



# Urban Design Manual

City of Guelph

July 2017



# Volume 1



# Urban Design Vision

DRAFT

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# Main components of the Urban Design Manual

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## **Volume 1:** The urban design vision for Guelph

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## **Volume 2:** Urban Design Action Plan

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The existing Urban Design Action Plan was completed in 2009. This section provides an update on actions taken to shape the future of the city's urban design and provides recommendations for the comprehensive update to the City's zoning bylaw.

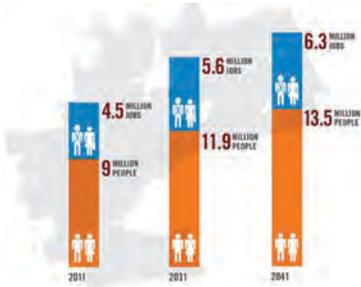
## **Volume 3:** Urban Design Standards and Directions

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1. Urban design concept plans for the following community mixed-use nodes:
  - Watson/Starwood Node
  - Paisley/Imperial Node
  - Gordon/Clair Node
  - Woodlawn/Woolwich Node
2. Urban design concept plans for select intensification corridors.
3. Commercial, townhouse and mid-rise typology Built Form Standards.

These standards provide design direction for private investment and new development as well as guidance for the comprehensive zoning bylaw review.

# Introduction



Between 2011 and 2041, 4.5 million additional people and 1.8 million additional jobs are projected to be added in the greater Golden Horseshoe.

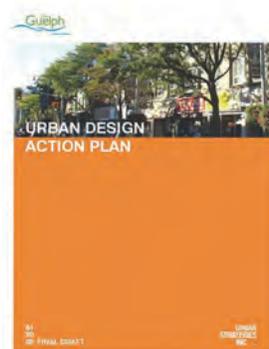
## Guelph is growing.

**In conformity with the Province's Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, Guelph expects to add 55,000 residents and 22,000 jobs by 2041.**

The way Guelph is growing is also changing. Significant population growth and more intense development is happening in specific parts of the city, as required by Provincial legislation. These changes also reflect larger demographic shifts, such as an increase in aging baby boomers and millennials entering the workforce, as well as trends in the fields of economy, municipal finance, environment and health.

Responsible growth means building up and not out into surrounding farmland outside the city's boundary. When the 2009 Urban Design Action Plan was created these ideas were just beginning to be implemented. With many supportive growth policies now in place, Guelph has seen more intensification over the last few years. Today, Guelph is becoming denser with a broader mix of uses, a change from how the city was developing over the previous 60 years.

This growth and intensification is an opportunity and a challenge. If managed well, greater density can enhance the high quality of life Guelph is known for while maintaining and creating liveable neighbourhoods. How successfully Guelph responds to these challenges will depend in large part on urban design.



*Guelph's first Urban Design Action Plan was completed in 2009.*

# Purpose of this document

**The goal of the Urban Design Manual is to demonstrate and provide guidance on the use of urban design excellence in the creation of a complete and distinctive community that enhances the sense of place enjoyed by Guelph citizens.**

The Urban Design Manual provides a thoughtful and consistent approach to urban design in Guelph. The purpose of the Urban Design Manual is to:

- Highlight the importance of urban design;
- Establish general urban design objectives and principles for specific areas of Guelph;
- Provide a consistent approach for urban design in Guelph based on the City's Official Plan;
- Elaborate and expand on the design vision of the Official Plan for the physical evolution and development of the City while providing guidance for implementing policies and regulations to guide growth and change; and,
- Nurture a culture of urban design excellence within City Hall and the broader community.

The Urban Design Manual is meant to be a document that evolves over time based on input from City staff, Council and the community, while following the vision laid out in the City's Official Plan Update (OPA 39 and 48).

## What is urban design?

Urban design is fundamental to creating a great city. Urban design deals with the design of buildings, groups of buildings, spaces and landscapes within the city to create positive, thriving places. Urban design aims to make connections at multiple scales (e.g. between people and places, buildings and streets, movement and built form, natural heritage and the built environment etc.).

In the municipal context urban design is a process for creating successful places, sometimes referred to as **"placemaking"**. Developing a shared urban design vision for Guelph allows citizens, developers, design professionals and staff to talk and think about our city as a shared project.

The City's urban design plans and policies improve the livability, sustainability, economic vitality and attractiveness of Guelph and support its distinctive identity.

# Why is urban design important?

**The intention of urban design is to create a complete community; a place where people want to live, work and play. Urban design reflects a desire for improved social wellbeing and an economically and environmentally sustainable community.**

## Energy: Making Guelph more energy efficient

A more urban and intensified city presents an opportunity to reduce the city's environmental footprint. Density 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.

Think of all the units in a tall building being spread out in the less dense suburbs. Now imagine all the wires, pipes, cars and service trucks it takes to connect them. It isn't hard to see how multi-unit buildings do this much more efficiently.

Multi-unit buildings can also share heating and cooling systems if energy is part of the development discussion. This allows for efficiencies and savings, while making it possible to have cogeneration systems that a single home could not afford.

## Health: Our cities affect our health

There is a new appreciation of the health and social benefits of city living. Cities across North America are embracing "walkability" where pedestrians, not cars, are increasingly the priority. The alarming levels of obesity and its many associated illnesses have launched numerous studies and determined various and complex causes. High on the list of causes is a lack of exercise, 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 our communities for walking and cycling through the establishment of complete neighbourhoods throughout our city. The key is density. In order for services to be delivered economically, they need to be able to serve a large population within a single area. In less dense neighbourhoods the

distance between commercial spaces/services and the population they serve is too great to make walking or cycling to the store, school or the dentist's office practical for most people. Greater density creates demand for a variety of services, employment opportunities and other community facilities within a walkable area. It also improves public transit, 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 integrated into residential neighbourhoods — referred to as mixed-use.

Land use policies should also include a range of housing types for 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, 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 types would be within walking or cycling distance of the same shops, services, amenities and, most importantly, their friends and neighbours. Separating housing types breaks up the continuity of peoples' lives and decreases their social connections.

Streetscapes, which today are often built primarily to move cars, often at relatively higher speed, also need to be redesigned for multiple uses, including designated bus lanes, cycling facilities and safe, accessible sidewalks. Pedestrians and cyclists don't want to be brushing shoulders with fast moving trucks and buses as they go to get milk. Street furniture, intersection layout, shading, lighting and traffic calming measures can all help to make walking and cycling along the street an attractive alternative to driving



**Figure 1: City of Guelph Tax values by hectare**

Figure 1 shows tax revenue per hectare based on an analysis of Guelph's taxes.

and, eventually, the norm.

In addition, emerging research by Professor Colin Ellard and others investigates the connection between public mental health and urban design. Ellard argues that boredom in our streetscapes and buildings increases mental stress and does not support human comfort or happiness.<sup>1-1</sup> Similarly, urban design can impact how someone feels in a space and how they move through it.

### **Economics: Doing the math**

Mixed-use walkable neighbourhoods are also financially more sustainable. Low-density housing developments are expensive, they require more roads, more pipes and are more expensive to service. As suburban infrastructure degrades, roads, sewers and sidewalks need replacing.

The solution is to change our thinking about land use planning, specifically how we increase tax revenues. Intensifying our use of existing land is more efficient. Intensification encourages exactly the kind of denser, mixed-use development that is trending with Millennials and Boomers, which attracts developers looking for just

these kinds of opportunities.

Traditional approaches to tax planning, look at taxes per property owner, with non-dense, industrial areas being the most productive. However, when looking at tax revenue in terms of revenue per hectare, the colourful spikes on the map above are Guelph's downtown and Stone Road Mall. The large industrial properties in the northwest corner of the city don't show up because they have very large properties, with large parking lots, and aren't tax efficient from a land use perspective.

The downtown is tax efficient because multi-storey buildings generate more tax revenue per unit of land.

Stone Road Mall is unusual. According to Urban 3, it is one of the most tax-efficient suburban 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 in certain sections on a relatively small parcel of land. 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 throughout the city in the form of **community mixed-use nodes**.

1-1 <https://aeon.co/essays/why-boring-streets-make-pedestrians-stressed-and-unhappy>

## Conclusion

The resulting tax base associated with land use intensification will contribute to a more financially and environmentally sustainable city, help foster a healthier population, and generate long-term return on the taxpayers' investment.

