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**Subject:** Official Plan Review Update: Draft Policy Directions Report and Commercial Policy Study (D08)

**Staff Report No.** DS-046-21

**Department:** Development Services

**Date:** November 16, 2021

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**Recommendation:**

- 1) That Council endorse in principle the draft Policy Directions Report, November 2021 (Attachment 1 to this Report); and
- 2) That Council direct staff to proceed with the preparation of the new draft Official Plan, as part of Phase 3: Policy Development, of the Official Plan Review; and
- 3) That Council endorse in principle the Commercial Policy Study, Phase 1 Report: Market Analysis and Background Review, November 2021 (Attachment 3 to this Report); and
- 4) That Council direct staff to proceed with Phase 2: Policy Review and Framework, of the Commercial Policy Study, as a component of the Official Plan Review.

**1. Purpose:**

The purpose of this Report is to provide Council with an update on the status of the Town's Official Plan Review (OPR) and to seek Council endorsement in principle of the revised Draft Policy Directions Report, November 2021, and the Commercial Policy Study, Phase 1 Report: Market Analysis and Background Review, November 2021; and to direct staff to proceed with the preparation of the new Official Plan, as part of Phase 3: Policy Development.

**2. Executive Summary:**

The Town's Official Plan Review (OPR) will address the opportunities and challenges of planning and building in the Town and will result in a new Official Plan that implements

Provincial and Regional planning policies in a locally appropriate manner. The new Official Plan will establish a unified community vision and policy directions for managing growth and development in the Town to the year 2051.

Staff have completed Phases 1 and 2 of the OPR consultation activities that have included work associated with establishing the Community Vision and Guiding Principles and the preparation of four Discussion Papers to identify key issues and preliminary policy directions to be considered in the new Official Plan. Council endorsed the Community Vision Summary Report and Discussion Papers on July 20, 2021.

Since that time, Staff have undertaken work program items in Phase 3 of the OPR which included the preparation of the draft Policy Directions Report, and a series of meetings with stakeholders and the public, including two public open houses held on October 7, 2021. Sections 4.1 and 4.2 of this Report provides an overview of the key policy directions, including a summary of the results of the consultation activities.

The Town is also undertaking a Commercial Policy Study to assess the commercial policies and designations of the Town's Official Plan and forecast future market demand for commercial needs. A series of public open houses were held on September 15, 2021 to present the background research, key findings and feedback received from the online survey which was undertaken over the summer of 2021. Section 4.3 of this Report provides an overview of these findings and preliminary policy directions.

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The Town's OPR is being undertaken iteratively with the Region's Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR). It is anticipated that a draft of the Town's new Official Plan will be available for review and consultation by early to mid 2022.

### **3. Background:**

The Town's Official Plan Review (OPR) was formally initiated on June 18, 2019, with a Special Meeting of Council, in accordance with Section 26(3) of the *Planning Act*, to solicit public input on the issues that should be addressed through the OPR. Council endorsed an Introductory Discussion Paper, a Communications Plan, a preliminary Work Program and Schedule, and a list of Planning Principles and Directions to guide the OPR process, as outlined in Staff Report No. DS-033-19, June 18, 2019.

The OPR will address the opportunities and challenges of planning and building in the Town and will result in a new Official Plan that implements Provincial and Regional

planning policies in a locally appropriate manner. The new Official Plan will seek to direct and manage growth in a sustainable manner, promote a more complete and healthy community, and continue to protect and enhance our natural environment, and agricultural and rural resources. The new Official Plan will establish a unified community vision and policy directions for managing growth and development in the Town to the year 2051.

In March 2020, the Town retained a consulting team lead by WSP Group Canada Inc. (WSP) to assist in undertaking the Town's OPR.

Phase 1 primarily included consultation activities that included work associated with establishing the Community Vision and Guiding Principles to support the preparation of the Town's new Official Plan. This included:

- Online public and stakeholder consultations
- Virtual meetings with the OPR Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC)
- Virtual public workshop on September 23, 2020
- Presentation of the Draft Community Vision Report Summary to Council on November 3, 2020.

Throughout January 2021, staff undertook additional online consultations and surveys to receive feedback on the draft Community Vision and Guiding Principles. Based on comments received, a revised Draft Community Vision Summary Report, March 2021 was prepared and was endorsed by Council on July 20, 2021.

