



## Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

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**REPORT #:** CDS-25-084 **COMMITTEE DATE:** 2025-06-18  
**DUE IN COUNCIL:** 2025-06-24  
**REPORT TO:** COTW-Planning  
**SUBJECT:** Official Plan Update: Status Update and Council Workshop

### 1. RECOMMENDATION

It is respectfully recommended that:

- 1.1 Council **RECEIVE** this status update on the Official Plan Update process accompanied by the presentation to Committee of June 19, 2025;
- 1.2 Council **DIRECT** Staff to finalize the changes to the 2019 Adopted Official Plan considering input from Committee of the Whole provided at the June 19, 2025 Workshop, and bring forward an amended draft Official Plan (using 'track changes') in July.

### 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Council adopted a new NOTL Official Plan in October 2019 and submitted it the Region of Niagara as the approval authority.
- The Region paused its review of the adopted NOTL Official Plan due to non-conformity with the Niagara Official Plan, and to await the completion of the new Niagara Official Plan to the 2051 planning horizon.
- The new Niagara Official Plan has now been approved by the province, but was transferred to the 12 local municipalities on March 31, 2025 with the removal of land use planning responsibilities from Niagara Region.
- Town staff asked the Region to return the 2019 Adopted Official Plan to the Town for review and update, re-adoption, and submission to the province as the new approval authority.
- In December 2024, Council directed staff to implement a work plan to review and re-adopt a new Official Plan by October 2025.
- In February 2025, staff hosted a Council workshop on the Official Plan Update.
- On April 27 and May 1, staff hosted public open houses in St. Davids and Old Town to provide the public with information on the purpose and scope of the Official Plan Update.
- Over the last 4 to 6 weeks, staff have met with the Town's advisory committees, resident and business associations. An on-line survey was also conducted to obtain public input on what was important to be considered as part of the Official Plan Update.
- This report accompanies a second Council workshop on the Official Plan Update, in which staff will present policy recommendations for the new Official Plan for Council discussion and input.
- The next step in the process is a report to Council with a draft new Official Plan to receive direction to release it for public consultation.

### 3. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the initial public engagement component of the Official Plan Update work program, and a report on the status of each of the Official Plan Update theme areas: growth management, employment/economy, housing, agriculture, environment, climate change, heritage, urban design and Indigenous engagement.

### 4. BACKGROUND

#### 4.1 Summary of Public Engagement

##### Public Information Centres:

Public Information Centre sessions were held in St. Davids and Old Town on Thursday, March 27, 2025, and Tuesday, April 1, 2025. The intent of the Public Information Centre sessions was to provide an opportunity for the public to learn more, ask questions, and provide input on the scope of review for the Official Plan Update.

Participants were invited to review display boards and provide feedback on specific Official Plan related questions using sticky notes. Information was also shared following the meeting on the Town's website: <https://www.notl.com/official-plan-review>

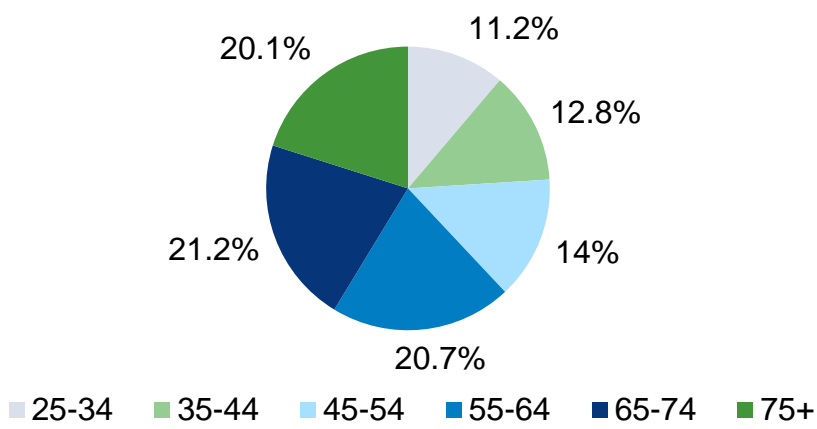
Feedback provided is summarized, as outlined below:

