

4 MILLION MORE PEOPLE, BUT WITHOUT THE SPRAWL

EXCLUSIVE Ontario plans bold new rules to promote compact communities where people can live and work without cars



TONY BOCK/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

The provincial government wants to end the kind of development, like this part of Markham, that leads to more commuter traffic, more smog and loss of farmland.

More of us, living better

KERRY GILLESPIE
QUEEN'S PARK BUREAU

Say goodbye to sprawling suburban lots with two-car garages and hello to denser and more tightly packed neighbourhoods where you can walk to the corner store for milk and kids can take a bus to their summer job.

Today, the province will announce its plan to make sure population growth doesn't mean endless kilometres of traffic-clogged roads and urban sprawl housing taking the place of precious farmland.

Nearly 4 million more people are expected to make southern Ontario their home in the next 25 years, bringing with them 2 million new jobs.

Without action now, the government will argue, that growth would lead to dire results, including further commuter hell, unacceptable loss of farmland

and an increase in smog.

The "Places to Grow" plan sets out lofty goals and specific targets for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, an area that stretches from Niagara through the Greater Toronto Area to Peterborough and north as far as Collingwood.

Among the key goals:

► To protect farmland, 40 per cent of all new growth must be contained within existing built-up areas by 2015.

► The growth that will still occur on undeveloped land must meet minimum targets — about twice as dense as traditional sprawl.

► To better use existing infrastructure, like roads and water lines, minimum densities have been set for 25 city centres, effective in 2031.

► Please see **Sprawl, A6**



PETER POWER/TORONTO STAR

The Cornell community in Markham has been touted as an example of the new mixed-use urban model.

25

years from now, the Greater Golden Horseshoe's population will increase from 8 to 12 million people

40

per cent of growth must be contained within existing built up areas to protect farmland

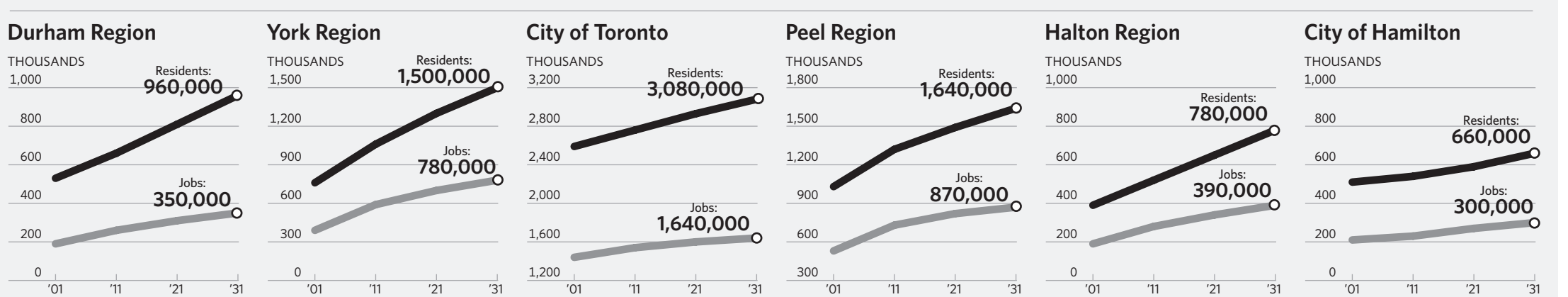
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city centres have been given minimum densities to meet by 2031 to better use existing sewers and roads

Growth Strategy

'If we continue the way we're going, the estimates are pretty dire'
Infrastructure Minister David Caplan

Projected population and employment for 2031



SOURCE: Ontario Government

TORONTO STAR GRAPHIC

'People want to see action on sprawl, air quality and traffic congestion'

► Sprawl From A1

Cities must promote more compact living and build "complete communities" where people can live, work, shop and play without needing a car.

Municipalities and regional governments have three years to amend their official planning documents to show just how they'll do all this.

The province says cities — many of which are already choking on traffic congestion and have discovered how expensive it is to provide services to far-flung housing developments — want to make this work.

The province has a bag full of sticks and carrots just to make sure.

To start with, the province is vowing it will put its infrastructure money — \$3 billion to \$4 billion a year — only into communities reaching their targets.

"This is the guiding vision for how we're going to live tomorrow," said David Caplan, minister of public infrastructure and renewal, who is responsible for this plan.

