West Lincoln

Cultivating West Lincoln
New Official Plan

Discussion Paper

A Resilient Township

November 2026

Introduction

West Lincoln is facing change over the coming decades. The Township of West Lincoln has projected its population will increase from approximately 15,454 to 38,370 by 2051. To accommodate this growth, the Township must plan for the future while protecting the agricultural lands, natural heritage and rural identity that define West Lincoln.

Building resilience is an important consideration as West Lincoln continues to grow. The Township's extensive agricultural lands, businesses, natural heritage system, waterways, parks, and infrastructure networks support the community's long-term environmental, social, and economic well-being. At the same time, West Lincoln faces challenges associated with severe weather events, including flooding, drought, winter storms, and extreme heat, which can affect residents, infrastructure, agricultural operations, and natural systems.

As part of the Official Plan Review, the Township has an opportunity to consider how future growth and development can support long-term resilience. This discussion paper explores emerging policy ideas related to sustainable community design, green infrastructure, natural hazard management, water resource protection, connected parks and open spaces, and fiscal sustainability. Together, these policy directions can help ensure West Lincoln remains a healthy, prosperous, and resilient community for future generations.



Aerial view of the Leisureplex

Policy Context

Provincial Planning Statement, 2024

The PPS 2024 places a strong emphasis on building resilient, sustainable, and prosperous communities. Key themes include supporting climate change adaptation, protecting and restoring natural heritage and water resources, investing in resilient infrastructure, promoting energy conservation and renewable energy, maintaining connected parks and open spaces, and protecting the long-term viability of Ontario's agricultural system. The policies also emphasize economic competitiveness, fiscal sustainability, complete communities, and coordinated planning to enhance environmental, social, and economic resilience over the long term.



Sunrise in West Lincoln

Niagara Official Plan

Since March 31, 2025, the Niagara Official Plan policies related to the natural environment have applied within the Township. However, as part of the transition of regional planning authority responsibilities to local municipalities across Niagara, applicable natural environment policies will need to be integrated into the Township's Official Plan. The Niagara Official Plan emphasizes climate resilience, environmental protection, watershed-based planning, and the long-term sustainability of natural heritage and water resources while supporting future growth and development. Key policy themes include:

- **Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience:** Establishes targets and strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase climate resilience, support corporate climate initiatives, and facilitate the transition to net-zero communities. The policies focus on both climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- **Natural Heritage System:** Identifies and protects a Regional Natural Heritage System and Water Resource System that together form the Natural Environment System. Specific policies apply to lands within the Natural Heritage System to support long-term environmental protection.
- **Water Quality and Quantity:** Requires watershed and subwatershed planning to guide growth management, settlement area expansions, infrastructure planning, and the protection, enhancement, and restoration of water resources. These policies emphasize integrated planning and consideration of cross-jurisdictional and cross-watershed impacts.

Emerging Policy Ideas

The following section provides an overview of emerging policy ideas that will be explored to inform the Township's long-term growth, environmental stewardship, and economic prosperity. These ideas will be explored through the Official Plan Review and help guide policy direction discussions.

Bill 98

Recent provincial planning changes (Bill 98) have altered the scope of matters that municipalities may address through Official Plan policies including climate change. While climate change can no longer be addressed through Official Plan policies, climate-related objectives can be advanced through policies focused on community resilience, natural hazard management, environmental protection, infrastructure planning, water resource management, and sustainable development.

Sustainable Community Design and Green Infrastructure

- Encourage low-impact development, green infrastructure in new development, parks and public spaces.
- Incorporate native landscaping, tree planting, and naturalized stormwater features into public and private projects.
- Promote compact and efficient development within settlement areas to make efficient use of infrastructure and municipal services.
- Support connected communities through walkable neighbourhood design and improved mobility options.
- Encourage consideration of environmental risks and long-term resilience in infrastructure planning and asset management.

Natural Hazard Management and Community Resilience

- Encourage land use and design strategies that enhance resilience to drought, flooding, wildfires, extreme weather events such as heatwaves
- Direct development away from natural hazards and environmentally sensitive areas.

Connected Parks and Green Space System

- Enhance existing parks and green spaces and improve connections between them to create a system.
- Expand tree canopy coverage and naturalized areas.
- Utilize native vegetation and naturalized landscaping to strengthen connections to local ecosystems
- Confirm environmental and conservation mapping reflects current conditions and future needs.

Protect Water Quality and Quantity

- Promote watershed-based planning and water conservation initiatives.
- Protect groundwater recharge areas, streams, wetlands, and headwaters.
- Encourage agricultural and rural best management practices that improve water quality and reduce runoff.

Fiscal Sustainability and Economic Resilience

- Coordinate the timing of growth with infrastructure planning and investment to ensure municipal services can be delivered efficiently.
- Direct growth to areas that maximize the use of existing infrastructure and public investments.
- Plan for infrastructure upgrades and expansions ahead of future development to support growth and intensification.
- Promote development that contributes to the Township's long-term financial sustainability and economic diversification.



Soybeans in a field at sunrise