

# Region of Waterloo Regional Official Plan Update 2021

A More Ambitious Plan Is Needed

Kevin Thomason

November 9, 2021



## SMART GROWTH

Waterloo Region

Growing our cities, protecting our countryside

# Previous ROP and RGMS

- Bold, visionary plans with ambitious, unprecedented goals for a region of our size,
- Pioneered numerous concepts - Countryside Line, Rapid Transit, Protected Countryside, Environmentally Sensitive Landscapes, etc.,
- Tremendous amounts of public consultation and engagement.



# Current ROP Process

- Almost no visibility in the community - current review and update completely unknown by most residents this time,
- No media coverage - contrasting Hamilton where it has been regularly in the news and even front page headlines since January,
- No Open Houses, no public meetings, no public events - only a few stakeholder group meetings and one Ask-A-Planner webinar in June that I am aware of,
- The community has been waiting for the traditional levels of engagement to begin - hence such surprise when it was learned that a Recommended Growth Scenario was coming to Council for decision on November 9th and locked in commitments such as the Land Needs Analysis immediately underway next.



# Current Recommended Growth Scenarios

- Scenario #1 - 55% intensification, 60 pj/ha DGA density
  - 1,300 ha of Greenfield expansion (519 ha residential, 801 ha employment\*)
- Scenario #2 - 60% intensification, 60 pj/ha DGA density
  - 1,000 ha of Greenfield expansion (227 ha residential, 801 ha employment\*)
- Scenario #3 - 60% intensification, 65 pj/ha DGA density
  - 800 ha of Greenfield expansion (0 ha residential, 801 ha employment\*)

\* Not sure why employment lands are identical in every “different” scenario and why the amount of farmland targeted for destruction jumped from 600ha to 801ha in the past week.





# Current Recommended Growth Scenarios

- Not enough ambition - all three presented scenarios are insufficient to address climate crisis or maintain leadership,
- Not enough difference between Scenarios to provide Councillors with insight and meaningful information - Goals hardly vary in each scenario and Employment Lands don't even vary in any scenario,
- Unambitious and mediocre targets are incongruent with Region's history of Smart Growth success, leadership, and bold visionary planning.



# Serious Concerns

- All 3 Scenarios are too weak and unambitious:
  - The recommended intensification target for the next 30 years (our visionary aspiration) of 60% is below the 70% intensification rate that we have already been achieving the past three years,
  - 1,000+ hectares (2,500+ acres) of local farmland destroyed for sprawling subdivisions and low density employment lands is horrific given the increasing need for local food and groundwater recharge,
  - The low targets and massive amount of required land uses up too much of our remaining land reserves, threatening the Countryside Line and our Protected Countryside,



# Serious Concerns

- All 3 Scenarios are too weak and unambitious:
  - Targets may be so low that future phases of iON Light Rail Transit are difficult to justify and support as well as successfully compete for funding against other municipalities choosing more ambitious goals,
  - Ends our renown Smart Growth Leadership in Ontario with many other municipalities equalling or surpassing these mediocre targets,
  - Threatens our ability to achieve the 50% x 2030 and 80% x 2050 commitments agreed to by all levels of Waterloo Region governments,
  - Is out of synch with Canadian's increasing demands for bold, visionary action from government on the climate crisis.



# Hamilton Official Plan Process

- Huge public engagement, consultation, and participation since January with meetings, webinars, front-page headlines, lawn signs, survey's mailed to every residence,
- Staff responded to Council demands with a new more ambitious 4th Scenario for Zero Urban Boundary Expansion and costed the alternatives to show the impact of each scenario on individual annual property taxes,
- Over 19,000 households returned surveys to the City of Hamilton with an astounding 90.4% households voting for the most ambitious intensification Scenario with 0 ha of urban boundary expansion and the lowest tax increases due to the efficiencies of better utilizing existing infrastructure and saving the money losing expense of developing greenfield subdivisions.





# Our Current Growth Scenarios

- Over the past decade+ we have already averaged at least 50% intensification,
- For the past 3 years we have exceeded 70% intensification (supposedly only a temporary blimp due to Kitchener permits issued due to downtown development charge exemptions expiring - however, this proves we know how to affordably drive intensification to 70%+ and developer/market demand is already there).



# Regional Staff Comparison of Waterloo Region Proposed 2021-2051 ROP Targets to Other GTA Plans

## Comparison to other municipalities

Municipality	Minimum Intensification Target (%)	Minimum Density Target for Designated Greenfield Areas (people and jobs/hectare)
Waterloo Region (Growth Scenario 2)	60%	60
Halton Region	50-54%	65
York Region	50% (2021-2041) 55% (2041-2051)	65
Durham Region	50%	64
Niagara Region	60%	50
Peel Region	55%	65



# However, Intensification Rates in Perspective

- Since the City of Toronto has long ago run out of farmland to pave over it's intensification rate is already 100% and it has been seeing some of the most dramatic growth in North America,
- The City of Waterloo is nearing 100% intensification as it runs out of greenfield to pave over and is leading our Region with showing firsthand how to grow more sustainably,
- Hamilton is proposing intensification rates of 70% to 80%+ in the years ahead and they don't even have their LRT yet, the billions of dollars of core redevelopment we have already seen, and the proven track record of Smart Growth intensification that we have.



# Flawed Planning Process

- Doug Ford and provincial government has moved Ontario backwards compared to progressive planning happening in globally leading cities:
  - Reduced provincial intensification requirements from 60% to 50%,
  - Reduced density targets from 80 p&j/ha to 50 p&j/ha,
  - Extended the mandatory planning horizon by 10 years to 2051 when we can't even predict if people will work from home or return to the office next month,
  - Removed many environmental protections and prevented Climate Change to be given priority over any other issues in Official Plans - requiring it to only be weighted equally at most despite dire forecasted impacts.





# Flawed Planning Process

- Doug Ford and provincial government has:
  - Changed Land Needs Assessment Methodology that we must use to re-instate outdated “market demand” forecasting that looks too much at past historical urban sprawl housing sales, doesn’t take into account enough modern trends and future demographics - greatly over-predicting and over-designating suburban greenfield singles and semi’s compared to the modern urban trends and consumer demands for downtown, uptown, and 15 minute walkable complete communities in the village.
  - Required Official Plans to use new significantly higher population growth allocations that don’t even align with the historically quite accurate Ministry of Finance population projections.



# Flawed Planning Process

- Doug Ford and provincial government has:
  - Implemented a deadline for Official Plans and MCR's just days after the June's provincial election so regardless of the election outcome, huge amounts of sprawling growth due to these recent planning changes will be locked-in for decades.
  - Removed the ability for anyone to appeal Official Plans and downloaded all decisions onto local elected-officials who will now be responsible for far-reaching land-use decisions 30 years into the future that can't be revoked, appealed, or withdrawn unless purchased from developers and speculators at market rates.



# Flawed Planning Process

- All of these recent provincial changes creates the likelihood that many municipalities will commit to and approve flawed, irrevocable 30 year plans considerably over-designating residential greenfield sprawl and investing in expensive servicing infrastructure for people who are never going to arrive and instead under investing in far more efficient infrastructure and services in the sustainable urban core areas where people increasingly want to live.



# ROP Goals/Desired Outcome

- At a recent meeting this past weekend of 40 community leaders and organizations there was broad consensus that Staff be requested to develop a more ambitious 4th Growth Scenario that includes:
  - 70%-80% intensification rates,
  - no local farmland or greenfield loss,
  - no residential greenfield expansion - ensuring that we more wisely use lands remaining within existing urban boundaries with visionary sustainable developments and removing all local in-fighting about who gets permission to destroy farmland for new development since all municipalities will be treated equally with zero residential greenfield expansion.
  - better industrial intensification reflecting the tremendous opportunity/need to use our employment lands more efficiently,





# ROP Goals/Desired Outcome

- Far greater community consultation and engagement similar to previous Regional Official Plans with Open Houses, Public Information Community Meetings, Webinars, Surveys, Town Halls with Councillors, Charettes and Visioneering Sessions - there are so many ways to engage the public on developing a shared plan, common values, and community vision for the future - almost everyone wants a say in planning their future as seen firsthand with the tremendous engagement/response rates in Hamilton,
- Far better communications - there wasn't even a mention of the ROP Update and all of these long-term planning decisions about to be made in the new Monthly Regional Community Update that was sent out this past week...
- Media Coverage - similar to other communities with print, broadcast, and social media coverage all informing and engaging the public,
- Adequate timelines before any pending decisions to allow vigorous consultation and feedback.



# Conclusion

- Many of us won't even be here in 2051, however the almost one million residents of Waterloo Region will be grateful for your bold, ambitious actions that could help to continue our legacy of pioneering leadership and be better prepared for our climate crisis.
- Please ask Staff to aim higher with a more ambitious 4th Growth Scenario along with vigorous community consultation.
- Thank you!

Kevin Thomason  
[kevin@smartgrowthwaterloo.ca](mailto:kevin@smartgrowthwaterloo.ca)  
(519) 888-0519

**SMART GROWTH**  
Waterloo Region

[www.smartgrowthwaterloo.ca](http://www.smartgrowthwaterloo.ca)

