

URBAN STRUCTURE PLAN

BACKGROUND STUDY REPORT

A guide for:

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1. What is an Urban Structure Plan

The purpose of an Urban Structural Plan is to identify the key structural elements within the Settlement Boundaries of the municipality. These key structural elements and the linkages between them establish a big picture strategic framework with which more detailed land use designations and policies can be established.

The Urban Structure Plan (USP) formally illustrates the existing “big picture” form of the municipality through visual mapping and policy. It identifies the key structural elements such as nodes, corridors, and areas where specific activities are present. These key structural elements and the linkages between them will inform help Official Plan review with respect to the urban areas of the municipality.

Based on the nodes and corridors concept, the urban structure includes the following key elements:

- Urban Nodes:
 - Downtown Core;
 - Community Nodes;
 - Neighborhood Nodes;
- Corridors:
 - Primary Corridors;
 - Secondary Corridors;
 - Scenic Corridors;
- Major Activity Centres;
 - Growth Areas
 - Employment Areas
 - Major Open Space
 - Culturally Significant Areas
- Neighbourhoods

The Urban Structure Plan **will not** identify land use designations. The purpose of a USP is to identify the Municipality of Amherstburg’s key structural elements and describe them within the policy framework. The USP can also help inform where logical future nodes, corridors, or activity centres may arise. This USP is a high level document and will provide background for the Official Plan review.

Key Structure Elements

1.1 Urban Nodes:

The Urban Structure Plan and policies will identify a hierarchy of nodes, which include the urban nodes that make up the Municipality of Amherstburg. Urban nodes are indefinable by their mix of land uses and are intuitively recognized as areas of historic growth and urban fabric. Nodes are clusters that provide services and generally have a mix of residential, commercial and institutional buildings, such as shopping areas, community centres, libraries, and higher density housing. Nodes can be large in scale, such as the downtown, and can be the cultural hub of a community or on a smaller scale, provide goods and services to a neighbourhood.

1.1.1 Downtown Node

Downtown Nodes have a higher density, a range of uses and functions, and are identified as the core of the municipality by residents. The Downtown Node is intended to contain the broadest range and mix of land uses. It provides services to the residents across the town, and has a regional draw that serves neighbouring municipalities. It provides regional scale commercial stores, services and tourism as well as provides day-to-day commercial facilities and services for the downtown residents. This node is the cultural and institutional centre of the town.

1.1.2 Community Nodes

Community Nodes are smaller urban areas and settlement areas within the municipality of Amherstburg. They provide commercial and personal services for their immediate community. They provide a range of housing opportunities and provide a sense of place for neighbourhoods. These areas are sometimes located in secondary settlement areas and provide for the smaller communities that make up the municipality of Amherstburg. Often Community Nodes include a variety of residential developments, small-scale commercial and institutional uses. Mixed use street-level commercial and upper-level commercial or residential uses are encouraged at Community Nodes. Examples of Community Nodes include McGregor, Malden Centre and River Canard.

1.1.3 Neighborhood Nodes

Neighbourhood Nodes are small-scale centres typically focused on retail and service commercial uses for a neighbourhood. The function of Neighbourhood Nodes is to provide commercial and personal services to residents living in neighbourhoods at or near these locations. Many of these services are within a few hundred metres of area residents, suggesting that they can be reached by walking. Examples of Neighbourhood Nodes include the small-scale commercial uses at the corner of Middle Side Road and 2nd Concession, the commercial uses at Texas Road and 2nd Concession and other similar pockets of development.

1.2 Corridors:

Corridors are a critical part of the urban network structure. Neighbourhoods gravitate towards these corridors to serve their everyday needs or to connect with nodes and major activity centres to access a wider range of services and opportunities. Corridors have opportunities for intensification that would provide a wider range of services and opportunities for adjacent neighbourhoods but also more opportunities to live and work in the area.

