



CITY OF
WELLAND

SEPTEMBER 2021

OFFICIAL
PLAN
REVIEW

GROWTH MANAGEMENT BACKGROUND REVIEW



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1 Introduction



SGL has reviewed the current City of Welland Official Plan and identify possible gaps necessary to bring the Plan into conformity with growth management policies in the Provincial Policy Statement, Growth Plan and the Niagara Region Official Plan. As Niagara Region is responsible for undertaking the Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) and Land Needs Assessment, we have reviewed their work to date and identified the implications of their work . As well, during this background review we have:

- Reviewed the Region’s “Niagara Official Plan: Land Needs Assessment and Settlement Area Boundary Review Update” Staff Report and associated attachments (Staff Report PDS 33-2021, dated August 11, 2021);
- Reviewed the Region’s “Regional Structure Policy Paper” (dated May 2021), as attached to Niagara Region Report PDS 17-2021; and
- Reviewed the policies on how intensification and infill housing are addressed in the current Official Plan, in the context of the Region’s updated terminology for its Regional Structure.

2 Review of Niagara Region MCR



- Niagara Region is currently in the process of updating the Region's Official Plan through its Municipal Comprehensive Review which will shape the use of land, the economy and how the Region will grow for the next 30 years.
 - Specifically the Updated Niagara Region Official Plan will address:
 - How and where growth will occur;
 - Ensure adequate and diverse supply of attainable housing;
 - Plan for infrastructure needs;
 - Create desirable conditions to attract and retain jobs; and
 - Protect the natural environment and address climate change.
- The Region's Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) will bring the Niagara Official Plan into conformity with new Provincial policies.
 - Recent Provincial policies have set minimum population and employment growth targets for Niagara Region to the year 2051.
- It is the Region's responsibility to distribute the population and job forecasts to each municipality in the Region.
- In August of 2021, Niagara Region released their draft Regional Official Plan policies and Growth Allocations for accommodating the projected growth to the year 2051
 - The Region of Niagara is anticipated to accommodate a population of 694,000 people and 272,000 jobs by the year 2051
 - To accommodate the 2051 growth, the Region has identified a Regional Intensification Rate of 60%, which is an average, with different intensification rates for each municipality.
- The draft Regional Official Plan policies and Growth Allocations also included a preliminary land needs assessment, that identified a need of an additional 495 hectares of Community Area through settlement area boundary expansions across the Region, and 210 hectares of additional employment lands required.
- In Welland, the Region's report summarizes the following key statistics:
 - 2051 Population: 83,000 people (2021-2051 growth of 26,790 people);
 - 2051 Households: 37,540 units (2021-2051 growth of 13,930 units);

- 2051 Jobs: 28,790 jobs (2021-2051 growth of approx. 10,750 jobs);
- Intensification Target: 75%; and
- DGA Density Target: 50 residents and jobs per hectare.

- In terms of household growth in Welland:
 - Of the 13,930 additional households between 2021-2051:
 - 10,440 units are forecast within the Built-up Area comprised of:
 - 2,920 singles/semis (28%);
 - 3,330 townhouses (32%); and
 - 4,190 apartments (40%);
 - 3,450 units are forecast within the DGA comprised of:
 - 2,630 singles/semis (76%);
 - 720 townhouses (21%); and
 - 100 apartments (3%);
 - Remaining 40 units are forecast within the Rural Area.
 - According to the Region, 115 hectares of land are required to accommodate forecast household and job growth in the Community Area of Welland. Since there are 115 hectares of DGA lands in Welland, no expansion is required for Community Area lands.
 - This 115 hectares of land is largely contained in North West Welland, which was recently brought into the City's Settlement Area boundary by OPA #29.

- In terms of job growth in Welland:
 - Of the 10,750 jobs additional jobs between 2021-2051:
 - 4,513 are Community Area jobs (42%);
 - 5,658 are Employment Area jobs (53%); and
 - 579 are Rural Area jobs (5%).
 - According to the Region, Welland can accommodate all Community Area jobs on existing designated lands.
 - However, Welland's existing Employment Area lands only have the potential to accommodate 4,552 jobs. This works out to 1,106 jobs fewer than the forecast jobs for Employment Area lands for 2051.
 - As such, the Region states that Welland needs an Employment Area expansion of 45 hectares to accommodate the forecast jobs (calculated at a density of 25 jobs per hectare).

