

Halton Integrated Growth Management Strategy (IGMS): an Oakville planning staff discussion paper

July 15, 2019

Introduction

The Province of Ontario requires Halton Region to plan to accommodate one million people and nearly half a million jobs by 2041 according to Schedule 3 of the 2019 Growth Plan. Oakville will be growing.

The 2019 Growth Plan acknowledges that the magnitude of growth coming to the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) presents challenges directly related to the large number of people who will be coming to the region:

- **climate change impacts**, primarily due to increased carbon emissions and energy in the atmosphere leading to a greater frequency of intense storm events and a greater risk of flooding in our communities;
- **degradation of air quality, water, and natural resources** that often occurs with urban sprawl;
- an **increased demand for** municipalities to provide **major infrastructure**, driven directly by population growth;
- **increased traffic congestion**, which will lead to costly delays in the movement of goods and people;
- **increased rates of obesity, diabetes and cardio-vascular illness**, due in part to rising rates of inactivity linked to low-density, automobile-dependent development patterns;
- an **aging population**, which will require age-friendly community design and transportation options for individuals with reduced mobility;
- a **finite supply of quality agricultural lands** under pressure for redevelopment as residential and/or employment uses as these are the lands that will be replaced by urban expansion; and

The Halton Integrated Growth Management Strategy (IGMS) is a process coordinated by Halton Region to create a plan for how to accommodate future population and employment growth within the region from now until 2041. The IGMS will then inform an

update to the Halton Region Official Plan which will bring the regional official plan into conformity with the 2019 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

On June 19, 2019, the IGMS presented a number of growth scenarios to Halton Regional Council generally differentiated by the amount of new designated greenfield area being added within Halton, ranging from no additional greenfield development to 1000 hectares of new designated greenfield area.

Town of Oakville planning staff's preliminary analysis and response to the IGMS growth scenarios is presented in this discussion paper from a purely Oakville perspective. The analysis examines which scenario would be best for Oakville when evaluated against the challenges identified above which Oakville will encounter in the face of growth. The discussion paper presents this analysis and response by way of a number of key messages or thoughts about what the scenarios would mean for Oakville that can be used to interpret the IGMS results as the process rolls out.

The discussion paper concludes with the premise that Oakville must be "all-in" with respect to accepting growth – simply choosing a 'middle-ground' or 'no-growth' position would be detrimental to Oakville. Oakville must also be decisively strategic in directing where that growth should go, and in what form it will take, in order to protect what we value and maintain the existing character of our neighbourhoods.

A growth scenario that does not include any new designated greenfield expansion is the best growth management strategy to address the challenges that Oakville will face because of future population and employment growth. Halton cannot afford to sprawl more than it already has and growth is needed in Oakville's planned nodes and corridors in order to enable viable higher-order transit that will in turn enable a large number of people to prefer to walk, bike, roll or take mass transit rather than use a car.

The Key Messages

- **Building complete communities where people choose to live without a car is one of the most impactful and structurally sustainable ways to reduce carbon emissions and combat climate change.**

On June 24, 2019, Oakville Council declared a climate emergency in Oakville due to consequences attributed to the climate change crisis that are already being experienced in Oakville. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a significant structural reduction in carbon emissions in the next decade is needed to avoid even more economic, ecological and societal losses than those already experienced.

A significant part of the solution for addressing climate change is rethinking how we build our homes and communities, particularly the relationship our homes have to each other, the places we need to go, and how we get around. Our

homes in conjunction with our transportation choices work hand-in-hand to determine a significant part of our overall carbon footprint.

Data that maps and compares the carbon footprint of sprawling suburban neighbourhoods comprised primarily of single-family homes in comparison to the carbon footprint of walkable, urban neighbourhoods oriented around transit shows that there is a significant difference between the two. The latter has a significantly reduced carbon footprint than the car-dependent, low-density neighbourhood.

