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# Background Report

Official Plan Review and Update  
Township of Ramara



September 26, 2017

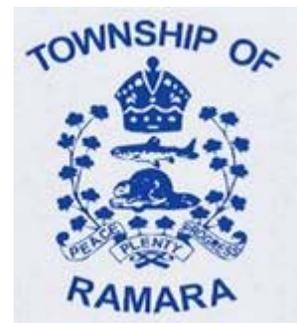
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## 1.0 Introduction

An Official Plan is the primary tool for guiding land use planning in a municipality. A municipal Official Plan sets out policies regarding how land in a community will be used and developed by establishing a framework of goals and objectives that direct growth within a 20-year horizon. Although it is focused primarily on land use, the Plan must be holistic in its direction by including economic, environmental and cultural themes within the goals and objectives. The goals, objectives and policies that are contained in an Official Plan provide direction to municipal council and staff, landowners, developers and the community at large.

The proposed Update to the Township of Ramara Official Plan will be based on an outlook to 2031, which is consistent with the recently approved County of Simcoe Official Plan. The Update will also allow for the opportunity to incorporate and consolidate all amendments to the existing Official Plan (as described in Section 2.0 of this Report) into the main document. That said, there is a vast amount of additional information that must be considered when updating an Official Plan. The intent of this Background Report is to identify policies and regulations within provincial, municipal or agency documents and guidelines that have been introduced since 2003 that should be reflected in Official Plan land use policies. A number of changes to Provincial and County policies have occurred since the current Official Plan was adopted in 2003 – most notably, updates to the *Planning Act*, Provincial Policy Statement, and the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Modifications to the Official Plan will be made to bring the Plan into conformity with these documents, where necessary.

Comments and suggestions from residents and community stakeholders will also influence the introduction of new policies and updates to existing policies. This Background Report will provide a brief summary of comments received during initial public consultation. A number of events will be held during the Update process to gather comments and input from members of the public and other important community stakeholders, in order to ensure that the policies of the Official Plan accurately represent the needs of the community. As required under Section 26 of the *Planning Act*, the Official Plan Update project was introduced to Council via a statutory public meeting on June 26. A kick-off Open House was held on August 23, 2017 in order to obtain preliminary input from residents. An initial meeting was held with the Chief, Council and senior staff of the Chippewas of Rama First Nation on September 1 at the CRFN offices in Rama. Further community stakeholder sessions will also be held in the coming months

to solicit comments and questions from residents and stakeholders. Once the Official Plan final draft is created, a Statutory Public Meeting will take place for the Plan to be presented to the public and to allow for a review of the document.

It should be noted, however, that the information identified in this report should not be considered exhaustive. It is our intention to gather information throughout the Official Plan Update in order to ensure that the final document encapsulates all policies and regulations, including those that may be implemented during the update process.

## **2.0 Township of Ramara – Regional Context**

The Township of Ramara is located along the eastern shores of Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching in Central Ontario, east of the City of Orillia. The Township is primarily rural and composed of many small settlement areas. The larger settlement areas of Atherley and Brechin are connected by Highway 12, which provides access to the neighbouring City of Orillia and Township of Brock.

According to the 2016 Census, the Township of Ramara had a population of 9,488 persons. The 2.3% increase in population from the 2011 Census represents a lower rate of population growth than Simcoe County and the Province. The average age of a Township resident was 47.7 years old, 6.7 years older than the provincial average. The percentage of the Township's population aged 65 years or older is 25.8%. As noted in the 2011 National Household Survey (the most recent available data for this demographic variable), 7.6% of the population identifies as having either First Nations or Metis ancestry. This is in addition to the 870 residents of the Chippewa of Rama First Nation, which is located adjacent to Lake Couchiching, near the western portion of the Township.

