built Form Design:** Materiality and articulation. Articulation refers to the thoughtful arrangement of building elements, such as walls, windows, doors, and surfaces, to create harmony and visual interest. It breaks down large building mass into smaller, human-scaled components. Articulation can be used to introduce offsets, material changes, and fenestration patterns every 5-15 metres to create interest and avoid overly-repetitive and blank walls. Often this is encouraged through smaller parcel fabric in more urban settings. Articulation can also be used to express and define a clear base, middle, and top of buildings to reinforce proportion and hierarchy. Materiality refers to the choice and placement of materials in the built form, particularly the choice of materials for sidewalks, building facades, and the ways in which these choices impact the functionality, aesthetics, and environmental impact of urban spaces. Some municipalities have moved to prohibit certain materials in their Zoning By-laws, though this blunt tool can do very little to promote good urban design. Urban Design guidelines can provide more effective guidance to designers on how to make material choices complementary to other goals of the design, such as reducing maintenance costs by selecting easy to maintain street furniture.



Figure 4-3: Building Articulation and Materiality Variation along a Main Street

- Missing-middle Housing:** The “missing middle” refers to residential buildings that contain a higher density than a single detached house but lower density than a mid-rise building, ideally at different thresholds of affordability to deliver a full range and mix of housing options. Mid-range housing types and densities, for example, duplexes, fourplexes, are intended to fit within the

context of existing lower density and higher multiple unit density housing, which helps the Town achieve a full range of housing while respecting existing neighbourhoods and contexts. As the Town continues to intensify, policies specific to missing middle typologies such as Townhouses will need to be developed and codified in the Zoning By-law, and supported by the Urban Design Guidelines.



Figure 4-4: Missing Middle – Row Townhomes with Shared Access and Articulation

Private Realm – Sustainable Site Design: Incorporating natural systems and energy-neutral strategies into the design and construction of buildings. This includes pursuing certifications such as LEED and [Passive House](#), building design which optimizes solar orientation, thermal efficiency, and material re-use and local sourcing for reduced carbon footprints.

4.2 Private Realm

The private realm refers to all of the properties and spaces that are under private ownership and may have restrictions on public access or no public access. This includes private residences and apartment complexes, businesses, and institutional buildings. The private realm plays a critical role in shaping the perceived quality and character of an area or neighbourhood.



Figure 4-5: Examples of Sustainable Design – Orientation (Solar/Wind), and Local Sourcing

4.2.1 Current Issues, Trends, and Best Practices

Several current issues, trends and best practices will impact the development of the Town-wide Urban Design Guidelines, including:

- Development Compatibility and Character:** Development compatibility refers to the ability of proposed land uses, buildings, or sites to work harmoniously together with existing development in the area. This is typically guided through the zoning by-law and Urban Design Guidelines by maintaining and complementing existing neighbourhood character in terms of consistent or complementary scale (size and relationship to the public realm), proportion (height, setbacks), and site organizations (site layout, building orientation). Buffers, transitions and other urban design techniques can also be implemented to ensure development compatibility. Through carefully crafted regulations, new developments can begin to weave a new character into existing residential neighbourhoods, providing a sense of place and cohesion.

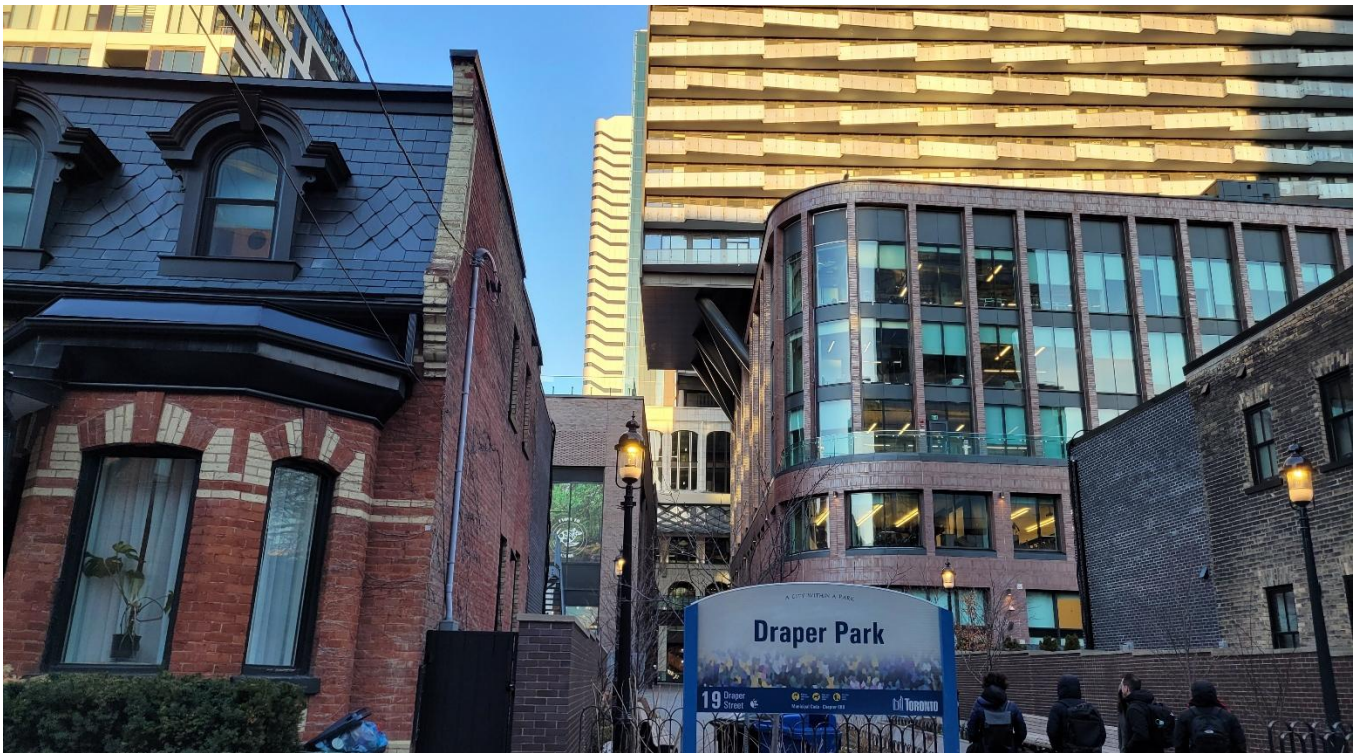


Figure 4-6: Transitioning Heights and Complementary Building Materials and Styles Help to Achieve Compatibility between Different Developments

- **Gentle Intensification:** Gentle intensification refers to low-impact, small-scale additions of housing units, typically within mature neighbourhoods. This may include garden and garage suites and accessory dwelling units, multi-family housing, duplexes, triplexes, and/or fourplexes. Sensitive development and infill in mature neighbourhoods requires design standards that respect the existing character while enabling growth and greater density.



Figure 4-7: Multi-unit Homes Increase Density without Changing the Character of the Street

- Creating Complete / Walkable Communities:** Complete Communities are neighbourhoods where people can meet the day-to-day needs of their household through active transportation, such as walking or cycling, encouraging active lifestyles and reducing reliance on cars for transportation. This often includes integrated zoning approaches, allowing for work, shopping, services, education and social activities to all be located in one neighbourhood. In existing, established communities, the integration of small-scale retail and mixed use nodes is a current best practice for encouraging walkable, complete communities. This, however, can be difficult to achieve organically in already established neighbourhoods, though in-fill development and residential intensification offers an opportunity to expand complete communities within the Town. Urban design guidelines can support the new vision implemented by the zoning by-law. By providing guidance to property owners interested in in-fill development, Urban design guidelines can promote methods to reduce the impact of the new development on the neighbouring properties while still ushering in a new context.