Advanced green technological solutions for our homes and cars are other good ways to combat climate change and reduce carbon emissions but they can come with counter-productive side effects as well. Evidence is showing that some people who drive electric or hybrid vehicles may be driving more than previously. People who live in homes with higher-efficiency heating and cooling systems and/or the latest in green home technology may choose to turn the temperature up further on cold days or turn their air conditioning on sooner than they previously did. These side effects work to offset the benefits of green home and vehicle technology.

Land use and built-form changes, on the other hand, are embedded into the urban structure and are not so easily thwarted. For example, an energy-efficient home may have little effect if you have to drive further and further to work, to a grocery store or to accomplish everyday tasks. A family living in a smaller dwelling without the latest in green technology, within a mixed-use neighbourhood where they walk or take transit to accomplish most of their daily tasks, may actually consume less energy than a green suburban home with the latest technology.

In general, living in an apartment unit will consume less energy than living in a townhouse which will consume less energy than living in a single-detached house. If we develop a mixture of housing types that includes more apartments and townhouses than our current built-form of predominantly single-detached homes; if we arrange them in conjunction with jobs, stores, schools, parks, etc.; and, if we orient these mixed-use communities around higher-order transit to enable residents to potentially live without the need for a car we can significantly reduce the energy needed for daily living – not even yet factoring in the benefits of moving towards more technological solutions. As Oakville shifts its growth management strategy to accommodate future population growth in a network of higher-density, transit-oriented nodes and corridors, we will be able to affect a significant reduction on Oakville's carbon emissions in a structurally sustainable way.

- **Saying 'no to growth' will not save Oakville from the effects of growth.**
 - ▶ ***Pressure on Infrastructure:*** Existing Oakville residents will continue to pay for the maintenance of infrastructure to accommodate growth in other municipalities

even if no future growth is directed to Oakville. This would create an unfair tax burden on Oakville residents to support growth in other local municipalities. Oakville produces the highest tax assessment per residential unit of all the local municipalities in Halton Region. As a result, Oakville residents will continue to bear a significant portion of the cost to maintain regional infrastructure even if that infrastructure is not necessarily located in Oakville. Oakville residents would pay for growth but not get any of the benefits associated with that growth, such as the ability to deliver new community facilities.

Ground-oriented housing that is made up mainly of single detached houses is the type of development that dominates greenfield development in much of Halton Region and Oakville. This form of development spreads people out over a large area which requires longer roads, pipes and other infrastructure to serve that population. The maintenance of this greater amount of infrastructure then needs to be paid for by that dispersed population. This can lead to an infrastructure gap – a difference in the cost to maintain existing infrastructure and a population's ability to fund the long-term maintenance of that infrastructure (i.e. through municipal property tax) – in the absence of subsidies or other revenue sources to make up this difference. Adding larger amounts of new designated greenfield areas, as proposed in scenarios 1B and 4B, would perpetuate this form of lower-density growth. This creates a risk that Oakville residents would be required to support a potentially less economic form of residential growth in other parts of the region which could exacerbate any infrastructure gap that often comes along with this type of growth.

- **Traffic Congestion:** Growth in adjacent local municipalities — particularly if that growth continues the status quo of car-dependent, lower-density built-form — will continue to contribute to traffic congestion in Oakville regardless of whether that growth is in Oakville or not.

Higher-order transit is not currently viable within our existing development pattern of predominantly ground-oriented housing that is car-dependent — as demonstrated, for example, by the fact that Dundas Street does not meet the minimum density threshold as suggested by the Ministry of Transportation's Transit Supportive Land Use Guidelines to support bus rapid transit. If we continue to build the lower density types of neighbourhoods that currently characterize our greenfield areas, the future form of our communities will still not be able to support viable, higher-order transit either.

In this case, we will have a collection of new neighbourhoods with an abundance of people relying on cars to move around, such as we are currently experiencing in North Oakville which mainly includes ground-oriented housing at this point. To continue to accommodate growth in this manner region-wide will create even more traffic congestion without providing an environment in which alternatives to simply building more and wider roads are possible to relieve that congestion.

