

Staff Report

Presented By: Kristen Sears, Planning Policy Coordinator

Meeting Date: December 16th, 2024

Subject: Comments on New Bruce County Official Plan

Attachment(s): Consolidated BCOP Draft Boundary Expansions
Consolidated BCOP Draft Schedules ABCEF

Recommendation

That Council endorse the comments in this report and forward them to the County of Bruce for consideration in finalizing the new County Official Plan.

Report Summary

The County of Bruce has proposed a new Official Plan. This report outlines comments to be forwarded to the County of Bruce for consideration before a final Plan is brought to County Council for approval.

Background/Analysis

The County of Bruce has proposed a new Official Plan (OP) and is reviewing feedback before a final draft is brought to County Council, anticipated in early 2025. The new Official Plan sets out the goals, objectives and policies for land use planning in Bruce County until the year 2046. The proposed Official Plan is both the Town's upper-tier plan and serves as the land use plan for the area outside of the boundary of the Local Plan or Settlement Area Boundary in Saugeen Shores.

The proposed Official Plan contains some content from the current County Official Plan and includes work previously adopted by Council in preparation of this Plan being the [Agriculture Amendment](#), [Good Growth Amendment](#) and Implementation Amendment.

In review of the proposed County Official Plan, topics that have undergone substantial change or are of key interest to the Town have been outlined in this report and further examined as they relate to or affect the recently implemented [Provincial Planning Statement \(PPS, 2024\)](#), local context of Saugeen Shores, the identified proposed change, analysis of change and impact on the Town and recommendation.

Settlement Area Boundary Expansion or Adjustment

Alignment with Provincial Planning Statement

Proposed changes to the Provincial Planning Statement as it relates to Settlement Area Boundary Expansion or Adjustment include:

- i. Section 2.3.2 New Settlement Areas and Settlement Area Boundary Expansions permits a planning authority to identify a new settlement area or allow a settlement area boundary expansion at any time and that the following shall be considered:
 - a. the need to designate and plan for additional land to accommodate an appropriate range and mix of land uses;
 - b. if there is sufficient capacity in existing or planned infrastructure and public service facilities;
 - c. whether the applicable lands comprise specialty crop areas;
 - d. the evaluation of alternative locations which avoid prime agricultural areas and, where avoidance is not possible, consider reasonable alternatives on lower priority agricultural lands in prime agricultural areas;
 - e. whether new or expanded settlement area complies with the minimum distance separation formulae;
 - f. whether impacts on the agricultural system are avoided, or where avoidance is not possible, minimized and mitigated to the extent feasible as determined through an agricultural impact assessment or equivalent analysis; and
 - g. the new or expanded settlement area provides for the phased progression of development.
- ii. Introduction of a new policy in Section 2.3.2.1.b) indicating that planning authorities may identify a new settlement area only where it has been demonstrated that infrastructure and public service facilities to support development are planned or available.

Generally, proposed changes in the County's Official Plan aligns with the recently adopted Provincial Planning Statement; however, the County Settlement Area Expansion policies have been drafted to be somewhat more restrictive than the PPS.

Saugeen Shores Context

Town staff have been involved in preliminary discussions with the County Planning team regarding private landowner requests and have reviewed the identified boundary expansions or adjustments. Further studies, such as an updated Servicing Master Plan, are needed to determine what potential infrastructure upgrades and public service facilities are required to support further expansion or adjustments to the settlement area boundary. Additionally, other reviews, such as the Natural Heritage Official Plan Review are required to examine other planning issues which may affect settlement expansion.

Proposed Changes

The draft County Official Plan indicates in Section 2.2.4 (1) Settlement Area Boundary Expansions or Adjustments that the County, in consultation with local municipalities, may identify Settlement Area boundary expansions or adjustments to accommodate forecasted growth. It also indicates that the Saugeen Shores Primary Urban Areas are expected to become constrained with respect to current employment and commercial land supply over time. These

policies link settlement area expansion to forecasted growth, which is somewhat more restrictive than the PPS and appears to only contemplate settlement area expansion where land supply will be constrained. For Saugeen Shores, this implies that only settlement area expansions for employment and commercial lands will be supported by the County. To date, the private landowner requests for settlement area expansion in Saugeen Shores have been for residential only and mixed-use developments.

In addition, the County of Bruce has identified potential opportunities for boundary expansions and adjustments but is also reviewing requests from municipalities and property owners. An Official Plan schedule is attached to this report and identifies all proposed or identified settlement boundary adjustment or expansion requests. A comparison of the proposed can also be viewed on the County's interactive map. Bruce County staff intend to bring a recommendation forward for consideration regarding proposed expansions and adjustments to the settlement area boundary following public engagement.

Analysis

The Town is of the understanding that settlement area expansion should be open to an appropriate range and mix of land uses and should not restrict settlement area expansion to only those uses that are expected to be constrained in the planning horizon. Ensuring these requests align with the Town's vision in how future growth is managed in Saugeen Shores will be of importance in the future development of the Town.

At this time, a settlement area boundary expansion or adjustment would be premature. Additional studies are necessary to understand where infrastructure upgrades are required. Once determined, a potential settlement area boundary expansion or adjustment could be justified and applied for through an amendment to the County.

Recommendation 1:

The Town supports the County in exploring expansion or adjustment opportunities to the settlement area boundary where appropriate and will continue to consult with the County regarding potential expansions and adjustments to the settlement area boundary as needed or requested. However, the Town would prefer that the draft County Official Plan policies related to Settlement Area Boundary Expansions or Adjustments be greater aligned to that of the Provincial Planning Statement for clarification and consistency purposes. This would provide clarity for staff and applicants in understanding what justification or supporting materials would be required to support a Settlement Area Expansion request.

Housing

Alignment with Provincial Planning Statement

Proposed changes to the Provincial Planning Statement as it relates to housing include:

- i. Re-introduction of policy requiring planning authorities to establish and implement minimum targets for the provision of housing that is affordable to low- and moderate-income households;
- ii. A revision to an existing policy that planning authorities identify underutilized shopping malls and plazas as potential commercial sites for redevelopment in addition to the already existing requirement of permitting and facilitating the development and

redevelopment of underutilized commercial and institutional sites for residential development.

The proposed introduction of new housing policies to the County's Official Plan does align with the recently adopted Provincial Planning Statement.

Saugeen Shores Context

The housing objective as outlined in the Towns Official Plan is to provide opportunities for a range of housing types and densities to accommodate a diversity of lifestyles, age groups, income levels and additional needs of housing. To achieve this objective, the Town continues to review and update existing regulations in place including density targets to ensure appropriate intensification in the settlement area. The Town continues to remove barriers and cut red tape from housing development processes by ways of streamlining while advertising inventive opportunities including the recent adoption of the Community Improvement Plan to encourage developers and organizations to build more homes in Saugeen Shores. Partnership opportunities will continue to be explored in the development of affordable housing projects.

Proposed Changes

The County identifies housing as a key objective of the proposed County Official Plan and is introducing new policies that can be seen as encouraging to the future of housing development in Saugeen Shores. New policies of importance include:

- i. Providing a range of planning and regulatory incentives where authorized to encourage affordable housing. This includes fast-tracking development applications, reduction in parking requirements, and encouraging efficient housing to reduce operating costs;
- ii. Identifying a target of 30% of new residential development in the County to be affordable at the 6th income decile;
- iii. Supporting the maintenance of existing rental housing by introducing an ability to decline conversion of rental apartments to condominium in buildings with more than four rental apartment units when rental vacancy rates in the community are below 5%; and
- iv. Recognizing the Bruce County Housing and Homelessness Plan as it should be read in conjunction with the proposed Official Plan.

Analysis

It is recognized that housing is of importance to the County as significant work into the development and expansion of housing policies in the proposed plan was identified. In the Towns review, it is worth noting what ability the County has and through what body or policy the County can deny the potential conversion of rental units to condominium. There County can also expand on an existing policy as per Section 3.2.3(1)(b) to address the noted Provincial Planning Statement changes to include, commercial sites being shopping malls and plazas. However, it is also identified that there is an opportunity to increase or expand on existing housing policies in the Towns Official Plan which is noted for review in future amendments. The Town will continue to work alongside Bruce County to further expand where possible on existing policies to address housing issues in Saugeen Shores.

Recommendation 2:

The Town supports the County in introducing new housing policies and will continue to work with the County in advancing new housing policies in Saugeen Shores. Additionally, the Town

would like further clarification surrounding the noted concerns in the housing analysis but would like to further explore and express interest in potential partnership opportunities in the development of future housing projects.

Cultural Heritage

Alignment with Provincial Planning Statement

Previously the Provincial Policy Statement required the conservation of significant built heritage resources, changes as per the new plan require the conservation of protected heritage property. The change in policy means that properties listed on a municipality's register but have not been designated are no longer required to be conserved.

The proposed County Official Plan complies with the recently adopted Provincial Planning Statement.

Saugeen Shores Context

The Town of Saugeen Shores is currently in the process of developing a Cultural Heritage Master Plan. The Cultural Heritage Master Plan will provide the Town with tools to lawfully preserve cultural heritage in the Town of Saugeen Shores. The Town does have an existing register containing properties designated.

Proposed Changes

The newly proposed Official Plan now contains a section pertaining to Cultural Heritage. This section outlines the Plans intent in regards to Cultural Heritage as well as policies to preserve, protect and manage cultural resources while enhancing their value.

The County Plan also contains policies for archaeological resource management.

Analysis

The effect of these policies on the Town is limited. However, the County Plan enables the Town to develop further refined local policy as well as enable the protection of heritage resources outside the settlement area.

Recommendation 3:

The Town supports the County in recognizing the importance of cultural heritage in the proposed County Official Plan.

Agriculture

Alignment with Provincial Planning Statement

Proposed changes to the Provincial Planning Statement as it relates to agriculture include:

- i. Policy changes to permit up to two additional residential units where a residential dwelling is permitted on a lot in a prime agricultural area in accordance with provincial guidance and provided that specific criteria are met;
- ii. Permitting lot creation for up to one residence surplus to an agricultural operation provided certain criteria are met, including limiting the new lot to a minimum size needed to accommodate the use, meeting infrastructure requirements and that new dwellings

and additional residential units are prohibited on any remnant parcel of farmland created by the severance.

The proposed County Official Plan does align with the recently adopted Provincial Planning Statement.

Saugeen Shores Context

A housekeeping amendment to the Town Official Plan and Zoning By-Law was submitted in April 2024 and proceeded in two phases. As of October 2024, Phase I of that work has since been approved and adopted by Council. The second phase is the subject of a separate report on this meeting agenda that deals with a proposed Zoning By-Law Amendment that implements policies that are aligned. Phase II of the housekeeping amendment proposes significant changes to the agriculture zone including the introduction of agriculture-related uses and on-farm diversified uses. The purpose of this amendment was to comply with previous changes introduced in the Provincial Policy Statement, a land use planning document which has since been replaced with the Provincial Planning Statement as well as in the County Official Plan. The proposed agriculture-related amendments were also recognized of key importance to the Town in implementing and allowing for the versatility and expansion of operations on agricultural lots.

Proposed Changes

In review of the proposed County Official Plan, two specific changes were noted. The first notable change was the significant transition of land use designations outside the settlement area boundary from agricultural lands to rural lands. This was a result of a Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) study conducted by the County of Bruce. A LEAR study is a commonly used tool in Ontario that is used to evaluate the importance of lands for agriculture use based on their characteristics as well as other inherent factors that may affect the land's agricultural potential. The LEAR study resulted in the change of the designation of these lands from agricultural to rural as well as the combining of land use designations (Rural Recreation area, Inland Lake Development area, Travel Trailer Park and Commercial Campground) under a broader land designation of 'Shoreline and Seasonal Recreation'.

As a result of the recent implementation of the new Provincial Planning Statement, additional policy changes have been introduced and seen through the proposed County Official Plan, including:

- Up to two additional residential units are permitted within or attached to a primary dwelling in the agriculture zone [3.2.6(6)]; and
- No new dwellings are permitted on the remnant parcel in the case of a severance of a lot containing a surplus farmhouse dwelling in the 'Agriculture' or 'Rural' designation [5.10.1(8)(c)].

