
Subject: Niagara Housing Statement: Affordable Housing Data

Report to: Planning and Economic Development Committee

Report date: Wednesday, April 17, 2019

Recommendations

1. That Report PDS 17-2019 **BE RECEIVED** for information; and
2. That a copy of Report PDS 17-2019 **BE CIRCULATED** to the Local Area Municipalities.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the development of a Niagara Housing Statement database to inform the concurrent studies being undertaken by the Planning and Development Services Department and the Community Services Department. Specifically, the comprehensive review of the Niagara Region's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan and the preparation of a regional housing strategy to inform the policies of the Regional Official Plan.
- An inter-departmental Steering Committee was formed in 2018 to align the concurrent efforts across the Corporation to address issues of housing supply and affordability. The Steering Committee determined that there is a need for a single source of housing-related data that clearly delineates housing need within Niagara Region.
- The Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis (CANCEA) was awarded the project and has prepared a comprehensive database that includes key housing metrics, and detailed demographic and housing trends for Niagara by region and municipality.
- A series of one-on-one consultation meetings was held in March 2019 between local municipal planning staff, Regional staff, and the CANCEA Project Team to discuss the database and emerging trends. Feedback received during these sessions was overwhelmingly supportive of the project deliverables, and indicated an urgent need for this data to be shared in order to inform municipal-level housing studies and related initiatives.
- Following this Committee meeting, Regional staff will distribute the database to local municipal staff, and organise a one-day working session to review the data, identify local and regional trends and identify scenarios that will inform the preparation and implementation of local and regional housing policy.

Financial Considerations

The Niagara Housing Statement project was funded through the 2018 Council Approved Operating Budget with contributions from the Planning and Development Services Department, and the Community Services Department. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Analysis

Background

New Regional Official Plan and Housing and Homelessness Action Plan

Section 26 of the *Planning Act* requires municipalities to undertake regular reviews of their Official Plans in order to align and conform to Provincial planning policy and legislation, including the policies of the Provincial Policy Statement (2014), the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2017), the Greenbelt Plan (2017), and the Niagara Escarpment Plan (2017).

Through approval of Report PDS 40-2016, Regional Council endorsed the preparation of a new Regional Official Plan in accordance with the *Planning Act*. Subsequently, Report PDS 41-2017 outlined eight (8) background studies necessary for the development of the new Regional Official Plan. In conformity with Section 2.2.6 of the Provincial Growth Plan (2017), this list of studies includes the preparation of a regional housing strategy, that must, among other things: identify a diverse range and mix of housing options and densities to meet the needs of current and future residents; establish targets for affordable ownership and rental housing; identify land use planning and financial planning tools to support these measures; and align with the Niagara Region 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP) as required under the *Housing Services Act*.

The Niagara Region 10-Year HHAP was developed in consultation with local community members, service providers, local area municipalities, and other stakeholders as per the requirements of the *Housing Services Act*. Action plans play a critical function in setting out how Service Managers, such as the Regional Municipality of Niagara, are to address housing and homelessness locally, including: housing affordability, the co-ordination of homelessness and related support services, and the prevention of homelessness and chronic homelessness. The Plan was approved by Niagara Regional Council in 2013, and came into effect on January 1, 2014.

The *Housing Services Act* stipulates that Service Managers must review their plans at least once every five (5) years to reflect changes in policy and/or shifts in local priorities, as well as to ensure consistency with the Policy Statement: Service Manager Housing

and Homelessness Plans (2016). The review process is an opportunity to consider if any substantial changes have taken place in the local context since its initial creation, particularly in relation to local demographic and economic changes.

This is formally reflected in the Policy Statement: Service Manager Housing and Homelessness Plans (2016), which requires Service Managers to complete an assessment of current and future housing needs. The assessment must be used to inform objectives, targets, and achievements within the updated HHAP, including goals related to the provision of a mix and range of housing by non-profit housing corporations, non-profit cooperatives, and the private sector in order to meet the needs of the local community. The action plan must also reflect a coordinated approach with Ontario's land use planning framework, including the Provincial Policy Statement (2014) and the Provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2017).

Preparation of the Niagara Housing Statement Database

In 2018, staff members from Niagara Regional Housing, Planning and Development Services, Community Services, and ERMS Departments formed an inter-departmental Steering Committee to coordinate concurrent housing studies, as well as to align efforts being undertaken across the Corporation to address housing supply and affordability within the Niagara Region.

The Steering Committee identified that there was no existing source of data either within or outside the organization that could provide an accurate assessment of the current and future demand for ownership, rental, and affordable housing within the Niagara Region. As such, in recognition of the mutual need for this information, the Planning and Development Services Department and the Community Services Departments prepared a joint Request for Proposal (RFP) for the development of a comprehensive database that would inform the policies of the Niagara Region Housing and Homelessness Action Plan and the Regional Official Plan.

In December 2018 the project was awarded to the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis (CANCEA), an analytics and data organization with over 15 years experience in the provision of demographic, household, employment, land-use and economic analyses for various municipal and provincial government bodies. The database prepared by CANCEA includes detailed demographic and housing trends, both based on historical data, as well as data projections in conformity with those developed for Niagara 2041 Growth Strategy. The database also includes geographical mapping of income levels, demographic and housing characteristics at the sub-municipal levels, key housing need metrics at the municipal level, and analyses of key sub-groups, including older adults, low-income earners, immigrant and homeless populations, and aboriginal identity.

Local Municipal Consultation

Following a presentation by CANCEA to the inter-departmental Steering Committee on March 25, 2019, a series of one-on-one consultation meetings were held on March 26, 2019 and March 27, 2019 between local planning staff from all twelve (12) area municipalities, staff from Planning and Development Services, Community Services, and Niagara Regional Housing, and the CANCEA Project Team

As part of these consultation sessions, each municipality was provided with data specific to their community, as well as a high-level overview of the housing data collected. The contents and capabilities of the prepared database were presented by the Project Team, followed by a facilitated discussion regarding the results of the preliminary data analysis and its potential implications on municipal housing initiatives.

Feedback from local municipal staff was positive, with few corrections or gaps in the data identified. Several local municipalities indicated that they were in the process of undertaking similar types of housing analyses to address the specific needs of their communities, and that receipt of the prepared database would be critical to determining their scope and direction.

Process and Next Steps

Given the overall response to the database and the urgent nature of select municipal studies, Regional staff have determined that it is imperative that the results of the data analysis be presented to the Committee at this time, so that the Niagara Housing Statement database can be shared with local municipalities to work with.

Following the circulation of the dataset, Regional staff will be working with CANCEA's Project Team to arrange and host a training session for local municipal staff. Regional staff also intend to use this session as a means to facilitate further discussion regarding the specific housing needs of local area municipalities, and to develop specific scenarios for a risk and opportunities analysis that can inform the policies and regional targets within the Niagara Region HHAP and the new Regional Official Plan.

Alternatives Reviewed

The inter-departmental Steering Committee discussed various means of utilizing existing data sources to form the basis of the Region's housing policies and objectives. However, due to the incomplete and disjointed nature of the information available, it would compromise the effectiveness of any recommended tools or metrics. The comprehensive database prepared by CANCEA is necessary for staff to develop evidence-based policies that more accurately reflects the Region's housing needs, as well as to provide consistency between Regional and local municipal housing studies and strategies.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The new Regional Official Plan will assist in implementing Council's Strategic Priority of Labour-Ready Workforce.

Other Pertinent Reports

N/A

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