

Commissioner questions Growth Plan's effectiveness

The Province's Environmental Commissioner is concerned that Ontario's Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe is not on track to meet its goal of curbing urban sprawl in this rapidly growing region.

In his 2013/14 Annual Report Managing New Challenges, Gord Miller stated the 2006 Growth Plan was intended to reverse the pattern of unsustainable growth and development within the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

"Driving population growth towards urban areas helps create stronger communities and make more efficient use of infrastructure," he said. "Better managed growth also protects our agricultural lands and natural areas from the relentless sprawl of development." Miller is troubled, however, about how the Growth Plan is being implemented. Despite the goal of intensification, the government has authorized lower density targets for nine of the 15 municipalities in the outer-ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe beyond the Greenbelt.

"The government is allowing communities to continue the pattern of low density development that is too sparse to support even basic transit services," he said.

As well, last year the government extended the population and employment forecasts in the Growth Plan to 2041, essentially pushing out the status quo growth pattern for another 10 years.

"If the Growth Plan is not on track to curb sprawl and increase intensification, continuing on the same trajectory only aggravates existing problems, and puts pressure on municipalities to open more land for development," he said.

"Indeed, the extended forecasts continue to allow low density development to sprawl into the less urbanized outer parts of the Greater Golden Horseshoe rather than concentrate more growth in the more urbanized inner ring," Miller added. "I expect the government to address these issues when it reviews the Growth Plan in the next few years."

The report is available at www.eco.on.ca