

Municipality of Lakeshore – Report to Council

Growth and Sustainability

Community Planning



To: Mayor & Members of Council

From: Ryan Donally, Division Leader – Community Planning (Acting)

Date: February 22, 2024

Subject: Greenhouse Projects Status Update

Recommendation

Direct Administration to continue discussions with the County of Essex and Provincial Ministries on Official Plan Amendment No. 18 to the Municipality of Lakeshore Official Plan and related Zoning By-law Amendment 2-2023, and report back to Council, as presented at the March 5, 2024 Council meeting.

Background

The scope of this report provides Council with an information update on Official Plan Amendment No. 18 and the related Zoning By-Law Amendment 2-2023 and the ongoing report related to the development of a “Greenhouse Facility Industrial Park” located within the municipality.

OPA 18 & ZBA 2-2023 Background

At the December 12, 2023, Regular Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

Direct Administration to meet with the County of Essex and Provincial Ministries to discuss Official Plan Amendment No. 18 to the Municipality of Lakeshore Official Plan and related Zoning By-law Amendment 2-2023, and report back to Council, as presented at the December 12, 2023, Council meeting.

Greenhouse Business Park Background

At the February 14, 2023, Regular Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

Direct Administration to bring a report describing the scope and estimated cost of a study to consider designating a Greenhouse Facility “Business Park”.

At the June 13, 2023 Regular Council Meeting, the following motion was passed:

Award the tender for the Greenhouse Business Park Report to the partnership of Harry Cummings and Associates INC. (HCA) and J.L. Richards & Associates Limited (JLR) and approve up to \$65,000 funded from the Plans and Studies Reserve to cover the cost of the work, as presented at the June 13, 2023, Council meeting.

Comments

OPA 18 & ZBA 2-2023 Update

The CAO and Corporate Leader of Growth and Sustainability attended a meeting in January 2024 with the County of Essex planning manager and representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA); the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing; and the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA). It was a positive discussion. However, it was expressed by the OMAFRA representatives at that meeting that Large Scale Commercial Greenhouses should be permitted in the Agricultural Area without setback restrictions. The County subsequently circulated notes of the discussion for review (Attachments 1, 2 and 3) and is waiting for formal written response from all parties. County administration stated that after receiving comments from Lakeshore Administration, another meeting will be conveyed.

Lakeshore will work with the County to respond to the comments submitted and draft modifications (changes) to the Official Plan Amendment no. 18 to address the comments received. It is felt that the discussions with the County will take approximately two months. Any proposed modifications will be brought to Lakeshore Council for review.

A number of the comments are agreeable to administration as the proposed changes will make the policies easier to understand and interpret. For other comments, administration will not be able to come to an agreement without Council direction as mentioned below.

- (1) The policies of the Provincial Policy Statement state that commercial greenhouse farms need to be permitted as of right in the Agricultural area. Should Council provide direction, administration could discuss allowing commercial greenhouse farms (CGF) in the Agricultural designation in the Official Plan (subject to the criteria in the Official Plan Amendment); however, not permit them in the Zoning By-law. This would require a site-specific zoning by-law amendment to permit each greenhouse proposal. Administration recognizes that this is a compromise, and not the approach adopted by Council. Also, it is not certain that this compromise would be acceptable to the County and provincial representatives.
- (2) The OMAFRA comments note that Lakeshore could use the existing 300 metre setback between greenhouses and residential uses. The comments note that the

Official Plan amendment policies prohibit Greenhouse development north of County Road 42 and the zoning by-law amendment introduces various setbacks. Section 6.23 b) of the Zoning By-law (existing provisions) states that the setback for all greenhouse farm buildings and structures from all Residential zones shall be 300 metres. If Lakeshore agrees to using the 300-metre setback, administration notes that this may be a good approach, in keeping with the existing setbacks in the zoning by-law. However, administration notes that this is not in keeping with the approach adopted by Council.

- (3) Section 6.2.1 h) ix) reads: “the CGF shall be designed to eliminate the impact of any odours generated from growing or processing so as to prohibit the transmission of odour beyond the greenhouse structure.” It is noted in the comments that the policy should be more permissive and use the word “minimize” instead of “eliminate” to allow greenhouse operators a period of time to release the air; open blackout curtains; and allow excess heat and light to escape. If Lakeshore agrees with this change in wording, administration recognizes that this is a compromise, and not the approach adopted by Council.

Administration is seeking Council endorsement to continue discussions, as per the Recommendation section, and report back to Council.

Greenhouse Business Park Update

In April of 2023, the Municipality put out a request for proposals for a “Greenhouse Business Park Plan”. In late June of 2023, the Municipality of Lakeshore retained Harry Cummings and Associates and J.L. Richards & Associates to complete the works.

Administration has been working with the consulting team regularly through the summer months. To date, a significant percentage of work has been completed.

As part of the work, the consulting team and Administration have met with the following stakeholders:

- A large-scale greenhouse farm operator which included a facility tour
- Hydro One
- Enbridge
- Leadership from other municipalities
- Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers

The consulting team has completed many elements of the proposed scope of work. Still outstanding is the potential for public consultation, the creation of graphical guidelines for the greenhouse business park, and the development of zoning guidelines for the proposed location(s). Some of these elements may be in draft and being considered by the consultants; however, administration has not yet reviewed the works.

Potential Location and Size

Large scale greenhouses require heat, energy, and water to operate. As such, greenhouses generally develop in the vicinity of existing natural gas pipelines, electrical transmission routes, and municipal (or private) waterlines.

Depending on the type of greenhouse and the operations therein, the quantity required of each service may vary. In some instances, and for generally smaller operations, electricity can be generated in-house through a natural gas generator; however, this energy is not preferred and potentially not supportive for larger scale operations. Additionally, some greenhouse developments may be able to source water directly from nearby lakes. Most greenhouses will also have a well to draw water, but this is not used as a primary water source.

The location and size of the proposed greenhouse industrial park is not finalized; however, existing, and future infrastructure has generally narrowed down the location to an area south of Comber, south and east of the existing Hydro One switching station.

Although the primary transmission routes of the infrastructure exist in this general area, this does not mean that greenhouses will be able to develop immediately. Large demand users such as greenhouses require additional infrastructure and/or increased capacity of these services to develop. Likely there is a 5-year+ delay before infrastructure is built for connections can be made (depending on the service).

The recommended size of the industrial area will reflect a reasonable amount of acreage that considers future growth projections of the industry but does not narrow the area to remove any choice in future land-use (from either the buyer or seller). The Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers Association (OGVG) identifies that there are currently approximately 3800 acres of greenhouses in Ontario with approximately 2500-2800 of those acres located in Essex County. Future base-case projections indicate that there is an expectation of 6000 to 8000 total in Ontario by 2032 (2200 to 4200 new acres built). This projected growth was not assigned to any location in the province.

Based on projected growth of the industry and the goal as to not remove competition from the market, the total proposed acreage for the greenhouse industrial park will likely be in the range of 4000 acres with potential to increase as development occurs.

Next Steps

Included in the workplan are two public engagement sessions. Prior to When the report is in draft final form, Administration will bring a report to Council that will seek feedback on the draft report and seek guidance on how public consultation should be considered. This will likely take place in Q2, 2024.

For illustrative purposes only:

The image below identifies approximately 4100 acres in an area south of Comber.



Attachments

Attachment 1 – Official Plan Amendment No. 18

Attachment 2 – Comment Table – Response from County of Essex

Attachment 3 – ERCA comments

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Greenhouse Projects Status Update .docx
Attachments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Attachment 1 OPA-18 - Adopted Official Plan Amendment.pdf- Attachment 2 Table of Comments OPA-18 Response from County .docx- Attachment 3 ERCA Comments on Lakeshore OPA 18.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Feb 29, 2024

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Prepared by Ryan Donally

Submitted by Tammie Ryall

Approved by Justin Rousseau and Truper McBride