

A strategy for a healthy,
sustainable future.

2031

NIAGARA

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Niagara's Growth Management Strategy

Backgrounder

Charting Our Shared Future

Table of Contents

Title	Page
Introduction	3
Guiding Principles	3
Why are we doing a Growth Management Strategy now?	4
What is meant by 'growth'?	5
Engaging the Community	6
List of Topics for the Growth Management Strategy to Address:	
Sustainable Long-term Strategy and the Local Context	7
Established Urban Areas and Expansions	8
'Grow South' – Making it Work	9
Specific Areas of Intensification	9
Redeveloping - Brownfields, Greyfields, and Bluefields	10
Housing for Everyone	11
A Variety of Places to Work	12
How to Get There	13
Pipes and Asphalt	13
The Social and Cultural Dimensions	14
Conserving Environmental Features and Agricultural Land	14

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Introduction

Niagara's Growth Management Strategy will examine land use and supporting infrastructure to set the stage for where and how Niagara will grow until 2031. The Strategy will focus on healthy and sustainable growth. An important component of the Strategy will be gaining community input to help plan for our common future.

This Backgrounder provides some insight into why we are doing a Growth Management Strategy, what is meant by growth; the importance of community engagement; and the breadth of topics that will be discussed and studied through the process. It is meant to spark discussion of concepts and ideas and intended to build some common understanding to begin the process of studying the future of Niagara.

This Backgrounder is designed to provide Regional Council and the consultants with some detail about what is intended by this study. A more formal Request for Proposals is also to be prepared that specifically details the requirements for a successful consultant proposal to complete the Growth Management Strategy.

After the successful consultant has been hired, more detailed analysis involving a significant amount of public engagement will be expected for each of these topics and their interconnections.

Guiding Principles

Niagara's Growth Management Strategy will focus on high-order, regional concerns such as population and employment allocations, servicing systems, transportation corridors, and regionally and provincially significant agricultural lands and environmental features. It is not expected to deal with the more detailed, lower tier issues. The Strategy will build on Niagara's many positive attributes and result in a plan for a first-rate future for all of Niagara.

A vision of what Niagara will be in 10, 20 or 30 years will be explored through a wide-ranging public engagement process. Tried and true methods of connecting with Niagara's citizens we will be combined with creative and non-traditional techniques.

Niagara's vision will consider ideas from other successful communities. The "best practices" of Regions from across Canada and around the world will provide ideas for consideration for Niagara.

Niagara is geographically in a strategic position between the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and the United States. The study will address and be mindful of any tactical advantages for Niagara in its relationship to these two major players.

The Strategy will be developed in conjunction with parallel regional-scale sub-area assessments to be undertaken with the Province as proposed in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Included in these assessments will be examination of the future role of the Gateway Economic Zone, the Gateway Economic Centre, and the Major Port.

Why are we doing a Growth Management Strategy now?

There are seven basic reasons for Niagara to be doing a Growth Management Strategy at this time. The following list is not exhaustive, but provides some of the reasons:

- **Provincial policy has been significantly changed** in the last year or so, therefore the Regional Policy Plan must be brought into conformity with the changes to the *Planning Act*, *Provincial Policy Statement 2005*, *Greenbelt Act* and Plan; and the *Places to Grow Act* and Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe;
- Provincial directions in the Growth Plan have also indicated that **further sub-area assessment** will need to be carried out for specific components, therefore this provides Niagara an avenue to work with the Province to create more local solution to some of this work, as advocated in DPD 72-2006;
- A further requirement of the *Places to Grow Act* is that **conformity of all official plans** (Regional and local) be done within three years of it being released, therefore the Region needs to progress quickly to allow sufficient time for these documents to be changed with full public involvement.
- The Strategy will provide a **strategic means of linking land use, infrastructure and capital investment**, as advised by the Growth Plan. This will also help clarify directives in existing Regional Strategies such as the Transportation Strategy, the Strategy for Development and Conservation, as well as intentions outlined in such initiatives as the Economic Strategy or the Sustainability Plan.

- The **Regional Policy Plan** is due to be revised under the **five-year review** required by the *Planning Act*. The Strategy will provide base information for the five-year review.
- With so many changes proposed, this provides an **excellent opportunity to involve the citizens of Niagara** in planning for a sustainable future.
- Providing a clear direction of where growth is intended will make it **easier for developers** to invest and develop in a manner that benefits the community.

What is meant by 'growth'?

The process of growth is complex. It involves not just physical, but also economic, cultural and social growth. Growth is best achieved with a view to health and wellness. Sustainable growth will also require a keen understanding of wants, needs, abilities, capacity, issues to resolve, practices to change, and goals for the future.

