
Subject: Natural Environment Work Program – 2nd Point of Engagement

Report to: Planning and Economic Development Committee

Report date: Wednesday, February 17, 2021

Recommendations

1. That Report PDS 1-2021 **BE RECEIVED** for information; and
2. That Report PDS 1-2021 **BE CIRCULATED** to the Local Area Municipalities and the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA)

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to present a summary of the 2nd Point of Engagement for the Natural Environment Work Program, including input received, which has recently been completed in support of the new Niagara Official Plan.
- A decision on the final preferred option for the Natural Heritage System (NHS) and Water Resource System (WRS) is not being requested at this time. That will be requested from Committee and Council as part of the Joint Consolidated Official Plan Report to be considered in April 2021.
- Based on the input received – additional analysis of each of the NHS and WRS options in each of the urban areas of the Region is currently being undertaken by Staff with the support of the Consultant team. The results of this additional analysis will be used to inform the decision on the final preferred options.
- The full report entitled “*Natural Environment Work Program: Consultation Summary Report – 2nd Point of Engagement*” prepared by the Consultant team is attached to this report as Appendix 1.

Financial Considerations

The ongoing costs associated with the current Natural Environment Work Program are accommodated within the Council approved project budget for the Niagara Official Plan.

Analysis

The 2nd Point of Engagement is Phase 5 of the Natural Environment Work Program - Consultation on Options for the Natural Systems. The following is an overview of the activities undertaken and a summary of the input received.

List of Consultation Activities Conducted

The following activities were undertaken as part of the 2nd Point of Engagement:

Date	Activity
July 15, 2020	Presentation to Planning and Economic Development Committee (PEDC) (PDS 26-2020)
August 28, 2020	Introduction Presentation to Area Planners
September 11, 2020	Meeting with Port Colborne Planning Staff
September 14, 2020	Meeting with Niagara Falls Planning Staff
September 15, 2020	Meeting with St. Catharines Planning Staff
September 16, 2020	Presentation to Provincial Planning Staff (MMAH, MNRF, & MECP)
September 16, 2020	Presentation to Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) Staff
September 16, 2020	Presentation to Planning Advisory Committee (PAC)
September 17, 2020	Presentation to Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) Board
September 18, 2020	Meeting with Lincoln Planning Staff
September 18, 2020	Stakeholder Workshop – Development Community & Planning and Ecological Consultants
September 21, 2020	Meeting with Wainfleet Planning Staff
September 21, 2020	Meeting with Fort Erie Planning Staff
September 21, 2020	Stakeholder Workshop – Agricultural Community

Date	Activity
September 22, 2020	Meeting with West Lincoln Planning Staff
September 22, 2020	Stakeholder Workshop – Environmental Stakeholder Groups
September 23, 2020	Meeting with Grimsby Planning Staff
September 23, 2020	Virtual Public Information Centre 1 (Natural Heritage System)
September 24, 2020	Presentation to NPCA Public Advisory Committee
September 24, 2020	Virtual Public Information Centre 2 (Water Resource System and Watershed Planning)
September 25, 2020	Meeting with Pelham Planning Staff
September 25, 2020	Presentation to the Agricultural Policy and Action Committee (APAC)
September 28, 2020	Meeting with Welland Planning Staff
September 29, 2020	Presentation to NPCA Staff
September 29, 2020	Presentation to Niagara Parks Commission (NPC) Staff
September 29, 2020	Meeting with Thorold Planning Staff
September 30, 2020	Participate in Trout's Unlimited 12 Mile Creek Subwatershed Study Meeting
October 1, 2020	Meeting with Niagara-on-the-Lake Planning Staff
November 19, 2020	Presentation to Team Niagara
December 11, 2020	Meeting with Mississauga of the Credit First Nation Staff

In addition to formal planned activities – numerous other submission were made by members of the pubic and other stakeholders through e-mail, the Region's website, and delegations and submissions to Committee and Council. Several formal letters were also received from industry groups in the Region. A copy of all submissions and other correspondence received is included as part of the attached Consultation Summary Report.