## **3.0 Official Plan for Township of Ramara, 2003**

According to Section 26 of the *Planning Act*, it is the responsibility of municipalities to perform an update of their existing Official Plan every five years. The [Township of Ramara Official Plan](#) has not been updated since it was adopted in 2002 and granted final approval on July 31, 2003. There have been significant changes in the Provincial and municipal land use planning regime since the approval of the Official Plan 14 years ago. A total of 18 amendments (16 of which were granted final approval) have been made to

the Official Plan since its adoption and approval, with the last one occurring in 2015. The amendments are as follows:

- OPA #1 – adopted in August 2003 to change the land use designation from “Industrial” to “Rural” in the area defined as Part of Lot 25, Front Range, in the former Township of Rama (Part 1 on Plan 51R-20306).
- OPA #3 – adopted in August 2004 to change the land use designation from “Rural” to “Highway Commercial” in the area defined as Part of Lot 15, Concession 1, in the former Township of Rama to permit the development of a self-storage facility.
- OPA #4 – adopted in June 2004 to change the land use designation from “Agriculture” to “Village Residential” in the area defined as Part of Lot 27, Concession 10, in the former Township of Mara to permit the creation of four new residential lots.
- OPA #5 – adopted in May 2006 to change the land use designation from “Agriculture” to “Shoreline Residential” and to add special polices to extend the shoreline residential area and access to the lands. The change in land use designation allowed for the creation of three new shoreline residential lots along Lake Dalrymple.
- OPA #6 – adopted in November 2006 to change the land use designation from “Rural” to “Mineral Aggregate Extraction Area” in the area defined as Lots 11 to 15 and Part of Lots 16 and 17, Concession B, and Part of Lot 15, Concession C, all in the former Township of Rama, to permit the licencing of the subject lands for quarry operations.
- OPA #7 – adopted in April 2007 to change the land use designation from “Agriculture” to “Rural” on the lands known as Part of Lot 16, Concession 9, in the former Township of Mara, to permit marine sales and service on the two properties.
- OPA #9 – adopted in November 2007 to allow two additional residential lots in a “Rural” designation on the lands known as Part of Lot 18, Concession 6, in the former Township of Mara.

- OPA #10 – adopted in December 2007 to establish policy and schedule changes with regards to the Atherley-Uptergrove Secondary Plan area.
- OPA #11 – adopted in December 2007, and modified in December 2008, to establish policy and schedule changes with regards to the Rama Road Corridor Secondary Plan.
- OPA #12 – adopted in June 2008 to change the land use designation from “Natural Area Protection” to “Rural” on lands located in Part of the West part of Lot 25, Concession 11, in the former Township of Mara (Parts 1, 2 and 3 of 51R-32953) to recognize three existing residential lots.
- OPA #13 – adopted in June 2012 to change the land use designation from “Destination Commercial” to “Shoreline Residential” on Schedule “A” and from “Destination Commercial” to “Existing Built Up Area” in Schedule “B” on the lands known as Part of Front Range, Lot 2, in the former Township of Rama.
- OPA #14 – adopted in November 2012 to change the land use designation from “Destination Commercial” and “Rural” to “Shoreline Residential” on the lands known as Part of Lots 28, 29 and 30 Front Range, and Part of the Original Shoreline Allowance in Front of Lots 28, 29 and 30, in the former Township of Rama to permit a total of 36 lots.
- OPA #15 – adopted in July 2013 to change the land use designation from “Rural” to “Mineral Aggregate Extraction Area” on the lands known as Part of Lots 3 and 4, Concession C, in the former Township of Rama, to permit the licencing and operation of a quarry.
- OPA #16 – adopted in July 2014 to change the land use designation from “Mineral Aggregate Extraction” to “Rural Special Policy Area” on the lands known as Part of Lot 4, Concession C, in the former Township of Rama, to permit a soil bio-remediation facility.
- OPA #17 – adopted in May 2015 to adjust the boundary of the designated Lagoon City Settlement Area boundary.

- OPA #18 – adopted in July 2015 to change the designation of Strawberry Island from “Rural” to “Island Accommodation (Strawberry Island)” and “Natural Area Protection”. This OPA is currently at the County of Simcoe for approval. **Inclusion of this OPA into the updated Plan is contingent on final County approval.**

All of the above amendments will be incorporated into the text of the updated Official Plan.

