

CHAPTER 2 – GROWING REGION

Section 2.2 Build Complete Communities

The achievement of *complete communities* is a foundational principle of growth management that informs how lands are to be developed, resources are to be managed and protected, and investments are to be made in public *infrastructure*.

Complete communities refer to safe, accessible, and healthy neighbourhoods that allow people of all ages and abilities to meet their needs throughout their lifetime by providing convenient access to a mix of jobs, local stores and services, and a full range of housing and transportation options.

The policies in this Chapter establish a Regional Structure that defines how growth will be managed within identified land use components across the Region's landscape in order to facilitate the creation of *complete communities* that improve the quality of life for Niagara residents. The land use components that make-up the Regional Structure are depicted in Schedule B.

The Regional Structure also supports planning for more *resilient* communities and *infrastructure* that are adaptive to the impacts of *climate change* by implementing *sustainable* land use forms, development standards, and technologies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

2.2.1 Direct growth to urban areas.

- 2.2.1.1 The majority of the growth forecasted in Table 1 will be directed to *urban areas* with existing or planned *municipal services* that can support the achievement of *complete communities*.
- 2.2.1.2 The boundaries of the Region's *urban areas* are shown on Schedule B of this Plan.
- 2.2.1.3 Development within *urban areas* will integrate land use planning and *infrastructure* planning to:
 - a) support the intensification rates and density targets outlined in Subsection 2.2.2;
 - b) provide a *compact built form*, a vibrant *public realm*, and a mix of land uses, including residential uses, employment uses, recreational uses and *public service facilities*, to support the creation of *complete communities*;

- c) provide a diverse range and mix of housing types, tenures, unit sizes, and densities to accommodate the market based and *affordable* housing needs of Niagara's current and future residents pursuant to Section 2.3 {Housing};
- d) improve social equity, human health, and the overall quality of life for people of all ages, abilities, and incomes and at all stages of life by expanding convenient access to:
 - i. a range of transportation options, including public transit and *active transportation*;
 - ii. affordable, locally grown food and other sources of *urban agriculture*;
 - iii. co-located *public service facilities*; and
 - iv. the *public realm*, including open spaces, parks, trails, and other recreational facilities;
- e) promote built forms, land use patterns, and street configurations that minimize land consumption, reduce costs of *municipal services*, and optimize investments in *infrastructure* to support the financial well-being of the Region and local municipalities;
- f) promote built forms, land use patterns, and street configurations that support the use of *active transportation* and goods movement;
- g) promote opportunities for *transit-supportive* development pursuant to Section 6.2 {Urban Design};
- h) avoid built forms, land use patterns, and street configurations that may adversely impact the health and safety of the public and environment;
- i) maintain and complement the character of established neighbourhoods, where feasible, and promote *compatibility* with infill development and surrounding uses pursuant to Section 6.2 {Urban Design};
- j) conserve *cultural heritage resources* pursuant to Section 6.4 {Cultural Heritage};

- k) occur in accordance with the availability and provision of *infrastructure* and *public service facilities*; and
- l) mitigate and adapt to the impacts of *climate change* by:
 - i. protecting natural heritage and hydrologic resources pursuant to the policies in Chapter 6 {Sustainable Region};
 - ii. integrating *green infrastructure* and *low impact development* into the design and construction of *public service facilities* and private developments; and
 - iii. promoting built forms, land use patterns, and street configurations that improve community *resilience* and *sustainability*, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and conserve biodiversity.

2.2.1.4 The establishment of new *settlement areas* is prohibited.

2.2.1.5 Notwithstanding Policy 2.2.1.4, expansions to existing *settlement area* boundaries may be permitted pursuant to Policy 2.2.3.6 and Section 2.2.5.

2.2.2 Accommodate growth through strategic intensification and higher densities.

2.2.2.1 *Built-up areas* will be the focus of residential *intensification* and mixed-use development over the horizon of this Plan.

