

**Niagara Community
Observatory****LAND-USE PLANNING
IN NIAGARA: A Study in
Multilevel Governance
and Smart Growth****INTRODUCTION**

There is now an urgency in the popular global discourse surrounding climate change. For Canada, it means time is of the essence, having pledged under the Paris Agreement to reduce its national greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. This urgency has catapulted land-use planning to the centre stage of policy action on the environment and provided an opportunity for local governments to have a global impact. Under the shadow of international accords and national policies that have failed to stem the tide of climate change, there is an opportunity for local policymakers and communities to shift their attention to land-use planning as a fertile area to implement environmental sustainability initiatives.

Land-use planning consists of policy mechanisms by which governments regulate the use of land in pursuit of an integrated set of environmental, social and economic goals. In Canada, land-use planning intersects between provincial and municipal jurisdiction, thereby making it an intrinsically intergovernmental policy issue. In similar vein, debates over what constitutes effective uses of land are framed by the distinct environmental, social and economic perspectives of the actors engaged in policymaking. Within this context, for instance, the mandate of conservation authorities such as the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) to oversee watersheds and manage the integrity of diverse ecosystems in close partnership with a range of community stakeholders has taken on a particular significance.

In Canada, local governments have direct or indirect control over approximately 52 per cent of national GHG emissions, with tools ranging from regulation to procurement. Much can be controlled through land-use planning which is a fundamental policy tool used to manage GHG emissions because energy use is shaped by the organization of our streets, buildings, and communities (Association of Municipalities of Ontario, 2010; Gore and Robinson, 2005). Municipal land-use planning can create compact communities that improve the efficiency of utility usage, reduce the reliance on automobiles, and preserve green spaces.

Land-use planning represents one of the few regulatory powers that local governments have, and in recent years many Ontario municipalities have been incorporating environmental sustainability initiatives in their official plans by adhering to the principles of 'smart growth' (Association of Municipalities of Ontario, 2010; Corfee-Morlot et al., 2009; Opp et al., 2018).

There are 10 principles that represent the foundation of a smart-growth approach to land-use planning: create a mix of land uses; promote compact building design; offer a range of housing opportunities and choice; produce walkable neighbourhoods and communities; foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place; preserve open space, farmland and natural resources; strengthen and direct development into existing communities; provide a variety of transportation choices; make development predictable

and cost effective; and encourage community stakeholder collaboration (Vassan, 2015).

The effectiveness of land-use planning often rests on how well governments engage with a broad range of actors embedded in different territorial scales to pursue collaborative solutions to complex problems. Moreover, the integrity and legitimacy of this policy domain often requires establishing platforms and processes involving close and sustained engagement with local non-state actors who have vested interests in the social, economic and environmental issues associated with land-use planning. Determinations of which actors are engaged in the process will influence which social, economic and environmental perspectives are included in the policy outcome. The main questions, therefore, that this policy brief seeks to address are as follows: First, how effectively are key actors from different levels of government working together to give effect to the smart-growth principles in Niagara? Second, what mechanisms have been put in place in Niagara to ensure that land-use planning is

grounded in a process of sustained engagement with local non-state actors?

In answering these questions, we employ the concept of multilevel governance – a framework that helps us understand how governments from across several levels of jurisdiction along with non-state actors interact to design and implement policies that affect the livelihood and welfare of residents. Multilevel governance provides a lens for examining the relationships between cities, regions, and upper-tier governments as well as across a wider range of non-governmental actors.

Using this concept, this policy brief seeks to describe how the embodiment of smart-growth principles in Niagara's land-use planning system is governed by multiple tiers of government, explores the role of non-governmental actors, identifies components in this system that can be improved upon and suggests solutions to address these weaknesses.

RESEARCH METHOD

This policy brief uses archival sources and interviews with key actors in the policy domain. The data collection began by undertaking a qualitative content analysis of archival data including the *Planning Act*, the *Provincial Policy Statement* (PPS), all provincial plans issued from the PPS that cover the Niagara Region, as well as each of the official plans of the Regional Municipality of Niagara (the "Region") and its 12 constituent municipalities.

