

How we talk about how we build



Citizen's guide to the language of urban planning in Toronto.

ADAPTIVE REUSE: changing the particular use of a structure, typically from commercial or industrial to residential.

BONUS: an incentive to a developer, usually in the form of additional floor area, in exchange for the provision of an amenity or service.

BROWNFIELDS: abandoned, vacant, or under-utilized lands where past industrial activity has resulted in actual or perceived contamination.

BUFFER: an area of land, landscape feature or structural feature that separates and insulates two or more land areas whose uses conflict or are incompatible.

BUILDING CODES: rules which exist to ensure the basic structural integrity and safety of buildings. All new buildings, along with existing ones, have to be "up to code." All of these rules can be found in the Ontario Building Code. The Building Inspector is the person who ensures that a building is up to the standards of the Building Code.

BUILDING PERMIT: formal permission from municipalities required for the construction, renovation, or demolition of any building. Permits require that buildings comply with the Ontario Building Code, zoning by-laws, and other requirements.

BUILDING REGULATION

CONSULTANTS: stationed at the Customer Service counter in each of the City of Toronto's four District offices to provide advice regarding building permit applications, inspections, zoning by-laws, and other relevant legislation.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT: refers to the human-made elements, such as streets, furnishings, utilities, buildings and other structures that support and provide the settings for our daily activities.

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREAS

(BIAS): associations of business property owners and tenants within a particular area who work to create and maintain thriving commercial main streets, districts, and neighbourhoods. Their activities include place branding, neighbourhood promotion, local physical improvements, street festivals, and crime prevention strategies. BIAs are made possible by municipalities, but operate as private bodies with sustainable funding raised through levies on all commercial and industrial properties within their respective areas. First developed in Toronto in 1970 with the founding of the Bloor West Village BIA, some 68 BIAs have been established across the City.

COMMITTEE OF ADJUSTMENT: is a group of citizens appointed by City Council to make decisions on a wide range of applications from minor variances of zoning by-laws, to approvals to divide a property into more than one lot. It operates under four panels, one for each Community Council service area (Etobicoke, North York, Toronto and East York, and Scarborough).

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

MEETING: meeting held during the initial stages of a development, during which the development is formally presented to the community, which is asked to give its opinions on it. The purpose is to address any problems the community may have early on in the planning process. Similarly,

community consultation sessions can be used as tools to generate feedback from the public during the development of various planning-related studies such as secondary plans, master plans, planning frameworks, urban design guidelines, etc. Session formats can include meetings, workshops and open houses. Ontario's Planning Act does not require a community consultation meeting.

COMMUNITY COUNCILS: a group comprised of City Councillors who represent one of four areas in Toronto: Etobicoke, North York, Toronto and East York, and Scarborough. They generally make recommendations to City Council on local planning, development, and neighbourhood matters.

COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

(CIP): a flexible, strategic planning document adopted and approved under the Planning Act for the enhancement of an area or a municipality. Community improvement may be desirable for environmental, social, economic, or spatial reasons. Plans can incorporate incentives to stimulate the local economy including grants for realty tax rebates and façade improvement grants. They can also include things like capital improvement projects.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE: lands, buildings, and structures that support local quality of life by providing public services for health, education, recreation, socio-cultural activities, safety and security, and/or affordable housing.

COUNCILLOR: an elected member of City Council. Toronto has 44 councillors, each of whom represents a ward of the city.

COVENANT: a legal agreement, usually set up by the developer, which puts specific restrictions on the use of a parcel of land. These are common in residential developments where covenants could conceivably restrict everything from the creation of secondary suites to the use of clotheslines to the colour you can paint your home. Most covenants are tied to the property, not to a specific owner, and will remain after the property is sold.

DENSITY: the number of people, size of building, or floor space compared with the size of a specific lot or larger area. Lower density developments may include single family detached and semi-detached dwellings. Moderate densities occur in townhouses and rowhouses, and higher densities occur in mid-rise and high-rise apartment buildings.

DESIGNATED GROWTH AREAS: lands within settlement areas or urban growth boundaries designated in an official plan for growth over the long-term, but which have not yet been fully developed.

DEVELOPMENT CHARGE: an expense imposed on developers by the City to recover some of the costs of the infrastructure needed to service (re)developments. Charges help to pay for City services, such as water, public transit, and parks.

EMPLOYMENT AREA: a designated place of business and economic activity, where land uses must support this function and any adjacent areas.

FLOOR AREA RATIO: the measure of the total floor area of all buildings on a lot divided by the total area of a lot. This ratio describes the intensity of the use on a particular site.

THE GREENBELT PLAN (2005): a provincial planning document that protects 1.8 million acres of green space, farmland, forests, and watersheds from urban development. The Greenbelt wraps around the Golden Horseshoe and encompasses the Oak Ridges Moraine, the Niagara Escarpment, and Rouge Park.

GREENFIELD: a piece of undeveloped land, such as a farm, usually located outside an existing built-up area.

GREYFIELD: a piece of land that has already been developed, but is underutilized or unused (e.g. parking lots, old shopping centres, and closed schools). Unlike brownfields, greyfields usually have little to no environmental contamination to be remediated.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION

DISTRICT (HCD): a defined area whose built heritage, structures, streets, and landscape collectively contribute to a special character valued by a municipality. An HCD is designated through a by-law under the Ontario Heritage Act. Establishing a district does not freeze development, but rather creates guidelines to keep that development in step with a community's existing character and more intangible feelings of place. Once a local designation by-law is approved, any alteration, addition, or demolition to a property within the district requires a permit. District designation also allows property owners access to heritage incentive programs offered by the City to support conservation or restoration.

HOLDING BY-LAWS: regulations passed in relation to a Zoning By-law Amendment. The holding by-law promises to change the zoning for a particular property, but only after certain conditions have been met by the developer. Once these conditions have been met, the developer must apply to have the holding by-law lifted before proceeding with development.

HUMAN SCALE: implies that the design of a development relates well in size to a person and makes the members of a community feel comfortable.

INCLUSIONARY ZONING: a planning tool that enables municipalities to require that developers include affordable housing units in new building projects.

INFILL DEVELOPMENT: development of small gaps within the existing landscape of the city. A parking lot, abandoned lot, subdivided lot or inner city field may serve as an infill site.

INFRASTRUCTURE: the physical structures that form the foundation for development. It includes sewage and water systems, septage treatment systems,

waste management systems, electric power generation and transmission, communications/telecommunications, transit and transportation corridors and facilities, oil and gas pipelines, and associated facilities.

INSTITUTIONAL AREA: a cluster of one or more of the following uses; medical, educational, cultural, religious or governmental. These uses can occur in coordination other complementary uses, including recreational, residential and/or commercial uses.

INTENSIFICATION: the development of a property, site, or area at a higher density than currently exists. It can take place by way of redevelopment, including the reuse of brownfield sites; through the development of vacant and/or underutilized lots within previously developed areas; via infill development; and/or by expanding or converting the use of existing buildings.

INTERIM CONTROL BY-LAW: can be enacted for a specific area for up to two years to permit the City to study the land use options for the area. Land use is subject to the by-law and building permits are not issued for uses permitted beforehand. During this period, the City can adopt Official Plan and/or Zoning By-law amendments to implement any recommendations of the study.

LEGAL NON-CONFORMING USE: a situation where a building has already been built (or where building has started) and then the zoning by-law is amended to prohibit the building or its use. Technically, the building is against the current law, but it is nevertheless allowed to stay as is. Once the building is torn down or is no longer occupied by the use in question, the new by-law comes into effect.

MINOR VARIANCE: a small change to existing restrictions outlined in the Zoning By-Law, e.g. expanding a porch, adding a new story, or building a garage. The Committee of Adjustment deals with such proposals.

