NEW TECUMSETH URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

Submitted to:
Town of New Tecumseth
Jan 2023

Prepared by:
DTAH + LURA

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This project will update and advance the current Town of New Tecumseth Urban Design Guidelines (UDG). The new UDG will contribute to the evolution of New Tecumseth communities from small towns to mid-sized urban centres.

This Needs Assessment Report summarizes the Phase 1 findings and identifies recommended guideline directions. Phase 1 included a review of recent and current development, policy review, best practices review, SWOT analysis, and public and stakeholder engagement. The outcome of Phase 1 is presented as Ten Priority Content Areas. Priority Content Areas provide recommendations for possible guidelines directions specific to New Tecumseth's current and future needs.

The next stage of work will include the development of the Annotated Table of Contents (TOC) and Urban Design Principles. The Annotated TOC will detail the expectations regarding the overall content. The Urban Design Principles will establish the foundation for guidelines to come in the final stage of the project.

1.0 RECENT DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

We toured the Town to review recent and current development projects and document existing conditions.

The full analysis of recent and current development is included in Appendix 1.
The key findings are summarized below.

Community Structure and Identity

We toured several recently constructed large-scale residential and mixed-use developments and observed:

- Limited mixing of residential building forms. While the inclusion of townhouses and single-detached building forms is common in New Tecumseth, there is limited inclusion of higher density building forms (tri and quad-plexs, low-rise walk-ups, mid-rise buildings, etc.) within developments. These building forms are known as 'the missing middle' and can assist to increase the number of units built and provide broader diversity of housing types.
- Mix of uses is included in recently constructed neighbourhoods (e.g., residential, commercial, and civic), but the different uses are horizontally dispersed and not well connected.
- Recently constructed neighbourhoods often lack a public space heart or focus. Sometimes parks and community facilities are included in the overall design, but these are located at the edges and not always as accessible as they could be.
- Streets within recently constructed neighborhoods are designed to prioritize the private automobile. This has resulted in a dominance of surface parking, wide streets, garages, and driveways lining the street, increased impermeable surfaces, and increased heat island effect.
- Recently constructed neighbourhood developments often have long blocks that facilitate vehicle operations over the needs of other users. Long blocks are typically more than 80-100m in length as they intersect with larger streets and are not entirely supportive of active transportation. Some recently constructed townhouse developments include short blocks more supportive of walking.
- Many arterial streets are designed to prioritize vehicle movement and lack sufficient infrastructure for safe, accessible, and equitable movement for pedestrians and cyclists, the most vulnerable users. These streets often include backlotted buildings – buildings with no doors and windows onto the street.
- Many recently constructed neighbourhoods lack elements to provide traffic calming or pedestrian priority. There are often large turning radii & wide pavement width conducive to higher vehicle operating speeds, pedestrian crossing facilities sometimes incomplete or missing, sidewalks are often located only one side of the street and there is an abundance of driveways that limit opportunities for on-street parking.

Site and Building Design

We toured several infill residential and mixed-use building projects and observed:

- Exterior spaces are often 'left-over' after the arrangement of buildings and parking areas and not designed to provide form or focus within their settings. This includes limited integration of low impact storm water management (SWM) and green infrastructure.

- We reviewed a Site Plan Application (SPA) for a proposed building along Main Street in Tottenham and identified several challenges for how this project related to the heritage main street context. The challenges include: no ground floor retail uses; datum line and frontage pattern treated as 'aesthetic' add-ons; lack of doors onto the street; lack of animation and sense of address alongside street; and existing mature trees being removed.

