

This section of the Official Plan deals with the importance of building and sustaining a strong community in West Elgin. It addresses matters of a nature that are of importance in this regard to West Elgin as-a-whole, such as community improvement, housing and cultural heritage as opposed to a specific area or location. Proposals and other initiatives that would strengthen or sustain West Elgin as a community should be evaluated against the goals, objectives and policies of this section.

Creating a strong, viable and sustainable rural community in West Elgin is essential to maintaining a meaningful quality of life for existing residents and to attract new residents and development. Such a strategy requires an-ongoing assessment of community needs from which improvements to community infrastructure, facilities and services are identified and undertaken. Identifying and protecting the cultural heritage is also considered an important element of community sustainability.

The type, cost and quality of housing are critical considerations in the supply of housing in any community. In West Elgin, housing is primarily in the form of single unit detached dwellings with only limited instances of multiple unit housing, usually in the form of small scale apartment style accommodation. New housing starts are low, reflective of the traditionally slow population growth characteristic of the Municipality.

Based on the findings of the St. Thomas & Elgin County Affordable Housing Needs Assessment released in 2004, a need exists to ensure there is an adequate supply of affordable housing to meet current and future housing needs in communities across Elgin County including St. Thomas. The study found a significant number of lower income households in St. Thomas and Elgin County as-a-whole. West Elgin was identified along with Bayham, Aylmer and St. Thomas as having the highest concentrations of low-income households. Housing needs were found to be greatest in St. Thomas, Aylmer and West Elgin. A local housing group, Heritage Homes Non-Profit Housing, has identified a need for 16 housing units for seniors on low and moderate incomes and is developing a housing project of that size in West Lorne.

The study identified a total housing need of 335 units for West Elgin over the 10 year period 2005 – 2016. It also determined that 45% of all households in West Elgin constituted the lowest 60% of the income distribution. Assuming this figure remains constant, at least in the short term, out of the total need of 335 units, 150 need to be affordable to low and moderate income households. In actual fact, given the average price of housing in West Elgin, housing is affordable to moderate income households leaving only low income households in need. Low income households make up approximately 30% of all households in West Elgin according to the aforementioned needs study.

Annual housing starts in West Elgin over the last 10 year period (1995 – 2005) averaged 16 units per year. If 25% of all housing starts is a reasonable housing target for low and moderate income households, a total of 4 units per year would be required or 20 units over a five year period and 80 units over the planning period if average housing starts remain constant. Coupled with the 16 units already established as a target for senior citizen housing, the amount of additional housing required for low and moderate income households would be 4 units over the next 5 year period. Given the relatively low average price of housing in West Elgin of approximately \$120,000, there is evidently housing available in the market place, to some extent, that is affordable to both low and moderate income households.

4.1 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- a) To improve the health, safety and welfare of the community,
- b) To maintain and improve social, educational and recreational services and facilities,
- c) To foster a sense of community involvement and pride,
- d) To create an appealing and distinctive community image,
- e) To provide an appropriate range of housing types in terms of selection and affordability,
- f) To achieve intensification and redevelopment in settlement areas,
- g) To improve housing and property conditions,
- h) To protect and enhance cultural heritage resources, and
- i) To create opportunities and amenities for increasing physical fitness and exercise.

4.2 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

4.2.1 Facilities & Services

The Municipality recognizes the importance of maintaining and improving health, educational and recreational facilities and services to the quality of life and to the development of a sustainable community in West Elgin. Where opportunities exist to expand or improve such facilities and services or where existing facilities and services are threatened, the Municipality shall take the necessary measures to ensure such opportunities are considered and existing facilities and services are maintained.

4.2.2 Intensification and Redevelopment

Intensification and redevelopment shall be encouraged in the 'Village Areas' of Rodney and West Lorne where opportunities are greatest for these purposes. Opportunities include abandoned railway lands, former industrial sites and other vacant or underutilized lands. Opportunities also exist to convert and up-grade vacant or underutilized buildings, many of which may be found in the downtown cores to more intensive and viable purposes. Changes in use shall be in conformity with this Plan. To encourage intensification and redevelopment, the Municipality may offer incentives in accordance with the provisions of the Planning Act and the Municipal Act. In terms of targets, a minimum of 20

intensification and/or redevelopment projects over the planning period is established.

4.3 COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT

4.3.1 Objectives

- a) To up-grade physical services to a minimum standard,
- b) To improve streetscapes, pedestrian amenities and parking,
- c) To convert underutilized, obsolete or derelict building space to more productive purposes,
- d) To reduce land use conflicts and incompatibilities, and
- e) To eradicate substandard housing and property conditions.

4.3.2 Improvement Areas

The contiguous built-up areas of Rodney and West Lorne are designated as a 'Community Improvement Area' within the meaning of the Planning Act. Within these areas, community project areas may be established, by by-law, for the purposes of undertaking specific or comprehensive improvement projects. These areas shall be selected using the following guidelines:

- a) areas where there is a deficiency in municipal services and facilities (e.g. water supply, sanitary sewers, storm drainage, streets, sidewalks, parking, traffic circulation),
- b) areas in need of economic revitalization and beautification (e.g. 'main' street),
- c) areas where there is a potential for a more efficient use of land through redevelopment, infilling or reuse of brownfield sites,
- d) areas of older dwellings and buildings which are in need of repair and/or rehabilitation, and
- e) areas with land use conflicts or incompatibilities.

4.3.3 Establishing Priorities

Community improvement projects shall be identified, from time to time, having regard to the stated goals and objectives, the availability of government financial assistance, the impact on the area directly affected and the financial limitations to the Municipality. Priorities shall be given to those areas where deficiencies are found to be the most critical from the standpoint of public health and safety.

4.3.4 Implementation

Once a community improvement project area has been identified, the Municipality shall prepare, adopt and implement a community improvement plan which may include the following measures:

- a) undertaking capital improvements and public works,
- b) acquiring, holding, and preparing lands for redevelopment,
- c) preserving and restoring architecturally and historically significant buildings and structures,

- d) developing local funding programs and tax incentives,
- e) obtaining financial support from other levels of government, and
- f) eliciting the support and involvement of local groups and clubs.

4.3.5 Property Maintenance

The Municipality shall prepare and adopt bylaws to ensure minimum standards of property maintenance and occupancy to protect public health, safety and welfare; to eliminate unsightly and unsafe conditions and appearances with respect to buildings, lands, neighbourhoods and other areas; and to ensure adequate enjoyment of property. These by-laws may take the form of Property Maintenance and Occupancy Standards adopted under the Building Code Act or the Clearing and Cleaning of Land adopted under the Municipal Act.

4.4 HOUSING

4.4.1 Supply of Building Lots

The Municipality shall maintain at all times, subject to limitations imposed as a result of servicing constraints and market demand, a minimum 10 year supply of land designated and available for residential intensification, redevelopment and development and a minimum 3 year supply of land available for residential development with servicing capacity.

4.4.2 Housing for Special Needs

The Municipality, within the limits of its financial resources and statutory authority, shall use its best efforts and may partner with senior levels of government and other bodies or groups to ensure that an adequate and physically accessible supply of housing is available for those in social and economic need including low and fixed incomes, senior citizens and the mentally and physically challenged. The *St. Thomas and Elgin County Housing Strategy: Housing Demand and Supply Analysis* (November, 2004) shall be used as a basis for developing a municipal housing strategy.

4.4.3 Affordable Housing

The Municipality shall support, to the extent its resources permit, the efforts of non-profit housing organizations and similar groups to increase the supply of housing to moderate and low income households. Such support may take the form of land, the provision of services, waiving of municipal fees and other incentives. For the 5 year period 2008 – 2012, a target of 20 housing units is established. The target shall be reviewed at the time of the mandatory 5 year review of the Plan as required by the Planning Act and revised as need be.

4.4.4 Group Homes

Group homes comprise living arrangements whereby persons by reason of their emotional, mental, social or physical condition require or benefit by a group living arrangement reside under responsible supervision. They may be permitted in settlement areas and in the 'Rural Area' in existing dwellings in areas designated 'Agricultural'. In order to prevent an undue impact of group homes in settlement areas, standards governing their type, size and location (including minimum separation distances between them) may be established in the Zoning By-law. Group homes shall also be registered by the Municipality under the provisions of the Municipal Act.

4.4.5 Garden Suites

A garden suite (as defined by the Planning Act), granny flat or other temporary accommodation may be permitted for up to 10 years on the same lot as a dwelling for family members and for reasons related to the personal health and safety of the main occupant(s) of the dwelling. Such units shall be designed to be portable and removed or readily converted to non-residential use upon not being required for the intended occupancy. The lot on which the unit is to be placed shall be sufficiently large to accommodate the dwelling and its required services and be compatible with adjacent uses. A Temporary Use By-law shall be required in accordance with the provisions of the Planning Act along with an agreement with the Municipality that addresses occupancy of the dwelling and its removal or conversion to other uses at the end of the temporary period.

4.4.6 Substandard Housing

The Municipality shall use its statutory powers and may participate in programs to eradicate substandard housing conditions. Opportunities shall be explored to up-grading the existing housing stock as a means of increasing the supply of affordable housing.

4.5 CULTURAL HERITAGE

4.5.1 Meaning

Cultural heritage resources shall include artifacts, buildings, structures, installations, remains, archeological sites, patterns of development, streetscapes, scenic roads and landscapes modified by human activities which serve to give the community a sense of identity and uniqueness and considered to be of value to the community as a tangible reference to its past and in distinguishing itself from other communities.

4.5.2 Inventory

The Municipality may undertake an inventory to identify, evaluate and record its cultural heritage resources to assist it in efforts of ensuring their protection and to increase public awareness, understanding and appreciation of them.

4.5.3 Alteration and Destruction

The inappropriate and unwarranted alteration, destruction and demolition of cultural heritage resources shall be prevented wherever possible.

4.5.4 Heritage Buildings and Structures

The Municipality shall use its best efforts and the measures available to it to protect, conserve and enhance buildings and structures of significant architectural and historical interest. Development and redevelopment which is sensitive to the preservation, restoration and reuse of heritage buildings and structures shall be encouraged. The protection of heritage buildings and structures may include the designation of individual properties or the designation of heritage conservation districts.

4.5.5 Archeological Resources

Where development (including the creation of a building lot) is proposed in an area or on a site which is previously undeveloped or undisturbed where such development may adversely impact a registered archeological site or a potential exists that archeological resources may be discovered, an archeological assessment shall be required which shall address the protection of any resources discovered either in place or by rescue excavation.