
Subject: Agriculture – Project Framework

Report to: Planning and Economic Development Committee

Report date: Wednesday, April 25, 2018

Recommendations

1. That the project framework and work program contained within Report PDS 17-2018 for the agricultural component of the new Regional Official Plan **BE ENDORSED**; and,
2. That a copy of Report PDS 17-2018 **BE CIRCULATED** to the Local Area Municipalities, Niagara Home Builders' Association, the Agricultural Policy and Action Committee, and the North and South Federations of Agriculture.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to seek Council's endorsement of the work program for the agricultural component of the new Regional Official Plan.
- The Agricultural Project Initiation Report (PDS 7-2018) presented to the Planning and Economic Development Committee on January 31, 2018 provided an overview the agriculture framework and sought direction to consult with the Area Planners group and local municipal planning staff toward the development of a detailed work program. These discussions have taken place and the input received has been considered and reflected in the work program.
- Agricultural system planning and natural environment planning are highly integrated. 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. PDS 18-2018 provides the framework for the natural environment work program.

Financial Considerations

The completion of the agricultural work program for the new Regional Official Plan will require staff resources, and may also require consulting resources. These costs can be accommodated within the Council approved Regional Official Plan Project budget.

Analysis

Consultation on PDS 7-2018

The Agricultural Project Initiation Report (PDS 7-2018) presented to the Planning and Economic Development Committee on January 31, 2018 provided an overview the agriculture framework and sought direction to consult with the Area Planners Group and local municipal planning staff toward the development of a detailed work program. Individual one-on-one meetings were held with the Local Area Municipalities between February 1 and 21, 2018. Presentations were also made to the Area Planners Group on January 26 and March 16, 2018. The meetings and presentations included a range of topic areas related to the new Regional Official Plan. The input received related to the agricultural work program centred on the following themes:

- Improving the viability of certain lands designated for agriculture (e.g. parcels that may have limitations due to size, location, soil health, water issues, etc.)
- Examining the Province's mapping of an Agricultural System for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, including potential opportunities for refinement
- Examining how wineries are addressed in the Niagara Escarpment Plan and the Province's Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas
- The importance of Agricultural Impact Assessment and corresponding guidance material released by the Province
- The importance of compatibility between the Regional Natural Heritage System and Agricultural System
- Consideration for the legalization of recreational cannabis and interactions with the Agricultural System

The input received from the Area Planners Group and the one-on-one meetings provided valuable insight into the key issues of importance to the local municipalities. The discussions helped to confirm that the agricultural work program is appropriately scoped to address issues of both regional and local importance. The issues raised will be considered in the development of Terms of Reference for the agricultural background study and the overall implementation of the work program.

The issue of agricultural viability was raised frequently in the one-on-one meetings and will be examined as part of the work program, potentially through a separate discussion paper. This includes lands that fall within the "Specialty Crop Area" designation of the Greenbelt Plan, 2017 that were previously developed for non-agricultural uses. Examination of this issue will include a legislative and policy review as well as discussions with the Province regarding any possible approaches.

Purpose of the Agricultural Work Program

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. In addition, discussions with the Area Planners Group and the Local Area Municipalities highlighted that there are opportunities to further strengthen the Region's Agricultural System and corresponding policy framework.

The agricultural work program will support the Region's continued leadership in agricultural policy development and ensure consistency with provincial policy. It will include undertaking research, analysis and consultation to develop an Agricultural System comprised of both mapping and policies in the new Regional Official Plan. More specifically, the agricultural work program will include:

1. An agricultural background study, which includes a review of the Province's agricultural system mapping;
2. Identifying and evaluating options for the Agricultural System;
3. Developing an Agricultural System;
4. Developing agricultural policies and schedules for the Official Plan; and
5. Considering policies and other tools to implement the Agricultural System.

