



NEW NIAGARA OFFICIAL PLAN

Natural Environment Work Program: Consultation Summary Report – 2nd Point of Engagement

Niagara Region
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SUSTAINABLE REGION



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Executive Summary

Introduction

Niagara Region is developing a new Niagara Official Plan (N.O.P.) – through a process known as a “municipal comprehensive review”. As part of Niagara’s land use planning that is intended to responsibly manage land and resources throughout the Region, the N.O.P. will be a long-range policy planning document to shape Niagara’s physical, economic, and social development.

Natural Environment planning is undertaken in consideration of the broader land use planning needs of the Region, and includes natural heritage, water resources, and watershed planning is an important part of the process. As part of the new N.O.P., natural environment mapping and policies are being developed as part of natural environment planning for the new N.O.P. – this work is being completed as part of the Natural Environment Work Program, which commenced in 2018.

An important component of the Natural Environment Work Program is to engage with public agency stakeholders, interested groups/stakeholders, Indigenous groups and the public about natural environment matters in the region to better inform the development of options for the natural environment system(s) and policies. The purpose of this 2nd Point of Engagement was to inform the public and stakeholders on the options for the Natural Heritage System (N.H.S.) and Water Resource System (W.R.S.) through conceptual mapping and policy framework that was completed as part of Technical Report #2: Identification and Evaluation of Options for Regional Natural Environment Systems (s) (North-South Environmental Inc. et. al., 2020) and to seek input towards the evaluation of the options.

The purpose of this document is to summarize the results of the 2nd Point of Engagement, identify key themes and related implications, and inform the identification of preferred options for the N.H.S. and W.R.S that will be carried forward into the next steps in the work program.

Overview of the Consultation Process

The 2nd Point of Engagement has been document in this Consultation Summary Report, which summarizes the second of three points of engagement that will take place over the course of the work program. Forms of engagement included presentations, virtual workshops and virtual public information sessions. Stakeholder and community engagement included the following:

- Planning and Economic Development Committee Presentation
- Meetings with Local Planning Staff
- Stakeholder Workshops

- Virtual Public Information Centres (P.I.C.s)
- Planning Advisory Committee (P.A.C.) Presentation
- Agricultural Policy and Action Committee (A.P.A.C.) Presentation
- NPCA (Board, Staff, and Planning Advisory Committee) Presentations
- Provincial Planning Staff Presentation
- Niagara Escarpment Commission (N.E.C.) Presentation
- Niagara Parks Commission (N.P.C.) Presentation
- Team Niagara Presentation
- Ongoing Engagement with Indigenous Groups

Key Themes

Through the consultation process three key themes emerged related to the identification of preferred options for the natural environment systems, and three key themes related more generally to the Natural Environment Work Program. The following provides a summary of the key themes, in no particular order, and the implications for consideration by the Region and consultant team when developing the natural environment policies and options for mapping the natural environment system.

Key Themes to Inform the Identification of Preferred Options

1. Balanced Land Use Planning: Protection of the Natural Environment and Opportunities for Growth

There is no consensus on what the N.H.S. and W.R.S. in the Region should look like. There were a wide range of opinions expressed related to the identification of a preferred option, from a comprehensive and well-connected enhanced system, to a more basic system that minimizes constraints to development within settlement areas and allows targets set by the Province for growth to be achieved within settlement areas to the extent possible. When taken together, these opinions speak to the need for a natural environment system that goes beyond the minimum provincial standard to identify and implement a comprehensive N.H.S. and W.R.S., with a policy framework that limits restrictions on development and growth in settlement areas.

2. Recognize and Protect Agricultural Uses

Agriculture is an important part of the Region's land base, economy, and historical fabric that must be recognized and protected as part of the policy framework for the protection of the N.H.S. and W.R.S. Policies should be consistent with Provincial plans that provide permissions and exemptions for certain agricultural uses (existing and proposed), as well as be clear on other prohibitions and permissions.

3. Informed by Science and Guided by Goals and Objectives with Numerical Targets

The identification of the details of the preferred options should be informed by goals and objectives with numerical targets, based on an analysis of statistics on the current natural cover, areal extent of the natural environment system, and impacts to the

amount of developable area. The preferred option should be designed to meet goals, objectives and measurable/numerical targets that will ultimately inform the development of policies and guide future interpretation and implementation of policies.

Key Themes to Inform the Natural Environment Work Program

1. Accurate and Comprehensive Mapping of the Natural Environment Systems

Mapping is intended to support the interpretation and implementation of policies; therefore, it is foundational to facilitating wise and informed decision-making. Mapping accuracy and completeness is therefore considered important to support the interpretation and application of N.H.S. and W.R.S. policies. Clear mapping also provides important information to the public and landowners related to natural environment resources in the Region. Mapping should be current, accurate, easily available and updated on a regular basis to reflect notable updates in datasets. Policies should recognize that mapping is inherently imperfect by allowing refinements to be made, through approved site-specific studies, without the need for an Official Plan Amendment.

2. Clear, Consistent Policies and Guidance for Implementation

Policies should be clear and recognize policies and regulations of other agencies for the same features to ensure either consistency or to avoid conflicting direction. There is a need to provide more clarity on how linkages and supporting features will be identified, refined, and mapped through site-specific studies. Guidelines will be required for the identification of these features and areas.

3. Build Trust Through Continued Engagement, Collaboration and Education

There have been a range of expectations of what the natural environment policies should be or should emphasize which differ considerably among stakeholder groups — from calls for more flexibility and fewer restrictions, to much greater environmental protection. In addition, members of the community have expressed a desire to have ongoing opportunities to provide meaningful input to the development of the natural environment systems and policy. The Region has implemented a comprehensive consultation and engagement plan as part of the Natural Environment Work Program that will continue through the development of details for mapping and policies of the preferred option for the N.H.S. and W.R.S.

Direction for the Selection of Preferred Options

The feedback received through the 2nd Point of Engagement included a wide range of opinions and preferences related to the identification of the N.H.S. and W.R.S. The opinions ranged from a desire to maintain flexibility and minimize additional restrictions on development (N.H.S. Option 1 or 2), to calls for a systems-based approach to identify a connected and enhanced N.H.S. with much greater environmental protection (N.H.S. Option 3C). A consensus will not be reached on a preferred option that meets the expectations of the public and stakeholders to both prioritize protection for the natural environment, and growth and development.

A balanced approach to land use planning will be necessary to address the wide range of interests including the strong desire for protection of the natural environment, the requirement for growth and development, and to recognize the primacy of the agricultural system. In order to achieve this balanced approach, the policy framework for the natural environment system should:

- a) ensure strong protection of significant features and areas within the N.H.S. and W.R.S., as informed and supported by science-based goals and objectives with measurable and achievable targets;
- b) recognize Provincial requirements for growth and development by including permissions and exemptions, where appropriate, that still achieves the goals and objectives for the N.H.S. and W.R.S.; and
- c) recognize the primacy of agriculture and ensure consistent policies with Provincial plans that include exemptions and permissions related to existing and proposed uses and normal farming practices.

Based on the options developed in Technical Report #2 that were presented to the public and stakeholders as part of the 2nd Point of Engagement and subsequent comments on the options, a N.H.S. and a W.R.S. that adequately protects significant natural features while providing flexibility for development should be carried forward as the preferred option. The selection of the preferred option should also be informed by more details about the options, particularly within urban areas, including statistics of areal cover of each option, and the policy intent of each option in order to better compare and contrast the options. Following a review of this more detailed information, it is possible that a blend of N.H.S. Options 3B and 3C, and W.R.S. Option 2A may achieve a natural environment system that both protects significant natural features and provides flexibility for development.

Next Steps

The input received through the 2nd Point of Engagement has provided direction to the Region and consultant team that will inform the development of a preferred option for the N.H.S. and W.R.S. It is clear through the consultation and feedback received that there is no consensus on a preferred option for the natural environment systems. The framework for the identification of a N.H.S. and W.R.S. and the related policies identified in Technical Report #2 will need to be modified to reflect the direction provided in this Consultation Summary Report. Furthermore, there have been requests for additional details related to the options that can better inform decisions on a preferred option for the N.H.S. and W.R.S. As part of providing an update to Regional Council, Region staff had prepared a memorandum on November 20, 2020 (CWCD 314-2020) noting that as part of addressing the request to provide more details on the options to assist with identifying a preferred option, the consultant team would undertake additional analysis on each of the options for the N.H.S. and W.R.S. within urban areas. This additional work will include establishing a preliminary methodology and criteria for each feature-type of the N.H.S. and W.R.S. and providing detailed statistics and comparison of each option. To accompany these detailed statistics, the policy intent of

each option will also be explored in more detail to better compare and contrast the options. Following this additional analysis, a preferred option for the N.H.S. and W.R.S. mapping and policy framework will then be presented to Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee to seek their endorsement to move forward with the Natural Environment Work Program.

Following Council's endorsement of the preferred option for the natural environment systems, the detailed design of the preferred options will be developed through Phase 6 and identified in Technical Report #3, along with more detailed definitions and criteria and recommendations for the policies for the natural environment. Following the development of this third technical paper, the Region will commence with the detailed mapping of the systems and the policy development process in Phase 7; this will ultimately be followed by the 3rd Point of Engagement in Phase 8 of the Natural Environment Work Program.

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1.0 Introduction

Niagara Region is developing a new Niagara Official Plan (N.O.P.) – through a process known as a “municipal comprehensive review”. The N.O.P. will be a long-range policy planning document to shape Niagara’s physical, economic, and social development.

Natural Environment planning, which includes natural heritage, water resources, and watershed planning, is an important part of the process. As part of the new N.O.P., natural environment mapping and policies will be developed to reflect the current vision, goals, and objectives for Niagara Region. A key element of the work to develop the new NOP will be policies and mapping that incorporate Provincial requirements on natural environment planning. Niagara Region has retained a consultant team, led by North-South Environmental Inc, with Meridian Planning Consulting Inc., Ecosystem Recovering Inc., and GLPi, to support the Region in undertaking the Natural Environment Work Program.

