



TOWN OF
HALTON HILLS
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REPORT

TO: Mayor Lawlor and Members of Council

FROM: Kelly Aldridge, Senior Policy Planner

DATE: December 21, 2023

REPORT NO.: PD-2024-002

SUBJECT: Recommendation Report for an Official Plan Amendment for Alternative Public Meeting Notice Policies

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. PD-2024-002 dated December 21, 2023, regarding a Recommendation Report for an Official Plan Amendment to allow for alternative Public Meeting Notice Policies be received;

AND FURTHER THAT Town of Halton Hills Official Plan Amendment No. 55 attached to this report as Schedule 1 be adopted as an exempt Local Official Plan Amendment.

KEY POINTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The purpose and effect of the proposed Official Plan Amendment is to revise the Implementation Section of the Town's Official Plan in order to allow alternative notice for amendments to the Official Plan and Comprehensive Zoning By-law. This will allow the Town to provide notices for public meetings via digital means rather than in a printed newspaper.
- This amendment also considers eliminating the requirements for public notice and public meetings for minor Zoning By-law Amendments, for example, when correcting grammatical errors and/or making changes to the numbering of sections. This would apply to publicly initiated amendments only, which are amendments that are initiated by the Town.
- The Statutory Public Meeting was held December 11, 2023, to present the proposal and no comments or questions were received. In addition, there have been no comments from the public and/or agencies received while processing this amendment.

- Given the amendment is minor in nature, Halton Region's Chief Planning Official has confirmed that this Official Plan Amendment is exempt from Regional approval.
- This report recommends approval of the proposed Official Plan Amendment.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

The Ontario Regulations under the *Planning Act* currently require that Public Notices be issued in a printed newspaper that, in the opinion of the clerk of the municipality, is of sufficient general circulation in the area to which the proposed application would apply and that it would give the public reasonable notice of the public meeting and/or open house.

For privately initiated amendments, the *Planning Act* requires a notice for a statutory public meeting to be i) posted on a sign on the subject property and mailed out to property owners within 120m of the subject property or ii) the notice to be published in the local paper.

Until recently, for Town initiated amendments impacting large geographic areas such as Secondary Plans, statutory notice requirements were met via the newspaper. Complementary notice has also been provided by digital means (i.e. the Current and social media), and on occasion, courtesy notices to residents within 120 metres of the subject properties have been sent via regular mail.

However, given that the local newspaper, the Independent and Free Press is no longer publishing the newspaper in print, this Official Plan Amendment proposes alternative measures for public notification. Recently, staff have utilized the Toronto Star to publish required notices, which has significantly increased costs. Therefore, as per the permissions within section 17(19.3) and section 34(14.3) of the *Planning Act*, which speak to alternative measures for informing and obtaining the views of the public in respect to Official Plan and Zoning By-law amendments, staff are proposing an amendment to section G2.4 of the Official Plan to provide for alternative means for public notices. Furthermore, it appears that the Province is also encouraging municipalities to take this approach based on the November 6, 2023 article in the Trillium, titled [As local papers die, municipalities should post public notices wherever they think is best: province - The Trillium](#).

As shown in the Official Plan Amendment attached as Schedule 1, staff are proposing that the Town maintain the status quo for privately initiated amendments, which require a notice sign to be posted on the subject property and the standard letter notice to be circulated to all property owners within 120 metres of the site. For publicly (Town) initiated applications, staff are proposing that rather than being required to provide notice in the local newspaper, that the notice be made available digitally, for example, by posting on the Town's website, the Town's social media platforms (such as Facebook or 'X'/Twitter), through the Town's newsletter (The Current) and online via the Halton Hills Today and/or Independent and Free Press.

Staff are proposing to maintain the 20-day notice requirement for all notices for public meetings and/or open houses and will continue to ensure the appropriate information is made available to the public prior to a statutory public meeting.

Currently section G2.4 of the Official Plan speaks to eliminating notice to the public and a public meeting for minor Official Plan Amendments based on certain criteria. Staff are also suggesting we follow suit for municipally-initiated Minor Zoning By-law Amendments based on the same criteria. This will allow for certain housekeeping items to be updated quicker and more frequently to ensure the Zoning By-law is as up to date as possible.

Lastly, given the proposed Official Plan Amendment is deemed to be minor in nature, Curt Benson, the Region's Chief Planning Official has confirmed by way of a letter dated January 4, 2024, and attached as Schedule 2 to this report, that proposed Official Plan Amendment No. 55 is exempt from Regional Approval.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report is administrative in nature and does not have an impact on the Town's Strategic Plan.

RELATIONSHIP TO CLIMATE CHANGE:

This report is administrative in nature and does not directly impact or address climate change and the Town's Net Zero target.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

A Statutory Public Meeting, accompanied by a Public Meeting Report and a draft Official Plan Amendment was held on December 11, 2023 in accordance with the *Planning Act* requirements for public consultation. As it relates to the Town's Public Engagement Charter, this meeting met the Inform and Consult levels of engagement by presenting the information and providing an opportunity for residents to ask questions and/or share their comments. There were no residents in attendance at the meeting and no comments from residents were received before, during or after the public meeting.

INTERNAL CONSULTATION:

Planning staff has consulted with the appropriate Town Departments and Thomson Rogers in preparation of this Report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

This report is administrative in nature and does not have any financial implications. However, approval of the proposed amendment may result in savings for advertising costs.

Reviewed and approved by,

Bronwyn Parker, Director of Planning Policy

John Linhardt, Commissioner of Planning & Development

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer