

Strategic direction 1: Apply a climate emergency test to the Official Plan

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.

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. 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.

The ultimate expected outcome of this Official Plan is 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?

Overarching strategic direction

For every major direction decided under this plan, the option selected must best align with the goals of 1) eliminating CO₂ emissions, and 2) preserving or increasing carbon stores such as wetlands and greenspace.

This implies data driven assessment of options: CO₂ reductions in metric tonnes, greenspace/wetlands in hectares, % canopy cover at block level. It is imperative that this measurement framework guide land use planning over this emergency period.

Strategic direction 1:

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.

Strategic direction 2:

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.

Implications

No expansion of the urban boundary

There are already two thousand hectares of vacant residential land within the urban boundary, almost all of it in the outer suburbs.¹ This is the least efficient growth pattern from a climate change perspective and under no circumstances should additional residential land be added through urban expansion in these areas.

Concentrate growth in a multi-polar, compact, connected and walkable built form

Ottawa is still more or less developed around a single central core. While residential development has increased in the core, which reduces the volume of car oriented travel from the periphery to the core, still the vast majority of daily commuting trips are to and from the core from the inner and outer suburbs.² The roll out of the full LRT network through to 2031 will enable many residents to substitute transit for car travel, but the majority will still be beyond convenient access to transit and beyond the effective range of active transportation. To address this, not only must new development be concentrated near transit stations, but neighbourhoods outside the core must be allowed/encouraged to develop so as to reduce the need to travel to the city core for employment, services and entertainment.

Preserve and increase greenspace

Set a 40% canopy cover across the urban area

Establish new area targets for greenspace per 1000 pop within the urban area and across the entire city geography, and ensure they are attained.

Ensure all residents live within 400 m of accessible greenspace

Assess all development applications against these targets.

¹ <https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/get-know-your-city/statistics-and-economic-profile/statistics/land-surveys-and-research-reports/vacant-urban-residential-land-survey#2017-update>

² <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2019001/article/00008-eng.htm>