

Our Orillia

Official Plan Review

Policy Directions Report

December 2024



Table of Contents

1	Introduction	3
1.1	Report Overview	3
1.2	What is Our Orillia OPR Project?	3
2	Vision & Guiding Principles	5
3	Project Drivers: Key Updates	7
3.1	Planning Act	7
3.2	Provincial Planning Statement, 2024	8
4	What We've Heard So Far	12
4.1	Our Approach	12
4.2	A Look Back at Stage 1 Engagement	12
4.3	Stage 2 Engagement	13
4.4	Next Steps on Engagement	13
5	Policy Directions	14
5.1	Growing Up, Nurturing Neighbourhoods, and Improving Access to Housing	14
5.2	Planning for a Greener Future: Climate Change and Resiliency	27
5.3	Planning for a Greener Future: Natural Heritage System Evaluation	31
6	Summary and Next Steps	35

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Detailed Issues & Options Survey Input

1 Introduction

1.1 Report Overview

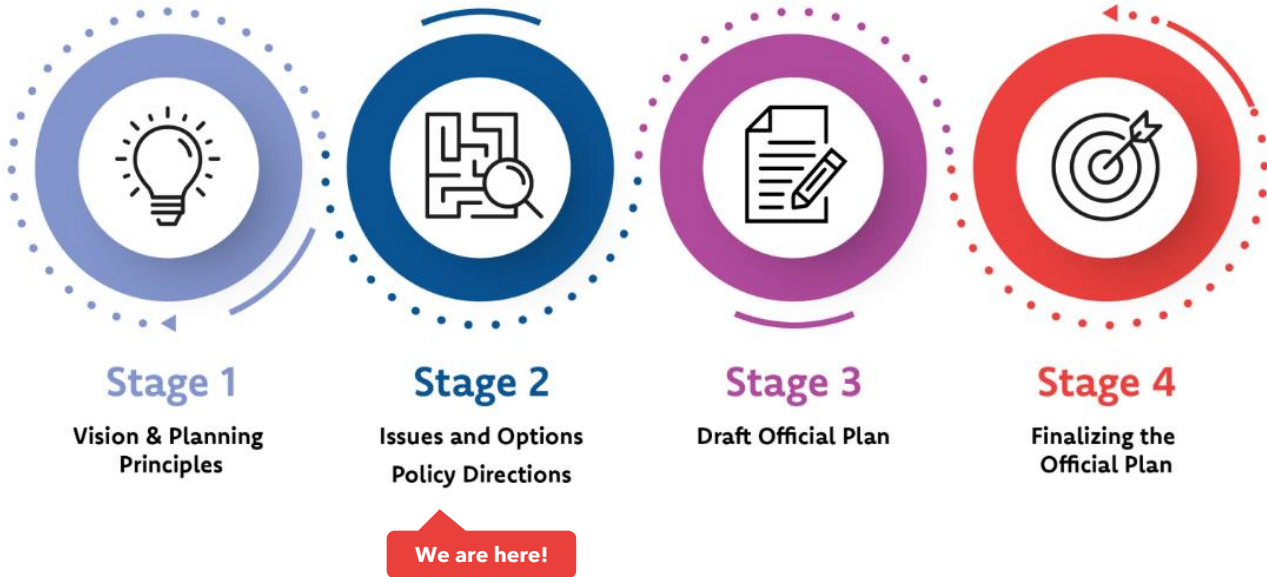
The purpose of this Policy Directions Report is to consolidate all the work completed so far on the Our Orillia Official Plan Review (Our Orillia OPR) project and outline clear and concise directions to be implemented in the City’s new Official Plan. These directions will serve to implement the Vision and Guiding Principles developed in Stage 1 of the project and will act as a road map for the drafting of the policies and schedules of the new Official Plan.

- Section 2 of the Report revisits key policy drivers for the new Official Plan, looking particularly at the changes that have occurred during Phase 2 of the project, with the enactment of a new Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 and the revocation of the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020 and Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.
- Section 3 of the Report summarizes the approach to engagement on the Our Orillia OPR project and the activities that have been completed in the first two Stages of the project.
- Section 4 presents the final Vision and Made in Orillia Guiding Principles for the new Official Plan (which received Council’s endorsement at its March 25, 2024 meeting), which will be implemented through the Policy Directions.
- Section 5 lays out the policy directions for the new Official Plan. These directions progress the recommendations and options presented earlier in Stage 2 through the five Issues and Options reports, considering community feedback and changes to Provincial policy. These are high-level summaries of the major thrusts of the new Official Plan – more details on the rationale and analysis for the policy directions can be found in the Issues and Options reports and the City Moves Report released in Stage 1 of the project.
- Section 6 explains the next steps for the Our Orillia OPR project.

1.2 What is Our Orillia OPR Project?

Over the last 13 years, Orillia’s Official Plan has guided growth and development in the community since its approval by the Province in 2011. In recent years, as the City continues to grow and change, the current Official Plan has become out of date with Provincial and city policies, legislation, and plans. The Our Orillia Official Plan Review was initiated to create a modern, forward-looking, and strategic Official Plan that is driven by community input. Our Orillia OPR is a multi-year project that began in Summer 2023 and is comprised of four stages of work, as shown below. Each stage will include opportunities for the public and stakeholders to provide input.

As part of the Our Orillia OPR Project, the City is undertaking a detailed review of its natural heritage system and developing new floodplain mapping. These concurrent technical tasks will help the City respond to a changing climate and protect what is important to the community. The **Natural Heritage System Evaluation** will establish new policies and mapping that protect important natural areas, such as woodlands and wetlands. The **Floodplain Mapping Study** will inform policy and mapping updates to protect areas from future flooding risk along Mill Creek and Ben’s Ditch.



Stage 1 | Vision & Planning Principles

- Develop a new Made-in-Orillia vision and guiding principles
- Document background information and issues related to key City Moves and project drivers
- Generate ideas about planning issues, opportunities, and challenges with the community
- Generate project awareness

Stage 2 | Issues, Options, and Policy Directions (Current Stage)

- Identify specific options and recommendations to help manage change and respond to City Moves
- Develop policy directions based on community input
- Prepare a roadmap to writing a new Official Plan

Stage 3 | Draft Official Plan

- Prepare and release first draft of the new Official Plan
- Undertake preliminary consultation on the draft new Official Plan

Stage 4 | Finalizing the Official Plan

- Refine the draft Official Plan based on comments and collect input on a revised draft through the statutory consultation process
- Present the new Official Plan for Council adoption and submission for Provincial approval

2 Vision & Guiding Principles

As noted in Section 3 of this Report, in Stage 1 of the Our Orillia Official Plan Review involved the development of a Vision and Made-in-Orillia Guiding Principles for the new Official Plan. The Vision statement as written in the City's existing Official Plan, requires updating to keep up with the needs of a growing and changing Orillia. The refreshed Vision reflects what was heard from the community, aligns with City priorities, and provides an aspirational statement for Orillia to the year 2051.

The Vision and Made-in-Orillia Guiding Principles were formulated from a culmination of community input from 60 people who attended the Vision Workshop on November 21, 2023, who provided over 145 written comments, together with 196 people who responded to the Visioning Survey released in Fall of 2023.

New Our Orillia Vision Statement

"Orillia thrives as a complete community with unique hometown character, linked by commitments to civic and environmental stewardship and providing opportunities for all. With a vibrant Downtown, situated along the Trent-Severn Waterway, we celebrate our culture and heritage in every season."



Made-in-Orillia Guiding Principles

The policy directions for the new Official Plan which are detailed in Section 5 of this Report are intended to implement the Made-in-Orillia guiding principles listed below. These Principles reflect the complexity of challenges in the City and the common themes between issues. Through consultation with the community and Indigenous nations, feedback was received that cross-cutting themes, such as inclusion, resilience, and reconciliation, be reflected throughout the Plan and all principles. For instance, planning for resiliency requires policy direction related to areas such as the natural heritage system, climate adaptation and mitigation, parks, neighbourhoods, and natural hazards.

Overarching Themes



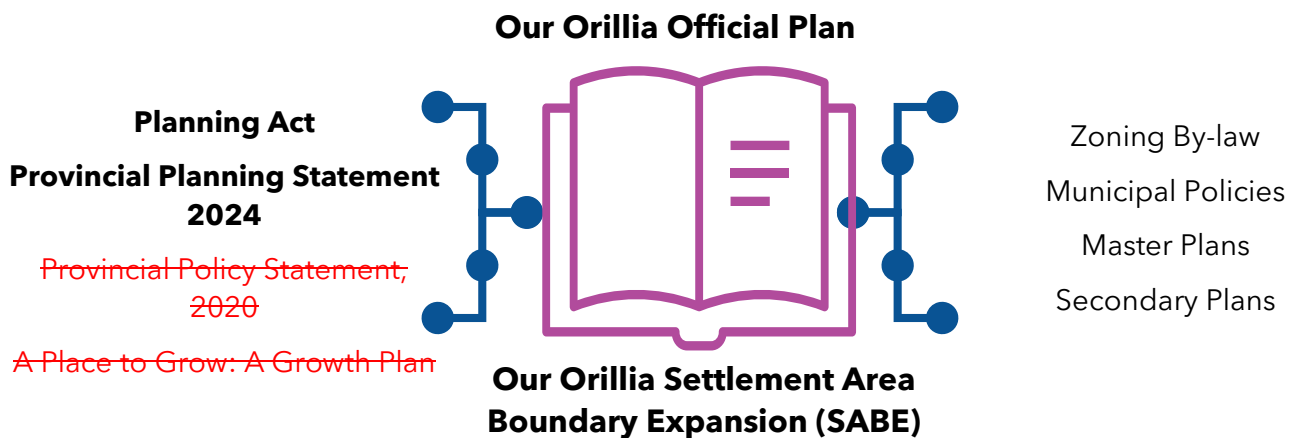
Made-in-Orillia Guiding Principles

Complete Community	Land Use, Parks, Retail, Community Services, Infill & Intensification, Mixed-Use, Urban Design, Public Realm
Sustainability & Stewardship	Climate Action, Natural Heritage System, Natural Hazards, Waterfront, Green Development, Energy
Integrated Mobility & Infrastructure	Active Transportation, Trails, Transit, Complete & Safe Streets, Emerging Mobility Technologies, Infrastructure
Safe & Affordable Housing	Affordable Housing, Attainable Housing, Supportive Housing & Homelessness, Age-Friendly Housing, Student Housing
Strong & Diverse Economy	Economic Development & Diversification, Education & Training
Wellness & Creativity	Arts & Culture, Heritage, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

3 Project Drivers: Key Updates

The City’s existing Official Plan was approved by the Province in 2011. As a single-tier municipality, the City of Orillia must update its Official Plan to be consistent with and conform to Provincial legislation, policies, and plans. Since 2011, the Provincial planning framework has evolved and there is a need to reflect these changes in the Official Plan. Separate from the Our Orillia OPR Project, the City has undertaken several studies, Master Plans, and initiatives that will inform updates to the Official Plan. These Provincial and municipal documents are key project drivers.

Once the City’s new Official Plan is in place, it will then inform other municipal policies, by-laws, and procedures. An example of this relation between Provincial policy, the Official Plan, and implementing documents is illustrated below, now updated to reflect the change in Provincial planning policy direction as of October 20th, 2024.



3.1 Planning Act

The *Planning Act* is the primary legislation for land use planning in the Province of Ontario and provides the legal basis for, among other things, the preparation and updating of municipal official plans. Much of what the *Planning Act* governs regarding official plans is procedural, such as timelines for approval and consultation requirements, but it also prescribes certain components that must be incorporated into an Official Plan. All planning decisions, including the preparation and update to an Official Plan, must be consistent with the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024, shall conform to the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, and shall have regard for a list of Provincial interests. These interests include but are not limited to the protection of natural heritage and cultural heritage resources; adequate and efficient provision and use of water, transportation, and energy infrastructure; accessibility; and adequate supply of employment and housing. The *Planning Act* has been amended several times through different pieces of legislation. These key changes include the following:

- Smart Growth for our Communities Act, 2015 (Bill 73);
- Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act, 2017 (Bill 139);
- More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019 (Bill 108);

- COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020 (Bill 197);
- Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act, 2021 (Bill 257);
- Supporting People and Businesses Act, 2021 (Bill 13);
- More Homes for Everyone Act, 2022 (Bill 109);
- More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022 (Bill 23);
- Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act, 2023 (Bill 97); and
- Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024 (Bill 185).

Since 2011, the City has undertaken several housekeeping amendments to the Official Plan to respond to evolving *Planning Act* changes. Our Orillia OPR project will evaluate the City’s Official Plan policies to ensure conformity with the *Planning Act*.

3.2 Provincial Planning Statement, 2024

On October 20, 2024, the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS, 2020) and the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan) were revoked and replaced with a new Provincial Planning Statement (PPS, 2024). The PPS, 2024 carries forward much of the policy direction of the former Provincial Policy Statement, while only certain policies of the Growth Plan have been carried forward. As a policy statement issued under Section 3 of the *Planning Act*, all planning decisions and direction made by Council, including the policies of the new Official Plan, must be consistent with the PPS, 2024.

The PPS, 2024 has been enacted mid-stream during this Official Plan Review. Earlier work on the project, including the City Moves Report and Issues and Options Reports, summarized the key directions of the PPS, 2020 and the Growth Plan, but it is necessary to consider the major changes arising from their revocation and the enactment of the PPS, 2024. Where the previous policy regime has been carried forward into the PPS, 2024 (e.g., around climate change or natural heritage), the summarization of Provincial direction in the previous reports mentioned above has been used to inform the policy directions in Section 5 of this Report.



3.2.1 Forecasting and Land Supply

While the Growth Plan and its accompanying growth forecasts have been repealed, municipalities may continue to use those forecasts for long-term planning. In the case of Orillia, these forecasts are 49,000 people and 26,000 jobs to the 2051 horizon. The PPS, 2024 directs that municipalities must set aside sufficient lands to accommodate a range of uses for a horizon of 20 years, but not more than 30 years –

this is a change from the PPS, 2020, which set the same requirement for a horizon of 25 years but did not set an upper limit. Land supply requirements for housing (a 15-year supply of land designated for residential uses, and a 3-year supply of serviced land) remain unchanged.

Considerations for the New Official Plan

- Orillia will continue to rely on previous Provincial guidance provided by the Growth Plan to plan for a minimum population of 49,000 people and a minimum employment of 26,000 jobs to the year 2051.

