

Wellington County Official Plan Review OPA 120 Virtual Public Open House Meeting Summary December 15, 2022

Prepared by LURA Consulting

Background

The County of Wellington is currently reviewing its Official Plan (OP) to complete a Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) and a 5-year review of its Official Plan as specified under Section 26 of the *Planning Act*. An MCR is part of the OP review process. It establishes a long-term vision and planning framework for a municipality that fosters a sustainable approach to future growth and economic development. The County is doing this to prepare for additional population and employment growth and ensure that the updated OP supports healthy, compact, and complete communities in Wellington as directed through *A Place to Growth: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*.

In June 2021, the County released its MCR Phase 1 Report ([review the report](#)). It held a virtual public open house ([review the presentation](#) and [read the consultation summary](#)) to discuss the recommendations prepared by consultants Watson & Associates Economists Ltd. relating to Urban Structure and Growth Analysis. Official Plan Amendment (OPA) 120 implements part of the growth management technical work from Phase 1, including:

- Updating the population, household and employment forecast tables in the Official Plan
- Revising text in accordance with updates

Meeting Promotion

A public notice regarding the Virtual Public Open House was published in the Wellington Advertiser two weeks before the meeting. The meeting was also promoted through the County's social media platforms.

Members of the public who wished to join the Virtual Public Open House were requested to register in advance. Individuals could also join the meeting by phone.

Meeting Overview

The Virtual Public Open House was held on December 15, 2022, with the purpose to:

- Provide an update on the County of Wellington's Official Plan Amendment (OPA) 120
- Gather feedback and answer questions about Wellington County's OPA 120

The meeting presentation was posted in advance on [Plan Well](#), the County of Wellington's Official Plan Review website, to allow participants to review it beforehand or follow along if they joined the meeting by phone.

In total, 42 participants joined the meeting.

Susan Hall (Facilitator from LURA Consulting) began the meeting with an introduction and overview of the meeting agenda. Sarah Wilhelm (Manager of Policy Planning at the County of Wellington) provided introductory remarks and delivered a presentation ([review the presentation](#)) on the following areas of the County of Wellington's OPA 120:

- Policy Context and Provincial Planning Policy Structure
- County and Local Planning Policy
- Potential Impacts of Bill 23
- Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) and Work Plan
- Overview of Phase 1 Work
- County Growth Forecast Amendment
- Population, Housing, and Employment Highlights 2021-2051
- Consultation to Date
- Key Themes from Comments

Susan Hall facilitated a discussion to receive feedback and comments from participants. A summary of the facilitated discussion is provided below.

What We Heard

General OP Review and MCR Process

Participants were invited to ask questions and share their comments regarding the County of Wellington's Official Plan Amendment (OPA) 120.

The questions, answers, and comments are included as follows. Questions are marked by a "Q", comments are marked with a "C", and answers and responses are noted with an "A".

General

Q: Is there a timeline for completing the Official Plan review?

A: There is currently no timeline for completion. Previous government legislation, Bill 23, changes to the 2020 Provincial Policy Statement, updates to the Growth Plan, and guidance documents have made things a bit of a moving target. The County is phasing in amendments gradually and pushing forward so that it can continue to support future growth.

Q: How can residents and communities in the Town of Caledon be kept informed?

A: For the OPA 120 process, individuals can subscribe through the project website for updates or be added to the email list to receive email updates on the project. In terms of

services from the Town of Erin, individuals can request information directly on the Town of Erin's website.

Agricultural Designation

Q: What kind of employment is anticipated to accommodate the increase in population in Centre Wellington?

A: More information is required to answer this question completely. Sarah Wilhelm, Policy Planning Manager, will address this and follow up with the participant who posed this question.

Q: What is the difference between Prime Agricultural and Secondary Agricultural?

A: Puslinch Minto and Erin are the only three municipalities with a Secondary Agricultural designation in Wellington County. The Prime Agricultural designation is primarily in areas with soils in Classes 1, 2, and 3, while the Secondary Agricultural designation is located in areas with lower capability for agriculture. The Province, under the Growth Plan, has issued for the agricultural system to be mapped in which they identified Prime Agricultural areas and candidate areas. Through the implementation and updating of the Official Plan and under the Growth Plan, the County is required to go through a process of rationalizing and reviewing the County's agricultural mapping. This work is ongoing, and there will be a detailed assessment of the difference between county and provincial mapping. The County will recommend how these lands should be designated based on a series of provincial and county criteria and put forward a final recommendation on what it would look like to implement the refined agricultural system under the Growth Plan.

