



## **Administrative Report**

### **Office of the Manager, Planning Services**

**To:** Warden MacDonald and Members of Essex County Council

**From:** Rebecca Belanger, MCIP, RPP  
Manager, Planning Services

**Date:** Wednesday, January 18, 2023

**Subject:** County of Essex Official Plan Review Update

**Report #:** 2023-0118-IPS-R01-RB

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#### **Purpose**

To provide County Council with an update on Official Plan Review work that has been completed to date and next steps in the process.

#### **Background**

##### **Introduction**

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The County's first Official Plan was adopted in 2002 and approved by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in 2005. Following the approval of this plan, the Province delegated approval authority for local Official Plans and Amendments, subdivisions and condominiums and part lot control exemption to the County. County Council subsequently delegated this approval authority responsibility to the Manager, Planning Services.

In 2014, the County adopted and received approval for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation of the Official Plan, based on work that started in 2009.

In September of 2021, pursuant to Section 26 of the *Planning Act*, County Planning Staff commenced preliminary background work needed to undertake a comprehensive review and update of the existing Official Plan.

The Official Plan Review is being undertaken in three phases:

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
<i>Background Review &amp; Growth Projections</i>	<i>Policy Options &amp; Additional Technical Studies</i>	<i>Draft &amp; Adopt New Official Plan</i>

The County Official Plan is one of the most important policy documents that County Council adopts. The overall health, well-being and prosperity of people living in this region will be impacted and shaped by the vision, goals, policies and designations that are contained within this Official Plan.

It will serve as a “road map” for Essex County to responsibly manage growth and change over the next 30 years. It will guide and provide direction to landowners, residents, developers, homebuilders, investors, owners of businesses, non-profit groups, and the community at large on matters that shape how neighbourhoods, employment districts, waterfronts and rural landscapes respond to and take advantage of the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

The Official Plan Review project has been titled:

## Official Plan Review (2022 – 2052)

*One Land, One Climate, One Future, Together*



### **Discussion**

Phase 1 is now complete, with the following deliverables having been successfully undertaken:

#### **Phase 1 Background Report (dated September 2022)**

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This report was prepared by the County Planning Advisor and County Planning Staff, with the assistance of County GIS Staff.

It contains important information pertaining to:

- How the County Official Plan affects the daily lives of Essex County residents;
- The Provincial Planning Framework;
- Planning in a two-tier governance structure;
- Why this Official Plan Review is being undertaken at this time;
- How the region has changed over the last two decades;
- Settlement Area changes;
- Lot Creation Approvals granted by the County;
- The County's Climate Change Emergency Declaration, and the County Energy Plan;
- The Healthy Places, Healthy People Statement of Principles; and
- A detailed summary of the Initial Round of Consultation.



It should be noted that during the last 10 years (between 2011 and 2021) the County granted approval to new Plans of Subdivision and Plans of Condominium that resulted in 4,873 new residential dwelling units being created county-wide (an average of approximately 500 new dwelling units per year). Designated Settlement Areas located throughout the County of Essex are continuing to urbanize at a rapid rate, with more than 800 hectares of land being converted from rural to urban land uses between 2010 and 2021.

### **Growth Analysis Report (dated October 2022)**

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This report was prepared by Watson & Associates, with input provided by County Planning Staff, Local Municipal Planning Staff, and the County Planning Advisor.

It contains important information that will be carried forward and utilized as part of the remaining phases of this Official Plan Review, including data and a corresponding analysis of:

- evolving national, provincial and regional economic outlooks;
- historic and projected levels of international immigration, and inter-provincial and intra-provincial migration;
- labour force and commuting trends;
- historic demographic and housing trends;
- historic building permit activity and price trends;
- 30-Year County-wide Population, Household and Employment Forecasts (2021 to 2051);
- 30-Year Population, Household and Employment Forecasts (2021-2051) for each of the 7 Local Municipalities in Essex County;
- the assumptions associated with each of the growth forecasts.



