



Coordinating Plans in Canadian City-Regions: Implications and Opportunities for Small Town and Rural Communities

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9 December 2016

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Dr. Jill Grant and Dr. Patricia Manuel with the Dalhousie University School of Planning for their invaluable supervision, feedback, and advice throughout this project.

This research contributes to the larger Coordinating Land Use Plans in the Context of Multiple Plans project. As part of the broader project, this research benefits from the work of the research team, including the data collection, analysis, and reports that have been produced. Dr. Jill Grant is the lead researcher for this project from Dalhousie University. Other researchers from Dalhousie are Dr. Ahsan Habib, Dr. Patricia Manuel, and Dr. Eric Rapaport. Research assistants from Dalhousie include Andrew Burns, Amanda Taylor, Nathan Hall, Ian Harper, Christina Wheeler, and Meaghan Dalton. Contributors from the University of Waterloo are Dr. Pierre Filion and research assistant Tanya Markvart.

The Coordinating Land Use Plans in the Context of Multiple Plans project is conducted in partnership with the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) and the Dalhousie Transportation Collaboratory (DalTRAC). The project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) through their Insights Grants Program.

Thank you to the planning professionals who volunteered their time to participate in interviews with the research team, contributing valuable insights to the overall project. Further information and research from the Coordinating Multiple Plans project can be found online: <http://theoryandpractice.planning.dal.ca/>

Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

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Summary

Regions in Canada represent a dynamic administrative structure that vary greatly across the country. An emerging shift in regions has seen a concentration of growth and power in select city-regions, which contain a variety of communities centered around a strong urban area. Rural communities in Canada are affected by community planning in ways that are distinct from urban areas. Increasingly, rural and small town communities find themselves facing complex issues and challenges when they are situated within these city-regions, in addition to historical issues that these communities face. This study aims to show how Canadian city-regions that contain urban and rural communities coordinate their planning documents and practices to ensure that rural and small town issues are taken into consideration. This question is investigated through a comparative case study of five Canadian city-regions, utilizing some of the data from the larger Coordinating Multiple Plans research project:

- St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador
- Halifax, Nova Scotia
- Toronto, Ontario
- Edmonton, Alberta
- Vancouver, British Columbia

First, this study examines the context of these city-regions, which vary in size, demography, and economic characteristics. Media articles and interviews with planning professionals from the five Canadian city-regions are reviewed and analyzed to identify relevant issues or challenges that rural and small town communities within regions are dealing with. Planning documents from regional administrations and small municipalities are reviewed to identify areas of policy that address the interactions between regions and their municipalities, and the issues that small town and rural communities face. Four broad categories of challenges were identified through this process:

- Growth and development pressures
- Mandated growth targets and/or growth limits in planning policy
- Protection for agricultural land and other natural landscapes
- Rural and small town character and community identity

In reviewing planning documents from each of the five city-regions in the study, it was found that regional planning documents were often concerned with accommodating and managing growth and development. Such plans contained policies for protecting green space and

agricultural land, and contained goals for allocating or restricting development in certain rural areas of regions. Municipal plans usually addressed the identified issues in more detail, but contained some conflicting objectives with regional plans.

Media articles were most likely to identify impactful issues surrounding urban expansion into rural areas, often reporting on specific cases or events. Interview respondents most often identified policy issues as affecting rural and small town communities within regions. Regional planning policies most often addressed issues surrounding growth and implemented growth management policies, while supporting agricultural and natural lands. Small town municipal plans were often the only sources to consistently recognize or prioritize rural character issues. Regions facing the highest rates of growth, including Toronto, Edmonton, and Vancouver, tended to have the most severe issues amongst small town and rural communities. Growth pressures, land use conflicts and wide-reaching policy interventions were common here. Halifax and St. John's still possessed challenges in their small town and rural areas, but these largely stemmed from policy issues and not growth pressures. These challenges are often interconnected across the various sources and study regions, demonstrating the importance of well-coordinated planning approaches in Canadian city-regions to further address these issues.

Introduction

Community planning in Canada is a professional activity that is widely practiced at various levels of government and the private sector, that aims to organize and regulate the land use, social, transportation and other objectives and visions for communities. Rural and small town community planning is a field that demands careful attention to the issues that affect these communities (Krawchenko, 2014). Rural and small town communities exist in Canada in diverse forms, and have faced challenges in planning in areas such as agriculture, infrastructure, diversity of land use, economic development, and demographic change (Gordon & Hodge, 2008). Increasingly, rural and small town communities are becoming intertwined with the interests of the regions that they are a part of or adjacent to, leading to greater challenges and issues (Caldwell, 2010).

Regional planning reflects the need to plan for communities that are geographically linked, and is concerned with the features that these communities share, whether natural or manmade. Regional planning is commonly centered on a larger community, with concerns for the areas outside of it as well. Planning for large Canadian metropolitan regions began mostly after World War II, in response to specific issues arising from rapid growth and sprawl (Gordon & Hodge, 2008). Increasingly, the city-region is becoming a powerful political and organizational entity in Canada with influence and complexity beyond the traditional metropolitan area (Krawchenko, 2012). Regional administrations have grown in prevalence over the last few decades in response to complex and pressing planning issues and the perceived need to demonstrate economic competitiveness (Wheeler, 2002; Hall & Stern, 2009). It is recognized that there is an increased interdependence between cities and their suburban and rural counterparts within regions, and that regionalism demands the careful coordination of planning activities (Wheeler, 2002). This is especially true given the impact of growing city-regions on communities within and beyond their regional areas (Gordon & Hodge, 2008). The continued growth of planning at the metropolitan region scale has implications for the small town and rural communities in these areas.

Planning for growing urban regions often involves a coordinated policy approach, especially given the number of plans that administrations are producing to address various emerging issues (Grant et al., 2012). Increasingly, the planning concerns of small communities are being taken up in larger city or regional policies, with wide ranging effects (Hall & Stern, 2009). City-regions may deal with these communities in unique ways through their land use planning processes. Innovative regional policies that achieve a consensus in large urban regions may still have unintended consequences for outlying areas. While there is extensive

literature regarding regionalism in Canada, metropolitan area growth challenges and rural fringe area issues, more information is needed regarding how the planning practice within these regions can solve or exacerbate these challenges for rural areas (Hall & Hall, 2008). Perceived issues amongst these rural communities may be addressed differently than those of larger communities in the same region. As part of the larger multi-year research project, Coordinating Land Use Plans in the Context of Multiple Plans, this research aims to demonstrate how planning practice and policy treats rural and small town communities within regions. How do Canadian city-regions that contain both urban and rural communities coordinate planning activities to address rural and small town issues?

Metropolitan areas in Canada vary in their nature, including their political organization (Sancton, 2005). This report presents a comparative case study of five Canadian city regions, varying in size and geography, to gain a broad understanding of the community planning issues affecting small towns in larger, urbanized regions. Each region presents a unique view into the various policies and practices that may affect rural areas. This study employs mixed methods to identify and understand the issues that may be affecting these communities, and to discover how local planning policies do or do not address these issues in a regional context. Evidence is presented from various sources to demonstrate the actions and implications of regional policy on rural and small town challenges.

Understanding the Regions

Methods

This study aims to investigate how planning practice and documents are coordinated in order to ensure that rural and small town issues are being considered in Canadian city-regions. This report employs mixed research methods in a comparative case study of five Canadian regions: St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador; Halifax, Nova Scotia; Toronto, Ontario; Edmonton, Alberta; and Vancouver, British Columbia. In some cases, numerous regional boundaries and definitions exist for these study regions. For uniformity, the census metropolitan area is used as the unit of study for this research, even though some regions extend their influence well beyond such boundaries. This study uses three primary research methods. First, a scan of media sources is undertaken. A sample of articles from each study region has been identified through keyword searches online. The purpose is to identify and review content from the five study areas that addressed or identified issues that rural communities may be facing in the larger urban regions. The media scan provided a brief understanding of some of the current challenges facing such communities. A sample of 39 online media articles in total is utilized for this portion of the study. Articles are analyzed by identifying and recording themes of issues that emerge into a database, as well as the recording of passages from the articles. Most articles in this sample were published in the past year, and none were more than a decade old. This presents a contemporary overview of issues that have been encountered or are currently being faced by rural communities in the study regions. It is useful to identify these issues through media articles as they commonly represent visible, on-the-ground effects of land use planning policy or practice.

