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Cindy Tan
Manager
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Ontario Growth Secretariat
777 Bay Street
Toronto Ontario M5G 2E5

Kim Peters
Strategic Advisor
Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
Niagara Escarpment Commission - Georgetown Office
232 Guelph Street
Georgetown Ontario L7G 4B1

Re: Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review
Proposed Greenbelt Plan (2016), (part of the Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review) (EBR #: 012-7195)
Proposed Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2016 (part of the Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review) (EBR #: 012-7194)
Amended Niagara Escarpment Plan, 2016 (part of the Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review) (EBR #: 012-7228)
Proposed Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (2016), (part of the Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review) (EBR #: 012-7197)

Ms. Tan and Ms. Peters:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the “Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review”. Conservation Ontario is the network of Ontario’s 36 Conservation Authorities (CAs). These comments are being provided to you as a result of consultation with CA planning staff who have extensive experience working within the framework of the Growth Plan (GP), Greenbelt (GB), Niagara Escarpment (NEP) and/or the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plans (ORMCP). These comments were endorsed by Conservation Ontario Council on September 26, 2016 and they are not intended to limit consideration of comments shared individually by Conservation Authorities through the Provincial Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review process.

General Comments

Conservation Authority Contributions to the Implementation of the Provincial Plans

Conservation Authorities provide support for the implementation of the four provincial Plans. Conservation Authorities help the Province and municipalities to reach the objectives of the provincial Plans through their delegated responsibilities around flooding and other natural hazards, their watershed management agency role, as plan review service providers to their municipalities, and as one of the largest landowners in Ontario.

Integrated watershed management (IWM) is an approach that requires the management of human activities and natural resources, together, on a watershed basis to ensure the sustainable and resilient ecological and socio-economic well-being of Ontario. Conservation Authorities are at the forefront of delivery of IWM at the local scale by involving municipalities, businesses including the agriculture and building industry, environmental non-government organizations, the local community, and other

stakeholders in shared decision-making about management plans and actions to be undertaken in the watershed.

The Role of Conservation Authorities

Conservation Ontario strongly supports the Province's proposal to require watershed planning and to measure plan performance. Conservation Authorities are the experts when it comes to watershed planning and management and the Province is urged to recognize this expertise and increase the integration of Conservation Authorities in the implementation of these Plans. This is particularly pertinent for facilitating watershed planning; defining natural heritage and water resource systems; natural hazard delineation and mapping under individual CA regulations; stormwater management (including green infrastructure and low impact development); protection of municipal drinking water sources; protection of environmentally sensitive lands; and partnering and providing technical advice to planning authorities and the Province. Actions that the Province should consider to enhance integration between the proposed policy directions and the role and function of Conservation Authorities include:

- Collaborating with Conservation Ontario and affected Conservation Authorities on the proposed guidance materials for watershed planning;
- Acknowledging in the Plans that Conservation Authorities undertake and facilitate collaborative watershed planning through all of its phases (building partnerships, watershed characterization, action plans, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and updating);
- Consulting with, and utilizing natural heritage systems prepared by Conservation Authorities when considering the proposed provincially mapped Natural Heritage System (NHS);
- Recognizing that Conservation Authorities, in partnership with municipalities, will be required to effectively implement the Plans at a watershed and site specific scale; and
- Ensuring that the current *Conservation Authorities Act* review harmonizes with the significant policy direction related to Conservation Authority functions and skills contained in the proposed revisions to the Plans (i.e. supporting Integrated Watershed Management).

As numerous amendments will impact the operational roles of CAs, CA expertise and information will be increasingly relied upon to implement these Plans. To ensure better integration and operationalization of the Plans, the role of Conservation Authorities should be clearly acknowledged throughout these Plans. Moreover, the Province is encouraged to consider the Conservation Authorities as partners and to leverage their knowledge and expertise for greater efficiencies in the development of guidance materials, monitoring programs, and natural heritage system mapping.

