



REPORT

REPORT TO: Mayor Bonnette and Members of Council

REPORT FROM: Keith Hamilton – Planner, Policy

DATE: September 18, 2020

REPORT NO.: PD-2020-0037

RE: Regional Official Plan Review – Agricultural System Discussion Paper

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. PD-2020-0037, dated September 18, 2020, regarding the Regional Official Plan Review – Rural and Agricultural System Discussion Paper, be received;

AND FURTHER THAT Council's consideration of this report be deferred to the October 13th Council meeting;

AND FURTHER THAT Council endorse the discussion question responses prepared by Town staff, attached as Schedule Two to this report, to be submitted to the Region of Halton in advance of the commenting deadline of October 30, 2020;

AND FURTHER THAT a copy of this report be forwarded to the Region of Halton as input into the Rural and Agricultural System component of the Regional Official Plan Review Process;

AND FURTHER THAT a copy of this report be forwarded to the Local Municipalities of Burlington, Milton and Oakville, Conservation Halton, Credit Valley Conservation and the Grand River Conservation Authority.

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an overview of Halton Region's Rural and Agricultural System Discussion Paper (attached as Schedule One);
- Provide a summary of Town staff's participation in the consultation process for developing the Discussion Paper; and,

- Provide staff's responses to the 11 discussion questions presented in the Discussion Paper, to be submitted to Halton Region by October 30, 2020.

BACKGROUND:

1.0 Halton Region Official Plan Review

The Region of Halton is currently undertaking a Regional Official Plan Review (ROPR), as required under the Planning Act (Section 26). This Review will produce a revised Regional Official Plan (ROP) that is consistent with multiple Provincial Plans, including the Growth Plan and Provincial Policy Statement (PPS). This is a three phase process that began with a [Directions Report](#) outlining the goals and deliverables of the ROPR. The Review is currently in Phase 2, which has resulted in the release of five 'Discussion Papers' designed to inform and solicit feedback from Halton's Area Municipalities, Conservation Authorities, special interest groups, and the general public. The five papers are on key policy areas (components) that shape the ROP, including:

- Climate Change;
- Integrated Growth Management (Urban Structure);
- Regional Natural Heritage System;
- Rural Agricultural System; and,
- The North Aldershot Planning Area

Additionally, Landing Pages were developed for each of the Discussion Papers to provide a simplified summary of the Discussion Papers intended to facilitate consultation with the public. The Discussion Papers and Landing Pages were presented as part of a workshop to Regional Council on July 8, 2020 and released for public consultation on July 15, 2020. Region staff provided a presentation to Town Council on September 14th, which summarized each Discussion Paper, and provided Council an opportunity to ask questions and provide comments.

1.1 Role of the Rural and Agricultural System in the Regional Official Plan Review

The Regional Rural and Agricultural System (RAS), as a component of the ROP, provides a basis for Regional rural and agricultural policies that ensure protection of agricultural land and resources as Halton continues to grow. The Rural and Agricultural Discussion Paper plays a critical role in the ROPR process by serving as a guide to the current system, and outlining necessary and potential changes to RAS policies and mapping. The paper also serves as a tool for public consultation, providing eleven discussion questions for which the public can submit responses to Region staff.

It has also been acknowledged in Phase 2 of the ROPR that policy areas (from which the Discussion Papers are based) have an impact on one another. The RAS impacts the other components of the ROP by:

- Helping to shape the urban structure of Halton Region through policies that require any urban expansions into rural and agricultural areas to satisfy a series of tests, and requiring that all potential impacts of such development are identified and assessed;
- Acknowledging the role of the Regional Natural Heritage System within the RAS, developing and revising policies that balance the needs of both; and,
- Ensuring the protection of a connected and functioning RAS that helps mitigate the impacts of climate change through the preservation of undeveloped rural and agricultural land.

