



# The Corporation of the Town of Milton

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Report To: Council

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From: Barbara Koopmans, Commissioner, Development Services

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Date: July 20, 2020

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Report No: DS-022-20

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Subject: Proposed Amendments to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe 2019 - A Place to Grow

**Recommendation: THAT Report DS-022-20 be received for information;**

**AND THAT Planning Staff submit comments to the Province regarding the proposed amendment as outlined in Report DS-022-20.**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The provincial government is consulting on a proposed amendment to *A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*. This update includes changes to the population and employment forecasts, the horizon year for planning, and other policies to increase housing supply, create jobs, attract business investment and better align with infrastructure. The proposed amendment moves from an approach that is currently forecast based and process driven to an approach that is capacity based and outcomes focused; where capacity is based on assessment of opportunities and constraints and outcomes are focused on local housing and economic strategies.

Milton Planning staff is generally encouraged and supportive of the proposed changes, with the exception of the contemplated amendment to aggregate policies.

## REPORT

### Background

On June 16, 2020, the Province announced a number of proposed changes to *A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (the "Plan"). The Plan came into effect on May 16, 2019 and was released as part of the Province's "More Homes, More Choice: Ontario's Housing Supply Action Plan." When released, the Province indicated that it would be working to update the Plan's projections and planning horizons. Proposed Amendment No. 1 provides this update. Comments are due to the province by July 31, 2020.

## Discussion

Highlights of the proposed revisions, along with staff's commentary are set out below:

### Updated Growth Forecasts and Change to the Horizon Year

The current Plan provides population and employment forecasts for each of the twenty-one upper- and single-tier municipalities in the GGH to 2041 (Schedule 3) and for the lower-tier municipalities in the Simcoe Sub-area to 2031 (Schedule 7). Municipal comprehensive reviews currently underway in support of Official Plan Reviews throughout the GGH are using the forecasts to 2041.

Through Proposed Amendment No. 1, the province proposes to amend the Plan to update the growth forecasts and extend the horizon of the forecasts to 2051. The province is further proposing to remove Schedule 7 and revise Schedule 3 with one of three growth forecasts: a Reference Forecast, a High Growth Scenario or a Low Growth Scenario. The three forecasts contain variations based on different assumptions for comparative purposes. The current consultation period will be used to determine which forecast will be inserted into Schedule 3 as the new 2051 forecast.

The policy language accompanying the new forecast will make it clear that the 2051 forecasts are to be treated as "minimums" and not "targets". This means that upper-tier and single-tier municipalities will be required to update their official plans (by July 2022) to accommodate at least the 2051 forecasts for population and employment. Moreover, the province's expectation is that any municipal comprehensive reviews that are currently underway will need to revise their projections to meet the new minimums. There is no transitioning.

*Planning staff is supportive of the above changes. It is logical and pragmatic to adjust the planning horizon to the year 2051 as this aligns with the horizon for transportation planning in the GGH. Also, it is consistent with the long-range planning approach of previous growth plans and better aligns with the land supply requirements of the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020. The added clarity that the 2051 forecasts are to be treated as **minimums** is helpful as the current Plan is ambiguous in this regard.*

*According to the proposed growth targets for Halton Region, at the high-end, it is 1.156 million people/522K jobs and at the low-end, it is 1.06 million people and 477K jobs for 2051. It is recognized that the difference between the scenarios is relatively small. As such, Milton staff is supportive of the "high-end" minimum to inform land requirements, infrastructure, financial planning as well as economic and business investment strategies to support population and job growth in Milton.*

*The low-end scenario and reference forecasts would represent a downturn in the rate of growth. That being the case, the high scenario represents a more fiscally sustainable*

*approach - i.e. a steady rate of growth to support and maintain municipal finances and infrastructure investment. This is especially important considering that Milton's legacy infrastructure will all begin to need refurbishment/renewal and potential upgrades to adapt to climate change.*

### **Aggregate Mineral Resource Extraction**

The proposed change to the Plan's aggregates policies would remove the prohibition on new mineral aggregate operations, wayside pits and quarries from habitats of endangered species and threatened species within the Plan's Natural Heritage System.

*Planning staff is NOT supportive of the proposed change to the Plan's aggregates policies. Right now, it is prohibited to build a quarry or gravel pit in a natural heritage area that is home to endangered plants or animals. Planning staff see no compelling reason to change this and are of the opinion that it would not be in the public interest to do so.*

### **Provincially Significant Employment Zones**

Under the current Plan, employment lands within a provincially significant employment zone ("PSEZ") are not eligible for conversion outside of a municipal comprehensive review. This is the key feature of a PSEZ.

A proposed policy amendment would allow conversions of employment areas to non-employment uses within a PSEZ outside of a municipal comprehensive review if the land is located within a major transit station area. Through this amendment, the province intends to allow for mixed-use developments to be initiated faster around major transit station areas, notwithstanding that the area may have been identified as forming part of a PSEZ. The province has indicated that this will not change municipal zoning by-laws or other conversion policies within the Plan.

*Planning staff is supportive of mixed-use developments being initiated faster around major transit station areas. This amendment would support the Council endorsed planning vision for the Agerton Secondary Plan, which is predicated on mixed-use development in support of a proposed GO Station.*

### **Transition**

If approved, the Minister would make the following amendments to the Growth Plan transition regulation (O. Reg. 311/06) to facilitate implementation of the changes to the Plan:

- Provide that required conformity with the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe 2019 would now require conformity with the amended Plan; and

- Provide that where the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal has completed a hearing, but not yet issued a decision in respect of a matter required to conform with the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe 2019, those decisions are required to conform with the Plan as it read before it was amended.

The proposed amendments to the Plan, if approved, would apply immediately after they come into effect, including in-progress municipal comprehensive reviews.

The Province is proposing to retain the current date of July 1, 2022 for municipalities to bring their official plans into conformity with the amended Plan.

*Planning staff is supportive of the proposed transition timeline, as it aligns with the work plan for Halton Region's Official Plan review and the Town's Official Plan update.*

### **Land Needs Assessment**

In addition to the proposed amendments to the Plan, the province is consulting concurrently on a proposed new Land Needs Assessment Methodology for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

The proposed methodology outlines key steps for assessing community and employment land needs to the Plan's 2051 horizon year. The proposed new methodology would provide a streamlined approach to land budgeting activities by outlining the key components, at a minimum, that would be addressed as part of local land needs assessment processes.

The proposed methodology would not preclude municipalities from considering alternate assumptions about population and employment growth to the horizon of the Plan. A municipality may test alternative growth assumptions to establish the case for a higher density target. Assumptions that include density targets lower than those required in the Plan would require the Minister's approval.

*Planning staff is supportive of the proposed new Land Needs Assessment Methodology. It moves from an approach that is currently forecast based and process driven to an approach that is capacity based and outcomes focused; where capacity is based on assessment of opportunities and constraints and outcomes are focused on local housing and economic strategies. It could assist the Town with addressing the higher employment land needs generated by warehousing and logistics operations. It also provides the flexibility for planners to be much more creative and imaginative in addressing local priorities.*

### **Financial Impact**

None arising from this Report.