Building Complete Communities

Conservation Ontario is supportive of the concept of the development of "Complete Communities" in principle; however it is felt that the definition of complete communities is too narrow in scope. Broadening of the definition of "Complete Communities" should be considered to describe all aspects of healthy and sustainable communities such as public health and safety, and the contributions of a healthy environment (clean air/water; functioning and accessible natural systems and green infrastructure; access to a low-carbon lifestyle) to the overall health and well-being of residents. This definition should be expanded to include an environmental component and further consideration should be taken to include reference to this in the context of watershed planning.

Increasing Intensification Targets in the Growth Plan

Conservation Ontario is supportive of increased intensification targets in the Growth Plan to assist Ontario in reaching its climate change objectives as outlined in the Climate Change Strategy, 2015 as well as to build complete communities. Strong policies are required to ensure that increasing intensification targets does not equate to unreasonable pressure to develop lands adjacent to or within natural heritage or natural hazard areas, or drinking water vulnerable areas in order for municipalities and developers to meet the density targets. At the same time, thoughtful approaches to protection and management of natural features is required based on science, best management practices, and innovative technology. With land at a premium these approaches need to support continued functioning of the system while allowing for multi-use of an area where appropriate.

Subsection 2.2.1 of the GP outlines policies to manage growth. It should be recognized that not all municipally serviced areas have the existing hydraulic capacity in their wastewater treatment plants or capacity in the receiving river system to support growth without substantial effort to optimize existing infrastructure or capital investments to build new treatment plants. Section 4.2.4.5 of the Growth Plan applies to developed shoreline areas outside of settlement areas. It provides policies to guide minor rounding out, infill development, redevelopment and resort development that were previously zoned for concentrations of development as of an effective date. While the principle of the policy is understood, it is unclear what is meant as a “concentration of development” (e.g. is linear development along a shoreline considered a concentration of development?). It is recommended that this policy be amended to clarify when ‘rounding out’ is appropriate in these sensitive areas.

Supporting Agriculture

Conservation Ontario is supportive of the Province’s efforts to “protect the region’s high-quality agricultural lands from urban sprawl”, and “enhance the agricultural system to include not only the land base, but also the infrastructure and other assets”. The clarification and additional protection policies for agricultural lands and greater flexibility for “on-farm diversified uses” and planning for local food and near-urban agriculture through development of regional agri-food strategies, and the mapping of the “Agricultural System” is also supported. Conservation Ontario would like to be engaged in the “agricultural system” mapping discussions as there is only ‘one landscape’ and recognizing that there is an inter-relationship with the natural heritage and water resource systems.

Conservation Ontario is supportive in principle of the removal of the requirement for a natural heritage evaluation (NHE) or hydrologic evaluation provided certain criteria are met for buildings and structures for “agricultural uses”, and “agriculture-related uses”. It is recommended that “on-farm diversified uses” that meet a threshold size for major development (500 m²), or large-scale filling activities (>500 m³) be subject to a natural heritage evaluation or hydrologic evaluation. Moreover, additional detail surrounding this exemption is required to ensure consistent implementation. For example, in the GB section 3.2.5.8 b-f, development is exempted from requiring a natural heritage evaluation or hydrologic evaluation based on conditions which may be difficult to implement, due to wording such as “where feasible”, and “to the maximum extent possible”. Further clarity is requested through detailed implementation guidance prepared in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including agriculture, municipalities and Conservation Authorities; otherwise the determination of whether a proposed development has met many of these conditions could be subjective. Moreover, the policy direction to ensure “ecological impacts are minimized” could be challenging because demonstrating conformity with this test requires some level of reporting and analysis which could end up quite similar to a NHE.

Consideration should also be given to ensure that the Plans' direction is consistent with implementation of CA regulations, where a CA permit, including supporting studies may still be required under the *Conservation Authorities Act*, particularly with proposed development in natural hazard areas. Furthermore, consideration should also be given to *Clean Water Act, 2006* source protection plans, which contain policies that could require hydrological and hydrogeological assessments for certain future development and buildings. In limited situations, prohibitions may apply.

Finally, some key natural heritage features identified in the Plans do not have a specified minimum vegetation protection zone (MVPZ). Instead, they state that the width of the MVPZ shall be determined through the completed NHE. Additional guidance is required to determine how the MVPZ is to be set for agricultural development in the cases where a NHE is not required. The Vegetation Protection Zone definition has also been changed to simply state, "A vegetated buffer area surrounding a key natural heritage feature or key hydrologic feature". As new buildings and structures for agricultural purposes may be exempted from the requirement to establish a condition of natural, self-sustaining vegetation within a vegetation protection zone, it is unclear whether cropped areas would "count" as that buffer. Further implementation guidance is required.

