Halton Area Planning Partnership (HAPP)

Joint Submission on Proposed Amendment 1 to the Growth Plan and Proposed Land Needs Assessment Methodology

July 2020

Introduction

The Halton Area Planning Partnership (HAPP) is comprised of Halton Region, City of Burlington, Town of Halton Hills, Town of Milton, Town of Oakville, Credit Valley Conservation, Grand River Conservation Authority and Conservation Halton.

This submission represents HAPP's collective review and joint response to proposed Amendment 1 to the Growth Plan, 2019 and the proposed Land Needs Assessment (LNA) Methodology. The proposed changes were placed on the Environmental Registry of Ontario as a Policy Proposal Notice (ER Numbers: 019-1679 and 019-1680) on June 16, 2020 with a comment period ending July 31, 2020.

HAPP welcomes this opportunity to have its collective voice heard by responding to the proposed changes to the PPS. HAPP's response contains comments and recommendations related to main areas of proposed policy changes in Amendment 1 and proposed changes to the LNA Methodology within the PPS that are relevant to and important for Halton.

Background

Schedule 3 to A Place to Grow ('the Growth Plan') contains population and employment forecasts for all upper and single-tier municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe that must be used for planning and managing growth to the horizon of the Growth Plan. The forecasts are a key input into the Land Needs Assessment methodology that municipalities use to determine the quantity of land needed to accommodate growth. In fall 2019, the Province initiated a review of the Schedule 3 forecasts, as directed by policy 5.2.4.7 of the Growth Plan. Hemson Consulting was retained to complete the review.

On June 16, 2020 the government released proposed Amendment 1 to the Growth Plan, containing the certain key proposed changes to the Growth Plan, together with more minor changes to ensure consistency with the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS), 2020. These key changes are:

- Updated Schedule 3 population and employment forecasts extended to the year 2051 (the current Growth Plan horizon is 2041).
- An amendment to the Schedule 3 forecasts with one of three growth outlooks: A Reference Forecast which represents the most likely future growth outlook, a High Scenario and a Low Scenario.
- A direction that municipalities must use the Schedule 3 forecasts to plan for growth, or substitute higher forecasts determined through their municipal comprehensive review.
- An extension of the planning horizon from 2041 to 2051, intended to achieve better alignment with the land supply requirements of the PPS, 2020.

- A removal of the prohibition on new mineral aggregate operations in the habitat of threatened and endangered species within the Natural Heritage System of the Growth Plan.
- A removal of the prohibition on the conversion of employment lands to non-employment uses within Provincially Significant Employment Zones (PSEZ), if the lands are also located within the boundary of a Major Transit Station Area.
- A strengthening of policies requiring the engagement of Indigenous communities in the planning process.

Also released on June 16, 2020 was a proposed Land Needs Assessment Methodology to implement the Growth Plan, replacing the methodology released in 2018 to implement the previous 2017 version of the Growth Plan. The proposed methodology is intended to provide an "outcomes-based streamlined approach" to assessing Community Area and Employment Area land need to the horizon of the Growth Plan, by outlining the key components that must be addressed at a minimum.

The methodology is premised on the diversity of local needs, and to ensure a sufficient and appropriate mix of land is available to accommodate:

- All housing market segments, to avoid supply shortages;
- Market demand;
- All employment types, including those types that are evolving;
- All infrastructure services needed to meet complete community objectives to the horizon of the Growth Plan.

Key Points of HAPP's Response

1. Extension of the Planning Horizon to 2051

The proposed change to extend the planning horizon of the Growth Plan from 2041 to 2051 is generally supported by HAPP. Extending the planning horizon to 2051 facilitates better alignment with transportation planning for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, and provincial and municipal planning initiatives to focus growth around priority transit corridors and nodes.

However, extension of the planning horizon in the midst of the current municipal comprehensive review, does have implications for the development of growth concepts, and progression to a preferred growth concept as part of the Region's Integrated Growth Management Strategy.

Also, if the longer planning horizon is implemented, the Growth Plan objective of minimizing settlement boundary expansion in order to encourage intensification and compact urban form may be more difficult to achieve, than in the case of potentially more incremental settlement area expansion to a shorter planning horizon. Therefore, clear policies in municipal official plans (i.e. Region Official Plan) addressing development phasing will be critically important, if a settlement boundary expansion is determined to be necessary to 2051 as part of the current municipal comprehensive review.

2. Selection of a Growth Forecast from the Reference, High and Low Scenarios

Proposed Amendment 1 contains a Reference Forecast which represents the most likely future growth outlook, as well as a High Scenario, and a Low Scenario. The range of population and employment in 2051 from the Low to High Scenarios is 100,000 people and 40,000 jobs. Proposed Amendment 1 also includes versions of the forecast that either includes forecast numbers in 2031, 2041 and 2051 (i.e. 'Mock A') or forecast numbers in the 2051 horizon year only (i.e. 'Mock B').

