



Chapter 1 – Making Our Mark

Introduction

This is the Niagara Official Plan (NOP), the Regional Municipality of Niagara’s long-term, strategic policy planning framework for managing growth coming to Niagara. The policies of this Plan will guide land use and *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 to the year 2051. Niagara is expected to accommodate a minimum population of 694,000 and 272,000 jobs which will be shaped by the proactive growth management, community building, and other forward-thinking policies of this Plan. Proactive growth management will require this Plan to integrate with and inform key engineering and finance programs, including the Development Charges, Water and Wastewater Master Plan and Transportation Master Plan in order to ensure the necessary *infrastructure* is in place to accommodate growth.

The strategic policy direction of the Plan balances the input provided by the comments of individuals, agencies, boards, governments, academics, and organized interest groups. This input also shaped the creation of a vision and pillar statements that form the foundations of policy development. The vision sets a high level statement of intent and direction and the pillar statements provide insight into the relationship between community values and policies and expected outcomes over the life of this Plan. Both pillar statements and policies are interconnected and must be considered holistically.

Vision

“An evolving Niagara that is ready to manage the oncoming change associated with the growth of its many diversified communities and changing climate by: growing strategically; improving the resiliency of existing and new communities; protecting and enhancing the regional natural environment system; supporting an integrated transportation system; and planning a sustainable economy.”

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.

There are various objectives integrated throughout the Sections of each Chapter of this Plan. These objectives are shown as bolded subtitles to each policy section so it is clear what policy direction implements the objective.

1.1 Overview – Niagara Past, Present, and Future

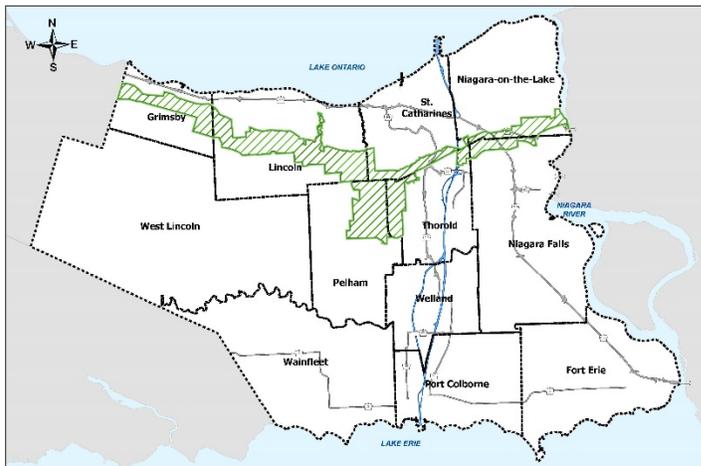


Figure 1: Niagara region and 12 local municipalities

Formed in 1970¹, Niagara 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. The geographic areas of the region have an influence on climate, and, combined with the sand and silt soils of the Fonthill kame moraine and along the Lake Ontario plain create unique areas for the growing of tender fruits and grapes.

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

¹ 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.

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

1.2 Planning Context

1.2.1 Legislate 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 regularly 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 review.

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 among other matters: sufficient lands to accommodate growth; the adequate provision of affordable housing; protection of the environment; the development of complete communities; addressing climate change; protecting the environment ;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 Plan is required to conform 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 Plan Utilization

This Plan will be used by Regional Council and local municipalities relative to making planning decisions and updating local 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.

Where there is a conflict between the Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan, Niagara Escarpment Plan, the policies in Chapter 7 {Implementation} should be referred to.

1.3.2 Format

This Plan consists of text, tables, comment boxes, maps, figures, schedules, appendices, and glossary of terms, 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 8 and the Glossary of Terms of this Plan, inclusive of text, schedules, and tables, shall be considered the Plan.

Comment boxes are included within the Plan to add context and clarification. 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. Appendices provide context for understanding policy application but are not part of the NOP and can be amended without an amendment.

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.

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. However, this Plan does not limit the planning for infrastructure and public service facilities beyond the horizon of the Plan.

1.3.4 Interpretation

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.

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.

Auxiliary verbs, such as “shall”/“will” “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 is intended to be applied 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.

Enabling or supportive language in policies are not to be interpreted as committing Regional Council to any form of financial support or funding for their implementation.

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 structure of the Plan includes eight Chapters, a Glossary of Terms, Schedules and Appendices as follows:

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. **Chapter 2 – Growing Region.**

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

This chapter 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.

1.4.2 Chapter 3 – Sustainable Region

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

This chapter 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. This chapter also provides policy direction on source water protection and excess soil management.

1.4.3 Chapter 4 – Competitive Region

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

This 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.

1.4.4 Chapter 5 – Connected Region

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

This 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.

1.4.5 Chapter 6 – Vibrant Region

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

This chapter 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 tools to effectively and proactively manage growth

through 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. Cultural and archaeology heritage are 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.

1.4.6 Chapter 7 – Implementation

This chapter provides implementation policies that 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.

1.4.7 Chapter 8- Site Specific Policies

This chapter contains policies for site specific permitted land uses and infrastructure across the Region. These policies provide additional permissions for specific properties in Niagara Region for things such as land use designations, permitted uses and infrastructure.

1.4.8 Glossary of Terms

The Glossary of Terms provides a list of defined terms that are italicized within the Plan.