

Housing Policy Brochure

The Town of Smiths Falls is in the process of creating a new Official Plan (O.P.). This is a key guiding document that provides context for, and directs, growth and development throughout the Town. Five brochures provide information on key themes that have been identified as important to the development of the new O.P.: Housing, Community Spaces, Downtown Revitalization, Transportation, and Sustainability.

Historical Context

Smiths Falls, Ontario is a small town situated along the Rideau Canal, known for its scenic landscapes, history, and close-knit community. Over the years, the town has experienced growth, influenced by both its own local economy and the economy of the greater national capital region. Smiths Falls has seen a resurgence in its housing market in recent years, partially driven by the growth of new industries, as well as an influx of people seeking more affordable living options outside major cities like Ottawa. The forecasted residential growth far exceeds the current unit supply potential emphasizing the need for innovative policies to ensure affordability and inclusivity for all residents.

Why Housing

To support the anticipated population growth in Smiths Falls, 1,380 new housing units will be required, all of which can be accommodated within the urban boundary. The housing mix for these units is projected to include 55% single-detached homes and semis, 20% townhouses, and 25% apartments. The population is aging, with significant growth among those over 55, and there is a notable interest in aging in place. Additionally, there is now more younger individuals and their families¹. Important to note is that the Land Needs Study only identified some of this intended growth to occur within our existing urban settlement area boundary. The boundary would need to be expanded by 92 acres to accommodate the totality of this forecast development. By working on a New Official Plan, this work can also address and fill gaps that are identified between supply and demand to create and inclusive housing supply.



¹ For more detailed information, please refer to the Land Needs Assessment: <https://www.smithsfalls.ca/en/town-hall/land-needs-study2022.aspx#:~:text=What%20is%20a%20Land%20Needs,need%20per%20land%20use%20designation>

Key Influences on Housing in Smiths Falls

Provincial Legislation

The Planning Act in Ontario regulates the land use planning framework by requiring municipalities to have Official Plans that, among many other things, address housing in the community. The Planning Act also allows municipalities to use zoning by-laws help to regulate housing requirements and permissions on a site-by-site basis.

Provincial Policies

Ontario's Provincial Planning Statement (PPS 2024) includes policies that speak to housing in Chapter 2, Building Homes, Sustaining Strong and Competitive Communities.

Municipal Policies

Aside from the Official Plan and Zoning By-law, Smiths Falls adopted a Housing Task Force Report (2020), a Community Improvement Plan (2022), a Lands Needs Study (2023), and a Council Strategic Plan (2023). Aside from this, the Lanark County 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan (2019) is an overarching County document that offers a framework to enhance access to safe, healthy housing for residents of the Town of Smiths Falls. Additionally, Smiths Falls is currently working on a Housing Needs Assessment Report. All these pieces collectively assist in the realization of housing. The new Official Plan will utilize these existing documents when updating policies to help Smith Falls plan for housing well into the future.

Assessment of Existing OP Policies and Other Municipal Policies

Social Equity and Diversity: The current O.P. aims to provide diverse housing options across various types, prices, and tenures, catering to all economic and demographic groups, including seniors, families, the homeless, and individuals with special needs. It supports multi-generational housing and promotes affordable starter homes.

Affordable Housing: The current O.P. aims to promote low to moderate-income housing by leveraging policies and financial resources from various government levels. It seeks to integrate affordable housing throughout the community and encourages second residential units as a source of affordable options. A balanced mix of rental, co-op, and ownership housing is encouraged, with planning incentives like fast-tracking approvals, height/density bonuses, partnerships, and financial relief for affordable housing projects.

High Quality Housing and Great Places: The current O.P. prioritizes the development or redevelopment of housing that incorporates high-quality amenities, urban design, and architectural excellence. In higher-density and mixed-use developments, particularly in designated Growth Areas, the focus is on creating safe, walkable environments that encourage pedestrian activity. These developments should allow residents to complete routine errands nearby, preferably by walking or biking. Additionally, projects should integrate seamlessly with surrounding neighborhoods, drawing on local architectural elements when appropriate to foster a sense of community and avoid isolation.

Environmental Sustainability: The current O.P. supports green building principles in housing design and construction to reduce environmental impact. It aims to minimize housing's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions by promoting developments that reduce vehicle trips and auto dependency. Higher residential densities are encouraged in Growth Areas to create complete, mixed-use, walkable, and bikeable communities, further reducing energy use and emissions.

Potential Policy Directions

While the O.P. and other documents within Smith Falls currently speak to the need for diverse housing options, targeted growth areas, affordability, accessibility, and aging in place, there are opportunities for the new Official Plan to enhance these given the current population projections that the Town now faces. With a changing downtown core and expanding industry base, it is incumbent that housing be broad and dynamic throughout to ensure that growth can be accommodated.

Strategies and/or other Policies to Consider

Higher Density and a Range of Forms: Higher-density housing forms, such as apartment buildings, townhouses, and mixed-use developments, help address housing shortages by maximizing land use and creating more units within a smaller area. This approach increases housing supply without expanding the urban footprint, making it a more sustainable option.

Encouraging a range of dwelling types through flexible permissions in official plans is crucial for fostering diverse and inclusive communities. It allows municipalities to meet the varying needs of different demographic groups, including families, seniors, and young professionals. By accommodating different housing forms, such as single-detached homes, townhouses, and apartments, flexibility promotes affordability, reduces housing shortages, and supports sustainable growth by maximizing land use. This adaptability ensures that housing supply can evolve with changing market demands and needs.

*The Town is working on a separate **Housing Needs Assessment**, and a breadth of other strategies will emerge from that work.*



Questions for Consideration

1. What types of housing do you feel are most needed in our community (e.g., affordable housing, rental units, single-detached homes, apartment buildings)?
2. What types of housing are currently missing in our community?
3. What role should the town play in regulating housing development and helping renters and new homeowners?
4. What sustainable practices could be incorporated into new builds?
5. Where are opportunities that exist within the urban boundary to support infill/intensification?

Let us know what you think!

Visit smithsfalls.ca/opupdates to find out more information about the New Official Plan and ways you can get involved. You can also connect with us at: opupdate@smithfalls.ca