

Clause 16 in Report No. 5 of Committee of the Whole was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting held on March 26, 2015.

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Urban-Agricultural Compatibility - Buffering the Greenbelt

Committee of the Whole recommends adoption of the following recommendations contained in the report dated February 24, 2015 from the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner:

1. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Regional staff consult with the agricultural community, local municipalities and other stakeholders and report back to Council with:
 - a. any proposed new policies or policy modifications through the Regional Official Plan review and update process; and
 - b. recommendations to the Province during the upcoming provincial review of the *Greenbelt Plan* and *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan*
2. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing as input for review of the *Greenbelt Plan* and *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan*.
3. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Clerks of the local municipalities and to the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group.

2. Purpose

This report outlines some of the challenges associated with urban-agriculture boundary compatibility, and proposes an approach to identify and address these issues as part of the current York Region Official Plan review and update process and the upcoming Provincial review of the *Greenbelt Plan* and *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan*.

3. Background

The interface between new residential communities and abutting existing, permanent agricultural uses creates planning challenges

On September 11, 2014, Regional Council approved, with modifications, Amendment No. 744 to the Vaughan Official Plan – the Block 40/47 Secondary Plan (Clause No. 7, Report No. 13 of Committee of the Whole). At Committee of the Whole, concern was expressed over the potential impact development in the Secondary Plan area may have on adjacent active farm operations. At issue was the extent to which the Secondary Plan adequately addressed buffering requirements to protect existing and future farm operations and avoid incompatibility issues with future residential developments and residents. A modification was made to the Block 40/47 Secondary Plan (Attachment 2, Clause No. 7, Report No. 13, September 11, 2014) which adds a new policy addressing the urban-agricultural compatibility issue within Vaughan OPA 744.

Through other business, Committee of the Whole further discussed the issue of buffer zones between the Greenbelt and urban developments and requested that staff report back on means to address the issue through a broader policy framework (Clause No. 60, Report No. 13 of Committee of the Whole). Land use compatibility and buffering issues may arise where York Region's urban areas are located immediately adjacent to rural and agricultural areas within the *Greenbelt Plan* area.

Upcoming Provincial and Regional policy reviews provide an opportunity to address this issue

In May 2014, Regional Council endorsed the work plan for the Regional Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) and Official Plan update. Included is a review of Official Plan policy to ensure conformity with provincial legislation and plans, as required by Section 26 of the *Planning Act*. The Regional Official Plan update provides the opportunity to ensure that Regional priorities and changing community needs continue to be reflected in Official Plan policies.

The *Greenbelt Plan*, released in 2005, protects a large area of rural and agricultural land within the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Included within the *Greenbelt Plan* area are lands subject to the *Niagara Escarpment Plan* and lands subject to the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP)*. In York Region, 69% of the land base is within the Oak Ridges Moraine and the *Greenbelt Plan* area, and as a result, these plans have significant influence on the development of land use policy in York Region.

The legislation requires that the Province undertake a review of these Provincial Plans in 2015. Council provided preliminary input to the Province on the *Greenbelt Plan* and *ORMCP* (Clause No. 7, Report No. 7, April 17, 2014). Additionally, as directed by Council, Regional staff hosted three Public Open Houses in June 2014 in three different locations across the Region in order to gather public input to be used to inform the Regional position on the pending provincial review of these plans. The agricultural community has expressed an interest in seeing updates to the Greenbelt Plan which will ensure long term agricultural viability, recognizing that farms to evolve and modify operations over time.

4. Analysis and Options

A number of compatibility challenges arise at the interface between urban and rural agricultural land uses

Residents of new or existing developments situated adjacent to active agricultural operations may experience some unavoidable disturbances associated with normal farm practices, such as noise, dust, odour and other nuisances. Where possible, efforts can be made to minimize the conflicts between these neighbouring land uses through subdivision design and lay-out, the provision of buffer areas, landscaping and screening, setbacks, as well as building orientation and massing, and grading measures.

The agricultural community also faces challenges from neighbouring urban land uses. These challenges include pollution, drainage issues (during and post construction), and altered growth patterns for crops (caused by changes in shading or lighting). In addition, possible interactions between nearby residents and livestock may pose a safety risk to both groups.

The Provincial Minimum Distance Separation (MDS) Formulae provides an opportunity to address some aspects of compatibility

In Ontario's rural and prime agricultural areas, the 2014 *Provincial Policy Statement* requires that land uses, including the creation of residential lots and new or expanding livestock facilities, comply with the minimum distance. MDS is a land use planning tool that determines a recommended separation between a livestock operation and associated facilities and a sensitive land use, such as residential. The objective of the minimum distance formulae is to minimize land use conflicts and nuisance complaints from odour associated with livestock and manure operations and facilities. In addition to the compatibility issues discussed in the previous section, a primary concern discussed at Committee of the Whole in September related to future implications when applying the Provincial Minimum Distance Separation Formulae. Application of the Minimum Distance

Separation formulae pertains to existing conditions at the time of application. Accordingly, residential development associated with new communities could be permitted abutting existing agricultural operations with application of the MDS formulae alone.

As MDS does not account for other nuisances such as noise or dust from crop agricultural activities or grazing livestock, policy approaches to these challenges are required. Policies should ensure the delivery of complete communities that are compatible with the long term viability of agricultural operations, including their ability to evolve and modify operations, which may include introducing new uses that are subject to the minimum distance, such as a livestock barn or manure facility.

In addition to updated policies at the Regional level, the Greenbelt would benefit from strong Provincial direction providing consistency across Regions

During the process of updating the York Region Official Plan, there is an opportunity to review policies related to agriculture and implementation of complete communities. Regional staff will continue to consult with the agricultural community and research best practices on approaches to buffering agriculture and urban development from one another. Findings will be used to inform the development of a recommended policy framework for the Official Plan update and as input to the Province for the *Greenbelt Plan* and *ORMCP* 2015 reviews.

Consultation with the farming community (including the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group), local municipalities and the development industry, will be undertaken to ensure that any proposed buffering policy considers the needs of all stakeholders. In addition, any proposed policy framework will be presented to the public through on-going public consultation, providing opportunity for input.

The Province is encouraged to include consultation and recommendations on how to address transition zones between urban and permanent agricultural areas through the upcoming review of the *Greenbelt Plan* and the *ORMCP*, particularly as this issue is not unique to York Region.

Link to key Council-approved plans

Developing complete communities and protecting agriculture land and farming operations is essential to delivering the Region's commitments as outlined in the *Strategic Plan 2015-2019*, the *York Regional Official Plan 2010* and *Vision 2051*. Proactively addressing the agriculture-urban interface is consistent with the following Strategic Plan priority areas:

- Strengthen the Region's Economy

- Support Community Health and Well-being
- Manage Environmentally Sustainable Growth

Potential buffering options identified during future consultation with local municipalities and the agricultural community on this issue may provide the opportunity to support the *York Regional Official Plan 2010* objective of increasing woodland cover to a minimum of 25% of the Region's total land area.

Further, addressing this matter will help ensure that in 2051, York Region will include "A Resilient Natural Environment and Agricultural System"; a goal of the Region's *Vision 2051*.

5. Financial Implications

No new funds are required to address this matter. Consultation and policy development for the York Region Official Plan review and update, and 2015 Provincial Plan reviews will be undertaken within the existing Planning and Economic Development staff complement and budget.

6. Local Municipal Impact

Compatibility issues typically arise at the local level through consideration of development applications. A Regional policy framework that addresses these issues could provide direction to local municipalities on how to address site-specific issues, as they arise, in a consistent manner across the Region. Local municipalities will continue to be consulted on urban-agricultural compatibility through the Regional Official Plan review process.

7. Conclusion

As the Region continues to urbanize, compatibility issues at the urban-agricultural boundary will continue to arise. In order to ensure on-going support to the agricultural industry and build complete communities, these challenges will be reviewed through the current York Region Official Plan review and the Region's comments on the upcoming Provincial review of the *Greenbelt Plan* and *ORMCP*.

The Region will continue to work with partners in the local municipalities, development and agricultural communities to develop an appropriate Regional policy framework. York Region encourages the Province to include consultation and recommendations on how to address transition zones between urban and

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agricultural areas through the upcoming review of the *Greenbelt Plan* and the *ORMCP*, particularly as this issue is not unique to York Region.

For more information on this report, please contact Sandra Malcic, Manager, Policy and Environment at ext. 75274, or Valerie Shuttleworth, Chief Planner at ext. 71525.

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Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request