

Executive Summary: Tower Neighbourhood Renewal in the Greater Golden Horseshoe

**An Analysis of High-Rise Apartment Tower Neighbourhoods
Developed in the Post-War Boom (1945-1984)**

Prepared by
**E.R.A. Architects,
planningAlliance, and the
Cities Centre at the University of Toronto**

for the
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Ministry of Infrastructure**

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Executive Summary

Background

The Greater Golden Horseshoe's (GGH's) pattern of urbanization is unique in North America. A major contributing factor to this urban form is the significant development of high-rise modern apartment housing that occurred in the post-war period, roughly between 1945 and 1984, though concentrated between 1960 and 1980. There are nearly 2,000 post-war Apartment Towers located throughout the region as a result of post-war planning policies that encouraged the “tower-in-the-park” housing model and higher density apartment clusters in new suburban communities.

Though unique in North America, the region's decentralized clusters of modern towers share similarities with post-war housing developments found the world over, with particular concentrations in Europe, the former Soviet Union, and parts of Asia. In many of these locations, the revitalization of aging tower clusters and their neighbourhoods has been recognized as a key strategy for achieving contemporary urban planning goals of low-carbon, prosperous, and equitable communities. With the European Union showing particular leadership in this field, post-war Apartment Tower Neighbourhoods have emerged as model low-carbon communities and centres of social and economic development, through targeted green refurbishment and integrated processes of neighbourhood renewal. Throughout this report, this process will be defined as Tower Neighbourhood Renewal, and residential buildings that are eight storeys and above, constructed between 1945 and 1984, will be referred to as Apartment Towers.

The Province of Ontario has established a policy framework to foster regional sustainability and prosperity, through the development of initiatives such as the Greenbelt, the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, The Big Move – Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan, the Poverty Reduction Strategy, and the Go Green Action Plan on Climate Change, among others. The GGH's prevalence of post-war Apartment Towers makes it uniquely suited in North America to benefit from engaging in Tower Neighbourhood Renewal strategies as a compliment to these initiatives.

The focus of this study is two-fold. The first objective is to analyze and catalogue this housing resource to better understand its current role within the GGH. The second objective is to examine the potential for Tower Neighbourhood Renewal to support the realization of provincial priorities, such as implementing the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, creating a network of regional rapid transit, conserving energy, reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) production, reducing poverty, providing affordable housing, and building a green economy.

The Greater Golden Horseshoe's (GGH's) pattern of urbanization is unique in North America, with nearly 2,000 post-war apartment towers located throughout the region.



“Tower-in-the-park” housing model typical of sites throughout the GGH

Tower Neighbourhood Renewal

In this report, the opportunities related to achieving complete and sustainable communities within Apartment Tower clusters will be referred to as Tower Neighbourhood Renewal. Described as Tower Renewal in previous documents, Tower Neighbourhood Renewal makes explicit the holistic set of strategies related to the renewal, retrofit, and regeneration of Apartment Clusters, and their intersection with the complete communities mandate of the Growth Plan, prosperity and sustainability mandates of provincial policy, as well as comprehensive sustainable planning in general.

Findings Related to Current State of Apartment Towers:

Key findings of this study related to the current state of these Apartment Towers and their neighbourhoods include the following:

