



An Attractive City

Discussion Paper

The Planning Partnership
Nethery Planning

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1

An Introduction to “Our Niagara Falls Plan”

The City of Niagara Falls is creating a new Official Plan - “Our Niagara Falls Plan,” a long-term vision to 2051 that guides us through a future of unprecedented growth while providing a high-quality living experience for our residents and our visitors from around the world.

The Official Plan is a high-level, visionary document that guides and shapes the future of a community identifying where, and under what circumstances, specific types of land uses can be located. The Provincial *Planning Act* requires that all local public works projects, official plans, zoning by-laws, related amendments, and all future development must conform to an approved Official Plan.

Our Niagara Falls Plan is going to define a vision for the City to 2051 - how we are going to create a complete community

Our Niagara Falls Plan will serve a broad range of community and municipal objectives. In addition to establishing appropriate land uses, it also establishes the goals, objectives and policies related to all of the essential components of making and sustaining a complete community. It sets policy requirements on how to create attractive and livable communities with a variety of housing and employment opportunities. It specifies means to protect, conserve, and enhance the city’s cultural and natural heritage and agricultural land base. It identifies locations for new growth to make the most efficient use of land and infrastructure. It outlines the structure around parks and open space, and how to

acquire and grow such spaces. It directs how to move people and goods in and around a city. It details how to plan and provide for community needs such as schools, recreation centres and libraries.

It provides all of this in a way to ensure that Provincial and Regional policy is implemented, as required by law. To this end the Official Plan must conform to the Provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and Niagara Escarpment Plan, and the Niagara Region Official Plan, and “consistency” with the Provincial Policy Statement. This is done while also providing the critical local context and input, to ensure implementation happens in the manner Niagara Falls intends it to occur, to address the unique needs of our community.

1.1 A Little Bit About Niagara Falls

Niagara Falls is an international landmark and destination for visitors, residents, businesses and employees alike. It is a high growth municipality, forecasted to take on the largest share of growth in Niagara Region over the next 25 years. Identified as one of Southern Ontario's 29 large and fast growing municipalities in the draft 2024 Provincial Planning Statement, Niagara Falls Council has pledged to build 8,000 new homes by 2031. It hosts two international crossings, the Rainbow and Whirlpool Bridges, with the major Queenston-Lewiston Bridge just north of the city limits—together, responsible for 3.6 million vehicle crossings in 2023.¹ It hosts a significant concentration of hydro-electrical generation facilities. The Niagara Parks Commission is a major partner agency in Niagara Falls, founded in 1885 and overseeing over 16 square kilometres of parkland and lands along the Niagara Parkway connecting Niagara-on-the-Lake with Fort Erie. Niagara Parks Commission facilities welcomed just under 3.0 million visitors from April 2022 through March 2023.²

Transportation Access. Niagara Falls is bisected by the Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW) freeway connecting Buffalo and the Niagara Region to the Golden Horseshoe, including Toronto. Highway 420 crosses through Niagara Falls to connect the QEW to the Rainbow Bridge border crossing. Intercity and international rail service is provided by Via Rail and Amtrak, with more frequent commuter rail and bus connections to Hamilton and Toronto via Metrolinx/GO Transit. In 2023, Niagara Falls Transit's fleet

was transferred to Niagara Region Transit, who also support paratransit service and connections between the cities of Niagara Region.

Landmarks and Attractions. In addition to the Falls themselves, Niagara Falls is a tourist destination, with multiple hotels, convention space, observation towers, multiple theme parks and resorts, and entertainment destinations across the City, including the bustling Clifton Hill area. The Niagara Parks Commission operates with a mandate to manage and develop the many public spaces along the Niagara River shoreline, including entertainment and recreational facilities. A short trip along the Niagara River Parkway brings guests past the Flower Clock, Botanical Gardens, Butterfly Conservatory, Niagara Glen, the former Toronto Power Generating Station, Spanish Aero Car, and Queen Victoria Park. The river itself is a feature, with the Iron Scow shipwreck and International Control Weir part of the falls environment. Away from the falls are the Gale Centre, Firemen's Park, The Exchange, and an emerging culinary scene. It is easy for local landmarks to be overlooked, which are as core and foundational to creating a sense of place as the all-day buzz of the tourist areas. The city is home to a branch of the Niagara Health Hospital network (Greater Niagara Hospital). The new South Niagara Hospital is being constructed with a targeted in-service date of 2029, creating an opportunity for a new purpose for the existing hospital lands.

¹ As reported by the Bridge and Tunnel Operators Association and [South Niagara Chambers of Commerce](#)

² [Niagara Parks 2022/2023 Annual Report](#)

Commercial and Recreation Amenities.

Niagara Falls is serviced with a full range of local shopping amenities. Niagara Square is a former indoor mall that fully completed a transition into a power centre format in 2020. It is located at the southwest corner of the McLeod Road interchange and the QEW. A similar cluster of large format commercial uses can be found in the middle of the urban area, at the intersections of Morrison Street and Dorchester Road. Other commercial nodes can be found along Lundy's Lane such as the Canada One Outlets, in the Stamford neighbourhood, and the historic Downtown Niagara Falls, north of the main tourist area. Local-level commercial blocks are found throughout the city.

A recent cultural development is the opening of The Exchange, a 10,000-square-foot indoor/outdoor multipurpose event space with gallery and working studio facilities. schedule farmers market and supper market events, bring a variety of interest to this new community space.

The Niagara Falls History Museum, Battle Ground Hotel Museum, and Willoughby Historical Museum cater to those interested in documents pasts and historic preservation.

Niagara Falls has the Gale Centre (four-pad arena), Willoughby Memorial Arena, and the MacBain Community Centre with an indoor pool, gym, and multi-purpose rooms.

There are four locations of the Niagara Falls Public Library.

The City is in Growth Mode. According to the 2021 Census of Canada, the population of Niagara Falls was 94,415, with 44,600 having reported being in the labour market. The City's current Official Plan was approved by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs on October 6, 1993. The 1993 Plan was written to guide growth to the year 2011 and a population of 83,000. The planning horizon was extended in 2014 (three years beyond the original target) to guide growth to the year 2031, with an anticipated population of 106,800 and 53,640 jobs. At 7.2% population growth between 2016 and 2021, Niagara Falls is on pace to exceed that 2031 population forecast. The city has completed a number of urban boundary expansions since 1993, with three new expansion areas added through the 2022 Niagara Official Plan. Niagara Falls is a growing and expanding community.

The Legislative and Policy Framework around Planning has Changed. Another major change since 1993 is the complete overhaul of the Provincial and Regional Planning Policy framework. There are new documents at both levels, whose directions need to be reflected in local policy. From an administrative perspective, the current Official Plan has been amended over 160 times over the past 30 years. The various edits have created an Official Plan with some internal conflicts and inconsistencies, duplications, some confusion in intent of policies—and, overall, an outdated planning vision that is in need of replacement.

1.2 Intent of the Discussion Papers and the Path to Our Niagara Falls Plan

To initiate the process of creating Our Niagara Falls Plan, the project team has prepared six “Discussion Papers”. These papers are about starting a conversation with the community about what the city will look like in 2051, what jobs will be here, how do we move in and around that community, how do we integrate nature and resiliency, how do we effectively manage growth and climate adaptation, and what infrastructure, features or amenities are needed for the community.

Community input is essential to delivering the Our Niagara Falls Plan. The Discussion Papers are intended to guide a conversation that will ultimately form the basis for policy.

The Discussion Papers have structured several contemporary issues in land use planning in Ontario into digestible sources of information in six thematic areas:



1. **A Growing City.** Niagara Region’s 2051 Land Needs Assessment forecasts Niagara Falls to add the greatest number of new housing units in the Region, even more than St. Catharines and its large assignment of apartment dwellings. Further infrastructure master planning work can look at growth beyond the 2051 planning horizon, opening a door for even longer-term planning. This means a considerable outlay of infrastructure and soft services will be required to support the building of complete communities connected through a resilient, layered mobility network. The new Official Plan must also ensure the infrastructure is available (planned or existing) to accommodate this growth, and will either accommodate or be ready to accommodate the outcomes of the City’s range of ongoing growth management projects and planning, the housing pledge to 2031, urban boundary expansions, affordable housing goal, and volume of development applications.



2. **An Attractive City.** Niagara Falls is a gateway to our country and a destination in its own right. Growth will need to build upon this foundation—more accurately, it will raise the bar for excellence in design and architecture, even in a world where exterior design elements cannot be completely regulated through Site Plan Control. This is achieved by comprehensively identifying landmark locations where priority design treatment is expected, while leveraging further placemaking opportunities through planning for a complete community that contributes to health and civic pride.



3. **A Connected and Mobile City.** Communities are grappling with how and where goods and people move through them. In addition to needing to serve the vehicle demands, the transportation system of a city is also a public good. This means it contributes to the overall

quality of life for residents, contribution to the economic well-being for businesses, and supports tourists and visitors to the area. Key to this is designing a transportation system that is premised on the principles of safety, equity, accessibility, and mobility for all users and modes. Our Niagara Falls Plan will aim to address these questions and be complemented with street design policies and guidelines.



