



# OUR REGION | OUR COMMUNITY | OUR HOME

## A DISCUSSION DOCUMENT FOR THE 2015 CO-ORDINATED REVIEW

- THE GROWTH PLAN FOR THE GREATER GOLDEN HORSESHOE
- THE GREENBELT PLAN
- THE OAK RIDGES MORaine CONSERVATION PLAN
- THE NIAGARA ESCARPMENT PLAN

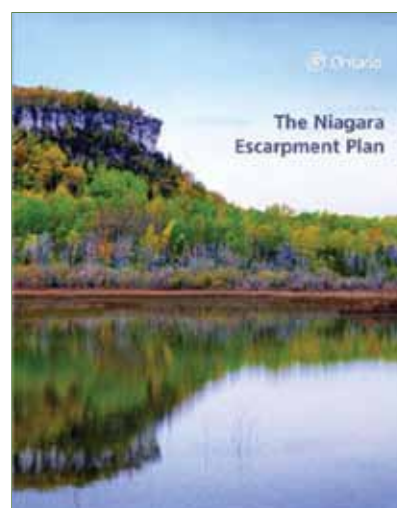
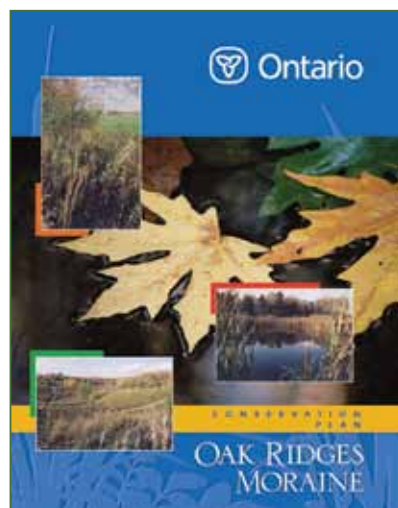
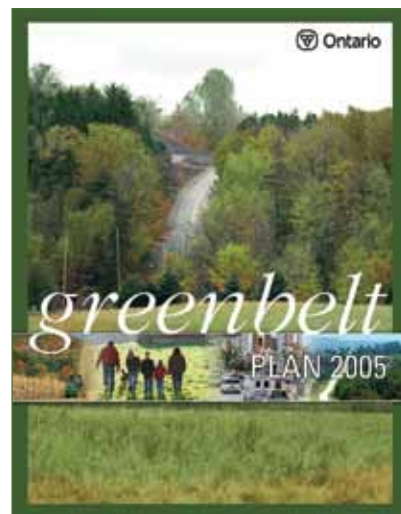
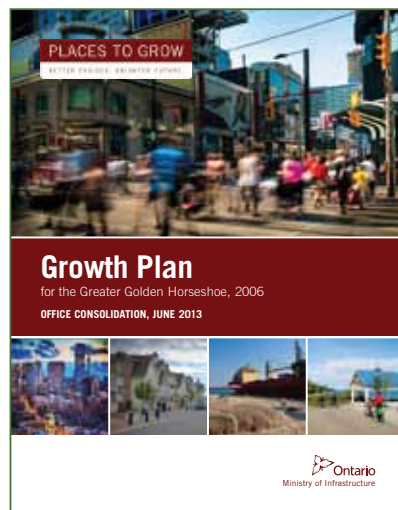
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# 1



## THE REGION

The Greater Golden Horseshoe is one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing regions in North America. Look around and you will see a rich tapestry of urban and rural communities, embedded in a unique natural environment, with people enjoying a quality of life that is second to none.

The region is home to people from every corner of the world. It offers a fast-moving, diverse and flexible economy that generates about two-thirds of Ontario's and one-quarter of Canada's Gross Domestic Product.<sup>i</sup>

It has some of Canada's most important and productive farmland. Its fertile soil, moderate climate and abundant water resources support agricultural production that cannot be duplicated elsewhere in the province or the country.

Many of Canada's most significant ecologic and hydrologic natural environments and scenic landscapes are located in the region, including the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment. These natural areas clean our air, provide our drinking water and support recreational activities that benefit our health and quality of life.

Today, over nine million people live and work in the region – over two-thirds of Ontario's and more than one-quarter of Canada's population.<sup>ii</sup>



School group hiking in the Greenbelt  
Credit: Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation

This number is rapidly rising. By 2041, an estimated 13.5 million people will call this region home, with the number of jobs forecast to rise from 4.5 million to 6.3 million. This will increase our population by almost 50 per cent and boost the number of jobs by 40 per cent. <sup>iii</sup>

This growth is welcome. Growth is an important component of all thriving communities. If carefully planned and smartly managed, it is an opportunity to build a stronger, more prosperous Ontario, with vibrant urban and rural communities that offer more options to live, work and play.

The region also faces challenges that can impact our quality of life: sprawl and highly-varied rates of growth; mounting congestion; increased pressure on infrastructure; loss of agricultural land and natural spaces; water quality challenges; changing demographics that include an aging population; and a changing climate.

As the region grows and changes, we must address these complex and interconnected opportunities and challenges, while respecting all that makes the region unique. By understanding and managing various interests, we can ensure the prosperity of Ontario, its people and future generations.



Farmer's Market in Mississauga



Farm in the Greenbelt  
Credit: Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation



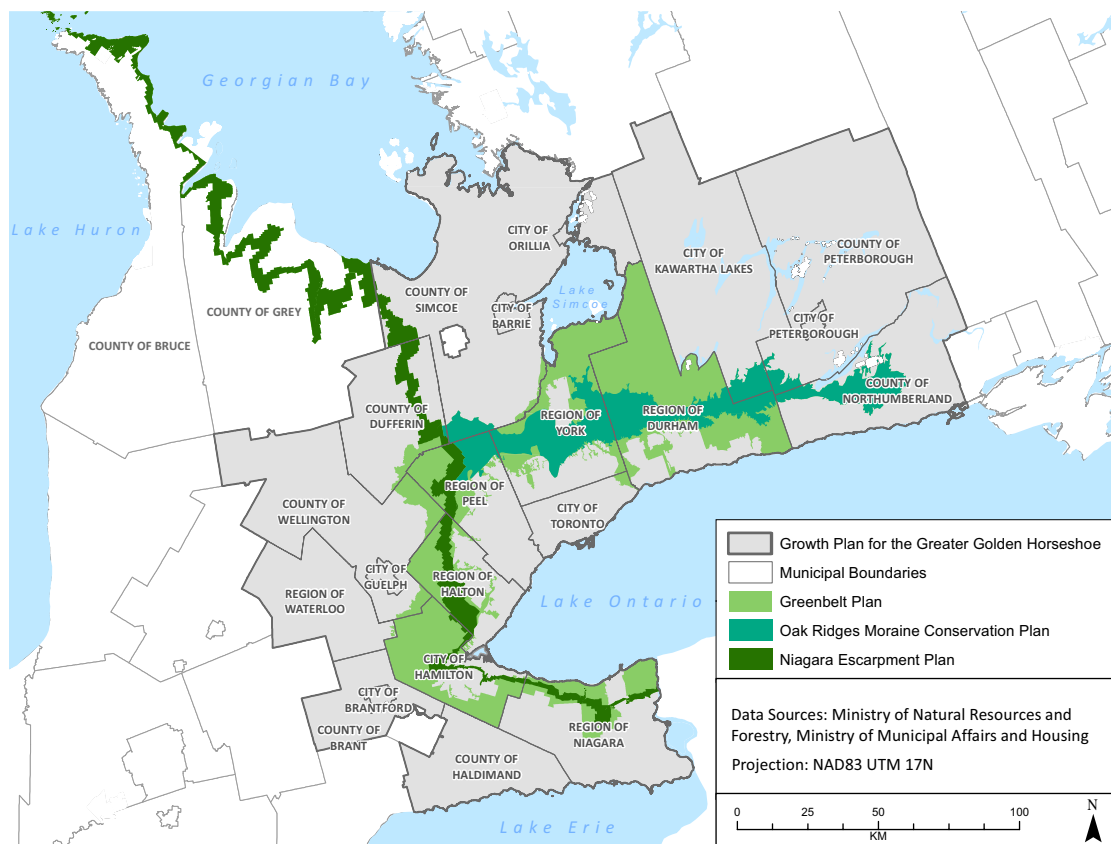
Bee pollinating a flower

# 2



## THE FOUR PROVINCIAL PLANS

Over the years, the province has put into place legislation, plans, policies and programs that have guided the region's growth and protected its environment. In 1985, it established the *Niagara Escarpment Plan* (revised in 1994 and 2005). In 2002, it approved the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan*. The province embarked on a landmark initiative for the region and created the *Greenbelt Plan* in 2005, followed by the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (the "*Growth Plan*") in 2006.



**Figure 1: The Region and Plan Areas** (for a larger version of this map please see page 36)

These four plans, along with other provincial and municipal plans, policies and programs, direct planning and organize how cities and communities grow in the region. They have received local, national and international recognition for their roles in promoting responsible growth into the future.

Together, these plans provide direction on how to accommodate growth in a smart, sustainable way that uses land more efficiently and protects resources, while distinguishing between urban and rural areas.

The plans encourage development patterns that make the most of existing buildings and infrastructure, and support a modern, integrated and seamless transportation network that allows for more efficient movement of goods and people.

They help to create complete communities that attract workers and businesses to the region, and ensure that existing businesses have access to the infrastructure they need. In doing so, the plans contribute to the region's continued prosperity and economic competitiveness, while supporting the province's commitment to growing the economy and creating jobs.

To help mitigate future climate change, the plans encourage compact built form and complete communities, which can reduce greenhouse gas emissions through improved energy efficiency and a reduced need to drive. They also protect agricultural lands, water resources and natural areas that support our efforts to address and adapt to climate change.

Although developed at different times and for different purposes, the plans work together to provide a broad, long-term planning framework for the region that is almost through the first round of implementation. For the *Niagara Escarpment Plan*, implementation has been managed by the Niagara Escarpment Commission. For the rest of the plans, the first step of implementation has been to bring municipal official plans into conformity with the plans, thus ensuring that municipal planning reflects the plans' policies.

**Complete communities meet people's needs for daily living throughout an entire lifetime. They provide convenient access to an appropriate mix of jobs, local services and community infrastructure, including affordable housing, schools, recreation and open space. Convenient access to public transportation and options for safe, non-motorized travel are also provided.**

## 2.1 THE GOALS OF THE REVIEW

As we review the four plans, it is important to reflect on the successes we have achieved, while recognizing the challenges we have faced and those that lay ahead.

The plans provide a framework for growing the region in an integrated and co-ordinated manner. Acknowledging the need to use land more efficiently, the review will focus on specific goals while balancing competing interests.

We are starting to see positive results since the implementation of this framework. For example, a key goal of the *Greenbelt Plan* is to stop fragmentation of agricultural land by limiting non-agricultural lot creation. In the area protected by the Greenbelt, the number of rural lots has increased by only 1.3 per cent between 2007 and 2014.



Hamilton skyline

- **All 21 upper- and single-tier municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe have adopted official plan amendments or official plans to achieve conformity with the *Growth Plan*, and 76 per cent of those are in effect or substantially in effect.**
- **71 per cent of lower-tier municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe have adopted official plans to be in conformity with the *Growth Plan*.**
- **91 per cent of upper- and single-tier municipalities have adopted amendments or official plans to conform with the *Greenbelt Plan*, and 64 per cent are in effect or substantially in effect.**
- **59 per cent of the lower-tier municipalities have adopted official plans to be in conformity with the *Greenbelt Plan*.**

We are beginning to see more compact development patterns. Between 2007 and 2010, upper- and single-tier municipalities across the region, excluding Toronto, reduced greenfield development by accommodating 44 per cent of new residential development in already developed areas. In Toronto, all growth is within already developed areas.

Toronto is experiencing unprecedented levels of new office and residential development that is reflective of the demand for vibrant downtown centres. Other municipalities are planning new and re-invigorated urban centres, for example, Mississauga City Centre, Markham Centre, Downtown Kitchener/Uptown Waterloo and Downtown Hamilton.

We are also seeing a greater variety of housing types. There has been a shift in new housing completions towards higher density forms like row houses and condominiums, which will give people more choice in meeting their housing needs throughout their lives. The recent regulatory changes under the *Building Code Act* to allow six-storey wood construction give builders and the public more flexible building options, further supporting a greater variety of housing types in the region.

Despite these early successes, there is still more to do. Congestion remains a serious concern. Farmland and natural areas, such as wetlands and woodlands, are still being lost. Low-density development persists in some parts of the region, creating the risk that we will continue to consume more land than is necessary.

Now, with the first stage of implementation almost complete, we are at an appropriate time to consider whether the plans go far enough to tackle these and other issues or if we can do more to address them as the region's population continues to grow.

Within this context, the review will focus on how the plans can better achieve the following six goals:



Grapes being harvested in the Niagara Region

- **Protecting agricultural land, water and natural areas:** Our agricultural lands, lakes, rivers, wetlands and woodlands are finite and valuable resources that feed and provide drinking water to communities in our region and beyond. They provide important economic and ecological benefits, and improve our quality of life.
- **Keeping people and goods moving, and building cost-effective infrastructure:** Aligning land use planning and infrastructure, including transit, can realize cost savings, produce more vibrant communities, ensure the mobility of people and goods, and increase our region's sustainability over the long term.
- **Fostering healthy, livable and inclusive communities:** Healthy, livable, inclusive and complete communities can improve our quality of life, attract people and jobs to the region, reduce healthcare costs and be accessible to all Ontarians at all stages of life.
- **Building communities that attract workers and create jobs:** Communities need to be planned in ways that attract skilled workers and their employers, and that ensure land is readily available for a range of employment uses. This is fundamental to maintaining our economic competitiveness.
- **Addressing climate change and building resilient communities:** Climate change is one of the most significant challenges facing the region. Taking action to address climate change, and build resilient landscapes and communities can improve our health and quality of life, as well as reduce the damage and related costs resulting from extreme weather events.
- **Improving implementation and better aligning the plans:** Better implementation and alignment between the plans can improve the efficiency with which the plans' goals are realized, and provide greater certainty for our communities and developers.

We have separated these goals to facilitate and organize public consultation, but they do not exist in isolation. Throughout the review, we encourage you to think about how these goals, together, support a region that is prosperous and healthy as it moves into the future.



Skating in Mississauga's Celebration Square

## 2.2 THE CO-ORDINATED APPROACH TO CONSULTATION

In recognition of their many complementary policy goals, the province is co-ordinating the review of all four plans to ensure a consistent and integrated approach that reinforces common policy goals. The co-ordinated review will also inform the review of The Big Move, Metrolinx's regional transportation plan, to ensure that the plans are working together to build an efficient and modern transportation network for the region.

### 2.2.1 Opportunities to Participate

We strongly encourage you to join the conversation. The plans guide decisions that impact many aspects of our daily lives. Therefore, it is important to hear from you about the issues you think are most important for the future of your communities and the region.

The review will include two formal stages of public consultation.