- Current zoning and policy do not include floor plate controls, which is resulting in applications for buildings above 6 storeys that are long (over 80m in length) slab buildings.
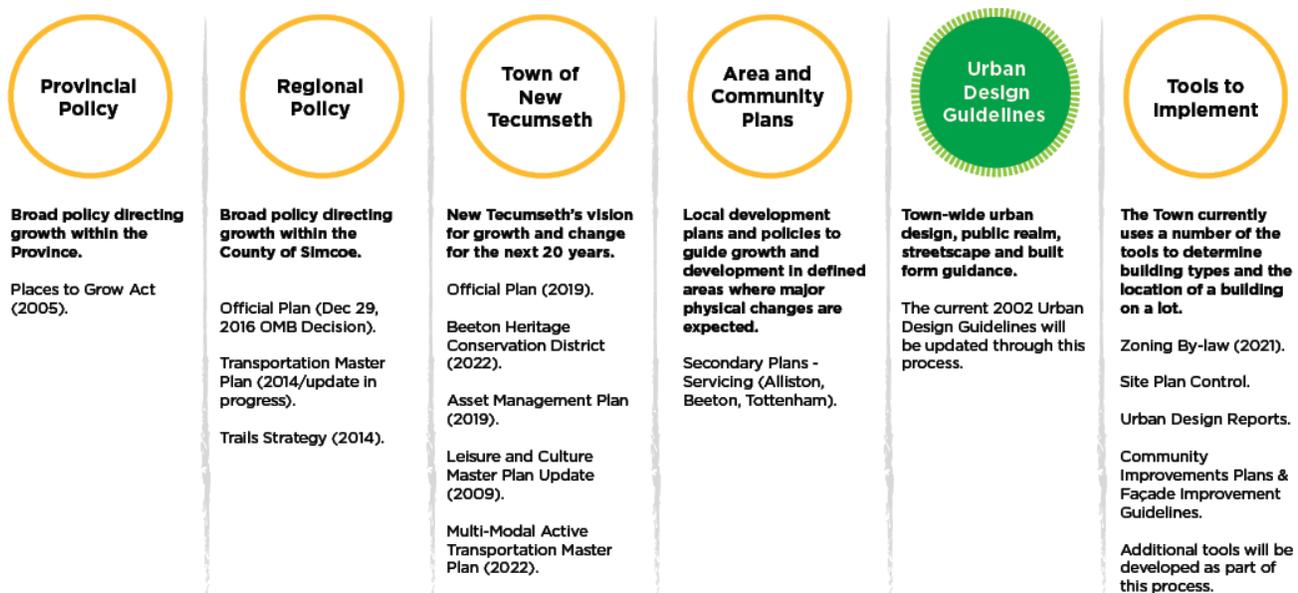

64 Queen Street South: example of residential Infill project visited during the site tour.

2.0 POLICY REVIEW

The planning policy that directs growth and change in New Tecumseth begins at a high-level (Province) and becomes more focused and detailed as it gets closer to the specific study area or site scale (Secondary Plans, Area-Specific Guidelines, Re-zoning).

The UDG will guide New Tecumseth's evolution towards the vision set out in the Official Plan and complement existing in-force area specific and secondary plans. The figure below provides an overview of the relationship of UDG to the larger policy framework. Policy at the Provincial, Regional and Municipal level defines the importance of building healthy and vibrant complete communities. Healthy complete communities are walkable neighbourhoods designed to provide safe and comfortable access to services, amenities, employment, recreation, green-space, social connection, and public transit.

Provincial Policy

Broad policy directing growth within the Province.

Places to Grow Act (2005).

Regional Policy

Broad policy directing growth within the County of Simcoe.

Official Plan (Dec 29, 2016 OMB Decision).

Transportation Master Plan (2014/update in progress).

Trails Strategy (2014).

Town of New Tecumseth

New Tecumseth's vision for growth and change for the next 20 years.

Official Plan (2019).

Beeton Heritage Conservation District (2022).

Asset Management Plan (2019).

Leisure and Culture Master Plan Update (2009).

Multi-Modal Active Transportation Master Plan (2022).

Area and Community Plans

Local development plans and policies to guide growth and development in defined areas where major physical changes are expected.

Secondary Plans - Servicing (Alliston, Beeton, Tottenham).

Urban Design Guidelines

Town-wide urban design, public realm, streetscape and built form guidance.

The current 2002 Urban Design Guidelines will be updated through this process.

Tools to Implement

The Town currently uses a number of the tools to determine building types and the location of a building on a lot.

Zoning By-law (2021).

Site Plan Control.

Urban Design Reports.

Community Improvements Plans & Façade Improvement Guidelines.

