



# NIAGARA OFFICIAL PLAN

## **Regional Structure Policy Paper** Growth Management for the Niagara Region

Niagara Region  
May 2021

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**GROWING REGION**



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## Executive Summary

This Discussion Paper identifies the Regional Structure and outlines the direction of growth management policies and mapping for the new Niagara Official Plan (“NOP”).

*A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (“Growth Plan”) sets out that Niagara Region will grow by 85,000 jobs and 182,000 people from 2021 to 2051. We are planning for this growth by identifying areas in the Region that can accommodate future jobs and residents.

The Regional Structure will ensure that the distribution of growth within local municipalities is directed appropriately and achieved in a manner that conforms to the *Growth Plan*.

The Region has undertaken numerous studies to understand the characteristics of our existing population and built infrastructure.

Updates to the Region’s Growth Allocations and Land Needs Assessment (“LNA”) identify over 91,000 dwelling units to be added to the Region’s housing stock by the year 2051. The form in which these dwelling units are developed depends on how the Region seeks to grow over time.

The Niagara Region Housing Affordability and Growth Plan Report (“2021 Housing Report”), concluded that meeting the Growth Plan’s population forecasts will better address rates of core housing need compared to the status quo or a slower growth scenario. In other words, the Region needs to grow at the minimum *Growth Plan* targets to maintain the same level of affordability.

Achieving the *Growth Plan* (targeted growth) forecasts can be accomplished by establishing policies as part of the Regional Structure that encourage the development of townhouses, apartments, and other higher-density dwelling units that provide more affordable housing choices.

The Regional Structure is informed through consultation, including meetings with local municipalities and the Planning Advisory Committee. Additionally, information regarding the Regional Structure was made available to members of the public as part of a series of Public Information Centre (“PIC”) meetings held in November 2019 and October 2020 for the NOP, as well as the release of a Growth Management Survey.

Engagement with the public identified the top priorities for managing growth strategically in Niagara. Our communities need to be planned in ways which offer more housing options, make use of existing infrastructure, improve existing transportation systems, including transit and cycling networks, and support jobs and economic prosperity.

The policies and mapping of the Regional Structure must be consistent with the *Provincial Policy Statement* and must conform to the Provincial land use plans that apply to Niagara, including the *Growth Plan* and the *Greenbelt Plan*.

Provincial Policy directs municipalities to achieve the creation of complete communities that are well-designed, efficiently serviced, and protect and preserve key agricultural and natural heritage resources.

The achievement of complete communities is dependent on the location and development of the future population and jobs.

In recent years, the majority of the Region's growth has been directed to its Urban Areas. Specifically, the Region's:

- Built-Up Areas, which are characterized primarily by infill intensification and redevelopment. Intensification rates, which measure the amount of new development that occurs within the Built-Up Area, are assigned to the local municipalities with an overall minimum intensification rate of 50% Region-wide; and
- Designated Greenfield Areas (DGA), which are characterized primarily by larger scale community planning and development projects. Overall, the Region must meet a density target of 50 person and jobs per hectare in the DGA.

The Downtown St. Catharines Urban Growth Centre is the only Urban Growth Centre identified in Niagara in the *Growth Plan*. The Urban Growth Centre will be planned as a regional focal point for accommodating population and employment growth, with a higher density target of 150 persons and jobs per hectare. The Urban Growth Centre is also a Strategic Growth Area ("SGA"), as that term is used in the *Growth Plan*.

Through the Regional Structure, additional SGAs have been identified, including the Major Transit Station Areas (GO Station Areas), Downtown Welland and the District Plan areas. SGAs require higher density targets and have specific policy direction.

The Regional Structure includes the following:

1. A comprehensive set of policies that implement the relevant intensification and density targets and incorporate strategic infrastructure planning, climate change considerations, and urban design principles for the creation of complete communities. This is included as **Appendix 4.3**.
2. A new "Schedule B" that maps the Regional Structure and includes: Urban Areas and related land use components, such as Built-Up Areas, Designated Greenfield Areas, Major Transit Station Areas, Employment Areas, Regional Growth Centres, and other Strategic Growth Areas; Rural Settlement Areas (Hamlets); Agricultural Areas; Rural Lands, and Excess Lands. This is included as **Appendix 4.4**.

Monitoring will play a critical role in tracking performance of new growth and development following implementation of the NOP.

Further consultation on the Regional Structure, and other NOP items, is planned for the Summer and Fall 2021.

Staff ask that **comments be made by July 2, 2021 on the Regional Structure**, to allow sufficient time to review and report for August 2021.

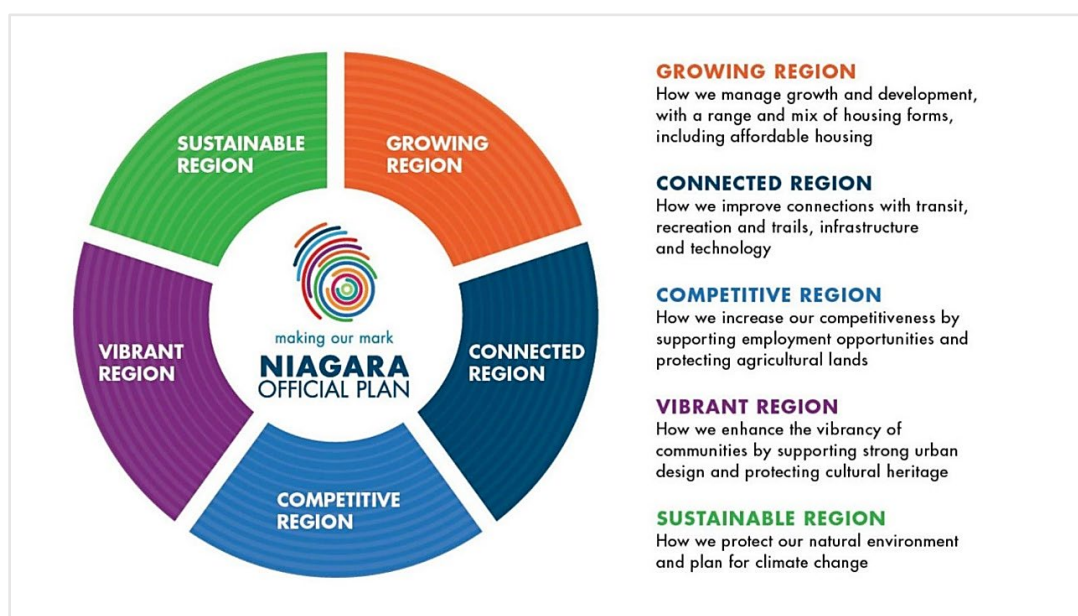
Following this comment period, revisions to the draft Regional Structure will be made, as appropriate, and presented to Council for consideration.

## 1.0 Introduction

Niagara's Official Plan guides the short- and long-term development of the Region, including:

- where population and employment growth should and should not occur;
- the size and location of land uses within a municipality;
- the infrastructure and services needed to support planned land uses; and
- the regulatory framework used to implement its policies and objectives.

The policies and mapping of the new OP will be grouped into the five key components described in **Figure 1** below.



**Figure 1:** Key Components of the new Niagara Official Plan

An important component of the NOP is the development of the Regional Structure; a growth management framework that establishes land use components and policy tools to achieve the objectives, forecasts and targets of Provincial policy.

Planning for the Regional Structure is considered within the Growing Region component of the NOP; however, its recommendations are based on a range of land use considerations, including investments made in infrastructure and municipal servicing; the protection of employment lands, employment areas, and agricultural lands; and the preservation of key natural heritage and hydrologic systems. These matters are each informed by background studies or work programs and will be included in other sections of the NOP.

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## 2.0 Purpose

This Regional Structure Policy Paper is a follow-up to the Regional Structure Background Report (Report No. PDS 28-2020) prepared in September 2020. That report was received by Council at its meeting on September 17, 2020.

