

REPORT

Planning and Development Council

Meeting Date: May 10, 2021

FROM: Planning Services Department

DATE: May 6, 2021

SUBJECT: Regional Official Plan Review – Integrated Growth Management Strategy and Draft Regional Official Plan Amendment 48 – May 10, 2021

LOCATION: Town of Oakville

WARD: Town-wide

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RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report titled *Regional Official Plan Review – Integrated Growth Management Strategy and Draft Regional Official Plan Amendment 48 – May 10, 2021*, be received.
2. That the report titled *Regional Official Plan Review – Integrated Growth Management Strategy and Draft Regional Official Plan Amendment 48 – May 10, 2021*, be submitted to Halton Region as part of the statutory process for ROPA 48 and the Regional Official Plan Review.
3. That the report titled *Regional Official Plan Review – Integrated Growth Management Strategy and Draft Regional Official Plan Amendment 48 – May 10, 2021*, be forwarded for information to the City of Burlington, the Town of Halton Hills, the Town of Milton, Credit Valley Conservation, Grand River Conservation Authority and Conservation Halton.

KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- Phase 2 of Halton's Regional Official Plan Review is underway and involves research, technical analysis and community engagement around key themes.
- Halton is exploring issues and opportunities related to growth management through the Integrated Growth Management Strategy. This is a key component

of the Regional Official Plan Review that addresses where and how Halton will grow to from 2031 to 2051.

- Another component of the Regional Official Plan Review is Regional Official Plan Amendment 48 that intends to advance certain strategic local municipal plans and priorities related to urban structure.
- Regional Official Plan Amendment 48 helps define a regional urban structure and provides direction on key elements including Urban Growth Centres, Major Transit Station Areas, Regional Nodes and employment areas.
- Public engagement is an ongoing component of the Regional Official Plan Review and a range of opportunities has been provided to date.
- Current opportunities for participation include taking an on-line survey, attending a virtual Public Information Centre and having a discussion with a regional planner through a virtual meeting.
- This report presents an update on the Regional Official Plan Review and highlights comments from town staff.

BACKGROUND:

The purpose of the Regional Official Plan Review (ROPR) is to update the Regional Official Plan (ROP) to meet the evolving needs of Halton Region. The ROPR will also update policies required by the 2019 Growth Plan, as amended, as well as other provincial plans and policies changes affecting the growth, development and protection of lands within the region.

Halton Region is undertaking the ROPR in partnership with its local Municipalities of Oakville, Burlington, Halton Hills and Milton. A wide range of residents, businesses, stakeholder groups, governmental agencies and Indigenous Communities are also engaged.

The ROPR is currently in Phase 2, which involves the following components:

- Integrated Growth Management Strategy
- Draft Regional Official Plan Amendment 48
- Public Engagement

Town staff has participated in the ROPR since it was initiated in 2014 and has provided regular updates to Oakville Council. The most recent update was March 22, 2021 where Oakville Council received the following Discussion Items and accompanying staff presentations:

- Item 3. Regional Official Plan Review - Growth Concepts Discussion Paper - Integrated Growth Management Strategy, March 11, 2021
- Item 4. Regional Official Plan Review - Draft Regional Plan Amendment 48 - An Amendment to Define a Regional Structure, March 11, 2021

This is the link to the meeting agenda containing those items #3 and #4:

<https://securepwa.oakville.ca/sirepub/mtgviewer.aspx?meetid=4176&doctype=AGENDA>

The key messages from *Item 3. Integrated Growth Management Strategy* included:

- Livable Oakville is the town's growth management strategy and Oakville's ongoing official plan review is focused on implementing a town-wide urban structure.
- For Oakville to maximize the benefits of accommodating required population and employment growth, the Preferred Growth Concept resulting from Halton Region's Integrated Growth Management Strategy must:
 - Support existing local urban structure;
 - Minimize greenfield expansions to protect natural heritage and agricultural lands; and
 - Build complete communities in a compact urban form with sustainable transportation choices.

The key messages from *Item 4. Draft Regional Plan Amendment 48* identified areas of agreement and areas where town staff expressed the opinion that further refinement of the draft Regional Plan Amendment 48 (ROPA 48) would be appropriate:

- For the Bronte GO Major Transit Station Area, Halton Region's Employment Area overlay should be entirely removed from the study area lands.
- The use of minimum density targets of combined people and jobs per hectare as required by the 2019 Growth Plan to focus and distribute forecasted population and employment growth to strategic growth areas (SGAs) was appropriate.

