



September 23, 2008

Honourable George Smitherman  
Minister  
Ministry of Energy & Infrastructure  
Hearst Block  
4th Floor  
900 Bay St  
Toronto ON M7A 2E1

Dear Minister:

The Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) is pleased to provide comments on *Towards a Growth Plan for Northern Ontario: A Discussion Paper*.

Established in 1986, the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) is the recognized voice of the Province's planning profession. Its more than 3,000 members work in government, private practice, universities, and non-profit agencies in the fields of urban and rural development, urban design, environmental planning, transportation, health and social services, heritage conservation, housing, and economic development. For further information, go to: [www.ontarioplanners.on.ca](http://www.ontarioplanners.on.ca)

I would be pleased to discuss our comments further with you. Please feel free to have your staff contact Loretta Ryan, MCIP, RPP, Manager, Policy & Communications at (416) 668-8469 or by e-mail at [policy@ontarioplanners.on.ca](mailto:policy@ontarioplanners.on.ca) for follow up or to schedule a meeting.

Sincerely,

Wayne Caldwell, MCIP, RPP  
President  
Ontario Professional Planners Institute

Copy:  
Brad Graham, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Energy & Infrastructure  
George McKibbin, MCIP, RPP, Chair, Policy  
Loretta Ryan, MCIP, RPP, Manager, Policy and Communications, OPPI

## **Towards a Growth Plan for Northern Ontario:**

### **A Discussion Paper**

### **Comments from the Ontario Professional Planners Institute September 23, 2008**

OPPI commends the Province for initiating the Northern Growth Plan and supports its general intent. The discussion paper describes Northern Ontario and sets the scene for what is currently happening in Northern Ontario by providing a thematic summary of what leaders and organizations have recommended over the past few years. We have used these themes as a starting point for considering what should be addressed in a draft growth plan.

Using the collective experience of members of the Policy Committee and the Northern District's executive committee, we fashioned responses to the questions set out on page 16. We also considered previous comments OPPI made on related northern policy and legislative matters.

**1. Are the themes the correct ones to be focusing on? The themes are: strengthening and advancing resource-based industries; growing emerging sectors; fostering research, innovation and commercialization; increasing education and training opportunities; retaining and attracting people and jobs; supporting business development and entrepreneurship; and making strategic use of infrastructure.**

We believe that these seven themes represent a good starting point that should be eventually broadened to address the North's social and environmental realms.

We also urge the authors to have regard for the discussion, "Developing Priorities: The Challenge of Creating a Sustainable Planning System in Northern Ontario", in the 2006-07 Report of the Environmental Commissioner.

Overall, we are concerned, however, that the proposed themes, while all essential, focus predominantly on economic issues, and that inadequate weight is given to social and environmental issues. The focus should be broadened in order to address these realms.

## **2. What themes should be added or removed?**

A discussion of quality of places in the North is needed together with an exploration of those attributes that contribute to and detract from that quality of place. What are those physical, social and environmental qualities which make for sustainable northern communities and how can we replicate these qualities appropriately in the implementation of the Growth Plan?

The Premier's announcement about Boreal planning on July 14th should be addressed as a theme, recognizing that the initiative may take a longer period of time to fully develop. The Premier's announcement also highlights Northern Ontario as a multi-faceted community with tremendous variety and circumstance from organized versus unorganized communities; urban versus rural; growing and stable communities versus declining communities; remote versus well serviced and inter-connected transportation hubs.

A much stronger and comprehensive thematic discussion of First Nations is required, not only Reserve communities but also the requirements of Band members living off Reserve in northern urban centres. This needs to involve much more than a limited discussion on consultation.

## **3. Do certain themes have priority over others?**

We would like to see a discussion paper that has a more positive tone. The paper is silent on the North's strengths and what sets Northern Ontario apart from other regions in Canada and the world, socially, economically and environmentally. This is an opportunity to define who we are and our strengths and why this is important.

Furthermore, with respect to topics like education and training, we do not believe a target definition that simply attempts to bring education and training standards to par with the standards of the rest of Ontario is adequate. Attaining Provincial standards is not enough to ensure competitiveness; the standards need to be International in scope and comparison.

Future change in Northern Ontario should be sustainable. This requires a balance of economic, social and environmental objectives, with a view always towards a strong and healthy economy.