1.2.1 Primary Corridors

Primary Corridors are located along major entry points into urban areas and connect nodes and major activity centres. Primary Corridors have the most frequent service. They usually have a higher volume of vehicular travel. They provide residents with opportunities to travel by bus, bicycle or on foot to their desired destination. Increased employment and residential densities along primary corridors support a range of transportation types, and in turn more transportation type’s support and attract higher density land uses. This symbiotic relationship between transportation options and corridor intensification is key to the success of any corridor and forms a key component of integrated land use and transportation planning. Thus, primary corridors and transportation should be planned and fostered together since neither can exist with much success without each other. Examples of Primary Corridors include Sandwich Street and Simcoe Street within the primary settlement area.

Primary corridors provide higher density employment and residential opportunities, with a significant amount of retail to support both everyday needs, but also needs beyond the day to day, such as specialized stores. Pharmacies, medical services and dental services are available with multiple choices for specialized care. Government services and buildings associated with the municipality, province or federal government are also found in these areas.

1.2.2 Secondary Corridors

Secondary Corridors are intended to link with nodes and neighbourhoods to Primary Corridors. Higher order transit options are limited in these areas primarily due to land use constraints and the level of transit options within the community. Secondary Corridors are bicycle and pedestrian friendly. These corridors are generally not a continuous strip of a mix of uses along their entire length. They can include segments of mixed use, segments of predominantly commercial land use and segments of predominantly residential land use. Secondary corridors are often in a state of gradual transition and targeted corridor studies can be used to develop additional direction for the development of these areas. Examples of Secondary Corridors include Alma Street, Thomas Road, and Fryer Street.

1.2.3 Scenic Corridors

Scenic Corridors are identified by the experience and views as you move along them. These corridors can act as major thoroughfares or have minimal capacity. Scenic Corridors generally

have reduced vehicular speeds and traffic interruptions are minimal. Examples of Scenic Corridors include Front Road South, Front Road North and Creek Road.

1.3 Major Activity Centres;

1.3.1 Growth Areas

Growth Centres are areas where growth is expected or should be encouraged. The highest in the hierarchy of nodes, density, range of uses, function and identity (or future identity). Growth Centres should be planned for:

- As focal areas for investment in institutional and municipal public services, as well as commercial, recreational, cultural and entertainment uses;
- To accommodate and support transit infrastructure;
- To accommodate an increase in residential, employment and institution uses;
- To accommodate a significant share of population and employment growth; and,
- Investment in existing infrastructure to provide further capacity for intensification;

These areas are intended to continue to grow and attract community investment.

1.3.2 Employment Areas

Employment Areas are the primary employment generators for the Town and range from the historic heavy industrial areas to modern business parks. Their primary function is to provide employment in goods production, distribution and business services. Employment Areas should identify targeted growth goals that take into consideration attracting new industry and balancing available services and planned service growth. Secondary plans can be utilized to identify growth targets for these areas.

Employment Areas in the Town of Amherstburg are focused on Sandwich Street, parts of Simcoe Street and within the downtown core for the most part. Industrial Employment Areas are focused on the former GC lands, Alma Street, St. Arnaud Street, and within the Howard Industrial Secondary Plan Area.

1.3.3 Major Open Space

The Major Open Space Systems are associated with Environmentally Significant Areas, Natural Heritage areas, and the parks system. Major Open Space provide the Town with a variety of passive and active recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Identifying Major Open Spaces can help the Town recognize opportunities and challenges with respect to infrastructure planning and growth management. Major Open Space Systems in the Town of Amherstburg include the Libro Centre Complex, Holiday Beach Conservation Area, and Big Creek.

1.3.4 Culturally Significant Areas

The Culturally Significant Areas are identified by their historical contribution to the urban fabric and by the contribution they make to the current cultural health of the municipality. Culturally

Significant Areas contribute the unique culturally identity of the Town. These areas can be tied to significant historical events or places, but are also identified by their contributions to the current culture of the municipality. Generally, these areas include the historic core, the Libro Centre, and Fort Malden.

