To: **Committee of the Whole**

Agenda Section: Corporate Services
Division: Engineering, Planning and Environment
Department: Planning

Item Number: **CCW - 2026-108**

Meeting Date: April 14, 2026

Subject: Information Report – Universal Development Design Guidelines

Recommendation

That Item CCW 2026-108, dated April 14, 2026, regarding the Universal Development Design Guidelines, be received.

Executive Summary

The County of Simcoe hired the consulting firm, Dtah, to collaborate with staff, area municipalities and stakeholders, to create Universal Development Design Guidelines (UDDG), attached to this report (CCW 2026-108) as Schedule 1. The UDDG is a collection of best practices and design examples to guide desirable development while promoting complete communities and complete streets. It also encourages a built form that complements existing buildings to preserve the neighbourhood character and provides guidance on enhancing active connections and healthy lifestyles, all while helping municipalities address the rural and urban intersect. While some municipalities have had the opportunity to create urban design guidelines (or similar documents), not all area municipalities have been able to do so. The purpose of the UDDG project is to leverage County resources to create a practical resource tool for local municipal partners to use, if desired.

The UDDG was developed in consultation with local municipalities and a steering committee (made up of County and local municipal planning staff) to provide a shared resource for all municipalities to apply during development review, infrastructure planning, and creating future policy initiatives. The UDDG is to help enhance the process of evaluating future development and design initiatives.

The UDDG is a compilation of industry-wide best practices and design principles applicable to most local municipal contexts and can be used as a supplementary resource in addition to other policy, technical, and legislative requirements, to provide local municipalities assistance when dealing with urban design matters, subdivision review, site plan control, and infrastructure planning e.g. sidewalk placement and street design.

The UDDG is a comprehensive framework offering guidance to developers and municipalities when designing and evaluating development applications, while trying to achieve complete communities that are walkable, are inviting for pedestrians, and help with the natural and built form intersect to promote active lifestyles and community to congregate. The UDDG was completed by the County to make available an urban design resource for the upper-tier and lower-tier municipalities to use, or to have on an interim basis until such time as further work was completed by local municipalities relating to urban design objectives for their communities.

Through a combination of text, images, and illustrations, the UDDG outlines cohesive and achievable design strategies aimed at promoting inclusive, accessible, and environmentally vibrant communities that contribute to residents' social well-being.

These guidelines are meant to have broad applicability and can be further expanded upon by local municipalities for local context and nuance.

Though the document is not mandatory to implement, it does provide local municipalities with a resource to be more time efficient, reduce duplicative research efforts, and be financially responsible without having to research and create their own guidance document for development review and servicing planning. This UDDG project is a primary example of a County-led project that provides support to all local planning authorities. It directly reflects continued implementation of the 2021 Land Use Planning Service Delivery Review, and specifically the Core Opportunity 2: Proactive Approach by providing resources and supports to local municipal partners.

Background/Analysis/Options

The County hired the consulting firm, Dtah, to undertake the development of County-wide universal development design guidelines. These guidelines would be a shared resource for Simcoe County municipalities to use as they choose, and to enhance the process of evaluating future development and urban design initiatives. To ensure the project created a document that was both relevant and useful, Dtah collaborated with local stakeholders and a Steering Committee to review the existing conditions and character of Simcoe County and produce a guidance document that may assist all municipalities throughout the County. The Steering Committee was comprised of County staff and select local municipal planners who had responded to the County's request for municipal members.

Having a regional document that all municipalities can use offers an opportunity for cost savings and also provides a standard baseline expectation across the County for all municipalities which will help support the effort of improving urban design by raising the

benchmark expectations with respect to development design and review applicable to all communities of Simcoe County.

The project deliverables included an ‘Existing Context’ Report, ‘Best Practice’ Report, as well as the final ‘Universal Development Design Guidelines’.

The ‘Existing Context Report’ was informed by site visits conducted by the Steering Committee and Dtah consultants, visiting various communities in Simcoe County, as well as a review of strategic policy documents issued by the County, Province, and local agencies.

- County of Simcoe Official Plan (2023)
- Transportation Master Plan Summary Report (2023)
- Trails Strategy (2014)
- Lake Simcoe Protection Plan (2009)
- Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority Strategic Plan (2022-2024)
- Growth Forecasts and Land Needs Assessment (2022)
- Housing Our Future (Community 10-year Affordable Housing and;
- Homelessness Prevention Strategy) (2014-2024)

The Existing Context Report provided an overview of the issues, challenges, and the existing community/neighbourhood character needing to be preserved.

The Best Practice Report included examples of community design standards where built form has proven success, having direct applicability to local municipalities throughout Simcoe County. The examples range from local (Ontario), national (Canada), North American (United States) and international contexts. The best practices informing the UDDG were reviewed for their real-life applicability, how desirable the community was over time for residents, and success in contributing toward the creation of complete communities.

The UDDG can be used by local officials as a supplementary evaluation tool when applying existing policy, technical, and legislative frameworks. The UDDG can be referenced and applied to *Planning Act* applications to ensure that new development aligns with and enhances the principles of complete streets and complete communities. It also helps provide a framework for planners, developers and decision-makers to find opportunities to enhance future subdivision design to better integrate and match the existing character of neighbourhoods, to help ensure the standards of development are not compromised even while being faced with pressures to deliver housing as quickly as possible.

The UDDG is organized across three development scales; Community Design, Site Design, and Built Form. The document uses concise text, images, and illustrations to outline cohesive strategies that aim to strengthen built form community structure. By providing a flexible, non-prescriptive framework, municipalities can adapt the guidelines and apply them to local context and nuance. It provides guidance on how to establish

complete streets, sustainable and desirable block patterns, and how to organize open-space and active transportation networks.

The UDDG can be relied upon as a new resource immediately, however, municipalities may also choose to use it as an interim tool to “springboard” into working towards a more detailed urban design manual tailored to local municipal needs.

Financial and Resource Implications

There are no financial or resource implications associated with this Item. The project was completed using approved budget resources.

Relationship to Corporate Strategic Plan

No specific relationship to corporate strategies.

Reference Documents

There are no reference documents associated with this Item.

Attachments

Schedule 1 – Universal Development Design Guidelines (December 2025)

Prepared By Julie Nolan, Planning Program Supervisor, RPP

Approvals	**Date**
Nathan Westendrop, Director of Planning, Chief Planner	April 2, 2026
Rob Elliott, General Manager, Engineering, Planning and Environment	April 7, 2026
Trevor Wilcox, General Manager, Corporate Performance	Click here to enter a date.
Mark Aitken, Chief Administrative Officer	Click here to enter a date.