External Briefing Note

GEORGINA

Subject: **High Street Streetscape and Infrastructure Redevelopment - Request for Second Design Option for Relocation of Overhead Wires**

To: Mayor and Council

From: Michael Vos, Director Operations and Infrastructure

Date: June 17, 2026

Briefing:

At the meeting of May 6, 2026, Council received Report OID-2026-0006 entitled "High Street Streetscape & Infrastructure Redevelopment – Project Update", which provided background information about the project, an update of current status and outlined next steps.

As a result of its deliberations, Council accepted the five recommendations presented and added a sixth, as listed below:

1. That Council receive Report No. OID-2026-0006 prepared by the Capital Projects - Linear Division, Operations & Infrastructure Department, providing an update on the High Street Streetscape & Infrastructure Redevelopment project;
2. That By-Law 2026-0048 (TR-1) be adopted to amend By-Law 2023-0087 (TR 1) to regulate traffic and control the parking of vehicles as outlined herein;
3. That Council authorize additional funding in the amount of $484,997 for Watermain replacement in Phase 1 & 2 of the project, to be funded from the Water – Infrastructure – Repair and Replacement Reserve;
4. That Council direct staff to pursue cost-sharing opportunities with Hydro One, Rogers, Bell and York Net for relocation of overhead wires to underground as proposed for Phase 2 of the project; and
5. That Council direct staff to provide a report in January 2027 to update Council on the progress of the project work as well as updating the financial projections for Phase 2 and the project as a whole; and,
6. **That Council direct staff, in order to ensure the continuity of the project, to develop a contingency plan with an estimate for the design of the aesthetic hybrid option for hydro utility lines should substantial cost escalations occur, and that said contingency plan be submitted to Council on June 17, 2026, for consideration.**

This briefing note summarizes the actions taken to obtain the information requested in recommendation six.

Background:

In the June 4, 2025 Council report (OI-2025-0008 High Street Streetscape & Infrastructure Redevelopment Update and Recommended Design Approach) a few options were provided to develop a streetscape design for the overhead wires including utility, cable and hydro. In simplest form, the options included a "do nothing" option, a hybrid option, and a full underground option. The do-nothing and full underground options are self-explanatory. The hybrid option was a lower cost alternative to the full underground, that involves:

- Relocate only the cross-street hydro and communication wires to underground at the same time as excavation for the underground infrastructure;
    - Note that wires parallel to the street, high voltage transmission wires, transformers and individual property service connections will not be modified.
- Apply decorative elements (i.e. decorative wraps) to poles in the BIA zone, with the intent of making them appear as new streetlight poles; and
- Decorative streetlight enhancements (costs included in previously approved streetscape components estimates).

This lower cost hybrid alternative was not selected at that time. Council endorsed the design approach of relocating all overhead wires underground to achieve the streetscape aesthetic improvement sought. The project team has been advancing this approach in its design development since.

Throughout this design phase, and as outlined in the May 6, 2026 report, Hydro One has consistently stated their policy to provide construction cost estimates only after the detailed design achieves 100% completion, which is expected in the fall of 2026. This timing for completion of design and finalization of cost estimates forms the basis for recommendation number five of the May 6, 2026 Council Report. It is important to note that the work associated with relocation of the overhead wires is solely in Phase 2 of the construction program, which is planned to take place in 2027, subject to Council approval. Staff will bring a report early in 2027, providing the updated cost estimates and full design.

Council's Request:

At the May 6, 2026 Council meeting, concern was expressed that if the 100% design estimate of costs for full relocation of overhead wires, expected to be presented in early 2027, exceeds the current budget, and staff are required to request additional funding for construction, Council may be unwilling to approve the required funding. If that were the case, the project would incur delays if at that time Council requested a re-design of the overhead wires to a lower cost alternative.

As a result, recommendation 6 was added to Report OID-2026-0006 as direction to staff to quickly obtain quotes and feasibility for completion of a parallel design for a lower-cost alternative, being the hybrid approach as outlined above. When brought back, it would have allowed Council to consider the trade-off of additional cost beginning in June 2026 with potential risk mitigation directly associated with delays from a re-design due to an over-budget, fully underground option, being presented in early 2027.

To respond to the direction provided by Council in recommendation 6, on May 7, 2026 staff requested that the Town's design consultant for the High Street project (CIMA+) provide a proposed engineering scope of work, costs and schedule to prepare a stand-alone alternative (referred to as "Option B") detailed design and tender package for Phase 2 of the High Street Infrastructure and Streetscaping Project. The following were identified as the key principles necessary to be addressed in the proposal:

