

1. Overarching Themes for the New Official Plan

The following overarching themes are proposed to guide policies throughout the new Official Plan.

 Healthy Community	<p>Supports healthy living, active transportation, access to passive and active recreation, social interaction and the creation of spaces that are comfortable, safe and accessible for all ages and abilities (the “8 to 80 Cities” concept).</p>
 Environmental Sustainability	<p>Supports energy conservation and efficiency, improved air quality, reduced greenhouse gas emissions and climate change adaptation.</p>
 Integrated Mobility	<p>Supports accessibility and choice of a diversity of transportation modes.</p>
 Sense of Place	<p>Fosters a welcoming place for all that establishes connection and provides a memorable experience to visitors.</p>
 Sustainable Growth (Growth From Within)	<p>Stimulates reinvigoration of neighbourhoods to provide a complete range of housing, services, employment and recreation.</p>
 Economic Resiliency	<p>Supports the growth and diversification of the city’s economy.</p>
 Social Equity	<p>Contributes to creating a welcoming and inclusive community, focusing on the removal of systemic barriers so that everyone has access to an acceptable standard of living and can fully participate in all aspects of community life.</p>
 Cultural Vitality	<p>Celebrates the Sault’s history, diverse communities and natural and cultural heritage, with the Downtown as the Sault’s core destination for arts and culture.</p>

2. Executive Summary

The Official Plan (OP) is the blueprint for the physical development of Sault Ste. Marie. It is a statutory municipal policy document that guides short- and long-term decisions on land use, development and infrastructure in the community, reflecting the Sault's development vision and goals for the next 20 years. This OP Background Report is a compilation of data and information gathered and includes policies proposed for the City's new Official Plan.

Growth and Settlement

Key Points:

- It is anticipated that the Sault will grow by almost 10,000 people over the next 20 years, from approximately 73,400 in 2016 to 83,300 in 2036. The overwhelming majority of this growth will result from newcomers moving here to fill job vacancies.
- Employment is projected to grow by about 6,000 jobs, from approximately 31,000 jobs in 2016 to 36,900 jobs in 2036. Health and social services, and business services sectors will see the largest gains, accounting for over 1/3 of all job growth. It is anticipated that manufacturing jobs will see a slight decline.
- Attracting and retaining newcomers will be critical to supporting growth. An increasingly mobile and remotely located workforce suggests that developing and marketing significant quality of life attributes will be required in order to compete for the skilled workforce in the projected growth sectors.
- Based upon projected land demand and current vacant land supply, there is generally enough residential, commercial and industrial designated lands to accommodate projected growth over the next 20 years.

Key Policy Directions

- Six amendments are proposed to the Urban Settlement Area (USA), which will increase its size by approximately 124 hectares. In some cases, the proposed alterations will round out the current USA boundary. In other cases, minor alterations are aimed at securing a healthier surplus of residential lands to help ensure ongoing affordability and choice in Sault Ste. Marie's housing market.
- Residential intensification and mixed-use residential development will be encouraged, which will also help to reduce land requirements to accommodate projected residential development. 
- The slight deficit of institutional designated lands will be addressed by permitting a variety of institutional uses across numerous land use designations.
- A surplus of industrial lands can be utilized to make up for the projected commercial land deficit by permitting a range of commercial uses in select industrial areas.
- An emphasis will be placed upon encouraging a wide variety of compatible and complementary uses and developments in close proximity to major nodes, corridors and activity hubs. 
- The adaptive reuse of existing vacant buildings will be encouraged by permitting a wider variety of uses and reduced development standards that recognize existing site layout. 
- Policies will continue to encourage large office uses to locate in the downtown, utilizing existing incentives such as lower development standards (ie. reduced setbacks and parking), however the maximum size will be increased from 300m² to 700m² for office space proposed to be

located outside of the Downtown. Furthermore, there will be no size limit for existing vacant buildings proposed to be occupied by office space. The zoning by-law should be amended to further differentiate and define office uses so that non-profit, medical and service oriented offices can locate throughout the community with no size limit. 

- Applications to re-designate lands for new commercial development in excess of 5,000m² gross floor area, must be accompanied by a market impact study that assesses the impact on existing commercial areas. This is consistent with existing policies, however the gross floor area is proposed to be increased from 4,000m² to 5,000m².

