

# Official Plan Review Discussion Paper #1 – What We Have Heard



## *A Sound Future – Parry Sound 2044*

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**Town of Parry Sound**

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# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Town of Parry Sound, like most municipalities, has an Official Plan. The Official Plan is a document that describes Council's policies on how land in the Town can be used and deals with a broad range of topics including: where and how the municipality will manage growth; which lands should be protected from development and preserved for their natural character; what lands should be available for development and redevelopment and the general type of land uses allowed in those areas; what services like roads, water and sewer systems, and parks will be needed to support growth; and, how and where land can be subdivided.

The Official Plan establishes a long-term vision and strategy for the Town that recognizes the public interest to effectively manage change and is the primary tool for implementing the Town's goals and objectives in that regard. Land use planning plays an important role in identifying and protecting a range of things that the community values. The updated Official Plan will guide all land use planning and development in the Town of Parry Sound for the next 20 years.

The current Town Official Plan was approved by the Province in 2014 and has been subject to several amendments over the years. The updated Official Plan will form the foundation for decision makers in protecting the environment, and guiding future growth and development, public works, and capital investment. The decisions of Town Council must conform to the Official Plan.

## 1.1 Purpose of Discussion Paper

The purpose of this Discussion Paper is to:

- Provide a brief overview of the Official Plan update process;
- Provide an overview of what we have heard through the public engagement during Phase One;
- Seek feedback and confirmation of the messages we have heard, to ensure we are on the right track;
- Propose possible updates to the Vision Statement for the future of Parry Sound and areas to focus the updated Official Plan around; and,
- Seek feedback on the draft Vision Statement options.

## 2.0 Official Plan Update

The Official Plan update is being undertaken in three (3) phases, over an approximately twelve (12) month period. Overall, Phase One of the process will consist of a thorough background research phase, including opportunities for gathering community input, then Phase Two includes the preparation of a draft Official Plan where the document will be released for public feedback, and Phase Three will conclude with the finalization and adoption of the updated Official Plan by Town Council.

We are currently in Phase One as reflected in the image below.



As part of the review, the Official Plan update has to reflect any legislative changes and will also consider the following:

- Appropriateness of currently designated lands;
- Where to direct growth and at what scale;
- Housing policies and encouraging additional residential units;
- Age-friendly, culturally aware and healthy community planning;
- Economic development and growth; and,
- Urban design policies.

## 2.1 Public Consultation and Engagement

The updated Official Plan must be prepared with the full participation and engagement of the Town including residents, property owners, public agencies and other communities of interest.

The following are some of the ways the Town will communicate with the community and provide opportunities for participation throughout the project:

- Parry Sound website;
- Online and in-person engagement;
- Feedback on Discussion Papers;
- Feedback on Draft Updated Official Plan;
- Open House; and,
- Statutory Public Meeting.





### 3.1.1 Natural Parry Sound

From the community engagement efforts to date and as shown in the word cloud of values above, there is a clear appreciation of the Town's natural assets, geographic setting and beautiful scenery including the rugged shoreline and Canadian Shield. Parry Sound gets its identity from the location and owes its history to the natural resources and opportunities that the geographic location provides.

The waterfront, Bay area and natural environment setting are elements of what makes Parry Sound so unique and desirable. The importance of Parry Sound's geographic location in providing opportunities for people to connect with nature and the water must be reflected in the future vision of the Town.

#### **Waterfront and Georgian Bay**

Over and over in the feedback received, people mentioned the waterfront and Georgian Bay as some of the things they value most. There is a strong desire to protect the views and public access to Georgian Bay. The Town's location on the shores of Georgian Bay, the deep-water harbour and the access opportunities this presents including to the UNESCO-designated Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve and the 30,000 islands archipelago is critically important to both residents and visitors alike.

The waterfront itself and access to it comes across loud and clear.

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*"...A waterfront that is fully accessible to the public, this is such a unique feature of a community and we need to be protective of its maintenance and expansion..."*

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Ways to enhance and keep a naturalized waterfront experience should be explored. There is also recognition that change is happening along the waterfront and on former brownfield sites, places where former industrial-type uses have been reclaimed to allow for new uses. Although there is change happening, residents wish to see the natural setting respected and incorporated into designs. Respondents identified the Fitness Trail as an important component of the waterfront area and the need to maintain public access to it.



