



SMITHS FALLS
RISE AT THE FALLS

HOUSING GUIDE

A Guide to Infill Housing in Smiths Falls

Development Services Department
Town of Smiths Falls

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Local Housing Needs and Low-Rise Infill

2 Before You Start

Planning the Site

2.1 Building Location

2.2 Entrances and Walkways

2.3 Parking

2.4 Landscaping and Trees

2.5 Yards and Outdoor Space

2.6 Utilities, Waste, and Service Areas

Designing the Building

2.7 Building Height and Size

2.8 Heritage

2.9 Windows and Balconies

2.10 Exterior Materials

3 Funding and Incentive Programs

4 Pre-Consultation and Review

4.1 Planning Pre-Consultation

4.2 Department and Agency Review

5 Planning Applications and Public Process

6 Building Permit and Construction

7 Approval Flow Chart

8 Application Checklist



1. Local Housing Needs and Low-Rise Infill

Smiths Falls is planning for future residential growth and changing housing needs. The Town's Land Needs Analysis projects that the population will increase by approximately 4,267 people between 2021 and 2051, creating the need for approximately 1,502 additional housing units. About half of these are projected to be townhouses or apartment units.

Changing household needs support a wider range of housing types, sizes, tenures, and levels of affordability. Low-rise infill can help provide more housing choices within established neighbourhoods. The Town supports the development of a wide variety of housing types that fit in our existing neighborhoods.

This Guide provides design guidance to assist property owners, designers, and developers. It is not a regulatory document and does not replace or override the Town of Smiths Falls Zoning By-law, Official Plan, Ontario Building Code, or other applicable legislation.

Eligible projects may qualify for funding or financial incentives. See **Section 3** for more information.



Figure 1 - Local example of a proposed eight-unit, two-storey residential development



Figure 2 - Local example of an existing eight-unit, two-storey residential development



2. Before You Start

A simple concept sketch helps you understand how your ideas fit your property before investing in detailed design. It can identify opportunities and constraints early, support discussions with Town staff, and reduce the need for design changes later in the process.

Contact Development Services early to confirm zoning, approvals, servicing, heritage, and other site-specific requirements before investing in detailed drawings.

Consider:

Existing Property

- property boundaries and approximate dimensions
- existing and proposed buildings, and accesses, including setbacks from property lines
- nearby roads, rights-of-way, easements, and unopened road allowances
- site features such as trees, drainage, wetlands, slopes, and Town services
- how neighbouring properties are used

Planning the Site

- building location
- driveway and parking layout
- front doors and pedestrian access
- yards or shared outdoor space
- landscaping, trees, waste storage, utilities, and servicing

Designing the Building

- housing type and number of units
- building height, size, and shape
- heritage features and nearby historic buildings, if applicable
- windows, balconies, roofs, and exterior materials
- common building materials in the immediate area

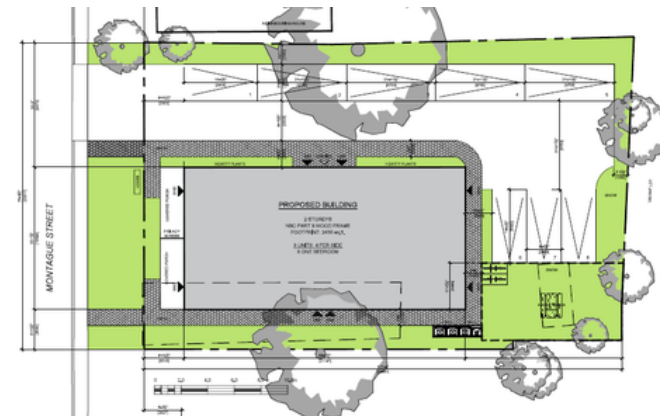


Figure 3 - Local example of a site plan for a proposed development

Planning the Site

Site decisions influence how a development functions on-site and how it relates to the street and neighbouring properties.

2.1 Building Location

Building location must meet applicable zoning setbacks and Ontario Building Code requirements. Confirm requirements with Town staff.

