

## **Downtown Revitalization Policy Brochure**

The Town of Smiths Falls is creating a new Official Plan (O.P.). This is a key guiding document that provides context for, and directs, downtown revitalization in the Town. Five brochures provide information on key themes that have been identified as important to the development of the new O.P.: Housing, Community Spaces, Downtown Revitalization, Transportation, and Sustainability.

### **Historical Context**

Smiths Falls' downtown has a rich history shaped by its strategic location along the Rideau Canal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Founded in the early 19th century, the town quickly became a bustling hub for waterway transportation and later a key stop on the railway. Its downtown core grew alongside these industries, becoming the town's commercial and social heart.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw a building boom in Smiths Falls, with the construction of significant structures like the town hall, hotels, and various businesses. The town's industrial growth fueled this expansion, as factories and mills brought new life to the downtown. However, as the town's industrial base declined in the late 20th century, the downtown faced economic challenges, leading to vacancies and decline in some areas.

Despite these challenges, Smiths Falls has managed to preserve much of its historical charm. The town has increasingly focused on revitalizing its downtown, aiming to blend its rich heritage with modern needs and sustainable growth. The Rideau Canal remains a central feature, attracting visitors and serving as a reminder of the town's historical roots as a transportation and industrial hub.

### **Why 'Downtown Revitalization'?**

Downtown revitalization brings significant social, economic, and sustainability benefits, making it a crucial goal for Smiths Falls. Socially, a vibrant downtown fosters a sense of community and place, attracting residents and visitors to gather, shop, and enjoy cultural events, which enhances the town's identity and livability. Economically, revitalization boosts local businesses, attracts new investments, and increases property values, driving job creation and long-term economic growth. From a sustainability perspective, revitalizing the downtown area promotes efficient land use, reduces sprawl, and encourages walkability aligning with environmental goals. For Smiths Falls, strengthening the downtown core is essential to preserving its rich heritage while adapting to modern needs, ensuring a resilient and prosperous future for the community.

## Key Policy Influences on Downtown Revitalization in Smiths Falls

### Provincial Legislation

The *Planning Act* encourages downtown revitalization particularly through provisions that allow municipalities to adopt and implement policies that support these goals. The Act gives municipalities the authority to create and enforce Official Plans, Community Improvement Plans (CIPs), and zoning by-laws, which are key tools in promoting downtown revitalization.

The *Ontario Heritage Act* (OHA) governs the protection of heritage buildings by giving municipalities the authority to designate properties of cultural heritage value or interest (Part IV), establish local heritage committees, create heritage conservation districts (Part V), and maintain a register of designated properties. Smiths Falls has several protected heritage buildings in its downtown, including the Town Hall and the Beckwith Street Heritage Conservation District, which are vital to the town's identity and revitalization efforts.

### Provincial Policies

Ontario's Provincial Planning Statement (PPS 2024) emphasizes the importance of promoting economic development and vitality, particularly in Chapter 2, Building Homes, Sustaining Strong and Competitive Communities.

### Municipal Policies

The Town of Smiths Falls has developed a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to encourage revitalization through financial incentives for property owners, including grants for façade improvements, building restorations, and residential intensification in the downtown area.



## Assessment of Existing O.P. Policies

**Targeted Planning:** The current O.P. includes Master Planning Studies, such as the Downtown Revitalization and Waterfront Integration Master Plan (2013) and the Downtown Community Improvement Plan (2022).

**Economic Development:** The current O.P. aims to allow for a high degree of flexibility for job growth to occur at appropriate locations throughout the Town. These locations include the further intensification of Targeted Growth Areas such as the Downtown Core area.

**Mixed Use, Housing & Walkability:** The current O.P. articulates a Town Centre concept for the Downtown Core characterized by medium density housing, mixed-used zoning, and an emphasis on pedestrianization and public space. The Town Centre concept will promote a vibrant downtown attractive to a wide variety of future employers and residents, including creative workers; and residents seeking a place to live less reliant on automobile travel as a primary means of personal mobility.

**Growth:** The current O.P. supports the intensification and increase of mixed uses of the Downtown Core area and through the creation of the Downtown Core as a Targeted Growth Area.

**Heritage:** The current O.P. utilizes several policies that encourage the preservation of heritage buildings, and contains policies for the alteration, removal, or disposal of such properties.



## Potential Policy Directions for the Future

Municipalities across Ontario are making strides to support downtown revitalization. Here are some initiatives for Smiths Falls to consider.

### Arts and Cultural Development

While the current O.P. supports arts and culture as integral to community development and revitalization through the integration of public art into the urban environment and encourages the use of public spaces for cultural activities and events, the new O.P. offers an opportunity to expand on the Town's current strategies and bolster the Town's arts and culture scene. The presence of art galleries, theatres, and cultural activities and events enhances a town's identity, making it a unique and desirable destination, boosting foot traffic and supporting local businesses. Moreover, integrating arts and culture into revitalization efforts can act as a catalyst for economic growth and community pride. Lastly, as per the recently completed Land Needs Analysis (LNA) (2023), rationalizing the abundant supply of vacant commercial properties could provide the opportunity for the adaptive reuse of existing and underutilized buildings for institutional and residential use.

### Strategies and/or Policies to Consider:

**Establishing a Cultural District:** This can be achieved by promoting local history and architecture, attracting tourism and investment, fostering community engagement through events and programs, and encouraging the preservation and adaptive reuse of historic buildings. This approach enhances the area's identity, creates vibrant public spaces, and stimulates economic growth while maintaining the cultural fabric of the community.

**Incentivizing Cultural Spaces:** This strategy can encourage the development of arts and cultural venues, galleries, and performance spaces. These incentives help attract artists and creative businesses, promote local culture, stimulate economic activity, and enhance the overall vibrancy of the downtown core, making it a more appealing destination for residents and visitors alike.

**Percent of Art:** Council adopted a Public Arts Policy and Master Plan that calls for up to 1% of the Town's revenue to be set aside for public arts. There is an opportunity for the Official Plan to determine the goals and intent of the public art grants.

**Housing and Density:** Increasing housing density and intensification in the downtown core of Smiths Falls will bolster revitalization efforts by creating a concentrated population base that drives demand for local businesses and services. Higher density means more residents living, working, and spending in the area, which supports economic growth and encourages a vibrant, round-the-clock community. This influx of residents strengthens the viability of shops, restaurants, and cultural amenities, contributing to a lively downtown atmosphere. Additionally, promoting density aligns with sustainable development goals by reducing urban sprawl,



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encouraging walkability, and making efficient use of existing infrastructure. Ultimately, a denser downtown core leads to a more dynamic, resilient, and economically thriving community.



## Questions for Consideration

1. What are your favorite features of downtown streets in other towns and cities that could be incorporated into the fabric of Smiths Falls' Downtown Core?
2. What municipal infrastructure considerations need to be made to support a more densely populated Downtown Core, with thriving businesses and more residents living and working there?
3. Beyond the immediate properties facing Beckwith Street, what is the next area for downtown investment so that we can foster a cohesive town centre as Smiths Falls grows?

Let us know what you think!

Visit [smithsfalls.ca/opupdates](https://smithsfalls.ca/opupdates) to find out more information about the New Official Plan and ways you can get involved. You can also connect with us at: [opupdate@smithfalls.ca](mailto:opupdate@smithfalls.ca)