

## Report PDR-PCD-21-15

**To:** Chair Wright and Members of the Planning and Community Development Committee

**From:** Randy Scherzer, Director; Scott Taylor, Senior Planner; and Alisha Buitenhuis, Planner

**Meeting Date:** May 19, 2015

**Subject:** **2015 Provincial Co-ordinated Policy Review**

**Status:** Recommendation adopted by Committee as amended per Resolution PCD70-15; Endorsed by County Council June 2, 2015 per Resolution CC81-15;

### Recommendations

**WHEREAS the Province of Ontario is undertaking a co-ordinated review of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the Greenbelt Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, and the Niagara Escarpment Plan,**

**AND WHEREAS the Niagara Escarpment Plan is partially located within Grey County,**

**AND WHEREAS the Province is seeking input to guide proposed changes to the four aforementioned policy documents,**

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Report PDR-PCD-21-15 is hereby received,**

**AND THAT the report be forwarded onto the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing as the County of Grey comments for the proposed updates to the Niagara Escarpment Plan,**

**AND THAT this report be forwarded onto member municipalities within Grey for their information.**

### Background

Planning in Ontario is guided by the *Planning Act* and the Provincial Policy Statement. More detailed and geographically unique plans are implemented in certain areas, including the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (“the Growth Plan”), the Greenbelt Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, and the Niagara

Escarpment Plan. The Province's land use policy framework is primarily implemented by municipalities through official plans and other land use planning documents. These Provincial policy documents are currently undergoing a review by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH).

The Growth Plan guides growth and development in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The major goal of this plan is to accommodate growth through intensification and curb sprawl through sustainable and livable densities. The plan distinguishes between different sizes of communities and how each type of community should accommodate growth. It also sets density targets for different areas (i.e. built-up areas, greenfields, emerging downtowns). Infrastructure planning is a significant part of the plan as well, and the plan encourages growth planning and infrastructure planning to be a connected process. Grey County is not affected by the Growth Plan as it is located outside of the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

The Greenbelt is protected by three plans: the Greenbelt Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, and the Niagara Escarpment Plan. The Greenbelt Plan delineates the Protected Countryside, where agriculture is the predominant land use. It provides long-term protection to natural heritage and water resource systems, and allows for tourism, recreation, and resource-based uses. Towns, villages, and hamlets within the Greenbelt are provided with some policies as well. Grey County is only affected by the Greenbelt Plan in areas covered by the Niagara Escarpment Plan.

The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan covers a moraine landform of approximately 190 000 hectares (470 000 acres) in size. The moraine contains important surface water and groundwater resources which are protected by the plan. Development is permitted under four land use designations: Natural Core Areas and Natural Linkage Areas which create an ecological connection across the plan area; Countryside Areas which promote agricultural and rural economic uses; and Settlement Areas which are mainly governed by the Provincial Policy Statement, official plans, and applicable Growth Plan policies. Grey County is not affected by the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

The Niagara Escarpment Plan encompasses approximately 195 000 hectares (480 000 acres) of continuous natural environment along the Escarpment. Development within the Escarpment must be compatible with protecting the natural environment. There are seven land use designations within the Niagara Escarpment Plan. The three most predominant designations are Escarpment Rural Areas, Escarpment Natural Areas, and Escarpment Protection Areas. Multiple urban designations exist as well. The Niagara Escarpment Commission is responsible for the implementation of the plan. This plan affects Grey County and six of its member municipalities: Municipality of Grey Highlands, Town of The Blue Mountains, Municipality of Meaford, Township of Chatsworth, City of Owen Sound and Township of Georgian Bluffs.

## *Public Participation Process*

MMAH is currently undertaking a public participation process. Regional town hall meetings began on March 25, 2015 and conclude on May 15, 2015. Planning and Community Development staff attended an open house in Owen Sound on April 18, 2015. Discussions at the open houses are focused around six main topics:

1. Protecting agricultural land, water and natural areas,
2. Keeping people and goods moving, and building cost-effective infrastructure,
3. Fostering healthy, livable and inclusive communities,
4. Building communities that attract workers and create jobs,
5. Addressing climate change and building resilient communities, and
6. Improving implementation and better aligning the plans.

It is important to note that at this stage, no changes have been proposed to the four plans. MMAH is collecting feedback on what changes the public, planning staff, and other interest groups would like to see. Comments at this stage can be submitted until May 28, 2015. At the end of 2015, MMAH will be presenting proposed changes and undertaking a second round of public consultation to collect feedback.

## *Suggested Changes*

Planning staff are focusing comments on the Niagara Escarpment Plan, as it is the only plan applicable to Grey County. The Niagara Escarpment Commission has released 17 discussion papers in relation to the review; however, they are each quite lengthy and staff have not reviewed them in detail at this time. The topics are as follows:

1. Review of Land Use Designation Criteria
2. Revised Land Use Designation Mapping
3. Additions to the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area
4. Urban Uses and Urban Designations
5. Water Policies
6. Aggregates
7. Agriculture
8. Scenic Resources
9. Land Filling and Contour Changes
10. Second Dwelling Units
11. Definition and Interpretation of Existing Uses
12. Small Scale Uses
13. Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Space System
14. Cemeteries
15. Woodlands and Significant Woodlands
16. Cultural Heritage
17. *Endangered Species Act*

Staff have compiled a list of suggestions for MMAH with regard to changes to the Niagara Escarpment Plan. Some of these changes may be covered in the Niagara Escarpment discussion papers; if so, staff support the Niagara Escarpment Commission position. The suggested changes are as follows:

1. Bill 140 (Strong Communities through Affordable Housing Act) provisions should be incorporated.
2. Existing development approvals within the Escarpment Recreation Area should be recognized.
3. The Provincial Minimum Distance Separation Formulae should be incorporated and used by the Niagara Escarpment Commission.
4. Municipal and County environmental mapping, such as that for Significant Woodlands, should be recognized.

Staff will continue to monitor the policy review process and will bring forward a second report when the proposed changes are released. There will be further opportunity to provide comments at that time.

## Financial / Staffing / Legal / Information Technology Considerations

There are no financial, staffing, legal or information technology considerations arising from this report. As noted above, the policy review is in its early stages and it is not clear whether the policy changes will result in changes to the County Official Plan. If so, the changes can be implemented in the form of a housekeeping amendment, which would combine them with other changes, and therefore not result in any additional staffing or financial needs.

County Planning staff will look to attend any future training open houses hosted by MMAH, but such sessions are generally free or minimal cost.

## Link to Strategic Goals / Priorities

Action 2.10 under Goal 2 of the County's Strategic Plan speaks to the continued management of growth and the application of sound land use planning principles. The Provincial Co-ordinated Policy Review is providing the opportunity for updated land use planning in Ontario and improving policies to reflect new ideas in planning. Potential changes to the Niagara Escarpment Plan can improve land use planning in parts of Grey County, and new ideas that result from this review could be incorporated into the OP regardless of whether the plans apply to Grey County or not.

## Attachments

Information regarding the co-ordinated review can be found at [www.ontario.ca/landuseplanningreview](http://www.ontario.ca/landuseplanningreview).

The discussion papers published by the Niagara Escarpment Commission can be found at <http://www.escarpment.org/planreview/NECDiscussionPapers/index.php>

Respectfully submitted by,

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Planner

Director Sign Off: *Randy Scherzer*