



Downtown Mount Forest

Housing Focused: A Housing Policy Review in Wellington County

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Executive Summary

The County of Wellington is facing increased challenges related to housing. This includes challenges like affording a home or having access to the right type of home based on your current needs. The cause of these challenges cannot be solely attributed to just one thing, or one level of government or industry, but rather a series of compounding factors which come together when dealing with housing.

The County Official Plan and local planning documents have a significant role in guiding housing decisions in Wellington. Historically, planning policy has disproportionately supported low density development and the preservation of existing neighbourhoods over increased density in the County. This approach has resulted in approximately 70% of all new housing development in the County to be in the form of low-density dwellings since 2008. For our communities to remain resilient and supportive of a diversity of needs, our approach to housing needs to change. Establishing a framework that more equitably supports a broader housing mix, tenures and affordability will ensure that County policies are supporting a range of housing solutions.

This report provides an overview of the land use planning policy framework in the County of Wellington and applies a housing focused lens on the County's land use planning policies. Through this perspective several housing supportive policy recommendations for the County Official Plan are presented, as well as suggestions for our member municipalities focused on the following themes:

- Meeting long-term housing demand
- Providing an appropriate mix of housing options
- Intensification and compatibility of development
- Supporting the efficient use of land and Municipal services.

The goal of this document is to identify helpful land use planning policy changes related to housing within the County's control. These recommendations and suggestions are a necessary step in addressing the housing crisis but will not in and of themselves solve the problem. Federal and Provincial governments, as well as the development industry and the public have crucial roles to play in bringing housing to market.

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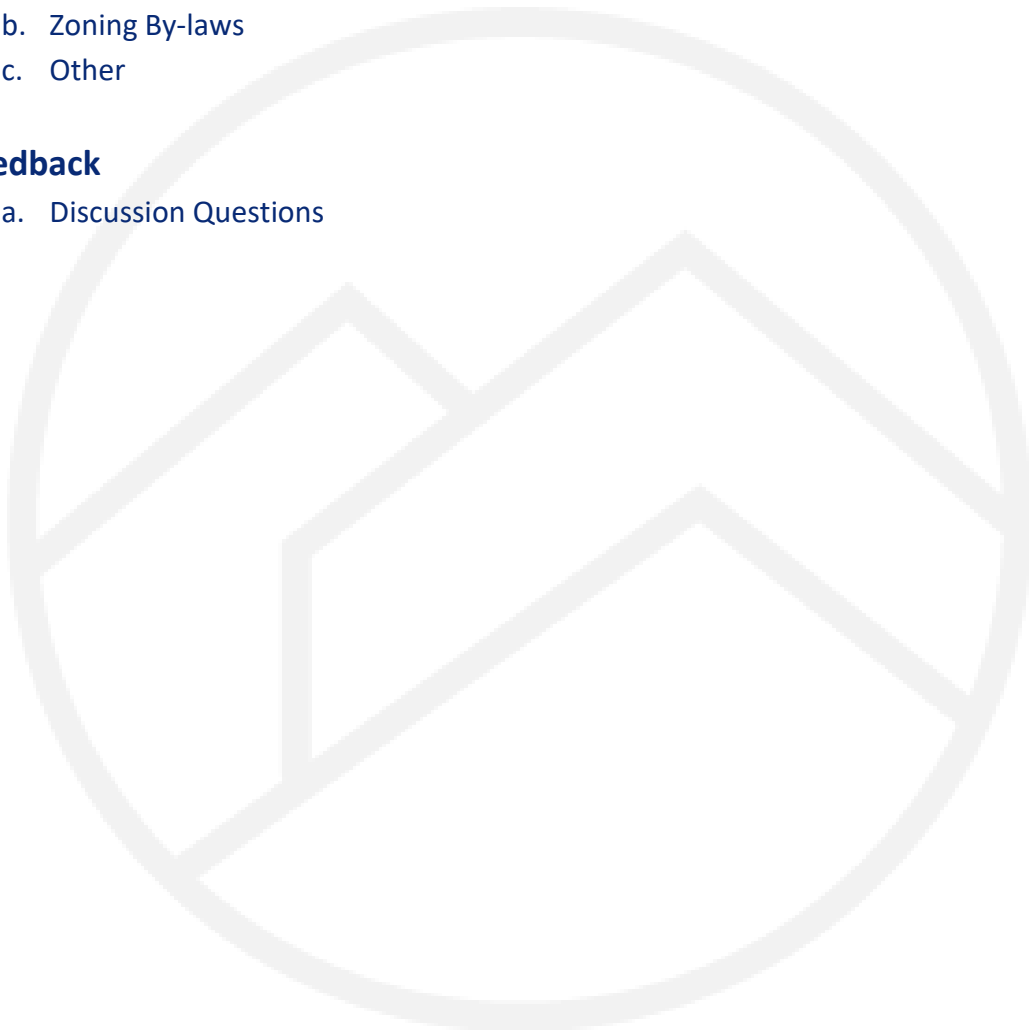
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Planning Framework

Decisions related to new housing development in the County of Wellington are required to be consistent with or conform to the different planning policies that apply within Wellington. This section provides an overview of the current planning policy framework in the County affecting new housing development.