## **4.0 Provincial Documents**

### **4.1 Planning Act**

Land use planning in the Province of Ontario is guided by the [Planning Act, R.S.O 1990, as amended](#). According to the *Planning Act*, municipal land use decisions must be consistent with provincial planning documents issued under the *Planning Act* (i.e. the Provincial Policy Statement, 2014). The *Planning Act* is also the legislation that gives authority to municipalities to develop and adopt their own Official Plans to guide land use and future development.

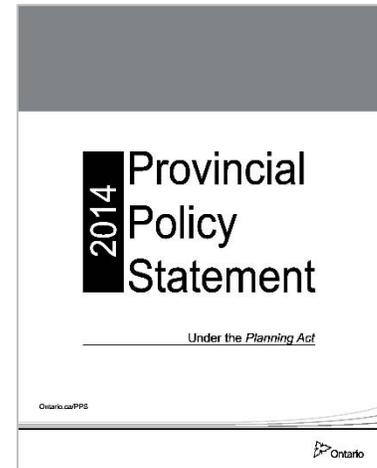
There is a provision in the *Planning Act* that requires existing municipal Official Plans to be updated every five years. This policy is in place to ensure that the Official Plan conforms to the current Provincial Policy Statement (PPS), that it has regard to matters of provincial interests and to ensure that it conforms to other provincial policy documents issued under the *Planning Act*. Municipalities that are considered lower-tier, like the Township of Ramara, must also conform to the upper-tier Official Plan; in this case the County of Simcoe Official Plan.

#### **4.1.1 Section 16(3) – Second Units**

Section 16(3) of the *Planning Act* was approved in 2011 and requires that all municipalities include policies that allow for the development of accessory dwelling units for single detached, semi-detached or rowhouse dwelling units. Policies related to accessory dwelling units must also allow for the development of these units in a separate building on the same property.

## 4.2 Provincial Policy Statement

The [Provincial Policy Statement](#) (PPS) came into effect in 2014 and replaced the 2005 Provincial Policy Statement. The PPS provides a policy framework for land use within the Province of Ontario. It is then the responsibility of the local planning authority to uphold the policies pertaining to land use planning and development. In particular, the planning authority must ensure that their decisions are consistent with key provincial interests.

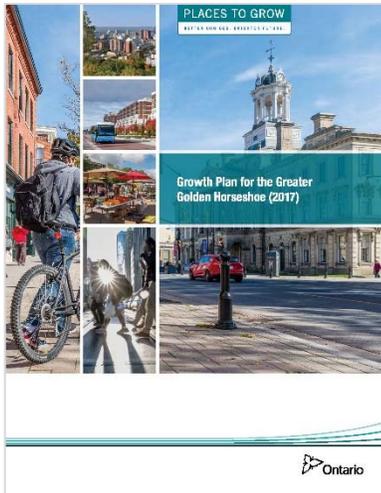


Changes to the PPS include increased emphasis on:

- Intensification and redevelopment;
- Biodiversity and impacts of climate change;
- Active transportation, transit supportive land and planned corridors;
- Promotion and protection of agricultural lands, agriculture-related uses and on-farm diversified uses;
- Mixed use development;
- Planning for stormwater management;
- Energy conservation and supply;
- Natural heritage systems and linkages;
- Consideration of interests of Aboriginal communities in conserving cultural heritage and archaeological resources;
- Hazardous forest types susceptible to wildfire.

New policies that ensure “consistency” with the policies of the PPS will be incorporated into the updated Township Official Plan.

### 4.3 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017



The Township of Ramara is included within the [Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe](#) (Growth Plan) area, prepared under the *Places to Grow Act, 2005*. The Growth Plan is intended to guide decisions respecting transportation, infrastructure planning, land use planning, housing, natural heritage and resource protection. Although the PPS provides overall policy direction on matters of Provincial interest related to land use and development, the Growth Plan prevails where there is a conflict with two exceptions: natural environment and human health.

