

STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY REPORT

Official Plan Update

City of Brockville, ON

December 2021



Table of Contents

Introduction..... 3

Housing 3

Maintaining, Rehabilitating and Promoting Brockville's Assets..... 4

Community-Building: Social Infrastructure, Downtown Revitalization, and Economic Development..... 5

Regional Collaboration and Partnerships with Neighboring Municipalities 6

Permissive Development Clauses and Cutting Red-Tape 7

Clear Vision and Identity for Brockville 7

Introduction

In November 2021, NPG Planning Solutions Inc. (NPG) held a series of stakeholder meetings as part of the public engagement process for the City of Brockville's Official Plan Update. NPG engaged five stakeholder groups in the City of Brockville via Zoom meetings, consisting of the Immigration Partnership, Business-Representative Organizations, the Institutional Sector, the Development Industry, and the Economic Development Sector. The purpose of these meetings was to solicit detailed information on stakeholder perspectives regarding key issues for growth, community development, and infrastructure that will inform the strategic priorities for the update to the Official Plan for the City of Brockville.

The key themes that were raised throughout these meetings were related to affordable housing, economic retention, building a vibrant and attractive community with a clear identity, downtown revitalization, fostering collaboration and partnership, and encouraging development. The feedback and discussion from these stakeholder meetings were crucial in informing the Official Plan Update's approach to addressing these critical issues. A summary of each key theme is outlined in the following sections.

Housing

All stakeholder groups have unanimously identified the supply and affordability of housing as the most crucial challenge for Brockville's future. Housing relates to livability and economic growth and retention - it is a factor that has been repeatedly identified as the biggest barrier to attracting people to live and work in Brockville, especially as related to immigration, talent acquisition, and creating a vibrant downtown. The availability of affordable housing for both international students and immigrants was noted as an immediate priority for newcomers to the community. Stakeholders have stated that the current affordable rental housing stress on students will only be further exacerbated with the expected increase of incoming international students over the next five years.

All stakeholders who participated identified the significance of housing in economic development and job retention. Business-Representative Organizations and the Institutional Sector noted the labour shortage and difficulty in acquiring talent. In particular, the lack of affordable housing is a challenge in keeping skilled workers and talent locally, acting as a challenge to recruitment and directly impacting the availability of human resources. Brockville General Hospital has noted the incredibly competitive environment of the healthcare sector and the difficulty in retaining talent as registered nurses and healthcare professionals are often offered a lucrative package to relocate elsewhere. Housing is key to attracting and retaining talent to Brockville. The lack of housing developments and underutilized properties was repeatedly pointed out as a large disconnect between demand and opportunity. The labour shortage and lack of housing directly relates to the importance of social infrastructure and community-building which is further discussed in the following section.

The supply, placement, and types of housing are crucial pieces to be considered for growth management. All stakeholder groups are in favour of infill, intensification, and redevelopment over greenfield developments. Underutilized and underdeveloped properties, particularly in the downtown, were identified as the priority for future housing development. Stakeholders were in support of infill and intensification options such as laneway housing, secondary suites, brownfield redevelopment, and

repurposing of old buildings. Proponents from the Development Industry advocated for flexible regulations related to reduced setbacks, parking relief and amenity space relief as well as flexibly to other zoning and subdivision lot requirements to support further intensification. Stakeholders from the Development Industry are supportive of intensification along the waterfront, although they have noted this should be facilitated by the removal or loosening of height restrictions. Other stakeholders have noted that while downtown intensification is favourable, it should not be done at the expense of access to the waterfront. Housing forms should ensure that waterfront vistas are not obstructed by developments. Higher density may be preferred over medium density developments in the downtown provided that the waterfront view corridor is preserved certain pedestrian nodes and gathering spaces. Additionally, while intensification is preferable, stakeholders have expressed that density should not compromise access to greenspace and community amenities for existing neighborhoods.

Accordingly, with Brockville's expected growth, stakeholders have expressed that beyond the need for retaining qualified professionals, it is highly desirable for the City to attract younger families and individuals to contribute to the City's economy, downtown, and community life. A wide variety of housing forms should be provided for - stakeholders have pointed out that people move to Brockville for waterfront access and greenspace, not to live in high-rises. An appropriate mix of housing types should consider income and demographics such as providing for 2-3 bedroom dwellings over large 4-5 bedroom dwellings.

