

# UNDERSTANDING THE COUNTY OF SIMCOE OFFICIAL PLAN



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## Purpose of the County Official Plan

- Sets broad policies for land use incorporating provincial policy
- All official plans must align with provincial policies
- More detailed planning and community growth vision is captured in local municipal official plans and zoning bylaws
- Province approves all new and revised County planning policies and maps
- County approves all new and revised local municipal official plans

## The path to the County Official Plan

- Official Plan process began in 2004
- There are many external items that altered the path of the County Official Plan:
  - o IGAP (Inter-Governmental Action Plan) 2005 -2006
  - o Provincial Policy Statement updated in 2005
  - o Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Places To Grow) approved in 2006
  - o In 2009, the province released a proposed Vision Plan for the Simcoe Area, which involved consultation to gauge reaction before finalizing policies
  - o Lake Simcoe Protection Plan came into effect in 2009
  - o Green Energy Act also approved in 2009
  - o Province released a proposed amendment to the Growth Plan, which involved more consultation by the province, public, and stakeholders
  - o Growth Plan Amendment 1, established new provincial policies in 2012 specific to the Simcoe Area. These policies must be integrated into the County's Official Plan
  - o Province introduces updated Provincial Policy Statement in 2014; County Plan must be consistent with these policies

## Typical Official Plan Process





## New Stronger Vision for the Official Plan

The County of Simcoe's new Official Plan provides a strong vision for growth and sustainability to 2031.

The OP is based on the principles of protecting the natural environment and agricultural lands and building healthy communities with a variety of housing options.

The Plan will also place an emphasis on increasing travel options for County residents while building and maintaining a strong economy. Highlights include:

### Greenlands designated areas increased

The Official Plan increases the amount of Natural Heritage Areas lands protected from approximately 34% to 39%.

### Agriculture lands better protected

The Official Plan establishes a new specific agriculture designation placing stronger emphasis on long-term protection of farmland.

### Fixed Settlement Boundaries

The Official Plan now establishes fixed boundaries for all Settlement Areas in the County. Any change to a Settlement Boundary will now require a higher level of study and public consultation. Changes to a Settlement Boundary will also require both a County and Local Official Plan Amendment, which will entail Provincial approval.

### Density Targets Established

The Official Plan now establishes density targets that will ensure a greater utilization of existing settlement areas

through intensification and infilling so there is less demand on settlement area expansions. Greater densities will also provide an opportunity for a variety of housing types and provide opportunities for transit.