Protecting Natural Heritage and Water

Conservation Ontario is strongly supportive of the Province's goal of identifying and mapping the natural heritage system (NHS) in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH), outside of the Greenbelt Area. The target date for mapping the NHS within the GGH is ambitious, and Conservation Authorities are prepared to assist. The Province is strongly encouraged to utilize existing mapping from Conservation Authorities and Municipalities, where it exists, to ensure the best possible mapping product is developed. When undertaking this mapping exercise, it is important for the Province to note that NHS mapping is typically completed in conjunction with watershed planning, as supported in Section 3.2.5 of the Greenbelt Plan. Therefore, the mapping product should be created with this intersection in mind to ensure consistency between Provincial and Municipal/Conservation Authority NHS system mapping and watershed planning documents. Finally, it is unclear for municipalities that do not currently have completed mapping of the Water Resource Systems (including key features) whether they would be required to do so as part of their subsequent conformity exercise/comprehensive municipal plan review. Conservation Authorities are prepared to assist in this mapping, however direction is required to indicate what criteria should be used and the appropriate Provincial resources must be allocated.

In the interim, it is recommended that the Growth Plan be amended to indicate that the Natural Heritage System and Water Resources System policies still apply to unmapped features that meet the technical criteria for being included.

As the second largest landowner in the province, Conservation Authorities play a key role in providing recreational opportunities to the public, as well as protecting, enhancing and managing this land within the Plan areas. The Province is requested to provide further clarity and coordination regarding implementation of approved Parks and Open Space Master Plans for Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Space Systems (NEPOSS) properties, including species at risk coordination of all recreational uses/development in approved NEPOSS Master Plans. To address this request, the Province could amend section 2.7.3 of the NEP and/or a notwithstanding provision could be added to policy 2.7.6 to allow development to proceed, subject to obtaining the necessary ESA approvals.

Key Hydrologic Features and Areas

The identification of Water Resource Systems is integral to protecting water. These Systems include key hydrologic features and areas. However, mapping of these key features and areas is either inconsistent or absent amongst various pieces of legislation. Key hydrologic features include permanent and intermittent streams; lakes (and their littoral zones); seepage areas and springs; and wetlands. Key hydrologic areas include significant groundwater recharge areas; highly vulnerable aquifers; and significant surface water contribution areas. Many of these features and areas have been mapped in Assessment Reports under the *Clean Water Act*. Conservation Ontario supports the integration of Provincial initiatives within these Plans. As these vulnerable areas were mapped using the best available data, this mapping should be considered in the development of technical rules and as a potential starting point for mapping the key hydrologic features/areas. It is important that consistent mapping is utilized in the implementation of the Provincial Plans and which is complementary to the work already undertaken under the *Clean Water Act*. This supports a consistent approach to water protection across Ontario amongst the various plans and Acts. In areas where the mapping is quite coarse or was not required under the *CWA* (e.g. intermittent streams), it is recommended that the Province provide grant funding to complete the field assessments needed to map these.

Additionally, it is recommended that the policies regarding wellhead protection areas and highly vulnerable aquifers in the ORMCP should be consistent with the Source Protection Plans developed under the *Clean Water Act*. Municipal Official Plans are already required to conform to local Source Protection Plan requirements, and must include *Clean Water Act* vulnerable area mapping. Mapping of wellhead protection areas in the ORMCP should match those developed under the *Clean Water Act* as different wellhead protection areas mapping for the same municipal wells would make Official Plan implementation very difficult for municipalities. To avoid confusion and duplication, the wellhead protection areas in the ORMCP should defer to the *Clean Water Act* and to the policies in the applicable Source Protection Plan.

As another example of integration, Conservation Ontario supports exemptions for agricultural operations in wellhead protection areas and areas of high aquifer vulnerability in the ORMCP if the owner or operator is carrying out operations that are regulated under the *Nutrient Management Act, 2002* and any applicable requirement under the *Clean Water Act, 2006*.