2.2.2.2 Forecasted growth will be accommodated primarily through *intensification* in *built-up areas*, and directed to the following locations:

- a) *built-up areas*;
- b) *strategic growth areas*, including:
 - i. the Downtown St. Catharines Urban Growth Centre
 - ii. *major transit station areas*;
 - iii. *regional growth centres*; and
 - iv. district plan areas;

Land Use Components

The land use components outlined in Policy 2.2.2.2 are not considered land use designations, and instead act as overlays to help manage forecasted growth and guide local conformity. Lands within identified areas are still subject to the relevant land use planning policies and approval processes at the local municipal level.

- c) areas with existing or planned *public service facilities*; and
- d) other locations with existing or planned transit service, with a priority on areas with existing or planned *frequent transit*.

2.2.2.3 A minimum of 50 per cent of all residential development occurring annually within the region will occur within *built-up areas*.

2.2.2.4 *Strategic growth areas* are considered the highest priority for development and *intensification*, as well as the primary location for major *public service facilities*, high density and mixed-use development, and major commercial and entertainment uses.

2.2.2.5 *Strategic growth areas* identified on Schedule B will be required to achieve the following minimum density targets to the horizon of this Plan:

- a) the *major transit station areas* will be planned to achieve a minimum density target of 125 residents and jobs combined per hectare;
- b) the Downtown Welland *Regional Growth Centre* will achieve a minimum density target of 125 residents and jobs per hectare; and
- c) the Brock District Plan Area and Glendale District Plan Areas will achieve a minimum density target of 100 residents and jobs per hectare.

Strategic Growth Areas

Niagara's *strategic growth areas* currently include the land use components shown on Schedule B, including the GO Transit Station Areas, the Brock District Plan and Glendale District Plan, the Downtown Welland Regional Growth Centre, and the Downtown St. Catharines Urban Growth Centre.

2.2.2.6 Within the *built-up area*, the Region and local municipalities may plan for development beyond the horizon of this Plan for *strategic growth areas*, provided that:

- a) the development does not exceed the existing or planned capacity of *infrastructure* or *public service facilities*;

- b) the type and scale of development is designed to be *compatible* with the surrounding area;
- c) the development supports the achievement of complete communities;
- d) the development would not adversely impact natural heritage and water resources in accordance with the policies in Chapter 3 {Sustainable Region}; and
- e) the development uses design and construction standards that help to mitigate the impacts of *climate change* pursuant to the policies in Chapter 3 {Sustainable Region}.

2.2.2.7 New *strategic growth areas* that are not identified in Schedule B will be incorporated through an amendment to this Plan that addresses the following:

- a) consistency with the policies and mapping of the Provincial Policy Statement and the Growth Plan, where applicable;
- b) the ability to further support the forecasts listed in Table 1 {See Forecasted Growth policies} and the intensification rates and density and housing targets established in this Plan;
- c) the impact of planned densities and land uses on existing *strategic growth areas*, including their ability to achieve the applicable intensification rates and density and housing targets established in this Plan;
- d) the ability to provide a mix of land uses and built forms that support transit service and *active transportation*;
- e) the provision and financing of any additional Regional and local *infrastructure* or *public service facilities* required to service the new *strategic growth area*; and
- f) addresses the criteria listed in Policy 2.2.2.6 a) through e).

2.2.2.8 The Downtown St. Catharines Urban Growth Centre will be planned:

- a) to accommodate a significant share of the region's future population and employment growth;

- b) to achieve a minimum density target of 150 residents and jobs combined per hectare by the year 2031;
- c) as the focal point for regional investment in commercial, recreational, cultural, civic, and entertainment uses, *public service facilities*, and related programs and services;
- d) to serve as a high density employment centre that will attract significant employment uses;
- e) to accommodate and support the use of inter-municipal regional transit and *active transportation*; and
- f) to accommodate and support opportunities for high density residential and mixed-use development.

2.2.2.9 The Region, in collaboration with the City of St. Catharines, will support growth within the Downtown St. Catharines Urban Growth Centre through investments in the *transportation system*, including improvements to public transit and *active transportation*, where appropriate.