3.2.2 Settlement Areas, Built-up Areas, and Designated Growth Areas (greenfield areas)

Several major changes have been made to the policy framework for Settlement Areas in the PPS, 2024, as well as arising from the revocation of the Growth Plan. The PPS, 2024 carries forward the concept of Settlement Areas consisting of existing development (built-up areas) and undeveloped lands designated for growth (designated growth areas, what would typically be called greenfield areas). The Growth Plan concept of the Built-up Area, which was fixed at 2006 levels, lands outside of which were termed Designated Greenfield Areas, has been removed. The outcome of this removal is that the Growth Plan version of intensification, which set minimum targets for growth to occur in the Built-up Area, along with minimum density targets for Designated Greenfield Areas, has now been removed. Municipalities, including Orillia, are required to set their own minimum growth targets for built-up areas, and are not required to meet minimum density target for designated growth/greenfield areas.

Another major change is the removal of the requirement for changes to Settlement Area Boundary Expansions (SABE) to occur through Municipal Comprehensive Reviews of Official Plans. Settlement Area Boundary Expansions are subject to certain criteria carried forward from the revoked PPS, 2020 and Growth Plan. Notably, however, municipalities are no longer required to demonstrate that growth to be accommodated by Settlement Area Boundary Expansion cannot be accommodated through intensification.

Considerations for the New Official Plan

- The City must establish minimum growth targets for the built-up areas of the City.
- Criteria and process for future Settlement Area Boundary Expansions should be clearly established in the new Official Plan.

3.2.3 Strategic Growth Areas and Intensification

The concept of Strategic Growth Areas (SGAs) has been carried forward from the Growth Plan into the PPS, 2024. Strategic Growth Areas is the new term for Intensification Areas. Municipalities are encouraged to identify these areas for significant population and/or employment growth in built-up areas, and as locations for investment in community services, education, commercial, recreational, and cultural uses. Much of this policy guidance is carried forward from the Growth Plan, however a notable addition is the encouragement by the PPS, 2024 for planning authorities to support redevelopment of

commercially designated retail lands (i.e. underutilized shopping malls and plazas) to support mixed-use residential.

Considerations for the New Official Plan

- The City can establish Strategic Growth Areas as the locations of planned mixed-use intensification (both inclusive of appropriate residential and non-residential uses). This direction for the new Official Plan is already being developed through the Official Plan Review.

3.2.4 Major Transit Station Areas

Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs) are another Growth Plan concept which has been carried forward into the PPS, 2024, which was previously part of the Growth Plan). Technically a subset of Strategic Growth Areas, MTSAs are required to be delineated on higher order transit corridors (i.e., transit (bus, rail, light-rail) that operates partially or wholly in its own right-of-way), and the PPS, 2024 carries forward minimum density requirements to be applied to different types of MTSA. A new policy, however, allows for municipalities to identify MTSAs on transit corridors which would not be considered higher-order, which requires the following:

- Delineation of the specific boundaries of the MTSA; and
- Establishment of a minimum density target for the MTSA in persons and jobs per hectare in the municipality’s Official Plan.

While the PPS, 2024 permits the establishment of MTSAs not on higher-order transit corridors, Section 16(15) of the *Planning Act* continues to define **Protected** Major Transit Station Areas (PMTSAs) as being on higher-order transit corridors. Thus, it can be interpreted that the City cannot identify a PMTSA anywhere in Orillia and cannot unlock the inclusionary zoning tool currently only permitted to be applied in PMTSAs. However, the City can identify an area within its boundary that is identified as an MTSA as part of its SGAs and not a PMTSA, which would still consider this area, to be identified in future through the current Our Orillia OPR process, as an area of significant and appropriate intensification to support the future presence of higher-order transit.

Considerations for the New Official Plan

- The City can establish one or more Major Transit Station Areas by delineating boundaries and setting a minimum density target.

3.2.5 Employment Areas

One of the most impactful changes in the PPS, 2024 from the previous policy regime under the PPS, 2020 and the Growth Plan is the re-defining of Employment Areas. Where both previous documents defined Employment Areas as “areas designated in an official plan for clusters of business and economic activities including, but not limited to, manufacturing, warehousing, offices, and associated

retail and ancillary facilities”, the PPS, 2024 explicitly excludes retail and office uses not associated with a manufacturing use from the definition of Employment Areas. This new definition was enshrined in Section 1 of the *Planning Act* via Bill 185 (*Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024*), although a new Section 1.1 of the *Planning Act* permits the continuation of uses not compatible with the new definition, provided they were legally existing as of October 20, 2024.

Employment Areas are still subject to the same conversion criteria as under the previous framework; however, conversions may occur at any time, not just during a Municipal Comprehensive Review. Thus, the impact of the change in the definition of Employment Area is that any lands permitting office, retail or other commercial uses will not be subject to the same tests for re-designation to mixed or residential uses.

Considerations for the New Official Plan

- Based on the new definition of Employment Area in the PPS, 2024, and the *Planning Act*, the City must update the employment land use framework in its new Official Plan to clearly delineate where Employment Areas as defined by the Province are located.

4 What We've Heard So Far

4.1 Our Approach

Engagement and consultation with Orillia residents are at the front and centre of Our Orillia OPR project and a commitment has been made to report on what has been heard from the community throughout the project. Engaging with residents is fundamental to establishing, and implementing, a Made-in-Orillia approach to planning. Following each consultation event, a summary of commentary and feedback has been provided along with an explanation of how input has shaped the work completed to-date.

4.2 A Look Back at Stage 1 Engagement

Stage 1 engagement provided opportunities for the community to share their input and ideas to craft a Made-in-Orillia vision and guiding principles for Our Orillia. Stage 1 also raised awareness of the project and collected input on issues and opportunities that could be addresses through the subsequent stages. Engagement and consultation activities are described in Table 1 below.

The primary goal of Stage 1 engagement was to develop the Made-in-Orillia Vision and Guiding Principles that will underpin Our Orillia OPR project. By establishing this foundation in Stage 1, the vision and guiding principles have been formalized (refer to Section 2.0 of this report) and used to guide the enclosed policy directions.

Table 1: Summary of Stage 1 Engagement Milestones

Meeting/Event	Date	Purpose
Special Meeting of Council	Oct. 16, 2023	Fulfill <i>Planning Act</i> requirement and formally launch Our Orillia. Notice was first issued on Sept. 25, 2023.
Meeting with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH)	Oct. 19, 2023	Introduce project to MMAH and seek preliminary input.
Launch of Online Survey	Oct. 25, 2023	Consult with the community on the Made-in-Orillia Vision and Guiding Principles.
Meeting with Chippewas of Rama First Nation	Oct. 27, 2023	Introduce Our Orillia, outline process, and begin initial dialogue.
Environmental Advisory Committee Meeting	Nov. 21, 2023	Seek input on the natural heritage system evaluation, climate change policies, and flood plain mapping study.
Visioning Workshop	Nov. 21, 2023	Consult with the community on the Made-in-Orillia Vision and Guiding Principles.
Orillia Secondary School Grade 9 Geography Class Presentation	Dec. 18, 2023	Introduce Our Orillia to students and youth, alongside general planning concepts and obtain input to inform the Made-in-Orillia Vision Statement and Guiding Principles.
Orillia Secondary School Grade 10 Civics Class Presentation	Jan. 23, 2024	
Lakehead Community and Volunteer Fair Booth	Jan. 11, 2024	

4.3 Stage 2 Engagement

The early work of Stage 2 has focused on the development of five Issues and Options Reports, structured around the five City Moves developed in Stage 1 of the Official Plan Review. These Reports proposed a series of issues, options and policy directions informed by best practices and legislated requirements. The Reports were made publicly available at the end of August 2024. The engagement activities that followed are described in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary of Stage 2 Engagement Milestones

Meeting/Event	Date	Purpose
Launch of Online Issues and Options Survey	August - October 2024	Consult with the community on the Issues & Options Reports.
Climate Change and Sustainability Working Group Presentation	September 11th, 2024	Consult with the Climate Change and Sustainability Working Group on the Issues & Options Reports.
Affordable Housing Working Group Presentation	September 19 th , 2024	Consult with the Affordable Housing Working Group Working Group on the Issues & Options Reports.

Goals and Results

The primary goal of Stage 2 engagement was to gather community reactions to the Issues and Options Report. Understanding the community’s preferences and opinions is paramount when turning the issues and options into policy directions. Snapshots of survey results and comments collected from the survey are described in the subsequent sections of this report. Full survey results are included in **Appendix A**.



2

Presentations to Working Groups of Council



10

Written comments submitted to the City



297

People completed the survey

4.4 Next Steps on Engagement

All the input received through consultation will be comprehensively reviewed at each stage of the project to recognize these contributions and to efficiently build on this input.

5 Policy Directions

As noted in Section 1 of this Report, development of Orillia’s new Official Plan is an iterative process that to this point has involved background work, consultation, and the identification of key issues and options for new or amended policies. All the information gathered in these processes is summarized in this section through key policy directions. These policy directions provide a roadmap for how the policies of the new Official Plan will be written. The policy directions are grouped by their relation to the City Moves established in Stage 1 of the Official Plan Review, which also formed the basis for the five Issues and Options Reports.

5.1 Growing Up, Nurturing Neighbourhoods, and Improving Access to Housing

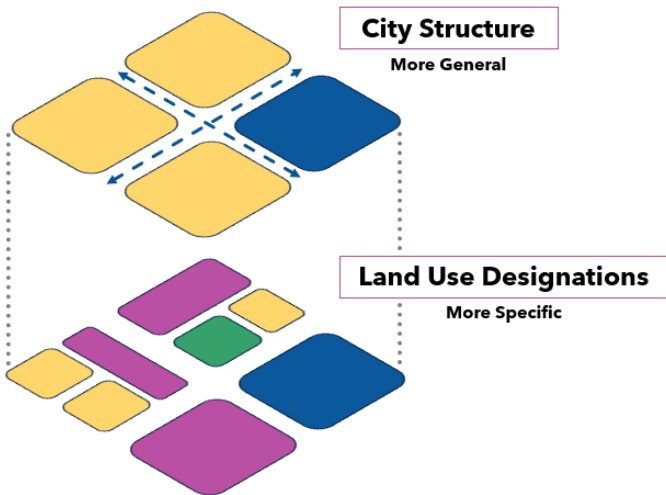
The Official Plan plays a role in a variety of City processes, but its primary function is to guide growth and development in Orillia by setting out the goals, objectives, and priorities for land use in the City. One of the key aspects of this guidance is establishing a clear strategy for where and how future population growth (people) and employment (jobs) will be accommodated in the City. Through a separate exercise, the City has determined the forecasted 30-year population and employment growth for Orillia, and through the Settlement Area Boundary Expansion (SABE) project, is determining if this forecasted growth can be accommodated in the City’s existing urban boundary.

Beyond simply accommodating growth, the new Official Plan is an opportunity to support the provision of a wide range of housing types and tenures, and to plan for land uses, infrastructure, and community services throughout the City that achieve complete communities for residents and victors. These three City Moves (Growing Up, Nurturing Neighbourhoods, and Housing) are intertwined in the path to this goal, so their related policy directions are presented together.

Our Orillia OPR project is only focused on lands within the City’s existing municipal boundary.

To learn more about the Boundary Expansion project, please visit:

Orillia.ca/boundaryexpansion



5.1.1 Direction 1: More directly guide growth and intensification through a new City Structure

The City’s existing Official Plan guides land use through **designations** (e.g., Stable Neighbourhood, Business Park/Industrial), which establish permitted uses and development criteria for various lands and areas across the City. In the new Official Plan, this approach will be complemented by a new City Structure, which will broadly establish where and how much residential and job growth is to occur in Orillia.

5.1.2 Direction 2: Identify Strategic Growth Areas for intensification

As noted above in Section 2.2, the new Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 directs municipalities to identify Strategic Growth Areas where growth through intensification will be concentrated. These areas are to be transit-connected wherever possible and support active transportation.

While Orillia’s existing Official Plan identifies standalone areas intended for intensification, the new Official Plan will conceive of Strategic Growth Areas as a series of connected Nodes (clusters of development) and Corridors (the major streets connecting the Nodes). Most of the future residential growth will be directed to Strategic Growth Areas, which should be complemented by a mix of non-residential uses (e.g., offices, retail amenities and services, employment opportunities, and community uses like schools and recreation facilities). All Strategic Growth Areas will be designated for mixed-use development through the new Mixed-Use Area designation, however, certain Strategic Growth Areas may be identified for higher levels of growth than others.

What we heard

“[Strategic Growth Areas] creates opportunities for density which is the only way to both accommodate growing demand for housing and protect our natural environment.”

- Survey respondent

5.1.3 Direction 3: Delineate a Major Transit Station Area around the Orillia Bus Terminal

As noted in Section 3.2.4 of this Report, under the new Provincial Planning Statement, 2024, the City is permitted to delineate Major Transit Station Area (MTSA) that are not on higher order transit corridors and establish minimum density targets for those areas. Through the new Official Plan, the City will delineate the boundaries of an MTSA around the proposed new Orillia Bus Terminal at 53 and 59 Colborne Street East and 66 Peter Street South. The PPS, 2024, directs that MTSA’s should include the lands within an approximate five- to ten-minute walk of the transit station. In the case of the Orillia Bus Terminal, this area would include most lands currently identified in the Downtown Area in both the existing Official Plan and the Draft Downtown Tomorrow Plan.

Through the development of the draft new Official Plan, a conceptual 500-metre radius around the planned new bus terminal (see **Figure 5.2**) will be refined to more clearly delineate specific lands to be included within the MTSA, and a minimum density target in people and jobs per hectare will be established. This work will be completed concurrently with the continuation of the Settlement Area Boundary Expansion project.



