

# Waterloo Region Healthy Communities Coalition

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Chairman Ken Seiling & Members of Regional Council  
150 Frederick St  
Kitchener, ON N2G 4J3

March 24, 2003

Dear Councillors,

Our Coalition would like to express our position with regard to the draft Regional Growth Management Strategy (RGMS) and to thank staff of the Planning, Housing, and Community Services Department for their generous commitment of time in meeting with us.

The Waterloo Region Healthy Communities Coalition is a group of individuals and organizations with a common interest in seeing Healthy Communities principles implemented in this Region. We believe that, to be healthy, a community requires a balance among its environment, economy, and society. Many principles of the Healthy Communities movement are consistent with the Smart Growth philosophy (e.g. curbing sprawl, preserving greenspaces and the natural environment, encouraging a diversity of housing options in every neighbourhood) upon which the RGMS seems to be based.

We have taken a keen interest in the Growth Management process since Planning staff presented the Phase 1 Report to Council in March 2002. Most of our active members have read through the background documents. We have met with Planning staff on four occasions and written two letters to them in the past year on this subject. We feel well positioned to comment on a strategy which will have an impact on the long-term health of the Region.

## **Support for *Concept* of Intensification**

We wish to start by stating our support for the **concept** of intensification of development in our Region. We affirm strong support for the idea of a firm countryside line and for minimizing the amount of land currently zoned agricultural being converted to urban. We support plans to concentrate development along the Central Transit Corridor (CTC), since this would greatly increase access to services and the opportunities to use multiple modes of transportation, and reduce air pollution and traffic congestion. We agree with the argument in the Draft Strategy that the Intensive option would greatly enhance the viability of a Light Rapid Transit system, and look forward to the possibility of such a system.

However, several concerns prevent us from a clear endorsement of the intensive re-urbanization option. First, the process of developing a growth management strategy has been rushed, and opportunities to consult more widely with the public have been missed as a result. Second, without key information that is within the jurisdiction of area municipalities – like the height and setback of buildings, amount of greenspace, walkways, etc. – it is difficult to assess how livable it will feel to have an additional 150,000 residents and 100,000 employment spaces in the CTC. Third, and perhaps most importantly, we continue to question what population level our ecosystem can handle and whether the assumptions behind the Region's economic strategy are consistent with Healthy Communities and Smart Growth principles.

## 1. Process Considerations

While our Coalition appreciates the efforts that Planning staff have put into meeting with various constituencies over the past year, our members are still amazed by how many of our community contacts are unaware of a process that will have such great impact on the future of our Region. Developing a plan for managing population growth forty years into the future requires not just detailed input from planning departments of area municipalities, but time for substantive input from citizens on draft proposals. To date, we feel the public has not had enough meaningful input on the RGMS, partially because there has been inadequate detail for the public to comment on. We regard the ROPP review process of the early 1990s as a model of a more inclusive public consultation process.

A key question we feel has been missed in the public consultation process is that citizens were never asked “do you want our Region to grow to 700,000 people by 2040?” Page 4 of the Executive Summary posted on the Region’s Growth Management website refers to support from a majority of respondents in the consultation process for “the scale of community growth”, yet we see no evidence that the public has been asked for input on this question. For our Coalition, this point becomes particularly important given our concerns about environmental carrying capacity described below.

Further, we believe the RGMS needs to be linked more directly to the visions for the future identified by citizens through the processes undertaken by area municipalities in the last decade (e.g. Compass Kitchener, Imagine! Waterloo, Cambridge’s Our Common Future, see attached Figure). University of Waterloo Planning Professor Robert Shiple recently completed a study<sup>1</sup> of five Regional visioning processes in the past decade and reported that the public felt disillusioned by the lack of follow-up to these processes. Our Coalition feels that if local governments are to gain back the confidence of their citizens, the RGMS should make explicit reference to how this strategy fits in with the visions already articulated by citizens of the Region.

## 2. Is Intensification Livable?

Our members appreciated the images produced by Planning staff in the brochures and electronic presentations to represent the intensified urban forms of the future – the four- to five-story buildings surrounded by trees, greenspace, public transit, and pedestrian walkways, etc. We believe they did a good job of making a more densely populated core look attractive, and, in Healthy Communities parlance, livable.

The numbers given in the brochures accompanying the draft RGMS suggest that the intensive option would add 150,000 residents and 100,000 jobs to the CTC by 2040. Would the images staff produced be consistent with the reality of what would be required in terms of building height, setback from the street, and greenspace to accommodate this population increase? This is a question presumably for the area municipalities to answer, as they have the jurisdiction over such specific zoning regulations. Until they have had a chance to answer this question, we feel it premature to support the intensive re-urbanization option unequivocally.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Shiple, Robert Early, Robert Fieck, and Brent Hall, Evaluating Municipal Visioning: Comparing the Results of Five Visioning Exercises Conducted Between 1992 and 2001 in the Waterloo Region. Kitchener: Waterloo Community-University Research Alliance, August 2002.

