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**Subject:** Agricultural Project Initiation Report

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

**Report date:** Wednesday, January 31, 2018

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## Recommendations

1. That staff **BE DIRECTED** to present the overview of the framework for the agricultural work program as presented in this report to the Area Planners group and begin consultation towards the development of the detailed framework.
2. That staff **BE DIRECTED** to report back to Committee once the detailed framework for the agricultural work program has been prepared.

## Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the agricultural work program that will be required in support of the new Regional Official Plan, and for staff to be directed to begin consultation with the Area Planners group towards the preparation of a detailed framework.
- Since the Region introduced its current agricultural policies, including Regional Official Plan Amendment 6-2009 on value-added agricultural policies, the Province has released a new policy framework for agricultural and related uses in Ontario.
- Regional Official Plan policies and mapping will be reviewed for alignment with the new Provincial policy framework as a component of the work plan.

## Financial Considerations

The completion of the agricultural background study and policy development will require staff and consulting resources. Council approved the resources to complete the new Regional Official Plan as part of the 2017 budget process.

## Analysis

The Region's current agricultural policies recognize the importance of protecting the agricultural land base and supporting the agricultural economy. Policies introduced through ROPA 6-2009, were the first of their kind in Ontario – encouraging a wide range of farm diversification uses that contribute to long-term farm viability.

Since their introduction, the Province has released a new policy framework for agricultural uses in Ontario:

The Provincial Policy Statement, 2014 (PPS) introduced new policies for agricultural uses, on-farm diversified uses, and agriculture-related uses to further encourage opportunities for economic activities on agricultural lands to support viable rural economies.

- In 2016, the Province released *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas*, intended to help municipalities, decision-makers and others interpret the policies of the PPS. The guidelines are intended to complement, be consistent with and explain the intent of the PPS policies. Criteria for permitted uses may be based on the provincial guidelines or municipal approaches set out in municipal planning documents, which achieve the same objective.
- In 2017, the Province released the new Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, Greenbelt Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan, which included changes to policies for agricultural and related uses.
- The Province also committed to map the agricultural system across the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

Through the agricultural work program, an agricultural background study will be completed, options for policy direction and mapping will be identified and evaluated, and a new agricultural system and supporting Regional Official Plan policies and mapping will be developed. The entire process will be supported by a comprehensive consultation and engagement program.

### Overview of Work Program

An overview of the proposed work program is as follows:

1. Preparation of the detailed project framework
2. Completion of a comprehensive agricultural background study, which may include consulting assistance on specific policy areas
3. Development of a regional agricultural system
4. Development of Regional Official Plan policies and mapping
5. Implementation tools

The detailed framework for the work program will be prepared in consultation with the Area Planners group and meetings with individual municipalities. Following preparation of the detailed framework, staff will return to Committee to seek final endorsement before moving forward with the work program.

### Emerging Policy Topics for Review in the Background Study & Other Related Projects

Through preliminary assessment of changes to the Provincial policy framework and through on-going discussion with municipal planning staff and stakeholders, some of the policy areas that have been identified for potential review include:

- Permitted uses (e.g. on-farm diversified uses and agriculture-related uses)
- The agri-food network
- Servicing, infrastructure and climate change adaptation
- Non-agricultural uses in prime agricultural areas
- Agricultural impact assessment requirements

Priority policy areas to include within the scope of the agricultural background study will be discussed with the Area Planners during discussions on the agricultural framework.

The work program for the new Regional Official Plan also includes other related projects, such as updating aggregate policies and policies relating to the natural environment that will be addressed through separate work programs. Staff recognizes the inter-relationships between many of the policy areas in the new Official Plan and will ensure alignment and consistency across all policy areas.

### Consultation and Engagement

The work program for the agricultural component of the new Regional Official Plan will include a comprehensive consultation and engagement program. The details of the program will be finalized through discussions with the Area Planners group and individual meetings with Local Area Municipalities' staff. The consultation and engagement plan will be presented as part of the detailed framework and is anticipated to include at a minimum:

- Meeting with the Area Planners group and 1-on-1 meetings with each Local Area Municipality's staff during the project initiation phase to seek input on the detailed framework and identify major issues to be considered by the study. Consultation with the Area Planners group and Local Area Municipalities is proposed to start in early February.

- Potential options for advisory groups or working groups will be discussed with the Area Planners.
- The identification of key project stakeholders including the agricultural community (e.g. Agricultural Policy and Action Committee), industry stakeholders, the public, Local Area Municipalities, and Indigenous Groups.
- A presentation to the Councils of each of the Local Area Municipalities. It is anticipated that this presentation would be following the completion of the agricultural background studies and prior to the development and evaluation of options. However this will be confirmed through discussions with the Area Planners group.
- Engagement with the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) at regular intervals.
- Ongoing communication, education, consultation, and engagement throughout the work program with major points of engagement at key milestones/points of decision-making.

#### Integration with Environmental Planning

Planning for agricultural and the natural environment is highly connected. The required work to support the new Regional Official Plan in each of these areas will be completed concurrently and will have regard for each other.

#### **Alternatives Reviewed**

There are various methodologies in which agricultural planning can be undertaken – leading to the development of policies for the new Regional Official Plan. These options will be considered in consultation with the Area Planners group and Local Area Municipalities' staff. The preferred option to undertake the work program will be presented as part of the detailed framework.

#### **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

The agricultural work program is part of the new Regional Official Plan, which will assist in implementing Council's Strategic Priority of Innovation, Investment & Entrepreneurship.

#### **Other Pertinent Reports**

PDS 41-2017 High Level Official Plan Process Framework  
PDS 20-2016 Regional Official Plan Update

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