Growing together:

The inseparable successes of smart growth and regional government in the Waterloo area

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For presentation at the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Conference

June 1, 2016

University of Calgary, Calgary AB

Introduction

The Region of Waterloo has been unusually committed to provincially-favoured growth management approaches often described as 'smart growth.' They aim to curb urban sprawl by growing up instead of out, protecting environmentally sensitive areas and prime farmland while increasing the density and improving the liveability of existing urban centres. The Region of Waterloo has arguably been unusually successful in adopting and maintaining a commitment to smart growth principles. The Region of Waterloo is the only single- or upper-tier municipality covered by the provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe[1] that opted to immediately set intensification and density targets higher than the minimums required by the province.[2] Most recently, the Region defended a Regional Official Plan it had developed to implement the smart growth vision of the provincial *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*, which had been seriously threatened by a 2013 ruling of the Ontario Municipal Board.[3] Regional councillors also decided to build light rail transit (LRT), of which one third is funded by the Region, despite both significant costs and painful public controversy.

Both the court appeal and the LRT project are evidence of an elected regional council that was willing to devote significant financial and political resources to its growth management objectives. Their commitment to smart growth is holding despite concrete challenges. Understanding these decisions to fight for the Region's smart growth planning policies requires understanding a much longer tradition of planning policymaking in Waterloo Region.[4]

In this paper, I argue that planning and local government have changed together in the Waterloo area, and that the story of growth management in the Waterloo area is inseparable from its story of local government reform. I describe three main periods in regional government and planning in the area: [1] the period immediately prior to the creation of a two-tiered regional government structure in 1973, [2] the period from regional amalgamation to 2000, and [3] the period from 2000 to 2010. Each period shows that growth management problems have brought both conflict and collaboration between the area's diverse municipalities, and that changes in planning and local government structures have been firmly entwined.

Before Regional Government

In the mid- to late-1960s, fragmentation of both local government and planning in the Waterloo area was seen to be a major problem by local and provincial governments, and the Province of Ontario instituted regional government to solve both. Local problems with rapid post-war growth were significant. Between 1951 and 1961 alone, the population of the area grew by 40%, outpacing both the Midwestern Ontario Region (27%) and Ontario as a whole (36%).[5]

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[1] Toronto's intensification target, though higher, is largely irrelevant, since all future projects in this built-up municipality will necessarily be infill. Allen and Campsie, "Implementing the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe," 42.. While Peel plans to eventually exceed the provincial target, it decided to "increase the intensification target over time" Ibid., 40.

[2] Allen and Campsie, "Implementing the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe," 40, 48.

[3] Ontario Municipal Board, "Decision Delivered by Steven Stefanko and Joseph Sniezek and Order of the Board."

[4] This paper is an overview of the first half of the author's dissertation, currently in progress. The final version of this paper will be comprised of three longer chapters.

[5] Fyfe and Farrow, "Data Book of Basic Information," 12.

Massive growth in urban areas (62%) hid significant decreases in both farm and non-farm rural populations.[6] People were moving to cities, and cities were swelling to fit them.

These challenges were exacerbated by local government structures, which were based on the common separated county system. Administratively, the area contained sixteen separate municipal organizations in total: three cities, separate themselves, along with 12 other municipalities that were also part of the rural Waterloo County municipality.[7] In addition to the local governments, and as was common in Ontario at the time,[8] the area was served by a number of special purpose bodies providing services on a variety of scales.[9]

The massive scale of change was causing challenges for urban and rural areas alike, though the specific problems generally differed.[10] Urban municipalities, which had experienced most of the post-war growth,[11] were facing problems in providing adequate services, such as transit[12] and water,[13] to their swelling populations. Rural municipalities, in contrast, were largely facing issues related to their relatively small capacity and increasing expectations of urban-style municipal services,[14] in service areas like policing [15] and welfare payments.[16]

Broadly, the problems faced by local municipalities under these conditions were largely seen to be the result of fragmented planning. Planning had, for some time, been under the control of the 16 municipalities, and each municipality had a planning board that generally operated on the same geographic lines as the municipality, but which was not subordinate to it.[17] In addition to these 32 bodies, there were 13 committees of adjustment, the Ontario Municipal Board, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs involved in planning in the Waterloo Area,[18] along with some joint planning boards that crossed municipal boundaries.[19]

Many local decision-makers saw the absence of a comprehensive plan for the area as a major threat. Two main planning problems were particularly acute by the late 1960s: annexation and planning for assessment. Haphazard annexation, when one municipality's territory is transferred to another municipality, had to date been used as the primary method of urban expansion. By 1970, the boundaries of the area's municipalities had been changed more than 50 times, and more than 30,000 acres of land had been annexed.[20] Waterloo Township alone, facing the most pressure from neighbouring urban municipalities, had ceded 24,000 acres.[21] Another

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[6] Ibid.