1.4 Neighbourhoods

Neighbourhoods are the most basic component of the urban structure. Neighbourhoods are stable, low-to-medium-density residential areas and are comprised of local streets, parks, open spaces, schools, minor institutions, and convenience scale retail services. The three dominant types of dwellings in neighbourhoods are single detached, semi-detached and townhouses. The density range for neighbourhoods is between 20 to 35 units per net hectare. This density range provides for low and some medium-density intensification to occur in existing neighbourhoods. Multiple dwelling buildings with medium and high-densities are encouraged at nodes identified in the Urban Structure Plan.

2. Guiding Principles of the Urban Structure Plan

Amherstburg is committed to managing development and growth that is sustainable, comprehensive and recognizes a balance between the economy, the environment and the community's cultural needs. This Plan provides direction for the community to ensure that a high quality environment is created in a sustainable manner. The following principles are intended to guide the outcomes of the Urban Structure plan:

- Support **environmentally** conscious growth by identifying areas that are transit supportive, have compact forms, provide opportunity for mixed-use developments, are active transportation friendly, and utilize existing infrastructure and service.
- Support **economically** conscious growth by identifying areas with existing infrastructure and services, existing commercial nodes, existing employment areas, and areas where growth makes economic sense for the community.
- Support **culturally** conscious growth by identifying areas that are culturally or historically sensitive, identify existing open space and potential connections between these areas, identify major open spaces and connections.
- Support and facilitate investment in Amherstburg's nodes and corridors;
- Provide an Urban Structure Schedule and recommended Urban Structure policies for the new Official Plan.

The town's urban structure intends to protect natural heritage, open space and cultural heritage, maintain the character of residential areas and direct growth to Growth Areas – an identified system of nodes (such as Downtown) and corridors (such as Sandwich Street). That does not mean there will not be some measure of modest growth in established neighbourhoods, however; where there is development, it integrates harmoniously with the existing character.

The urban structure also functions to co-ordinate land use, mobility and infrastructure requirements, ensuring they are aligned and complementary. It facilitates better decision-making for both Amherstburg and Essex County Councils as it relates to capital investments and long-term planning.

3. Guiding Context

The Urban Structure Plan is being prepared to conform to all relevant Provincial Acts, policies and plans, including the Planning Act and the Provincial Planning Statement (PPS). Further, the Urban Structure Plan will inform the Municipalities Official Plan, Zoning By-law, and other guidelines/plans that the municipality will prepare to help the town grow in a strategic and sustainable way.

The Province has enacted various legislation changes over the last several years which have acutely altered how land use planning in Ontario is undertaken. With the uncertainty caused by evolving legislation, and changes to Ontario's planning regime, it is important for the town to remain vigilant and continue to rely upon, and implement the Urban Structure Plan. It remains a relevant and discerning tool, which the town can continue to employ for responding to changes in the Province's land use planning regime.

3.1 Provincial Planning Statement

The Provincial Policy Statement was issued under Section 3 of the Planning Act and came into effect on May 1, 2020. The Provincial Policy Statement provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development. As a key part of Ontario's policy-led planning system, the Provincial Policy Statement sets the policy foundation for regulating the development and use of land. It also supports the provincial goal to enhance the quality of life for all Ontarians.

The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) provides for appropriate development while protecting resources of provincial interest, public health and safety, and the quality of the natural and built environment. The PPS supports improved land use planning and management, which contributes to a more effective and efficient land use planning system.

The PPS recognizes that the wise management of development may involve directing, promoting, or sustaining growth. Land use must be carefully managed to accommodate appropriate development to meet the full range of current and future needs while achieving efficient development patterns.

The PPS Section 1.1.3 provides direction for managing development in settlement areas. The Urban Structure Plan is focused on settlement areas including primary and secondary settlement areas. The Urban Structure Plan provides the municipality with an opportunity to identify appropriate locations for transit-supportive development, and intensification and redevelopment of existing areas, taking into account existing and planned infrastructure and public service facilities. The Urban Structure Plan provides an opportunity to identify designated growth areas, intensification targets and opportunities for sustainable development.

