

Meeting Date: January 17, 2022
Department: Building, By-law & Planning
Report No.: BBP-2022-10
Submitted by: Jennifer Huff, Director of Building & Planning
Approved by: Fred Tranquilli, Chief Administrative Officer / Clerk
SUBJECT: ‘Growing Together’ Official Plan Progress Report – January 2022

RECOMMENDATION: THAT: Council receive Report BBP-2022-10 for information; and further; **THAT:** Council support modifying the work plan so as to complete a red-lined revised Official Plan for Council adoption before the Settlement Boundary Process is complete.

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.

Specifically, the 5-Year update to the Official Plan was identified as one of several short-term tactics necessary to achieve the above noted strategic priorities.

BACKGROUND:

In October 2020 the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc embarked upon the completion of an Official Plan 5-Year update and engaged WSP, a planning consulting firm, to complete this project along with other Master Plans. The Official Plan Update project has been branded as the “**Growing Together Strathroy-Caradoc**” Project.

A website has been created that is dedicated to the Official Plan review project:

growingtogethersc.ca. It is a live website that is continually updated and reviewed as this project progresses. The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Council and the public on the

progress of the project and anticipated next steps. The project can be divided into three (3) key components, being:

1. Scoped Settlement Area Boundary Review
2. Official Plan Review and Master Plans
3. Comprehensive Settlement Area Review

The last update Council received on the project was via Report BBP-2021-56, provided on the September 7th, 2021 Council agenda.

COMMENTS:

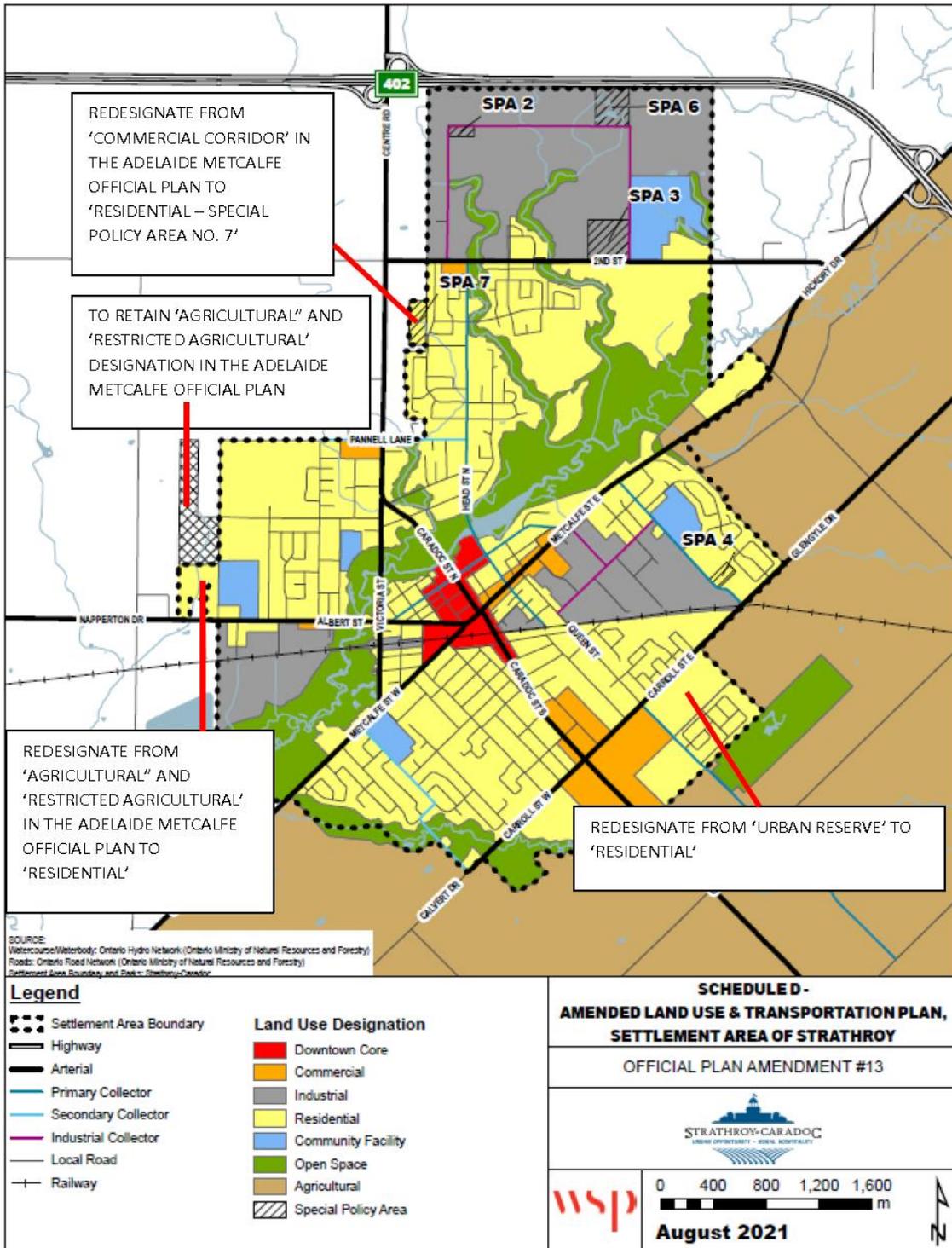
The following provides a brief description of each of the three (3) key project components noted above and their current status.