- **Goods movement:** Even though different ways of accommodating employment are not being tested through the scenarios, the way that future growth is

accommodated in the Region affects the viability of employment in Oakville. A reliance on the automobile as the primary transportation option for residential areas will add congestion to 400-series highways and major arterial roads — which could detrimentally affect the ability to transport people and goods to/from our employment areas — regardless of whether the residential growth occurs in Oakville.

- ***Isolation of seniors:*** Car-dependent, ground-oriented neighbourhoods do not often provide an opportunity for people to age in place as there are limited options for downsizing within one's own neighbourhood. There is also a risk that older residents may be isolated in their own homes. The loss of the ability to drive, and other factors contributing to reduced mobility, combined with a lack of downsizing alternatives may mean that older people choosing to stay in their own neighbourhoods may in fact be isolating themselves as a result.

Limiting growth in Oakville and adding new greenfield areas to accommodate growth in other areas of the region — likely in the form of car-dependent, ground-oriented neighbourhoods — will not address the potential isolation of seniors that comes from perpetuating this form of development.

- ***Affordable Housing:*** A reliance on ground-oriented housing — single detached, semi-detached and townhouse units — will not result in housing that is affordable for the majority of the population. Should Oakville not accept and accommodate new growth in more compact, transit-oriented manner, it is not likely that Oakville will be able to facilitate the provision of market housing at an affordable price for its citizens.
- ***Environmental Implications:*** Limiting growth in Oakville will push growth to other parts of the region, resulting in the expansion of designated greenfield areas elsewhere in the region putting increased development pressure on agricultural land and the natural heritage system. A recent report from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) says Canada needs to protect a minimum of 30 percent of its land and inland water – which is three times what is currently being protected — in order to combat the rapid decline of biodiversity worldwide and prevent a 'nature emergency'. Increased efforts in land protection will also help fight the 'climate change emergency' in addition to protection biodiversity. Choosing to limit the greenfield expansion of our cities is an important factor in our ability to protect and preserve biodiversity and fight climate change.

- The way forward for Oakville requires a change from the status quo.
 - ▶ ***Higher-order transit must become the preferred method of transportation for a large number of people in Oakville in order to combat traffic congestion.***

Increased traffic congestion is inevitable for Oakville, regardless of where growth happens in the Region. The 2016 Transportation Tomorrow Survey for Halton Region shows that approximately only half of the vehicle trips in Oakville are made by residents of Oakville. The other half are made by residents of communities outside of Oakville. For example, residents outside of Oakville will drive to the Oakville GO and Bronte GO stations to take advantage of the upcoming two-way, 15-minute rail service on the Lakeshore West GO line. Development outside of Oakville will continue to increase traffic congestion in Oakville.

How much we can minimize future traffic congestion in Oakville is directly related to how successful we can be at building places where people prefer to walk, bike, or take mass transit over driving a car, both in Oakville and in surrounding communities.

Oakville needs to take on as much of the growth in Halton Region as they can AND accommodate it in a robust network of complete communities in nodes and corridors that make higher-order transit – such as BRT and LRT – not only viable but the preferred method of getting around. Only by building communities where people choose NOT to use a car (including owning, driving, or hiring a car) do we have any hope of significantly combatting the inevitable traffic congestion that comes with population growth.

Oakville already has a great start to a robust network of higher-order transit. The Lakeshore West GO line is already being improved to provide higher-frequency 15-minute two-way transit service. This provides the basis for a series of transit-oriented developments at each and every station. From this base, north-south higher-order transit corridors – such as Trafalgar Road, and Bronte Road in the longer term – can build on this to start creating north-south connections. From there, other east-west higher-order transit corridors – such as Dundas Street – can be created. This will only be possible if future development at these nodes and corridors is built to create places to live, work, and play without the need for a car.

The 2041 Regional Transportation Plan indicates that electrification of the Lakeshore West Line in order to provide 15-minute, all-day service is one of initial priority actions of the plan to be completed prior to 2025. Therefore, it makes sense to accommodate as much growth in the region close to the Lakeshore West line, or in nodes and corridors connected to that line, in order to leverage that public investment in higher-order transit.