## Natural Beauty and Rugged Landscape

The environment, nature and the natural beauty and rugged landscape are also identified as things Town residents value most. We heard that people value the “nature at your doorstep” and want to see the natural beauty protected as its part of what makes Parry Sound so unique and adds to the sense of place and quality of life here. There is an interest in ensuring that growth and redevelopment occurs in such a way as to respect the natural form and features of the landscape in and around Parry Sound, and to see the implementation of appropriate development standards to guide future development accordingly.

### Access

Access to the natural environment and the water/waterfront spaces was a common point raised across respondents. The Town and its residents take pride in the Fitness Trail and its importance not only as a linear trail through Town, but also its location running alongside the waterfront and the prospect for enhancing viewpoints and protecting vistas for all to enjoy. It was suggested that this can be further explored through the addition of benches and stopping points along the trail system, which will ensure the trail is made accessible for all ages.

Dock facilities were another item mentioned by several people. Enhancing and repairing the Town dock as well as adding more public docking facilities is viewed as important ways of providing other means of accessing the Town.

### 3.1.2 Building Parry Sound

From the community engagement efforts to date, there is recognition for the need to accommodate future growth in the Town and some of the challenges and opportunities that this presents. We have grouped them into common areas and describe them below:

### Housing

Through the feedback received, and reflected in Figure 1, it is clear that the lack of housing options and supply, and housing affordability in Parry Sound is a critical issue the Town is currently facing and will continue to experience in the coming years with the expected increase in population.

There is a clear need to offer an appropriate range and mix of housing options to meet the needs of current and future Parry Sound residents. There is general consensus that housing types appropriate for all ages, incomes and household types are lacking.

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*A diversity of housing types is important. The "missing middle" and affordable housing will be important for the future. Examples include: duplex, triplex and fourplex, courtyard apartments, townhomes and mid-rise condo units.*

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The lack of affordable housing is seen as a deterrent to attracting people to Parry Sound, as well as a challenge in keeping people living in the community. This is affecting young families and professionals looking to move to Parry Sound.

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*"... we need to start supporting those who live in the town year-round, and we need to make Parry Sound more viable of a choice should anyone wish to move here"*

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Also, there is the recognition that with an aging population, there is a need for greater support for seniors through aging in place, providing more long-term care facilities or other housing options.

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*"Affordable, barrier free housing for elderly and disabled is needed."*

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The lack of housing is a challenge however it can also be an opportunity. Areas can be identified for housing and accommodating growth. The Redevelopment section below identifies some of the properties and areas in Town that were identified by respondents as potential areas to incorporate new housing and supportive uses.

## **Year-Round Economy**

From the feedback received, respondents have highlighted the importance of strengthening the year-round economy by leveraging tourism and promoting a diversity of jobs in the local economy.

There is general support to strengthen the economy by increasing tourism opportunities year-round and leveraging what makes Parry Sound unique. Georgian Bay was identified as the preeminent tourist draw.

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*"We need to lean into a niche - ours is the Bay."*

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In the responses received, there were suggested ideas for how to grow the year-round tourism economy such as providing services and attractions to enhance the experience of the cruise ship industry patrons, providing accommodation opportunities at the waterfront, promoting more eco-tourism opportunities,

promoting winter sports and other recreation options. A further idea to create a year-round entertainment attraction that could be located at the waterfront or nearby was suggested.

The potential for enhanced tourism draws both at the waterfront and in the downtown areas through creating inviting places, and ensuring there is a strong connection between them was also noted.

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*“...More encouragement for tourists and residents alike to venture downtown from the waterfront (it's just right there)...”*

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This includes things such as signage and wayfinding and making the experience overall pleasant and welcoming for all ages to enjoy. Market Square was an area that many respondents suggested for adding activities to enhance the experience and draw.

Promoting a diversity of jobs in the local economy beyond tourism was identified as an important challenge to strengthen the economy on a year-round basis. Jobs in the retail, service and light industrial sectors were identified as areas to explore.

