

Grand River Conservation Authority

Report number: GM-02-19-22

Date: February 22, 2019

To: Members of the Grand River Conservation Authority

Subject: Proposed Amendment to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 201 (ERO Posting #013-4504)

Recommendation:

THAT Report Number GM-02-19-22 – Proposed Amendment to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017 (ERO Posting #013-4504) be received for information and

THAT Grand River Conservation Authority Report GM-02-19-22 be submitted to the province through the Environmental Registry.

Summary:

On January 15, 2019, the province posted a Proposed Amendment to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017 on the Environmental Registry (ERO# 013-4504). The amendments include changes such as reductions to intensification and greenfield density targets, simplified settlement area boundary expansion criteria and the creation of provincially significant employment zones.

This report summarizes GRCA comments on the changes to requirements for watershed planning and intensification targets.

Report:

On January 15, 2019, the province posted a Proposed Amendment to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017 on the Environmental Registry (ERO# 013-4504). The province hopes the amendments will, if approved, provide greater flexibility in the municipal implementation process of the Plan and increase the available housing supply in Ontario. The closing date for comments on the proposal is February 28, 2019.

In 2005, the Province approved the Places to Grow Act and subsequent implementation documents including the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe area (see Attachment 1). The Growth Plan outlines where and how growth should be directed in a way that protects natural heritage and water resources, the agricultural system and the economy while also building complete communities. The Growth Plan was amended in 2017 to incorporate many of the protective policies provided for in the Greenbelt Plan for natural heritage and water resources. The 2017 amendments included requirements for co-ordinated watershed and subwatershed planning, mapping of Natural Heritage Systems and Water Resource Systems and new policies for dealing with climate change. Density and intensification targets were also raised at that time for all municipalities in an effort to discourage low density single residential developments outside of existing built-up areas and encourage a more compact, urban form.

The amendments proposed under the new Environmental Registry posting are generally summarized below:

- Twenty-nine Provincially Significant Employment Zones will be established to protect employment uses. It is proposed that other uses (e.g. residential) will not be permitted. In general, these zones are located within already established municipally designated employment lands.
- Reduced density and intensification targets are intended to allow for more variation in the type of available housing. The new targets will vary across municipalities with smaller communities having the lowest targets. Municipalities will still be allowed to request alternative targets, but with simpler criteria than previously required.
- Allow municipalities to identify, plan for and expand Major Transit Station Areas in advance of a Municipal Comprehensive Review.
- Allow municipalities to undertake settlement area boundary adjustments and expansions of no more than 40 hectares in size outside of a Municipal Comprehensive Review subject to a number of criteria.
- Allow municipalities to refine and implement provincial mapping of the Natural Heritage System and Agricultural System in advance of the next municipal comprehensive review.

GRCA Comments

Watershed Planning

The current Growth Plan requires that proposals for settlement area boundary expansions include watershed planning and evidence that expansions would not negatively impact the Water Resource System, including the quality and quantity of water. These requirements have been removed. If avoidance of the Water Resource System is not possible, then expansions are now required to minimize or mitigate impacts.

In addition, the proposed amendment removes the explicit requirement to include policies in official plans for Water Resource Systems (e.g. seepage areas, wetlands, significant groundwater recharge areas and highly vulnerable aquifers including some source water protection areas). The current wording provides clear guidance on the municipal implementation of the Growth Plan policies to identify and protect these areas.

GRCA continues to support watershed planning as an important tool for considering impacts of settlement area boundary expansions. The requirements for mapping Water Resource Systems and demonstration of no impacts as a result of settlement area boundary expansions should remain in place. This will ensure that any expansions consider potential impacts on the features and functions of the Water Resource System. This would also be in keeping with the overall context of the Growth Plan which recognizes that “watersheds are the most important scale for protecting the quality and quantity of water” and “municipalities are required to undertake watershed planning to inform the protection of water resource systems and decisions related to planning for growth”. The Water Resource System should continue to be identified in official plans along with supporting policies for its protection. The amendment also proposes allowing an expansion to settlement area boundaries up to 40 hectares. It is unclear if there is a limit on the number of these expansions. The province is encouraged to clarify the criteria for these expansions.

Intensification and Greenfield Density Targets

The province proposes to reduce the existing greenfield (lands located outside of built-up areas) density targets. The current density target requires that new development on greenfield lands meet an 80 residents or jobs per hectare target. Under the new targets, smaller municipalities would see reductions in their greenfield targets cut in half to 40 residents and jobs per hectare. A reduction in intensification targets is also proposed. Currently, a minimum of 60% of new residential development is required to be within the existing built-up area. Larger municipalities would remain at 60%, but some smaller communities would have their targets reduced. Municipalities may continue to request alternative density and intensification targets, but with new simpler criteria.

