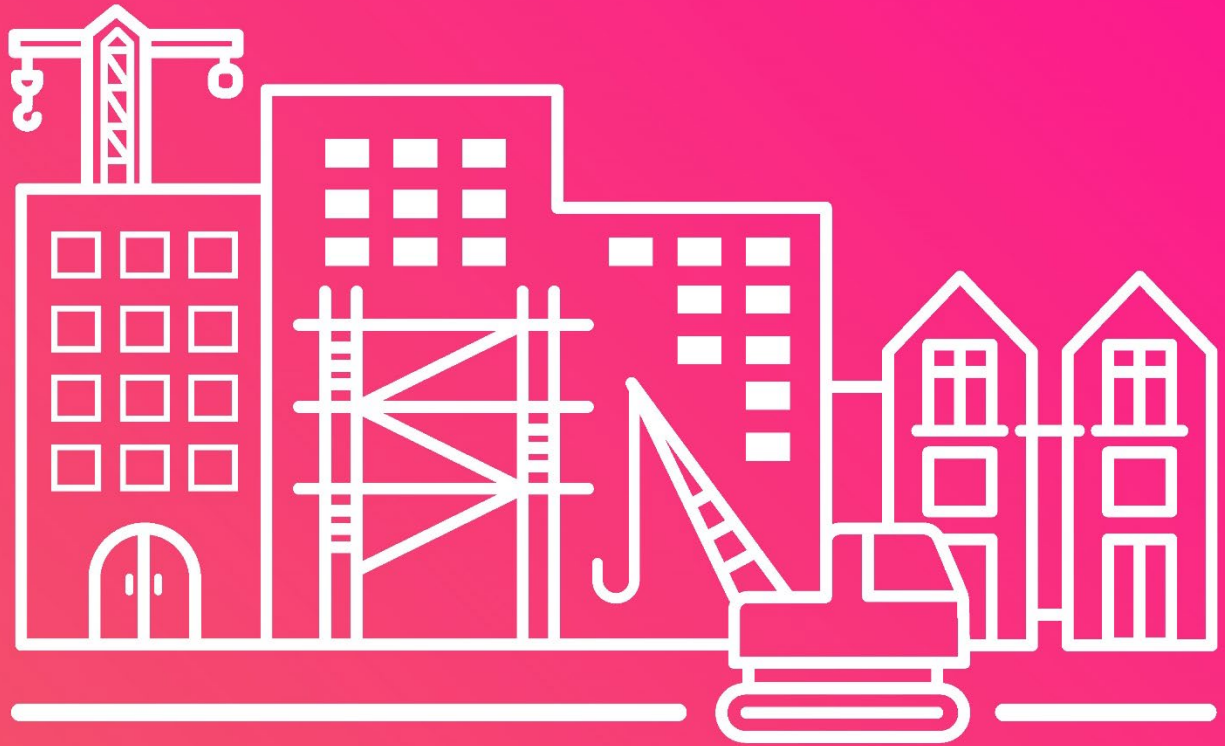




A Growing City

Discussion Paper

urbanMetrics

The Planning Partnership + Nethery Planning

May 30, 2024

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1

An Introduction to “Our Niagara Falls Plan”

The City of Niagara Falls is creating a new Official Plan - “Our Niagara Falls Plan,” a long-term vision to 2051 that guides us through a future of unprecedented growth while providing a high-quality living experience for our residents and our visitors from around the world.

The Official Plan is a high-level, visionary document that guides and shapes the future of a community identifying where, and under what circumstances, specific types of land uses can be located. The Provincial *Planning Act* requires that all local public works projects, official plans, zoning by-laws, related amendments, and all future development must conform to an approved Official Plan.

Our Niagara Falls Plan is going to define a vision for the City to 2051 - how we are going to create a complete community

Our Niagara Falls Plan will serve a broad range of community and municipal objectives. In addition to establishing appropriate land uses, it also establishes the goals, objectives and policies related to all of the essential components of making and sustaining a complete community. It sets policy requirements on how to create attractive and livable communities with a variety of housing and employment opportunities. It specifies means to protect, conserve, and enhance the city’s cultural and natural heritage and agricultural land base. It identifies locations for new growth to make the most efficient use of land and infrastructure. It outlines the structure around parks and open space, and how to acquire and grow such spaces. It directs how to move

people and goods in and around a city. It details how to plan and provide for community needs such as schools, recreation centres and libraries.

It provides all of this in a way to ensure that Provincial and Regional policy is implemented, as required by law. To this end the Official Plan must conform to the Provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and Niagara Escarpment Plan, and the Niagara Region Official Plan, and “consistency” with the Provincial Policy Statement. This is done while also providing the critical local context and input, to ensure implementation happens in the manner Niagara Falls intends it to occur, to address the unique needs of our community.

1.1 A Little Bit About Niagara Falls

Niagara Falls is an international landmark and destination for visitors, residents, businesses and employees alike. It is a high growth municipality, forecasted to take on the largest share of growth in Niagara Region over the next 25 years. Identified as one of Southern Ontario's 29 large and fast growing municipalities in the draft 2024 Provincial Planning Statement, Niagara Falls Council has pledged to build 8,000 new homes by 2031. It hosts two international crossings, the Rainbow and Whirlpool Bridges, with the major Queenston-Lewiston Bridge just north of the city limits—together, responsible for 3.6 million vehicle crossings in 2023.¹ It hosts a significant concentration of hydro-electrical generation facilities. The Niagara Parks Commission is a major partner agency in Niagara Falls, founded in 1885 and overseeing over 16 square kilometres of parkland and lands along the Niagara Parkway connecting Niagara-on-the-Lake with Fort Erie. Niagara Parks Commission facilities welcomed just under 3.0 million visitors from April 2022 through March 2023.²

Transportation Access. Niagara Falls is bisected by the Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW) freeway connecting Buffalo and the Niagara Region to the Golden Horseshoe, including Toronto. Highway 420 crosses through Niagara Falls to connect the QEW to the Rainbow Bridge border crossing. Intercity and international rail service is provided by Via Rail and Amtrak, with more frequent commuter rail and bus connections to Hamilton and Toronto via Metrolinx/GO Transit. In 2023, Niagara Falls Transit's fleet

was transferred to Niagara Region Transit, who also support paratransit service and connections between the cities of Niagara Region.

Landmarks and Attractions. In addition to the Falls themselves, Niagara Falls is a tourist destination, with multiple hotels, convention space, observation towers, multiple theme parks and resorts, and entertainment destinations across the City, including the bustling Clifton Hill area. The Niagara Parks Commission operates with a mandate to manage and develop the many public spaces along the Niagara River shoreline, including entertainment and recreational facilities. A short trip along the Niagara River Parkway brings guests past the Flower Clock, Botanical Gardens, Butterfly Conservatory, Niagara Glen, the former Toronto Power Generating Station, Spanish Aero Car, and Queen Victoria Park. The river itself is a feature, with the Iron Scow shipwreck and International Control Weir part of the falls environment. Away from the falls are the Gale Centre, Firemen's Park, The Exchange, and an emerging culinary scene. It is easy for local landmarks to be overlooked, which are as core and foundational to creating a sense of place as the all-day buzz of the tourist areas. The city is home to a branch of the Niagara Health Hospital network (Greater Niagara Hospital). The new South Niagara Hospital is being constructed with a targeted in-service date of 2029, creating an opportunity for a new purpose for the existing hospital lands.

¹ As reported by the Bridge and Tunnel Operators Association and [South Niagara Chambers of Commerce](#)

² [Niagara Parks 2022/2023 Annual Report](#)

Commercial and Recreation Amenities.

Niagara Falls is serviced with a full range of local shopping amenities. Niagara Square is a former indoor mall that fully completed a transition into a power centre format in 2020. It is located at the southwest corner of the McLeod Road interchange and the QEW. A similar cluster of large format commercial uses can be found in the middle of the urban area, at the intersections of Morrison Street and Dorchester Road. Other commercial nodes can be found along Lundy's Lane such as the Canada One Outlets, in the Stamford neighbourhood, and the historic Downtown Niagara Falls, north of the main tourist area. Local-level commercial blocks are found throughout the city.

A recent cultural development is the opening of The Exchange, a 10,000-square-foot indoor/outdoor multipurpose event space with gallery and working studio facilities. schedule farmers market and supper market events, bring a variety of interest to this new community space.

The Niagara Falls History Museum, Battle Ground Hotel Museum, and Willoughby Historical Museum cater to those interested in documents pasts and historic preservation.

Niagara Falls has the Gale Centre (four-pad arena), Willoughby Memorial Arena, and the MacBain Community Centre with an indoor pool, gym, and multi-purpose rooms.

There are four locations of the Niagara Falls Public Library.

The City is in Growth Mode. According to the 2021 Census of Canada, the population of Niagara Falls was 94,415, with 44,600 having reported being in the labour market. The City's current Official Plan was approved by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs on October 6, 1993. The 1993 Plan was written to guide growth to the year 2011 and a population of 83,000. The planning horizon was extended in 2014 (three years beyond the original target) to guide growth to the year 2031, with an anticipated population of 106,800 and 53,640 jobs. At 7.2% population growth between 2016 and 2021, Niagara Falls is on pace to exceed that 2031 population forecast. The city has completed a number of urban boundary expansions since 1993, with three new expansion areas added through the 2022 Niagara Official Plan. Niagara Falls is a growing and expanding community.

The Legislative and Policy Framework around Planning has Changed. Another major change since 1993 is the complete overhaul of the Provincial and Regional Planning Policy framework. There are new documents at both levels, whose directions need to be reflected in local policy. From an administrative perspective, the current Official Plan has been amended over 160 times over the past 30 years. The various edits have created an Official Plan with some internal conflicts and inconsistencies, duplications, some confusion in intent of policies—and, overall, an outdated planning vision that is in need of replacement.

1.2 Intent of the Discussion Papers and the Path to Our Niagara Falls Plan

To initiate the process of creating Our Niagara Falls Plan, the project team has prepared six “Discussion Papers”. These papers are about starting a conversation with the community about what the city will look like in 2051, what jobs will be here, how do we move in and around that community, how do we integrate nature and resiliency, how do we effectively manage growth and climate adaptation, and what infrastructure, features or amenities are needed for the community.

Community input is essential to delivering the Our Niagara Falls Plan. The Discussion Papers are intended to guide a conversation that will ultimately form the basis for policy.

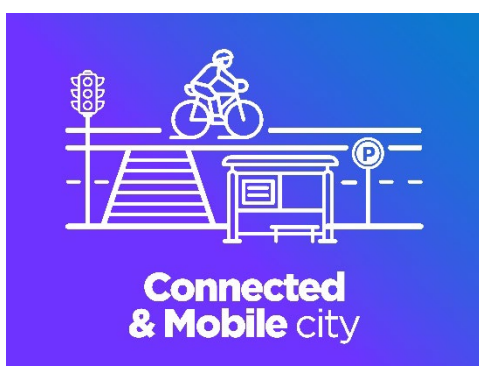
The Discussion Papers have structured several contemporary issues in land use planning in Ontario into digestible sources of information in six thematic areas:



1. **A Growing City.** Niagara Region’s 2051 Land Needs Assessment forecasts Niagara Falls to add the greatest number of new housing units in the Region, even more than St. Catharines and its large assignment of apartment dwellings. Further infrastructure master planning work can look at growth beyond the 2051 planning horizon, opening a door for even longer-term planning. This means a considerable outlay of infrastructure and soft services will be required to support the building of complete communities connected through a resilient, layered mobility network. The new Official Plan must also ensure the infrastructure is available (planned or existing) to accommodate this growth, and will either accommodate or be ready to accommodate the outcomes of the City’s range of ongoing growth management projects and planning, the housing pledge to 2031, urban boundary expansions, affordable housing goal, and volume of development applications.



2. **An Attractive City.** Niagara Falls is a gateway to our country and a destination in its own right. Growth will need to build upon this foundation—more accurately, it will raise the bar for excellence in design and architecture, even in a world where exterior design elements cannot be completely regulated through Site Plan Control. This is achieved by comprehensively identifying landmark locations where priority design treatment is expected, while leveraging further placemaking opportunities through planning for a complete community that contributes to health and civic pride.



3. **A Connected and Mobile City.** Communities are grappling with how and where goods and people move through them. In addition to needing to serve the vehicle demands, the transportation system of a city is also a public good. This means it contributes to the overall

quality of life for residents, contribution to the economic well-being for businesses, and supports tourists and visitors to the area. Key to this is designing a transportation system that is premised on the principles of safety, equity, accessibility, and mobility for all users and modes. Our Niagara Falls Plan will aim to address these questions and be complemented with street design policies and guidelines.



4. **A Green and Resilient City.** The effects of climate change are becoming known. Cities can and need to do more to prepare for and incorporate these new systems and patterns into growth and development. Whether that is through right-sized infrastructure, a comprehensive natural heritage system, low impact design techniques, sensitively designed community facilities, or increased expectations from private development, Our Niagara Plan should build upon City and Regional studies to incorporate the best elements in a manner that readies the community for adaptation to climate change. It must also consider the fiscal and economic implications of policies related to building a green and resilient city.



5. **An International City.** Our Niagara Falls Plan will incorporate design policies and community improvement principles and a framework for intensification that will maximize the opportunities for creating landmarks and physical presence at major locations to support the many places of entry to the city. Our Niagara Falls Plan needs to leverage its location, multiple attractions, and quality of life to continue encouraging tourism, new economic development, and a range of jobs to support overall well-being.



6. **A Cultural City.** Our Niagara Falls Plan will incorporate multiple goals, objectives, and policies to continue to build upon Niagara Falls' recent growth in diversifying cultural options. This is

more than just the Falls area itself and must incorporate the entire city, providing the places and spaces necessary for an enriching social experience. There is a strong base of significant cultural heritage resources at a local and national scale in Niagara Falls, for which Our Niagara Falls Plan can work to conserve. This also requires planning for and providing community facilities to support a growing population.

The six Discussion Papers together represent a thorough, comprehensive and interconnected approach to initiating this discussion about the future of Niagara Falls. Each Paper contributes its own piece to this project. A further paper on Planning Policy Conformity and Implementation will be prepared once current Provincial reform proposals are complete.

Project team staff are available at any time to answer questions about this project. All public input received will be summarized into a "What We Heard" engagement summary report throughout the process to prepare the new Official Plan.

1.3 Public Engagement So Far

This diagram illustrates the engagement that will be completed up to the end of June 2024. The following two pages summarize what we are hearing with respect to each one of the topics for discussion.



A Growing City

- The aim should be on growth that is orderly, cost-effective, and sustainable.
- Re-connect city's decision-making with the Official Plan.
- Planning priorities should be within the built boundaries
- Downtown should not be just for visitors - try to get people living in this area
- Plenty of room for growth south of McCleod near Garner South; Grassy Brook and Hospital site
- Tourist commercial across from residential – incompatible. Transition and buffer are important.
- Niagara Falls does not need densification: lots of space. Large number of rental units available, many houses for sale
- Should do more with what we have instead of taking over more green space.
- Need better facilities for residents, including those with addictions (e.g. shelters, long term treatment facilities)

“This city has potential to become a true beacon of education, natural beauty, job opportunities, and more. Niagara University seems like a good start, but one win after a mountain of disappointments means nothing if it leaves locals in the dust.”

- Diversify the local economy by drawing other industries beside tourism to the city
- Don't need more industrial parks but do need co-working spaces.
- Like to see something like University Village, Seattle: a shopping destination/village rather than large format shopping
- Currently, a lot of homeless, need single person residences; more apartments for baby boomers who give up their houses, and housing for seniors - but not stacked townhouses.
- Need to bring back good, permanent, year-round jobs - seasonal jobs contributing to local homelessness.

An Attractive City

- Niagara Falls is not the showcase I remember. We have to do a lot of work to do to bring us to a standard to welcome people back.
- Want to see better quality parks, cycling trails, no space between houses, more public places.
- Growth of short-term rentals causing issues in residential areas – needs some control.
- Niagara Falls has lots of beautiful parks – no complaints or recommendations, done a good job on parks.

“I hope for a city that focuses on keeping the city clean. There is a huge issue with litter - take a look at the side of major roads, off ramps, on ramps, and even city trails.”

