

Facts in Focus



2018

FACTS IN FOCUS

DID YOU KNOW?

Compact, Complete Communities

Citizens' daily lives are profoundly impacted by the shape of their cities – their urban form. Great urban form can make residents healthier – both physically and mentally – and poor urban form can do real harm.

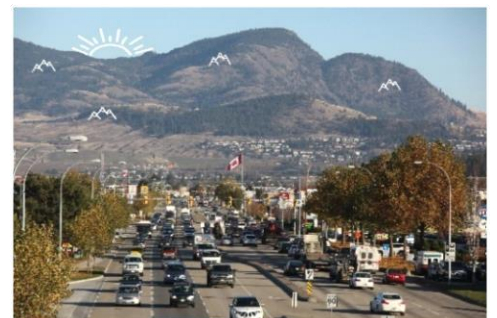
Over the past 60 years, most cities in North America have developed in a more or less uniform pattern: suburban sprawl. While this has given many people access to larger homes, greater privacy, and access to nature, its downsides are now broadly apparent and cannot be ignored: social isolation, obesity, economic exclusion, unsustainable infrastructure costs, environmental damage, and elevated greenhouse gas emissions.

Many alternative visions for urban growth have emerged in recent decades, with most sharing a common theme: create compact, complete communities. These communities have a wide variety of more compact housing forms, they support active transportation and transit, they encourage social interaction and cultural vibrancy, and they support innovation. Considerable progress has been made towards this end and change is happening; but, today, Kelowna is still far from this reality.

Through the OCP update, in connection with planning for Our Kelowna as We Move, the Transportation Master Plan, and the 2040 Infrastructure Plan; lasting, positive change can be made.



It is envisioned that 43 per cent of development in 2030 would be in the form of low-density, predominantly single family homes.



Our Kelowna as We Grow, the 2040 Official Community Plan update, represents the most significant opportunity to influence urban form in Kelowna over the next 20 years.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

There have been many initiatives related to compact, complete communities since the 2011 OCP. The following are either in progress or endorsed:

- Capri-Landmark Urban Centre Plan
- My Downtown Plan
- Community Climate Action Plan and Update
- Healthy Housing Strategy
- Civic Precinct Plan



The City is Growing

Where older cities may have been less impacted by sprawl, much of Kelowna's growth – similar to hundreds of Canadian cities – has been dominated by suburban development, resulting in sprawl.

The vision of the detached home with a two-car garage and a private yard is a deep-set cultural value that still reinforces many of the decisions of home buyers today. And, as suburban development grew, so did the market forces that support it. After decades of dominance, these forces are entrenched. Suburban development is easier to finance, approvals are easier with very limited opposition, and trades and construction industries have shaped themselves to support it. Social and market forces like this remain strong factors driving pressure for continued sprawl today.

It has long been known that the long-term effects of sprawl are profound and are largely negative, as illustrated below:

Lifecycle infrastructure costs: When compared to denser, more urban forms of development, suburban development carries far greater infrastructure costs (e.g. water pipes, sewer systems, roads, parks, etc.). In the case of Kelowna, it is estimated that the lifecycle infrastructure costs of sprawl are 100-150 per cent greater than those of compact development.

No diversity: Typically, suburban development consists only of single, detached dwellings occupied by owners. Often, this results in suburbs that exclude a wide range of residents.

Poor flexibility: The physical layout of suburban communities (curvilinear streets, cul-de-sacs, no laneways, no sidewalks, etc.) often makes them impractical for any other use.

Car dependent: Suburban development is typically located far away from employment centres and from daily needs. Meeting resident's daily needs is entirely reliant on vehicle use.

Health impacts: Because residents of suburban communities rely heavily on their vehicles, they are less likely to be physically active than their urban counterparts. Residents of these communities also tend to be more socially isolated.

Environmental Impacts: Suburban development largely takes place on previously undeveloped land ("greenfield"), land that may have been host to sensitive habitat, such as wetlands.

Climate Change: With inherent inflexibility, environmental impact, and elevated transportation-based greenhouse gas emissions, it appears that suburban development is not resilient to a changing climate.

DID YOU KNOW?



Social and market forces remain strong factors driving pressure for continued sprawl today.



The shift towards a more urban future was first laid out in the City's 1992 Strategic Plan.



Kelowna has begun to take on a new role as regional hub containing 80 per cent of the region's employment as well as services and amenities.

The negative effects of sprawl have been known for decades, and the City's growth management policy has been slowly shifting us towards a greater focus creating a compact, complete community. Each successive Official Community Plan (OCP) has pushed this concept one step further.