A second method helped identify and gain an understanding of the issues that may be facing small town and rural areas within regions. A set of interview transcripts from interviews with respondents from the five study regions is analyzed. A sample of 82 transcripts involving interviews with 92 respondents is used, with respondents representing a range of planning professionals in the five study regions. This sample was collected as part of previous work for the primary Coordinating Multiple Plans research project. Of the 82 transcripts reviewed in detail, 36 proved useful for further analysis. The interviews were conducted in person or over the phone with research assistants, using a semi-structured format. These interviews were conducted in 2014 with planning professionals from municipal, regional, provincial, and private sectors, providing a large sample of experiences and perceptions. These transcripts are analyzed by recording relevant passages into an evidence bank, grouped by interview and region. Notes are taken on the emerging themes and issues from these interviews using

thematic content analysis. These interviews provide important insights into the perceptions of practicing planners in the five city-regions regarding plan coordination. The interview analysis provides insights into the views of planning professionals regarding how policy and plan coordination impacts the rural and small town areas of regions in Canada.

The final method is a review of planning documents and policies from the five regions in the study. These documents comprise regional planning documents from the five study regions where available, in addition to municipal plans from a sample of small municipalities within each region. Regional planning documents are identified for each of the five study regions, except for St. John's. The regional plan for St. John's is being updated, and the only current documentation available online is an amendment to the 1976 regional plan maps. In some regions, multiple regional planning documents are identified and studied, especially where the documents deal with varying issues that may affect rural and small town areas. Comprehensive or growth plans for regions are the primary documents considered for this phase of research. A larger sample of municipal planning documents has been gathered for this study. Municipal planning documents are selected from some of the smallest municipalities by population within each region's Census Metropolitan Area. Due to differing demographics and political structures across the regions, this sample of planning documents is not exhaustive, but many different types of small communities are represented.

Due to the nature of the organization of the Halifax Regional Municipality as a single-tier entity, only one comprehensive municipal plan exists for the entire CMA. For this study, this plan is considered a regional plan, as it covers all communities within the amalgamated municipality. A sample of secondary or community plans for rural areas are used in place of municipal plans.

The planning documents used were publicly available for download on government websites and are the most current policies in effect, although several are under review and slated to be replaced soon. Planning documents provide an overview of the comprehensive land use, social, transportation, environmental, and other visions of a community, and provide a method for municipalities to formally document such visions and objectives. Thus, it is pertinent to review these documents to identify the areas of policy that address the interactions and interconnections between urban and rural areas within regions in both municipal and regional planning documents. After identifying issues or challenges that small towns may be facing in larger urban areas, it is possible to learn how plans are coordinated to address these issues. Analyzing both regional and small town municipal planning documents allows for the discovery of how governments at different levels deal with rural issues.

St. John's, NL	Halifax, NS	Toronto, ON	Edmonton, AB	Vancouver, BC
City of St. John's Municipal Plan	Halifax Regional Municipal Planning Strategy	Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2006	Growing Forward: The Capital Region Growth Plan	Metro Vancouver 2040: Shaping Our Future
Town of Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove Municipal Plan 2014	Halifax Regional Municipality Municipal Planning Strategy for Eastern Shore (West)	Greenbelt Plan 2005	Town of Morinville Municipal Development Plan	Village of Anmore Official Community Plan
Municipal Plan 2014-2024 Town of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's	Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy Planning Districts 14/17 (Shubenacadie Lakes)	Town of Mono Official Plan	Town of Calmar 2007 Amended Municipal Development Plan	Village of Belcarra Official Community Plan
		Town of East Gwillimbury Official Plan		

Table 1: Planning document analysis sample, with regional level documents shaded in green (Statistics Canada, 2012)

The research methods present some significant limitations in this project. Identifying land use planning issues that affect rural areas within urban regions through a scan of media articles may not represent the scope of issues truly facing these communities. Time constraints for this project affected the sample size of community plans that are studied. Historical rural and small town planning issues were not investigated. Additionally, the sample size of both the media scan and the document analysis is not exhaustive in scope. Rural and small town concerns may be expressed through other formal mechanisms that were not investigated, including government legislation or other non-comprehensive community plans. The interview data set presents unique challenges. The interview questions were developed for the broader study, and did not explicitly deal with rural and small town issues in regions. The interviews were conducted by past research assistants, and represent only a sample of planning officials and perceptions. Overall, this study cannot endeavor to explain and analyze all issues facing

the numerous rural and small town communities within regions throughout Canada. Instead, the goal is to provide broad insights into how community planning is carried out in several major Canadian regions and to show its impact on specific communities.

Case Study Regions

	St. John's, NL	Halifax, NS	Toronto, ON	Edmonton, AB	Vancouver, BC
Population (CMA)	196 966	390 328	5 583 064	1 159 869	2 313 328
Population Growth 2006-2011 (%)	8.8	4.7	9.2	12.1	9.3
Area (Sq. km)	804.65	5495.71	5905.71	9426.73	2882.55
Number of Municipal Divisions (within CMA)	13	5	24	35	39
Regional Administration	Provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador	Amalgamated regional municipality (single-tier)	Provincial government of Ontario	Capital Region Board	Metro Vancouver

Table 2: Characteristics of the five study regions, using Statistics Canada Census Metropolitan Area data (Statistics Canada, 2012)

The five regions included in this study vary greatly in their characteristics. The St. John's region is the smallest by population of the five. The region has experienced a high rate of growth in recent years, comparable to the Toronto and Vancouver regions. The St. John's region is comprised of 13 distinct municipalities, ranging from small and remote fishing villages to relatively large suburbs on the periphery of the core city. Conception Bay South, Mount Pearl and Paradise are some of the larger suburban communities within this region, while Pouch Cove and Flatrock are examples of much smaller municipalities in the region.

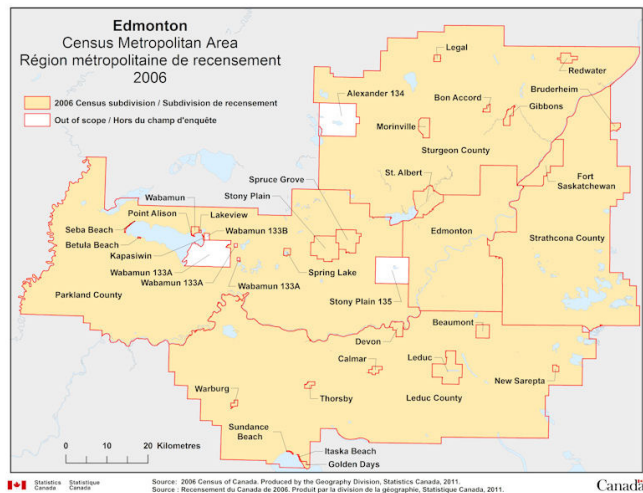
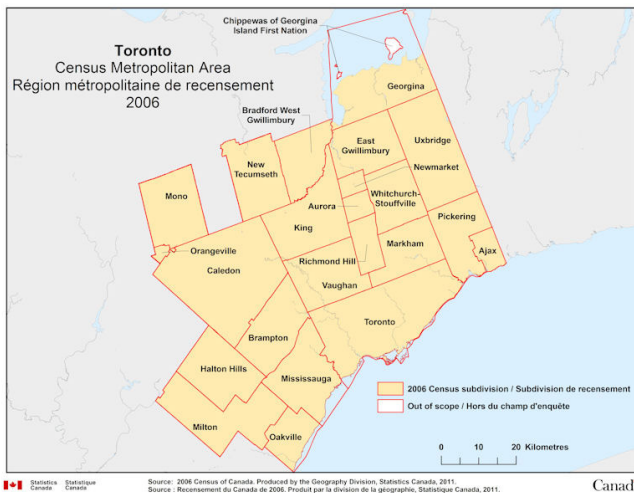
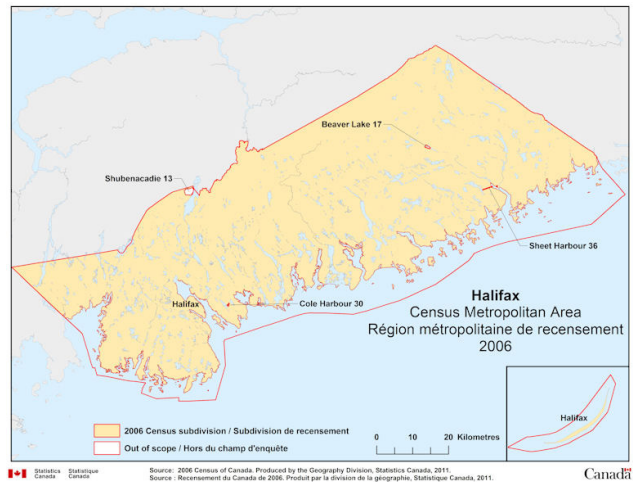
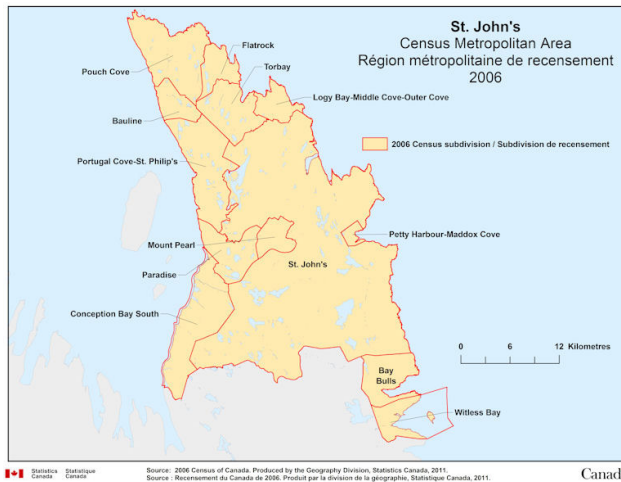
The economy of St. John's has experienced booms and busts, relying on resource extraction in recent years. The population of the region is concentrated in St. John's and a few large suburbs (Harper & Wheeler, 2015). Regional planning for St. John's is administered by the province of Newfoundland & Labrador.

Halifax is a distinct region within this study. Formally the Halifax Regional Municipality, it is a single-tier municipal region comprised of one amalgamated municipality (four 'Indian Reserves' form the other census subdivisions in this CMA). Halifax is the second smallest region included, and features a densely populated regional core with a sparsely populated periphery. Smaller communities outside of the regional core include Musquodoboit Harbour, Prospect and Fall River. The economy of Halifax relies on government and military employment, with the slowest population growth rate of the five study regions (Harper & Wheeler, 2015).

Toronto is the largest region by population in this study, and is the largest Census Metropolitan Area in Canada. It is characterized by fast growth in a region that includes 24 distinct municipalities, some of which are also included in five upper-tier regional municipalities. Small town municipalities within this region include Uxbridge, Mono, and King. The Toronto region includes very large secondary cities, and a range of large and small towns. Toronto has a strong and diversified economy driving its high growth rate (Harper & Wheeler, 2015). Regional planning is undertaken by the provincial government of Ontario. The Toronto region has a notable influence well beyond its defined census metropolitan area boundaries.

The Edmonton region is the largest by area included in this study, and also had the highest population growth rate amongst the regions from 2006-2011. The region contains 35 census subdivisions, including the small communities of Calmar, Gibbons, and Devon. Population is spread throughout the region in the core city, large suburban cities, towns, villages, and other divisions. Edmonton has an economy that is strongly tied to resource extraction within and beyond the region (Harper & Wheeler, 2015). Regional planning in Edmonton is administered by the Capital Region Board.

The Vancouver region is the second largest of the five study regions by population, and has the second highest growth rate. The region contains 39 diverse census subdivisions, including 24 local authorities representing municipal divisions, an electoral area, and a treaty First Nation (Taylor, 2014). Small municipalities in Vancouver include Lions Bay, Bowen Island, Anmore, and Belcarra. Regional planning for Vancouver is undertaken by the Metro Vancouver authority.



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Findings

Despite overall rural population decline, rural and small town communities that are within larger urbanized regions are experiencing growth in Canada (Mitchell, 2009). People who prefer to live in rural and small town settings may choose to live in such a community that is within a larger urban region. Regarding rural settlement in Ontario, Mitchell states that “An assessment of the destination of these migrants revealed that the majority selected a municipality that was under either strong or moderate urban influence. Relatively few migrants selected rural locales that were too isolated to allow for a regular connection to an urban core” (2009, p. 388). This further reinforces the growing trend of influential city-regions in Canada and the growth of their rural and small town communities. This is due to the ability to access employment, services and other conveniences within close proximity in the larger urban centre (Mitchell, 2009). There are some consequences of this growth for rural communities relating to their overall character. “It is inevitable, however, that as these municipalities continue to grow they will become less ‘rural’” (Mitchell, 2009, p. 389).



Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove, NL



Prospect, NS

Identifying the Issues - Media

Popular media outlets were used to identify a sample of news articles that reported on or identified some of the unique issues that rural and small town communities may be facing, in the context of larger, urbanized regions.

In the St. John's metropolitan area, many issues reported on in the media surrounded development and growth in the Northeast Avalon region. The unique resource economy of the region has recently driven fast-paced residential growth, which some perceived to be sprawl. Some consequences of this growth were causes for concern. Traffic, municipal servicing, and loss of small town identity were noted issues regarding this growth and development (Crummey, 2014). Other identified



East Gwillimbury, ON

issues included land use and ownership problems, and an overall perceived lack of concern for rural issues from St. John's (Fitzpatrick, 2015).

The Halifax Regional Municipality was created by amalgamation in 1996. This saw the creation of a single tier regional government from four former municipalities. Many of the current issues identified in the media relate to policies or factors stemming from amalgamation. The media widely reported on a perceived rural-urban divide within the municipality. This included political issues between representative councilors, as well as broad criticisms of the effectiveness of this form of government structure (Donovan, 2016).

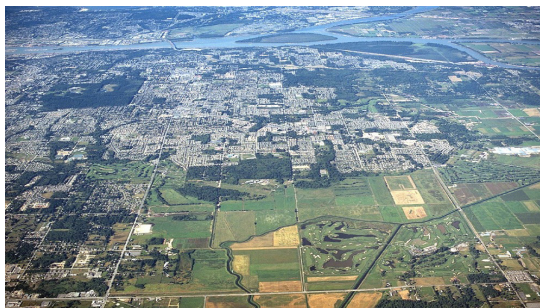


Morinville, AB

The regional government came under criticism in many more ways. Rural residents perceived that there was a lack of attention given to rural concerns and a lack of rural voice within politics (D'Entremont, 2016).

Policy is also a perceived issue in Halifax. Many articles reported on the nature of region-wide bylaws and planning policies, and their lack of effectiveness in addressing specific small town and rural areas. It was seen that the regional government may be failing to address these needs. Frustration was expressed

regarding what was perceived to be urban policies being applied in rural areas of the municipality, resulting in conflicts (Brundale, 2015). Some articles reported on the feeling that



Agricultural land reserve and suburban sprawl, Vancouver region, BC

rural residential growth and development was being discouraged by certain policies and regulations in the municipality, despite demand for it (Bell, 2016). This may demonstrate that regional bylaws or other planning policies are out of touch with the needs or demands of rural residents. Servicing and taxation in outlying areas of Halifax was a hotly contested issue in some articles, with rural residents perceiving an inequity between their level of services and those received in urban areas (Brundale, 2014).

Furthermore, some land use issues were identified, relating to unwanted and nuisance land uses, which may generate opposition from some residents (Withers, 2016).

The Greater Toronto Area presents some unique issues in the media analysis. Some of these issues were political in nature, representing tension between some smaller and larger municipalities, as well as with the province of Ontario. However, many of the identified

“There will be lots of talk about the “unintended consequences” of the existing legislation: the leapfrogging of development over the Greenbelt into small communities often ill-equipped to deal with rapid growth” (Pigg, 2015)

“While polls show as much as 90 per cent of people want to protect land, they are nervous about how the resulting intensification will impact their communities” (Queen, 2016)

“Councillors are concerned upgraded density policies proposed by the province could wipe out the small-town feel of the township.” (Robinson, 2016)

issues in the Toronto region were related to land use, development, and growth. The importance of protecting agricultural land from high-demand residential and industrial development was noted. Some perceived that resentment exists between rural and urban residents and politicians. The perceived application of urban policies to rural areas was noted as an issue, including the limiting of rural development in many ways (Grewal, 2016).

Many issues are identified relating to policy in the Greater Toronto Area. Provincial planning for the region has resulted in controversial growth and intensity targets for many small communities. There were concerns over these growth management policies in many small towns, which may be ill-equipped to handle the increased demand on infrastructure and traffic (Kovach, 2016). Some saw the development pressures on small towns as detrimental to rural character and quality of life. Regional governance, implemented through provincial policy, may place limits on growth in some areas while encouraging it in others (Pigg, 2013). The implementation of agricultural and environmental policies, such as the Greenbelt plan, were seen as introducing unintended consequences of growth in rural areas that were not protected, while lowering property values in those areas that were protected. Intensification may be introduced by provincial policy in some small towns, while it is discouraged in others, leading to local concerns (Queen, 2016). Often, it was reported that issues arose stemming from conflicts between these provincial policies and municipal documents. It can be seen that there is resentment between the fast growing urban centres, which produce demand for growth, and the smaller rural centres that were designated shares of this growth by the province (Gombu, 2008). Some frustration was noted regarding the demand for development in protected areas.

Some similar perceptions are noted in the Edmonton region. It was reported that regional policy is introducing growth and intensity targets for outlying communities, drawing backlash from some residents and politicians who wish to preserve their way of life (Stolte, 2016c). Many of these communities may not be prepared to handle such expansion. As well, it was perceived that these regulations were unfair for communities outside of Edmonton, and favored the city (Martell, 2016). Some demand for agricultural land protection was reported (Stolte, 2016a). There was

concern over how even the smallest communities in the region were given growth mandates from the region (Morinville News, 2016). Some perceived that the pace of industrial growth in the region warranted the need for protected areas. Municipal amalgamation was viewed as a cause for concern, introducing inequity between Edmonton and its satellite communities (Stolte, 2014).

The Vancouver region is a unique area of Canada, with many pressures on land use planning. Due to high housing costs, it was reported that some outlying communities are facing residential growth pressures. It was stated that these communities may not be able to handle such growth, which is sprawled and requires servicing (Gathercole, 2016). In some outlying areas, zoning and other regulations may not be keeping up with development pressures, introducing negative consequences. Suburban growth in formerly rural areas was seen as a troublesome land use pattern for the outlying areas of Vancouver (Daflos, 2016). Controversy was noted regarding overall regional density and growth targets, which may affect smaller communities disproportionately (Hyslop, 2016). It was reported that some small towns in the region were working to curb urban sprawl by limiting development within their borders (Melnychuk, 2016).

Agricultural land protection was a major theme identified in the media scan of articles from the Vancouver region. Many viewed this policy as important, but argued that the agricultural land was in need of further protection. Due to the strong housing market in the region, these lands are facing increasing development pressures (Olsen, 2016). Despite regulation and protection, some agricultural land is being used for illegal uses, which are detrimental to the basis of the regulations (Bainas, 2016). The viability of the agricultural land reserve was questioned, due to increasing land prices and loopholes in regulations which allow for residential growth (Olsen, 2016).

“We’re all feeling the stress of development and sprawl” (Stolte, 2016a)

“Many farmers and rural residents came out, worried about the loss of a lifestyle and good quality farm land.” (Stolte, 2014)

“As its empty lots fill with palatial homes, major challenges have come up in the community that wasn’t designed for that kind of growth” (Daflos, 2016)

“However, immediate threats continue as realtors try to convince overseas buyers that farmland flipping is the quick way to make a pile of money, he said” (Bainas, 2016)

“Residents in a small corner of northwest Langley are lobbying Township council to change “outdated” zoning, saying builders are taking advantage of it” (Gathercole, 2016)

Identifying the Issues - Planners' Perceptions

"I think provincial land use policy would be really important or having up-to-date regional plans. I think that would be really good because then all municipalities in the area would be on a level playing field about certain key elements."
(SJ05f, Small Town Planner, St. John's region)

"Particularly now in the last 10 years, there's been significant investment and growth in development in the region. And there's a lot of residential pressure, residential development pressure in the outlying communities. So the regional plan didn't foresee those sorts of issues and that type of development. So you have lots of conflict between those municipalities and the regional plan in terms of ensuring that the municipal plan complies with the regional plan."
(SJ02m, Provincial Planner, St. John's region)

Interviews with planning professionals were analyzed for this study, to gain an understanding of the perceptions of planners regarding the issues that face rural and small town communities within larger urban regions.

In the St. John's region, planners perceived that the regional plan for the area was highly outdated and irrelevant, leaving the region without an effective coordinating mechanism. Residential growth pressures are an issue facing small town and rural communities within the region due to economic growth. This introduces issues regarding servicing and traffic for the region and small towns. Planners thought that conflicts exist between the municipalities in this region. As well, the issue of municipal-regional plan coordination was noted. It was perceived that there was a mismatch between the regional plan and development outcomes in outlying areas of the region. Unclear policy in the St. John's region may be driving inequalities in development between rural and urban areas. New sprawling development in outlying areas of the region has brought about some concerns regarding coastal preservation and view plane protection. St. John's has perhaps the loosest form of regional governance or planning of any of the regions studied, with an outdated regional planning document produced by the province and no formal regional body. Some planners lamented the lack of regional guidance in the area, suggesting that some issues surrounding service provision could be solved with greater regional cooperation. However, some expressed the opinion that smaller municipalities may feel underserved in such a regional arrangement.

In Halifax, planners perceived that policy objectives were different between urban and rural areas of the municipality. The cost of servicing rural and sprawl growth was noted. Community identity and resentment in the regional politics was seen, stemming from amalgamation with some rural councilors advocating for a personal agenda. This may lead to barriers related to plan consolidation in the amalgamated municipality. Some planners themselves advocated for a clear hierarchy in planning policy in the region that addressed rural areas after urban and suburban, due to the single-tier structure of the municipal government.

This municipal structure presented some challenges for planners. Some planners identified the wide disparities between urban and rural communities in the region as driving resentment amongst the rural population. Planners noted the prescribed growth targets in regional planning policy, and effects that it may have on rural areas. Changing this target over time may create problems. As well, some planners understood that the current regional policy discouraged rural growth by allocating it elsewhere, to curb rural sprawl and subdivision of land. This was perceived as a favorable outcome by some planners, valuing urban development over suburban and rural.

In the Toronto region, many planners saw that there were issues regarding conflicts between municipalities and regional planning priorities. Aligning local policy priorities with regional conservation documents such as The Greenbelt Plan and others may be a challenge for small town and rural communities in the region. Some planners saw that working towards this regional compliance may counteract past planning work within municipalities. One planner viewed the effects of regional planning on small municipalities as a loss of control over planning decisions. Many planners saw value in producing plans to support continuing agricultural and natural land protection in the outlying areas of the region, but one planner perceived that the overall planning structure may not be set up to protect important rural land uses. Despite the support for conservation plans, one planner noted the unintended consequences of conservation policies on rural areas, demonstrating its effects on property values.

