

<b>Prepared for</b>	Council-in-Committee	<b>Report No.</b>	CDS-55-13
<b>Agenda Date</b>	June 10th, 2013	<b>File No.</b>	350313.002

**Subject**

**RIDGEWAY-THUNDER BAY SECONDARY PLAN – AUTHORIZATION OF FORMAL PROCESSING AND SCHEDULING OF STATUTORY PUBLIC MEETING**

**Recommendations**

**THAT** Council provide authorization for Community and Development Services staff to commence formal processing of draft Official Plan Amendment No. 15 (draft OPA 15) being the Ridgeway-Thunder Bay Secondary Plan, and further

**THAT** Council provide authorization for Community and Development Services staff to schedule a Statutory Public Meeting mid-summer for the draft Ridgeway-Thunder Bay Secondary Plan (draft OPA 15) as part of the formal public consultation process prescribed under the Planning Act, R.S.O., 1990, Chapter P.13.

**Relation to Council’s 2011-2014 Corporate Strategic Plan**

Priority: Infrastructure & Economic Development  
 Goal 3: Leverage value from infrastructure investments to generate future growth and revenue for the Town  
 Initiative 3.1: Continue infrastructure investment to realize the new growth/revenue opportunities associated with the Frenchman’s Creek Trunk Sewer  
 Initiative 3.2: Promote development on brownfields and other existing serviced areas

**List of Stakeholders**

- Residents, Property and Business Owners including the RBIA in the Ridgeway-Thunder Bay Secondary Plan Area
- Existing and Potential Developers
- The Town of Fort Erie, the Region of Niagara, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority School Boards and Utility/Communication Companies.

<b>Prepared by:</b>	<b>Submitted By:</b>	<b>Approved by:</b>
<i>Original Signed</i>	<i>Original Signed</i>	<i>Original Signed</i>
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## **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to request Council's authorization to initiate the formal processing of the draft Ridgeway-Thunder Bay Secondary Plan (draft OPA 15).

Additionally, Community & Development Services staff request authorization from Council to proceed with scheduling the Statutory Public Meeting required under the Planning Act.

## **Background**

### **Recent History**

The Ridgeway-Thunder Bay "Neighbourhood Plan" was adopted by Council for land use and development guidance in June 2009. Adoption of the Plan followed input from stakeholders including the Community Focus Group, Residents, RBIA / business owners, landowner/developers and Town staff, as far back as 2006.

The earlier Neighbourhood Plan process also included SWOC Analysis (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities & Constraints) sessions conducted separately with staff and Focus Group members. Two community Public Information Open House sessions were also held prior to a Public Meeting before Council in 2009. However, the Plan remained a policy guiding document of Council.

Recommendations of the Neighbourhood Plan together with current policy of our Official Plan direct that Neighbourhood Plans be formalized as Secondary Plans via Official Plan Amendments.

Staff have subsequently undertaken additional preliminary consultation sessions with public, stakeholders and agencies in the informal context and are now prepared to move this process forward as a Secondary Plan document, including relevant draft policy and schedules. This additional consultation has occurred over the course of the past 12 months, leading to the recommendations made herein.

### **Existing Land Use Character**

The existing land use character can generally be described as low density residential for much of the Ridgeway-Thunder Bay neighbourhood.

Thunder Bay for the most part is almost completely low density detached dwellings with a few recently constructed townhomes (Ridgeway-by-the-Lake) and recent draft approval for semi-detached dwellings along Dominion Road (South Ridge Meadows). To date, most of the new development in the older, more established area of the Thunder Bay has been done through consent and low density detached in-filling.

Ridgeway has a slightly broader mix of unit type available, but it too is generally lower density with some multiples and higher density dwelling units scattered throughout the

neighbourhood. Ridgeway also contains the commercial components that both Ridgeway and Thunder Bay residents access for their typical commercial needs.

The commercial areas within Ridgeway can be generally defined as two distinct districts; the downtown commercial core area and the Gorham highway commercial area.