Design Guidance

- Locate and orient buildings toward the street with visible entrances and windows to create an attractive and welcoming streetscape.
- Consider nearby front yard setbacks when locating the building to create a consistent streetscape and help new development fit the surrounding neighbourhood.
- In most residential zones, the minimum front yard setback is 6 m (20 ft) and the minimum rear yard setback is 8 m (26 ft). Refer to the Town of Smiths Falls Comprehensive Zoning By-law for property-specific requirements.

- Consider how building placement affects privacy, sunlight, and outdoor amenity areas on neighbouring properties, especially where windows, decks, or upper-storey areas face adjacent yards.
- Preserve space for planting trees, landscaped areas, and snow storage along street edges and shared outdoor spaces where possible.



Figure 4 - Example of a low-rise triplex infill development



2.2 Entrances and Walkways

Design Guidance

- Locate the main entrance where it is visible from and connected to the street, making the building easier for residents, visitors, and emergency services to find.
- Provide clear pedestrian routes between the sidewalk, entrances, parking areas, and outdoor amenity spaces to improve safety and everyday convenience.
- Use durable, permeable materials, such as permeable interlock pavers, to enhance curb appeal, support stormwater infiltration, and reduce long-term maintenance.
- Provide lighting and weather protection, such as canopies, covered porches, or recessed doorways, to make entrances safer and more comfortable year-round.
- Consider site grading early to reduce steep paths, unnecessary steps, and costly design changes, while supporting accessibility where feasible.
- Locate side or rear entrances to provide convenient access while reducing privacy impacts on neighbouring homes and yards.
- Integrate ramps, stairs, secondary doors, and window wells into the building and landscape design to maintain curb appeal and preserve usable front yard and planting space.



Figure 5 - Example of a pedestrian walkway connecting the sidewalk to the entrance



Figure 6 - Example of stairs integrated with the building and front-yard landscaping to maintain usable planting space

2.3 Parking

Design Guidance

- Design driveways so they are not too prominent from the street and do not detract from building entrances, walkways, or landscaping. Driveway widths should not be wider than needed. The Zoning By-law limits driveway width to the lesser of 6 m (20 ft) or 50% of the lot width.
- Locate garages and parking areas in rear yards where possible, and avoid front-yard parking.
- Separate vehicle access from pedestrian routes where possible, using landscaping, pavement markings, or other design features to support safe movement through the site.
- If a development requires four or more parking spaces together, they must be provided in a parking lot or parking garage in accordance with the Zoning By-law. Ensure adequate turnaround space and use landscaping, trees, or screening to reduce visual impacts.
- For multi-unit developments, provide bicycle parking or storage in a convenient location near building entrances or pedestrian access routes.

- Design parking areas with adequate space for on-site snow storage to maintain safe access, circulation, and efficient year-round operation.



Figure 7 - Local example of side-yard parking, pedestrian access, and bicycle racks near a side entrance

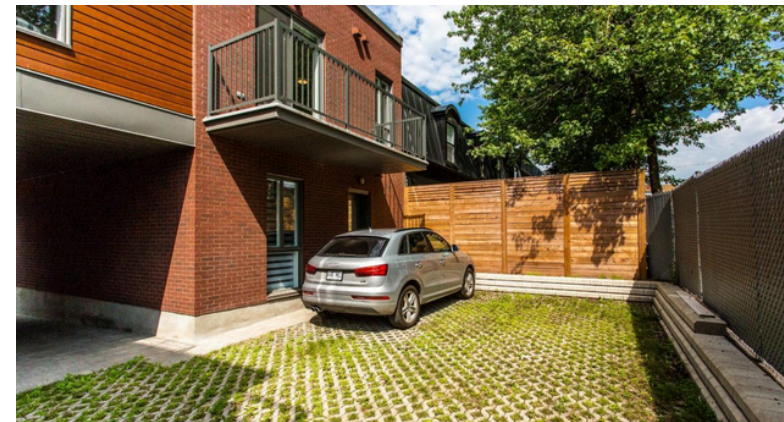


Figure 8 - Example of rear-yard parking that reduces the visual impact of parking from the street