4. **A Green and Resilient City.** The effects of climate change are becoming known. Cities can and need to do more to prepare for and incorporate these new systems and patterns into growth and development. Whether that is through right-sized infrastructure, a comprehensive natural heritage system, low impact design techniques, sensitively designed community facilities, or increased expectations from private development, Our Niagara Plan should build upon City and Regional studies to incorporate the best elements in a manner that readies the community for adaptation to climate change. It must also consider the fiscal and economic implications of policies related to building a green and resilient city.



5. **An International City.** Our Niagara Falls Plan will incorporate design policies and community improvement principles and a framework for intensification that will maximize the opportunities for creating landmarks and physical presence at major locations to support the many places of entry to the city. Our Niagara Falls Plan needs to leverage its location, multiple attractions, and quality of life to continue encouraging tourism, new economic development, and a range of jobs to support overall well-being.



6. **A Cultural City.** Our Niagara Falls Plan will incorporate multiple goals, objectives, and policies to continue to build upon Niagara Falls' recent growth

in diversifying cultural options. This is more than just the Falls area itself and must incorporate the entire city, providing the places and spaces necessary for an enriching social experience. There is a strong base of significant cultural heritage resources at a local and national scale in Niagara Falls, for which Our Niagara Falls Plan can work to conserve. This also requires planning for and providing community facilities to support a growing population.

The six Discussion Papers together represent a thorough, comprehensive and interconnected approach to initiating this discussion about the future of Niagara Falls. Each Paper contributes its own piece to this project. A further paper on Planning Policy Conformity and Implementation will be prepared once current Provincial reform proposals are complete.

Project team staff are available at any time to answer questions about this project. All public input received will be summarized into a "What We Heard" engagement summary report throughout the process to prepare the new Official Plan.

1.3 Public Engagement So Far

This diagram illustrates the engagement that will be completed up to the end of June 2024. The following two pages summarize what we are hearing with respect to each one of the topics for discussion.



A Growing City

- The aim should be on growth that is orderly, cost-effective, and sustainable.
- Re-connect city's decision-making with the Official Plan.
- Planning priorities should be within the built boundaries
- Downtown should not be just for visitors - try to get people living in this area
- Plenty of room for growth south of McCleod near Garner South; Grassy Brook and Hospital site
- Tourist commercial across from residential – incompatible. Transition and buffer are important.
- Niagara Falls does not need densification: lots of space. Large number of rental units available, many houses for sale
- Should do more with what we have instead of taking over more green space.
- Need better facilities for residents, including those with addictions (e.g. shelters, long term treatment facilities)

“This city has potential to become a true beacon of education, natural beauty, job opportunities, and more. Niagara University seems like a good start, but one win after a mountain of disappointments means nothing if it leaves locals in the dust.”

- Diversify the local economy by drawing other industries beside tourism to the city
- Don't need more industrial parks but do need co-working spaces.
- Like to see something like University Village, Seattle: a shopping destination/village rather than large format shopping
- Currently, a lot of homeless, need single person residences; more apartments for baby boomers who give up their houses, and housing for seniors - but not stacked townhouses.
- Need to bring back good, permanent, year-round jobs - seasonal jobs contributing to local homelessness.

An Attractive City

- Niagara Falls is not the showcase I remember. We have to do a lot of work to do to bring us to a standard to welcome people back.
- Want to see better quality parks, cycling trails, no space between houses, more public places.
- Growth of short-term rentals causing issues in residential areas – needs some control.
- Niagara Falls has lots of beautiful parks – no complaints or recommendations, done a good job on parks.

“I hope for a city that focuses on keeping the city clean. There is a huge issue with litter - take a look at the side of major roads, off ramps, on ramps, and even city trails.”

A Green & Resilient City

- Love the McBain Centre – need more spaces like that where communities can gather.
- Green space very important, need to think about how to build urban green space as different kinds of landscapes. (Kansas City good model for green space revitalization.)
- Prefer planted medians – woodland boulevard is a great example of a suburban street, no bike lanes, but safe, with median with trees.
- Queen Street signs, sidewalks, - walking to Queen from e.g. Victoria library - walk is not good. Need to enhance the larger context.
- Planting street trees does not make up for removing a forest.
- Niagara Falls wetlands are mainly complexes, which should appear in the Official Plan. Mapping of natural corridors is key to their protection. Ideally, should be under public ownership (e.g. the Conservation Authority).

“In 2051, my Niagara will have many public gardens for its residents to grow vegetables annually, positively impacting the lives of those in low income neighborhoods and teaching a skill that is transferrable. Teaching people how to grow their own food could be life saving to those who cannot afford fresh produce.”

“Our watershed and forests, wetlands and all remaining green areas are our assets to protect...Our Official Plan must reflect our respect, appreciation and gratefulness of being blessed with these magnificent natural features.”

- Need better language in the Official Plan about our remaining natural areas and woodlots to make environmental protection enforceable.
- Would like to see public gardens/vegetable gardens replacing some of the lawn area in parks

A Mobile & Connected City

- Niagara Falls should think about light rail transit as well as GO. The only semi-good public transportation are the WeGo buses, which almost exclusively serve Niagara Parks and the tourist districts.
- Need different measures to slow traffic, without speed bumps and stop signs.
- Investigate a new people mover system, LRT using CP rail corridor, and connect to train station.

“Niagara Falls 2011 Active Transportation Plan was to develop a robust bike lane network in the city. Looking back on this document in 2024, so few of these plans and ideas have actually been completed.”

- Traffic is bad. Roads to be expanded: Dorchester, Drummond, Thorold Stone Road - easily expanded, use their wide boulevards to create 3 lanes.
- Regional Transit system has resulted in a lot of vacant buses. Not getting value for money.
- Clifton Hill on a summer day - lots of people walking but not enough space. Need bigger, accessible, sidewalks, bike, and electric scooter rentals. (Kitchener Waterloo is doing a good job integrating cars, rentals, walking.)
- Stanley is another street that can be better planned, now a mini highway - opportunity for a better sidewalk connection.
- Lots of bike lanes that just stop. Love to see city with specific requirements for new build areas, things to make areas more pedestrian friendly, including bike paths through new builds/shopping areas.

An International City

- Niagara Falls is tourist town, but that's what makes the region unique. The city has "a community vibe" and whatever tourists use, locals will use.
- Transit issue: tourists don't have change; need better signage re: presto, no cards, cash.

"One thing Niagara Falls needs is an environment that attracts foreign visitors who want to slow down and enjoy the scenery. Bring some European style culture to Niagara Falls. NPC owns lots of land and they can designate areas for cafes and sit down space looking out over the falls or just as people walk about on the grounds. Let's make the Falls area not just a viewing opportunity but a refreshing experience."

A Cultural City

- Niagara Falls does not seem to care about history – razed historic neighbourhoods, demolish heritage-designated school to expand cemetery.
- Public buildings need to be maintained. The new Exchange location is not good and took away parking at the corner of Main and Central.

"Find out what features make us stand out from other cities around the world. Highlight the features that make the city worth traveling to. This can include unique cultural activities, historical landmarks, diversity welcoming places and cultural foods, different museums unique architecture, streets, and also attractive game zones for visitors."

"Let's spend less on fireworks and more on feeding Niagara's families. Let's make the city more fun and inviting for all with cultural events and attractions such as a state of the art children's museum, aquarium, theme park, hockey team, indigenous events, etc."

2

An Attractive City Overview

2.1 What is an Attractive City?

An Attractive City is a beautiful city that engenders a sense of pride as a place to live and a sense of stewardship in its long-term care and maintenance. The creation of the Our Niagara Falls Plan will provide the opportunity to refresh and improve policies that promote placemaking and design excellence in Niagara Falls. To support this endeavour, the City needs a set of directions on how public spaces, the public and private realms, buildings, streets, and gateways should be designed and organized.

A high quality and ultimately an **Attractive City**:

- Is a **welcoming city** that encourages and supports active living, social engagement, civic pride, and the creation of a sense of place and well-being.
- Promotes **design excellence** in both the public and private realms through well-designed and contextually appropriate built form and public spaces.
- Is an **accessible city** that ensures all residents and visitors are afforded the same opportunity to access buildings, places, and information in an equitable environment.
- Includes **landmarks and gateways** that clearly identify where you are, and when you have entered, as well as distinguishing the city within its context.
- Builds **beautiful streets** and streetscapes that accommodate all modes of transportation and are designed to be pedestrian friendly and safe, well maintained and kept clean to support a welcoming appearance and standard of care.
- Ensures that **parks, open spaces and views**capes, including and beyond Niagara Falls and its natural features, are accessible, equitable, well-designed, sustainable, and linked.
- Requires **high quality architecture** through a diversity of scale and style.
- Ensures that new development and intensification are **compatible with their surroundings**.
- Responds to the impacts of a changing climate through **resilient built form**.



An Attractive City embraces placemaking with great places that people use and that encourage social interaction. Through enhancing community spaces to strengthen connections between people and their environment, the City can incorporate the concept of placemaking into community design.

2.2 Quality Places and Spaces

An Attractive City includes destinations, landmarks, and gateways that distinguish it within its context and establish a sense of place. There is a public sector role in creating impactful public facilities, and a private sector role in creating quality development. Crucial to a high-quality city is the attention to the interplay among built form, the public realm, and the natural environment. Making these great places requires a coordinated, mutual effort. Niagara Falls should engender a sense of pride as a place to live and a sense of stewardship in its long-term care and maintenance.

An Attractive City ensures that parks and open spaces, as well as Niagara Falls' natural features, are beautiful, accessible, and linked. Parks and open spaces need to be visible and accessible from, and integrated with, the street system, and include a full array of opportunities for outdoor festivals, recreation, and play, as well as quiet contemplation. Having the right places, small and large, supports community events and community building. High quality landscape architecture will ensure that these outdoor spaces

*The City of London Official Plan, “**London Plan**”, sets forth key directions for the City.*

Direction #7 is to Build strong, healthy and attractive neighbourhoods for everyone.

*The City of Barrie Official Plan, “**One City, One Vision, One Plan**”, includes policies for **Planning an Attractive City** under design excellence, urban design, built form development criteria, and parking design.*

include public art and appropriate grading, paving, and planting materials that celebrate the landscape and historic context.

An Attractive City includes high quality architecture that transcends a theme or a specific period in time. Buildings should be compatible with one another, but there must be a diversity of scale and a diversity of style as it may be defined through building materials and architectural details.

2.3 A High Standard for Development

An Attractive City has beautiful streets and streetscapes. Streets need to accommodate all modes of transportation and be designed to be pedestrian friendly and safe. High quality building facades and architecture play a crucial role in defining the street edge, animating the street, and creating the image and character of the community. The overall standard of care and condition is especially important in places with a destination function such as Niagara Falls, to ensure a “welcoming” presence.

*The Town of East Gwillimbury Official Plan includes policies for **A Beautiful and High-Quality Community** that support and promote community identity, good urban design, compatible development, designing with nature, safety and accessibility, and public art.*

3

Key Topics for Discussion

3.1 Healthy Communities

Why it's Important

An Attractive City is a healthy city. Public health and land use planning are intrinsically linked. Bringing to the forefront a number of increasing public health challenges related to the way in which we interact with our built and natural environments is essential. Built environments that encourage physical activity can in fact reduce the incidence of diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, asthma and respiratory disease and contribute to better overall public health. It is essential that the goal of creating livable communities that focus on public health, climate change, and the built environment be at the forefront of all policy documents.

The limited supply of land for development within urban boundaries and the current pattern of development in many municipalities is placing a strain on the natural environment and the health of residents. The evidence of the linkage between improvements to both sustainability and public health through meaningful interventions in community design has made significant progress in recent years. The nature and shape of development needs to change to respond to these limits if we are to achieve any meaningful sustainable measures.



A supportive, inclusive, and healthy community ensures the well-being of residents by providing all the pieces they need to thrive and meet their basic needs of food, shelter, water, income, and safety. A healthy community not only meets basic needs but provides a high-quality living environment, access to public health services, a variety of experiences, a welcoming atmosphere, support of cultural heritage, a vibrant economy, and a healthy ecosystem.



Things to Think About

1. Provincial and Regional planning frameworks provide some direction for healthy communities. However, it is not one single action or policy topic that will define or lead to the achievement of a healthy community, but rather an approach to implementation that considers all the policy sections of the Our Niagara Falls Plan comprehensively. Our efforts to cultivate a healthy city should come from policy that addresses all topics rather than any single topic alone.
2. The happiness, health, and well-being of residents should be a key consideration for policy development in Our Niagara Falls Plan.
3. Ensuring that Niagara Falls evolves and develops in a manner that is accessible to all is critical to creating an inclusive community. Buildings, parks, transportation, and information need to be accessible to ensure those with a disability are afforded the same opportunity as those without a disability in an equally effective manner. Through the development of Our Niagara Falls Plan, it will be important to ensure that the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) are appropriately implemented.
4. Our Niagara Falls Plan should implement policies that expand the City's trail system and make active transportation (e.g., walking and cycling) viable, convenient, and safe.
5. Physical, social, and mental well-being are the necessary components of public health, and the built environment should be designed to ensure access to healthy food, clean air and water, safe environments, and opportunities for physical activity. To support public health, property standards need to be maintained. This entails maximizing opportunities for the use of existing spaces and minimizing vacancies, which includes efforts for well-designed and inclusive redevelopment.
6. The City should support opportunities for a sustainable local food system that may include local farmers markets, agri-tourism, Community Shared Agriculture programs, diversity of agricultural uses (greenhouses, orchards), educational and on farm experiences, and community gardens. Urban agriculture should be part of a community's character and integrated into the open space system to provide a transitional use between the natural and built environments and the traditional farm areas at the city peripheries.
7. Support the Niagara Falls Tree and Forest Canopy Project. Establishing more robust urban forest policies can include speaking to the benefits of the urban forest such as reduction in air pollution, mitigating the urban heat island effect, energy savings, habitat for urban wildlife, biodiversity, and opportunities for recreation and physical activity. The Our Niagara Falls Plan can further explore the establishment of a percentage tree canopy target, tree replacement requirements (such as the 2-for-1 compensation request by City Council for tree removals), and other tree protection policies.

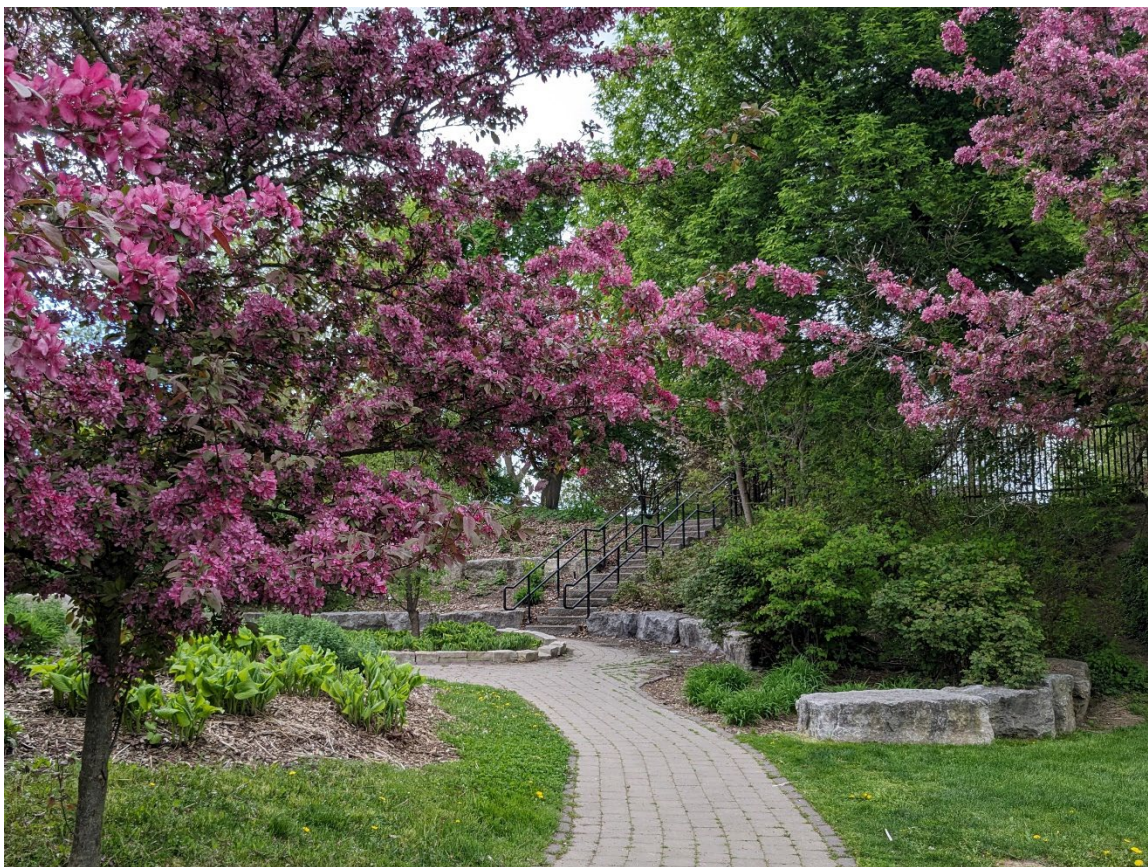
3.2 Place-making

Why it's Important

Place-making involves a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design, and management of private development and public spaces to create quality places that strengthen the connections between people and these places. Place-making is the recognition and enhancement of a community's unique assets and potential. Recognizing the unique assets of a community requires an understanding of its history, existing attributes and how they contribute to creating a recognizable and defined character. These attributes assist in understanding the physical make-up of an area and help to identify what sets an area apart from its surrounding context.