Planners in the Toronto region identified the increasingly large role that the province is playing in regional planning. This provincial influence in regional planning extends to legislation affecting rural and small town areas. This regional planning has mandated certain growth targets for various communities, and it is perceived that this creates challenges for smaller communities in responding to such demands for growth and further complicates efforts to align municipal objectives with regional requirements.

Some planners in the Toronto region noted the role of development in the region and its effects on rural and small town areas. One planner

“But essentially the regional plan is outdated right now. And what’s happening is any time a town amends their plan or regulations and requires a regional plan amendment, essentially the regional plan is amended. There’s kind of no questions asked. The process, it just goes through. It’s rubber stamped for sure” (SJ13f, Provincial Planner, St. John’s region)

“And it tends to be each councillor wants their area done faster even though, for example, the rural areas don’t seem to have much in terms of issues. Not a lot of it has evolved in terms of rural areas in terms of how you plan differently. If it has, it’s already been captured in regional plan. I think the priority should be the regional centre, then the suburban, then the rural areas, and kind of plan out like that.” (HRM02m, Municipal Planner, Halifax region)

“Because we are a municipality that includes a regional centre and a city, and lots of outlying kind of suburban or urban or rural land, it can be difficult to take a hard stand on anything because you’re having to get a bunch of folks who have very different views and come from very different areas and have very different ideas of what HRM should be like together to vote on one thing.” (HRM04f, Provincial Planner, Halifax region)

“When the politicians are being elected from their community, of course, they usually have a strong sense of community too and a strong sense of the uniqueness of the community. That uniqueness isn’t always accurate but they believe it and the community believes there’s uniqueness.” (HRM13m, Municipal Development Officer, Halifax region)

emphasized the importance of strong planning practice in responding to the development pressures that are present, especially in protecting natural and agricultural areas. Some planning officials perceived unique issues to respond to in planning for small communities, especially at a local level through municipal planning. However, some planning officials in the region viewed planning priority being given to the larger regional core communities. Other planners expressed frustrations regarding planning for specific smaller communities in such a large region, seeing it as an unjustified activity.

Planners in the Edmonton region frequently noted the importance of protecting agricultural land and the natural environment in the outlying areas of the region. Planners viewed the increasing growth in the region and development pressures as issues facing rural and small town communities, including both residential and industrial growth pressures driving up the prices of land. However, several planners noted that agricultural land protection may drive conflicts between governments and landowners.

Some planners in the Edmonton region perceived that regional cooperation was important but challenging for communities, due to political issues with coordinating planning priorities. As well, planners identified the challenge of regional planning needing to address the multiple perspectives and needs of multiple small municipalities in regional planning, with the need to respect rural and small town character. Conflicting interests between rural, small town and urban municipalities may further complicate planning for the region. Smaller municipalities may be challenged by the prospect of aligning their own interests with regional planning objectives.

Planners in the Vancouver region perceived many challenges relating to planning for small communities in a regional setting. One planner saw a need to balance objectives and interests between rural and urban communities in terms of regional planning, and that political issues may exist in planning for varying types of communities with differing interests. It was perceived that the regional government in Vancouver was ineffectual at addressing the myriad issues that face the differing

communities that make up the region. Another planner expressed frustration with the current regional planning structure, perceiving that conflicts between communities may exist without a strong regional authority to resolve them. Furthermore, it was perceived that smaller municipalities may lack proper regional political representation, risking having their concerns overwhelmed by the interests of larger municipalities. Other planners supported the notion that conflicts may occur between regional and local planning objectives.

Many planners in the Vancouver region noted the context of development pressures in the area. Coordinating growth is an issue, and may produce negative consequences for small towns and rural areas. Some planners noted that this growth and demand for development in the region was driving changing land uses, including industrial and agricultural land, and viewed agricultural land protection as important. However, one planner viewed certain land protection mechanisms as limiting growth in the region. Development pressure and land availability were frequently noted issues for outlying areas of the region.

“Like when the growth plan came out, and they drew a line in the sand saying everything has to conform to the growth plan by this date, I think 2, maybe 3 municipalities in the growth plan in Greater Toronto actually did it...Because it was just impossible to do.” (GTA18f, Town Planner, Toronto region)

“The province has put into place the Places to Grow act, which is going to say you will grow whether you like it or not. You can either be part of the process and plan where these people are going to go. And as a municipality or regional government, if you don’t do it, we will do it for you.” (GTA21m, Small Town Economic Development Officer, Toronto region)

“Yes, because there’s a huge emphasis when you’ve got to consider the Niagara Escarpment Commission, the... We touch on almost 3 conservation areas. They all interpret the conservation act in a little different manner at times. It has a real impact on municipalities when you’re dealing with them, and with development.” (GTA21m, Small Town Economic Development Officer, Toronto region)

“Well, at the moment in the regional plan, the challenge that we’re having is that we are dealing with very different perspectives. We’re dealing with a... Simply put, we have a county perspective, a village perspective, a town perspective, a city perspective, and a big city perspective. So in dealing with all of these things, you know, it can be pretty complicated as to what’s right and wrong to do, and at what point do you draw the line?” (EDM11m, Regional Planner, Edmonton region)

“But I would think that some of the other reasons would be like conflicting priorities for different groups. For example, in terms of regional plans, I know there has been some conflict between regional plans, the rural kind of...I will say the rural areas and then the municipalities within Alberta.” (EDM12f, City Planner, Edmonton region)

“The regional district, as you know, in Vancouver is a weak federation. It’s not a strong regional government. And in that weak federation, they will try to identify issues but often have very little power on most fronts to get what they’re concerned about fixed.” (VAN13m, Private Planning Consultant, Vancouver region)

“So for smaller municipalities, I’ve heard concern that their interests are often overwhelmed by the larger municipalities. The larger municipalities would argue that that’s legitimate because they represent an awful lot more citizens than a smaller municipality.” (VAN07m, City Planner, Vancouver region)

“In a region that is quite varied both in its sort of urban nature and urban versus suburban and rural, then there are different kinds of objectives at play. And so looking for kind of solutions that fit all those needs is really kind of difficult. So the political context in that regard is kind of tricky.” (VAN04m1, Transit Planner, Vancouver region)

Planning Documents

With an awareness of the broad categories of issues that face rural and small town communities within larger urban regions, planning documents from these regions can be studied to investigate how policies and governments at differing levels respond to the issues. Specific attention was given to sections of policy at both municipal and regional levels that addressed the relationship between urban areas and their rural counterparts. Many of the municipal planning documents in the sample contained general information on rural land use and development, recreation, tourism, agriculture, and conservation. Plans frequently acknowledged rural areas or settlement when discussing the context of their community. However, only some of this information was framed in the context of the larger urban region and the implications of coordinating between levels of government.

Regional planning for St. John's is undertaken by the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. However, the current plan is outdated and under review. The municipal plan for the City of St. John's (2016) contains some regional planning information. This planning document addresses issues surrounding municipal servicing and development in serviced areas, providing limits to rural sprawl in the municipality. Planning for some rural communities within the municipal boundary is addressed through land use policies, providing further restrictions on sprawling growth in outlying areas. Rural land uses are specified, but rural development restrictions seem flexible. This planning document only makes small steps towards addressing the various forms of rural development that are possible.

Small town municipal plans in this region addressed some issues that are facing their communities. These plans address the context of fast growth and development, with the Town of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's embracing growth but recognizing the challenge to maintaining rural character in their 2014 plan. One concern was that development in the town was outpacing the planning response to it. This document was concerned about further development in rural areas, and addressed specific rural land use concerns such as land protection and conservation. This plan stipulated goals for infill development and growth, but expressed further concerns about maintaining the unique small town identity of the municipality. This planning document addressed many connections to the regional plan, bringing up concerns regarding it being out of date and irrelevant to current conditions. The document acknowledged its growth centre designation from the regional plan, and mentions the large influence of the regional plan on the municipal plan development.