Since the receipt of the Regional Structure Background Report, Staff have further consulted, including through virtual public information sessions in October 2020 and individual meetings with local planning staff in September-October 2020 and February-March 2021. Further consultation details are provided in **Subsection 2.1** below.

As a result of those consultation events, and further research and refinement, this Regional Structure Policy Paper was prepared.

This Regional Structure Policy Paper is appended to the Joint Report on the NOP (**Appendix 4.2**). This Paper should be read in conjunction with the Regional Structure Executive Overview, Regional Structure policies, and balance of the materials provided with Report No. PDS 17-2021.

This Report provides the following:

- recent background studies relevant to the development of the Regional Structure;
- pertinent growth management concepts and land use planning practices;
- recommended actions related to the identification of strategic growth areas, and proposed intensification rates and density targets; and
- additional matters that have informed policies.

The Regional Structure Policy Paper is one of several steps undertaken by the Region for the developing the Regional Structure.

The Region has consulted with local municipal planning staff, stakeholders and the public on the Regional Structure. Further consultation will be conducted prior to finalizing the draft policies and mapping outlined within this report. A consultation discussion is provided in **Subsection 2.1** below.

### 3.0 Background

The existing policy for Niagara's urban areas was initially established in the 1970s through the creation of its original Official Plan. Although there have been many amendments over the years, the Region's Official Plan structure is out-of-date with modern planning policies.

Over the past several decades, there have been significant changes to the planning system. Today's system is hierarchical and policy-lead, requiring the Region to be consistent with, conform to, or not conflict with the *Provincial Policy Statement, 2020* (PPS), *A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan)*, the *Greenbelt Plan*, and the *Niagara Escarpment Plan*.

A comprehensive review of the Official Plan and its urban area policies occurred in 2009 with the development of the Niagara 2031 Growth Management Strategy, as implemented by Regional Policy Plan Amendment 2-2009 ("RPPA 2-2009"). This amendment established a new vision for the long term growth and development of Niagara, which recognized the changes in economic drivers and infrastructure investments made in the Region since the Official Plan's inception.

RPPA 2-2009 was initiated to ensure conformity with the policies and growth forecasts in the 2006 Growth Plan. This exercise led to the creation of the existing "Regional Urban Structure" as mapped in Schedule A of the existing Official Plan.

RPPA 2-2009 also introduced new areas for residential and employment intensification, added policies and mapping that guide the development of the Niagara Economic Gateway and Centre, and established design, construction, and maintenance standards for Regional water, wastewater, and transportation infrastructure.

Since the passing of RPPA 2-2009, there have been several significant changes to Provincial Policy that necessitate a reevaluation of Niagara's growth management policies and mapping. In 2014, the Province completed a comprehensive review of the PPS, which in turn, lead to extensive updates to the *Growth Plan*, the *Greenbelt Plan*, and the *Niagara Escarpment Plan* in 2017.

Further revisions were made to the policies and mapping in the *Growth Plan* and *PPS* in 2019 and 2020, respectively, which emphasized the provision of affordable and market-based housing, the promotion of economic competitiveness, and efficiency in the development process.

In response, the Region initiated a new growth management strategy, known as Niagara 2041, which until recently, formed the basis for the MCR and numerous companion strategies, such the Water and Wastewater Master Servicing Plan, the Transportation Master Plan, the Housing Report, and the Employment Strategy. Further details on this background work are outlined in **Subsection 2.2**.

In August 2020, the Province approved Amendment 1 to the 2019 *Growth Plan* (Amendment 1), which, among other things, extended the horizon for land use planning from the year 2041 to the year 2051. Amendment 1 revised Schedule 3 of the *Growth Plan* in order to institute new regional population and employment forecasts, and revised the methodology for assessing land need.

As an upper-tier municipality, the Region is required to conform to the *Growth Plan* and revise its Regional Structure as part of its MCR to ensure that the distribution of growth to local municipalities can be achieved.

### **3.1 Consultation for the Regional Structure**

Prior to the 2019 *Growth Plan* changes, the Region met on numerous occasions with the Planning Advisory Committee and, separately, with planning staff of local municipalities, to discuss the development of Niagara 2041 and the Regional Structure.

In September 2019, Regional staff provided a Growth Management Program Update to the Planning and Economic Development Committee (Report No. PDS 33-2019), which included preliminary information on the Regional Structure (at the time referred to as the “Urban Structure”). That same year, Public Information Centre (PIC) meetings were held at various locations across the Region in order to provide the public an opportunity to learn about and comment on the Regional Structure and other components of the NOP.

In 2020, Staff prepared the Regional Structure Background Report outlining recent changes and addressing key matters for the Regional Structure that would be determined through further study and consultation. Subsequently, Regional staff:

- engaged Hemson Consulting and the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis (CANCEA) to update the previous data and analyses conducted for Niagara 2041 (as outlined in **Subsection 2.2**);

- prepared an online survey to assess the public's priorities for growth management in the NOP;
- met with local municipal planning staff on numerous occasions to discuss updated population and employment allocations, employment policies and mapping, and matters related to the Regional Structure; and
- hosted a series of virtual public information sessions in October 2020 and held additional meetings with key stakeholders on the components of the NOP, including discussions on the Regional Structure.

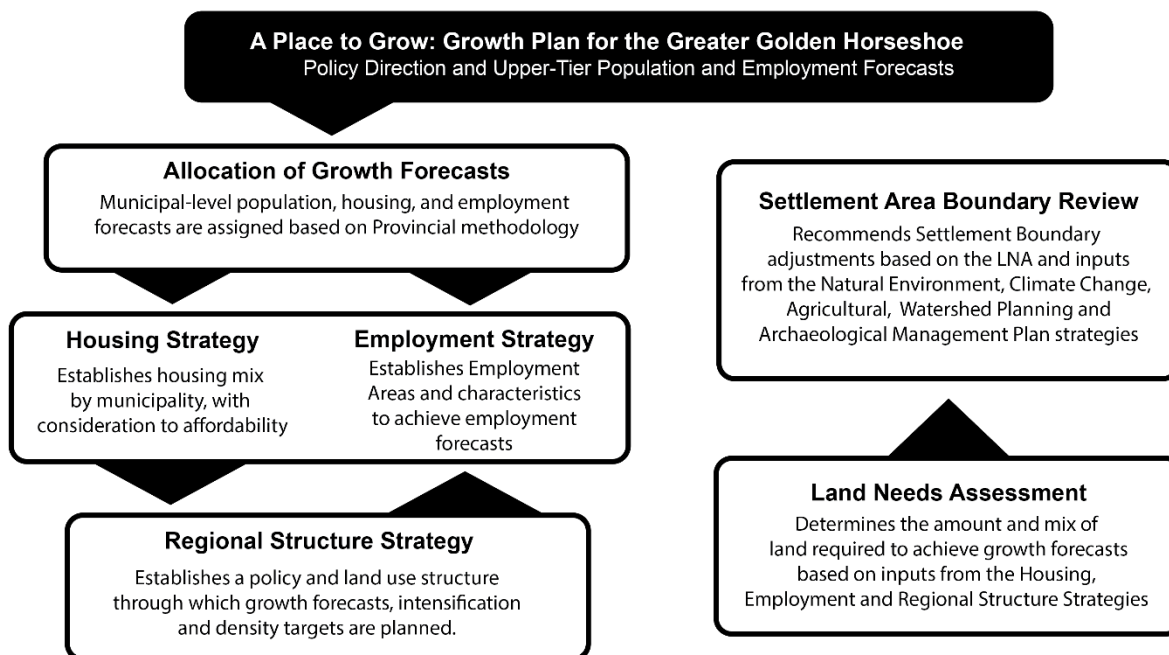
The feedback received through this engagement generally identified growth management as both the key challenge and opportunity for Niagara. Specifically, that strategic growth management is needed to accommodate growth in a manner that creates thriving, complete, and resilient communities that mitigate and adapt to our changing climate and protect the Region's significant natural heritage and water systems.

