

# Background Information on Planning for Growth

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## The Planning Framework in Ontario:

Municipalities are created by the Province, which gives municipalities all of their powers and authority. The Province establishes the ground rules for land use planning in Ontario through the *Planning Act*.

Under the *Planning Act*, there is a hierarchy of policy documents, plans, and by-laws (Figure 1); this “planning hierarchy” guides all planning decision making from Province-wide planning priorities to county level planning policies, all the way down to each individual property.

The key documents of the “planning hierarchy” are as follows (in order from highest on the hierarchy to lowest):

**1. Planning Act:** The Planning Act provides a land use planning system led by provincial policy; among other powers, the Planning Act gives municipalities the power to:

- Prepare official plans;
- Regulate and control land uses through zoning;
- Process applications relating to divide land through consents and subdivisions;
- Establish site plan control areas;
- Appoint committees of adjustment;
- Require parkland or cash-in-lieu of parkland for each development.

The Planning Act also has requirements for what each document lower down on the hierarchy must contain and provides the process for changing those documents. As an example, the Planning Act requires that official plans are reviewed by municipalities 10 years after adoption and then every 5 years after that.

**2. Provincial Policy Statement:** The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) sets the rules for land use planning on Ontario. The most recent PPS was introduced by the Provincial government in 2020 with a new version slated for release soon. The Planning Act requires that documents lower on the hierarchy “shall be consistent with” the PPS. As an example, the PPS requires that municipalities plan to accommodate growth over a 25-year timeframe.

- 3. Sustainable Communities Official Plan (County Official Plan):** County governments (such as Lanark County) are required by the Planning Act to create official plans. Official plans are municipality or county specific policy documents that provide a vision for future growth and guides the physical development and use of land over the long-term. In 2012, Lanark County adopted a new official plan – the Sustainable Communities Official Plan for all of Lanark County, including Mississippi Mills. Among a wide range of land use planning policies, the County Official Plan includes population projections for each municipality in the County and designates the boundaries of towns and villages. The County Official Plan also contains specific directions for how municipalities in Lanark County evaluate the need and opportunities for growth.
- 4. Community Official Plan (Mississippi Mills Official Plan):** Municipalities within a county are also required to prepare official plans by the Planning Act. The Municipality of Mississippi Mills adopted the Community Official Plan (COP) in 2005. The Mississippi Mills Official Plan is a high-level policy document; it determines when, where, and how the Municipality grows; where amenities and industries are located; and how vital infrastructure is laid out. Mississippi Mills Council can adopt changes to the Community Official Plan, but must follow the County Official Plan and all other documents higher up on the hierarchy. Within Lanark County, the ultimate approval authority for new local municipal official plans and for amendments to the official plans is Lanark County; in some cases, changes to the Mississippi Mills Official Plan also require changes to the County Official Plan.

  - a) Supporting Plans:** Supporting plans such as the Transportation Master Plan (TMP) and the Water and Wastewater Master Servicing Plan (MSP) are integral to supporting the vision and objectives in the Mississippi Mills Official Plan. Supporting plans play an important part in ensuring that the infrastructure needed to support both the current community and the growth that is currently envisioned in the Mississippi Mills Official Plan. Supporting Plans are not a direct part of the “planning hierarchy”, however, they affect the decision making process for municipal land use planning; they also inform updates to the Mississippi Mills Official Plan.
- 5. Comprehensive Zoning By-law:** The Planning Act requires that local municipalities adopt zoning by-law as a tool to implement the policies of the Mississippi Mills Official Plan; zoning by-laws must follow the Mississippi Mills Official Plan and all other documents above it on the “planning hierarchy”. Zoning determines what is and is not allowed to be built on every property within the Municipality’s boundaries. Zoning can regulate the specific uses permitted on a property and it can also include a specific set of regulations (called provisions or performance standards) that shape development by setting limits on the location of the building on the property, the height of the building, and the number of parking spaces required.

## The Planning Hierarchy



