

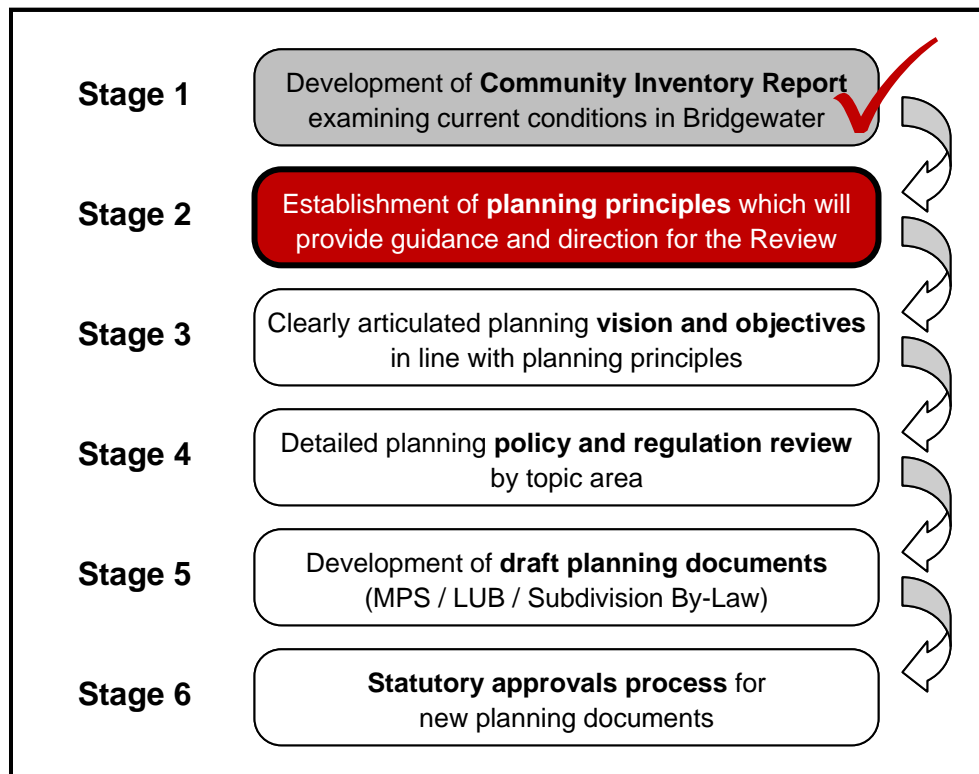
Planning Department - Staff Report February 11, 2011

Smart Growth Principles - Planning Review (Stage 2)

In September, 2010, the Town of Bridgewater launched its Planning Documents Review process (aka “the Planning Review”). As part of that launch, Town Council approved the proposed Planning Review process and the establishment of the Planning Review Advisory Committee (PRAC) (Document # 10-253).

Since the launch of the process, the Planning Department and the PRAC have completed *Stage 1 – Community Inventory Report*, and are now in the process of completing *Stage 2 – Planning Principles*. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the proposed Planning Principles and to seek Town Council’s approval of them.

The below chart summarizes the Planning Review process. In addition, a more detailed timeline is provided as Appendix A.



Proposed Planning Principles

Why Do We Need Planning Principles?

Unified planning principles should be selected early in the process to help guide the Planning Review. Sound planning principles will help keep the comprehensive process focused, strategic and in-line with best practices. This helps to ensure that as current planning policies are updated, and as new planning policies are considered, they will be consistent with our principles.

What is “Smart Growth”?

Smart Growth is a unified planning theory based in the understanding that community form is the fundamental determinant of so many things that matter. This theory promotes a collection of principles designed to reduce wasteful sprawl, limit environmental disruption and create vibrant, compact communities. Smart Growth was first championed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the early 90s, and has since been applied by countless communities, organizations and leading developers across the globe.

Below is a short list of just some of the organizations that have formally adopted Smart Growth Principles.