Implications for Welland

- The City should consider where the small 45-hectare settlement area boundary expansion is most appropriate in the City.

3 Employment Conversions



- The Region will be considering potential employment conversions as part of its MCR later in the Fall of 2021.
 - Employment conversions refer to changing land uses from traditional industrial to alternative land uses such as residential
 - Employment conversions provide an opportunity to accommodate a portion of the anticipated population growth in the City.
 - Interestingly, no employment conversions have been requested within the City of Welland.
 - Requests have been made in Niagara-on-the-Lake, St. Catharines, and Thorold.
- Provincial policy now permits employment conversions to occur both during an a Regional MCR and outside of the MCR
- With no employment conversion being requested at this time within the City, it is possible future conversions could occur outside of the MCR process. These future employment conversion will be subject to both Provincial policies as well as the Region of Niagara Official Plan policies for conversion but also appropriate policies should be incorporated into the City's Official Plan to guide that process.

Implications for Welland

- The Official Plan should incorporate policies to guide the employment conversion process outside of the MCR process as permitted by the Growth Plan.

4 Review of Regional Structure Policy Paper



- The Region’s May 2021 Regional Structure Policy Paper, attached to Regional Staff Report PDS 17-2021, sets out the various components of the Regional Structure in Niagara, including the identification of:
 - Settlement Areas
 - Built-up Areas
 - Designated Greenfield Areas
 - Strategic Growth Areas, including
 - Urban Growth Centre (Downtown St. Catharines)
 - Major Transit Station Areas
 - Regional Growth Centres
 - Employment Areas
 - Rural Settlements
 - Rural Lands
 - Agricultural Area
 - Natural Environment System (NES)
 - Excess Lands.

- While many of these elements of Regional Structure are familiar and will remain unchanged as a result of the Region’s MCR and City’s Official Plan Update, one of the key identified elements of the Regional Structure for Welland is the “Downtown Welland Regional Growth Centre”.

- There is no detailed map of the proposed Downtown Welland Regional Growth Centre, however there is a conceptual map provided, an excerpt of which is shown in **Figure 5**. This map should be provided by the Region so that we may review the boundaries of the Downtown Welland Regional Growth Centre.