We prefer the option of intensifying the CTC over converting more agricultural lands to urban, but wonder what population level is the threshold for livability in the core. Side-by-side high rises throughout the core would certainly not meet with the visions articulated in the municipal visioning processes.

We would also like to echo the need to “support housing proposals that address priorities relating to affordability, age, disability, and other requirements of residents with unique needs,” as the RGMS reminds us to do on page 48 of Volume 2. The higher property values along the CTC that the intensive option would likely engender would inhibit the Region’s ability to provide affordable housing choices in the core. Can the CTC support the proposed levels of intensification and still avoid gentrification that would force low-income people out into the suburbs? This would be an unfortunate side-effect of intensification, given that the people most likely to rely on public transit would be priced out of living close to the transit backbone. We would like to see detailed proposals of how this can be avoided.

### **3. Limits to Growth, Kinds of Growth**

Our Coalition’s first question to Planning staff in May of last year was how the projected population figures were arrived at, and whether the carrying capacity of our ecosystem could sustain that level. Ten months later, we return to the same question.

Planning staff have informed us that municipalities have very little control over how many people migrate to a municipality, and that the population levels projected in the RGMS are based largely on historical realities projected into the future. We understand that the Region does not control the level of immigration to the country, nor how many immigrants choose to settle here. But the Region and area municipalities do have significant tools to control population growth – particularly the decisions to build infrastructure, and zoning of agricultural versus urban lands – and we believe it is reasonable for local governments to consult with citizens over the choice of whether or not to use them.

We believe that a municipality must determine the limits of its ecosystem and design policy tools to ensure the population’s size and consumption levels do not go beyond them. To their credit, Planning staff conducted considerable studies to assess the ability of the Region’s water supply, water treatment facilities, and waste systems to accommodate the projected population levels. We remain unsatisfied with the evidence presented to date that our ecosystem can handle a population of 700,000.

Regarding air quality, the draft RGMS contains no mention of the effect that a population of 700,000 would have on the Region. We do understand that Planning staff are aware of the issue, and have made preliminary efforts to address it. Given the number of poor air quality days the Region is already experiencing, we feel it is inconsistent with principles of sustainability to plan for further population increase without significant consideration being given to the impact of air quality on the health of our community. Our concern here is shared by Ontario’s Environmental Commissioner Gordon Miller, who has said that southern Ontario has reached a saturation point and that increases in population will have a negative effect on our quality of life.

Regarding water supply, page 11 of Volume 4 implies that the Intensive option may negate the need to build a Great Lakes Water Pipeline, which pleases our members. But we remain concerned that we rely on its possibility as a backup plan, as we believe the environmentally responsible option would be to rely on water resources of our own ecosystem.

Our final growth-related concern has to do with the nature of economic growth. While economic development seems to be accepted to be the jurisdiction of area municipalities in our Region, the Region has displayed support for certain models of economic growth through its support for Canada's Technology Triangle and for the way the RGMS has determined that additional lands are required for "large manufacturing and distribution" employers. Support for these growth models needs to be put into the context of social factors like the growing income gap in our Region, and environmental factors like the relative land use of large warehouses versus other economic activities that can be carried out in denser land use.

Encouraging high-tech companies to locate in the Region, while not objectionable in and of itself, can skew the income distribution in our Region even more if pursued in the absence of economic development strategies to encourage other types of economic activity and employment opportunities. Additionally, justifying the need for additional employment lands on studies forecasting that demand for certain land uses will exist (or exists already) implies that because the demand exists, we should accommodate it. An economic development strategy based on Healthy Communities principles would seek to balance economic concerns with environmental and social concerns, and would involve wide community participation in its development. Hence decisions to alter land use policies within a long-term Growth Management Strategy should be based not just on economic forecasts, but summaries of public consultations on what kind of economic development citizens desire.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

In summary, the Waterloo Region Healthy Communities Coalition recommends:

1. Keeping a firm countryside line and minimizing the amount of land currently designated agricultural being converted to urban;
2. Continuing to pursue everything possible to establish a Light Rapid Transit system along the Central Transit Corridor;
3. Asking staff, the Ecological and Environmental Advisory Committee, and consultants if necessary to determine what level of population the Region's ecosystem can sustain;
4. Intensifying along the Central Transit Corridor to the degree attainable at the liveable level of intensity portrayed in the images accompanying the RGMS colour brochure;
5. Giving the RGMS process more time to incorporate more detailed input from planning departments of area municipalities, and more substantive input from citizens;
6. Asking staff to develop an action plan to promote diversity of housing stock, price, income, and demographics in order to mitigate effects such as gentrification in the cores as land prices rise;
7. Asking public health staff, and consultants if necessary, to estimate the air quality impact of projected population and economic activity increases;
8. Asking citizens, once reports on #3 and #7 have been publicised, what population level they would choose to grow to;

