



Will the New Official Plan Do the Job?

October 25, 2021

Press Statement by the People's Official Plan

We are meeting on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe Nation. We have committed to truth and reconciliation. It has become clear that the City of Ottawa has not yet meaningfully consulted with all the Algonquin communities, although this is required by the Province regarding land-use planning matters. We find this concerning, especially as the rationale for the massive Tewin project land allocation is reconciliation action.

In the view of the People's Official Plan, a loose-knit alliance of community groups, the current draft Official Plan (OP) falls short of meeting its own ambition (the 5 Big Moves and OP higher-level policy statements) and is an inconsistent policy document. Having followed the OP process for over 2 years, it also does not meet our stakeholder expectations. We propose solutions to these concerns:

AFFORDABILITY

The Ottawa housing market, and hence the 'affordability' discussion, is split into two parts.

1) Market affordability: Middle-class residents and new market entrants are increasingly priced out of 'market affordability' due to a variety of factors. These include the long-term supply of housing, population growth, a well-functioning industry, construction sector prices/inflation and regulatory certainty. As confirmed by the Hemson 2021 Update report, urban infill is far more economical for the city (positive revenues of \$606/person/year) than greenfield sprawl (costs City of Ottawa \$465/person/year plus ecological and climate costs).

While strongly supporting intensification, POP's proposed solution is to improve market affordability by planning that enables gentle density and a better distribution of density inside the greenbelt. The OP however appears to foresee little change in Ottawa's existing inner and outer suburbs, aiming to put the majority of intensification where costs are highest: downtown and tower construction.

2) Deep affordability: Low-income residents are increasingly priced and pushed out of deeply affordable housing, and face the threats of housing stress and homelessness.

On the homelessness crisis, and commitments to equity and inclusion, progress was made between earlier and current versions of the Official Plan. We are seeing commitments on racial justice and equity, and look toward tracking equity across neighbourhoods. We still need to see the City follow through to lay out a strategy to improve equity in neighbourhoods that are under-resourced, through location of city amenities (daycare, improved public transit, increased tree canopy, community food assets, etc.). POP is pleased to see a better definition around housing, with a recognition that everyone deserves to have housing that costs no more than 30% of their income as well as commitments to identify and acquire additional lands for social housing.

To mitigate and work towards solving the housing and homelessness crisis, we need measures including support to non-profit housing providers and the use of anti-displacement measures to the fullest extent to ensure that core affordable private-market housing is not demolished in favor of quick profits for developers and investors in real estate financialization.

LIVABILITY

A City of Towers, Corridors and Cars, or a City of Walkable Neighbourhoods?

The Official Plan has described a compelling vision of 15-minute complete communities, where people can live, work and play. The policies meant to get us there, however, are vague and in key instances contradictory. There is a sizable risk that inside the Greenbelt, tall towers and road corridors will dominate, and neighbourhoods will lose the trees that make them livable. In newer parts of the city, and in suburbs outside of the greenbelt, amenities will be scarce, and jobs nearby scarcer still. Getting into a car to move from home to work, to shop, or to walk in a shaded area will still be the norm for most people in Ottawa's suburbs. POP's solution is to do much better analysis, modeling, local planning and engagement of communities and stakeholders in local design of 15-minute neighbourhoods.

Can we Live in an Urban Desert? Concerns about the loss of trees and access to greenspace was the top issue – by far – for public delegations to weigh in on the Official Plan over the last two years. Directions to staff respecting the Greenspace and Urban Forest Master Plan (ETA 2023) in response to demands for more equity

in access to both tree canopy and greenspace are encouraging. It remains to be seen whether or not new provisions for making more effective use of the public realm and rules around front yard setbacks will make space for trees to line our streets and shade us from the heat island effects of Ottawa's famously hot and humid summers. The POP solution of a 40% canopy per neighbourhood target was not accepted by staff, nor was a no net canopy loss by neighbourhood.

CLIMATE

Shifting Ottawa to become a city of compact, higher density neighbourhoods is one of the best solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions - and will save land, money and improve quality of life at the same time. However, based on the limitations of the Ottawa in-house climate model, the City is in official denial about the GHG benefits of compact vs sprawl developments outside the urban core.

The provincial legislation governing the OP has clear language encouraging energy efficiency, climate response and sustainability. The Ottawa OP mostly fails to achieve traction on the climate agenda for building better. The new High Performance Development Standard looks like it will fall prey to site plan exemptions and we are far from net-zero build requirements on greenfield development. Pro-active land-use measures for local renewable energy generation targets were similarly left lying on the table. Knowledgeable experts in the insurance industry and federal government are predicting there will be serious and costly impacts to infrastructure, buildings, roads, transmission lines and health over the next 30 years unless strong prevention starts now. Unfortunately, the OP is weak on prevention and leaves Ottawa exposed to the flooding, heat waves and wilder weather of the future.