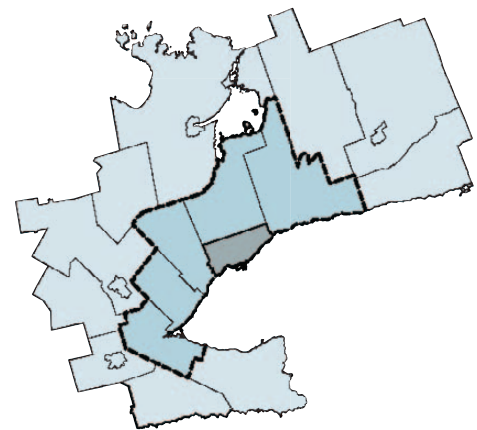
- Apartment Towers are a major component of the GGH's housing stock. There are 1,925 Apartment Towers in the GGH. Collectively these towers are home to approximately one million people.
- Apartment Towers represent one-third of the GGH's rental housing stock, and 48 per cent of the City of Toronto's rental stock.
- Apartment Towers are among the highest energy users of all housing types in the region, requiring as much as 25 per cent more energy per square metre compared to a single detached house. Similarly, they typically have low waste diversion rates of less than 12 per cent.
- Apartment Towers are very closely linked to areas of social need. Seventy-seven per cent of all Apartment Towers in the GGH are found in Census Dissemination Areas considered to have high or very high social need, while only 12 per cent of towers are found in areas considered to have low or very low social need.
- Apartment Towers can be found throughout the GGH. The majority (62 per cent) are found in Toronto, with 29 per cent found in the GTHA without Toronto and nine per cent found in the municipalities that make up the Outer Ring of the GGH (see diagram of region on this page). Over two-thirds of upper- and single-tier municipalities in the GGH have Apartment Towers as part of their housing mix.
- Apartment Towers in the GGH are generally found in clusters. In the GGH, 89 per cent of all Apartment Towers are found in clusters of two or more, and 62 per cent are found in large clusters of five or more. The largest of these Apartment Tower clusters contain more than 10,000 households.
- Apartment Towers are generally situated on large land parcels of 1 hectare or more. This is a legacy of open space ratios that were encouraged to achieve the "tower-in-the-park" configuration, with 80 to 90 per cent of the site area left as open space. The total land resource in the GGH on which Apartment Towers are situated is 2,198 hectares. More than half of apartment properties are directly adjacent to another apartment property, creating clusters of adjoined open space.
- Residents of Apartment Towers tend to rely more on transit, walking and cycling to get around than other residents of the region. Sixty-two per cent of Apartment Towers are within areas with higher than average public transit use for their respective municipalities. Fifty-eight per cent of Apartment Towers are in zones with higher than average rates of walking and cycling. Seventy per cent are located in zones with lower than average car ownership rates.

Greater Golden Horseshoe

The study area for the project is the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH). Located in Southern Ontario, the GGH is home to over eight million people, roughly 60 per cent of Ontario's population, and 25 per cent of the population of Canada.



● Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH)



--- Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA)

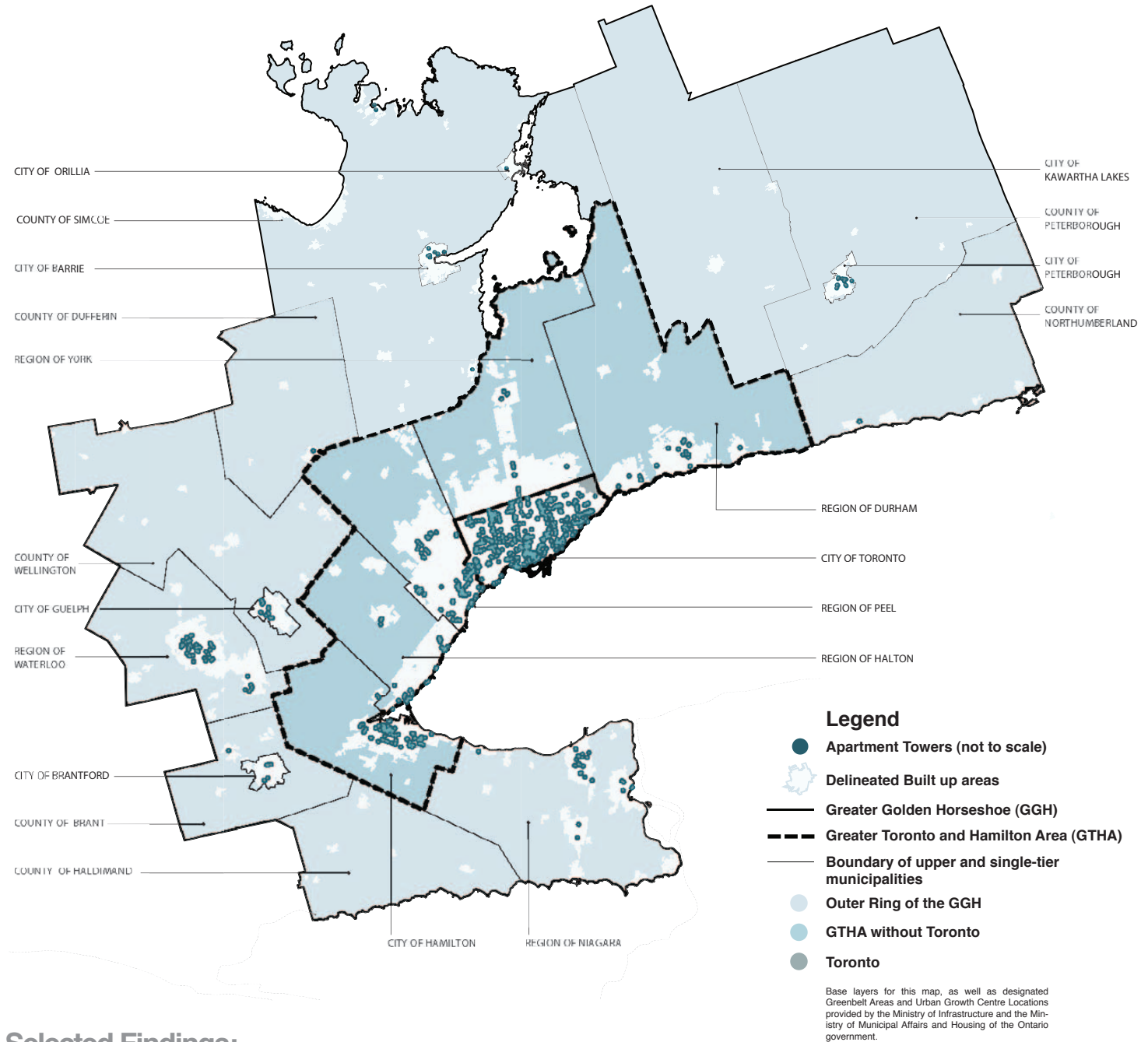
● Outer Ring of the GGH

● GTHA without Toronto

● Toronto

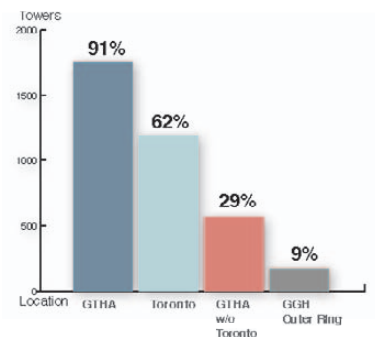
Base layers for this map, as well as designated Greenbelt Areas and Urban Growth Centre Locations provided by the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing of the Ontario government.

Apartment Towers in the Greater Golden Horseshoe 1945-1984, Eight Storeys and Above

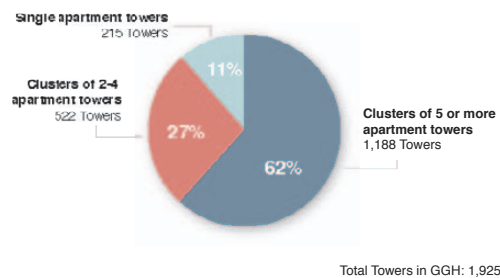


Selected Findings:

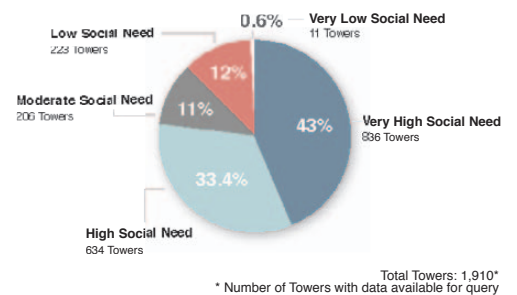
Location of GGH's 1,925 Apartment Towers



