

Community Dispatch

An InfoFax of the Halton Social Planning Council

February, 2003

Vol. 7, No. 2

EMBRACING SMART GROWTH – WHICH PATH?

This edition of Community Dispatch presents highlights of the Council's recent report: *Embracing Smart Growth – Which Path?* It offers the Council's observations on the proposed changes to the Halton *Official Plan*.

Background

The Regional Municipality of Halton is currently undergoing the statutory five-year review of its *Official Plan* as set out in *The Planning Act*. A key component of the review process is a *Consultation Plan*. The purpose of the *Consultation Plan* is to provide opportunity for public discussion and agency consultation on the *Official Plan*. Regional staff have prepared the *Directions Report* to provide an opportunity for community information and feedback on the framework and direction for the new *Official Plan*.

The *Directions Report* suggests a new framework for planning policies for the new *Official Plan* and recommends 15 directions for change. These 15 themes include affordable housing, the countryside, greenlands, environmental quality and mobility. The underlying framework of the *Directions Report* is that of Smart Growth and includes the recommendation of a Smart Growth Index to gauge new development.

The Council believes the *Official Plan* sets the stage for social and economic development and as such affects in some way the many activities of the voluntary sector. Therefore, the Council has participated in the review process in two ways. Firstly, we have convened two community consultations in the Region to provide community agencies with the opportunity for input and discussion on the *Directions Report*. The outcome is available in a report entitled: *Halton Official Plan Review Consultations – A Non-Profit*

Perspective. Second, we have prepared a report, *Embracing Smart Growth – Which Path?*, which discusses the importance of having an Official Plan based on an underlying framework that strives to improve the quality of life for all its residents. It examines some of the areas discussed in the *Directions Report*, as well as emphasizing other topics the Council feels are essential in a Regional Official Plan. The Council has selected those areas that are most relevant to the human service sector. Specifically, the report addresses: Healthy Communities, Smart Growth and the Smart Growth Index, a Human Services Plan, and Affordable Housing. The Council shares these observations with the belief that they will contribute to the development of a far reaching and innovative Official Plan.

Healthy Communities

The 1995 *Official Plan* clearly recognizes the importance of the assumptions underlying a healthy communities framework. Section B1a2 states that the goals of the Region are: "To develop and maintain healthy communities by fostering physical, social and economic conditions that will enhance the state of well-being and the quality of life for the residents of Halton." The 1995 *Official Plan* embraces a holistic vision of health, one that recognizes that our need for clean air and water, safe communities, green space and housing flow as much from our physical and social environments as our health care system. This framework searches for balance.

The *Directions Report*, however, does not discuss or emphasize the need for a healthy communities framework.

Regional Government is responsible for and influences the development of the community, not

only its physical infrastructure but also its economy, its health and its social environment.

Recommendations

The Council recommends that the healthy communities philosophy be retained and further developed in Halton's new *Official Plan* based on the following principles:

- the quality of its environment (natural or man-made)
- the vitality of its social fabric
- the efficient use of material resources
- the vitality and strength of its economy
- access to public and private services
- the involvement of citizens in the decisions that affect them, and
- the health of its citizens

This framework complements Smart Growth by guaranteeing that the human face of life in Halton is central to Regional Government.

Smart Growth

Smart Growth is a collaborative, incentive-based approach to growth management that emerged in the United States in the 1990s in response to a range of problems associated with conventional patterns of development.

Smart Growth means different things to different people and as such lacks precision and, in fact, can cause confusion. Smart Growth has become the touchstone for a catch-all of physical and fiscal development ideas for governments.

The *Directions Report* draws its Smart Growth principles from a 2001 policy paper produced by the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario, the *Directions Report* states:

...in a policy paper produced by the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario called *Beyond Smart Growth: A Call to Action*... there are 20 specific action items that will achieve Smart Growth or good planning. Much of this *Directions Report* is built upon these action items. (Halton Regional Municipality, *Directions Report*, 2002, 17)

Beyond Smart Growth: A Call to Action organizes its 20 action items into five themes:

- Maintain firm urban boundaries and densities;
- Development of key nodes;
- Invest in public transit infrastructure;
- Protect greenland and the countryside; and
- Re-align fiscal policies (Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario, *Beyond Smart Growth: A Call to Action* 2001,1).

