Discussion paper

The Guelph difference: designing a complete and distinctive community

CITY OF Guelph

Making a Difference

June 2015

The intention of good urban design is to create a complete community, a place where people want to live, work and play.

It is people, with all their energy, skills, talents and commitment, who will determine its future. People choose their community based on it having everything they need and value: a great place to live, raise a family, start a business or whatever they value most, from the environment to the arts. And because, in this day and age, people choose where they live, Guelph is competing with other cities to be unique and distinctive, not only in the region, but across North America and the world. Good urban design will be a large part of that choice.

The value of a place to its residents not only relates to social and cultural values. Economically, place is becoming more important than traditional assets, such as available infrastructure. This is particularly true in the knowledge economy, but in other parts of the economy as well. Place plays a key role in fostering innovation and creating network effects in local economies. Already a leader in advanced manufacturing, clean energy and agri-innovation, Guelph's economic future depends on it becoming a recognized hub that brings skilled and creative people to the city. Attractive, vital cities are milieus for social and economic interaction, which, in turn, act as engines for growth and prosperity.

For all these reasons and more, Guelph is experiencing a renewed and lively interest in its urban spaces and design. Besides economic competitiveness, there are also sustainability issues and a new appreciation of the health and social virtues of city living. The renewed interest in urban design reflects a desire for improved social wellbeing and an economically and environmentally sustainable community. The good news is that through collaboration and consultation with the citizens of Guelph, plans and policies already exist to make Guelph even more desirable community. Some of the changes have already begun, but many are either in planning or expected to occur over the coming decades.

In this paper, we discuss the trends and thinking that are behind the City's plans and policies and how they will help differentiate Guelph in its competition for global talent and jobs, as well as improve the livability and attractiveness of Guelph for its citizens in the decades to come.

Guelph's legacy of urban design

Guelph's founder would understand and sympathize with today's trends in urban design. John Galt, representing the Canada Company, famously launched Guelph in 1827 with a plan to create a vibrant city that would attract immigrants, businesses and create a distinctive and thriving urban centre. Galt understood that future prosperity would depend on creating the kind of place in which people would choose to live.

Galt's original design reflects some of the European urban design ideas of his day: narrow side streets more friendly to pedestrians, and large squares and broad avenues that give a sense of open space and are ideal for large public gatherings. Reflecting these design principles, downtown Guelph has an urban and slightly European character missing in many North American cities. Today, Guelph is fortunate to have Galt's foundation on which to build, and that DNA is inspiring similar ideas throughout the city that will set Guelph apart in the coming century.

Although never densely filled in, the basic outlines of Galt's original plan served the city until the end of WWII when Guelph, along with most North American cities, underwent a boom in home construction that led to tremendous growth in a new urban form, the suburb. Conceived as a healthier, semi-rural kind of city, these less dense neighbourhoods were made possible by the new mobility of the automobile. People wanted to move out of the heavily industrialized city centres, and suburbs provided larger lots with single-detached homes surrounded by gardens, lawns and trees: a lifestyle seen as friendlier to young children and growing families.

From an urban design perspective, land use policy in this era also tended to promote the separation of uses, the result being large tracts of single-purpose development. This meant that the various parts of the city where people worked, lived, shopped and played were often separated by distances too great to be walked, thus they relied almost solely on the automobile to move between them. In many cities, including parts of Guelph that developed during this suburban period, apartment buildings and townhouse complexes stand apart from neighbourhoods of detached houses. Shopping plazas are separated from neighbourhoods and are not distinctive in their architecture and sense of place. Residential streets are not well connected and limit traffic movement between neighbourhoods. Arterial connecting roads are broad and encourage cars, but not pedestrians and cyclists. And the lack of density means that urban transit doesn't work as well as it does in denser urban centres.

Suburban development has eaten up precious farmland and natural heritage sites across North America, yet the reliance on the automobile continues. Eight in 10 people still drive alone to work, despite the obvious perils of climate change and the car's continued reliance on petrocarbons. However, as we will see in the rest of the paper, the biggest legacy the car has left us is an urban built form that is out of step with some of the most important trends of our time and the proven popularity of older forms of urban development. We will depend on cars for generations to come, but in the design of our cities, we have to focus less on designing for cars and more on people and what makes them happy, healthy and successful in a sustainable way.

