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June 30, 2021

## **Re. Approaches to the MCR in Durham**

Dear Envision Durham,

We are writing today to suggest approaches to the MCR / OP update / Envision Durham process. First, we would like to support the process Durham is undertaking, by recognising that this is an opportunity to modernize the Region's OP to make it more helpful in achieving environmental, social and community goals.

According to the Envision Durham website - "Today, the region is home to 699,460 people. By the year 2051, our population is expected to grow to 1.3 million people, with over 460,000 jobs in the region. Our vision is to create healthy and complete, sustainable communities within the region, shaping Durham into a great place to live, work, play, grow and invest."

We also appreciate that the Region conducted a framing public survey in early 2019 which revealed "a desire for greater balance amongst broad objectives, including:

- Increased job opportunities and overall economic prosperity;
- Healthy communities that provide a variety of supports, services and affordable housing options;
- Livable urban areas that preserve lands for greenspace and recreation by shifting from sprawl to more sustainable growth patterns;
- Resilient built and natural environments ready for adaptation and mitigation against the effects of climate change;
- Protected rural landscapes with strong agricultural roots; and
- Transportation networks that support and promote a range of modes, including active transportation and enhanced transit.

When considered together, the priorities identified by residents foster a complete community where our residents want to live, work, play, grow and invest.”<sup>1</sup>

Further, we understand that the implementation and development of the ROP would include building upon the vision and goals of the Durham Region Strategic Plan, 2020-2024.

These are all fantastic ways to ensure that the policies are consistent with Durham’s vision and goals. However, we are wondering if the Region has considered how to share growth options with its residents? The Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition is providing input and helping to engage residents in the important process of updating the OP / MCR, across the Lake Simcoe watershed in Simcoe County, Durham, and York Region. In each region, at this early stage in the MCR we are proposing a way to present the effect of various growth options to its residents and interested parties.

### **Fully analyze existing conditions in the Land Needs Assessment**

To that end we request that in the lead up to the presentation of growth options in Durham must:

- Accept that the Land Needs Assessment (LNA) allows extensive flexibility for municipalities to develop their own options on how to accommodate the Growth Plan forecasts;

- Provide an assessment of what types of housing units people can afford - this is a requirement of the Growth Plan. The growth option chosen must improve housing affordability for more people in low income households;

- Provide an assessment of how people can be accommodated in houses which will be freed up as people age and either downsize or pass away. (The parents of the boomers and most boomers will no longer be with us by 2051 - this will free up 1 million ground related houses in the region which could accommodate 3 million people (at 3 people/unit) in the GGH).

### **Present growth options:**

Durham should also present a variety of growth scenarios to the public in a way that makes sense to non-planners. Hamilton sent a survey out to their residents to ask them IF they want an urban boundary expansion. Residents convinced Council to present options that include a no boundary expansion option. No boundary expansion should be one of the growth options presented to the public through the MCR.

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<sup>1</sup> Envision Durham, Framework for a new Regional Official Plan, Report #2020P-24, Nov 3, 2020

How will each growth option Durham Region presents benefit the community, both in existing communities and in new greenfield communities? Will it:

- Increase or decrease access to public transit?
- Increase or decrease the proportion of affordable housing?
- Increase or decrease public greenspace on a per capita basis?
- Increase or decrease the extent of agricultural land?
- Increase or decrease the extent of natural areas (forests, wetlands, valleys, grasslands)?
- Increase or decrease property taxes?
- Increase proportional salt from roads polluting our waterways?
- Increase or decrease personal vehicle GHG emissions from Simcoe County?
- What are the costs of servicing each of the growth options (infrastructure building and maintenance, and taxation required to maintain each option, on a per household basis)
- For employment lands, provide a breakdown of vacancy rates in existing employment lands.

### **The problems are intertwined and share solutions**

There are a host of persistent and worsening symptoms of poorly planned communities that could be remedied by the addition of hundreds of thousands of people. In short those are environmental and social issues related to the impacts of planning in silos and prioritizing private interests before social and environmental outcomes.

### **Address social and housing needs of lower income individuals and families**

The MCR should aim to meet the housing needs of residents while reducing impacts to the environment. High rents, poverty, social isolation, and discrimination against homeless people are social symptoms of a society that doesn't take care to plan for the ups and downs of normal lives, where people are not always financially stable, and sometimes live alone. These issues are all related to the provision of appropriate housing. Poverty and homelessness advocates are increasingly focused on housing as the necessary first step for people to get back on their feet.

We know full well there will be some new suburbs in greenfields as the MCR is applied. But while that is built form that most enriches developers, that is only one form of building that is needed.

### **Protect Lake Simcoe and the natural environment: focus on density**

The MCR presents an opportunity to build for environmental sustainability too. Luckily, there is a solution that benefits the environment, people and communities. *Increase density and focus on infill development where we already have infrastructure.* There are many fiscal and environmental arguments for this:

One, that we do not yet have 40% of the LS watershed in high quality natural cover as per the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan; achieving this target should be one of the MCR's objectives.

Two, Ontario is losing 175 acres a day of prime farmland. (Ontario Farmland Trust.) This is completely unsustainable if we are serious about food security.

Three, converting agricultural land to residential contributes to phosphorus pollution to Lake Simcoe through the construction phase and through stormwater pollution. The ecological impacts are worse if forested lands are converted to residential. We must only use greenfields as a last resort.

Four, density promotes less Single Occupancy Vehicle driving and better transit uptake. If greenfield development isn't contiguous with existing bus and transit routes, and if density is less than 100 RJ/H then transit is not feasible. Perhaps Durham Region should also assess the density at which transit becomes viable in Durham. This is important for Durham to reduce GHG emissions per capita and make good on the Climate Emergency Declaration.

Five, increasing density reduces the need for new roads, which are contributing to the salt pollution of Lake Simcoe. LSRCA says, "If recent rate of increase continues, chloride level (salt) in the lake will reach the chronic guideline level of 120 mg/L in 38 years."

Six, it's cheaper for residents over time to live in denser communities, and it's cheaper for the municipality to administer and maintain.

#### **Slow down the process:**

No municipality met the timelines for the first Growth Plan conformity exercises and many exceeded by years; there were and are no repercussions. No one got sent to planning jail.

In a pandemic it is entirely appropriate to slow down and take time to understand the needs and interests of residents, not developers. The various growth options must be explained and explored with the public, and their feedback sought on the options.

Thank you for considering our input. We look forward to hearing a response from Envision Durham regarding the proposed process for presenting growth options to the public.

The Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition is submitting comments on the Policy Directions Report under separate cover.

Sincerely,  
Claire Malcolmson



Executive Director, Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition

## **About the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition**

The Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition (RLSC) is an umbrella organization representing 26 groups that empowers local groups to take action to protect Lake Simcoe's health. We focus on promoting dialogue between citizens and their governments around the lake. One of RLSC's primary objectives is to encourage land use planning decisions that will protect the lake as well as forests, wetlands, and working farms within the Lake Simcoe Watershed. Currently, our work centres on maintaining or improving the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan (LSPP) and ensuring its full implementation.

[www.rescuelakesimcoe.org](http://www.rescuelakesimcoe.org)