



# STRONG NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMPLETE COMMUNITIES: A NEW APPROACH TO ZONING FOR APARTMENT NEIGHBOURHOODS

Prepared by  
The Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal (CUG+R)

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## PART 1:

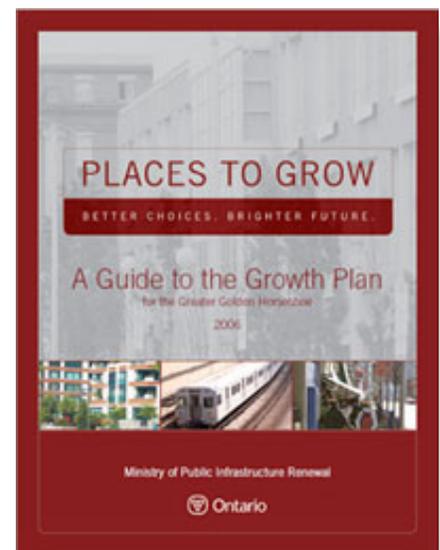
# STRONG NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMPLETE COMMUNITIES: THE EMERGENT POLICY CONSENSUS

Over the past few years, a series of commendable policy initiatives at the provincial, regional and municipal levels have promoted the creation of strong neighbourhoods and “complete communities” as a core principal of community planning.

The notion of a “complete community” is best defined by the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, which reads as follows:

Complete communities meet people’s needs for daily living throughout an entire lifetime by providing convenient access to an appropriate mix of jobs, local services, a full range of housing and community infrastructure, including affordable housing, schools, recreation and open space for their residents. Convenient access to public transportation and options for safe, non-motorized travel is also provided. (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure, Growth Secretariat, 2006)

The Growth Plan recommends all communities be developed as complete communities. In the City of Toronto Official Plan a similar approach supporting complete communities is reinforced in policies specifically related to apartment neighbourhoods (Section 4.2. Toronto, 2006, 2010), The Official Plan encourages these neighbourhoods to provide a range of locally focused activities to support community needs, contribute to the quality of life through well-designed community infrastructure and to accommodate new residential and commercial development appropriate to the neighbourhood. (Toronto, 2006, 2010)



**Image:**

Places to Grow, (Ontario Growth Secretariat, 2006)

## Apartment Neighbourhoods and The Toronto Official Plan:

The City of Toronto's Official Plan (Toronto, 2006, 2010) states that areas designated as Apartment Neighbourhoods are to be:

Made up of apartment buildings and parks, local institutions, cultural and recreational facilities, and small-scale retail, service and office uses that serve the needs of area residents. (Policy 4.2.1 page 4-6)

The Official Plan also provides direction on land use and development in Apartment Neighbourhoods that is intended to "contribute to the quality of life" in these neighbourhoods. This direction includes:

- Allowing for changes by "locating and massing new buildings to provide a transition between areas of different development intensity and scale" (Policy 4.2.2 (a)).
- Integrating community infrastructure by "providing indoor and outdoor recreation space for building residents in every significant multi-unit residential development" (Policy 4.2.2 (f)).
- Adding "ground floor uses that enhance the safety, amenity and animation of adjacent streets and open spaces" (Policy 4.2.2 (g)).
- Ensuring Apartment Neighbourhoods provide a home for everyone by allowing buildings to conform to "the principles of universal design, and wherever possible contain units that are accessible or adaptable for persons with physical disabilities" (Policy 4.2.2 (h)).

Further, the Official Plan encourages new development in Apartment Neighbourhoods that will:

- Help "organize development on the site to frame streets, parks and open spaces in good proportion, provide adequate sky views from the public realm, and create safe and comfortable open spaces" (Policy 4.2.3 (e)).
- Promote a better relationship between Apartment Neighbourhoods and public streets by "providing pedestrian entrances from an adjacent public street wherever possible" (Policy 4.2.3 (f)).
- Allow development that respects and builds on valued neighbourhood characteristics, which will "preserve and/or replace important landscape features and walkways and create such features where they did not previously exist" (Policy 4.2.3 (j)).

While not specific to Apartment Neighbourhoods, in section 2.3.1 Healthy Neighbourhoods, the Official Plan recognizes that all neighbourhoods are improved by being flexible and by changing to meet the current needs of local communities:

## Apartment Neighbourhoods Defined:

Throughout this report, the zones under study are referred to as apartment neighbourhoods. The Toronto Official Plan also refers to the term "Apartment Neighbourhoods" as a specific land-use designation with a series of policies guiding growth and neighbourhood form. Many, but not all, of the areas discussed in this report are designated as apartment neighbourhoods in the Official Plan. However, some apartment neighbourhoods are also found in areas designated mixed-use or residential. As a result, these terms are not interchangeable. In this report, the capitalized term "Apartment Neighbourhoods" will be used to denote the specific Toronto Official Plan land-use designation, and the non-capitalized term "apartment neighbourhoods" will be used when referring to these neighbourhoods more generally.

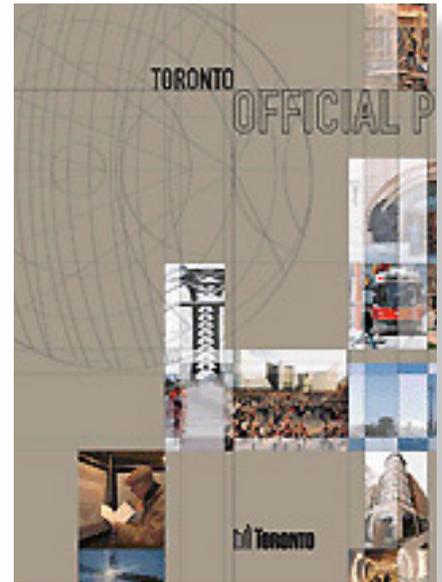
Community and neighbourhood amenities will be enhanced where needed by “creating new community facilities and local institutions, and adapting existing services to changes in the social, health and recreational needs of the neighbourhood.” (Policy 2.3.1.6(b))

### Challenges To Reaching Official Plan Goals

The policies outlined in both the provincial Growth Plan and the Toronto Official Plan provide clear direction to encourage the evolution of apartment neighbourhoods into more complete communities. Complementary policy initiatives, such as the City of Toronto’s ‘Priority Investment Areas’ also aim to address the growing community challenges in areas of high poverty and low investment in Toronto’s inner suburbs, where many apartment neighbourhoods are located.

However, ongoing research indicates that despite broad policy consensus supporting complete communities, barriers exist within the planning framework that work against the achievement of this goal. Specifically, the current zoning and site-specific zoning that exists in apartment neighbourhoods act as significant obstacles to realizing the types of changes that are necessary for them to evolve into more complete communities. As a result, these neighbourhoods are falling behind.

This report focuses on identifying specific policy and regulatory barriers that prevent apartment neighbourhoods from becoming more complete communities. It also examines potential solutions that may enable apartment neighbourhoods across the city to become more complete and prosperous places.



**Image:**

City of Toronto Official Plan, (City of Toronto, 2010)

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