

COUNCIL REPORT

Meeting Date: February 16, 2021
Department: Building, Planning and Waste Services
Report No.: BBP-2021-06
Submitted by: Jennifer Huff, Manager of Building and Planning
Approved by: Matthew Stephenson, Director of Building, Planning & Waste Services
Fred Tranquilli, Chief Administrative Officer / Clerk
SUBJECT: **North Meadows Secondary Plan Official Plan Amendment – Final Report**

RECOMMENDATION: THAT: Council adopt the North Meadows Secondary Plan Official Plan Amendment and forward it to the County of Middlesex for consideration of final approval; AND THAT Council endorse the North Meadows Urban Design Guidelines.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This matter is in accord with the following strategic priorities:

Economic Development: Strathroy-Caradoc will have a diverse tax base and be a place that offers a variety of economic opportunities to current and prospective residents and businesses.

Growth Management: Strathroy-Caradoc will be an inclusive community where growth is managed to accommodate a range of needs and optimize municipal resources.

Destination Building: Strathroy-Caradoc will provide distinct experiences that celebrate its past and future by prioritizing innovative new ideas that set the community apart.

The development of the North Meadows Secondary Plan was identified as one of several short term tactics necessary to achieve the above noted strategic priorities.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide a policy analysis of the draft Official Plan Amendment implementing the North Meadows Secondary Plan. Completion of the North Meadows Secondary Plan is required prior to any development occurring within the plan area.

SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS

- This report provides a policy analysis of the Draft North Meadows Secondary Plan and reviews and responds to public and agency comments received at the Public Meeting.
- Development of the draft North Meadow Secondary Plan (NMSP) has been based upon significant levels of public and agency consultation, notwithstanding COVID-19.
- The final draft plan was presented to the public and Council at the statutory public meeting on January 18, 2021. This final plan was further modified in response to comments received at the Public Meeting. These changes are considered minor in nature (detailed in the comment section below).
- The report details responses to all objections and concerns received. One formal written objection has been received by an effected landowner. Upon consideration of all feedback received staff maintain that the policies of the plan are desirable and in keeping with the intent of the Secondary Plan area.
- In the opinion of staff, the draft NMSP reflects Council's Strategic Planning objectives and vision for the area as an integrated pedestrian scaled community comprised of a range of residential dwelling types and densities reflecting enhanced streetscaping, appealing urban design and parkland/trail features.
- Staff recommend the adoption of the Draft North Meadows Secondary Plan and the North Meadows Secondary Plan.

BACKGROUND:

A Secondary Plan is a unique and comprehensive municipal-led approach to land use planning for multiple adjacent properties.

Council initiated the project on December 17, 2018, with the overall vision for the North Meadows Secondary Plan area as:

“intended to provide a well-integrated pedestrian-scaled residential community comprised of a range of residential dwelling types and densities that includes enhanced streetscaping, urban design and parkland/trail features. Further, it will be sensitive to the significant natural features and corridors of the area and maintain the unique pedestrian connection between the north end of Strathroy and its downtown.”

This vision has guided staff and the project consulting firm, Monteith Brown, throughout the project and the development of the final draft of the Plan being considered by Council for adoption.

STAFF COMMENTS:

The North Meadows Secondary Plan area is identified on the location map attached. It is generally bounded by Second Street to the north, the Municipal boundary with Adelaide-Metcalf to the east, natural features associated with the Sydenham River Valley to the south and the existing residential development fronting on to Deborah Drive and Kemp Crescent to the west.

In total, the area includes approximately 108 ha (268 ac) of land which currently contains natural heritage features (woodlands and valley lands), undeveloped fields used for agricultural field crops, unnamed watercourses that drain south towards the Sydenham River, as well as existing agricultural / livestock structures and residential dwellings along Second Street.

A background information report prepared for the January 18th, 2021 public meeting provided a summary of the surrounding land use and infrastructure context and the key elements of the plan.

POLICY AND REGULATION BACKGROUND:

The majority of the North Meadows Planning Area is currently located with the 'Residential' designation of the Strathroy-Caradoc Official Plan (SCOP), while a portion of the natural heritage features as located within the 'Open Space' designation of the Official Plan. The area is also subject to Section 3.3.4.13 of the SCOP that requires the completion of a secondary plan to establish a development framework that will guide subsequent development approvals.

Portions of the natural heritage features are identified as 'Significant Woodlands' and 'Provincially Significant Wetlands'. Much of the area is regulated by the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority.

The subject lands are considered to be located within a fully serviced Settlement Area as per the definitions of the Provincial Policy Statement and the County of Middlesex.

The Planning Act:

Section 22 of the Planning Act, 1990, defines a "Secondary Plan" as being, " a part of an official plan, added by way of an amendment, that contains policies and land use designations that apply to multiple contiguous parcels of land, but not an entire municipality, and that provides more detailed land use policy direction in respect of those parcels than was provided before the amendment..".

The Act governs the required procedures (i.e. public and agency circulation) necessary to undertake a Secondary Plan and applies a 2-year moratorium on applications or requests to amend a secondary plan after it is approved, unless permission to do so is granted by Council.

The Planning Act, Section 3, identifies land use matters of Provincial Interest, including, but not limited to the:

- protection of ecological systems, including natural areas, features and functions;
- the orderly development of safe and healthy communities;
- the adequate provision of a full range of housing, including affordable housing;
- the promotion of development that is designed to be sustainable, to support public transit and to be oriented to pedestrians; and,
- the promotion of built form that: a) is well-designed, b) encourages a sense of place, and c) provides for public spaces that are of high quality, safe, accessible, attractive and vibrant.

Staff Comment on Consistency with the Planning Act:

- *The North Meadows Secondary Plan provides protection of the natural heritage features, opportunities for a range of housing types and densities, as well as amenities that support a variety of recreational options. The Urban Design Guidelines will ensure that the built-form will be cohesive and well-designed, creating a high-quality, safe and pedestrian oriented community with a sense of place in keeping with matters of Provincial Interest as identified in the Planning Act.*

Provincial Policy Statement, 2020:

The PPS states that decisions of approval authorities affecting planning matters “shall be consistent with” policy statements issued under the Planning Act.

In regards to the Secondary Plan, a number of policies of the PPS are relevant, including, but not limited to:

- Section 1.1.3 speaks to the importance of focusing growth and development to settlement areas and that land use patterns with settlement areas shall be based on densities and a mix of land uses which efficiently use land and resources, are appropriate for and efficiently use infrastructure and public service facilities, support active transportation, and other such elements as included. This section also speaks to the importance of new development: locating in designated growth areas adjacent to existing built up areas; having a compact form, and; being phased in a manner that is orderly and appropriate from a servicing perspective.
- Section 1.4 of the PPS includes numerous policies relating specifically to housing and the need for Municipalities to ensure an adequate supply of housing inventory is available to meet projected requirements of current and future residents. Planning authorities are to provide for an appropriate range and mix of housing options and densities to meet projected market-based and affordable housing needs of current and future residents.
- Section 1.5 of the PPS promotes healthy and active communities by including policies which: recommend planning public streets, spaces and facilities to be safe, meet the needs of pedestrians, fosters social interaction and facilitates active transportation and community connectivity; as well as, providing for a full range and equitable distribution of publicly accessible built and natural settings for recreation opportunities.
- The PPS includes policies that promotes the efficient, long-term, cost effective planning for infrastructure in a manner that promotes conservation and mitigates the impacts of climate change.
- Section 2.1 and 2.1 of the PPS includes a number of policies that direct the protection of natural heritage features and systems from negative impacts.

Staff Comment on Consistency with the Provincial Policy Statement:

The North Meadows Secondary Plan is considered consistent with the policies of the PPS as it:

- *Encourages the efficient use of land, infrastructure, public service facilities and resources by identifying the location of new development areas and the extension of infrastructure and public facilities within the existing growth boundary, adjacent to existing built up areas;*
- *Identifies areas for 'low', 'medium' and 'high' density housing types and densities to assist the Municipality in meeting the projected housing need of current and future residents;*
- *Provides for the protection of natural heritage resources in the area for the long term, as well as provides recreational trail opportunities to promote active transportation and community connectivity; and*
- *Promotes a healthy and active community through the identification of neighbourhood and community park facilities that will service both the existing north-end area residents and future residents.*

The County of Middlesex Official Plan

The County of Middlesex Official Plan directs growth and development to Settlement Areas and that such areas are to accommodate a significant portion of projected growth over the planning horizon. New development shall be fully serviced by municipal water and sanitary services and shall proceed in a logical, phased manner. Permitted uses in Settlement Areas include a range of housing types, commercial, industrial uses, community facilities, natural system elements, recreation and open space areas.

While the County Official Plan generally leaves the detailed planning policy to the local municipalities, as the Secondary Plan is implemented by way of an Official Plan amendment, the County is the approval authority in this case.

Staff Comment on Conformity with the County of Middlesex Official Plan:

The North Meadows Secondary Plan conforms with the policies of the County of Middlesex Official Plan as it will provide for the logical extension of existing development on full services within the current Strathroy growth boundary. It will provide for land uses permitted within a 'Settlement Area' according to the County Official Plan, and particularly will provide for a range of housing types, commercial uses, community facilities, recreational and open space areas, as well as natural system elements.

The Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc Official Plan

As noted earlier, the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc Official Plan (SCOP) identifies the subject lands as being within the 'Residential' designation, subject to the requirement for the completion of a Secondary Plan. In addition, the natural heritage features associated with the unnamed watercourse / valley lands are located within an 'Open Space designation, as well as identified as 'Natural Heritage Features' and 'Hazard Land' in the Official Plan.

Section 3.3.4.13 of the SCOP states that the following matters are to be considered in the preparation of the North Meadows Secondary Plan;

- Areas for low, medium and high density residential purposes
- General road pattern and pedestrian circulation system
- Areas to be maintained in a natural state or reserved as open space
- Need for and location / size of parks and school facilities
- Buffering measures to reduce potential land use conflicts
- Measures to enhance the area under development to improve the quality of life for future residents
- Stormwater management

Staff Comment on Conformity with the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc Official Plan:

The North Meadows Secondary Plan conforms with the policies of the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc Official Plan as it includes all of the elements required as per Section 3.3.4.13 of the OP:

- *The plan identifies the intended location of low, medium and high density residential development, with the medium and high-density developments located along Second Street and along the intersection of Adair Blvd and Thorn Drive. The policies of the plan identify density targets for each area.*
- *In regards to the road locations, the plan proposes the extension of Thorn Drive easterly and northerly to Second Street, as well as the southerly extension of Adair Blvd (aligned with the location of the unopened road allowance) terminating at the northern boundary of the natural heritage features. The intersection of Adair Blvd and Thorn Drive is shown as a round-about, however this is only for illustrative purposes and does not presuppose the final design of the intersection.*
- *A possible extension of Adair Blvd across the Sydenham River Valley is not anticipated during the lifetime of this plan, however the municipality will maintain the unopened road allowance beyond Adair Blvd in the event a future extension is required.*
- *The plan identifies the location of Natural Heritage features, systems and buffer areas for the purpose of protecting such areas from development. Future development applications will require the completion of a more detailed 'Development Assessment Reports' to refine the boundaries of these areas and guide specific mitigation requirements for each development phase, to be implemented through the subdivision development agreement.*
- *The local recreational trail system has been maintained and enhanced as a key feature of this area, providing pathway connections throughout the area and to the surrounding land uses. An on-street bike lane is also proposed along Thorn Dr, Adair Blvd and Second Street.*

- *The plan includes the location of a large community park, being approximately 5-5.5 ha (12-13.5 ac) in size, south of Thorn Dr, west of Deborah Dr. The park is intended to fill the gap in the distribution of municipal parkland and recreational facilities in the north area of Strathroy by serving the needs of existing residents to the west as well as those moving into the North Meadows area. The specific recreational facilities and equipment placed on the lands will be determined at a later date.*
- *A smaller, neighbourhood park, being approximately 1.5 ha (3.7 ac) is identified as being required south of the easterly extension of Thorn Dr. east of Adair Blvd. This park is intended to service new residents primarily located in the easterly portion of the NMSP area.*
- *The Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) has identified the potential need for land to accommodate a public elementary school in the NMSP area. The TVSDB has requested approximately 3 ha (7.4 ac) of land be identified for school purposes on the plan at the south-east corner of Adair Blvd and Thorn Dr. (identified as part of the land designated 'Community Services'). It is noted that this location is conceptual, and that alternative sites with frontage on Thorn Dr. east of Adair Blvd which are of sufficient size and in close proximity to the neighbourhood park may also be considered. Further, at the time of subdivision approval, conditions of draft plan approval will include a time-limit within which the school board must make a decision whether or not to purchase the land for school purposes. If the school board decides not to purchase the land, the policies of the plan would allow the area to be used for low-density residential purposes.*
- *Urban Design Guidelines have been developed to primarily guide the physical appearance and layout of multi-unit residential and commercial buildings located in the area.*
- *The location of two stormwater management ponding areas have been identified on either side of the Degroot watercourse for the purpose of centralizing these facilities for the benefit of all the lands within the North Meadows area.*

ZONING BY-LAW:

Much of the lands within the Secondary Plan area are located within the 'Future Development (FD)' Zone of the Strathroy-Caradoc Zoning By-law. The 'FD' zone applies to undeveloped or underdeveloped parcels of land that have been identified as having future development opportunities on their own or in a coordinated manner with adjacent lands. The existing enclave of residential dwellings in the north-west side of the plan are located within the 'Low Density Residential (R1) Zone', while the farm one the east side of the plan is located within the 'Low Density Residential Holding (R1-H-5) Zone which requires the completion of a development agreement (and the Secondary Plan) prior to development of the lands. Some natural heritage areas along the south end of the area are located within the 'Environmental Protection (EP) Zone.

The zoning of the area has been in effect since 2008, at the time of the first Strathroy-Caradoc Zoning By-law.

It is noted that the zoning of the lands will stay in place until such time as a site-specific zone change application is made for the purpose of implementing a development application.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION:

Circulation and notice of the statutory public meeting has been in accordance with the provisions of the Planning Act. It is noted that landowners with 240 m of the area received notice of the public meeting (representing double the circulation distance required per the Planning Act).

Public Comments

Staff, agencies and the public participated in a number of consultation meetings throughout the process and Monteith Brown prepared a 'Summary of Consultation and Preferred Land Use Plan' report which summarizes the results of the consultation meetings as of February 20, 2020 (this document is available on the website).

Since February 2020, Monteith Brown and staff have undertaken a virtual public Open House (September 7, 2020) and landowner consultations (Oct/Nov 2020) for the purpose of presenting, discussing and receiving feedback on the preferred draft plan. Correspondence received from landowners in response to the preferred draft plan was attached to the January 18, 2021 public meeting and is again attached to the report below.

Staff offer a summary and response to the public comments received to date at the Open House and during the Public Meeting:

Public Comment: The inclusion of medium and high density residential development areas in the Plan do not align with market demand or are in keeping with the low-rise character of Strathroy;

Staff Response: It is the opinion of staff the proposed medium and high density housing will address the pressing need for more affordable ownership and rental housing options in the community.

Public Comment: The inclusion of large parks in the area are not necessary and takes development opportunity away from the lands.

Staff Response: The 2015 Parks and Recreation Master Plan identified the existing residents in the north end as being underserved by park space. The size and location of the proposed park areas are intended to address the existing park space deficiency. Parks are an important component of a healthy, active community.

Public Comment: There is concern that the proposed road configuration limits access to Second Street.

Staff Response: Second Street is constructed as a County arterial road, intended to convey a large volume of traffic along the north end of Strathroy. In order for the road to function as designed, the transportation report, as well as the County engineer, recommended limiting the number of accesses to Second Street from the development area.

Public Comment: The use of a roundabout is not a safe intersection design for this neighbourhood, particularly given the proximity of the lands for a potential school site.

Staff Response: The roundabout is a conceptual intersection design at this point. Final intersection design will not be determined until such time as a plan of subdivision is submitted for consideration. Policies of the Secondary Plan prioritize pedestrian safety in the consideration of intersection design.

Public Comment: The location of trails in proximity to low density residential areas / backyards are undesirable;

Staff Response: The location of trails is intended to promote physical activity, community connectivity and active transportation. The existing Rotary Trail is a highly used and valued trail system and Council directed that the Secondary Plan both protect and enhance this trail system as a desirable neighbourhood amenity.

Public Comment: The existing traffic volumes and speed on Second Street will only increase with the development proposed and there will be a need for sidewalks / bike lanes to separate pedestrians and cyclists from traffic

Staff Response: Second Street is identified as a location for sidewalks along its south side as well as separated bike lane. A Transportation Study was undertaken to review the traffic and intersection implications associated with the plan. A number of intersection improvements were identified as being required as the development area is phased in over time.

Public Comment: The Secondary Plan places two zones over individual properties.

Staff Response: The Secondary Plan recommends the location of Official Plan designations, not 'zone categories' on lands. The exact limits of the Official Plan designation boundaries are approximate and only when they are defined by roads, railways or other such physical features are they to be considered absolute. In other words, the designation boundaries are flexible.

Public Comment: The Secondary Plan is not consistent with the existing Official Plan in regards to the type of housing forms permitted in the low, medium and high density residential designations. Single-detached dwellings should be permitted in low and medium density residential designations.

Staff Response: The intent of the Secondary Planning area is to increase the types of housing forms and density in comparison the housing forms and densities permitted in the general policies of the existing Official Plan. The purpose of permitting single-detached dwellings only in 'low density residential designated areas' is to ensure medium and high density areas actually include more dense forms of housing.

Public Comment: The 'Island' has not been designated for development, but rather for passive natural area. There is too much park space in the plan. It should be made available for residential development.

Staff Response: The 'Island' is outside of the North Meadows Secondary Plan and is subject to existing Official Plan policies directing that it be a location of natural regeneration. Virtually the entire area is subject to regulation by the Conservation Authority.

Public Comment: The existing homes south of Second Street should not be subject to the North Meadows Secondary Plan policies, rather development of these lands should be considered as 'in-fill' intensification.

Staff Response: All lands within the Secondary Plan area have been subject to the requirement for a Secondary Plan before development can proceed since 2008 and will be subject to the policies contained therein upon final approval. All future development applications will be assessed based on their conformity to the Secondary Plan.

Written Objection: One formal written objection was received from an area landowner, noting objections to the dual designations on the lands, the proposed location of the trail along the south boundary of the property and that the Plan would not permit a three (3) lot severance proposal for the purpose of creating three single-detached dwellings in a 'flag-ship' configuration on a shared private road connected to Second Street.

Staff Response: As noted above, the boundary of Official Plan designations are flexible unless fixed by a road, railway track or other similar physical feature and the 'trail' location is also approximate and not fixed until such time as a development application is made. Further, the 'trail' could be either a sidewalk or off-road trail – its final composition is unknown until such time as a development application is brought forward. Finally, the intent and purpose of the Secondary Plan is to set the expectations for development in the area as being a community that is comprised of a variety of housing forms and types at a high density rate and in a manner that is inter-connected by way of local streets and trails. A three lot development on a private road extending services off of Second Street is not consistent with the principals of development in this area and would not be supported by the policies of the North Meadows Secondary Plan.

Agency Comments

At the time of writing the subject report, agency comments were received from the Thames Valley District School Board and the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (agency comments attached).

Staff and the consultants have worked with both the SCRCA and TVDSB to ensure their comments are adequately addressed in the policies of the Secondary Plan.

Final Plan Modifications

As noted earlier, the policies and schedules of the plan have been further modified since the public meeting in response to comments received by the public and agencies. These modifications are considered minor in nature, and include the following:

- The text of the Official Plan Amendment has been revised to reflect that the natural heritage features are shown on Schedule M2 and the natural hazards are shown on Schedule K;
- Revision to policies for SSPA#2 to highlight the development constraints on the property due to its unusual configuration; and,
- Urban Design Guidelines modified to consistently reference the site plan trigger as being 'three or more' attached residential units.

Staff Comments

No concerns or comments from staff have been received which have not been addressed in this report. It is noted that the Plan was developed, in part based on the review, feedback and direction provided by the Municipal Steering Committee throughout the process. The Municipal Steering Committee included the Director of Building, Planning and Waste Services, the Director of Community Services, the Director of Engineering and Public Works, the Manager of Building and Planning, as well as the County Planner for Strathroy-Caradoc.

ANALYSIS

Based on the above analysis, it is staff's opinion that the draft North Meadows Secondary Plan as implemented by Official Plan Amendment No. 12 is consistent with the Planning Act, the Provincial Policy Statement, conforms to the County of Middlesex Official Plan and the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc and represents sound land use planning.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

None

ATTACHMENTS:

- Location Map
- Draft Final North Meadows Secondary Plan
- Draft Final North Meadows Urban Design Guidelines
- Schedule M1 – Land Use Designations
- Schedule M2 – Natural Heritage Designations
- Official Plan Amendment No. 12
- Written Objection – February 5, 2021
- Landowner Comments
- Agency Comments