

# EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

## Chapter 2 – Section 2. REGIONAL STRUCTURE

### **SUMMARY**

The Regional Structure is the basis for growth management in Niagara. It provides direction on critical factors needed to allocate population and employment forecasts within Urban Areas and Rural Settlements.

The Regional Structure will coordinate and support a range of land use considerations, including: investments in infrastructure and public service facilities; the protection of employment areas and agricultural lands; the creation of sustainable and resilient communities; and the preservation of key natural heritage and water resource systems.

- Schedule B identifies the land use components that comprise the Regional Structure, including Settlement Area boundaries. The Regional Structure is used to determine where forecasted growth will and will not be directed.
- Urban Areas will accommodate the majority of forecasted growth through strategic intensification and redevelopment opportunities. Growth will also be accommodated through development of Designated Greenfield Areas that support the creation of complete communities with a range of land uses and housing options.
- Intensification rates are provided for each area municipality. Local municipalities will be required to update or develop intensification strategies that support their applicable intensification target, identify priority areas for growth, and establish design and development standards for development in Built-Up Areas.
- Strategic Growth Areas are the focus for higher density, mixed-use development and major investments in transit infrastructure, public service facilities, and improvements to the public realm. For Niagara, Strategic Growth Areas include:
  - Downtown St. Catharines Urban Growth Centre;
  - Major Transit Station Areas, including the confirmed and future proposed GO Transit Stations;
  - Regional Growth Centres, including Downtown Welland; and
  - District Plan Areas, including the Brock and Glendale Niagara District Plans.
- Local municipalities, in consultation with the Region, will complete secondary plans for Strategic Growth Areas that support and refine identified density targets and implement the growth management objectives of the Niagara Official Plan (“NOP”).



- The limited amount of growth that occurs outside of Urban Areas will be accommodated in Rural Settlements. Rural Settlements will support existing residential, agricultural, commercial, and employment uses, and will continue to be serviced through private water and wastewater treatment systems.

**A Draft Policy set is provided with this sub-section document.**

Integration Guide for Sub-sections Reported in PDS 17-2021			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Regional Structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Archaeology
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Housing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Employment
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Land Needs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SABR	<input type="checkbox"/>	Aggregates
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Transportation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Natural Heritage incl.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Infrastructure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Water Systems Options
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	District/Secondary Plans	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Watershed Planning
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Urban Design	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Climate Change

## **OVERVIEW**

The *Growth Plan* requires municipalities to plan for forecasted growth in a manner that supports the achievement of complete communities.

Complete communities are defined as areas within a town or city that offer opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to conveniently access most of the necessities for daily living, including an appropriate mix of jobs, local stores and services, and a full range of housing and transportation options.

The Regional Structure accomplishes this by identifying land use components that manage the growth forecasted in the *Growth Plan* Schedule 3 and allocated through the Region's Land Needs Assessment.

Specifically, the Regional Structure strategically directs growth in alignment with *Growth Plan* Policy 2.2.2.1, which requires the majority of forecasted growth to be directed to Urban Areas that are serviced by existing or planned infrastructure.

This growth is to be focused in Built-Up Areas, Strategic Growth Areas, locations with existing or planned transit service, and areas with existing or planned public service facilities.

Only limited amount of growth can be directed to areas outside of Urban Area boundaries where development will be concentrated within Rural Settlements, including villages and hamlets.

Intensification rates for Built-Up Areas and density targets for Strategic Growth Areas and Designated Greenfield Areas are set to guide the location and form of future development.

Intensification refers to development or redevelopment within the Built-Up Area and can include a range of housing forms. The *Growth Plan* requires a minimum of 50% of new development across the Region occur within the Built-Up Area. Formerly, this minimum was 40%. The in-effect *Growth Plan* requires more intensification than in the current Official Plan.

Municipal intensification rates were determined based on significant consultation with local municipalities. The rates were determined based on thorough assessment of the capacity to accommodate growth within the Built-Up Area through intensification and infill opportunities and the geographic context of the municipality. Municipalities within the *Greenbelt Plan* area typically have a higher intensification rates due to the inability to expand its Urban Area boundary.

**The result is a 56% overall intensification rate, higher than the 50% Growth Plan requirement.**

**Table 1** below sets out the intensification rates by municipality.

**Table 1: Intensification Rates for Built-Up Areas by Local Municipality**

Municipality	Intensification Rate
Fort Erie	50%
Grimsby	98%
Lincoln	80%
Niagara Falls	50%
Niagara-on-the-Lake	25%
Pelham	25%
Port Colborne	30%
St. Catharines	95%
Thorold	25%
Wainfleet	0%
Welland	60%
West Lincoln	13%
<b>Niagara Region</b>	<b>56%</b>

In addition to intensification rates, the Region sets density targets, as directed by the Growth Plan.