Opportunities to cooperate with municipalities in the region came up through the feedback as well. Some people expressed desire for the Town to explore amalgamation or annexation, however, those are not areas that the Official Plan update can address. The Official Plan can include policy direction for the Town to work with neighbouring municipalities on matters of common interest such as economic growth, transportation, and services (social and public services including health care).

## **Redevelopment Areas**

Through the engagement, we have heard that there are many places in Parry Sound that could be developed or redeveloped for new or improved uses. Feedback identified that due to a lack of public transit in the community, walkability is crucial in ensuring that people can live and work in close proximity.

To help create a more walkable community and bridge the gap between where people live and work, some of the commonly mentioned areas that could be considered for housing and supportive uses such as retail include the following:

- Harbour lands on the east side of the Bay;
- Downtown residential units in the upper storeys of buildings with retail on the ground level;

- Areas surrounding downtown including properties on Seguin Street, Bowes Street, River Street, Miller Street and Great North Road;
- Formerly developed sites such as the St. Joseph's Hospital;
- The area near the new Recreation Centre along Joseph Street;
- Parry Sound Mall property and surrounding area; and,
- Adding housing to existing commercial developments.

Many of these sites were identified because they are either vacant or underutilized. Further research would need to be conducted to determine the developmental potential of any given site.

### **Infrastructure Challenges**

Infrastructure includes the municipal piped services for water, sewer, and storm water, as well as roads, sidewalks, and public docks. It was noted that there are concerns with the aging infrastructure and the cost associated with upgrading and replacement of these services to accommodate future development.

Through the engagement to date, we have heard that the geographic and topographic challenges as well as capacity issues in some pipes and pump stations are important factors in determining where development and redevelopment could occur.

Climate change is a reality and Parry Sound, like any other municipality, must prepare for the changes that are occurring. Many respondents raised this as a challenge that the Town will face in the future. Ways the Town will have to deal with this includes having to invest in infrastructure upgrades to accommodate higher levels of run-off from storm events for example and ensuring that the Town's drinking water is protected and other critical infrastructure is able to adapt.

### **Reimagining Downtown**

Through the engagement we have heard of the importance of the downtown and its role as the retail focus as well as the role it plays in supporting the tourism industry. There are opportunities and challenges with this.

We heard many people's concerns with the non-retail uses occupying valuable ground floor retail space on the main street and in some cases hindering a vibrancy of the downtown. The desire is to see non-retail uses either located in the upper levels or in buildings on the surrounding streets. Respondents want to see local small businesses on the main street that both permanent residents as well as tourists would enjoy such as shopping and a variety of dining establishments.

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*“Downtown has a lot of untapped potential—why don't we have a coffee shop that's open beyond 5pm here?...”*

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We also heard about traffic congestion and the lack of parking to support the downtown shopping and creating a more walkable environment.

More gathering spaces are desirable and Market Square has been identified as an opportunity for a larger public gathering space that could accommodate increased activity.

In keeping with trying to revitalize the downtown, when properties are being redeveloped, there has been feedback that increased density and higher buildings appropriate for the scale of downtown, should be encouraged.

### 3.1.3 Striking a Balance

Overwhelmingly we have heard about the need to balance the changes that are occurring and must occur to allow the Town to prosper, while preserving the natural environment and unique setting of Parry Sound. This includes protecting the environment and natural setting, while allowing for development and redevelopment opportunities. People speak of striving to make Parry Sound known as a beautiful and welcoming tourist destination as well as an enviable place to call home. We must find ways to accomplish this and accommodate change without negatively impacting what makes Parry Sound so special.

From a land use planning perspective and how the Official Plan update can address what we have heard so far, this section of the Discussion Paper highlights some of the points of tension that the Town faces in achieving a balance between protecting, enhancing and respecting the natural environment, while making way for change and building Parry Sound.

- From a year-round economy perspective and creating a welcoming tourism destination, the waterfront area is a prime area of focus of activities and potential redevelopment – the tension comes in trying to keep the waterfront and access to it as public while creating the space as a tourist destination.
- As change starts to happen along the east harbour lands, and waterfront areas, respondents have requested that there be appropriate balance between private and public interests. Access to the Fitness Trail and keeping it as a continuous linear public trail along the waterfront is important.
- Strengthening tourism and job growth but not at the expense of loss of access to the waterfront or becoming overrun by traffic and parking issues.