- American Institute of Architects
- American Planning Association
- American Society of Landscape Architects
- Canada Green Building Council
- Center for Communities by Design
- Clean Calgary
- Clean Nova Scotia Foundation
- Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria
- Congress for the New Urbanism
- Conservation Council of Ontario
- Environmental Law Institute
- Genuine Progress Index Atlantic
- Heart & Stroke Foundation
- Institute of Transportation Engineers
- National Association of Home Builders
- National Association of Local Government
- Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition
- Ontario Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure
- Project for Public Spaces
- Rails to Trails Conservancy
- Scenic America
- Sierra Club
- Sustainable Communities Network
- The Conservation Fund
- Toronto Environmental Alliance
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Green Building Council - LEED for Neighborhood Developments
- Urban Land Institute
- US National Association of Realtors
- US National Trust for Historic Preservation

The Goals of “Smart Growth”

1. To protect and conserve natural and cultural resources for present and future generations;
2. To save money and conserve material, labour, energy and fiscal resources;
3. To promote and provide opportunity for sustainable economic development and housing; and
4. To ensure opportunity and the social equity of all citizens in decisions that affect their future.

The following pages provide an overview of each of the **10 Smart Growth Principles**.

Principle 1: Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration

Engaging stakeholders early and often, and sharing with them vital information about development options, will give them a greater understanding of the importance of and challenges associated with good planning and investment.

Growth can create great places to live, work, and play, if it responds to a community's own sense of how and where the community wants to grow. A key component of smart growth is to ensure early and frequent involvement of all stakeholders to identify and address specific needs and concerns. Involving varied perspectives is essential to the success of a planning review. This means engaging the community and stakeholders at the outset, from early stakeholder input in community plans to ongoing feedback and evaluation of the plan's implementation as projects are constructed.



Ensuring a high level of public awareness is one of the most fundamental strategies to guarantee that community needs and possible solutions are fully considered. This strategy can help local leaders better identify and support development that meets those needs. Engaging stakeholders early and often and sharing with them vital information about development options will give them a greater understanding of the importance of and challenges associated with good planning and investment. Projects and plans developed without strong citizen involvement will lack the community buy-in necessary for success and make it more difficult to build support when tough decisions need to be made.



Principle 2: Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices

A mix of housing choices should be available to meet the needs of all citizens and lifestyles, including a variety and integration of singles, townhouses, apartments and specialized housing at varying price ranges.

By creating a wider range of housing choices, communities can begin to use their infrastructure resources more efficiently and better accommodate the housing needs of all residents. Housing is a critical part of the way communities grow, as it constitutes a significant share of new construction and development. More importantly, however, housing provides people with shelter and is a key factor in determining a household's access to transportation, commuting patterns, access to services and education, and consumption of energy and other natural resources.

Changing demographics mean that the standard post World War II approach - one that emphasized the construction of single family detached homes - may no longer adequately meet changing housing needs. The share of households comprised of two parents and their children is diminishing significantly, while the number of single adult households and households without children is growing rapidly. Furthermore, by 2030, for the first time ever, half of all Bridgewater citizens will be elderly. Many older citizens will be unable or unwilling to drive or care for expansive back yards. While the single-family detached home will remain the housing product of choice for many, demand is growing for greater alternatives in housing. Housing that is constructed to accommodate the needs for better walkability, proximity to publicly maintained parks and civic spaces, or smaller housing units in familiar neighbourhoods, for example, helps communities achieve smart growth and create more options from which people can choose.



Principle 3: Foster Walkable, Close-Knit Neighbourhoods

A compact, walkable neighbourhood fosters a sense of community. A key factor is to have a destination to walk to, such as a school, work, or the local convenience store. This promotes human interaction which contributes to an increased sense of place.

Before the mid-1900s, urban communities and neighbourhoods focused on the pedestrian. They were designed to move people to their destinations. However, in the past fifty years, dispersed development patterns and the separation of uses have led to an increased reliance on personal automobiles and to an elimination of many characteristics that support walkable communities. Though sidewalks by themselves do not induce walking, when they are married with other pedestrian-friendly features, such as an appropriate mix of densities and uses, compact street intersections, and neighbourhoods that are scaled to people, walking behaviour increases significantly.