The Council is concerned about the adoption of a Halton *Official Plan* based on a Smart Growth framework where little priority or importance is given to social development and human well-being. Furthermore, the *Directions Report* proposes to take Smart Growth a step further by developing a Smart Growth Index on which to gauge any new development applications in Halton. The *Directions Report* states:

We propose to introduce a system to measure development plans or planning applications, such as secondary plans, plans of subdivision and re-zoning applications, against the principles or objectives of Smart Growth using what we call a *Smart Growth Index (SGI)*...In brief, each planning application will be assessed against the following ten Smart Growth Indicators, producing ten scores:

- density of development,
- mix in land use
- facilities within walking distance and ease of walking through the neighbourhood,
- availability of affordable housing,
- amount of green space,
- access to major facilities or services – health, social, recreation, shopping, etc.,
- access to public transit,
- proximity of existing urban service (water and wastewater) infrastructure,
- design of the development in meeting objectives of environmental protection, heritage feature preservation, and barrier-free design, and
- degree of public involvement in the development process (Regional Municipality of Halton, *Directions Report*, 2002,17).

Again, these indicators do not incorporate many of the principles that the 1995 *Official Plan* embraced by using a Healthy Communities framework that links the importance of social well-being to the physical and economic environments.

A recent report, *Building Inclusive Communities: Cross-Canada Perspectives and Strategies*, complements and further elaborates a healthy communities vision. The report states:

Social inclusion reflects a growing international recognition that investments in human and civic assets are core foundations to economic prosperity and social well-being. Successful countries in the global era will develop the social capacities of people and communities to live in states of mutual trust and to contribute to innovations. Smaller countries such as Canada have a greater challenge to ensure that no human resource capacity is lost or underdeveloped, and that no civic community is neglected or undervalued. It is within municipalities that basic states of social inclusion are created and experienced in everyday life. Social inclusion is promoted by policies:

- that reduce economic, social and cultural inequities within the population (e.g. economic disparities, racism, age or gender discrimination, etc);
- that recognize, value and support the contributions of all community members to the economic, social and cultural life a a society; and
- that are grounded in shared values/principles and common commitments while respecting and accommodating appropriately the diversities within a society (Clutterbuck and Novick, *Building Inclusive Communities: Cross-Canada*, 2002, 6).

Recommendations

The Council recommends that the framework of Smart Growth be redefined to include not only economic and physical criteria but to reflect the importance of social and human capital. This holistic approach reflects a healthy communities

philosophy and promotes Halton as an inclusive community. The characteristics of an inclusive community, which promotes democracy and values citizenship, are as follows:

- Integrated and cooperative – inclusive communities bring people together and are places where people and organizations work together.
- Interactive – inclusive communities have accessible community spaces and open public places and groups and organizations that support social interaction and community activity, including celebrating community life.
- Invested – inclusive communities are places where both the public and private sectors commit resources for the social and economic health and well-being of the whole community.
- Diverse – inclusive communities welcome and incorporate diverse people and cultures into the structures, processes and functions of daily community life.
- Equitable – inclusive communities make sure that everyone has the means to live in decent conditions (i.e. income supports, employment, good housing) and the opportunity to develop one's capacities and to participate actively in community life.
- Accessible and Sensitive – inclusive communities have an array of readily available and accessible supports and services for the social, health, and developmental needs of their populations and provide such supports in culturally sensitive and appropriate ways (essential services identified include good schools, recreation, childcare, libraries, public transit, affordable housing and supportive housing, home care, crisis and emergency supports, well coordinated and comprehensive settlement supports)
- Participatory – inclusive communities encourage and support the involvement of all their members in the planning and decision-making that affect community conditions and development, including having an effective voice with senior levels of government.
- Safe – inclusive communities ensure both individual and broad community safety and security so that no one feels at risk in their

homes or moving around the neighbourhood and city (Clutterbuck and Novick, *Building Inclusive Communities: Cross-Canada*, 2002, 8).

Human Services Plan

Human Service policy and planning is also about the allocation and distribution of resources for the benefit of all people. It plays a critical bridging role between the economic and social environments. A strong human service infrastructure builds an inclusive community and positively influences economic development.

Economic and social development are not discrete functions but are interwoven processes that lead to prosperous, just and inclusive communities. The *Directions Report* does not discuss or stress the importance of developing a human services policy or plan in the new *Official Plan*. The Council believes, however, that human service planning needs to be an integral part of an Official Plan.