Starting with the release of this document, the first stage will continue throughout early to mid 2015. During this time, municipalities, landowners, stakeholders, Aboriginal communities and the general public can provide input on all matters outlined in this document to inform our understanding of how the plans can better meet their objectives.

This stage will involve town hall meetings held across the region, where all feedback will be welcome. Provisions have also been made for online submissions and submissions through the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry. The information and viewpoints gathered in this stage will inform the development of proposed amendments to the plans. For the most up-to-date information on regional town hall meetings and other opportunities to participate in the review, please visit [ontario.ca/landuseplanningreview](http://ontario.ca/landuseplanningreview).

The second stage of public consultation will focus on obtaining feedback on potential amendments to the plans.

The unique perspectives of Aboriginal communities are vital to this process. The region's lands, waters and natural resources have supported Aboriginal communities, economies and cultures for thousands of years. We value and respect the insights of Aboriginal peoples, and will work directly with Aboriginal communities to ensure there is ample opportunity for involvement throughout the co-ordinated review process.

For more information on the key goals of the review, to respond to the discussion questions and/or to provide other feedback, please see [Section 4](#).



Hands holding a seedling

# 3



## BACKGROUND ON THE FOUR PROVINCIAL PLANS AND PLANNING FRAMEWORK

This section summarizes Ontario's broader land use planning framework. It also provides greater detail on each of the four plans and how they work together with other provincial initiatives.

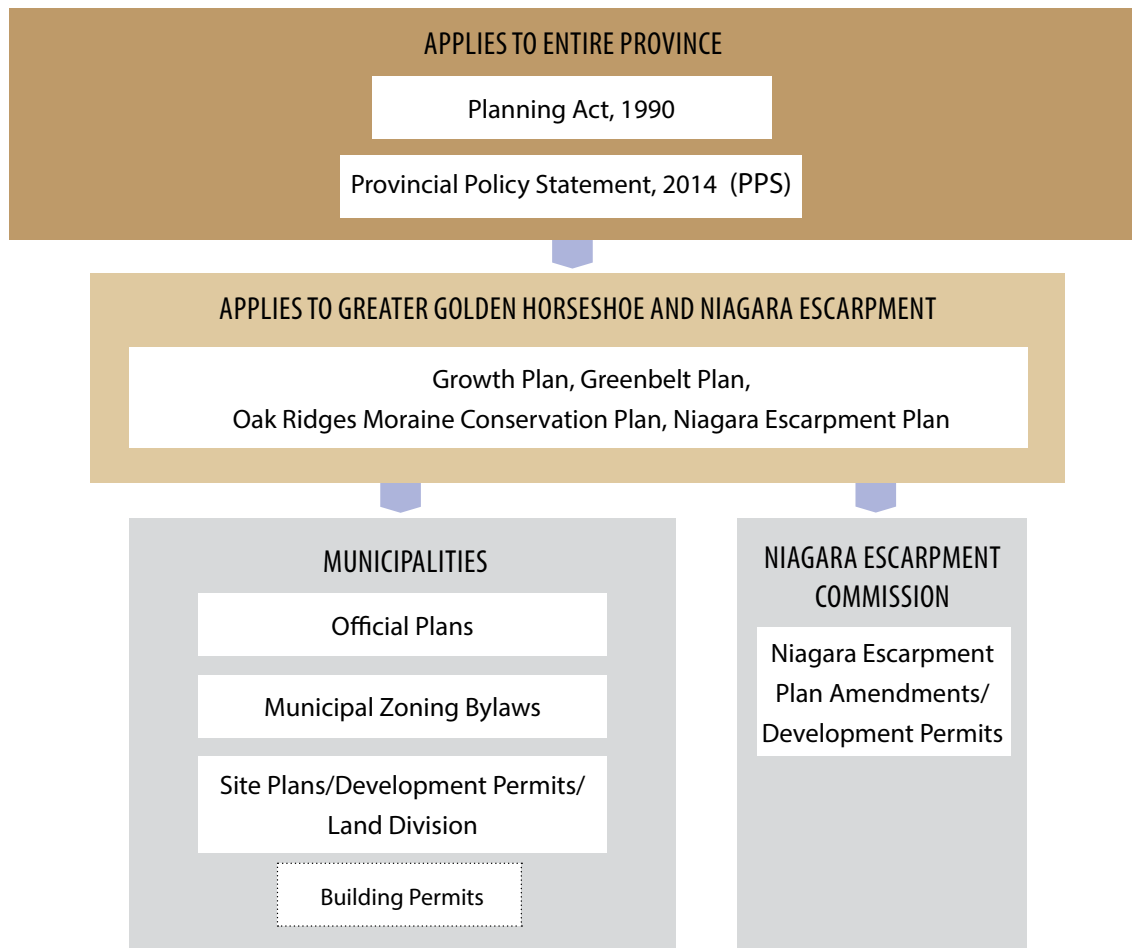
### 3.1 ONTARIO'S LAND USE PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The responsibility for long-term planning in Ontario is shared between the province and municipalities. The province sets the ground rules and directions for land use planning through the *Planning Act* and the Provincial Policy Statement. Additional plans, such as the four plans under review, are created as needed to provide more detailed and geographically specific policies.

Municipalities are the primary implementers of the province's land use policy framework. Our cities, towns and surrounding rural areas use official plans and land use decisions to give shape to local priorities and to steer their communities' growth, while implementing provincial policies.

Planning is fundamentally a public process. The input of the public, communities, developers, stakeholders and Aboriginal communities is vital throughout the planning process and to helping municipalities implement the province's policy framework.

For more information on the provincial land use planning system, please visit [ontario.ca/bzln](http://ontario.ca/bzln).



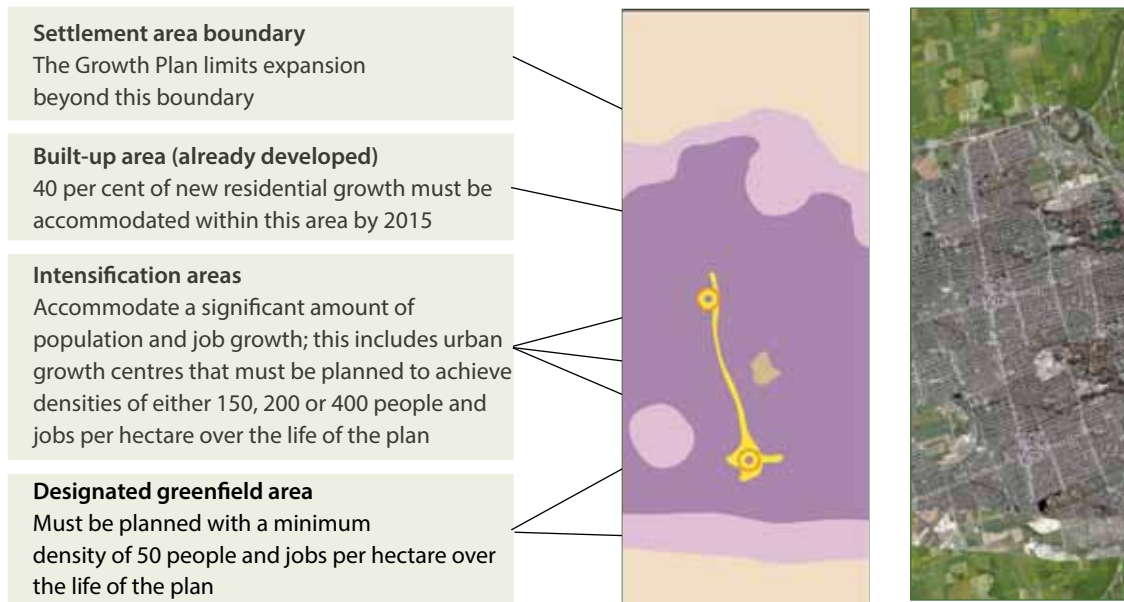
**Figure 2:** Overview of Ontario's Land Use Planning Framework

## 3.2 THE GROWTH PLAN: WHERE AND HOW WE GROW

The *Growth Plan* sets the direction for accommodating growth and development in the region. It requires that municipalities: grow in ways that use land and resources more efficiently, reducing outward growth; build new developments in ways that use existing infrastructure to the fullest potential; and create complete communities.

