

Town of Fort Erie Official Plan Review

Engagement Summary Report

March 2024

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. Introduction..... | 3 |
| Purpose | 3 |
| Objectives | 4 |
| 2. Phase 1 Engagement | 4 |
| Project Website | 4 |
| Indigenous Engagement | 5 |
| Special Committee of the Whole Meeting (Section 26)..... | 6 |
| Vision Workshop | 6 |
| Vision Survey | 7 |
| Guestbook | 8 |
| Community Focus Group | 8 |
| Technical Advisory Committee | 8 |
| 3. What We Heard | 8 |
| Housing and Growth Management | 9 |
| Heritage and Culture | 10 |
| Employment, Industrial and Commercial..... | 11 |
| Natural Environment..... | 11 |
| Agriculture and Rural..... | 12 |
| Transportation | 13 |
| Vision and Guiding Principles..... | 13 |
| 4. Next Steps | 15 |

1. Introduction

The Town of Fort Erie is undertaking an Official Plan Conformity Review and 10-year update to its Official Plan. An Official Plan establishes a municipality’s vision and supporting land use planning policy framework for managing growth and change over the planning horizon. The Town’s Official Plan will be updated to have regard for matters of provincial interest, address recent changes in provincial policy and legislation, manage future growth and development, and be responsive to the unique opportunities and aspirations of the Fort Erie community.

The Official Plan Review (OPR) is following a multi-phase process to develop a vision for the future stated through goals and policies.

Purpose

The purpose of this Engagement Summary Report is to provide an overview of the initiatives undertaken and a summary of the input received from the public and key stakeholders during Phase 1 of the OPR (**Figure 1**).

The OPR is following a multi-phase process to develop a vision for the future of Fort Erie to the year 2051. Phase 1 of the OPR is well underway and this report provides a summary of what was heard through discussion with various stakeholder groups, including the community. The report also sets out feedback received regarding the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles for the updated Official Plan. Over the next three phases, the Vision and Guiding Principles will continue to evolve and expand.

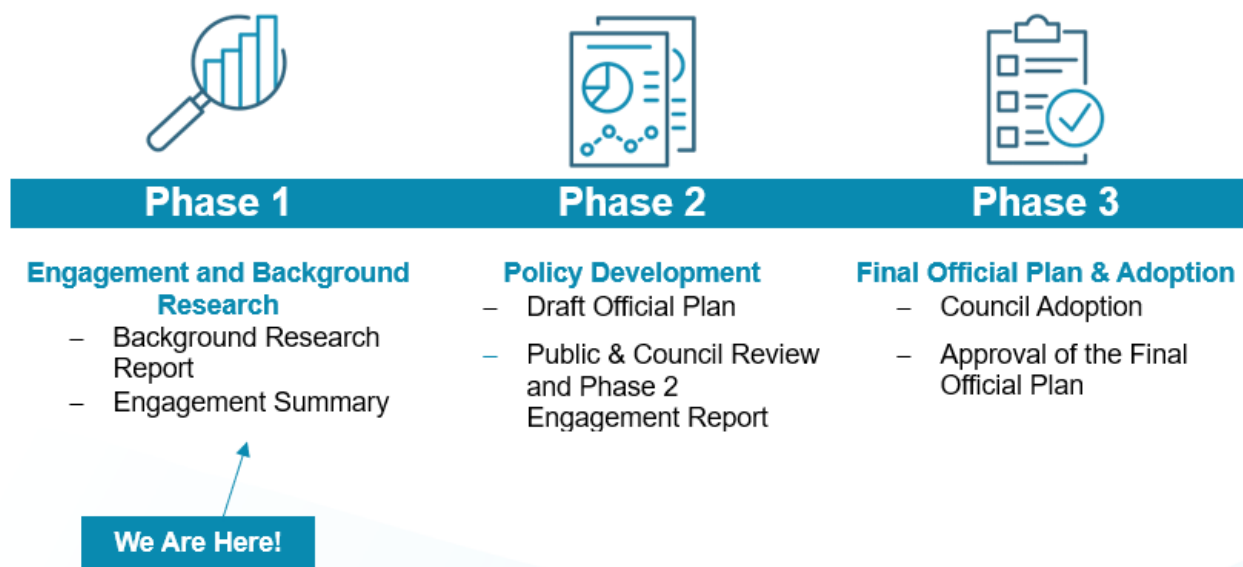


Figure 1: Official Plan Review Work Plan

Objectives

The engagement objectives for Phase 1 were to:

- Introduce and launch the Town of Fort Erie Official Plan Conformity Review and 10-year update to the community, raise awareness about the project’s importance and encourage participation in the process; and,
- Collect input on community priorities to assist in the creation of a vision and guiding principles for the updated Official Plan.

