

Municipality Of Chatham-Kent

Community Development

Planning Services

To: Members of the Natural Heritage Committee of the Whole

From: Ryan Jacques, MCIP, RPP
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Date: October 26, 2021

Subject: Meeting Framework and Public Participation

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1. The Natural Heritage Committee of the Whole endorse the meeting framework and civic engagement commitment outlined in this report.

Background

Land-use and strategic planning builds actionable plans in preparation for the future. Including a strong commitment to civic engagement, its purpose is to focus the community in a common direction to achieve community sustainability.

Since Chatham-Kent's inception, thousands of citizens have participated in community wide planning exercises to identify the many economic, social, and environmental pressures converging on Chatham-Kent today. Chatham-Kent has undertaken numerous studies, plans, and strategies that address a multitude of subjects and collectively provide direction toward achieving community sustainability around the pillars of health, economy, environment and culture. These community-wide planning exercises have shown that there is an interest in preserving and enhancing the traditions that make the communities within Chatham-Kent distinctive, and to protect the natural environment through sound planning principles.

Natural heritage planning issues have resonated throughout the community, signifying that this issue has re-emerged as a high municipal priority. The Natural Heritage Committee of the Whole is established to review this strategic and policy issue, give direction to Administration, and make recommendations to Council.

Comments

This report outlines the following:

- A meeting framework, including a partial schedule and proposed topics for each meeting. It is anticipated additional meeting dates are required and additional topics will emerge through the course of regular business.
- An approach to public participation in municipal decision-making.
- Affirming procedural matters of importance to the Committee and the public. The Procedure By-law 109-2018, as amended by By-law 113-2020 to deal with electronic participation, governs the proceedings of meetings of the Natural Heritage Committee of the Whole in the same manner as Municipal Council.

Committee Meeting Framework

Meeting No. 1 – November 1, 2021

The initial meeting of the Committee will establish a Committee Chair and Vice Chair as required by its Terms of Reference. Reports will be received for the purposes of introducing Committee business to its members and to the public, and to outline a meeting framework and a commitment to public participation.

Meeting No. 2 – November 29, 2021

The purpose of this meeting is to familiarize the Committee with the achievements of the community in enhancing the natural environment, to gain further understanding of approaches to land-use planning, and to review new information related to natural heritage cover in Chatham-Kent. Members of the Administration of the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority will lead a presentation to generally review:

- 2014 Natural Heritage Implementation Strategy.
- Past and ongoing community-based efforts to enhance the natural environment through stewardship programs and partnerships.
- Watershed-based natural heritage planning.
- Natural heritage change cover mapping analysis.

Meeting No. 3 – December 13, 2021

This meeting will provide an information report containing a review of the current land-use planning framework, including the Ontario Planning Act and other relevant Provincial legislation and applicable Regulations, Provincial Policy Statement, as well as the Chatham-Kent Official Plan and Zoning By-law. This report will outline how Zoning regulations affect land use.

At this meeting, the Committee will receive a presentation from Administration with an introduction of an approach to strategically align Chatham-Kent's natural heritage planning framework. It is anticipated several documents will be presented in draft form

for the review of the Committee and the public. These documents are expected to remain a focal point of Committee business through the remaining meetings. This presentation will also review in detail, the results of the 2021 community engagement process carried out at Council's direction.

Meeting No. 4 – January 10, 2022

In response to information received at the previous meeting, further deliberation on the approach to strategically align Chatham-Kent's natural heritage planning framework is planned, which may include Administration receiving direction regarding the relevant draft documents.

New information presented on this date is anticipated to include a report and presentation on municipally-owned trees, including street trees. As well, trees in asset management planning, and the benefits of trees in the context of municipal policy goals as well as day-to-day operations.

Meeting No. 5 – February 14, 2022

It is anticipated that the Committee will further deliberate on the approach to strategically align Chatham-Kent's natural heritage planning framework is planned, which may include further direction to Administration regarding the relevant draft documents.

By this meeting, additional reports on items raised by the Committee through previous meetings are also expected.

Future Meetings

Additional meetings will be scheduled as necessary to conclude Committee business, including hearing final public deputations, and making final recommendations to Council on any of the matters considered by the Committee.

Public Participation in Municipal Decision-Making

Public participation in municipal decision-making, or "Civic Engagement", is fundamental to the business of the Committee. Chatham-Kent will strive to engage the public in this decision-making process in a consistent, predictable fashion. The degree of engagement will be in proportion to the degree of impact to the public. Commitments to the public should include the following engagement goals, to:

- **Inform** the public by providing balanced and objective information to assist in forming an understanding of the problems, alternatives, opportunities, or solutions. This is achieved through Committee reports, posts to Let's Talk Chatham-Kent, and other mediums such as mailings and information releases as appropriate.
- **Consult** the public to obtain feedback on analysis, alternatives, or other decisions. This is achieved by keeping the public informed, listening to feedback, acknowledging concerns, and providing feedback.

- **Involve** the public throughout the process to ensure that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. This is achieved by working with the public to ensure that concerns and aspirations are reflected in alternatives developed by providing feedback on how public input influenced decisions.

Consideration should be given to create opportunities for meaningful engagement that will support the Natural Heritage Committee of the Whole in its deliberations. Many interested parties have provided comments and opinions already, either unsolicited or through formal public engagement initiatives. These submissions are public record, they have influenced the decision-making process, and they will contribute to future decision-making.

Public deputations to the Natural Heritage Committee of the Whole will be most beneficial if, in addition to stating general opinions, that submissions address material put before the Committee. In this pursuit, it is practical to receive deputations on items after the Committee has received relevant materials and information, and the public has had an opportunity to review as well. Otherwise, it is possible that valuable time and effort of all parties will be spent with less meaningful impact on the outcome. That said, deputations are permitted at all meetings as set out in the Procedure By-law.

Committee Procedure

The Procedure By-law 109-2018, as amended by By-law 113-2020 to deal with electronic participation, governs the proceedings of meetings of the Natural Heritage Committee of the Whole in the same manner as Municipal Council.

It is important to highlight at the outset of this Committee that the Procedure By-law sets out that, The Clerk, in consultation with the Chief Administrative Officer, may refuse a deputation when there has been or will be at least one (1) public meeting, including a Committee of the Whole meeting, held at which the public was provided the opportunity to make formal presentations on that subject matter.

The Natural Heritage Committee of the Whole meetings will provide the opportunity for public participation on natural heritage planning decisions to be put to Council. No further deputations to Council should be expected at that time. If any matters are directed to a Planning Act process (such as Zoning), further public meetings for those specific items may occur in accordance with Provincial legislation.

Consultation

The Municipal Clerk was consulted.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications resulting from this Report.

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