Additional tools will be developed as part of this process.

Planning and policy context: overview of the relationship of Urban Design Guidelines to the planning policy framework.

3.0 BEST PRACTICES REVIEW

The project team reviewed eleven (11) urban design guides and one (1) paper to learn best practices and inform the New Tecumseth Urban Design Guide.

The graphic below highlights the key lessons learned from the Best Practices Review. The full Best Practices Review is included in Appendix 2.
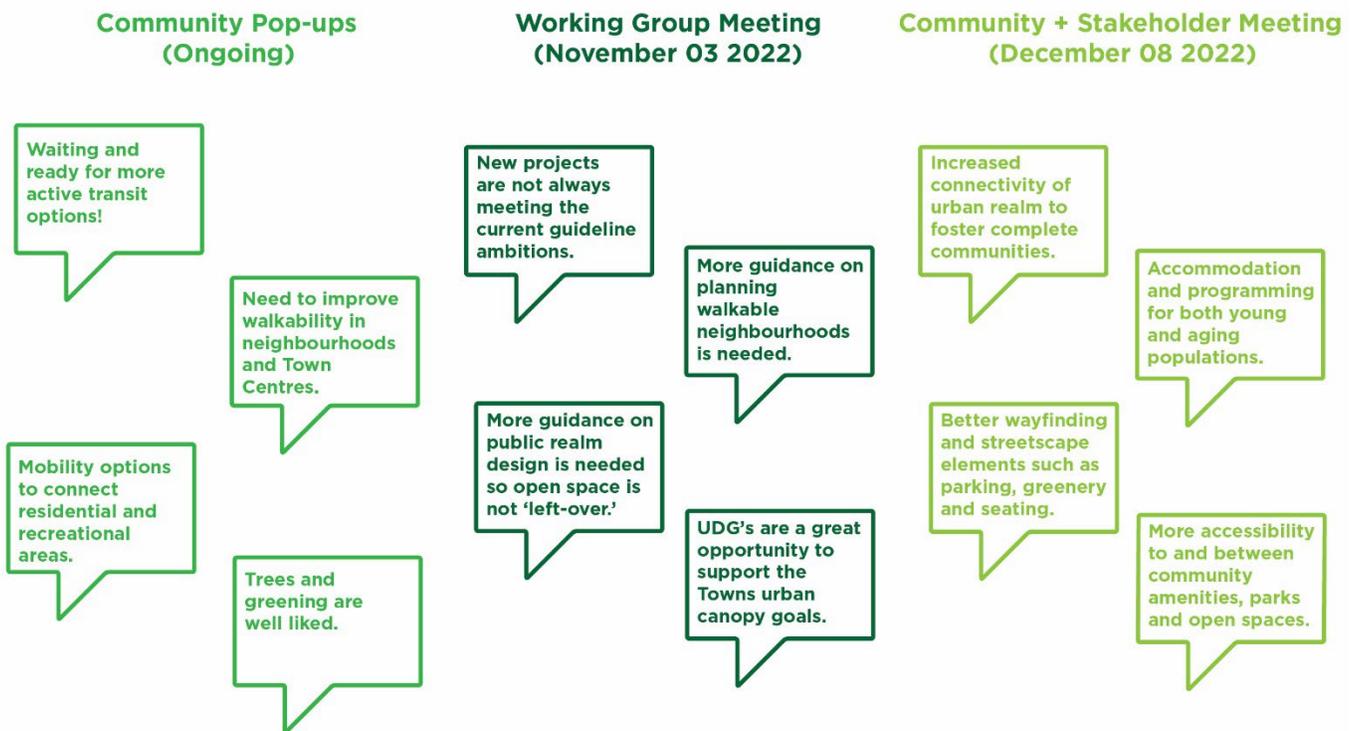
Simple	Flexible	Promotes Design Excellence	Advances the Town Vision
Clear language and graphics. Speaks to multiple audiences.	Formatted to 'use'. A reference document first. Easy to navigate and update.	Demonstrate how to make the best possible built environment for New Tecumseth.	Show how to achieve the vision, goals and objectives defined by the Official Plan and other policies.

