

Planning workshop was seeking input on Regional growth plans

At a Growth Management Workshop held last week in Mississauga, planning, urban design and development sector experts in the private and public sectors came together to examine stakeholder feedback that will help shape planning policies for future growth in Peel.

With Peel's population expected to grow by 46 per cent to 1.97 million new residents by 2041, how this growth is managed will have widespread implications for the economy, environmental sustainability, health and overall quality of life.

The workshop focused on three key planning priorities: The correlation between the design of communities and the health of residents; how to manage and invest in essential infrastructure that residents and businesses rely on, such as water/wastewater services, transportation and building areas where residents can work and live; and how to ensure that planning for Peel's growth is done in an environmentally and financially sustainable manner.

"Peel's growth has been significant and successful in many ways, but there are areas which I continue to be concerned about," said Regional Chair and CEO Emil Kolb. "Firstly, sprawling growth in our urban areas is making it more of a challenge to service far-reaching areas. Secondly, as we continue to grow, we must ensure that growth continues to pay for growth. New development has to pay for servicing costs. Next, we need to address the traffic congestion which plagues the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area and burdens our local economy. Lastly, we need to protect our precious agricultural lands and preserve our environmental landscape. The Region's challenge is to balance all of these factors to create a healthy and livable community that our future generations will be proud of."

"While today, the Region is largely suburban and rural, by 2041 our population will grow to almost two million people,"

Mississauga Regional Councillor Jim Tovey, chair of the Region's Growth Management Committee, added. "We have arrived at a crossroads in our history. To ensure a sustainable Peel in the future, we have to think differently as to how we'll continue to plan for growth and where these investments will be most impactful."

In addition to extensive population growth, it is estimated that by 2041, 21 per cent of the population will be older than 65 and those over 85 will represent four per cent of the population. Ontario's Ministry of Transportation estimates that by 2036, 42 per cent of residents in car-dependent communities may not have a driver's licence; therefore, mobility in environments designed around the car will become an increasingly challenging issue.

Along with a changing and aging demographic, reliance upon car-centric urban designs has contributed to an increase in traffic congestion, which has resulted in longer commute times. Today, the average commute time for a Peel resident is 82 minutes a day. By 2031, it's expected that it will rise to 109 minutes a day. Currently, traffic congestion costs the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area (GTHA) \$6 billion annually, and it will take a rising toll on the livability and economic productivity of the region. The discussions produced during the workshop will help the Region examine strategies for less car-dominated and land-extensive growth, and focus on designs that encourage the use of public transit and make use out of our current urban centres areas where residents will be encouraged to work, shop, live and play.

"How we design, operate and build cities is perhaps the most important legacy of any City council," said keynote speaker Gord Hume, a national columnist and speaker on improving local government, redesigning sustainable communities, cultural planning and creative cities, and the inter-relationship of governments. "The public realm is crucial to vibrant communities. We're in a competitive global economy, and Canadian cities need to think carefully about sustainability, the creative design of both suburbs and the core, how to pay for future growth, and how to animate their streets and neighborhoods. These are crucial decisions for prosperous and livable cities, and the local community has to be engaged."

The workshop also addressed the impact growth has on the overall health of Peel residents. Currently, more than 50 per cent of the adult population is overweight or obese and one in 10 currently has diabetes, a rate projected to increase to one in six by 2025. Among Peel's youth, half to two-thirds of Grade 9 students are not physically fit, further underscoring the need for future growth to address the need for increased spaces that boost physical activity and encourage active transportation such as walking and cycling to your destination.

"As seen through their Health Background Studies, Peel Region is an innovator in attempting to provide important answers to key questions," said Dr. Jim Dunn. "In their efforts to try and create healthier and more walkable communities, today's discussions have been really enlightening, and I think, provide a great example of their continued desire to find innovative solutions on issues that affect their residents."

The Ontario Planning Act requires municipalities to update their Official Plan every five years to ensure policies stay current, meet Provincial plans and policy statements, and achieve the Region's goals and objectives.

Peel residents are encouraged to submit their feedback for the Peel 2041: Regional Official Plan Review.
For more information, visit peelregion.ca/planning/officialplan/2013offplan-review.htm