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Town of Aurora
Public Planning Report
No. PDS20-077

Subject: Official Plan Review

Prepared by: Edward Terry, Senior Policy Planner

Department: Planning and Development Services

Date: December 8, 2020

Recommendation

1. That Report No. PDS20-077 be received; and,
2. That Staff report back prior to releasing the Discussion Papers for public consultation and to provide an update on the Official Plan Review work plan.

Executive Summary

The Town of Aurora's Official Plan Review is a provincially legislated Municipal Comprehensive Review, conformity exercise and major undertaking. Public consultation is a key component of a successful Official Plan Review Process.

- To date, public engagement for the OPR study has reached over 1,100 people including pop-up events, online engagement and committee meetings.
- There have been 841 visits to the public engagement website (July – Nov 19th 2020).
- Public Engagement activities to date includes: Pop-Up events, Leadership Team meeting #1, Community Steering Committee meeting #1, Public Vision Workshop, Self-guided Walking tours and online engagement.
- Early Consultation has focused on the following key themes: Growth & Infrastructure, Complete Communities, Natural Heritage, Cultural Heritage & Archaeology.
- Aurora's Official Plan must conform with the Regional Official Plan, Provincial Policy Statement, Growth Plan, and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.
- The study process is envisioned in five phases over a multi-year work program.

Background

Aurora's Official Plan Review was first presented to Council in December 2019, through Report No. PDS19-098 seeking direction to hold a public meeting prior to officially launching the review in accordance with the requirements of the Planning Act.

On February 4, 2020, a Special Meeting of Council was held for the Official Plan Review. Council expressed the concern about the lack of consultation that had taken place leading up to the February 2020 public planning meeting. Council passed the following motion:

“That another Public Planning meeting be held after the public engagement consultant's work is underway and staff report back with an Official Plan Review work plan that incorporates the feedback received to date from public consultation.”

The Town has retained two consultants to assist with undertaking the Official Plan Review (OPR). In February 2020, the Town retained WSP as the Public Engagement Consultant for the OPR. In Summer 2020, the Town retained SGL Planning & Design as the Study Consultant Lead, to undertake the technical review of the Official Plan.

As part of the “pre-launch” leading up to the February 2020 public meeting, the Town hosted seven (7) informal “Planner-Pop-Up” events in various locations in Aurora to introduce the Official Plan Review to the public. Planner Pop-Up events are non-statutory public engagement sessions that do not require public notification. Prior to the Special Meeting, Staff had already engaged more than 300 people.

As a result of the pandemic, public consultation after the Special Meeting of Council has primarily been conducted online via engageaurora.ca/OPR and virtual meetings. There have been 841 visits to the public engagement website between July and November 2020 (see Appendix 1 - Public Engagement Summary).

Analysis

To date, public engagement for the OPR study has reached over 1,100 people using pop-up events, online engagement and committee meetings

Project Website - Self-Guided Walking Tour

The Self-Guided Walking Tour received a total of twenty-three (23) comments highlighting locations that are important to residents or identified as needing improvement (see Appendix 2).

The fourteen (14) pins highlighting areas and topics of importance include:

- Various natural areas (Sheppard's Bush Conservation Area, Town Park, Vandorf Woodlot, Aurora Community Arboretum)
- New development should be built to complement surrounding areas (i.e. Edward Street and Yonge Street near Bloomington Road developments)
- Hillary House
- Library Square revitalization

The nine (9) pins identifying areas needing improvement include:

- Various vacant properties fronting Yonge Street
- Road design and revitalization at the intersection of Yonge and Wellington
- Unsafe intersection at Leslie Street and Vandorf Sideroad
- Impacts to businesses during the construction of the Wellington Street East underpass as part of the expansion of the Barrie GO line.

Project Website - Poll, Comments and Ideas Tools

Through the OP Review website's Poll, Comments and Ideas tools, feedback received included sixteen (16) responses to the Poll, ten (10) posts using the Comments tool, and two (2) posts using the Ideas tool. Results from the Poll as of November 3, 2020 show that respondents consider the Natural Environment & Climate Change to be the most important topics.

