



Official Plan Review

Summary Report - The Built Environment

August 2014

Part 1: Introduction

Planning for a healthy, prosperous and sustainable community is an important goal for our municipality. From urban design and residential development, to transportation, schools, and public infrastructure, there are many components that make up a community's built environment.

Following a series of open houses and workshops as part of a Community Vision project in 2012, Town staff compiled a list of eight priorities that now form the basis of the Official Plan Review process. Three of those priorities – development of an inclusive, integrated and healthy town; provision of mobility choices; and ensuring a well-planned built environment – are the focus of this issues paper.

Part 2: Healthy Communities

2.1 Urban Design

Policies and Guidelines

Urban design policies and guidelines are crucial elements in planning sustainable communities. Our Official Plan requires that they be a part of all Secondary Plans. Currently, urban design guidelines are in place for intensification proposals in Virgil and the Old Town and for all urban development in St. Davids, Queenston, and Glendale. Niagara Region's Model Urban Design Guidelines provide design principles and guidelines for the entire region in both the public and private realms. The public realm guidelines focus on creating pedestrian-friendly and self-sustaining communities. The private realm guidelines focus on improving elements of private property that interface with the public realm.

Policy Ideas/Options

Specific public and private realm urban design guidelines should be considered for Old Town and Virgil. A review of the St. Davids Community Plan should include the adoption of the St. Davids Urban Design Guidelines into the Official Plan.

2.2 Affordable Housing

Policies and Guidelines

The Official Plan provides policies for affordable housing by identifying the percentage of new residential units that should be affordable; the need for senior and low income rental units; and the provision of accessory or secondary units, as well as the conversion of existing buildings for residential use.

Policy Ideas/Options

The definitions for affordable housing and low and moderate income in the Town's Official Plan will be updated.

The Town is required to establish and implement affordable housing targets through its Official Plan review. If Niagara Region establishes a higher target for affordable housing than the Town's, the higher target is considered the minimum. The Town may choose to develop a process for monitoring affordable housing in collaboration with the Region to ensure housing targets are met.

The Official Plan must also be revised to address special needs requirements in its affordable housing policies.

2.3 Secondary Units

Policies and Guidelines

The Town's Official Plan permits both accessory apartments and "granny flats" on residential lands. Accessory apartments are dwelling units created by converting part of, or adding on to, an existing dwelling unit.

To encourage the creation of affordable housing, the Ontario government amended the Planning Act through the Strong Communities for Affordable Housing Act to permit second units in existing detached, semi-detached and row houses and accessory structures.

The Province recognizes there may be constraints within portions of a municipality which make those areas inappropriate for second units. The Town will consider those constraints when reviewing "second unit policies."

The maximum length of time that municipalities are permitted to pass temporary use by-laws for garden suites is 20 years and can be extended further in three-year increments.

Policy Ideas/Options

The Town is required to permit second units, both in the Official Plan and the Zoning By-law. The Town will also need to identify constraints within the community when implementing the second unit requirement of the Planning Act (16 (3)).

2.4 Recreation

Policies and Guidelines

The province and Niagara Region both provide general direction with respect to outdoor recreational amenities through their plans. These policies promote healthy, livable and safe communities sustained by an appropriate range and mix of recreation, park and open space uses, including multi-use trails and water-based shoreline uses. The Town's current Official Plan policies do not conflict with Provincial or Regional policy in this regard and include the following:

- support for recreational facilities in built-up areas
- provision of an "open space and community facilities" designation which is intended, in part, for neighbourhood parks
- the ability to collect park dedication fees
- secondary plan policies which foster a vibrant public realm and recreational amenities

Policy Ideas/Options

The Town could prepare a Recreation Master Plan to assist in identifying existing park land and recreation trails, as well as proposed locations for new recreational facilities and appropriate landscape and park design.

2.5 Schools

Following the proposed closure of Parliament Oak Public School scheduled for June 2015, there will be no elementary school in Old Town. Given the changing demographics in Niagara-on-the-Lake, it may be necessary to open a new school in Old Town. However, the existence of fixed urban boundaries and the lack of green-field sites presents a challenge to where a new school could be located.

2.6 Accessibility

It has become standard to incorporate accessibility standards in all new developments since The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) was approved in 2005. Currently the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake has no accessibility policies or plans.

AODA policies should be included in the Official Plan to ensure all new commercial, institutional, industrial and public spaces are compliant with Ontario's accessibility requirements and to bring existing buildings up to current accessibility standards.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is unique because of the large number of buildings designated under the Ontario Heritage Act that require AODA compliance. When the Queen-Picton Heritage Conservation District Plan is updated, it should contain objectives and policies for alterations to designated properties that meet the AODA standards.