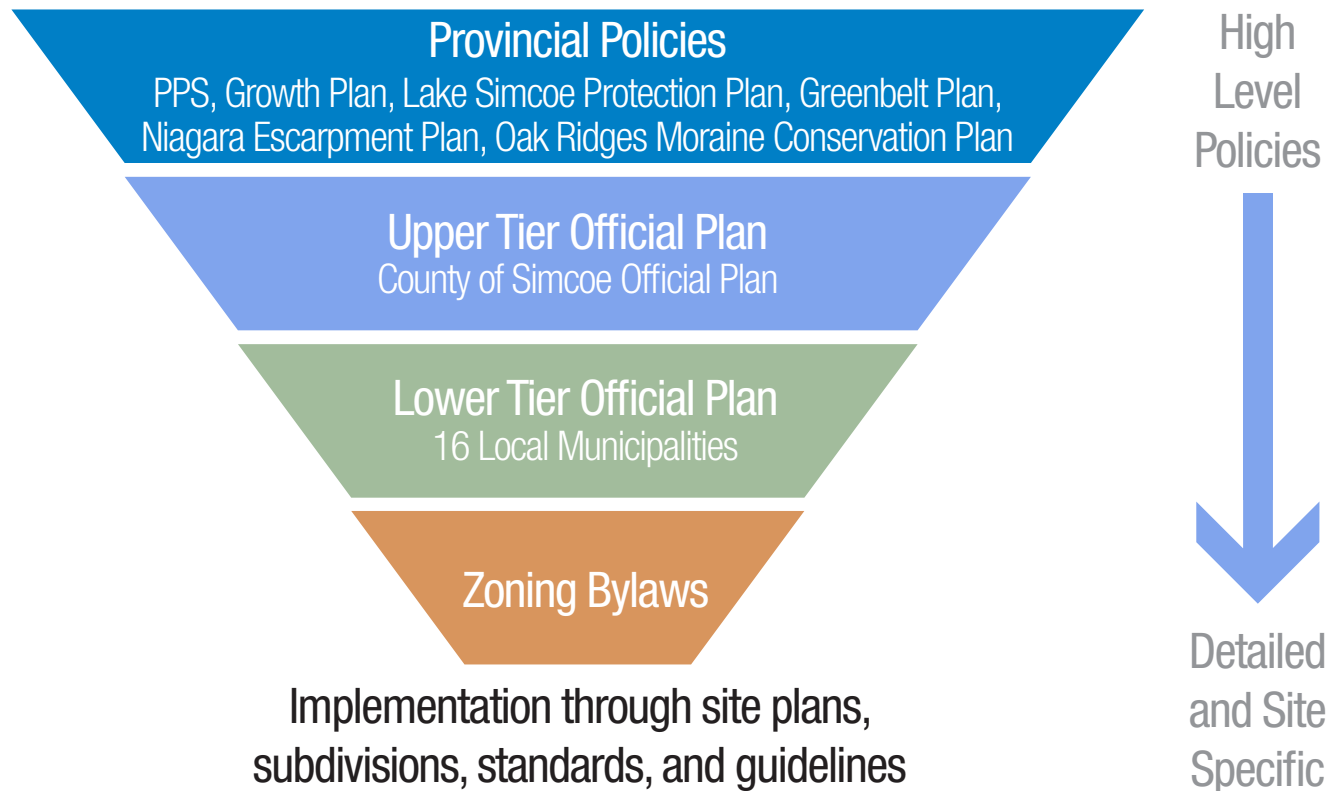
### More options for Transportation

The Official Plan establishes policy to encourage and study a variety of transportation options for County residents, including transit, bike lanes, and trails.

### Strong Economy

The Official Plan establishes employment policies and areas to ensure a strong prosperous and diverse economy for the County.

## Ontario's land use planning framework



## What has been approved by the OMB?

- **Growth Management**  
Population and employment forecasts, phasing, etc.
- **Settlement Area**  
Boundaries, phasing, rules for expansions, density, and intensification targets
- **Transportation**  
Current and future
- **Waste Management**  
County, local, and private sites
- **Strategic Employment Areas**  
Four key employment areas established by Growth Plan
- **Policies implementing specific provincial plans**  
Oak Ridges Moraine, Niagara Escarpment, Greenbelt, Lake Simcoe Protection Plan

## What remains in the OMB's hands?

- **Agricultural**  
Protect agricultural land for agricultural uses
- **Rural**  
Preserve rural character; manage land uses and development
- **Infrastructure**  
Sewer and water services planned and provided as per provincial requirements and in-step with growth
- **Greenlands**  
Preserve and enhance natural heritage system throughout County
- **Resource Conservation**  
Sustainable management of water, floodplain areas, shorelines, fish habitat, and energy production/conservation

## The OMB Process and what's next?

- Formal OMB process began in March 2013, almost four years after appeal
- More than 100 groups/individuals involved in the hearing (appellants, parties, and participants)
- Parts of the Official Plan have been approved based on expert opinion presented to the OMB
- All decisions, including OMB decisions, must be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement and also conform to other provincial plans (e.g. Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe)
- The OMB establishes the rules of procedure for how the hearing will proceed, it is judicial process
- Large, complex hearings are often split into phases, with common issues/themes grouped
- OMB encourages resolution of issues and provides mediation services when necessary
- The OMB process is a public judicial process that permits involvement, not consultation
- Next OMB dates are set for May and July 2015

## Can we make changes to the Official Plan?

- No. The Official Plan can only be revised by the OMB at this point.
- OMB hearing is meant to move appealed issues towards approval, not to gather further consultation on aspects of the Official Plan.
- The County cannot introduce new policy directions without restarting the process, whether with a new Official Plan or new sections to the existing OP; this could delay the process for years and create economic uncertainty.
- The OMB could move forward in the County's absence. Other appellants have been waiting for several years and want resolution.
- Uncertainty at the County level prevents local municipalities from updating their official plans.
- Instability and out-of-date policies negatively impact economic investment and may allow undesirable development.

### For more information

[simcoe.ca/dpt/pln/official-plan](http://simcoe.ca/dpt/pln/official-plan)



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