

Wellington County Official Plan Amendment No. 131 Virtual Public Open House Meeting Summary

Prepared by LURA Consulting

Background

On February 5, 2026, the County provided an update on the Official Plan Review process and an overview of the proposed Official Plan Amendment (OPA) No. 131. This amendment proposes changes to the Official Plan related to: County-wide PPS rural area policy consistency, Erin rural residential growth re-allocation, Puslinch rural residential growth and Puslinch rural employment growth. It is part of Rural Phase 3B of the County's Official Plan Review. Community members were invited to attend the open house, listen to the presentation, and ask questions or share comments with staff.

Meeting Promotion

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

A public notice regarding the Virtual Open House was published in the Wellington Advertiser in the January 15, 2026 edition. The meeting notice was also posted on the Official Plan Review webpage and promoted through the County's Official Plan Review Project email circulation list, with almost 300 contacts, to raise awareness.

Meeting Overview

The Virtual Open House was held on February 5, 2026, to:

- Provide an overview of OPA 131.
- Provide the public with an informal opportunity to discuss OPA 131.
- Allow the public to ask questions and identify additional planning issues that can be addressed.

Seventy-nine (79) participants attended the meeting. Susan Hall (Facilitator from LURA Consulting) began the meeting by reviewing the agenda and the purpose. Sarah Wilhelm (Manager of Policy Planning at the County of Wellington) provided introductory remarks and reviewed the official plan and policy review context. The presentation regarding OPA 131 covered the following topics:

- Official Plan Review Context
- Rural Growth and Policy Updates
- County-wide changes
- Rural Residential Growth Re-allocation
- Puslinch Rural Residential Growth
- Puslinch Rural Employment Area Growth
- Consultations to Date
- Questions
- Next Steps

Susan Hall facilitated a discussion to gather public feedback and comments. Below is a summary of the discussions and comments received until 19 February 2026. This report was

written by LURA Consulting, the independent community engagement team retained to deliver community engagement. It summarizes and reflects the community's diverse inputs during the open house. It is not intended to be a verbatim record of responses; rather, it summarizes and synthesizes the feedback shared throughout the meeting.

What We Heard

Following the presentation, participants were invited to ask questions and share comments regarding OPA 131. The questions, answers, and comments are included thematically below. Questions are marked with a 'Q', comments with a 'C', and answers and responses are noted with an 'A'.

Land Use Designations and Planning Terms

Q: What is a Rural Employment Area?

A: Rural employment area lands are lands where you would expect to see industrial-type uses, areas which would generate jobs. In Puslinch, these would be dry industrial uses that would not typically use a lot of water.

Q: What is a Residential Transition Area?

A: The residential transition area is a land-use designation that is meant to provide a transition between different uses. Recognizing that there are some residential uses nearby. We did not want the back portion behind the Aberfoyle garage to be industrial. We wanted to put it in the residential transition category so it might be considered public uses, but we recognize we need to be mindful of the residential uses nearby.

Q: Can you explain the practical impacts to current residents of changing the land use designation from agriculture to residential?

A: There are a lot of properties that would not have intensification potential necessarily. They would be moving from one designation to another, and it would have very little impact on those properties, because it would just be moving from a secondary agricultural designation, which permits residential designation, to a residential designation.

Q: A couple more that are specific, and then a little bit more general on the timeline. There appears to be a change in zoning for the land at 34 and Brock Road, near the floodplain. Can you clarify?

A: It might be helpful if we have this conversation offline. I need to clarify exactly where that is. I know there's a small sliver of core Greenland that is being added to the map, and that area, I believe, is related to wetlands, but if there's something else, perhaps you might want to reach out to me by e-mail or give me a call and show me exactly where it is.

Q: Please explain the significance of removing the rural clusters clause 6.5.4. Does this now allow rural clusters?

A: The rural cluster policy was modified through OPA 119. That was the first amendment we did, and the province had concerns because it applied in prime agricultural areas that didn't meet provincial policy. We also had comments from the Town of Minto. They wanted us to look at rural clusters a little more closely, or the potential for them, in light of the Growth Plan and potential limitations associated with the provincial agricultural system and the provincial natural heritage system, and how that might limit individual severances.

What we did was change the clause and made it a placeholder to review rural growth as part of the Official Plan Review and look at what type of limitations those systems might pose. Since that time, the Growth Plan has largely been removed. Some of those limitations were no longer a factor and because we have done the detailed analysis of rural growth it is no longer needed. Currently, the way it's written, it only allows for severances in secondary agricultural area that would qualify under the March 1st, 2005 date. It doesn't allow for anything more than that.