2. Phase 1 Engagement

Engagement activities for Phase 1 ran from September 2023 and concluded in March 2024. Engagement events and tactics during this stage of the project included:

- Public Notices and Project Website Launch (<https://letstalkforterie.ca/>);
- Special Committee of the Whole Meeting (Section 26 of the *Planning Act*);
- Pre-engagement and continued Engagement with Indigenous Peoples;
- One (1) Community Vision Workshop;
- One (1) Community Vision Survey; and,
- Creation of the Technical Advisory Committee and the Community Focus Group.

Details on the engagement activities completed in Phase 1 are set out in this section of the Report.

Project Website

The project engagement portal, (link to the engagement page is found here [Let’s Talk Fort Erie](https://letstalkforterie.ca/)) which is hosted on the EngagementHQ platform, was launched at the onset of the project to act as a destination for project information, frequently asked questions, project updates and engagement opportunities (**Figure 2**).

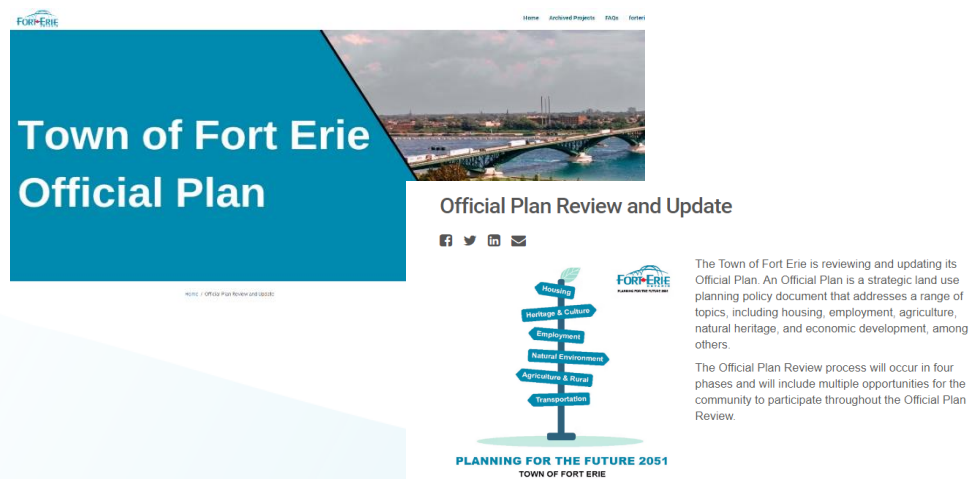


Figure 2: Let's Talk Fort Erie Project Page

Since the launch of the engagement portal until March 27, 2024, there have been a total of 989 visits to the project page with 14 visitors registering to receive project updates. **Figure 3** illustrates the number of ‘Engaged’, ‘Informed’, and ‘Aware’ visitors. Additional visitors have viewed the site, however, they have not been categorized as engaged, informed, and aware visitors by the EngagementHQ platform and are noted in Figure 3 as ‘Other’.

Engaged visitors are visitors to the project page that have contributed to a tool, such as participated in a survey, asked a question or posted a comment. Comparatively, informed visitors are those, that have clicked on a piece of information available on the engagement portal, such as viewed a photo, downloaded a document, visited the Frequently Asked Questions (“FAQ”) page. Lastly, an aware visitor has made at least one single visit to the site. Important to note that engaged visitors are always informed and aware, informed visitors are aware but not engaged, and aware visitors are just aware, they are not informed or engaging with the portal.

