
Subject: Natural Environment Project Initiation Report

Report to: Planning and Economic Development Committee

Report date: Wednesday, January 31, 2018

Recommendations

1. That staff **BE DIRECTED** to present the overview of the framework for the natural environment work program as presented in this report to the Area Planners group and begin consultation towards the development of the detailed framework.
2. That staff **BE DIRECTED** to report back to Committee once the detailed framework for the natural environment work program has been prepared.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the work program to support the natural environment policies for the new Official Plan, and to direct staff to begin consultation with the Area Planners and Local Area Municipalities' staff on the preparation of a detailed framework.
- 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.
- Early consultation with Local Area Municipalities and other stakeholders has identified that the current Regional Natural Heritage System is out-of-date and difficult to use. A new Natural Heritage System as part of the new Regional Official Plan is required.
- 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.
- The detailed framework for the work program will be prepared in consultation with the Area Planners group and Local Area Municipalities' staff. Following preparation of the detailed framework staff will return to Committee to seek final endorsement before moving forward with the work program.

Financial Considerations

The completion of the natural environment background study and policy development will require staff and consulting resources. These costs can be accommodated within the Council approved Regional Official Plan Project budget.

Analysis

Background

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. Among the many considerations are the new requirements from the Greenbelt Plan (2017), Niagara Escarpment Plan (2017), and Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2017). For example, the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe includes a new Provincial Natural Heritage System in the Growth Plan Area which will have to be fully considered and integrated with the new Regional system. This new Provincial system is in addition the existing Provincial Natural Heritage System in the Greenbelt Plan area.

Throughout staff's early consultation work on the new Regional Official Plan, it was identified by Local Area Municipalities and other stakeholders that the current Regional Natural Heritage System is out-of-date and difficult to use. Therefore a new Natural Heritage System will be designed and implemented as part of the new Regional Official Plan. A natural environment background study will be completed based on the best and current science, options will be identified and evaluated, and a Natural Heritage System and supporting Official Plan policies will be developed. The entire process will be supported by a comprehensive consultation and engagement program.

Overview of Work Program

An overview of the proposed work program is as follows:

1. Project Initiation Phase including preparing and finalizing the detailed framework
2. Completion of the natural environment background study
3. Consideration of options for the Region's Natural Heritage System
4. Development of a Regional Natural Heritage System
5. Development of Official Plan policies and finalize mapping
6. Other implementation tools (e.g. updated EIS Guidelines, etc.)

It is anticipated that the need for field work or additional mapping will be determined as part of the natural environment background study.

The detailed framework for the work program will be prepared in consultation with the Area Planners group and Local Area Municipalities' staff. Following preparation of the detailed framework staff will return to Committee to seek final endorsement before moving forward with the work program.

In-Scope & Out-of-Scope

The work plan is proposed to be scoped as follows:

In-Scope	Out-Of-Scope*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural Heritage Features <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • woodlands, wetlands, habitat, etc. • Hydrologic Features • Water Resource Systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • groundwater systems • surface water systems • Natural Hazards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flooding, erosion, shoreline, etc. • Provincial Natural Heritage Systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greenbelt NHS • Growth Plan NHS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregates & Petroleum Resources • Watershed Planning • Stormwater Management • Source Water Protection • Stewardship • Man-made Hazards

**Official Plan policy development for out-of-scope items to be addressed through separate work programs. Staff will ensure alignment and consistency across all policy areas.*

Consultation and Engagement

The work program for the natural environment component of the new Regional Official Plan will include a comprehensive consultation and engagement program. The details of the plan will be finalized through discussions with the Area Planners group and Local Area Municipalities' staff. The consultation and engagement plan will be presented as part of the detailed framework and is anticipated to include at a minimum:

- Meeting with the Area Planners group and 1-on-1 meetings with each Local Area Municipality's staff during the project initiation phase - to seek input on the detailed framework and identify major issues to be considered by the study. Consultation with the Area Planners group and Local Area Municipalities on the framework is proposed to start in early February.
- Potential options for advisory groups or working groups will be discussed with the Area Planners.
- The identification of key project stakeholders including the agricultural community, industry stakeholders, the public, Local Area Municipalities, and Indigenous Groups.
- A presentation to the Councils of each of the Local Area Municipalities. It is anticipated that this presentation would be following the completion of the natural environment background study and prior to the development and evaluation of options. However this will be confirmed through discussions with the Area Planners group.
- Engagement with the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) at regular intervals.
- Ongoing communication, education, consultation, and engagement throughout the work program with major points of engagement at key milestones/points of decision-making.

Integration with Agricultural System Planning

Natural environment planning and agricultural system planning are highly connected. 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. Members of the agricultural community will be invited to participate on the Steering Committee for the natural environment work program. Agricultural groups and the Agriculture Policy and Action Committee (APAC) will be engaged early in the process. Compatibility with agriculture is an important aspect of natural environment planning.

Alternatives Reviewed

There are various methodologies in which natural environment planning can be undertaken – leading to the development of policies for the new Regional Official Plan. These options will be considered in consultation with the Area Planners group and Local Area Municipalities' staff. The preferred option to undertake the work program will be presented as part of the detailed framework.

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

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