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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Planning and Economic Development Committee
From: Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development
Report: #2020-P-24
Date: November 3, 2020

Subject:

Envision Durham – Framework for a New Regional Official Plan

Recommendation:

That the Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends to Regional Council:

- A) That Regional Council endorse the framework for the new Regional Official Plan as outlined in this report; and
 - B) That a copy of Report #2020-P-24 be forwarded to Durham's area municipalities, conservation authorities, the Envision Durham Interested Parties List and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.
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Report:

1. Purpose

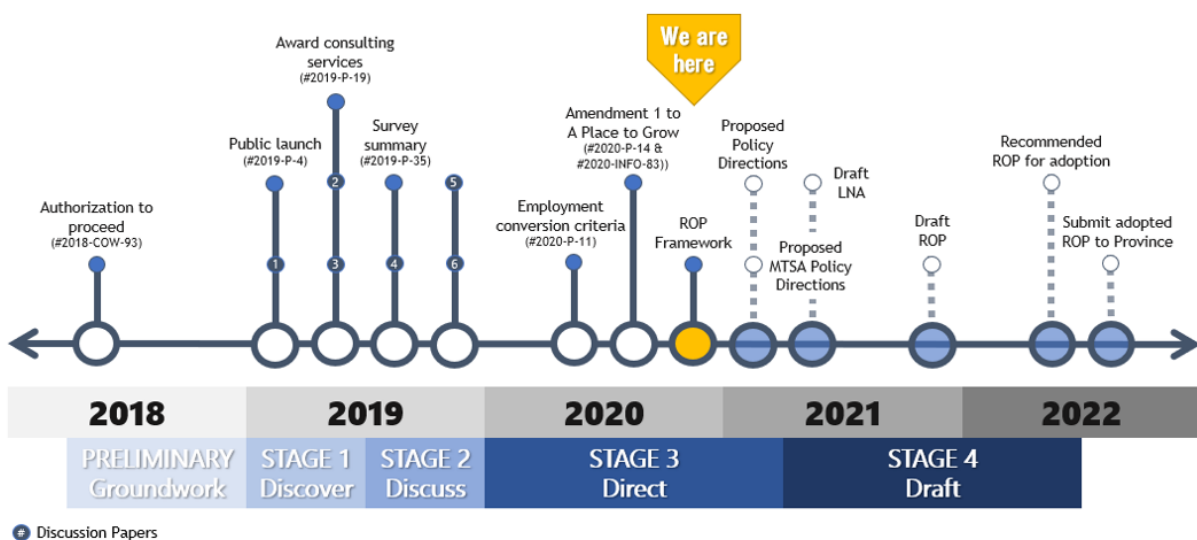
- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on Envision Durham, the Region's Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR), and introduce the framework for the new Regional Official Plan. Envision Durham will replace the current Regional Official Plan (ROP) by establishing a progressive and forward-looking planning vision for the Region to 2051. A new framework, with a streamlined structure and approach will support a new and compelling ROP.

2. Previous Reports and Decisions

2.1 Envision Durham is a multi-year project which has been the subject of several reports to Council as illustrated below in Figure 1. Recent activities have included:

- Receiving, cataloguing and examining feedback received through the discussion paper submissions;
- Undertaking policy reviews and analyses in preparation for upcoming proposed policy directions; and
- Examining and preparing policies and delineations for proposed Major Transit Station Areas, to be provided as a standalone amendment for public review and comment in early 2021.

Figure 1 – Envision Durham stages and reporting milestones



3. A New Regional Official Plan Framework – Need for Change

3.1 The framework of the current ROP dates back to the early 1990s, which has its roots in the structure of the 1976 ROP.

3.2 It is appropriate that the current ROP be repealed and replaced with a new ROP that will implement contemporary land use planning policies, new and updated policies contained in the PPS and the provincial plans which apply to Durham, such as the Growth Plan, the Greenbelt Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan.

3.3 A new framework and vision will support a well-defined structure of urban areas and rural settlements, a system of connected environmental features, extensive and productive agricultural areas, a variety of open spaces and a comprehensive, integrated and multi-modal transportation network.

4. Guiding Principles and Desired Outcomes

4.1 The following guiding principles will help shape the new ROP:

- **Progressive**— contemporary, compelling and forward-thinking in both subject matter and delivery.
- **Streamlined**— avoiding redundancy while providing meaningful policy direction on matters of provincial and Regional interest, the ROP will be efficient in structure and content while providing appropriate depth.
- **Accessible**—intuitive and user-friendly, the ROP will be clear and easier to read by a wide variety of audiences.

4.2 In addition to these three guiding principles, the new ROP will:

- **Anticipate Change.** The ROP will plan for a population of 1.3 million people and 460,000 jobs over the next 30 years. The form of development will not be the same as was experienced over the last 30 years, and the pace and timing of development can never be fully predicted. The new ROP will direct growth to appropriate locations while protecting important environmental features from development.
- **Focus on Results.** The new ROP will establish meaningful performance indicators, so that progress on achieving intended outcomes can be identified, measured and reported on.
- **Have a Strong On-line Presence.** There is a need to modernize the look and feel of the ROP to one that is more accessible for online viewing (including online mapping), is visually pleasing, includes high quality graphics, provides call-out explanations and incorporates other features to make it more useful in an on-line world.
- **Articulate Meaningful Regional Priorities.** Rather than simply reiterating or administering provincial policy, the ROP will articulate strategic Regional priorities. This would include building upon the vision and goals of the Durham Region Strategic Plan, 2020-2024 while enabling detailed land use planning policies and designations through area municipal official plans, as appropriate.

