
Subject: Niagara Official Plan - Consultation Update

Report to: Planning and Economic Development Committee

Report date: Wednesday, December 9, 2020

Recommendations

1. That Report PDS 35-2019 providing an update on consultation for the Niagara Official Plan since March 2020 **BE RECEIVED** for information; and
2. That Report PDS 35-2020 **BE CIRCULATED** to the Local Area Municipalities and the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA).

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on consultation which has taken place on the Niagara Official Plan since the last update provided in March 2020.
- The consultation strategy for the Niagara Official Plan is multi-layered, and includes consultation with the public, stakeholders, local planning departments and decision-makers.
- Overall, most participants have shown an interest in several topic areas of the Official Plan and recognized the interrelationships between topic areas.
- Our engagement showed that managing growth is the key challenge and opportunity. This includes recognizing the heterogeneous communities in Niagara while accommodating the growth that is coming; create thriving complete resilient communities; assist in addressing affordable housing and aging-in-place; address our changing climate and protect our significant natural heritage and water systems.

Financial Considerations

Council approved the resources to complete the New Official Plan over a 5 year period as part of the 2017 Budget Process.

The completion of the necessary background studies and preparation of the Niagara Official Plan along with appropriate consultation will require significant staff resources.

Analysis

Public Consultation

The Planning Department had to reconsider the delivery of consultation given the COVID pandemic. However, the use of virtual consultation methods along with the ability for citizens to call staff for discussion has been successful.

Since the last consultation update, public consultation has occurred through virtual Public Information Centres (PICs) and on-line surveys.

On-line surveys are demonstrating that they reach a broader audience and gather input from a wider demographic and participation across all municipalities. Virtual PICs allow attendees to bring forward questions and discussion on specific topics of interest resulting in more detailed discussion. Together, both of these formats are attracting more participation and complementing each other.

Virtual PICs

During the months of September/October 2020, six virtual PICs were held on key topic areas of the Official Plan. The following metrics are associated with these PICs:

PICs	Attendance	Questions
Natural Heritage System Options	68	64
Water Resource System Options and Watershed Planning	55	40
Growth Management (Regional structure, land needs, growth allocations, settlement area boundary review, housing)	79	41
Employment lands, Urban Design, District & Secondary Plans	35	7
Agriculture, Aggregates and Archeological Master Plan	57	15
Transportation, Servicing, and Storm Water	38	44

PICs	Attendance	Questions
TOTAL	332	211

Sessions lasted from approximately 90 minutes to two hours. Each session started with a staff and/or consultant presentation of 30-60 minutes followed by questions and answers. Participants could ask questions by typing and submitting questions or by calling-in. A recording of each virtual PIC, a copy of the presentation, and a table with input received in comment form and answers to questions that could not be provided during the sessions due to time constraints or need for further analysis are also posted on the Niagara Official Plan webpage.

A summary of the input received at the virtual public webinars is provided in two formats. The first is an outline of key themes raised through questions/comments for each session attached as **Appendix “1”**. The second is the detailed questions and comments (as submitted) received for each of the six sessions attached as **Appendix “2”**.

We highlight the following overall themes:

- Many participants are interested in several topic areas of the Niagara Official Plan recognizing the interrelationships between topic areas.
- There is some understanding that growth management, infrastructure and the natural environment cannot be considered in isolation of each other. This is essential to understanding the Niagara Official Plan, and we will need to strengthen this message moving forward.
- The role of regional versus local planning for various policy sections will need to be clarified moving forward.
- Managing growth properly is the key to good planning for all the interrelated topics of the Niagara Official Plan.
- A comprehensive consultation report will be provided in the next several months for the Natural Environment Work Program that analyses the input received through the virtual PICs along with all the other input received through the 2nd Point of Engagement in greater detail.

Online Surveys

Two online surveys, an Employment Policy Survey and Growth Management Survey have been conducted. Surveys were available online for approximately 1 month and were promoted through social media and stakeholder e-mailing to gather input.

Employment Policy Survey

There were 97 respondents to the Employment Policy Survey with participation largely reflective of the stakeholders consulted through the Region's Employment Strategy work. All municipalities were represented in terms of responses relative to location of residence and work.

Key themes extracted from the survey are provided in **Appendix "3"**. Many of these themes extend beyond the scope of the land use policy parameters of the Niagara Official Plan. However survey results will be shared with the Region's Economic Development and Transportation Divisions. The land use related themes are as follows and will be addressed by the employment program for the Official Plan:

- Niagara should prioritize municipal servicing and infrastructure for employment uses, including proactively providing servicing to vacant employment sites to make them more marketable.
- Employment development and redevelopment should be integrated within existing communities wherever possible and should blend with community character.
- Employment uses should be located with similar employment uses.
- Niagara's commuters have limited transportation options to get to work and would consider using an alternative means of travel, other than private vehicle, to get to work if it were reasonable and accessible.
- Niagara should encourage employers to promote transportation demand management practices and reduce surface parking spaces where possible.
- Employer needs, such as physical assets and building space, may shift as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Jobs that have transitioned to work-from-home jobs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic may remain as such after the pandemic.

