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REPORT TITLE: **UPDATE ON CREATING HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENTS IN PEEL**

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RECOMMENDATION

That a Regional Official Plan amendment be brought forward for consideration in order to strengthen plan policies to:

- **Require health assessments as part of the development application process;**
- **Ensure municipal councils are informed of the health impact of development;**
- **Support the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the health impacts of development at the Regional and municipal levels.**

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Reducing chronic diseases such as diabetes and obesity requires creating supportive environments, such as complete communities, which enable health-promoting behaviours.
- Complete communities meet people's needs for daily living throughout an entire lifetime. Such communities provide convenient access to an appropriate mix of jobs, local services, a full range of housing, convenient access to public transportation, safe options for active transportation, and community infrastructure, including affordable housing, schools, recreation and open space for their residents.
- In light of the increasing diabetes and obesity rates in Peel, staff from Public Health and Planning have been directed to work together to assess the extent to which proposed land-use developments contribute to the development of complete communities.
- These efforts resulted in the creation of the Healthy Development Assessment (HDA), an evidence-based and user-friendly health assessment tool for the planning community.
- An evaluation of early versions of the HDA found success in raising awareness of the link between the built environment and health; integrating health-promoting elements into new and existing planning policies and documents; and testing the tool on a variety of development proposals and plans.
- Challenges brought forward through the evaluation suggest that implementation of the HDA has been inconsistent because it is not a required study; health assessment recommendations are not always addressed by proponents; and certain key elements of design require alignment of Regional and municipal public policies to better support healthy, complete communities.

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- In order to be more consistent and impactful in the future, the evaluation recommends that:
 - health assessments be required on new development,
 - the findings from these health assessments be reported to municipal councils, and
 - where planning policies and healthy development standards are misaligned, efforts be undertaken to identify and address the issues, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the health impacts of development at the Regional and municipal levels be completed.
- Overall, the healthy communities' agenda is well aligned with other Regional priority areas such as sustainability, growth, transportation demand management, active transportation including transit, and supporting an aging population.
- Further advancement towards designing healthy, complete communities will require continued, progressive Regional leadership and collaborative action across levels of government.

DISCUSSION

1. Background

a) The underlying health issues: Obesity and diabetes

The circumstances in which people have been leading their lives have changed dramatically in recent decades. Alterations in our physical, social and economic environments have exerted powerful influences on food consumption and physical activity behaviors. Not unlike most developed countries, Peel residents less frequently walk or cycle to work, school and/or to run errands. Residents are more sedentary at work and deploy a multitude of labour-saving devices at home. The consequences of these societal changes include a population that is less active and fit, obesity rates that have doubled in a few decades and ever-increasing rates of diabetes. Not only does this situation reflect a direct threat to the health and wellbeing of the residents of Peel, but it hampers productivity as a society, and further stretches the capacity of the healthcare system.

b) The Link between Community Design and the Public's Health

Evidence indicates that reducing chronic diseases such as diabetes and obesity requires creating supportive environments, namely complete communities, which support health promoting behaviours. Complete communities meet people's needs for daily living throughout an entire lifetime by providing convenient access to an appropriate mix of jobs, local services, a full range of housing, and community infrastructure, including affordable housing, schools, recreation and open space for their residents. Convenient access to public transportation and options for safe, non-motorized travel is also provided.

The impact of designing healthier built environments is emerging in several jurisdictions across North America where, over the past decade, comprehensive policy change has been pursued to support this direction. In New York City, the feasibility of achieving policy change has resulted in demonstrable improvements in population behaviours, including increases in commuter cycling, reduced traffic injuries and increased transit use. New York City is also one of many areas in the U.S. that have demonstrated reductions in childhood obesity rates with the establishment of healthier schools, as well as a number of other initiatives to support walking and cycling.

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From an environmental health perspective, complete communities offer reduced pollution, reduced energy consumption, and protection of greenspace and habitats.

From a societal perspective, complete communities enable healthy aging in place, promote social connectivity, and mental health. Complete communities also encourage a range of housing options that contribute to the increased development of affordable housing stock and allow residents to remain in their communities if or when their lifestyle needs change.

c) Planning and Public Health

In Peel, Public Health and Planning have undertaken a deliberate, yet evolutionary approach to shifting the paradigm towards planning for healthy built environments. Concerted efforts have been made across both sectors to raise awareness of this inter-dependent relationship and opportunities to advance shared goals. This has been accomplished through policy directives included in the Region of Peel Official Plan Amendments (ROPA) 24 and 25. These amendments required the Region:

- To work with area municipalities to raise public awareness of the health impacts of development
- To prepare an assessment tool to evaluate the health impacts of development

These amendments also created the policy context for the Region to:

- (May) request health impact studies as part of a complete development application
- (May) develop health indicators to analyze the effectiveness of the Official Plan policies and serve as the basis for policy adjustments.

The current discretionary application of health-based criteria, however, is not sufficient to address the challenges associated with historical approaches to developing the built form in Peel. Fostering complete communities requires the consistent and explicit consideration of health impacts of proposed development and planning decisions in the Region of Peel.

This report summarizes progress and milestones the Region and municipalities have achieved in shifting the practices within the planning community to date. However, changing the design of communities in Peel requires continued progressive Regional leadership that supports all participants in the planning process to develop and prioritize complete communities (Appendix I).

2. Update of Activities

a) Healthy Development Assessment

The need for an evidence-based tool to assess potential health impacts of planning decisions was identified as an early priority. The Healthy Development Assessment (HDA) has been developed and refined through a series of updates. Initially, a body of research evidence was compiled that identified elements and quantifiable measures associated with increased walkability. This evidence base was developed in partnership with St. Michael's Hospital Centre for Research on Inner City Health and McMaster

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University, and presented to Regional Council in July 2010. It summarizes the empirical evidence linking attributes of the built environment with health outcomes into quantifiable standards. The standards are organized according to the following categories: Density, Service Proximity, Land Use Mix, Street Connectivity, Streetscape Characteristics and Efficient Parking.

In response to feedback obtained during the initial feasibility testing, the HDA was refined further into a more user-friendly health assessment tool. The tool is applicable across a range of different contexts and allows developers to identify and preemptively mitigate any potential health impacts associated with their development proposals. The framework was developed in a manner such that it can be refined by the area municipalities to suit their needs and contexts. Implementation of the HDA brings forward evidence-based criteria to provide ongoing, transparent, and consistent health rationale to the development review process. However, it is imperative to note that while the Region's tool brings forward opportunities to increase the health promoting potential of proposed developments, the decision-making authority to enforce these recommendations remains with the local area municipalities. As such, Public Health is working in partnership with these municipalities to adopt the assessment tool to each unique municipal context.

To date, Public Health has engaged with municipalities as follows:

- Planning Technical Advisory Committee meetings have provided an opportunity for engagement of municipal staff on the policy intentions and HDA process updates
- The Town of Caledon has already reflected these policies and are testing them in the Mayfield West Phase II secondary plan through ROPA 29
- The City of Brampton is well aligned with the policy and processes through their Sustainability Community Development Guidelines
- The City of Mississauga has been working in partnership with Regional staff to ensure the health assessment tools meet the needs of the local context.

b) Evaluation

Overview:

In 2014, Regional staff undertook an evaluation to determine the influence and impact of the Healthy Development Assessment.

The evaluation found that the tool has been used to assess the following:

- development proposals;
- plans and projects, including the Town of Caledon's Mayfield West Phase II Secondary Plan, the City of Brampton's Transportation Master Plan and the Ninth Line Corridor Review Study in the City of Mississauga.

The HDA has also been used to integrate health promoting elements into new and existing evaluative tools and documents, such as the City of Brampton's Sustainable Community Development Guidelines and the Caledon East Community Improvement Plan (CIP). Recently, integration of the HDS into the Caledon East CIP resulted in the Town of Caledon receiving the following awards:

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- Ontario Professional Planners Institute's (OPPI) Annual Excellence in Planning Award;
- OPPI and Heart & Stroke Foundation of Ontario's Healthy Communities Award.

The evaluation found the following:

- The HDA has been instrumental in raising awareness about the link between health and the built environment, especially among the public health and planning communities locally, provincially and nationally;
- The HDA has been used to build and sustain a variety of partnerships, particularly across all Region of Peel planning departments;
- However, when used to assess development proposals and plans, the following challenges were identified:
 - i) A lack of consistency in implementation across the planning processes, because Regional and municipal policies only stipulate the HDA "may" be required
 - ii) The extent to which the recommendations from the HDA are addressed by development proponents was inconsistent. Currently, there is no statutory authority through planning policies or processes within the Region to enable local area municipal staff to enforce the recommendations with the development proponent or inform the respective municipal council of the health impact
 - iii) Decisions about certain elements of the built form are outside of the development proponent's control. For example, public policies and plans often dictate location of key services such as schools and transit, some streetscape characteristics, and street connectivity.

Evaluation Report Recommendations

The evaluation also made recommendations to address the aforementioned challenges.

i) Requirement to Complete the Assessment and Report on Findings

Current Official Plan policies at both the Regional and municipal levels only encourage the completion of health assessments on proposed development applications and do not enable local area municipal staff to enforce the recommendations with the development proponent or inform the respective municipal council of the health impact.