On July 1, 2017, a new Growth Plan came into full force and affect. Although the policies of the new County of Simcoe Official Plan do not reflect the new Growth Plan policies, it will be the Township's responsibility to ensure that the updated Township Official Plan is in conformity with the new Growth Plan. More specifically, the 2017 Growth Plan places further emphasis on natural heritage systems and agricultural systems which will have the effect of significantly reducing the areas within the Township that were previously identified as Rural. The Growth Plan supports a further shift to complete communities that are compact, transit supportive and efficient.

The Growth Plan's Natural Heritage and Agricultural policies also allow for the creation of Province-wide Natural Heritage and Agricultural Systems mapping, which is currently being rolled out as a follow-up to the introduction of the 2014 PPS and the new Growth Plan. At this point, the mapping is in draft form and has not yet been finalized. Although this mapping must be reflected in upper-tier planning documents, EcoVue and Township staff will be following this process closely in order to ensure that there are no future policy or mapping conflicts.

### 4.4 Agricultural Guideline 851

In 2016, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) released a document titled [Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas](#), also known as Publication 851. The Guidelines provided in this document assist in the assessment and classification of permitted uses within prime agricultural areas, notably agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses. Municipalities are

required to provide policies that allow for these uses. Although Publication 851 provides some suggested parameters for evaluating these uses, there is some latitude as to the extent and variation of accessory uses in Prime Agricultural areas, particularly on-farm diversified uses.

## 5.0 County of Simcoe Official Plan

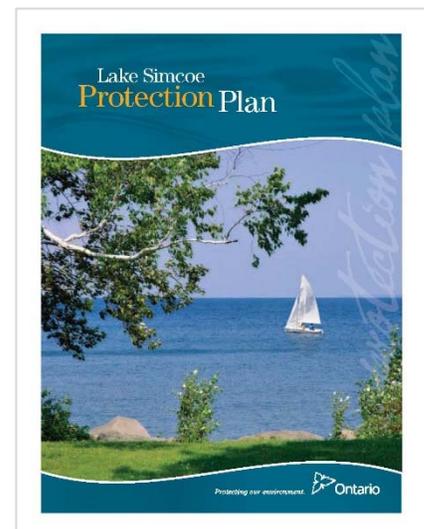
The [County of Simcoe Official Plan](#) sets out broad goals, objectives and policies that determine how growth in the County should occur. The County recently undertook their own review of the County Official Plan that was partially approved by the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) in December 2016, although certain sections are still under appeal at the OMB.

As a lower-tier municipality, it is important that the Township's Official Plan be updated to conform to the new County Plan. The delay of full approval of the County Official Plan prevented the update of the Township of Ramara Official Plan until the late winter of 2017.

The County's Official Plan sets out the broad land use policies, while the lower-tier municipal Official Plans provides more detailed policies regarding growth and land use. As the upper-tier municipality, the County of Simcoe is the approval authority for the Township of Ramara's new Official Plan.

## 6.0 Lake Simcoe Protection Plan

The [Lake Simcoe Protection Plan \(LSPP\)](#) came into effect on June 2, 2009 and applies to a large part of the Township of Ramara. The LSPP directs local municipalities affected by the Plan to implement several policies within their respective local Official Plan with the intention of protecting and restoring the Lake Simcoe Watershed. Some of these policies include the implementation of Low Impact Development requirements for stormwater management associated with major developments and the provision for the safe and sustainable installation of small and large septic systems.



## 7.0 Township of Ramara Corporate Strategic Plan

In the spring of 2017, the Township of Ramara presented its [Corporate Strategic Plan 2017 – 2022](#). The Strategic Plan is a five-year road map for staff and Council to follow that will help shape the future of the Township.

Some of the vision and mission statements included in the Corporate Strategic Plan should provide a basis for the goals and objectives of the Township’s updated Official Plan.