Some of the key findings from the Growth Analysis Report include:

- Over the next thirty years the County's population is forecast to grow from 199,100 to between 268,100 and 315,000 persons;
- This amounts to an average of 2,300 to 3,900 persons being added per year to Essex County's population, as compared to an average of 1,040 persons that were added per year over the last 15 years;
- It is important to note that while the County's population based is growing, it is also getting older. During the 30-year growth horizon, the 75+ age group is forecast to represent the fastest growing population age group with an average annual population growth rate of 3.4%;
- The County will be more reliant on net in-migration as a source of population growth, as opposed to natural increase;
- With respect to housing needs, strong population growth in the 75+ age group is anticipated to place an increasing demand on medium

and high-density forms of housing, including purpose-built “seniors’ housing” and housing types and unit sizes that provide a broader and more affordable range of housing options;

- By 2051, the total number of households in the County are forecast to grow from 71,400 to 101, 200 and 114,300. This will result in the need to accommodate on average an additional 990 to 1,430 new households per year, as compared to an average of 606 new households that were added per year over the last 15 years;
- By 2051, the total employment in the County is forecast to grow from 72,300 to between 107,900 and 124,200. This employment forecast is projecting an average annual increase over the next 30 years of between 1,180 to 1,700 in total employment being added per year county-wide, as compared to an average of 453 in total employment that was added per year over the last 15 years;

In accordance with the Provincial Policy Statement 2020, the County has prepared 30-year growth forecasts for all seven Local Municipalities. These forecasts have incorporated input received from municipal planning staff from each municipality and have been reviewed by the Technical Planning Advisory Committee, County Planning Staff and the County Planning Advisor.

All seven local municipalities are forecast to experience growth at substantially higher levels than what was actually experienced during the last 20 years. Detailed information related to each of these forecasts is included in the October 2022 Growth Analysis Report.

It should be noted that since these are 30-year forecasts, a range of projections are being carried forward in the subsequent phases of the Official Plan Review. This will enable Council, working collaboratively with Staff and Consultants retained to assist with the preparation of the new County Official Plan, to formulate growth management and land use policies that are fiscally, environmentally and socially responsible, and capable of adapting as needed to respond to unexpected economic changes that are unforeseen at this time.

### **Initial Round of Consultation (March to August 2022)**

As part of the Phase 1 Work Plan it was important to complete an initial round of consultation to better understand:

- What were the strengths of the County of Essex;
- The key challenges and issues to be addressed over the next 25 years;
- What were the opportunities that County Council should be focusing on;

- How the County Official Plan can improve the health, well-being and prosperity of Essex County residents;
- How effective the existing County Official Plan has been in achieving stated goals of the Plan;
- Policy Gaps that exist and what policy areas the new Official Plan needs to focus on;
- Levels of engagement that need to be part of the Phase 2 and Phase 3 Work Plan.

County Planning Staff and the County Planning Advisor held a series of virtual workshops and meetings during Phase 1 with the following:

- Three virtual workshops were held with members of County Council;
- A virtual workshop was held with the Directors and Managers of Planning from each of the local Essex County municipalities (TPAC);
- A virtual workshop was held with senior representatives from key community stakeholders in the region (CSAC). Participants in this workshop included representatives from Invest Windsor-Essex, the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, the Windsor-Essex Community Foundation, the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers, the United Way, Tourism Windsor-Essex-Pelee Island, the Windsor-Essex Home Builders Association, the Western Ontario Wardens Caucus;
- Two virtual workshops were held with student representatives from three Essex County Secondary Schools;
- Virtual meetings were held with Senior Engineering and Planning Staff from each of the 7 local municipalities to discuss servicing availability, infrastructure expansion plans, and servicing constraints in each of the existing designated settlement areas.

Preliminary meetings were also held with Staff from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the City of Windsor and with First Nation Communities. These initial meetings were held to introduce the County's Official Plan Review project, to explain the three phases of the work plan, and to obtain information as to how they wish to become involved in Phases 2 and 3.

Some of the key takeaways from what we heard during this initial round of consultation include:

### **Strengths of the County**

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- Safe and welcoming communities;
- Abundance of fresh water & proximity to US Border;

- Warm climate, long growing season, fertile soils;
- Specialized skills in agri-business & manufacturing;
- Cultural diversity
- High quality open spaces, parks and recreational amenities
- Short commuting times
- Less congestion
- Extensive trail network
- Strong philanthropic spirit

### **Challenges and Issues to be Addressed**

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- Housing affordability;
- Shortage of shovel-ready lands is only going to get worse;
- Meeting the growing demand for health & emergency services;
- Continuing to grow while protecting important agricultural & natural heritage lands;
- Working collaboratively to effectively compete with other regions;
- Preparing & protecting our communities from more intense and more frequent storm & heat events;
- Giving people real mobility choices;
- Attracting & retaining the skilled labour force needed;
- Making sure transit is accessible, convenient & affordable;
- Designing and building complete communities;
- Giving residents more options to live sustainably & reduce their carbon footprint

### **Opportunities the County Should be Focusing On**

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- Plan for 1 or 2 large scale fully serviced "County Industrial Parks";
- Simply/streamline development approval process, and have 1 common expedited approval process across the county;
- Convert surplus/underutilized commercial lands for new rental housing, and provide incentives for new affordable housing;
- Take a more active role in coordinating and applying for infrastructure funding from senior levels of government;

- Coordinate and plan for expanded transit services county-wide;
- Adopt a county-wide DC Fee to help fund transportation-related infrastructure needed to support growth

## **How the County Official Plan Can Improve the Health, Well-Being and Prosperity of Essex County Residents**

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- Focus on quality of life, sustainability and housing affordability;
- Continue to plan and invest in active transportation;
- Provide county-wide targets for natural heritage protection;
- Stronger Policies & Investments to make neighbourhoods more walkable and communities more complete;
- Implement targeted CIPs at county and local level to support job creation objectives;
- Create inviting public spaces and mandate tree planting along all streets;
- Adopt policies and make investments in built forms that support transit service county-wide;
- Adopt policies that creates greater access to food that is produced locally for county residents;
- Adopt Best Practices that are proven to be effective

A detailed summary of what we heard during the initial round of consultation can be found in the Phase 1 Background Report.

## **Phases 2 and 3 of the Official Plan Review**

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County Planning Staff and the County Planning Advisor prepared a Request for Proposal (RFP) to retain a Planning Consultant that will prepare the remaining technical reports including the land needs analysis, policy and options report and draft the new County Official Plan.

This RFP was issued in keeping with the County's procurement policy and submissions were received up to and including December 22<sup>nd</sup>. An evaluation of the proposals received was conducted and administration found that NPG Planning Solutions, Niagara Falls, has provided that most advantageous proposal. Further to the County of Essex procurement policy a contract is being finalized for execution with NPG Planning Solutions in the amount of \$211,220 + applicable taxes.



## Financial Implications

The costs associated with the Official Plan review to date have been approved by County Council as part of the budget deliberations in December 2021 and in prior years.

## Consultations

The County's Manager of Procurement and Compliance has been consulted through-out the process, and the Official Plan Planning Advisor was consulted in the preparation of this report.

## Recommendation

That Essex County Council receive Report number 2023-0118-IPS-R01-RB from the Manager, Planning Services with regard to the County of Essex Official Plan Review process.

## Approvals

Respectfully Submitted,

*Rebecca Belanger*

Rebecca Belanger, MCIP, RPP, Manager, Planning Services

Concurred With,

*Allan Botham*

Allan Botham, P.Eng., Director, Infrastructure and Planning Services

Concurred With,

*Mary Birch*

Mary Birch, Interim Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix Number	Title
1	County of Essex Growth Analysis Report, Watson and Associates
2	Official Plan Review Phase 1 Background Report, Miller Silani Inc.