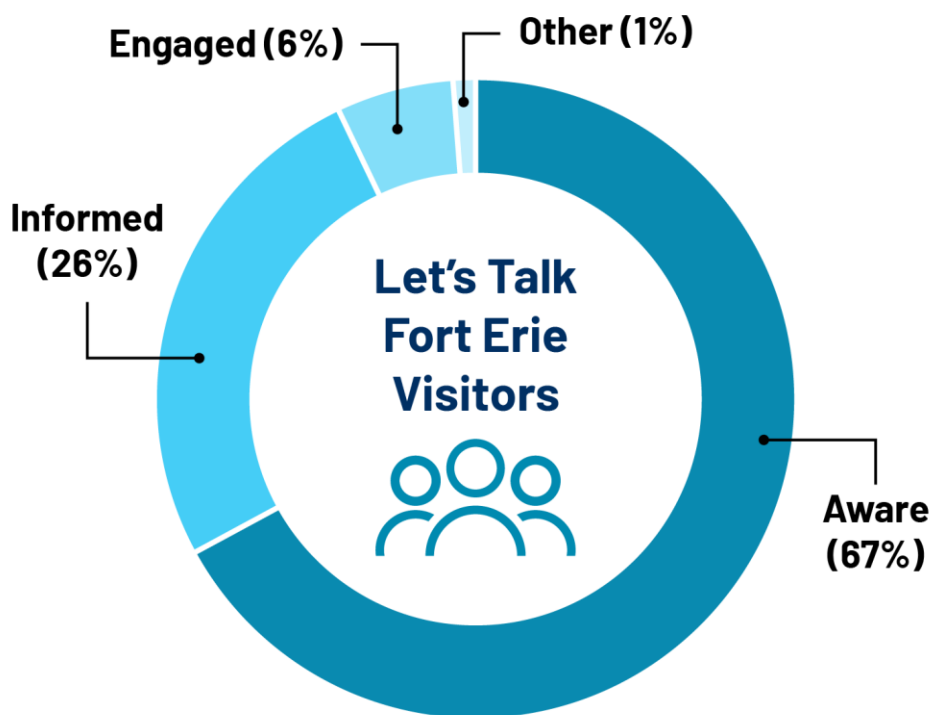


Figure 3: Let's Talk Fort Erie Visitors

Indigenous Engagement

The Town of Fort Erie is committed to inclusive Public Consultation. As prescribed by the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020, the Town recognizes the importance of engaging with Indigenous Peoples on planning matters that may affect their Section 35 Aboriginal or treaty rights in the *Constitution Act*, 1982. As a planning authority, the Town will continue to meet with Indigenous Peoples in a collaborative manner to build meaningful relationships and discuss the OPR. It is important to provide Chief and Council with an opportunity to comment on their communities' preferred level of involvement and ask how leadership would like to be engaged in the OPR. As a starting point, Indigenous communities were

contacted by letter, which included an open invitation for one -on -one meetings. A letter was sent to each of the following Indigenous communities:

- Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre;
- Haudenosaunee Development Institute;
- Métis Nation of Ontario;
- Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation;
- Niagara Region Métis Council;
- Niagara Regional Native Centre; and
- Six Nations of the Grand River.

To date, the Six Nations of the Grand River have responded, requesting a meeting at a later date to discuss the draft Official Plan.

Special Committee of the Whole Meeting (Section 26)

A Special Committee of the Whole Meeting was held on December 11, 2023, to publicly launch the project with an introduction to the Town Council. The meeting officially commenced the Town’s OPR, provided key information, and gave the public the opportunity to participate through written submission and speaking at the event, with one member of the community attending virtually. The meeting fulfilled the Section 26 requirement of the *Planning Act* which requires a special meeting of Council to be held at the commencement of an OPR.

Vision Workshop

An in-person drop-in style vision workshop, open to the community, was held to introduce the project, identify the project’s purpose, and collaborate in developing a Vision for Fort Erie to 2051. The Project Team presented high level information summarizing the project background, timeline and work completed to-date. Following the presentation, a series of activities were carried out that included interactive display boards at various tables that encouraged participants to provide their thoughts and feedback on the key themes developed as part of the OPR. The tables were set up around the room and were broken out by key themes of Housing; Heritage and Culture; Employment, Industrial and Commercial; Natural Environment; Agriculture and Rural; and Transportation. **Figures 4 and 5** are photos taken at the vision workshop. More information on the vision workshop can be found on the Town’s project engagement portal ([Official Plan Open House | Official Plan Review and Update | Let’s Talk Fort Erie](#)).



Figure 4: Vision Workshop Display Board

The session was held on February 27, 2024, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Fort Erie Leisureplex, 3 Municipal Centre Drive. Over 40 participants attended the session and feedback received during the vision workshop has been summarized in Section 3 of this Report.