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- The proposed regional requirements for a *Target Proportion of Residents & Jobs* for SGAs was not appropriate and since this is not a requirement of the 2019 Growth Plan, as amended, should be removed from draft ROPA 48.
 - The proposed regional requirements for site-specific employment targets and development criteria such as gross floor area thresholds within mixed use SGAs was prescriptive and not appropriate for an upper-tier municipal official plan.
 - Town staff raised concerns with a prescriptive approach in the ROP related to difficulty in implementation and that unintended consequences of a restrictive approach could lead to missed opportunities and limit the town's ability to implement its urban structure and manage required growth accordingly.
 - Town staff expressed the opinion that flexibility in the policy framework would enable mixed use SGAs to thrive independently and that a generic or universal approach in the ROP for SGAs was not appropriate.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:

This section of the report provides an update on the ROPR key components listed above and highlights comments and opinion from town staff including areas where further refinement to the region's proposals would be appropriate.

Town staff notes that collaborative discussions with regional staff are ongoing with the aim of reaching consensus on the outstanding matters and to see that this is reflected in the ROPR.

Integrated Growth Management Strategy

The Integrated Growth Management Strategy (IGMS) looking at how and where Halton Region will accommodate forecasted population and employment growth from 2031 to 2051, as required by the 2019 Growth Plan, as amended.

As presented to Oakville Council on March 22, 2021, the regions IGMS Growth Concepts Discussion Paper containing four Growth Concepts and an evaluation of those growth concepts has been released for public consultation.

Since then, through a series of reports and resolutions, regional staff has been directed by Regional Council to undertake:

- An analysis that builds on Concept 3 that accommodates employment growth to 2051 without a settlement area boundary expansion
- An analysis on the creation of a permanent food belt/agricultural preserve

- A comparative assessment of greenhouse gas emissions for each Growth Concept

Report No. LPS45-21 *Additional Information relating to Growth Concepts associated with the Integrated Growth Management Strategy – Regional Official Plan Review* received by Regional Council at their meeting of April 21, 2021, detailed this information and the directions to regional staff.

Town Staff Opinion: Town staff is supportive of a Growth Concept that accommodates employment growth to 2051 without a settlement area boundary expansion.

Town staff is also of the opinion that for Oakville, there is a strong future for high quality and dense employment opportunities in mixed used developments and through employment intensification at strategic locations.

A Growth Concept that does not expand the settlement area boundary will protect agricultural lands and help reduce overall greenhouse emissions across the region.

Draft Regional Official Plan Amendment 48

Draft ROPA 48 helps to define and provide direction on elements of a regional urban structure. This is accomplished through the identification of SGAs across the region including Urban Growth Centres, Major Transit Station Areas, Regional Nodes as well as providing long-term planning direction for employment areas.

Regional staff has stated that draft ROPA 48 implements non-discretionary policies of the 2019 Growth Plan, as amended, in order to achieve conformity with that plan and is intended to advance certain strategic local municipal planning priorities related to urban structure.

As presented to Oakville Council on March 22, 2021, town staff supports the intent of draft ROPA 48 and supports advancing draft ROPA 48 in a timely manner so that local plans and priorities can be recognized and implemented.

Town staff identified areas of support for the region's amendment to the ROP through draft ROPA 48, including:

- The region's proposed hierarchy of SGAs,
- The proposed boundaries for the Midtown Oakville Urban Growth Centre and the Bronte GO Major Transportation Station Area in accordance with provincial requirements,

- Proposed updates to incorporate the revised growth forecasts from the 2019 Growth Plan, as amended. For Halton Region, this is a population of 1,100,000 and 500,000 jobs to the year 2051,
- Assigning Minimum Density Targets to certain SGAs since these are required by the 2019 Growth Plan, as amended, and are considered non-discretionary.

Notwithstanding the areas of support and alignment identified, there are remaining areas where town staff is of the opinion that further refinements to the region's proposals are necessary.

These outstanding matters are addressed in the following sections.

Process Timing and Responses to Comments

According to regional staff, draft ROPA 48 is targeted for a Statutory Public Meeting before Regional Council on June 16, 2021. Town staff has been providing comments to the region on draft ROPA 48 since initial versions were made available in January 2021 and more recently through authorized comments provided through Oakville Council.

Town Staff Opinion: In this context, town staff wishes to understand how and when comments provided to date will be recognized and acknowledged in the region's process.

Regional staff has advised that the date for a final recommendation report on ROPA 48 to Regional Council has yet to be confirmed.

Town Staff Opinion: Town staff is of the opinion that the date for a recommendation report should reflect an appropriate period of time for consideration and acknowledgement of the comments received to date on draft ROPA 48.

Regional Employment Area Overlay

Town staff continues to raise concerns around the application of the region's Employment Area overlay to the Bronte GO Major Transit Station Area (Bronte GO MTSA) and the Neyagawa Urban Core.

Town staff and regional staff continue to engage in productive dialogue to resolve matters and updated comments from town staff are presented below.

Bronte GO MTSA

Town staff is of the opinion that the region's Employment Area overlay should be removed in draft ROPA 48 from the areas in the Bronte GO MTSA proposed to be designated Urban Centre and Urban Core. This would be appropriate since it

reflects the town's priorities, provides local flexibility to develop a mixed use SGA and would be consistent with local Official Plan Amendments being advanced through the town's Official Plan Review.

Neyagawa Urban Core

These lands are identified in the town's urban structure as a Node for Further Study as a mixed use area. Through the town's ongoing official plan review, a study will be undertaken of the Neyagawa Urban Core Area (NUC) to delineate a boundary and to determine an appropriate mix, scale and intensity for this SGA. Town staff anticipate that this study will be initiated in Q4 2021.

This study would also examine the potential role, support and connectivity of the NUC with a future 407 Transitway station at Neyagawa Boulevard and Highway 407.

Although the town will study all four quadrants of the NUC at the intersection of Neyagawa Boulevard and Burnhamthorpe Road West, the northeast and northwest quadrants are currently designated in the region's Employment Area overlay.

Town Staff Opinion: Town staff is of the opinion that the region's Employment Area overlay should be removed from the NUC north of Burnhamthorpe Road West in order for the town's study to proceed. More specifically:

- For the northeast quadrant, the lands extending eastward to line up approximately with the northerly extension of Carding Mill Trail; and
- For the northwest quadrant, the lands west of Neyagawa Boulevard should be removed, as well as the lands west of Fourth Line over to the limit of the Region's Natural Heritage System.

Prescriptive Employment Planning Policies in the Regional Official Plan

Town and regional staff agree that certain SGAs being converted from Employment Area to mixed use areas should still be planned to maintain an employment focus. The success of mixed use nodes will depend on a combination of employment, commercial and residential uses. The region's policies should enable the local municipalities to implement this direction at the local level where it can be tailored to the local context.

However, town staff continues to raise concerns around the prescriptive nature of certain policies proposed for SGAs in draft ROPA 48. Town staff is of the opinion that a prescriptive and universal set of policies do not belong in the ROP since they may not be appropriate for all SGAs across the local Municipalities.

There is a concern for Oakville that development focused on Council priorities and implementing the town-wide urban structure could be impaired through unintended consequences of restrictive policies leading to missed opportunities.

Town Staff Opinion: Town staff is of the opinion that the ROP policies should enable flexibility in the policies for mixed use SGAs so they can thrive and be successful by responding to the market and the changing nature of employment. Greater flexibility is also appropriate in light of the constantly evolving nature of employment recently brought into focus by the COVID-19 emergency pandemic.

This evolution was highlighted recently for Regional Council at their meeting of April 21, 2021 in a presentation from StrategyCorp titled the “Changing Nature of the Economy and Employment”.

That presentation covered initial research findings on the growth and composition of Halton’s economy, impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, Halton’s non-residential real estate market outlook, financial risks, growth and jobs of the future and strategic approaches for attracting employment. Town staff understand that additional reporting on this research is still to come.

The following sections of this report provide more detailed comments on proposed prescriptive policies in draft ROPA 48.

Site-Specific Development Criteria for Strategic Growth Areas

Draft ROPA 48 proposes a series of policy requirements for the local municipalities in order to plan for employment uses in certain SGAs. These proposed policies would apply to *site-specific* developments and require that multiple development criteria be satisfied, including:

- Identification of *minimum employment targets* for SGAs;
- Identification of minimum amount of *gross floor area* to be planned for employment uses;
- Identification of *a minimum proportion or threshold of the total gross floor area* within this area to be developed for employment uses *(emphasis added)*

Town Staff Opinion: Town staff does not support the introduction of these requirements through draft ROPA 48 and recommends that they be removed to provide greater flexibility for meeting planning goals in SGAs.

The proposed regional policies are not requirements of the 2019 Growth Plan, as amended, and appear to be discretionary policies being introduced by the region.

Target Proportions for Strategic Growth Areas

Draft ROPA 48 introduces a new Table 2b, which contains for certain SGAs, Minimum Density Targets and Target Proportions of Residents & Jobs. As mentioned earlier, minimum density targets are non-discretionary requirements of the 2019 Growth Plan, as amended, and town staff has no concerns with this policy.

However, Town staff has concerns with the proposed Target Proportion of Residents & Jobs. Draft ROPA 48 proposes the following regional requirement:

"Require Local Municipalities to plan for employment uses within Strategic Growth Areas by: ...

... b) planning to achieve, where applicable, the target proportion of residents and jobs within the Strategic Growth Area as identified in Table 2b, through policies that:...

