

The Official Plan and Economic Development

Prepared by the People's Official Plan for Ottawa's Climate Emergency

Municipal governments in Canada are empowered to promote cleaner, safer, and healthier economies and enhance employment and new careers through a wide range and mix of policy measures. The new Official Plan for the City of Ottawa provides an opportunity to innovate in this role while at the same time responding in a meaningful way to the climate emergency.

We are well-placed to take this path. Ottawa is located at the confluence of three great rivers and connects to many human and natural resources that make up the region (Ottawa Valley, eastern Ontario, western Quebec). Rural Ottawa is 80% of the city's landmass, and a potential engine for generating and sharing the benefits of green innovation in our economy. Working together across urban, peri-urban and rural parts of the city and with the greater Ottawa-Gatineau region offers significant economic opportunities for all and is our best option to avoid the worst consequences of global heating and ecological breakdown.

At a City of Ottawa Committee meeting August 22, 2019 City staff presented draft Policy Directions for the Official Plan that include economic development for the first time in its history. How can this draft be improved?

First, balance a global orientation for economic development with a **strong regional economy**. This means attention to building local and regional linkages in supply and demand chains for food, energy, building materials and recreation and tourism. Local and regional linkages in economic activity multiply the economic and employment gains of everyday expenditures related to meeting basic human needs. A greater degree of self-provision and autonomy also provide a kind of insurance in the face of disruptions to economic networks, whether these be due to the climate crisis or unstable global economic forces.

Second, **plan for the carbon economy**. Nationally and globally, pricing carbon is a key policy instrument in the fight against climate change, and an economic driver. The Official Plan can do more to protect public lands that provide critical ecosystem services and help owners of private lands host desirable land uses. As all Ottawa residents benefit from ecosystem services, tax breaks and payment for services from rural forest fragments and wetlands is consistent with the benefit principle of public finance (beneficiaries pay). Creating opportunities for 'carbon farming' is also a potential economic driver. Cover crops,

windbreaks/shelterbelts, reduced tillage, mulching and compost application, and other reliable but underused farming practices on commercial farms and in household and community gardens are among many ways to farm carbon at a scale that can make a difference. Below-ground biomass in the form of unsealed soils with high levels of organic matter are even bigger carbon sinks than than the trees above. Supporting ecosystem services and carbon farming offers 'double insurance value' by providing both long and short term benefits from richer, more productive land that boost farm economies, improves resistance to drought and flooding, locates more food production closer to points of consumption, and allows rural populations to position themselves as innovative, forward-looking climate leaders.

Third, leverage the abundant health, economic, and environmental benefits of food producing communities by adopting a strong **food focus in the Official Plan**. That means allowing for agriculture in all zoning throughout our city, not just in Rural Employment Areas that cluster agriculture with mining of aggregates, transport, construction and storage. Young people are interested in growing food and can do so on small parcels of land in urban and rural areas. Small and medium-sized food businesses can be integrated in the Official Plan through the distribution across the city of space for food manufacturing, warehousing and distribution and integrating more nut and fruit-bearing trees into the urban forest canopy. Demand currently outstrips Ottawa's supply of products from apiaries, greenhouses, market gardens, poultry eggs, locally adapted seed, and other food products. The new sustainable agriculture goals in the NCC Greenbelt Master Plan, and its special focus on food for people, offer support for and direction for Ottawa to become an edible landscape and world-class culinary, farm-to-table destination. We can Savour Ottawa/Savourez Ottawa within a region rich in nature-based tourism and recreational opportunities, diverse cultural communities, and village and urban historic sites.

Fourth, the transition to a vibrant and innovative low-carbon economy requires **greater energy efficiency and more local and regional energy generation**. The 2015 Energy Evolution Baseline Study found that only 17% of energy dollars spent by Ottawa residents, businesses, and institutions remained within the local economy, and only 5% of the energy consumed during 2015 was produced within the city's boundaries. The development of a local, decentralized energy grid in Ottawa, aligned with city-wide efforts in comprehensive energy efficiency, could keep more of that economic activity in the regional economy, and boost energy self-reliance. This will require a regional orientation and high degree of cooperation with other municipalities and the provincial government. To achieve it's potential, the City could also use the Official Plan to reduce barriers for new players in renewable energy production. Energy efficiency also offers enormous economic gains. The sector already employs 436,000 Canadians, more than twice the total in oil and gas.

Building and retrofitting existing buildings to a Passivhaus standard would create local jobs and deliver dramatic health, environmental and equity benefits.

Fifth, plan for **Nature-based Tourism and Recreation** locally and regionally. Tourism and recreation are already mainstays of the Ottawa economy. It has many cultural attractions and year-round recreational opportunities including being one of the best places in the world to do white-water rafting and cross-country skiing. Hiking, biking, birding, sailing and swimming are ubiquitous and oft cited reasons why people choose to settle in Ottawa. A regional orientation to the further development of nature-based tourism and recreation offer a significant opportunity to support a cleaner, safer and healthier economy that also integrates rural and village Ottawa into the mix.

A policy framework for land use in Ottawa could support a regional orientation to nature-based tourism and recreation that accomplishes two goals:

1. Within Ottawa, attract local residents beyond the Greenbelt - connect suburban/urban to rural areas with nature and recreation corridors, possibly using the hydro corridors to create a web of multi-use trails.
2. Globally, attract external visitors to experience a city and a region with high quality nature-based tourism and recreation.

Some physical assets not yet fully appreciated include:

- Rural west - Fitzroy Provincial Park, Morris Island Conservation Area, sailing clubs, Carp Hills, South March Highlands (mountain biking), Greenbelt
- Suburban west - Carp River Living Classroom (3 km of trails by restored section of Carp River in Kanata).
- Rural south - Marlborough Forest, Rideau River, RVCA conservation areas, Greenbelt
- Rural east - Petrie Island, Mer Bleue, SNC conservation areas, Greenbelt
- Region - Gatineau Park, Ottawa River, Larose Forest,

Rural villages can support these destinations by providing a place to begin and end outdoor recreation, with restaurants/food vendors, accommodation, equipment rentals, and guides/education). For example, the Village of Carp provides cycling, hiking, cross-country skiing, boating, and is located on the north-south flight path of migratory birds. Wellness businesses in the village also connect people to natural areas - spas, eco-wellness, forest bathing, spiritual renewal. Educational opportunities also support business including eco-camps for kids and guided walks/tours that include a visit to a vineyard or spa. First Nations are also located nearby in the Ottawa valley and in Western Quebec where

heritage, education, spiritual experiences can also support tourism and recreational business up and down the Ottawa River and its tributaries.

Finally, the Official Plan needs to rethink how planning decisions are implemented through the City's various plans, programs and budgets, and the need for **mainstreaming mitigation and adaptation** into these processes. Making the most of local, regional and global economic opportunities from well-planned land use requires a new culture of decision-making across municipal departments and sectors and between local and higher levels of governance. Linkages and synergy at all levels is the key to a cleaner, safer and healthier economy and a caring and creative city at the confluence of three great rivers.