

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.
6. **Reducing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions from new buildings and transportation:** Buildings and transportation are large contributors to corporate and community GHG emissions. GDS can reduce these emissions by implementing standards for energy efficiency and supporting community design that prioritizes low-carbon transportation.
7. **Improving health and wellness for residents:** Neighbourhoods with a compact, walkable form and integrated greenspaces can improve physical and mental health. Increased physical activity through active transportation benefits residents who live sedentary lifestyles and reduces air pollution from vehicles.
8. **Enhancing the local building stock:** High-quality buildings offer a more comfortable living environment, are quieter, and are less susceptible to mould. This improves air quality, reduces sick days, and can increase productivity.

Benefits of GDS

4. **Using municipal infrastructure more efficiently:** The burden on municipal infrastructure can be reduced with developments that conserve energy and water, manage stormwater runoff, and maintain green spaces. GDS can help ensure that future service delivery costs are factored into new development and defer the need for infrastructure upgrades and expansions.
5. **Supporting local economic opportunities:** Green development requires innovative skills and products that can expand the green economy locally and regionally.
9. **Increasing resilience:** Buildings that include resilience measures improve comfort and resilience to extreme weather events.
10. **Creating diverse communities:** GDS can shape communities to meet the needs of seniors and an aging population, improve safety for vulnerable transportation users, and create new opportunities for economic development.
11. **Cost savings:** Green buildings have lower operating costs compared to traditional buildings, which can help to address fuel poverty.

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.
- Vaughan, Brampton, Richmond Hill, Markham** – [Vaughan](#), [Brampton](#), [Richmond Hill](#), and Markham collaborated to create a consistent set of GDS that apply across their municipalities.
- Whitby**– Whitby adopted the [Whitby Green Standard](#) in 2020.
- 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 2022.
- Pickering** – Pickering adopted the [Integrated Sustainable Design Standards](#) in January 2023.

GDS Milestone Framework

21. CAP, in its [Towards Low Carbon Communities toolkit](#), has created a Milestone Framework to help municipalities take action on creating GDS. The key actions and processes involved in taking this idea from declaration to implementation have been organized into 4 key milestones.
22. **Milestone 1: Declaration**
The municipality has made the decision to develop a GDS to be integrated into their planning approvals process, and this commitment is supported and passed through Council. A working team is established, and project objectives are identified.
23. **Milestone 2: Metric Development and Consultation**
The municipality conducts analysis, develops the metrics, and consults with internal and external parties.

24. **Milestone 3: Implementation**

The municipality updates its internal process to integrate the GDS into the planning approvals. The new GDS requirements are communicated to stakeholders. Finally, staff and applicants should be trained on their use.

25. **Milestone 4: Track, Monitor and Review**

The municipality has developed and implemented the GDS. It should now develop a continuous process to track and monitor the uptake of the various sustainability metrics, amending over time as needed.

Municipal Implications

26. With GDS in place, municipalities can ensure that new buildings and infrastructure are constructed to be more resilient to disruptions from extreme weather events.
27. 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.
28. Using a holistic sustainability framework to design GDS can help guide municipalities towards building healthy, sustainable, and more equitable communities.

Related Webinars and Further Reading

29. [Towards Low Carbon Communities- Creating Municipal Green Development Standards](#)
30. [Green Development Standards- Helping municipalities act now to increase efficiency in the buildings sector](#)