

Background Review Report

Town of Fort Erie Official Plan Review

Final | May 2024



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1 Introduction

The Town of Fort Erie (“Town”) has embarked on an exciting and important community building initiative to update and review the Official Plan (“Official Plan Review”). An Official Plan is a strategic policy document that guides decision-making on matters related to land use planning by managing growth and development. The Town’s current Official Plan was first adopted in 2011 and has been implemented for more than a decade.

The Official Plan is now required be updated to conform with relevant Regional and Provincial policies and to establish an updated land use planning framework for the Town. The updated Official Plan will be a forward looking, strategic document that responds to evolving priorities of the community. It will provide direction on matters such as how the Town will grow, where this growth will occur, and how it will be managed by recognizing the need for housing opportunities, jobs, leisure, and protecting the environment, among others.

The process of reviewing an Official Plan involves making collective decisions as a community about the future, while ensuring that the Town is equipped to plan for and manage change. On this basis, the Official Plan Review (OPR) will:

- Demonstrate how Fort Erie plans to accommodate 48,050 people and 18,430 jobs by 2051;
- Incorporate policies that are relevant to the Town’s strategic direction and the core values of its residents and industries;
- Consider and implement recent Provincial legislation and policies; and
- Respond to evolving social and economic conditions, such as housing and jobs.

The policies contained within an Official Plan define a vision for the future and respond directly to local priorities and opportunities, while being consistent with, and conforming to, Provincial and Regional land use planning policy. The Official Plan is also informed by other initiatives and studies a municipality may undertake, including Master Plans, that provide more detailed direction on specific matters related to building complete communities that contribute to the overall well-being of the Town.

1.1 Background and Work Plan

The Official Plan contains a series of goals, objectives, and policies that work together to shape development and guide land use planning decisions. In Ontario, the basis for land use planning is established by the Province of Ontario – principally through the *Planning Act* R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13 (“*Planning Act*”) and Provincial Policy Statement, 2020 (“PPS, 2020”). The Town is required to regularly review and update the Official Plan in accordance with Section 26 of the *Planning Act*, to reflect changing planning legislation and policy, while responding to evolving local land use planning priorities.

Fort Erie is a lower-tier municipality within Niagara Region (“Region”). The Region is an upper-tier municipality and is responsible for developing Niagara’s Regional Official Plan (“Niagara Official Plan”) and approving the Official Plans of each respective lower-tier municipality. All lower-tier municipalities within the Region, including Fort Erie, must prepare an Official Plan that conforms with the Niagara Official Plan.

The Town has retained WSP Canada Inc. (“WSP”) and Parcel Economics (“Parcel”) to undertake the Official Plan Review. The Official Plan Review is a multi-year initiative that began in July 2023 and will be undertaken through three phases of work, as shown in Table 1. Phase 1 involves background research and initial public consultation with the community. This Report represents the culmination of Phase 1. The Draft Official Plan will then be prepared in Phase 2, building on the input and findings of Phase 1, and the Final Official Plan will be presented to Council for adoption in Phase 3. Once the Official Plan is adopted, it must be approved by the Region before coming into full force and effect.

Table 1: Official Plan Review Work Plan

Project Phase	Project Milestones
<p>Phase 1 Fall 2023 – Spring 2024</p>	<p>Engagement and Background Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Background Research Report – Engagement Summary
<p>Phase 2 Spring – Summer 2024</p>	<p>Policy Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Draft Official Plan – Public & Council Review and Phase 2 Engagement Report
<p>Phase 3 Fall – Winter 2024</p>	<p>Draft & Final Official Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council Adoption – Approval of the Final Official Plan

Regular opportunities to engage and consult with the community will be critical to preparing the new Official Plan – one that reflects the aspirations and ideas for the future of Fort Erie and establishes a forward-looking land use planning strategy in response to local priorities.

1.2 Community Engagement and Consultation

Engagement and consultation are pillars of this Project and represents an important input to an updated Official Plan that is responsive to local priorities by reflecting the aspirations of the community. The Town is committed to transparent and meaningful engagement and consultation opportunities to inform the new Official Plan. Multiple activities have been identified through each of the three phases to facilitate this outcome.

Table 3, below, reviews the engagement and consultation activities that are planned to support the Official Plan Review.

Table 2: Consultation and Engagement Plan for the Official Plan Review

Project Phase	Milestones
All Phases	<p>Let’s Talk Fort Erie</p> <p>A dedicated project web page has been created on Let’s Talk Fort Erie, the Town’s online engagement platform. The dedicated project webpage will be regularly updated to share information about the Official Plan Review with the community, including documents that are available for review (such as the Draft Official Plan), engagement and consultation events, project contact information, and opportunities to provide additional input and comments to the Project Team.</p>
Phase 1	<p>Focus: Project Awareness, Interest, and Understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Indigenous Community Outreach – Section 26 Meeting – Visioning Workshop and Survey – Municipal Advisory Team – Engagement Summary
Phase 2	<p>Focus: Community Input on the Draft Official Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Community Focus Group – Municipal Advisory Team – Indigenous Community Consultation – Public Open House – Engagement Summary
Phase 3	<p>Focus: Adopting a New Official Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Statutory Public Open House – Community Focus Group – Municipal Advisory Team – Indigenous Community Consultation – Statutory Public Meeting (Town Council) – Engagement Summary – Council Adoption

The engagement and consultation program focuses on fostering meaningful discussions with the community to further understand community priorities and interests in how growth will be managed, but

also includes direct participation from Town staff and other parties who have a heightened interest in the Official Plan Review, such as Niagara Region and Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority. Further, each phase concludes with an Engagement Summary that will detail “what we heard” from the community through the various consultation activities associated with each phase. The Engagement Summaries are important opportunities to communicate with the community what feedback and input has been received, as well as how this input is being considered in the broader context of preparing the new Official Plan.

1.3 Purpose and Structure of this Report

This Background Review Report (“Report”) is the first major deliverable in Phase 1 of the Official Plan Review. It represents the first major deliverable of the Official Plan Review work plan and establishes a framework for how the current Official Plan will be updated. More specifically, this Report:

- Reviews current and emerging Provincial policy direction and legislation that guides land use planning in Ontario;
- Identifies key drivers of change, such as projected residential and employment growth within the Town;

Review relevant studies and initiatives completed by the Town to inform updated Official Plan policies;

- Assesses existing policies and reviews relevant considerations to inform recommended updates to the Official Plan; and
- Document how the Official Plan will be reviewed.

The table below identifies the sections that comprise this Background Review Report, and the purpose of each section.

Table 3: Structure and Content of the Background Review Report

Section	Purpose
Section 1: Introduction	Section 1 sets the stage for this Background Review Report, outlining background and the work plan for the OPR, and the structure of this Background Review Report.
Section 2: Background Review	Section 2 provides an overview of the Provincial, Regional, and Local policy context for the OPR. This includes a review of relevant legislation, policies, guidelines, and strategies that help to inform growth and change in Fort Erie.
Section 3: Policy Gaps, Conflicts, and Opportunities	Section 3 identifies key policy recommendations to inform an updated Official Plan. The key policy recommendations respond directly to the identified priorities of the community, including matters such as how growth will be

managed, housing, the economy, and the environment, among others.

Section 4: Key Policy Recommendations

Section 4 identifies and describes key recommendations for updating the Official Plan. This includes an outline of the approach for updating the Official Plan, and policy development principles.

Section 5: Official Plan Review Next Steps

Section 5 identifies next steps for the Official Plan Review.

2 Background Review

The purpose of this Section is to identify and review relevant land use planning inputs that will need to be considered in updating the Official Plan. Section 3 of this Report then identifies key policy gaps, conflicts, and opportunities that will need to be addressed in response to the matters outlined in this Section.

2.1 Provincial Context

Provincial planning legislation and policies directly influence planning policies in Fort Erie. This Section outlines these key considerations, as well the main changes to Provincial legislation and policies that have occurred since the Official Plan was last updated.

2.1.1 Planning Act

The *Planning Act* is the governing statute for land use planning in Ontario. Section 26 of the *Planning Act* requires municipalities to regularly review and update Official Plans. Much of what the *Planning Act* governs regarding Official Plans is procedural such as timelines for approval and consultation requirements, but it also prescribes certain components that must be incorporated into an Official Plan. For example, this includes stipulating that all planning decisions in a municipality, including preparing and updating Official Plans, must be consistent with the PPS, 2020 and shall have regard for a list of Provincial interests. These interests include, but are not limited to, the protection of natural heritage areas, the adequate provision and efficient use of infrastructure, accessibility, and the adequate supply of employment and housing.

Recent changes to the *Planning Act* that will need to be considered by the OPR include:

- **Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act, 2017 (Bill 139):** reformed the planning appeals process, replacing the Ontario Municipal Board with the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal and putting more emphasis on the decisions of planning authorities. Many changes made by Bill 139 were subsequently amended by Bill 108 (see below). Bill 139 also modified Community Planning Permit legislation, which set out an alternative approach to development approval processes in place of zoning and site plan control.
- **More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019 (Bill 108):** amended the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal Act to change the appeals process, and amended the *Planning Act* regarding additional residential units, development charges, and Community Benefits Charges (formerly known as Section 37 Benefits).
- **COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020 (Bill 197):** expanded, in part, the scope of a Minister’s Zoning Order to allow the Minister to make decisions as it relates to site plan control and inclusionary zoning (affordable housing). Allows municipalities to set alternative rates for parkland dedication subject to requirements and appeals.
- **Supporting People and Business Act, 2021 (Bill 13):** amends the *Planning Act* to provide the Council with discretionary authority to delegate planning decisions for minor zoning by-law amendments to committees of council or municipal staff. Bill 13 requires that the criteria for a minor zoning by-law amendment be established in the Official Plan.

- **More Homes for Everyone Act, 2022 (Bill 109):** made significant amendments to the *Planning Act*. New subsections were added that introduce a refunding regime for planning application fees if municipalities fail to render a decision on an application within certain timeframes. This bill also introduced a new ministerial zoning tool known as the ‘Community Infrastructure and Housing Accelerator (CIHA).
- **More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022 (Bill 23):** introduced broad changes to the land use planning regime in Ontario, with immediate amendments to the *Planning Act*, *Development Charges Act*, *Conservation Authorities Act*, *Ontario Land Tribunal Act*, and the *Ontario Heritage Act*, as well as proposals and direction for making further changes to natural heritage policies, developing a new Provincial planning policy framework, and the development of standardized tools for zoning.
- **Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act, 2023 (Bill 97):** amended the definition of “area of employment” in the *Planning Act* to include lands designated for manufacturing, warehousing and ancillary uses, but to exclude institutional, retail, and office uses. The intent of this change is to preserve employment lands for those uses that are unable to locate in the community area – while encouraging compatible uses such as office and institutional to integrate into the community area.
- **Homes You Can Afford in the Communities You Love Act, 2024 (Bill 156):** a proposed amendment to the *Planning Act* that would require Official Plans to contain policies authorizing the use of up to four residential units in a detached house, semi-detached house or rowhouse as well as multi-unit residential buildings of up to four stories. Additionally, Bill 156 would require Official Plans to authorize midrise housing developments ranging from six (6) to eleven (11) stories on major streets in settlement areas, including along transit corridors.
- **Planning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2023 (Bill 150) and Get it Done Act (Bill 162):** reversed some of the Province’s changes made in November 2022 to the Niagara Region Official Plan. This included rolling back one (1) Urban Boundary Expansion in Fort Erie as well as minor modifications to the Region’s Natural Heritage System Overlay.

While some of these changes do not directly contain policies that the Town of Fort Erie must include in an Official Plan, they provide important context related to an evolving land use planning framework in Ontario that will need to be considered to ensure the updated Official Plan aligns with legislative direction and while balancing community needs.

Provincial Policy Statement (2020)

While the *Planning Act* defines matters of provincial interest, the PPS 2020 provides policy direction on these matters. The PPS 2020 sets the foundation for Ontario’s policy-led planning system and its direction is implemented through municipal Official Plans.

Key direction from the PPS 2020 that will impact the Official Plan Review includes:

- **Land Supply:** municipalities are required to plan to have enough land available to accommodate projected growth for a 25-year horizon.

- **Housing:** municipalities are required to maintain the ability to accommodate residential growth for a minimum of 15 years. Furthermore, municipalities are required to facilitate transit-supportive development in proximity to transit corridors and stations.
- **Intensification:** provincial policy emphasizes planning for intensification and transit-supportive development to achieve cost-effective growth.
- **Servicing:** stormwater planning is to be integrated with water and sanitary service planning. The impacts of individual on-site servicing are to be reviewed at the time of an Official Plan update.
- **Employment and Land Use Compatibility:** municipal Official Plans are required to incorporate strong policies that protect existing and planned industrial and manufacturing uses from encroachment.
- **Flexibility around Comprehensive Reviews:** conversions of employment areas to non-employment *outside* of a comprehensive review can only be undertaken under certain circumstances.
- **Settlement Area Boundary Expansions:** municipalities may adjust settlement area boundaries outside of a comprehensive review, under certain circumstances. These are also referred to as “urban boundary expansions” throughout this Report.
- **Indigenous Consultation:** Planning authorities are required to engage meaningfully with Indigenous communities on land use planning matters and build cooperative relationships to share knowledge in land-use planning processes.
- **Cultural Heritage:** municipalities are directed to conserve cultural heritage, including “significant built heritage resources” and “significant cultural heritage landscapes”.

The Official Plan will be reviewed and updated to be consistent with the PPS, 2020. This includes, but is not limited to, consistency with Provincial direction for servicing, infrastructure, consultation with Indigenous communities, and cultural heritage.

Proposed Provincial Planning Statement (2024)

This Official Plan Review is being undertaken in accordance with the PPS 2020, which is applicable at the time of drafting this Background Report. However, the preliminary implications of the proposed Draft Provincial Planning Statement (PPS 2024) are also considered by this Report. If the PPS 2024 comes into force before the new Official Plan is adopted, it may be necessary to prepare the updated Official Plan to be consistent with the PPS 2024.

There are several changes in the PPS 2024 that may need to be considered within the context of the Official Plan Review. These include:

- Removing the 25-year horizon for planning land supply. Municipalities would be required to make sufficient land available “to meet projected needs for a time horizon of at least 20 years, but not more than 30 years”.
- Removing the concept of the “Comprehensive Review”, thereby allowing settlement area boundary expansions and employment conversions to be initiated at any time. This also means

that refusals or non-decisions of OPAs for boundary expansions could be appealed to the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT).

- Requiring municipalities to consider allocating or re-allocating unused system capacity for municipal water and sewage services for the purpose of meeting current and projected needs for increased housing supply.
- Revising policies for the conservation of Cultural Heritage to focus on “protected heritage property”, which has a narrower definition than the previously used terms of “significant built heritage resources” and “significant cultural heritage landscapes”.

2.1.2 A Place to Grow (Office Consolidation 2020)

A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2019 (Office Consolidation 2020) (“Growth Plan”) was first prepared and approved under the *Places to Grow Act, 2005*, to take effect on May 16, 2019. Amendment 1 to the Growth Plan was approved to take effect on August 28, 2020. A Place to Grow also works in conjunction with the PPS and provides specific land use planning policies to address issues facing the specific geographic area (Greater Golden Horseshoe; GGH) in Ontario.

A Place to Grow is a long-term plan to promote growth of the economy, housing supply, jobs, and communities. The Growth Plan prioritizes intensification and higher densities in strategic growth areas to make efficient use of land and infrastructure and support transit viability. It seeks to improve the integration of land use planning with investment in infrastructure and public service facilities by all levels of government and integrate climate change considerations into all aspects of planning and growth management.

2.1.3 Supplementary Agricultural Guidelines to the Provincial Policy Statement

In 2016, the Province published two sets of guidelines to assist municipalities in implementing the agricultural policies of the Provincial Policy Statement: the Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario’s Prime Agricultural Areas and the Minimum Distance Separation Formulae Document. These documents are not regulations or policies of themselves but provide additional information and tools to clarify the policies of the PPS.

The Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario’s Prime Agricultural Areas provide guidance on agricultural, agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses described in Policy 2.3.3 of the PPS. The Guidelines also clarify the allowance for limited non-agricultural uses in prime agricultural areas, as well as the mitigation of impacts from new or expanding non-agricultural uses.

The Minimum Distance Separation Document outlines in more detail the Minimum Distance Separation (MDS) Formulae defined in the PPS, and provides technical guidance for implementing the MDS formula, which mitigates or prevents land-compatibility issues surrounding high-odour uses like livestock facilities or anaerobic digesters. Official Plans are required to have up-to-date policies around MDS requirements.

2.1.4 Land Use Compatibility

The PPS 2020 provides direction to municipalities on land use compatibility. It requires major facilities and sensitive land uses to be planned in a way that avoids, minimizes, or mitigates adverse effects from odour, noise, and other contaminants. New policies were added in 2020 to provide criteria for how to plan developments where avoidance is not possible.

Where the PPS provides general direction regarding land use compatibility, it is implemented through the Province's D-Series guidelines that provide specific direction for municipalities to follow when deciding whether a new development or land use is appropriate in any given location.

2.1.5 Conservation Authorities

Conservation Authorities (CAs) are public sector organizations that provide programs and services that further the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources in watersheds in Ontario. Conservation Authorities are governed under the Conservation Authorities Act, which is administered by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation, and Parks (MECP).

2.1.6 Source Water Protection

The Provincial government passed the *Clean Water Act*, 2006 to protect existing and future sources of municipal drinking water throughout Ontario. A key deliverable required under the Act is a source water protection plan, which is undertaken to:

- Protect existing and future drinking water sources in the source protection area; and
- Ensure that activities never become a threat in every area where an activity is or would be a threat to drinking water.

The *Clean Water Act* provides a number of tools that can be used to ensure source water protection:

- **Restricting Land Use:** Under Section 59 of the *Clean Water Act*, Development applications or activities which may be considered a clean water threat may be subject to restricted land use and other conditions. Official restrictions can be implemented through policies in the *Planning Act*, Official Plans, Zoning By-laws, or Site Plan Controls.
- **Requiring Risk Management Plans:** Under Section 58 of the *Clean Water Act*, activities may be regulated, and a Risk Management Plan will be required before proceeding.
- **Supporting Education and Outreach Programs:** Engage the public and key stakeholders to raise awareness and understanding of drinking water threats as well as the Source Protection Plan and why it is significant for residents.

2.2 Regional Context

The Town is a lower-tier municipality within Niagara Region. The Region, as the upper-tier municipality, is responsible for undertaking coordinated growth-management, land-use, infrastructure, servicing, and transportation planning. These policies are established by the Niagara Official Plan, with all lower-tier municipalities within the Region being required to conform to the Region's Official Plan.

2.2.1 2022 Niagara Region Official Plan

The Niagara Official Plan was adopted on June 23, 2022, and approved by the Province on November 4, 2022. Various studies and background reviews were conducted to inform the Niagara Official Plan as it sets out policies in key themes area which have been outlined below.

2.2.1.1 Regional Structure

The Niagara Official Plan establishes a regional structure that directs forecasted growth to settlement areas. Settlement areas are comprised of urban areas, and rural settlements, which are also known as hamlets. Most development is directed to urban areas, where infrastructure exists to support a growing population, greater density, and a mix of land uses.

Through the Niagara Region Official Plan, the Region strategically manages growth by accommodating residential development through intensification and higher densities in urban areas, while protecting and enhancing the character of the Region’s rural settlements. The Region also identifies employment areas and protects these lands for activities such as manufacturing and warehousing.

The policy framework in the Niagara Official Plan envisions urban areas as places with a compact built form, vibrant public realm, and a mix of land uses, including residential, employment, and recreational uses. A diverse range of housing options are provided, people have access to a range of transportation options, and social equity, public health, and safety are prioritized. Rural settlements are the focus of growth outside the Region’s urban boundary. Development in rural areas is planned to encourage residential infill that reflects and builds on the rural character, considers active transportation, and protects the natural environment.

2.2.1.2 Growth Management

The Niagara Official Plan establishes a land use planning framework to accommodate population and employment projected to the year 2051. Niagara Region is forecasted to grow to 694,000 people and 272,000 jobs during this time period. In accordance with the intensification targets required by the A Place to Grow, the Niagara Official Plan directs that 50% of future growth will be accommodated to existing built-up areas.

Growth that is not accommodated in existing built-up areas requires new lands to be developed, often leading to the loss of agricultural lands or natural heritage. Lands designated for development but currently undeveloped are known as ‘greenfield’ lands and considered part of the ‘Designated Greenfield Area’. Through the Regional Official Plan Review, it is possible expand the boundaries of various settlement areas (e.g., Crystal Beach) in order to add more ‘Designated Greenfield Area’ that can accommodate forecast growth. Adding more greenfield lands is known as an ‘urban boundary expansion’.

In June 2022, the Region completed the 2051 Land Needs Assessment (the “LNA”) to determine the amount of land needed to accommodate growth within the Region to 2051. This assessment was conducted using the Land Needs Assessment Methodology for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Findings from the LNA were used to inform updates to the Niagara Official Plan, including settlement area boundary expansions.

The Town of Fort Erie has five (5) urban areas that are meant to accommodate growth. These are: Fort Erie, Crystal Beach, Ridgeway, Stevensville, and Douglstown. The urban area of Ridgeway includes

the community of Thunder Bay. Informed by the 2051 Land Needs Assessment, Niagara Region added 105 hectares of additional community lands and 175 hectares of additional employment lands to Fort Erie’s urban settlement areas in order to ensure that enough land would be available to accommodate growth to 2051.

The employment lands added to Fort Erie’s urban settlement area are located immediately south of the QEW along Sunset Drive. The Region designates these lands as a “Dynamic Employment Area” which permits a broader mix of employment uses, including office parks and institutional uses. This contrasts with the “Core Employment Areas” located in Stevensville and in the Bridgeburg neighbourhood of Fort Erie, which are reserved for traditional employment uses such as manufacturing or warehousing.

2.2.1.3 Housing

The Niagara Official Plan recognizes the provision of adequate housing as key to a good quality of life. The policy framework supports and is aligned with the Region’s Housing and Homelessness Action Plan, supporting a range and mix of housing options that are essential for the creation of complete communities and economic prosperity. This includes affordable and attainable housing options, such as community housing and specialized housing.

The Niagara Official Plan also sets affordable housing targets, with a plan to achieve these targets through land use and financial incentive tools. Local municipalities, including Fort Erie, are required to establish targets in their Local official plans for an overall housing mix by density type and affordability. These are to be prepared in accordance with the affordable housing targets in the Niagara Official Plan.

Local municipalities are encouraged to prepare their own local housing strategies to identify planning tools and other initiatives and programs, such as financial incentives, streamlining planning approvals, and others, to support housing options. These and other policy directions will be identified and addressed through the Official Plan Review to ensure the Official Plan conforms to the Niagara Official Plan.

2.2.1.4 Climate Change

Climate Change policies in the Niagara Official Plan were informed by a Climate Change Discussion Paper and Climate Projections for Niagara Region developed by the Toronto Region Conservation Authority, which support the transition to low-carbon, climate-resilient communities. Detailed Natural Heritage System mapping and supporting policies were developed for protecting and enhancing the Natural Heritage System and water resources system. The Climate Change Discussion Paper also identified policies at the provincial and regional level as an important avenue to address climate change.

The Niagara Official Plan commits to establishing greenhouse gas reduction targets in order to work toward the long-term goal of net-zero emissions. Among other things, it notes that the Region will work with local municipalities to restore and enhance vegetative cover, elevate standards of green building development and develop a municipal energy plan to reduce energy consumption. The Official Plan acknowledges that land use and infrastructure master planning have a key role to play in the reduction of energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

2.2.1.5 Natural Environment

The Natural Environmental Work Program provides background information and informs the Regional Official Plan. The Natural Environmental Work Program focused on establishing a regional natural

heritage system and water resource system, which formed the Integrated Natural Environmental System. Two discussion papers and two technical reports were completed in phases 2 and 4 of the Natural Environment Work Program. Policies in this plan include details on the significance of protecting natural features, systems, and connecting areas, and what actions should be taken to ensure the protection of these areas.

According to the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines Aggregate Resources Inventory Program for Niagara Region Municipalities, the Region has a significant number of resources including quality bedrock, shale, sandstone, limestone, and more. The Regional Official Plan policies related to aggregate resources were updated using the State of Aggregate Resources in Niagara Region Report which was published in January 2016. The State of Aggregate Resources in Niagara Region Report advised that the Regional Official Plan clarifies conflicting uses with Aggregate Areas, as previously the Regional Official Plan only regulated this under agricultural policies. Additionally, the State of Aggregate Resources in Niagara Region Background Report emphasizes the need for clearly defined policies in Local official plans to manage this change related to aggregate resources.

2.2.1.6 Niagara Region Natural Heritage Mapping

The Niagara Official Plan is required to be consistent with the PPS 2020, conform to the Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan (2017), and not conflict with the Niagara Escarpment Plan (2017). Section 3.1, The Natural Environment, outlines the objectives and policies for a Regional Natural Heritage System (NHS) and Water Resource System (WRS). The NHS is made up of features such as wetlands, woodlands, valleylands, and wildlife habitat, as well as components such as linkages, buffers, supporting features and areas, and enhancement areas. The WRS is made up of both groundwater and surface water features and areas. The establishment of these natural systems is required by Provincial policy. These systems are ecologically linked, rely on and support each other, and have many overlapping components. Therefore, they have been integrated and are known together as the Region's Natural Environment System (NES).

The features and components of the NES are listed in Section 3.1.1, 3.1.2, and Schedule L. Schedule L also includes the definitions and criteria for each of the features and components of the NES. Additionally, within Section 3, policies related to development and site alteration within and adjacent to the NES are provided and follow guidance identified in the provincial legislative requirements. Specific policies are provided for lands outside of a Provincial NHS (e.g., the Growth Plan NHS).

2.2.2 Niagara Region Housing and Homelessness Plan

Niagara Region launched its 10-year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan in 2014. In 2019 the plan was updated to provide a strategy for addressing the issues of affordable housing and homelessness in the Region from 2019 to 2023. The plan coordinates efforts to increase access to affordable housing, reduce homelessness, and end chronic homelessness. The plan responds to changes in the community and the housing market that affect local demand for homelessness services and affordable housing over the long term. The plan augments other Region strategies and initiatives, including the Official Plan, Niagara Housing Database, Niagara's Housing Master Plan, Niagara's Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan (CSWP), Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C), direct investment in housing, the Region's incentive review and development charge bylaw review.

The vision of the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan is that everyone in Niagara will have a home. The plan contains four goals:

1. House people who do not have a home;
2. Help people to retain a home;
3. Increase housing options and opportunities for low- and medium-income households; and,
4. Build capacity and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the housing and homelessness system.

The plan has identified 75 action items to be completed in years 6-10 of the action plan to support the following twelve outcomes related to the four goals:

- Improve access to shelter and housing for those experiencing unsheltered homelessness;
- Reduce the time spent in emergency shelter before successful exit;
- Improve the housing situation for those exiting emergency shelter;
- Reduce the time it takes for those who are at risk of homelessness to access prevention services;
- Improve long-term housing stability for households at risk of homelessness;
- Improve long-term housing stability for households that have graduated from housing with support programs; and
- Increase the supply of higher-density housing forms, including townhouse and apartments

In 2022 the Region provided an update to Council and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) on progress achieved in 2021. Key highlights noted that by the end of December 2021, 61% progress had been made toward finishing all 75 actions in the updated Housing and Homelessness Action Plan. At that time, 32 actions were completed, 27 had seen progress and were on track for completion by end of 2023, and 16 required significant work to be completed within the five-year period covered by the updated Housing and Homelessness Action Plan. Two key areas requiring additional focus in 2022 and 2023 include Indigenous housing and homelessness prevention.

2.2.3 Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority

As shown in Figure 1, the Town of Fort Erie is located within the area administered by the Niagara Region Conservation Authority (NPCA). The NPCA is one of 36 Conservation Authorities in the Province of Ontario and manages 41 Conservation Areas within the Niagara Peninsula watershed held in public trust for recreation, heritage preservation, conservation, and education.

The NPCA Strategic Plan (2021-2031) sets out the NPCA’s commitment to the mandate of conservation authorities and addresses the evolving issues of climate change, growth, and the need for green infrastructure.



Through six overarching strategic priorities, twenty-one specific goals, and measurable actions, the plan has a strong focus on results, establishing performance indicators for each goal of the plan. Additionally, the strategic priorities are to guide the actions that are to be taken to work towards a Niagara Peninsula watershed with robust nature, thriving agriculture, and resilient urban areas vital to the health and well-being of residents. The plan sets out to improve ecosystems and natural cover, protect drinking water sources, develop resilient communities and shorelines, build active transportation routes to greenspace destinations (conservation areas), engage communities in the watershed, and contribute to the thriving and vibrant economy of Niagara.

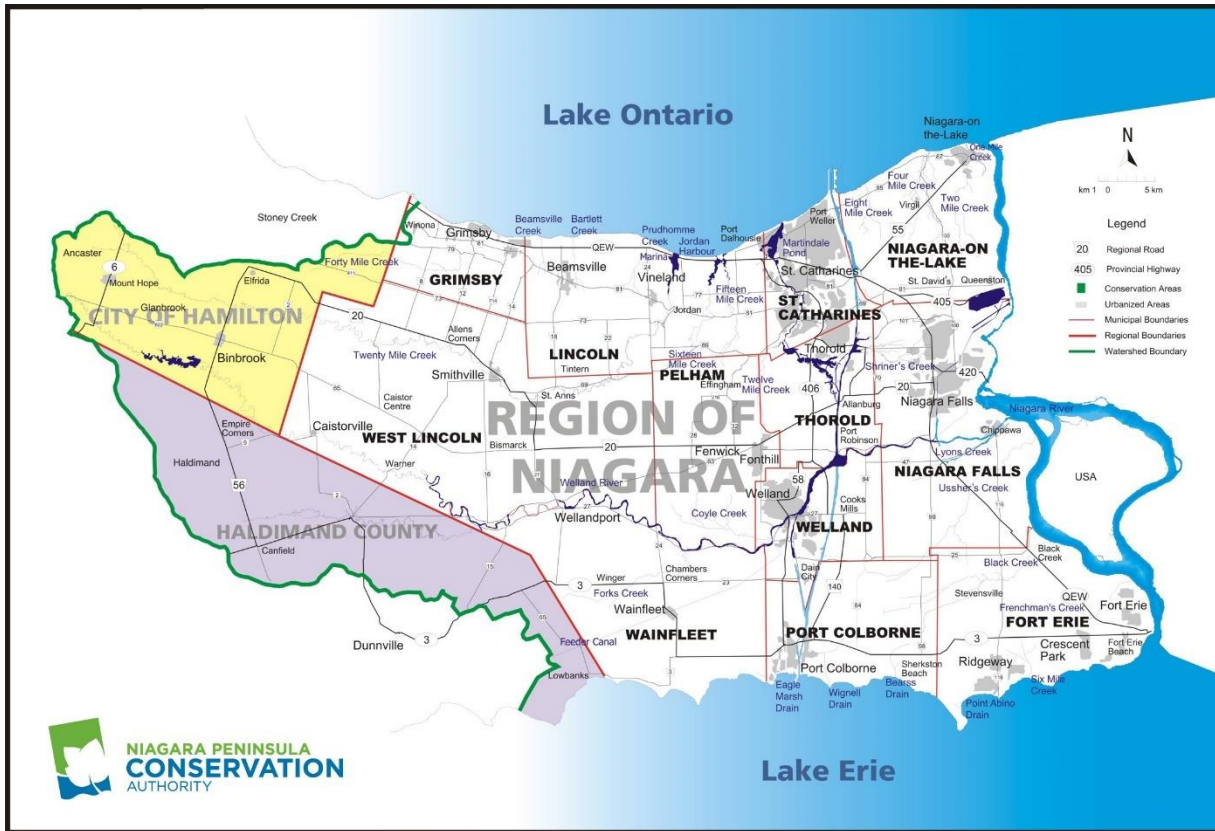


Figure 1: The Niagara Region Map provided by Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

2.2.4 Niagara Peninsula Source Protection Plan

In 2013, Niagara Region developed the Niagara Peninsula Source Protection Plan to support the protection of municipal drinking water sources as part of the *Clean Water Act*. The Source Protection Plan applies to the entire area covered by the NPCA (Figure 1). There is a wide range of recommendation in the Plan which include management practices and the development of Risk Management Plans. An Explanatory Document was released to accompany the Source Protection Plan and explain the rationale behind the policies in the Plan.

The Plan controls activities around Intake Protection Zones, which are areas deemed at risk for possible water threats according to the Assessment Report. There are no municipal wells in the Niagara Peninsula Source Protection Area, and therefore no Wellhead Protection Area (WHPAs). The Source Protection Plan was informed by an Assessment Report that assessed the quality and quantity of

municipal drinking water supplies and identified current and future threats. It was approved by the Ontario Ministry of Environment in 2011 and last updated in 2013.

2.2.5 Niagara Region Archaeological Management Plan

The protection of cultural heritage resources – including archaeological resources – is a key responsibility of planning authorities. Official Plans are one of the main tools that regional and local municipalities can use to guide the conservation and management of cultural heritage. In 2019, as part of the development on the Region’s new Official Plan, Niagara Region prepared and consulted on a Regional Archaeological Management Plan (AMP). The AMP is intended to:

- Support the goals and directions of provincial planning documents;
- Identify and map areas of archaeological potential;
- Ensure the long-term protection of archaeological resources;
- Streamline the planning and development review process; and
- Provide clear direction for when archaeological assessments will be required.

The AMP informed the development of policies and planning protocols in the Regional Official Plan. It can equally be used to guide policies specific to Fort Erie Official Plan, including implementation policies that defines roles and requirements when dealing with cultural heritage considerations in development applications.

2.2.6 Niagara Region Water and Wastewater Master Servicing Plan

The provision of water and wastewater services in the Town of Fort Erie is led by Niagara Region under a two-tier system. The Region is responsible for water treatment, transmission mains, feeder mains, storage facilities and major booster pumping stations; as well as wastewater treatment, trunk sewers and sewage pumping stations. Local municipalities such as Fort Erie are responsible for local water distribution networks and local sewer collection systems.

The planning of water and wastewater services is guided by the Water and Wastewater Master Servicing Plan. The Region began updating its Master Servicing Plan in 2021 and completed the update in Fall 2023. The 2021 Master Servicing Plan Update (MSPU) used updated population and employment growth forecasts based on a 2051 planning horizon. It reviewed the ability of existing and planned water and wastewater infrastructure to service the Region’s existing users and anticipated growth while considering sustainable solutions, cost-effectiveness and opportunities to optimize existing infrastructure. This approach is consistent with direction from the PPS 2020 that directs planning authorities to optimize “the use of existing infrastructure” before consideration is given to developing new infrastructure (PPS, 2020 – Policy 1.6.3).

2.2.6.1 Water Services

The MSPU notes that water services in the Town of Fort Erie “will experience additional demands from intensification and greenfield growth as well as a large amount of employment growth in central Fort

Erie”.¹ This suggests that planning of future employment areas in Fort Erie will need to closely consider servicing capacity as those areas develop. The MSPU concludes the Fort Erie (Rosehill) Water Treatment Plant “has sufficient capacity to support growth beyond 2051”.²

2.2.6.2 Wastewater Services

The five urban settlement areas in Fort Erie are served by a variety of wastewater services. Of note, the areas of Stevensville and Douglastown are serviced by the “Stevensville Douglastown Wastewater Treatment Plant” which relies on lagoons. Based on the level of growth expected in the service area, the Stevensville Douglastown Lagoons will require additional treatment capacity. Allocating growth to these two areas will need to be aligned with plans to expand wastewater treatment capacity. The Official Plan will also need to consider policies that promote green infrastructure and low-impact development in order to improve wet weather management and better control peak flows.

2.2.6.3 Wet Weather Management

A critical element of future servicing in the Town of Fort Erie will be the implementation of a wet weather management program.³ This will ensure that any areas of the municipality which are served by combined sewer systems do not get overwhelmed by peak flows during significant rainfall events. The Official Plan can play a significant role by implementing policies that manage infiltration and run-off in new developments.

2.3 Local Context

While provincial legislation and policy can provide a high-level framework to guide development in Fort Erie, more specific local direction is provided by the Official Plan and various local studies, strategies and Master Plans.

2.3.1 Fort Erie Strategic Plan

The Town of Fort Erie’s Strategic Plan is structured around five fundamental planning elements, focusing on shaping the community’s vision, mission, strategic priorities, objectives and actions. The Strategic Plan identifies six strategic pillars, including sustainable health care access, quality of life, sustainable growth, economic prosperity, environmental resilience, and comprehensive housing options. Each pillar is accompanied by specific strategic objectives and action plans, outlining steps for implementation and key performance indicators to measure success. The Strategic Plan is intended to be a living-document that evolves and changes, while acting as a guiding document for staff work plans and annual and multi-year budgeting. Overall, the 2023 – 2026 Strategic Plan establishes a comprehensive framework for Fort Erie’s development and prosperity.

2.3.2 Town of Fort Erie Official Plan

The Official Plan is a powerful tool that municipalities use to express a vision for the future, and to implement the necessary land use controls that will help to achieve that vision. Fort Erie’s existing

¹ Niagara Region: 2021 Water and Wastewater Master Servicing Plan Update, Final Report: December 5, 2023. Volume I – Executive Summary, p. 21.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p.36

Official Plan will be the baseline document that will inform the new Official Plan. It will be necessary to critically analyze and evaluate the performance of the exiting Official Plan policies and structure.

In addition to updating the vision and corresponding policies of the Official Plan, this review creates an opportunity to re-visit the structure of the Official Plan and consider changes to streamline and improve the readability of the document. The Official Plan has a traditional structure and layout that includes text-heavy chapters and minimal use of visual elements such as diagrams and photographs. A more “user-friendly” Official Plan can help users (e.g., residents, developers and elected officials) to better understand the Town’s goals and contribute to achieving its vision.

2.3.2.1 Official Plan Land Use Designations

The Official Plan defines an urban structure for the Town of Fort Erie and establishes range of Land Use Designations to manage land uses and development.

Table 4: Overview of the Official Plan Land Use Designations

Land Use Designation Description

Urban Boundary

Core Mixed Use

The Core Mixed Use designation permits residential, commercial and institutional uses within or around the downtown areas. The intent of this designation is to stimulate commercial activity and support the continued vitality of the unique downtown environment.

Commercial

The Commercial designation permits a broad range of commercial, retail, and service-oriented uses located in different land use contexts throughout the Town. For example, this includes shopping centres, highway commercial, recreational commercial, and more general commercial uses.

Industrial

The Industrial-Business Park designation permits a range of employment-related land uses, including office, industrial, and manufacturing related activities. The intent of this designation is to recognize lands that are intended to accommodate projected employment growth and protect those lands from the encroachment of incompatible land uses (e.g., residential uses).

Institutional

The Institutional land use designation is generally applied to public uses and associated uses that are owned and/or operated by the Town, Region, Province, or Government of Canada or an agency thereof. This includes, for example, the Peace Bridge Authority and the Niagara Parks Commission.

Open Space

The Open Space land use designation is intended for conservation, open space and recreation uses. Secondary uses are also permitted, including golf courses, education buildings,

arenas, and recreational buildings. The intent of this designation is to permit and provide opportunities for active and passive recreational opportunities.

Urban Residential

The Urban Residential land use designation permits a wide range of housing forms, from single-detached dwellings to boarding and lodging homes. Other non-residential uses are also permitted, including but not limited to schools, churches, parks, and neighbourhood commercial. The intent of this designation is to accommodate a range of residential uses and densities in the form of infill and intensification.

Agriculture and Rural

Agricultural

The Agricultural land use designation is intended to preserve land for agricultural uses and associated on-farm buildings and structures. The policies supporting this land use designation also seek to reduce fragmentation of agricultural lands, supporting a continuous agricultural land base and strong agricultural industry.

Rural

The Rural land use designation permits agriculture of all types, as well as secondary and value-added uses. The intent of this designation is to protect agricultural lands while permitting uses which are compatible with, but not necessarily directly related to agriculture, such as veterinary establishments or conservation.

Rural Residential

The Rural Residential land use designation applies to lands located outside the Urban Area where rural residential development has taken place, or approval for development has been granted. Permitted uses range from single-detached dwellings, groups homes, home occupations and accessory buildings primarily on larger lots with sustainable private services.

Environmental

Environmental Conservation

Lands subject to the Environmental Conservation policies are generally comprised of areas designated as Environmental Conservation include Locally Significant Natural Areas, Locally Significant Wetlands, Woodlands, in some cases Valleylands, Meadows, and Rehabilitation Areas, which include corridor and linkages. Development is generally not permitted within areas subject to the Environmental Conservation policies. Development is generally not contemplated by the Environmental Conservation policies.

Environmental Protection

Lands subject to the Environmental Protection policies are represented by the identified presence of Provincially Significant Wetland Areas, Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest, the Habitat of, Threatened, and Endangered Species, Species of Special Concern and Natural Hazard areas. These lands are generally protected from incompatible development, with permitted land uses including low-intensity uses such as conservation activities, forestry, fish, and wildlife management, and passive recreational uses, for example.

2.3.2.2 Community Area Policies

Community Areas are the areas within the Town’s Urban Boundary that are designated for most residential, mixed-use and institutional uses. These are the areas where most of the housing required to accommodate the forecasted population will be located, as well as a significant amount of population-related jobs, and office jobs. Community Areas are contrast with Employment Areas which are characterized by industrial development.

The Official Plan seeks to achieve “strong, liveable and healthy communities comprising interconnected vibrant neighbourhoods” (Policy 2.3.3 (a)). It is noted that the Plan seeks to recognize and maintain the identities of the various communities within Fort Erie while facilitating economic growth. Within neighbourhoods, the Plan seeks to promote a “compact orderly urban structure that links institutional, recreational, commercial, natural features and employment resources” [Neighbourhood Goals – 2.3.3 (a)].

2.3.2.3 Employment Lands Policies

The Town of Fort Erie aims to promote diverse employment opportunities, enhance economic potential, and improve residents’ quality of life. Key objectives of the Town’s Employment Lands policies include facilitating infrastructure and services; supporting designated business districts and fostering commercial and industrial growth. The Official Plan also emphasizes efficient resource use and seeks to promote economic revitalization by attracting new businesses to the main commercial areas.

2.3.2.4 Rural and Agricultural Area Policies

There is a significant agricultural land base in the Town of Fort Erie that needs to be protected through a robust land use planning framework. The stated objective of the existing Official Plan is “to protect and preserve the prime agricultural land for long term use by the agricultural industry”. This aligns with direction from the Province and the Region. In addition to agricultural uses, the existing policy framework may permit “agriculture-related uses, secondary uses, value added uses and public utilities”. Section 3 of this report discusses the need to align these secondary permissions with policy direction from the Province and Region regarding on-farm diversified uses agricultural areas.

2.3.2.5 Natural Heritage

It is an objective of the Town’s current Official Plan to protect, conserve, maintain, and where possible restore, natural heritage features. This is outlined in Section 2.3.9 of the current Official Plan. Natural Heritage policies are outlined in Section 8 of the current Official Plan. Section 8 provides policy for the

protection of Fort Erie’s Natural Heritage Features and Natural Hazards. Natural Heritage Features are shown on Schedule A to the current Official Plan. Schedule C provides additional details, showing elements such as Provincially Significant Wetlands and Woodlands over two hectares. All Secondary Plans included in the Official Plan also have separate Natural Heritage policies. These are primarily contemplated in Section 4 of the current Official Plan.

The Town is required to update the Official Plan to be consistent with and conform to policies in the Niagara Region Official Plan and the PPS 2020. Section 3 includes additional detail with respect to the changes required to the current Official Plan to ensure conformity and consistency.

2.3.2.6 Climate Change

While an explicit discussion about climate change is absent from the current Official Plan, there is policy direction that aligns with more recent direction from the Town regarding climate change and sustainability. For example, Town Council’s current strategic objective states the Town of Fort Erie will be, “A community that addresses climate change and the impacts to the natural environment by proactive planning and action.” Strategies identified by the Town to action this objective includes directions that align with policies in the current Official Plan. Examples of these actions and alignment with the current Official Plan are identified below:

- **Policies that preserve and enhance natural heritage.** Many of the Secondary Plans included in the current Official Plan contain policies and land use schedules for natural heritage. Section 8 in the current Official Plan provides policies for the protection of the Town’s natural heritage features and natural hazards.
- **Secure and preserve the waterfront, natural heritage, and natural areas through stewardship and/or acquisition.** The current Official Plan supports voluntary efforts for stewardship and restoration in support of related targets for wetland and forest cover, for example. The Town also supports landowner stewardship through the development of Woodland Management Plans, planting of native vegetation, and direction for the implementation of tree by-laws.
- **Recognize and protect natural heritage corridors.** The current Official Plan references the Niagara Region Official Plan for policy direction related to natural heritage corridors.
- **Shoreline protection and stormwater management through infrastructure investments.** There is some policy direction for the provision of municipal services, such as stormwater infrastructure.

These policies are further discussed in Section 3 of this Background Report as they relate to gaps and opportunities in the current Official Plan regarding natural heritage and infrastructure services.

The Town’s broader vision for promoting intensification, compact communities and a multi-modal transportation system also form part of the Town’s response to a changing climate. Policies that promote intensification may reduce the need for expansions of the urban area, thereby preserving agricultural lands and contributing to the long-term protection of the natural environment in Fort Erie. Further, a growth management strategy that focuses on developing compact communities connected by a multi-modal transportation system contributes to a long-term shift away from dependency on private vehicle usage and towards more sustainable modes of transportation.

Overall, there is an opportunity for the Official Plan to be updated to implement a policy framework that incorporates adaptation, resiliency and mitigation strategies for the Town. At a minimum, the Official Plan must provide direction for the Town to achieve its legislative requirements with respect to addressing and planning for the impacts of a changing climate.

2.3.3 Transportation Master Plan and Active Transportation Master Plan

As part of the Niagara 2041 Growth Strategy, the Region developed a Transportation Master Plan (TMP) to set a strategic vision for the next 25 years. The TMP also sets three strategic priorities focusing on economic development, supporting growth, and improving the Region's position globally. The primary goal of the TMP is to improve the existing transportation system and to ensure that the movement of people and goods is efficient and enhanced as the Region continues to evolve and grow. Acknowledging six key trends and five strategic priorities, the TMP sets an overarching vision that "In 2041, Niagara Region will be supported by a transportation network that will help establish Niagara as a leader in: building, preserving and enhancing liveable communities; economic development; tourism; sustainable transportation practices; and the emerging shared economy."

The Niagara Region TMP was used to inform the development of the Regional Official Plan and, as a result, also informs the development of transportation policies in lower-tier municipalities. It is integral that transportation and land use plans complement one another and address the challenges and opportunities of the Region. These plans can collectively help achieve social, environmental, and economic goals.

The TMP sets out seven goals for the Region, including integrating transportation and land use; supporting economic development; enhancing multi-modal connectivity; improving options for sustainable modes of transportation; maintaining and improving the efficiency of the goods movement network; promoting the development of healthy communities; and developing a realistic and innovative blueprint for implementation. Based on these goals and an analysis of the most critical needs and opportunities, the Region identified four themes:

1. Transportation as a Catalyst for Change
2. Connecting the Region
3. Meeting the Needs of Residents;
4. Taking Advantage of New Technologies

Chapter 5 of the Niagara Region TMP focuses on implementing a Complete Streets Approach. The Complete Streets approach supports Smart Growth and recognizes the importance of integrating transportation planning, land use planning, and urban design. Focusing on Policy and Design (5.1) and Accessibility (5.2), the Region provides opportunities and supporting strategies that can be implemented to achieve the overarching goals and vision. Chapter 6, Transportation Choice, outlines opportunities to enhance and improve travel choices, including subchapters on Active Transportation, Public Transit, the Road Network, and Transportation Demand and Systems Management. While Chapter 7 focuses on Goods Movement to ensure the efficient movement of freight throughout the Region and support economic growth. Lastly, Chapter 8 on Implementation is critical as it sets out a

timeline and phasing for the TMP, defines key performance indicators, and sets a framework for evaluating and monitoring progress.

2.3.4 Growth Management and Housing Needs Assessment

In 2024, Parcel Economics Inc. concluded the comprehensive Growth Management & Housing Needs Assessment ("the Assessment") for the Town of Fort Erie. The Assessment offers an in-depth exploration of growth management, affordable housing, trends influencing land use planning, and housing affordability. The primary objective is to discern existing housing gaps and propose policy tools to address them.

According to the Niagara Region Official Plan, Fort Erie is projected to accommodate 48,050 residents, 18,430 jobs, and 21,510 households by 2051. The anticipated housing mix, encompassing 7,360 new units from 2021 to 2051, is projected to comprise 55% singles/semis, 37% row housing, and 8% apartments (rental and ownership). The Assessment emphasizes the necessity for implementing supportive zoning and policies favouring higher-density housing. While affordable and social housing falls within regional jurisdiction, the Town can enact supportive policies and formulate plans to address housing provision and residents' needs. Given that 37% of the population is aged 60 and above, the Assessment outlines the needs of an aging population, recommending alternative housing types such as smaller, accessible apartment units, seniors housing, and long-term care facilities.

The analysis also showed that Fort Erie experienced an increase in the number of residents aged 0-9. The Town should ensure that student accommodation planning, such as child care services, schools, and community services, are provided for the community's youth. This is consistent with the analysis produced by the District School Board of Niagara in their "Long Term Accommodation Plan 2023-2032". The School Board analysis predicts growing enrollment in all elementary schools in Fort Erie through the year 2032 and a need for extra capacity in the Town's schools.⁴

Highlighting Fort Erie's predominant trend of home ownership (80% of households), the Assessment identifies a notable gap in rental housing options. Through the Housing Needs Assessment, Parcel outlines four primary gaps in the Fort Erie housing market: affordable housing (ownership and rental), purpose-built rental housing, smaller housing units, and seniors housing & long-term care. Recommendations include setting an affordable housing target, defining attainable housing, offering financial incentives, and implementing land use planning policies supporting affordable housing typologies.

With regards to employment land planning, the Niagara Region Official Plan designates two core employment areas in Fort Erie: the Stevensville Industrial Cell (FE-1) and the Bridgeburg Rail Zone (FE-3). The International Peace Bridge Trade Hub (FE-2) is also recognized as a dynamic employment area. In alignment with the Niagara OP, the Town must meet the 2051 Land Needs Assessment (LNA) requirement of an additional 165 hectares of employment area land. Fulfilling this requirement necessitates the Town redesignating lands through an Official Plan Amendment (OPA). The additional employment area lands have been added to the "International Peace Bridge Trade Hub" (FE-2) in the Niagara Official Plan and are locally known as the Bowen-West QEW Employment Expansion Area.

⁴ District School Board of Niagara (DBSN). "Long-Term Accommodation Plan 2023-2032". p. 77.

2.3.5 2023 Development Charges Background Study

In March 2024, the Town passed a new Development Charges By-law. The new by-law and the updated rates for development charges were supported by a Development Charges Background Study, as required by the Development Charges Act. The Background Study prepared development growth forecasts based on Niagara Region's Official Plan and used those forecasts to determine the increased needs for services arising from development, as well as the costs associated with providing the increased services. The OPR will undertake a similar assessment of the Town's needs as it allocates density and growth to different areas of Fort Erie. It will be important to coordinate with the growth forecasts prepared in the Development Charges Background Study in order to ensure consistency across all of the Town's planning documents.

2.4 Summary of Inputs, Documents, and Other Drivers

Since the Fort Erie Official Plan was approved in 2011, significant Provincial policy and legislative changes have occurred. The Town has also advanced its own planning and updated various strategies and initiatives. This Official Plan Review must consider the updated Provincial and local direction as it develops a vision for future land use in the Town.

The most notable provincial changes are the various amendments to the *Planning Act*, the PPS 2020, and PPS 2024, which would establish an update provincial land use planning framework during this review.

3 Policy Gaps, Conflicts, and Opportunities

The purpose of Section 3 is to identify the major policy gaps, opportunities for new policies, and potential conflicts between the Town’s current Official Plan and recent Provincial/Regional policy, as well as other Town-led master plans and studies. This section builds on the review of inputs and policy drivers completed in Section 2.

3.1 Policy Review

The following table characterizes existing policies of the Fort Erie Official Plan, identifies the key issue, conflict or gap, and summarizes the key policy and legislative drivers and resources to address this issue, conflict, or gap. Through this process, the project team will develop a list of priority policy changes and issues to be discussed further with the Region, Province and relevant agencies.

The table is organized by key thematic areas within the Official Plan. Further gaps and opportunities may be identified and added through the final iteration of this Report. Phase 2 of the OPR project will involve drafting new and updated policies based on the gaps and opportunities identified in this section.

For convenience purposes, the following is a list of acronyms used in the analysis:

- PPS 2020 means the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020

PPS 2024 means the proposed draft Provincial Planning Statement, 2024

- Growth Plan means ‘A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2019’ as further amended by Amendment 1 (2020).
- ROP means the Niagara Region Official Plan

The issues, conflicts, or gaps identified fall into one of three categories:

- Issues, conflicts or gaps that **must** be addressed to conform to or implement Provincial and Regional policies;
- Issues, conflicts or gaps that **should** be addressed to implement best and emerging practices; and
- Issues, conflicts or gaps that **could** be addressed to be innovative or respond to the local context in Fort Erie.

3.1.1 Overall Structure of the Official Plan

The structure of the current Official Plan is outlined in Section 2.3.2 of this Background Review Report – it is noted that the current Plan contains text-heavy chapters and minimal use of visual elements. Moreover, navigating the Official Plan is currently not user-friendly, as there are hundreds of pages of site-specific and secondary plan policies embedded within the chapters. Notably, Chapter 4 – Land Use Plan and Policies contains over one-hundred sub-sections that are specific to the Town’s Secondary Plans and Site-Specific Areas. Through the OPR, the Town has an opportunity to rethink how the Official Plan is structured, organized, and presented. This is further discussed in Section 4.1 of this Report. In particular, the Town may consider reorganizing and restructuring the Official Plan to move the Site-Specific Policy Areas and Secondary Plans to a new, independent section in the Official Plan.

There are comparable examples of other municipalities locating these policies in a separate, standalone section towards the end of an Official Plan. For example, the City of Toronto Official Plan dedicates the final two chapters of its Official Plan to Secondary Plans and Area Specific Policies. The City of Brampton takes a similar approach in their new Official Plan where Secondary Plans are retained in a separate part of the document.

It is recommended that the Town consider a refreshed, streamlined approach to structuring the Official Plan in a manner that is user friendly and implementable for Town staff, the general public, and other interested parties involved in land use planning matters.

3.1.2 Table of Policy Gaps

Table 5: Policy Issues, Conflicts, and Opportunities Assessment

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
Agriculture			
Agricultural System and Agri Food Network	Section 4.5 address agricultural policies. Section 4.6 Rural polices and Section 4.7 Rural residential policies.	Update policies to address the Agricultural System (PPS) and the Agricultural Land Base (NROP) and Agri-food Network including objectives. Schedule A Land Use is to be updated to reflect the Agricultural Land Base Schedule F of the NROP.	PPS 2020 Niagara Region Official Plan
Prime Agricultural Areas	Agricultural lands are defined as prime agricultural lands.	Update the agricultural policies that specifically relate to Prime Agricultural Areas, including permitted uses, new land uses, lot creation and lot adjustments, removal of land from Prime Agricultural Areas, non-agricultural uses, agricultural-related uses and on-farm diversified uses, including reference to Provincial Guidelines for criteria, Additional Residential Units (ARUs) and mineral extraction.	PPS 2020 Niagara Region Official Plan

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
Definitions	Definitions are embedded in policies.	<p>Add definitions including agricultural condition, agricultural system, agri-food network, agri-tourism, agriculture related uses, on farm diversified uses, prime agriculture areas, urban agriculture.</p> <p>Expand current agricultural uses to include those in PPS.</p>	<p>PPS 2020 Niagara Region Official Plan</p>
Agricultural, agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses	Agriculture policies contains references to value-add uses.	Update the policies to type of uses permitted. For agriculture - related uses include policy for commercial and farm-related industrial uses/services that support farm operations. For on-farm diversified uses, include a policy relating to home occupations, home industries and agritourism.	<p>PPS 2020 Niagara Region Official Plan</p>
Land use compatibility and minimize potential impacts to Agricultural lands	MDS policies are included to address land use compatibility.	Update policies to discuss adjacent lands and identifying when an agricultural impact assessment is required.	<p>PPS 2020 Niagara Region Official Plan</p>

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
Rural Lands and Rural Residential	Section 4.6. and 4.7 contains policies regarding rural lands and rural residential respectively, including permitted uses including agriculture, secondary agriculture uses and value-added uses.	Update the policies to reflect the agricultural system and include policies that address management or use of resources, resource based recreational uses, lot creation, agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses, on-farm diversified uses and normal farm practices, home occupations and home industries, and non-agricultural uses such as residential development and other rural land uses including cemeteries. Add policy to address minimizing land use conflicts in rural lands.	PPS 2020 Niagara Region Official Plan
Urban Agriculture	No existing policies.	New policies that address promoting healthy communities by permitting urban agriculture, rooftop and community gardens supporting the agri-food network within the settlement areas. Promoting local food and food security is also an important policy direction to address climate change.	PPS 2020 Growth Plan Niagara Region Official Plan

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
Development and site alteration in adjacent lands outside of the Natural Heritage System	Not applicable. The current Official Plan does not contemplate this.	Add policies within the Natural Heritage section of the Official Plan to address minimum buffers for site alteration between new buildings and structures for agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses or on-farm diversified uses; and permitting new and expanding agricultural uses, on-farm diversified uses within the mapped linkages.	PPS 2020 Niagara Region Official Plan
Cultural Heritage			
Updating Official Plan Cultural Heritage Policies	Language and terminology associated with Cultural Heritage in the Purpose and Goals, all secondary plan areas, and Cultural Heritage (Section 11) sections.	Update policies and terms to match the PPS 2020, the <i>Planning Act</i> , and the <i>Ontario Heritage Act</i> . There are several terms to be defined or refined including but not limited to: built heritage resources, cultural heritage landscapes, conservation, and significant archaeological resources, municipal heritage committee. Greater focus is needed for the protecting existing cultural heritage resources when a new	Cultural Heritage Policies must comply with the <i>Planning Act</i> and <i>Ontario Heritage Act</i> , be consistent with the PPS 2020, and conform with the Niagara Region Official Plan.

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
		<p>development or site alteration is proposed.</p> <p>Update discussion regarding moveable artifacts.</p> <p>Update policies associated with the Municipal Register.</p>	
<p>Criteria to Determine Cultural Heritage Value or Interest of Provincial Significance</p>	<p>Ontario Regulations are not mentioned which prescribes criteria for determining cultural heritage value.</p>	<p>Update to include criteria to determine the cultural heritage value or interest of a property at a local level.</p>	<p><i>Ontario Heritage Act</i> refers to the prescribed criteria. The prescribed criteria are referenced in the Ontario Regulation 09/06 amended by Ontario Regulation 569/22.</p>
<p>Updated Processes for Designating and Listing Properties</p>	<p>Currently there are no references in the Official Plan associated with changes enacted by Bill 23, More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022</p>	<p>Add new policies regarding process requirements for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Listing properties on a municipal heritage register – Designation under the Ontario Heritage Act – Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs) 	<p>Bill 23, More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022, Schedule 6 – Amendments to the <i>Ontario Heritage Act</i>.</p>
<p>Ontario Heritage Toolkit and Standards and Provincial Guidelines for the Conservation</p>	<p>No specific reference to the Ontario Heritage Toolkit and Standards and Guidelines. Toolkit is mentioned on the</p>	<p>Add a reference to the Ontario Heritage Toolkit and Standards and Provincial Guidelines as part of resources for Cultural Heritage Resource evaluation</p>	<p>Support references made in Bill 23, More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022, Schedule 6 – Amendments to the <i>Ontario Heritage Act</i>.</p>

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
Properties (Standards & Guidelines)	Town's website under Heritage Planning.	and designation, which supplements the Ontario Regulation of 9/06 and as amended 569/22.	
Protection of adjacent cultural heritage resources	Permissive language and direction are provided for development and site alteration on lands adjacent to a cultural heritage resource.	Include stronger language to prohibit development or site alteration adjacent to cultural heritage resources except where the proposed development and site alteration has been evaluated and it has been demonstrated that the heritage attributes of the protected heritage property will be conserved.	PPS 2020
Archaeological Resources	Archaeological Resource section contains policies regarding identification and evaluation of archaeological sites and protocols for when an Archaeological Assessment is required. Moveable Heritage and Intangible Heritage Policies are procedural.	Update existing policies and including new policies regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Preparation of Archaeological management plans. – Preparation of a cultural plan. – Indigenous Engagement. 	PPS 2020 Niagara Region Official Plan

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Requirements for an Archaeological Impact Assessment. <p>Consider adding a policy that references the Archaeological Management Plan in place of the Moveable Heritage and Intangible Heritage policies for procedural requirements.</p>	
Development of Criteria for Heritage Impact Assessment	The Cultural Heritage section contains several policies associated with Heritage Impact Assessments.	<p>The requirements and criteria for impact assessments should be enhanced using the Ontario Heritage Tool Kit as a guideline.</p> <p>A detailed description of the contents of heritage impact assessment should be listed.</p>	Niagara Region Official Plan
Financial Incentives and implementation tools	The current Official Plan refers to financial incentive programs in various sections. The Heritage Planning webpage on the Town’s website refers to the Tax Rebate program,	Some incentives and implementation policies could be added, for example, HCD Façade Improvement Loan Program, HCD Building Code Upgrade Loan Program, HCD Rehabilitation Grant Program, HCD, piggyback with community improvement plans, heritage conservation easements, and	<i>Planning Act, Ontario Heritage Act</i> and Niagara Region Official Plan

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
		heritage property tax rebate programs.	
Sustainability in Heritage Conservation	Sustainability is mentioned in several secondary plans and other sections of the Official Plan. The Cultural Heritage section refers to heritage being a non-renewable resource.	An additional policy that refers to why and how employing wise use of cultural heritage resources in a sustainable manner e.g. by way of reuse and in the event of demolition (and actions for disposing material) helps the Town meet its sustainability goals.	PPS 2020
Property Standards By-law to include Cultural Heritage resources	Section 13.11 Minimum Standards of Maintenance and Occupancy By-law sets the appropriate standards.	The current policy does not include cultural heritage properties and should be included to prescribe minimum standards for the maintenance of the heritage attributes of heritage properties designated under Parts IV and V of the Act. This policy will help with cultural heritage resources going into disrepair.	Municipal Act and Best Practice
Public Realm and municipal services enhancing existing roads	Policies exist that speak to the public realm and roads rights-of-ways, day lighting triangles and corner rounding, and	Update existing policies to reflect best approaches regarding cultural heritage conservation and the public realm, municipal services,	Niagara Region Official Plan

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
	streetscapes specifically for Heritage Conservation Districts.	roads, streetscaping, and public works.	
Accessibility	Accessibility policies are found throughout the Official Plan.	As cultural heritage resources may be damaged by accessibility requirements, it is recommended that a policy is contained in the Cultural Heritage section to work with the municipal heritage advisory committee and AODA regulations to minimize impacts.	Best practice
Natural Heritage			
Secondary Plans	All Secondary Plans have separate Natural Heritage policies.	All Secondary Plans should have Natural Heritage policies that reflect the overarching Official Plan policies. Additional regulations can be listed per Secondary Plan Area rather than redefining policies per Secondary Plan.	Natural Heritage policies must comply with Regional and Provincial plans.
Environmental Protection Areas (EPA)	Include Provincially Significant Wetland Resource Areas, Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest, the Habitat of Threatened, and Endangered Species and Species of Special	Regional OP no longer uses the term EPA. Individual Natural Heritage System and Water Resource System components	Natural Heritage policies should comply with Regional OP and must comply with PPS 2020.

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
	Concern and Natural Hazard Areas, including Dune Protection Areas.	are grouped as a Natural Environment System. Fort Erie Official Plan may include local designations in addition to incorporating regional mapping & designations.	
Environmental Conservation Areas (ECA)	Include, Significant Natural Areas, Locally Significant Wetlands, as well as other woodlands and meadows.	Regional OP no longer uses the term ECA. Individual Natural Heritage System and Water Resource System components are grouped as a Natural Environment System. Fort Erie Official Plan may include local designations in addition to incorporating regional mapping & designations.	Natural Heritage policies should comply with Regional OP and must comply with PPS 2020.
Significant Wetlands	Grouped under EPA.	Current OP states “development and site alteration shall not be permitted <u>unless it has been demonstrated</u> that there will be no negative impacts to the wetlands features and their ecological functions.” Whereas the PPS 2020 states “development and site alteration	Natural Heritage policies must comply with PPS 2020.

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
		shall not be permitted in: a) significant wetlands in Ecoregions [7E].”	
Habitat of Endangered and Threatened Species	Provided in Section 8.2.3 of the current Official Plan.	<p>Refine text to include mandatory consultation with the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) regarding Species at Risk. Development and site alteration may only occur in accordance with provincial and federal requirements.</p> <p>Include minimum buffers and specify distance for adjacent lands as directed by Niagara ROP.</p> <p>Conservation Authorities do not have jurisdiction to permit SAR individual or habitat impact or removal.</p>	Natural Heritage policies must comply with PPS 2020 and <i>Endangered Species Act</i> .
Growth Management			
Intensification	Current Official Plan policies defer to “Provincial and Regional growth management initiatives” to encourage the intensification and	Provincial and Regional direction has a strong focus on promoting intensification.	Niagara Region Official Plan PPS 2020

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
	redevelopment of existing urban areas.	<p>The Region has established a residential intensification target of 50% for the Town.</p> <p>There is a need to identify “intensification corridors” and “intensification nodes” within the Town’s Urban Structure in order to achieve the target.</p>	
Designated Greenfield Areas	<p>Current Official Plan defers to the Growth Plan for discussion of density targets for Designated Greenfield Areas.</p> <p>The text does not state what the density target is for Fort Erie.</p>	<p>The Niagara Region Official Plan sets a minimum density target of 50 residents and jobs combined per hectare when measured across all Designated Greenfield Areas.</p> <p>Fort Erie will be expected to integrate this minimum density target into the Official Plan and ensure that new greenfield developments in the Town contribute to its achievement.</p>	Niagara Region Official Plan
Employment			
Core Employment Areas and Dynamic Employment Areas	Policy 4.10 designates some areas as “Industrial-Business Park”	The Niagara Region Official Plan uses terms such as “Core employment areas” and “Dynamic Employment Areas. New term should be applied to	Niagara Region Official Plan

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
		<p>the Fort Erie Official Plan, provided Schedule G (a map required for conformity) uses this term.</p> <p>Schedule “A” also requires revision.</p>	
<p>Illustrating Core employment areas and dynamic employment areas</p>	<p>Current documents and Schedules do not use the same terminology as the Niagara Region Official Plan.</p>	<p>Section 4.2.1.8 of the Niagara Region Official Plan notes: “Local Area Municipalities shall map employment areas shown on Schedule G in Local official plans”.</p> <p>Schedule G identifies “Core” and “Dynamic” employment areas in Fort Erie</p>	<p>Niagara Region Official Plan</p>
<p>Employment Targets</p>	<p>The current Official Plan does not include employment density targets.</p>	<p>Section 4.2.1.10 of the Niagara Region Official Plan states, “Employment area minimum density targets established in this Plan shall be implemented in Local official plans and zoning-by-laws, and used to promote employment development and</p>	<p>To conform with the Niagara Region Official Plan, the Town needs to include employment density targets, employment targets, and minimum Density targets from the Region’s Official Plan.</p>

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
		<p>redevelopment that supports achievement of the target.</p> <p>Fort Erie employment target of 18,430 by 2051.</p> <p>Table 4-2 “Employment Area Minimum Density Targets to 2051” includes 3 areas in Fort Erie.</p>	
Redesignating lands to non-employment uses	<p>Policy 4.10.V of the existing Official Plan notes that: “re-designation of lands within the core of the Industrial designation to accommodate non-employment uses may only be permitted by comprehensive review where it has been demonstrated that the land is not required for employment purposes over the long term and that there is a need for the conversion in accordance with the Niagara Region Growth Management Strategy and the Provincial Growth Plan.”</p>	<p>In section 1.2.5.1 of the Niagara Region Official Plan, it is noted that “Any proposed redevelopment of non-employment uses on employment land, outside of employment areas, shall retain space for a similar number of jobs to remain accommodated on site.”</p> <p>Information about maintaining a similar number of jobs should be incorporated.</p>	Niagara Region Official Plan
Planning Tools for Land Use Compatibility	<p>The existing Official Plan does not address this.</p>	<p>Section 4.2.1.12 of the Niagara Region Official Plan states that, “Local Area Municipalities shall</p>	Niagara Region Official Plan PPS 2020

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
		<p>use planning tools identified in policies 4.2.4.2 and 4.2.4.3 to achieve land use compatibility between employment areas and non-employment lands”.</p> <p>The Official Plan may be updated to be consistent with the language of PPS 2020 and the ROP which states that compatibility will be determined “in accordance with Provincial guidelines, standards and procedures”.</p>	
Redevelopment of Employment Lands	Not addressed Town-wide; protecting the ability to expand is referenced in Southend Secondary Plan.	Section 4.2.5.3 of the Niagara Region Official Plan states, “The Region and Local Area Municipalities shall discourage any redevelopment of employment land that may restrict the ability for nearby existing or planned employment uses to operate or expand”.	Niagara Region Official Plan
Intensification of Employment Lands	The existing Official Plan does not address this.	Section 4.2.4.9 of the Niagara Region Official Plan states, “Local Area Municipalities	Niagara Region Official Plan

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
		<p>should encourage intensification on designated employment lands, where appropriate, through zoning and economic development initiatives, including: a. expansion to employment uses and/or land operations; and b. reuse of buildings and infrastructure for new employment uses”.</p>	
<p>Rural Employment and Rural Employment Lands</p>	<p>Not applicable. The current Official Plan does not contemplate this. There are no designated Rural Employment Lands.</p>	<p>Section 4.2.7.1 of the Niagara Region Official Plan states “The Region and Local Area Municipalities should support rural employment within rural settlements by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. ensuring sufficient rural employment land is available to accommodate forecasted employment within rural settlements; b. providing opportunities for rural employment clusters and more intensive rural employment uses within rural settlements to build synergies; 	<p>Niagara Region Official Plan</p>

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
		<p>c. supporting rural character and community, and leveraging rural amenities and assets; and d. using rural infrastructure and public service facilities efficiently.</p> <p>Additionally, Section 2.2.3.4 states, “A portion of rural employment is to be planned within rural settlements to support the surrounding agricultural community. Local Area Municipalities should ensure that adequate lands are available for rural employment within rural settlement boundaries to satisfy long-term needs and support the rural economy”.</p>	
Criteria for Redeveloping Employment Lands to Non-Employment Uses	These criteria are currently not available in the Official Plan	Policy 4.2.5.2 of the Niagara Region Official Plan notes that: “Local official plans may contain criteria for employment land redevelopment to non-employment uses outside of an employment area. If Local criteria are unavailable, the	Niagara Region Official Plan

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
		Region and Local Area Municipalities may use the Region’s Employment Land Redevelopment Criteria Guideline identified in Appendix”	
Infrastructure and Servicing			
Extending Municipal Services	Policy 12.1 (VI) of the existing Official Plan notes that: “The inclusion of lands within an urban area shall not be considered as any commitment by Niagara Region or the Town to provide municipal services within the time period of this Plan to any area not currently serviced”	This approach does not reflect an integrated approach to land use & infrastructure planning. Suggest revising this policy to better emphasize the fact that lands shall not be added into the Urban Settlement Areas without considering long term servicing plans. It is recommended that more clear direction for the development of infrastructure on Natural Features is contemplated by the policy.	Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe – Policy 3.2.1.1
Lots on Private Sanitary and Water Services	Policy 12.4 (I) of the existing Official Plan notes that: “New private communal systems are prohibited”	Does not clearly align with PPS 2020 servicing hierarchy. Suggest revising to mirror the PPS servicing hierarchy and clarify circumstances where	PPS 2020 – Policies 1.6.6.2, 1.6.6.3, 1.6.6.4, 1.6.6.5

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
		partial services or private communal systems may be permitted.	
Stormwater Management	Section 12.5 – Stormwater Management is focused on the provision of storm sewer facilities (i.e., hard infrastructure) but does not adequately consider the potential to integrate green infrastructure in order to limit peak flows.	The section related to Stormwater Management is missing clear references to Low-Impact Development / green infrastructure. The Growth Plan, PPS, and Niagara Region all require consideration of green infrastructure.	Niagara Region Water and Wastewater Master Servicing Plan – Section 5.3: Wet Weather Management Strategy Growth Plan – Section 3.2.7 PPS 2020 – Policy 1.6.6.7 (c)
Climate Change			
Climate Projections	There is no policy in the current Official Plan referencing Regional and/or local climate projections, and the relationship to land use planning.	The Niagara Region Official Plan directs the Region and the local municipalities to consider climate change projections in the preparation of land use plans, policies, and strategies.	Growth Plan Policy 4.2.10.2 Niagara Region Official Plan Policy 3.5.1.10
Climate Change Mitigation	There are no policies in the current Official Plan that are explicitly tied to climate change mitigation, including greenhouse gas emission reduction targets or strategies.	Municipalities are required to apply the policies of the Growth Plan and the PPS, 2020 to support the achievement of complete communities that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.	PPS, 2020 Policy 1.8.1 Growth Plan Policies 2.2.1.4 f), 4.2.10.1, and 4.2.10.2 Niagara Region Official Plan Policy 3.5.1.11 a)

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
		Niagara Region encourages local municipalities to develop and maintain greenhouse gas inventories, establish emission reduction targets, and develop strategies to reduce emissions and monitor progress.	
Climate Change Adaptation	There are no policies in the current Official Plan that are explicitly tied to climate change adaptation.	Through the Growth Plan, the Province requires municipalities to develop policies in their Official Plans to address climate change adaptation goals and build resilience, as appropriate. The	PPS, 2020 Policy 1.8.1 Growth Plan Policies 2.2.1.4 f), 4.2.10.1, and 4.2.10.2 Niagara Region Official Plan Policy 3.5.1.11 b)
Reducing Private Automobile Dependence	Section 2.3.5 in the current Official Plan states reduced need for private automobiles in residential areas is a primary goal for Residential land use designations.	There is an opportunity to strengthen policies that reduce dependence on the automobile, supporting existing and planned transit and active transportation to address climate change adaptation and mitigation.	PPS 2020 Policy 1.8.1 b) Growth Plan Policy 4.2.10.1 b) Niagara Region Official Plan Policies 5.1.3.1 and 6.2.1.2
Infrastructure Risks and Vulnerabilities	The current Official Plan does not contain policy direction for the Town to assess infrastructure risks and vulnerabilities, including those	The Official Plan must include policy direction for the Town to assess infrastructure risks and vulnerabilities, including those caused by the impacts of climate change. The Town is	Niagara Region Official Plan Policy 5.2.1.10 PPS 202 Policy 1.6.1 Growth Plan Policy 2.2.10.1 c)

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
	caused by the impacts of a changing climate.	also required to identify actions and investments to address these changes through a tool such as an asset management plan.	
Consultation and Engagement in Planning for Climate Change	There is no policy in the current Official Plan guiding and/or directing the Town to engage with Indigenous communities when planning for various elements of land use planning, including climate change and sustainability.	The Province requires municipalities to engage with Indigenous communities when contemplating land use planning matters. Niagara Region requires local municipalities to include policies to support consultation and engagement with Indigenous communities when planning for a range of topics. Introducing this type of policy is required for local conformity.	PPS 2020 Policy 1.2.2. Growth Plan Policies 5.2.3.4 and 5.2.3.7 Niagara Region Official Plan Policy 7.11.1.3
Additional Considerations			
Active Transportation	Policies of the Secondary Plans broadly contemplate the promotion of active transportation and multi-modal infrastructure.	It is recommended that policies be established in the Official Plan provide express direction for active transportation and multi-modal policies. This is broadly consistent with the Provincial and Region land use planning policy direction.	PPS 2020 policy 1.1.3.2.e) Growth Plan Policies 3.2.3.4 Niagara Region Official Plan Policy 5.1.d)

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
Transit	Section 2.3.13 of the current Official Plan sets goals and objectives for public transportation. The objectives include encouraging public participation and citizen involvement in developing the Official Plan and transportation plans.	There is an opportunity to provide additional policy direction regarding the provision of transit that is sustainable, fiscally responsible, and balances the needs of the Town, and supports the Region’s long-term objective to establish a connected public transit network.	PPS 2020 policy 1.6.7.3, 1.6.7.4 Growth Plan Policies 3.2.3.1, 3.2.3.2f), 9) Niagara Region Official Plan Policy 5.1
Urban Design	Section 5.6 of the current Official Plan recognizes the importance of Urban Design in the planning process. This Section sets out general policies for urban character, residential development, heritage resources, and development patterns. The current OP also guides Streetscapes (Section 5.6.2), and Buildings and Public Spaces (Section 5.6.3).	The policies of 5.6 will need to be assessed against contemporary best practice and for conformity with the ROP, to develop policies that provide direction for encouraging a sense of place and promoting well-designed built form. This includes policies providing direction on the achieving built-form outcomes are responsive to a changing climate.	PPS 2020 policy 1.7.1.e) Growth Plan Policies 1.2.1 Niagara Region Official Plan Policy 6.2
Community Planning Permit System	Community Planning Permit System (CPPS) is a tool afforded to municipalities under the <i>Planning Act</i> to approve certain types of development	The current Official Plan does not contain enabling policies for a CPPS. The updated Official Plan may establish enabling policies to provide the Town an	CPPS is a tool afforded to municipalities under the Planning Act that may streamline approvals of certain development applications in some land use contexts. This has

Topic	Existing Policy Characterization	Issue, Conflict, or Gap	Key Policy & Legislative Drivers and Resources
	<p>applications. CPPS is regarded as a more streamlined, efficient, and flexible tool in certain land use contexts. Pursuant to the <i>Planning Act</i>, a municipality must have enabling policies established by the Official Plan before a CPPS By-law may be enacted by Council.</p>	<p>opportunity to adopt a CPPS by-law in the future.</p>	<p>broad applicability in response to matters of Provincial interest as set forth in the Planning Act and PPS 2020, and in consideration of the land use planning policies of the Niagara Region Official Plan.</p>

4 Key Policy Recommendations

4.1 Approach to Updating the Official Plan

This OPR is intended to result in an updated Official Plan that satisfies the requirements for a Comprehensive Review set out in the PPS 2020. Building on the statutory requirements to update the Official Plan, this project provides the opportunity to reimagine a modern and forward-thinking Official Plan for the Town of Fort Erie.

There are two options for a municipality to consider when implementing the proposed policy changes through an OPR.

1. The first option involves preparing one or more Official Plan Amendment(s) which update, remove, and add policies throughout the Official Plan to implement the outcomes of the OPR.
2. The second approach involves developing an Official Plan for the Town which, once adopted by Council, would repeal and replace the current Official Plan with a new planning document.

At this time, it is recommended that the second approach be implemented by developing a new Official Plan, which would repeal and replace the Town's current Official Plan.

In addition to the required conformity changes required to the Official Plan, this approach also provides the opportunity to re-write, re-format, and update many of the other policies and non-operative sections throughout the Official Plan and streamline redundant policies.

4.2 An Updated Official Plan for the Town of Fort Erie

While the OPR requires a municipality to align its policies with direction from the Region and Province, it also presents an opportunity for the entire community to decide how it wants to grow and to think about what Fort Erie will look like in 30 years. This vision is then translated into policies that aim to influence the trajectory of the Town's growth and development. The updated Official Plan will aim to influence Fort Erie in the following ways:

Growth Management

1. The Niagara OP forecasts 48,050 residents in Fort Erie by 2051 which represents an increase of 15,230 residents from the 2021 population of 32,820 residents.
2. Growth in Fort Erie will be directed to areas within the Urban Boundary that are municipally serviced.
3. Future growth is recommended to be accommodated within the following land use designations:
 - Core Mixed-Use
 - Medium-High Density Residential

- Urban Residential
4. Schedule A: Fort Erie Land Use Plan will be updated to identify areas where more growth can be accommodated. This can include expanding the land use designations that permit greater density and identifying strategic areas when growth will be targeted.
 5. Modest residential intensification may be accommodated on lands within the 'low-density residential' designation. This will be achieved through infill development of vacant or underused lots, as well as additional residential units.

Housing

1. The Niagara OP forecasts an additional 7,360 housing units needed in Fort Erie from 2021 to 2051, with the following breakdown:
 - 55% singles/semis
 - 37% row housing
 - 8% apartment units (rental and ownership)
2. New Official Plan policies will create more opportunities for row housing and apartment buildings, which have not traditionally represented a significant portion of the housing mix in Fort Erie.
3. Revised Official Plan policies will support updates to the Town's Zoning By-law which currently only permits row housing in the RM1 Zone, and apartments in the RM2 Zone.
4. Enabling more housing in the existing built-up areas will accommodate future growth while protecting the natural environment and agricultural lands.

Employment

1. The Niagara OP forecasts an additional 7,900 jobs in Fort Erie between 2021 and 2051 for a total of 18,430 jobs, with the following breakdown:
 - 2,785 jobs in community areas
 - 4,600 jobs in employment areas
 - 515 jobs in rural areas
2. The Niagara Region Official Plan and Land Needs Assessment identified a need for an additional 165 hectares of employment land to accommodate job growth in to 2051.
 - The Fort Erie Official Plan will reflect the Delineated Built-Up Area(s) designated by the Niagara Official Plan and illustrated in Schedule B of the Niagara Official Plan.
3. Official Plan policies will protect industrial lands for manufacturing, logistics and similar land-intensive uses. Policy protections will provide the stability and predictability necessary for businesses to make long-term investments in Fort Erie.

4. Policies that encourage density and growth in the built-up areas of Fort Erie support vibrant, mixed-use neighbourhoods that create new employment opportunities.

Heritage

1. The Official Plan will recognize the Town's unique cultural heritage assets and strengthen the policies that conserve and protect them. Protecting and promoting the Town's cultural heritage can also provide additional economic opportunities in Fort Erie.
2. New policies will need to be added in order to emphasize the protection of cultural heritage resources when a development or site alteration is proposed.
3. Processed for evaluating, designating and protecting heritage resources will be clearly defined in the Official Plan. This can include adding defined terms or references to provincial standards and toolkits that must be used.

Transportation

1. Policies in the Official Plan will guide decisions about road width, which may take into consideration active transportation infrastructure, such as sidewalks and dedicated bicycle lanes, and how to accommodate a variety of transportation options throughout the Town.
2. The Official Plan will emphasize a 'complete streets' approach to transportation planning.
 - o This approach informs street designs that highlight the needs of vulnerable road users and allocate space accordingly.
3. Transportation planning will be integrated with land use planning and will inform decisions about growth management and neighbourhood design.
4. The Official Plan can be leveraged to advance other Town-led initiatives and promote mobility options that increase safety and accessibility for all residents.

Natural Heritage

1. A key focus of the revised policies will be protecting and enhancing Fort Erie's Natural Heritage System. Stronger policies will ensure that development will not negatively impact natural heritage features or the viability of the overall natural heritage system.
2. New policies in the Official Plan will integrate considerations about natural heritage with infrastructure planning. These new approaches will reduce hard infrastructure costs and help Fort Erie adapt to the effects of climate change.
3. Fort Erie will update its mapping of the Natural Heritage system in order to align with the Regional Official Plan and provincial mapping of the Natural Heritage System for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.
4. Policies in the Official Plan will protect natural heritage features in accordance with regional and provincial direction, including buffer areas and requirements for natural heritage evaluations.

Agriculture

1. Clear policies in the Official Plan will ensure that agricultural uses are protected from encroachment from non-compatible uses that could affect their viability.
2. Agricultural lands will be preserved while creating additional economic development opportunities by permitting on-farm diversified uses and agriculture-related uses.
 - New policies and defined terms will be added to the Official Plan in order to clarify direction regarding on-farm diversified uses and agriculture-related uses.
3. The Official Plan will revise requirements for Agriculture Impact Assessments in line with direction from the Province and Region.

4.3 Policy Development Principles

The overall approach to preparing Official Plan policies is to find the right balance between prescriptive policies and offering a degree of flexibility. The writing process for the Official Plan will be iterative in nature and input from the community, agencies, staff and Council will continue to inform policies. The following principles should guide the writing and approach to preparing and reviewing policies for the Official Plan.

Future-Thinking

The Official Plan should be written and structured to be a forward-thinking strategy which reflects the vision and goals of the community and Town. The Official Plan will be instrumental to guide and navigate future growth, investments, and decision-making in Fort Erie.

Flexibility and Criteria-Based

Policies should be written in a manner that is not overly prescriptive so they can remain appropriately flexible unless there is a need for specific, enforceable, and defensible policies and details. Policies should be criteria-based, which enables strategic decision making and flexibility allowing for detailed performance standards to be further explored and defined in the Town's Zoning By-law, or through Secondary Plan areas. This is contrasted with prescriptive policies which reference specific minimum and maximum numbers. As a general guideline, an Official Plan should not need to be amended, but should contemplate criteria to allow staff to evaluate a range of different scenarios.

Consistency

Throughout the document, repetition and cross references to other sections should be minimized where possible to improve readability and to ensure users do not miss important, relevant policies. A consistent writing style should be followed throughout the document. This style should yield policies that use plain language wherever possible and avoid the use of passive language, ensuring the intent of policy is clearly articulated and be easily interpreted.

5 Official Plan Review Next Steps

This Background Review Report is the final deliverable in Phase 1 of the OPR. The Report identifies and reviews key policy drivers and inputs that will be considered in Phase 2 – Policy Development.

The Draft Report will be circulated to a Technical Advisory Committee composed of subject matter experts from the Town, Region, and relevant agencies, who will provide feedback and comment. The Background Review Report will then be presented to the public and Town Council for consideration.

The project team will use the policy recommendations from this report, along with information received through public and agency consultation, to develop draft Official Plan policies in Spring and Summer 2024.

Appendix A

Growth Management and Housing Needs Assessment

Prepared By: Parcel Economics Inc.



Fort Erie

Growth Management & Housing Needs Assessment

February 12, 2024

Parcel



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Cover Image: Wikipedia



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1.0

Growth Management

1.1 Introduction

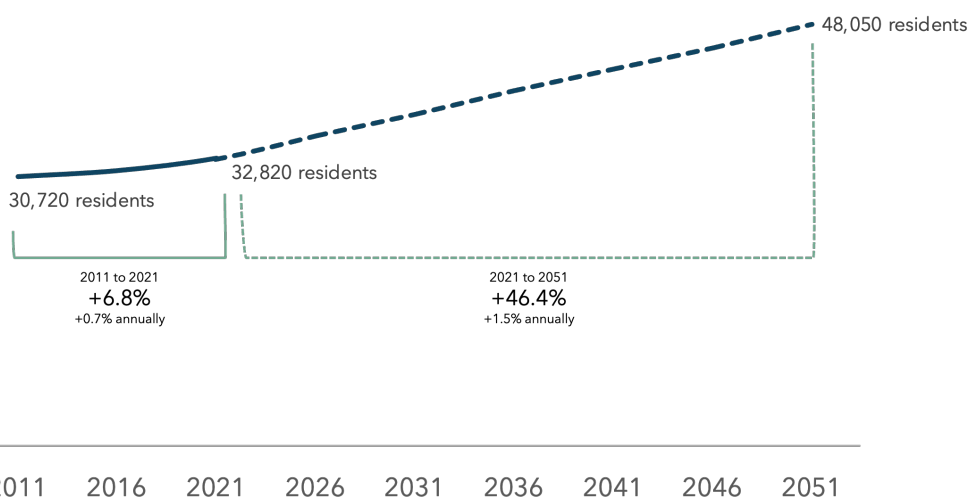
The recent *Niagara Official Plan 2051 Land Needs Assessment* (June 2022) (2051 LNA) and recently approved *Niagara Regional Official Plan* (Niagara OP) identify population, employment, and household growth forecasts for the Town of Fort Erie. This includes a 2051 target of 48,050 persons, 18,430 jobs and 21,510 households.

The purpose of this analysis is to rationalize these forecasts to assist in assessing the existing land use structure and designations in the Town and determine if they are appropriate for continued use in the new Official Plan.

1.2 Population Trends

The Niagara OP forecasts **48,050 residents** in Fort Erie by 2051 which represents **an increase of 15,230 residents** from the 2021 population of 32,820 residents. The Town would have to grow by **508 residents** or **1.5% annually** to achieve this forecast. For comparison, the Town grew by approximately 210 residents or 0.7% annually between 2011 and 2021.

Figure 1.1
Historical & Forecasted Population (2011 to 2051)

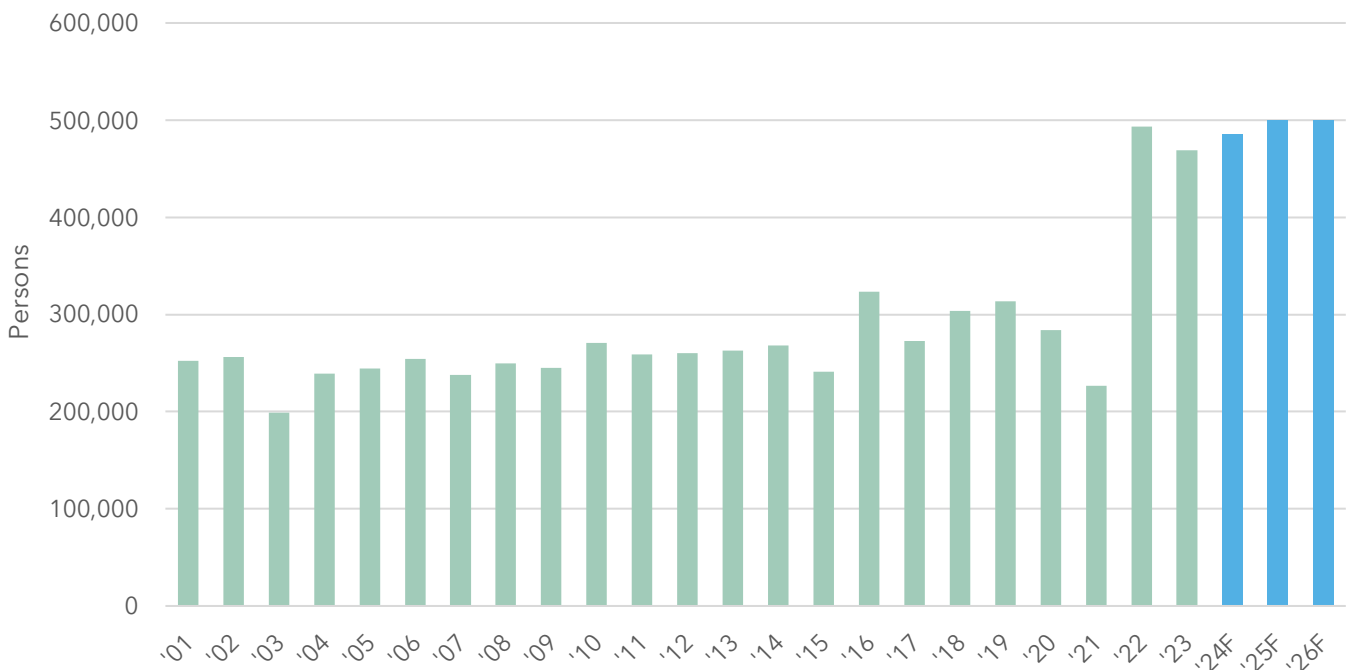


Source: Parcel, based on 2011, 2016, and 2021 Census data, and Niagara Region 2051 Land Needs Assessment.

In recent years the rate of immigration to Canada and the Federal immigration targets have increased substantially. This has resulted in Canada experiencing unprecedented population growth. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada welcomed approximately 260,000 international immigrants per year. The level of international immigration increased to 480,000 new residents per year between 2021 and 2023, with the Federal Government now targeting 500,000 international immigrants per year starting in 2024, as shown in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2

International Migration to Canada



Source: Parcel based on Statistics Canada (green) and Federal immigration targets (blue).

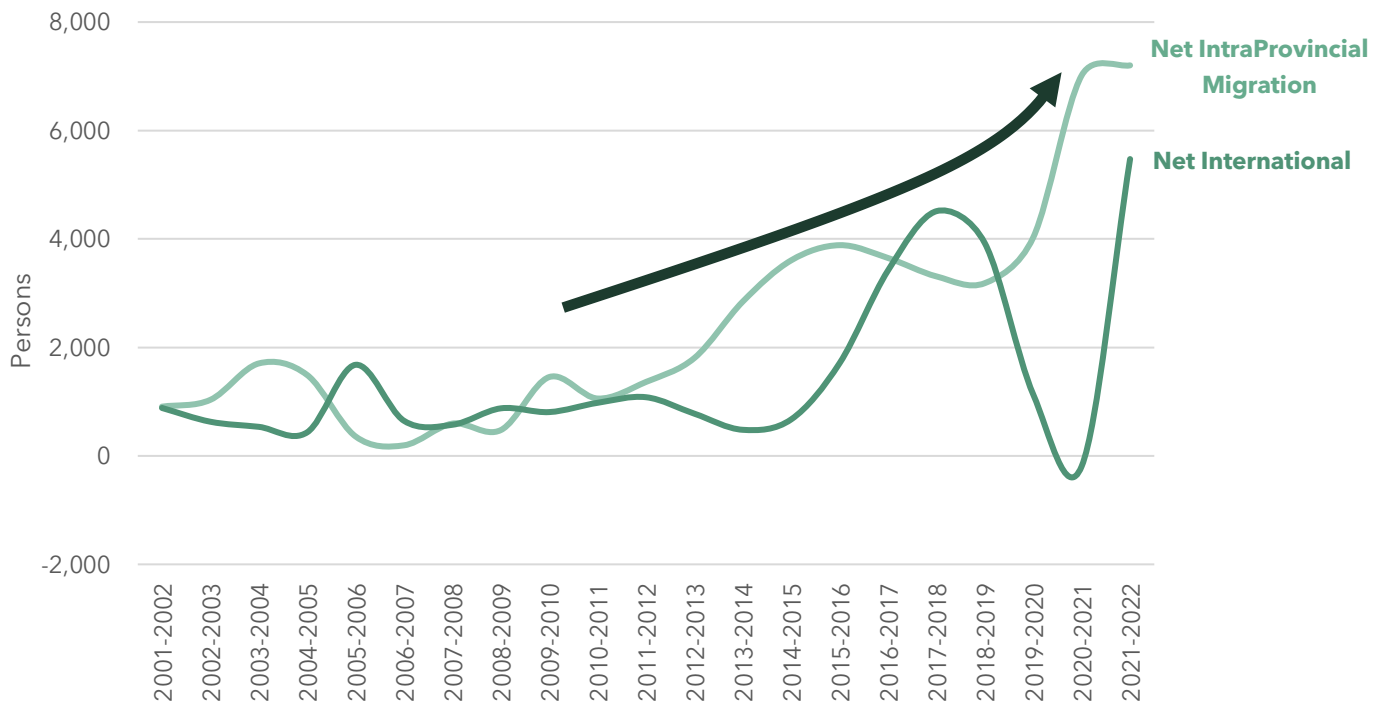
Increased migration to Canada is being felt in Niagara Region. As shown in Figure 1.3, net intra-provincial migration, which is people moving to Niagara Region from elsewhere in Ontario, accounted for the largest share of population growth and has been trending higher since 2010. Similarly, net international migration accounted for a growing share of population growth in the Region, aside from a dip in 2020 associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The nation-wide increase in international immigration in 2022 (as shown previously in Figure 1.2), also

resulted in an increase in net international migration to Niagara Region during the same period. The elevated international migration targets in Canada are likely to contribute towards elevated population growth in Niagara Region going forward and is supportive of the population growth forecasts allocated to Fort Erie.

In our view, the population forecasts in the 2051 LNA are reasonable.

Figure 1.3

Niagara Region, Net Intra-Provincial and International Migration



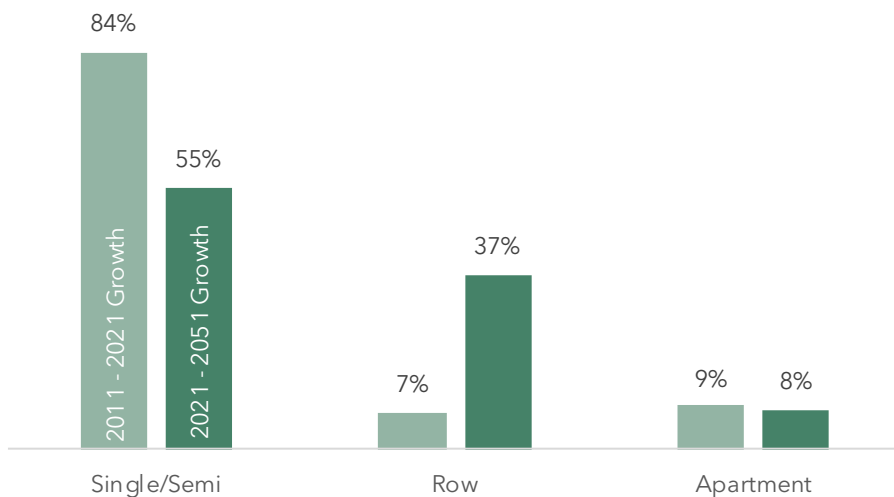
Source: Parcel based on Statistics Canada data.

1.3 Housing Market Trends

The Niagara OP forecasts an additional 7,360 housing units from 2021 to 2051. Of these, 55% are projected to be singles/semis, 37% are projected to be row housing, and 8% are projected to be apartment units (both rental and ownership).

Given historical development patterns favouring single- and semi-detached housing, these projections represent a significant change to the housing mix in Fort Erie. Row housing is projected to make up 37% of new housing units and would require approximately 91 new units of row housing annually to meet projections. For context, row housing accounted for 7% of housing stock growth between 2011 and 2021, or approximately 12 units annually.

Figure 1.4
Housing Unit Growth by Typology



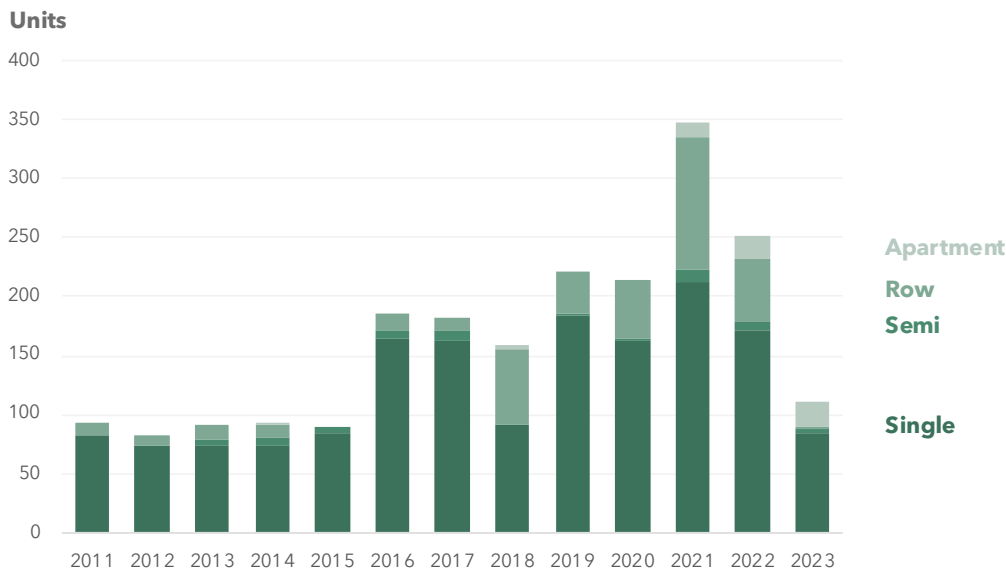
Source: Parcel, based on 2011, 2016, and 2021 Census data, and Niagara Region 2051 Land Needs Assessment.

There are some indications that a shift to row housing is already underway. Between Q3 2021 (i.e., following 2021 Census data collection) and Q3 2023 (i.e., the most recently available housing completion data), 67% of completions were singles/semis, 30% were row housing, and 4% were apartments¹. Additionally, of the 3,824 units

¹ Based on CMHC Housing Market Information Portal - New Housing Construction - Completions

in the development pipeline as of Q2 2023², 39% are singles/semis and 61% are units in multi-unit developments (i.e., townhouses, apartments, etc.)³.

Figure 1.5
Housing Starts by Typology



Source: Parcel, based on CMHC Housing Market Information Portal.

The Town will need to ensure zoning is in place to support this higher density housing. Currently, row housing⁴ is only permitted in the Residential Multiple 1 Zone (RM1) which totals approximately 9% of residentially zoned land. Apartments are only permitted in the Residential Multiple 2 Zone (RM2), which totals 5% of residentially zoned land.

In our view, the housing unit forecasts in the 2051 LNA are reasonable, however they will require supportive zoning and other policies to be achieved.

² Fort Erie 2023 - Q2 Subdivision, Building, Planning, By-Law Report. Development pipeline defined as unbuilt units in registered plans, draft approved plans, and active plans (i.e., plans currently under council consideration).

³ Reporting does not distinguish between the type of multi-unit development.

⁴ RM1 zoning permits street townhouse dwellings and block residential dwellings.

1.4 Employment Market Trends

The Niagara OP forecasts an additional 7,900 jobs in Fort Erie between 2021 and 2051 for a total of 18,430 jobs. Of these, 2,785 will be in community areas, 4,600 will be in employment areas, and 515 will be in rural areas.

There are two types of employment area designations in the Niagara OP: **core** and **dynamic**.

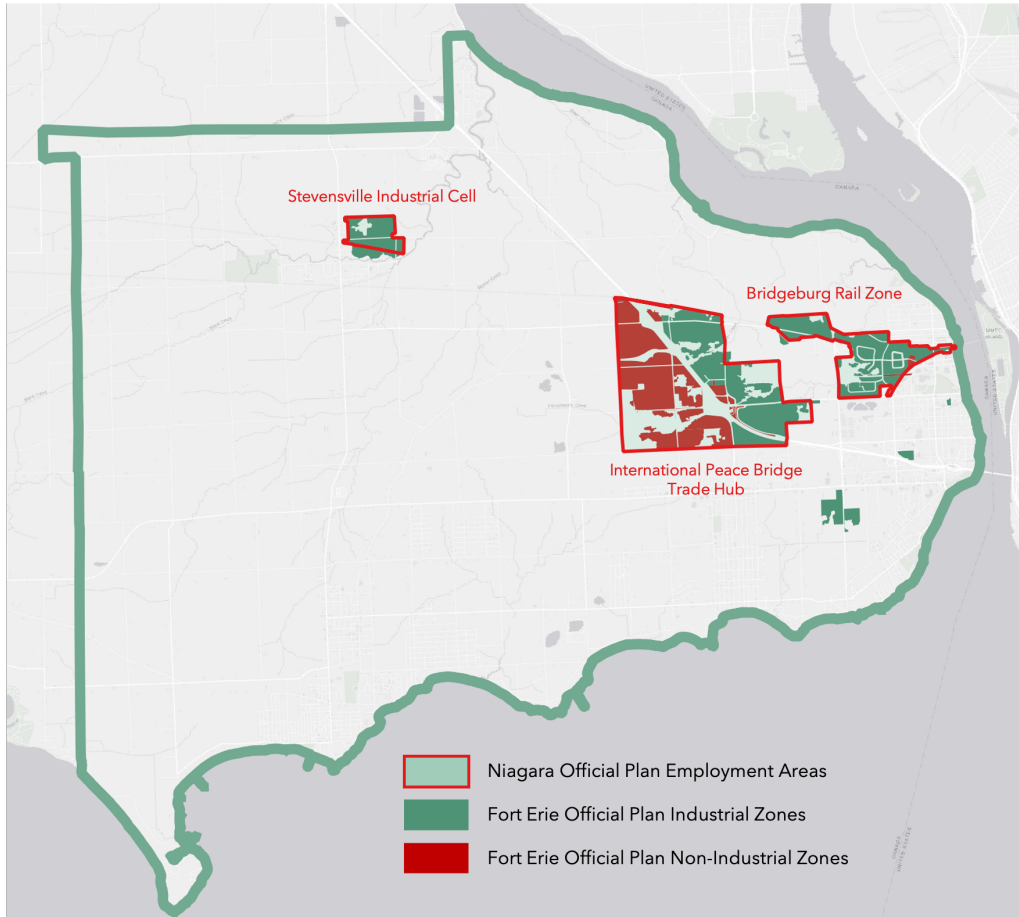
- **Core employment areas** are clusters of traditional employment uses, such as industrial, manufacturing, construction, transportation and warehousing.
- **Dynamic employment areas** are clusters of traditional and lighter industrial uses with a broader mix of employment uses including office parks and institutional uses including office parks and institutional uses that can function without limiting the viability of one another.

The Niagara OP designates two (2) core employment areas - **Stevensville Industrial Cell** (FE-1) and **Bridgeburg Rail Zone** (FE-3) - and one (1) dynamic employment area - **International Peace Bridge Trade Hub** (FE-2) - in Fort Erie. The Fort Erie core employment areas align with industrial land uses identified in the Fort Erie Official Plan. The Fort Erie dynamic employment area encompasses both existing industrial lands to the east of the Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW) and the non-industrial lands to the west. The lands to the west of the QEW, which comprise approximately 253 ha, are largely designated Canadian Motor Speedway (site specific policy area 12), as well as Agricultural, in the Fort Erie Official Plan.

It is important to note the 2051 LNA identified a need for an additional 165 ha of employment area land based on this larger dynamic employment area, that is, inclusive of non-industrial lands that would require an Official Plan Amendment (OPA) to be redesignated as employment. As a lower-tier municipality, the Town of Fort Erie will have to conform with these employment area designations as part of its Official Plan Update.

As such, **the employment forecasts in the Niagara OP will require Fort Erie to redesignate additional lands for employment (industrial) uses.**

Figure 1.6
Niagara OP Employment Areas



Source: Parcel.

2.0

Affordable Housing

Purpose

The following Housing Needs Assessment has been prepared as part of the ongoing Official Plan Review. The purpose of this Housing Needs Assessment is to identify existing and potential future housing “gaps” in the town and recommend policies to improve housing outcomes for current and future residents of Fort Erie.

As part of this Housing Needs Assessment, we have reviewed recent and emerging trends in: **demographics** (age groups and migration), **tenure** (owner and renter), **housing type** (single-detached, apartments, etc.) and **affordability** to identify any potential housing gaps that may exist.

Market vs. Affordable vs. Social Housing: What’s the Difference?

We refer to various types of housing throughout this report, including market-based housing, affordable housing, and social housing. While this terminology is typically used to describe the spectrum of housing that is available to residents in a municipality, it can often be confusing, as the housing types do not fit into the discrete categories identified in Figure 2.1, and there is often overlap between housing types.

For example, though often used interchangeably, affordable housing is not the same as **social housing**, which is housing that receives government subsidies to support deeper levels of affordability, typically by offering below-market rents in government-owned and/or managed buildings (it can also be referred to as community housing). Therefore, while social housing by its very nature is designed to be affordable, not all affordable housing is social housing.

Market housing is a term used to describe housing that is for sale or rent on the open market and does not take into consideration purchase prices or monthly rent of a unit. **Affordable housing** is both an umbrella term that encompasses *any housing* that meets the definition of “affordable” (See Section 5.1), including market housing, and can also refer to housing that is specifically designed to achieve affordable rents/prices per the definition of affordable. Throughout this report, we have attempted to differentiate between the types of housing we are referring to when summarizing housing needs.

Figure 2.1
Housing Spectrum



Source: City of Toronto, HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan Background.

Municipal Responsibility for Affordable/Social Housing

Affordable/social housing in Niagara municipalities is managed at the regional level. As a lower-tier municipality, **Fort Erie is not directly responsible for the provision of affordable/social housing.** However, municipal planning policies (e.g., Official Plan, Zoning By-law) and fees indirectly affect the provision of affordable/social housing by determining where housing can be built, what type of housing is permitted, development costs, etc. **Supportive policies represent an important way a municipality can encourage affordable/social housing.** There are also more direct ways municipal policies can support affordable/social housing, for example through a dedicated Affordable Housing Community Improvement Plan.

The role of municipalities and, importantly, what they can and cannot do has been considered when evaluating potential policies to improve housing outcomes in the town presented later in this report.

Key Findings of 2019 Housing Needs Study

The Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis (CANCEA) conducted a Housing Needs Study in 2019. Key findings from the Study include:

Demographics

- The town has an older population than the provincial average, and the 65+ population is expected to more than double by 2041.
- Couples without children and single-person households are the dominant types of households. This trend is expected to increase as the population ages and household sizes decrease.

Housing Stock

- Housing stock is primarily single-detached dwellings.
- Ownership is the main form of tenure. One in five households rent their dwelling.
- Housing prices almost doubled from 2001 to 2018 (the study period for the Report) while average rent for a one-bedroom apartment increased by 27%. Prices and rents are lower than regional averages.

Income Levels

- Average individual and median income in Fort Erie were similar to the Regional average and median.

Housing Need

- 14% of households (1,810 households) were in core housing need. Renter households were more likely to be in core housing need and all households affected by core housing need were in the lower three income deciles.
- The types of housing most needed by households in core housing needs were bachelor and one-bedroom units for single-person households, two-or-more bedroom units for lone-parent households, and affordable units renting for under \$737 per month.
- The rate of core housing need was expected to increase to 22% if current growth trends persisted. An increase in housing supply focusing on medium- and higher-density dwellings could help minimize core housing need.

Achieving Target Growth

- Fort Erie is required to construct an additional 5,200 housing units to meet its population growth targets for 2041. The demand for housing is likely to exceed supply based on current construction rates and lead to negative housing, economic, and social outcomes for the Town.
- There will be a shortfall of 2,800 dwelling units if development patterns persist. Most of this shortfall is in apartment units (2,150 units).

Structure of Report

We have structured this Housing Needs Assessment as a series of questions aimed at identifying gaps in the need for housing in the town and how these gaps can be addressed.

- 1. How are Demographic Trends Impacting Housing Needs?**
- 2. What is the Current State of the Housing Market?**
- 3. How Do We Define Affordable Housing?**
- 4. What Affordable Housing Gaps Exist in Fort Erie?**
- 5. What Housing Gaps Exist in Fort Erie?**
- 6. What Policy Tools Are Available to Fill These Housing / Affordability Gaps?**

A Note On Data Sources

This report uses data from the following sources:

- Statistics Canada
- Province of Ontario
- Niagara Region
- The Town of Fort Erie

- Niagara Association of Realtors
- Third party real estate sites (realtor.com, Altus Data Studio, rentals.ca)

3.0

How are Demographic Trends Impacting Housing Needs?

Key Findings

- Population growth in Fort Erie between the 2016 and 2021 census (+4.5%) was greater than between the previous census (+2.2%), but lower than in Niagara Region (+5.9%) and Ontario (+6.7%).
- **Approximately two of every five (37%) Fort residents are over the age of 60.** This will drive the need for seniors-friendly housing (smaller, accessible units, dedicated seniors housing, and long-term care facilities) to allow these residents to age in place.
- Migration to Niagara Region (including Fort Erie) is largely from municipalities with higher average household incomes and house prices.
- Fort Erie has a higher share of lower-income households (<\$100,000 per year) than Niagara Region and Ontario which may be due, in part, to the availability of affordable housing options in the town.

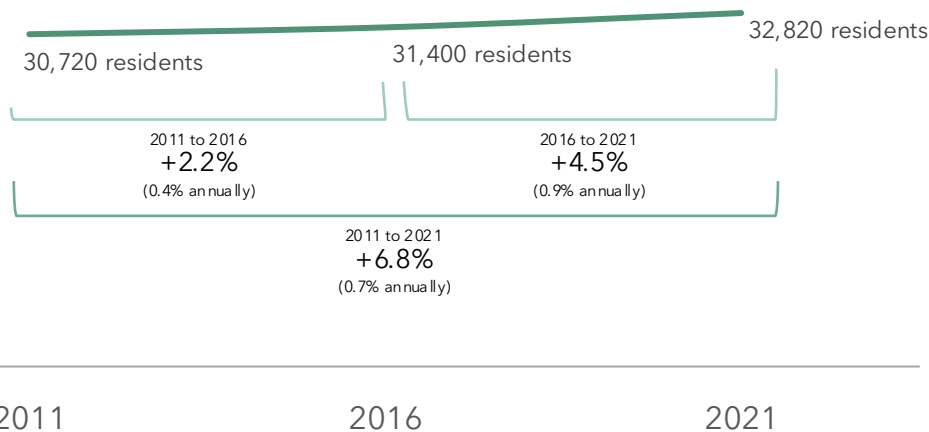
To better understand the current state of the housing market in Fort Erie and any “gaps” that may exist, we have reviewed demographic and migration trends, as well as the income and commuting profile of residents to determine how these factors could impact housing needs in the municipality.

Population & Age

The population in Fort Erie grew by approximately **4.5% (1,400 persons) between the 2016 and 2021 census period**, slightly lower than both Niagara Region (+5.9%) and the province (+6.7%). The population growth rate was higher between 2016 and 2021 than 2011 and 2016, which could be related to seasonal residents moving to the town full-time during the COVID-19 pandemic (See Seasonal Dwellings).

Figure 3.1

Fort Erie Historic & Recent Population



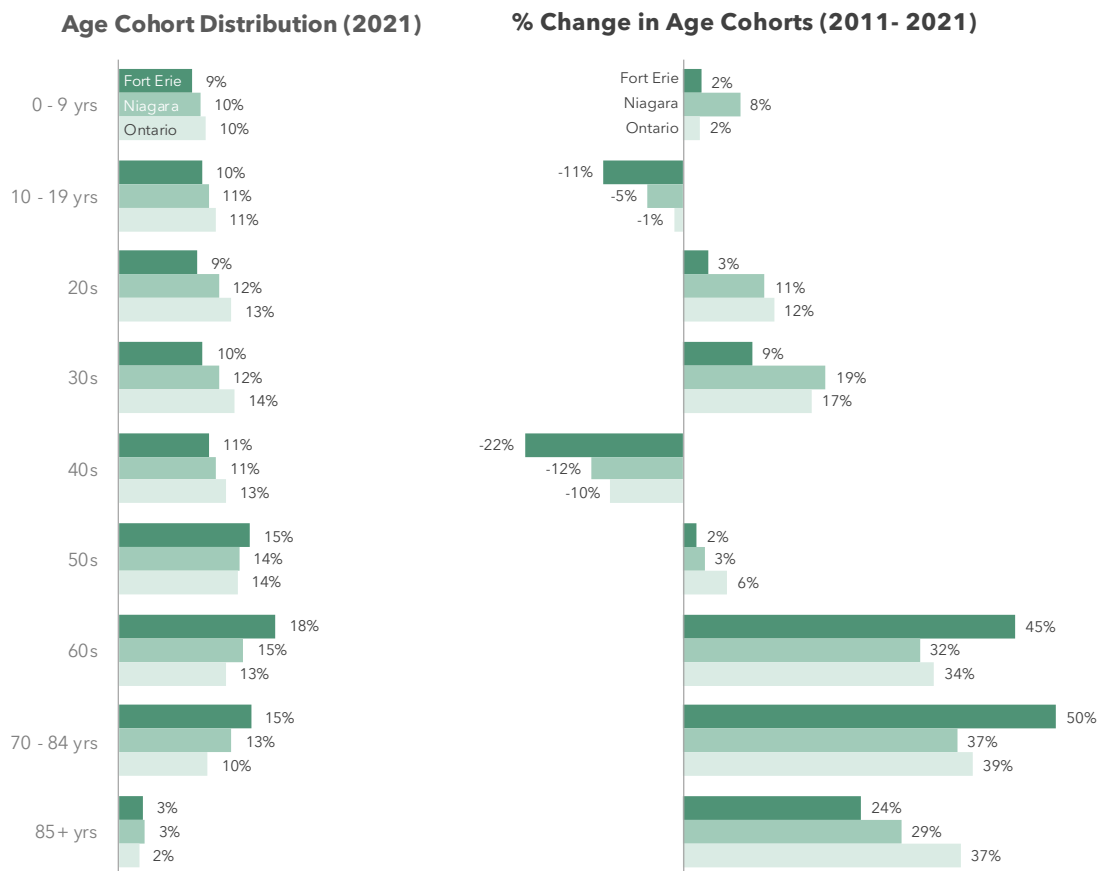
Source: Parcel, based on 2011 and 2016 Census data, 2022 Population Estimates

The town has a higher proportion of residents over 60 years of age, relative to Niagara Region and the province (Figure 3.2). As the population in the town continues to age, it will likely result in the need for alternative types of housing, such as **smaller and accessible apartment units, seniors housing and long-term care facilities** to meet

the needs of these residents. There is a very predictable pattern when it comes to housing type and the age of residents, whereby people move into apartment units and seniors housing as they age. Therefore, it is important to ensure there are a variety of housing options available in the town to meet the diverse needs of these residents and allow them to age in place within the community.

Figure 3.2

Age Cohorts (2021)



Source: Parcel, based on Statistics Canada 2021 Census

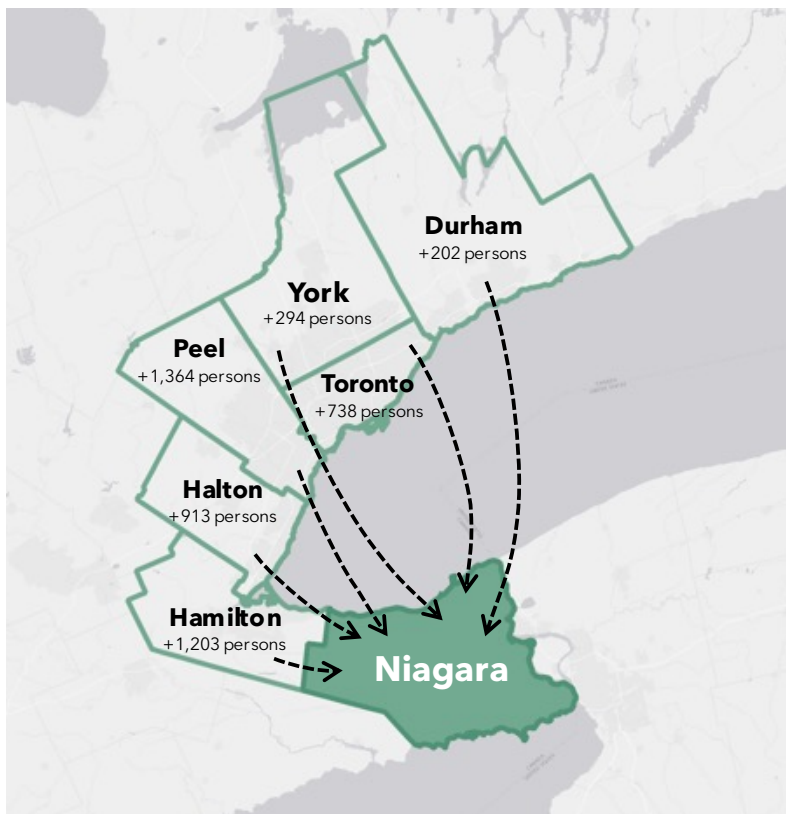
Migration

Migration has accounted for most of the population growth in both Niagara Region and Fort Erie in recent years. Between 2016 and 2021, positive net migration to Niagara Region was approximately **6,985 new residents each**

year.⁵ The majority of migration has been from out-of-country immigration followed by migration from other municipalities in Ontario (intraprovincial migration), most notably, the Greater Golden Horseshoe (“GGH”). Peel Region (Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon) and Toronto accounted for the largest shares of migrants to Niagara Region among Ontario municipalities, as shown in Figure 3.3.

Where migrants are coming from will have an impact on demand for housing by unit type and price. As shown in Figure 3.4, **household incomes and existing home prices in these GGH municipalities are higher than those in Niagara Region and Fort Erie.** Therefore, continued migration from GGH municipalities could increase housing prices in the town, as many of these migrants can absorb higher-priced housing.

Figure 3.3
Net Migration to Grey County (2016 to 2021)

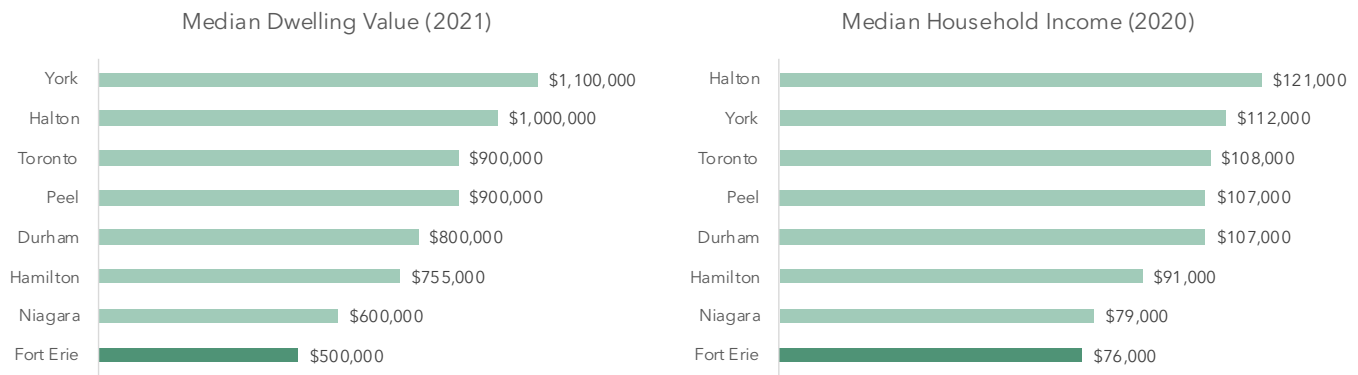


Source: Parcel, based on Statistics Canada Tax Filer Migration Data, 2016 to 2021

⁵ Tax filer migration data is not available for Fort Erie. Therefore, we have focused on Niagara Region.

Figure 3.4

Median Dwelling Value & Income in Migration Origins Compared to Niagara Region



Source: Parcel, based on Statistics Canada 2021 Census data.

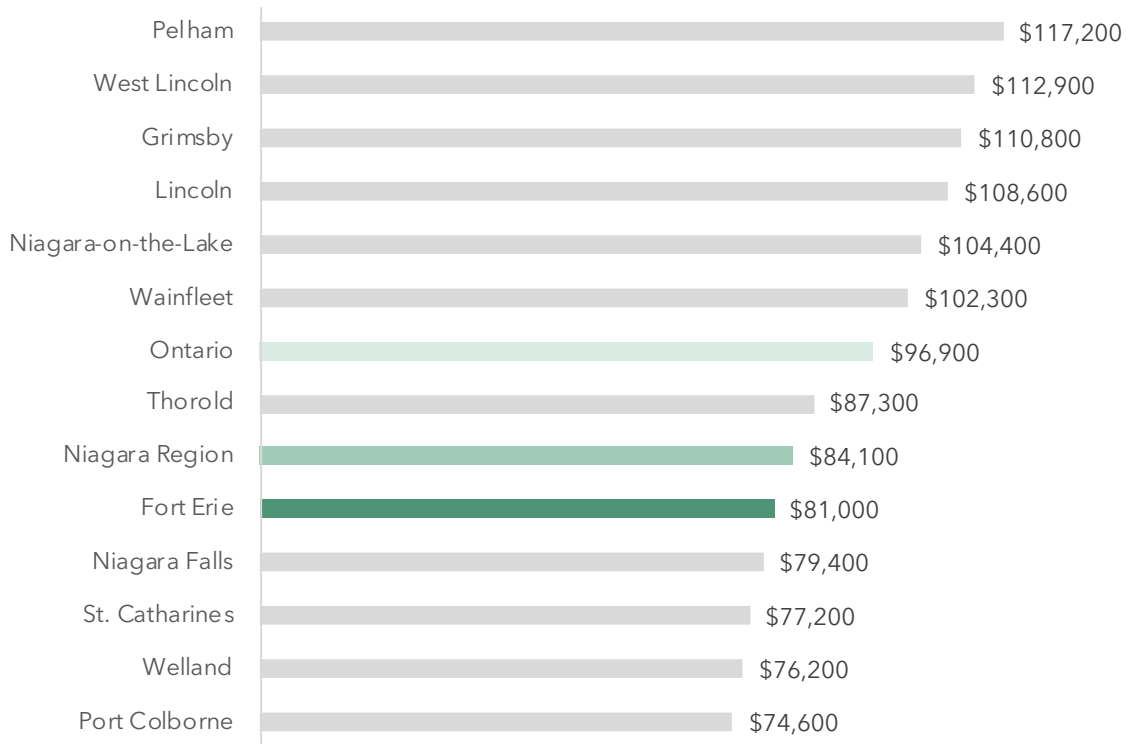
Household Income

Average household incomes in Fort Erie are in the bottom half of **Niagara Region municipalities**, below both the regional and provincial average. Income growth, however, has outpaced growth at the region and provincial level, increasing 40% from 2011 to 2021.