Characteristics of a successful Urban Design Guide.

4.0 WHAT WE'VE HEARD (SO FAR)

Community pop-ups, a Working Group Meeting, a Stakeholder Group Meeting, and a Community Open House was held in Phase 1 of the Project.

A summary of what we have heard from the various engagement activities is included below. Refer to Appendix 3 for findings from the stakeholder and public meeting.

Community Pop-ups (Ongoing)

Waiting and ready for more active transit options!

Need to improve walkability in neighbourhoods and Town Centres.

Mobility options to connect residential and recreational areas.

Trees and greening are well liked.

Working Group Meeting (November 03 2022)

New projects are not always meeting the current guideline ambitions.

More guidance on planning walkable neighbourhoods is needed.

More guidance on public realm design is needed so open space is not 'left-over.'

UDG's are a great opportunity to support the Towns urban canopy goals.

Community + Stakeholder Meeting (December 08 2022)

Increased connectivity of urban realm to foster complete communities.

Accommodation and programming for both young and aging populations.

Better wayfinding and streetscape elements such as parking, greenery and seating.

More accessibility to and between community amenities, parks and open spaces.

What we've heard (so far).

5.0 SWOT

Building upon the recent development analysis, policy review and what we've heard, we completed a SWOT analysis to categorize the findings as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Theme	Strengths	Weakness	Guideline Opportunities	Threats
Official Plan Policy Vision: 'Healthy Complete Communities'	• Clearly defined 'urban settlement' pattern defining where growth is to be located. • Healthy Complete Communities Vision is clearly articulated in the OP.	• Lower density development resulting in limited guidance for creating more compact, walkable forms of development. • Underdeveloped transit.	• Clarify and cross-reference policy goals and how related to intended guideline outcomes.	• Delayed investment in transit. • Established practices by existing developers.
Neighbourhood Design & Site Design	• Large sites provide opportunities for comprehensive development.	• Auto-oriented streets and blocks. • Missed connections in recent development (connections to retail, parks and open spaces and community amenities, etc.). • Missed opportunities for creating focal points in recent development. • Open spaces often 'left-over.' • Surface parking dominance. • Integration of low impact storm water management (SWM) and green infrastructure (GI).	• Include site organization principles and guidelines. • Reinforce the need for areas/communities to be as part of larger systems. • Reinforce the need for pedestrian and cycling connections. • Guidelines for GI.	• Established practices by existing developers. • Surface parking driving site design decisions. • Pre-conceived notion that SWM and GI cost more.
Building Design	• Wide range of existing and planned housing types and building forms in New Tecumseth. • Recently updated Zoning By-law speaks to higher density forms anticipated throughout Town.	• Recent development with little animation of the street and public realm. • Limited controls for high-rise buildings. i.e. no max floor plate size. • Limited controls for long buildings.	• High-rise building definition and guidelines.	• Established practices by existing developers. • Surface parking driving site design decisions • Misunderstanding that good architecture is solely 'aesthetics' and not the overall design.
Street Design	• Development provides opportunities to introduce complete streets. • Temporary patio program, recent road diet projects and CS retrofits (i.e. bump-outs etc.) implemented by the Town.	• Auto-oriented street design. • Current modal split.	• Integration of SWM and GI. • Retrofit opportunities. • Road diets. • Traffic calming (staff noted a specific need for traffic calming in the downtowns). • Integration of AT. • Curbside management.	• Multiple ownership. I.e. (Province, Region, Town) • Private vs. public streets. • Established practices by existing developers.
Main Street Character	• Unique Main Street within each Settlement Area – good 'urban bones.'	• Backs of the buildings lack animation, are not being maintained or improved.	• Guidelines to reinforce consistent form and character.	• Main Street as thoroughfare for traffic, including large trucks.