The regional planning document for the Halifax Regional Municipality (2014) also acts

“Urban expansion and encroachment into Rural areas will be minimized wherever possible to reduce the potential for loss, fragmentation, and degradation of the natural habitat, and to sustain continued opportunities for resource based activities and other discretionary uses.”
Municipal Plan 2014-2024, Town of Portugal Cove-St. Philip’s, p. 56

as the municipal plan for the single-tier municipality. This document acknowledges some rural issues, including declining growth and the need for protection for the natural environment. As a regional plan, the document stipulates rural settlement designations to control and specify land uses and types of development. It also acknowledges that some communities are not targeted for growth, and contains specific growth management policies to limit growth in rural areas. Growth in outlying areas is perceived as a burden for the municipality, due to servicing costs in low density communities.

Because of the governmental structure of the Halifax Regional Municipality, the single-tier government produces a regional municipal plan and multiple local community plans covering districts within the municipality, considered to be secondary plans. In the areas that were studied, these secondary plans address or acknowledge several concerns for rural and small town communities within the region. Plans studied in the region produced policies that supported continued low density uses, including residential. The Eastern Shore West Municipal Planning Strategy (2006) produces more specific residential policy only for higher growth areas within the district. This document contains strict policies to address nuisance land uses that may be common in rural areas, such as landfills. Additionally, the protection of traditional ways of living is implemented through specific zoning for fishing villages.

Further issues identified in rural district plans in Halifax include environmental protection, as well as challenges related to residential and industrial development. The Districts 14 and 17 Municipal Planning Strategy for Halifax (2016) discusses challenges stemming from highway development in the area. Growth has occurred in some rural areas due to increased highway access into the central city. This planning document aims to protect its small town and rural residential uses from other land uses, and balancing uses in the more rural areas of the district. Further growth in some areas is perceived as an imminent threat to current low intensity land uses. Servicing for small communities is addressed, acknowledging that low density rural development will not allow for municipal servicing. Heritage, nature preservation, and recreation are all recognized elements of rural character that are prioritized and protected in this plan through specific sub-policies. One challenge addressed in the

“Local attitudes generally tolerate and support this diversity of land use. However, the continued growth of the area may be expected to place pressures upon the semi-rural character.” HRM Planning Districts 14/17 Shubenacadie Lakes MPS, p. 65

plan is the need to adapt residential growth policies to the regional plan, which seeks to control growth in such outlying areas. This challenge may lead to conflicting objectives across communities in the region that are compelled to align their policies with those of the municipality.

The Toronto region produces a wealth of planning documents at both regional and local levels. Two regional level plans were used in this study, including the 2013 document *Places to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*. This planning document focusses on directing and managing the growth in population that the region is experiencing, to avoid negative consequences for municipalities such as increased traffic, pollution, and natural degradation. Connections are made to municipal plans, to coordinate objectives. Anticipated growth in the region is directed to areas that can best accommodate it, with the use of targeted settlement areas. These targeted communities include some small towns, but the major focus is on currently built-up urban areas. Rural and small town communities are largely ignored in the plan because of the use of intensification and growth policies. The vision section of the document contains no mention of rural communities, instead focusing on specific rural land uses like agriculture. This planning document introduces some policies to address rural issues, including conservation and agricultural policies. However, despite the emphasis on protection of natural areas, there is also a priority given to recreational uses of rural land, which may be detrimental. Strict development limits are placed on small town communities, affecting their potential for growth. The regional policy is somewhat ambiguous regarding the form that future growth and intensification may take in outlying areas of the region, with the only provision being to limit growth in areas without municipal servicing.

The Greenbelt Plan for the Toronto region (2005) was analyzed as a regional plan. The plan acts as a complimentary document to other regional policies in Toronto. Overall, there is a theme of accommodating growth but protecting nature in the region. The need to protect rural and small town character, as well as agriculture, are prioritized in the plan. Continued settlement is allowed within some rural communities that are part of the greenbelt. Certain coordinating measures are undertaken with municipal plans, as well as the delegation of some planning to these

“This Plan recognizes and promotes the traditional role of rural towns and villages as a focus of economic, cultural and social activities that support surrounding rural and agricultural areas across the GGH. Healthy rural communities are key to the vitality and well-being of the whole area.” *Places to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*, p. 13

“The Greenbelt Plan identifies where urbanization should not occur in order to provide permanent protection to the agricultural land base and the ecological features and functions occurring on this landscape.” *Greenbelt Plan*, p. 3

“The Greenbelt Plan identifies where urbanization should not occur in order to provide permanent protection to the agricultural land base and the ecological features and functions occurring on this landscape.” Greenbelt Plan, p. 3

communities. This document alludes to the fact that lands outside of the greenbelt are not as strictly controlled, perhaps driving growth to other rural communities that are not as well protected.

Small town municipal planning documents in the Toronto region contain a wide variety of policy objectives and priorities. The 2016 Town of Mono Official Plan notes the importance of agricultural land, recreation, and nature preservation land uses within the community. Rural areas of the town are planned for specifically, with limited non-agricultural land uses allowed. It is clear that Mono and other small towns in the Toronto region face challenges in aligning to the multitude of regional planning policies that exist. Mono addresses and demonstrates the alignment of their plan to various regional policies in specific plan sections. As well, the governance and planning hierarchy is noted, with provincial-produced regional plans taking precedence. Regional growth targets for the town are discussed, with some challenges identified including the need for municipal servicing to accommodate potential residential growth.

The Town of East Gwillimbury Official Plan (2014) reflects values of a changing small town community within the Toronto region. It is perceived that there is a growing urban influence on the town due to its proximity to the regional core. Settlement areas for intensification and growth targeting are identified, in alignment with the regional growth plan. It is perceived that coordinating with regional and provincial plans is a priority for community planning despite this resignation to urban growth, the plan also prioritizes rural and agricultural elements, and the influence of the Greenbelt Plan and other conservation plans. In identifying growth areas, the town directs future development away from rural and agricultural areas, perhaps identifying a threat to these lands from the regional growth priorities. Some land use conflicts are identified, including the challenge of accommodating existing agricultural uses adjacent to new residential growth. Infill is being encouraged in already built-up areas of the community, as sprawling large-lot developments are identified as an issue and further limited in their ability to grow.

“Current growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe Area will continue to influence development trends within the Town” Town of Mono Official Plan, p. 11

Regional planning in Edmonton is administered through the Growing Forward Capital Region Growth Plan (2009). Like other regional plans investigated, this document aims to control growth and land use within

the region. Priority growth areas are identified, where most future growth and development is to be directed. Concentrated, targeted growth is allowed in this way in certain priority areas of the region that are already built up, but some growth is also allowed in rural and small town areas. Land use planning in this document relies on principles, with little in the way of implementation mechanisms. Housing and growth are identified as issues for outlying areas of the region due to the local context of recently strong economic development. Although many policies in this document are conceptual, there is a prioritization of agricultural and natural land preservation, as well as the importance and consequences of industrial and resource land uses.

Small town municipal plans in the Edmonton region tend to anticipate and plan for future growth and development, and the consequences due to their proximity to the central city. The 2007 Calmar Municipal Development Plan sees future residential growth occurring in the region, with a concern for commercial and industrial land uses and development. Transportation and traffic concerns are expressed as part of this regional growth context in small towns. The Calmar Municipal Development Plan makes some attempts at aligning priorities with the regional growth plan. The Town of Morinville Municipal Development Plan (2012) makes further ties to the regional plan. Aspects of alignment and compliance of objectives are discussed, and the plan raises concerns about how growth is planned for regionally. Morinville identifies concerns regarding being left outside of the regionally targeted growth areas, including that there is little guidance in policy for how communities such as theirs are supposed to grow. Being left out of a growth targeted area in the regional plan has implications, and in the Morinville plan is perceived as limiting growth despite the potential and willingness for the town to grow. The town desires to achieve growth, introducing conflicting objectives with the regional plan. Maintaining small town and rural character for the town is prioritized through a vision statement within the town's plan, but there seems to be little concern for the protection of rural, natural and agricultural lands in their future growth policies.