Q: How are lands designated as Prime Agricultural or Secondary Agricultural? Is there documentation showing how lands are designated as such?

A: Soil composition is a significant part of how agricultural lands are designated. This designation process refers to the Canadian Land Inventory (CLI) mapping. The range of soils (e.g., Class 1, Class 2, Class 3, etc.) helps inform what can constitute Prime Agricultural land. The land use and its surrounding area are also factors that can contribute to the designation, and these factors are mainly used within the provincial agricultural system mapping.

When the Province did their desktop assessment, it developed several criteria and weighed them. There were assessment units that were created, and the consultants went across the GTA and weighed each of those criteria in those particular units and stitched them all together to create an agricultural system map that produced a Prime Agricultural area if it hit a certain threshold. The [Implementation Procedures for the Agricultural System in Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe](#) is a document that provides a simplified explanation of the agricultural system and the assessment methodology. A

more detailed technical document exists on how the Province has done their assessment, which is available for request through the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA).

Through the agricultural system review, the County will take the Province's initial mapping and refine it further to ensure that it reflects what it believes should have a Primary Agricultural or Secondary Agricultural designation. A consultation process with the public will also support this review.

Q: If the initial designation was a "desktop exercise," does this mean these lands were grouped via computer satellite photos? Will the consultants review these recommendations by visiting each site before Phase 3 is finalized and submitted to the Province?

A: The Province only conducted a desktop exercise through Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping and other automated mapping processes - ground truthing was not part of the provincial process. The Province did their process, mapped it, and then gave the County the primary and candidate areas, which have a bit more flexibility in reviewing and refining those areas. The primary areas recommended are more rigid because only certain scenarios allow refinement. The County has integrated some ground-truthing into the process to ensure nothing is egregious or out of place.

WSP is the consulting firm assisting the County of Wellington with Phase 3 work. The County needs to look at agricultural impact as part of the Settlement Boundary Expansion work. Margaret Walton, PLANSCAPE Inc., is the other specialized consultant helping the County review its agricultural system mapping. Margaret Walton is prominent in the agricultural space for her extensive field and planning work across the country. She has helped many municipalities implement their agricultural system mapping and provided recommendations. A ground-truthing element to this work has already been completed to help form the County's recommendations.

Q: What is ground-truthing?

A: The County cannot go on to private properties, so ground truthing involves driving to a site to look and observe what is on the land in terms of crops, buildings, etc. This is the extent of what the County can do given the geographic size of the County.

Q: Do you speak directly to the landowners during the ground-truthing process?

A: That is not part of the process at this point. The County is conducting this ground-truthing exercise to form an objective opinion on the lands and present a recommendation. There will be time for consultation and public engagement later in the process. At that time, landowners can share their ideas and concerns about their property and when there will be a discussion about what the County has proposed and what the policies require.

Q: Are any specific dates being explored for further details regarding site-specific requests to re-designate lands from Prime to Secondary Agricultural?

A: There are three municipalities involved in this process, and it is a significant undertaking to understand and review all these areas and put forward a recommendation. The public has not yet been involved in this process, but the County is open to hearing about the public's interests. There will be a point where the County will present its recommendations based on its assessment, and a more formal dialogue and process with the public will occur.

Q: Do you have an estimated timeframe for when the agricultural mapping work will be done? Will there be an opportunity to provide ground-truthing comments about what the consultant has presented?

A: It's hard to put an exact timeframe as there are close to 1,000 assessment units across Wellington County, with close to 300 assessment units in the Township of Puslinch alone. It takes some time to go through all the assessment units, but the County is working diligently with the consultants and member municipalities. Once the County and the member municipalities arrive at a minimum level of agreement on how to proceed, it can start a broader consultation with agricultural stakeholder groups and members of the public. At that point, there will be an opportunity to comment on and refine the agricultural mapping work.

Q: Who can the public contact about the agricultural review, particularly when the agricultural land is next to and partially integrated into a rural residential development?

