



To: **Committee of the Whole**

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

Item Number: **CCW - 2019-061**

Meeting Date: **February 12, 2019**

Subject: **Proposed Amendment to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017**

Recommendation

That Item CCW 2019-061, dated February 12, 2019, regarding an update on the Proposed Amendment to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe 2017, be received; and

That staff provide comments on 'The Proposed Amendment to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe 2017', substantively in the form identified in Schedule 1 to Item CCW 2019-061, to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing through the EBR Registry Number: 013-4504; and

That a copy of Item CCW 2019-061 be forwarded to all of the local municipalities within Simcoe County, for information.

Executive Summary

The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2006 (Growth Plan) was the first Growth Plan to provide a framework for implementing Ontario's vision for building stronger, prosperous communities by better managing growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH). The County of Simcoe has a dedicated sub-section within the Growth Plan which is unique to all other areas within the GGH, resulting in the County having some unique challenges.

In May 2016, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) released the proposed changes to four land use plans for Ontario as part of the Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review. The four land use plans are; the Growth Plan, the Greenbelt Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan. County Planning staff provided comments on the proposed Growth Plan to the Committee of the Whole on October 11, 2016 as per Item CCW-16-327.

In May 2017, the MMAH released the new Growth Plan, 2017 which came into effect on July 1, 2017. County Planning staff provided comments on this document to the Committee of the Whole on September 12, 2017 as per Item CCW-17-269. The other Provincial planning documents were also updated at that time.

In response to widespread criticism of the Growth Plan 2017 as well as other provincial initiatives such as the Natural Heritage and Agricultural mapping and the proposal to expand the Greenbelt, the newly elected provincial government initiated consultation on the Ontario planning process in the fall of 2018. Following this consultation, in January 2019, MMAH released further proposed amendments to the Growth Plan 2017. The proposed changes to the Growth Plan would work with the following proposed regulations to implement the changes, if approved:

- 63+ 013-4505: Proposed Modifications to Ontario Regulation 311/06 Transitional Matters – Growth Plan
- EBR 013-4506: Proposed Framework for Provincially Significant Employment Zones
- EBR 013-4507: Proposed Modifications to Ontario Regulation 525/97 Exemption from Approval – OPA

At this time, the Province is seeking feedback on the proposed Growth Plan amendments.

This report provides an overview of the key proposed changes to the Growth Plan 2017, for Council's consideration. It identifies how these proposed changes would affect the County of Simcoe. County planning staff are pleased that Ministry staff have proposed changes which were identified as areas of concern to the County and its municipal partners.

County Planning staff will be providing comments to the MMAH regarding the proposed changes as shown on Schedule 1 to this Item. The deadline for submissions is February 28, 2019 as posted on the EBR Registry Number: 013-4504.

Background

County Planning staff has reviewed the proposed changes to the Growth Plan 2017 in the context of all other land use legislation to determine the key findings for and implications on the County of Simcoe. The growth forecasts remain the foundational component of this Plan, focusing on regional growth plans that guide government investments and land use planning policies. The proposed Plan continues to place more responsibility with the upper-tier municipalities for land use and growth management decisions in the lower-tier municipalities. However, this proposed version of the Growth Plan provides additional flexibility in key areas such as Settlement Area Boundary Expansions, Employment Land Conversions, Provincial Agricultural and Natural Heritage System mapping, 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;
6. Major Transit Station Areas.

The following sections provide an overview of the key proposed changes and highlights certain concerns that are contained in the comment letter to the MMAH, attached as Schedule 1. Schedule 2 provides an overview of the changes proposed.

The County Planning staff are pleased that Ministry staff have proposed these changes as they are items in which were identified by the County and its municipal partners as being problematic.

