

OPH Support of Draft New Zoning By-law: Report to Joint Housing and Planning & Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee (2025)

Ottawa Public Health (OPH) collaborated with Planning, Development and Building Services in the development of the new Official Plan, in which promotion and protection of health and well-being are integrated as underpinning goals. The second draft of the new Zoning By-law implements Official Plan policies that support overall health and well-being through the built environment. The new Zoning By-law contributes to creating the conditions for people to thrive and helps to address some of the root causes of poor health that the health care sector cannot address alone.

The new Zoning By-law supports population health and helps advance healthy communities through provisions that promote the evolution of healthy, walkable 15-minute neighbourhoods. By promoting physical activity through walkable and bike-friendly places, reducing reliance on cars, and improving air quality, 15-minute neighbourhoods enhance health and well-being. They also foster social connections and community engagement by making essential services and amenities easily accessible, while incorporating diverse land uses and housing types to ensure convenient access to various services and living options. This approach is also integrated in a context-sensitive way in recognition of the uniqueness of rural villages, to help improve walkability and access to services, amenities and diverse housing types, addressing the specific needs and characteristics of these areas.

Some of the supporting zoning provisions include the following:

Housing

A full range of housing, both in terms of type and affordability, is central to supporting health and well-being. The provisions continue to address Ottawa's housing supply and affordability challenges by allowing for a full range of housing options. Standards are focused on regulating form and function rather than the building typology (which is concerned with the number and configuration of units), enabling more housing units on lots, as well as more forms of higher-density multi-unit housing. The provisions propose removal of any ability to institute separation distances or caps that have the effect of excluding housing that meets the needs of particular groups of people, such as those living on a low income, in group settings, or in alternative forms of housing, such as shelters or group homes, from communities. This will support health by reducing housing insecurity and fostering stable, supportive living environments for all. In addition, provisions will allow retirement homes and residential care facilities to be integrated with other uses. For more efficient land use, residential uses in certain zones will include permission for a range of non-residential uses on the ground floor. In addition, provisions will allow for co-location of residential uses with uses such as community centres, day cares, recreation and athletic facilities, and libraries. These complementary uses can provide people with supports and amenities closer to where they live.

Economy

The continued focus of provisions to allow for a greater density, mix, and diversity of land uses in neighbourhoods, and primarily on minor and main street corridors, will support the viability of commercial uses, businesses and services, making it easier for people to access their daily needs using active transportation (e.g. by walking, biking or wheeling), and reduce reliance on personal vehicles. Provisions have been further simplified to allow for more home-based daycares, and small home-based businesses, including establishments that offer low risk foods, which are considered non-hazardous and do not require refrigeration. In combination with a wider range of land uses, broader affordability and greater density of housing, these provisions work together to support the development of healthy, walkable 15-minute neighbourhoods.

Parking and Mobility:

Surface parking lots are associated with an increase in the urban heat island effect, and reduced walkability. The new Zoning By-law will prohibit new or expanded surface parking lots downtown as well as parking lots as a primary use in the inner urban transect. To provide more shade and protect trees in parking lots, the minimum landscaping requirements have been revised and a minimum soil depth of 1 metre for landscape buffers are provided for larger parking lots. This can help positively impact the temperatures felt in the urban area, to help mitigate heat-related illness and reduce the overall urban heat island, which contributes to climate change impacts that affect human health and well-being.

Reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change will be supported through requirements for 100 per cent of parking spaces to be EV-ready with energized outlets capable of supporting Level 2 chargers, for residential or mixed-use buildings. For office uses or uses in industrial zones, the requirement is for a minimum of 30 per cent of parking spaces to be EV-ready, with the same requirement for energized outlets capable of supporting Level 2 chargers. This will support the expected gradual increase in electric vehicles. Alternative requirements to provide shared Level 3 chargers will reduce the required number of EV-ready parking spaces, as vehicles will be able to charge more quickly. Reducing reliance on fossil fuels is key to protecting against climate-related health impacts, including extreme weather events, heat-related illnesses, and respiratory issues caused by air pollution.

Active transportation is supported by provisions requiring more bicycle parking (long and short term, sheltered and unsheltered), and parking inclusive of different types of bikes (e.g. cargo bikes and e-bikes). This will help incentivize cycling by making bicycle parking more inclusive, convenient, and accessible. Active transportation is associated with lower levels of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity, contributing to overall better public health.

Air Quality and Climate Change

Trees are provided for in the new Zoning By-law by allowing for enough soil volume and space for the roots on residential lots. This allows for greater canopy trees and the resulting shade needed to protect people and homes from the increased impacts of extreme heat due to climate change. There are also provisions that address the health impacts from harmful air emissions related to sensitive land uses. Outdoor children's play areas, associated with new childcare facilities, must avoid locations adjacent to high traffic corridors and be placed behind

buildings, unless a 2 metre screen is provided. In addition, buffers will be required when a drive-through facility abuts a residential zone.

Draft 2 of the new Zoning By-law aligns with OPH's 2023- 2027 Strategic Plan goal that aims to "Create the Conditions to Live Well and Thrive" as it contributes to building healthier, more walkable 15-minute neighbourhoods that are resilient, reduce inequities and create the conditions for people to thrive. OPH supports the directions of the new Zoning by-law as a tool that advances healthy communities.