Results from the Comments and Ideas tools align with feedback received during other public engagement activities, focusing on the following topics:

- Balancing growth and the natural environment;
- Preserving green spaces, woodlands, lakes and wetlands;
- Providing affordable housing options;
- Improving transit to help address traffic congestion and create walkable communities;
- Maintaining Aurora's small-town charm;
- Ensuring community services reflect the needs of the Town's growing and diverse residents; and
- Updating Secondary Plans to reflect present day issues and policies discussed during the OPR process.

Community Steering Committee

The Project Team established a Community Steering Committee (“CSC”) based on a hybrid approach of Town appointed members and an open call for participants. The purpose of the CSC is to provide a sounding board to the Project Team and share insights into key issues and draft policy during the OPR process.

During the first meeting discussion, Community Steering Committee members identified their top priorities being Complete Communities and Growth Management & Infrastructure.

In particular, the Community Steering Committee discussion focused on the following concerns:

- Growth pressures in the Town;
- Existing infrastructure capacity and its ability to accommodate growth;
- Maintaining the charm and general “vibe” of Aurora over the next 30 years;
- Providing housing options, such as “missing middle” typologies, and affordable housing for older adults and younger generations;
- Exploring future employment opportunities and means to support existing businesses;
- Preserving natural heritage features and resources by balancing growth and conservation (i.e. St. John’s Forest);
- Prioritizing diversity and inclusion to create safe communities for everyone; and
- Preservation of Town’s cultural heritage features.

Leadership Team Meeting

The Leadership Team is comprised of senior staff from the Town and three members of Council. During the initial Leadership Team meeting, members discussed the topics of height, density and housing. Highlights from this discussion include:

- Preference to maintain a height of seven storeys or less;
- Investigate the use of townhomes as higher density housing options;
- Investigate bungalows as an option to allow aging-in-place; and
- Revisit CIP enacting policies as they relate to heritage buildings/districts.

Consultation undertaken focused on Growth & Infrastructure, Complete Communities, Natural Heritage, Cultural Heritage & Archaeology

The following themes were identified following the analysis of feedback received from the Phase 1 engagement activities undertaken to date that were used to collect additional feedback during the visioning workshop (see Appendix 3) that was held on October 22, 2020:

- Growth Management
- Attainable Housing
- Preserving Natural Areas
- Sustainability and Climate Change
- Diversity and Inclusion

Visioning Workshop

The Vision Workshop was advertised through Eventbrite and required an RSVP. Twenty (20) participants registered for the event, and ten (10) attended the workshop. This event was also promoted on the Town's social media accounts, project website, mobile signs and by Project participants.

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss the gaps and changes required to the existing Official Plan vision and guiding principles. The workshop ended by informing attendees about the Project's next steps and how to stay involved in the process.

During Activity 1 of the Vision Workshop, feedback was collected from attendees to identify terms from the Town's existing Vision that are still applicable as well as those terms that are missing. Existing terms such as sustainability, housing, healthy, public transportation, accessibility and heritage were most prominently identified by participants as terms that should remain in the updated Town vision.

When asked what was missing from the vision, participants identified terms such as diversity and inclusion, affordability and choice.

Further discussion identified key considerations such as:

- Sustainability should encompass multiple facets, such as protecting the environment, encouraging a healthy community, creating a self-sufficient Town, providing public transit and community programming.

- Provide a mix of housing types and choices that can serve a range of income levels with parks and amenities within close proximity.

During Activity 2, the Official Plan's Fundamental Principles were divided into four themes and discussed as a group.

Theme	Feedback
Growth & Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage growth to lessen impacts to natural areas; protect natural features • Allow for organic growth by becoming a community of best practices (i.e. sustainable practices, provide community amenities, cultural events, economic opportunities, etc.)
Neighbourhoods of the Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more housing options such as bungalows, triplexes, co-ops, purpose built rental, etc. (i.e. John Westway offers stacked townhomes, semidetached units and retirement living options) • Consider innovative housing types (i.e. assisted living with daycare services in same building) • Provide safe parks, green spaces and meeting places within neighbourhoods to create vibrancy
Downtown and Community Vitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community facilities, restaurants, parks, green spaces and trails are important • Maintain small-town charm of downtown main street
Green Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt sustainable practices (i.e. solar panels) • Increase access points to existing green spaces

Public consultation refined the Focus Area Themes that were presented at the February 2020 Public Planning Meeting

Early consultation examined the 12 fundamental principles of the current Official Plan and has refined these principles into 4 focus area themes based on feedback from the pop-up events, online polls on the project website and the work undertaken to date by the project team.