Places to Grow

One of the greatest downsides of the car and less dense urban spaces is its erosion of the idea of place as one of social and economic activity and the sense of community it engenders. It is no coincidence that as tourists, people often find the most attractive places to visit are cities that were built before the automobile. The historic core of cities such as Paris, London, San Francisco or New York mix live, work and play together in interesting and beautiful ways, creating walkable, people-friendly places to live and visit.

The cores of these cities are also hubs of business and innovation for similar reasons. One of the key characteristics of the knowledge economy is how design, innovation and creativity have become increasingly collaborative. Entrepreneurs, investors, scientists and inventors profit from mixing with others, even in other fields. Innovation is often born from cross-pollination of ideas and methods. The popularity of the coffee house, for instance, has become one of the key symbols of where innovation is taking place. These spaces and the informal contact they promote play the same role as they did in 17th and 18th century London and Paris. Creating places where creative, innovative people want to be enables this crucial intermingling to occur.

Random casual encounters are also important for other areas of social life. Sociologists would refer to it as the level of social connectedness. Just like a vibrant business environment, the health of neighbourhoods can be measured by their degree of connectedness. If everyone moves through the neighbourhood in cars, unplanned encounters with neighbours, colleagues and friends almost never happen. When the car was mixed with single-purpose land use planning, the result was a poor sense of place and community. The suburban neighbourhoods would empty during the day, industrial parks and downtowns at night. The majority of people travelling between them rarely encountered their neighbours and fellow community members. This led in turn to low levels of social connectivity and support in many suburban neighbourhoods, and high levels of loneliness, depression and isolation. In many North American cities, downtowns became virtual ghost towns and dangerous after dark.

As the implications of post-war urban planning and reliance on the automobile became better understood, the thinking on what constituted a healthy and balanced community began to change. Urban designers and city planners embraced this as an opportunity to create more complete communities. The Ontario government's landmark legislation, *Places to Grow*, announced in 2005, and the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, which was released in 2006, formulated this idea of "complete community" into policy.

Places to Grow promoted urban densification and mixed-use development. It recognized that cities with mixed residential and commercial areas have greater vitality. Mixed use, intensive developments also meet current objectives for transportation, energy, health and housing diversity. Development in the greenbelt around Greater Toronto Area was significantly restricted. Those municipalities directly outside the greenbelt, such as Guelph, which were targeted for future population and economic growth, were also limited in how much they could expand their land use footprint in the future.

Fortunately for Guelph, and unlike some other municipalities, it was ahead of the curve. In the years before 2006, there had been intensive consultation with the citizens of Guelph over what kind of future they saw for their city. SmartGuelph, as it was called, created important design principles that meshed well with *Places to Grow* and helped the City's planners to take the Province's new guidelines in their stride. Over the subsequent six years, the City comprehensively updated its Official Plan through a series of Official Plan Amendments in a manner that reflected a thoughtful balance between the new policy priorities of the Province and the consensus that had resulted from the local SmartGuelph consultations.

According to *Places to Grow* and the related *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*, Guelph is targeted to increase its population to 175,000 by 2031. And the Provincial legislation established that 40 per cent of that growth has to come from built-up areas, which means putting denser, mixed-use developments into existing areas of the city.

The Official Plan for Guelph identifies nodes for mixed use development and densification in the north, south, east and west corners of the city along intensification corridors, as well as downtown. The nodes and corridors are currently at different stages of planning and development, and urban design plans will be guiding their future evolution. Meanwhile the downtown is already rolling with more than $85 million of private development money committed.

The live/work/play shift

Places to Grow and the policies that have flowed from it, including the Growth Plan related policies in Guelph Official Plan, reflect several broad trends in urban design that are shifting the way we design our cities for the future. But this isn't simply a case of government policy trying to force the market to go where it doesn't want to go. Many of these trends reflect large demographic shifts in safety and the market, as well as clear trends in the economy, municipal finances and in the environmental and health fields.

The millennial/boomer shift

For most of the second half of the last century, the major trends were driven by the baby boom generation. Over the coming 15 years, Boomers will retire and many of them are expected to leave their large, single-detached suburban homes for townhouses and denser, multi-use developments in walkable neighbourhoods. The next largest and most influential age cohort will be their children, known as Millennials. Not as large a cohort as their parents, the values and tastes of Millennials will, nonetheless, drive most consumer markets, including housing and real estate in the coming decades. Being a smaller population, they will not entirely replace their parents, either in the job market or the real estate market. There will be both talent shortages and "freeing-up" of single-detached homes.

