

DRAFT CHECKLIST FOR PLANNERS TO DESIGN ACTIVE COMMUNITIES

Introduction:

The purpose of a checklist for municipal planning is to encourage the development of communities that promote and support physical activity opportunities. This development includes both the built environment, such as sidewalks, pathways, trails, parks and recreation centers, and the social environment such as whether residents feel safe in the community and whether they know their neighbours. The checklist will be the first tool developed within a joint urban planning and public health unit framework.

The checklist offers principles and specific criteria that will aid in the design of active communities by influencing the planning recommendations by municipal planners in Ontario.

Incentive for Municipal Planners to Use the Checklist:

The Government of Ontario has changed the rules for municipal planning. Municipalities are now required to meet new criteria that support designing healthy active communities.

The **Ontario Planning Act** (2006) included in Part 1: Provincial Administration; items of provincial interest requires planning decisions to have regard to “the orderly development of safe and healthy communities” in Section 2 (h).

The **Ontario Provincial Policy Statement** (2005) included in Part V: Policies 1.0 Building Strong Communities

1.1 Managing and directing land use to achieve efficient development and land use patterns

1.1.1 Healthy, livable and safe communities are sustained by:

- b) Accommodating an appropriate range and mix of residential, employment, recreational and open space uses to meet long-term needs;
- c) Avoiding development and land use patterns, which may cause environment or public health and safety concerns;
- f) Improving accessibility for persons with disabilities and the elderly by removing and/or preventing land use barriers, which restrict their full participation in society.

1.5 Public Spaces, Parks and Open Space

1.5.1 Healthy, active communities should be promoted by:

- a) Planning public streets, spaces and facilities to be safe, meet the needs of pedestrians, and facilitate pedestrian and non-motorized movement, including but not limited to, walking and cycling.
- b) Providing for a full range and equitable distribution of publicly-accessible built and natural settings for *recreation*, including facilities, parklands, open space areas, trails, and where practical, water-based resources.

The checklist will help municipal planners meet the requirements within the provincial planning policies that refer to developing complete communities, addressing urban sprawl, protecting farmlands and green spaces, reducing traffic congestion, incorporating mixed land use in developments, intensification and other planning decisions that could increase the physical activity opportunities for residents in Ontario.

An urban design criterion is an underlying principal for municipal policies. The checklist reflects smart growth principles and, where there are development industry standards, they are used as the criteria. This checklist has been designed to reflect the “gold standard” of municipal planning decisions for the creation of active communities.

Another underlying principle of this checklist is that, when it is used by planners to evaluate new development projects that are submitted for municipal approval, it will highlight how the developer can better meet the need to design active communities. It will help shape future developments in the municipality by influencing what is an acceptable planning standard for new real estate development projects.

This checklist also reflects the belief *“If you go through the criteria listed in the checklist you will meet the provincial requirements to build healthy active communities.”*

Sections of the checklist include:

1. Population Density
2. Street Connectivity
3. Street Design
4. Streetscape
5. Transportation/Transit System
6. Mixed Land Use
7. Parklands and Trails
8. Safe Community Features

Instructions:

The following questions have been developed to prompt planners to think about the features of development that can support physical activity opportunities for residents.

Municipal Planners: With plans in hand, review the listed questions and make your responses and comments. Some questions require measurements or calculations. Use your answers to assist in the development of a report for submission to your planning committee.

Future plans for this tool include posting it online so planners can input their information and print out a completed report or export the information into other documents.

For more information or to provide feedback on this tool contact:

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1. POPULATION DENSITY

Rational: Density related with travel behaviour by affecting distances between destinations and the portion of destinations that can be reached by active modes such as walking and cycling.

(a) Consider minimum 15 units per/ha for low density with a target of 20 units per/ha. What are you recommending as the average density for proposed development projects?

- 15 units per/ha
- >15 units per/ha
- <15 units per/ha
- Other

(b) Consider a range of housing forms and density, which splits up the economics and demographics of a neighborhood. Does the development include "blended" neighbourhood? A "blended" neighbourhood is being defined as including housing forms such as single, semi-detached, townhouses and low-rise building.

- Yes
- No

If "yes," check off all the types of housing being developed in the development:

- Single
- Semi-detached
- Townhouses
- Low-rise building with rental units

2. STREET CONNECTIVITY

Rational: Connectivity determines how directly one can travel between activities. Well-connected walking and cycling networks are crucial to encourage active transportation.