Figure 5.1: Rendering of the planned new Orillia Bus Terminal

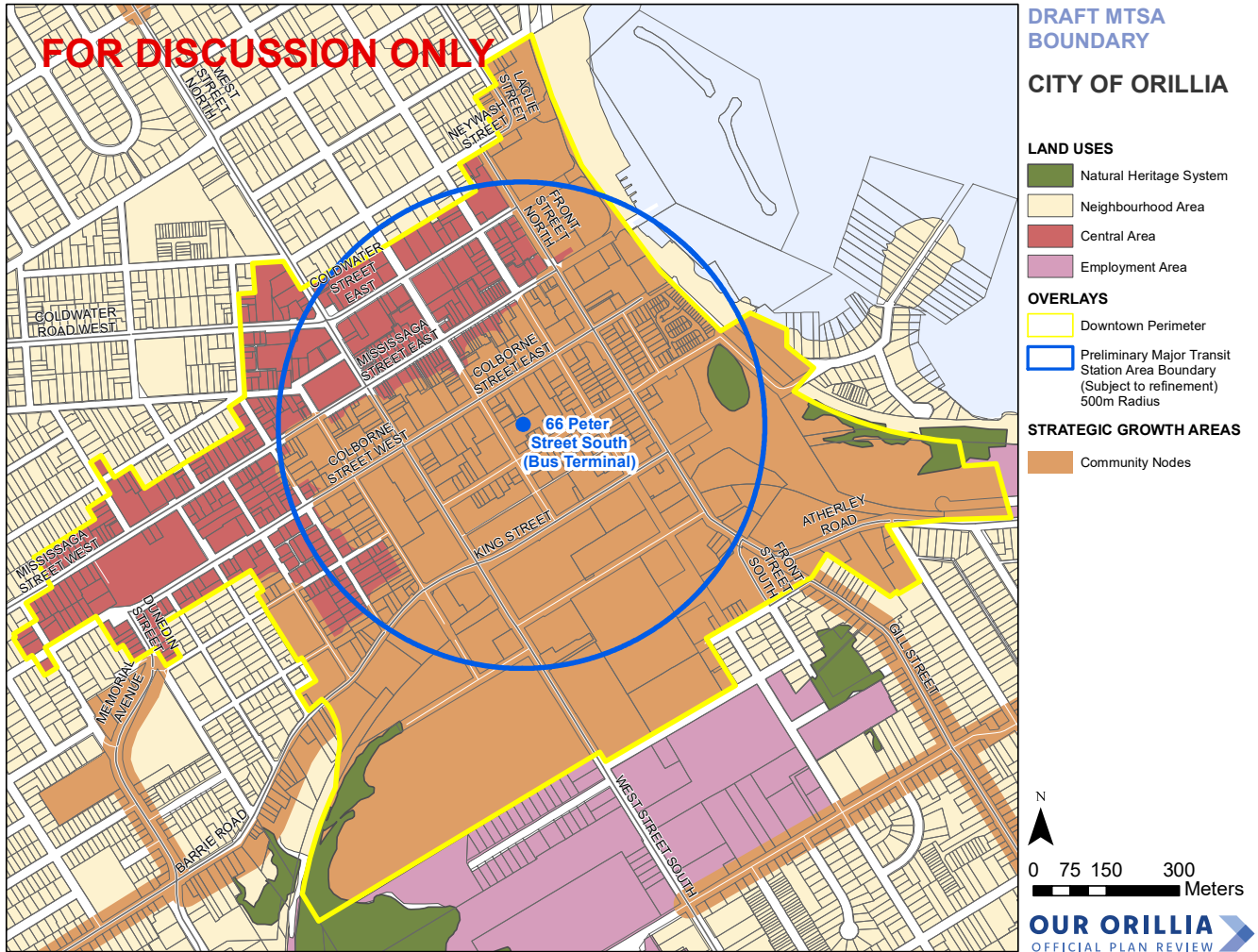


Figure 5.2: Illustration of preliminary Major Transit Station Area boundary.

5.1.4 Direction 4: Incrementally increase permitted heights in Strategic Growth Areas to a maximum of 12 storeys with strengthened urban design policies

Through the work completed in Phases 1 and 2 of the Our Orillia OPR project, as well as the SABE project, it was established that to support residential intensification in the existing built-up area of Orillia, an increase in maximum permitted building heights would be required. Modest increases in height, beyond the status-quo, can be supported for a range of reasons, including:

- Attendees at the visioning workshop and online survey responses generally responded favourably to increased height permissions, particularly within Downtown and along major streets.
- Reducing the need for potential site-specific Official Plan Amendments over time and providing a comprehensive vision for Orillia’s Strategic Growth Areas.

Through the Growing Up Issues and Options Report, several options for modest maximum height increases were presented for Strategic Growth Areas, from the status quo of eight storeys to sixteen storeys. Feedback collected through the Stage 2 survey showed a strong desire from the public to maintain the status quo, and that a substantial increase to maximum heights was not preferred. Nevertheless, many survey respondents were supportive of taller buildings in the City if it meant an increase in housing supply and less need to expand the City’s urban area.

To find a balance between the factors considered above, the maximum permitted height in the Strategic Growth Areas is recommended to be increased to 12 storeys. This maximum height will be lower in certain areas subject to overlays (e.g., along historic Mississauga Street and near the waterfront), and new urban design policies will be included in the Official Plan to guide transitions between taller buildings and existing low-rise areas.

The shortfall in potential increased housing opportunities in Strategic Growth Areas arising from the smaller increase in maximum height (i.e., compared to 14 or 16 storeys) can also be balanced by a modest increase in permitted heights in Neighbourhood Areas to support increased housing opportunities in those areas.

5.1.5 Direction 5: Realign Employment Area designations

As noted in Section [3.2.5 Error! Reference source not found.](#), the PPS, 2024 and accompanying changes to the *Planning Act* have redefined employment areas at a Provincial level to prohibit

What we heard

48% of survey respondents would prefer the maximum height in intensification areas (refer to Schedule A) be kept at the status quo of 8 storeys.

54% of survey respondents would prefer to see the status quo in the Central Core Intensification Area of 6-8 storeys and 12 storeys for the lands south of King Street.

What we heard

“Why restrict the height, go 8-12 floors. Use less green space and have less urban sprawl.”

“High density housing should be priority, as close to the city centre as possible.”

“Please try to utilize efficient land-use practices and intensification so we don't have to expand the boundary for urban sprawl!”

- Survey respondents

commercial uses which are not directly associated with manufacturing, research and development, or warehousing uses. The City’s existing Official Plan has two employment designations: Business Park/Industrial, and Light Industrial Services which permit traditional employment uses. Both designations permit a range of uses, including office and other non-industrial uses.

In the new Official Plan, to align with Provincial policy, new designations will replace the existing employment designations:

- The Core Employment designation will permit a range of manufacturing, warehousing, and related research and development uses, as well as retail and office uses directly associated with a manufacturing/warehousing use. This designation will be applied to lands currently designated Business Park/Industrial. Existing non-industrial uses such as offices or other commercial uses will continue to be permitted as existing uses.
- The Flex Employment designation will permit a broad range of non-residential uses, including office and retail uses in addition to industrial uses, but will continue to prohibit residential uses. One of the intents of this designation, to replace the Light Industrial Services, is to support uses which may not be feasible to locate in more compact Strategic Growth Areas, such as auto dealerships, private recreational uses like dance studios or gymnastics, self-storage or landscape/garden centres.

It should be noted that all lands with the Core Employment and Flex Employment designations will be identified as being within Employment Areas on the new City Structure schedule. To align with Provincial policy, the new Official Plan will direct that only lands within the Core Employment designation are considered “areas of employment” under the *Planning Act* and Provincial Planning Statement, 2024, and subject to the tests for conversion to non-industrial uses.

5.1.6 Direction 6: Support the implementation of the City of Orillia 5-Year Economic Development Strategic Plan

In October 2024, Orillia City Council approved the 5-Year Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) which provides a comprehensive guide for fostering economic growth and development within Orillia. The EDSP outlines a series of goals and supporting objectives and actions for the next five years to create a desirable environment for investment, living, and tourism in the City. Through the new Official Plan, the following goals and objectives of the EDSP can be supported or implemented.

What we heard

“We need more jobs before Orillia can grow.”

“Focus on bringing in quality employment opportunities.”

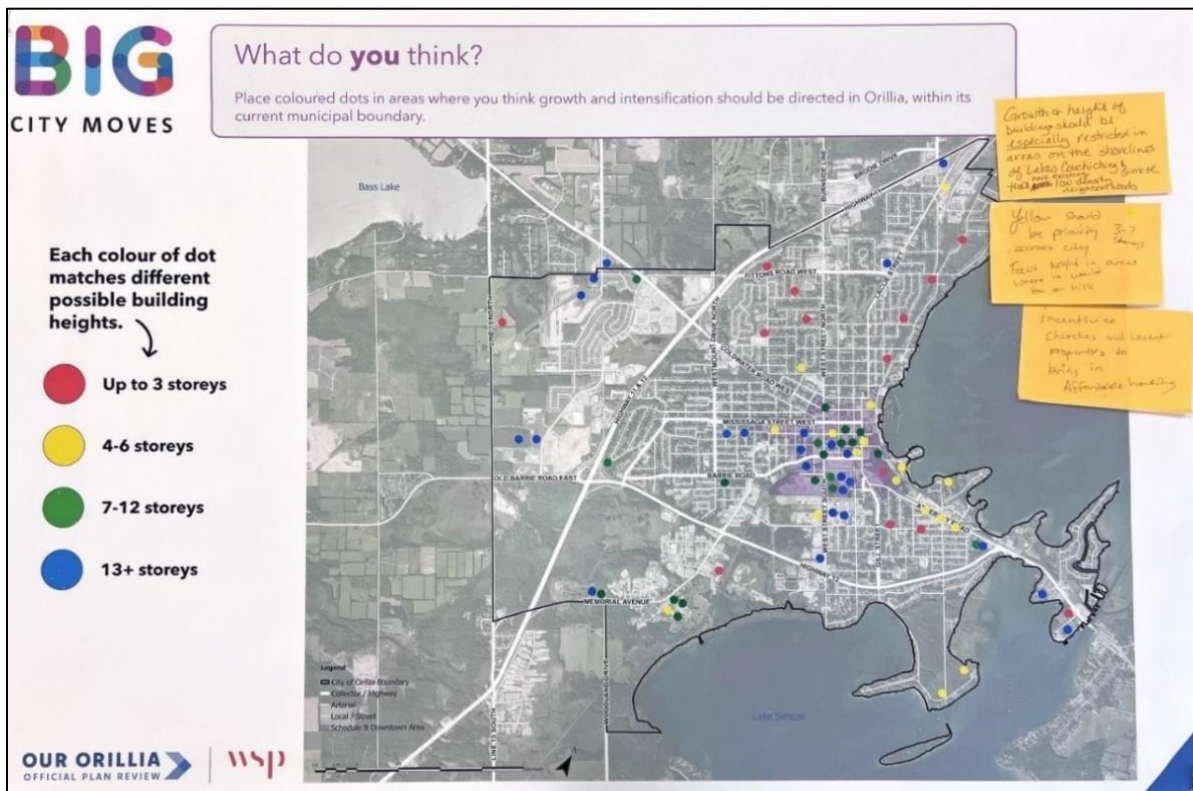
- Survey Respondents

EDSP Goal	EDSP Action	Official Plan Implementation
<p>Increase jobs and Orillia's average income through targeted investment attraction and workforce development</p>	<p>Work with Planning to support the attraction of new retail and commercial opportunities to newly developed neighbourhood commercial space.</p>	<p>Expand flexibility for development of neighbourhood commercial uses.</p>
	<p>Revise Community Improvement Plan to prioritize brownfield redevelopment, attainable housing, medical facilities and commercial property ownership.</p>	<p>Revise Community Improvement Policies as needed to enable and support these changes to the Community Improvement Plan(s).</p>
<p>Orillia is an ideal location for living and visiting to attract and retain a stable workforce.</p>	<p>Create and promote Community Improvement Plan opportunities related to workforce attainable housing.</p>	
	<p>Advocate for the improvement of cycling infrastructure, such as lanes on the road, bike racks in key locations (near employers, downtown, Couchiching Park), signage at strategic points along the trail.</p>	<p>Direct for increased implementation of cycling infrastructure and complete streets.</p>
	<p>Invest in enhancing street lighting, to provide well-lit public spaces at night. Prioritize areas between parking, transit, open venues, and the waterfront.</p>	<p>Develop enhanced design policies in the new Official Plan that include direction for street lighting and universal accessibility in the public realm.</p>
	<p>Work with Development Services to ensure accessibility on sidewalks, roads, and downtown storefronts.</p>	
	<p>Regularly connect with large institutions and employers to collect information on development needs and advocate outcomes that best align with economic development goals (such as new hospital site, Lakehead University expansion, Hydro One).</p>	<p>Permit a broader range of uses and activities in the Major Institutional designation to support innovative development on and around institutional sites and attract new institutional uses.</p>
<p>The tourism sector grows by maximizing opportunities to increase visitor</p>	<p>Enhance and develop the necessary infrastructure to attract and welcome cyclists.</p>	<p>Direct for increased implementation of cycling infrastructure and complete streets.</p>

EDSP Goal	EDSP Action	Official Plan Implementation
spending year-round.	Improve linkages between trails and nature assets and commercial spending opportunities.	Direct for improved linkages between trail systems, natural areas, and built-up areas, through both public investment and the development process.

5.1.7 Direction 7: Streamline land use designations for Neighbourhoods

It is recommended that the new Official plan consolidate the existing Stable Neighbourhood and Neighbourhood Greenfield designations into a new “Neighbourhoods” designation.. This change would simplify the land use framework for Orillia’s neighbourhoods by applying one designation across all residential areas. Policies related to infill within existing neighbourhoods and development within new neighbourhoods will continue to be guided by other policies in the Official Plan.



Map showing Visioning Workshop responses to where growth and intensification should be directed

5.1.8 Direction 8: Transition from segregated land uses to supporting complete communities

The City’s existing Official Plan has several land-use designations which solely permit low commercial uses, comprising the Community Commercial and Arterial Commercial designations. It is recommended that the new Official Plan shift away from planning areas of low-density commercial development to areas of mixed-use development by re-designating Community Commercial and Arterial lands to a new Mixed-Use Area designation. This shift is occurring in recognition of the opportunities that low-density commercial areas offer for increasing housing supply through intensification, and to support complete communities.

It is also recommended that the new Official Plan include revised policies to support a broader range of low-intensity uses in Neighbourhood Areas and provide more opportunities for services and permit small-scale neighbourhood commercial uses and other non-residential uses (such as community or artist spaces or live-work units) as-of-right. These uses, which are intended to allow for jobs and services to be located in walking distance of more residents, will be encouraged along Collector, Arterial, and Local Roads. It is also recommended that the City review on-site parking policies related to these uses to incentivize active transportation and leverage on-street parking.

What we heard

“Medium density housing creates opportunities for retail and service businesses to thrive in the neighbourhoods themselves. That might mean restaurants, cafes or shops that exist in residential areas. We should adopt policies to zone appropriately to encourage local small businesses to be established in neighbourhoods”.

- Survey respondent

What we heard

71% of survey respondents support combating the housing mix issue by permitting street townhouses as of right in residential areas, expanding walk up apartment permissions and increasing the maximum permitted height in neighbourhood designations.

5.1.9 Direction 9: Support housing opportunities in Neighbourhoods

As noted above, increased housing opportunities in Orillia may be supported without substantially increasing maximum permitted building heights by allowing for modest increases in height and density in the Neighbourhood Areas. Responses to the Stage 2 survey showed broad support for this increased flexibility, particularly along more major roads.

