
Subject: New Niagara Official Plan - Public Consultation Summary

Report to: Planning and Economic Development Committee

Report date: Wednesday, January 15, 2020

Recommendations

1. That Report PDS 3-2020 **BE RECEIVED** for information; and
2. That a copy of Report PDS 3-2020 **BE CIRCULATED** to the Local Area Municipalities.

Key Facts Key Facts

- Consultation on the new Niagara Official Plan takes place at four different levels as outlined in this report.
- Significant stakeholder and public input has been received on the structure and contents of new Niagara Official Plan and on the key findings of the background studies that will inform the Official Plan.
- This report provides a summary of the input received to date through public surveys, stakeholder input, direct public input and the Planning Advisory Committee.

Financial Considerations

Council approved the resources to complete the new Niagara Official Plan (NOP) over a 5 year period as part of the 2017 Budget Process, predominantly funded through Development Charges.

Analysis

Public and stakeholder input is an important component of the Niagara Official Plan process and is required in to provide input into the preparation of planning policy and to provide a mechanism for Council to gauge public sentiment.

There are four different consultation formats where input has been received to date, details of which are as follows:

1. Public Surveys

The key themes that the public identified as being important to address were identified through Imagine Niagara (October 2013 – June 2014) and confirmed through Shape Niagara (March – August 2018). Together both of these surveys involved significant community outreach and generated thousands of responses. A summary of the important themes of these initiatives is shown in Appendix 1.

A Special Meeting of Council was also held in July 2018 to hear input on the need for a new Official Plan and what planning matters it could address. A more detailed summary of public comments can be found in Appendix 2.

2. Stakeholder Input

The Official Plan is being informed by various background studies/reports which have involved the input of relevant stakeholder groups. For example, the Natural Environment and Water Systems (NE&WS) background work involved meetings with environmental, agricultural and developer stakeholder groups. These groups will have further opportunity to provide input into the evaluation of options for the NE&WS. Local municipal planning staff also participate via Technical Advisory Groups and are updated on background work.

Local Councils have been updated on the new Niagara Official Plan process and the status of supporting background work twice to date. In general, local Council concerns or questions focused on: bringing local Official Plans in to conformity with the Regional Official Plan; affordable housing; natural heritage and water resource protection; urban boundary expansions; employment land conversions; protecting agricultural land and recognizing the importance of agriculture.

Discussions are ongoing with Indigenous groups.

3. Direct Public Input

Four Public Information Centres (PICs) were held to inform the public and gather input on key findings of the background studies. The PICs were held at Regional Headquarters, Niagara Falls, Grimsby and Fort Erie.

In general, the input provided by the public was confirming as to what planning staff believe to be the relevant planning issues, challenges and opportunities.

Key attendance and input highlights from the PICs are as follows:

- 161 people attended the four PICs;
- Each PIC had a few attendees from outside the host municipality, ranging from four to 9.
- The attendee distribution was about 70% urban and 30 % rural
- Over 200 comments were received; and
- 61 survey results were received;

Interactive PIC Board Input

A variety of interactive boards were placed around the room at the open houses to seek input on each of the topic areas. The first activity board (**Figure 1**) asked participants to place a sticker beside their top three priorities for the new Niagara Official Plan. The top priorities overall were protecting the natural environment, transportation improvements, and more housing options.

Figure 1 – What is most important to you?

Priorities	Sticker Tally
Protecting the natural environment (e.g. woodlands, wetlands)	32
Transportation improvements (e.g. transit cycling)	26
More housing options (e.g. affordable housing)	25
Access to open space, waterfronts and natural areas	21
Supporting jobs and economic prosperity (e.g. tourism)	19
Protecting farmland and supporting the agricultural industry	17
Infrastructure for growth (e.g. sewer, water, stormwater)	14
Sustainable development and planning for climate change	11
Conserving cultural heritage and archaeological resources	9
Community planning and urban design	9

Participants were also asked if anything was missing from the list. The majority of the comments related to the priorities identified in some capacity. However, some notable examples of additional priorities included poverty reduction, accessibility and inclusion.