In speaking to key hydrologic areas in the Greenbelt Plan, section 3.2.4.1 sets out requirements for infiltration. Although the goals articulated in this section are admirable, the policies as proposed are quite restrictive. In some areas, it is not possible to maintain predevelopment infiltration and if roads are added, road salt becomes a concern relative to the quality of infiltrating water. A middle ground may be more appropriate in this case. For example, the Halton-Hamilton Source Protection Plan includes a policy that states, “the municipal planning authority shall require that planning applications demonstrate that all attempts have been made to achieve a pre-development recharge condition using best management practices and including low impact development measures”.

Finally, to ensure that development affecting hydrologic features will have no negative impacts, section 2.6 of the NEP should be amended to include the need to implement stormwater management controls. The Province could defer to the stormwater management policies found within the Growth Plan, consistent with the approach taken with the Greenbelt Plan.

Mineral Aggregate Operations

Conservation Ontario is supportive of the general prohibition of new aggregate operations, wayside pits and quarries from significant wetlands; habitat of endangered and threatened species; and significant woodlands. The revised Greenbelt Plan (section 4.3.2.3) permits new mineral aggregate operations in wayside pits in key natural heritage features and key hydrologic features, subject to certain application demonstrations and restoration. This seems contradictory to the Plans' goal of maintaining the natural heritage system. Applications should only be considered where proponents can demonstrate that there will be no negative impacts on the features or ecological or hydrological functions they provide. It is recommended that language similar to that found in the NEP (section 2.9.2) be reflected in the GB; which requires a demonstration that there be no negative impacts on the feature or its functions prior to approval.

Similarly, the GB (section 4.3.2.6) sets out the minimum requirements for rehabilitation of new mineral aggregate operations in the natural heritage system. The minimum rehabilitation requirements are inadequate to address the loss of the features and the functions due to below water table extraction. The policy should be revised to permit new or expanded mineral aggregate operations or wayside pits where it can be demonstrated that there will be no negative impacts on the key features and the ecological and hydrological functions they provide.

Finally, the GP discusses ecological rehabilitation of mineral aggregate sites. Criteria are required to determine whether the rehabilitation has provided a "greater ecological value" (policy 4.2.8.5a). This policy should also provide additional direction with regard to below water table extraction and particularly, the assessment of potential impacts on key hydrologic features.

Watershed Planning

As previously indicated, CO is very supportive of the requirement to undertake watershed planning across all four Plans. The Province is further encouraged to amend the Plans to include the collaborative tone found within the GB, which clearly identifies CAs as partners within the watershed planning process (as compared to section 4.2.1.1 of the GP which states municipalities should partner with CAs "as appropriate"). Conservation Authorities have significant expertise in this area and are prepared to assist with the development of forthcoming Provincial guidance on watershed and subwatershed plan preparation.

When undertaking watershed planning, it is important to integrate the natural heritage system mapping as per the comments above. Clarity is required for how the identification of the NHS and mapping (to be completed by the Province) will be integrated, if it is to be completed as a separate task. It is currently unclear what the scale of this mapping will be and whether it will be sufficient to satisfy local needs. Consistent terminology and definitions with regard to watershed planning within the Plans and between the Plans is also required.

It is strongly supported that the ORMCP requires municipalities to prepare watershed plans, however it should be clarified that all municipalities must complete these plans, not just municipalities which are subject to "large scale development". The NEP refers to "approved" watershed planning (p. 32 and 40) but it is unclear who will approve and fund the plans. Additionally, there is no indication regarding how frequently these plans will need to be updated. While the Province is commended for including watershed planning requirements into the Plans, these requirements must be appropriately resourced both through the creation of technical material prepared in close collaboration with municipalities, Conservation Ontario and affected Conservation Authorities, and funding to undertake the work.

