
Subject: Natural Environment – 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 18-2018 for the natural environment component of the new Regional Official Plan **BE ENDORSED**; and,
2. That a copy of Report PDS 18-2018 **BE CIRCULATED** to the Local Area Municipalities, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, the North and South Federations of Agriculture, the Agricultural Policy and Action Committee, the Niagara Home Builders Association, and the Niagara Industrial Association.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to seek Council's endorsement of the project framework and work program for the natural environment component of the new Regional Official Plan.
- PDS 6-2018 which was presented to Planning and Economic Development Committee on January 31, 2018 provided an overview of the natural environment work program and sought direction to consult with the Area Planners group and local municipal planning staff. The engagement process has been completed and input received has been incorporated into the framework and work program.
- The work program has been designed with several points of decision making and consultation and engagement along the way, this will give Committee and Council the opportunity to participate and provide direction throughout.
- Natural environment planning is a complex and evolving science. There is a wide range of Provincial requirements, guidance, and direction; scientific and technical requirements; industry best practices; and local context that must be taken into consideration.
- Natural environment planning and agricultural system 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 17-2018 provides the framework for the agricultural work program.

Financial Considerations

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

Analysis

Purpose of the Natural Environment Work Program

Early consultation with Local Area Municipalities and other stakeholders identified that the current Regional Natural Heritage System is out-of-date and difficult to use. New natural environment policies as part of the new Regional Official Plan are required.

The purpose of this work program is to research, analyze, and develop new environmental policies and schedules as a component of the new Regional Official Plan. As first presented in PDS 6-2018 the following major tasks are required:

- 1) The undertaking of a natural environment background study including discussion papers on the high-priority areas of mapping and watershed planning;
- 2) The identification and evaluation of options for one or more Regional natural system(s);
- 3) The development (and mapping) of Regional natural system(s);
- 4) The development of environmental policies and schedules for the new Regional Official Plan; and
- 5) The consideration of tools and policies that will be required for implementation of the Regional natural system(s).

Any previous regionally initiated Regional Official Plan Amendments (ROPAs) related to the natural environment will be considered through the work program. For example we will not be moving forward with ROPA 12 which was related to watercourse mapping. Work completed to date on the identification of watercourses will be considered in this work program.

Consultation on PDS 6-2018

At the Planning and Economic Development Committee on January 31, 2018 staff presented PDS 6-2018 which provided an overview of the natural environment work program and sought direction to consult with the Area Planners group and local municipal planning staff.

1-on-1 meetings with local municipal planning staff and staff from the NPCA occurred between February 1st and February 21, 2018. Presentations were made to the Area Planners group on January 26th and March 16, 2018. The meetings and presentations

included a range topic areas related to the new Regional Official Plan. The following is a summary of the input received related to the natural environment work program and the changes that are proposed to the work program.

Input Received	Proposed Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mapping was identified as an important issue for all. There were a range of concerns identified – most related to the age and accuracy of the mapping. It was identified that there is a need to have reliable mapping to support local planning and for the Region to consider a range of mapping options through the Official Plan process. There were also requests to have flexibility in the policy to allow refinements to boundaries based on field verification. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mapping options will be considered as a high-priority first component of the work program. A discussion paper considering a range of mapping issues will be prepared in advance of the comprehensive natural environment background study.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The interconnectedness between natural environment and watershed planning was discussed, as was the inclusion of watershed planning in the work program instead of a stand-alone item. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watershed planning will be added to the scope of work and identified as a high-priority consideration. A discussion paper will be prepared in advance of the comprehensive natural environment background study.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Woodlands were identified as an important issue for many. Specific input ranged, but included the process to determine significance; illegal cutting and private tree removal; and die-off from emerald ash borer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of analysis and options for identifying and mapping woodlands will be highlighted in the work program.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific topics for inclusion in the work program were requested including offsetting, shorelines, and watercourse identification. Invasive species and climate change were also discussed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offsetting, invasive species, shorelines, and watercourse identification will be specifically identified for inclusion in the background study and work program. A separate work program to address climate change is currently being prepared.

Input Received	Proposed Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education on a range of natural environment topics was identified as priority component of the consultation and engagement process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The importance of education will be identified in the consultation and engagement program. The first major point of engagement will primarily be an education exercise

Framework for Natural Environment Work Program

The natural environment work program for the new Regional Official Plan is proposed to be undertaken as follows. As it is proposed that a consultant will be retained to undertake Phase 2-6 and to support Region staff with Phase 7 and 8; some aspects of the work program may be refined further through the procurement process and once the consultant is retained. Phase 9, which is the development of other implementation tools (e.g. updated EIS guidelines, etc.) is outside of this work program and will be considered once the Official Plan policies have been developed and endorsed.

Phase 1- Project Initiation and Procurement

- Prepare overview and detailed work programs and consult
- Prepare terms of reference and form Technical Advisory Group (TAG)
- Complete procurement process and retain consultant

Phase 2 - Background Study and Discussion Papers for Mapping and Watershed Planning Priority Areas

- Prepare mapping discussion paper
- Prepare watershed planning discussion paper
- Prepare comprehensive background study

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

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

Phase 4 - Develop Options for the Natural System(s)

- Develop options/frameworks/methodologies for system development
- Evaluate options
- Identify preliminary preferred option

Phase 5 - 2nd Point of Engagement: Consultation on Options for the Natural System(s)

- Consult with full range of stakeholders on preliminary preferred option (additional detail below)

- Select preferred option
- Present preferred option to Committee and Council for endorsement

Phase 6 - Develop Regional Natural System(s)

- 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 (e.g. updated EIS Guidelines, etc.)

Following the completion of the natural environment 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 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 Natural System(s) for Endorsement
8	7. Draft Official Plan Policies and Schedules for Endorsement
9	TBD

*The formal reporting to Committee/Council is identified. However, it is assumed that additional memos and correspondence may be provided to Committee to provide

updates on key issues as we move forward through the work program. A memo will be provided to Committee early in Q1 2019 to provide an update on the status of the project.

Consultation and Engagement

It is anticipated that there will be ongoing consultation and engagement throughout the work program. Through the 1-on-1 meetings with local municipal planning staff the importance of focusing on education early in the engagement program was highlighted. A Technical Advisory Group (TAG) of local municipal planners will be formed to support the work program, representatives from the NPCA and Province will also be invited to participate in the TAG. A mandate and terms of reference (ToR) will be developed as part of Phase 1 work. The Area Planners group will be presented the ToR before the group is formed.

Formal consultation and engagement for the work program will be completed in three phases as identified in the table above. The full range of stakeholders including the following will be consulted during each of these phases:

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

An indigenous engagement strategy for the Official Plan work program is currently being developed. Consultation and engagement for the natural environment 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 inform on the basis and need for natural environment planning, present the results of the background study, and then seek input towards the development of options in the next phase. This presentation may be stand-alone, a joint presentation with the agricultural background study, or as part of a presentation on the overall Official Plan work program.

Alternatives Reviewed

The alternative would be for Committee and Council to not endorse the natural environment work program. This is not recommended as natural environment and watershed planning are important component which are required to inform most other aspects of the new Regional Official Plan work program.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The natural environment 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
- PDS 6-2018 Natural Environment Project Initiation Report

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