Growing Close to Home: Creating Complete Rural Communities

Greenbelt Foundation

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Possibility grows here.

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Executive Summary

A complete community is one that offers a full range of jobs, retail and services, housing options, transportation options, and public service facilities that meet people's needs for daily living throughout their entire lifetimes. Complete communities provide residents with easy access to a variety of services and amenities, are attractive for businesses and employers, offer diverse housing options for different age groups and incomes, enable the efficient use of existing services and infrastructure, support active and/or public transportation, and protect vital natural features and productive farmland by preventing scattered development.

Supporting the development of complete communities, including in settlement areas within rural municipalities, is a core objective in the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* as well as the *Greenbelt Plan*. However, rural municipalities can experience challenges because of lower population densities due to expansive rural landscapes with dispersed populations. It is imperative for these communities experiencing growth to prevent development encroachment, further fragmenting the surrounding prime agricultural lands and natural features.

This report summarizes findings from a literature review, jurisdictional scan of policies and plans, and interviews with staff in rural municipalities across the Greenbelt, including the Niagara Escarpment area. It identifies and discusses the key challenges and opportunities rural municipalities have when attempting to make their communities more complete.

Many rural Greenbelt municipalities recognize the value of complete communities and are taking steps to become more complete, including:

- Directing the majority of growth to existing settlement areas with existing water and wastewater servicing and infrastructure in order to reduce scattered development and utilize servicing and infrastructure more efficiently;
- Updating Official Plan policies and zoning to allow for higher density developments, mixed uses, and intensification areas, and encouraging investment in more diverse and affordable housing types, including rental housing;
- Investing in active and public transportation systems and infrastructure to reduce car-dependency, providing residents with more transportation options, and ultimately improving residents' health by encouraging an active lifestyle;
- Building on existing economic assets and major sectors, like tourism and agriculture, to promote more economic development within existing communities, while also identifying and addressing related issues, such as a lack of housing and transit that impede some residents' ability to live and work in one community;
- Protecting and enhancing the character of the community through identifying what is valued, revitalizing heritage assets, and implementing urban design guidelines;
- Supporting the agricultural economy and protecting the natural environment by restricting development on agricultural and natural heritage lands, addressing existing land-use conflicts, and enabling value-added agriculture; and,
- Diversifying public consultation strategies to attain input from a broader array of residents and achieve greater buy-in for developments and initiatives that support the achievement of complete communities.

1

Introduction

1.1 What are Complete (Rural) Communities?

Imagine you are walking in a small town. Along a lively main street, you pass by shops, restaurants, and cafes housed in renovated historic buildings. On their top floors, you see signs for doctors' and lawyers' offices, or perhaps some evidence that somebody lives there, like houseplants on the windowsill or a lit lamp. At your favourite coffee shop, you run into your neighbour grabbing a quick breakfast before he gets on the train to the city for work. You chat with the new, young barista, who tells you she's excited about her first job. From the main street you find an entrance to one of the town's public trails, where you enjoy a walk through the neighbourhoods among trees and creeks. The trail takes you to the farmer's market at the community centre, and here you talk with the local farmers about what's in season. One of them tells you they've recently opened up a Pick-Your-Own business, and encourages you to come visit sometime. After loading up on fresh produce, you take the trail back to your home on a treelined street.

This is what a complete community looks like: a vibrant, compact, walkable place with retail and services, transportation options, housing diversity, employment, public service facilities, and protected natural spaces and agricultural lands. Complete communities are economically more robust, improve residents' health, and are more resilient to the impacts of climate change because their compact built form:

- Provides residents with easy access to a variety of services and amenities;
- Is attractive for businesses and employers;
- Offers diverse housing options for different age groups and incomes within the same place;
- Enables the efficient use of existing services and infrastructure;
- Supports the use of active and/or public transportation; and,
- Maintains valuable natural heritage and keeps agricultural lands intact by preventing scattered development.

The *Greenbelt Plan* and the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*, introduced in 2005 and in 2006 respectively, promote the development of complete communities in all settlement areas across the region, including settlement areas within rural municipalities. Decades of low-density scattered development created automobile-dependent communities that lacked in housing, transportation, and employment diversity, and fragmented local natural heritage and agricultural systems. Together, the *Greenbelt* and *Growth* plans work to manage growth in a way that creates healthier, compact communities, while protecting agricultural production and associated jobs along the supply chain, and the natural environment.

Rural municipalities can face difficulties with making their towns and villages complete communities given their low population densities across an expansive rural area and dispersed populations.[1] Yet the achievement of complete communities in rural Greenbelt municipalities is especially critical given that some of them are experiencing growth.[2] As they are located in or near Canada's most productive farmland, including the provincially designated specialty crop areas in the Holland Marsh and the Niagara Peninsula, and natural heritage features such as wetlands, complete communities help to prevent development encroachment onto these vital farmland and natural areas. They also prevent the associated conflicts between non-farm residents and farmers by maintaining settlement area boundaries and supporting more infill within towns and villages.[3] [4] [5]

Many rural municipalities are developing context-specific goals and strategies for making their communities more complete, drawing their inspiration from the past. In many ways, their historic settlement areas are already models of complete communities, or have the potential to become more complete with some investment. Often, they are compact, walkable, contain a mix of uses, housing types, and places of work, and provide a diversity of services for residents' daily needs.

1.2 About this Research

The purpose of this research was to understand how the complete community concept is, and could be, applied to the rural context, and specifically to rural municipalities in and around the Greenbelt. For this research, rural municipalities are defined as municipalities that contain significant swaths of rural areas, including prime agricultural land and natural features, and predominantly communities with populations between 1,000 and 29,999, which Statistics Canada defines as small population centres.[6] Research involved a literature review, a jurisdictional scan of policies and plans, and semi-structured key informant interviews. A total of 22 staff members of municipal planning departments were interviewed between the months of June and September 2019, representing 18 municipalities in or near the Greenbelt, including the Niagara Escarpment. This research also draws on interviews conducted with 7 economic development staff, representing 8 municipalities, in the spring of 2019. For simplicity, the municipalities considered for this research will be referred to as "rural Greenbelt municipalities," though it should be noted that for some of the municipalities studied only a small percentage of their land area is included in the Greenbelt.

1 Caldwell, Kraehling, Kaptur, & Huff, 2015
2 Both the Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan restrict settlement areas' ability to expand the boundaries of their towns and villages for the reasons outlined throughout this report.
3 Caldwell & Dodds-Weir, 2003
4 North-South Environmental Inc., 2010
5 Milburn, 2011
6 Statistics Canada, 2016

Additional perspectives on and experiences with building complete communities were gleaned from a workshop the Greenbelt Foundation held in November 2019. A diversity of stakeholders from municipalities across the Greater Golden Horseshoe, including planners, economic developers, provincial staff, non-profit organizations, and community groups attended the workshop. During panel presentations and discussion tables, participants shared learnings from their own communities, including challenges and opportunities.

This report is divided into seven sections, reflecting different aspects of achieving a complete community and their applications in rural communities: growth management, housing, public and active transportation, economic development, character, agriculture and environment, and public consultation. These components are interrelated, and policies and actions taken to strengthen one aspect of a complete community often improve upon another aspect at the same time. For instance, downtown revitalization projects promote economic development opportunities by supporting existing commercial uses, creating the potential for new commercial uses, and attracting more tourism activity. At the same time, they build on and enhance the valued historic character of the community. They also typically provide more diverse and denser housing options, and support active transportation. Interrelationships between aspects of complete communities will be noted.


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COUNTRY STORE
LUKE'S
for home
CARD SHOP

2

Growth Management

Rural Greenbelt municipalities are located within or in close proximity to the Greater Golden Horseshoe, one of the fastest growing regions in North America. While some are experiencing modest or slow growth, others have seen significant growth within the past few years and are expecting that this trend will continue. For example, Uxbridge's population grew modestly with a 2.7% population increase between 2011 and 2016, while King's population surged with a 23.2% increase between 2011 and 2016.[7] Some municipalities, including those that are experiencing no growth or even decline, are also building new developments to accommodate seasonal growth, provide existing residents with more housing options and services, or are building in anticipation of future growth.

Historically, towns and villages in rural municipalities had a role as service centres for the agricultural community. However, over the past few decades, rural municipalities in close proximity to large urban areas saw an influx of non-farm populations, which created demand for residential development. Residential development in these areas most often happened in the form of low-density subdivisions and residential lot creation in the countryside. Commercial strip development along arterial highways, leading in and out of settlement areas, was also common.[8] [9] This form of development has had a number of negative impacts on rural areas, including fragmentation of farmland and natural heritage systems, conflicts between agricultural practices and new land uses like housing development, inefficient use of infrastructure and servicing, and increased car traffic on rural roads.[10]

Rural Greenbelt municipalities are now accommodating and managing growth differently by planning for a more compact built form with higher densities and mixed uses within their existing settlement area boundaries. This is being done to make better use of infrastructure and services, encourage population densities that support more active and public transit, and prevent further encroachment onto farmland and natural areas.

This section explores how rural Greenbelt municipalities are planning for and managing their growth, the opportunities growth has presented to them, and the challenges they have encountered.

7 Statistics Canada, 2017
8 Caldwell W. , 2010
9 Milburn, 2011
10 North-South Environmental Inc., 2010

2.1 Identifying Where to Grow

Rural Greenbelt municipalities have developed or are developing policies that direct the majority of their growth to existing settlement areas (often referred to as "urban areas" in Official Plans, as distinguished from "hamlets" and "rural areas"). Growth is generally directed to specific parts of existing settlement areas such as downtowns, corridors that can support more commercial activity or transit, or areas near existing or planned GO stations. Hamlets and rural areas are not targets for growth—often only limited infill is permitted in these areas. Having strong policies that clearly delineate exactly where growth is going—and where it is not—and how much growth is to be accommodated in certain areas helps municipalities better plan for housing, transportation, and services in the long-term.

Infrastructure capacity and pre-existing or planned water and wastewater servicing was commonly cited by interviewees in this research as an essential determinant for where growth can be accommodated. The majority of growth is directed to settlement areas because they often have full municipal servicing, or are planned to have full municipal servicing. Directing growth to areas with full municipal servicing and infrastructure capacity, rather than extending costly infrastructure into undeveloped areas, utilizes infrastructure and services more efficiently, which results in lower operating costs for municipalities.[11]

Infrastructure and servicing is needed to support denser clusters of population growth—residential and commercial. Lots that are serviced by septic tanks can't sustain much density. There is limited potential for compact growth and density in settlement areas that have no municipal water or wastewater servicing, or have municipal water but no wastewater servicing and vice versa. Servicing constraints limit municipalities' ability to support housing types other than single-detached family homes, such as townhouses, apartments, and secondary suites. Many municipalities noted that new higher density and infill developments could only be permitted after they had upgraded their servicing.

11 United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2015b

HIGHLIGHTS
Growth Management Policies: King and Hamilton

Through their new proposed Official Plan policies, the Township of King is directing most of their growth to three settlement areas: King City, Nobleton, and Schomberg. Out of the three settlement areas, King City is the primary focus of growth. King City has full municipal servicing, hosts a Seneca College campus, and an existing GO station that is designated as a Major Transit Station Area (MTSA). The area around the GO station is seen as an opportunity to accommodate significant intensification through mixed-use buildings and medium and higher density residential units like townhouses and apartments. The MTSA is also adjacent to the Village Core, which is a focal point of commercial activity, and the Mixed Use Areas designated through their Official Plan policies. Staff are hoping to see smaller housing units built in the MTSA to attract younger families and individuals, who can benefit from nearby access to the GO train in order to access work and other opportunities in or near Toronto.

The City of Hamilton has adopted a 'nodes and corridor' approach to plan for growth within the municipality. Supportive policies and appropriate zoning help direct growth to these areas. Nodes are focal points within a community that are interconnected by corridors. They are intended to have a mix of uses, allowing for access to housing, employment, services, recreation, and transit all within close proximity. One community node is Waterdown, a small urban area surrounded by farmland and natural heritage features. Through the Waterdown Community Node Secondary Plan, the City will protect historical characteristics, such as heritage buildings, integrate newer areas with older ones, and address concerns related to traffic and access. Currently, the growth target for Waterdown is still pending, as it was identified that intensification would not be directed to Waterdown until servicing is in place and issues with traffic are addressed.

2.2 Opportunities and Challenges with Growth

The rural Greenbelt municipalities interviewed for this research considered growth to be an opportunity that would improve the vitality and vibrancy of their towns. Population growth and increased population densities within towns support the existing amenities and services, such as shops, health services, libraries, community centres, and schools, as well as justify improvements or expansions of those amenities and services. Some municipalities have noted that the businesses on their Main Streets have seen increased clientele as a result of new residents. Concentrated growth also makes investing in active and public transportation more viable for the community and supports demand for a wider range of housing options.

Accommodating and managing growth does, however, present a number of challenges for municipalities, including:

- **Increased Pressure on Municipal Resources**
  Municipal staff have concerns about their ability to respond adequately to increased population growth, particularly where the amount of growth occurring was not expected. Increased pressure on services and infrastructure, as well as the cost of new or improved services and infrastructure, is a concern identified through this research. This issue becomes more pronounced in municipalities that do not yet have full municipal servicing, even in their established settlement areas. Some municipalities are undertaking growth management studies in order to understand their capacity to service growth.

  Growing through greenfield development appears to be more cost-effective in the short term because municipalities acquire development charges and new property tax revenues. Capital costs for new infrastructure required to service these developments, however, can be high. There are also long-term costs associated with this kind of development that are not initially apparent: municipalities must pay for future infrastructure maintenance and replacement costs that continue indefinitely and increase over time.[12] Focusing growth in areas with existing infrastructure and services that can be maximized or improved reduces the long-term financial burden for municipalities.

- **Public Buy-In**
  It can be difficult to balance what current residents want their communities to be like while accommodating new residents. Even though municipalities notify residents that they are planning for population growth and higher densities, residents are often unclear what new growth and higher densities would look like and how they would impact the character of their communities, and have concerns it will contribute to traffic and parking problems. Informing the public about what growth will entail and where growth will go can help residents better understand what is to come and how their concerns will be addressed. Municipalities are using opportunities to speak with residents, either individually or at consultations, to discuss their concerns, help them understand the impacts of growth, and highlight the positive aspects of growth, such as commercial revitalization, more housing choice, money saved on infrastructure and servicing, new schools, and so on. This ultimately helps to achieve greater acceptance and support for policies and initiatives taken to accommodate growth.

12 Thompson, 2013

3

Housing

The predominant housing type in most rural Greenbelt municipalities is single-detached houses, with many municipalities reporting that at least 80% or more of their housing stock is made up of single-detached houses.[13] Housing tenure is also predominantly homeownership, and there is limited rental housing stock. However, the residential landscape is starting to change as rural municipalities are planning for and seeing the building of more diverse and denser forms of housing, as well as rental housing. Many new housing developments include townhouses, either exclusively or mixed with single-detached and semi-detached houses. In some municipalities, more apartment or condominium buildings are being developed or planned. Many rural Greenbelt municipalities are also planning for more mixed-use developments combining housing with commerce in designated mixed-use areas.

Many rural Greenbelt municipalities have created or are in the process of creating policies and zoning by-laws that permit and encourage higher densities, diverse housing types, and mixed-use areas in order to provide more housing options for residents. To attain more affordable housing options, many municipalities are permitting and encouraging the development of secondary and garden suites. They are also looking at opportunities for intensification and infill to make better use of land, and reduce dependency on greenfield developments for accommodating new population growth. This section looks at how and why rural Greenbelt municipalities are encouraging more housing diversity, intensification, and infill, as well as the opportunities and challenges associated with housing.

13 Statistics Canada, 2017

3.1 Housing Diversity

Providing a wide range of housing types—including rental housing, seniors' housing, and affordable housing—as well as a diversity of forms like townhouses and condominium buildings, accommodates all age groups, varying levels of income, and individuals and families with differing housing needs or preferences.[14] The rural Greenbelt municipalities interviewed for this research would like to see more diversified housing options, particularly for seniors looking to downsize or move into a retirement home, youth who want to move out of their family home into their own apartment, young families looking for a starter home, and lower income workers in need of more affordable housing options. Currently, due to the general lack of housing diversity across many of the municipalities, attaining adequate housing can be a challenge for these demographics.

With an aging demographic and an influx of empty nesters and retirees who are moving from larger urban centres into smaller and rural municipalities,[15] housing geared toward seniors is becoming a priority. There are not enough services and housing options for seniors; in some cases, seniors are forced to leave their community as a result. Providing more diverse housing types, especially condominiums, smaller housing units, and retirement homes, allows residents to remain in their communities while they age. At the other end of the age spectrum, youth also face challenges with staying in the community. Youth are often drawn away from rural municipalities due to a lack of suitable housing options, such as rental apartments and secondary suites. A community with more diverse housing options ultimately accommodates residents of all ages throughout the course of their lifetimes.

3.2 Housing Affordability

As is the case in communities throughout Ontario, rural Greenbelt municipalities are challenged by issues of housing affordability.[16] Rural areas in proximity to medium or large urban areas, like most Greenbelt municipalities, have seen significant increases in home values while incomes have not kept pace. Limited rental housing options are available for those who cannot afford to purchase a home, as well as those who are working in more transient or seasonal work, such as in the tourism sector.[17]

The lack of affordable housing makes it difficult to attract and retain employees with lower incomes working in manufacturing, retail, and service industries that support tourism. This has created situations in some municipalities where local jobs are unfilled, or where the majority of local workers commute to the municipality because they cannot afford to live there while those who live in the municipality commute outside of it for higher paying jobs. For instance, in the South Georgian Bay region, the lack of affordable housing was identified as the biggest challenge for attracting and attaining tourism industry workers. The housing market is largely driven by seasonal and retirement buyers, which results in local employees competing for residential property with buyers who have significantly higher incomes. This lack of affordable housing contributed to an estimated labour shortage of over 800 positions across Bruce, Grey, and Simcoe counties in 2017.[18]

14 United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2015b
15 Kitts, 2017
16 The Provincial Policy Statement (2014) defines "affordable" as, in the case of home ownership, the least expensive of: housing for which the purchase price results in annual accommodation costs which do not exceed 30 percent of gross annual household income for low and moderate income households; or, housing for which the purchase price is at least 10 percent below the average purchase price of a resale unit in the regional market area. In the case of rental housing, affordable is defined as the least expensive of: a unit for which the rent does not exceed 30 percent of gross annual household income for low and moderate income households; or, a unit for which the rent is at or below the average market rent of a unit in the regional market area.
17 Slaunwhite, 2009
18 N. Barry Lyon Consultants Limited, 2019

Many rural Greenbelt municipalities are attempting to increase affordable housing options by allowing, encouraging, and incentivizing the development of more diverse housing types in order to attain housing at different price points. However, even as housing becomes more diverse, it is not necessarily becoming more affordable. While the higher density forms of housing that are being built are relatively affordable compared to single-detached houses, their costs are often still too high for individuals and families on lower incomes.

Another way municipalities are attempting to create more affordable housing is by permitting, encouraging, and incentivizing the creation of secondary suites, garden suites, and apartments above stores. Secondary and garden suites are regarded as an effective way to introduce more affordable, rental housing in rural municipalities through the existing housing stock. In some municipalities, there is a revived interest in turning vacant units above stores in the historic downtowns back into apartments. A number of municipalities are offering incentives, such as through their Community Improvement Plans (CIPs), to encourage the development of more rental housing and other affordable housing options. Some municipalities are also working with their upper-tier municipalities to address housing affordability issues, and many upper-tier governments have their own strategies or programs in place to address the issues at a broader scale.

HIGHLIGHTS

Incentivizing Affordable Housing: Grey Highlands and Georgina

The Municipality of Grey Highlands has multiple large industries in town, including Chapman's Ice Cream; however, these employers are experiencing workforce challenges largely due to the lack of affordable housing for their employees. To help address the lack of affordable housing, the Municipality of Grey Highlands offers a program through their Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to wave administration permit fees for affordable housing options, such as secondary suites. The CIP also offers grants for planning and building permits, as well as tax increment equivalent grants to encourage infill housing and redevelopment. While most of the uptake on their CIP has been for the programs related to building upgrades like façade improvements, Grey Highlands is seeing more applications for secondary suites in their towns and on rural properties. Commercial units that are multi-storied are also increasingly looking at renovating or upgrading their vacant second floors for rental units.

The Town of Georgina recently approved a new housing strategy to provide more affordable housing and more housing options, specifically including rental housing. Proposed action items include creating stronger policies to encourage mixed-use development, infill development, and accessory apartments in the Keswick Secondary Plan area, one of Georgina's main settlement areas. They have also proposed the possible creation of a municipal servicing allocation assignment program geared to servicing affordable housing projects. This strategy also recommends allowing accessory apartments in detached buildings and garden suites as-of-right in certain areas of the municipality. Finally, the strategy highlights efforts by York Region to address affordable housing through its draft Rental Housing Incentive Program, which would give financial benefits matched by the municipality to build purpose-built rental housing.

3.3 Intensification and Infill

Rural Greenbelt municipalities are increasingly planning for and are seeing more housing development through intensification and infill development. In addition to creating policies that enable intensification and infill, many rural Greenbelt municipalities have also established intensification targets. Many of these municipalities have conducted or are conducting intensification and infill studies to identify lots or parts of a settlement area that can accommodate intensification and infill. Vacant or underutilized lots and buildings are good locations for infill as they better utilize the existing land base, increase density, and contribute to the revitalization of an area.

In some municipalities, larger tracts of underutilized lands could become infill opportunities; for instance, the landowners of a golf course in Uxbridge proposed that a part of it be developed as a townhouse subdivision. Other areas that are often identified as intensification areas in municipalities' studies, and which are seeing more development activity, include the downtowns, neighbourhoods near GO stations, and low-density arterial highways leading into downtowns. These areas are targeted in order to promote more transit use and more vibrant downtowns.

"Gentle" intensification or infill can be more desirable and appropriate than some higher density developments for the context of rural Greenbelt municipalities because it involves increasing densities at a more modest scale, resulting in minimal impacts on the character of a community. It provides for townhomes or linked bungalows, as well as conversions or the redevelopment of existing single-detached homes into multiple units. Some rural municipalities have identified that forms of gentle intensification or infill are occurring through lot severances. Developers and even individual landowners are proposing to sever large lots within settlement areas, usually containing only one single-detached house, in order to redevelop them into two or more lots containing multiple houses. Dividing dwellings like single-family houses into multiple units is another kind of gentle intensification that increases the number of units within the existing housing stock.

3.4 Opportunities and Challenges with Housing

Diversifying the housing stock and intensifying settlement areas provides opportunities for more residents with diverse needs and of all ages to live and remain in their communities and creates the densities needed to support revitalization, transit, and other services. Municipalities have faced a number of challenges with attaining housing diversity, affordability, and intensification, such as:

- **Public Buy-In**
  Residents have concerns over how different housing types, like higher density developments and intensification, will impact the character and traffic in their communities. Some municipalities noted a stigma associated with rental housing and renters. Educating the public on the benefits of denser and diverse housing and discussing their concerns helps to create more public buy-in.

  As many municipalities noted that their residents are primarily concerned with heights and densities of housing developments, it is important to distinguish between height and density: denser development does not always mean tall buildings, and there can be low-rise developments that are compact. In fact, the historic downtowns of many of the settlement areas are an example of low-rise, compact development. Showing residents what density looks like in existing communities like their own is an effective way of demonstrating that there are a number of ways to achieve higher densities in residential and mixed-use developments.[19]

  At the same time that there is skepticism, municipalities have generally seen more public acceptance of the creation of different housing types and intensification. More residents understand the positive aspects, which include achieving densities that can better support local shops and community facilities, more efficient use of servicing and infrastructure, and allowing residents to age in place. Residents in Newcastle, a small settlement area in Clarington, for instance, have been more open to denser developments because the predominantly older population has increased need for apartments that will allow them to downsize within their own community. In Clearview, residents viewed a new 4-story retirement home positively even though it is taller than the existing built form because it would allow seniors to stay in the community.

19 Evenson & Cancelli, 2018

- **Developer Buy-In**

  There have been challenges in convincing developers to build a variety of housing types, as there is a perceived lack of demand for anything other than single-detached houses. While some developers are proposing and building more townhouses, it has often been difficult for municipalities to secure apartment buildings, purpose-built rentals, mixed-use developments, or even denser single- and semi- detached housing forms in addition to townhouses. With that said, some municipalities identified receiving inquiries about rental units, and see their existing and newly built rental units occupied quickly, indicating that there can be a demand for this type of housing.

  In some municipalities, developers have told municipal staff that it can be difficult to receive a return on their investment when building affordable and rental housing, adaptive reuse, and housing created through intensification. Meaford has encountered challenges with attaining infill in their downtown that preserves the historic character and the uniform 3-storey height along the Main Street. Developers have argued that developments need to be 4-5 stories in order to make a development financially feasible. Municipalities can offer grant programs through their CIP to make diverse housing developments more attractive to developers. This diverse housing includes rental housing, secondary suites, intensification through vacant lots, adaptive reuse, and brownfield developments.

HIGHLIGHTS
Higher Density Housing: Grimsby and Meaford

The Town of Grimsby is experiencing significant growth, addressed in part through high-density development: currently, the tallest building approved in one of their designated areas of growth is 20 stories. Grimsby initially had a hard time convincing developers to invest in high-story development because developers believed there wasn't a market for it. But when the first 9-story development, approved in 2014, sold out quickly, developers began to understand that there is a market for higher density, and other developments have since followed.

The Municipality of Meaford is increasing their density at a smaller scale. They are building linked bungalows, which are 1-story buildings usually with a loft and garage, totaling around 1,000sqft. The developments are typically 20-30 bungalows in 4-unit blocks with central, small-scale recreational facilities, geared towards seniors. Linked bungalows are denser than their traditional single-detached housing stock, and are ideal for downsizing households as well as individuals.

4

Public and Active Transportation

The use of public and active transportation, such as walking and cycling, as a commuting mode is low in rural Greenbelt municipalities. In the latest Census, the majority of residents in every municipality considered in this research indicated that commuting by car as either a driver or a passenger is their main mode of transportation.[20] Public transportation is limited or non-existent in most municipalities, and active transportation infrastructure like sidewalks, trails, and bike lanes are also generally limited or are intended to be used primarily for recreational purposes. While there are a number of challenges associated with developing viable and well-used public and active transit systems in rural areas, many rural Greenbelt municipalities are developing public and/or active systems for their context. Most municipalities have policies supportive of public and active transportation, and are undertaking studies like transit feasibility studies, cycling master plans, and trail master plans to examine the opportunities in their communities to improve public and active transit. This section discusses what municipalities are doing to enable more walking, cycling, and public transit use and the challenges associated with getting these alternative transit modes to work for rural contexts.

20 Statistics Canada, 2017

4.1 Public Transportation

A number of rural municipalities in and around the Greenbelt are looking into creating or improving public transit to meet residents' needs. Rural municipalities that have piloted and implemented public transit systems have seen a number of positive impacts. These include increased access to educational and employment opportunities, social activities and recreation, and health and other essential services. This is especially true among youth, lower-income individuals, and seniors, who may not have access to a car or who are unable to operate a car.

Public transportation also encourages more physical activity, more social interaction, and improves transit users' sense of independence.[21] Some rural Greenbelt municipalities noted that despite the high use of personal vehicles, there are residents who do not have a car or cannot drive. There is a recognized need to provide them—and all other residents—with alternative transit options so that all residents can access jobs, education, essential services, and other needs.

Given the low population densities and high car use in rural Greenbelt municipalities, existing public transit is often infrequent and sometimes underutilized. Some routes have been cancelled or will be cancelled due to low ridership numbers. However, other municipalities noted that their public transit is well-utilized and is an essential service for residents without cars. Upper-tier governments and Metrolinx are also looking into expanding some of their routes or building new GO stations, for which many municipalities advocate. Regional transit services are especially essential in rural municipalities because of the large geographic area and the high proportion of residents that currently commute out of their home municipality for work.

Photo courtesy of Ontario Growth Secretariat, Ministry of Municipal Affairs

21 Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, 2014

There are two types of public transportation systems that rural Greenbelt municipalities have established or are considering establishing: fixed-route transit with scheduled routes and times, and on-demand transit (ODT), which is a more flexible service that responds to users' specific transit needs. Most upper-tier governments service their municipalities with regional fixed-route transit systems. Metrolinx services some municipalities with GO buses or trains. Municipalities like Clearview and Pelham have been successful in implementing their own fixed-route public transit systems with the help of external grant programs. Other municipalities, like Caledon and Grimsby, determined through transit feasibility studies that, based on factors like the built form and current or planned population densities, the municipality could support a fixed-route transit line. Based on the recommendations in their transit feasibility study, Caledon launched two fixed-route transit lines in the Fall of 2019: a bus servicing Mayfield West, operated by Brampton Transit, and a bus servicing Bolton that connects with GO Transit and Brampton Transit, operated by the Town in partnership with Voyago, a transit and mobility company.

ODT has more recently emerged as an effective means of providing transportation in low-density and dispersed areas where fixed-route transit may not be cost effective or efficient. The City of Belleville, for instance, converted one of their night fixed-routes into an ODT service in September 2018. Users can book a trip request, specifying their pickup and drop-off locations, through a mobile app, online, or through a call centre. Software then calculates the bus driver's route based on the riders' trip requests. The pilot project proved to be successful in improving efficiency, increasing coverage, providing greater convenience and reliability for users, and increasing ridership.[22] [23]

Many rural Greenbelt municipalities already have an ODT specialized service in place that caters to seniors and individuals with disabilities. As demonstrated in Belleville, municipalities could expand this ODT model to service the general population, as well. Caledon Community Services (CCS), the non-profit agency that offers specialized ODT services to seniors and people with disabilities, has expanded their program to service all residents who require transportation to health-related and social service appointments, post-secondary education, and employment and employment training. CCS was able to expand their service after receiving a grant from the Ontario Ministry of Transportation under the Community Transportation Grant Program.

HIGHLIGHTS
Municipal Public Transportation: Clearview and Pelham

Public transit in the Township of Clearview is operated by both the municipality and the County of Simcoe. Clearview's own public transit system started in 2016, with the first route connecting the settlement area of Stayner with Wasaga Beach. Before Clearview launched their transit system, they surveyed their residents and found a high level of interest in introducing transit. In fact, it became clear that, in some areas, residents were impeded without public transit; they needed it to get to work. Clearview used the federal Gas Tax Fund to help launch their service.

22 Sanaullah, Djavadian, Farooq, & Mellor, 2019
23 Ryerson City Building Institute, 2019

Clearview received an AMO Gas Tax Fund award for their public transit system in 2018. Ridership grew to a consistent level of over 1,000 riders per month. Its system continues to expand through a second transit route added in 2019 that connects with other communities within the municipality, including the settlement area of Creemore. (The bus route to Creemore is on a trial program to ensure ridership before full implementation). At the regional level, Simcoe transit is expanding thanks to the County of Simcoe's investment in their LINX program. Riders on the new bus route that connects with Creemore will also be able to connect with Simcoe's LINX transit service to Barrie.

The Town of Pelham's bus service began as a pilot project in 2015 with a $100,000 grant from the Ontario Ministry of Transportation. Their bus route connects Fenwick and Fonthill, the Town's two settlement areas, with Niagara College and a shopping centre in Welland. It also connects with Niagara Region's transit system. Initially, there was a lot of doubt about Pelham's transit project but it has since proven to be very successful. Ridership on the bus service has increased every year, and in 2018, Pelham Transit had an average monthly ridership of 517 riders. Buses have a capacity of 16 passengers, are equipped with a bike rack, and are fully accessible.

Pelham received an additional $500,000 from MTO's Community Transportation Grant Program in 2019 to further improve their transit system. This grant has allowed them to get a second bus, which was introduced in September 2019. With the second bus, Pelham was able to increase the frequency to every half hour, up from the previous frequency of once every hour.

Pelham is also partnering with the Region of Niagara to provide an ODT service that will link the Town of Pelham with other communities in Niagara. This service will allow the Town to reach residents beyond the fixed-route transit service, with the goal of increasing ridership and improving service connections to other areas in the Region. The ODT service is expected to roll out in the third quarter of 2020.

4.2 Active Transportation

Many rural Greenbelt municipalities are planning for and making investments in active transportation infrastructure to support more walking and cycling in their communities. Improving walking and cycling infrastructure is associated with better physical and mental wellbeing among users and reduced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as a result of less reliance on personal vehicles. It also helps people without personal vehicles to more easily access education, employment, social services, and other social opportunities.[24] Enabling and promoting active transportation can also provide economic benefits to a municipality, as the installation of cycling and walking paths can attract visitors to the area and promote cycling- and hiking-based tourism.[25]

Rural Greenbelt municipalities have well-used trail networks for walking, cycling, and, in some cases, equestrian uses. These networks contain trails created and managed by the municipality, as well as larger-scale trail systems that span multiple municipalities like the Trans Canada Trail, the Bruce Trail, the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail, and the Greenbelt Cycle Route. In some municipalities, trail networks can be quite extensive: for instance, Uxbridge has over 220km of trails and is considered the "Trail Capital of Canada."

24 Hill, 2018
25 Smith Lea, Mitra, & Hess, 2017

While trails in rural municipalities have typically been designed and used for recreational purposes, most municipalities are looking at expanding and connecting trails to meet economic development opportunities, such as by linking existing trails with destination areas that have shops and other important services. In addition to trail connections, by providing other supporting infrastructure like bike racks, bike repair stands, a bikeshare program, and benches, municipalities are making walking and cycling viable options for both recreational and practical purposes (i.e. accessing shops, services, appointments, and places of work).