The Natural Environment Work Program commenced in 2018 and includes the following phases:

- Phase 2 - Mapping and Watershed Planning Discussion Papers and Comprehensive Background Study [complete]
- Phase 3 - 1st Point of Engagement: Inform on Background Study [complete]
- Phase 4 - Identification and Evaluation of Options for Regional Natural Environment System(s) [complete]
- Phase 5 - 2nd Point of Engagement: Consultation on Options for the Natural Systems [currently underway]
- Phase 6 - The Regional Natural Environment System and Considerations for Implementation
- Phase 7 - Develop Draft Official Plan Policies and Finalize Mapping
- Phase 8 - 3rd Point of Engagement: Draft Official Plan Policies and Schedules

An important component of the work program is to engage with public agency stakeholders, interested groups/stakeholders, Indigenous groups and the public. The purpose of this 2nd Point of Engagement was to inform the public and stakeholders on Technical Report #2, which presented conceptual options for the natural environment systems and policy framework, and to seek input towards the options for the natural heritage system (N.H.S) and water resource system (W.R.S).

The following table (Table 1) provides an overview of the activities that were undertaken as part of this point of engagement.

Table 1. Dates of engagement activities undertaken during the 2nd Point of Engagement.

Date (2020)	Activity
July 15	Presentation to Planning and Economic Development Committee (P.E.D.C) (P.D.S. 26-2020)
August 28	Introduction Presentation to Area Planners
September 11	Meeting with Port Colborne Planning Staff
September 14	Meeting with Niagara Falls Planning Staff
September 15	Meeting with St. Catharines Planning Staff
September 16	Presentation to Provincial Planning (M.M.A.H., M.N.R.F., & M.E.C.P). Staff
September 16	Presentation to Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) Staff
September 16	Presentation to Planning Advisory Committee (P.A.C.)
September 17	Presentation to Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (N.P.C.A.) Board
September 18	Meeting with Lincoln Planning Staff
September 18	Stakeholder Workshop – Development Community & Planning and Ecological Consultants
September 21	Meeting with Wainfleet Planning Staff
September 21	Meeting with Fort Erie Planning Staff
September 21	Stakeholder Workshop – Agricultural Community
September 22	Meeting with West Lincoln Planning Staff
September 22	Stakeholder Workshop – Environmental Stakeholder Groups
September 23	Meeting with Grimsby Planning Staff
September 23	Virtual Public Information Centre 1 (Natural Heritage System)
September 24	Presentation to N.P.C.A. Public Advisory Committee
September 24	Virtual Public Information Centre 2 (Water Resource System and Watershed Planning)
September 25	Meeting with Pelham Planning Staff
September 25	Presentation to the Agricultural Policy and Action Committee (A.P.A.C.)
September 28	Meeting with Welland Planning Staff
September 29	Presentation to N.P.C.A. Staff
September 29	Presentation to Niagara Parks Commission (NPC) Staff
September 29	Meeting with Thorold Planning Staff

September 30	Participate in Trout's Unlimited 12 Mile Creek Subwatershed Study Meeting
October 1	Meeting with Niagara-on-the-Lake Planning Staff
November 19	Presentation to Team Niagara
December 11	Meeting with Mississauga of the Credit First Nation Staff

1.1 Consultation Summary

This consultation summary report provides an overview of the 2nd Point of Engagement that has been recently completed. It is the second of three consultation summary reports that will be prepared by the consultant team over the course of the Natural Environment Work Program. As illustrated in **Figure 1**, the public and stakeholder engagement program Natural Environment Work Program includes a variety of engagement opportunities to communicate, educate, engage participants, receive input, and to inform.

The general comments and feedback received from each group are provided in the following sections:

- Planning and Economic Development Committee
- Local Planning Staff
- Stakeholder Workshops
- Virtual Public Information Centres (P.I.C.s)
- Other Public and Stakeholder Feedback
- Planning Advisory Committee (P.A.C.)
- Agricultural Policy and Action Committee (A.P.A.C.)
- NPCA (Board, Staff, and Planning Advisory Committee)
- Provincial Planning Staff
- Niagara Escarpment Commission (N.E.C.) Staff
- Niagara Parks Commission (N.P.C.) Staff
- Team Niagara Presentation
- Ongoing Engagement with Indigenous Groups

Appendices are provided that include invitations and notices of meetings, presentation materials, completed questionnaires, and e-mail and letter submissions.

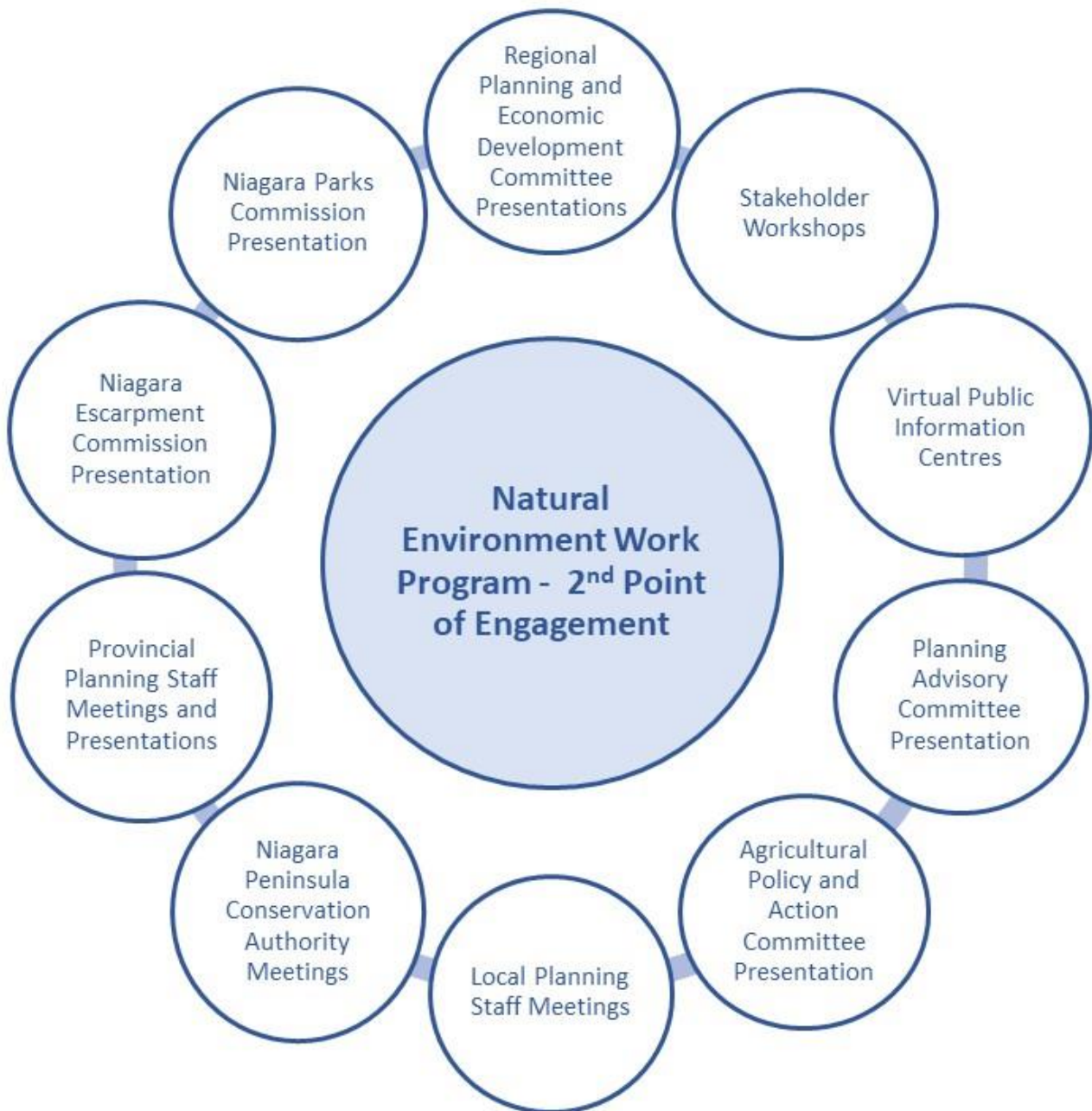


Figure 1. Schematic of Consultation Undertaken during the 2nd Point of Engagement

2.0 Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee Presentation

At the July 15, 2020 Planning and Economic Development Committee (P.E.D.C.) meeting, the staff report PDS 26-2020 was presented (**Appendix A**). Following the presentation members of the P.E.D.C. discussed the presentation and asked questions for clarification.

2.1 Summary of Comments

Comments received at the July 15, 2020 P.E.D.C. meeting have been summarized as follows:

Summary of comments to inform the preferred options

- Sufficient protection of the natural environment system should be achieved through a preferred option.
- Normal farming practices should not be affected by the identification of a natural heritage system or water resources which may also serve to support the agricultural community, particularly man-made features (e.g., agricultural drains, irrigation ditches, etc.).

3.0 Meetings with Local Planning Staff

There was a high-level of engagement with the Local Municipalities. Niagara Region Planning Staff introduced the topic at an Area Planners meeting and then conducted one-on-one meetings individually with the Planning Director and Planning Staff from all of the Local Municipalities to provide an update on the work program, an overview of the options, as well as to seek input towards the identification of a preferred option for the N.H.S. and W.R.S. A copy of the presentation given by Regional staff is included in **Appendix B**.

The following provides a summary of comments received during the 12 meetings with local planning staff, organized into themes as follows:

Comments on Options

- N.H.S. Option 3 (A, B, C) will be the most challenging to implement, in part due to linkages over agricultural areas, even with agricultural exceptions.