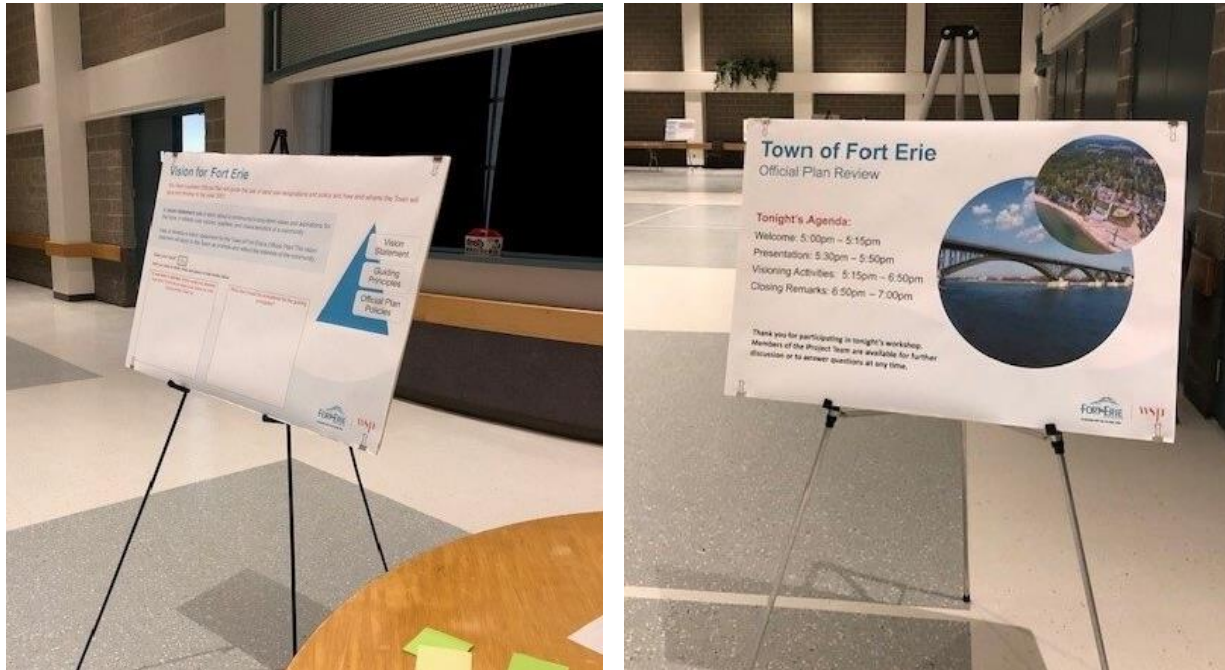


Figure 5: Vision Workshop Display Boards

Vision Survey

A Vision Survey was launched online from the engagement portal on February 1, 2024, through March 4, 2024. The objective of the Vision Survey was to provide an opportunity for the community, including those that could not attend the vision workshops, to provide input to the issues that will inform the updated Fort Erie Official Plan.

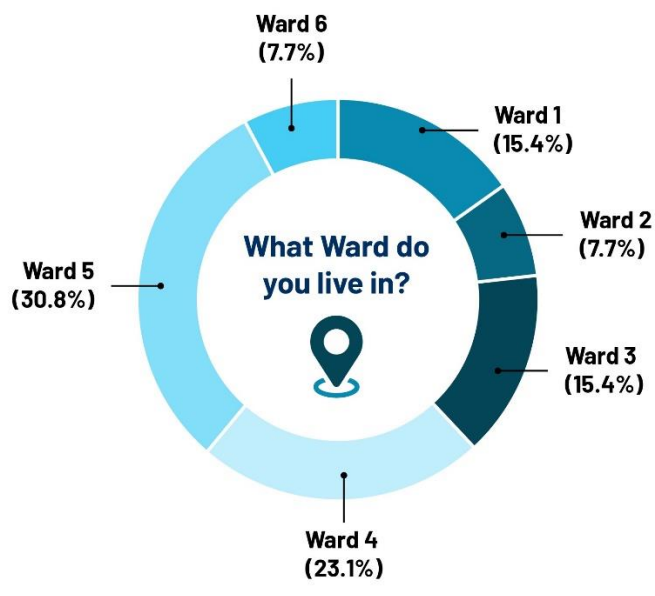


Figure 6: Vision Survey Respondent Ward Distribution

The survey had 13 contributors, with the findings of the survey included in Section 3 of this Report.

Guestbook

The Guestbook tool on the engagement platform was made available from February 28, 2024, to March 18, 2024, for participants to provide comments or responses to the questions presented on the display boards at the Visioning Workshop. The Guestbook had six visitors and zero submissions.

Community Focus Group

In February 2024, the Town invited members of the community to participate as a voluntary member of the Community Focus Group for the OPR, with the intention of this group being to provide input to the Project Team over the course of the OPR. Participants were asked to apply to the Town by February 15, 2024, if they were interested in contributing towards creating a long-term vision for the community. At the March 18, 2024, Council meeting, Town Staff were asked to extend the application period to April 3, 2024, and further advertise for the Community Focus Group. Through the application process, the Town will be seeking individuals that represent a cross-section of the community, including residents, business owners, community organizations, and land developers.

The Town intends to be forming the Community Focus Group and host first meeting in Spring 2024. Therefore, feedback from the Community Focus Group has not been included in this Report.