2.0 Rural and Agricultural System Discussion Paper

Halton Region's Rural and Agricultural System Discussion Paper provides an overview of the RAS in its current state and outlines required mapping and policy changes, as well as discussion on other potential policy modifications. The following is a brief summary of the paper's components:

- **Current Halton Rural and Agricultural System:** The RAS currently consists of two components. The 'Agricultural Area' includes both Prime and non-Prime Agricultural lands with similar policies protecting and encouraging agricultural uses. The other component, 'Areas outside of RNHS Key Features' are lands also within the Natural Heritage System, but where agricultural operations are permitted.
- **Designation of Prime Agricultural Areas and Mapping Options:** The most recent versions of the PPS and Growth Plan require municipal plans to designate Prime Agricultural Areas. The current ROP includes 'Prime Agricultural' as a constraint on development in certain areas, but does not include a designation, prompting discussion in this paper on how to address Provincial plan requirements. The four policy/mapping options presented are the same as those in the Natural Heritage Discussion Paper, with:
 - **Option 1:** RNHS mapped entirely as an overlay with a designated Prime Agricultural Area.
 - **Option 2:** Designated RNHS Key Features and Prime Agricultural Area, with all other RNHS components (i.e. linkage areas) as an overlay.

- **Option 3:** Separate designations for RNHS Key Features in and outside of the designated Prime Agricultural Area, with all other RNHS components (i.e. linkage areas) as an overlay.
 - **Option 4:** All RNHS components (with Key Features) as one designation, and one Agricultural Area designation (with Prime Agricultural Area overlay).
- **Agriculture-Related Uses:** These are often considered to be small-scale commercial or industrial uses, directly related to a farm operation. The current ROP does not formally identify Agriculture-Related uses under a policy section. Section 5 of the paper explores the extent to which these uses should be permitted, and under what conditions, based on existing Regional and Provincial Guidelines (i.e. Region's On-Farm Business Guidelines, OMAFRA's Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas).
 - **On-Farm Diversified Uses:** These uses are considered to be secondary to the principal agricultural use on a property, smaller in scale, and will produce value added agricultural products. Agri-tourism is often considered a subsection of On-Farm Diversified (OFD) uses and is also discussed in the paper. The current ROP does not formally identify OFD uses under a policy section. Similar to section 5, section 6 explores the extent to which these uses should be permitted, and under what conditions, based on existing Regional and Provincial Guidelines.
 - **Cemeteries in Prime Agricultural Areas:** This section acknowledges that current Provincial policies (PPS) consider cemeteries as part of complete communities in settlement areas, but that there is also support for them to be located in rural areas as well. Section 7 of the paper outlines potential criteria for locating cemeteries on agricultural land, while also stating the preferred location should be in settlement areas or existing cemeteries that can be retrofitted for expansion.
 - **Other Considerations:** Also included is a section outlining other areas of interest that were identified in the research leading up to the creation of the Rural and Agricultural System Discussion Paper. These include:
 - Discussion on policy updates to existing ROP policies for Agricultural Impact Assessments (AIAs), including where and when they should be required in order to be consistent with more recently updated Provincial policies (i.e. Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan, Niagara Escarpment Plan).
 - Discussion on policy updates to existing ROP policies on Special Needs Housing, and more specifically the need to permit this use within the RAS wherever residential uses are permitted.

COMMENTS:

1.0 Summary of Town Staff Comments

As a participant in the ROPR consultation process, Town Policy Planning staff has worked together to draft responses to the eleven (11) discussion questions included in the Discussion Paper. These responses (along with the questions) have been attached as Schedule Two to this report. Town staff provided responses consistent with comments and concerns expressed throughout the development of the Discussion Papers, which included:

