

Neighbourhood Plans Review

Public Engagement and Communication Plan

1.0 Background and Project Overview

The Neighbourhood Plans Review project is a comprehensive review of the City's 90 Council approved Neighbourhood Plans. It is being conducted in response to directions received through the Residential Zones - Reimagining Neighbourhoods project.

Staff anticipate that through this review, updates to some Neighbourhood Plans will be made and some Neighbourhood Plans may be recommended for removal. To provide transparency into the decision-making process, a set of preliminary review criteria have been developed. To assist members of the public in providing informed feedback, a major component of this project will also involve informing the public of the history and role of Neighbourhood Plans within the City's land use planning framework.

2.0 Decision Process

2.1 Goal

Facilitate public participation in the review of Neighbourhood Plans to enhance transparency and clarify the basis for decisions. Community input will help validate and refine the criteria used in the review process.

Scope

The scope of this engagement is to obtain input on the criteria to be used for reviewing Neighbourhood Plans, and on the recommendations for changes to Neighbourhood Plans as a result of applying the criteria.

- Phase 1: Gather feedback on the preliminary review criteria for Neighbourhood Plans.

- Phase 2: Report back on the final Council approved criteria to the public and identify preliminary recommendations for each Neighbourhood Plan (repeal or update). Gather feedback from the public on those preliminary recommendations.

Out of scope

- Creation of new Neighbourhood Plans.
- Engagement on Residential Zones - Reimagining Neighbourhoods.

2.2 Process and Timeline

Preparations in advance of initiating engagement include:

- Securing accessible facilities within Hamilton, Stoney Creek and Dundas for public engagement.
- Identifying any special considerations and adaptations to engagement that may be necessary such as schedule adjustments and translated material.
- Developing a set of questions and guiding material for public consultation.
- Developing informational content, including background information on the Neighbourhood Plans history and the Provincial land use planning framework.
- Creating an Engage Hamilton page for digital engagement.

Phase 1: Gathering Feedback on the Preliminary Criteria

- The process will include three Public Information Centres (one for each of the former Municipalities that contain Neighbourhood Plans: Hamilton, Dundas and Stoney Creek) and one virtual information meeting for those unable to attend in person. An Engage Hamilton webpage will be created and used for online engagement and feedback. The Engage Hamilton webpage will be used as a tool for online comments on the preliminary criteria. Comments will also be collected through feedback forms and displays at in-person events.

Timing:

- The public engagement events are planned to take place in Q2 of 2026 with a feedback report to be shared with participants and staff for analysis in Q3. A report back to Council on the final criteria and preliminary recommendations resulting from the criteria is planned for Q1 of 2027.

Phase 2: Report Back

- This phase would involve providing notice to everyone that was circulated and/or provided input in Phase 1 of the engagement and asking for comments on preliminary recommendations for the Neighbourhood Plans resulting from the application of the final Council approved review criteria. The Engage Hamilton webpage, a mailing list of agencies and community partners, previous email submissions received, and the collected contact information of those interested in staying updated on the project during the in-person Public Information Centres in Phase 1 would be used to solicit input on Phase 2.

Timing:

- The commenting and final report on Phase 2 of the engagement would occur Q2 2027.

3.0 Situation Analysis and Audience Identification

3.1 Demographics

Consultation should be planned to reflect Hamilton's diversity of population. Some neighbourhoods have higher proportions of first-generation Canadians, visible minorities, and Indigenous residents than the city overall. Engagement should intentionally include these communities to ensure decisions reflect the people most affected. This would be achieved by intentionally locating Public Information Centres within areas that have a higher proportion of underrepresented groups, within accessible locations and during times that would be convenient to residents (i.e. after typical working hours). In-person engagements will be supplemented with virtual engagement and online engagement through the Engage Hamilton webpage,

communicated to residents and landowners in the City using the communication strategy outlined in the communication plan section of this report.

3.2 Issue Identification

On February 23, 2024, Council provided direction to update the City’s Neighbourhood Plans to reflect a broadening of land use permissions within low density residential areas. With recent changes to provincial planning policy and updates to Hamilton’s Official Plan to encourage residential intensification, this review is a response to these recent changes.

3.3 Audience Identification (Interested, Involved, Impacted and Affected Communities and Agencies)

Audience Group	Who
<p>Interested Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General interest • May hold traditional power • Contribute/influence decisions • Keep informed, nice if engaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents • Landowners • Councillors • Neighbourhood Associations • Development Industry • Business Improvement Areas
<p>Involved Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previously engaged • Usually hold traditional power • Contribute to/influence decision • Keep informed, nice if engaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents • Landowners • Councillors • Neighbourhood Associations • Development Industry • Business Improvement Areas
<p>Impacted Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity to location • Impacted • Should be engaged in process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents or landowners whose property is located in an existing Neighbourhood Plan

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents who tie their identity to a neighbourhood Development Industry
<p>Affected Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditionally under-represented in decision-making, low level of power Barriers to participation Rely on advocacy Must be engaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents Landowners Development Industry

4.0 Role of Community: Defining Engagement Level

Engagement is based on a “Consult” level of engagement in accordance with Hamilton’s public engagement levels.

