

REPORT

REPORT TO: Mayor Bonnette and Members of Council

REPORT FROM: Bronwyn Parker, Manager of Planning Policy

DATE: June 26, 2019

REPORT NO.: PLS-2019-0056

RE: GTA West Environmental Assessment – Project Re-initiation

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report PLS-2019-0056 dated June 26, 2019 regarding the GTA West Environmental Assessment Project Re-initiation be received for information;

AND FURTHER THAT staff be authorized to continue to review and evaluate the impacts of the future GTA West Corridor as it relates to the Halton Hills Premier Gateway Employment Area, Future Strategic Employment Areas (FSEA) and the Agricultural Areas located within the Focused Analysis Area (FAA);

AND FURTHER THAT staff report back to Council regarding any new information related to the GTA West Environmental Assessment and potential impacts within the Town of Halton Hills;

AND FURTHER THAT the Town Clerk forward a copy of Report PLS-2019-0056 to the GTA West project team, the Region of Halton, the City of Burlington, the Town of Milton and the Town of Oakville for their information.

BACKGROUND:

- **GTA West Environmental Assessment (2007-2015)**

In 2007, the GTA West Environmental Assessment (EA) Study was initiated by the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) to plan for future infrastructure needs and consider options to provide better movement of people and goods throughout the Greater Golden Horseshoe to the year 2031. The GTA West Preliminary Study Area extended north of Highway 401 between Highway 400 in the City of Vaughan in the east and the City of Guelph in the west. A number of staff reports regarding the GTA West Corridor EA were

presented to Council from 2007 to 2015. For Council's benefit, a list of those reports is attached as Appendix 1 to Report PLS-2019-0056.

A number of alternatives were considered through Stage 1 of the Study for the GTA West Corridor, including Alternative 4-2 and Alternative 4-3 that were initially recommended by MTO in 2010 as worthy of more detailed analysis.

As it relates to Halton Hills, Alternative 4-2 consisted of a new transportation corridor generally following the proposed north-south Halton Peel Boundary Area Transportation Study (HPBATS) transportation corridor through Halton Hills and widening of the 401 corridor through Milton. Alternative 4-3 proposed a new transportation corridor extending southwesterly through the agricultural and rural areas of Halton Hills between 5 Side Road and 10 Side Road, connecting to Highway 401 in the vicinity of Tremaine Road in Milton.

In 2011, MTO released a Draft Transportation Strategy that consisted of a single option that combined elements of both Alternatives 4-2 and 4-3. Through Report No. INF-2011-0035, the Town requested that MTO amend the Draft Transportation Strategy to recommend only Alternative 4-2.

In 2012, MTO released the GTA West Corridor Transportation Development Strategy Report. Key recommendations in that report included the widening of Highway 401 to 12 lanes through Halton, as well as the design and construction of a new transportation corridor generally following the alignment of the HPBATS north-south corridor. With the adoption of Report No. INF-2012-0036, Council endorsed the foregoing approach and encouraged the Ministry to:

- commence Stage 2 of the GTA West EA;
- ensure that the impact of the proposed highway facility on existing properties is minimized;
- utilize the work completed as part of HPBATS, specifically the recommended East-West connection around the Hamlet of Norval.

• **Focused Analysis Area (2015)**

In 2015 during Stage 2 of the GTA West EA, a Focused Analysis Area (FAA) was released. The FAA map is attached to this report as Appendix 2. The purpose of the FAA was to identify properties within the overall study area which may be directly impacted by the future transportation corridor (as demonstrated by the orange colour), as well as properties for which it is anticipated that the development process may proceed (those properties within the green colour). A short list of alternatives for GTA West was also released during this timeframe.

- **Province Suspends and then Cancels the GTA West EA**

In December 2015, the Minister of Transportation temporarily suspended the GTA West EA and committed to a review of the project with the assistance of an advisory panel. The panel was asked to conduct a strategic assessment of potential alternative approaches to meet future needs for moving people and goods throughout the GTA West Corridor, including how recent policy changes and new transportation technologies could impact the project going forward.

The GTA West Corridor Advisory Panel Report was completed in May 2017. The Panel recommended that the GTA West EA be stopped, and that the Ministry of Transportation lead the development of a single regional transportation plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

After considering the Advisory Panel's advice, the Minister of Transportation cancelled GTA West EA in February 2018.