Percentage of Apartment Towers Grouped in Clusters Within 150m of One Another



Apartment Towers and Social Need



Tower Neighbourhood Renewal and Provincial Policy Objectives:

The Renewal of Apartment Tower Neighbourhoods provides a significant opportunity to support the livability and sustainability goals of Provincial policy. Found in large clusters throughout the region, tower neighbourhoods provide a large geography for action. The following is a breakdown of key Tower Neighbourhood Renewal opportunities, and how they relate to key areas of Provincial interest.

The Big Move - Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan:

Given the already strong tendencies of Apartment Tower residents to use transit, and their relative dependence on transit due to lower than average car ownership rates, Apartment Tower Neighbourhoods have significant potential to function as the ridership anchors that will enhance the effectiveness of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) transit network. Currently, only 17 per cent of Apartment Towers are within walking distance (approximately 500 metres) to regional rapid transit. The RTP's 25-year regional rapid transit network would significantly improve this situation, providing direct access to nearly 64 per cent of towers. As detailed planning proceeds for the RTP transit network, an understanding of Apartment Towers can help to guide decisions on routing and station location. Knowledge of Apartment Tower Neighbourhoods and their needs and opportunities can also inform the Transportation Master Plans and Active Transportation Master Plans that the RTP suggests be undertaken by municipalities, as well as the Transit Supportive Land Use Planning Guidelines being developed by the Ministry of Transportation. Local transit, pedestrian, and cycling infrastructure strategies as they relate to apartment clusters could also be considered.

Poverty Reduction Strategy:

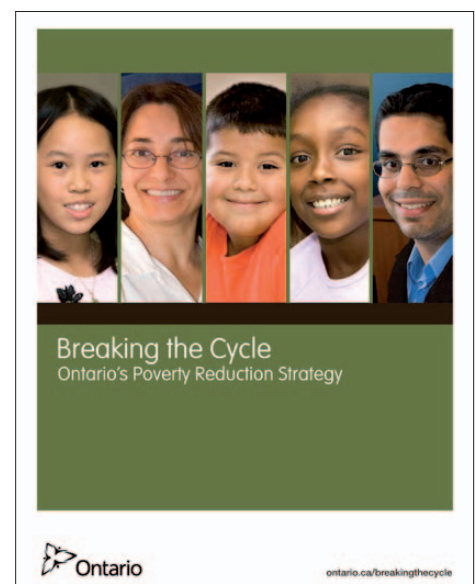
With high concentrations of New Canadians as well as youth in areas of high social need, there is significant potential to integrate the renewal of these neighbourhoods with Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy programs such as the expansion of Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Ontario Early Years Centres and After School Programs, the Community Use of Schools Program and Community Hub Program, and the Newcomer Settlement Program. Renewal can also contribute to affordable housing supply and bring new employment and social enterprising opportunities to what are currently isolated neighbourhoods.

Go Green Action Plan on Climate Change:

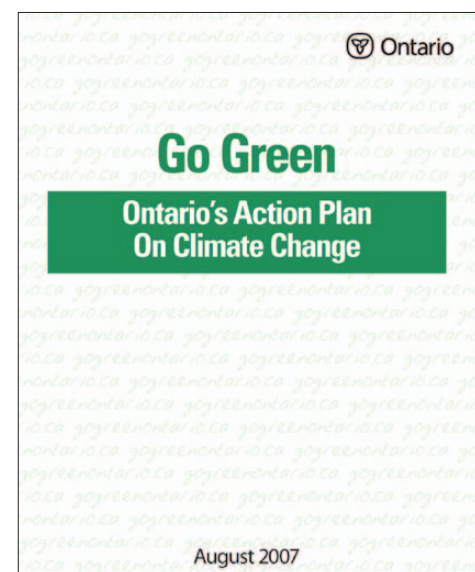
Tower Neighbourhood Renewal has the potential to be a key component of Ontario's climate change strategy, and contribute to the greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets of Go Green: Ontario's Action Plan on Climate Change. Apartment Towers are among the most energy wasteful housing types, and collectively are responsible for upwards of two megatonnes of GHGs on an annual basis for building operation alone. However, Apartment Towers are well suited for refurbishment, and in other jurisdictions they have been upgraded to become model green buildings, with GHG output reduced by more than 50 per cent. The dense clusters of Apartment Towers that are common throughout the GGH also provide opportunities for using distributed clean energy and district heating and cooling systems, as well as alternative waste management systems.