MIXED-USE AREA: zoning that accommodates a wide range of commercial, residential, institutional, employment, and recreational uses.

NATURAL HERITAGE SYSTEM:

made up of natural heritage features and areas, linked by natural corridors that maintain biological and geological diversity, natural functions, viable populations of indigenous species and ecosystems. These systems include lands that have been restored and areas with the potential to be restored to a natural state.

NIMBYISM (“NOT IN MY BACKYARD”):

generally refers to an individual or group which opposes a particular development, or a particular kind of development (e.g., a garbage dump, highway, or affordable housing) near their home or neighbourhood.

NOTICE OF APPLICATION: notifies the community that a development application has been submitted to the City. It can take the form of a sign posted on the site that is subject to the application or an ad in a local newspaper.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING: notifies the community of an upcoming public meeting about a development application that has been submitted to the City. It tends to be given on the sign posted on the site that is subject to the application or in a local newspaper.

OFFICIAL PLAN: plan required under the Planning Act and articulates a city’s vision and principles for long-term land use and development. It contains policies to guide decision-making and maps which outline designated land uses as well as built and natural features.

OFFICIAL PLAN AMENDMENT: the process by which an Official Plan is changed to allow a use, alteration, or development of a property that does not conform with the existing document. Developers and landowners may draft amendments and apply to the City of Toronto for approval of these changes. The City’s Planning Division may also draft an amendment and present it to City Council. Their applications are open to public review, and subsequent Council decisions may be appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board within 90 days.

ONTARIO MUNICIPAL BOARD (OMB): a diverse board of individuals appointed by the Ontario government, which acts

as an independent adjudicative tribunal on planning decisions. They hear appeals and applications on land use disputes from developers, municipalities or communities and can overturn most planning decisions of City Council and the Committee of Adjustment.

THE PLACES TO GROW ACT (2005):

lays out population growth and intensification targets for various municipalities throughout the Greater Golden Horseshoe and surrounding areas of Central and Southern Ontario. The municipalities must meet these targets in terms of zoning for new housing and employment areas, or achieving certain densities, although they do have some discretion as to how they may go about achieving these goals.

PLANNING ACT: set up by the Province to describe how planning processes should be dealt with and how land uses may be controlled and by whom. It gives the City of Toronto the power to create Official Plans and Zoning By-laws, which in turn provide direction to the various officials, staff members, and other authorities involved in the planning and development decision making processes.

TORONTO’S PLANNING AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE: a group composed of City Councillors. They deal primarily with urban form. They monitor and make recommendations on planning, growth, and development in the City.

PLAN OF CONDOMINIUM: represents the division of land and/or buildings into units that may be sold as part of a condominium corporation. The plan may also lay out the governance for the condominium (e.g., how it will be run, any rules that apply to the property, etc.).

PLAN OF SUBDIVISION: outlines all details that are required to develop a parcel of land into a subdivision with individual properties.

PRE-APPLICATION CONSULTATION: a formal meeting between a developer and city staff, generally arranged by a member of the City’s planning department, before the submission of an application. This meeting may involve staff from a number of departments and identifies issues of con-

cern and concurrence, guides the content of the application submission (reports, studies, drawings, etc.) and identifies the need for any further applications or approvals. Pre-application consultation generally occurs directly between City Staff and the development team. Community consultation meetings are often arranged after the application has been submitted and City Staff have provided an initial review.

PRELIMINARY REPORT: Within two meeting cycles of submission, all Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendment applications are presented to Community Council for review and direction through a preliminary report. This report provides an early opportunity to raise and discuss any issues of concern, recommends direction on the extent of community consultation and indicates the expected timing for a final report to City Council.

PRESCRIBED BODIES: a legal term that refers to particular organizations or individuals that must be consulted and/or included in a particular planning decision.

PROPERTY TAXES: taxes levied on real property within the municipality. Some categories of real property, such as public hospitals, schools, and other government buildings, are exempt from taxation.