Therefore, future Regional Official Plan reviews present an opportunity to enhance related policies so that health assessments of all development applications are required and municipal Councils are informed of the health impact.

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ii) **Alignment with Planning Public Policies and Standards**

In some circumstances, an assessment element may be outside of the development proponent's control. Therefore, when and where possible, it is critical for all parties involved in a development application to consider the health impacts of their decisions. In addition, some HDA standards are strongly influenced by transportation engineering standards that are outside of the developer's and local municipality's control. In an effort to address this discrepancy, Public Health staff has acquired a position at the Transportation Association of Canada table to advocate for transportation engineering standards that incorporate active transportation into their new Geometric Design Guidelines.

iii) **Refinement of Assessment Tool**

The evaluation also recommended further refinement of the tool into a more succinct format to increase the ease-of-use and reduce the time commitment required to conduct the assessment by development proponents. Efforts towards achieving this recommendation are already underway and a draft revised tool is currently in the later phases of testing and implementation planning. The revised tool is anticipated to be ready for release by the end of 2015.

3. **Strategic Alignment**

While Public Health's role has been primarily focused on the health implications of land use and transportation planning, advancing the healthy communities agenda has presented an opportunity to strategically align with other priority areas in the Region of Peel.

Environment and Sustainability

Complete communities offer reduced pollution, reduced energy consumption, and the protection of greenspace and habitats. Accordingly, the Region has prepared a Climate Change Strategy and municipalities, such as the City of Brampton, are adopting sustainability guidelines. Compared with typical suburban development, healthy complete communities offer significant reductions in energy expenditure and greenhouse gas emissions, predominantly by reducing car use through walking, cycling and public transit (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2011). For example, a Toronto-based study comparing inner-city and suburban neighbourhoods estimated greenhouse gas emissions that were 2.6 times less in the inner-city on a per capita basis (Norman et al, 2006).

Transportation Demand Management

A reliance on cars for transportation has led to ever-worsening congestion on roads and highways. The annual cost of congestion to commuters in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area in 2006 was \$3.3 billion with a further \$2.7 billion cost in lost opportunities for economic expansion (Metrolinx, 2008). These costs will more than double over the next 25 years, if congestion remains unattended.

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As of 2006, the transportation modal split in the Region of Peel for the morning peak period demonstrates the dominance of automobiles, with over three quarters of individuals driving or being a passenger. Public transit and active transportation accounted for 9.5 per cent and 7.6 per cent of morning peak period trips, respectively (University of Toronto Data Management Group, 2006). The Peel Long Range Transportation Plan – Update 2012 indicates that widening existing roads and building new ones will be insufficient to meet future growth in travel demand. Substantial increases in mode share for public transit and active transportation will be required to avoid congestion, which will reach critical levels. Efficient transit use, however, requires the denser, more compact communities that the HDA endeavors to design. These efforts are bolstered further by the work being done on the Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Development Guidelines project that aims to effectively integrate TDM into the development approvals process.

Infrastructure Costs

The cost implications of low density suburban development patterns to municipalities and their taxpayers are substantial. A recent summary of case studies from across the U.S. found that compared with traditional suburban growth, more compact development saved an average of 38 per cent on upfront infrastructure costs, 10 per cent savings on ongoing delivery of services, and generated 10 times more tax revenue per acre (Smart Growth America, 2013). These findings are consistent with analysis from Calgary, which demonstrated more compact development would be 33 per cent less expensive to build than if the city were to continue to grow if following existing patterns (IBI Group, 2009). The single largest contributor to the difference was road capital costs, followed by water, wastewater and schools. Annual operating costs were 14 per cent less for the more compact option.

Within the Region of Peel, a recent analysis was undertaken on capital and state of good repair (SOGR) costs for water and sewer infrastructure for one sample intensification and two sample greenfield areas. The analysis indicates that capital and SOGR costs are lower for the intensification area when compared with the two greenfield areas. While the unit cost for watermains and sewers in an intensification area is higher because of factors such as utility relocation and traffic management, the total length of watermains and sewers is considerably less compared to greenfield areas, which contributes to overall lower costs in an intensification area.

Aging Population

Peel Region's population over the age of 65 is expected to double in size by 2031. Recognizing the challenges and opportunities posed by an aging population, it is critical to plan for age-friendly communities that enable residents to age actively through supportive policies, services and infrastructure.

The implementation of the Healthy Development Assessment can help to alleviate some of this burden through the creation of healthy, walkable communities that are close to amenities, services and programs. Healthy communities support independent, active and healthy aging for all residents in the Region along with aging in place - the ability for older adults to remain in the community safely, comfortably, and independently later in life.

