

Regional Municipality of Halton

# Submission to the Minister of Finance

2017 Provincial Pre-Budget Consultation

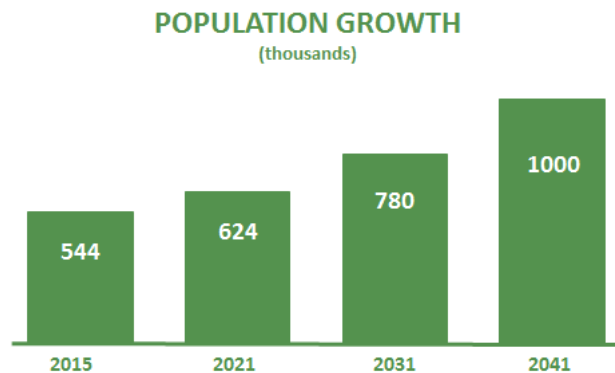
January 2017



## Introduction

Halton Region is a vibrant and growing community with more than 540,000 residents and four distinct communities – Burlington, Halton Hills, Milton and Oakville. Recognized for a high quality of life and close proximity to Lake Ontario and the Niagara Escarpment, Halton is committed to ensuring that our future is strong and stable while continuing to be a great place to live.

The Provincial *Places to Grow Act* mandates that Halton Region's population grow to approximately 1 million by the year 2041. To facilitate this growth, there are a number of critical supports that Halton Region requires from other levels of government in order to maintain the high quality of life and support Halton's economy.



Halton Region's vision is to preserve for current and future generations a landscape that is rich, diverse, balanced, productive and sustainable and a society that is economically strong, equitable and caring. The Region plans for communities where urban sprawl is minimized, infrastructure is maximized, natural heritage is protected and natural spaces and farmland are preserved. The overall goal is to enhance the quality of life for all people of Halton, today and into the future.

Ensuring that growth pays for itself, and that we work with other levels of government in a collaborative manner, is imperative to the future vitality of Halton Region. Halton's strong financial position is a key element to our foundation as we work to ensure that our communities are inclusive and complete, in order to provide the programs and services required to meet the needs of Halton residents.

Halton is an economic hotspot, with many multinational companies like Amazon, Lowes and Siemens choosing to call Halton home. Halton's prosperous business community is a key driver of Ontario's economic engine. A Strong Halton helps build a Strong Ontario.

Halton Region's shared priority issues with the Provincial Government that are highlighted in this submission include:

- Growth Management
- Infrastructure
- Community Wellbeing
- Economic Prosperity

As one of the fastest growing Regions in the Province, Halton Region is committed to working with the Provincial Government to invest in people's talents and skills, build and revitalize community infrastructure, and create a dynamic, innovative environment where businesses thrive, all while providing the services that our residents need.



### **Growth Management: Growth Plan**

As the Greater Golden Horseshoe is one of the fastest growing regions, experiencing tremendous pressure from population growth and urban and suburban development, it is imperative that the growth plans (Niagara Escarpment Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, Greenbelt Plan and the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe) are revised to not only accommodate growth but to protect valuable farmland, water resources and natural heritage.

Halton's response to the recent provincial consultation on the Four Plan Review included the following recommendations:

- Restriction of appeals to Provincial Plan implementation and urban structure
- Phasing in of the 60% intensification target and 80 people and jobs/hectare target to be applied to unplanned and undeveloped areas
- Requirement for Provincial funding models/financial tools

Halton's concerns focus on the ability to successfully implement the plan, potential impact on approved development and preservation of strong planning principles already embedded in Halton's Official Plan. In addition, the timeliness of the revised plans and associated guidelines and tools are critical.

Halton cannot achieve the Growth Plan targets without support from the Province.