Great architecture and design, attractive streets and parks, distinct neighbourhoods, a sense of safety and security, and opportunities for social interaction all work together to support place-making in a city and improve the happiness, mental health, and well-being of residents. It requires the correct balance of policy direction, political will to deliver on that direction, and encouraging and documenting the results of strong design practices through development.

Niagara Falls has many attributes that set it apart from other communities, such as the city's setting next to the Falls and Niagara River, which create a connection to the natural environment and landscapes that shape the city.





Things to Think About

Many of the considerations for a healthy community support place-making and creating an environment where people want to live, work, play, and learn.

1. Our Niagara Falls Plan cannot create great places in itself but should create a policy framework that focuses on placemaking, demonstrating the commitment of the City to support places that people use and promote community stewardship.
2. The City should plan for public settings (streets, spaces, facilities) to be safe, foster social interaction, meet pedestrian needs, and make community amenities easy to reach when using active transportation.
3. Integrate arts, cultural, and recreational facilities with local business, health and social services, schools, parks, and civic buildings. Consideration should also be given to cultural integration into landscape design, recognizing cultural heritage landscapes or promoting culture in the design of parks or art installations. The Recreation, Culture and Parks Plan also recommends this initiative. This is explored further in the Cultural City Discussion Paper.
4. Looking beyond statutory requirements, the City should consider policies to enhance its local character and identify opportunities for built heritage resources. The adaptive reuse of older buildings,

which can also include adding modern additions, is often a popular strategy for preserving the character of older buildings, while adapting them to contemporary uses. Adaptive reuse can also provide environmental sustainability benefits through the reuse of existing materials. The City should consider policies to encourage such redevelopment projects, particularly encouraging the adaptation of the entire building, rather than the facade alone.

5. Support a refreshed vision for urban design that will enhance place-making through a focus on the form and function of the public realm, such as streets, parks, squares, and public infrastructure. Creating meaningful and beautiful places through good urban design can strengthen economic, social, and environmental benefits.



3.3 Urban Design

Why it's Important

Land use planning, urban design, and sustainability need to be fundamentally linked to guide and create liveable and sustainable communities that are resilient to the impacts of climate change. Land use plans and policies must not only guide land use distribution and the creation of complete, walkable, and attractive neighbourhoods, but also direct development to support reductions in energy and greenhouse gas emissions, address urban flooding, and move towards net zero communities.

With respect to the policy review there is clear direction from the Province and Region to mitigate the impacts of a changing climate by planning for efficient land use and development patterns, supporting the use of alternative transportation modes, supporting water and energy conservation, and embracing the use of green infrastructure and natural areas for water infiltration.

While various planning, urban design, and sustainable policies and principles share a common intent and are applicable in a broad range of conditions, the means by which they are applied can vary significantly with the local context.

In setting a refreshed direction for community and urban design policies there are several themes which must run throughout the policies in order for them to be relevant, comprehensive, and defensible.

1. **Preservation** – Can occur in a variety of ways and applies to the safeguarding of built and cultural heritage, as well as the natural environment. It encompasses the preservation of views, important places, and landmarks.
2. **Compatibility** – As more intense forms of development are considered the concept of compatibility becomes important. New development should integrate with the existing context and consider high quality design, sensitivity to heritage (built and natural), appropriate transitions to stable neighbourhoods, the character of neighbourhoods and community identity, and fit within the streetscape and overall vision for the city.
3. **Connectivity** – Should occur beyond the scale of roads and must consider how pedestrians connect to smaller sites, access transit, visit natural systems, and do so safely and in a comfortable manner. New development must play a role in ensuring a high degree of connectivity by enhancing circulation systems and creating clear routes.
4. **Legibility** – It is important that there is coherence across Official Plan policies and land use classifications to allow for the harmonious integration of new and existing development. A legible urban environment should be easy to navigate, safe, and create opportunities for public interaction.
5. **Sustainable Urban Form** – Sustainability impacts all aspects of the Official Plan and should be used as a lens for policy development. It is essential this approach be reflected in support

for new growth that is compact, designed efficiently, avoids ecosystem degradation, creates sustainable systems of transportation, promotes active transportation, green infrastructure, healthy communities, and mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

The following sections will provide additional detail for urban design in the city and will describe creating a sense of place and community through the arrangement and articulation of its component elements, including:

- **Public Realm** – Hierarchy of public parks, linkages and connections, walkability, views and vistas, gateways.
- **Private Realm** – Built form and site design, location of the different types of built form, expression of height, massing, and transition, landscaping, access and parking considerations.

Considerations for both the Public and Private Realm discussion will include:

- Protection and enhancement of surrounding **environmental lands/natural features**, while broadening opportunities for public access, enjoyment, education and stewardship.
- Establishment of a variety of **public spaces** to support cultural events, festivals and community life throughout the year.
- Creation of **animated, safe and comfortable human-scaled streets** that enhance mobility for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.
- Provision of **connected systems** of parks, open space, roads, and trails.
- An **accessible and connected active transportation network**, consisting of pedestrian and cycling routes, sidewalks and trails, will be important to promoting healthy, active lifestyles.
- Recognition of the scale and form of development/existing **built character** of the area.
- Promotion of a mix of uses within a **variety of building forms** including a range of housing types and opportunities for retail, commercial and community uses.
- The use of **green infrastructure** to enhance ground water infiltration and improve water quality as part of a comprehensive water management plan.



*Read more about green infrastructure and low impact development in the **Green & Resilient City** discussion paper.*



Things to Think About

1. Our Niagara Falls Plan should set an urban design vision for how the city should look and feel. To support this vision, guidance should be provided on the planning and design of the public realm (parks, streetscapes), buildings, and sustainable development elements.
2. Urban design in the context of Niagara Falls must consider preservation, compatibility, connectivity, legibility, and a sustainable urban form.
3. Policies should provide greater clarity on how to shape the built environment to achieve a desired level of prescribed quality in both the public and private realms.
4. Consider policies and guidelines to address other aspects of good community design including community structure, street connectivity, building orientation, how parking is provided, land use mix, screening, active engagement of the street, a variety of parks, and access to services and amenities. Other considerations should include sustainable design (e.g. passive solar orientation, low impact development), and the preservation of important views and vistas.
5. The City has urban design guidelines for specific areas of the city, such as Downtown, Lundy's Lane, Historic Drummondville, and the Tourist Area, as well as Site Plan Guidelines. To support consistency, and emphasize what is already in place, reference should be made to these guidelines when preparing a coordinated set of urban design policies.

3.4 Public Realm Design

Why it's Important

Public realm design addresses matters such as the arrangement of streets and blocks, ease of movement, streetscapes and sidewalks, building orientation, parks and open spaces, views, and gateways and landmark and public spaces. The successful design of the public realm relies on defining the community character and creating diverse, comfortable, welcoming, safe, and accessible spaces. The design of the public realm plays an incredibly important role in defining the community character and presenting an attractive and successful image to residents and visitors. Good design can improve the walkability/bikeability of Niagara Falls, attract visitors and customers for local businesses, spur private investment, and generally improve the identify of Niagara Falls and the overall quality of life.

A high-quality public realm, consisting of a hierarchy of active and passive parks, along with a variety of streets, will enhance mobility, promote healthy and active lifestyles, and contribute to the character of the community. The public realm serves as the 'Living Room' of the community and should be developed to support and enhance the range of activities and functions of the community. Private development impacts the look, feel and function of the public realm (discussed in greater detail in Section 3.7 of this Discussion Paper). Accordingly, most municipalities provide design policies and guidelines to help influence the quality of development to provide the most positive impacts possible on the quality of the public realm experience.





Things to Think About

1. The Provincial and Regional policy frameworks support high quality of urban design, and particularly emphasize the need for good design in downtowns and other higher density mixed use areas. There is significant support for ensuring that public rights-of-way are designed in a way that supports active transportation, prioritizes pedestrian comfort and safety, and incorporates green infrastructure where appropriate.
2. Addressing factors such as high quality streetscaping and sidewalks, appropriate streets cross-sections/widths for different contexts, ensuring well designed facilities for all modes of travel (walking, cycling, transit), incorporating green elements, and creating opportunities for public art can all have a positive impact on moving through Niagara Falls and encouraging active transportation.
3. It should be noted that urban design and streetscape policies are not necessarily limited to one type of land use. While some strategies are appropriately implemented across all land use types, Our Niagara Falls Plan could also explore how specific design policies should be applied in each designation to ensure that the objectives of an attractive and walkable community are achieved.
4. It is also important to link streetscaping policies with the design and configuration of adjacent buildings, which play an important role in creating a comfortable public realm. Policies should ensure that buildings frame adjacent streets and open spaces to assist in further defining and complementing the public realm.
5. Our Niagara Falls Plan should guide the physical orientation of newly built development to maximize solar energy gain opportunities.
6. Gateways and landmarks are important parts of the fabric of the city and can be created using a combination of buildings, landscapes, structures, spaces, or public art. Properly designed, these elements have a unique ability to enhance wayfinding, reinforce a sense of place and identity, and welcome visitors to the city. Policies should be expanded to reinforce the importance of these entry features not only to attract tourists but to instill a sense of civic pride in residents. Smaller scale local identifiers that highlight neighbourhood character areas can also create a sense of identity for areas of the city. These smaller gateways can be thought of as community signatures that reflect the local culture, natural landscape, or history or help to clearly define community boundaries.
7. The City should strengthen policies to provide clear, contemporary guidance for development backed by public investments and partnerships.
8. The City should update the public art policy. Public art can set the city apart from other cities and can strengthen a sense of place. Establishment of policies that promote, support, and create funding for public art installations will create an environment that embraces public art and encourages artistic expression. Public art can take a variety of forms, media, and scales.