Housing opportunities in the Neighbourhoods can be increased by permitting a broader range of housing types. The existing Official Plan permits single-detached, semi-detached, and duplexes throughout Neighbourhood Areas. **It is recommended that the new Official Plan modify these policies to permit street townhouses as-of-right everywhere, subject to locational criteria, access to transit and compatibility with existing neighbourhoods. These criteria may be applied through the City’s Zoning By-Law. In addition, it is recommended that the new Official Plan also permit apartments, multiple dwellings and stacked townhouse-style dwellings along Collector and Arterial Roads to a maximum building height of 4 storeys, subject to criteria that can include adequate servicing, proximity to a transit route or Strategic Growth Area.**

What we heard

“Start developing areas that have secondary dwellings (coach house) as a viable option to provide additional cost-efficient housing. Rent in Orillia is outrageous and unaffordable for most people working in the City’s economic drivers (tourism, food and beverage, retail).”

- Survey respondent

To support the expanded permissions for housing types, it is recommended that the new Official Plan permit a maximum building height of four storeys on Arterial and Collector Roads in Neighbourhood Areas. Three storeys would remain permitted as-of-right on Local Roads. Under this option, enhanced policies for infill development will be required to support land use compatibility, such as a height transition and design policies for developments with more than ten dwelling units.



Examples of how four units can be accommodated on a lot (Source: Province of British Columbia)

5.1.10 Direction 10: Establish clear built form policies to guide compatibility of development in Strategic Growth Areas and Neighbourhood Areas

Based on information gathered in the Stage 1 and Stage 2 community surveys, it is understood that much of the apprehension around permitting taller buildings and more dense development in Orillia is that new development won't be compatible or "fit in" with existing buildings. While compatibility is a subjective term, there are certain urban design best practices that can be employed, including regulation of building massing and relation to the public realm. Much of this regulation will occur through zoning and site plan control, but the Official Plan can establish key principles.

In particular, it is recommended that the definition of "compatibility" in the Official Plan will be refined to state, "Compatible development is development that may not necessarily be the same or similar to the existing buildings in the vicinity, but, nonetheless, can coexist with existing development and potential adverse impacts to adjacent properties will be mitigated through setbacks, stepping back building design and other such architectural choices fencing and/or landscaping."

What we heard

"What does "compatibility with existing neighbourhoods" mean?"

- Survey respondent

In addition, the following principles will be considered to inform policies for the review of planning applications which seek to increase the maximum permitted building height through a site-specific Zoning by-law Amendment and / or Official Plan Amendment:

- Requiring angular planes adjacent to existing built forms of less than four storeys in height;
- Proximity to a transit stop or multi-use pathway, and provision of other transportation demand management tools such as bikeshare, autoshare, and parking reductions;
- Proximity to commercial uses or zones;
- Impacts on surrounding roadways, green space and public realm, including shadowing impacts; and
- Appropriate transition to adjacent lots.

5.1.11 Direction 11: Prioritize surplus publicly owned land for development of new affordable housing.

There is an opportunity to create a policy within the Official Plan that prioritizes using surplus government or City-owned land for affordable housing, in addition to updating the Real Property Policy, to ensure that there is clear direction from Council for disposition of municipal land at below market prices. This policy will also require staff and Council to evaluate surplus lands and consider alternative uses, such as affordable housing, prior to sale.

5.1.12 Direction 12: Expand the scope of the rental replacement policy identified in the Affordable Housing Action Plan.

Through the new Official Plan, policy will be included to recommend and justify the enactment of a Rental Replacement By-law. This by-law would require that when buildings with rental units are redeveloped, at least as many rental units are provided in the new building. Retaining existing rental units mitigates the upward rental price pressure of reduced supply. The rental replacement policy may also include encouragement for maintaining affordable rents in the new building for a period of time.

5.1.13 Direction 13: Expand the range of permitted uses within the Downtown Area

The proposed relocation of the Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital will open up a significant amount of land in the City's Downtown that can be leveraged to support Orillia's development as a complete community. **The new Official Plan will, in alignment with direction in the Draft Downtown Tomorrow Plan, create a policy environment for the redevelopment of the hospital lands that is considerate of the District's current role in supporting health-related uses, while allowing for the evolution of the area for a broader mix of uses.** This will include adding permissions for high density mixed-use with general office uses and retail spaces, allowing for greater flexibility in this area over the long-term as development and redevelopment occurs.

What we heard

Over 70% (71%) of survey respondents support combating the housing affordability issue by permitting affordable housing on municipally owned lands, apartment buildings in the stable neighbourhood designation and four-storey maximum along arterial and collector roads.

What we heard

"The hospital should be relocated outside the downtown core and that property could be used to build affordable housing that is central to the city."

- Survey respondent

5.1.14 **Direction 14: Update Parkland Hierarchy and implement the Parks, Recreation, and Culture Master Plan**

To support the implementation of the Parks, Recreation, and Culture Master Plan, there is an opportunity to reflect the new parkland hierarchy within the Official Plan. This would include specific policies for each classification, related to matters such as design, location, accessibility, and programming. **It is recommended that policies related to urban squares will be retained as they relate to privately owned publicly accessible spaces (POPs) within Strategic Growth Areas and Mixed-Use Areas.**

It is recognized that the City has recently initiated an update to the Master Plan, known as the Parks, Recreation, Culture and Trails Master Plan, coordination with this update, where possible, will be reflected in the new Official Plan.

5.1.15 **Direction 15: Support placekeeping and Indigenous community-building**

To recognize and support the Indigenous community, it is recommended that the new Official Plan include policy direction to introduce placekeeping features that consider Indigenous representation, the needs of all ages including children and seniors, and cultural groups. This direction will complement Direction 15 in that when implementing the Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan, policies to support Indigenous placekeeping through ceremony, stewardship, and cultural activities will be introduced.

Further, as the City of Orillia continues its reconciliation efforts, it is recommended that the new Official Plan provide direction to seek input from Indigenous communities when naming public assets, spaces, and buildings.

5.1.16 **Direction 16: Provide Flexibility for childcare spaces.**

The Nurturing Neighbourhoods Issues and Options Report highlighted a need to expand, support, and retain childcare as part of complete communities. **To provide flexibility for the provision of childcare in Orillia, it is recommended that the policies in the new Official Plan encourage the integration of childcare facilities with the development of schools, mixed-use developments, and other community facilities.**

5.1.17 **Direction 17: Support creative industries and public art**

The new Official Plan will support diversification of the economic sectors in the City by expanding permissions for land uses that facilitate creative industries, including live/workspaces, home industries, home occupations, maker spaces, studios, performing arts venues, and galleries.

Through the new Official Plan, it is recommended that the City also support public art through different mechanisms such as the City’s capital construction program and other public realm initiatives in Orillia.

5.1.18 Direction 18: Support the achievement of a network of safe, complete streets

The consultation undertaken as part of Stage 2 of Our Orillia OPR project revealed that Orillia residents have a diverse range of priorities when it comes to mobility in their City. To facilitate a connected transportation network that benefits all users, the new Official Plan will introduce policies that support complete streets. These policies will facilitate the shift towards active transportation by prioritizing vulnerable road users, including those who walk and roll through new and rebuilt streets, but will also serve to provide a connected, consistent, and easier to understand transportation network for those who still rely on private automobiles.

In an additional effort to encourage other modes of mobility (e.g., walking, cycling), it is recommended that the new Official Plan include specific policies related to safe streets in proximity to schools, community facilities, and parks.

What we heard

“Why the need for so many streets with bike lanes. They are hardly used. Orillia is too spread out.”

“[The City needs] better bike lanes (with real barriers between cars)! Look to Holland for inspiration.”

- Survey respondents

5.1.19 Direction 19: Improve active transportation opportunities

The City of Orillia’s size and location uniquely positions it as a City with great active transportation potential. The City is small enough that with safe and connected routes its residents could access services, the Downtown and waterfront via active transportation. **It is recommended that the new Official Plan leverage existing and planned infrastructure by planning for new development that is highly connected to existing and planned active transportation routes (e.g., trails and bike lanes). Consideration will be given to policies related to the redevelopment of large sites (e.g., shopping plazas, brownfields) and opportunities for the City to secure pedestrian-oriented access.**

In coordination with Direction 24, it is recommended that **the new Official Plan include revised policies related to bicycle parking, micromobility devices such as accessibility scooters, and other transportation demand management measures, such as end of trip facilities, long-term/secure bicycle parking, carpooling, and shared parking arrangements.** The overarching goal of both policy directions is to facilitate increased bicycle ridership and reduce automobile reliance.

What we heard

Survey respondents listed the following as the top three priorities for active transportation policy direction:

- Complete streets which prioritize those who walk and roll through new and rebuilt streets.
- Safe streets in proximity to schools, community facilities, and parks.
- New development that is highly connected to and supports existing and planned active transportation routes (e.g., trails and bike lanes).

5.1.20 Direction 20: Future-proof for transit

The new Official Plan will support the early introduction of transit in new neighbourhoods through the policies related to the layout of the road network and inclusion of medium and high-density developments (which are often built in later phases of development after low-density blocks are constructed).

5.2 Planning for a Greener Future: Climate Change and Resiliency

Climate change is one of the most critical issues facing communities throughout the world. Climate impacts such as unpredictable weather events are already impacting municipalities across Canada and will worsen significantly if massive reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are not achieved within the next 30 years. Local governments in Ontario have the authority to act through land use planning to respond to climate change, including reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from transportation and buildings, reducing waste, and preserving and enhancing tree cover and vegetation.

Acting on climate change and sustainability has been identified as a priority in City Council’s 2022 – 2026 Council Priorities, and the urgency of taking action has been echoed by the general public, Indigenous communities, advocacy groups like Sustainable Orillia, and the City’s Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Working Group, – all of whom have been engaged through Our Orillia Official Plan Review and other City-led climate initiatives.

5.2.1 Direction 21: Incorporate actions from the Community Climate Action Plan & Climate Change Adaptation Strategy

The City has made great strides towards achieving ambitious climate related targets and actions set out in the Community Climate Action Plan (CCAP) and the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (CCAS). This includes the City’s target to achieve net zero GHG emissions by 2050, and to help the Orillia community build resiliency to climate impacts. Together, the CCAP and CCAS guide the City’s built, natural, and social systems in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to a changing climate. Where appropriate, the new Official Plan will incorporate actions and leverage language from the CCAP and CCAS.

The CCAS also refers to the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) Healthy Community Design Policy for Official Plans. It is recommended that the new Official Plan recognize the SMDHU as an important partner in land use planning and incorporate policies that encourage a sustainable local food system, promote renewable and alternative energy, ensure active transportation and that maximize environmental and community health benefits.

It is recommended that the new Official Plan introduce new policies that will require the City to plan for infrastructure and services in a manner that prepares for the impacts of a changing climate. In keeping with the CCAS, this policy may direct the City to incorporate and consider risks to existing infrastructure.

It is recommended that the new Official Plan build off the CCAS in its direction for climate resilient tourism by supporting and providing flexibility for the evolution of the tourism industry and directing for a collaborative approach to tourism that increases the offering of all-season activities.

It is recommended that the new Official Plan introduce a refreshed policy framework for energy and water conservation and efficiency, by leveraging the direction of the CCAS and CCAP the policies can provide direction for microgrids and geothermal energy and explore large scale solar installations.

5.2.2 Direction 22: Strengthen the local food supply chain

The new Official Plan presents an opportunity to support and expand access to local food, thereby reducing the City of Orillia’s reliance on traditional agricultural practices and the transportation emissions associated with shipping. It is recommended that the policies of the new Official Plan direct the City to strengthen the local food supply value chain by making it easier for agricultural producers to supply retailers and restaurants. This could be supported through various means, including permitting more flexible uses of public spaces such as parking lots for temporary markets or storage or partnering with neighbouring municipalities in Simcoe County to support agriculture-related uses in Orillia (e.g., value-add processing of agricultural goods within the City’s Employment Areas).

The SMDHU recognizes the importance of protecting and conserving land and water for use as part of a sustainable local food system. The new Official Plan will implement these priorities of the SMDHU by permitting and encouraging urban agriculture (e.g., community gardens, backyard growing, shared garden allotments) in all and/or certain land use designations.

In addition, it is recommended that the new Official Plan include policies that will direct the City to explore and support the use of City-owned land for growing food.

What we heard

“There were empty shelves in grocery stores when we could not get imported produce during COVID.”

- Survey respondent

5.2.3 Direction 23: Improve and update transportation and mobility policies to support climate change mitigation

To reduce vehicle reliance and thereby emissions, the new Official Plan will include updated policies for bicycle parking and low- or zero-emission vehicles and an expanded application of these policies to other land use designations.

In addition, it is recommended that the new Official Plan align with the City’s Multi-Modal Transportation Master Plan by directing the City to develop Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Strategies (i.e. carpool, vanpool, car share, etc.) to reduce reliance on private automobiles.

As noted above in Section 2.2, the new Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 directs municipalities to identify Strategic Growth Areas where growth through intensification will be concentrated. These areas are to be transit-connected wherever possible and support active transportation. The new Official Plan will reduce parking rates in higher density areas to achieve this Provincial direction and encourage the reduction of the City’s reliance on private automobiles and use of alternative forms of mobility.

What we heard

“Increase the tree canopy through proper city funding.”

“Please encourage developers to plant trees in parking lots to help keep the areas cool in the summer. Studies have been done to show the impact of trees on the temperature of streets and parking lots, keeping the temperature cooler. Plus, it adds greenery and charm to the area. We need to focus on climate change actions.”

- Survey respondents

5.2.4 Direction 24: Protect and enhance the robust City-wide tree canopy

As directed by the CCAS, CCAP and SMDHU, it is recommended that the new Official Plan support the urban tree canopy with stronger policies. The policies will reference the role of tree planting in contributing to the City’s tree canopy cover targets and promote City and community-led planting initiatives. In addition, the new Official Plan will encourage the City and / or the development community to partner with community groups for tree planting initiatives.

5.2.5 Direction 25: Encourage sustainable building practices and design

It is recommended that the new Official Plan promote sustainable design and climate change resilience through consolidated general design policies in the

current Official Plan that consider sustainable design principles. Multiple options for encouraging improved building design were offered in the Climate Change Issues and Options Report, the proposed use of general design policies allows for these policies to apply to all new development, regardless of land use designation. Additionally, the use of general design policies ensures that the policies are implemented with the approval of the Official Plan, rather than deferring them to a separate future document (e.g., a standalone green standard).

It is recommended that the proposed general design policies support bird-friendly window design, green roofs, permeable surfaces and enhanced tree planting and landscaping. In coordination with this approach, the City will introduce a by-law under Section 97.1 of the *Municipal Act*.

In addition, the new Official Plan policies can direct the City to improve the climate resiliency of City-owned facilities during extreme weather events by ensuring reliable emergency back up power. Further, the policies can encourage the City to consider utilizing municipal facilities as emergency centres (e.g., cooling and warming centre, evacuation centre, etc.) for residents during extreme weather events.

What we heard

Survey respondents were split (nearly evenly!) when considering the best ways to encourage sustainable building design.

By applying the general design policies to all new development, the new sustainable building design policies in the Official Plan will be broadly applicable and encouraged.