Soil Re-Use Strategies and Managing Excess Soil

Conservation Ontario applauds the Province for updating the Plans to include consideration relative to the movement of large-scale fill. The proposed policies for large-scale fill sites are general and high-level; therefore further direction will be required in order to operationalize these proposals. It is suggested that reference be made within these Plans to the Province's concurrent efforts to develop an Excess Soil Management Policy Framework which should provide guidance to municipalities on how to address excess soil from source to receiving site. Sections 4.2.9.2 and 3 of the Growth Plan (GP) encourage municipalities to develop soil reuse strategies as part of planning for growth and to integrate soil management practices into planning approvals which is supported however, a general strengthening of the policies is required. For example, section 4.2.9.3 b should be amended to note that excess soil will not be permitted in key natural heritage features and key hydrologic features. Fill placement in the areas adjacent to these features should also be discouraged.

Overall, given the potential negative impacts on natural features and hazards that may result from large-scale fill, policy language should be strengthened to require best practices to sustainably manage excess soil. The Province is commended for its efforts to manage fill from source to receiving site through its Excess Soil Management Policy Framework however the proposed amendments to these Plans do not include sufficient strength to make that happen. The Province is encouraged to include a reference to the future legislative obligations to proponents under the Excess Soil Management Policy Framework and regulations. In order to fully ensure environmental protection, it is necessary that Provincial Plans (a) consistently define fill to include any type of material deposited or placed on land and prohibit fill placement within key natural heritage and key hydrologic features and the associated minimum vegetation protection zones, and (b) provide guidance with regard to all types of fill, not just excess soil.

Further to the statements above, the Province is encouraged to amend the proposed exemption found within the GB for a NHE/HE for on-farm diversified uses to address the placement of large-scale fill. This potential exemption would be contrary to the proposed policy which requires the demonstration of no adverse environmental effects.

The Province is also reminded that a large proportion of the excess soil *receiving* sites are operating outside of a requirement for a Planning Act approval. For that reason, the Province is again encouraged to require that municipalities have site alteration/fill and tree protection/ cutting by-laws which are consistent with these Plans. In cases where receiving sites are without a planning approval, the operationalization of the Excess Soil Management Policy Framework will be left to municipalities and Conservation Authorities. Therefore, to assist CAs with managing violations under the regulations related to illegal filling activities, it is recommended that amendments be made to the *Conservation Authorities Act* and, if necessary, regulations made under the *Provincial Offences Act*, to enhance compliance and enforcement efforts.

Growing the Greenbelt

Conservation Ontario is supportive of the proposed provincially led process to identify additional areas of ecological and hydrologic significance in the Greenbelt (GB) Plan where urbanization should not occur. Conservation Authorities have extensive monitoring programs which could assist the Province with developing science-based mapping of these areas of significance. The Province should better define how expansion of the GB will be completed and CAs are prepared to assist.

Conservation Ontario applauds the expansion of the GB to include large coastal wetlands. This is buttressed by the Province's desire to continue to grow the GB in major river valleys. The Province is

encouraged to consider provisions in the Greenbelt Plan to allow for privately owned urban river valley lands to be included in the plan area where the landowners are supportive. Conservation Authorities, municipalities, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) partners have been successful in delivering private land stewardship programs that help educate the public on the environment and best management practices for protecting, managing and enhancing the natural heritage system. The GB Plan should be amended to allow private lands along the urban valley systems to be designated under the Plan, should the landowner be supportive of this designation. Financial support to initiate and expand education, land stewardship, tax incentive programs, and other related initiatives should be considered to incent implementation of supportive actions, both public and private.

Addressing Climate Change

The Province is commended for directly incorporating climate change considerations into these Plans and referencing and integrating concurrent provincial initiatives, including the Ontario Climate Change Strategy, 2015. Conservation Ontario is supportive of the requirement for municipalities to develop policies in their official plans to identify actions that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address climate change adaptation goals. Adding the protection of natural areas to mitigate and reduce the impact of climate change as a purpose of the Natural Core Area designation in the amended ORMCP is also supported.

Section 4.2.10 of the Growth Plan provides very high level policy related to climate change. Requiring that municipalities have climate change policies, but merely *encouraging* municipalities to implement them creates a potential gap. Moreover, this section could include policies that encourage actions to address climate change beyond the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. For example, policies which deal with building resilient landscapes and infrastructure that would assist in mitigating flooding from extreme rainfall events. Section 4.2.10.2 of the GP offers ways in which municipalities can address climate change. Consistent with section 3.1.3 of the PPS which requires planning authorities to consider the potential impacts of climate change that may increase the risk associated with natural hazards, drought management and flood preparedness planning, including contingency plans, should be included in the list of items to address the impacts of climate change in the GP. This section should be strengthened and tied back to other climate change policies in the remainder of the Plan.