9. Developing a proactive economic strategy for the Region that would seek to spread the benefits of employment and remuneration most equitably among citizens and be consistent with environmental sustainability;
10. Consulting the public actively and routinely throughout the further development – and implementation – of the Regional Growth Management Strategy.

We submit these recommendations to you in recognition of all the hard work that Councilors and staff have already dedicated toward this forward-looking process.

Sincerely,

Michael Parkinson, Secretary,  
Waterloo Region Healthy Communities Coalition

This letter was approved by a majority of members of the Waterloo Region Healthy Communities Coalition March 24, 2003.

cc. Kevin Curtis, Administrator, Policy Planning, Region of Waterloo Planning  
Senior Planners, Area Municipalities  
Area Municipality Councilors

### Compiled Vision Objectives from Communities within Waterloo Region

This is a collection of the primary vision statements and objectives of the recent community visioning processes in Waterloo Region. These vision objective statements were extracted from the respective community vision documents. Some wording may have been adjusted in non-substantial ways in order to increase readability. Please see the complete vision documents for the original wording and further explanation of each statement.

#### Caring & Trusting Social Relationships (Conviviality) Objectives

- We will be a safe, caring, and healthy community. (Wilmot)
- We will be a caring community. (Waterloo)
- We will be a safe community. (Hespeler)
- The City will be a safe and caring community with accessible human services emphasizing prevention and education. (Cambridge)
- We will build a feeling of community. (Woolwich)
- We will have a strong sense of community. We need to recognize and build upon our existing resources (human & physical) to develop our capacity to work together. (Hespeler)
- We will see schools as resources. (Hespeler)
- We will build cooperation within our township and with other community and government partners. (Wilmot)
- We will work in partnership with community members, agencies and providers to promote well-being and a healthy community. (Kitchener)
- The City will have strong community leadership through partnerships, volunteerism, and innovation. (Cambridge)
- We will develop decision-making and management processes that respond to the issues, directions, values and vision of our community. (Kitchener)
- We will honour the past and safeguard the future. (Woolwich)
- We will identify and promote our heritage. (Wilmot)

#### Livability Objectives

- The City will have strong core areas with a single civic centre. The City will be linked by its rivers and natural areas. New growth will emphasize the importance of linking the community and revitalizing the cores. (Cambridge)
- We will revitalize the Downtown Core. We will have a picturesque and viable downtown. (Hespeler)
- We will continue to create a vital downtown in our community. (Kitchener)
- The community will be a place where people want to live and visit because of its arts, culture, heritage and natural environment, and its opportunities for recreation, shopping and entertainment. (Cambridge)
- We will improve community amenities. (Woolwich)
- The city will be a fun city. (Waterloo)
- We will actively work towards meeting the affordable housing needs of the community. (Kitchener)
- The city will be a community of neighbourhoods. (Waterloo)

#### Viability Objectives

- We will protect our environment and natural resources. (Wilmot)
- We will treat waste as a resource. (Woolwich)
- We will improve the quality of the environment. (Woolwich)
- We will improve the quality of our air, water, and land resources and increase green space. (Kitchener)
- We will be a green city. (Waterloo)

#### Equity Objectives

- We will provide for people's basic needs. (Woolwich)
- Our community will be accessible to all. (Waterloo)
- We will value the voices of youth. (Hespeler)
- We will promote a strong voice for all residents. (Woolwich)

#### Prosperity Objectives

- The community will be an economic leader. (Waterloo)
- We will provide a diversity of job opportunities. (Wilmot)
- The community will have a vibrant and diverse economy driven by innovation and entrepreneurship, building on the strengths of an educated and skilled workforce, cooperation and a competitive spirit. (Cambridge)
- We will support local businesses. (Woolwich)
- We will support farming. (Woolwich)
- We will be a learning community. (Waterloo)

#### Sustainability Objectives

- The community will have the necessary infrastructure (e.g. water, power, waste management and transportation systems) to sustain the community's lifestyle and economic development, while maintaining and enhancing the environment. (Cambridge)
- We will recognize the river [and the environment] as one of the community's most important assets and ...explore ways to improve the river both physically and functionally. (Hespeler)
- We will manage growth and maintain the rural agricultural base. (Wilmot)