5.2.6 Direction 26: Support and encourage climate resilient infrastructure

It is recommended that the new Official Plan Introduce a new policy framework for climate resilient infrastructure by encouraging the City and development proponents to incorporate green infrastructure and low impact development in new planning, engineering, and conservation concepts to complement existing infrastructure.

It is recommended that the new Official Plan introduce new policies that will require the City to consider and integrate climate change into asset management practices and decision-making processes. This could complement the work the City has undertaken previously to prepare the Strategic Asset Management Policy and the Asset Management Plan, which takes an integrated approach to help the City deliver value to the community through the effective management of infrastructure assets.

In addition, the new Official Plan could recognize various natural and human-made elements as forms of green infrastructure and provide policy direction for the protection and enhancement of these elements to support stormwater management.

What we heard

Survey respondents ranked Green Infrastructure, Low Impact Development Measures and Stormwater Management Measures as the most important elements of sustainable design.

5.2.7 Direction 27: Implement floodplain mapping

Alongside work developing a vision and policy directions for the new Official Plan, WSP has been supporting the City to update the City’s floodplain mapping for Mill Creek and Ben’s Ditch. The Mill Creek floodplain was last mapped during 1991 and did not include floodplain mapping of Ben’s Ditch. Floodplain mapping (see **Figure 5.3: Example of Regulatory Flood Mapping for Mill Creek** for an example) helps to identify areas at risk of flooding during severe and infrequent storm events, and the output of this mapping work will be incorporated into the policies and schedules of the new Official Plan.

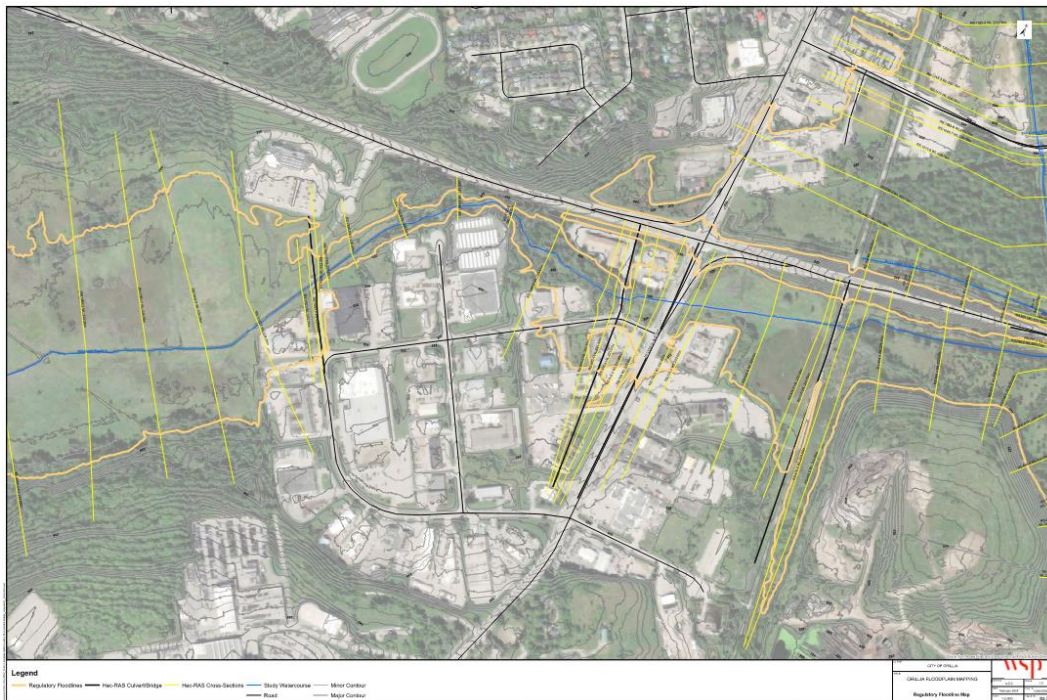


Figure 5.3: Example of Regulatory Flood Mapping for Mill Creek

5.3 Planning for a Greener Future: Natural Heritage System Evaluation

The City of Orillia has a responsibility to protect its natural environment. Maintaining, restoring, and enhancing the environment within the city is a strategic approach to addressing biodiversity loss and climate change so ecosystems continue to provide clean air, clean water, and a rich diversity of plants and animals to sustain residents for generations. In part, this is accomplished by the development of a natural heritage system.

What is a “natural heritage system”?

A natural heritage system is a system made up of natural features and areas prescribed in Provincial policies and legislation: wetlands, woodlands, valley lands, significant wildlife habitat, areas of natural and scientific interest (ANSI), fish habitat, habitat of endangered and threatened species, and the linkages between and among them. Natural heritage systems planning extends beyond a features-based approach to protecting important natural features and areas. It recognizes that it is not sufficient to protect a particular wetland, woodland, river, or area on its own – but rather within the context of an interconnected system of features, corridors, and buffers. As discussed in Section 5.1.1 of this Report, Orillia’s Natural Heritage System (NHS) forms an integral part of the City Structure.

5.3.1 Direction 28: Update terminology for Natural Heritage

The existing Official Plan uses the term Environmental Protection Area. This term has generally been replaced in favour of a “natural heritage system” or similar, as a systems-based approach is presented in Provincial policies. Mapping using PPS, 2024 terminology (i.e., Provincially Significant Wetlands, Other Wetlands, Significant Woodlands, etc.) is also more widely used among practitioners to allow for preliminary environmental screenings. Presenting the terminology as separate entities also allows for varying intent, level of protection, and permitted uses. It is recommended that the new Official Plan update terminology from “Environmental Protection Area” to a systems-based approach (e.g., Natural Heritage System and its respective elements).

It is recommended that the existing Official Plan’s definition for Significant Woodland be updated by switching the ‘and’ conjunction to ‘or.’ In turn, not all three components related to species composition, age of trees, and stand history would be required. Alternatively, the definition may be updated to match the qualitative ecological importance criteria provided in the PPS, 2024. All Significant Woodlands will be determined and mapped during an Environmental Impact Study undertaken for a specific planning application.

It is recommended that modifications to glossary terms and policy structures related to natural heritage systems be incorporated into the new Official Plan. Proposed terminology (see Table 3: Example of Proposed Glossary Terms New Natural Heritage Terminology) is recommended to be incorporated into the new Official Plan.

Table 3: Example of Proposed Glossary Terms New Natural Heritage Terminology

Term	Glossary Terms
Linkage	An area that may or may not be associated with the presence of existing natural heritage features. Provides and maintains ecological connectivity between natural heritage features and enables plants and animals to move

Term	Glossary Terms
	among natural heritage features, thereby supporting the long-term sustainability of the overall natural heritage system.
Municipally Significant Woodland	<p>Municipal woodlands do not include woodlands meeting the criteria for significant woodlands. They include all terrestrial treed vegetation communities with a percent tree cover greater than 25.</p> <p>These woodlands are determined to be important in terms of features, functions, representation, or amount and contribute to the quality and diversity of an identifiable natural heritage system.</p>
Municipally Significant Wetland	<p>Lands that meet the definition of a wetland and which have not been evaluated as a Provincially significant wetland. May include wetlands that were evaluated by the province as non-significant but are locally significant.</p> <p>Wetlands determined to be important in terms of features, functions, representation, or amount and contribute to the quality and diversity of an identifiable natural heritage system.</p>
Provincially Significant Wetland	Those wetlands identified as Provincially significant by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry using evaluation procedures established by the Province, as amended from time to time (PPS, 2020).

The Natural Heritage System (NHS) and Water Resource System (WRS) are ecologically linked and have overlapping components. The establishment of these systems is required by Provincial policy. Key hydrologic features are wetlands, permanent and intermittent streams, inland lakes and their littoral zones, and seepage areas and springs. Key hydrologic areas are significant groundwater recharge areas, highly vulnerable aquifers, and significant surface water contribution areas. These features can be defined as such on Schedules and included in the definitions. The WRS would include these key hydrological features and areas, providing terminology and policy that are more aligned with the PPS, 2024.

5.3.2 Direction 29: New Official Plan Schedule (A1) Detailing Natural Heritage System

Building off the direction in Section 5.3.1, it is recommended that the new Official Plan include one or more new Official Plan Schedules (e.g., Schedule A1, etc.) that details specific elements of the Natural Heritage System, including potential restoration/enhancement areas. Elements for delineation include but are not limited to linkages, municipally significant wetlands, significant woodlands, and fish habitats.

Ensuring the Natural Heritage System (NHS) aligns with Provincial and local mapping and maintains consistency outside City boundaries will be important, as natural features do not stop at human-derived boundaries. A review of proposed areas of restoration/enhancement is required, with areas prioritized by City ownership and the ability to provide long-term protection.

The introduction of the proposed mapping would not negate the requirement that Significant Woodlands must be determined during an Environmental Impact Study associated with a planning application where they are not already mapped.

5.3.3 Direction 30: Prescribe minimum Natural Heritage System buffer widths

It is recommended that the new Official Plan will prescribe minimum buffer widths for natural heritage features to be followed based on guidelines and industry standards.

The proposed policies provide an opportunity to increase buffer width based on consideration of site-specific biophysical circumstances such as buffer slope, soil type, hydrology, and vegetation. It is recommended that the policies include that, at a minimum, buffers must be achieved and maintained as natural self-sustaining vegetation. **Table 4:**

Proposed Minimum Buffer Widths proposes minimum buffer widths to be included in the policy.

What we heard

81% of survey respondents agreed that minimum buffer sizes should be prescribed by the new Official Plan.

The majority feedback from survey respondents on each proposed buffer is summarized in **Table 4**. The survey results confirm the value that stakeholders place on the protection of the natural heritage system in Orillia.

Table 4: Proposed Minimum Buffer Widths

NHS Feature or Area	Minimum Buffer Width	What We Heard
Provincially Significant Wetlands	30 metres	54% of survey respondents thought this was too small
Municipally Significant Wetlands	15 metres	67% of survey respondents thought this was too small
Provincially Significant Woodlands	30 metres beyond the dripline	45% of survey respondents thought this was just right
Municipally Significant Woodlands	15 metres beyond the dripline	63% of survey respondents thought this was too small
Valleylands	10 metres	48% of survey respondents thought this was too small
Floodplains	Determined through hazard land mapping	52% of survey respondents thought this was just right
Shoreline (i.e., Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching)	30-metre buffer along Lake Couchiching and a 30-metre buffer along Lake Simcoe, or larger if determined appropriate by an EIS.	45% of survey respondents thought this was just right , while 45% thought this was too small
Watercourses (cool and cold water)	30 metres from the high-water mark on both sides, plus 0.5 metres per 1% of the slope	63% of survey respondents thought this was just right

NHS Feature or Area	Minimum Buffer Width	What We Heard
Watercourses (warm water)	15 metres from the high-water mark on both sides	57% of survey respondents thought this was just right
Significant Wildlife Habitat	Significant Wildlife Habitat criteria schedule to determine setbacks. Where they are not determined, 30 metres	53% of survey respondents thought this was too small
Habitat for Threatened or Endangered Species	To be determined through consultation / permitting with the MECP	Not surveyed.

Following the adoption of the existing Official Plan in 2011, the City updated its Zoning By-law to provide further protection for shoreline areas through the establishment of the “Shoreline Buffer Overlay Zone”. These overlay zones provide for a 15-metre buffer along Lake Couchiching and a 30-metre buffer along Lake Simcoe. Under the Natural Heritage System direction a consistent buffer zone is recommended. It is recommended that the new Official Plan be updated to increase the 15 m shoreline buffer overlay zone to 30 m for Lake Couchiching. Further to the above, it is recommended that the new Official Plan would identify specific native vegetation requirement for the naturalized buffers.

5.3.4 Direction 31: Add Environmental Impact Study Guidelines

Developing Environmental Impact Study guidelines will support interpreting and implementing the Natural Heritage System policies to be provided in the new Official Plan. These guidelines provide a framework of the minimum requirements to assist proponents in creating an Environmental Impact Study associated with a planning application. It is also recommended that guidelines provide an avenue for the inclusion of Indigenous engagement and cultural keystone species identification and protection. Draft guidelines have been provided in the Natural Heritage System Evaluation Gaps Analysis Memo.

6 Summary and Next Steps

As noted earlier in this Report, the Our Orillia Official Plan Review (OPR) project is proceeding concurrently with the City’s Settlement Area Boundary Expansion (SABE) project. As the City moves into Stage 3 of Our Orillia OPR project with the drafting of the new Official Plan, these two processes will converge (see **Figure 6.1**). The policy directions detailed in this Report around intensification, housing, building forms and densities, parks and community services, climate change, and natural heritage will be combined with critical direction from the SABE Technical Land Evaluation on growth forecasts and land needs for review, consideration, and ultimate adoption by City Council.



Figure 6.1: Official Plan Review and SABE Timelines

This Policy Directions Report will be presented to Council for endorsement to inform the policies to be developed as part of the first Draft Official Plan that will be prepared in Stage 3. Stage 3 of Our Orillia OPR project will include comprehensive engagement with the community and stakeholders, including public open houses.

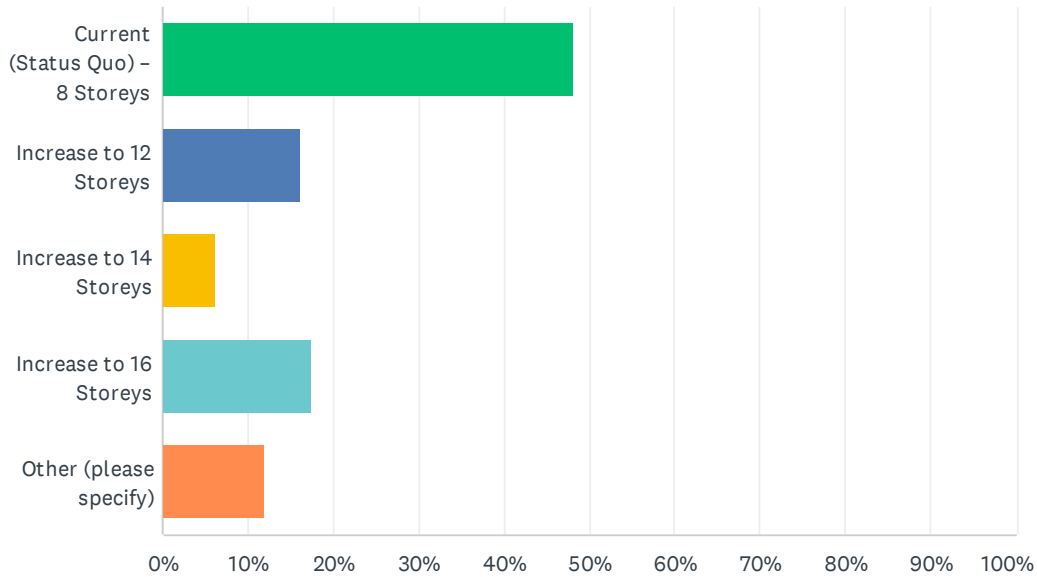
Following completion of Stage 3, work to revise the Draft Official Plan based on feedback from consultation will begin in Stage 4 of Our Orillia OPR project – informed by all input and recommendations of earlier stages of work.

