

Joint Declaration on the Climate Emergency and the 2021 Official Plan

1. We are facing a climate emergency. Following the lead of international organizations and other governments at all levels, the City of Ottawa has officially recognized this fact.
2. Over the timespan covered by the new Official Plan, we, collectively, must take dramatic, unprecedented measures to lower the concentration of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere.
3. We can achieve this by reducing our emissions of greenhouse gases, mostly by reducing the burning of fossil fuels, and by increasing our carbon capture and storage, mostly through trees, greenspace and wetlands.
4. In the development of this official plan, the city must make many choices about land use and supporting infrastructure. The measures selected must be the ones that result in the lowest levels of greenhouse gas emissions and the highest levels of carbon capture and storage. This is what we call the climate emergency test.
5. The climate emergency test must be the central unifying theme of the new official plan and the guiding measure of its success.

How can this be done?

Figure 1 shows what an official plan with climate change as the central unifying theme and measure of success would look like. Boxes represent major policy groupings of the Official Plan.

(Boxes with a solid outline are those for which the City has prepared a discussion paper. The discussion paper title is in brackets, italic font, under the box title. The boxes with dotted line outlines are policy groupings for which discussion papers have not been prepared.)

If you or your organization wish to endorse this declaration, please do so by email to the City of Ottawa's Official Plan team (planning@ottawa.ca), with a copy to the Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital (contact@greenspace-alliance.ca)

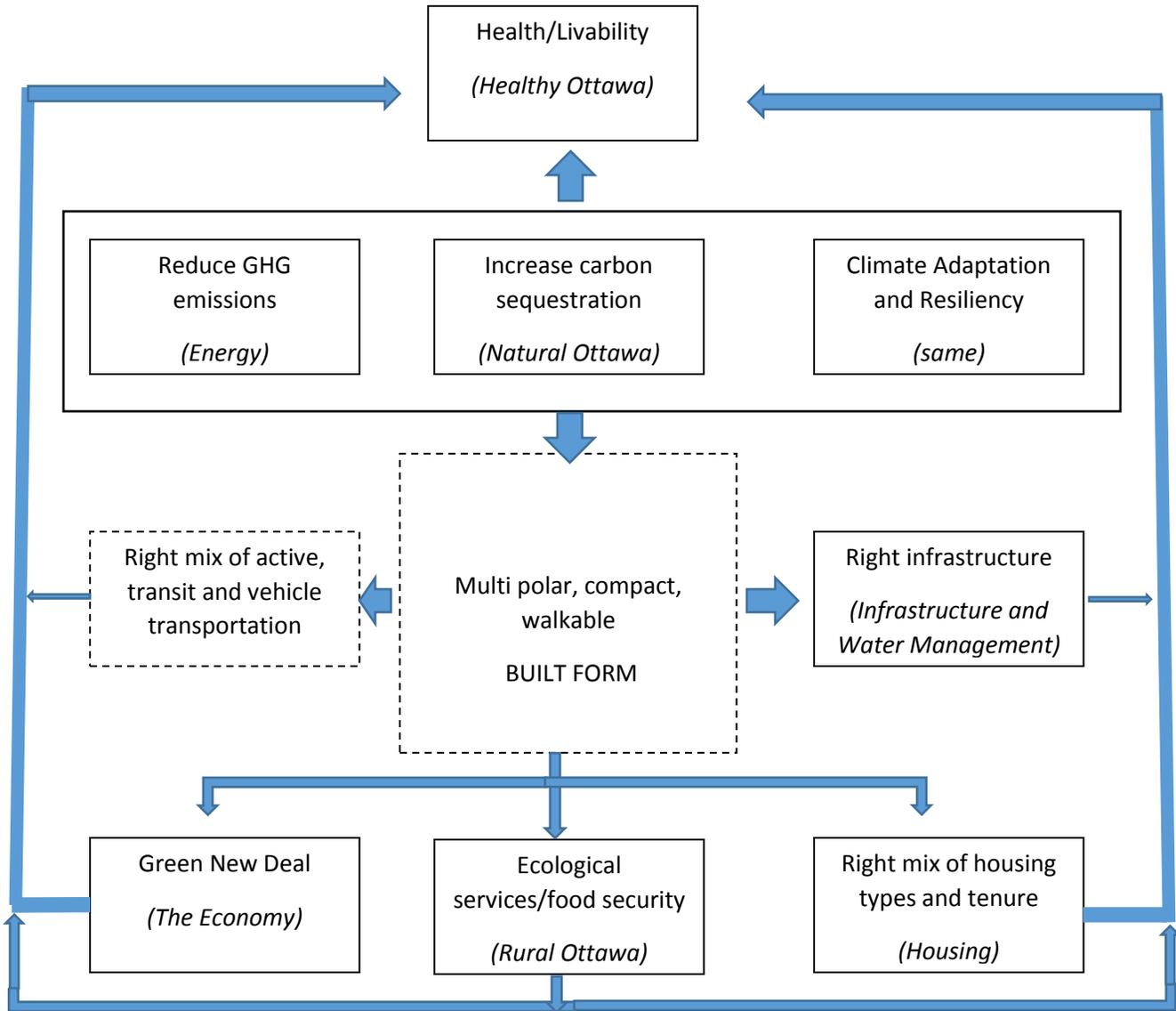


Figure 1

Climate change as the unifying central theme of the new Official Plan

At the apex is the Health/Liveability box, given as the ultimate expected outcome of the Official Plan: a healthy, liveable city for all. Fundamentally, the climate crisis is a public health emergency. The reason why climate change matters is the impact it has on human health and wellbeing, locally and globally. This is taking “liveability” at its most literal sense. Will Ottawa be liveable, will the planet be liveable, if we do not act now? There are other elements contributing to this outcome not represented in the diagram, for example Safety and protective services. Only those elements traditionally covered by an official plan are shown. These OP elements are foundational, laying down many of the essential pre-conditions to public health.