- Address growth management and population growth projections
- Increased diversity of types and forms of housing
- Address concerns of building heights
- Clarity on additional dwelling unit permissions in rural lands
- Improve shoreline protection
- Direction on climate change policies
- More focus on parking, transportation, and active transportation
- Protection of agricultural land and clarity on agriculture-related uses
- Connectivity between watersheds and settlement areas
- Integration of the Draft Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- Chautauqua neighbourhood

##### Survey Results:

An online survey was launched on March 19 through to April 16, 2025, to receive community input on the Town's Adopted 2019 Official Plan and Official Plan Update. The online survey received a total of 179 responses. An infographic of the survey results is attached as **Appendix I** to this report. The survey results are contained in **Appendix II: Public Engagement Summary** to this report. Most respondents were residents and 59.3% have lived in the municipality for 11+ years. The top three age groups that participated were 55-64 (21.2%), 65-74 (21.2%), and 75+ (20.1%) as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1:** Age Group of Respondents for the Official Plan Update Online Survey



Generally, respondents are divided on whether the Community Vision and Strategic Pillars still reflect the priorities of the community. While 41.9% of respondents agreed with the Community Vision, 38.5% felt it needs updating. Responses suggest that the Vision is too general and could be made shorter. Similarly, 44.1% supported the Strategic Pillars, while 40.2% felt that revisions are necessary, including mention of tourism, families and youth, transportation and protecting heritage.

**Community Vision:**

*Niagara-on-the-Lake is a fiercely independent, economically empowered Town offering a rich tapestry of recreational, historical, cultural and educational opportunities, public green spaces and a uniquely valuable agricultural area. Our stunning landscape offers a rich experience where the journey equals the destination. We are community for everyone. We are a resilient, distinctive and dynamic Town in which to live, work and learn. Through responsible stewardship we preserve the balance of values that makes us a world-class destination. Although we dream big, we stay true to our small-Town roots.*

**Strategic Pillars:**

- 1. A prosperous and diverse economy*
- 2. Strong environmental leadership*
- 3. An inclusive, integrated, healthy town*
- 4. A centre for culture, heritage and recreation*
- 5. Mobility choices*
- 6. A well-planned built environment*
- 7. A prosperous and sustainable agricultural sector*
- 8. Well managed municipal finances*

Given the feedback received to date, staff do not recommend any significant changes to the Vision and Strategic Pillars but may propose some revisions to address the public comments received. For example, the Strategic Pillar “Mobility choices” is intended to capture transportation priorities but could be re-worded to ensure clarity. Similarly, given the importance of heritage to the community, a focus on heritage could be given its own strategic pillar.

When asked which policies or priorities should be carried forward in the updated Official Plan, the top three themes were identified:

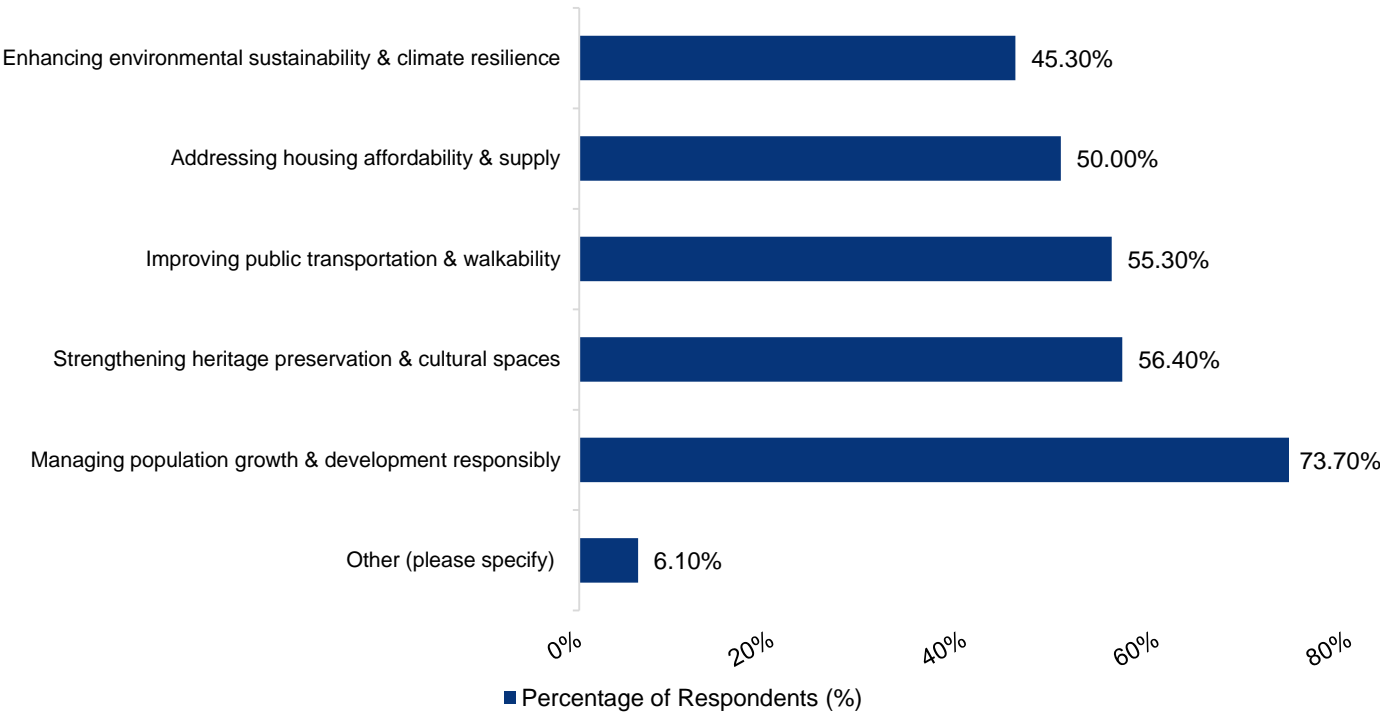
- 1. Heritage Preservation
- 2. Environmental Stewardship and Greenspace Preservation
- 3. Growth Management and Housing Concerns

When asked about aspects of the Town’s Adopted 2019 Official Plan that needs improvement or revision, the top three themes emerged: growth and housing management, heritage protection and town character, environmental stewardship and infrastructure planning.

Many responses highlighted the need to balance growth and quality of life, emphasizing that future development should align with the Town’s heritage character and preservation of its history. Additional responses showed support for housing affordability, senior housing, and ensuring that infrastructure can support new development.

Responses indicated strong support for the protection of natural landscapes, agricultural lands, and green space. Respondents noted concerns of the potential environmental impacts from new development and a need for environmental responsibility. Respondents also called for sustainable development, environmental protection, and infrastructure upgrades, particularly in transportation, mobility, and public spaces.

**Figure 2:** Current or New Challenges or Opportunities that should be Addressed in the Town’s Updated Official Plan



Respondents were asked to select three key areas of focus to consider as the Town grows. The top three focus areas selected were:

1. Protecting Natural Areas and Agricultural Land
2. Strengthening Heritage Conservation
3. Improving Transportation and Public Transit

When asked to select current or new challenges or opportunities that should be addressed in the Town's updated Official Plan, most respondents (73.7%) selected the management of population growth and responsible development, as shown in Figure 2.

Responses indicated that the Town's adopted 2019 Official Plan overlooked or did not effectively address transportation and active transportation infrastructure, development control, planning compliance, and the preservation of heritage and town character.

Additional responses suggested more timely progress on the Official Plan Update and more opportunities for meaningful public consultation would be beneficial.

This survey input is being considered in staff's development of revised Official Plan policies. The Official Plan Update work program continues to target Fall 2025 for Council consideration of a new draft Official Plan, which will be preceded by additional opportunities for meaningful public consultation, including open houses, meetings with interest groups, and online engagement.

#### Indigenous Communities:

Planning staff has reached out to the following Indigenous communities in keeping with the commitment to engage these communities early in the planning process and coordinate on land use planning matters:

- Mississauga's of the Credit First Nation;
- Six Nations of the Grand River;
- Haudenosaunee Development Institute;
- Metis Nation of Ontario;
- Niagara Regional Native Centre.

A meeting has been arranged with the Mississauga's of the Credit, and efforts are ongoing to engage with the other Indigenous communities.

#### Town Advisory Committees:

Staff attended meetings of the Town's advisory committees to provide an update on the scope and timing of the Official Plan Update, and to receive initial comments on issues to be considered in the review of the Adopted 2019 Official Plan:

- Agricultural Advisory Committee – April 7, 2025
- Environmental Advisory Committee – April 23, 2025
- Municipal Heritage Committee – May 7, 2025

Once an updated draft Official Plan is released for public consultation, staff will attend meetings of each of these advisory committees to receive input on the revised policies in the draft Official Plan.

### Community and Business Associations:

Staff reached out to a list of known community and business associations to offer an opportunity to meet with staff and receive information and provide input on the Official Plan Update.

The following meetings were held:

- Niagara Home Builders Association – April 29, 2025
- Chautauqua Residents Association – April 30, 2025
- Wine Growers Association of Ontario/Ontario Craft Wineries – April 30 and May 20, 2025
- St. Davids Residents Association – April 30, 2025
- Niagara Greenhouse Growers – May 27, 2025
- Ontario Tender Fruit Growers Association – June 4, 2025

Additional meetings were held with individual residents and business owners upon request. All of these meetings were invaluable in giving staff a perspective on the concerns of residents and businesses, and the efforts to organize and attend meetings and in some cases provide detailed written submissions are appreciated by staff. The input received is being reviewed as changes are considered to the Adopted 2019 Official Plan.

### Written Submissions:

Town staff has received written comment submissions from the public, local organizations, and interest groups. The comments include recommendations on the Official Plan update and input on the scope of the review.

The written comments received to date align with several of the major theme areas: growth management, housing, climate change, agriculture, natural environment, cultural heritage, and transportation/infrastructure.

Comments were made regarding the importance for policy to ensure that the Town character and cultural heritage values are maintained with the anticipated growth. Comments also focused on the review of housing policies related to affordability, density, building form, urban design, existing neighbourhoods, and the Heritage Conservation District Study.

Suggestions highlighted that further review of wineries, agriculture-related uses, and on-farm diversified uses policies is required to align with provincial regulations, such as Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) and Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO). Several comments indicated interest in partaking in further consultation to inform the Official Plan update. Town staff will continue to inform the public, local organizations, and interest groups of engagement opportunities. The written submissions received throughout the Official Plan Update process will be reviewed and considered, and how these comments are addressed in the final draft Official Plan will be provided to Council and the public for information.

5. DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

5.1 Status of Official Plan Update by Theme Area:

Growth Management:

The approved Region of Niagara Official Plan (now an official plan of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake as of April 1, 2025) contains population and employment forecasts to 2051, based on a Land Needs Assessment completed by the Region, and in conformity with Schedule 3 of the Growth Plan (2019), which is no longer in force, but was in force at the time of the approval of the Region of Niagara Official Plan.

**Table 1: 2051 Population and Employment Forecasts (Niagara Official Plan, 2024)**

	Population	Employment
Niagara-on-the-Lake	28,900	17,610
Niagara Region	694,000	272,000

\*The 2024 Ministry of Finance Population Projection in 2051 for Niagara Region is 723,000

With the sunseting of the Growth Plan, and the replacement of the 2020 Provincial Policy Statement with the 2024 Provincial Planning Statement (PPS), it is this policy document that provides direction to municipalities with respect to population and employment forecasts. The 2024 PPS directs that municipalities must base population and employment forecasts on Ontario Population Projections published by the Ministry of Finance, but in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, municipalities can continue to use population and employment forecasts previously issued by the province through Schedule 3 of the Growth Plan (2019).

Subsequent to the Land Needs Assessment completed by the Region, the Glendale Secondary Plan was recently approved by Council (under appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal) after a joint planning exercise between the Town and the Region. The forecasted growth in population and employment to 2051 in Glendale is 12,600 people and 4,000 jobs, based on the Population, Commercial and Employment Analysis completed to support the development of the secondary plan. Incorporating this growth into the Town’s Official Plan will necessitate an increase in the population and employment forecasts shown in Table 1.

Staff are also working to update the monitoring of growth in the Town, to ensure any revisions to growth forecasts are based on the most accurate monitoring data.

Another change to the provincial planning framework resulting from the sunseting of the Growth Plan is the removal of the concept of “built-up areas” in which intensification in existing communities occurs, and “designated greenfield areas” in which urban development occurs on undeveloped lands. The PPS, 2024 still requires municipalities to support general intensification and redevelopment to provide a range of housing options to achieve complete communities and encourages municipalities to establish density targets for designated growth areas, but the mandatory minimum intensification and density targets of the Growth Plan are no longer in force. The Niagara Official Plan contains an intensification target of 25% or 1,150 units, and a designated greenfield area target of 50 people and jobs per hectare by 2051.

The Adopted 2019 Official Plan contains intensification and designated greenfield area policies and mapping that staff are reviewing against the new provincial planning framework and Niagara Official Plan. The mapping is being updated to reflect the new provincial planning framework and development that has occurred in each settlement area since 2019.

#### Employment/Economy:

With recent changes to the definition of “area of employment” in the Planning Act and “employment area” in the new Provincial Planning Statement, staff are reviewing the Adopted 2019 Official Plan to ensure conformity with these changes and protect the objectives of the Town for employment growth and economic development.

Through the above changes the province has narrowed the range of permitted uses in employment areas to provide more opportunities for housing/residential uses in areas with a mix of employment and other uses, as residential uses are not permitted in employment areas. An “employment area” is now generally defined as an area of land designated in an official plan for clusters of business and economic uses, including manufacturing uses, uses related to research and development connected to manufacturing, warehousing/goods movement uses, retail and office uses associated with manufacturing, research and development or warehousing, and ancillary uses. An area of employment cannot include institutional uses or commercial uses, including retail and office not related to permitted employment uses.

The recently approved Glendale Secondary Plan sets out a vision for a complete urban community with a full array of opportunities to live, work, learn and play. It is a strategic growth area and includes a Knowledge and Innovation employment area in the Niagara Official Plan with a minimum employment area density target of 60 jobs per hectare. A range of land use designations are set out in the secondary plan including Existing Residential, New Residential, Regional Commercial, and Mixed Use. The Industrial/Business Park designation generally corresponds with the Employment Area designation in the Niagara Official Plan, but permits office uses, institutional uses, recreation/health facilities, retail commercial and restaurant uses (by zoning by-law amendment). While existing non-conforming uses can continue to be permitted in employment areas, under the Planning Act change, new uses are not permitted. Therefore, if the Town wants to continue to permit these uses in the Industrial/Business Park designation the area cannot be designated as an “employment area” and would not be subject to the tests of the PPS, 2024 for removal of lands from employment area intended to protect critical employment lands from conversion to residential uses.

#### Housing:

The 2024 PPS continues to have a policy requiring municipalities to provide for an appropriate range and mix of housing options and densities to meet projected needs of current and future residents. This is to be achieved by establishing and implementing minimum targets for provision of housing that is affordable to low- and moderate-income households.

The Niagara Official Plan contains minimum targets of 20 percent of all new rental housing and 10 percent of all new ownership housing, which will be incorporated into the Town’s Official Plan.



Staff are also preparing an amendment to the current Official Plan and Zoning By-laws of the Town to achieve conformity with new Planning Act provisions for additional dwelling units (ADUs) on existing lots. This amendment will be incorporated, as appropriate, into the new Official Plan.

The intent of this review is to make changes to the Adopted 2019 Official Plan to address provincial conformity, although staff is reviewing the Plan to determine if changes related to encouraging student and seniors housing may be appropriate at this time. It is intended that more fundamental changes to housing policies in the Plan would be addressed through the upcoming Affordable and Attainable Housing Strategy and future amendment to the Plan.

As noted previously in this report, staff has met with representatives of the Niagara Home Builders Association and some local home builders to receive their input.

#### Agriculture:

As noted previously in this report, staff has met with the Town's Agricultural Advisory Committee, the Wine Growers of Ontario, the Ontario Tender Fruit Association, and Niagara Greenhouse Growers to discuss the agricultural policies of the 2019 Adopted Official Plan.