Technical Advisory Committee

As part of the OPR, the Town has formed a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The TAC includes members and subject matter experts from departments from within the Town, such as Building, Community Planning, Development Planning, Fire, Museum and Cultural Services, Engineering, Economic and Development Tourism Services, Infrastructure, Corporate Services, Legal Services, Clerks and the Chief Administration Office. Additionally, there is regional representation as well on the TAC, with staff from agencies like the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority and Niagara Region.

The TAC did not meet during Phase 1 of the OPR, therefore, feedback from the TAC is not summarized in this Report.

3. What We Heard

The various meetings, workshop and engagement tactics used throughout Phase 1 of the OPR resulted in valuable feedback to support the development of a Vision for the updated Official Plan. This Section provides a summary of that feedback, which has been organized according to the following themes:

- Housing;
- Heritage and Culture;
- Employment, Industrial and Commercial;
- Natural Environment;
- Agriculture and Rural; and
- Transportation.

The Online Vision Survey that was issued through the engagement portal, with one of the questions asking participants to rank the key themes identified by the Project Team. **Figure 7** shows the results from the Vision Survey, with the most important theme to the residents of Fort Erie being the natural environment, as well as both employment and housing. Additionally, it should be noted, the survey indicated residents do not place transportation as high importance in comparison to the other themes.

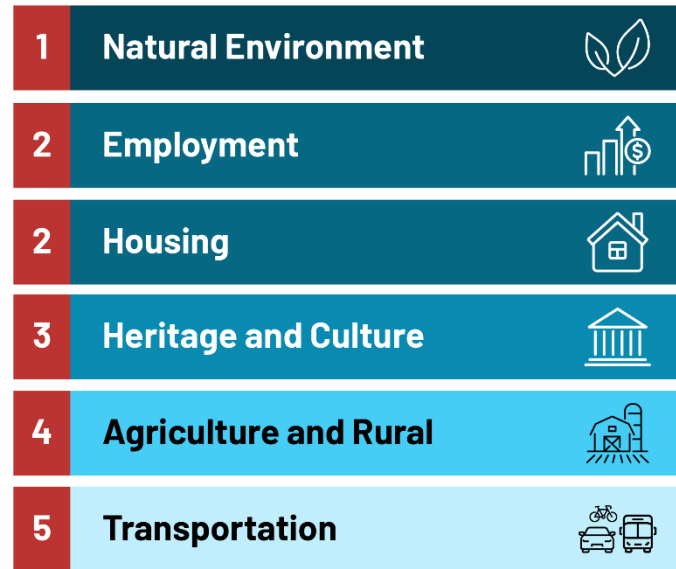


Figure 7: Online Visioning Survey Results – Key Themes

Housing and Growth Management

The Town is projected to grow to a population of 48,050 residents and 18,430 jobs by 2051. This represents significant population and employment growth over the next 25 years, and the Official Plan has a key role in managing this growth. The updated Official Plan will guide future growth and development and address emerging opportunities and issues in the Town. The Official Plan will aim to direct development and intensification to areas that are already built up, offer housing and employment opportunities, have access to water and wastewater, and are close to everyday amenities, including transportation options.

Participants of the vision workshop were asked to provide areas where they think the Town should consider opportunities for intensification and where growth should be directed. **Figure 8** illustrates the feedback from participants on where growth should be directed in the Town.

We heard from residents that it is important to:

- **Manage the Town's growth** in a way that balances development with the protection of natural and cultural areas. Growth should occur in a way that maintains the Town's existing character and access to natural areas.

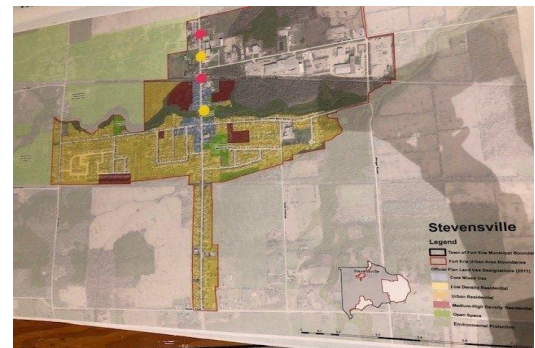


Figure 8: Growth Management Maps from Vision Workshop

- **Prioritize providing a range of housing options** by broadening the range of housing options and ownership arrangements to cater to the diverse requirements of residents across different age groups, income levels, abilities, and life stages. Provide more affordable housing units through the implementation of financial incentives and strategies.
- **Encourage multiple density forms** to meet the demand in Fort Erie. Explore allowing high-rise apartment buildings in appropriate areas, such as along arterial roadways, may assist in fulfilling the demand for housing and preserve greenspace. Encourage more mid-rise apartments (e.g., four to seven storey buildings) in appropriate areas where higher rise development may not be appropriate. It was noted that there is general support for low-rise apartments being integrated into low density neighbourhoods, such as the units in the Ridgeway area.