On the real estate front, this shortage is exacerbated because the tastes of Millennials are changing. Like their aging parents, they too favour denser, multi-use, live/work/play neighbourhoods. A recently released study (October, 2014) by Price Waterhouse Cooper (PwC) and the Urban Land Institute on Emerging Trends in Real Estate: Canada and United States 2015, concluded that Millennials in general prefer urban to suburban living. The authors went so far as to say, urbanization is no longer a trend, but the "new normal."

This shift can already be seen in Canada's housing market. In the November 2014 report from CMHC, single-detached homes represented only 40% and mixed developments 60% of new starts (CMHC, Housing Information Monthly, Nov 2014). This preference not only reflects shifting tastes, but also economic realities. In the last decade, single-detached home prices across Canada have doubled. Guelph's prices, for instance, have grown by 88%, slightly below the national average, but on par with similar mid-sized Canadian cities. Canada's "overvalued housing market," as it has been referred to by the International Monetary Fund, has seen the steepest inflation in housing values of anywhere in the world.

The job shift

What PwC refers to as the new normal, re-urbanization, is also leading employers back to the city core in hot pursuit of increasingly scarce talent, especially Millennials. Labour markets in North America are entering a 15-year period where there will be shortages across the labour pool as baby boomers retire and the relatively smaller age cohort, represented by Millennials and the generation following, do not bring enough workers into the workplace to replace them. As the PwC study notes,

> … *the movement of workers is driving location decisions for many employers. The recent surge in office construction in a number of markets is being driven to facilitate companies' ability to attract and retain qualified workers. Urbanization is creating greater demand for offices in downtown cores (PwC, p. 6)*

What does this mean for mid-sized cities on the outside of large urban markets, such as Guelph? Can they attract the businesses and the investment dollars needed to transform themselves? Fortunately, there is good news from the PwC study:

> … *"edge city" locations that combine office, retail, and residential areas effectively—especially those that have two characteristics … those attributes are of sufficient density to support live/work/play interactions and a combination of transit and walkability. (PwC, p. 41)*

In other words, Millennials will be attracted to transit-connected edge cities, as long as they have the same urban characteristics that are drawing them into large urban centres, such as downtown Toronto and Vancouver.

Kitchener's downtown growth is illustrative of the new trends in urban design and corporate HR. Graduates of the University of Waterloo software engineering program are no longer only going to Silicon Valley, as they were in the 90s. Instead, key Valley employers, such as Google, are coming to them. Kitchener foresees creating 15,600 jobs in their downtown by 2031, creating a mix of office, residential and retail space around a completely revitalized central train station. Kitchener's traditional manufacturing centre is being reimagined as a vital new urban core of high-tech innovation and excellence, connected locally by LRT and regionally by reliable rail service to the airport and Toronto's rapidly densifying downtown. Google's 1,200 person office space is a keystone property, and there are more companies following them.

The good news for Guelph is that it is on the same proposed two-way, all-day regional rail corridor with Toronto and Kitchener-Waterloo. This makes Guelph a prime destination for Millennials and the companies that need them. This is the key idea behind the 2-way GO proposal and the Innovation Super-cluster Corridor between Kitchener, Guelph and Toronto. However, to attract the Millennials and the jobs that follow them, Guelph has to create the mixed-use and denser urban spaces they value.

The health shift

Designing cities to improve the health of citizens is another key trend behind the demand for denser, mixed-use neighbourhoods. Our dependence on the car has had a significant impact on the climate. In cities, such as Los Angeles and the greater Toronto area during the summer the cumulative impact of millions of cars running their engines is quite easy to see. And for many people suffering from asthma and other lung ailments, city living is becoming increasingly hard on their health.

The health issues associated with the car go beyond air quality. Cities across North America are embracing "walkability," and pedestrians, not cars, are increasingly the priority. The alarming levels of obesity and its many associated illnesses has launched innumerable studies and determined various and complex causes. However, high on everyone's list is a lack of exercise and, especially,

walking as part of everyday life. Public health organizations are united on the need to make walking or cycling a regular part of daily transportation.