1. Scoped Settlement Area Boundary Review

Description: The purpose of this component was to assign appropriate Official Plan designations to parcels of lands within Strathroy that were either not designated or had 'placeholder' designations within the Strathroy-Caradoc Official Plan. This component focused on three (3) parcels of land, as shown on Location Map 1 (below).

Status: This project component is complete. Council adopted Official Plan Amendment No. 13 (OPA 13) on September 20th, 2021 and the County of Middlesex approved OPA 13 November 23, 2021. There has been no appeal of the County's decision, therefore this decision is now final.

Location Map No. 1 – Project Component No. 1 - OPA 13 Designations of Lands in Strathroy



2. Background Reports and Master Plans

Description: The purpose of this component was two-fold. First, the Project Team has undertaken a number of master plans and studies to provide a fulsome understanding of the land use, infrastructure and servicing context within the Municipality. It was then intended that the findings and recommendations of each of these master plans and studies would guide the updates to the Official Plan and the completion of a red-lined revised version of the Official Plan. The updated Official Plan would also consider matters of Provincial and County policy conformity as part of its 5-year review, which together with the master plans and studies, were identified in the 'Official Plan Review Background Report' that was endorsed by Council on August 16, 2021.

In total, eight (8) master plans and studies are either complete or in the process of being completed. In addition to these eight (8) master plans and studies, a 'Policy Directions and Conformity Report' was also prepared in support of the Official Plan update to identify specific recommendations and directions to consider. It is noted that many of the completed reports are available for review on the project website, www.growingtogethersc.ca.

A brief description and status of each of the reports is provided below.

Table 1: Description and Summary of Background Reports / Master Plans

BACKGROUND REPORT / MASTER PLAN	DESCRIPTION	STATUS
Fire Station Location Study	Purpose is to review existing fire services in the Municipality to identify the best location(s) for future fire stations and other service enhancements.	Completed. Available on project website.
Attainable Housing Background Report	Purpose is to outline an action plan to address the gaps between the demand for and supply of attainable housing, as well as housing affordability in the Municipality.	Completed. Available on the project website.
Parks and Recreation Master Plan	Purpose is to understand the needs and priorities related to parks and recreation. This includes services and amenities such as parkland, community facilities, operations and programs.	Completed. Available on project website.
Employment Lands Background Report	Purpose is to provide an assessment of the employment land (industrial land) requirements for the next 25+ years to support local economic development.	Completed. Available on project website.
Regional Commercial Needs Background Report	Purpose is to review the location of existing designated commercial areas, such as shopping areas, to determine if there is enough land to meet current	Completed. Available on project website.

	and anticipated market needs and respond to consumer trends.	
Recreation Trails Master Plan	Purpose is to identify future trail routes and improvements to existing trails, promote a healthy and active community, guide the long-term implementation of a trails network across the Municipality.	Draft report in process.
Transportation Master Plan	Purpose is to provide recommendations and strategies to improve the transportation system in the Municipality, address the multi-modal needs for how people move and respond to future travel needs.	Draft report in process.
Servicing Constraints Study	Purpose is to evaluate the capacity for drinking water, wastewater and storm water systems in response to current and future needs in the Municipality.	Draft report in process.
Policy Directions and Conformity Report	Report is to review the existing Official Plan relative to new Provincial Policies and legislation / guidelines for consistency / conformity and make recommendations.	Completed. Available on project website.

