

# GROWTH MANAGEMENT CONCERNS IN OUR COMMUNITY



Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries

March 2006

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## Introduction

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Welcome to the 2006 *Growth Management* issue paper. This paper is part of a series of four issue-specific documents that synthesizes and reflects upon research that is related to key topics in our communities. While this paper looks at sustainable growth management concerns in our community in Cambridge, previous papers have explored the nonprofit sector in Cambridge, employment and training supports in Cambridge, and important local issues in North Dumfries.<sup>1</sup>

These papers fall on the heels of a community-wide initiative called Moving Forward Together (MFT). Moving Forward Together was implemented by three local agencies: the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries (SPC), Volunteer and Information Cambridge and the United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries. One of the objectives of the project was to identify community priorities. To gather this information, project staff collected data from people that lived and worked in Cambridge and North Dumfries concerning the strengths and challenges in their communities. To date, seven reports have been published that summarize what was learned.<sup>2</sup>

Findings discussed in this paper are derived from several reports written for the MFT project. Sources include a resident survey, focus group discussions with residents and stakeholders (with additional interviews with some stakeholders) as well as a research scan. Wherever appropriate, information found in the Regional Growth Management Strategy and other provincial initiatives may also be cited to give a broader perspective of issues, emerging trends and initiatives currently underway.

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## What is Growth Management?

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With rapid rates of suburban expansion experienced by North American urban regions over the past 50 years, many communities have begun to employ various techniques—often referred to collectively as growth management—to regulate land use and development. The term ‘growth management’ refers specifically to a planning process and the development of policy. It is generally associated with curbing the negative effects of sprawl and insuring that there are services available to meet the demands of a growing population. As a long-term and community visioning process, growth management strategies typically look many years into the future and take on a “coordinated approach for anticipating and managing new development to accommodate growth in ways that reflect community needs and balance community goals.”<sup>3</sup>

Growth management programs vary from community to community, but generally consider economic issues, the delivery of utilities and services, increasing transportation choices, the protection of natural spaces, providing sufficient and affordable housing and the delivery and the preservation of buildings and places of historical value.

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## Growth Management Tools & Strategies

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Growth management strategies typically utilize tools that have come to be associated with concepts of sustainability and ‘smart growth’. The terms ‘sustainable growth’ and ‘smart growth’ have even been used interchangeably when people talk of growth management, as many growth management

strategies incorporate both concepts.

Sustainable growth, for example, emphasizes patterns of living that do not negatively impact the environment and in a much broader sense balance economic growth with environmental concerns and quality of life issues. Smart growth specifically integrates transportation policies with land use decisions.<sup>4</sup> The Canadian Urban Institute outlines six smart growth actions including:

- promoting cities as engines of the economy;
- containing urban sprawl;
- providing transportation alternatives;
- providing housing choice;
- protecting natural areas and cultural heritage;
- creating community.<sup>5</sup>

Specific smart growth urban design practices can also include using context sensitive design, creating more self-contained communities, and fostering distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.<sup>6</sup>

Over the past few years, achieving specific smart growth goals has been identified by the Ontario government as a critical part of maintaining a high quality of life in the province. The following sections briefly outline growth management strategies established by the Province of Ontario and rapidly growing regions within the province such as the Greater Golden Horseshoe area and the Region of Waterloo. Strategies are discussed here in order to provide the reader with a framework from which to understand Cambridge residents' perceptions of growth management issues.

### **ONTARIO'S SMART GROWTH VISION AND PLACES TO GROW PLAN**

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It is estimated that the population of Ontario will increase nearly 2.5 million by the year 2015. In order to balance 'growth promotion' with 'growth management', the Ontario Government has set out the following broad goals as part of its smart growth vision:

- grow toward a better future;

- make more strategic decisions about infrastructure;
- improve competitiveness and increase opportunity;
- create transportation choices;
- protect and enhance the environment;
- build livable communities.<sup>7</sup>

The *Places to Grow* plan is one outcome of Ontario's smart growth vision. While in some areas, communities are suffering because of a lack of growth, the Greater Golden Horseshoe region (the focus for *Places to Grow*) is struggling with the countless negative impacts of sprawl. Building on the broad goals of the smart growth vision for the province, more specific goals of *Places to Grow* include:

- creating more livable communities where people are close to shops, parks and jobs;
- revitalizing downtown neighbourhoods;
- creating complete suburbs that offer more options for living, working, shopping and playing;
- providing greater choice in housing types;
- curbing urban sprawl and preserving valuable green spaces and agricultural lands;
- getting better use from public infrastructure investments in schools, hospitals, and water and sewage systems;
- reducing traffic gridlock by improving access to a range of transportation choices.<sup>8</sup>