- Development potential will be impacted with the identification of additional features and areas within urban areas in N.H.S. Option 3. The decision to go beyond minimum standards should be supported by science and more detailed information.
- It is recognized that there are competing land uses; an option that achieves a balance is preferred.
- Maximum protection outside of the urban area and minimal protection inside the urban area is preferred to direct growth and development in settlement areas.
- A hybrid between N.H.S. Option 3B and 3C should be considered. It is suggested that secondary planning in greenfield areas can be used to look at linkages inside of the urban area (rather than being mapped now and a required component as in Option 3C).
- There is concern about how the Region's growth management objectives will be realized with additional features and areas identified in an N.H.S. that goes beyond the minimum – for this reason, N.H.S. Option 1 or 2 are preferred.
- If the Region goes ahead with N.H.S. Option 3 there is concern about the municipality not agreeing with the linkages and not being able to change them.
- N.H.S. Option 3B seems reasonable and balanced as it captures more features and provides connectivity, but concern with the impact on development without seeing details of policies.
- N.H.S. Option 3A is sufficient in urban areas., and it is the easiest to implement. Option 3B and 3C would reduce the land supply in settlement areas. Additional protections/ enhancements should be considered outside urban areas only.
- As an overlay N.H.S. Option 1 is preferred for allowing changes to mapping errors and minimizes impact to developable areas in settlement areas.
- Option 3A is preferred inside settlement areas and Option 3C for outside settlement areas.
- It is difficult to provide input towards a preferred option without seeing more detailed draft mapping in settlement areas and compare and contrast the options to understand the implications of the options on development potential within settlement areas.

Goals/Objectives/Targets

- Questions were asked about how targets will be measured and monitored to determine the success of the option selected.
- It would be good to know how targets can inform planning decisions (e.g., how much tree planting should be required as a part of new developments? Should green infrastructure/LID contribute to achieving targets? etc.).

Mapping

- If possible, update mapping to reflect changes to feature boundaries based on approved development applications (as informed by Environmental Impact Studies).

- There is concern about inconsistent mapping between the N.P.C.A. and the Region.
- There should be a consistent approach to mapping across the Region.
- Provincially Significant Wetlands and regionally significant wetlands should be mapped as a separate land use designation to be more clear about the type of protection through policy, particularly in greenfield areas.
- Features and linkages should be mapped now and the secondary planning process should be used to refine them or to justify reducing or enhancing them.
- Linkages should be included in an option to connect isolated features.
- Accuracy of mapping is important.
- There is concern about not being able to adjust mapping.
- There is concern that Provincial mapping is not ground truthed and will be imposed on municipalities. Several local municipalities expressed an interest in being involved in the process of making technical refinement to the Growth Plan N.H.S.
- There is concern about having natural features mapped on top of agricultural buildings or areas.
- If fish habitat is not mapped, the Region should maintain an internal fish habitat and other watercourses dataset to support screening as part of pre-consultation to ensure fish habitat is not overlooked.
- It is better to map buffers and linkages to ensure these components are not overlooked – allow refinements through site specific studies.

Planning/Policy Direction

- There is general support that the Region should continue to review Environmental Impact Studies and provide their technical expertise – it was generally mentioned that most local municipalities do not have this expertise “in-house”.
- The policies related to managing development on aquifers need to be carefully considered given the large extent of aquifers throughout the Region.
- There is a continued preference that the approval of EISs in urban areas should be the responsibility of the local area municipality, even where there are natural features mapped as part of the Region’s N.H.S. mapping. The Region should continue to provide their expertise in the review of environmental studies (i.e., keep status quo).
- The current Environmental Protection Areas (E.P.A.) and Environmental Conservation Areas (E.C.A.) designations are confusing.
- Clarification was sought related to a Regional designation and the requirement for local Official Plans to update zoning by-laws to reflect the Region’s designation.
- Municipalities sought confirmation that the identification of the N.H.S. and policies were not intended to add further restrictions to agricultural uses or buildings beyond any restrictions and exemptions provided by Provincial policies.
- There is concern about the issue of setbacks from watercourses and the impact this has on very small lots.

- There were questions asked about how optional features in the urban area will be implemented if an area is already developed.

Linkages/Buffers

- There is concern about how policies for linkages may impact the amount of developable land in urban areas. Policies need to clearly indicate restrictions and permission for development within linkages.
- The identification of buffers and opportunities for refinement of buffers needs to be informed by updated Environmental Impact Study guidelines.
- A systems approach to the N.H.S. should include linkages.
- There is concern about mapping buffers in settlement areas that may require additional mapping changes; whether buffers are mapped or not, policies will need to be clear about restrictions, exemptions and potential for refinements based on site-specific studies. It is important that in settlement areas every feature and buffer is treated differently and subject to an evaluation.
- Criteria for linkage size, width and form should be developed.
- Mapping buffers could assist with ensuring they are included in a plan and also provide clear intentions for buffers so developers can factor them into their design and how they achieve density targets.

3.1 Summary of Comments

Through meetings with local planners there were a range of opinions and comments provided across the municipalities demonstrating the varying needs and interests of the municipalities in land use planning. The comments summarized below are not intended to represent a consensus of opinion, but rather reflect the range of opinions provided. Based on the input received during meetings with the local planning staff, the comments have been consolidated below as they specifically relate to the identification of a preferred option for the natural environment systems, as well as other comments more generally related to the Natural Environment Work Program.

Summary of comments related to the identification of a preferred option

- There is no consensus on what is the preferred N.H.S. or W.R.S. option for the Region. Generally speaking, an approach that recognizes the inherent balance between a range of land uses is preferred.
- More details related to the implications of the options in settlement areas is needed to compare and contrast the options in order to understand the impacts on development potential within settlement areas.
- Mapping should be based on an accurate dataset, be clearly illustrated and reflective of the policies.
- Policies for the water resource system should provide flexibility recognizing the large extent in area of some components (e.g., aquifers).

Summary of other comments to inform the Natural Environment Work Program

- Policies will need to clearly indicate restrictions and exemptions for agricultural uses
- Policies should clearly identify restrictions and permission for development in linkages or other optional components if they are included in settlement areas
- Policies should permit refinement of mapping through more detailed studies
- Regional expertise and support to review Environmental Impact Studies when the local municipality is the approval authority should continue. Local municipalities should continue with their ability to approve E.I.S's within settlement areas.
- Criteria and/or guidance should be provided to identify and refine linkages

4.0 Virtual Stakeholder Workshops

Three virtual stakeholder workshops were held during the 2nd Point of Engagement, with the date and time, and number of participants who participated recorded in **Table 2**. A copy of the invitation for each workshop is included in **Appendix C**. Several follow-up e-mails were sent by the project team after each workshop with additional information. A copy of this correspondence can be found in **Appendix C**.

Table 2. Virtual Stakeholder Workshops Details.

Group	Date and Time	Approximate Number of Attendees
Development Community, Planning Consultants and Ecological Consultants	September 18, 2020, 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm	35
Agricultural Community	September 21, 2020, 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm	12
Environmental Stakeholder Groups	September 22, 2020, 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm	32

Each stakeholder workshop consisted of a presentation of the Natural Environment Work Program, including provincial policy direction and requirements for natural environment planning and an overview of the options development for the natural heritage system and water resource system (**Appendix C**). The formats of the webinar-style workshops were designed to provide attendees the opportunity to type in questions via the Q & A function in Zoom, to which Regional staff and members of the consultant team provided live verbal responses. Written responses (**Appendix C**) to both questions answered as well as those questions posed which were not answered live, were provided in a formal table via email after the workshop to each person who attended. The written response table also included a copy of all input that was made in comment form.

Furthermore, a questionnaire (**Appendix C**) was distributed to all attendees seeking additional input and comment on the identification of options for the natural heritage system and water resource system. **Appendix C** includes a copy of all of the questionnaires that were completed and returned. The following sections summarize the questions, comments, and responses from the workshops, as well as input received following the stakeholder workshops (i.e., via completed questionnaire).

4.1 Development Community, Planning Consultants and Ecological Consultants Stakeholder Workshop

The questions, comments and responses to the Q & A and the questionnaires have been summarized below and paraphrased as comments:

- Option 3A provides a forward-thinking approach because it allows for development and proper planning to be focused inside the urban area and reduces unnecessary sprawl.
- Niagara Official Plan policies should not duplicate other agency policies (e.g., N.P.C.A. policies related to wetlands) and/or conflict with other agency policies
- The option of the N.H.S. should clearly define features and areas in order to make policy interpretation more clear.
- Option 1, 2 or 3A are the only options which will allow for balance in the Region and prevent premature urban sprawl.

- Option 3B and 3C will have implications on environmental planning may lead to premature urban sprawl. These options have also not taken into consideration the implications that urban expansion would have on the agricultural community or the taxpayers.
- Option 2 for the N.H.S. and Option 2B for the W.R.S is preferred because it allows to plan for development while protecting the natural heritage system and providing enhancement opportunities.
- By expanding and improving the natural environment policies beyond the minimum standards it allows for support and compliance by landowners and developers.
- These options do not explore the potential for options 3B and 3C to cause urban sprawl and the impact that would have outside settlement areas.
- Clear, concise, and user-friendly sources such as interactive mapping are the most beneficial and useful resources for the public and technical professionals.
- The preferred option should not result in a decrease in potentially developable land within settlement areas.
- Long-term ownership by public agencies should be considered for those features that are protected (i.e., not developed) within settlement areas.

4.1.1 Additional Clarification Regarding Buffers

The Natural Environment System Background Study provided a comprehensive review of policy requirements for buffers, a review of comparator municipal approaches to identifying and implementing buffers, and best practices to identifying buffers. Technical Report #2 carried the recommendations from that review forward in order to provide suggested approaches to applying buffers in settlement areas vs. outside of settlement areas as part of allowing an evaluation of options for the N.H.S. framework. Technical Report #2 provided a suggested approach for the identification of buffers across Options 3A, 3B and 3C; the report did not clearly represent the intent of increasing components and protection across the options.

