

Wellington County Official Plan Review Virtual Public Information Centre (PIC) Meeting Summary

Prepared by LURA Consulting

Background

The County of Wellington is currently reviewing its Official Plan (OP) to complete a Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) and a 5-year review of its Official Plan as specified under Section 26 of the [Planning Act](#). An MCR is part of the OP review process. It establishes a long-term vision and planning framework for a municipality that fosters a sustainable approach to future residential growth and economic development. The County is doing this to prepare for additional population and employment growth and ensure that the updated OP supports healthy, compact and complete communities in Wellington as directed through [A Place to Growth: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe](#).

In June 2021, the County engaged community members to gather public input on the Draft Phase 1 MCR Report. The draft Phase 1 Report focuses on a proposed Urban Structure and Growth Analysis for the County of Wellington and is the topic of this consultation. A draft Phase 2 Report focusing on Urban Land Needs and Policy Recommendations will be released in Fall 2021 for further consultation.

Phase 1 consultations included:

- A Virtual Public Information Centre (PIC) on June 23, 2021
- A Special Meeting of the County of Wellington Council on June 29, 2021
- A project email planwell@wellington.ca to accept written feedback from June 23 to July 16. Written feedback was also accepted by mail.

Meeting Promotion

Members of the public who wished to join the Virtual (PIC) were required to register in advance. Individuals could also join the meeting by calling in by phone.

A public notice regarding the Virtual PIC was published through the Wellington Advertiser two weeks before the meeting. The meeting was also promoted through the County's social media platforms to raise awareness.

Meeting Overview

The Virtual PIC was held on June 23, 2021, with a purpose to:

- Introduce the OP review process
- Present preliminary findings of the Phase 1 MCR
- Gather and answer any questions participants may have about the Phase 1 MCR.

The meeting presentation was publicly posted in advance on [the County of Wellington's Official Plan Review website Plan Well](#) to allow participants the opportunity to review beforehand or follow along if they joined the meeting by phone. **In total, 43 participants joined the meeting.**

Jim Faught (Facilitator from LURA Consulting) started the meeting with an introduction and overview of the meeting agenda. Sarah Wilhelm (Manager of Policy Planning at the County of Wellington) provided introductory remarks and a brief context to the County's Official Plan review process. Jamie Cook (Partner at Watson & Associates) delivered a presentation on the following topics of the OP Review:

- Policy Context and Growth
- Urban and Rural Systems
- County wide Population and Growth Forecasts
- Municipal Population and Housing Growth Forecasts
- Employment Forecasts

Jim Faught facilitated a discussion to receive feedback and comments from members of the public. A summary of the facilitated discussion is provided below.

What We Heard

Residential Growth Forecast

Participants were asked the following questions to prompt discussion:

- What are your thoughts on the population growth allocation shares by location?
- What types of housing should the County focus on promoting to achieve its population targets?
- Which settlement and built-up areas should the County focus on encouraging higher density housing (e.g. apartments), and how can they be integrated into existing and new communities?

Generally, participants did not respond directly to the prompting questions, instead they asked questions to the project team. The questions and answers related to the Residential Growth Forecasts are included as follows. Questions are marked by a 'Q', and answers are marked with an 'A'.

Q: Does the forecast include only new residents moving in? Or does it also include the approximate projected population growth from birth rates?

A: Growth from birth rates is being taken into consideration. The County estimates growth using the Cohort Survival Projection Method, which primarily looks at the net migration plus natural increase (or sometimes decrease). Since the County's population is aging and the birth rate has only rebounded to some extent, the natural increase is still relatively low. The County would need to rely more on net migration from surrounding areas as a source for population growth.

Q: There is currently an overall concern about housing affordability, and many local residents have commented that certain areas of Centre Wellington are built "for the rich". How will housing issues be mitigated to ensure there is sufficient mixed housing at affordable rates? With lower-paying jobs becoming more prevalent, how can we expect people to work and live in the County if it is not affordable to do so?

A: The Provincial Policy Statement requires the County to set targets through the OP related to affordable housing. The County aims to ensure a broader selection of housing types among all levels of housing density options. However, this focus has created a shift in demand towards higher-density housing options. More work needs to be done to examine how housing is broken down by tenure, such as the demand for rental housing versus ownership housing.

It is also important to explore various tools and incentives to achieve a greater supply of affordable housing. Although the County has a significant role and responsibility in housing affordability, affordability is complex. Some issues may be beyond the County's control when it comes to delivering affordable housing and controlling housing prices. The County has completed an attainable housing study with a task force looking at implementing some of the recommendations of that work. Overall, the County recognizes this as an important issue.

Employment Growth Forecast

Participants were asked the following questions to prompt discussion:

- What are your thoughts on the employment growth allocation shares by location?
- What policy enhancements are required to strengthen the County's ability to accommodate employment uses/sectors associated with structural changes in an evolving economy?
- Are the County's employment and economic Official Plan policies favourable when compared to competing municipalities in the surrounding area? If not, what would make the County's policies more competitive?

Generally, participants did not respond directly to the prompting questions, instead they asked questions to the project team. The questions and answers related to the Employment Growth Forecasts are included as follows. Questions are marked by a 'Q', and answers are marked with an 'A'.

Q: As professionals are leaving the GTA and looking for housing outside of the City, why are we not targeting some business professionals or types of employment? For example: technology/software/engineering/etc.

A: The County is looking to accommodate a shift towards a more knowledge-based sector. Several sub-sectors have been identified under the employment land category to support that shift. Apart from industrial-type jobs, employment areas would also include office-type development, which can accommodate knowledge-based sectors. This would likely take the form of multi-tenant small-scale offices, which may increase over time as the market dictates.

Q: We moved here during the pandemic to a smaller community and greener spaces. How will the County refactor employment estimations due to the pandemic's acceleration of distributed workforce workers in the community? Especially for those who work from home?

A: The County is expecting to see a strong rate of growth post-pandemic. There will likely be continued opportunities to work from home and for remote learning. Many industries are pivoting towards a hybrid model of work; however, the County still expects to see on-site office setting employment.

Although the trends for work from home may increase, it can be complicated to track how many people work from home. Even if someone works from home a few days a week under the hybrid mode, they would still be counted as working full time in their office by the census. The County acknowledges that the hybrid model may become more common post-pandemic.

Q: Is there a breakdown of the type of employment that we're targeting?

A: The County classifies employment by sector (industrial, commercial, and institutional) then breaks these down into sub-sectors such as manufacturing, constructing, retail, etc.

The focus of employment allocation is to take a high-level look at these sectors and subsectors and allocate them into more detailed categories related to the land use requirements they need. These employment categories are usually population-related, such as urban employment lands employment and rural employment. The County follows a series of requirements prescribed in the land use assessment methodology to determine these categories.

Q: Mapleton employment is expected to grow at a faster rate than other areas. Why is there not a larger population growth target allocated to Mapleton? Are historical growth rates the primary driver in determining future growth targets? It seems like many built-up areas have had servicing constraints, which halted growth in some of the smaller built-up areas.

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A: Urban settlement areas usually have a boundary that can constrain growth due to the surrounding environment, such as being around agricultural land. Land supply was assessed to determine the growth target. There is a lot of mixed employment in Mapleton, including the agricultural sector, rural-based employment, and employment within the urban settlement areas.

[General MCR process](#)

Participants raised other questions and comments related to the OP Review and MCR process.

Q: The Township of Centre Wellington's water is identified by The Centre Wellington Tier 3 Water Budget Study as being at significant risk. This presents a limited growth situation due to the uncertainty of the water source. Centre Wellington cannot estimate its capacity for future growth in the next few years. How can growth be targeted to the County of Wellington when water needed to support that growth is uncertain and unsustainable?

A: In terms of long-term projections, growth is broadly driven by many macroeconomic factors. From a servicing standpoint, it is important to identify potential issues that could constrain growth in the long term and address them accordingly. The County is looking into servicing issues as they work through the MCR; however, the County currently has not identified a constraint on growth due to water or wastewater servicing. There will be more opportunities to monitor this 30-year growth process since the Official Plan will be updated in the next 10 years. The County has been actively working with the Township of Centre Wellington, and they have been part of the County's technical team on this matter.

Q: How accurate had previous Official Plan projections been for the current 2020/21 years?

