



February 28, 2019

Land Use Planning Review
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Ontario Growth Secretariat
777 Bay Street, Suite 425 (4th floor)
Toronto, ON, M5G 2E5

Dear Sirs:

RE: County of Simcoe Comments on the Proposed Amendment to the Growth Plan, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed amendment to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe 2017. The County of Simcoe supports the proposed amendment and thanks the Ministry for listening to the concerns raised and addressing them within the amendment. The changes being proposed address the issues of the County of Simcoe and its member municipalities. These changes will help streamline the planning processes and provide clarity to the many local official plan updates that are now being undertaken. The proposed changes will also streamline the County's Municipal Comprehensive Review process to ensure it can occur in an effective and efficient manner.

This letter provides a summary of the County's comments and suggestions related to these potential revisions to the Growth Plan 2017 document.

The proposed Growth Plan continues to offer more responsibility to the upper-tier municipalities for land use and growth management decisions and on the structure for growth in the lower-tier municipalities. The proposed changes to the Growth Plan will provide additional and much needed flexibility in key areas such as Settlement Area Boundary Expansions, Employment Land Conversions, Provincial Agricultural and Natural Heritage System mapping implementation, and Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) requirements.

The proposed changes to the Growth Plan 2017 are addressed in the following key issues:

1. Employment Planning;
2. Settlement Area Boundary Expansions;
3. Rural Settlements;
4. Provincial Agricultural and Natural Heritage System;
5. Intensification and Density Targets;

1. Employment Planning:

- Some modifications to the Employment section 2.2.5 are being proposed. The County of Simcoe is seeking further clarification on these proposed policies
- How can this policy ensure non-developed employment lands remain viable for the suite of possible uses once the sensitive land uses are there since impacts may not be known until the industry is proposed?
- Some allowance for employment land conversions are proposed in section 2.2.5.9 and 2.2.5.10.

The County agrees with providing this allowance. For further clarity, section 2.2.5.10 should include additional criteria when allowing an employment land conversion outside of a MCR. This additional criteria could include a residential exclusion policy to avoid conversion of employment lands to residential. Criteria could also include specific land requirements for employment land swaps. Criteria which would only allow municipally driven employment land conversions would help to limit conversions. Making a distinction between employment land adjustments and employment land conversions in a similar fashion to settlement area boundary expansions would also benefit the policies differentiating between minor and major employment land conversions.

- Section 2.2.5.10(b) requires clarity to explain how a significant number of jobs can be maintained on the lands once it has been converted to non-employment uses. Further describing 'significant' would benefit the policy.
- A proposed new policy section 2.2.5.12 suggests that the Minister may identify Provincially Significant Employment Zones (PSEZ). It is unclear what the difference is between PSEZ and the Strategic Settlement Employment Areas (SSEA) / Economic Employment Districts (EED) identified within Section 6 and Schedule 8 of the Growth Plan. PSEZ are located within settlement areas, while SSEA's and EED's are located outside of settlement areas.
- The County recommends that each of the SSEA's and the EED's recognized in Schedule 8 of the Growth Plan be consolidated and recognized as PSEZ's without limiting the range of uses.
- The Minister has identified a PSEZ in Simcoe County. This Zone relates to the Honda Assembly Plant at Hwy 89 and County Road 10 in Alliston. The Draft mapping by the Province excludes some lands adjacent to the Honda Manufacturing plants and includes some lands not associated with Honda. Therefore, County Staff are proposing revisions to the Alliston PSEZ. These revisions are described under a separate letter and schedule and will be submitted as part of the EBR Posting 013-4506.

