

Ontario Government Releases Long Anticipated Provincial Planning Statement



On August 20, 2024, the Ontario government released the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 (2024 PPS), introducing fundamental changes in how growth planning is carried out in the province. The 2024 PPS comes into effect on October 20, 2024 and applies to all decisions in respect of the exercise of any authority that affects a planning matter made on or after that date.

The 2024 PPS continues the Ontario government's focus in recent years on building more homes and replaces the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020 and A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2019 (the Growth Plan), the latter of which no longer will be applicable by operation of a [regulation that was filed on August 20, 2024](#), revoking the designation of the Greater Golden Horseshoe as a growth plan area effective October 20, 2024.

To understand the proposed changes introduced through the PPS 2024 in context, Osler has prepared a comprehensive comparison, which can be downloaded here:

[Provincial Planning Statement 2024 \[PDF\]](#)

In addition, the new definition of “area of employment” in the *Planning Act*, which was introduced in Bill 97 in 2023, will come into force on October 20 as well.

Some of the key changes are:

Growth targets

- With the repeal of the Growth Plan, municipalities no longer will be required to plan to specific population and employment targets for a horizon year, which represents a fundamental shift from the past 20 years that involved all land budget decisions of municipalities being driven by those targets.
- When creating a new official plan, and for each official plan update, municipalities will be required to have enough land designated to meet the projected needs for a time horizon of at least 20 years, but not more than 30 years, as informed by provincial guidance, based on Ontario population projections from the Ministry of Finance. Infrastructure planning can be for beyond the 30-year time frame.

Settlement area expansions

- With no requirement for municipal comprehensive reviews, municipalities can consider settlement area expansions at any time. The tests to be applied in considering settlement area expansion are less stringent, and require consideration of, among other things, capacity in infrastructure and public service facilities, phasing, avoidance of prime agricultural areas, and consideration of the minimum distance separation formulae. There is no limitation on the ability of landowners from applying for such an expansion. Combined with the ability to appeal settlement area expansions to the Ontario Land Tribunal (introduced in Bill 185), this allows owners to apply for, and appeal, expansions.

Strategic growth areas and major transit station areas

- The concept of strategic growth areas from the Growth Plan has been integrated into the 2024 PPS. Municipalities are encouraged to identify strategic growth areas in official plans, and should be the focus of significant population and employment growth.
- Strategic growth areas include major transit station areas, which are similarly carried forward into the 2024 PPS from the Growth Plan. Planning authorities must delineate major transit station areas on higher order transit corridors within an approximately 500 to 800-metre radius of a transit station and which maximizes the number of potential transit users that are within walking distance of the station.

Intensification

- The Growth Plan contained specific intensification targets which required municipalities to plan for a certain amount of growth within defined built boundaries. The 2024 PPS supports intensification in general and requires planning authorities to establish and maintain minimum targets for intensification and redevelopment within built-up areas, based on local conditions.
- Municipalities are required to keep their zoning by-laws up to date by establishing minimum densities, heights and other standards to accommodate growth and development.
- The 2024 PPS introduces the concept of “large and fast-growing municipalities”, which are listed in Schedule 1 of the 2024 PPS. These municipalities are encouraged to plan for a target of 50 residents and jobs per gross hectare in designated growth areas.

Municipal comprehensive reviews

- Municipal comprehensive reviews of official plans have not been integrated into the 2024 PPS.

Employment land conversions

- Municipalities can consider (and landowners can apply for) the removal of land from employment areas. The tests to be met include a need for the removal and the land not being required for employment uses over the long term, the proposed uses would not negatively impact the overall viability of the employment area, infrastructure and public service facilities are available to accommodate the proposed uses, and the municipality has sufficient employment lands to accommodate projected employment growth to the horizon of the relevant approved official plan.

Protection of employment uses

- A new policy has been introduced that will require that all development within 300 metres of employment areas shall avoid, or mitigate, potential impacts on the “long term economic viability” of employment uses.

Other policy changes

- In implementing the PPS, the Ministry can take into account other considerations to “balance government priorities”.
- Collaboration with school boards in the design of schools is encouraged, to design schools innovatively, including integration in high rise developments.
- Land uses which may cause a potential aviation safety hazard in relation to airports are now prohibited – they were previously “discouraged”.
- Watershed planning is encouraged for listed large and fast-growing municipalities to plan for sewage, stormwater and water services.

The content of this article is intended to provide a general guide to the subject matter. Specialist advice should be sought about your specific circumstances.

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