### **Halton Requests:**

- Changes to the proposed Growth Plan to recognize the impact on the community
- Timely release of guidelines and tools in consultation with municipalities
- Flexibility to reflect actual growth when setting target growth levels
- Growth funding for infrastructure

### **Growth Management: Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) Reform**

Halton Region and the area Local Municipalities spend significant time and financial resources defending land use planning matters before the OMB. Halton Region's consultation submission highlighted that the process often becomes lengthy and inefficient in addition to the following recommendations:

- Give the OMB the authority to dismiss appeals that are broad and without basis
- Place limits on what can be appealed to the OMB
- Re-evaluate the mediation process
- Amend the *Planning Act* to limit opportunities for 'de novo' hearings
- Provide a more predictable, transparent, cost-effective and responsive appeals system

#### **Halton Requests:**

- Effective changes to the OMB to streamline processes, limit appeals and to respect and protect approved Planning

### **Growth Management: *Conservation Authorities Act***

In response to the Provincial government's review of the *Conservation Authorities Act*, Halton Region provided a submission outlining the following recommendations:

- Greater oversight of Conservation Authority (CA) operations
- Provincial long-term, sustainable funding
- Consultation with municipal governments prior to the delegation of provincial programs/services to public agencies
- Re-evaluation of the CAs regulated areas and reduce overlap between land-use permitting and CA permitting/EA approvals
- More clearly defined mandate, objects and powers of CAs under the Act

Halton Region supports CA management of natural hazards on a watershed basis, however it is critical that the Province improve and streamline all CA programs and processes and clarify the CA roles and responsibilities, in the context of the delegated authority given to municipalities under the *Planning Act*.

#### **Halton Requests:**

- Clarify roles and responsibilities for the CAs in the context of the current provincial planning system
- Review the regulated areas for the CAs in the context of a single Natural Heritage System for a geographical area
- Provide sustainable provincial funding for the CAs

## **Growth Management: Partnership Opportunities**

### **Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System**

The Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System (EcoPark System) is a collaborative initiative among nine local governments, academic and non-government organization partners to protect, restore and connect approximately 3,650 hectares of natural lands in the City of Burlington and the City of Hamilton. Partners included in this initiative are Halton Region, City of Burlington, City of Hamilton, Royal Botanical Gardens, Conservation Halton, Hamilton Conservation Authority, the Bruce Trail Conservancy, McMaster University and the Hamilton Naturalists' Club. Halton Region has been involved in the EcoPark System since its inception in 2007.

The EcoPark System links two of southern Ontario's most important natural heritage areas – Cootes Paradise Marsh (Canada's second migratory bird sanctuary) and the Niagara Escarpment (a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve) and includes six environmentally sensitive areas which provide habitat to a wide diversity of plant, bird, reptile, amphibian, fish and insect species.

The EcoPark System was initiated to limit potential development-related impacts from population growth on these ecologically significant lands which are among southern Ontario's richest biodiversity areas and Canada's richest botanical lands. Halton Regional Council has endorsed the long-term vision and strategy for the EcoPark System to become recognized as an internationally known, protected, permanent and connected natural lands sanctuary, promoting ecosystem and human health.

A commitment from the Provincial Government to join as a partner agency and to recognize the EcoPark System as an area of provincial significance will help ensure the long-term sustainability and preservation of these environmentally sensitive lands.

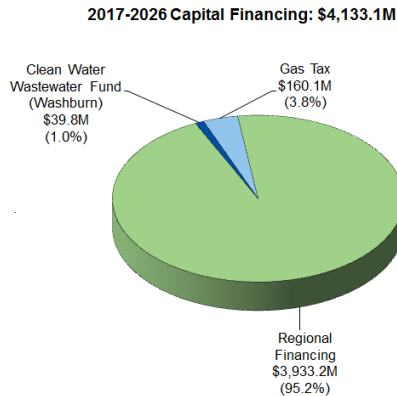
#### **Halton Requests:**

- The Provincial Government (Province) to recognize the EcoPark System as an area of provincial significance
- The Province to join the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System partnership

### **Infrastructure: State-of-Good-Repair**

Investments in infrastructure make for a strong economy and a desirable place to live and do business. Halton has a robust Asset Management Plan to ensure the state-of-good-repair of our infrastructure. The Plan demonstrates sound stewardship of existing assets to support services at desired levels and to ensure financial sustainability. It also supports decision-making for future investments regarding the construction, operation, maintenance, renewal, replacement, expansion and disposal of infrastructure assets while minimizing risk and cost to the Region and residents.

