



REGION OF WATERLOO

PLANNING HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES
Community Services

TO: Chair Jim Wideman and Members of the Planning and Works Committee

DATE: January 17, 2006 **FILE CODE:**

SUBJECT: REGION OF WATERLOO RESPONSE TO THE *PLACES TO GROW* PROPOSED GROWTH PLAN FOR THE GREATER GOLDEN HORSESHOE (NOVEMBER 2005)

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Regional Municipality of Waterloo forward Report No. P-06-003, dated January 17, 2006 to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Ontario Growth Secretariat as its formal response to the Places to Grow Proposed Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe;

AND THAT the Regional Municipality of Waterloo forward Report No. P-06-003, dated January 17, 2006 to local Members of Provincial Parliament and to Members of Parliament, as the Region's formal response to the Places to Grow Proposed Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

SUMMARY:

The Region of Waterloo endorses the Province's overall vision and leadership role for managing future growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The *Places to Grow* Proposed Growth Plan, released in November 2005, supports and furthers the goals and strategic directions of the Regional Growth Management Strategy (RGMS) with regard to reurbanization, transportation choice (including the expectation that the Region of Waterloo will establish a rapid transit system in the future), the protection of environmentally sensitive lands, and the provision of community infrastructure.

In the near future, staff will prepare a report for Council's consideration regarding proposed Bill 51 (An Act to amend the Planning Act and the Conservation Act and to make related amendments to other Acts) and other related Provincial planning initiatives that will be instrumental in successfully implementing the Final Growth Plan and the RGMS.

The new Regional Official Plan (ROP) will be required to comply with the Final Growth Plan, which is expected to be approved within the next few months. This means that the new ROP and local municipal plans must contain some very specific provisions (e.g. population and employment projections, a higher-order or rapid transit system, 40% intensification within the Built Boundary Line by 2015, minimum density targets, and maximum acreage of new Designated Greenfield Areas) that will be set out in the Final Growth Plan or in subsequent Implementation Analysis processes.

The population and employment forecasts for The Region of Waterloo are significant. Effective management of the forecast growth requires timely Provincial strategic infrastructure investment to support Regional initiatives, particularly in such areas as rapid transit, water supply and quality, waste water, public health, and social services.

Areas of the Proposed Growth Plan, and its implementation, that can benefit from further refinement include:

- Clarification as to whether, when and how Sub-Area Assessments for the area, including the Region of Waterloo, the Cities of Brantford and Guelph, and Brant, Dufferin and Wellington Counties, will be undertaken;
- Identification of strategic Provincial investment in the infrastructure required to implement the Growth Plan (e.g. rapid transit, Highway No. 7);
- A more direct connection between Waterloo Region and the Niagara Region border crossings to the United States; and
- The addition of a Higher-Order Transit link between Waterloo Region and Milton;

Significant additional work will be required with the Province, local municipalities, the development industry, and other stakeholders to implement the Final Growth Plan in Waterloo Region. This work will be facilitated by a series of new Provincial planning policies and implementation tools. Regional staff will prepare a report regarding these Provincial planning initiatives for Council's consideration in the near future.

This report has been prepared to meet the formal Provincial deadline for comments of January 27, 2006.

REPORT:

The *Places to Grow* Proposed Growth Plan was released in November 2005, with a formal deadline for comments of January 27, 2006. Some members of Regional staff that were involved in developing the RGMS were seconded to assist Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal staff in the preparation of the Proposed Growth Plan.

The proposed Growth Plan, which has a time horizon of 2031, builds on the Draft Growth Plan, which was released in February of 2005. Staff Report P-05-045 (dated April 5, 2005) outlined the Region's positive response to this Draft Plan and included several suggestions regarding plan refinement and clarification. The Proposed Growth Plan addresses most of Regional Council's original recommendations in whole or part. For example, the Proposed Growth Plan now includes: policies regarding the provision of community infrastructure (e.g. health, education, recreation, socio-cultural activities, security and safety, and affordable housing) to support quality of life; focused Sub-Area Assessment policies that clearly pertain to matters of Provincial interest rather than broad, Sub-Area Growth Strategy policies that potentially overlap with Regional interests; and refined density targets for all proposed urban growth centres.

However, the Proposed Growth Plan does not address Regional Council's earlier recommendations to have the plan show: 1) a more direct connection between Waterloo Region and the Niagara Region border crossings to the United States, and 2) a Higher-Order Transit link (rapid transit) between Waterloo Region and Milton.

Implementation of the Proposed Growth Plan is heavily dependent upon the creation of new or revised official plans and infrastructure master plans for single-tier and Regional municipalities. All plans must comply with the final Growth Plan within three years of its approval. Key elements of the Plan that will need to be incorporated into the new Regional Official Plan include:

- population projection of 729,000 persons;
- employment projection of 366,000 jobs;
- 40% of annual new residential units to be accommodated in existing built-up areas by 2015;
- policies and strategy to achieve the 40% target;
- a minimum density of 200 residents and jobs per hectare in the Uptown Waterloo, Downtown Kitchener, and Downtown Cambridge urban growth centres;
- higher-order (rapid) transit service linking the three urban growth centres;

- minimum densities for Intensification Areas (includes urban growth centres, intensification corridors, major transit station areas, and other major opportunities);
- restrictions on the conversion of lands in designated employment areas to major retail uses or non-employment uses;
- major office and institutional development will be located in urban growth centres and areas with frequent transit service; and
- minimum densities of 50 residents and jobs per hectare in designated greenfield areas.

