



## Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

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**REPORT #:** CDS-26-040 **COMMITTEE DATE:** 2026-04-14  
**REPORT TO:** COTW-Planning **DUE IN COUNCIL:** 2026-04-28  
**SUBJECT:** Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Official Plan – Recommendation Report

### 1. RECOMMENDATION

It is respectfully recommended that:

- 1.1 The final Draft Official Plan, attached as **Appendix I, BE APPROVED** and that the By-law, attached as **Appendix II**, be forwarded to Council for adoption; and,
- 1.2 Council **DIRECTS** Staff to forward the adopted Official Plan to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for final approval.

### 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This report presents Staff's recommendation to Committee and Council regarding the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake's new Official Plan.
- The proposed Official Plan will guide growth, development, and community priorities over the next 25 years and beyond.
- The Official Plan review is based on the 2019 Council-adopted Official Plan and focuses on alignment with updated Provincial policies and legislative requirements.
- The proposed Official Plan reflects years of coordinated technical review and extensive community input, marking a significant milestone in the Town's long-range planning.
- The new Official Plan introduces updated policy direction on growth management, housing, agriculture, environmental protection, and climate change to reflect current Provincial requirements and local priorities.
- Staff recommend approval of the new Official Plan (**Appendix I**), as it satisfies *Planning Act* requirements, is consistent with the Provincial Planning Statement, and conforms with Provincial planning policies.
- The adoption of the new Official Plan will satisfy part of the Planning for Progress pillar (Vibrant & Complete Community) of Council's Strategic Plan.
- Upon adoption, Staff will issue a Notice of Adoption and submit the Official Plan to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for review and final approval.

### 3. PURPOSE

This report provides a recommendation to Committee and Council regarding the adoption of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake's new Official Plan in accordance with the *Planning Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13, as amended (the "Planning Act").

This report presents how the new Official Plan will provide a vision for planning within the Town to guide growth, development, and municipal priorities for the next 25 years and beyond. This report also identifies how received feedback has been considered and/or incorporated into the final Draft Official Plan, and provides next steps regarding the implementation of the Plan once adopted by Council.

The final Draft Official Plan supports a complete, resilient community by directing growth to appropriate areas, protecting agricultural lands, and enhancing environmental systems. The Plan further reflects a balanced approach to managing growth while protecting the Town's cultural heritage assets.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

The adoption of a new Official Plan is identified as a key action under the “Planning for Progress” initiative within the Vibrant & Complete Community pillar of Town Council's 2022–2027 Strategic Plan. One of the success indicators for this initiative is the adoption of the new Official Plan. The final Draft Official Plan has been prepared in alignment with this Strategic Plan.

##### **4.1 Purpose of an Official Plan**

An Official Plan is the primary policy document that establishes a municipality's long-term vision for land use, growth, and development. It guides decisions related to the location of housing, employment, infrastructure, parks, and environmental protection, while supporting the overall well-being of the community. The Official Plan also provides the policy framework for zoning by-laws and other planning tools and must be consistent with Provincial policy and conform to applicable Provincial plans.

Under the *Planning Act*, municipalities are required to prepare and adopt an Official Plan. Sections 16 and 17 of the Act set out the required content and approval process, while Section 2 identifies matters of Provincial interest that must be considered. In addition, Subsection 3(5) requires that decisions of Council be consistent with Provincial policy statements and conform with Provincial plans in effect. The Draft Official Plan has been prepared in accordance with these requirements and addresses all applicable matters of Provincial interest.

##### **4.2 Adopted Town Official Plan, 2019**

Council adopted a new Official Plan on October 22, 2019, intended to replace the 1994 Official Plan (current 2017 Consolidation). However, approval of the 2019 Plan was delayed due to the adoption of the new Niagara Official Plan in 2022 and numerous ongoing provincial land use planning changes. As a result, the 1994 Official Plan (current 2017 Consolidation) remains in effect.

The 2019 Council-adopted Official Plan served as the foundation for the current review. Staff have updated this Plan to reflect recent provincial policy changes, the Niagara Official Plan, and evolving local priorities.