Current direction of the 2030 Official Community Plan

The existing 2030 OCP establishes clear and strong policy supporting the creation of a compact, complete community. Core directions include:

- **Containing suburban growth:** the 2030 OCP introduced the city's first Permanent Growth Boundary (PGB) beyond which no significant development should be supported.
- **Focusing growth in Urban Centres:** the OCP reinforced the city's five Urban Centres and directed the majority of new growth to support them.
- **Investing in Urban Centres:** To support a more urban form of growth, the OCP and supporting 2030 infrastructure program have invested heavily in the city's urban areas.
- **Shifting the transportation balance:** major investments in separated cycling infrastructure, trails and building centres that can support frequent transit are all supported by the OCP.
- **Protecting agricultural lands:** the OCP establishes clear policy to protect agricultural land from further urban encroachment.
- **Protecting the natural environment:** a true strength of the 2030 OCP is its impactful policy around environmental preservation and enhancement.

Over the years the current OCP has been in place, there are several core directions that have proven successful. A selection of these successful directions is listed below:

Hierarchy of Growth: the 2030 OCP identifies a hierarchy to help direct growth, defining the Urban Core, Urban Centres and Village Centres. To a large extent, this framework has been upheld.

Permanent Growth Boundary: A Permanent Growth Boundary (PGB) was established in the current OCP with the purpose of preventing further suburban expansion. The PGB has remained largely unchanged and intact and is a key pillar defining the overall policy direction. In particular, it has been instrumental in protecting agricultural lands from the pressure of suburban expansion.

Environmental Protection and Enhancement: Backed by provincial policy and regulation, the 2030 OCP contains effective policy that has helped protect and restore considerable amounts of environmentally sensitive areas (e.g. wetlands, riparian areas, and hillside areas).

FAST FACTS

178,000

By 2040, Kelowna is expected to have a population of 178,000.

84%

Kelowna has lost 84 per cent of its wetlands due to development.

83%

Approximately 83 per cent of Kelowna's residential zoned land base is occupied by housing development that could be characterized as sprawl.



Integrating the Imagine Kelowna outcomes with the OCP's growth strategy is the starting point for imagining our future city.

Strategic Direction from Imagine Kelowna

The City and community partners recently undertook the most extensive public engagement process to date to create a new community vision for the future. Imagine Kelowna is a draft vision for building a prosperous and sustainable city in the face of an uncertain future. The City will use Imagine Kelowna to help shape its short and long-term planning priorities and provide the foundation for future strategies, plans and projects. The wording of the Imagine Kelowna draft goals may change, however, the overall direction of the goals was supported by City Council at the March 12, 2018 City Council meeting. Key draft directions from Imagine Kelowna include:

Principle: Connected

- Goal: Embrace diverse transportation options to shift away from our car-centric culture
- Goal: Create great public spaces that bring people together

Principle: Smarter

- Goal: Take action and be resilient in the face of climate change
- Goal: Build healthy neighbourhoods that support a variety of households, income levels and life stages

Principles: Responsible

- Goal: Concentrate on growing vibrant urban centres and stop facilitating urban sprawl
- Goal: Strengthen the protection of our land, water and air resources
- Goal: Protect agricultural land and promote sustainable farming

While still in draft form, much of the work from Imagine Kelowna has reinforced the policy direction of the 2030 OCP.

Looking Ahead: Future Trends

Kelowna's future is not dictated purely by growth management policy. Good policy must respond to critical external and internal shifts taking place. There are several key trends that will influence Kelowna's urban form in the coming years and decades.

Steady growth: Kelowna and the Central Okanagan are expected to continue to grow steadily, principally driven by growth from elsewhere in BC and Canada. By 2040, Kelowna is expected to have a population of 178,000.

Regional Hub: As Kelowna and surrounding areas grow, the city has begun to take on a new role as regional hub, containing 80 per cent of the region's employment as well as services and amenities that only larger centres can accommodate (e.g. airport, post-secondary institutions, Kelowna General Hospital).



Shifting Expectations: Whether you are an aging local looking to downsize or a young person moving from a larger centre, the expectations of residents are shifting, placing a higher priority on urban amenities.

Transportation Shifts: As a small town, Kelowna benefited from decades of low traffic volumes. As the city matures, congestion is going to increase, particularly in dense, urban areas. This will drive a greater focus on supporting active modes of transportation and transit. Technological changes may also result in changes in transportation behavior, with a lower reliance on vehicle ownership.

