

## West Lincoln's Position Paper on Provincial Regional Governance Review

Provincial Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy  
St. Catharines, ON

Wednesday, January 10, 2024

### Executive Summary

This position paper outlines the Township of West Lincoln's perspective on three potential governance scenarios that West Lincoln has been hearing about:

- **Status Quo – West Lincoln's current position**
- **One Niagara - no**
- **“West Niagara” as part of a multi-city model – based on future growth projections and the ability to get houses built, this model provides the best solution for West Lincoln in the future.**

In regard to the various scenarios on future governance, West Lincoln has provided detail from our perspective, relating to:

- a) Important facts about West Lincoln
- b) Key geographic statistics
- c) Growth - population targets and allocations
- d) Importance of Housing as related to economic growth and long term sustainability
- e) Importance of Agriculture
- f) Current governance structure
- g) Opportunities for efficiency in current structure
- h) Service delivery- improvements and the need to maintain the status quo for some services
- i) Implementation issues for consideration

From West Lincoln's perspective, **any** decision that looks at efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery must be made on the basis of maintaining and providing an acceptable level of service for the public at an affordable price point.

The Township of West Lincoln has historically provided excellent service delivery, programs (including libraries) and assets to our residents. The cost of governance is very low and the residents and businesses in West Lincoln receive good value for their money. Our residents want and expect a local, accessible front-line government.

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## **West Lincoln's Position Paper re: Regional Governance Review**

Based upon the province's mandate to review the governance, decision-making and service delivery functions of Niagara Region as delegated to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy, the Township of West Lincoln offers their perspective.

This paper will address the following topics:

- 1) Key Information about West Lincoln
- 2) Governance Structure
- 3) Existing and Potential Growth Opportunities (Housing)
- 4) Municipal Service Delivery
- 5) Implementation Issues for Consideration

### **Key Information about West Lincoln**

West Lincoln is a lower-tier municipality in the Niagara Region. It is geographically the largest municipality in the region with a land area of 387.81 km<sup>2</sup>. It includes a substantial agricultural sector with the town of Smithville being its main urban area. It also includes other small hamlets within rural settings.

#### Quick facts about West Lincoln:

Population (2021) - 16,370

Roads maintained - Paved 266 km. Unpaved 122 km.

Sidewalks maintained - 30 km.

# of Bridges and culverts - 91

# of facilities - 13

#Parks, Playgrounds, Trails - 18

# cemeteries - 21

### **Appendix A – West Lincoln Location within Niagara Region**

Fire Apparatus - 2 pumpers, 2 pumper-rescue, 1 ladder, 2 squads of approximately 55 volunteers split between the 2 stations, 2 - 3000 gal. tankers, 2 fire halls (one existing / one to open in early 2024)

Libraries - 3 locations (Smithville, Caistorville & Wellandport)

West Lincoln, created with the formation of the Niagara Region over 50 years ago, is made up of the former Gainsborough, Caistor and South Grimsby Townships. We currently share borders with the City of Hamilton, Haldimand Region, the Towns of Grimsby, Lincoln and Pelham, and the Township of Wainfleet.

**By 2051, West Lincoln is projected to have a population of 38,370. Currently there are approved home-building lots of close to 1,000 spaces within our current urban boundary. We also have a Provincially and Regionally-approved urban boundary expansion of the town of Smithville which is destined to allow for this forecasted growth. The approved urban boundary expansion area provides for the building of more than 7,000 homes in the foreseeable future to accommodate this prescribed growth.**

### **Governance Structure**

From West Lincoln's perspective, any decision that looks at the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery must be made on the basis of maintaining and providing an acceptable level of service for the public at an affordable price point. There are three governance scenarios that West Lincoln is hearing about and therefore is providing its perspective on each.

#### **A. Status Quo Scenario** – West Lincoln's current preference

The two tier structure in Niagara Region is currently appropriate for a municipality of our size, available resources and financial capacity. The system works, and could be strengthened by refined municipal service delivery and good governance. The Township provides very good value for money in terms of services, programs and assets at an affordable price point for residents.

The Regional north/south road infrastructure of Regional Roads 12 and 24 are key roads affecting West Lincoln as are the east to west regional roads consisting of Regional Road 20 (the old Highway 20), Regional Road 63, Regional Road 65 (also known as Silver Street) Regional Road 73 and Regional Road 81. Many of the north/south roads must intersect the Niagara Escarpment which makes north/south linkages challenging, especially for large vehicle traffic. The three West Niagara municipalities of Grimsby, Lincoln and West Lincoln have been actively working



together advocating for years for a new, safe and efficient Escarpment connection to resolve the dangerous, unsafe crossing conditions that currently exist. We realize that it will take **all** levels of government working together to create this new transportation corridor. We currently have another delegation with the MTO on this same topic at the 2024 ROMA Conference later this month.

### **1. Growth/Housing Opportunities**

In 2015, with Regional support, local planning staff achieved what was known as a land *swap*, which saw 100 hectares (60 hectares residential and 40 hectares' employment) with a de-designation of supply from the hamlet of Wellandport being re-designated to Smithville. By doing this, an additional supply of land in the existing urban boundary of Smithville was achieved to assist with continued growth for about 10 years.

Realizing that that supply will be exhausted by 2025 or so, West Lincoln and the Region began in 2018/2019 to work together on what is now referred to as our Urban Boundary Expansion area. As land supply in other areas of West Niagara, close to the Hamilton border is becoming more and more limited, this land offers a logical and strategic place for the Region to grow and achieve Provincial growth targets, avoid Greenbelt lands and specialty crop lands.

Although the growth being proposed for Smithville is small in Provincial and Regional terms, it is important for the communities in West Niagara. **Smithville** as the main urban area is projected to grow from its current approximately 7,000 to approximately 29,000 by 2051. This is significant on a local scale and has required significant planning and studying to get it right to this point. In 2023, this expansion, now part of our Official Plan and thus embedded in the Regional OP was approved by both the Region and the Province. The various studies, including water/wastewater servicing, natural heritage systems and transportation corridors were front-ended by the local development community through a Land Owner's Funding Agreement.

With approximately 833 approved lots ready for various types of homes to be built within the existing urban boundary and another approximately 7,000 more potential homes within the newer expanded boundary of Smithville, West Lincoln is poised to add to the number of new homes that the Provincial government is looking to see built. Continued partnership with the Region in regard to the appropriate timing for water/sewer infrastructure remains a critical piece of this home-building puzzle.

**Appendix B1, B2 - Approved – Home- building lots within current existing boundary**

**Appendix B3 - Future Pending – Building lots within current existing boundary**

## 2. Municipal Service Delivery

As stated before, from West Lincoln's perspective, any decision that looks at the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery must be made on the basis of maintaining and providing an acceptable level of service for the public at an affordable price point. To that end there are areas where some improvement between the upper and lower tiers can be explored. Any of these suggested concepts would need to be rationalized with a transfer of the associated funds including the capital reserve dollars and the corresponding reductions/increases in the tax levy.

- **Regional Road Maintenance** – Delegating the maintenance of regional roads to the local municipality would provide for a consistent delivery service and a higher level of accountability. Alternatively, the Region should work towards creating a better arterial road network. There is a lack of Regional Roads in this very large geographic area.
- **Water/Wastewater** – This is a highly technical service area that requires expertise to ensure public safety requirements are met and planned for the future. There is an opportunity to develop a consolidated approach to this service area to improve coordination of asset management and service delivery.
- **Economic Development** – Currently a number of smaller municipalities, like West Lincoln, use Regional Economic Development services while the larger municipalities have their own. To best leverage the Niagara brand and image and to ensure equal access to services across the Region and a “one stop shop” for investors, this is a service area that is worthy of consolidation. Another area for focus under economic development is tourism.
- **Planning Approval** – Although the Province is in the process of working on the issue of Planning approval streamlining and duplication avoidance, this remains an area of concern as we still deal with Regional overlap and await the new Provincial Policy Statement that should help clarify the process.
- **Building Services** – Currently under review with Regional coordination of various aspects, options and formats still under formal review.
- **Other Services** – Although steps have been taken to improve some areas, areas such as information technology, human resources, communication services, procurement and the Integrity Commissioner would benefit from continued, improved cooperation between all parties.