While intensification and infill was agreed upon as the most appropriate and desirable form of housing growth, stakeholders have also acknowledged the physical constraints of Brockville. In addition to infill and intensification, stakeholders have suggested that partnership with the Township of Elizabethtown-Kitley should be considered for a greater Brockville housing market.

Maintaining, Rehabilitating and Promoting Brockville's Assets

Brockville has many existing assets that are unique to the community and are key for livability and tourism. These have been identified as the waterfront, the St. Lawrence River, the marina, the Brockville Tunnel, the Brock Trail, and the Aquatarium. Stakeholders have expressed that these assets are essential to making Brockville a great place to live and work and is key to drawing in tourists. With Brockville's strategic location between the major Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal corridor, there exists a greater opportunity for tourism by leveraging and further promoting these assets to draw tourists in. As well, a stakeholder from the Economic Development sector has expressed the need for a year-round approach to tourism rather than the current summer-oriented approach. A well-defined strategy to protect, maintain, rehabilitate, and promote these assets is crucial.

Stakeholders noted the upkeep and promotion of the waterfront, the Brock Tunnel, and Aquatarium have been positively received and would like to see these efforts extended and expanded on a larger scale to the rest of Brockville's assets. In particular, stakeholders have noted the need for improving the connection between the downtown and waterfront, as well as the north end of the Brock Tunnel. Protecting, preserving, and promoting these assets will create destination places, great parks, and a beautiful waterfront for residents and tourists alike.

Community-Building: Social Infrastructure, Downtown Revitalization, and Economic Development

The importance of building a vibrant and thriving Brockville that supports the needs of residents was a key point of discussion for the City's future direction. Stakeholders identified the support and funding of social infrastructure as a key factor in fostering both downtown revitalization as well as economic growth. The need for funding and promotion of these key services ranged from arts and culture to social services, both of which are integral to supporting the community and encouraging creativity and collaboration that will draw people to Brockville and positively impact the community.

Key services for immigrants that would require further support were noted to be translation services and grocery stores that meet the food needs of newcomers. The lack of capacity for translation services was repeatedly noted as a barrier for immigrants in seeking employment opportunities and participating in the community. In particular, there is an issue for immigrants that possess professional qualifications that are not currently recognized in Canada and must then resort to other means of employment.

Additionally, there is a limited number of grocery stores that offer a range of food types to meet the needs of immigrants. It is noted that the existing Food Basics offers a good range of international foods although there is a need for more grocery stores that offer greater food options. Grocery stores should be planned for in centralized locations that are walkable and easily accessible by transit. As newcomers often do not have access to a car or possess a driver's license, transit access to key services in the community is crucial. Access to employment opportunities is limited for those who are dependent on transit service as bus schedules do not accommodate shift working hours (e.g 6-to-6). More extensive and frequent public transportation options would be beneficial for many immigrants and long-time residents alike. Growth should similarly consider the creation of walkable and transit-supportive developments in centralized locations, with the downtown and underutilized built-up areas in Brockville identified to be the most important areas for future development. It is noted that many new immigrants who are unfamiliar with the City gravitate to the downtown due to the walkability and centralized services.

The importance of growing the community and drawing in a younger and diverse population has been repeatedly noted across different stakeholder groups, as it is considered vital for economic growth and for a thriving community. Essential factors that will contribute to downtown revitalization, community vibrancy, and economic growth are arts and culture, education, and social services. The key barriers are related to the lack of funding for arts and culture, lack of support for social services, and lack of support for an ecosystem of downtown and small businesses.

Many stakeholders have cited the lack of safety and security in the downtown as a barrier to proper revitalization and the lack of vibrancy. Homelessness in the downtown was noted as a key issue, with some stakeholders pointing to the need for funding of social services to properly address this. Furthermore, stakeholders have expressed frustration over the lack of shopping and commercial opportunities in the downtown, especially as related to accessible store hours and businesses that cater to the needs of residents and not merely tourists. There is a need for greater shopping, recreational, entertainment, and community-related opportunities that draw people to the area. Stakeholders have noted that these factors would augment proper development of the downtown, and would make

downtown living attractive or viable. There should be a focus on encouraging and supporting core businesses in the downtown with a property strategy to diversify and draw businesses to the area.

