

# Joint-Report on the Niagara Official Plan

Wednesday, May 12, 2021  
Planning and Economic Development Committee  
Report No. PDS 17-2021

**Isaiah Banach**

Acting Director, CLRP  
Planning and Development Services  
[Isaiah.Banach@niagararegion.ca](mailto:Isaiah.Banach@niagararegion.ca)

**Doug Giles**

Acting Commissioner  
Planning and Development Services  
[Doug.Giles@niagararegion.ca](mailto:Doug.Giles@niagararegion.ca)

The Official Plan has not been comprehensively updated in **nearly 50 years**. A new Niagara Official Plan is needed to improve:



## OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT SYSTEM

Improved mapping of the Region's natural heritage features and water resources



## OUR RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Prioritize climate change throughout the plan to achieve sustainable and resilient communities.



## OUR HOUSING MIX

Support a diverse range of dwelling types to addresses affordability and market demand.



## OUR ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

Identified areas that are protected for long-term investment in employment uses.



## OUR PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Clearer policies for local implementation and coordination with Regional planning.



The Province is the final approval authority for the new Niagara Official Plan. The Provincial deadline for the Official Plan is **July 1, 2022**.

To move the Official Plan forward, a decision is needed on the Natural Environment System Option.





# natural environment systems options

01

## OPTIONS MAPPING IS A VISUAL AID

Mapping of the options  
assists in decision-making.

02

## DETAILED MAPPING WILL BE CREATED

Detailed mapping will be  
prepared after the option  
is selected in consultation  
with local municipalities  
and the NPCA.

03

## WE WILL CONSULT ON THE NES

There will be significant  
opportunities for public and  
stakeholders comments.





12

public information  
centres

1,220

survey responses  
received

105

meetings with local  
planners and councils

250+

meetings with various  
stakeholders

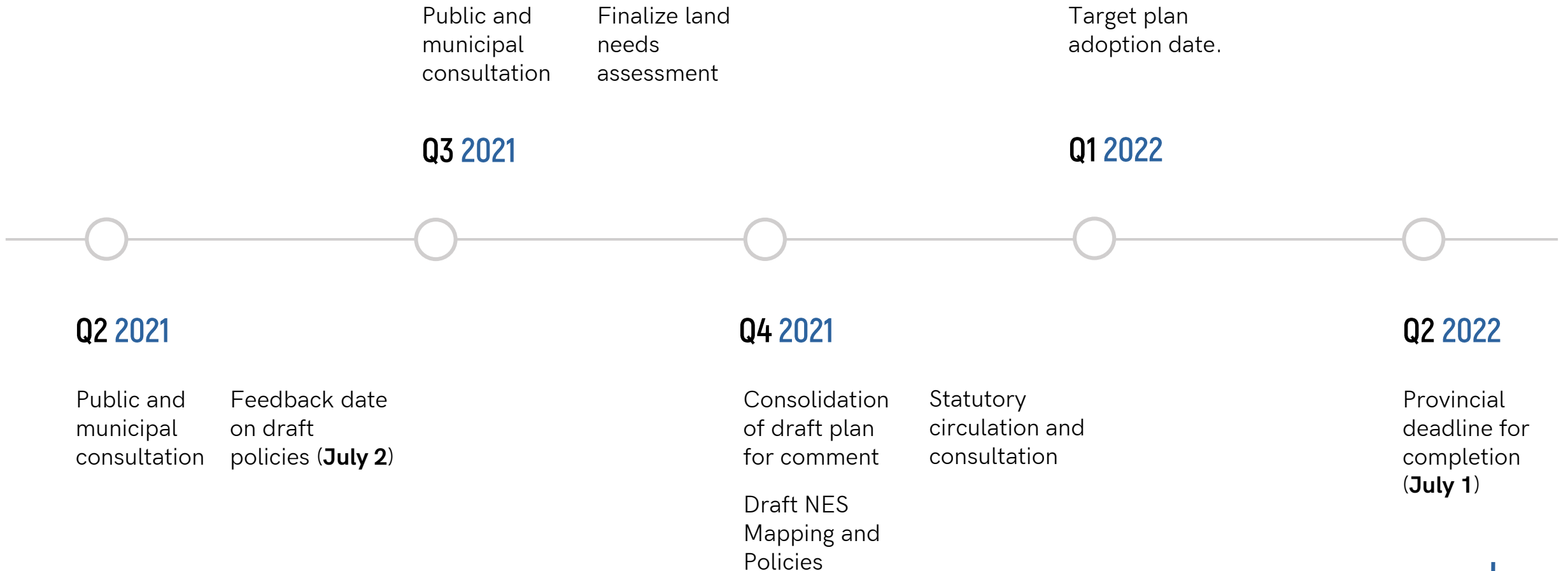
34

reports brought forward  
to council

Additional consultation  
is scheduled for  
**Summer and Fall 2021.**



# official plan timeline

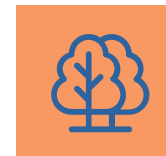




The new Official Plan **will balance the interests of current and future residents.**

Challenges such as housing affordability, the natural environment, climate change, economic development may not have consensus from all parties.