- ▶ ***Oakville must fully embrace a shift to apartment-style housing from ground-oriented housing as the primary way to accommodate growth, particularly in our planned nodes and corridors.***

Simply accommodating growth through car-dependent, lower-density, ground-oriented neighbourhoods by expanding greenfield areas and building predominantly ground-oriented housing in our existing greenfield areas is not good enough. As mentioned earlier, there is a danger that we may build new ground-oriented neighbourhoods at higher densities than older neighbourhoods and still not generate the density needed to support viable higher-order transit. This just makes the issues we face — like traffic congestion, deteriorating health, increased carbon emissions, and an infrastructure gap — even worse.

We need to grow in such a way that higher order transit becomes the preferred method of transportation for a significant proportion of Oakville's population. It is not enough to just grow to minimum densities that in theory can support transit. We actually need to get people to choose to live without a car – we need people to shift to a new lifestyle in Oakville and the region. This can only be accomplished by creating complete communities with enough people living in a small area that can accomplish their daily lives either through walking, rolling, biking and taking transit.

Vertical forms of housing — such as apartment housing — is a vital ingredient to building complete communities that will enable a large number of people to choose to live without a car.

- ▶ ***Embracing the shift to apartment housing built in compact, walkable nodes and corridors oriented towards higher-order transit is the best way to address the identified deficiency in the existing transportation network to accommodate future growth.***

The IGMS work to-date has included a high-level transportation analysis of the growth scenarios. It indicates that our existing transportation network — predominantly roads for cars — is inadequate to handle the growth that is coming in any of the scenarios. The results suggest that there is a minimal difference between the scenarios with respect to this deficiency. These results mean that traffic congestion is inevitable no matter which scenario is chosen.

However, the high-level analysis does not provide any insight into whether any of the scenarios are better suited to address the transportation deficiencies. The high-level transportation analysis fixes the regional model split at 10% transit and 90% private automobile. Fixing the modal split in this way makes the assumption that the same number of people will choose to take transit no matter which way future growth is accommodated regardless of the form that development takes. Furthermore, this assumed modal split does not match the Halton Region Official Plan which seeks to achieve a level of public transit use that averages at least 20% of all daily trips made by Halton residents by the year 2031.

Selecting a scenario that embraces apartment-style housing built in compact, walkable nodes and corridors oriented towards higher-order transit presumably would result in more people choosing transit as their primary method of transport than selecting a scenario that expands greenfield area to build more of the same ground-oriented housing that currently characterizes the existing greenfield areas. This latter choice of scenario would require more and/or wider roads to accommodate the cars necessary to serve the ground-oriented housing — which while being dense, will not likely be dense enough to support viable higher-order transit. A transit-oriented scenario will likely result in a shift in modal split with more people preferring to take transit and thereby potentially reducing the need to expand the road network as much as in other scenarios. In this regard, the growth scenarios are not equal from a transportation perspective despite the preliminary high-level transportation analysis of the IGMS work indicating that there is little difference between the scenarios.

- ***Building apartment housing in compact, walkable nodes and corridors oriented towards higher-order transit is the best way to make housing more affordable.***

It is easier to provide housing that is affordable in apartment form than it is in single-detached form. One simple indicator of this is that an apartment unit is less expensive to purchase than a single-detached unit.

This is particularly true for Oakville. Tax assessment is based on property values. The weighted tax assessment for a single detached home in Oakville is at least 2.5 times the weighted tax assessment for an apartment unit — as reported by the IGMS analysis. This suggests that purchasing a single detached home in Oakville is generally two to three times as expensive as purchasing an apartment unit. While typical apartment units in Oakville, at present, are not necessarily sized for families, it is plausible to think that a larger, family-sized apartment unit would still be less expensive than a single-detached family home.

Care must be taken when evaluating scenarios based on tax assessment because the scenario that provides that highest estimated property tax revenue is not likely the scenario that will make housing more affordable. In fact, the inverse is likely true. The scenario that provides the smallest amount of potential property tax revenue could be the one that best enables the provision of affordable housing. The scenario that relies most heavily on multi-family housing to accommodate future growth will generally provide the best opportunity to create housing that is affordable. The 2017 State of Housing Report for Halton Region indicated that 53 percent of Halton's affordable new housing unit sales were in Oakville, none of which were detached or semi-detached housing units.