- **Agriculture-Related and On-Farm Diversified Uses:** Town staff has suggested consideration be given for local plans and policies to apply a case-by-case analysis where agricultural operations or farm buildings are developing and expanding, where appearance and use are more industrial in nature. Additionally, it is critical that Agriculture-related and OFD uses, while important, do not divert too much land and resources away from the primary farming activities. Lastly, it was suggested that if the Region intends to re-evaluate its On-Farm Business Guidelines, the Region should consult with local municipalities, Conservation Authorities, and agricultural stakeholder groups on any proposed changes. Additionally, an updated version of the Guidelines should be endorsed by all applicable Councils and Boards.
- **Mapping:** Town staff has supported a ROP policy direction that would see the establishment of a Prime Agricultural Designation, consistent with Growth Plan and PPS policies. Further, the responses in Schedule Two support a RAS mapping option that would contain separate Prime Agricultural and Natural Heritage Key Feature designations, ensuring a balance in priorities for the RAS and RNHS.
- **Cemeteries:** The suggestion that cemeteries can be primarily directed to settlement areas is challenging given their land extensive nature, high land costs and the need to achieve minimum greenfield densities. The proposed policy direction for such uses outside settlement areas is also very limiting. Further discussion is warranted on this policy area.
- **Parkland in the Rural Agricultural System:** Town staff has asked that consideration be given for greater flexibility in rural agricultural policies to permit public park uses in the RAS. The Halton Hills Recreation and Parks department has, in the past, provided comments to the Region on this issue (see Schedule 3) based on the results of a Parkland Acquisition Study recently completed. This study concluded that the Town will need to look outside urban boundaries to accommodate parkland needs, with a notable deficit in parkland when only considering available land in urban areas. In supporting these comments,

Planning staff has recommended that through the ROPR, the Region should consider introducing a supportive policy framework for such uses in the RAS given that they are a critical component of ensuring a complete community and cannot be accommodated inside the urban boundary.

2.0 Next Steps in the ROPR Process

Upon release of the Discussion Papers and Landing Pages, the Region will record and respond to input received through public engagement, and present it to Regional Council in a Consultation Summary Report. The input related to the Rural and Agricultural System Discussion Paper will also be used to identify opportunities to further modify policies to protect and preserve the RAS.

The comments the Region receives on the Discussion Papers and Landing Pages will be used in determining 'policy directions' that will be presented to Council in advance of preparing amendments to the Regional Official Plan. It is anticipated that the Region will provide additional opportunities for public engagement, such as Public Information Centres (PICs) and stakeholder meetings, in the forthcoming Phase 3 of the Regional Official Plan Review in 2021. Phase 3 will involve presenting draft ROP policy directions for public and stakeholder group comment, and finalizing any necessary Regional Official Plan Amendment(s). Further public consultation on policy directions for each ROP component will take place in 2021. Town staff will continue to keep members of Council informed on any developments and engagement opportunities associated with the ROPR, including:

- Regional Council workshops on ROPR components (including the Integrated Growth Management Strategy);
- Any public outreach including Town Halls, Public Information Centres, or any online consultation;
- Any planned presentations to local Councils by Regional staff on the progress of the ROPR;
- Any reports to Regional Council on the progress of the ROPR;
- Any future opportunities for Town staff to engage in and provide comment on the ROPR; and,
- Future Town staff reports on the progress for the ROPR.

The Region is also proposing to introduce a separate ROPA to address local municipal planning priorities related to urban structure and to facilitate a special meeting of Council by year end 2020. The proposed ROPA will include the following planning matters: Urban Growth Centres, Major Transit Station Areas (including boundaries and density targets), Strategic Growth Corridors (potential identification and density targets) and limited Employment Land Conversions of those properties identified by local municipalities as having strategic importance in advancing elements of the local urban structure.

As Council may recall, Regional Council previously directed that the four growth concepts based on the “Local Plans and Priorities Growth Scenarios” be carried forward for further refinement and analysis. It is our understanding that further work is being undertaken by the Region on the concepts to respond to the revised growth forecasts and extended planning horizon contained in Amendment No. 1 to the Growth Plan. The exact timelines to present the revised growth concepts and ultimately select a preferred growth concept have yet to be finalized.

RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN:

This report directly aligns to the following values in the Strategic Plan 2019-2022 including:

Foster a Healthy Community

To maintain and enhance a healthy community that provides a clean environment and a range of economic and social opportunities to ensure a superior quality of life in our community.

Preserve, Protect and Enhance our Environment

To preserve, protect and enhance our natural environment for the health benefits and enjoyment it provides to present and future generations.