5. Public Opinion Survey

5.1 In early 2019, a Public Opinion Survey was undertaken where participants provided input on some of the most important land use planning issues in the region today and over the next 30 years.

5.2 The survey reveals a desire for greater balance amongst broad objectives, including:

- Increased job opportunities and overall economic prosperity;
- Healthy communities that provide a variety of supports, services and affordable housing options;
- Livable urban areas that preserve lands for greenspace and recreation by shifting from sprawl to more sustainable growth patterns;
- Resilient built and natural environments ready for adaptation and mitigation against the effects of climate change;
- Protected rural landscapes with strong agricultural roots; and
- Transportation networks that support and promote a range of modes, including active transportation and enhanced transit.

When considered together, the priorities identified by residents foster a complete community where our residents want to live, work, play, grow and invest.

6. Proposed Framework

6.1 In addition to broad strategic directions, ambitious goals, pragmatic objectives, and action-based policies, the new ROP will be founded on a strong vision for the region's future. The proposed framework for the new ROP is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 – Illustrating a new ROP framework



- 6.2 The new ROP will incorporate a regional vision presenting Durham as a “community of communities”—diverse, distinct and connected. Staff will work towards developing a broad regional vision that embodies public and stakeholder input.
- 6.3 Seven Strategic Directions will serve as chapters to the new ROP. These directions have been prepared based on over 25 years of experience with the existing ROP, informed by public feedback received to-date and aligned with the broader goals of the Regional Strategic Plan. They are intended present balanced, aspirational, outcome-oriented themes, reflective of the Region’s diverse characteristics:
- **Prosperous Economy**
 - **Healthy Communities**
 - **Supportive Infrastructure**
 - **Vibrant Urban System**
 - **Thriving Rural System**
 - **Protected Greenlands System**
 - **Connected Transportation System**
- 6.4 Goals, objectives and policies will be introduced through proposed policy directions to be released through 2021.
- 6.5 The new ROP should continue to support the essential elements valued most by Durham residents (e.g. access to natural areas, waterfronts, clean air, an abundance of recreational opportunities, protected farmlands, historic downtowns, etc.) while managing the growth and development that will continue to transform Durham over the next 30 years.
- 6.6 For consistency and clarity of language, proposed objectives will begin with one of three verbs of intention, namely: “Support”, “Promote” or “Ensure”.
- **Support**—where the Region has little control over outcomes and will employ tactics to support conditions (e.g. coordinate, guide, monitor, study, research, investigate);
 - **Promote**—where the Region has moderate control over outcomes and will actively influence a particular result (e.g. encourage, maintain, improve, develop, evaluate, review, identify, update); and

- **Ensure**—where the Region has greatest control over outcomes and expects to achieve results through direct actions (require, provide, protect, preserve, establish, delineate, conduct, implement, amend, prepare, adopt).

In addition to creating a consistent structure, this approach helps signal the relative degree of influence the Region has over a particular outcome.

- 6.7 Policy statements will begin with action verbs to give clear direction and convey a sense of imperative.

7. Relationship to Strategic Plan

- 7.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:

a. Environmental Sustainability

- Protect, preserve and restore the natural environment including greenspaces, waterways, parks, trails and farmlands;
- Demonstrate leadership in sustainability and addressing climate change; and
- Expand sustainable and active transportation.

b. Community Vitality

- Revitalize existing neighbourhoods and build complete communities that are walkable, well-connected, and have a mix of attainable housing; and
- Build a healthy, inclusive, age-friendly community where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

c. Economic Prosperity

- Position Durham Region as the location of choice for business;
- Enhance communication and transportation networks to better connect people and move goods more effectively; and
- Provide a supportive environment for agriculture and agri-food industries.

d. Social Investment

- Revitalize community housing and improve housing choice, affordability and sustainability.

- e. Service Excellence
 - Demonstrate commitment to continuous quality improvement and communicating results.

8. Next Steps

- 8.1 In early 2021, staff will seek authorization to consult on proposed policy directions informed by best practice reviews, research, public engagement and feedback received during Stages 1 and 2 of the Envision Durham process.
- 8.2 Concurrent work is being completed through the Growth Management Study (i.e. Land Needs Assessment), as well as advancing a standalone Major Transit Station Area Regional Official Plan Amendment.
- 8.3 The timeframe for completing Envision Durham and submitting it to the Province is July 1, 2022. Ongoing changes to Provincial Policy have impacted the ability of all GGH Regions to complete their MCRs by the prescribed conformity date. Regional staff will continue to take the steps necessary to meet this deadline.
- 8.4 It is recommended that a copy of this report be forwarded to Durham's area municipalities, conservation authorities, the Envision Durham Interested Parties List and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Brian Bridgeman, MCIP, RPP
Commissioner of Planning and
Economic Development

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original signed by

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer