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## Report 2025-010

**Report Title:** Recommended Modifications to Official Plan Amendment No. 1 – Natural Heritage System

**Committee Name:** Economic Development, Tourism and Planning

**Committee Meeting Date:** January 8, 2025

**Prepared by:** Dwayne Campbell  
Director  
Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Initiatives

**Approved by:** Jennifer Moore, CAO

**Council Meeting Date:** January 22, 2025

**Strategic Plan Priorities:**  Innovate for Service Excellence  
 Ignite Economic Opportunity  
 Foster a Thriving Community  
 Propel Sustainable Growth  
 Champion a Vibrant Future

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### Recommendation

“**That** the Economic Development, Tourism and Planning Committee, having considered Report 2025-010 ‘Recommended Modifications to Official Plan Amendment No. 1 – Natural Heritage System (OPA1-NHS)’, recommend that County Council endorse the recommended modifications in this report to align with the new Provincial Planning Statement, 2024, and additional community consultations; and

**Further That** the Committee recommend that County Council direct staff to respectfully request the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to modify and approve Official Plan Amendment No. 1 in substantially the form as endorsed, noting that the spatial extent of the Northumberland Natural Heritage System is not recommended to change.”

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### Purpose

This report introduces the final recommended modifications to County Official Plan Amendment No. 1 – Natural Heritage System, following a review of the new Provincial Planning Statement, and additional community consultations that took place in November and December 2024.

## **Background**

On December 15, 2021, after an extensive 3-year process, County Council adopted Official Plan Amendment No 1 – Natural Heritage System (OPA1-NHS) and it was submitted to the Province for approval.

On October 18, 2023, County Council passed a resolution requesting that a Provincial decision on OPA1-NHS be deferred considering the pending release of the new Provincial Planning Statement.

In a letter dated September 6, 2024, Honorable Paul Calandra (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing), requested that the adopting by-law to OPA1-NHS be repealed to allow the County the ability to re-visit the Amendment to ensure alignment of local land use policies and interest with the new Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 (PPS, 2024).

On October 16, 2024, County Council directed staff to respond to the Minister's letter to suggest an alternative approach wherein staff draft modifications for OPA1-NHS to ensure alignment with the new PPS, 2024. Council also directed staff to prepare a report outlining the modifications required, and to hold a public meeting to present the proposed modifications and provide the public and interested parties the opportunity to provide input.

On December 4, 2024, staff and the consultant team presented a report of the proposed modifications to the Economic Development, Tourism and Planning Committee and hosted a public meeting. This report is the final step in the suggested alternative approach to request the Minister to modify and approve a Natural Heritage System for Northumberland.

## **Consultations**

An additional community consultation campaign on the proposed changes to OPA1-NHS took place in November and December and wrapped up on December 21, 2024. At the public meeting held on December 4th, one resident addressed the Committee citing requirements to determine natural heritage feature significance. At the time of writing this report, one written submission about reviewing environmental impact study reports was received. Staff have considered all public feedback received and made additional changes to the modifications where necessary. In addition, a number of minor changes to the policy framework are proposed to provide additional clarity.

In addition to the public consultation, County Planning staff circulated the proposed modifications to First Nation Communities involved in the Williams Treaties. A member of Hiawatha First Nation replied that they have no questions or concerns.

## **Legislative Authority / Risk Considerations**

The proposed modifications to Official Plan Amendment No. 1 have been prepared to align with the new Provincial Planning Statement, 2024.

It is noted that a municipal request to the Minister to modify and approve an official plan amendment is somewhat unique. However, taking into account the length of time that has passed since Council adopted Official Plan Amendment No. 1 in December 2021, and the numerous changes in Provincial legislation since that time; County staff, in consultation with Ministry and local municipal staff, believe that an appropriate planning process, complete with public engagement and indigenous consultation has been delivered, and that will allow the

Minister to modify and approve the first County Official Plan Amendment to implement a Natural Heritage System in Northumberland as is required by Provincial legislation.

### **Discussion / Options**

A memo and recommendation report, prepared by Meridian Planning Consultants, dated December 16, 2024, is attached and provides the details about the modifications required to OPA1-NHS. There are 85 recommended modifications that include new map schedules and text changes to the adopted Amendment (refer to attachment 1). It is noted that the spatial extent of the Northumberland Natural Heritage System is not recommended to change. In addition, the spatial extent of the natural features and areas shown on the schedules (except for significant woodlands) is not proposed to change. With significant woodlands, the amount of land proposed to be classified as significant woodland is proposed to increase by approximately 213 hectares, from 57,480 hectares to 57,693 hectares as a result of the simplification of the significant woodland criteria. This change is considered to be very minor because it represents an increase of 0.0036% and because the new policy framework permits development in significant woodlands provided the no negative impact test is satisfied (whereas the previous policy framework as per the Growth Plan prohibited development completely).

### **Financial Impact**

The process undertaken to draft and present the proposed modifications to OPA1 are additional costs to the Council approved budget for the Official Plan update that was approved in 2020. It is anticipated that a portion of the additional expense will be covered by deferring subsequent amendments and projects as part of the Official Plan update. If necessary, staff will prepare a report seeking Council approval for additional funds to complete the other components of the County Official Plan update.

### **Member Municipality Impacts**

Once approved by the Province, the OPA1-NHS mapping and policies will be integrated into the Northumberland County Official Plan and each of the local municipalities will need to update their official plans with the Natural Heritage System.

### **Conclusion / Outcomes**

This report and the attached recommended modifications to adopted Official Plan Amendment No. 1 - Natural Heritage System, is the final step in a suggested alternative approach for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to consider approving the Amendment. It is recommended that Council endorse the recommended modifications attached to this report and direct staff to send a copy of this report and the modifications to the Minister with a request to modify and approve Official Plan Amendment No. 1- Northumberland Natural Heritage System.

### **Attachments**

1. Report 2025-010 ATTACH 1 'Memo: Final Recommendation on Proposed Modifications to OPA 1 (Natural Heritage System), Meridian Planning, December 16, 2024'
2. Report 2025-010 ATTACH 2 'Recommended Map Schedules'