Green Infrastructure and Low Impact Development

A key to integrated planning is the incorporation of green infrastructure, including the use of Low Impact Development (LID) measures for new and existing communities. Green infrastructure can extend the life of many types of traditional infrastructure, can be implemented at multiple scales, and there is flexibility as to when and how it is integrated into developed areas. The benefits of green infrastructure include providing greater resilience to the potential impacts of climate change, stormwater retention, erosion control and improved air and water quality.

Conservation Ontario supports the improved policies to require integrated infrastructure and land use planning related to proactive stormwater management, green infrastructure, and low impact development design; all of which have a stronger focus on watershed planning/one water approach. Moving forward, there is an opportunity to further promote the use of innovative green infrastructure throughout the Province as a means to address new and emerging issues, including climate change adaptation and mitigation. In addition, green infrastructure may also mitigate the impacts associated with watershed stressors such as urbanization and increasing demands on urban and rural natural heritage systems and water supplies. It is also well documented that green infrastructure and LID

measures can be a key component to support the creation of attractive, livable and healthy communities.

A gap in the policy approach can be found in section 3.2.7.2 of the GP, where it requires that proposals for large-scale development proceeding by way of secondary plans, plans of subdivision and vacant land plans of condominium, and proposals for resort development be supported by stormwater management plans or *equivalent*. It is unclear what is considered to be equivalent. Similarly, policy 2.2.8.2e references an “equivalent” to subwatershed plans. Implementation guidance is required in both instances.

The Plans incorporate new terminology around green infrastructure and LID, consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement. The concept of the natural heritage system as part of green infrastructure, while incorporated into the definition of green infrastructure, is not sufficiently integrated into the policy text. It is recommended that the Provincial Plans acknowledge that the most appropriate level to address green infrastructure is through watershed and subwatershed planning. Further guidance and support is required by the Province as it relates to the roles that CAs can play in assisting municipalities in incorporating green infrastructure into watershed /subwatershed plans and the watershed planning process. This should be emphasized across all four Plans.

Finally, while the support for green infrastructure and LID is appreciated, it must also be acknowledged that it is not a panacea. The use of LID applications should be encouraged, but a caution should be provided for those areas that rely on groundwater as their primary source for drinking water. Chlorides and other contaminants may be introduced into groundwater systems through certain green infrastructure/ LID applications. The Province is encouraged to address this issue in section 2.2.1.3 f and 3.2.7.1 c of the GP. Consideration should be given to local Source Protection Plan policies that may require that water, returned to supply surface water bodies or aquifers, is not contaminated and does not further deteriorate known water quality issues

Integrated watershed management approach

Given the significant impact from urbanization and climate change on riverine and urban flooding, as well as to erosion processes and natural hazard management, these concepts should be included in the definition of watershed planning and subwatershed plans. This is particularly important as they relate to the protection of long-term public health and safety, as well as natural heritage and hydrologic systems. Consideration for climate change mitigation and adaptation could be further integrated throughout the four Plans by identifying it as a necessary component of watershed planning at the local, regional and provincial levels. The Province is encouraged to develop technical material to support this endeavor and Conservation Authorities are prepared to assist.

Integrated watershed management would allow for the assessment of resilience on the landscape and in the river systems to climate change, and address issues such as flooding, erosion, and drought. This would allow for the development of strategies to ensure that there are redundancies in the natural environment to address climate change impacts at a variety of scales and scopes. The GP makes reference to the “consideration of climate change impacts” in the Plan’s definition of “watershed planning” however, the language is too ambiguous to be useful. It is recommended that the language be strengthened to include how climate change will be considered and addressed in the context of watershed planning and how it relates to the other climate change policies found within the Plan. The role that Conservation Authorities play in addressing climate change and assisting municipalities in adapting to and mitigating for the impacts of climate change through the implementation of water and land management programs should also be acknowledged throughout all of the Plans.

