



# A Simply Grand *Plan*

As the County of Brant continues to change and grow, the time has come to develop a new Official Plan. *This plan belongs to all of us.*

## How We Green

### OVERVIEW DOCUMENT



# How We Green

## Introduction and Context

The County of Brant has initiated an update to its Official Plan. An Official Plan is a document that outlines a municipality’s general land use planning policies in ways that plan for future growth. The process of preparing a new Official Plan requires a Municipal Comprehensive Review to ensure the Official Plan aligns with provincial land-use planning documents. The County of Brant Official Plan must follow the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2019, reflect policy direction from the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020 and incorporate the County’s strategic initiatives, all to create an Official Plan that best suits the County of Brant. To plan for the future, the County will seek guidance from the Province of Ontario and input from the community and key stakeholders, to help create updated policy directions that will help guide our new Official Plan. One of the ways to begin discussions and receive valuable feedback is through the presentation of themed discussion papers. These papers are intended to provide background information on specific topics to help the discussion of important issues and objectives for growth management and land use. Community support is essential to creating and implementing an Official Plan that best reflects a community’s goals.

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# Executive Summary

Sustainability, resilience and comprehensive planning are an important part of ensuring the land use policies and objectives of the County of Brant are the best fit for climate change mitigation. Through our Municipal Comprehensive Review process and the creation of a new Official Plan, the County of Brant has an opportunity to update long-term visions and planning framework that ensure our built and natural environments are protected against the impacts of climate change. Our growth and development must provide smart solutions and opportunities that adapt to the needs of the County of Brant to protect and reduce our negative impacts on the environment.

**What we need is an Official Plan which sets out policies that maintain the safety and wellbeing of our residents**, while protecting our air, land and water. Through land use policies that help our community adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change, we can build on our identity as a charming, prosperous, and inclusive place to live, work and play<sup>i</sup>, and become a front-runner in responsible climate change adaptation. With an analysis of the current policies in place, the guiding policies of the *Growth Plan* and *Provincial Policy Statement*, among other guidelines provided by the Province of Ontario, this informative starting point will help guide discussions about planning for the future of the County of Brant.

Key discussion items will encourage community feedback on fundamental opportunities and challenges that the County of Brant may face as we continue to develop green energy opportunities, address litter and reduce waste, and support our residents and businesses to continue doing their share to reduce the impacts of climate change.

# Key Discussion Items

## Climate Change and Resilience

In November 2019, the County confirmed its commitment to combat climate change by joining many municipalities in Ontario to declare a climate emergency. The County recognizes that impacts of a changing climate result in more intense storms and volatility of weather patterns, in which there is a greater risk to property and life due to increased natural hazards such as flooding. With a goal of being carbon neutral by 2050, The new Official Plan will form an important part of the County's plan to combat climate change. The County can build on current initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen our resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Greenhouse gas emissions contribute to climate change through increased global temperatures, melting of glaciers and rising sea levels. Impacts of a changing climate are notable throughout the world, as communities continue to face challenges due to changing weather patterns. Climate change can have various direct and indirect impacts on the health of residents due to extreme heat, intense storms, floods, ice storms, air pollution, and in vector-borne and zoonosis diseases. Health inequities and those with existing vulnerabilities are at more risk for suffering the consequences of climate change. The impacts of climate change often pose a serious risk to life and property.

Homes, businesses and farms located near rivers and valleys like the Grand River are particularly vulnerable to hazards. Intense storms that result in large volumes of precipitation in a short amount of time increase the chances of flooding, as land is unable to absorb water in a short amount of time. Rain falling during the winter when the ground is frozen and unable to absorb water has become more frequent resulting in increased emergency flood warnings throughout the year.

Damages to property and infrastructure caused by climate change are extensive and continue to increase. Since 2009 insured losses in Canada due to severe weather events has averaged \$1.4 billion per year. In 2013, a single flood in Toronto that resulted in 126 mm of rainfall in a few hours caused \$1 billion in insured damages. The 1998 ice storm in Ontario and Quebec resulted in \$2.2 billion in insured losses. This does not account for uninsured costs from governments, residents and businesses.<sup>ii</sup>

Climate change is not a future threat: its impacts can already be seen throughout the County of Brant and beyond. For example, we have seen several notable flood events in the last few years. Unexpected rainfall in June 2017 caused significant flooding in several Grand River watershed communities. Extreme flooding from the Grand River in February of 2018 directly impacted more than 5,000 residents in the City of Brantford and infrastructure along the

Grand River. An independent review of the 2019 flood events in Ontario recommends several ways to plan for flooding hazards and other hazardous lands<sup>iii</sup>. Ensuring a proactive approach to the impacts that our natural environment can have on our built-up areas will help manage climate change impacts as temperatures rise and extreme rainfall becomes more common.

Even in areas away from river systems, extreme weather can cause damage to buildings and critical infrastructure such as roads and bridges. Paved surfaces, sewer systems and stormwater systems are not able to absorb rain created from intense storms. When water is not properly drained, properties and transportation systems may become flooded and damaged. People and vehicles may not have a way to safely enter and exit areas during times of an emergency.