In addition, from an economic development perspective, a sense of place not only attracts people and business to the city, it helps keep them here. Place is becoming more important than traditional assets, such as available infrastructure. In particular, place plays a key role in fostering innovation and collaboration in the local economies.

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 gather and work together. Place is critical to creating a culture of success in education, the arts, manufacturing and innovation. If designed well, new developments will also attract retiring Boomers, and more importantly for the future, Millennials and the companies that want to hire them, further contributing to the city's tax base.

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**The City's 5 mixed-use nodes** are central, connecting points in a neighbourhood that have a mix of residential, commercial and institutional buildings, such as shopping areas, community uses, libraries and medium to high density housing

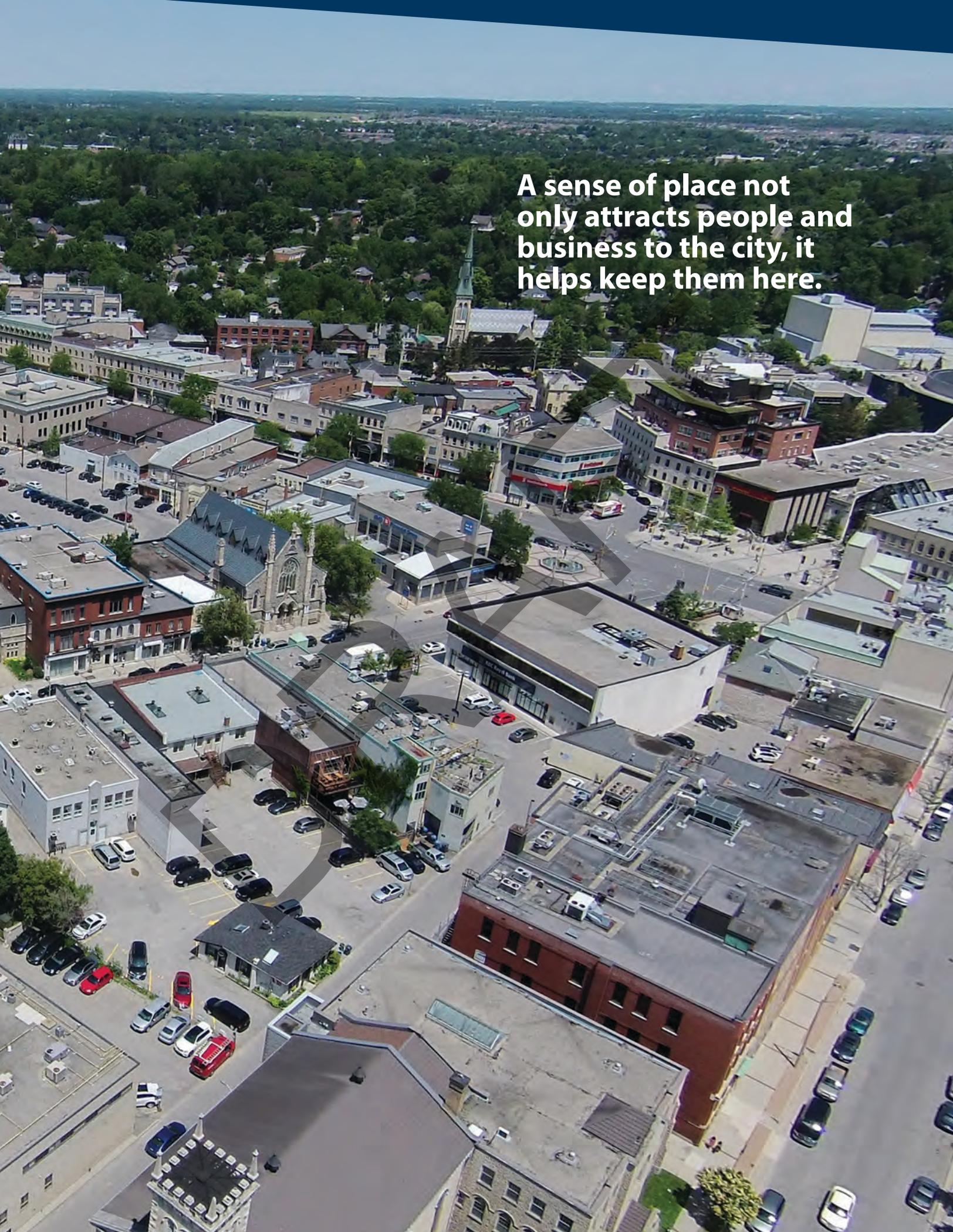
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### Existing community mixed-use node (Watson/Starwood Node)



