



Staff Report

Planning & Development Services – Planning Division

Report To: COW-Operations_Planning_and_Development_Services
Meeting Date: December 10, 2024
Report Number: PDS.24.141
Title: Recommendation Report – Official Plan 5 Year Review
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A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report PDS.24.141, entitled “Recommendation Report – Official Plan 5 Year Review”;

AND THAT Council proceed to adopt Official Plan Amendment No. 5 being the recommended Official Plan Amendment and to direct Staff to forward to the County of Grey for final decision;

B. Overview

This report is intended on providing an update to Council on the Official Plan Review project.

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a summary of all other comments received, a summary of modifications made to the Draft Official Plan Amendment No. 5 since the Public Meeting, and Planning Staff’s recommendation.

C. Background

The Town of The Blue Mountains Official Plan Review started in July 2021 with an initial public meeting, council interviews and Information Report to Council. This process resulted in the finalization of the project framework and public engagement plan, and the creation of a Steering Committee. A detailed project Terms of Reference and project timeline was prepared and endorsed by Council in December 2021 through Staff Report PDS.21.150. The project was divided into phases, with Phase 1 addressing conformity to Upper Tier and Provincial Planning policy documents, and addressing policies related to Density, Height, Character, as well as other Housekeeping matters. Phase 1 culminated in a proposed Amendment which was endorsed in principle by Town Council in December 2022. Phase 2 commenced shortly thereafter, addressing other priority items including Environment/Climate Change, Transit and Transportation, Parks and Open Space, Commercial/Employment Lands, Source Water Protection, Agricultural/Rural Lands, Cannabis, Community Planning Permit Systems, and a more detailed look at building heights across Town. The culmination of Phase 2 is where we

are at today, after having completed a robust and comprehensive community and stakeholder engagement, resulting in a final recommended Official Plan Amendment No. 5.

Engagement

Throughout both Phases of the Official Plan Review process, extensive consultation has been held, as summarized in **Figures 1 and 2** below.

Figure 1: Phase 1 Engagement

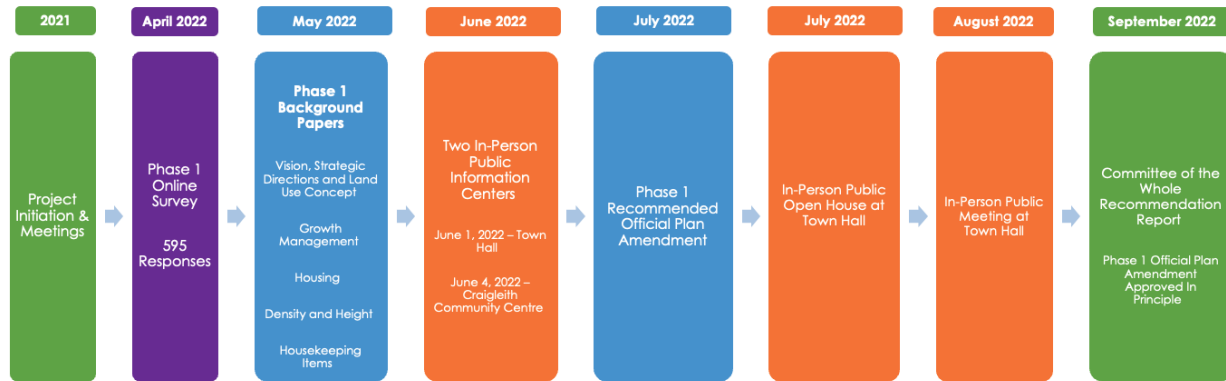


Figure 2: Phase 2 Engagement



After the September/October Public Open House and Public Meeting, Planning Staff completed a comments response matrix (See Attachment #2), ten one-on-one stakeholder meetings (to review their submission, staff response, and proposed modifications), and held an additional Open House on November 22 to provide an additional opportunity for stakeholders to review and comment on final edits.

Throughout the engagement process the key themes of comments received include:

- Preserve community character;
- Balance growth and density;
- Improve housing affordability and availability;
- Enhance environmental protection;
- Reduce land consumption;
- Prioritize sustainable design and climate change adaptation;
- Efficiently use infrastructure;
- Improve economic development opportunities;
- Improve active transportation infrastructure; and
- Protect and enhance parks and open spaces.

