



# COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

## COMMITTEE REPORT

**To:** Chair and Members of the Planning Committee  
**From:** Sarah Wilhelm, Manager of Policy Planning  
**Date:** Thursday, September 12, 2019  
**Subject:** County Official Plan Review - Process and Key Phases

### 1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to:

1. introduce County and local Councils to the process for the County Official Plan Review, which will address the requirements for a municipal comprehensive review (“MCR”) and a five-year review; and
2. provide an outline of key work plan phases.

### 2.0 Background

Since amalgamation in 1999, the County Official Plan has been the core-planning document that guides decision-making on long-term growth and development for the County and our member municipalities. The County Official Plan provides policies to ensure that:

- existing and future residents have an adequate supply and variety of jobs, homes, shopping, services, leisure activities, educational opportunities and cultural facilities; and
- people of the County enjoy clean air, clean water, healthy communities, natural heritage, cultural heritage, public health and public safety.

The Plan establishes the County’s goals and directions for land use planning and development based on a broad structure of urban, rural and greenlands systems. The urban system is the focus for growth, the rural system is the focus for resource activities, and the greenlands system is the focus for protection of the natural environment.

### 2.1 Keeping the Official Plan Current

The basic framework of the Official Plan has been in place for 20 years and Council has revised the Plan regularly to respond to changing needs and policy directions. Figure 1 identifies the three key ways for the County to review and amend the Official Plan to incorporate policy updates.

**Figure 1 Approaches for County-Initiated Policy Updates**



The Planning Act requires municipalities to keep their official plans up to date every five years to ensure that the Plan:

- conforms, or does not conflict with provincial plans (the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and Greenbelt Plan in Wellington);
- has regard to the matters of provincial interest listed in section 2 of the Act; and
- is consistent with the provincial policy statement.

The County completed the last 5-year review in 2014.

The Province has also defined a process for bringing an official plan into conformity with aspects of the Growth Plan termed a “municipal comprehensive review” (“MCR”). This is unique to the Growth Plan and is associated with its own deadline.

It is also possible for the County to update official plans to address specific policy matters through a 5-year review or as standalone official plan amendments. Some recent examples of standalone amendments in Wellington include updated policies for Community Improvement Areas, Source Protection Plans and second units.

The top priority for the County is to move forward with the MCR, however, the Plan is also out of date with the 2014 PPS, 2017 Greenbelt Plan and other amendments to the Planning Act. Under subsection 26(2) of the Act, Council has discretion to complete the MCR as a separate exercise, or combine it with a 5-year review.

## **2.2 Municipal Comprehensive Review**

Staff reported to Planning Committee in June about the new Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (“Growth Plan”) released by the Province. The 2019 Growth Plan carried over the requirement to complete a municipal comprehensive review by mid-2022 to bring Official Plans into conformity with the Growth Plan. The Growth Plan defines a municipal comprehensive review as:

“A new official plan, or an official plan amendment, initiated by an upper- or single-tier municipality under section 26 of the Planning Act that comprehensively applies the policies and schedules of this Plan.”

County Staff will approach the MCR in a collaborative manner with municipal input.

The County Official Plan is currently up to date with June 2013 amendments made by the Province to its growth forecasts and to extend the forecasts to 2041 in the Growth Plan. To do so, the County retained Watson & Associates to extend the County forecasts to 2036 and 2041, and allocate the updated Growth Plan forecast to local municipalities and then to urban centres for residential growth. In May 2015, County Council received the growth forecast update report from Watson & Associates, and directed staff to circulate the amendment to local municipalities for comment. Staff revised the draft Official Plan Amendment to reflect a number of comments received.

In 2016, County Council adopted the current County Official Plan forecasts and they came into effect in 2017 (by Ontario Municipal Board settlement). This Official Plan Amendment (OPA 99) brought the Plan into conformity with and allocated the forecasts in the Growth Plan. By 2041, the County is forecast to accommodate a population of 140,000 residents and 61,000 jobs. This represents an almost 50% increase of the County’s 2016 population of 95,805 and a 50% increase of the County’s 40,070 jobs. Since the approval of OPA 99, Statistics Canada released

the 2016 Census, and the Province released an updated Growth Plan in 2017 and a series of guidance documents for implementation (Figure 2). These documents present information, technical criteria and approaches.

**Figure 2 Current Status of Provincial Guidance Documents**

Final Documents	Draft Documents
Land Needs Assessment methodology	Municipal Comprehensive Review process
Agricultural System implementation	Application of the Intensification and Density Targets
Natural Heritage System implementation	Agricultural Impact Assessment

It is our understanding that the Province intends to update some of the guidance documents to align with the 2019 Growth Plan and staff will monitor the status of these documents as we move forward with the MCR.