Communities can be built so that walking to destinations is a viable alternative, thereby improving access to services for the one-third of the population that is too old, too young, or too poor to drive. Communities that enhance pedestrian access provide many economic, social and environmental benefits, including lower transportation costs, improved personal health and fitness, and expanded consumer choice. As these many benefits of pedestrian-friendly communities are realized, more communities are engaging the public and private sectors in developing walkable neighbourhoods.

Principle 4: Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place

Unique and historical places and buildings of significance should be protected and celebrated. These types of landmarks not only provide culture and history, but help define a special place.

Typical development patterns have helped to create a predominance of strip shopping centres and suburban tract home developments that are, with the exception of small cosmetic variations, largely indistinguishable from one another. While such an approach may conserve costs initially and make development more profitable for some, it does little to stimulate civic pride or contribute to a strong sense of place with which community residents can identify. Smart growth supports the idea that development should not only respond to basic commercial or housing needs, for example, but should also help create communities that are distinctive and unique.



Communities that have a strong sense of place represent the values of their residents and reflect the unique historical, cultural, economic, and geographical context of the area. They use natural and man-made boundaries and landmarks to create a sense of defined neighbourhoods, urban communities, and regions. These communities encourage the construction and preservation of



buildings, which prove to be assets over time, not only because of the services provided, but also because of the unique contribution they make to the look and feel of a community. Beyond the construction of buildings, these communities reflect their unique characteristics through design details, such as landscaping, signs, and awnings, all of which help to further distinguish the area for passers-by and visitors. As a result, economic benefits accrue as well; high-quality communities with architectural and natural elements that reflect the interests of all residents are more likely to retain their economic vitality and value over time.

Principle 5: Encourage Mixed / Multiple Land Uses

Clustered development needs to have a mix of residential, commercial, office space, and community services so people can walk to and from home, work, shopping, and other services. Single-use districts and neighbourhoods make life less convenient and require more driving.

Mixing land uses - commercial, residential, recreational, educational, and others - in neighbourhoods or places that are accessible by bike and foot can create vibrant and diverse communities. In large part, a mix of uses attracts people to shop, meet friends, and live. Most post-World War II suburban development - which is primarily low-density, single use development - is a significant departure from the way towns were built in the early 20th century. During that time, land uses were more integrated, enabling many people to walk to a corner store, school, or work. Where once walking to school as a child was the standard practice, today land uses and other changes in development patterns combine to make walking or bicycling the mode of transportation for less than 15% percent of all trips made by Bridgewater citizens. While the separation of land uses was originally intended to protect communities from polluting industries and businesses, it has led to a pattern of land development in which stores, housing, and schools are often placed so far apart that they can be reached only by car. Improved environmental regulation and private sector innovation mean that many businesses are now cleaner than they were eighty years ago when zoning was first introduced to separate land uses, thereby eliminating much of the need for their strict separation from homes and schools. Mixed land use can also enhance the vitality and perceived security of an area by increasing the number of people on the street.



Principle 6: Preserve Open Space, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas

Today, more than ever, people understand the ramifications of clearing natural land and open space within their community. Overall, it negatively affects the environment, but it also has an effect on drainage, drinking water, the air we breathe, and an individual's overall quality of life.

Communities across Canada are realizing that open space preservation is an important component to achieving better places to live. Open space supports smart growth goals by bolstering local economies, preserving critical environmental areas, providing recreational opportunities, and guiding new growth into areas with existing infrastructure. Preservation of open space can have a profound impact on a community's quality of life, and therefore a region's economic prosperity. There are significant fiscal, environmental quality and health benefits associated with the protection of some open space. Open space can increase local property values (thereby increasing property tax bases), provide tourism dollars, and reduce the need for local tax increases by reducing the need for construction of new infrastructure.



Preservation of open spaces also helps to protect animal and plant habitats, places of natural beauty, and working lands by directing new growth to areas with existing infrastructure. Preservation benefits the environment by combating air pollution, providing erosion control, preventing flood damage, and moderating temperatures. Finally, open space also protects surface and ground water resources by filtering trash, debris, and chemical pollutants before they enter the community's water systems.