Summary of What We Heard

Through the 2nd Point of Engagement there were a range of opinions expressed and comments made related to the options for the NHS and WRS to be implemented as part of the new Niagara Official Plan.

It is clear that there is no consensus on which option best meets the needs of all stakeholders in the Region over the long-term. There are differing land use planning priorities among the range of stakeholders engaged and consulted. There was a general understanding amongst most participants on the interconnectedness of policy sections of the new Official Plan and that natural environment protection plays an important role in outlining where growth can and cannot occur.

What we heard can be briefly summarized as follows. For complete details, please see the attached Consultation Summary Report.

Local Planning Departments:

- No consensus on what is the preferred option in Niagara. Range of opinions and input received is reflective of the diversity of communities and priorities across Niagara.
- Generally speaking, prefer an approach that recognizes the inherent balance between a range of land uses.
- Request that additional analysis of options be undertaken in urban areas to inform decision-making on preferred option.

Agricultural Community:

- Prefer an option that reflects the primacy of the agricultural system over the natural heritage and water resource systems.
- Request that agricultural drainage and irrigation systems be excluded from the natural heritage and water resource systems.

Development Community:

- Concerns expressed with options that go beyond minimum provincial standards, including decreasing housing affordability in the Region and reducing the amount of developable land within urban areas.

- Reinforced the need for flexibility, site specific analysis, and local decision-making.
- Suggestion for additional analysis in urban areas to inform decision-making on preferred option.

Environmental Stakeholder Groups:

- Prefer an approach which prioritizes natural heritage and environmental protection in the Region.
- Prefer an approach where natural environment planning in the Region is primarily a science-based exercise.

Public:

- A range of comments received, but generally speaking, prefer an approach with the highest number of optional features and areas to be included in the NHS and WRS.
- Request for goals and objectives to be included as part of the final NHS and WRS.
- Biodiversity loss and climate change were identified as highly important issues.

Key Themes and Discussion

The attached Consultation Summary Report prepared by the Consultant team identifies six key themes that emerged through the 2nd Point of Engagement. Three of the themes are related to the identification of the preferred option for the NHS and WRS and three of the themes are more generally related to the overall Natural Environment Work Program. These themes are summarized in the tables below.

To Inform the Identification of the Preferred NHS and WRS Option

Key Theme:	Discussion and Implications:
1. Balanced Land use Planning: Protection of the Natural Environment and Opportunities for Growth	• A range of opinions and comments were received – from increased environmental protection to concerns regarding the ability to accommodate growth, and affordability in the Region. • The range of opinions and comments speak to the need for a natural environment system

Key Theme:	Discussion and Implications:
	that goes beyond the minimum provincial standard, with a policy framework that allows for growth and development. • A shift in mindset and approach to natural environment planning that makes both the protection of the natural environment and potential for growth simultaneously achievable is required – the goal is for a balanced approach to land use planning.
2. Recognize and Protect Agricultural Uses	• Exemptions for a full range of agricultural uses should be clearly articulated in policy, including those policies and exemptions already provided through the PPS and Provincial Plans. • Additional consideration is required regarding how watercourses that are also agricultural infrastructure should be recognized in the NHS and WRS.
3. Informed by Science and Guided by Goals and Objectives with Numerical Targets	• Numerous comments were received reinforcing the need for goals, objectives, and numerical targets to be part of the Region's natural systems. • Goals, objectives, and targets will be included as part of the NHS and WRS and will be developed to be specific, measurable, achievable, and informed by science to the extent possible.

To Inform the Overall Natural Environment Work Program

Key Theme:	Implication:
1. Accurate and Comprehensive Mapping of the Natural Environment Systems	• Mapping needs to be consistent with provincial requirements, be easily available and user-friendly, and be updated on a regular basis.