A sustainable community is one that fulfills the needs of its population, while also being flexible to change as new issues or opportunities arise. As we approach the Growth Management Strategy, we must be willing to see opportunities where we might not have seen them before. This is an excellent opportunity to improve on past practices. We can also look up and within, instead of out, as a solution to growth pressures. In conjunction with allocating growth among Niagara's communities we can comprehensively look at providing services such as water, sewer, waste collection, fire, police, schools, parks, hospitals, and cultural and sports facilities. We can once again focus on our community and truly plan for sustainable and healthy growth.

Engaging the Community

The goal for Niagara's Growth Management Strategy is to be a living document that guides our future, is implemented through official plans, secondary / neighbourhood plans and zoning by-laws, involves as many Niagarans as possible and sets a direction upon which future decisions and directions are made. In order to do this effectively, this process should aim to reach every household in Niagara through a variety of information mediums.

It is understood that change challenges members of the community differently in part due to misperceptions and misunderstandings. Therefore a key part of the process will be explaining and exchanging concepts and views, and discussing alternative actions through a number of innovative engagement processes.

The Growth Management Strategy will be guided by a very detailed and multi-layered Communication Plan that ensures active engagement by citizens, politicians, interest groups, businesses, and levels of government. This is a key requirement of any successful consultant's proposal for the project.

The exploration of the following topics will be led by the consultation team.

List of Topics for the Growth Management Strategy to Address

A SUSTAINABLE LONG-TERM STRATEGY AND THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Regional Council have endorsed a Sustainability Plan, Smart Growth Principles, and the Melbourne Principles. These mechanisms all have the same intention – using our existing resources in a more effective and efficient way that better our health and social wellness, communities, political system, economy, and environment. They are based on good planning principles that take a long-term approach to solving the problems of today while not limiting the opportunities and enjoyment of future generations.

To be able to effectively plan for the future we must create a sustainable long-term approach that reinforces the similarities between Niagara's many communities and work together on shared objectives while recognizing local diversity. This will mean exploring those issues for which a common purpose can be agreed to, and for which mutually beneficial solutions can be found.

The guiding document for community development is the official plan. The visions for the Niagara community and the local communities are reflected and articulated in the Regional Policy Plan and local Official Plans. Effective growth management, and Provincial legislation, requires that these two levels of Plans be consistent with each other, and will require that whatever solutions are proposed be reflected in all levels of planning documents.

The Growth Management Strategy will:

- be grounded in sustainability, regardless of the nomenclature used to describe the approach,
- focus on an over-riding strategy for growth and conservation that benefits all of Niagara in the long-term by providing draft policies for the Regional Policy Plan.

ESTABLISHED URBAN AREAS AND EXPANSIONS

To study opportunities for growth in the future, the development potential in all urban areas within Niagara must be analyzed before additional area is considered. This includes an analysis of specifically designated intensification areas, nodes and corridors, the redevelopment potential of existing built-up areas, and measures for efficient and phased development of greenfields.

The Growth Management Strategy will examine:

- the boundaries of the built up areas within settlement areas, and the location of greenfields;
- the development potential in conjunction with the municipality involved while focusing on growth as it relates to Niagara as a whole;
- growth targets for each local municipality based on the Regional allocation found in the Growth Plan;
- targets for the number of people and jobs per hectare in designated greenfield areas, based on the local municipality, to achieve the overall target of 50 people and jobs per hectare;
- strategies, targets and policies for smaller communities to ensure they meet the goal of one full-time job per three residents;
- policies for infilling, intensification, redevelopment and compact greenfield area development will help Niagara achieve the 40% intensification target within built up urban areas by 2015;
- best practices for implementation;
- all strategies, policies, and best practices to consider the land use and servicing implications including transportation, water and wastewater, waste management, and community infrastructure;
- phasing of growth, including intensification and greenfield development, as well as servicing upgrades;
- possible future expansion areas that may be considered for additional urban development and the timing when these may be expected to be required to meet future needs only after it has been determined that existing urban areas cannot accommodate forecasted growth; and
- if, when and where future Urban Areas Boundaries Expansions can be considered.

'GROW SOUTH' – MAKING IT WORK

The Regional Strategy for Development and Conservation has anticipated that long-term growth will be directed to the southern municipalities along the Niagara Falls/Fort Erie and Thorold/Welland/Port Colborne corridors. This strategy is referred to as 'Grow South'. To 'Grow South' it will be necessary to agree on where, when, and how this growth will occur.

The Growth Management Strategy will examine:

- o policy, infrastructure and incentive options to make the 'Grow South' vision a reality; and
- o policy, infrastructure and incentive options that can be used to support the sustainability of the northern municipalities.