The PPS Section 1.3 provides direction for managing development in Employment Areas. Employment areas are intended to provide for an appropriate mix of employment, institutional and broader mixed uses to meet long-term needs. The Town of Amherstburg has multiple employment areas, including areas specifically utilized for industrial uses and areas utilized for

service based employment such as retail and office space. The Urban Structure Plan will identify these areas and provide high level policy that is consistent with the PPS.

3.2 Ontario Planning Act

The Ontario Planning Act sets out ground rules for land use planning in Ontario. It describes how land uses may be controlled, and who may control them. The purpose of the Act is to provide for planning processes that are fair by making them open, accessible, timely and efficient.

The Planning Act has had many changes in the last few years including Bill 109, Bill 23, and Bill 97. These changes provided policies to decrease timelines for planning approvals providing for a faster and more efficient process to get shovels in the ground for development. The changes also incentivized increased residential development to build more homes in Ontario.

The creation of an Urban Structure Plan for the Town of Amherstburg is consistent with Section 2 of the Planning Act, which outlines provincial interests. The Urban Structure Plan provides for a high level plan in order to address the following:

- the adequate provision and efficient use of communication, transportation, sewage and water services and waste management systems
- the orderly development of safe and healthy communities;
- the adequate provision of a full range of housing, including affordable housing;
- the adequate provision of employment opportunities;
- the appropriate location of growth and development;
- the promotion of development that is designed to be sustainable, to support public transit and to be oriented to pedestrians;
- the promotion of built form that,
 - is well-designed,
 - encourages a sense of place, and
 - provides for public spaces that are of high quality, safe, accessible, attractive and vibrant.

3.3 Amherstburg Strategic Plan

The Town of Amherstburg is currently undertaking an update to the Community Strategic Plan. The existing plan covers the time period of 2016-2021. The existing Community Strategic Plan outlines four pillars that identify the needs, challenges and opportunities of the town. The pillars include:

- Marketing and promotion - Objective: Promote the Town as a destination for all demographics including young families and retirees.
- Economic development - Objective: Target the growth of our business community and cultural institutions, and foster an attractive downtown core within the constraints of zoning and Provincial Policies.
- Investment in infrastructure - Objective: Provide infrastructure that will facilitate growth and development.

- Fiscal sustainability - Objective: Demonstrate fiscal responsibility and the efficient allocation of tax dollars.

The Urban Structure Plan will provide the town with consistent messaging regarding locations for growth, reducing any ambiguities related to appropriate areas for development. It will provide opportunities for further policies that will encourage private sector development and support business attraction. It will help inform decisions about future infrastructure services. It will inform the new Official Plan of the future vision for the town, will provide opportunities for investment and help the town maintain fiscal responsibility.

3.4 Amherstburg Official Plan

The Town of Amherstburg Official Plan (2009) provides policies regarding where certain land uses should be located, the densities and specific uses associated with the land uses, and details identifying where growth should occur. Land designations within the Official Plan provide detailed policies that identify the types of land uses permitted within a designation, and separates land uses into distinct categories, for instance, low density residential, medium density residential and high density residential. The Urban Structure Plan is not intended to provide the same level of detail as the Official Plan.

Sections 1.7.4 and 1.7.5 of the Official Plan identify the requirement for the Town to plan for growth and development and identifies locations for future residential development.

Section 2.19 of the Official Plan identifies smart growth policies including investing in a system of service nodes, facilitating more efficient movement of people, goods, and information, and promoting a strong and vibrant economy.

4. Study Area

The study area includes the Municipality of Amherstburg.

5. Next Steps

The next step will be to develop a draft Urban Structure Plan. The draft Urban Structure Plan and associated Draft Policies will be the subject to stakeholder consultation. Staff will be draft an Urban Structure Plan and circulate for input from of departments and stakeholders. The draft USP will available to the public through the Talk The Burg website and community feedback and direction will help inform the plan.

The final step is to receive the endorsement of the Urban Structure Plan by Council. The consultant completing the Official Plan review will integrate the Urban Structure Plan into the work that they are completing.