



## MEMO

**TO:** Town of Essex  
**FROM:** WSP Canada  
**SUBJECT:** Phase 1 Consultation Summary Memo  
**DATE:** March 2025

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### 1.0 SUMMARY

This memo is intended to provide a summary of the consultation process undertaken by the Township and how all comments will be considered in the Town's Draft New Official Plan. Section 2 below provides an overview of the comments received by the Town, while Section 3 outlines next steps for consultation on the New Official Plan project.

During Phase 1 of the consultation process for the Town's Draft New Official Plan, a diverse range of feedback was received from residents, business owners, and other stakeholders. To date, the Project Team and/or the Town have engaged with the community and technical advisors through various activities, including the following:

- Two (2) Community Stakeholder Meetings;
- Two (2) Development Advisory Group Meetings;
- Three (3) Public Focus Groups; and
- Three (3) Public Open Houses on the Draft New Official Plan and Colchester Secondary Plan (one each in Essex Centre, Harrow, and Colchester).

The Town has received hundreds of written comments from the public and stakeholders related to the Draft New Official Plan, most of which relate to the Colchester Secondary Plan. The comments received in Phase 1 consultations reflect a strong desire to preserve the existing character of Colchester, protect agricultural land, and address environmental and infrastructure concerns. Many residents have voiced overwhelming opposition to new developments, driven by fears of increased traffic, decreased property values, and changes to the neighborhood's aesthetics. There was a large portion of the comments received which make reference to potential changes to Colchester. The community's feedback underscores a collective effort to maintain the town's unique charm and prevent any developments that might disrupt its current state. Below is a summary of the key points and overall sentiment expressed by the community.



## 2.0 KEY POINTS

### 2.1 DRAFT COLCHESTER SECONDARY PLAN

The proposed new Colchester Secondary Plan generated the most discussion and engagement of any issue or subject at hand with the Draft New Official Plan. It is WSP's understanding that two grassroots citizens groups have been formed to organize opposition to increased development in Colchester, appears to have been galvanized by a major subdivision proposal on the vacant lands at Dunn Road and County Road 50.

The Town and WSP did engage with the public on the proposed changes to the Draft New Official Plan and Colchester Secondary Plan through three public focus groups in 2023. An open call was made for members of the public to join these focus groups (one of which was devoted entirely to Colchester), but uptake was very low.

In contrast, following the public circulation of the proposed development at Dunn Road and County Road 50, attendance was extremely high at the public open house in Colchester on August 28, 2024, and comments received on the Secondary Plan number in the hundreds.

Common comments received around Colchester include:

- Significant concern over the proposed Colchester Bay development, which includes higher densities and than exist elsewhere in Colchester. Many commenters referenced the proposed development and the draft Secondary Plan interchangeably. This misunderstanding is entirely reasonable given how close together the development proposal and draft Secondary Plan were made public.
- There was a strong sentiment that the draft Official Plan and Colchester prioritize tourism over the needs of local residents. Many commenters referenced Grand Bend, Ontario, as a model that they did not wish to follow.
- Commenters stressed the importance of maintaining Colchester's quiet, residential character and opposed the commercialization of the waterfront.
- Many commenters expressed a desire to see development directed to Harrow and Essex Centre rather than Colchester, or to see no new development in Colchester at all.
- Concerns were expressed over the capacity of infrastructure (especially sewage and roads) to support increased residential development and tourism in the Colchester area.
- Some commenters expressed support for development in general, including in Colchester, but at a lower and slower rate than currently proposed.



- Some commenters correctly pointed out that elements of the Secondary Plan borrowed from the previous Colchester Landscape Plan, which was not supported by the Colchester community and not adopted by Council. This includes the proposed future trail linkage along the waterfront, which some commenters believed would require expropriation.
- A misconception was repeated in many comments that the Town would be expropriating land from homeowners where the Main Street Mixed-Use designation was applied, or otherwise forcing commercial development on these lands.
- Many residents highlighted the environmental impact of the proposed developments in Colchester, including increased carbon emissions, loss of green space, and potential flooding.

## **2.2 GENERAL COMMENTS ON DRAFT NEW OFFICIAL PLAN**

### **2.2.1 CONCERNS ABOUT AGRICULTURAL LAND**

- Frustration was expressed over the perceived encouragement of the redevelopment of prime agricultural land for residential and greenhouse use.
- Emphasis was placed on the importance of preserving farmland and questioning the long-term sustainability of such developments.