Heritage and Culture

The Town of Fort Erie has a rich cultural history that holds significant value to the Town. The current Official Plan has five categories of cultural heritage which include cultural heritage landscapes, built heritage, archeological sites, moveable heritage (artifacts and archives) and intangible heritage.

Feedback received on heritage and culture highlighted the community's interest in:

- **Protecting and enhancing heritage features and buildings**, preserving the Town's cultural heritage districts and historic landscapes. Ensure that newly constructed buildings adjacent to heritage structures mirror the quality and aesthetic standards of the heritage buildings. A thoughtful evaluation of historical and cultural significance should guide decisions to ensure the preservation of meaningful heritage while allowing for the evolution of the built environment.
- **Protecting and enhancing the unique sense of place**, ensuring the character of Fort Erie is preserved and continues to be prioritized throughout the OPR.
- **Identifying heritage and cultural features to be preserved** through the creation of clear guidelines or policies that identify what constitutes as a heritage building. Support the provision of additional guidance to current or prospective property owners of designated or listed heritage buildings.
- **Encourage the creation of community hub or flex streets** throughout the community and in some specific areas as noted by participants. There is interest in having public spaces to hold events, with opportunities for entertainment and connection to existing Town amenities like the library.

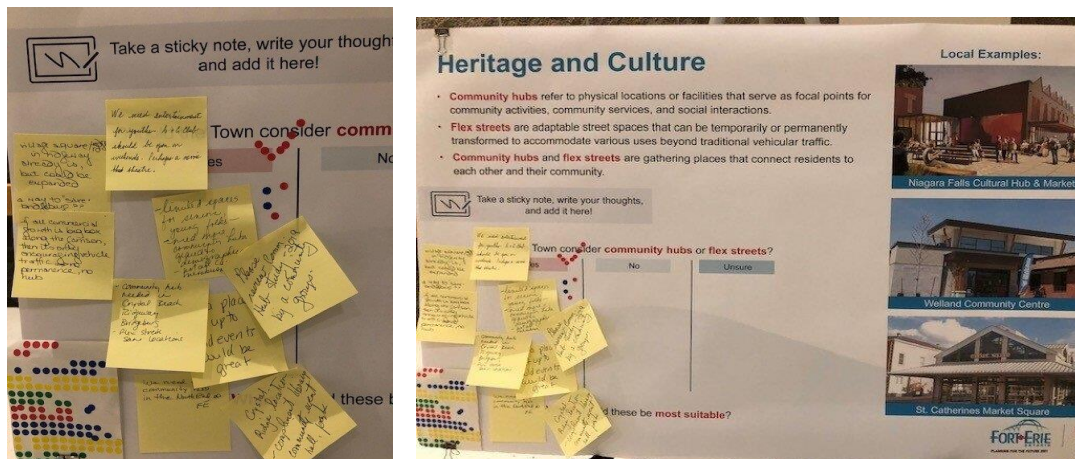


Figure 9: Community Hubs and Flex Street Display Boards from Vision Workshop

Employment, Industrial and Commercial

The Town's current Official Plan encourages the expansion of industrial and commercial development, and the revitalization of existing main commercial areas to expand Fort Erie's economy, support local business, and increase employment opportunities.

A summary of comments received during Phase 1 engagement regarding employment, industrial and commercial industries included:

- **Attract more diverse employers** diversifying the Town's employer base will create a resilient economy, and increasing the number of businesses will stimulate economic growth, create more business opportunities, and foster community prosperity.
- **Improve the viability of office, retail, and employment uses** implement policies and offer incentives that support the growth of office and retail businesses, such as tax incentives, grants, or low-interest loans, can help reduce the financial barriers to entry and encourage entrepreneurship and investment in the Town. Encourage mixed-use development that combines office, retail, and residential spaces within the same area can create vibrant, walkable neighborhoods.
- **Support and enhance tourism** within the Town in a way that can significantly boost the local economy by attracting visitors, which stimulates business growth and generate additional revenue for local businesses and the town itself. There is interest in developing a Tourism Strategy.

Natural Environment

The current Official Plan has policies that protect the Town's natural heritage features and promote biodiversity, while having regard for protecting environment in accordance with Provincial and Regional land use plans and policies. We heard from engagement efforts that one of the biggest values to residents of Fort Erie is the natural environment. Residents who contributed in engagement sessions had an overall consensus that the natural environment of Fort Erie plays a key role in the creation and preservation of a complete community and should be a top priority in the OPR.

