

History of the Process

What is an Official Plan?

Under Ontario's Planning Act, an Official Plan is a key land use planning document. It plays an important role in the development of a municipality. It sets goals, objectives, and policies which guide municipalities' land use planning decisions. Everything a municipality does, related to land use and development, needs to conform to its Official Plan. That includes passing any by-laws and undertaking any public works.

A municipality's Official Plan contains text (several chapters which describe many land use systems and areas) as well as maps (called "schedules"). The maps sort land into various categories known as "designations". The text of the Official Plan has policies relating to each land use designation.

Neebing's current Official Plan was adopted in 2009. Official Plans are required to be approved by the Province (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing) before they can become effective. The 2009 Official Plan for Neebing was subject to some appeals to provincial land use tribunals, but was ultimately approved, and is the Official Plan that is now in effect.

The Province requires municipalities to review and update their Official Plans from time to time.

Review History

As a small, rural municipality without significant financial resources to hire consulting firms, Neebing's review of its Official Plan required the use of in-house administrative staff.

The Municipality commenced review of its 2009 Official Plan in 2013. This process was delayed due to administrative staffing changes at the Municipality. The process was re-commenced in 2015. During 2015, through to, and including 2017, a series of open houses and public meetings took place to review the 2009 Official Plan and consult with the public on changes required.

As a result of these processes, Council adopted a new Official Plan in September of 2017. Under Provincial law, the Official Plan cannot simply be adopted by a municipality. Once adopted, the approval of the Provincial Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is required before the new Official Plan can be implemented.

After Neebing sent its 2017 Official Plan to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for approval, in the fall of 2017, the Ministry returned extensive comments to the Municipality in the late summer of 2018. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing ("MMAH") acts as a central point to collect and deliver comments for other provincial ministries. Accordingly, the comments were those of several ministries; not just the MMAH.

2018 was an election year, and the (then) Council decided to reserve comment on the Ministry's requests to amend the Official Plan that it had adopted in 2017, in order to let the newly elected Council address them. After the 2018 election, and once the newly elected Council was settled, the Council established a sub-committee of members to review the Ministry's comments and respond. During 2019, a series of reports from the sub-committee was presented to Council, and Council made decisions to make some amendments to the Official Plan it had adopted in 2017, based on the comments received.

During 2019, as this process was unfolding, the Municipality received an application to amend the Official Plan to re-designate a property designated by the 2009 Official Plan as “Agricultural”, to the “Rural” designation. The purpose of the re-designation request was to allow the property owner to develop a medical clinic on the property. Because the 2017 Official Plan had yet to be approved, the amendment was processed to the 2009 Official Plan. Council approved the amendment, however, it has not (to date) been approved by the Province.

In early 2020, a revised Official Plan (from the one adopted by Council in 2017) was sent to MMAH, which incorporated amendments based on the comments from the various ministries. Council had accepted most, but not all, of the changes recommended by those ministries. (This revised Official Plan did not include the amendment processed in 2019. That had been considered and processed as a “parallel” amendment, to the 2009 Official Plan.)

MMAH reviewed the re-submitted Official Plan, and subsequently directed the Municipality that, in MMAH’s considered opinion, the changes to the 2017 adopted plan were extensive enough that the Municipality should undertake further public consultation before adopting the new Official Plan – and then re-submitting it to MMAH for approval.

Two major delay factors followed, almost simultaneously. The first was another staffing change, and the second was the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Neebing is now picking up the process to have the Province approve the changes that Neebing’s Council has approved to the 2017 Official Plan.

Because Council considers that it makes the most sense to do so, Neebing’s Administration is “rolling” the mapping amendment for the medical clinic (approved in 2019 for the 2009 Official Plan) in to this process, so that, once the new Official Plan is approved, it will be a “wholistic” document.