## **4. What other regions (in Canada or around the world) offer valuable lessons that can be adapted for the North?**

There are many examples in Canada and around the world where senior levels of government have focused attention on the planning of their northern areas, each with different results. In addition to Ireland's National Development Plan (2000-2006), the government should look to New Brunswick's "Be our future: New Brunswick's Population Growth Strategy", Quebec's "Development Policy for the Nord du-Quebec Region" and "National Policy on Rurality 2007-2014", Manitoba's "Building Strong Communities A Vision for Rural Manitoba", Saskatchewan's "A Strategy for Rural Saskatchewan: Responding to Acre" and draw the best elements from these precedents for incorporation into the new Northern Growth Plan.

Manitoba, northern Quebec, and Nunavut, the Yukon and Northwest Territories, are all examples where aboriginal communities have been able to participate in the resource and development opportunities to a significantly greater extent than in Northern Ontario, and these should provide some assistance. With respect to hydro electric development, Manitoba Hydro is the largest employer of First Nations members in that Province and many of the northern Manitoban hydro electric facilities are owned or partially owned by First Nations businesses. *[Québec also has examples, e.g., Air Creebec.]* Australia, New Zealand and Scandinavia have examples of programs addressing indigenous peoples.

The Growth Plan should examine what are the obstacles to learning from other jurisdictions about adding value, building human and financial assets, and growing business in remote regions, and what can be done to overcome those obstacles.

Unfortunately, the far north of Northern Ontario has really fallen behind the rest of the Boreal and sub-Arctic regions of Canada. This only exacerbates the issues described above.

#### **5. What strategies or programs are currently being used in the North that are considered successful or can be broadened?**

We think the Provincial Parks program has been successful in terms of protecting an outstanding resource base that can serve as a foundation for the future. There are many tourism efforts, especially those which are non-consumptive of resources, which are examples of success stories. But Ontario Parks is drastically under-funded to deliver on either environmental management or tourism development of its fabulous resource base. To capitalize on the North's future tourism potential will require a drastic mind shift and co-ordinated resource commitment between the private and public sectors to develop and market these resources.

Existing funding programs need to link future funding to the directions of the Northern Growth Plan (should it be have a planning/growth management component to it). So for example, all future infrastructure investments would be in line with the Growth Plan as would NOHFC funding.

#### **6. What are the fundamental elements needed to create and sustain a climate supportive of economic growth?**

Northern Ontario relies upon a land and resource based economy. We recommend the "strengthening and advancing resource based economies" be re-organized around the comprehensive co-ordination of land and resource planning on Crown lands with planning on privately owned lands (the Planning Act), especially in organized municipalities, and with First Nations Reserves as well as lands and waters traditionally used by Aboriginal communities.

Further, we believe this co-ordination should include the various resource planning mechanisms where land use approvals and/or dispositions are involved under the Public Lands Act including dispositions provided for under the Mining Act. Co-ordination should be three dimensional decision-making involving: the Crown, municipal, and First Nation

interests in a comprehensive manner, including co-ordination with the Department of Indian and Northern Development, where appropriate.

Refinement of the Provincial Policy Statement and its administration also needs to be addressed thematically so its application will be sensitive to the circumstances that apply in northern communities. This may include amendments to the PPS or an overriding Growth Plan policy which applies northern based Provincial policy, where applicable, without compromising the environmental policies of the Provincial Policy Statement.

In the absence of clarifying the public planning and decision making between private and public lands as well as resource management and licensing procedures, we believe it will be very difficult to create a climate supportive of economic development, especially in those industries where access to public resources is essential.

There is a need to invest resources to establish the "data" required to support the Provincial Policy Statement planning objectives for the area. For example, the government could allocate resources to define a full system of significant coastal wetlands, from Muskoka to the Manitoba Border. The same could be said for defining the capacity of surface water bodies.

On the public health and safety side, the government could invest in refinements to the Abandoned Mines Information System to determine which points do not represent a threat to public health and safety. The same can be said for floodplains, many of which are not delineated.

## **7. What specific policies should be included in the draft Northern Growth Plan to realize the development of the themes (e.g., supporting emerging sectors is a priority)?**

The policies should include incentives. First Nations need to be engaged as part of the solutions. New governance models may be required to accomplish this and provide certainty to the market place to in turn attract capital investment.

If the plan is to be successful, we need to recognize that things will change and we need to imagine a future that cannot be defined by simply projecting current trends into the future. The emphasis should be on improving and sustaining the northern quality of life and in places, it may involve decline in absolute economic terms.

We observe that Northern Ontario is not a designated growth area under the legislation. Furthermore, we question whether the Places to Grow Act with its purpose and objectives, is the right legislation to address the North's unique and varying circumstances.