This qualitative data helped to inform in-depth interviews with key actors in the policy domain. In total, seven interviews were conducted in July and August of 2020

with stakeholders across Niagara. The interview questions were designed to provide context and shed more light on the conclusions drawn from analyzing archival sources.

Five components of multilevel governance were analyzed, as suggested by Homsy et al. (2019): sanctioning and coordinating authority (central authority), effective provision of capacity (fiscal and technical support), active knowledge co-production (knowledge sharing), the framing of co-benefits, and meaningful public engagement.

LAND-USE PLANNING IN NIAGARA

In Niagara, the Province of Ontario sets the ground rules for land-use planning through the *Planning Act* and provides overall policy direction on matters of provincial interest through the *Provincial Policy Statement* (PPS). The PPS provides a policy foundation upon which the Province can issue "provincial plans", which include minimum standards for municipalities. Municipalities issue official plans that set out general planning goals and policies to guide future land use, as well as zoning bylaws which set the rules and regulations that control development as it occurs. In Niagara, local municipalities must get their official plans approved by the Region which checks

for conformity with provincial standards. Further layers of review include the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC), a provincial agency which controls development on protected areas of the Niagara Escarpment; and the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA), established under the *Conservation Authorities Act, 1946*, which comments on municipal planning applications for development taking place within the Niagara Peninsula watershed.

In 2005, the *Greenbelt Act* and the *Places to Grow Act* were introduced to address urban sprawl in Canada using smart-growth principles. The *Greenbelt Act* created



The Wainfleet Bog Conservation Reserve is an extensive peatland and the largest bog in southwestern Ontario. It measures 230 hectares (568 acres) and is part of a larger section of land over which the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority has stewardship. The bog is protected by the provincial Wainfleet Bog Conservation Reserve Management Statement. (Photo courtesy NPCA)

the Greenbelt Plan which designates millions of acres of greenspace as off-limits to development. The *Places to Grow Act* spawned the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, which includes Niagara and consists of regional growth plans that establish specific density targets and planning priorities to promote compact and sustainable urban communities across the province. Together the Greenbelt Plan and the Growth Plan work in tandem with the Niagara Escarpment Plan to embody smart-growth principles.

Sanctioning and Coordinating Authority

Effective multilevel governance requires a central authority to help identify the problem, establish minimum targets, and force non-compliant actors into meeting shared policy goals under some sort of sanction. To embody the principles of smart growth in Niagara land-use planning, both the Province of Ontario and the Niagara Region act as a shared sanctioning and coordinating authority that can penalize and otherwise steer other actors into achieving policy goals. They share responsibilities under the *Planning Act*. The Province sets mandatory policies, targets, and guiding principles. It is able to forcibly amend the policies of a local municipality if it does not conform with these minimum requirements. But under the *Planning Act*, the Province has also voluntarily divested much of its authority to the Region by granting it the ability to approve local municipal official plans, distribute targets (such as residential intensification targets), monitor implementation activities and sanction other actors for being non-compliant with provincial policies.

The Province and the Region coordinate implementation activities for the purposes of embodying smart-growth

principles in a number of ways. Perhaps to the greatest effect, the Province issues provincial plans through an order in council that help ensure implementation activities are coordinated across jurisdictions. The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe states that the successful attainment of its policies will feature a diverse mix of land uses; more compact building design; the creation of walkable neighbourhoods and communities as well as expanded access to a range of transportation options across the Region (Government of Ontario, 2019a). Alongside this growth plan, the Greenbelt Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan tightly control development in the Niagara Region for the purposes of preserving farmland and natural resources by limiting growth to prescribed areas and designating large swaths of land as protected areas in which growth is either restricted or tightly controlled (Government of Ontario, 2019a; 2019b, Niagara Escarpment Commission, 2018). The Province also coordinates implementation activities across Niagara by establishing minimum standards in legislation relating to affordable housing, the identification of brownfield sites and public consultation requirements.

The Region coordinates implementation activities by meeting regularly with 'Local Municipal Coordinators of Community Improvement' and coordinating cross-jurisdictional policy initiatives such as the Greater Niagara Circle Route and Twenty Valley Trail (Niagara Region, 2014)

As the sanctioning and coordinating authority, the Province establishes minimum targets (such as density and employment targets), identifies "urban growth centres" (designated areas that have special density targets), and "designated areas" that are protected or otherwise controlled lands found in provincial

plans like the Greenbelt Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan (Government of Ontario 2019a; 2019b; Niagara Escarpment Commission, 2018). For example, downtown St. Catharines is a designated “urban growth centre” which stipulates there should be 150 residents and jobs combined per hectare by 2031 (Government of Ontario, 2019a). Much of the Niagara Escarpment has been identified as a “designated area” in the Niagara Escarpment Plan, preventing or otherwise restricting lot development in that area.

The Region allocates minimum density and employment targets across local area municipalities that must then be included in their respective official plans (Niagara Region, 2014). The Region has also developed a “Gateway” economic zone in five Niagara municipalities in which significant tax incentives and grants can be issued to development projects in those areas (Niagara Region, 2014).¹

The Province is able to deem a policy goal as a “matter of provincial interest” with which municipal policies must be consistent when developing their official plan and bylaws. Matters of provincial interest include many smart-growth-related policy goals listed in the *Planning Act* as well as policies included in provincial growth plans. Municipal policies that are inconsistent with matters of provincial interest will be forcibly amended by the Province and/or the Region.

Provision of fiscal and technical support

Multilevel governance requires that actors have the ability to mobilize and distribute resources and capacity that many local governments lack (Homsy et al., 2019). Both the Province and the Region offer fiscal and technical support to local municipalities and non-governmental organizations for the purposes of embodying smart-growth principles in Niagara land-use planning.

For example, the Province offers fiscal support via land acquisition programs through the Ontario Heritage Trust agency. It has also committed to providing “financial assistance to any person, organization or municipality that is undertaking any policy or program” under the Niagara Escarpment Plan (Government of Ontario, 2019b, Niagara Escarpment Commission, 2018; Ontario Heritage Trust, 2020). In practice, this financial assistance has come in the form of land-acquisition purchases for the purpose of protecting the Niagara Escarpment (Niagara Escarpment Commission, 2018). And it fiscally supports local agricultural groups, such as the Niagara Federation of Agriculture, an organization that helps ensure the local



agricultural industry remains viable and competitive (Niagara Region, 2014).

The Region has committed to providing fiscal support by setting up an Affordable Housing Reserve Fund for private and community organizations seeking to offer a range of housing opportunities. It offers tax incentives and grants for construction projects found within the designated “Gateway” zones of Niagara while also encouraging local municipalities to develop community improvement plans in these areas. (Niagara Region, 2014).

The Region assists with funding for the purposes of identifying and protecting the routes for the Waterfront Trail and Twenty Valley Trail while also supporting local municipalities through grants such as the Heritage Conservation Incentive (Niagara Region, 2014). It has also committed to establishing programs that provide grants and loans to local municipalities for the purposes of achieving the goals of community improvement plans (Niagara Region, 2014). The Region provides matching grants on a cost-shared basis with local municipalities in order to make projects in community improvement plans more attractive, such as the local Brownfield Tax Increment Grants and Environmental Assessment Study Grants (Niagara Region, 2014).

The Niagara Region offers technical support to local municipalities, for example, by providing cultural asset mapping and cultural heritage landscape conservation plans for cultural heritage landscapes that cross municipal

¹ The Gateway Economic Zone is located across five Niagara municipalities: Thorold, Niagara Falls, Welland, Port Colborne and Fort Erie. The zones were strategically selected based on their proximity to border crossings, the Welland Canal, major highways and education centres (Niagara Region, 2014).

boundaries. Also, the Region has adopted a “development permit system” (DPS), an implementation tool that combines zoning, site plan control and minor variances into one process and is administered by the local municipality (Niagara Region, 2014). The DPS provides more certainty about development requirements and establishes faster timelines for decision-making and eliminating potential duplication in approvals. This makes development more predictable and cost-effective, a principle of smart growth.

The Region, alongside the NPCA, also assist local area municipalities with completing watershed studies by providing environmental staff. And requests for human resource support from the Region made by smaller local municipalities, when their staffing levels are low, are often granted (Interview, 2020).



Successful land-use planning requires close and sustained engagement between government and local non-state actors who have vested interests in the social, economic and environmental issues surrounding the policy domain. Collaboration and cooperation, as the establishment of the Rockway Conservation Area shows, are pillars of policy implementation. (Photo courtesy NPCA)

During stakeholder interviews, there was some hesitation expressed over the acceptance of fiscal support from the Region. The concern is that if the Region assists with funding, it may become a vested interest and could control the outcome of the program. Some municipalities may prefer to retain their autonomy by funding an initiative themselves, rather than accepting fiscal support from the Region and relinquishing partial control over the outcome. As one stakeholder stated: “[...] when you get fiscal and/or technical support from a particular agency, whether it be the Region or the Province, they then become a stakeholder in what kind of results happen as well. So, [it’s] kind of a double-edged sword.” (Interview, 2020).

Knowledge-Sharing

Top-Down: Knowledge is shared from the top-down in several ways. The Province provides data and information to municipalities in the form of mapping, delineated built boundaries, growth forecasts, size and location of urban growth centres as well as a standard methodology for land needs-assessments (Government of Ontario, 2019a). Similarly, the Region provides municipalities with population and employment forecasts, vacancy rates, supply of affordable housing units and affordability thresholds to inform policymaking.

Horizontal: Knowledge is shared regularly between the Region, the real estate sector, not-for-profit housing agencies as well as council committees dedicated to affordable housing in order to assist with achieving affordable housing supply targets. Horizontal knowledge flows are also demonstrated via inter-municipal partnerships for policies such as: supplying recreational facilities and trail networks that cross jurisdictional boundaries, and an environmental database program that assesses ecosystem health and integrity while also recommending improvements to planning policies. Municipal planning officials across the Niagara region also meet regularly to discuss regional initiatives, local issues and share information (Interview, 2020).

Bottom-Up: Municipal planners require enough data and information – such as GIS mapping and forecasting data – from the Province, Region and other municipalities to support their work. But municipalities also have an opportunity to share knowledge upwards by commenting on density and intensification targets in provincial plans and providing data and information to the Province to inform provincial mapping in the growth plan (Government of Ontario, 2019a; Niagara Escarpment Commission, 2018). Municipalities are also represented on the advisory committee to the NEC and the board of the NPCA.

Framing of Co-Benefits

A strategy to frame the co-benefits of smart-growth policies involves the transformation of an abstract or global concept into a local goal whose successful attainment can be tied to multiple benefits. This research has found that the framing of co-benefits is not a key factor in Niagara’s land-use planning because there is no evidence of such a strategy in any municipal official plan. However, the Province has demonstrated its ability to frame co-benefits by linking the embodiment of smart-growth principles with positive economic development, improved public health and enhanced environmental sustainability in the Growth Plan, PPS, Greenbelt Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan.

In Niagara land-use planning, the community is engaged in an advisory and ad-hoc manner for a wide-range of purposes. As part of the public consultation requirements to amend provincial plans, stakeholders can provide written submissions and otherwise participate in the review process (Government of Ontario, 2019a; 2019b & Niagara Escarpment Commission, 2018). The Region works collaboratively with community partners to advance an economic and land-use agenda that supports cultural assets and creative cultural industries, to conduct watershed studies and to provide financial support to local agricultural groups like the Niagara Federation of

Agriculture in order to ensure a viable agricultural industry exists (Niagara Region, 2014). Not-for-profit agencies like Habitat for Humanity and Bethlehem Housing are consulted for matters like affordable housing, and stakeholders have representation or are working on various municipal affordable housing advisory committees dedicated to alleviating affordable housing restrictions. Some municipalities have also partnered with Brock University and Niagara College so that co-op students can assist with matters like economic development, GIS mapping and other land-use initiatives.

DISCUSSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The goal of the above analysis was to examine the nature of land-use planning in Niagara. It sought to shed light on how governments engage with actors embedded in different territorial scales to pursue collaborative solutions to complex problems. It also examined the nature of engagement between government and local non-state actors, detailing which social, economic and environmental interests are included - and not included - in Niagara's land-use planning. The rest of this section, therefore, concludes with some observations about the effectiveness of how key actors from different levels of government work together to give effect to smart-growth principles in Niagara. It also makes some suggestions for improving mechanisms by which Niagara's land-use planning process could be a more grounded, inclusive and sustained engagement with local non-state actors.

This policy brief finds that the presence of a central authority, the provision of fiscal and technical support, knowledge-sharing, and public engagement are all key factors that can account for the embodiment of smart-growth principles in Niagara land-use planning.

The strong sanctioning and coordinating authority administered by provincial legislation and provincial plans, the allocation of targets by the Region and allowing municipalities to achieve those targets with a wide latitude of discretion via official plans and bylaws are interesting examples of top-down and bottom-up



Condominiums are currently being built in Beamsville by the railway tracks near the highway. The site's proximity to a future planned GO Station is meant to target people who may be commuting to work. It is within walking distance of the proposed station, as well as adjacent to a grocery store and miscellaneous businesses.

governance structures coming together and allowing for coordinated and localized policy implementation. In the literature on multilevel governance, the role of a sanctioning and coordinating authority is generally assigned to a single actor, yet the case of Niagara uncovers two actors fulfilling this role (Doberstein, 2013; Galvin, 2019; Homsy et al., 2019). While some may point to the risk of duplicating services and adding more layers of government, the localized nature of land-use planning in Ontario and the dependency on municipalities for policy implementation require a second sanctioning and coordinating authority that is more familiar with the complexity and unique characteristics of a local region.

To embody the principles of smart growth in Niagara land-use planning, the Province appears to be the best



planning decisions. Having the planning hierarchy be led by those elected does allow the opportunity for a high-profile political champion to appear who may lend more democratic legitimacy and resources to the network (Doberstein, 2013). The embodiment of smart-growth principles benefitted from such a political champion in 2003 when Dalton McGuinty entrenched the smart-growth planning paradigm in provincial policies. However, the multilevel governance literature suggests that there are practical advantages to bureaucrats making planning decisions because the commitment to a well-functioning multilevel

vehicle to coordinate implementation activities via mandatory public consultation requirements in the *Planning Act*, designating matters of provincial interest and setting minimum targets. The Region appears to be best at determining the distribution of externalities due to its localized knowledge of unique regional characteristics. The Province and the Region have proven to be effective in working together to ensure implementation activities are coordinated and consistent with activities across the province; the allocation of minimum targets across municipalities is informed by localized knowledge; and the potential for the fiscal power of the Province is leveraged to alleviate capacity constraints. Such a finding may suggest that localities under a two-tier system may especially benefit from having two sanctioning and coordinating authorities who can leverage strong fiscal power while also being informed by localized knowledge. Of note here is the increased use of Minister's Zoning Orders (MZOs) by the Province, which override local zoning by-laws, curtail public debate and are considered final rulings on how land is used (Gray, 2020). More than 30 MZOs have been issued since 2019, compared to 49 issued between the period between 1969 and 2000 (Dingman, 2020). While MZOs may speed up the planning process to allow for quicker development, critics view them as a threat to local governments who wish to exert control over what has traditionally been their jurisdiction.