Appendix A

Detailed Issues and Options Survey Input

Q1 1.a) Which of the following do you think is the most appropriate maximum height for Intensification Areas (refer to Schedule A) in Orillia?

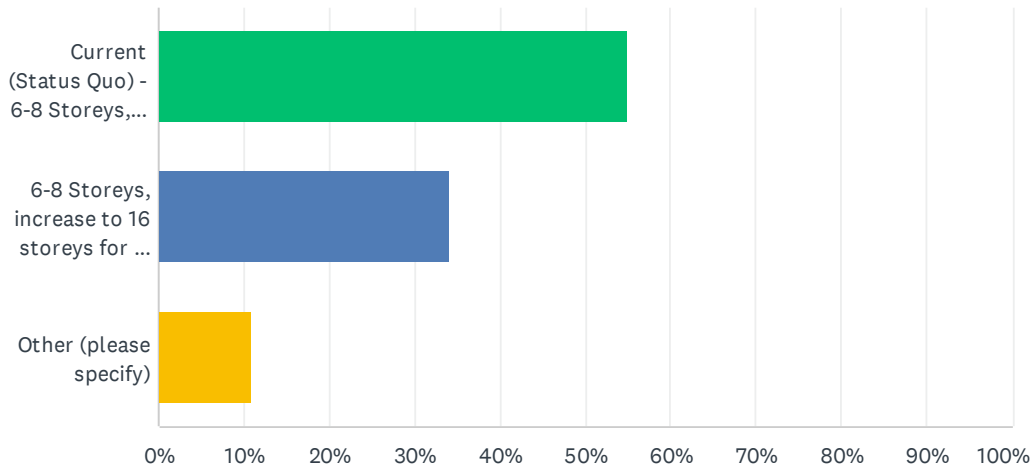
Answered: 276 Skipped: 21



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Current (Status Quo) – 8 Storeys	48.19%	133
Increase to 12 Storeys	16.30%	45
Increase to 14 Storeys	6.16%	17
Increase to 16 Storeys	17.39%	48
Other (please specify)	11.96%	33
TOTAL		276

Q2 1.b) Which of the following do you think is the most appropriate maximum height for the Central Core Intensification Area (refer to Schedule B) generally located south of Mississaga Street?

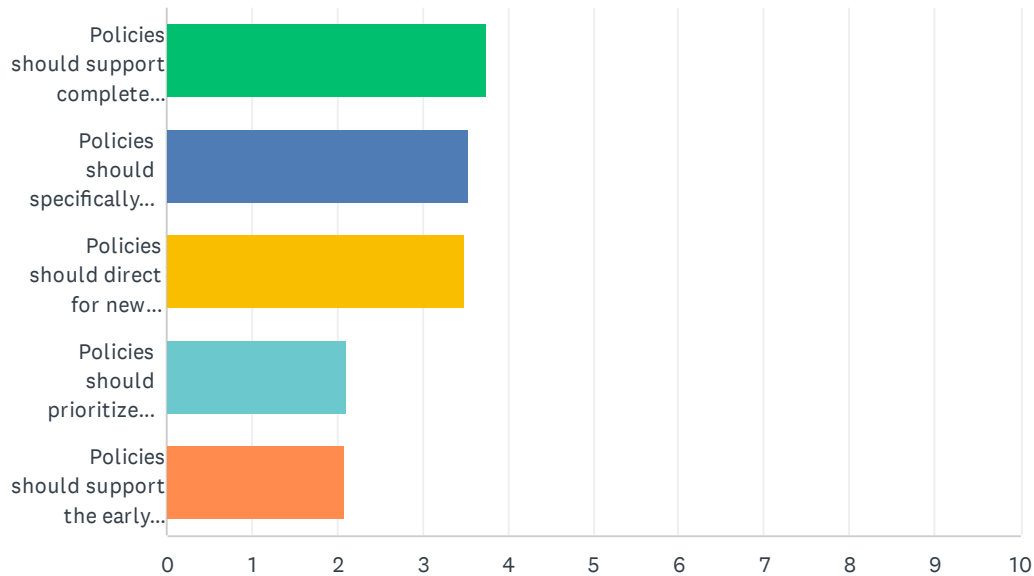
Answered: 275 Skipped: 22



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Current (Status Quo) - 6-8 Storeys, 12 storeys for the lands generally south of King Street	54.91%	151
6-8 Storeys, increase to 16 storeys for the lands generally south of King Street	34.18%	94
Other (please specify)	10.91%	30
TOTAL		275

Q3 2. The following are statements related to potential active transportation policy direction in Our Orillia. Please order the following statements in order of highest (1) to lowest (5) priority.

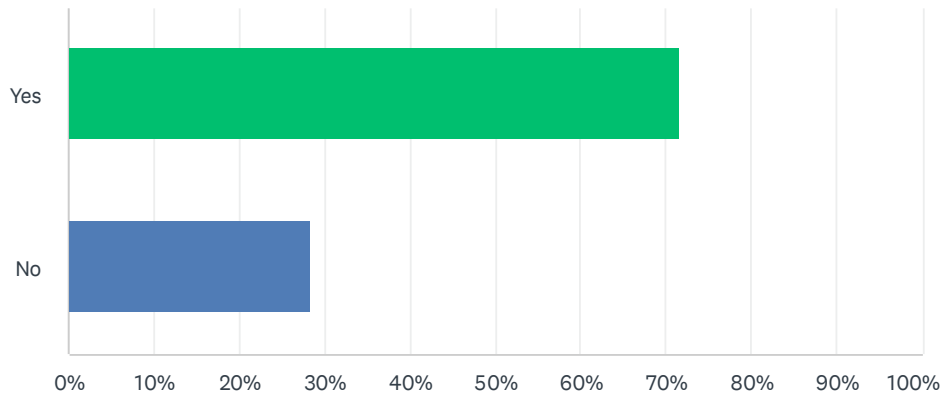
Answered: 277 Skipped: 20



	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	SCORE
Policies should support complete streets which prioritize vulnerable road uses, including those who walk and roll through new and rebuilt streets.	35.74% 99	26.71% 74	20.94% 58	10.47% 29	6.14% 17	277	3.75
Policies should specifically relate to safe streets in proximity to schools, community facilities, and parks.	27.44% 76	30.69% 85	18.41% 51	14.80% 41	8.66% 24	277	3.53
Policies should direct for new development that is highly connected to and supports existing and planned active transportation routes (e.g., trails and bike lanes). Consideration should be given to policies related to the redevelopment of large sites (e.g., shopping plazas, brownfields) and opportunities for the City to secure pedestrian-oriented access.	27.80% 77	22.02% 61	30.32% 84	11.55% 32	8.30% 23	277	3.49
Policies should prioritize bicycle parking and other transportation demand management measures, such as end of trip facilities, long-term/secure bicycle parking, carpooling, and shared parking arrangements.	2.53% 7	10.47% 29	15.52% 43	38.99% 108	32.49% 90	277	2.12
Policies should support the early introduction of transit in new neighbourhoods within the Designated Greenfield areas, such as through the layout of the road network and inclusion of medium and high-density developments (which are often built in later phases of development after low-density blocks are constructed).	6.50% 18	10.11% 28	14.80% 41	24.19% 67	44.40% 123	277	2.10

Q4 3. The City has a housing affordability issue which is increasingly making attaining housing out-of-reach for some households and individuals. Do you like the following options for addressing the affordability issue? Create policies within the Official Plan that prioritize using surplus government or municipally-owned land for affordable housing, Permit Apartment Buildings in the Stable Neighbourhood designation, subject to the following height restrictions. Along arterial and collector roads, a maximum of four storeys would be permitted. Along local roads, a maximum of three storeys would be permitted.

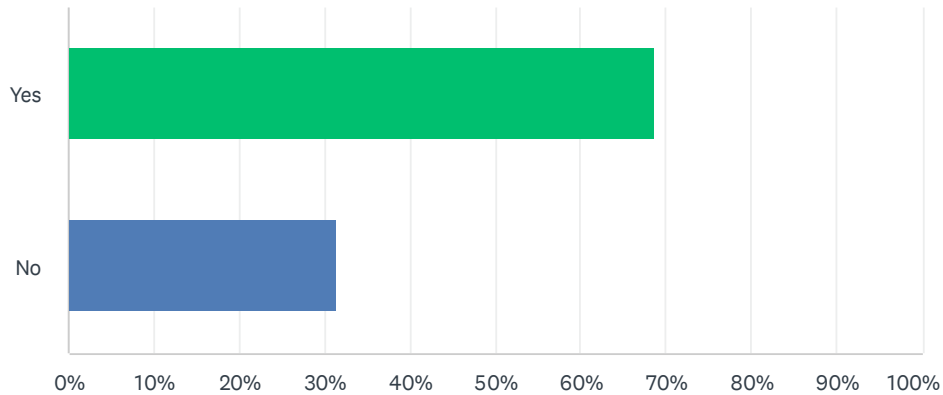
Answered: 205 Skipped: 92



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	71.71%	147
No	28.29%	58
TOTAL		205

Q5 4. As Orillia has grown, the housing stock has not grown in proportion to the needs of today’s residents. Do you like the following option for addressing the housing stock issue? To enable and support smaller, innovative, alternative housing options (i.e., tiny homes), create policy that supports new residential zones with maximum unit sizes, instead of minimum unit sizes.

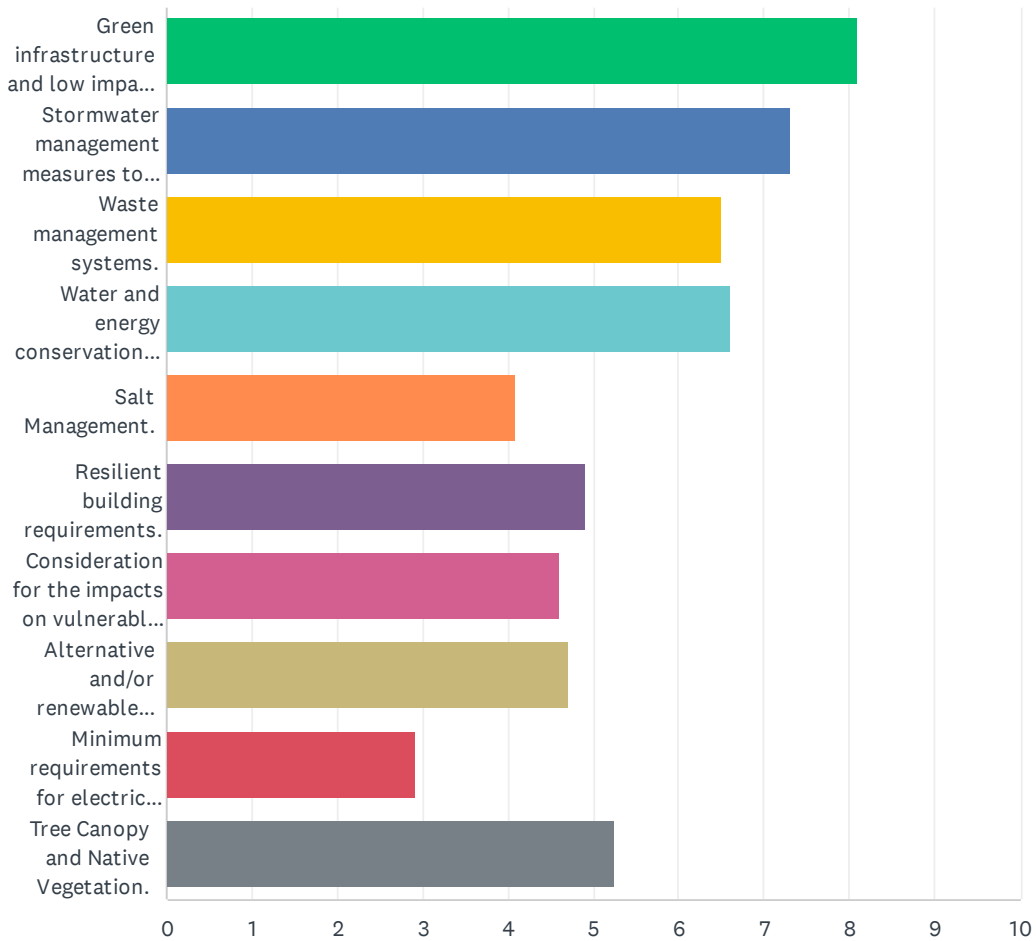
Answered: 208 Skipped: 89



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	68.75%	143
No	31.25%	65
TOTAL		208

Q6 5. What are the most important elements of sustainable building design? Please order the following statements from most (1) to least (10) important.

