

Municipal & Planning Law

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Ontario Releases Proposed Revisions to Four Land Use Plans Affecting the Greater Golden Horseshoe

By Laura Dean

Earlier this week, the province released **proposed revisions** to four of its land use plans in effect within the Greater Golden Horseshoe: the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the Greenbelt Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan.

The release of these proposed revisions comes following a year-long co-ordinated review of the plans which included extensive public consultation and the appointment of an Advisory Panel which released its report containing 87 recommendations in December 2015.

The general themes of the proposed revisions are: building complete communities, supporting agriculture, protecting natural heritage and water, growing the greenbelt, addressing climate change, integrating infrastructure and improving plan implementation.

Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe

Proposed revisions to the Growth Plan would introduce a number of new policies and directions for supporting growth. These revisions centre around increased intensification, promoting transit, protecting and enhancing employment areas, goods movement, stormwater management, protecting natural heritage systems and supporting agriculture.

Although there are numerous proposed revisions, highlights include an increase in the minimum intensification target from 40 per cent to 60 per cent, minimum density targets for “major transit station areas” and new policies to increase the minimum density target for “designated greenfield areas” from 50 to 80 residents.

Greenbelt Plan

Revisions to the Greenbelt Plan focus predominately on growing the Greenbelt, encouraging opportunities

for economic activities on agricultural lands, watershed planning and preserving cultural heritage resources.

Highlights of the proposed revisions to the Greenbelt Plan include the province’s proposal to add four new parcels of land to the Greenbelt Plan’s “Protected Countryside” designation and the designation of 21 major river valleys and seven associated coastal wetlands as “Urban River Valley” areas.

Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan

Proposed revisions to the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (“ORMCP”) focus on protecting natural areas, supporting agriculture, conserving cultural heritage resources, encouraging opportunities for economic activities on agricultural lands and planning for stormwater and watersheds.

Highlights of the proposed revisions to the ORMCP include greater flexibility for “on-farm diversified uses” and “agricultural related uses,” a requirement that applications for major development not be approved unless the applicant can demonstrate there is sufficient assimilative capacity to deal with the sewage from the development and prohibiting the approval of applications for small-scale commercial, industrial and institutional uses in prime agricultural areas.

Niagara Escarpment Plan

The Niagara Escarpment Plan’s policies and land use designations would be updated and streamlined to better harmonize and align with the rest of the planning framework in the region, including the Provincial Policy Statement. Land use designation mapping in the Niagara Escarpment Plan, some of which dates back to 1985, would also be updated to ensure it is accurate and current.

Ongoing Work

In response to the Advisory Panel recommendations and feedback from public consultations, the province is in the process of:

- considering possible expansion of the Greenbelt outside of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area where important water resources are under pressure from urban growth;
- obtaining detailed technical information from municipalities, conservation authorities and landowners in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area to determine if further refinements to the Greenbelt are required; and
- producing guidance documents and mapping of natural heritage and agricultural systems outside the Greenbelt.

Feedback

The province will be hosting **public open houses** on the proposed changes to the four plans across the Greater Golden Horseshoe from late May until early July 2016. **Comments and feedback** may be provided until September 30, 2016.

If you have questions regarding any aspect of municipal, land use, planning or development law, please contact any member of the Aird & Berlis LLP Municipal & Land Use Planning Group:

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