A: Jameson Pickard, Senior Policy Planner, is the contact for any questions regarding the agricultural review or to discuss the agricultural work being done and how that applies to a specific residential property. His contact information is included in this summary's Wrap-Up and Next Steps section.

Growth Forecast

Q: Why is the growth very high for Centre Wellington?

A: Watson and Associates have done a detailed analysis of Centre Wellington's growth and found that it has traditionally taken about a 50% share of the County's growth - part of this is due to market demand and demographics. The County was able to shift some of this growth, with the Town of Erin now taking a higher share of growth. However, Centre Wellington continues to be a desirable place for people to live. When the County presents to the Centre Wellington Council, it will be able to speak more specifically about the growth in this area.

Q: Would Belwood not having municipal services be a limitation for residential growth?

A: A certain amount of growth can occur within the boundaries of all the rural settlement areas designated in the Official Plan.

Q: Can you confirm that the density targets are a minimum?

A: Yes. The intensification target and density targets are a minimum.

Q: Higher densification numbers would support compact communities and protect farmland. Why is this topic being pushed to Phase 3?

A: This topic is being addressed through Phase 2. Through the technical work of Watson and Associates, the intensification target that has been established is a reduced target of 15% and the greenfield area density of 40 people and jobs per hectare remains the same. The County has a full technical document that details how Watson and Associates arrived at the actual targets, and County Council has approved this technical work. However, since the Wellington Federation of Agriculture is weighing in on this topic again, the County will include their additional comments.

Q: Could Bill 23 bring in challenges for growth targets?

A: The County is aware of concerns around the development charge changes in Bill 23 and the challenges it could create. This legislation is meant to speed up growth, though the County continues to monitor this legislation and its potential impacts. The County continues to consult with the Province and has been encouraged to move forward with OPA 120. At this point, the County will continue with the OPA 120 process, but as things change regarding Bill 23, it will adapt accordingly.

Town of Erin

Q: How will the Greenbelt expansion in the Town of Erin impact rural land use?

A: The Greenbelt expansion in the Town of Erin is taking place on rural land that was not considered for urban land use, which means that the expansion will not impact the allocation of growth to the urban areas. This expansion might have a moderate or minor impact on severance potential in other parts of the Greenbelt that are in Wellington County, but there should not be any changes related to OPA 120. There is also a report on the project website that the County prepared last year, which includes a table that compares the differences in requirements or policy provisions for lands within and outside the Greenbelt.

Q: What is the significance of the Whitebelt designation? When and why was the land in the Town of Erin designated as Whitebelt? How large is this new proposed

Whitebelt in the Town of Erin? Was adding a Whitebelt designation in the Town of Erin part of the Bill 23 Greenbelt changes?

A: There are currently no Whitebelt designations in the County of Wellington or the Town of Erin. However, when the Greenbelt designation was first put in place, large areas of land were reserved to accommodate future urban growth and became known as Whitebelts. These lands are located between the municipalities' urban boundaries and where the Greenbelt restriction fell.

The Greenbelt designation changes were once separate from Bill 23, but the government has now related them. The Greenbelt designation changes were to remove about 7,400 acres of land from the Greenbelt in several municipalities.

As part of the consultation on the Greenbelt designation changes, the County of Wellington and the Town of Erin have provided coordinated comments over the last 12 years expressing that there are many layers of protection in place for the Paris Galt Moraine and natural heritage features in its rural areas.

In the Land Needs Assessment for the Town of Erin, there was a need for Employment Lands. This need for Employment Lands would be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve under the current Greenbelt and Growth Plan policies because the boundaries are essentially set with such minor limitations.

A letter was written to the Province requesting approximately 400 acres of designated Whitebelt to address the land needs identified. This Whitebelt designation does not necessarily mean that all this area is intended for development, but it aims to provide flexibility to look at an appropriate area where some additional Employment Lands could go. The County is still awaiting a response from the Province regarding this request, but this was the County's effort to help deliver the Employment Land needs that are anticipated but cannot be met with the current urban boundaries.

Q: Does the Town of Erin have the required water source for the forecasted residential and industrial growth and use until 2051 and beyond? Has there been a study on groundwater for this growth?