PROVINCIAL POLICY STATEMENT (2005): lays out clear, overall policy directions on land use planning and development matters of provincial interest. It emphasizes the building of compact urban forms and strong communities, the wise use and management of resources, and the protection of public health and safety. While municipalities hold authority with regard to planning matters, all decisions must be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement.

PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE SPACES: buildings, streets, and exterior areas, which may be privately-owned, but to which the public has access.

PUBLIC MEETING: meeting required by the Planning Act at the certain stage in the planning process where the public is asked for its input on applications for changes to the Official Plan, Zoning By-laws, and Plans of Subdivision. The four

Community Councils are responsible for organizing and facilitating public meetings, except when applications are significant to the entire City.

PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP (PPP): refers to an arrangement in which a public body and a private company agree to share costs, risks, and rewards in providing a major capital project such as a water treatment plant or hospital and in the delivery of day to day services.

PUBLIC SPACE: a social space such as a street, park or open space that is open and accessible to all persons and is owned and maintained by either the City or another public entity.

RATEPAYERS' AND RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATIONS: are groups of citizens who come together to address specific neighbourhood concerns. Ratepayers' Associations are generally limited to those who pay property or utility taxes in a particular jurisdiction, while Residents' Associations include tenants as well.

REGENERATION AREA: an urban area with significant unproductive lands and/or buildings in need of revitalization. (as defined in Toronto's Official Plan)

RENTAL HOUSING DEMOLITION AND CONVERSION CONTROL BY-LAW: the regulation designed to protect affordable rental housing and rental housing in general. Without a permit, it is illegal to demolish rental housing or to convert it for sale to someone who plans both to own and to occupy the apartment.

REZONING: If a property is used, altered, or developed in a way that does not conform to the Zoning By-law, a site-specific amendment to the By-law must be applied for. This can be done through either a rezoning (formally called a Zoning By-law Amendment application) or a Minor Variance application. Rezoning is used for major revisions to the by-law, such as land use changes or significant increases in permitted building heights and development densities. Minor Variances are used for issues such as small changes to building setback or parking requirements.

RIGHT-OF-WAY: refers to the land which

is publicly owned between property lines. It could be used for a street, utilities, or other developments.

SCALE: the sense of proportion or apparent size of a building or building element as created by the placement and size of the building in its setting. Scale refers to the apparent size, not actual size, since it is always viewed in relationship to another building or element.

SECONDARY PLAN: a planning document passed under the Official Plan which provides a detailed set of guidelines for planning in a particular neighbourhood or district. It is more detailed and less general in its scope than the Official Plan, but has a wider community-level focus than a zoning by-law. Secondary Plans address the development or redevelopment of land for which they apply. Secondary Plans typically include policies related to community size and structure, housing, schools, parks and commercial development. The text of a Secondary Plan is usually accompanied by schedules identifying proposed land uses, development constraints and transportation schedules. The policies of Secondary Plans are intended to complement the more general policies of the City's Official Plan and are implemented through plans of subdivision and site planning.

SECONDARY SUITES: are additional and separate apartments set up in a traditionally single-family residential home. Suites are usually rented out or used by extended family members. They are also known as a basement suite, grandma suites, or garage suites.

SECONDARY USES: also known as an accessory use, refers to those uses that are secondary to the principal use of the property. For example, a residential property may accommodate a garage, shed, or small workshop as a secondary use where zoning permits.

SECTION 37: (of the Planning Act) allows a developer or property owner to negotiate with City Planning Staff, through a process of rezoning, to achieve additional density and/or height beyond what is allowable under the Zoning By-Law, in return for paying for or providing certain community benefits (e.g. public art, streetscape

improvements, new affordable rental housing, community services and facilities spaces), provided related Official Plan policies are in place.

SENSITIVE LAND USES: are the buildings, amenity areas, or outdoor spaces where routine or normal activities occurring at reasonably expected times would experience one or more adverse effects from contaminants discharged by a nearby major facility. Sensitive land uses may be a part of either the natural environment (e.g. wetlands) or the built environment (e.g. seniors' residences, day care centres, and educational and health facilities).