Land Use and Compatibility

Key Points

- About 75% of land in Sault Ste. Marie is designated as Rural Area, including the Precambrian Shield. Within the Urban Settlement Area (USA), Residential and Industrial are the dominant land use categories.
- The Province has regulations requiring minimum separation distances between potentially noxious land uses and sensitive land uses, such as residential, which may be negatively impacted if located too close to each other.

Key Policy Directions

- 7 new land use categories are proposed. In some cases, these new designations are intended to further define and provide greater clarity on the mix of land uses that exist in the rural area. Examples include:
 - Precambrian Uplands - Applied to all lands north of the 'shield line'.
 - Aggregate Extraction – Applied to sand and gravel deposits just south of the 'shield line'.
 - Airport Employment Lands – Applied to the airport area.
 - Waste Management – Applied to landfill.
- Other new land use categories include:
 - Downtown – Applied to the defined downtown area.
 - Mixed Employment – Applied to smaller industrial properties along major arterial corridors.
 - Open Space - Applied to undeveloped lands that are not necessarily public parkspace, such as golf courses and environmentally sensitive lands such as ravines.
- Specific policies will be included referencing the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks' (MECP) Land Use Compatibility Guidelines¹, which aim to ensure minimum separation between various defined classes of industrial/noxious uses and sensitive uses such as residential. More specifically:
 - Class 1 industrial uses – Minimum of 20m separation from a sensitive use or vice versa.
 - Class 2 industrial uses - Minimum of 70m separation from a sensitive use or vice versa.
 - Class 3 industrial uses - Minimum of 300m separation from a sensitive use or vice versa.
- Policies will also be put in place requiring additional studies where Planning Act approvals are required to permit development of the following noxious uses in proximity to an existing sensitive use or vice versa:
 - Rail Yards: 300m.

¹ MECP is in the process of amending the existing Land Use Compatibility Guidelines. It is anticipated that these new guidelines may be in effect in early 2022, at which point alterations will be required.

- Rail Lines: 70m.
- Landfill: 500m from the landfill footprint.
- Wastewater Treatment Plants: 150 metres from the periphery of the noise/odour source.
- Airport Runway Approaches: Noise Exposure Forecast 30 (NEF 30).
- Further policy direction and zoning by-law amendments will aim to recognize and differentiate the size and scope of certain land uses, such as contractor's yards and maker spaces, in an effort to grant greater flexibility to locate small-scale businesses in a wider variety of land use designations and zones, including as home based businesses where appropriate. 
- Additional policies will encourage the grouping of a wide variety of public services to co-locate in 'community hubs' throughout the community.   

Housing

Key Points

- In terms of adequacy, suitability and affordability, the housing situation in Sault Ste. Marie is better than that of Ontario as a whole.
 - 11% of households locally are considered to be in "core housing need" (a measure of affordability, adequacy and suitability), compared to 15% Ontario-wide.
 - Housing costs in Sault Ste. Marie are much less than the average costs in Ontario, especially for homeownership which is relatively affordable here. Rental affordability in the Sault is on par with the rest of Ontario.
 - The rental housing vacancy rate has fluctuated based on the amount of rental housing being built. It has increased from around 1% ten years ago to a healthier 5% now.
- The vast majority of homes in the Sault are single detached dwellings, but there is a growing trend towards denser types of housing (apartments and townhouses) being constructed.
- Provincial policies require municipalities in Ontario to support the development of mixed residential neighbourhoods with diverse forms of housing that can meet the needs of different demographics, including affordably priced dwelling units.

Key Policy Directions

- Policies will continue to encourage and support residential intensification and mixed residential neighbourhoods, including continued support for 'secondary units'.    
- Additional incentives, which may be in the form of a Community Improvement Plan, will be developed to:
 - Encourage the creation of new rental units and affordable units. 
 - Encourage redevelopment of older residential areas where housing stock has not been significantly improved or upgraded and may be beyond its useful life. 
- Mixed-use residential development will be encouraged, especially along major corridors, nodes and activity hubs. Mixed-use residential development may take the form of ground floor commercial/institutional with dwellings above or the development of residential dwellings within existing commercial areas, where residents have easy access to a wide variety of commercial, social and recreational amenities.   