A reduction in density and intensification targets will ultimately result in fewer residential units in new developments. Greenfield lands will be used up quicker, placing greater pressure on the Water Resource and Natural Heritage Systems which the Growth Plan aims to protect. Consideration of impacts to community health, climate change and the long-term cost of financing urban sprawl is an important component of the planning process. GRCA supports requirements that consider the impacts of low density development on the Water Resource System, Natural Heritage System and the Agricultural System.

Financial implications:

Not applicable

Other department considerations:

Water quality and engineering staff contributed to this report.

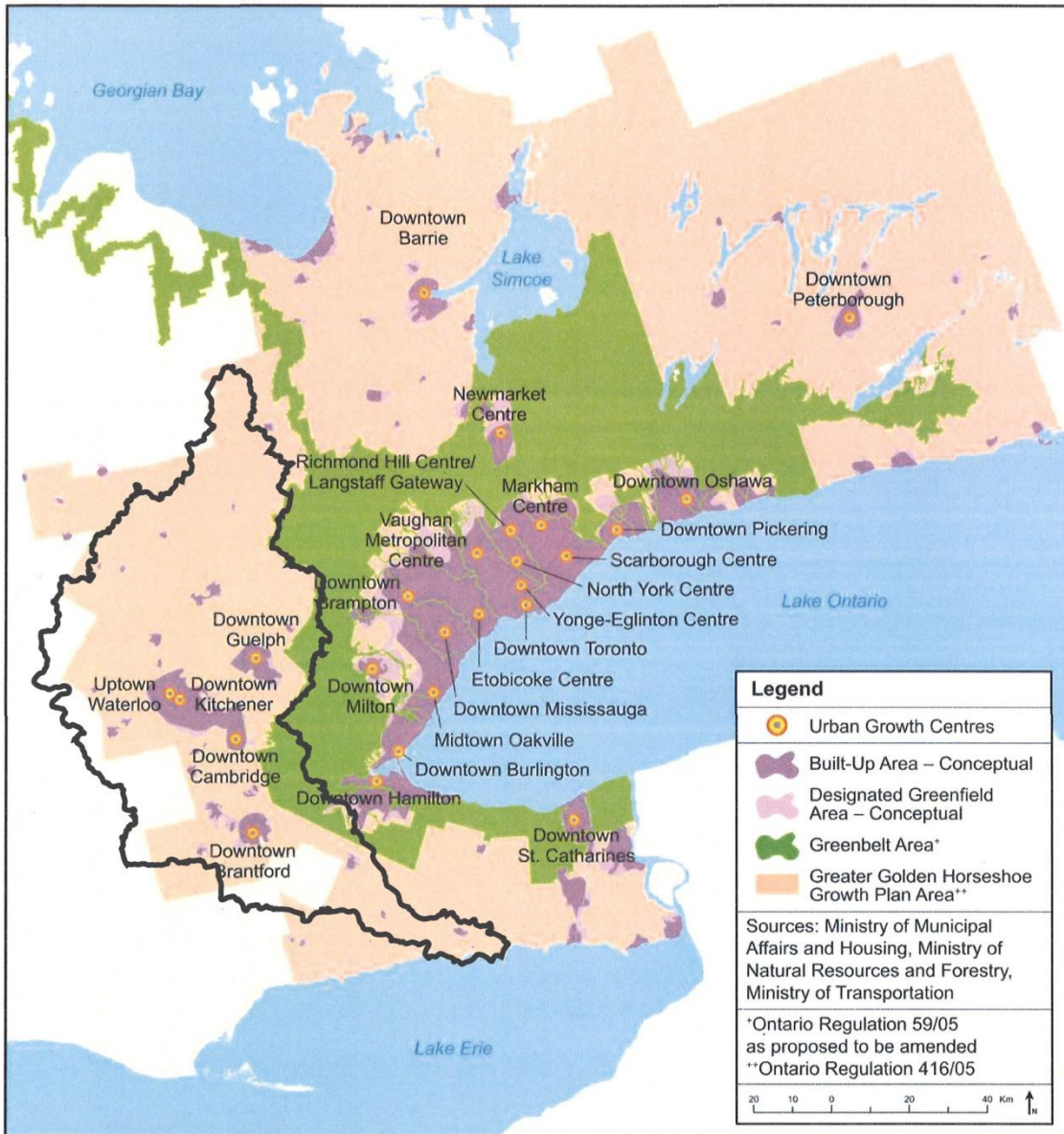
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Appendix 1 – 2017 Growth Plan and Grand River Watershed Boundary



PLACES TO GROW

PROPOSED GROWTH PLAN FOR THE GREATER GOLDEN HORSESHOE, 2016

SCHEDULE 4 Urban Growth Centres

Note: The information displayed on this map is not to scale, does not accurately reflect approved land-use and planning boundaries, and may be out of date. For more information on precise boundaries, the appropriate municipality should be consulted. For more information on Greenbelt Area boundaries, the Greenbelt Plan 2016 should be consulted. The Province of Ontario assumes no responsibility or liability for any consequences of any use made of this map.