(a) Review street pattern, pedestrian and cycling linkages. *"A highly interconnected local street network with shorter block lengths will allow traffic flow to dissipate more evenly through neighbourhoods. This pattern will limit increased traffic speed on long road stretches and the need for traffic calming devices, which limits emergency vehicle response time, reduces street parking and are costly to construct and maintain."*¹ Consider rectilinear grid pattern or modified grid pattern for streets. Describe the street pattern, pedestrian and cycling linkages.

¹ Frank, L., Kavage, S. & Litman, T. (2006). Promoting Public Health through Smart Growth. Smart Growth BC. Retrieved on May 2007 from <http://www.smartgrowth.bc.ca> page 24.

(b) Block lengths should generally range from 200 to 250 metres. Are street block lengths:

- 200 to 250 metres
- > 200 to 250 metres
- < 200 to 250 metres
- Other

(c) Where blocks are > 200 to 250 metres due to topography, do you recommend mid-block pedestrian walkways or parkettes. If not, what do you recommend?

(d) Collector roads/sidewalks should lead to destinations such as parks, arterial roads/sidewalks, commercial buildings, schools or other institutional buildings. Do the collector roads lead to destinations such as: (*check all that apply*)

- Parks
- Arterial roads/sidewalks
- Commercial buildings
- Schools
- Institutional buildings
- Other

3. STREET DESIGN

Rational: There is a need to balance street design objectives, accommodate alternative modes and activities, and to create safer, more convenient conditions for walkers, cyclists and transit users.²

3.1 Arterial Roads

(a) Are you recommending center median (landscape) for traffic calming and pedestrian refuge as a means to provide safe crossing for pedestrians?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” why not?

² Ibid

(b) Do you recommend sidewalks on both sides of the road?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” why not?

(c) Consider bike lane or bike path/multi-use sidewalk, depending on road speed. The faster the speed limit, recommend a bike path or multi-use sidewalk. What are you recommending most often on arterial roads?

- Bike lane
- Bike path/multi-use sidewalk
- Other
- No recommendations

3.2 Collector Roads

(a) Do you recommend center median (landscape) at gateways for safe crossing of pedestrians?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(b) Are there sidewalks on both sides of the road?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(c) Do you recommend bike lanes on both sides of the road?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” why not?

(d) When recommending bike lanes do you recommend that they be:

- 1.5 metres wide
- > 1.5 metres wide
- < 1.5 metres wide
- Other width

(e) Ensure that cycling lanes do not end abruptly at intersections or mid-block locations without providing continuity of cycling facilities. Are cycling lanes connected?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

3.3 Local Roads

(a) What is your minimum standard for sidewalks on local roads:

- One side only
- Both sides of the road
- Sidewalks are not recommended

3.4 On-street Parking

(a) Ensure that cycling lane lies adjacent to the traffic lane instead of curb.

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(b) Are you recommending that there is a grass strip between the sidewalk and on-street parking on local roads?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” why not?

(c) Are you recommending that traffic calming and street design strategies include:
(*check all that apply*)

- Narrower street widths
- Direct pedestrian connections
- Safe street crossings to control traffic speeds and create more walkable environments
- Other recommendations

(d) Are there other strategies for traffic calming that you have included to ensure safe street design for pedestrians? Please list.

4. STREETScape

Rational: Alternative approaches to street design can increase walking, cycling and public transit use, and reduce potential conflicts with vehicles related with traffic volume and speeds.

(a) Are you recommending that streetscape include: (*check all that apply*)

- Travel/parking lanes
- Boulevard of grass with trees
- Sidewalk minimum 1.5m
- Setback on private property to the structure
- Other recommendations

(b) Does the proposed plan include the principle that sidewalks located closer to the road must be wider?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” landscape plantings should be lower than 1.0m or higher than 2.0m to ensure sightlines. What is your recommendation?

(c) Does the proposed plan include sidewalks that are set back from the curb?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(d) Does the proposed plan include street tree plantings to shade the sidewalks?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(e) Consider the type of grills used to protect the earth under the tree with the safety for cyclists and those pushing strollers in mind. Are they present in the proposed design?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(f) Are sidewalk ramps aligned across intersections to allow wheelchairs and strollers to easily maneuver?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(g) Are you recommending that sidewalks be buffered from adjacent parking including both street parking and commercial parking lots?

- Yes
- No

If “yes,” what types of buffers between sidewalks and parking lots are being recommended?

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(h) Are crosswalks continuous and connected to adjacent sidewalks?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(i) Are crosswalks clearly designated for safety with appropriate surface markings or variations in construction material and signage to alert drivers of pedestrians?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(j) Existing street trees should be preserved wherever possible, as mature street trees create a greater sense of enclosure along roads. Are you recommending the preservation of mature street trees?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(k) Street lighting provides safety and character that reflects the neighbourhood design. Does the proposed plan include street lighting that provides safety and character?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

- (l) Street furnishings such as benches, tables, garbage bins should not be placed in locations that obstruct pedestrian circulation or block vehicular sight lines. Are the street furnishings included in the plan in locations that could obstruct pedestrian circulation or vehicular sight lines?