[7] These municipalities were, for clarity, the three cities (Galt, Kitchener, and Waterloo), four towns (Elmira, Hespeler, New Hamburg, and Preston), three villages (Ayr, Bridgeport, and Wellesley), the five townships (North Dumfries, Waterloo, Wellesley, Wilmot, and Woolwich), and Waterloo County. Ibid., 3.

[8] Fyfe, "Local Government Reform in Ontario," 19.

[9] For more on the history of special purpose bodies in the Kitchener area, see Jack Lucas's *Fields of Authority: Special Purpose Governance in Ontario, 1815-2015*, forthcoming from University of Toronto Press.

[10] None of the municipalities, for instance, were able to institute a recycling program due to inadequate scale. Palmer, "Report of the Waterloo Region Review Commission," 33.

[11] Fyfe and Farrow, "Data Book of Basic Information," 12.

[12] Palmer, "Report of the Waterloo Region Review Commission," 31.

[13] Fyfe and Farrow, "Report of Findings and Recommendations," 41.

[14] Ibid., 23.

[15] Fyfe and Farrow, "Data Book of Basic Information," 50.

[16] Palmer, "Report of the Waterloo Region Review Commission," 33–34.

[17] Fyfe and Farrow, "Report of Findings and Recommendations," 130.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 127–28.

[20] Ibid., 17.

[21] Ibid.

problem was "planning for assessment," as rural municipalities had an incentive to encourage new housing, shopping, and industrial developments on the outskirts of neighbouring urban municipalities in order to fill gaps in municipal finances by increasing the property tax base.[22]

While there was general agreement that there were problems, there was less agreement on the appropriate solution. In 1964, the planning department for the City of Kitchener, the most populous municipality in the area, had proposed a plan called Kitchener 2000. In the long term, Kitchener wanted one political jurisdiction for the geographic county, and for all the major urban areas to eventually be amalgamated into one central city, while the more rural parts of the area would be populated by denser suburban towns.[23] As an interim step, they proposed an amalgamation between the urban Kitchener municipality and what remained of the rural Waterloo Township. This would allow Kitchener to gain control of lands it needed for industrial uses, of which it had short supply,[24] and a more orderly expansion of the urban area into the rural, with more comprehensive planning.

It would be an understatement to say that their vision was not shared by neighbouring municipalities. There were concerns that such a loss to the rural County would gut its already limited resources,[25] and both the City of Waterloo and, unsurprisingly, Waterloo Township preferred a less industrial vision for land use in Waterloo Township, and one that was based on meaningful two-tier government.[26]

The same year that Kitchener proposed Kitchener 2000, the provincial government proposed the Waterloo County Area Planning Board.[27] Elizabeth Bloomfield says support for the Board among other municipalities was reinforced by the Kitchener 2000 report, which she notes had "stressed Kitchener as the focus of Waterloo County with a kind of manifest destiny to continue its expansion without waiting for the county to agree on co-operative action."[28] The Waterloo County Area Planning Board was created in 1965, in an attempt to bypass the structural blocks preventing coordinated local planning in the Waterloo Area.[29] The Board spent two years preparing to create an official plan for the area, and then took the main coordinating role in the Waterloo-South Wellington Area Study, [30] which began in March 1967,[31] and involved a wide variety of government bodies from provincial and local levels.[32]

These processes were generally seen to be successful for coordination and as resources,[33] but those who designed these regional plans did not have authority to approve or implement them. It was becoming clear that implementing the resulting official plans would be "impossible…if municipal powers remained unchanged."[34]

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[22] Bales, "The Regional Municipality of Waterloo," 4.
[23] Kitchener Planning Department, *Kitchener 2000 and a Plan of Action*.
[24] Ibid., 7.
[25] Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries*, 394.
[26] Fyfe and Farrow, "Report of Findings and Recommendations," 139.
[27] Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries*, 393; Department of Municipal Affairs Community Planning Branch, "Waterloo Area."
[28] Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries*, 393.
[29] Palmer, Church, and Winegard, "A Collection of Perspectives on Municipal Planning," 12.
[30] Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries*, 394.
[31] Waterloo County Area Planning Board, *A Strategy for Growth*, 1.
[32] Ibid., 47–49.
[33] Fyfe and Farrow, "Report of Findings and Recommendations," 131.
[34] Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries*, 394.