Implementation of the Final Growth Plan will also be dependent upon timely Provincial strategic infrastructure investment to support Regional initiatives in areas such as rapid transit, water supply and quality, waste water, public health, and social services. The infrastructure development necessary to address the Province's population forecasts for the Region of Waterloo (within the 2006 – 2031 timeframe) will be substantial.

Regional staff attended information sessions held by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal on Friday, December 2, 2005 and Wednesday, December 7, 2005. In addition, Regional staff held a meeting on December 15, 2005 to discuss the proposed Growth Plan with local municipal planning staff, Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) staff, members of the Prosperity Forum Employment Lands Task Force and the K-W Homebuilder's Regional Liaison Committee. There was broad support among municipalities and the GRCA for the Proposed Growth Plan. Major concerns generally involved technical implementation issues, many of which are expected to be addressed over the next 18 months as the Province begins the Technical Analysis and Sub-Area Assessments that are part of the Growth Plan implementation process. Members of the development industry continue to be concerned about the future availability of Greenfield land to accommodate projected population and employment growth.

Significant additional work will be required with the Province, local municipalities, the development industry, and other stakeholders to implement the Final Growth Plan in Waterloo Region. Much of the work over the next 18 months will involve Implementation Analysis as described below.

Implementation Analysis

The Province is proposing two major plan "Implementation Analysis" processes for the Proposed Growth Plan.

Technical Assessment

This assessment will involve the verification and delineation of the built boundary, a detailed assessment of future land needs, and the determination of the scope and scale of the Region's three urban growth centres (i.e. Uptown Waterloo, Downtown Kitchener, and Downtown Cambridge).

With regard to the built boundary, Regional staff continues to have a concern regarding the density figures proposed to be applied to registered and draft approved plans of subdivisions that are not yet built or built-out (i.e. 50 persons per hectare for all greenfield areas). This approach means that many subdivisions that are planned at densities below 50 persons per hectare would be applied to intensification calculations and thereby skew the analysis and monitoring of intensification efforts across the Region. Therefore, Regional staff recommends that the densities of registered and draft approved plans of subdivision in designated greenfield areas be calculated on an "as planned" basis.

In terms of the assessment of future land needs, the Region's Land Budget report, which will be tabled with Planning and Works Committee in the near future, will be a key component of the

Region's negotiations with the Province regarding the required amount of designated greenfield areas, particularly new employment land to meet the needs of businesses that require larger land parcels (e.g. in excess of 20 acres).

The process of determining the scope and scale of the three proposed urban growth centres will involve considerable consultation with planning staff from the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo. Discussions regarding the Downtown Cambridge (Galt City Centre) urban growth centre will require particular attention as the ability to reach the proposed density target of 200 persons per hectare may be more challenging given development constraints associated with bedrock, flooding, and the preservation of heritage buildings and scenic viewscapes.

Sub-Area Assessment

Sub-Area Assessment is a refinement of the previous Sub-Area Strategy concept. The Region of Waterloo is grouped in a sub-area that includes the Cities of Brantford and Guelph, and Brant, Dufferin and Wellington Counties. The focus of the sub-area assessment work will be:

- a regional economic assessment to guide planning for employment;
- refinement and phasing of the proposed transportation network;
- analysis of the water/wastewater capacity and requirements to serve projected growth;
- identification of a natural system; and
- identification of prime agricultural areas.

Provided that these two Implementation Analysis processes occur within the specified 18 months (i.e. by June/July 2007), they should complement work that is either underway or planned in the near future. Examples of the work in question include the Waste Water Master Plan, the Region's Water Supply Strategy Update, the Greenland Strategy, and the Regional Transportation Master Plan.

Further clarification from the Province is still required as to whether, when and how the Sub-Area Assessments for the area including the Region of Waterloo will be undertaken so that municipal resources and project work programs can be refined accordingly.

CONCLUSIONS:

The Region commends the Government of Ontario for taking a strong leadership role to articulate a long-term plan for growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe and strongly endorses the Province's vision for managing growth in the area. The *Places to Grow* Proposed Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) contains many useful policies and strategies that complement the Regional Growth Management Strategy and provide additional support for Regional and local municipal planning initiatives. However, achievement of the plan will also require strategic Provincial investment.

The Region also supports the Province's proposed policy framework and a set of implementation tools (e.g. Strong Communities Act, the new Provincial Policy Statement, and proposed Bill 51 – An Act to amend the Planning Act and the Conservation Act and to make related amendments to other Acts) necessary to implement the Growth Plan and the RGMS in an effective and timely manner. Staff will prepare a report regarding proposed Bill 51 and other related Provincial planning initiatives for Council's consideration in the near future.

CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN:

This report supports several objectives of the current focus areas in Council's Strategic Focus. The Province's growth management plan will directly support and build on the Regional Growth Management Strategy. This is consistent with the following focus areas:

Focus Area 1: Manage Regional Growth to Enhance Quality of Life.
Focus Area 2: Enhance Community Health and Social Well Being
Focus Area 3: Protect and Enhance the Environment
Focus Area 4: Ensure High Quality Transportation System

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

There will be an ongoing need for the Region to fund its share of infrastructure and other growth management objectives to ensure that the growth management plans of the Region and Province are successfully implemented.

OTHER DEPARTMENT CONSULTATIONS/CONCURRENCE:

All Regional departments have had an opportunity to provide input into this report.

ATTACHMENTS:

NIL

PREPARED BY: *Kevin Curtis*, Associate Director of Community Planning

APPROVED BY: *Rob Horne*, Commissioner of Planning Housing and Community Services