



Subject: Planning Update Report on the New Niagara Region Official Plan

To: Council

From: Planning and Development Department

Report Number: 2021-247

Meeting Date: September 27, 2021

Recommendation:

That Planning and Development Department Report 2021-247 be received; and

That staff be directed to send a letter to Regional staff and Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee outlining the importance of employment lands in Port Colborne and the concerns overall with the Niagara Official Plan.

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on forthcoming changes proposed to the New Niagara Official Plan (NOP) as they pertain to the City of Port Colborne and to outline staff's involvement in the formulation of new policies and mapping.

Background:

As Council is aware, the Niagara Region is currently undergoing a comprehensive review of the Niagara Region Official Plan. Growth projections estimate that the Region will grow to a population of roughly 694,000 by the year 2051. In order to manage this anticipated growth, the provincial government has mandated that all Regional Official Plans across the province shall be consistent with updated Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and Growth Plan. A deadline of July 1, 2022 has been set by the Province in which the Region must submit their final comprehensive Niagara Official Plan (NOP) for review and approval. Once approved, the new NOP will replace the existing Regional Official Plan, that has been guiding Regional planning since the plan's adoption in the

1970s. The City of Port Colborne will need to bring their Official Plan into conformity with the NOP upon its adoption and approval.

In response to the rapidly changing world, the new NOP will include topics that may have not been covered in former renditions of the plan, as well as updates to existing policies that will guide Niagara through a progressive 30-year horizon. Key topics and policy directions in the NOP include the following:

- Ensuring a diverse range of housing options are provided through development applications and encouraging more compact, efficient forms of development through intensification policies.
 - Policies to direct growth to areas with municipal infrastructure such as urban areas, preventing urban sprawl.
 - Setting new, updated density and intensification targets for lower-tier municipalities to incorporate more compact housing in communities.
 - Establishing climate change policies that will support the development of a Regional Greening Initiative and updating the Natural Environment System mapping to limit the development of natural areas.
 - Defining and mapping Niagara's employment areas to help direct investment, attracting and retaining jobs and growing Niagara's economy.
 - The preparation of a Regional Archaeological Management Plan identifying areas of archaeological potential, streamlining the planning and development review process, ensuring the long-term protection of archaeological resources.
 - Implementing the findings of the Land Needs Assessment conducted to accommodate forecasted residential and employment growth to 2051.
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Discussion:

Planning staff have been working in consultation with the Niagara Region to address concerns raised regarding the proposed changes introduced through the NOP.

Meetings between Regional and City Planning staff have been held on a near monthly basis where staff have been able to ask questions and provide input on the prescribed focus areas.

To date the following positions on key topics have been consistently presented to the Region from City Planning staff:

- Land Needs Assessment (LNA)
 - Mapping of excess lands will be problematic and should be avoided.
 - Excess lands should be identified as a numeric policy that will set thresholds and caps that can be modified over time, should growth and development patterns intensify.

- Lands included in the Natural Environment System and the employment/residential lands should not overlap, as Natural Environment areas prevent development.
 - The City is moving forward with large development plans in both the employment and residential sectors and staff want to be assured the LNA will not impact these developments.
 - Natural Environment System (NES)
 - The NES cannot be mapped until sites are inspected by Regional staff; City staff would be happy to attend selected sites for further review.
 - The City has identified areas on the draft NES mapping that do not warrant being in the NES, the areas have been identified through discussion and consultation with Regional staff.
 - Regional staff have ensured that areas included in the new NES mapping will be visited prior to its inclusion.
 - As identified in the LNA section above, NES lands cannot also be lands set aside for employment/residential growth and cannot count toward the hectares the City needs.
 - The LNA will likely need to be updated once the draft mapping is completed.
 - The City is expecting to be able to comment on more formal mapping prior to the mapping being approved.
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Internal Consultations:

Economic Development and Tourism Services

The City's Economic Development and Tourism Services Division staff are concerned with the Niagara Official Plan's (NOP) proposed natural heritage designations. The new designations are likely to impact City-owned lands as well as private development opportunities.

The City owns lands designated for employment purposes on Invertoise Drive that are currently undergoing an Environmental Constraints Assessment (ECA) and Environmental Impact Study (EIS). Based on the draft Natural Environment System (NES) options, Economic Development staff are concerned that any developable lands that may be discovered through the ECA and/or EIS process will be designated as environmental features regardless of the findings. Similarly, the City also owns employment designated lands on Ramey Road that are part of the City's Gateway Community Improvement Plan (CIP). These lands are proposed to be impacted by new environmental features, as presented by the Region in their NES options.

Having these lands included in the NOP as new environmental features would severely restrict the City's ability in the future to nurture these lands for employment purposes

and development. Economic Development staff believe that both of these parcels do not fit the definition of natural heritage and the City is having this position reviewed by environmental and planning consultants.

Economic Development staff are requesting Council pass a motion directing staff to send a letter to Regional staff and Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee outlining the above concerns and the importance of employment lands in Port Colborne. A copy of the draft letter has been attached as Appendix A.

Financial Implications:

There are no direct financial implications with this report.

Public Engagement:

There are no direct public engagement initiatives pertaining to this report.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillar(s) of the strategic plan:

- People: Supporting and Investing in Human Capital
 - Governance: Communications, Engagement, and Decision-Making
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Conclusion:

Both City Planning and Economic Development staff have significant concerns with the proposed changes in the Niagara Official Plan. Planning staff will continue discussions with the Region to ensure the City's concerns are addressed in an effort to minimize the impact on the City's employment and residential lands. Economic Development staff will continue working with their counterparts at the Region to ensure the long-term viability of growth and development in Port Colborne is maintained.

Appendices:

- a. Draft Economic Development Letter to be sent to Region

Respectfully submitted,

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Report Approval:

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final review and approval by the Chief Administrative Officer.