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**Subject:** Niagara Official Plan Consolidated Policy Report

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

**Report date:** Wednesday, May 12, 2021

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## Recommendations

1. That Council **RECEIVE** Report PDS 17-2021, which provides significant information and draft policies for the Niagara Official Plan;
2. That Council **ENDORSE** Natural Environment System Option 3B or an alternative Natural Environment System Option, as described in this Report and Appendix 6;
3. That consultation **BE INITIATED** as set out in this Report, with a request for feedback by July 2, 2021, to allow sufficient time for Staff to review those comments and make recommendations based on that feedback; and
4. That this Report and all Appendices **BE CIRCULATED** to the Province, local municipalities, agencies, and stakeholder groups, and all parties who have indicated an interest.

## Key Facts

- This Report provides a comprehensive outline of the Niagara Official Plan (“NOP”). It includes the following components:
  - Executive Overviews of many Official Plan policy sections;
  - Background Reports for sections, where available; and
  - Draft policies for many sections.
- With the exception of the Natural Environment System Options, staff are not requesting any decisions from Council. The information provided is for information and further consultation.
- This Report sets out a recommendation for the Natural Environment System (“NES”) Option 3B. This option was selected with careful consideration of all technical work completed on the project to date, feedback gathered at nearly 130 individual points urban areas of the region. The Option selected provides enhanced protection while still balancing other important considerations.

- All NES Options are an improvement over the existing Official Plan systems. For this and other reasons, Regional staff do not oppose any of the Options, should they be preferred, and all Options could be designed and implemented.
- Critically, a decision on the NES Options should be made now, so that the next phase of work on the natural environment work program can begin; being the development of the mapping and policies for the NES, based on the selected Option. The NES Option decision influences outcomes for other policies.
- For many topics, draft policies and background reports are included for review and discussion. Staff will receive input and report further in the summer and fall 2021.
- The *Growth Plan* requires the NOP to contain policies allocating local population and employment forecasts to 2051. Through the Land Needs Assessment, the Region determines if additional lands are needed for community area (generally, residential lands and mixed use) or employment area (generally, traditional industrial lands).
- This Report sets out the NOP steps through to completion in early 2022. The next major reporting will be after the consultation noted above, in late summer 2021, at which time the Region will report on that consultation and provide a recommendation on land needs.
- The Province is the approval authority for the NOP. This means that the NOP can only come in to effect if the Province agrees with its content, including that it conforms, is consistent with, or does not conflict with, applicable Provincial Policies. The Region will continue to engage the Province on draft policy and process. The required date for the Region to adopt the NOP remains July 1, 2022.

### **Financial Considerations**

There are no financial considerations directly related to this report.

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

## Analysis

The NOP is the first comprehensive review since the original Policy Plan was approved in the early 1970s.

The NOP process – in its current form – started in 2017. Before that, other Official Plan initiatives like Imagine Niagara were completed, which provided certain direction that carried forward to the NOP process. Other projects started prior to the NOP have been merged with the NOP work program.

The NOP is a long range planning document that implements a planning horizon to 2051, which conforms with the timeframe in *A Place to Grow, Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (2019, amended 2020) (“*Growth Plan*”).

The requirements for an Official Plan is set out in the *Planning Act, 1990*. Additionally, the NOP must be consistent with the *Provincial Policy Statement* (2020), conform with the *Growth Plan*, the *Greenbelt Plan* and not conflict with the *Niagara Escarpment Plan*. Decisions of Council and advice from staff must also meet these requirements.

Until now, background reports have been reported by subject matter. We are now reporting subject matters and policies together since they are interconnected. For this reason, we have shared NOP policies on most subjects, so they can be reviewed comprehensively.