In Ontario, elected officials (municipal and regional councillors as well as the executive branch at the provincial level) have the ultimate authority when making

governance network would be a core part of their job, rather than one of many competing priorities for a temporarily elected official (Doberstein, 2013).

Much of the fiscal support that is allocated for the purposes of embodying smart-growth principles is allocated towards community stakeholders and the development community, such as the Niagara Federation of Agriculture and developers who build in designated "Gateway" economic zones. While the Region provides funding to municipalities for cross-jurisdictional cycling routes, for example, much of the funding allocated towards municipalities comes in the form of cost-sharing arrangements for secondary plan development and cost-sharing grants administered via community improvement plans. There is an opportunity here for the Province to leverage its spending power to better assist in attaining the policy goals of provincial plans. Moreover, smart-growth principles that primarily require the deployment of fiscal instruments could benefit from provincial involvement, such as dedicated funding for affordable housing supply, developing multi-modal transportation networks and acquiring parkland.

Niagara land-use planning benefits from active knowledge-sharing that assists in the embodiment of smart-growth principles. Structural knowledge flows are embedded in mandatory public and municipal consultation requirements for provincial plan amendments, council committee recommendations and more. However, many interviewees complained that the

data they provide to inform mapping during provincial plan amendments are often ignored, and top-down data in the form of mapping and guidelines can be interpreted widely while the definitions provided can be inconsistent. Active knowledge sharing within the Niagara land-use planning system may also be threatened by the increased use of MZO's by the Province as they do not require input from either the general public or local governments. Furthermore, Niagara's land-use planning system reveals that knowledge is shared between governments, the real estate sector and not-for-profit organizations, but it is unclear how Indigenous communities are engaged in the process.

Public administrators seeking to embody the principles of smart growth in Niagara's land-use planning system would benefit from effectively framing co-benefits, which has proven to be an effective strategy to spur policy action (Corfee et al., 2009; Homsy et al., 2019; Gore and Robinson, 2005). Because elected officials ultimately approve recommendations made by planners, the framing of co-benefits may be a useful strategy for planning officials who are seeking a bylaw or official plan amendment that promotes the achievement of smart growth. By linking the embodiment of smart-growth principles with economic benefits (from reduced energy costs, or public transportation enabling more of the population to get to work), health benefits (from improved air pollution as a result of improved public transit, or less need to drive if you can walk or bike somewhere) or other miscellaneous co-benefits, planners

can better appeal to elected officials and improve the likelihood of policy action. Such a strategy may also be relevant for any public administrator looking to influence policy action in governance networks led by elected officials. Municipalities can follow provincial direction and incorporate such policy-framing strategies in their official plans, public consultations, and recommendations to city council. In particular, the official plan represents the long-term goals for the development of the municipality and acts as a reference for decision-makers to approve planning decisions. Provincial plans are not as actively consulted by decision-makers on council as an official plan would, making official plans the perfect policy document for framing of co-benefits strategies.

Given the statutory requirement of public consultations for many planning decisions, planning officials have an opportunity to engage in the framing of co-benefits during open houses, surveys, and media releases to the public. While many interviewees stressed that much of their work does not necessarily require buy-in from the public, obtaining a social licence may prove effective when making recommendations to council. Furthermore, adopting a strategy of framing the co-benefits of smart growth may strengthen accountability because responsiveness to community preferences is an important indicator of an accountable relationship (Young, 2013). Such a strategy may also help local governments prepare for an increasingly activist provincial government. In many cases, MZO's were only issued after local city councils supported their use.



