
Subject: Updated Employment Work Plan for the New Niagara Official Plan

Report to: Planning and Economic Development Committee

Report date: Wednesday, July 15, 2020

Recommendations

1. That Report PDS 21-2020 **BE RECEIVED** for information; and
2. That a copy of Report PDS 21-2020 **BE CIRCULATED** to local municipal Planning Directors and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Key Facts

- This Report sets out the Region's updated employment work plan for the new Niagara Official Plan.
- At the May 13, 2020 Planning and Development Committee ("PEDC") meeting, the PEDC deferred endorsement of the Employment Area Strategy (PDS 14-2020) to allow for further consultation.
- As a result, Regional staff updated its employment work plan to include additional consultation this Summer and Fall.
- With the deferral of PDS 14-2020, staff updated the employment work plan to merge components of the Employment Area Strategy, Regional Official Plan Amendment No. 16 and the Official Plan Employment Policy Paper. Doing so will simplify the development of policies and mapping, and allow for additional consultation opportunities.
- The Official Plan Employment Policy Paper is planned for completion by the end of 2020. Regional Official Plan Amendment No. 16 will no longer proceed.

Financial Considerations

The ongoing costs associated with the Employment Work Plan can be accommodated within the Council approved Regional Official Plan project budget.

Analysis

Provincial Plans require the Region to plan for employment uses. Recent amendments to the *Provincial Policy Statement, 2020* (the “PPS”) and *A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2019* (the “Growth Plan”) have modernized employment planning in Ontario.

The Employment Area Strategy

In 2018, Regional staff started work on the Employment Area Strategy (the “Employment Strategy”) with its consultants MHBC Planning and urbanMetrics.

The Employment Strategy included the following consultation that informed the recommendations of the Strategy:

- Throughout the Fall of 2018 and Summer of 2019, Regional staff had multiple one-on-one meetings with each local municipality to identify employment lands that should be included within employment areas.
- On October 8, 2019 and October 10, 2019, Regional staff hosted stakeholder workshops with local municipal planners and industry stakeholders, respectively, to review draft employment area policy direction and mapping.
- In November 2019, Regional staff participated in 4 Public Information Centres (“PICs”) as part of the new Niagara Official Plan (the “new OP”) to solicit public input on employment areas, amongst other things.
- On February 25, 2020, Regional staff hosted an industry stakeholder update and question and answer session to discuss the draft recommendations of the Employment Strategy and its next steps for implementation.

In May 2020, the Employment Strategy was advanced to Planning and Economic Development Committee (“PEDC”) for endorsement (PDS 14-2020). The Report was deferred to allow for further consultation. Additionally, the Committee raised questions about how Niagara’s employment planning will respond to the changes arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

ROPA 16

In response to the Province's updated rules on employment, in late 2019, the Region started the process for Regional Official Plan Amendment No. 16 ("ROPA 16").

The purpose of ROPA 16 was to address the employment policy gap in the existing Regional Official Plan ("ROP") prior to the completion of the new OP in 2021. ROPA 16 included a proposed new schedule (Schedule G3 – Employment Areas) that would implement employment area boundaries as mapped through the Employment Strategy.

Additionally, preliminary work had started on the Official Plan Employment Policy Paper (the "Employment Paper"), which was to follow endorsement of the Employment Strategy and ROPA 16. The Employment Paper would inform the development of the employment policies for the new OP.

Updated Employment Work Plan

Regional staff considered how to incorporate additional consultation into its employment work plan.

It was determined to merge the Employment Strategy, ROPA 16 and Employment Paper into a unified process.

With this change, the Employment Paper will address the matters set out in the Employment Strategy and ROPA 16, instead of advancing a separate ROPA 16. Since the Employment Strategy was deferred, the planned timing for ROPA 16 was revisited to allow for further consultation. The original ROPA 16 timeframe would be set back, which would be too close to the planned timing for the new OP. Thus, staff determined that a unified approach for all projects was more appropriate.

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on employment areas was not addressed in the Employment Strategy since that work was completed prior to the pandemic having a substantive impact in Canada.

Additionally, on June 16, 2020, the Province released *Proposed Amendment 1 to A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* and the *Proposed Land Needs Assessment Methodology for A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*.

The new Provincial materials noted above, and the COVID-19 impact on employment areas, will be addressed in the Employment Paper.

A detailed timeline of the updated employment work plan public consultation process is shown in Appendix 1.

Planned consultation and milestones are as follows:

- Throughout the Summer and Fall, Regional staff will continue to consult with local municipal planners and industry stakeholders to address matters and requests as they arise.
- In mid-July, 2020, the Region will launch an online survey using MetroQuest to gather public feedback on employment planning. This online survey will be live for approximately 3 weeks.
- On July 22, 2020, the Region will host a virtual open house to present draft materials and gather feedback.
- At the September 9, 2020 PEDC meeting, Regional staff will report on the consultation feedback received.
- In August or September, 2020, the Region will host Public Information Centres for the new OP. Components of Employment Paper will be featured for comment.
- Staff are targeting the December 9, 2020 PEDC meeting to report on the Employment Paper.

Alternatives Reviewed

An alternative to the simplified, merged approach set out above, is one in which the Region continues with the original employment work plan, condensed with additional consultation. This modified original work plan could include advancing ROPA 16, rather than merging ROPA 16 with the balance of the employment work.

With the deferral of the Employment Strategy, this alternative is not recommended. Since it involves more approvals, the process is more complex. Likewise, public consultation opportunities may be more limited and in close succession to each other

because of the tight time between events. As a result, this process would be more confusing for the public.

Although the original work program made sense if the Employment Strategy had been adopted in May 2020, given the outcome at PEDC and the release of the draft Provincial materials noted above, the new merged approach is more practical to achieve the Committee's objectives.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The Region's employment work plan feeds in the new OP work program and helps to achieve the following Strategic Priorities:

- Business and Economic Growth; and
- Responsible Growth and Infrastructure Planning.

The initiatives of the Region's employment work plan will offer important insight on matters relating to the short- and long-term protection of employment in Niagara. Analysis and recommendations from this work program will improve the Region's ability to plan for the long-term economic growth and support the viability of all types of employment. These initiatives will improve the ability for municipalities and industry stakeholders to make sound evidence-based decisions on land uses, infrastructure, and other service delivery programs.

Other Pertinent Reports

PDS 33-2019 – Growth Management Program Update for New Official Plan

PDS 35-2019 – Project Initiation Report, Employment Policies Update

PDS 14-2020 – Niagara Region's Employment Area Strategy: Background Report and Recommendations

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Updated Employment Work Plan: Timeline of Public Consultation