The Official Plan project team has included a large number of policy changes to address these themes based on community feedback and best planning practices. At the conclusion of all public engagement, there remains some consistent comments/positions which staff have summarized below in **Table 1**. For more detail on all comments raised and staff response, please refer to the **Analysis** section and **Attachment #4** to this report.

Table 1: Recurring Comments

Comment	Response
The modifications to the Environment / Natural Heritage policies are well received at the goals and objectives level, however even stronger language is requested through specific policies including the removal of ‘encourage’ and replacement with ‘require’.	Project Team supports the proposed flexibility in the Official Plan language and the need to balance environment, social, and economic aspects with no ‘one size fits all’ solution. No further modifications to the Plan are recommended.
Research and recommendations from other Town Studies that are active but not fully completed (such as Natural Asset Inventory, Natural Heritage Study, Drainage Master Plan) should be incorporated into the Official Plan now.	Project Team has made revisions to the Plan. It is anticipated that upon completion of these studies, follow up work and receiving Council endorsement/direction on recommendations that a future Official Plan Amendment will be prepared.
Building Height: Proposed building heights beyond 3 storeys should be scaled back further with 3 storeys maximum to also include sections of Hwy 26 Downtown Area. Maximum building heights should only be permitted where affordable housing is provided. Conflicting comments also received that the Building Height policies are too permissive and too restrictive.	Project Team has reviewed the locations for taller buildings in the Downtown Area and continue to recommend that outside of the historic Bruce Street area, that taller buildings are appropriate. Modifications also include that buildings up to a maximum of 4 storeys are permitted here, and where a community benefit is provided to the satisfaction of Council (such as affordable housing) buildings up to

	5 storeys can be considered in the prescribed Downtown Area.
Density: Density limits are considered too high at 25 Units Per Hectare in Thornbury/Clarksburg and too high at 10 -15 Units Per Hectare for the Residential Recreational Area of Lora Bay, Camperdown, and Craigleith. Consideration should be given to not include minimum density and to reduce maximums to a modest increase only.	Project Team continues to recommend that the density increases are appropriate and that the introduction of minimum densities can encourage a larger mix and range of housing types. Increases to density offer better opportunities to support affordable housing development and efficiently use municipal services.
Overall there is a unified recognition and desire for Affordable/Attainable Housing in the community. Comments received indicate that policies may not deliver lower priced units when considering the strict controls proposed on density, intensification and community design. In addition, the Town may be overreaching the available permissions under the Planning Act and PPS.	From the onset of the Official Plan project, there has been a requirement to include strong affordable/attainable housing policies that will aid in delivering units. The Project Team believes that the proposed policies as modified are appropriate and will result in an incremental step to deliver a larger variety of housing types and price points that currently exist. Together with annual housing monitoring, future policy modifications can be considered.

Overall Strategic Alignment

The Official Plan Review project was identified within the Corporate Strategic Plan 2020 – 2024 as Priority 3.2. Specifically, the action item notes that “Council and Staff, with significant public engagement, will deliver an updated Official Plan.” Based on the above summary of public engagement between both Phase 1 and Phase 2, staff are confident that the updated Official Plan fulfills the intent of this strategic priority and is underpinned by the pillars of sustainability.

D. Analysis

With consideration for all comments received, we have prepared the final recommended Official Plan Amendment. While changes that been made throughout the Official Plan, this staff report summarizes the key changes that have been made in response to comments received, including comments received since the date of the Public Meeting, with respect to Housing Mix, Intensification, Density and Height, Attainable and Affordable Housing, Sustainability, Parks and Open Spaces, Commercial & Employment, Agricultural and Rural Lands and Transportation.

Housing Mix

The Town has increased density targets to promote the development of more townhouse and apartment units in new projects, with the overall goal of increasing housing mix across the Town. This approach acknowledges the importance of intensification in creating a wider range of housing options, with a particular focus on Thornbury. The Town encourages compatible infill and intensification within established neighborhoods to support this goal. Additionally, policies will permit the construction of additional dwelling units, the conversion of large homes into multiple units, and the development of purpose-built employee housing to further diversify housing availability.