Part 3: Sustainable Growth

3.1 Sustainability

Policies and Guidelines

The Official Plan does not have a specific section that addresses sustainability, although many policies in the Plan and Secondary Plans encourage sustainable planning.

The Provincial Vision for Sustainability states “the long-term prosperity and social well-being of Ontario depends upon planning for strong, sustainable and resilient communities for people of all ages, a clean and healthy environment, and a strong and competitive economy.”

Policy Ideas/Options

This issue of sustainability has been the subject of discussion around the world. Currently, many municipalities have developed their own Municipal Sustainability Plans. The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake may choose to follow suit and develop policies encouraging the development and implementation of a Municipal Sustainability Plan through the Official Plan review.

3.2 Density

Policies and Guidelines

Ontario's 2014 Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) supports land use intensification, encouraging more optimal use of land, infrastructure, resources and services. Intensification is also a key policy of the Growth Plan.

The majority of the Town's intensification efforts will be directed to specifically identified areas. Appropriate infilling in other locations within the Town's Built-Up Area may be allowed where development proposals are consistent with applicable policies, such as urban design policies, and provided they will not adversely impact heritage resources and estate lots.

Official Plan Amendment No. 43 requires that the Town accommodate 15% of its forecasted intensification development within the Built-Up Area between 2015 and 2031, with the predominant built-form being single-detached, semi-detached, townhomes and low-rise apartment buildings. Mixed-use development is also encouraged. While the objective is to maintain a low-rise, small-town community image, a variety of other higher density housing forms may be considered that complement the existing built-form.

In addition to intensification areas, the Town identified larger tracts of undeveloped land known as Greenfield Areas which provide an opportunity to accommodate new growth. Efficient development patterns optimize the use of land, resources and investment in infrastructure and public service facilities. They promote a mix of housing, including affordable housing, employment, recreation, parks and open spaces, and active transportation options.

Policy Ideas/Options

The maximum densities as currently set in the general Official Plan policies should be reviewed, as should the implementing land use compatibility policies.

Also, minimum green field density requirements should be re-evaluated. It is extremely difficult for green field lands which are designated low-density to meet the current 50 people and jobs per hectare provincial target. The methodology used to calculate densities should be reviewed.

3.3 Structural Planning - Nodes and Corridors

The planning structure of the Town includes five urban areas, an airport, and rural residential properties found among a mix of small and medium-sized agricultural parcels. The physical “connectors” for all these parts are the Town’s transportation corridors (regional and town roads, the Niagara Parkway, and associated active transportation trails). If there is a way to describe this land use pattern, it could be described as a rural “Nodes and Corridors” structure.

Policy Ideas/Options

The notion of new urban development growing beyond our current urban boundaries is not practical. The revised Official Plan should focus on how best to manage growth and change inside our current urban boundaries.

Queenston

Residential growth in Queenston is not anticipated to be significant over the planning period. Planning staff anticipate a policy regime that reflects that reality.

Old Town

The policy regime recommended for Old Town is expected to focus on managing infill development opportunities, directing those to areas best suited to intensification, while paying greater attention to design detail, including more enforceable rules and regulations associated with urban design. Areas of important heritage value will be recommended for greater protection under local legislation where appropriate.

Virgil

Virgil has great potential for residential growth. There are also exciting opportunities for intensification and mixed-use development along the Regional Road #55 corridor. Application of urban design standards and mixed-use land use policies will be required.

St. Davids

St. Davids is an area undergoing significant change and requires greater attention in local land use policy. New urban design guidelines are needed, as well as the development of a clear vision for the commercial core within the next five years. It is recommended this vision include a more walkable and accessible area for all residents.

Glendale

Glendale has seen significant development in recent years, particularly with the completion of the Outlet Collection at Niagara. Zoning approvals are in place for the balance of the Niagara-on-the-Green residential community, although much of this area remains undeveloped. The industrial lands in Glendale continue to be developed and remain the Town's primary source of industrial land supply.

Airport

While it has no residential community, the Niagara District Airport is identified as a node in Schedule I of the Official Plan. However, it is identified as a key node because it is both a major transportation hub for Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Region, and serves as an employment centre with municipal services.

Part 4: Transportation, Services and Utilities

4.1 Roads and Transportation

Policies and Guidelines

Provincial policy directs municipalities to provide for transportation systems which are safe, energy efficient, facilitate the movement of people and goods, and are appropriate to address projected needs and encourage connections between municipal transit systems.

The Niagara Region Transportation Strategy also provides guidelines for future transportation projects, and tools for implementation. The strategy seeks to improve the arterial road system, and support many modes of transportation.

Policy Ideas/Options

While the Town's Transportation Master Plan identifies a variety of issues that will arise from future growth, it is somewhat out-of-date. To remain a useful tool, it should be revised to include policies for public transit and other modes of transportation.

4.2 Active Transportation

Policies and Guidelines

Provincial policy provides the basis on which settlement areas are developed, ensuring that development patterns support active transportation and create land use patterns suited for active transportation.

The Complete Streets for Niagara Plan sets out guidelines to ensure streets are suitable for all types of transportation and walking. It defines a complete street as "a road that is designed to be safe for drivers; bicyclists; transit vehicles and users; and pedestrians of all ages and abilities".¹

The Town's Transportation Master Plan also considers the implementation of active transportation as a strategic option.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is home to several major multi-use path networks identified through Niagara Region's Trails Master Plan. Some of these trails are internal to Niagara-on-the-Lake, such as the Upper Canada Heritage Trail and the Bob Howse Trail, and several are used to promote active transportation and recreation. There are also other trails which are part of larger trail networks.

¹ Complete Streets for Niagara Plan

Policy Ideas/Options

Currently, the Official Plan has minimal reference to active transportation policies. Some do exist in secondary plans and in policies related to community improvement plans. It is necessary to develop active transportation policies directed toward future development proposals and investment in public transportation infrastructure.

The Town should develop complete streets policies, identifying major streets for projects under the Complete Streets Plan for Niagara.

Also, all new Secondary Plans should develop specific policies for active transportation, identifying opportunities and constraints.

4.3 Infrastructure

Policies and Guidelines

Official Plan Amendment No. 43 added 'Growth Management Policies' to the Official Plan. These policies give general direction on transportation infrastructure, goods movement, water and wastewater services and utilities. In general, development may only be approved where adequate infrastructure exists.

Secondary Plan policies in the Official Plan recognize the importance of continued improvement to municipal infrastructure, roads, and watercourses. All existing Secondary Plans contain policy direction related to infrastructure to varying degrees.

Provincial Policy speaks to the need to maximize the use of existing and planned infrastructure to support growth in a compact and efficient manner.

The Regional Policy Plan aims to maximize the use of existing and planned infrastructure to support growth in a compact and efficient manner.

Policy Ideas/Options

When new Secondary Plans are developed, provisions for future infrastructure improvements must be included. A review of existing Secondary Plans should take place to ensure servicing policies are in place.

The Official Plan requires general policies related to existing and planned infrastructure. These policies should be developed in conjunction with the Public Works Department, utilizing information from previous background studies. Where Secondary Plans do not exist, infrastructure plans may be developed to guide development.

Priority and staging policies for water and sewage systems should be developed, including a permanent wastewater allocation policy. Council will then be in a position to consider a development application based on availability of water and wastewater capacity.

4.4 Renewable Energy

Policies and Guidelines

The current Official Plan is silent on the subject of renewable energy. The Plan would benefit from the inclusion of policy direction on energy projects.

Policy Ideas/Options

Although planning applications are not required, review of energy projects through the submission of municipal consultation forms or other documents will occur. Therefore, the Official Plan should provide policy guidance for the consideration of energy projects.

4.5 Communication Towers

Policies and Guidelines

The Official Plan does not address communication towers in-depth; but states, that such towers shall only be located in industrial and commercial areas.

Since Industry Canada, rather than the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, has the final approval authority, Official Plan policies do not have to be in place in order for municipalities to comment on proposed structures. The Official Plan could provide general principles with respect to cell towers, but policies separate from the Official Plan can set an adequate framework for commenting to Industry Canada and proponents.

Part 5: Area and Site Specific Policies

Policies and Guidelines

Section 6.32 of the Official Plan contains policies for Special Study Areas and Special Policy Areas. These areas are identified on the schedules to the Official Plan.

Special Study Areas are areas in the municipality identified as having particular planning issues requiring further analysis including land use, servicing infrastructure, built form, urban design and environmental constraints.

Policy Ideas/Options

As part of the Official Plan Review, it may necessary to identify additional Special Study Areas. Policies directed at protecting estate lots, conserving neighbourhood character, and assessing development proposals may also be the subject of a special study.