FOOD

Where will our food come from? Food still does not have any significance in the Official Plan. It is identified as "not a good fit", with targets for community gardening, edible tree canopy, farmland preservation and has been shuffled off entirely or to minor plans despite being *fundamental*.

POP's solution is that food is a critical lever to address health, climate change and economic development. Community garden space was refused to be included within Parks' mandate as a core service along with 22 other core services. Farmland preservation remains a stated goal with zero actual meaning, given Council's continued approval for an ever-expanding urban boundary onto prime farmland. We need to incorporate the readily available solutions of edible landscape, including significant targets within the urban tree canopy, community gardening as a core service and consistent support for diversified farms, with emphasis on lands adjacent to residential zoning and transportation routes. Joined-up policy where a food lens is applied to all departments, sharing responsibilities for outcomes, is the only way to successfully lead to the Big Moves desired.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

What will it all cost? The public has not been provided with estimates of how much the OP will cost or how these costs will be profiled over time. We do know three financial realities:

1. Urban boundary expansion is very costly both in taxes on established community and in terms of carbon emissions;
2. it is cheaper to build complete and energy-efficient communities in the first place, rather than retrofitting later; and,
3. the operating and capital costs of an affordable, high-service, accessible public transit system that out-competes the car are very high (even more so for a city choosing to sprawl).

POP's proposed solution is for a high-level long-term financial plan or framework to 2050 (encompassing growth, climate action and public transit costs) has so far not been heard.

The Official Plan on its own won't solve all the big problems and emergencies Ottawa faces. All levels of government and all sectors of society are needed to do that. The policy framework is, however, a major tool for doing our collective part. And mapping out the financial burden sharing expectations is a part of responsible municipal leadership.

Possible legacy of unmitigated risk - Tewin. In POP's review of the OP, one risk stands out above all others: Ottawa's rushed and huge urban boundary land-deal. The Tewin development was proposed in the name of reconciliation and benefitting Algonquin people. Yet, too many questions remain, ranging from Indigenous prior consultation; technical issues assessing the land in question (which failed the Council-agreed rating criteria); and not least unspecified issues of cost and liability for the City in what may be a P3 project larger than the LRT. POP's proposed solution is that Tewin planning needs more time, and we recommend that finalization of the Tewin MOU cannot be delegated to staff at this time but must come back to Council once more information is available. We also recommend independent reviews of the financial risks to the City stemming from the Tewin MOU and Agreement, which may be in the billions – an expensive legacy of the OP.

Direction of Travel, Course Corrections, Metrics:

The People's Official Plan strongly endorses the so-called "Five Big Moves" that frame the City's vision of a land-use framework to 2046. Our detailed analysis, key issues paper and recommended targets and solutions can be found on the [People's Official Plan website](#). The future will tell whether the OP succeeds in charting a clear path, or whether soft language and contradictions will sow confusion and conflict.

We applaud the high level of cooperation among members of the Planning and Agriculture and Rural Affairs committees that have recommended to Council an amended draft of the new Official Plan. City staff have worked tirelessly, and taken on board many suggestions and solutions from the People's Official Plan and other community-based groups. They have also tried to contain the influence of financial interests on decision-making at City Hall.

Recent amendments to the Official Plan and directions to staff on monitoring go part way to set a tracking and accountability frame to help Council and citizens engage in oversight at City Hall. A solution towards making this future engagement work have positive traction is to establish metrics at the neighbourhood scale. Local plans and collaborative conversations can be built on these metrics, and we will know together whether we are succeeding in building complete inclusive walkable 15-minute neighbourhoods.

Background

Ottawa's new Official Plan will go to City Council Wednesday, October 27, 2021 with amendments passed by the Joint Committee for Planning, Agriculture and Rural Affairs. The committee meeting was quite the ordeal for all involved, with 94 public delegations speaking, 78 motions presented by Councillors, and many, many concerns and motions put forward by residents and the development industry. It was a melee of epic proportions, with Councillors and City Staff doing the best they could with limited time and a complicated job. They definitely get an A for effort.

The [People's Official Plan](#) (POP) is an informal alliance of environmental, social justice and neighbourhood organizations in Ottawa with no financial interests in the outcome of the Official Plan discussions. We are almost all volunteers who want the City to get it right, or at least the best it can be. Land-use decisions in Ottawa have an enormous impact on day-to-day life and the future livability of the city. We have spent countless volunteer hours over the last two years thinking, talking and mobilizing others committed to a singular goal: how do we **move** our city into the post-COVID economic and social era in ways that make Ottawa livable for generations to come, inclusive and affordable.

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