West Lincoln

Cultivating West Lincoln
New Official Plan

Discussion Paper

A Transforming Township

November 2026

Introduction

West Lincoln is expected to grow substantially by 2051. Most new residents and jobs will be directed to Smithville, while the Township's agricultural area and hamlets will continue to have different and more limited development roles. The challenge is to accommodate growth without losing the farmland, rural character and small-town qualities that define West Lincoln.

Much of the growth framework is already established through the Niagara Official Plan, Official Plan Amendments 62 and 63, and the Smithville Master Community Plan. The new Official Plan must bring these directions together, clarify where different forms of growth belong and connect development with infrastructure, housing and economic-development priorities.



Aerial view of Smithville, West Lincoln.

Direction from Existing Documents

Growth Forecasts and Settlement Roles

Niagara Official Plan Table 2-1 allocates 38,370 residents and 10,480 jobs to West Lincoln by 2051. OPA 62 directs most growth to serviced lands in Smithville and provides a more limited role for hamlets. These forecasts must guide land, infrastructure and public-service planning.

Smithville Intensification and Greenfield Growth

The Niagara Official Plan establishes a minimum of 1,130 units, or 13 per cent of new housing, within West Lincoln's built-up area and a minimum greenfield density of 50 residents and jobs combined per hectare. OPA 63 applies the greenfield target to the Smithville expansion and requires coordinated Block Plans and Master Environmental Servicing Plans.

Housing and Affordability

OPA 62 establishes a Smithville greenfield housing mix of 60 per cent low density, 35 per cent medium density and 5 per cent high density. Niagara policy also sets minimum affordability targets of 20 per cent of new rental housing and 10 per cent of new ownership housing. The Affordable Housing Community Improvement Plan adopted in April 2026 provides complementary incentives.

Employment and Economic Development

The Niagara Official Plan identifies the Smithville Industrial District as a Core Employment Area with a minimum overall target of 20 jobs per hectare. OPA 63 extends the urban employment area, while the Township's Economic Development Plan supports investment-ready land, downtown activity, agriculture and agri-food, rural broadband and workforce housing.

Agriculture, Hamlets and Severance

Section 4.3 of the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 protects prime agricultural areas and generally discourages lot creation, except in limited circumstances. Niagara policy directs limited rural growth to hamlets and protects the agricultural system. The Fulton Rural Employment Area work may inform future policy, but Draft OPA 70 should not be treated as approved until Council completes its process.

Emerging Policy Ideas

Growth policies should clearly distinguish Smithville, hamlets, rural employment areas and the agricultural land base. Transformation does not mean applying one density or development model across the Township.

Smithville as the Primary Growth Area

- Direct most new housing, jobs, commercial uses and public facilities to Smithville, where municipal water and wastewater services can support growth.
- Coordinate phasing with water, wastewater, transportation, stormwater, parks, schools and other public-service capacity.

Complete Communities, Nodes and Corridors

- Plan new Smithville neighbourhoods with a mix of housing, parks, schools, local services and appropriate employment, connected by streets and trails.
- Identify local nodes or corridors within Smithville where additional housing and mixed uses are appropriate. West Lincoln has no provincially or regionally identified Strategic Growth Area, and urban-intensification language should not be applied to hamlets or farmland.

Urban Employment and Downtown Smithville

- Protect the Smithville Industrial District and coordinate servicing, transportation and land-use permissions so employment land is usable and compatible with nearby uses.
- Support downtown Smithville as a focus for shops, services, offices, housing and community activity, with mixed-use development directed to suitable locations.
- Update the definition of employment areas to reflect the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024, which excludes office, institutional and commercial uses unless they are associated with a primary employment use.

Housing Choice and Affordability

- Provide a broader range of housing types, sizes and tenures, including family-sized, smaller, rental, accessible, seniors' and additional residential units.
- Focus higher-density and affordable housing where services, amenities and transportation are available and coordinate Official Plan permissions with the Affordable Housing CIP.

Agriculture and Rural Employment

- Protect the agricultural land base from fragmentation and incompatible development while supporting agriculture-related uses, on-farm diversified uses and appropriate home-based businesses.
- Provide clear policy for rural employment areas, including Fulton when its current process is complete, while maintaining rural character, suitable private servicing and compatibility with nearby farms.

Hamlets and Rural Severance

- Maintain hamlets as the focus for limited development outside Smithville, mainly through context-sensitive infill within established boundaries and on private services.
- Distinguish hamlet development from agricultural severance. Additional residential units may be permitted where provincial criteria are met but cannot be severed into separate lots.

Implementation

Translate the 2051 forecasts into a clear land-use structure, phasing approach and infrastructure strategy. Schedules should identify Smithville's built-up area, greenfield lands, employment areas, hamlets and any locally identified nodes or corridors. Implementation should coordinate zoning, Block Plans, servicing, capital and financial planning, economic-development initiatives and the Affordable Housing CIP, supported by regular monitoring.



Housing development in Smithville, West Lincoln.