A: It has been quite accurate so far, with 2016 being slightly lower than projected. There was an economic downturn during 2008/9, which affected growth. Now the County is seeing growth accelerating and catching up to the expected growth target set for 2021. Employment is a more difficult factor to track, but it should also be relatively close to current projects.

Q: Does the County have incentives for tech companies to come to Wellington County? Especially when competing with areas like Waterloo and Kitchener?

A: This question would be taken back to the County to inquire with economic development staff. The project team is currently unaware of specific strategic plans and will bring this topic back for further discussions.

Q: Are there any plans to expand the Guelph/Eramosa urban boundary?

A: It is premature to discuss expansion as the current focus is on the Phase 1 report, which focuses on County-wide population, employment and housing. The report does

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not go into the specifics of urban land needs. The project team has some preliminary understandings but still needs to wait for a later process when more information is available to provide an accurate answer.

Q: Does the County have any intention to support the Wastewater Treatment Plan in Erin? If so, how much?

A: Currently, the County has no intention to support the Wastewater Treatment Plant, as it is a local municipal responsibility.

Q: How is community water, wastewater, hydro, natural gas and broadband capacity, or ability to service being considered into population growth allocation by location?

A: The County has retained a consultant to conduct high-level municipal servicing analysis. There are no results to share on that analysis yet. The County's current main focus is on water and wastewater service. The Phase 1 Report has also been circulated to hydro, natural gas and other service providers to provide input and feedback.

Q: Are there any plans for the County to take over water or wastewater services? Could cost be reduced if the County took over these services? This is one of the major concerns for Erin residents as the cost is very high.

A: Counties are structured differently than regional government, as in they are not involved with water and wastewater servicing. Reducing cost is currently not under consideration, but the County understands that it is a concern for Erin residents.

The Association of Ontario Municipalities provides a helpful guide to understanding the differences between County and Regional government structures and their associated responsibilities. Learn more at <https://www.amo.on.ca/about-us/municipal-101/ontario-municipalities>

Written Feedback

Following the meeting, the County of Wellington received **20 submissions by email**. The following key points were raised through written feedback:

- Concerns regarding sufficient housing to support a growing population, particularly as the County continues to see regional migration from the core of the Greater Golden Horseshoe to the edges.
- Concerns regarding sufficient water infrastructure and sustainable water supply to service the projected population growth (including considering the risks outlined in the Tier 3 water Budget Study).
 - Concerns were also noted regarding the importance of conducting the OP review considering the impact of growth on watershed and sub-watersheds, natural heritage systems, hazardous lands, and climate change.

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- Agricultural systems and agricultural impact assessment should be prioritized in the OP review since future population growth and developments may negatively impact and pose risks to agricultural land loss.
- Suggestion that there could be more considerations and emphasis in the MCR on the Growth Plan policies concerning servicing rural settlements.
- Interest in the County’s plans regarding whether urban boundaries will be expanded or not.
- Concerns about lower growth targets and few existing or future Settlement Areas to accommodate growth, and how this will impact the future of these municipalities. Specifically, concerns were raised about targets for Puslinch, Morriston, and Mapleton.
- Suggestion to allow limited growth in rural settlements and clusters that are mapped as part of the Agricultural Area to create opportunities to round out these settlements and allow some limited infilling. Precedents from the Town of Halton Hills (Rural Cluster Areas), the Township of Woolwich (Rural Residential Settlements and Service Settlements), and the Town of Caledon were identified.
- Significant hazard lands were identified for areas within the County presenting lost intensification opportunities that would need to be accommodated elsewhere.

The County of Wellington has documented details included within each of the written submissions for consideration as the Official Plan review progresses.

Additionally the following questions were identified in the written feedback for clarification:

Q: Will archaeological studies or fieldwork will be conducted for the OP review?

A: At this time the County is not intending to conduct a archeologic study as part of the Official Plan Review process. These studies, were deemed necessary, would be carried out at a more site specific level (i.e. through a secondary planning process or site specific development application).

Wrap Up and Next Steps

Jim Faught of LURA Consulting provided participants with the project team’s contact information for any additional feedback and wrapped up the meeting. Members of the public can contact the project team by email or by phone at:

Contact	Sarah Wilhelm, Manager Policy Planning
Phone	519-837-2600 ex 2130
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