The other activity boards asked participants to identify the biggest challenges and opportunities relative to various themes. Key challenges and opportunities are identified in **Figure 2** below. A more detailed summary of comments is included in Appendix 3.

Figure 2 – What are our biggest challenges and opportunities?

Theme	Biggest Challenge	Biggest Opportunity
Growing Region (growth, development & housing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-density development and uneven growth • Lack of diversity in housing types and affordable options, including for seniors and youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher-density development, including in proximity to GO Transit stations • More housing options (row housing, semi-detached, apartment buildings, etc.)
Vibrant Region (urban design & cultural resources)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development occurring without proactive, comprehensive plans, such as a secondary plans, and appropriate archaeology assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure plans are in place to guide development in order to achieve design excellence and conserve archaeological resources
Competitive Region (employment, agriculture & resources)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited public transit to access employment opportunities • Impacts of resource extraction on the natural environment, including our water resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boost employment and tourism through public transit, including the GO train • Strong policies to manage resource extraction and final rehabilitation
Connected Region (transportation & infrastructure)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring infrastructure (transportation, water, wastewater, sewer) has the capacity to support growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast, efficient and accessible public transit network and complete streets that accommodate all road users
Sustainable Region (natural environment & climate change)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of trees and other natural features • Adapting to impacts of extreme weather events, such as flooding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger protections for the natural environment • Meaningful action on climate change across all sectors

Digital Survey

For those that participated in the digital survey the following planning themes were ranked in order of importance: more transportation options; more housing options for all ages and incomes; more jobs; protecting the natural environment; preserving farmland; and planning for climate change. There was no one dominant planning theme. Further planning for the other themes all impact climate change.

The top three planning objectives confirmed for managing growth were: directing growth to strategic locations; using our land and resources wisely; and ensuring growth is supported by infrastructure.

The natural environment, open space and scenery was significantly more valued than other reasons for enjoying the agricultural and rural areas such as wineries, events and tourism; access to a variety of local food; recreation opportunities; jobs and economic opportunities.

Urban Boundary (Settlement Area) Expansions

A variety of requests to expand urban boundaries were submitted as part of the Municipal Comprehensive Review/new Niagara Official Plan process, as well as part of the Comprehensive Provincial Plan review in 2017.

Source of Request	Number of Requests	Area (ha)	Number in Greenbelt
Greenbelt Review	34	558	34
Municipal Council Request	6	1,136	1
Private Land Owner	35	592	16
Summary	76	2,286*	51

* 2,150 ha - accounting for overlap between municipal and private requests

At the time the above-referenced submissions were received, urban boundaries could be expanded only through the Region's Municipal Comprehensive Review/new Niagara Official Plan process. Earlier this year, the Province amended the Growth Plan to allow the consideration of expansions up to 40 Ha, and boundary adjustments, in certain cases and subject to specific criteria, outside of the Official Plan process.

The Region's review of expansion requests is linked to the analysis of lands needs and will be reported further in 2020. In many cases, requests for urban expansions cannot be accommodated because they are located in the Greenbelt Area which automatically disqualifies consideration. Land owners who have made requests in these areas will be notified accordingly.

4. Planning Advisory Committee

To date, the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC), consisting of eight citizens with a professional/academic background, has been providing input on visioning, directives and background information that will inform the development of the new Niagara Official Plan.

Alternatives Reviewed

The public consultation is following a consultation framework approved by Council in March 2019.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

This report highlights the various consultation steps to date on the new Niagara Official Plan as well as a summary of public input received to date. This process is important to address Council's priority as a Sustainable Engaging Government. The new Niagara Official Plan addresses Council's other priorities, being: Supporting Businesses and Economic Growth; Healthy and Vibrant Community; and Responsible Growth and Infrastructure Planning.

Other Pertinent Reports

PDS 9-2019 New Official Plan Consultation Timeline Framework
PDS 33-2019 Growth Management Program Update for New Official Plan
CWCD 421-2019 New Niagara Official Plan Updates

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Appendices

Appendix 1	Important themes- Imagine Niagara and Shape Niagara
Appendix 2	Summary of Public Comments- Special Council Meeting
Appendix 3	Detailed summary of PIC Comments