There are many ways to address these challenges. As long as Council's decision conforms with Provincial Policy, we can have a **made in Niagara solution.**



# we can address housing affordability.



Draft policies:

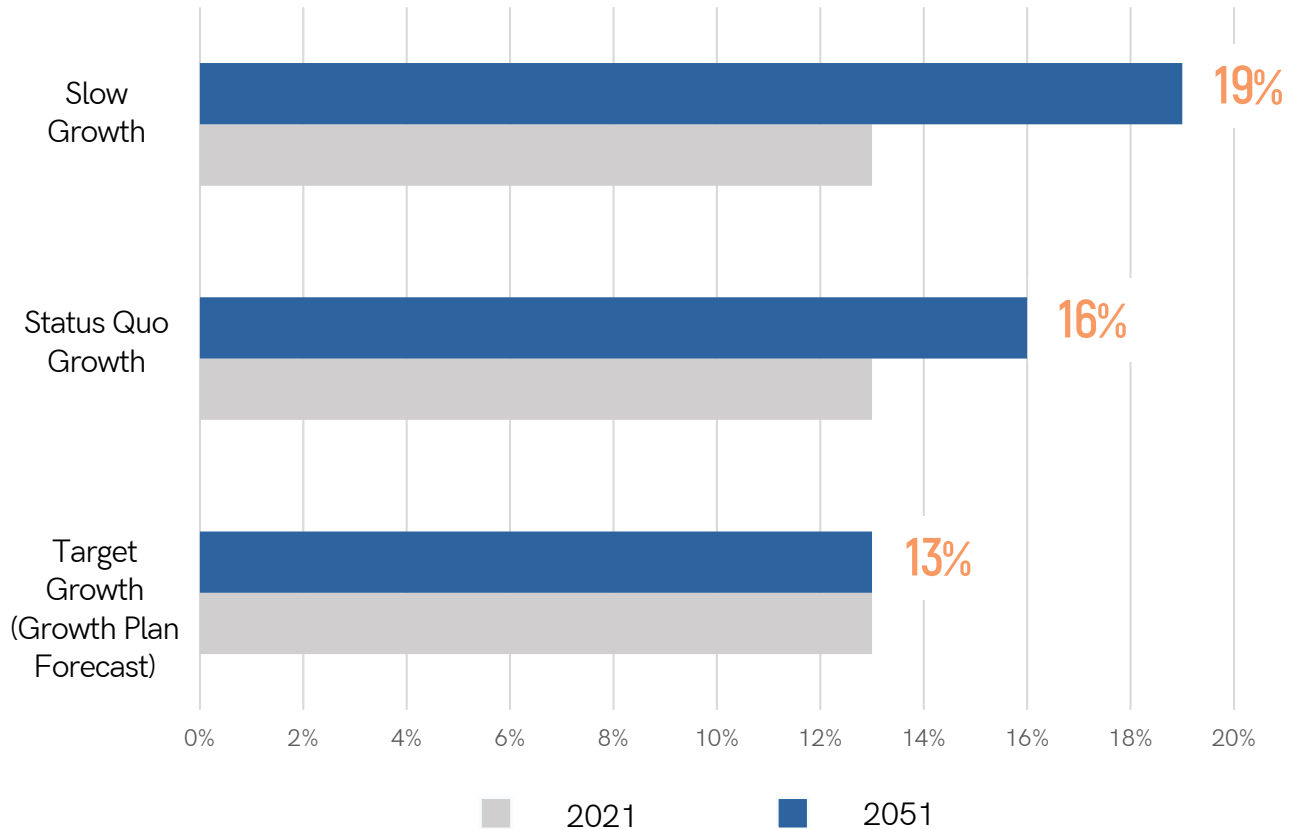
- Support the diversification of our housing stock, especially higher-density dwelling units.
- Establish a Regional affordable housing target that corresponds to core housing need.
- Direct growth in ways that support intensification and the development of affordable housing.
- Promote transit and active transportation options for affordable and convenient travel across Niagara.





