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**Subject:** Niagara Official Plan: Preferred Rural Settlement Area Recommendations

**Report to:** Planning and Economic Development Committee

**Report date:** Wednesday, March 9, 2022

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## Recommendations

1. That Council **ENDORSE** in principle the Rural Settlement Area Boundary recommendations in Appendix 1 of Report PDS 7-2022; and
2. That this report be **CIRCULATED** to the Township of Wainfleet and the Township of West Lincoln.

## Key Facts

- This report summarizes feedback and provides an update to the Rural Settlement Area Boundary Review (“SABR”) recommendations previously presented through PDS 42-2021.
- The Region received submissions and identified potential locations for rural settlement area expansion. All areas were reviewed using evaluation criteria based on Provincial policies and direction.
- West Lincoln and Wainfleet have an identified need for community and rural employment lands.
- Following Council’s receipt of PDS 42-2021, staff consulted on the recommendations. A record of the consultation points through meetings, phone calls, a webinar and submissions is attached to this report. The commenting period concluded February 7, 2022.
- Consultation and submissions have been carefully considered through the review process. As a result of this review, staff’s preferred recommendations are provided in this report and illustrated in Appendix 1.
- The recommendations contained in this report represent the most appropriate locations for rural settlement expansion to align with the objectives of the Niagara

Official Plan, are consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement and conform to Provincial plans.

- The expansion areas will be identified in the Niagara Official Plan for the upcoming statutory public meeting and further related consultation.

## **Financial Considerations**

There are no financial considerations directly related to this report. Council approved the resources to complete the Niagara Official Plan (“NOP”) over a five year period as part of the 2017 Budget Process.

## **Analysis**

The Growth Plan provides population and employment forecasts for upper- and single-tier municipalities to 2051. Niagara is required to plan for these minimum forecasts to ensure settlement areas can accommodate forecasted growth.

The majority of the Region’s forecasted population and employment growth is directed to urban areas. The remaining small portion of growth will be accommodated in rural areas, primarily within rural settlement (also known as “hamlet”) boundaries.

The Region has prepared a Rural Land Needs Assessment (“RLNA”) that directs how this growth will be accommodated. The RLNA identified a need for expansion to the Wainfleet and West Lincoln hamlet boundaries to accommodate growth.

Staff’s preliminary recommendations were presented to Planning and Economic Development Committee in December for information prior to the commencement of a robust consultation period.

This report relates to rural settlement area boundary expansion recommendations only. Urban area recommendations may be found in PDS 6-2022.

The following outlines the results of staff’s consultation and preferred recommendations on the rural settlement area boundaries.

## **Consultation and Consideration**

The Region circulated letters notifying all affected landowners and those that made requests of Report PDS 42-2021 recommendations. It noted that recommendations

were received for information and consultation, including a deadline for commenting. The letter offered an opportunity to arrange a meeting with staff to discuss the review. Information was also shared via social media and the Niagara Official Plan newsletter e-blast.

The Region had six meetings/phone calls with landowners or their representatives and received a total of eleven submissions on the rural recommendations.

Primarily the meetings, correspondence and phone calls have related to specific property requests.

For West Lincoln, the Region met representatives for the recommended community area locations in Caistorville and Abingdon. Letters of support were received following these meetings.

Comments provided on the Caistorville boundary requested consideration of adjusting the southerly boundary to follow the environmental feature. Staff does not support this as the feature may change over time and therefore does not form a reliable boundary. This change is not recommended.

Staff also met with a landowner in the recommended rural employment in Fulton. Concern was raised as preference was expressed for community/residential area for this expansion. Staff explained the rationale for the recommendation, including the location, size and desirable access. Through these discussions, as well as discussion with the Township, concerns have been resolved and the direction remains for rural employment.

Township staff presented a report to West Lincoln Council supporting the identified locations. This information was considered prior to presenting PDS 42-2021.

For Wainfleet, no formal meetings have been requested. Additional information was submitted by the landowner to support the Wellandport recommendation.

Staff were contacted by the landowner in Ostryhon Corners requesting consideration for community lands, not the rural employment originally recommended. Additional information was submitted following this discussion to support the landowner's request. This information has been considered; however, staff's position remains that rural employment is the preferred direction for these lands. This location offers additional business employment opportunities within the hamlet and would be more compatible

with the surrounding uses. The Region will work with the Township to identify appropriate uses for this area through the conformity exercise.