In addition, there was significant interest in ensuring that the NOP could facilitate an increase in affordable housing options; improve existing transportation systems, especially transit and cycling networks; and properly manage the Region's employment areas to support job creation and economic prosperity.

### **3.2 Growth Management Studies**

The Regional Structure is informed by a number of considerations related to growth management, many of which are informed by their own respective studies. These studies collectively inform the current and future plan for growth and development in Niagara.

**Figure 2** demonstrates the relationship between the *Growth Plan*, the Regional Structure, and other key growth management studies completed as part of the NOP.



**Figure 2:** Relationship between the Plans and studies that inform the Regional Structure

### 3.2.1 Niagara 2041: Preferred Growth Option Report

A series of reports were completed by Hemson Consulting between 2014 and 2019 that provide detailed population and employment forecasts at a regional and local municipal level to 2041, in conformity with the in-effect Growth Plans at the time.

Following consultation with local municipalities and relevant stakeholders, population and employment allocations were further refined to identify a Preferred Growth Option, which was used to inform the Niagara Region Master Servicing Plan and Transportation Master Plan, and ultimately led to the forecasts used within the 2016 Development Charges Background Study. Associated housing forecasts were later revised through the development of the 2019 Housing Strategy.

This work is now outdated as it does not conform to the in-effect Growth Plan with a 2051 horizon.

### 3.2.2 Niagara Region Municipal Comprehensive Review – Growth Allocation Update to 2051 and Land Needs Assessment

As noted, the Region has been working on the growth allocations and land needs assessment (“LNA”) for a number of years. The Niagara Region Municipal Comprehensive Review - Growth Allocation Update to 2051 (Hemson, 2021) builds off

the results of the Niagara 2041: Preferred Growth Option (Hemson, 2019) analysis to align regional forecasts with those established through the 2020 *Growth Plan*. Significant consultation has been ongoing with municipalities, stakeholders and the public since the release of the amended *Growth Plan*.

The allocations are used to directly inform the Region's LNA. The LNA is a Provincial requirement of the NOP – the Region must follow a Provincial methodology to determine the amount of land needed to accommodate forecasted population and employment growth to 2051.

Hemson Consulting provided the Region with updated municipal-level forecasts based on inputs from consultation and certain Official Plan background strategies. The Hemson, 2021 memo is included in the Joint Report as **Appendix 3.3**.

Accompanying the 2020 *Growth Plan* was a revised LNA methodology that requires municipalities to consider market-based housing demand as part of the LNA.

The updates provided in the Hemson, 2021 memo inform the corresponding updates to the Housing Report (described in **Subsection 2.2.4** below), and identified housing by type and location forecasts, by municipality, consistent with intensification rates and density targets identified within the Regional Structure.

The Draft Lands Needs Summary document is included with the Joint Report as **Appendix 3.2**. This provides details on how the Region has performed the LNA using the Provincial Methodology. Like the Regional Structure, the Draft LNA will be finalized following consultation.

### **3.2.3 Master Servicing Plan and Transportation Master Plan**

The Master Servicing Plan ("MSP") and the Transportation Master Plan ("TMP") were completed in 2016 and 2017, respectively, to evaluate the capacity requirements of the Region's existing water, wastewater, and transportation infrastructure. These studies inform where growth and development can be accommodated by Regional infrastructure, and how it can be designed and constructed to support the key planning principles outlined in **Section 5.0**.

The MSP and the TMP utilize growth forecasts to identify where and when infrastructure improvements will be made to meet the demands of future households and businesses. Both these studies currently align with the work of the previous *Growth Plan* and the Niagara 2041: Preferred Growth Option report (Hemson, 2019).

The full costs associated with maintaining and replacing infrastructure over its life-cycle often extend beyond established planning horizons. To ensure that public funds spent on physical assets are costed and planned over a predicted life cycle, it is important to ensure that growth planning is considered comprehensively with the MSP and TMP.

At this time, the MSP, TMP and the Development Charges By-law are all under review, with cooperative work underway between the Public Works, Corporate Services and Planning and Development Services. The updated forecasts provided in the Hemson, 2021 memo and the policy direction of the Regional Structure will be used to inform these reviews.

The Regional Structure supports alignment between infrastructure and land use planning, and uses available information to direct future growth and development to areas where infrastructure investments are or will be made, including those beyond the current planning horizon of 2051.

### **3.2.4 Niagara Region Growth Scenario Analysis Report (Housing Report)**

In 2019, Niagara Region engaged CANCEA to prepare a regional housing database that aggregated existing sources of housing-related data to determine the region's current and future demand for affordable housing.

The results of this analysis found that as of 2016, over 20,000 households in Niagara were considered to be in “core housing need”, primarily driven by a lack of affordable housing options within the community.

Core housing need is a measure tracked through Statistics Canada as part of the national census. The term refers to households that are either in need of major repair; do not have enough bedrooms to suitably house its residents; or cost more than 30% of the household's annual income without more affordable housing alternatives available within the market area.

In Niagara, core housing need is primarily driven by affordability, and especially impacts single-person, rental, and low income households.

To determine how best to address growing rates of core housing need, CANCEA subsequently prepared a housing report title Niagara Region Housing Market Analysis, Trends, Current State and Forecasts, 1996-2041 (“2019 Housing Report”) that tested the impacts of several growth scenarios on the capacity of the Region's housing stock to accommodate future growth.

The 2019 Housing Report concluded that a targeted growth scenario, in which population growth in the region occurs at a rate that is targeted to achieve the population numbers forecasted by the 2019 Growth Plan, had the most positive impact in mitigating rates of core housing need and maintaining housing affordability. The 2019 Housing Report was received by Planning and Economic Development Committee as Report PDS 27-2019 on April 17, 2019 and Report PDS 37-2019 on November 6, 2019.

After the release of the 2020 *Growth Plan*, the Region reengaged CANCEA to test the impacts of the revised 2051 growth numbers. CANCEA produced a report, Niagara Region Housing Affordability and *Growth Plan* 2051 (“2021 Housing Report”), which is appended to the Joint Report as **Appendix 5.2**.

The 2021 Housing Report updated the housing database and growth scenario analysis based on the growth allocations and housing mix identified in the Hemson, 2021 memo. The 2021 Housing Report identified similar conclusions as the 2019 report.

Specifically, achieving the minimum population forecasts within the *Growth Plan* would maintain the current rate of core housing need in Niagara at 13% of households. This means that core housing need will not be improved, but will be kept the same, at 13%.

This is compared to status quo scenario of growth at a similar rate to what has occurred, which put core housing need at 16% to 2051. In a slow growth scenarios core housing need will reach 19% by 2051.

Core housing needs cannot be met unless a certain volume of population forecasts are achieved and that a range of housing types and densities are incorporated. Specifically, to address core housing need, more townhouses, apartment units, and other forms of housing are needed over what has traditionally been developed in Niagara.

To improve affordability in Niagara over time, other policy and financial tools will be required, in addition to more total housing and denser forms of housing noted above.

These are addressed, in part, through the Regional Structure, as outlined in **Subsection 5.4**, as well as through the NOP housing policies, set out in the Joint Report as **Appendix 5.3**.

### **3.2.5 Employment Area Strategy**

The Employment Area Strategy and Policy Paper was prepared by the Region in 2020. It identifies and designates employment areas within the Region.

The employment areas identified by the Strategy are largely based on existing local land use designations, as well as the site characteristics, location characteristics and market impacts of individual parcels. The recommendations of the Strategy inform the employment area policies in the NOP, which is explored in detail through the Employment Policy Paper included as set out in the Niagara Official Plan Consolidated Policy Report as **Appendix 10.2**.

### **3.2.6 Settlement Area Boundary Review**

As part of the NOP, the Region may also consider Settlement Area boundary changes. This includes possible boundary expansions, where it is demonstrated that the municipality has an identified land need that cannot be accommodated within its existing urban boundary.

This review is further discussed in **Subsection 7.4**.

