

1. Introduction to the Regional Official Plan

1.A Overview of Waterloo Region

This is the Regional Official Plan (Plan), the Regional Municipality of Waterloo's guiding document for directing growth and change for the next 20 years. This Plan represents a fundamental shift in shaping Waterloo Region (see Map 1) towards a more balanced community structure, building from a strong, long standing planning policy framework that has supported substantial historical growth and change.

With a population of just over half a million, Waterloo Region is currently the fourth largest urban area in the Province of Ontario and tenth largest in Canada. It is also one of the fastest growing urban areas in the Province and is projected to grow to 729,000 people by 2031. Officially established on January 1, 1973, Waterloo Region includes the Cities of Cambridge, Kitchener, and Waterloo and the Townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot, and Woolwich (Area Municipalities), blending a unique balance of urban and rural centres (see Map 2). Internationally known for its leading-edge technology and advanced manufacturing industries, innovative educational institutions, vibrant agricultural communities and the historically significant Grand River, Waterloo Region continues to earn its reputation as a forward-thinking community and as an attractive place to live, work and play.

The Regional Municipality of Waterloo (the Region) is also recognized for its innovative and progressive approach to growth management. In light of the anticipated population increase and associated growth pressures, the Region embarked on the development of a proactive strategy in 2001 to manage growth in order to further the sustainability and *liveability* of the community.

In June 2003, following an extensive public consultation process, Regional Council adopted the Regional Growth Management Strategy. The Strategy identified a vision for the future of the community and recognized that strong partnerships with Area Municipalities and other stakeholders are necessary to help this vision be realized. The Strategy advocated a balanced approach to growth management that fundamentally changes the way planning occurs within the community. The key elements of the Regional Growth Management Strategy are: big picture environmental planning; a Countryside Line; *reurbanization*; transportation choice, including the creation of a *rapid transit* system; targeted development in greenfield areas; and quality of life initiatives.

The Regional Growth Management Strategy also identified forward-looking initiatives that integrated land use and transportation planning, consistent with the direction originally established in the first Regional Official Policies Plan in 1976. Structured around six goals, the Regional Growth Management Strategy provided a long-term strategic framework that identified where and how growth should be accommodated to further enhance the high quality of life already enjoyed in the community.

The six main goals of the Regional Growth Management Strategy include:

1. Building vibrant urban places
2. Fostering a strong economy
3. Providing greater transportation choice
4. Protecting our countryside
5. Enhancing our natural environment
6. Ensuring coordination and communication

On June 16, 2006, the *Province* approved the Places to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (the Growth Plan), a document which reflects many of the same principles and directions of the Regional Growth Management Strategy. Prepared under the Places to Grow Act, the Growth Plan represents a key component of the *Province's* initiative to “plan for healthy and prosperous growth throughout Ontario”. The Growth Plan is consistent with and directly complements the Regional Growth Management Strategy.

This Plan implements the Regional Growth Management Strategy as well as the mandated components from the Growth Plan. It also incorporates many of the policies of the former Regional Official Policies Plan and the broad direction set out in the Region's Corporate Strategic Plan. As such, this Plan creates a policy framework that retains an historically relevant tie with successful past policy approaches, while moving forward with a refined vision for a *sustainable* and *liveable* future for Waterloo Region.

1.B Vision for a Sustainable and Liveable Waterloo Region

In keeping with Regional Council's Corporate Strategic Plan, the vision of this Plan is that **“Waterloo Region will be an inclusive, thriving, and *sustainable* community committed to maintaining harmony between rural and urban areas and fostering opportunities for current and future generations”**. This vision embraces *sustainability* and *liveability* as central concepts and provides the foundation for the policies and future actions set out in this Plan.

A Sustainable Waterloo Region

A *sustainable* region is one that is robust, resilient and strives to live within its natural limits. Economic growth and prosperity are acknowledged as being fundamental to sustaining a high quality of life, but not at the expense of the other components of a *sustainable* community. For Waterloo Region to be such a community, the four related elements of *sustainability* – cultural, economic, environmental and social - need to be balanced.

From a Regional perspective, achieving the cultural element of *sustainability* includes fostering a strong sense of place and community identity by preserving elements of the past, providing new opportunities for cultural expression and supporting quality urban and rural design. Providing appropriate *community infrastructure* and physical

infrastructure and services to support a diverse and growing economy ensures that the regional economy continues to develop in a *sustainable* manner.

From an environmental perspective, *sustainability* means maintaining, enhancing and even restoring the natural environment. It also means developing a culture of conservation to protect, enhance and wisely use the valuable natural resources for current and future generations. Finally, social *sustainability* involves building cities and towns as *complete communities*, which provide for the needs of all residents, foster social equity, inclusion and collaboration, and encourage healthy lifestyles. This Plan has been prepared from the perspective that the key to achieving and maintaining *sustainability* lies in the Region and its partners embracing a *sustainability* ethic, or set of values, which consistently inform and direct day-to-day actions and decision-making.

A Liveable Waterloo Region

Waterloo Region also needs to be a *liveable* community that is well-designed, accommodates people at all stages of life, offers a variety of employment opportunities and provides easy access to shopping, health care, educational, recreational and other services to meet daily needs. One of the key ways to achieving *liveability* is by taking steps to ensure that, wherever feasible, Waterloo Region develops as an integrated, compact and *mixed-use* community. *Liveable* communities also have a distinct sense of place and character with which people closely identify, and which sets them apart from other communities. This Plan recognizes that “place matters”. Much of Waterloo Region’s distinctive character is associated with its various cultural heritage elements: the Grand River, which has been nationally recognized as a Canadian Heritage River for its outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values; the diverse range of cities, towns, villages, and hamlets; and the gently rolling countryside. Ensuring *liveability* in Waterloo Region means planning to retain and/or create the types of distinct local communities that will provide people with choices about where they live, work and play.

1.C Role of the Regional Official Plan

In accordance with the provisions of the Planning Act, the Region is required to prepare and update an official plan. The Regional Official Plan is a legal document that contains goals, objectives and policies to manage and direct physical (land use) change and its effects on the cultural, social, economic and natural environment within the regional community. Once approved, the Planning Act requires that all Regional and Area Municipal public works, Area Municipal official plans and land use related by-laws, and all future *development* must conform to the Regional Official Plan.

The underlying philosophy of this Plan is that land use planning is a shared responsibility between the Region and Area Municipalities. This responsibility is grounded in the idea that citizens are best served by effective Regional and Area Municipal partnerships and collaboration, including the development and review of their respective official plans. This Plan incorporates the policy and regulatory framework established by the *Province*, as outlined in the Provincial Policy Statement, the Growth

Plan, the Greenbelt Plan and other Provincial legislation. Within this framework, Area Municipal official plans provide the detailed community planning goals, objectives and policies that implement this Plan in a manner that reflects unique local needs and circumstances.

This Plan also serves as a guide for *infrastructure* planning and strategic investment decisions to support and accommodate forecasted population and economic growth consistent with the Planned Community Structure described in Chapter 2.

In addition, this Plan establishes the basis for exercising the Region's four roles in the review and approval of *development applications*:

1. Protecting Regional corporate interests;
2. Ensuring conformity with the Regional Official Plan;
3. Exercising *development* review responsibilities delegated to the Region; and
4. Exercising approval authority responsibilities assigned to the Region through the Planning Act.

Protecting Regional Corporate Interests

The Region is responsible for commenting on how proposed *development applications* affect Regional corporate interests such as *community housing*, transit, water supply, wastewater treatment, Regional Roads and *Regional forests*. In these circumstances, the Region has a direct corporate interest in, and responsibility for, Planning Act approvals that affect Regionally owned and operated facilities. These interests are defined by policies in this Plan and other corporate documents, including Regional Council's Corporate Strategic Plan.

Ensuring Conformity with the Regional Official Plan

The Regional Official Plan, as adopted by Regional Council, sets out Council's intent in the form of policies dealing with planning within Waterloo Region to the year 2031. The Plan establishes a legal policy framework that directs and informs public and private sector decisions regarding immediate and longer-term land use, servicing, transportation and other *infrastructure* investment, and economic matters in Waterloo Region. The Region and Area Municipalities are responsible for ensuring *development applications* conform to the policies of the Regional Official Plan.

Exercising Delegated Development Review Responsibilities

The Region has been delegated *development* review responsibility on behalf of the *Province*. In exercising this authority, the Region also ensures that Provincial interests in planning matters, as expressed in the Provincial Policy Statement, the Growth Plan and the Greenbelt Plan issued and approved in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Planning Act, are appropriately addressed.

Exercising Assigned Approval Authority Responsibilities

The Region is also the approval authority for Area Municipal official plans, official plan amendments, plans of subdivision, plans of condominium and part-lot control exemption by-laws. This responsibility is assigned to the Region through the Planning Act, or, in the case of *development applications* that were submitted prior to March 28, 1995, is delegated to the Region by the *Province*. Regional Council has the authority to sub-delegate any or all approval authority responsibilities to Regional staff, or to Area Municipalities as it deems appropriate.

1.D Preparing the Plan

The original Regional Official Policies Plan was approved in 1976 and updated in 1986. Although minor revisions were made at that time, the basic objectives of the Regional Official Policies Plan were left unchanged.

In 1991, Regional Council determined that a comprehensive review of the Regional Official Policies Plan was needed to address the social, economic and environmental changes that had occurred since 1976. This review resulted in a new Regional Official Policies Plan, which was approved in 1995, that reflected changes in public values, better integrated land, *infrastructure*, environmental and social policies, and established a mechanism to monitor the success of key policies.