Township staff prepared a memo to Wainfleet Council advising of the SABR process and the details of the recommendations. Regional staff are still having conversations with Wainfleet Council regarding the recommended rural expansion areas.

Correspondence was submitted regarding boundary expansions in general. A key theme raised in correspondence is loss of agricultural land. The review criteria considered impacts to the agricultural area through the assessment; including soil classification, the overall agricultural system and any impacts to existing livestock operations using minimum distance separation (MDS) information. In most cases, the MDS information was provided by the local municipality.

A summary of consultation and staff response is included as Appendix 2.

Finally, the Niagara Official Plan team held a webinar specifically devoted to the SABR process. A consultation summary from the webinar is included as Appendix 2 to Report PDS 6-2022 and posted on the report website.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the RLNA, an additional 75 hectares is needed within Wainfleet and 40 hectares within West Lincoln to accommodate growth in the rural area to 2051.

Wainfleet does not have an urban settlement area and therefore the entirety of its growth is to be accommodated in the rural area and within its hamlets. Half of residential growth and approximately 60% of rural employment growth allocation is to be directed to its hamlets.

For West Lincoln, a significant majority of new population growth is forecasted to go to the Smithville urban area, with only a small percentage planned for hamlets. All residential land need directed to the rural area is to be accommodated within hamlets. Approximately 60% of rural employment growth will be directed to West Lincoln's hamlets.

Port Colborne, Fort Erie and Lincoln were reviewed as part of this work. It was determined that the existing land supply was adequate. No additional lands were required.

To determine the most appropriate location for expansion, the Region developed assessment criteria that is consistent with Provincial Policy Statement and conforms to Provincial plans. The criteria is based on five categories: contribution to rural character, support for agricultural community, impacts to agricultural operations and system, the recommended natural environment system/features, and hydrogeological considerations. The review also looked at site specific context considerations. The criteria was applied to all expansion requests, and considered the full extent of each rural settlement boundary.

The original rationale for recommendations is included in Appendix 3. Following the release of PDS 42-2021, staff has considered all comments provided, reviewed any new submissions, collected additional information from the recommended natural environment system and, in some cases, completed further review of the agricultural area. With the exception of a minor adjustment to the southern boundary of the Wainfleet Village to address the minimum distance separation arc, the recommended rural expansion areas in Report PDS 42-2021 are recommended to be carried forward.

Appendix 1 identifies the Rural Settlement Area boundaries recommended for inclusion in the Niagara Official Plan.

### West Lincoln

Regional staff recommendations for West Lincoln remain unchanged.



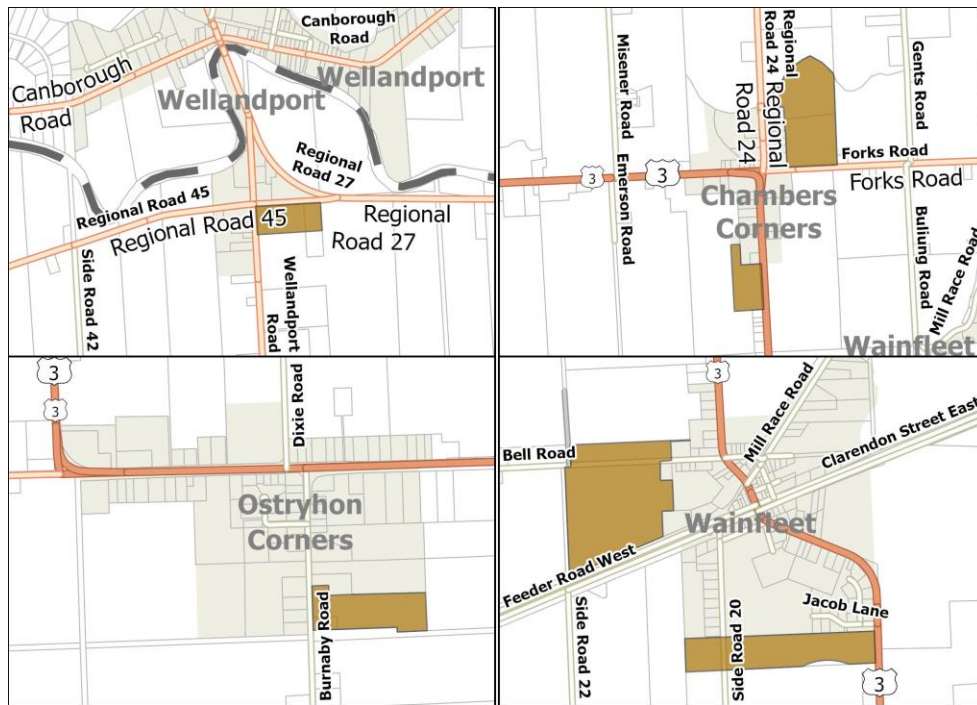
The following table demonstrates the breakdown of how land need was distributed to the rural settlements:

<b>Rural Settlement</b>	<b>Community Lands</b>	<b>Rural Employment</b>
Abingdon	11 hectares	
Caistorville	7 hectares	
Wellandport	3 hectares	
Fulton		19 hectares*
<b>Total</b>	<b>21 hectares</b>	<b>19 hectares</b>

\*The Fulton area is increased by approximately 29 ha total (i.e. an additional 10 ha) to accommodate relocation of existing business operations currently located outside the rural settlement area. The NOP will include a special policy area directing implementation through Local Official Plan conformity.

Wainfleet

Regional staff continue to recommend the following for Wainfleet.



Wainfleet Rural Settlement	Community Lands	Rural Employment
Wainfleet	47 hectares	
Wellandport	3 hectares	
Chambers Corners		17 hectares
Ostryhon Corners		5 hectares
<b>Total</b>	<b>50 hectares</b>	<b>22 hectares</b>

As noted earlier, the expansion boundary at the south end of Wainfleet Village has been adjusted slightly. New information on minimum distance separation is now available and Regional staff are recommending that the rural settlement boundary be adjusted to reflect the arc to the southerly poultry barns. This adjustment will have minimal impact to development of the property to be included in the Wainfleet Village boundary. Staff have also considered the impact to future expansions of the livestock operation. The current operation could expand without impact.

## Conclusion

Concentrating growth within the hamlets supports new residents and businesses who wish to locate in Niagara's rural municipalities and provides Niagara's rural communities opportunity to accommodate this growth over the next 30 years.

The recommended boundaries as set out in this report best meet the objectives of the Niagara Official Plan, conform to Provincial Plans, and are consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement.

The boundaries identified in Appendix 1 are to be included in the draft Niagara Official Plan and presented at the Statutory Public Meeting in April. Refinements to the hamlet boundaries or the RLNA may be considered through the remainder of the public process.

## Alternatives Reviewed

Option 1: Council could choose not to endorse the recommended expansion areas. This option is not recommended. By not supporting rural expansion areas the Region will not be consistent with the PPS and not conform to the Growth Plan.

## Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Settlement Area Boundary Expansion, as part of the Region's MCR and NOP, is supported by the following Council Strategic Priorities:

- **Supporting Business and Economic Growth:** Through long range planning to accommodate growth for rural community and employment lands and offer opportunities to attract and support economic wellbeing;
- **Healthy and Vibrant Community:** Through planning for safe, healthy rural settlements that are attractive, inclusive and connected;
- **Responsible Growth and Infrastructure Planning:** Through coordinated, efficient use of rural infrastructure and responsibly directing growth to rural settlements; and
- **Sustainable and Engaging Government:** Through planned growth that is fiscally sustainable and fosters strong, successful relationships between all levels of government in the supply of services.



## **Other Pertinent Reports**

- PDS 4-2021 Niagara Official Plan–Steps and Directions Moving Forward (information)
- PDS 17-2021 Niagara Official Plan Consolidated Policy Report (endorsement)
- PDS 33-2021 Niagara Official Plan: Land Needs Assessment and Settlement Area Boundary Review Update (endorsement)
- PDS 42-2021 Niagara Official Plan: Settlement Area Boundary Review – Rural Recommendations

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This report is coordinated with PDS 6-2022.

This report was prepared in consultation with and reviewed by Diana Morreale, Acting Director of Community and Long Range Planning.

## **Appendices**

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| Appendix 1 | Map of Rural Settlement Area Boundary Review Recommendations                                  |
| Appendix 2 | Summary of Consultation   |
| Appendix 3 | Rural Settlement Area Boundary Review Recommendations<br>(Niagara Official Plan website only) |

Please see Appendix 2 of Report PDS 6-2022 for a summary of questions and answers related to the Settlement Area Boundary Review Public Information Centre.