Halton Region's 10 year capital infrastructure program (2017-2026) totals \$4.1 billion including \$1.9 billion to fund the state-of-good-repair. Halton Region contributes 95.2% to this program with the remaining funded from the Gas Tax and the federal Clean Water and Wastewater Fund (CWWF).



The cost shared infrastructure programs (i.e. CWWF) require funding applicants to demonstrate that projects are new or accelerated (incremental) rather than projects funded and/or prioritized through asset management plans. Applicants are required to demonstrate that projects would not otherwise have taken place and/or would not have been undertaken without federal funding in order to meet the federal incrementality rules. In order to support sound infrastructure planning, it is essential that future funding programs acknowledge sound municipal asset management planning by providing greater flexibility for project eligibility to direct funding towards existing priorities while respecting existing fiscal plans.

#### Halton Requests:

- Long-term sustainable provincial and federal commitment to infrastructure funding
- The removal of incrementality requirement of current infrastructure programs

#### Infrastructure: Growth Funding

The *Development Charges Act* (DCA) limits the amount of money municipalities can collect to cover the costs of infrastructure and services to support growth. Halton's development charge (DC) shortfall averages \$14.1 million per year as a result of restrictions in the DCA. Recent changes were made to the DCA, however, the amendments were far from being meaningful. The limited changes made to the DCA do not satisfy the "growth pays for growth" principle. Outstanding changes include:

- Remove all exemptions of municipal services
- Remove 10 year historic average service level limit
- Remove 10% discount for all services
- Provide Council with ability to determine exemptions – do not use DCs as a provincial policy tool.
- Permit Conservation Authority infrastructure DCs

Without adequate growth infrastructure funding, Halton cannot meet Growth Plan targets. Halton also supports the principle of AMO's *What's Next Ontario?* campaign to achieve long-term municipal fiscal sustainability.

#### Halton Requests:

- Meaningful amendments to the DCA consistent with the principle that growth pays for growth

- Recognition that the intent of DC revenues are to pay for required infrastructure and are not a Provincial policy tool
- Confirmation that Conservation Authority infrastructure is eligible for DCs

### **Infrastructure: Coordinated Delivery**

Complete communities require the timely delivery of provincial infrastructure and services to keep pace with growth. Halton Region has currently budgeted over \$4.1 billion in infrastructure capital over the next 10 years which includes over \$2.2 billion in water and wastewater investments and over \$1.5 billion in transportation investments. The Region's capital budget has also increased from \$1 billion in 2000 to \$4.1 billion in 2017, of which Gas Tax makes up 3.8%.

Delivery of community infrastructure such as schools is not currently aligned with the timing of growth in Halton. Between 2018 and 2029, 14 new elementary schools and four high schools, as well as additions to other existing schools are required to accommodate growth within Halton.

Transportation continues to be the number one issue of concern for Halton residents. In 2017, Halton's ten-year transportation capital program is \$1.5 billion, an increase of \$735.7 million from the 2007 ten-year capital program. Provincial highway congestion puts pressure on Regional Roads. Provincial investment in highways (401 and QEW), bridges, transit and active transportation routes are necessary to meet the critical infrastructure needs of the growing Halton community in order to help reduce gridlock for residents, employees, businesses and goods movement.

#### **Halton Needs:**

- Provincial infrastructure investment and timing to reflect the Provincial Growth Plan and be linked with Halton's plans
- Highways
- Schools
- Court facilities
- Hospitals

### **Infrastructure: Metrolinx**

Halton supports the vision of Metrolinx's discussion paper on the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), The Big Move, released in June 2016 in addition to recent announcements from Metrolinx for increased GO service levels through Regional Express Rail (RER) for 15 minute two-way, all day service on the Lakeshore West line and increased two-way off-peak service on the Kitchener Line (Georgetown service). However, Halton Region is eager for the full realization of Metrolinx commitments including all day, two-way GO service on the Milton and Kitchener lines as the reliability and frequency of GO train service throughout Halton is vital to the Region's economic prosperity.