Growth Management Survey

The recent Amendment 1 to the Growth Plan resulted in the need for further feedback on key areas of the Growth Management Program from members of the public, local area municipalities, public agencies, and key stakeholders. One component of this was gathering input through the Growth Management Survey. A total of 217 participants responded to the survey and a total of 102 comments were received. Respondents were asked to rank key growth management and select preferred options between various growth management scenarios.

This item is covered in greater detail in a separate Report PDS 33-2020 (and the accompanying presentation) planned for December 9, 2020 Planning and Economic Development Committee.

Future Surveys

There will be other surveys conducted on major topic areas of the Official Plan. Regional Planning Staff have recently released a survey seeking feedback on the goals and objectives of the Niagara Watershed Plan project which is also being prepared in support of the Niagara Official Plan.

Report PDS 9-2020 was provided to Planning Committee in March 2020. This report summarized public consultation to date but also provided preliminary statements and key policy directives to acquire future public input on. Public input via a survey will be gathered on these statements in November/December 2020 so that Council can consider them as guidance in the finalization of key policy directives for the Niagara Official Plan.

Planning Advisory Committee

Planning staff gather input from an 8 member Planning Advisory Committee comprised of citizens with professional expertise in business, agriculture, environment, engineering and planning. The Committee last met virtually in September 2020 for updates and discussion on growth management, natural environment heritage and water system options as well as the then-planned PICs.

Stakeholder Engagement

Area Planners

Throughout September and early October, Regional Planning Staff met, individually, with all 12 local Planning Directors and Planning Staff to discuss growth management matters relating to land needs assessment and methodology, growth allocations, employment areas, settlement area boundary review and regional structure. These 12 one-on-one meetings also included an update and discussion on the Natural Environment Work Program including the identification and evaluation of natural heritage and water system options.

Stakeholder Groups

During the time that the virtual PICs were being undertaken, Regional staff were also undertaking the 2nd Point of Engagement for the Natural Environment Work Program which included: the PICs; virtual stakeholder workshops with the development, agricultural and environmental stakeholders; meetings with local planning staff; presentations to Provincial Planning Staff; presentation to the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC); presentation to the Agricultural Planning and Action Committee; presentation to the NPCA Board , PAC, and Staff; and Presentations to Niagara Escarpment Commission and Niagara Parks Commission staff. This results of this 2nd Point of Engagement will be presented to Council in January under a separate cover.

Regional planning staff have also discussed the growth management and natural environment work programs with the Niagara Homebuilders' group.

There was a presentation on the Niagara Official Plan and the natural heritage and water system options to Team Niagara representing the Economic Development Officers in the Region in November 2020.

Indigenous Consultation

Planning staff have twice met with Indigenous groups on the Niagara Official Plan. A sharing portal has been established to share background information on the Niagara Official Plan. Consultation with Indigenous Groups will continue on the expressed topic areas of interest.

Decision Making Bodies

In the first quarter of 2021, Regional Planning staff plan to organise online workshops with Regional Councillors and Planning Directors for each municipality to discuss growth management, natural environment and other areas of interest. This will provide an opportunity for decision-makers to have detailed discussion with staff on these matters.

To date, Planning staff have twice made presentations to local Councils on the Niagara Official Plan. In the second half of 2021, there will be a third round of presentations to local Councils on the Niagara Official Plan on Official Plan policy directions. Local municipalities are encouraged to inform their citizens to listen in on the presentations.

Official Plan Moving Forward

An Official Plan progress report is scheduled for January 2021. This report will outline how different sections of the Official Plan will be reported on going forward given the interrelationships of the sections of the Plan.

A key theme is the interrelated nature of the sections of the Regional Official Plan and managing growth. Managing growth is the challenge and opportunity to: recognize the heterogeneous communities in Niagara while accommodating the growth that is coming; create thriving complete resilient communities; assist in addressing affordable housing and aging in place; and protect our significant natural heritage and water systems.

Alternatives Reviewed

There are many approaches to consultation. The consultation strategy for the Niagara Official Plan is being done virtually because of the pandemic and is incorporating: topic specific, public sessions and public surveys; virtual workshops with stakeholders groups; Indigenous consultation; and virtual workshops with local and regional council members. Consultation has been and will continue to be a fluid process moving into the next stage of policy formulation stage.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Consultation on the Niagara Official Plan is an important process in supporting Council's priority as a Sustainable Engaging Government. The Plan will address Council's other priorities, being: Supporting Businesses and Economic Growth; Healthy and Vibrant Community; and Responsible Growth and Infrastructure Planning.

Other Pertinent Reports

PDS 1-2020 New Niagara Official Plan-Public Consultation Summary
PDS 33-2019 Growth Management Program Update for New Official Plan
PDS 9-2019 New Official Plan Consultation Timeline Framework
CWCD 421-2019 New Niagara Official Plan Updates

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Appendices

Appendix 1	Key Themes from Virtual PICs
Appendix 2	Submitted PIC Questions and Comments
Appendix 3	Employment Policy Survey Themes