**Creating policies, objectives and guidelines that encourage development in ways that are resilient to natural events like extreme rainfall or ice build-up are essential to ensuring a safe and complete community for the residents of the County of Brant.** Our new Official Plan will address our commitment to combat climate change and can help the County further become a leader in municipal climate change resilience.

# Renewable Energy

The County of Brant is committed to building a sustainable, carbon neutral municipality by 2050 and has taken measurable steps towards accomplishing this goal. Renewable energy generation and conservation initiatives have been incorporated into municipal undertakings and best practices including solar installations, LED lighting retrofits, sustainable building designs and long-term energy planning.

In an effort to encourage members of the community to also participate in reducing their carbon footprint, the municipality has introduced items like reduced permit fees for solar installations and education and facilitation of renewable energy and conservation initiatives through Brant Renewable Energy, a division of the County of Brant's municipal corporation.

The County has also developed strategic partnerships in renewable energy projects with Six Nations, local businesses and the Sustainability Brant Community Energy Co-operative; a local renewable energy cooperative which provides ownership and investment opportunities for residents of Brant and surrounding communities. Combined, this portfolio of County initiated solar generates enough clean energy to provide more than 400 local homes with their total electricity supply.

The Council of the County of Brant and staff are committed to ensuring that decisions made today contribute towards a carbon neutral environment for future generations to live, work, play and thrive in Brant.

## Public Green Spaces

Green spaces, including parkland, open space and trails, make up an important system in any community. With the growth of urban areas, many people have become detached from their natural environment. The County of Brant is rich in valuable green space that spreads widely within the County limits and is connected to many other green spaces outside of our boundaries. Creating policies that facilitate the creation of public green spaces and encourage connectivity has several benefits. Planning and providing for a full range and equitable distribution of publicly accessible natural settings for recreation, linkages and water-based resources is a key factor when promoting a healthy and active County of Brant. Public spaces should foster social interaction, facilitate active transportation and recreation opportunities, and provide the public with safe spaces to enjoy the County's rich natural features.

Public green spaces should be coordinated and connected through a system planning approach. A public green space system can be used to encourage sustainable measures such as urban agriculture, rooftop gardens, communal courtyards, public parks and connections for modes of active transportation such as walking and biking. It can encourage equitable and safe access to natural features, such as rivers and wetlands, by preserving the features and using spaces to educate the public on natural resilience to climate change. Development in settlement areas should prioritize the creation of public green spaces, acquired by the County to make them accessible to more residents of the County of Brant. The Barker's Bush land acquisition on the Nith Peninsula in Paris is an example of environmental lands acquired by the County. An area comprising about 140 acres will be protected as a system of parks, trails, and forests along the Nith River.

The impacts of climate change present a more urgent need to implement policies that focus on resilience, greenspace protection and renewable energy. In some cases, homes and businesses were historically built in flood prone areas near rivers. We must be proactive in our approach to these historic situations, as well as protecting new development from these risks.

Several initiatives are already under way that will help the County improve our public green spaces and resilience to climate change. The Paris Flood Risk Mitigation Study will reduce risks by improving flood control works in the form of dikes and retaining walls. The Downtown Master Plan outlines a plan to create a resilient downtown area using natural beauty in the form of gardens, trees and green buildings to absorb water where it falls. The County has also recently partnered with Equal Grounds Community Gardens in a pilot project to engage residents in the County to grow gardens on their property. Free seeds, plants and training are provided.

The opportunities abound to create vibrant public green spaces, as well as encourage the greening of private properties in the County of Brant. The new Official Plan will improve on policies, objectives and initiatives for green spaces in ways that provide many opportunities for County of Brant residents to benefit from these spaces.

## Engage with Us

With policies in place to further the County of Brant's leadership in green energy and climate change initiatives, the County's commitments to a sustainable and green future will continue as the County continues to grow and develop. The policies and objectives of the new Official Plan will help improve the resilience of the County of Brant to the impacts of climate change, as well as best meet the objectives of the Provincial land use planning framework.

Engagement and community support are essential to creating and implementing effective policy and implementation that reflects a community. Through the authority given to the Council of the County of Brant by *the Planning Act* and other Provincial legislation, there are tools to create a comprehensive approach to resilient communities and infrastructure.

Creating a comprehensive Official Plan is important in laying the framework to best move Brant towards carbon neutrality by 2050. With the creation of a new Official Plan and the update to the County of Brant land-use policies and implementation tools, re-evaluating our approach to how we green is especially important as the County of Brant continues to grow.

Help us **create policy directions** for the County of Brant as we consider the following:

- What initiatives or ideas do you have to make the County more resilient to climate change? What about your neighbourhood?
- How can the County of Brant work to make its important rivers and water resources available for benefits like recreation and education opportunities, while protecting our residents from the potential negative impacts of flooding?
- If you could plan the perfect public green space, what would it offer?
- Should that County of Brant offer incentives for new developments to promote carbon-neutrality and other green initiatives?

# References

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<sup>i</sup> The County of Brant Strategic Plan (2019)

<sup>ii</sup> Facts of Property and Casualty Insurance Industry in Canada, Insurance Bureau of Canada (2019)

<sup>iii</sup> An Independent Review of the 2019 Flood Events in Ontario, Ontario's Special Advisor on Flooding Report to Government, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (2019)