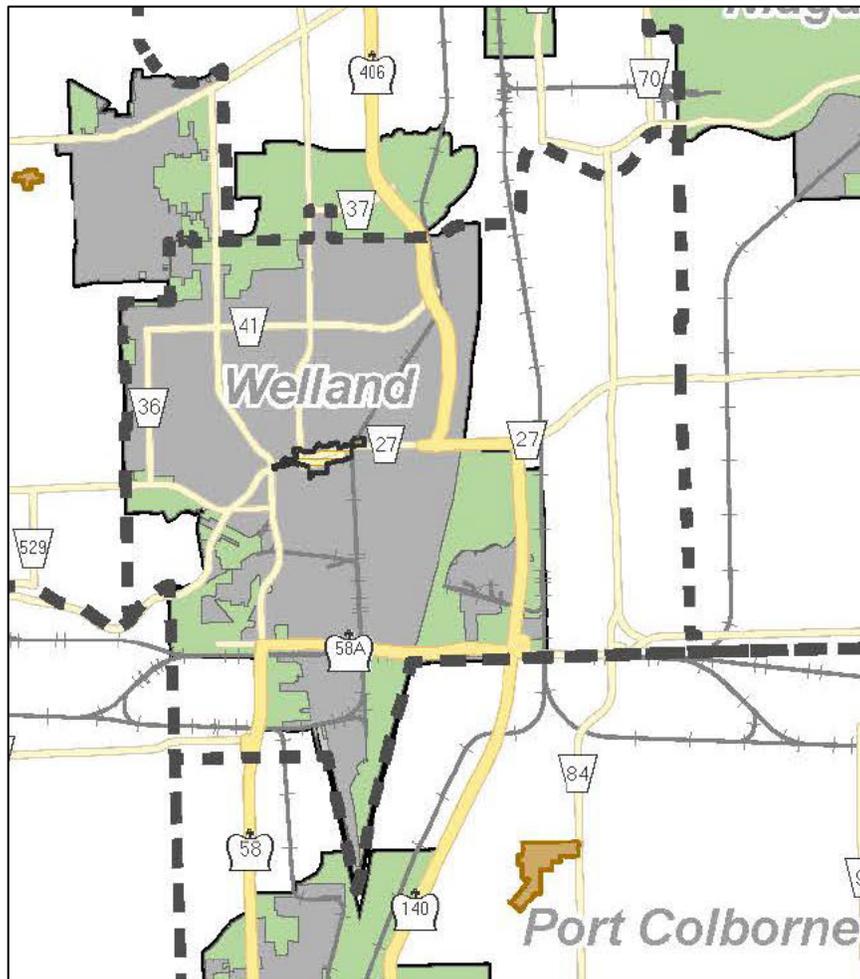


Figure 5: Excerpt from Appendix 4.4 of Regional Staff Report PDS-17-2021

- According to the Policy Paper, “the Regional Growth Centre needs to strengthen its public transit connections by extending or offering new transit services. This will be a critical link in providing access throughout the communities and the Region in general. Enhanced access to transit can improve opportunities for housing choice and access to employment opportunities, as well as Regional destinations of broader interest and reliance. Secondary Plans will provide a vision to guide growth within these areas. The process can proactively support infill, growth and intensification opportunities, urban design to support compatibility and technical studies prepared in support of infrastructure and transportation capacity.”
- The Region is planning for a density target of 125 people and jobs per hectare by the year 2051 for the Downtown Welland Regional Growth Centre.

- Other key policy directives proposed include the development of local intensification strategies for other strategic growth areas.
- It is also important to note that the Regional Structure Policy Paper encourages the identification of “Local Growth Centres” as Strategic Growth Areas, to be identified at the local level, and not mapped within the Regional Official Plan.

Implications for Welland

- Delineate the Downtown Welland Regional Growth Centre.
- Identify other Local Growth Centres.
- Create policies for both of these categories fo Strategic Growth Areas.

5 Conclusions



- As noted in this background review, the projected 2051 population growth for the City of Welland can be accommodated within the existing municipal boundary, and no settlement area boundary expansion is required to accommodate additional population. However, a small 45-hectare settlement area boundary expansion will be required for employment lands.

- **DGA:**
 - Beyond the lands that have recently been brought into the Welland urban boundary (Northwest Welland Secondary Plan Area OPA# 29), no additional Community Lands are required to accommodate population growth to the year 2051.
 - Considering the planned intensification target of 75% (discussed more below), the amount of Community Lands designated to accommodate future development is appropriate.
 - As noted in this background review, a 45-hectare expansion to the City's urban boundary will be required to accommodate forecast jobs on Employment Lands.
 - The City will need to evaluate, in consultation with the Region, the public and other stakeholders, the most appropriate location for this Employment Lands settlement boundary expansion.

- **Built-up Area:**
 - It is important to note that the majority of growth that will occur within Welland between 2021-2051 will occur within the Built-up Area, with an intensification target of 75%.
 - Based on a cursory review of designated lands within the City's Built-up Area, there appear to be many opportunities for intensification on vacant lands as well as on underutilized lands (e.g. parking lots).
 - In addition, it is important to note that over the last few years, the City has been achieving an intensification around 70%, which has grown since years prior. As such, it is reasonable to conclude that the City will be able to reasonably achieve its 75% intensification target.
 - While much of this growth will be dispersed throughout Welland, on vacant lands and on underutilized sites, there is recognition that Downtown

Welland is being planned to accommodate much of the intensification, within the Downtown Welland Regional Growth Centre.

- This is supported in the Region's unit growth forecast, where the majority of units (40%) to be located within the Built-up Area will be in the form of apartments.
- While the exact boundary of the proposed Downtown Welland Regional Growth Centre has not yet been delineated in detail, there appear to be many opportunities for infill and intensification within Downtown Welland.
- However, it should be noted that the policies of the Official Plan need to be updated to direct intensification to the Downtown, recognizing the need to accommodate much higher densities than currently exist today, within compact built form.
- The City will also need to examine other locations within the Built-up Area that should be planned to accommodate intensification – identified as “Local Growth Centres” by the Region.
- Currently, the Official identifies the Downtown, brownfield sites, lands along the Recreational Waterway and key transit corridors as intensification areas.
- These are appropriate areas to accommodate intensification, however the Official Plan should be more specific in delineating and defining the preferred locations for intensification.
- The draft Regional Policy document also requires the City to identify Intensification Nodes and Corridors. This should be addressed in the Official Plan Update, using the Region's terminology of “Local Growth Centres”.