Additionally, the cost of daily transportation also affects how affordable housing is for residents. The cost of owning/leasing and maintaining a car is generally more expensive than walking, biking, rolling or taking transit. By building communities where people choose to live without a car creates places that are inherently more affordable to live in.

Communities with apartment housing oriented towards higher-order transit that creates an environment where families can live without cars is the best way to create place with housing that is affordable.

- ***Population growth in compact, transit-oriented developments in Oakville will translate to more employment jobs for Oakville.***

While the amount of Employment land is kept constant through all the scenarios, the IGMS technical report indicates that the number of jobs provided by population-based employment will vary through the scenarios. However, building transit nodes close to employment areas — or mixed with employment, such as the Bronte GO MTSA or Midtown Oakville UGC — as compact, complete communities where people choose to live without a car will also attract a certain amount of office development in addition to the population-related employment. These transit nodes will provide the type of mixed-use, urban environments close to higher-order transit that are desired by new office employees and which employers are looking to provide in order to attract talented workers. Allowing residential uses to be mixed into currently designated employment areas close to GO stations will not likely result in a loss of employment jobs and will likely result in more jobs than would otherwise be realized.

- ***Building communities where people choose to live without a car is also the best way to build communities that are ideal for an aging population.***

Reduced mobility is a fact of life for many people as they get older. Losing the ability to drive is a big concern for many older residents, particularly those who continue to live in a suburban-style, low-density neighbourhood where the only viable means of travel is by car.

However, building compact, complete communities with a mixture of land uses and services along Oakville's growth nodes and corridors supported by vibrant public transit and active transportation networks create communities where older individuals can choose to live without sacrificing the ability to access goods and services even if they can no longer drive.

- ***Building communities where people choose to live without a car is also the best way to build communities that promote a healthy lifestyle and active transportation.***

Living in a community where a person does not need a car generally means that that person is walking, rolling, biking or taking transit on a daily basis instead of sitting in a car. An active lifestyle leads to generally better health of residents.

- ***No designated greenfield expansion is the best way to protect prime agricultural land and the natural heritage system.***

Any expansion of designated greenfield areas within the region will be an expansion onto prime agricultural land, converting it from agricultural use to urban/suburban land uses. Any greenfield expansion scenario represents a loss

of prime agricultural land. Converting agricultural land that currently supports our natural heritage systems would also detrimentally affect the health of our natural heritage systems.

Conclusion

Expanding the existing designated greenfield within Halton does not make sense for Oakville. Redirecting growth that might otherwise occur in Oakville also does not make sense for Oakville.

Oakville must be “all-in” with respect to accepting growth – simply choosing a ‘middle-ground’ or ‘no-growth’ position would be detrimental to Oakville. Oakville must also be decisively strategic in directing where that growth should go, and in what form it will take, in order to protect what we value and maintain the existing character of our neighbourhoods.

A growth scenario that does not include any new designated greenfield expansion is the best growth management strategy to address the challenges that Oakville will face because of future population and employment growth. Halton cannot afford to sprawl more than it already has and growth is needed in Oakville’s planned nodes and corridors in order to enable viable higher-order transit that will in turn enable a large number of people to prefer to walk, bike, roll or take mass transit rather than use a car.

By choosing the growth scenario that does not propose any designated greenfield expansion, Oakville will be able to structurally reduce carbon emissions in order to combat the climate change crisis. It helps us prevent and/or avoid degradation of the environment and our natural heritage. It protects prime agricultural lands that support our food production networks. It gives us the best chance at alleviating the traffic congestion we already experience and avoiding future traffic congestion. It establishes a built environment that facilitates healthy and active lifestyles and embraces an aging population.

Scenario 3B of the IGMS growth scenarios – the scenario that does not propose a new designated greenfield expansion – is the preferred growth scenario for Oakville.