

Wednesday, July 29, 2020

Ontario Growth Secretariat
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing 777 Bay Street
23rd Floor, Suite 2304
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

RE: A Place to Grow Amendment 1 – Comments from the City of Guelph

The following comments are provided by the City of Guelph with respect to ERO Number 019-1680 **Proposed Amendment 1 to A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe** and ERO Number 019-1679 **Proposed Land Needs Assessment Methodology for A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe**.

Population and Employment Forecasts

The proposed amendment 1 contains low, reference and high forecasts with a planning horizon of 2051. The technical report prepared by Hemson titled "Greater Golden Horseshoe: Growth Forecasts to 2051" dated June 16, 2020 provides detailed forecast results for each upper and single tier municipality.

The report notes that no land supply constraints have been identified and that no environmental constraints on growth have been identified or assumed except for Dufferin County. Since the inception of the initial Growth Plan, the City of Guelph has provided comment and been in discussion with the Ministry to ensure that considerations for the City's water and wastewater servicing are taken into account as constraining factors in the establishment of forecasts and accommodating growth. The City requests that these constraints be addressed in the allocation of growth.

The reference or low scenarios as set out in the report project that the City will maintain a steady, consistent rate of growth over the forecast period. Until the MCR is completed, we cannot be certain that there is sufficient land supply or servicing available to accommodate the forecast to 2051. In terms of land supply, growth is limited by the City's current boundaries and future annexation scenarios would be limited by the extent of the provincial natural heritage and agricultural systems.

Our primary concern is with respect to the sustainability of local water resources to service the future growth proposed by the province. Guelph is a single-tier municipality, reliant primarily on groundwater as a water supply source. As such, Guelph is somewhat limited in its ability to increase municipal water supply. Increasing water supply for growth beyond that which can be supported by the local water resources will result in significant environmental impacts and potentially

adverse impacts. The Province's growth targets must consider the limits of a sustainable water supply.

In reviewing the Hemson report, it is not apparent that Hemson has considered the unique situation of Guelph with respect to its water supply. In 2017, Guelph, under the requirements of the Clean Water Act and in coordination with the Lake Erie Source Protection Authority (i.e., the Grand River Conservation Authority), had completed a Tier 3 Water Budget and Local Area Risk Assessment (<https://www.sourcewater.ca/en/source-protection-areas/Guelph-and-Guelph-Eramosa-Tier-3.aspx>). The Tier 3 Study identified Guelph as having a Significant Risk of not having sufficient water quantity to service its future water supply needs under drought conditions. The reference future demand period was 2031, although the City's 2014 Water Supply Master Plan, and through its water conservation and efficiency program, predicted a revised future demand equal to 2038. The Significant Risk designation is the result of the high water taking from groundwater aquifers in the relatively small footprint of the City's boundaries. The Tier 3 Study also identified a risk of significant baseflow reduction in a number of creeks and streams in Guelph and the surrounding area resulting from the future demand (i.e., 2038). The additional groundwater taking to meet the water demand in 2038 was predicted to reduce baseflow in a number of local creeks (i.e., Torrance Creek, Chilligo/Ellis Creek, Hanlon Creek, Blue Spring Creek and Irish Creek) by 14 to 41 percent. The results of the Tier 3 Study, with respect to surface water impacts, raise serious concerns regarding the potential sustainability of additional water takings within the City to support the growth forecasts to 2051.

We continue to have concerns that there is insufficient water supply capacity in the local area and that increased water taking to support the 2051 growth forecasts is unsustainable. Studies to address the sustainability of the City's water supply and assessments of future demands resulting from population forecasts to 2041 are currently underway as part of the City's Water Supply Master Plan Update (WSMP Update). To adequately assess the 2051 water supply demand and the sustainability question, the City would need to undertake detailed investigations and computer modelling studies. The studies, which are currently in progress for the WSMP Update, would aid in determining if the proposed forecasted growth is feasible and estimate the potential significant environmental impacts that would occur as a result. The appropriate studies could take months to complete, therefore, it is not feasible to assess the sustainability of a 2051 water demand for the City prior to the APTG comments closing deadline.