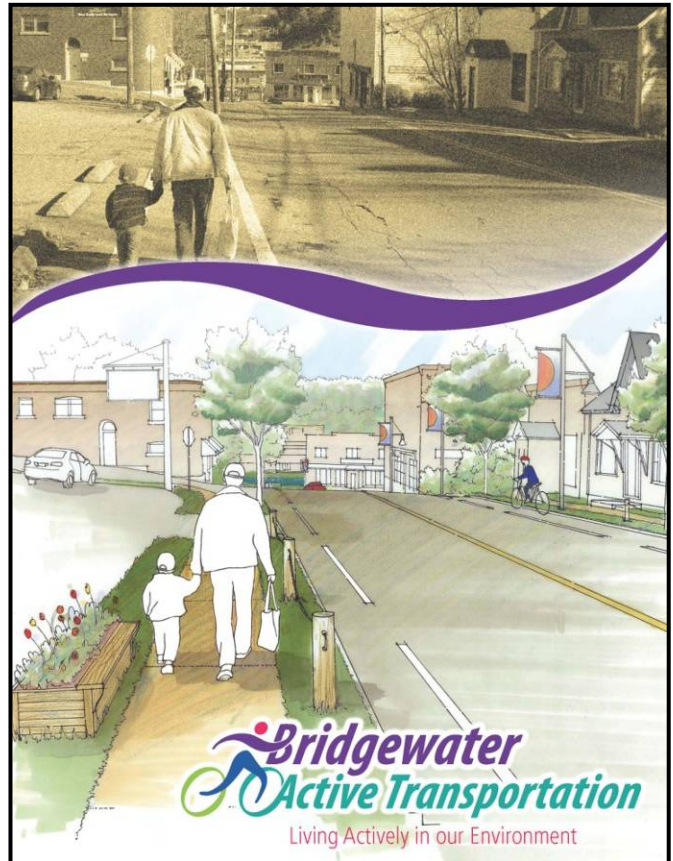
Principle 7: Provide a Variety of Transportation Options

By creating a compact community, the options of walking and bicycling may be achieved by means of more sidewalks, bicycle lanes and trails. Safe and reliable public transportation also becomes a more feasible option in the future.

Providing people with more choices in housing, shopping, amenities, and transportation is a key aim of smart growth. Communities are increasingly seeking these choices - particularly a wider range of transportation options - in an effort to mitigate social, environmental and municipal infrastructure costs, and to relieve stress on existing transportation systems.

The science of traffic management and prediction has begun to catch up with what citizens have observed for years: new road capacity fills up almost as fast as it is constructed. Known in transportation circles as “induced demand,” studies now show that as large new roads are built people increase their driving to take advantage of the new infrastructure. Some studies suggest that between 60 and 90 percent of new road capacity is consumed by new driving within five years of the opening of a major road. In regions around North America, travel forecasters show that the continuation of current policies and practices is unlikely to alleviate congestion.

In response, communities are beginning to implement new approaches to transportation planning, such as better coordinating land use and transportation; creating redundancy, resiliency and connectivity within their transportation networks; and ensuring connectivity between pedestrian, bike, transit and road infrastructure. In short, they are coupling a multi-modal approach to transportation with supportive land-use patterns that create a wider range of transportation options for all people.



Principle 8: Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Infrastructure

Public and private investment should take advantage of the infrastructure that is already in place, getting the most out of what is already built.

During the post–War World II era, many urban communities experienced disinvestment in their urban and historic cores, when newer, low density, dispersed developments expanded in the urban periphery. This pattern of development, which has been experienced in many large and small communities, has had dramatic effects on the social and economic viability of many downtown cores. It also led to significant impacts on the natural environment by developing on formerly open lands, which reduced animal habitats, degraded water



resources and water quality, and influenced unsustainable transportation choices. Communities are now questioning the economic and environmental rationale of their disinvestment in neighbourhoods, sidewalks, and water and sewer services in the urban core, only to rebuild them further out.