The downtown commercial core was the original commercial centre, which developed following the railroad's introduction of a station at this location. The evolution of the village core area was typical with commercial uses springing up in close proximity to the rail station and the residential community growing out from there. The rail and station have long since been removed with the Friendship Trail taking over the role of link in a recreational & active transportation context. The downtown commercial core has managed to retain much of its village character and ambiance over the years and is experiencing a resurgence of interest following major capital replacement and streetscaping improvements.

Furthermore, with completion of the Village Square in the heart of the downtown, combined with the divestment of 283 Ridge Road North for re-development, the core area's social and cultural identity is being further enhanced. Redevelopment of 283 Ridge Road will be subject to site specific urban design guidelines to ensure a quality redevelopment that leverages its exposure on the square and presents an attractive backdrop for the civic site.

The Gorham commercial had developed in more contemporary times where automobile use was abundant and traffic patterns heading to Crystal Beach could be captured along with the immediate community being served commercially. The commercial character of the Gorham area makes provision for auto oriented customers by providing ample on-site parking. Many of the commercial structures are single storey with larger single user floor space than its downtown counterpart. This commercial district and its building stock is primarily commercial only with a few properties having a residential component.

There are several institutional uses in the Ridgeway area (Schools & Churches) with the remaining community comprising of parks/open space, very limited local commercial beyond the identified districts, environmental lands including the Mann Farm wetlands and waterfront. Much of the waterfront remains in private ownership with two publicly accessible waterfront parks accessible by former Town road allowances.

More recent residential development activity has been occurring in the Prospect Point / Thunder Bay Road area with the Ridgeway Shores and Ridgeway-by-the-Lake subdivisions comprising largely bungalow detached and townhomes that have attracted a more senior demographic to the community.

Despite its large geographic coverage, which is almost completely built environment, the general character of the Ridgeway-Thunder Bay neighbourhood is low density, low

intensity, with areas suitable for intensification that may offer a more diversified dwelling types supporting age-in-place concepts and existing commercial.

### **Key Considerations**

From the outset of initiating the Secondary Plan (draft OPA 15), staff have taken a position that the Neighbourhood Plan was sound in its approach and remained quite relevant to today's policy regime. Through review of the document, staff determined some modifications should be explored for consideration in making changes prior to the Plan's migration into the Town's Official Plan. Given the Neighbourhood Plan's adoption of June 2009, the plan recognized many of the current planning requirements and principles found in regional and provincial policy. For the most part, staff has approached this Secondary Plan exercise as an opportunity to consider 'tweaking' what had been adopted previously before formalizing the Plan.

The more recent consultations and information meetings provided staff with an opportunity to ask questions and gain feedback from those attending the meetings. This has been beneficial in both re-affirming the Plan's relevance and also, that some of the anticipated modifications discussed during those meetings are also being generally well received by stakeholders.

Some of the key modifications being considered by staff, in effort to support more of a "complete community" concept within the Plan Area include:

- More clearly defined distinction in purpose between the Downtown Commercial Core Area and the Gorham Commercial Area;
- Provide policy that better defines their commercial roles (eg. – prohibiting new automotive uses in the Ridgeway downtown core);
- Seeking to broaden intensity of commercial uses in select area of the Gorham Commercial Area;
- Re-designation of Downtown Commercial to Core Mixed Use designation;
- Minor additions to the medium to higher density residential designation to support intensification objectives and better support the existing commercial while providing for additional opportunities of unit type diversification;
- Provides specific criteria for establishing new residential intensification sites not designated in this Plan
- Increased identification and pursuit of active transportation awareness and infrastructure;
- Efforts to enhance pedestrian and trail networks including identifiable connection between the Friendship Trail and the water front areas; and
- Revisit need for illustrating some conceptual components that were shown on the remnant from the 2009 Neighbourhood Plan.