Figure 4-8: Transition of a Mall to a Complete Community Hub

- **Public Realm Enhancement:** Tools and design interventions which can improve the streetscape and pedestrian environment through private realm development include:
 - **Activation of the street.** Street activation refers to how vibrant an area is or may be perceived to be, often in direct relation to how many people are present in the public realm / street frontage. It is most often enhanced through the provision of ground-floor commercial spaces or street-fronting developments with higher foot traffic.
 - **Provision of privately-owned public-spaces (POPs).** POPs enhance the public realm by providing a publicly-accessible but privately maintained community space, whether it be a plaza, parkette or other public amenity. Private developers may be given concessions if they incorporate POPs into the development, for example, exemption or reduction of outdoor amenity space requirements, parkland dedication credits, or increased heights allowing for greater unit-yields.
 - **Glazing on the ground floor.** Encouraging glazing (windows) is a way to promote the private-public interface and flow between public and private realm, enhancing the visibility of businesses and retail stores and activating the streetscape. A minimum percentage of glazing for ground floors is often a standard in Urban Design Guidelines to help to achieve this, particularly along main streets.

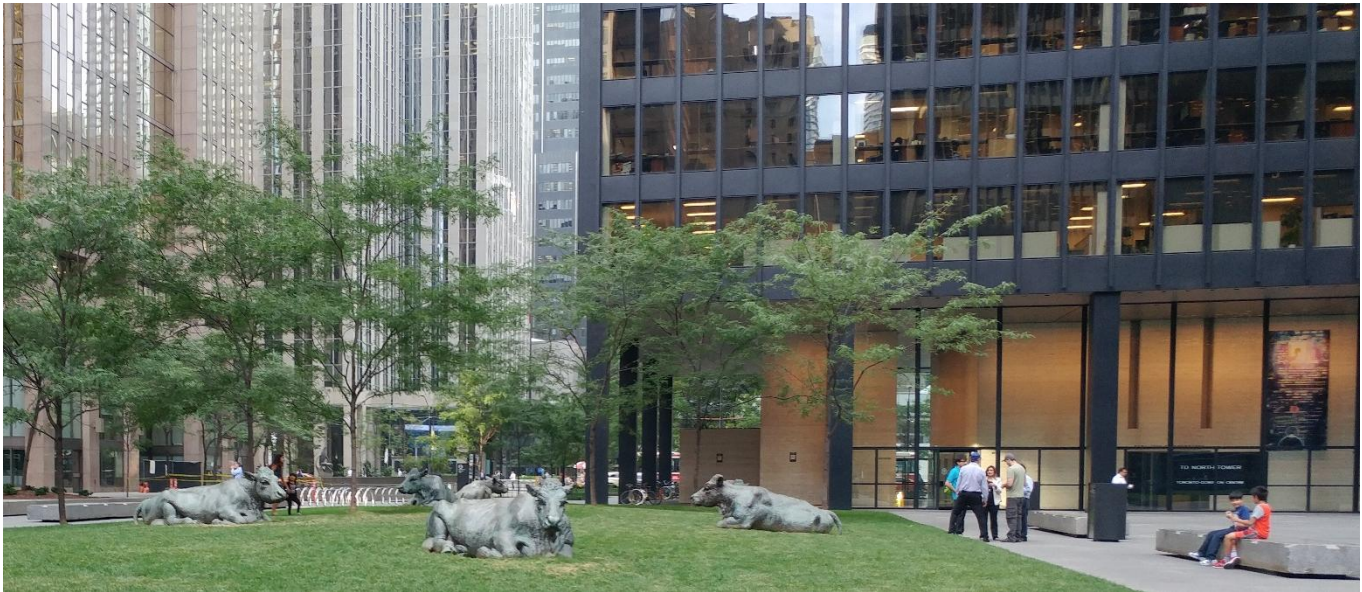


Figure 4-9: 100 Wellington Street West, Toronto – the “Pasture” Privately-owned Publicly-accessible Space which includes Public Art and Significant Glazing

- Sustainable Site Design** (refer also to Built Form – Sustainable Architecture). Sustainable design for the private realm refers to site interventions that enhance and promote sustainability. This may include features such as low impact development (LID) and green infrastructure use in site stormwater management, energy and carbon reduction through re-use of existing materials, and thoughtful site layout to optimize solar gains and reduce wind impacts to maximize the use of outdoor spaces. These treatments become more and more critical with the growing trend of overdevelopment, where developers maximize the allowable lot coverage in their developments, leading to fewer private greenspaces and natural areas.