... [iii] identify the minimum amount of gross floor area that should be planned for employment uses, including major office uses, within the Strategic Growth Area in order to meet the minimum jobs target and the target proportion of residents and jobs."

Requiring local municipalities to create official plan policies that identify a minimum amount of gross floor area in order to meet the proposed target proportions is onerous and will be difficult to establish accurately.

Determining a minimum amount of floor area to accommodate a specific number of residents and job requires the use of numerous assumptions and estimates about the nature of the future development.

Some of these assumptions and estimates include:

- estimated gross floor area per employee or job (which varies based on the type of employment)
- estimated mix of employment uses
- estimated average residential unit size
- estimated persons per residential unit
- estimated building efficiency

Knowing the exact values for each of these assumptions prior to development is not possible. The actual values can only be known after a development is completed and residents and tenants have moved in.

Furthermore, these values do not remain constant over the life of a development and change continually as the occupants of the places of employment and residential units change periodically.

The exercise is also not as simple as requiring a minimum proportion of gross floor area that is equal to the target proportion in Table 2b. In general, gross floor area used by a resident is greater than the gross floor area used by an employee or job.

For example, requiring a minimum 35% of all gross floor area to be dedicated to employment would likely yield far more than 35% jobs. Depending on the values selected for the above list of assumptions, 35% gross floor area dedicated to employment could yield 55% jobs and thereby only 45% residents. The target proportion is looking for more residents than jobs. If this same proportion were applied to gross floor area, however, the result would be more jobs than residents.

Town Staff Opinion: Town staff is of the opinion that these targets should be removed from draft ROPA 48. The 2019 Growth Plan, as amended, and companion provincial planning documents do not contain requirements for target proportions of residents and jobs planned to be achieved within SGAs.

In this regard, the proposed regional target proportions appear to be a discretionary policy introduced by the region. And while it may be possible for a regional policy to be more restrictive than a provincial policy, that possibility alone does not constitute a planning rationale for the more restrictive policy.

Public Engagement in the Regional Official Plan Review

Information about the Regional Official Plan Review can be found on-line at their main webpage for the project:

[https://www.halton.ca/The-Region/Regional-Planning/Regional-Official-Plan-\(ROP\)-\(1\)/Halton-s-Regional-Official-Plan-Review-\(ROPR\)?mc_cid=a40331bb63&mc_eid=d937cdb23a](https://www.halton.ca/The-Region/Regional-Planning/Regional-Official-Plan-(ROP)-(1)/Halton-s-Regional-Official-Plan-Review-(ROPR)?mc_cid=a40331bb63&mc_eid=d937cdb23a)

From that page, there are links to additional information, including:

- Learn about the Growth Concepts
- Take a short questionnaire
- Join a virtual Public Information Centre
- Discuss the Growth Concepts with a regional planner

- Read the initial consultation report

A virtual Public Information Centre (PIC) for the Town of Oakville is scheduled for Thursday, May 13 at 7:00 PM. Town staff will attend the Oakville PIC.

The full schedule and instructions on how to join are in the table below:

Dates	How to join
Halton Hills: Tues., May 4 at 7 p.m. Milton: Thurs., May 6 at 7 p.m. Burlington: Tues., May 11 at 7 p.m. Oakville: Thurs., May 13 at 7 p.m. North Aldershot: Mon., May 17 at 7 p.m. Region-wide: Tues., June 29 at 7 p.m.	Online: Visit halton.ca/ropr on the date of the PIC to join. By phone: Call 1-855-703-8985 (toll-free). <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting ID: 970 665 2261• Passcode: 858099 (if requested)

CONCLUSIONS:

Town staff will continue to engage in Phase 2 of the Regional Official Plan Review process to improve alignment among the participants and to focus on reaching consensus. Town staff welcomes the opportunity to participate and will be providing information to Oakville Council as appropriate.

Phase 3 of the Regional Official Plan Review will provide a Policy Directions Synthesis Report, draft official plan policies and further draft Regional Official Plan Amendment for consideration.

Town staff anticipates that there will be a considerable amount of reviewing and commenting to undertake during Phase 3 of the Regional Official Plan Review in addition to the ongoing collaboration with staff from the Halton Region and the local Municipalities.

Town staff will continue to provide Oakville Council with further updates, analysis and commentary through Phase 3 of the Regional Official Plan Review.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

There are no public considerations and no notice requirements from this report.

(B) FINANCIAL

There are no financial considerations from this report.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

Multiple town departments have had the opportunity to provide input into the town's responses to Halton's Regional Official Plan Review.

(D) CORPORATE STRATEGIC GOALS

This report addresses the corporate strategic goal(s) to be the most livable town in Canada.

(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION

Managing and directing required population and employment growth to a defined urban structure is an action to mitigate Climate Change.

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