- **Northwest GTA Corridor Identification Study (2018)**

At the same time as GTA West EA was cancelled, the Province announced a new, narrower and refined corridor known as the Northwest GTA (NWGTA) Corridor Identification Study Area. This area, which was approximately one-third the size of the original GTA West Corridor, was to consider other transportation and infrastructure opportunities such as utilities and transit within the refined corridor. A decision was expected regarding the results of the study by Spring 2019, however, after the Provincial election in June 2018, the project was officially suspended.

- **Province Reactivates GTA West and the Focused Analysis Area (2019)**

As part of the Fall Economic Statement, the new Provincial Government advised that it would be resuming the EA for GTA West, however, no further details were provided regarding the timelines of the same. Subsequently on June 19, 2019, the Ministry of Transportation announced that the GTA West EA Study was once again resumed. The announcement came on the heels of a motion being passed in the legislature on June 4, 2019 calling on the government to immediately resume the EA.

The announcement confirmed that the Focused Analysis Area (FAA) as originally introduced in 2015 is once again being considered. Again, the FAA map is attached to this report as Appendix 2.

While the MTO information explains that the properties included within the green areas of the FAA may proceed for development purposes, any lands which are included within the Region of Halton and Town of Halton Hills' Corridor Protection Areas (which includes the FAA green areas) remain restricted from development until such time as the Region and Town are able to refine or remove the Corridor Protection policies and related mapping from our Official Plans.

The province has identified that the technically preferred route for the new multimodal transportation corridor will be presented at a Public Information Centre in Fall 2019. Specific property impacts will be identified as part of the preliminary design of the corridor.

- **Regional Electricity Planning GTA West Study Has Commenced**

With the GTA West EA resuming and the cancellation of the NWGTA Corridor Study, the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines (ENDM) and the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) have also initiated a new electricity planning study called the Regional Electricity Planning GTA West Study.

The long-term need for a new electricity corridor was identified by the province in 2015 due to high anticipated growth within the GTA West region. In accordance with the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS), opportunities for colocation of linear infrastructure are to be made wherever practical, which is why ENDM and IESO are coordinating the electricity planning study alongside the GTA West Corridor EA work.

Messaging on the study website and information made available through a webinar attended by staff explains that land will be identified and protected for a future transmission corridor that is adjacent to the future GTA West transportation corridor, to ensure that the longer-term electricity needs can be accommodated if and when they arise.

A draft Scoping Assessment report was posted for a 3 week comment period on the IESO website, with a comment deadline of July 8, 2019. The final Scoping Assessment report will be posted online on August 8, 2019.

Given this is an electricity planning study, the local distribution companies (including Halton Hills Hydro) have been engaged within the project. Town Engineering staff has also been circulated on the study notification.

A letter from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing was received by the Town Clerk on June 28, 2019. This letter requests notices of any development applications within the GTA West Corridor and Transmission Corridor Identification Study Areas. A copy of the letter has been attached as Appendix 3 to this report.

COMMENTS:

- **Premier Gateway Impacts**

With the uncertainty surrounding the re-initiation of the project, Town staff will be paying close attention to any information that is shared by the Province as there are potential significant impacts to the Town's Premier Gateway Employment Areas particularly north

of Steeles Avenue between Eighth Line and Winston Churchill Blvd (Premier Gateway Employment Area Phase 2B) that would have to be mitigated¹.

As Council may recall, the preparation of a Secondary Plan for the Phase 2B lands was to commence in 2019. In this regard, staff has completed a Terms of Reference for the project including the Scoped Subwatershed Study. Given the announcement that the GTA West EA has resumed and the larger 2015 Focused Analysis Area (FAA) is once again being considered, it would be premature to release the project RFP until we have greater certainty regarding long term corridor protection requirements in this area. According to the Province, a reduced FAA will be presented at Public Information Centre 2 in the Fall of 2019.

- **Provincially Significant Employment Zones and Future Strategic Employment Areas**

In addition to the potential impacts on the Halton Hills Premier Gateway, staff will also be considering the ramifications of GTA West on Provincially Significant Employment Zones (PSEZs) and Future Strategic Employment Areas (FSEA).

As Council may recall, PSEZs were introduced by the Province through Amendment No. 1 to the 2017 Growth Plan, now refined through the Growth Plan 2019, “A Place to Grow”. The Halton Hills Premier Gateway is considered to form part of PSEZ number 18.

FSEA were identified during the Sustainable Halton exercise and incorporated through ROPA 38 and OPA 10. FSEA are lands that are strategically located with respect to existing employment areas and major transportation facilities and are considered to be suitable for employment uses beyond the 2031 planning horizon. The FSEA in the Town are largely located within the FAA.

