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Proposed Amendment to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017 Staff Report

Report Number: 2019-14

Department(s): Planning and Building Services

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Meeting Date: February 4, 2019

Recommendations

1. That the report entitled Proposed Amendment to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017, dated February 4, 2019 be received; and,
2. That the report entitled Proposed Amendment to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017, dated February 4, 2019 be submitted to the province as feedback; and,
3. That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

Purpose

The province has released a proposed amendment (“Amendment 1”) to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (the Growth Plan) and is now seeking feedback on these proposed legislative and regulatory changes. The purpose of this report is to provide information to Council regarding these changes. The consultation period is from January 15, 2019 to February 28, 2019; it is recommended that this report be submitted to the province as input to this process.

Background

The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe was originally approved in June, 2006. The Growth Plan establishes the long-term framework for where and how the

Greater Golden Horseshoe region will grow, and sets the framework for managing growth.

The Growth Plan was largely unchanged until 2017, with the exception of an office consolidation released in 2013. In 2017, the provincial government completed a comprehensive update to the 4 main provincial planning policy documents:

- Niagara Escarpment Plan
- Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan
- Greenbelt Plan
- Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe

The comprehensive update was known as the ‘2017 Provincial Plans Review’ and included an extensive consultation period from 2015 to 2017, including consultation directly with municipalities. The Town, through various staff reports, provided input to this process. This review resulted in new and modified policies which emphasized the intensification of existing built-up areas and better protect the natural environment. The 2017 Growth Plan is currently in force.

On January 15, 2019, the province released “Amendment 1” to the Growth Plan, 2017, which is the focus of this report. This Amendment contains a host of policy changes intended to address policies that the provincial government sees as potential barriers to the development of housing, job creation and business attraction.

Discussion

The proposed policy changes can be categorized into seven main policy areas, as discussed below. Each of these policy areas is followed by a staff’s response and recommendation(s).

1. Employment Planning

The proposed amendment includes the following key policy changes:

- Removing the “prime employment area” designation.
- Adding a new designation called “Provincially Significant Employment Zones” which are areas to be identified by the province that must be protected and cannot be converted outside a Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR). There are 29 such Zones across the Greater Golden Horseshoe region, none of which are in Newmarket.
- Entitling upper and single-tier municipalities (in consultation with lower-tier municipalities) to designate other “Employment Areas” for incorporation into official plans by amendment in advance of the next MCR. Newmarket’s existing employment areas would meet the definition of these “Employment Areas”.
- Adding a new policy that creates a one-time window to allow municipalities to undertake some conversions between the effective date of the proposed amendments and their next MCR, where appropriate certain criteria are met.

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- Modifying language to require municipalities to set multiple density targets for employment areas rather than a single target, and removing the requirement for an employment strategy.
- Adding a new policy that requires municipalities to retain space for a similar number of jobs when redeveloping employment lands.

Staff Response and Recommendation(s): Staff generally support these changes.

The proposed changes adequately respond to comments provided by staff during the 2017 Provincial Plans Review regarding creating mixed use communities. Currently, the Growth Plan prohibits mixing residential and employment within “Prime Employment Areas”. This exacerbates the philosophy of separating land uses, which is contrary to other policies of the Plan that encourage the concept of mixed use. In 2016, it was therefore recommended that the Plan move away from segregated employment uses in favour of truly mixed use, walkable, complete communities. However, this recommendation was not implemented in the 2017 Growth Plan.

In 2016 it was also recommended that the term “Prime Employment Areas” be replaced by “Transportation-reliant Employment”, or “Freight-supportive Employment”, or similar. Staff opined that the word “Prime” was misleading as it is typically used to refer to prestige industrial and office uses that are compatible with other land uses, whereas the policy refers to employment areas located along major transportation corridors such as provincial highways. Being distinct from “Provincially Significant Employment Zones”, the proposed term “Employment Areas” seems to adequately address this concern, however it is noted that is not defined in the amendment. It is therefore recommended that a definition for “Employment Areas” be added as well as policies that specify that these areas may accommodate other land uses over the long term.

Finally, the proposed changes provide flexibility to add uses to Employment Lands outside of an MCR, through a one-time window. This is of importance to Newmarket given that the Mulock Station Areas Secondary Plan proposes non-employment (residential) uses within its study area.

