

ENGAGING MUNICIPAL COUNCIL AND STAFF

TEMPLATES AND RESOURCES

Resources to Cultivate Connections

A photograph showing a tractor from a rear perspective, driving on a paved road that stretches into the distance. The tractor is dark-colored with large, treaded tires and has a yellow triangular warning sign on its back. The driver is wearing a dark jacket. The road is flanked by lush green trees and bushes under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds.

Approaching
change with
confidence.

Bringing Agriculture to Municipalities

Templates

- Letter to Clerk to request a delegation
- Templates for writing letters opposing a land use change
- Letter to Council
- Delegation Checklist
- FED TALK training video on doing delegations effectively
- Congratulations letter
- Thank you letter
- Agriculture Impact Infographic Page

Welcome to Rural Ontario Sheet

- A fact sheet advising of life in the country - farm safety on the roads, no trespassing and normal farm practice
- Give to Municipal offices to hand out to their residents with recycling program; with welcome packages; to place on websites and socials
- Give to developers to give to residents
- Give to real estate agents

Why Agriculture Economic Development?

Ontario's agri-food sector is a significant driver of the national, provincial and local economies, and one of the province's largest economic contributors. Over 200 diverse food products are grown, produced, and raised across Ontario's 49,600 farms. Production and processing of these commodities contributes more than \$47 billion annually to the economy and employing over 860,000 Ontarians.

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) provides the [Statistical Summary of Ontario Agriculture](#), including economic indicators like Gross Domestic Product, employment, labour productivity and economic impact analysis of the agri-food value chain. Statistics are further broken out by sector, such as horticultural and field crops, dairy, livestock and poultry and food and beverage. [County Profiles](#) are also available, providing a detailed breakdown by region, county, and township of number of farms and gross farm receipts, major crops grown, land base in production and more.

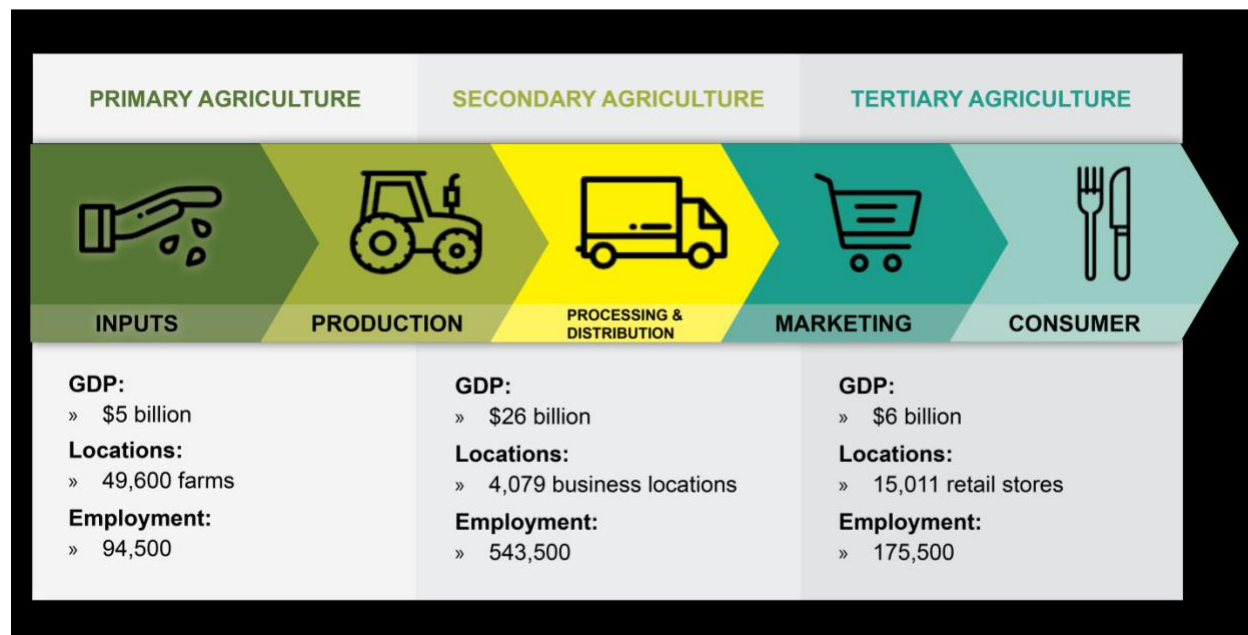
These statistics illustrate that agriculture matters! It is important to use these numbers to tell the story about the impact of the agriculture and food sector locally and regionally to help the sector prosper and grow in your community.