## **4.0 Provincial Land Use Planning Framework**

The Provincial government sets the direction for municipal planning through a framework of statutes, regulations, and policy plans. As an upper-tier municipality, the NOP will implement this and provide direction for conformity of local Official Plans and subsequent conformity of Zoning By-laws to the local Official Plan.

In Niagara, the applicable Provincial land use plans are the *PPS*, which provide policy direction on a range of Provincial interests; the *Growth Plan*, which dictates how and where employment and residential intensification is to be developed, amongst other things; and the *Greenbelt Plan* and *Niagara Escarpment Plan*, which provide protection for a system of agricultural and rural lands (i.e. the Agricultural System) and ecological areas and features (i.e. the Natural Heritage System or “NHS”) located within the Greater Golden Horseshoe and along the Niagara Escarpment.

The Regional Structure must comprehensively apply the principles of these land use plans. Beyond the identification of areas in which urban development will be restricted, the influence of the *Greenbelt Plan* and *Niagara Escarpment Plan* is limited in urban areas. As such, the discussion of the legislation and policy below is focused on the *Planning Act, 1990*, *PPS* and *Growth Plan*.

The requirements of the NOP are set out in the *Planning Act, 1990*. The NOP must be consistent with the *Provincial Policy Statement (2020)*, conform with the *Growth Plan*, the *Greenbelt Plan* and not conflict with the *Niagara Escarpment Plan*. Decisions of

Council and planning advice and recommendations made by staff must adhere to these requirements.

#### **4.1 The Planning Act, 1990**

The *Planning Act, 1990* outlines the manner in which development and redevelopment can be controlled, and the role and responsibilities of the Province, municipalities, and other participants in implementing and managing these planning processes.

Section 2 of the *Planning Act, 1990* lists the areas of provincial interest that municipalities must have regard for when making land use decisions and creating new Official Plans. These include the appropriate location of growth and development; the promotion of development that is designed to be sustainable, to support public transit, and pedestrian oriented; and the promotion of a built form that is well-designed, encourages a sense of place, and provides for high quality, accessible and safe public spaces.

##### **4.1.1 Land Use Planning Tools**

To proactively plan for growth, the *Planning Act, 1990* provides municipalities with a range of land use tools and processes, including the use of **secondary plans** to help manage future growth and development.

A secondary plan is a land use plan for a particular area or neighbourhood within a municipality, whose implementing policies are adopted into an Official Plan. Secondary plans are usually prepared and approved by local municipalities, and completed through extensive public consultation.

These land use plans help to identify and address challenges and opportunities specific to the area, and provide detailed policies that guide the development and design of buildings, parks, and public spaces.

**District plans** are similar to secondary plans in that they provide land use guidance for defined locations within a municipality, with implementing policies that are adopted into the Region's Official Plan.

District Plans are Region-led initiatives. The areas selected for District Plans are typically high-growth areas that require collaboration between multiple municipalities or stakeholders, levels of government and/or private and public partnerships, or are areas that currently are, or have the potential to become, iconic in nature.

District plan policies provide a framework for land use, urban design and development that supports the key planning principles outlined in **Section 5.0**.

## 4.2 The Provincial Policy Statement, 2020 (PPS)

The PPS provides direction for areas of provincial interest. Municipalities must plan and develop Official Plans that are consistent with PPS policies.

The PPS provides for appropriate development while protecting key municipal resources, public health and safety, and the quality of the natural and built environment. Development within a municipality is to be directed to Settlement Areas (see adjacent definition), and then more specifically, to designated areas of growth that can service and support residential and employment intensification.

The PPS defines **Settlement Areas** as “urban areas and rural settlement areas within municipalities (such as cities, towns, villages and hamlets) that are:

- (1) built up areas where development is concentrated and which have a mix of land uses;
- (2) lands which have been designated in an official plan for development in accordance with the policies of [the PPS].

Where there are no lands that have been designated for development, the settlement area may be no larger than the area where development is concentrated.

The PPS is to be read in conjunction with the *Growth Plan*, the *Greenbelt Plan*, and the *Niagara Escarpment Plan*.

## 4.3 A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2019

The *Growth Plan* provides additional policy direction for municipalities located in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (“GGH”), which is planned to receive a significant share of the Province’s population and employment growth.

The *Growth Plan* promotes the efficient use of existing and planned infrastructure, increased housing density and choice, and land use patterns which balance pressures for growth and development with the protection of key agricultural and natural heritage resources.

*Growth Plan* Schedule 3 provides population and employment forecasts for all upper-tier and single-tier municipalities in the GGH. The Region is responsible for implementing these forecasts through its Official Plan by completing the LNA. Local Official Plans would then be updated through conformity exercises to implement this direction.

The Regional Structure directs forecasted growth to specific areas within local municipalities that will implement the density and intensification targets provided in the *Growth Plan*.

## 5.0 Key Planning Principles

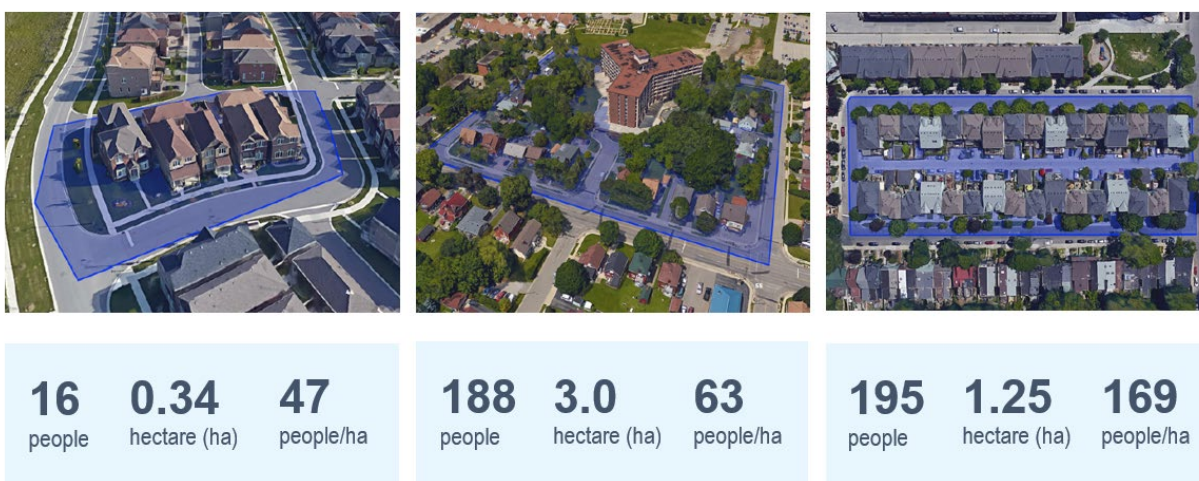
### 5.1 Intensification of Urban Areas

The intensification of urban areas is a key part of Ontario's planning documents.

Intensification refers to the redevelopment or repurposing of existing parcels, buildings, or other vacant lands at a higher density than what currently exists. Intensification is measured across a municipality's Built-Up Area.

Intensification is intended to redirect new residential development away from the periphery of urban areas in order to avoid urban sprawl into agricultural lands and key natural heritage systems. It will also make more efficient use of serviced urban land.

Intensification is different from the concept of density. Intensification measures the number of new dwelling units that are accommodated within existing Built-Up Areas. Density reflects the number of people and jobs that are located within a specified area. Intensification is a measure used to direct forecasted growth; density is usually used to guide the scale and form of new development within identified neighbourhoods.



**Figure 3:** Demonstration of density. Source: MMAH

Many Built-Up Areas in Niagara have limited opportunities for large-scale, community planning, with the exception of larger **brownfield** and **greyfield** sites.

Brownfields refer to vacant or underutilized properties that were previously used for commercial or industrial activity, which often contain leftover soil contamination that can pose a risk to public health and safety.