3.5 Parks and Open Spaces

Why it's Important

All residents should have access to parks and open spaces, and this should be a key planning principle. Opportunities to engage with nature has physical, mental, and social health benefits and should be available through trail systems, a variety of parks and open spaces such as municipal parks, community parks, neighbourhood parks, parkettes, sports fields, community gardens, and rooftop gardens, as well as access to the natural environment.

Parks and open spaces have many benefits such as providing for a healthier urban ecosystem through improved air quality and the reduction of heat islands while also encouraging residents to be physically and socially engaged. As communities become more compact with higher density forms of housing it is critical to ensure a diversity of accessible park spaces are available for residents to provide areas for both active and passive recreation.

An accessible, animated and varied hierarchy of park spaces is vital to promoting a healthy community and important to fostering a strong sense of place within Niagara Falls. Well-designed, interesting and unique park spaces where people go to rest, relax, play, walk their dogs, eat lunch, enjoy the landscape, access community amenities, provide a platform for public events, and become the jewels of the community. These spaces must support a variety of special, seasonal and daily activities. Their design must reflect their context and enhance the character of Niagara Falls and provide scalability from city-wide facilities to smaller open spaces (often privately owned) to reflect the function and need of the space.



Things to Think About



1. Ensuring residents have convenient access to a connected and diverse range of open spaces, parks, trails, and recreation facilities offers opportunities for improved public health, including both physical and mental health, and exercise. It will be important to ensure the policy framework supports an appropriate parks and open space network, which considers the current needs of residents in addition to future needs as Niagara Falls continues to grow and evolve. This may include consideration of more urban park typologies.
2. Policies should be provided to ensure that parks and open spaces, including the existing natural features, are beautiful, accessible, and linked. Parks and open spaces need to be visible and accessible from, and integrated with, the street system, and include a full array of opportunities for outdoor festivals, recreation, and play, as well as quiet contemplation. High quality landscape architecture will ensure that these outdoor spaces include public art and appropriate grading, paving, and planting materials.
3. Connectivity should occur beyond the scale of roads and must consider how pedestrians connect to parks, water, and visit natural systems, and do so in a safe and comfortable manner. Policies for new development must play a role in ensuring a high degree of connectivity by enhancing circulation systems and creating clear, legible routes.
4. Ensure development appropriately connects to and integrates with the Queen Victoria Park Master Plan recommendations, and other Niagara Parks Commission lands.
5. The preparation of Our Niagara Falls Plan must undertake an overview of parkland dedication to support the harmonization of the existing frameworks, reflect updates required to conform to legislative changes, consider the inclusion of more urban park typologies, and ensure that new growth supports the development of parks.
6. Consider policies for Strata Parks and Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) POPS are a specific type of open space which is accessible to the public but remains privately owned, offering opportunities for additional open space that will complement the public park system. Strata parks and POPS would be secured through appropriate legal agreements to ensure ongoing public access, as well as design and maintenance standards over the long term. Given concerns about life-cycle costs, and programing control, Strata Parks and POPS may not be fully credited toward the achievement of parkland dedication requirements.

7. Review and address the impacts of Bill 23. Our Niagara Falls Plan must consider the impacts of Bill 23 that have reduced the rates permitted for parkland dedication. Changes include the following:

- Bill 23 caps the amount developers are required to pay for new parkland.
- Setting a maximum parkland dedication cap of 10% for sites less than 5 hectares in area, increasing to 15% for larger sites.
- Reducing the maximum parkland dedication rates in half for land and cash-in-lieu.
- Allowing the possibility of encumbered lands and privately-owned parks to be counted for parkland credit.
- Requiring 60% of development charge and parkland dedication funds to be spent or allocated to be spent on an annual basis.

3.6 Complete Streets

Why it's Important

Provincial and Regional policies require that the City meet the transportation needs of all users, irrespective of mode, including the implementation of a “complete streets” approach. Complete streets provide pleasing pedestrian experiences, improved safety for cyclists and enhanced opportunities for active transportation, all while ensuring the efficient movement of goods, transit, and passenger vehicles within a balanced right-of-way. Further, a priority of the City is to enhance the multi-modal connectivity for residents throughout the city and to the wider region, which will better facilitate access to jobs, services, recreation, and housing.

The City of Greater Sudbury defines “Complete Streets” to be those designed to be safe for all users: people who walk, bicycle, take transit or drive, and people of varying ages and levels of mobility

Recent trends in land use and transportation planning, as well as public health research, emphasize the importance of ensuring the provision of a well-connected, attractive, and functional multi-modal system to provide more balanced access to active transportation options. Active transportation, including walking, cycling and transit, will become increasingly important within Niagara Falls as more intensified development occurs and as a means to increase the accessibility of all residents.

There is the opportunity to support a full spectrum of mobility options for all residents and improved connectivity within a fully integrated network. This is an essential element of planning for sustained transportation methods and healthier lifestyles. Providing enhanced mobility for people of all ages means understanding opportunities to make any type of street a “complete street”.



*Read more about complete streets and alternative transportation options in the **Connected & Mobile City** discussion paper.*



Things to Think about

1. Prioritize compact street grids, street connectivity, and intersection density to provide more direct routes and reduced travel time for people who walk and cycle.
2. All streets should have well maintained infrastructure (i.e., sidewalks, extra wide road shoulders for walking and cycling, and/or pedestrian trails and walkways) for all users, particularly the most vulnerable users: children, youth, the elderly, and those with special needs. Additional amenities to support active transportation include seating, planters, waste collection, bike racks, and transit shelters.
3. Pedestrian and cycling improvements for consideration include: expanded sidewalks on both sides of the street, street trees and lighting fixtures to enhance the streetscape, buffered cycle tracks and left turn bike boxes, transit stops designed to be accessible for all users with gently sloped curb ramps and tactile paving, way finding signage, multi-use trails in the boulevard separated from the roadway, reduced traffic lanes, reduced speed limits, and pedestrian crosswalk markings.

3.7 Private Realm

Why it's Important

The private realm is comprised of the built form and site design within development blocks and their relationship to adjacent open spaces, sidewalks and roads. The residential, institutional, commercial, mixed-use, and employment buildings within a community contribute to its character and can assist in further defining and complementing the public realm.

High quality urban design within the private realm is based upon the quality, scale, and character of the surrounding existing and emerging contexts to reinforce 'human scaled' environments and promote a sense of place. These include creating distinctive, appealing, and pedestrian friendly streetscapes through attention to building design and detailing; and ensuring appropriate massing, materials, building siting, and design compatibility.



Things to Think about

1. All development shall achieve a high degree of environmental sustainability, and demonstrate high quality architectural form, design, materials and detailing. New policies could support city-wide architectural control and urban design guidelines to promote excellence for new development, which could address elements such as building design, design for priority/high visibility locations, and architectural standards. Our Niagara Falls Plan will also provide a means to implement these policies.
2. Our Niagara Falls Plan could explore expanding the current design policies for specific areas in the city, and for specific building types. To manage the transition between new, higher intensity development and existing lower density residential neighbourhoods consider the scale and massing of new development when considering a more intensified form of development; mitigate any adverse effects on adjacent built form and the comfort and use of the open spaces and streets; and respect existing heritage.

3. Our Niagara Falls Plan should include a revised height schedule to identify building heights for buildings in specific areas of the city, such as the Fallsview Area, and the low- and mid-rise corridors.
4. Residential and public buildings should be designed in an innovative way that contributes to energy reduction, natural resource conservation, green roofs, and cooperative relationships between buildings and site management practices.
5. Consider adding new policies which enhance the sustainable design of new development and buildings. This could include policies related to:
 - Energy conservation (geo exchange, solar thermal).
 - Innovative public and private building designs that contribute to energy reduction and natural resource conservation, green roofs, synergies between buildings and site management practices.
6. One of the consequences of a changing climate is the development of urban heat islands. This term refers to urban areas with higher temperatures, typically caused by heat-absorbing buildings, roads, and other hard surfaces, such as surface parking lots. Responding to heat islands requires strategies related to both the built and natural environment and policies should promote green or white roofs, a tree canopy target, and green building standards.

