Clean Air Partnership

Briefing Note

July 2024

Municipal Green Development Standards

Introduction

1. Green Development Standards (GDS) are voluntary or mandatory measures created by municipalities to encourage environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable design. GDS are comprehensive principles to guide development at a level of planning and design that focuses on the community as a whole.

2. A GDS Framework encompasses healthy, well-designed communities with integrated green spaces, pedestrian and transit networks, and offers a variety of options for housing, transportation, and employment. GDS help municipalities alleviate pressures from population growth and urbanization by using infrastructure and resources efficiently.

3. GDS are integrated into the planning approvals process, where development applications are asked to meet certain criteria in the GDS. They generally apply to new private and municipally-owned buildings and developments, covering Site Plans, Block Plans, and Draft Plans.

Benefits of GDS

4. **Using municipal infrastructure more efficiently**: Developments that conserve energy and water, manage stormwater runoff, and maintain green spaces reduce the burden on municipal infrastructure, defer the need for upgrades, and lower future service delivery costs.

5. **Supporting local economic opportunities**: Green development promotes innovative skills and products, expanding the local and regional green economy.

6. **Cost savings:** Green buildings have lower operating costs, helping to address fuel poverty.

7. **Reducing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions:** GDS help lower GHG emissions from buildings and transportation by implementing energy efficiency standards and supporting low-carbon transportation options.

8. **Improving health and wellness for residents:** Compact, walkable neighborhoods with integrated green spaces enhance physical and mental health, increase physical activity, and reduce air pollution.

9. **Enhancing the local building stock:** High-quality buildings offer a more comfortable living environment, better air quality, reduced sick days, and increased productivity.

10. **Increasing resilience:** Resilient buildings enhance comfort and withstand extreme weather events more effectively. They also meet the needs of seniors, improve safety for vulnerable users, and foster economic development.

Actions Included in GDS

12. GDS can include a combination of actions which can be tailored to suit municipal needs. These can include:

- Maintaining the existing tree canopy
- Enhancing stormwater quantity and quality
- Energy efficiency requirements for buildings
- Water conservation requirements for buildings
- Waste minimization

- Protecting and integrating green space
- Promoting compact, mixed-use development
- Integrating access to active and public transportation
- Renewable energy generation and storage
- Access to public parks
- Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure
- Building resilience
- Bird-friendly design
- Pedestrian Infrastructure
- Conserving cultural heritage
- Material re-use and recycling
- Soil quantity and quality
- Connectivity

Legislative and Policy Framework for Advancing GDS in Ontario

13. In Ontario, GDS are supported by different legislation including:

14. The **Planning Act** provides for municipalities to mandate sustainable urban design through site plan approvals. Municipalities must also consider matters of provincial interest, such as conservation of natural resources, energy and water efficiency, waste minimization, healthy communities, and promoting transit-accessible and pedestrian-friendly development.

15. The **Provincial Policy Statement** reflects the need for sustainable development and resiliency in the face of climate change. It directs planning authorities towards land use and development patterns that promote compact form, active transportation and transit, and design and orientation that maximize energy efficiency and conservation and renewable energy systems.

16. The **Municipal Act** allows municipalities to pass environmental protection and conservation by-laws. It also allows municipalities to participate in long-term energy planning for energy use in their community.

17. The **Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe** provides strategic direction for growth management and encourages integration of climate change considerations into the planning and management of growth as a guiding principle.

18. **Ontario Building Code (OBC)** is a regulation under the Building Code Act, 1992, which establishes technical requirements and minimum standards for building construction.

19. **Regional Policy Statements** influence tiered municipalities in Ontario and present some unique opportunities for coordinating sustainable development. Upper-tier municipalities can create regional strategic plans, community energy plans, or climate resilience plans to influence land use and the built form in all their lower-tier municipalities. Lower-tier municipalities can set out more specific visions for their communities, including guiding principles for sustainable development and more specific urban design guidelines.

Ontario Municipalities Advancing GDS

20. The following municipalities in Ontario are developing or using the GDS currently:

Toronto – The Toronto Green Standard has been in effect since 2010. Version 4 came into effect in 2022 for new planning applications.

Vaughan, Brampton, Richmond Hill, Markham – Vaughan, Brampton, Richmond Hill, and Markham collaborated to create a consistent set of GDS that apply across their municipalities and updated them in 2023.

Whitby – Whitby adopted the Whitby Green Standard in 2020 and updated it in 2023.

Halton Hills – The Halton Hills GDS was launched in 2014 and updated in 2021.

Ajax – The Ajax Green Standard came into effect in May 2022.

King – King launched Sustainable King: Green Development Standard in 2021 and updated it in 2024.

Pickering – Pickering adopted the Integrated Sustainable Design Standards in January 2023.

Caledon – Caledon adopted Green Development Standards in 2024.

Aurora – Aurora launched the Aurora Green Development Standards in 2022.

Mississauga – Mississauga updated Green Development Standards in 2024 and aligned them with Toronto's ambitious targets.

East Gwillimbury – East Gwillimbury developed the Thinking Green! Development Standards in 2012 and last updated them in 2018.

Best Practices for Implementing GDS

21. **Stakeholder Engagement**: Involve a diverse group of stakeholders, including community members, developers, businesses/NGOs and local government officials, to ensure the GDS address a broad range of needs and perspectives.

22. **Clear Guidelines and Standards**: Develop clear and comprehensive guidelines that outline specific performance metrics.

23. **Incentives for Compliance**: Offer incentives such as tax breaks, grants, or expedited permitting processes to encourage developers to meet or exceed GDS requirements.

24. **Integration with Other Policies**: Ensure GDS are integrated with other local policies and plans, such as climate action plans, to create a cohesive approach to sustainable development.

25. **Regular Updates and Reviews**: Periodically review and update GDS to incorporate new technologies, practices, and feedback from stakeholders to ensure they remain relevant and effective.

26. **Education and Training**: Provide education and training programs for developers, municipal staff and construction professionals to ensure they can effectively implement GDS.

27. **Monitoring and Verification Systems**: Establish robust monitoring and verification systems to ensure compliance with GDS and to measure their impact over time.

28. **Application Process and Requirements:** Develop an online portal with sustainability checklists, a summary outlining how the GDS was applied and where alongside how to demonstrate compliance.

Municipal Implications

24. With GDS in place, municipalities can ensure that new buildings and infrastructure are constructed to be more resilient to disruptions from extreme weather events.

25. In the long run, designing new buildings and infrastructure with lower energy demands will contribute immensely to achieving short and long-term fiscal sustainability and GHG reduction targets set by municipalities.

26. Using a holistic sustainability framework to design GDS can help guide municipalities towards building healthy, sustainable, and more equitable communities.

Related Resources

27. Towards Low Carbon Communities- Creating Municipal Green Development Standards

Contact: **Devanshi Kukadia**, Research and Communications Manager.
Email: dkukadia@cleanairpartnership.org