### **REGIONAL GROWTH GOALS AND COMMUNITY THEMES**

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The Region of Waterloo has consistently been ranked as one of the fastest growing areas in Canada, and similar efforts have been undertaken by the Region to develop a long-term planning framework to manage growth.<sup>9</sup> In 2003, the *Regional Growth Management Strategy* was adopted by Regional Council and countless initiatives and actions continue to be implemented based on the goals outlined in the strategy. Several of these goals are key to understanding local perceptions to growth documented in MFT responses; namely:

- enhancing the natural environment;
- protecting the countryside;
- providing greater transportation choice;
- building vibrant urban places.

**The Regional growth management strategy is “a long-term strategic framework which identifies where, when, and how future residential and employment growth will be accommodated.”**  
(Region of Waterloo, *Planning Our Future*, p. 1)

### **Growth Challenges and Growth Management in Our Community**

Based on regional goals and common issues found in provincial growth initiatives listed above, we’ve identified three themes that form our framework for examining growth and growth management. Throughout the paper, we reflect on the following themes within the context of what residents identify as specific strengths and challenges in Cambridge:

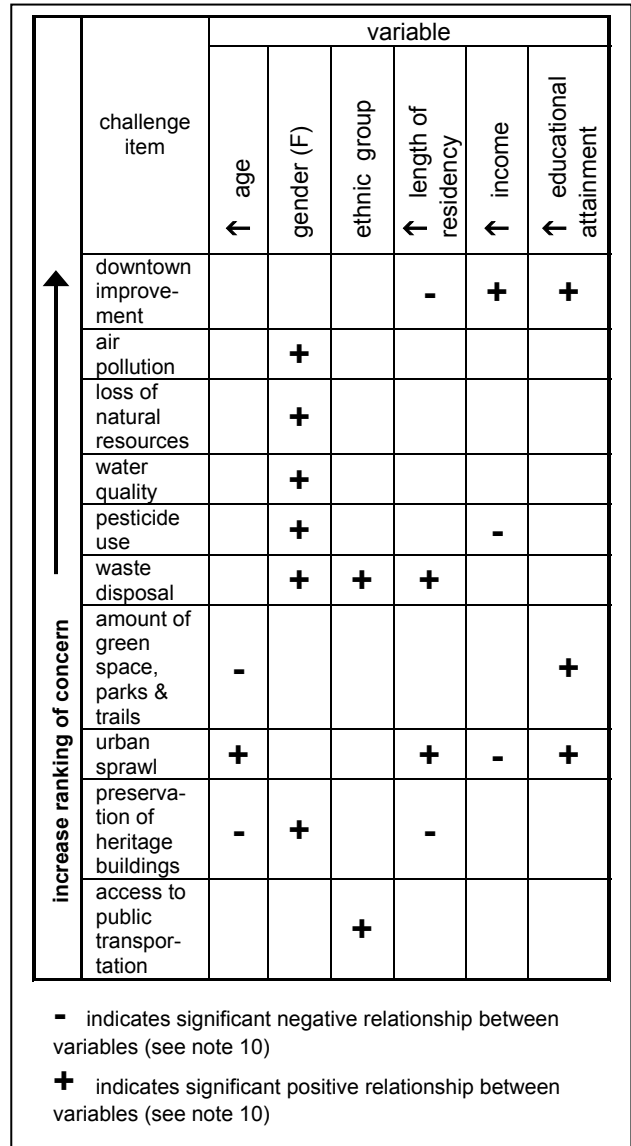
- **the natural environment;**
- **re-urbanization and downtown improvement;**
- **transportation.**

It is important to note that the focus of the MFT project was generally on what are considered social service issues as opposed to physical planning issues. Therefore, few responses made by residents can be directly attributed to growth management concerns. What findings do suggest though is that residents express concerns about issues that are generally reflective of growth management strategies/issues.

### **RESIDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF GROWTH AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT**

Household surveys distributed as part of MFT indicate that many growth management issues are clearly a concern to Cambridge residents [Figure 1].<sup>10</sup> Downtown improvement, air pollution, loss of natural resources in particular, rank very high as a community challenge—essentially within the top 10

out of a total of forty (40) diverse community challenges that residents were asked to rate. Further challenges such as pesticide use, waste disposal, the amount of green space and urban sprawl also ranked relatively high as community challenges. Generally, residents felt that almost all issues related to growth management were at least of moderate concern to them.