The good news is that we can design walking into complete neighbourhoods throughout our cities. The key is to start with density. In order for services to be delivered economically, they need to be able to serve aggregate populations sufficiently large to make them economically sustainable. In less dense neighbourhoods the distance between commercial/service nodes and the population they serve is too great to make walking to the store, school or the dentist's office practical for most people. Greater density helps to create demand and support for a variety of services, employment opportunities and other community facilities within a walkable area. It also makes transit work better, allowing for greater frequency and less walking distance to transit stops.

Density is not the only answer. Changes in land use planning are required to allow retail and services to be more integrated into residential neighbourhoods — what we have been referring to as mixed use. Land use policies should also include an integrated range of housing forms servicing different populations.

There are recognized benefits to individuals, families and communities when people live, work and age in the same neighbourhood. For example, it should be possible for a person to move from their family home to an apartment as a student, later, with marriage, to a starter townhouse, then a larger family home, and, as they age a condominium and, finally, a senior's residence. Ideally, all these housing forms would be within walking distance of the same shops, services, amenities and, most importantly, their friends and neighbours. Separating housing forms breaks up the continuity of peoples' lives and risks decreasing their social connectedness. Single-use planning forces them to re-connect their lives using the car, and they miss the random and casual encounters that a walkable, integrated neighbourhood can foster.

Streetscapes, which today are often built primarily to move cars, often at high speed, also need to be redesigned for multiple uses, including designated bus lanes, cycling lanes and sufficient offsets from the traffic to make walking comfortable. Pedestrians don't want to be brushing shoulders with speeding trucks and buses as they walk to get the milk. Street furniture, intersection treatments, shading, lighting and traffic calming measures can all help to make walking along the street an attractive alternative and, eventually, the norm.

The energy shift

Density, it also turns out, is simply more energy efficient. Counter-intuitively, the island of Manhattan has one of the smallest environmental footprints per person of any North American city. Elevators are the most energy-efficient form of transportation. Think of all the units in a tall building being spread out in a less dense suburban form. Now imagine all the wires, pipes, cars and service trucks it takes to connect them. It isn't hard to see how multi-storey buildings do this much more efficiently.

Larger, multi-storey buildings also have less exposed surface area per unit then single-detached homes, and thus are more efficient to heat and cool. Although not always the case today, they can also share the heating and cooling systems amongst all the units if energy is part of the development discussions. This alone allows for efficiencies and savings, but it also makes possible interesting cogeneration systems that a single home could not afford. A building with a small or mid-sized cogeneration system can generate its own electricity and recover 30 to 40 per cent of the heat that would otherwise go to waste. The heat can be used for water or space heating while the electricity helps operate the facility.

Guelph is a leader in the energy field with an ambitious plan to create a city-wide district energy system, an economical, convenient and sustainable way of providing buildings with hot water, heating and air conditioning from a central community heating and cooling facility. Under the plan, the City foresees the community energy system providing at least 50 per cent of Guelph's total heating and cooling needs by 2041. The denser the neighbourhood and the more multi-storey buildings it serves, the more efficiently the shared system operates.

Financing the shift

This shift in housing and employment patterns is, as PwC notes, already the new normal across North America. Fortunately, for cities that are able to capitalize on densification and re-urbanization, the financial news is good.

The financial issue for many largely suburban municipalities in North America is that non-dense housing developments turned out to be expensive. Highly distributed housing requires more roads, more pipes and is more expensive to service. This wasn't obvious in the beginning, but as post-war suburban infrastructure degrades, roads, sewers and sidewalks need replacing. In the case of some U.S. municipalities that have lost their industrial and commercial tax base, the burden of servicing these less dense neighbourhoods is forcing them into bankruptcy, and they have had to resort to imposing special infrastructure levies or significantly raising taxes. Needless to say, neither solution is politically popular.

The solution, it turns out, is to change our thinking about land use planning — and how we grow tax revenues especially. With *Places to Grow* restricting Guelph's ability to grow its footprint, land use becomes the critical variable. In other words, we can't continue to grow our tax base by swallowing up land and expanding the limits of the city. We have to intensify the use of our existing land. And because denser urban forms are more efficient on a number of fronts, the increase in tax revenue is not matched by increased costs.

A number of cities across North America faced with a financial crisis have realized they need to plan future development according to taxes per hectare. Fortunately, this also encourages exactly the kind of denser, mixed-use development that is trending with Millennials and Boomers, so it isn't difficult to attract developers looking for just these kinds of opportunities.