### Vision for community mixed-use node (Watson/Starwood Node)



An aerial photograph of a city street grid. The image shows a variety of buildings, including a prominent church with a tall steeple, a bank, and several multi-story commercial buildings. The streets are lined with cars, and there are green trees interspersed throughout the urban landscape. A large, semi-transparent text box is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**A sense of place not  
only attracts people and  
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helps keep them here.**

# The Guelph context: Design is in Guelph's DNA

**Guelph is a designed place. 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.**

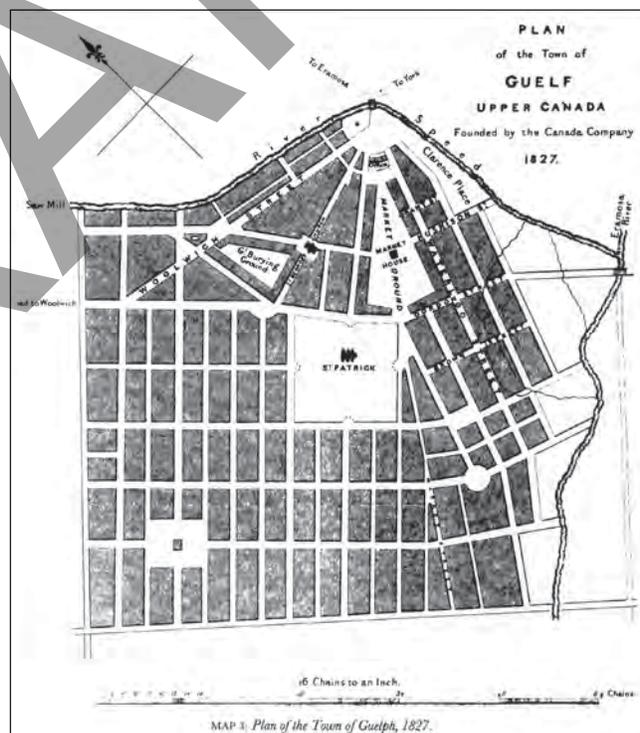
Galt's original design reflects European urban design ideas of his day, such as broad avenues with narrow side streets more friendly to pedestrians. As a result, downtown Guelph has an urban and slightly European character.

Although never densely filled in, the basic outlines of Galt's original plan served the city until the end of World War II when Guelph, along with most North American cities, underwent a boom in home construction that led to tremendous growth in a new urban form, known as the suburb. Conceived as a healthier, semi-rural kind of city, these less dense neighbourhoods were made possible by the automobile. People wanted to move out of the heavily industrialized city centres. Suburbs provided larger lots with single-detached homes surrounded by gardens, lawns and trees; a lifestyle seen as more appropriate for young children and growing families. Land use policy in this era also supported large single-purpose development. This meant that the parts of the city where people worked, lived, shopped and played were often separated by distances too great to walk comfortably.

Many cities that developed during this suburban period, including parts of Guelph, contain:

- apartment buildings and townhouse complexes that stand apart from neighbourhoods of detached homes;
- shopping plazas that are separated from neighbourhoods;

- residential streets that are not well connected and limit traffic movement between neighbourhoods;
- arterial connecting roads that are broad and encourage cars, but not pedestrians and cyclists;
- a lack of density that impedes effective public transit; and,
- unexceptional architecture that does not create a sense of place.



1827 Plan of Guelph

Guelph is fortunate to have Galt's foundation to build upon as we look to manage positive intensification and investment. Guelph's DNA is inspiring high-quality urban design throughout the city that will set Guelph apart in the coming century.



