

A SMART FUTURE FOR ONTARIO

How to Create Greenways and
Curb Urban Sprawl in Your Community

Linda Pim and Joel Ornoy

Revised & Updated



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FOREWORD

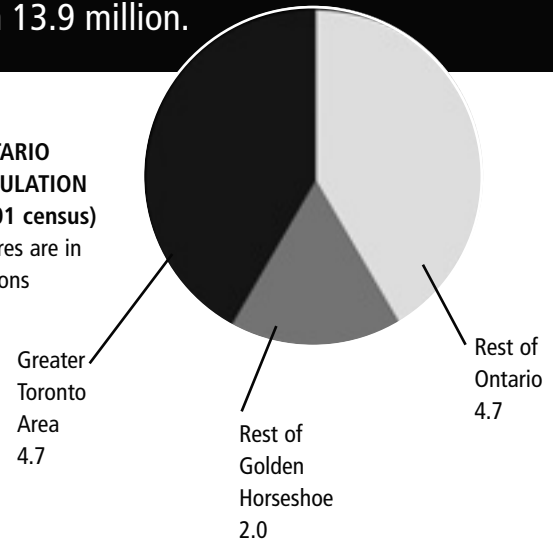
Ninety-one percent of Ontarians – that’s 9.1 million people – live in urban areas, defined by Statistics Canada as communities with populations of at least 10,000. The urban numbers will increase further as the population of Ontario rises by about 2.5 million over the next 20 years to reach 13.9 million.

We must keep a distinct boundary between urban and rural areas to maintain the health of both, since each depends on the other. We all need the food that farmers grow, while farmers need the farm equipment and other goods that are manufactured in cities and towns. Wherever we live, we all benefit from the “green services” – clean air, clean water, woodlands and wetlands – that both urban and rural natural areas provide. If we are to have any natural areas and farmlands left for the future, then we simply must grow smarter.

This community guide is about solutions to the loss of natural areas caused by rampant urban sprawl. When Ontario’s cities and towns grow in the future, they must grow smarter. If we don’t do enough to protect nature, what will the experience of Ontario’s natural world be like for our great-grandchildren and those who come after them?

We need to plan our urban areas in the smartest possible ways through urban intensification and compact urban design, while still leaving room for protecting nature within our towns and cities. If we do not plan smarter, there will come a time when our environment cannot sus-

ONTARIO POPULATION (2001 census)
Figures are in millions



tain itself ecologically with an ever-larger population using more and more natural resources. Each region’s natural systems can withstand only a certain level of human intervention and abuse without one or more parts collapsing. The Golden Horseshoe – that huge regional city curving around the western end of Lake Ontario and fanning inland – is rapidly reaching its ecological limits to growth. Some may say it has already exceeded it. The strains are being felt already in reduced greenspaces, traffic gridlock, unhealthy air quality from motor vehicle and industrial emissions, and polluted beaches from overloaded sewage systems.

To adapt to the changes and choices in our society that come with population growth,



Toronto Transit Commission

Ontarians need to be sufficiently prepared with information and options, not only by the work of organizations such as Ontario Nature, but also by governments. This is a role for all levels of government – to educate and engage the public on issues of community planning and development. Since smart communities depend on the participation of residents, governments have a responsibility to ensure that the public are well informed and have ample opportunity to provide input into how their communities will grow smarter.

Creating a smart future for Ontario to protect nature is all about the choices that we make as a society. It's about changing our way of thinking about our communities – what shape they take, how we travel around in them, and how we interact with people and with nature in them. The authors of the groundbreaking book, *The Limits to Growth*, published 30 years ago, put it well: "As soon as society recognizes that it cannot maximize everything for everyone, it must begin

to make choices. Should there be more people or more wealth, more wilderness or more automobiles, more food for the poor or more services for the rich? Establishing the societal answers to questions like these and translating those answers into policy is the essence of the political process." In the end, a sustainable society will need to balance a clean and healthy environment with a strong economy for today's vibrant communities and for future generations. This will mean more compact urban areas and a greener countryside.

Ontario Nature - Federation of Ontario Naturalists hopes this community guide will help you grapple with the choices that need to be made to create a healthy, ecologically sustainable future for your community. The book is packed with practical information for you to use and share with others about how to protect nature and curb urban sprawl. Let's work together to create a smarter future for Ontario!

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Ontario Nature - Federation of Ontario Naturalists has a proud, 74-year history of putting nature first as we work for a better Ontario. Key to our work in nature conservation has been our involvement in pressing for land-use planning legislation and policies that better protect Ontario's woodlands, wetlands, other precious natural features, and wildlife. This smart community guide is key to our work in planning for nature protection. Ontarians can help nature best when we plan our cities and towns smarter so that we protect nature within urban areas and do not allow sprawl into the countryside to jeopardize Ontario's rural natural areas.

This community guide provides information, ideas, tools and strategies for anyone interested in working to protect nature and curb urban sprawl in Ontario. Although the guide is Ontario-specific in terms of understanding and participating in a smarter future, much of the information here may be useful in other parts of Canada and beyond.

The guide is written with the typical Ontario community group and resident in mind. Community groups differ in their levels of experience and skills in organizing and advocacy. This guide is meant to fill in the gaps by walking the reader through the A to Z of becoming an effective advocate for nature and smart communities. Although no single guidebook can cover all the available information and ideas on smart growth, we have done our best to make ours as comprehensive as possible and to provide ample references for further reading.

Each chapter can be read on its own or in sequence as part of the whole book. If, for example, you are already familiar with urban sprawl (Chapter 1) and the features of smart growth (Chapter 2), you may want to jump right to Ontario Nature's vision for a smarter Ontario (Chapter 3), our smart community toolbox (Chapter 4), and our action timeline for a smarter Ontario (Chapter 5). If, on the other hand, you are already a well-organized community group that is taking on smart growth as a new community project, you may not need to read about community organizing (Chapter 6).

For those wishing to do more research, most of the references supplied at the back of the book are available on the Internet. However, other information sources are provided, which may be available in libraries and bookstores.

Here's how this community guide works:

- **Chapter 1** outlines the problem of urban sprawl and its social, environmental and economic consequences. This and subsequent chapters have sprawl-related statistics that may be useful to advocates for smart communities.
- **Chapter 2** describes the smart-growth solution to urban sprawl, including definitions of smart growth, a set of smart-growth principles, and case examples.
- **Chapter 3** presents Ontario Nature's vision for a smarter Ontario.
- **Chapter 4** is our smart-growth toolbox, giving the reader 32 practical ways to make smart communities happen, from using the land-use planning system to forming a land trust to seeking reform of tax laws.
- **Chapter 5** contains Ontario Nature's recommendations for a smarter Ontario action timeline.
- **Chapter 6** is about organizing your community for smart growth, from collecting the information you need to writing a news release and holding a news conference, to fostering good relationships with elected officials and the business community.
- **Chapter 7** concludes with inspiration, urging you to use the information in the guide to become smart-growth advocates in your own communities as well as at the provincial level.
- **Glossary:** Here you will find definitions of words used in the text and a few more you may encounter elsewhere in your reading.
- **References and Resources:** Here we list sources of information on urban sprawl and smart growth, as well as contact information for resource groups and agencies. Wherever we refer in this guide to a specific report or book, you will find it listed in the references section.