- **Regional Electricity Planning GTA West Study Impacts**

Given the minimal information that has been shared with municipalities, including specific mapping identifying key areas where the transmission corridor may ultimately be located, definitive impacts with respect to the size, location and magnitude of this electricity transmission corridor are unknown as it relates to Halton Hills at this time.

Staff has engaged with Halton Hills Hydro representatives as to the details of the electricity planning study and will continue to monitor the study and report back to Council with any key information as it evolves over the coming months.

¹ ROPA 47 and OPA 30 identified replacement employment land supply in Lot 2 to the west of the Eighth Line to compensate for the Premier Gateway Phase 2A lands south of Steeles Avenue east of the Toronto Premium Outlets extending easterly to Winston Churchill Boulevard that are subject to HPBATS/GTA West Corridor Protection Area. For purposes of this report, we are assuming that ROPA 47 and OPA 30 will receive final approval.

- **Halton Regional Official Plan Review**

Given the recent announcement regarding the resumption of the GTA West EA, it is unknown at this time how this could impact Halton Region's ongoing Official Plan Review (OPR) work. While the current Corridor Protection policies and area could be refined through the OPR process, should existing 2021-2031 employment lands within Halton Hills be frozen from development in perpetuity, Halton Region will need to consider through this OPR process not only the employment lands needs of the Town to the 2041 planning horizon, but additional replacement employment lands for the 2021-2031 period.

In addition, the potential impacts to the Halton Hills Agricultural land area within the study corridor are also unknown. The Town will seek all opportunities for participation in the study refinement process and will report back to Council with any details that are made available.

- **Servicing implications along Steeles Avenue**

Again, given the uncertainty surrounding the extent of lands which may be impacted and frozen from future development, it is unclear whether or not the lands along the Steeles Avenue corridor east of the Toronto Premium Outlets to Winston Churchill Blvd will be able to be serviced as originally planned. Should the GTA West corridor culminate in a large interchange at the 407 ETR/401 Hwy location, it may be challenging for Halton Region to extend municipal water and wastewater servicing capacity to these lands.

RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN:

The Town's Strategic Plan contains Goals and Strategic Directions related to growth management, among others. This report is related to many of those Strategic Directions including:

- C.1 To ensure an adequate supply of employment lands to provide flexibility and options for the business community and provide a range of job opportunities.
- C.4 To protect strategic employment lands from conversions to non-employment uses.
- C.5 To aggressively promote all of the Town's employment areas, including the opportunities provided by the 401/407 Employment Corridor.
- G.1 To provide for a moderate scale of growth that is in keeping with the Town's urban structure and protects its rural character.
- G.8 To promote the identification of strategic employment land reserves to accommodate employment growth beyond 2031.

- I.1 Support Council and staff participation in efforts to advocate for issues important to the Halton Hills community
- I.6 To participate fully in Region-wide initiatives to protect and promote the Town's objectives.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no immediate financial impact associated with this report.

CONSULTATION:

The Town's Extended Senior Management Team was consulted in the preparation of this report.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

There is no public engagement associated with or required for purposes of preparing this report. The Province has indicated that a Public Information Centre on a Technically Preferred Route for GTA West will be held in the Fall of 2019.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS:

The Town is committed to implementing our Community Sustainability Strategy, Imagine Halton Hills. Doing so will lead to a higher quality of life.

Sustainability implications will be further considered as the GTA West project proceeds.

COMMUNICATIONS:

A copy of this report will be forwarded to the GTA West project team, the Region of Halton, the City of Burlington, the Town of Milton and the Town of Oakville for their information.

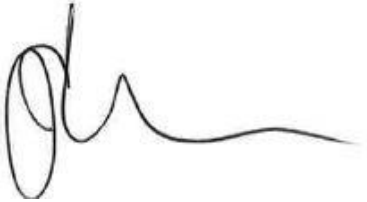
CONCLUSION:

The GTA West Corridor Environmental Assessment Study has been re-initiated by the Ministry of Transportation.

Town staff will be paying close attention to any information that is shared by the Province as there are potential significant impacts on the Town's Premier Gateway Employment Area, particularly Phase 2B, as well as Future Strategic Employment Areas that could accommodate post 2031 employment growth and to the necessary expansion of servicing infrastructure along Steeles Avenue.

Staff will continue to inform Council of any changes or information that becomes available over the course of the summer and will advise when dates have been set by the Province regarding the planned PICs with respect to the announcement of the technically preferred route in Fall 2019.

Reviewed and Approved by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Linhardt', with a stylized, flowing script.

John Linhardt, Commissioner of Planning and Sustainability

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Brent Marshall', with a stylized, flowing script.

Brent Marshall, Chief Administrative Officer