Severance in Erin and Puslinch

Q: My question is primarily about the land severance in the Town of Erin. I had a land severance three years ago, and recently spoke with my planner, who mentioned that the Town of Erin will not allow a second severance after one has been done on the property, they mentioned that the County is moving away from Erin development and moving towards Puslinch. Could I get in contact with someone in the city to discuss this further and confirm this?

A: You can reach me, Sarah Wilhelm. My contact information is at the end of the presentation, or we can be reached at planwell@wellington.ca. I'm happy to have further conversations about that.

Q: What is the severance reset year? 2025 or 2026.

A: The resetting of the severance date, is May 1st, 2025, for the Township of Puslinch.

Q: Can you explain the significance of the May 2025 date and how this will affect a resident interested in proposing a severance that has not submitted a proposal yet? Also, when will this policy become finalized?

A: When we did our background work, staff did a lot of work to estimate how much potential there would be for severances, depending on what date is set. We looked at a few different options. Rather than focusing on the date, think about how many units a certain date would release into the supply. The selected date is basically the date that balances things out, when we no longer have a shortfall, and so that's the significance of the date.

If someone is looking to benefit from the new date, we cannot consider applications under it until the new date is in full force and effect. We still have a long way to go. We need to consider the comments that we receive here tonight and also at the public meeting, and then report back through the committee and council. Ultimately, we will be sending the council adopted amendment, to the province for approval. And once they're done, then we would expect it to be finalized. We cannot estimate when things would be finalized because we do not control the provincial timeframe, but we are certainly hoping to move things along with the OPA.

Q: Is it defensible to keep the severance dates different in Erin and Puslinch?

A: Once we hear all of the feedback, we will be certainly be arriving at a professional planning opinion. We can use different dates in the Official Plan. Municipalities can grow at different rates, and the County is responsible for allocating growth. We feel that that's an appropriate approach at this point.

Q: What does the May 1st, 2025, severance date mean?

A: If somebody has property in Puslinch that is designated secondary agricultural, they will need to meet all the existing criteria for a rural residential lot. If somebody has already had a severance since 2005, if the dates have been reset, then that one criterion would be met, and it

would no longer be an obstacle; all of the other criteria would still need to be met. We encourage people to do a pre-consultation with our development staff, but we would ask that folks wait until the policies are in play.

Q: For the Puslinch Township Severance, did you say that if we had not applied before May 2025, we don't stand a chance, or how does it work?

A: No, it means that if you have already had a severance since 2005, once that date changes to May 1st, 2025, it resets the date, and it means that you will qualify to have another one considered. Provided that you meet the other policies.

Q: What constraints can be used so that land speculators are not buying land just to sever it to make a quick profit?

A: One of the policy criteria for residential lot creation in the secondary agricultural area is that you need to have owned the property for at least 5 years before you can apply for a severance. Certainly, interested if there are any other comments or ideas around that, but that is the policy we have used over the span of the Official Plan to try to discourage land speculation.

Q: Is there a deadline to submit the severance application?

A: Here are a few things you should know about the proposed May 1, 2025, severance cut-off date as part of Draft Official Plan Amendment (OPA) 131:

Planning staff is unable to consider applications under any proposed new policies until the policies are approved and in effect. This means it is too early to submit an application because the policies in the Official Plan haven't yet been changed, and they may change along the way. OPA 131 needs to first be considered in final draft format and adopted by County Council. Next, we send OPA 131 to the Province for their review and approval.

If you like, I can add you to the list to be notified of County Council's decision on OPA 131 so that you'll know when that happens. Please confirm that with me.

Once a Provincial decision has been made, I suggest you speak with planning staff at the County before applying to review all applicable policies.

Agriculture and Rural Impacts

Q: Has there been any consideration of the effects of additional rural residences in Puslinch on agriculture, and removing the cut-off date for severances would result in a lot of agricultural fragmentation?

A: What we have seen through the new Provincial Planning Statement and the removal of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe is that the provincial government has created some additional flexibility for having some lot creation in rural areas of the province. The severances that we are looking at would not be on prime farmland, but they would be on what we refer to as secondary agricultural areas, which are generally the less productive or have lower soil capability so that is where that comes from.