**Figure 1 Significant differences in perception among community members—issues related to growth management**

Although there appears to be some consistency among Cambridge residents concerning growth

related concerns, it is important to stress that priorities are different among the diverse members in our community. Women for example are consistently more concerned with issues related to the natural environment than men. Residents with a higher educational status tend to view downtown improvement, the amount of green space and urban sprawl a priority—issues that have a marked impact on property values and positive aspects of the community that may have attracted them in the first place. Older residents and long term residents also tend to be concerned with urban sprawl, but not necessarily with other growth related issues such as downtown improvement and heritage conservation.<sup>11</sup>

### **RESIDENTS DISCUSS GROWTH MANAGEMENT**

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Although growth management was not the specific focus of the MFT survey, this issue did surface during focus group discussions when residents and stakeholders could openly bring up any community strength or challenge that concerned them.

Cambridge's growth was not necessarily viewed in a negative light during discussion, but both stakeholders and residents expressed concern that the community may be growing too fast and that too much agricultural land has been developed. Increased efforts towards broader community planning related to 'smart growth' principles were mentioned as a way to support the City's growing population and contain the loss of farmland.<sup>12</sup>

**"It seems as if [city] planning has had no foresight—new development of idle land [continues] while other areas of the city that could be used (by fixing up) just lay desolate and become more run down with time."** (Cambridge resident, open ended comment, resident survey)

### **RESIDENTS DISCUSS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT**

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Protection and enhancement of natural environmental attributes are key components of

many growth management tools and strategies. More particularly in our local community, the naturalized environment plays an important role in defining what makes this area unique and there is a collective effort to take care of the environment. Comments made by residents and stakeholders during focus group discussions indicate that there is some community awareness of the interrelationship between land development, the natural environment and urban sprawl. Concerns touch upon the tension between the physical growth of the community and the need for sufficient environmental resource protection—such as general water resources, wetlands and green spaces. The issue of urban/rural boundaries was also raised and support was expressed for targeted greenfield development and the establishment of a "firm countryside line" to curb agricultural land loss and contain and manage growth.<sup>13</sup>

**"Sustainability and diversity [are concerns to me]. It disturbs me that we can destroy a natural area and replace it somewhere else thinking it is good enough or develop so closely to a natural area and not realize it will detrimentally affect the ecosystem."** (Cambridge resident, open ended comment, resident survey)

### **RESIDENTS DISCUSS RE-URBANIZATION AND DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENT**

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Fostering distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place is an underlying goal of many growth management and smart growth strategies. In the *Regional Growth Management Strategy* this goal is expressed as the desire to "build vibrant urban places" (p. 8) so re-urbanization and downtown improvement become central to achieving this goal.

In Cambridge, residents value the City's urban core areas and the uniqueness of its historic buildings. Based on focus group discussions, downtown improvement was mentioned within the context of needed repairs to older buildings and optimizing older buildings for current uses. Most groups noted

that more work needs to be done in the area of downtown revitalization, including preservation of heritage buildings and halting the threat of competition from Big Box stores.<sup>14</sup>

**“I think Cambridge needs to clean up the downtown areas. Some areas are so beautiful, but then beside it is a run down building. People in Cambridge should be proud of the area and not embarrassed.”** (Cambridge resident, open ended comment, resident survey)

### **RESIDENTS DISCUSS TRANSPORTATION CHOICES**

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Smart growth practices encourage ‘multi-modal’ transportation to include walking, cycling and public transit in addition to private automobile usage. Increasing people’s transportation choices is at the very heart of most growth management policies as well as current movements in urban design such as New Urbanism and Transit Oriented Development. ‘Providing greater transportation choice’ is also one of six goals identified as part of the Region’s growth management strategy (p. 12).

During focus group discussions, transportation challenges in Cambridge were noted by both stakeholders and residents. Challenges mentioned pertain mainly to the availability and sufficiency of transportation in general, and more specifically, local public transit. There is a high level of dependency on private car use by Cambridge residents which results in heavy automobile congestion causing delays across the City. There was some consensus as well among participants that the public transit system in Cambridge needs improvement. Many felt that buses are inconvenient with long rides and insufficient routes, and that better connections are needed with other communities.<sup>15</sup>

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### **What We’ve Learned**

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- Cambridge residents are concerned with the very issues that encompass growth management challenges and policy.
- For longtime Cambridge residents, there appears to exist a disconnect between their concerns surrounding urban sprawl and related issues such as downtown improvement and heritage conservation.
- Residents recognize the negative impacts of uncontrolled growth, and are generally supportive of broader community planning strategies that manage growth.
- Further Cambridge specific research is needed that more directly probes residents about the issue of growth management.