3.8 Compatibility/Intensification

Why it's Important

The concept of compatible development is critical to appropriately accommodating and encouraging redevelopment and intensification while preserving community character. The City, through Our Niagara Falls Plan, will be placing a stronger emphasis on accommodating residential growth through intensification and therefore it will be important that an appropriate policy framework is in place which ensures that new development provides a positive contribution to the community, without deterring this form of development. Balancing new growth through compatibility ensures positive contributions to the community without disrupting existing neighborhoods.

Higher density development is not appropriate everywhere in the city. The current planning paradigm in the city plans for the greatest height and density along its major corridors and in its nodes while promoting compatibility and stability in the surrounding low-density neighbourhoods. Stable residential neighborhoods can support a variety of housing forms but should not be negatively impacted by housing forms that are not compatible or have an adverse impact on adjacent built form and the comfort and use of private yards, open spaces, and streets.



Read more about intensification and Additional Dwelling Units in the **Growing City** discussion paper.



Things to Think About

1. Consider adding policy guidance for compatible development, including a clear definition. A suggested definition is, *“Compatible development means development that may not necessarily be the same or similar to the existing buildings in the vicinity, but, nonetheless, enhances an established community and coexists with existing development without causing any undue adverse impact on surrounding properties.”*
2. Considering the joint goals of protecting existing neighbourhoods and encouraging appropriate intensification, it will be important for Our Niagara Falls Plan to include a policy framework that provides guidance for how new development fits into existing neighborhoods and the city as a whole, while still permitting these areas to evolve and be enhanced over time, with flexibility for innovation.
3. The City promotes increased densities to make use of existing infrastructure, buildings and available transit. New policies should focus on encouraging appropriate and compatible forms of redevelopment and intensification throughout the city. Policies should also support different scales of development or redevelopment, with consideration of the local context.
4. Establish a clear policy framework for the design issues related to infill and redevelopment (transition, shadowing,

wind, angular plane, setbacks, and setbacks) in order to ensure compatible development adjacent to existing neighbourhoods.

5. The City has zoning regulations for the development of Additional Dwelling Units. Our Niagara Falls Plan will need to include policies for Additional Dwelling Units to conform to Provincial direction, Council direction, and support the zoning regulations in Zoning By-law No. 79-200.

Multiple recent pieces of Provincial legislations have introduced and subsequently modified the requirement that municipalities authorize in their Official Plans and Zoning By-laws the use of 'additional dwelling units' in detached, semi-detached, and row houses and in an ancillary building or structure (e.g., above laneway garages or coach houses), totaling three residential units on the property. The Province has also released regulations on this topic, aimed at removing barriers to the creation of such units, though largely to be applied through an implementing zoning by-law.

Notwithstanding that Niagara Falls will be obligated to implement this new Provincial requirement, the facilitation of additional residential units throughout

Niagara Falls has the potential to help increase the range of housing options and in particular introduce additional rental options in existing low-rise neighbourhoods. Our Niagara Falls Plan must have up-to-date policies on Additional Dwelling Units (ADU), including permitting those in detached, accessory buildings, to be consistent with Provincial requirements.

6. Bill 185, the *Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act*, added further policy direction for ADU's to assist with reducing barriers to building ADU's. The Province is proposing changes to the *Planning Act* that, if passed, would help create additional residential units, such as garden, laneway or basement suites, by providing authority for regulations to eliminate practical barriers to these units being built, which may include maximum lot coverage and limits on the number bedrooms allowed per lot.
7. New policies could support city-wide architectural control guidelines for new development, which could address elements such as building design, design for priority/high visibility locations, and architectural standards.

4

Policy Review

The following is a review of Provincial, Regional, and Local policy frameworks and documents in regards to healthy, complete communities, urban design, and sustainability to support an Attractive City.

4.1 Provincial Policy Statement (2020)

POLICY REFERENCE: Section 1.1 (Managing and Directing Land Use to Achieve Efficient and Resilient Development and Land Use Patterns); Section 1.5 (Public Spaces, Recreation, Parks, Trails and Open Space); Section 1.7 (Long-Term Economic Prosperity)

The Provincial Policy Statement, 2020 (PPS 2020) provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development. The PPS 2020 sets the policy foundation for regulating the development and use of land. The Provincial Policy Statement is issued under the authority of Section 3 of the *Planning Act*. Section 3 of the Planning Act requires that decisions affecting planning matters “shall be consistent with” policy statements issued under the *Act*. Comments, submissions or advice that affect a planning matter that are provided by the Council of a municipality, a local board, a planning board, a minister or ministry, board, commission or agency of the government “shall be consistent with” the PPS 2020.



(A draft “Provincial Planning Statement” was released for consultation purposes in 2023. Should it become final policy during the course of this study, an update will be provided at that time.)

An overarching theme of the PPS is the promotion of sustainable, complete communities and the careful coordination and management of land uses to accommodate appropriate development to meet the full range of current and future needs of the community, while achieving cost effective development patterns. Stronger emphasis must also be given to preparing for the impacts of a changing climate through maximizing energy conservation, effective management of storm water, and the use of green infrastructure.

Policy 1.1.1 advises that healthy and livable cities are sustained in part by promoting development and land use patterns that conserve biodiversity and by preparing for the regional and local impacts of a changing climate. Land use patterns within settlement areas is to be based on a mix of land uses which minimize negative impacts to air quality and climate change and promote energy efficiency, as well as a mix of land uses that help prepare for the impacts of a changing climate.³

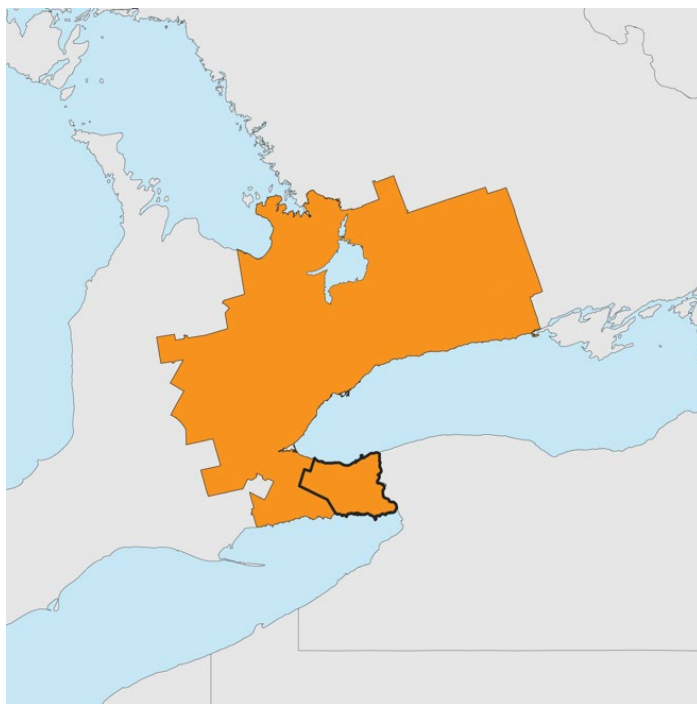
The PPS advises that healthy and active communities should be promoted by planning public spaces, street, and recreation settings to be accessible, equitably distributed, to foster social interaction and to promote travel by active transportation.⁴

Economic prosperity should be supported by encouraging a sense of place, by promoting well-designed built form and through cultural planning and conserving features that help define character.

4.2 A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2019)

POLICY REFERENCE: [Section 1.2.1 \(Guiding Principles\)](#); [2.2.1 \(Managing Growth\)](#); [Section 3.2 \(Policies for Infrastructure to Support Growth\)](#); [Section 4.2.7 \(Cultural Heritage Resources\)](#); [Section 4.2.10 \(Climate Change\)](#); [Section 5.2.5 \(Targets\)](#)

A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2019 (Growth Plan), builds on the Provincial Policy Statement to establish a unique planning framework for the Greater Golden Horseshoe that supports the achievement of complete communities, a thriving economy, a clean and healthy environment, and social equity. It provides detailed policy direction across a range of issue areas, with an overarching principal being to support the achievement of complete communities that are designed to support healthy and active living and meet people's needs for daily living throughout an entire lifetime. It does this by promoting intensification, improving the integration of land use planning with investments in infrastructure and public service facilities, and providing for different approaches to manage growth that recognize the diversity of communities subject to this Plan. Comments, submissions or advice that affect a planning matter that are provided by the Council of a municipality, a local board, a



³ Policy 1.1.3.2.

⁴ Policy 1.5.1.

planning board, a minister or ministry, board, commission or agency of the government “shall conform to” this Provincial policy document.

The guiding principles of the Growth Plan direct the policies of the Plan and how land should be developed, managed, and protected. Although community design is not directly stated, the guiding principles and policies support the foundation for successful community design.