Just as the practical planning challenges were not resolved by these coordinated planning efforts, the conflicts they engendered between municipalities were not resolved, either. The cities felt that they needed more land for development, and Kitchener was still pursuing Kitchener 2000 to meet its needs for "industrial, commercial and housing growth."[35] The Waterloo County Area Planning Board had given its support for Kitchener's plans for the east side of the Grand River in Waterloo Township in the summer of 1966, and these plans along with the "flurry of annexation proposals" at that time [36] did not assuage concerns of aggressive urban expansion under the emerging planning arrangement.[37] Conflict between different communities in the Waterloo area over planning would continue.

As these debates developed locally, often with provincial involvement, the provincial government was developing its own vision for addressing municipal government and planning fragmentation across the province, and particularly in the areas most affected by the post-war building and population boom. Through a series of plans under the banner of Design for Development in the mid to late 1960s,[38] the province signaled its demand for significant changes that would fuse regional development, regional planning, and regional government. Local government reviews were underway across the province, in concert with the government's stated aim of implementing one- or two-tier regional governments across Ontario that would have jurisdiction over urban and rural communities, and create integrated plans for both of them together.[39]

In 1966, the Province of Ontario commissioned the Waterloo Area Local Government Review.[40] The review's work nestled fairly comfortably into the broad frenzy of activity around planning in the Waterloo Area. In the end, the provincial government and the review's commissioner, Dr. Stewart Fyfe of Queen's University, disagreed about the problem and its severity in the Waterloo Area. Rejecting the two most extreme options of total amalgamation and doing nothing,[41] Fyfe recommended what he named Scheme A, which he described as "A Reorganized City-County System."[42] It proposed the creation of two larger cities [43] that would remain separate from the County municipalities, which would be reorganized from 12 into five.[44] The County would be tasked with rural planning responsibilities, leaving only two cities and the county charged with the task: a significant consolidation and reduction of the fragmentation that had been seen on the planning file.[45]

Despite the province's clear preference for a one- or two-tier regional arrangement,[46] Fyfe did not believe that "the strength of the interest in common between urban and rural areas and between the two urban complexes" was "strong enough" to "warrant one government for the

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Waterloo County Area Planning Board, "The Waterloo County Area Planning Board - Its Role, Functions and Responsibilities," 79.

[37] see Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries*, 394.

[38] Office of the Premier, *Design for Development*; McKeough, "Statement by the Honourable W. Darcy McKeough."

[39] McKeough, "Statement by the Honourable W. Darcy McKeough," 4.

[40] Fyfe and Farrow, "Report of Findings and Recommendations," 10.

[41] Ibid., 178.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 178–79.

[45] Ibid., 179–80.

[46] See McKeough, "Statement by the Honourable W. Darcy McKeough," 4–5.

whole area at this time."[47] One of his concerns was that "the rural voice would be relatively weak" under any regional council arrangement with the cities that respected representation by population.[48] In the end, Fyfe thought regional government was too "drastic … for the more limited problems of the Waterloo Area."[49] His plan would entail a more streamlined separation between urban and rural Waterloo, but a continued separation nonetheless.

Fyfe's efforts to preserve smaller municipalities split along urban and rural lines were predictably unsuccessful, given the province's strong push for regional governments. Fyfe likely foresaw this when he also outlined details for a two-tiered regional government system, which he called Scheme B, that would create three urban cities, four rural townships, and the Town of Elmira, all included under one regional municipality.[50] Yet in addition to its general support for regional government, the province's choice also reflected a very different view of the severity and nature of the area's problems.

With respect to severity, Fyfe had argued that the situation was not as dire as in other areas of Ontario,[51] and recommended more minor modifications to the system. In contrast, the provincial government did not see Fyfe's Scheme A as an adequate departure from the dysfunctional status quo. "Scheme A," Minister Bales said, "is essentially a re-organized city-county system such as we have known in Ontario for well over one-hundred years."[52] In his speech announcing the province's decision for the Waterloo area, the minister declared:

> *It is quite clear to all of us by now that the present local government system is breaking down in this area as in other parts of Ontario because it cannot deal effectively with the insistent pressures for urban development. There is no one political institution which has the final responsibility for designing and carrying out a broad sound development policy.*[53]

The government saw problems in the Waterloo area as substantial, and regional government was seen as a big change to address those big problems.

