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Dufferin County creates Citizen?s Guide to help residents understand Official Plan, future growth

In September, Dufferin County was excited to announce that after many years of engagement and consultation, it had completed its Municipal Comprehensive Review process.

But what is a Municipal Comprehensive Review?

?A Municipal Comprehensive Review is the process a municipality takes to update its Official Plan to plan for and accommodate growth,? says Rajbir Sian, director of planning and development at Dufferin County.

?Dufferin County is expected to grow to approximately 100,700 people and 40,900 jobs by 2051 ? an increase of 32,300 people and 14,100 jobs since 2021,? adds Rajbir. ?The County's approved Official Plan provides policy direction on how land in the community should be used, and based on the Province of Ontario's Provincial Planning Statement, lays out what the future of the community should look like to ensure that Dufferin is a complete, healthy and sustainable community.?

While an Official Plan may not seem to directly impact the daily lives of community members, it is incredibly important for all Dufferin residents. The Official Plan provides critical direction on growth management and land use decisions from a broader, more holistic upper-tier land use planning lens, which directly impacts all eight local municipalities in Dufferin County.

?The Official Plan is basically the blueprint for Dufferin's future. It establishes county-wide growth targets and settlement areas, protects areas for local economic development activity, ensures that prime agricultural lands are strengthened and viable, and preserves the natural heritage and rural character of Dufferin,? says Liam Morgan, manager of planning at Dufferin County. ?We want our community to understand where Dufferin is going, and what the Official Plan means for them.?

?That's why we have published the Citizen's Guide,? says Rajbir. ?Residents, developers, local planning staff and others are welcome to read the entire Official Plan. But this guide is meant to clearly communicate points of interest related to the Official Plan in an accessible and digestible format.?

The County also wants its community members to understand that planning at the local, lower-tier municipalities is different than what the County is responsible for as the upper-tier level of local government.

The lower-tier municipalities are who developers would go to with a planning application they want reviewed and approved. The County sets the framework that all development in Dufferin should adhere to and provides overall guidance to the lower-tier municipalities as part of the planning application review process. The lower-tier municipalities make decisions off the framework established by the County. Together, Dufferin and the local municipalities manage growth in Dufferin with a focus on health, sustainability, the economy and a high quality of life.

What is the Citizen's Guide

Dufferin County's Citizen's Guide is a condensed copy of the County of Dufferin Official Plan. It provides users with a points-of-interest version of the Official Plan Policies in effect for the County.

Highlights include:

? Growth projections ? growth in the County will be managed by focusing and promoting growth within settlement areas, optimizing the use of existing infrastructure, developing complete communities, and protecting the natural environment and agricultural areas

? Economic development ? the Plan focuses on specific types and scale of economic activity in the local environment best suited to their success, and relies on the local municipal official plans to identify and protect for areas of economic development activity

? Housing and affordability ? the Plan has guidelines around Additional Residential Units and Garden Suites to promote more affordable housing in Dufferin

? Prime agricultural areas ? lands designated as Prime Agricultural Area are intended to preserve and strengthen the continued viability of Dufferin's agricultural community. Agricultural areas accommodate a diverse range of agricultural uses

? Rural lands ? rural lands are intended to protect the natural amenities and rural character of the county while providing opportunities for rural and other agricultural uses and resource-based activities, and recreational and tourism opportunities

? Natural heritage system ? a Natural Heritage System has been mapped to support a comprehensive, integrated, and long-term approach to planning for the protection of the County's natural heritage and biodiversity

?Over the past few years, Dufferin County has been working towards the goal of improving its communications,? says Liam. ?We hope that the Citizen's Guide will help our community understand what the County is responsible for in terms of planning. And we hope that it helps answer any questions about the main amendments of our Official Plan and what they mean for Dufferin now, and into the future.?

Up next, the County is required to undertake an additional Official Plan Amendment to ensure conformity with any policies that were added or modified in the new Provincial Planning Statement from the Province of Ontario. The County is currently in the process of retaining a consultant to undertake the amendment exercise.

Questions about the Citizen's Guide or planning in Dufferin? The County's Planning and Development team is here to help. Community members, planners and other stakeholders can reach out toplanner@dufferincounty.ca

The Citizen's Guide, Official Plan and more information on planning policies can be found at www.dufferincounty.ca