REGION OF HALTON	POPULATION			EMPLOYMENT		
	2031	2041	2051	2031	2041	2051
Current Growth Plan Forecast	820,000	1,000,000	N/A	390,000	470,000	N/A
Reference Forecast	820,000	1,000,000	1,100,000	390,000	470,000	500,000
Low Scenario	820,000	1,000,000	1,060,000	390,000	470,000	480,000
High Scenario	820,000	1,000,000	1,160,000	390,000	470,000	520,000
Hemson Reference Forecast	767,000	931,000	1,100,000	352,000	420,000	500,000

HAPP supports use of the Reference Forecast with 1.1 million people and half a million jobs in 2051. However, the position of HAPP is that the 'Mock B'

Reference Forecast, should be used to update Schedule 3 of the Growth Plan. Unlike the 'Mock A' forecast, the 'Mock B' forecast does not contain population and employment forecasts for the 2031 and 2041 years, but only the 2051 horizon year.

3. Direction that the Schedule 3 forecasts can be substituted with higher forecasts

The Schedule 3 numbers are referred to as forecasts and not targets, but according to policy, upper-tier municipalities must plan to achieve the Schedule 3 forecasts. This proposed change would permit upper-tier municipalities to substitute higher forecasts for the Schedule 3 forecasts, through its municipal comprehensive review, subject to Provincial approval.

HAPP supports this change in the policy, assuming that the policy change (and the Province as the approval authority) will ensure that any higher forecasts are supported by adequate analysis and do not undermine efforts to foster intensification and minimize settlement boundary expansions.

4. Proposed New Land Needs Assessment Methodology

HAPP generally supports the simplified Land Needs Assessment methodology, provided the critical steps of the methodology are retained, as proposed, and the desired outcome achieved – which is to ensure an accurate assessment of the land needs of the upper-tier municipality to accommodate the forecasted growth, and to clearly demonstrate the need, as necessary, for a settlement area expansion, in a manner that maximizes opportunities for intensification, and minimizes settlement area expansions.

However, HAPP would like to reiterate its earlier comments to the Province with respect to the introduction of "market demand" to the PPS, 2020, the 2019 Growth Plan, and now the proposed LNA methodology. In particular, it is critical to emphasize that "market demand" is only one consideration amongst many considerations such as protecting natural hazards and natural heritage with respect to implementing the Growth Plan, and in particular, planning for settlement area expansions.

With respect to the Employment Area Land Needs Assessment and the Employment Categorization and Needs Analysis step, HAPP supports the recognition that employment types are evolving. However, HAPP recommends that consideration be given to revising the LNA Methodology to facilitate the identification of new employment types, and allow for adjustments which reflect local priorities and strategies, in addition to having regard for factors such as changes in economic activity, market disruptors, infrastructure and investment strategies, and other business environment impacts.

5. Mineral Aggregate Extraction in Habitat of Threatened and Endangered Species

HAPP has significant concerns with, and does not support this policy change.

However, if a policy change is carried forward HAPP recommends that the wording align with the PPS, 2020, which would allow for extraction to take place in certain circumstances, where it can be justified, but would protect species/habitat in circumstances where extraction is not appropriate. The proposed wording that would provide more clarity with respect to the PPS, 2020 is as follows:

"… shall not be permitted in habitat of endangered species and threatened species, except in accordance with provincial and federal requirements."

It is also the position of HAPP that there must be a more detailed assessment of demand for aggregates relative to supply as part of a new mineral aggregate resources application. Determining the impact of development proposals on the demand for aggregates in the Province is crucial. The supply of recyclable aggregate must also be determined through the needs analysis so that this valuable resource is not wasted and so that virgin aggregate is not unduly extracted.

HAPP recommends a change with respect to adding a "demonstration of needs" test to the Growth Plan.

Proposed changes:

PPS 2020 Section 2.5.2.1:
"Demonstration of need for mineral aggregate resources, including any type of supply/demand analysis, shall not be required, notwithstanding the availability, designation or licensing for extraction of mineral aggregate resources locally or elsewhere.

Demonstration of need for mineral aggregate resources, including a supply/demand analysis for virgin and recycled aggregates in a regional context, shall be required prior to the issuance of a license."

Proposed Amendment 1 Growth Plan 2020:
New Sub-Section 4.2.8.2.b) v.

"the need for mineral aggregate resources, including a supply/demand analysis for virgin and recycled aggregates in a regional context; and…"

6. Employment Conversions in PSEZ located within MTSAs

This change would permit employment conversions of lands within a Provincially Significant Employment Zone (PSEZ) in advance of the next municipal comprehensive review, if the lands are located within the boundary of a Major Transit Station Area (MTSA).

The policy change is generally supported by HAPP as it provides flexibility to support mixed use development in MTSAs, where appropriate. However, there is a concern that permitting residential uses on employment lands in MTSAs would result in the displacement of higher density office employment. Therefore, performance criteria will be critical to ensure an appropriate mix of residential and non-residential uses in MTSAs.

As per previous HAPP comments on the Provincially Significant Employment Zones, more detail on the purpose and role of the PSEZ, and expectations for long term planning is requested from the Province, in a timely manner to assist in the municipal comprehensive review (MCR) process.

7. Strengthening of requirements for Indigenous Engagement

HAPP strongly supports policy changes to further reinforce the importance of engagement with Indigenous communities. However, HAPP requests again that the Province provide additional guidance to municipalities on what constitutes "appropriate engagement" in various planning contexts and/or geographic areas of the Province. There is a pressing need for Provincial guidance to support implementation of these policies by providing municipalities with clear direction on what will be expected through consultation and which applications will require consultation with Indigenous communities. Therefore, it is recommended that the Province develop consultation guidelines so that there is a mutual understanding of what constitutes meaningful engagement. In addition, it is extremely important that the Province provide Indigenous communities with the funding and other resources necessary to ensure that they can meaningfully engage in municipal planning processes in which they have an interest.

HAPP notes that use of the term "shall" in the proposed policy elevates the duty to consult Indigenous communities. This change is supported by HAPP, but this underscores the need for the Province to both provide resources to Indigenous communities and guidance to municipalities on how to fulfill this policy direction.

8. Changes to achieve consistency with the PPS, 2020

Proposed Amendment 1 also contains a number of changes to achieve consistency of policy and definitions with the PPS, 2020. In general, HAPP supports these changes recognizing the importance of consistency between Provincial planning documents to facilitate consistency in interpretation.

For instance, HAPP strongly supports the alignment of the definition of ‘Cultural Heritage Landscape’ with the PPS, 2020 to ensure consistency in interpretation, however, HAPP notes that it is also critical to align the definition of ‘Built Heritage Resource’ in the Growth Plan with the definition in the PPS, 2020 to avoid problems with interpretation.

With respect to the change of terminology from ‘second units” to ‘additional residential units’, HAPP recommends that a definition be provided to assist in interpretation. Although the previous term “second units” did not have a definition, its meaning is very intuitive, whereas the proposed “additional residential units” can be widely interpreted.

9. Growth Plan Conformity Date

HAPP supports no change to the conformity date of July 1, 2022, in order that the MCR can be completed, thereby permitting the lower-tier municipalities to complete their work to achieve conformity with the 2019 Growth Plan and Regional Official Plan.

However, in order to ensure upper-tier municipalities can complete the MCR work by the deadline, any further changes to the policy framework which has implications for the MCR (i.e. policy direction on Provincially Significant Employment Zones, review of municipal request for refinement of the Growth Plan Natural Heritage System, update of the Built Boundary, Agricultural Impact Assessment and Subwatershed Study guidelines, etc.) must be provided to municipalities in a timely manner, in order to not further delay the process.

Conclusion

There is general support for the Amendment 1 changes to the Growth Plan, and the new Land Needs Assessment Methodology, and for the use of the Reference Forecast for the 2051 horizon year to update the Schedule 3 population and employment forecasts. HAPP does not support the proposed policy change permitting mineral aggregate extraction in the habitat of threatened and endangered species.

However, the successful implementation of the Growth Plan can only occur with a well coordinated, integrated, and phased approach to land-use planning, infrastructure needs, municipal service delivery, and public sector financial planning. Halton’s integrated approach is clearly articulated in the Regional Official Plan and long-term infrastructure plans and capital programs.

Delivering of infrastructure to support the Growth Plan's complete communities will require significant financial commitment and partnership from all levels of government, including a provincial multi-year, multi-ministry infrastructure plan to build essential community infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and transportation networks. In addition, municipalities will need appropriate funding tools to enable delivery of infrastructure planned to achieve the Growth Plan forecasts while ensuring that growth pays for itself.

Thank you for providing the Region, its Local Municipalities, and Conservation Authorities the opportunity to comment on the proposed Amendment 1 to the Growth Plan, and the proposed Land Needs Assessment Methodology. We welcome the opportunity to have further discussions with Provincial staff to clarify our comments prior to Amendment 1 coming into force and effect.

Respectfully submitted,

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