2. Settlement Area Boundary Expansions:

- The County of Simcoe supports the proposed changes to the Growth Plan in sections 2.2.8.4 and 2.2.8.5 maintaining the responsibility and control of the settlement area boundary expansion at the upper-tier level. The proposed changes allow expansion considerations outside of a MCR. Adjustments can be considered to settlement areas with delineated built boundaries if there is "no net increase in land", provided certain criteria is satisfied. Further clarity to this section is required to understand if there is any flexibility in land area related to the "no net increase in land". The County suggests a 10% land area discretion for specific situations.
- Is there a limit to the number of expansions that could occur for each settlement area? It is unclear if expansions apply to each settlement area or each municipality.
- The proposed changes to section 6.3.5 in the Simcoe County subsection of the Growth Plan have not corrected concerns related to the interpretation and application of this policy. The policy remains unclear if it applies to inside settlement areas or outside settlement areas with the cross reference to policy 2.2.8 (settlement boundary expansions). Staff suggest dividing section 6.3 into two subheadings dealing with primary settlement areas and settlement areas and to further refine section 6.3.5 to include reference to settlement areas, while removing the language referring to policy 2.2.8.

Excess Lands:

- The County of Simcoe supports the proposed changes to allow settlement area boundary expansions without de-designating excess lands.
 - The County of Simcoe continues to have significant concern with prohibiting these excess lands from future development. This requirement to identify excess lands through the MCR will create substantial conflict between local municipalities and land owners and will result in complex time
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consuming appeals. The County of Simcoe supports removing the excess lands policy from the Growth Plan.

Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR):

- The Growth Plan, as proposed, still requires the County, amongst all upper and single-tier municipalities and as a regional planning authority, to complete a MCR by July 2022. The County suggests the deadline to complete the MCR be changed to December 2023.
- Water and wastewater master plans are still a requirement of the MCR. The County of Simcoe does not administer water and wastewater servicing. We must work with the local municipalities to undertake and complete the servicing capacity study and financial assessment required by the MCR process, which will add significant time to the process in the County.
- The County prefers to complete the MCR in phases, allowing existing data to be used to formulate strategic decisions in stages, which would inform the next steps. The County suggests either additional clarity be added to the policies of the Growth Plan to address phasing and/or the Ministry's Draft MCR document be modified accordingly.

3. Rural Settlements:

- A new reference to 'Rural Settlements' is proposed in the Growth Plan. These Rural Settlements essentially refer to all 'settlement areas' which do not have a delineated built boundary. They are serviced by individual private on-site water and wastewater systems. The County seeks additional clarity on whether rural settlements exclude those settlements on partial services or communal systems.
- The County suggests some clarity be provided to further explain what is meant by 'minor rounding out' and servicing in 'an appropriate manner'. The County suggests the definition of 'minor rounding out' include reference to a percentage (e.g. no more than 10 % of the Rural Settlement).

4. Provincial Agricultural and Natural Heritage System:

- The County of Simcoe supports the changes to the Growth Plan related to the Provincial Agricultural and Natural Heritage System mapping.
- These proposed changes allow municipalities the flexibility to refine the provincial mapping in advance of the MCR, allowing lower-tier municipalities to incorporate the refined mapping into their Official Plans. Alternatively, the proposed changes allow lower-tier Official Plans to include the existing upper-tier's mapping prior to refinement of the provincial mapping. This alternative allows the provincial systems mapping to be included in lower-tier Official Plans only once the upper and single-tier municipalities complete their MCR and have the chance to refine the mapping based on local level knowledge.

5. Intensification and Density Targets:

- The County of Simcoe supports the proposed changes to the Growth Plan related to intensification and density targets. These targets have been reduced from the Growth Plan 2017 and have been established based on unique and appropriate circumstances given the size, location and capacity of the area.
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Other implications of proposed changes:

Undelineated Built-up Areas:

- Any previous reference to 'undelineated built-up areas' within the Growth Plan have been changed to 'rural settlements'. Based on the definition of 'rural settlements', this may not be accurate as there could be settlement areas classified as having undelineated built-up areas which have partial services. Please advise if these areas would be classified as 'rural settlements'? The County suggests establishing a hierarchy of settlement areas in the proposed changes to the Growth Plan. This settlement area hierarchy would include the following categories; Primary Settlement Areas, Settlement Areas with full or partial services, and Rural Settlements with no municipal services.