The goals of the *Growth Plan* are to:

- accommodate growth through intensification and build at sustainable, livable densities to curb sprawl and avoid the unnecessary loss of farmland and natural areas
- optimize new and existing infrastructure



**Figure 3:** Growth Plan Land Use Terminology

- focus new development to create complete communities and revitalize downtowns
- plan public transit, reinforced by transit supportive densities, as the first priority for moving people
- plan highways and highway corridors to promote efficient goods movement and to support compact built form
- ensure appropriate land is available to accommodate future employment growth and that it is planned to facilitate economic development
- promote a culture of conservation which includes, but is not limited to, conservation policies within municipal official plans.

The plan distinguishes between how high-density cities, smaller cities and surrounding rural areas should accommodate growth. Central to *Growth Plan* goals are targets that direct how municipalities will accommodate new growth. The plan requires that a minimum of 40 per cent of new residential development occur within already developed areas (known as the built-up area in the plan) by 2015, and each year thereafter. Additionally, the plan sets a density target for new greenfield developments (development in previously undeveloped areas) that requires they be planned to achieve densities of at least 50 people and jobs per hectare. Existing and emerging downtowns that are identified as urban growth centres in the plan are provided with minimum densities that range from 150 to 400 people and jobs per hectare.



Density of approximately 50 people and jobs combined per hectare



Density of approximately 150 people and jobs combined per hectare



Density of approximately 200 people and jobs combined per hectare



Density of approximately 400 people and jobs combined per hectare

**Figure 4:** Hypothetical streetscapes depicting the *Growth Plan* density targets

The *Growth Plan* also calls on municipalities and the province to link planning for growth with planning for infrastructure, so that transit, roads, sewers, schools and other services are in place to meet the needs of the region's growing communities. The plan encourages active transportation, which contributes to healthier communities, as people can walk and cycle to meet their daily needs. It requires compact development, which is more energy efficient, diminishes the heating and cooling needs of buildings, and reduces the need to drive, decreasing greenhouse gas emissions. These efforts reduce costs, promote conservation and build greater resiliency.

For more information on the *Growth Plan*, please visit [ontario.ca/bzlo](https://ontario.ca/bzlo).

### 3.3 THE PLANS FOR THE GREENBELT: PROTECTING WHAT IS VALUABLE

The region's Greenbelt contains almost two million acres (800,000 hectares) of protected land. It is the largest and most strongly protected greenbelt in the world. It includes the Niagara Escarpment, the Oak Ridges Moraine and the land known as 'Protected Countryside' that lies at the centre of the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The Greenbelt contains important natural and agricultural areas, and supports a wide range of recreational and cultural opportunities. Protecting these agricultural lands and natural areas supports the quality of life and health of the region's communities.

The *Niagara Escarpment Plan* and *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan* were established to protect the ecological and hydrological integrity of these two important geologic features in perpetuity. The *Greenbelt Plan* builds on the protection provided by these two plans, striving to secure the ecological, social and economic value of the broader rural area. All three plans protect natural features and agricultural lands from urban development. As outlined below, each plan takes a slightly different approach, reflecting their differing policy objectives.

#### 3.3.1 The Greenbelt Plan

The *Greenbelt Plan* establishes the Protected Countryside, which supports agriculture as the predominant land use and seeks to prevent the loss and fragmentation of agricultural land. It also:

- gives long-term protection to the natural heritage and water resource systems that sustain ecological and human health
- provides for a range of complementary economic and social activities including tourism, recreation and resource uses.

Within the Protected Countryside, the *Greenbelt Plan* identifies and protects an agricultural system composed of prime agricultural areas, rural areas, and two unique specialty crop areas (the Niagara Peninsula Tender Fruit and Grape Area, and the Holland Marsh). It identifies and protects natural areas and water resource systems that extend from the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges Moraine. It also includes policies for towns, villages and hamlets within the Greenbelt,

**The 2013 Urban River Valley Designation amendment to the *Greenbelt Plan* helps the Greenbelt grow along river valleys in urban areas, connecting the Greenbelt to the Great Lakes and inland lakes, to ensure long-lasting connectivity and protection.**

**For more information on the Urban River Valley Designation, please see [greenbelt.ca/urbanrivervalleys](http://greenbelt.ca/urbanrivervalleys).**

although most growth in these settlement areas is guided by the Provincial Policy Statement, municipal official plans and applicable *Growth Plan* policies.

For more information on the *Greenbelt Plan*, please visit [ontario.ca/bzkk](https://ontario.ca/bzkk).

### 3.3.2 The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan

The *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan* protects approximately 470,000 acres (190,000 hectares) of the unique moraine landform. It protects the moraine's important surface water and groundwater resources, as well as its natural features and biodiversity.

The plan's objectives are to:

- protect the ecological and hydrological integrity of the Oak Ridges Moraine Area
- ensure that only land and resource uses that maintain, improve or restore the ecological and hydrological functions of the Oak Ridges Moraine Area are permitted
- maintain, improve or restore all the elements that contribute to the ecological and hydrological functions of the Oak Ridges Moraine Area, including the quality and quantity of its water and its other resources
- ensure the Oak Ridges Moraine Area is maintained as a continuous natural landform and environment for the benefit of present and future generations
- provide for land and resource uses and development compatible with the other objectives of the plan
- provide for continued development within existing urban settlement areas and recognize existing rural settlements
- provide for a continuous recreational trail through the Oak Ridges Moraine Area that is accessible to all
- provide for other public recreational access to the Oak Ridges Moraine Area.



Water body in the Oak Ridges Moraine

**The Oak Ridges Moraine is often referred to as the 'rain barrel' of southern Ontario, due to its role as the primary groundwater recharge area in the central part of the region, supplying drinking water to about 250,000 people. It forms the headwaters of 65 streams flowing south to Lake Ontario and north to Lake Simcoe, Lake Scugog, Rice Lake and Georgian Bay.**

The *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan* sets out permitted users under four land use designations:

- *Natural Core Areas* and *Natural Linkage Areas* create a continuous east-west ecological connection across the entire plan area
- *Countryside Areas* promote agriculture and other rural economic uses
- *Settlement Areas* are largely governed by the Provincial Policy Statement, municipal official plans and applicable *Growth Plan* policies.

For more information on the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan*, please visit [ontario.ca/bzlq](http://ontario.ca/bzlq).

### 3.3.3 The Niagara Escarpment Plan

The *Niagara Escarpment Plan* protects approximately 480,000 acres (195,000 hectares) of land to support a continuous natural environment along the Escarpment. It ensures that development on the Niagara Escarpment and in its immediate vicinity is compatible with protecting the natural environment.

The objectives of this plan are to:

- protect unique ecological and historic areas
- maintain and enhance the quality and character of natural streams and water supplies
- provide adequate opportunities for outdoor recreation
- maintain and enhance the open landscape character of the Niagara Escarpment in so far as possible, by such means as compatible farming or forestry, and by preserving the natural scenery
- ensure all new development is compatible with the purpose of the plan
- provide for adequate public access to the Niagara Escarpment
- support municipalities within the *Niagara Escarpment Plan* area in their exercise of planning functions conferred upon them by the *Planning Act*.

**Ontario's Niagara Escarpment stretches more than 725 km from Niagara Falls to Tobermory. It has a 450-million-year geological history, with caves, valleys, cliffs and crevices that support a significant amount of biodiversity. In 1990, Ontario's Niagara Escarpment was designated as a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve.**

The plan contains seven land use designations, with three being predominant:

- *Escarpment Rural Areas* provide opportunities for development compatible with rural land uses and the natural environment
- *Escarpment Natural Areas* and *Escarpment Protection Areas* aim to maintain the natural features of the Escarpment and only allow uses that support this goal.

Urban boundaries within the *Niagara Escarpment Plan* include *Minor Urban Centres*, *Escarpment Recreation Areas* and *Urban Areas*. This review provides an opportunity to evaluate changes to urban boundaries, as well as urban uses in the *Niagara Escarpment Plan* area, where appropriate.

The Niagara Escarpment Commission oversees the implementation of this plan, makes recommendations for amendments where necessary and oversees development within the plan area (outside of municipal settlement areas).

For more information on the *Niagara Escarpment Plan*, please visit [escarpment.org/landplanning/plan/index.php](https://escarpment.org/landplanning/plan/index.php).



Niagara Escarpment and rural landscapes in Halton Region

### 3.4 BROADER PROVINCIAL POLICIES

The four plans work with many other acts, plans, policies and strategies to achieve provincial priorities and goals. This co-ordinated review is an opportunity to consider how well the plans support and align with broader provincial initiatives, legislation and long-term goals for the region. It is also an opportunity to consider whether other initiatives can be more effectively leveraged to achieve the goals of the plans.

This page lists some of the key provincial initiatives that can support the plans' objectives. One priority is addressing climate change, which will, in turn, protect the region's long-term prosperity and livability. Successful implementation of the plans can contribute to achieving the province's climate change goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting the way we plan and grow in response to a changing climate. Consultations for a renewed climate change strategy will take place in parallel to consultations for this co-ordinated review.

An important complementary plan is *The Big Move: Transforming Transportation in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (The Big Move)*. This plan implements the *Growth Plan's* vision for a transportation network that supports the efficient movement of goods and gives people more access to transit. *The Big Move* is required to conform with the *Growth Plan*.

Metrolinx, the provincial agency responsible for *The Big Move*, is currently undertaking a review of that plan. The province is working with Metrolinx to ensure that both reviews and plans remain aligned. The review of the four plans is an opportunity to consider if they should be more direct about the kind of growth that happens around transit corridors and transit station areas.

#### Provincial initiatives that have emerged since the release of the four plans, and may inform the review, include:

- Clean Water Act, 2006
- Endangered Species Act, 2007
- The Big Move, 2008
- Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, 2009
- Green Energy Act, 2009
- Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, 2010
- Climate Ready: Ontario's Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan, 2011-2014
- Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy, 2012
- Biodiversity: It's In Our Nature, Ontario Government Plan to Conserve Biodiversity 2012-2020
- Achieving Balance: Ontario's Long-Term Energy Plan, 2013
- #CycleON: Ontario's Cycling Strategy, 2013
- Local Food Act, 2013
- Rural Roadmap: The Path Forward for Ontario, 2014
- The Provincial Policy Statement, 2014
- Better Business Climate Act, 2014
- Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2014 (proposed)
- Pollinator Health Action Plan (under development)
- The review of the Aggregate Resources Act, 1990



# 4



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions are intended to help focus the discussion during the first stage of consultation. They are organized around the goals of the review outlined in Section 2.1. These questions address issues that have been raised by municipalities, stakeholders and the public, and identified by the province during the implementation of the plans.

We strongly encourage you to participate in the review. Written comments can be provided by:

Emailing us at:

[landuseplanningreview@ontario.ca](mailto:landuseplanningreview@ontario.ca)

OR Writing to us at:

Land Use Planning Review  
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
Ontario Growth Secretariat  
777 Bay St. Suite 425 (4th Floor)  
Toronto, ON M5G 2E5

OR Responding to the Environmental Registry posting by searching the registry number 012-3256 on the following website:

[ontario.ca/EBR](http://ontario.ca/EBR)

Additionally, we invite you to participate at the regional town hall meetings being held across the region. Please see [ontario.ca/landuseplanningreview](http://ontario.ca/landuseplanningreview) for the most up-to-date consultation schedule and details.

If you have any questions on how to participate in the review, please call 1-800-665-1120 or email [landuseplanningreview@ontario.ca](mailto:landuseplanningreview@ontario.ca).

## 4.1 PROTECTING AGRICULTURAL LAND, WATER AND NATURAL AREAS

### Discussion questions:

1. How can the plans better support the long-term protection of agricultural lands, water and natural areas?
  - a. How can the plans better direct urban development to areas already developed?
  - b. Where are the opportunities to expand the Greenbelt both within urban areas, such as urban river valleys, and in rural areas beyond the Greater Toronto Area?
  - c. What new approaches or tools could be used to protect agricultural land, water and natural areas?
  - d. How can we grow and strengthen the region's network of open spaces to provide for recreational opportunities?
  - e. How can the agricultural protection that the plans provide enhance the impact of agriculture on Ontario's economy?

An overarching purpose of the plans is to identify valuable agricultural lands, water resources and natural areas and systems, and protect them for the long term. The plans recognize that the agricultural lands, which feed communities in our region and beyond, are finite resources, and that rivers,



River in the Limehouse Conservation Area, Halton Hills

**One example of successful land protection is the Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Space System, which consists of a network of 158 public parks and open spaces covering about 20 per cent of the total plan area.**

**For more information on the Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Spaces System, please visit**

[escarpment.org/travel/parks/index.php](http://escarpment.org/travel/parks/index.php).





Farmland in the Holland marsh  
Credit: Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation



Wetland in Oshawa  
Credit: Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry

lakes, woodlands, wetlands, and other water resources and natural areas provide irreplaceable ecological and hydrologic functions.

Specifically, the *Growth Plan* contributes to the protection of agricultural lands, water resources and natural areas by limiting settlement area expansions, requiring that more growth and development be accommodated in already developed areas (known as the 'built-up area' in the plan) and setting population and employment density targets within those areas.

However, development pressure continues on agricultural lands, water resources and natural areas, particularly near major urban settlements. Between 2006 and 2011, the region as a whole lost 4.4 per cent of its total farmland area – just over 160,000 acres (65,000 hectares) – an area larger than the City of Toronto.

A principal question to consider is: how do we stem these continued losses of agricultural lands? This review is an opportunity to look at how the *Growth Plan* can better direct growth to already developed areas. Should we consider increasing *Growth Plan* density and intensification targets? Or, recognizing that *Growth Plan* targets set minimum baselines for the entire region, would a better approach be to encourage municipalities to go beyond the minimums? For example, should we encourage municipalities to assess where and how they can go beyond minimum targets, then require them to act on this assessment, where appropriate?

The plans for the Greenbelt all support modest growth in towns and villages that keep with their characters and servicing capacities, and prohibit expansion beyond identified settlement areas, except at the time of legislated review, where appropriate.

Another approach to protecting agricultural land is to consider how the Greenbelt can be expanded. The review can also consider other ways to protect farmland,

besides Greenbelt expansion, that would give farmers greater flexibility in how they conduct their farm operations.

The environmental protections offered through the four plans, together with the Provincial Policy Statement, work to preserve the region's rich water resources and drinking water supplies. The province recognizes the need to take a watershed-based approach to protecting and managing water resources. Other provincial policies have also been developed to protect our water, most notably the Source Water Protection Plans under the *Clean Water Act, 2006*, the policies developed under the *Lake Simcoe Protection Act, 2008* and Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy, 2012. This review is an opportunity to consider how the plans can better align with each other and other water protection policies.