A: The Town of Erin is responsible for water and wastewater servicing. The County has done a high-level servicing review as part of the technical work for Phase One, and the only urban centre within Wellington County that has more than enough services to 2051 is the village of Clifford. However, it is not unusual for municipalities not to have the servicing in place. They will start to plan out these services once the forecasts are in the plan because they are typically used for new growth. There is also information on the Town of Erin's website about environmental assessments related to a sufficient water supply.

Q: The Town of Erin is disposing of its sewage effluent and urban drainage directly into Caledon. Has this been factored into the forecasts for growth? The West Credit River is too small to receive the forecasted sewage effluent daily. Is this why the Town of Erin can grow as much as it has been noted?

A: The Town of Erin having a municipal wastewater system is part of why more growth is being directed there. The Town of Erin is responsible for the appropriateness of the technical design and any related impacts of its wastewater system. If there are specific concerns related to how the plant is being designed and their work, that can be brought up directly with the Town of Erin.

Environment and Climate Change

Q: What steps will be taken to protect the West Credit River's vital watershed area?

A: OPA 120 deals with increasing the forecasts in the forecast timeframe and does not affect the mapping of any environmentally significant areas. However, there are protections around significant features and environmentally significant areas. For example, the Official Plans of the Town of Erin and Wellington County have Core Greenlands and Greenlands designations that protect a range of environmental features.

Q: Has Wellington County done any measurements on how its growth will contribute to climate change?

A: Certain policy requirements require the County to integrate climate change considerations into settlement boundary expansion work. This is a top-down process where the Province issues the growth forecast for jobs and population. The County is then mandated to take that growth as a minimum and allocate it amongst its municipalities. The County would also need to develop a suite of climate change policies in its Official Plan. The County of Wellington recognizes that climate change is an important component of the Official Plan, and climate change will be considered when looking at the settlement boundary expansions. There is a Climate Change and Sustainability Manager that has been part of this process, but because of Bill 23 and the potential impacts of this new policy document, it is hard for the County to anticipate whether there might be changes to climate change policies.

Other

Q: Is there thought being given to the impact on soft services, not just water, sewer, and roads, but other important services that help integrate newcomers into the community?

A: Municipal services, including hard and soft services, is something the County will be looking at as part of Phase 3.

Q: How would having three residential units per lot affect the tax base?

A: If a lot has more than one residence on it, it will impact taxes. The tax base is based on the property's value; if the value of the property increases, it is likely that the impact will be assessed slightly higher. It also depends on the circumstance of the property, its conditions, and several other factors, but typically, one might expect to see taxes go up.

Q: Will municipalities be encouraged to ensure that the housing types are added to allow those working in Wellington County to afford those residences?

A: Although it is not within the scope of OPA 120, the County acknowledges that this is an important issue. The County has a task force that deals with attainable housing, and the work of this group will continue to emphasize to the community how important it is to provide places for everyone to live. The County will eventually look at policies around housing and housing mix once the dust settles a little bit more with the provincial policies.

Q: Will the proposed 2051 population growth forecast for the Clifford village allow for land currently designated as Future Development for residential uses? Does this growth forecast reflect and utilize the available servicing capacity in the village of Clifford?

A: The County recently received the several-page detailed letter submitted regarding interest in the land at 41 Park Street in the village of Clifford. The County would like to spend some time reviewing this and will report through the Planning Committee when it has reviewed all the questions that have been filed.

Q: Will the Senate's work on soil across Canada be published in time for the County's study?

A: The Federal government has not initiated anything, and it could take some time before they can complete the review and present the study results. The aim is to wrap up this work by the end of next year, but it will certainly be considered if it becomes available during that time.

Written Feedback

Following the meeting, the County of Wellington received 1 submission by email. The submission relates to previous technical work on a site-specific employment area conversion request.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

Susan Hall (LURA Consulting) invited the participants to attend the in-person statutory public meeting on Thursday, January 12, 2022, at 10:30 a.m. in the Council Chambers at the County of Wellington Administration Centre located at 74 Woolwich Street

Guelph, ON N1H 3T9. It will not be a hybrid meeting, but those who cannot attend are welcome to send in their comments before the meeting.

Sarah Wilhelm (Manager of Policy Planning at the County of Wellington) provided participants with the project team's contact information for any additional feedback and wrapped up the meeting. Participants can provide their feedback and comments until January 4, 2023. Members of the public can contact the project team by email or by phone at:

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