As part of Phase 2 of the OPR work program, a series of four Discussion Papers were prepared to identify the key issues and preliminary policy directions to be considered in the new Official Plan, which included:

- Planning for Growth Discussion Paper;
- Planning for the Natural Environment Discussion Paper;
- Planning for Complete Communities Discussion Paper; and
- General Technical/Housekeeping Updates Discussion Paper.

The Discussion Papers were subsequently endorsed by Council on July 20, 2021, and staff was directed to proceed with Phase 3: Policy Development of the OPR.

In January, 2021, the Town retained urbanMetrics to undertake the Commercial Policy Study in support of the OPR. A series of public open houses were held on September 15, 2021 to present the background research, key findings and feedback received from the online survey which was undertaken over the summer of 2021. The Commercial Policy Study, Phase 1 Report: Market Analysis and Background Review, November 2021, presents these findings and preliminary policy directions.

The Town's OPR is being undertaken iteratively with the Region's Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR). A first draft of the Region's new Official Plan is anticipated to be available for consultation in November 2021, with potential adoption by

Regional Council anticipated by June 2022. It is anticipated that a draft of the Town's new Official Plan will be available for review by early to mid 2022, pending completion of the Region's MCR.

#### 4. Analysis and Options:

The following provides an overview of the consultation activities undertaken to date (Section 4.1); a summary of the revised draft Policy Directions Report, November 2021 (Section 4.2) and the Commercial Policy Study, Phase 1 Report: Market Analysis and Background Review, November 2021 (Section 4.3).

##### 4.1 Overview of OPR Consultation and Engagement Activities

The following table provides an overview of the OPR consultation and engagement activities, status, and anticipated timing.

**Table1 – OPR Consultation and Engagement Activities**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Status / Timing</b>
<b>PHASE 1 - VISIONING AND CONSULTATION</b>		
1.1 Communications Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Communications and Engagement Strategy provides an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the project team, engagement activities and tactics, and our approach for engaging the public and stakeholders.</li> <li>The engagement tactics will be further refined as the OPR progresses.</li> </ul>	June 2020
1.2 Project Kick-Off Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Project Kick-Off Meeting was held with the Steering Committee (SC) to review the OPR work program and schedule, engagement activities, and discuss issues to be addressed through the OPR.</li> </ul>	April 15, 2020
1.3.1 TAC/SAC Meeting #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual meetings were held with both the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) to review the OPR work program and solicit input on the vision and guiding principles that should inform the new Official Plan.</li> </ul>	August 13, 2020
1.3.4 Community Visioning Workshop #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An interactive online Community Visioning Workshop was held to solicit input on the draft vision and guiding principles.</li> </ul>	September 23, 2020
1.3.5 Council Meeting #1 and 1.6 Visioning Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A presentation was provided to Council on the draft Visioning Report (Task 1.6) which outlined the findings of the Phase 1 consultation activities,</li> </ul>	November 3, 2020

Task	Description	Status / Timing
	presented the draft vision and guiding principles, and identified key issues to be addressed through the OPR. An online survey was subsequently made available in January 2021 to present the draft vision and guiding principles and receive further input.	
<b>PHASE 2 - BACKGROUND STUDIES AND DISCUSSION PAPERS</b>		
2.3.1 TAC/SAC Meeting #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual meetings were held with both the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) to review and receive feedback on the Draft Discussion Papers.</li> </ul>	March 10, 2021
2.3.4 Public Open House #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A series of two interactive virtual Public Open Houses were held to receive input on the Draft Discussion Papers.</li> </ul>	May 6, 2021 (afternoon and evening)
2.3.5 Council Meeting #2, and 2.4 Finalize Discussion Papers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Council meeting was held to present and receive endorsement on the revised Discussion Papers.</li> </ul>	July 20, 2021
<b>PHASE 3 - POLICY DEVELOPMENT</b>		
3.2.1 SC/TAC/SAC Meeting #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual meetings were held with both the Steering Committee (SC), Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) to review and receive feedback on the Draft Discussion Papers.</li> </ul>	October 5, 2021
3.2.4 Public Open House #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A series of two interactive virtual Public Open Houses were held to receive input on the Draft Discussion Papers.</li> </ul>	October 7, 2021
3.2.6 Council Meeting #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Council meeting will be held to present the draft Policy Directions Report for Council endorsement.</li> </ul>	November 16, 2021
3.3 Finalize Policy Direction Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on Council recommendations the Policy Directions Report will be finalized.</li> </ul>	November 2021
3.4 Preparation of Draft Official Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff will proceed with the preparation of the new draft Official Plan for consultation.</li> </ul>	Winter 2021/ 2022

For the Phase 3 Public Open Houses (October 7, 2021), Town staff used similar consultation techniques and meeting advertisements/notifications as used for the previous Public Open Houses, including:

- Two virtual online Public Open Houses including interactive questions and

discussions.