The City also has concerns with respect to wastewater treatment requirements for growth beyond 2031. The City will need to consider the additional flow projections to accommodate growth through a study of the assimilative of the Speed River as part of our Wastewater Treatment Master Plan that is currently underway. There may be increased capital and operating and maintenance costs that would result from additional growth. Also, with the potential impact on the water servicing for the increased growth forecasts and potential short falls in water supply for the extended growth period (i.e. to 2051), this could impact the raw influent at the

Guelph Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) and even flows in the Speed River. Increased water conservation to address water supply issues could result in more concentrated influent wastewater, if water usage is reduced or if increased water reuse is undertaken. If water servicing due to lack of water supply, includes any direct water usage from the Speed River or its tributaries, water taking from new wells or increased taking from existing wells, this could reduce the base flow in the Speed River at the WWTP and its ability to assimilate effluent flows from the WWTP. Water reuse could be increased beyond the current in-plant reuse and proposed sewer flushing uses, which could involve additional infrastructure or treatment levels at the WWTP. This would result in increased capital and operating and maintenance costs independent of or in addition to costs for increased servicing, which could increase the rate costs for users.

At this time, we are not able to definitively state that any of the forecasts for 2051 are appropriate for the City. Water Supply and Wastewater Treatment Master Plan updates that are currently underway will support the municipal comprehensive review and will provide the opportunity to assess the extended forecasts to determine, among other things, whether or not water and wastewater servicing continue to place limitations on Guelph's growth potential, and if they do, to what extent.

The City of Guelph, due to its reliance on groundwater and the assimilative capacity of the Speed River, must consider sustainability in planning for growth and it is important that the Growth Plan projections recognize this in the allocation of growth. At this time, the implications of growing beyond even the 2031 forecast on local water resources has not yet been fully understood, and the City of Guelph is not supportive of any future growth that would trigger the need to examine inordinately expensive regional or provincial servicing solutions.

Recommendation: The City cannot commit to a growth forecast until such time as it is determined that the local water resources can support the growth target(s). As such, the population and employment forecasts for the City of Guelph should be established as the low forecast set out in the Hemson Report and there should be allowance for the forecasts to be adjusted lower through the municipal comprehensive review should it be demonstrated that the forecasted growth cannot be serviced in an environmentally and fiscally sustainable manner.

Should the province choose to impose growth targets on the City that would require additional water takings either inside or outside of the City, the City would continue to advocate for the Province's prioritization of water resources permitting to support municipal growth needs under the permit to take water processes of the Ontario Water Resources Act.

In recognition of the City of Guelph's commitment to the environment, it is requested that the Province consider the constraints to servicing growth that may affect the planning and distribution of growth in Guelph to the horizon of the Growth Plan.

Growth Forecasts as Minimums

The proposed amendment states that municipalities would be required to use the selected growth outlook as the updated forecasts or use higher forecasts as determined through the municipal comprehensive review as part of this round of conformity exercises to meet the conformity deadline of July 2022. The amendment also states that the proposed forecasts in Schedule 3 would be applied at a minimum by upper- and single-tier municipalities through a municipal comprehensive review.

This proposed policy amendment creates uncertainty with long range planning for land supply and infrastructure and has implications on the regional approach to growth planning established in the Growth Plan. Since the forecasts are predicated on distributing growth, this scenario could create the potential for over-designation of land within certain municipalities and/or the GGH as a whole where municipalities choose to plan for a higher growth rate. This also creates potential for conflict during the MCR process as municipalities could be lobbied by landowners to include their lands within the horizon even if the forecasted growth would be exceeded. This approach is not fiscally or environmentally sustainable.

Recommendation: The City of Guelph is not supportive of the proposed direction for the forecasts to be applied as a minimum growth forecast. Policy 5.2.4.1 and 5.2.4.2 should not be amended to include the wording “or such higher forecasts as are established by the applicable upper- or single-tier municipality through its municipal comprehensive review”.

Planning Horizon of 2051

Another proposed change is an extension of the Plan horizon from 2041 to 2051 to ensure municipalities have sufficient land to support the fostering of complete communities, economic development, job creation and housing affordability. The new horizon is stated to be consistent with the long-range planning approach of previous growth plans and better aligns with the land supply requirements of the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020.

The City recognizes that the longer planning horizon provides greater consistency with the PPS, 2020 policies. However, the introduction of a new planning horizon at a time when municipalities are in the midst of preparing master plans and studies to support the municipal comprehensive review creates financial and resource challenges in terms of meeting the conformity deadline.

Recommendation: While the City of Guelph is not in agreement with the timing of the proposed change to the planning horizon while municipal comprehensive reviews are already underway, the City does not object to the proposed horizon year of 2051.

Conformity Timeframe

Under section 12 of the Places to Grow Act, 2005, the official plan of a municipality must be brought into conformity with a growth plan within three years of the growth plan coming into effect. Subsection 12 (3) gives the Minister the ability to set an alternate date for a municipality to meet the conformity requirements. The proposed approach is to retain the current date for conformity as July 1, 2022 for APTG as amended.

We request that consideration be given to extending the timeframe for conformity to July 1, 2023 at a minimum or three years from the date of approval of Amendment 1. The Growth Plan and Land Needs Assessment have changed significantly since the conformity date was set with the 2017 Growth Plan. With Amendment 1 being released for comment in June 2020 and uncertainty around the timing for finalization of the amendment, municipalities do not have certainty as to the planning horizon or forecast for the conformity exercises. A municipal comprehensive review involves significant community engagement and substantial work on master plans to inform it; all of this takes time and resources. Municipal resources are strained at this time due to COVID-19 response and we are not in a position to continue work that may have to be revised depending on the outcomes of the consultation on Amendment 1.

Recommendation: That the conformity deadline to be set by the Minister, for municipalities to bring official plans into conformity with APTG as revised by the Amendment, if approved, be set at July 1, 2023 (at a minimum) or 3 years from the date of approval of Amendment 1.

Land Needs Assessment Methodology

The proposed land needs assessment methodology (LNA) is a simplified approach that is intended to reduce the overall complexity of implementation of the Plan. The proposal states that the Methodology will provide more flexibility to municipalities. Our concern is that the proposed approach does not appropriately balance the desire for flexibility with the need for prescriptiveness and certainty in determining land needs.

The City of Guelph continues to be supportive of the current provincial methodology for land needs assessment (2018) in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The methodology for land needs assessment allowed for a transparent and consistent approach for municipalities within the Greater Golden Horseshoe to assess the quantum of land needed to accommodate the forecasted growth to the horizon of the Growth Plan. The proposed simplified approach does not provide for this same level of consistency across the GGH. It also does not address data sources and does not provide guidance or criteria for addressing the housing market. The proposed increased flexibility is not helpful for working with stakeholders or achieving consensus and does not provide direction for alignment of land needs with other Growth Plan priorities.

Recommendation: That the detailed technical steps of the Land Needs Assessment methodology (2018) be retained and that criteria be developed for determining the market component of the LNA that considers and upholds local direction for long-term growth.

Other Considerations

Alignment with Provincial Policy Statement, 2020

The City of Guelph is supportive of the proposed amendments to provide consistency between the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020 and the Growth Plan.

Aggregate Mineral Resource Extraction

The proposed change to the Plan's aggregates policies would be more permissive of new aggregate operations, wayside pits, and quarries within the Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan. Section 4.2.8 is proposed to be amended to delete the prohibition on establishing new mineral aggregate operations and new wayside pits and quarries, or any ancillary or accessory use thereto, in the habitat of endangered and threatened species within the Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan.

While deleting this prohibition from the Plan does not absolve proponents from adhering to the requirements of the Endangered Species Act, 2007 (ESA), it has the potential to cause confusion regarding the applicability of the ESA and its approval process. This could lead to contraventions of the ESA and a reduction in the protection and recovery of species that are at risk and their habitats.

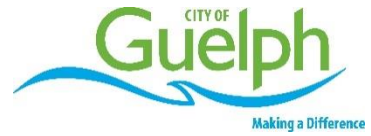
To avoid this unintended consequence, it is recommended that, rather than deleting the prohibition, Policy 4.2.8.2 a) ii be amended to be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020:

"ii. habitat of endangered species and threatened species, except in accordance with provincial and federal requirements"

While the Growth Plan Natural Heritage System is not located within the City of Guelph, it is identified on lands adjacent to the City as are Mineral Aggregate Areas in the County of Wellington's Official Plan. Recognizing linkages between and among natural heritage features and areas, this recommendation would provide greater certainty for the protection of the City of Guelph's Natural Heritage System and associated ecological functions.

Recommendation: That Policy 4.2.8.2 a) ii be amended to be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020:

"ii. habitat of endangered species and threatened species, except in accordance with provincial and federal requirements."



Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on amendment 1 to the Growth Plan and the proposed land needs assessment methodology. Should you require clarification or wish to discuss these comments, please contact: Melissa Aldunate, Manager of Policy Planning and Urban Design; by email: melissa.aldunate@guelph.ca or by phone: 226-821-0434.

Sincerely,

Kealy Dedman, P. Eng, MPA
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Infrastructure, Development and Enterprise Services
519-822-1260 extension 2248
kealy.dedman@guelph.ca