



Agriculture Advisory Committee (AAC) Meeting

Virtual Conference

Wednesday July 21, 2021

Present: Councillor Metcalfe, Henk Lise (Chair), Stuart Heeg (Vice-Chair), Ron Young, Richard Blyleven, Nick Kinkel (OMAFRA), , Tony and Petra Daly (Windecker Wood Flower Farm, James Richardson (Richardson’s Farm and Market), Will Stoneman (OFA), Matt Reniers, and Marilyn Bidgood.

Staff: Mike Evers, Manager of Community and Development Services, Lidy Romanuk, Manager of Economic Development & Tourism, Shannon VanDalen, Manger of Planning and Development, Alison Earls Senior Economic Development Officer, and Breanna Beauchamp, Division Support.

Regrets: Jordan Fowler, Bruce Armstrong, Stephanie Campbell-Heron, Rick Armstrong

1. Welcome and Introduction

Meeting called to order by Chair Henk Lise at 6:02 p.m.

2. Council Update

Councillor Metcalfe provided a brief update on Council activities including the broadband internet project, operations projects, and the Garfield Disher Memorial Park initiative.

A discussion then ensued.

3. Connect ON Asset Mapping Demonstration

M. Bidgood delivered a presentation on the Connect ON Asset Mapping ,including Connect ON user examples, and provided a demonstration to the committee of the functions of the mapping tool.

A discussion then ensued.

4. Official Plan Update

M. Reniers provided a brief update on the Official Plan, phase one has been completed and submitted to the province for final approval. M. Reniers then reviewed the discussion questions with the committee, which were provided to members prior to the meeting.

Trends in Farming

Are you seeing or experiencing any new farming trends that you think would require a change to land use planning policies?

The Committee expressed concern that farming lots were being lost to development, and to ensure there are policies in place to protect these lands.

M. Reniers added that farm land and urban development/ policies require justification or expansion of agricultural lands, there are provincial policies in place that this Official Plan needs to be consistent with.

The committee noted that larger vehicles are utilizing roads much more frequently, and thus the roads will require additional maintenance.

The Committee sees an increased trend in niche farming, and hobby farms. The policies should reflect these smaller agricultural businesses, and allow flexibility for these niche markets.

Education to the second and third generation of farmers and new landowners remains a priority.

It was noted that agri-tourism is a trend gaining momentum after the effects of Covid-19, and policies to allow additional freedom to these businesses would be appreciated.

Have you ever felt that the growth or evolution of your agricultural operation was restricted by the policies of Haldimand County?

The committee added that there have been obstacles obtaining building permits in the past for agriculture structures.

The committee inquired if studies on urban development in or close to agricultural areas have been completed, and if these have had a positive impact on their communities i.e. increased direct sales to these agricultural operations.

The committee also raised issues on obstacles for land use, value added farm processing and production for on farm diversified uses, and the possibility of expanding to a wider range of activities to supplement farm incomes.

Support for Agriculture

Is the county lacking farm infrastructure or agriculture related businesses to support the agricultural industry in Haldimand County?

If so, where are the gaps and how do you propose the county attract this infrastructure and these businesses?

The committee expressed that they felt there were enough suppliers and warehouses to accommodate their agricultural needs.

There was discussion on the need for additional food processing options including smaller abattoirs and micro processors, policy should be flexible to reflect this need.

Public transit to bring workers from the urban areas to agricultural jobs would assist in the labour challenges many operations are currently facing. Accommodations were also a growing concern for the potential and future of agri-tourism in Haldimand County.

M. Evers added that the need for roofed accommodations has been heard throughout the Official Plan process consultations, the intention is to create policies that will lead to an environment to establish more roofed accommodations.

Non-Agricultural Businesses

Are there non-agricultural businesses the County should support in the agricultural area and are there non-agricultural businesses that the County should not support in the agricultural area because they are a detriment to the agricultural area?

The committee expressed that if the business venture has a direct connection to agricultural, it should be supported. Policies surrounding these kinds of businesses should be flexible, and open for interpretation, essential for growth in the experiential farming industry.

S. VanDalen addressed the committee to offer if there was a difference of definitions on wedding ceremony vs wedding reception? Does the committee see these as different definitions within the policy? This has been a larger discussion during the completion of this process.

- There was discussion that noise could be a possible issue for neighboring farms, and could be disruptive to surrounding areas.
- Weddings could follow general noise by-laws, and be part of the contract of the wedding venue that the receptions would have to end at a certain time.
- Flexible policies are important for businesses that are respectful, but may fall into issues into the future if there is a different interpretation.

The committee agreed overall that these policies need to be simplified and flexible to allow opportunity for new, and innovative agricultural businesses.

On-farm Diversified Use

**Should a wider range of on-farm diversified uses be permitted provided that the use is secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property?
How can the County attract or assist entrepreneurs to invest in on-farm diversified uses?
How could the County assist farmers better through the approvals process?**

The committee believes that there should be encouragement of businesses that promote agriculture and provide education about the agricultural process, and that flexibility should be reflected in the policies.

There was discussion that farm and livestock tours are gaining popularity, although there have been issues about bio-security and animal care, these tours should be allowed as long as it doesn't impact neighboring operations or animal safety and care.

The committee inquired on how the County determines what is the primary and secondary source of income on the farm? M. Reniers provided feedback that is determined on the size of the operation, rather than a monetary amount.

5. The Provincial Policy Statement generally does not permit the creation of new residential lots in Prime Agricultural Areas. One exception is for surplus farm dwellings. According to the Official Plan, a habitable farm dwelling made surplus through the consolidation of farm properties may be severed from the farm provided that the dwelling is at least 10 years old. The 10-year age requirement for the dwelling is to discourage property-owners from circumventing the PPS severance restriction.

Is the 10-year age requirement appropriate? Too long? Or too short? Or should such severances be permitted at all?

The committee felt that the 10 year age requirement policy is still adequate, no change needed from their perspective.

Farm Size

The severance policies of the Official Plan generally require, in the case of farms, that the parcel to be severed and the parcel to be retained are a minimum of 40 hectares (99 acres) in size. Maintaining farms of this size allows for flexibility and resilience to changing circumstances. According to the 2016 Census of Agriculture, about 57% of Haldimand farms were 40 hectares or more in area.

Are farms getting bigger or smaller? What types of farms are predominating? Is the 40-hectare minimum farm property size still appropriate? If not, should the size requirement be larger or smaller?

The committee felt that overall farms are getting larger and owned by few. .

There was also discussion that the minimum size should be altered, 40 hectares is quite significant, 25 acres could be a possibility for smaller niche farms or added flexibility in the policies to allow smaller lots.

They added that large farmers sever land – a dwelling should be able to be built on a portion of the severed land, and that there should be flexibility added in the policies for small farms, and lots being used for agricultural/ agricultural focused businesses.

Existing Lots

Provincial Policy encourages retention of existing lots of record for agriculture, and discourages the use of these lots for non-agricultural purposes. Should the County continue to permit dwellings on existing, small vacant lots of records (former railways, vacant lots, etc.) or small farm properties?

The committee expressed that they saw no issue adding dwellings to smaller agricultural lots and small farm properties.

There was also discussion that additional housing on lots would help the County financially with taxes, and will assist in selling these lands.

Additional Farm Dwellings

The Official Plan permits an additional dwelling for temporary or full time farm help, a temporary garden suite (mobile home) for 10 year period, and secondary suites (small, second units).

Are additional housing opportunities necessary based on trends you are seeing in farming?

Are secondary dwellings appropriate as standalone buildings on farm properties?

The committee expressed interest and saw opportunity in adding secondary dwellings on farm properties to help families with rising cost of real estate, and would be worth adding flexible policies to explore these options.

The committee noted that Haldimand County doesn't have as many seasonal workers as surrounding counties, no additional policies should be needed for bunkhouses etc.

Climate Change

According to the Province of Ontario website, average temperatures in the Province are projected to rise by 2.5-3.7oC by 2050. Summers are expected to be hotter, winter's milder and severe storms more frequent.

**How do you see climate change impacting agriculture in Haldimand County?
How can the Official Plan mitigate these impacts?**

The committee added that the climate will remain a challenge in agriculture, and their crops will continue to change. Members added that cannabis will be the next popular crop in Haldimand County, diversification will likely be reduced.

The committee added that clay dries out, may look at mitigating grass lands, adding fence rows, run offs, cover crops etc. to help mitigate these impacts.

Natural Heritage

As part of the Official Plan Update, mapping of the natural heritage system and associated policies is being developed. The vitality of ecosystems promotes health and enjoyment opportunities for residents and visitors. The protection of an interconnected system of natural environment features plays an important role in supporting biodiversity, strengthening resiliency and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Many natural features are on farm properties.

How can agriculture play a role in preserving and protecting natural heritage features and how can the County support such activities?

The committee added that it may be beneficial to establish policy for buffer areas, or separation of land use for buffers between agricultural areas and natural features.

The committee added it is important to interconnect systems of the natural environment, we shouldn't be cutting down any trees, but strive to continue to plant woodlots in specific areas, wildlife corridors etc.

How else can Haldimand County support the agricultural economy in Haldimand?

The committee provided they felt supported by staff, and Council overall.

It was also noted that there is an increase of agri-tourism with the onset of COVID-19, and any flexibility in policies or support for agri-tourism would be appreciated.

M. Reniers thanked the committee for their input and direction, and will return to continue this discussion later in the year.

12. Adjourned at 8:20 pm