our Niagara Falls plan

PLANNING THE FUTURE. TOGETHER.

August 2024

What We Heard Report #1



The Planning Partnership

This page is intentionally left blank.

Contents

1.0 Introduction 1

1.1 Community Engagement So Far - at a glance 4

1.2 Themes Emerging from all Input and Engagement 5

2.0 Interviews with the Mayor and Council Members 7

3.0 Stakeholder Meetings 8

4.0 Niagara Networks Trade Show 11

5.0 One-on-one Conversations with Residents 12

6.0 Public Online Survey #1 Summary of Results 13

7.0 Input to Inform the Discussion Papers Received Through *Let's Talk Niagara Falls* 16

8.0 Engagement with Children and Youth 20

8.1 High School Visits 20

8.2 High School Ambassadors 23

8.3 Mother Earth Day Event 29

9.0 Input Through the Public Open House on the Discussion Papers 30

10.0 Public Online Survey #2 38

11.0 Pop-up Events 56

12.0 Written Submissions and Emails 57

13.0 Next Steps 58

This page is intentionally left blank.

1.0 Introduction

The City of Niagara Falls is preparing a new Official Plan Our Niagara Falls Plan that will outline its long-term land use vision until 2051, aiming to manage rapid growth while ensuring a high-quality living environment for both residents and visitors.

This What We Heard Report summarizes the input received on Our Niagara Falls Plan up to the end of July 2024. The project is organized into five phases: project initiation and visioning, background research and discussion papers, policy directions, drafting the Official Plan, and the final approval process.

The first phase of the Our Niagara Falls Plan was initiated at a Special Meeting of Council on March 5, 2024. This phase focused on building awareness of the project with community, council, stakeholder, and First Nations engagement. A project specific website was developed on the City's Let's Talk Niagara Falls platform with postings, printed materials were produced, and informational inserts were included in water bills. Project videos have been prepared to help build awareness of the Official Plan process.

First Nations have been contacted and are being kept updated on work completed in each phase. Six Nations has expressed interest in reviewing draft Official Plan policies.

Engagement in Phase 1 and 2 focused on understanding issues and opportunities that could be explored in new Official Plan policy. This input helped inform the preparation of the six Discussion Papers and will help to craft an overarching vision statement for the Official Plan. Engagement in Phase 2 also sought input on the content of the six Discussion Papers. The Let's Talk Niagara Falls - Official Plan page provided a summary and links to the six Discussion Papers.

This document summarizes the input received from multiple events held over five months. Engagement events included one-on-one conversations, small group meetings and large format public sessions in person and online. Multiple engagement with children and youth occurred with the help of four youth ambassadors and through visits to high schools, a youth oriented online and paper survey and pop up engagement at Mother Earth Day to understand how they perceive their neighbourhoods and ideas for a future city.

Timeline

Phase 1 – Project Initiation & Visioning:

Robust Community Engagement and Consultation program, to clearly understand the community's vision for the future of Niagara Falls.

- Special Meeting of Council Held March 5, 2024

Phase 2 – Background Research & Discussions Papers

Undertake background research and explore community priorities on a variety of topics, through detailed Discussion Papers.

- Open Houses held on June 6 & 11, 2024 on the Discussion Papers
- Council update report and presentation June 18, 2024

Phase 3 - Policy Direction

Explore guiding policy, based on the Phase 1 visioning, Phase 2 discussion papers, and community feedback.

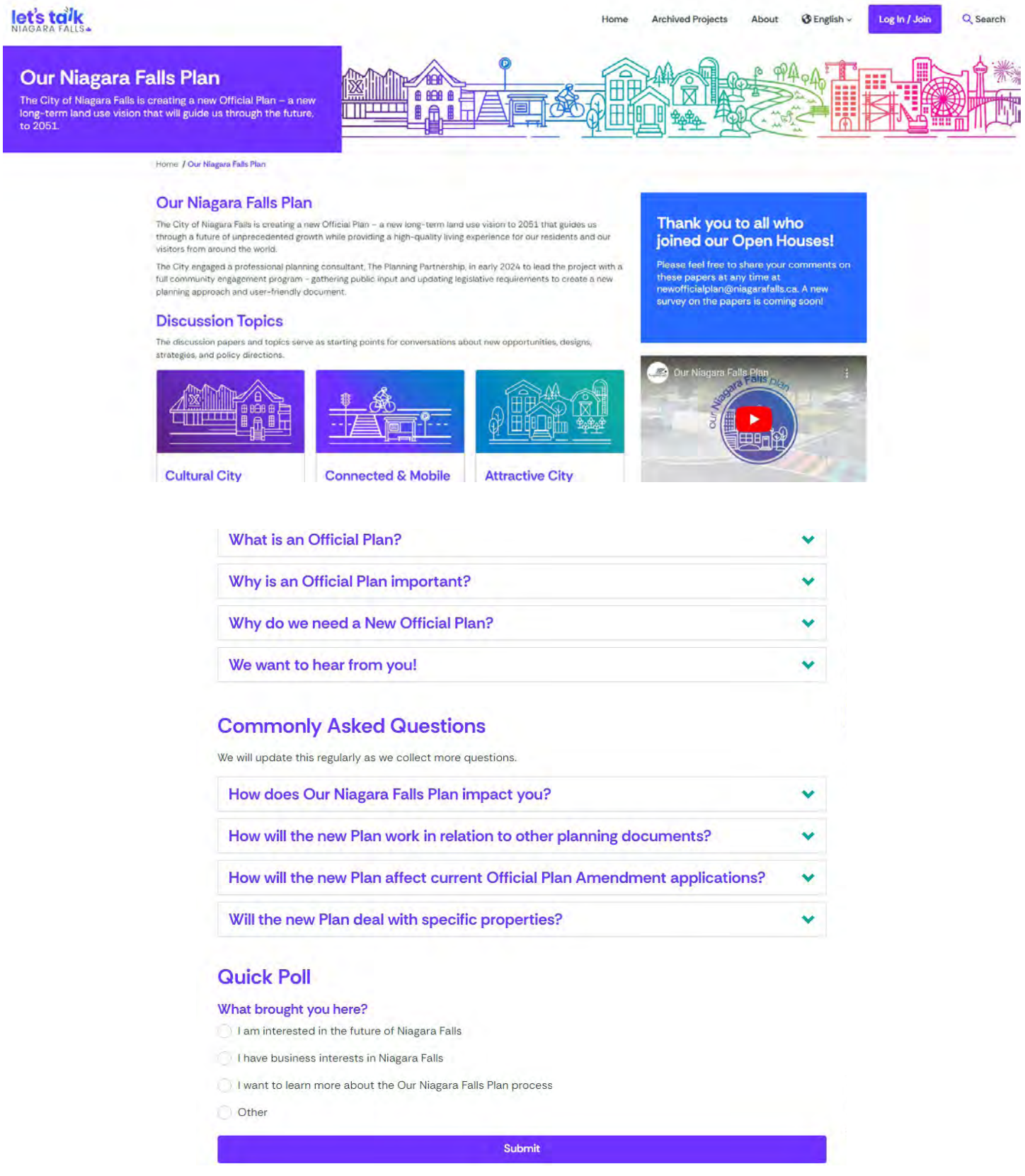
Phase 4 - Draft New Official Plan

Present draft official plan for community and stakeholder consideration.

Phase 5 - Approval Process

Refine and finalize the Official Plan based on feedback received in Phase 4, for final Council approval.

Let’s Talk Niagara Falls Web Page



The six Discussion Papers were posted in full and as a summary of the Let's Talk Niagara Falls Official Plan web page. The focus of each Paper is described on this page.



Cultural City

A cultural city is rich in built and cultural heritage resources and community facilities. Archaeological resources, built heritage resources, cultural heritage landscapes, and intangible, ephemeral, or lost heritage sites are critical parts of a city's range of cultural experiences. Cultural experiences happen when the physical elements of the city interact with its symbolic heritage elements and their meanings.



Connected & Mobile City

A connected and mobile city has a transportation network that balances the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and drivers. A connected and mobile city improves safety, equity, accessibility and mobility for all who engage with the transportation network.



Green & Resilient City

A Green and Resilient city has complete communities within a Natural Heritage System. The Natural Heritage System provides connectivity among natural heritage features to support the natural processes required to maintain biological and geological diversity, natural functions, viable populations of native species, and ecosystems. A Green and Resilient City has less environmental impact and provides climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies. It contains a significant number of green spaces, including woodlands, wetlands, parks, and trails.



Attractive City

An Attractive City is a welcoming and beautiful city that engenders a sense of pride as a place to live, a sense of well-being, and a sense of stewardship in its long-term care and maintenance. An Attractive City has beautiful streets, parks and open spaces and includes high-quality architecture, destinations, landmarks, and gateways.



Growing City

A Growing City means planning for homes, jobs, shopping, retail, entertainment, places of worship, infrastructure, and community facilities to accommodate and manage growth. Growth provides many choices for places to live and work, generates revenue for public and private sector services, drives infrastructure use and improvement, supports and develops the local economy, and creates opportunities for renewal of all parts of the community.

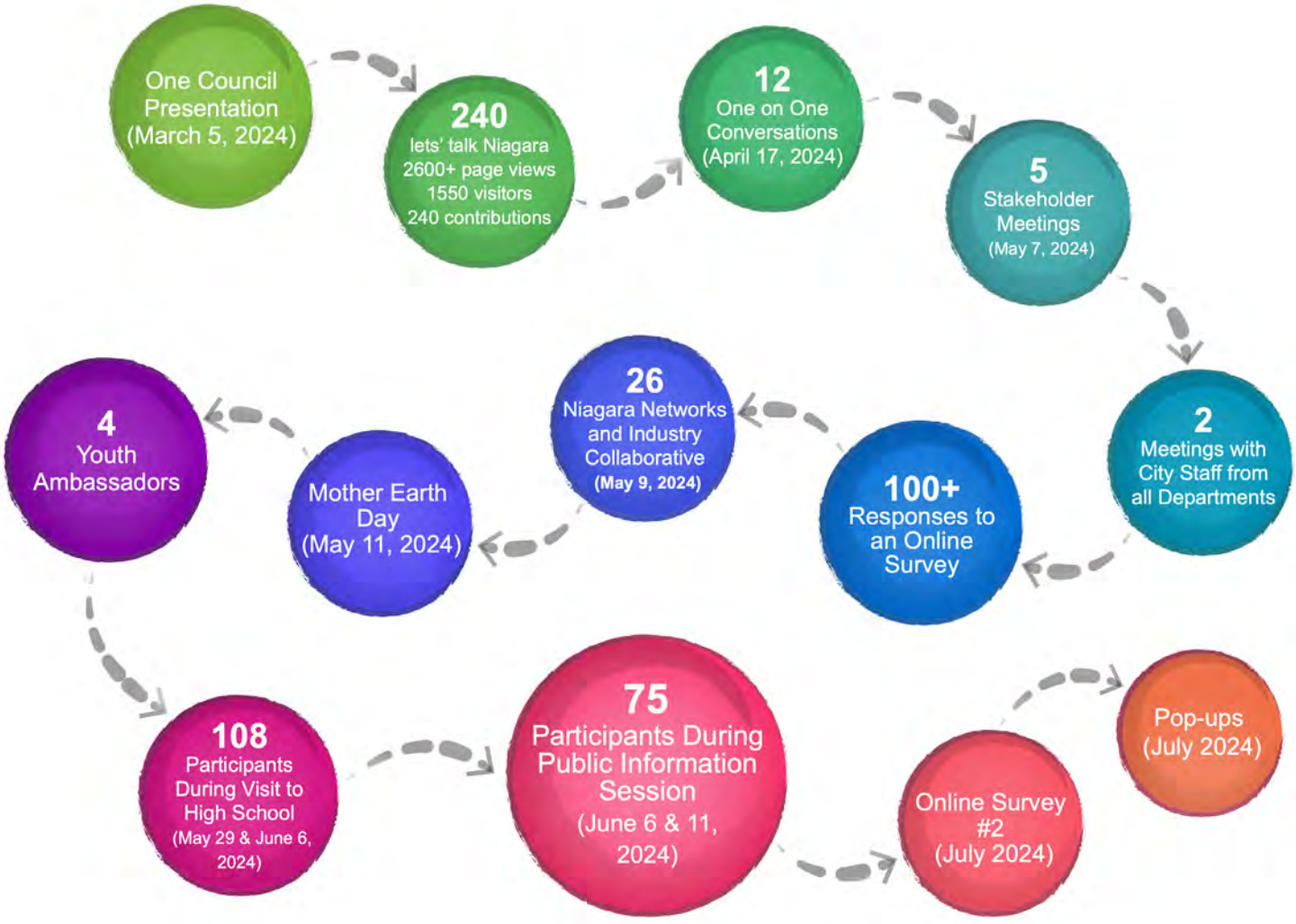


International City

Niagara Falls is a tourist and convention destination worldwide. The Eighth Wonder of the World is the star of many movies and spectacles. Niagara Falls is renowned as an important part of the cultural landscape. Its effect goes beyond the city, extending along its similarly named Escarpment north toward Wisconsin and eastward into New York State. Niagara Falls is home to industries and part of a "Gateway Economic Zone" planned to support economic diversity and promote increased opportunities for cross-border trade, movement of goods, and tourism.

1.1 Community Engagement So Far - at a glance

The diagram below is a snap shot of the engagement completed up to July 2024 where input was sought on key considerations for new Official Plan policy based on the six Discussion Papers:



1.2 Themes Emerging from all Input and Engagement

Development and Planning

- **Balanced Growth:** concerns about balancing residential and commercial development; a desire for flexible policies that adapt to market conditions while protecting existing commercial and industrial areas.
- **Densification and Land Use:** prefer increasing density and intensification over encroachment into agricultural and natural lands; integrating multidisciplinary and age-friendly planning.
- **Revitalization and Aesthetics:** priority to revitalize downtown and create aesthetically pleasing housing; need for better urban design.

Environmental Concerns

- **Green Spaces and Urban Forestry:** importance of protecting urban forests, vernal pools, and maintaining green spaces; create community gardens and pollinator areas in parks to enhance their ecological value.
- **Sustainable Practices:** support for rigorous Environmental Impact Studies, better integration of environmental considerations into planning processes; the importance of sustainable development and design practices.
- **Public involvement in Environmental Decisions:** need for accessible planning documents and increased public participation.

Housing and Affordability

- **Affordable Housing:** concern about housing affordability, with calls for improved building standards and measures to support affordable housing initiatives.
- **Mixed-Use Development:** support for creating vibrant, diverse neighbourhoods with a mix of housing types and uses; particularly beneficial in a tourist city like Niagara Falls.
- **Challenges with Short-Term Rentals:** impact on residential neighbourhoods and long wait times for assisted housing.

Connectivity and Transportation

- **Transit and Mobility:** Improve connectivity within the city and to neighbouring municipalities; enhanced public transit (including GO train services), and integration of micro-mobility options like scooters and bike shares.
- **Pedestrian and Cyclist Safety:** ensure safe and pedestrian-friendly paths, and well-designed bike lanes to enhance the overall livability and attractiveness of the city.
- **Trails and Paths:** more hiking trails with better wayfinding, potential to create trails along hydro corridors.

Community and Cultural Engagement

- **Youth and Arts:** encourage youth involvement in public art and creating opportunities for local artists to retain young talent and enhance the cultural vibrancy of the city; integrate arts and culture with local businesses through programming and cultural/ historical events.
- **Public Spaces:** protect and enhance public open spaces, including parks and recreational area; value for spaces that support various activities and contribute to the overall quality of life; need for pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and community hubs.
- **Collaboration Between City and Region:** Joint efforts in beautification projects and other initiatives.

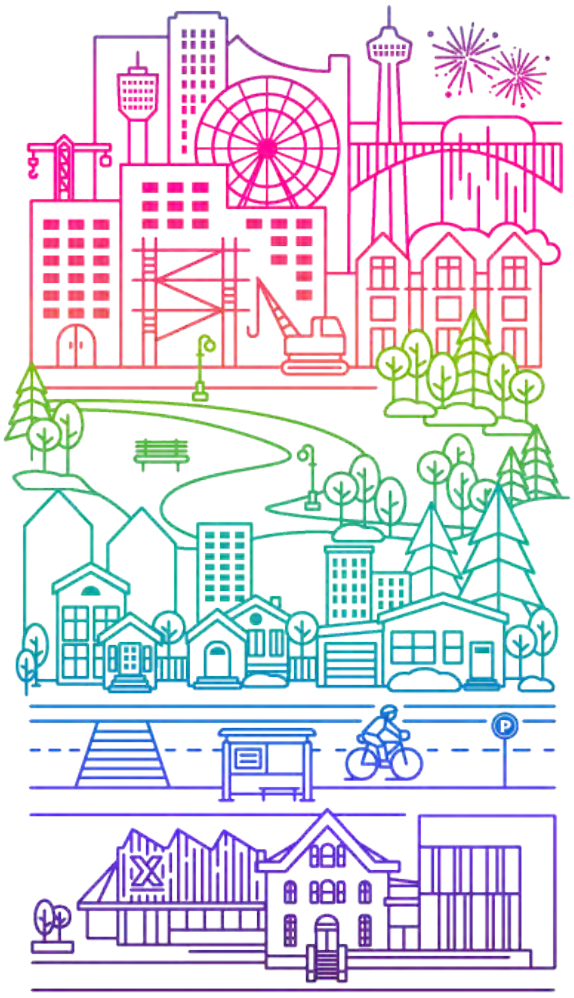


Visitor Experience and Tourism

- **Extended Visitor Stays:** need strategies to retain visitors longer and diversify attractions.
- **Aesthetics and Cleanliness:** improve the city's appearance and maintain cleanliness for a better visitor experience.

Economic Development

- **Job Creation and Industrial Protection:** bring more jobs to Niagara Falls and protect industrial areas from residential encroachment; want a thriving local economy supported by strategic planning and policy measures.
- **Support for Local Businesses:** need for policies that support local businesses and attract professional firms and institutions.
- **Retail and Local Economy:** need for more diversity in retail particularly in downtown Niagara Falls.



2.0 Interviews with the Mayor and Council Members

March 21 and April 5, 2024

A member of the project team met with the Mayor and Councillors (two at a time). The conversations focused on two objectives: identifying key words and phrases for the creation of a Vision Statement for Niagara Falls' future over the next 20 to 30 years, and pinpointing topics for consideration within the Official Plan process. The discussions were positive, revealing optimism and determination among elected officials towards the city's future, despite ongoing concerns and challenges.

- The identified key words and phrases for a Vision Statement emphasized a high-quality, attractive, competitive, livable, and sustainable city.
- Topics for consideration within the Official Plan process included the need to raise the bar on urban design, diversify the economic base beyond the hospitality sector, and promote connectivity within the region.
- There were concerns about cultural diversity, affordability, and coordination among various levels of government.
- In terms of concerns to be addressed through the Official Plan process, Councilors expressed worries about a perceived culture of negativity within the community, reactive decision-making, and a lack of coordination among different levels of government. There were also concerns raised about the prescriptive nature of the Regional Official Plan, particularly regarding the Natural Heritage System, and its potential impact on development opportunities and efficiency.



Overall, the discussions highlighted a strong commitment to addressing current challenges and shaping Niagara Falls' future in a proactive and strategic manner through the Official Plan process.

3.0 Stakeholder Meetings

April 11 and May 7, 2024

Meeting #1. Business Stakeholder Discussion

Main themes:

- The main themes discussed revolve around industrial development, challenges in municipal processes, and concerns about the city's future direction.
- The acquisition of the Russel aviation property by the City to develop an industrial park highlights a long-term vision to establish the QEW as a business corridor. However, participants expressed concerns about the city's focus on industry, noting a perceived lack of emphasis on this in discussion papers.
- Issues with municipal processes, including difficulties in obtaining permits and frustrations expressed by homebuilders, were brought up.
- Concerns were voiced about the lack of affordable housing and the aging demographic of home buyers, with discussions touching on the need for a more accommodating approach to development and innovation in zoning and planning processes. The potential impact of the Skyway and rezoning of employment lands as residential areas on connectivity, employment opportunities, and the city's overall development trajectory were also discussed.

Preserving employment lands is important, as is preserving buffers between employment and residential and other lands.

Meeting #1.A. Niagara Business Group - May 7, 2024

Main themes:

- The discussion mainly focused on Niagara's "Business downtown", as well as recent population growth in Niagara and accommodation through housing, transit services and parking for businesses.
- Mention of the failures regarding every incentive and initiative for Niagara's "Business downtown".
- Not all areas need height – many agreed that high rises can take away from sunshine, many projects are being put on pause and beautiful old buildings are being torn down, concern for the city's pride.
- Wondering what the City's plans are to expand/ improve transit and combined sewage system.
- Wondering if Grassy Brook/Grand Niagara will be high end.
- Wayfinding is missing downtown.

Meeting #2. Environment stakeholder group

Main themes:

- The discussion revolved around the importance of preserving natural heritage spaces, promoting environmentally friendly tourism, and prioritizing green infrastructure initiatives.
- Participants expressed a desire for any natural elements used for tourism to be integrated in a more sustainable and environmentally conscious manner, emphasizing the need for less paved areas and greater consideration for native flora and fauna.
- There was recognition of the economic and social value of street trees, with a focus on native species and efforts to support pollinators through careful vegetation selection.
- Concerns were raised about development pressures on natural spaces, particularly critical habitats for species at risk, and the importance of conserving and restoring woodlands to mitigate habitat loss.
- Participants advocated for a higher level of consultation with Indigenous communities in decision-making processes, particularly regarding land use planning and visual representation.
- A call for greater transparency and accuracy in mapping natural landscapes to ensure the preservation of unique and special green spaces.

If any natural element going forward is going to be used for tourism, can it be used in a more environmentally friendly manner?



Meeting #3. Developers and Major Landowners meeting

Main themes:

- The main themes discussed revolve around development patterns, density considerations, and communication between developers and city officials. Participants noted a focus on mid-rise developments over high-rise constructions, with concerns about the pace of approvals and the need to balance costs to ensure affordability. Specific development projects, such as those at Mountain Rd and St Paul, Garner Rd, and Portage Rd south of William St, were mentioned, highlighting ongoing efforts to accommodate housing needs within the city.

Comments are coming out of the blue, there has been a turnover in City staffing which is a challenge in development applications.

- Discussions about the saturation of the market for mixed-use developments and the need to explore other commercial and office opportunities in the area.
- Questions were raised about how density ranges would be addressed in the new Official Plan and whether bonusing options for affordable housing would be considered by the City.
- Concerns were also voiced about the transparency of pre-consultation processes and challenges arising from turnover in city staffing, leading to unexpected comments and delays in development applications.
- There are affordable housing policies in the existing Official Plan that set out criteria that each project has to meet. One participant mentioned a strong push to include attainable housing, meeting a specific price point, and how certain areas of Niagara Falls are conducive to these policies. In establishing affordable housing targets, site-specific considerations must take into account the context of the neighbourhood.

Meeting #4. Business Improvement Association stakeholder group

Main themes:

- During the meeting, participants brought up challenges with property standards, transportation infrastructure, and coordination between different levels of government. Participants highlighted the need for Niagara Falls to aspire to world-class standards, in comparison to neighboring municipalities like Niagara-on-the-Lake.
- Issues such as inadequate roads, abandoned buildings, and incomplete construction projects were raised, emphasizing the importance of proper infrastructure to support the growing population. Concerns were also voiced about the effectiveness of existing transit systems, with calls for a more seamless and robust transportation system that serves both residents and visitors.
- The discussion brought forth the need for better collaboration between the City and the Region, as delays in decision-making hinder progress on beautification projects and other initiatives. Participants also emphasized the importance of addressing safety concerns, homelessness, and improving amenities such as Wi-Fi access in tourist areas.
- Suggestions for improvement included adopting successful models from other jurisdictions, enhancing community-oriented policing initiatives, and creating a more cohesive and efficient governance structure to address the various challenges facing the city.

Infrastructure is not in place to support the new population.

We need more roads and more ways to move people around.

4.0 Niagara Networks Trade Show

May 9, 2024

26 conversations

On May 9, 2024 the Niagara Networks & Industry Collaborative held a trade show event at the Niagara Falls Convention Centre. The trade show featured various exhibitors to help connect businesses with potential customers, suppliers, and vendors, bridging gaps and building partnerships together. Challenges and opportunities across various sectors were explored.

The following highlights public opinions collected through approximately 26 conversations:

Queen Street

- The road is typically closed and only open for certain events.
- The city should put a farmers' market on that street to give it more use, especially because you can catch people coming from transit before they reach Clifton.

Roads in general

- Niagara is one of the most visited cities in the world; there is so much tourism here, but the roads are so bad. They need to be fixed and taken care of. This is important because Niagara serves as a representation of Canada to tourists.

Bus Shelters

- People are waiting in the cold, rain, and other elements with no shelter to protect them.
- If we implemented bus shelters at all stops (similar to Brampton), it would provide a better experience for the public transit users in Niagara Falls.

Public Events

- There are not very many public events in the summer from which local businesses can benefit and at which residents can congregate.
- No sense of community when people cannot meet new people while supporting the local economy.



Place to raise a family

- Want a City where I can raise my family, and my kids can raise theirs, too.

Bike lanes

- I want to be able to ride my bike to the grocery store. It is not feasible when the only way to get around is via car. We need bike lanes.

Transit improvements

- The car is the only mode of transportation given attention to. We need more options to choose from. Increase GO train frequency and offer more routes for residents to get around.

5.0 One-on-one Conversations with Residents

April 17, 2024

12 conversations

An open invitation was extended to residents to register to speak with a member of the project team in a 20 minute conversation. A member of the team had individual conversations with 12 residents who expressed their opinions and concerns about living in Niagara Falls.

Below are the main themes of the discussions:

- **Transit and Infrastructure:** There are concerns about the reliability and efficiency of public transit, particularly the #104 bus route. Suggestions include better signage for payment methods and addressing delays. Additionally, there are calls for improved road infrastructure and maintenance, with specific mentions of roads like Thorold Stone Road and Dorchester Road.
- **Housing:** Affordable housing is a pressing issue, with long wait times for assisted housing and reports of substandard living conditions, including issues with electrical, heating, and plumbing. There are also concerns about homelessness and a need for more options for single-person residences and apartments.
- **Economic Development:** Calls for diversifying the economic base beyond the hospitality sector and attracting sustainable jobs to Niagara Falls are prevalent. Some express disappointment in the focus on condominium development and suggest focusing on brownfield sites.
- **Environmental Conservation:** Concerns are raised about preserving natural areas, woodlots, and wetlands within the city. Suggestions include stronger protections in the Official Plan and public ownership of sensitive ecological areas.
- **Urban Planning and Development:** Individuals express mixed views on densification, with some advocating for more housing options and others emphasizing the importance of preserving green space and avoiding dense neighbourhoods. There are also concerns about the effectiveness of the Official Plan process and the need for better coordination between urban development and infrastructure planning.
- **Community Engagement and Quality of Life:** Suggestions include enhancing public spaces, improving pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, and creating more community hubs like the MacBain Centre. Concerns are raised about the negative impact of short-term rentals on residential neighbourhoods and the need for better traffic management.



6.0 Public Online Survey #1 Summary of Results

April 26, 2024

104 respondents

The City posted a survey in March 2024 on the project webpage with three questions:

1. What makes you proud of living in Niagara Falls?
2. What part of the city do you enjoy spending time in?
3. What's most important to you for us to address in new policies in the Official Plan? Think about land uses, the city's appearance, how people move around the city, etc.

The survey also asked respondents to complete the following sentence **"in 2051, my Niagara Falls will have….."**

There were 104 respondents who completed the survey. Almost 50% of the respondents were over 55 years old. Less than 15% were under 34 and no one under 18 responded. The table on this page is a breakdown of the age of the respondents.

Age	Number	Percent
Less than 18	0	0
19-25	2	1.92
26-34	13	12.5
35-44	14	13.46
45-54	15	14.42
55-64	25	24.04
65-74	24	23.08
75 plus	8	7.68
Prefer not to say	3	2.88

This following section summarizes the results of the survey that closed at the end of April 2024. Of the 104 respondents, almost all (101) indicated that they live in the City.



Question 1 - What makes you proud of living in Niagara Falls?

- Nothing
- Parks system
- Natural beauty and environmental features
- Niagara Park Commission Parks and trails
- Community – small town feel - safety
- World renowned – the Falls themselves
- Location of City in the Region/Province provides many opportunities
- Recreation facilities

Most responses to this question indicated that residents were not proud of the City.

Responses indicated that some parts of the City are safe communities/ neighbourhoods while others reflected concerns about safety in the downtown core of the City.

Many responses indicated that the location of the City, both as a world class tourist area and in proximity to many other opportunities and amenities in the surrounding areas, was important, however these comments do not deal with the City itself.

Question 2 - What part of the city do you enjoy spending time in?

- Horticultural gardens
- Libraries
- Theatre
- Niagara Parkway
- Golf courses
- Niagara River trail
- Our home
- The Falls and the river
- MacBain Centre
- Dufferin Islands
- Recreation Centres
- Chippawa
- Clifton Hill
- Lundy's Lane

As requested in the survey, most of the responses identified specific sites within the City. The majority of responses referred to the open space and parks, including the trails. Specific libraries and recreation centres were also included in the responses.

Question 3 - What's most important to you for us to address in new policies in the Official Plan?

Think about land uses, the city's appearance, how people move around the city, etc.

- Provide more opportunities for housing
- Provide more housing for people with special needs
- Focus municipal improvements more on the non-tourism aspects of the City
- Protect the natural environment
- Stop continued sprawl and development
- Complete road improvements and reduce traffic congestion
- Define more bicycle routes on roads and trails
- Provide more and improve pedestrian trails
- Provide incentives and direction to improve the appearance (beautification) to the urban fabric
- Protect and make improvements to parkland system
- Impose and enforce property maintenance standards to reduce vacant/abandoned or decrepit buildings

There was a common sense of a need to improve the appearance and character of the City by cleaning up garbage, maintaining public lands and roads and dealing with a decaying urban fabric. Many comments provided specific examples of where traffic issues need to be resolved and what roads are in very poor condition. There was also a common theme of the need to refocus the attention of the City away from the tourist area toward the rest of the City, especially the older parts of the City.

Question 4 - In 2051, my Niagara Falls will have….

People were asked to think about what Niagara Falls will be like in the future if everything in Our Niagara Falls Plan is completed. They were asked to add a positive statement about the future by completing the following sentence: **"In 2051 my Niagara Falls will have…."**.



7.0 Input to Inform the Discussion Papers Received Through *Let's Talk Niagara Falls*

281 Facebook comments

Many contributions were received through the City's webpage. The following is a summary of input received organized under the topics of the six Discussion Papers. This input was considered in the preparation of the six Discussion Papers and will be considered during the preparation of the Policy Directions Report in the next phase of the project.

A Growing City

- The aim should be on growth that is orderly, cost-effective, and sustainable.
- Re-connect city's decision-making with the Official Plan.
- Planning priorities should be within the built boundaries.
- Downtown should not be just for visitors - try to get people living in this area.
- Plenty of room for growth south of McCleod near Garner South; Grassy Brook and Hospital site.
- Tourist commercial across from residential – incompatible. Transition and buffer are important.
- Niagara Falls does not need densification: lots of space. Large number of rental units available, many houses for sale.
- Should do more with what we have instead of taking over more green space.
- Need better facilities for residents, including those with addictions (e.g. shelters, long term treatment facilities).
- Concerns about overpopulation, rapid development, and the impact on wildlife and community resources are prominent. Some suggest that the city should stop expanding and focus on current issues instead of future growth.
- Diversify the local economy by drawing other industries beside tourism to the city.

"...While millions visit the city each year I don't think enough is done for its permanent, year round residents. Road work that is years over due, transit system that is lacking especially with the rapid increase in population. There needs to be more advocating for GO train expansion. Tourism brings in a lot of money to this city, that revenue needs to be spread out more to non-tourism areas."

- Don't need more industrial parks but do need co-working spaces.
- Like to see something like University Village, Seattle: a shopping destination/village rather than large format shopping.
- Currently, a lot of homeless, need single person residences; more apartments for baby boomers who give up their houses, and housing for seniors - but not stacked townhouses.
- Need for affordable housing over luxury condos, rising demand for food banks.
- Need to bring back good, permanent, year-round jobs - seasonal jobs contributing to local homelessness.

An Attractive City

- Niagara Falls is not the showcase I remember. We have to do a lot of work to do to bring us to a standard to welcome people back.
- Want to see better quality parks, cycling trails, no space between houses, more public places.
- Growth of short-term rentals causing issues in residential areas – needs some control.
- Niagara Falls has lots of beautiful parks – no complaints or recommendations, done a good job on parks.

"I hope for a city that focuses on keeping the city clean. There is a huge issue with litter - take a look at the side of major roads, off ramps, on ramps, and even city trails."

A Green & Resilient City

- Love the McBain Centre – need more spaces like that where communities can gather.
- Green space very important, need to think about how to build urban green space as different kinds of landscapes. (Kansas City good model for green space revitalization).
- Prefer planted medians – woodland boulevard is a great example of a suburban street, no bike lanes, but safe, with median with trees.
- Queen Street signs, sidewalks, - walking to Queen from e.g. Victoria library - walk is not good. Need to enhance the larger context.
- Planting street trees does not make up for removing a forest.
- Niagara Falls wetlands are mainly complexes, which should appear in the Official Plan. Mapping of natural corridors is key to their protection. Ideally, should be under public ownership (e.g. the Conservation Authority).
- Need better language in the Official Plan about our remaining natural areas and woodlots to make environmental protection enforceable.
- Need for integration of natural solutions, biophilic design, and protecting natural resources to address climate change.
- Would like to see public gardens/vegetable gardens replacing some of the lawn area in parks.

"In 2051, my Niagara will have many public gardens for its residents to grow vegetables annually, positively impacting the lives of those in low income neighbourhoods and teaching a skill that is transferable. Teaching people how to grow their own food could be life saving to those who cannot afford fresh produce."

"Our watershed and forests, wetlands and all remaining green areas are our assets to protect…Our Official Plan must reflect our respect, appreciation and gratefulness of being blessed with these magnificent natural features."

A Mobile & Connected City

- Niagara Falls should think about light rail transit as well as GO. The only semi-good public transportation are the WeGo buses, which almost exclusively serve Niagara Parks and the tourist districts.
- Need different measures to slow traffic, without speed bumps and stop signs.
- Investigate a new people mover system, LRT using CP rail corridor, and connect to train station.
- Traffic is bad. Roads to be expanded: Dorchester, Drummond, Thorold Stone Road - easily expanded, use their wide boulevards to create 3 lanes.
- Poor road conditions – a need for infrastructure improvements + spending on aesthetics projects for tourists instead of addressing essential infrastructure like roads and train crossings.
- Regional Transit system has resulted in a lot of vacant buses. Not getting value for money.
- Clifton Hill on a summer day - lots of people walking but not enough space. Need bigger, accessible, sidewalks, bike, and electric scooter rentals. (Kitchener Waterloo is doing a good job integrating cars, rentals, walking.)
- Stanley is another street that can be better planned, now a mini highway - opportunity for a better sidewalk connection.
- Lots of bike lanes that just stop. Love to see city with specific requirements for new build areas, things to make areas more pedestrian friendly, including bike paths through new builds/shopping areas.
- Mixed opinions on the regulation of e-bikes, golf carts, and other alternative transportation modes. Some support stricter regulations for safety, while others see them as viable alternatives to cars.

"Niagara Falls 2011 Active Transportation Plan was to develop a robust bike lane network in the city. Looking back on this document in 2024, so few of these plans and ideas have actually been completed."

An International City

- Niagara Falls is tourist town, but that's what makes the region unique. The city has "a community vibe" and whatever tourists use, locals will use.
- Transit issue: tourists don't have change; need better signage re: presto, no cards, cash.

"One thing Niagara Falls needs is an environment that attracts foreign visitors who want to slow down and enjoy the scenery. Bring some European style culture to Niagara Falls. Niagara Parks Commission owns lots of land and they can designate areas for cafes and sit down space looking out over the falls or just as people walk about on the grounds. Let's make the Falls area not just a viewing opportunity but a refreshing experience."

A Cultural City

- Niagara Falls does not seem to care about history – razed historic neighbourhoods, demolish heritage-designated school to expand cemetery.
- Public buildings need to be maintained. The new Exchange location is not good and took away parking at the corner of Main and Central.

“Find out what features make us stand out from other cities around the world. Highlight the features that make the city worth traveling to. This can include unique cultural activities, historical landmarks, diversity welcoming places and cultural foods, different museums unique architecture, streets, and also attractive game zones for visitors.”

“The future of Canada is indigenous. We need to give every available platform back to the rightful stewards of this land. If we cannot give the land back, we should dethrone ourselves and give everything else possible to the native caretakers of this geographic location. Every job in power, every advisory position, every voice, should be indigenous. They have a history of respect for this place, they have the knowledge of the forests. They will always do the right thing.”

8.0 Engagement with Children and Youth

May 29 and June 6, 2024

8.1 High School Visits

108 participants









As part of the engagement process, two secondary school visits occurred on May 29 and June 6: Westlane Secondary School (28 students participated) and A.N. Myer Secondary School (80 students participated).

Groups of 1-3 students were given 2 sheets of 11 by 17 papers, one with a context map of the areas surrounding their respective schools, and another with directions for the exercise. Students were asked to use the maps to mark down places where they liked to spend their free time, and to write down what makes these places their go-tos, and what they do there. They also marked places they want to or need to go to but often hesitate to go to, explaining what holds them back. Additionally, students marked down the places where they want to see the most change happen and what kinds of change they want to see.

Students used the maps to show potential places and ways to implement their ideas in regards to what they wished Niagara Falls had more of. They were able to write comments and brainstorm ideas under the following categories: Things to do, Nature, Restaurant & Grocery options, Transportation options, and Volunteering & part-time/full-time job opportunities. 45 worksheets were complete.

Key Themes

1. Places to Spend Free Time

Popular Locations:

- Niagara Whirlpool
- Clifton Hill: Noted for many attractions.
- Canada One Outlet: Conveniently located, popular for shopping.
- John Allen Park: Close to home, good for taking siblings and photos, hanging out with friends.
- Various Commercial Plazas: Around Westlane.
- Freshco and Bakery: Hangout spots with friends.
- Chippawa Park: Favored for picnics.
- Solar Park and Preakness Park: Suggestions for more benches and picnic tables.
- YMCA, Firemen's Park, Haulage Road Recreational Trail, Heritage Park

Activities:

- Socializing: Hanging out with friends and family.
- Recreational Activities: Picnics, shopping, taking photos.
- Exercise and Outdoor Fun: Parks, trails, and sports.

2. Places Students Hesitate to Visit

Common Locations:

- Doctor's Office
- Westlane S.S
- Clifton Hill: Too busy, traffic issues, parking difficulties, safety concerns.
- Niagara Go-Karts
- Nearby Streets in Niagara Falls: Often too crowded.
- Fallsview Strip: Crowded and busy, deterring visits.

Reasons for Hesitation:

- Crowding and Traffic: Making navigation and enjoyment difficult.
- Safety Concerns: Particularly in busy areas.
- Expense: High costs associated with certain attractions.

3. Desired Changes

Locations Needing Change:

- Neighbourhood around Westlane S.S
- Marineland: Desire for shutdown due to animal cruelty and lack of attractions.
- Downtown Niagara Falls: Need for traffic and street light improvements.
- Various Roads (McLeod Rd, Kirkland Dr, Montrose Rd)
- Niagara Falls Public Library on Victoria Ave
- Chippawa Battlefield Area: Suggestions for better environmental and community use.

Types of Changes:

- Infrastructure Improvements: Better lighting, signage, and traffic control.
- Recreational Developments: More malls, halal fast food options, and recreational spaces.
- Environmental Enhancements: Improved park maintenance and better land use.

Additional Amenities and Opportunities

Things to Do:

- Bigger Malls and Theme Parks: Dissatisfaction with Marineland, more recreation needed.
- Teen Hangout Spots: Public parks for older children.
- More Attractions: Beyond Clifton Hill and near the falls.
- Cultural Shops: Modest shops for Muslim women and girls.
- Sports and Leisure: Basketball courts, sports fields, movie theaters, fishing areas.
- Community Events: Festivals, parties, and seasonal tourist events.
- Tourism App: To guide visitors to attractions and events.
- Pet-Friendly Areas: Dog parks and better stairs at Whirlpool.

Nature:

- More Parks and Trails: For community and environmental benefits.
- Pet-Friendly Spaces and Trees: Enhancing greenery.
- Cleanliness and Maintenance: Addressing litter and bird poop issues.
- Conservatories and Gardens: Butterfly conservatory and community gardens.

Restaurant & Grocery Options:

- Popular Chains: Raising Cane's, Chic Fil A, Chipotle, Shake Shack, Five Guys, Wing Stop.
- Diverse Food Options: Halal, Latin American, and more inclusive cultural foods.
- Local Produce: More produce markets and locally grown food.

Transportation Options:

- Expanded Bus Services: Including late-night buses.
- Better Infrastructure: Road maintenance, sidewalks, bike lanes, pedestrian walkways.
- Affordable Transport: Taxi services, better trash systems, eco-friendly options.

- Accessibility: Options for the elderly and addressing roadkill issues.
- Transportation Hubs: GO train station downtown, more bike racks, international airport.

Job and Volunteer Opportunities:

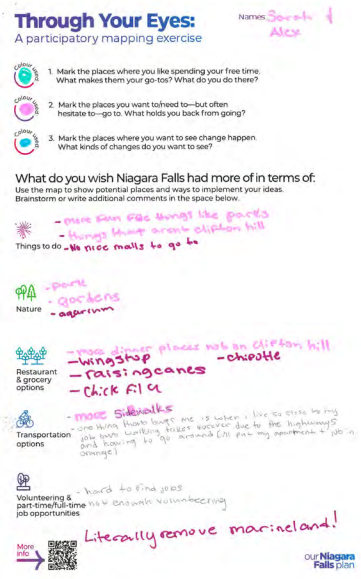
- Non-Tourism Jobs: More opportunities for new immigrants and youth.
- Volunteering: Student-focused opportunities, better advertising, and application processes.
- Community Service: Soup kitchens, Humane Society, Salvation Army, festival volunteers.

Other Comments

Community Needs:

- Affordable Housing and More Schools
- Family Amenities: Grocery stores, schools, transportation downtown.
- Homeless Services: Shelters, jobs, mental health support.
- Elderly Support: Improved communities.
- Public Facilities: Bathrooms, water fountains, health care clinics.
- Mental Health Services: More accessible and affordable options.





Here is some of what the students said:

More sidewalks on big roads, more trails

More restaurants for jobs

More jobs outside tourism

Marineland should be built like Wonderland, and we should have more attractions because there's barely anything to do in Niagara Falls other than the hill compared to other cities

Better sidewalks - too many cracks

More parks would be a nice touch to add to the community as it would bring people together

Why expand when we have people struggling with homelessness?

More trails for walking

Stop cutting down trees for airports and other environment destroying establishments

More jobs because people are currently jobless especially new immigrants

More attractions scattered around the area (parks, amusement parks, slingshot rise etc.) So that we don't have to travel far to do different things

8.2 High School Ambassadors

Early May 2024

Four high school students were youth ambassadors to help gather ideas on what teens want their city to look like. The ambassadors made presentations to various classes and a total of 37 students responded to an online survey. Students participated from A.N. Myer Secondary School, Westlane Secondary School, Stanford Collegiate, Saint Michael High School and Saint Paul High School.

The following is a summary of the students' responses to the survey questions.



Look at your neighbourhood, school grounds, street, or park. What do you see?

- Construction activity
- Green spaces (grass, trees)
- Mentions of garbage on the ground in parks and near school property
- Specific landmarks (e.g., Clifton Hill, The Falls)
- Neighbourhood and residential views

Write a couple of words to describe where you live:

- Quiet, peaceful
- Busy, crowded
- Green, natural
- Low income community, high homeless population
- Urban and populated
- Car-centric and suburban

What is one of your favourite things about your neighbourhood?

- Community feel
- Close to parks and main area with shops
- Safety
- Friendly and kind neighbors, everyone knows each other
- Going on walks on a trail
- Many students love the parks that they live nearby

Write a couple of words to describe where you go to school. What do you see around your school? What do you like or don't you like about it? What does it look like?

- Lots of sidewalks
- Lack of shady trees
- Small, lush, diverse
- Clean, organized, welcoming, educational
- Big, diverse, kind staff, clean, hard-working
- Love the school's courtyard
- Big parking lot, disorganized, want more trees

IMAGINE: It is 2051. You are standing inside the future city. What does the future city look like?

- Accessible for disabilities in most areas
- More lush, more bike lanes
- More business areas
- Many want more green space and parks
- More shopping areas and exciting things to do
- Electric trains
- More recreation centres like YMCA
- Less focus on tourist areas and more on residential development

Where do you live in this future city?

- Many envision living in suburban areas, often in houses or big homes, appreciating the greenery and peaceful neighbourhoods “Suburban Area,” “A house in the suburbs,” “A big house in the suburbs,” “Suburban community”.
- Some prefer living in urban areas, particularly in apartments or penthouses in the heart of the city for easy access to stores, parks, and other amenities “In the heart of it,” “In a downtown apartment,” “An apartment building in the heart of the downtown,” “Penthouse”.
- Some are open to various living arrangements, from suburban to urban settings, or even in mixed development areas combining residential and commercial spaces: “I would prefer to live in a downtown apartment,” “Mixed development area,” “House in a neighbourhood, not on the same street as businesses”.
- Specific features of the desired living area, such as safety, community, and environmental aspects; “In a peaceful neighbourhood with not much crime,” “In a nice house with lots of greenery,” “In a small neighbourhood just outside the city,” “A house in an unpopulated city with lots of nature”.
- A few express uncertainty or a negative outlook on living in the future city: “I won’t be living here,” “I hope I’m not here”.

Where do you work in this future city?

- Many envision working downtown or in high-rise buildings, often in professional or corporate roles; “In the main city,” “In a nice tall high rise building,” “At an accounting firm,” “In an office building”.
- Some prefer working in community-oriented locations, often in roles related to education, healthcare, or community services;: “At a nice elementary school in the suburbs,” “I would work at the hospital or like a psychiatrist’s office,” “As a teacher,” “At the MacBain Centre (on Montrose)”.
- Several express interest in working in healthcare or scientific fields, often in specific facilities like hospitals, clinics, or laboratories: “As a dental professional,” “I would work in the hospital in the midst of the city,” “Hopefully the new hospital being built,” “Working in a science lab in the city”.
- Some prefer working in creative or community spaces, such as cafes, libraries, or community centres: “At a cafe, or a library,” “I would work at The Exchange (on Main street),” “As a physiotherapist for a sports team in a university”.
- A few indicate a desire for entrepreneurial roles or flexible work environments, often near key landmarks or accessible locations: “As an entrepreneur just a nice place maybe near MacBain Centre,” “Designing buildings,” “For a company”.
- A few express uncertainty about working in the future city or potential relocation:“Probably not in Niagara Falls because of my future plans currently,” “No engineering jobs here unfortunately”.

Where do you hang out in this future city?

- Parks
- Shopping areas
- Community centres
- Coffee shops
- Where the attractions and activities are
- A “central park” style park
- Walking trails
- Recreational area

What are some things you don’t like about this future city? Is there anything you do not wish to see here?

- All the cannabis stores
- Lack of malls, places and things to do
- Spaces without a lot of greenery
- Over crowding and pollution
- Not effectively directing tourists to explore other areas of the city rather than just the falls.
- More buildings,
- Too many houses getting built making the city cramped
- Lack of accessible transit, not walkable, lack of amenities nearby, congested, no jobs other than tourism, boring areas to hang out (only Clifton Hill)
- Business and litter and garbage
- Too many people
- Don’t like how long it takes for buses to come and how unsafe some of the sidewalks are
- Spaces that are not wheelchair accessible, roads without sidewalks, urban sprawl, lack of middle-housing, and strip malls.

- Chain and unhealthy fast food places
- Bigger roads
- Big, ugly industrial buildings
- Don’t need weed stores every 10 steps
- Dead spaces (parking lots etc)
- Any further development in tourist attractions, especially Clifton Hill, which ruins the city in the summer.

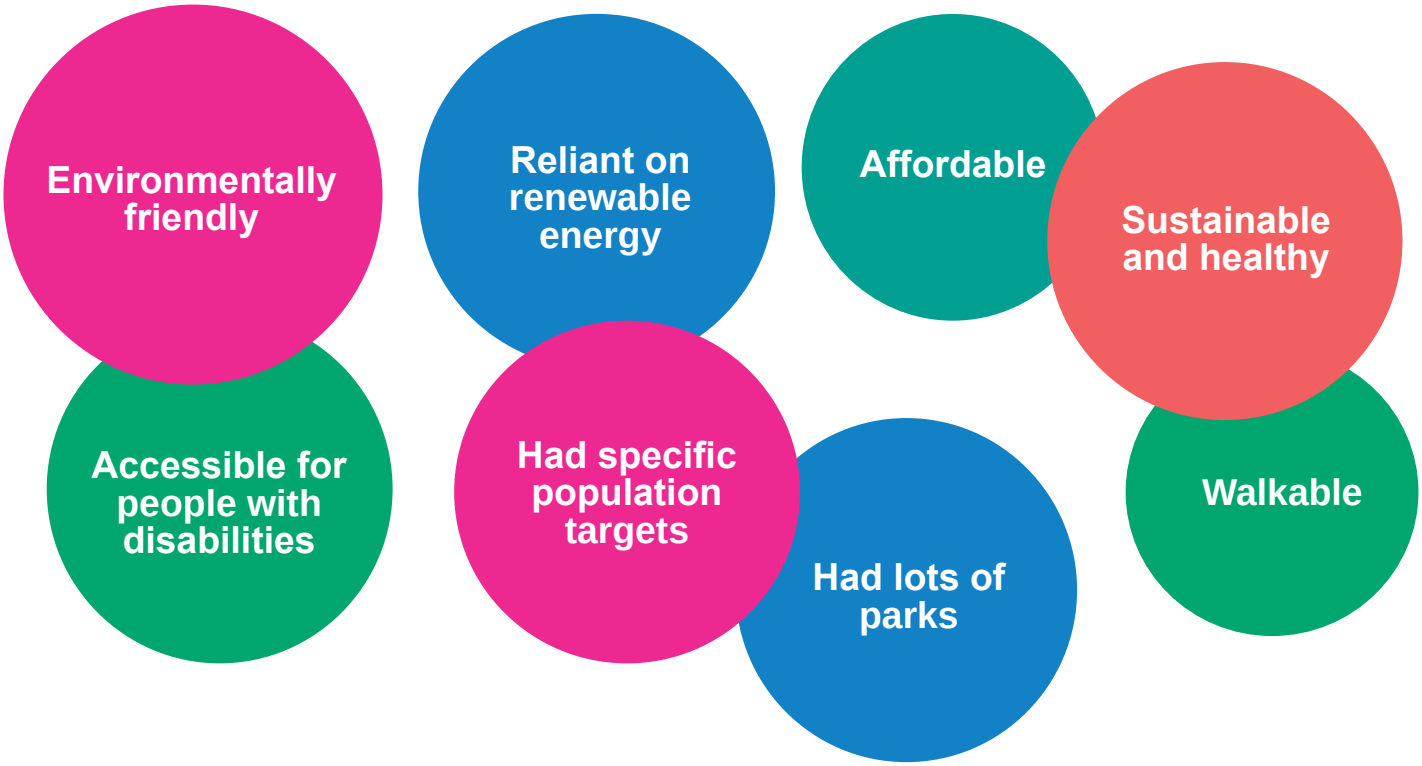
What are you most surprised by in this future city? What catches your eye?

- Surprised by how small the city actually is
- Diverse population
- Strong community and city connections
- Abundance of activities and outdoor spaces
- Advanced technology throughout the city
- Innovation and use of robots in workplaces.
- Amazing public transportation system
- Improved roads and modes of transportation
- Sustained greenery and more plant life
- Youth involvement in running aspects of the city.
- Increased social interaction and pedestrian activity
- The amount of people walking around

Think about how this future city would be better than our current city. Hey future, it would be great if homes were...

- Cheaper
- Using 99% green energy
- Spaced out enough to have decent sized driveways and backyards without feelings crowded by other homes
- A little bit more different from each other, right now most neighbourhoods look the same
- Affordable, rentable, different housing types (townhouses, apartments, etc
- Homes should have green space on the roofs, and should either have lots of green space for each home or a large collective space that provides a park or area for the residents
- Compact and took up less space
- Energy efficient, integrated with technically advanced security, and community-oriented, near many community spaces such as stores/shops, schools, and parks.
- If homes were closer to shopping areas so people can walk and bike
- More visually appealing
- Energy efficiency and advanced security features
- Homes should be near community spaces like shops, schools, and parks. – walking and biking

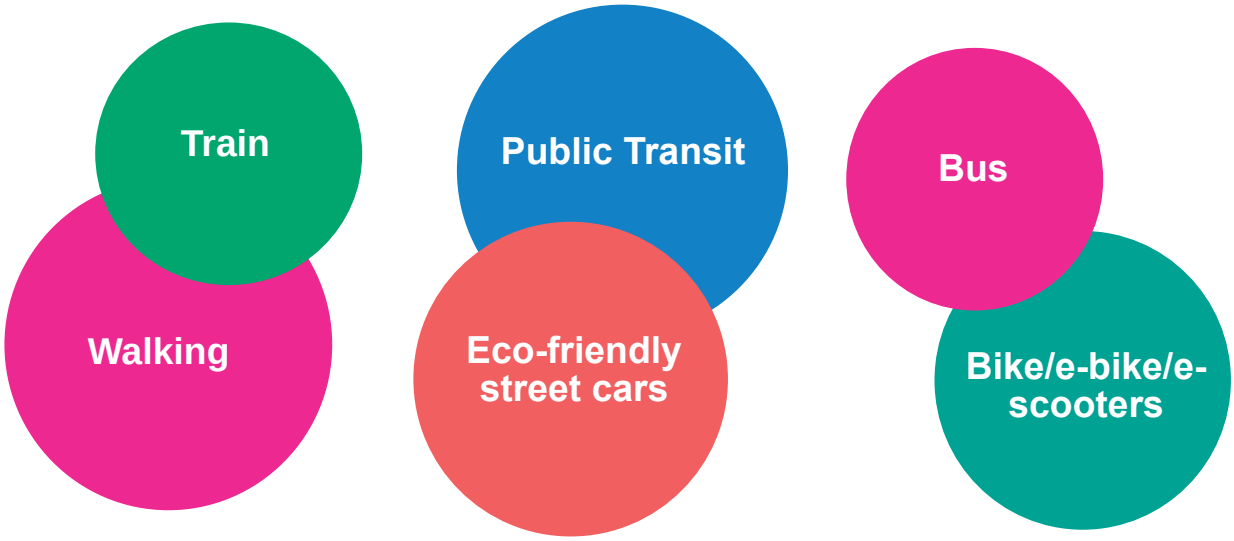
Hey future, it would be great if we could build a city that was…



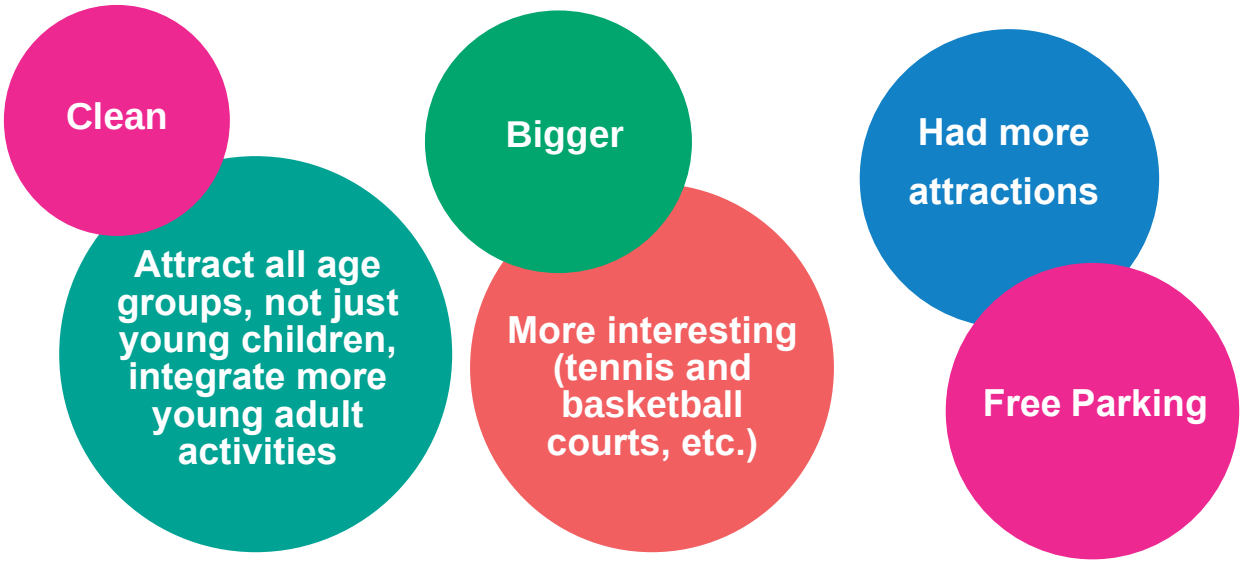
Hey future, it would be great if places to work were...



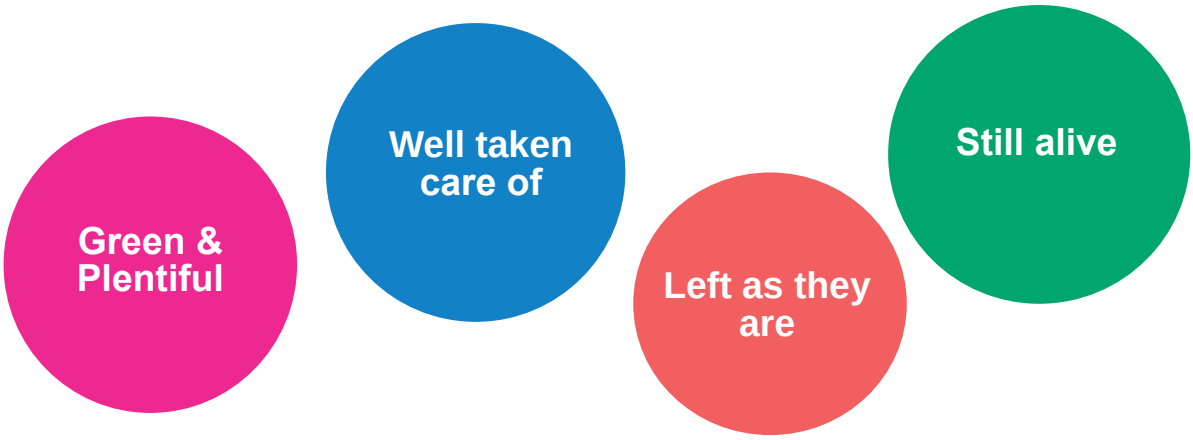
Hey future, it would be great if we moved around the city by…



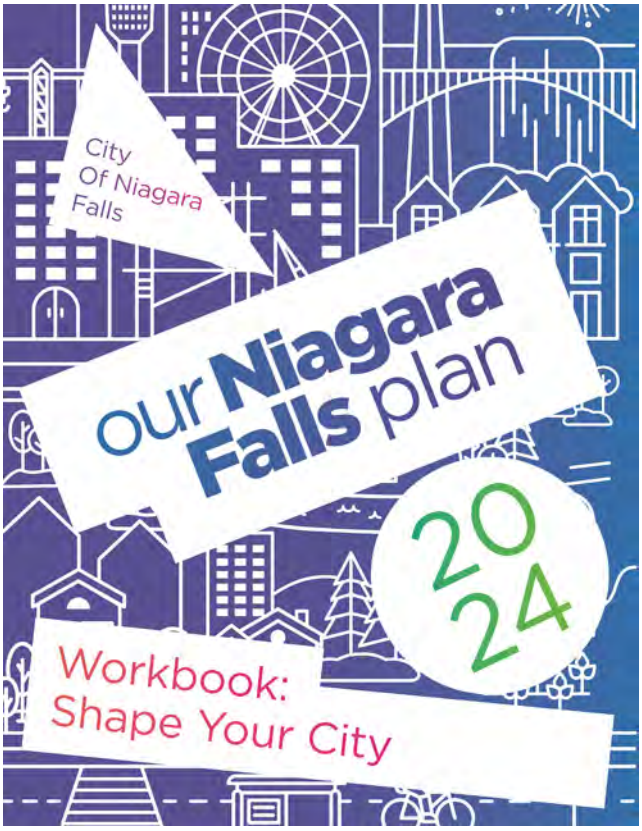
Hey future, it would be great if parks were...

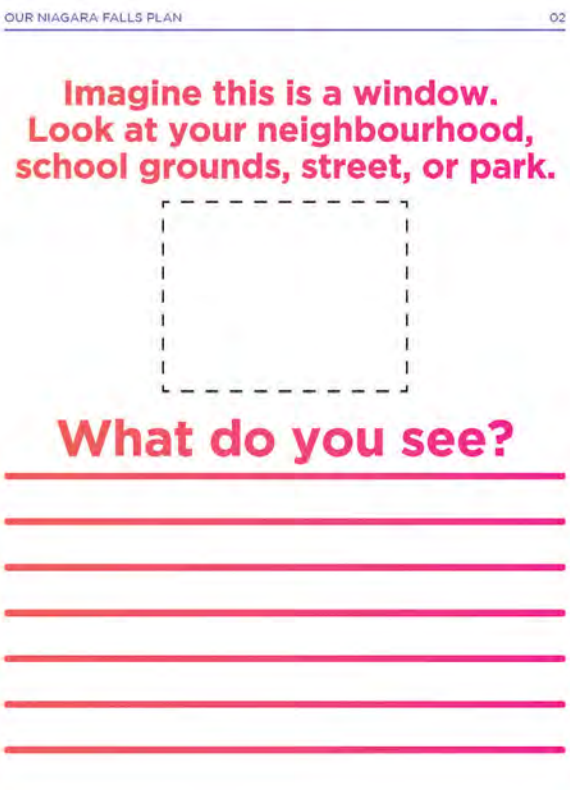


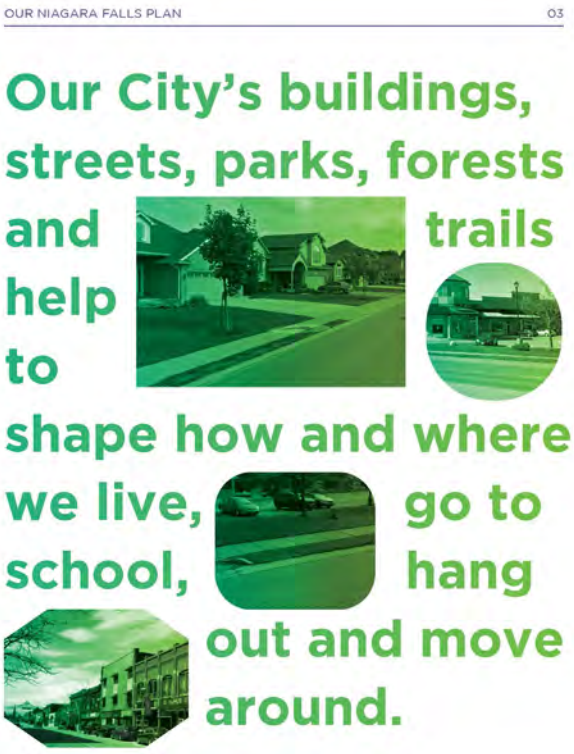
Hey future, it would be great if forests were...



Below is an example of some pages from the Workbook:









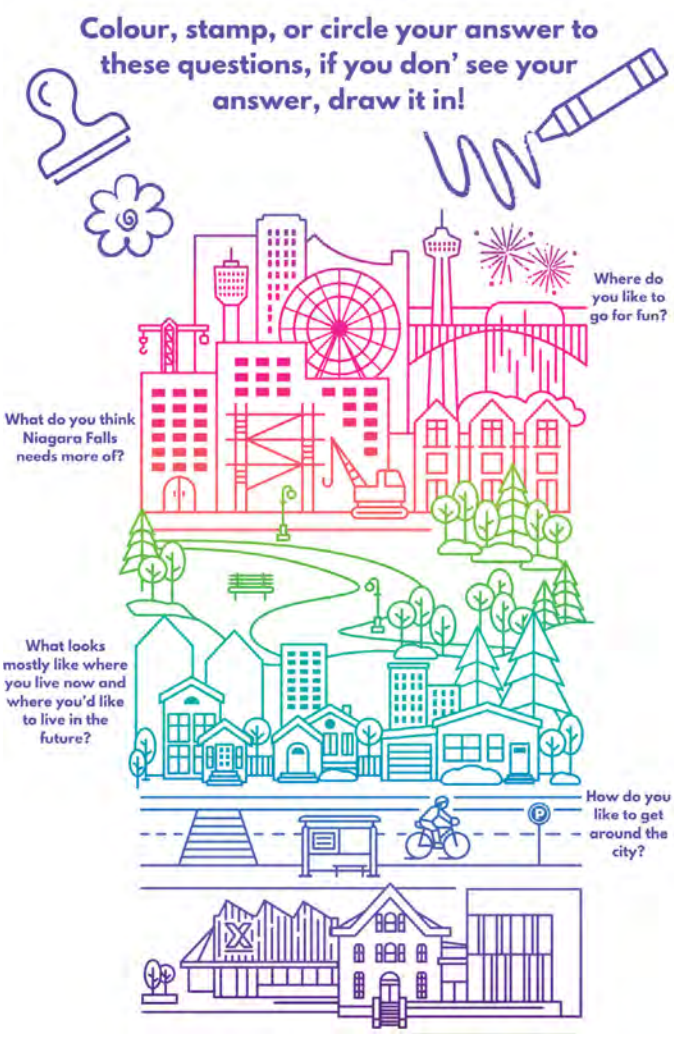
8.3 Mother Earth Day Event

May 11, 2024

Mother Earth Day was an in-person engagement event on May 11, 2024 at Fireman's Park. Booths were set up, affording Staff an opportunity to gather the views of the City's younger residents ranging from 6 to 13 years old through a question and colouring project. Generally, this group saw parkland and entertainment/cultural venues as the places they most like to visit and identified cars and bikes as the most used way to travel around.

Below is an example of the worksheet used for the Mother Earth Day event:







9.0 Input Through the Public Open House on the Discussion Papers

June 6 & 11, 2024

75 participants

The first Public Open House was held on June 6, 2024, where an afternoon and evening in person public session was held at the Gale Centre Arena in Niagara Falls. On June 11, 2024 three virtual meetings occurred where two discussion papers were presented in each.

Each session began with a presentation, followed by a conversation on the Discussion Paper topics. The in-person sessions included six tables, one for each discussion paper and its respective authors. Those who attended a session were able to visit each table and respond to questions posed by the representatives of the teams who wrote the discussion papers, as well as ask questions and voice their concerns. Approximately 50 people attended the in person Public Open House and approximately 25 people attended the three virtual meetings.

The following pages are a summary of what we heard on each Discussion Paper:







Cultural City

Culture in Niagara Falls

- Residents feel there is little cultural presence in the city.
- Cultural events often require leaving the city (e.g., St. Catharines for symphony, theatre; Niagara-on-the-Lake for Shaw Festival, art classes, wineries).
- The Exchange is appreciated for cultural events and art exhibitions/workshops.
- Suggestions for more maker spaces and rooms for classes at The Exchange.
- Some residents disliked The Exchange's location; preferred it closer to downtown and transit.
- Desire for art and culture to be spread throughout the city.
- Financial barriers: High costs, including transportation/gas.
- Communication barriers: Lack of awareness about upcoming events.

Tourism

- City prioritizes tourism over residents' quality of life.
- Events are primarily located in tourist areas, which residents often avoid.

Downtown

- Perception of being unsafe.
- Deterioration over the past decades.
- Tourists view downtown as Clifton Hill, while residents see it as Queen St. and Victoria Ave.

Community Culture

- Insufficient community centres and libraries.
- YMCA requires membership, and the closure of Chippawa Library was upsetting.
- Suggestion for a downtown civic centre with city hall, park, and library.
- City feels fragmented with no unified cultural identity.
- Residents travel outside the city for cultural events and classes.

Built Heritage/Architecture

- Loss of old buildings due to neglect and lack of funding.
- Historic buildings are being sold and demolished instead of restored.

History

- History is minimally acknowledged beyond plaques.
- Rich historical aspects like the underground railroad and Lundy's Lane are not celebrated.
- Welland Canal's history is underrepresented.

Positive Aspects

- Falls and river parks are beautiful and enjoyable even with tourists.
- Trails and nature areas.
- Strong sense of community in neighbourhoods.
- Emerging night scene with socializing after late shifts.

Desired Improvements

- More community events: folk festivals, international cultural festivals, music events.
- Public art: murals, paintings, sculptures in public areas and parks involving local artists.
- Cultural/historical programming: walking tours, battle reenactments, Indigenous cultural events.
- Cultural activities should benefit residents and spread tourism money city-wide.
- More things to do for residents and to extend tourist visits beyond day trips.
- Transform downtown into an attractive destination.
- Need to think about what incentives are available to attract doctors to Niagara.



Connected & Mobile City

Transportation and Connectivity

- Need for an Active Transportation Plan and integrated Transportation Master Plan.
- Desire for pedestrian-friendly trails/pathways connecting attractions and businesses.
- Focus on last-mile connectivity and seamless integration between different modes of transportation.
- Consideration for micro-mobility options like scooters and segways.
- Concerns about traffic congestion, unsafe pedestrian crossings, and lack of proper bike lanes.
- Calls for safer, convenient, and reliable transportation options.
- Suggestions for improved transit frequency, bike paths, and synchronized traffic lights.
- Desire for more regional transit options and coordination among municipalities.
- Transportation seen as an equity issue, with a need for accessible transit options.
- Prioritization of transit accessibility for the aging demographic.
- Concerns about safety around transit stops and the need for better accommodation for vulnerable populations.

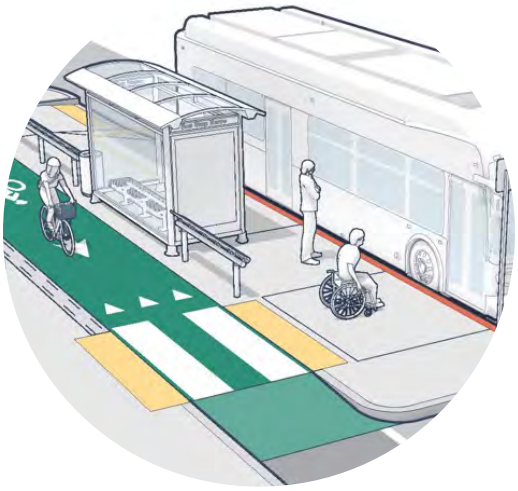
Urban Development and Planning

- Preference for gentle intensification and mid-size densities in urban development.
- Emphasis on creating complete streets and attractive city spaces.
- Desire for improved streetscapes, quality sitting areas, and accessibility features.
- Calls for more recreational trails, bike lanes, and continuous connectivity throughout the city.
- Suggestions for enhancing street signage.
-

Civic Engagement and Consultation

- Active consultation process involving various engagement methods.
- Need for inclusivity in consultation processes, considering diverse demographics.
- Concerns about elderly residents' accessibility to information and participation.
- Desire for ongoing communication and collaboration between the public sector and community members.





Green & Resilient City

Environmental Conservation and Planning

- Recognize Niagara Falls' location in the Carolinian Zone, preserving its intact forests and diverse species.
- Strong policy emphasis on habitat protection within the Official Plan, safeguarding woodlands, waterways, and natural habitats from urban expansion.
- Advocacy for low-impact development and green infrastructure integration to maintain ecological balance amid urban growth.
- Ensure rigorous Environmental Impact Studies with public consultation, prioritizing the preservation of urban forests, vernal pools, and habitats for common wildlife species.
- Mandate greenspaces in new developments, with provisions for community gardens in parks to enhance urban biodiversity.

Civic Engagement and Consultation

- Advocate for transparent, accessible planning documents in plain language, facilitating public understanding and involvement.
- Stress the importance of public participation in the Environment Impact Statement process, ensuring access to lands and qualified environmental consultants' involvement.
- Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration and public engagement to strengthen environmental planning practices.

Sustainable Development Practices

- Promote the adoption of low impact development techniques, reducing paved surfaces, and repurposing brownfield sites for parkland to mitigate urban heat islands and support ecological restoration.
- Recognize the vital role of greenspaces in fostering community well-being, mental health, and physical activity.

Historical and Institutional Context

- Draw on historical studies and reports highlighting Niagara Falls' natural heritage, advocating for continued protection and preservation efforts.
- Critique past planning practices relying heavily on consultants, advocating for more rigorous review processes and increased public involvement in decision-making.







Attractive City

Downtown Revitalization

- Past vibrancy lost with Niagara Square's construction.
- Inspiration from successful downtown restorations in the USA.
- Emphasis on restoring original buildings and supporting small businesses.

Urban Agriculture and Food Environment

- Focus on improving policies for urban agriculture.
- Promote community gardens, green roofs, and fruit trees in parks for healthier food access.

Urban Development and Community Identity

- Balance between taller urban development and maintaining a smaller town feel.
- Emphasis on mid-size densities for housing and employment to enhance community feel.
- Distinct identities for neighbourhoods, with Clifton Hill as a tourism district and Queen Street for regeneration.

Transportation and Connectivity

- Importance of active transportation and connectivity between key areas.
- Need to improve the city's bus system, including service quality and expansion.
- Train station rebuild expected to boost city visitors; need for consistent delivery of GO train services.
- Improve GO bus station and entrance signage for better visitor impressions.



Population Growth and Planning

- Concerns about rapid growth projections; need for realistic targets and proper planning.
- Growth targets are minimums, allowing room for more extensive planning.

Trails, Parks, and Connectivity

- Enhance trail maintenance and wayfinding; Millennium Trail as a model.
- Increase and improve park amenities.
- Opportunities for tech-enhanced mobility and rail-to-trail conversions.

Downtown Challenges

- Adaptive reuse of heritage buildings with educational signage.
- Rejuvenate Queen Street while retaining historical elements.
- Consider Downtown as a student hub with careful planning for housing.

Green Space in Developments

- Ensure new developments include usable, landscaped green spaces, with policies and incentives for developers.

Local Culture

- Enrich community life with public art by local artists and cultural integration with businesses.

Miscellaneous

- Protect employment areas, maintain cemeteries, achieve age-friendly designations, and address sidewalk hazards.
- Move utilities underground for better aesthetics, maintain a traditional skyline around the Falls, and address traffic issues for sustainable transit solutions.



Growing City

Planning and Development Challenges

- Suburban sprawl has led to issues such as social poverty and poorly maintained streets.
- Niagara Falls faces problems with abandoned homes and unplanned historic development.
- There is a need for clarification between regional and city responsibilities.
- Focus on Clifton Hill has led to neglect of other areas.

Economic and Industrial Concerns

- Decline in manufacturing and downtown areas.
- Emphasis on orderly, sustainable growth through infill, intensification, and rehabilitation.
- High-rise developments reduce value of adjacent properties.
- Flexibility in zoning and planning is needed.

Housing Issues

- High number of vacant homes and Airbnb properties.
- Need for affordable housing and smaller lot sizes.
- Prefab homes are considered a potential solution for affordability.
- Examples like Vienna's social housing model are considered.

Transportation and Infrastructure

- Existing congestion issues, particularly on McLeod Road.
- Coordination required between different government levels.
- Increased need for GO Train services.

Economic Opportunities and Community Growth

- Interest in moving to Niagara Falls from the GTA.
- Economic benefits from institutions like the University of Niagara Falls and new hospital.
- Debate over the impact of affordable housing units on the market.
- Influx of residents into the Niagara Region and potential real estate growth.

Sustainability and Environmental Protection

- Importance of protecting employment lands and balancing residential growth.
- Sustainable development with interconnected natural resources and areas.
- Prevent residential encroachment into prime agricultural and natural areas.
- Retain mature trees.

Visitor Retention and Tourism

- Need strategies to retain visitors for longer stays.
- Vital role of transit in enhancing neighbourhood vibrancy and supporting tourism.

Policy Flexibility and Development Balance

- Balance between residential and commercial development.
- Flexible policies to accommodate market conditions and ensure feasibility.
- Developers need design and planning flexibility.
- Residents often push back against multi-residential projects.

Industrial and Commercial Area Protection

- Protect industrial and commercial areas from residential encroachment.
- Holistic growth plans to safeguard existing interests and promote appropriate land use.

Housing Affordability and Quality

- Major concerns about housing affordability and the quality of new builds.
- Solutions needed for bankrupt developers and poorly maintained homes.
- Support affordable housing through repurposing older buildings and increased funding.
- Improve building standards for better living conditions.

Mixed-Use and Diverse Neighbourhoods

- Encourage vibrant, diverse neighbourhoods with a mix of forms and uses.
- Address stigmas against multi-residential homes to foster community acceptance.
- Urban revitalization focuses on downtown areas and infill development.



International City

Foreign Trade Zone Benefits and Opportunities

- Niagara Region's designation as a foreign trade zone brings potential incentives and policy support to attract businesses.
- Significant interest from businesses looking to use Niagara as a gateway to the US and European markets.

Infrastructure and Redevelopment

- Potential redevelopment of Niagara General Hospital lands, focusing on creating housing for seniors and low-income residents.

Concerns about Foreign Trade/Bonded Zones

- Worries about foreign governmental control and policing within the trade zones.
- Previous negative experiences with the Thundering Waters project highlight the need for careful consideration and investigation.

Public Transportation and City Cleanliness

- Complaints about dirty buses and the lack of car rentals for everyone.
- The city's appearance is embarrassing, especially compared to Europe.
- As a major tourist destination, it's critical that the city looks good.

Industrial Development and Infrastructure

- Need for more manufacturing jobs and rail infrastructure to reduce truck traffic congestion.
- Tax rebates and policy changes to attract and support industrial development.
- Protect industrial areas from residential encroachment to maintain a competitive supply chain and avoid conflict with residential uses.
- Preference for rail over trucks to minimize residential interference.

Retail and Local Economy

- Not enough retail options within the city, leading residents to shop outside the city.
- Once thriving, downtown now has many closed businesses and needs revitalization.

Tourism and Diversification

- Need for more varied attractions beyond golf courses and wineries.
- Suggestions for family-oriented amusement parks.
- Reducing reliance on tourism by attracting industrial and professional jobs.

Connectivity and Infrastructure Improvements

- Enhancing connectivity and attractiveness of the GO train station.
- More public transportation options to extend visitors' stays.
- Better urban planning to make industrial lands more attractive and protect employment areas.

Housing and Residential Development

- Issues with inadequate affordable housing and the need for better housing options.
- Encouragement of mixed-use rental units and better residential buildings.
- Need for accessible grocery stores, especially for low-income residents.

Environmental Concerns

- Importance of managing odors from wastewater treatment and planning for quarries.
- Promoting and protecting natural areas and outdoor activities.
- Using green products and promoting sustainable development.

Economic and Community Development

- Lobbying for federal or provincial support to bring jobs to the area.
- Creating an environment to support manufacturing and other businesses.
- Emerging nightlife and its impact on the community.

Government and Policy

- Criticism of spending on non-essential items like fancy garbage cans instead of renovating key areas.
- Concerns about developers starting projects and not finishing them, affecting city aesthetics.
- Emphasis on planning and public advocacy to ensure responsible development.

We also asked participants for words or phrases that could be captured in a Vision Statement. **This is what we heard...**



10.0 Public Online Survey #2

June 19 - July 29, 2024

Survey Results

An online survey was launched from June 19 to July 29, 2024 to seek input on policy directions being explored through the six Discussion Papers. A total of 782 people completed the survey providing 29,757 data points. The survey was posted on the Let's Talk Niagara Falls web page and was regularly promoted through the City's social media.

782 participants

Who We Heard From

How old are you?

under 18 years old	1 (0.2%)
19-35 years old	91 (17%)
36-50 years old	143 (27%)
51-65 years old	163 (30%)
over 65 years old	138 (26%)

How long have you lived in Niagara Falls?

less than 5 years	75 (14%)
6-15 years	95 (18%)
more than 16 years	361 (68%)

Are you a business owner/operator in the city?

yes	70 (13%)
no	460 (87%)

Please describe your household

single	92 (17%)
couple	173 (33%)
family with young children	78 (15%)
family with teenagers and young adults	132 (25%)
empty nester	52 (10%)

What part of the city do you live in?

Stamford	133 (25%)
Chippawa	51 (10%)
Elgin	15 (3%)
Westlane	53 (10%)
Beaverdams	38 (7%)
North West	61 (12%)
Drummond	109 (21%)
Queen Victoria	22 (4%)
Grassy Brook	7 (1%)
Willoughby	3 (0.6%)
Crowland	5 (1%)
I don't live in Niagara Falls	19 (3%)

What's most important for policy to address?

The first part of the survey sought input in key considerations that were most important from a list of six. The list came from the results of the online survey in March and April 2024 in which people were asked what was most important to consider in a new policy. The following are the results in rank order.

Rank 1
More affordable housing

Affordable housing can be provided by reserving space in new developments for housing at below market prices or rents. Affordable housing can also be encouraged by with financial and other incentives such as fast-tracking development proposals.



Rank 2
Stop sprawl

The results of the first survey revealed a concern about continued residential development on the outskirts of the city, with its associated costs of, for example, infrastructure, roads, and community facilities.



Rank 3
Improve roads

The first survey revealed an interest in having roads upgraded to ensure that vehicles can move easily and quickly through the city.



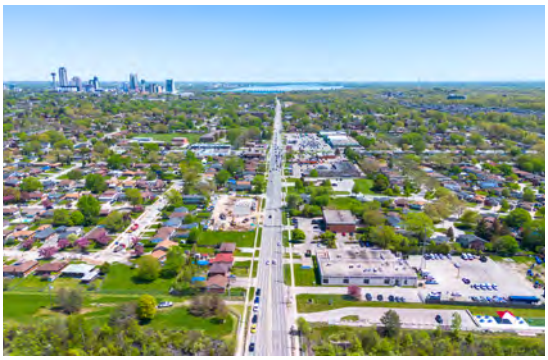
Rank 4
Protect the natural environment

Woodlands and wetlands provide essential components of the city's natural heritage system and can provide key components of the city's parks and open space network. Policies are required to protect natural heritage features.



Rank 5
Refocus on the rest of the city

The first survey revealed a common thread of comments asking for the city to focus attention away from the tourist areas toward the rest of the city, especially the older areas.



Rank 6
Improve the look of the city

The look of a city can enhance its attractiveness to new residents and workers and make people proud of the place they call home. Beautiful buildings, streets, parks, and community facilities all contribute to creating an attractive city.



Rank 7
Protect and improve parks

Parks are essential components of neighbourhoods and urban areas. They provide locations to meet friends and family and to play. Policy should ensure there are a variety of parks with different sizes providing a diversity of amenities such as benches, playground equipment and sports fields.



Rank 8
Improve trails

Cycling and pedestrian trails are essential parts of the city's transportation network, enabling opportunities to move around the city in other ways than driving.



Things to think about - Growing City

The survey included “things to think about” extracted from each one of the six Discussion Papers. The survey asked “thumbs up” (yes) or “thumbs down” (no) whether the idea was a good direction for new Official Plan policy. The results of the percentage of the respondents replying “thumbs up” follow.



Affordable Housing

The City should use all of the tools available to encourage the development of more affordable housing.



Broader Variety of Housing

A broader variety of housing is needed in the city to accommodate the growth in population. We need to build townhouses, mid-rise buildings, and high-rise buildings.



Intensification

The City should facilitate intensification by developing a strong vision and supportive policies to give priority to supporting residential intensification projects.



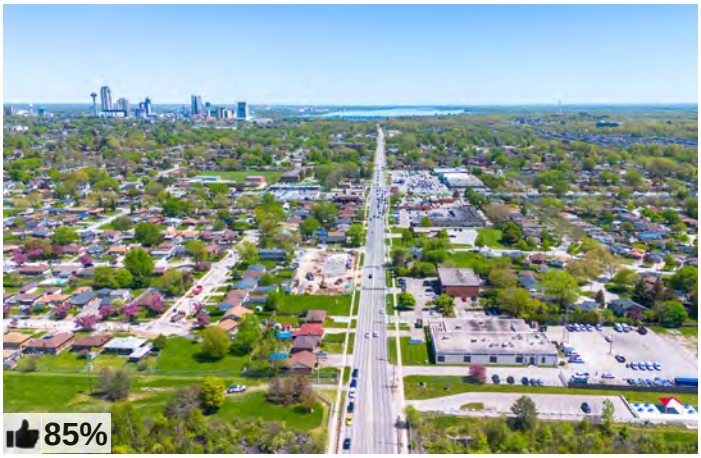
Downtown

Include policies that support intensification Downtown and in other strategically chosen road corridors.



Existing Infrastructure

Optimize the City's use of existing infrastructure investments to limit the need to build new infrastructure for cost efficiency.



Balance Tourism and Liveability for Residents

Growth needs to occur in ways that improve the City as a tourism destination while not detracting from its liveability for residents.



Complete Communities

Higher density neighbourhoods should identify space for uses such as parks and places to shop and go to school, to create a complete community.



Mixing Uses in One Building

Commercial uses (like shops, services, and offices) are good on the ground floor of buildings with residential or office uses above.



Anchors for New Development

Use the new university and hospital projects as anchors for community and business development.



Agricultural Lands

Intensification of urban areas is encouraged to protect agricultural lands.

Things to think about - International City



75%

Labour Force

The educational offerings local to Niagara Falls should match the business sectors that the City aims to grow to support the labour force required.



68%

Attracting More People to Work in Niagara Falls

Attract new talent to the City by leveraging Niagara Falls existing livability and creating affordable, walkable and transit supportive neighbourhoods sought after by knowledge workers.



77%

Lands for Employment Uses

Take a long-term approach to creating employment opportunities in the Gateway Economic Zone that takes advantage of Niagara Falls' border location.



58%

Intensification of Shopping Malls and Plazas

Redevelopment of large parking lots at malls and plazas could accommodate housing to help retain commercial uses while providing additional higher density housing.



Downtown Niagara Falls

Policies should help to unlock business investment in Downtown.



Major Transit Area

The area around the GO station and bus terminal should receive more investment, including the creation of higher-density housing.

Things to think about - Attractive City



Urban Design Vision

Create an urban design vision for how the City should look. Provide greater clarity on how to shape beautiful buildings, streets, and parks.



Design of Streets and Parks

Streets and parks in Downtown and higher density areas should be beautifully designed to build a stronger economic, social and environmental benefits.



Urban Agriculture

Urban agriculture should be part of a community's character and integrated into the open space system as a transition between the natural and built environment.



Parks and Open Space

Ensure everyone can walk to a diverse range of parks and open spaces with a variety of amenities, trails, and recreation facilities.



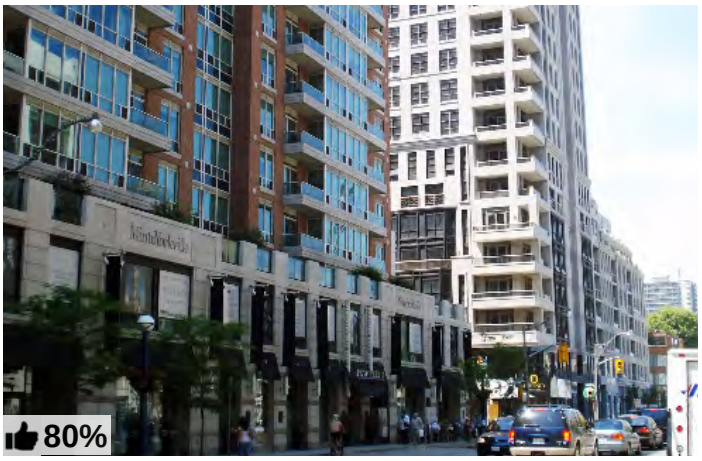
Complete Streets

Complete streets provide pleasing pedestrian experiences, improved safety for cyclists, and enhanced opportunities for active transportation and pedestrians of all ages and abilities, all while ensuring efficient movement of vehicles



New Buildings

All development should achieve a high degree of environmental sustainability and demonstrate high-quality architecture.



Compatibility with New Development

The transition between new higher density development and existing residential neighbourhoods will need to be considered in the height and massing of new building.



Building Height

Reconfigure the area for bus and car drop off and parking
Determine building heights for new development based on the special characteristics and conditions of particular areas in the city.



Pedestrians and Cyclists

Support streetscape improvements for pedestrians and cyclists, such as wider sidewalks, street trees, and separate lanes for cyclists.



Place-making and Landmarks

Policies should support the integration of public art and culture with local businesses, civic buildings, schools, and parks to showcase Niagara Falls.

Things to think about - Connected and Mobile City



83%

Travel Choices

Establish a variety of transportation choices to support people's different travel requirements.



86%

Multi-use Trails

Prepare guidelines to ensure a well-connected off-street system of multi-use trails that includes all modes suited for the multi-use trails.



90%

Transit

The transportation network should support affordable, convenient, and reliable public transit to enhance the way residents can move around the city.



81%

Street Network

Compact street grids should be encouraged to provide choices for various routes that can reduce travel time and support options for the ways people move around by car, bike, mobility devices, and on foot.



90%

Connections from Transit

Transit users should be able to seamlessly transfer from transit to a dedicated space (multi-use trail, sidewalks, bike lanes) to reach their destination



81%

Major Transit Station Areas

Give priority to investments in public transit cycling infrastructure and pedestrian-friendly spaces near Major Transit Station Areas.



68%

New Mobility-related technologies

Stay on top of new mobility-related technologies and their impacts. Identify opportunities to use new technologies to achieve goals for safety, equity, accessibility, and multi-modal mobility.



40%

Electric Vehicles

Encourage preferred parking spaces to be reserved for sustainable modes of transportation, such as carpooling and electric vehicles.

Things to think about - Green and Resilient City



Natural Heritage System

Clearly define the city's natural heritage features in a Natural Heritage System to support healthy natural processes and functions.



Woodlands

Consider policies to protect woodlands and tree canopy and to integrate the woodlands as part of new development.



Ecological Features in Urban Areas

Invest in restoring, enhancing, and incorporating supportive ecological features into the urban landscape.



Climate Change Adaptation

Explore opportunities to increase tree cover, increase infiltration, and support renewable energy and energy efficiency initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



Tree Canopy

Establish targets for tree canopy coverage with policies for protecting and replacing trees in the city.



Low Impact Development Measures

Policies should ensure implementation of Low Impact Development Measures -methods that help to increase water infiltration and groundwater recharge, lowering the amount of water that runs over a surface.



Green Development Standards

Encourage more efficient building designs through green standards and requirements for higher energy efficiency.



Heat Island

Use green roofs and increase the tree cover in the city to combat the effects of high temperatures.



Network of Green Spaces

Protect Niagara Falls' network of green spaces while minimizing the creation of new impervious surfaces to increase the City's overall resiliency.

Things to think about - Cultural City



Protect Heritage Properties

Include a sound policy framework for identifying and protecting built and cultural heritage properties in areas proposed for new development



Historical Neighbourhoods

Urban design guidelines for historical neighbourhoods should help to ensure that infill development is scaled and designed to maintain the area's character, including by protecting significant views.



Heritage and Culture

Promote and celebrate features that relate to a community's heritage or culture through events, festivals, signage, public art, interpretive programming, etc.



Collaborative Property Management

Develop policies to support collaborative property management between the City and key property owners, such as Ontario Power Generation, Niagara Parks Commission, and Metrolinx.



Queen Victoria Park

Consider distinguishing the cultural landscape of Queen Victoria Park in a land use designation that recognizes the cultural heritage of the open space.

11.0 Pop-up Events

July, 2024

July 16: Gale Centre, 9 to 11am

- Light foot traffic.
- Engaged with 4 seniors; shared postcards; they showed interest in completing the survey online.
- Comments: Need more attention to areas outside the Tourist Area, and appreciation for the city's trail system (excluding NPC lands).

July 17: McBain Centre, 12 to 2pm

- Medium foot traffic; 6 surveys completed on-site, 5 paper surveys taken (one returned).
- Comments on substandard road conditions in Willoughby.

July 20: Farmer's Market, 8:30am to 1pm

- High engagement.
- 30 surveys completed on-site.

Comments:

- Automatic pedestrian crossings should be considered for complete streets, no button needed.
- A resident mentioned there are good facilities for seniors; walkability should be improved.
- A resident noted that roads need improvement; too many politicians for the population.
- Cyclist concerns: lack of connection between east and west sides, need for a QEW crossing, buses are not an efficient way to travel across the city, better traffic control along Stanley & Fallsview, dangerous cycling conditions, Clifton Hill crossings are deceiving as they visually appear to give right of way to pedestrians but are signed to give cars the right of way.

July 23: Gale Centre, 12:30 to 2pm

- Light foot traffic, 2 cards taken for home completion of survey.
- One resident noted how tourism has taken away local access to the Niagara River as it was when they grew up (eg fishing at the glen, swimming at Dufferin Islands). It's become more privatized and money dependent.
- Another resident enjoys walks along the parkway, but is afraid to ride her bicycle in the City – partly because of the fear of injury at her age and the lack of safe bicycle lane on roadways.

July 24: Supper Market, 6 to 8pm

- Limited interest in the table (80 attendees, some City Staff); event shifted to music/games.
- Comments received were general interest in the project.

July 25: McBain Centre, 9:30 to 12:00pm

- Interest in the table, good level of interest and conversation.
- Postcards taken and promises to complete survey, none done at table.
- One resident is a proponent of efficient building practices to decrease the need for electricity/gas in future builds.
- Affordable seniors housing – providing for a range of options.
- Appreciative of the community facilities for seniors.
- Better transit connections (primarily time reductions) is desired.

12.0 Written Submissions and Emails

Comments were received by email from March to July 2024 and will be considered during the development of the draft policy directions for the Official Plan. Comments received include the following:

- The Official Plan needs to provide direction on servicing, financial aspects, long-term development buildout, and asset management. Specific amendments to the current Official Plan are becoming more common.
- Future site-specific amendments should require a higher level of justification to amend what has been considered through this review. The new Official Plan should identify the highest priority areas for development based on the City's needs and capabilities, with reference to long-term costs.
- Aggregates mapping should be included as a schedule in the Official Plan, and Special Policy Area 44 should be retained.
- Urban design and environmental planning should ensure that developers comply with the highest standards of environmental science best practices.
- The new Official Plan should address land use incompatibility and future/existing jobs.
- Consider including "Niagara Falls property prioritized for Niagara Falls residents" in the Vision Statement.
- Consider an urban boundary 'fix' where the boundary does not align with a road or creek.
- The promotion of natural area retention within the 'Green and Resilient City' Discussion Paper can be strengthened by adding wording that addresses loopholes in the environmental policies of the Niagara Region Plan, as identified by the commenter.
- Minimum distance separations between industry/quarry and the environment should be strengthened.
- Considerations for the new Official Plan include: supporting a private tree bylaw; encouraging permeable assets in City projects and private development; post-quarry use policies; protection of agricultural land; enhanced buffers for wetlands; natural area preservation; guidance for land use conversions between residential and industrial; a holistic approach to land use; requiring a new parkland strategy; revitalizing Downtown; clarifying industrial classifications for land use; building phasing with respect to infrastructure; alternatives to stacked townhouses; the future of the Marineland property; student housing for the University of Niagara Falls; green development standards; retaining youth in Niagara Falls; enabling seniors to stay at home longer; natural linkages through new development and green infrastructure; sunset clauses for older approvals; and implementable infill policies.

13.0 Next Steps

Engagement is ongoing through every phase of preparing a new Official Plan. The team is continuing to meet with Committees of Council over the summer to seek input on the Discussion Papers. Input is always welcome through the Let's Talk Niagara Falls web page.

The team is now proceeding to Phase 3 - Policy Direction with the preparation of a Policy Direction report that will be released in the Fall of 2024.


P