Immediately under this primary outcome is a larger box containing the three policy groupings that directly address the climate emergency. To keep Ottawa liveable, we need to reduce GHG emissions, increase carbon capture and sequestration, and introduce adaptation measures. Together they form a test through which all remaining policy groupings must pass so as to maximize the achievement of the ultimate outcome of a healthy, liveable Ottawa. This dependency is represented by the up arrow.

To reduce greenhouse gas emissions, OP policies must support the shift away from fossil fuels to renewable sources. Official Plan policies needed to achieve significant GHG reductions include greater density in walkable complete communities; increase the use of active transportation; decrease vehicle kilometers travelled; increase zero-emission mass transit; set better building thermal energy requirements; support renewable electricity generation.

To increase carbon capture and sequestration, policies must be adopted that value trees, woodlands and wetlands in terms of the ecosystem services they provide. The City’s Greenspace Master Plan must be rebooted and the critical risks to the urban forest and canopy loss must be addressed. The importance of Natural Ottawa as part of the City’s response to mitigating climate change through carbon sequestration must be emphasized and its measurement included in the City’s GHG balance, not as an offset to emissions, but as a supplementary contribution to lowering CO₂ concentration in our atmosphere.

The Climate Adaptation and Resiliency policies must guide how we prepare for the eventuality of the negative effects of climate change, which are already being felt. All categories of risk stemming from climate change must be covered, including climate risks to green infrastructure itself. For example, we are counting on urban trees to shade and cool as an adaptation to higher temperatures, but how do we protect the trees themselves from the effects of those same high temperatures?

The down arrow illustrates the constraints placed by this climate screen on the Built form block of policies. We agree with the proposition that a multi-polar, compact and walkable built form is the right strategic direction to take to achieve the best results for reducing GHG emissions, increasing carbon sequestration and climate adaptation.

Adopting a built form model that best responds to the climate change emergency informs, in the first instance, both the transportation and the infrastructure policy blocks. The transportation policy grouping must address the mix between modal shares, putting greater emphasis on transit and active transportation, and shifting away from internal combustion driven modes. In addition to the health benefits flowing from the climate change mitigation provided by these measures, both transit use and active transportation independently provide health benefits due to increased physical activity. This is illustrated in Figure 1 by the left long arrow pointing back to Health/Liveability.

The Infrastructure/Water management policies must also anticipate a compact, intensified, built form, which has the added advantage of being the lowest cost option. Trees, forests and natural areas must be considered as asset categories, with attendant funding and renewal/replacement strategies. The long right arrow pointing back to Health/Liveability illustrates the clean water and sanitary services provided by City infrastructure, essential pre-requisites to Health/Liveability.

The Built form also informs, secondarily, the mix of type and tenure of housing, the role and status of rural Ottawa and the location of employment and economic activity, represented by the down arrow splitting to each of these boxes.

The quantum and type of housing needs to be addressed through the growth management policies and the built form, subject to the climate emergency test. Housing policies on rental housing, affordability and homelessness are vital actions for social equity and inclusion, and will help ensure that all residents benefit from the steps taken to manage the climate emergency. The long right arrow back to Health/Liveability illustrates the fundamental contribution of adequate housing to public health and liveability for all.

The policies regarding rural Ottawa must address the particular climate risks faced by agricultural operators and support the contribution of rural areas to food security, both important climate adaptation topics. Policies should also support the essential role of rural Ottawa as the major provider of ecological services to the city as a whole. For example, the forests, wetlands and greenspaces of rural Ottawa carry the bulk of the city's carbon sequestration load, a climate change mitigation measure from which all residents benefit. Policies that promote the green economy should be adopted in response to the demographic and economic challenges of rural Ottawa. The arrows flowing back from the Rural Ottawa box to the Health/Liveability box represent the benefit flow from ecological services and from food security.

Official Plan policies regarding the Economy must address the economic costs and opportunities of the climate emergency, the significant economic development opportunities in the transition to a low carbon economy and the local economic revitalization made possible by adopting a multi-polar, compact, integrated built form. Other policies should focus on challenges and opportunities such as the share economy, social enterprises, precarious employment and income inequality, the circular economy and, in particular, the opportunities presented by the green economy. The transition to a low carbon economy could stimulate new economic activity in a wide range of industrial areas, both urban and rural. The new Official Plan could set the scene for Ottawa's version of the new green deal. These steps are the economic engines needed to deliver on the ultimate expected outcome of a healthy, liveable and sustainable city for all.

Endorsed by:

Community Associations for Environmental Sustainability
Ecology Ottawa
Federation of Citizens' Associations of Ottawa
Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital