DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
Staff Report

REPORT NO:	DS-2026-07
TO:	Council on May 21, 2026
SUBMITTED BY:	Andrew Martin, MCIP RPP, Director of Development Services
PREPARED BY:	Andrew Martin, MCIP RPP, Director of Development Services
	Rachel Greene, MPl, Senior Policy Planner
REVIEWED BY:	Jeff Willmer, Chief Administrative Officer
DATE:	May 14, 2026
SUBJECT:	Draft New Township of Wilmot Official Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report DS-2026-07 Draft New Township of Wilmot Official Plan be received for information.

SUMMARY:

The Township of Wilmot is creating a new Official Plan (OP) to replace the current Regional and Township Official Plans with one document aligned with the 2024 Provincial Planning Statement (PPS). The plan will be developed in four phases, with ongoing community engagement.

This public meeting, held in accordance with Section 17 (15)(d) of the Planning Act, provides an opportunity for the public and Council to provide feedback to the project team prior to finalizing the plan with the goal of Council adoption in late June 2026.

BACKGROUND:

The Township's current Official Plan was last updated in 2019 and no longer reflects the Township's legislative, governance, and growth context. Several key factors necessitate a comprehensive update:

- As of 2025, the Region no longer has planning authority, and the Township is now responsible for implementing both regional and local planning policies, resulting in duplication under the existing framework.
- A new Provincial Planning Statement (2024) has come into effect, requiring municipal Official Plans to be brought into conformity.

- The current plan does not adequately reflect updated population projections or the infrastructure realities that will shape growth over the next 25 years. A modernized plan is required to manage growth in a coordinated and sustainable manner.

On May 26, 2025, Council considered report DS-2025-05 and awarded Nethery Planning the contract to prepare a new Township Official Plan to replace the current Township Official Plan and Regional Official Plan.

On November 17, 2025, a Special Council Meeting was held in accordance with Section 26(3) of the Planning Act. The project team introduced the Official Plan project, shared the progress completed to date and provided an opportunity for public and Council feedback to help identify community priorities to be considered when shaping the policies in the new Official Plan.

Most recently, the project team provided a presentation at the March 23rd Council Meeting to seek Council feedback on the proposed growth targets and intensification policies to inform the first draft of the new Official Plan.

A community open house was held on April 15, 2026 and the statutory public open house was held on April 28, 2026. These sessions provided an opportunity to review draft maps, the draft document and to ask questions and engage in discussion with Township staff and the consulting team.

Notice of this statutory public meeting was provided, in accordance with the requirements of the Planning Act, in the April 2, 2026 edition of the Wilmot Tavistock Gazette. Notice was also in the May 7th edition of the Gazette and given on the Township's Engage webpage.

REPORT:

The creation of the new Official Plan has been planned to occur in 4 phases over the course of a year with several opportunities for community consultation. The workplan has followed the phasing strategy outlined in Figure 1. The project is the final step of Phase 3.



Figure 1 Official Plan Project Phasing

Over the last several months, the project team has reviewed and consolidated relevant policies from the existing Township and Regional Official Plans, ensuring consistency with the Provincial Planning Statement (2024). Policy development has also been guided by relevant background studies, input received from the public and Council, as well as agency comments.

Key concepts have been carried forward from the current plans including:

- The countryside line as shown on Map 1
- The preservation of Source Water Protection policies and mapping as shown on Map 6
- The protection of the Natural Heritage System which includes the Regional Recharge Area as shown on Map 8
- The existing Rural Settlement Area Boundaries as shown on Maps 5.1-5.12

As the Township continues to grow and develop, population and employment forecasts will be used to guide planning for the Township's future. These forecasts are used to guide preparation for land, infrastructure, servicing, and public service facility needs in Wilmot to the year 2051. The township is planning for a minimum population forecast of 34,000 and an employment forecast of 12,000 jobs.

Population Growth

On March 23, 2026, the project team presented Council with several potential growth scenarios and identified key areas for potential intensification. Based on the evaluation of multiple growth scenarios and existing wastewater servicing constraints, it was determined that the Township has capacity to accommodate approximately 11,000 additional people. Therefore, the Township is planning for a minimum population target of 34,000 people by 2051. This closely aligns with the population-share projection as outlined in the housing needs background study.

Future growth is proposed to be accommodated through a combination of new neighbourhood development and intensification of the existing built-up area through infill, redevelopment and

additional dwelling units. The draft plan establishes an intensification target of 20% (around 1000 new people). Taking into consideration servicing capacity and committed development in the form of draft-approved and in-process applications (amounting to approximately 5,000 people), the remaining growth to be accommodated in new neighbourhoods is approximately 5,000 people.

Three density scenarios were evaluated for new neighbourhood lands added through ROPA 6 and Bill 162 with the project team recommending 45 people and jobs per hectare as an average target across new neighbourhood developments. This approach results in a land surplus of approximately 19 hectares, does not require further urban boundary expansions, and maintains flexibility to respond to future servicing improvements.

The project team also identified potential “Strategic Growth Areas” with the capacity to support compact, mixed‑use development of up to six storeys in height, including:

- Baden Mill District and Schmidt Estate Lands (expanded urban growth centre)
- Nafziger Road and Snyder’s Road area (includes Cachet subdivision mixed-use block)
- Waterloo Street corridor in New Hamburg, supporting gradual intensification
- 148/166 Peel Street block, an under-utilized downtown site suitable for redevelopment

Based on Council feedback these areas have been scaled back as shown on maps 3 and 4 of the revised draft Official Plan to minimize potential impacts on existing low-density development. Staff note that the plan contains urban design and compatibility policies to guide the development of mid-rise and mixed-use development. Site development regulations (such as setbacks, lot coverage, and landscaping) will be further refined through a future comprehensive zoning by-law review.