Some municipalities are looking at applying the "complete street" concept to their roads. Complete streets are designed to accommodate all road users, and may include features such as sidewalks, bike lanes, bus-only lanes, and safe and frequent places for pedestrians to cross. However, a complete street in a rural context will look different from a complete street in a city because of its unique characteristics and needs.[26] Road users in rural contexts include not only drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians, but people transporting farm equipment and equestrian users, as well. Some rural roads may be considered "complete" simply by providing a paved shoulder and reducing the speed limit.[27] Rural Greenbelt municipalities are evaluating specific rural roads for their capacity to support walking and cycling infrastructure, such as by providing and/or improving sidewalks on both sides of the street, paving shoulders, painting "sharrows" on roads to indicate that cyclists use the route, or implementing separated bike lanes for cyclists. Appropriate infrastructure upgrades will depend on the volume of vehicular traffic on a road. It will also depend on the relevance of active transportation to the areas, and the capacity to support it as a viable travel option. Municipalities can consult complete streets guides, such as Active Transportation Alliance's *Complete Streets, Complete Networks: Rural Contexts*, to evaluate how to design their roads to be more complete.

26 The Toronto Centre for Active Transportation & MMM Group Ltd., 2015
27 Active Transportation Alliance, 2014

While improving the built environment to better support active transportation modes is essential to making walking and cycling safer and more viable, educating residents about the values of active transportation through promotional materials, events, and other forms of engagement also plays a vital role. Municipalities that have seen a strong uptake of walking and cycling have promoted active transportation through events, promotional materials (brochures, maps, etc.), on social media, and/or have partnerships with local cycling or walking advocacy groups and/or active transportation committees. Part of the reason Uxbridge became the "Trail Capital of Canada" is because enthusiastic volunteers put a lot of effort into acquiring land easements or purchased land for trails. Having highly engaged and supportive residents means that active transportation infrastructure is well-used and justifies further investment in improving the walking and cycling environment.

HIGHLIGHTS
Walk- and Bike-Friendly Communities: Caledon and Pelham

The Share the Road Cycling Coalition is a province-wide cycling advocacy organization that works with municipal, provincial, and federal governments and other organizations to improve the cycling environment in communities across Ontario. They host a 'Bicycle-Friendly Communities' program, which awards communities with bronze, silver, or gold bike-friendly designations. Canada Walks is a country-wide walking advocacy organization that works with a variety of partners to improve the pedestrian environment in communities across Canada. Similar to the Share the Road Cycling Coalition, Canada Walks hosts a Walk Friendly Community designation program, which awards municipalities that have made progress towards walkability with bronze, silver, gold, or platinum designations.

The Town of Pelham was the first rural municipality in Ontario to receive a Silver Bicycle Friendly designation from Share the Road Cycling Coalition in 2013 and a Bronze Walk Friendly designation from Canada Walks in 2014. Over 60% of their total road network (or 150km) is considered highly suitable for road bikes. Part of their success is tied to the fact they've historically had a system of trails, stemming back to the 1980s with the conversion of a railway into the Steve Bauer Trail. Having a budget for improving connectivity and significant efforts on the part of Pelham's Active Transportation Advisory Committee (PATC), who has been leading the Town's active transportation initiatives since 2008, also contributed to the Town's success.

A number of initiatives helped to earn Pelham their Walk-Friendly designation. In 2013, the Town implemented a snow removal by-law, which made it so that snow removal on all sidewalks is the responsibility of the Town. This was an effort made to improve walkability and accessibility to sidewalks in all seasons. Pelham has made many investments in walk-friendly infrastructure, including adding new sidewalks or reconstructing existing ones, adding new street furniture, adding new crosswalks, and adding signage. The Town hosts many walk-friendly events, including street festivals, parades, and a farmer's market, where roads are closed to vehicle traffic. Pelham has also done a number of walking safety and encouragement campaigns and workshops. The Town also has walking clubs.

In 2015, the Town of Pelham started their first Active Transportation Plan and Implementation Strategy in collaboration with PATC and other stakeholders, and the Plan's endorsement and support from Council has helped the Town to move forward with their active transportation goals. The Active Transportation Plan includes requirements and provides guidance for developers to build active transportation infrastructure into their developments. One of the Town's long-term goals is to provide for cycling and connectivity on Canboro Road, a historic road that connects Pelham's two urban settlement areas, Fenwick and Fonthill.

The Town of Caledon created a Cycling Task Force with a mandate to achieve a Bike-Friendly Community Designation from the Share the Road Coalition. The Town asked the Share the Road Coalition to hold a workshop before they applied for the designation in order to identify how the Town could become more bike-friendly through new programs, projects, and partnerships. A priority project that was established was the conversion of a rail line that runs east-west across the Town into a 35km, multi-use trail. In 2017, the Town also reconstructed Kennedy Road to include bike route signs and paved shoulders for cyclists, pedestrians, and large farm vehicles. Kennedy Road now connects the Caledon Trailway to the Greenbelt Cycling Route, as well as the Etobicoke Creek Trail, which runs along the border of Mississauga and Toronto and connects to the Waterfront Trail in Mississauga. This ultimately has created a continuous route between Caledon, Brampton, and Mississauga. As a result of Caledon's work, they were awarded a Bronze designation by Share The Road Cycling Coalition in 2018.

Since they fulfilled their mandate, the Cycling Task Force was dissolved. The Town of Caledon then formed an Active Transportation Task Force in early 2019, which continues to look at improving cycling infrastructure. The Town also continues to identify roads that would be good candidates for the Complete Streets model. The Town promotes active transportation through events like Caledon Day, which features a cycling event. They also circulate brochures and maps, have established a bikeshare program for Town of Caledon employees as part of the Smart Commute program, and install bike repair stands and bike racks. The Town receives a lot of support and enthusiasm for their initiatives from the public and Council—this support is pivotal as it allows the Town to invest in and dedicate staff resources to maintaining and expanding cycling infrastructure and programs.

Photo provided by Eric Chan, Town of Caledon

4.3 Opportunities and Challenges with Public and Active Transportation

Rural municipalities are increasingly looking at creating public and active transportation systems that work for their context. Public and active transit increases physical activity among residents, provides alternatives to car use, and allows seniors, people with disabilities, youth, and those without vehicles to live more independently. It also provides opportunities for revitalization and economic development by enabling greater mobility among residents—helping them get to work, school, stores, and other services—and by attracting cycling and hiking tourism. While there are challenges with developing public and active transportation in rural contexts, many municipalities have found or are looking into how to address them. Challenges, and how municipalities have responded to them, include:

- **Geography**

  Large geographies with low densities make it difficult to support and justify investment in public or active transit. The large distances between residents and retail, services, and employment opportunities make walking or biking a non-viable commuting option, and make it difficult to plan transit routes that can be well-used and sustainable.

  Transit-supportive planning creates clusters of population densities and services in areas that are identified as able to support alternative transit modes, such as near a GO station, along a corridor, or in and around a downtown. Planning for this form of development creates destinations that residents can feasibly walk, bike, or take public transit to, as well as creates the densities needed to sustain use and investment in alternative transit modes. The Ministry of Transportation's *Transit-Supportive Guidelines* can assist municipalities in implementing transit-supportive planning practices.

  While residents in rural areas may have to travel large distances to get to services, most towns in rural municipalities are small in geographic size and have compact centres, which already support alternative transit modes like walking and cycling or have the potential to support them if the proper active transportation infrastructure is in place.[28] [29] Planning and designing downtowns to be walkable and bikeable by constructing or improving sidewalk areas, adding bike lanes, and creating linkages with nearby neighbourhoods will support active transit within and near settlement areas.

- **Road Design**

  Most roads in rural municipalities were not originally designed to support public and active transit modes. They often lack sidewalks and any form of cycling infrastructure. Municipalities have found that road reconstruction projects are good opportunities to implement active transportation infrastructure like paved shoulders, bike lanes, or road painting for cyclists. Other municipalities consider expanding and connecting their multi-use trails to provide alternative, safe routes for pedestrians and cyclists.

28 U.S. Department of Transportation, 2016
29 Smith Lea, Mitra, & Hess, 2017

Planning roads in new developments offers opportunities to implement public and active transportation infrastructure from the start and improves overall public and active transit networks. Most municipalities now require that developers put active transportation infrastructure in place when creating new development communities. This includes installing sidewalks on both sides of the street, creating connections to broader trail networks, and developing bike lanes. Some municipalities also plan to construct bus shelters to support public transit. It is easier to achieve public buy-in for public and active transportation infrastructure if it is already there, rather than having to implement it in existing developments or after a development has been completed. For instance, residents may be concerned that the creation of a bike lane will take away from their existing parking space.

To avoid these sorts of reactions, the Township of Scugog recommended that the developers of a golf course redevelopment upgrade the trail running behind the former golf course before building a new residential development. They did this so that the trail was operational before residents moved into the development. Doing so lessened objection to trail upgrades and concerns about the public walking behind the houses, as residents buying the houses knew upfront that there was an active, public trail behind their lots.

- **Funding**

  Attaining and sustaining funding is one of the biggest challenges. Public and active transit systems require upfront capital costs, continuous maintenance, and operating subsidies. Grant programs, such as Infrastructure Canada's Gas Tax Fund and the Ontario Ministry of Transportation's Community Transportation Grant Program, can help municipalities start or pilot a public transit system. Utilizing public lands or working with developers to implement new trails in existing subdivisions can save on the costs of trail expansions and connections. Designing and constructing trails to be relatively low-maintenance also helps to reduce ongoing maintenance costs.

  Municipalities that have been able to fund public and/or active transportation initiatives noted that they had strong support from their town council and residents. This support was a result of education outreach initiatives, which highlighted the economic, health, environmental, and social benefits of public and/or active transportation. Communicating the need for alternative modes of transit for residents with limited access to vehicles—particularly seniors, youth, people with disabilities, low-income individuals, and families without multiple vehicles—can also help to attain Council and public buy-in.

- **Public Buy-In**

  Given the reliance on personal vehicles, some rural Greenbelt municipalities noted skepticism among residents about how public and active transportation could be viable alternatives. Residents do, however, appreciate existing trail networks for walking and cycling for recreational purposes. Municipalities are finding that designing and expanding these trails to better connect neighbourhoods to community services, such as schools, parks, community centres, shops, services, as well as places of work can make active transportation a more viable option for everyday life. Events, programs, and educational pieces that promote walking and cycling help to inform the public about the possibilities and benefits of these transit modes and helps to achieve buy-in. Similarly, communicating the need for and benefits of public transit helps to achieve public buy-in.

There is, however, a lack of understanding among the public about how different transit modes can share a space. This is especially an issue between cyclists and drivers who are using major roads. To address this issue, municipalities can educate drivers and cyclists on how they can accommodate each other on the road through installing separate bike lanes, implementing signage that reminds users to share the road, and demonstrating to drivers how they can pass cyclists safely. Caledon, for instance, is working on sharing educational materials in videos, through cycling clubs, on social media, and in bike stores, as well as other locations.

Residents in some municipalities have resisted trail expansions for public use, expressing concerns about privacy and the idea that trails will attract crime, such as vandalism. Yet, despite initial concerns in West Lincoln, Clarington, and Uxbridge, there were no reported issues with privacy or crime once the trails were constructed or programmed for public use. In fact, residents and the broader public in these areas came to love the trails. For instance, residents in West Lincoln take pride in a milkweed corridor they planted for monarch butterflies and other pollinators on their South Creek Trail. Communicating to residents the need for public trails and their benefits, as well as demonstrating that concerns over privacy and crime are generally unfounded, can help to achieve public buy-in.

5

Economic Development

Many of those interviewed for this research indicated that one of the greatest challenges to achieving complete communities is a lack of local jobs for residents. This is particularly true for municipalities within commuting distance to major employment hubs in the Greater Toronto Area. For most municipalities, only about a quarter or third of their population works within their Census subdivision; for some, half or more of their population commutes out of their Census division for work.[30] At the same time, in some municipalities, there are residents from elsewhere who are commuting into their municipalities for work.

