



Information Memo

To: Council-In-Committee Meeting
Date: April 14, 2026
Division: Planning and Realty Services
Department: Community and Development Services
Ward: All Wards
Subject: Provincial Consultation on Simplifying and Standardizing Official Plan

Recommendation(s):

That the Information Memo regarding the provincial [consultation on simplifying and standardizing Official Plans](#) be received as information.

Background

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) completed a consultation on simplifying and standardizing Official Plans from October 23, 2025, to November 22, 2025, that was published on the Environmental Registry of Ontario.

Official Plans are guiding land use documents that provide policy direction to manage growth, protect the natural environment and set goals for future development within a municipal jurisdiction. The intent of the proposed changes is to increase consistency across municipalities and reduce the burden of developing Official Plans.

Discussion:

The consultation sought feedback on requiring a consistent framework for Official Plans across all Ontario municipalities and identifying best practices for streamlining the Official Plan update process to the provincial planning framework.

The proposed changes are classified into five themes discussed below:

1. Official Plan Structure and Contents

MMAH is considering a prohibition on secondary or site-specific plans and limiting development standards that can be more adequately addressed in the zoning by-law given the prescriptive nature of some of the provisions.

The Official Plan template is proposed to have mandatory titles/orders and the same for Official Plan schedules, overlays and data that should use standardized naming, for all Official Plans in Ontario.

2. Limiting the Length of Official Plans

Consideration is being given to limiting the length of Official Plans by setting a page limit or word limit.

3. Creating Permissive Land Use Designations

Consideration is being given to standardizing land use designations across municipalities and making land use designations more permissive.

The following land use designations are proposed:

1. **Residential I** – low-rise/density residential buildings, small-scale commercial uses, institutional uses
2. **Residential II** – mid-rise/density residential buildings, commercial use, institutional uses
3. **Mixed Use Areas I** – low/mid-rise/density buildings, includes residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial, manufacturing, and small-scale warehousing that could be located adjacent to sensitive land uses
4. **Mixed Use Areas II** – high-rise/density buildings, includes residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial, manufacturing, and small-scale warehousing that could be located adjacent to sensitive land uses
5. **Rural Areas** – low-rise/density rural and related uses, small-scale commercial and employment/industrial uses, agricultural, tourism, recreation, cemeteries
6. **Employment Areas** – business and economic uses that may require separation from some sensitive uses
7. **Major Facilities** – industrial and infrastructure land uses (other than employment areas) that require separation from sensitive uses
8. **Parks and Open Spaces** – recreation and public open space
9. **Natural Heritage** – conservation of environmental features
10. **Agricultural Areas** – agriculture and agriculture-related uses

The proposed designations are flexible and permit a wider range of uses than typically seen in any one land use designation. Some of the designations in Norfolk County's Official Plan would transition easily to the new designations, while some others would require additional review and updating.

MMAH is also suggesting a list of standardized schedules, overlays, and data that would be consistent across all municipalities. Some of the data required for these schedules is readily available, while others would require further work in order to implement.

4. Transitioning to a New Framework

Municipalities would be required to update Official Plans at the time of the next 5- or 10-year review to be consistent with the new framework.

5. Submission of Official Plans Through an Online Portal

When MMAH is the approval authority of Official Plans, the submission of an amended Official Plan, as adopted by Council will be conducted through an on-line portal providing enhanced traceability and record keeping.

Finance Comments:

There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

If the proposed changes are approved and become effective, funding to review and update the Official Plan to bring it into compliance with the new legislative requirements may be required. Further information will be provided if updates to the Official Plan are needed and funding is required.

Conclusion:

The Norfolk County Official Plan will require a review of current land use designations and policies if the proposed changes take effect. The proposed changes would greatly limit the need for Official Plan Amendment applications in the future as they provide for increased flexibility in the permitted uses.

The review of Official Plan schedules and labels in alignment with established standards will be a subsequent process to updating land use designations.

Overall, Planning staff are supportive of the proposed changes, aside from the Official Plan length/page number limit. This may hinder the adaptation of land use policies to the diverse and complex geography of Norfolk County, its natural heritage assets and development infrastructure.

The proposed prohibition/elimination of secondary plans needs to be monitored, as a number of secondary plans are proposed to be implemented in Norfolk County.

Approval:

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