

Neighbourhood Change and Intensification Bulletin

Date: November 10, 2021

To: Planning and Housing Committee

From: Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning

Wards: All Wards

SUMMARY

The Neighbourhood Change and Intensification Bulletin examines growth and change within lands designated as Neighbourhoods. The results of this research provide a broad understanding of demographic characteristics across Toronto's low rise neighbourhoods and have helped inform the Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods initiative, an ongoing study exploring new policy approaches that could increase housing diversity in lands designated as Neighbourhoods.

The Bulletin examines Building Permits, Planning applications, and Census demographic data across the city's five low-density Residential zone types. The research categorizes these zone types as "more permissive" and "less permissive", and presents a high-level overview of how zoning, along with other intervening factors, may influence community outcomes. The Bulletin also looks more closely at case studies of neighbourhoods that represent some of the prototypical pre and post war fabric of the city to inform the conversation on the evolution of neighbourhoods. The work provides a critical input into the broader consideration about how neighbourhoods can play a role in serving goals around housing diversity and inclusion, regional growth management, and adapting the city to climate change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning recommends that:

1. The Planning and Housing Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications resulting from the recommendations included in the report in the current budget year or in future years.

COMMENTS

The attached Bulletin summarizes research that has been conducted by City Planning on the characteristics of Toronto's Neighbourhoods, as well as the type and scale of intensification occurring. This research was initiated in 2018 with an analysis of Building Permits in Neighbourhoods to identify instances of net new unit intensification. Additional review of the demographics and development applications in Neighbourhoods was conducted in 2021 and is presented in this Bulletin, including an analysis of their relationship with the underlying residential zoning. Preliminary findings from this research helped inform the initial reports that launched the Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods initiative.

The Neighbourhood Change and Intensification Bulletin updates the previous research with more current information and includes custom 2016 Census tabulations from Statistics Canada. The results from the 2021 Census are not currently available. The analysis was conducted at the Dissemination Area level, an area comprising approximately 400 to 700 people in size, enabling a finer grained level of analysis.

Toronto's history of amalgamation and neighbourhood growth through various time periods has resulted in a broad diversity of housing forms, densities, and zoning permissions throughout the city. Within the city's pre-war streetcar suburbs much of the area contained within the Neighbourhood designation is zoned Residential (R), which permits a greater variety of residential forms including fourplexes and low-rise apartments. Lands zoned Residential Multiple (RM), Residential Townhouse (RT), and Residential Semi-Detached (RS) form distinct clusters throughout Toronto, each with successively less permissive zoning. The remainder and majority of Toronto's Neighbourhoods built mostly in the post-war period are zoned Residential Detached (RD), which permit single-detached units with few exceptions.

Municipalities across North America are contemplating changes to their existing zoning structure to permit a greater diversity of housing options within their respective low density neighbourhoods. As housing turnover and reinvestment is a gradual process, the results of zoning changes can take decades to manifest in a quantifiable manner.

Given this challenge, the Bulletin looks within Toronto to try to understand to what degree the underlying zoning permissiveness impacts various outcomes for communities, in particular the range of housing types that have been constructed over time. Development patterns are impacted by multiple intervening factors, including proximity to transit, employment, parks, and community facilities and services, the time period of initial construction, and market preferences. Without isolating each of these factors to assess their impact, the results presented in the Neighbourhood Change Bulletin cannot be interpreted as a direct causal relationship between zoning permissiveness and the associated community characteristics. Recognizing this complexity, case studies were evaluated to compare differing zoning permissions and their corresponding community characteristics within adjacent and similar neighbourhoods.

Research Findings

The Neighbourhood Change and Intensification Bulletin presents analysis at three geographical scales; citywide, within Neighbourhood case study areas, and through individual applications. The research reviews a range of housing intensification typologies occurring within Neighbourhoods, but focusses on the creation of "missing middle" housing. "Missing middle" housing is defined as including duplexes, laneway suites, garden suites, townhouses, low-rise walk-up apartments, and other housing forms of a similar scale. A detailed explanation of the research methodology is contained within the Bulletin.

Some of the key findings include:

- Citywide, more permissive zones (R, RM, RT) had higher population and dwelling unit densities than less permissive zones (RD, RS).
- More permissive zones experienced more intensification activity through as-of-right Building Permits and Planning applications than less permissive zones.
- Case study areas illustrate that zoning is an important factor, but not the only factor, in determining existing conditions, change in built form, and differences in population density in Neighbourhoods.
- Case study areas with more permissive zoning were less likely to have experienced population declines between 2001 and 2016, and have greater housing and population diversity, on average, than less permissive areas.
- While some degree of "missing middle" development is already occurring in Neighbourhoods through both as-of-right building permits and Planning applications, this represents only a small percentage of overall activity in the Development Pipeline.

The Bulletin also provides an estimate of Neighbourhood population potential under a series of scenarios. This analysis provides a hypothetical estimate of the number of additional residents that could be accommodated if population densities in less permissive zones matched those in more permissive zones. These population scenarios are intended to illustrate the potential impact of policy and regulatory changes and the relative intensity of land use within Toronto's Neighbourhoods. These scenarios are not projections of growth nor indicate proposed changes. Instead, these hypothetical scenarios provide a rough measure of the range of outcomes that could occur in residential areas based on different population densities and built form conditions than exist in these areas today.

In complex urban environments change generally occurs gradually over long periods of time in response to multiple influencing factors. Despite this, research contained in this Bulletin illustrates that zoning does play an important role in shaping the characteristics of Toronto's Neighbourhoods. Although many other intervening factors are also important, the potential zoning changes being considered through the Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods initiative could result in gradual shifts in the growth and population characteristics of low-density residential areas. Combined, residential areas classified as having less permissive zoning comprise approximately 16,400 hectares, while more permissive zones comprise an additional 6,400 hectares. Over such a large geography, even modest increases in the rates of "missing middle"

development in Neighbourhoods could have a meaningful impact in delivering a more diverse and geographically dispersed housing supply in Toronto.

The Growth Plan prioritizes intensification and compact built form with the objective of achieving complete communities, supporting active transportation, making effective use of infrastructure investments, protecting agricultural and natural areas, and supporting climate change adaptation. In addition, analysis conducted for TransformTO demonstrated that denser areas of Toronto have lower per capita greenhouse gas emissions from personal vehicle use. As such, policies that enable Neighbourhood intensification could have a positive impact on housing diversity and inclusion, regional growth management, and adapting the city to climate change.

Next Steps

The Bulletin is part of the research supporting the Land Needs Assessment, a component of the Municipal Comprehensive Review of the Official Plan, and will be incorporated into the background work currently underway. This Bulletin also provides a resource for the Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods initiative to assess policy options and evaluate potential regulatory changes. City Planning will continue to monitor trends in as-of-right housing completions and intensification through Building Permits.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Neighbourhood Change and Intensification Bulletin