Section 2.2.1 4 states that applying the policies of the Growth Plan will support the achievement of complete communities through a mix of land uses, range and mix of housing options, access to transportation options, co-location of public service facilities in community hubs, parks and open spaces, compact form and vibrant public realm, and green infrastructure and to plan for resilient communities.

Policy 3.2.2.3 requires that in the design, refurbishment, or reconstruction of the existing and planned street network, a complete streets approach be adopted that ensures the needs and safety of all road users are considered and appropriately accommodated.

The Growth Plan directs municipalities to develop policies in their official plans to identify actions for greenhouse gas emissions and address climate change adaptation goals by supporting complete communities, reducing automobile dependence, supporting transit and active transportation, assessing infrastructure risks, stormwater management planning that incorporates low impact development, protecting the natural environment, and promoting local food.⁵

In planning to achieve the minimum intensification and density targets in this Plan, Section 5.2.5 directs municipalities to develop and implement urban design and site design official plan policies and other supporting documents that direct the development of a high-quality public realm and compact built form.

4.3 Draft 2024 Provincial Planning Statement

On April 10, 2024, the Government of Ontario released the proposed Provincial Planning Statement (2024). The proposed Provincial Planning Statement would be a single, province-wide policy framework along with implementing legislative changes, which combines the Provincial Policy Statement 2020 and Growth Plan into one consolidated policy. At the time of writing this Discussion Paper, the public consultation stage had just closed (May 12, 2024).

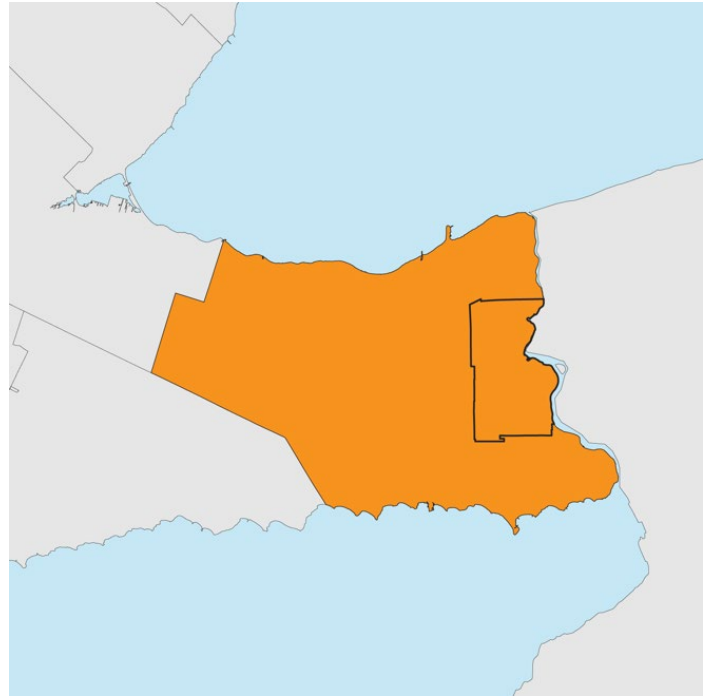
The proposed Provincial Policy Statement continues to support complete communities under Section 2.1 and the accommodation of an appropriate mix of uses, housing and transportation options, and accessibility but has removed the concept of “healthy, liveable, and safe communities”. This concept has been modified to healthy, active, and inclusive communities under Section 3.9 and is promoted by planning streets and spaces to be safe and meet the needs of all ages and abilities and by providing for a full range of parks, public spaces, open spaces, and trails.

⁵ Policy 4.2.1.10

4.4 Region of Niagara Official Plan, 2022

POLICY REFERENCE: Section 1.4 (Organization of the Niagara Official Plan); Section 6.2 (Urban Design)

The Niagara Official Plan, 2022 (Regional Official Plan), is the vision document for growth across Niagara Region. Approved in 2022, it replaced a 1973 Plan (reformatted in 2014) with a new vision to 2051. Its four pillars include “Exceptional Development and Communities,” “Diverse Housing Types, Jobs and Population,” “Thriving Economy,” and “Resilient Urban and Natural Areas.” The Region undertook a Municipal Comprehensive Review to bring its Official Plan into conformity with the Provincial Growth Plan in order to assess its future land needs and growth strategy. On November 4, 2022, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing approved the Niagara Official Plan. It is now in force and in effect. It is a key guiding document for development of the new Our Niagara Falls Plan.



The Niagara Official Plan sets forth a number of directives under which the policies of the Plan are based. Chapter 6 - Vibrant Region includes policies that support the directive to *Elevate the livability and engaging qualities of communities, facilities and attractions*. The Region has established policies to assist with achieving a high-quality built environment, and healthy, vibrant, and safe communities. Under Section 6.2, the urban design policies establish the context, direction, and guidance for development and transportation systems undertaken at a Regional scale. It is expected that the policies of this Plan are further refined in local official plan policies to address the local context.

It is the policy of the Region to promote excellence in urban design to ensure that built environments are attractive, walkable, accessible, diverse, and functional. The supporting urban design policies encourage liveable and vibrant urban areas and streets, a complete streets approach, a vibrant public realm, high quality streetscapes, attractive public spaces, and views of cultural heritage features, landmarks, and significant natural heritage features to enhance a sense of place.⁶

Further supporting the City's goal as an Attractive City, the Region encourages public art in new developments, along streetscapes, in public spaces, and in key locations along Regional Roads.

⁶ Section 6.2.1 and 6.2.1.8

It is also an objective of the Region to support the development of healthy and safe communities. Under Policy 6.3.1, the Region supports planning for all ages, incomes, and abilities, creating walkable and bikeable neighbourhoods, integrating open spaces and parks, providing space for urban agriculture, co-locating public service facilities, and encouraging the implementation of a health impact assessment during the planning process.

4.5 Niagara Falls Strategic Plan 2023-2027

In October 2023, Council approved a new **Strategic Plan**, which is intended to act as its road map throughout its terms. The Plan identifies a number of existing plans and strategies that relate to community design that should be completed in the current term of Council. This includes a new official plan (this project) and comprehensive zoning by-law, but also, as objectives:

- Optimize the use of City assets across the corporation and generate additional revenue streams.
- Implementation of the Climate Change Adaptation Plan.
- Enhance community services and facilities.
- Address the issue of abandoned and neglected properties.
- Strengthen the ecosystem by developing key assets as anchor institutions and facilitating partnerships and connections between organizations.

4.6 Niagara Falls Climate Change Adaptation Plan

The City of Niagara Falls **Climate Change Adaptation Plan** was completed in September 2023, with the objectives around minimizing the negative impacts of climate change for the wellbeing of the community. The City developed this plan to tailor climate change adaptation strategies to local circumstances and use this opportunity to plan for new actions and expand existing tools and processes for greater resilience.

*Read more about the Climate Change Adaptation Plan at **Let's Talk Niagara Falls** or in **this project's Green and Resilient City Discussion Paper**.*

One action item called for in the plan is the preparation of “Green Design Guidelines” and updated Engineering Design Standards for new development and retrofits to support Low Impact Development and green infrastructure to manage heat and flooding. Design policies can help to structure important principles in the documents and guide their use in reviewing development applications and public works. Multiple other actions exist, discussed at length in the Green and Resilient City Discussion Paper, provides additional content on this important strategic document.

4.7 Niagara Falls Recreation, Culture and Parks Plan

The City of Niagara Falls **Recreation, Culture and Parks Plan** was completed in October 2021. It contains 8 objectives to address the recreation, culture and parks needs of Niagara Falls residents, implemented by 97 individual initiatives:

- Bring the Community Together through Recreation, Culture and Parks
- Reflect Authentic Cultural Experiences and Local History
- Build and Revitalize Facilities to Reinvigorate Established Neighbourhoods
- Connect People and Places to the Outdoors
- Embrace Natural Beauty and Sustainability within our Public Open Spaces
- Contribute to Complete and Vibrant Communities
- Improve Access to Facilities and Services Across Niagara Falls
- Set the Recreation, Culture and Parks System Up for Success

There is considerable emphasis in the Plan's recommended initiatives to increase the range of programming offered. There are opportunities to ensure Our Niagara Falls Plan supports designing or retrofitting community facilities to support a diverse, broad audience. This includes identifying and supporting underrepresented populations and working to address service gaps.

Under authentic cultural experiences and local history, there are initiatives recommended to design new and existing parks in a manner that reflects the strong ties to the natural and built heritage of Niagara Falls and to incorporate culture and traditions of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour into the design of appropriate parks and public spaces to promote Reconciliation and showcase the positive contributions of these communities. A number of initiatives also relate to park design and monitoring facility and service usage to ensure increased interaction with the community.

Under connecting people and places outdoors and improving access to facilities, it is recommended to review the parkland classification and parkland acquisition opportunities—the parks hierarchy is included as part of developing Our Niagara Falls Plan. A Privately Owned Public Spaces, or POPS, policy is also recommended—design direction and acceptability strategies for POPS shall be included in Our Niagara Falls Plan. Additional park design and programming recommendations are made for specific facilities in the city. A conceptual trail network is also included in the Plan.