In some cases, yes, the severances will come off farms. In other cases, severances will come off existing residential or primarily residential properties, but the prime agricultural areas will continue to be protected. We have an idea of where there is potential for severances to happen, but they each will need to be reviewed on their own merits when they come in. There will be an opportunity for more severances if the date is changed and our policies provide for that type of growth to happen in Wellington.

Q: Agriculture is an industry with the changes in tariff policies, which is becoming more difficult to access parts for agricultural equipment. If they're coming from the US, we need to develop local small-scale industries to assist local farmers in keeping their equipment functional. Expanding the range of uses available in rural secondary agriculture areas could strengthen local agriculture. Would it not be wise to consider more flexibility in the plan to strengthen local agriculture?

A: It's always a balancing act, and we have done pre-consultation with the province with primary focus on the work that has been done, and that has informed some of the policy directions that we are going in, particularly around the size of agricultural lots. We are happy to consider those comments and will review them alongside those we have received from other agricultural stakeholders.

Just to supplement that, in terms of expanding the range of uses available in the secondary agricultural area. The permitted uses in the prime agricultural area we are talking about through OPA 131, the agriculture-related uses and the on-farm diversified uses, are also permitted in the secondary agricultural area. Beyond that, there is existing policies in the plan that do support small-scale commercial, institutional, and industrial uses. So there are existing policies in the plan that offer flexibility to those in the secondary agricultural area designation to pursue certain small-scale industries that you are discussing.

Q: How will the proposed OPA impact the agricultural areas with respect to additional residential growth?

A: By prioritizing growth within Aberfoyle and directing some growth to Arkell, that is trying to concentrate growth within an area that has already been developed and taken out of agricultural production. That is one way to reduce impacts on agricultural areas.

Q: Is it possible to comment on being able to allow Puslinch residents to retain their wells and septic systems?

A: If a development application were to come forward for a subdivision, then those are the types of things that would need to be looked at as part of a development application. So that would be something that a developer would need to speak to, and it would be reviewed as part of development applications coming forward to make sure that there would not be impacts.

Q: Will Erin consider additional industrial employment on prime agricultural land along the side of Road 17 or expanding the urban boundary to access additional employment land designated opportunities?

A: There is a need for more additional industrial land in Erin, and that would be urban industrial land. The Town of Erin has opted to develop its own Official Plan, and their Official Plan covers both urban and rural areas because of that we would be expecting that they would be a big part of that and to take the lead in helping determine what direction they want to see that growth go, but there is a need for additional industrial land in the Town of Erin.

Housing Allocations and Growth Targets

Q: Who designated the numbers for housing the 120/460/250 rate?

A: In our presentation, we referenced the report that the analysis was set out in detail. The County tracks housing through the development pipeline from vacant through to building permit issuance. Those numbers were covered off through the analysis that we did.

Q: Who will determine the housing that is allowed?

C: I need a bit more context on that question. If the question is about secondary agricultural severances or whether it is a question about the housing in an expanded Aberfoyle. I just need to know where.

Q: Who allows or determines what is being built on the land that we are providing? Is it to help with the housing or lack of, or is it to help offload severance, which has been in the pipeline since 2005?

A: OPA131 is proposing to put a residential designation in place, and the residential designation permits residential uses. There will need to be zoning put in place to allow for multiple uses. If a property is large enough for a subdivision, it would need to go through a rezoning and development approval, that would be when more detailed zoning standards would be put in place for the property looking at things like lot size and coverage. Servicing is private in Puslinch. There will still be larger lots, but the number of residential units within a dwelling would be governed by the zoning. That is a Township responsibility. There are notification requirements for that as well. Either the Township would lead a process to put new zoning in place, or it will happen on a site-specific basis when development applications come forward.

Q: How does the County handle the encroachment of Guelph versus the addition of 250 housing units, and how does it relate to water use?

A: We have been reviewing issues around water with our risk management official here at the County, who will be providing comments and speaking to the extent of housing. The amount of water usage in Guelph is clearly considerably more than what we would expect from 250 households. We expect this housing to develop over the years. We will also need to submit technical information and water-related information with their development applications as they bring them forward.

Aberfoyle Expansions

Q: Do you have background reports that were used to delineate the line between the residential and Greenland lines in the Aberfoyle expansion area?