- Yes
 No

If “yes,” what are your recommendations?

- (m) Streetscape design includes access to cycling lanes and trail connection where appropriate. Does the plan include access to cycling lanes and trail connections?

- Yes
 No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

5. TRANSPORTATION/TRANSIT SYSTEM

Rational: Transit stops are co-ordinated with the design of walkways, sidewalks, intersections and other development in order to minimize walk distances, ensure safety and provide for reasonable bus stop spacing.

- (a) Are you recommending that 90 per cent dwelling units should be within a 450m or five to six minute walking distance of an existing or future bus stop?

- Yes
 No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

- (b) Does the proposed plan include multiple dwelling units that are within 300m or four minutes walking distance of an existing or future bus stop?

- Yes
 No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(c) Does the plan ensure that transit routes are: (*check all that apply*)

- Looped
- Have a reasonable timing
- Make use of arterial and collector roads
- Other

(d) Transit routes should link to destinations where people need to go. Are the proposed transit routes linked to any of the following destinations:

- Shopping
- Grocery stores
- Entertainment
- Leisure facilities
- Care facilities and services
- Other community destinations

(e) Do the proposed transit stops include basic amenities such as:

- Seating
- Transit shelters
- Trash receptacles
- Lighting
- Route information

6. MIXED LAND USE

Rational: “Mixing land use is most effective where habitual activities (home, work, school) are co-located with uses that are used less habitually, such as entertainment or retail.”³

(a) Development needs to include mixed land use as it provides greater live-work opportunities, minimizing commuting and promoting neighbourhoods as complete “villages”. Does the proposed plan include types of mixed land use?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

³ Ibid, page 15.

- (b) Neighbourhood-scale retail opportunities should exist in close proximity to residential areas. This means ensuring that the development takes into consideration commercial land use to support the day-to-day needs of residents. Does the proposed plan take this into consideration?

- Yes
 No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

- (c) Community facilities such as schools, libraries, daycares and churches should be located as a focal point of the community and integrated into the community and generally be situated at the center of neighbourhoods. Does the proposed plan reflect this integration?

- Yes
 No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

7. PARKLANDS AND TRAILS

Rational: The design of the neighbourhoods should have a strong visual and physical link to natural environments such as trails, waterways and woodlands.

- (a) There should be efforts on the part of the developer to integrate natural features such as woodlots and watercourses into the parklands and open spaces. Does the proposed plan identify ways to protect the environment such as trees and other vegetation during construction?

- Yes
 No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

- (b) Does the proposed plan ensure that parks and other open spaces are a part of a linked network via sidewalks, pathways or trails with an eye to accessibility by walking or cycling?

- Yes
 No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(c) Does the proposed plan ensure that there is a visible connection with the major park amenities and facilities through walkways and pathways?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(d) Has the developer taken into consideration that there needs to be signage to promote the location and mapping of these walkways or pathways?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(e) Parklands and open space should be designed to meet the needs of the community. Is there a range of active and passive recreational parklands?

- Yes
- No

If yes, are they located appropriately within the types of housing designed to meet the needs of the potential residents?

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(f) Open spaces should be framed or flanked by public roads wherever possible to improve the presence and safety of these amenities. Does the proposed plan reflect this principle?

- Yes

No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

- (g) Parks should have a minimum of 50 per cent exposure to public roads, i.e., single loaded roads. Does the proposed plan have a minimum of 50 per cent exposure to public roads?

Yes

No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

- (h) Consider using a target number of dwelling units in subdivision agreement to ensure that the development of parklands and trails occurs in a timely fashion. Are you making this recommendation?

Yes

No

If “yes,” what is your target number of dwellings?

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

- (i) Parks adjacent to school sites should encourage mutual use of outdoor facilities. Does the proposed plan include this feature?

Yes

No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

- (j) Appropriate sized buffers should exist between active park areas and adjacent residential areas. Does the proposed plan include this principle?

Yes

No

If “yes,” what types of buffers are you recommending?

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

8. SAFE COMMUNITY FEATURES

Rational: Safety needs to be a consideration in any urban design.

(a) Landscape plantings should be lower than 1.0m or higher than 2.0m to ensure sight lines. Does the proposed plan include this principle?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?

(b) Lighting needs to be incorporated and pedestrian-scale. Does the proposed plan include this principle?

- Yes
- No

If “no,” what are your recommendations?