The number of households earning over \$100,000 increased between 2016 and 2021, which is consistent with regional and provincial trends. It is not known if the increase is due to rising incomes of existing households, an influx of wealthier residents, or a combination of both. However, the town still has a greater share of lower-income households compared to the region and province. As previously mentioned in the Migration section of this report, income growth Fort Erie may be the result of an influx of residents from GGH municipalities, where household incomes tend to be higher than the provincial average.

Figure 3.5

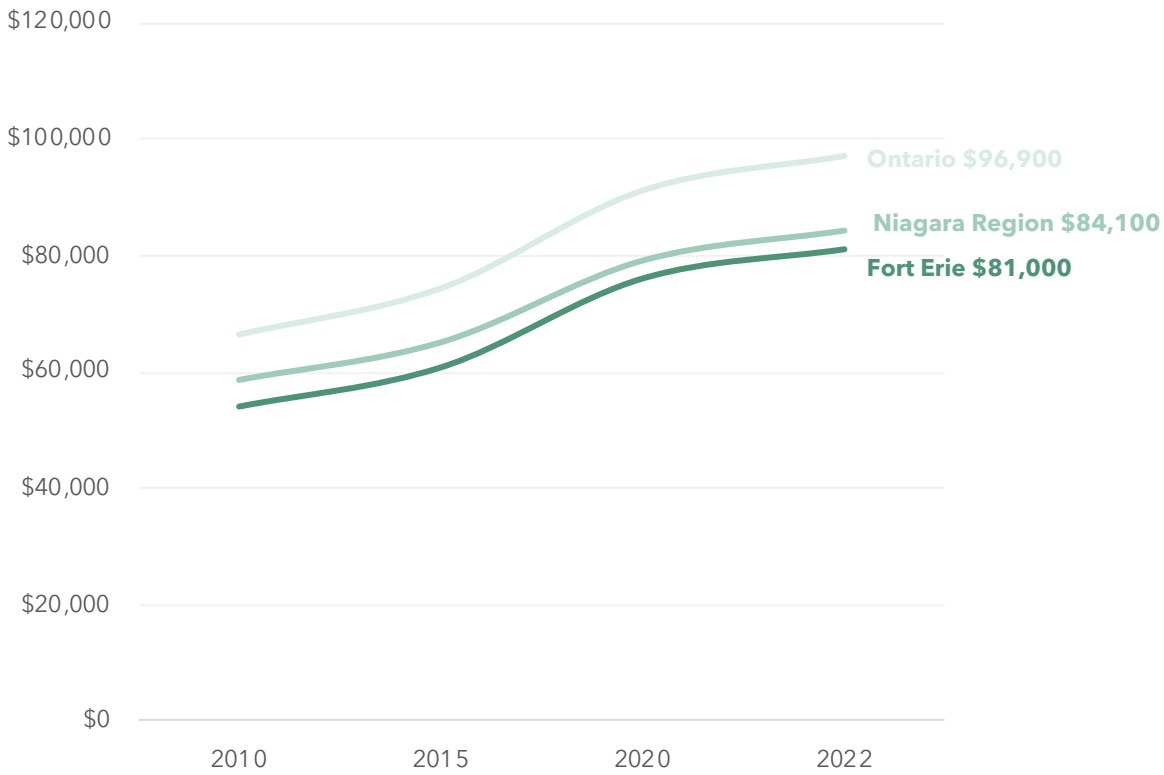
Estimated Median Household Incomes (2022 Dollars)



Source: Parcel, based on 2011, 2016, and 2021 Census data. 2022 Household income estimated by multiplying 2020 household income by growth in Ontario wages between 2020 and 2022 per Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0340-01 (approximately 6.5%). Incomes rounded to nearest \$100.

Figure 3.6

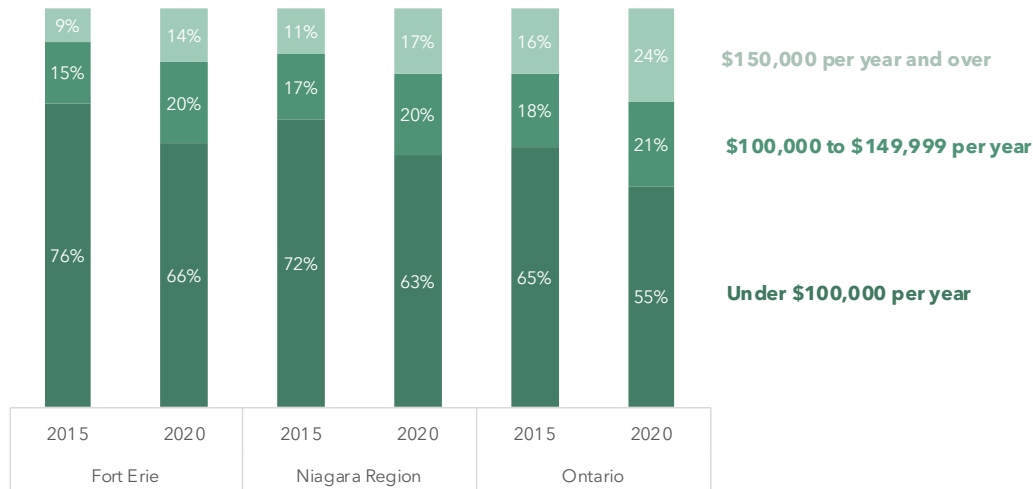
Growth in Median Household Incomes



Source: Parcel, based on 2011, 2016, and 2021 Census data. 2022 Household income estimated by multiplying 2020 household income by growth in Ontario wages between 2020 and 2022 per Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0340-01 (approximately 6.5%). Incomes rounded to nearest \$100.

Figure 3.7

Annual Household Income (2015 and 2020 Dollars)



Source: Parcel, based on 2016 and 2021 Census of Canada.

Employment / Commuting to Work

Approximately 56% of the Fort Erie workforce live in Fort Erie, with the remaining 44% commuting from elsewhere. Ideally, employment and housing should be balanced such that housing stock in a community is affordable based on local wages/salaries. While it is possible workers may choose to commute to Fort Erie for a variety of reasons (e.g., family commitments, personal preference), many commuters suggests there may not be adequate or appropriate housing in the community for the workforce.

Figure 3.8

Workforce in Fort Erie by Place of Residence

Place of Residence	% of Fort Erie Workforce
Fort Erie	56%
Other Niagara Region	38%
Hamilton	2%
Toronto	2%
Halton Region	1%
Peel Region	1%
Other Ontario	1%

Source: Parcel, based on Statistics Canada Table 98-10-0459-01. Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Comparing the jobs of Fort Erie residents to jobs in Fort Erie, there are many residents in is a large “gap” in the **lower-paying employment sectors** (i.e., less than \$60,000 per year in compensation) whereby there are more residents with jobs in these sectors than jobs in the town. This mismatch could be related to housing stock in Fort Erie being more affordable for people in these lower wage jobs compared to elsewhere in the region (e.g., a retail worker working in St. Catharines but living in Fort Erie). Currently, Fort Erie has the third lowest housing values and second lowest rental costs in the region. Worsening affordability in the town will result in residents having fewer options to find housing that is affordable in the region.

Figure 3.9

Jobs in Fort Erie Compared to Jobs of Fort Erie Residents

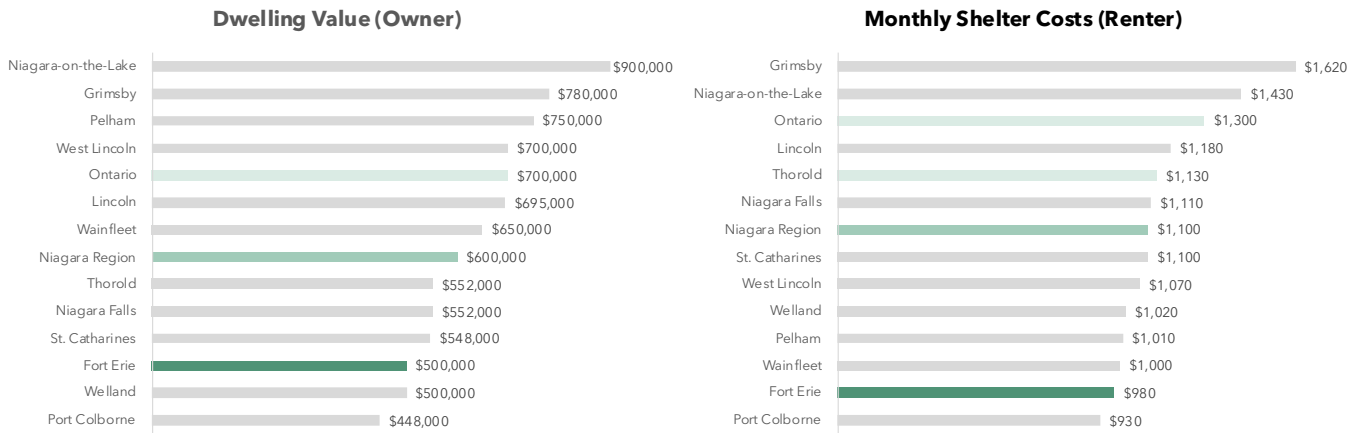
NAICS Category	Jobs of Fort Erie			Compensation ¹
	Jobs in Fort Erie (A)	Residents (B)	Delta (C = B - A)	
23 Construction	430	1415	985	\$85,892
62 Health care and social assistance	1020	1745	725	\$66,080
44-45 Retail trade	1200	1855	655	\$44,537
72 Accommodation and food services	655	1275	620	\$30,916
56 Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	315	725	410	\$51,426
31-33 Manufacturing	1215	1610	395	\$93,063
48-49 Transportation and warehousing	600	965	365	\$63,955
81 Other services (except public administration)	475	815	340	\$49,890
71 Arts, entertainment and recreation	290	590	300	\$48,991
54 Professional, scientific and technical services	530	750	220	\$94,277
91 Public administration	640	850	210	\$115,352
61 Educational services	640	780	140	\$72,542
41 Wholesale trade	255	365	110	\$94,908
52 Finance and insurance	295	370	75	\$105,490
11 Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	165	235	70	\$40,859
22 Utilities	65	135	70	\$141,067
53 Real estate and rental and leasing	170	240	70	\$67,173
21 Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	0	30	30	\$135,248
51 Information and cultural industries	105	135	30	\$110,117
55 Management of companies and enterprises	20	25	5	n/a

¹ Ontario-wide average compensation, 2022

Source: Parcel, based on Statistics Canada Table 98-10-0491-01 and 2021 Census data.

Figure 3.10

Median Dwelling Value (Owner) and Shelter Costs (Renter) (2021)



Source: Parcel, based on Statistics Canada 2021 Census.

4.0

What is the Current State of the Housing Market?

Key Findings

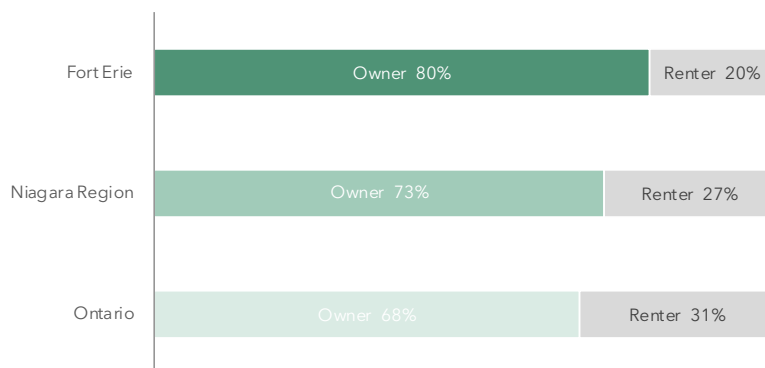
- **A majority of households in Fort Erie own their home (80%).** The relatively small share of renter households (20%) is likely due, in part, to the fact there is limited purpose-built rental housing in the town.
- A lack of purpose-built rental units in the town as well as surrounding municipalities means renter households are **increasingly relying on the less stable secondary rental market.**
- **Single-detached houses**, typically the largest and most expensive type of housing, **make up the majority of housing stock (83%).** The distribution of housing typologies as a percentage of housing stock has remained unchanged since 2011.
- Housing in Fort Erie tends to be large compared to household sizes. **Approximately one out of every two households are “overhoused”**, that is, the number of bedrooms exceeds the number of people in the household.
- Non-market (community housing) and seniors housing (dedicated seniors housing, long-term care facilities) in the town is currently limited.

The following section examines the current stock of housing in the town, as well as proposed units in the development pipeline, to identify potential housing “gaps” by unit type (single-detached, apartment, etc.), unit size (number of bedrooms) and tenure (ownership/rental).

Housing Tenure

There is a clear tendency towards ownership housing in Fort Erie where **four of every five households (80%) households own their home**. It is also important to note that the data from the Census under-represents the number of owned housing units in the town, as it only reports on households that occupy their unit on a permanent basis. Therefore, seasonal dwelling units (e.g., cottages) and short-term rental accommodations (i.e., units listed on Airbnb and Vrbo) that are owned, but not occupied on a permanent basis are not reported as “owner households” in the Census. **The lack of rental housing, both purpose-built and in the secondary market, is a clear “gap”** in the Fort Erie housing market.

Figure 4.1
Household Tenure (2021)



Source: Parcel, based on Statistics Canada 2021 Census.

Rental Housing

Primary Rental vs. Secondary Rental

Primary Rental housing (also referred to as “Purpose-Built Rental”) consists of units that were built with the intention of being used as rental units. It is desirable because it is typically the most stable form of

rental housing. Primary rental units typically remain rental units in perpetuity and tenants have security of tenure. In contrast, **Secondary Rental** consists of units that were built for purchase (i.e., freehold and condominiums tenure) and are now being rented by their owners. The Secondary Rental market is a **less stable** form of rental as owners can move back into or sell their units at any time, but an important contributor to rental supply in the absence of primary rental units.

Primary Rental

There were **458 purpose-built rental units** in the town as of October 2023. This amount represents a decrease of 65 units from 2022 (-12% of all units), all of which were two-bedroom units. Prior to this decline, the total number of units had remained relatively unchanged over the past eleven years. The number of purpose-built rental units peaked in 2010.

Comparing the number of purpose-built rental units (458 units) to the number of renter households in the town (2,850 households) indicates that **most renter households live in secondary market units**. Unfortunately, it is difficult to estimate the number of secondary market units in a community and CMHC does collect data on secondary rental units in Fort Erie.

More broadly, purpose-built rental construction has not kept pace with growth in rental households in the town. Between 2011 and 2021, the number of renter households in the town grew by 250 households (+10%) while the number of purpose-built rental units declined by 12 units (-2.3%).

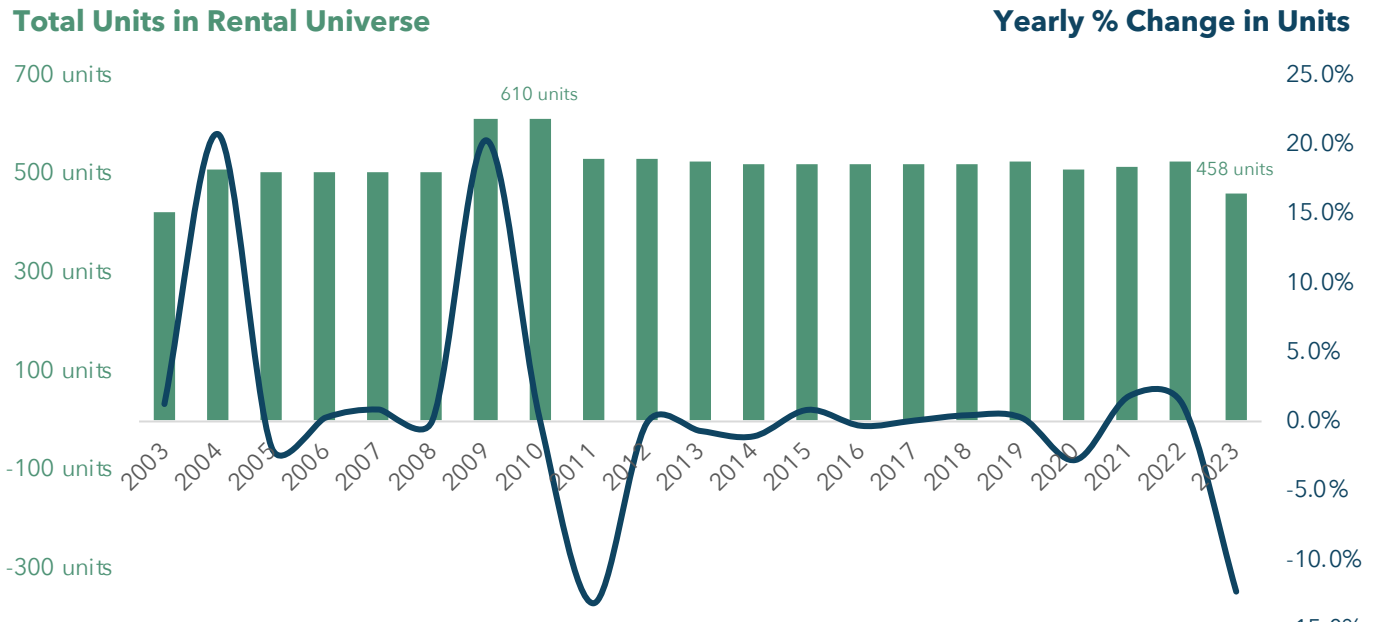
Average rent for all units in Fort Erie as of October 2022 was \$1,069, comparable though down slightly from the October 2022 rent of \$1,076. Despite recent declines in rent, **rents grew at almost double the rate of inflation between 2013 and 2023** (42% rent growth compared to 29% inflation). The growth may, in part, be due to the increasing number of renter households competing for fewer units and result in affordability challenges for renter households.

The **overall vacancy rate in 2023 was 3.5%**, however CMHC graded this data as a "D" indicating it should be used with caution. A 3% vacancy rate is generally considered a "healthy" match between supply and demand. Rates below 3% may put upward pressure on rents without an increase in supply as more renter households compete for fewer rental units. Rates above 3% may dissuade the construction of new rental supply for fear units are more likely to sit vacant. Vacancy rates in both Fort Erie and the St. Catharines-Niagara census metropolitan area (CMA) have been at or below this threshold since 2015.

GAP: Primary Rental Housing

Figure 4.2

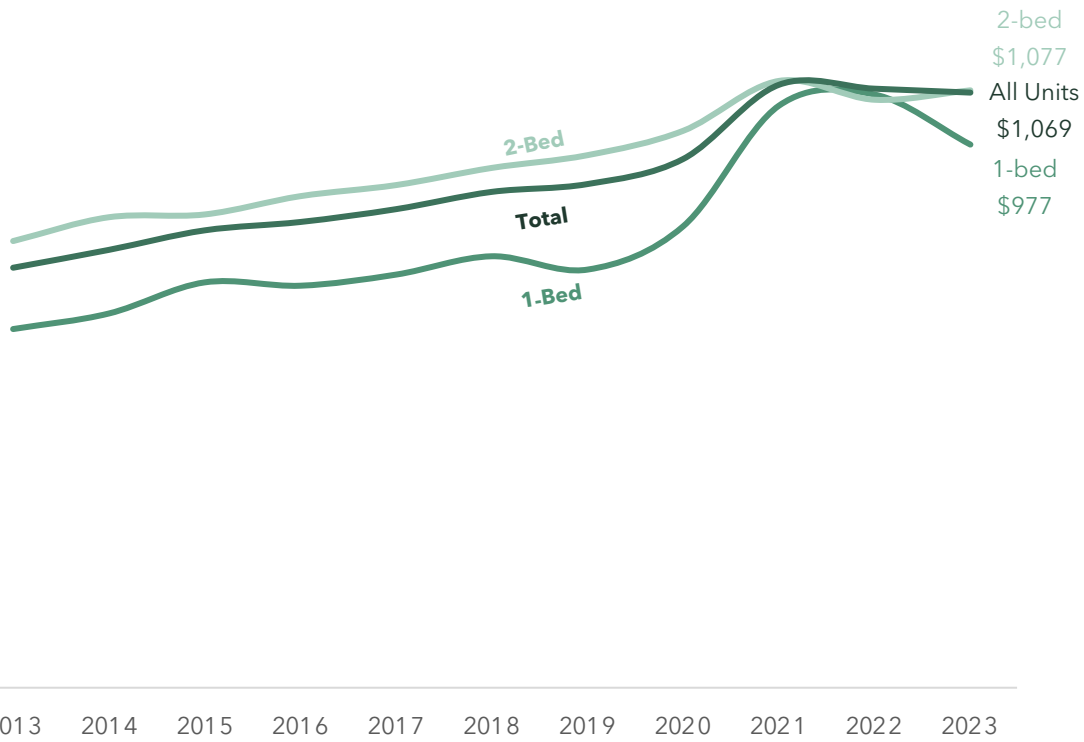
Total Units in Rental Universe & Yearly Percentage Change in Units



Source: Parcel, based on CMHC Rental Market Survey.

Figure 4.3

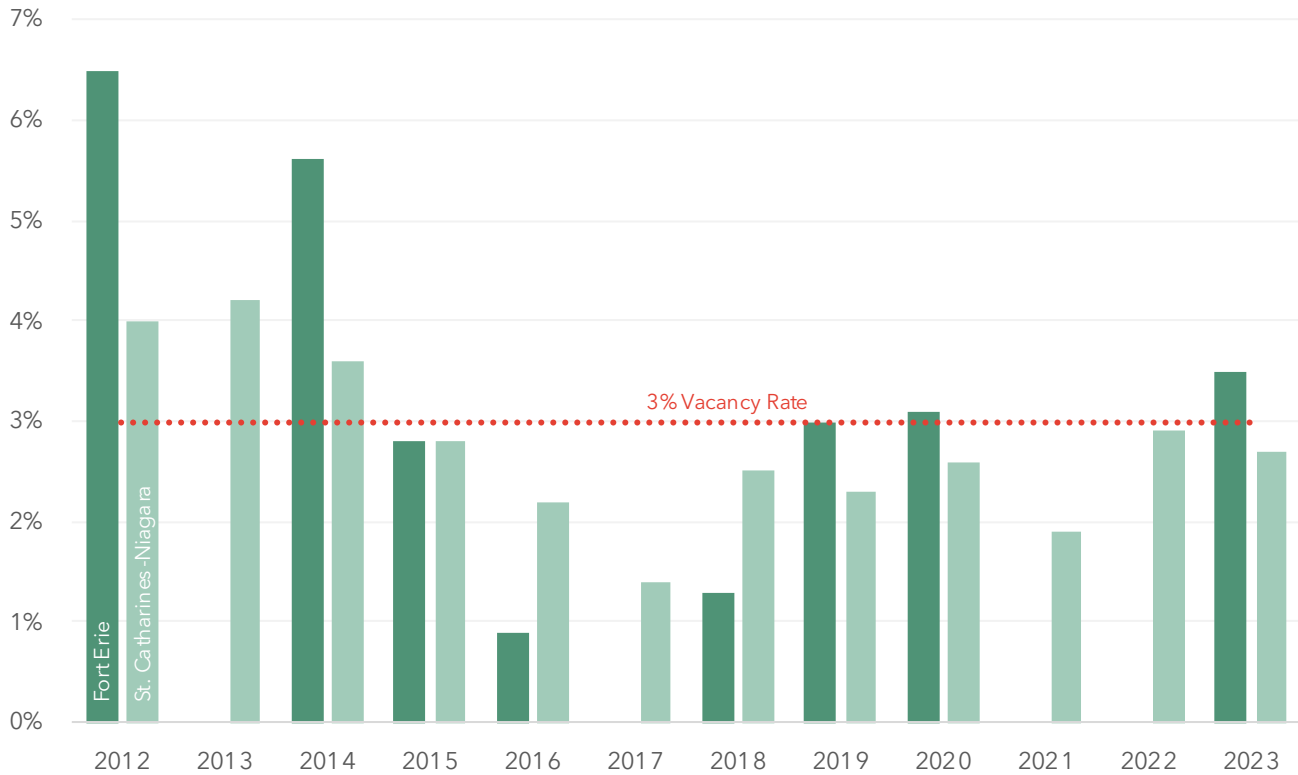
Average Market Rents



NOTE: 3-bedroom data suppressed from 2021 to present. Last reported 3-bedroom rent was \$1,053 in 2020.
 Source: Parcel, based on CMHC Rental Survey data.