Answered: 206 Skipped: 91

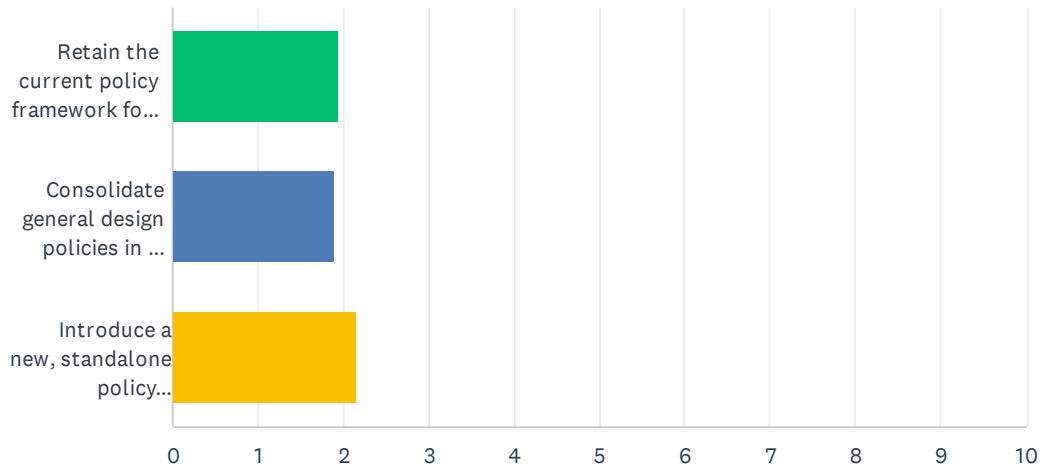


City of Orillia Official Plan Review - Stage 2 Survey

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	TOTAL
Green infrastructure and low impact development.	39.32% 81	18.93% 39	10.19% 21	10.19% 21	6.80% 14	5.34% 11	3.40% 7	1.94% 4	2.43% 5	1.46% 3	206
Stormwater management measures to mitigate snowfall and rainfall.	14.56% 30	30.10% 62	14.08% 29	9.22% 19	7.28% 15	8.74% 18	8.25% 17	3.88% 8	2.43% 5	1.46% 3	206
Waste management systems.	6.31% 13	13.59% 28	19.90% 41	11.65% 24	18.45% 38	10.19% 21	9.71% 20	3.88% 8	5.34% 11	0.97% 2	206
Water and energy conservation measures.	4.85% 10	9.71% 20	16.50% 34	28.64% 59	12.62% 26	13.11% 27	8.25% 17	5.34% 11	0.49% 1	0.49% 1	206
Salt Management.	0.97% 2	1.46% 3	3.88% 8	8.25% 17	16.02% 33	10.19% 21	13.59% 28	18.93% 39	12.14% 25	14.56% 30	206
Resilient building requirements.	4.37% 9	3.88% 8	8.25% 17	5.34% 11	9.71% 20	24.27% 50	15.53% 32	14.08% 29	10.68% 22	3.88% 8	206
Consideration for the impacts on vulnerable populations, including children and seniors.	6.31% 13	3.88% 8	7.28% 15	8.25% 17	7.77% 16	8.74% 18	16.99% 35	16.99% 35	13.11% 27	10.68% 22	206
Alternative and/or renewable energy systems.	4.37% 9	7.28% 15	9.71% 20	4.85% 10	8.74% 18	8.74% 18	13.11% 27	20.39% 42	17.96% 37	4.85% 10	206
Minimum requirements for electric vehicle charging infrastructure and/or bicycle parking.	2.43% 5	3.40% 7	2.91% 6	5.34% 11	5.34% 11	2.91% 6	3.40% 7	8.25% 17	26.21% 54	39.81% 82	206
Tree Canopy and Native Vegetation.	16.50% 34	7.77% 16	7.28% 15	8.25% 17	7.28% 15	7.77% 16	7.77% 16	6.31% 13	9.22% 19	21.84% 45	206

Q7 6. What is the best way for Our Orillia to encourage sustainable building design? Please order the following statements from most (1) to least (3) effective.

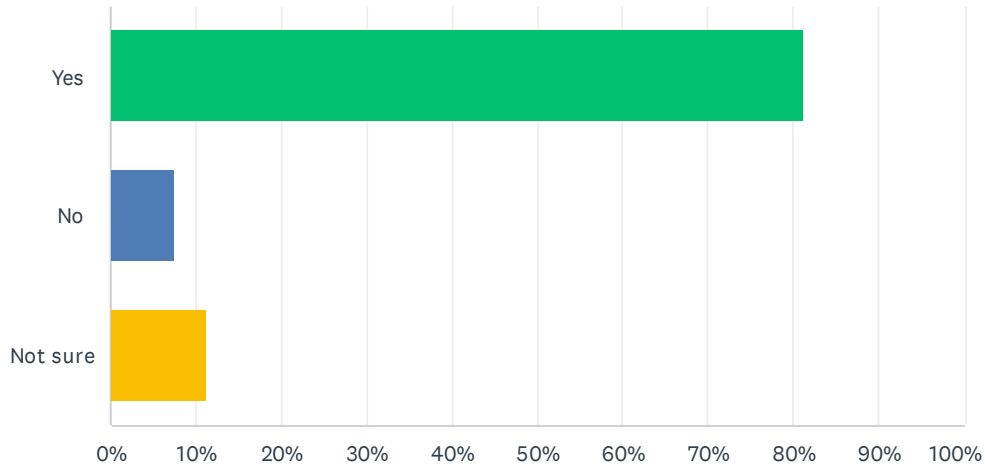
Answered: 183 Skipped: 114



	1	2	3	TOTAL	SCORE
Retain the current policy framework for the design of buildings (i.e., embedded within land use designations), but introduce new policies that require new and emerging standards for sustainable design.	28.42% 52	38.25% 70	33.33% 61	183	1.95
Consolidate general design policies in the current Official Plan that contemplate sustainable design principles. These policies may apply to all new development, regardless of land use designation.	21.86% 40	45.90% 84	32.24% 59	183	1.90
Introduce a new, standalone policy directing the City to prepare a minimum standard for new residential and non-residential development. The standard for new development could be referred to as the "Orillia Green Standard" to align with the direction of the Community Climate Action Plan and could apply to new development applications subject to the Planning Act.	49.73% 91	15.85% 29	34.43% 63	183	2.15

Q8 7. The existing Official Plan directs that an individual environmental impact study (EIS) prepared for a specific development shall recommend an appropriate buffer (no development zone) adjacent to natural features and areas. Do you think minimum buffer sizes should be prescribed by Our Orillia?

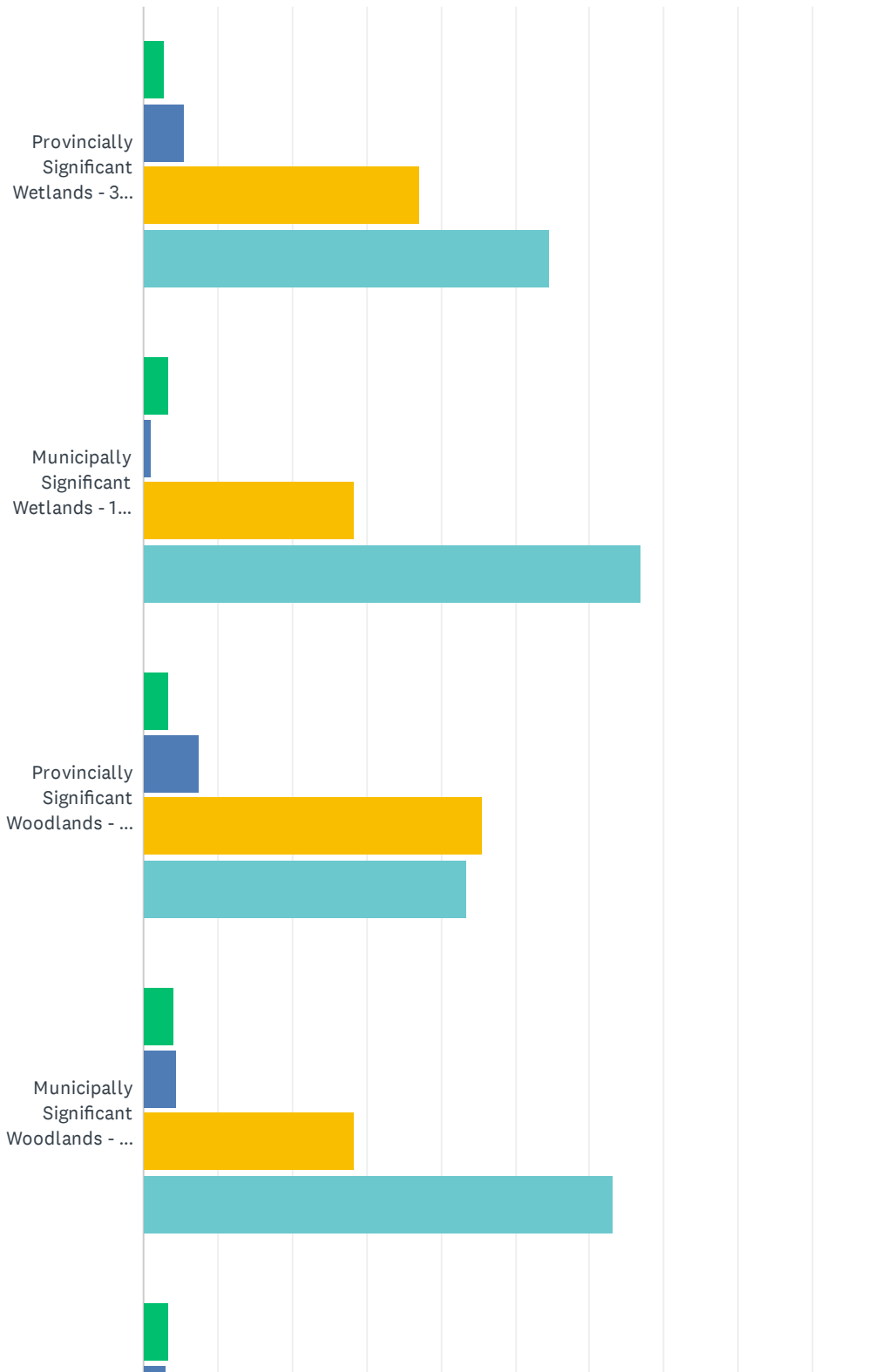
Answered: 186 Skipped: 111



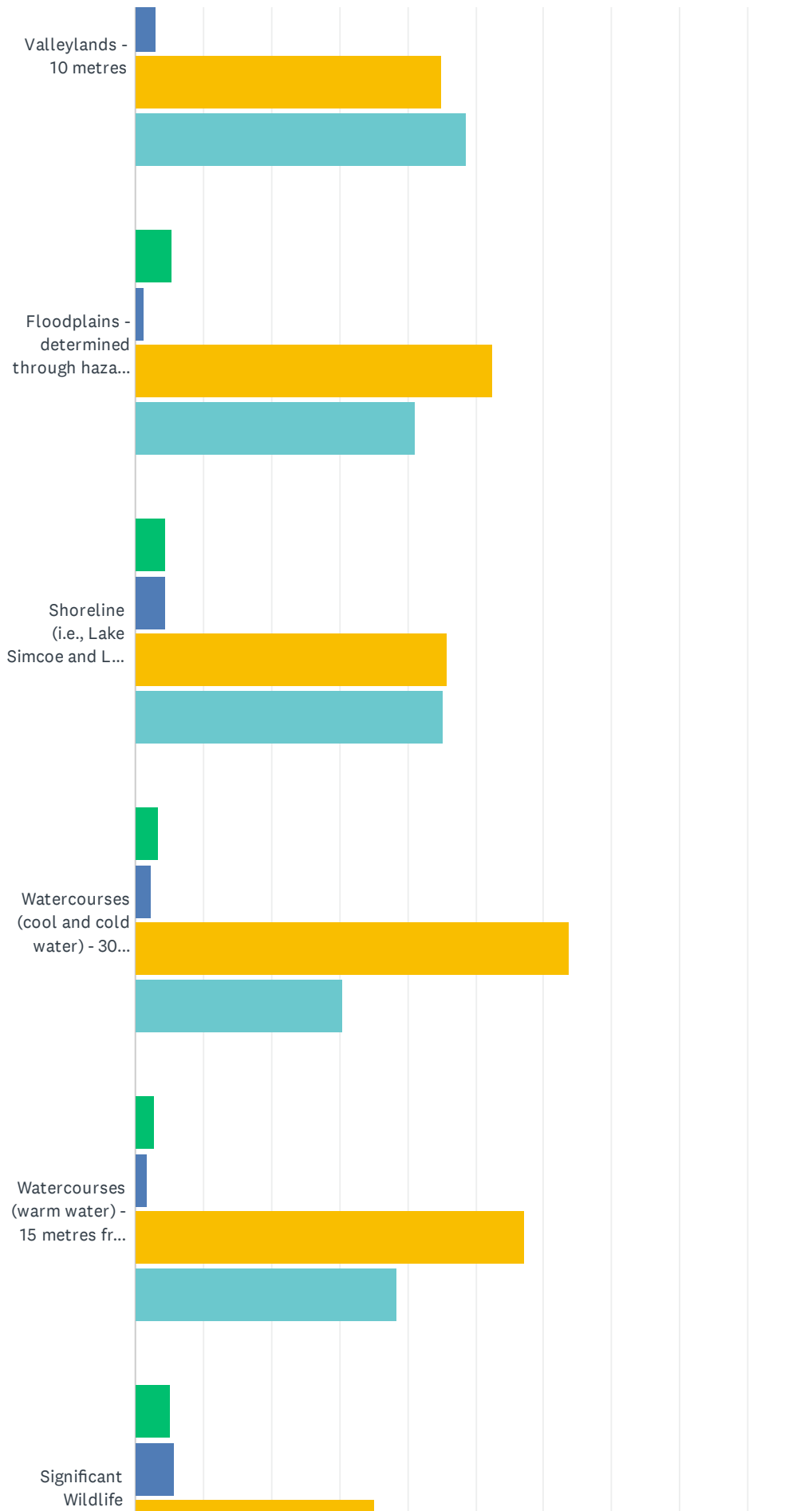
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	81.18%	151
No	7.53%	14
Not sure	11.29%	21
TOTAL		186

Q9 8. The following are potential prescribed minimum buffer widths based on guidelines and industry standards. Using the rating scale below, please check one box per row.