Density is a measure of the number people and jobs that are located within a specific area. Density targets can be achieved in a number of ways, and does not in of itself dictate the built form of a community.

The Province requires Designated Greenfield Areas to achieve a minimum density of 50 people and jobs per hectare. This minimum density target is to be measured over the entire Designated Greenfield Area of the Region, excluding certain take-outs (i.e. natural heritage features, areas and systems). Unlike the intensification rate, the Designated Greenfield Area density target is the same for all local municipalities.

Strategic Growth Areas (“SGAs”) are a new land use component introduced through the NOP, in line with the Growth Plan. SGAs are intended to accommodate significant intensification and higher-density, mixed use development over time.

Density targets for SGAs were established by undertaking the following background analysis:

- a jurisdictional scan and review of intensification and growth area targets within the Official Plans of comparable single-tier and upper-tier municipalities;
- a review of the land use designations, permissions, and design standards outlined within applicable secondary plans, district plans, and/or Official Plans and Zoning By-laws;
- calculating the minimum and maximum densities that could be implemented within the SGA as established by the aforementioned policy structure; and
- applying Provincial policy to the relationship between Niagara’s identified SGAs.

Table 2 provides draft SGA density targets.

**Table 2:** Density Targets for Strategic Growth Areas

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Minimum Density Target</b>
Downtown St. Catharines Urban Growth Centre	150 people & jobs per hectare to <b>2031</b>
GO Transit Station Areas in St. Catharines, Lincoln, Niagara Falls, and Grimsby	125 people & jobs per hectare to <b>2051</b>
Downtown Welland Regional Growth Centre	125 people & jobs per hectare to <b>2051</b>
Brock and Glendale Niagara District Plans	100 people & jobs per hectare to <b>2051</b>

Regional Structure policies support the above-noted land use components and establish intensification and density targets. Related policies implement other Provincial growth management objectives, including:

- the efficient use of infrastructure, public service facilities, and the public realm that meet the needs of residents over time and sustain the financial well-being of municipalities;
- the development of affordable housing for low and moderate income households, including housing for specialized needs;
- support for a range and mix of residential, employment, institutional, recreation, park and open space uses that incorporate sustainable design and facilitate the use of public transit and active transportation;
- conservation of the region's biodiversity and protection of the region's natural heritage and water resource systems; and
- use of secondary planning to identify and address the challenges and opportunities specific to strategic and priority areas of growth, and provide detailed policies that guide future development and design of buildings, parks, and public spaces within these areas.

Regional Structure also includes policies for local municipalities to update or develop new intensification strategies as part of local Official Plan conformity. Intensification strategies and secondary plans can help direct growth and manage change within their communities.

Intensification strategies will also benefit from NOP urban design policies and local Official Plans. Urban design can assist with implementing or establishing community identity,

provide direction to address compatibility for infill and support complete communities and complete streets.

The policies and targets of the Regional Structure are informed by the results and recommendations of the various studies and matters of interest related to growth management, land use planning, and infrastructure and asset management, including the Niagara 2041: Preferred Growth Option Report (Hemson, 2019) and Niagara Region Municipal Comprehensive Review – Growth Allocation Update to 2051 (**Appendix 3.3**); Niagara Region Housing Market Analysis and Growth Scenario Analysis (CANCEA, 2019); the Memorandum: Housing Affordability and Growth Plan 2051 (CANCEA) (**Appendix 5.2**); and the Employment Policy Paper (**Appendix 10.2**), and the Water/Wastewater Master Servicing Plan and Transportation Master Plan.

The policies are also informed by input from members of the public, local area municipalities, Regional Committee and Council, and other stakeholder groups. The feedback received through many engagement sessions identified growth management as the key challenge and opportunity for Niagara. Specifically, that strategic growth management is needed to accommodate incoming growth in a manner that creates thriving, complete, and resilient communities that mitigate and adapt to our changing climate and protect the Region's significant natural heritage and water resource systems.

Responsible, efficient use of land and infrastructure needs to be coordinated. This will be achieved through a monitoring program. Monitoring will play a critical role in tracking levels of new growth and development following implementation of the NOP. The ability to monitor growth will assist with decisions concerning allocations and targets set for the horizon of the planning period for all local municipalities.

Included in this section is the Regional Structure Policy Paper, **Appendix 4.2** and Regional Structure Draft Policies, **Appendix 4.3** and draft schedule mapping, **Appendix 4.4**.