

## **New Zoning By-law: Report to Joint Housing and Planning & Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee**

The new Zoning by-law represents an important opportunity to build a healthy, inclusive and resilient city. Ottawa residents, like the rest of Canada, are experiencing health and well-being challenges that the health care sector alone cannot address. Chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer are leading causes of death in Ottawa,<sup>1</sup> and are linked to shared risk factors including physical inactivity, unhealthy eating and obesity. Almost 20% of Ottawa adults are affected by high blood pressure, and 20% of older adults are affected by heart disease. In addition, 58% of adults are overweight or obese. An estimated 12% of Ottawa residents 12 and older rated their mental health as fair to poor, demonstrating that people are also experiencing mental health challenges including social isolation.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, climate change and extreme weather impacts are increasingly being felt through extreme heat and cold events, storms and flooding. There was a median of 106 emergency room visits per year in Ottawa directly related to exposure to extreme heat, such as dehydration, heat exhaustion and heat stroke.<sup>3</sup> These burdens of illness are accompanied by rising health and social costs; an estimated average of \$8245 per person in health care costs is spent per year in Ontario, representing one of the biggest provincial expenditures.<sup>4</sup> All of these health impacts can be influenced by the built form.<sup>5 6 7</sup>

Ottawa Public Health (OPH) collaborated with Planning, Real Estate and Economic Development in the development of the new Official Plan, with promotion and protection of health and well-being integrated as underpinning frameworks. OPH supports the directions of the new Zoning by-law as a tool that advances healthy communities through Official Plan policy goals (2.2.4) that include:

- Encouraging the development of healthy, walkable, 15-minute neighbourhoods that feature a range of housing options, supporting services and amenities.
- Building accessible, inclusive communities, and designing for all ages.
- Promoting health through sustainability.
- Advancing human health through the decisions that are made on the built environment.

The new Zoning by-law will advance the Official Plan's healthy and inclusive communities policies in many ways. It will support the evolution of the overall walkability of neighbourhoods in the urban area and villages. Housing is central to fostering a sense of stability, security and well-being. It will help contribute to addressing Ottawa's housing supply and affordability challenges by aiming to increase peoples' access to a wider range of housing types, forms, and affordability. This includes zoning that will allow for more housing units on lots as well as more forms of housing such as multi-unit housing forms, recognizing that many kinds of housing can be compatible together. It will serve to mitigate discriminatory "people zoning", where zoning rules have the effect of excluding housing that meets the needs of particular groups of people, such as people living on a low income, in group settings, or in alternative housing forms, from communities.

Elimination of parking requirements will encourage more efficient use of land and create more comfortable walking environments. The increased densities and permissions for a mix of land uses will help bring local services and amenities closer to where people live, decreasing reliance on private vehicles. This will help make it less expensive for people to move around the city by reducing the combined cost of housing and transportation, easing financial pressures on households, and leaving more money for other essentials. Zoning for greater housing density in already built-up areas will also

help protect Ottawa’s woodlots, wetlands and agricultural and rural areas, with all their health, ecological and climate benefits.

Provisions to allow for greater land use mix and diversity in neighbourhoods, with densities to support viability of local businesses and services, create the conditions to make walking and cycling the easier daily choice. This in turn contributes not only to physical health, but also mental health, by providing opportunities for social connection and the likelihood of meeting others, which reduces feelings of isolation and loneliness. When people feel lonely or socially isolated, it can increase risk of poor health or premature death; neighbourhood design elements such as density and diversity can be a contributing protective factor.<sup>8</sup> The new Zoning by-law will also expand permissions for home-based businesses, potentially also including those selling low-risk foods. This will make it easier and more convenient to access goods and services locally, as well as provide economic opportunities for small businesses, which contribute to healthy and thriving communities.

The proposed provisions for a minimum amount of soft landscaping on lots will ensure there will be enough space for trees, helping to mitigate the urban heat island impacts of climate change, improving air quality, and giving people exposure to greenness, which contributes to well-being. Additionally, the new Zoning by-law takes into account health impacts from harmful air emissions by sensitive land use separations. Increases in density and overall walkability will also reduce the need for vehicular trips, contributing to emissions reductions. All these elements will also help create more supportive environments for active transportation, transit supportive densities, and the accompanying health and climate co-benefits.

In recognition of the significant impact the built environment has on health and well-being, OPH’s 2023-2027 Strategic Plan includes the goal to “Create the Conditions to Live Well and Thrive,” with which the new Zoning by-law is aligned. The new Zoning by-law will contribute to building healthier, more walkable 15-minute neighbourhoods that reduce inequities and create the conditions for people to thrive. OPH is providing public health expertise to PRED during the development of the new Zoning by-law and will continue to support the City in developing provisions that support population health benefits.

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<sup>1</sup> Ottawa Public Health. Morbidity, Mortality, and Quality of Life [Internet]. Ottawa (ON): Ottawa Public Health; c2024. Available from: <https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/reports-research-and-statistics/morbidity-mortality-quality-of-life.aspx#Leading-Cause-of-Death-by-Sex-and-Age>

<sup>2</sup> Ottawa Public Health. State of Ottawa’s Health: 2023 Report. Ottawa (ON): Ottawa Public Health; 2023. [STATE OF OTTAWA'S HEALTH2023 REPORT \(ottawapublichealth.ca\)](https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/STATE-OF-OTTAWA'S-HEALTH2023-REPORT)

<sup>3</sup> National Ambulatory Care Reporting System 2017-2021, IntelliHEALTH ONTARIO, Ontario Ministry of Health. ICD-10CA T67 or X30 for Ottawa residents. Date Extracted: May 29, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Canadian Institute for Health Information. How do the provinces and territories compare?. Accessed January 23, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Ige-Elegbede J, Pilkington P, Orm J, Williams B, Prestwood E, Black D, Carmichael L. Designing healthier neighbourhoods: a systematic review of the impact of the neighbourhood design on health and wellbeing. Cities & Health. 2020. DOI: 10.1080/23748834.2020.1799173

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<sup>6</sup> Tam T. The Chief Public Health Officer's report on the state of public health in Canada 2017: designing healthy living. Ottawa, ON: Public Health Agency of Canada; 2017. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-publichealth-canada/2017-designing-healthy-living.html>

<sup>7</sup> Giles-Corti B, Vernex Moudon A, Lowe M, Cerin E, Boeing G, Frumkin H, Salvo D, Foster S, Kkeeman A, Bekessy S, Herick de Sa T, Nieuwenhuijsen M, Higgs C, Hinckson E, Adlakha D, Arundel J, Liu S, Oyeyemi A, Nitvimol K, Sallis J. What next? Expanding our view of city planning and global health, and implementing and monitoring evidence-informed policy. *Urban design, transport and health*. 2022; 10: e919-926.

<sup>8</sup> Tam T. The Chief Public Health Officer's report on the state of public health in Canada 2017: designing healthy living. Ottawa, ON: Public Health Agency of Canada; 2017. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-publichealth-canada/2017-designing-healthy-living.html>