- The City aims to ensure that a minimum of 30% of all dwelling units throughout the community are affordable through the following²: 
 - Supporting a mixture of housing types, including infill development and residential intensification.
 - Continued support for the creation of accessory dwelling units.
 - Supporting innovative housing design, such as smaller units and alternative development standards such as reduced parking requirements.
 - Conducting ongoing monitoring on affordability levels and producing an annual update.
 - Maintaining a current, comprehensive understanding of funding opportunities for the creation of affordable housing and assisting applicants in accessing such funding.
 - Maintaining a formal relationship with non-profit stakeholders that provide affordable and supportive housing units.
 - Providing additional incentives for the provision of affordable housing, through a Community Improvement Plan, which may include the waiving of planning application (rezoning, site plan control) fees.

Urban Design and Mobility

Key Points

- There is room for improvement in Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma residents' physical health. Designing a built environment that enables and promotes healthy living and mental wellness is important, especially as the City increasingly needs to accommodate an aging population.
- Sault Ste. Marie must prepare for and adapt to projected impacts of climate change, including hotter and rainier seasons and more frequent, severe storms.
 - The Sault's transportation system and sustainable site design for urban developments are two key areas in which the City can have a direct impact in reducing our community's greenhouse gas emissions.
- The Transportation Master Plan identifies transportation needs of the community and highlights approaches to facilitate alternative modes of transportation. The Transportation Master Plan shall be updated at regular intervals.
- In recent years, the City has actively developed its cycling infrastructure, with an emphasis on Active Transportation as a meaningful part of the City's overall transportation system.
- As a result of strategic policy approaches and targeted capital construction, Downtown Sault Ste. Marie has experienced a significant amount of private sector investment over the past 10 years (2010-2020).

Key Policy Directions

- The City will develop and maintain a series of guiding documents that will help to inform high-quality, sustainable and safe urban development. 
- The concept of Complete Neighbourhoods will be promoted, encouraging mix-use neighbourhoods where residents can easily access a diversity of amenities, services and housing options. 

² The affordable housing policies are under review as part of a separate process that will be completed prior to the completion of a new Official Plan.

- Promoting the development of complete neighbourhoods where residents can easily access a diversity of amenities, services and housing options, as well as complete streets which comfortably accommodate multiple modes of transportation, will go a long way towards creating a healthy, sustainable and attractive city. 
- The Sault's transportation system and sustainable site design for urban developments are two key areas in which the City can have a direct impact in reducing our community's greenhouse gas emissions.
- The Downtown will continue to be a strong focus area. Policies and incentives will be used to continue the area's transformation into a vibrant neighbourhood.
- Landmarks and public vistas will be emphasized, supporting public access and enjoyment of these areas.
- High quality design and connectivity will be encouraged in areas identified as Nodes, Corridors, and Gateways.
- The City will continue to promote a transportation system that is integrated, provides mobility choices, and is grounded on the concept of Complete Streets. 

Parks, Recreation, Arts, Culture and Heritage

Key Points

- Only about 16% of total parkspace in Sault Ste. Marie is owned and operated by the City. Other public organizations, such as the Conservation Authority, provide significant amounts of recreational space. Numerous local organizations and user groups play an important role in programming public space.
- The parkspace system in Sault Ste. Marie includes community parks, neighbourhood parks, parkettes and linear parks (trails). Many include equipment for active play or sports, but some simply function as green spaces to enjoy passively.
- Total amount, equitable distribution and suitable programming are critical components in determining appropriate parkspace service levels. Generally, residential neighbourhoods in the Sault have walkable access to enough parkspace with suitable programming.
- While school yards are technically not parks, they often function as public recreational or green spaces. As local school boards continue to close underutilized schools, we risk losing the recreational spaces offered as part of school properties.
- The powers under Section 42 of the Planning Act, which allow municipalities to collect parkland or cash in lieu of parkland in relation to development and redevelopment proposals, are underutilized.
- Sault Ste. Marie has a vibrant arts and culture community that could benefit from stronger collaboration and support from both public and private sectors.
- There are currently 38 designated heritage sites in Sault Ste. Marie, of which over two-thirds are located in the Downtown.

Key Policy Directions

- Policies related to parkland will provide the following direction:
 - Ensuring that the majority of urban residential dwellings are within an 800m safe walking distance of a park. 