A Green & Resilient City

- Love the McBain Centre – need more spaces like that where communities can gather.
- Green space very important, need to think about how to build urban green space as different kinds of landscapes. (Kansas City good model for green space revitalization.)
- Prefer planted medians – woodland boulevard is a great example of a suburban street, no bike lanes, but safe, with median with trees.
- Queen Street signs, sidewalks, - walking to Queen from e.g. Victoria library - walk is not good. Need to enhance the larger context.
- Planting street trees does not make up for removing a forest.
- Niagara Falls wetlands are mainly complexes, which should appear in the Official Plan. Mapping of natural corridors is key to their protection. Ideally, should be under public ownership (e.g. the Conservation Authority).

“In 2051, my Niagara will have many public gardens for its residents to grow vegetables annually, positively impacting the lives of those in low income neighborhoods and teaching a skill that is transferrable. Teaching people how to grow their own food could be life saving to those who cannot afford fresh produce.”

“Our watershed and forests, wetlands and all remaining green areas are our assets to protect...Our Official Plan must reflect our respect, appreciation and gratefulness of being blessed with these magnificent natural features.”

- Need better language in the Official Plan about our remaining natural areas and woodlots to make environmental protection enforceable.
- Would like to see public gardens/vegetable gardens replacing some of the lawn area in parks

A Mobile & Connected City

- Niagara Falls should think about light rail transit as well as GO. The only semi-good public transportation are the WeGo buses, which almost exclusively serve Niagara Parks and the tourist districts.
- Need different measures to slow traffic, without speed bumps and stop signs.
- Investigate a new people mover system, LRT using CP rail corridor, and connect to train station.

“Niagara Falls 2011 Active Transportation Plan was to develop a robust bike lane network in the city. Looking back on this document in 2024, so few of these plans and ideas have actually been completed.”

- Traffic is bad. Roads to be expanded: Dorchester, Drummond, Thorold Stone Road - easily expanded, use their wide boulevards to create 3 lanes.
- Regional Transit system has resulted in a lot of vacant buses. Not getting value for money.
- Clifton Hill on a summer day - lots of people walking but not enough space. Need bigger, accessible, sidewalks, bike, and electric scooter rentals. (Kitchener Waterloo is doing a good job integrating cars, rentals, walking.)
- Stanley is another street that can be better planned, now a mini highway - opportunity for a better sidewalk connection.
- Lots of bike lanes that just stop. Love to see city with specific requirements for new build areas, things to make areas more pedestrian friendly, including bike paths through new builds/shopping areas.

An International City

- Niagara Falls is tourist town, but that's what makes the region unique. The city has "a community vibe" and whatever tourists use, locals will use.
- Transit issue: tourists don't have change; need better signage re: presto, no cards, cash.

"One thing Niagara Falls needs is an environment that attracts foreign visitors who want to slow down and enjoy the scenery. Bring some European style culture to Niagara Falls. NPC owns lots of land and they can designate areas for cafes and sit down space looking out over the falls or just as people walk about on the grounds. Let's make the Falls area not just a viewing opportunity but a refreshing experience."

A Cultural City

- Niagara Falls does not seem to care about history – razed historic neighbourhoods, demolish heritage-designated school to expand cemetery.
- Public buildings need to be maintained. The new Exchange location is not good and took away parking at the corner of Main and Central.

"Find out what features make us stand out from other cities around the world. Highlight the features that make the city worth traveling to. This can include unique cultural activities, historical landmarks, diversity welcoming places and cultural foods, different museums unique architecture, streets, and also attractive game zones for visitors."

"Let's spend less on fireworks and more on feeding Niagara's families. Let's make the city more fun and inviting for all with cultural events and attractions such as a state of the art children's museum, aquarium, theme park, hockey team, indigenous events, etc."

2

A Growing City Overview

2.1 What is a Growing City?

A growing city means planning for homes, jobs, shopping, retail, entertainment, places of worship, infrastructure, and community facilities to accommodate more people, jobs and to manage growth. Growth management has been a central part of land use planning in Ontario. By reviewing projected growth, it can be determined how much land, floor space, and infrastructure is needed to enhance a community's form and function to become more complete.

Growth provides many opportunities to solidify a community's future. It provides choice and options for places to live and work, generates revenue for both public and private sector services, drives infrastructure use and improvement, supports and develops the local economy, and creates opportunities for long-term renewal of all parts of the community.

2.2 Niagara Falls as a Growing City

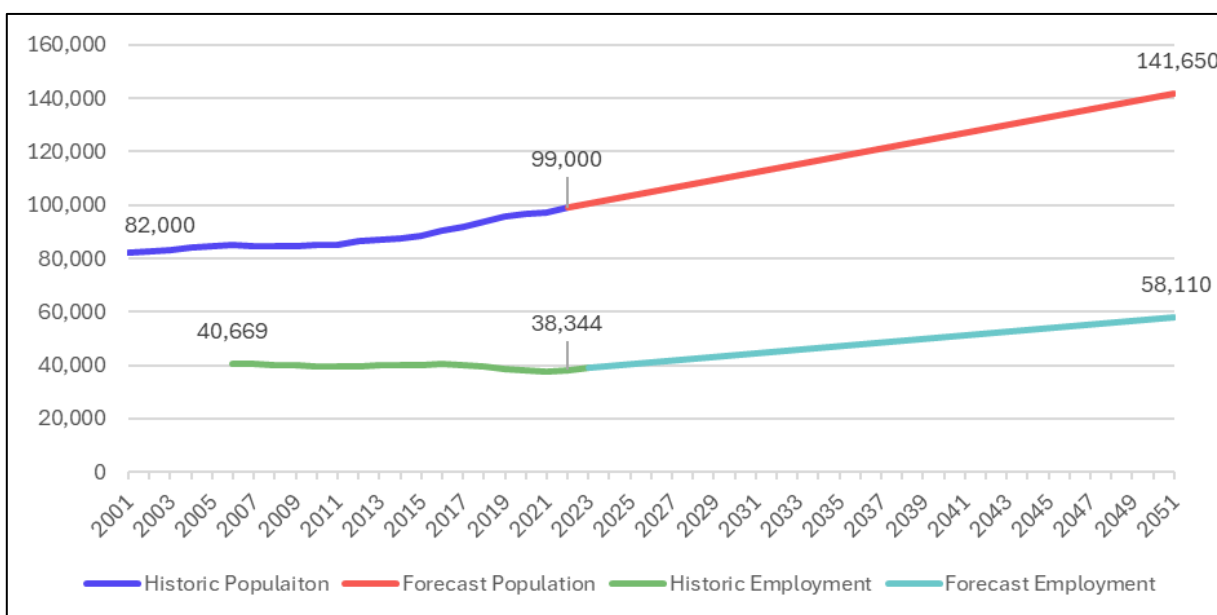
Like many municipalities in Ontario, the City of Niagara Falls is Growing. From 2001 to 2022, the City of Niagara Falls grew by 0.9% per year annually to a population of approximately 99,000 in 2022. That annual growth rate was higher in the past years than in the 15 years prior to that, averaging 1.5% annually. At the same time, from 2006 to 2022, total employment in Niagara Falls remained generally flat: a very slow decline of 0.24% per year and is now at approximately 39,000 jobs in the City.³

This inverse relationship is not entirely unique in Ontario. Declines in traditional industrial sectors and tourism have not been completely offset by population-related jobs in service commercial areas. However, in Niagara Falls, that decline has been greater than observed generally across Ontario.⁴

Residential growth remains forecasted for Niagara Falls in the coming years. Niagara Region's 2051 Land Needs Assessment forecasts Niagara Falls to add the most new housing units in the Region. The City has completed tremendous work in adopting Secondary Plans to guide approved growth outward. The decline in employment is also expected to reverse, as population-related demand will spur an increase. Our Niagara Falls Plan must also ensure the infrastructure is available (planned or existing) to accommodate this growth.

³ All statistics are generated from the 2021 Census of Canada's Community Profile for Niagara Falls

⁴ 2021 Census of Canada's Community Profile for Niagara Falls



Niagara Falls Population and Employment Growth

SOURCE: urbanMetrics Inc. Historic population from Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0142-01 Population estimates, July 1, by census subdivision, 2016 boundaries. Historic Employment from the 2024 Niagara Falls Development Charges Background Study. 2051 population and Employment from the Niagara Region Official Plan (2022).

Based on the need to conform to Amendment 1 of the Province's Growth Plan and to Niagara Official Plan, the Region completed a 2051 Land Needs Assessment exercise that resulted in updated residential population and employment forecasts for the use in concurrently running studies, including the Water and Wastewater Master Plan and the Transportation Master Plan. For Niagara Falls, that would mean using the numbers codified in the Niagara Official Plan as a starting point. That 2022 approval saw a forecasted minimum of 141,650 residents and 58,100 jobs as a minimum in the year 2051. This would represent an annual residential growth rate of 1.2% and an annual employment growth rate of 1.4%.

Planning for infrastructure (as well as employment lands) in Ontario is permitted to look beyond the approved planning horizon in order to properly account for infrastructure, public service facilities and employment areas.⁵ To that end, reviewing potential lands in some existing planned areas for intensification suggests that there could be capacity to accommodate additional growth within the existing urban area beyond that contemplated in 2022. It is wise and prudent to consider long-term potential in making multi-million-dollar infrastructure decisions.

Since approval of the Niagara Official Plan, the City has been working with Regional counterparts over the course of two major infrastructure planning projects. To help direct Niagara Region's 2021

⁵ Provincial Policy Statement 2020, Section 1.1.2, and proposed Provincial Planning Statement 2024, Section 2.1.3

Master Servicing Plan Update, the Region and its consultant partner, GEI Consultants (formerly GM BluePlan), completed a land use analysis exercise to further refine the large, spatially allocated Traffic Analysis Zones, which are a basic geographic unit for inventorying demographic data and land use within a study area, and most commonly used in conventional transportation planning models. Traffic Analysis Zones often cover larger geographical blocks which are appropriate for traffic analysis but less refined for the use in water and wastewater infrastructure analysis which requires a more granular level of detail to refine accuracy of results.

The Region's analysis included a review of vacant residential and employment land, strategic areas for planned intensification nodes and corridors, and land associated with the Region's current development planning process, such as Draft Plans of Subdivision and building permits. This process converted the residential and employment projections from the growth management study into more detailed allocations which enabled a spatial analysis of existing water and wastewater service areas.

Completion of the land use analysis exercise enabled the projected growth to be spatially assigned to the existing water and wastewater service areas. With more recent analysis occurring at the Regional level, additional capacity is expected to be accommodated (following the new South Niagara Wastewater Treatment Plant completion) for more housing within the City. City staff are building upon this previous work in current infrastructure planning exercises, including Master Plan studies, Secondary Plans, the Development Charge By-law, and the Asset Management Plan. These studies are using updated population and growth projections, considering the Traffic Analysis Zones data and City-identified candidate lands for intensification over the 2021 to 2051 planning horizon. The expectation in that work is that not all candidate intensification lands will develop during this period.

Existing Secondary Plan areas and projections are also incorporated into these studies, with consideration that planned densities of some Secondary Plan areas, while meeting provincial minimums, are low compared to contemporary development densities. Some lands in the Grand Niagara Secondary Plan, for example, have exceeded minimum densities by almost twice the original approved amounts.

The "low growth" scenario, adjusted by the City in October/November 2023 shows significantly more growth than was included as part of the Region's Master Servicing Plan Update. Of this, nearly 25% of the potential additional population growth identified as corridor intensification potential. Niagara Region has been involved throughout these studies and has recognized the likelihood for higher growth numbers than previously identified and approved, and have signaled support for working with the City in considering development higher than the 2022 targets.

Note that all of the targets included in these documents are minimums—as noted elsewhere in this Discussion Paper, planning beyond these minimums is supportable. In fact, the City's recently adopted Development Charge By-law (May 28, 2024) was developed based upon these higher potentials, and underpin the City of Niagara Falls Water, Wastewater Master Servicing Plan Update; Wet Weather Management Strategy; Transportation Master Plan; and Asset Management

Plan work. Our Niagara Falls Plan will align with those studies, and this shall be an important part of defining an urban structure mindful of these opportunities and investments.

2.3 Other Historic Development Patterns in Niagara Falls

Niagara Falls has a range of built forms and land uses. The commercial sector is dominated by tourism uses, including attractions, hotels and green space, which are generally found near the river and the Falls. There are three major commercial retail nodes along the Queen Elizabeth Way. In addition, the downtown core is situated to the northeast of the City adjacent to the VIA and GO Rail Station.

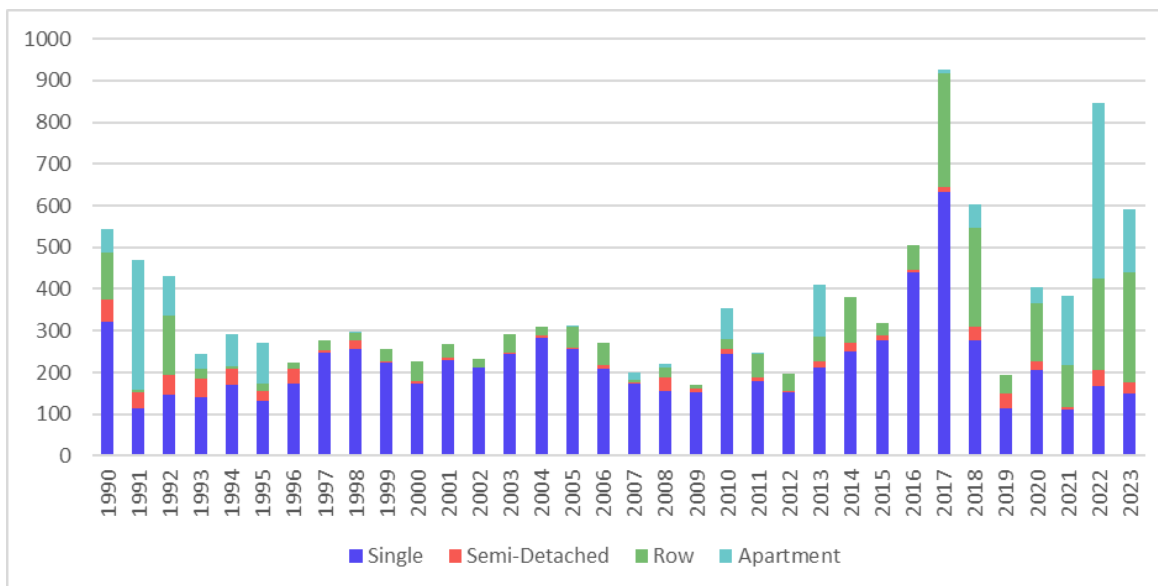
The majority of residential areas are low density neighborhoods dominated by single detached homes, and as of the 2021 Census, 66% of the City's existing homes were single-detached homes. There is currently a small amount of medium- and high-density residential buildings in the city. These buildings are distributed throughout the city, and not concentrated in a specific area. The highest building heights exist primarily in the hotel districts with a view of the falls. However, these buildings are generally not counted as residential, and as a result the area has low population density.

Niagara Falls has historically experienced development heavily oriented to single-detached homes, and it is only since 2017 that there has been a shift towards rowhouses and apartments (see Figure 2-0-2). From 2014-2023, 51% of all homes built were single-detached homes, and row houses and apartments were 29% and 16% of homes built, respectively (with

the remainder being semi-detached homes). However, single-detached homes are rapidly becoming a smaller part of the new housing mix. From 2019-2023, those three housing types each accounted for about a third of the new housing built. This shift in housing types coincides with an increase in number of units built, as well as with rapidly increasing ownership prices. Of note, only 11% of new housing between 2014 and 2023 was purpose-built rental, with almost all of this supply being delivered in 2022 and 2023.

This growth represents an opportunity to diversify and strengthen the local economy, achieve more efficient and broad service delivery, while also presenting challenges in providing sufficient housing and services to support new residents and jobs. Leveraging this growth and meeting its challenges will require a bold and innovative vision, as well as new strategies and policies to implement this vision.

