



Possibility grows here.

# WHAT IS SMART GROWTH?

COORDINATED LAND-USE PLANNING REVIEW: DENSITY AND INTENSIFICATION 101

## Getting Smart About Growing Smart: How Growing Smart Can Improve Your Community and Your Quality of Life.

“Smart Growth”, “intensification”, “density”, and “compact development” are some terms that turn up often in discussions about growth in and around the world’s major urban centres.

### **But what do these terms really mean? And why does it matter?**

In general, “smart growth” refers to mixed-use development that combines housing, retail, and commercial uses to create communities that are affordable, walkable, transit-friendly, and low-carbon. These sorts of benefits increase when you have more people and jobs/hectare. Compact communities are ideal for all stages of life and cultivate healthier, happier citizens while paying attention to resource needs for the future.

In addition to supporting vibrant neighbourhoods where families and individuals can live, work, and play, this approach to development maximizes the efficient use of land and tax dollars and minimizes the loss of irreplaceable farmland and natural areas. Since the creation of Ontario’s Greenbelt Plan in 2005 and Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe in 2006, the Province has been moving towards a smart growth model.

Smart Growth is often contrasted with urban sprawl — a model characterized by car-centered and low-density development. Smart Growth aims to fix many of the economic, social, and environmental problems created by decades of sprawl in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. We can see the problems created or exacerbated by sprawl every day in the news – economy crippling traffic congestion, mental and physical health issues, such as childhood obesity, and increasing carbon emissions resulting from the inefficient movement of goods and people.



Complete compact communities create safe spaces to live, work, and play - bringing life and personality to our regions’ cities and towns.

**“AS WE GROW, WE NEED TO GROW SMARTER. WE CAN’T KEEP SPRAWLING OVER OUR COUNTRYSIDE, DESTROYING FARMLAND AND FORESTS AND CLOGGING OUR HIGHWAYS.”**

Environmental Defence

## In Practice, Smart Growth Means Many Different Things:

### Smart Growth means complete communities

The **Growth Plan** directs growth to existing settlement areas in order to create more compact, complete communities, whether in urban or rural settings. The Growth Plan defines complete communities as those that “are well-designed, offer transportation choices, accommodate people at all stages of life, and have the right mix of housing, a good range of jobs, and easy access to stores and services to meet daily needs.”

### Smart Growth means better transit

Smart Growth results in housing and employment densities that support public transit, i.e. ensuring sufficient numbers of users to make transit financially viable. Compact development also supports the flow of goods and people throughout a region by reducing the number of trips made by car. Sprawling development is car-reliant, leading to clogged highways, higher living costs, and reduced quality-of-life, including less time available to spend with family members. The Toronto Board of Trade estimates traffic congestion costs our economy \$6 billion a year!

### Smart Growth means more affordable infrastructure

Smart Growth encourages the **intensification of already built-up areas**. This saves taxpayers millions in unnecessary infrastructure costs. Servicing new low-density development with everything from pipes, to roads, to schools is extremely expensive. Using existing infrastructure and building more compactly, frees up millions for municipalities to invest in upgrades and other services like community centres that provide citizens of all income levels opportunities to lead healthy, active lifestyles, which in turn can lower the cost burden on the health care system.

### Smart Growth means efficient land-use

Smart Growth means protecting farmland, forests, and watersheds that in turn provide us with environmental, health, and economic benefits. Sprawling development will pave over natural and agricultural assets that give us clean water and a secure supply of local food.

### Smart Growth means tackling climate change

Smart growth reduces carbon emissions from transportation of people and goods, which is the fastest growing source of emissions in Ontario. It also prevents emissions from the large stores of carbon that are locked in to the land and trees of the Greenbelt’s agricultural and natural heritage systems. Once these systems are paved over the carbon is released into the atmosphere and the storage potential is lost forever.



Pickering's Nautical Village, a walkable and scenic neighbourhood along the city's waterfront, has become a destination for residents and tourists alike.

**“IF WE CONTINUE TO CONSUME LAND FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT AT THE RATE WE HAVE BEEN FOR THE PAST THREE DECADES, WE WILL JEOPARDIZE THE FINANCIAL, SOCIAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS THAT MAKE THE REGION SO ATTRACTIVE TO NEW RESIDENTS AND NEW ECONOMIC GROWTH.**

**DEVELOPMENT WILL CONSUME 1,000 SQ KM OF PRIMARILY AGRICULTURAL LAND BY 2031, AN AREA TWICE THE SIZE OF TORONTO”**

Government of Ontario,  
A Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe:  
Discussion Paper, Summer 2004. P.5.

**“WE CAN BUILD WALKABLE, TRANSIT - FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES THAT ARE BETTER FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH, AND WALLETS.”**

Environmental Defence

## Smart Growth: Myths & Facts

**Myth:** Higher density means only 40-story condominiums and the loss of rural character.

**Fact:** Smart Growth is not about applying a “one-size-fits-all” model to urban development. In fact, it’s the opposite. It’s about moving away from the sprawling subdivision model of development, towards communities characterized by a mix of land uses and housing options.