The province also had a different view of the nature of the problem. Fyfe focused on ensuring that meaningful communities of interest had adequate capacity to provide for their drastically different needs, and believed the problems of restricting urban growth in rural areas and inadequate coordination could be solved by changes in the behaviour of the provincial government.[54]

In contrast, Minister Bales made it clear that the province wanted local government to solve planning problems comprehensively, and that this must involve bodies that could be responsible for solving urban and rural problems together. Bales was particularly critical of Fyfe's preferred arrangement because he did not believe it would adequately address planning for assessment. The province thought County government under Scheme A would have limited "potential for industrial and commercial assessment," putting strain on residential property taxes, and giving the County reason to support development on the urban periphery to raise additional

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[47] Fyfe and Farrow, "Report of Findings and Recommendations," 181.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., 182.
[50] Ibid., 180.
[51] Ibid., 182.
[52] Bales, "The Regional Municipality of Waterloo," 2.
[53] Ibid., 4.
[54] Fyfe and Farrow, "Report of Findings and Recommendations," 182.

taxes.[55] The government was concerned that such development would continue current problems, and threaten both farming and rational land use planning in the area, and that three separate planning bodies would be ill-suited to addressing these challenges.[56]

Local governments in the Waterloo area were, by the numbers, more in agreement with Bales than with Fyfe. Formal responses from the municipalities showed more consensus on Scheme B among the local municipalities than on any other option. Eight of the 16 municipalities supported some form of regional government, while only four supported a reorganized city-county system modeled on Scheme A.[57] Kitchener was alone in arguing for a one-tier amalgamation.[58] [59]

Thus Kitchener's manifest destiny lurked in the background, and the smaller changes proposed by Fyfe failed to satisfy many of those who were embroiled in the fractious planning politics of the day. As Elizabeth Bloomfield describes the comments of "one critic," "Fyfe seemed … to be more concerned with a political scientist's principles of accountability, responsibility, community of interest and simplicity than with the acute planning problems that had prompted the whole exercise."[60] Since the government was, it said, concerned with some minimal level of political palatability,[61] local public opinion made its choice of a two-tier regional government easier.

As a result, the province's choice to institute regional government in the area was largely due to concerns over planning and growth management. The Region of Waterloo was created, comprised of four rural and three urban local-tier municipalities. While the former city/county system was based on explicit municipal separation between neighbouring urban and rural areas, the new regional structure would combine jurisdiction for services like policing, waste disposal, public health, and welfare into a single regional government,[62] while leaving local matters to urban and rural municipalities of an increased size. A two-tiered regional government system would be expected to address fragmentation and the conflict it had engendered, and to provide both regional government and regional planning. It had its work cut out for it.

1973-2000: Defining Regional Relationships in the 20th Century

On January 1, 1973, two-tier regional government took effect.[63] Creating the first Regional Official Policies Plan in the 1970s was one of the major processes that would define the relationship between the regional government and the seven local-tier governments in the earliest days of regional government. While planning changes in the 1990s were noteworthy, it was really the redefinition of those relationships in that decade that would prepare Waterloo Region for smart growth policies in the 21st century.

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[55] Bales, "The Regional Municipality of Waterloo," 4.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ontario Department of Municipal Affairs, "Waterloo: Local Government Reform Proposals," 1–21.
[58] Ibid., 18.
[59] While these indications of local government support are important, they should not be overstated. Many of the municipalities supporting one option or the other at the same time said that no amalgamation would be necessary at all, or at least that their own municipality should continue to exist under the option they supported. Yet a general tendency to support a two-tier regional option was visible.
[60] Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries*, 396.
[61] Bales, "The Regional Municipality of Waterloo," 5.
[62] Palmer, "Report of the Waterloo Region Review Commission," 28–36.
[63] Outhit, "Region Celebrates 40 Years as One Big Family Region Has Low Profile, Big Budget."

The initial terms of those relationships reflected the major features of regional government that still exists today. As Minister Bales clearly intended, regional government would require that urban and rural areas solve more problems together. The new regional council consisted of 25 members, including its appointed chairman and the mayors of each of the seven local-tier municipalities.[64] The remaining 17 members had been elected to the local-tier municipalities.[6566] At regional council, municipal reorganization came with formal and prominent representation of rural residents, through significant overrepresentation by population.[67]

The Waterloo Region Review Commission, tasked in the late 1970s with assessing the results of the new system in its first few years, generally found that regional government had met many of its aims,[68] and that "on balance, … the improvements have far outweighed the declines."[69] The process was not, however, always smooth. One of the major challenges of the two-tier amalgamation was determining who had jurisdiction over what, and what relationship the two levels of government would have with each other.

