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**Subject:** St. Catharines Regional Road 42 (Ontario Street) Corridor Secondary Plan Memorandum of Understanding

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

**Report date:** Wednesday, July 13, 2022

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## Recommendations

1. That the Regional Chair **BE AUTHORIZED** to sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Region of Niagara and the City of St. Catharines for the Ontario Street Corridor Secondary Plan Study, attached as Appendix 1; and
2. That a copy of Report PDS-11 2022 and the executed MOU **BE CIRCULATED** to the City of St. Catharines.

## Key Facts

- The City of St. Catharines has initiated work on a secondary plan for the Ontario Street Corridor (Ontario Street from the Queen Elizabeth Way to Welland Avenue).
- The secondary plan will focus largely on lands associated with the former General Motors plant, located at 282 and 285 Ontario Street, however lands to the north and south of these properties have been included in the secondary plan to ensure the final land use vision for the area is comprehensive and cohesive.
- City staff are proposing to complete work on the secondary plan internally, utilizing the assistance of development proponents of lands within the secondary plan area, as well as Regional staff.
- Regional staff involvement would consist of representation on the Technical Advisory Committee, peer review of studies, preparation of certain technical components of the secondary plan, assistance with public engagement efforts, and the provision of data.
- A MOU has been prepared to outline the role of the Region in the completion of this work. Council authorization is required in order to enter in this agreement.

## **Financial Considerations**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Regional staff time will be required to support work on the secondary plan; however, this will be accounted for in the Planning and Development Services Operating Budget.

The Region previously awarded a Smarter Niagara Incentive Program (SNIP) – Planning Grant to the secondary plan. The SNIP planning grant will fund 50% of the total cost of the secondary plan project, to an established limit of \$100,000. An amount of \$41,000 has already been allocated to the City to complete an Employment Land Needs Assessment which included a review of lands within the secondary plan area. Accordingly, \$59,000 of Regional funding remains available to complete work associated with the secondary plan.

## **Analysis**

On May 30, 2022, City of St. Catharines Council endorsed a Terms of Reference to guide the completion of the Ontario Street Corridor Secondary Plan. The secondary plan area, as shown in Appendix 2 to this report, extends along Ontario Street, from the Queen Elizabeth Way to Welland Avenue.

The purpose of the secondary plan will be to establish a clear vision, goals, objectives, land use policies, permissions and implementation strategies to guide future development in this secondary plan area. A significant component of this work will focus on lands associated with the former General Motors plant, located at 282 and 285 Ontario Street. These lands, which total approximately 20 hectares in area, are currently vacant and are a significant brownfield site within the City of St. Catharines and the Region. Redevelopment of these lands will result in significant environmental remediation and redevelopment of the area.

Lands located at 282 and 285 Ontario Street were previously subject to City of St. Catharines Official Plan Amendment No. 26 (OPA 26), which was approved by Regional Council in March 2021. OPA 26 re-designated the subject lands from General Employment to Mixed Use, and required that a comprehensive secondary plan be approved prior to the future redevelopment of 282 and 285 Ontario Street. An appeal of Regional Council's decision to approve OPA 26 was recently dismissed by the Ontario Land Tribunal. This dismissal is currently under a request for judicial review; however, OPA 26 remains in effect.

Lands to the north and south of 282 and 285 Ontario Street have been included in the secondary plan to ensure the final land use vision for the area is comprehensive and cohesive. From a Regional perspective, this segment of Ontario Street is a Regional Road and serves as an important gateway into the City of St. Catharines downtown core. An intended objective of the secondary plan is to develop design strategies aimed at enhancing the gateway function of this corridor. Therefore, the Region has a key interest in the overall outcome of the secondary plan.

### **Regional Involvement**

The secondary plan will take approximately 2.5 years to complete. City staff have estimated that the cost to hire a consultant to oversee and complete work on the secondary plan would be significantly greater than what the City has allocated for the project. Accordingly, the City is intending to complete most of the work on the secondary plan and its deliverables in-house. Development proponents of lands within the secondary plan area will be required to contribute towards the completion of technical studies required to inform the secondary plan. The City will require that these proponents enter into an agreement with the City to ensure their role in the secondary plan is clearly defined and transparent to the public.

Recognizing that Regional staff have specific technical expertise associated with certain components of the secondary plan (i.e. urban design, environmental planning, servicing etc.), City staff have requested that the Region also provide assistance. In addition to having representation on the Technical Advisory Committee that will guide work on the secondary plan, it is intended that Regional staff will assist with the peer review of studies, support City staff in the preparation of certain technical components of the secondary plan, as well as with public engagement efforts, and provide data to the City and/or their consultants to inform the work that will be completed. Regional staff have met with City staff to discuss the intended scope of the Region's involvement, and have no objections to what has been proposed, given the importance of the secondary plan from a Regional perspective.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been developed to formally establish the role of both the Region and the City of St. Catharines throughout the secondary plan process. The MOU is attached as Appendix I to this report. Authorization by Regional Council is required in order to enter into this agreement with the City of St. Catharines.

Regional staff have partnered with Local Area Municipalities on similar secondary planning exercises in the past. In addition to the Niagara GO Hub and Transit Stations

Study, which resulted in the creation of four secondary plans to guide development in and around the Grimsby, Beamsville, St. Catharines, and Niagara Falls GO station areas, Regional staff assisted the Town of Lincoln in the completion of the Prudhommes Secondary Plan.

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

Council could choose not to enter into a formal agreement with the City of St. Catharines to permit Regional staff to assist in the preparation of the secondary plan. If this option is pursued, there is a risk that completion of the secondary plan may be delayed, or the secondary plan may not be completed, which would be detrimental to the eventual remediation and redevelopment of the vacant brownfield lands within the secondary plan area. The secondary plan is also proposed to explore opportunities to enhance this segment of Ontario Street, which is a Regional Road. This planning work would have to be accommodated as part of a different exercise if the secondary is not completed.

### **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

Endorsement of the MOU and Regional staff assistance in the preparation of the Ontario Street Corridor secondary plan will support the following Council Strategic Priorities:

- Supporting Business and Economic Growth – the Ontario Street Corridor will be proactively planned through the secondary plan work to support the achievement of a complete community.
- Healthy, Vibrant, and Complete Community – the secondary plan work will support the remediation and revitalization of vacant brownfield lands for housing and other community needs.
- Responsible Growth and Infrastructure Planning – the secondary plan work will explore opportunities for active transportation and pedestrian improvements along the Ontario Street Corridor.
- Sustainable and Engaging Government – the secondary plan work provides an opportunity for the Regional staff to share resources and expertise with the City of St. Catharines, creating cost efficiencies.

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**Appendices**

- Appendix 1      Memorandum of Understanding between the Region of Niagara and the City of St. Catharines for the Ontario Street Corridor Secondary Plan Study
- Appendix 2      Map of the Ontario Corridor Secondary Plan Area