This Report includes the following six parts:

1. Why a new Official Plan
2. Official Plan Pillar Statements
3. Consultation
4. Decision on the Natural Environment System Option
5. What is Included in this Report
6. What is Happening Next

## 1. Why a New Official Plan

For many reasons, Niagara needs a whole new Official Plan. Some of the key reasons are as follows:

- **Improve our natural environment system** over the existing Plan's system. Regardless of the Option chosen by Council, it will be an improvement to what currently exists.
- **Address Climate Change.** The new Official Plan will prioritize climate change throughout, with the goal of mitigation and adaptation to achieve resiliency. Our existing Plan is deficient in this area.
- **Consider Affordability and Market Demand.** Housing prices have gone up 42% in Niagara over the last 5 years. Housing affordability is a problem – we need to address that by adding new housing, and in particular, higher density forms of housing. We need a plan that promotes the range and forms of housing to help address this issue.
- **Intensification and Density policies to help create complete communities.** Our new Official Plan will have policies for more compact, efficient forms of development, including clear, strategic intensification policies. The Province requires a 50% intensification rate; the NOP draft policies exceed that at 56%. The current Plan only requires a 40% intensification rate.
- **Related to the above, we will have focused Strategic Growth Areas.** This includes GO Station Areas and other locations where more intense forms of growth are anticipated. This is needed to help meet affordability and climate change goals, and to provide clearer direction to municipalities on how and where to focus denser forms of development.
- **Clearly defined employment areas and policies to provide stability and predictability.** Currently, the Region's employment area policies and mapping are unclear, unlike most other regions. Niagara needs to better direct employment area investment and limit risk of undesired conversion to non-employment uses.
- **Easier to implement by local municipalities.** Niagara Region's existing plan has inefficiencies that can be improved. Likewise, local municipalities are waiting for the NOP to be approved for them to make corresponding changes to their Plans.

- **Efficiently coordinate with key engineering and finance programs.** Specifically, the NOP's timeline aligns with the Development Charges update, Water and Wastewater Master Plan and Transportation Master Plan update. The Region needs a plan that is infrastructure-coordinated and will work to help capture growth-related costs set out in the Development Charges Background Study, so growth can pay for growth.

As previously noted, the NOP covers a horizon to the year 2051; Niagara in 2051 will look different than it does today. The Region needs a plan that preserves what's important, while permitting growth for a future generation of businesses and residents.

Not everyone will agree on the best way to achieve this plan; in fact, there can be more than one good planning approach on a given topic. Consultation to date has identified a variety of competing interests. The NOP must strike a balance between these interests to ensure the social and economic health of our communities. A balanced policy approach can mean fewer people or groups being highly satisfied.

Once the NOP is approved, local municipalities must undergo a local exercise to conform to the NOP. As a first step, this involves an update to its local Official Plan. This process is to be guided by Provincial and Regional policy and will involve further study so that it can address local, context-specific outcomes.

After approval, the NOP will be carefully monitored for what is and isn't working. The Region seeks to be flexible and adapt to changes when necessary. Policies will be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure Regional and Local interests are aligned and that growth planning is monitored to determine if changes should be advanced.

## **2. Official Plan Pillar Statements**

The NOP is based on Pillar Statements; these form the basis for policy development. Like the NOP policies themselves, Pillar Statements are interconnected and must be considered holistically.

These Pillar Statements were originally drafted by staff and subsequently presented to Regional Councillors for reflection and comment. The feedback received generally confirmed the Pillar Statements as the basis for preparing the NOP. Council's recognition of competing interests associated with the Pillar Statements highlights the need for a balanced approach built on creativity and collaboration.

The following are those Pillar Statements:

**EXCEPTIONAL** development and communities - Well planned, high quality development in appropriate locations that improves our communities, while protecting what is valuable;

- Niagara must proactively manage growth by strategically locating it. We must utilize tools such as District Plans, Secondary Plans, and intensification strategies to allow places to evolve, while being sensitive to established areas.
- Urban design plays an important role in ensuring our communities are aesthetically pleasing and functional as they evolve.
- Growth must take place in a manner that creates resilient communities and does not negatively impact the Natural Environment System.