Deer in a forest



Apples grown in the Greenbelt  
Credit: Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation

Collectively, the plans for the Greenbelt create a system of connected natural areas, including linkages and corridors of farmland and other working landscapes, that connect natural areas. These systems support ecological functions and the movement of species, and provide recreational opportunities. Other benefits include: improved air, water and land quality; critical habitat for pollinators; and an overall healthier environment.

Throughout the review, it will be important to consider how we can grow the region's system of natural areas to contribute to enhanced environmental protection and recreational opportunities. In addition, the province has already committed to working with municipalities to bring public lands in urban river valleys into the Greenbelt, and there may be opportunities in other areas.

## 4.2 KEEPING PEOPLE AND GOODS MOVING, AND BUILDING COST-EFFECTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

### Discussion Questions:

2. How can the plans be strengthened to ensure our communities make best use of key infrastructure such as transit, roads, sewers and water?
  - a. How can the plans better leverage transit investments across the region?
  - b. How can the plans better promote livable, walkable communities that use new and existing infrastructure in the most cost-effective way?
  - c. How can the plans align long-term infrastructure planning with planning for growth?
  - d. How can the plans better support goods movement by all modes of transportation?
  - e. How can the plans identify and better protect the strategic infrastructure corridors needed over the long term?
  - f. How can the plans better balance the need for critical infrastructure to support economic growth with environmental protection?

Growth needs to be supported by well-planned infrastructure, such as transit, roads, sewers, water and electricity transmission lines. The four plans seek to ensure that, as a first priority, growth is focused in areas that already have the infrastructure in place. The *Greenbelt Plan* also requires that new major infrastructure in the Greenbelt (in particular, linear infrastructure like roads) serves important regional goals, such as serving significant growth and economic development.



Viva bus stop in Richmond Hill

**More than two million automobile trips are made each morning in the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area alone, and, if trends continue, that number will grow to three million by 2031.<sup>iv</sup>**

A key infrastructure question for the review is: how can the plans help tackle congestion? An integrated approach is required to ensure that infrastructure investments address the need to move both people and goods. People need a well-connected network of roads, public transit, bike lanes, sidewalks and pedestrian pathways. The movement of goods requires strong connections between transportation modes and to domestic and international markets.

The region's existing transportation network is facing significant challenges, including congestion, that impact the economy. To address these challenges and to strengthen the region's transportation system, the government is making major investments in transportation infrastructure. Through the *Moving Ontario Forward* plan, the province is making nearly \$29 billion in dedicated funding available over the next 10 years for public transit, highways and other priority infrastructure projects across the province.

Linking transit and transportation investments with efficient land use planning can help maximize the value of these investments and minimize environmental impacts. A well-planned transit corridor connects people to home and work more quickly and efficiently. This, in turn, can attract more riders, which can help alleviate congestion on our roads and pay for the ongoing operating costs of the transit system. Improved transit planning also supports the development of vibrant communities that can attract new investments and job growth. The review is an opportunity to consider whether the plans can do more to align growth with transit and transportation investments, and to ensure that communities provide safe and convenient access to transit.

Better integration between land use planning and transportation planning can

**Since 2003, the province has invested more than \$21.8 billion in public transit, including \$10.8 billion in GO Transit, and has committed almost \$5.2 billion for provincial highway infrastructure in the Greater Golden Horseshoe.**

ensure that lands are preserved for future goods-movement corridors, and that the development of lands adjacent to these corridors is compatible with efficient goods movement. Municipal roads also have a key role to play in the first- and last-mile movement of goods to markets, as does the provincial highway system. These connections support the efficiency of the rail, marine and air modes, which provide for the movement of goods over longer distances. The review of the plans provides the opportunity to consider how the province can better provide direction on

municipally managed roads to support efficient goods movement.

Additionally, all major infrastructure investments need to be planned in the most cost-effective way possible. A number of studies have found that compact urban development can generate significantly lower capital, maintenance, operating and replacement costs for infrastructure, particularly linear infrastructure, compared to traditional development patterns. In other words, if we build more compact communities, we need fewer roads, fewer kilometres of water and wastewater pipes, and fewer forms of other infrastructure.

The Provincial Policy Statement already requires that municipalities take into account the financial viability of their infrastructure assets over its life cycle. This can be done through asset management plans that consider factors such as the initial cost of construction, the cost of operation and maintenance, and the cost of replacing infrastructure. Should the plans do more to support this goal?

To support cost-effective infrastructure decisions, large municipalities in the region typically develop water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure and transportation master plans at the same time as they plan for growth. This allows them to understand the infrastructure and environmental implications of a variety of different growth scenarios, and make decisions accordingly. The review can help determine if the four plans can do more to encourage best practices in infrastructure and growth planning across the region.

Beyond supporting cost-effective infrastructure decisions, the plans can also help us prepare for the future by developing a long-term vision and goals that guide decisions about growth. These decisions can include protecting lands and corridors for future infrastructure use. Major infrastructure projects are complex and can take decades to plan and build. Planning ahead by protecting lands and corridors, and examining the social and economic impacts of these future uses in advance, can go a long way towards ensuring these projects are delivered in a timely and cost-effective way.

For example, protecting land for roads, transit lines, electricity transmission lines and generating facilities can streamline the planning and development of these facilities at a later date. The review provides an opportunity to evaluate and strengthen the plans' roles in protecting these corridors.

**Many municipalities in the region rely on local rivers, inland lakes and groundwater for drinking water, and to support sewage services. The limited capacity of these resources must be recognized and planned for. Using these resources wisely means we can protect the environment and avoid having to build costly new infrastructure, such as pipes to a lake.**

## 4.3 FOSTERING HEALTHY, LIVABLE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

### Discussion Questions:

3. How can the plans continue to support the design of attractive, livable and healthy communities that are accessible to all Ontarians at all stages of life?
  - a. How can the plans provide more direction on designing:
    - i. Communities that have the right layout and mix of parks, natural areas, public spaces and people-focused streets?
    - ii. A safe and interconnected network of streets that support walking and cycling, and that are connected to our transit networks and key destinations?
  - b. How can the plans better support the development of a mix of housing that meets the needs of the region's growing population, including affordable housing?
  - c. How can the plans better protect heritage buildings, cultural heritage landscapes and archaeological resources?

The four plans require that we accommodate growth by planning complete communities that meet people's daily needs throughout their lifetime, with convenient access to a mix of jobs, services, community infrastructure, transportation options, a range of housing, and vibrant public spaces and streets. The plans recognize that complete communities can include different elements depending on their locations – from busy urban downtowns, to new developments on the suburban edge, to towns or villages and smaller rural centres. Nonetheless, there are some aspects of complete communities where the plans could provide more detailed direction or respond to emerging issues.



Sherbourne Street in Toronto

Key components of a complete community include active modes of transportation, such as cycling and walking, and connected transit systems. Other components are the parks, natural areas, public spaces and people-focused streets that make communities attractive, vibrant and accessible places to live.

While the plans clearly support these goals, they are not explicit about when and how these elements should be combined in different settings. For example, what is the best way to support a bicycle network? What is a good mix of parks and open space in a community? How could the plans address new and emerging issues, such as the growing interest in access to local and healthy food and urban agriculture?

Although municipal planning is best placed to answer these questions, this review is an opportunity to consider whether the province can provide greater direction to help guide municipal planning and create a common approach across the region. Consideration should also be given to how the plans can support the commitments to improved cycling infrastructure, as contained in #CycleON: Ontario's Cycling Strategy, 2013.

