Consultation Summary
Waterdown Community Node Secondary Plan

Event: Focus Group Meeting #5 (Final Focus Group)
Location: Virtual Meeting held via WebEx (due to Covid-19)
Date: May 27, 2021
Time: 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm
Participants: 14 (7 Stakeholders/Residents and 7 Staff/Consultants)

Event Description
It was noted that this is the fifth and final Focus Group Meeting. City Staff expressed their appreciation for the commitment and input of the Focus Group over the last two years noting the importance of their contribution which has shaped the final draft Secondary Plan, Urban Design Guidelines and Cultural Heritage Review.

Presentations at the Focus Group Meeting were provided by City Staff (on the Draft Secondary Plan), Brook McIlroy Urban Design Consultants (BMI) (on the Urban Design Guidelines) and Archeological Services Inc (ASI) (on the recommendations from the Cultural Heritage Review). The meeting was facilitated by Sue Cumming, Cumming+Company. City Staff from Transportation and Heritage also participated. The presentations were followed by a Q&A and discussion period.

What We Heard
Draft Secondary Plan and Urban Design Guidelines

Following the presentation, the facilitator lead a discussion on feedback to the draft secondary plan policies and urban design guidelines.

Questions and Comments noted (these are numbered for reference purposes):

1. You talked about high quality design for all the various sections – I'm assuming the verbiage sounds great “high-quality design”. These properties are privately held, and private developers are going to do certain things. What kind of guideline specific facades does the city have in mind? Will it be left up to the developer or the owner? (If they want “high-quality design” are we seeing what in their mind is a high-quality design?) Or will the city provide more strict guidelines for the type of design they expect to see?

Response by BMI: In terms of saying “high-quality design”, we do get into some specifics in terms of trying to capture what aspects are important when we think about the buildings that we value and trying to continue that lineage in new developments. That gets into things like material quality and the idea of using authentic materials – if we’re using brick, we use real brick we don’t use an application that might appear to be brick. Things like that where we can get into a degree of specificity to ensure that the quality of the façade
materials is evocative of a quality that’s acceptable in the area. We highly trust the city’s review process – in terms of the urban design review in ensuring that as those applications come in, the review process ensures they conform to those guidelines and that back and forth happens with the development community as the development goes through the approvals process.

2. In all of the slides that were shown and all the references that were made to streetscape and tree planting – again I looked at the existing road allowances, property allowances and Hamilton Street on the east side of the plaza – the city level of property between the sidewalk and plaza property is so narrow that you can’t plant anything there. Does the city have budgetary allowances or the intention to let’s say force the developer to give up 6 feet of the plaza parking lot so that they can accommodate streetscaping and wider sidewalks etc.?

Response from City Staff: Within every road that we have there is a road allowance maximum or an ultimate road allowance that we’re trying to achieve. Every time that a development comes in, we can require a developer to give us additional frontage if that’s already in our plan for our road allowance width. A lot of times this will happen because the ultimate widths in our official plan are bigger than what’s existing now. In many cases we get an extra piece of land along the front and that is required at no cost to the City as part of the cost of development. We require that landscape plans be submitted as part of development where developers would be required to have landscaping – both on their property but also within the City road allowance. They would be required to pay for trees within the City’s property.

3. I noticed boxed architecture on Main Street in the midst of older buildings. I was wondering how this is possible and how it got there. Is the whole area on Main zoned in a different way? Additionally, the bike paths on the node – where are they going to go – they have been included in the plan but what happens after that? Are you going to have the bike path go north on Hamilton Street all the way to Carlisle? Is it going to go elsewhere, because there are no bike paths here? How is that going to work with the rest of the village?

Response from City Staff: We are aware of that particular site, and we are looking at what we can do to try and make sure buildings are a little more compatible when we have something new proposed. We have some different tools that we are looking at because low density residential areas are a little bit different in terms of what we can do than the commercial areas. We’ll talk about that with the material that ASI is going to present today, but we would also be looking at doing a review as part of the implementation of the secondary plan – doing a review of the zoning and seeing if there’s some zoning standards that we can adjust to try and make sure that the mass and the size and the setbacks for new houses fit in with what’s there now and the existing character of those streetscapes. Mill Street we know is in a heritage district, but some of the other areas do not have the same protection as that.
Response from City Staff on the cycling infrastructure: The new infrastructure that is shown on the secondary plan map will continue on outside of the area. They are all part of an active network that will connect and none of these pieces will operate in isolation from the other.

Q3 follow up comment: We have people who come from outside of town to the region specifically to bike. I see loads of families and individuals who drive to our area and unload their cars to bike on the rural trails, but we have no actual bike paths for these riders. It would be fantastic if we could have something not just in Waterdown but around that could link everybody – the small communities - through trails. Especially so its less dangerous for the bikers who come up here.

4. My main concern would be the trees and how we can actually get those onto the streets – walking downtown I do like all the things that the Waterdown BIA has, and I take my kids down the streets, and I have no idea where these trees would go. I really want them there don’t get me wrong, I just don’t know how that would happen. So, if that can be a dream, then by all means I think its fantastic. My question would be, if you’re redeveloping a space like the Sobeys’s Plaza at what point do you actually put in those roads? Would it be a complete demolition of everything there and then you put in the roads, or do you try and work around the current things that are there?

Response from BMI: The development plans that we present are a magical land where you can just start from scratch and in reality, if a development proposal came in from that site, it would probably be phased, and they would probably look at a few buildings to start and move from one end of the site to the other. Most likely the city would then require as part of that development application that certain roads be included as they move throughout the site. It would be possible that it might happen in 2 or 3 phases but its usually in agreement that the roads would happen at the same time as a certain phase so it would kind of build itself out over time.

5. The first thing I saw was the limited height on downtown which is very encouraging. The expansion of the district – I didn’t know if that was going to be incorporated in the secondary plan or is that going to be something looked into after the secondary plan is complete? I know there is quite a process to get there. The downtown is going to be restricted to 2-3 stories. Currently the commercial zones of Hamilton’s downtown have been rezoned to C5 zoning which is a 6-8 storey plan. If the secondary plan is approved is the zoning in that area actually changed? Does the secondary plan trump what the city has laid out for the remainder of the areas for zoning?

Response from City Staff: If we’re looking at an expansion of a Heritage District or creating a new Heritage District that would have to be done through a separate study – it’s a heritage conservation district study that’s done under the Ontario Heritage Act. That would be something that we would recommend as part of this process, but it wouldn’t be implemented at the same time as the secondary plan.
Response from City Staff: With the other question on the zoning, yes, we would need to do both – we would need to do the policies and the zoning changes. We’re looking at drafting those zoning changes and bringing them forward on the same date that we bring forward the report for the secondary plan. The plan is to do everything concurrently, so we’d be looking at changing that height requirement in the zoning at the very same time.

Q5 follow up: For infill – that was part of the issue – earlier it was noted that there was a house in the core that didn’t exactly fit in. That’s why the expansion of the district might help those to blend into the neighborhood. If there is residential zoning that is coming through with the SDU, does that affect anything of what the secondary plan is? Do these secondary units apply to all residential areas?

Further Response from City Staff: The secondary plan would be recognizing that the secondary dwelling unit policies have been approved so that’s now permitted in the area as part of the secondary plan policies. For the zoning in the residential areas, we are actually looking at making some zoning changes concurrently with the secondary plan. We’ve started looking at the properties in the area to see if there are some tweaks we can make to try and ensure compatible development because we know it may be a little bit of time before the new residential zoning is drafted. We want to see if we can fill that gap between the zoning that’s in place now and the new zoning that is coming – which would also be aligned with the secondary plan policies. It may take some time for that to come in.

6. This is great! This is very consistent with the feedback we’ve been applying to this process all along. I’m very encouraged to see the plans that you are showing us. I have a couple of questions with MCR. I know that it’s also in the midst of the planning for the provincially mandated targets for density and intensification at the municipal level – as I am participating in a number of those, I know that there’s a survey going out in early June for that. I’m assuming this is all being done concurrently, that the intensification and density goals for the area will meet what’s in these proposals and plans so that they won’t override us. If we’re saying we want only 3 storey buildings in the heritage area, but we’re also being mandated by the GRIDS process to increase density, just want to make sure that these are working concurrently and will make sure that one doesn’t override the other.