After 50 years of the existence of West Lincoln, our residents are very used to calling their Ward Councillors or even having a direct conversation with the Mayor regarding their concerns, ideas and/or suggestions. Additionally, the ability to meet in person, by telephone or zoom, with Senior staff allows residents to “feel heard”.

### **Interim Conclusion**

From our perspective the current alignment and governance model between the Township and the Region is working well. We do acknowledge that there are areas for realignment and sharing services to find better ways to provide effective service delivery and we have made some suggestions in our previous comments.

#### **B - “One Niagara Scenario”** Opposed

The Township of West Lincoln is **not** in support of this model! Our residents rely on easy access to their local government and local representatives. There would be no substantial savings to cut representation at this level with the 2023 salaries of each of 6 local Councillors being \$30 000 and the Mayor’s salary set at \$47 000. There are no additional staffing costs related to these positions, and no additional offices to maintain. Only the Mayor has an office in the Municipal Administration building and that position shares an Executive Assistant with the CAO. If it is the will and desire of the Province to reduce the number of politicians as a cost savings measure, this will **not** be achieved by the elimination of local municipal representatives.

Efficient customer service at an affordable level is what is offered to our residents. Within the regional structure, our residents already pay for services that as a small-populated urban/rural mix municipality, they do not receive locally. Such examples include public transit, social services, assisted living and long term care. The loss of identity for a smaller municipality such as West Lincoln looms greatly over our residents and council members alike.

### **Implementation Issues for Consideration**

**Funding** – Any decision for municipal restructuring requires funding for the implementation and long term sustainability. Ideas for service delivery reform, which are intended to result in long term savings, require appropriate funding at the outset to ensure successful implementation. For example, there are often upfront costs associated with technology, service migration and staffing.

**Timing** - Should the provincial standing committee review result in any changes, adequate time for a transition should be incorporated into the implementation plan. Time would be required to ensure fiscal implications are carefully reconciled and any negative fiscal implications are mitigated. Time between the decision, if made, and announced and the next municipal election would be prudent.

**C - "West Niagara "Scenario - Supportive**

As stated earlier, the status quo quite suits West Lincoln as we are now in January of 2024 and it might remain so for a few more years. However, as we look to the future and what will be best for our residents, West Lincoln's preference would be to see ourselves aligned with the other 2 municipalities of Lincoln and Grimsby that along with West Lincoln are already being referred to as "West Niagara".

At present, these municipalities separately or with some recently developed shared services, deliver: library, fire, recreation, planning, maintenance of collector and local roads, internal to urban boundary sewer and water services. Further, each of these municipalities collects taxes and water bill payments.

The services missing from the list are provided by the Region of Niagara at present and include: policing, social services, public health (including the Medical Office of Health), water treatment, sewage treatment and some upper tier planning and economic development.

The three municipalities share the same water and wastewater treatment plants currently operated by the Niagara Region.

The combined area of the 3 municipalities in West Niagara is almost 620 km<sup>2</sup> of land. Individual municipality land areas are:

- West Lincoln 387.81 km<sup>2</sup>
- Town of Lincoln 162.81 km<sup>2</sup>
- Town of Grimsby 68.93 km<sup>2</sup>

Geographically, it is a large area with a substantial agricultural sector which all of these municipalities have been promoting. Each municipality has also been working individually with various differing agriculturally-related groups. In fact, the West Niagara Agricultural Society, which is an amalgamation of the historically separate Agricultural Societies/Fair Boards have their new, centrally located, state of the art facility situated in West Lincoln on the border of Grimsby and West Lincoln at 7402 Mud St.

Although the **current** population of West Lincoln is the smallest of the 3 municipalities considered to be "West Niagara" at approximately 16,300, the projected growth for the 3 municipalities, by 2051, put us all at a similar size thus allowing for a combined municipality of approximately 100,000 people.

- Grimsby by 2051 - 37,150
- Lincoln by 2051 - 31,590
- West Lincoln by 2051 - **38,370**

**This area is currently serviced by 3 Mayors, 3 Niagara Regional Councillors, 22 Local Councillors.**

**Each of these lower tier municipal Councils is closest to the people and is the first point of contact for their respective residents. Lower tier municipalities in West Niagara deliver services as efficiently and effectively as possible. Any decision made by the Province that looks at the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery must be made based on maintaining the provision of an acceptable level of service at an affordable price point for the public.**

The **West Niagara** area is readily identifiable, has many common interests and works well together now and most certainly could continue to do so, well into the future, due to our similar size, service structures and common interests.

- West Lincoln, Grimsby and Lincoln are served by one hospital, which after several years of joint advocacy is now in the process of seeing a new build of the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital. Provincial funding was of course necessary but the Region and our 3 local municipalities are all contributing substantially to the required "local share" for this build.
- The three municipalities share a single hospice, McNally House. Each municipality has made a financial commitment to the current expansion campaign so as to increase the number of beds and palliative services available to our residents.
- A new mega High School has recently opened (Fall, 2023) that is the main public secondary school for the 3 municipalities. It has been named West Niagara Secondary School. Residents of each of our 3 municipalities have contributed financially to the live Theatre/Auditorium publicly available addition to this new



school. Of note also, is fact that all Catholic high school students from the 3 municipalities attend Blessed Trinity High School situated in Grimsby.

- The three municipalities currently share a landfill site in the area of Regional Road 12.
- The three municipalities share Emergency Management Operations which are led by the Emergency Coordinator located in Lincoln.
- Mutual Aid – Fire Services Mutual Aid have been in place for years, this model provides an efficient and effective method to deliver service.
- This area is currently serviced by the provincial QEW Highway corridor and no other provincial highway exists within West Lincoln, Grimsby and Lincoln. The area is serviced by some key transportation infrastructure including interchanges at Casablanca, Christie, Ontario, Bartlett, Victoria and Jordan Station. In addition, the 3 municipalities have for many years, been collectively delegating at AMO and ROMA for a new Escarpment crossing in the area of Bartlett Road. Currently the ever-increasing truck traffic, in the event of congestion on the QEW, is choosing to use the smaller Regional roads as an alternative route to avoid these main highway slowdowns. These chosen alternative routes unfortunately now pass through built up residential areas on roads that were not built to carry either the weight nor the volume of this traffic. Public safety, especially in the areas of Grimsby and Beamsville in Lincoln, is of major concern. As West Lincoln looks to our future growth as already outlined elsewhere in this paper, it is more imperative for safety, economic viability and sustainability than ever, that this proposed new Escarpment crossing connects our Industrial Park area in a safe and efficient manner, to the QEW as well.

Given that the provincial government had announced that a facilitator was going to be placed in Niagara Region in the Spring/Summer of 2023, our three Mayors and CAOs decided that it would be prudent to hold a tri-council meeting so that councillors from each municipality had at the same time, in a neutral location, in a meeting led by a third party, the opportunity to a) meet each other and b) express their own thoughts and concerns regarding any future governance structure changes that could be decided by that soon to be appointed facilitator and thus potentially be imposed upon our three municipalities. This meeting was held on August 9, 2023 at the West Niagara Agricultural Centre & Fairgrounds.

No decisions were made at that tri-council meeting as discussion took place appropriately in closed session, however some of the comments, as reported in open council sessions held at a later date, in each individual municipality by the facilitator, Mr. Tim Dobbie were as follows:

- Appears to be interest in considering a governance alternative should the Province of Ontario decide to make governance changes in Niagara
- Several questions regarding whether or not there could be potential cost savings for the public were asked
- Each municipality has a somewhat similar urban/rural mix which could land a newly formed municipality within the 100 000 population mark
- Consideration should be given to keeping the number of Councillors, as reducing the number would have some thinking that the public would have less representation.
- Some participants favoured one West Niagara community with fewer councillors and some regional services such as water/wastewater, public health and social services, police and EMS remaining regional.
- Social and political decisions should be at the local level closest to the people we serve. This would allow us to control our own destiny
- Creating a larger community could improve the area's economic development.
- Some thought that the Region should be dissolved entirely, while others thought that it should be a service delivery organization
- Many felt that possible governance of West Niagara would be a logical fit as we already have many examples of shared services to build upon.
- Comments were made by some that they hoped that the Province will develop a good process for any governance changes that they may decide to make and that they will listen to the local communities. Major identified issues to be resolved would include:
  - The role of the Region
  - Services to be delivered by the single tier municipality
  - The number of elected representatives required if changes were to be made in the governance structure

**Appendix C - Urban Boundary Expansion Area Block Plans for future development**

**Appendix D - Approved Urban Boundary Expansion Area surrounding current urban boundary.**

## **Report Summary**

As a geographically large, however relatively small- populated municipality, being the most westerly part of Niagara Region, thus sharing our western border with the City of Hamilton, we find ourselves in a unique position. At our current population and sitting on the cusp of huge growth potential, many of our Councillors feel that remaining part of the existing Niagara Region i.e. maintain the “status quo” is currently the best option for West Lincoln.

We do however as a Council, recognize that being poised for the designated and expected growth in population for Smithville moving out toward 2051 and the associated housing potential within our existing urban boundary and additionally within our currently approved expanded urban boundary, requires that we maintain open minds about our future.

If this standing committee, in gathering appropriate information, from all affected stakeholders throughout this process, eventually suggests to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs that governance reform is required in Niagara and if the Ministry then determines that a change in the governance structure in Niagara Region should be made, we very clearly, as previously outlined, feel that the “West Niagara” as one municipality of potentially 100,000 residents, is the best choice for West Lincoln.

With both Grimsby and Lincoln moving steadily closer to being “built-out” due to continued long-term growth being confined by Lake Ontario, the Niagara Escarpment and Greenbelt legislation, West Lincoln with its availability of land would round out this future, new municipality’s ability to continue building a wide variety of homes. The downside to having available land however is the inability for a small municipality such as ours to be able to fund the necessary water and wastewater infrastructure to get the necessary pipes in the ground to allow for currently approved and future housing starts.

We recognize and support, that this Provincial government has identified the need for housing as a priority and thus desires to see more homes built as soon as possible. This is an undeniably important issue that will require input and financial support from all levels of government to make it happen as intended!

