

Prologue

The Ottawa Official Plan is the first plan of the City of Ottawa and its guide to the 21st century. Creation of the city in 2001 brought 11 urban and rural municipalities and a regional government into one government structure, responsible for services to a population of about 800,000 living in an area of 2,760 square kilometres. Over the next 20 years, Ottawa’s population will push past the one million mark, a level of growth that will open new opportunities for the city and its residents. This Plan manages this growth in ways that reinforce the qualities of the city most valued by its residents: its distinctly liveable communities, its green and open character, and its unique characteristics that distinguish Ottawa from all other places.

Ottawa is unique among Canadian cities because its boundary takes in an urban area surrounded by a large and varied countryside. Prime agricultural lands touch the city’s suburbs and spread in all directions in broad plains, interspersed with wetland and forests and a fragment of Canadian Shield. But it is the rivers and waterways that are the hallmarks of Ottawa. Located at the juncture of the Ottawa River and the Rideau River and Canal, Ottawa and its history, economy and culture have been shaped by these waterways.

The Ottawa River and its tributaries form the most direct water route between the St. Lawrence River and the continental interior, making it the superhighway of the fur trade from the 17th to the 19th century. Evidence of Algonquian habitations has been found in Ottawa and throughout the Ottawa valley. The first European settlements were scattered farms and later a construction camp for the Rideau Canal was established in 1826. In the early 1800s, timber supplanted furs as the dominant good carried on the river. With its mill operations, Ottawa was the centre of this industry when it was named as the capital of the province of Canada in 1857 and as the national capital in 1867.



Today, Ottawa functions as both a national capital city on the international stage, and as an exciting yet comfortable place to call home. Parliament Hill is both a powerful national symbol and a familiar landmark to residents, a landmark carefully preserved in urban design plans prepared by both the federal government and the City of Ottawa. The green parkway system owned by the National Capital Commission, charged with coordinating the planning of federal properties in the National Capital Region, hosts motorcades for visiting dignitaries as well as streams of resident joggers and cyclists. The people

of Ottawa celebrate Canada Day on Parliament Hill on national television, but also get together in neighbourhood parks to share their fireworks on the Victoria Day weekend.

As part of the National Capital Region, the City of Ottawa partners with the federal government as well as with the City of Gatineau in Québec on a range of issues, from the health of the river that runs between them to plans for new bridges to cross it. Together with the City of Gatineau, Ottawa is part of the fourth largest metropolitan area in Canada, with an economy to match.

Federal employment has long dominated the Ottawa economy, giving way through the 1990s to employment in high technology. With three universities and a combination of government and private research facilities, plus an active business community and well-educated work force, Ottawa is a seedbed for innovation. Future growth will depend on the city's continuing ability to develop its own talent pool and to attract talent in the international market.

Ottawa is increasingly cosmopolitan, with an estimated 1 in 4 residents born outside of Canada and 1 in 7 residents members of visible minorities. About 20 per cent of the population speaks a language other than English and French, while about 37 per cent speaks both official languages.

These are some of the qualities of Ottawa that this Plan seeks to preserve over the next 20 years. It proposes to manage growth in ways that enhance the liveability of Ottawa's existing communities while creating exciting new areas for housing, work, shopping, and recreation. The environmental integrity of the city is reinforced throughout the Plan. The city shines as both a national capital and as a great place to call home.