

May 31, 2019

Halton Region
Halton Strategic Business Plan Consultation
PDF via e-mail: accesshalton@halton.ca



Introduction:

BurlingtonGreen Environmental Association has been the solution-focused voice for the environment in Burlington for the past 11 years. To date, we have advocated on more than 100 environmental issues including sustainable growth at the municipal and provincial level. Through awareness, advocacy, and action, we collaborate with the community to protect the environment, mitigate climate change and to create a healthier, more environmentally responsible Burlington.

We welcome the opportunity to provide input to Halton Region's Strategic Business Plan 2019 – 2022. It is a critical time for climate action in Canada, and many communities across the country are feeling the impacts of climate change. All levels of government play a role in combating climate change and must come together to deliver effective solutions.

After reviewing the consultation document, we would like to offer feedback on specific strategic themes, in addition to advocating for a holistic environmental framework to drive the Strategic Business Plan.

Planning Growth and Management

Planning

While ensuring that infrastructure and services are kept in pace with growth, and when continuing to advocate for provincial infrastructure including schools, hospitals, highway and transit, the region needs to expand in a direction that supports transit-oriented development, protects valuable farmland and promotes job creation. All of these elements are necessary to ensure our communities remain competitive and resilient in the years to come.

Greenspace

Several studies have shown the psychological benefits of green space. Growing up in an urban area without sufficient access to green space can result in a 55% higher risk of developing a psychiatric disorder independent from effects of other known risk factors ¹ To ensure that our population has adequate access to greenspace, BurlingtonGreen supports land use planning that prioritizes the protection and enhancement of green space and improves local biodiversity while advancing sustainable development with smart communities, ensuring effective connections to transit and greenspace.

The expansion and development of greenspace will regulate air quality and climate and reduce energy consumption by countering the warming effects of paved surfaces and recharging groundwater supplies while protecting lakes and streams from polluted runoff and mitigating flooding. Flooding in Ontario is unprecedented and increasing green space to mitigate these effects will become more crucial as we

¹ <https://www.pnas.org/content/116/11/5188>

continue to experience record breaking water levels. Green space provides a multitude of social, economic and environmental benefits, contributing to a quality of life we can all enjoy.

Smart Communities/Mixed Use Development

We agree with implementing a policy framework that will support mixed use development and smart communities to meet the needs of a growing population. Multi use communities provide effective connections to transit, incorporate sustainable design and include high walk scores, ensuring that day to day needs can be met without the use of a car. We can no longer accommodate our growing population through urban sprawl and in order to protect the green space that we do have and address the issue of climate change, residents need to be encouraged to walk or cycle rather than drive.

Transportation and Infrastructure

Traffic congestion is a major issue throughout Halton, in particular the City of Burlington. There are many reasons for this congestion, but two significant reasons are the high rates of car ownership (Burlington, in particular has the highest rate of car ownership in the GTHA²), and the rapid population increase in the region. Traffic congestion is a major barrier to achieving greenhouse gas reduction targets. There are several ways to ease traffic congestion, but it is clear that getting less cars on the road should be a priority. This can be done in a variety of ways, including improving public transit, including ensuring more cohesion between transit networks and more effective inter-regional transit, as well as making it easier and more enjoyable to take get out of the car and travel on bicycle or foot.

Public Transportation

Across Halton Region there are different public transit systems in operation. In order to allow people to move more efficiently beyond the reaches of their local transit, there needs to be better cooperation between transit providers. Given this we are supportive of the plans to participate in transit reviews for GTA West but the region needs to engage in this review, with a focus of better cohesiveness in transit throughout the broader area. Additionally, we support the planned advocacy for Metrolinx service improvements to the area, but again—this should be done with a focus of making the systems operate better together.

Partner to expand walking, cycling, driving and transit options on major corridors connecting Halton

We support the planned investment in road cycling and multi-use pathways. As the region looks to add new pathways, it should do so with careful consideration of where the pathways will most effectively be used. For example, linking employment areas to transit hubs would allow more people to take transit, and their bicycle, to work. In order to encourage people to use these pathways, there should be stronger implementation of sustainable design guidelines to support an interesting and safe streetscape for people travelling on foot or bicycle.