Protect and Enhance our Agriculture

To protect and enhance the viability of our agricultural land base and agricultural industry.

Preserve, Protect and Enhance our Countryside

To protect and enhance the open space character of our countryside.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There are no financial impacts associated with this report.

CONSULTATION:

Planning staff will continue to consult with the different Town departments including, Transportation and Public Works, Recreation and Parks, Economic Development, Climate Change, Finance and Fire through the ROPR process. Staff will also continue to update the Senior Management Team and Council.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

The Region will conduct consultation primarily through online engagement. An expanded 75 day consultation period from July 15 – September 28, 2020 will include:

- Discussion Papers and Landing Pages, which summarize the Discussion Papers, being posted on halton.ca/ropr
- People will be able to provide their responses to questions posed and/or general comments using an online survey tool;
- Presentations to local municipal Councils on the Discussion Papers, as requested.
- Meetings with Advisory Committees;
- Public Information Centres, which will be held virtually, but following the same outline as a traditional Public Information Centre with an introduction, staff presentation and question/answer session. A technical moderator and a process facilitator will be utilized. People who do not have access to the virtual meeting because they do not have the technology, are not comfortable with the technology, or have accessibility issues will be accommodated;
- Public Information Centre meeting materials and questions, which will be posted on halton.ca/ropr to allow people to provide input and comments after the sessions;
- Stakeholder meetings, which will be held using a virtual meeting format;
- Indigenous people's engagement undertaken on a case-by-case basis depending on the preferences of those communities; and
- Receipt of comments to the Regional Official Plan email account at ropr@halton.ca.

Public notification of future engagement opportunities will be promoted through the Region's website, newspaper advertisements, signboards, mailing lists, social media, stakeholder groups, and other means. Given that part of the engagement period is during the summer, most engagement activities will be focused in the month of September. Recognizing that the engagement plan may have to be adjusted in light of changes to COVID-19 restrictions, Regional staff will continue to monitor restrictions and make adjustments as needed.

Virtual Public Information Centre

Halton Region hosted a combined Virtual Public Information Centre (PIC) regarding the Natural Heritage and Rural Agricultural System Discussion Papers on September 17. The PIC was held from 7:00-9:00 pm which Town staff attended virtually. The format of the PICs included a presentation by Regional staff along with a Question and Answer period where Region staff responded to questions that were emailed or submitted through the chat function from the public. The presentation can be found in the [Regional Official Plan Review webpage](#).

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS:

The Town is committed to implementing our Community Sustainability Strategy, Imagine Halton Hills. Doing so will lead to a higher quality of life.

The recommendation outlined in this report directly relates to the Land Use goals in Imagine Halton Hills under the Environmental Health pillar.

Overall, the alignment of this report with the Community Sustainability Strategy is:
GOOD

COMMUNICATIONS:

Upon Council approval of this report, a copy will be forwarded to the Region of Halton, the Local Municipalities of Burlington, Milton and Oakville, Conservation Halton, Credit Valley Conservation and the Grand River Conservation Authority.

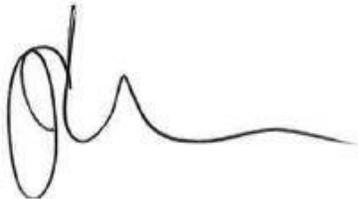
CONCLUSION:

The Rural and Agricultural System Discussion Paper provides a framework that will be utilized when determining policy measures to both protect and enhance the Regional Rural and Agricultural System. Town staff has participated in the development of this paper and have provided responses to the paper's 11 discussion questions (attached as Schedule Two). These responses reflect the local context, values and interests of Halton Hills, while acknowledging the importance of protecting agricultural land and rural landscape permanence through responsible planning policies. Town staff looks forward to on-going discussion through the public consultation phase and continuing to participate in the development of updated policies through the Regional Official Plan Review.

Reviewed and Approved by,



Bronwyn Parker, Director of Planning Policy



John Linhardt, Commissioner of Planning and Development



Chris Mills, Acting Chief Administrative Officer