2.2.2.10 Within *major transit station areas*, development will be supported, where appropriate, by:

- a) planning for a diverse mix of land uses and housing options, including *affordable* housing and *specialized housing needs*, that support existing and planned public transit, including inter-municipal regional transit and *active transportation*;
- b) providing multimodal access to *higher-order transit* and connections to nearby major trip generators;
- c) encouraging the use of *transit-supportive* development standards pursuant to Section 6.2 {Urban Design} and Section 5.1 {Transportation}, including reduced or shared parking standards, provision of bicycle infrastructure, and commuter pick-up/drop-off areas;
- d) prohibiting land uses and built forms that would adversely affect the achievement of *transit-supportive* densities; and
- e) fostering collaboration between the public and private sectors, including the pursuit of joint development projects.

2.2.2.11 Development applications that are within *major transit station areas* or on sites adjacent to or near existing or planned public transit routes will be reviewed in accordance with *transit-supportive* development standards outlined in Section 6.2 {Urban Design} and Section 5.1 {Transportation}.

2.2.2.12 *Designated greenfield areas* will be planned as *complete communities* by:

- a) achieving a minimum density of 50 residents and jobs combined per hectare;
- b) accommodating a diverse mix of land uses including residential, commercial, recreational, and employment uses, where permitted by scale;
- c) promoting built forms, land use patterns, and street configurations that support *a compact built form* and the integration of public transit and *active transportation*;
- d) ensuring that development is sequential, orderly and contiguous with existing *built-up areas*.

Density in Designated Greenfield Areas

Density in the *designated greenfield areas* is measured over the entire Region in accordance with Policy 2.2.7.3 of the *Growth Plan*, which excludes areas constrained by environmental features, utility corridors, cemeteries, and *employment areas*.

2.2.3 Protect and enhance the character of rural settlements.

2.2.3.1 A limited amount of development will occur outside of *urban areas* to achieve the forecasts in Table 1.

2.2.3.2 Development outside of *urban area* boundaries should be directed to *rural settlements* as identified on Schedule B.

2.2.3.3 Development in *rural settlements* should be planned to:

- a) build upon the rural character and characteristics of the surrounding area and leverage rural amenities and assets;
- b) encourage residential infill development that complements the historic rural character and parcel fabric of the area;
- c) promote the vitality and redevelopment of *brownfield* sites;

- d) accommodate an appropriate range of housing, social, cultural, and employment uses to serve the needs of rural residents and area businesses;
- e) ensure there is adequate capacity to accommodate *agriculture-related uses*, commercial activities, and other cultural and economic opportunities to serve the needs of the surrounding nearby agricultural and rural communities;
- f) ensure there is adequate capacity for *infrastructure* and co-located *public service facilities* in the area;
- g) conserve biodiversity, where appropriate, and protect natural heritage and water resources in accordance with the policies in Chapter 3 {Sustainable Region};
- h) increase the resilience of *rural settlements* and *infrastructure*; and
- i) encourage reduced energy consumption, improved air quality, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and increased *resilience* to *climate change* in accordance with the policies in Chapter 3 {Sustainable Region}.

2.2.3.4 Development in *rural settlements*, including severances, shall comply with *minimum distance separation formulae*.

2.2.3.5 *Rural settlements* will be serviced by *sustainable* private water and wastewater treatment systems, unless otherwise permitted in Section 5.2 {Infrastructure}.

2.2.3.6 No adjustments to the boundaries of *rural settlements* will be permitted unless the following criteria are met:

- a) the *rural settlement* is not in the Greenbelt Area;
- b) the change would constitute minor rounding out of existing development, in keeping with the rural character of the area; and
- c) servicing through private water and wastewater treatment systems can be provided suitably over the long-term and in an appropriate manner, with no negative impacts on water.