1. Employment Planning:

- **In previous correspondence to the MMAH, the County requested the ability to allow local municipalities to make some adjustments to their employment lands through their local Official Plan update or Official Plan Amendments.**
- Upper and single-tier municipalities are no longer required to develop an employment strategy.
- Designating employment areas within upper and single-tier Official Plans can now be done in advance of a County MCR, including adding existing lower-tier municipal designations.
- The proposed Growth Plan has removed any reference to prime employment areas, which were previously the responsibility of upper and single-tier municipalities to designate inside settlement areas. Lower-tier municipalities can now designate and preserve employment lands within settlement areas.
- Section 2.2.5.8 refers to avoiding or minimizing adverse impacts on uses vulnerable to encroachment by development of sensitive land uses, major retail or major office.
- Some flexibility for employment land conversions are proposed in section 2.2.5.9 and 2.2.5.10.
- A proposed new policy section 2.2.5.12 suggests that the Minister may identify provincially significant employment zones.
- The provincially significant employment zone identified in Simcoe County is in Alliston (New Tecumseth) related to the Honda Assembly Plant at Hwy 89 and County Road 10.

2. Settlement Area Boundary Expansions:

- **In previous correspondence with MMAH, the County suggested that local municipalities could be allowed to make minor adjustments to their settlement area boundaries through their local Official Plan update or Official Plan Amendments.**
- The proposed changes to the Growth Plan in sections 2.2.8.4 and 2.2.8.5 maintain the responsibility and control of the settlement area boundary expansion at the upper-tier level. Any expansions to settlement areas will be reconciled across the County based on the Schedule 3 growth forecasts to 2036 and 2041 through the County's MCR process. However, flexibility has been included in the proposed changes to 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 are satisfied. Expansions can be considered for settlement areas with delineated built boundaries if the land area is "no larger than 40 hectares in size", provided certain criteria are satisfied.

Excess Lands:

- The proposed Growth Plan continues to require upper-tier municipalities to assess Excess Lands which are defined as lands within a settlement area but outside of delineated built-up areas that have been designated for development but are in excess of what is needed to accommodate growth to 2041.
- In order to meet the overall intent of the Growth Plan and to focus the growth appropriately, the County will identify excess lands through an MCR using the growth forecasts of Schedule 3 (2036/2041).

Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR):

- The Growth Plan, as proposed, still requires the County, amongst all upper and single-tier municipalities to complete a MCR by July 2022.
- However, the proposed changes have reduced the requirements of the MCR. For instance, of the 11 complex studies previously required, there is no longer a requirement for an Employment Strategy, Housing Strategy, or to designate Prime Employment areas. Flexibility has been provided in the proposed changes to allow settlement area boundary expansions or adjustments and employment land conversions in advance of a MCR, given certain criteria are satisfied.
- Water and wastewater master plans are still a requirement of the MCR. Since 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.
- Some of the proposed changes have allowed the 'Outer Ring' municipalities, with diverse and unique geographical areas and settlement patterns, to make some decisions for themselves recognizing the local context and circumstances.

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 and are serviced by individual private on-site water and wastewater systems.
- Section 2.2.9.7 of the proposed Growth Plan allows for minor adjustments to the boundaries of rural settlements outside of a MCR provided certain criteria is satisfied.

4. Provincial Agricultural and Natural Heritage System:

- **In previous correspondence with MMAH, the County requested that the requirement to incorporate the Provincial Agricultural System and Natural Heritage System mapping into local Official Plans be withdrawn until refinement to the mapping can be completed at the local level through evidence-based, accurate and rationalized information.**
- The proposed changes to the Growth Plan identified within the EBR Registry posting 013-4507 (Proposed Modifications to Ontario Regulation 525/97), would allow municipalities the flexibility to refine this provincial mapping in advance of the MCR. This would allow lower-tier municipalities to incorporate the refined mapping into their Official Plans. Subsequently, lower-tier municipalities could choose to conform with the upper and single-tier's Official Plan Agricultural and Natural Heritage System (i.e. Greenlands) mapping until such time that it is refined through a County MCR.