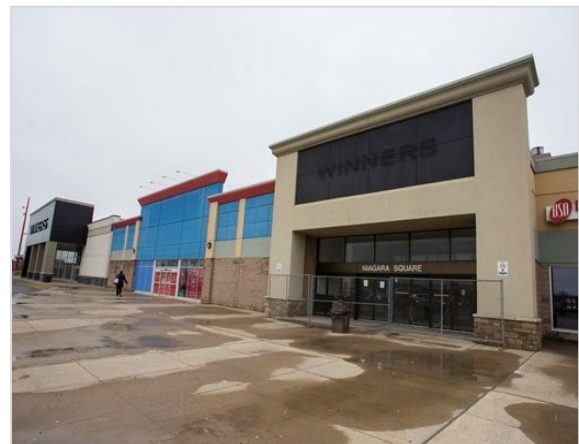
Redevelopment of brownfield properties can require costly and lengthy soil remediation; however, these sites also provide significant opportunities for intensification, as they are often comprised of one or more large parcels of land within existing Built-Up Areas and have access to municipal water and wastewater infrastructure.

Greyfields offer a similar opportunity for community planning in built-up areas. Greyfield sites refer to stretches of paved areas, such as parking lots, or other large structures, such as shopping malls and commercial plazas, which are underutilized. The development of greyfield sites provide opportunities to provide a mix of commercial, higher-density residential, and employment uses within existing neighbourhoods, that often have existing connections to transit, pedestrian networks, and other community facilities.

As available, serviced land become more scarce or costly, brownfield and greyfield sites will become more attractive for redevelopment. Additional direction for brownfields and greyfields is contained in the Employment Policy Paper, included in the Joint Report as **Appendix 10.2**.



*Figure 4: The former GM Lands in the City of St. Catharines is an example of a brownfield site.*  
**Image Source:** Julie Jocsak, *The St. Catharines Standard*.



*Figure 5: Niagara Square in the City of Niagara Falls is an example of a greyfield site.* **Image Source:** Julie Jocsak, *The Toronto Star*

## 5.2 Complete Communities

Achieving complete communities is how the Province anticipates lands to be developed, resources to be managed and protected, and investments to be made in public infrastructure.

Complete communities are defined in the *Growth Plan* as mixed-use neighbourhoods or other 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.

Complete communities are to be designed in a way that reduces urban sprawl and supports the appropriate intensification of existing built-up areas. The *Growth Plan* accomplishes this by establishing minimum intensification and density targets for designated areas of growth within a municipality.

In meeting these targets and establishing policies which support the appropriate intensification of built-up areas, municipalities are able to make more effective use of investments in infrastructure and the public realm, and in turn provide a better quality of life for its residents.

Some of the benefits of complete communities include:

- Construction or adaptation of existing street networks to accommodate all modes of transportation, including walking, cycling, and running, which result in healthier communities;
- Use of existing infrastructure in built up areas, meaning that less public funds are spent on constructing and maintaining new municipal services;
- More efficient building design and land use patterns that help reduce our carbon footprint and mitigate the impacts of climate change; and
- A fostered sense of community through the provision of an adequate number of accessible, well-designed public spaces.

Creating complete communities is foundational to the NOP; it guides the policies and objectives of the Regional Structure. The successful implementation of these policies is predicated on ensuring that an appropriate scale and form of development takes place on individual land parcels.

## 5.3 Compact Form and Transit-Supportive Development

*PPS* Section 1.1.3.4 encourages municipalities and other planning authorities to establish appropriate development standards that facilitate “intensification, redevelopment and compact form, while avoiding or mitigating risks to public health and safety.”

A compact built form is guided by massing, scale, and footprint of development and redevelopment by promoting land use patterns that allow residents to live, work, shop, and play within the same neighbourhood. The form of development should vary depending on local needs; they may include low-rise, detached housing on small lots, or larger, multi-storey developments with a mix of housing types and uses.

The layout and design of the street network is another key component of complete community, and is an important influence on the character, built form and quality of a neighbourhood. Modern principles suggest streets should be designed in ways that are easily accessible by active transportation (i.e. by walking, cycling, or running) and encourage the use of transit. This is closely related to the concept of “transit-supportive development”, which reflects the same principles of the compact built form, but with a higher concentration of employment and residential development to improve the viability, quality, and frequency of transit service.

**Figure 4** and **Figure 5** are examples of planned complete communities. Mount Pleasant Village in the City of Brampton and the Glendale District Plan Area are characterized by their municipal transit presence and access, and proximity to higher-order transit corridors, the provision of well-designed public spaces, the mix of commercial, office, recreational, and residential uses within walkable distances, and the range of housing choices available at densities which support the investments made in infrastructure and servicing to these areas.

**Figure 4** and **Figure 5** are examples only. The Regional Structure will identify appropriate densities within designated growth areas across Niagara, with careful consideration of locational context. Further, the Regional Structure will work in tandem with the Urban Design policies of the NOP to establish design and development standards for implementation within local municipal Official Plans, Zoning By-laws, and secondary plans.



**Figure 4:** Mount Pleasant Village in the City of Brampton, known as the "urban transit village", is an example of a transit-supportive, mixed-use community. Image Source: NAK Design Strategies.



**Figure 5:** The Conceptualized Main Street from the Glendale District Plan. The Plan demonstrates urban form in a contemporary example of a purpose-built complete community, which contains transit supportive density, a mix of housing types, land uses and an innovative, sustainable urban design. Image Source: Niagara Region.

## 5.4 Housing Mix and Affordability

Planning for forecasted growth means ensuring there is enough land, servicing, and housing available to accommodate the anticipated population and employment growth.

In terms of housing, Provincial policy requires the Region, as the upper-tier municipality, provide and identify a range and mix of housing options and densities that support identified intensification rates and density targets that meet the market-based and affordable housing needs of current and future residents.

Affordability, in the context of land use planning, refers to shelter costs that amount to less than 30% of annual household income for low and moderate income households.<sup>1</sup> This can include housing provided by the private, public and non-profit sectors, and all forms of housing tenure, including rental, ownership and co-operative ownership, as well as temporary and permanent housing.

Market-based housing as a concept was first introduced through the earlier changes to the *Growth Plan* and the *PPS*, and was incorporated into the land needs assessment methodology at the time of the 2020 *Growth Plan*. No formal definition was provided; however, it is understood that market-based housing requirements were included to help balance between the provision of ground-related housing, such as single-detached, semi-detached, and row housing, and the higher-density dwelling types, such as apartment buildings.

Local municipalities are responsible for establishing and planning for a local housing mix through its Official Plans. A housing mix is also established for the purpose of undertaking the LNA and addressing affordability. This is discussed in detail in the Draft Land Needs Assessment Summary document included as **Appendix 3.2**.

The Regional Structure plays a key role in establishing a housing mix. Municipal intensification rates, and density targets for Strategic Growth Areas and Designated Greenfield Areas all shape the housing mix that can be planned and accommodated within the Region.

Additionally, to support the conclusions of the Housing Report as outlined in Section 2.2.4, the housing policies of the NOP support and encourage alignment with the

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<sup>1</sup> Low and moderate income households refer to households with incomes in the lowest 60 per cent of the income distribution for the regional market area. In Niagara, this includes households making \$84,000 per year or less.

outcomes and objectives of the Region's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan, which also target an increase in more dense forms of housing.

## 6.0 Components of the Regional Structure

The *PPS* and *Growth Plan* suggest that areas of growth will differ depending on their context and location. Provincial policy distinguishes areas designated for growth and development based on function and level of intensification. The NOP must direct growth to these components in different ways, while using the principles of complete communities, compact built form, and transit-supportive development.

The proposed Regional Structure policies and mapping are included in the Joint Report as **Appendix 4.2** and **4.3**.

The following section provides a description of each land use component to be identified in the NOP, and, if applicable, their specific policy requirements under the Growth Plan.

### 6.1 Settlement Areas

*PPS* Section 1.1 directs growth and development to occur within Settlement Areas. The Niagara Region is currently comprised of 58 distinct Settlement Areas; 27 of which are Urban and 31 of which are Rural (also referred to as Hamlets).

