

# Sustainable Halton

Towards An  
Intensification Strategy  
for Halton Region



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# Sustainable Halton

This is a draft final background report for the Sustainable Halton planning process. As the project continues and as we receive public feedback, there may be slight adjustments made to the content of this report.



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The ultimate purpose of the housing intensification strategy will be to assist in determining the means of achieving conformity with the *Growth Plan* on intensification. The strategy will deal with both the supply (i.e. development potential) and the demand (the type of units people want to live in) for growth classed as intensification. On the supply side, the strategy will coordinate local efforts dealing with the issue to better understand the likely scope, form and location for potential intensification in the Region. Intensification supply potential is largely in apartment-type units. On the demand side, where most people's housing preferences favour ground-related housing, the strategy will address the potential means of shifting housing preferences, thus allowing more development to occur through intensification in higher density forms. The full exploration of intensification in the strategy will be multi-faceted and complex and will involve the Province, the Region and the local municipalities. The strategy will be prepared later in the Sustainable Halton process.

The purpose of the report is to identify key issues and the work needed to be undertaken towards the preparation of the intensification strategy. On the supply side this takes the form of an update on the work completed and currently underway by each of the local municipalities and the Region. On the demand side, the report attempts to identify and provide an initial discussion on issues related to housing demand and intensification. The Region and the local municipalities will need to address these issues through the remainder of the Sustainable Halton process and as the Region works with the Province on *Growth Plan* implementation.

## **CONTEXT**

Planning policy in Halton Region has long encouraged the provision of growth through housing intensification. Intensification is generally understood to be the provision of new housing units through redevelopment, infill development and the addition of accessory units in already built-up areas.

The Province's *Growth Plan* moved the requirement for intensification from a general principle of desirability to a specific rule, that is: "By the year 2015 and for each year thereafter, a minimum of 40 per cent of all residential development occurring annually within each upper- and single-tier municipality will be within the built-up area<sup>1</sup>."

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<sup>1</sup>*The concept of built up area is somewhat broader than the generally understood definition of intensification. The built up area will be defined by a built boundary, which will be a mapped line around the developed urban area, determined by the Province. Development within the boundary will count towards the 40% whether it is a remaining greenfield parcel or true infill or redevelopment. In south Halton, for example, the built boundary is likely just to be Dundas Street, across Oakville and eastern Burlington.*

How to implement this rule is a central challenge of the Sustainable Halton process. As a starting point, intensification opportunities and strategies need to be identified in the Region.

## **1. Work Towards the Supply Potential of Intensification Units**

The Province has yet to finally determine the location of the built boundary within Halton. For the purposes of the Sustainable Halton land supply analysis in Phase I, estimates have been prepared based on an assumed location of the built boundary and based on the land supply analysis undertaken for the *Halton Regional Official Plan Amendment 25* Ontario Municipal Board hearing. These preliminary estimates indicate insufficient unit supply potential within the built boundary to meet the Province's 40% intensification rule.

The potential unit supply through intensification will be revised upward, once the Region and local municipalities have defined the Urban Growth Centres (UGC) identified in the *Growth Plan* and have conducted further detailed analysis of intensification potential.

The preparation of the final intensification strategy for incorporation into the Sustainable Halton process will require the Region and the local municipalities to define the UGCs and determine development potential within these areas. In addition to the UGCs, the supply analysis will need to address transit station areas, brownfields, intensification corridors and other scattered intensification sites in the Region's communities. The required work is underway in all four local municipalities and will be incorporated into intensification strategy later in Sustainable Halton.

Though the work is not yet completed, some conclusions can be reached:

- Like intensification potential in Halton and elsewhere, most of the additional unit potential is likely to be in the form of apartments and some rows with only a few single and semi-detached units.
- Intensification is not constrained by physical supply of land (apartments consume very little land), but rather through planning policy constraints and the demand of households for higher density units.
- Housing supply from intensification is constrained by a shared desire to maintain existing stable residential neighbourhoods — large-scale redevelopment of existing neighbourhoods for intensification is not envisioned by the *Growth Plan* or any Regional or local municipal policies.
- Recognising the challenge created by the high density supply in intensification and the demand for ground-related units, supply-side strategies will be most successful where more ground-related housing can be provided through intensification.
- Intensification supply is always changing and evolving as communities themselves mature and change over time.

Based on the local and Regional analyses, policy options relating to the intensification supply potential will be prepared for the intensification strategy for implementation through Sustainable Halton. Allocation of intensification targets to each local municipality will be part of that strategy and will be based on Growth Plan policies, intensification studies and development capacity.

## **2. There Are Significant Challenges in How to Encourage More Demand for Intensification Units and How this Balances with the Desire for Complete Communities in the Region**

To be successful, the intensification strategy not only needs to consider where and what type of units can be provided (i.e., supply), but also how more households might be encouraged to purchase or occupy such units (i.e. demand).

A maturing housing market in the Region will increase demand for a greater range of housing types as there are more elderly people in the population and as Halton's population becomes more diverse. The possibility to develop attractive, high amenity areas will also act to increase market interest in higher density living.

However, the amount of such development required to meet the *Growth Plan's* intensification rules presents challenges. The demographic profile of Halton and of those who move to Halton is concentrated in the family age groups that typically prefer lower density housing. The units provided through intensification are typically higher density. Aligning these two factors will be a significant policy challenge for Province, the Region and local municipalities in considering intensification.

How growth is accommodated through intensification must also be considered in the context of broader objectives for all parts of the Region. In particular there is a strong desire by the Province and the Region to developed "complete communities," that contain a mix of housing types, are close to places to work and are pedestrian and transit supportive. How and where land uses and housing types are directed in the Region needs to consider objectives and policies for old and new communities in all parts of the Region, not just the intensification potential addressed here.

The intensification strategy that will be prepared later in the Sustainable Halton process will explore the issues raised here in greater detail and will address policy options. The Region's policy options will be considered in conjunction with the Province creating funding and policy tools required to implement the *Growth Plan*.