**DIVERSE** housing types, jobs and population - A wide mix of housing types and employment opportunities that attract diverse populations to Niagara across all ages, incomes and backgrounds;

- Niagara must diversify its housing stock to address affordability and meet market needs. To manage growth and remain competitive, Niagara must address the diversity of its housing.
- A competitive employment sector that offers a wide range or variety of employment options will attract people to live in the Region.
- Residential and employment areas should be connected by active transportation linkages and serviced by sustainable green infrastructure, to help address our changing climate.

**THRIVING** agriculture and tourism - A prosperous agricultural industry and world-class tourism opportunities that grow our economy and elevate the Niagara experience.

- The Agricultural System objectives and policies support agricultural uses, normal farm practices, and diversification of activities to ensure the industry continues to prosper in Niagara.
- A world class tourism industry built on diverse and accessible attractions, including, amongst many, Niagara Falls, Niagara on the Lake, and the grape & wine industry.

**RESILIENT** urban and natural areas - Areas rich in biodiversity that mitigate and adapt to climate change while strengthening Niagara's ability to recover from extreme weather events.

- Niagara is the most biodiverse region in Ontario and includes the Niagara Escarpment World Biosphere Reserve. The physical and biotic features of the Region provide the character that defines it. The NOP is guided by policies and objectives that prioritize the protection and enhancement of the natural environment system.
- In addition to biodiversity, natural areas need to be protected for air purification and assisting with water quality and retention.
- Niagara's urban and natural areas must be resilient to address our changing climate.
- Growth needs to be supported by public transit, active transportation, sustainable and green infrastructure and energy efficient development.

### **3. Consultation**

Consultation is key to establishing a good Plan.

A significant amount of consultation has occurred to date, and more is planned before the NOP is advanced for final consideration.

A detailed list of past consultation is set out in Appendix 1.

As detailed in that Appendix, hundreds of consultation events have happened since 2017. Approximately 130 points of consultation have occurred on the Natural Environment Work Program alone.

PEDC has been informed by 35 Reports relating to the NOP between 2018 and 2021. These reports and presentations provided updates on the work program, individual sections of the Plan, and consultation.

The background work for the Official Plan has been informed by this consultation, including comments from the general public; stakeholder groups; local Councils; Indigenous groups; local municipal planners; local planning workshops, and meetings with the Planning Advisory Committee.

Additional consultation is planned for the spring and summer 2021. Further consultation will occur after a complete draft NOP is prepared in the fall: see section “6. What is Happening Next.”

#### **4. Decision on Natural Environment System Option**

The Natural Environment Work Program (“NEWP”) is a critical part of the NOP. The NEWP sets out the regional-scale natural heritage system (“NHS”) and water resource system (“WRS”), including policies and mapping.

Previously, the NHS and WRS were described separately. These are now described together as the integrated **Natural Environment System (“NES”)**. This was done since the NHS and WRS are ecologically linked, rely on and support each other, and have many overlapping components. A further description of the merged NHS and WRS is provided below (and more fully set out in the Status Update and Recommendation Report at Appendix 6.2.)

The NEWP was endorsed by Regional Council in 2018 (see PDS 18-2018). Staff were directed to take an incremental approach to developing the policies and mapping. This included a number of decision points for Council; we are now at one of those decision points.

It is critically important that Council choose a NES Option, so staff can proceed to the next step of NES mapping and policy development. Staff need significant time to complete the balance of the NEWP to integrate with the rest of the NOP prior to finalizing the NOP in 2022.

On July 15, 2020, Council was provided 3 NHS Options and 2 WRS Options. As noted above, these have now been combined into the NES. This merger arose after further review of the WRS by the Region’s consulting team, who concluded that there are no ‘optional’ components of the WRS. Rather, only one option for the WRS exists, which includes all of the required water resource features, areas, and systems as informed from provincial direction and the Niagara Watershed Plan (“NWP”) project. Thus, a single WRS will proceed, regardless of the NES Option.

