

# Density by Design

Kingston's Mid-Rise and Tall Building Policies



## Issues and Options Report Executive Summary





Completing the “Density by Design: Kingston Mid-rise and Tall Building Policy” is one of the ways the City intends to encourage appropriate development of all types of housing city-wide through intensification. Because intensification makes efficient use of existing City services and helps keep the community’s carbon footprint in check, this initiative is also a climate action (in March 2019, City Council declared a climate emergency).

The City’s Planning Department is seeing more, and more complex, applications for bigger and taller buildings, both in the centre of Kingston and at the edges of its built-up area. The Official Plan mainly limits taller buildings to arterial and collector roads, however, not all of these are appropriate for taller buildings. City staff and the building community need clearer direction.

The Density by Design project’s Issues and Options Report lays the groundwork for developing new policies for the City that will guide where and how mid-rise and tall buildings are built.



#### This report:

- Considers a number of key policy and strategic planning documents, including the City’s Official Plan, Zoning Bylaws and Council’s 2019-2022 Strategic Plan.
- Builds on background studies and is being developed in tandem with several secondary planning exercises (listed on page 5).
- Is informed by public and stakeholder consultations including meetings, workshops, interviews and briefings with/from City departments.
- Points to new policies expected to be completed in 2020. Public workshops are set for January 2020. A draft policy document will be released for public comment in late winter, 2020.



# Project Background & Lenses

**The Issues & Options Report primarily considers residential/mixed-use buildings. Design considerations for commercial/office buildings will be confirmed when draft policies are created.**

The Report looks at encouraging appropriate mid-rise and tall building development through four lenses:

**1**  
**The Climate Emergency**  
The new policy will consider the link between land-use planning, transportation and building design. Green building best practices and wood-frame/cross-laminated timber construction are considerations.

**3**  
**Sense of Place and Neighbourhood Character**  
The new policy will define a made-in-Kingston approach to reflect the different locations, contexts and character across the city, particularly around cultural heritage areas.

**2**  
**Affordability and Market Choice**  
The new policy will be aligned with the results of the Mayor's Task Force on Housing. Proposed new policies will be considered relative to how they affect affordability and will support greater housing diversity and choice.

**4**  
**Ease of Development in the Most Important Places**  
The new policy will make development in preferred locations easy to propose and achieve.



# Location of Height and Density, Vacancy Rate and Growth Forecasts

- The new policy will consider where tall buildings should/should not go.
- Kingston's low 0.6 per cent vacancy rate has been driven more by lack of supply than by demand due to population growth but, as previously forecasted, growing senior and student populations contribute.
- This also considers how many units are required to reach a 3 per cent vacancy rate.
- A March 2019 Rental Vacancy Rate Report showed 3,629 multi-residential units had received land-use planning approvals but had not yet moved to building permit application. An additional 8,571 residential units were actively awaiting planning approvals.
- In 2019, almost 1,000 housing units have continued to construction and approximately 1,700 additional units have received zoning approval since March and are able to proceed to site plan approval and building permits.
- Planners are coordinating with the Mayor's Housing Task Force to identify policy solutions to motivate applicants to move to construction more quickly after projects are approved.
- Projections show the need for 13,730 additional housing units over the next 30 years. The number of units in the pipeline represents 62 per cent of this projected need. Another 5,159 units would be needed.

# Density in the Right Locations

**The City's current policy allows consideration of tall buildings/ high-density everywhere, subject to meeting specific criteria. The Project Team recommends densification in the right places within the urban boundary vs. densification anywhere within the urban boundary.**

Tall buildings, placed in well-connected, mixed-use locations well-served by public transit, walking and biking infrastructure, offer the general benefits of density, other significant public benefits and avoid problems associated with urban sprawl.







# Current Policy Directions and the Official Plan

## **Intensification** (Official Plan, Section 2.4.5)

The Official Plan identifies centres and corridors as areas to focus intensification and calls for 40 per cent of new residential development to be within the urban boundary (Section 2.4.5). These numbers are now considered low.

The Project Team is identifying infill locations that are transit-supported and is researching how to differentiate car-dependent infill from transit-supported infill.

## **High-density Residential** (Official Plan, Section 3.3.6)

The Official Plan establishes policies for high-density residential uses. They must be: within a Centre or Corridor;

within walking distance of commercial areas, open space or community facilities; and on an arterial or collector road.

## **Downtown and Harbour Area** (Official Plan, Section 10A.4)

The Official Plan has specific policies for the Downtown and Harbour area based on a number of studies including the Downtown Harbour Architectural Guidelines Study.

Section 10A.4.6 prescribes height limits and references need for angular plane setbacks.

Section 10A.4.7 allows for greater height if a taller building is compatible with the massing of surrounding buildings, does not create unacceptable shadows and is compatible with land-use.

There is no upper height limit implied in this section. This policy is confusing and ambiguous and will require refinement.

## **Land Use Compatibility** (Official Plan, Section 2.7)

This section describes principles of land use compatibility to support the quality of existing areas and provide for suitable transitions. Factors considered include: shadowing; intrusive overlooks; light, pollution, noise, odour, dust or vibration; wind speed; environmental damage; ability to enjoy a property; visual intrusion; degradation of heritage resources; architectural incompatibility; and loss of significant views.

# Applying Current Policy Direction

Although staff is now considering applications using the Climate Emergency Declaration lens, this results in challenging negotiations with applicants, and may result in challenging appeals given the lack of clarity in current policy.

## 01

Create an Infill Green Light Strategy relating to the strategic locations to help address the Climate Emergency and other City policy.

## 02

Amend the Official Plan to address the existing criteria for tall/dense buildings to ensure they are permitted only in locations where they will not be car-dependent.

## 03

Pause tall/dense building development in unfavourable or counter-productive car-dependent suburban locations.

All three options should be undertaken, but it is recommended Option 2 be pursued first as it works with the existing policy framework and can be brought forward quickly.



# Urban Design Issues

Options for each of the following areas are outlined and discussed in the Report. Below, please find the recommendations of the Project Team.

## 01

### **Building Height:**

How tall should we allow tall buildings to be?

The Project Team recommends an approach that sets maximum heights within/across the Central Business District/downtown, while allowing maximum height to be considered on a site-specific basis using urban design analysis across the rest of the city.

For the North Block, the Project Team recommends an economic analysis to determine if the permitted 9-storey building approach is viable, with or without variables such as step-back requirements above the 6th floor or angular plane requirements.

## 02

### **Defining “Mid-Rise” and “Tall Buildings”**

The Project Team recommends that buildings of 4-6 storeys be considered mid-rise buildings and buildings of 7+ storeys be considered tall.

Design approaches for tall buildings are discussed later in the Report. “Perimeter block” buildings between 7-9 floors should be treated differently than tower-and-podium or slim tower buildings taller than 9 storeys.

## 03

### **Policy Area**

**Contexts:** Avoiding a “One-Size-Fits-All” design policy.

Approximately 6 definable policy areas are recommended

to provide sufficient context differentiation, while avoiding the excessive management and communications challenges of even more policy areas, including site-specific policies.

## 04

### **Building Width/Floor Plate Size: How wide is too wide?**

A contextual approach to maximum floor plates based on defined policy areas is recommended, with further consideration of what the specific maximums should be across the areas defined in the policy.

The Project Team would like to hear from the public and stakeholders on tower width in the suburbs specifically, without a recommendation at this time.



# Urban Design Issues Cont.

## 05 Building Width, Height and Angular Plane in Williamsville

The Project Team is not yet ready to recommend revised requirements for Williamsville and would like to hear further from builders and the broader community about this question.

In keeping with the intended creation of a “Green Light” Strategy, it is important to avoid over-regulating the very forms of development we seek to encourage.