Vision Statement:

*A diverse community living in harmony and preserving Ramara’s country setting. Whether permanent or seasonal, with urban and rural roots, all inhabitants are committed to conserving Ramara’s natural and cultural heritage, natural resources and lifestyle.*



Mission Statement:

*The Township of Ramara will achieve the Vision by working cooperatively. Ramara staff and Council will provide guidance through the Township’s Official Plan, policies, budget process and service delivery to help assist and direct all community stakeholders. Our Vision will remain foremost in our minds as we provide services for our community and plan for growth.*

The Vision and Mission Statements will be used to guide the development of the goals and objectives of the new Official Plan and its policies.

### 7.1 Strategic Priorities

Six strategic priorities were identified in the Strategic Plan through consultation with ratepayers, community leaders and Township staff and Council. For each strategic priority, goals have been identified followed by the actions required to achieve those goals.

### **7.1.1 Plan for Growth and Development**

The first strategic goal that was determined was Planning for Growth and Development. Under this priority, three goals were identified. One of the goals was to “*Be Business Ready for Growth*”. It was then broken down into five action items.

Initiating and completing a formal review and update of the Township’s Official Plan is an action item that will help the Township achieve this goal. Not only will the completion of the Official Plan help the Township achieve their goal of being “*Business Ready for Growth*”, it will also help to achieve their goal to “*Develop a Long Term Growth and Development Plan*”.

### **7.1.2 Protecting Significant Natural Heritage Features**

Natural Heritage features are an important aspect of the Township of Ramara and it is important that they are protected for the long term. The Corporate Strategic Plan has made protecting natural heritage a priority and the new Official Plan can help achieve two of the goals set out under this priority.

Goal one is to “*Protect Important Natural Heritage Features*” by ensuring the Official Plan identifies and protects the significant natural heritage features. The second goal is “*Promote a Clean and Sustainable Environment*”. The Strategic Plan’s actions for this goal is to ensure the Official Plan outlines best management practices to protect these features.

### **7.1.3 Support a Thriving Agricultural Sector**

In order to support a thriving agricultural sector, the Strategic Plan includes the goal of “*Protecting important agricultural land for long term use*”. By bringing the Official Plan into conformity with the 2014 PPS and the 2017 Growth Plan, policies can be created for the protection of prime agricultural lands and to provide opportunities for agriculture related and on-farm diversified uses.

## **8.0 Stakeholder Engagement and Community Consultation**

It is important to consult with landowners, business owners, community organizations and all residents throughout the Official Plan Review and Update process to ensure everyone has a voice and all concerns are heard.

Engaging with the public, First Nations and other key stakeholders, will enable the Township of Ramara Council, Staff and EcoVue Consulting Services Inc. (EcoVue) to identify and respond to various issues and interests that should be addressed in the Official Plan Review.

With technology playing a bigger role in our lives, it is important to include various formats of communication in order to reach as much of the community as possible.

EcoVue, in conjunction with Township of Ramara staff, have created various ways for information to be exchanged. One such way is through the creation of a Ramara Official Plan Update website, which will provide updates on the project, upcoming event dates, copies of documents related to the project and contact information for project leads. There is also a Township of Ramara Official Plan Update Twitter page that will provide updates and upcoming event dates regarding the update and review.

## **8.1 Public and Agency Issues Identification**

During our initial discussions, EcoVue and Township and County staff identified a number of issues that require attention as part of the Official Plan update process. After reviewing comments from the public received after the Special Meeting of Council on June 26, 2017 and comments received at the Public Open House on August 23, 2017, it was confirmed that many of the concerns raised by staff are shared by members of the public, councillors and representatives of agencies. Some of the common themes among all stakeholders are as follows:

### ***8.1.1 Protection of Water and Natural Heritage Resources***

The most common theme among the comments received is the idea of “protection”. Specifically, the protection of Lake Simcoe and its shoreline and natural heritage features such as wetlands, woodlands and watercourses. This protection also includes the expansion and recognition of new and previously unidentified natural heritage features and resources. Members of the public would also like to see an increase in access to Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching for recreational purposes.

