

Policy Advisory Council (PAC) Survey on Land Use Planning

About the Survey



- **Survey to PAC**
 - Dates: Conducted across May and early June of 2025
 - Solicited Group: Policy Advisory Council (PAC)
 - Subject: OFA land use planning positions
 - 6 selected topics within the subject were considered by respondents
 - Also provided an opportunity to comment on other topics not covered by the survey
- **30 of the 90 PAC representatives completed the survey**
 - 33.3% response rate
 - Strong enough for general interpretations of PAC positioning
 - Remaining 66.6% of PAC could overturn results if gathered responses are not representative of PAC

OFA has proposed the creation of *locally prime agricultural areas*, a policy that would protect *rural lands* where *prime agricultural lands* are not available in a municipal jurisdiction.

A new *locally prime agricultural area* policy for Ontario is supported (90%)

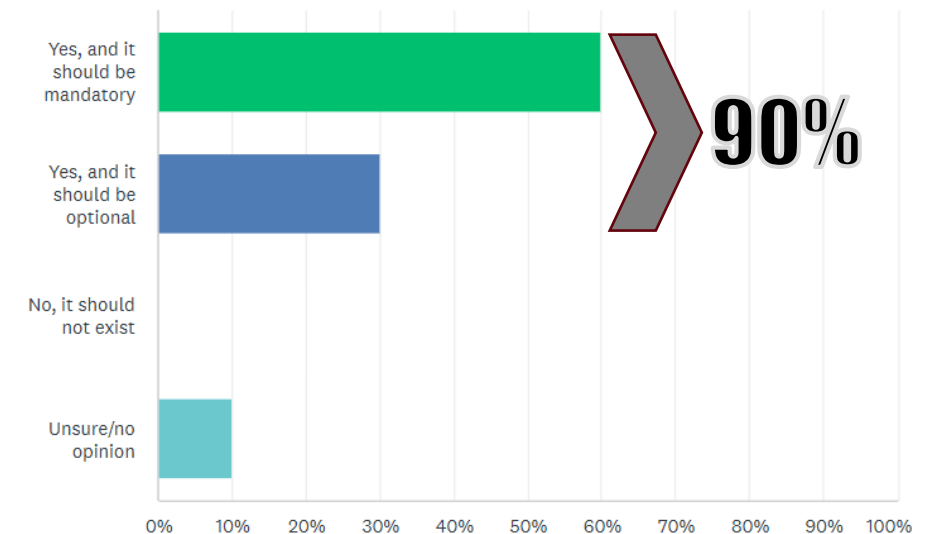
- 60% support that policy being mandatory
- 30% support that policy being optional

Respondents emphasized other key points related to agriculture related to *prime agricultural areas*

- Livestock agriculture is not as dependent on *prime agricultural lands*
- *Prime agricultural lands* may not adequately capture areas of other exceptional characteristics
- General sentiment that existing protections are insufficient or unapplied

Should the Provincial Planning Statement (PPS), or another planning instrument, include locally prime agricultural areas as a municipal planning tool, and should it be a mandatory or optional policy?

Answered: 30 Skipped: 0



OFA has proposed the creation of new separation distance formulae that would spatially setback greenhouses and grain dryers from *sensitive land uses* (e.g. dwellings, churches, etc.)

A new spatial separation formulae for greenhouses and grain dryers is supported

- 57% support greenhouse separation formulae
- 69% support grain dryer separation distance formulae

Respondents were divided on whether this policy would cause greenhouses, grain dryers, and livestock agriculture to compete for spatially setback land

- 46.4% stated competition would occur; 35.7% stated competition would not occur; 17.9% were unsure or had no opinion.

Support for imposing new setbacks on cannabis farming operations

- 50% stated today's municipal setbacks are insufficient, 57% supported a provincially-imposed setback policy

OFA has an explicit policy to review all *Greenbelt Plan* amendments and a general policy to review all proposed legislative changes;

OFA must also prepare for the upcoming coordinated review of Ontario's land use plans

Respondents favoured the retention of the current explicit policy

- All Respondents: 63% support for current position
- Greenbelt Respondents: 67% support for current position

A new provincial plan to protect agriculture outside of the *Greenbelt* has strong support among respondents

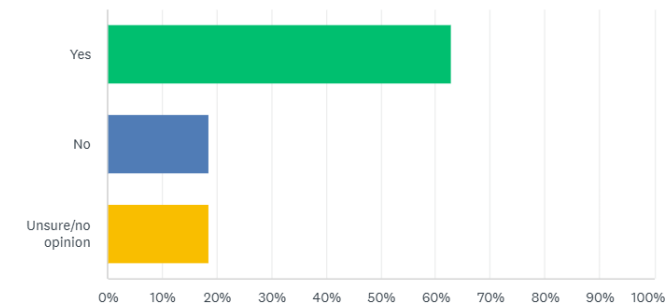
- 78% supported a new “Farmbelt Plan”

Respondents commented that the *Greenbelt Plan* can be restrictive on agricultural operations, particularly smaller farms

- Less regulation within the *Greenbelt* desired
- More regulation of *rural areas* outside the *Greenbelt* desired

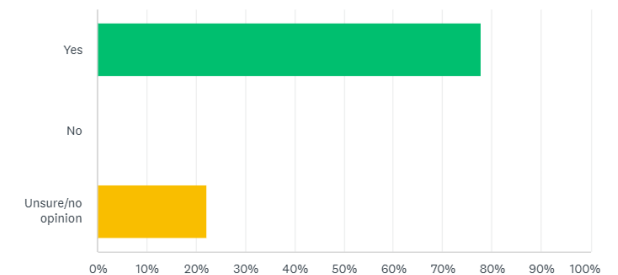
Does OFA require an explicit commitment to review potential proposed changes to the Greenbelt Plan?

Answered: 27 Skipped: 3



Is a new provincial plan needed to protect agriculture outside of the Greenbelt Plan area?

Answered: 27 Skipped: 3



OFA has proposed the dissolution of the Niagara Escarpment Commission;

OFA must also prepare for the upcoming coordinated review of Ontario's land use plans

There is a lack of consensus among respondents regarding whether the NEC should be dissolved

- All Respondents : 62% unsure/no opinion, 23% yes, 15% no
- NEP Respondents: 50% unsure/no opinion, 25% yes, 25% no

Respondents described the NEP, *Greenbelt Plan*, ORMCP, and PPS as components of a restrictive and convoluted or otherwise inefficient planning system in need of an update

**OFA has proposed that *natural heritage* and *prime agricultural areas* should be mutually exclusive designations;
OFA proposes that the government should compensate farmers for environmental services provided by farmland**

Consensus is lacking among respondents regarding the proposed mutual exclusivity

- 35% in favour, 35% unsure/no opinion, 31% opposed

Very strong support for a system to compensate farmers for their lands' environmental services

- 85% support a compensation system

Respondents strongly favour allowing more agricultural land uses within designated *natural heritage*

- 76% in favour of more agriculture in NHFA
 - 48% favour some more farming
 - 28% favour unrestricted farming

OFA has stated that residential *lot creation* should not occur in *prime agricultural areas*, with an exception for *surplus farm dwellings*

Respondents generally supported the status quo

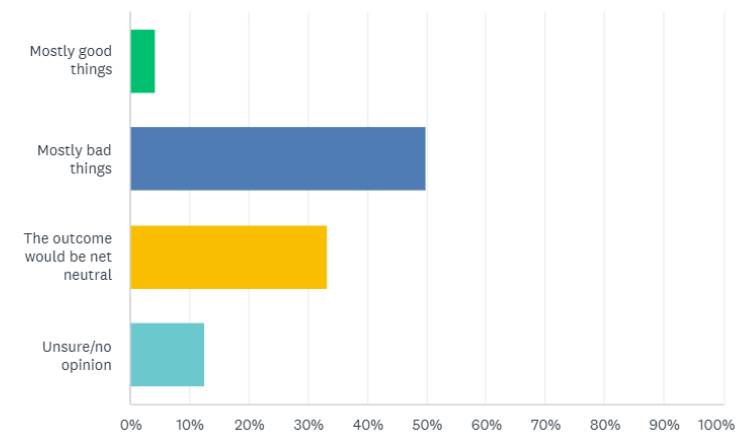
- In *prime ag*, 78% support 1 severance/lot or fewer
- In *rural lands*, 50% support 2 severances/lot or fewer and 50% support 3 severances/lot or more
- 52% supported the current practice of sterilizing a lot of future severances following a *surplus severance*, while 40% stated there should be a “cool down time,” averaging to 15 years or by site-specific circumstances
- 70% stated that unspent a *surplus dwelling severance* should not be transferrable to another farm

Lot creation in *rural areas* is perceived as causing either harmful or neutral outcomes

- 50% stated more lot creation would result in “mostly bad things”; 33.3% stated changes would be “net neutral”

If agricultural properties in your area were allowed to sever or subdivide more residential lots, what would happen in your community?

Answered: 24 Skipped: 6



OFA solicited for general comments on land use planning (1/2)

Lack of trust in planning authorities, municipal and provincial

- A common sentiment is that the current planning system is too complicated to be understood by the general public and too easily overridden by planning authorities in favour of residential development

Minimum Distance Separation Formulae (MDS)

- MDS is felt to both protect livestock operations and hinder their ability to grow and be profitable
- This topic will likely remain divisive; there is support both for more MDS requirements and relaxing existing MDS requirements

Controversial Land Uses

- Requiring cannabis setbacks was a popular idea, strong comments from some PAC members regarding cannabis
- Landfills remain a concern for select PAC members

OFA solicited for general comments on land use planning (2/2)

Residential Uses in *Rural Areas*

- Respondents were concerned about the consistent application of farm worker housing policies
- We see support for both more and less residential land use in *rural areas*

More specific proposals from PAC members

- Change the PPS to focus on farmland protection outcomes, not simply farmland area
- Improve communication and pool resources between local federations and the OFA
- Increase planning transparency requirements
- Call for more guidance, such as on *specialty crop areas*
- More emphasis on farmland loss prevention

OFA sees general support for many current positions, highlighting them as they represent member interests; There are several topics that do not have consensus and further discussion is required.

Stronger consensus in favour of:

- *Locally prime agricultural areas*
- Separation policies for greenhouses, grain dryers, and cannabis
- Retaining the explicit policy to review *Greenbelt Plan* amendments
- Relaxing *natural heritage* regulations
- Environmental services compensation
- Status quo/similar lot creation policies

Lack of Consensus regarding:

- Dissolution of the NEC
- Mutual exclusivity of *prime agricultural areas* and *natural heritage*
- Expansion of existing provincial plan areas
- Whether more regulation or less regulation is desirable for the province

End

Questions & Discussion