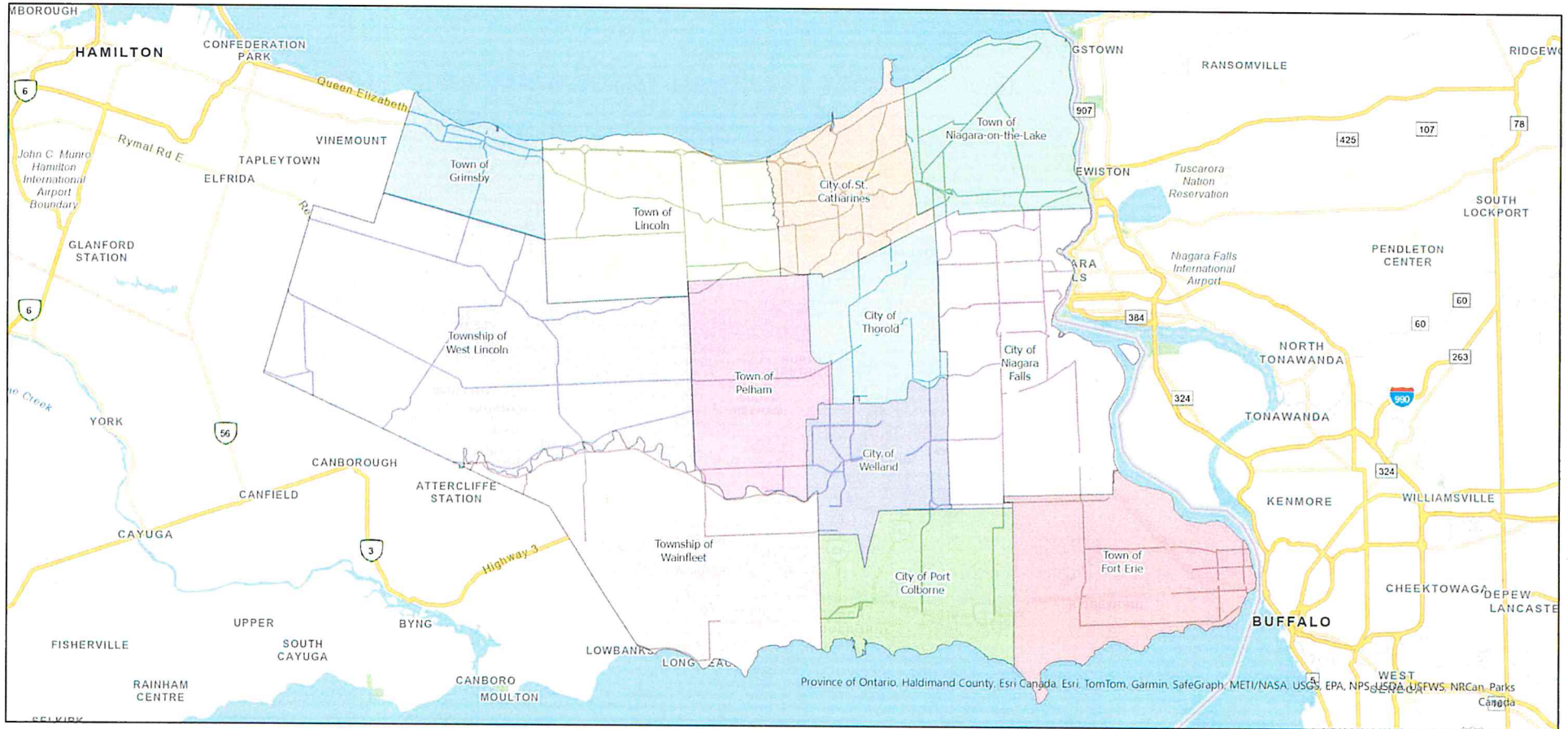
**The Township of West Lincoln is most appreciative of this opportunity to provide input regarding any potential changes to the governance structure of Niagara Region to this Provincial Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy.**

**Thank You.**



# Map of Niagara Region

# Appendix A



### Legend

Regional roads

Regional roads

Municipal Boundaries

Label

- City of Niagara Falls
- City of Port Colborne
- City of St. Catharines

City of Thorold

City of Welland

Town of Fort Erie

Town of Grimsby

Town of Lincoln

Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

Town of Pelham

Township of Wainfleet

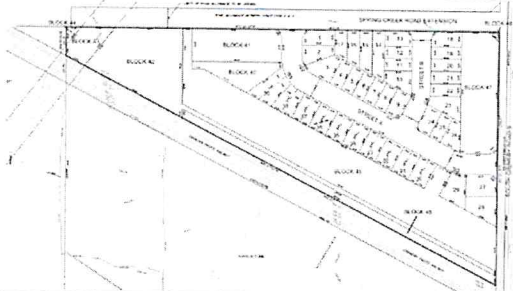
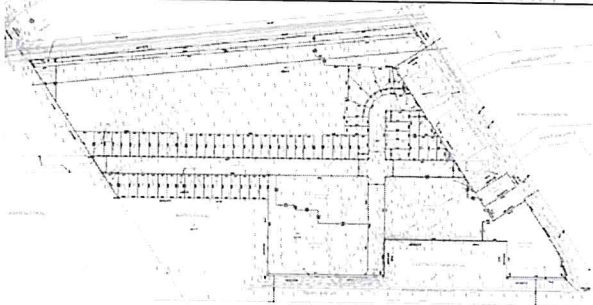

Township of West Lincoln

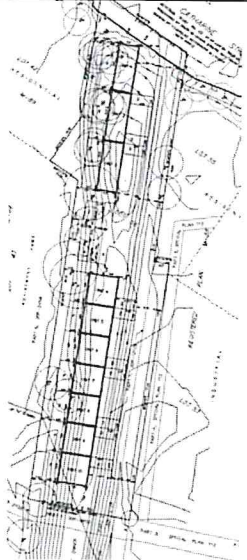

**West Lincoln**

Your Future Naturally

January 2024



	Draft Plan Approval Date	Land Area (Ha)	Number of Residential Units	Unit Breakdown	Subdivision/Condo Plan
<p><b>Dunloe Developments (Now Marz) Subdivision</b></p>	<p>December 2019</p>	<p>5.65</p>	<p>124 units</p>	<p>Singles - 29 Semi-detached - 20 Townhouse - 75</p>	
<p><b>Marz Thrive Subdivision</b></p>	<p>November 2021</p>	<p>10.91</p>	<p>267 units</p>	<p>Singles – 61 Townhouses – 138 Back to Back – 36 Apartments (mix use) - 32</p>	
<p><b>P Budd Developments Station Meadows West Subdivision</b></p>	<p>May 2021</p>	<p>36.7</p>	<p>412 units</p>	<p>Singles – 56 Townhouses – 216 Back to Back – 80 Apartments (condo) - 60</p>	

<p><b>DeHaan Homes Crossings North Condominium</b></p>	<p>October 2009</p>	<p>0.432</p>	<p>10 units</p>	<p>Townhouses - 10</p>	
<p><b>167 St. Catharines Street Condominium</b></p>	<p>June 2018</p>	<p>0.65</p>	<p>20 units</p>	<p>Townhouses - 20</p>	
<p><b>TOTAL DRAFT PLAN APPROVED</b></p>	<p>-</p>	<p>53.91 ha</p>	<p>833 units</p>	<p>Singles - 146 Semi-detached - 20 Townhouses - 459 Apartments – 92 Back to Back - 116</p>	<p>-</p>

<b>FUTURE PENDING APPLICATIONS/ PROPOSALS</b>					
<b>Knaithville Holdings – Regional Road 20</b>	<b>Application Submitted</b>	<b>7.43</b>	<b>250 units</b>	<b>Single – 3 Semi – 36 Townhouse – 115 Apartment - 76</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>6087 Regional Road 20</b>	<b>Pre-consultation Meeting Held</b>	<b>10.75</b>	<b>445-475 units</b>	<b>Singles – 49 Townhouses – 76 Back to Back – 40 Apartments – 280-310</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>North-west Smithville – Regional Road 20</b>	<b>Pre-consultation Meeting Held</b>	<b>3.95</b>	<b>221 units</b>	<b>Townhouses – 41 Apartments - 180</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>TOTAL PENDING APPLICATION</b>		<b>22.13</b>	<b>916-946 units</b>	<b>Singles – 52 Semi – 36 Townhouse – 232 Back to Back – 40 Apartments – 536-566</b>	<b>-</b>



BLOCK PLAN AREA PROJECTIONS BY STATE		Area (ha)	Units		
Stage 1	-	207.5	1947 units + 1662 jobs	Housing Type TBD	
Stage 2	-	67	0 units + 556 jobs	Housing Type TBD	
Stage 3	-	135.5	1987 units + 707 jobs	Housing Type TBD	
Stage 4	-	130.6	1502 units + 578 jobs	Housing Type TBD	
<b>TOTAL BLOCK PLAN AREA PROJECTIONS</b>		<b>540.6</b>	<b>5,436 units + 3,503 jobs</b>	-	

<b>TOTAL PROJECTED UNITS 2023-2051</b>	<b>±7,185 Residential Units</b>
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# URBAN BOUNDARY EXPANSION: Study Area

## Legend

### Water Bodies

— Rivers

### Roads

#### Owner

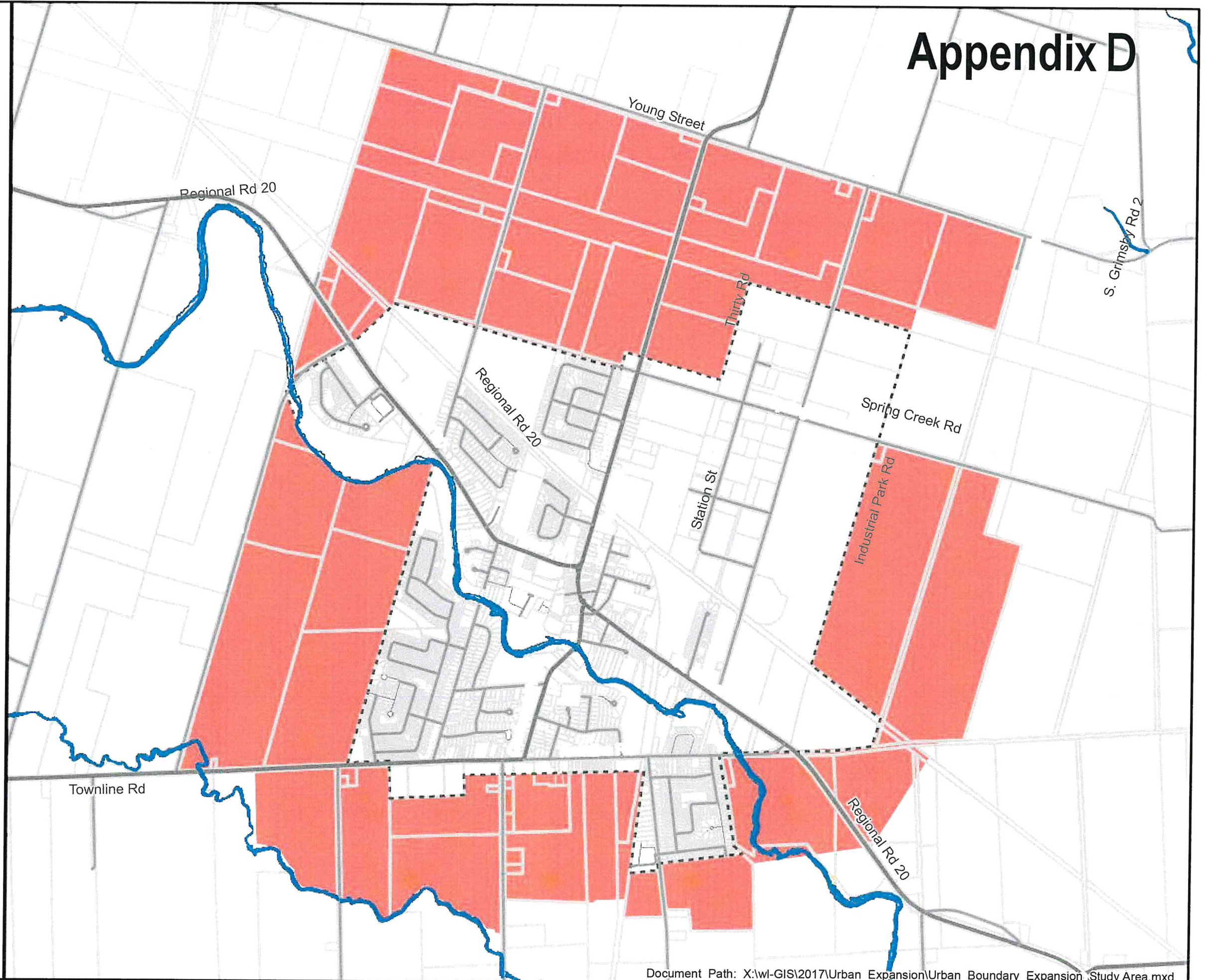
— Regional Road

— Municipal Road

- - - Urban Boundary

■ Expansion Boundary/Study Area

# Appendix D



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0 125 250 500 750 1,000  
Meters

September 2018