The Consult engagement levels promise to:

- Keep the public informed about the project.
- Listen to and acknowledge concerns or hopes for the project.
- Provide feedback on how the input received was used to inform the project.

5.0 Public Engagement and Communication Goals and Objectives

5.1 Communication Goals

- Provide a clear understanding of what Neighbourhood Plans are.
- Inform the public about the role of Neighbourhood Plans within the land use planning framework.

- Explain the impact of Provincial and Federal housing initiatives on traditional residential/neighbourhoods land use policies and how current Neighbourhood Plans are not consistent with recent changes introduced to the Urban Hamilton Official Plan.
- Explain why it is important to review the Neighbourhood Plans.
- Explain the rationale for the criteria.
- Clearly define how input will be used in the decision-making process.

5.2 Communication Objectives

1. Provide a clear understanding of what Neighbourhood Plans are.
 - Develop plain language explanations and visuals that describe the purpose, scope, and function of Neighbourhood Plans.
 - Explain the historical context of Neighbourhood Plans.
 - Ensure audiences can distinguish Neighbourhood Plans from other planning tools (e.g., Secondary Plans, the Official Plan).
2. Outline the legal authority of Neighbourhood Plans
 - Communicate how Neighbourhood Plans fit within the hierarchy of planning documents.
 - Ensure audiences understand why some plans may no longer align with current legislation.
 - Increase public awareness so that residents can accurately describe what a Neighbourhood Plan does and does not do.
3. Explain the impact of Provincial and Federal housing initiatives.
 - Summarize Provincial changes introduced through Bill 23 to allow 3-units as-of-right on urban residential land and the Federal government's Housing Accelerator fund which required permissions for 4-units as-of-right on urban residential land for municipalities to receive funding.

- Speak to how current Neighbourhood Plans remain a barrier to supporting these planning initiatives which look to increase the supply and variety of housing options.
4. Demonstrate the need for a review
- Communicate the historical context and limitations of the plans to show why some may no longer be effective.
 - Clearly define the criteria being used to evaluate Neighbourhood Plans.
 - Explain why consistent criteria are necessary for fairness, transparency, and efficiency.
 - Explain the benefits of the review, including reducing unnecessary duplication in development application reviews.
5. Define how input will be used in decision process.
- Clarify when and how residents can participate in the review process.
 - Ensure residents understand how their feedback will influence decisions.

5.3 Public Engagement Objectives

1. Build public understanding of the purpose of the review (WHAT)

- Ensure residents understand why Neighbourhood Plans are being updated or repealed. (HOW)
- Clarify how provincial and municipal planning changes have created the need for this review.

2. Increase transparency in how decisions will be made (WHAT)

- Communicate the criteria being used to evaluate each Neighbourhood Plan.
(HOW)
- Help residents understand how these criteria support fairness, consistency, and alignment with current land-use permissions.

3. Gather local knowledge to inform the review

- Collect community insights about neighbourhood priorities, unique contexts, and lived experiences that may not be captured in technical criteria.
- Identify any gaps or limitations in the draft review criteria from a community perspective.

4. Strengthen trust in the planning process

- Demonstrate how public input will be used in decisions to retain or repeal plans.
- Provide clear feedback loops so residents see how their contributions shaped the final recommendations.

5. Support smoother implementation of updated Neighbourhood Plans

- Prepare residents for how changes may affect development applications, local planning expectations, and future neighbourhood conversations.
- Reduce confusion by ensuring residents know where Neighbourhood Plans fit within the broader planning framework.

6.0 Communication Plan and Methods

6.1 Communication Plan – Key Messages

- Neighbourhood Plans are historic land use documents which do not form part of the Urban Hamilton Official Plan but are referenced when evaluating development proposals.

- Sometimes development proposals require an amendment to a Neighbourhood Plan even when the existing Zoning is permissive of the proposal.
- Recent changes to Zoning and the Urban Hamilton Official Plan responding to Provincial (Bill 23) and Federal (Housing Accelerator Fund) housing initiatives, have introduced as-of-right permissions for up to 4 residential units within the City's neighbourhoods.
- Currently, Neighbourhood Plans contain more restrictive land use permissions than what is found within the City's Zoning By-laws and the Urban Hamilton Official Plan.
- As a result, the City is initiating a comprehensive review of Neighbourhood Plans to determine their relevance and usefulness for guiding development in order to determine which Neighbourhood Plans should be retained and updated and which Neighbourhood Plans can be repealed.
- To guide this review, the City is looking to consult with the public on a set of preliminary review criteria which guide the determination for repealing or retaining Neighbourhood Plans.

6.2 Communication Methods and Target Audience

Communication methods and the detailed communication strategy will be refined as necessary in consultation with the City's Communications team.