2.4 Landscaping and Trees

Design Guidance

- Use landscaping to create an attractive entrance, improve curb appeal, and guide visitors to the building.
- Limit large paved areas and use landscaping to manage stormwater.
- Fences and hedges must be located within the property line unless adjoining property owners agree to a shared fence on the property line. Hedges must be planted at least 0.61 m (2 ft) from the property line to allow for growth, as required by the Zoning By-law.
- Existing mature trees add shade and value to your development. Preserve and protect them where possible, so you do not have to wait years for new trees to provide the same benefits.
- Where a tree must be removed, consider a replacement where it will have enough room to grow.
- Choose the right plant for the right location. Consider available space, sunlight, soil, salt exposure, mature size, and nearby buildings or utilities.

- Use plants suited to the site, including native Eastern Ontario, pollinator-friendly, salt-tolerant, or shade-tolerant species where appropriate, such as serviceberry or eastern white cedar

For additional tree planting guidance, see **Section 4** of the Town's *Tree Canopy and Vegetation Preservation and Enhancement Policy*.



Figure 9 - Example of a continuous hedge providing privacy between neighbouring properties



Figure 10 - Example of front-yard landscaping with shrubs, planting beds, lawn, and a walkway that clearly defines the entrance

2.5 Yards and Outdoor Space

Design Guidance

- Yards should not be an afterthought. Plan for a contiguous space in a useful location to add value for residents. Consider its intended use, such as seating, playing, gardening or gathering.
- Well-designed yards and outdoor spaces enhance residents' quality of life by providing comfortable, usable areas for recreation, relaxation, and everyday activities.
- Where fencing is proposed, consider its location, height, and materials. Use lower or more open fencing in front yards to maintain visibility and a connection to the street, and use privacy fencing in rear yards where appropriate.
- Keep outdoor spaces away from waste storage, servicing, and busy parking areas where possible.



Figure 11 - Example of private outdoor spaces for multi-unit housing

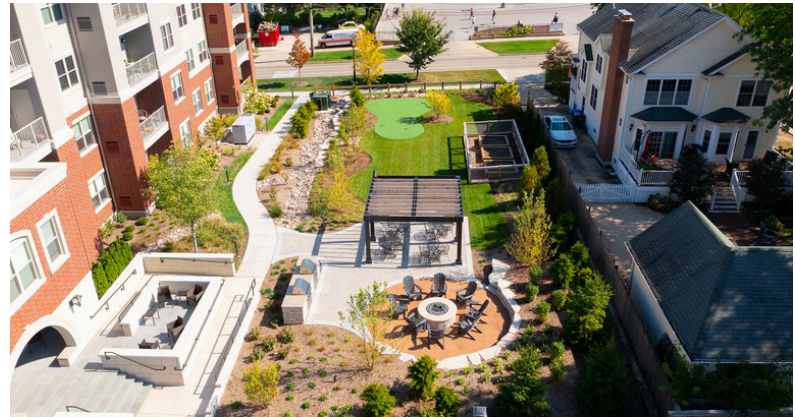


Figure 12 - Example of a shared outdoor amenity area

2.6 Utilities, Waste, and Service Areas

Design Guidance

- Identify utility, servicing, waste storage, and mechanical equipment needs early so they can be planned for.
 - Coordinate utility boxes, meters, servicing connections, and related infrastructure with Hydro One, the Town, and other applicable agencies where required.
 - Keep service areas away from front entrances, main walkways, outdoor living spaces, and prominent street-facing locations where possible.
 - Do not block pedestrian routes, parking spaces, snow storage areas, or emergency access.
 - Use fencing, planting, or enclosures to screen waste containers and mechanical equipment from streets and neighbouring properties.
- Leave enough space around equipment for safe access, ventilation, maintenance, and snow clearing.
 - For multi-unit developments, group shared waste, utility, and servicing areas to reduce visual clutter, improve maintenance, and maximize usable outdoor space.



