



County Council Special Meeting

Meeting Date: January 14, 2025

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Subject: County Official Plan Update – Section 26 Meeting

BACKGROUND:

The Planning Act and the PPS require that planning authorities keep their Official Plans up to date to ensure that they provide clear, reasonable and attainable policies to protect provincial interests and facilitate suitable development. Section 26 of the Planning Act provides that when the County of Middlesex Official Plan is updated, it must be revised to ensure that it:

- (a) conforms with provincial plans or does not conflict with them, as the case may be;
- (b) has regard to the matters of provincial interest listed in Section 2 of the Planning Act; and
- (c) is consistent with policy statements including the Provincial Planning Statement.

A new Provincial Planning Statement 2024 (PPS) came into force on October 20, 2024. The PPS provides that all land use decisions made as of October 20, 2024, shall be consistent with the updated document. As such, there is the opportunity to consider updates to the Official Plan to bring it into conformity with the PPS, among other matters.

Prior to revising the Official Plan, Section 26 of the Planning Act requires that Council hold a Special Meeting, open to the public, to discuss the revisions that may be required to the Official Plan. The Planning Act also requires that Council has regard for any written submissions about suggested revisions to the Official Plan and shall provide any person who attends the meeting an opportunity to be heard. The Section 26 Special Meeting is the potential start of the Official Plan update process. It is noted that this report was prepared prior to any agency or public input.

ANALYSIS:

The County's Official Plan is a municipal policy document created under the Planning Act that sets out a land use policy vision based on long-term goals and objectives. The Plan provides a policy framework for topics such as resource management, growth management, and the provision of physical services by dealing with issues of Provincial and County interest. The Official Plan recognizes the planning powers and authorities vested in local municipalities and does not set out detailed local policies.

The broader land use planning framework in Ontario has undergone significant change in recent years. These changes include the implementation of a new PPS and the release of numerous Provincial housing bills that amended the Planning Act and other statutes as part of the Provincial 'Housing Supply Action Plan'.

Project Scope

Based on the changes to the Planning Act and updated policy direction in the PPS (2024), as well as new and emerging issues both locally and provincially, staff have begun to consider revisions to the County Official Plan that fall under the following four subject areas:

Agriculture – is the predominant land use within the County and an important component of the economy and culture. Middlesex County's agricultural lands and agricultural operations are important locally, provincially, and nationally. The protection of farmland and promoting and supporting agri-businesses presents challenges and opportunities, however, good land use planning will ensure that Middlesex County will continue to be a place where current and future generations of farmers prosper.

Economy – employment areas encompass lands that are designated for employment uses to support job growth and the economy as the County continues to grow. The protection of employment areas through land use planning is fundamental to ensure that the County accommodate employment needs over the long-term. Additionally, land use planning can help Middlesex County attract workers and entrepreneurs, and contribute to communities that boast a wide range of businesses, including agri-business, which will enhance and diversify the local economy.

Housing – is a complex issue that has important implications for local communities. The County recently undertook an 'Attainable Housing Review' that examined the housing continuum and identified gaps in the provision of housing and corresponding strategies, including land use planning recommendations. Additionally, the new PPS includes further housing-supportive policy direction and definitions.

Growth and Development – across the County, building and development has remained steady across all types of planning applications. Population and Housing forecasts will continue to assist the County and local municipalities in managing growth and development, as well as planning for housing-enabling infrastructure. The new PPS provides for a planning horizon of 20 to 30 years, which provides municipalities with additional flexibility in respect of the year in which they will plan to. Additionally, the new PPS removes the requirement for a municipal comprehensive review (MCR), which was the process by which municipalities formerly contemplated settlement area boundary expansions.

Additional Considerations – there may be minor or technical changes to be made to update wording to reflect changed Provincial or other terminology, update mapping

schedules to reflect newer information, and to include overarching policy direction as it relates to Complete Communities.

Consultation and Engagement

Consultation with the Province, County Council, the County's Planning Advisory Committee (PAC), Local Municipalities, Agencies, Indigenous Communities, and the public is an essential component of the Official Plan update. In addition to the statutory public open house and public meeting, staff are proposing stakeholder workshops and roundtable discussions; Planning Advisory Committee meetings; and online engagement.

Proposed Timeline

Following Council direction to proceed with the Official Plan update, staff would continue with the background and analysis work and begin the consultation and engagement components of the project. Most of the work would be completed over the next six months with the goal being to achieve a draft Official Plan Amendment prior to summer.





The Planning Act requires that a draft Official Plan Amendment be provided to the Province for a 90-day review prior to Council consideration for adoption. This would likely put Council in a position to consider adoption in October. Following adoption of the Official Plan Amendment by County Council, the document must be forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for approval and this process is estimated to take six to twelve months.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The approval of development and the accompanied community growth has indirect long-term financial implications for the County, local municipalities, and partners. The Planning Act states that no public work shall be undertaken, and no by-law shall be passed that does not conform to the Official Plan.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC FOCUS:

This report aligns with the following Strategic Focus, Goals, or Objectives:

Strategic Focus	Goals	Objectives
Cultivating Community Vitality 	Advance a diverse, healthy, and engaged community across Middlesex County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote and support community wellness Attract, retain, and engage youth in our community
Connecting Through Infrastructure 	Ensure communities are built on a sustainable foundation that is connected and thriving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commit to a sound asset management strategy to maintain and fund critical infrastructure
Strengthening Our Economy 	Encourage a diverse and robust economic base throughout the county	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support opportunities to create a stronger and sustainable agricultural sector Create an environment that enables the attraction and retention of businesses, talent, and investments Attract visitors to Middlesex County Support the development and prosperity of downtown core areas in Middlesex County
Promoting Service Excellence 	Innovate and transform municipal service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anticipate and align municipal service delivery to emerging needs and expectations Build organizational capacity and capabilities

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the County Official Plan Update – Section 26 Meeting report be received for information; and

THAT in accordance with Section 26 of the Planning Act, staff be directed to proceed with the Official Plan Update.