- "Option B" is the hybrid approach to dealing with overhead wires in the BIA core of High Street as outlined at high-level in the Town's June 4, 2025 Council report OI-2025-0008 High Street Streetscape & Infrastructure Redevelopment Update and Recommended Design Approach, to which CIMA contributed information about the hybrid approach;
- Base scope of work required:
    - Prepare for and conduct one pre-design workshop with Town stakeholders to clarify and resolve key decisions needed to allow the "Option B" design to proceed
    - Prepare and submit the 60% Design Review Package for "Option B" including all elements as described in Engineering Services Specification (ESS) 3.3.1
    - Prepare and submit the 100% Design Review Package for "Option B" as described in ESS 3.3.2
    - Base scope for "Option B" must be completed as final by the same date as final completion of the primary design for Phase 2 that is currently underway (being fully underground Option A)
- Provisional scope of work:
    - Tendering Support Tasks as described in ESS 3.4
    - Construction Phase Work Activities as described in ESS 4, with hour allocations and number of events modified to suit the potential construction program for "Option B"
- Include a description of the work tasks to be completed and how they will be integrated within the overall progress of the primary design for Phase 2 that is currently underway
- Identify and describe any new agreements or modifications to existing agreements that the Town many need with external partner organizations (i.e. utilities)
- Include a description of the contributions and CIMA's coordination required with external partner organizations to contribute to the base scope and provisional work of "Option B"
- Include a GANNT chart schedule showing the "Option B" task being completed in parallel with the primary design for Phase 2 that is currently underway, including identification of tasks and timeframes required for work contributions by external partner organizations.
- Include a detailed time task matrix for the proposed "Option B" workplan.
- Include Price Schedules in the same format as established by the Town for the current assignment with line items modified to suit the scope of the potential "Option B" assignment
- All work must be fully defined and addressed within your workplan so we can provide a complete response to the direction provided by Council. No exclusions can be entertained.
- CIMA's proposed work plan and budget document will be included as an attachment to the June Council report, which will become a public document.
- All in accordance with the terms, conditions and requirements of the Town and CIMA's current engineering agreement entitled "OID2024-049 High Street Streetscape and Infrastructure Improvements" and its approved Change Orders.

As requested, CIMA+ quickly began work on preparing its proposal and contacted Hydro One to request their contribution. Unfortunately, Hydro One would not agree to participate in preparing two tender-ready, detailed

design options in parallel. Town staff contacted Hydro One directly, explained the challenge faced by Council in considering the potential funding needs of the project and the desire to avoid delays that would result from the need to re-design aspects of the project early in 2027. Hydro One stated in writing that they do not have the engineering resources available to complete two such designs in parallel on the same timeline and respectfully declined to participate beyond their current responsibility.

Hydro One voiced its continued support for the High Street project and its commitment to contribute to the full overhead wire relocation approach as planned. Hydro One confirmed that, if Council should change its planned design approach following completion of the 100% design and presentation early in 2027, Hydro One would at that time, commit to re-design of an alternative. Hydro One also indicated that the time required to complete a re-design for the Option B approach would be less than the time taken for design of the full relocation approach as they would be able to make use of some of the completed investigations and design work, minimizing the impact to the construction schedule in 2027. CIMA+ also confirmed the likely reduction in construction schedule for a hybrid approach.

Staff did consider the possibility of relying on third party consultants to prepare the parallel Option B design approach as a result of Hydro One's response. However, it was recognized that this would be inefficient, would still require substantial contribution from Hydro One prior to construction and therefore would not fulfill Council's objective of avoiding delay due to a change in direction to Option B.

As a result, staff regret to report that Council's direction of recommendation 6 of the May 6, 2026 meeting cannot be fulfilled.

Continued Next Steps:
As planned, a report will be presented in January 2027 following completion of the Phase 2 detailed design to update Council on the progress of the project work as well as updating the financial projections for Phase 2 and the project design as a whole. At that time and at Council's direction, re-design of the project to accommodate a lower cost treatment for the overhead wires could commence if necessary.

In the context of potential funding concerns for the overhead wires aspect of the project, it is important to be aware that staff are currently proceeding to negotiate cost-sharing arrangements with utilities, as directed in recommendation 4 of the May 6, 2026 report. While commitments have not yet been established, staff have investigated and determined there is a strong rationale for cost-sharing and that supporting precedents exist in Ontario. Key factors to consider include:

- Following completion of the project, the affected electrical and communications utilities will be the beneficiaries of installation of all new equipment and infrastructure within the BIA core. Effectively, the long-term lifecycle costs associated with maintenance and depreciation of that infrastructure will effectively be re-set to zero, providing a very significant financial benefit to those utilities.
- The Public Service Works on Highways Act (R.S.O 1990) establishes:
    - A basis for a road authority in Ontario to direct utilities to remove or change the location of utility infrastructure located within a road; and,
    - Apportionment of cost sharing between the road authority and the utility.

- Rogers communication has indicated its expectation of a 50/50 cost-sharing arrangement for relocation of its High Street infrastructure
- York Region staff have confirmed that cost-sharing arrangements for relocation of utilities has been established for many of its major corridor projects

It is anticipated that outcomes of the Phase 2 cost-sharing negotiations with utilities will be finalized as the construction cost estimates are completed and will be available to present to Council as part of the update of Phase 2 in early 2027.