2. Settlement Area Boundary Adjustments & Expansions

The proposed amendment includes the following key policy changes:

- Adding a new policy that allows municipalities to *adjust* settlement area boundaries without an MCR, if:
 - There would be no net increase in land within the settlement area,
 - The adjustment would support the ability to meet intensification and density targets,
 - The normally applicable requirements for a settlement area expansion (found in policy 2.2.8.3) are met,
 - The land is not a rural settlement or in the Greenbelt, and
 - The land is serviced and there is sufficient reserve.

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- Adding a new policy that allows municipalities to undertake settlement area boundary *expansions* without an MCR, if:
 - The land proposed to be expanded is no greater than 40 ha,
 - The lands will meet the resident and jobs density targets or the applicable employment area density targets,
 - The applicable requirements for a settlement area expansion (found in policy 2.2.8.3) are met,
 - The land is not a rural settlement or in the Greenbelt,
 - The land is serviced and there is sufficient reserve capacity, and
 - The land and accompanying growth will be fully accounted for in the next MCR.

Staff Response and Recommendation(s): Staff require additional information regarding these changes and recommend a further modification to the definition of “Settlement Areas”. As in the 2017 Growth Plan, the “Settlement Areas” definition includes the following language:

“Urban areas...that are...lands which have been designated in an official plan for development in accordance with the policies of this Plan.”

This reference to “an official plan” is the source of confusion; it is not clear if this includes lower tier official plans, or is limited to single / upper tier official plans. This is of importance to Newmarket as much of the southwest quadrant may or may not be a “Settlement Area” depending on this interpretation (this area is not ‘urban’ and is not located in the *designated in an official plan for development* in the Town’s Official Plan, but is designated as such in the Region’s Official Plan). To address this matter, it is recommended that language be included in this definition that specifies that local official plans must designate such lands for development in order to be considered a “Settlement Area”.

3. Small Rural Settlements

The proposed amendment includes the following key policy changes:

- Adding a defined term “rural settlements”.
- Deleting the defined term “undelineated built-up areas”.
- Adding a new policy that specifies that rural settlements are not part of the Designated Greenfield Area.
- Adding a new policy that allows for minor rounding out of rural settlements in keeping with the rural character of the area, and subject to other criteria.

Although not directly applicable to Newmarket, the changes to the Small Rural Settlement policies reinforce the idea that these areas are not expected to face significant growth pressures. This is done by adding language that states that these areas are not part of the Designated Greenfield Area and therefore not subject to the Proposed Amendment to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017

designated greenfield density targets (see 5 below). It is unclear at this time what density targets apply to these areas.

Staff Response and Recommendation(s): Staff require additional information in order to form an opinion on this proposed change, specifically the density target that will be applied to these areas.

4. Agricultural & Natural Heritage Systems

The proposed amendment includes the following key policy changes:

- Adding a new policy that specifies the provincial mapping of the agricultural land base and the Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan does not apply until implemented in single / upper-tier official plans.
- Adding a new policy that clarifies that before provincial mapping is implemented in official plans, the Growth Plan policies for the Agricultural System and the Natural Heritage System will apply to municipal mapping.
- Adding a new policy that clarifies that municipalities can request technical changes to mapping and OMAFRA and MNRF can update and re-issue mapping in response to such requests.
- Adding new policies that allow municipalities to refine and implement provincial mapping in advance of the MCR.

Staff Response and Recommendation(s): Staff require additional information in order to form an opinion on this proposed change, specifically the role of lower-tier municipalities in delineating Natural Heritage System limits. Staff would welcome the opportunity to work with the Region and province to refine the Natural Heritage Limits.

5. Intensification Targets

The proposed amendment changes the intensification targets:

- A minimum intensification target of 60% is provided for York Region. This means that at least 60% of growth must occur within the Region's delineated Built-up Area. This is a 20% increase from the existing 40% requirement.

Staff Response and Recommendation(s): Staff generally support this change. It is noted that this is increased from the existing 40% that currently exists in the existing 2017 Growth Plan, however the current Growth Plan requires an intensification target of 60% by 2031.

6. Density Targets

The proposed amendment changes the density targets:

- A density target of no less than 60 residents and jobs per ha is provided for York Region's Designated Greenfield Area. This is decreased from 80 residents and jobs per ha in the existing 2017 Growth Plan.

Staff Response and Recommendation(s): Staff do not support this change.