A significant amount of analysis was undertaken in developing and refining the Options. Two major reports from our consultant team have been dedicated to the NES Options: Technical Report #2 – June 2020 & Technical Memorandum #1 – March 2021, included as Appendix 6.3.



All of the NES Options are an improvement over the existing, deficient system. All Options conform with, are consistent with, or do not conflict with, Provincial policy. For these reasons, all Options are acceptable systems that can be balanced with other NOP policies to achieve provincial and local goals.

The NES Options are reviewed in detail in Appendix 6.

As previously noted, all Options are supported by Staff. Staff are of the opinion that Option 3B is most preferred, and therefore is Staff's recommended Option. This opinion is summarized below.

- Option 3B **exceeds the required provincial standards** for the identification of features and systems which in the long-term will support a more resilient and biodiverse NES.
- Option 3B **ensures that there is not a reduction in the area of treed vegetation communities** included within the Region's NES.
- Option 3B **helps support other objectives, such as helping mitigate the impacts of climate change.**
- Option 3B provides a balanced approach for the protection of the natural environment by **increasing the number of components and features outside of settlement areas** and limiting additional constraints to development in settlement areas. This option works from both an ecological and land-use planning perspective
- Option 3B provides **flexibility for local municipalities to plan for local needs** and priorities in their communities. Local municipalities would not be prevented from going beyond the Regional system, either through their Local Official Plans or Secondary Plans. Regional Planning Staff are available to provide support for those exercises should they be desired by local municipalities.
- Option 3B **considers the significant public input received** through the first and second Points of Engagement. A comprehensive outline of the Engagement is set out in Appendix 1. Through the second Point of Engagement, it was clear that there was no consensus on which NES Option was most desirable. This speaks to the **need for a balance between the Options.**

Mapping of the Options and associated data contained in this Report was shared with stakeholders in March 2021, electronically, and at focused meetings and local Council workshops. These meetings helped inform the positions set out in this Report.

The Option 3B recommendation is made with consideration of local municipalities' implementation of such system. As previously noted, **Options 3B has the advantage of allowing flexibility for local municipalities to plan for local needs and priorities in their communities.**

After the Option decision is made, planning staff can immediately proceed with detailed mapping review and refinement and policy development. Staff will report further on that progress in the summer and fall 2021.

Timeline details are provided below, in section 6 "What is Happening Next".

## **5. What else is Included in this Report**

This Report includes substantive materials on many subjects. A detailed list of what is included is provided in the NOP Draft Framework (Appendix 2).

The inclusion of detailed material is intentional to help readers understand the interconnectedness of the NOP. Sections should be read together to gain an understanding of the comprehensive nature of the Plan. Adjustments to one section often effect others.

Each NOP topic is covered in a separate Appendix. Within the topic-specific appendices, one or more of the following is included:

- An Executive Overview; a short summary of what's covered in that policy section or subject and a chart depicting connections to other Sections;
- One or more memos or reports relating to the topic;
- Draft policies on certain topics;
- Draft schedules to accompany policies on certain topics.

Please refer to the NOP Framework (Appendix 2) for what is included within each topic-specific Appendix, and how to locate that information.

Within the draft policies, the subheadings state the objective of the following policy group. Comment boxes are not part of the policies; they are provided for context. Schedules and maps are draft for future inclusion in the NOP.

Where a document is described as a guidance document, discussion paper, study, criteria or supporting map, it is provided for information purposes only and will not form part of the NOP.

Some NOP sections are not drafted due to ongoing work programs, direction from other policies or need for ongoing coordination. An update on these sections, including status of draft policy and any supplemental information, will be provided for circulation at the next NOP report in summer 2021.

