

5.0 Growth Strategy and Land Use Plan

Goal

To realize the Guiding Principles identified by the community and endorsed by Council:

- Foster prosperity for people, business and government
- Protect and preserve green spaces and sensitive areas
- Ensure housing meets the needs of the whole community
- Create a culture of sustainability
- Protect agricultural land
- Create strong, compact and complete neighbourhoods
- Provide alternative transportation
- Revitalize the Downtown
- Create a youth friendly city

Guiding Principles Met

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Context

The Guiding Principles strongly reflect an approach to sustainable urban development that addresses economic, social and environmental considerations. Sustainable development provides for orderly urban growth that preserves our community's significant natural resources, mitigates the impacts of development, increases the quality of life for residents and makes more effective use of taxpayer dollars. Essentially, it is about compact development that supports alternative transportation options. By developing residential uses in close proximity to commercial services, employment, schools and recreational amenities, people have greater opportunity to walk or bike to where they need to go. In addition, development occurs at densities necessary to support the provision of efficient public transit. Compact development and alternative transportation options also reduce the cost of maintaining and replacing infrastructure, promoting greater financial sustainability for the municipality in the long term.

To support this sustainable approach, three districts have been established within the city boundaries, generally defined to correspond with both the existing level of growth in the city and the areas where growth and redevelopment are to be encouraged. These districts are the City Centre District, the Neighbourhood District and the Hillside Residential and Agricultural District.

City Centre District (District 1)

Bounded by 43 Avenue to the north, the east side of 27 Street to the east, 25 Avenue to the south, and generally 35 Street to the west, the City Centre is a mix of commercial and small lot residential development with some medium density residential development (Figure 12). People are drawn to the area for work, shopping, community events and recreational opportunities.

The City Centre District has been identified as the key redevelopment area in the city. A vibrant downtown is an asset in the community from an economic and social perspective. The City Centre is the economic and social anchor for the entire city, providing the community with significant and diverse commercial and residential opportunities. With improvements to park space, cultural facilities and other amenities, the City Centre will become a primary location for community interaction.



Figure 12 - City Centre

Vernon's Historic Downtown, within the City Centre, is a prized neighbourhood favoured for its heritage façades and quaint atmosphere, and it is this setting that is to be retained and expanded upon as redevelopment occurs. While there are many great attributes already present in the City Centre, there are also many challenges that need to be addressed. It is necessary to create a vibrant commercial and residential area that is resilient to the lure of big box developments located in other parts of the city. Both the Historic Downtown and the larger City Centre should be areas that attract people to shop, live and play. Key to this is creating a pedestrian friendly environment that encourages people to walk around and explore the many nearby shopping opportunities, thus making visiting the City Centre an experience in itself. Mixed use

development of appropriate design, will be encouraged on 30 Avenue and some adjacent streets. Creating designated mixed use areas in the downtown will create a constant commercial market for the residences above ground level and immediately adjacent to the mixed use areas. Creating an environment in which residential opportunities are directly adjacent



to commercial opportunities encourages people to shop locally, and if provided ample pedestrian access, the attraction to driving to the big box locations for everyday shopping is diminished.

Another challenge facing the redevelopment of the City Centre District is the need for large scale redevelopment in the area. Much of the current building stock is aged and poised for redevelopment. OCP policies make the redevelopment of the City Centre District a priority and include provisions that encourage redevelopment in this key location.

While appropriate planning practices can encourage and direct development to particular areas, inadequate infrastructure to facilitate redevelopment can hinder progress. Therefore, deficient infrastructure (in either capacity or state of repair) currently servicing the City Centre must be identified and addressed. To overcome this challenge, the City Centre District has been identified as the top priority for capital works funding for infrastructure projects, working in conjunction with development wherever feasible. This does not preclude capital works being undertaken in other development districts in order to address safety or health concerns or other significant issues.

Neighbourhood District (District 2)

The Neighbourhood District is roughly bounded by several ALR properties to the north and east, Okanagan Lake to the west, large agricultural properties to the south, the City boundary to the north and the northeast (Map 3). This area encompasses many established neighbourhoods such as East Hill and Mission Hill, as well as the commercial areas of north and south Vernon. Most of the development in this district will consist of infill and redevelopment.



There are several established neighbourhoods in the area and allowing new infill development presents some challenges. Preservation of neighbourhood character is an important issue to many residents, so infill development should either aim to minimize the impact on the existing neighbourhood or be consistent with the form and character of that neighbourhood. The growth strategy identifies a series of neighbourhood centres for a larger amount of infill development while allowing for some infill in other neighbourhoods.

Many of the neighbourhood centres that are identified on Map 3 are located within the Neighbourhood District — Polson, Okanagan Landing, and Waterfront. Each neighbourhood centre is unique and distinct from the others. Further distinction will largely be achieved through the neighbourhood planning process and resulting design guidelines and policies. The neighbourhood centres will have a concentration of commercial and multiple family residential development at its centre, including mixed use forms, with surrounding ground oriented multiple family development serving as a transition to lower density residential neighbourhoods.