Figure 1: Tax values by hectare

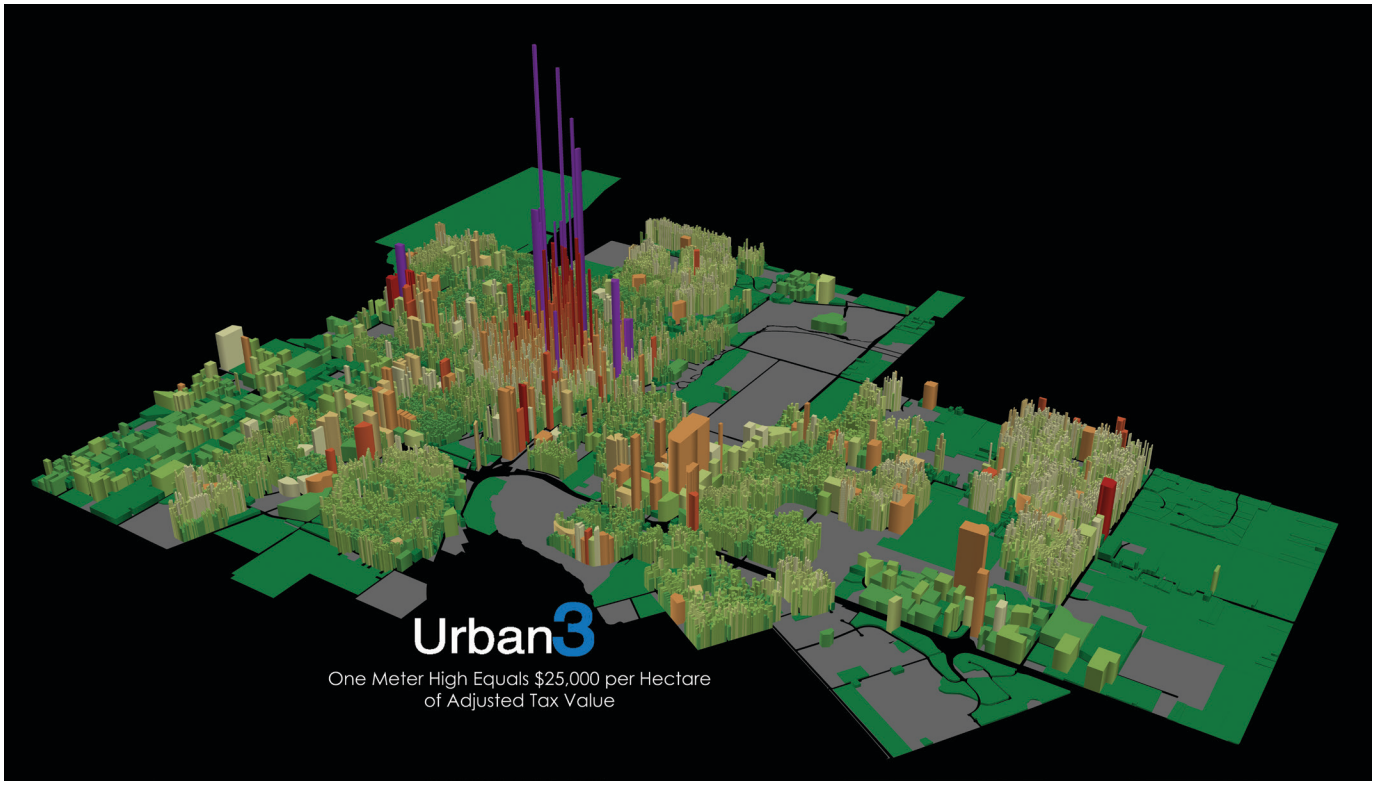

Figure 1 shows tax revenue per hectare based on an analysis of Guelph's taxes. Traditional approaches to tax planning, looked at taxes per property owner, with non-dense, industrial areas being the most productive. However, when looked at in terms of revenue per hectare, the bright spots on the map are Guelph's downtown and the Stone Road mall. The large industrial properties in the northeast corner of the city don't show up because they have very large properties, much of it parking lots, and aren't tax efficient from a land use perspective.