Under embracing natural beauty and sustainability within our public open spaces, linkages to urban forestry and the role of parks and street trees are also made, similar to the City's Climate Change Adaptation Plan summarized in Section 4.6 above.

The Plan also identifies the importance of recreation, culture and parks services in creating complete communities. More on these recommendations can be reviewed in the discussion paper on a Cultural City.

4.8 Niagara Region Model Urban Design Guidelines Update

In 2005, Niagara Region developed the **Model Urban Design Guidelines**. The Region Model Urban Design Guidelines assisted with facilitating development and redevelopment that supported the broad implementation of the Region's Smart Growth principles in both the public and private realms. The 2005 Model Urban Design Guidelines are currently being updated to respond to a change in focus for the Region of Niagara with attention placed on **complete communities, public health, resiliency, and sustainability**. These guidelines are currently being updated, with a target project completion of October 2024.

The guidelines are needed to reflect these changes and is organized under six categories:

1. Complete and Healthy Communities
2. Integration of Built Form into Public Realm
3. Sustainable Development and Mobility
4. Climate Resilience
5. Universal Design, Accessibility
6. Culture, Inclusion, Diversity, and Reconciliation

New guidelines and policies will continue to focus on both the public and private realms, looking at a variety of urban design conditions and setting high quality standards. The intent for both the Regional update and any future City-led design initiatives—the beginning of which shall be introduced in Our Niagara Falls Plan—is for the document to be user-friendly with highly graphic illustrations to support the guidelines.

Strong feedback has been received in early stages of this project to see the bar raised on aesthetic quality of development in Niagara Falls. The age and varied geographic applicability of current tools and policies is not producing the desired results. There is a strong desire for improved buildings and high-quality design outputs in development projects in the city. Our Niagara Falls Plan will provide the foundation for contemporary and exciting work and policies.

4.9 City of Niagara Falls Official Plan

POLICY REFERENCE: Part 1, Section 3.10 (Intensification Nodes); Part 2, Section 4 (Tourist Commercial); Part 2, Section 12 (Open Space); Part 3, Section 5 (Urban Design Strategy); Part4, Section 11

The following review of the current City of Niagara Falls **Official Plan** identifies a number of existing polices and tools that the City has in place for intensification, community improvement, tourism environment, urban design, and landscaping and open spaces. The Our Niagara Falls Plan will set forth new policies to support an Attractive City. To establish a set of refreshed policies, it is important to understand the existing policy framework and where the opportunities exist to enhance placemaking and urban design excellence.

Part 1, Policy 3.10 identifies the intensification nodes of Downtown and Drummondville as areas for residential intensification in order to regenerate and increase the vitality of existing commercial

areas. Urban design policies for these two nodes respect the existing context and built form character and promote development that builds on the unique features and heritage aspects of the two nodes.⁷ However, the age of these documents and development constraints call into question the continued relevancy of those policies.

Policies under Part 2, Section 4.1 support a vision for a world-class tourist destination and the enhancement of the physical setting of the natural wonder Niagara Falls. Queen Victoria Park is extended into the city to create a high-quality urban environment that is implemented through a program of greening and beautification. The upgrading of the tourist environment includes new linkages, greening of streets, streetscape improvements, and the creation of a vibrant and animated public realm.

The policies under Part 2, Section 12 are formulated to promote and enhance an attractive community environment through the development and maintenance of appropriate recreation and open space areas. The intent is to ensure that open spaces are preserved for the enjoyment of city residents.

The urban design strategy for the City is supported by policies under Part 3, Section 5 of the Official Plan. The policies provide guidance for both the public and private realms to ensure harmony between the various elements. Development that has high quality design, that is oriented to the pedestrian, and creates a safe, comfortable and convenient environment is a priority for the City. These same priorities are to be reflected in the design of streets and streetscaping.

The City also uses Community Improvement as a tool to maintain and promote an attractive and safe living and working environment through community improvement, rehabilitation and revitalization.

4.10 Community Improvement Plans

The City of Niagara Falls has five **Community Improvement Plans** in place for the following areas of the city:

- Downtown Community Improvement Plan
- Historic Drummondville Community Improvement Plan
- Lundy's Lane Community Improvement Plan
- City Wide Brownfields Community Improvement Plan
- Niagara Gateway Economic Zone Community Improvement Plan

The City will be updating the Community Improvement Plan program to consolidate and eliminate unused programs and introduce new programs to align with both Region and Council priorities. This will include a Community Improvement Plan for building affordable housing in 2024.

⁷ Part 1, Policy 3.14.1.

4.11 Urban Design Guidelines

The City has a number of urban design guidelines, some of which are corresponding guidelines for the Community Improvement Plan areas and have been established to assist with stimulating improvements and development there.

The **Historic Drummondville Conceptual Urban Design Guidelines** were prepared to encourage investment and redevelopment while preserving the unique character of the area. The guidelines are organized under the umbrella of a Heritage Theme to create a unified character and feel for the area. Guidelines focus on gateways, streetscapes, public spaces, and built forms to guide rehabilitation, renewal, and redevelopment.

The **Lundy's Lane Urban Design Guidelines** were prepared to support the Lundy's Lane Community Improvement Plan and Land Use Plan. The guidelines provide private realm built form siting and design direction, façade treatment, and streetscape guidelines for mixed-use and a range of residential development.

The City of Niagara Falls Urban Design Guidelines (2007) provide guidance on how built form is to evolve during the revitalization of the Downtown Area, with a focus on heritage and incorporating infill in an area with an existing historic and human scale character. The guidelines are organized under the following sections:

- Heritage Preservation
- Signage
- Building Heights and Massing
- Building Orientation and Site layout
- Building Façade and Ground Floor Design
- Building Rooftops and Rooflines
- Building Materials
- Building Service Areas
- Parking Areas
- Pedestrian Areas and Streetscape Elements

The guidelines provide detailed direction for all development that may occur in the Downtown in both the public and private realms. Downtown is further broken down into eight districts, to respond to the variety of built form, open space, and streetscape conditions in each block. Detailed guidelines are provided for heights and setback; frontages and ground floor uses; setbacks, open space, and access; and parking and servicing.

The **Niagara Falls Site Plan Guidelines** (2023) are a comprehensive set of guidelines that are to be implemented at the site plan stage to promote the creation of attractive, functional, safe, and environmentally sustainable development. The document provides guidelines in support of the City's urban design and sustainability objectives for low impact development; site design including building setbacks, amenity areas, building design, and drive through facilities; parking areas; lighting; signage, and landscaping. Throughout the guidelines reference is made to other City documents and guidelines that provide further guidance for development.

The **Tourist Area Design Guidelines** are a consolidation of the City’s Tourist Area Development Application Guide and its Implementation Handbook and provide guidance for architects when designing buildings in the city’s Tourist areas. The City requires an Architectural Design Brief for all buildings greater than 4 storeys in height within a tourist district. The brief is to identify how each of the design policies and objectives of the Official Plan are being met. For buildings that are over 10 storeys in height, applicants must illustrate that the development does not have any adverse impacts on surrounding uses. Studies required include sun/shadow diagrams, a pedestrian level wind study, transportation and servicing studies, and an architectural design review. The architectural design review includes building base, public realm, sky view, skyline, views and vistas, microclimate, and parking.

4.12 Queen Victoria Park Concept Master Plan and Implementation Strategy, 2018

The **Queen Victoria Park Concept Master Plan** is a 10 year plan that includes priorities and strategies for the phased implementation and achievement of park improvements. The strategies explored in the Concept Master Plan followed the four themes for future initiatives under the NPC’s Strategic Plan:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preserving and showcasing NPC’s rich heritage, culture and lifestyle. 2. Leveraging and activating NPC’s natural wonders and iconic experiences. 3. Supporting a dynamic business environment with a focus on investment | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> attraction, connection to local communities, job creation, and economic well-being. 4. Taking experiences, services, and hospitality to the next level. |
|---|--|

The Concept Master Plan developed a long-term vision for the lands and includes consistent design standards across the four theme areas and identifies opportunities for change, linkages and connectivity within the Park and with abutting lands, resource efficiencies, programming diversification, management strategies, and event spaces for a range of festivals and cultural activities.

5

Next Steps

The six Discussion Papers have been prepared as a basis for starting the process of public engagement and engaging stakeholder feedback on the path forward for Our Niagara Falls Plan. These papers are not intended to answer any questions—quite the opposite. The hope and goal for these papers is to stimulate discussion and generate ideas to consider when preparing the new Official Plan.

The project team will be preparing a “What We Heard” engagement summary report that captured the feedback received and discussion generated by this report.

The next product in this exercise is the Policy Options Report. Research generated by the project team plus the above public feedback will inform a deeper discussion on several issue areas that an official plan generally governs. The project team will be back later this year to engage on these questions and obtain more ideas to shape Our Niagara Falls Plan itself.