The online Visioning Survey asked residents what they feel the Town of Fort Erie currently protects and enhances. **Figure 10** below demonstrates survey responses indicated what residents feel the Town currently protects and enhances.

- **Protect Fort Erie’s environment and greenspaces** through the implementation of policies to prevent development from impacting the existing natural areas and woodlands and enhance their preservation. The population in Fort Erie is growing which poses a threat in developments expanding through the natural areas which should be protected.
- **Enhance Fort Erie’s environment and greenspaces** by promoting initiatives for programs for planting trees, managing invasive species, and organizing events to clean up parks. Ensure the Town preserves and enhances its valued natural heritage features such as conservation areas, parks, trails, woodlots and wetlands.
- **Prioritize development criteria and regulations** that aim to prevent the disturbance of woodlands and open spaces, nurturing the natural surroundings.

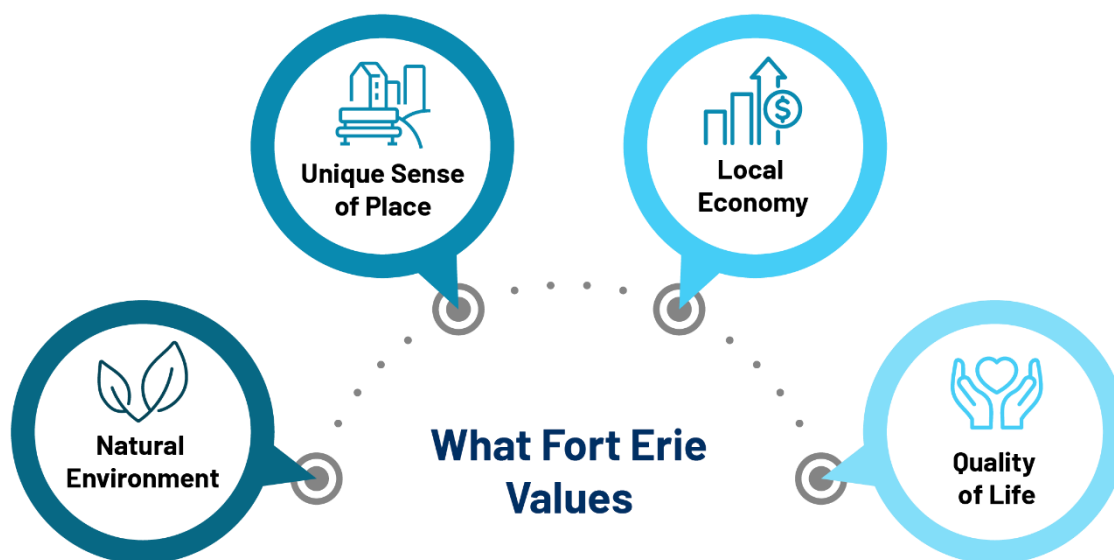


Figure 10: Online Vision Survey Results – What Fort Erie Protects and Enhances

Agriculture and Rural

The current Official Plan sets out agriculture and rural policies, noting that prominent agricultural uses in the Official Plan are the growing of crops, nursery and horticultural crops; raising of livestock; raising of other animals for food, fur or fibre, including poultry and fish; aquaculture; apiaries; agro-forestry; maple syrup production; and associated on-farm buildings and structures.

Feedback received on this theme has been summarized below:

- **Protect, enhance, and support the agricultural sector** implement policies and incentives that protect and prioritize the maintenance of viable agricultural lands for sustaining food production, preserving rural landscapes, and supporting local economies.

- **Preserving rural heritage** allowing greater autonomy to agricultural landowners that respects the traditional knowledge, practices, and culture in order to preserve their rural heritage. Review opportunities to reduce regulatory barriers.
- **Financial support and incentives for local farmers** through grants and subsidies to farmers that encourage the maintenance of agricultural land for food production in the Town. Encouraging the preservation of agricultural lands will support food security, preserves valuable farmland, and stimulates the local economy. Through investing in agricultural sustainability through grants and subsidies not only benefits farmers but also contributes to the town's environmental, economic, and social well-being.

Transportation

There are goals and objectives set out for transportation in Fort Erie to help ensure communities and neighbourhoods are well-connected to each other, as well as employment centres, commercial areas and community facilities in a manner that is safe and efficient, while providing opportunities for public transit, walking and cycling.

