**Niagara Escarpment Commission**

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May 19, 2021

# P4: STAFF REPORT

**Commission Review and Approval of**

**Draft Technical Criteria for Landscape Plans**

## BACKGROUND

A Landscape Plan is a technical drawing that lays out proposed landscaping that conforms with Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP) policies and external agency requirements, and addresses recommendations of environmental studies or visual impact assessments. Landscaping may be required for mitigating visual impacts, mitigating environmental impacts, or enhancing the natural environment. The Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP) and the *Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act* (NEPDA) require the protection of natural heritage features and functions, and the conservation of landform and scenic resources. These technical criteria are intended to support the implementation of NEP policies and provide a standardized approach for the preparation of Landscape Plans.

Draft Guidelines for Landscape Construction Drawings have been in use since 2012 and were last updated in 2017. Developing technical criteria for landscape construction drawings was identified as a priority in a report to the Commission in October 2017. In October 2018, the Commission directed staff to initiate a process to develop technical criteria to replace the draft guidelines and return to the Commission with the proposed technical criteria prior to consultation. NEC staff have since completed research, development, and preliminary consultation. Staff are bringing forward this report to seek Commission approval of the Draft Technical Criteria for Landscape Plans (see Attachment #1) and direction to initiate a targeted consultation process.

Note, the change in title from Landscape Construction Drawings to Landscape Plans has been made for consistency with industry standards.

## 2. PLANNING CONTEXT

The NEP provides for the development of guidance material and technical criteria to assist the NEC with implementing the policies of the Plan. This document is intended to support but not add to or detract from the policies of the Plan.

## 3. SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Draft Technical Criteria for Landscape Plans provides helpful information for applicants and their consultants on landscape design standards and minimum requirements for the preparation of a Landscape Plan. The technical criteria also address:

* Policy context for landscaping
* Types of applications where a Landscape Plan may be required
* Professional expertise required to undertake a Landscape Plan (e.g., knowledge of planting design and landscape planning)
* Scope of work including defining objectives and coordinating with other plans and studies
* Minimum standards for landscape design (e.g., appropriate use of native and non-native species, plant sourcing, size and spacing)
* Format of a Landscape Plan submission
* Review and approval process for a Landscape Plan
* Overview of related plans (e.g., visual impact assessment) and relevant terminology

## 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) often applies a Condition of Approval that necessitates the submission of a Landscape Plan. At this stage of the approvals process, the Landscape Plan provides important information on how landscaping will be implemented. In some cases, however, landscaping may need to be addressed at an earlier stage in the application process to determine if the proposed development is compatible with the natural environment.

The level of detail required on a Landscape Plan varies from basic to complex depending on the extent of the proposed development and objectives for the landscaping. For most applications, a basic Landscape Plan that includes planting layout and a plant list will suffice. For more complex applications, the Landscape Plan will take the form of a series of detailed landscape construction drawings, which may include specifications for site preparation, erosion and sediment control, vegetation protection, construction staging, planting, surfacing, lighting, furnishings, fencing, retaining walls, decks, lookouts, pools, tennis courts, signage, and monitoring and management plans.

The scope of work, level of detail, and timing of a Landscape Plan submission is determined by NEC staff in the context of the development proposal and site conditions. Other considerations include the findings of related studies (e.g., visual impact assessment, natural heritage evaluation, environmental impact study) and any external agency requirements (e.g., setbacks). NEC staff consult with applicants facing a Landscape Plan submission to confirm plan requirements and provide guidance materials. The Technical Criteria for Landscape Plans will be a useful resource for NEC staff and ensure that applicants and their consultants have the information they need to proceed.

The Technical Criteria for Landscape Plans will provide applicants and their consultants with an understanding of why a Landscape Plan is required, important considerations for landscaping, and how to prepare an effective Landscape Plan submission. This will result in better quality submissions, fewer revisions and resubmissions, and a streamlined submission and approval process.

## 5. PROCESS AND TIMING

The targeted consultation process will invite key stakeholders, including qualified professionals with expertise in landscape design, and municipalities and conservation authorities within the Plan area to review and comment on the Draft Technical Criteria for Landscape Plans. NEC staff will return to the Commission upon completion of the consultation phase for approval of the finalized technical criteria in late 2021.

## 6. RECOMMENDATION

That the Niagara Escarpment Commission:

1. Approve the Draft Technical Criteria for Landscape Plans attached to this staff report; and,
2. Direct staff to undertake targeted consultation with key stakeholders and municipalities within the Plan area.

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