

Mayor's Desk Article - Official Plan – October, 2016

Every five years the Municipality is required to update our Official Plan. We are currently undertaking that process. It is fair to ask - what is an Official Plan? The Official Plan describes Council's policies on how land within the Municipality should be used. It is prepared with input from the Public, Municipal Staff, and Council. Professional Planners are involved to facilitate the process and prepare documents.

An Official Plan deals generally with where housing, industry, offices, retail, and institutional areas will be located. It uses population data and projections and outlines what services like roads, water, sewer, parks, and schools will be needed. And it generally directs when and where different types of growth will occur.

The Official Plan informs the public and developers about the Municipality's general land use planning policies and provides mapping for designating use locations. The Official Plan also provides a framework for establishing Municipal Zoning By-Laws which set standards such as set-backs, size of lots, height of buildings, and other such matters.

There will always be differing points of view related to Official Plans. Council needs to consider all points of view and find a balance between open, deregulated development and over-planned, over-regulated development. It is important to look back to see where things might have been planned differently, listen to present concerns, and consider where the community currently seems to be headed. Ultimately the Official Plan must be a document that addresses planning needs for the good of the whole community while neither penalizing nor pandering to the exclusive needs of a few.

When undertaking an Official Plan review such as we are doing, there are certain minimum steps that must be taken. These include: public meetings, review by approval authority, special meetings of Council, open house information sessions, adequate information made available to the public. Any person or public body may provide written or verbal comments. Council may consult with agencies, boards, authorities or commissions before making decisions on the Official Plan. But the prepared plan must be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement issued under the Planning Act and conform to, or not conflict with, any applicable Provincial Plans.

Once the Official Plan is in effect, it guides all the Municipality's planning decisions. But, just as it is being reviewed and updated now, the Official Plan can be changed in future years as the community's needs change.

You can be involved by coming to advertised meetings, contacting the Municipality and obtaining information, reading background documents, and giving your opinions and working with Council and Staff to resolve concerns.