

Streamlining Growth Management – Proposed Amendments to the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017*

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By Denise Baker, and Talia Rotman

On January 15, 2019, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing announced proposed amendments to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017 (the “Growth Plan”) on the [Environmental Registry](#) (the “Proposal”).^[1]

The Growth Plan seeks to provide a “long-term framework for growth” by providing better access to community services, housing and businesses by building communities that promote infrastructure investment and balance the need for farming and green space.^[2] The amendments aim to provide tangible ways to advance these goals.

The amendments are an attempt by the Provincial government to address challenges that municipalities, developers and stakeholders have identified in implementing the policies in the Growth Plan. The amendments seek to allow municipalities to meet the July 1, 2022 deadline to update their official plans more quickly in addition to, among other things, allowing local governments to decide where and when new land for housing is added, providing a more flexible framework for transit infrastructure investment and ensuring that municipalities can implement the Growth Plan “in a manner that better reflects their local context.”^[3]

The amendments are generally categorized across the following six areas:

Intensity and Density Targets:

The amendments provide a streamlined and simplified approach to intensification and density targets intended to support transit investments, planned growth and changing local realities, like the demand for housing.^[4]

- **Intensity:** Policy 2.2.2.1 provides for the following minimum intensification targets of residential development occurring annually to be within the delineated built-up area:
 - A minimum of 60% within the City of Hamilton and the Regions of Peel, Waterloo and York
 - A minimum of 50% within the Cities of Barrie, Brantford, Guelph, Orillia and Peterborough and the Regions of Durham, Halton and Niagara
 - The City of Kawartha Lakes and the Counties of Brant, Dufferin, Haldimand, North Cumberland, Peterborough, Simcoe and Wellington are directed to each establish a minimum percentage through the next municipal comprehensive review. This percentage will be based on maintaining or improving the current target expressed in the applicable upper or single-tier official plan.^[5]
- **Density:** Policy 2.2.7.2 provides for reduced density targets applicable to the designated greenfield area of each upper and single-tier municipality on the basis of the number of residents and jobs combined per hectare:
 - Not less than 60 residents and jobs per hectare in the City of Hamilton and the Regions of Peel, York and Waterloo;

- Not less than 50 residents and jobs per hectare in the Cities of Barrie, Brantford, Guelph, Orillia and Peterborough and the Regions of Durham, Halton and Niagara; and
- Not less than 40 residents and jobs per hectare in the City of Kawartha Lakes and the Counties of Brant, Dufferin, Haldimand, North Cumberland, Peterborough, Simcoe and Wellington.[\[6\]](#)

Note: the previous Growth Plan released in 2017 provided for an intensification target of 60% and a density target of 80 residents per hectare.

Employment Planning:

An “employment area” designation system is created that both protects lands used for employment and “unlocks” land required for residential development.[\[7\]](#)

- Upper and single-tier municipalities (in consultation with lower-tier municipalities) are entitled to designate “employment areas” and to incorporate these areas into their official plans by amendment in advance of the next municipal comprehensive review (2.2.5.6).[\[8\]](#)
- The Minister may identify “provincially significant employment zones” to support planning for jobs at a regional scale (2.2.5.12).[\[9\]](#)

Settlement Area Boundary Expansions:

A system is created that allows land to be unlocked faster to ensure that local municipal decisions regarding “reasonable changes to settlement area boundaries” can be made in a timely fashion.[\[10\]](#)

- Municipalities may designate lands within settlements areas as areas used for manufacturing, warehousing and logistics that are adjacent to or near “major goods movement facilities and corridors” including major highway interchanges (2.2.5.5).[\[11\]](#)
- Settlement area boundary expansion may occur prior to a municipal comprehensive review provided the lands meet the minimum density targets, the settlement meets the requirements set out in policy 2.2.8.3, is not a rural settlement or in the Greenbelt area, is serviced by municipal water and wastewater systems (and that there is sufficient infrastructure capacity) and that the additional lands and forecasted growth be “fully accounted for in the lands needs assessment” (2.2.8.5).[\[12\]](#)
- Where a settlement boundary expansion is undertaken, the amount of land added cannot exceed 40 hectares (2.2.8.6).[\[13\]](#)

