

## Minimum density targets and zoning changes to control sprawl

### Ecology Ottawa is calling on city council to:

Stem the tide of urban sprawl by revising its official plan and zoning by-laws to bring Ottawa's urban density levels in line with the standards of other Canadian cities. This would involve:

- Designating urban growth centres throughout the city and targeting these for compact, mixed-use development
- Setting a minimum density target of 400 residents or jobs per hectare in these urban growth centres<sup>1</sup>
- Setting a minimum density target of 40 residential units or jobs per hectare in new "greenfield" developments (suburban development on new lands)<sup>2</sup>
- Revising zoning provisions related to allowable uses, building types, lot sizes, street widths, etc. to make these densities achievable

### Why we are calling on city council to take this action

Ottawa's population, currently at 870,800, is expected to grow by about 30% by 2031, to over one million people.<sup>3</sup>

Without firm policies to direct development away from the low-density suburban model, this growth will result in increasing urban sprawl.

Urban sprawl exacerbates some of the city's most challenging environmental and economic problems. Low-density neighbourhoods reinforce car dependency, and the associated traffic congestion and air pollution endanger our climate and our health. The outward spread of the city is destroying rural green spaces and forests, valuable agricultural land, and the character of rural villages.

<sup>1</sup> This is the target prescribed by the Ontario government for urban growth areas within Toronto. See the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal's Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2006. ([www.placestogrow.ca/images/pdfs/FPLAN-ENG-WEB-ALL.pdf](http://www.placestogrow.ca/images/pdfs/FPLAN-ENG-WEB-ALL.pdf))

<sup>2</sup> This level of density has been surpassed by the suburban neighbourhood of East Clayton, in Surrey, BC. See Federation of Canadian Municipalities. *Municipal Governments and Sustainable Communities: A Best Practices Guide 2006*. p.18.

<sup>3</sup> City of Ottawa. New Growth Projections for 2006-2031. [www.ottawa.ca/residents/statistics/new\\_growth/index\\_en.html](http://www.ottawa.ca/residents/statistics/new_growth/index_en.html)

Sprawl also puts an incredible burden on the city's budget and, therefore, on taxpayers; servicing widely spread-out buildings with sewers, roads, and other infrastructure is more costly than providing these services to compact neighbourhoods. If it fails to halt sprawl, Ottawa has little chance of ever balancing its budget.



Photo: Open Planning Project

While the city's current official plan notes the need to direct growth towards compact, complete communities, this is difficult to achieve in practice without firm targets to be met. The official plan should indicate exactly how dense the city should be, on a neighbourhood by neighbourhood basis.

Achieving such densities would likely require changes to the city's zoning by-laws, which currently require low-density, detached houses on large lots in many neighbourhoods. In light of the growing environmental, social, and economic costs related to sprawl, zoning regulations designed to maintain the status-quo make little sense. Changing zoning regulations in both urban and suburban areas to allow for a more diverse housing mix, mixed residential/employment areas, smaller lots, and narrower streets would result in much more compact, sustainable communities.

### Other cities have achieved much higher densities

Residential densities in European cities have long been higher than the North American norm. Barcelona, Spain, which is Europe's most compact city, has an average of 400 dwelling units per hectare across the city as a whole—with even higher densities in the downtown core.<sup>4</sup>

Many Canadian cities have successfully increased urban densities through careful land use planning and changes to their zoning by-laws. Vancouver, Montreal, and Halifax have each achieved significant intensification by reducing lot size requirements in selected areas.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Paul M. Syms. *Land, Development and Design*. Blackwell Publishing. 2002. p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. *Smart Growth in Canada: Implementation of a Planning Concept*. 2005. [www.smartgrowth.ca/research/SmartGrowth.pdf](http://www.smartgrowth.ca/research/SmartGrowth.pdf). p. 4

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The success of Surrey, B.C., in creating high densities in the suburban neighbourhood of East Clayton demonstrates that intensification can be achieved without sacrificing green space or building towering high-rises. In this community of townhouses, row houses, and detached single-family homes, a net density of 40 residential units per hectare—double the average for Surrey as a whole—had already been achieved by the time the neighbourhood was three-quarters developed.<sup>6</sup> This success has been attributed to simple measures such as required rear laneways and zoning that allows for smaller lots, narrower streets, and a wide mix of housing types.

## For more information see:

An in-depth report by the Pembina Institute on Ottawa's efforts to reduce sprawl, at [http://pubs.pembina.org/reports/Ottawa\\_Appendix+Summary.pdf](http://pubs.pembina.org/reports/Ottawa_Appendix+Summary.pdf)

A case study of the East Clayton neighbourhood, at <http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection/NH18-23-78E.pdf>

## What you can do:

**Write to your councillor and the mayor** to tell them you want Ottawa to adopt higher standards of urban density, and to achieve them. You can find your councillor's contact information at [http://www.ottawa.ca/city\\_hall/mayor\\_council/councillors/index\\_en.html](http://www.ottawa.ca/city_hall/mayor_council/councillors/index_en.html), or by calling 311.

**Get involved with Ecology Ottawa**, and help make Ottawa a more sustainable city. You can:

- **Sign up for our e-mail updates** at [www.ecologyottawa.ca/take-action/sign-on/get-updates.php](http://www.ecologyottawa.ca/take-action/sign-on/get-updates.php). We will send no more than two updates a month, which provide information on local events and actions you can take to help protect Ottawa's environment.

- **Check out our calendar of events** at [www.ecologyottawa.ca/calendar](http://www.ecologyottawa.ca/calendar) to stay informed of the many opportunities to get engaged on environmental issues throughout the city.
- **Volunteer your time** with Ecology Ottawa. To find out more, send an email to [volunteer@ecologyottawa.ca](mailto:volunteer@ecologyottawa.ca), or call 613-850-9101.
- **Make a donation.** Ecology Ottawa is a legally registered, not-for-profit organization that relies on the financial support of people like you. Please make cheques out to Ecology Ottawa, and send to:

**Ecology Ottawa, 298 Dalhousie Street, Box 52002,  
Ottawa, ON K1N 7E0**

## About Ecology Ottawa:

We are a not-for-profit organization working to make Ottawa the green capital of Canada. We believe that Ottawa residents are concerned about issues such as pollution, waste, and global warming, and that they want sustainable communities where public transit, renewable energy, recycling, and green space protection take priority. We are working with residents and local organizations across the city to ensure that these concerns are heard at city hall. Together we can make a difference, but we need your active support to move our city in the right direction.

**Ecology Ottawa gratefully acknowledges the support of**



<sup>6</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities. *Municipal Governments and Sustainable Communities: A Best Practices Guide 2006*. p.18