



December 10, 2018

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Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
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Re: Implementing the 2017 Growth Plan with a focus on MTSAs

The Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON), representing high-rise, mid-rise, and low-rise residential builders, appreciated the opportunity to participate in the recent Growth Plan Implementation Working Group sessions. As you know, these sessions addressed five key aspects of the Growth Plan: “Employment Area Conversions”; “Natural Heritage System and Agricultural System Mapping”; “Major Transit Station Areas”; “Settlement Boundary Expansions”; and “Density and Intensification Targets”.

Comments in this letter, which align with comments provided at the Ministry’s November implementation workshops, are concerned primarily with Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs), and the need to better integrate transit and land use planning. They also touch on some other topic areas including Density and Intensification Targets and Employment Area Conversions.

Other industry stakeholders have also been involved in the process and submitted feedback to the Secretariat, including the Ontario Home Builders’ Association (OHBA), who in their correspondence in October and November provided detailed comments on: Natural Heritage and Agricultural Systems; Settlement Boundary Expansion; Density and Intensification Targets; and Employment Conversions. Overall, RESCON agrees with the commentary provided by OHBA.

Our comments and recommendations, while focussed on two topics, namely MTSAs, and Density and Intensification Targets, are in general alignment with and reinforce the comments contained in OHBA’s letters.

General comments

The Growth Plan is a critical planning tool for ensuring an adequate housing supply. As you know, the GTA in particular, has a major housing supply shortage which exacerbates affordability problems. Too



many millennials are being excluded from home ownership and rental markets. As well, too few empty nesters living in detached houses are able to find transit/pedestrian-oriented, mid-rise condominiums or rental apartments, within their community. The lack of affordable housing makes the GTA less competitive, reducing job-creating investment.

The Ontario Government's Housing Supply Action Plan consultation is focussed on addressing this supply issue. If the 2006 and 2017 provincial Growth Plans had been truly effective in properly facilitating growth, we would not need a Housing Supply Action Plan.

The 2017 Growth Plan puts a heavy emphasis on what we would call "planning by numbers". It includes density targets for designated greenfield areas, intensification targets, as well as for mass transit station areas. The density targets for mass transit station areas refers to an area within 500 metres of a transit station or a 10-minute walk. The Growth Plan and associated planning legislation and regulations provide an implementation and transition regime that requires municipal official plans and zoning to conform to the new 2017 Growth Plan.

The Growth Plan has broad-brush population density targets for fringe greenfield areas whether transit exists or is planned, which has resulted and will continue to result in unnaturally high densities along the urban fringe. While buyers of new townhouses on the urban fringe have to drive everywhere, in many parts of Toronto, for example, we find detached houses adjacent to subway stations. There needs to be a much better alignment between transit and density – transit must be a key determinant of land use and urban form.

In addition, implementation of the Growth Plan has been glacial. Municipalities have five years to update their official plan through a municipal comprehensive review, and then after that, three years to update zoning – that's eight years if time frames are met, which is rare, based on previous experience. There is also very little clarity as to what development is permitted in major transit station areas during the interim period before official plans, site plan guidelines and zoning are updated.

The Growth Plan says that infrastructure planning and land use needs to be better coordinated and that the Province will work with public sector partners, including Metrolinx, to identify strategic infrastructure investments to support the implementation of the Growth Plan. Much more needs to be done to make this happen.

From a high-level perspective, problems with the Growth Plan include: a) too much emphasis on planning by numbers and too little focus on integrating land use and transit or to put it differently, integrating building form/density with access to transit; b) a very slow planning updating process; and, finally, c) too little focus on expanding transit and mobility options.

If we get the basics right – fast track approval of transit-oriented development and urban form near transit stations and along arterials, in conjunction with expedited expansion of the transit network and transit services – most of the rest will follow. Some details about our suggested approach are outlined below.



Ontario Needs Bold Solutions

1. We need much faster implementation of municipal plans enforcing MTSA density targets

A “complete planning package” for the inner portion of major transit station areas (MTSAs) and adjacent avenues should be completed within one year with provincial guidance documents to facilitate some development during the interim period.

This complete package for MTSAs and urban growth centres overlapping with MTSAs, includes 3D digital representations of updated official and secondary plans, site-plan guidelines, along with pre-zoning or community development permits.

The OHBA submission supports pre-zoning of Urban Growth Centres (UGCs), but we also recommend that such pre-zoning be part of a “complete planning package” for MTSAs.

We recommend that the complete planning package for MTSAs be completed within one year rather than the eight years provided under the current Growth Plan implementation schedule.

The complete planning package would apply to at least the inner portion mass transit station area and that part along an arterial road. Outer portions of the mass transit station areas (within 500 metres or a 10-minute walk) would be completed later but as soon as possible.

To ensure faster and proper alignment with the provincial growth plan within the one-year update period, the Province itself, along with outside consultants, could also assist in the completion of updated planning documents. Since there is still uncertainty during the one year updating process, the Province should develop guidelines for municipalities and developers in order to facilitate at least some development during this interim period.

As suggested by OHBA, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing should review prescribed densities for each of the UGCs. In addition, prescribed densities for MTSAs will be refined during the development of a comprehensive planning package – in fact some MTSAs should have higher densities such as Yonge Street and Eglinton Avenue.

2. We need to prioritize provincial policy goals for MTSAs

MTSAs are associated with very expensive public infrastructure investments in the form of high capacity transit lines, transit stations along with high capacity water and sewer services. The priority in these areas must be to facilitate aesthetically attractive, transit and pedestrian friendly development that achieves the employment/residential density targets or higher, as outlined in the 2017 Growth Plan.

There should be no other objectives in the 2017 Growth Plan for these particular areas to create confusion or planning paralysis.

The 2017 Growth Plan talks about the need for municipalities to identify “employment areas”, designated in official plans through a municipal comprehensive review process, for economic activities such as



manufacturing, warehousing, offices and associated activities. It is important that in MTSAs, pedestrian and transit-oriented urban form should be a top priority. This may mean that low density manufacturing or warehousing areas close to MTSAs should be rezoned for higher density office and residential uses while facilitating the relocation of existing low-density manufacturing and warehouse activity.

We support the OHBA recommendation that Official Plan Amendments should be allowed at any time to support employment conversions. We would also recommend that in the inner portion of the MTSAs, these employment areas and any required conversions be addressed through the “MTSA complete planning package” concept outlined above.

The recently introduced open-for-business provisions in Bill 66, *Restoring Ontario’s Competitiveness Act*, which allows municipalities with approval from the Minister, to pass a zoning bylaw aimed at speeding up approval of economic development projects by streamlining planning requirements including modified site plan control provisions, should help in opening up other employment areas as necessary.

Contained within the Guidance documents that are part of the 2017 Growth Plan, is a reference to “stable neighbourhoods”. Under 7.1.1. of the document “Application of Intensification and Density Targets” is the following statement, “many MTSAs could contain portions of stable neighbourhoods or other areas where the potential for development is constrained”. The note also correctly acknowledges that “even stable neighbourhoods inevitably change”. Detached homes directly adjacent to subway stations should definitely not fall under the “stable neighbourhoods” classification, but rather should be classified as “existing neighbourhoods”. Moreover, in this scenario, change is not just “inevitable” but would be rather quick.

The Growth Plan language should be changed to refer to “existing neighbourhoods” rather than “stable neighbourhoods” in the context of MTSAs, particularly the inner portions of the MTSAs very close to transit stations and arterials. Otherwise, the Growth Plan is supporting conflicting goals where this can be avoided.

3. We need to stop pushing higher densities into urban fringe areas with no high-quality transit

The 2017 Growth Plan calls for increased broad-brush density targets in new designated greenfield areas (80 people and jobs per hectare) as well as in existing designated greenfield areas (60 people and jobs per hectare). These targets have been increased from 50 people and jobs per hectare under the 2006 Growth Plan. These higher densities are to be achieved after the municipal comprehensive review has been completed (presumably within five years of the 2017 Growth Plan’s effective date). To comply with the increased broad-brush densities prescribed in the Growth Plan will require municipalities to specify much higher densities on the ground for new projects (with some estimates putting this at over 130 jobs and people per hectare), in order to achieve the prescribed averages given lower existing densities.

We support OHBA’s comment that we should return to the 2006 growth plan’s designated greenfield density of 50 jobs and persons per acre. Higher densities belong only in those parts of existing and



designated greenfield areas where there is high quality transit. For other lower density areas in suburban area, uber-based transit as implemented in Innisville, can be an option.

4. Municipalities need to have pre-zoning in place before the Province invests in new transit lines

Some urban fringe areas could have higher densities but only where high-quality transit investments are being made, such as above ground light rail or bus service on a separated right of way, subway lines, regional rail (GO).

These provincial transit investments should be made only **after** the municipality has prepared a complete planning package including secondary plans and site plan control bylaws and pre-zoning (or community development permits) that allow immediate construction of higher density development along avenues and adjacent to major transit stations.

Areas between major transit lines should be reserved for lower density housing including detached housing as is the case in Toronto's old streetcar neighbourhoods. This helps satisfy the demand for ground-related housing by locating such development where it belongs.

5. We need to expand and improve our transit network using innovative financing tools

The GTA has a huge transit deficit - with a population of 6.5 million, the region has only 77 kilometres of subways including the recent extension to Vaughan, meanwhile Melbourne with a population of 4.8 million has 390 kilometers of subway and high capacity transit.

Some existing Toronto subway lines, and in particular the Yonge line, are chronically over-crowded. The GTA transit network is grossly inadequate and needs many additional lines and stations to allow the city to intensify, expand housing supply, reduce congestion, improve the quality of life and attract international job creating investment.

RESCON has consistently been advocating for the use of land value increment capture to help fund transit expansions and improvements.

Recently Minister of Transportation Jeff Yurek announced that the province will partner with a private firm, which would build a new GO station at Mimico in exchange for the right to develop above the station (e.g. air rights). The Minister has asked Metrolinx to explore the feasibility of this approach.

An example of successful transit-oriented development is the Hong Kong's self-funded transit body "Mass Transit Railway" (MTR), which is a rail plus property company that develops land above and adjacent to new subway and transit stations. MTR also manages the entire system in both Melbourne and Stockholm where densities are more in line with Toronto.

Of course, if new transit lines are to follow pre-zoning, as suggested under item #5, then to take full advantage of land value capture, transit station land would be purchased or expropriated by the transit authority at land values that existed prior to the transit investment or announcement.



6. We need to use 3D BIM to better communicate the comprehensive planning packages for MTSAs

We also recommend that the Province rely on 3D BIM (Building Information Modelling) representation to help planners and the general public visualize the transit and pedestrian oriented development to be located near transit stations and along avenues. Using 3D BIM technology will provide people with a clear visual representation of the benefits of transit and pedestrian oriented development. Referring to just “density targets” and “intensification” is counter-productive.

The use of 3D BIM helps to address planning issues, site plan control issues such as streetscapes, shading, pedestrian routes, and transitions to existing neighbourhoods. Industry consultants (architects, engineers, planners) and some builders, are already using BIM extensively. It is time government caught up and started using BIM technology to better communicate planning and built form concepts.

RESCON is currently working with municipal building officials, industry, the University of Toronto, and other stakeholders to develop a common file transfer standard. RESCON looks forward to working with the Province on this initiative as well in the hopes of the creating a common file platform for Ontario.

In summary

To summarize, we think that the Province needs to ensure that municipalities are better at preparing communities for transit expansion and better at utilizing existing transit infrastructure through the land use planning process. The Province seems to be receptive to new and bold approaches and appears to be moving in the right direction. Thank you again for inviting RESCON to the Growth Plan implementation workshops – we think they were well organized, necessary and timely. RESCON would be pleased to meet with the Growth Secretariat to further discuss our views on the Growth Plan and its implementation.

Best regards,

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