



# City Growth Structure and Form

Waterloo is a growing city with a young and well-educated population. The city's high quality of life makes it an attractive place for people to live, work and learn. Our growth needs to be managed to ensure that Waterloo continues to be an attractive, functional and inclusive community, and that our community infrastructure is used efficiently. Management of growth and the opportunities it presents is a key function of the Official Plan.

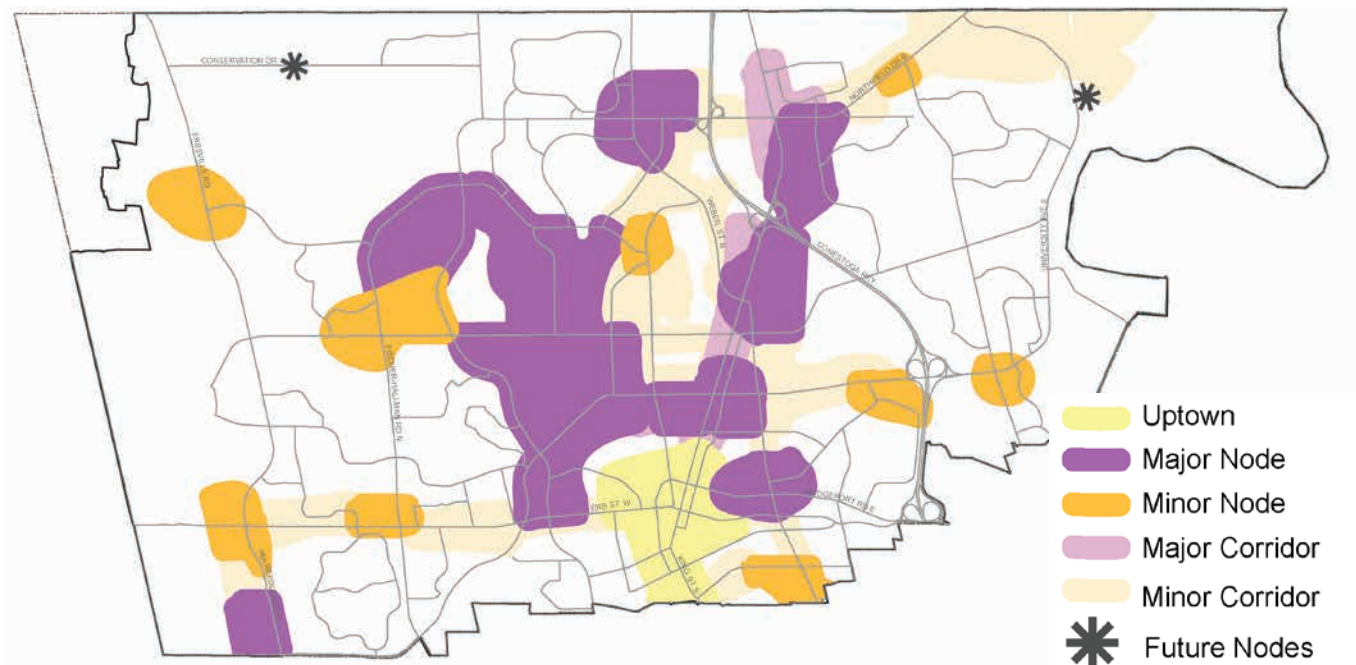
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## Urban Structure

Waterloo has many different urban areas that serve a variety of functions, such as commercial districts, residential areas and employment areas. Certain areas such as Uptown Waterloo and the areas classified as “Nodes” and “Corridors” are where the Official Plan directs the most growth, highest densities and mixture of uses. Outside of these node and

corridor areas, residential areas are more likely to have lower densities and a narrower range of uses. Taken together, all these areas contribute to making Waterloo a complete city, where different components of the urban fabric serve to meet the various needs of its citizens.

## CITY OF WATERLOO'S NODES AND CORRIDORS



Waterloo's Official Plan outlines a particular hierarchy and urban structure, which are the main building blocks of the city. These structural components include:

- **Uptown Waterloo (also known as the Urban Growth Centre):** the urban centre of the city, identified by the province as the focus area for growth as well as the civic and cultural centre of the city.
- **Major and Minor Nodes:** generally located at intersection of major roads, these are mixed-use areas that allow for higher density development and may include commercial uses including grocery stores.
- **Major and Minor Corridors:** these areas are generally located along major roads and transit routes in the city and connect nodes. Corridors also allow for higher density and mixed use development.

The City Official Plan provides context and more detailed land use policies, including maximum heights and densities for each of these areas. Given that the City of Waterloo only has a little undeveloped land left, an increasing amount of future growth will be in these higher density areas

More recently, the city added land use policies for Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs) for the areas around the ION LRT stops. The detailed land use policies for these areas identify where and what type of development is permitted, and include important land use considerations such urban design, compatible uses, and heights and densities.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS/INITIATIVES

### Fewer Greenfields

Undeveloped lands within the urban boundary are known as greenfield areas. The City of Waterloo has very few greenfield areas remaining. Beginning about the year 2000, an increasing amount of development in the city has been through infill and intensification development, adding or placing duplexes, townhomes, and low and high rise apartments in already built areas. This trend will likely continue as the balance of greenfield versus infill development tips towards intensification.

### Major Transit Station Areas

The ION light rail transit (LRT) line began service in 2019. The city developed Station Area Plans for the areas around the LRT stops with a vision to encourage growth and intensification. The [Station Areas Plans](#) are designed to enable and encourage higher densities, mixed use and transit supportive development for these areas over the next 10, 20 and 30 years, and were approved by Council in June 2017. Updates to the Official Plan will continue facilitating growth and intensification to these station areas.

## ■ **Update to the Urban Design Manual**

Good urban design is an important component of urban development, but is especially important in areas of increased levels of intensification. Good design is always important, we want buildings, structures and surrounding areas to look nice, and that includes new designs that compliment and are compatible with existing structures. The city is in the process of updating our urban design manual, recognizing that excellence in urban design assists in creating and maintaining a liveable city. With proper design, form and function work together to ensure natural and built environments are healthier and more enjoyable.

## ■ **Focus on Employment Areas**

We have a requirement from the Province to set aside Employment Areas, spaces where the development will support future jobs and investment in our community. These areas are designated for future business activities, including manufacturing, warehousing, research and technology offices, and even retail. The City Official Plan will continue to protect Employment Areas with policies that encourage existing and new employment opportunities in the community.

## ■ **Other Considerations**

The city's Official Plan is required to conform to the Region of Waterloo's Official Plan, as well as Provincial requirements. Provincial plans (such as A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and the Provincial Policy Statement 2020) require us to plan for growth and urban development for the next 30 years. The Region is also currently reviewing their Official Plan, and some of the regional considerations from their review will affect our planning framework for the city. Considerations include planning for the overall growth, density and intensification rates around the region. City and regional staff are working together to meet these requirements. Further, the city's Official Plan will need to balance growth pressures and requirements with other considerations such as affordable housing, provision of park spaces and other land use components needed to meet the needs of various groups in the community.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

- **Continue to plan for projected residential and employment growth** with emphasis on accommodating the majority of growth in the strategic growth areas
- **Review and refine land use policies for remaining greenfield areas** to ensure they can accommodate adequate levels of growth and development
- **Refine city structure to align with city, regional and provincial requirements, including:**
  - Refining existing policy framework and boundaries
  - Incorporating/refining new elements, such as additional Major Transit Station Areas (MTSA)
  - Ensure that new development meets a high quality urban design reflecting best practices

## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- **Planning for growth in strategic growth areas, including:**
  - Evaluating the development capacity of designated growth areas (Nodes and Corridors) with a view to ensuring these areas are appropriate in size and configuration to accommodate desired levels of intensification
  - Updating MTSA boundaries in accordance with the Region's identified boundaries
  - Assign appropriate densities for city nodes, corridors and MTSA's in accordance with Regional direction

- **Consider the policies and land use designations to enable services and facilities needed to support growth**

(like community facilities and schools). Review and clarify policies that set out criteria for considering increases to residential land use intensity, including:

- Redesignating lands to a higher density,
- Expanding designated nodes and corridors
- Building apartments within areas previously designated low density residential

- **Refine Employment Area framework to reflect boundary and policy changes** to regional and locally significant employment lands in conformity with the Region's Official Plan

- **Refine Commercial land use framework to ensure an appropriate mix and location of commercial land use types**

- **Refine residential, commercial and employment land use designation policies reflect changing demographics and market trends such as:**

- New and emerging employment types and evolving land needs
- Evolving housing markets and housing preferences

- **Strengthen urban design policies into the Official Plan in accordance with the Urban Design Manual** (update underway) to ensure that higher density development supports or enhances the public realm, considers pedestrian friendly scale and microclimates, and is sensitive to nearby lower density residential areas

It is anticipated that additional issues are likely to be identified during the Official Plan review. New emerging issues will be considered as required as part of the Official Plan review.