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Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe:

Tower Neighbourhood Renewal can support the creation of complete communities as envisaged by the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. These buildings often sit on large, underused parcels of land, and are frequently located in parts of municipalities that have high potential for intensification. Fourteen per cent of Apartment Towers are located within urban growth centres and 55 per cent are located near (within 250 metres) to arterial roads. Mixed-use intensification of these sites can contribute to the complete community goals of the Growth Plan, as Apartment Towers are often isolated, with relatively poor access to key community services, employment, cultural facilities and shopping areas. Intensification provides an opportunity to introduce these types of amenities, particularly in areas identified for future regional rapid transit. Undertaken with thoughtful urban design, the currently fragmented and isolated apartment clusters can become integrated, connected and complete communities.

Challenges:

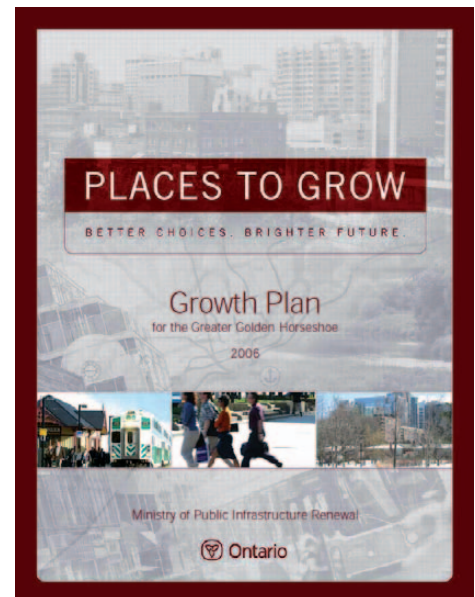
The greatest potential for Tower Neighbourhood Renewal rests in coordinated action among a number of players to address large clusters of Apartment Towers, related to the areas of policy interest discussed above. Taking advantage of these opportunities will require an integrated approach to address a number of challenges.

The GGH is unique internationally by the degree to which post-war Apartment Towers are privately owned and operated - for example, approximately 85 per cent of buildings in Toronto are in private ownership. Furthermore, ownership is fragmented, with large clusters found throughout the region typically divided among multiple owners. In Europe, renewal was often the result of initiatives undertaken by public housing companies, or large private owners, responsible for large estates. Achieving Tower Neighbourhood Renewal in the GGH will require the establishment of an investment framework attractive to market interests, as well as a means by which multiple owners can effectively coordinate renewal efforts.

A related challenge is the high degree of social need associated with the housing stock, paired with private ownership. With this pairing, the needs of at risk residents are often not met, with programs related to newcomers, youth, families, education, training, and access to daily conveniences generally beyond the scope of private owners. Addressing these acute challenges will require partnerships with public service providers, non-profit agencies and community development corporations as part of an affective process of renewal.