"It's about kids having places to play, moms and dads having places to work. It's about building great communities where you can actually get around and you don't have to spend hours and hours in the car. It's about all those things and so much more," Caplan said in an interview.

While that vision sounds good in the abstract, turning it into reality won't be easy. Residents tend to ferociously fight any moves to bring more people, and the cars they bring with them, into their neighbourhoods.

Developers also often oppose government moves to tell them where and what they can build, saying they just build the homes people want to live in.

So what will the region look like in 25 years, with 11.5 million people — up from 7.8 million now — packed more tightly together?

Better, says Caplan. Bringing more people into an area can turn car-dependent strip malls, like those on Kingston Rd. in Toronto, into lively neighbourhoods like Bloor West Village.

It can revitalize derelict downtowns, like Oshawa's, making them places to live as well as shop and do business.

Future subdivisions won't be just cookie-cutter houses on dead-end roads, but a mix of housing: smaller lots, townhouses and mid-rise condo and apartment buildings.

There will be more high-rise towers on major roads near existing transit lines.

While it's up to cities to decide how to accommodate 40 per cent of the new growth in existing built-up areas, the province has set specific density targets for 25 downtown or central districts, which already have the roads, transit and other infrastructure in place to handle rapid growth.

The five centres in Toronto must meet density targets of 400 people and jobs per hectare. That's the minimum number of people required to support a subway.

The Bay St. corridor from Bloor St. to the lake, by way of comparison, is about 1,000 people and jobs per hectare.

Toronto's popular Annex neighbourhood, with a mix of detached homes, semis, housing above shops and a few high-rise condos and apartments is about 150 people and jobs per hectare. Traditional suburban sprawl is



SOURCE: Ontario Government

TORONTO STAR GRAPHIC



STEVE RUSSELL/TORONTO STAR

The province's new "Places to Grow" plan envisions more lively neighbourhoods like Toronto's Bloor West Village. The way to achieve these neighbourhood successes is through increased density in certain areas, the plan says.

about 30. The 15 centres in surrounding cities have targets of 200 people and jobs per hectare, which means they'll have enough people to support bus service every 15 minutes and possibly even light rail or bus rapid transit. The five centres in smaller communities have targets of 150 people and jobs per hectare, which can also support bus service every 15 minutes. And to make sure that new suburban developments don't repeat the mistakes of the past, there's a target of 50 people and jobs per hectare for development on greenfields. That's

enough to support bus service every 30 minutes. Many municipal politicians are onside with the overall idea of using their space more efficiently and giving residents options other than the car to get around, but they'll still face battles from residents when specific neighbourhoods are targeted for more growth. But whether residents — living in neighbourhoods that are perfect just the way they are, thank you very much — want it or not, growth is coming. The Greater Golden Horseshoe is the third fastest growth region in North America, be-

hind Dallas-Fort Worth, Tex., and greater Atlanta. "If we continue the way we're going, the estimates are pretty dire," Caplan said. Commuting times are projected to increase by more than 40 per cent in the GTA. Smog-causing auto emissions would also rise by more than 40 per cent. More than 1,000 square kilometres of farmland — twice the size of Toronto — would be consumed by new sprawl-style developments in the next 25 years. These types of statistics aren't new and this is not the first time a government has declared war on sprawl and declared that

compact living is good. Yet, developers still buy land on the outskirts of cities, municipalities still let them build single-family detached houses, and people still line up to buy those homes. Caplan thinks people are finally ready to embrace change. "People want to see action on sprawl, air quality and traffic congestion," he said. Trends in housing purchases show people want other options besides suburban sprawl, Caplan said, pointing to Toronto real estate data showing half of new home sales are in high-rise condominiums.

ENFORCEMENT Making it work

How is the province going to enforce its anti-sprawl vision over the next 25 years? A combination of money and regulations — a.k.a. carrots and sticks. They include:

- Provincial investment in roads, transit, hospitals and other infrastructure is worth \$3 billion to \$4 billion a year and it will be spent only in municipalities following the rules.
- The province can refuse to grant municipal boundary expansions to cities.
- The province can take a city that doesn't follow the rules to the Ontario Municipal Board, whose rulings must conform with provincial growth planning decisions.
- The province has changed rules to make it easier and cheaper for cities to develop brownfields — derelict former industrial lands, which are often polluted — to help with intensification.
- The province is also speeding up the environmental assessment process so municipalities can build big projects such as transit and garbage landfills or incinerators more quickly.