Provincial Policy Direction

In the County, the Province's housing policy framework is primarily delivered through the Planning Act and land use plans such as the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020 (PPS) and A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (A Place to Grow) 2019.

The Planning Act is the foundation of planning in Ontario, as it identifies matters of Provincial interest related to land use planning and establishes important statutory processes essential for the implementation of the provincial policy framework. However, most of the detailed provincial policy direction related to provincial objectives, including housing, come through the PPS and A Place to Grow.

The PPS is the primary Provincial land use planning policy document, applying across Ontario. A Place to Grow is a growth plan that provides a more detailed framework for where and how growth should be accommodated in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. In terms of housing policy, both policy documents aim to support the achievement of livable communities, a thriving economy, a clean and healthy environment, and social equity, improving the quality of life for all Ontarians. The PPS achieves this through specific policy directives to planning authorities including:

- maintain at all times the ability to accommodate residential growth for a minimum of 15 years through residential intensification and redevelopment;
- provide for an appropriate range and mix of housing options to meet projected market-based and affordable housing needs;
- promote densities for new housing which efficiently use land, resources, infrastructure and public facilities;
- establish and implement minimum targets for the provision of housing which is affordable to low- and moderate-income households and which aligns with applicable housing and homelessness plans;
- permit and facilitate all housing options required to meet the social, health, economic and well-being requirements of current and future residents, including special needs requirements, as well as all types of residential intensification including additional residential units and redevelopment.

A Place to Grow builds upon the policy foundation provided by the PPS and provides additional and more specific land use planning policies to address housing in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. In particular, the plan:

- Places the responsibility of housing with upper-tier Municipalities in consultation with member municipalities;
- Establishes a planning horizon of 2051 for planning authorities to plan to;
- Allocates specific population, household, and employment forecasts to the County;
- Establishes an intensification first approach and sets out a detailed growth structure with specific intensification and density targets for planning authorities to achieve;
- Provides direction to planning authorities to support housing choice through intensification and identifying a diverse range and mix of housing options.

County of Wellington Official Plan

The County of Wellington Official Plan is the main land use planning policy document in Wellington that influences housing development and implements the Provincial land use policy framework locally. The County Official Plan applies across Wellington and serves as the local Official Plan for five of the seven Member Municipalities in the County and offers specific policy sections that cater to local needs. Centre Wellington and the Town of Erin have their own official plans and are discussed in the following section.

Housing policy contained in the County Official Plan needs to be updated to reflect new Provincial policy. The County is currently undertaking an Official Plan Review to revise the Official Plan, including its housing policies. While dated, the housing policies in the Plan were innovative for the time and still provide a solid framework to build upon. This document is intended to articulate specific policy directions that will guide policy development to align with new Provincial policy direction and support the County's long-term housing needs.

Local Official Plans

As noted above the Township of Centre Wellington and the Town of Erin both have local official plans in place. These official plans in some instances closely resemble the County Official Plan but generally provide a series of policy directions that are tailored to respond to the local context and needs. Each of these plans require various levels of updating to address Provincial and County policy direction related to housing. Once the County is completed its Official Plan Review Centre Wellington and Erin will be required to update their plans to conform to the County planning policies.

Local Zoning by-laws

Member municipalities within the County each have their own Comprehensive Zoning by-laws which govern housing development. The zoning provisions authorize specific types of uses and built forms on properties and dictate standards which development must meet to be allowed to proceed. These documents play a crucial role in determining if certain forms of housing can be built as of right or if planning approvals are necessary to allow different forms of housing on a property. Updates to the various municipal zoning by-laws in the County will be required to implement the housing policy direction of the Province, County and local municipalities.



Housing Focused Policy Directions

The following section identifies several housing focused policy directions for the County Official Plan, that if implemented will help the County meet its housing objectives and support the diverse needs of our communities. Planning Staff have identified 4 broad themes in Provincial policy to help frame these policy directives and root them in sound planning policy. These themes include the following:

- Meeting long-term housing demand
- Providing an appropriate mix of housing options
- Compatibility of development and intensification
- Support efficient use of land and services.

Meeting the Long-term Housing Demand	
Policy Direction	Policy Impacts
Make enough land available to meet the 2051 Planning forecast	• Implement Urban Centre boundary expansion recommendations from the County's Land Needs Assessment.
	• Develop clear policy in the Plan which commits to monitoring and updating residential land supply.
	• Review the rural growth policies to ensure appropriate rural growth can continue to be provided.