Key Theme:	Implication:
	• Features that are not mapped, but where some data exists, should be used as internal screening tools, as part of pre-consultation, and for review of studies. • Policies need to allow for site-specific studies to refine mapping, through studies approved by the Region.
2. Clear, Consistent Policies and Guidance for Implementation	• Need to ensure consistency with the policies of other agencies to the extent possible. • To support implementation, clear definitions, criteria, and guidance documents (e.g. updated EIS Guidelines, WRS Guidelines, etc.) will be required. • If included as part of the natural environment systems, there will be a need to provide more clarity on how linkages and buffers will be identified, refined, and mapped through site-specific studies.
3. Build Trust Through Continued Engagement, Collaboration and Education	• The public and other stakeholders have been actively engaged with the Natural Environment Work Program. • Compared with other municipalities, the consultation and engagement undertaken as part of the Natural Environment Work Program is extensive and exceeds typical consultation undertaken as part of municipal natural environment planning. • Niagara should continue with this enhanced level of consultation and engagement.

Next Steps

As the 2nd Point of Engagement was being completed it became clear that Council and other stakeholders were seeking additional details on each of the options to assist with the decision-making process.

To satisfy this request, as first reported in CWCD 314-2020 (November 20, 2020), Region staff have engaged our Consultant team to assist in completing additional analysis on each of the options for the NHS and WRS in the urban areas of the Region.

This additional work will include establishing a preliminary methodology and criteria for each feature-type and providing detailed statistics and comparison of each option. The comparison will be completed on both a quantitative and qualitative basis. To accompany these detailed statistics, our Consultant team will also be preparing preliminary information on the policy intent of each option on a feature by feature basis.

This additional analysis has begun and will be presented to Committee and Council in April 2021 (as part of the Joint Consolidated Official Plan Report) to assist with the selection of the preferred NHS and WRS options.

Alternatives Reviewed

No alternatives have been considered.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

This report is being brought forward as part of the ongoing reporting on the Niagara Official Plan. The Natural Environment Work Program aligns with Objective 3.2 Environmental Sustainability and Stewardship:

A holistic and flexible approach to environmental stewardship and consideration of the natural environment, such as in infrastructure, planning and development, aligned with a renewed Official Plan.

Other Pertinent Reports

- PDS 40-2016 Regional Official Plan Update
- PDS 41-2017 New Official Plan Structure and Framework
- PDS 3-2018 New Official Plan Update
- PDS 6-2018 Natural Environment Project Initiation Report
- PDS 18-2018 Natural Environment – Project Framework
- PDS 9-2019 New Official Plan Consultation Timeline Framework
- PDS 10-2019 Update on Natural Environment Work Program – New Regional Official Plan

- CWCD 122-2019 Agricultural and Environmental Groups – Draft Stakeholder Lists
- CWCD 150-2019 Update on Official Plan Consultations – Spring 2019
- CWCD 179-2019 Notice of Public Information Centres – Natural Environment Work Program, New Regional Official Plan
- CWCD 271-2019 Update on Consultation for New Official Plan
- PDS 32-2019 Natural Environment Work Program – Phases 2 & 3: Mapping and Watershed Planning Discussion Papers and Comprehensive Background Study
- PDS 1-2020 New Niagara Official Plan – Public Consultation Summary
- PDS 3-2020 Ecological Land Classification Mapping Update
- PDS 9-2020 Niagara Official Plan – Consultation Details and Revised Framework
- CWCD 153-2020 Natural Environment Work Program Update – New Niagara Official Plan
- PDS 26-2020 Natural Environment Work Program – Phase 4: Identification and Evaluation of Options
- CWCD 314-2020 Update Natural Environment Work Program
- PDS 35-2020 Niagara Official Plan Consultation Update
- PDS 4-2021 Niagara Official Plan – Steps and Direction Moving Forward

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Appendices

Appendix 1:	Consultation Summary Report - 2nd POE
Appendix A:	Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee Presentation
Appendix B:	Presentation to Local Planning Staff
Appendix C:	Virtual Stakeholder Workshops
Appendix D:	Virtual Public Information Centres
Appendix E:	Additional Feedback
Appendix F:	Planning Advisory Committee Presentation
Appendix G:	Agricultural Policy and Action Committee Presentation
Appendix H:	Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority Consultation
Appendix I:	Provincial Planning Staff
Appendix J:	Niagara Escarpment Commission Staff Consultation
Appendix K:	Niagara Parks Commission Staff Consultation