SPECIFIC AREAS OF INTENSIFICATION

Growth Plan Urban Growth Centre /Gateway Economic Zone and Centre

The Provincial Growth Plan has designated downtown St. Catharines as an Urban Growth Centre (UGC) that will be required to achieve a minimum gross density of 150 residents and jobs combined per hectare by 2031. This UGC is intended to be the focal area for investment in institutional and region-wide public services, as well as commercial, recreational, cultural and entertainment uses; accommodate and support major transit infrastructure; serve as high density major employment centres that will attract provincially, nationally or internationally significant employment uses; and to accommodate a significant share of population and employment growth.

The settlement areas of Fort Erie and Niagara Falls have been designated as the Gateway Economic Zone. A Gateway Economic Centre and a Major Port have been located in the general areas of Welland and Port Colborne. According to the Growth Plan, the Zone and Centre are intended to recognize the importance of cross-border trade with the United States. Planning and economic development in these settlement areas is intended to support economic diversity and promote increased opportunities for cross-border trade, movement of goods and tourism.

In concert with discussions between the Province, the Region and local municipalities, the Growth Management Strategy will examine:

- the boundaries of the Urban Growth Centre, Gateway Economic Zone and Gateway Economic Centre within the respective settlement areas;
- intentions and proposed policies for how these areas should develop by 2031 in a coordinated fashion; and
- possible strategies, tools, incentives and targets to achieve the desired goals and objectives.

Regionally and Locally Significant Nodes and Corridors

The Growth Management Strategy will examine the concept of nodes and corridors to identify those that would be regionally and locally significant. Such nodes and corridors could be the focus for accommodating intensification.

The Growth Management Strategy will examine:

- and identify potential nodes and corridors through an assessment of existing commercial-centred or higher density mixed-use areas;
- visual understanding of nodes and corridors locations, such as a map of the regionally significant nodes and corridors that could be included in the Regional Policy Plan to ensure these nodes and corridors are designated as places of special Regional interest for servicing and transportation planning purposes, and locating of facilities and employment centres; and
- possible criteria for the designation of additional locally-significant nodes and corridors.

REDEVELOPING - BROWNFIELDS, GREYFIELDS, AND BLUEFIELDS

The challenge in redeveloping existing built-up areas is often to deal with the past uses on the site, and how the land or buildings will be used in the future. Brownfields (former commercial or industrial sites that may or may not be contaminated), greyfields (former or existing commercial sites that are automobile oriented and feature an abundance of asphalt), and bluefields (former institutional facilities such as abandoned schools or hospitals) all offer significant potential for future redevelopment that can take advantage of existing infrastructure. Existing buildings can sometimes also be retained for new uses.

The Growth Management Strategy will examine:

- possible strategies for the revitalization of brownfield, greyfield and bluefield sites;

- the tools that are needed to ensure that these areas and sites will intensify;
- possible targets and strategies for a mix of uses; and
- possible guidelines and policies to integrate the redevelopment into the community, especially when heritage resources are involved.

HOUSING FOR EVERYONE

Niagara faces a number of housing challenges. Recent analysis has found gaps in the supply of housing in relation to demographic and economic realities. These gaps create significant challenges for Niagara residents. Effective growth management and a strong economy require attention to housing needs.

The Growth Management Strategy will examine:

- and build upon *People Needing Housing: A Collaborative Strategy for the Niagara Community* to address housing in an integrated growth management context;
- possible targets to ensure a range of housing choices are available to all market and non-market segments, considering both rental and ownership;
- possible policies to ensure a range of housing is properly located within all communities;
- minimum affordable housing targets, policies, and implementation strategies for their achievement;
- all housing forms in relation to employment opportunities, intensification areas, corridors, the urban growth centre, and Gateway Economic Zone, the Gateway Economic Centre and the Major Port;
- possible strategies, policies and best practices to support and encourage the creation of secondary suites through-out the built up area;
- mediation strategies that will suitably integrate higher density housing forms into existing areas; and
- special needs housing in relation to support services and community facilities to ensure the success of integrated program delivery.

A VARIETY OF PLACES TO WORK

The Growth Management Strategy will ensure that there are a variety of areas within communities for people to work. While past practice separated work from home, there is now a greater recognition that some forms of workplaces are better suited to being integrated within the community. Provincial policy has also been guiding communities to preserve those employment lands that contain uses that need to be separated due to regulation for our long-term economic prosperity. Therefore employment uses from mixed-use areas with people and jobs in the same neighbourhood, to those strictly designated for employment uses will all be considered.