These problems extended to planning, which was a file on which the Region would have its hands full. Like 10 other new regional municipalities, the Region of Waterloo was required to create an official plan within three years of its creation.[70] Fortunately, the Region had significant and collaborative work from the former Waterloo County Area Planning Board on which to build.[71] Of the 11 governments, only Waterloo Region would meet the three-year provincial deadline.[72]

Yet even while succeeding within this short timeframe, there was significant conflict to manage and resolve. Planning tensions had not abated during the local government review,[73] and in the context of the Region's frenzied work toward a new Official Plan, the appropriate split between regional and area authority on planning became contentious. In 1974, public controversy erupted with "fears that Regional Planning was taking over."[74] Though these issues settled down somewhat, at least in the public's view,[75] the behind-the-scenes struggle over the limits of the Region's role in planning would continue. With its first version of the plan,[76] passed by regional council and submitted for ministerial approval in late 1975,[77] some of the urban municipalities expressed concerns that the Region was exceeding its bounds. Having envisioned a relationship based on the cooperation of "equal partners," a committee of staff in Waterloo and

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[64] Palmer, Church, and Winegard, "Representation and the Electoral System in the Region of Waterloo," 19.
[65] Ibid., 16–21.
[66] Though one Wilmot councillor was elected to a joint position to serve on both councils.
[67] Palmer, "Report of the Waterloo Region Review Commission," 125–27.
[68] Ibid., 27–36.
[69] Ibid., 36.
[70] Palmer, Church, and Winegard, "A Collection of Perspectives on Municipal Planning," 16.
[71] Regional Municipality of Waterloo, *The Regional Official Policies Plan Appendix: Regional Municipality of Waterloo A Moment in Time*, 16.3-16.5.
[72] Palmer, Church, and Winegard, "A Collection of Perspectives on Municipal Planning," 16.
[73] Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries*, 396.
[74] Regional Municipality of Waterloo, *The Regional Official Policies Plan Appendix: Regional Municipality of Waterloo A Moment in Time*, 16.24.
[75] Ibid.
[76] The Regional Municipality of Waterloo, "Bylaw Number 57-75: A by-Law to Adopt the Regional Official Policies Plan for the Waterloo Planning Area."
[77] Regional Municipality of Waterloo, *The Regional Official Policies Plan Appendix: Regional Municipality of Waterloo A Moment in Time*, 16.3.

Kitchener[78] felt that the Region was exceeding its authority under provincial legislation by imposing "many controls and requirements which, particularly in the field of planning, effectively reduce the area municipalities to the status of branch offices for the Region."[79]

Resolutions to these conflicts were found. The final version of the plan, passed in late 1976,[80] incorporated a number of changes, including the creation of a new chapter covering The Region And the Area Municipalities. It contained noticeably softened and more collaborative language compared to the initial version.[81] The Region's efforts at primacy had been tempered in the early back-and-forth necessitated by the official plan process, and the local-tier municipalities had established that they would continue to have meaningful influence over planning within their jurisdictions. The process certainly did not resolve all disagreements between the local municipalities on who would do what, and complaints about "nit-picking" and "intrusion into local affairs" on planning matters continued.[82] Yet some initial parameters had been set.

The 1976 Regional Official Policies Plan (ROPP) incorporated elements that would set some key directions for planning into the next half-century, including limits on farmland severances (which were additionally strengthened in early ROPP amendments in the late 1970s), the establishment of Environmentally Sensitive Policy Areas, and the rough sketching of a central transit corridor through the region.[83] These early policy parameters would later be crucial for the success of smart growth.

Thus the 1976 ROPP was one of the early processes by which the Region of Waterloo found its feet, and by which the area municipalities and the regional municipality negotiated their relationship to each other. The relationship between the area's eight municipalities had hardly been settled; in perhaps the strongest example, residents of the newly amalgamated City of Cambridge, which was formerly Galt, Preston, and Hespeler, expressed their desire to secede from the new regional arrangement in a referendum.[84] Such relationships would continue to be renegotiated. Yet in this period as in the previous one, the various municipalities fought and collaborated over regional planning issues. What had changed was that a new regional government, representing both urban and regional concerns, finally had jurisdiction to create and implement a truly regional plan. Municipal government actors continued to sort through older problems in this changed context.

The next 15 years would be comparatively quiet. Following the massive changes of regional governments, municipal reorganization was settling down across Ontario, [85] and Waterloo Region was no exception. The same was true on the planning front. Although the 1976

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[78] Darrah, "Re: Regional Official Policies Plan," May 11, 1976.

[79] Darrah, "Re: Regional Official Policies Plan," May 7, 1976.

[80] The Regional Municipality of Waterloo, "Bylaw Number 75-75: A by-Law to Adopt the Regional Official Policies Plan for the Waterloo Planning Area."

[81] The Regional Municipality of Waterloo, "Bylaw Number 57-75: A by-Law to Adopt the Regional Official Policies Plan for the Waterloo Planning Area," 1.3-1.7; The Regional Municipality of Waterloo, "Bylaw Number 75-75: A by-Law to Adopt the Regional Official Policies Plan for the Waterloo Planning Area," chap. 2.

[82] Palmer, "Report of the Waterloo Region Review Commission," 36.

[83] The Central transit corridor was largely conceptual at this stage. Yet it outlined in broad strokes the general corridor through which the LRT project would be built 40 years later.

[84] Palmer, "Report of the Waterloo Region Review Commission," 61–62; Sancton, *Merger Mania*, 50–51.

[85] Siegel, "Municipal Reform in Ontario: Revolutionary Evolution," 127.

ROPP had been updated in the 1980s to comply with a new requirement in the Planning Act that plans be reviewed every five years,[86] "the basic policies had not undergone major changes."[87]

Attention to planning and municipal government structure would pick up in the 1990s. In the middle of the decade, the Region conducted a more in-depth review of the policies, goals, and structure of the Official Plan.[88] Around the same time, the province increased the Region's role in planning to include serving as the approval authority on local-tier Official Plans and Official Plan Amendments, and commenting on behalf of provincial ministries on development approvals.[89]

Yet the most important story of the 1990s was about the changes that would be made to the relationships between governments that had been established 20 years earlier. It was a fractious time in the Region. Premier Mike Harris's ideological drive for less government, more efficiency, and lower taxes was the basis for a series of amalgamations and related restructurings across Ontario.[90] The "veiled threat" that the province would "step in if locals can't streamline themselves"[91] hung over the excited, and at times fierce, debates over regional reform. Some, including a majority of the local-tier council at the City of Kitchener, supported amalgamation into a single-tier megacity.[92] Some others, particularly from Cambridge, felt that regional government was the problem, and that Cambridge should secede from the Region.[93] Between them were those who might have general leanings toward one- or two-tier systems, but who could agree to a two-tier rationalization that preserved the governments in question while reducing the number of local councillors at all levels, and transferring some local services to the regional government.[94]

A number of major changes would take place as a result of these conflicts: some were jurisdictional, while others were representational. Jurisdictionally, an early decision to transfer responsibility for garbage collection and transit to the Region from the local-tier municipalities gained traction and was passed.[95] Further efforts at reform, which would have transferred responsibility for water and sewer services to the Region and provided centralized municipal administrative services, were defeated at regional council by those who wanted amalgamation into a single-tier region.[96] Most significant of the service changes that did occur, from a planning standpoint, was the Region's assumption of transit services in 2000. In the new century, a truly regional transit service would facilitate the creation of a north/south public transit link between

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[86] Stewart, "Managing Growth: A Regional Planning Perspective," 120.

[87] Ibid., 121.

[88] See Stewart, "Managing Growth: A Regional Planning Perspective"; Plautz, "Other Regional Official Policies Plans: Policy Directions and Innovations."

[89] Curtis and Matthews, "New Regional Official Plan Update," 2; White, *The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe in Historical Perspective*, 39; Kevin Eby, interview by author, Waterloo, ON.

[90] Siegel, "Municipal Reform in Ontario: Revolutionary Evolution," 128.

[91] Caldwell, "Region Moves Closer to Reform; Seven Mayors and Regional Chairman Agree on Need to Revamp Local Government."

[92] Caldwell, "Kitchener Backtracks on Reform Consensus."

[93] Monteiro, "Stepping Down, but Not Ready to Leave; After 12 Years as Cambridge Mayor, Brewer to Run for Regional Council."

[94] Rubinoff, "Region Reform Falls Apart; Councillors Agree to Defer All Talks until after November Elections."

[95] Thompson, "Region Votes to Reinvent Itself; Council to Be Separate from Municipalities."

[96] Rubinoff, "Region Reform Falls Apart; Councillors Agree to Defer All Talks until after November Elections."

Cambridge and the other urban municipalities,[97] which had been a long-term local concern,[98] and would allow transit planning and implementation to take place at a regional scale.

