

## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

This is the Niagara Official Plan (NOP), the Regional Municipality of Niagara's long-term, strategic policy framework for managing inevitable growth coming to Niagara by guiding future land use and physical *development* thereby influencing economic, environmental, and planning decisions until 2051 and beyond.

Niagara is on the threshold of significant growth. A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2020) challenges Niagara to effectively prepare for a significant increase in population and employment growth to the year 2051. Niagara is expected to accommodate a minimum population of 694,000 and 272,000 jobs. This growth will be shaped by the proactive growth management, community building, and other forward-thinking policies of this Plan - the Region and local municipalities will be ready for the future.

Proactive growth management will require this Plan to integrate with and inform key engineering and finance programs, namely: the Development Charges update, Water and Wastewater Master Plan and Transportation Master Plan update in order to ensure the necessary *infrastructure* is in place to accommodate growth.

The strategic policy direction of the NOP balances the input provided by the comments of thousands of individuals, agencies, boards, governments, academics, and organized interest groups. This input also shaped the Pillar Statements that form the foundations of policy development for the NOP. They describe what is most important to the community and how the region will change over the next 30 years. Like the policies, Pillar Statements are interconnected and must be considered holistically.

The following are the NOP Pillar Statements:

**EXCEPTIONAL** *development* and communities - Well planned, high quality *development* in appropriate locations that improves our communities, while protecting what is valuable.

**DIVERSE** housing types, jobs and population - A wide mix of housing types and employment opportunities that attract diverse populations to Niagara across all ages, incomes and backgrounds;

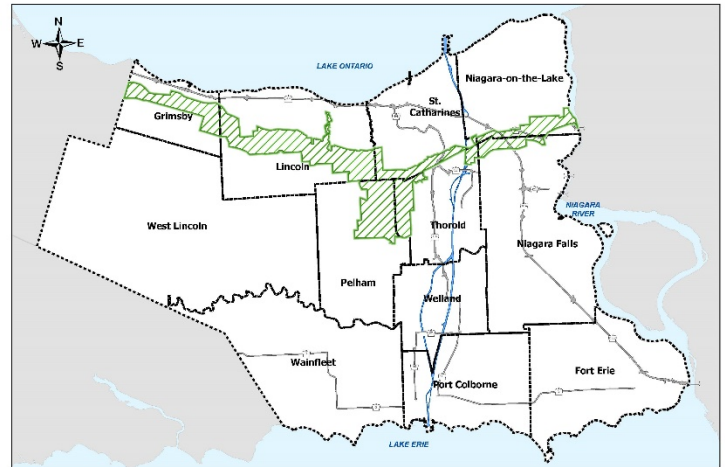
**THRIVING** agriculture and tourism - A prosperous agricultural industry and world-class tourism opportunities that grow our economy and elevate the Niagara experience.

**RESILIENT** urban and natural areas - Areas rich in biodiversity that mitigate and adapt to *climate change* while strengthening Niagara's ability to recover from extreme weather events.

## 1.1 Overview - Niagara Past, Present, and Future

Formed in 1970<sup>1</sup>, the Region is composed of twelve local municipalities, comprising urban and rural communities, with a growing population of over 450,000 and a land base of about 1,854 square kilometres.

Niagara is a geographically distinct area of land sheltered by Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, and the Niagara River. The Niagara Escarpment, a renowned UNESCO World biosphere reserve, is a prominent visual landmark and natural corridor transecting the region. These features are influencers on climate, and, combined with the sand and silt soils of the Fonthill kame moraine and along the Lake Ontario plain create irreplaceable unique areas for the growing of tender fruits and grapes. The Provincial Greenbelt Plan, which protects these lands, will require certain municipalities to intensify development to accommodate oncoming growth.