- Finding ways to create that unique Georgian Bay experience for all visitors to enjoy while ensuring the Town’s residents feel welcomed and are a part of the plans for the waterfront and connected areas.
- Encourage development and redevelopment while not becoming too urban and losing the small-town feel.

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*“Keeping the heights of overall of buildings down... don't let them get higher than the original hospital, more trees, vegetation so not to have the town look like asphalt and concrete like the larger city centers, want a more northern outdoor feel , which is what draws people up to the North.”*

*“Parry Sound is a wonderful small town and hopefully can maintain the small town environment. If we wanted to live in a city we would move.”*

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- Encourage development and redevelopment while respecting the natural environment.

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*Yes, there is a housing demand, but it's a shame that we have to sacrifice the nature surrounding us to do it.*

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- The height and placement of buildings need to respect the natural setting and views to the waterfront.
- Protection of the built heritage that is iconic to Parry Sound including certain buildings, railway trestles and other important fixtures (such as Tower Hill lookout tower), from being impacted through new development.
- Infrastructure renewal to accommodate new development and the impacts of climate change with the Town’s ability to pay for this.
- Regional cooperation – Parry Sound is the regional service hub and must find ways of working with other municipalities to share the load, while not losing its identity.

We also recognize there are things that have been identified through the engagement process, but from a land use planning perspective, cannot be directly addressed in the Official Plan and as such they are not expanded upon in this Discussion Paper.

## 4.0 An Updated Vision of the Future

The process of updating an Official Plan provides an opportunity to refocus the vision of the future for the community. A Vision Statement expresses a future state through words that help to paint a picture, the same picture, in people's minds. This is different than setting goals or objectives that might express how and by what steps the Town wishes to take to get there. Having a Vision Statement that paints the picture in people's minds of the future they desire can be a very powerful and motivating thing. Through this exercise of engaging with the community and seeking feedback on these topics and emerging themes, we believe that the Vision of the Future for the Town of Parry Sound needs to be updated to align with the values that have been expressed.

As part of the Discussion Paper, we have drafted three possible Vision Statements for your consideration based on the themes heard through the engagement efforts to date. The final Vision Statement will reflect further feedback as the Official Plan Update process progresses. We welcome comments on which of the statements most closely aligns with your vision for land use and built form in Parry Sound.

The three draft Vision Statements are as follows:

1. Parry Sound, a unique community with natural beauty, situated on the shores of Georgian Bay, maintains a small-town charm while offering all of the urban amenities and an affordable lifestyle, making it the envy of others.
2. Balancing its natural beauty set on the shores of Georgian Bay while maintaining a small-town charm, Parry Sound offers an urban lifestyle with all of the amenities, with access to nature at your doorstep year-round.
3. Parry Sound is a community like no other where its natural setting on the shores of Georgian Bay offers a stunning backdrop for a lifestyle where nature is all around, and the small-town character is maintained while offering all of the amenities of urban living.

When commenting on the Vision Statement that you prefer, please think about the following:

- Which of the vision statements do you prefer and why?
- Are there words, concepts or ideas that are missing that we should consider adding?
- Is there something that does not belong in the vision statement?

## 5.0 How to Participate

Let us know what you think! We welcome comments on the themes that we have described throughout this Discussion Paper. We also want to hear from you regarding the questions above about the options for a new Vision Statement. Your feedback will be used to help inform the preparation of the updated Official Plan for the Town of Parry Sound.

Comments should be submitted by using the online form, or in writing to the Town's Official Plan email account at [officialplan@parrysound.ca](mailto:officialplan@parrysound.ca) or feel free to drop off hard copies of your responses to the Planning Department at the Town of Parry Sound to the attention of Jeremy Rand.

**We welcome your submission of comments on this Discussion Paper until March 12, 2024. Please check the Town's Official Plan Review website for further details on the Official Plan Update project.**

**The link to the website is: [www.parrysound.ca/business-development/official-plan-review](http://www.parrysound.ca/business-development/official-plan-review)**

As we move forward, there will be additional opportunities for you to participate in the preparation of the updated Official Plan as described above. We look forward to your continued involvement in this important initiative.