

Grand River Conservation Authority

Report number: GM-09-24-74

Date: September 27, 2024

To: General Membership of the Grand River Conservation Authority

Subject: ERO Posting 019-8462 Decision - Updated Provincial Planning Statement

Recommendation:

THAT Report Number GM-09-24-74 ERO Posting 019-8462 Decision - Updated Provincial Planning Statement be received as information.

Summary:

On August 20, 2024, following public consultation on the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO), the province released the final version of the updated Provincial Planning Statement, which will come into effect on October 20, 2024. This document will replace the current Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The goal of the new document is to support growth by reducing and streamlining planning rules, simplifying development approvals, and removing duplication in the planning process.

Through Reports GM-04-24-33 and GM-05-24-24, GRCA submitted comments on previous ERO postings to the province requesting:

That the province includes a requirement for watershed/subwatershed planning to support all settlement area boundary expansions, secondary planning and other large-scale planning projects (i.e., planning for potable water, stormwater, and wastewater systems).

The new PPS does not include a specific policy that requires watershed/subwatershed planning to support all large-scale planning projects and initiatives. However, large and fast-growing municipalities are required to, and others encouraged to undertake watershed/subwatershed planning for planning for sewage, water services and stormwater, water quantity and quality.

Report:

On April 12, 2024, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) released an updated proposed PPS on the ERO (ERO Posting 019-8462) titled "Review of proposed policies for a new provincial planning policy instrument". The posting incorporated feedback received through previous consultations completed in spring 2023 and outlined the province's plan to integrate the PPS and A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe into a single province-wide land use planning policy document.

The GRCA provided comments during the initial consultation in 2023 as outlined in Report GM-05-23-43. Our comments focused on several items such as recognizing the importance of natural heritage and water resource features (i.e., wetlands and watercourses) and systems, clarifying the roles of municipalities and conservation authorities in the identification and management of natural hazards, and requiring watershed/subwatershed planning for large-scale planning initiatives such as settlement area boundary expansions and secondary plans.

In the April 2024 version, as noted in GM-05-24-24, GRCA's comments on natural heritage and the clarification of roles in natural hazard management were generally addressed. However, the past recommendation to require watershed/subwatershed planning for large-scale planning initiatives such as secondary plans and settlement area boundary expansions was not incorporated.

On August 20, 2024, the final version of the Provincial Planning Statement was released and takes effect on October 20, 2024. The document includes some changes which are in line with GRCA's past recommendations such as a requirement to recognize natural heritage and water resource systems and features. However, the recommendation that watershed/subwatershed planning be required for large-scale development planning such as settlement area boundary expansions was not incorporated.

At a high level, the new PPS recognizes the importance of identifying and sustaining water resource systems and minimizing impacts. It requires municipalities to consider cumulative impacts of stormwater from development on a watershed scale (Policy 3.6.8g). For integrated and long-term planning, municipalities must use the watershed as the scale for protecting, improving or restoring the quality and quantity of water (Policy 4.2.1a).

Large and fast-growing municipalities (as identified in Schedule 1 of the document) are required to, and others encouraged to undertake watershed planning to inform planning for sewage and water services and stormwater management, including low impact development, and the protection, improvement or restoration of the quality and quantity of water (Policy 4.2.3).

All municipalities undertaking watershed planning are encouraged to collaborate with conservation authorities (Policy 4.2.5) and the upper-tier municipality (Policy 4.2.4) where applicable.

As noted above, the recommendation to require watershed/subwatershed planning for new settlement areas or settlement area boundary expansions was not incorporated in the new PPS. Municipal comprehensive reviews of official plans are no longer required. As such, municipalities can now consider new settlement areas or settlement area boundary expansions at any time and the tests for considering settlement area expansion are less stringent than before. Therefore, it will be particularly important for watershed municipalities to consider the value of subwatershed planning in planning for future growth.

Subwatershed planning is an important tool used to identify the most appropriate areas for new growth, including assessing alternative areas that avoid water resource and natural heritage systems as well as natural hazard areas that may be unsafe for development. This proactive approach to planning ultimately streamlines the development review process when Planning Act applications are submitted to municipalities. The result is a more seamless and less costly development application review process for applicants, municipalities and commenting agencies.

GRCA staff will continue to assist our watershed municipalities in recognizing the importance of subwatershed planning through ongoing plan input and through our Category 2 program and services, which includes subwatershed services as per established Memorandums of Understanding.

Financial Implications:

Not applicable.

Other Department Considerations:

Staff from Water Resources were consulted in the preparation of this report.

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