It can be stated that the points noted above have been highlighted in a recent informal Public Information Meeting and have generally met with little opposition. Staff believe the modifications, which are captured in the current draft policy document, are relatively minor, yet improve on the 2009 Plan.

Although not a modification, Planning staff are proposing to maintain the institutional land use designation and zoning on the school properties within the Plan Area. Staff are aware that an Accommodation Review is underway with the District School Board of Niagara concerning future consolidation of high schools in Fort Erie. As such, leaving the Institutional status on the properties will provide the town with continued control over the future land use of school sites (specifically Ridgeway-Crystal Beach High School) should there be any divestment by the Board. An appropriate use for the site can be assessed on a site specific basis at the appropriate time in such instances.

### **Preliminary Public & Agency Consultation Process**

Since initiating the recent Secondary Plan exercise, staff have been aided in their efforts, having undertaken the following consultations for comment, input and feedback:

- Pre-consultation with the Region of Niagara and NPCA;
- Land Use Plan design and distribution with review and comment from Region and NPCA;
- Meeting with remaining/interested original Focus Group Members for information and feedback on the Plan with invite to comment;
- Public Information Meeting No.1 in open forum with invite to comment;
- Presentation and discussion with Town Committees including the Environmental Advisory Committee, Active Transportation Committee, and Heritage Committee;
- Informal circulation to Town departments and outside agencies for informal comment on the Draft Secondary Plan;
- Public Information Meeting No.2 in open forum with invite to comment;
- Scheduled and impromptu meetings with developers, landowners and interested stakeholders over the course of the program.

Prior to conducting the Statutory Public Meeting requested in this report, staff will prepare and release a revised draft Secondary Plan addressing comments or concerns received through the informal circulations and Information Meetings. Modifications based on the latest commenting have begun and the revised draft will be made available at the time of issuing Notice of a Statutory Public Meeting.

A copy of the Plan that was circulated for comments, and was made available prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Public Information Meeting remains available on the Town's website.

Staff is pleased to advise that our consultations with the approval authority (the Region) have resulted in positive and supportive commenting to date.

Staff is confident any new issues can be addressed, and in effort to remain on target for bringing the Secondary Plan forward to Council for consideration, staff seeks Council authority to schedule the requested meeting.

Should Council provide authority for staff to schedule the Statutory Public Meeting, it is anticipated the meeting would be held either July 8<sup>th</sup> or August 12<sup>th</sup> of Committee-in-Council's summer schedule.

### **Formal Plan Process Steps**

Should Council provide its endorsement of the recommendations contained in this report, staff will schedule a Public Meeting date and prepare to commence the Public Notification Process including the following:

- Notice will be published in the local newspaper (Fort Erie Times) and will be posted under “Public Notices” column of the Town’s website homepage. An announcement will be made as part of the “Mayor’s Announcements” regularly conveyed at the opening of Council and Council-in-Committee Meetings.

In addition, and resulting from recent Council action on enhancing Notice for Town initiated amendments, the Notice will be further circulated to, and announced via the following means:

Community Organizations – Ridgeway, Crystal Beach and Bridgeburg BIA’s  
Municipal Billing – Tax and Water billing (space permitting)  
Community Facilities Postings – Libraries, Post Offices, Town Hall Atrium, Leisureplex, Museums and the electronic Billboard in front of Town Hall.  
Social Media – Website, Facebook, Twitter and Blog.

It should be noted that in light of space limitation on billing and billing cycles, notice may not always be available for the billing cycle preferred. Staff advises that if it is prepared for a July 2013 Statutory Public Meeting (preferred), notice of the meeting date will not be provided through water billing due to the billing cycle. If staff schedules the Public Meeting for August 2013, notice can be added to the July Water billing, provided space is available.