Comments on the Town's transportation services, and network are summarized to highlight:

- **Build on current transit services** leverage existing infrastructure, expertise, and resources to enhance mobility, safety and accessibility for residents. Expand and improve on the existing transit networks within the Town to address the growing demand, fill service gaps and accommodate the evolving transportation needs of residents.
- **On-demand systems** provide convenient, flexible, and responsive transportation that can offer convenient and personalized transportation options. Expand on travel options within the Town, through service options like Uber and Lyft that can fill the gaps that public transit cannot.
- **Improve inter-municipal links** convenient inter-municipal transit networks contribute to a more integrated regional economy, allowing residents to access employment, education, healthcare, and recreational opportunities across different municipalities, thereby enhancing overall quality of life and economic vitality. There is interest in additional and enhanced public transit to destinations like Niagara Falls and Toronto.

Vision and Guiding Principles

The Vision of an Official Plan should represent the fundamental values or principles of the community, as well as guide the direction of policy.

Based on feedback received during Phase 1 of the OPR, the Phase 1 Engagement Summary Report identified key terms and principles that make up the Vision for Fort Erie to 2051, which is the horizon for the updated OP. The new Vision Statement and updated Guiding Principles will be presented to the community during Phase 2 in the Draft Official Plan.

From the engagement efforts conducted throughout Phase 1 of the OPR, the following directions should be explored as a vision for Fort Erie:

- Thoughtful integration of urban growth while preserving of natural and cultural areas;
- Foster a pedestrian-friendly environment, create walkable communities that support convenient transit access in Town to shops and parks, while promoting connectivity throughout the Niagara Region;

- Support a high-quality way of life and wellbeing for the community;
- Strike a balance between accommodating rapid growth and ensuring the well-being of residents, promote recreational spaces, a range of housing, including affordable housing and age-in-place opportunities, improve community services and amenities such as healthcare;
- Mitigate the impacts of climate change and promote environmental protection of natural spaces;
- Protect and enhance the Town’s natural areas and assets, such as the waterfront;
- Recognize the Town’s cultural heritage and history;
- Provide diverse services, including shopping and entertainment, encourage and foster better job opportunities, and support small scale businesses;
- Create accessible and safe spaces;
- Promote the spirit and sense of community, support an inclusive, welcoming and diverse Town; and
- Position the Town as a tourist haven, showcase Fort Erie’s scenic landscapes and vibrant town culture.

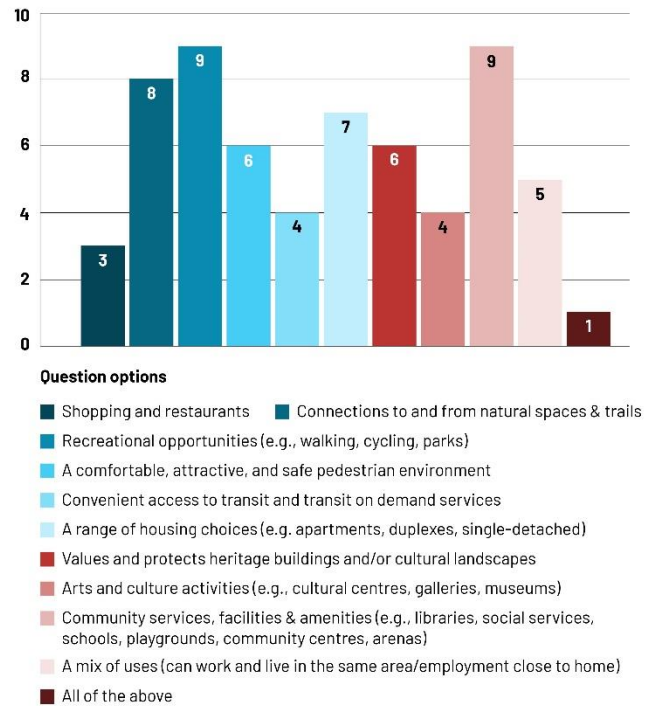


Figure 11: Complete Community Survey Response

4. Next Steps

Phase 1 of the OPR will wrap up with the issuance of the Background Research Report and the publishing of this Engagement Summary Report. Feedback will be collected on the Background Research Report and the Vision Statement and Guiding Principles during the development of the Draft Official Plan in Phase 2.

The Town is committed to reporting back to the community on what has been heard throughout each phase of work. These reports will be accessible through the engagement portal, [Let's Talk Fort Erie](#). All feedback received will be carefully considered during the development of the updated Official Plan and the Town will continue to engage with the community in a way that is open, transparent, accessible, and inclusive. Thank you to all that have provided input in the work completed to-date.

There are many ways for you to get involved in the OPR and share your feedback. More information can be found on [Let's Talk Fort Erie](#).



Figure 12: Sign located in front of Town Hall