A: Yes, there is a Natural Heritage System study that was completed by the County. The Grand River Conservation Authority did the bulk of the work and coordinated with all our conservation authorities. The study itself is not there, but there is a link to the mapping prepared through the study. The link can be accessed [here \(https://www.wellington.ca/business-development/planning-development/major-projects/wellington-county-natural-heritage-system\)](https://www.wellington.ca/business-development/planning-development/major-projects/wellington-county-natural-heritage-system)

Q: Can you expand on the reasons for expanding the boundary of Aberfoyle?

A: The idea for the expansion originated from the Puslinch Council a few years ago. This was brought forward by Puslinch Council, and then subsequently council set the study area boundary that they wanted us to look at. One of the objectives in provincial policies and also in the County Official Plan is that we have a hierarchy for allocating or distributing growth. Existing settlement areas are meant to be given higher priority because they already have some of the building blocks for complete communities. That is where services are concentrated and where there might be a mix of uses. That is one of the reasons we would look to direct more growth to an area like Aberfoyle in Puslinch, because that is the largest urban centre that they have.

Employment and Industrial Lands

Q: Will there be properly serviced industrial lots South of Highway 401 and in the Puslinch area? If yes, when will they be ready? This is specific to water and wastewater.

A: I'm not sure what proper service refers to; perhaps that could be clarified, but if it refers to municipal servicing, municipal servicing is not available in Puslinch. Water and wastewater would be privately provided; there is no municipal water or wastewater servicing in Puslinch.

Q: Has anything changed with the OPA from what was proposed in the Puslinch by design with regards to the additional language further protecting Side Road 20 N?

A: We have not changed the Official Plan Amendment since the draft that was published. There have not been any changes. There very well could be changes to the Official Plan Amendment between now and when we bring forward the final draft, but we would make sure to clearly report what those changes are and why we make them.

Q: How long does the province normally take to approve a county's proposal, and is there a fixed timeline for provincial approval of the OPA and its adoption?

A: In my experience of us having four previous Official Plan Amendments, it has taken between a year and two years, maybe a little bit less than a year. We really don't know, it's up to the province. You are welcome to ask the province at the appropriate time once it has been referred to them for a decision.

Q: Will there be any changes regarding the property zoning at Wellington Road 34 and Brock Road in Aberfoyle?

A: There will be no changes to the Core Greenland designations proposed for this property under OPA 131.

Presentation, Public Engagement and Accessibility

Q: Will the slides be made available following the presentation

A: The presentation slides are available on the project website at www.wellington.ca/planwell.

Q: Will the in-person Public Meeting have different information, or only if asked by the public? Is it the same presentation for the in-person session? Will the Questions and Answers from tonight be in a written format before February 19?

A: Yes, it will essentially be the same. We might just add a bit of commentary about what happened tonight, but the slides are almost identical. The Question and Answer of today will not be published before February 19. We want to make sure people have time to submit comments after hearing the information today, and then they have until the 19th to be able to provide comments.

Q: For those of us with mobility issues, will this type of accessibility and accommodation be available for us on February 12th to be able to attend?

A: If you would like to send more details or connect with the team about specific accessibility needs that you are looking for, that would be great. I can confirm that the public meeting next Thursday will be in person. It is not a virtual Question-and-Answer like we are doing right now. It is at our office in Guelph. We do take written comments as well, and written comments are every bit as important as hearing from people verbally. If there's any concern about parking, our County clerk is available to speak with anyone who might need some accommodation.

Q: What kind of comments could influence those decisions, given that a professional planner develops them? Is it worthwhile for us to comment that we support this solution, given that it was transparent throughout the process? I'm concerned that one-off comments can influence. How much influence could a single comment have on the final decision that part of the OPA?

A: I cannot answer that right now because we still need to complete our detailed review and prepare the recommendation report. I do not know what changes may or may not occur, but I need to be clear that changes are possible. I do not mean to cause concern, but in fairness, everyone should be aware of that.

Additional Comments and Questions Received

Following the public open house, participants were invited to ask questions and share comments regarding OPA 131 from February 5, 2026, until February 19, 2026. All written comments received following the public open house will be included in the County's final recommendation report on OPA 131 with responses where appropriate.

Next Steps

Susan Hall of LURA Consulting provided participants with the project team's contact information for any additional feedback and wrapped up the meeting. Participants can provide additional feedback and comments until February 19, 2026, and are invited to attend the public meeting on February 12, 2026, at the County Administration Centre. Members of the public can contact the project team by email or by phone at:

Contact: Sarah Wilhelm, Manager Policy Planning
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