The reason for the downtown being so tax efficient on a per hectare basis is perhaps obvious. Multi-storey buildings clearly generate more tax revenue per unit of land. Stone Road Mall is unusual in an interesting way. It is one of the most tax-efficient malls in North America. Unlike most other suburban malls, Stone Road Mall has an attached multi-storey car parkade and three-storeys of shops and offices for part of its footprint. This significantly increases its tax per hectare efficiency.

This way of looking at City finances puts the emphasis on multi-storey downtown renewal and, reflecting the example of Stone Road Mall, multi-storey, mixed-use development in the north-, south-, east- and west-end nodes. Based on the City's plans for downtown, as an example, current developments will increase downtown's current contribution to the City's total tax base by 400% by 2031. Planning for the nodes is not as advanced, but similar tax intensification should occur there as well. This contribution to City finances will be more financially and environmentally sustainable; help to foster a healthier population; and generate long-term return on the taxpayers' investment.

If designed well, these developments will also attract retiring Boomers, and more importantly for the future, Millennials and the companies that want to hire them, contributing even further to the City's commercial tax base.

The importance of public space

So far we have seen significant macro trends across North America that are driving real estate developers, corporations, public health authorities and municipal governments to embrace denser, multi-use urban design. Ontario's landmark legislation, *Places to Grow* created a policy and regulatory framework that recognizes these trends and requires Ontario municipalities to change their thinking and plan more sustainable communities and cities.

Without good urban design, however, greater density also has the potential to create unliveable neighbourhoods. To work, greater density demands more public space and more investment in the quality and attractiveness of those spaces. Retiring Boomers and Millennials are willing to give up their backyards, and all the time and cost in maintenance they require, but they still need to get outside. They need places to play with their children or grandchildren, ride a bike, have a picnic or just throw a Frisbee. Denser neighbourhoods need broad boulevards to bring in sunlight and space, with main-street-style shops and central services, as well as sidewalk cafés and restaurants where residents can socialize. Social life in denser cities is more public, less private, and this increases social connectedness. Small squares and courtyards bring trees and gardens into the spaces between buildings. And large central squares host festivals, local markets and other events and public gatherings.

These public spaces are a shared or common good. Individual developers of buildings might add a courtyard here or a small garden there, but by and large the responsibility for the design and creation of these public spaces has to belong to the City. Good urban design is for the sake of everyone in the neighbourhood and the city as a whole. Nathan Philips Square in Toronto and Times Square in New York are famous examples of public spaces where the community can gather. Central Park in New York or Mount Royal in Montreal, both designed by the father of landscape architecture, Frederick Law Olmsted, greatly enhance the lives of their respective cities, making natural areas accessible in two of the densest, yet liveable cities in North America.

Good urban design will be essential for ensuring that Guelph is a complete community by fostering greater liveability in denser neighbourhoods, such as the downtown, and a greater sense of shared community space in the nodes. Good design also contributes to fostering a distinctive sense of place and identity.

In Guelph, this has been very evident in the impact of Market Square. The addition of the fountains and splash pool/skating rink, the more open mix of street, parking and sidewalk cafes has created a public space that in its design and look creates something unique and valuable that sets Guelph apart. And the city's residents have responded enthusiastically. Summer days bring throngs of young families to play in the pool, while on most winter evenings one is enchanted by the sight of people of all ages skating to music under the coloured lights.

Future developments of public space, such as St. Georges Square and downtown riverfront parkland, as well as distinctive mainstreet-like developments in nodes throughout the city, will all contribute to making Guelph distinctive, with its own style and charm that helps differentiate it from other cities.

Towards a complete community

Places to Grow and the Guelph Official Plan reflect a shift in urban planning and design. In much of this paper, we have discussed what is new in these policies, a move towards greater density and mixed-use neighbourhoods. It is important to stress that this is an evolutionary shift that will mostly be integrated into the current city.

The City has already implemented water, waste management and energy policies designed to promote Guelph's long-term sustainability and support greater densification. The planning policies embedded in the Official Plan also address social, cultural and economic aspects that, together with the environment, identify the following as strategic goals:

- A complete and healthy community, including a balance of economic growth objectives, sound municipal finances and a safe, liveable community
- Protecting what is valuable, including natural and cultural heritage features
- A safe, efficient and convenient transportation system
- Accessible recreational lands and facilities, community facilities and a balanced mix of housing types, including affordable and special needs housing

The balancing of urban, suburban and natural characteristics of the city will continue to be present and are part of what makes Guelph such a complete community. Guelph is a green place with a nice mix of dense older neighbourhoods and less dense post-war neighbourhoods. Its spacious university campus, trail systems, extensive park lands and gardens are a unique and distinguishing characteristics of the city. The continued protection and enhancement of Guelph's natural heritage systems, parks and open spaces are a key objective for the City.

