

City of Kelowna

Urban Centres Roadmap - Draft Principles and Targets

Peer Review

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Submitted by:

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12 November 2015

Purpose and overview

SSG completed a peer review of the Draft Principles and Targets for the Draft Urban Centres Roadmap. The review consisted of two parts. Firstly, the overall scope of the principles and indicators was considered in the context of the vision and goals articulated by the City of Kelowna in the revised Official Community Plan (2013). Secondly, each of the goals and targets were assessed against the literature to validate both the intention and level of ambition described.

Intention

The draft principles and targets for the Urban Centres Roadmap are intended to provide consistent guidance for planning processes for each of the urban centres, and, in the interim, for planning approvals prior to the development of those plans. The development of the draft principles and targets was informed by background research summarised in the report titled Urban Centres Roadmap Best Practices Scan, and a process of stakeholder engagement facilitated by the City of Kelowna.

Task 1- Scope

The City of Kelowna revised its Official Community Plan in 2013 to articulate a shared vision for the City for the next twenty years. The vision incorporates ten goals including: improve efficiency and performance of buildings; foster sustainable prosperity; protect and enhance natural areas; provide spectacular parks; include distinctive and attractive neighbourhoods; enable healthy and productive agriculture; encourage cultural vibrancy; contain urban growth; address housing needs of all residents; and, feature a balanced transportation network.

The review opinion is that the principles and targets as outlined are generally consistent with the vision and goals described in the Official Community Plan. Each of the goals of the OCP is addressed by one or more of the draft principles and targets. The overall result, as illustrated in the summary of the principles and targets, is the development of city centres that achieve social, economic, cultural and environmental objectives in an integrated approach- and this integrated approach is the definition of sustainability. In many cases the targets are reinforcing, in other words, achieving one target will also enable or facilitate achieving another, or even several other targets.

While the principles do not explicitly address sustainable prosperity the review team is confident that the principles and targets lay the foundation for a built environment that does advance sustainable prosperity, in particular as a result of the targeted density of people and employment.

The principles and targets also do not include consideration for improving the efficiency and performance of buildings and we recommend an additional target to address this gap, for the neighbourhood as a whole cannot be sustainable without consideration for individual buildings. While these buildings are generally constructed by the private sector, the City does have access to tools to influence the design and construction. Further, voluntary standards such as LEED not only enhance the sustainable design features of buildings but also deliver ancillary benefits such as improved health outcomes, durability, reduced operating costs and others.

Task 2- Principles and indicators

The details of the principles and targets were found to be consistent with the literature; however, the review does identify several areas for clarification or enhancement. These areas may include additional review, but do not compromise the overall direction of the principles and targets.

The full literature review of the Draft Targets and Principles is provided in *Urban Centres Roadmap - Draft Principles and Targets Peer Review* dated November 9, 2015.

DRAFT TARGETS AND PRINCIPLES

1. Promote vitality through a mix of land uses

Why: A mix of land uses if appropriately configured can create a “critical mass” to support retail services and local shopping, as well as pedestrian access to parks and community facilities. A mix of uses along key streets ensures activity and vitality at different times, enhancing the safety and economic function of a place.

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- Increasing densities and diversity through a mix of land uses are associated with a variety of indicators of environmental, economic, and social sustainability, and through proper development, lead to more dynamic urban districts.
- Integration of land uses, housing types, activities, transportation modes and people creates diversity, promotes vitality, and adds to the visual and social richness of a place.
- A diverse mixture of commercial, residential and civic uses in close proximity to each other, creates human traffic throughout day and night, and subsequently benefits the safety, economic functioning and appeal of a place.
- Increased diversity creates a more resilient local economy as economic activity is spread across a broader range of industry sectors and business activities.
- Benefits of diversity and density include:
 - Reduced automobile dependence, higher levels of transit use, and lower total costs of operating urban passenger transportation systems;
 - Increased safety, social cohesion, commercial dynamism, and pedestrian access to amenities;
 - Increased physical activity (through walking & cycling) and associated health co-benefits;
 - Less consumption of rural/agricultural land and environmentally sensitive areas;
 - Greater environmental sustainability through lower energy and GHG’s on a per capita basis;
 - More efficient municipal infrastructure use at lower cost.

2. Encourage building and street proportions that are inviting for people

Why: Through careful design of the relationship between buildings and streetscapes it is possible to create well defined spaces that encourage walking and lingering. The quality and arrangement of physical elements such as building and streets contribute to the ability of spaces to be distinct, recognizable, and memorable.

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- Good streets make for good cities; the combination of appropriate street, sidewalk and building frontage design enhances the public realm, making walking more desirable, thereby activating street frontages and creating lively urban areas.
- Walkable streets encourage further social interaction and added health benefits; people living in walkable neighbourhoods engage in more physical activity, and a multitude of valuable social and recreational opportunities naturally emerge when the built environment reinforces walking.
- Active streets support economic activities, particularly well design and appropriate ground floor commercial and retail activities.

3. Promote a diversity of housing types.

Why: Communities that offer a range of housing choices and meet the full spectrum of housing needs are by definition more liveable, more economically competitive and more resilient, providing for the economic transitions that individuals experience over the course of their lives. As Kelowna’s urban centres densify over time it is vital that future intensification results in a range of housing types and tenures (multi-family, townhouses, market and non-market, rental, ownership) to encourage a diverse population.