Shifting Demographics and Preferences

Shifts in perspectives are also occurring regarding the desired form of neighbourhoods. In a survey of GTA residents, 13 per cent currently living in more automobile friendly

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neighbourhoods indicated that they would prefer to live in a pedestrian/transit friendly neighbourhood (Frank et al, 2012). Conversely, only 4.6 per cent of those living in pedestrian/transit friendly neighbourhoods would prefer to live in a more automobile friendly neighbourhood. Survey data from the U.S. also indicates that the majority (56 per cent) of adults nationwide would prefer living in a smart growth community rather than a sprawl community, primarily because of the convenience of being within walking distance to shops and restaurants (Belden Russonello and Stewart, 2011). (See Appendix II for list of references from this section.)

4. Recommended Direction

To continue to build on the momentum to date and as identified in Council's endorsement of the Peel 2041 Regional Official Plan Review work program (Council Resolution 2013-1151), Regional staff recommend that a Regional Official Plan amendment be brought forward for consideration in order to strengthen plan policies to:

- Require health assessments as part of the development application process;
- Ensure municipal councils are informed of the health impact of development;
- Support the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the health impacts of development at the Regional and municipal levels.

This will help achieve the next milestone towards a planning process in Peel that prioritizes and develops healthy, complete communities.

CONCLUSION

Traditional automobile-oriented communities have been developed for generations in Peel. Over the last few years, departments across the Region of Peel and area municipalities have come together to reverse this trend and move towards designing and building healthier environments. To this end, Peel Region is beginning to see promising approaches amongst planners and supportive landowners and developers. However, to be impactful and optimize opportunities during a time of growth, continued effort is required to strengthen policies and processes that will normalize the planning of complete communities in Peel. The proposed policies are an important signal and a critical next step in progressive Regional leadership in achieving the longer term vision of building healthier communities in Peel.



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APPENDICES

1. Appendix I - Building Healthy, Complete Communities in Peel
2. Appendix II - References

For further information regarding this report, please contact Olha Dobush, Director, Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention, Ext : 2617, olha.dobush@peelregion.ca.

Building Healthy, Complete Communities in Peel

2005

2015-16

2021-31



AUTO-DEPENDENT SPRAWL

- ↓ Walkability/Active Transportation
- ↓ Transit Use

Contributes to:

- ↑ Chronic disease conditions
- ↑ Health care utilization
- ↑ Congestion
- ↑ Air pollution
- ↓ Economic impact (i.e. productivity and job loss)

COMPLETE COMMUNITIES

- ↑ Walkability/Active Transportation
- ↑ Transit Use

Enables:

- Healthy active lifestyles
- Congestion alleviation
- Air quality mitigation
- Social connectivity
- Aging in place
- Agricultural land preservation
- Affordable housing options

Evolutionary Approach towards Building Healthier Communities

Link Health and Planning through:

- Awareness raising
- Development of evidence based tools



Shift Practices of Planning Community through:

- Refinement of planning policies, processes, and tools
- Capacity building across the sector



Change Design of Communities to be Healthy and Complete through:

- Consistent and explicit consideration of health impacts
- Incorporation of healthy design elements
- Health impacts prioritized in decision making processes

Regional Leadership

ROPA 24:

Work jointly with area municipalities to raise awareness of public health issues related to planning

ROPA 24:

Prepare jointly with area municipalities, an assessment tool that will allow evaluating the public health impacts of proposed developments

ROPA 25:

Region may request health impact studies as part of a complete development application

POTENTIAL OFFICIAL PLAN POLICY OPPORTUNITIES:

- Require health assessments as part of a complete development application
- Ensure councils are informed of health impacts of proposed developments and planning decisions

FUTURE STATE:

Regional and municipal planning departments ensure all development meet/exceed leading standards for healthy community design

Healthy Built Environments in Peel Appendix II

References

Belden Russonello and Stewart. The 2011 Community Preference Survey: What Americans are Looking for When Deciding Where to Live. 2011.

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BUILDING HEALTHY, COMPLETE COMMUNITIES IN PEEL REGION



SHIFTING THE PARADIGM

Auto-Dependent Sprawl

Complete Communities



OUR APPROACH



Link Health and Planning through:

- Awareness raising
- Development of evidence based tools



Shift Behaviours of Planning Community through:

- Refinement of planning policies, processes, and tools
- Capacity building across the sector



Change Design of Communities to be Healthy and Complete through:

- Consistent and explicit consideration of health impacts
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REGIONAL COUNCIL LEADERSHIP



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FUTURE STATE:

Regional and municipal planning departments ensure all development meet/exceed leading standards for healthy community design