In the two years that the draft version of "Places to Grow" has been in public consultation, Caplan heard one comment often. "Somebody should have done this 30 years ago. It's about time," Caplan said.

That's what Neil Rodgers, president of the Urban Development Institute, which represents developers and builders, thinks, too.

"We haven't seen super-regional scale provincially led planning in 30 plus years," Rodgers said.

The 400 series highways and other major infrastructure projects, which defined growth in the Greater Toronto Area, were undertaken in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

"Those were the dreams and implementation of the John Roberts and Bill Davis eras," Rodgers said. "Those were designed to carry a generation. That generation stopped in 1980 and we've been riding on that infrastructure for the last 20 years. We see the stresses and strains every day when we commute. We've got gridlock, we've got poor air quality, we don't even have a world-class subway system."

Through its plan, the province has the chance to design the infrastructure for current and future generations, he said.

Public transit is key. Without it, there are just more people fighting to drive their cars on the same roads.

"A growth plan that will direct growth to certain areas and direct it away from other areas is great, but if you don't put infrastructure behind it, it's not going to realize its true opportunity," Rodgers said.

Caplan points to the last provincial budget as proof that the province is bringing dollars and not just big dreams to the table.

Transit in the GTA got an \$838 million boost in the budget, with money set aside to extend the subway to Vaughan Corporate Centre at Highway 7, and for transit projects in Mississauga, Brampton and York Region.

'We are building much more smartly than we were in the 1970s'

Neil Rodgers, Urban Development Institute

Priority is given to green space

► **Oakville** From A1

Priority will be given to preserving parks and green space; streetscapes will be more pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly than elsewhere in the town.

Progress on the plan is heating up just as the province unveils its growth plan to stem suburban sprawl across southern Ontario. The plan aims to accommodate four million new residents in more compact communities over the next 25 years.

If all goes as planned, Oakville's northern expansion should line up with provincial targets. But the one key element Mulvale says will set her town apart from others in the Greater Toronto Area — a 712-hectare environmental area dubbed the "Natural Heritage System" — is the one that has been the most problematic for planners.

Originally, the town set out to prohibit development around environmentally sensitive areas and "links" traversing the development, such as streams that connect creeks, watersheds, Sixteen Mile Creek, Joshua Creek, Morrison Creek and elements of the Trafalgar Moraine.

But disagreements over just how much green space to preserve forced a rift between the town and several private landowners who control a patchwork of lots sprinkled across the area, which stretches from Sixteen Mile Creek east to the Ninth Line, and from Highway 5 north to Highway 407. The landowners' plan also called for less dense development.

The rift between the two camps began to grow three years ago when the town hired a series of aquatic life and bird specialists, water chemists and geologists to study how to preserve various habitats in the development area.

Feeling shut out of the process, eight major landowners banded together under the name North Oakville Management Inc. The group, which has an interest in at least 1,000 hectares at the proposed site, then developed

its own vision for development and made an appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board, an independent tribunal that adjudicates community land disputes.

Since then, in an effort to avoid an expensive and lengthy hearing, the two sides have been involved in talks to reach an agreement before going to the OMB.

An agreement seemed unlikely when talks began a few months ago, but an unexpected breakthrough came this week, when four major landowners reached a settlement with the town, Mulvale said. Not only did the four agree not to challenge the town's version of the plan at the hearing, they agreed to donate \$5 million toward a new sports complex at Oakville's north park and an additional 145 hectares of environmental lands.

The OMB hearing is still set to begin in August, since the settlement didn't involve all eight members of the landowners' group. None of the landowners returned calls yesterday.

When asked what caused the landowners to reconsider their position and side with the town, Mulvale said, "Land is money."

She went on to say that both the town and the owners were concerned about the cost of the OMB hearing (the town budgeted \$13 million) and wanted to get on with developing what Oakville says is the largest secondary planning process currently taking shape in North America.

Peter Cheatley, the town's director of planning, said water and sewage-treatment plants must be expanded before houses are built in the development area. The upgrades could be ready by 2009, he said.

As for attracting homebuyers to the new, northern location, Mulvale said she isn't worried.

"I've never seen a time in the market in all my years here that houses in Oakville haven't sold," she said. "Having done their bit with the loft in Toronto . . . the amount of open space that's going to be here will be very attractive to families," she said.

North Oakville

The development plan for the eastern portion of north Oakville that will go to the OMB for approval includes a natural heritage system that connects green spaces.