Analysis

In review of the LEAR study, it was noted that there was an importance to first ensure the identification and preservation of prime agricultural lands and where lands are not identified as prime lands, zone lands appropriately to allow gentle development and opportunities. The Town believes that this has been achieved as the rural area designation allows for the gentle development that supplements and is supportive of the agricultural area. Permitted uses as per

both designations in the proposed Official Plan are outlined in the below table and may be subject to other policies and by-laws.

Additionally, the Town appreciates the County’s proposal in combining of land uses designations for ease of reference as the previous land use designations are similar in type and use and does not significantly impact Saugeen Shores.

In review of the Provincial Planning Statement changes and their impact on agriculture, the Town will look to implement the proposed changes at the earliest convenience and subject to the County’s review.

Agricultural Area Designation	Rural Area Designation
i. Agricultural uses	i. Agricultural uses
ii. Agricultural related uses	ii. Agricultural related uses
iii. Limited on-farm diversified uses	iii. Schools, places of worship and cemeteries
iv. Schools, places of worship and cemeteries	iv. A residence, an additional residential unit and home industries and home occupations
v. Temporary garden suite and/or additional residential unit	v. Industrial uses serving the immediate agricultural community
vi. Extraction of mineral aggregate resources	vi. Commercial uses: a) Space extensive recreational commercial uses b) Tourism related commercial enterprises c) Rural commercial enterprises.
vii. Cannabis production	

Recommendation 4:

The Town is supportive of the proposed changes to the County Official Plan as it relates to agriculture and the requirements of the Provincial Planning Policy Statement.

Natural Heritage

Alignment with Provincial Planning Statement

The Provincial Planning Statement does not introduce or contain any significant changes as it relates to Natural Heritage other than the amending of certain definitions.

Saugeen Shores Context

The Towns Official Plan contains a goal and objective to maintain, restore and enhance natural heritage features of the Town. This includes identifying, maintaining, protecting and enhancing important natural heritage features while understanding their impact on Town residents and development.

Proposed Changes

The proposed County Official Plan identifies Natural Heritage as a subsystem of the Natural Environment System. Additional objectives, policy and criteria regarding Natural Heritage is also further outlined in the proposed plan.

Analysis

The Town has reviewed the Natural Heritage policies in the proposed County Official Plan and the relation to the new Provincial Planning Statement and believe there are no impacts to Saugeen Shores. The Town intends to complete its own Natural Heritage Official Plan review to ensure locally significant concerns are outlined and to consider potential linkages, enhancement areas and offsetting policies to facilitate appropriate development.

Recommendation 5:

The Town is supportive of the proposed changes to the County Official Plan as it relates to natural heritage.

Other

Additional comments in review of the entirety of the proposed plan will be provided to the County for consideration. Comments include the following:

1. The recommendation that the proposed Bruce County Official Plan include a table of contents for ease of reference;
2. As per Section 3.5.1(5), the Town supports the development of a policy and implementation program to address opportunities to incorporate artwork into future development. The Town has prepared a Public Art Policy and alternative Art policies through the Towns Destination Development Plan and expresses interest in aiding the County in the development of such policy or program to ensure alignment;
3. As per Section 4.2.1(6), the Town recommends that additional wording including affordable and attainable housing be identified as an objective of the Settlement Area as it relates to providing an appropriate range and mix of housing options;
4. As per Section 4.7 Hazard Lands 4.7.1 General Policies, a recommendation that terminology referring to 'Two-Zone / 2-Zone' be used consistently; and
5. As per Section 5.9.2 Development Applications (6), language indicates that pre-submission consultation is required. The Town notes that pre-consultation is not mandatory and that the regulation be revised to reflect this.

Linkages

- Strategic Plan Alignment: Pillar 1: Meeting the Needs of a Growing Community
- Business Plan Alignment: Development Services Business as Usual

Financial Impacts/Source of Funding

Revenue/costs are unknown at this time and will be detailed in a future report.

Prepared By: Kristen Sears, Planning Policy Coordinator

Reviewed By: Jay Pausner, Manager, Planning and Development

Approved By: Kara Van Myall, Chief Administrative Officer