The NOP is divided in to the following 7 Chapters:

- Chapter 1 - Introduction
- Chapter 2 - Growing Region
- Chapter 3 - Sustainable Region
- Chapter 4 - Competitive Region
- Chapter 5 - Connected Region
- Chapter 6 - Vibrant Region
- Chapter 7- Implementation

Below is a short description of the Chapters.

As previously noted, the executive overviews (and other materials, where included) provide further details on these subjects (see NOP Framework, Appendix 2).

## **Chapter 1 – Introduction – Making Our Mark**

The introduction will include Niagara’s planning context, Pillar Statements and Directives, the legislative basis of the Plan and outline the plan’s structure and organization.

This is not included as an Appendix; an update will be provided during the next reporting in summer 2021.

## **Chapter 2 - Growing Region**

The *Growth Plan* requires Niagara to plan for a significant increase in population and employment growth to 2051. Proactive growth management is needed to ensure we are ready for this growth, including having the appropriate infrastructure and housing available.

### **Section 2.1 - Growth Allocations and Land Needs - Appendix 3**

Niagara must plan to accommodate a minimum population of 674,000 people and 264,000 jobs to 2051. It is essential to coordinate these growth forecasts with land use planning to ensure there is sufficient land available to meet projected population and employment needs.

To do this, the Region is required to allocate population and employment growth to its local municipalities and undertake a Land Needs Assessment (“LNA”), in conformance with a provincial methodology. The LNA is a technical, Region-led process, which determines the amount of “community area” (mostly, where people live and shop) and “employment area” (mostly, where traditional-type businesses are located) required to accommodate the forecast referenced above.

The LNA suggests the Region has an overall need for approximately 460 ha of community area land and a slight oversupply of 20 ha of employment area.

On a municipal-scale, some municipalities need community or employment lands, or both, to accommodate growth: Fort Erie, Niagara Falls and West Lincoln. Other municipalities may have too much land to accommodate forecasted growth: Thorold and Pt. Colborne. The rest have an appropriate amount of land.

The Province approves the LNA; the Region must satisfy the Province that the assessment conforms to the Provincial LNA methodology. Most importantly, the Region must have an overall amount of land need for community and employment lands, regardless of individual municipal needs.

The draft LNA is presented now for information only – no decisions are sought. Staff provide it to seek input in advance of further reporting in August 2021.

Staff ask that comments be provided by July 2, 2021 so that there is sufficient time to consider and report on it, with recommendations, in August 2021.

## **Section 2.2 - Regional Structure – Appendix 4**

The Regional Structure directs how growth within settlement areas can be accommodated.

A significant amount of forecasted growth is focused in “strategic growth areas” as directed by Provincial policy. Strategic growth areas are those locations with existing or planned transit service, areas with existing or planned public service facilities, and those which can more easily integrate more intense forms of development.

In addition to strategic growth areas, growth will occur in built-up areas through intensification and redevelopment, and within designated greenfield areas. General policies are provided; most of the implementation will be done by local municipalities.

Regional Structure policies set minimum density targets for strategic growth areas, provide direction for infill and intensification in built-up areas, density targets for designated greenfield areas, and contain policies for settlement area boundary expansions (as described later in this report).

## **Section 2.3 – Housing - Appendix 5**

This Housing section includes a consultant report from CANCEA which sets out Niagara’s needs for a greater supply of housing to address affordability (being the main component of core housing needs).

The Region currently has a core housing need at 13% of its population; primarily driven by a lack of affordable housing options within the community. This core housing need will remain at the same rate if the Region achieves its forecasted growth set out above. If the Region does not accommodate this forecasted growth, and grows at a slow rate, core housing need will be 19%. The Region needs to improve on its 13% core housing need; more housing is needed to do so.

Housing policies focus on providing a mix of housing and built form, incorporating more affordable housing options for low and moderate households and ensuring a full spectrum of housing options along the housing continuum. The provision of more affordable housing options is a needed to support the Region’s economy.