Providing an Appropriate Mix of Housing Options	
Policy Direction	Policy Impacts
Supports a wider range of housing options	• Revise language in the Plan that currently places priority on low density housing development.
	• Introduce a new multi-unit building definition to the Plan which can take many forms (ex. Apartments, Stacked Townhomes, back-to-back townhomes, etc.)
	• Identify the Residential Transition Area designation as strategic growth areas for compatible medium/high-density residential and mixed-use buildings. Service commercial uses would continue to be permitted.
	• Introduce policies in the plan that clarify housing mix includes a range of unit sizes, tenures and built forms.
	• Update County policies to clearly articulate and facilitate mixed-use development in highway commercial and central business district designations.
Better support Community Housing and Affordable Housing	• Revise the "Special Needs housing" policies in the Plan to better capture community housing uses –

	emergency shelters, shelters, group homes, transitional housing etc. Clearly permit these uses in all Residential and appropriate Commercial designations.
	Introduce policies into the plan that identify inclusionary zoning as a tool that can be used to support affordable housing and outline steps for its use if a future Provincial policy environment would allow the County/ Member municipalities to implement this framework.
	Introduce new condominium conversion policies into the plan to prevent the demolition and conversion of existing rental housing unless certain conditions are met.
	Introduce policy connections to the County Housing and Homelessness Plan.
	Establish rental housing target in the Official Plan as required by the Growth Plan.

Intensification and Compatibility of Development	
Policy Direction	Policy Impacts
Support the character of our communities, while facilitating a broader range of housing options	Develop a policy approach to support the protection of our community's urban character through innovative architectural styles and urban forms that compliment and support it.
	Review and update official plan policies to place a stronger emphasis on urban design for infill development and newly developing areas.

Support the Efficient Use of Land and Municipal Services	
Policy Direction	Policy Impacts
Better respond to housing demands and infrastructure efficiencies	Create a policy that allows for urban centre boundaries to be adjusted in a manner that results in no increase in urban areas. This rationalization exercise could occur outside of a municipal comprehensive review subject to municipally initiated official plan amendment and meeting specific policies related to impact and servicing.
	Introduce development phasing policies to the plan to ensure the orderly development of new growth areas and alignment with infrastructure and community facility investment.

Use land more efficiently	• Introduce a policy that would require residential development on sites larger than 2 ha in the Designated Greenfield Area to provide 30% of the new residential units in forms other than single-detached or semi-detached, such as townhomes and multi-unit residential buildings.
	• Update the low and medium housing density requirements in the plan and add a new high-density category. Update could include broadening the permitted uses in low density category and adding height ranges across all categories.

Local Planning Recommendations

Local planning documents and processes are recognized as a key element in achieving a successful and healthy policy environment for housing in the County. We recognize and support the diversity in our local communities and understand that there are various approaches that can be taken to achieve our collective housing goals. Suggestions offered in this section are intended to provide guidance on housing policy and zoning provisions that should be considered in local planning documents to support the County's long-term housing objectives.

Local Official Plans

The integration of the following policy concepts should be considered for the local official plans in Centre Wellington and Erin:

- Support the development of a full range of housing options including size, type, tenure, special needs etc.
- Support intensification through new compatible housing forms.
- Identify areas for new compatible medium and high-density development.
- Support walkable communities through the integration of commercial/retail uses in residential areas.
- Complete comprehensive updates of the plans on a regular basis to keep policies responsive to demand.

Local Zoning By-laws

The following changes should be considered for all local Zoning By-laws:

- Amend housing-related definitions to create increased flexibility.
- Redefine what is permitted in low density Residential zones.

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- Ensure Additional Residential Unit provisions are up to date with current legislative requirements.
 - Permit as of right Special Needs Housing in all residential and commercial zones (includes group homes, shelters for victims of abuse, hospice, supportive housing, transitional housing, etc.)
 - Review zoning maps to identify sites that could be pre-zoned for higher density development.
 - Reduction of minimum parking requirements for residential uses (where appropriate).
 - Remove minimum unit size requirements and let the building code guide minimum size.

Other

Given the roles and responsibilities in the County, our member municipalities have other by-laws, standards and guidelines that are influential in the development of housing. These include:

- Municipal servicing allocation by-laws
- Engineering and design standards
- Design guidelines.

These by-laws, standards and guidelines should be reviewed to ensure that they are optimized to meet our housing goals, align with other applicable municipal documents, and facilitate the effective delivery of housing in our communities.

Feedback

This document begins a discussion on housing policy changes in the County of Wellington's Official Plan. We know that the local experts leading our communities, residents living in our communities and stakeholders helping build our communities have valuable insights to share about housing development. We want to learn from those insights to help shape a policy environment that achieves our goals.

The following questions are not intended to limit the scope of feedback but rather help generate a thoughtful dialogue about the future of housing policy in the County. Please provide additional feedback about matters you feel are relevant to the housing policy discussion in the County.

Please submit feedback by **May 31st, 2024**, through the project email planwell@wellington.ca.

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- 1) Are there current policies in the Official Plan that create problems for housing development in the County? If so, why?
 - 2) Do the proposed policy directions go far enough to help support a diverse mix of housing options?
 - 3) What actions and/or policy changes should the County pursue to help increase the supply of rental housing?
 - 4) Other than the predominance of low-rise housing, what elements of your community help define its character and identity?
 - 5) Are any of the suggested policy directions not a good option for the County to consider and why?