Beyond jurisdiction, a number of representational changes would occur at regional council, and two would be crucial for smart growth in the next decade. First, in 1997, the regional chair was elected for the first time, rather than being appointed by election by regional council.[99] Long-time chair Ken Seiling would continue in the role he held as an appointee since 1985, but the change would solidify the legitimacy of the regional chair position and strengthen the already considerable influence wielded by a political giant in the area.[100]

Second, beginning in 2000, councillors would be selected by very different means. While the seven mayors and the now elected regional chair would continue to sit on regional council, the remaining members would be elected directly by voters in elections conducted at-large across the respective local-tier municipality in each of the three cities. Under this "separated councils" arrangement and for the first time, there would be regional councillors who would no longer sit on their local-tier councils.[101] A majority of regional councillors would now represent their areas, not their municipal corporations. While the move remained controversial, supporters highlighted that removing local-tier responsibilities would mean that those councillors would have a more regionally-oriented perspective,[102] and would have more time to consider regional issues.

The wounds of this period should not be underestimated. Disputes between those advocating total amalgamation, a revised two-tier system, or the secession of Cambridge left lasting scars for those who had lived through them. Yet, by the early 2000s, it was clear to most participants that regional reform was largely dead. The last unsuccessful round of attempted municipal reform at the local level was in July of 2000; future talks were delayed until after the November 2000 municipal election.[103] While regional council voted to ask the province for a facilitator in February of 2001,[104] no facilitator was forthcoming, and by May, major advocates on opposing sides of the reform issue agreed that substantial change in the next few years was unlikely.[105] With the exception of a 2005 request for amalgamation discussions from the City of Kitchener,[106] there seemed to be little desire to prolong painful discussion in the absence of real signs that change would be forthcoming.

Thus some change had come, but not nearly as much as had been expected. As a result, the local-tier governments retained significant strength, but the Region would emerge stronger than it had been. The Region embarked on the 21st century with a newfound control over transit, a newfound independence with an elected chair and directly elected regional councillors, and a newfound sense that they were stuck with two-tier regional government more or less in its current form.

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[97] Aagaard, "Transit Link Dissolves the 'Wall.'"

[98] Ken Seiling, interview by author, Kitchener, ON.

[99] Aagaard, "Seiling Steam-Rolls to Win as Regional Chairman."

[100] See Aagaard, "Chairman Ken Seiling."

[101] Thompson, "Region Votes to Reinvent Itself; Council to Be Separate from Municipalities."

[102] Outhit, "New Regional Councillors Argue for Restoring Old Links with Cities."

[103] Rubinoff, "Region Reform Falls Apart; Councillors Agree to Defer All Talks until after November Elections."

[104] Petricevic, "Region to Ask for Facilitator."

[105] Simone, "Put Amalgamation to Rest, Craig Says; But Cambridge Will Conduct $15,000 Poll."

[106] Pender, "City Bids to Amalgamate; Kitchener Council Votes to Resume Negotiations on Region-Wide Reform."

2000-2010: Stronger Planning in a Strengthened Region

In many ways, then, the beginning of the 21st century was a new beginning for the Region of Waterloo. As the dust settled on regional reform, the shape of government had been, at least in the interim, settled. This new independence and directly elected leadership from the chair coincided with the growing popularity of smart growth approaches. The convergence of the two meant concerted work toward smart growth was possible.

There were three major policies in the first decade of the century that would together enact a vision for smart growth in Waterloo Region. The first was the Regional Growth Management Strategy (RGMS), adopted in 2003,[107] which included key smart growth-related policies including intensification along a Central Transit Corridor, a firm urban growth boundary known as the "countryside line," and "protection" of newly designated "environmentally sensitive landscapes."[108]

The second was the light rail transit system. Plans from the 1970s for a north/south transit corridor re-emerged in the early 2000s, while the RGMS was being prepared, as part of the plan for RGMS implementation.[109] Drawing development to core areas would be a significant part of the LRT project. Such a direct and intentional connection between regional planning and regional transit service relied on the still very recent changes that put the Region in charge of transit.

The third was the Region's new Regional Official Plan (ROP), which was passed by regional council in 2009,[110] the same month that the full LRT project was initially approved.[111] The ROP reflected a number of key policy provisions, including a permanent Protected Countryside designation to connect key rural environmental features, and a Countryside Line that would serve as a long-term urban growth boundary. One of the most important components of the ROP was the Region's land budget, which was based on the intensification and density requirements of the Growth Plan.[112] The ROP was designed to bring the Region's policies into conformity with the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. One of its major effects was to give legal force to the policies enshrined in the RGMS.[113]

These major steps depended significantly on the new footing upon which regional government found itself. The freshly strengthened chair had been a major force of leadership on the smart growth file, and a report from the chair in April of 2001 had initiated the entire exercise of the RGMS with a report to council on smart growth.[114] Regional councillors suddenly had fewer responsibilities for the day-to-day issues around changes to land use that are handled at the local tiers, such as neighbourhood disputes over zone change applications, and could focus their attention on planning at the regional level.