The recommended growth framework balances population growth with infrastructure constraints. The proposed approach allows the Township to accommodate residential growth within existing urban boundaries, promote a more diverse housing mix, and direct higher densities to appropriate locations while maintaining flexibility over the 25-year planning horizon.

The plan identifies new neighbourhood development under a new “Future Development” designation. Development of these lands will be subject to future planning applications and Council review to determine their ultimate land uses and design. The designation allows existing land uses and limited, minor development while supporting coordinated and comprehensive future planning.

Additional Needs Housing

In accordance with the Provincial Planning Statement, the draft Official Plan includes policies to permit and facilitate Additional Needs Housing, meaning housing, including dedicated facilities, designed to accommodate individuals with needs beyond economic need, such as mobility limitations or support requirements for daily living. This includes housing forms licensed or funded under provincial or federal legislation or other funding bodies, intended for individuals requiring varying levels of care or supervision due to age, physical, mental, social, or emotional conditions. Examples include long-term care facilities, residential care homes, group homes, respite care facilities, emergency shelters, hospice care homes, and addiction recovery housing.

The Official Plan establishes clear locational and design criteria for Additional Needs Housing to ensure compatibility with surrounding areas and access to appropriate services. These criteria address matters such as adequate lot size and configuration to accommodate buildings, parking, green space, amenity areas, and required servicing or infrastructure. Conversions of existing buildings are required to maintain the physical form and character of the surrounding neighbourhood. Larger-scale facilities must also provide appropriate buffering, on-site parking and amenity areas, and be located in proximity to community facilities, employment opportunities (where appropriate for residents), and retail and service commercial uses.

The zoning by-law will identify appropriate zones in which additional needs housing (small and large) may be provided by:

1. The availability of adequate water and wastewater services.
2. Proximity to community amenities and employment opportunities accessible by public transit or walking and active transpiration linkages that a use would reasonably rely upon.
3. Based upon the type of facility, ensuring adequate access to the full range of services and other land uses required to provide the support structure necessary for the integration of residents within the community.
4. Generally prohibiting additional needs housing in rural areas and rural settlement areas unless adequacy of community amenities reasonably required to support the use can be demonstrated or otherwise provided for within the Zoning By-law.

Overall, the intent of these policies is to ensure that Additional Needs Housing is located in areas where reliable servicing infrastructure and appropriate community supports are available. Township staff will be bringing forward a zoning by-law amendment to ensure zoning permissions align with the direction of the new Official Plan.

Employment Growth

ROPA 6 and Bill 162 did not incorporate the Township's requested adjustments to expand the "Employment Area" in support of its long-standing vision to balance anticipated residential growth with employment opportunities. As outlined in the Employment Land Needs Background Report, additional employment lands are required to accommodate an estimated 12,000 new jobs over the planning horizon.

The Employment Land Needs Background Study identified key characteristics necessary to support competitive employment land development and business attraction, including proximity to Highway 7/8, access to major intersections, potential rail connectivity, and the availability of existing or readily deliverable infrastructure to ensure lands are shovel-ready. Proximity to urban settlement areas and recreational amenities was also identified as beneficial for workforce attraction and retention.

The lands proposed for inclusion within the urban boundary, as shown on Map 4, are located west of the Baden Trunk Sewer alignment, south of the CN railway, and north of Highway 7/8. Staff are of the opinion that these lands are well-suited to accommodate future employment growth and are essential to achieving a balanced distribution of residential and employment uses within the Township and the broader Waterloo Region.

The proposed expansion encompasses approximately 90 hectares of unconstrained land in a strategic location with access to a four-lane provincial highway, potential rail connectivity, and the ability to integrate with existing and planned municipal water and wastewater infrastructure, while supporting a coordinated and integrated approach to servicing, transportation, and active transportation networks. The lands align with the long-standing vision endorsed by the current Council and previous councils over the last 25-plus years.

Provincial Direction

On March 30, 2026, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing released proposed amendments to the *Planning Act* through Bill 98, the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act, 2026. The proposed changes are intended to streamline Official Plans by introducing a standardized table of contents and a standardized set of land use designations.

Following consultation with the Province, the project team has revised the draft Official Plan to generally align with the proposed provincial direction. This alignment is not anticipated to affect the project timeline, and the Province has indicated that it will review the revised draft in a timely manner. Aligning the Plan at this stage is expected to reduce the need for future amendments and result in time and cost savings during subsequent comprehensive reviews.

Public Engagement

The project team hosted two open houses; on April 15 and April 28, 2026. These were drop-in events to provide an opportunity for the public to review the draft Official Plan and mapping, ask questions of the project team and provide feedback.

Comments received have been incorporated into the revised Draft Official Plan where necessary. The revised Draft Official Plan and mapping is now posted on the New Township of Wilmot Official Plan Engage page.

A companion engagement summary will be prepared that documents all feedback received from this round of public engagement on the project, including tonight’s input from Council and the public.

Next Steps

Following the May 21 public meeting, the project team will review and incorporate feedback received and make revisions to the policies and mapping, as appropriate. Once revisions are complete, a final version of the Official Plan will be brought forward to Township Council for adoption in June.

Upon adoption by Council, the Official Plan will be forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for final approval. Following ministerial approval, the new Official Plan will come into effect and will replace both the existing Township Official Plan and the Regional Official Plan as they apply to the Township of Wilmot.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE TOWNSHIP OF WILMOT STRATEGIC PLAN:

Prosperous Businesses & Balanced Growth

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The project funding was considered and endorsed by Council through Report DS 2025-05.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Official Plan, May 14, 2026