

HAMILTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE RESPONSE TO CITY OF HAMILTON GRIDS STUDY

1. **Long range vision for the City must include all lands outside of the Greenbelt Plan**

The Provincial Greenbelt Plan and the recently released Places to Grow Strategy, the Province has proactively set out the Provincial framework for accommodating new growth through the GTA and Golden Horseshoe area. The Provincial directive for accommodating growth in the Hamilton area is clearly and precisely defined by the limits of the Greenbelt area. All new growth within the City is confined by these limits and is expected to be accommodated between the existing urban boundary and the limits of the Greenbelt designation. The Chamber supports this position and recognizes that all future growth for the City must be accommodated between the Urban Area and the Greenbelt Plan.

This restriction presents an opportunity for the City to engage in a long term planning process. Based on the Provincial directive alone, it therefore makes sense to consider all of the lands outside of the Greenbelt area for future urban development. While the timing of the development of each part of the plan can be determined through a properly implemented program of staged growth and infrastructure planning, it is recommended that all of the lands outside of the Greenbelt Plan be part of the long term vision for the City.

One of the compelling arguments for such a direction is that a comprehensive planning program can be made to be pro-active rather than reactive given the propensity for the planning process to seriously lag behind market needs and changing growth patterns. The Chamber feels it is important not to engage in an incremental planning process that can result in ad hoc boundary revisions on a 5-year basis. Considering that the completion of the GRIDS strategy urban boundary expansion and Regional studies required by the Province could take almost five years to complete, the need for a longer planning range strategy is imperative.

This long-term strategy is also important to properly plan for major infrastructure improvements. It is simply not economically viable to extend trunk services on an ad hoc basis or twin trunk extensions to incrementally serve new growth areas. Further, the need for long term planning for schools and other community needs is facilitated with a more comprehensive approach that more accurately defines urban areas rather than accommodating needs on a piecemeal basis.

By adopting a long term planning perspective, important natural features can be identified early in the planning process and thereby be better protected. This early review can also identify and preserve important linkage features which can then be properly incorporated into later urban design programs so that significant environmental features become part of the foundation of new urban form, rather than added in at a later date as an afterthought.

This approach allows for a much clearer decision making process in terms of business investment strategies for those who will be implementing the plan. It also allows for more meaningful public investment decisions based on a long-term vision. Certainty for continued investment in the agricultural sector is also increased by eliminating future uncertainty with respect to long-term expectations for lands that may or may not be included in a five-year boundary review. This elimination of the "urban shadow" uncertainty will direct a long-term agricultural investment into more appropriate areas.

This approach is consistent with sustainable development and will help prevent uncontrolled urban sprawl. By focussing development within definable limits, new growth can be accommodated in a logical and predictable pattern. We agree that future urban development form must include higher density standards. When combined with the nodes and corridors strategy, this approach can lead to the establishment of new, more compact communities on a staged basis, in a predefined urban context as an alternative to an incremental subdivision by subdivision growth pattern.

Further, it minimizes "leapfrog" development to neighbouring communities which occurs when new growth needs cannot be properly accommodated within the areas set aside by the Province to accommodate new urban development. This trend has now begun in the Hamilton area with new communities benefiting from increased assessment in both industrial and residential components, as the supply of land in Hamilton becomes tightened. It is expected this trend will continue over the next five years until the community has properly established a new growth strategy.

By maintaining future growth within defined limits in the City of Hamilton, existing infrastructure and growth centres in the City are supported and encouraged to grow, including the downtown area, the Hamilton waterfront and the airport.

2. Urban form should be modelled on nodes and corridor framework

The Hamilton Chamber of Commerce recommends that preferred development form is that which do the nodes and corridor concept represent. This is consistent with much of the historical development of the City of Hamilton where strong nodes have been created in strategic locations throughout the City. This has ultimately contributed to the development of strong corridor linkages between nodes within the City.

The Chamber feels the City should continue to build on this success in new urban communities as it will help create separate identities for sustainable communities, allowing each to have its own centre of urban activity. We believe this option will allow for the greatest variety of urban design and density, while at the same time maximizing choice and alternative housing options. This development form, for example, could allow for the establishment of important live/work opportunities within minor nodes in new urban settings.

This concept is also important in supporting the continued prominence of the Hamilton Downtown as a focal point for the City as well as the broader region. While the Chamber does not feel that the downtown can or should accommodate all of the future growth needs of the City, its importance must be continually recognized and promoted. We feel this option will continue to give proper attention to the downtown area.

This development form is also helpful in implementing staged programs of development. Within the future urban area of the City, new identifiable communities can be established within a more comprehensive framework on a staged basis. The staging of new communities will also help in planning for long-term infrastructure needs and for establishing strong corridor linkages.

The corridor node concept for development within the City of Hamilton is also consistent with the role the City plays in a regional context. Hamilton itself is a regional node with strong external linkages to the GTA, to the US border, and to South Western Ontario. Hamilton also has strong national and international linkages through activities at the Port and the Hamilton Airport. With further improvements and enhancements anticipated through future transportation improvements in all sectors, the importance and relevance of external linkages will be enhanced. This form of internal growth pattern will then be consistent and can be properly integrated with the external framework.

3. Response by Hamilton-Halton Homebuilders Association (“HHHBA”)

The Chamber has also reviewed a “draft” version of the responses prepared for the HHHBA with respect to GRIDS and growth options. The Chamber broadly supports the position of that Association as well; and is of the opinion that the positions outlined by the HHHBA in this document are reasonably consistent with those of the Chamber.

In particular, we do strongly share the HHHBA concerns with respect to the “Triple Bottom Line” (“TBL”) evaluation tool for the reasons outlined therein. We, as a community, do require a truly “balanced” tool, which is the broad intent of TBL.

To quote the HHHBA “draft” document which we reviewed:

“ . . . the heavy environmental bias in the TBL tool has yet to be overcome. It fails to recognize the existing economic resources of the municipality, the approved economic cluster strategy, or council’s direction that economic growth is the number one priority of the municipality.”

We could not agree more. The importance of a strong economy is absolutely vital for long-term prosperity and community sustainability. We are of the opinion that the current TBL model does not reflect true balance in recognizing the importance of economic development in a sustained model of community development.

Thus, we too, would recommend the TBL Stakeholders Group be reconvened to further refine the model.