Based on comments received from the wine growers, staff is reviewing the most recent Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario regulations to determine if there are areas of overlap of jurisdiction that could be addressed through this Official Plan Update, keeping in mind the goal of protecting the agricultural land base while encouraging growth of the rural economy of the Town.

The intent of this review is to generally only make changes to the Adopted 2019 Official Plan to address provincial conformity, for matters such as on-farm diversified uses and agriculture-related uses, and additional dwelling units. It is intended that any fundamental changes to policies pertaining to the wine industry would be addressed through the upcoming Winery Policy Review, which will allow for broader engagement with both small/farm and large/estate wineries and the broader Town community.

#### Environment:

The current environment system policies of the Adopted 2019 Official Plan emphasize the importance of protecting natural and hydrological features within the Town, while ensuring that the Town's agricultural industry is also appropriately protected and prioritized. It is intended that these policies will be maintained in the Official Plan Update, but some changes will be necessary to ensure consistency with the new PPS (2024), conformity with the Greenbelt Plan (2017), and the incorporation of relevant policies and mapping from the Niagara Official Plan (2022).

Updates may include:

- Restructuring the environmental policies to better reflect the integrated natural heritage and water systems approach directed by Provincial and Regional policy, and to clearly identify those policies subject to the Greenbelt Plan Natural Heritage System;
- Incorporating strategic policy direction established since the Official Plan's adoption, including the Town's Climate Change Adaptation Plan and the Niagara Watershed Plan.

- Incorporating the agricultural, agriculture-related, and on-farm diversified use exemptions of the Niagara Region Official Plan;
- Ensuring appropriate direction is provided for site alteration and development on adjacent lands to natural heritage features as directed by Provincial and Regional policy; and
- Incorporating any updates to the mapping contained in the Niagara Official Plan.

The review is still in progress, but any changes to the environmental mapping of the Adopted 2019 Official Plan as expected to be minimal, as the natural environment system in Niagara-on-the-Lake is almost entirely within built-up settlement areas or the Greenbelt Plan area, unlike other Niagara local municipalities with larger undeveloped urban areas formerly covered by the Growth Plan Natural Heritage System.

It should be noted that as part of the Regional review of its official plan, three Natural Environment System options were presented for consideration: Minimum Standards – Overlay, Minimum Standards – Designation, and Beyond Minimum Standards (with 3 sub-options), with the chosen option of Beyond Minimum Standards. Given that most of Niagara-on-the-Lake is within the Greenbelt Plan Area and is governed by the natural system policies of the Greenbelt Plan, the difference between these options is not as substantial as it is in other Niagara municipalities. The objective of staff is to refine the policies and mapping of the Adopted 2019 Official Plan to ensure provincial plan conformity and policy consistency, while retaining policies designed for Niagara-on-the-Lake, and addressing areas which could be improved, such as watershed planning and climate change policies.

#### Climate Change:

The scope of the review of the Adopted 2019 Official Plan policies regarding climate change include:

- Addressing the PPS (2024) direction to plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prepare for impacts of a changing climate through transit-supportive complete communities, energy conservation, green infrastructure and development of stormwater management systems;
- Incorporate new climate change policies from the Niagara Official Plan, as appropriate, such as consideration of climate projections and the requirement to assess infrastructure risks from climate change and identify actions and investments as part of asset management planning; and,
- Implement a goal of the Town's Climate Change Adaptation Plan to integrate climate change into the Official Plan.

Planning staff are working with the Climate Change Coordinator to revise the 2019 Adopted Official Plan policies to better address climate change.

#### Transportation/Infrastructure:

The Transportation Master Plan led by Operations staff is ongoing. The current timing for bringing a draft Transportation Master Plan to Council and the public for review is September 2025. The Pollution Prevention Control Plan (PPCP) led by Operations staff is also ongoing.

Planning staff are working with Operations staff to review and integrate the draft Transportation Master Plan recommendations, and any outcomes of the PPCP, into the updated Official Plan, where possible and appropriate.

The Recreation and Parks Master Plan was initiated by Parks staff in March 2024. The current timing for completion of a draft Recreation and Parks Master Plan is June 2025, with a planned Public Information Centre in July and a report to Council in September 2025.

Planning staff will work with Parks staff to review and integrate the draft Recreation and Parks Master Plan recommendations into the updated Official Plan, where possible and appropriate.

Final changes to the Official Plan can be made after Council has approved the final Recreation and Parks Master Plan and Transportation Master Plan and may occur before the final draft Official Plan is brought to Council for adoption by the end of 2025. If this is not possible, any necessary changes to the Official Plan can be brought forward through an amendment to the Official Plan when appropriate.

#### Heritage:

The OP Update with respect to heritage policies is primarily focused on ensuring that the policies are consistent with recent changes to the Ontario Heritage Act. In addition, staff is also determining how to incorporate local heritage planning initiatives since the 2019 Official Plan was adopted, such as Official Plan Amendment No. 92, which implemented the recommendations of the Former Rand Estate and John Street East Character Study (currently under appeal with the Ontario Land Tribunal) into the current Town Official Plan.

The in-progress Queen-Picton (Old Town) Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study has reached the end of Phase 1. If Council direction is received, the study will enter Phase 2 in which a draft HCD Plan will be prepared for public consultation. Staff will be assessing if emerging objectives or policies from the draft HCD Plan may be appropriate for reference in the Official Plan.

#### Urban Design:

Public input received at the public open house that urban design is a critical component of community planning and should also be a theme area of the Official Plan Update. Staff has therefore included it in this report, and staff's review of the urban design policies of the Adopted 2019 Official Plan will be reported under this theme area when subsequent reports are brought to Council. It is important to note that provincial planning legislation recently passed has significantly restricted the ability of a municipality to ensure good urban design through the land use planning approvals process.

#### Indigenous Engagement:

As noted previously in this report, staff is working to arrange opportunities to discuss topic areas of mutual interest with Indigenous communities, including the Official Plan and Heritage Conservation District projects, and will report to Council when more information is available.

The purpose of the meetings will be to consult on the policies of the Official Plan and to foster ongoing dialogue and relationship building, such as:

- Integration of language in the Official Plan related to the geographical and historical background of the Indigenous groups;
- Recognition of the rights and interests of the Indigenous groups in the Official Plan;
- Protection of cultural heritage and archaeological resources; and,
- Preferences and requirements for consultation and engagement opportunities.

In the meantime, staff will bring forward draft wording for the Official Plan that attempts to address the importance of Indigenous communities.

## **6. STRATEGIC PLAN**

The content of this report supports the following Strategic Plan initiatives:

### **Pillar**

1. Vibrant & Complete Community

### **Priority**

1.1 Planning for Progress

### **Action**

1.1 a) Official Plan

## **7. OPTIONS**

- 7.1 Option 1: That Council receives the Official Plan Update report and directs staff to finalize a draft 'track changes' Official Plan for Council's consideration and release for public comment (***Recommended***)
- 7.2 Option 2: That Council does not receive the Official Plan Update report or direct staff to finalize a draft Official Plan for Council consideration and public consultation (*Not Recommended*)

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications associated with this status update report.

## **9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environmental implications associated with this status update report.

## **10. COMMUNICATIONS**

The Official Plan Update notification list has received notice of this report and the Council workshop. Once a draft Official Plan is released for public consultation all the Town's communication channels will be used to inform the public. Public open houses/information centres will be scheduled in Fall 2025.

## 11. CONCLUSION

This report has provided Council with a status update on the Official Plan Update work program to accompany the Council workshop scheduled for June 19, 2025. Staff will be providing a presentation related to the content of this report. It is recommended that Council receive the report and direct staff to use the input provided to inform the finalization of a draft Official Plan for the consideration of Council and release for public consultation.

## 12. PREVIOUS REPORTS

- CDS-24-185: Update on Niagara-on-the-Lake Official Plan and Conformity Exercise
- CDS-25-044: Council Workshop – Official Plan Update and Conformity Exercise

## 13. APPENDICES

- **Appendix I** – Infographic Survey Results
- **Appendix II** - Public Engagement Summary

Respectfully submitted:

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