The need for a strong human services focus was also identified in the following comments made at the community consultations hosted by the Council with the non-profit sector in Halton.

We need to develop a human services plan as part of an official plan.

Planning for human services should be given equal importance to economic development by government (Halton Social Planning Council, *Halton Official Plan Review Consultation: A Non-Profit Perspective*, 2003, 6).

Growth must include human service planning. This cannot be achieved by government alone, but by strong collaborations within government departments, and partnerships with non-profit agencies and community groups of civil society.

Recommendations

The Council recommends that the new *Official Plan* include a strong Human Services focus that includes a Human Services Plan for Halton Region to assist Government and human services

agencies in the planning and delivery of their services or programs.

The Council recommends that this Human Services Plan be developed, jointly with the Area Municipalities, service agencies, and other human services planning organizations.

Affordable Housing

The 1995 Halton *Official Plan* incorporated the 1989 Provincial Policy Statement requiring 25 per cent affordable housing into its regulations. With the 25 per cent quota of affordable housing no longer a Provincial Policy requirement, the *Directions Report* proposes a new affordable housing policy. This policy is predicated on the Smart Growth paradigm and the use of the Smart Growth Index.

The Council is pleased to see the recognition of the need for more affordable housing identified in the *Directions Report*; however, we are concerned about the implementation of such a policy direction. The new direction only discusses the delivery of more affordable housing through the use of the Smart Growth Index. The supposition is that by using the Index, it will encourage developers to build affordable housing. However, as we have previously discussed, affordable housing is only one of the criterion in the Smart Growth Index. New housing developments could, in fact, repeatedly score zero in the affordable housing criterion (with no provision of affordable housing units) on the Smart Growth Index and still be approved.

It is unlikely that the Smart Growth Index and private sector cooperation will provide a strong basis to promote affordable housing in a new *Official Plan* policy. The Smart Growth Index gives all its criteria equal weight and it does not prioritize. For example, access to major facilities or services and the degree of public involvement are given the same weight in the index as affordable housing. This is not to say that the most important criterion is affordable housing. They are all important criteria, but if this is the only way affordable housing is to be supported in the *Official Plan*, it falls short.

Recommendations

The Council recommends that Halton Region develop a new *Official Plan* with a strong framework to address affordable housing. This could include a stronger weighting of the affordable housing criterion in the Smart Growth Index or affordable housing land-use designations and partnerships.

The Council recommends that this housing policy be developed jointly in cooperation with other departments of Regional Government, such as Social and Community Services, Housing and with other community groups that have a key role in identifying how Halton affordable housing needs be met.

The Council supports the 2002 recommendations of the Halton Emergency Housing Advisory Group's *Final Report*. They are as follows:

1. That this report be forwarded to the Councils of the Region of Halton, Area Municipalities and the Head Office organization of the Salvation Army for their consideration.
2. That the Region of Halton, the Town of Oakville, and the Salvation Army endorse the report and incorporate its recommendations to the fullest extent possible within their respective legislation, program, and funding responsibilities.
3. That once the Region of Halton has endorsed site location criteria, Council pass a resolution indicating that the criteria cannot be changed without consulting the public.
4. That the definition and location criteria for emergency housing outlined in this report be

forwarded to the regional and area municipalities for consideration within their Official Plan and Zoning Amendment Review, to establish a consistent definition and application across the Region of Halton.

In addition the Council supports the additional recommendation associated with emergency housing, that is #7 as outlined in report SS-04-03 to Regional Council. This moves our community to action in an effort to alleviate the human suffering experienced by some of our neighbours. The recommendations is as follows:

7. THAT the Region of Halton purchase and own the land for the proposed emergency shelter.

Also, in recognition of the need for a continuum of housing supports in Halton and in recognition of the difficult and fractious situations often unfolding around emergency and transitional housing, the Council recommends that Regional Government and Area Municipal Official Plans and zoning by-laws shall provide opportunities for transitional and emergency accommodation. Municipal shelters shall be a permitted use in all zones or districts in all the Area Municipal zoning by-laws. This "as of right" clause recognizes the responsibility of Regional and Municipal Government in facilitating the development of such institutions that meet the needs of all its population.

For a copy of *Embracing Smart Growth – Which Path?* or the *Halton Official Plan Review Consultations – A Non-Profit Perspective* report, please contact the Council.