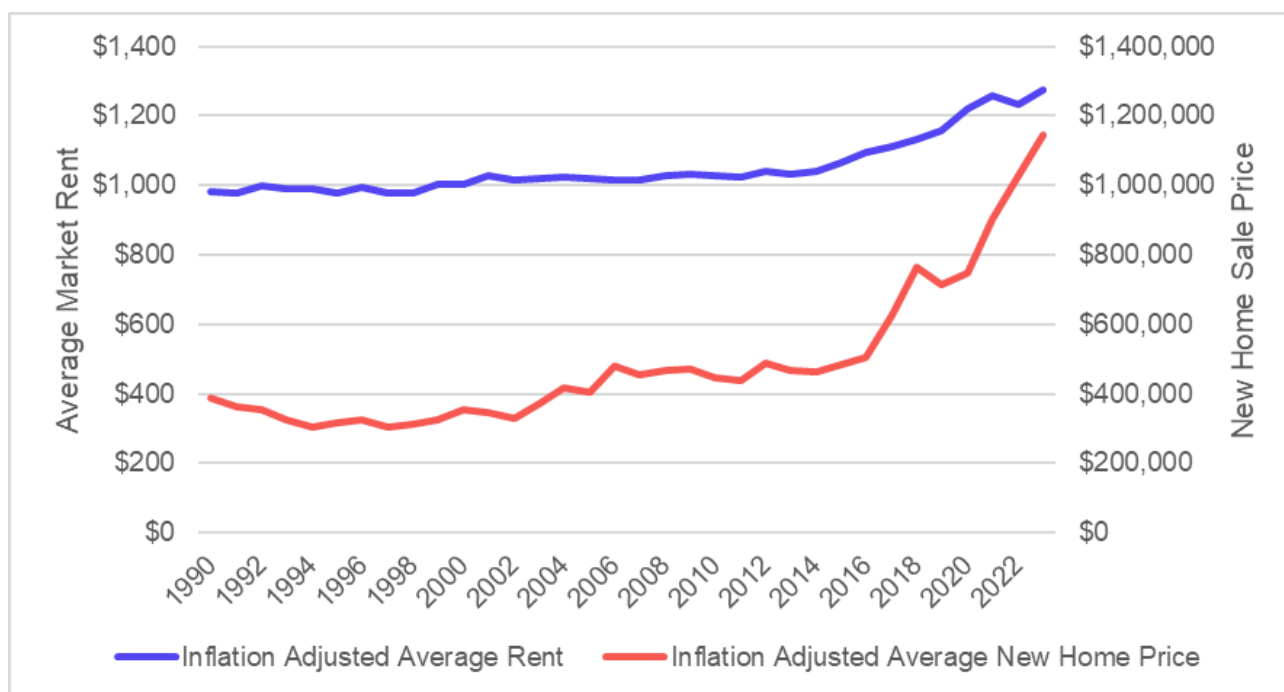
*How residents, workers, tourists, and goods move into and through Niagara Falls is of major importance when planning for growth. The **Connected and Mobile City** Discussion Paper reviews these issues in greater detail.*



Niagara Falls Annual Housing Completions by Type

SOURCE: urbanMetrics Inc. Completions data from CMHC Starts and Completions Survey

Historically, the City of Niagara Falls has experienced relatively stable inflation-adjusted rents and newly built home prices. However, as shown in the Figure above, rents began increasing in 2014 and newly built home prices began increasing in 2017, a period during which the population of Niagara Falls grew rapidly. The inflation-adjusted average rent in Niagara Falls has risen from \$1,156 in 2019 to \$1,273 in 2023, a 10% increase. At the same time, the inflation adjusted average newly built home price rose from \$714,029 to \$1,145,413, an increase of 60%. It should be noted that newly built homes are significantly more expensive and rose more rapidly than the average home price. For reference, the benchmark house price in Niagara Falls rose from \$448,890 in 2019 to \$605,800 in 2023, an increase of 35%. Since 2014, rental vacancy rates have averaged 2.6%, and have dropped as low as low as 0.7% in 2019. These are below the 3% vacancy rate (or higher) often considered to be required for a balanced rental market. These increases in housing costs highlight the need to provide an adequate supply of housing to maintain housing affordability.



Inflation-Adjusted Average Market Rent and New Home Sale Price

SOURCE: urbanMetrics Inc. Data from CMHC Rental Market Survey and CMHC Market Absorption Survey. Rents and prices adjusted to 2023 dollars using Statistics Canada. Table 18-10-0005-01 Consumer Price Index, annual average, not seasonally adjusted.

NOTE: Prices of newly built homes are generally significantly more expensive than the average home price in the City of Niagara Falls.

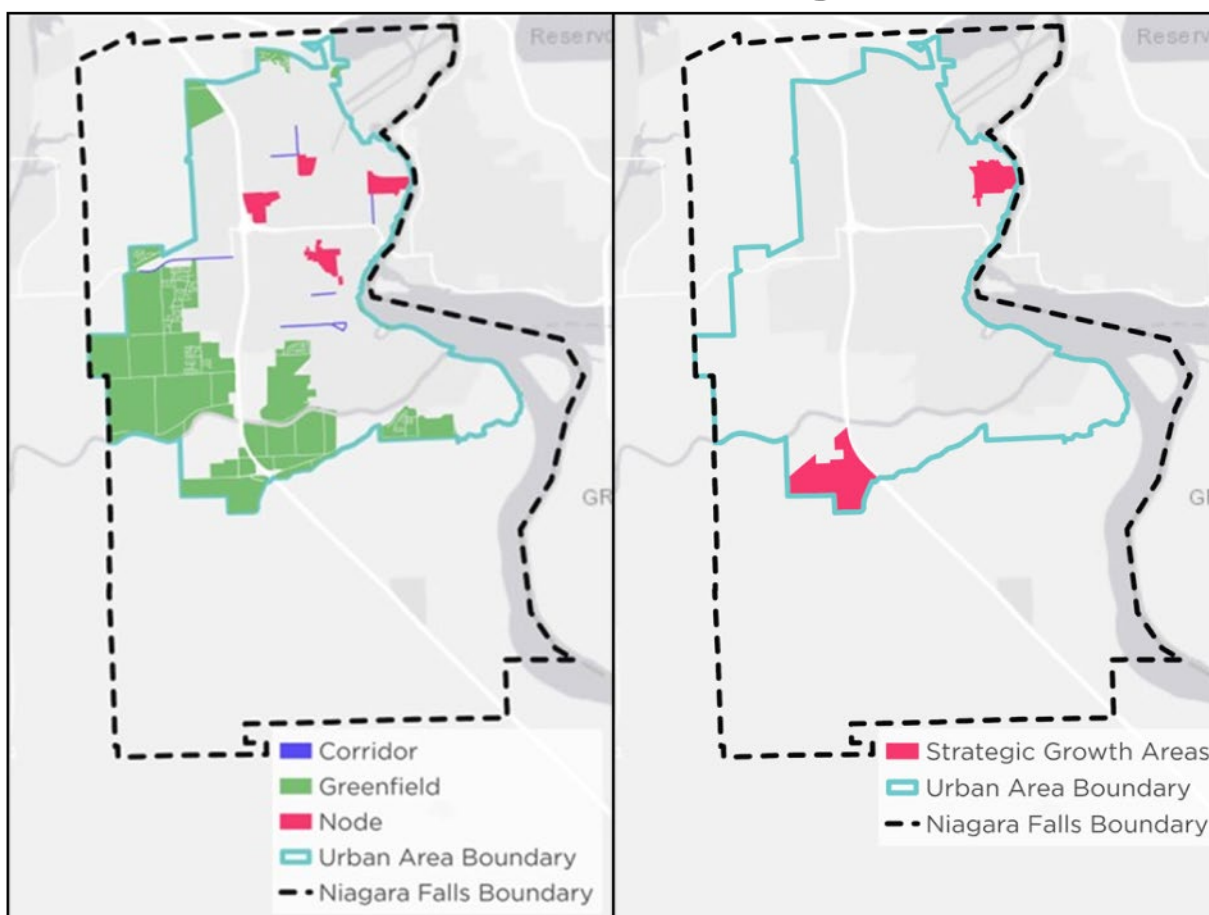
Looking inward has represented a significant shift from historic growth patterns—it has even overtaken “greenfield” growth at the edge of Niagara Falls in terms of volume. It cannot overlook future growth in the urban expansion areas approved by Niagara Region in 2022, the pace of which will pick up in the coming years once services are available to these sites. Our Niagara Falls Plan will be taking information and recommendations generated out of these important infrastructure studies for incorporation into the City’s overall policy framework. This work must include consideration of areas with greater intensification opportunities to ensure a good quality of life for residents, economic growth for businesses, and fiscal resilience for the City of Niagara Falls.

There are several existing land use designations in the current City of Niagara Falls Official Plan and Niagara Region Official Plan identifying areas for growth. Our Niagara Falls Plan will not be limited to the structure of the current Niagara Falls Official Plan, and the more rapid anticipated growth forecasts will require new approaches. Each designation will contain permitted uses, plus likely development criteria and other policies, outlining how lands in those designations will develop (typically through secondary planning). However, understanding how the city has grown in the past is important in determining where and how to grow in the future. The current City of Niagara Falls Official Plan identifies Nodes, Corridors, Greenfield lands, and Urban Area. The nodes and corridors are areas identified for intensification over the long term, while greenfield lands are areas for new complete communities, some of which have been developed, are developing, or pending.

New development is limited to within the Urban Area, with land outside the Urban Area (Rural Lands) maintaining a rural character. The City of Niagara Falls contains two Strategic Growth Areas: The Niagara Falls MTSA and the South Niagara Falls Hospital Regional Growth Centre. The Niagara Falls MTSA has a density target of 125 people and jobs per hectare by 2051, while the South Niagara Falls Hospital Regional Growth Centre has a density target of 100 people and jobs per hectare by 2051.

City of Niagara Falls Current Official Plan: Nodes, Corridors, and Greenfield Lands

Niagara Region Official Plan: Strategic Growth Areas



Select growth-oriented land use policy areas (map not to scale)

Looking inward like this represents a significant shift from historic growth patterns—and the City of Niagara Falls has performed well in making this shift. Infill development does not overlook future growth in the urban expansion areas approved by Niagara Region in 2022. Our Niagara Falls Plan will be taking information and recommendations generated out of these important infrastructure

studies for incorporation into the City's overall policy framework. This work must include consideration of areas with greater intensification opportunities to ensure a good quality of life for residents, economic growth for businesses, and fiscal resilience for the City of Niagara Falls.

Our Niagara Falls Plan will also need to be consistent with Provincial and Regional policies around growth management, including "general intensification" throughout the urban area in a manner that supports building complete communities that take advantage of available infrastructure—but in a manner that is contextually sensitive and appropriate, not merely intensification for the sake of intensification.

2.4 Why does Niagara Falls need to Grow?

In light of these projected changes, why does the City need to grow? Can the City of Niagara Falls just stay the same? Change can be disruptive, and it can be natural to be concerned when the City changes.

The reality is that all cities change over time because their inhabitants and the world around them are already changing over time. Children grow up, strike out on their own, and start families. Individuals and families are moving to Canada and to Ontario to seek better lives. Technologies and tastes change, and new businesses and industries are founded while others naturally fade away.

This process cannot and should not be stopped. It is impossible to prevent people from wanting to move to Niagara Falls, unless the City were to become less desirable to live in. Without building enough housing to accommodate everyone who wished to live here, someone would have to be excluded from living in the City (whether by market forces, lottery, or tenure systems). Often, the most vulnerable are the ones who are impacted the most by housing shortages. None of this is consistent with the stated values of the City of Niagara Falls.

Beyond that, there are many benefits to being a Growing City. Businesses prefer to locate in municipalities that allow for change and adaptation, and where their employees can enjoy a low cost of living. Cities that stagnate also often face an aging population along with the burdens of maintaining existing infrastructure with a shrinking labour force and economy.

Finally, our worst fears about change almost never happen. Instead, allowing the city to grow and change means we can build a better City: a City that is more friendly to residents, visitors, and the environment. Residents can have more freedom in how they commute to their jobs, meet up with friends and family, and satisfy their daily needs. The City could be more accessible for visitors, allowing them to better explore its attractions and businesses. The City can also develop in a way that minimizes its impact on environmentally sensitive lands, as well as reducing pollution such as greenhouse gas emissions.

2.5 What Does a Growing City Need?

With population and employment growth comes an increased need for the services and infrastructure that make a city a desirable place to live. As Niagara Falls grows, it will need more housing, transportation infrastructure, amenities, retail for local residents and visitors, and additional employment. While Niagara Falls will need all of these as it grows, this discussion paper will focus primarily on housing and employment, with transportation addressed in the Connected and Mobile City Discussion Paper, retail and employment addressed in the International City Discussion Paper, and amenities addressed in the Attractive City Discussion Paper.

Intensification will play an important role in providing a full range of housing forms, while also contributing to more dynamic centres, support for local businesses, and more efficient use of infrastructure. With the introduction of new housing development and intensified housing forms, it will be increasingly important to support measures which ensure that new development builds on and supports the existing community character, provides public benefits, and contributes to a higher quality public realm. It generally is supported through existing infrastructure (both soft and hard) to maintain that continued level of support. Detailing infrastructure upgrade requirements, and associated costs as part of infrastructure planning work will help mitigate risk associated with intensification development. Niagara Falls' share of intensification is a high proportion of the Region's overall growth, which should not come as a surprise given its large size relative to the other urban centres of the Region.

Growth on the urban edge generally takes the form of greenfield development, where new developments are built on previously undeveloped land, and new roads, services, and lots area created. Residential greenfield development is generally targeted to form a "complete community." This is a concept embedded in the 2019 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. There, it is defined as, "Places such as mixed-use neighbourhoods or other areas within cities, towns, and settlement areas that offer and support

opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to conveniently access most of the necessities for daily living, including an appropriate mix of jobs, local stores, and services, a full range of housing, transportation options and public service facilities. Complete communities are age-friendly and may take different shapes and forms appropriate to their contexts."⁶

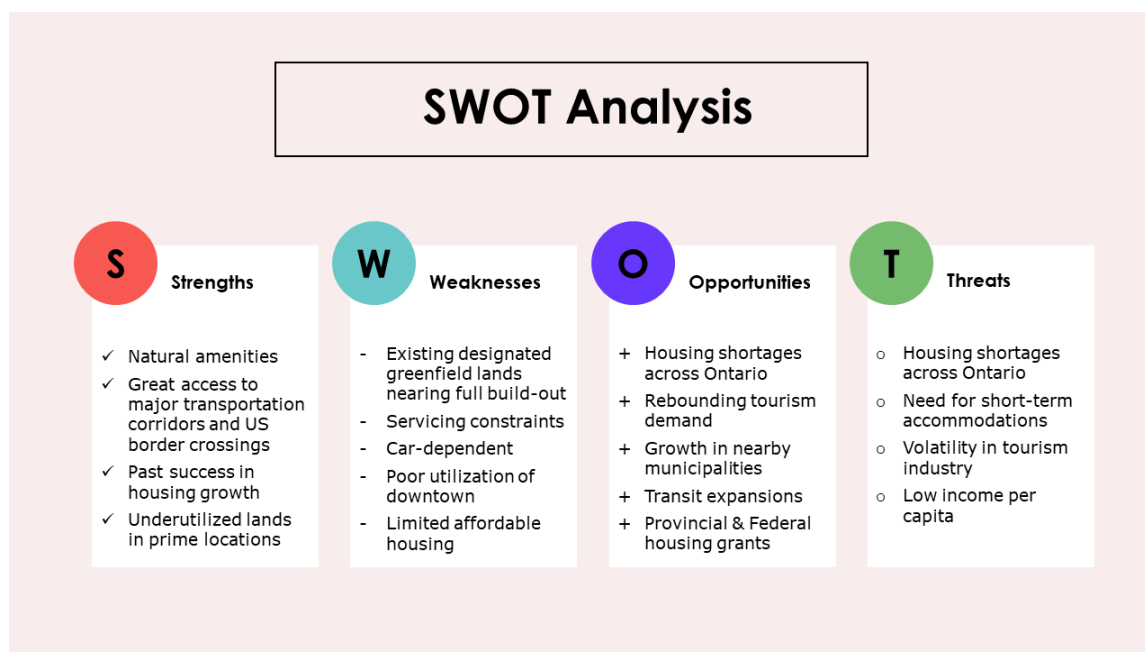
A complete community meets people's needs for daily living throughout an entire lifetime by providing convenient access to an appropriate mix of jobs, local services, a full range of housing, including affordable and supportive housing, public services and community infrastructure including educational and recreational facilities

⁶ Section 7, Definitions

Each is distinct with various characteristics that define the area - be it shoreline, agriculture, environmental resources, regional or local service centres, large employers, or tourism. Although each area is unique, complete communities' policies must be applied consistently across the city with the goal of supporting residents and providing equitable access to daily needs.

