

Exploring the impacts of the GPNO and the Far North Act on Official Plans and a Community-Based Land Use Plan

Prepared in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Planning by:

Leena Lamontagne-Dupuis

Supervisor:

Dr. Leela Viswanathan & Dr. Graham Whitelaw
Queen's University School of Urban and Regional Planning

n.d

© Leena Lamontagne-Dupuis, 2020

Executive Summary

Population shifts in Northern Ontario are eliciting provincial attention in the form of policy documents aimed at mitigating the consequences of population decline. There is a steady decrease in the population throughout Northern Ontario, a region often perceived as quite different to its southern counterpart due to social, geographical, geological, and economic differences. The population peaked in 1991 at 822,450 residents, but has steadily declined to 797,000 residents in 2016 and is predicted to see another 2.1% decrease to 782,000 by 2041 (Ministry of Finance, 2019). Twenty percent (20%) of northern Ontario's population is Indigenous (Nelson & Stroink, 2013). While settler populations are decreasing, Indigenous populations are increasing: the Northwest portion of Northern Ontario will grow 1.1% now until 2041, which is predicted to be primarily Indigenous population growth. Indigenous population growth for Northwestern Ontario, for example in the Cochrane, Sudbury, and Manitoulin districts, is also predicted (Cuddy & Moazzami, 2017). Two primary documents were released to mitigate the consequences of these shifting populations and to promote growth across municipal and reserve jurisdictions: the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario (GPNO) and the Far North Act (FNA) for First Nation's communities, respectively. However, little research has shown how these planning documents impact Official Plans and Community-Based Land Use Plans.

This report explored how the planning legislation impacts local land-use planning in Official Plans and Community Based Land Use of Hearst, Kapuskasing, Timmins and Constance Lake which are geographically close, but with varying population sizes. There were three analyses in total. The first analysis looks at the relationship of the Planning Act, the Provincial Policy Statement, and the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario to understand how each document conceptualizes growth, Indigenous issues, and tiering. The second analysis takes the 11 growth themes most valued in the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario and explores whether they are pronounced in the three municipal plans. The third analysis explores the three most prominent themes in the Far North Act of collaboration, environmental protection and Indigenous Planning. The themes are then expanded to include ideas from section 6 (7) of the Far North Act such as collaboration, biological diversity, interconnectedness, culture and heritage, economic development, infrastructure, and tourism and applied for the CBLUP. It is show that the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario, although paved with good intentions, does not provide realistic growth

measures for the municipalities of Hearst, Kapuskasing, and Timmins. The municipalities involved limited their inclusion of the 13 growth initiatives meant to diversify their economy, and rather maintained their focus on their economic heritage of resource extraction. As for the Far North Act, the plan directly impacts Constance Lake's Community-Based Land Use Plan for growth initiatives and land-use plans, but forces us to consider why First Nation communities do not have the same freedom with their land-use plans compared to municipalities.

Four recommendations are presented in the hopes of inspiring change at the local and provincial level:

Recommendation One: This recommendation does not solely apply to Northern Ontario, but the whole province as demonstrated by the lack of direction associated with Indigenous issues in the Planning Act. This gap should be addressed to ensure that the highest-level policy on planning in the Province is setting the policy framework for municipal-indigenous relations.

Recommendation Two: If serious about creating a provincial plan for the region of Northern Ontario, the province should consider the main growth issues currently impacting the region. It should aid communities in planning not only for growth but for no and slow growth, and even decline. Moreover, a study should be conducted to understand the differences between small towns and cities in the region and elaborate policies that are respective of their strengths and weaknesses.

Recommendation Three: If Indigenous peoples are to be properly included in the GPNO, the plan should articulate both the responsibilities of the Province as well as municipalities to encourage better collaborative planning between FNs and municipalities.

Recommendation Four: The Far North Act should permit as much freedom to interpretation as does the Planning Act for municipalities. Currently, CBLUP must follow the Far North Act closely, and First Nation's communities must work with the government of Ontario in establishing their land-use planning. Municipalities do not require to work so closely with the government of Ontario and can write their Official Plan independently. According to research by Minkin, Indigenous people's will plan according to cultural preservation "based on sustenance activities that are directly linked to the land and the land's ecosystems" (Minkin et al, 2014, p.142). An Act

should be established that permits for Indigenous planning based on traditional practices, as well as autonomous decision-making.