Agriculture is an economic development opportunity. Enhancing agriculture economic development in the local municipality can help agri-food businesses prosper and boost the rural economy.

“Economic development can be described as a process influencing growth or the restructuring of an economy to enhance the economic well-being of a community. Just as there is no single definition for economic development, there is no single strategy, policy or program for achieving successful economic development. Agricultural economic development, quite simply, involves traditional community economic development practices tailored and adapted to the agricultural sector.”

~ from OMAFRA's [Agriculture Economic Development: A Resource Guide for Communities](#)

Economic Impacts along Ontario's Agricultural Value Chain



Ontario is not just a leader in productivity, it's also a leader in emerging and ground-breaking new research and development. New technologies and agricultural practices are continually being developed in Ontario – ready to be used close to home and exported around the world. The future of agribusiness in Ontario is promising. Through the efforts of producers, processors, and distributors along the value chain, as well as governments, the sector's impact will continue to grow.

Source: OMAFRA's [*Agriculture Economic Development: A Resource Guide for Communities*](#)

The OFA has created many resources to assist municipalities, regions and community organizations in supporting the agriculture and food sector. The resources are described below and can all be found on the [OFA's Growing Agriculture in your Community](#) webpage. These resources can be used to educate councillors, candidates, municipal staff, and organizations working with municipal staff.

[Agriculture Matters: A Guide for Municipal Councillors and Staff](#) provides an overview of issues affecting farm businesses today, as well as identifying opportunities for local communities to support this untapped, and sometimes undervalued, economic sector. The introduction provides an overview of Ontario's agriculture and food sector economic contributions and the role the sector plays in producing prosperity. It also outlines the role and structure of OFA's local federations. The guide is organized by high-level topics with a linked Table of Contents. Each detailed topic is covered in a one-pager that succinctly breaks down the issue, its importance, what municipalities can do and finishes up with resources available. Agriculture Matters is available in English and French.

The [Guide to Support Agricultural Growth in Your Municipality](#) and accompanying [Checklist](#) outlines best practices that municipalities can implement to support their local agri-food sector. These best practices cover topic areas such as land use planning, property assessment and taxation, financial incentives and reduced costs, community and regional food planning, and consultation with the farming community. The resources are available in English and French.

Additional resources available to educate municipalities include:

- [Agri-Food Initiatives Ontario Directory](#): a directory of hundreds of provincial, regional, and municipal initiatives that support agriculture and food, with the goal of sharing best practices.
- [Municipal Job Descriptions that Support Agriculture](#): sample job descriptions to help municipalities develop or revise a position to support the local agri-food sector.
- [Agriculture Economic Development Initiatives](#): a quick guide to the types of programs and initiatives that can be undertaken to develop and support agriculture and food businesses locally. Examples of these resources can be found in the Agri-Food Initiatives Ontario Directory.
- [Agriculture Economic Development & Planning Community of Practice](#): OFA & OMAFRA co-chair the Community of Practice with the goal of sharing knowledge, tackling issues, networking, and advancing best practices

- [Always in Season](#): a toolkit for local food practitioners and example pilot projects to advance local food in your community.

Find OFA's economic resources to support municipalities on our [Growing Agriculture](#) webpage.

Want to Learn More about Agriculture Economic Development?

Learn more about exploring agriculture as an economic development opportunity with OMAFRA's [Agricultural Economic Development Guidebook](#) and related training. The resource and training are designed to help economic developers, land-use planners, municipal councils, and community leaders use a community-led planning process to enhance the prosperity of the sector and boost the rural economy. Communities can benefit from using this guidebook regardless of their current capacity or the stage they are at in exploring agriculture as an economic development opportunity.

What is land use planning?

Community or land use planning is the process behind managing our land and resources. Good land-use planning means meeting a balance of interests and involving multiple stakeholders, including municipalities, the provincial government, other government agencies, and local stakeholder groups, such as different citizens and community groups. With responsible land use planning, communities can manage their growth and development while addressing critical social, economic, and environmental concerns, including all urban and non-urban development which can impact agriculture. The land-use planning process can affect your needs as an individual property owner, farm operator, or overall community. It can have a significant effect overall on your community's quality of life.

Local Federations of Agriculture have a pivotal role in land use planning. As a critical stakeholder of the community, you can influence the decisions made on existing and future land use matters and on issues related to local planning documents that can impact agriculture for better or for worse.

It is important to note that land use planning affects most other municipal activities and almost every aspect of life in Ontario. Municipal councils will consider these effects when considering, debating, and determining planning decisions, recognizing that most planning decisions have long-lasting impacts. Public consultation is a fundamental and mandatory part of the planning process and is critical for local Federations to influence planning issues. Engaging in planning issues means always being aware of the proposed changes in your municipality, interacting with municipal staff, council, and the public on planning matters, and investing part of your time in community planning issues.

Good planning contributes significantly to long-term sustainable growth and complete, dense, and transit-supportive communities that protect farmland. But to do so, we must understand the planning system and process.

Land Use Planning Made Simple:

Ontario follows a hierarchical land use planning process. Planning decisions and policies in Ontario are shared between the Province and municipalities. The provincial land use planning policy framework, from the highest level of provincial policy, all the way to the local level, is outlined as follows:

Provincial Plans and Policies:

The Province outlines the legal tools and processes for land use planning decisions in the [Planning Act](#). The Planning Act states that all planning decisions must be consistent with matters of provincial interest and the policies outlined in the Provincial Policy Statement (2020).

The [Provincial Policy Statement \(2020\)](#), or the 'PPS' is a consolidated statement on the provincial government's priorities and policies on land use planning. It gives municipalities direction on land use planning issues, like farmland protection, water conservation, natural heritage, aggregate resources, transportation systems, efficient use of infrastructure, growth management, and more.

In some parts of the Province, provincial plans* give more detailed and geographically-specific policies to meet particular objectives, like managing urban growth and development or protecting agricultural lands and the natural environment. Examples of these plans include:

The [Greenbelt Plan \(2017\)](#) outlines where urban development *should not* occur. It provides permanent protection to the agricultural land base and other ecological features in the landscape.

The [Niagara Escarpment Plan \(2017\)](#) is Canada's most extensive environmental protection land-use plan that outlines policies to maintain the Niagara Escarpment as a continuous natural environment and ensure that only development is compatible with this environment is permitted. Planning applications in the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area are different from the rest of the Province. Applicants must secure a Development Permit first from the Niagara Escarpment Commission before applying to their municipality.

The [Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan \(2017\)](#) is also an environmental protection plan that guides land use and resource management decisions for land and water within the Oak Ridges Moraine.

[A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe \(2020\)](#) or the 'Growth Plan' is a long-term plan that outlines where future urban development, including residential and employment uses, can go. It outlines urban density, intensification, and greenfield targets that 110 municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe must meet. The goal of the Growth Plan is to prevent sprawl and commuter communities and instead create "complete communities" that are compact, support transit, and deliver services that address the needs of local communities within a convenient or shorter distance. The Greenbelt Plan and the Growth Plan provide a framework to protect Ontario's prime agricultural areas and keep urban development within existing urban and settlement areas.

The [Growth Plan for Northern Ontario \(2011\)](#) is a 25-year plan that gives direction on decision-making and investment for economic and population growth in Northern Ontario.

While these plans all work together with the PPS, their policies often take priority over the PPS in the areas where they apply. While planning decisions must be consistent with the PPS, the policies in these provincial plans are more stringent, and municipalities' planning decisions must *conform to* and not *conflict with* the provincial plans.

*It is important to note that the policies of multiple plans will govern some municipalities. For instance, many municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area will be covered by the Greenbelt Plan, Niagara Escarpment Plan and/or Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, and the Growth Plan.

Provincial Policy Guidance Material and Approaches:

To help municipalities and the farmers interpret provincial policy that affects agriculture, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) have several guidance documents available:

The [Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas \(2016\)](#) is a guidance document to help explain, distinguish, and determine what qualifies as an *agricultural use, agriculture-related use, and on-farm diversified use* in Ontario's prime agricultural *and* rural areas.

[Agricultural Impact Assessments](#) or AIAs are studies that evaluate the impacts of non-agricultural development on agricultural operations and the Agricultural System and ways to avoid, minimize, or mitigate any negative effects. An AIA is mandatory (or recommended) in some areas when a municipality will be expanding its settlement area boundaries.

[The Minimum Distance Separation \(MDS\) Formulae and Guidelines \(2017\)](#) is a land-use planning tool to prevent land-use conflicts and minimize nuisance complaints from odours coming from livestock operations.

The [Agricultural System](#) is a unique land-use planning approach in North America which protects farmland and the viability of the agri-food sector through two main components: an [Agricultural Land Base](#) and the [Agri-Food Network](#).

The [Normal Farm Practices Protection Board](#) resolves disputes and complaints about incompatible uses near agricultural operations to determine what is a "normal farm practice," such as flies, odour, noise, or dust.

Municipalities and Planning Boards:

Provincial policies and plans guide decision-making on land use at the local level. As noted above, municipalities (southern Ontario) and planning boards (northern Ontario) implement the Province's land use planning policy framework. They do so through various tools in the Planning Act, like Official Plans, Zoning By-laws, and more. The job of municipalities and planning boards is to translate provincial policy direction and design policies that achieve their local community's social, economic, and environmental goals. While municipal policy and decisions must be consistent with the policies in the PPS, municipalities do have some flexibility. They can create stricter policies if these policies and decisions do not conflict with the PPS.

Municipalities have various land use planning tools available to them. The legal requirements for each, including timelines, public consultation, approval authorities, and appeal rights, are outlined in the Planning Act. Some of the planning tools and applications can include (but are not limited to):

- Official Plans and Municipal Comprehensive Reviews
- Zoning By-Laws
- Community Planning Permit By-laws, Holding By-laws, Interim Control By-laws, and Temporary Use By-laws
- Land Division (i.e., Plans of Subdivision or Consent)
- Site Plan Control

Official Plans (OPs) are the primary tool for implementing the PPS at a local level; their policies must be consistent with provincial policy. OPs are the long-term and publicly informed vision for how and when lands will be used in your community. For example, they will designate lands for prime agricultural, rural, commercial, industrial, residential, or other uses by their size and location. They will also outline where necessary municipal services and facilities will be needed, like roads, water mains, and sewers, areas where the municipality should grow or intensify, and existing areas where your municipality could improve.

OPs are essential tools; they act as the guiding document for how your municipality will grow 25-years into the future, meaning their impact affects the present and the long-term future. Every five years, a municipality must update their OP through an Official Plan Review. The review of OPs will be informed by the public, approved by the municipal council, and ultimately approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (at the upper-tier level). In the interim, anyone can apply to change the OP through an Official Plan Amendment. It is critical to note that most *major* farmland loss at the municipal level will likely happen through an Official Plan Review or Official Plan Amendment. For instance, research shows that between 2000 and 2017, southern Ontario lost 72,000 acres of prime farmland through Official Plan Amendments.

Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) is the technical process behind creating a new OP to ensure it conforms with the updated growth management policies and requirements as outlined in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

Table outlining total hectares of prime agricultural land (classes 1-3) lost by region and municipality through Official Plan Amendments from 2000 - 2017. Statistics from [Farmland Preservation and Urban Expansion: Case Study of Southern Ontario \(2022\)](#).

Region	Municipality	Prime Agricultural Land Loss (ha) 2000—2017
Central Ontario	York	7,989
	Peel	3,442
	Halton	2,938
	Niagara	2,087
	Durham	1,693
	Simcoe	2,426
	Waterloo	1,019
	Peterborough	796
	Wellington	935
	Hamilton*	186
	Haldimand	284
	Dufferin	247
	Kawartha Lakes	236
	Northumberland	63
	Brant	64
Southwestern Ontario	Grey	136
	Huron	25
	Perth	756
	Middlesex	175
	Lambton	540
	Chatham-Kent	132
	Elgin	242
	Bruce	136
	Oxford	869
	Norfolk	519
	Essex	0
Southeastern Ontario	Ottawa	179
	Prescott and Russell	217
	Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry	155
	Leeds and Grenville	205
	Renfrew	54
	Hastings	219
	Prince Edward	247
	Frontenac	0
	Lennox and Addington	0
	Lanark	0
Total**		29,217
*The City of Hamilton's results are not directly comparable to other regions in this Table as the dataset is not complete nor verified.		
**Totals may not add due to rounding.		

Zoning By-laws (ZBL) control the land use in a community. ZBL states where the buildings and structures will be located in a zone, the types of buildings permitted, how they may be used, and the 'building envelope' including the lot size and dimension, parking requirements, building heights, densities (number of people or jobs) and setbacks from the street, along with other potential conditions such as MDS. A ZBL must conform to OP policies as it essentially implements them on the ground. ZBL requirements are legally enforceable, and compliance is the only way to receive a building permit. A ZBL intends to outline safe, compatible, and desirable development in a community. ZBLs must be updated every three years after an Official Plan has been updated. Like an OP, ZBL reviews require public consultation and approval by the local council. If a use is not permitted in the ZBL, one can 'rezone' a property by applying for a Zoning By-law Amendment or a 'ZBA.'

ZBLs will dictate the types, ranges, sizes, scales, and intensities of agriculture, agriculture-related, and on-farm diversified uses on farmland. Therefore, it is essential to review these policies as they will limit what can be done on the ground. Remember, a ZBL only outlines what is 'allowed' rather than 'what is not allowed.' Therefore, if your desired use isn't listed, be sure to advocate having those policies put into writing in the ZBL to avoid applying for a ZBA or a minor variance. 'As of right' uses in the ZBL will be the most efficient, secure, and straightforward way to go about doing your business on your farm property by just applying for a [building permit](#).

Other types of by-laws may exist. These include community planning permit by-laws, holding by-laws, interim control by-laws, and temporary use by-laws.

Plans of subdivision and **land severances** (or 'consents') are applications by individual property owners or developers to divide the land into multiple or smaller parcels. These applications will contribute to farmland loss on a smaller but cumulative scale or introduce non-compatible uses into the agricultural area.

Site Plan Control (SPC) is a tool that a municipality uses to evaluate certain site elements, such as walkways, parking areas, vehicle access, drainage, landscaping, or exterior design on a proposed development. SPC provides 'control' on site-specific matters to ensure that the proposed development is well designed, is compatible with the surrounding land uses, and minimizes any negative impacts. The municipality must identify the area subject to SPC in the OP. OFA urges the Province and municipal counterparts to continue exempting agricultural uses, buildings, and structures from designated SPC areas. We also suggest agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses be subjected to a streamlined SPC process with scaled back fees and requirements at the municipal level. All SPC processes should be appropriate for the agricultural area; the procedure and conditions must be designed with a rural and agricultural lens suited for the property (e.g., no permanent, paved parking areas).

Table outlining the timelines and processes required for different land use applications as legislated under the Planning Act.

Planning Act Application	Radius of Notice to be Circulated (m)	Notice of Public Meeting	Notice of Decision	Period to File an Appeal
Official Plan Amendment	120m	At least 20 days before meeting	Mailed out within 15 days of hearing	20 days
Zoning By-law Amendment	120m	At least 20 days before meeting	Mailed out within 15 days of hearing	20 days
Severance	60 m	At least 14 days before meeting	Mailed out within 15 days of hearing	20 days
Minor Variance	60 m	At least 10 days before meeting	Mailed out within 10 days of hearing	20 days

Ontario Land Tribunal:

The [Ontario Land Tribunal](#) (OLT) is an independent adjudicative tribunal responsible for hearing and resolving issues on appeals for land use planning applications at the municipal level. One can appeal to the OLT on a municipal planning decision if they have made their opposition or support known through a written submission to the municipal council or a verbal delegation at a public meeting. Appellants can only file appeals within certain timelines after an issued decision. Applications for an appeal request to the OLT must be submitted to the municipality.

Minister's Zoning Orders:

[Minister's Zoning Orders](#) (MZOs) are tools under the Planning Act that the provincial government uses to fast-track development by overriding any requirement that developments need to conform to the PPS, provincial plans, or municipal Official Plans and Zoning By-laws. MZOs are *intended* to be used to fast-track development that would serve the public interest, typically in cases of an emergency (e.g., such as a hospital, airport, or another facility). However, MZOs are increasingly (and unprecedentedly) being used to fast-track all sorts of developments, from warehouses and factories to housing developments, often at the expense of farmland or other natural areas, with no opportunity for public consultation. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing can issue an MZO anytime, anywhere. Municipalities can also request an MZO under certain conditions. One cannot appeal an MZO to the OLT.

OFA has continuously emphasized our opposition to the frequent use of MZOs in areas where there is already a robust planning process. We have requested the Minister's

support in deterring the use of MZOs for municipalities with well-developed, Ministry-approved Official Plans and Zoning By-laws.

How to Get Involved:

Whether proactive or reactive, there are several ways to get involved with land use planning in your municipality. For example, if you have a concern about a planning application, you should:

- Find out as much as possible about the application
- Ask questions about how it affects you, your property, or agriculture in the local community in the short-term and long-term.
- Go to any information sessions, including open houses and public meetings, to give your opinions, ask questions, and get clarity.
- Contact your planning department to learn about details and their opinions on the proposal.
- Discuss the proposal with municipal staff and council members
- Raise your concerns with the agricultural advisory committee (if there is any).
- Discuss the proposal to the local Federation of Agriculture
- Learn about community or stakeholder groups' positions on the issue
- Make a written submission or verbal delegation to the council
- If you have any concerns, you should make sure that you let the council know about them early in the process. Council will then have time to consider your feedback and may make changes before a decision is considered.
- Know how to get your appeal rights and prepare accordingly!

Resources:

The [OFA Consolidated Land Use Policy Document](#) assists local Federations of Agriculture by outlining OFA's policy stances on different land use matters to stem the effects of urban growth on agricultural lands in their municipalities.

The [Agriculture Economic Development and Planning Community of Practice](#) virtually brings together economic development and planning professionals interested in agriculture and agri-business issues across Ontario.

OFA's [Growing Agriculture in Your Community](#) is a resource page that includes land use policy resources to assist municipalities in supporting the agricultural sector, including:

- [Guide to Support Agricultural Growth in Your Municipality](#) which outlines best practices for agriculture in municipal land use planning
- A land-use planning [Checklist to Support Agricultural Growth in Your Municipality](#)

[Home Grown](#) is OFA's public awareness and advocacy campaign that focuses on protecting farmland and local food production and aims to increase consumer awareness and knowledge of the impacts of urban development on Ontario agriculture.