Past disputes over regional government continued to surface. In particular, much of the most fractious debate around the Council table on light rail transit centred on the fact that

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[107] Region of Waterloo, "Planning Our Future: Regional Growth Management Strategy."

[108] Ibid., 5.

[109] Vincent, Richardson, and Kotseff, "Transportation in the 21st Century - Implementation of the Region's Growth Management Strategy."

[110] Region of Waterloo, "Council-Adopted Regional Official Plan."

[111] Barrick, "Region Approves Rail Plan; Council Votes 15-1 in Favour of Bringing Electric Trains to Region."

[112] Region of Waterloo, "Region of Waterloo Land Budget."

[113] Rob Horne, interview by author, Kitchener, ON.

[114] Seiling, "Smart Growth and the Region of Waterloo: Planning for Our Future."

Cambridge would not receive trains in the first phase of the LRT project.[115] Yet in many ways, smart growth planning in this period is an example of the success of regional government. Under the two-tier regional system, implementation of the growth management strategy would involve a large range of actions by the area municipalities. This arrangement left regional staff with little choice but to work with the local tiers on implementation, and an Implementation Coordinating Committee, later the Area Municipal Working Group,[116] facilitated large-scale buy-in at the various municipal levels on the staff side.[117][118] By the 2010 municipal election, leadership at the strengthened regional council and collaboration with local-tier municipalities meant that smart growth was the established vision.

Conclusion

During the next term of Council, which began in October of 2010, the ROP would be approved with amendments by the provincial government, prompting a series of appeals by a range of parties.[119] The strongest of these were a number of greenfield developers, who would temporarily win. The OMB would side with developers who had designed their land own budget based on an older methodology.

Closer to home, the Region's light rail transit project would become one of the most controversial issues in the Region's history. The 2010 municipal election would be, in many ways, consumed by it. Candidates from incumbents to challengers promised to review the plan and to consider other alternatives that would be less costly.

Yet in the end, and for now, the Region's vision has prevailed. Regional council, despite enormous and loud public pressure, voted for a second time with overwhelming support to build LRT in June of 2011,[120] and construction began in 2014.[121] The Region, with significant support from council and at its own expense, appealed the OMB ruling to divisional court,[122] while simultaneously pursuing negotiations with those who had appealed. In May of 2015, they reached a settlement that preserved the fundamental policy directions of the ROP, including the Countryside Line, the Protected Countryside, and crucially, the Region's land budget methodology.[123] Once approved by the Board,[124] the comprehensive settlement brought the Region's Official Plan into effect in June of 2015.

In each of the three periods outlined above, municipal government and planning have changed together. Fragmented local government and fragmented planning in the Waterloo area

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[115] Outhit, "Cambridge Transit Gets Short Shrift, Mayor Says"; Outhit, "Cambridge Report Boosts Buses; As Region's Vote on Rapid Transit Nears, Conflicting Reports Are Tabled."

[116] Curtis and Eby, "Recommended New Regional Official Plan (ROP)," 4.

[117] Kevin Eby, interview by author, Waterloo, ON.

[118] For an in-depth treatment of this process, see Wegener, Raine, and Hanning, "Insights into the Government's Role in Food System Policy Making."

[119] Region of Waterloo, "Regional Official Plan."

[120] Outhit, "Rail Plan Passes; Regional Council Votes 9-2 in Support of 'Transformational' Rapid Transit."

[121] Desmond, "Light Rail Vision Moves Closer to Reality; Politicians Gather for Groundbreaking Ceremony at Waterloo Site for Ion Maintenance Facility."

[122] Region of Waterloo, "Regional Council Appeals Ontario Municipal Board Decision on the Regional Official Plan."

[123] Region of Waterloo, "Region Reaches Settlement on New Regional Official Plan."

[124] Ontario Municipal Board, "Memorandum of Oral Decision Delivered by Steven Stefanko and Joseph Sniezek on June 18, 2015 and Order of the Board."

brought both conflict and collaboration, which eventually led to regional government. The new upper-tier government negotiated its relationship with its new municipal partners in part through development of its first Regional Official Policies Plan. Changes in the late 1990s that strengthened the region positioned the area to pursue and implement strong smart growth policies in the 21st century. Waterloo Region's path to smart growth has depended on its history of planning and local government reform.

The story of growth management in the Waterloo area is inseparable from its story of local government reform. It can be tempting to examine growth management as a specific and isolated policy area. This research suggests that looking at specific policy issues in a jurisdiction over time, in the context of local government structures, can yield new insights on policy outcomes. Such research can also build on a rich literature on the history of local government reform in Ontario.

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