Intensification, Density and Height

In Thornbury, taller buildings are directed along Highway 26, where residential and mixed-use structures of up to four storeys may be considered within the Downtown Area designation, subject to a site-specific zoning by-law amendment. This has been reduced from 5 storeys, as presented at the Public Meeting. However, the maximum height of three storeys will be maintained along Bruce Street in the Downtown Core and in the rest of the Town (with the exception of Blue Mountain Village, where a maximum of height of 5 storeys is already permitted). Any development above three storeys in other locations will require an Official Plan Amendment. All developments will be subject to intensification criteria, which include preserving and enhancing existing trees and vegetation, ensuring compatibility with the surrounding built form, and maintaining appropriate architectural details. To ensure a smooth transition in height, developments must adhere to a 45-degree angular plane, with setbacks and/or step-backs incorporated as needed. Along Highway 26, a building setback of 12 to 16 metres will be required to preserve and enhance the area's open landscape character. Additionally, developments must minimize impacts related to shadow, overlook, massing, grading, drainage, traffic, access, circulation, and privacy.

Attainable and Affordable Housing

All development proposals with more than 10 residential units will be required to demonstrate how affordable housing units can be provided. As part of the development application process, an Affordable/Attainable Housing Report must be submitted. The Town has set a minimum target of 30% of new housing, or units created through conversion, to be affordable. Additionally, all developments proposing ground-related housing must consider design options that allow for additional residential units to be provided in the future. The Town will also maintain an inventory of viable surplus Town-owned properties that could be considered for new affordable or attainable housing. Furthermore, there is a directive to pre-zone vacant or underutilized sites to facilitate the development of affordable housing.

The Official Plan also contains a policy stating that maximum building height, within Downtown Thornbury along Highway 26, outside of Bruce Street in the Downtown Core, may be increased to 5 storeys, without amendment to the Official Plan, where facilities, services and matters (community benefits) are secured, to the Town's satisfaction, through an implementing Community Planning Permit application, where a Community Planning Permit System has been established. Facilities, services and matters, in this case, could include affordable housing units.

Sustainability, Parks and Open Spaces

The Town's strategic objectives are grounded in its Climate Change Emergency Declaration and the Future Story: Community Sustainability Plan. Updated policies promote compact, mixed-use development, infill projects, and the integration of active transportation infrastructure. The Town also encourages the protection, enhancement, and expansion of its tree canopy, prioritizing the planting of native species that are resilient to climate change. Additionally, there is strong support in the Official Plan for agri-tourism and small-scale farming, recognizing their role in fostering community sustainability. Design guidelines, currently being prepared by the consulting team, will emphasize sustainable practices, including low-impact development features and energy-efficient building and site designs.

Changes have also been made to the parkland policies of the Official Plan. Parkland dedication is prioritized over cash-in-lieu contributions to ensure the creation of accessible public spaces throughout the Town. The Town encourages the co-location of parks with schools and recreation facilities to maximize community use and connectivity, and the policies requires that all park designs will be made accessible to people of all ages and abilities, ensuring inclusivity. Additionally, park designs will focus on integrating focal areas, natural features, and thoughtful plantings that enhance the character of the space, while accommodating a range of both active and passive recreational uses. Policies have been added to support trail linkages and the enhancement of the overall trail network (including the Bruce and George Trails) between residential, commercial, institutional and waterfront areas.

Commercial and Employment

In Downtown Thornbury and Clarksburg, development and redevelopment of lots and buildings are encouraged to reach their maximum potential, with a focus on accommodating a mix of uses. Intensification and mixed-use development should include affordable and attainable housing options to support community diversity.

In Craigleith, it is essential to provide a range of commercial and service uses that bridge the gap between the downtown and resort areas, ensuring the success of both existing and future residential developments. Commercial development will adhere to policies that ensure adequate on-site parking, loading, servicing, landscaping, and compatibility with surrounding areas.

In the Thornbury/Clarksburg Urban Employment Areas, the policies of the Town aim to ensure that employment lands are accessible, appropriately sized, and ready for development. Design policies will maintain high standards for building, landscaping, and site design, with a focus on pre-zoning lands where suitable to permit employment uses.

To support commercial and employment uses, the Official Plan permits employee housing within any residential designation, encourages the development of employee housing near major employment centres, and requires employee housing to be designed to maintain the character of existing built environments, in accordance with applicable zoning regulations.