The focus area themes are graphically presented below: Growth and Infrastructure, Complete Communities, Natural Heritage, Cultural Heritage & Archaeology.



The Poll tool on the project website asked participants to identify what topic is most important to them. The Comments tool asks participants, “What are the most important issues facing Aurora in the next 25+ years, and how do you see the community evolving”? The Ideas tool offers the opportunity for participants to share their vision for the future of Aurora.

Phase 1: Background Review

July 2020 – November 2020

Phase 2: Background Studies & Discussion Papers

October 2020 – April 2021

Phase 3: Policy Development

April 2021 – November 2021

Phase 4: Official Plan Amendments

November 2021 – June 2022

Phase 5: Regional Approval

June 2022 – November 2022

The OP Review study process consists of five phases over a multi-year work program

The OP review study will be undertaken in five phases over a multi-year work program (see Appendix 4).

Over Fall and Winter 2020/2021, the Project Team will issue a Vision Survey to confirm what was heard during Phase 1. As part of Phase 2 of the OPR, the following engagement events and tactics are planned:

- Four (4) CSC Meetings
- Four (4) LT Meetings
- Four (4) Public Open Houses in support of Discussion Papers
- Four (4) Focus Group Discussions (Business Owners, Seniors, Cultural Groups, Youth)
- Ongoing social media posts, project website content, mobile signs and other communications

These efforts will complement and inform the development of the four (4) Discussion Papers to guide the Town's updated Official Plan. Staff will present the discussion papers to Council prior to their release for public consultation.

Advisory Committee Review

Not applicable.

Legal Considerations

The Town already held the requisite statutory special meeting of Council to discuss the revisions that may be required to the Official Plan in February 2020. Further public meetings have been held at the request of Council. Council is required to have regard to any written submissions received as to what revisions may be required to the Official Plan.

Financial Implications

To date Council has approved a capital budget of \$300,000 in support of the Town's Official Plan Review. There is a potential requirement for further capital fund requests in this regard in the future, dependent upon the final scope of this project and other timing considerations to be determined as the project progresses.

Communications Considerations

The Town will engage the public broadly in the Official Plan Review. Staff, in partnership with the project's engagement consultants, will involve the public and work directly within them throughout the process to ensure that public concerns are consistently

understood and considered. We will work to ensure community concerns are reflected in recommendations and alternatives public feedback will be considered as part of the decision-making processes. The Town will also make sure to close the feedback loop with citizens to share feedback received, and action taken as a result of the feedback.

Notice was provided for this meeting emailing identified interested parties, posting an ad in the local paper, advertising on local mobile signs and via social media.

Link to Strategic Plan

The Municipal Comprehensive Review and review of the Official Plan supports the Strategic Plan goal of: Supporting an exceptional quality of life for all, via the objective of Strengthening the fabric of our community, specifically through the action item: Prepare and update the Town's Official Plan and Zoning By-law in accordance with the requirements of the Planning Act.

Alternative(s) to the Recommendation

1. That Council provide direction.

Conclusions

The review of the Town's Official Plan, represents a major undertaking that will result in a multi-year work program scheduled to conclude in 2022 with the approval of amendments to the Official Plan.

The work program presented in this report, will continue to be refined as the project progresses and presented to a future Council meeting. Following the public planning meeting, the Town's consultant will commence drafting discussion papers on the focus area themes based on best management practices and the public input received to date. Public consultation will be ongoing throughout the OPR.

Attachments

- Appendix 1 – WSP Public Engagement Summary Report
- Appendix 2 – Self-Guided Walking Tour Map
- Appendix 3 – Visioning Workshop Notice
- Appendix 4 – OPR Work Plan

Previous Reports

General Committee Report No. PDS19-198, dated December 3, 2019

General Committee Report No. PDS20-014, dated February 11, 2020

Pre-submission Review

Agenda Management Team review on November 17, 2020

Approvals

Approved by David Waters, Director, Planning and Development Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer