

Introduction to the Official Plan

Learn what the Official Plan is and how it works.

What is the Official Plan?

Every municipality has a vision. It may be expressed as part of a strategic plan or a capital works program. More often than not, that vision is set out in an Official Plan. An Official Plan is like a blue print for how a community will grow and develop. The Plan describes how land in the community should be used. It deals mainly with issues such as where new housing, industries, offices and shops will go and what services like roads, parks and schools will be needed. It also provides for the protection of fish and wildlife habitat and the conservation of heritage buildings and landscapes. With an eye to public safety, the Plan will identify areas that are unsafe i.e. floodplains, or where special precautions have to be undertaken such as building on contaminated soils or near a landfill site or heavy industry. In rounding out the content of an Official Plan a municipality will set out its goals and objectives, in essence its vision on what kind of a community residents and businesses want to live, work and play in.

In Ontario today, municipalities must plan for a 20 year time horizon when preparing a new Official Plan. This is often described as the planning period. Municipalities will project population and employment growth and how much land is required to for new housing and other land uses to accommodate growth within the planning period. The Planning Act also requires that municipalities conduct a check-up every five years. This is a way to evaluate how they have progressed, whether they are achieving their goals and objectives, and whether changes should be made to the Official Plan.

The Township of Central Frontenac has just initiated the first five year review of its Official Plan. This process is expected to take six to eight months and involves consultation with residents and businesses in the community. There are several issues which are particularly relevant to the review and will be incorporated into the program for public consultation. The first of these is lake management planning. With the increasing demand for waterfront residential development, questions arise as to how much development is feasible without compromising the water quality of our lakes and rivers in Central Frontenac? Should lake management plans be prepared for all lakes? Who should prepare these plans? Should higher standards be imposed in conserving shorelines in their natural state?

Many shoreline areas are only accessible by private roads. Poorly constructed and poorly maintained private roads may make access by a fire truck difficult or impossible. Questions arise as to whether new private road construction should be permitted at all, whether there is merit to permitting minor extensions to existing private roads and whether further development on existing private roads should be curtailed? Currently, the Official Plan only permits new private road construction where water access is not feasible or where a condominium is proposed.

The sign of a healthy community is a prosperous business community. In Central Frontenac, businesses provide important services to local residents as well as to the tourism industry. Ways and means to encourage new business development and to retain existing businesses warrant discussion. A new issue is 'green energy'. An Official Plan can provide the framework for permitting alternative sources of energy such as wind turbines. Should the Official Plan for Central Frontenac make provision for 'green energy' facilities?

Successful communities are ones where residents are active and involved in community planning. Make your voice count by participating in the five year Official Plan Review. Join your neighbours in attending community workshops.