##### **4.3 Policy Context**

The Provincial Planning Statement (2024) came into effect on October 20, 2024, and establishes the overarching policy direction for land use planning in Ontario. The Town's Official Plan must be consistent with this policy framework. Since the adoption of the 2019 Official Plan, several Provincial policy updates have occurred, which have been incorporated into the new Official Plan.

In addition, the Greenbelt Plan (2017) and Niagara Escarpment Plan (2017) apply to lands within the Town. The new Official Plan reflects the direction of these plans and incorporates applicable guidelines, including those related to permitted uses in Prime Agricultural Areas.

As of March 31, 2025, the *Planning Act* was amended to remove planning responsibilities from the Regional Municipality of Niagara. As a result, the Niagara Official Plan (2022) has been transitioned to local municipalities for implementation. The Town's Official Plan is required to conform to the Niagara Official Plan. Staff have consolidated applicable policies of the Niagara Official Plan into the Draft Official Plan.

#### **4.4 Official Plan Review Process**

The review of the Town's Official Plan commenced in December 2024. While Council adopted a new Official Plan in 2019, the Town's in-force Official Plan dates back to 1994 (2017 Consolidation). The *Planning Act* requires municipalities to review and update their Official Plans periodically to ensure continued alignment with Provincial policy and changing community needs.

A key component of the review process was a comprehensive conformity assessment to ensure alignment with updated Provincial legislation, including the Provincial Planning Statement, Greenbelt Plan, Niagara Escarpment Plan, and Niagara Official Plan.

The review process included extensive engagement with Council, advisory committees, agencies, Indigenous communities, and the public, including:

- Council Workshops: February 26 and July 8, 2025
- Online Public Survey: March 19 to April 16, 2025
- Public Information Centres: March 27 and April 1, 2025
- Meetings with Community and Business Associations: April to November 2025
- Agricultural Advisory Committee Review: April 7, August 18, and September 10, 2025
- Environmental Advisory Committee Review: April 23 and August 11, 2025
- Municipal Heritage Committee Review: May 7 and August 6, 2025
- Open Houses: October 15 and 16, 2025
- Statutory Public Meeting: November 25, 2025

Staff also consulted with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Six Nations of the Grand River, as well as external agencies including Niagara Region, the Niagara Escarpment Commission, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Feedback on the Draft Official Plan was also received through the Town's website, email submissions, and written correspondence.

Staff also reported regularly to Council and Committee on the status of the review and incorporated feedback received throughout the process. The final Draft Official Plan reflects a comprehensive update to ensure alignment with current Provincial policy, regional direction, and local priorities.

## 5. DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

The following table (**Table 1**) provides an overview of the layout of the final Draft Official Plan, briefly outlining each Section of the Official Plan, their objectives and intent.

**Table 1 – Final Draft Official Plan Outline**

Official Plan Section	Objective	Intent
1: A Framework for a Sustainable Community	Establish the overall vision, guiding principles, and policy framework for managing growth to 2051.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define how the Town will grow while protecting key resources</li> <li>• Integrate climate change, sustainability, and complete communities</li> <li>• Provide the foundation that all other sections build upon</li> </ul>
2: Protected Countryside: The Unique Specialty Crop Area	Protect the Town’s specialty crop lands and broader agricultural system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevent fragmentation and non-farm development</li> <li>• Support agricultural viability and agri-food economy</li> <li>• Align with the Greenbelt Plan and agricultural protection policies</li> </ul>
3: Settlement Areas	Guide where and how urban growth occurs within the Town.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct growth to built-up areas and strategic growth areas</li> <li>• Support intensification, housing diversity, and complete communities</li> <li>• Plan for population and employment growth to 2051</li> </ul>
4: Niagara Escarpment Plan	Ensure land use within the Niagara Escarpment area conforms to the Niagara Escarpment Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect the Escarpment’s environmental and scenic values</li> <li>• Apply strict development controls and designation policies</li> <li>• Coordinate with provincial legislation and the Niagara Escarpment Commission</li> </ul>
5: Niagara District Airport	Provide policy direction for the airport and surrounding lands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect airport operations</li> <li>• Manage land use</li> </ul>

Official Plan Section	Objective	Intent
		compatibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support economic development linked to aviation</li> </ul>
6: Heritage, Archaeology and Culture	Conserve cultural heritage resources and archaeological sites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect built heritage, landscapes, and archaeological resources</li> <li>• Require necessary assessments prior to development</li> <li>• Promote cultural identity and tourism</li> </ul>
7: Natural Environment System	Protect, maintain, and enhance Niagara’s natural heritage and water systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and regulate natural features and ecological linkages</li> <li>• Maintain biodiversity and watershed health</li> <li>• Require necessary environmental studies for development</li> <li>• Support climate resilience and ecosystem connectivity</li> </ul>
8: Infrastructure	Ensure infrastructure supports planned growth in a sustainable and efficient manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate water, wastewater, transportation and utilities</li> <li>• Promote sustainable and climate-resilient infrastructure</li> <li>• Align infrastructure investment with growth planning</li> </ul>
9: Implementation and Administration	Provide tools, responsibilities, and processes to implement the Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define roles of the Town and agencies</li> <li>• Outline monitoring, phasing, and financial tools</li> <li>• Establish processes for amendments and conformity</li> </ul>
10: Secondary Plans	Guide detailed planning for specific areas within the Town, including Glendale, Queenston, St. Davids, and the Dock Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more detailed land use planning policies for specific areas of the Town</li> <li>• Address local context (urban design, infrastructure, environment)</li> <li>• Ensure large developments</li> </ul>

Official Plan Section	Objective	Intent
		are comprehensively planned
11: Interpretation	Clarify how policies should be read and applied.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide rules for interpreting policies and mapping</li> <li>• Address conflicts, definitions, and flexibility</li> <li>• Ensure consistent application across the Town</li> </ul>

### 5.1 Draft Official Plan Iterations

Multiple iterations of the Draft Official Plan have been released throughout the review process:

- Redlined Draft: July 16, 2025
- Second Draft: October 1, 2025
- Third Draft: November 19, 2025
- Fourth (Final) Draft: March 13, 2026

Each iteration of the Draft Official Plan has been posted on the Town’s website, the Join the Conversation webpage, advertised through the Town’s social media channels, and a link has been provided to all individuals who have engaged with the Official Plan review to-date.

### 5.2 Draft Official Plan Revisions

Staff received a range of comments on the draft iterations of the Official Plan that have focused on clarity, conformity with provincial policy, and aligning with the identified key theme areas of the Official Plan Update. The following discussion provides an overview of the received public and Council feedback, categorized by key themes. All received public feedback has been presented in **Appendix III** to this report.

Following the Statutory Public Meeting, Staff also received eleven additional written submissions. Staff also continued to correspond with individuals who had site-specific requests or comments. Additional comments were received from MMAH and the Town’s Public Works and Infrastructure Department. A summary of updates made in the final Draft Official Plan since the Statutory Public meeting held on November 25, 2025 is provided in **Appendix IV**.

Key revisions made to the draft Official Plan since the initial posting of the Redlined Draft, for formal consultation and included in the recommended final Draft Official Plan, include:

- Revised the growth management policy language and updated schedules to reflect new provincial planning framework and development, regional forecasts and targets, the Glendale Secondary Plan, and site-specific policies, such as site-specific S3-43 (1570 Niagara Stone Road), that support a balanced approach to accommodate growth in the Town.
- Revised policy language for the minimum targets for provision of housing that is

affordable to low- and moderate-income households, addressed provincial conformity and incorporated the NOP's minimum housing targets.

- The Council-approved Official Plan Amendment for ARUs has been incorporated into the final Draft Official Plan. Definitions for short-term rentals were implemented, as appropriate.
- Updated policy language to address provincial conformity for matters including clarification of agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses, winery policies, lot creation and expansion permissions, non-agricultural uses, normal farm practice, and agricultural impact assessments.
- Revised environmental policy language and schedules based on comments received by the Niagara Region, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, Niagara Escarpment Commission, the Province's one-window review, Council, Town Staff, and the public. Key themes included environmental stewardship, impacts from agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses, site alteration, linkages, alignment of terminology and definitions.
- Addressed climate change comments to incorporate direction from the PPS to assist with reducing 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.
- Incorporated climate change policies from the Niagara Official Plan, such as consideration of climate projections, the requirement to assess infrastructure risks from climate change, and identify actions and investments as part of asset management planning.
- Integrated climate change policy language in accordance with the Town's Climate Change Adaptation Plan (CCAP).
- Updated transportation and infrastructure policy language to reflect the Town's long-term transportation and infrastructure objectives, including stormwater management.
- Updated transportation policy language and schedules, primarily related to road classification, based on further review completed by Public Works and Infrastructure Services Staff.
- Updated heritage policies focused on consistency with recent changes to the *Ontario Heritage Act* and the new PPS, 2024.
- Incorporated the site-specific policy language for the Former Rand Estate and John Street East Character Study (S3-47). Where appropriate, revisions were made to S3-47 to remove site-specific policy language where such policies are already addressed elsewhere in the final Draft Official Plan.
- Included clarity of compatibility criteria, secondary plan policies, and ensuring that new development respects the established character of existing neighbourhoods.
- Updated community design and urban design policy language in Section 3.8 and Section 3.9, as appropriate and in accordance with the PPS. Staff acknowledge the importance of the Town's unique character and have incorporated urban design policy language as guidance to highlight and support this character while acknowledging the PPS reflects a shift in policy direction as it relates to the ability for local municipalities to govern urban design.
- Incorporated policy language to support ongoing dialogue and relationship building with the First Nations and Indigenous communities.
- Incorporated comments provided by Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Six

Nations of the Grand River, where appropriate. Staff recognizes the importance of consulting with First Nations and Indigenous communities on planning matters that may affect their section 35 Aboriginal or treaty rights.

- The in-force Glendale Secondary Plan, recently approved by the Ontario Land Tribunal, was added to the final Draft Official Plan.

The final Draft Official Plan provides a growth management policy strategy, addresses climate change, protects the environment and agricultural lands, while promoting the unique character of the Town and celebrating its heritage. The final Draft official Plan establishes a policy framework that supports the development of complete, sustainable communities.

### **5.3 Next Steps and Transition**

Following Council adoption, a Notice of Adoption will be posted on the Town's website and in the newspaper no later than 15 days after the day the final Draft Official Plan is adopted (i.e., no later than May 13, 2026). The adoption of the Official Plan by Council cannot be appealed pursuant to the *Planning Act*.

The final Draft Official Plan will be sent to MMAH, as the approval authority. Once received and processed, the MMAH will publish the Official Plan on the Environmental Registry of Ontario for additional review and comment. The MMAH has 120 days to approve, modify and approve as modified, or refuse to approve the Official Plan. Once the MMAH issues a decision to approve the Official Plan, the new Official Plan is in effect and cannot be appealed.

While the Plan has been prepared to align with Provincial direction, the MMAH retains the authority to modify the Plan as part of its approval process.

Implementation of the Official Plan will include updates to the Town's Zoning By-laws, completion of key studies such as the Growth Management and Intensification Strategy and Housing Needs Assessment, and ongoing monitoring of policy effectiveness. It is important to note that the Official Plan is not intended to be a static document, as it will be updated to address changing planning trends and policies. Monitoring the implementation of the Plan is critical to analyze its effectiveness in meetings its overall objectives.

#### **5.3.1 Effective Official Plan Policies Prior to Ministry Approval**

The Town's current Official Plan (2017 Consolidation) and the NOP (2022) will continue to apply until the Town's new Official Plan receives approval from MMAH. In the interim, the Town will continue to receive, process, and consider Official Plan Amendment applications against the current Town policy documents.

The following will apply to Official Plan Amendment applications approved after the adoption of the final Draft Official Plan by Council and prior to MMAH approval:

- Staff will share the approved Official Plan Amendment application with MMAH for consideration to include in during their review to approve the Town's new Draft Official Plan; or
- Staff will incorporate the approved Official Plan Amendment application through a

housekeeping amendment once MMAH approves the Town's new Official Plan.