2.2.4 Plan for the orderly implementation of infrastructure and land use patterns.

- 2.2.4.1 Land use planning in Niagara will be supported by planning for *infrastructure and public service facilities* that:
- a) consider the full life-cycle costs of these assets and options to pay for these costs over the long-term;
 - b) encourage *compact built forms*, land use patterns, and street configurations that support *intensification* and avoids the need for unjustified and uneconomical expansion;
 - c) meet the capacity requirements of forecasted growth within *urban areas*;
 - d) is planned, built, and maintained in accordance with the policies in Section 5.2 {Infrastructure}.
- 2.2.4.2 The Region and local municipalities may plan for *infrastructure and public service facilities* within *urban areas* beyond the horizon of this Plan in order to address long-term needs.
- 2.2.4.3 The Region will coordinate with local municipalities, school boards and other public agencies to improve the delivery of *infrastructure, public service facilities*, and other related programs and services.
- 2.2.4.4 The Region will update its Development Charge By-law, as required, to reflect changes in growth forecasts and to ensure that new development will cover the costs required to expand, upgrade and/or maintain *infrastructure and public service facilities* as a result of growth related capital costs.
- 2.2.4.5 The Region will develop a Smart City Strategy that identifies and assesses the use of existing and new technologies in order to manage regional *infrastructure*, resources and services more efficiently and more *sustainably*.

2.2.5 Ensure settlement area expansions support Regional Forecasts and growth management objectives.

- 2.2.5.1 Expansions or adjustments to settlement area boundaries are not permitted except where the requirements set out in section 2.2.5, as applicable, are satisfied.

2.2.5.2 Expansions to settlement area boundaries may only occur through a municipal comprehensive review where the Region is satisfied that:

- a) based on the minimum intensification rates and density targets identified in this Plan and the forecast allocation outlined in Table 1, sufficient opportunities to accommodate forecasted growth to the horizon of this Plan are not available through *intensification* or new development in *urban areas*:
 - i. within the Niagara Region; and
 - ii. within the applicable local municipality;
- b) the proposed expansion will only make available sufficient lands needed to the horizon of this Plan based on the analysis required in Policy 2.2.5.2 a), while minimizing land consumption; and
- c) the timing of the proposed expansion and the phasing of development within *designated greenfield areas* will not adversely affect the achievement of the minimum intensification rates and density targets established in this Plan, and the comprehensive application of all of the policies in this Plan.

2.2.5.3 The Region, in consultation with local municipalities, will determine the feasibility and location of *settlement area* boundary expansions eligible under Policy 2.2.5.2 based on the following considerations:

- a) there is sufficient capacity in existing or planned *infrastructure* and *public service facilities* to service development in the proposed expansion area;
- b) the *infrastructure* and *public service facilities* needed for the proposed expansion would be financially viable over the full life-cycle of these assets;
- c) the proposed expansion would be informed, where applicable, by the Region's:
 - i. Water and Wastewater Master Servicing Plan;

- ii. Transportation Master Plan; and
 - iii. Stormwater Management Guidelines;
- d) *municipal services* needed for the proposed expansion would be planned and demonstrated to avoid, or if avoidance is not possible, minimize and mitigate any potential negative impacts on the watershed and the water resource system in accordance with Chapter 3 {Sustainable Region};
- e) the proposed expansion would avoid key hydrologic areas, the natural heritage system, and *prime agricultural areas*, where possible;
- f) further to Policy 2.2.5.3 e), if avoidance is not possible, alternative locations across the local municipality will be evaluated, prioritized and determined in accordance with the following:
- i. expansion into specialty crop areas is prohibited;
 - ii. reasonable alternatives that avoid *prime agricultural areas* are evaluated; and
 - iii. where *prime agricultural areas* cannot be avoided, lower priority agricultural lands are used;
- g) the proposed expansion is in compliance with the minimum distance separation formula;
- h) any adverse impacts on the agri-food network would be avoided, or if avoidance is not possible, minimized and mitigated as determined through an agricultural impact assessment;
- i) the policies in Section 2 (Wise Use and Management of Resources) and Section 3 (Protecting Public Health and Safety) of the Provincial Policy Statement are applied;
- j) the proposed expansion would meet any applicable requirements of the *Greenbelt Plan*, the *Niagara Escarpment Plan*, and the *Niagara Peninsula Source Protection Plan*; and
- k) within the Protected Countryside in the Greenbelt Area:

- i. the proposed expansion is identified in the *Greenbelt Plan* as a Town/Village;
- ii. the proposed expansion would be modest in size, and represent no more than a 5 percent increase in the geographic size of the *settlement area* based on boundaries mapped in Schedule B, up to a maximum size of 10 hectares;
- iii. residential development would not be permitted on more than 50 percent of the lands that would be added to the *settlement area*;
- iv. the proposed expansion would support the achievement of *complete communities*;
- v. the proposed uses within the expansion area cannot be reasonably accommodated within the existing *settlement area* boundary;
- vi. the proposed expansion would be serviced by existing *municipal services* without impacting future *intensification* opportunities in the existing *settlement area*; and
- vii. expansion into the *natural heritage system* identified by the *Greenbelt Plan* is prohibited.

2.2.5.4 Notwithstanding Policy 2.2.5.2, the Region, in consultation with local municipality, may adjust *settlement area* boundaries outside of a *municipal comprehensive review*, provided:

- a) there would be no net increase in land within settlement areas;
- b) for the purpose of Policy 2.2.5.4 a), no net increase includes all lands, except lands that are:
 - i. natural heritage features and areas, natural heritage systems and floodplains;
 - ii. rights-of-way for utility services, such as freeways, railways, and electricity transmission lines; and
 - iii. cemeteries;

- c) the adjustment would support the municipality's ability to meet the intensification rates and density targets established in this Plan;
- d) the location of any lands added to the *settlement area* will satisfy the applicable criteria in Policy 2.2.5.3;
- e) the affected *settlement area* is not a *rural settlement* or in the Greenbelt Area; and
- f) the *settlement area* is serviced by *municipal servicing* and there is sufficient reserve *infrastructure* capacity to service the lands.

2.2.5.5 Notwithstanding Policy 2.2.5.2, a *settlement area* boundary expansion may occur in advance of a *municipal comprehensive review*, provided:

- a) a Regional *municipal comprehensive review* is not underway;
- b) the amount of land to be added to the *settlement area* will be no larger than 40 hectares;
- c) notwithstanding Policy 2.2.5.5 b), multiple, concurrent expansions totalling larger than 40 hectares may occur subject to Policies 2.2.5.3 and 2.2.5.5,
- d) the lands that are added will be planned to achieve at least the minimum density targets in Policy 2.2.14 a) and Section 4.2 {Employment} as applicable;
- e) the location of any lands added to a *settlement area* will satisfy the applicable requirements of Policy 2.2.5.3;
- f) the affected *settlement area* is not a *rural settlement* or in the Greenbelt Area;
- g) the *settlement area* is serviced by *municipal services* and there is sufficient reserve *infrastructure* capacity to service the lands;
- h) it is demonstrated that the additional lands and associated growth will be fully accounted for in the regional land needs assessment associated with the next *municipal comprehensive review*; and

- i) the proposed expansion complies with applicable regional guidance document(s).

2.2.5.6 The Region will develop criteria to guide the review of *settlement area* boundary expansions and adjustments as set out in Policies 2.2.5.2 to 2.2.5.5.

2.2.6 Provide clear direction for local municipalities to implement the regional structure.

2.2.6.1 At a minimum, local municipalities shall include policies in local Official Plans and/or Zoning By-laws that do the following:

- a) identify the boundaries of *urban areas*, as applicable, and designate and plan for lands within these boundaries pursuant to Policy 2.2.1.3;
- b) identify the boundaries of *built-up areas*, *strategic growth areas*, *designated greenfield areas*, and *rural settlements* where applicable, as shown on Schedule B;
- c) apply the minimum intensification rates listed in Table 2 to achieve the region-wide intensification target outlined in Policy 2.2.2.3;

Table 2: Intensification Rates for Built-Up Areas by Local Municipality

Municipality	Intensification Rate
Fort Erie	50%
Grimsby	98%
Lincoln	80%
Niagara Falls	50%
Niagara-on-the-Lake	20%
Pelham	25%
Port Colborne	30%
St. Catharines	95%
Thorold	25%
Wainfleet	0%
Welland	60%
West Lincoln	13%
Niagara Region	56%

- d) develop or update existing intensification strategies that promote *intensification* throughout the *built-up area* and

support the achievement of the minimum intensification rates listed in Table 2;

- e) develop secondary plans for new and identified *strategic growth areas* pursuant to Section 6.1 {District and Secondary Plans}, and the minimum density targets established in Policy 2.2.2.5 and Policy 2.2.2.9;
- f) identify minimum residential and employment densities within *designated greenfield areas* to achieve the region-wide density target outlined in Policy 2.2.2.12 a);
- g) deem plans of subdivision, or parts thereof, that have been registered for eight years or more, have had no construction occur or *infrastructure* installed on-site, and do not conform to the policies of this Plan, to no longer be a registered plan of subdivision;
- h) require that approvals of draft plans of subdivision include a lapsing date in accordance with Section 51(32) of the *Planning Act*;
- i) permit only one extension to a lapsing draft plan of subdivision for a period of up to two years unless:
 - i. the draft plan conforms to the policies of this Plan; and
 - ii. it can be demonstrated that concerted effort and progress has been made toward satisfying existing conditions of approval;
- j) limit future growth in *rural settlements* to minor infilling and small scale industrial, commercial, and institutional uses, subject to the ability to service growth by private water and wastewater treatment systems;
- k) prohibit the approval of local Official Plan and Zoning By-law amendments that would reduce individual site densities in areas approved for medium or high density residential development, unless otherwise determined through a *municipal comprehensive review*;
- l) prepare secondary plans for future *urban areas* expansions pursuant to Section 6.1 {District and

Secondary Plans} of this Plan, which shall include the following policy objectives:

- i. future *settlement areas* will be planned as *complete communities*, with a wide range and mix of housing types, sizes and levels of *affordability*;
- ii. future *settlement areas* should focus proposed commercial uses, public service facilities, related programs and services, around a core area that has access to transit service and active transportation;
- iii. future *settlement areas* will conserve biodiversity, where possible, and protect natural heritage and hydrologic resources pursuant to the policies in Chapter 3 {Sustainable Region};
- iv. the form of servicing for future *settlement areas* is *municipal servicing*; and
- v. future *settlement areas* should have access to a high quality *public realm* and urban design standards consistent with Section 6.2 {Urban Design} of this Plan.

2.2.6.2 The intensification strategies required in Policy 2.2.7.1 d) shall be implemented through local Official Plan policies and designations, secondary plans, updated zoning provisions, and other supporting documents that identify:

- a) development standards that support the achievement of *complete communities*, permit and facilitate a *compact built form* and all forms of *intensification* throughout the *built-up area*, and avoid or mitigate risks to public health and safety;
- b) the location and boundaries of *local growth centres*, where appropriate, that:
 - i. are considered priority areas for development;
 - ii. achieve higher densities than what currently exist within the *local growth centre*;
 - iii. identify an appropriate design and scale of development and the transition of built forms to adjacent areas pursuant to Section 6.2 {Urban Design};

- iv. provide a diverse mix of land uses that support existing or planned public transit and *active transportation* infrastructure;
 - v. support the provision of *affordable* housing and *specialized housing needs*; and
 - vi. revitalize and, where appropriate, preserve *cultural heritage resources* within areas that reflect local heritage, character, and streetscapes pursuant to Section 6.4 {Cultural Heritage};
- c) other major opportunities for intensification, such as infill, redevelopment, brownfield redevelopment, and the expansion or conversion of existing buildings and greyfields; and
 - d) the timing and efficient provision of Regional and local *municipal services* and their fiscal impacts on the Region and local municipality.

2.2.6.3 At a minimum, local municipalities should include the following policies in local Official Plans and/or Zoning By-laws:

- a) the inclusion of *smart city* policies pursuant to the Region's Smart City Strategy per Policy 2.2.4.5 to help improve the efficiency of *infrastructure*, resources, and services, and to promote *sustainability*.