The Growth Plan also requires municipalities to complete various background studies and analysis through the MCR process in order to demonstrate conformity with provincial policies, including (but not limited to) the following:

- A hierarchy of settlement areas and of strategic growth areas within them, across the County
- Servicing
- Land needs assessment
- Strategies to address intensification, employment, housing, excess lands, climate change, Indigenous consultation, etc.
- Transportation
- Agricultural System and Natural Heritage System mapping and policy direction

We have been told by Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing staff that the growth allocations made through OPA 99 will be subject to further review through the MCR (as they were not subject to the standardized land needs assessment methodology at that time). The Planning and Development Department maintains employment and residential land inventories in a geographic information system. As these inventories are an important input to land needs assessment, planning staff started work to update the inventories in June 2019.

The MCR will be a complex undertaking and staff anticipates the process will take at least two years to complete.

### 2.3 5-Year Review

There have been a number of significant provincial policy initiatives and other matters that will directly affect the 5-year review exercise, including:

- Greenbelt Plan, 2017
- Provincial Policy Statement, 2014 (currently under review)
- Significant amendments to the Planning Act through:
  - Bill 73, the Smart Growth for Our Communities Act, 2015
  - Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act, 2017
  - Bill 34, Green Energy Repeal Act, 2018
  - Bill 108, the More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019
- Updates to Source Water Protection Plans

There are also County initiatives that will help inform the 5-year review, including the following:

- Active Transportation Plan (2012)
- A Place to Call Home: 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan for Guelph Wellington (5-year update awaiting provincial approval)
- Climate Mitigation Strategy (in process)
- Economic Development Strategic Plan (2012)
- Energy Management Plan (2014)
- Strategic Action Plan (2019)
- Transportation Master Plan (pending)

The 5-year review process will seek to incorporate the relevant policies and directions from these and other documents from the standpoint of land use planning and development policy.

## **2.4 Approval Process**

The MCR and 5-year review will lead to the preparation of an Official Plan Amendment in accordance with section 26 of the Planning Act.

Once a final draft of the County Official Plan Amendment is completed, the Province requires it to be forwarded to them not less than 90 days prior to notice being given for the statutory public meeting. Once County Council adopts the Amendment, the Province will have 210 days to render its decision.

The MCR and 5-year review have two important differences from other amendments to the Official Plan as they both require the following:

- provincial approval; and
- an open house/special meeting of Council.

The decision of the Province is non-appealable.

## **3.0 Work Plan**

The County will:

- manage the overall project in-house
- hire consultants to undertake specific components of the review
- work in consultation with local municipalities, Indigenous communities, members of the public, agencies and other key stakeholders
- prepare an overall communications and engagement plan including a dedicated page on the County's website and provide required updates to the content
- follow the required Planning Act process of consultation after the MCR and 5-year review has concluded

County planning staff will report to County Council periodically and seek direction at key decision-making points to scope further work. The timeline below identifies the broad phases and components of the MCR and 5-year review process (Figure 3).

**Figure 3 County Official Plan Review Phasing**  
 Joint MCR and 5-year Review

Consultation Throughout 	<b>PHASE 1</b>	<b>Setting the Stage</b> Fall 2019 – Spring 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Background review*</li> <li>▪ Initiate key MCR background studies</li> <li>▪ Prepare communications and engagement plan</li> <li>▪ Official project launch</li> <li>▪ Develop key themes</li> </ul>
	<b>PHASE 2</b>	<b>Technical Analysis, Issues and Opportunities</b> 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue work on MCR background studies</li> <li>▪ Provincial Policy Statement review</li> <li>▪ Greenbelt Plan Review</li> <li>▪ Identify other county and/or local policy priorities</li> </ul>
	<b>PHASE 3</b>	<b>Options</b> 2020 - 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prepare policy option discussion papers on key theme areas based on MCR background studies, community engagement and Council input</li> <li>▪ Report on Provincial Policy Statement consistency, Greenbelt Plan conformity and other policy priorities</li> <li>▪ Prepare Draft Official Plan Amendment</li> </ul>
	<b>PHASE 4</b>	<b>Final Draft Official Plan Review</b> 2021 – early 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prepare final Draft Official Plan Amendment</li> <li>▪ Follow Planning Act requirements for Official Plan Amendment</li> </ul>

\*NOTE: County staff has commenced work to update employment and residential land inventory updates

Staff are considering a combined MCR and 5-year Review process to complete the Official Plan Review. The Planning Act also allows municipalities to implement new policies through standalone amendments. The main advantage of the combined process is to engage the public, Council and other stakeholders more efficiently and effectively. We will monitor our approach (phasing) in light of any shifting provincial, County and local priorities and make changes as necessary.

### Recommendations

That the report “County Official Plan Review – Process and Key Phases” be received for information and forwarded to member municipalities.

That the Director of Planning and Development be authorized to proceed with the County Official Plan Review.

Respectfully submitted,



Sarah Wilhelm, BES, MCIP, RPP  
 Manager of Policy Planning