



Rural and Agricultural System Discussion Paper

Regional Official Plan Review

June 2020

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Executive Summary

Regional Official Plan Review

The Regional Municipality of Halton has initiated a review of its Regional Official Plan (ROP) in accordance with the legislative requirements of the [Planning Act](#). The last comprehensive review of the ROP resulted in Regional Official Plan Amendments (ROPA) 37, 38 and 39, which implemented the policies of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2006 and the Greenbelt Plan, 2005 amongst other key policy initiatives. The ROPR is being undertaken in three phases and the Rural-Agricultural Discussion Paper is part of Phase 2. Phase 2 will inform the development of ROP policies during the upcoming policy drafting phase of the ROPR (Phase 3).

Through this Regional Official Plan Review (ROPR), specific theme areas and policies will need to be updated, enhanced, and refined based on changing demographics, evolving land use trends, the [Provincial Policy Statement](#) (PPS), 2020 and the applicable 2017 Provincial Plans ([Greenbelt Plan](#) and [Niagara Escarpment Plan](#)) and [A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe](#), 2019. New Source Protection Plans may also have impacts on uses in the Agricultural Area. The ROPR also provides an opportunity for a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of existing policies and implementation through a Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) process.

Halton Region and Rural and Agricultural Lands

Halton Region is home to an active and vibrant farming sector which includes a wide range of farming types including horse farms, oilseeds and grain operations, greenhouse/nursery/floriculture operations, hay producers, livestock operations, fruit and vegetable growers and more. In Halton Region, approximately 30 percent of the land base is urban and the remaining 70 percent is comprised of agricultural areas, hamlets, rural clusters, mineral resource extraction areas and a natural heritage system. The purpose of this Discussion Paper is to identify the key agricultural and rural policy areas that will need to be investigated further through the ROPR process.

Rural and Agricultural Lands and the ROPR

In order to understand key issues and opportunities for agricultural and rural lands in Halton, a technical background review was conducted to:

- Review the new and emerging Provincial policy framework and its impacts on planning policy in the Regional Official Plan (ROP) (the policy audit);
- Review key background documents that have been completed by the Region, the Province and others that may have an impact on land use in the rural and agricultural areas and review a number of best practices from other jurisdictions as it relates to rural and agricultural land use;
- Review proposed prime agricultural areas and candidate areas mapping prepared by the Province and review against mapping of prime agricultural areas generated through the Region's Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) study in the ROP currently; and,
- Identify key issues to be examined in this Discussion Paper for consultation.

The purpose of this Discussion Paper is to identify the key agricultural and rural policies that will need to be investigated further through the ROPR process. A more comprehensive review of the current ROP, including a complete policy and mapping audit, will be undertaken through the Phase 3 Implementation theme. For each subject area, this Discussion Paper contains a brief summary along with the changes in Provincial policy that have to be considered, and provides discussion for consideration. The subject areas reviewed in this Discussion Paper are set out below:

Designation of prime agricultural areas

- The current ROP identifies the prime agricultural area as a constraint to development within Halton's Agricultural Area designation with very protective policies. The PPS 2020 now requires that prime agricultural areas be shown as a separate designation in official plans.
- Several options are presented to deal with how the prime agricultural areas can be mapped.

Mapping of prime agricultural areas

- The Province released Agricultural System mapping in February 2018 which identifies the extent of prime agricultural areas in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, including in Halton Region. The Provincial mapping differs slightly from the mapping of prime agricultural areas currently shown in the ROP.

- Draft mapping of Halton's Prime Agricultural Area shows a small increase in the amount of prime agricultural area.

Agriculture-related uses

- The PPS, 2020 permits a wider range of agriculture-related uses in prime agricultural areas than the PPS, 2005 which included agriculture-related uses under the broader category of secondary uses. The current ROP does not specifically permit agriculture-related uses, however the Region's On-Farm Business Guidelines do under certain conditions.
- The additional agriculture-related uses, as described by the PPS 2020, will be considered for addition to the ROP. Municipalities may be more restrictive in implementing these policies.

On-farm diversified uses and agri-tourism

- The PPS, 2020 has also introduced a new group of permissions for prime agricultural areas called 'on-farm diversified uses.' These policies could allow farms to explore new options for generating income to help support agriculture for the long term.
- In addition to the "standard" types of on farm-diversified uses, there has been considerable interest in agri-tourism. Agri-tourism is a type of on-farm diversified use which includes the ability to host a wide variety of events and festivals including weddings and banquets in a rural setting, with some of these events not necessarily relating to agriculture. To some extent, these events could be considered an on-farm diversified use and an agri-tourism use as broadly defined by the PPS 2020.
- On-farm diversified uses will be considered for addition to the ROP. Municipalities may be more restrictive in implementing these policies.