- Providing guidelines for permitting new uses in existing parks.
- Generally discouraging the sale of city owned parks and including a process to follow when selling a city owned park.
- Ensuring that city owned parks and properties that provide waterfront access are not sold or otherwise developed in a manner that would impact public access to the waterfront.
- Recognizing the informal parkland function of school sites.
- Expanding the scope of developments where parkland or cash in lieu of parkland will be required, including residential intensification projects.
- Outlining when it is appropriate to consider parkland dedication versus cash in lieu of parkland dedication.
- The City will continue to ensure that existing archaeological resources are protected and areas of archaeological potential are assessed prior to development. 🎭
- Where development is proposed within or adjacent to one of the 38 Designated heritage sites, in Sault Ste. Marie, the Heritage Committee will be consulted to ensure there are no negative impacts to the designated site. 📍 🎭
- Five neighbourhoods have been designated as “Locally Significant Heritage Areas” to help preserve their character, uniqueness and appeal. 📍 🎭
- The Downtown will continue to be Sault Ste. Marie's centre for culture and entertainment, with special regard for supporting public art and art installations within underutilized spaces. 🎭

Natural Environment, Resources and Constraints

Key Points

- The requirement to protect natural heritage resources and ensure that development is directed away from any natural hazards is largely dictated by Provincial Policies.
- Natural heritage features in Sault Ste. Marie include 273km of creeks and streams identified as fish habitat, 1,700 hectares of wetlands, 47 species at risk and significant wildlife habitat.
- Natural hazards include flood prone areas along the St. Marys River, Lake Superior and other watercourses, wildfires in forested areas and erosion of significant slopes. All of these hazards are expected to become increasingly prominent in the coming decades due to climate change.
- The Precambrian Uplands, extending from the Precambrian Shield Line to the north City limits, is an environmentally sensitive area due to its many water features, rugged topography, little topsoil and its role in recharging the aquifer that provides much of our drinking water.
- Aggregates (sand and gravel) are a Provincially Significant Resource that the City is required to protect for long-term use. All of the Sault's aggregate pits and quarries are located in the rural northern portion of the City, within the 'Significant Groundwater Recharge Area'.
- Sault Ste. Marie has adopted a *Sault Ste. Marie Region Source Protection Plan* aimed at ensuring activities that could pose a risk to the local drinking water supply are monitored and managed.

Key Policy Directions

- Prior to development occurring within or adjacent to natural heritage resources (fish habitat, wetlands, habitat of endangered species and significant wildlife habitat), studies may be required to ensure that such development does not negatively impact the natural heritage resource. 🌿
- Support for a scoped tree-preservation by-law, that will regulate vegetation removal within or adjacent to known natural heritage features such as along shorelines and within wetlands. 🌿
- The Precambrian Uplands Area will continue to be subject to strict development regulations aimed at maintaining the area in its current natural state. 🌿
- Within the aggregate extraction area, residential development will continue to be limited to existing lots of record, to limit the encroachment of sensitive residential uses which may impact the overall aggregate extraction potential. 📈
- Expanding pits and quarries will generally be supported adjacent to existing aggregate operations, with special regard for mitigating off-site impacts to sensitive uses, the groundwater aquifer, and the natural environment, including requirements for appropriate rehabilitation of the site back to its natural state once the resource has been exhausted. 🌿
- Non-residential land uses within the protection areas established around each of the city's four groundwater well sites and the Significant Groundwater Recharge Area will continue to be subject to regulations aimed at mitigating the threat of contamination.
- Development will generally be directed away from any natural hazards, such as flood prone areas and significant slopes. Where development is permitted, mitigation measures will be required to reduce the threat of the hazard.

Rural Area and Agriculture

Key Points

- Sault Ste. Marie's Rural Area comprises approximately 16,000 hectares (40,000 acres) and around 75% of the Sault's total land mass.
- There is increasing recognition and desire to support local agriculture and local food, including the production, processing and distribution of food.
- The number of active farms in Sault Ste. Marie has varied between approximately 25 and 35 farms since 2006. Based on Statistics Canada data, agriculture activity in Sault Ste. Marie accounts for 7% to 10% of the agriculture activity in the entire Algoma District.
- The Province and many municipalities permit a variety of 'on-farm diversified uses' to support farm operators.
- Maple syrup production is a growing sector and there is interest and potential for maple syrup harvesting in the Sault's Precambrian Uplands.
- Rural living is an attractive option for many residents. Approximately 10% of Sault Ste. Marie's population lives outside of the city's urban area. Over the past two decades, about one quarter of all new dwellings were constructed in the Sault's Rural Area. This proportion has decreased in the past few years in favour of the urban area.
- The Sault Ste. Marie Airport is a significant land use and activity hub in the city's Rural Area, encompassing 735 hectares of land and supporting approximately 300 jobs.

Key Policy Directions

- Support for both urban and rural agriculture:

- Permit a variety of agricultural related and non-related uses that are appropriately located on an agricultural property without impacting the agricultural function, including a wider scope of permitted home based businesses, all aimed at providing additional revenue opportunities for farmers. 
- Permit small scale urban agriculture in the form of gardens and the keeping of 3 hens.
- Permit community gardens in all land use designations excluding Industrial.
- Continue to permit limited rural residential lot creation, restricted to the creation of 2 new lots, plus the remnant or remaining parcel, applied from July 2014.
 - New rural residential development must adhere to minimum distance separation requirements from nearby livestock operations and other uses that might create negative off-site impacts, such as the airport or aggregate operations.
- Continue to discourage rural estate subdivisions, with the exception of subdivisions that have frontage upon or direct access to the upper or lower St. Marys River.

Infrastructure and Servicing

Key Points

- The design and provision of most civic infrastructure and core services are guided by Provincial policies, regulations and guidelines.
- The City has existing plans and policy documents regarding stormwater management, solid waste management, and the review of telecommunications infrastructure.
- The City works with the PUC as well as other agencies and community stakeholders to appropriately plan for and support water and energy infrastructure, as well as various transportation infrastructure such as marine, rail and airport facilities located in the Sault.
- The Planning Division will continue to work with Fire Services to ensure that all development and redevelopment meets Building Code and Fire Code requirements, including adequate water pressure for fire fighting purposes.
- The Planning division will work with Police Services and other partners to ensure that new developments are designed in a manner that is safe and welcoming, utilizing the concept of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

Key Policy Directions

- All development within the Urban Settlement Area shall be serviced with municipal water and sewers where such services are accessible. All rural development shall be serviced with private on-site well and septic systems. Extension of services to development outside the Urban Settlement Area is generally discouraged, unless required to address specific issues on a case-by-case basis.
- All new development, particularly in the urban area, shall provide for stormwater management, especially where there is an increase in impervious surfaces. Wherever possible, low impact design (LID) and green infrastructure will be encouraged as a means to managing stormwater. 
- New development shall ensure that appropriate servicing (water, sewer, electrical) can be achieved, to the satisfaction of those who oversee this infrastructure, with special regard for infrastructure capacity to accommodate new development.
- The City will proactively work with outside agencies and companies to ensure the safe, adequate and efficient provision of a variety of public infrastructure, such as telecommunications and energy infrastructure.

Implementation and Monitoring

Key Points

- The Province provides municipalities with various planning tools that can be used to implement policies contained in an Official Plan with Zoning being the most prominent. The ‘planning toolbox’ contains tools to control, discourage, incentivize and obtain benefits from certain types of development. The City has not taken advantage of all of the tools aimed at obtaining benefits from certain developments.
- Public participation is an integral part of the planning process. The City’s Planning Division primarily uses the procedures established in Ontario’s Planning Act; however, the City can go above and beyond these minimums.
- The nature of public participation and civic engagement has extensively evolved over the past two decades.
- To maintain conformity with Provincial policies and plans, as well as relevance to local conditions, at a minimum, the City must complete a comprehensive review of the Official Plan ten years after the adoption of the new Official Plan, and every five years thereafter.

Key Policy Directions

- A variety of policies are aimed at enabling the use of the full suite of tools available under the Planning Act to control the use of land, incentivize certain types of development and obtain benefits from new development. 
- Revised public notice procedures for all Planning Act applications going before Council, including posting of signage on the subject property. 
- The City should explore dedicating resources towards implementing a coordinated, ongoing civic engagement program. 

3. Introduction

Planning in Ontario

Figure 3.1: The Planning Hierarchy in Ontario and Sault Ste. Marie.



In Ontario, planning and decision making on land use and development is conducted under what is termed a “policy-led planning system”. As illustrated in Figure 3.1, the authoritative planning document in Ontario is the **Planning Act**, which is the enabling legislation that gives municipalities the power to make decisions on land use and development. Ontario also has numerous other Provincial legislation and regulations that are relevant and must be considered.

In addition, the Province regularly issues Province-level policy documents that express the Government of Ontario’s goals for development. The most important of these documents is the **Provincial Policy Statement**³, most recently updated in 2020, which is an expression of “matters of Provincial interest” related to planning. It covers policies about managing growth, using and managing natural resources, protecting the environment, public health and safety. The **Growth Plan for Northern Ontario (2011)**⁴ is another Provincial policy document — it provides guidance to align decision making and investment for economic and population growth in Northern Ontario.

All decisions on planning matters made by municipalities must be consistent with the Province’s legislation and policy documents. This includes the adoption of any planning documents such as an Official Plan, Zoning By-law and the approval of site specific ‘current planning’ applications such as rezonings and plans of subdivision.

³ Available at: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/provincial-policy-statement-2020>

⁴ Available at: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/growth-plan-northern-ontario>

Every municipality in Ontario has an **Official Plan** that acts as the top planning document for the municipality. The Official Plan is based upon the vision and projected growth for the municipality on a time horizon of at least 20 years. Upon adoption of the Official Plan, the municipality will utilize various planning tools provided through the Planning Act to realize the vision and implement the policies in the Official Plan. More details on this can be found in the [Implementation and Monitoring Chapter](#).

Shape the Sault: The New Official Plan Project

In 2018, the City of Sault Ste. Marie's Planning Division launched "Shape the Sault" — an initiative to create a new Official Plan for the City of Sault Ste. Marie. The Official Plan is the statutory municipal policy document that guides short- and long-term decisions on land use, development and infrastructure in our community, and it should reflect Sault Ste. Marie's vision and goals for the next 20 years.

The existing Official Plan was written in 1996, more than 20 years ago. Sault Ste. Marie is ready for a new Official Plan that considers and addresses our community's trends, realities, challenges and opportunities. The intent of the Shape the Sault Project is to engage, inform and inspire residents and stakeholder groups in Sault Ste. Marie, and to give our active and diverse community a voice as we design a new blueprint for our city.

Table 3.1: Snapshot of Shape the Sault's Community Engagement to Date.

Public open houses and information sessions: 15	Stakeholder groups and organizations that have provided feedback: Over 35	Community events attended to share information and hear ideas and comments: Over 40
Shape the Sault email distribution list: Approx. 400	Social media followers Over 1,500	In-person discussions with individual Saultites: Over 2,600

Table 3.2: Timeline of Shape the Sault Including Anticipated Next Steps.

Event	Timeframe
Launch at City Council	February 2018
Pop-up engagement at community events	February 2018 – November 2019
Meetings and presentations with stakeholder groups	February 2018 – Ongoing
Public open house on Rural Area and Agriculture	March 2018
Public open house on Natural Environment	June 2018
Public open house on Housing	September 2018
Public open houses on Heritage Areas	November 2018 – January 2019, and June 2019
Public open house on Recreation and Culture	January 2019
Release of 20-Year Population and Employment Projections at City Council	January 2019
Public open house on Second Units	February 2019

Event	Timeframe
Neighbourhood meetings on James Street / Jamestown	October 2019
Information session on Land Use	March 2020
Release of the OP Background Report (we are here!)	September 2021
Community engagement on Key Policy Directions	October – December 2021
Release of the first full draft of the new Official Plan at City Council	January 2022
Submission of draft Official Plan to the Province (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing) for comment	January 2022
Community engagement on the draft Official Plan	January – April 2022
Approval of the new Official Plan by City Council	May 2022
Final Provincial Approval	TBD

The purpose of this document is three-fold:

1. **What we Know** - Present in one document a wide range of relevant data and information that will inform the policies in the new Official Plan.
2. **What we Heard** - Share input, feedback and key themes heard from residents and organizations in Sault Ste. Marie.
3. **What we Propose** – Communicate key policy directions for the new Official Plan.