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Official Plan Review and South of Davis Area Policy Directions

Staff Report to Council

Report Number: 2025-34

Department(s): Building and Planning Services

Author(s): Andria Sallese, Senior Planner, Policy

Meeting Date: June 16, 2025

Recommendations

1. That the report entitled “Official Plan Review and South of Davis Area Policy Directions”, dated June 16, 2025, be received; and,
2. That the report entitled “Official Plan Review Policy Directions Report” by WSP Canada Inc., dated May 2025 (Attachment 1), be endorsed in principle; and,
3. That the report entitled “South of Davis Area Policy Directions Report” by WSP Canada Inc., dated May 2025 (Attachment 2), be endorsed in principle; and,
4. That the document entitled “Future Newmarket Vision” dated May 2025, (Attachment 3), be endorsed in principle; and,
5. That the “Phase 3 – Policy Directions Engagement Summary for the Official Plan Review and South of Davis Area”, dated May 2025 (Attachment 4), be received; and,
6. That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

Executive Summary

This report summarizes the findings from Phase 3 of the Official Plan Review (OPR) and the South of Davis Area (SODA) studies, as well as a summary of feedback received through various consultation activities. The Phase 3 work program included refining the draft vision statement and guiding principles initially developed in Phase 2 and preparing policy direction reports. A variety of interactive in-person and virtual

engagement events were held in 2024 and 2025, and materials were posted to the project webpage, to facilitate public input. Presentations to Council on the vision, guiding principles, and draft policy directions were made in September of 2023 and December of 2024. Feedback received in Phase 3 informed updates to the Policy Directions reports and *Future Newmarket Vision*, which will serve as the foundation for policy development in Phase 4. A draft of the Town's new Official Plan is expected to be available for review and consultation in early 2026.

Purpose

The purpose of this Report is to provide Council with an update on the Town's OPR and SODA studies, and to seek Council endorsement, in principle, of the Official Plan and SODA policy directions reports and *Future Newmarket Vision*. This report recommends staff use these documents to prepare a draft Official Plan and SODA policy framework, and to conduct related engagement activities in Phase 4.

Background

OPR and SODA Study Timeline

The OPR and SODA studies are being undertaken in parallel through a comprehensive six-phase work plan. Phases 1 to 3 included the development of background studies and reports informed by provincial and regional policy frameworks, best practices across Ontario, and extensive consultation with Council, the public, Indigenous communities with treaty rights in Newmarket, agencies, and other stakeholders.

Phases 1 and 2 are complete. These phases focused on background research and consultation activities to support the development of an updated Vision and Guiding Principles for the new Official Plan and SODA. The project is currently nearing the end of Phase 3, which involved drafting policy directions and conducting public engagement.

Discussion

Official Plan Review and South of Davis Area Study Timeline

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Phases 1 and 2, which are complete, focused on background research and consultation activities to support the development of an updated Vision and Guiding Principles for the new Official Plan and SODA. The project is currently nearing the end

of Phase 3, which involves drafting policy directions and conducting public engagement.

Subject to Council's endorsement of the Policy Direction Reports, the project team will advance work on Phase 4, which will involve preparing the draft Official Plan, including a policy framework for SODA, and supporting schedules. Phase 4 will also include further consultation with the public, Council, Indigenous communities, and relevant stakeholders and agencies. Following this consultation, in Phase 5, the final Official Plan will be presented at a Statutory Public Open House(s) and a Statutory Public Meeting. Phase 6 will involve submitting the final Official Plan to the Province for approval.

Discussion

Future Newmarket Evolves with Community Feedback

Draft Vision, Guiding Principles, and Policy Lenses

Feedback from Phases 1 to 3 of the OPR informed the development of a draft Vision Statement and Guiding Principles for the new Official Plan. The Vision Statement articulates what Newmarket aspires to be by 2051:

“The Town of Newmarket will grow as a sustainable, complete, inclusive, and connected community that offers a high quality of life, supports a strong economy, and is a destination for all to enjoy.”