Figure 13 - Examples of landscaping and fencing used to screen utilities



Designing the Building

New infill does not need to copy surrounding buildings. It should, however, fit with the general size, shape, proportions, and character of the neighbourhood.

2.7 Height and Size

Design Guidance

- Most zones have a maximum building height of 11m (36ft). Use the height wisely to complement your surroundings.
- Design the building height, width, roof shape, and front yard setback to fit the character of the street, and place taller building elements away from neighbouring homes where possible.
- Use smaller building sections, recessed entrances or upper floors, sloped roofs, and roofline or material changes to reduce bulk and the apparent height of the building.
- On corner lots, design buildings to address both street frontages with windows, entrances, landscaping, or façade details, while maintaining a compatible scale, height, and setback with nearby homes.

- Choose a roof shape and height that fits with nearby residential buildings, and use gables, dormers, or changes in roof height to break up larger buildings.
- For flat roofs, use parapets, recessed upper floors, or varied roof heights to reduce a box-like appearance, and screen rooftop equipment and other features from view.



Figure 14 - Example of a fourplex on a corner lot in a neighbourhood facing both streets



Figure 15 - Example of roof design that breaks up the massing of a long or large building

2.8 Heritage

Designated Heritage Properties

Properties designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act* have additional requirements. Owners are expected to retain identified heritage attributes, design compatible alterations and additions, and obtain any required heritage approvals before work begins.

Design Guidance

- Learn about the building's history and original features before planning changes. Heritage House Museum and the Smiths Falls Public Library may have historic photographs, records, or other useful information.
- Check whether the property is designated, listed on the Town's Heritage Register, or located within the Heritage Conservation District (HCD).
- Contact Town staff early to confirm whether heritage approvals, studies, or additional design requirements apply.
- Design additions to work with the existing building's scale, materials, roof form, and window proportions, without copying historic details.
- For historic but non-designated buildings, consider retaining original architectural features, such as brickwork, stonework, windows, doors, porches, and decorative details.
- New buildings do not need to copy historic styles, but should respect the scale, proportions, materials, and character of nearby heritage buildings.



Figure 16 - Soper House, a designated heritage property in Smiths Falls



Figure 17 - Local example of a low-rise infill apartment that incorporates traditional architectural features, including a mansard roof and red brick, reflecting elements commonly found in Smiths Falls' built heritage.



2.9 Windows and Balconies

Design Guidance

- Place windows, front doors, porches, and balconies facing the street to create a visible entrance and an active, welcoming frontage.
- Arrange windows with consistent size, spacing, and alignment to create an organized and cohesive front façade.
- Avoid placing upper-storey windows, balconies, decks, or terraces where they directly look into neighbouring windows, yards, or outdoor spaces.
- Use frosted glass, screening, landscaping, or additional separation where needed to improve privacy.
- Design balconies and projecting features so their size, shape, and projection fit the overall form and massing of the building.



Figure 18 - Example of a projecting bay window integrated into an existing building façade



Figure 19 - Example of windows and balconies that are consistent in proportion, placement, and architectural detailing

2.10 Exterior Materials

Design Guidance

- Use a limited palette of exterior materials and colours that work well together and avoid a busy or fragmented appearance.
- Choose durable, low-maintenance materials, such as brick, stone, fibre cement siding, or high-quality wood.
- Use materials and colours that complement the building and fit the character of the surrounding neighbourhood.
- Use changes in materials or colours to define entrances, corners, or other building elements and reduce the appearance of long blank walls.
- Avoid highly reflective, mirrored, or heavily tinted materials on street-facing façades.
- Where required by the Ontario Building Code, use fire-rated exterior wall assemblies, particularly where buildings are close to property lines.



Figure 20 - Example of complementary exterior materials used to define building elements



Figure 21 - Example of durable brick exterior cladding



3. Funding and Incentive Programs

Funding may be available for housing development. Program availability, eligibility, and funding may change, so applicants should confirm current details with the relevant agency.