Housing Affordability: A desirable place for many reasons, Kelowna home prices will continue to rise faster than incomes over the long run. This will place continued strain on our housing supply.

Financial Sustainability: Inheriting the inefficient infrastructure burden of decades of suburban development is challenging the financial sustainability of many Canadian communities, including Kelowna.

Current challenges of the 2030 Official Community Plan

Despite the laudable policy directions contained in the OCP, the plan still acknowledges and accommodates a considerable amount of suburban development. In fact, it envisioned that 43 per cent of development to 2030 would be in the form of low-density, predominantly single family homes, with much of it located on hillsides. Neighborhoods such as Kettle Valley, Wilden and others together represent thousands of units of development. These neighbourhoods still contain enough designated capacity to absorb all of the city's growth for 5-7 years.ⁱ

Key Directions for the 2040 Official Community Plan

The first and most critical step is recognition that a course correction is needed, not a minor adjustment. Small measures, while beneficial, are unlikely to create the scale of change needed. If a significant share of our new growth is planned in a suburban form, the city's ability to change course is substantially reduced, effectively tying one hand behind our back.

As described above, there has been clear policy for nearly thirty years articulating a more urban future, and yet suburban development continues. The weakness in the City's growth management efforts to date has not been in policy, but has instead been in the implementation and "follow-through" on the policy that is established. This policy is not just the work of administration; it is the community's expectation for their collective future.

Using the foundation of the lessons learned through the successes and challenges in delivering previous growth management policy, and the draft goals from Imagine Kelowna, the following key directions emerge to help inform our action for the next 20 years:

Minimize Suburban Growth

Cities have a number of ways that they can counter-act suburban development. Development policy is the most frequently cited example, with strategies like growth boundaries. Kelowna's policy structure on this front is healthy, built on the foundation of the Permanent Growth Boundary, the Urban Core, Urban Centres and Village Centres.

Also important is ensuring that suburban development pays for itself and its infrastructure through appropriate value and structure of Development Cost Charges (DCCs). Cities should also re-examine where they have currently designated future growth. If those lands identified for future growth do not align any longer with community objectives, careful consideration should be given to changing their status.

Create a Compact, Complete Community

Counteracting suburban development will not in and of itself result in a great city. The equally important part of that equation is about creating a compelling alternative: building a compact, complete community. Overall, the residents of compact, complete communities are healthier and enjoy a higher quality of life. The environmental impact of growth in these communities is lower than their suburban counterparts, and their long-term financial sustainability is more secure.

While the rewards are clear, the process of transforming urban areas requires a far greater commitment to the final vision and dedication to quality every step along the way. Redevelopment and infill development is held to a higher standard by the public. New or expanded public spaces and parks must be established, and every new building must contribute to a high-quality public realm. The right mix of uses at the right density is important. And all this must be accomplished within constrained financial means.

Align Our Plans, Policies and Bylaws

In order to deliver this scale of change, great policy with broad community support must be taken on and followed through to implementation. For this to take place, there has to be clear and consistent alignment from the highest level policy down to our most basic actions. The effort needed to create this alignment should not be underestimated, and may necessitate updates to dozens of plans, strategies and bylaws, such as:

- ▶ Zoning Bylaw
- ▶ Utility Master Plans
- ▶ Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw
- ▶ Financial plans and strategies
- ▶ Development Cost Charge Bylaw

Creating compact, complete communities is not without its challenges. First among these is resistance from residents. Directing growth to existing areas means that residents of existing, established neighbourhoods will need to deal with change on a regular basis.



A further challenge is financial in nature. Development typically pays for most up-front infrastructure costs for suburban development, making it easy to finance at first (not life cycle). But, financing growth in existing neighbourhoods is not so simple. It requires us to rely on different financing tools to address up-front infrastructure costs.

Finally, where the aesthetic quality of an individual detached home in the suburbs is not of great importance, the same cannot be said for higher density infill development. In developed areas, expectations for the design and integration of major new buildings are far higher and require a strong commitment to quality over quantity.

In many ways, the challenges we are facing can also be seen as opportunities. Kelowna is at a point in its evolution where its future and its identity are not yet clear. Unlike major cities, Kelowna is not too big to change, nor is it too small to change. The steady growth can also be harnessed to drive rapid change in a positive direction. Committing to strong policy direction through to implementation is vital. The key is to view every new development as an opportunity to move one step closer to a more compact, complete community.

ⁱ Calculated on the basis of approximately 7,000 units of capacity divided by the long-term average building permits per year of 1,263