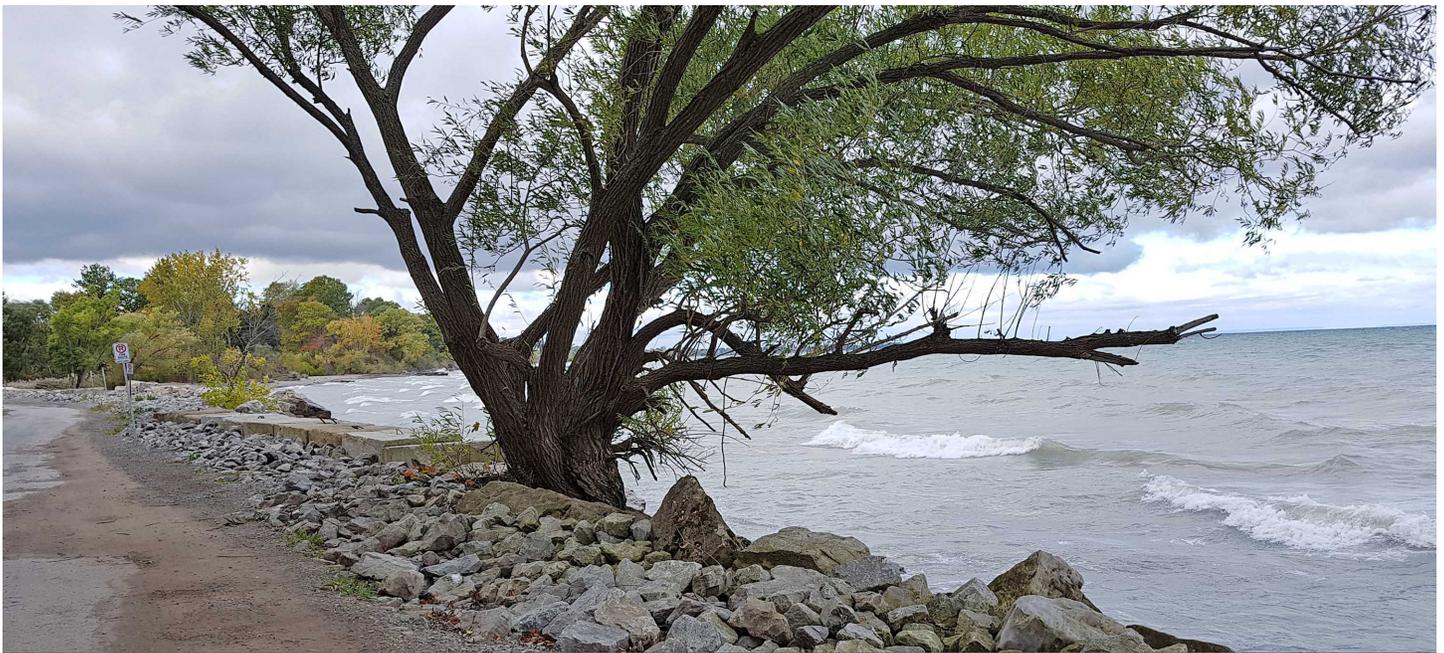
The Konkle Creek Multiuse Trail which travels behind the "Fairgrounds" development in Beamsville was constructed by the developer as a condition of subdivision approval. It was previously identified in the Town of Lincoln's masterplan for trails.

Perhaps the biggest opportunity to improve the embodiment of smart-growth principles in Niagara land-use planning is to increase engagement with non-governmental actors. Current engagement tends to be ad-hoc in nature and limited to an advisory capacity. Sustained engagement with local postsecondary institutions, think-tanks and not-for-profit housing agencies can all improve the embodiment of smart-growth principles in Niagara land-use planning. For instance, Brock University and Niagara College can establish more formal relationships with local municipalities for co-op programs, assist with GIS mapping, as well as general research. Think-tanks and research centres are a hot-

bed for knowledge in related areas like transportation, sustainability, recreation, and land-use best-practices. Not-for-profit organizations like Bethlehem Housing, Habitat for Humanity, and the Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy often work in cultural heritage areas, affordable housing, and the protection of greenspaces. Sustained engagement with Indigenous communities can create mutually beneficial relationships for the purposes of achieving shared goals in the areas of environmental protection and economic growth. Moving beyond ad-hoc engagements and towards more formal working relationships could provide valuable on-the-ground data and a local perspective to inform decision-making.

