



COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

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October 1, 2025

At its meeting held on October 1, 2025, Wellington County Council approved the following recommendation from the Planning Committee:

That the County Official Plan Review – OPA 131 Rural Area Policies and Growth report be received for information.

That the County Clerk circulate this report to Member Municipalities for comment.

That draft OPA 131 Rural Area Policies and Growth be circulated for comments.

That staff be directed to schedule and hold an open house(s) under the Planning Act to provide the public with opportunities to review and comment on the amendment.

That the Planning Committee be authorized to hold a public meeting under the Planning Act at the appropriate time.

Please find enclosed the OPA 131 Rural Area Policies and Growth report.

Should you have any questions, please contact Sarah Wilhelm, Manager, Policy Planning, at sarahw@wellington.ca or Jameson Pickard, Senior Policy Planner at or jamesonp@wellington.ca.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kim Courts". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

Kim Courts
Deputy Clerk



COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

Committee Report



PLANWELL

To: Chair and Members of the Planning Committee
From: Sarah Wilhelm, Manager of Policy Planning
Jameson Pickard, Senior Policy Planner
Date: Thursday, September 11, 2025
Subject: **County Official Plan Review – OPA 131 Rural Area Policies and Growth**

1.0 Purpose of Report

This report provides an overview of draft Official Plan Amendment 131 (OPA 131). This County-initiated amendment provides rural area policy updates, re-allocates 120 households from Erin to Puslinch and addresses rural residential and employment growth needs in Puslinch. This amendment is part of the County's Official Plan Review.

2.0 Report Highlights

- This report sets the stage for staff to seek feedback and prepare for future public consultation on proposed OPA 131.
- No decisions on the proposed amendment are being requested at this time.
- After circulation and public consultation on OPA 131, a more detailed planning report will be brought forward for consideration by Planning Committee.

3.0 Background

The County's ongoing Official Plan Review was launched in late 2019 as a joint municipal comprehensive review (MCR) and 5-year review. Since that time, the County's primary focus has been on completing the MCR component to fulfill the requirements of the Provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. However, the Province streamlined and combined the 2020 Provincial Policy Statement and 2019 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan) into one document. As a result, the 2024 Provincial Planning Statement (2024 PPS) came into effect October 20, 2024 and all land use planning decisions are required to be consistent with its policies.

4.0 Purpose of the Official Plan Amendment

The purpose of Official Plan Amendment 131 (OPA 131) is to:

- Add and change rural area policies to align with the 2024 Provincial Planning Statement;
- Re-allocate a portion of Erin's rural residential growth to Puslinch;
- Expand Aberfoyle and redesignate lands to Residential, Highway Commercial, Residential Transition Area, Policy Area PA7-9, Core Greenlands and Greenlands;
- Modify the rural residential severance cut-off date in Puslinch to May 1, 2025 and keep it as March 1, 2005 in Erin and Minto;
- Designate new rural employment area lands in Puslinch, implement site-specific policies and modify the existing Puslinch Industrial Policy; and
- Complete other policy changes and map corrections.

5.0 Main Changes to Official Plan

This section provides a description of the main changes resulting from proposed OPA 131. Appendix A includes a summary of the key areas of the amendment and mapping. The full draft OPA and other relevant material is posted online at: www.wellington.ca/planwell and [Puslinch by Design-Employment Land Study](#).

5.1 Provincial Planning Statement (PPS) Consistency

5.1.1 Rural Area Policy Updates

Rural areas are defined by the PPS as a “system of lands within municipalities that may include *rural settlement areas, rural lands, prime agricultural areas, natural heritage features and areas*, and resource areas.” OPA 131 deals primarily with PPS policy consistency for rural lands and prime agricultural areas of the County. Rural lands means “lands which are located outside *settlement areas* and which are outside *prime agricultural areas*.” Changes proposed in OPA 131 focus on:

- Aligning permitted uses in prime agricultural areas with the PPS (i.e. on-farm diversified uses, agriculture-related uses, etc.)
- Additional agricultural impact assessment requirements when introducing new non-agricultural uses in the prime agricultural area
- Incorporating an “agricultural systems” approach and aligning with the “rural areas” concept
- Adding policies to enable municipalities to choose whether to apply Minimum Distance Separation (MDS) to on-farm diversified uses
- Other changes to add and revise definitions
- Removing language allowing smaller agricultural lots in prime agricultural areas
- Allowing consideration of lot creation for infrastructure in prime agricultural areas in keeping with the PPS
- Clarifying size of severance for residence surplus to a farming operation
- Aligning rural employment area policies with more flexible Provincial policy approach

With respect to rural residential growth, the prohibition on new residential lot creation in prime agricultural areas was carried forward into the new PPS. However, for rural lands outside of the Greenbelt, the new PPS policies provide more flexibility. The policies allow growth and development to be directed to rural lands outside of rural settlement areas but leaves it up to municipalities to determine how.

Planning staff are not proposing changes to allow new Country Residential or Lifestyle Communities in the rural area County-wide or to allow additional lots within existing rural clusters as part of the County’s PPS consistency exercise. Through OPA 131, rural growth would continue to be directed to rural settlement areas (Secondary Urban Centres and Hamlets) and through Secondary Agricultural Area severances to achieve the County’s long-term growth forecast to 2051.