Figure 4-10: Green Roof Example

4.3 Public Realm

The public realm refers to the publicly accessible spaces, such as streets, sidewalks, parks, plazas, trails, waterfronts, and civic buildings, that form the setting for civic life. The public realm is fundamental to creating healthy, inclusive communities and shaping neighbourhood character.

4.3.1 Current Issues, Trends, and Best Practices

Several current issues, trends and best practices will impact the development of the Town-wide Urban Design Guidelines as it relates to the public realm, including:

- **Consistency and Character:** Clear street walls (both in offset from the roadway and similar storey heights across neighbouring developments), a consistent suite of furnishings and amenities, street plantings and trees, and integrated private frontages help to strengthen sense of place.

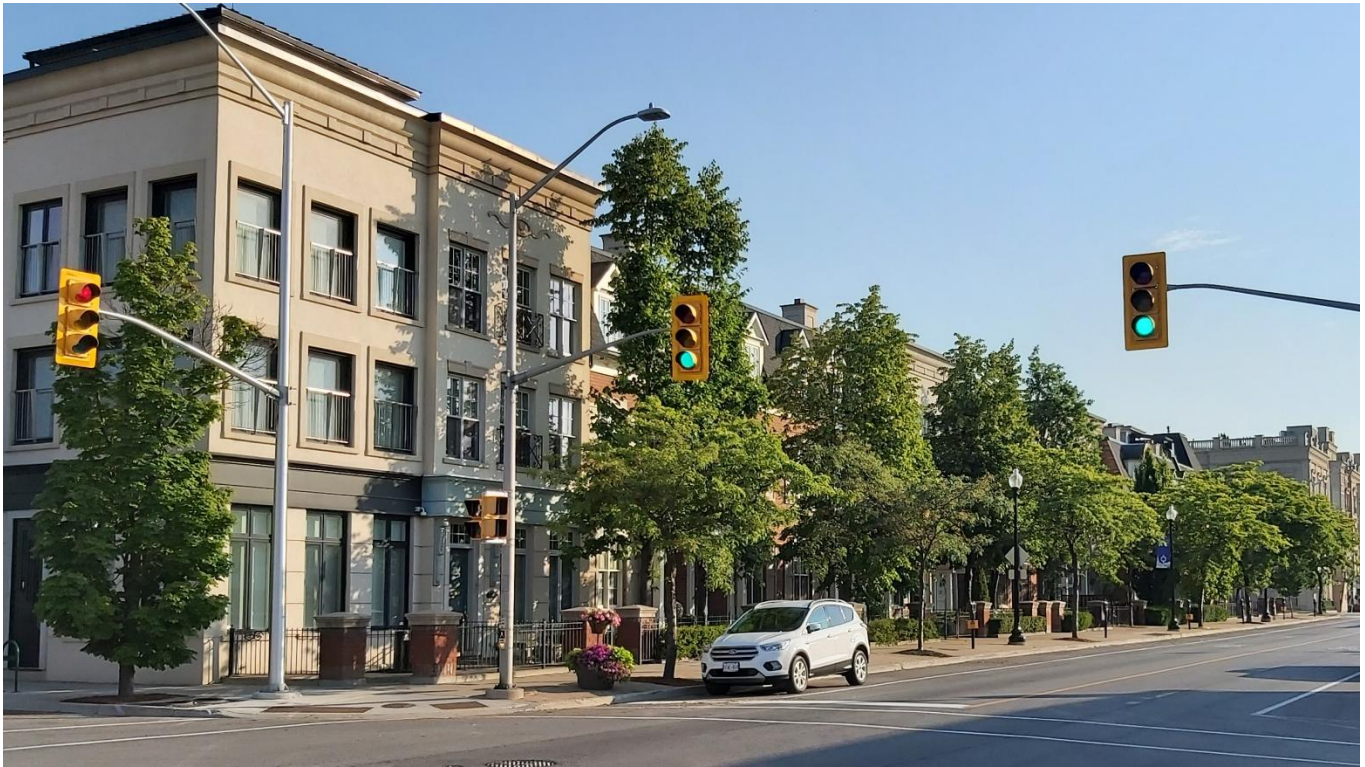


Figure 4-11: Clear Street Wall and Street Trees contribute to this Urban Residential Street

