



Planning and Development Services

Prepared for: Council-in-Committee

Report: PDS-24-2024

Meeting Date: May 13, 2024

File: OPA-11-2023

1. Title

Official Plan Review Engagement Summary Report and Background Report

2. Recommendations

That: Report PDS-24-2024, Official Plan Review Engagement Summary Report, March 2024 and Background Report, March 2024 be received for information.

3. Relation to Council's Corporate Strategic Plan

Priority: Sustainable and managed growth

Initiative: 3.1 Manage growth in a responsible manner by:

- Updating the Official Plan to include density targets (including Secondary Plans) that align with the Community's ability to grow.
- Developing a strategy to accommodate growth through phased servicing;
- Determining and responding to the impacts of legislation (i.e. Bill 23 and Bill 109 on growth, more impact on taxpayers, and fees to support growth).
- Focusing on preserving our natural heritage.

4. List of Stakeholders

Landowners/ Developers / Residents and Business Owners

Region of Niagara, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, Niagara Parks Commission

Various Agencies, Utilities and Provincial Ministries.

5. Purpose of Report

To provide an information update on the status of the Official Plan Review, including the release of the Phase 1 Engagement Summary Report and Background Report.

6. Analysis

6.1 Executive Summary

The Official Plan Review began in July 2023 with gathering background information and developing the project branding. The public components of Phase 1 (Visioning) began in December 11, 2023 ([PDS-79-2023](#)), with the Section 26 Public Meeting, and a Visioning

Workshop was held on February 27, 2024. The purpose of the Phase 1 was to learn about residents’ high-level vision for the Town of Fort Erie to 2051. This phase ends with the creation and release of two documents including the Phase 1 Engagement Summary Report, and a Background Report.

6.2 Visioning Workshop

The Vision Workshop was advertised through the Town’s Social Media Accounts, Facebook (9,000 followers), Instagram (6,000 followers), LinkedIn (2,500 followers), and Twitter X (6,100 followers), with approximately 23,600 followers, Town’s email newsletter, with approximately 2000 subscribers. In addition, a newspaper advertisement (**Appendix 1**) was inserted into the Fort Erie Observer and was distributed to approximately 14,000 households. Over Forty (40) participants attended the workshop, with an additional 13 members who completed the online workshop/survey.

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss changes required to the existing Official Plan vision and guiding principles to move the Town forward to 2051. The workshop started by a brief presentation from Staff and the WSP consulting team to inform attendees about the need for the project, next steps and how to stay involved in the process.

During the Vision Workshop, feedback was collected from attendees to identify terms from the Town’s existing Vision that are still applicable as well as those terms that are missing. Existing terms such as sustainability, housing, healthy, public transportation, accessibility and heritage were most prominently identified by participants as terms that should remain in the updated Town vision.

6.3 What We Heard

The Phase 1 Engagement Summary Report summarizes how people and groups have been engaged and made aware of the Official Plan Review, as well as the initial results of the consultation.

Phase 1 Engagement Overview

By the Numbers



How Our Community Will Grow

- Housing and Growth Management**
 - Manage future growth to balance development with the protection of the natural environment and cultural resources
 - Support a range of housing options, including housing types and tenure.
- Natural Heritage**
 - Preserve, protect, and enhance the natural environment and open space systems
- Agricultural and Rural Areas**
 - Support the agricultural sector by prioritizing the protection of viable agricultural lands and recognizing additional economic opportunities.
- Heritage**
 - Recognize, conserve, and protect the Town's unique cultural heritage assets, while providing additional economic opportunity.
- Employment**
 - Attract more diverse employers and improve the viability of existing office, retail, and employment use.
- Transportation**
 - Promote transportation options, including transit, that leverage existing infrastructure and resources to enhance mobility, safety and accessibility for all residents.
- Natural Environment**
 - Recognize, conserve, and protect the Town's unique natural heritage assets, while providing additional economic opportunity.
- Vision Principles**
 - Promote the well-being of residents by creating safe, connected, and complete communities that offer convenient access to everyday amenities, including housing, employment, recreation, and community services.
 - Plan for growth that promotes a full range of housing opportunities for all ages and abilities, including affordable housing and age-in-place opportunities, promote economic competitiveness and employment opportunities, and improve access to community services and amenities.
 - Mitigate and adapt to a changing climate and promote the protection of the environment and natural spaces

Engagement tools included:

- Let’s Talk Fort Erie webpage (<https://letstalk.forterie.ca/official-plan-review-and-update>)
- Online survey
- Visioning Session
- Statutory Special Meeting of Council (December 11, 2023)
- Numerous emails, newspaper ads, and Town social media accounts

Through events and online applications, residents were asked what they liked about the Town, what they use most, and what they would like changed. The online survey was a detailed questionnaire that included a broad range of topics including housing, transportation, parks and natural spaces, public spaces, and new development and growth.

Stakeholders, including community groups, business groups, regional agencies, Indigenous groups and members of the community were informed and invited to engage in the project.

Through consultation, six distinct themes emerged through the engagement process. These themes include:

- Natural Environment
- Employment
- Growth Management (Housing)
- Heritage & Culture
- Agriculture and Rural
- Transportation

Theme	Feedback
Natural Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protect Fort Erie’s environment and greenspaces - Enhance Fort Erie’s environment and greenspaces - Prioritize development criteria and regulations
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attract more diverse employers - Improve the viability of office, retail, and employment uses - Support and enhance tourism
Growth Management (Housing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manage the Town’s growth - Prioritize providing a range of housing options - Encourage multiple density forms
Heritage & Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protecting and enhancing heritage features and buildings - Protecting and enhancing the unique sense of place - Identifying heritage and cultural features to be preserved - Encourage the creation of community hub or flex streets
Agriculture and Rural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protect, enhance, and support the agricultural sector - Preserving rural heritage - Financial support and incentives for local farmers
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build on current transit services - On-demand systems - Improve inter-municipal links

The Phase 1 Engagement Summary Report has been attached as **Appendix 2**.

6.4 Background Report

This Background Report, which has been attached as **Appendix 3** is the first major deliverable in Phase 1 of the Official Plan Review and establishes a framework for how the current Official Plan will be updated. More specifically, this Background Report:

- Reviews current and emerging Provincial policy direction and legislation that guides land use planning in Ontario;
- Identifies key drivers of change, such as projected residential and employment growth within the Town;
- Assesses existing policies and reviews relevant considerations to inform recommended updates to the Official Plan; and
- Document how the Official Plan will be reviewed and updated.

The majority of the identified gaps/conformity matters extend from the numerous Provincial red-tape reduction Bill's, which there have been 12 introduced since 2018. In addition to these changes, the Region of Niagara updated its Official Plan, which came into effect in November 2022, and requires the Town's Official Plan to be updated to bring it into conformity with the Region's Official Plan.

On April 10, 2024 the Province introduced Bill 185, *the Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024* and the draft updated Provincial Policy Statement, 2024. These proposed changes have not been fully addressed in the background report, but will be monitored by staff and incorporated into the updated Official Plan as required.

As part of the Background Report, Parcel Economics completed a Housing Needs Assessment that identifies several local housing priorities', local housing demand, and housing gaps.

What is driving housing demand within the Town:

1. Population Growth: Population growth in Fort Erie between the 2016 and 2021 census (+4.5%) was greater than between the previous census (+2.2%), but lower than in Niagara Region (+5.9%) and Ontario (+6.7%).
2. Demographics: Approximately two of every five (37%) Fort Erie residents are over the age of 60. This will drive the need for seniors-friendly housing (smaller, accessible units, dedicated seniors housing, and long-term care facilities) to allow these residents to age in place.
3. Migration: Migration to the Niagara Region (including Fort Erie) is largely from municipalities with higher average household income and house prices.
4. Income: Fort Erie has a higher share of lower-income households (<\$100,000 per year) than Niagara Region and Ontario which may be due, in part, to historic housing market values in the Town.

Current state of housing within the Town:

1. Most households in Fort Erie own their home (80%). The balance (20%) of households rent.
2. A lack of purpose-built rental units in the Town means renting households are increasingly relying on the secondary rental market.
3. Single-detached houses, typically the largest and most expensive type of housing, make up most of the housing stock (83%).
4. Housing in Fort Erie tends to be large compared to household sizes. Approximately one out

of every two households are “over housed”, that is, the number of bedrooms exceeds the number of people in the household.

5. Non-market (community housing) and seniors housing (dedicated seniors housing, long-term care facilities) in the Town is currently limited.

Based on the findings of the Housing Needs Assessment, there is a need for the following housing types:

- Affordable Housing,
- Purpose Built Rental Housing,
- Smaller Housing Units,
- Seniors Housing, and
- Long-Term Care.

6.5 Next Steps

The next step in the process is to start drafting policies, with a draft updated Official Plan expected for public release by the beginning of August 2024.

During the summer of 2024 staff plan on hosting several PIPS (Planners in Public Spaces), which are mini pop-up consultation events that take place during regular scheduled events through out the season, such as the Farmers Markets in Ridgeway and Stevensville, Crystal Beach Supper Market and Ridgefest. The purpose of the PIPS is to drive traffic to the engagement site, to find a touch point to engage with our seasonal residents at events that they are already likely to attend, and direct them to the Official Plan Let’s Talk page for additional information and further engagement opportunities.

In addition to the PIPS, a formal public open house will be hosted to present the draft Official Plan to the public and to solicit feedback in the early Fall.

7. Financial, Staffing and Accessibility (AODA) Implications

Council has allocated \$300,000 towards the completion of the Official Plan review and update project.

The Official Plan will follow AODA legislation.

8. Policies Affecting Proposal

The Town’s Official Plan, is a policy document that guides the short-term and long-term development of the Town. It applies to all lands within the municipal boundary and the policies within it provide direction for the size and location of land uses, provision of municipal services and facilities, and preparation of regulatory bylaws to control the development and use of land. As part of the Official Plan Review and Update project, staff will ensure that any Town policies and/or procedures are updated to be in alignment with any modifications to the Official Plan.

9. Comments from Departments, Community and Corporate Partners

The Engagement Summary Report summarizes the Community comments from the Visioning Workshop and online survey. As part of Phase 2 of the project, additional public engagement will take place, in addition to a Technical Advisory Committee meeting.

10. Alternatives

As directed by Council.

11. Communicating Results

Planning Staff will post the What We Heard Report and Background Report on the Official Plan Lets Talk page: <https://letstalk.forterie.ca/official-plan-review-and-update>

Planning Staff will work with the Communications department to have the Engagement Summary briefing page, posted on the Town's social media accounts.

12. Conclusion

With the release of the Engagement Summary Report, and Background Report, Phase 1 of the Official Plan Review is complete. The working draft of the Vision and Guiding Principles will be further refined as a result of the next phase of the Official Plan Review (Policy Direction). Additional update reports will be prepared as the review process unfolds.

13. Report Approval

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14. Attachments

Appendix 1 – Newspaper Advertisement
Appendix 2 – Engagement Summary Report, March 2024
Appendix 3 – Background Report, March 2024