Framework for Agricultural Work Program

The agricultural work program for the new Regional Official Plan comprises nine phases:

Phase 1- Project Initiation

- Prepare overview and detailed work program and consult
- Prepare terms of reference and form working group

Phase 2 - Background Study

- Prepare comprehensive background study
- Review provincial mapping

Phase 3 - 1st Point of Engagement: Inform on Background Study

- Consult with full range of stakeholders on background study (additional details below)
- Present to Local Councils

Phase 4 - Develop Options for the Agricultural System

- Develop and evaluate options for the agricultural system
- Identify preliminary preferred option

Phase 5 - 2nd Point of Engagement: Consultation on Options for the Agricultural System

- Consult with full range of stakeholders on preliminary preferred option (additional details below)
- Select preferred option
- Present preferred option to Committee and Council for endorsement

Phase 6 - Develop Regional Agricultural System

- Expand on preferred option to develop details of system
- Develop detailed recommendations to support implementation

Phase 7 - Develop Official Plan Policies & Finalize Mapping

- Develop Official Plan policies and finalize mapping/schedules
- Prepare implementation framework

Phase 8 - 3rd Point of Engagement: Draft OP Polices and Schedules

- Consult with full range of stakeholders on draft Official Plan polices and schedules

Phase 9 – Other Implementation Tools

- Finalize tools that are required for implementation

Following the completion of the agricultural work program there will be a process to ensure alignment across all sections of the new Regional Official Plan. Then there will be a statutory public meeting, and the Official Plan will be brought to Council for adoption as a single comprehensive document.

Reporting to Committee and Council

The following is a proposed schedule for reporting to Committee and Council as per the phases listed above.

Phase	Reports to Committee and Council*
1	1. Project Initiation Report✓ 2. Detailed Framework for Endorsement
3	3. Inform on Background Report
5	4. Preliminary Preferred Option and Direction to Consult 5. Preferred Option for Endorsement
6	6. Details of Regional Agricultural System for Endorsement

8	7. Draft Official Plan Policies and Schedules for Endorsement
9	TBD

*The formal reporting to Committee/Council is identified. However, additional memos and correspondence may be provided to Committee to provide updates on key issues as the work program progresses. A memo will be provided to Committee early in Q1 2019 to provide an update on the status of the project.

Consultation and Engagement

The agricultural work program will be supported by ongoing consultation and engagement activities.

An Agriculture Working Group will be established comprised of planners from the Region and Local Area Municipalities. Representatives from the Province will also be invited to participate in the Agriculture Working Group. A mandate and Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Working Group will be developed as part of the Phase 1 work. The Area Planners Group will be consulted on the ToR before the group is formed.

Formal consultation and engagement for the work program will be completed during Phases 3, 5 and 8 of the work program. A range of partners and stakeholders will be engaged during these phases, including but not limited to:

- Committee and Council
- Planning Advisory Committee (PAC)
- Area Planners Group
- Agricultural Policy and Action Committee (APAC)
- Agricultural Stakeholders
- Environmental Stakeholders
- Development Community
- The Public

An Indigenous engagement strategy for the Official Plan work program is currently being developed. Consultation and engagement for the agricultural work program will be consistent with the overall strategy.

In addition, it is anticipated that a presentation would be made to each of the Local Councils following the completion of the background study. The purpose of the presentation would be to inform on the basis and need for agricultural system planning, present the results of the background study, and seek input towards the development of options in the next phase. This presentation may be stand-alone, a joint presentation with the natural environment background study, or as part of a presentation on the overall Regional Official Plan work program.

Alternatives Reviewed

The alternative would be for Committee and Council to not endorse the agricultural work program. This is not recommended as agricultural planning is a critical component of the Regional Official Plan, which has implications for the regional economy.

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 7-2018 Agricultural Project Initiation Report
- PDS 3-2018 New Official Plan Update
- PDS 41-2017 High Level Official Plan Process Framework
- PDS 20-2016 Regional Official Plan Update

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