Through developing conceptual mapping for the N.H.S. for the presentations as part of the 2nd Point of Engagement, it was necessary to revisit the suggested approaches described in Technical Report #2; as such the presentations given as part of the 2nd Point of Engagement provided clarification on how buffers are being proposed across the options. In settlement areas, buffers are not proposed in Option 3A and 3B; mandatory (non-prescribed) buffers (i.e., to be determined through detailed study) are included in Option 3C. Outside of settlement areas, mandatory (non-prescribed buffers) are introduced in Option 3A, while Option 3B and 3C have minimum (prescribed) buffers.

4.1.2 Summary of Comments

Based on the input received during the development community workshop, the comments have been consolidated below as they relate to the identification of a preferred option, as well as other comments more generally related to the Natural Environment Work Program.

Summary of comments related to the identification of a preferred option

- In identifying a preferred option, the broader planning perspective should be considered that limits constraints to development in settlement areas, and identifies opportunities for additional features and connections outside of settlement areas, to limit the extent of expansions outside of existing settlement areas.
- The selection of a preferred option should take into consideration the potential impacts to the developable area within existing settlement areas and the impact on urban sprawl.

Summary of other comments to inform the Natural Environment Work Program

- Policies, definitions, criteria, and guidelines related to the natural environment should be clear.
- Roles and responsibilities for the application of policies for “shared” features (e.g., wetlands are both components of the N.H.S. that require protection through official plan policies as well as are regulated by the N.P.C.A.) should be clear or at least consistent between the agencies.

4.2 Agricultural Community Stakeholder Workshop

The questions, comments and responses to the Q & A have been summarized below and paraphrased as comments:

- The open ditch irrigation in Niagara-on-the-Lake and “man-made” swales should not be included as part of the options.
- Irrigation channels should not be identified as fish habitat.
- Some landowners would like to be notified of mapping of the natural environment systems on their property and be provided with an opportunity to provide further comment.
- The agricultural system should continue to take primacy over the natural heritage system.

4.2.1 Summary of Comments

Based on the input received during the agricultural community stakeholder workshop, the comments have been consolidated below as they relate to the identification of a preferred option, as well as other comments more generally related to the Natural Environment Work Program.

Summary of comments related to the identification of a preferred option

- The options for the N.H.S and W.R.S should not include “man-made” swales and watercourses associated with the irrigation system.
- The agricultural system should have primacy over the natural heritage system.

Summary of other comments to inform the Natural Environment Work Program

- Provide advanced notification to allow for a review of draft mapping of the natural environment system by landowners.

4.3 Environmental Stakeholder Workshop

The questions, comments and responses to the Q & A and the questionnaires have been summarized below and paraphrased as comments:

- N.H.S. Option 3C represents a forward-thinking approach because:
 - It includes linkages of various sizes that support a functional ecological system and most vigorously defends the natural systems in the Region both in and out of settlement areas. This option best promotes ecological function across the natural system as a whole.
 - environmental degradation most often occurs on edges of protected area and mandatory buffers assist in reducing damage to protected features.
 - It does the most to mitigate the effects of climate change and maintaining environmental sustainability, function, and biodiversity for future generations
 - It does the most to support health and well-being
- W.R.S. Option 2B most vigorously defends that natural systems in the Region, identifies additional features in settlement areas, does the most to mitigate the effects of climate change.
- A truly forward-thinking approach should include objectives, like those laid out in the Region’s current OP under “Objectives for a Healthy Landscape”; currently none of the options provide a forward-thinking approach as they lack targets, goals, and objectives to determine if they are forward-thinking.
- Growth and economic development are a threat to agricultural areas of the Region, and we need to maintain agricultural zones. Providing the best option for the natural environment will not impact agriculture.

- N.H.S. Option 3C and W.R.S. Option 2B will direct development to urbanized areas, brown field, etc. Option 3C encourages efficient new neighbourhood development (denser population areas with more efficient transportation services) rather than urban sprawl into natural or agricultural areas.
- N.H.S. Option 3C and W.R.S. Option 2B ensures growth takes place in the appropriate areas because it provides the necessary protection for features in and out of settlement areas that. These options ensure buffers and linkages are mapped to mitigate impacts to our natural heritage.
- Options 3C and 2B protect more beaches, woodlands and other natural areas within settlements which are highly desirable by Niagara residents and especially for young families as has been evident during the past seven months of COVID.
- N.H.S. Option 3A and W.R.S. Option 2B allows for development and proper planning to be focused inside the urban area and reduces unnecessary sprawl. These options can help achieve higher density, compact, transit-friendly communities without compromising our green space. Re-development should be encouraged over urban sprawl.
- N.H.S. Option 3C and W.R.S. Option 2B are the options that best protect the natural systems and ultimately protect the economy, particularly the ecosystem services we rely on: resistance to environmental threats associated with climate change, flood protection, cleaner air and water, and recreation areas that promote good health.
- The environment should not be seen as an impediment to growth, development, and economic prosperity; rather it should be integrated into future designs and smarter more efficient designs should be developed to ensure the protection of the natural environment.
- Option 3C gives planners more tools for negotiating what is deemed “appropriate” growth and economic development.
- N.H.S. Option 3C and W.R.S. Option 2B will help protect wetlands, woodlands, meadowlands, and watercourses in our settlement areas where the majority of people live. More natural areas in settlement areas will benefit everyone.
- Even though N.H.S. Option 3C and W.R.S. 2B attempt to do the right thing for the community they lack in commitment and do not go far enough to meet the objectives in the current OP.
- Mapping should be more comprehensive. We need to go further to ensure what we have left in settlement areas is protected.
- Linkages and buffers do not receive enough protection; these are required to ensure a healthy environment and climate change mitigation.
- The Ecological Land Classification study should have been completed prior to making recommendations for which options are best.
- The options have been developed without goals and objectives. Goals are necessary to inform the development of options and policy. Need to outline goals for achieving a sustainable natural heritage system that will lead to a healthy ecosystem and mitigate climate change first.
- There is concern related to relying on an Environmental Impact Study that is produced for and paid for by a developer.

- A more advanced option should be identified that is first based on a goal to protect existing features and areas with mandated buffers, requirements for linkages, and identified enhancement areas; the option should include the following:
 - additional features in and out of settlement areas;
 - supporting features inside and outside of settlement areas including potential enhancement areas;
 - mandatory large medium and small linkages outside of settlement areas;
 - suggested large, medium, linkages inside settlement areas;
 - mandatory small linkages wherever possible inside settlement areas;
 - mandatory prescribed buffers outside of settlement areas; and
 - prescribed minimum buffers for key features and supporting features and areas inside of settlement areas.
- In order to increase natural cover in the region, the option should also require planting of only native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers on all new developments and on municipal lands; naturalize 25% of municipal parks; provide more efforts for naturalization.
- To make the natural environment policies more defensible, the Region should include wording that the protection of Niagara's natural heritage and water resources is a first priority for the Region.
- Consider the Carolinian Canada initiative, "In the Zone", where settlement residents are encouraged to plant native species to provide wildlife habitat.
- Consider the findings of several studies that question the future growth stats from the Growth Plan including:
 - Greenbelt Council Report, Growth Plan 2020;
 - Population Forecasting in the GGH-EBY GMPS – March 26, 2020; and
 - Growth Plan ERO Submission Ontario Nature – July 2020.

4.3.1 Summary of Comments

Based on the input received during the environmental groups' stakeholder workshop, the comments have been consolidated below as they relate to the identification of a preferred option, as well as other comments more generally related to the Natural Environment Work Program.

Summary of comments related to the identification of a preferred option

- Option 3C for the N.H.S. and 2B for the W.R.S. best achieves the following:
 - is most inclusive of natural features and areas throughout the Region;
 - provides the most connections (i.e., linkages) in and outside of settlement areas; and
 - protects ecological functions and ecosystem services, including within settlement areas; and
 - mitigates the effect of climate change.
- Buffers should be required for features when there is a proposed change in adjacent land use.

Summary of other comments to inform the Natural Environment Work Program

- Goals, objectives, and targets should be identified for both the N.H.S. and W.R.S.
- Since not all features and areas will be mapped a full set of internal screening datasets should be maintained by the Region, such as habitat for species at risk, cold/cool/warm water fish habitat, etc.
- Policies should ensure the permanency of features and areas as part of the natural environment systems

5.0 Virtual Public Information Centres

Two virtual public information centres (PICs) were held as part of the 2nd Point of Engagement:

- Public Information Centre #1 – Natural Heritage System - Wednesday, September 23, 2020, 6:00 - 8:00 pm,
- Public Information Centre #2 – Water Resource System and Watershed Planning Project – Thursday, September 24, 2020, 6:00 - 8:00 pm

Notice of the PICs were posted on the new Niagara Official Plan's website and advertised through the Region's social media and in print in several local newspapers in the Region. A copy of the PIC notice is included in **Appendix D**.

The virtual P.I.C.s were held via Zoom, in a webinar-style format with information presented to the attendees (**Appendix D**). The format of the P.I.C.s also provided attendees with an opportunity to write in questions via the Q & A function in Zoom, or ask verbal questions through either Zoom or by calling in. Regional staff and members of the consultant team provided live verbal responses. Written responses then followed (**Appendix D**) to questions posed which were not answered during the live webinar. The table with the written responses also includes all feedback that was received in comment form. The webinar was recorded and is available at the following link: <https://www.niagararegion.ca/official-plan/public-information-centres.aspx>.

Comments received during the P.I.C.s have been summarized in the following sections.

5.1 Public Information Centre # 1: Natural Heritage System

Comments received during PIC #1 regarding the N.H.S. have been organized into themes as follows:

Mapping

- All features and areas (e.g., fish habitat, significant woodlands, specialized habitats and rare vegetation communities) should be mapped as a lack of mapping could lead to loss of features.
- The Growth Plan N.H.S. mapping should be reviewed and recommendations for revisions/corrections be provided to the Province.