- Updates to the project website ([www.cometogetherws.ca/opr](http://www.cometogetherws.ca/opr)) to make the Draft Policy Directions Report publicly available and receive feedback on the Report.
- Notifications and advertisements for the meeting were distributed through the Town's social media networks, local newspaper, mobile signs, On The Road, and the OPR Interested Parties list (e-newsletter).
- A dedicated email address is available to provide comments on the OPR ([opreview@townofws.ca](mailto:opreview@townofws.ca)) or to be added to the interested parties list.

## **4.2 Draft Policy Directions Report**

The Policy Directions Report identifies opportunities for the Town in planning for expected growth and investment, while maintaining its unique rural character by strategically managing growth. The Report presents policy recommendations that will implement the long-term vision of the new Town Official Plan.

Based upon public and stakeholder feedback received (in accordance with the public consultation described in Section 4.2.1 below), a revised Policy Directions Report, November 2021, has been prepared for Council endorsement, which is included in Attachment 1. The draft Policy Directions Report was made available on the OPR project webpage ([www.cometogetherws.ca/opr](http://www.cometogetherws.ca/opr)). The proposed policy directions have been organized by key theme area, which include:

### **Planning for Growth (S. 4.1)**

Ensuring smart growth through directing residential and employment growth in the Town's settlement areas, through policy directions related to:

- Residential Growth and Intensification Strategy
- Employment Growth and Economic Development
- Transportation System
- Water, Wastewater and Other Infrastructure

### **Planning for Complete Communities (S. 4.2)**

Promoting the Town as a place where homes, jobs, schools, community services, parks and recreational facilities are easily accessible, and support a high quality of life, through policy directions related to:

- Affordable and Attainable Housing
- Built Form and Urban Design
- Cultural Heritage Resources
- Parks, Trails and Open Spaces
- Health and Well-being

### **Planning for the Natural Environment (S. 4.3)**

Promoting the Town's natural environment through the protection of natural areas and integrating the environment as part of future growth, through policy directions related to:

- Preserving Rural Areas
- Natural Heritage

### **Planning Administration, Implementation and Interpretation (S. 4.4)**

Ensuring that the new Town Official Plan is accessible and understandable to all, and conforms to updated provincial requirements, through policy directions related to:

- Public Engagement and Consultation
- Planning Tools and Administration
- Implementation and Interpretation

#### **4.2.1 Summary of Consultation and Engagement on the Policy Directions Report**

An Official Plan Review Engagement Summary is included in Attachment 2 to this report. The Memo documents the consultation and engagement activities completed during Phase 3 of the Town's OPR and summarizes the feedback received from stakeholders and the public.

On October 5, 2021, Technical Advisory Committee, Stakeholder Advisory Committee, and Steering Committee meetings were held to discuss and receive input on the Policy Directions Report.

On October 7, 2021 the Town hosted two virtual public open houses for the Official Plan Review. The purpose of these virtual Public Open Houses was to provide the public with an opportunity to collect feedback on the Policy Directions Report and generate discussion. The public open houses were well attended with approximately 50 participants at each open house. The public open houses were promoted through various methods including:

- Sun Tribune Newspaper Advertisement;
- Come Together Website;
- Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville Official Facebook Page;
- Social Campaign; and,
- Community Billboards.

The social campaign to promote the public open house meetings involved three ad versions, with the ads linked directly to the Eventbrite registration page for the Public Open House. The social media campaign reached approximately 9,000 residents and 475 clicked through the registration to find more information on the project. Additionally, the Eventbrite registration had 1,055 page views and 185 registrations.

#### **4.2.2 Summary of Key Comments and Revisions to the Policy Directions Report**

The stakeholder and public feedback received during Phase 3 were directly incorporated into finalizing the Policy Directions Report. Notable feedback from stakeholders and the public received during Phase 2 includes the following:

- Promote accessibility to active transportation infrastructure in rural and urban communities.
- Promote a variety of housing types to ensure accessible and adequate housing forms.
- Implement detailed and stringent urban design policies to guide intensification and compatible growth.
- Implement policies that are age-friendly.
- Support on-farm diversified uses and agri-tourism opportunities for a sustainable rural economy.

It should be noted that any comments received after October 26, 2021 and not incorporated into the Policy Directions Report, will still be considered in drafting the new Official Plan.

#### **4.3 Commercial Policy Study: Phase 1 Report: Market Analysis and Background Review, November 2021**

In January, 2021, the Town retained urbanMetrics to undertake the Commercial Policy Study in support of the OPR. The Commercial Policy Study will assess the commercial policies and designations of the Town and forecast future market demand for commercial services. A series of public open houses were held on September 15, 2021 to present the background research, key findings and feedback received from the online survey which was undertaken over the summer of 2021. The Commercial Policy Study, Phase 1 Report: Market Analysis and Background Review, November 2021, presents these findings and preliminary policy directions (Attachment 3 to this Report).

The following provides a summary of the key findings:

##### **Growth and Demographics**

- Whitchurch-Stouffville is a rapidly growing municipality, outpacing population growth experienced across York Region. By 2051, the Town projects that the population will more than double, reaching 101,400. This estimate exceeds preliminary estimates prepared by York Region over the same time period.
- By 2051, the Town projects employment growth to a total of 39,300 jobs in the community, also exceeding projections prepared by York Region.

## Commercial Trends and Survey Results

- E-commerce continues to represent amongst the most disruptive shifts in the commercial retail / services industry to date. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this broader trend. Based on survey research, almost 90% of respondents from the Town indicated that they have increased their spending through online channels as a result of the pandemic.
- Mixed-use development featuring ground floor retail and services has become an important part of sustainable planning and should be incorporated into future planning by the Town. However, it has not been universally successful. Planning policies should be tailored to ensure that appropriate retail uses can be accommodated where they are needed.
- Whitchurch-Stouffville has a diverse range of retailing options, ranging from a traditional main street retail environment to a big box regional power centre.
- Despite the fact that the Community of Stouffville serves as an important commercial node for local and surrounding residents, the Town lacks the full breadth of retail outlets and services that would be expected of a municipality of its size. Survey results indicate that some 45% of residents travel outside of the community to shop on a weekly basis. Population growth and the establishment of a greater critical mass provide the opportunity to address this current shortfall.

## Commercial Supply and Demand Analysis

- There is currently some 1.6 million square feet of retail / service commercial space in Whitchurch-Stouffville. With a reported vacancy rate of 6.5%, the Town's commercial environment is considered healthy.
- The Community of Stouffville accounts for the vast majority—over 85%-- of commercial space in the Town.
- Based on future population growth combined with the need to add additional space to provide a more balanced commercial structure, it is estimated that the Town would require approximately 2.5 million square feet of additional space. This additional space would be divided into four principal areas:
  - Local Serving Retail and Services Space to serve future population growth to be accommodated largely through future Secondary Plans and plans of subdivision (approximately 1,050,000 square feet).
  - Regional Serving Retail Space, which would include filling out the existing Regional Retail Area and the designation of one or two additional sites (approximately 750,000 square feet).
  - Intensification, primarily along Stouffville Road, including the Community Core Area (Downtown), the Western Approach, and the Gateway site (approximately 450,000 Square Feet).

- Select Limited Retail and Services Space in Industrial Areas and Business Parks, including: specialty building supplies, automotive repair and service, ancillary retail and services, local serving offices, and other uses as appropriate (approximately 250,000 square feet).

### **Supply and Demand Reconciliation**

- urbanMetrics has estimated potential known sources of supply of between 700,000 – 800,000 square feet of commercial space. This includes:
  - Sites under development;
  - Minister's Zoning Order Lands;
  - Approved Employment Conversion Requests;
  - Gateway Mixed Use Area;
  - Neighbourhood Retail Area;
  - Lincolnville MTSA and,
  - Other vacant commercially designated lands;
  - Remaining capacity in the Regional Retail Area.

