



MAKING OUR MARK

NIAGARA OFFICIAL PLAN



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This is the Niagara Official Plan, 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.

The Niagara Official Plan identifies: what we need to protect; how and where we will grow; and policy tools to manage the same. Resources such as the *natural environment system*, *agricultural system*,

source water, aggregates and petroleum, and cultural heritage and archaeology each are protected for specific reasons whether it be ecological, economic, cultural heritage or community health.

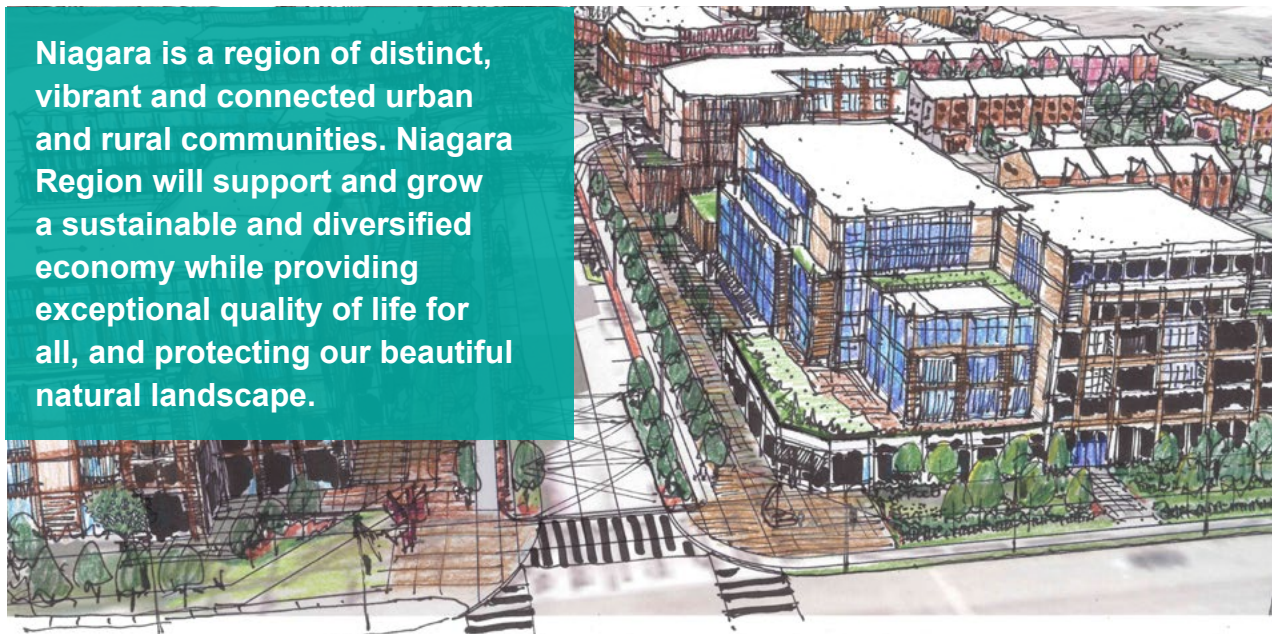
Properly protecting resources while planning for growth is critical. Policy tools such as district and secondary planning, *subwatershed planning* and urban design are important in managing growth to ensure relevant resources are protected. *Infrastructure* in terms of services and a *transportation system* must be sustainably provided for to support growth.

Niagara is on the threshold of significant growth. A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2019, as amended) requires 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 this Plan balances the input provided by individuals, agencies, boards, governments, First Nations, Indigenous communities, 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.

2051 Vision

Niagara is a region of distinct, vibrant and connected urban and rural communities. Niagara Region will support and grow a sustainable and diversified economy while providing exceptional quality of life for all, and protecting our beautiful natural landscape.



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 Economy

A prosperous agricultural industry and *employment areas* that provide jobs and grow our economy.

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.

1.1 Overview – Niagara Past, Present, and Future



Formed in 1970¹, Niagara Region is composed of twelve Local Area 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 bordered 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.

¹ On June 26, 1969, the Province of Ontario enacted The Regional Municipality of Niagara Act. On January 1, 1970, twelve area municipal governments and one regional government replaced the two counties and twenty-six municipal structures.

Niagara's history spans more than 10,000 years, 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 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, breweries and distilleries, 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 Transit train connection to the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, make 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 Legislative 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; *climate change* mitigation and adaptation; the adequate provision of *affordable* housing; protection of the environment; the development of *complete communities*; and protection of *employment areas*, agriculture and resources.

This Plan was adopted by Regional Council on June 23, 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 Area Municipalities in updating their official plans for conformity, the Region will develop guidelines. 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 Area 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.

This Plan is required to be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement (2020), conform to the Growth Plan (2019, as amended) and Greenbelt Plan (2017), and not conflict with the Niagara Escarpment Plan (2017).

1.2.3 Plan Utilization

This Plan will be used by Regional Council and Local Area 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, businesses, 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 Section 1.2.2.

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.

The policies in Chapter 7 and Provincial policies and legislation will assist in interpreting this Plan.

1.3.2 Format

This Plan consists of policies, tables, comment boxes, maps, figures, schedules, appendices, and a Glossary of Terms. The schedules, tables and Glossary of Terms must be read in the context of the related policies. For the purpose of the Planning Act and the Municipal Act, Chapters 1 to 8 and the Glossary of Terms, inclusive of policies, schedules, and tables, shall be considered the Plan.

Comment boxes are included within this 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.



A leaf image can be found beside key policies located throughout chapters and sections of this Plan to highlight their relation to *climate change* adaptation and mitigation.

Changes to certain schedules may be made without an amendment to this Plan where permitted in policy. Appendices provide context for understanding policy application but are not part of this Plan and can be amended without an amendment.

Italicized terms contained in this 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 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.” The term “will” is similar and requires the policy direction to be carried out. 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 is 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

This 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. Schedules of this Plan identify geographically where certain policies apply and are listed in the Table of Contents. Appendices, also listed in the Table of Contents, provide supplemental information to assist with policy understanding and implementation. Descriptions of the core chapters are as follows:

1.4.1 Chapter 1 – Making Our Mark

The introduction identifies Niagara’s planning context, provides a vision, 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.

1.4.2 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 land* planning are also addressed. There are several schedules and tables that must be read in conjunction with the policies.

1.4.3 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* provide for the protection of environmental features and *ecological functions* from adverse impacts. The policies of this chapter also give direction for *climate change* mitigation and adaptation, although *climate change* is also addressed throughout the Plan. This chapter also provides policy direction on *source water* protection, *excess soil* management and planning within the Niagara Escarpment.

1.4.4 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 a sound tax base to position Niagara for economic prosperity. Agricultural policies direct 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 converting existing or establishing future *employment areas*. Policies in this chapter also protect *mineral aggregate resources* and *petroleum resources* from incompatible land uses and provide for extraction while minimizing environmental and social impacts. The economic prosperity section captures policy direction from other chapters and sections, which can directly or indirectly assist in improving economic prosperity.

1.4.5 Chapter 5 – Connected Region

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

This chapter addresses Niagara’s *infrastructure*, transportation, services and trails and open spaces for 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. Trails and open space policies ensure active and healthy connections within and between communities.

1.4.6 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. Healthy community policies support the development of healthy, vibrant and safe communities. Cultural and archaeological 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.

1.4.7 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, transition, as well as consultation policies.

1.4.8 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, such as land use designations, permitted uses and *infrastructure*.

1.4.9 Glossary of Terms

The Glossary of Terms provides definitions of terms that are italicized within the Plan.