

July 6, 2025

Mayor, Councillors, and Senior Staff
Town of Blue Mountains
PDF via Town website



RE: Corporate Strategic Plan

Dear Mayor, Council, and Senior Staff,

Further to previous correspondence and a presentation to you, we are pleased to share with you the significant evolution of our Outcomes-based Framework for Watershed Security, with its new focus on Watershed Security for Municipalities: The Need to Integrate Land Use and Watershed Planning, attached overleaf.

We hope you will seriously consider this integration as you develop the Corporate Strategic Plan.

As you will be aware, Ontario is experiencing significant challenges with housing availability and affordability, as well as extensive controversy on recent legislative changes on planning and its normal processes for both municipal democracy and autonomy, as well as reductions in historic legal avenues of appeal.

In addition, there are provincial pressures on local food security and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and local pressures on stormwater management, flooding, and access to greenspace.

Regardless of the outcome of these swirling debates, the Ontario Headwaters Institute believes that the most positive future direction to protect our water, maintain democracy, and address the housing crisis would be to integrate land use and watershed planning at the municipal level.

As a result of our commitment to this vision, as well as due to feedback on our suite of position papers released in April, we have re-focused the Outcomes-based Framework from multiple papers with 26 recommendations to a one-pager with nine recommendations for municipalities, overleaf.

We hope that these recommendations are consistent with the motion that you passed last year to encourage discussion on a sound municipal role in the protection of your local watersheds, as well as the opinions you sought from local conservation authorities, and that they will be helpful in refining your Corporate Strategic Plan.

While our recommendations are equally important, allow me to highlight number nine. With all neighbouring municipalities facing the need to expand development, collaborative regional action on new or expanded Greenbelt-style core and corridor areas on natural heritage would be both a counter-balance to the growth of the urban envelope and would signal a multi-generational commitment to watershed security, natural heritage, biodiversity, local agriculture, and access to greenspace.

Sincerely,

Andrew McCammon

Executive Director

cc: Numerous local agencies and organizations

Watershed Security for Municipalities

The Need to Integrate Land Use and Watershed Planning



Ontario municipalities deliver core services that impact watershed security. These core municipal services include land use planning and the management of drinking water, storm water, and sanitary sewage, while the OHI defines watershed security as healthy and resilient watersheds that protect regional ecological integrity, social wellbeing, and economic vitality.

A key document on these issues is the Provincial Planning Statement, which clearly directs that planning authorities such as municipalities “shall protect, improve, or restore the quality and quantity of water by ... using the watershed as the ecologically meaningful scale for integrated and long-term planning, which can be a foundation for considering cumulative impacts of development”.

The Provincial Planning Statement (PPS) also requires a municipality to minimize the potential negative impacts of planning on water, including cross-jurisdictional and cross-watershed impacts.

Unfortunately, Ontario has over the last few years subverted the vision of the PPS with multiple actions meant to address the housing crisis.

As a result, the ecological integrity and biodiversity of our watersheds are being threatened, especially in South-central Ontario, and it is now more important than ever for municipalities to implement a strategic framework to integrate land use and watershed planning.

The OHI therefore recommends the following nine practical actions for municipalities to integrate land use and watershed planning, honouring their duty to protect local watersheds without compromising efforts to address the housing crisis:

1. Adopt a council motion to integrate land use and watershed planning;
2. Consider drafting a Municipal Charter for Watershed Security, embracing the ecosystem approach to local planning;
3. Identify early efforts in key municipal departments on how to integrate their responsibilities for land use and watershed planning, including the consideration of climate change and the need to protect biodiversity;
4. Maintain up-to-date current condition reports on the health of local watersheds;
5. Establish targets for watershed and sub-watershed health, including for areas in natural heritage, agriculture, wetlands, streamside vegetation, and urban canopies, with restoration targets where needed;
6. Require aquatic and terrestrial studies to identify and protect key ecological features and functions with respect to proposed development and conduct follow-up monitoring;
7. Apply adaptive management to redress unacceptable conditions documented in monitoring reports;
8. Encourage sound stewardship practices on all land in the municipality; and,
9. Work collaboratively, with other municipalities and relevant agencies, to enlarge or create new Greenbelt-style core and corridor natural heritage and agricultural areas as a counter-balance to the extensive land conversion now taking place across South-central Ontario.

These additional special planning areas could constitute a multi-generational commitment to protect our water, natural heritage, and food security while reducing environmental risks and their cost. They would also be logical locations to implement nature-based solutions to address the climate and biodiversity crises.

The OHI is working to develop tools to help municipalities address the actions suggested above, and notes that each would benefit from community engagement.

**Water is Life.
Let's act like it**

Please contact Andrew McCammon, our Executive Director,
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Promoting Watershed Security in Ontario: Water for People and for Nature
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