Urban Areas are the focus for future development and the provision of municipal infrastructure and public service facilities. The majority of growth will be accommodated within Urban Areas.

Provincial policy only directs limited growth and development to Rural Settlements. Rural Settlements often have a distinct rural character, provide rural commercial and employment opportunities and support the surrounding agricultural community.

All components described in **Subsection 6.2** to **Subsection 6.5** below are located within the boundaries of Urban Areas.

A very small amount of growth is permitted outside Rural Settlements and Urban Areas and thus are not described further below.

### 6.2 Built-Up Areas

The Built-Up Area was identified by the Province in 2008. It represents the general location of existing development within the Region's Urban Areas prior to 2006. The Built-Up Area is defined as:

*“The limits of the developed urban area as defined by the Minister in consultation with affected municipalities for the purpose of measuring the minimum intensification target in this Plan.”*

Residential development occurring within the Built-Up Area is referred to as intensification. *Growth Plan* Section 2.2.2 requires a minimum intensification target be achieved across all Built-Up Areas within Niagara. Intensification refers to new 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%. In other words, the in-effect *Growth Plan* requires more intensification than in the current Official Plan.

Municipal intensification rates were determined based on thorough assessment of the capacity to accommodate growth within the Built-Up Area through intensification and infill opportunities. The geographic context of the municipality, size of the Urban Area, and existing constraints were also considered in evaluating the level of intensification that could be accommodated.

**Table 1** sets out the intensification rate for each local municipality.

**Table 1:** Municipal Intensification Rates

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Built Up Area</b>
Fort Erie	50.0%
Grimsby	98.0%
Lincoln	80.0%
Niagara Falls	50.0%
Niagara-on-the-Lake	25.0%
Pelham	25.0%
Port Colborne	30.0%
St. Catharines	95.0%
Thorold	25.0%
Wainfleet	0.0%
Welland	60.0%
West Lincoln	13.0%
<b>Niagara Region</b>	<b>56.0%</b>

Municipal intensification rates were determined based on significant consultation with local municipalities. This resulted in a higher overall intensification rate than the minimum 50% required by the Province.

**The Region has established a 56% draft intensification rate to 2051 – exceeding the minimum requirement.**

The rate is fluid and municipalities might exceed their target percentage in some years and fall short in others. The intent is that local municipalities encourage growth and development opportunities that will assist in meeting or exceeding their identified rate on average. The Region will use development monitoring, as discussed in **Subsection 7.5.2**, to track how the overall intensification rate is being met.

As seen in **Table 1**, some municipalities have a much higher intensification rates (i.e. Town of Grimsby and City of St. Catharines) than others. Municipalities within the Greenbelt Plan area typically have a higher intensification rates due to the inability to expand urban area boundaries that were tightly drawn around the affected Urban Areas when the Greenbelt Plan was first introduced in 2005. These municipalities will need to accommodate the majority of the allocated growth within their Built-Up Area as Designated Greenfield Areas are effectively built out.

In order to do so, local municipalities will be encouraged to update or undertake local intensification strategies that will assist in guiding intensification within their existing communities. Planning for intensification requires thoughtful, long term goals and objectives to consider how best to achieve the outcome of complete communities.

Secondary planning is another tool for proactively managing and directing growth. This process considers specific policies and land use for a certain area of the municipality. These plans are based on technical studies to inform and refine policy direction. They are also informed by landowners, stakeholders and the public through numerous engagement activities.

Both secondary planning and intensification strategies can be used to assist local municipalities in proactively directing growth management efforts. Both processes will engage residents and businesses to provide input in broader areas of local interest.

### **6.3 Designated Greenfield Areas**

Designated Greenfield Areas (DGA) represent the remaining lands within the Urban Area that are outside the Built-Up Area (excluding Excess Lands), as they were at the time of Provincial mapping in 2006. Generally, DGAs are comprised of large, undeveloped parcels that have access to municipal servicing and are able to accommodate a significant amount of growth and development.

*Growth Plan* Section 2.2.7 a) requires DGAs to achieve **a minimum density target of 50 residents and jobs combined per hectare**. This is consistent with the density target identified in Niagara's current Official Plan.

The minimum density target is to be measured over the entire Designated Greenfield Area of Niagara Region (excluding certain parts that are discounted such as natural heritage features, areas and systems, and other specified lands).

Unlike the intensification rate, each municipality is required to meet the same minimum 50 person and jobs per hectare within their urban boundaries.

A visualization of what this density may look like at a neighbourhood level is outlined in **Figure 6**. As discussed in **Subsection 5.1**, however, density targets in and of themselves do not determine the built form developed.



**Figure 6:** Visual representation of what a density target of 50 people and jobs per hectare may look like at the neighbourhood level. Image Source: MMAH.

Through the Settlement Area Boundary Review, the Region will determine which municipalities will require additional urban land to accommodate their allocated growth forecasts to 2051 (see **Subsection 7.4**). Any new urban lands added to the Urban Area boundary will become a DGA, subject to the requirements set out in this section. For new DGAs and existing, unplanned DGAs, secondary plans will be used to provide specific land use direction for accommodating growth within their boundaries. Additional direction is found within the District and Secondary Plan policies in **Subsection 6.1**.

#### **6.4 Strategic Growth Areas**

Strategic Growth Areas (SGAs) are lands within Urban Areas that are the focus for more significant intensification and higher-density uses. Introduced as part of the recent updates to the Growth Plan, SGAs identified by Provincial policy include:

- Urban Growth Centres;
- Major Transit Station Areas; and
- Other Strategic Growth Areas, which in Niagara, include Regional Growth Centres and District Plan Areas.

The Region will plan for growth and development in SGAs through the preparation of Secondary Plans and will work with municipalities with SGAs to ensure minimum targets are being achieved in local Official Plans and Zoning By-laws. Further discussion on the options related to identifying and planning for SGAs is outlined in **Section 7.0**.

##### **6.4.1 Urban Growth Centre: Downtown St. Catharines**

The *Growth Plan* maps one Urban Growth Centres in Niagara: Downtown St. Catharines. This designation is for areas of existing or emerging downtown that are to

be the focus of a substantial amount of growth and development, as well as focal area for investment in regional public service facilities, commercial uses, recreational uses, and major employment centres.

The *Growth Plan* requires that Downtown St. Catharines be planned to achieve a minimum density target of 150 residents and jobs combined per hectare by the year 2031. The existing density in the Downtown St. Catharines Urban Growth Centre is approximately 100 residents and jobs per hectare.

A visualization of what this density may look like is shown in **Figure 7**.



**Figure 7:** Visual representation of what a density target of 150 people and jobs per hectare may look like at the neighbourhood level. Image Source: MMAH.

As described further in the next section, the Region also considers the Downtown St. Catharines Bus Station as a Major Transit Station Area. The bus terminal is located within the Urban Growth Centre, supports the Downtown as a civic, commercial, and recreational destination, and will play a role in future planning within the Urban Growth Centre.

The City will be required to prepare a Secondary Plan for the Urban Growth Centre, which will demonstrate how it will achieve the minimum target to 2031, as well as how growth and intensification will continue to be accommodated beyond 2031 to the horizon of the NOP.

#### **6.4.2 Major Transit Station Areas**

Major Transit Station Areas are defined by the *Growth Plan* as the area including and around any existing or planned *higher order transit* station or stop within a *settlement area*; or the area including and around a major bus depot in an urban core. *Major transit*

*station areas* generally are defined as the area within an approximate 500 to 800 metre radius of a transit station, representing about a 10-minute walk.

Major Transit Station Areas encompass the lands around any existing or planned higher order transit station or stop within an Urban Area. For Niagara, these include the planned GO Transit Stations in the Town of Grimsby, City of St. Catharines, and City of Niagara Falls, and the future proposed GO Transit Station in the Town of Lincoln. Also included is the Downtown St. Catharines Bus Station, as noted above.

*Growth Plan* policies for Major Transit Station Areas only apply to areas located along an identified “priority transit corridor”. Currently, the Region’s GO Transit Stations are not identified along this corridor. As such, the *Growth Plan* has limited policy direction for Niagara’s MTSAs.

The Region, in partnership with its local municipalities, proactively approved Secondary Plans for each station area to position and plan for higher densities similar to those identified as being on a priority transit corridor.

Following the approval of the NOP, the Secondary Plans will be reviewed through local Official Plan conformity to ensure they are in line with the Regional Structure.

In all instances, a multi-modal approach should be applied in planning around MTSAs and will be supported through the transportation and urban design policies of the NOP.

### **6.4.3 Regional Growth Centres**

The *Growth Plan* allows municipalities to determine the location and extent of other SGAs. Unlike the Urban Growth Centre and MTSAs, other SGAs do not have specific *Growth Plan* policy sections that guide the form, density, and land use types permitted. These are referred to as “Other SGAs” or “Regional Growth Centres” interchangeably.

Other SGAs should be proactively planned to evolve in manner that shares the same principles of other areas that anticipate more robust growth. The Region will direct a significant amount of Niagara’s population and employment forecast to these areas even where those SGAs do not have the highest order transit the same density thresholds as others.

Currently identified is the Regional Growth Centre of Downtown Welland. A minimum density target is assigned.

Further to the discussion on the MTSAs, the same consideration is needed for connection to the Downtown Welland Regional Growth Centre. The Regional Growth Centre needs to strengthen its public transit connections by extending or offering new transit services. This will be a critical link in providing access throughout the communities and the Region in general. Enhanced access to transit can improve opportunities for housing choice and access to employment opportunities, as well as Regional destinations of broader interest and reliance.

Secondary Plans will provide a vision to guide growth within these areas. The process can proactively support infill, growth and intensification opportunities, urban design to support compatibility and technical studies prepared in support of infrastructure and transportation capacity. This proactive process will ensure that the lands within the SGA are development-ready.

In addition to Downtown Welland, Other Strategic Growth Areas include in part the District Plan Areas of Brock and Glendale. Both these areas have been identified and planned through the District Plan process to provide specific direction for growth and development to transition into complete communities. Both areas will offer frequent transit service in the form of transit hubs to connect different routes and modes of transit. They will play an important role in connecting local, inter-municipal and inter-regional transit level services.

Through the District Planning exercise, ongoing monitoring and implementation has been identified to ensure success.

## **6.5 Employment Areas**

The Growth Plan sets out four categories of forecasted employment:

- Major Office Employment
- Population-Related Employment
- Employment Land Employment
- Rural Area Employment

The majority of Major Office Employment and Population-Related Employment are anticipated to occur within Built-Up Areas, SGAs, and DGAs. These types of jobs support the development of mixed-use and complete communities, rely on transportation infrastructure, and are generally more compatible with sensitive land uses, such as residential, institutional and recreational uses.

Employment Areas are defined in the *PPS* as “areas designated in an official plan for clusters of business and economic activities including, but not limited to, manufacturing, warehousing, offices, and associated retail and ancillary facilities”. Employment Land Employment and some Major Office Employment, are planned within designated Employment Areas.

Employment Areas are mapped to help support existing businesses’ locations, offer a higher degree of protection from encroachment of more sensitive land uses such as residential (which are prohibited), and to secure a long-term future for the types of employment that often require separation from community use for compatibility purposes. Employment Areas provide a supply of jobs to those within the community.

Employment planning in Niagara has been carefully researched and analyzed as part of the NOP process since 2018. The location, type, characteristics, and density of Employment Areas are discussed in detail within the Employment Policy Paper, included with the Joint Report as **Appendix 10.2**.

The remaining employment category, Rural Area Employment, occurs outside of Urban Areas within Rural Lands and Agricultural Areas.

## **6.6 Rural Settlements (Hamlets)**

Rural Settlements are non-serviced areas with clusters of rural residential and business uses that support surrounding agricultural lands. Rural Settlements generally contain a mix of low density residential, rural commercial and employment uses, and, in some cases, public service facilities.

Hamlet development relies on private water and wastewater systems. Rural Settlements are not areas of focused population or employment growth, and will develop in a manner consistent with the rural character of the local community.

## **6.7 Rural Lands**

Rural Lands are areas located outside of Settlement Areas and Agricultural Areas. Rural Lands allow for a range of land uses that are compatible with the rural landscape and sustained by rural service levels.

Although limited development is permitted on Rural Lands, the Region’s planned population and employment growth is not directed to these lands.

## **6.8 Agricultural Area**

Agricultural Areas are located outside of Settlement Areas and are lands that are suitable for agriculture and agricultural-related uses. Agriculture is a major component

of the Region's economy, and the protection and effective use of these lands are a priority of the NOP.

Niagara is subject to the policies of the *Greenbelt Plan*. The identification of the Agricultural System within the Niagara Region is an important component of the Regional Structure, in that it helps us determine where growth and development should *not* be directed, in order to preserve these lands for their intended agricultural use. Population and housing growth is generally not contemplated within agricultural lands.

The Region has reviewed its agricultural land base as part of the NOP process. Candidate areas analyzed in consultation with the local municipalities.

Draft agricultural policies are included for discussion in the Joint Report as **Appendix 9.2**.

## **6.9 Natural Environment System (NES)**

The NES is comprised of core natural heritage and hydrological areas and features that support the natural environment. The NES is necessary to maintain biological and geological diversity, natural function, and viable populations of indigenous species and ecosystems by restricting new development and limiting Settlement Area expansions within these identified areas and features. The Regional Structure does not contemplate development within the NES.

### **6.10 Excess Lands**

Excess Lands refer to vacant, unbuilt but developable lands within Urban Areas, but outside of the Built-Up Area, that have been designated in an Official Plan for development but are in excess of what is needed to accommodate forecasted growth to 2051.

The Region will develop an approach for excess lands in the NOP and local Official Plans in consultation with applicable local municipalities.

## **7.0 Policy Direction for the Regional Structure**

The Regional Structure establishes policies and mapping to manage forecasted growth to 2051. This is done in a manner that reflects recent changes in Provincial policy and the various land use plans and infrastructure projects undertaken in the Region since RPPA 2-2009, as set out earlier in this Policy Paper.

Regional Structure policies provide direction for complete communities, promotes the development of a compact built form, emphasizes the need to plan for the impacts of a

changing climate, and supports the efficient use of infrastructure and public service facilities and a diverse range and mix of housing to ensure housing in Niagara remains affordable.

A number of specific Provincial policy requirements must be included in the Regional Structure. Other policies are discretionary, and are included to aid decision-making by the Region or local municipalities.

The following section outlines key direction of the Regional Structure policies, which addresses Provincial policy requirements and the land use planning concepts and background studies described earlier in the report.

## **7.1 Intensification Rates and Density Targets for Area Municipalities**

**Subsection 6.2** describes the minimum 50% intensification rate for all Built-Up Areas, to achieve the densities and built form that support key planning principles.

As noted, local municipal rates are reflective of the local context and ability for redevelopment and infill opportunities. The intensification rate was confirmed through discussions with local municipal planners.

**Subsection 6.3** sets out the minimum density of 50 people and jobs per hectare for development within the Designated Greenfield Area. This target is applied uniformly for all local municipalities.

### ***7.1.1 Minimum Density Targets within SGAs***

The Region carefully considered the plans detailed in **Subsection 6.4**, and the previous work and development activity within the St. Catharines Urban Growth Centre and elsewhere, to determine the appropriate density targets for the SGAs.

Staff reviewed potential build out over time in relation to envisioned land uses and permissions to set a proposed target that could reasonably be achieved.

Specifically, 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;

- calculation of the minimum and maximum densities that could be implemented within the SGAs, as established by the aforementioned policy structure; and
- applying Provincial policy to the relationship between Niagara's identified SGAs.

**Table 2** provides the draft SGA density targets.

**Table 2:** Density Targets for Identified 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>

As noted, secondary plans will be prepared or updated to reflect these targets and provide supporting land use direction for the achievement of complete communities.

## **7.2 Local Municipal Intensification Strategies and Local Growth Centres**

Many local municipalities have prepared intensification strategies to identify and provide direction for allocating growth within its Built-Up Area. An intensification strategy may be an effective way to protect stable residential neighbourhoods and direct development to those areas that can better accommodate increased population and jobs.

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

In line with the direction for Regional Growth Centres, local municipalities will be encouraged to identify **Local Growth Centres**, which refer to focus areas for growth and investment within the local municipality, and may include traditional downtowns and key mixed uses areas.

Local Centres may vary in size, nature and characteristic. They are envisioned as areas that will develop over the long term as compact, complete communities through the incorporation of higher density housing forms that support existing or planned transit routes and the expansion of the public realm.

Local Centres will not be mapped in the NOP. Instead, they will be identified in local Official Plans and will have broad policies for local municipalities to implement through conformity.

Intensification strategies will also benefit from the urban design direction of the NOP 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.

Local municipalities will require planning documents to include development standards that permit and facilitate a compact built form, a vibrant public realm and all forms of intensification throughout the Built-Up Area.

### **7.3 Future Strategic Growth Areas**

The purpose and components of Strategic Growth Areas are described in **Subsection 6.4**.

All SGAs have common elements, including proximity to major transportation infrastructure, major civic/institutional/public service facilities and existing or planned mixed use areas with a host of commercial uses.

SGAs are meant to contribute to or evolve into a complete community that offers a mix of uses, supports opportunities for people of all ages and abilities and where residents can meet their daily living needs.

The Region may identify new SGAs in the future. If a new SGA is identified, the Region will process an amendment to the NOP to map its boundary on the Regional Structure schedule. A Secondary Planning exercise will be required to provide the appropriate direction to manage growth and the development of this new SGA and provide the development standards to achieve a complete community.

## 7.4 Settlement Area Boundary Review

The Growth Plan prohibits municipalities from establishing new Settlement Areas; however, the Region may consider expansions to existing Settlement Areas, where a complex series of conditions are met through the NOP.

The Region has exclusive jurisdiction to determine Urban Area and Rural Settlement boundaries and any changes to them.

Managing growth requires balancing a broad array of interests from the environment, agriculture, servicing, transportation, community and industry. Decisions concerning one area of interest will have impacts on one or more of those remaining and therefore, there is no one single solution or consideration when considering boundaries.

The Region must follow explicit direction from Provincial Plans when considering Settlement Area boundary expansions. In particular, policies of the *PPS*, the *Greenbelt Plan* and *Growth Plan* may restrict or prohibit expansions.

As discussed in **Subsection 5.4**, new Provincial Policy directs municipalities to consider market-based housing demand as a component of the LNA and the accommodation of forecasted growth. In Niagara, market-demand includes the considerable market for low-density housing forms, such as single- and semi-detached dwellings. The need to provide single- and semi-detached housing types is one of the driving factors in Settlement Area expansions.

The LNA takes into account the location and density of Strategic Growth Areas, municipal intensification rates, and existing DGA land supply. The LNA output will provide an amount of land needs to determine the threshold question of whether an expansion is notionally needed. Detailed requirements are included in the *Growth Plan*.

Draft criteria for the Urban Settlement Area Boundary Review (SABR) can be found in the Joint Report as **Appendix 18.2**.

The Region is not making any boundary recommendations at this time. Recommendations will be made by Regional staff based on conclusions drawn from the SABR process in a future report.

### 7.4.1 Other Settlement Area Expansions and Adjustments

The NOP process is the primary means in which expansion should be considered; however, the *Growth Plan* provides two other tools to consider expansions or adjustments to Urban Area boundaries.

First, *Growth Plan* policy 2.2.8.4 outlines the process and criteria for considering **adjustments** to Settlement Area boundaries.

A municipality may consider boundary adjustments where the result is no net increase in land within settlement areas. Any consideration given to this option still requires NOP-related expansion policies of the Growth Plan being addressed and support a municipality's ability to meet with its established intensification and density targets.

The settlement area to which the lands are to be added is serviced and has sufficient reserve infrastructure capacity.

This option would not be permitted in the Greenbelt or for rural settlements.

The second way in which expansions may be considered is through permissions set out in *Growth Plan* policy 2.2.8.5 and 2.2.8.6 that allows for consideration of **an expansion of up to 40 hectares to occur in advance of a municipal comprehensive review** (which, for Niagara, is the NOP).

This option requires a significant amount of study work that meets the criteria listed in Policy 2.2.8.3.

The municipality must also ensure that growth allocated within the expansion area will be fully accounted for in the *next* LNA conducted by the Region.

This option may be used where a municipal comprehensive review is not underway, when it is apparent a municipality has outperformed its projected growth rate, and the municipality is in need of additional land to maintain its ability to accommodate growth.

Policies related to the process and criteria for allowing the expansion and adjustments to Settlement Areas, as listed above, will be included in Regional Structure policies.

## **7.5 Phasing and Monitoring of Development**

Phasing and monitoring policies will be included in the Implementation Chapter of the NOP and required to be added to local Official Plans during conformity. The Region will work collaboratively with local municipalities to ensure minimum standards are being met or exceeded.

### 7.5.1 Development Phasing

Development phasing within the DGA, including any expansions or excess lands provided through the NOP, will play a critical role in ensuring growth is occurring in a balanced manner as intended by the Growth Plan.

District or secondary planning will be required to manage how expansion lands develop. The Region, in conjunction with local municipalities, will implement a monitoring program that will track and measure the achieved local intensification rates and new DGA development. The program will provide timely and accurate results to ensure growth is being managed as efficiently as possible.

Responsible, efficient use of land and infrastructure need to be optimized to maintain appropriate expectation of capital planning and works. Phasing of development will play a critical role in achieving the needed controls on growth to avoid sprawl.

### 7.5.2 Development Monitoring

The Region will carefully track new development following NOP implementation. Growth monitoring will help make future decisions on allocations and targets.

The Region will monitor how municipalities are achieving growth beyond or less than forecasted. Forecasts associated with the *Growth Plan* are minimums, and therefore, monitoring development will allow the Region to request alternative forecasts or revise allocations between municipalities, if warranted, through future Official Plan changes.

Monitoring development within municipalities with excess lands will allow for revisions to excess lands and related policies, if necessary.

Data collection will provide the factual evidence needed to determine if infrastructure investment is being outpaced or underutilized. It will also inform whether reevaluation on timing of infrastructure may be warranted when Master Plans are reviewed.

The Region will have minimum standards for the types of data and frequency of reporting. Leveraging technology to aid in performance monitoring is expected and will better provide for real-time (or as close to real-time) analysis that can be used across all departments and jurisdictions that would benefit from “up-to-date” measures.

Furthermore, performance monitoring will provide more accurate and frequent reporting to support decisions concerning phasing strategies as a means of ensuring balanced growth (intensification and Greenfield) is occurring and if needed, curtailing sprawl.

Phasing and Monitoring policies will be developed and made available for the next draft release of the NOP.

## **8.0 Next Steps for the Regional Structure**

Following this report release, and the balance of the Niagara Official Plan Consolidated Policy Report in May 2021, the Region will undertake a series of planned Public Information Centres in Spring/Summer of 2021, and other focused consultation. Regional staff can provide additional details on this draft material, as needed, and provide the public with opportunities to pose questions, seek clarification and offer comments.

Regional staff will compile a comprehensive record of feedback received on all components of the NOP, including Regional Structure. Moving forward, consultation is expected to include all components of the NOP to maintain a complete appreciation of interconnectedness of the NOP policies.

Staff ask that comments on the Regional Structure, and the balance of the NOP materials provided, be circulated **by July 2, 2021**. This is to allow staff sufficient time to review and comment in advance of its next report in late summer 2021.