

Big G in Conversation: Comprehensive Zoning Bylaw Review “Know your zone”

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Intro Music 00:00

Wendy King 00:04

Welcome to Big G. In conversation. The podcast from Inside Guelph City Hall, I, Wendy King, and on today's show we're talking with the staff from planning and building services about the zoning bylaw update and what that means to people who live and own property in Guelph. Let's get to know your zone.

Wendy King 00:28

Joining us on today's show - Abby Watts, project manager comprehensive zoning bylaw review, planning and building services. Melissa Aldunate, a manager of public policy planning and urban design and David de Groot, senior urban planner, policy planning and urban design. Thanks for joining me everyone. So Abby, I guess we'll go to you first off, with that overarching question of what is its zoning bylaw?

Abby Watts 00:55

Yeah, thanks for having us here today Wendy. And so what is the zoning bylaw? The zoning bylaw is a set of rules that apply to every property in the city, so that includes residential houses and apartment buildings, commercial and industrial businesses, and even our green spaces are regulated. These rules tell us what type of buildings can be built, where they can be built on a lot, how they can be used, and even how much parking should be provided for the that use.

Wendy King 01:25

And just in general, how is that figured out? I guess you're looking at population and all that kind of thing densities and...

Abby Watts 01:33

Yeah, so the zoning bylaw is really an implementation in implementation tool of our city's current official plan. So the official plan provides policies on how we want to grow into the future and provides the direction for the regulations and the zoning bylaw.

Wendy King 01:51

So I understand you've been updating the zoning bylaw as approved by Council, So what would you say is gonna change for a Guelph property owner?

Abby Watts 02:01

Yeah, so the new zoning bylaw has all new zoning categories, so every property in the city is going to be assigned a new zone. So that is that will be changing for every property owner. The use is permitted on a property or building. Regulations could also be changing, for example on a residential property where you can build a garage. How big and tall that garage can be and how wide a driveway can be is all regulated by the zoning bylaw. And for a commercial property you'll want to check out what uses are permitted and make sure that those uses align with your business plan as well.

Wendy King 02:38

So when you say you're looking at every single property, would you say most of them are changing? Or most of it stays the same?

Abby Watts 02:48

So it's gonna be important for residents to have a look at their zone and see if it is changing and provide comments on what is being proposed.

Wendy King 02:59

OK, so yeah it's gonna ask you that. So how would a person find out what the property is zoned? Or if it's changing and therefore what is allowed now?

Abby Watts 03:07

Yeah, so we have online mapping available through the project website whichisguelph.ca/zoningreview and there we have the proposed zoning bylaw for everyone to check out, and we also have a fancy new swipe map that's available so people can easily compare what their existing zoning is and what their proposed zoning is on a property. And there's also a search bar that makes it easy for a property owner to look up a specific address in the city.

Wendy King 03:37

And what are the next steps? Where do you go from here?

Abby Watts 03:41

So right now we've released the draft bylaw for review for public review, and that's available from now until December 20th, and no decisions are being made at this point by Council and so from there in 2022 will come back to Council for a statutory public meeting, and this is a requirement under the Planning Act, again where no decisions are made, but it provides an additional opportunity for Council to receive

public feedback. And once we've completed, that, will go back to Council again for a decision on the bylaw, so changes can be made to the bylaw until Council makes a decision. But it's important that we hear from the public and up until December 20th early in the project so we can have a look at the comments and make changes as appropriate.

Wendy King 04:31

Right makes sense, so Melissa, let me ask you, how does the zoning bylaw update support the city's official plan and the strategic plan?

Melissa Aldunate 04:41

Well, there zoning bylaw is used to implement the vision and land use policies for the city from our official plan. The zoning bylaw provides a way for the city to manage land use and future development and prevent conflicting land uses from being built or developed near each other. This new zoning bylaw will align with our official plan land use designations and it also provides regulations for height and density permissions.

In terms of the city strategic plan, our new zoning bylaw aligns with a number of its priorities, and in particular the new zoning bylaw will help businesses succeed. It will assist in designing a sustainable city and will help adopt clean transportation options as well as helping to increase the range and mix of housing options available in our community to meet our resident's needs.

Wendy King 05:27

So how could zoning possibly support affordable housing? I'm sure that's a big segment of what you think about.

Melissa Aldunate 05:36

Yes, affordable housing is definitely a key issue in our community and our draft new zoning bylaw supports that provision of affordable housing in a few ways. It proposes to combine zones that permit housing to simplify the permitted uses. So, for example, where now are by law only permits detached houses, we would now permit other uses such as semi-detached houses as well.

It also broadens the permissions for additional residential units, which we also refer to as basement apartments or garden suites, and that allows an additional 2 units on properties within the city.

It encourages a greater range and mix of housing types within neighborhoods and provides more options for affordability. We've also looked at our parking requirements, so the provision of parking spaces in our city also effects affordability. The draft new zoning bylaw proposes to reduce the number of vehicle parking spaces required with in some areas of the city.