## **Chapter 3 - Sustainable Region**

Niagara must enhance the sustainability and resilience of its built and natural environment. Protection of the natural environment systems will assist in maintaining ecological health, conserving biodiversity and support recovery from changing conditions.

### **Section 3.1 - Natural Environment Section - Appendix 6**

The NES is described in the above section 4, “Decision on Natural Environment System Option.”

In order to meet the NOP conformity timelines, a decision on the NES Option must be made at this time.

### **Section 3.2 - Watershed Planning - Appendix 7**

The Niagara Watershed Plan is informing the NOP. This work is ongoing on an iterative basis, which is the typical way that watershed planning informs land use planning.

This work includes:

- Informing what features and systems should be considered required components of the WRS;
- The integration of the NHS and WRS. It was the work of the NWP that confirmed the need to consider these systems collectively as the integrated NES.
- Providing criteria to support the settlement area boundary review portion of the NOP.

### **Section 3.5 - Climate Change – Appendix 8**

The NOP will include policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change. This will be done throughout the NOP, including policies that support the achievement of resilient complete communities that are compact, walkable, and transit-supportive, implementing sustainable design principles, protecting agricultural lands, and water resources and natural areas.

Draft climate change policies are not yet included in this Appendix. They will be in the consolidated draft Official Plan following consultant prepared climate modeling and projections work set to conclude in the fall of 2021.

Although climate change will be addressed throughout the NOP, a specific section of the NOP will include policy supporting the development of a Regional Greening Initiative, among other things. This section will also identify future required studies such as vulnerability assessments.

## **CHAPTER 4 - Competitive Region**

Plan and manage growth to position Niagara for economic prosperity.

### **Section 4.1 – Agriculture – Appendix 9**

Niagara Region has an active and vibrant farming sector that must be protected and enhanced through the NOP.

Niagara has approximately 218,251 acres of farmland, which has a \$1.41 billion impact on Gross Domestic Product. Agriculture in Niagara has an employment impact of approximately 19,892 jobs.

NOP agricultural policies will enable the agri-food sector to thrive and support agricultural uses, normal farm practices, and diversification of uses.

### **Section 4.2 - Employment - Appendix 10**

The Region and local municipalities have different policy roles for managing employment.

The Region primarily addresses “Employment Areas”, a term used for clusters of generally more traditional industrial-type businesses. It’s critical that these areas are protected from sensitive uses over the long-term.

The Region has identified 34 draft employment areas. These were identified after considerable collaboration with local municipalities and stakeholders.

Employment policies identify and protect employment areas, establish density targets for those areas, assist with evaluation of any proposed conversion of employment areas or employment lands, and establish a process to identify and implement future employment areas.

### **Section 4.3 – Aggregates - Appendix 11**

Protecting aggregate resources, and providing for extraction where appropriate, is important to Niagara's economy.

Mineral aggregate resources, such as sand, gravel, stone, and shale, are located throughout Niagara Region. These resources are finite and must be protected from incompatible land uses or uses that would limit their extraction in the future. The extraction, processing, and transportation of mineral aggregate resources must take place in a manner that minimizes environmental and social impacts.

### **Chapter 5 - Connected Region**

Provide connections within and between communities and outside the Region.

#### **Section 5.1 – Transportation - Appendix 12**

The Region must plan for a sustainable transportation system that appropriately accommodates forecasted population and employment growth.

The transportation policies are mostly carried-forward from the recently approved Regional Official Plan Amendment No. 13 that covered these matters.

The policies prioritize investments in public transit, the design and construction of complete streets at the regional and local levels, and the incorporation of active transportation infrastructure into the transportation system and new development.

#### **Section 5.2 – Infrastructure - Appendix 13**

Well planned and managed infrastructure is fundamental to attaining the Region's vision for thriving and resilient communities. Forecasted population and employment growth should be aligned with planned infrastructure to ensure that growth can be accommodated.

Infrastructure policies address the Region's existing and future infrastructure needs relating to drinking water, wastewater, waste, energy, and utility services. The planning and development of infrastructure must ensure capacity for growth, ensure financial sustainability and integrate climate change resiliency.



## **Chapter 6 - Vibrant Region**

Elevate the livability and engaging qualities of communities, facilities and attractions.

### **Section 6.1 - District Plans and Secondary Plans - Appendix 14**

District Plans and Secondary Plans provide a framework for proactive, coordinated and comprehensive growth management planning within defined areas.

District Plans are prepared by the Region to strategically direct a significant portion of population and employment growth to areas that have cross-jurisdictional interests and require regional level planning.

Secondary Plans follow a similar process, although they may, or may not, be used to help direct anticipated population and employment growth. Secondary plans will help to implement the regional structure at the local level, and will be required for strategic growth areas, newly designated greenfield areas and to implement district plan direction.

### **Section 6.2 - Urban Design - Appendix 15**

Urban design assists the Region in achieving a high-quality built environment with buildings and streetscapes. By committing to excellence in urban design, the Region is taking a leadership role in guiding the design of the built environment towards attractive, safe, diverse, and functional communities.

### **Section 6.3 – Archaeology – Appendix 16**

Cultural heritage resource conservation is an important priority and needs to be balanced with the forecasted growth to the Region.

The Region's Archaeological Management Plan will set out a more coordinated and consistent planning system in Niagara that accurately screens *Planning Act* applications for significant archaeological resources prior to development occurring.

## **Chapter 7 – Implementation**

An update on this Chapter's policies will be provided at the next report, in August 2021. Policies will address Plan Interpretation, Performance Indicators and Monitoring, Roles, Coordination, Complete Applications, Phasing and Site Specific Policies.

## **Other Niagara Official Plan Items**

The Niagara Official Plan will include Schedules (maps) that will compliment policies. For the purpose of this Report, draft schedules are included within the relevant Appendix.

Also included is a **Glossary of Terms** (Appendix 17).

Further, the Region has developed a “Settlement Area Boundary Review” (SABR) program. This is the process by which the Region will review and determine whether Settlement Areas should be adjusted, including expansions.

At this time, no recommendations are being made relating to SABR.

The Region has received a number of requests for consideration of both urban area and rural settlement boundary expansions. The Region has started its review of these requests and will continue to do so over the coming months.

Draft criteria have been prepared to guide this SABR process. The SABR criteria is included in Appendix 18. This Appendix includes criteria for urban area, rural settlement, and technical boundary reviews. These documents are draft for consideration. The SABR criteria is not intended to form part of the NOP; rather, it is intended to inform boundary recommendations as transparently as possible.

## **Local Municipal Conformity**

The *Planning Act, 1990* sets out that local municipalities have one year after the NOP is approved by the Province to have their respective Official Plans conform with the NOP.

Each draft policy section in the draft NOP contains policies to help guide local municipal conformity.

The Region will continue to work with local municipalities to assist this local conformity and provide support through the process. The Region is the approval authority for local Official Plan conformity.

## 6. What is Happening Next

As noted, a decision on the NES Option is critical to allowing the entire NOP to move forward.

All other sections are provided for information and to receive feedback.

Assuming a decision is made on the NES Options at this Committee meeting, the following are the key future steps:

- Circulate all materials in this Report to local municipalities, agencies, stakeholders and the public (if not already complete prior to consideration of this Report).
- Prepare and distribute the next edition of Niagara Official Plan Newsletter to notify the approximately 390 subscribers of the materials in this Report.
- Notify all those who have attended consultation events and submitted previous comments of the materials in this Report.