Multiple stakeholder groups have expressed the desire for a business hub and the creation of an economic development agency in the downtown similar to InvestOttawa that will support small businesses and provide a space for coworking, collaboration, resources, and initiatives. Furthermore, the St. Lawrence College has noted an interest for the creation of a Downtown Innovation Centre that will foster connection and collaboration between the college and the municipality, which presents further potential in bringing creativity and vibrancy to the downtown.

Economic growth and retention were also identified as key issues across the board for all stakeholder groups. Brockville's older population base has left a labour shortage in the community with a lack of skilled workers in its place. There is a need for skilled trades to provide for more training and employment opportunities. However, in the situation that skilled workers do exist to fill vacancies, experience indicates there is a barrier to obtaining employment. Immigrants in particular with professional qualifications that are not currently recognized in Canada must resort to other means of employment while there is a labour shortage. Talent retention is also inextricably linked to the availability of attainable housing, with the anticipated demand in labour and difficulty in recruitment exacerbated by the housing challenge. Stakeholders from the Economic Development sector have noted that economic growth should not be encouraged at the expense of arts and culture, however, as arts and culture contribute to the vibrancy and livability of the community, while providing key community services such as the Brockville Library and Brockville Museum.

In addition to this, questions were raised around whether there are adequate services and amenities available to support and attract a younger population, especially young families and young professionals. This highlights the importance of supporting and funding social infrastructure for both current and future Brockville residents, as it impacts both community life as well as economic development.

Regional Collaboration and Partnerships with Neighboring Municipalities

Numerous stakeholder groups have identified the need for Regional collaboration between neighboring municipalities to ensure that there is a coordinated approach to development and social services. With the multiple levels of coordination required from different levels of government, stakeholders have emphasized the importance in collaboration and partnership for the next Official Plan to reduce redundancy and ensure proper services are provided to meet the needs of residents. Stakeholders from the St. Lawrence Corridor Economic Development Commission have noted that with Brockville's strategic positioning between the Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal corridor and access to major highways and rail, there is opportunity for Brockville to capitalize on the logistics industry. Doing so would require collaboration and sharing agreements with the Township of Elizabethtown-Kitley regarding servicing capacity as distribution centers require large land supply. They have noted that a regional approach such as this will support the City's economic growth.

As mentioned in the previous section on housing, there is also interest expressed in collaboration with the Township of Elizabethtown-Kitley to create a greater Brockville community and meet opportunities for housing demand and housing choice given the constraints of the City's size.

Permissive Development Clauses and Cutting Red-Tape

In response to the affordable housing crisis, all stakeholder groups have noted there needs to be a reduction in red-tape to building housing. In particular, there is a need for a streamlined planning process to ensure the construction occurs quickly and with fewer delays. It has been noted that despite the demand for housing, there is a lack of developers in Brockville. Stakeholders from the Development Industry have suggested that attracting developers to Brockville will require that permissive development clauses be included in both the Official Plan and Zoning By-law, such as reducing requirements or granting greater flexibility for lot size, setbacks, and further development regulations.

Additionally, there are suggestions for a greater collaborative effort between both municipal planning staff and developers in order to ensure that development requirements are feasible and practical from both standpoints. Forefront among these development requirements are the issues of parking ratios and height restrictions, especially for developments in the downtown. Proponents of the Development Industry have advocated for lower parking ratios, especially in consideration of other modal shares as well as to encourage Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures that promote multi-modal trip options and walkability. Especially in the downtown, parking should not be required at the expense of density in order to maintain livability, walkability, and efficient land-use. Height restrictions were also noted to be an impediment for downtown development, with proponents of the Development Sector advocating for removal or flexibility in these requirements order to encourage further intensification.

Lastly, there is an expressed desire for the private sector to play a greater role in the planning process. More initiatives to encourage development such as tax incentives for brownfield redevelopment should be provided for.

Clear Vision and Identity for Brockville

In forming a strategic plan for Brockville's growth in the next 25 years, stakeholder groups have all agreed there is a need for a clear vision and identity for Brockville. Presently, stakeholders have expressed there is a lack of clear direction and identity for Brockville's future and positioning as a City. The execution of Brockville's vision while addressing the challenges that come with growth requires strong leadership, commitment, and follow-through on the strategic priorities. Partnership and collaboration between different governmental sectors, as well as a set of shared objectives and vision will be crucial for carrying out the goals of the Official Plan and ensuring the needs of current and future residents are met.