And that would help achieve more walkable and and transit supportive areas in our city. And it also we've combined with that requirements for bicycle parking spaces. So adding this in provides more

equity for other modes of transportation, and address is one of the many contributing factors to affordability within our city.

Wendy King 06:50

Wow, there's so much to think about for sure, so David, what would you say is maybe new or innovative about this updated zoning bylaw?

David DeGroot 07:01

I, I think one of the first things you'll notice Wendy. If you or anyone else goes online is that it looks different. So, one of the main goals of this project was to create a more accessible and user-friendly diagram. So, what you'll see is a much cleaner layout than our previous bylaw. More reader friendly layout and that means sort of more illustrations that explain the text. It also is easier to navigate than before, and certainly a more attractive bylaw than the previous one. And then, as Abby had sort of talked about.

You know we are making this more digital so there is online mapping which will make it more easier for the public to find information on the property then sort of the paper based map that the previous bylaw only relied on. And in addition, we've also done our best to try to use more sort of plain language where possible. It is a, it is a legal document, but we've done our best to try. Try to make it as understandable as we can and then again it also what you'll see in there is more sort of forward-looking regulations so.

Melissa mentioned one about bicycle parking, but there's also stuff about electrical vehicle parking and really, it's about trying to meet the needs of residents and businesses now and into the future. And then I, I guess, my final thing about what you'll see that's different and just excites me as an urban designer, is that there's more of an emphasis on built form regulation, so.

You know how do we promote and build a more walkable and attractive built environment? And this zoning bylaw certainly moves us closer to that goal of the official plan.

Wendy King 08:32

You've really all answered this question, but it seems to me the fact that you've come, it's not really - I mean, you're totally revamping it. It sounds like, but obviously because of all the changes, I mean just in terms of like you mentioned, electric cars or more biking. Or you know, and I know you're changing your transportation system in Guelph as well. So all of that, I'm assuming is why this had to happen as well?

David DeGroot 08:57

Yeah, I mean I, I think one of the big things is that it modernizes the city zoning bylaw, so we haven't comprehensively updated our zoning bylaw since 1995. And really this this is meant to take that vision.

Document all the lofty goals of the official plan and put them into regulation and really try to better again reflect the needs of our Community today and then also looking into the future. So again, that's why there's an emphasis in this right in the zoning bylaw on sustainability on protecting our natural heritage system, on better urban design and that promotion of active transportation and such as walking and cycling.

Wendy King 09:36

So what will this mean? Uhm, changes in how people like apply for permits or if they wanted to do something on their property that was had to get permission. Obviously, that still happens, but any change in what kind of permits are needed or how that process is going to take place?

David DeGroot 09:52

It doesn't change the permits per say, but once, a new zoning bylaw is approved by council, in effect it will replace the existing zoning bylaw. So that means that any new application will have to conform to the new zoning bylaw and not the not the older one anymore, as there will be a transition period, there usually is as you try to implement some of these larger changes. As you can imagine. But generally new applications will be reviewed by city staff to make sure they meet the new requirements once it's approved by council.

Wendy King 10:26

I know having sat through a lot of Council meetings as a reporter, a lot of times that's what you see is people coming forward because they either don't agree with the zoning that they have or they wanna make changes to it. Do expect more of that, or because it seems simpler to handle, maybe less than less of those.

David DeGroot 10:48

Yeah, I mean that's that is one of the reasons why update your official plan is that you make it more in line with the official plan and the hope and goal is to reduce the amount of site specific zoning that's needed generally. So that's certainly one of the goals here is to say you know, if you're building in line with the city's vision through the official plan and then we're going to make it easier for you to develop in Guelph.

Wendy King 11:13

And I know we were mentioning Abby. I think you mentioned a lot of the different zoning categories, but could we run over those again just so people know what all the different categories might be?

Abby Watts 11:26

Sure, so there are a number of zones within each category, but I'll just go over the high-level categories, so we've got a residential, we we're introducing a lot of new mixed-use zones into the new zoning bylaw to align with the official plan, and we've got commercial zones, employment zones, institutional zones, and we have our natural heritage system, which is a new zone that's being introduced, and we have a

utility zone, Parks zones, open space, some urban reserve zones that are kind of land set aside for future development.

Wendy King 12:06

Yeah, there, there's more than I thought. I was thinking that the you know the top four -but yeah, there's a lot more and so David is at your job and your team to ensure that you know it's all mixed together and looks good too. Like you don't wanna have obviously three hospitals together etc. etc. So you're trying to figure that out like a giant puzzle in a way.

David DeGroot 12:30

Yeah, absolutely. I mean part of what you're trying to do through the zoning bylaw is take that official plan map and turn it into regulations and built form on the ground. So just as you said there, there is more emphasis on this new zoning bylaw on sort of where buildings are positioned in order to make them more walkable there is an emphasis on reducing, you know where we can and where the data has supported it. The amount of parking stalls in order to allow for more green space and more trees and sort of again try to deliver the vision that we heard as planners when our official plan was developed.

