

# BENCHMARKING BEST PRACTICES



**Matt Durnan**

**K**ing Township has established a new set of green standards for all new developments, which will expand upon the town’s existing sustainability initiatives and play an important role in helping King to realize its overarching goals of supporting a sustainable, resilient, and healthy community.

At its May 13 meeting, King town council adopted the ThinkKING Green Sustainable Development Standards, which will officially come into effect on September 1, 2024. The new standards will build upon King’s already strong policy framework supporting sustainable development practices.

“King has had a sustainable development checklist or program of some type since 2013. In 2019, we started to work on the updates to actually formalize that as green development standards, and that was adopted in late 2020 as the Sustainable King Green Development Standards,” King senior policy planner **Aloma Dreher** told *NRU*.

“That was applicable to just site plan application, so industrial, commercial, institutional, mixed-use. At that point, we received direction

from council to consider an expansion to subdivisions down the road, and then in 2022, we received formal direction to look at expanding the program to subdivision.”

The ThinkKING Green program includes five sustainability metrics: green infrastructure, energy and conservation, built environment, natural environment, and healthy communities.

Each of the five sustainability metrics includes an intent, which identifies the goal and purpose of the metric, and each metric contains up to three target levels: minimum, level one, and level two. All development applications are required to meet all minimum targets throughout the program, and in addition to meet at least one level one and one level two target.

All site plan and draft plan

of subdivision applications will be required to address the metrics of the program in order to be deemed complete, and all complete applications will include the submission of a completed ThinkKING Green program table.

“When we started looking at [expanding the Sustainable King Development Standards], we determined that it was better and easier to do an overhaul of the program itself,” Dreher said.

“We introduced a number of new metrics, a new points system, and we updated the points system to align with the system being used in other municipalities in York Region. We also updated some of our old metrics based on changes in legislation and changes to minimum standards to address our new zoning by-law that came into effect in 2022. In total, there’s about 15 to 20 new metrics and a new scoring

system.”

Under the scoring system, points are tallied, with minimum targets scoring one point and additional points awarded if level one and level two targets that are met. Applicants will be required to achieve at least one level one and one level two target under

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Table breaking down the points ranges required for applications to reach each level of the King Townships ThinkKING Green sustainability scores for site plan (left column) and draft plan of subdivision (right column) applications. Each site plan or draft plan of subdivision application will have to achieve a minimum score level of ‘bronze’ under King’s recently adopted ThinkKING Green Sustainable Development Program in order to be deemed a complete application. Points are awarded to applications based on how well they adhere to the metrics and principles outlined in the new green development standards.

SOURCE: TOWNSHIP OF KING

| Score Level | ThinkKING Green Sustainability Scores |            |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|------------|
|             | Site Plan                             | Draft Plan |
| Bronze      | 35 – 50                               | 30 – 40    |
| Silver      | 50 – 75                               | 40 – 60    |
| Gold        | 76 +                                  | 60 +       |

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each of the five metrics.

For example, under the ThinkKING Green “Green Infrastructure” metric, one of the principles identified is ‘heat island effect’; under this principle, applicants would be required to meet the minimum standard of 25 per cent of new hardscaped areas being constructed using light-coloured materials. Light-coloured materials absorb less heat from the sun than dark-coloured materials and thus reduce ambient surface temperatures in hardscaped areas such as driveways, parking lots and walkways. Heat radiating off hardscaped surfaces impacts nearby buildings, making it more challenging to keep the buildings cool, leading to increased reliance on air conditioners.

Meeting the minimum target would add one point for the applicant’s sustainability score, while a second point could be added for having at least 50 per cent of new hardscaped areas constructed with light-coloured materials, and a third point could be earned by having at least 75 per cent of new hardscaped areas constructed with light-coloured materials.

Points are tallied over all five metrics and their corresponding principles and

all applications must achieve a minimum score of ‘bronze’ in order to proceed in the application review process.

Site plan applications must achieve between 35 to 50 points for a bronze score, while draft plan of subdivision applications must achieve a score of 30 to 40 points to achieve a bronze score. Site plans earning scores of 51 to 75 points would be given a ‘silver’ score, while those earning 76 points and above are scored ‘gold’. For draft plan of subdivision, scores of 41 to 60 points are scored silver, and 61 points and above are gold.

“We pride ourselves on being a green community, so this is not new. King has always been green and we’ve had our sustainability checklist that goes back to 2013. And we were one of the first municipalities to have a full-blown sustainability committee,” King Township Mayor **Steve Pellegrini** told *NRU*.

“Now we have expanded our green initiatives, so it’s the old adage ‘walk the talk’, and we have done it. It’s important to note that under this planning regime, you can’t mandate [these standards], however all of our site plan applications have always gone through it and [developers]

pride themselves on going through this and participating with the municipality to get a better product at the end.” While King Township can’t mandate these new green development standards, the reception of the previous iteration of the Town’s green development standards suggests that applicants looking to develop in King are more than willing to adhere to the standards that have been set out.

“We have actually had meetings with consultants who have said ‘this has resulted in a better plan for us’, so they have actually gone back and revised things on their site plan before even submitting it in order to meet our green development standards,” King manager of policy planning **Kristen Harrison** told *NRU*.

“The applicants have ended up with a better, more thoughtful plan. It’s a great selling feature, whether it’s for residential, or multi-unit residential, or even for commercial, to be able to say you’ve met these standards, so there is benefit on both sides.”

Other municipalities that have introduced their own green development standards have done so with the inclusion of incentives such as tax incentives and development application fee reductions (*See: “Stepping up to Sustainability”, NRU GTHA, Wednesday, April 24, 2024*).

King Township will not be including any incentives at the outset of the program, but

will be looking at bringing in incentives for those applicants that go above and beyond what is required in the future. The ThinkKING Green standards are also a living document that will be reviewed and revised as time goes on and as technologies and sustainability standards continue to evolve.

“Some municipalities have used a tiered system where they have a benchmark that gets higher in three years or five years or however many years as they build out that line to net-zero or to a higher standard,” said Dreher.

“We will be looking to update this every two to three years in response to changing legislation, or to introduce and respond to changing technology and encourage a higher standard of development. This will probably align with our introduction of an incentive program by the end of 2026, when we’ll be looking to refresh this document again.”

To view the full ThinkKING Green Sustainable Development Program, please visit the King Township website [here](#). 🌱