Intensification will improve the walkability and bring more street life to many parts of the city. The already well used transit system will improve and become a more attractive travel option, even though most residents will continue to rely on cars for the foreseeable future. In the less dense, suburban areas of the city, the mixed-use nodes and intensification corridors will evolve to add walkable and transit-accessible services to lessen the reliance on the automobile in those neighbourhoods. Most nodes will feature main streets with on-street parking, multi-storey buildings and a mix of retail, services and residential, encouraging a more active social aspect to neighbourhoods, where this is currently missing.

Guelph also has to recover from some of its industrial past. Historically, Guelph's rivers, the Speed and Eramosa, were the location for industry. Most of these factories are long gone, but have left "brownfield" lands along the river and through the core of the city. Many of the new and planned denser developments are slated for these brownfield properties. The result is that the targets for densification set forth in Places to Grow, and reflected in the Guelph Official Plan, can mostly be realized in this way, with less need for infill projects in existing neighbourhoods, although these will happen as well.

The goal in the downtown area is to increase both jobs and residents. Studies of other downtown cores worldwide indicate that for long-term health of a downtown core, there has not only to be a good mix of residential and commercial, but scale as well. To this end, the goal for Guelph's downtown core is to increase the population by 6,000 people and bring in 1,500 more jobs by 2031. Current projections for downtown developments already underway or in the planning stages see the tax assessments for the area growing to four times their current levels.

Looking to the future, the Guelph Innovation District embodies many of the characteristics of the new design principles. It will be situated on the western side of the Eramosa River in the block defined by York, Watson, Stone and Victoria Roads. Adjacent to the University of Guelph Arboretum and a pleasant walk or quick bicycle ride to the campus, the Innovation District is being designed

as a mixed-use district that will provide for a range of live/work/play opportunities. Plans include a knowledge-based innovation cluster intended to appeal specifically to the agri-innovation, clean and high-tech businesses, as well as the health and related science sectors. An urban village is planned at the district's centre (College Avenue extension) linking residential and commercial areas. It will be designed as a main street, with multi-storey buildings, pedestrian-focused and well served by public transit with quick links to downtown. The City has also just initiated the preparation of a secondary plan for the Clair Maltby lands in south Guelph, which will lead to a comprehensive community planning vision for this last unplanned greenfield area of the city

Summary

Guelph has key assets that can help it succeed in the future. The University of Guelph has an international reputation in agriculture and bio-tech, key areas in the coming century. Guelph has a strong and well-balanced economy with a strong presence in advanced manufacturing. Guelph also has one of the lowest unemployment rates and is part of the hottest economic region in the country — and in the next decade will be joined to Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo and Canada's main international airport by two-way, reliable rail service.

Guelph's assets fortunately align well with important macro trends emerging across North America. Ontario's Places to Grow and Guelph's new Official Plan have already set the policy framework to support key shifts in real estate development, business relocation, health, environment and municipal finances.

The goal is to take one of southern Ontario's finest mid-sized cities and to use sound urban design to enhance the already established sense of place that its citizens enjoy, creating a complete and distinctive community. A sense of place not only attracts people to the city, it helps keep them here. And with the mobility of business and the talent it needs, this is both a cultural and an economic imperative. As well as Millennials, Guelph needs to attract talented people of every age and occupation, including entrepreneurs and investors, people who believe that Guelph is the best place for them to meet and work together. Place is critical to creating a culture of success in education, the arts, manufacturing and innovation.

With significant population growth expected for Guelph in the coming decades, the challenge set by the Ontario government is how to take the features that already make their city a great place and make it even better — on roughly the same land area. As it intensifies, we have to look, like Guelph's founder, John Galt, to the best of European urban design where for centuries denser urban areas were accompanied by accessible parks, attractive retail and services, and beautiful public squares and spaces where people could congregate and enjoy their community together. Guelph is already a different kind of city, rich in natural and architectural heritage, with a strong identity and sense of place. It is a place where, as in the past, good urban design can make an important difference.

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CITY OF Guelph
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