- Tactical Urbanism:** Small-scale, low-cost interventions, sometimes referred to as tactical urbanism, can be utilized to activate streets and the public realm. These often may include temporary installations or interventions, such as pop-up parkettes, painted bike lanes, street furniture and amenities. These temporary installations can serve as a pilot or tipping point for integration of more permanent infrastructure and allow municipalities to test out lower-cost installations to confirm public need or reception.

- Gateways and Focal Points:** A sense of place can be cultivated through urban design by designing neighbourhoods and communities around new or existing attractions, such as plazas, parks, viewpoints, or civic buildings. The design of neighbourhoods should also maintain existing viewpoints, which can be reinforced through the zoning by-law.



Figure 4-12: Examples of Focal Points and Gateways to Residential Areas

- Public Art:** The integration of public art can be a boon to the urban public realm, it can serve to represent and celebrate the culture and history of an area, function as a gateway / wayfinding point, become an attraction, photo opportunity or encourage play and interaction. Key considerations for integrating public art include consideration for appropriate location(s), approximate budget, intent of the artwork (interactive, passive, landmark, etc.), inclusivity and accessibility features, intended duration (temporary/permanent), durability and maintenance. Public engagement and consultation is also encouraged to build community consensus and pride.



Figure 4-13: Examples of Public Art in Main Street Settings

- Landscape / Greenspace:** Street trees and plantings can enhance the public realm and contribute to pedestrian enjoyment and comfort, ecological diversity and sustainability (especially if features such as bioswales or other green infrastructure are incorporated), improved air quality and health, and creating a more attractive public realm. Plantings are encouraged for the multitude of benefits they impart. Key considerations for implementation include adequate space and soil volumes for healthy growth, integration with utilities and transit, use of native species for resilience and biodiversity, and maintenance requirements. A lack of

landscaping and greenspace can be addressed through a zoning by-law through soft landscaping requirements, though the Urban Design Guidelines can provide guidance on how to get the most out of these spaces.



Figure 4-14: Planting Bump-out and Street Trees

- **Climate Resilience:** The public realm can play a key role in enhancing climate resiliency. This may involve the inclusion of green infrastructure such as bioswales, permeable paving, and



Figure 4-15: Bioswales in the Public Realm

increased plantings or green space to manage stormwater, and reduce flooding and urban heat. It may also involve the use or installation of sustainability features. Refer also to Private Realm – Sustainable Site Design

- **Limited Public Parks & Private Amenity Spaces:** Developers are typically required to provide a portion of land to the municipality as parkland when developing new communities, though this land is often comprised of the lowest-quality portion of the site. This can lead to inaccessible, small, or otherwise unusable parks or amenity spaces.
- **Safety, Accessibility, and Connectivity:** Human safety and universal accessibility are critical to creating a welcoming public realm. CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) principles are broadly applied to the public realm to minimize potential negative activities. When combined with connectivity requirements to provide pedestrian access through new developments, these principles can lead to a safer and more pedestrian friendly community. These interventions must occur during the design phase, and should be informed by the Urban Design Guidelines.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Flexible design has a greater value to the community and public realm as it allows for changing needs, demographics and technologies. Spaces that are designed to support multiple uses, pop-up events, and seasonal programming are encouraged.
- **Funding and Maintenance:** Limited resources can restrict upkeep and replacement of aging infrastructure, which can be detrimental to public spaces.

5. Conclusions and General Principles

The purpose of this Discussion Paper was to introduce the Whitchurch-Stouffville Comprehensive Zoning By-law Review and Urban Design Guidelines project by priming a discussion on the state of the current Zoning By-law, the policy and legislative framework, how zoning and urban design guidelines work. This Discussion Paper also highlighted some of the key trends and best practices which would help the Town's new Zoning By-law become modernized and more accessible to everyone. This Discussion Paper sets the stage for some of the key issues to be explored in other Discussion Papers.