Status: While the project timeline originally had anticipated completion of all eight (8) of the reports by fall of 2021, it is now anticipated that these reports will be completed by end of February 2022, at which time the Policy Directions and Conformity Report will be finalized. Accordingly, it is now anticipated that the red-lined revised version of the Official Plan will be completed by March 2022.

3. Settlement Boundary Review / Comprehensive Review

Description: The Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc contains two (2) settlement areas referred to as Strathroy and Mt. Brydges. The Strathroy-Caradoc Official Plan defines the specific boundaries of those settlements which allows for growth and development to happen within the Settlement Boundaries, while the areas outside of these boundaries are considered 'Prime Agricultural lands' or privately / partially serviced 'Hamlet Areas'. Growth and development is restricted on lands outside of the Settlement Boundaries.

The intent of focusing growth and development inside 'Settlement Boundaries' is to:

- minimize the fragmentation of agricultural and natural heritage lands to protect their viability and function;
- promote efficient land use, infrastructure and development in a manner that is financially viable for a Municipality to maintain over the long-term (i.e. installation and long term maintenance, repair and replacement of infrastructure such as roads, sewers, water, storm water, parks);

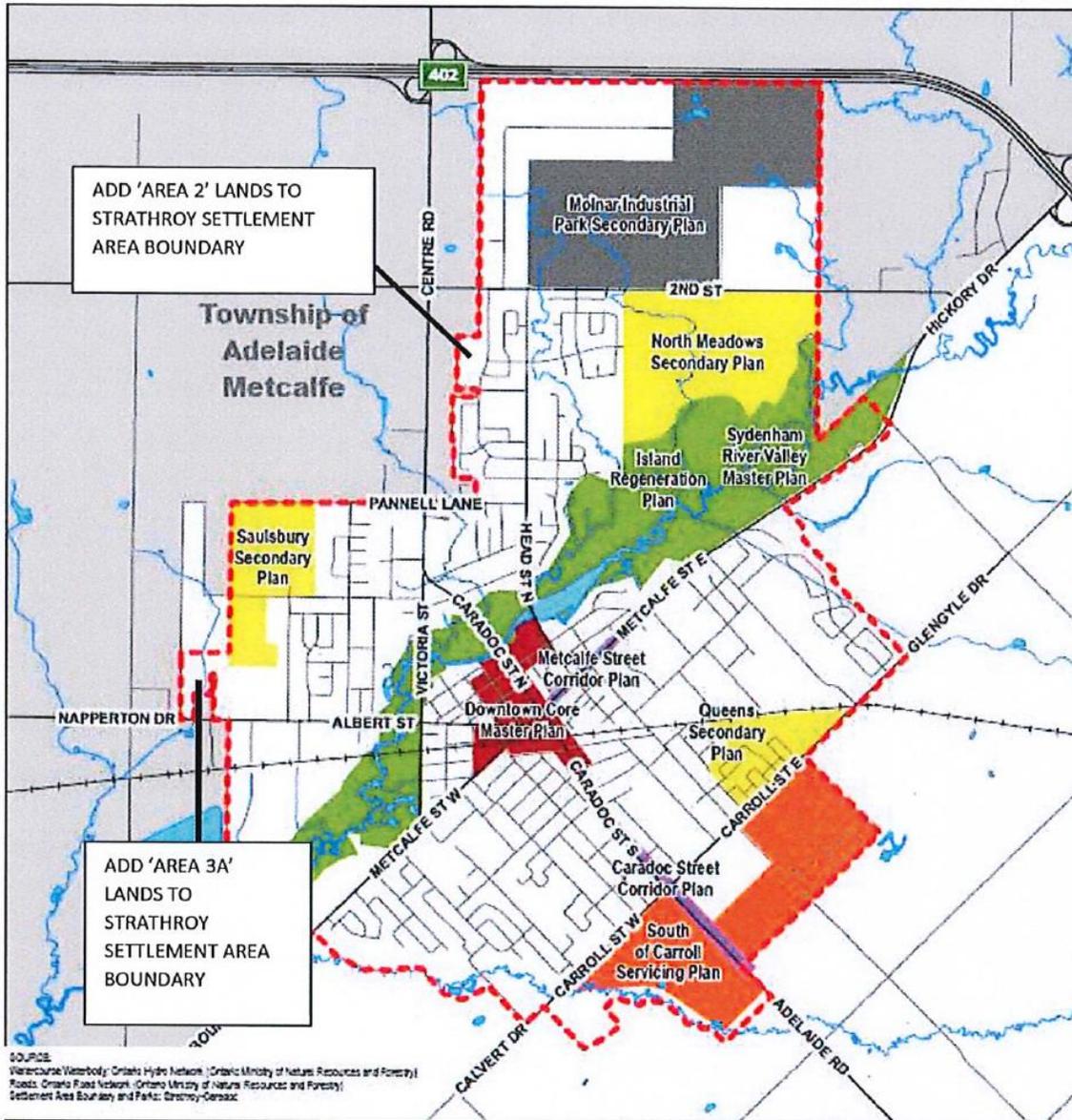
- promote healthy, active communities that are compact and allow for connections for social, economic and health purposes;
- ensure an adequate land supply is available for residential, recreational / open space, commercial and employment land needs over a 25-Year horizon to facilitate vibrant, livable, and adaptive communities.

While over simplifying it, a Settlement Boundary review assesses the need, if any, to bring lands that are currently outside a Settlement Boundary and identified as 'agricultural' within both the Zoning By-law and Official Plan, into the Settlement Boundary and then re-designate the lands to allow for residential, commercial or employment development in the Official Plan.

It is necessary for lands to be within a Settlement Boundary before they can be re-zoned or subject to the subdivision/site plan control applications proposing development of the lands. A development application received for lands outside the Settlement Boundary would be considered pre-mature and incomplete – staff would issue a 'Notice of Incomplete' and the application would not proceed (unless an appeal of the Notice was filed).

Location Maps 2 and 3 below illustrates the existing Settlement Boundaries of Strathroy and Mt. Brydges.

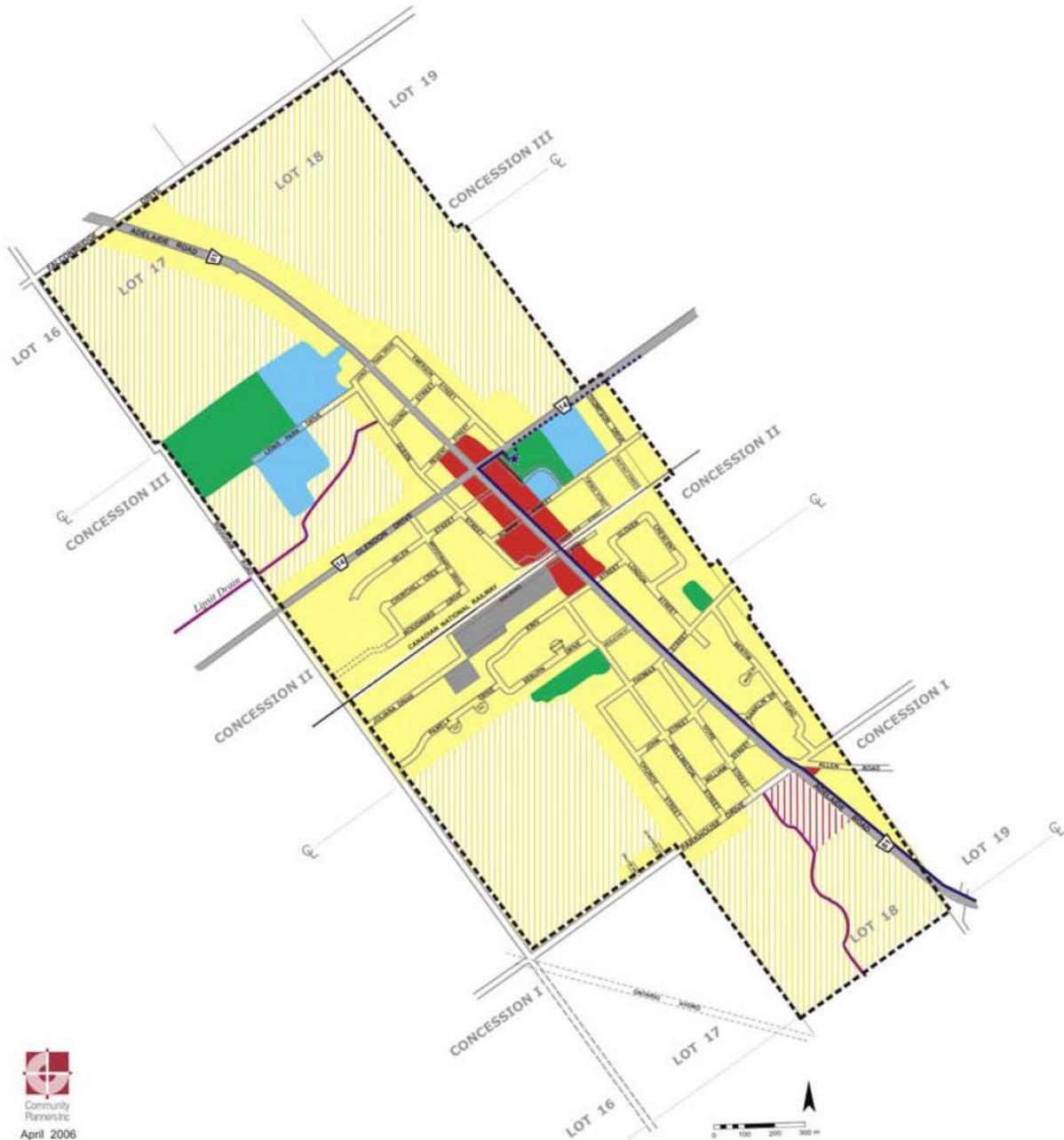
Location Map 2 – Settlement Boundary – Strathroy (red dotted line)



SOURCES
 Watercourse/Waterbody: Ontario Hydro Network (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry)
 Roads: Ontario Road Network (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry)
 Settlement Area Boundary and Parks: Strathroy-Caradoc

<p>Legend</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strathroy Settlement Area Boundary Molnar Industrial Park Secondary Plan (Section 3.3.3.4) North Meadows Secondary Plan (Section 3.4.4.12) Saulsbury Secondary Plan (Section 3.3.5.13) Queens Secondary Plan (Section 3.3.4.13) Downtown Core Master Plan (Section 3.3.1.7) Sydenham River Valley Master Plan (Section 3.3.7.1) Caradoc Street Corridor Plan (Section 3.3.2.5) Metcalfe Street Corridor Plan (Section 3.3.2.5) South of Carroll Servicing Plan (Section 3.4.3.1) Island Regeneration Plan (Section 3.3.4.14) 	<p style="text-align: center;">SCHEDULE E - SPECIAL STUDY AREAS</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">OFFICIAL PLAN AMENDMENT #13</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"> STRATHROY-CARADOC TOWNSHIP</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"> 0 400 800 1,200 1,600 m</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"> May 2021 </p>
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Location Map 3 – Settlement Boundary – Mt. Brydges



The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) regulates the manner in which Councils determine how and if a boundary should expand, by how much and where.

The PPS states that a Settlement Boundary expansion can only happen as part of a process that deals with the issue 'comprehensively', through a process called a 'Comprehensive Review'.

A 'Comprehensive Review' process includes the following elements:

- Assessment of whether there is sufficient capacity in existing or planned infrastructure and public service facilities over the long term and whether they are financially viable over their life-cycle and protect health and safety and the natural environment.
- Assessment of the potential impacts of a settlement boundary expansion relative to agricultural areas, natural heritage features, corridors, functions, and natural hazards.
- Assessment of the need for an expansion must be determined based on population, housing, and employment projections relative to the existing land supply.

It is noted that while a Land Needs Assessment (LNA) was completed in 2019 to assess population and housing needs relative to supply, one of the first tasks for this project will be to update this LNA to reflect current land supply as well as the recommendations for any designation changes resulting from the background reports and Master Plans.

Finally, a major component of this exercise is the need for a fully transparent evaluation process that is consistent, fair and thorough in evaluating ALL of the areas surrounding BOTH Strathroy and Mt. Brydges Settlement Boundaries. The PPS does not allow the municipality to consider the needs of each settlement boundary on its own, but rather requires the municipality to base the evaluation process on the needs of the municipality **as a whole**.

Staff are currently aware of a number of landowners / developers who would like their parcels brought into the settlement boundary of Mt. Brydges or Strathroy in order to allow for their development. The benefits to the landowners / developers whose lands are brought into the boundary is the immediate increase in the value of their lands due to the development potential, as well as the value gained if the landowner / developer actually participates in the land development process. For this reason, this process is often considered very competitive and can be associated with political pressure as landowners/developers try to position themselves favourably with local and County Councillors who ultimately will make a decision on whether to expand a boundary, and / or by how much, and where. Staff anticipate, based on the internal 2019 Land Needs Assessment completed, that there will not be enough population and housing need to justify a Settlement Boundary expansion that would satisfy all of the landowners who are interested. However, this will not be known until the Municipality undertakes and completes the formal Municipal Comprehensive Review process.

Accordingly, a key component of this project has been providing an opportunity to landowners to bring forward their requests during a formal consultation program, as well as developing a formal set

of evaluation criteria which will be used to evaluate all of the lands being considered having regard for growth projections and the need for various housing and development forms. Staff/consultant recommendations regarding where the boundaries should be adjusted will be the end result based on scores using the evaluation criteria.

Landowners / developers who are not satisfied with the outcome of a Settlement Boundary Expansion process have the option of appealing such a decision to the Ontario Lands Tribunal (OLT).

For all of the reasons noted above, staff have directed all inquiries from landowners / developers to the WSP Project Team who have logged those requests and any additional information provided, until such time as this part of the project officially begins. Staff and the WSP Project Team have also declined to participate in discussions with landowners / developers about particular parcels of lands they wish considered for a boundary adjustment so as to maintain transparency, consistency and to avoid creating a perception of providing favorable treatment to any single landowner. This is particularly important so as to avoid the Municipality becoming unnecessarily involved in any appeals to the OLT.

Members of Council must exercise a duty of fairness when making decisions. Administrative staff have a similar professional obligation. In order to maintain the integrity and transparency of the process, having the request of interested landowners vetted through the WSP Project Team and evaluation criteria is important to protect the decision making process and mitigate against the potential for litigation on the basis of bias or unfairness. This approach is consistent with previous reports to Council, as follows:

- Land Needs Assessment Report | August 2020
- Landowner & Development Community Meeting, February 23, 2021 where landowners and developers were invited to engage in the boundary adjustment project and the process was explained in detail
- Section 26 Council Public Meeting/Staff Report, March 15, 2021

Several landowners have retained planning and engineering consultants who have already made submissions to the WSP Project Team in support of their requests.

Status: Scheduled to begin February 2022 – Estimated Completion Date March 2023.

OVERALL PROJECT STATUS

It is staff's recommendation that the project timelines and outcomes be slightly modified.

Originally, the project included the preparation of a red-lined revised Official Plan reflecting the recommendations of the background reports, master plans and the policy directions and conformity report. This red-lined OP was then to be put on pause until after the completion of the Settlement Boundary Review, upon which it would then be amended to reflect the recommendations of the Settlement Boundary Review. The original project outcome would have only one Official Plan Amendment brought forward to Council for consideration of adoption and approval.

Staff are now proposing that the red-lined revised OP be brought forward for Council's consideration BEFORE completion of the Settlement Boundary Review process. This first OPA could be adopted before July 2022 and would implement key policy changes resulting from the master plans and studies, along with other housekeeping and conformity updates. A separate OPA would then be brought forward after the Settlement Boundary Review Process is complete and would deal solely with the recommendations of the Municipal Comprehensive Review.

The benefits of this suggested change include:

- An interim OPA will allow a significant body of work to be completed prior to the election and allow the project team to continue working on the Settlement Boundary Review process while the new term of Council is commenced.
- As boundary adjustment OPAs are often appealed, it could avoid 'tying-up' large components of the Official Plan not directly tied to the boundary review until an OLT hearing is completed.
- The existing Official Plan is dated, and it would provide the Municipality with a much needed, up-to-date Official Plan sooner than previously scheduled.
- It puts into effect all of the recommendations of the master plans and studies sooner than previously scheduled.
- The Middlesex County Official Plan Review is in process and is not anticipated to be completed in 2022. The 'second' OPA will allow the Municipality to consider the outcomes of the County OP Review and incorporate any additional changes required.

Attached to this report is a modified work schedule for consideration by Council.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

This modification will now require going through the statutory OP approval process twice, rather than once. Accordingly, there will be additional costs incurred largely related to consultation, preparing an additional OPA, report review and project management. These costs by WSP have been estimated to be \$30,925.00 + HST. These additional costs should be addressed as part of the 2022 operating budget exercise.

**ATTACHMENTS:
MODIFIED WORK PLAN**

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