The balance of warranted commercial space is unallocated and will require planning approvals in the future, including:

- a) The designation of lands for Local Serving commercial uses, either as stand-alone commercial sites or as part of mixed-use developments. Typically, these sites would include space ranging from 10,000 to approximately 100,000 square feet and be located on locations strategic to future residential communities, such as gateway sites, important crossroads, or key activity nodes.
- b) The designation of lands for Regional commercial uses. The future population will require some 750,000 square feet of additional commercial space that will serve more than day to day or weekly needs. At present, there is only approximately 80,000 square feet of expansion lands remaining on the Hoover Park Regional Retail Area. The remaining 680,000 square feet of space, which could take the form of one or two single purpose or mixed-use sites, should be situated on a major arterial roadway or preferable at the intersection of two major arterials. Highway 48 in the vicinity of the existing Regional Retail Area would be ideal for all or a portion of this space, given its centrality to existing and future population growth; the importance of Highway 48 as a major transportation corridor; the existing commercial emphasis of the area; and its location in proximity to the Highway 48/Stouffville Road intersection.
- c) Approximately 450,000 square feet has been identified for the Gateway / Western Approach, which represent vacant sites, sites under application and estimated intensification potential along Stouffville Road between Highway 48 and the eastern edge of the Community Core Area (Downtown Stouffville).

- d) Commercial space accommodated on Employment Lands has been estimated at approximately 10% of the total future required space in the Town based on our experience in other municipalities.

The Phase 2 (Policy Review and Framework) Report is anticipated to be brought forward to Council in early 2022 for consideration. The final Report will outline the proposed recommended policy changes to be included in the Town's new Official Plan to assist in meeting the Town's future commercial needs.

#### **4.4 Next Steps**

Subject to Council direction, Staff and the Consulting Team will advance work on Phase 3: Policy Development, which will involve the preparation of the new draft Official Plan and related Schedules. The new draft Official Plan will be made available in early to mid 2022 for public review and consultation.

Phase 4 will involve consultation on the new draft Official Plan which will include a series of meetings with the Project Steering Committee, TAC/SAC and two public open houses, followed by a Statutory Public Meeting before Council to present the new draft Official Plan. A revised draft Official Plan is anticipated to be available for Council adoption in late Q2 2022, subject to the timing of completion of the Region's MCR and the adoption of the Region's new Official Plan.

Over the Winter 2021, staff will also be consulting on the ongoing Preliminary Growth Management Strategy, Housing Strategy, Natural Resources Study and the Commercial Policy Study, being undertaken as part of the Official Plan Review. These studies will further inform the policy development of the new Official Plan.

Town staff will continue to provide regular updates and briefings to Council and seek further direction at key milestones throughout the OPR, including the release of major deliverables and community and stakeholder consultation activities.

#### **5. Financial Implications:**

None

#### **6. Alignment with Strategic Plan:**

1. Expanding the tax base through a growing, diversified economy  
Building and maintaining a tax base that supports the highest quality program and service delivery.
  - Focus on servicing and development of Provincially Significant Employment Zones
  - Identify expansion areas for Industrial / Commercial growth

4. Asset Planning, Maintenance and Development

Successful stewardship of the infrastructure and facilities required to support a growing community and vibrant economy.

- Address / plan for maintenance of existing assets & infrastructure; Create new infrastructure

**7. Attachments:**

Attachment 1 – Official Plan Review: Draft Policy Directions Report, November 2021

Attachment 2 – Re-Imagine Stouffville: Official Plan Review Engagement Summary (Phase 3a), October 29, 2021

Attachment 3 – Commercial Policy Study: Phase 1 Report: Market Analysis and Background Review, November 2021

**8. Related Reports:**

DS-033-19: Official Plan Review – Introductory Report, June 18, 2019

DS-001-20: York Region Municipal Comprehensive Review Update and Major Transit Station Area Delineation, January 21, 2020

DS-017-20: Official Plan Review Update, May 5, 2020

DS-038-20: Official Plan Review Update, August 25, 2020

DS-049-20: Official Plan Review: Draft Visioning Consultation Report, November 3, 2020

DS-011-21: Official Plan Review Update: Phase 2 Consultations, April 6, 2021

DS-012-21: Draft 2051 Growth Forecast and Land Needs Assessment, April 20, 2021

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