The draft Guiding Principles supporting this vision are organized into five themes:

1. A Vibrant, Diverse, and Accessible Community
2. A Green and Resilient Community
3. A Complete Community for Sustainable Living
4. A Connected Community
5. A Place to Stay and Visit

Three policy ‘lenses’, as well as strategic actions, were introduced in Phase 3 to guide the implementation of the vision and guiding principles, which included the People-First, Climate Resilience, and Indigenous Values-Based Lenses (refer to **Attachment 3**). The purpose of these lenses is to align policy development with core community and Indigenous values.

11 Transformative Theme Areas Shaping Newmarket's Future

Extensive community feedback during Phase 3 led to the refinement of the initial policy themes and the introduction of new ones. Originally, nine “areas of concentration” were identified in Phases 1 and 2. Staff have added two new theme areas and reframed some of the others to respond to feedback received through the Phase 3 consultation process as follows:

- Complete Communities (**refined**)
- Growth Management (**refined**)
- Housing Newmarket
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (**new**)
- Employment
- Transportation & Connections
- Parks & Open Spaces (**new**)
- Climate Change & Natural Heritage (**amalgamated**)
- Cultural Heritage
- Placemaking & Urban Design
- Infrastructure
- SODA

Draft policy directions for each theme area were presented during Council Workshops in Fall 2023 and December 2024. These policy directions address gaps and opportunities that were identified in the Phase 1 Background Summary Report, draw from best practices in other municipalities across Ontario, and set out actionable policy directions to guide growth in Newmarket to 2051. The project team also hosted multiple engagement events to receive feedback on the proposed policy directions. Comments were considered by the project team and, where appropriate, were integrated into the Policy Directions Report. The feedback is described in more detail in the Consultation section of this report. The consultant's OPR Policy Directions Report and Phase 3 Engagement Summary report can be found in **Attachments 1** and 4, respectively.

The next phase of the OPR, Phase 4, involves drafting policies. It is anticipated that a draft of the Town's new Official Plan will be available for review in early 2026, pending any significant updates or changes in Provincial policy.

South of Davis Area Study

Study Area Boundary

SODA is a key link between the Urban Centres Secondary Plan and the Historic Downtown. The study area is bound by Simcoe Street (north), the Canadian National Railway and Holland River Ravine (east), Millard Avenue and the Main Street Heritage Conservation District boundary (south), and Niagara Street (west). SODA is located within a five to ten-minute walk of the Newmarket GO Transit Station and within close walking distance of amenities and attractions in the historic Main Street area, and Southlake Regional Health Centre. In Phase 3, Staff amended the original SODA study boundary to exclude lands at the northeast corner of Superior and Simcoe Streets that are within the Urban Centres Secondary Plan, as well as Town-owned lands at 170 Doug Duncan Drive. The updated study area boundary is illustrated in **Attachment 5**.

Existing Conditions

Phase 1 included an analysis of SODA's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and constraints (SWOC). The findings identified several strengths, including SODA's valued heritage resources, pedestrian-scale buildings, mature tree canopy, and proximity to transit and trails. Weaknesses included the study area's lack of identity, minimal pedestrian activity, and limited public spaces, as well as accessibility challenges due to existing grading and retaining walls in some areas. Opportunities for improvement include enhancing the area through the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, encouraging the sensitive redevelopment of small and large-scale sites, and leveraging connectivity to existing transit and trails. Constraints include the need to manage and upgrade infrastructure capacity to keep pace with anticipated growth and the floodplain area on the east side of SODA which limits the extent and type of development in this area.

Policy Context

Section 3 of the *Planning Act* requires municipal official plans to be consistent with the Provincial Planning Statement (PPS 2024), which came into effect on October 20, 2024. The PPS 2024 promotes intensification and mixed-use development in Strategic Growth Areas (SGAs). SODA qualifies as an SGA due to its proximity (500-800 metres) to a Mobility Hub and its location largely within Protected Major Transit Station Area 33 (PMTSA 33) which has a density target of 160 people and jobs per hectare. The lands within the PMTSA boundary are expected to support complete communities through the provision of diverse housing types and tenures, improved transit connectivity, and mixed-use development.

PMTSAs are also an important component of the Town's overall structure for growth. Planning authorities are directed to meet density targets within these areas, promote redevelopment of underutilized spaces such as surface parking lots, and encourage walkable, transit-oriented neighbourhoods which support a variety of building forms and tenures to ensure affordability, accessibility, and sustainability. The lands west of SODA, which fall outside of PMTSA 33, form part of the Town's Historic Downtown Area which allows for sensitive infill opportunities. A detailed description of the relevant provincial, regional, and local policy context for SODA can be found in **Attachment 2**.

SODA Vision and Guiding Principles

The SODA vision statement builds on the overarching OPR vision and guiding principles, and is informed by feedback received in Phases 1 to 3:

"SODA will thrive as a dynamic centre for culture, business, tourism, public services and entertainment, providing a mix of diverse uses and housing options. With convenient active transportation choices, a vibrant public realm, and enhanced connections to natural areas and key destinations, SODA will be a place that is well beyond the ordinary."

The Guiding Principles which support the vision are:

1. Preserve and Promote Cultural and Natural Heritage Resources
2. Design Great Places and Vibrant Public Spaces
3. Promote Active Transportation
4. Support Economic Opportunities
5. Provide a Range of Housing Options
6. Facilitate Accessible and Inclusive Spaces

SODA Policy Directions

This section outlines key themes and policy directions for the SODA study that will guide policy development in Phase 4.

Public Realm

Policy directions for enhancing the public realm emphasize creating a vibrant, walkable Main Street through active storefronts, wider sidewalks where required, and pedestrian weather protection. The integration of urban squares at key intersections and pedestrian-friendly north-south laneways may be used to divide blocks into smaller parcels or to facilitate access/egress, foster community interaction and a more seamless pedestrian experience. An enhanced streetscape design will blend heritage elements with features unique to the SODA area or “brand,” while green infrastructure, such as rain gardens and street trees, will support sustainability objectives for the area. Other public realm policy directions include the creation of a network of parks and open spaces in an urban form, including parklets and privately owned public spaces (POPS).

Transition and Heritage Context

SODA is a key link between the Urban Centres Secondary Plan (UCSP) area along Davis Drive and the historic lower Main Street South area, which is designated as a Heritage Conservation District (HCD). The consultant report indicates that there are opportunities to guide development in the SODA area to support the UCSP while also respecting the existing built form heritage context in the Main Street HCD. Recommended policy directions for SODA include:

- Develop design guidelines for SODA to ensure new development complements both the UCSP and heritage character of Main Street South;
- Explore policies that recognize and protect cultural heritage resources in SODA;
- Engage with Indigenous communities to incorporate their perspectives and knowledge into cultural heritage conservation efforts;
- Developing policies for properties designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act*, or have been identified as having cultural heritage value or interest; and
- Develop site-specific policies and urban design guideline to guide conservation and compatible development.

These policy directions would support growth that acknowledges SODA's strategic role as a transitional area between the UCSP and the Main Street South HCD, promoting development that responds to its existing and planned context, while celebrating its history and cultural heritage resources.

Landmarks and Important Views

Development within SODA will aim to preserve and enhance key visual and cultural landmarks, including the Main Street South Gateway and the Christian Baptist Church spire. Building heights in proximity to these landmarks would need to be carefully designed to protect view corridors and vistas. Opportunities to frame new views and establish visual anchors will be prioritized to strengthen SODA's urban design framework and support the area character.

Public Art

Public art can enhance local character, identity, civic pride, and sense of place by encouraging community dialogue around public space. The SWOC analysis for SODA found that the area currently lacks public art installations while highlighting the need for place-making. Policy directions for supporting public art include:

- Developing a Public Art Plan which may include a Mural /Laneway program;
- Encouraging on-site public art for larger developments;
- Promoting community-led art installations; and,
- Involving Indigenous communities in developing a reconciliation-focused art program.

Future Land Use Framework

The future land use approach for SODA proposes to permit a mix of uses that help the Town achieve its minimum target of 160 people and jobs per hectare within PMTSA 33 while promoting a walkable, vibrant, and economically thriving area. To support this land use framework, three development scenarios were developed to help inform discussion around open space, heights, and built form (refer to **Attachment 5**). Input received from Council during the March 2025 Council Workshop and from the public during the April Public Open House meetings will inform future refinements to these options and guide policy development in Phase 4. A summary of feedback received on the three scenarios can be found in **Attachment 4**.

Consultation

Throughout 2024 and early 2025, Staff undertook a comprehensive consultation program to gather feedback on the Vision, Guiding Principles, and preliminary policy directions for the OPR and SODA. Staff also prepared eleven Discussion Papers and accompanying surveys based on the 11 OPR theme areas. Regular updates were posted to the project webpage at www.heynewmarket.ca/officialplan, supported by outreach via email and social media. Engagement events included:

- One (1) OPR in-person, interactive Public Information Centre (August 29, 2024);
- Two (2) SODA in-person Public Open Houses (April 12 and 17, 2025);
- One (1) OPR virtual online Public Open House (February 27, 2025);
- Fourteen (14) Planner Pop-Up events at various Town locations (June-July 2024);
- Two (2) Technical Advisory Group meetings (June 2024 and January 2025);
- One (1) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Land Use Planning Focus Group with local organizations (October 7, 2024);
- Three (3) OPR Council Workshops (September 11, 2023, [Item 4.1](#); September 18, 2023, [Item 4.1](#); December 2, 2024, [Item 4.1](#)); and,
- One SODA Council workshop (March 3, 2025, [Item 4.1](#)).

The Town used a range of outreach methods to promote engagement for the Official Plan Review (OPR). Combined, OPR and SODA engagement efforts resulted in over 800 direct interactions (1:1 conversations) with the community. Full details can be found in the Phase 3 Engagement Summary (**Attachment 4**).

Indigenous Engagement

At the outset of the OPR (November 2022), letters to Indigenous communities with treaty rights in Newmarket were distributed from the Office of the Mayor. The purpose of these letters was to share information about the launch of the OPR and to invite involvement in the project.

A follow-up communication on Phase 3 of the project, including links to the 11 Discussion Papers on Policy Direction Theme Areas, was distributed by email in August 2023. Introductory meetings were held virtually on October 24, 2024, and October 29, 2024 with Indigenous communities who expressed an interest in meeting with Town staff, which included the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation (MSIFN) and Alderville First Nation, respectively. The purpose of the introductory meetings was to provide an overview of the OPR process, including the timeline, key milestones, and outline opportunities for input. Participants asked questions of clarification about the project, shared their priorities related to each project theme and provided recommendations for First Nation and Local Indigenous engagement.

In March 2025, Town staff hosted a virtual workshop with MSIFN. The session began with a presentation outlining the OPR process and draft Policy Directions of interest to MSIFN. This was followed by a plenary discussion focused on opportunities to integrate Indigenous values into Newmarket's Official Plan. Topics included feedback on the proposed "Indigenous Values-Based Lens" and a review of best practices from other Ontario municipalities and governments that have incorporated Indigenous perspectives and policies into their Official Plans. As part of Phase 4, Town staff will reconnect with MSIFN, as well as other Indigenous communities with Treaty Rights in Newmarket who express interest in participating in the Official Plan process.

Conclusion

Subject to Council's endorsement of the Policy Direction Reports and *Future Newmarket Vision*, the project team will advance work on Phase 4, which will involve preparing the draft Official Plan including a policy framework for SODA and supporting schedules. Phase 4 will also include further consultation with the public, Council, Indigenous communities, and relevant stakeholders and agencies. Following this consultation (Phase 5), the final Official Plan will be presented at a Statutory Public Open House(s) and a Statutory Public Meeting.

Council Priority Association

This report aligns with the following Council Priority: Extraordinary Places and Spaces

Human Resource Considerations

None

Budget Impact

None

Attachments

Attachment 1 – Official Plan Review Policy Directions Report, prepared by WSP Canada, dated May 2025

Attachment 2 – South of Davis Area Policy Directions Report, prepared by WSP Canada, dated May 2025

Attachment 3 – *Future Newmarket Vision*, prepared by Town Staff, dated Spring 2025

Attachment 4 – Official Plan Review and South of Davis Area Phase 3 Engagement Summary, prepared by WSP Canada and Town Staff, dated May 2025

Attachment 5 – SODA Circulation Network, Land Use, and Built Form Scenarios, prepared by Town of Newmarket, dated March 2025.

Submitted By

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Approval for Submission

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Report Contact

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