- Final modifications to the draft Secondary Plan and Schedules will be completed and made available to public on the Town’s website, or for review at the Community & Development Services counter.
- Final and formal circulations for comment will be conducted with internal departments, external agencies and authorities together with copy of the Public Meeting Notice and access to the final draft document for review.
- A Planning Act Statutory Public Meeting anticipated to be held before Town Council on either July 8<sup>th</sup> or August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013, to present the final draft of the Secondary Plan. Council will receive staff’s Information Report in their Agenda package prior to the meeting. Depending on the outcome of the Public Meeting and reception of Council, a Recommendation Report would follow for consideration at a future Council Meeting.
- If adopted, it can be anticipated that a By-law would be presented to Council for approval in late summer 2013. The By-law would then be forwarded to the Regional Municipality of Niagara for their consideration on approval of the Secondary Plan.

### **Financial/Staffing Implications**

The required Secondary Plan and any subsequent Zoning By-law Amendments will be completed as part of the Town's Neighbourhood/Secondary Plan Program as provided for in the Community and Development Services operating budget.

There is, however, a slight increase in staff time relating to the additional Notice requirements. As this will be a new and an on-going requirement for Town initiated amendments, staff are working out details on how and where Notices are to be sent, who the contact persons are, who will physically post them (or distribute them as the case may be). As this becomes a regular part of Notice circulations, it will become routine. But for the early going, we need to establish the contacts, logistics and timing accordingly.

### **Policies Affecting Proposal**

The Town's Official Plan places strong emphasis on the Neighbourhood Planning component in achieving more detailed land use distribution and a "complete community" approach to providing long term goals for ultimate build-out scenarios for the many Neighbourhoods in Fort Erie.

The Planning Act and the Provincial Policy Statements support the development of Neighbourhood Plans, as a way to promote and manage smart growth, and to encourage increased densities and in-filling to reduce urban sprawl. The Town's Official Plan also identifies Secondary Plans as a means of furthering its goals and policies at a more detailed level.

**Sections 5.5 Neighbourhood Planning** and **Section 13.3 Neighbourhood Plans** of the Town's Official Plan supply the majority of policy directives staff are working within to generate Secondary Plans. The Official Plan requires the Secondary Plans be adopted as an amendment to the Official Plan (OPA) and to proceed with any necessary zoning amendments to assist in the implementation of the Plans.

Staff are proceeding with the requirements of our Official Plan, under the direction of Council, on set priority of order in which the Secondary Plans are to be advanced and adopted. The Region of Niagara is the approval authority for Secondary Plans and following approval, the Secondary Plan will then form part of our Official Plan, giving it status under the Planning Act.

### **Comments from Relevant Departments/Community and Corporate Partners**

Staff has received comments from some interested departments and agencies through informal circulation for comment. We have also received comments from the public through our two information Open House meetings conducted for just such a purpose.

To date, there has been generally good response from government and departments in their response. Resident and business owners have also expressed concerns over

some item that have been addressed in the latest draft, namely the Wells Avenue road allowance, commercial close to Bernard Avenue at Thunder Bay, commercial identity of the downtown vs. Gorham and some conceptual road locations.

A comprehensive Information Report will be prepared for Council leading into the requested Statutory Public Meeting. Commenting submissions and action of staff will be outlined in the information report.

### **Alternatives**

Council can deny the request for scheduling of a Public Meeting until a later date.

### **Conclusion**

The process of developing a Secondary Plan for Ridgeway-Thunder Bay is well advanced, wherein staff wishes to proceed to formal stages, ultimately leading to decision of Council. In order to do this, staff requires Council's authorization to proceed with the formal processing and scheduling of the Statutory Public Meeting. Staff respectfully requests such authorization from Council.

Complimentary activities relating to the Secondary Plan are either close to complete, or in process such as the Village Square development, the divestment and redevelopment of 283 Ridge Road and developing a Community Improvement Plan for façade improvement, signage and mixed use residential renovation funding programs.

### **Attachments**

**Appendix "1"** – Key Map of Ridgeway-Thunder Bay Secondary Plan Area



# RIDGEWAY / THUNDER BAY SECONDARY PLAN AREA