Cemeteries

- The PPS 2020 permits cemeteries in settlement areas and rural areas outside of prime agricultural areas.
- The PPS 2020 also allows municipalities to consider permitting cemeteries in prime agricultural areas but only if strict tests are met. Large areas appropriate for cemeteries are rare within settlement areas however, prime agricultural areas are intended to prioritize agricultural activities to support the agricultural system.

- Careful consideration should be given to whether cemeteries should be permitted in the prime agricultural area.

Agricultural Impact Assessments

- The Regional Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) Guidelines were released following the adoption of the current ROP in 2009. These guidelines are similar to the Provincial Draft Agricultural Impact Assessment Guidance Document which was released for public consultation in July 2018. The Provincial Draft Guidelines have enhanced the amount of research and essential components required for a fulsome AIA.
- There is an opportunity to add AIA requirements to existing policies to better align with the 2017 and 2019 Provincial Plans.

Special needs housing in the agricultural system

- The PPS 2020 provides direction regarding the provision of an appropriate range and mix of housing options required to meet the social, health, economic and wellbeing requirements of current and future residents including special needs requirements. The PPS 2020 does not distinguish between urban and rural areas for these uses. Special needs housing is not explicitly permitted outside of urban areas by the current ROP.
- The addition of policies to permit this use in the rural area should be carefully considered.

Discussion Paper Questions

Throughout the Discussion papers, there are discussion questions being presented for each section and a summary of these questions can be found in Appendix 2. The Region is requesting that the reader respond to these questions in their comments on this Discussion Paper.

The Rural and Agricultural System Discussion Paper is one of five discussion papers being made available to support public input for the Regional Official Plan Review.

How to get Involved:

Please visit halton.ca/ropr to learn more and provide feedback.

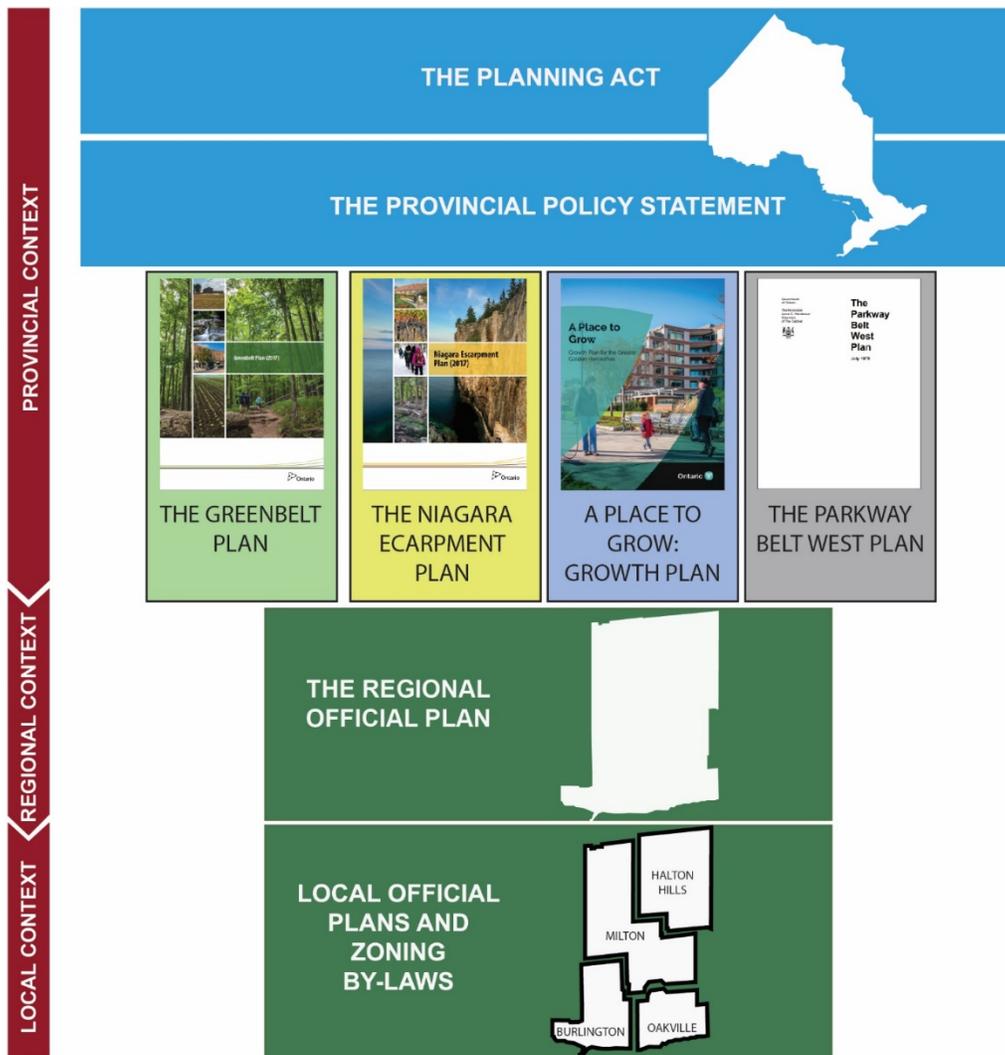
The Regional Official Plan Review page contains more information to support participation as well as a questionnaire on the policy themes being considered by Regional Council.

Comments can also be submitted to ropr@halton.ca.

1.0 Regional Official Plan Review

The Regional Municipality of Halton is undertaking a Regional Official Plan Review (ROPR) in accordance with Provincial requirements established in Section 26 of the [Planning Act](#). The last comprehensive review of the Regional Official Plan (ROP) resulted in Regional Official Plan Amendments (ROPA) 37, 38, and 39, which implemented the policies of the Provincial Policy Statement 2005, the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe 2006 and the Greenbelt Plan 2005, amongst other key policy initiatives. The general framework for land use planning in Halton is set out in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Ontario's Land Use Planning Framework as Applicable to Halton Region



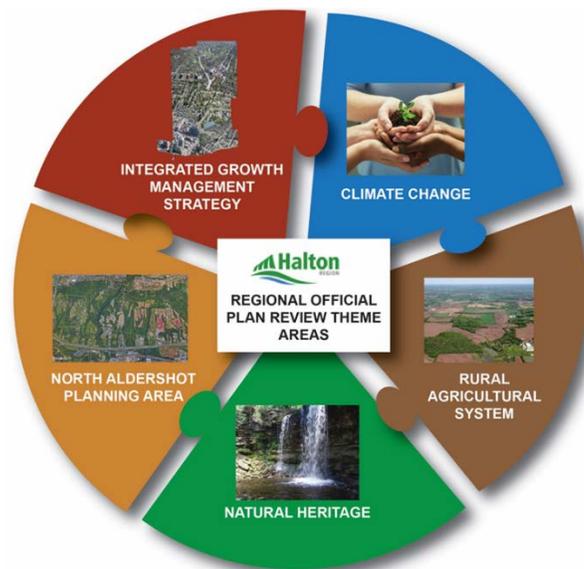
The current ROPR will ensure consistency with the [Provincial Policy Statement \(PPS\)](#), 2020, as well as conformity to [A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe](#) (2019), the [Greenbelt Plan](#) (2017) and the [Niagara Escarpment Plan](#) (2017).

The PPS applies to all lands in the Province and provides a consistent framework for decision making. The three Provincial Plans that apply to Halton Region are intended to supplement the PPS in a particular geography. In this regard, the NEP contains policies that are unique to the Niagara Escarpment area, the Greenbelt Plan contains policies that are unique to the Greenbelt Plan area and the Growth Plan contains policies on where and how to grow that are unique to the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Where a Provincial Plan includes policies that are more detailed than the PPS on a matter, the more detailed policies in the Provincial Plan will generally apply. New Source Protection Plans may also have an impact on activities in the Agricultural Area.

These policies and plans also include new directions for land use planning to identify actions that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address climate change.

The ROPR is a three-phased process: Phase One was completed in October 2016 through the endorsement of “Phase 1: Directions Report” which outlined the tasks and deliverables to be undertaken during the remaining two phases of the ROPR. This Discussion Paper is one of five, composed as part of Phase 2 for the purpose of ensuring consistency with provincial policy while presenting analysis of the ROPR key theme areas as per **Figure 2**. The work in Phase 2 will inform the development of ROP policies during the upcoming policy drafting phase of the ROPR (Phase 3).