**Complete communities can contribute to better health outcomes through design that encourages physical activity. Physical inactivity and obesity cost the GTHA \$4 billion each year, including \$1.4 billion of direct medical costs. <sup>v</sup>**

Another key point is housing affordability and the varying challenges faced in urban, suburban and rural settings. Complete communities include a mix of housing types to accommodate a range of incomes and housing needs, yet many in the region find it hard to own or rent a home that meets their needs. Many factors contribute to this trend, but there is evidence that housing costs are driven in part by a growing demand for housing that offers access to amenities, transit and jobs. The plans play a role in ensuring that a range and mix of housing is planned in the right locations. The review provides an opportunity to consider whether they could do more to encourage the right mix of housing.

Finally, an important component of complete communities is conserving our rich heritage. Provincial policy, including the updated Provincial Policy Statement, requires that municipalities conserve significant cultural heritage resources and archaeological resources, including those of Aboriginal communities. The plans being reviewed include policies for the protection of



Heritage streetscape in the Village of Creemore, Clearview Township

cultural heritage resources. For example, the *Niagara Escarpment Plan* has policies to protect the scenic views of the 450-million-year-old escarpment. These resources encourage a sense of place, which gives communities unique character and identity, fosters cultural and heritage tourism, and plays an important role in achieving complete communities. The review provides an opportunity to consider if the plans could provide greater cultural heritage protections and bring consistency to existing protections.

## 4.4 BUILDING COMMUNITIES THAT ATTRACT WORKERS AND CREATE JOBS

### Discussion Questions:

4. How can the plans better support the development of communities that attract workers and the businesses that employ them?
  - a. How can the plans better support the development of vibrant office and mixed-use employment areas near existing and planned transit, as well as the protection of industrial and commercial uses, particularly those near critical transportation infrastructure?
  - b. What is the role of retail in building vibrant communities and how can the plans support or direct retail development?
  - c. How can the plans balance the need for resource-based employment, including the agri-food and mineral aggregates resource sectors, with protecting the natural environment?
  - d. How can the plans' policies better support and foster vibrant rural economies while taking into account the character of rural areas and communities?

Workers and their employers are increasingly drawn to high-quality, healthy communities that are walkable and offer interesting retail opportunities, cultural activities, green spaces, vibrant public spaces and streets, and transportation choices. The plans recognize that land use planning can facilitate regional economic development through the creation of places that are attractive to live, work and play.

The *Growth Plan* supports the development of vibrant mixed-use areas by directing major office and institutional employment to urban centres and areas near transit, and seeks to locate retail, commercial and service-based employment near where people live. In some cases, however, it is hard to attract office developments to newly planned areas. Ensuring that office employment continues to thrive in our major

urban centres, alongside residential and retail development and close to transit, is crucial to our regional competitiveness. The review provides an opportunity to consider how to best achieve this goal.

The *Growth Plan* requires that municipalities plan for industrial and commercial uses close to transportation facilities, e.g., highway interchanges, ports, rail yards and airports. However, large sites with good transportation access are also experiencing pressures to convert to other uses, such as major retail and residential development. In some cases, this has resulted in fragmentation of industrial and commercial lands and the introduction of incompatible uses, which can limit the viability or expansion of existing industrial and commercial uses. Protecting these sites is important, as is providing municipalities with the flexibility to use them in ways that respond to changing economic development opportunities. The review allows us to consider ways to clarify the criteria for identifying and protecting industrial lands.



Pedestrian-friendly office building in Toronto

The plans for the Greenbelt aim to strengthen existing rural settlements, villages and hamlets, and support the vitality of rural communities as hubs for surrounding rural areas. To do this, the plans protect agricultural lands and rural industries that support the communities and promote tourism, cultural, recreational and resource management in keeping with the character of rural areas.

The region also has a robust resource economy with significant deposits of mineral aggregate resources. Aggregates are an essential ingredient in the construction and maintenance of homes, roads and infrastructure – for example, 114,000 tonnes of aggregate is needed to construct one kilometre of subway line – and demand is growing.

While mineral aggregate operations and management are subject to Ontario's *Aggregate Resources Act*, the plans play an important role in identifying areas where extraction can be considered, and where it cannot due to the presence of important natural areas and water

**In 2013, Ontario's agri-food sector contributed almost \$35 billion to the provincial economy and employed more than 750,000 people.**

**At the 2013 Premier's Agri-Food Summit, this sector was challenged to double its annual growth rate and create 120,000 jobs by 2020.<sup>vi</sup>**



Active quarry in Halton Hills

**Ontarians use about 14 tonnes of aggregate per person per year. Consumption of aggregates is projected to average about 186 million tonnes per year over the next 20 years, 13 per cent higher than in the past 20 years.<sup>vii</sup>**

resources. The Provincial Policy Statement requires municipalities to identify and protect mineral aggregate resource deposits to make them available for the long term. The review is an opportunity to consider the effectiveness of mineral aggregate resources policies across the plans, while recognizing the importance of sustainably managed aggregate resources in supporting growth and economic development in the region.

## 4.5 ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AND BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

### Discussion Question:

5. How can the plans help address climate change?
  - a. How can the plans contribute to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions?
  - b. How can the plans provide more direction on building resilient communities that can withstand extreme weather events related to climate change?
  - c. Is there a need to consider new policy approaches in the plans to increase the resiliency of our communities by reducing the development pressures on natural areas, open spaces and flood prone areas?

Climate change is one of the most significant challenges facing the region and the province as a whole. Ontario is committed to mitigating climate change through reduced greenhouse gas emissions and increased resiliency of infrastructure. The province has set a target to reduce its emissions from 1990 levels by 80 per cent before mid-century.

Consultations for a renewed climate change strategy will take place in parallel to consultations for this co-ordinated review.

Land use planning has a major impact on the amount of greenhouse gas emissions produced. Where people live and how people move between their homes and work or school have been demonstrated to be one of the most significant contributors to Ontario's emissions. The energy consumed by our buildings and transportation systems account for almost 70 per cent of emissions in Ontario, and historically, transportation and building emissions have grown faster than emissions in any other sector. Better design of communities, buildings and transport networks will not only lower our energy use, but will make our communities healthier and more resilient. For example, locating housing and jobs close together creates more compact, walkable, higher-density and transit-supportive communities that are more energy efficient and, therefore, reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Protecting natural areas, such as wetlands and forests, can also reduce greenhouse gas emissions, since plants absorb carbon dioxide – a key greenhouse gas – remove it from the atmosphere and store it in soils. Currently, the plans include no policies that explicitly address climate change. The review provides an opportunity to consider the possible addition of such policies.

Land use planning policies also influence our ability to adapt to a changing climate. Through the Provincial Policy Statement, municipalities are encouraged to plan for resilient communities and are required to direct development away from flood-prone areas, except in limited circumstances. The review provides an opportunity to consider if the four

**Carbon “sinks” refer to forests, green spaces, water bodies, or other natural areas that have the ability to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Carbon sinks can be preserved or created in communities to offset emissions from buildings or subdivisions.**

**Green infrastructure refers to natural and human-made features that perform an urban infrastructure function and natural functions. An example is using vegetation and soils to manage storm water.**



Man and young child planting a tree

plans can build on Provincial Policy Statement requirements and help establish criteria for planning resilient landscapes, development patterns and infrastructure in the region. This might include consideration of how to use carbon sinks and green infrastructure, as well as infrastructure that can withstand extreme weather events. It could also include protecting our headwaters, recharge areas, natural areas and open spaces that act as flood mitigation features.