Integrating Infrastructure

It is agreed that matching infrastructure investments with long-term land use decisions makes the best use of limited resources. As promoted in the proposed climate change policies, the encouragement of municipalities to undertake infrastructure vulnerability risk assessments is appreciated. CAs' hydrologic modelling and floodplain mapping will be quite useful to municipalities and the Province for these assessments.

The proposal to include section 3.2.5.1 d of the Growth Plan to demonstrate through an Environmental Assessment avoidance or impact minimization /mitigation to key natural heritage/hydrologic features and key hydrologic areas in infrastructure corridors is helpful.

Section 3.1 of the GP discusses the infrastructure required to support growth. A definition for "optimized" or "optimization" should be provided as it pertains to existing infrastructure. It is recommended that these definitions include the concept that a continuous improvement process be undertaken relative to the performance or capacity of existing infrastructure. This would involve an evaluation of the current infrastructure, followed by a systematic approach to achieve improvements.

Given the sensitivities of the landscape found on the Oak Ridges Moraine, it is recommended that the definition of "infrastructure" found within Section 41 of the ORMCP be amended to remove items related to energy, including 41 (1) (c) "gas and oil pipelines and associated facilities and (f) "electric generation facilities and electricity transmission and distribution systems". The requirement under Section 41 (2) (a) to demonstrate need and that there is no reasonable alternative should be given legislative regard by infrastructure ministries and related legislation.

Improving Plan Implementation

While it is acknowledged that many of the Crombie Advisory Panels' recommendations would have to be implemented outside of the Plans themselves, it must be stated that significant Provincial support is required for effective and consistent plan implementation. In order to improve plan implementation, Conservation Ontario is supportive of the Crombie Advisory Panel recommendations, including:

- A Secretariat within the provincial government with the capacity and resources to ensure effective coordination of actions by provincial ministries, municipalities, conservation authorities, and other local bodies that will facilitate implementation of the four Plans;
- An Oversight Forum to monitor and report on implementation and deliver public education about the four Plans; and
- Provincial Programs with consistent long-term funding for conservation land securement, restoration, stewardship, and etc.

In addition, Conservation Ontario supports the following:

- Specific Practitioners Guidance Letters issued by the Province on a regular basis to assist with implementation and interpretation challenges in a timely manner;
- Updated practitioner technical bulletins and guidelines, particularly with regard to watershed planning, as well as natural heritage and water system development and mapping; and
- As the proposed Provincial Plan amendments will not be appealable, municipal conformity amendments to incorporate the policies into Official Plans and zoning by-laws should be similarly shielded from appeal.

Consistency and Integration with the Four Plans and the Provincial Policy Statement

Consistent definitions should be used in the PPS and all Provincial Plans, including: access standards, adjacent lands, coastal wetlands, designated vulnerable areas, erosion hazard, flooding hazard, groundwater features, hazardous sites, ecological function, ecological integrity, ecological value, intermittent streams, significant wildlife habitat, significant woodland, significant valleyland, conserved, development, stormwater management plan, negative impact, habitat of endangered and threatened species, and woodland. Moreover, there are many instances where policies of the Greenbelt Plan and Growth Plan with respect to natural heritage are very similar but with minor wording differences. These policies should be amended so that both Plans use the same policy wording and terms to avoid confusion over the intent of these minor differences. If there is a policy reason for the different wording, then that interpretation should be provided to reviewers before the different wording is finalized so that the full implications of the wording differences are understood. Technical bulletins regarding the definitions and the appropriate interpretation should also be produced.

All Key Hydrologic Features policies with the Plans should ensure that their ecological functions are also considered and subject to “no negative impact”. For Key Hydrologic Areas within the Growth Plan, the term “surface water storage areas” should be added since not all storage areas are wetlands and not all wetlands recharge groundwater. For the infrastructure definition in the Growth Plan, dams and dikes should be included in the list of examples. For consistency across the board, definitions should be provided for watershed planning, watershed plan and subwatershed plan in all four Plans.