Goals/Objectives/Targets

- Goals/ objectives for the natural environment system options should be provided.
- Performance criteria should be developed for the various options to evaluate if the policies are resulting in the desired outcomes.
- Woodland cover targets should be considered and a goal to increase woodland cover should be established recognizing 30% is recommended as the minimum by 'How Much Habitat is Enough?'
- Plantations should be considered part of forest cover.
- Periodic reviews, perhaps annually, should be undertaken to determine if success is actually being made in Niagara in increasing forest cover.
- The benefits and ecological functions of Niagara's agriculture areas should be considered in how Niagara is meeting natural cover targets.

Planning/Policy Direction

- It should be recognized that the Province's Growth Plan and N.H.S. is a one-size-fits-all approach that does not recognize regional geography and limitations in Niagara, and the pressure of growth on the natural environment.
- Option 3 could speed up the need for urban boundary expansion and hasten sprawl into the rural areas.
- The policies need to be clear to ensure Local Municipalities with independent agendas are consistent in their interpretation and application of policies for the protection of the natural environment.
- There was a suggestion that all EISs should require a peer review by a third party.
- The identification of a features as “significant” should be consistent and objective to avoid bias and reduce subjectivity in applying criteria.
- It needs to be clear who is responsible for restoration and tree planting of developments and a process to ensure the success of these plantings must be in place.
- It should be clear that directing development to Urban Areas does not imply that natural areas will be open to development simply because they are zoned as urban.
- Regarding claims that protection of natural areas would create pressures to expand urban boundaries most of these lands are already protected to some degree and excluded from development potential. The exclusion of lands as enhancement areas would likely be limited in scale.
- Requirements for studies (e.g., Environmental Impact Study) should be scoped depending on the scale of the proposed development.

Environmental Protection

- The Region should choose the most forward-thinking scenario and not simply do the minimum.
- There was a comment made that none of the options presented are good enough to preserve the environment.
- COVID-19 has shown us how important natural areas are to our health and well-being. These natural areas need to be where people live. N.H.S. Options 3B and 3C are the best to ensure these natural areas within settlements are protected.
- Bill 68 requires municipalities to demonstrate how they will maintain, protect, and enhance the tree canopy and natural vegetation in the municipality. The option that best meets this should be strongly considered by the Region.
- There should be compensation required for disturbance to fish spawning areas.
- The options must adequately address the urgency of climate change.
- There was an opinion expressed that site- specific surveys are biased by developers since they are paying for them. It is important that the natural features mapped be protected without any doubt or bias during the Environmental Impact Study process. This should be reflected clearly in policy to ensure there is no subjectivity.
- Cumulative effects should be considered when selecting an option.

Buffers/Linkages

- Considering N.H.S. and W.R.S. as continuous systems, linkages are essential to analysis, protection and enhancement of features and must include settlement areas.
- Without linkages in place between natural watercourses and areas, heat sinks, and heat islands will develop that will alter hydrology.
- A question was asked about how buffer size will be determined.
- The minimum buffer approach in agricultural areas should not take agricultural land out of production and policies need to be clear how these competing interests will be addressed.
- Make buffers mandatory as suggested in N.H.S. 3C to afford the most protection to natural areas.

Other

- Preliminary preferred options should not have been included in the Technical Report prior to receiving feedback from the consultation process.
- The City of Toronto has a very good approach available on their website. The City of Hamilton is working on a Biodiversity plan. These documents should be considered by the project team.

5.1.1 Summary of Comments

Based on the input received during P.I.C. #1, the comments have been consolidated below as they relate to the identification of a preferred option, as well as other comments more generally related to the Natural Environment Work Program.

Summary of comments related to the identification of a preferred option

- The preferred option should be inclusive of all features and afford the maximum protection possible to natural features and areas to mitigate the impacts of climate change.
- Linkages and buffers should be mandatory to ensure features are connected and adequately protected.
- The mapping of the preferred option should be as comprehensive as possible.

Summary of other comments to inform the Natural Environment Work Program

- Environmental Impact Studies (E.I.S.s) should be scoped to the scale of the development and potential for impact and include a review of cumulative impacts.
- Clear goals, objectives and natural area cover targets would support the identification of the preferred natural heritage system as well as support the interpretation and implementation of policies. Periodic reviews should be undertaken to determine if success is actually being made in Niagara in achieving goals and objectives.

5.2 Public Information Centre # 2: Water Resource System and Niagara Watershed Plan Equivalent Project

P.I.C. #2 included both a presentation on the W.R.S. Options and the Niagara Watershed Plan (N.W.P.) Project. Comments related to both the N.W.P. and the W.R.S. have been organized into themes as follows:

Mapping

- Clarification was requested about how policies will be implemented if a feature is not mapped.
- There was a question asking when full mapping will be provided for comment.
- Consider other sources of information and mapping, including, the Ontario government, Brock University Earth Sciences and Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, Ontario Geological Survey have watershed flow assessment tool (e.g., <https://www.ontario.ca/page/watershed-flow-assessment-tool>), Nature for Niagara's Future.

Planning/Policy Direction

- The growth numbers put forward by the province and what effect the increase in growth will have on these options should be considered.
- Development should not be occurring on top of highly sensitive aquifers.
- Urban Growth should be within the existing urban boundaries and sprawl should be reduced.
- All future development proposals should undergo cumulative impact assessments.

Environmental Protection

- W.R.S. Option 2B should be selected because it better protects water resources including those within settlement areas.

- An opinion was stated that the proposed options do not prevent the further destruction of Niagara's natural resources.

Water Quality

- Ground water contamination is a serious problem that needs more attention.
- An opinion was stated that aquifers are not afforded enough protection. The need to protect drinking water should be incorporated into the policies.
- There should be policies against illegal dumping to help protect watercourses.
- Policies should provide protection of and improvement of water quality.

Other

- A watershed plan regarding urban growth would be a helpful form of damage control.
- Please suggest possible responsible uses for exhausted aggregate quarries where quarrying has been done into an aquifer.
- The following should be considered when designing the preferred option for the W.R.S.:
 - recreation areas for fishing, swimming, shorelines/beaches, etc.
 - flood control, water table
 - utilization by agriculture, industry, the Welland Canal, and urban developers
 - utilization by the indigenous population (hunting, fishing rights)
- Accelerated flow rates resulting from more frequent storm events must be better addressed.

5.2.1 Summary of Comments

Based on the input received during P.I.C. #2, the comments have been consolidated below as they specifically relate to the identification of a preferred option for the W.R.S., as well as other comments more generally related to the Natural Environment Work Program.

Summary of comments related to the identification of a preferred option

- W.R.S. Option 2B is preferred because it better protects water resources including those within settlement areas.
- The identification of options should incorporate the information from other sources, such as Nature for Niagara's future and watershed flow assessment tools.

Summary of other comments to inform the Natural Environment Work Program

- Environmental Impact Studies (E.I.S.s) should include a cumulative impact assessment.
- Policies should be included that protect water quality, address groundwater contamination, pollution, and provide adequate protection for aquifers.

6.0 Other Public and Stakeholder Feedback

A range of comments and feedback were provided to the Region through e-mails, via the Region's website, and submission of letters leading up to, and throughout the 2nd Point of Engagement. In total, five (5) letters (**Appendix E**) were provided on behalf of the following:

- Agricultural Associations:
 - Grape Growers of Ontario
 - Niagara Federation of Agriculture
 - Ontario Tender Fruit Growers
- Niagara Home Builders' Association
- Joint Letter from Environmental Groups

In addition, a total of 61 online submissions and e-mails were provided (**Appendix E**). The comments provided in the letters from each of the groups and the comments received in the online submissions and e-mails have been compiled below followed by a summary of the comments.

6.1 Agricultural Associations

- There is a strong preference for N.H.S. Option 1.
- Agricultural operations rely on agricultural water resource infrastructure for the viability of the agri-food sector; agricultural groups have requested the following components not be mapped as part of the N.H.S.
 - agricultural swales,
 - constructed drains,
 - ditches,
 - privately owned irrigation ponds,
 - and all current and future municipally or privately owned irrigation systems or channels.
- Linkages should not have an impact on the agricultural land base and future development potential.
- Policies need to be clear related to exemptions to normal farming practices.

- There is concern that Option 3C prioritizes protection of natural heritage above agriculture.
- Members of the agricultural community would like to be provided an opportunity to review mapping before it is finalized.
- An Agri-Food Network for the Niagara Specialty Crop Area should be established by the Region with members of the Agricultural Policy Action Committee.

Summary of comments related to the identification of a preferred option

- N.H.S. Option 1 and W.R.S. Option 1 are preferred because they will have the least impact on the agricultural system/community.
- The following components of the agricultural water resource infrastructure system should not be mapped as part of the N.H.S.:
 - agricultural swales,
 - constructed drains,
 - ditches,
 - privately owned irrigation ponds,
 - and all current and future municipally or privately owned irrigation systems or channels.

Summary of other comments to inform the Natural Environment Work Program

- Landowners should be provided with an opportunity to review mapping and policies before they are finalized.
- An Agri-Food Network for the Niagara Specialty Crop Area should be established by the Region with members of the Agricultural Policy Action Committee.
- Linkages and enhancement areas should not impact farming.
- Exemptions and permission should be clear related to farming.

6.2 Niagara Home Builders' Association

- The priority of the Regional Official Plan (R.O.P.) should be about growth management, and how the Region will proactively plan to accommodate significant growth in the coming years. Issues such as housing supply and affordability will be negatively impacted by an overly restrictive planning framework. Accommodating growth should be the main position from which all other R.O.P. work emanates.
- The proposed approach to the N.H.S. will cause further fragmentation and limit growth opportunities in otherwise appropriate locations within urban areas.
- More detailed mapping is needed with statistics of areal coverage of the N.H.S. in each of the options that would inform policy direction.

- Mapping should be based on current more accurate datasets.
- The Region should provide statistics for each of the features and areas mapped for each option, particularly in settlement areas.
- Duplication of policies for regulated features (e.g., wetlands) should be avoided to avoid inconsistent/contradictory comments from reviewing agencies.
- There needs to be more information available to demonstrate the need for going beyond the minimum standards that also takes into consideration the other objectives of the Official Plan related to growth and development.
- Growth information, as informed by criteria, needs to be integrated into the analysis to inform the identification of the N.H.S and W.R.S.
- Buffer widths should not be pre-determined but based on ground-truthed information obtained through site-specific studies.
- The options for the natural environment systems should not result in higher restrictions on lands outside of the urban area that could limit the viability of Agricultural operations in the Region.
- Landowners should be notified of any designation changes prior to the change being finalized.
- Offsetting should be considered as part of the policy framework.

Summary of comments related to the identification of a preferred option:

- The Region should provide statistics for each of the features and areas mapped for each option, particularly in settlement areas to better inform and justify the selection of a preferred option.
- Buffers should not be pre-determined – they should be determined through site-specific information and studies.

Summary of other comments to inform the Natural Environment Work Program:

- There needs to be more information available to demonstrate the need for going beyond the minimum standards that also takes into consideration the other objectives of the Official Plan related to growth and development.
- Accommodating growth should be the priority of the R.O.P. and should be taken into consideration when selecting an option for the natural environment systems.
- There needs to be clear and consistent policies among agencies to ensure transparent interpretation and implementation.
- Landowners should be provided with an opportunity to review mapping and policies before they are finalized.

6.3 Environmental Groups

- The Region should adopt the most robust N.H.S. and W.R.S. due to the limited ability of the Woodland Bylaw to protect existing tree cover.
- Option 3C for the N.H.S. and Option 2B for the W.R.S. are the best of the options to protect the remaining natural areas in Niagara for the following reasons:
 - Identifies additional features in and outside of settlement areas
 - Identifies supporting features inside and outside of settlement areas including potential enhancement areas
 - Includes large, medium and small linkages
 - Requires mandatory (prescribed) buffers outside of settlement areas and mandatory (non-prescribed) buffers inside of settlement areas
 - The W.R.S. identifies additional features and areas Region-wide, including within settlement areas.

Summary of comments related to the identification of a preferred option

- N.H.S. Option 3C and W.R.S. Option 2B are preferred for the following reasons:
 - Identifies additional features and supporting features in and outside of settlement areas
 - Includes large, medium and small linkages
 - Requirement for buffers throughout the Region
 - The W.R.S. identifies additional features and areas Region-wide

6.4 Online Submissions and E-mails

- Option 3C is preferred for the N.H.S. and Option 2B for the W.R.S. because they apply a more comprehensive ecosystem approach that includes enhancement areas and linkages, both inside and outside of settlement areas and prescribes mandatory buffer minimums outside of settlement areas with suggested policy minimums inside of settlement areas.
- Goals and objectives related to environmental sustainability, biodiversity protection, ecosystem function and climate change crisis are missing from the current options and should be provided to demonstrate how the options are achieving the goals and objectives.
- Areas should be flagged for species at risk based on more recent information to ensure that landowners and developers are aware of this restriction.
- Targets should be established to ensure that there is adequate representation of the natural communities and their components, including a tree/woodland cover target.
- The Official Plan must clearly state what the Region's goals are for the N.H.S. and W.R.S. and demonstrate that measures will be included which will both retain and protect existing assets and identify and support opportunities for remediation where needed.

- Rather than developing in undeveloped areas, urban areas should be re-developed. There are empty buildings across the Region that can be re-developed.
- Green infrastructure should be utilized in re-development.
- The policies and mapping should provide clear direction for protection of the N.H.S. and W.R.S. in order to better inform where development and growth can occur which will reduce conflicts and contentious applications.
- Buffers are required to protect features and prevent/reduce degradation of the features resulting from adjacent land uses.
- Small linkages should be included in settlement areas because it assists these natural areas to function as a larger system rather than isolated units.
- There needs to be clear and strong policy that ensures interpretation and implementation is consistent and achieves the goals and objects for the N.H.S. and W.R.S.
- Given the low percentage of natural area cover in the Region, protection of wildlife habitat, biodiversity and overall wildlife populations should be prioritized through the selection and implementation of the most comprehensive option – N.H.S Option 3C.
- Option 3C provides the greatest resilience to climate change, best addresses biodiversity loss, and identifies additional features in and outside settlement areas.
- Protecting natural areas and enhancing them is key to improving ground water quality.
- Ecosystem services should be considered, including benefits of green infrastructure such as shade/cooling, water purification, flood abatement, oxygen production and erosion control.
- Option 3C provides the greatest benefit to the overall physical and mental health of residents, the economy and the health of the environment.
- Where tree removal is permitted as part of an approved development application, replacement of the trees/woodlands should be enforced in order to avoid a reduction in tree cover.
- Niagara's remaining natural areas and water resources should be protected to maintain and enhance biodiversity and natural environment resilience for future generations.
- The science must come first, followed by other considerations, if we are to have a N.H.S. that will adequately address protection and mitigates natural deficits.
- The process to identify and implement a preferred N.H.S. and W.R.S. must be transparent.
- The N.H.S. options considered by Niagara Region should follow the guidance of the Natural Heritage Reference Manual and conform to relevant policies requiring the identification and protection of the N.H.S. and natural features and areas.
- Providing natural spaces including forests, fields, and habitat for wildlife close to residential neighbourhoods has proven invaluable to minimize anxiety and permit outdoor activity while other indoor activities are restricted.

- Agricultural practices should not be permitted to damage the natural environment through applying policies that exempt normal farming practices.
- Nature clubs should be asked about Significant Wildlife Habitat.
- There is currently no requirement to consult with local people about planning, impacts, significant features, etc. Consultation processes should be improved with the new policies and mapping.
- The findings of the review of Environmental Impact Studies by municipal staff should be presented to a committee made up of members of the community with relevant qualifications/expertise for additional feedback/review.
- The information presented through the workshops should be geared more towards the general public with less focus on policy, and more focus on the mapping of the options.
- There should be more monitoring of natural areas, with strong protection, serious fines/punishment when violations occur, and requirements for remedial action.
- The interpretation of policies from the Greenbelt Plan and Growth Plan that require vegetation protection zones, with some exemptions for planting crops or permitting existing uses should be considered as it relates to impacts on normal farming practices. This is particularly a concern with respect to managing pests that may be invade a crop/orchard and affect yields and revenue.
- There can be an impact to crops resulting from pests that originate from natural vegetation found in vegetation protection zones located adjacent to crops – the N.H.S. features should not create the circumstance where pests can have a negative impact on crops (e.g., grapes).

Summary of comments related to the identification of a preferred option

- N.H.S. Option 3C and W.R.S. Option 2B are preferred for the following reasons:
 - Follows a more comprehensive ecosystem approach that includes enhancement areas and linkages, both inside and outside of settlement areas.
 - N.H.S. includes mandatory buffer minimums outside of settlement areas with suggested policy minimums inside of settlement areas.
 - Helps address biodiversity loss.
 - Does the most to mitigate the impacts of climate change and protect ecosystem services.

Summary of other comments to inform the Natural Environment Work Program

- The preferred options for the natural environment systems should be informed by goals, objectives and targets.
- Development should be directed to urban areas and areas for redevelopment.
- The policies and mapping should provide for the protection of the N.H.S. and W.R.S. in order to better inform where development and growth can occur.
- Ecosystem services should be recognized as important and protected through the development of policies for the natural environment system.
- The process to identify and implement a preferred N.H.S. and W.R.S. must be transparent and continue to provide opportunities to contribute to the identification of the N.H.S. and W.R.S. mapping and policies.
- Vegetation Protection Zones should take into consideration the impact on crops.

7.0 Planning Advisory Committee Presentation

The Planning Advisory Committee (P.A.C.) consists of eight (8) public members with expertise on a range of planning and land use topics who provide input on topics to be addressed by the new N.O.P. The P.A.C. is responsible for reviewing background studies and other inputs and providing comments, high-level direction/confirmation. The PAC will also provide comments on draft policies as they are being developed, including the natural system policies.

At the September 16, 2020 P.A.C. meeting, a presentation (**Appendix F**) was made by staff from the Region and the consultant team regarding the Natural Environment Work Program for the new N.O.P. During the presentation several questions were posed and comments made - these have been summarized as comments:

Summary of other comments to inform the Natural Environment Work Program

- More mapping and statistics related to the options should be provided to inform the preferred option.
- Objectives and targets could help inform the identification of the preferred options. Objectives and targets could also allow for an ongoing evaluation of success of implementation of policies and protection of the natural environment systems.

8.0 Agricultural Policy and Action Committee Presentation

The Agricultural Policy & Action Committee (A.P.A.C.) is an advisory committee established by Niagara Region to recognize the critical primacy of agriculture in the Region in terms of both public policy and demonstrable actions. A.P.A.C. was also established to advise Regional Council on issues that impact the agricultural industry, and to support Regional Council, reporting through the Planning and Economic Development Committee, by initiating, developing, implementing and participating in actions and strategies needed to advance the agricultural industry and preserve the agricultural land base throughout the Niagara Region.

At the September 25, 2020 A.P.A.C. meeting, a presentation (**Appendix G**) was made by the Consultant Team with the support of Regional staff to provide an overview of the options developed for the natural heritage system and water resource system. During the presentation several questions were posed and comments made - these have been summarized as comments:

Summary of comments related to the identification of a preferred option

- The municipal/agricultural drain/irrigation system should not be included in the W.R.S., but be included in the OP under a different set of policies
- Man-made swales/ditches should not be included in W.R.S. or N.H.S.

Summary of other comments to inform the Natural Environment Work Program

- A question was asked about linkages: even if conceptual at this time, could they eventually become more restrictive in the future, including to existing uses in agricultural areas?
- Suggestion that natural features, including floodplains, be given higher protection in urban areas recognizing the ecosystem services these features and areas provide.
- There should be consideration for the expansion of the existing agricultural irrigation system and the development of a new agricultural irrigation system in St. Catharines/Lincoln within the new Niagara Official Plan.

9.0 Meetings with Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority

Niagara Region Planning Staff gave separate presentations to the Board of the N.P.C.A., staff, and the N.P.C.A. Public Advisory Committee to provide an update on the work program, provide an overview of the options, as well as to solicit input towards the identification of a preferred option for the natural heritage system and water resource system. A copy of the presentations (3) given by Regional staff are included in **Appendix H**.

During the presentation several questions were posed and comments made - these have been summarized as comments:

Summary of comments related to the identification of a preferred option

- N.H.S. Option 3C appears to best meet the objective of creating a resilient system.
- The identification of a W.R.S. should extend throughout the Region and not stop at urban boundaries.
- There are concerns with the ability to implement a mandatory buffer.
- The identification of options needs to be informed by science and statistics, such as current natural area cover.

Summary of other comments to inform the Natural Environment Work Program

- There was a question asked related to the identification of a preliminary preferred option being presented prior to received input through the 2nd Point of Engagement.
- The issue of the difference between the Forestry Act definition and the ELC definition of Woodlot was raised by NPCA staff.
- Goals and targets should be used to inform the natural systems.

10.0 Meeting with Provincial Planning Staff

Niagara Region Planning Staff gave a presentation to staff from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks, and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an update on the work program, provide an overview of the options, as well as to ask the Province about any additional direction or guidance documents that could be provided to inform the identification of a preferred option for the natural heritage system and water resource system. A copy of the presentation given by Regional staff is included in **Appendix I**.

Following the presentation Regional staff asked several questions to seek input from the Province. Staff from the provincial agencies did not provide any specific feedback or comments that would inform identification of a preferred option. No additional guidance or information was provided from the Province that could be used to inform the identification of a preferred option.

11.0 Meeting with Niagara Escarpment Commission Staff

Niagara Region Planning Staff gave a presentation to staff from the Niagara Escarpment Commission to provide an update on the work program, provide an overview of the options, as well as to solicit input towards the identification of a preferred option for the natural heritage system and water resource system. A copy of the presentation given by Regional staff is included in **Appendix J**.

During the presentation several questions were posed and comments made – these have been summarized as comments:

Summary of comments related to the identification of a preferred option

- Ensure that if Provincial data sources are being used to map components of the natural environment system, the most current dataset is being used.
- The Region can identify an option for the N.H.S. and W.R.S that is more restrictive than the Niagara Escarpment Plan; the Niagara Escarpment Commission would implement the Region's more restrictive policies.
- There is support for identification of linkages within the Niagara Escarpment Plan area.
- Niagara Escarpment Commission staff note that in the Niagara Escarpment Plan area, all wetlands are protected, not just Provincially Significant Wetlands (section 2.7.1 of Niagara Escarpment Plan).
- The Niagara Escarpment Commission is supportive of more protection for the natural environment and going beyond minimum standards.

Summary of other comments to inform the Natural Environment Work Program

- The Niagara Escarpment Commission support the decision to not use offsetting, unless where disturbance is absolutely necessary (e.g., emergency road repair).
- There is concern with intensifying development, especially in the NEP area or adjacent to NEP area. Need to make sure natural features are protected in those urban areas and minor urban centres.
- Ensure there is reference to the Niagara Escarpment Plan in the Niagara Official Plan and adequate explanation of how to implement policies from the Niagara Escarpment Plan and Niagara Official Plan where there is overlap.
- There is support for the identification of linkages in settlement areas to provide for tree planting and restoration efforts and help manage invasive species.

12.0 Meeting with Niagara Parks Commission Staff

Niagara Region Planning Staff gave a presentation to staff from the Niagara Parks Commission to provide an update on the work program, provide an overview of the options. A copy of the presentation given by Regional staff is included in **Appendix K**. Staff from the Niagara Parks Commission gave a presentation to the Region that is also found in **Appendix K**. There were no comments provided to the Region that would inform the identification of the preferred option for the natural environment systems.

13.0 Team Niagara

Team Niagara is a group of economic development staff from the Region and Local Municipalities that meets on a regular basis to discuss and coordinate on issues related to economic development in Niagara. On November 19, 2020 Region staff presented an update on the Natural Environment Work Program to Team Niagara. This presentation was part of an overall update on the status of the new Niagara Official Plan. Team Niagara representatives stressed the importance of engaging with industry representatives in the Region – such as the Home Builders Association (note: correspondence from the Niagara Home Builders Association is included in **Appendix E**).

14.0 Ongoing Engagement with Indigenous Groups

Ongoing engagement with Indigenous Groups is an important part of the Natural Environment Work Program and the engagement program for the Niagara Official Plan in general. Through the 1st Point of Engagement, as documented in Consolation Summary Report #1, Indigenous Groups expressed an interest in environmental planning in the Region, and requested to be informed of future, more detailed work being undertaken.

To that end, all Indigenous Groups were sent a Notice of Study Commencement for the Niagara Watershed Plan project in June 2020 and were sent a letter requesting feedback on the goals and objectives of the watershed plan in November 2020. To date, no specific feedback has been received in regard to either of those requests.

In addition, to further support engagement with Indigenous Groups on the N.O.P. a sharepoint site has been set-up and is maintained to facilitate the sharing on information. Region planning staff regularly update this site with new background reports and other information relevant to the preparation of the Official Plan.

Finally, Region staff met virtually with staff from the Mississauga of the Credit First Nations on December 11, 2020. The purpose of this meeting was to provide an update on the status of the Natural Environment Work Program and the new N.O.P in general.

15.0 Key Themes and Implications for the Natural Environment Work Program

Through the 2nd Point of Engagement there were a range of opinions expressed and comments made related to identification of the preferred options for the natural environment system. Additional comments were provided related to other aspects of the Natural Environment Work Program.

It is clear that the identification of the preferred option for the N.H.S and W.R.S is a polarized and contentious issues. There are differing land use planning priorities among the range of stakeholders consulted, and no consensus on the appropriate path forward.

Based on a review of all the comments, several themes emerged; these are presented below, in no particular order, with those that specifically inform the identification of the preferred option for the natural environment systems and those that can inform future aspects the Natural Environment Work Program.

15.1 Key Themes to Inform the Identification of Preferred Options

1. Balanced Land Use Planning: Protection of the Natural Environment and Opportunities for Growth

There is no clear consensus on what the N.H.S. and W.R.S. in the Region should look like. Many comments were explicit about the need to follow a systems approach to protect and enhance the natural environment in the Region, find opportunities to increase natural area cover, and protect and enhance groundwater and surface water quality. These comments spoke to the need to provide a policy framework that recognizes the ecosystem services, including benefits to human health, biodiversity and the economy, provided by the natural environment system, through natural environment protection. Conversely, there were many other comments related to concerns that increased natural environment protection would make achieving growth targets difficult and possibly result in the need for urban expansion (which then could result on impacts on the environmental systems and agricultural land base in the Region).

When taken together, the range of opinions and comments speak to the need for a natural environment system that goes beyond the minimum provincial standard to identify and implement a comprehensive N.H.S. and W.R.S., with a policy framework that limits restrictions on development and growth in settlement areas.

Implication: The implementation of the N.H.S. and W.R.S. must achieve not only protection of existing features and areas, it should result in an enhancement to the overall area and health of the natural environment; at the same time, the policy framework for the protection of the natural environment system must recognize and allow for the need to accommodate growth and development. This will require 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 – the goal is for a balanced approach to land use planning.

Innovative planning for growth and development will need to ensure natural environment protection is achieved and vice versa. This will require integrating growth planning with natural environment mapping and protection that ensures growth targets can be achieved, as mandated by the Province, while protecting and enhancing the

natural environment. This protection and enhancement should identify ecologically appropriate linkages, buffers and enhancement areas and provide adequate flexibility to ensure growth, as required by the Province, can be achieved. The result will be a natural environment system that captures both significant features, and features and areas that support the resiliency of those features, with a policy framework that provides adequate flexibility to both achieve natural environment protection and growth and development. This policy framework would include restrictive policies for “significant” features and areas, and policies that guide management and development within supporting features and areas (e.g., linkages and enhancement areas) and adjacent to “significant” natural features and areas.

2. Recognize and Protect Agricultural Uses

Agriculture is an important part of the Region’s land base, economy, and historical fabric that must be recognized and protected as part of the policy framework for the protection of the N.H.S. and W.R.S.

Implication: Exemptions for a full range of agricultural uses should be clearly articulated in policy, including those policies and exemptions already provided through the P.P.S. and Provincial Plans. Policies should clearly identify mandatory restrictions (e.g., related to the Fisheries Act, etc.) and permission/exemptions for agricultural related uses of water resource infrastructure (e.g., agricultural drains, irrigation ditches, etc.), should they be included in the W.R.S. or N.H.S, to ensure the use of the agricultural infrastructure can continue unencumbered by Regional policy. Furthermore, exemptions for certain agricultural uses in areas of the N.H.S. or W.R.S, such as within buffers/vegetation protection zones, linkage and enhancement areas — whether mapped or not — need to be made clear.

3. Informed by Science and Guided by Goals and Objectives with Numerical Targets

There were numerous comments noting that the identification of the preferred options for the natural environment system should be informed by science and based on a clear understanding of the current natural cover, areal extent of the natural environment system, and impacts to the amount of developable area. Comments received suggested that the preferred option would then be informed by the ability of that option meet goals, objectives and measurable/numerical targets that will ultimately inform the development of policies and guide future implementation of policies. Furthermore, comments received suggested that developing goals and objectives with measurable targets will facilitate interpretation of policies related to the protection of the natural environment systems. The development of targets will also provide opportunities to measure success of the natural environment system policy framework against the goals and objectives.

Implication: The Region should undertake additional analysis of the N.H.S. and W.R.S. options to compare and contrast each to understand the implications of each option on growth and development potential. The statistics generated related to natural cover (e.g., woodland and wetland cover) could then be used to inform goals and objectives,

including measurable targets, that could be used to inform the policies of the Niagara Official Plan. These goals and objectives should be developed based on best practices and science/evidence-based data (e.g., current natural area cover). The goals should be specific (e.g., targets for natural area cover), relevant, attainable/realistic (i.e., based on current cover and potential for enhancement) and time-bound. Measurable targets should be developed using comprehensive and accurate datasets, such as the most current Ecological Land Classification dataset, to determine natural cover as a baseline of existing conditions. Ultimately, the preferred option for the N.H.S. and W.R.S., including policies, should be developed with the intention of achieving the goals and objectives of the natural environment systems. It will therefore be important that the goals, objectives, and any related targets for the natural environment systems are considered when developing policies for the N.H.S. and W.R.S.; this will ensure that through implementation of the policies, the goals and objectives can be achieved.

That said, it is important to recognize that the identification and protection of a natural environment system is part of a broader land use planning and policy framework used to guide the physical, economic and social development of Niagara; this includes direction for managing growth and the economy, protecting the natural environment, resources and agricultural land, and providing infrastructure. The identification of a N.H.S. and W.R.S. and any goals, objectives and targets should not be undertaken without consideration of the overall land use planning framework. The new N.O.P., including goals and objectives, will need to be in conformance with Provincial requirements, including Provincial policies (i.e., of the P.P.S, Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan); these plans and policies include, for example, clear direction on what features and systems must be included, direction on how the systems must be implemented, and exemptions for certain land uses. Natural environment planning is not intended to function as an environmental conservation plan; rather it is intended to support the overall land use planning objectives of the Region's Official Plan, including those related to environmental protection. Therefore, in developing the goals, objectives and any targets for the natural environment system, this will need to be done with consideration of how the natural environment fits within the overall land use planning and policy framework in the new N.O.P.

15.2 Key Themes to Inform the Natural Environment Work Program

1. Accurate and Comprehensive Mapping of the Natural Environment Systems

Mapping is foundational to facilitating wise and informed decision-making. Mapping accuracy and completeness is vital to support the interpretation and application of N.H.S. and W.R.S. policies. Clear mapping also provides important information to the public and landowners related to natural environment resources in the Region.

Implication: It is first important to recognize that the policies are what determine the make-up of the natural environment system, as well as the restrictions, permission and

exemptions related to land use planning decisions in and adjacent to the natural environment features and areas. Mapping is solely intended to support the implementation of policies and guide land use planning decisions. That said, there have been a considerable number of comments pertaining to the need to have as complete and accurate a dataset as possible to comprehensively map the N.H.S. and W.R.S. components, where possible.

The mapping will need to reflect and be consistent with provincial requirements, be easily available and user-friendly, and be updated on a regular basis to reflect notable updates in the different features and areas. 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; this internal dataset should be made available to local area municipalities to support reviews conducted at the local level.

It should also be recognized that datasets derived for use at a Regional-scale may not have the accuracy required for making property/site-specific planning related decisions. Therefore, policies will need to be clear regarding the identification of features and areas, and will need to allow for property/site-specific studies to refine mapping, through studies approved by the Region, without the need for an Official Plan Amendment.

2. Clear, Consistent Policies and Guidance for Implementation

Policies should be clear and recognize policies and regulations of other agencies for the same features to ensure either consistency or to avoid conflicting direction.

There is a need to provide more clarity on how linkages and supporting features will be identified, refined, and mapped through site-specific studies. Guidelines will be required for the identification of these features and areas.

Implication: The Niagara Official Plan should strive for greater consistency of its policies with those of other agencies. For features that have restrictions/prohibitions across multiple plans and regulations (e.g., wetlands, watercourses/fish habitat), there should be consistency with, or reference to these policies and regulations where applicable to ensure clear direction is provided and consistent interpretation is applied.

To support interpretation and appropriate application of policies, clear definitions and criteria will need to be developed in addition to detailed guidance documents (e.g., Environmental Impact Study Guidelines and W.R.S. Guidelines). This will be particularly important to ensure features and areas, such as linkages, enhancement areas and buffers are sufficiently studied and appropriately designed to achieve their intended function.

Furthermore, with the implementation of a comprehensive W.R.S. for the first time, there will need to be guidelines that direct the completion of appropriate studies to update and refine the mapping of the W.R.S. within a specific area; these guidelines should also provide direction for how policies are to be interpreted and implemented in order to achieve the goals and objectives for the W.R.S. Policies will also need to

include adequate direction for permitting refinements to mapping of the natural environment systems, as informed by appropriate studies approved by the Region, without the need for an Official Plan Amendment.

3. Build Trust Through Continued Engagement, Collaboration and Education

The community has been actively engaged in the Natural Environment Work Program expressing both a strong desire to protect the N.H.S. and W.R.S., and to ensure development is accommodated to meet the requirements for growth by the Province.

Members of the community have expressed a desire to continue to provide meaningful input to the identification of the natural environment systems and policy development. While there has been a high level of engagement through the Natural Environment Work Program, this does not necessarily translate into a high level of confidence about the anticipated outcome of the process to reflect the interests of the community. This may in part be due to the lack of understanding that natural environment planning needs to consider a range of land use planning matters when developing the N.H.S. and W.R.S. There continues to be some cynicism and skepticism about the process to identify preferred options for the natural environment system, and potential outcomes of implementing the policies of the natural environment.

Furthermore, consensus remains elusive: there are a range of expectations of what the natural environment policies should be or should emphasize which differ considerably among stakeholder groups — from calls for more flexibility and fewer restrictions, to much greater environmental protection.

Implication: The Region has developed a comprehensive engagement plan as part of the Natural Environment Work Program that exceeds typical consultation undertaken as part of municipal natural environment planning. Compared with other municipalities, the engagement with stakeholders and the public undertaken by Niagara for the Natural Environment Work Program is extensive. The Region recognizes the high level of interest from stakeholders and the public on matters related to the natural environment and values the contribution to the Natural Environment Work Program that will ultimately shape natural environment planning for years to come. Ongoing consultation will continue as part of identifying the preferred option for the natural environment system and policy.

16.0 Direction for the Selection of Preferred Options

The feedback received through the 2nd Point of Engagement included a wide range of opinions and preferences related to the identification of the N.H.S. and W.R.S. The opinions ranged from a desire to maintain flexibility and minimize additional restrictions on development (N.H.S. Option 1 or 2, and W.R.S. Option 1), to calls for a systems-based approach to identify connected and enhanced natural environment system with much greater environmental protection (N.H.S. Option 3C and W.R.S. Option 2B).

However, a consensus will not be reached on a preferred option that meets the expectations of the public and all other stakeholders.

Land use planning for the natural environment system, including the identification of the systems and related policies, will require taking a balanced approach that strives to protect and enhance the natural environment while ensuring development can occur to meet growth targets as required by the Province. Furthermore, as part of a broader land use planning exercise, the identification of the natural environment systems must take into consideration the other interests and needs in the Region.

A balanced approach to land use planning will be necessary to address the wide range of interests including the strong desire for protection of the natural environment, the requirement for growth and development, and to recognize the primacy of the agricultural system. In order to achieve this balanced approach, the policy framework for the natural environment system should:

- a) ensure strong protection of significant features and areas within the N.H.S. and W.R.S., as informed and supported by science-based goals and objectives with measurable and achievable targets;
- b) recognize Provincial requirements for growth and development by including permissions and exemptions, where appropriate, that still achieves the goals and objectives for the N.H.S. and W.R.S.; and
- c) recognize the primacy of agriculture and ensure consistent policies with Provincial plans that include exemptions and permissions related to existing and proposed uses and normal farming practices.

Based on the options developed in Technical Report #2 that were presented to the public and stakeholders as part of the 2nd Point of Engagement and subsequent comments received on the options, a N.H.S. and a W.R.S. that adequately protects significant natural features while providing flexibility for development should be carried forward as the preferred option. The selection of the preferred option should also be informed by more details about the options, particularly within urban areas, including statistics of areal cover of each option, and the policy intent of each option in order to better compare and contrast the options. Following a review of this more detailed information, it is possible that a blend of N.H.S. Options 3B and 3C, and W.R.S. Option 2A may achieve a natural environment system that both protects significant natural features and provides flexibility for development.

17.0 Next Steps

The input received through the 2nd Point of Engagement has provided direction to the Region and consultant team that will inform the development of a preferred option for the N.H.S. and W.R.S. It is clear through the consultation and feedback received that there is no consensus on a preferred option for the natural environment systems. The framework for the identification of a N.H.S. and W.R.S. and the related policies identified in Technical Report #2 will need to be modified to reflect the direction provided

in this Consultation Summary Report. Furthermore, there have been requests for additional details related to the options that can better inform decisions on a preferred option for the N.H.S. and W.R.S. As part of providing an update to Regional Council, Region staff had prepared a memorandum (CWCD 314-2020, dated November 20, 2020) noting that as part of addressing the request to provide more details on the options to assist with identifying a preferred option, the consultant team would undertake additional analysis on each of the options for the N.H.S. and W.R.S. within urban areas. This additional work will include establishing a preliminary methodology and criteria for each feature-type of the N.H.S. and W.R.S. and providing detailed statistics and comparison of each option. To accompany these detailed statistics, the policy intent of each option will also be explored in more detail to better compare and contrast the options. Following this additional analysis, a preferred option for the N.H.S. and W.R.S. mapping and policy framework will then be presented to Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee to seek their endorsement to move forward with the Natural Environment Work Program.

Following Council's endorsement of the preferred option for the natural environment systems, the detailed design of the preferred options will be undertaken in Phase 7 and documented in Technical Report #3, along with more detailed definitions and criteria and recommendations for the policies for the natural environment. Following the development of this third technical paper, the Region will commence with the detailed mapping of the systems and the policy development process; this will ultimately be followed by the 3rd Point of Engagement in Phase 8 of the Natural Environment Work Program.