### **2.2.2 ENVIRONMENTAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES**

- The Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA) provided comments on stormwater management, erosion hazards, and the need for permits for works within regulated areas. It emphasized the importance of adhering to the Clean Water Act and the Essex Region Source Protection Plan.

### **2.2.3 CALL FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

- Residents called for more community involvement in the planning process in Colchester.
- Emphasis was placed on the need for collaboration with local residents to ensure that Official Plan and Secondary Plan policies align with the community's needs and values.

### **2.2.4 HOUSING**

- Several commenters agreed on the need for affordable housing but stressed that new developments should not alter the lifestyles, demographics, or cultural nature of existing communities. They expressed concerns about the proposed housing density and its impact on property values, traffic, and local infrastructure.



- Several residents opposed high-density housing and commercial development, fearing it would disrupt the tranquility of Colchester, increase traffic, and strain infrastructure. They also raised concerns about the impact on local wildlife and the environment.

#### **2.2.5 EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE:**

- The Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB) and the Windsor Essex Catholic District School Board (WECDSB) highlighted concerns about school capacity due to residential growth. They stressed the importance of coordinated enrolment management and safe transportation routes for students in conjunction with the Town's current and future growth strategy

#### **2.2.6 OPPOSITION TO CANNABIS CULTIVATION:**

- Residents strongly opposed the inclusion of cannabis cultivation in the Official Plan.
- Concerns were raised about the negative impact on the community.
- Commenters argued that cannabis greenhouses are industrial rather than agricultural and should not be allowed in the Town of Essex.

### **3.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

While engagement was conducted on the entire Draft New Official Plan, which applies to the whole of the Town of Essex, the vast majority of public comments received relate to the proposed Colchester Secondary Plan. The feedback received during Phase 1 reflects a community that is deeply invested in preserving the existing character and lifestyle of Colchester. While there is recognition of the need for growth and development, residents are calling for a more balanced approach that prioritizes their needs and addresses environmental and infrastructure concerns. The strong opposition to commercialization of the waterfront and high-density development underscores the community's desire to maintain Colchester as a quiet, residential area.

To mobilize the feedback heard during Phase 1 consultations, the Town encouraged to consider the recommendations below for engagement in Phase 2.

- Communicate to Council and the public that the volume of comments and concerns raised by the Essex community is being considered by Towns staff and WSP, and formed the basis for an additional scope of work on the project related to the Local Comprehensive Review and further engagement on the Colchester Secondary Plan.
- Further educate Council and the public are educated on the context, parameters, and constraints of the Colchester Secondary Plan, including:



- The base rationale for the Colchester Secondary Plan (i.e., supporting the growth of the wine, recreation, and agri-tourism industries in the south of the Town). WSP would highly recommend that the support of Council is engaged before proceeding on further work for the Secondary plan.
- That the lands proposed for the controversial Colchester Bay development were previously added to the Colchester settlement area, and have been intended for residential development for years.
  - WSP would also recommend communicating to Council any legal risk of removing any designation for residential uses on these lands, but as professional land use planners, we are not qualified to provide advice on legal matters. This should be undertaken by internal or external counsel of the Town if deemed necessary and appropriate.
- That no new development requiring additional infrastructure (e.g., improved sanitary service) will be permitted in Colchester until the infrastructure is in place.
- That the Secondary Plan is intended to guide its evolution over 30 years, and that no home/landowners will be forced to sell or redevelop their properties.
- Continue to seek community involvement in the Official Plan process as Phase 2 progresses to ensure that the work is meaningfully informed by public feedback and engagement. WSP recommends that the grassroots groups in Colchester be approached as partners in the engagement process going forward, especially to form a Colchester-specific focus group.
- Look for opportunities to educate the Council and the public on permissions and guidance for greenhouse development (i.e., that they are already a permitted use in agricultural areas as required by the Province, and that the new policies are an attempt to be proactive in protecting prime agricultural lands).
- Develop a Frequently Asked Questions document that can be circulated and/or posted on the Town's website to support all the of educational components mentioned above, as well as general information on how Official Plans and the planning process work.