To encourage full implementation of the Plans, the Province is encouraged to review the transition provisions of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Act. Currently, applications submitted under the *Planning Act* prior to the promulgation of the ORMCP (2001) where no decision has been made are exempt from complying with the full suite of policies in the ORMCP. This should be amended to remove this grandfathering, given that fifteen years have now passed. Furthermore, the Act should be amended to require that approvals issued prior to the ORMCP coming into effect and the work has not commenced, be revised and subject to the full Plan. Finally, to encourage full implementation of the ORMCP, wording such as “where feasible”, “where possible”, and “if possible” should be removed, clarified and strengthened to align with the Plan’s objectives.

Finally, Section 5.2.2.3 of the Growth Plan deals with forthcoming supplementary direction from the Province. While it indicates that any policy that relies on supplementary direction should be implemented to the fullest extent possible, it does not provide direction on how to do so. This is particularly concerning with regard to technical issues, including watershed planning, the delineation of a natural heritage system, etc. Therefore it is pivotal that the Province sticks to their commitments to develop this direction as the absence of it may result in these policies being appealed to the OMB.

Alignment with Other Provincial Initiatives

Conservation Ontario is supportive of the Province’s efforts to align the updates to these Plans with other concurrent provincial initiatives. This includes the new policy within the Greenbelt Plan requiring municipalities to consider the Great Lakes Strategy, 2014, the targets and goals of the *Great Lakes Protection Act*, 2015 and applicable Great Lakes agreements as part of watershed planning, coastal or waterfront planning initiatives. Similarly, the connection to the Province’s Climate Change Strategy, 2015 has also been acknowledged, as well as the need to bolster the relationship to the Province’s proposed Excess Soil Management Policy Framework.

The efforts to bring these Plans into closer alignment with the *Endangered Species Act, 2007* is also acknowledged; as well as the harmonization, where possible, with the Provincial Policy Statement, 2014. The *Conservation Authorities Act* is also currently under review. Effort should be made to ensure that changes proposed to the four Plans are reinforced with those being proposed to the *Conservation Authorities Act*, including clear provincial support for the Conservation Authorities' role in integrated watershed management and the establishment of appropriate penalties and enforcement tools, such as stop work orders, under the Act to adequately address excess soil/ large-scale fill.

Finally, policies should support *Clean Water Act* Source Protection Plan policies, contributing to the protection of quality and supply of water including sources of drinking water.

Measuring Performance, Promoting Awareness and Increasing Engagement

Conservation Ontario supports the establishment of a comprehensive monitoring program to measure the effectiveness of these Plans. This program should build on existing monitoring efforts being undertaken by Conservation Authorities, including CA watershed report cards, include Provincial funding, and be consistent across the Plans.

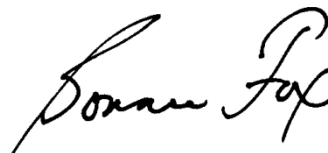
The Province is also commended for their commitment to build on existing education and outreach programs to explain the intent of the Plans, report on their progress and promote their benefits. As Conservation Authorities have tremendous expertise in delivering locally tailored stewardship and engagement programs, it is highly recommended that the Province draw from this existing capacity. Community support can often be augmented through tangible projects on the land.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the "Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review" of the Growth Plan for Greater Golden Horseshoe, Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan". Given that CAs are a commenting body in both the planning and environmental assessment processes necessary to implement the provincial Plans, and the extensive knowledge of CA planning staff regarding both the planning process and their local watersheds, Conservation Ontario is uniquely positioned to provide valuable input into this review process. Conservation Ontario is strongly supportive of the continued implementation of these Plans and looks forward to a continued dialogue as the Province completes its ten year review. Should you have any questions about this letter, please contact Leslie Rich, at extension 226 or Bonnie Fox, at extension 223.

Sincerely,



Leslie Rich, MCIP, RPP
Policy and Planning Officer



Bonnie Fox, CAE
Manager, Policy and Planning

c.c. Ling Mark, Director, Land and Water Policy Branch, Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change
Jennifer Keyes, Manager, Water Resources Section, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry

CONSERVATION ONTARIO
120 Bayview Parkway, Newmarket ON L3Y 3W3
Tel: 905.895.0716 Email: info@conservationontario.ca

www.conservationontario.ca