Theme	Strengths	Weakness	Guideline Opportunities	Threats
	• Function as 'Town centre cores' with a strong identity. • Walkable. • Sufficient right-of-way width to accommodate a range of streetscape elements. • Several buildings have recently undergone rehabilitation/facade improvement.	• Impact of garbage and recycling pick-up. • Existing condition and quality of the public realm. • Immediately surrounding residential neighbourhoods are low density.	• Address front and backs of Main Street buildings. • Consider tactical uses at backs of building. I.e. farmers' market, pop-up shops, seasonal patios, greening. • Streetscape revitalization. • Celebrate culture and heritage in Town Centres.	
Heritage	• Existing heritage Buildings and Heritage Conservation District.	• Heritage seen as aesthetic.	• Adaptive reuse guidelines. • Reinforce how to integrate "old" with "new." • Celebrate culture and heritage in Town Centres.	• Heritage seen as aesthetic
Implementing high quality urban design	• The 2002 Urban Design Guidelines UDGs embody concepts of growth, change and flexibility.	• 2002 UDGs include basic principles, but do not provide sufficient detail in some areas. Some areas are overly prescriptive. • The 2002 UDGs focus is on individual buildings and not on the public realm. • The 2002 UDGs have limited guidance on sustainability and equity. • The 2002 UDGs are written for the practitioner and sometimes are too abstract/jargony for Council and the public.	• See best practices review. • Include all departments in the process of developing the Guide to ensure recommendations are 'doable' from an operational and cost perspective.	• Misunderstanding that good design costs more. • Political or community resistance to change. • Political interference in development review resulting in projects that don't always meet the UDG ambitions. • Managing public expectations on what the UDGs will and will not do. • Culture change is needed to shift the focus from the car to walkability. • Education and workshopping is needed to build community and council support for the UDGs

6.0 PRIORITY CONTENT AREAS

Ten Priority Content Areas will help to provide the best possible direction for the UDG, and make specific to New Tecumseth's current and future needs.

Reinforce, Elaborate and Supplement Policy. The UDG is a tool to help achieve the Official Plan's goals in the areas of design and intensification. It will provide guidance as to "how" to achieve the desirable outcomes - great streets, quality buildings, and memorable places. The UDG will emphasize how urban design will contribute to the overarching Town goal of building healthy complete communities. We suggest that the UDG is structured to allow for quick reference to current policy or relevant resources and additional guidance.

Public Realm First. The best UDGs place the highest importance on how a building—or collection of buildings—influences the character and quality of the spaces in-between, namely the public realm. The way in which a site is organized, is an important starting point in a project's urban design quality. We see building design, open space design, streetscape design, and environmentally friendly aspects as critical components in making great urban places in New Tecumseth. Each of these aspects will include high-level principles to inform development, as well as general and typology-specific guidelines. Two of the biggest take-aways from our existing conditions review was that urban design in New Tecumseth can improve with simple site organization adjustments such as better connections between different land uses (residential, commercial, civic, park, etc.); including a 'focal point' in the neighourhood (e.g. community facilities, schools, parks, urban squares, retail areas, etc); and requiring buildings to address and animate streets and parks.

Principle Based Approach. At the next stage of the process, we will collectively establish Urban Design Principles to provide a foundation for guideline development. Generating and gaining consensus on these Principles with the various partners and stakeholders is a primary step of the Education and Awareness Campaign. Our experience on several similar urban design guideline and master planning projects is that common ground and agreement can be found on Principles within groups that may have widely divergent perspectives and objectives. Such agreement then provides common ground for subsequent definition of prescription, metrics, or performance measures.

Scalability. The Guide will address redevelopment at variety of scales, including both the site scale (single building, individual or multiple parcels) and neighborhood scale (sites with multiple buildings on a single large parcel or multiple parcels). All scales of development need to contribute to making healthy complete communities in New Tecumseth. It is imperative that all projects extend the public realm and integrate into the life of the Town. We suggest including a series of guidelines that address neighbourhood structuring elements such as the open space system, street and transit networks, edge conditions, streetscape character, building placement and patterns of land use. Together, these elements need to be

combined to reinforce the overall Town structure and sense of place.