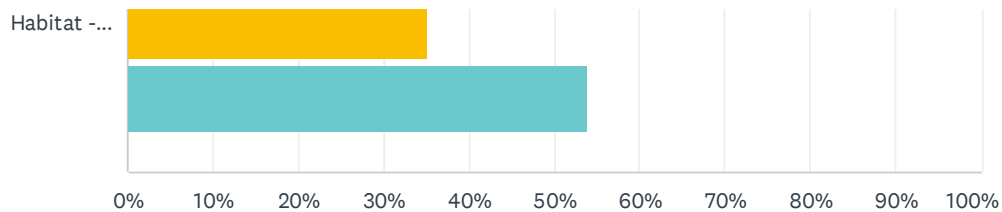
Answered: 178 Skipped: 119



City of Orillia Official Plan Review - Stage 2 Survey



City of Orillia Official Plan Review - Stage 2 Survey

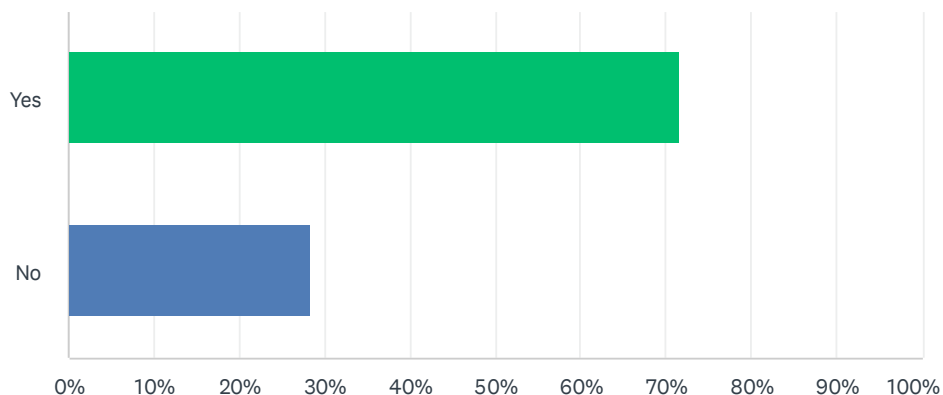


■ No Minimu...
 ■ Too Large
 ■ Just Right
 ■ Too Small

	NO MINIMUM SHOULD EXIST	TOO LARGE	JUST RIGHT	TOO SMALL	TOTAL
Provincially Significant Wetlands - 30 metres	2.81% 5	5.62% 10	37.08% 66	54.49% 97	178
Municipally Significant Wetlands - 15 metres	3.41% 6	1.14% 2	28.41% 50	67.05% 118	176
Provincially Significant Woodlands - 30 metres beyond the dripline	3.43% 6	7.43% 13	45.71% 80	43.43% 76	175
Municipally Significant Woodlands - 15 metres beyond the dripline	3.98% 7	4.55% 8	28.41% 50	63.07% 111	176
Valleylands - 10 metres	3.47% 6	2.89% 5	45.09% 78	48.55% 84	173
Floodplains - determined through hazard land mapping	5.29% 9	1.18% 2	52.35% 89	41.18% 70	170
Shoreline (i.e., Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching) - 15-metre buffer along Lake Couchiching and a 30-metre buffer along Lake Simcoe, or larger if determined appropriate by an EIS.	4.52% 8	4.52% 8	45.76% 81	45.20% 80	177
Watercourses (cool and cold water) - 30 metres from the high-water mark on both sides, plus 0.5 metres per 1% of the slope	3.39% 6	2.26% 4	63.84% 113	30.51% 54	177
Watercourses (warm water) - 15 metres from the high-water mark on both sides	2.86% 5	1.71% 3	57.14% 100	38.29% 67	175
Significant Wildlife Habitat - Significant Wildlife Habitat criteria schedule to determine setbacks. Where they are not determined, 30 metres	5.11% 9	5.68% 10	35.23% 62	53.98% 95	176

Q10 9. While single-detached dwellings have historically been the predominant housing type in Orillia, housing preferences have undergone a shift. More people are now looking for semi-detached, townhouse, and apartment dwellings that meet a greater diversity of needs, stages of life, and financial circumstances. Do you like the following options for addressing the housing mix issue? Permit street townhouses as-of-right in residential areas, subject to locational criteria, access to transit and compatibility with existing neighbourhoods. Expand permissions for walk-up apartment and stacked townhouse-style dwellings along Collector and Arterial Roads, subject to criteria that can include adequate servicing, proximity to a transit route or Strategic Growth Area. Increase the maximum permitted height within neighbourhood designations up to four storeys on Arterial and Collector Roads. Three storeys would remain permitted as of right on Local Roads.

Answered: 180 Skipped: 117



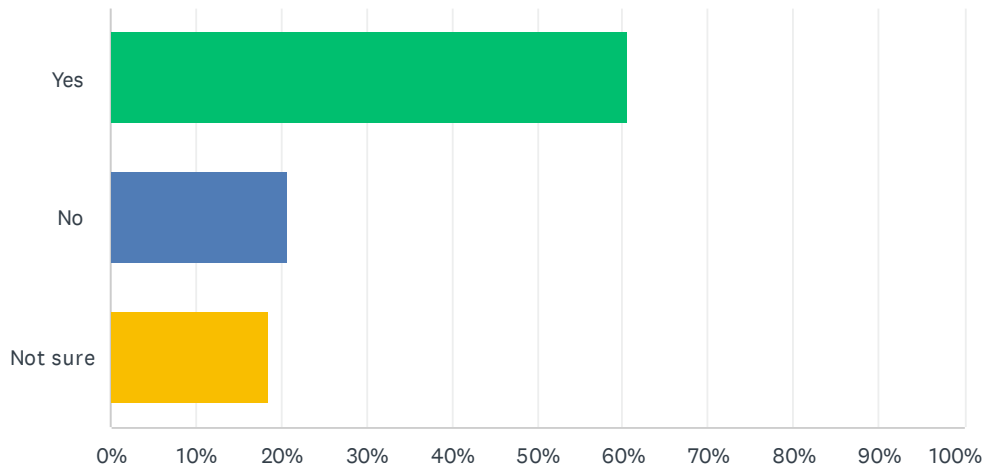
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	71.67%	129
No	28.33%	51
TOTAL		180

Q11 Do you have other suggestions? Please specify.

Answered: 55 Skipped: 242

Q12 10. In the existing Official Plan, the establishment of local convenience / service retail uses in the Living Area designation requires a Zoning By-law Amendment. Should Our Orillia policies be updated to permit small-scale neighbourhood commercial uses as of right in Living Areas?

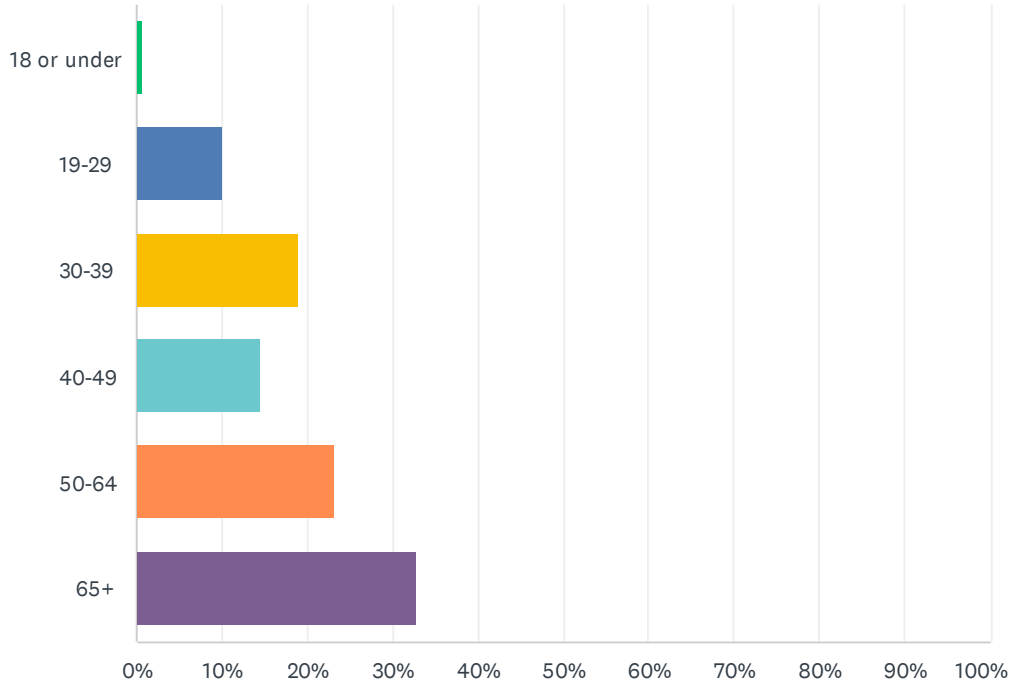
Answered: 183 Skipped: 114



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	60.66%	111
No	20.77%	38
Not sure	18.58%	34
TOTAL		183

Q13 11. What age group do you belong to? Please select from the list below.

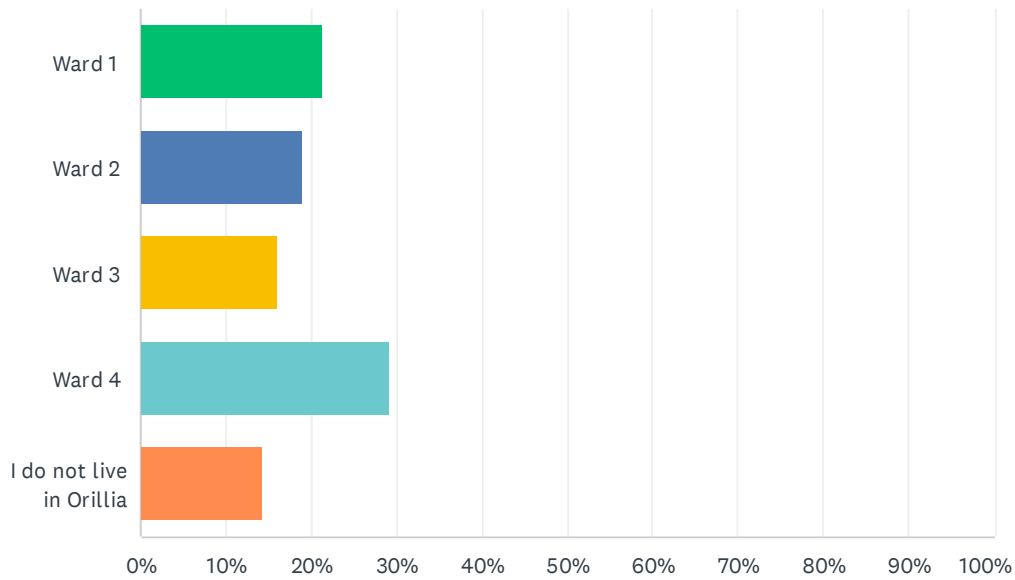
Answered: 180 Skipped: 117



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
18 or under	0.56%	1
19-29	10.00%	18
30-39	18.89%	34
40-49	14.44%	26
50-64	23.33%	42
65+	32.78%	59
TOTAL		180

Q14 12. What Ward do you live in? Please select from the list below.

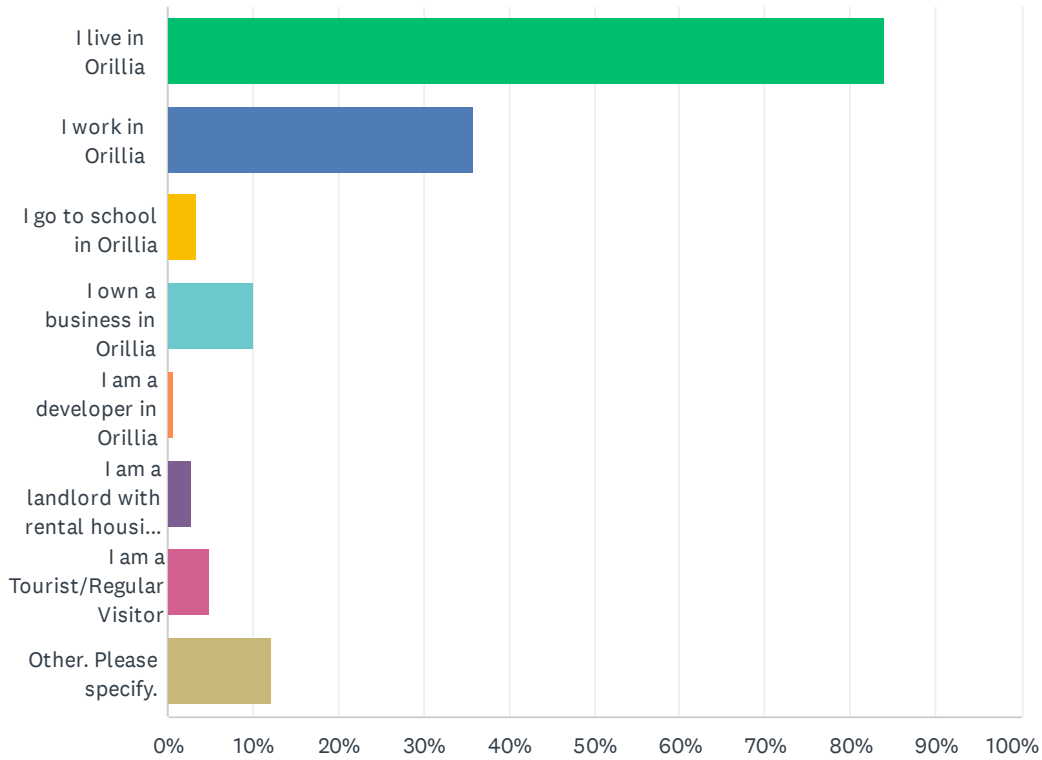
Answered: 174 Skipped: 123



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Ward 1	21.26%	37
Ward 2	18.97%	33
Ward 3	16.09%	28
Ward 4	29.31%	51
I do not live in Orillia	14.37%	25
TOTAL		174

Q15 13. Please select the option(s) below that you identify closest with:

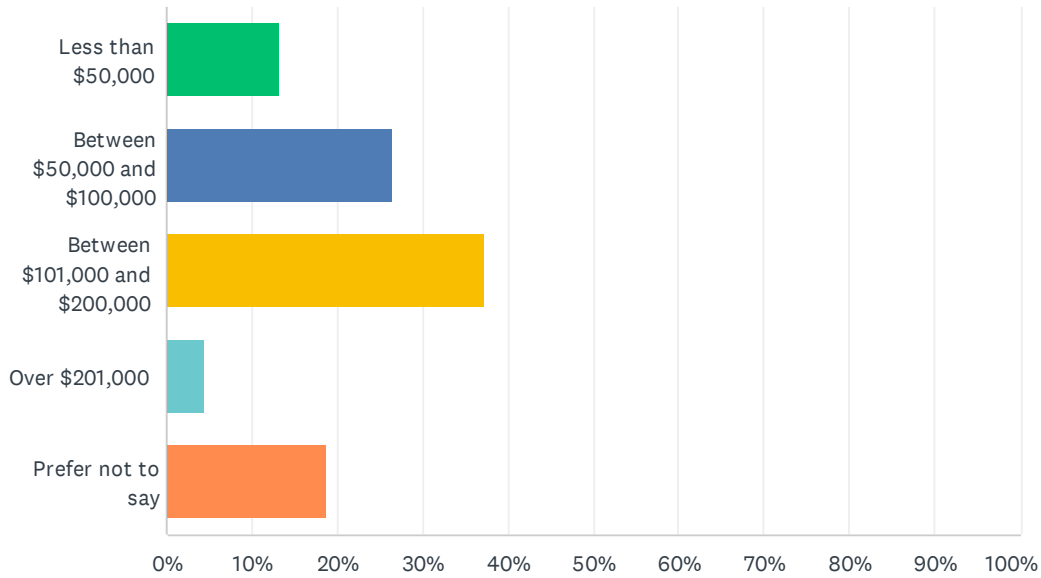
Answered: 181 Skipped: 116



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I live in Orillia	83.98%	152
I work in Orillia	35.91%	65
I go to school in Orillia	3.31%	6
I own a business in Orillia	9.94%	18
I am a developer in Orillia	0.55%	1
I am a landlord with rental housing in Orillia	2.76%	5
I am a Tourist/Regular Visitor	4.97%	9
Other. Please specify.	12.15%	22
Total Respondents: 181		

Q16 14. What is your approximate total annual household income?

Answered: 182 Skipped: 115



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than \$50,000	13.19%	24
Between \$50,000 and \$100,000	26.37%	48
Between \$101,000 and \$200,000	37.36%	68
Over \$201,000	4.40%	8
Prefer not to say	18.68%	34
TOTAL		182

Q17 What have we missed? Please provide any additional comments in the space below.

Answered: 72 Skipped: 225