## 06 Upper Floor Stepbacks: Should tall and mid-rise buildings step back on higher floors?

Angular plane requirements are no

longer recommended in Williamsville.

For 5-6 storey wood frame or hybrid buildings, no required stepbacks are currently recommended.

For buildings above 6 storeys, it is recommended that economic analysis be conducted to determine how various stepbacks affect project viability in various contexts. If determined to be generally feasible, concrete buildings between 7-9 storeys will have minimum stepback requirements above the 6th floor, and/or above the 8th floor.

## 07 Building Setback/Orientation: How should buildings relate to streets?

Policies that establish minimum and maximum setbacks and required building orientation to streets are recommended,

with consideration for the various areas/contexts across the city.

## 08 Tower Separation: How close should towers be permitted to be?

A mandated minimum tower separation approach of 25 metres is recommended, as implemented in many other comparable cities, with some limited discretion for reduced distances where towers are not “flush.”

## 09 Podium Design: Should tall buildings be designed with podiums?

A policy that provides design direction for podium and point towers is recommended.



# Urban Design Issues Cont.

A general policy establishing podium and tower designs as a permissible approach to height and density is also recommended, as absence of such a policy has led to confusion and complications.

Establishing specific areas where podium and tower forms are either allowed in addition to other forms, or are in fact the preferred/required form is also recommended.

## **10** **Ground Floor/Street Wall Design: How should the ground floor(s) be designed to activate and enliven streets?**

A policy approach that directs the design of the street wall is recommended, given the critical importance of this element of building

architecture to buildings of every scale. Consideration of various land uses typically found on the lower floors of buildings should be given with associated design policies developed.

## **11** **Above-Grade Parking Screening: How should above-grade parking be handled in building design?**

The best option to address parking is to build less of it. The next best option is to put as much of it as is feasible underground. Although a ban on above-grade parking likely isn't viable, this should be considered the ultimate goal (if changes that make parking redundant don't happen first), with timely steps to both reduce the amount of parking and increase the amount below-grade over time.

Screening above-grade parking where avoidable is recommended, and in the Central Business District/downtown and key urbanizing contexts, the ground floor should be viable and useable space.

## **12** **In-Building Active Transport Supports: How should buildings support active, healthy and sustainable mobility choices?**

The Project Team recommends creating a high-level policy establishing the municipal goal of further developing more detailed policies, regulations and initiatives relating to additional active/sustainable transportation supports, required or incentivized, in new higher density building design/construction.

# Urban Design Issues Cont.

## 13

**Building Tops/Caps:** How should buildings be topped/capped to create positive visual additions to the skyline?

The Project Team recommends including a policy that speaks to the architectural public aspirations for building caps, including requirements for visual screening of elements such as mechanical equipment.

## 14

**Additional Architectural Details:** Can policy support more architecturally interesting and beautiful buildings?

The Project Team recommends creating

policies that discuss details such as materials and colours, and architectural beauty relative to issues such as heritage compatibility, de-emphasis of building height, width and façade length, etc., with clarity around what is permissible under provincial legislation.

## 15

**Integration of Commercial Uses:** How should a building's commercial uses be integrated?

The Project Team recommends including a policy to address the integration of commercial uses, including direction regarding an appropriate range of commercial uses, floor heights, signage, entrances, and other commercial-oriented criteria.

## 16

**Building Access:** How should building entrances be made functional and attractive?

The Project Team recommends including a policy generally addressing the integration of entrances, including direction regarding placement, prominence, and how people and goods arrive.

# Density by Design

Kingston's Mid-Rise and Tall Building Policies

## Next steps:

The new policies created through this work program are anticipated to be completed in the Spring of 2020. Further opportunities for community input into the project will be available in the coming months, with specific community consultation on this paper held in November 2019, and further consultation on the release of a draft policy for community in late winter of 2020.



Offer input now at  
[GetInvolved.CityofKingston.ca/Tall-midrise-buildings.](https://www.getinvolved.cityofkingston.ca/tall-midrise-buildings)