5.1 Conclusions

The topics explored in this Discussion Paper were meant to be introductory, and many conclusions drawn from this Paper are expanded upon in other Discussion Papers, focused issue briefings, and project deliverables. The key takeaways from this Paper are as follows:

- The scale of changes brought in by the 2025 Official Plan mean most existing zones are not in conformity with the new Land Use Designations, and detailed analysis will need to be conducted for each designation. Discussion Papers #2 through #5 provide more analysis on Land Use Designations in rural, commercial, employment, and residential areas, respectively.
- The existing Zoning By-law does not employ form-based regulations, and could benefit from increased flexibility. This discussion has spoken of the benefits associated with moving away from Euclidean zoning and by creating increased flexibility in the regulation of uses to reduce administrative burden. Analysis around built-form regulation will be touched on in Discussion Paper #8: Mid- and High-rise Buildings. Discussion Paper #3: Commercial Uses, Areas, and Downtown Zoning provides an analysis on the existing commercial use framework, and speak to ways to simplify the regulated uses.
- There should be transition considerations for the new Zoning By-law. Discussion Paper #7 explores the topic of by-law transitions, and provides insights into what factors to consider when developing the transition framework for the new Zoning By-law.
- Transportation and land-use topics intersect in many ways. Off-street parking, bicycle parking, and electric vehicle charging requirements are often regulated in zoning, and many municipalities are using land use planning to advance transportation initiatives. These topics are further explored in Discussion Paper #6.
- Accessibility and communication should be at the forefront of the project. A brand new Zoning By-law is an opportunity to create a user-friendly, accessible document which demystifies the

planning process and clearly displays information to property owners, Town officials, and the development community. This topic will be considered throughout the project.

- Built form and urban design regulations are most effective when drafted together and codified where possible. Recent Provincial changes have restricted the role of urban design guidelines in the site plan approval process, but many of the innovations identified in this report can be introduced within the regulations of the new Zoning By-law. These topics are explored further in Discussion Papers #8 and #9.

5.2 General Principles

Throughout this Discussion Paper, several broad topics have been identified which will be explored throughout the project, and expanded upon in subsequent Discussion Papers. To guide further discussion on these topics, and developed through this Paper's review of key approaches and trends, the following general principles have been identified by the project team:

1. **Implementation and Conformity with the Official Plan:** The Town's new Official Plan introduces a vision for the Town, but also consolidated the vision into a single document which incorporates Provincial, Regional, and local intentions for the Town. Not only is conformity with the Official Plan a legislative requirement, the creation of the Zoning By-law and Urban Design Guidelines will support the Town for the upcoming decades as it continues to grow.
2. **Accessibility and User-Friendliness:** The review of best practices has shown that Zoning By-laws do not need to be difficult documents to understand. To help promote engagement with the planning process, the new Zoning By-law has an opportunity to become an accessible, user-friendly document which informs the public of the zoning regulations in a clear, easy to understand, and intuitive to navigate document.
3. **Modernization of Zoning to Support Diverse Housing Options:** The existing Zoning By-law does not address the various challenges which have led to the housing shortage in the Town. The new Zoning-By-law has a role in contributing to the solutions for the housing crisis through clear interventions which are examined and developed in subsequent Discussion Papers.
4. **Integration of Transportation and Land-use Planning:** The 2025 Official Plan has brought policies which address the best-practice of integrating transportation topics into the land-use control of the Town. The Zoning By-law has an opportunity to address these policies in creative ways which seamlessly integrate the two topics, and lead to a safer, more efficient built environment and transportation network for the Town.
5. **Seamless Communication of Urban Design Provisions:** The creation of Town-wide Urban Design Guidelines will be critical to the success of the Town's vision of densification while retaining the existing sense of place and character within the Town, and the community of Stouffville. Due to

recent changes to the *Planning Act*, efforts should be made to incorporate urban design topics into the Zoning By-law wherever possible.

6. **Technological Integration:** The emerging trends in zoning have highlighted how much of a difference technological interventions can make in the communication and accuracy of zoning by-laws. It is recommended that the Town implement technological features which enhance the user experience through the new Zoning By-law.

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