Response from City Staff: We have been collaborating with the team that is working on the GRIDS MCR process. We did do some estimates of potential growth in 10-year increments that they are going to be integrating into their estimates and their work. We are meeting with the GRIDS team to review the policies that we are looking at putting in place and the growth that we would be expecting through those policies. This is actually a fairly dense area if you look at the jobs and the population put together. So, we will be meeting the targets that the official plan has for community nodes and what sort of density targets we’d be looking at in those areas. Definitely they would be aligned and the heights that we’re proposing, and the types of density would be meeting those requirements of the MCR process that’s going through now.
7. I think we all get really excited when we see some of hypotheticals of if you were starting something, what the vision for the community could look like. But I guess my overall concern is – what is the reasonable expectation that some of these things will happen when they are private properties and when you’re having investment taking place in and around them. For instance – the Bulk Barn Plaza site. It is probably a plaza that needs to be redeveloped in time, but right now we have the north-east corner of Hamilton and Dundas that has a proposed building on it. So, there’s going to be a fairly significant investment when that build happens and its kind of happening piecemeal – when we look at this, it would be great if it was all happening at the same time but what is the expectation that any of these will actually be able to be implemented when there are all these things that already exist?

Response from BMI: It is really difficult. We can’t dictate markets or what properties go up for development and in what order. I think the intent of the guidelines is to set out what we are looking for – the maps that we create really show how the ideas of the guidelines can be applied to multiple sites and really illustrate those principles and what we’re trying to achieve on each of the developments so that we know that – over time, whether it takes 10 years or 20 years when some these sites start developing, each building that goes in starts to contribute positively right from the beginning when it goes in. Because it has a good relationship with a street, it starts creating those really nice street frontages and the good urban conditions. So, I think the expectation is that the most we can hope for is that every development that happens – whenever that does happen based on the market – does conform to all of these principles and ideas that we have established. That’s the overall goal of the guidelines.

8. It is a great presentation, the way you’ve handled the downtown is a nice job. I don’t think a lot of it is achievable, because fundamentally, the downtown is very small, but its good to dream and I’m sure some of it is going to happen. Probably the biggest issue right now – I have talked about it before – is parking. Right now, you’re studying the BIA parking areas, are you going to incorporate any of those recommendations in this zoning?

Response from City Staff: We have had some discussions with City Parking Staff about the possibility of maybe having municipal parking in the area in the future. I don’t think at this time that we’re recommending changes to the zoning for parking standards. What we’ve tried to do is take a bit of a multi-pronged approach to the issues – trying to balance some of those parking needs with also promoting the active transportation and transit use, looking at supporting some of those transit improvements that are planned and looking at maximizing the on-street parking as well. When new development comes in, we’ll be trying to maintain those spaces and put access in locations where we can create the most on-street parking as possible. Councillor Partridge is working on some time limits for the area, which is also to encourage some turnover in the area for patrons. So, there are a couple of different things – in this way – that we are looking at the issue. I know that there is a parking issue in the historic core, but it’s a very difficult thing to try and balance some
of these different objectives – something that we’re trying to really look at with a few different approaches.

**Q8 follow up:** This doesn’t answer my question. They took away all the parking for anything under 5,000 square feet. Take for example a guy that’s coming, if you had the old parking standard there and he was required 6 spots, planning could then ask him: “could you give me 2 spots, could you give me 1 spot, can you do something?” I mean you have a plan here that shows parking in the backs of all these buildings, but you’ve got nothing here that requires it. I think you’re weak on your parking. No one’s going to be able to achieve the kind of parking numbers in the old business district but at least you could ask the guy for one spot or two spots – can you look around/can you shift something? Right now, Waterdown has no public transit system, it totally survives on people walking downtown, and you have to park them somewhere. Personally, I think public transportation isn’t going to work, it’s going to peter out and eventually something better will replace it, but that hasn’t happened yet, and so I think you should consider keeping some parking in the nexus because right now you have none. Buildings with no parking don’t do well – they fail, and its important so I think you should give that some more consideration. I don’t think your C5 zoning is written properly.

Response from Staff: We appreciate your perspective.

**Cultural Heritage Review**

Following the presentation, the facilitator led a discussion on the recommendations from the Cultural Heritage Review.

Questions and Comments noted (these are numbered for reference purposes):

9. There’s no process that’s perfect, but I think you’re giving it a good shot. I think you understand the problems. Honestly, I don’t know any more than that. At least you’re being respectful of what people are hoping for. So not sure what to tell you in terms of a question.

10. I have a couple of quick questions. If we decided to go with the expansion of the district for whatever length of time – so basically, are you saying one year from now to implement it after the secondary plan is in place? Secondly, there has been interest in town to expand – some people are a little bit hesitant to say okay since they don’t want to have restrictions on what they can do to their property. They’re also finding out now that this puts restrictions on their neighbours that can do whatever they want to the property. So there does seem to be growing support for that. The other portion which was the considered site plan control – is the idea that that would be implemented initially to have some kind of control and then in the background possibly in the future – like within a year – to implement a heritage district or would it be one or the other?

Response from ASI: For the consideration of site plan control we are looking at whether it can be used as an interim measure for a future HCD study while that study is occurring,
so that review of applications can be happening throughout the course of that process. So, it doesn’t have to be an either/or, but we are looking at both options and whether its an HCD-only site plan control as an interim measure to then ultimately an HCD or site plan control only. It’s good to hear community feedback on how people are feeling about the idea of a Heritage Conservation District, yet I just didn’t quite capture exactly what your question was on the expansion of the district. Were you seeking to confirm the length of time that it could take?

Q10 follow up: Yes, just if that was a decision we were going to make, you said it could take up to a year while being past when the secondary plan is implemented. So, that’s why I was asking would one plan be implemented initially, while the other one was proceeding?

Follow-up response from ASI: Your comment on the length of time that a district process could take is correct, I think a year is conservative based on many other municipalities – from when they start the HCD study phase to the passing of the bylaw often even exceeds a year. This is due to all of the consultation required, council meetings, development of guidelines and all of the technical work – a year would even be ambitious. To come back to your subsequent question, we’re looking at before that (if that does become the direction) Heritage Conservation District bylaw is registered on title and implemented, and appeals are worked through because that’s the other issue that can always add time to the process. Site plan control is being looked at as an interim measure not perhaps an alternative measure should the HCD not evolve in the direction of implementation.

11. For infills - any property within that area – for protection for infills, this is mainly just a comment: I live in the heritage district, so we know the restrictions there, so outside of a heritage district or a considered site in a control plan or whatever they call that – which gives the better protection to infill so that they blend into the community. For the two, either having a Heritage District implemented or this considered site control plan – which one would give more protection on an infill basis?

Response from ASI: The HCD plan and guidelines would give the most clarity on what the expectation is for infill, because there is clear delineation of which properties are to be conserved – they would be indicated as contributing properties that uphold the values of the Heritage Conservation District versus non-contributing properties (not including Main Street, the Mill Street HCD does that currently) but this is something that newer HCDs are using. Those non-contributing properties would have a separate set of guidelines and info properties would be within that realm as they present a different set of guidelines that need to be adhered to. Site plan control can be not as transparent a process, because it doesn’t have a document to support it, like a plan that is given to community members – its about a dialogue between city staff at that point.

Response from City Staff: What we’ve looked at between the two tools is that the HCD really reflects a little better what we’re trying to accomplish. Site plan control can be a little
less specific with regards to looking at some of those heritage character items, typically if we do use it in low density areas, we’ve been using it more to review things like grading or protection of environmental areas. So, I think the HCD tool has a little bit better of a process to deal with what we’re trying to accomplish through this area.

12. My understanding right now is that a lot of that development in those residential areas is currently on hold, or there’s a bit of a moratorium based on what’s coming out of this community node plan, so if this wraps up before you get through the HCD, or the site plan, will some of those developments be able to move forward or is that still going to be on hold?

Response from City Staff: There was an interim control bylaw that was passed last year in May for the whole study area, that was in place for a year, and that has now expired – it was not extended by City Council, so it expired on May 20th and as of now development could occur in those areas if we did receive an application.

Q12 follow up: Those developments that are going forward now then – are they under any sort of overall guiding principles right now if we’re still determining which direction to go? Is there any site control on those?

Follow-up response from City Staff: We would be looking at some zoning controls and looking at that for residential and commercial as well to reflect the directions of the secondary plans and the guidelines. So that’s an interim measure that we’re looking at but other than that, right now those low-density buildings (single detached properties) are not subject to anything like site control. We’re looking to have something in the fall – we don’t have specific dates yet – sometime before the end of the year to have something to bring forward.

13. If we decide to go through the expansion route – is there any fear that if that doesn’t get passed, we lose the original one and then you have to do the whole process again just to get that original Mill Street piece? Or is the better option to do that adjoining district where the first one is safe from being manipulated or lost?

Response from ASI: That’s really spot-on. We’re recommending a separate HCD so that the current bylaw remains protected and in effect and isn’t at risk of being lost should this HCD not go through the entire process. So, its not an extension or an expansion it’s a new adjacent HCD.

14. Unfortunately, some of the terminology is flying over my head. If I understand correctly, if a site has a heritage building on it, it is protected. My question would be first of all, is all of Mill Street protected as heritage buildings, and if it is not – if there is something in there that’s not a heritage building and someone decides to plow it over, are we going to get another monstrosity on that street? The second half of this question involves – you said that right now the city did not renew the interim control bylaw so can people be building now on that
Street and there’s no control? Why are we not doing something out this (or am I simply misunderstanding)?

Response from City Staff: The response was made by referring to the presentation slides for clarity – these are maps of the Mill Street HCD and the heritage district. On the right-hand side is the built heritage inventory and that shows the candidates for part IV designation listed properties, as well as the Mill Street HCD so all of those properties will ultimately – if they’re not already on the register – they will be on the heritage register going forward once the City’s Build Heritage Inventory Project is complete.

The properties that are within the cultural heritage landscape but not reflected on the maps in the built inventory are recognized and identified that they have cultural heritage value, and we are working on tools to protect those properties. That’s why we’re using the secondary plan – to provide policies and the urban design guidelines to give shape to what is desired development in those areas. Then adding an HCD or Site plan control would be an extra layer of protection for those areas. As part of our work before we complete the heritage review and to set up for a potential HCD study is that we’re going to examine what that boundary will be for the additional HCD area that would adjoin the existing Heritage Conservation District. So, we would be looking at an area that would start to tell a cohesive story about the place that is the extension of the Mill Street Story and provides a more complete picture of the village of Waterdown.

Follow-Up from City Staff: For the second question, were you referring to what happens in the Mill Street area – if there’s still protections there? Or in the area as a whole?

Q14 follow up: My concern would be off the top of my head, that there’s already one really ugly house in the area that really doesn’t fit, so if there’s no protection in that area - that would be Mill Street (whatever’s in green on the right-hand side of the map there) what might happen.

Further response from City Staff: The Mill Street Heritage District would still be in place, so no changes will be happening in that area. Permits will still be required for any new development, and I think within the other areas as ASI have said, we are expecting these registered listings and recommendations to be coming forward fairly soon, so that would be starting to implement some of those protection tools that we have. We could have those on the register if there’s proposed demolitions for any of those properties, we can take a look at that.

Other Questions/Comments

15. For the transit hub: it was indicated it would be on Franklin next to the lady’s shop. How do you visualize that? There is no space there and it is all privately owned property. Is that considered a road only transit hub?

Response from City Staff: Based on preliminary discussions with HSR it would be within the road allowance. A bus bay on both sides of the road along Dundas.
**Next Steps**

Public Consultation will occur in June and following that City Staff and consultants will review all of the feedback, review changes and finalize documents and materials. The Secondary Plan and Urban Design Guidelines are anticipated to be presented to City Council in late fall 2021.

Focus group members were encouraged to share information about the upcoming public consultation with others in the community and to provide any additional comments to City Staff by emailing Melanie Pham.

Staff further thanked Focus Group members for participating at this fifth and final Focus Group meeting.