An example of this could be to establish a formal platform bringing together key stakeholders for regular and sustained deliberation and resolution of issues and problems pertaining to the embodiment of smart-growth principles in Niagara land-use planning. Facing an unwanted MZO issued by the provincial government, the Town of Ajax has partnered with the not-for-profit organization Environmental Defence to launch a campaign against the development project (Snowdon, 2020). If the need arises, Niagara municipalities may wish to deepen and broaden their engagement with local nongovernmental actors who share local interests.

NEXT STEPS



Brock University is conducting a three-year study in collaboration with the Town of Lincoln examining the impact of climate change on coastal communities. (Photo courtesy The Brock News)

The integrity of land usage with respect to the broader goals of climate-change action has become one of the driving forces shaping discourses and practices of land-use planning in Canada and most other countries. Under the shadow of failed international accords and insufficient national plans, the embodiment of smart-growth principles in land-use planning will positively contribute to Canada's fight against climate change. Effective policy outcomes in this domain require a coordinated solution across jurisdictional boundaries with the help from a network of actors.

By employing the analytical lens of multilevel governance to understand how the Niagara region embodies smart-

growth principles in its land-use planning, we are able to better understand the current state of policy implementation in this field. There is an opportunity to leverage the spending power of the Province by providing dedicated funding for affordable housing supply, developing multi-modal transportation networks, and acquiring parkland. Continued knowledge flows are necessary for planners to continue their work. However, the development of mapping at the provincial level must take into consideration data provided by local municipalities while guidelines and mapping provided by the province must be clear and have consistent definitions. The inclusion of a "framing of co-benefits strategy" in municipal official plans would assist

local planners in their efforts to garner support for recommendations to council through the use of various “lenses”. Lastly, establishing formal working relationships with non-governmental stakeholders such as local postsecondary institutions, think-tanks, and not-for-profit housing agencies can help inform decision-making.

Land-use planning systems are complex but interrelated domains consisting of varying networks of actors, constellations of competing ideas, and sets of institutions that shape, influence or constrain collective action. Like other communities in Ontario and Canada, Niagara’s land-use planning system is made up of actors with conflicting environmental, economic and social interests woven into the status quo of conventional narratives about growth, development, livability and sustainability. Determining who is included in this process and to what extent they are engaged will shape the political and policy outcomes in this area.

- To what extent does land-use planning in Niagara coexist or align with Indigenous ways of knowing or seeing?
- Is Niagara’s land-use planning shaped or influenced by the understanding of relations and interactions between human and non-human species bound together by a complex and inextricably intertwined but fragile symbiosis?

- How can local governments in Niagara broaden and deepen their engagement with local non-governmental actors? Who should be engaged?

- How can Niagara’s land-use planning system defend local interests against an increasingly activist provincial government? For instance, recent political developments such as Schedule 6 of the Ontario government’s omnibus COVID-19 recovery bill (Bill 229) raises fundamental questions about the power and autonomy of local conservation authorities to manage the integrity of ecosystems within their jurisdictions in the face of expanding ministerial authority on zoning and other potentially significant environmental issues. What does such a development mean for the capacity of municipalities and conservation authorities to harness their local knowledge and exercise ecological stewardship over their natural systems?

In closing, the next step for Niagara is to consider the administrative and institutional mechanisms by which land-use planning can more fully engage all tiers of government as well as leverage the voices and expertise of local non-state actors to enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of the process. It will mean rethinking current institutional structures, behaviours, and relationships that transcend the conventional vertical and horizontal boundaries of the public sector.



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The Niagara Community Observatory is a public-policy think-tank working in partnership with the Niagara community to foster, produce and disseminate research on current and emerging issues. An electronic copy of this policy brief can be found on our website at www.brocku.ca/nco

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