2.6 Growing City SWOT Analysis

We have conducted a SWOT analysis of the City of Niagara Falls as a Growing City, as shown in the figure below. The City of Niagara Falls has several features which help it succeed as a Growing City. It has fantastic natural amenities, headlined by Niagara Falls, which makes it an attractive place to live. It is along major transportation corridors including the Queen Elizabeth Way and an international passenger rail corridor, and three convenient border crossings to the United States. The City has experienced strong growth in its housing stock in the past and data trends suggest it is on track to meet its housing pledge of 8,000 new homes by 2031. Niagara Falls also has underutilized lands in prime locations which could be good sites for infill or redevelopment to meet future housing needs.



SWOT Analysis for the City of Niagara Falls as a Growing City

Unfortunately, some features of the City could hinder its potential as a Growing City. The City of Niagara Falls has historically met most of its housing needs through greenfield and lower-density development. Additionally, the City is experiencing servicing constraints and requires the completion of the South Niagara Falls Wastewater Treatment Plant to free up servicing capacity to meet projected growth. If the City is not ready to meet these challenges, it may struggle to accommodate enough housing to meet future needs. In the future, the City will need to continue to embrace its turn to infill and redevelopment to increase its housing stock.

This low-density pattern of development has also made the City dependent on cars as the primary mode of transportation. With development being focused on other locations, Downtown Niagara Falls has struggled. Coupled with infrastructure replacement and continued strategic investments in facilities and services such as University of Niagara Falls Canada and GO service expansion offer opportunities to rejuvenate it. And while the City of Niagara Falls has fared better than many other municipalities in managing the run-up in housing prices, it still experiences limited availability in affordable housing.

External factors which could impact the City's growth include the housing affordability crisis occurring across the Province, which is both an opportunity and a threat. If the issue is managed poorly, affordability pressures in other municipalities could spill over to the City of Niagara Falls. However, if the City enables building enough housing to meet demand, it could be an opportunity for Niagara Falls to attract new residents.

Economic growth in the City of Niagara Falls would help grow the City, attracting residents who work in the area. The tourism industry is heavily represented in the City, and with its recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic, more people may want to locate in the City of Niagara Falls to work in the area. Similarly, employment growth in nearby municipalities could also be an opportunity for the City of Niagara Falls. Due to the proximity by car or train, people may appreciate the option to live in the City of Niagara Falls, closer to natural and cultural amenities, while commuting to work in St. Catharines or Hamilton.

The potential for transit expansions would also provide an opportunity for the City of Niagara Falls. Transit in Niagara Falls has been amalgamated into Niagara Region Transit. There is interest in expanding Niagara Region Transit services, and the Province of Ontario has recently provided a \$6.8 million grant to do so.⁷ GO Transit services to Niagara Falls has been expanded recently. While there are no currently known plans for further expanding GO Transit service to Niagara Falls, this remains a possibility in the future. These transit expansions can improve accessibility for residents in the city, reducing costs of living and increasing visitors to local businesses, as well as providing additional support for the tourism industry.

Finally, the housing affordability crisis is generating action at the Provincial and Federal levels to support the growth of municipalities. For example, the Provincial government recently announced \$1 billion in funding for the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program and \$625 million for the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund. The Federal government also recently announced a \$6 billion Canada Housing Infrastructure Fund. These could help fund the infrastructure which the City of Niagara Falls needs to support growth.

Other external factors could threaten the growth of the City. First, if the demand for short-term accommodation cannot be met by hotels and other dedicated spaces, residential spaces may be used for vacation purposes rather than housing. The City of Niagara Falls prohibits vacation rental

⁷ Niagara-On-The-Lake Local. (April 25, 2024). "Ontario investing \$6.8M in Niagara Region Transit: MPP." <https://www.notllocal.com/local-news/ontario-investing-68m-in-niagara-region-transit-mpp-8649713>

units in residential areas, which could reduce but likely not eliminate the impacts of hotel shortages on housing. Worse, any unmet demand for short-term accommodation could also limit the expansion of the tourism industry.

Economic shocks are also a potential threat for the growth of the City of Niagara Falls. The tourism industry can be volatile and declines in the industry could reduce need to reside in the City of Niagara Falls. The City's employment growth has also been flat over the past 15 years.⁸ A poor economy could reduce the desirability of living in the City and threaten its future growth.

Overall, the City of Niagara Falls faces strong fundamental factors that encourage its growth. While some factors affecting growth are mostly outside the control of the City, prudent planning can forestall potential headwinds which can threaten this growth.

⁸ Niagara Falls 2024 DC Background Study, Appendix A - Table 1.

3

Key Topics for Discussion

3.1 How and Where to Grow

Why It's Important

The current Official Plan contains forecasts to 2031 with a population of 106,800, 42,740 jobs, and a total employment of 53,640.⁹ The Plan says these figures could be updated without amendment by Niagara Region. Our Niagara Falls Plan will be expected to contain forecasts to 2051, and can plan for infrastructure, public service facilities, and employment areas beyond this horizon.

Growth management is a core responsibility of a municipal planning department and Official Plans in particular. These decisions impact corporate capital planning, the quality of life of residents, and the ability of the municipality to achieve its goals. Planners must ensure that there is the right amount of land to serve future needs. Planners must also ensure that sufficient infrastructure is available to provide a sufficient quality of service to sustain the growth.

While planners can guide the type of growth which can occur in the future, planners cannot compel growth to occur in ways which are not feasible. As such, policies which are overly prescriptive and counter to local trends and needs tend to prevent growth altogether instead of bringing about growth in the way the planners envisioned. Not providing enough of a type of land in the locations where it is needed results in upward pressure on land costs, harming affordability and constraining economic growth. On the other hand, accommodating too much land in a certain category can lead to unproductive land reserves and inefficient growth patterns.

There are three general types of locations where a city can grow:

- **Greenfield Development:** undeveloped lands outside the built-up area, usually with minimal existing roads, sewers, and services. This location has the fewest constraints on the type of development, as there are large lot sizes, more flexibility in designing and locating roads and services, the ability to include a broad mix of new uses, and frequently have lower land costs. Surrounding land uses are often less restrictive, as large parcel sizes allow for buffers. However, the lack of existing infrastructure and services can require greater upfront costs. New master planned communities are usually built on Greenfield lands. Greenfield development is often typically well planned for within infrastructure planning as engineering studies can be tailored to new development and infrastructure and do not have to account for as many unknowns in areas with existing infrastructure.

⁹ Part 1, Section 2.6.

- **Intensification and Infill Development:** vacant or underutilized parcels within the built-up area. These lands can often benefit from existing infrastructure and services, while avoiding the costs of demolishing an existing use. However, these lands generally have smaller lot sizes, and higher land costs, which can make low-density development less financially feasible. Additionally, surrounding uses must be considered, and can benefit from existing infrastructure and services, but may also require complex and costly infrastructure upgrades to service increased growth - which can be required not only at the immediate site but also for the supply to the site, or downstream from the site.
- **Redevelopment of Existing Uses:** existing uses can be demolished and replaced with new, usually higher-density, development. These lands also benefit greatly from existing infrastructure and services, and face constraints in terms of lot size. However, this type of development usually is associated with the highest land costs, as well as the cost of demolition. As a result, this type of land usually requires the greatest increase in density to be feasible. Like infill development, surrounding uses must be considered, and development is limited to compatible uses. Infrastructure upgrades associated with redevelopment of existing uses to higher densities can be complex and far-reaching. Identification of the full scope of upgrades for an area often requires a comprehensive Master Servicing Plan for the area (or larger).

Growth needs to be accommodated with the necessary infrastructure. Where possible, it is ideal to take advantage of existing infrastructure, including roads, water/wastewater sewer networks, and transit networks, reducing the costs of providing servicing. Building more densely can also improve property values per land area, thus increasing property tax revenues.

Besides residential land, the City must also consider where to locate commercial and industrial lands. Industrial lands would prefer to be close to transportation networks and prefer to be on cheaper lands which are poorly suited for other uses. For the City of Niagara Falls, these may include lands which are closer to the Queen Elizabeth Highway. Other employment lands, such as commercial office, could be located in these regions or in other locations which are easily accessible by the labour force.

Niagara Region has defined two “strategic growth areas,” or areas “to be the focus for accommodating intensification and higher-density mixed uses in a more compact built form”¹⁰ within The City of Niagara Falls. These two areas are the Protected Major Transit Station Area around the Niagara Falls GO Station, with a target density of 125 people and jobs per hectare by 2051, and the South Niagara Falls Hospital Regional Growth Centre, with a target density of 100 people and jobs per hectare by 2051.¹¹ Additionally, the City of Niagara Falls may experience increased growth and intensification in other areas of the City, such as the tourist area and the Lundy’s Lane node and corridor and the emerging McLeod Road corridor east of the QEW.

¹⁰ Niagara Official Plan, Chapter 2: Growing Region. p.66

¹¹ Niagara Official Plan, Chapter 2: Growing Region. p.10, Table 2-3

These areas are far apart. The City would need to design servicing appropriately such that these areas can be serviced effectively. Connecting these areas by transportation networks and public transit would be important to foster the growth of all of these areas as well as improving access for residents. Other municipalities or jurisdictions with multiple nodes, such as perhaps Kitchener-Waterloo, could provide examples of best practices to service spread-out growth areas.

Things to Think About



1. It would be ideal to provide residents with easy access to a wide range of housing types, shopping and restaurant options, recreational spaces, employment opportunities, educational and cultural opportunities, live-work options, mobility options, and public service facilities, services, and amenities. These would create “complete communities” that allow residents to conveniently meet their basic needs. Policies should support these goals, acknowledging that these communities may need time to develop.
2. A variety of housing formats are possible, with each having advantages and disadvantages. Policy should support the development of the most beneficial housing types in each location.
3. Housing should be made available at locations where they are needed. Housing can be located to take advantage of existing investments to allow for more coordinated, efficient, and cost-effective delivery of service infrastructure and community infrastructure.
4. Commercial development also has a variety of built forms. Not all forms are financially feasible for any given location. Policy should permit viable forms of commercial development, while providing flexibility to allow for future adaptive reuse or redevelopment of space as the area evolves.
5. As the City builds out, higher density built forms and higher intensity land uses should be encouraged to promote the development of complete communities, reduce land consumption, reduce the need for cars, and maximize the efficiency and cost effectiveness of municipal service infrastructure. Higher density built forms would also limit the need for future urban boundary expansions and help protect agricultural lands and environmentally sensitive areas.
6. Growth has many benefits in terms of quality of life and housing affordability for current and future residents of the City, but there can also be impacts such as increased traffic and shadows. While these benefits and costs may be contextual and place-dependent, it would be helpful to develop a general understanding of the relative magnitudes of the costs of displacement or excluding potential future residents compared to costs such as increased traffic or shadows. Doing so could reduce uncertainty for developers and residents and improve transparency in municipal policy and decisions.

There is strong evidence that building more housing, including market-rate housing, is one of the most effective solutions to address the housing affordability crisis. Often, this means reducing barriers, taxes, and fees around housing construction. For example, many US jurisdictions saw apartment asking rents fall in 2023.¹² These jurisdictions all had high construction rates, increasing their apartment supply by anywhere between 6.1% to 15.4%.

There has been a growing understanding that regulation and development-related taxes and fees can have a large impact in housing affordability.¹³ These increase the costs of building housing or other developments, which raises the prices or rents required for the project to be feasible. Additionally, these factors increase the uncertainty and risk in the development process, which increases the required profit needed to make development a prudent investment. Finally, these can decrease the incentives for development companies to invest in productivity-enhancing processes and technologies.¹⁴

There is further evidence that new housing construction causes a reduction in housing prices, rather than merely being associated with it. Several recent studies examined the isolated effect of a newly constructed residential building on rents of the immediate area.¹⁵ Overall, the balance of these studies found that the new building reduces rents. Several of these studies also found new housing developments reduced eviction rates.

New housing built at market rates have impacts across the housing spectrum. In 2023, US jurisdictions with high apartment construction rates experienced larger decreases in the rents of older and more affordable Class-B apartments compared to newer and more expensive Class-A apartments.¹⁶ Academic studies also find evidence that new market-rate housing construction opens up spaces in more affordable housing markets.^{17,18} Further, there is evidence that restrictiveness in zoning is associated with higher homelessness rates.¹⁹

¹² Parsons, J. (2023). *After Rapid Cooldown, Apartment Rents Plateau (For Now)*. RealPage Analytics Blog. <https://www.realpage.com/analytics/october-2023-data-update/>

¹³ Glaeser, E., and J. Gyourko. 2018. "The Economic Implications of Housing Supply." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 32 (1): 3-30. DOI: 10.1257/jep.32.1.3

¹⁴ D'Amico, L., E.L. Glaeser, J. Gyourko, W.R. Kerr, G.A.M. Ponzetto. (December 30, 2023). *Why Has Construction Productivity Stagnated? The Role of Land-Use Regulation*. SSRN. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4679195>

¹⁵ Phillips, S., M. Manville, and M. Lens. (2021). *Research Roundup: The Effect of Market-Rate Development on Neighborhood Rents*. UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies. <https://www.lewis.ucla.edu/research/market-rate-development-impacts/>

¹⁶ Parsons, J. (2023). *Here's the Most Unexpected Twist of the Apartment Sector in 2023*. RealPage Analytics Blog. <https://www.realpage.com/analytics/class-b-market-softening/>

¹⁷ Mast, E. (2023). *JUE Insight: The effect of new market-rate housing construction on the low-income housing market*. *Journal of Urban Economics*: 133. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0094119021000656>

¹⁸ Bratu, C., O. Harjunen, T. Saarimaa. (2023). *JUE Insight: City-wide effects of new housing supply: Evidence from moving chains*. *Journal of Urban Economics*: 133. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0094119022001048>

¹⁹ Dawkins, C. (2023). *Homelessness and Housing Supply*. *Journal of Urban Affairs*. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07352166.2023.2168553>

Gentrification and the displacement of existing residents is one of the most pressing concerns in the housing affordability crisis. Gentrification and displacement occur when there is not enough housing built to accommodate newcomers, who then must displace existing residents to move into the area.²⁰ While gentrification often occurs around the same time as new housing construction, it is a common misconception that new housing construction is what causes gentrification and displacement. Instead, they are both caused by more people wanting to live in that area. To illustrate that gentrification does not depend on new housing construction, there are many areas where the lack of new housing did not prevent and in fact exacerbated gentrification. Examples include the Park Extension neighbourhood in Montreal, which saw a rise of displacements following the construction of Université de Montréal's Campus MIL in 2018.²¹ According to CMHC, there were only 419 housing completions in Park Extension from 2010 to 2023, which was just 3.3% of the total households in the neighbourhood as of the 2011 Census.²² In the United States, examples of gentrifying neighbourhoods with low housing growth include the neighbourhoods of Edgehill in Nashville, Tennessee, Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco, California,²³ and Echo Park in Los Angeles, California.²⁴

When considering policy to reduce housing prices and rents, it is natural to consider price controls.²⁵ However, it is generally understood that, outside specific situations, price controls tend to exacerbate supply shortages, create long wait times, and often lead to under-the-table transactions. In the context of rent control, there is strong evidence that rent control increases uncontrolled rental rates, decreases housing construction, decreases housing quality, and increases misallocation in housing (e.g., residents living in homes that are too big or small or too far from work).²⁶ They can also be poorly targeted, often benefiting wealthier households who do not need them to afford a residence.

While rent controls are counterproductive for improving housing affordability in a broad sense, "soft" rent controls can be useful for protecting renters from the threat of eviction.²⁷ Ontario has a form of

²⁰ Martin, A. (May 17, 2024). *Gentrification as a housing problem*. Works in Progress. <https://worksinprogress.co/issue/gentrification-as-a-housing-problem/>

²¹ Nichols, N., E. Guay, A. Megelas, A. Cadieux, L.I. King, R. St-Paul. (2019). *Homelessness, Hardship and Public Action in Gentrifying Areas: The Case of Park Extension, Montreal*. Homeless Hub. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/blog/homelessness-hardship-and-public-action-gentrifying-areas-case-park-extension-montreal>

²² Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Data Portal. Accessed May 27, 2024, from <https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-pimh/en#TableMapChart/1060130/6/Parc-Extension>.

²³ Martin, A. (May 17, 2024). *Gentrification as a housing problem*.

²⁴ Phillips, S., M. Manville, and M. Lens. (2021). *Research Roundup: The Effect of Market-Rate Development on Neighborhood Rents*.

²⁵ As an illustrative example in a broader context, the US CBS News/YouGov poll in December 2023 found 66% of adult respondents supported government price controls to control inflation.