Residents, Landowners and General Public

- Residents, Landowners, and the General Public will be notified through the City's social media channels and a newspaper notice in the Hamilton Spectator inviting them to comment, take part in the public engagement and sign-up to stay informed on the project.

Neighbourhood Associations and Business Improvement Areas

- In addition to the newspaper notice and social media campaign, Neighbourhood Associations and Business Improvement Areas will receive mailed and emailed

notices on the project, inviting them to comment, take part in the public engagement and sign-up to stay informed on the project.

Development Industry

- An overview of the project will be presented to the City Builders Group (formerly the Development Industry Liaison Group) inviting them to comment, take part in the public engagement and sign-up to stay informed on the project.

Council

- Councillors will be notified of engagement events and will be provided with an information toolkit to share with constituents (project description, key messages, how to participate).

6.3 Evaluation of Communication Plan

The success and effectiveness of the communication plan will be assessed using the following metrics:

- Social Media Impressions
- Responses collected via the Engage Hamilton Webpage
- Attendance at Public Information Centres
- Attendance at the Virtual Engagement Session
- Number of Sign Ups for Staying Informed on the Project.

7.0 Public Engagement Methods by Audiences

Method/Tool	Rationale	Audience(s)
<p>Drop-in Public Information Centres</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informational Panels and Graphics • Copies of Neighbourhood Plan Maps • Copies of Neighbourhood Plan policies • Maps overlaying Neighbourhood Plans with Natural Heritage Features, Heritage Districts, Secondary Plans and other City Designations (e.g. Community Improvement Plan Areas and Major Transit Station Areas). • Proposed review criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To allow for engagement from those who prefer in-person participation or to engage with those not digitally fluid or present and may miss the engagement opportunity due to a lack of an online presence. • To allow members of the public to ask questions and engage in live dialogue directly with planning staff. • To explain the history, purpose and role of Neighbourhood Plans and how they relate to the development review process. • To allow the public to review Neighbourhood Plans to better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents and landowners of Hamilton, Stoney Creek and Dundas • Development Industry • Business Improvement Areas • Neighbourhood Associations

<p>Feedback collected on panels.</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chart Paper • Question Prompts • Marker/Writing Utensils • Feedback provided via dots or sticky notes • General feedback/contact forms 	<p>understand what is being reviewed and consulted on.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback methods allow for active participation. • General feedback forms to allow audience to provide additional insight, questions and concerns which may not be captured through the question prompts. 	
<p>Virtual Engagement – Engage Hamilton Page</p> <p>Online commenting forum with question prompts.</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies of Neighbourhood Plan Maps • Information on web page 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To allow for sharing of Neighbourhood Plans and collecting feedback from residents regardless of schedules and availability. • To provide background about how the preliminary criteria were developed and allow the public to review them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Residents and landowners of Hamilton, Stoney Creek, and Dundas • Shift workers and those with limited time availability. • Those not comfortable in group settings. • Neighbourhood Associations • Development Industry • Business Improvement Areas

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital copies of panels from in-person events • Question Prompts <p>Commenting on review criteria document</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of preliminary criteria with rationale provided for the suggested criteria • Survey with question prompts • Open comment tool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question prompts to give examples on the types of feedback we're looking for and to help stimulate discussion related to Neighbourhood Plans, what audience like or don't like about them. • To collect feedback online for those unable to make it to an in-person engagement. • To help identify community priorities and shared values. • Survey with question prompts to provide a structured forum for audience to provide suggestions for additional criteria or specific considerations when utilizing the proposed review criteria. 	
<p>Virtual Community Information Meeting</p>	<p>To provide opportunities for virtual engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents and landowners of

<p>Online presentation</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slides explaining the project background and purpose. • Slides explaining proposed review criteria with rationale. • Question prompts for discussion of review criteria. • Link and invitation to Engage Hamilton Page along with sign-up for those who want to stay updated on the project progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explain the history, purpose and role of Neighbourhood Plans and how they relate to the development review process. • To allow for general questions about the project and scope. • To guide a discussion on what should be considered as review criteria and how they should be used when assessing Neighbourhood Plans. • Link and invitation to Engage Hamilton page will be shared as part of the invitation to the virtual engagement to allow audience to review Neighbourhood Plans and the criteria in more detail. 	<p>Hamilton, Stoney Creek and Dundas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Industry • Business Improvement Areas • Neighbourhood Associations
---	---	---

8.0 What We Heard: Close the Loop

8.1 What we heard

Throughout the engagement feedback will be recorded. Once the engagement concludes, there will be a summary report created to document the feedback received and highlight some key themes of the engagement.

8.2 Close the loop: Building Transparency, Accessibility, Trust

The summary of the engagement feedback received will be shared with the public through the project Engage Hamilton page. Those who also chose to sign-up for email updates on the project will also be notified via email when the “What We Heard” report is released.