Small Rural Settlements:

Small rural settlements are recognized as areas that are “not expected to face significant growth pressures”[\[14\]](#) and include existing hamlets or similar small settlement areas that are “long-established and identified in official plans.” This includes all identified hamlets in the Greenbelt Plan, rural settlements in the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and minor urban settlements in the Niagara Escarpment Plan.[\[15\]](#)

Natural Heritage and Agricultural Systems:

Regional mapping systems are created to reflect “local mapping realities” and to simultaneously provide protections for natural resources in order to build the continued viability of the agricultural food industry.[\[16\]](#)

- Upper and single-tier municipalities are entitled to refine the provincial mapping of the “Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan” when their official plans are implemented. Upper-tier municipalities may initially implement their provincial mapping separately for each lower-tier municipality. Once the *Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan* has been

implemented in the official plan all refinements must only be done through a municipal comprehensive review (4.2.2.5).[\[17\]](#)

Major Transit Station Areas:

Finally, the Proposal aims to provide a more direct and faster approach to determine major transit station areas.[\[18\]](#)

- The Minister may approve a lower target for a particular “major transit station area” where it can be demonstrated that the target cannot be achieved for several reasons, including, but not limited to a limited number of residents and associated jobs, but a “major trip generator or feeder service will sustain high ridership at the station or stop” (2.2.4.4)[\[19\]](#)

The amendments will remain posted on the Environmental Registry for public and stakeholder feedback until February 28, 2019. Please do not hesitate to contact Denise Baker should you have any questions with respect to the how the proposed Growth Plan amendments may affect you.

[\[1\]](#) Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, “Proposed Amendment to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017” (15 January 2019), online: *Environmental Registry of Ontario* <<https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/013-4504>> [ERO].

[\[2\]](#) *Ibid.*

[\[3\]](#) *Ibid.*

[\[4\]](#) ERO, *supra* note 1.

[\[5\]](#) *Amendment 1*, *supra* note 5 at 2.2.2.1

[\[6\]](#) *Ibid* at 2.2.7.2.

[\[7\]](#) *Ibid.*

[\[8\]](#) Ontario, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, *Draft Amended Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017*, (Toronto: Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 15 January 2019) at 2.2.5.6. [*Amendment 1*].

[\[9\]](#) *Ibid* at 2.2.5.12.

[\[10\]](#) ERO, *supra* note 1.

[\[11\]](#) *Amendment 1*, *supra* note 5 at 2.2.5.5.

[\[12\]](#) *Ibid* at 2.2.8.5.

[\[13\]](#) *Ibid* at 2.2.8.5.

[\[14\]](#) ERO, *supra* note 1.

[\[15\]](#) *Amendment 1*, supra note 5 at 7 “Rural Settlements.”

[\[16\]](#) *ERO*, supra note 1.

[\[17\]](#) *Amendment 1*, supra note 5 at 4.2.2.5.

[\[18\]](#) *ERO*, supra note 1.

[\[19\]](#) *Amendment 1*, supra note 5 at 2.2.4.4.

The information and comments herein are for the general information of the reader and are not intended as advice or opinion to be relied upon in relation to any particular circumstances. For particular application of the law to specific situations, the reader should seek professional advice.

For more information or inquiries:



Denise Baker

Toronto

416.947.5090

Email:

dbaker@weirfoulds.com

Denise Baker is Chair of WeirFoulds LLP.

Toronto

Email:

WeirFoulds^{LLP}

www.weirfoulds.com

Toronto Office

4100 – 66 Wellington Street West
PO Box 35, TD Bank Tower
Toronto, ON M5K 1B7

Tel: 416.365.1110

Fax: 416.365.1876

Oakville Office

1320 Cornwall Rd., Suite 201
Oakville, ON L6J 7W5

Tel: 416.365.1110

Fax: 905.829.2035