The 2015 regional plan for Vancouver, Metro Vancouver 2040: Shaping Our Future, stipulates where and how growth is to occur throughout the region. It identifies roles for various levels of governments in addressing

"The Town will transition from the historic 'community of communities' to a connected urban area, surrounded by protected countryside. The challenge for the Town is to ensure this transition takes place in a manner that preserves the history, unique character and charm of the original villages, while ensuring residential and employment growth is properly paced to ensure concurrent delivery of the necessary infrastructure and supporting services." Town of East Gwillimbury Official Plan, p. 1

"Regardless of preparedness, a PGA [Priority Growth Area] is expected to grow to the projections and an Outside PGA is expected to stifle growth beyond the projections. This level of CRB [Capital Region Board] management on the local level is practically impossible to achieve under current planning legislation." Town of Morinville Municipal Development Plan, p. 8

“Many people choose to live in Anmore because of the community’s semi-rural character. This character expresses itself in terms of the lifestyles of the residents and a relaxed “country type” style of community that is close to nature and within minutes of urban amenities. This type of ambience and character is vitally important to residents, and must be respected as growth and development occurs over the next decade.” Village of Anmore Official Community Plan, p. 11

“A number of factors contribute to the challenges Anmore faces in providing for the type of complete community envisioned by the RGS; namely, its secluded geographic location, rural land use designation and character, relatively small size and lack of supportive infrastructure.” Village of Anmore Official Community Plan, p. 57

certain issues that face rural and small town communities, including protection from urban expansion into rural areas. Agricultural land protection is addressed and is perceived to be threatened by growth in the region, but there are goals of making farming more feasible and controlling the price of agricultural land. As a growth management plan, the document notes that growth is occurring but accommodating it is a challenge. Growth in the region can produce sprawl in outlying areas containing rural and small town communities. Industrial land protection is also mentioned as an issue, to provide areas of employment and mixed use throughout the region. This regional plan uses an urban containment boundary as a mechanism to control development and prevent it from reaching sensitive rural and small town areas. Furthermore, the plan introduces a rural land use designation. This policy aims to protect rural and small town character, but limits growth in these areas. As well, it appears that only small parts of the region are covered by this designation, with other outlying areas receiving protection from agricultural or conservation policies. The main goal of the plan seems to be to control levels of growth and development, and preventing sprawl into rural areas to save on servicing and infrastructure costs.

The Vancouver region contains a unique mix of communities, including some in outlying areas that are predominantly rural in character. Official community plans for the villages of Anmore (2014) and Belcarra (2011) were investigated. Both municipal planning documents acknowledged the context of high growth in the region. In Anmore, although the village is not designated to receive growth in the official plan, it is recognized that growth may still occur in the village because of its proximity to Vancouver. The objectives of the village’s planning document address village character, protection of the natural environment, and accommodating residential growth. The village promotes its rural character and wants to protect it, linking it to slow growth in the past. It is recognized that rural and small town character should be protected in the face of potential growth. However, fiscal priorities may override these concerns, as the village desires further growth to increase its tax base and provision of services. In this context, future service provision and land subdivision are concerns that are raised related to growth. It can be observed through this document that municipal service provision and infrastructure are financial obstacles for smaller municipalities. Anmore has created a plan

that is somewhat in conflict with the regional plan, as the predominantly residential land uses in the village will not conform to mixed-use policies at the regional level.

The Village of Belcarra also recognizes the regional growth context, and that growth will not be directed to the village. Similar to Anmore, the rural character of the village is prioritized in their municipal plan. Growth is identified as a concern for the village, which desires only slow residential growth and development. Protection of the natural environment is also a major concern in this planning document. Due to perceived spatial constraints on growth, the village wishes to remain rural in character. Because of this, many aspects of the regional growth plan that apply to the village are dismissed in the municipality's plan, representing conflicts in objectives between the levels of administration.

"Because of its small size and limited opportunities for growth, the Village has a limited ability to influence the attainment of regional objectives. Nevertheless, Belcarra's OCP does take steps that are consistent with the fundamental regional strategies."
Village of Belcarra
Official Community
Plan, p.14

Discussing and Investigating the Themes

Common issues facing rural and small town communities within city-regions have been identified across the five study regions. These issues include challenges related to urban growth and development pressures, mandated growth targets or limits in regional policy, agricultural and natural land protection, and rural character and community identity. Media sources routinely addressed impactful issues, framed within a context of the broader issue that may impact the entire region. An interview analysis yielded varied results across the regions as well. Responses from the interviewed planning professionals represented a more focused and technical view on policy issues, due to the nature of the questions but also because of their professional roles. The sample of planning documents presented a mostly uniform view of issues. Analyzing these formal policies showed that municipalities and regional entities used plans to consistently accommodate for growth and plan land use policies, with some attention given to addressing various issues that may be encountered. Patterns emerged across all sources in each region, including the prevalence of the issue of growth pressures and their effects on rural and small town areas.

Media articles in the five regions commonly addressed the issue of growth pressures on rural land resulting from urban growth within the regions. This included concerns over limiting sprawl growth and municipal service provision amongst others. Media sources usually contained reports on specific events or cases that were the result of a larger process among these challenges. Policy issues, such as mandated growth and intensity targets for communities, were frequently reported on in the media and framed in the context of specific cases or events. Media sources may be responsible for reporting on the most visible, interesting or impactful issues that face rural and small town communities within city-regions.

Interviews with planning professionals in the five regions yielded interesting insights into the work of planners and their perceptions of planning practice. Planners across the regions were most likely to raise concerns about regional policy and its effects on rural and small town areas. It was perceived that growth or intensity targets implemented through regional plans could be detrimental for rural and small town areas. Additionally, planning professionals often noted the presence and effects of conflicting and inappropriate policy between regional and municipal plans, and the challenge of aligning municipal plans to regional documents. A unique challenge observed from the interview transcript sample was the idea of power lying with the regional core community, at the expense of rural areas. This was also expressed as a perceived loss of control for small municipalities, driving conflict between communities within regions.

Planning policies across all five regions, especially regional documents, were concerned with encouraging and managing population growth, introducing policy mechanisms to control it. Through growth management policies, many regions encouraged growth or intensity in some areas, while limiting it in other, typically rural areas. Regional planning documents were also commonly concerned with managing natural land, green space and agriculture within the outlying areas of their jurisdiction. Conflicts between municipal and regional planning documents were common, with some municipal plans explicitly outlining their concerns with aspects of regional plans. Municipal plans frequently noted the challenge of adapting to growth, especially in regions seeing high rates of population increase. As well, these plans often noted the importance and concern for agricultural lands. Concern for or the prioritization of rural and small town character and identity was observed in fewer municipal plans.

Productive agricultural land forms a significant portion of the territory in the outlying areas of many Canadian city regions. It is vital to recognize the role that urban expansion within regions has on consuming agricultural land. Clark & Munroe note that increased land prices, land use conflicts, and negative planning policy can all be challenges facing agricultural land (2013). “Peri-urban areas are continually incorporated into the urban region through urbanization of formerly agricultural or other undeveloped areas located beyond suburbia. This results in competition for land between farmers and non-farmers” (Clark & Munroe, 2013, p. 16). Agricultural land protection has been made a policy priority recently, amongst governments in Canada. Caldwell & Hilts argue that growth, especially in the Toronto region, has meant a loss of productive agricultural land or has led to restrictions on farming (2005).

Planning for agricultural and natural land preservation may be inadequate in Canadian regions. Caldwell & Procter find that planners, the government and the public do not understand agriculture, and see it as threatened especially in the Toronto region (2013). The implementation of greenbelts or other forms of conservation areas may not necessarily translate into the needed agricultural protection. Policy may have unintended consequences by directing growth beyond agricultural lands into other threatened landscapes (Caldwell & Hilts, 2005). Preserving agricultural land may be desirable to regions and municipalities, but may have additional consequences such as increased land values and threatened feasibility of farming (Caldwell & Procter, 2013). Carmo views the increasing trend of urban expansion into rural areas as a physical but also socially transformative process (2010). In such circumstances, agriculture is increasingly devalued by urbanized economies. There are important linkages to be identified between agriculture and the rural way of life (Carmo, 2010). Rural and small town communities within regions may be threatened by the increased demand for agricultural land, which is viewed as threatened by an idealized image of rural life

that can be bought and sold through the larger urbanization process (Halseth, 2003).