With respect to rural clusters, the County added policy 6.5.4 Rural Clusters through OPA 119. This policy was added to the Plan as a commitment to conduct a review of potential constraints to the supply of rural residential lots in the Secondary Agricultural Area. This assessment was completed in September 2024 (report PD2024-29). Policy 6.5.4 is no longer needed and is proposed to be removed through OPA 131.

5.1.2 Urban Employment Area Policy Updates

These changes clarify when Schedule A (County Growth Structure) amendments are required. For Industrial designated lands in the Town of Erin and Township of Centre Wellington where local official plans are in effect, the requirement for a duplicate County Official Plan Amendment is eliminated.

5.2 Rural Phase 3B - Residential

The residential component of the County's Phase 3B Rural Growth Review was launched in September 2024 as part of a rural residential growth analysis (report PD2024-29). The Town of Erin and Township of Puslinch councils were asked to provide input about how to address their long-term rural residential growth needs. County planning staff reported on the input received and considered options for addressing the rural area housing shortfall through report PD2025-20 (June 2025).

As detailed in the June report, considering Provincial, County and local priorities for rural growth, Puslinch and Erin would have a balance between their supply and growth forecast by:

1. Reallocating a 120 unit rural residential growth shortfall from Erin to Puslinch;
2. Assigning growth to support potential expansion of Aberfoyle and Arkell; and
3. Changing the severance date to May 1, 2025 as it applies to the Secondary Agricultural Areas of Puslinch only.

5.2.1 Reallocation from Erin to Puslinch

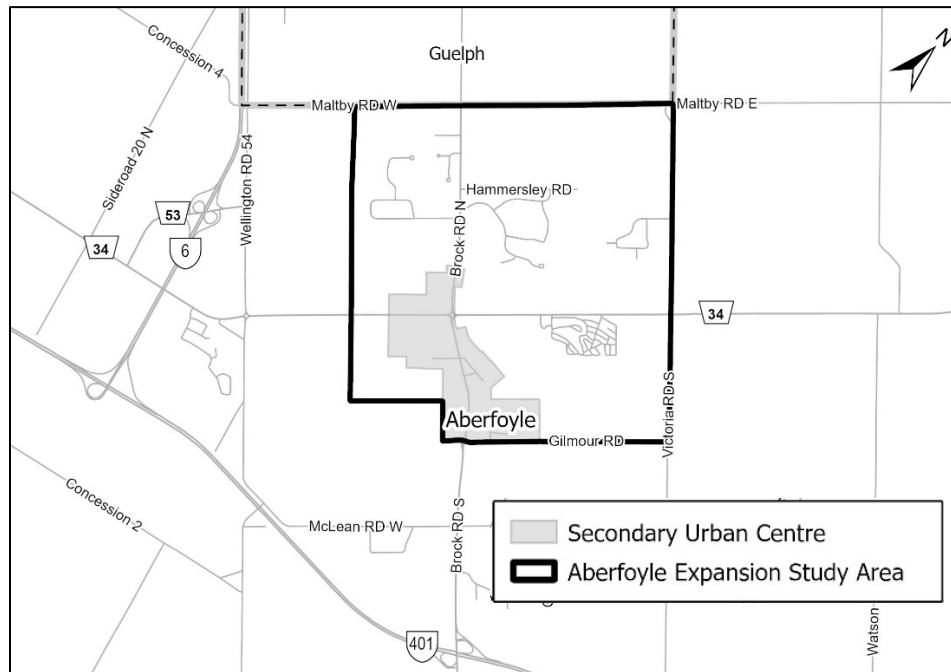
The reallocation of 120 units is in keeping with Town of Erin Council's preference to limit rural growth opportunities to those which currently exist through vacant units in Hamlets and other rural residential areas, existing vacant rural lots and potential supply from new rural severances under current policies.

5.2.2 Aberfoyle Urban Boundary Expansion

As part of addressing the identified household need for Puslinch to 2051 an expansion to the Secondary Urban Centre of Aberfoyle is being proposed. This expansion is to provide approximately 200 rural residential housing units. There is also a parcel at the southeast corner of Maltby Road E and Brock Road N considered for rounding out of an existing commercial use.

As shown in Figure 1, a Study Area was endorsed by Puslinch Council to investigate options for expanding Aberfoyle. The Study Area has a northern limit of Maltby Road, an eastern limit of Victoria Road S, a southern limit of Gilmour Road, and a western limit of the midway point of Concession 7 and Part Lots 16 through 22. Wellington Road 46 (Brock Road S) and Wellington Road 34 are major County roads which bisect the area.

Figure 1 Study Area Boundary - Aberfoyle Expansion



The Study Area is the most populated area in the Township of Puslinch and contains the current Secondary Urban Centre of Aberfoyle. Aberfoyle is the only Secondary Urban Centre in Puslinch that can be potentially expanded (Morriston is in the Greenbelt) and is a focus area for residential, commercial, recreational and public uses for the Township. Public uses include:

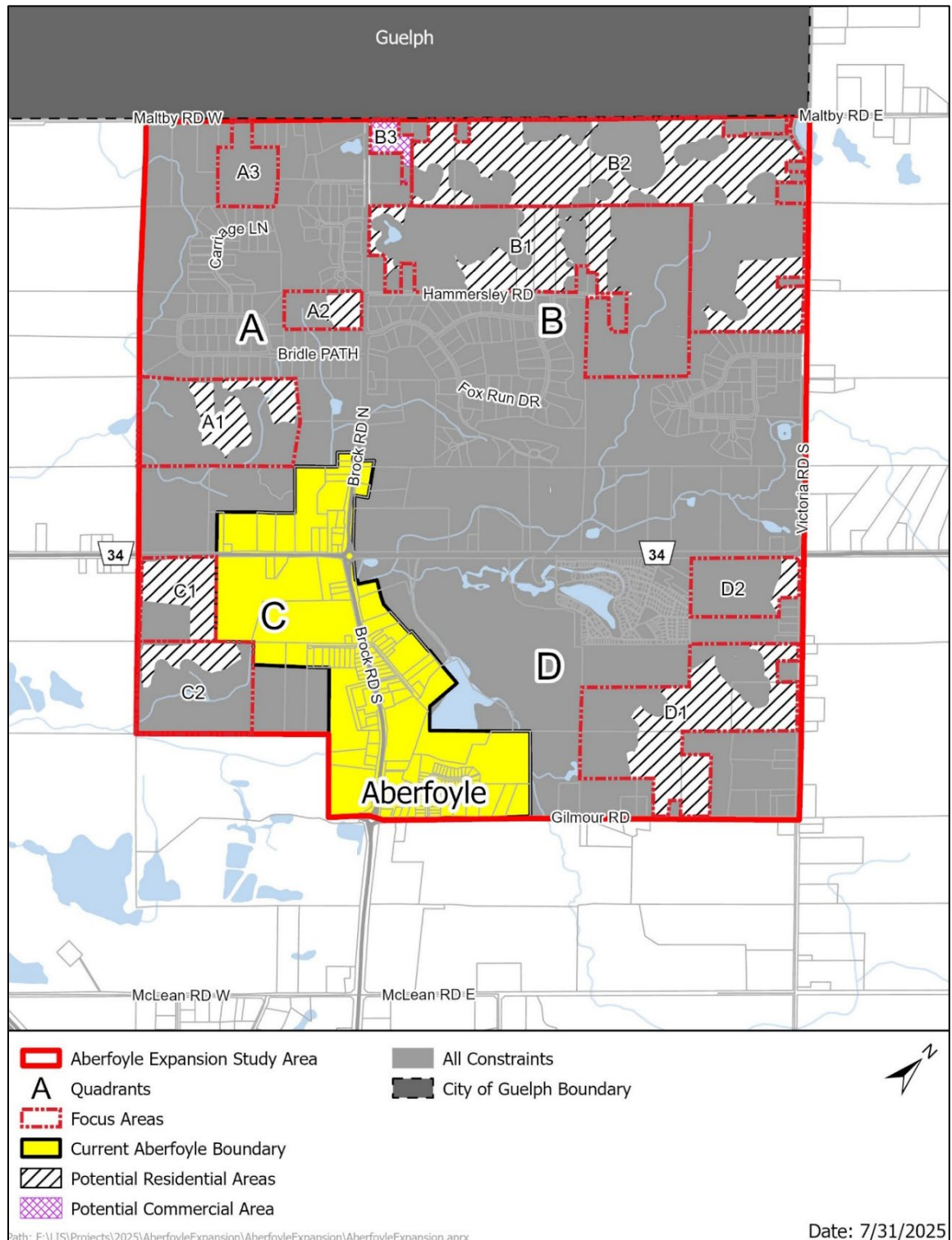
- Township Municipal Office
- Township Fire Station
- Aberfoyle Public School
- Community Centre
- Park
- Trail System
- Recreational Facilities
- County Library
- County Aberfoyle Garage

As part of the identification of constraints (Figure 2) and evaluation of locations for the expansion of Aberfoyle the following assessments were completed:

- Aggregate Impact Assessment, County of Wellington, September 2025
- Agricultural Impact Assessment, County of Wellington, September 2025
- Minimum Distance Separation (MDS) Study, Colville Consulting Inc., July 29, 2025
- Planning Impact Assessment, County of Wellington, September 2025

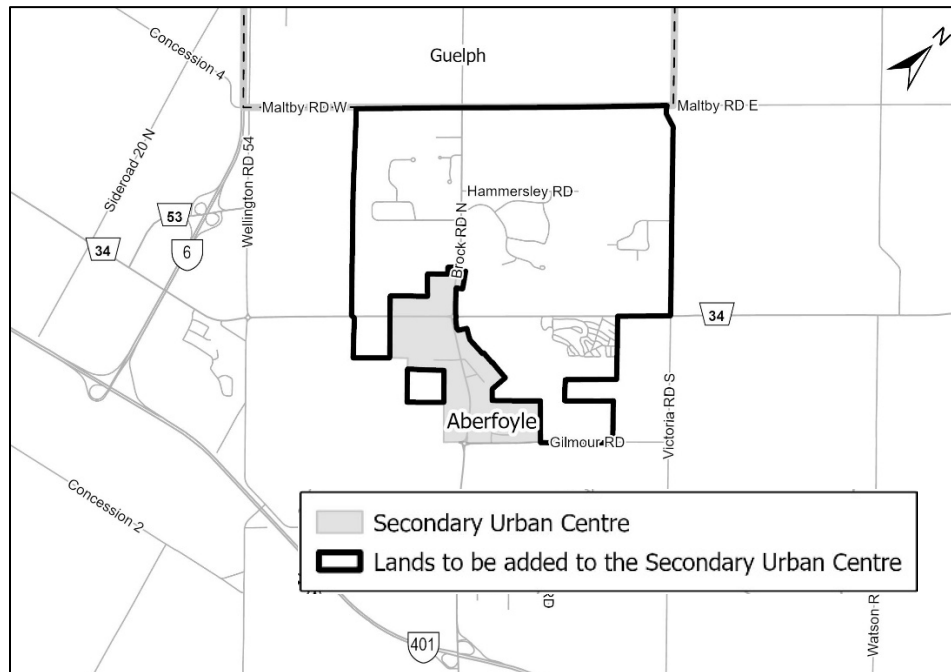
These studies are posted online at: www.wellington.ca/planwell and form the basis for the preferred expansion option (Figure 3) which aligns with the Provincial Planning Statement and Wellington County Official Plan.

Figure 2 **Aberfoyle Expansion Constraint Areas**



The Study Area also contains lands within the Mineral Aggregate Resource Overlay of the County Official Plan.

Figure 3 Preferred Option - Aberfoyle Expansion



More detailed mapping excerpts of OPA 131 are included in Appendix A (Figures A1 through A4). Land use changes within the expanded boundary are reflected in Figure A2 and include redesignations to recognize existing and new Residential and Highway Commercial lands. Woodlands areas (which are considered significant) have been recognized as new Greenlands areas and a small Core Greenlands update is also included.

5.2.3 Rural Residential Severance Cut-off Date

Rural residential lot creation in the Secondary Agricultural Area under section 10.4.4 of the Official Plan is part of the rural portion of the local municipal growth strategy in Erin, Minto and Puslinch. The County Official Plan uses a date restriction to align the rate of severances to the applicable rural growth allocation of households and population to 2051 in accordance with Provincial planning policy. OPA 131 changes the cut-off date from March 1, 2005 to May 1, 2025 for Puslinch and keeps the March 1, 2005 date the same for Erin and Minto. As previously stated, additional information is provided in Report PD2024-29 and PD2025-20.

5.2.4 Other Changes

There are vacant lands to the rear of the County's Aberfoyle Garage located at 7396 Wellington Road 34. These lands are currently designated Core Greenlands (floodplain and wetlands) and Secondary Agricultural. As these lands are to be added to Aberfoyle an urban designation needs to be applied. Small pockets of land have been added to the Industrial designation and the remainder have been added to the Residential Transition Area designation. A site-specific policy area (PA7-9) has been added to respond to future needs which may arise for public uses to serve the Puslinch community (Figure A3).

Housekeeping changes are also included to align the mapped boundary of existing policy area PA7-2 (Mill Creek Residential Area) and PA7-6 (Mini Lakes) with property boundaries (Figure A2). Another minor change is proposed to redesignate half of the residential property at 7388 Wellington Road 34 from Industrial to Residential (Figure A3).

5.3 Puslinch Focused Changes – Rural Employment

5.3.1 Study Background

A policy was introduced through OPA 119 (County Growth Structure) for a “Regionally Significant Economic Development Study Area” to identify additional land for rural employment growth in Puslinch. The Study was needed to address policies of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2019) and determine the best location for new rural employment area lands. County consultants (Watson and Associates) had previously calculated a need for a minimum of 30 ha of additional rural employment area land in Puslinch as part of the County’s Municipal Comprehensive Review. This need was based on a planning horizon of 2051.

After the study commenced, the Province made significant changes to the Provincial policy framework by introducing a new Provincial Planning Statement in 2024 and revoking the Growth Plan outside of the Greenbelt. One key difference in the 2024 PPS is that planning for employment areas may extend beyond the 2051 time horizon. This change provides more flexibility for municipalities in the amount of employment land which can be designated.

5.3.2 Study Results

Later named, “Puslinch by Design: Employment Land Study”, the County of Wellington and Township of Puslinch retained NPG Planning Consultants to complete the Study. Puslinch by Design is based on the following documents:

Phase 2 Background Report including the following Background Papers:

- Employment Land Market Study
- Transportation
- Municipal and Private Servicing
- Land Use Planning and Land Use Compatibility
- Aggregates
- Agriculture
- Natural Heritage
- Design
- Cultural Heritage Resources

Phase 3 Detailed Planning Study

Phase 4 Land Options Report

Phase 5 Recommended Land Option and Land Use Report

Phase 5 Addendum Report

These documents are available at the following link: [Puslinch by Design-Employment Land Study](#).