Financing Refurbishment:

One of the major challenges is financing physical renewal. The cost of green refurbishment of Apartment Towers is in the range of \$25,000 - \$45,000 per unit. In Europe, governments have facilitated renewal through low interest loans, loan securities and gap financing. In addition, the development of surplus land has been used to create revenue streams for renewal. The financing of renewal projects in Ontario will require a variety of approaches that target a wide range



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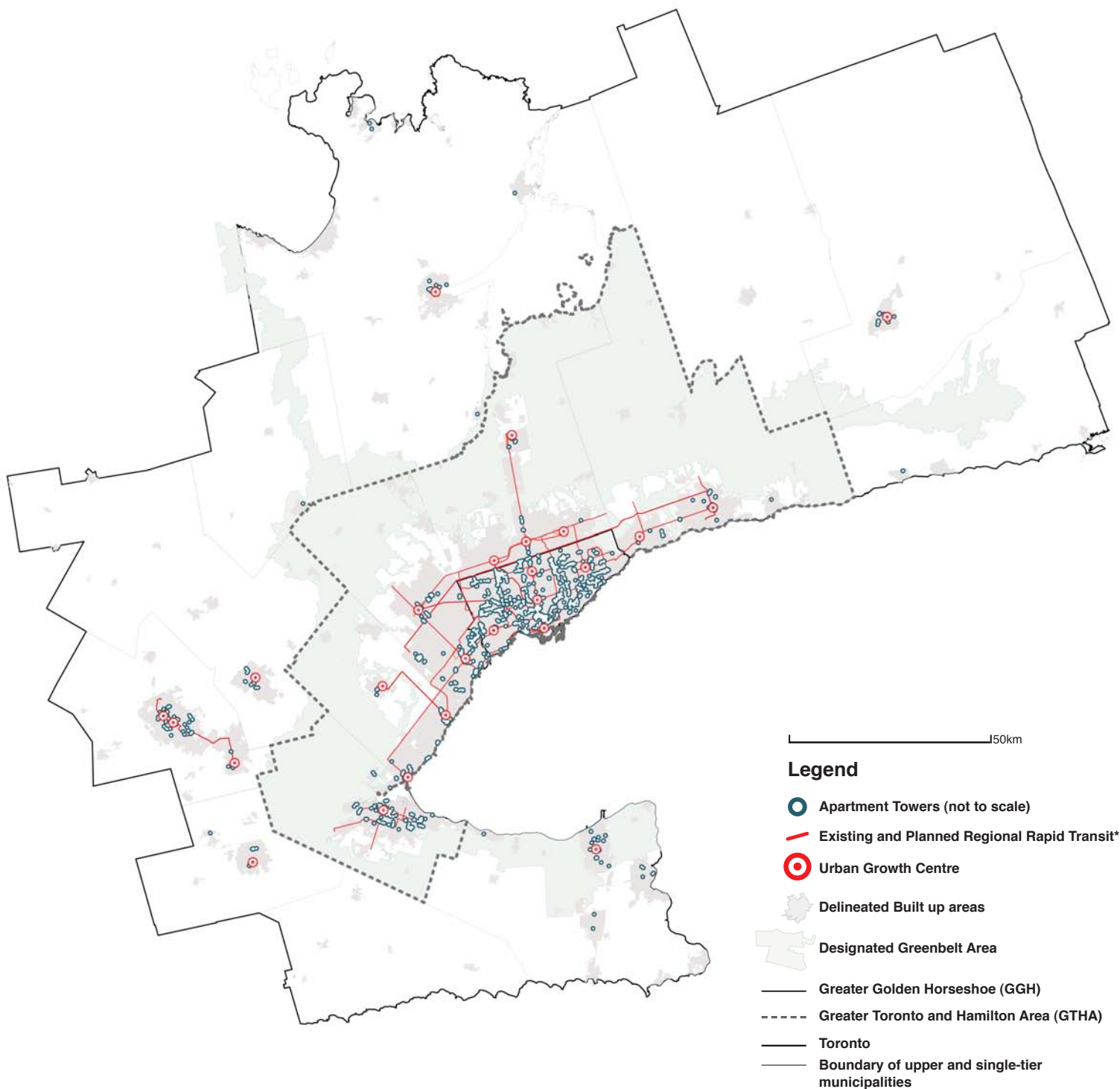
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Images

- 01) Cover of Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan, The Big Move: Transforming Transportation in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (Source: Metrolinx)
- 02) Cover of Go Green, Ontario's Action Plan on Climate Change (Source: Government of Ontario)
- 03) Cover of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy (Source: Government of Ontario)
- 04) Cover of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Source: Government of Ontario)
- 05) Current State of Apartment Neighbourhoods: Fragmented Tower Properties and Blocked Access

Greater Golden Horseshoe

Apartment Towers and Provincial Policy



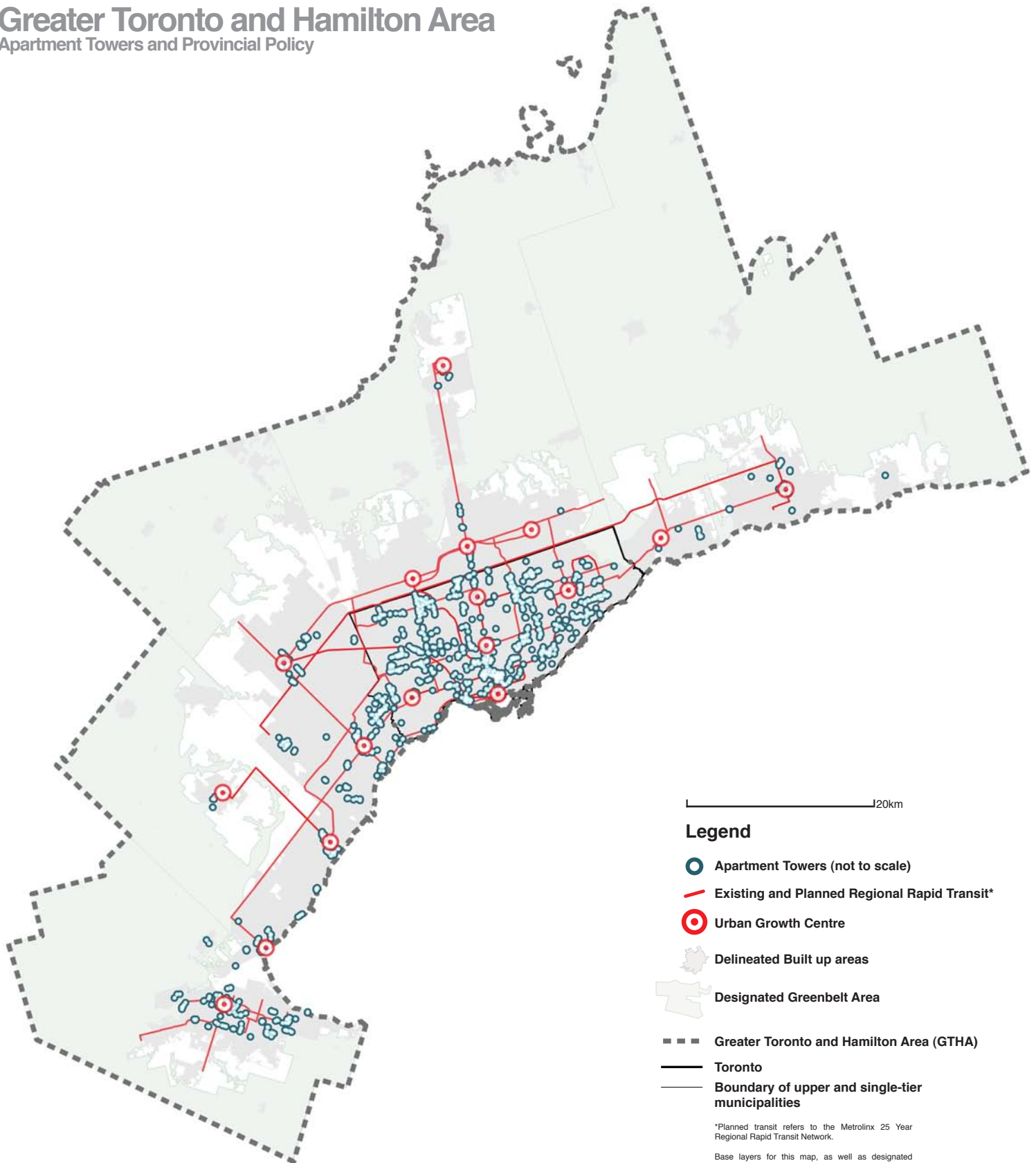
*Planned transit refers to the Metrolinx 25 Year Regional Rapid Transit Network.