Agricultural and Rural Lands

The Town has updated its policies to better align with provincial and county regulations regarding agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses. Current permitted uses were expanded to reflect the full range of activities allowed under the Grey County Official Plan, with clarifications added to the Agricultural, Special Agricultural, and Rural designations. Specific criteria for "on-farm diversified uses" have been introduced, including limits on scale, activities, duration, and design, to prevent any off-site adverse impacts. Additionally, new permitted uses have been added to the Rural designation to align with the Grey County Official Plan, including resource-based recreation, small-scale transport terminals, buildings and yards associated with trades, residential farm cooperatives, agri-miniums, institutional uses (such as cemeteries, churches, and schools), and recreational or tourist-based rural clusters.

Regarding cannabis production facilities, these are now permitted on lands designated as Rural Employment, Urban Employment, and Rural, through a site-specific zoning by-law amendment. Facilities must maintain a minimum 300-metre setback from sensitive uses, and all associated activities must take place within a fully enclosed building with no odour emissions. The Town may also require studies on air quality control, environmental impacts, noise, traffic, and lighting. All cannabis production facilities will be subject to site plan control.

Transportation

The Town is committed to enhancing active transportation options by making walking and cycling more viable, with a focus on pedestrian comfort, safety, and accessibility, while also encouraging tourism and recreational development. To support this, policies have been included to ensure that the design of mixed-use areas and new neighborhoods will include shorter block lengths. Additionally, a policy has been added that the Town will support the growth of a County-wide public transit system by promoting the use of technology, transit-supportive design, and compact, mixed-use development along Highway 26.

In terms of parking, the Official Plan includes a policy directing the Town to develop an Integrated Parking Management Strategy to assess the long-term parking supply in Thornbury and Clarksburg. There is also consideration to reduce the minimum required parking standards for higher-density development along Highway 26 in Thornbury, to promote more sustainable land use.

Implementation and Administration

To support the goals and objectives of the updated Official Plan and drive efficiencies in the review of planning and development files at the Town, new enabling policies have been added. Most prominently, this includes giving Council the ability to enact a Community Planning Permit System By-law. Through the Official Plan, a framework for a future by-law is provided that includes the Town's commitment to using it as the means to support community character and design, sustainability and housing diversification. Council is also further authorized to exercise Planning Act provisions with respect to the delegation of minor zoning by-law amendments in the effort to create additional efficiencies. These potential improvements to the administration

of files is balanced with creating more robust public participation. New language has been added to encourage proponents of large-scale projects to provide a public consultation strategy focused upon early engagement with Council and the community.

E. Strategic Priorities

1. Communication and Engagement

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders

2. Organizational Excellence

We will continually seek out ways to improve the internal organization of Town Staff and the management of Town assets.

3. Community

We will protect and enhance the community feel and the character of the Town, while ensuring the responsible use of resources and restoration of nature.

4. Quality of Life

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

F. Environmental Impacts

Policies contained within the Official Plan 5-Year Review provided an enhanced level of recognition and protection of Natural Heritage features. It is noted that additional measures will be considered through implementation of the recommendations within the Natural Asset Inventory and Natural Heritage Study.

G. Financial Impacts

Policies contained within the Official Plan 5-Year Review provide for modernization and efficiencies for long term community growth with expectations that those efficiencies can also lead to long term financial benefits.

Appeals to the Official Plan 5-Year Review may also be subject to appeals, which are required to be considered by the Ontario Land Tribunal.

H. In Consultation With

Town Council, Internal Town Departments, External Agencies, Town Committees, Community Stakeholders, Area Residents,

I. Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has been subject to extensive Public Consultation including numerous Workshops, Information Centres, Open Houses, Public Meetings, and Council Reports. A dedicated project page on the Town website, newspaper notices, regular press releases, and project updates have been provided. Any comments regarding this report should be submitted to Shawn Postma, planning@thebluemountains.ca

J. Attached

Attachment 1: Draft By-law to Adopt Official Plan Amendment No. 5

Attachment 2: Official Plan Amendment No. 5 – Official Plan Text

Attachment 3: Official Plan Amendment No. 5 – Official Plan Schedules and Appendix

Attachment 4: Planning Staff Comment Matrix

Attachment 5: Community Comment Letters Received

Respectfully submitted,

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Report Approval Details

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Attachments:	- PDS-24-141-Attachment-1.pdf - PDS-24-141-Attachment-2.pdf - PDS-24-141-Attachment-3.pdf - PDS-24-141-Attachment-4.pdf - PDS-24-141-Attachment-5.pdf
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This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Adam Smith - Nov 29, 2024 - 10:37 AM