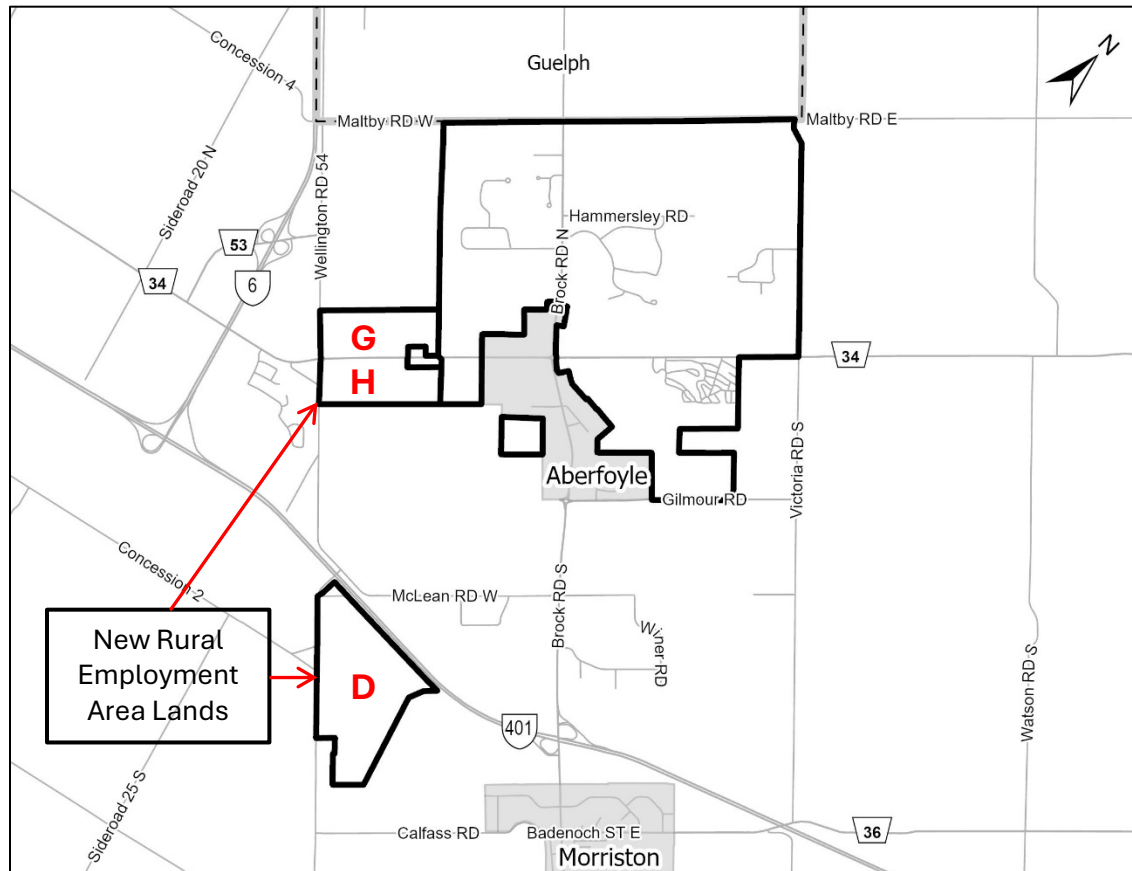
5.3.3 Lands Selected for Rural Employment Area Growth

At a meeting of July 23, 2025 Puslinch Council supported Area D (86 ha), G (23.30 ha) and H (30.1 ha) as locations for future rural employment area growth within the Study Area (Figure 4). This accounts for a total net area of 139.4 ha (345 ac) of Secondary Agricultural Area land to be redesignated Rural Employment Area. As there are mineral aggregate area resources within Area D which may be extracted in the future, identification of Area G and H will provide additional development options.

More detailed mapping excerpts of OPA 131 in Appendix A show the location of:

- New Rural Employment Areas;
- Site-specific policy area (PA7-10) for newly identified prestige rural employment areas (Part of Area D along Highway 401 and all of Area G and H); and
- Site-specific policy area (PA7-11) for a newly identified rural employment area (Part of Area D).

Figure 4 Location of New Rural Employment Area Lands



5.3.4 Changes to Puslinch Industrial Policy (Section 9.8.3)

OPA 131 also includes changes to an existing policy in the Official Plan: 9.8.3 Puslinch Industrial Policy. New policies have added a requirement for a Transportation Plan and a Concept Plan for designated lands west of the Hanlon Expressway. The Transportation Plan is to establish an internal road network and prohibit employment generated traffic from using Sideroad 20 N. Driveway access to Sideroad 20 N is also prohibited for employment uses. Other policies are added to address Design Guidelines, road infrastructure, communal wells, and land use compatibility.

Policies are also removed which allow for additional uses which do not comply with the new Provincial definition of employment area.

5.3.5 Minimum Distance Separation

Minimum Distance Separation I (MDS I) calculations were completed as part of the Agriculture Background Paper of the Study. A worst case scenario Type B land use was applied (which doubles the separation distance compared to a Type A land use). As the proposed new rural employment areas are

limited to industrial uses outside a settlement area, a Type A land use would apply per MDS guideline #33. Planning staff confirmed this interpretation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA).

As a result, Area G and H no longer have MDS encroachments and encroachments in the southern portion of Area D are significantly reduced. To ensure that the Rural Employment Area designation will not hinder potential expansion of livestock operations near Area D, policies have been added to the site-specific policy area PA7-11 in OPA 131 to support zoning relief for MDS II setbacks.

6.0 Pre-Consultation Process

County staff attended Puslinch Council on June 18, 2025 and July 23, 2025 to finalize the limit of the primary study area for expansion of Aberfoyle.

County staff also had preliminary discussions with Harden Environmental Services Ltd. and the Wellington Source Water Protection Risk Management Official regarding Puslinch-focused changes in OPA 131. Proposed water quantity policies extending into Puslinch will be released this fall for public engagement. Staff will continue to review ground water policies as they may relate to OPA 131.

In July 2025 County staff consulted with the following Provincial ministries regarding Rural Phase 3B and Phase 4 of our work programme:

- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA)
- Ministry of Energy and Mines (Mines)
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH)
- Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR)
- Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP)
- Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism (MCM)

As the associated official plan amendment will be processed under Section 26 of the Planning Act, it will be circulated to the Province as part of the land use planning approvals process for review and approval.

7.0 Conclusion

Planning staff are satisfied that the proposed amendment should be circulated to County departments, local municipalities, Indigenous communities, commenting agencies, and individuals or organizations on the mailing list, and should be made available to the public for comment and discussion at public meetings to be scheduled in the future.

The full draft OPA and other relevant material is posted online at: www.wellington.ca/planwell.

Strategic Action Plan:

This report relates to the following objectives and priorities in the County's Strategic Action Plan:

Making the best decisions for the betterment of the Community

Recommendations:

That the County Official Plan Review – OPA 131 Rural Area Policies and Growth report be received for information.

That the County Clerk circulate this report to Member Municipalities for information.

That draft OPA 131 Rural Area Policies and Growth be circulated for comments.

That staff be directed to schedule and hold an open house(s) under the Planning Act to provide the public with opportunities to review and comment on the amendment.

That the Planning Committee be authorized to hold a public meeting under the Planning Act at the appropriate time.

Respectfully submitted,

A stylized, handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Sarah'.

Sarah Wilhelm, RPP, MCIP
Manager of Policy Planning

A handwritten signature in dark ink, clearly legible as 'Jameson Pickard'.

Jameson Pickard, RPP, MCIP
Senior Policy Planner

In consultation with/approved by:

Aldo Salis, Director, Planning and Development
Scott Wilson, Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix A Key Details of the Amendment

Appendix A

Key Details of the Amendment

1. County-wide PPS Rural Area Policy Consistency

Aligns the rural area policies with the 2024 Provincial Planning Statement by:

- Updating permitted use policies in the prime agricultural area.
- Implementing an agricultural system approach to enhance protection of agricultural land base in the County and support the viability of agri-food network.
- Requiring new non-agricultural uses in the prime agricultural area to avoid or minimize impacts on the agricultural system as demonstrated through an agricultural impact assessments or equivalent analysis.
- Permitting lot creation in the prime agricultural area for infrastructure where the use or facility cannot be accommodated through an easement or existing right-of-way.
- Revising residence surplus to a farming operation severance policies to strengthen lot size requirements.
- Aligning the County Official Plan with the Rural Area concept of the PPS.
- Revising existing and adding new definitions in accordance with the PPS related to agriculture.
- Other changes to clarify and support the implementation of the rural area policy framework in the County.
- Removal of policy 6.8.4 which places restrictions on the type of employment areas uses outside of settlement areas as it is based on a Growth Plan policy which no longer applies.

2. Re-allocation of Erin Rural Residential Growth to Puslinch

Makes changes to re-allocate a portion of the Town of Erin's projected rural growth to 2051 (120 households and a population of 300) to the Township of Puslinch.

3. Puslinch Rural Residential Growth

Makes sufficient rural residential land available in Puslinch over the long-term by changing the severance cut-off date in Puslinch and expanding Aberfoyle:

- Change the rural residential severance date to May 1, 2025 as it applies to the Secondary Agricultural Areas of Puslinch.
- Expand the Secondary Urban Centre boundary of Aberfoyle.
- Change land use designations within the expanded Aberfoyle boundary:
 - From Secondary Agricultural and Country Residential to Residential, Highway Commercial, Industrial, Residential Transition Area, Core Greenlands and Greenlands.
- Add a new policy area (PA7-9) Aberfoyle Garage to County lands within the current and expanded Aberfoyle boundary to provide flexibility for future needs.

- Make housekeeping changes to:
 - Align the mapped boundary of existing policy area PA7-2 (Mill Creek Residential Area) and PA7-6 (Mini Lakes) with property boundaries.
 - Change land use designation from Industrial to Residential for a residential property at 7388 Wellington Road 34.

4. Puslinch Rural Employment Growth

To make sufficient rural employment land available in Puslinch over the long-term.

- Change land use designation from Secondary Agricultural to Rural Employment Area.
- Add new policy area (PA7-10) to establish site-specific policies for newly identified prestige rural employment areas.
- Add new policy area (PA7-11) to establish additional site-specific policies for newly identified rural employment areas.
- Make changes to section 9.8.3 Puslinch Industrial Policy by adding policies to implement Puslinch by Design: Employment Land Study to address road infrastructure, transportation, concept plan, communal wells and land use compatibility and deleting subsection (a).

5. Other Changes

Other changes include:

- Updates to clarify: (1) when amendments to County Growth Structure (Schedule A) mapping is required; and (2) when amendments are not required for employment conversions where a local Official Plan Amendment has been approved for such a conversion to take place.
- Removal of rural cluster policy 6.5.4 applicable to Secondary Agricultural Areas as the necessary assessment has been completed.
- Clarify that the rural residential severance date of March 1, 2005 continues to apply to the Secondary Agricultural Areas of Erin and Minto.

Figure A1 Location of Proposed Aberfoyle Expansion

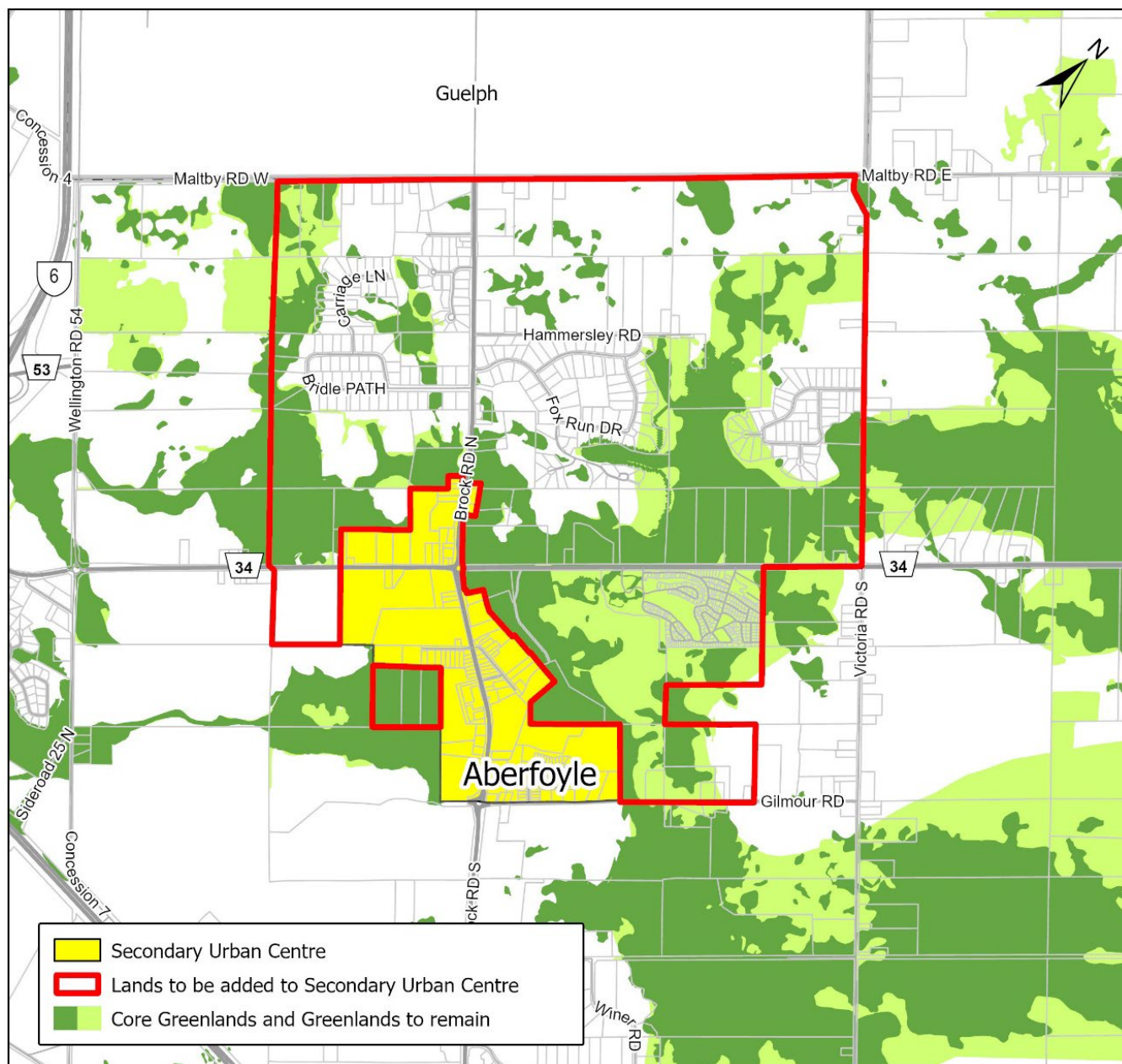


Figure A2 Proposed Land Use Designations within Proposed Aberfoyle Expansion

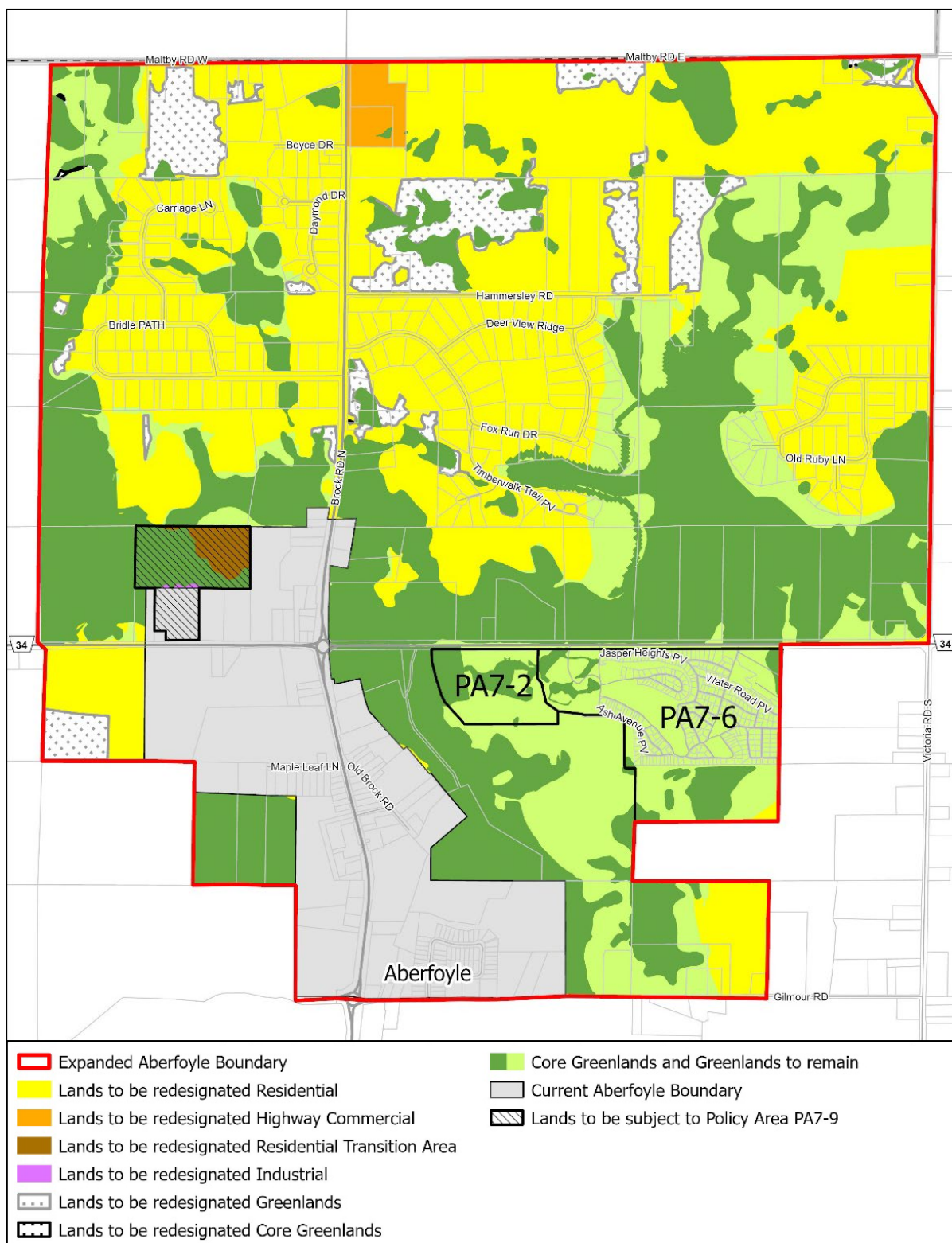


Figure A3 County Aberfoyle Garage Lands and Housekeeping Amendment

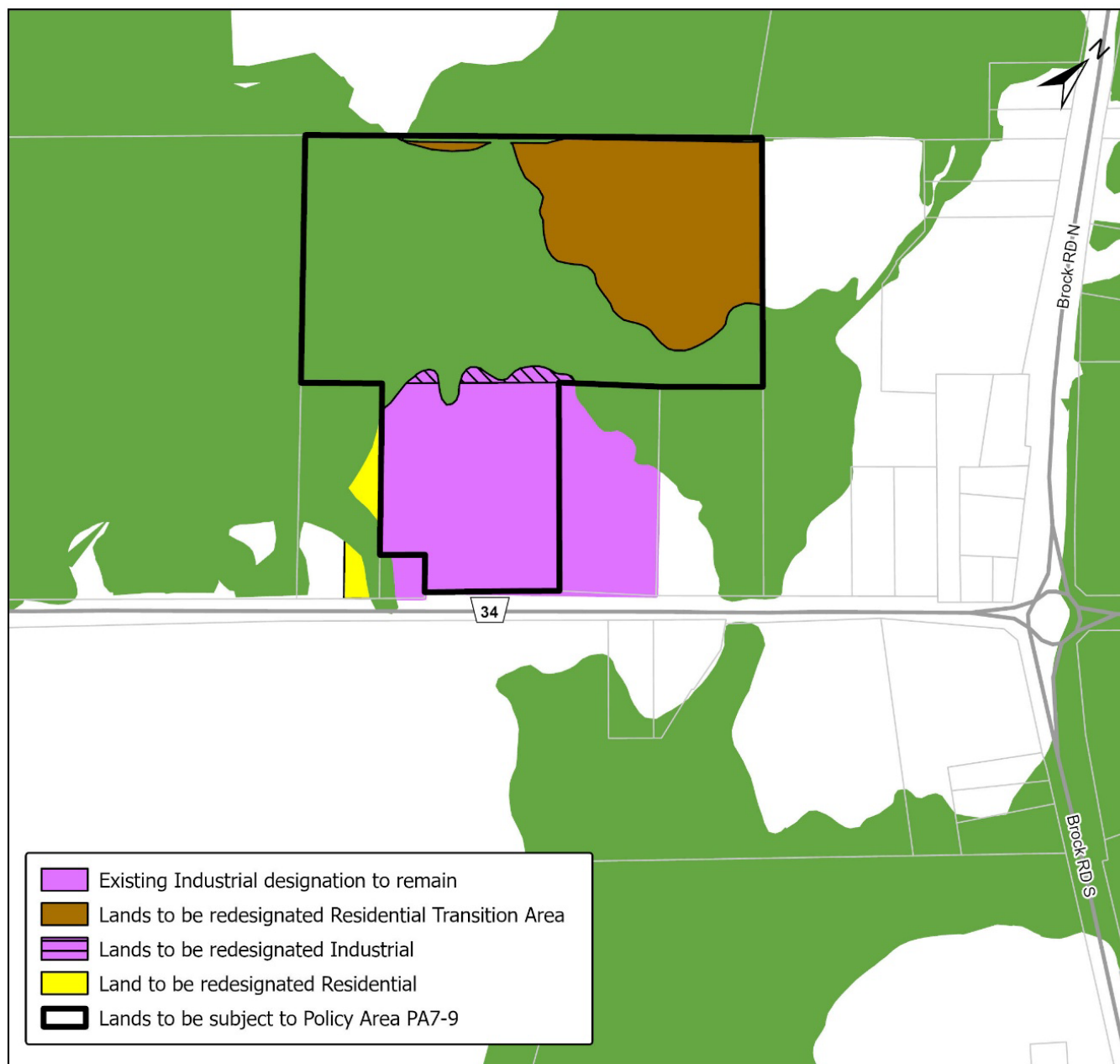


Figure A4 **Location of Proposed Rural Employment Area Lands and Site-Specific Policy Areas**