Halton Region is preparing a Mobility Strategy to clearly identify short and long-term transit priorities. The Strategy will focus on mobility-as-a-service and meeting the Region's goals of dramatically increasing the modal share of public transit and active transportation modes, while considering the unique characteristics of all four local municipalities. The development of this

Strategy will also balance the goals of the MTO Transportation Plan, the Big Move, and Metrolinx RER, in order to meet the Region's immediate and longer-term transportation needs through to the year 2041.

#### **Halton Requests:**

- 15 minute service on the Lakeshore West GO train line
- All day GO train service to Milton
- All day GO train service to Georgetown
- 1st and last mile solutions to support increased transit ridership

#### **Community Wellbeing: Health Department Funding**

As the Province continues to mandate public health service delivery targets as well as new accountability requirements with the potential of additional requirements forthcoming resulting from the *Patients First Act* (Bill 41) and the renewed Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS), Halton continues to experience funding shortfalls significantly below the expected levels of cost-shared and 100 percent funded programs.

Public Health Funding is not keeping pace with growth. Public Health mandatory program funding has not increased since the funding formula changed in 2015 and increased by inflation province wide prior to 2015. In addition, the Healthy Baby Healthy Children program has had no increase since 2008, despite increased service demands.

Provincial funding shortfalls for Health Department programs continues to grow. Halton will not be able to meet Growth Plan targets if funding formulas for Public Health do not reflect growth. Combined, the provincial subsidy shortfall in Public Health represents a funding shortfall of \$9.7 million in 2017, and a tax impact of 4% on the Regional portion of property taxes to Halton residents.

The *Patients First Act* has passed and while some of Halton's feedback was reflected, there are many unanswered questions such as the relationship between the Medical Officer of Health and the Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs), the relationship between the Board of Health (Regional Council) and the LHINs and whether a LHIN boundary review will be conducted.

#### **Halton Requests:**

- Funding formulas that appropriately reflect growth
- Review of Healthy Babies Healthy Children formula model
- Details on Patients First implementation
- LHIN boundary review

#### **Community Wellbeing: Paramedic Services**

Paramedic services are critical to our community and their performance is dependent on the Central Ambulance Communications Centre (CACC). Halton Region has had long-standing concerns with the MOHLTC operated CACC dating back to 2002. Since 2010, Halton Region has been advocating the Provincial Government with other GTA municipalities for reform to the ambulance dispatch system.



The CACC plays a significant role in Halton's ability to deliver responsive and timely paramedic services to our residents. Systematic and technological improvements to the MOHLTC operated CACC are critically necessary as they are putting our community at risk.

Response times experienced by the patient, overall system performance, costs and productivity, are greatly influenced by the CACC's use of Halton's paramedic resources. Despite the efforts of Halton officials for the past 10 years, Halton Region continues to receive a lower level of service from the MOHLTC CACC compared to CACCs in Niagara, Ottawa and Toronto.

Paramedic offload delays continue to be a significant issue in Halton particularly during flu season and other surges at the hospitals. Daily offload times at Halton's local hospitals have increased on average by over 30 minutes since December 13, 2016, with delays as high as eight hours. The Dedicated Offload Nurse program (DON) has reduced the impact of offload delays but there is a significant shortfall in provincial funding and uncertainty about the future of these resources.