Smart growth directs development towards areas already served by infrastructure, seeking to utilize the resources that existing neighbourhoods already offer and to maintain the value of public and private investment. By encouraging development in existing areas, communities benefit from a stronger tax base, closer proximity of jobs and services, increased efficiency of already developed land and infrastructure, reduced



development pressure in fringe areas, and preservation of open space. In addition, the process of increasing development in existing communities can maximize the use of existing impervious surfaces, thereby improving local and regional water quality, and can create opportunities for more transportation options, which lower vehicle miles traveled and ultimately improve regional air quality. Often existing neighbourhoods can accommodate much of the growth that communities require through infill development, brownfield redevelopment, and the rehabilitation of existing buildings.

Principle 9: Take Advantage of Compact Building Design

Demand for convenient neighbourhoods with many amenities, as well as public sector efforts to maximize the use of public infrastructure and resources, are creating increased interest in more compact development.

Compact building design presents opportunities to absorb growth and development in a way that uses land more efficiently. Higher-density development is a key element to creating walkable communities and providing more transportation options. From a retail standpoint, more density means more customers. A neighbourhood that includes more compact development can support more stores and restaurants within its boundaries. Density also fosters more transportation choices by helping make associated infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks, bicycle lanes, public transit) possible. For example, more riders in the same area means that bus service may be feasible for Bridgewater in the future.



Compact neighbourhoods require fewer linear feet of utility lines - like water, sewer, electricity, phone service, and others - than dispersed communities do. As a result, local governments find that it is cheaper to provide and maintain many services to compact communities. Higher-density projects can also reduce per-unit construction costs, allowing developers more flexibility to respond to the market and, thus, offer a range of housing types to a variety of consumers. Providing these options in the same neighbourhood enables residents to change housing arrangements without having to move from the community. For households with limited income, higher densities mean more housing choices at different price points.



Principle 10: Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair and Cost Effective

For smart growth to flourish, local governments must make an effort to make development decisions that support innovation in a more timely, cost-effective, and predictable way for developers.

For a community to be successful in implementing smart growth, its vision, objectives, and policies must be embraced by the private sector. The private sector is crucial to supplying the large amounts of money and construction expertise needed to meet the growing demand for smart growth developments. If investors, bankers, developers, builders, and others do not earn a profit, few smart growth projects will be built. Fortunately, government can help reduce barriers to profitable smart growth development practices. Since the development industry is highly regulated, the value of property and the desirability of a place are determined in large part by government investment in infrastructure and by government regulation.

Despite some barriers, developers have been successful in creating places that exemplify the principles of smart growth. The process of creating such places, however, sometimes requires them to get development agreements, by-law amendments or variances to land use regulations - a process that is often uncertain, time-consuming, and therefore costly. Creating more certainty and expediting the approval process for smart growth projects is of particular importance for developers, for whom the common mantra "time is money" very aptly applies. The longer it takes to get approval for building, the longer the developer's capital remains tied up in the land and not earning income.



For smart growth to flourish, municipalities must make an effort to make development decisions that support innovation in a more timely, cost-effective, and predictable way for developers. By creating a supportive regulatory environment for compact, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use projects, government can create a more attractive investment climate for smart growth in which the private sector is likely to participate.

Application of the Principles

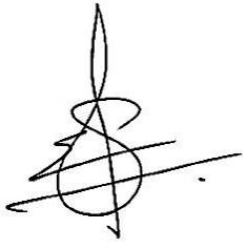
The proposed Planning Principles represents a very “high-level” stage of the Planning Review process. Ultimately, there are many different ways to apply and implement these principles. Every community is different, therefore, the specific application of these principles must be tailored to the needs of Bridgewater. This will be carefully considered in the coming months with continued input from the Planning Review Advisory Committee, citizens and stakeholders, and Town Council as we work through *Stage 3 – Vision & Objectives*, and most importantly, *Stage 4 – Detailed Policy & Regulation Review*.

Recommendation

The Director of Planning recommends that Town Council consider the following motion, which was passed by the Planning Review Advisory Committee (PRAC) on February 10, 2011:

Moved and Seconded that the Planning Review Advisory Committee (PRAC) recommend that Town Council approve ‘Smart Growth Principles’ as the guiding principles (Stage 2) for the Town’s Planning Review process.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Eric Shaw', written over a circular stamp or mark.

Eric Shaw MCIP, LPP
Director of Planning

Appendix A: Planning Review process timeline