Intensification will be permitted in single and two family neighbourhoods that does not significantly change the look and form of that neighbourhood, including the introduction of smaller homes, secondary suites and carriage houses. Low density multifamily development such as three-plexes and four-plexes may be explored, but a detailed neighbourhood planning process should be undertaken in order to identify appropriate intensification options and locations. Not all neighbourhoods will be appropriate for this form of intensification, given the presence of lanes and stage of redevelopment, among other factors. This approach serves to preserve the character of existing single and two family neighbourhoods, with the goal to connect all neighbourhoods to neighbourhood centres through sidewalks, trails, cycling routes and transit.

Hillside Residential and Agricultural District (District 3)

The Hillside Residential and Agricultural District is home to the hillsides and vast grasslands that help to make Vernon a unique and scenic city in the Okanagan Valley. The natural setting is a valuable resource for the citizens of Vernon, a resource to be carefully stewarded for future generations.



Official Community Plans prior to 2008 had designated all greenfield hillside areas with less than 30% slope as urban growth areas, regardless of environmental or servicing considerations. This resulted in considerable development pressure to maximize the stunning views and vistas afforded from these areas, without regard for the implications of sprawl development. While efforts are made to preserve the environmental integrity of major ecosystem features during the development process, there are nonetheless considerable impacts on habitat, agricultural lands and grassland ecosystems. The community has also raised concerns about the nature of much hillside development, in that it has tended

to present very large built expanses of housing and retaining walls. The City's Hillside Guidelines and Environmental Management Areas Strategy, both adopted in 2008, are utilized to minimize and mitigate impacts arising from future hillside development.

The land use plan recognizes the need for this housing form and considers it in the context of the current stock available and the Guiding Principles. The plan therefore restricts new greenfield opportunities through the elimination of the urban growth area designation. Neighbourhood plans for Bella Vista West, Okanagan Hills, East Bella Vista Highlands, Predator Ridge and the Foothills all provide ample opportunity to pursue this housing type. In addition, a fourth neighbourhood centre for the city is located in Foothills. Like other neighbourhood centres, these lands are identified for a mix of commercial and residential uses.

As these neighbourhood plan areas start to reach their approved development potential, additional greenfield areas may be brought forward to ensure that an adequate supply of this housing type is available. In order to provide certainty to both land owners and the City, greenfield areas intended to be brought into the development stream next are identified as Hillside Residential – Reserve on the Land Use Plan (Map 3). These lands are to be considered for development at each review of the OCP, or when comparable developments near completion. It is recognized that “nearing completion” is a subjective term, however, it is intended to accommodate market forces between OCP reviews, if necessary, due to rapid absorption of available stock. The onus will be on the property owner to demonstrate the need to bring the lands into the development stream at any point between OCP reviews, with due consideration for the remaining supply in comparable developments and a proven market need. Proposals will not be considered when less than half of comparable developments have been built out.



When the Hillside Residential – Reserve lands are brought into the development stream, by virtue of being redesignated to Hillside Residential, additional lands can be identified for the Hillside Residential – Reserve, thereby ensuring that a continuous supply of land is made available. Only one area or set of lands may be identified as Hillside Residential – Reserve at a time. Identification of future Hillside Residential – Reserve lands shall build on the nodal development pattern that is intrinsic to the growth strategy, with due consideration of the Guiding Principles and benefit to the community relative to other potential areas.

Development Strategy

The land use plan (Map 3) permits some growth in Development District 3, primarily in the adopted neighbourhood plan areas. The remainder of Vernon's projected growth, however, is intended to happen in

and around the City Centre (District 1) and in designated neighbourhood centres (District 2), each with the intent to accommodate commercial services and multiple family development.



This approach concentrates new multiple family development in and around the neighbourhood commercial centres and in designated areas which are close to services and amenities. The clustering of density in these key areas throughout the city aims to create transit-supporting densities to ensure the efficient provision of public transit. Several areas of the city have also been designated for small lot single and two family development to provide greater opportunities for attainable housing proximate to services and amenities. Smaller building forms that are less reliant on single occupant vehicle use will translate into reduced energy costs for residents.

It is important to stress that the land use plan seeks to provide opportunities for a broad range of housing forms, tenures and cost. Vernon is an attractive community for year round, permanent residents. It is also attractive as a seasonal recreational centre, and for retirement. All of these groups have different housing needs and wants, and the land use plan seeks to accommodate this broad array of interests.

The intent of the district approach is to utilize existing infrastructure more efficiently while providing cost effective options for new development in the existing built up areas of the city. Growth is encouraged in these areas by using the tools available to local government. Development is facilitated in the City Centre and neighbourhood centres by making it less expensive and less onerous than development in the Hillside Residential and Agriculture District.

A key tool in this district approach is the use of Development Cost Charges (DCCs). The City's previous DCC structure had implicitly biased the construction of larger and more expensive homes and did little to encourage growth in areas where infrastructure already exists. DCCs for multi-family development are now calculated on the basis of the square footage of the unit and on a development district basis, instead of a city-wide basis, with the lower fees in the City Centre and Neighbourhood District and the higher fees in the Hillside Residential and Agriculture District. Lower DCCs are also assessed for small lot development.



The district approach supports this cost basis, as infrastructure exists in the City Centre and Neighbourhood Districts, but is largely lacking in the Hillside Residential and Agricultural District.

In addition to varying development costs, it is also intended that development approvals be expedited in the City Centre and Neighbourhood Districts through use of the Development Scorecard. For example, if a certain score is required in order to accept the development application, the base score would be highest in the City Centre District, given its proximity to existing infrastructure and services. The base score would be slightly lower in the Neighbourhood District, with the exception of the neighbourhood centres, and lowest in the Hillside Residential and Agriculture District, where infrastructure is largely lacking and there is little proximity to services.

Additional tools available to local government to expedite development in key areas of the city should be considered and utilized if possible. Preferential application processing for development applications in key areas of the city, including the City Centre District and designated Neighbourhood Centres, is a key consideration. Staff resources should be directed first to those development applications that further the goals of the broader community, and secondly to those applications which are less of a community priority. The redevelopment of the City Centre, for example, serves the interests of the entire community and should take precedence over other lower priority considerations.

Designation of revitalization areas and investment in public infrastructure in key locations are other initiatives that support redevelopment in the City Centre and the Neighbourhood District. A Revitalization Tax Exemption program was adopted on May 14, 2012 for the City Centre and the Waterfront Neighbourhood Centre, and will be monitored to determine its effectiveness in promoting redevelopment in these two neighbourhoods. The costs of these initiatives must be considered relative to the ultimate value to the community of a revitalized City Centre, comprehensive alternative transportation network and the provision of more attainable housing options. Where possible, Local Area Service initiatives should be explored to provide infrastructure improvements.

The district boundaries also correspond with the Environmental Management Areas (EMA), for two key reasons. First, the EMA areas generally correspond with differing levels of growth, each with distinct environmental management issues. Hence, the City Centre District and the Neighbourhood District tend to have less onerous environmental requirements than the Hillside Residential and Agricultural District. Secondly, the intent is to simplify the development process such that a single Development Permit is required in each district. At this time, several permits can be required depending on the environmental requirements of a given site.

Supporting Policies

5.1 Focus new growth and development in the City Centre District and designated neighbourhood centres.

- 5.2 Perform a review of Zoning Bylaw #5000 to ensure consistency with the Official Community Plan and supplementary plans.
- 5.3 Use the Development Scorecard for development applications, as appropriate, with the intent to expedite those developments in the City Centre District and in neighbourhood centres and ensure that all development reflects sustainable urban development principles.
- 5.4 Continue to promote and monitor the Revitalization Tax Exemption program for the City Centre and Waterfront Neighbourhood Centre.
- 5.5 Investigate additional tools available to local government to expedite development in key areas of the city, including preferential application processing and investment in public infrastructure, either through capital works funding or a Local Area Service (LAS) program.
- 5.6 Development in the City Centre District shall be consistent with the policies outlined in the City Centre Neighbourhood Plan.
- 5.7 Undertake a neighbourhood-wide planning process for single and two family neighbourhoods interested in exploring densification, subject to funding and resources. This interest should be demonstrated through a petition representing at least 25% of the property owners in a given area.
- 5.8 Discourage the development of new low density greenfield residential subdivisions. When additional lands are needed in the future to meet population growth, ensure that new development is designed to meet the Guiding Principles, as well as the Regional Growth Strategy's goal of developing compact, complete communities.
- 5.9 Identify new greenfield development opportunities to bring greater certainty to future residential supply and the orderly provision of supporting infrastructure. These lands are to be identified as Hillside Residential – Reserve, and can be considered for development at each review of the OCP, or when comparable developments near completion. The onus will be on the property owner to demonstrate the need to bring the lands into the development stream at any point between OCP reviews, with due consideration for the remaining supply in comparable developments and a proven market need. Proposals will not be considered when less than half of comparable developments have been built out.
- 5.10 When the Hillside Residential – Reserve lands are brought into the development stream, by virtue of being redesignated to Hillside Residential, additional lands can be identified for the Hillside Residential – Reserve. Council is under no obligation to identify any lands for this designation. Only one area may be designated as such, and it may comprise multiple parcels. Identification of future Hillside Residential – Reserve lands shall build on the nodal development pattern that is intrinsic to the growth strategy, with due consideration of the Guiding Principles. The community benefit of any land designated Hillside Residential – Reserve relative to other potential sites must be demonstrated. Should future Hillside Residential - Reserve lands be identified that are within the Regional Growth Strategy's designated rural

protection area, work with the Regional District of North Okanagan on the redesignation of the lands as future growth area.

Only those lands with slopes less than 30% will be considered for designation to Hillside Residential. A neighbourhood plan is required for lands identified as Hillside Residential – Reserve once the designation is changed to accommodate development. The neighbourhood plan must encompass all lands contained in that designation. Development of lands with slopes 30% or greater is not encouraged using standard development practices; however, development proposed which is in conformance with Hillside Guidelines Goals and Objectives may be reviewed, and, if supportable, enabled subject to restrictions.