Figure 4.4

Average Vacancy Rate



Source: Parcel, based on CMHC Rental Market Survey.

Housing Stock & Size

We estimate there are approximately 14,700 housing units in Fort Erie as of Q3 2023⁶. Single-detached housing makes up the majority of units (83%) followed by apartment units (13%), row housing (2%), and semi-detached housing (2%). This distribution of housing units has remained relatively unchanged between 2011 and 2023, though housing forecasts anticipate higher-density housing (rows and apartments) will make up a greater share of units moving forward (See Future Housing Supply)

Households in the town tend to live in relatively large units, with approximately 65% having three or more bedrooms. The supply of large dwelling units, most of which are single-detached, may also explain affordability

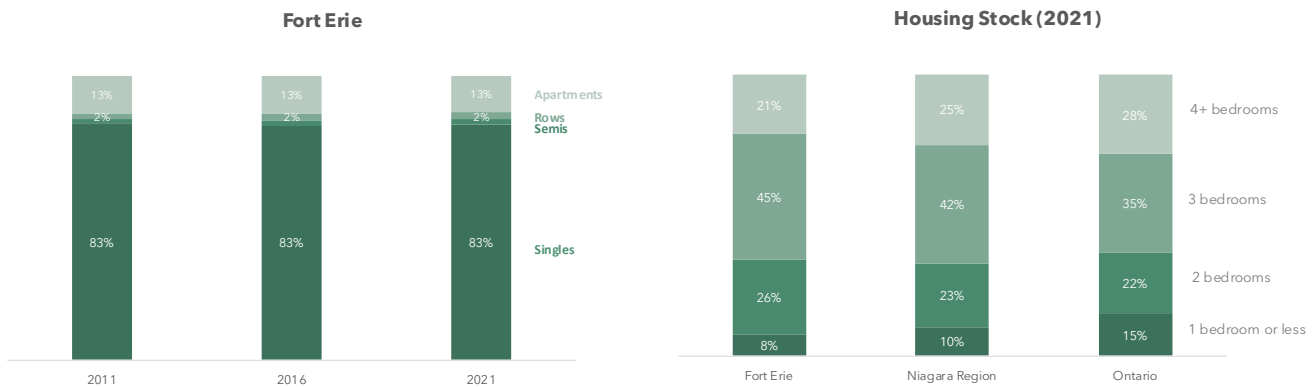
⁶ Calculated by adding reported housing stock in 2021 and CMHC completions data from Q3 2021 to Q3 2023.

challenges in the town, as both larger housing and single-detached housing is typically the most expensive type of housing available.

The lack of smaller housing units (two bedrooms and less) is a “gap” in the housing market, as it may be inhibiting households currently in larger dwelling units from moving into housing that is more appropriately sized.

GAP: Smaller Housing Units

Figure 4.5
Housing Stock by Typology and Number of Bedrooms



Source: Parcel, based on Statistics Canada Census data 2011 to 2021

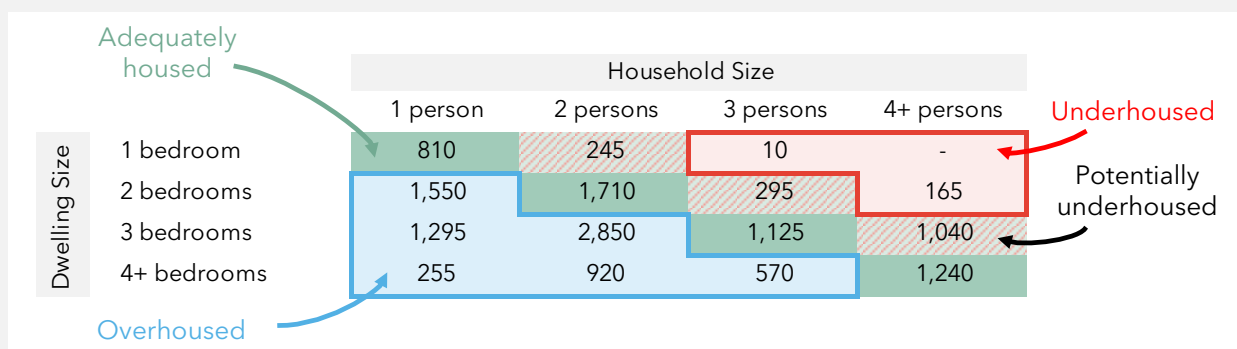
Housing Suitability (Household Size vs. Dwelling Size)

Figure 4.6 considers **housing suitability**, defined as having enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the household, by comparing household sizes to their dwelling sizes. **Green** cells denote a match between household size and dwelling size, that is, there is one bedroom for every one person. However, given household size does not account for household type (i.e., single, couple, couple with child, etc.) we have also identified households that are underhoused mathematically but may not be underhoused functionally. For example, a couple living in a one-bedroom dwelling would be adequately housed even though their household consists of two persons. Similarly, a couple with a child (three persons) would be adequately housed in a two-bedroom dwelling. These households have been denoted as “potentially underhoused” in the table below.

Red cells denote households that are **underhoused**, that is, there are fewer bedrooms than persons in the household. As shown, in Fort Erie, this represents a very small share of households. Lastly, **blue** cells denote households that are **overhoused**, that is, there are more bedrooms than persons. For example, a couple (two persons) living in a four-bedroom house.

Figure 4.6

Household Size vs. Dwelling Size

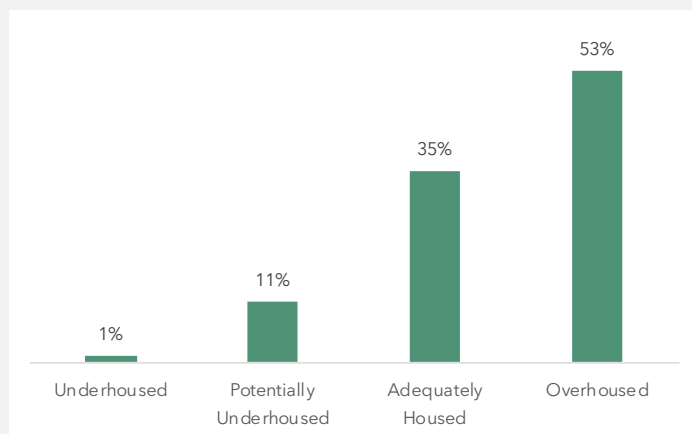


Source: Parcel, based on Statistics Canada Table 98-10-0240-01.

Overall, it appears Fort Erie has an **oversupply of large housing relative to household sizes**. Approximately one out of every two households (53%) could be classified as overhoused. Such a mismatch can negatively affect affordability, particularly for smaller households. For example, **68% of households consist of one or two persons, yet one- and two-bedroom dwellings make up just 34% of dwellings**. This results in smaller households being either forced into larger, typically more expensive housing or forced to look for housing elsewhere in the region. This mismatch between household size and dwelling size highlights the **need** for smaller units in the town, including one and two-bedroom units.

Figure 4.7

Housing Suitability



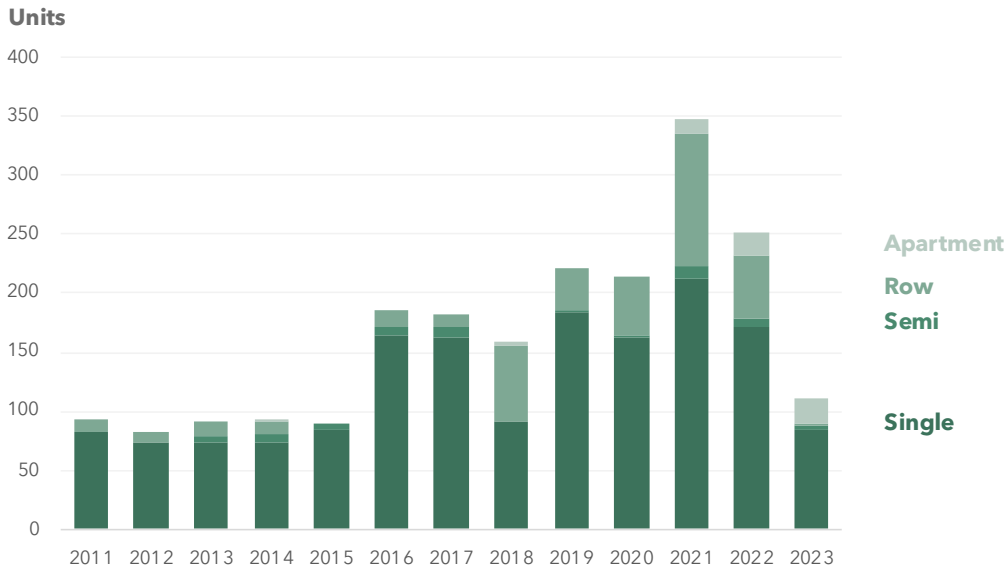
Source: Parcel, based on Statistics Canada Table 98-10-0240-01.

Recent Housing Construction

Consistent with the existing housing stock in Fort Erie, new housing construction is heavily skewed towards single and semi-detached units, which have consistently represented approximately 60% or more of yearly housing starts over the past two census periods. However, there has recently been a shift away from single and semi-detached units towards higher-density multi-family units, which includes townhomes and apartments. This shift could reflect increasing house prices in the town, as well as demand for smaller units, as discussed above. Even with this shift to smaller units, except for 2023, all housing starts have been intended for the ownership market.

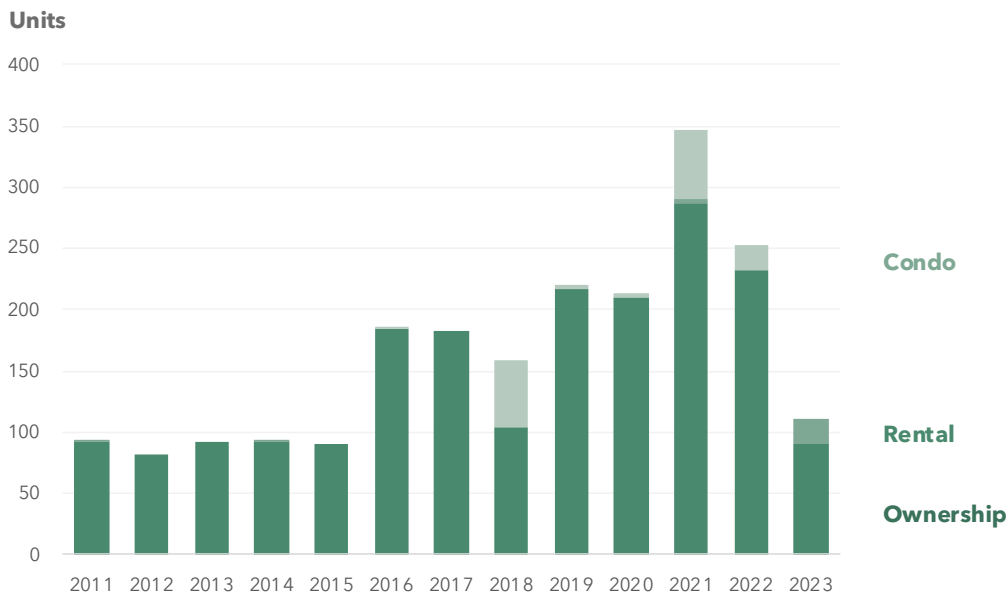
Housing construction activity has increased substantially in the town since 2016, which is consistent with the population growth experienced between the 2016 and 2021 Census. The town averaged approximately 90 housing starts per year between 2011 and 2015. This increased to an average of nearly 209 housing starts per year between 2016 and 2023, or a 130% increase. To put this in perspective, based on household growth projections contained in the Niagara Region Official Plan, the town will need to grow at a rate of approximately 245 new dwelling units per year to meet the 2051 projections. Housing starts will have to increase in future years to achieve these targets. This may prove challenging as there has been a sharp decline in starts since 2021.

Figure 4.8
Housing Starts by Housing Typology (2011 to 2023)



Source: Parcel, based on CMHC Housing Market Information Portal.

Figure 4.9
Housing Starts by Intended Tenure (2011 to 2023)



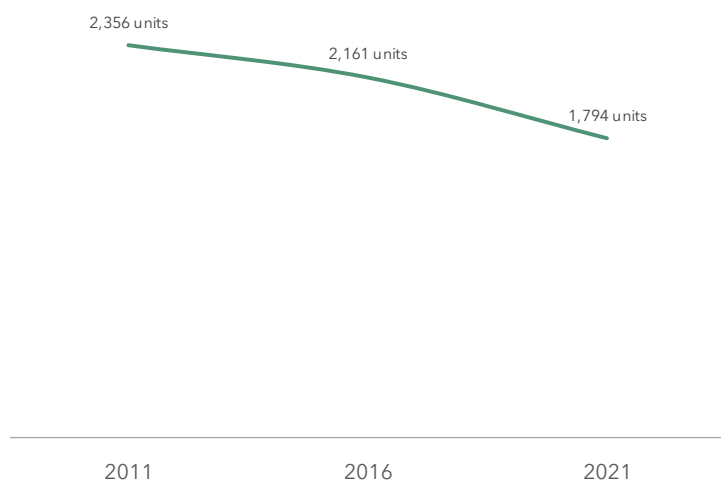
Source: Parcel, based on CMHC Housing Market Information Portal.

Seasonal Dwellings

The number of seasonal dwellings (i.e., cottages, chalets, etc.) has decreased by approximately 24% since 2011, likely due to seasonal residents moving to the town on a permanent or semi-permanent basis during COVID-19. While the declining number of seasonal dwelling units could be seen as positive in terms of increasing the supply of housing in the town, it is not clear if these are households moving into their seasonal residence on a permanent basis, which does not increase the supply of housing.

Figure 4.10

Seasonal Dwelling Units



Source: Parcel, based on Statistics Canada 2021 Census

Non-Market & Seniors Housing

The economics of housing development are such that it is often difficult for market housing to meet the affordability needs of lower-income households. **Non-market housing** - including transitional and supportive housing, community housing, co-op housing - is required to fill this affordability gap.

Overall, the supply of non-market housing in the town is limited. Community (i.e., subsidized) housing in the town consists of **403 units**. There is a waitlist for all unit types (e.g., studio, one-bedroom, two-bedroom, etc.) with wait times varying between four years for a two-bedroom unit to up to 12 years for a studio unit. Long wait times suggest an undersupply of community/affordable housing generally as well as a mismatch between current community housing supply and demand. For example, the 12-year wait for a studio unit is likely due to there only being 14 studio units in the community housing stock (3%).

Seniors are another group with specialized housing needs and often live in **dedicated seniors housing** communities or **long-term care facilities**. There are currently **189 dedicated seniors housing units** in Fort Erie between retirement communities and assisted living. There are **244 long-term care beds**, with a current waitlist of 109 persons. Demand for both types of accommodation is expected to grow as the population continues to age with the LTC waitlist demonstrating an immediate gap in the housing market.

GAP: Community Housing, Seniors Housing, and Long-Term Care

Figure 4.11
Community Housing in Fort Erie

Operator	Studio	1-Bed	2-Bed	3-Bed+	Total
Non-Profit	-	59 units	69 units	30 units	158 units
Niagara Region Housing	14 units	45 units	7 units	47 units	113 units
Co-op	-	33 units	30 units	37 units	100 units
Urban Native Non-Profit	-	-	7 units	25 units	32 units
Total	14 units	137 units	113 units	139 units	403 units
<i>% of Total</i>	3%	34%	28%	34%	100%

Wait Times

Seniors Aged 55+	-	10 Years	-	-
Singles Aged 16 to 54	12 Years	9 Years	-	-
Households with Dependents	-	-	4 Years	4 to 8 Years

Source: Parcel, based on Niagara Region website (<https://niagararegion.ca/housing-homelessness/nrh/find-a-unit/>).

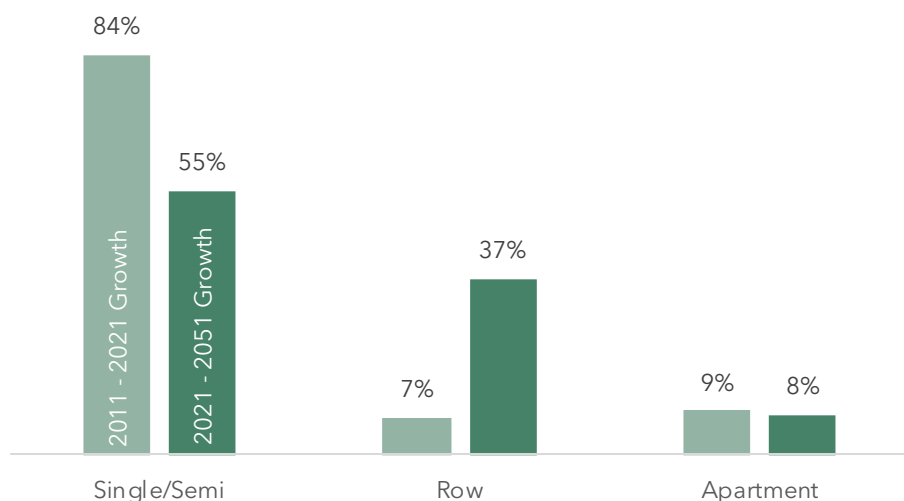
Future Supply of Housing

Based on forecasts contained in the Niagara Official Plan 2051 Land Needs Assessment, as well as units in the development pipeline, it is anticipated that the housing stock in the town will shift away from single-detached units and towards row and apartment units.

As shown in Figure 4.12, while 84% of households lived in single/semi-detached units in 2021, only 55% of growth is anticipated to be in this form of housing. At the same time, 43% of new housing is anticipated to be in the form of row housing and apartment units, which made up 16% of housing stock in 2021. Most of this higher-density housing growth is in row housing (37%).

Figure 4.12

Existing and Projected Housing Mix



Source: Parcel, based on Niagara Official Plan 2051 Land Needs Assessment (June 2022)

There are some indications that this shift to higher-density housing is already underway in Fort Erie and could be more significant than anticipated in the LNA projections. Among dwelling units approved, awaiting application and under review, **26% are single-/semi-detached and 74% are in multi-unit developments** (e.g., row houses, townhouses, apartments, etc.). The relatively large share of multi-unit units in the development application process would help address the need for smaller units to accommodate both existing and future residents.

Figure 4.13

Approved and Active Units Under Development in Fort Erie

	Number of Units	Percentage of Total Units
Single-Detached	660	17%
Semi-Detached	343	9%
Multi-Unit	2843	74%
Total	3,846	100%

Source: Parcel, based on Fort Erie Q2 2023 Residential Inventory

5.0

Housing Affordability in Fort Erie

Key Findings

- Per affordability definitions, the **affordable rent is \$1,329 per month or less** and the **affordable house price is \$379,500 or less**. There is limited housing available in Fort Erie at these rents/prices.
- **Average asking rents are \$2,400 per month** and the **average asking ownership price is \$814,200**.
- **One in every five households in Fort Erie is cost burdened** (i.e., spending more than 30% of its income on housing) and **10% are in core housing need**. Renter households are more likely to be cost burdened and in core housing need than ownership households.

In this section, we have examined existing home prices and monthly rent in the town. We have also defined what is considered *affordable* housing in the Fort Erie context and how these affordable prices and rents compare to the existing housing stock in the town as a method to determine “gaps” in affordability.

5.1 How Do We Define Housing Affordability?

One of the primary housing gaps across many Ontario municipalities is the availability of housing that is affordable to residents. However, various definitions of affordable housing across different levels of government can make pinpointing what qualifies as “affordable” housing confusing.

The **Provincial Policy Statement (PPS)** defines affordable housing as **the least expensive of housing that does not exceed 30% of gross annual household income for low- and moderate-income households OR housing that is 10% below average prices or at/below average rents**. Low- and moderate-income households are households in the lowest 60% of the income distribution for the regional market area. The definition encompasses both an **income-based** measure of affordability (i.e., tied to what specific households can afford) and a **market-based** measure of affordability (i.e., a benchmark against current market conditions and pricing).

The **Niagara Region Official Plan** and **Fort Erie Official Plan** both use the **same affordable definition as the PPS**.

Figure 5.1
Provincial Policy Statement Affordable Definition

	Ownership Housing	Rental Housing
	<i>The least expensive of:</i>	<i>The least expensive of:</i>
Income-Based	Purchase price results in annual accommodation costs which do not exceed 30% of gross annual household income for low- and moderate-income households*	Rent does not exceed 30% of gross annual household income for low- and moderate-income households*
	OR	OR
Market-Based	The purchase price is at least 10% below the average purchase price of a resale unit in the regional market area	Rent is at or below the average market rent (AMR) of a unit in the regional market area
	<i>*Households with incomes in the lowest 60% of the income distribution for the regional market area</i>	<i>*Households with incomes in the lowest 60% of the income distribution for renter households in the regional market area</i>

Source: Parcel, based on Provincial Policy Statement (2021)

Affordable Definitions in Other Provincial Legislation

In addition to the PPS, three new pieces of Provincial legislation offer definitions of affordable that may have implications for defining affordability in the future.

Proposed Provincial Policy Statement (June 2023)

The current iteration of the Proposed Provincial Planning Statement (June 2023) removes the definition of affordable housing that was included in the PPS. Instead, under Vision, the Proposed Provincial Planning Statement states:

Ontario will increase the supply and mix of housing options and address the full range of housing affordability needs. (page 4)

Where housing affordability is not a defined term. In Section 2.2 Housing, the Proposed Provincial Planning Statement goes on to state:

1. *Planning authorities shall provide for an appropriate range and mix of housing options and densities to meet projected needs of current and future residents of the regional market area by:*
 - a) *coordinating land use planning and planning for housing with Service Managers to address the full range of housing options including housing affordability needs;*

It is still unclear if a definition of affordable, or affordable housing will be added to the final version of the Proposed Provincial Planning Statement.

Bill 23, More Homes Built Faster Act (2022)

The recently passed Bill 23 introduced changes to the Development Charges Act that define an “affordable residential unit” as a unit whose rent or price is **no greater than 80% of average market rent or average purchase price**, depending on whether the unit is rental or ownership. While the previous PPS definition of affordable considered **both** income- and market-based measures of affordability, this new definition is **purely market-based**.

Bill 23 also introduces the concept of **attainable housing** that falls between affordable and full market prices. Initial legislation defines attainable as an ownership unit that is not an affordable unit. In other words, attainable housing is ownership housing that costs more than 80% of the average purchase price.

The Development Charges Act states that the average market rent and average purchase price within a jurisdiction will be identified in a bulletin entitled “Affordable Residential Units for the Purposes of the Development Charges Act, 1997, Bulletin”. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has not yet released one of these bulletins, so it remains unclear what will be considered an affordable or attainable unit in a development charges context.

Affordable Homes and Good Jobs Act (2023)

On September 28, 2023, the Province proposed legislation that would amend the definition of an “affordable residential unit” that was previously identified in Bill 23 that is included in the Development

Charges Act. The new definition would mirror the definition in the PPS, which includes both a market-based and income-based definition of affordable, where the income-based definition results in accommodation costs that do not exceed 30% of gross annual household income for low- and moderate-income households.

Attainable Housing

The Niagara Region Official Plan defines **attainable housing** as:

Rental or ownership housing provided by the market for moderate income households that are generally within the fifth and sixth income decile of the regional market area.

Fort Erie does not currently identify attainable housing in any of its policy documents.

Affordable Housing Prices and Rents in Fort Erie

Information that is required to calculate affordable prices and rents per the PPS definition of affordable include:

1. Average house prices and rents; and
2. Income decile data for all households and renter households in the regional market area.

Figure 5.2 shows average existing home prices and rents in Niagara Region and Fort Erie in 2023 based on information from the Niagara Association of Realtors and information from the CMHC Housing Market Information Portal, as well as the market-based definition of “affordable” per the PPS, which is calculated at 90% of the average resale price. Figure 5.3 shows estimated household income deciles for ownership and rental households in Niagara Region, which is the regional market area for Fort Erie. We have applied a gross-up factor of approximately 5% to 2022 incomes to reflect wage growth between 2022 and 2023. Low- and moderate-income households (i.e., households in the lowest 60th of income distribution) are outlined in **blue**.

Figure 5.2

Average Resale Prices and Rents

	Average Resale Price	90% Average Resale Price	Average Rent
Niagara Region	\$649,900	\$584,900	\$1,329
Fort Erie	\$536,400	\$482,800	\$1,069

Source: Parcel, based on Niagara Association of Realtors 2023 Annual Residential Overview, CMHC Housing Market Information Portal.