Town of Smiths Falls

Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Program

- Supports eligible projects related to accessibility, heritage, affordable housing, brownfields, and downtown revitalization.
- Funding may include grants for Additional Residential Units (ARUs), heritage and building improvements, planning and building permit fee rebates, tax increment equivalent rebates, and other incentives, depending on eligibility.
- Learn more here: <https://www.smithsfalls.ca/business-building-development/planning-and-land-use/community-improvement-plan/>

Development Charge Exemptions or Reductions

- Eligible affordable housing developments, including qualifying second dwelling units, may receive development charge exemptions or reductions under the Town's Development Charges By-law and applicable provincial legislation.
- Learn more here: https://www.smithsfalls.ca/media/qv1ajwf5/10324-2022_development-charges-by-law.pdf

Lanark County

Affordable Housing Capital Grant

- Supports eligible affordable rental housing projects and secondary rental units, with funding of up to \$25,000 per eligible unit (plus HST) as a 15-year forgivable loan.

- Learn more here: <https://www.lanarkcounty.ca/government/grants-programs/#1768404789358-6dd21cb3-26f4>

Some of the funding and incentive programs listed above may be combined, subject to program requirements.

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)

CMHC Funding Programs

- Offers funding and financing for housing construction, renovation, affordability, and innovation, including loans, grants, capital contributions, mortgage loan insurance, and other financing options depending on the project.
- Learn more here: <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/project-funding-and-mortgage-financing/funding-programs>

Province of Ontario

Ontario and the National Housing Strategy

- Supports affordable housing development, repairs, renovations, and housing assistance through Ontario's partnership with the Government of Canada, subject to program and project eligibility.
- Learn more here: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-and-national-housing-strategy>



4. Pre-Consultation and Review

4.1 Planning Pre-Consultation

Applicants should check the property's zoning and contact the Town's Development Services Department before preparing detailed plans or submitting an application. There is no fee for pre-consultation.

Preliminary planning review helps determine:

- whether the proposed housing type is permitted;
- applicable lot size, setback, height, lot coverage, and parking requirements;
- whether a minor variance or zoning by-law amendment may be needed; and
- whether other site-specific zoning provisions apply.

Applicants should also consider basic site conditions and needs, including:

- municipal water and sanitary servicing, including existing pipe locations and connection points; confirm available information with Public Works & Utilities
- driveway access and parking location
- pedestrian access and entrances
- trees, easements, drainage, or heritage features
- waste storage, utilities, landscaping, and outdoor amenity space

When contacting Development Services, applicants should provide:

- property address
- simple concept sketch
- brief description of the proposed project
- proposed housing type and number of units
- basic idea for access, parking, and servicing

Early contact with the Town can help identify zoning requirements, possible approvals, review needs, and next steps before applicants invest time and money into detailed drawings or formal applications.

4.2 Department and Agency Review

Planning staff follow a “One Window” approach, meaning they coordinate the application review with relevant Town departments and external agencies on the applicant’s behalf. Review timelines vary depending on the type and complexity of the proposal, the completeness of the application, and the number of agencies involved.

- **Fire Department:** May review emergency access, fire routes, building access, and the site’s ability to support safe emergency response.
- **Public Works:** May review driveway entrances, road access, drainage, grading, municipal servicing, snow storage, waste collection access, and impacts on the public right-of-way. A separate permit may be required for new or altered driveways, entrances, curb cuts, or other work affecting municipal infrastructure.
- **Utilities and Other Agencies:** Hydro One, Bell, and other utility providers may review servicing connections, utility infrastructure, easements, and clearance requirements. Buildings should generally be located at least 4.8 m horizontally from the outermost overhead Hydro One transmission line.
- **Parks Canada:** Properties adjacent to the Rideau Canal or Parks Canada lands may require separate review or approval. This may include shoreline alterations, docks, retaining walls, grading, drainage works, encroachments, or other work affecting the Canal.
- **Rideau Valley Conservation Authority (RVCA):** Applicants should review the RVCA’s online mapping to determine whether the property is within a regulated area. The RVCA may require permits or approvals and may also be circulated on Planning Act applications within its jurisdiction.
- **Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) and Via Rail:** Recommended residential setbacks are 30 m from main lines, 15 m from branch or spur lines, and 300 m from freight rail yards. Additional railway review or mitigation may be required for development near the corridor.



5. Planning Applications and Public Process

Some housing projects can proceed directly to a building permit if they meet zoning and other applicable requirements. Other projects require planning approval first.

What Planning Approval Might Be Needed?

- **Minor Variance** — for small changes to zoning standards
- **Consent & Severance** — for lot creation, lot adjustment, or easements
- **Zoning By-law Amendment** — for changes to permitted uses or zoning standards
- **Site Plan Control** — applicable for developments with 10 units or less to manage site layout, access, parking, servicing, landscaping, and related matters
- **Development Agreement** — where applicable, required as a condition of approval under the *Planning Act* to secure site-specific works, conditions, or commitments.

When Might an Application Be Needed?

- a housing type that is not permitted by zoning
- your development doesn't meet one or more zoning standards, such as reduced setbacks, parking, lot coverage, or height
- you are creating a new lot or changing property boundaries

- Site-specific constraints, such as access, servicing, easements, drainage, or heritage considerations
- A larger or more complex infill development requiring additional review

How Is an Application Processed?

- **Pre-consultation:** Meet with Development Services staff to discuss the proposal, required approvals, and supporting information.
- **Application submission:** Submit the required Planning Act application and supporting documents.
- **Public notice / consultation:** Some applications require public notice or consultation.
- **Public meeting:** Planning Act applications may be considered by the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC), depending on the application type.
- **Process confirmation:** Development Services staff will confirm the required process and supporting information.

Who Makes the Decision?

The Planning Advisory Committee decides minor variance and consent applications and recommends decisions on zoning by-law amendments to Council. The Town's Notice of Decision will include any conditions and appeal information.





6. Building Permit and Construction

Once zoning and any required planning approvals have been addressed, applicants may proceed to the building permit stage.

Building permit submissions may include:

- building drawings;
- a site plan or survey, where required;
- servicing or grading information, where required;
- structural, mechanical, or other technical information, where applicable; and
- Confirmation that all required planning approvals and internal departmental reviews have been completed, including any related conditions or requirements

Once an application is received, the Chief Building Official (CBO) will advise the applicant of any additional drawings, documents, or technical information required.