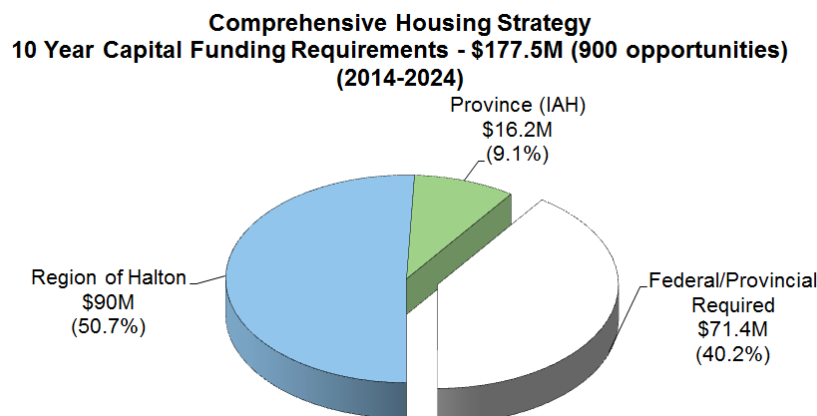
#### Halton Requests:

- Formal, enforceable performance agreements for CACCs
- New technology and triage tools for the Mississauga CACC
- Solutions to address offloading delays including the status on funding for offloading nurses

#### Community Wellbeing: Housing

Between 2008 and 2016, Halton has created 1,362 government assisted housing opportunities and provided sustainable rental assistance. It is expected that an additional 104 housing opportunities will be created in 2017, resulting in a total of 1,466 new opportunities since 2008. Long-term, sustainable investments are required for the planning, delivery of and access to safe, affordable, accessible housing.

Halton Region plans to invest \$90 million in our social infrastructure through our ten year Comprehensive Housing Strategy (CHS) (2014-2024) which provides government assisted housing options for low income residents. The Region's Strategy outlines a target of 550-900 new opportunities for residents over the next decade in order to meet community need.



While recent funding announced under the Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH), Social Infrastructure Fund (SIF)/Social Housing Improvement Program (SHIP) and Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) programs has been welcomed, however, in order to realize Halton's CHS upper target of 900 housing opportunities, a long-term investment and partnership with all levels of government is required.

**Halton Requests:**

- Long-term sustainable Federal/Provincial funding to match the Region's commitment
- Funding model needs to be sensitive to local real estate markets (GTA)

**Community Wellbeing: Vulnerable Populations**

It is critical for all levels of government to work together to expand services available to Halton's vulnerable population.

It was announced in 2016 that communities would need to develop Community Safety and Well Being Plans to meet the diverse needs of vulnerable communities and ensure that those in need of help receive the right response by the right service provider. As a result, Halton Region is developing a Community Safety and Well Being Plan for the Region. While this is an important step to further assist residents in need, no details surrounding the requirements for the development of these plans have been released. In addition, the announcement for the development of Community Hubs was released in 2015 and details surrounding the requirements for implementation as part of this initiative have also not yet been released.

Social assistance reform that helps people join the labour market will result in broad economic and social benefits. Halton Region shares the vision of AMO and is committed to working with the Province as it considers social assistance reform within the broader context of income security reform and as such, awaits details on the next steps as part of this plan. Halton has also provided comments on the Basic Income Pilot – announced in the 2016 Budget – and has expressed concerns regarding implementation and integration with other Social Assistance reform efforts.

In September 2016, the Province announced the creation of 100,000 new, licensed child care spaces within the next five years. While new licensed, affordable child care spaces for infants, toddlers and preschoolers would be welcomed by the Region, no details have been provided on the number of spaces that will be created in Halton.

The municipal role in Long-Term Care (LTC) shows that increasing costs, an aging population and increased provincial regulations are making the costs of LTC unsustainable for many municipalities. While the provincial government has provided increased funding for LTC over the last few years, municipal governments like Halton continue to face increased funding challenges in order to meet the needs of residents.

**Halton Requests:**

- Details on the implementation of:
  - Community Safety and Wellbeing Plans
  - Social Assistance Reform
  - Community Hubs
  - Additional Child Care spaces to reflect growth in population
- LTC funding that reflects residents' needs

## **Economic Prosperity: Provincial Highways**

A strong transportation system and infrastructure attracts businesses to our region which helps keep Halton and Ontario's economy strong. Halton is committed to working with the Province to develop a strategy for new and redesigned highways and interchanges as investments in highways (401 and QEW) will enable the efficient movement of goods throughout the Region and across the GTA to support growth and economic development.

As the Province has announced the Greater Golden Horseshoe Multi-modal Transportation Plan to outline current transportation trends and future scenarios for the Greater Golden Horseshoe in the next 50 years, including details required for the next 30 years, Halton Region looks forward to participating and providing feedback as part of stakeholder consultation for future project phases in 2017 and 2018.

To support Halton's Mobility Strategy, a comprehensive approach with the Province for highway access to unlock the potential of employment lands is required for the following areas:

- Midtown Oakville
- Prosperity Corridor in Burlington
- Trafalgar Corridor
- 401 Corridor

In October 2016, the Ministry of Transportation announced that a panel would be struck by the Minister to conduct a strategic assessment of transportation demand and infrastructure needs for people and goods in the GTA West Corridor Area following suspension of the MTO environmental assessment (EA) process in December 2015. As the Panel has now been established, Halton looks forward to the finalization of the EA process.

### **Halton Requests:**

- Completion of the Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan in consultation with municipalities
- Investments in highways 401 and QEW to increase capacity
- A comprehensive approach to highway access to support the Provincial Growth Plan and linked to Halton's plans, to unlock the potential of employment lands
- Finalization of the GTA West EA

## **Economic Prosperity: Global Business**

Halton Region is an economic hotspot. Businesses are choosing to locate here because of our competitive taxes, strong financial position and high quality of life. Halton Region is committed to promoting the Region to attract new businesses and visitors to ensure we become even more innovative and competitive while developing a strong regional economy that supports high standards of living and quality public services.

Provincial support under the "Going Global Trade Strategy" for a Halton Global Business Centre (launched January 1, 2017) will assist Halton-based small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to obtain the programs and services they need to enter the international marketplace. Provincial support required to ensure cross border competitiveness and access to US markets is maintained.

**Halton Requests:**

- Provincial support for Halton businesses to access international markets, including the United States

**Economic Prosperity: Rural Agricultural Strategy**

Halton's agricultural community is an integral and important part of the Region's economy. Although there continues to be an established, experienced agricultural sector in Halton there are a number of trends which are creating uncertainty about the future of farming in the region including: a production profile focused on high value, lower acreage operations, the ongoing decline in the amount of land under agricultural production, uncertainty regarding the future of the prime agricultural area that lies outside of the Greenbelt and current urban boundaries, lack of rural based infrastructure and rising land prices.

In order to continue to ensure the protection of the Region's agricultural and rural community, Halton Regional Council endorsed a Rural Agricultural Strategy (RAS) in 2016. While this Strategy is a critical step forward to protect and enhance the viability and success of the Region's rural and agricultural community, the development of a provincial agricultural strategy is required to complement the work of the Region's RAS and recognize the importance of agriculture and agricultural land to food and water security, economic development and humanitarian aid.

In addition to the importance of an agricultural strategy, many rural communities are faced with limited broadband support which has recently been identified as a basic everyday requirement by the CRTC. Broadband internet is now essential for living, working and effectively competing in a digital world, and Provincial support to aid in the implementation of universal access for communities in north Halton is required.

**Halton Requests:**

- The development of a Provincial Agricultural Strategy
- Universal access to broadband internet

**Conclusion**

Halton Region is a strong and fiscally responsible municipality that is advocating for support from all levels of government in the form of long-term, predictable funding, legislative and policy changes, open communications and consultation in order to ensure that Halton's taxpayers are not burdened with the cost of growth and that the quality of life of Halton's residents is not impacted.

With the mutual goals of investing in and revitalizing public infrastructure, investing in our residents while creating a dynamic environment and economy and providing high quality services and programs to our residents, Halton Region is a major component to the success of Ontario's economy. Working together, we can create a Strong Halton for a Strong Ontario.

Thank you for your consideration and for the opportunity to provide input into the 2017 Provincial budget. If you would like more information about Halton's advocacy priorities, please visit [halton.ca/advocacy](http://halton.ca/advocacy).