Sherbourne Commons, a stormwater treatment facility and public art feature in Toronto

## 4.6 IMPROVING IMPLEMENTATION AND BETTER ALIGNING THE PLANS

### Discussion Questions:

6. How can the implementation of the plans be improved?
  - a. Are there opportunities to better align key components of the plans with each other, and with other provincial initiatives? Are there ways to reduce overlap and duplication?
  - b. What policies of the plans do you think have been successful and should be retained?
  - c. Should the province develop any additional tools or guidance materials to help support implementation?
  - d. Are there other opportunities to better facilitate implementation?
  - e. Do the plans appropriately distinguish the differences between urban and rural communities?

Over the past several years, many municipalities and stakeholders have implemented the plans and may have suggestions on how implementation can be improved.

Decisions at every stage of the planning process, from official plan conformity to individual site plans, are considered part of the implementation process.

We have heard that effective implementation can be influenced by issues including the length of time required to conform with the *Growth Plan*, the lack of consistent terminology across the plans and other challenges. The review will be informed by this feedback, as well as our experience implementing the plans, third-party research and discussions with planning officials and others that have hands-on experience with implementation. This is an opportunity to identify areas where we can improve implementation policies to make sure the plans' requirements are clear and easy to implement, and that they work effectively together.

## 4.7 FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Ontario is recognized globally for its comprehensive approach to regional planning. The province wants to build on the success of the plans as we address new and evolving challenges and opportunities. By working together, we can ensure that growth is accommodated in sustainable ways that protect our important and finite agricultural lands and natural features, contributes to compact and complete communities, is built at livable densities, and supports our economy and quality of life.

Your input is an important part of the review process and we look forward to your thoughts on the issues outlined in this document. If there are issues that have not been addressed, or any further information you would like to provide, please submit them to [landuseplanningreview@ontario.ca](mailto:landuseplanningreview@ontario.ca).

Thank you for your participation in the review. Together, we can help protect our agricultural lands and natural areas, and shape the growth of our region for future generations.

## REFERENCES

<sup>i</sup> Government of Ontario, Planning for Employment in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, May 2008, accessed at: [ontario.ca/bzpd](http://ontario.ca/bzpd)

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<sup>v</sup> GTHA Medical Officers of Health, Improving Health by Design in the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area: A Report of Medical Officers of Health in the GTHA, 2014 accessed at: <http://peelregion.ca/health/resources/healthbydesign/pdf/moh-report.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Government of Ontario, The Premier's Agri-Food Challenge: Building on Success, 2013, accessed at: [ontario.ca/bzb1](http://ontario.ca/bzb1)

<sup>vii</sup> Government of Ontario, State of the Aggregate Resource in Ontario Study (SAROS) Paper 1 – Aggregate Consumption and Demand, 2009, accessed at: [ontario.ca/bzof](http://ontario.ca/bzof)

## HOW TO PARTICIPATE

We strongly encourage you to participate in the review. Written comments can be provided by:

Emailing us at:

[landuseplanningreview@ontario.ca](mailto:landuseplanningreview@ontario.ca)

OR

Writing to us at:

Land Use Planning Review  
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
Ontario Growth Secretariat  
777 Bay St. Suite 425 (4th Floor)  
Toronto, ON M5G 2E5

OR

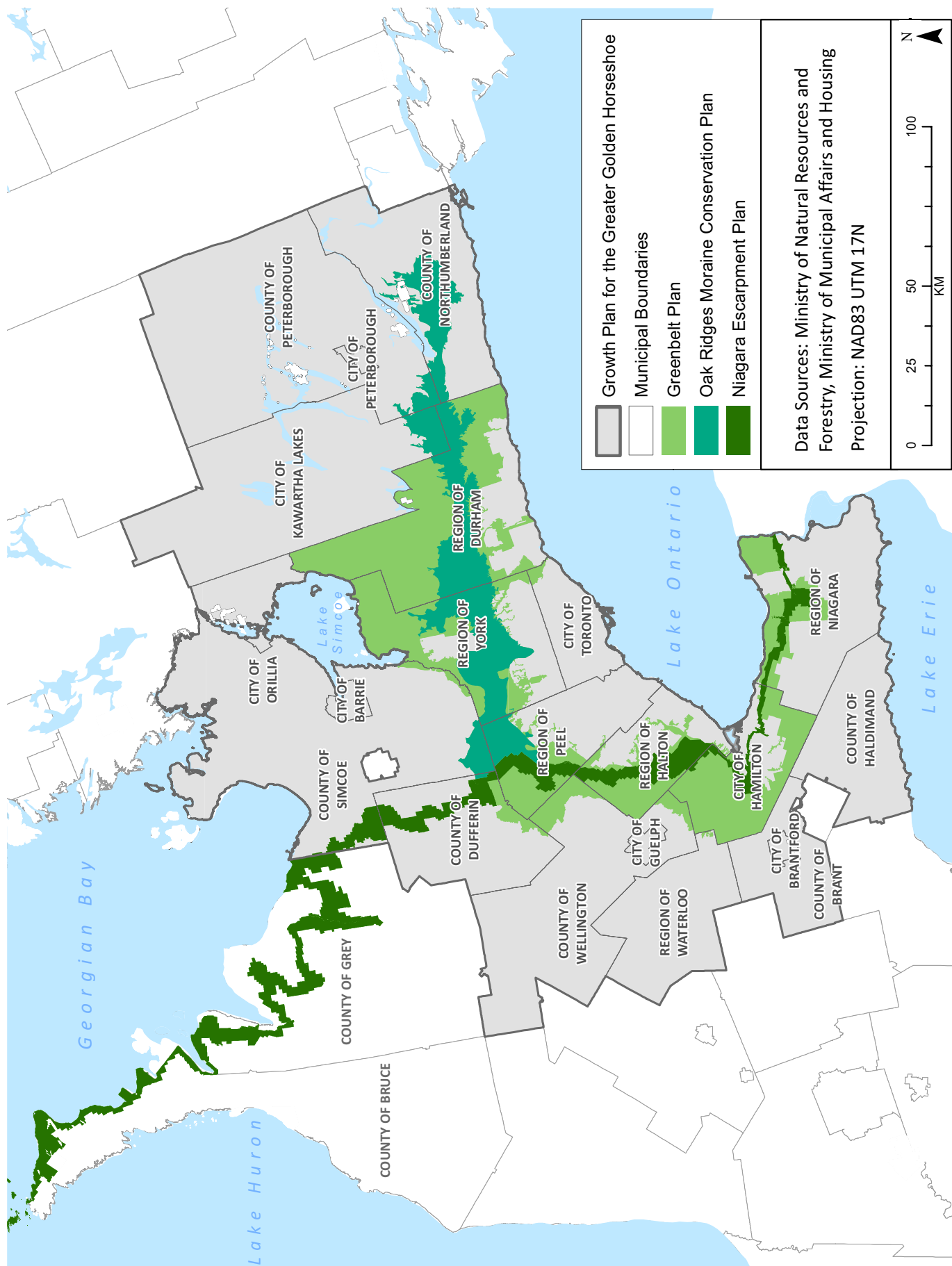
Responding to the Environmental Registry posting by searching the registry number 012-3256 on the following website:

[ontario.ca/EBR](http://ontario.ca/EBR)

Additionally, we invite you to participate at the regional town hall meetings being held across the region. Please see [ontario.ca/landuseplanningreview](http://ontario.ca/landuseplanningreview) for the most up-to-date consultation schedule and details.

If you have any questions on how to participate in the review, please call 1-800-665-1120 or email [landuseplanningreview@ontario.ca](mailto:landuseplanningreview@ontario.ca).

# The Region and Plan Areas







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