

Residents invited to provide input on Caledon's Green Development Standards

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A draft of Caledon's Green Development Standards is ready for review.

Last week, the Town of Caledon launched a survey online at haveyoursaycaledon.ca to give residents a chance to provide feedback on the standards.

The standards were created as part of the Town's Resilient Caledon Climate Change Action Plan, and work on them began in January of 2022. The Sustainability Solutions Group was hired by the Town to help create the standards.

One of Caledon's climate change priorities is to develop and apply a green development standard to ensure all new buildings are net-zero and climate-resilient by 2030, and promote efficient, green, and livable community design.

After community review, any necessary amendments will be made to the green development standards before they are presented to Caledon Council for adoption later this year. The last day for residents to provide comments on the standards is August 8.

In creating the draft standards, the Town engaged with neighbouring municipalities, the development industry, and various community stakeholders like non-profits and conservation authorities.

Erin Britnell, Caledon's Director of Corporate Strategy and Innovation, explained Caledon looked at green development standards models from Toronto, Brampton, Vaughan and Mississauga among others while creating its standards.

According to the draft, Green Development Standards (GDS) are sets of measures created by municipalities that are required or encouraged in new developments related to environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable design.

Once implemented, GDS become part of a municipalities' planning process, meaning future industrial, commercial/institutional, and residential developments must follow them. In the draft standards, the Town noted it would like to have GDS in place before significant growth occurs.

While a net-zero community is important, it must be a complete one too, according to the draft standards.

A zero-carbon community that fails to provide residents' needs locally will result in people having to drive to meet most or all of their day-to-day needs, counteracting energy reductions from efficient building design, reads the draft.

The guiding principles (condensed here for space) used in making Caledon's GDS are as follows: support energy efficient buildings and renewable energy systems; create communities resilient to climate change; create complete and transit-oriented communities; provide a mix of housing options; create local jobs to reduce commuting; protect local ecosystem and agricultural lands; create inclusive communities; and protect Caledon's rural character.

Britnell said as part of Caledon's consultations with the development industry, it became apparent flexibility was key in how developers could meet GDS targets.

All of those key metrics that we have, we're still hitting those - it just allows the industry to kind of pick their path to get there,

because we know there's not just one way to hit those," said Britnell. "There's different ways to design green infrastructure: you can have green roofs, you can have solar panels, you could have cool pavement. There's all these different areas, but they might work better in one community than in another."

The Town's GDS were developed to be implemented into its existing development application process. At preliminary meetings, applicants will be advised about GDS requirements. Then, the applicant must submit a GDS checklist as part of its complete application submission. Town staff will then review the application and send feedback to the applicant. If the applicant makes any necessary changes and meets the GDS criteria, their project can then move forward.

Caledon has opted for a single-tier approach to its GDS, meaning there is one set of metrics for all developments to achieve with flexibility as to how targets are met.

Britnell said the single-tier approach creates consistency for Town staff to be able to measure and report on what the development industry is doing in Caledon.

"This is a collaborative effort and we want to work with them the best we can," said Britnell. "We've had some really good discussions."

The GDS are organized into three areas: community design and mobility, which is about building communities that improve resident well-being; green infrastructure, which is about expanding urban green spaces and maximizing tree canopy; and buildings and energy, which is about promoting zero-carbon, energy efficient buildings and renewable energy sources.

GDS metrics for community design and mobility include: housing diversity, connection to parks and open space, light pollution reduction, pedestrian amenities, public spaces, walkability, cycling amenities, mixed-use neighbourhoods, and electric vehicle charging.

GDS metrics for green infrastructure include: soil volume requirements, cool paving, plant species requirements, stormwater management, natural heritage conservation, and bird-friendly design.

Finally, GDS metrics for buildings and energy include: reducing greenhouse gas emissions, making buildings solar-ready, generating renewable energy, water efficient irrigation and more.

"The GDS (metrics) must be undertaken to improve the performance of development in a given theme area," reads the draft.