The issues facing the rural and small town communities within the study areas seemed most pronounced in the Toronto, Edmonton and Vancouver regions. These regions were the largest by population, and had the highest growth rates. The most complex, formal and thorough regional planning administrations can be found in these three regions, producing myriad policies to support or accommodate growth, while mitigating and anticipating its negative effects. Although many of the issues in these three regions were also common in St. John's and Halifax, they appeared to be less pressing and widespread. The strong economic development context, although varied between Toronto, Edmonton, and Vancouver, may play a large role in exacerbating the challenges stemming from growth. St. John's and Halifax are both facing their own growth and resulting development pressures, but are affected to a lesser extent. In the St. John's region, both the media and interview respondents expressed concern over growth pressures in the region on suburban and small town communities. In this context, however, growth was perceived as unanticipated, leaving some communities unprepared for it. Pressures on and concern for agricultural and natural land are present in all five of the study regions, but are more pronounced in the regions with highest growth and accompanying land use pressures.

Although Canada's largest metropolitan regions are seeing population growth, this growth is uneven across the country, with population loss in rural areas. There has been continuous growth concentrated in select regions, leading to a concentration of power. There are challenges to accommodating this growth, that some regions may address through political means (Bourne & Rose, 2001). The conversion of agricultural lands in rural areas due to urban expansion drives increased dependency from rural areas on the urban cores of regions (Carmo, 2010). "We can define urbanization as a process of linkage responsible for deepening the relationship between the villagers and the city life (economically and socially speaking)" (Carmo, 2010, p. 81). With a growing trend towards city-regions, the changing forms of regional administration are viewed as responsible for the increased dependency in relationships between rural and urban areas within such regions (Goodwin, 1998).

Canadian metropolitan areas are becoming increasingly concentrated in city-regions. In this new regionalism, power is concentrated at a level above the local municipality, with a high priority placed on economic development (Hamin & Marcucci, 2008). "Typically the calls for a new regionalism are based on the increasing importance of regions in a globally competitive market, with the *raison d'être* of such regionalism being to improve the competitive position of regions in the global market" (Hamin & Marcucci, 2008, p. 468). In addition to promoting economic development, new regionalism has emerged as a movement to respond to

and manage increasingly complex local issues. However, rural areas are affected by this regionalism, with threats to traditional land uses and increasing urban sprawl into rural communities (Hamin & Marcucci, 2008). Regionalism means forming new structures and identities for built-up networks of communities, but is often viewed as a desirable end-goal that is tied to the inevitability of growth in the neoliberal economy (Hall & Stern, 2009). The role of provincial governments in promoting regionalism is unique in Canada, and that upper-tier regional administrations may lack the power to address local issues (Sancton, 2004). “Power is exercised in both the governance arrangements of formal regionalism and in the process of regionalization, albeit in very different ways” (Hall & Stern, 2009, p. 68). Rural areas are increasingly being brought into urbanized regions as people seek the unique recreational or residential uses that are present in such communities (Halseth, 2003). Urban expansion into rural areas can lead to conflicts between land owners and other stakeholders, who may possess differing values regarding ideal land uses (Spaling and Wood, 1998).

In the Toronto and Vancouver regions, many smaller municipalities face difficulty in aligning policy to regional objectives, while sources from Edmonton and St. John’s show a concern for the lack of policy direction regarding growth and regional planning overall. If effective coordination of policy is to be achieved at the regional scale, regions need to work towards the mitigation of conflicting policies, or work to address the concerns that municipalities explicitly write into their plans. These policy conflicts may hinder effective coordination and implementation of policy. Caldwell & Procter have observed conflicts between municipal and regional planning, with differing priorities across plans (2013). Some regions had an initial lack of regional and local planning to address issues facing small town and rural communities. In some amalgamated regions, such as Halifax, regional planning has lacked comprehensiveness and attention for rural and small town communities and their challenges (Heseltine, 2008). Regional growth policies may set out to protect rural areas and agricultural lands from sprawling development, but may have unintended consequences of redirecting growth to other communities at the expense of certain areas. Policy mechanisms to control growth may help and hinder simultaneously, including the use of servicing or growth boundaries (Millward & French, 2007).

There is power when organizations such as governments collaborate in planning, but it is still challenging to solve problems at the regional level with so many differing interests (Goodwin, 1998). Allen & Campsie criticize the implementation of regional planning policy in the Toronto region. Some policy lacks teeth in its implementation, with few consequences or incentives for municipalities to align their objectives to regional plans. Planning for rural areas of the Toronto region is seen as unclear in regional planning, leaving smaller communities unprepared for the prospect of future growth (Allen & Campsie, 2013). Coordination between

levels of government is viewed as lacking, due to inconsistent policies between municipalities and differential treatment. Regarding rural communities, it is argued that “The Growth Plan provides no guidance on managing growth in these communities and little information is available on their current levels of development” (Allen & Campsie, 2013, p. 27). Filion and Kramer recognize the role of neoliberalism as a barrier to correcting regional problems (2011). Although strongly implemented regional plans can overcome and solve the complex issues they set out to address, the entrenched effects of neoliberalism prevent the effective or full implementation of planning policies (Filion & Kramer, 2011). Hall & Hall identify gaps in literature in the study of regions, emphasizing the growing gap between high and low growth areas of the country, and the role that the globalized economy has played in promoting new regionalism in Canada (2008).

The consistent observation of a concern for rural and small town character throughout the regions demonstrates the universality of this concept, showing that even smaller regions with slower growth and development can have these issues. This was a challenge for rural and small town communities that was brought up frequently in media sources and in some interviews with planning professionals, yet was often not reflected in regional policy documents. Some small town municipal plans addressed this topic, but with little substance or implementable policy. Rural character or identity may be hard to define or quantify, or perhaps is addressed in other broad cultural or heritage policies. Thus, rural issues lack an understanding at the regional scale, or may be simply dismissed when they don’t affect the urban area.

Rural and small town communities are unique, and their identity and character results from vital social constructs (Carmo, 2010). Some communities have resisted regionalization movements, seeing them as threats to rural identity and character (Heseltine, 2008). Rural character may be threatened by land uses that are perceived as conflicting with current ideals, including nuisance uses introduced as part of urbanization in rural areas. “Signaling conflict can be seen as a kind of bargaining process to influence administrative decisions in order to change the distribution of rural property rights” (Mann & Jeanneaux, 2009, p. 133). Stronger planning at the regional level can better anticipate threats to rural character and identity, while municipal planning may need to better prioritize this issue (Mann & Jeanneaux, 2009).

Conclusions and Implications

Various forms of regional planning and municipal organization are being used to address emerging challenges facing some of Canada's largest metropolitan areas. Regional planning has emerged as a form of coordinating measure in Canadian city-regions to handle these issues. This has led to increased reliance of small communities on their larger counterparts within regions. However, regions may plan for their communities unequally. While regional administrations often have the power to implement solutions to rural and small town planning issues, regional policy instead complicates some of these issues. This study shows how rural and small town issues and challenges are addressed in the context of larger, urbanized regions. Planning issues brought up in media coverage and from planners' perceptions may not be fully recognized or reflected in effective planning policy.

Municipal and regional planning documents may prioritize different issues, or produce altogether conflicting policy objectives. In study regions with high rates of growth and residential pressures, issues can be found surrounding the response to growth, including greenbelt or agricultural land protection policies. Policies intended to limit or encourage growth in certain outlying areas may greatly affect the future of certain small town communities. Rural and small town character is threatened by urban encroachment, but lacks corresponding policy to resolve the issue in many cases. The emergence of urbanized city-regions as a form of regional power in Canada has introduced a variety of policy implications for the rural and small town communities contained within them, emphasizing the imperative for stronger coordination between municipalities and regions to improve the way that rural planning challenges are addressed.

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