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- Communities that provide a range of housing choices that meet the full spectrum of housing needs are by definition more liveable, more economically competitive and more resilient.
- With reduced housing costs, income is available for transport, food, medical or dental care, and other necessities.
- A diverse range of housing provides options for the economic transitions that individuals experience over the course of their lives, as well as allowing people to live closer to where they work.
- Given a wide range of alternatives, seniors become more independent and are more likely to remain in their own communities.
- Those who are vulnerable are able to find adequate and appropriate shelter and services.
- Research indicates positive community-wide benefits related to economic competitiveness, health, education, and community wellbeing.

4. Establish flexible and inclusive public spaces

Why: *Access to public spaces (parks, plazas, city squares, and community facilities) is critical to enabling formal and informal opportunities for the public to gather, facilitating social interaction and improving well-being. Also, proximity to public spaces is consistently associated with higher rates of physical activity.*

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- Good public spaces provide opportunities for social and recreational activities and interactions, including opportunities for people to walk and stay/sit, conversations and meetings, exercise, recreation, children’s play, and street entertainment.
- Functional and active public space strengthens social sustainability; all groups of society, regardless of age, income, status, religion or ethnic background, can meet and interact in public space.
- Active and lively public spaces promote social exchanges and community vitality and can contribute greatly to a city’s imageability. They function as “attractors” or destinations, and should be accessible by walking, cycling or transit.
- Parks, green open space and recreational facilities in particular promote physical activity, as well as contribute to environmental sustainability. From a public health perspective, green space is increasingly recognised for its contribution to the management of mental health and child activity.

5. Promote local character and sense of place

Why: *The design of buildings, public spaces and streets plays a major role in shaping the identity of a place. The local geography, climate, history and culture should be reflected in the spaces we plan and design to differentiate and define our local communities.*

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- Characteristics of the urban environment, such as building facades, proportion of historic buildings, buildings with identifiers, courtyards/parks/plazas, urban art, topography, and landscapes have an important impact on socialization, community, engagement, and defining local character.
- Further benefits include better health and wellbeing of residents from more time spent in the public realm and increased human interactions.
- Physical form alone does not create sense of place, incorporating the community’s experience and understanding of the place is vital in development. It is also important to consider places as centers of activities for people, rather than solely the end product of design, as these places have the ability to create experiences that have a positive and lasting impression.

6. Design for environmental sustainability

Why: *Environmental sustainability is enhanced through the integration of parks, community gardens, greenways, waterways, and green walls. These features make the natural environment more accessible and*

enhance the health and beauty of our communities. They also reduce air pollution and enhance stormwater management.

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- Increased green space cover (including city parks, community gardens, green path corridors, trees etc.), and connectivity between green spaces are associated with cooler air temperatures, relief from heat stress, reduced urban heat islands and air pollution reductions, providing considerable direct health benefits. Increased connectivity can also preserve biodiversity.
- Green space and natural infrastructure benefits include management of storm-water runoff, water capture and conservation, and if designed well, can strengthen a neighbourhood's resilience to climate change.
- Community gardens and urban farms have been shown to have multiple social, health, and economic benefits, including: creating safe spaces to recreate and improve the physical space of the neighbourhood; improving food access to food insecure areas and increasing fruit and vegetable consumption among participants; and, incubating new businesses in the form of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).

7. Prioritize alternative transportation options and connections

***Why:** Urban centres with their dense and diverse land uses have the greatest potential for reduced dependence on the automobile, but past policies and transportation investments have made the private automobile the only option for many personal transportation trips. Therefore, urban design and planning must be used strategically to create supportive conditions for walking; cycling and transit.*

- Increases in density, diversity, good design, and specifically destination accessibility and distance to transit greatly support and promote walking, cycling and transit use (a factor connected to higher levels of physical activity).
- Simultaneously, provision of transit services (location and coverage) and frequency of service within walking distance is vital in prioritizing transit use.
- Walking and cycling further increases with street design and adaptation that prioritizes pedestrians and cyclists, including: minimizing the footprint dedicated to motor vehicle traffic; slowing down the speed of moving traffic through traffic calming measures; and, the provision of cycling lanes.

8. Create streets and blocks that are walkable for everybody

***Why:** Urban Centres with strong walkability and accessibility are associated with increased levels of walking and improved health and recreation outcomes. To ensure walking is a safe, desirable and practical option for all ages and abilities requires prioritizing pedestrians at various scales of the planning and design process from the street network design to intersection and sidewalk standards.*

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- Maintaining a network of safe and interconnected streets and sidewalks encourages walking and cycling. Good street design, focused on safe, vibrant, and accessible streetscapes contributing in creating good walkable neighbourhoods.
- Designing streets with a focus on safety and accessibility for pedestrians allows for people of all ages and abilities to walk, increasing physical activity.
- Appropriate block sizing and provision of intersections (along with other street and sidewalk design elements) increases accessibility, connectivity and walkability, which activates street frontages.
- Trees and other landscape elements contribute to more appealing sidewalks and streets, provide shade, and can be used to help separate pedestrians from vehicular traffic through a buffer zone, increasing walking and creating improved conditions for all users, especially those with impaired vision or hearing.