Figure 5.3

Estimated Income Deciles of Niagara Region Households (2023)

	All Households	Renter Households
10th Percentile	\$31,500	\$22,800
20th Percentile	\$47,300	\$29,700
30th Percentile	\$61,200	\$38,500
40th Percentile	\$76,000	\$46,800
50th Percentile	\$92,200	\$56,600
60th Percentile	\$110,200	\$67,700
70th Percentile	\$131,000	\$80,600
80th Percentile	\$160,100	\$99,700
90th Percentile	\$208,800	\$128,700

Note: Incomes grossed-up by approximately 5% based on average wage growth in Ontario between 2022 and 2023.

Source: Parcel, based on PPS Housing Table 1 and Table 3 (2022), Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0417-01

Based on these average prices and income deciles, **ownership housing in Fort Erie is considered affordable if it costs \$379,500 or less (income-based) and rental**

housing is considered affordable if it costs **\$1,329 per month or less** (market-based).

Figure 5.4

Fort Erie Housing Affordability Prices and Rents per PPS

	Ownership Housing	Rental Housing
	<i>The least expensive of:</i>	<i>The least expensive of:</i>
Income-Based	\$379,500 (\$110,200 income required)	\$1,690 (\$67,700 income required)
	OR	OR
Market-Based	\$584,900 (\$169,700 income required)	\$1,329 (\$53,200 income required)

Source: Parcel, based on PPS Tables 1 to 4 (2022).

In the case of ownership housing, the *market-based* affordable ownership price of \$584,900 is just over \$200,000 higher than income-based affordable price and only affordable to households in the upper 90th percentile of income distribution (see Figure 5.5). Rental housing fares slightly better with an average market rent of \$1,329 being affordable to households in the 50th percentile of income distribution and higher. In dollar amounts, a household must earn **\$169,700 or more per year for the average affordable ownership price to be considered affordable and \$53,200 or greater per year for average rent to be considered affordable.**

It is important to note that average rents and prices in the market-based measure of affordability are calculated using *all* housing stock in Niagara Region, including older ownership units and rental units under rent control, both of which command lower prices and rents than units currently entering the market. As such, “affordable” often understates current market realities. This is true in Fort Erie, where an affordable house price is approximately \$584,900, yet the average price of a new construction house is \$922,300. Likewise, affordable rent is calculated at \$1,329 per month, yet average asking rents in the town are \$2,400. **Overall, this points to greater affordability**

challenges than the definition of “affordable” suggests, particularly for residents looking for housing compared to those who are securely housed.

Figure 5.5

Housing Affordability in Fort Erie by Income Percentile

Percentile	Ownership Housing				Rental Housing		
	Household Income	Affordable House Price	Average Resale Price	90% Average Resale Price	Household Income	Affordable Rent	Average Rent (All Units)
			\$649,900	\$584,900			\$1,329
10th Percentile	\$31,500	\$108,500	X	X	\$22,800	\$570	X
20th Percentile	\$47,300	\$162,900	X	X	\$29,700	\$740	X
30th Percentile	\$61,200	\$210,800	X	X	\$38,500	\$960	X
40th Percentile	\$76,000	\$261,800	X	X	\$46,800	\$1,170	X
50th Percentile	\$92,200	\$317,600	X	X	\$56,600	\$1,410	✓
60th Percentile	\$110,200	\$379,500	X	X	\$67,700	\$1,690	✓
70th Percentile	\$131,000	\$451,200	X	X	\$80,600	\$2,010	✓
80th Percentile	\$160,100	\$551,400	X	X	\$99,700	\$2,490	✓
90th Percentile	\$208,800	\$719,100	✓	✓	\$128,700	\$3,220	✓

✓ = Affordable
 X = Unaffordable

Source: Parcel, based on PPS Tables 1 and 3, Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0417-01, CMHC Housing Market Information Portal, Niagara Association of Realtors 2023 Annual Residential Overview; Affordable ownership house prices calculated using PPS Housing Table 1 assumptions: 30% gross debt service, 0.13% property tax, 4% CMHC mortgage loan insurance, 5% down payment, 5.65% mortgage rate, and a 25-year amortization period; Affordable rents calculated by dividing 30% of household income by 12 months.

5.2 Monthly Rent and Ownership Prices

Rents

To determine average monthly rent in the town, we have reviewed units listed on rentals.ca. In There were 20 units listed on in November 2023 with an average rent of approximately \$2,400 per month, which is significantly higher than what is affordable to renter households (See Figure 5.5). High rents coupled with low inventory make finding affordable housing difficult for renter households.

Figure 5.6

Asking Rents (November 2023)

Rental Type	# of Bedrooms	# of Units	Average Rent
Accessory Dwelling Unit	1	1	\$1,350
	<i>Sub-Total</i>	1	\$1,350
Apartment	1	1	\$1,475
	2	3	\$1,982
	<i>Sub-Total</i>	4	\$1,855
Townhouse	3+	2	\$2,448
	<i>Sub-Total</i>	2	\$2,448
Single-Detached	1	1	\$1,995
	2	1	\$3,100
	3+	11	\$2,644
	<i>Sub-Total</i>	13	\$2,629
Total		20	\$2,392

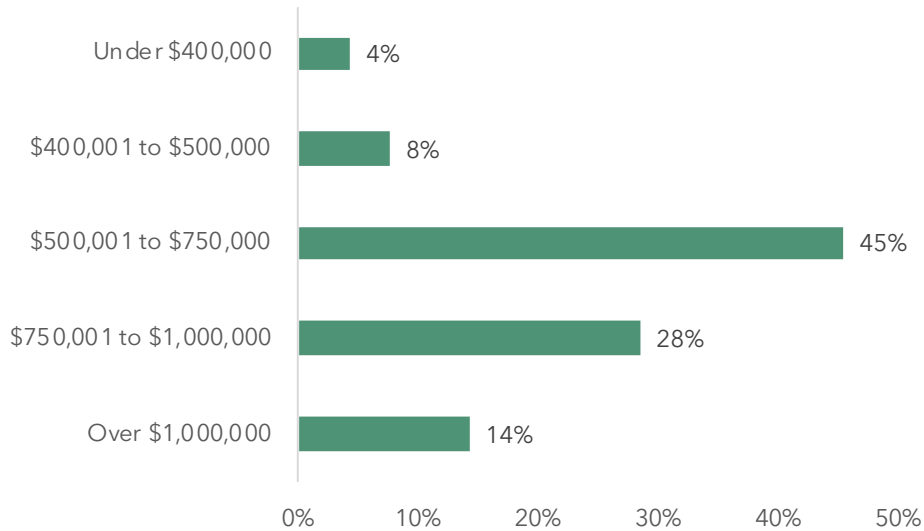
Source: Parcel, based on Rentals.ca listings (accessed November 6, 2023).

Ownership

Our analysis of current ownership prices considers both the resale of existing homes and new home prices in the town. Based on active listings on realtor.ca in January 2024, approximately **4% of houses are considered affordable based using the income-based affordable definition** (\$379,500). Houses listed for between \$500,000 and \$750,000 make up the single greatest share of ownership units on the market (45%) followed by houses that are over \$750,000 (42%).

Figure 5.7

Asking Ownership Prices Distribution

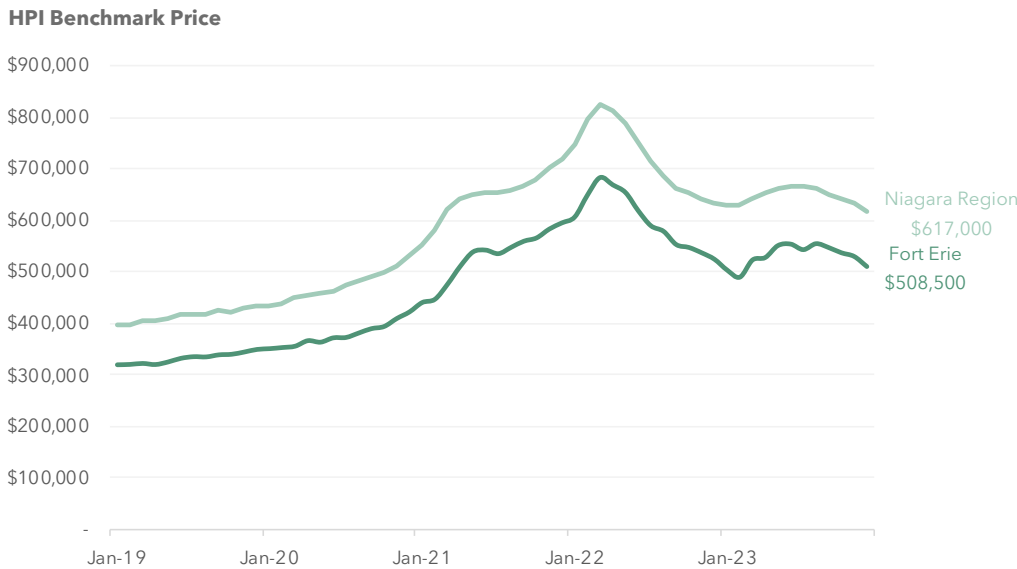


Source: Parcel, based on Realtor.ca listings (accessed January 19, 2024)

The Niagara Association of Realtors also publishes monthly housing prices based on the Housing Price Index (HPI). In December 2023, the HPI price in Fort Erie was **\$508,500, which meets the market-based affordable definition**. Overall, prices have declined since record highs in 2022 due to a higher interest rate environment that makes mortgage costs more expensive. This dynamic means housing is not necessarily more affordable as lower prices are offset by higher interest payments.

Figure 5.8

Monthly Housing Price Index (HPI) for Ownership Housing



Source: Parcel, based on Niagara Association of Realtors data.

In addition to prices of existing housing units in the town, we have also summarized the prices of units in new housing developments as of February 2024. Average house prices in these developments ranged from a low of \$563,000 to a high of \$1.36 million with an average price of \$814,200. These prices are significantly higher than resale house prices in the town and not affordable for many households. Of note, there was only one project in the town marketing condominium apartment units, which are typically more affordable than singles and towns and projected to be an important part of housing stock growth to 2051.

Figure 5.9

Asking Prices for New Construction Units

Number of Projects	Total Units	Minimum Price	Maximum Price	Average Price
20	805	\$563,000	\$1,358,800	\$814,200

Source: Parcel, based on Altus Data Studio (accessed February 9, 2024).

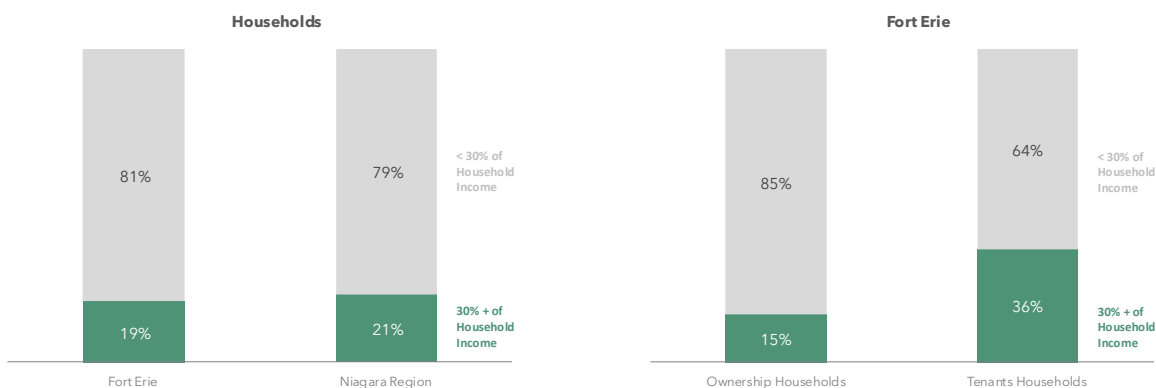
5.3 Cost-Burdened Households & Core Housing Need

The relatively high house prices and monthly rent in the town is clearly having an impact on households. Two commonly used indicators used to assess affordability is whether households are **cost burdened** or in **core housing need**. A household is defined as being “cost burdened” when it spends 30% or more of its pre-tax income on housing. A household is in “core housing need” when it lives in housing that is **inadequate** (fewer bedrooms than required), **unsuitable** (major repairs required), and/or **unaffordable** (costs more than 30% of income) AND would have to spend more than 30% of its income to obtain housing in the same area that is acceptable (i.e., adequate, suitable, and affordable).

In Fort Erie, approximately **one in every five households is cost burdened (19%) and ten percent (10%) of households are in core housing need**. Given only 6% of Fort Erie households live in inadequate housing and 3% live in unsuitable housing, this suggests that **core housing need is primarily driven by unaffordability**. However, both affordability and core housing need indicators show a greater share of renter households are cost burdened and in core housing need compared to ownership households, indicating a **greater need for affordable rental stock**.

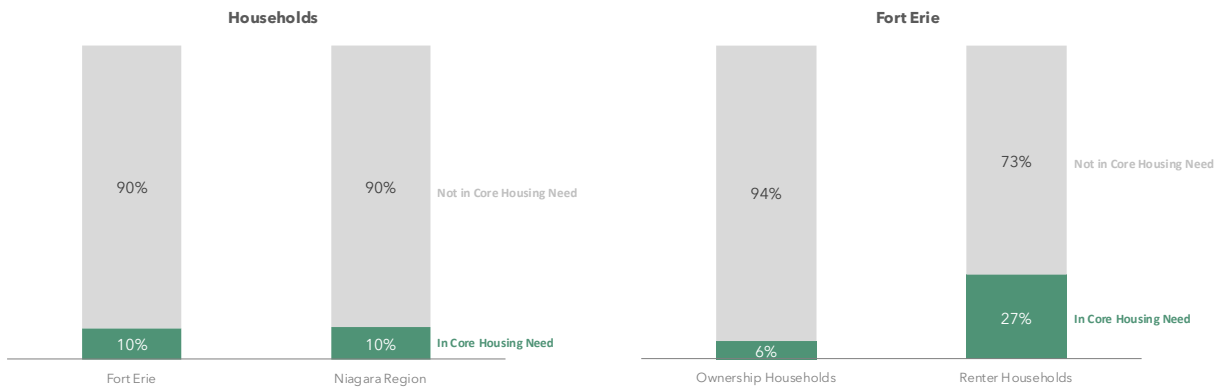
Of households in core housing need, **the majority are single person/roommate households (81%)**. Smaller affordable units (studio and one-bedroom) can help to address core housing need for these households. **Lone parent households (14%)** are the next largest group in core housing need and require two-bedroom units to be household suitably.

Figure 5.10
Cost-Burdened Households (2021)



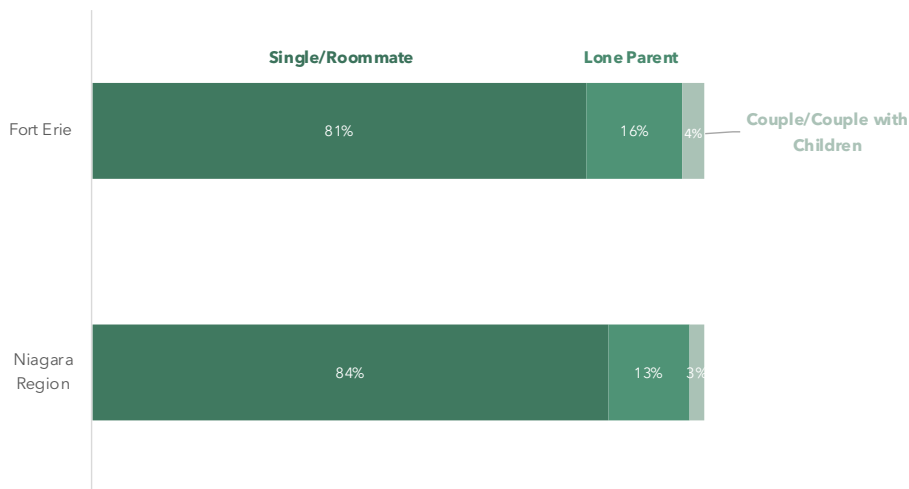
Source: Parcel, based on Statistics Canada 2021 Census

Figure 5.11
Households in Core Housing Need (2021)



Source: Parcel, based on Statistics Canada 2021 Census

Figure 5.12
Core Housing Need by Household Type (2021)



Source: Parcel, based on Niagara Regional Housing data.

GAP: Affordable Ownership and Rental Housing, Including Smaller Units

6.0

What Housing Gaps Exist in Fort Erie?

Throughout this Housing Needs Assessment, we have identified various “gaps” in the Fort Erie housing market. While some of these gaps could be filled in the fullness of time, other gaps will require more targeted intervention. The following section summarizes these gaps, while the final section of this report provides strategies and recommendations to help address them.

Gap 1: Affordable Housing (Ownership and Rental)

- There is a clear need for affordable housing options (both ownership and rental) in the town based on affordability definitions and indicators. Current housing prices are only affordable to households in the top income percentiles, while rents are unaffordable for 40% of renter households. Renter households are significantly more cost-burdened and likely to be in core housing need than ownership households.

Gap 2: Purpose-Built Rental Housing

- Limited primary rental stock in the town is forcing renter households into the secondary rental market where they are likely renting larger, more expensive housing typologies (singles, semis, rows) than may be desired. The lack of primary rental market housing could also be contributing to the higher incidence of cost burdened renter households and renter households in core housing need.

Gap 3: Smaller Housing Units

- There is a lack of smaller housing units (including townhomes and apartment units) in Fort Erie. As a result, nearly 53% of households in the town could be considered “overhoused”, as there are more bedrooms than persons in the dwelling unit (for example, a two-person household living in a four-bedroom house). A portion of these households may consider living in smaller housing units (one and two bedrooms) if they were available. This would provide a better match with household size and will be *more* affordable than larger housing units even if they do not meet the definition of “affordable”.
- The need for smaller housing units is anticipated to increase in the future. There is a very predictable pattern when it comes to housing type and the age of residents, whereby people move out of single-detached housing and into smaller apartment units as they age. This is due to larger dwelling units becoming more difficult to maintain and less need for space. It will be important to ensure there are a variety of housing options available in the town to meet the diverse needs of these residents and allow them to age in place within the community.

Gap 4: Seniors Housing & Long-Term Care

- The large share of residents over 60, especially compared to Niagara region and the province, will increase the need for housing that allows seniors to age in place. Long waitlist times for seniors' community housing (10 years) and for LTC beds (109 persons on the waitlist for 244 beds) demonstrate an acute existing need for more dedicated seniors housing.
- Filling the smaller housing units, primary rental, and affordable ownership and rental housing gaps may also help to meet the needs of seniors in the community.

7.0

What Policy Tools Are Available to Fill These Housing / Affordability Gaps?

Below is a list of preliminary recommendations to fill the housing gaps identified as part of this report. This list will be further refined as part of the final report following collaboration with and input from other members of the Official Plan Review team.

1. Identify and incorporate an **affordable housing target** in the Official Plan. Ideally, this target will align with the Niagara Region target of **20% of all new rental housing** and **10% of all new ownership housing** being affordable.
2. Incorporate a definition of **attainable housing** in the Official Plan to align with the Niagara Region Official Plan.
3. **Leverage municipally owned lands to achieve housing goals.** Recently updated Official Plans for both the City of Guelph (February 2022) and Town of Caledon (August 2023) have a policy regarding the use of surplus lands for affordable/attainable/assisted housing. The Town should also **advocate/partner with upper levels of government** (Regional, Provincial, Federal) to secure affordable/attainable housing on their surplus sites.

Example from the Future Caledon Official Plan Section 9.8.5

Publicly Owned Surplus Land

- a) *The Town will maintain an inventory and consider selling or leasing surplus municipal properties that have been deemed appropriate for the development of affordable housing at or below market value.*

Example from the Guelph Official Plan Section 7.2.6.7

The City will promote and where appropriate establish on-going partnerships with both federal/provincial governments for surplus land and/or buildings.

4. Incorporate policies in the Official Plan that will allow the Town to utilize incentive programs, Community Improvement Plans, community planning permit systems, supportive zoning by-laws, strategic reductions of development fees, and/or alternative site-development standards (either offered through the County or Town) that **reduce the cost of construction and maintenance of services for affordable housing units**.
5. Develop a specific **affordable housing community improvement plan** that provides incentives to create affordable housing in desired locations throughout the town.
6. **Identify and pre-zone sites** appropriate for affordable housing to accelerate the planning approvals process.

Example from the Future Caledon Official Plan Section 9.8.6

Zoning and Secondary Planning

- a) *The Town will work with the Region to identify and pre-zone sites, including vacant or underutilized sites, for affordable housing.*
 - b) *The Town will work with the Region to prepare a housing assessment report to inform housing policies in new or revised secondary plans or block plans.*
7. Include Official Plan policies recognizing the importance of **accessory dwelling units (ADUs)** as an affordable housing option. Specifically, require all development proposing ground-related housing, including single-detached, semi-detached, and street townhouse dwellings, to include design options that provide purchasers the ability to have two (2) residential units within the main building and/or an additional dwelling unit in an ancillary structure.
 8. Review as-of-right Official Plan and zoning permissions for opportunities to **increase permitted uses, heights, and densities** in support of more affordable housing typologies. The Town can consider minimum

density targets for greenfield areas to encourage higher density housing typologies. Maximum density targets can also be considered.

9. Require the submission of an **Affordable/Attainable Housing Report** when new development is proposed above a certain size (e.g., more than 40 dwelling units and/or taller than three (3) storeys) that demonstrates how the development aligns with/advances the housing goals of the Official Plan (e.g., increased supply, diversity, affordability, tenure, etc.). Developments that demonstrate this may be given **priority in the approvals process**.

Example from the Guelph Official Plan Section 7.2.2.3 and 7.2.2.8

General Policies

7.2.2.3 The City may require the submission of an Affordable Housing Report as part of a development application, demonstrating to the satisfaction of the City how the application addresses affordable housing needs and the affordable housing target including the provision of a range of affordable housing prices.

7.2.2.8 City Council shall consider giving priority, through the Development Priorities Plan, to development applications that provide the type, size and tenure of housing required to meet the social and economic needs of the City's residents.

10. Include Official Plan policies that encourage the development of **mixed-use buildings** and the **redevelopment of existing non-residential buildings** to accommodate residential units in urban areas.
11. Encourage affordable housing in areas with existing services and permissions for greater height and density.
12. Encourage the use of **innovative building methods** (e.g., prefabricated housing, modular housing) that can help to reduce the cost of housing. The Town may also consider adopting **pre-approved designs** for certain housing typologies (e.g., singles, semidetached, towns) to accelerate the planning approvals process.

Example from the Future Caledon Official Plan Section 9.8.7

Innovative Methods

- a) *The Town will support strategies that reduce the cost of affordable housing, such as low-cost housing using innovative techniques like prefabricated and manufactured housing, and tiny houses as additional residential units or as cluster housing.*

- b) *The Town will support developments that propose innovative home-ownership methods including shared equity housing, rent-to-own developments, land leases, community land trusts and co-operatives, among others.*

13. **Monitor** the development of new affordable and attainable housing in the Town on an annual basis:

- o The number of affordable / attainable housing units produced through new development;
- o Affordable prices / rents based on Official Plan definitions;
- o Average ownership and rental prices;
- o Rental vacancy rates; and,
- o Progress in achieving affordable/attainable housing targets.

Example from the Guelph Official Plan Section 7.2.6.11

The City will annually monitor:

- i. *The number and types of affordable housing produced through new residential development and intensification efforts;*
- ii. *The number of and types of affordable housing lost through demolition and condominium conversion;*
- iii. *Ownership and rental house prices;*
- iv. *Rental vacancy rates; and*
- v. *Achievement of the affordable housing targets of this Plan.*

Previous Recommendations

Both the 2019 Housing Needs Study and current Housing Action Strategy included recommendations to improve housing outcomes in Fort Erie. Where appropriate, these previous recommendations have been captured and restated in the recommendations developed as part of this Housing Needs Assessment. Recommendations from the 2019 Housing Needs Study and in effect Housing Action Strategy are listed in the table below.

Figure 7.1

Previous Recommendations

Housing Action Strategy	Housing Needs Study (2019)
<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>
Identifying and Strengthening Municipal Partnerships	Policy initiatives that encourage more medium- and high-density development
Education and Public Consultation	Policy initiatives that require a percentage of all new construction be affordable
Housing Needs Study <i>(completed 2019)</i>	Determine if any surplus municipal lands are conducive to regionally supported affordable housing
Identifying Innovative Housing Solutions	Update Official Plan to allow density bonusing for affordable housing units
Flexible Zoning	Create incentives for development of affordable units

Secondary Suite Policy

Explore opportunities for incentives through Development Charge By-law or other mechanisms (e.g., Community Improvement Plan)

Density Bonusing

Create a Housing Reserve Fund to support affordable housing initiatives

Community Improvement Plan for Affordable Housing

Create a public-private partnership taskforce

Development Charge Deferrals

Ensure Town policies are reflective of new housing developments and trends at the federal, provincial, and regional levels

Upzoning

Source: Parcel, based on Town of Fort Erie Housing Action Strategy and CANCEA Fort Erie Housing Needs Study (2019).



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