²⁶ Kholodilin, K.A. (2024). *Rent control effects through the lens of empirical research: An almost complete review of the literature*. Journal of Housing Economics: 63. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1051137724000020>

²⁷ These types of "soft" rent control allow for rent increases for inflation and maintenance, and also feature vacancy decontrol. See: Arnott, R. (1995). *Time for Revisionism in Rent Control?* Journal of Economic Perspectives: 9(1). <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/jep.9.1.99>

“soft” rent control for units occupied before 2018, which allows for annual rent increases with inflation and improvements as well as vacancy decontrol.

In addition to reducing barriers, taxes, and fees to spur construction of traditional housing typologies, many jurisdictions including the City of Niagara Falls have encouraged the construction of accessory dwelling units (ADUs), also known as secondary suites. These are smaller independent dwelling units on the same parcels as a single-family home and can take many forms (garden suites, laneway houses, basement apartments, upper floors etc.). In the City of Niagara Falls under the current Official Plan Part 1, Section 4, Policy 4.12, up to two ADUs are permitted on urban lots, and one ADU is permitted on rural lots. In Ontario, the number of ADUs varies widely between municipalities, with 15.4% of ground-related homes in Toronto having an ADU, while only 1.7% of ground-related homes in Burlington have an ADU.²⁸ Older homes and single-storey homes are more likely to contain an ADU, and municipalities with few purpose-built rental units or rented condo units had more ADUs. Overall, it is clear that the policy environment, market factors, and existing built form are all important factors to consider when identifying the potential for additional housing using ADUs. The City of Niagara Falls ADU policy was passed in October 2023, and it is currently too early to evaluate the impact of the current policy. Tracking the number of ADUs created and revising ADU policy as necessary is key to creating effective frameworks. For example, in California even with the widespread success of the 2016 ADU law, six further revisions closing loopholes and streamlining the processes have occurred since.

In addition to monitoring and evaluation of the current ADU policy, Niagara Falls should also keep in mind the competing demands for short-term accommodation, which as a major tourism destination are especially significant. The City of Niagara Falls currently prohibits vacation rental units in residential areas. Evidence suggests that vacation rental units such as Airbnb units can

²⁸ Passarelli et al. (2021) *Housing Market Insight Ontario: Secondary Units in Ontario*. CMHC. <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/housing-markets-data-and-research/market-reports/housing-market/housing-market-insight>

increase housing prices and rents, reducing housing affordability.^{29,30} The magnitude of the effects can be substantial: the first referenced study found Airbnb increased housing rents in Barcelona by 1.9% and housing prices by 4.6%, and the other study found Airbnb explained approximately 20% of rent growth and 14% of price growth. Still, the impact of Airbnb was a relatively small portion of the total change in housing prices and rents. The prohibition of vacation rental units can moderately improve housing affordability even though it does not solve the entire problem. Given the reliance of the City's economy on tourism, care should be taken that sufficient vacation accommodations are allowed to be provided in their ideal locations, so the prohibition of vacation rental units does not limit the amount of tourism to Niagara Falls.

Things to Think About



1. The outcomes of housing and land use policies should be assessed and reviewed. To do so, it is important to use indicators which properly and accurately reflect the scarcity or abundance of housing. The use of price indicators such as rent growth rates or housing price growth rates is recommended (with a target growth rate equal to the general rate of inflation), or rental vacancy rates (with a target vacancy rate such that rental growth rates are at their target levels).³¹ These indicators provide information on how the supply of housing is changing relative to the demand.
2. Often, housing policy uses quantity indicators such as housing completions or housing starts. For example, the City of Niagara Falls made a housing pledge to build 8,000 homes by 2031, a target which it is on track to meet. While quantity indicators are easier to understand, they do not provide information about whether the amount of housing available is keeping up with demand. As such, while the City of Niagara Falls is obligated to meet Provincial and Regional targets assigned to it, the City should consider whether these targets are sufficient for meeting its housing affordability goals and should consider supplementing these targets with additional targets as needed. As with any target, the housing pledge should be continually reviewed to ensure that it reflects changing need and market demand.
3. Where possible, the City of Niagara Falls should also support the development of non-market housing. The delivery of non-market housing is a Regional responsibility and is managed by Niagara Region Housing. Still, the City can provide crucial support. Possible options

²⁹ Garcia-López, M. À., J. Jofre-Monseny, R. Martínez-Mazza, M. Segú. (2020). *Do short-term rental platforms affect housing markets? Evidence from Airbnb in Barcelona*. Journal of Urban Economics, 119. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0094119020300498>

³⁰ Barron, K., E. Kung, D. Proserpio. (2021). The effect of home-sharing on house prices and rents: Evidence from Airbnb. Marketing Science, 40(1), 23-47. <https://pubsonline.informs.org/doi/abs/10.1287/mksc.2020.1227>

³¹ Ideally, these would be the rent growth rates of new units and/or to new tenants to avoid confounding with rent control. Also, the use of indicators that track the changes in the price of the same home, or otherwise control for the characteristics of the home, is ideal to avoid composition effects.

include the provision of municipally owned public land, co-location with City-run facilities, increasing the speed of planning approvals, reducing zoning and other regulations which could limit the amount of non-market housing provided, and waiving taxes and fees. While budgetary and other capacity limits mean the provision social housing cannot solve the affordability crisis on its own, it can fill a much-needed gap on the housing spectrum as market-rate housing cannot directly provide housing to the left end of the continuum. Additionally, increasing market-rate housing would allow for cheaper provision of social housing through lower housing costs (and thus need for subsidies) and by reducing the number of people who require support to meet their housing needs.

4. One policy to provide non-market housing adopted by many municipalities worldwide, including Toronto, Mississauga, and Kitchener, is inclusionary zoning policies which require a fraction of new housing units to be set aside to be sold at affordable rates. While no Niagara Region municipality has adopted a formal inclusionary zoning policy, the Region has adopted a target that 10% of newly constructed ownership housing and 20% of newly constructed rental housing would be affordable. The City of Niagara Falls has adopted an even higher target that 40% of all newly constructed homes

would be affordable. These are not mandatory “inclusionary zoning” policies (which are restricted to Protected MTSA’s), but City staff have discretion in considering these guidelines in approving developments. The City should consider the costs and benefits of these tools, with the understanding that not all tools may be ideal for its situation.

5. While guidelines or regulations for affordable housing in new housing developments can create affordable housing, these types of policies (e.g., inclusionary zoning policies³² in other jurisdictions) have not been a silver bullet for solving the housing affordability crisis.³³ For example, Montgomery County, Maryland, which has one of the oldest and most productive inclusionary zoning policies, still has some of the highest housing prices in the state.³⁴ Inclusionary zoning policies cannot produce sufficient units to address most affordable housing needs, meaning its benefits are concentrated on the few households who are fortunate enough to receive one.
6. Care should be taken that affordable housing requirements do not significantly reduce new housing construction. Excessively onerous affordable housing requirements could have the unintended consequence of reducing housing affordability more broadly by increasing

³² In Ontario, inclusionary zoning is only allowed in Protected Major Transit Station Areas and in areas subject to a Development Permit System.

³³ Faludi, R., D. Bailey, B. Li. (2023). *Is Inclusionary Zoning the Silver Bullet Needed to Solve the Housing Crises?* Ontario

Professional Planners Institute. <https://ontarioplanners.ca/blog/planning-exchange/october-2023/is-inclusionary-zoning-the-silver-bullet-needed-to-solve-the-housing-crises>

³⁴ Based on data collected from Redfin.

the prices and rents of the existing housing stock.³⁵

7. The City of Niagara Falls has historically been successful in keeping the growth of housing costs around the level of inflation, although housing prices and rents have grown more than inflation in recent years. As the City is expected to grow faster in the future, the City needs to ensure housing prices and rents remain affordable for all residents. While the City has little control over interest rates or the cost of materials and labour, City policies can have a significant impact on soft costs and financing costs of development. Additionally, City policies can greatly affect the timeline and overall risk of a project, which impacts the minimum profitability they must have to receive financing.
8. The City should consider ways to educate residents and manage expectations around the most effective ways to address the housing crisis. Studies have shown that the public often has limited understanding of the importance of building new market-rate housing on affordability.³⁶
9. The City should continue to prioritize intensification within the Downtown and along identified Corridors. The City should consider facilitating intensification

by developing a strong vision and supportive policies which prioritize and support residential intensification projects, and ensuring appropriate infrastructure is in place to support higher density development. Indicators on the degree of infill should be monitored, and targets should be set to encourage additional intensification (e.g., raising the intensification target from its current level of 50%), which would not be out of line with recent intensification figures of over 70% of all development. A caution, though, that this proportion will be adjusted as the new secondary plan areas come on stream in the coming years.

10. Intensification within areas of the City serviced by combined sewers (sanitary and storm) require site controls to ensure development does not contribute additional flows to the wastewater system. The City continues to work towards separation of their combined sewers to improve capacity of these systems, mitigate wastewater overflows to the environment during extreme wet weather events, and comply with contemporary MECP requirements.

³⁵ For example, a recent study simulated the effects of potential Inclusionary Zoning policies on market and affordable housing production in Los Angeles and found such policies would significantly decrease overall housing production. See: Phillips, S. (2024). *Modeling Inclusionary Zoning's Impact on Housing Production in Los Angeles: Tradeoffs and Policy Implications*. UC Berkeley: Turner Center for Housing

Innovation.

<https://turnercenter.berkeley.edu/research-and-policy/inclusionary-zoning-housing-production-modeling/>

³⁶ Nall, C., Elmendorf, C. S. and Oklobdzija, S. (April 29, 2024). "Folk Economics and the Persistence of Political Opposition to New Housing." SSRN. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4266459>

11. Due to the complexity that is often involved in intensification, there are numerous elements of a project's planning approval process that can pose a risk to the project's ultimate success. Reducing the risks of intensification projects may include pre-zoning certain lands to permit the desired form of

intensification, introducing financial incentives for desired projects, and building support among City staff and Council members to ensure a smoother approval process.

3.3 Future-Proofing with Flexible Policies

The difficulties of planning, especially far into the future, have long been established. Population and employment projections cannot foresee unexpected future events, shifting market conditions, changing needs, and novel innovations. They often rely on assuming certain current conditions remain the same, which is often not explicitly discussed. It can be challenging to predict what built forms would be needed or where different uses would be ideal in the future.

Why It's Important

An additional challenge is that zoning often mimics an area's existing uses, which makes it difficult for cities to adapt and grow. Overly restrictive policies often lock municipalities in development patterns of the past, which may no longer be well-suited for current or future conditions. Because of the added costs of site-by-site Official Plan Amendments and Zoning By-law Amendments, these restrictions are especially harmful for smaller developments and developers who often have fewer resources and smaller margins. As such, these restrictive policies can make changes more dramatic and disruptive when they do occur, after pressures to change build up enough.

When land-use regulations are overly prescriptive, they can reduce the welfare of the community by entrenching existing uses of land which no longer serve the needs of the community as a whole. Where insufficient residential density is permitted, people are required to consume a minimum amount of land, wasting scarce resources and creating a higher floor for housing costs. Where land is zoned for extremely prescriptive uses, land cannot be easily used for what would bring the greatest benefit for the community. These effects of restrictive zoning can act to reduce housing affordability, increase inequality and socioeconomic stratification, reduce economic growth and productivity, and threaten the attainment of environmental sustainability goals.

Historically, most of the housing built in the City of Niagara Falls were single-detached homes or row houses. As the City builds up, it will need to turn to infill to add new housing units and accommodate the projected future growth. These types of developments are more time- and resource-intensive from a planning perspective, as they can often require Official Plan Amendments and Zoning By-law Amendments when there are insufficient allowances and flexibility in existing policies. Cities which rely on infill for growth often experience prolonged timelines to approve new housing for construction, exacerbating the shortfall in local housing markets and overburdening city staff.

These problems can be avoided with more flexible policies which allow for a greater range of uses and built forms. Such policies can allow for land to be used for productive purposes immediately, while preserving the ability for their uses to shift in the future as conditions change. Allowing flexibility in development can be especially important because it can be difficult to reach the desired built form from scratch. For example, pedestrian-oriented retail requires a sufficient level of residents in the area before it can become feasible. Rather than building pedestrian-oriented retail in conjunction with residential development, which can be difficult due to timing and the large number of stakeholders, it can be much easier from a financial feasibility perspective to add such retail spaces in existing neighborhoods, or to add high-density residential apartments on top of or near existing retail establishments that serve a more car-oriented demographic.

Things to Think About



1. Planning policies should be more flexible to enable adaptation to changing conditions, such as housing affordability challenges or demand for easily accessible retail.
2. Mixed-use development is often encouraged due to its benefits in providing retail and employment spaces near homes. However, the benefits of mixed-use development can be achieved as long as an area has a mix of uses, and it is not necessary that each lot has a mix of uses. Policies could promote this additional level of flexibility to enable more efficient and feasible development of mixed-use areas.
3. Additionally, zoning policies should acknowledge that ideal uses and needs may change over time. Adding flexibility in land use and pre-zoning for the ideal future state rather than what is currently built on site can support the development of complete communities.
4. As part of this, properties with aging buildings could be redesignated to allow for potential future redevelopment opportunities with a lower cost in money and City staff resources. This has to be balanced against cultural heritage goals, which are discussed in detail in the Cultural City Discussion Paper.

4

Policy Review

Each Discussion Paper provides narrative on key components of legislation and policy governing that Paper's subject matter. Growth management in Niagara Falls is regulated and guided by a range of policy and strategy documents. Major contributors to this discourse are summarized below, although other documents may become relevant as part of writing Our Niagara Falls Plan.

There is a chance these documents may be updated by the Province during the life of this study—in particular, that the Niagara Region Official Plan would transition to become a local plan administered by the City of Niagara Falls. Any changes will be reflected in the Our Niagara Falls Plan, with updates provided by City staff and the project team as required.

4.1 Provincial Policy Statement (2020)

POLICY REFERENCE: [Section 1.1 \(Managing and Directing Land Use to Achieve Efficient and Resilient Development and Land Use Patterns\)](#); [Section 1.3 \(Employment\)](#); [Section 1.4 \(Housing\)](#); [Section 1.7 \(Long-Term Economic Prosperity\)](#)

The Provincial Policy Statement, 2020 (PPS 2020) provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development. The Provincial Policy Statement sets the policy foundation for regulating the development and use of land. The Provincial Policy Statement is issued under the authority of Section 3 of the *Planning Act*. Section 3 of the Planning Act requires that decisions affecting planning matters “shall be consistent with” policy statements issued under the *Act*. Comments, submissions or advice that affect a planning matter that are provided by the Council of a municipality, a local board, a planning board, a minister or ministry, board, commission or agency of the government “shall be consistent with” the Provincial Policy Statement.



Section 1.1.1, requires municipalities to plan for, “efficient development and land use patterns which sustain the financial well-being of the Province and municipalities over the long term.” Settlement areas shall be the focus of growth and development, intended to occur as intensification and

redevelopment within existing developed areas, and new development in designated growth areas that have not yet been fully developed.

With respect to growth management objectives, the Provincial Policy Statement instructs the City to consider all of the following policies for inclusion in Our Niagara Falls Plan:

- Maintain at all times the ability to accommodate residential growth for a minimum of 15 years through residential intensification and redevelopment and, if necessary, lands which are designated and available for residential development³⁷
- Maintain at all times where new development is to occur, land with servicing capacity sufficient to provide at least a three-year supply of residential units available through lands suitably zoned to facilitate residential intensification and redevelopment, and land in draft approved and registered plans³⁸
- Permit and facilitate all housing options required to meet the social, health, economic and well-being requirements of current and future residents, including special needs requirements and needs arising from demographic changes and employment opportunities³⁹
- Permit and facilitate all types of residential intensification, including additional residential units, and redevelopment in appropriate locations and promoting opportunities for transit-supportive development, with a significant supply and range of housing options through intensification and redevelopment where this can be accommodated⁴⁰
- Direct new housing to locations served by existing or planned infrastructure and public service facilities⁴¹
- Promote residential densities that use land, resources, infrastructure and public service facilities efficiently, and support the use of active transportation and transit in areas where it exists or is to be developed⁴²
- Establish development standards for residential intensification, redevelopment and new residential development that minimize housing costs and facilitate compact form⁴³

During an official plan review, municipalities should assess employment areas to ensure the designation is appropriate for their planned function, and sensitive land uses shall be prohibited from employment areas planned for industrial and manufacturing uses. The issue was reviewed through the Niagara Official Plan process and is further summarized in the International City Discussion Paper.

³⁷ Policy 1.4.1(a)

³⁸ Policy 1.4.1(b)

³⁹ Policy 1.4.3(b)(1)

⁴⁰ Policies 1.4.3(b)(2), 1.4.3(e), and 1.1.3.3

⁴¹ Policy 1.4.3(c)

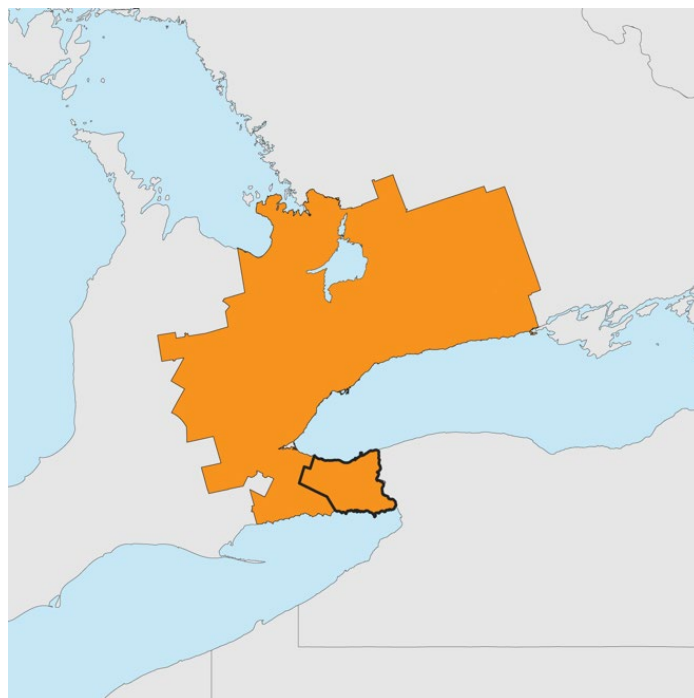
⁴² Policy 1.4.3(d)

⁴³ Policy 1.4.3(f)

4.2 A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2019)

POLICY REFERENCE: Section 2.1.1 (Managing Growth); Section 2.2.2 (Delineated Built-up Areas); Section 2.2.7 (Designated Greenfield Areas); Section 6.3 (Managing Growth)

A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2019 (Growth Plan), builds on the Provincial Policy Statement to establish a unique planning framework for the Greater Golden Horseshoe that supports the achievement of complete communities, a thriving economy, a clean and healthy environment, and social equity. It provides detailed policy direction across a range of issue areas, with an overarching principal being to support the achievement of complete communities that are designed to support healthy and active living and meet people's needs for daily living throughout an entire lifetime. It does this by promoting intensification improving the integration of land use planning with investments in infrastructure and public service facilities, and providing for different approaches to manage growth that recognize the diversity of communities subject to this Plan.



The 2019 Growth Plan builds upon the success of the initial 2006 Growth Plan in responding to the key challenges that the region continues to face over the coming decades with enhanced policy directions. Comments, submissions or advice that affect a planning matter that are provided by the Council of a municipality, a local board, a planning board, a minister or ministry, board, commission or agency of the government “shall conform to” this Provincial policy document.

Within the Growth Plan, Niagara Falls is a Settlement Area, one expected to accommodate a significant amount of new growth to 2051 (as identified through the Niagara Official Plan).⁴⁴ One of the foundational elements of the Growth Plan is for municipalities to plan for long-term growth within

⁴⁴ The basis for this status begins in Section 2.2.1.2(a), with Niagara Falls being allocated a significant amount of forecasted growth out of the Niagara Official Plan review process.

A community structure in “primary settlement areas” like Niagara Falls starts with a natural heritage system, centralizes around mixed-use and higher density nodes and corridors, and completed around employment lands and lower density residential areas and community facilities

a defined community structure. Niagara Falls already identifies a number of key nodes, corridors, and secondary plan areas as the primary locations for growth, each with varying levels of density.⁴⁵

New residential development will generally be accommodated within mixed use nodes and corridors, within designated greenfield areas, and also within existing residential neighbourhoods. The City has already identified a number of nodes and corridors that will need to be reassessed and updated, as well as Secondary Plan areas to accommodate greenfield growth.

Intensification is defined in the Growth Plan as, “The development of a property, site or area at a higher

density than currently exists through redevelopment (including the reuse of brownfield sites), the development of vacant and/or underutilized lots within previously developed areas, infill development, and the expansion or conversion of existing buildings.”⁴⁶ Intensification opportunities will play an important role in providing smaller and higher intensity housing forms that are typically considered more affordable, while also contributing to increased pedestrian and commercial activity in those focused locations and more cost-effective and efficient use of infrastructure investments.⁴⁷

Future housing would also be delivered in “designated greenfield areas.” These are defined as, “Lands within settlement areas but outside of delineated built-up areas that have been designated in an Official Plan for development and are required to accommodate forecasted growth to the horizon of this Plan.”⁴⁸ These lands are generally captured within a Secondary Plan area—some plans are approved, while others are in process. These areas will also be subject to minimum density requirements, which shall be finalized through those processes. New development in these areas will be designed to support achieving a “complete community,” supporting active transportation, and to encourage the integration and sustained viability of transit services.⁴⁹

Employment policies within the Growth Plan align with similar Provincial Policy Statement expectations. This includes protecting employment areas from sensitive land uses, major retail or major office uses from adverse impacts on industrial uses vulnerable to encroachment (preferably by avoidance but if not possible through minimization and mitigation).⁵⁰ This includes prohibiting

⁴⁵ Section 2.2.1.2(c) specifies growth will be focussed within delineated built-up areas, strategic growth areas (nodes, corridors, and other areas to be the focus for intensification), locations with existing or planned transit, and areas with existing or planned public service facilities.

⁴⁶ Section 7, Definitions. (Note this definition is also found in the PPS 2020.)

⁴⁷ All of which contributes to achieving complete communities—a key contextual underpinning found in Section 3.1.

⁴⁸ Section 7, Definitions.

⁴⁹ Policy 2.2.7

⁵⁰ Policy 2.2.5.8

residential uses, limiting sensitive land uses, and prohibiting major retail uses in employment areas, and providing an appropriate interface to maintain land use compatibility between employment areas and adjacent non-employment areas.⁵¹ Major office and institutional developments are to be directed to major transit station areas or other strategic growth areas.⁵² Employment density targets have been set out in the Niagara Official Plan to implement Growth Plan Policy 2.2.5.13.

4.3 Draft 2024 Provincial Planning Statement

On April 10, 2024, the Government of Ontario released the proposed Provincial Planning Statement 2024 (proposed PPS 2023). The proposed Provincial Planning Statement would be a single, province-wide policy framework along with implementing legislative changes, which combines the 2020 Provincial Policy Statement and Growth Plan into one consolidated policy. At the time of writing this Discussion Paper, the public consultation stage had just closed (May 12, 2024). A number of elements of the proposed Provincial Planning Statement will be discussed in each of the six Discussion Papers.

The changes proposed in the proposed Provincial Planning Statement represent fundamental changes in how growth planning is carried out in Ontario: the emphasis is strongly on, “the building of more homes for all Ontarians.”⁵³ This includes a potential change in what growth forecasts are to be used in planning for growth, further focusing priority on housing development, changing policies around settlement area expansions and strategic growth areas, potentially reducing some protections for employment lands via land use compatibility, introducing potential to allocate and reallocate servicing capacity if required, requiring watershed planning.

The proposed Provincial Planning Statement uses Ministry of Finance 25-year growth projections as the basis for population and employment forecasts, although municipalities would be able to continue using previously issued forecasts.⁵⁴ The planning horizon would shift to a 20-30 year range, with planning for infrastructure, public service facilities, strategic growth areas and employment areas permitted to extend beyond this horizon.⁵⁵ The concept of “healthy, liveable and safe communities” would be replaced by “support the development of complete communities.”⁵⁶

On housing, proposed Provincial Planning Statement requirements on establishing affordable housing targets and permitting development and redevelopment of underutilized commercial and institutional sites for residential development.⁵⁷

A major shift is proposed around settlement area limits. A major component of previous Provincial Policy Statement and the Growth Plan was to permit settlement area expansions only through a “municipal comprehensive review” to consider and plan options. The proposed Provincial Planning

⁵¹ Policy 2.2.5.7

⁵² Policy 2.2.5.2

⁵³ Contained in the Vision in Chapter 1: Introduction.

⁵⁴ Draft Policies 2.1.1 and 2.1.2

⁵⁵ Draft Policy 2.1.3

⁵⁶ Draft Policy 2.1.6

⁵⁷ Draft Policies 2.2.1(a) and (b)

Statement will permit this at any time, including through private applications and the identification of new settlement areas, with seven criteria requiring to be considered in such assessments (a unique eighth criterion applies for new settlement areas related to infrastructure and public service facility availability).⁵⁸ The separate Bill 185 amendments proposed to the *Planning Act* would restore appeal rights to applicants on such decisions.

With respect to strategic growth areas targeted for intensification, a slate of general policies is proposed in place of current policies around density targets for such areas. Such areas would continue to require policy focus on achieving complete communities, a range and mix of housing options, intensification and mixed-use development.⁵⁹ This includes prioritizing planning for investment in infrastructure and public service facilities in these areas, with development at an appropriate scale and type to achieve complete communities and compact built form. Support for redevelopment of underutilized shopping malls and plazas to support mixed-use residential development is also encouraged.

No major changes to rural and agricultural lands policies appear between the current Provincial Policy Statement and the proposed Provincial Planning Statement, with the lot creation policies found in the 2023 draft Provincial Planning Statement no longer found. The Provincially-mapped agricultural system would no longer be required to be followed by municipalities, although prime agricultural lands would retain strict policy protection.⁶⁰ Additional permissions for housing on a farm operation and accessory dwelling units would be permitted—without creating new lots.⁶¹

Also, a draft policy is included to make it clear that, “Where a planning authority must decide on a planning matter before their official plan has been updated to be consistent with this Policy Statement, or before other applicable planning instruments have been updated accordingly, it must still make a decision that is consistent with this Policy Statement.”⁶² This is clear direction to municipalities and the Ontario Land Tribunal that updated policies in the proposed Provincial Planning Statement will be a strong consideration when municipalities are making a decision.

The proposed Provincial Planning Statement includes policies that would only apply to 29 large and fast growing municipalities. Niagara Falls is included on that list.⁶³ Focused policies for such places include an encouragement to plan for a target of 50 residents and jobs per gross hectare in designated growth areas (lands added to settlement areas that have not yet been fully developed).⁶⁴ There is also a density target encouraged to be met of 150 residents and jobs per hectare in major transition station areas,⁶⁵ of which the Niagara Official Plan and the City generally considers to apply to Downtown Niagara Falls.

⁵⁸ Draft Policies 2.3.2.1 and 2.3.2.2

⁵⁹ Draft Policies 2.4.1.1, 2.4.1.2 and 2.4.1.3

⁶⁰ Throughout draft Policy 4.3

⁶¹ Draft Policies 4.3.2.4 and 4.3.2.5

⁶² Draft Policy 6.1.7

⁶³ St. Catharines is the only other Niagara Region municipality on this list. The next nearest municipalities are Brantford, Hamilton, and Burlington

⁶⁴ Draft Policy 2.3.1.5

⁶⁵ Draft Policy 2.4.2.2(c)

Watershed planning would be required to inform planning for sewage and water services and stormwater management and protecting, improving or restoring quality and quantity of water (and could be undertaken by Niagara Region, depending on timing and the final framing of the proposal).⁶⁶

4.4 Proposed Bill 185 Amendments to the Planning Act (2024)

At the same time as the release of the proposed 2024 Provincial Planning Statement, a slate of amendments to the *Planning Act* have been proposed that would have an implication on the development of Our Niagara Falls Plan:

- As noted above, application opportunities and appeal rights for those applications are proposed to be restored to applications for settlement area expansions.
- A proposed new power to municipalities would make it mandatory for draft plans of subdivision to include a lapsing provision, to encourage development to move to construction faster—being referred to as a “use it or lose it” tool to encourage approved developments to move to construction sooner.
- Pre-consultation before filing an application is proposed to become optional and would also allow an applicant whose application was deemed complete to be considered by the Ontario Land Tribunal at any time. The new refund requirements introduced in 2023 are also proposed to be repealed (with transition support for applications in that system).
- It is proposed to restrict municipalities from requiring parking in Major Transit Station Areas and areas with minimum development densities and higher-order transit. The current Official Plan identifies Downtown Niagara Falls as such an area.
- 2022’s Bill 23 amendments to the *Planning Act* introduced regulations to designate Niagara Region an upper-tier municipality without planning responsibilities, transition planning duties to lower-tier municipalities such as Niagara Falls. The Bill 185 amendments give effect to this clause to other upper-tier municipalities, but not Niagara Falls. Should that transition occur, the Niagara Official Plan would become a lower-tier municipal plan and the City would eventually decide how it wishes to deal with the content of that Plan. Until such transition occurs, the Our Niagara Falls Plan shall be required to be consistent with the Niagara Region Official Plan—which is the current assumption and plan for the project team.
- The Bill proposes exempting some community service facilities (schools, hospitals, long-term care homes) and some components of post-secondary institutions from *Planning Act* requirements in order to advance construction timelines.

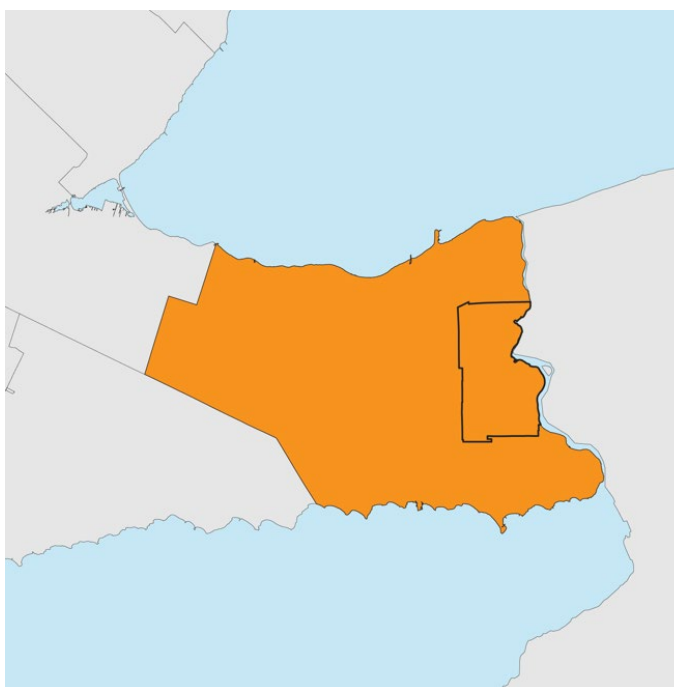
Again, the project team will monitor any Provincial movement on these (or further) amendments to the *Planning Act*. Should it come into effect during this process, the Our Niagara Falls Plan will need to be consistent with its policies.

⁶⁶ Draft Policies 4.2.3 and 4.2.4

4.5 Niagara Region Official Plan (Niagara Official Plan), 2022

The Niagara Official Plan, 2022 (Regional Official Plan), is the vision document for growth across Niagara Region. Approved in 2022, it replaced a 1973 Plan (reformatted in 2014) with a new vision to 2051. Its four pillars include “Exceptional Development and Communities,” “Diverse Housing Types, Jobs and Population,” “Thriving Economy,” and “Resilient Urban and Natural Areas.” It is a key guiding document for development of the new Our Niagara Falls Plan.

Growth Management is a fundamental policy element of an Official Plan in Ontario. Developing a thorough understanding of projected population and employment growth, land needs to accommodate this growth, and commercial needs for residents and visitors is crucial to establishing a logical urban structure and ensuring an efficient, complete, and liveable community.



Niagara Region is planning to accommodate a minimum population of 694,000 people and 272,000 jobs by 2051. The growth forecast established for the City of Niagara Falls is a population of 141,650 and 58,110 jobs by 2051. (Section 2.1 of this Discussion Paper goes into deep detail on subsequent work undertaken by the City in close cooperation with Niagara Region that has implications for these targets.)

Section 2.2 of the Niagara Official Plan sets forth the regional structure and how to manage growth in the Region. The Region directs growth to settlement areas, which in the context of Niagara Falls, are comprised of both urban areas, which include built-up areas, designated greenfield areas, strategic growth areas; and rural settlements (of which there are none in Niagara Falls).