Base layers for this map, as well as designated Greenbelt Areas and Urban Growth Centre Locations provided by the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing of the Ontario government.

Regional rapid transit corridors shown on this map are based on the research team's interpretation of Schedule 2 of the Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan entitled "25-Year Plan for the Regional Rapid Transit and Highway Network".
Kitchener/Waterloo Light Rail alignment provided by the Region of Waterloo (TBC).

Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area

Apartment Towers and Provincial Policy



120km

Legend

- Apartment Towers (not to scale)
- Existing and Planned Regional Rapid Transit*
- Urban Growth Centre
- Delineated Built up areas
- Designated Greenbelt Area
- Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA)
- Toronto
- Boundary of upper and single-tier municipalities

*Planned transit refers to the Metrolinx 25 Year Regional Rapid Transit Network.

Base layers for this map, as well as designated Greenbelt Areas and Urban Growth Centre Locations provided by the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing of the Ontario government.

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of owner groups. Strategies may include combinations of private lenders, utilities, pension funds and other investment funds; generating revenue streams from intensification; as well as governments guaranteeing long term loans of private lenders, providing gap financing and low-interest loans, and supporting public housing. In July 2010, the City of Toronto Council endorsed the creation of a Tower Renewal Corporation with the mandate to assist owners in financing Tower Renewal projects. The details of the program are still under development.

Planning policy framework:

The current land use planning policy framework presents challenges for achieving Tower Neighbourhood Renewal, with clusters of Apartment Towers often existing within restrictive 'single-use' zoning allowances. A supportive land use planning policy framework would need to address coordination of planning across multiple Apartment Tower properties; design guidelines for infill development; green standards for new construction within Apartment Tower Neighbourhoods; infrastructure needs and capacities; community consultation processes that shape renewal outcomes, and the long term management of Apartment Tower sites following renewal.

Ensuring equity:

Another challenge is maintaining housing equity and affordability in the face of Tower Neighbourhood Renewal. This will require methods for ensuring affordability post-renewal, minimizing tenant discomfort during the renewal process, and ensuring that displacement does not occur as a result of renewal. Addressing these challenges may include agreements with owners for rent freezes in exchange for density bonusing and renewal financing, as well as facilitating partnerships with affordable and public housing providers.

Conclusion:

For the past few years, the Government of Ontario has been pursuing a number of policy initiatives that, collectively, are intended to revitalize and improve the sustainability and livability of communities across the province. There are few locations in the province that could benefit more from the province's complete communities and carbon reduction agenda, and contribute more to their success, than the post-war Apartment Tower Neighbourhoods that have been the subject of this study.

With many Apartment Towers entering their fifth decade, this housing stock now requires significant reinvestment. A prime opportunity exists to make this reinvestment about more than just bringing individual buildings into a state-of-good-repair. Tower Neighbourhood Renewal can bring together refurbishment of individual buildings with a program for environmental, social and economic renewal of entire neighbourhoods. In so doing, it can help to implement provincial policy directions related to creating complete communities and enable a prosperous, equitable and sustainable Greater Golden Horseshoe, and Ontario as a whole.



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Images: International Renewal

01) Refurbished Apartment Tower integrated with new family housing at tower base in Amsterdam's Bijlmermeer Neighbourhood, the Netherlands

02) New commercial infill, such as fresh food markets between tower blocks in Apartment Neighbourhood in Halle Neustadt, Germany

03) Refurbished Apartment Towers with new infill housing, park, and community facilities in London's Swiss Cottage Neighbourhood, UK