## 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: Committee approves the final Draft Official Plan attached as **Appendix I**, forwards the By-law attached as **Appendix II** to Council for adoption, and directs Staff to forward the adopted Official Plan to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for final approval. **(Recommended)**
- 7.2 Option 2: Committee refuses the final Draft Official Plan, advises Staff of requested modifications, and directs Staff to return to Council at a future date with an updated final Draft Official Plan for consideration. *(Not Recommended)*

## 8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial implications associated with the adoption of the Official Plan; however, implementation of policy directions may result in a change to work plans and have future budget impacts. This includes establishing incentive programs and long-range policy plans such as the Community Planning Permit System, growth management and intensification strategy, on-farm diversified uses and winery policies review, secondary plans review, and housing needs assessment.

## 9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

While there are no direct environmental impacts associated with the adoption of the report, the final draft Official Plan establishes significant environmental policy direction and implements updated environmental policies, primarily included in Section 7. These policies have been included in consultation and coordination with the Niagara Region, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, Niagara Escarpment Commission, the Province, Council, Town Staff, Environmental Advisory Committee, Climate Change Coordinator, and the public.

## 10. COMMUNICATIONS

The Official Plan Update notification list, which includes internal and external agencies, individuals who signed up to be notified, and those who submitted comments, has received notice of this recommendation report and the final Draft Official Plan for Council adoption. The recommendation report, final Draft Official Plan, Comment Matrix, and Summary Table of

Official Plan updates since November 26, 2025, are available for review on the Town's website and Official Plan Update Join the Conversation website.

The notice of adoption will be posted on the Town's website at <https://www.notl.com/official-plan-review>, on the Official Plan Update Join the Conversation website at <http://www.jointheconversationnotl.org/officialplan>, and in the newspaper. A copy of the notice will be shared with Council and individuals who requested written notification of the notice of adoption.

Once MMAH issues a decision to approve, modify and approve as modified, or refuse to approve the Official Plan, Town staff will prepare and share the notice of decision with Council and the notification list, and on the Town's website and in the newspaper.

## **11. CONCLUSION**

The final Draft Official Plan is prepared based on the input received from those engaged throughout the Official Plan Update process and aligns with recent provincial policy changes, the Niagara Official Plan, and local priorities. This represents the Town's first comprehensively updated Official Plan under the new Provincial planning framework and establishes a modernized policy foundation to proactively manage growth, protect key assets, and support long-term community resilience.

Staff recommend that the final Draft Official Plan, attached as **Appendix I**, be forwarded to Council for adoption pursuant to Section 17 (22) of the *Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13, as amended* and confirm that the requirements of the Planning Act have been met including:

- consultation with the approval authority (MMAH) and prescribed public bodies
- at least one statutory public meeting has been held with proper notice provided
- information and materials have been made available to the public, Council, and the Minister

The adoption of the new Official Plan will establish a critical framework to guide growth, development, and municipal priorities within the Town over the next 25 years and beyond. This new Official Plan positions the Town to proactively manage change while preserving its unique character and supporting a complete, resilient community. Overall, the new Official Plan reflects a balanced approach to managing growth while protecting the Town's agricultural lands, natural environment, and cultural heritage resources.

## **12. PREVIOUS REPORTS**

- Official Plan Update – Statutory Public Meeting - CDS-25-177
- Official Plan Update – First Draft Official Plan - CDS-25-104
- Official Plan Update: Status Update and Council Workshop - CDS-25-084
- Update on the Adopted NOTL Official Plan and Conformity Exercise - CDS-22-058
- Council Workshop – Official Plan Update and Conformity Exercise - CDS-25-044
- Update on Niagara-on-the-Lake Official Plan and Conformity Exercise - CDS-24-185

## **13. APPENDICES**

- Appendix I – Final Draft Official Plan for Council Adoption

- Appendix II - Draft By-law 2026-XX
- Appendix III – Comment Matrix (Updated as of April 2, 2026)
- Appendix IV – Summary Table – Official Plan Updates since November 26, 2025

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