*Figure 1: Niagara region and 12 local municipalities*

Niagara's history spans more than 10,000 years of human history, beginning with the Indigenous peoples who hunted, fished, foraged and lived sustainably on the lands. There remains evidence of the role the Loyalist migration resulting from the American Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and Underground Railroad played in how Niagara developed. Evidence of Niagara's rich history can be seen in the considerable number of historic trails, sites, buildings, and monuments that are located throughout the region.

Today, Niagara is a region of contrasts where you can find quaint main streets and animated downtown cores, scenic parkways and busy highways, legendary waterfalls and reflective parks, historic pageantry, the glitz of an entertainment district, world class wineries and breweries, as well as beautiful natural areas and vineyards. These attributes together with Niagara's diverse economic base with major employment in the hospitality industry, manufacturing, agriculture, construction, service businesses, educational and medical facilities, and governments as well as recent GO train connection to the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), makes Niagara a desirable destination for growth. The

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<sup>1</sup> On June 26, 1969, the *Province* of Ontario enacted The Regional Municipality of Niagara Act. On January 1, 1970, 12 area municipal governments and 1 regional government replaced the 2 counties and 26 municipal structures.

challenge is managing growth sustainably to maintain and enhance all these attributes.

## 1.2 Planning Context

### 1.2.1. Legislative Basis

This Plan supersedes the Region's previous Official Plan. In 1973 the Region adopted a Regional Policy plan with amendments throughout the 1970's to solidify urban boundaries. Further core amendments to address natural heritage protection and growth management were approved. It was in 2014 that the Regional Policy Plan was reformatted into an Official Plan. An Official Plan is not intended to be a static document. In accordance with the provisions of the Planning Act, the Region is required to prepare and update its Official Plan.

In 2017, Regional Council determined that a new Official Plan was needed and directed Regional staff to commence a multi-year comprehensive study. The Planning Act requires that all Official Plans contain goals, objectives, and policies to manage and direct physical (land use) change and its effects on the cultural, social, economic, and natural environment within legislated boundaries. It is required to have policies and measures as are practicable to ensure the adequate provision of *affordable* housing, a description of the measures and procedures for informing and obtaining the views of the public, and other policies or measure as may be prescribed.

This Plan was adopted by Regional Council on XXXX, 2022. The *Province* is the approval authority for this Plan.

### 1.2.2. Plan Conformity

This Plan is a legal document. The Planning Act requires that all Regional and local *public works projects*, local Official Plans, amendments, land-use related by-laws, and all future *development* must conform to the approved Plan.

The Planning Act requires that local Official Plans must be updated to conform to this Plan within one year of Provincial approval.

Under the Planning Act, the Region is the approval authority for local Official Plan conformity. To assist local municipalities each policy section of this Plan contains policies to guide conformity of their Official Plans. Within this framework, local Official Plans are to provide the detailed community planning goals, objectives, and policies that implement this Plan in a manner that reflects unique local needs and circumstances.

Land-use planning is a shared responsibility between the Region and local municipalities. This responsibility is grounded in the idea that citizens are best served by effective regional and local municipal partnerships and collaboration, including the development and review of their respective Official Plans.

The NOP is required to comply with, where necessary the policy and regulatory framework established by the *Province*, as outlined in the Provincial Policy Statement (2020), the A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2020), the Niagara Escarpment Plan (2017), the Greenbelt Plan (2017), and other Provincial legislation.

#### **1.2.3. Review and Amendment**

This Plan will be reviewed and amended as required in the opinion of Regional Council to meet the changing needs of the people of Niagara, and to reflect responses prompted by new issues, information, and societal values. Amendments to this Plan can be initiated by Regional Council, or in response to an application by an individual, the Council of a local municipality, or any other public body. The process for amending this Plan will be in accordance with the provisions of the Planning Act and may be exempt from Provincial approval.

#### **1.2.4. Plan Utilization**

This Plan will be used by Regional Council and local municipalities relative to making planning decisions and updating Official Plans and Zoning By-laws. This Plan will also be used by other government agencies, business, industry and private citizens in considering their own plans, investments, and programs.