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### **Next Steps**

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Based on the information in this paper, the Social Planning Council will forward copies of this paper to appropriate governing, policy and funding bodies for use in their planning and programming decisions.

These include:

- the Regional Municipality of Waterloo (Planning, Housing, and Community Services)
- Regional Growth Management Strategy Public Advisory Committee
- the City of Cambridge (Planning Services, City Council and Staff) and
- Moving Forward Together implementing partners and members of the Community Partnership Committee (CPC).

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<sup>1</sup> The paper that features North Dumfries (planned for release in March 2006) will provide an in-depth analysis of the rural community.

<sup>2</sup> These reports can be downloaded from the Moving Forward Together website: <[www.movingforwardtogether.ca](http://www.movingforwardtogether.ca)>.

<sup>3</sup> Quote retrieved March 17, 2006 from <http://www.ccta.net/GM/GMdata/Volume%20I/Voll-C5.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> For example by encouraging more compact, mixed-use development within existing urban areas, and discouraging dispersed, automobile dependent development at the urban fringe) See source retrieved March 18, 2006 from <http://www.vtpi.org/tdm/tdm38.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Source retrieved March 16, 2006 from <http://www.canurb.com/media/pdf/SmartGrowthinCanada2.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Source retrieved March 16, 2006 from <http://www.vtpi.org/tdm/tdm38.htm>. The complete outline of smart growth practices in this report includes the following: 1) strategic planning; 2) create more self-contained communities; 3) maximize accessibility and transportation options; 4) create walkable neighbourhoods; 5) foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place; 6) encourage quality, compact development; 7) use context sensitive design; 8) encourage cluster development; 9) encourage infill development; 10) reform tax and utility rates; 11) concentrate activities; 12) encourage transit oriented development; 13) manage parking for efficiency; 14) avoid overly-restrictive zoning; 15) good roadway connectivity; 16) site design and building orientation; 17) improve nonmotorized travel conditions; 18) implement transit demand management; 19) improve street design to create complete streets; 20) preserve green space; 21) encourage a mix of housing types and prices; 22) utility management.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Province of Ontario (2002). *Ontario smart growth: A new vision*, 3-fold brochure. Toronto, ON: author.

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Province of Ontario (24 November 2005). Ontario Government Helping the Greater Golden Horseshoe Area Plan for Its Future, news release. Source retrieved March 19, 2006 from [http://www.pir.gov.on.ca/userfiles/HTML/cma\\_4\\_44021\\_1.html](http://www.pir.gov.on.ca/userfiles/HTML/cma_4_44021_1.html). See as well, Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Province of Ontario (2005, November). *Places to grow-Proposed growth plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*. Toronto, ON: author; and, Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Province of Ontario (2005, November). *Places to grow-Planning for growth: A guide to the proposed growth plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*. Ministry: author.

<sup>9</sup> Region of Waterloo (2003, July). *Regional growth management strategy*, p. 2. Waterloo: author. The Region is the 10<sup>th</sup> largest urban area in Canada, and the 4<sup>th</sup> largest in Ontario.

<sup>10</sup> Pye, A. (2005, May). *Moving Forward Together: A description of community life from residents of Cambridge and North Dumfries*, p. 42. Cambridge: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, Volunteer/Information. A negative relationship means that as one variable increases in value, the other decreases in value and vice versa. A positive relationship means that as one variable increases or decreases in value, so does the other (see pp. 34-38).

<sup>11</sup> Pye, A. *A description of community life*, op. cit., pp. 34-38.

<sup>12</sup> See the following: Pye, A. (2005, May). *Moving Forward Together: Resident discussion groups: A report on the strengths and challenges of Cambridge and North Dumfries*, p. 15. Cambridge: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, Volunteer/Information Cambridge, & United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries; Pye, A. (2005, May). *Moving Forward Together: Stakeholder perspectives on the strengths and challenges of Cambridge and North Dumfries*,

p. 11. Cambridge: Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, Volunteer/Information Cambridge, & United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

<sup>13</sup> See Pye, *Resident discussion groups*, op. cit., pp. 11-12, and Pye, *Stakeholder perspectives*, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> See Pye, *Resident discussion groups*, op. cit., pp. 14-16, and Pye, *Stakeholder perspectives*, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

<sup>15</sup> See Pye, *Resident discussion groups*, op. cit., p. 10, and Pye, *Stakeholder perspectives*, op. cit., p. 7.

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