Rural Greenbelt municipalities want to provide and retain more local jobs so that more of their residents can live and work in the community. There are existing, viable economies in rural Greenbelt municipalities, which have potential for economic growth. The economies of rural Greenbelt municipalities are largely characterized by the agriculture, tourism, retail, construction, arts and culture, and manufacturing industries. Settlement areas within rural Greenbelt municipalities also offer jobs in healthcare, education, social services, and personal services. This section discusses some of the economic development activities that rural Greenbelt municipalities are undertaking, particularly those that are building on existing assets, as well as the opportunities and challenges with economic development.

30 Statistics Canada, 2017

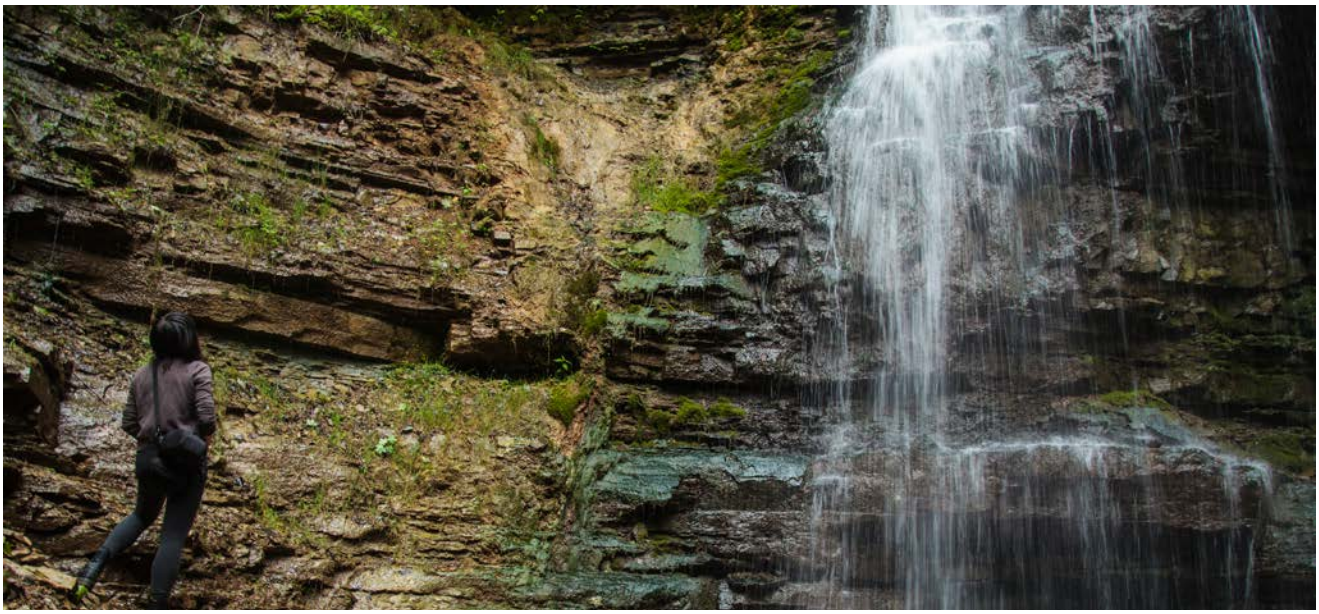
5.1 Identifying Economic Development Opportunities

Rural municipalities can improve their local economies by focusing on developing their unique place-based assets. Place-based assets can include natural features and beauty that provide outdoor recreation opportunities, historic architecture and downtowns, arts and cultural institutions and communities, and agriculture and value-added agriculture. Economic development strategies can also focus on attracting stores and services.[31] [32]

Many rural Greenbelt municipalities are investing in their historic downtowns or waterfronts, recognizing them as key economic assets to the communities. Downtowns are the heart of commercial life in a community, providing residents with retail and other needs; they also attract visitors to a community because of their architectural and cultural heritage, local businesses, and/or waterfront access. Municipalities such as Clearview, Meaford, Owen Sound, Pelham, and Scugog all have plans and policies to support revitalization of their downtowns and waterfronts. Revitalization may include refurbishment and adaptive reuse of architectural and heritage assets, physical improvements to the public realm, landscaping, and focusing more growth and development in or near downtowns to support their local shops and services. Most rural Greenbelt municipalities also have Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) focused on spurring investment in downtowns, primarily through façade and streetscaping improvement grants, incentives to redevelop vacant lots or buildings, and incentives to create infill housing.

Photo courtesy of https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Uxbridge_downtown.jpg

31 United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2016
32 United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2015a



Agriculture is a key component of the economies in rural Greenbelt municipalities. The Greenbelt contains over 4,700 farms on some of Canada's best farmland, which grow a diversity of crops, including a significant amount of the province's fruits and vegetables. Many municipal economic development strategies and policies are increasingly enabling and targeting financial supports towards value-added agriculture, such as craft breweries/wineries/cideries, equine-related businesses, restaurants, and agritourism venues. Lincoln, for instance, released a CIP for their rural areas, as a way of incentivizing more investment in value-added agriculture. Similarly, King is considering adopting an agricultural CIP to incentivize on-farm diversification, value-added operations, and other opportunities for supporting economic development in their rural and agricultural areas.

The natural heritage in rural Greenbelt municipalities is also highly valued for its economic contributions. Conserving and restoring natural resources for outdoor recreation and tourism can build stronger, more resilient economies, while preserving natural assets for the benefit of current and future residents.[33] Many rural Greenbelt municipalities contain conservation areas, including municipal, provincial and federal parks, which are important sites for tourism and recreation. Greenbelt lakes and rivers are attractive destinations for walking, hiking, cycling, canoeing, and various other nature activities. Large trail or route systems that cross over a number of rural Greenbelt municipalities, including the Bruce Trail, the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail, and the Greenbelt Cycle Route, provide economic development opportunities for hiking and cycling tourism. Investing in more and improved natural areas for recreational enjoyment can help minimize overuse of a few popular natural areas.

Municipalities have already identified or are identifying their place-based assets that they can build upon. Owen Sound, for instance, recognizes that it has a significant community of artists. Niagara-On-The-Lake has many wineries, tender fruit farms and on-farm markets, cultural heritage, and multiple and diverse seasonal events such as the Shaw Festival. Identifying these assets and targeting investments and supports towards dominant sectors through economic development strategies, business expansion and retention studies, CIPs, and Official Plan policies will help to retain and create more jobs within the community.

33 United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2015a

HIGHLIGHTS
Enhancing Place-Based Assets for Economic Growth:
Clearview, Lincoln, and Erin

Downtowns
The Township of Clearview has a plan to improve walkability and revitalize the downtown of Stayner. Clearview will improve sidewalks, pedestrian corridors to the downtown, and parking on side streets. A vacant lot will be turned into a new park called Celebration Park. One of the largest challenges with this revitalization project is that Stayner's main street is a provincial highway. While this can be a benefit as people passing through could stop to shop, it is a hindrance to cafes who want their patrons to enjoy a quiet atmosphere. The Township is hoping to address this concern by allowing cafes to be built backing onto the new park. The highway designation also provides challenges to increasing pedestrian safety. Pending Council approval, Clearview is proposing a number of measures: wider sidewalks, "jut outs" with cobblestone paths across the street to make safe pedestrian crossings, improved lighting, and pedestrian gateways to improve pedestrian safety.

Value-Added Agriculture
In the Town of Lincoln, agriculture and value-added agriculture are among their largest industries: the Town hosts over 50 wineries and over 8 million square feet of greenhouse space, predominantly for floriculture. Their Industrial Lands and Rural Areas CIP, released in May 2019, is one of the first CIPs in Ontario with the principal objective to incentivize the development of value-added agricultural uses in their rural area. Programs include grants for signage and landscaping improvements, building restorations, renovations and improvements, reduced development charges, planning application fees and building permit fees, tax increment financing, and agricultural feasibility studies. These programs are intended to enable the adaptive reuse of existing buildings for value-added agricultural uses, increase the supply of overnight accommodations, and improve signage to increase businesses' visibility to visitors. As of February 2020, there are already two submissions to the CIP and two more are incoming.

Natural Heritage
The Town of Erin is constructing a trail called the Riverwalk that connects their two settlement areas, Hillsburgh and Erin Village, along the Lower West Credit River. The trail is seen as a tourism and economic driver for Erin, attracting "trail enthusiasts" to the area and increasing visitation to local businesses by connecting residential areas to the historic downtown. In both its recreational and practical uses, the Riverwalk is designed to connect people to businesses and services. The long-term plan for the Riverwalk is to build it out into an extensive trail system that contains loops in Erin Village and Hillsburgh, and integrates with the Elora Cataract Trail.

Photo provided by Jessica Spina, Town of Erin

5.2 Opportunities and Challenges with Economic Development

Rural municipalities can create more local job opportunities for their residents by investing in pre-existing sectors and utilizing their unique assets as economic opportunities. Many municipalities noted that economic development is impeded by insufficient investment in new businesses, and a lack of housing and transportation options, and reliable broadband internet. Other challenges and opportunities include:

- **Lack of Affordable Housing**
  Some businesses have trouble attracting and retaining workers because there is a lack of affordable housing, including rental options. This is especially the case in municipalities that have high property values and/or a significant tourism sector, as they require more affordable and rental housing options for their transient and/or seasonal labour force.

  Encouraging and incentivizing the building of diverse housing options for residents of all income levels will ensure that those working jobs in the community can also live in the community. CIPs that include grant programs targeted to creating more affordable and rental housing options, such as secondary suites and apartments above stores, help create viable housing options for local workers. Municipalities can collaborate with large employers who face challenges attracting and retaining a workforce or with non-profit and/or social housing organizations to increase affordable housing options for workers. In the town of The Blue Mountains, the Blue Mountains Attainable Housing Corporation (BMACH), a non-profit organization, offers a Secondary Suites Grant Program and a Down Payment Assistance Program to help increase the supply of affordable and rental housing options and access to home ownership. In August 2019, the BMACH took further action to help develop more attainable housing stock by issuing a Request for Information from potential partners in the private and non-profit building sector as well as the local community. This Request for Information was geared to assessing opportunities for partnership in the development of attainable housing in the region.

- **Lack of Transportation Options**
  In some rural Greenbelt municipalities, the lack of public or active transportation options can be a hindrance to economic development. Some local businesses have difficulties accessing a labour force because local residents without personal vehicles have no means of getting to work. To address this issue, some large companies provide their own transportation service for their workers.

  Municipalities can plan for densities that could support public and active transit modes, identify the unique transit needs in their community, and identify ways to respond to them. They can also invest in public and active transit infrastructure in order to provide more transportation options to their residents. Municipalities that have their own form of public transportation have reported economic benefits associated with their system: public transportation increases access to employment opportunities, provides jobs for those operating the system, and promotes more local retail spending.[34] Improved transportation options help to improve economic development in a community by providing more options for workers to access jobs. Certain transportation infrastructure, such as trails and cycling routes, can also contribute to broader economic development goals by improving access to shops and services as well as providing for outdoor recreation and tourism uses.

34 Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, 2014

- **Community Improvement Plans (CIPs)**
  The Planning Act allows municipalities to use CIPs to revitalize targeted areas in a community by offering incentives, programs, and grants. Most rural Greenbelt municipalities already have a CIP in place, usually focused on their downtowns, and have found them to be successful. Some municipalities have CIPs targeted to supporting their employment areas, rural areas, and agricultural economy, as well. Many municipalities noted that their most popular programs are for façade and streetscape upgrades in the downtowns. CIPs may also contain programs that incentivize more housing and more infill, brownfield, and vacant lot redevelopments in order to contribute to the improved revitalization of the community. CIPs are a key tool that municipalities can use to encourage greater investment in their communities and support economic development and community livability.

- **Broadband Internet**
  The lack of reliable broadband internet in rural areas, even in those near the GTA, has been a hindrance to certain economic development opportunities. Many businesses, especially in the tourism sector, need access to broadband for marketing, reservations, customer service, and overall business management. Good quality broadband can help make the agri-food sector more competitive by enabling the adoption of agricultural technologies needed for precision agriculture, like GPS systems. Broadband can also help attract and retain younger residents, support the development of social enterprises, and enable more residents to work at home by reducing the need for workers to regularly commute to and from their place of work.[35] [36] Both the Federal and Provincial governments have broadband strategies in place to help facilitate the deployment of good quality broadband internet across all communities, ultimately enabling economic growth opportunities. Some Regional governments, such as Durham Region, have broadband strategies, as well.

35 Middleton, 2017
36 Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure, 2019

6

Character

All rural Greenbelt municipalities interviewed indicated that protecting the character of their community is a primary goal. These municipalities are often described as having a "small town," "village-like," and "rural" look and feel, due to their downtown cores, low-density built form, and surrounding farmland and natural areas. Residents have concerns about how growth and development will affect the community's character. They often perceive higher density developments and the design of new developments as threats to the established character of the community. Municipalities contain a diversity of towns and villages ranging in size, architectural styles and heritage, and unique community life. As a result, the Official Plans of multiple rural Greenbelt municipalities refer to their municipality as a "community of communities". The challenge many rural Greenbelt municipalities identified is how to ensure that new developments are keeping with their existing character in order to preserve what residents feel makes their communities unique and valued. This section explores how character in rural Greenbelt communities is defined and protected, the challenges with protecting character, and opportunities to enhance character.

Photo provided by Melissa Ricci, Town of Halton Hills

6.1 Defining and Protecting Character

While all rural Greenbelt municipalities prioritize protecting the character of their community, the term "character" is not always clearly defined. This can make it a challenge for municipalities to understand what it is exactly they should be protecting. Generally, character refers to the physical built form, which includes both the design and form of buildings and landscaping features. Some municipalities have undertaken or are undertaking character studies in order to identify what aspects of the physical appearance of their communities are most valued and worth protecting. They then use this information to inform urban design guidelines and policies.

Urban design guidelines and policies help ensure that new developments fit in with the character of the community. Character can be maintained in new developments by replicating elements of existing developments, such as by using similar materials, emulating architectural elements, conforming to lot sizes and built form structure, and using similar landscaping techniques that already exist. Some Greenbelt municipalities have found that residents are more receptive to new developments, even if they are taller or denser than is typical for the community, if they are similar in design to what already exists.

For many rural Greenbelt municipalities, the value of the community's character comes from the cultural and architectural heritage in historic downtowns and older neighbourhoods. Establishing heritage conservation districts or inventories of heritage assets provides protection to those assets. Understanding what specifically is of value in existing heritage assets can also help with developing guidelines and policies for new development. For example, applicants proposing developments in the heritage conservation district of downtown Port Perry in Scugog have to comply with architectural design guidelines. This involves replicating certain design elements present in the downtown, such as using brick as a building material or painting new buildings the same colours as historic buildings.

The character of a community is not only defined by the physical design of the settlement areas. Some municipalities noted that surrounding rural areas also contribute to their community's character—particularly local agriculture and natural environment. Having firm urban boundaries and focusing most of the population growth within existing settlement areas protects the character and land-base of the rural areas.

Photo courtesy of https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Queen_St_and_Clock_Tower,_Niagara-on-the-Lake_20170418_1.jpg

HIGHLIGHTS

Establishing Design Standards:

Niagara-On-The-Lake and Halton Hills

Protecting character while accommodating new development can be difficult. This is particularly true in Niagara-On-The-Lake's "Old Town," which is a heritage conservation district that includes many heritage buildings. In addition to having urban design guidelines, Niagara-On-The-Lake has an Urban Design Committee that reviews development applications in order to evaluate new developments for character compatibility with historic assets. The Committee is comprised of architects, landscape architects, urban designers, and urban planners who provide professional advice and recommendations on aspects of development that would affect the public realm, including the design of buildings, structures, parks and open spaces, and streetscapes.

The Town of Halton Hills initiated a character study in 2016 in response to concerns over how growth would impact the character of the community. The study included three neighbourhood walking tours, stakeholder interviews, a public workshop, two public open houses, and a statutory public meeting. This study led to the identification of Mature Neighbourhood Areas in the Town's Official Plan. By identifying these areas, the Town was able to provide specific policies and development guidelines for older, established residential neighbourhoods. The study also recommended amending the zoning by-law to implement protections of identified mature neighbourhoods such as maximum building heights and lot coverage. The introduction of policies and zoning to protect mature neighbourhoods has helped residents feel less concerned about the impacts of growth on character.

6.2 Opportunities and Challenges with Character

Part of what makes rural municipalities and their small towns attractive to both residents and visitors is their character, typically defined by historic buildings, Victorian-era architecture, lower density built forms, landscaping aspects such as tree-lined streets, and surrounding farmland and natural areas. Municipalities cited the following challenges and opportunities related to protecting character in their communities:

- **Public Buy-In**

  Residents often resist new, higher density developments because they want to preserve the small-town character of their community. For many residents, this small-town character is a significant draw for living in the community. While higher density developments will often look different from the existing built forms (especially if they have a "modern" design), it is possible to protect the essence of being a small town by making sure development is appropriate to scale and of a similar design aesthetic to existing buildings. Maintaining compatibility of new builds with existing design elements through urban design guidelines and policies helps preserve character and achieve greater public buy-in. Design review panels or committees can provide advice on ensuring proposed developments meet the urban design guideline requirements.

  Municipalities are generally able to secure buy-in from residents on new developments when they provide them with the opportunity to see what a new development will look like ahead of its build. This is true even if the new development is higher density. Municipalities can use public consultation as a means of understanding what residents most value about the character of their community. They can then work with developers to ensure compatibility between new developments and the most valued aspects of existing character.

- **Enhancing Character**

  Growth and change present challenges to protecting character, but they also provide opportunities to enhance character. Character can be enhanced through downtown revitalization efforts, the redevelopment of vacant or underutilized lots, and through the adaptive reuse or rehabilitation of historic buildings. The challenges with adaptive reuse and rehabilitation are largely financial, as they are costly to undertake. Successful large-scale adaptive reuse and rehabilitation projects often require significant investment on the part of the municipality or from donors. Municipalities can offer grant programs through their CIPs to encourage and enable adaptive reuse, rehabilitation, and revitalization. Façade and landscaping grant improvements offered through CIPs, which are generally well-subscribed programs in the municipalities that already offer them, are other ways to promote revitalization and enhance character.

  There are also opportunities in certain areas of towns that may be considered to be devoid of character, such as strip plaza developments on arterial highways that were built well after the initial founding of a town. Halton Hills, for instance, identified the strip plaza development along the Guelph Street Corridor in Georgetown as an intensification area that could bring in development, which would ultimately improve the town's character. Through doing this, Halton Hills is hoping to attract mixed-use developments—e.g., commercial at the bottom with residential on top—and seniors' housing.

Uxbridge has already seen redevelopment on Toronto Street, an arterial highway leading into downtown Uxbridge, which brought buildings like townhouses and apartments up to the sidewalk. The pedestrian environment on Toronto Street has also been improved with the addition of sidewalks on both sides of the street. Municipalities can look at redeveloping their arterial corridors to look more like traditional downtowns in terms of their built-form, mixed uses, and friendlier pedestrian environment, which can all help to enhance overall community character.

- **Social Character**

  While discussions about character predominantly refer to physical character (i.e. buildings), it is important to recognize that there is a social character that needs to be considered as well. Social character refers to the individuals that live in the community, as well as community groups that contribute to a place's vibrancy. Allowing residents of all ages and of diverse needs to remain in the community throughout their entire lifespan by providing diverse housing, transit options, and services helps to maintain the social character of a community. This is especially relevant for seniors who may require different, denser housing types, like apartments or retirement homes, and services, like specialized transit, in order to remain in their community as they age.

Photo courtesy of https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alton_Mill_Entrance,_Caledon,_Ontario.jpg

HIGHLIGHTS

Enhancing Character through Revitalization:
Owen Sound and Caledon

For the City of Owen Sound, the value of its character comes from the downtown and waterfront area. In recognition of the importance of these assets, the City is undertaking a Downtown River Precinct Project. Part of the project includes a revitalization of their historic Farmer's Market Building in the downtown. This facility houses a popular year-round, weekly farmer's market of local producers and artists. Revitalizing the market included reconstructing and enclosing a pavilion attached to the historic building to extend and winterize the space, installing new surrounding sidewalks, creating a new boulevard outside the building, and making more room for activities and events within the facility. This revitalization helps to support the local producer and artisan community and contributes to the physical and visual character of Owen Sound.

In the Town of Caledon, the adaptive reuse and rehabilitation of Alton Mill into an arts centre is another successful case of enhancing character through revitalization. Alton Mill Art Centre, as it is now known, is a historic mill in Alton (a small village in Caledon) that was built approximately 125 years ago. The mill building had long been vacant and derelict. The adjacent millpond was an inhospitable environment for fish, as it was gradually infilling over time due to silt build-up. Ideas to rehabilitate the millpond and restore the mill building into an arts centre to attract tourism, support the local artist community, and revitalize Alton date back to the late 1990s. The Alton Mill Arts Centre was completed in 2009 and includes artist studio spaces, galleries, a heritage museum, café, shops, and event spaces. Rehabilitation of the millpond to restore its natural functions is ongoing.

7

Agriculture and Environment

Rural municipalities need to consider the impacts of growth on surrounding agricultural areas and natural environment. As discussed in previous sections, agriculture and the natural environment are highly valued for their character and economic contributions to rural communities. Rural Greenbelt municipalities contain prime agricultural land, including the only two provincially designated specialty crop areas, and natural heritage, including critical water resources, that require protection. In addition to protecting the agricultural land base, municipalities can identify ways of supporting the agricultural economy, including through value-added agriculture and agri-food operations, and by promoting agri-tourism.

Rural Greenbelt municipalities protect the agricultural and natural heritage systems and reduce the negative impacts of land-use conflicts by directing most of their growth away from rural areas, prime agricultural lands, and natural heritage features. Many also maintain firm boundaries around their settlement areas to prevent development encroachment onto agricultural and natural heritage areas. This section discusses continuing conflicts between agriculture and rural development, as well as emerging challenges and opportunities for protecting agriculture and the natural environment.

7.1 Conflicts with Agriculture

When rural development is scattered instead of clustered within a town or hamlet, it negatively impacts the agricultural community. Non-farm development in rural areas causes fragmentation of the agricultural land base and triggers the need for minimum distance separation, which restricts farmers' ability to expand or change their farm operation.[37] For many rural Greenbelt municipalities, conflicts between non-agricultural and agricultural land uses have been decreasing because policy directions from the Province (i.e., through the Provincial Policy Statement, the Greenbelt Plan, and the Growth Plan) have increasingly emphasized protecting the agricultural land-base by containing non-farm development to settlement areas. Nonetheless, many municipalities still face ongoing challenges with managing the impacts of increased growth and development on the agricultural community.

Municipal staff hear complaints from residents about agricultural operations, particularly regarding noises, odours, and farm vehicles using the roads. Non-farm residents who live or move into rural municipalities may not have familiarity with what it means to live in or near an active agricultural community, and so view normal farm practices as nuisances. Roads that have traditionally been used as farm routes are now being used as commuter routes by the non-farm population, which has increased traffic conflicts between farmers and non-farmers. For some municipalities, there are conflicts between tourists and farmers, too. Tourists may also be unfamiliar with normal farm practices and use traditional farm routes to get to their destinations. Non-compatible businesses in the rural area, illegal dumping on agricultural lands, and other illegal uses of agricultural lands have also caused more conflicts with agriculture.

While value-added agriculture is increasingly recognized as important to rural economies, some rural Greenbelt municipalities noted conflicts related to the increase in value-added agriculture businesses. Conflicts include increased traffic and noise from visitors travelling to wineries, pick-your-own farms, and on-farm stores. To address conflicts related to value-added agriculture, the Municipality of Meaford educates businesses about strategies for better site-planning. A winery, for instance, could have their patio face away from neighbours and use parking as a buffer to increase space between their business and other uses in the rural area. Municipalities can seek out innovative ways to address conflicts while continuing to support the sector as a key component of their economic development.

37 Caldwell & Dodds-Weir, 2003

HIGHLIGHTS
Managing the Urban-Rural Boundary:
Clarington and Niagara-On-The-Lake

To protect the agricultural system, the Municipality of Clarington directs growth to its clearly defined settlement area boundaries. But Clarington is still experiencing increased conflicts with new residential development bumping up against agricultural operations. The agricultural community has noted that although subdivisions are being built in the settlement areas, they are right next to their farms, including dairy and hog farms. As minimum distance separation does not apply to urban areas, they are currently limited in how they can mitigate boundary issues between the urban area and agricultural areas. In order to address this issue, Clarington is looking at spatial separation strategies, such as putting in a road, trail, or trees to increase the separation between residential development and farms.

In the Town of Niagara-On-The-Lake, the agricultural community is concerned about the impacts of development. While they have firm urban boundaries because of the Greenbelt, the interface between settlement areas and agricultural areas can be difficult to manage. To address this challenge, Niagara-On-The-Lake is looking at edge planning in their Official Plan policies and through educating residents about normal farm practices. When there is development along the urban-rural boundary, Niagara-On-The-Lake sends information out to new residents. It puts a warning clause in new residents' purchase of sale to alert them if they are abutting an agricultural area, highlighting that there could be noise, odour, and farm vehicles present. Niagara-On-The-Lake's Agricultural Advisory Committee is also active in educating residents and tourists about normal farm practices, and are looking at producing educational pamphlets.

7.2 Opportunities and Challenges with Agriculture and the Environment

Agriculture production and the natural environment make significant contributions to rural Greenbelt municipalities—they directly and indirectly provide jobs, contribute to rural character, and provide many assets that residents and visitors need and enjoy. Focusing on creating complete communities is key to protecting them from further encroachment and fragmentation. There are, however, a number of opportunities and challenges:

- **Increased Pressure on the Environment**
  Increased growth often puts more pressure on the natural environment, whether within or outside the urban boundaries of a settlement area. Accommodating growth through greenfield development outside of a settlement area can degrade the quality and functioning of the natural features. Directing growth to be within settlement areas helps keep the surrounding natural environment intact.

A growing population and some forms of infill development can pose challenges for maintaining the integrity of natural features such as parks and watersheds. For instance, the Township of Georgina has seen a higher demand on their public parks and waterfront. This is a result of an increase in residents and visitors, which causes overcrowding, traffic congestion, and shortages of parking. As a result, municipal staff are creating a waterfront and parks master plan to identify solutions.

Municipalities can maintain, protect, and enhance natural features within settlement areas through investments in tree plantings, parks, and greenspaces. Municipalities can also consider implementing green infrastructure—i.e., natural vegetative systems and green technologies, such as trees, permeable pavement, rain barrels, green roofs, and hedgerows.[38] The Greenbelt Foundation's *Green Infrastructure Guide for Small Cities, Towns and Rural Communities* can help rural municipalities implement green infrastructure.

- **Complaints about Agriculture**
  Many rural Greenbelt municipalities hear complaints about normal farm practices from non-farm residents. Opposition to normal farm practices or expansions of agricultural uses can hinder the sector's ability to operate and grow. To prevent this, many rural Greenbelt municipalities work to educate residents about normal farm practices and warn new residents about what to expect when moving into an agricultural community. Municipalities can distribute informational brochures to residents, erect signs on the roadway that alert residents that they may encounter farm vehicles while on the road, and regularly consult with the agricultural community on the potential impacts of new developments.

- **Agricultural Advisory Committees**
  In rural communities, especially those near large urban centres, the non-farm population has increased. This results in changes in municipal councils, and elected officials may not reflect or represent agricultural interests.[39] Agricultural Advisory Committees (AACs) provide opportunities for municipalities to understand the value of and better support their agricultural community. AACs typically have a mandate to identify local agricultural issues, provide feedback on local policies, plans, and processes that affect agriculture, and look at opportunities to enhance the agricultural sector. AACs play an important role in educating regional or municipal staff, Council, and in some cases residents, on the importance of agriculture to a community. They can also inform members of the agricultural community about how certain policies or initiatives may positively or negatively impact the agricultural sector. In Ontario, there are AACs formed at both the regional and local levels.[40]

- **Firm Urban Boundaries**
  Ultimately, having firm urban boundaries defined in an Official Plan is the best way for municipalities to protect agriculture and natural heritage. As discussed, more contained and compact development reduces encroachment and fragmentation of agricultural and natural heritage systems. Many rural Greenbelt municipalities recognized that planning to have complete communities—namely, directing any growth towards settlement areas—inherently protects agriculture and the environment.

38 The Greenbelt Foundation and Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition, 2017
39 Caldwell W. , 2010
40 Epp, 2018

8

Public Consultation

Community buy-in is critical to creating complete communities, given that it can mean some changes for many towns. As discussed throughout this report, rural Greenbelt municipalities hear a number of concerns from their residents about possible impacts of intensification and infill development, and the larger size and/or heights of new developments, as well as how these changes may affect property values, traffic, and privacy. There are also residents who voice support for certain developments or proposed changes during public consultations. Municipalities have found that there is more openness to change when residents understand the positive aspects of developments, plans, or initiatives, and when their concerns are meaningfully addressed.

The public consultation process is an important opportunity to identify and address residents' concerns, and ultimately achieve greater community buy-in for proposed policies and developments. Public consultation processes also present opportunities for municipal staff to provide information directly to residents. This section discusses the various ways rural Greenbelt municipal staff are holding public consultations, as well as the challenges to and opportunities that emerge from successful public consultations.

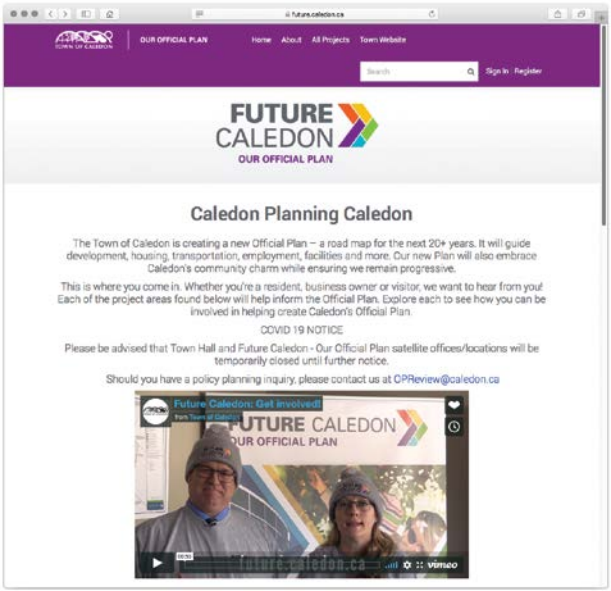
8.1 Public Consultation Formats

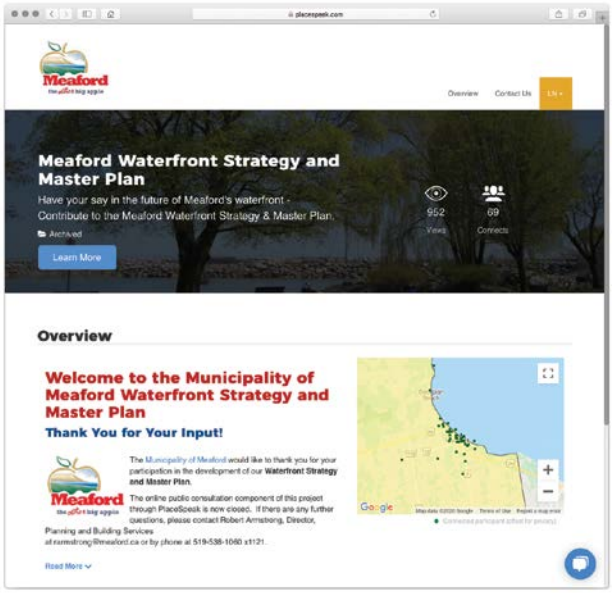
All rural Greenbelt municipalities indicated that they meet the minimum requirements under the Planning Act for consultations, i.e., they hold public meetings. Many municipalities have found that public meetings are not always the most conducive format for public consultations. This is because public meetings often do not provide a good sample of public opinion. Rather, attendance is usually dominated by residents with specific grievances or by those who generally oppose all local development. As a result, municipalities are not often hearing a variety of perspectives in these consultations. Some rural Greenbelt municipalities are exploring different public consultation mechanisms and formats in the hopes of hearing from a broader array of residents. Ultimately, public consultations must be conducive to discussion, rather than just complaint.

Many municipalities send staff into the community for consultation, rather than having community members come to them at public meetings. Municipal staff in Caledon, for instance, go to different locations within the community to consult as part of their Official Plan review. Venues for in-community consultations include hockey arenas and high schools. The goal with these consultations is to get comments from people who may not otherwise come to a public meeting. Going into the community and holding consultations at different locations and at different times of the day helps municipal staff to access a broader array of residents and allows for more dialogue between staff and individual residents.

Some municipalities hold other kinds of more informal consultations, such as open houses, workshops, small group sessions, and charrettes. These formats allow residents to ask questions and discuss what they think with staff or developers, who can then explain the rationale behind a development or plan. Scugog, for instance, started holding public open houses prior to Council meetings on development applications. They have found that at open houses, residents tend to be less aggressive or confrontational than at public meetings. At open houses, residents ask the applicants more technical questions, and the applicants have the opportunity to explain their proposal. This format has helped to reduce objections from residents and has allowed applicants to revise their proposals afterwards.

Some municipalities have used or are exploring online methods of engagement, such as online surveys or forums where residents can provide comments on proposed developments and plans. Online consultation tools can reach a broader audience by allowing residents who may be unable to or are uninterested in attending in-person consultations to provide feedback on their own schedule. Caledon developed a website using Bang the Table, a platform that provides online stakeholder engagement services, to consult on their Official Plan review. Meaford used a website called Place Speak as part of their waterfront plan consultations. Meaford found that there was a digital divide in the town: while online consultation may be preferable for their seasonal population, largely located in the GTA, not all permanent residents of Meaford have good internet. For example, there are many seniors who may not have access to the internet or are not regular users of the internet. To address this, Meaford used traditional consultation tools, as well as digital tools, to cater to the needs of permanent residents.





There are some cases of developers taking the initiative of hosting their own consultations to minimize conflicts with residents early on, as often happens in larger urban municipalities. Providing forums for developers to converse with residents about their proposals tends to lessen objections. Pelham, for instance, encourages developers to hold their own consultations before submitting their applications to make sure they've built community comments into their applications. As part of their consultation, Clearview initiates community liaison groups, where the developer of a proposed project and the residents sit down and talk to each other in an attempt to find common ground. Through talking to each other, developers and residents find where they can both compromise; in one proposal, for instance, a developer reduced the number of proposed units.

HIGHLIGHTS
Going into the Community: Grey Highlands and Halton Hills

Through their consultations, the Municipality of Grey Highlands has found that residents have been largely receptive to the new developments and policy changes. Municipal staff hosted a "pop-up" in a storefront in downtown Markdale to attract people walking down the street, encouraging them to talk about whatever was on their mind. It was a successful initiative, with about 15-20 people per day coming in to talk about planning issues in general. Municipal staff were also able to acquire feedback on specific matters they wanted to consult on. The Municipality also has a robust community engagement website called Connect Grey Highlands, which helps to connect with both rural and seasonal residents by allowing them to provide feedback online.

For their Intensification Opportunities Study Update, the Town of Halton Hills tried many different approaches for consulting residents. As the intensification concept (i.e., the development or redevelopment of properties at a higher density than what currently exists within the existing boundary of a town) is sometimes difficult to understand, staff have spent a lot of time going out into the community to explain it as part of consulting on intensification opportunities. Staff have visited farmer's markets and fall fairs with maps of key intensifications areas in the community. After explaining what intensification could look like, residents are asked to put dots on the areas where they would like to see intensification. Additionally, Halton Hills conducted an online survey, which was advertised on social media; it received over 120 responses.

Halton Hills also held in-person workshops with seniors and youth in the community. To connect with these specific demographics, planning staff liaised with Town staff who already had relationships with youth and senior community members. A youth coordinator at the Town helped arrange workshops with youth, and a coordinator at Hillsview Active Living Centre helped organize workshops with the seniors. At the workshops, staff provided participants with maps, allowing them to outline areas they find suitable for intensification. Staff also provided participants with LEGO pieces that represent different kinds of housing. Participants were asked to use the LEGO pieces to build their ideal town. Participants tended to create towns with mixed-use buildings and senior's accommodations. Following this exercise, staff created 3D modelling based on the different LEGO scenarios and presented them at a public open house, allowing residents to see what these imagined areas could actually look like. These workshops had a successful turnout with approximately 40 participants and they received positive feedback, especially from the youth groups.

In total, Halton Hills received input from over 400 people, in-person and online, for the Intensification Opportunities Study.

8.2 Opportunities and Challenges with Public Consultation

At public consultations, municipal staff learn what residents think about development proposals, plans, and other initiatives. It is also an opportunity for staff to educate and engage with residents in order to ensure that proposed developments and plans reflect residents' wants and alleviate or address residents' concerns. Rural Greenbelt municipalities are exploring many different consultation methods and formats geared to enhancing engagement and achieving community buy-in. Though staff resources are often limited, it is important to explore as many consultation practices as feasibly possible in order to consult as many residents as possible. There are, of course, challenges that emerge in any kind of public consultation, as well as other opportunities municipalities can explore, such as:

- **General Public Resistance**
  As discussed, there is often resistance to proposed new developments, plans, or initiatives due to concerns such as possible impacts on community character, and increased traffic and congestion. Engaging residents in a variety of ways provides staff with opportunities to both understand what the concerns are (so that they can be addressed) and educate residents on why certain changes are occurring. Using a variety of consultation formats will allow staff to access a broader range of residents and their perspectives. Consulting at different times of the day in different parts of the community also ensures a broader representation of residents' opinions.

  Additionally, municipalities have found that more engaging consultation formats, like pop-up events, charrettes, or open houses, provide residents with opportunities to talk with developers or staff about proposed projects. These discussions tend to yield positive and constructive feedback. The formats of these types of consultation are more informal and conversational, allowing residents to engage in a two-way dialogue with developers or staff—ideally, both can come to understand each other's perspectives and concerns. There will always be some residents who are opposed to changes in their community. It is important for municipalities to focus on getting a broad array of perspectives, improve engagement with a range of residents, and ultimately attain diverse public input and buy-in.

- **Unengaged Residents**

  Residents often don't get involved with planning processes until there is a development proposal near them, which means they are not involved with the formulation of long range planning that provides the general direction for growth and development in the future (i.e., Official Plans or Secondary Plans). For instance, there were parcels in Georgina assigned for urban growth decades ago through land-use designations, but these remained vacant for a long time after being designated. Some residents were using these areas for their own purposes, like walks, for years, and so they were upset when a development came forward as they didn't know or like that these lands were designated for growth.

  It is important to work to engage residents early on so that the long-term direction of the community reflects the residents' vision and addresses their concerns. Educating residents on the importance of Official Plans, Secondary Plans, and other policies, as well as the consultation process at all stages of community planning, enables them to understand the value in participating in consultations beyond those that directly affect them. Municipalities can also try to advertise consultations through as many lines of communication as possible, such as on their website, through social media, in the newspaper, and through direct mail in order to inform residents of upcoming consultation opportunities. Additionally, one municipality noted that providing high-quality snacks is an effective means of encouraging residents to come out to more consultations.

- **Direct Conversations with Residents**

  One advantage of being a small community is that municipal staff can more easily engage with individual residents or community groups. Some staff members said that they try to remain as open to the public as possible, for instance allowing residents to stop by their office to discuss particular issues. When staff respond to people one-on-one, this tends to resolve their concerns and issues because staff can walk residents through applications, plans, or initiatives and explain how they will address their concerns. The downside of this approach is that staff resources may be limited, and responding to individual concerns can be time consuming. Going out into the community is another way municipal staff can have direct conversations with many residents at a time.

9

Conclusion

To return to the original question posed at the beginning of this report: what are complete rural communities? How can the complete community concept be applied to the rural context? Is a complete rural community different from a complete community in a larger urban area? Rural Greenbelt municipalities are working to become more complete, but sometimes struggle with what that means in a rural context.

Many of the municipalities interviewed for this research noted that towns and villages in rural areas had historically developed as compact, complete communities. They were walkable, provided employment through the provision of services to meet residents' needs (shops, healthcare, education, industry, and so on), and contained a mix of uses and housing types (buildings with stores at the bottom and apartments on top, for instance). A robust agricultural economy and natural heritage lands surrounded them. As single-use, low-density residential development for predominantly residents who commute for work in the GTA increased over the past few decades, towns and villages in rural areas changed. Nonetheless, historic settlement areas remain in many rural Greenbelt municipalities, and municipal staff are increasingly looking at them as areas to revitalize and grow.

Most of the municipal staff interviewed consider a complete community to be one that provides the basic, everyday needs of its residents, regardless of its size and location. This means that its residents have access to what they need on a day-to-day basis within the community (i.e. work, healthcare, housing, etc.). Agriculture and natural heritage are key components to complete rural communities and need special consideration.

While historic settlement areas are already or could be made more complete, it can be difficult for every town, village, or hamlet in a rural municipality to provide all aspects of a complete community because of their variable population sizes, ranging from only a couple hundred residents to tens of thousands of residents. Public transportation systems may be more effective at a regional scale, a lack of servicing can hinder the development of housing diversity, and not every town will have large institutional assets like a hospital or a college. Instead, a rural municipality may consider itself complete at the municipal-level when all their settlement areas and rural areas combined meet the majority of residents' daily needs.

This report provided an overview of some of the actions rural Greenbelt municipalities are taking to manage growth, diversify their housing stock, expand transportation options, grow their economies, preserve character, protect agriculture and the natural environment, and consult with the public in order to move towards achieving complete communities. Ongoing work will need to occur in order to define what complete communities look like and how complete communities can be achieved in rural municipalities.

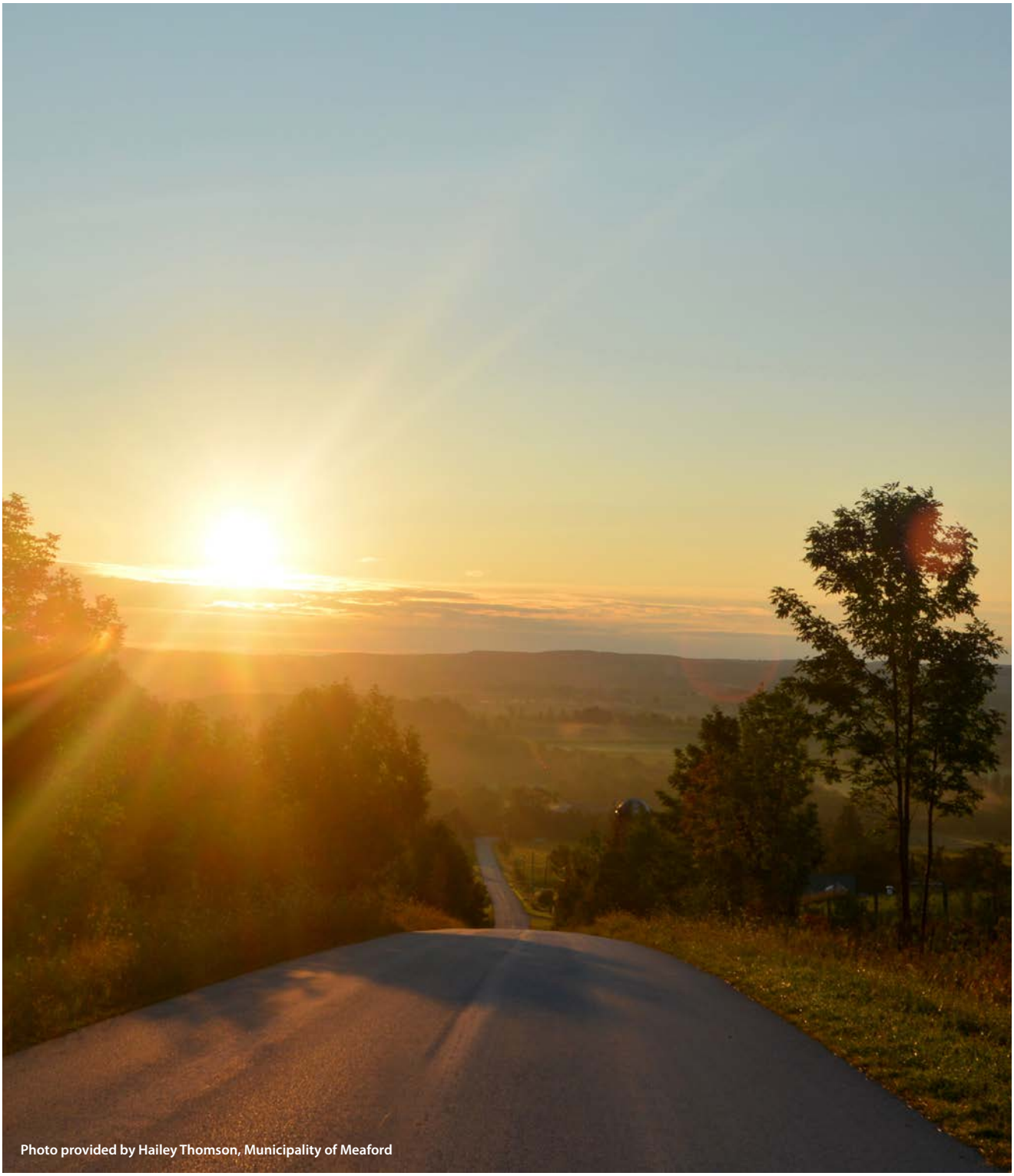


Photo provided by Hailey Thomson, Municipality of Meaford

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