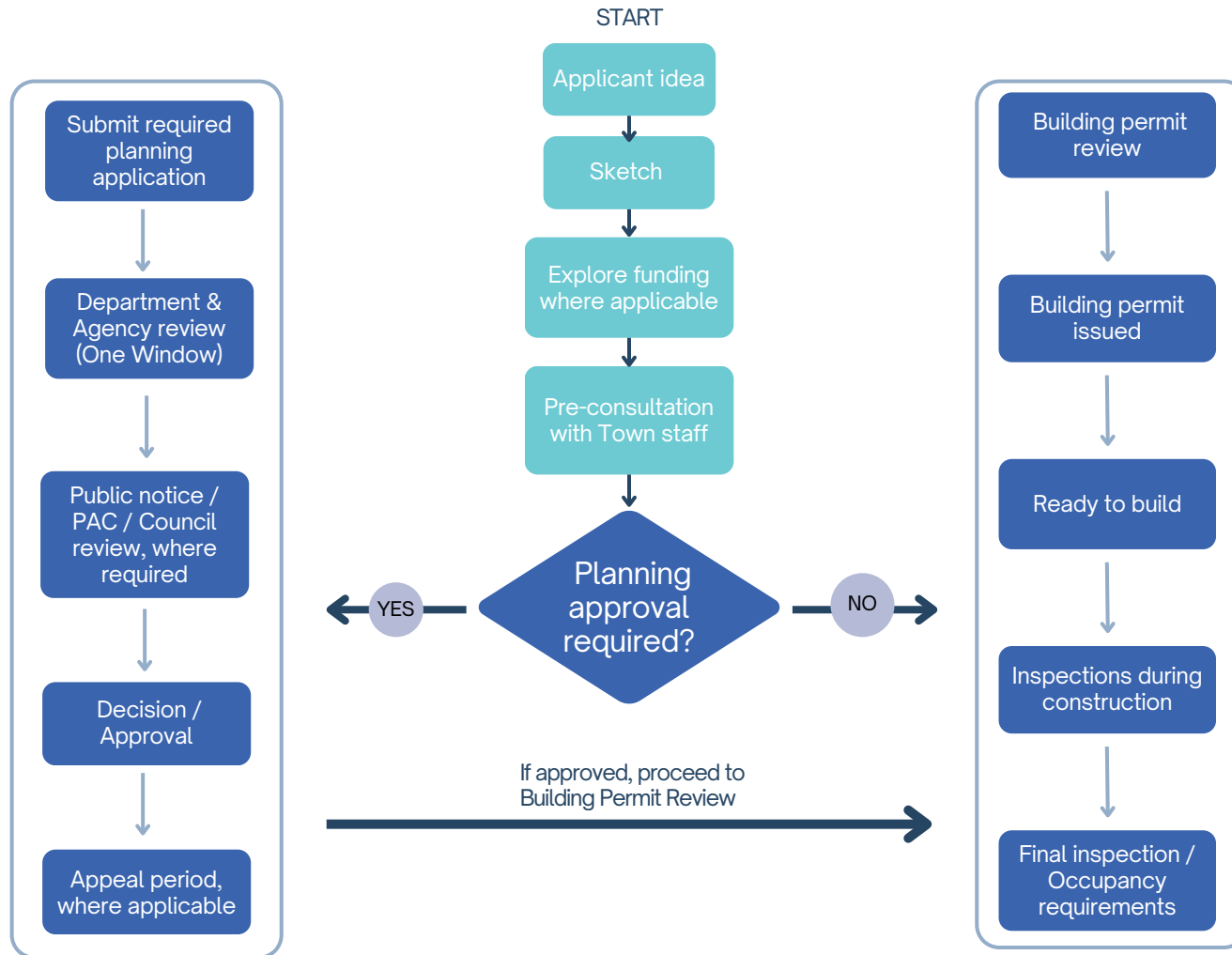
Applicants may need to coordinate water and sanitary connections, Hydro One, Bell, cable providers, and other utility services. The Building Division will confirm what servicing information is required.

Construction may begin only after the required building permit has been issued. During construction, inspections will be required at prescribed stages of construction, such as footings, foundations, and structural framing, depending on the project.

Applicants are responsible for building according to the approved permit drawings and meeting all applicable conditions, inspections, and final requirements before the new dwelling units can be occupied.



7. Approval Flow Chart





8. Application Checklist

Applicants should consider these items before scheduling a pre-consultation or preparing an application. The more information you have, the easier it is for us to help you.

Basic Information

- ☐ Property address
- ☐ Property owner contact information
- ☐ Current use of the property
- ☐ Simple concept sketch or survey

Project Idea

- ☐ Proposed housing type
- ☐ Number of existing and proposed dwelling units
- ☐ New building, addition, conversion, or additional residential unit
- ☐ Approximate building height or number of storeys

Key Site Questions

- ☐ Where will the building or addition be located?
- ☐ Where will vehicles enter, park, and turn around?
- ☐ How will residents walk from the street or parking area to the entrance?
- ☐ Is there space for landscaping, trees, waste storage, utilities, and outdoor amenity space?
- ☐ Are there known easements, drainage, heritage features, servicing, or access limitations or requirements?

Approvals and Next Steps

- ☐ Have you checked the property's zoning?
- ☐ Have you confirmed whether planning approvals are required?
- ☐ Have you reviewed possible funding or incentive programs?
- ☐ Have you confirmed whether a building permit is required before construction?



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