Regional Council's adoption of the Regional Growth Management Strategy in 2003 prompted work to begin on another comprehensive review of the Regional Official Policies Plan. The purpose of this review was to implement the policy directions of the Regional Growth Management Strategy, and to bring the Regional Official Policies Plan into conformity and/or consistency with a range of new Provincial policies and legislation including the Municipal Act, the Places to Grow Act and Growth Plan, the Greenbelt Act and Greenbelt Plan, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Clean Water Act, and updates to the Provincial Policy Statement and the Planning Act. This review culminated in June 2009, with the completion of this current Regional Official Plan as adopted by Regional Council.

Specific policies contained in this Plan anticipate that amendments will be required to implement the results of various ongoing and future Regional studies. These specific amendments are not intended to modify the fundamental structure, vision, goals and objectives of this Plan, but to establish policies that address issues that were not resolved at the time the Plan was adopted. Additional amendments to this Plan may also be considered by Regional Council in accordance with the provisions of the Planning Act to implement new Regional initiatives, respond to change having Regional implications, and to keep this Plan up-to-date with respect to changing Federal and Provincial regulatory frameworks.

1.E Plan Organization and Structure

Plan Organization

The policies contained in this Plan provide a statement of the intentions of Regional Council. If clarification of any policy is necessary, reference should first be made to the introductory text of each Chapter, and then to the overall goals and objectives of this Plan. The introductory text at the beginning of each Chapter provides a general statement of intent and a context for the policies, recognizing that it may not be possible, or feasible, to achieve everything in all situations or within the time frame of this Plan. The vision for this Plan, as described in this Chapter, provides a broad overview of the expected effect of the policies, but is not intended to take precedence over any other part of this Plan. The maps, tables and schedules contained in this Plan must be read in the context of the related policies.

Policies in this Plan that use the word “will” express a mandatory course of action. Where the words “encourage” or “may” are used, it indicates that the Region requires consideration be given to the policy, but not necessarily compliance in all instances. Such policies provide direction and support for achieving the Vision of a *Sustainable* and *Liveable* Waterloo Region. None of the policies are intended to formally commit Regional Council to provide funding for their implementation. Funding decisions will be made by Regional Council on a case-by-case basis.

Italicized terms in this Plan are defined in the Glossary. Defined terms are intended to capture both the singular and plural of forms of these terms. For other terms, the normal meaning of the word applies. Where the term “Region” is used, it refers to the Corporation of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo. Where the term “region” is used, it refers to the geographic area comprising Waterloo Region.

Where a specified planning horizon is required, this Plan uses the year 2031. However, in all planning decisions, it is the responsibility of those concerned to recognize that the results of these decisions will often have a permanent effect on the region, and that they should be made in the context of a time frame well beyond 20 years.

Plan Structure

Chapter One introduces the main purpose of this Plan as well as providing the context related to complementary documents, such as the Regional Growth Management Strategy and the Growth Plan. This Chapter also provides a brief overview of the **Vision** of this Plan and explains the concepts of *sustainability* and liveability in the context of decision-making in Waterloo Region.

Chapter Two provides the policy framework for **Shaping Waterloo Region’s Urban Communities** in both the cities and the townships, and outlines the policies that direct a greater share of new urban development towards existing communities.

Chapter Three focuses on **Liveability in Waterloo Region** and introduces policies related to creating vibrant urban and rural places.

Chapter Four outlines the Region's policies for **Supporting the Business Community**. The policy-related goal is to collaborate with Area Municipalities, Canada's Technology Triangle Inc., and other stakeholders to foster a diverse, innovative and globally competitive regional economy.

Chapter Five focuses on **Addressing Waterloo Region's Infrastructure Needs** with policies providing for the planning and development of cost effective *infrastructure* to support growth in a compact and efficient form.

Chapter Six focuses on **Supporting the Countryside** and the policies that will protect the rural character of the countryside while supporting the development of strong and prosperous rural communities.

Chapter Seven outlines the policy framework for the **Greenlands Network** that protects *environmental features* and *ecological functions* from *adverse environmental impacts*. The Chapter provides policies related to the natural environment through the conservation and enhancement of the region's sensitive natural areas and native *biodiversity*, and the promotion of informed stewardship.

Chapter Eight establishes a **Source Water Protection** policy framework to govern land uses that have the potential to impact surface and groundwater resources that contribute to the *municipal drinking-water supply system*.

Chapter Nine outlines the policies for **Managing Aggregate Resources** that balance the Provincial interest of permitting the extraction of mineral aggregates with other planning objectives.

Chapter Ten is the final Chapter of the Plan. This Chapter supports the implementation of the preceding policies and focuses on **Fulfilling Consultation and Implementation Roles**.