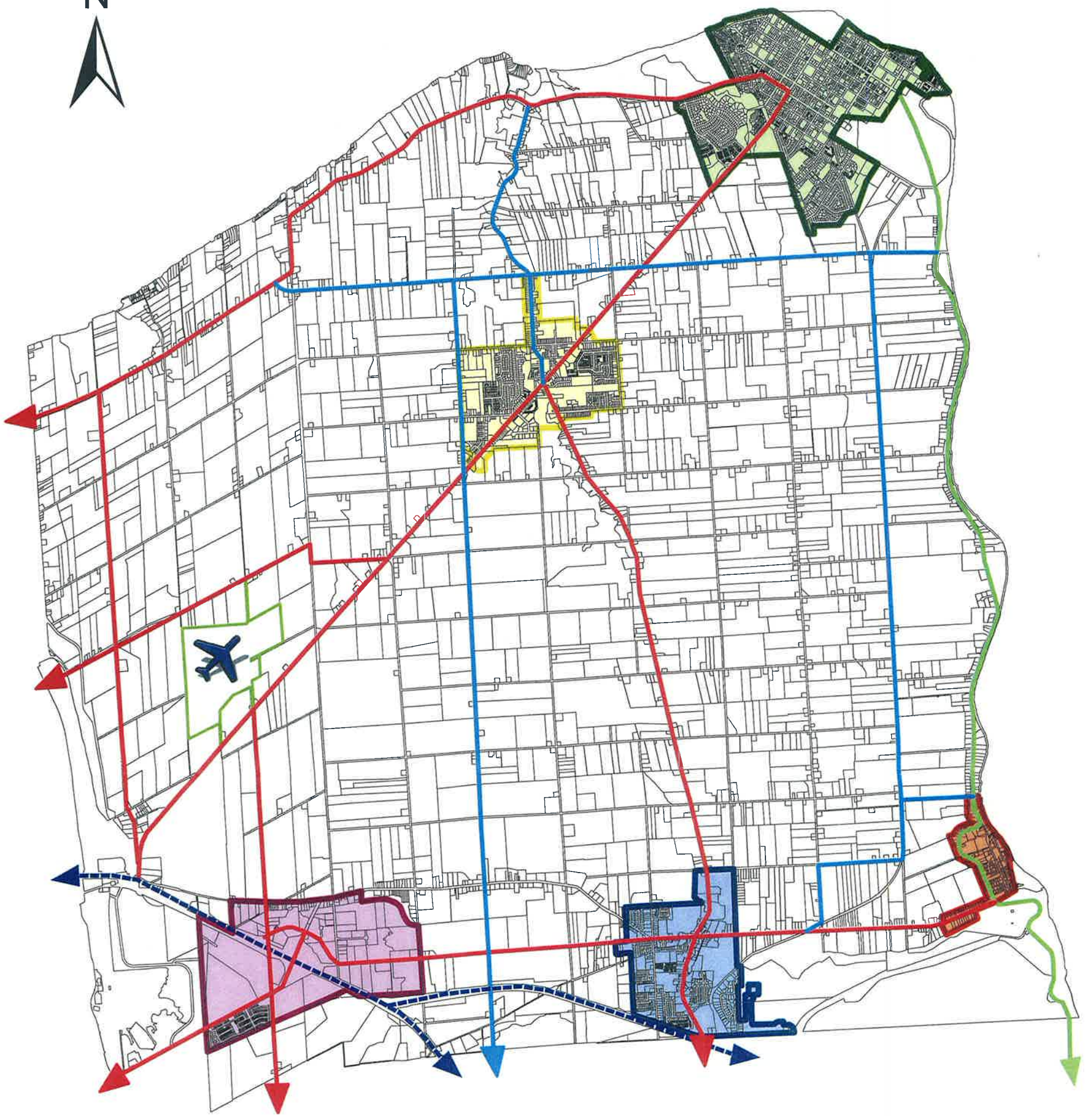
Additional Special Policy Areas may be identified to provide specific policy direction and strong urban design, transportation, infrastructure and, in the case of Old Town, heritage conservation policies.

To provide more clarity when reading the Official Plan, Special Policy and Secondary Plan policies should be separated from the main body of the Official Plan once the studies are completed and approved.

Conclusion

Overall, new communities throughout the Town are well-designed, helping to create compact, efficient, attractive neighbourhoods.

Strong built-environment policies that strengthen the role of urban design and provide for the creation of parks and trails; complete streets; walkable, vibrant neighbourhoods; and community facilities will ensure Niagara-on-the-Lake continues to be a unique and special place as reflected in the Town's Community Vision Statement.



-  Provincial Highway
-  Regional Road
-  Municipal Road
-  Niagara Parks Commission

OFFICIAL PLAN REVIEW

SCHEDULE 1 COMMUNITY NODES AND CORRIDORS