# housing affordability

Rates of Core Housing Need Under  
Different Growth Scenarios, CANCEA



**We need to build more housing or core housing need will get worse.**

Achieving the Growth Plan's minimum forecasts will help to maintain the Region's rates of core housing need.



we can **direct growth strategically.**



Draft policies:

- Direct a majority of new development to existing Built-Up Areas.
- Require local municipalities to develop intensification strategies.
- Identify Strategic Growth Areas and corresponding density targets for each.
- Direct significant growth to Strategic Growth Areas, including high-density, mixed use development.
- Locate public service facilities and public transit infrastructure within Strategic Growth Areas.







The majority of the Region's forecasted growth will be directed to the Urban Area, **with 56% directed to existing Built-Up Areas.**

This exceeds the current target of 40%. It also exceed the minimum of 50% required by the Growth Plan.

More intensification means less land is needed in the Designated Greenfield Area and for settlement area boundary expansions.



# strategic growth areas

There are four kinds of Strategic Growth Areas (SGA) identified. Combined, these areas are anticipated to accommodate **approximately 30% of the Region's growth**.

## MAJOR TRANSIT STATION AREAS

minimum density target  
125 people and jobs/ha



## REGIONAL GROWTH CENTRES

minimum density target  
125 people and jobs/ha



## DISTRICT PLAN AREAS

minimum density target  
100 people and jobs/ha



## URBAN GROWTH CENTRE

minimum density target  
150 people and jobs/ha





# land needs assessment



We must follow a Land Needs Methodology released by the Province, including focus on market demand.



The Land Needs Assessment is informed by data from specific background studies.



It determines how much land is needed to house and employ our future population.

The outputs of the Land Needs Assessment are based on the recommendations of various strategies.

- ✓ Population Forecasts
- ✓ Housing Forecasts
- ✓ Employment Forecasts
- ✓ Intensification Rates
- ✓ Density Targets
- ✓ Employment Area Boundaries
- ✓ Employment Area Supply
- ✓ Non-Development Natural Heritage Areas
- ✓ Vacant Employment Area (ha)
- ✓ Vacant Community Area (ha)



# draft results land need

An addition of **460 hectares** of Community Area  
and a surplus of **20 hectares** of Employment Land.

	Existing Area (ha)	Existing % of Total*	Potential Addition (ha)	Change in Total Area (%)
Settlement Area	35,962	19%	+460	1%
Growth Plan Prime Agricultural Area	95,481	52%	+3,300	4%
Greenbelt Protected Countryside	43,542	24%	+1,393 (set)	3%

Also an addition  
of 38,000+ ha of  
Provincial Natural  
Heritage System

\*other designations represent approximately 5% of total



# we can **create complete communities.**



Draft policies:

- Require Designated Greenfield Areas across the Region to achieve a minimum density of 50 people and jobs per hectare.
- Require local municipalities to undertake secondary planning to guide development, including within Strategic Growth Areas
- Apply Urban Design policies and principles to new development and the creation of the public realm.
- Use a complete streets approach for Regional Road improvement projects.



we can **identify and provide stability to employment areas.**

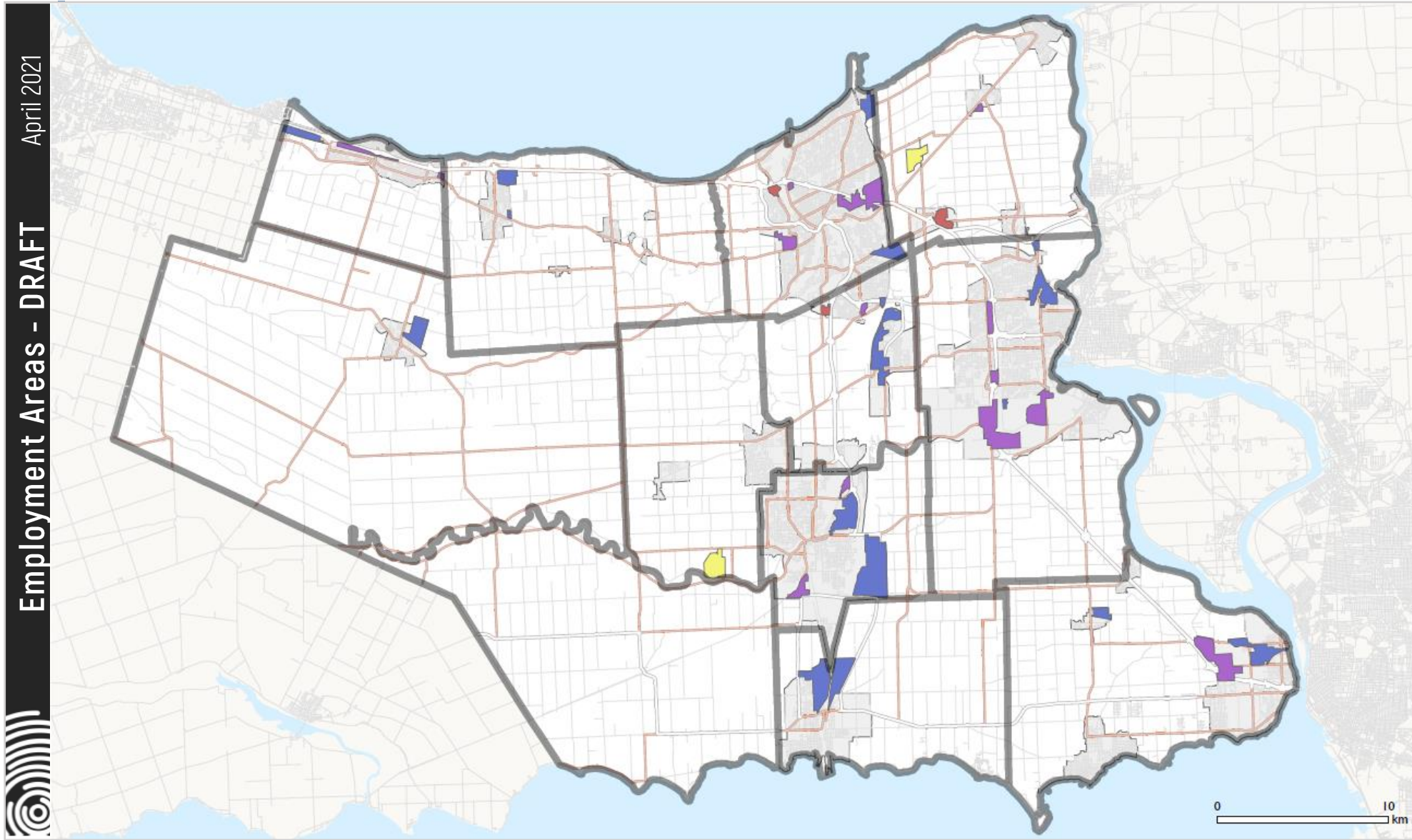


Draft policies:

- Map the boundaries of employment areas.
- Define employment area sub-groupings, including core, dynamic, and knowledge and innovation.
- Establish density targets for vacant lands within employment areas.
- Regulate how and when employment areas can convert into more sensitive land uses, such as residential or institutional.







## LEGEND

-  Core Employment Areas
-  Dynamic Employment Areas
-  Knowledge & Innovation Employment Areas
-  Airport Lands



we can **continue to coordinate growth and infrastructure.**

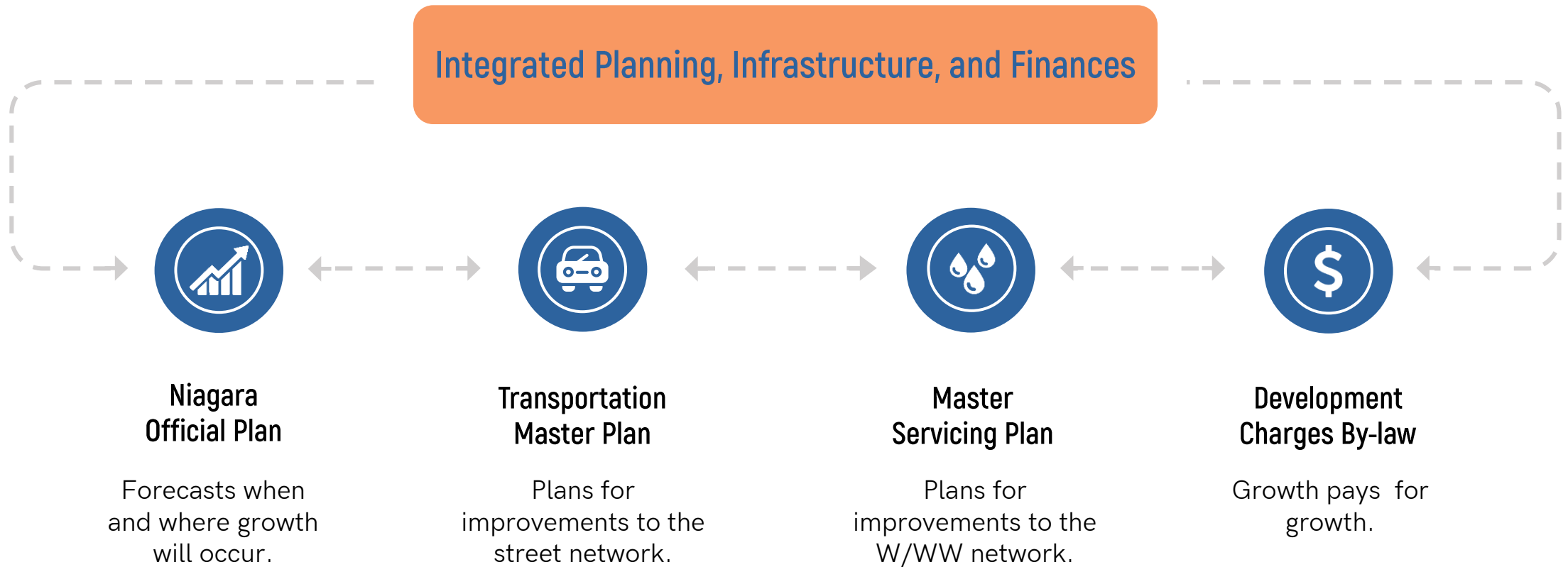


Draft policies:

- Identify population and employment forecasts for the Region that align with Growth Plan targets.
- Ensure there is sufficient infrastructure in places where growth is planned to occur.
- Use forecasts to address the current and future needs for infrastructure, including drinking water, wastewater, waste, and transportation.



# comprehensive review



we can **address climate change.**



Draft policies:

- Prioritize investments in public transit and active transportation infrastructure.
- Promote the design of compact, mixed-use communities that use land wisely.
- Encourage development in existing urban areas and strategic growth areas.
- Integrate low impact development and green infrastructure into new development.
- Enhance natural features that help to store greenhouse gas emissions.







# climate change program

1

## policy conformity review

Prepare draft policies and review for conformity with Provincial policy and legislation.

2

## climate change modeling & projections

The Region is working with the Ontario Climate Consortium to prepare regionally specific climate data and forecasting.

3

## greening initiative

Research, consult, and prepare options for a greening initiative with the overall goal of increasing tree planting across the Region.







## the natural environment

The Niagara Official Plan will establish an integrated natural environment system (NES) that includes both the natural heritage system and water resource system.

The new NES will represent an improvement over the existing system and address many known gaps.







## coordination with growth management.

The sooner the Natural Environment System is established, the sooner natural features and areas can be better managed and protected. That will help determine where growth can be accommodated outside of those areas.



# NES consultation breakdown

130

individual points of  
engagement

8 public  
information  
centres

7 stakeholder  
meetings  
held

6 reports to  
regional  
council

plus several meetings and presentations to:

Local Councils and Local Staff

Indigenous Groups

Region's Planning Advisory  
Committee (PAC)

Agricultural Policy and Action  
Committee (APAC)

Niagara Parks Commission

Provincial Ministries

Niagara Escarpment Commission

NPCA Board, Staff and PAC





# recommended NES Option 3B

1

**Exceeds** the  
required provincial  
standards.

2

**Allows** local  
municipalities to  
plan based on  
local context.

3

**Balances** feedback  
received through  
engagement.





## There will be changes to environmental planning in the Region based on Provincial policy, including:

- ✓ The need for a systems based approach to natural environment planning.
- ✓ The need for a comprehensive water resource system.
- ✓ The identification of the Growth Plan Natural Heritage System.



## Regardless of the options selected the following improvements should also be anticipated:

- ✓ Significantly improved mapping of the natural environment system.
- ✓ Modernized definitions, criteria, and methodology for the identification of environmental features
- ✓ Better alignment with the regulations and land use policies of the NPCA.
- ✓ Improved and more understandable policy.



# report overview

**PDS 17-2021** is a comprehensive report on all Official Plan topics. It includes 18 Appendix Categories.



**Executive Overviews** that provide a summary of topic areas.



**Background Reports** that provide background information and technical details.



**Draft Policies and Schedules** that are included for most topic areas. Comments requested by **July 2, 2021**.





## The Official Plan is outdated.

Updates are needed to secure future prosperity and address modern challenges.



## Increase housing supply.

The Region has a significant affordability problem. More housing is needed, particularly higher-density housing.



## A balanced approach.

The Official Plan balances feedback received with best practices and Provincial policy.



## A decision on the NES is needed.

Staff require direction on the NES to proceed with detailed policy & mapping development.



## Everything is still draft.

Draft policies on various parts of the Official Plan are available for review and comment.



## Consultation is a key component.

To date, staff have undertaken significant consultation. More consultation is planned for Summer and Fall 2021.