Wendy King 13:12

And Melissa, I wanted to ask you if the zoning bylaw update, UM, if it also works in coordination with the provincial and federal legislations. Like, you know the planning act or places to grow.

Melissa Aldunate 13:27

Sure, yes there zoning bylaw is 1 tool that the city uses to plan for growth and development and we are required to follow the provinces framework for land use planning and Ontario. The province does set out the regulatory and policy framework for us and we do have to follow that and that includes the Planning Act which sets out legislation and rules. And then it also includes the provincial policy statement which provides high level policy foundations for land use in Ontario.

When do you mentioned a place to grow that is another policy, provincial policy that we do follow and that provides direction for managing growth and achieving our population and employment targets to the year 2051. So, both the city's official plan and zoning bylaw must follow those provincial documents where our official plan sets out. As David mentioned, our big picture vision for growth and development and our land use framework in Guelph that provides our considerations for where certain types of development and land use are permitted. So where are employment areas or where housing and residential areas are, uhm, so our official plan does conform to that provincial framework and then our zoning bylaw is required to conform with our official plan.

So that means that the zoning bylaw puts our official plan into place through providing day-to-day administration of land use rules. So, Abby talked about regulations for land uses within the city and within those zones that she mentioned and the zoning bylaw also. And in terms of following provincial regular regulations and policy, helps us to achieve objectives for providing a range and mix of housing and arranging mix of employment and job opportunities as well.

Wendy King 15:08

How different would you say is your former zoning bylaw? Because you said you haven't done it for a while? There's been several years. How different would you say this one is to that one? The old one? Whoever wants to answer that.

Abby Watts 15:22

Sure, I can jump in and comment on that. So yeah, it has been 26 years since we've. We've introduced a new zoning bylaw, so it is quite a bit different. I think David touched on the look of the bylaw being different. A big emphasis on accessibility and usability of the bylaw. So we've incorporated a number of illustrations.

And we've also included more mixed-use zones, so you'll see zones within our nodes and corridors, allowing for a better mix of building types and commercial uses.

Parking rates have been reviewed as well, so we've looked at sort of all of the technical aspects of our bylaw. We've looked at what has been working and what hasn't been working through the data that we've collected over the years.

Wendy King 16:13

Maybe we should run over to. I know you want people involved. Guelph is amazing it at getting public people to get involved in different projects, etc. How do you want people to get involved in seeing what you're doing?

Abby Watts 16:26

Yeah, we want to be able to talk to as many people as we can during this phase of the project so you can visit. Have your say.guelph.ca backslash CZBR between November 8th and December 20th. We have a virtual open house available online. There you can attend an information session. Will have a number of those running to get more information about the zones that you're interested in and you'll be able to provide comments through that website as well. We are also offering office hours with staff so you can drop in ask US questions. It's a little bit more face to face online what we can do, and you can always reach out to me at zoningreview@guelph.ca. As well. I can answer any questions you have or we can set up an individual meeting to go through different questions that you have as well.

Wendy King 17:18

How long has this all taken?

Abby Watts 17:20

We started the project in 2018. UM, we've completed phase one, two and two, and now we're working

on completing phase three. And yeah, the last phase has been about a year of drafting a new zoning bylaw.

Wendy King 17:36

So you guys all live for zoning?

Abby Watts 17:40

There's lots of zoning, yes.

Wendy King 17:44

It's your thing. It's your thing for sure. So if I could ask you just, Umm, you know we're going to assume it all is approved and goes through smoothly. What is your hope for this new zoning bylaw? Could I ask each of you that?

Abby Watts 17:57

Sure, maybe I'll get started and I think my hope is that it is. It is really user friendly and something that people can understand that it's more inclusive, uhm allows for a better flexibility, allows for more flexibility in a better mix of housing types and allows for additional opportunities for housing within existing areas of the city as well.

David DeGroot 18:27

As someone who works in in urban design. Obviously, I'm excited about the fact that the zoning bylaw starts to embed some of.

The urban design work we've done through different guidelines and standards we've produced into the zoning bylaw and will, you know, make a more attractive and walkable city. And then also, I, I think the look and the fact that we've started to use illustrations and not just rely on sort of legal text to really show what we mean. I think is is really exciting about the work of this bylaw.

Wendy King 18:58

Great, Melissa?

Melissa Aldunate 19:01

Yeah, I'm just building on that. I think the flexibility that the new bylaw provides is as well as the modern framework will help to streamline business processes to help streamline development. Coming online, it will help the public and council understand the vision for development in the city and and just bring about development in a more efficient and forward thinking way for the city.

Wendy King 19:24

Fantastic guys, I feel like I kind of went through zoning 101 right now that was that was great. Really good information. Thanks to Abby, Melissa and David for all of their great expertise and for sharing all of what's going on in your zone. Thanks guys.

Abby Watts 19:38

Thanks, Wendy.

David DeGroot 19:39

Thank you.