It is important to acknowledge that investment in cycling and multi-use pathways is about much more than just allowing more people to ride bikes in the region. Getting more people out of cars and onto bikes, or their feet, will be a critical piece in our region reducing greenhouse gases. Additionally, by

² [COB 2014 Community Report](#), pg. 6

encouraging people to exercise, instead of using their cars, it will contribute to their well-being, as well as the community's.

Other feedback for transportation and infrastructure

A notable absence from the plan is the investment in electric vehicle infrastructure. In order to support the transition to a low-carbon economy, and low-carbon transportation, we need further investment in electric vehicle charging stations.

Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change

The greenhouse gas reduction targets stated in the Strategic Business Plan are not nearly sufficient. Ontario's new [Environment Plan](#) commits to achieving greenhouse gas emissions reductions in line with Canada's 2030 greenhouse gas reduction targets under the Paris Agreement. Under the Paris Agreement, Canada has committed to reducing GHG emissions by 30% below 2005 levels by 2030. New scientific developments are telling us that these targets are not ambitious enough, and we ask that Halton commits to reductions that align with the recommendation in the [IPCC's latest report](#) of keeping global warming to maximum of 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels. This calls for a greenhouse gas emissions reductions target of about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero around 2050¹.

This is no small task and requires commitment from all levels of government and stakeholders and all sectors of the community to come together and take bold action. Establishing a reductions target is the first step in the strategy, followed by identifying the key action areas and associated activities and commitments required to achieve the target.

One tactic that should be used, which is not called out in the Strategic Business Plan, is investing in the urban tree canopy in areas of the region, which do not have sufficient coverage. Insufficient tree canopies cause a number of issues, including exacerbating heat causing more extreme heat waves, reducing flood mitigation capability, and a reduction in biodiversity. According to the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan, GTA summers are expected to be three degrees Celsius warmer by 2050, and not only will the average temperature be warmer, there will be longer, and more severe, extreme heat events. Investing in trees is an essential component of any climate change plan and provides key adaptive and mitigation benefits.

Final Comments

According to the Plan, Halton's vision is to *"preserve for the current and future generations, a landscape that is rich, diverse, balanced, productive and sustainable and a society that is economically strong, equitable and caring"*. If the Region is to see this vision through to fruition, it is absolutely paramount to recognize the necessity of strong climate action.

In order to achieve progress in climate action, climate change mitigation must drive all regional decision-making. This calls for a complete transformation of the current decision-making and reporting framework, placing climate action as a top priority.

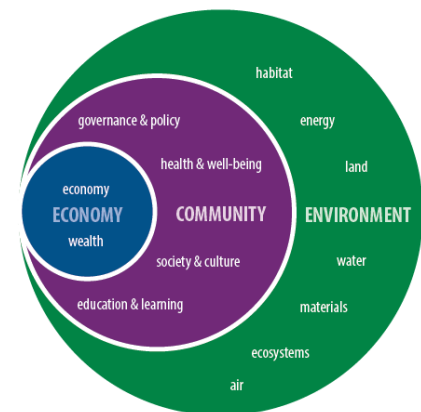


Photo credit:

A shift from the traditional framework to one that prioritizes our impact on the environment is necessary. The nested circle framework recognizes that social and economic activity occurs within ecological limits.

Extending the plan horizon is also recommended to allow for more effective and long-term strategies, actions and outcome measures, that are more suited to effective climate action planning.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on Halton Region's Strategic Business Plan. We look forward to further opportunities to collaborate on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marwa Selim". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marwa Selim

On behalf of the BurlingtonGreen Advocacy Team
Program Manager and Advocacy Coordinator
BurlingtonGreen Environmental Association

CC: Gary Carr, Halton Regional Chair

CC: Mayor Marianne Meed-Ward and Members of Council