



Committee Report

To: Councillor Steve Hammell, Chair and
Members of the Planning and Development Committee

From: Mark Paoli
Director of Planning and Development

Date: November 18, 2021

Re: Plan the Bruce: Agriculture - Next Steps

Staff Recommendation:

That staff be authorized to initiate an Amendment to the County Official Plan to add policy criteria for consideration of smaller agricultural lots and to update the policies on industrial and commercial uses in agricultural areas.

Background:

Committee has expressed interest in identifying opportunities to advance policy changes or tools in the near-term to support development objectives while not detracting from the work to advance the larger Plan the Bruce project. A review of feedback on the Plan the Bruce: Agriculture project has identified policy changes that meet this intent.

Plan the Bruce: Agriculture - Community Engagement:

Engagement and outreach for Plan the Bruce: Agriculture was done from March to July 2021. The process included social media, public and landowner surveys, an online map commenting tool, a stakeholder workbook and meetings/presentations where invited by stakeholders. Engagement efforts yielded:

- 2,200 web site visits
- 234 web site visitors downloaded 503 documents
- 80 general public survey responses
- 60 letters or emails
- 45 landowner survey responses including 18 through regular mail
- 11 individuals who provided feedback using the online map tool
- 9 stakeholder workbooks completed.

The engagement was focused on generating feedback about the 14 Recommended Directions that were set out in the Plan the Bruce: Agriculture report (see list in Appendix A).

Feedback Summary

A detailed analysis of and responses to specific comments received through the Plan the Bruce: Agriculture engagement will be brought forward in a report to Planning and Development Committee in the near future. Relevant to this report, the analysis of the feedback found that recommended directions fell into two categories: directions with general community consensus; and, directions with differences of opinion in the community.

Through stakeholder conversations, the County heard that it was difficult to indicate support for or opposition to the recommended directions without having specific proposed policies or the combined agricultural and natural features mapping to respond to. This perspective is understandable given the complexity of many of the issues, and the potential implications for the agricultural sector and/or individual landowners. This was the case for most of the directions on which there was engagement.

There was also, however, feedback on some directions where there was a general consensus and it was suggested that the County should get on with making those policy changes more quickly than could happen through the lengthier process for the new Official Plan.

Analysis

In considering the above, for those directions where there are differences of opinion in the community, the Official Plan process under the Planning Act that is underway would be the most productive way to advance specific draft policy language and map schedules, and to generate deeper, more detailed engagement. At the same time, there would be merit in doing a focused amendment to the current Official Plan to address matters that have both broad support and could benefit farmers and development applicants in the short term.

Specifically, policy changes for the following directions could be drafted in a short amount of time and, it is anticipated, with a relatively low risk of appeal delays:

- More policy detail to support proposals for smaller new agricultural lots; and
- Broaden permitted uses to reflect more flexible Provincial policy and guidelines.

One intended outcome of these changes would be to reduce the number of routine site-specific Official Plan Amendments that are required under current Official Plan policies.

If authorized to proceed, it is anticipated that the Public Meeting for this amendment could be held in January 2022.

Financial/Staffing/Legal/IT Considerations:

A general amendment to the County Official Plan includes costs of up to \$5,000 for public notices in newspapers throughout the County to notify the public of the proposal and the Public Meeting. The existing budget will cover this expense. The amendment will be prepared by staff in-house.

There is the potential for appeals to the Ontario Land Tribunal.

Interdepartmental Consultation:

None.

Link to Strategic Goals and Elements:

Goal 7: Stimulate and reward innovation and economic development.
Element A: Streamline and simplify our Planning Processes.

Departmental Approval:

Mark Paoli
Director, Planning and Development

Approved for Submission:

Sandra Datars Bere
Chief Administrative Officer

APPENDIX A

Plan the Bruce: Agriculture - Interim Report Recommended Directions

No.	Direction	Recommended Path Forward
1	Consult community for input on Prime Agricultural Areas and Potential Prime Agricultural Areas	Address through the project to develop the new Official Plan
2	No change to the baseline minimum size for new farm lots (100 acres in Agricultural, 50 acres in Rural)	Address through the project to develop the new Official Plan
3	More policy detail to support proposed smaller lots	Focused separate amendment to the current Official Plan now
4	Special Policy Area that allows 50-acre farm lots in the original 50-acre survey area	Address through the project to develop the new Official Plan
5	Consider trade-offs between irregular vs rectangular lot shapes	Address through the project to develop the new Official Plan
6	Consider removing bona fide farmer owner requirement for more applicant flexibility	Address through the project to develop the new Official Plan
7	Consider continuing to allow new residential lots in woodlots in the Rural Area	Address through the project to develop the new Official Plan
8	Review population decline with Hamlet growth in Plan the Bruce: Good Growth	Address through the project to develop the new Official Plan
9	Broaden permitted uses to reflect more flexible Provincial policy and guidelines	Focused separate amendment to the current Official Plan now
10	Develop made-in-Bruce Agricultural System policy	Address through the project to develop the new Official Plan
11	Identify specific areas with urban-agricultural edge issues and opportunities	Address through the project to develop the new Official Plan
12	Investigate potential to implement Farm Enterprise Zones	Address through the project to develop the new Official Plan
13	Investigate benefits of Community Planning Permit system for edge planning	Address through the project to develop the new Official Plan
14	Develop policies to address directing facilities to agricultural and rural vs industrial locations	Address through the project to develop the new Official Plan