Smart Growth developments could include single-family homes on smaller lots, row and semi-detached housing, walk-ups and low-rise apartments or a mix of all of these. Internationally and here at home, there are great ideas and options that maintain the existing character of a community.

**Myth:** Intensification means that rural areas will be forced to over-build and will lose their distinctiveness.

**Fact:** The density targets in the Growth Plan are conservative enough to allow smaller municipalities and rural areas to implement infill development and intensification in ways that maintain rural character and are context-appropriate<sup>1</sup>.

**Myth:** Ontarians want more low-density houses with big lots and multi-car parking.

**Fact:** A lot of this housing already exists. However, for many people preferences have changed. The Pembina Institute and RBC found that four out of five **GTA** residents would prefer to live in ‘location efficient’ neighbourhoods, close to amenities and transit<sup>2</sup>.

**Myth:** A protected Greenbelt means we won’t have enough land to accommodate population growth.

**Fact:** There is no shortage of land. Far from it.

Based on municipal projections, 81 per cent of the “greenfield” land that is available for development will still be unused by 2031.

There are more than 1,500 square kilometres of undeveloped land in the Greater Golden Horseshoe – enough land to build five more Mississaugas, or 11 more Oakvilles, without bumping up against the Greenbelt<sup>3</sup>.

**Myth:** The Greenbelt contributes to rising housing prices.

**Fact:** Rising cost of land and housing is a trend driven by a strong economy, low interest rates, and favourable mortgage insurance rules.

Studies have shown that in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, housing costs are linked directly to desirability and demand<sup>4</sup>. Housing prices in transit accessible and **liveable** communities are higher because there is a higher demand for these types of dwellings. There’s no shortage of housing – **there’s a shortage of transit accessible, complete communities** – exactly what smarter growth helps to solve.

**Myth:** Low density development is needed to pay for municipal services

**Fact:** Smart Growth is good for municipal finances.

Smart Growth reduces infrastructure and service costs (new roads, water and sewer pipes) for new development, allowing municipalities to achieve a better balance between tax revenues and service costs. Smart Growth contributes to lower taxes by reducing the health costs of sprawl, and it directly benefits residents who can lower their transport costs.

<sup>1</sup> Tomalty, Ray, and Bartek Komorowski. *Inside and Out: Sustaining Ontario’s Greenbelt*. Toronto: Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, 2011. Series, RBC-Pembina Location Matters. “Priced Out: Understanding the factors affecting home prices in the GTA.” (2013). Jennifer Keesmaat Cherise Burda. “Greenbelt makes GTA more, not less, livable.” Toronto Star. March 17, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Series, RBC-Pembina Location Matters. “Priced Out: Understanding the factors affecting home prices in the GTA.” (2013).

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Keesmaat Cherise Burda. “Greenbelt makes GTA more, not less, livable.” Toronto Star. March 17, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Series, RBC-Pembina Location Matters. “Priced Out: Understanding the factors affecting home prices in the GTA.” (2013).

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## Believe in Smart Growth and a Protected Greenbelt?

The province is currently seeking input on their proposed changes to the Greenbelt and Growth Plans until September 30, 2016.

Highlights from the governments proposed changes include:

- **A proposal to grow the Greenbelt** to include 21 urban river valleys and seven coastal wetlands, bringing the Greenbelt into cities and towns with over 6 million residents! However, **the widely supported initiative to expand the Greenbelt and protect a 'Bluebelt' of vulnerable water resources was left out of the amendments.**
- **Big changes to the Growth Plan should help curb urban sprawl and encourage the development of compact, livable communities**, by directing 50% more growth to existing urban areas, and increasing density targets for projects on undeveloped green space from 50 to 80 people and jobs per hectare.
- **Stronger alignment in the Growth Plan between transit planning and growth centres** should make better use of the \$31 billion in provincial transit spending over the coming decade and help us meet our ambitious climate change goals.
- **The 5,500 Greenbelt farms will also benefit from the proposed changes**, which enable farmers to be entrepreneurial by placing fewer restrictions on what they can do or build on their farms. **The Growth Plan will also identify and protect an agricultural system for the entire Greater Golden Horseshoe**, which builds on the Greenbelt to ensure that the \$11 billion industry continues to grow and provide us with healthy, fresh local food.

## Join Us In Showing Your Support for the Commitment to Curb Urban Sprawl and to Call on the Province to Move Quickly and Decisively to Grow the Greenbelt Further to Protect Vital Source and Drinking Water Resources.

Here's how to get involved:

### 1) Get informed

Visit our website for updates and resources related to the Coordinated Land Use Planning Review and province's proposed changes at [www.greenbelt.ca](http://www.greenbelt.ca)

### 2) Join the #GrowourGB movement

A grassroots coalition of more than 100 community groups have joined forces to advocate for quick and decisive action by government to grow the Greenbelt to protect vital source and drinking water resources not included in the proposed changes.

### 3) Share your voice!

Attend one of the province's public open houses in May and June 2016 or submit a comment online through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing website or through the Environmental Registry before September 30, 2016