To responsibly manage urban growth it is the policy of the Region to integrate land use planning and infrastructure planning in urban areas. This is essential to support compact development, intensification targets, a diverse range of housing forms, convenient access to transportation options and public service facilities, intensification, orderly development, and mitigate and adapt to the impacts of a changing climate by protecting natural heritage, integrating green infrastructure, and minimizing consumption.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Regional Official Plan, Policy 2.2.1.1

Policy 2.2.2.1 establishes that growth in urban areas will be accommodated primarily through intensification in built-up areas focusing on strategic growth areas, areas with public service facilities and transit service, and growth centres and corridors. Strategic growth areas are the highest priority for development and intensification, and the primary location for major public service facilities, major institutional uses, high density and mixed-use development, major office uses, major commercial uses, and major recreational uses.⁶⁸ The Niagara Region Plan includes an intensification forecast (minimums) of 10,100 total dwelling units for Niagara Falls, representing 50% of construction. Municipalities may plan for higher intensification rates.⁶⁹

Minimum density targets for strategic growth areas in Niagara Falls include:

Protected Major Transit Station Area → 125 people and jobs per hectare

South Niagara Falls Hospital Regional Growth Centre → 100 people and jobs per hectare

The South Niagara Falls Hospital Regional Growth Centre is to be a focal point for significant population and employment growth, to achieve higher densities and a broad range of uses. A future secondary plan is required for these lands.⁷⁰

Protected major transit station areas will be implemented through Official Plan policies that identify the minimum densities, incorporate transit-supportive planning, support active transportation, and provide commuter pick-up/drop-off areas. Further, protected major transit station areas are to be developed to support a diverse mix of land uses, multimodal access to higher order transit, reduce parking standards.⁷¹

For designated greenfield areas, the minimum density target is 50 residents and jobs combined per hectare as measured across the entire region. These areas are to be planned as complete communities ensuring infrastructure capacity and supporting active transportation. Employment lands information is contained in the International City Discussion Paper.

The Official Plan supports “the provision of a range and mix of housing options that are essential for the creation of complete communities and support the regional economy”⁷². Specifically, the Plan sets minimum targets that 20% of all new rental housing and 10% of all new ownership housing is to be affordable.⁷³ The Plan also recognizes opportunities to support tourism through the protection of the region’s natural environment system, parks and trails network and geological and cultural heritage resources. Equally important, is that it supports the improvement of linkages from nearby neighbourhoods to major trip generators, including tourist destinations, employment area, post-secondary institutions and other key locations.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Regional Official Plan, Policy 2.2.2.11

⁶⁹ Regional Official Plan, Policy 2.2.2.6 and Table 2-2

⁷⁰ Regional Official Plan, Policy 2.2.2.12

⁷¹ Regional Official Plan, Policy 2.2.2.17 and 2.2.2.18

⁷² Regional Official Plan, Policy 2.3

⁷³ Regional Official Plan, Policy 2.3.2.3

⁷⁴ Regional Official Plan, Policy 5.1.2.2

4.6 City of Niagara Falls Official Plan, 1993

The City's current Official Plan was approved by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs on October 6, 1993. The 1993 Plan was written to guide growth to the year 2011 and a population of 83,000. The planning horizon was extended in 2014 (three years beyond the original target) to guide growth to the year 2031, with a population of 106,800 and 53,640 jobs.

According to the 2021 Census of Canada, the population of Niagara Falls was 94,415, with 44,600 having reported being in the labour market. At 7.2% population growth between 2016 and 2021, Niagara Falls is on pace to exceed that 2031 population forecast. The City has completed four urban boundary expansions since 1993, with the South Niagara Falls Hospital currently under construction and the South Niagara Falls Wastewater Treatment Plant expected to be completed by 2028. It is evident that Niagara Falls is a growing and expanding community.

From an administrative perspective, the current Official Plan has been amended over 160 times over the past 30 years. The various edits have created an Official Plan with some internal conflicts and inconsistencies, duplications, some confusion in intent of policies—and, overall, an outdated planning vision that is in need of replacement.

The current Official Plan contains a defined urban structure, shown on Schedule A-2. There is a Built-up Area, within which development should be at a higher density than what currently exists in the neighbourhood.⁷⁵ The character of existing neighbourhoods should be retained with intensification and infilling.⁷⁶ The inclusion of housing forms beyond the predominant single detached housing is to be arranged in a gradation of building heights and densities.⁷⁷

Within the Built-up Area are a number of individual Nodes and Corridors, identifies as having potential to accommodate higher density development over the long term.⁷⁸ Given the changes in both the housing market, development industry broadly, and the overall land use planning policy framework, it will be wise to revisit those elements of the urban structure to ensure that part of the City's planning framework remains current.

The Provincial and Regional Planning legislative and policy framework has been completely overhauled since 1993. How land use planning works in Ontario is entirely different than when the current City Official Plan was first adopted over thirty years ago

⁷⁵ Part 1, Section 1.10.3

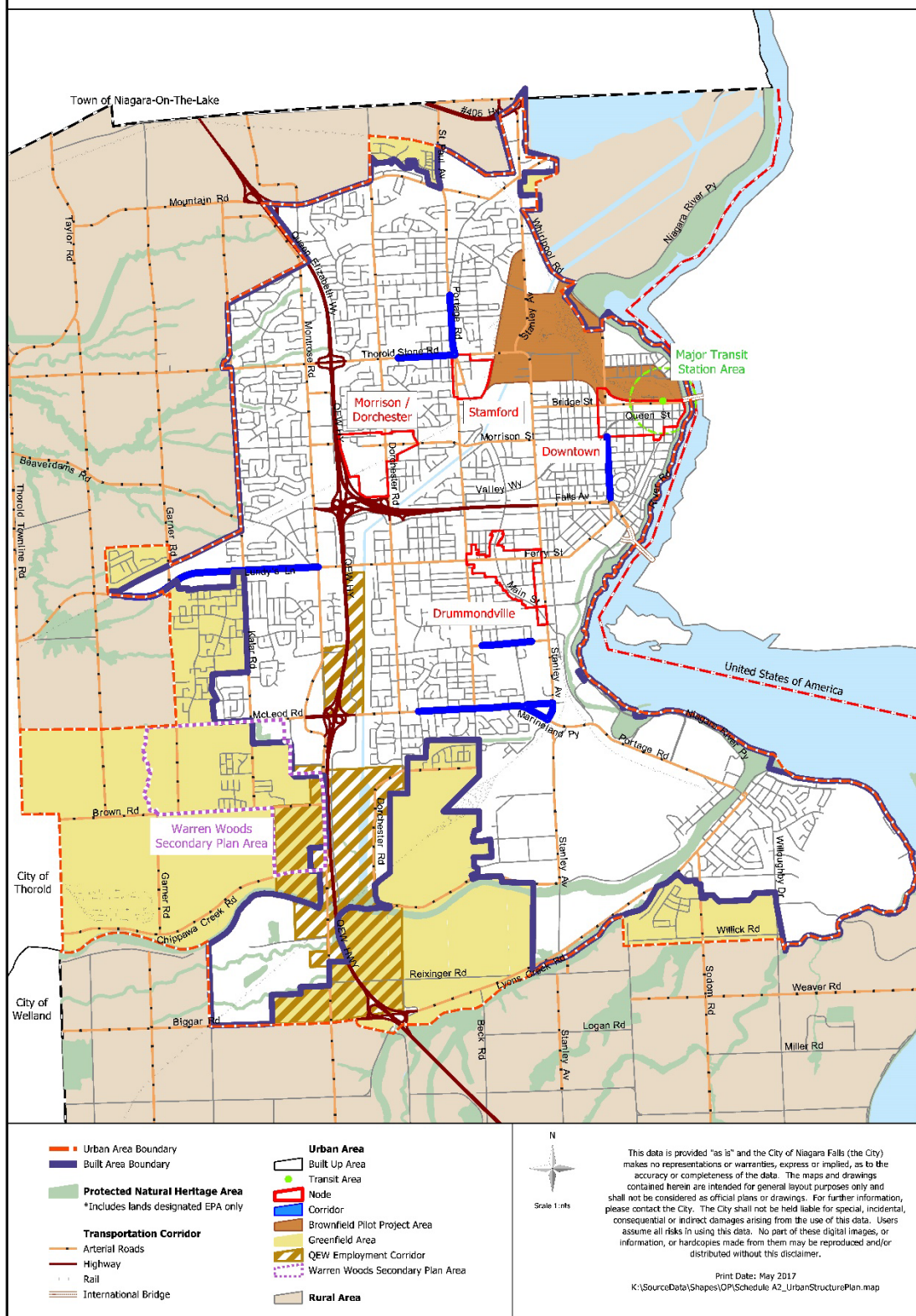
⁷⁶ Part 1, Section 1.10.1

⁷⁷ Detailed in Part 1, Section 1.10.5

⁷⁸ Part 1, Section 3.14



Schedule A2 Urban Structure Plan



- Within the Downtown Node, there are height maximums varied throughout the Node. It is also supported by a Community Improvement Plan and design policies in the Official Plan (including street system and heritage policies). This Node falls within the Transit Station Secondary Plan area, which includes some outlying low-rise residential areas intended to be stable.
- The Drummondville Node is similarly structured with height maximums throughout the Node and a Community Improvement Plan and design policies (including street system and heritage policies).
- The Stamford Node includes a height and density strategy, design policies (deeper than in the above two nodes, but without a Community Improvement Plan), and additional policies for lands in an Industrial designation to support potential for residential redevelopment in stand-alone or mixed forms.⁷⁹
- The Morrison/Dorchester Node is currently developed in a low-rise, large format retail agglomeration. The three large blocks are envisioned for long-term redevelopment as a mix of major commercial and institutional uses with residential uses at a range of densities (single- or mixed use).⁸⁰ There is encouragement for integration of parking—although redevelopment must ensure traffic and servicing requirements are addressed—and requirements for residential proposals to meet land use compatibility requirements.⁸¹
- The multiple “Corridors” (Lundy’s Lane; Thorold Stone Road; Portage Road; McLeod Road; Dunn Street; Victoria Avenue) are each subject to a range of density and height maximums (relaxed on Lundy’s Lane west of Montrose Road) are sited on arterial roads that have attributes conducive to supporting medium- and high-density residential development.⁸²

There is a Greenfield Area, largely encapsulated within secondary plan areas, with an overarching minimum density target of 53 people and jobs per “gross developable land area” (total land area net of natural heritage areas).⁸³ These lands are to be developed as “complete communities” with a range of housing types, employment and public transit.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Part 1, Section 3.16

⁸⁰ Part 1, Sections 3.17 and 3.18

⁸¹ Part 1, Section 3.20

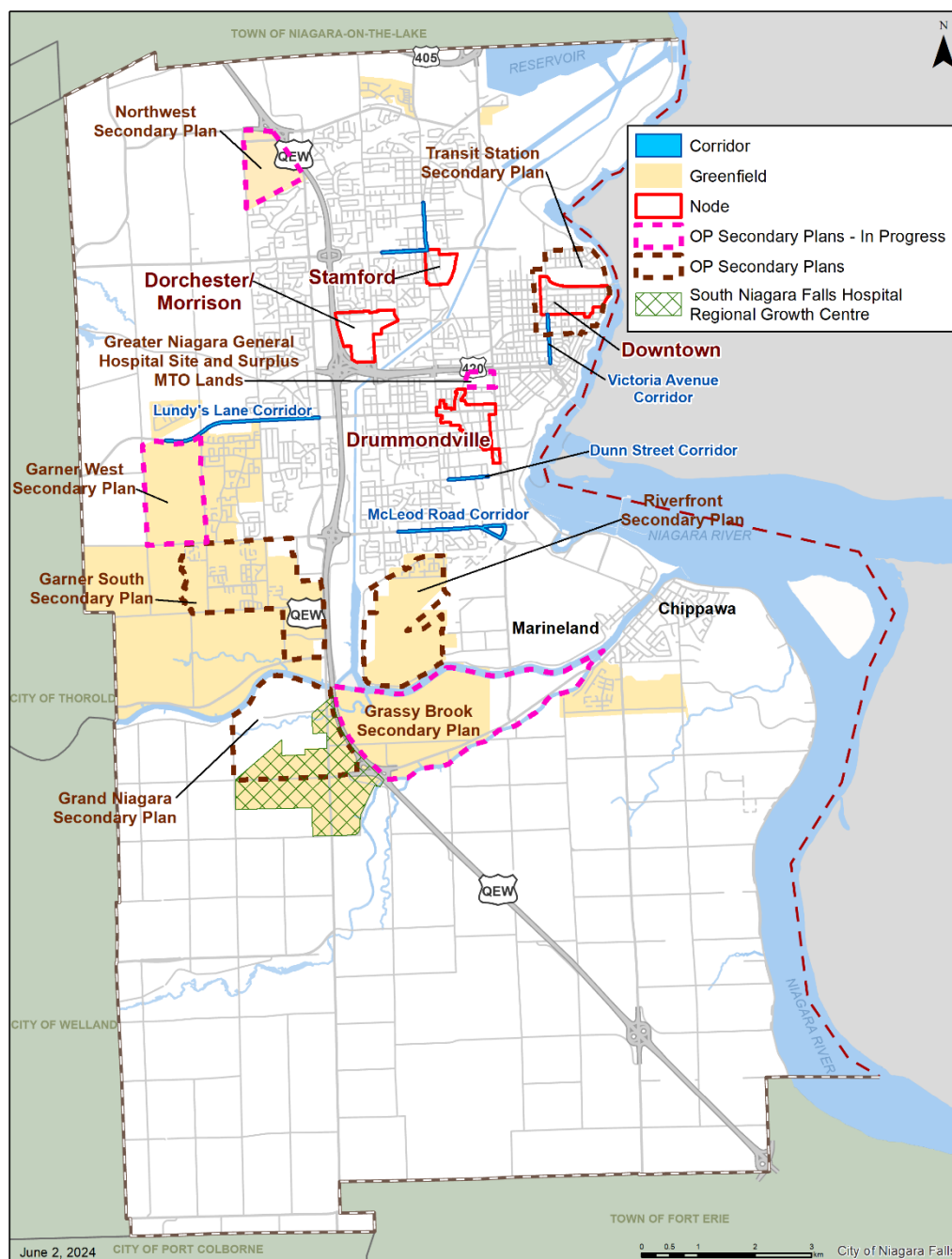
⁸² Part 1, Sections 3.5 through 3.9

⁸³ Part 2, Section 1.11.1

⁸⁴ Part 1, Section 2.8; Part 2, Section 1.11

4.7 Niagara Falls' Secondary Plans

On top of these identifiers in the current Official Plan, the City has several Secondary Plan areas—some approved, some in process, and some to be initiated—spanning the entire city and serving a variety of intents. A Secondary Plan is part of an official plan, incorporating specific policies to detail planned growth in a focused area. Niagara Falls targets the creation of complete communities within these areas.⁸⁵



⁸⁵ Referencing the project webpage for the Northwest Secondary Plan project: <https://letstalk.niagarafalls.ca/northwest-secondary-plan>

- As introduced in Section 4.6 above, the Transit Station Secondary Plan Area applies to the historic Downtown Niagara Falls and plans for a walkable, mixed use area integrated between the VIA Rail Station and the Niagara Regional Transit Hub. It forecasts additional 2,450 residents and 560 jobs above baseline figures (to 2041). The Secondary Plan contains comprehensive land use designations and development policies, including detailed design guidelines, a local transportation network with planned improvements and cross-section designs, gateways, sustainability policies—and a policy stating the Secondary Plan policies prevail over the parent Official Plan in the event of conflict.⁸⁶
- The Garner South Secondary Plan Area encompasses approximately 225 hectares of developable Greenfield land. Two small portions of the Secondary Plan Area in the northeastern quadrant are within the Built-up Area. A substantial amount of the Secondary Plan Area is natural heritage including Provincially Significant Wetlands, Warren Creek and associated wetlands and significant woodlands. It forecasts a population of up to 6,900 people in 2,700 dwelling units, supported by up to 2,000 jobs. Some development has been completed with many active construction projects, one active application (as of January 2024) and multiple properties remaining to be developed. The Secondary Plan contains comprehensive land use designations and development policies.
- The Riverfront Secondary Plan Area forecasts a population of up to 3,000 people in 1,110 dwelling units, supported by up to 2,800 jobs. Some development is now underway with one large, active application (as of January 2024). The Secondary Plan contains comprehensive designations and development policies.
- The Grand Niagara Secondary Plan Area includes lands located north of Biggar Road, south of the Welland River, east of Crowland Avenue, and west of the QEW, with a total area of 330 hectares. A substantial amount of the Secondary Plan Area is natural heritage including Provincially Significant Wetlands (PSW's) and associated wetlands and significant woodlands. It forecasts a population of up to 4,300 people in 1,380 dwelling units, supported by up to 3,600 jobs. The Secondary Plan contains comprehensive land use designations and development policies, including use-specific policies, parkland policies, secondary unit policies, a hospital campus policy, and a comprehensive natural heritage system and infrastructure plan including provision for front-ending agreements. Since the Secondary Plan's original approval, redline revised plans have been approved at much higher yields ranging between 3600 to 5400 units with the past year.

The following Secondary Plan studies have been initiated by the City, for lands identified through the Niagara Region Official Plan review as urban expansion areas. Each study is active and underway:

- The Northwest Secondary Plan Area is located west of the QEW, south of Mountain Road and east of Kalar Road. The existing residential area south of the hydro corridor represents the southerly limit. This Plan Area is just entering the first phase of the secondary planning process.

⁸⁶ Part 5, Section 2, Policy 4.15

- The Garner West Secondary Plan Area is located along the westerly built edge of the City. It is mostly bounded by Lundy's Lane (Regional Road 20) to the north, Garner Road to the east, McLeod Road along the south and Beechwood Road along the west. Like the Northwest, the Garner West Plan Area is simultaneously getting underway.
- The Grassy Brook Secondary Plan Area is located east of the QEW, boarded by the Welland River to the north and Lyon's Creek to the south. It is approximately 495 hectares in area. The study is well underway.

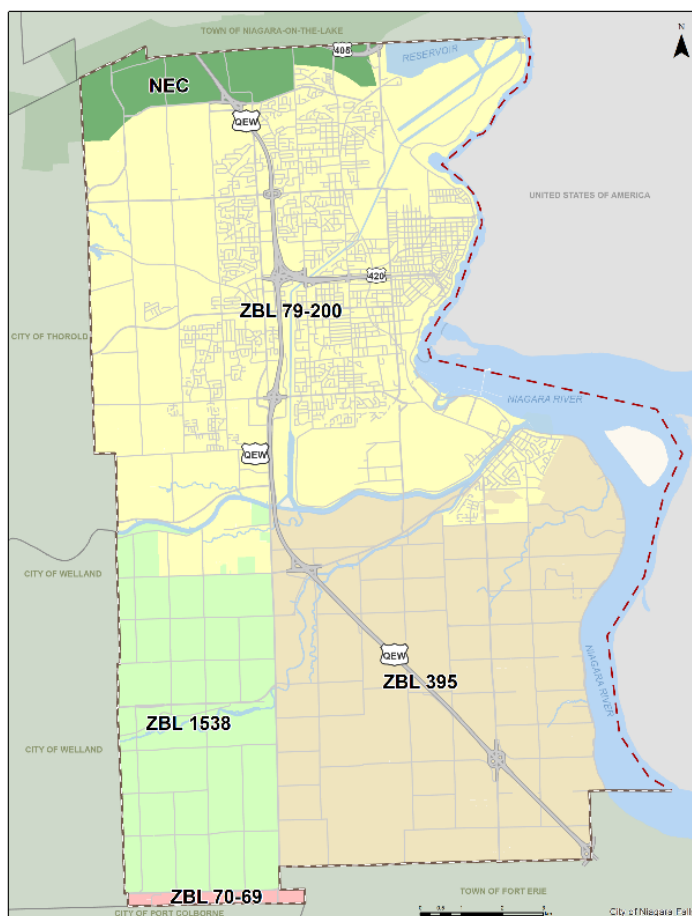
There is also one identified "Strategic growth area", locations planned for major public service facilities, major institutional uses, high density and mixed-use development, major office uses, major commercial uses and major recreational uses in a compact urban form. The South Niagara Falls Hospital Regional Growth Centre is to be planned to accommodate 100 people and jobs per hectare by 2051 and is to be planned through a future secondary plan or equivalent process.⁸⁷

4.8 Zoning in the City of Niagara Falls

A Zoning By-law is the primary tool that the City uses to regulate land use. The Zoning By-law establishes different categories of land use (zones), each having its own set of permitted uses and the regulations that apply to the zone (such as setbacks from property lines, or parking requirements).

The City of Niagara Falls has four Zoning By-laws that apply to various areas of the City:

1. Chippawa and the lands north of the Welland River are regulated by Zoning By-law No. 79-200 (originally passed in 1979).
2. The portion of the City previously part of Willoughby Township is regulated by Zoning By-law No. 395 (originally passed in 1966).
3. The former area of Crowland Township is regulated by Zoning



Four Zoning By-laws apply in Niagara Falls

⁸⁷ Regional Official Plan, Policies 2.2.2.11 through 2.2.2.13

By-law No. 1538 (originally passed in 1958)

4. The Humberstone area is regulated by Zoning By-law No. 70-69 (originally passed in 1970).

The Official Plan is given a more legal framework through a Zoning By-law. Zoning provides very specific regulations and provisions that define what, and where development is to occur, and how it is to be configured (height and massing) on any given property—implementing the goals, vision and policies of the official plan by providing a framework for regulatory analysis of development projects.

Policy that can be implemented as a direct regulation, especially through zoning, increases the certainty and effectiveness of Official Plan policy

4.9 Niagara Falls Strategic Plan 2023-2027

The Niagara Falls Strategic Plan 2023-2027 was approved by Council in October 2023 and provides Council’s road map for corporate priorities during its term. It lays out three strategic pillars to guide its goals and actions: Sustainability, Customer Service, and Economic Diversification and Growth.

Within the “Sustainability” Pillar, Council is committed to ensuring that long-term growth is financially, socially and environmentally sustainable. There are multiple Actions identified with implications on official plan policy:

Financial Sustainability	Environmental Sustainability	Social Sustainability
- The preparation of a 10-year capital plan - Asset management plan - Modernization of parking programs	- Implementation of the Climate Change Adaptation Plan - Infrastructure Servicing Master Plan - Strategic Urban Forest Management Plan, and create new woodland restoration and preservation policies - Review of active transportation opportunities	- Park Street affordable housing development - Affordable rental housing CIP - Housing incentive program review - Vacant building by-law - Accessory Dwelling Unit Plan

These actions mirror those included in other policy and strategy documents and affirm Council’s support for long-term sustainable urban growth management, as well as an urgent response to the City’s housing shortage.

4.10 Niagara Region Water and Wastewater Master Servicing Plan Update (2021 – 2023)

Niagara Region's 2021 Master Servicing Plan Update (MSPU) has completed a review, evaluation and development of growth-related water and wastewater servicing strategies, with consideration of sustainability requirements for the existing infrastructure, for all servicing within the urban areas of the Region. The 2021 MSPU uses updated population and employment growth forecasts based on a 2051 planning horizon, and accounts for changes in regulatory and legislative requirements. The 2021 MSPU addresses all Regional infrastructure within the urban areas for all Local Municipalities including the City of Niagara Falls.

The 2021 MSPU builds on previous work undertaken as part of the 2016 Master Servicing Plan and previous long term infrastructure planning studies. The 2021 MSPU is a critical component in the Region's planning for growth and will provide the framework and vision for the water and wastewater servicing needs for the lake-based service areas of the Region to year 2051, along with consideration for post-2051 growth. Furthermore, the next update will have consideration for the more recent forecasting activity at the City level, in relation to all that has occurred legislatively and otherwise since last approved, that have influenced the forecasts, as both the Region and the City work towards accommodating the increase.

The 2021 MSPU included:

- Review of planning forecasts to 2051 and determine the impacts on servicing needs for the Region's lake-based water and wastewater infrastructure.
- Evaluation of the ability of existing and planned water and wastewater infrastructure to efficiently and effectively service the Region's existing users and anticipated growth.
- Addressing key servicing considerations as part of the development and evaluation of water and wastewater servicing strategies including.
 - a. Level of service to existing users and approved growth.
 - b. Operational flexibility and system security and reliability.
 - c. Mitigation of impacts to natural, social, and economic environments.
 - d. Opportunity to meet policy statements, regulations and technical criteria.
 - e. Opportunity to optimize existing infrastructure and servicing strategies.
 - f. Ensuring the strategies are cost effective.
- Development of sustainable servicing solutions with lifecycle considerations.
- Updating of the capital program based on recent construction information, industry trends and best management practices.
- Utilization of the updated water and wastewater hydraulic models for the analysis of servicing alternatives.
- Determination of conceptual level water and wastewater servicing strategies, with corresponding capital programs,

implementation plans based on the projected growth, and flexibility to be

adjusted as growth is realized in the future.

Through the 2021 update of the Master Servicing Plan, the Region has highlighted the need to integrate the MSPU growth-related program with the Region's sustainability program intended to address the condition and performance of the existing infrastructure. The MSPU servicing strategies are based on the need to maintain appropriate levels of service throughout the systems and acknowledges that investment will be needed to support operations, maintenance, staff, and other resources related to maintaining the existing systems and facilities in a state of good repair.

4.11 City of Niagara Falls Master Servicing Plan and Wet Weather Management Strategy, 2022 – Ongoing

The City of Niagara Falls is currently developing the Water and Wastewater Master Servicing Plan and Wet Weather Management Strategy, to be completed as an Approach 2 Master Plan Class Environmental Assessment focusing on water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure. As part of the project, The City is developing a detailed system inventory and capacity assessment to clearly identify the existing condition, State of Good Repair, risk and capacity of the City's existing water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure to meet level of service objectives and regulatory requirements (including MECP's requirements related to maintenance, upgrade and separation of the City's existing combined (sanitary and storm) sewer system. The project includes a comprehensive review of existing and anticipated regulatory frameworks, existing system performance, and the City's existing financial constraints/tolerability to develop appropriate system level of service criteria, servicing policies and principles and performance priorities which will then be utilized to identify system needs and evaluate upgrade recommendations.

City Planning and Engineering staff have commenced work to clearly understand existing and future system demands and flows with consideration for development interest, infrastructure upgrade triggers and anticipated timing and phasing of growth. This project will be complimented by work to incorporate asset condition and life cycle needs of existing infrastructure and thorough understanding of the City's systems opportunities and constraints to upgrade water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure.

4.12 Housing Strategies

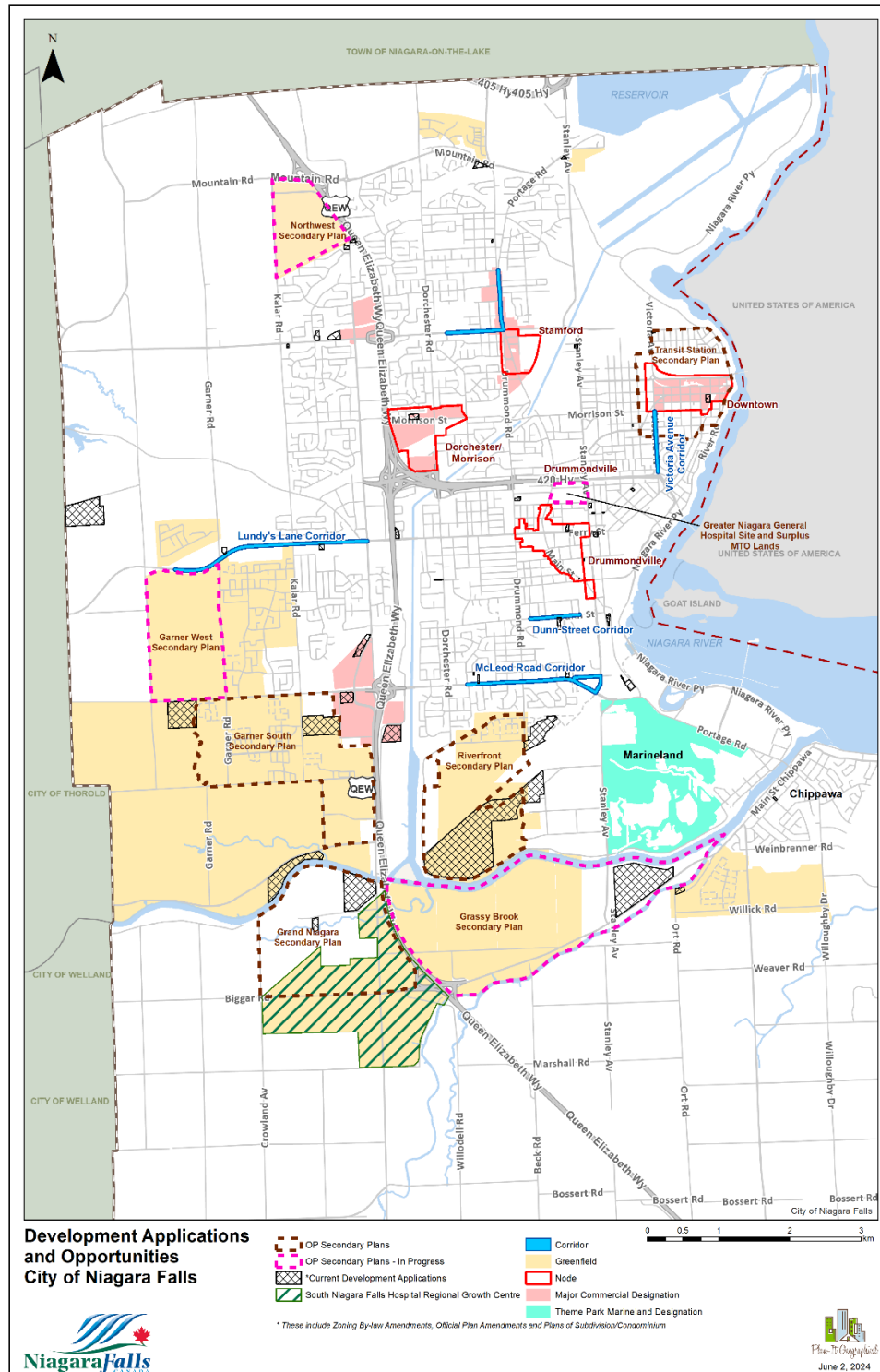
The City has adopted a housing pledge to build 8,000 homes by 2031. The City also has the following additional housing strategies:

- The Niagara Region Affordable Housing Strategy aims to create new affordable housing in the Region. The strategy includes maintaining existing community housing stock, developing new community housing, supporting new housing builds, collaborating with local municipalities, and innovation.

- The Niagara Region Housing and Homeless Action Plan primarily addresses homelessness and social housing but includes a goal to increase housing options and opportunities for low- and medium-income households.
- The City of Niagara Falls Housing Directions Study laid out the City of Niagara Falls's approach for addressing the housing affordability crisis in the City. It had two parts, starting with a Housing Needs and Support Report followed by the Housing Strategy, which was adopted by City Council in March 2022. The Housing Strategy lays out six themes:
 - Establish affordable housing target (of 40%)
 - Promote a greater diversity, density, and forms of housing
 - Ensure a healthy supply of rental units
 - Increase public education and provide advocacy for partnerships
 - Provide a variety of financial incentives to promote and facilitate the development of affordable and rental housing
 - Monitor and report on progress

4.13 Active Development Applications (January 2024)

Like many Niagara Region municipalities, Niagara Falls has a historically high number of active development applications. Over 50 sites are subject to a major development application (defined here as including official plan amendments, zoning by-law amendments, draft plans of subdivision or condominium, or combinations thereof). There are applications scattered across the City, although the majority of those are located in one of the City's currently identified areas targeted for growth. The following figure was built using data current to January 2024.



Recent and active development activity is an important indicator to validate previous decisions and directions around where growth is to occur. There are nodes with active applications and development activity, but other nodes where there are no applications. There are also some applications clustered outside of traditional nodes that might signal areas to consider focusing intensification policies.

5

Next Steps

The six Discussion Papers have been prepared as a basis for starting the process of public engagement and engaging stakeholder feedback on the path forward for Our Niagara Falls Plan. These papers are not intended to answer any questions—quite the opposite. The hope and goal for these papers is to stimulate discussion and generate ideas to consider when preparing the new Official Plan.

The project team will be preparing a “What We Heard” engagement summary report that captured the feedback received and discussion generated by this report.

The next product in this exercise is the Policy Options Report. Research generated by the project team plus the above public feedback will inform a deeper discussion on several issue areas that an official plan generally governs. The project team will be back later this year to engage on these questions and obtain more ideas to shape Our Niagara Falls Plan itself.