Figure 2: ROPR Phase 2 key theme areas addressed through research, analysis and discussion papers



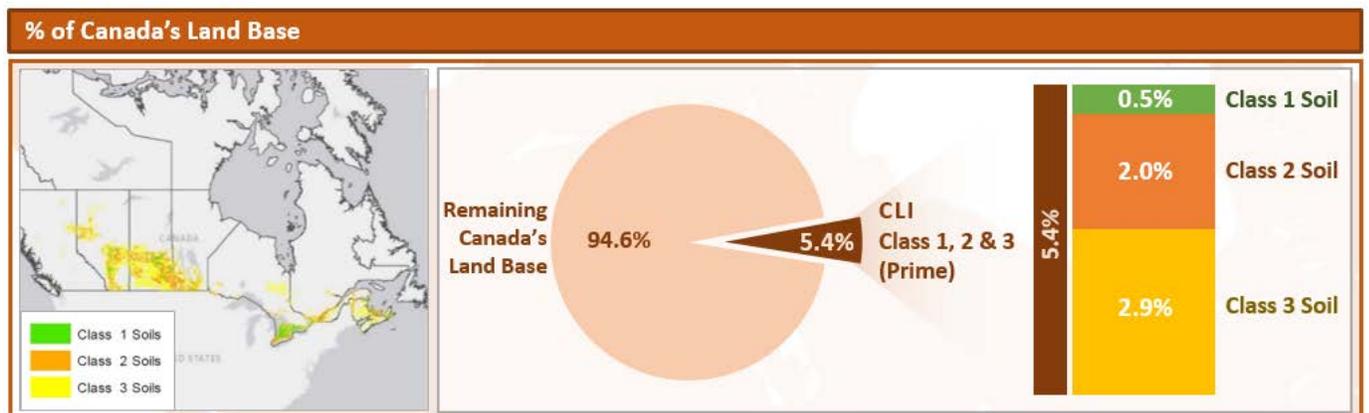
1.2 Rural and Agricultural System Discussion Paper

Viable agricultural land, including prime agricultural lands (which are comprised of the highest capability soils), are a non-renewable, finite resource that is essential for the existence of a healthy agriculture and food system.

The Canada Land Inventory (CLI) classifies land according to its ability to physically support agriculture and assigns a seven-class system with Class 1 having the highest soil capability to Class 7 which has no capability for arable culture or permanent pastures. Class 1, 2 and 3 are considered to be prime agricultural soils that have the highest capacity for agricultural production.

Canada is a vast country with a total land mass of 9,984,670 sq. km. In spite of its sheer size, only about 5 percent of Canada's land base is free of severe constraints for agricultural production (See Figure 3a). The highest capability soils in Canada are located in two key regions: the interior grasslands found in the southern half of the prairie provinces and a belt that runs diagonally along the shores of Lake Ontario, Lake Erie and the St. Lawrence waterway. Approximately three-quarters of these soils in Canada are located in Saskatchewan, Alberta and Ontario.

Figure 3a: CLI – Soil Capability Class 1, 2 & 3 (Canada's Land Base)

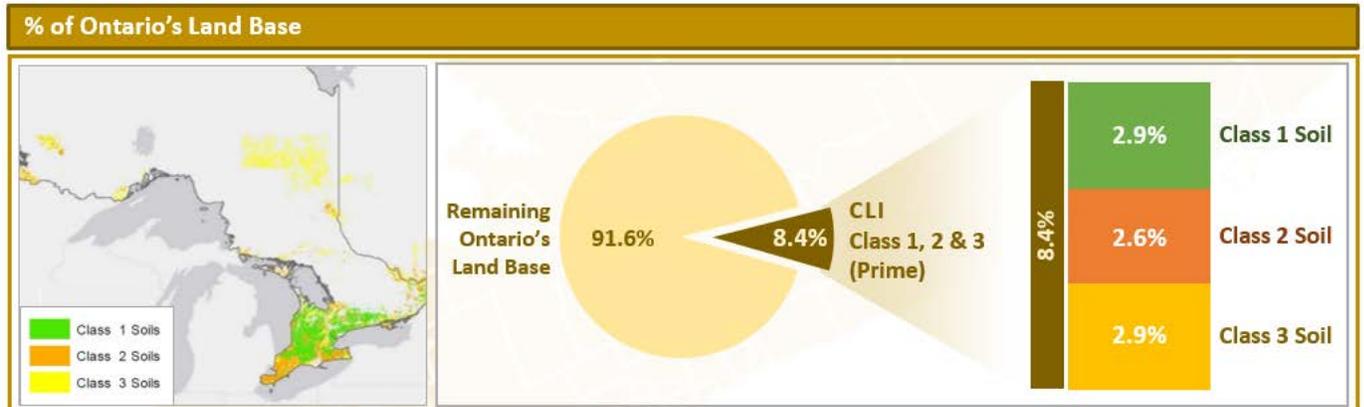


Note: Projections are based on Canada Land Inventory Soil Capability mapping at a 1:250,000 scale and are only estimates. Canada and Ontario estimates are based on Halton Specific Projection Numbers (NAD_1983_UTM_Zone_17N).