Those persons and groups noted in the above bullets can be directed to the Region's website dedicated to all information included in this Report, at: [Official Plan](http://www.niagararegion.ca/official-plan/consolidated-policy-report.aspx) (www.niagararegion.ca/official-plan/consolidated-policy-report.aspx)

- Continue the Region's regular meeting with Provincial staff. Critical to the NOP's success is the Province's support. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is the approval authority for the whole of the NOP; therefore, those staff must be satisfied with the NOP. The draft land needs assessment will be of particular focus in the near term.
- **Staff ask that comments on the materials included in this Report be submitted by July 2, 2021.** This is important to allow staff sufficient time to review those submissions and report in August 2021.
- **The July 2, 2021 date is particularly important for those interested in commenting on the land needs assessment, settlement area boundary expansions, or employment conversions. The Region will report further on those matters in August 2021. Only those submissions received prior to July 2, 2021 will be considered for comment in the Region's August 2021 Report.**

- Parties with requests for settlement area boundary expansions that cannot be considered due to explicit prohibits on expansion restrictions, such as those within the Protected Countryside of the *Greenbelt Plan*, will be notified of such.
- In June and/or July, the Region will hold a series of public consultation events to seek feedback on the materials included in this Report.
- Additional consultation events will be planned with stakeholder groups, including those involved in agricultural, environmental, development, and business. Also, input will be sought from the Region's Planning Advisory Committee.
- Focused consultation with indigenous groups will continue.

As noted above, the next major reporting on the NOP will be in August 2021.

Regional Planning staff will continue to finalize background studies, collect data and prepare/revise draft policies to complete a full consolidated draft NOP by the end of 2021.

The above date cannot be met if there is a delay in the NES Option selection. It will take considerable time to develop the policies and mapping after the Option is selected.

The NOP must be adopted by July 1, 2022 to meet the conformity deadline set by the Province.

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

Several NES Options are outlined in this Report and Appendices. Staff recommend Option 3B, but are able to advance any of the Options as all meet the Provincial standards. It is important that a decision be made on an NES to provide the opportunity to complete the Official Plan for the end of the year.

The decision on an NES Option is an important step in the development of the NOP, to ensure it is complete and adopted in this term of Council.

No alternatives are offered for the balance of the material presented since it is presented for information only, without recommendations.

## **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

The Niagara Official Plan will support the following Strategic Priority Objectives:

### **Objective 1.1: Economic Growth and Development**

- Enhance integration with local municipalities' economic development and planning departments to provide supports and improve interactions with businesses to expedite and navigate development processes.
- Forward thinking approach to economic development in Niagara through long term strategic planning and leveraging partnerships with post-secondary institutions.

### **Objective 1.4: Strategically Target Industry Sectors**

- Define Niagara's role in tourism including areas such as sport, eco, agricultural and culture tourism.

### **Objective 2.3: Addressing Affordable Housing Needs**

- Retain, protect and increase the supply of affordable housing stock to provide a broad range of housing to meet the needs of the community.

### **Objective 3.2: Environmental Sustainability and Stewardship**

- A holistic and flexible approach to environmental stewardship and consideration of the natural environment, such as in infrastructure, planning and development, aligned with a renewed Official Plan
- Drive environmental protection and addressing climate change such as through increasing waste diversion rates and reducing our carbon footprint

### **Objective 3.3: Maintain Existing Infrastructure**

- Sound asset management planning to ensure sustainable investments in the infrastructure needed to support existing residents and businesses, as well as future growth in Niagara.

## **Other Pertinent Reports**

The NOP has many pertinent reports. Please see Consultation Events Appendix 1.

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**Submitted by:**

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This report was prepared in consultation with **all staff** in the Community and Long Range Planning divisions, and reviewed by Erik Acs, MCIP, RPP, Manager of Community Planning, Kirsten McCauley, MCIP, RPP, Acting Manager of Long Range Planning, and Isaiah Banach, Acting Director of Community and Long Range Planning.

**Appendices:**

**\*Located at: [Official Plan](#)**

([www.niagararegion.ca/official-plan/consolidated-policy-report.aspx](http://www.niagararegion.ca/official-plan/consolidated-policy-report.aspx))

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