5. Intensification and Density Targets:

- **In previous correspondence with MMAH, the County requested the ability for municipalities to establish their own increased density targets that are reasonable and in character with their community.**

- The proposed changes to the Growth Plan would establish different minimum intensification targets for different municipalities. These intensification targets would take effect at the next MCR with no further increase in 2031.
- The County of Simcoe would establish a minimum intensification target based on maintaining or improving upon their current minimum intensification target. Therefore, the current alternative targets set in the County's Official Plan will apply until new alternative targets are established through the MCR for the 2041 growth forecasts.
- Similarly, the proposed Growth Plan would establish different minimum Designated Greenfield Area (DGA) density targets for the lower-tier municipalities. These density targets apply to the entire DGA and would take effect at the next MCR. For the County of Simcoe, the minimum DGA target identified is 40 residents and jobs per hectare. This target would be established through the work of the MCR. In the meantime, the alternative targets set in the County Official Plan will apply.
- Clarification has been included regarding prioritizing intensification around strategic growth areas and within delineated built-up areas.
- Councils may request alternative targets at any time where it is demonstrated that it cannot be achieved and that the alternative targets will be appropriate given the size location and capacity of delineated built-up areas. This simplified criteria may need to be enhanced.

6. Major Transit Station Areas:

- The proposed changes related to major transit station areas streamlines the approach that enables the determination of major transit station areas to happen faster so that zoning and development can occur sooner. This includes criteria for alternative targets that reflect on-the-ground realities.
- A new proposed policy allows municipalities to delineate and set density targets for major transit station areas in advance of the MCR, provided the protected major transit station area tool under the Planning Act is used.
- Clarification is also included that major transit station areas can range from an approximate 500 to 800 metre radius of a transit station.
- Bradford (Urban Area) and Innisfil (Alcona) will consider these measures as they have existing and planned GO Train Stations along higher order transit corridors, as identified in the Growth Plan.

Other implications of proposed changes:

Climate Change:

- The climate change section of the Growth Plan now refers to the "Made-In Ontario Environmental Plan" instead of the previous "Climate Change Strategy 2015". This section includes very broad statements and would be better suited to encourage specific action by upper, single, and lower-tier municipalities.
- Please note that the County is providing separate comments to the Made-in-Ontario Plan: Preserving and Protecting our Environment for Future Generations: A Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan.

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. It is unclear if these areas with partial services would be classified as 'rural settlements'.

Public Service Facilities:

- The County of Simcoe would suggest a change be made to this section to provide additional clarity where challenges have occurred. Section 3.2.8.6 references that public service facilities 'should' be located in settlement areas. The County of Simcoe would like to see this policy language change from 'should' to 'shall' to offer much needed direction for the development of new public service facilities.

Managing Growth in Simcoe County Settlement Areas:

- A change has been made to Section 6.3.5 to remove the reference to the MCR as being the only mechanism where currently designated agricultural or rural uses within settlement areas can be redesignated for development. As proposed, this form of redesignation could be considered through a settlement area expansion. 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.

Financial and Resource Implications

The County of Simcoe will be required to undertake more long term studies and projects to ensure that it can comply with the general intent and purpose of the Growth Plan. The extent of this work will be confirmed once the final modified Growth Plan is released.

Relationship to Corporate Strategic Plan

The intent of the Provincial Growth Plan is aligned with County of Simcoe Strategic Plan Goal of "Building Vibrant and Healthy Sustainable Communities".

Reference Documents

- CCW Item -16-327, Proposed Changes to the Growth Plan for the GGH dated October 11, 2016
- CCW Item 17-269, Growth Plan 2017 Implementation dated September 12, 2017
- Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017 Amendment 1 (EBR 013-4504)
- Proposed Modifications to Ontario Regulation 311/06 Transitional Matters – Growth Plan (EBR 013-4505)
- Proposed Modifications to Ontario Regulation 525/97 Exemption from Approval – OPA (EBR 013-4507)
- Proposed Framework for Provincially Significant Employment Zones (EBR 013-4506)

Attachments

Schedule 1 – County of Simcoe Comments on the Proposed Changes to the Growth Plan, 2017
Schedule 2 – Ministry of Municipal Affairs outline of Proposed Changes to Growth Plan, 2017

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Approvals

	Date
Dave Parks, Director of Planning, Development and Transit	January 30, 2019
Debbie Korolnek, General Manager of Engineering, Planning and Environment	January 31, 2019
Trevor Wilcox, General Manager, Corporate Performance	February 5, 2019
Mark Aitken, Chief Administrative Officer	February 5, 2019