DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
Staff Report

REPORT NO:	DS-2026-14
TO:	Council on July 27, 2026
SUBMITTED BY:	Andrew Martin, MCIP RPP, Director of Development Services
PREPARED BY:	Andrew Martin, MCIP RPP, Director of Development Services
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REVIEWED BY:	Jeff Willmer, Chief Administrative Officer
DATE:	July 18, 2026
SUBJECT:	New Township of Wilmot Official Plan for Adoption

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report DS-2026-14 New Township of Wilmot Official Plan for Adoption be received for information; and,

THAT Council adopts the Official Plan included as “Attachment A”; and

THAT Council direct staff to forward the adopted Official Plan to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for approval; and

THAT Council, upon final approval of the New Township Official Plan by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, revoke the current Township Official Plan and related modifications and amendments; and

THAT Council, upon final approval of the New Township Official Plan by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, revoke the current Region of Waterloo Official Plan, as it applies to lands within the Township of Wilmot, along with related modifications and amendments.

SUMMARY:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a recommendation for adoption of the new Township of Wilmot Official Plan.

BACKGROUND:

Over the course of the past year, the project team has advanced the development of the new Official Plan through four phases, each including opportunities for public and stakeholder input. Feedback received throughout the process has been reviewed and incorporated where appropriate. The resulting final draft Official Plan is now being presented to Council for adoption, after which it will be submitted to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) for approval.

The development of the new Official Plan addresses the evolving provincial legislative, governance, and growth context by incorporating several key updates, including:

- Governance Changes: Reflects the Township's expanded planning role following the removal of regional planning authority in 2025, eliminating duplication by integrating both regional and local policy responsibilities into a single framework.
- Provincial Alignment: Brings the Township into conformity with the Provincial Planning Statement (2024), ensuring alignment with current provincial policy direction.
- Growth and Infrastructure Planning: Incorporates updated population projections and accounts for existing and planned infrastructure to better manage future growth.

Collectively, these changes establish a modernized, coordinated, and sustainable policy framework to guide development over the next 25 years.



Figure 1 Project Process

REPORT:

Policy Analysis

Planning Act

The Planning Act is the overarching Provincial legislation which governs land use planning in Ontario. Section 26 of the Planning Act ensures municipal Official Plans:

a) Conform with, or not conflict with, applicable provincial plans;
b) Have regard to matters of provincial interest as set out in Section 2 of the Act, including, but not limited to, environmental and resource protection; the efficient provision of infrastructure and public services; the development of healthy, safe, and inclusive communities; the promotion of economic and financial well-being; coordinated planning and conflict resolution; sustainable growth and urban design; and climate change mitigation and adaptation; and
c) Be consistent with the *Provincial Planning Statement, 2024*.

Provincial Policy Statement, 2024

The Provincial Planning Statement (PPS) is a province-wide planning policy framework that sets out direction for how municipalities plan for growth, development, infrastructure and resource protection. Official Plans are the primary vehicle for implementing the PPS. Municipal decisions must be consistent with the policies of the PPS.

A key component of the review process was a comprehensive conformity assessment to ensure alignment with the new PPS.

The project team has been working collaboratively with MMAH and partner agencies throughout the review process, including targeted discussions with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFA) and the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) to address agency-specific comments.

Region of Waterloo Official Plan

Through amendments to the *Planning Act* introduced by Bill 23, the *More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022*, the Province transferred approval authority for Official Plans from the Region of Waterloo to the MMAH.

As of January 1, 2025, the Region of Waterloo no longer has land use planning responsibilities. As a result, the Township is currently governed by two Official Plans until MMAH approves the new Township Official Plan, which will replace both the existing Township Official Plan and the former Regional Official Plan.

The new Township Official Plan incorporates all relevant policies from the Regional Official Plan as they apply to the Township. The project team has incorporated comments from the Region specifically with respect to intermunicipal coordination, the source water protection framework, regional transportation policies, and growth planning with respect to infrastructure capacity.

New Township of Wilmot Official Plan

The Official Plan is built around a vision that is uniquely Wilmot, that recognizes the Township as an evolving countryside community where growth, housing, employment, and community services are balanced with the long-term protection of farmland, groundwater resources, natural heritage features, and rural character. Developed through consultation with residents, businesses, interest-holders, and Council, the Vision and Principles establish a local policy framework that reflects the community's priorities and guides decision-making to 2051.

Key features of the new Wilmot plan include:

A Localized Planning Framework

The Plan is the Township's first comprehensive Official Plan following the transfer of planning authority from the Region of Waterloo. It consolidates former Township and Regional policies into a single Wilmot-focused document designed to respond to local priorities and circumstances.

Managing Growth Within the Urban Boundary

A key theme of the new Official Plan is accommodating future growth to a projected population of 34,000 residents by 2051 (an additional 11,500 residents) within the existing Baden and New Hamburg urban boundaries. The Plan establishes a growth management framework that directs new development to strategic locations, supports intensification where appropriate, and ensures future neighbourhoods are designed as complete communities.

Strategic Growth Areas and Intensification

The Plan introduces Strategic Growth Areas in Baden and New Hamburg (Schedule A2 of the Plan) as the primary locations for intensification and mixed-use development. These areas are intended to accommodate additional growth through higher-density forms of development, including mid-rise residential to six storeys and a mix of uses including commercial, institutional, and recreational uses. The Strategic Growth Areas are also intended to support future transit service and provide opportunities for residents to access daily needs closer to home.

To support efficient use of land and infrastructure, the Plan establishes a target that 20% of future residential growth be accommodated through intensification and redevelopment within existing urban areas.

New Employment Lands and Economic Opportunity

The Plan identifies and protects a supply of employment lands to support long-term economic growth and local job creation. Based on the findings of the Employment Needs Study, the Plan incorporates approximately 92 hectares of new employment land between Baden and New Hamburg to ensure sufficient capacity to accommodate future employment growth. The Plan forecasts approximately12,000 jobs by 2051, representing growth of approximately 5,000 new jobs over the planning horizon.

New Employment Areas and Employment Mixed-Use Areas are intended to accommodate a range of industrial, manufacturing, warehousing, office, and employment-supporting uses while maintaining compatibility with surrounding land uses and supporting a diversified local economy. The plan seeks to attract investment and create more opportunities for residents to live and work within the Township.

Strong Protection of Agriculture through the Countryside Line

The plan carries forward the concept of a Countryside Line from the Regional Official Plan as a long-term boundary between the Urban Area and the surrounding farmland. This provides certainty for residents, farmers and investors by limiting urban expansion and protecting agricultural lands from sprawl over the horizon of this plan.

Agriculture is positioned as a foundational economic, cultural and tourism asset. The Plan protects the agricultural land base, supports farm diversification, agri-tourism, local food systems, farmers' markets and agri-food businesses while minimizing farm fragmentation.

Recognition and Protection of Wilmot's Rural Settlement Areas

The plan contains dedicated policies for Wilmot's 12 Rural Settlement Areas, recognizing that these communities have distinct needs from the urban areas of Baden and New Hamburg. The Plan proposes modest expansions to several Settlement Core Areas (Mixed-Use Rural Settlement Core), specifically in St. Agatha, Petersburg, and Mannheim along key corridors. While growth in the Rural Settlement Areas will remain carefully managed, the Plan creates opportunities for additional housing choice and services that support the local community, while maintaining rural character and respecting servicing constraints.

Urban Design and Complete Communities

The Official Plan places a stronger emphasis on urban design than the previous plan, recognizing that the quality of development is as important as the amount of growth. The Plan includes comprehensive design policies for intensification areas, new neighbourhoods, and different building types, promoting attractive, walkable, and connected communities.

Key urban design directions include:

- Creating pedestrian-oriented streets and neighbourhoods
- Locating parks, schools, and community destinations within walking distance of residents
- Supporting active transportation and complete streets
- Promoting compatible transitions between new and existing development
- Integrating natural heritage features into neighbourhood design
- Encouraging high-quality architecture and public realm improvements that reinforce community character

Engagement

Throughout the first three phases of preparing the plan, a comprehensive consultation process has been carried out. Following the release of the draft Official Plan, the project team heard from a broad range of voices. A summary of "What We Heard" is included as Attachment B.

The key themes of comments received included:

- Agricultural preservation and rural identity
- Environmental stewardship and climate change
- Need for balanced growth and intensification
- Support for inclusive housing options and public spaces for all ages
- Concerns for committing future Councils to working with the Waterloo Economic Development Corporation
- Concerns for infrastructure capacity (water, wastewater, and roads)
- Indigenous Engagement to occur early in development application process and should follow community protocols

- Desire for more transparency in the planning process

How Feedback Influenced the Plan

The project team has included some policy changes to address these themes based on community feedback and best planning practices. A redlined version of the document is available for review on the project's engage page for added transparency.