The Growth Management Strategy will examine:

- the aggregate areas and location of existing employment areas, with a particular focus on infilling or potential redevelopment within built-up areas;
- generic design solutions to address infill potential for employment lands that would effectively use this land, including discussion about redevelopment of single storey buildings into multiple stories; clustering of similar uses in more compact form; minimizing surface parking; the creation of mixed use nodes and corridors; and relocation of high-impact activities to create greater compatibility with, and sensitivity to, nearby areas;
- employment lands in the form of a comprehensive review to confirm if the employment lands are needed over the long-term or if they can be considered for conversion to other uses;
- the current and potential future trends, patterns, needs and location criteria of the retail industry in North America and its relevancy to Ontario and Niagara;
- the effect of socio-demographic trends on commercial land uses and forms (including big box, malls, plazas, mixed-use, main street, etc.) in relation to downtowns and major commercial centres;
- the role of commercial areas in mixed use intensification and the opportunities for such development in Niagara;
- the influence of retail development on travel patterns and the ability to link commercial development with transportation and transit infrastructure and investment; and
- possible strategies, targets and design considerations to ensure that people can live and work in the same community and neighbourhood.

HOW TO GET THERE

Transportation is the act of moving from place to place - whether it is by foot, wheelchair, walker, bicycle, scooter, skateboard, bus, train, car, truck, plane, or boat. There are three levels of transportation analysis – local, Regional and inter-regional.

The Growth Management Study will examine:

- the work of the Region, local municipalities, Province and Federal government in planning for the wide range of transportation choices in Niagara;
- possible guidelines that demonstrate how transportation infrastructure best interacts with land use to effectively move people and goods from point to point in a convenient manner, whether within a community or between communities;
- possible guidelines, strategies and policies that recommend transit supportive densities;
- possible policies that address transportation demand management to reduce trip distances and times, and increase the modal share of alternatives to the automobile;
- the economic, environmental and social costs of modes of travel on society and the community;
- strategies and policies regarding how transportation systems should be integrated with land-use, where/if new systems should be placed, any phasing that should be undertaken, and how existing systems could be improved; and
- the goals for transportation within nodes and corridors.

PIPES AND ASPHALT

Planning for infrastructure should be integrated with planning for growth. Municipal water and sanitary sewer services are the preferred form of servicing for urban areas. Encouraging intensification and redevelopment within already built up urban areas with municipal sewer and water provides greater efficiency of existing infrastructure and will be focused areas of intensification. Within the Region, growth will take the form of intensification, redevelopment, conversion of land uses and new development within greenfield areas.

The Growth Management Strategy will examine:

- existing and planned servicing in both the local municipalities and the Region to determine the infrastructure needs to accommodate future growth;

- infrastructure requirements to accommodate intensification and redevelopment in the built-up areas, with particular attention paid to the designated nodes and corridors; and
- greenfield development and phasing options, especially in the Grow South settlement areas.

THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

Employers looking to invest in an area, or people seeking to relocate or stay in place are influenced by the access to medical care, education opportunities, child care provision, wide-ranging cultural and recreation programs and activities, a sense of place with arts and heritage resources and services for people in need such as social assistance and care or programming for newcomers.

It is recognized that social and cultural infrastructure within a community can bring people together by providing places to gather, interact, share, learn, get well, play, get active, worship or even die. This social and cultural infrastructure can often act as focal points to a community, heighten the quality of life and spur economic development and activity.

The Growth Management Strategy will examine:

- all of the changes it proposes and the effects they will have on the social and cultural dimensions of our communities;
- guidelines, strategies and policies for public spaces and/or an open space system that support community interaction, active and passive recreation, environmental sustainability, and gathering;
- current social and cultural infrastructure network; and
- possible improvements for social infrastructure, including such issues as the location of existing and new, apparent needs or gaps in the network, the preservation of our heritage resources and their long-term use and survival, and the ability to include exercise in our daily experience.

CONSERVING ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES AND AGRICULTURAL LAND

Preserving and conserving the quality and quantity of our natural resources such as air, water, natural heritage areas, and agricultural land makes sense for our long-term survival. Even small actions can have cumulative effects on the natural environment. Such actions can include cleaning the contamination of a site that affects the ground water supply, or the recycling of materials to lessen the energy and resources required to make new.

The challenge for the Growth Management Strategy will be multi-fold with regards to conserving the environment. The Strategy will examine and be informed by the recently completed environmental policies and mapping contained in the Regional Policy Plan, as well as any subsequent amendments discovered through Ministry assessment. The Strategy will examine:

- areas where additional greenfield development may be acceptable, based on an assessment of the natural or agricultural features of the area, ability to service, and a comprehensive needs analysis;
- possible policies and strategies to address water conservation, energy conservation, air quality protection, integrated waste management and cultural heritage conservation; and
- possible design strategies and tools for how urban development (including buildings, sewer / water, roads, trails, hydro, waste collection, etc.) can best be integrated with various environmental features in a way that will not limit the quality or quantity of the resource, while also being compact in scale.