The reduced density target is not directly applicable to Newmarket because the municipality is almost entirely within the delineated built-up area and therefore not subject to the designated greenfield density targets. Notwithstanding this, staff are strongly opposed to the proposed reduction for two main planning reasons:

1. The GGH is forecast to grow to 13.5 million people by 2041, an increase of approximately 4.5 million people. Increased density (80 residents and jobs per ha) is required to effectively accommodate this increase in population; lower density targets (60 residents and jobs per ha) represents an inefficient use of land and presents challenges when accommodating this future population.
2. Increased density (80 residents and jobs per ha) has been found to be the minimum density that can support the lightest form of transit (local bus service). Density targets less than 80 residents and jobs per ha generally result in automobile-dependent land uses.

For these reasons, it is strongly recommended that 80 residents and jobs per ha continue to be used as the minimum density target for York Region's Designated Greenfield Areas.

7. Major Transit Station Areas

The proposed amendment includes the following key policy changes:

- Adding a new policy that allows municipalities to delineate a larger Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs) area, increasing these areas from an approximate 500m radius from these stations to 800m.
- Adding a new policy that sets targets in advance of an MCR, through the Protected MTSA tool under the Planning Act.
- Adding a new policy that simplifies the process and criteria for setting alternative targets that reflect on-the-ground realities.

Staff Response and Recommendation(s): Staff generally support this change.

This is of importance to Newmarket because there are 12 MTSAs identified within the Town, including all existing and planned vivaNext BRT Stations, vivaNext curbside stations, and the future Mulock GO Station.

The larger MTSA area of 800m represents a 10 minute walk, and is therefore a commonly used distance in urban design for creating neighbourhood centres and nodes. This change allows a larger area to be included in MTSAs and therefore applies the associated higher density targets to a greater area, thereby using the land within a walkable distance of these transit stations in a more efficient manner.

The proposed changes also allow for the province to approve a lower target for a particular MTSA. Staff note that not all of the Town's MTSAs are able to accommodate Proposed Amendment to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017

the same level of density; some MTSA's have unique attributes that result in lower densities being achieved, such as the presence of a land extensive school or other use. In these instances, alternative targets are required.

Mapping

Extension of Priority Transit Corridor

The Priority Transit Corridor along the rail line continues to end in Aurora.

Staff Response and Recommendation(s): As noted by staff during the consultation period for the 2017 Provincial Plans Review, it is logical and supportable to extend this corridor, at a minimum, to the Newmarket GO Station. This relatively short extension would support a host of provincial planning goals including:

1. Connection to a Provincial Urban Growth Centre, via an intensification corridor;
2. Connection to a Metrolinx Mobility Hub at Newmarket GO Station;
3. Connection to a vivaNext Rapidway MTSA along Davis Drive; and
4. Support the objectives of the Urban Centres Secondary Plan.

Technical Error – Misplaced Urban Growth Centre

As noted by staff during the consultation period for the 2017 Provincial Plans Review, there is a mapping error specific to the “Newmarket Centre” Urban Growth Centre on many of the Growth Plan’s schedules. The symbol that denotes “Newmarket Centre” is shown in the area of the Newmarket GO Station, however it actually exists further west at the intersection of Yonge Street and Davis Drive.

Staff Response and Recommendation(s): In order to correct this error, staff are recommending that the province show the “Newmarket Centre” Urban Growth Centre in its correct location in the amended Growth Plan.

Proposed Timeline for Implementation

The Minister directed July 1st, 2022 as the date for upper and single-tier official plans to be brought into conformity with the Growth Plan, 2017. The Minister also directed that, for lower-tier municipalities, the conformity date would be within one year of the applicable upper-tier official plan taking effect.

Conclusion

As noted, three of the seven main areas of proposed policy change are seen as positive and therefore supported by staff, and three others required additional information prior to forming an opinion.

However, the proposed Amendment’s most significant change relates to the density targets for Designated Greenfield Areas. Staff are strongly opposed to the proposed reduction for reasons related to land use efficiency and transit supportability.

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Finally, two mapping issues have been identified.

Business Plan and Strategic Plan Linkages

Well-Respected: Being an active, influential political contributor in regional, provincial and federal affairs.

Consultation

None.

Human Resource Considerations

None.

Budget Impact

None.

Attachments

None.

Approval

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