Public Service Facilities:

- The County of Simcoe recommends clarifying the permissions and location criteria for Public Service Facilities within the Growth Plan. Section 3.2.8.6 references that Public Service Facilities 'should' be located in settlement areas. The County of Simcoe would like to see more guidance within this policy, providing more specific language to encourage Public Service Facilities to be located within Settlement Areas unless certain criteria to locate elsewhere can be demonstrated. The following list provides an example of locational criteria that can be considered.
- **Public service facilities** are directed towards **settlement areas** and shall be permitted in any settlement area designation without amendment. **Public Service Facilities** may be located outside of settlement areas in limited situations, if the following criteria can be demonstrated:
 - i. The proposed use is not appropriate inside a **settlement area** or is required by a government body (i.e. municipal, provincial, or federal) to provide a service in a specific geographic area;
 - ii. Alternative locations inside **settlement areas** have been evaluated and are not available or feasible;
 - iii. Appropriate water and wastewater services are planned by the municipality or available to support the proposed use;
 - iv. The proposed use shall be compatible and/or minimize any adverse impacts on the rural landscape and surrounding uses;
 - v. Traffic from **development** can be accommodated within the planned or existing transportation infrastructure;
 - vi. Appropriate stormwater management opportunities are available with a focus on **low impact development**;
 - vii. The proposed **development** site is not located within a specialty crop designation;
 - viii. The proposed use will not be located in an area that may have a **negative impact** on the efficient and logical expansion of nearby **settlement areas**.

Section 6.3.5 – Managing Growth in Simcoe County:

- Section 6.3 should be subdivided into 2 subheadings – 6.3.1 Primary Settlement Areas and 6.3.2 Settlement Areas. This is consistent with the Growth Plan Amendment 1 (2012). The current version includes four (4) policies (6.3.1 to 6.3.4) which are primary settlement area policies. It has been argued that policy 6.3.5 applies to only primary settlement areas as the only other policies in this section are primary settlement area policies and there is no clear language in the policy that states that it applies to settlement areas as defined in the Growth Plan.
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- Policy 6.3.5 needs to clearly state that this policy applies to agricultural and rural areas in settlement areas, removing the reference to policy 2.2.8 (settlement boundary expansions). It has been argued that this policy is only to be applied to agricultural and rural lands outside of settlement areas since there is no reference to settlement areas but a reference to settlement boundary expansions. For instance, a revised policy may read “Any lands that are designated for agricultural uses or rural land use in a settlement area in a lower tier official plan as of January 20, 2017 can only be designated for development through a municipal comprehensive review.”
- If the reference to policy 2.2.8 in policy 6.3.5 is intended to have the upper-tier use the criteria under 2.2.8.3 to evaluate agricultural and rural lands through a MCR, a new policy under this subsection should be introduced to clearly state this direction.
- An additional policy could be added to the settlement area subsection to state that ‘settlement area boundary expansions are subject to policy 2.2.8 of this Plan’ which is consistent with policy 6.3.2.7 of Growth Plan Amendment 1.
- Additionally, the term ‘rural settlements’ is introduced as part of this proposed amendment. This term should be reflected or captured in policy 6.3.5 or any amendments thereto. It should be noted that there are settlement areas in the County that would meet the definition of ‘rural settlement’ that contain rural and agricultural lands.

The above provides an overview of the recommendations, comments and concerns that the County of Simcoe has with the proposed changes to the Growth Plan 2017. The County of Simcoe supports the proposed amendment which provides additional clarity and helps to streamline the planning processes. Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on this amendment to the Growth Plan. We look forward to working through the implementation of these proposed changes, once approved. If you have any questions with respect to this correspondence please feel free to contact the undersigned.

Sincerely,
The Corporation of the County of Simcoe

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Parks".

David Parks, MCIP, RPP
Director of Planning, Development and Transit

cc. Debbie Korolnek, General Manager, Engineering, Planning & Environment