# Guelph's city-wide urban design vision

**Guelph is growing and changing in response to local, regional, and demographic trends. Urban design is fundamental to building a great city and can help shape this change.**

Guelph has key assets that can help it succeed in the future. The University of Guelph has an international reputation in agriculture and bio-technology. Guelph has a strong and well-balanced economy with a strong presence in advanced manufacturing. In the coming years it 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 updated Official Plan set the policy framework to support key shifts in real estate development, business relocation, health, environment and municipal finances.

Guelph's overall goal is to take one of southern Ontario's finest mid-sized cities and to use good urban design to enhance the already established sense of place that its citizens enjoy, creating a complete and distinctive community.

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 our city a great place and make it even better within a contained footprint. As our city intensifies, we build on Guelph's original plan, by founder John Galt, incorporating urban design excellence with denser urban areas that are accompanied by accessible, inclusive parks, attractive retail and services, and beautiful public squares and spaces where people can gather and enjoy their community.

A sense of place not only attracts people and businesses to the city, it helps keep them here. Guelph is a city rich in natural and architectural heritage, with a strong identity and sense of place. It is a place where, as in the past, urban design excellence can make an important difference.

Each opportunity area within this document has its own specific vision developed based on the city-wide urban design vision.

# Community engagement summary

Community stakeholder input helps inform a shared agenda and explore future urban design initiatives. Community engagement to date has included the following:



1. **Urban Design Summit** (May 2014) which included a public session attended by approximately 300 people and workshops attended by 160 professionals. This two day session explored some of the key challenges and opportunities around urban design in Guelph. It had 3 themes:
  - » Making the Economics Work: Urban design and the creation of value;
  - » Showing Results Now: Using quick-win strategies to start implementing good urban design today; and,
  - » Evolving the Suburban Commercial Strip: Making more pedestrian-friendly mixed-use corridors.



2. **This is Your Brain on Urban Design Seminar** (November 2015) which was attended by approximately 150 people. Neuroscientist and author Colin Ellard talked about how urban design impacts psychological well-being. Staff also outlined the City's urban design focus and key themes. The City's urban design video was presented. Attendees had an opportunity to share their ideas about urban design excellence and priorities.
3. **Urban Design Manual public workshop** (December 2016) was attended by approximately 100 people. Participants reviewed urban design actions for different areas of the city and helped determine what should be done first. A follow-up feedback form was filled in by 75 participants. Staff used this information to inform the urban design actions and priorities.

# Basic urban design principles

Urban design excellence is fundamental to creating enduring, attractive and valued places that are memorable and flexible and can evolve to accommodate changes in use over time. Adaptable and well-designed infrastructure, buildings, trees and open space result in communities and places that remain viable and attractive for many generations, while supporting a high quality of life.

Urban design principles should reflect the future vision and respond to the characteristics, history and culture of the place where they are applied. Guelph's urban design principles provide a common point of reference for the Urban Design Manual and the related policies, programs and initiatives.

## Principles based on Official Plan objectives

1. Create neighbourhoods with diverse opportunities for living, working, learning and playing.
2. Build compact neighbourhoods that use land, energy, water and infrastructure efficiently and encourage alternative modes of transportation.
3. Showcase natural attributes as defining features of the City's character by making them highly visible and accessible, especially lands along the Speed and Eramosa rivers.
4. Engage in "placemaking"—developing infrastructure, spaces and buildings that are permanent and enduring, memorable and beautiful, adaptable and flexible, and valued.
5. Conserve and celebrate the City's cultural heritage resources through the reuse of built heritage and cultural heritage landscape assets and ensuring that adjacent development responds to and respects these assets.
6. Create a diversity of inviting and accessible gathering places that promote a full range of social, cultural and economic interaction.
7. Design for a choice of mobility including walking, cycling, transit and driving.
8. Establish a pattern of interconnected streets and pedestrian networks in which buildings frame and address public spaces.
9. Allow for a range of architectural styles and promote expressions that bring interest and diversity in urban form and architectural design while responding appropriately to the local context and achieving compatibility.
10. Ensure that the design of the built environment respects the character of the existing distinctive areas and neighbourhoods of the City.
11. Design space that is accessible to all, regardless of abilities.
12. Improve conditions for greater personal security within publicly accessible spaces by designing them to be attractive and comfortable to the public, increasing the potential for informal surveillance and reducing opportunities for crime.
13. Preserve and enhance protected public views and public vistas of built and natural features.

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