Key revisions made to the Official Plan from the previous draft:

- Inclusion of an additional guiding principle emphasizing support and protection of the agricultural sector as a tourism, cultural and economic pillar of the Township
- Requirement for agricultural impact assessments for new or expanding non-agricultural uses on the agricultural system
- Introduction of requirements to "demonstrate no negative impacts" in Natural Heritage System policies
- Ensuring no development or site alteration is permitted in Provincially Significant Wetlands
- Strengthened policies related to source water protection, implementing the GRCA's Source Water Protection Plan and updated mapping
- Additional Water Conservation policies recognizing that the provision of adequate supply of potable water is a necessity to all residents of the Township and that the Township will encourage and support water conservation and water use efficiency practices
- Refinement of the One- and Two-Zone Floodplain policies as per GRCA comments
- Refinement of Mineral Aggregate policies as per MNR comments
- Removal of Waterloo Economic Development Corporation from the Plan, and instead referring to upper levels of government and local partners (which could include Waterloo EDC) as all being important in collaborating on strategic investment in small, medium and large-scale employment opportunities
- Refined Strategic Growth Areas based on Council feedback
- Further compatibility criteria for residential and sensitive land uses in mixed use areas
- Refined policy language regarding engagement with Indigenous communities to ensure early involvement in land use planning matters
- Refined policy language and criteria for Additional Needs Housing

The project team has also prepared an "Engagement Compendium" included as Attachment C which has been broken down into 5 parts. This includes all comments received from agencies, Indigenous communities, landowners, the public as well as special interest groups.

Recommendation

The final Draft Township of Wilmot Official Plan has been prepared based on input received from those engaged throughout the process and aligns with current provincial policy direction and local needs. This represents the Township's first comprehensive Official Plan under the new Provincial planning framework and establishes a modernized policy foundation to proactively manage growth, protect key assets, and support long-term community sustainability.

Staff recommend that the final Draft Official Plan, included as Attachment A, be adopted by Council pursuant to Section 17(22) of the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13, as amended, and staff be directed to forward the adopted plan to MMAH.

Staff confirm that the requirements of the Planning Act have been satisfied, including:

- consultation with the approval authority (MMAH) and prescribed public bodies;
- the holding of statutory public meetings with notice provided in accordance with the *Planning Act*; and
- the provision of information and materials to the public, Council, and the Minister.

Adoption of the new Official Plan will establish a comprehensive framework to guide growth, development, and municipal priorities over the next 25 years. Overall, the Plan reflects a balanced approach to growth management that protects the Township's countryside, natural environment, water resources, and cultural heritage assets while supporting complete communities.

Next Steps

Following Council adoption, a Notice will be posted on the project website and sent to those requesting to be notified as well as prescribed public bodies. The adoption of the Official Plan cannot be appealed pursuant to the Planning Act.

Once received and processed, the MMAH will publish the Official Plan on the Environmental Registry of Ontario for additional review and comment. The MMAH has 120 days either to approve, or to modify and approve as modified, or refuse to approve the Official Plan. Once the MMAH issues a decision to approve the Official Plan, the new Official Plan is in effect and cannot be appealed.

While the Plan has been prepared to align with Provincial direction, the MMAH retains the authority to modify the Plan as part of its approval process. Once MMAH issues a decision to approve, modify and approve as modified, or refuse to approve the Official Plan, Township staff will prepare and share the notice of decision with Council and the notification list, and on the project website.

While the Official Plan guides land use decisions over the next 25 years, it remains a living document subject to statutory review and ongoing conformity exercises pursuant to Provincial Policy changes. Adopting a plan that aligns with Provincial direction on standardized official plan frameworks places the Township ahead of most municipal adoptions at this stage and is anticipated to reduce further need to review and update the plan within the foreseeable future. The Planning Act requires that the Official Plan be revised no less frequently than 10 years after it comes into effect and every five years thereafter (unless replaced by a new Official Plan). These statutory milestones provide the opportunity to consider any future land use policy decisions and changes that may impact current priorities and land need assessments envisioned by this plan within the 25-year planning horizon.

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.

The consulting team has also prepared a high-level cost estimate for the infrastructure required to support anticipated growth through the 2051 planning horizon. This analysis includes transportation, water and wastewater servicing, and stormwater management infrastructure, with a particular focus on the lands located between Baden and New Hamburg, bounded by Highway 7/8 to the north and Snyder's Road West/Waterloo Street to the south.

A brief overview is included in Table 1 below and the full cost estimate is included as Attachment D.

Table 1: Cost Estimates

Service	**Unit Rate**	**Total**
Transportation (roads)	$4.5-6.5 million per kilometre	$18-26 million
Watermain	$1000-2000 per metre	$4.1-8.2 million
Wastewater	$1000-2000	$1.2-4.8 million
Stormwater	$45,000-99,000 per impervious hectare	$14-15 million
TOTAL		**$37,300,000 – 54,000,000**

This information is intended to be a high-level estimate of costs that will ultimately be developer funded and/or funded through other sources such as Development Charges. Funding sources and responsibilities were not included at this stage and will be determined through future analysis and development approvals. The estimates may help inform an update to the Township's Development Charges Background Study.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Official Plan
Attachment B – What We Heard #2
Attachment C – Engagement Compendium
Attachment D – Cost Estimates