### **1.3 How to Read the Plan**

#### **1.3.1. Relationship with Provincial Legislation**

This Plan must be read in conjunction with the Provincial Policy Plans identified in 1.2.2 above.

This Plan builds upon the policy foundation provided by the Provincial legislation and provides additional and more specific land-use planning policies to address issues facing Niagara.

Within the Greenbelt Plan Area, policies of this Plan that address the same, similar, related, or overlapping matters as the Greenbelt Plan do not apply except where the policies of Growth Plan or the Greenbelt Plan provide otherwise.

Where there is a conflict between the Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan, Niagara Escarpment Plan, or this Plan regarding the natural environment or human health, the direction that provides more protection to the natural environment or human health prevails.

### **1.3.2. Format**

This Plan consists of text, tables, schedules, glossary of terms, figures, and comment boxes. The schedules, tables and glossary of terms must be read in the context of the related text. For the purpose of the Planning Act and the Municipal Act, Chapters 1 to 7 and the glossary of terms of this Plan, inclusive of text, schedules, and tables, shall be considered the Plan.

Figures show factual and/or conceptual information and are included in the Plan for illustrative purposes. Comment boxes are included within the Plan to add context and clarification. Figures and comment boxes are not part of the Plan and may be changed or updated from time to time by Regional Council without requiring an amendment to this Plan. Further, changes to certain schedules may be made without an amendment to the NOP where noted in policy.

Italicized terms contained in the Plan are included in the Glossary of Terms. Certain terms are used in this Plan for the purpose of achieving conformity with Provincial Plans and policies. Defined terms are intended to capture both the singular and plural forms of these terms.

Sections of this Plan may be re-numbered without amendment provided that the sequence and hierarchy of the sections are not affected by the re-numbering.

### **1.3.3. Horizon of this Plan**

Where a specified planning horizon is required, this Plan uses the year 2051. However, in all planning decisions, it must be considered that land-use decisions may have an impact on the region well beyond this 30-year horizon. The objectives of this Plan are intended to be achieved within the horizon of this Plan. Nothing in this Plan limits the planning for *infrastructure* and *public service facilities* beyond the horizon of the Plan. However, planning for *infrastructure* will not predetermine the form, pattern, or extent of *settlement area* boundary expansions.

#### **1.3.4. Interpretation**

Where the term “Region” is used, it refers to the Corporation of the Regional Municipality of Niagara. Where the term “region” is used, it refers to the geographical area comprising the Niagara region.

It is important to consider the specific language of the policies. The choice of language is intended to distinguish between the types of policies and the nature of implementation. Auxiliary verbs, such as “shall”, “should”, and “may” are used throughout this Plan. “Shall” implies that the policy directive is mandatory and requires full compliance. For example, “Prime agricultural land and specialty crop areas shall be protected for long-term use for agriculture, *development* and site alteration shall not be permitted.” The term “should” implies that the policy should be complied with unless there is a good planning rationale. Other policies use enabling or supportive language, such as “may”, “promote”, and “encourage”, which implies that the policy is permissive and not mandatory or obligatory. There is some discretion when applying a policy with enabling or supportive language in contrast to a policy with a directive, limitation, or prohibition.

None of the policies are intended to formally commit Regional Council to provide funding for their implementation. Funding decisions will be made by Regional Council on a case-by-case basis.

#### **1.3.5. Determining Applicability and Conformity**

The Plan is intended to be read in its entirety. All policies must be considered together to determine applicability and conformity. Individual policies should not be read or interpreted in isolation. Relevant policies are to be applied to each situation. When more than one policy is relevant, a decision-maker should consider all of the relevant policies to understand how they work together. The language of each policy will assist in understanding how the policies are to be implemented.

While specific policies sometimes refer to other policies for ease of use, these cross-references do not take away from the need to read the Plan as a whole.

There is no implied priority in the order in which the policies appear, unless otherwise stated.

#### **1.3.6. Policies Represent Minimum Standards**

The policies of this Plan represent minimum standards. Decision-makers are encouraged to go beyond these minimum standards to



address matters of importance, unless doing so would conflict with any policy of this Plan.

## 1.4 Organization of the Niagara Official Plan

The Plan is organized into seven chapters and a Glossary of Terms.

### 1.4.1. Chapter 1 - Introduction – Making Our Mark

The introduction identifies Niagara's planning context, the Pillar Statements and Directives upon which the Plan is based, the legislative basis of the Plan, a guide to reading the Plan and an outline of the plan's structure and organization. Key Directives identify the main thrusts of work necessary to achieve the Pillar Statements relative to core Chapters and are outlined for each Chapter below.

### 1.4.2. Chapter 2 – Growing Region

**Directive** – Manage growth strategically and diversify the housing stock to accommodate all ages and incomes.

Growing Region identifies how and where growth and *development* are to occur within Niagara. It identifies population and employment forecasts, land needs and the distribution of forecasted growth, as well as Niagara's growth strategy. This chapter contains general policies that support residential *intensification*, *redevelopment*, and other enhancements to the supply of housing to address affordability in Niagara. *Settlement area* boundaries and *fringe planning* are also addressed. There are several schedules and tables that must be read in conjunction with the policies.

### 1.4.3. Chapter 3 – Sustainable Region

**Directive** – Enhance the sustainability and *resilience* of Niagara's built and natural environment.

Sustainable Region outlines the policy framework that will enhance the sustainability and *resilience* of the Region's built and natural environment. Policies and schedules for the integrated Natural Environment System and watershed planning will provide for the protection of environmental features and ecological functions from adverse impacts. The policies of this chapter also give direction for climate change across all sectors, although climate change will also be addressed throughout the Plan.

### 1.4.4. Chapter 4 – Competitive Region

**Directive** – Plan and manage growth to position Niagara for economic prosperity.

The Competitive Region chapter focuses on the importance of a vital, competitive, and diverse economy, and sound tax base to position Niagara for economic prosperity. Agricultural policies direct for the protection and enhancement of Niagara's vital Agri-food sector. Employment policies identify and protect *employment areas*, establish density targets for *employment areas* and provide evaluation processes for use in converting existing or establishing future *employment areas*. Policies in this chapter also protect *mineral aggregate resources* from incompatible land uses and provide for extraction while minimizing environmental and social impacts.

#### **1.4.5. Chapter 5 – Connected Region**

**Directive** – Provide connections within and between communities, and outside the region.

The Connected Region chapter addresses Niagara's *infrastructure*, transportation and services existing and future needs. Policies direct for integrated planning and *development* and ensure capacity to support forecasted population and employment growth, financial sustainability and *climate change* resiliency. Transportation policies prioritize investments in public transit, the design and construction of *complete streets*, and active transportation. *Infrastructure* policies address the Region's *infrastructure* needs relating to drinking water, wastewater, waste, energy, and utility services.

#### **1.4.6. Chapter 6 – Vibrant Region**

**Directive** – Elevate the livability and engaging qualities of communities, facilities and attractions.

Vibrant Region focuses on elevating the livability of Niagara's communities and introduces policies related to creating vibrant urban and rural places. District Plans and Secondary Plans are identified as important areas of interest. Policies provide a framework for proactive, coordinated and comprehensive growth management planning within these defined areas. Urban design policies assist the Region in achieving a high-quality built environment through the design of the *built form* and mobility networks. Archaeology is also addressed in this chapter with policies directing for conservation of *cultural heritage resources* and early screening for *significant archaeological resources* as part of Planning Act applications.

#### **1.4.7. Chapter 7 - Implementation**

Implementation policies identify how the Plan is intended to be carried out to achieve the key directives, and focuses on identifying



consultation requirements, performance indicators, monitoring, coordination of roles, complete applications, phasing, and site-specific policies.

#### **1.4.8. Glossary of Terms**

Italicized terms contained in the Plan are defined in the Glossary of Terms.

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