Equity. Accessibility is a fundamental measure of equity, and the built environment can have a strong impact on the extent and nature of accessibility of a place. How can the UDG take this one step further? We know that creating a healthier Town for those most in need leads to a healthier Town for all. Our Best Practice Review and recent research has identified sources that will be helpful, including: the Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design (The World Bank, 2020); The Inclusive Healthy Places Framework (Gehl Institute, 2016); Growing Up: Planning for Children in New Vertical Communities (City of Toronto, 2020); amongst others, The Guide will include high-level equity principles to inform development, as well as guidance related to general and typology-specific guidelines, where possible.

Greater Emphasis on Climate Responses. To combat climate risks, urban design in new Tecumseth must increasingly be driven by human health and well-being and sustainable design that can support vibrant urban settings. The UDG update will include sustainability guidelines for buildings, landscapes, and streetscape design. This will include cross reference to other tools and identifying how climate responses can reinforce sense of place. How people move through New Tecumseth matters enormously to emissions and human health and happiness. Neighborhood density, ease of multimodal transit, space for varying nonvehicular traffic, and pollution must all be considered. The UDG will include guidance for retrofitting existing car-driven infrastructure and prioritizing micro-mobility, safety, and walkable neighborhoods.

The Elephant in the Room – Better Integration of Parking Within the Design Concept. Car parking takes up large amounts of urban space. A parking spot occupies at least 13 square metres – this can increase to 30 square metres including accessways. With intensification and redevelopment comes the opportunity to reconsider the role of the private automobile and the space it consumes. Where and how cars are parked is a major factor in the quality of a development. We will include building typologies and site plan organization guidance that balance the need for vehicle parking with the requirements of an active urban environment. Cycle parking is also important. Its smaller space requirements are easy to accommodate but often overlooked.

The Missing Middle. The Missing middle refers to multi-unit housing that falls between single detached homes and tall apartment buildings. It includes row housing, low rise apartments, mid-rise apartments and triplexes/fourplexes, etc. These will be new building forms in parts of New Tecumseth so this Guide will need to speak about opportunities. The shape and size of the lot is one of the key determinants of the type of 'missing middle' housing that can be achieved on a given property within New Tecumseth. The UDG will include guidance on how different contexts lend themselves towards different 'missing middle' building types.

Mitigate the Impact of Long + Tall Buildings. Town staff are seeing proposals for buildings that are taller and longer than anything built yet to date in New Tecumseth. In our policy review we noted that there is currently limited policy to control floor plate sizes and the length of buildings.

- **Tall Buildings.** The redevelopment and intensification of New Tecumseth must acknowledge and plan for the inclusion of tall buildings, at the same time ensuring that tall buildings be designed as fully integrated parts of the townscape and urban fabric of the neighbourhoods. The impact of tall buildings on the existing low-rise residential areas and open spaces should be minimized. Height limits should include a transitional or "angular" plane that is the lowest towards the low-rise neighbourhoods and increases in height with the distance from the existing low-rise area. Basic design guidelines are also required to control the number, spacing and floor plate size of tall buildings.

- **Long Buildings**. Redevelopment needs to avoid oversized blocks and long continuous buildings. This is a risk throughout New Tecumseth, but particularly within existing auto-related commercial strip mall contexts where there are large parcels such as 124-146 Young Street (Allison), which we reviewed as part of our existing conditions analysis. Long blocks are typically more than 80-100m in length and are not supportive of walking and active transportation. Urban block scale and connectivity are fundamental components to create walkable communities that offer choice. To mitigate the risk of long blocks and long buildings we recommend inclusion of the following design guidelines:
    - Requirements for one or more mid-block street or pedestrian routes to subdivide larger sites.
    - Limitations on block sizes.
    - Requirements for buildings over 80m in length to include components that are set back and/or of different heights to visually break-up the perceived length.

Prescription vs. Flexibility. The primary purpose of the UDG is to influence the making of safe, functional, memorable, and attractive places. We suggest that the UDG does not prescribe building or landscape 'style'. Rather, we suggest it focus on how the design of the built environments can contribute to the public realm. The Guide will provide sufficient design flexibility to allow a project to appropriately respond to its immediate context and the planning policy for the area. From an urban design perspective, most building types should adhere to a similar set of overall principles and objectives with additional specific principles applied to each building type to provide greater detail were warranted.