### ***8.1.2 Focusing Growth and Economic Opportunities to Settlement Areas***

Within the past 15 years, the Township of Ramara has seen little to no population growth. This stagnation is exemplified in the settlement areas within the Township of Ramara, particularly Brechin and Lagoon

City, which are struggling to provide the economic opportunities that would contribute to the recruitment and retention of new and existing residents. Although this issue is not limited to just land use planning, the policies of the Township's Official Plan can influence growth patterns and provide the basis for the Township as a viable permanent destination for newcomers. Residents are particularly focused on the revitalization and diversification of uses within the settlement areas.

### **8.1.3 Proper Identification of Prime Agricultural Lands**

It is our understanding, through both analysis of soil classification mapping and confirmation from local residents, that much of the rural lands within the Township are comprised of a lower quality of soil. This is due, in large part, to the location of the Township at the northernmost edge of the Bobcaygeon and Lower Gull limestone formations, which generally features limited, stony overburden. Despite these soil limitations, large swaths of the Township are, in fact, designated as Prime Agricultural in the Township Official Plan. The Prime Agricultural designation, which is normally reserved for lands that are Class 1-3 soils (as per Canada Land Inventory (CLI) mapping), provides for limited permitted uses and development opportunities beyond agriculture and agriculture-related uses. A large number of residents expressed frustration over certain rural lands with poor soils that remain fallow as a result of restrictions from Prime Agricultural policies.

### **8.1.4 Other Comments**

Additional comments received so far have been related to the following:

- Policies that promote healthy communities;
- Recreational opportunities, including policies that encourage the establishment of new trails and parks;
- Responsible aggregate development;
- There are also some site-specific mapping changes that are required in order to recognize changing conditions within specific areas.
- Community improvement, including façade and main street upgrades.

### **8.1.5 Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit**

Representatives from the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit have provided the Update team with useful information regarding policies related to healthy community design. Information provided includes a guide book with suggestions for land use policies that promote healthy community design that can be implemented into local official plans. Suggested policies include the promotion of walkable communities through the encouragement of compact urban design and requiring new development to include energy efficient design.

### **8.2 First Nations Consultation**

It is also important to note that all seven First Nation Williams Treaties Signatories, the Metis Nation of Ontario and the Huron-Wendat Nation have all been contacted as part of the First Nations Consultation. EcoVue and Township staff will work closely with the First Nations to ensure their needs are met throughout the review and update process.

Staff from EcoVue and the Township of Ramara met with the Band Council for the Chippewas of Ramara First Nation (CRFN) on Friday, September 1, 2017. Given the proximity of the lands under their jurisdiction, it is important that the CRFN is closely involved with the Update process and that their interests are protected. Furthermore, lands within the Rama Road Corridor Secondary Plan, which are adjacent to the CRFN, are of particular importance to the economic growth of both the CRFN and the Township. The meeting was productive and the Township is looking forward to ongoing discussions throughout the Update process.



**Figure 1: Key Issues**

## 9.0 Conclusion

Official Plans are the primary tool for guiding land use planning in a municipality through Section 16 of the *Planning Act* R.S.O 1990 as amended. As Official Plans establish a framework of goals and objectives to direct growth, it is important to update them to reflect the most current goals and visions of the Township as well as the current provincial and county plans.

There are many policies and regulations within provincial, municipal or agency documents and guidelines that should be addressed as part of the Official Plan update. The information provided in this Report is not exhaustive. It is our intention to continue to gather information throughout the Official Plan update process to ensure the Official Plan encapsulates all policies and regulations, as well as the general goals

and objectives of the residents and stakeholders. At this point, the information obtained at our initial meetings has provided us with a strong basis for conducting future stakeholder and roundtable sessions.

It is the intention of the Township to reach out to all interested parties as we continue to expand our list of key issues. We look forward to gathering further information and integrating new ideas into draft policies as the Official Plan Update process continues.

Respectfully Submitted,

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