



Possibility grows here.

Growing Close to Home: *Creating Complete Rural Communities*

WHAT IS A COMPLETE COMMUNITY?

Imagine a community that has everything you need: shops and restaurants, doctors and dentists, parks and playgrounds, places to rent and places to buy, places to walk and places to bike, community centres and schools, a business you can work for or a business you can own. This is what planners call a “complete community” because it offers residents of all ages, income levels, and abilities a complete range of options for living, working, playing, and moving within one place. Complete communities are compact with a mix of residential and commercial activities, and plenty of parks and public spaces.

Complete communities offer a lot of benefits to municipal governments and residents. They:

- Are attractive to employers, spurring economic development and giving residents more options to work close to home.
- Make walking, biking, and taking public transit a feasible option for residents as they go to work, shop and use services. Walking and biking helps improve physical and mental health and allows residents without cars to get around independently. Less dependency on cars also reduces GHG emissions, helping to create a more carbon-neutral community.



- Provide a mix of housing options that suit different housing needs, which helps residents of different income levels and all ages to live in the community throughout their lifetimes.
- Use infrastructure and servicing efficiently because of their compact form, which saves municipal governments money by not extending costly infrastructure and servicing to undeveloped areas.
- Protect our valuable farmland and natural areas because development is confined to a smaller area, rather than scattered across the landscape.

Photo courtesy of https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Uxbridge_downtown.jpg
Original image has been cropped.

WHAT IS A COMPLETE RURAL COMMUNITY?

When we talk about creating complete communities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) region, we usually talk about bigger cities and suburbs like Toronto, Mississauga, and Oshawa. But the Growth Plan, a provincial land use plan that directs how and where we should grow in the region, promotes the development of complete communities in all municipalities, including rural municipalities.

You may think that complete rural communities are not possible because these municipalities have lower population densities, a more dispersed landscape, and a certain rural character that is worth protecting. In fact, historically many towns and villages in rural areas were developed to be compact, complete communities. They are walkable, provide employment in a variety of sectors (retail, healthcare, education, various industry, and so on), and contain a mix of land uses and housing types (buildings with stores at the bottom and housing on top, for instance). Farmland and natural areas surround them. “Density” and “compact” do not have to mean 50-storey condos; these terms can refer to our historic main streets, too.

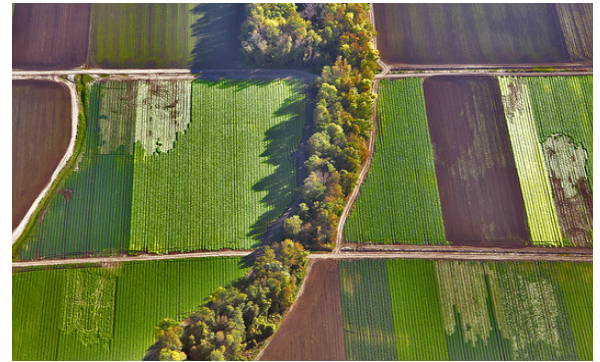
Creating complete rural communities, especially in the Greenbelt, is critical given that some of them are experiencing population growth. As they are located in or near Canada’s most productive farmland, including the provincially designated specialty crop areas in the Holland Marsh and the Niagara Peninsula, and natural heritage like wetlands and forests, complete rural communities help to prevent development from encroaching onto these vital farmland and natural areas.

As single-use, low-density residential development for residents who predominantly commute for work in the GTA increased over the past few decades, towns and villages in rural areas changed. However, their historic centres remain, and they offer a blueprint for what a complete rural community is and could be.



Many planners working across the Greater Golden Horseshoe, in consultation with community members, are already taking steps to make their communities more complete, such as:

- Directing the majority of population growth to areas that already have infrastructure and servicing in place, and identifying areas in a community that are better able to accommodate new or improved developments.
- Updating Official Plan policies and zoning by-laws to allow for higher density development and mixed uses, and encouraging investment in more diverse and affordable housing options, including rental housing.
- Investing in active and public transportation systems and infrastructure to reduce car-dependency, providing residents with more transportation options, and ultimately improving residents' health by encouraging an active lifestyle.
- Building on existing major sectors, like tourism and agriculture, to promote more economic development within the community, while also identifying and addressing related issues, such as a lack of housing and transit that impede some residents' ability to live and work in their community.
- Protecting and enhancing the character of the community by engaging residents on revitalization efforts and architectural heritage, and implementing urban design guidelines to make sure new developments fit the existing character.
- Supporting the agricultural economy and protecting the natural environment by restricting development in agricultural and natural areas, addressing existing land-use conflicts, and enabling value-added agriculture.





HOW TO GET INVLOVED

Complete communities are ultimately made up of the people who live and work in them. In order to build a community that works for everyone, residents have a role to play in the planning process.

Many municipalities now offer a variety of ways residents can get involved in community planning and learn more about planning for complete communities. Increasingly, municipalities also offer options to submit feedback on planning matters online at any time, or attend consultations online. In the future, you may see planners at your local farmers' market, at the mall, or at your hockey arena available to discuss ongoing planning initiatives. Let planners know what you like and what you would like to see in your community, not just what you don't like and don't want.

Beyond consultations, there are plenty of other opportunities for you to get involved in community planning, such as joining a committee or a neighbourhood association. Check out your local municipality's website or contact the planning department to know more about community planning and how you can get involved.

Read the full report: https://www.greenbelt.ca/complete_communities