SITE PLAN: a diagram that illustrates the main details of proposed development, such as where people will park their cars, where waste will be stored, where the physical infrastructure for utilities such as water and electricity will be located, etc. It also details certain design aspects of the building as well as the surrounding landscaping.

SITE PLAN CONTROL: a process that looks at the design and technical elements of a proposed development to make certain that it coheres with the surrounding area and contributes to the quality of life in Toronto. These elements include site access and servicing, parking, building design, and landscaping. The whole city is designated for site plan control, so all proposed developments must pass the site plan approval process.

SPECIAL POLICY AREA: a site within a community that exists in the flood plain, where site-specific policies are intended to provide for the continued viability of existing uses and address the significant social and economic hardships that would result from strict adherence to provincial policies concerning development. A Special Policy Area is not intended to allow for new or intensified development and site alteration, if a community has feasible opportunities for development outside the flood plain.

SPRAWL: refers to development that spreads across the countryside. It generally takes the form of scattered, low-density development that depends on the personal vehicles for travel and is expensive to service.

STREET FURNITURE: can be a variety of structures in and adjacent to a street which contribute to the overall streetscape. e.g. benches, public transit shelters, bike rings, newspaper boxes, garbage containers, and traffic barriers.

STREETSCAPE: the general look and feeling of a street, the sidewalks, and adjacent buildings. The goal is often to make elements of a particular street have a unique and shared design that work well together, thereby giving the street a singular character.

STORMWATER: rainwater or snowmelt that runs off urban and rural areas, flows through ditches and storm drain systems, and empties into rivers and lakes.

TORONTO GREEN STANDARD:

(formerly the *Toronto Green Development Standard*) is a set of performance measures that targets the City of Toronto's environmental concerns at three scales of development: low-rise non-residential, low-rise residential, and mid-rise to high-rise. Minimum standards include green roofs, tree planting, pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, and retention of stormwater on-site. As of January 31, 2010, new planning applications to the City, including for a Zoning By-Law Amendment, Site Plan Control, and Draft Plan of a Subdivision, are now required to meet minimum, sustainable performance measures (known as Tier 1).

TRAFFIC CALMING: techniques aim to reduce the speeds of vehicles, and can include constructing speed bumps, creating more pedestrian crossings, sidewalk bumpouts, on-street parking, special surface treatments and creating curves in a straight street.

TRANSIT-ORIENTED

DEVELOPMENT: is intensified development designed around a major transit hub to encourage the use of public transit. A diversity of places to live, work, shop, and play within a five- to ten-minute walk of the hub helps to generate a more walkable environment, and in turn, supports the increased use of transit by residents.

USER CHARGE OR FEE: charged for the use of a particular municipal service. e.g. the rental of an ice rink, use of a municipal golf course, or use of public transit.

UTILITY CORRIDOR: a general designation that applies to belts of land following rail, hydro, communication and energy networks that facilitate the movement of people and goods.

WALKABILITY: is a measure or description of how easy it is to get around by foot. The simple distance between where people live and the services and facilities they rely on everyday (e.g. public transit, grocery stores, restaurants, libraries, hardware stores, etc.) is the most significant indicator of walkability. Urban design, block lengths, security and lighting, public spaces, land use mix, retail and population density, and street connectivity strongly influence the walking environment and a person's decision to walk between two places.

WARD: an electoral district within a municipality used in local politics.

WATERSHED: the entire area of land whose water runoff drains into a stream and its tributaries. Its boundary can be drawn by connecting all the highest points of the area around the stream, where water starts to flow when it rains.

ZONING BY-LAW: consists of detailed rules and regulations which implement the goals and policies of the Official Plan by providing a legal way of managing land use and future development. They control specific land uses (residential, commercial, and industrial uses); building types, locations, and uses; and the evolution of other standards (building heights, parking requirements, and setbacks).