As shown in Figure 3b, CLI data indicates that approximately 8.4 percent of Ontario soils have prime agricultural soil capability however, this does not account for urban areas, rural settlement areas, Key Natural Heritage Features or mineral resource extraction areas that are located on these soils.

In Ontario, it is estimated by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) that the total area actually used for agriculture is 5.1 million hectares or 5.6 percent of the provincial land area as some lower capability soils are also used for agricultural purposes. Approximately 4.1 million hectares or 4.5 percent of Ontario are made up of prime agricultural lands.

Figure 3b: CLI – Soil Capability Class 1, 2 & 3 (Ontario’s Land Base)



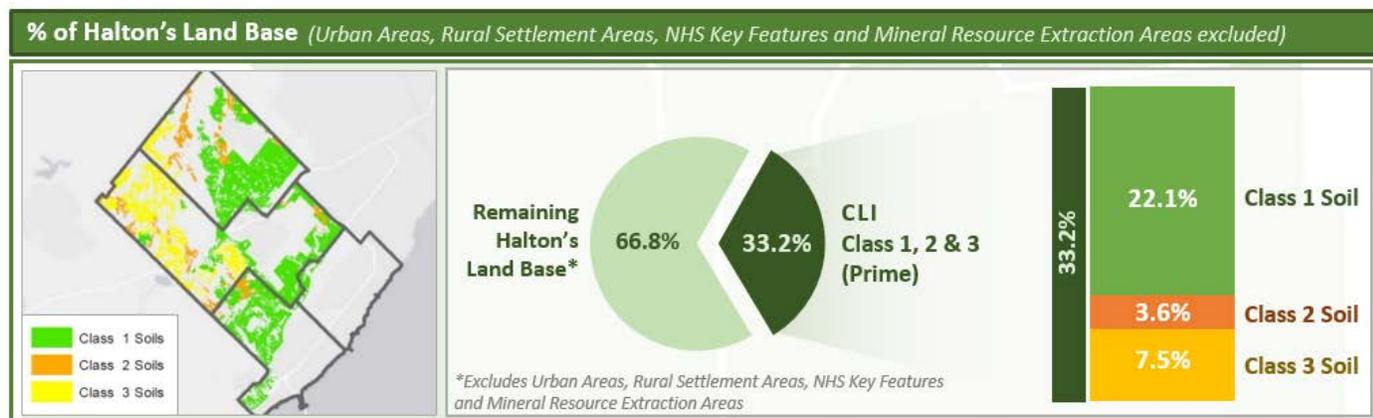
Note: Projections are based on Canada Land Inventory Soil Capability mapping at a 1:250,000 scale and are only estimates. Canada and Ontario estimates are based on Halton Specific Projection Numbers (NAD_1983_UTM_Zone_17N).

Halton Region is home to a productive agricultural sector based on outstanding soils, a favorable climate and a community of farmers that have an active and passionate interest in farming.

From a soil capability perspective, Halton Region contains a significant area of land with Class 1 soils. Overall, the majority of rural land in Halton Region is classified as prime agricultural land (Class 1, 2 and 3).

As shown in Figure 3c, prime agricultural areas in Halton Region comprise 33.2 % of the total land area with the urban areas, rural settlement areas, NHS Key Features and mineral resource extraction areas excluded. Halton’s evaluation of the prime agricultural area contains some soils in Classes 4 and 5 that have been categorized as prime agricultural where proper mitigation efforts are present. Given that the majority of Halton Region’s land base is classified as prime agricultural land emphasizes the importance of protecting this resource. From an agricultural perspective, the high quantity and quality of soils provides for some unique opportunities in Halton Region. As noted above, the value of prime agricultural land in Halton Region is enhanced by good climatic conditions and the availability of water.

Figure 3c: CLI – Soil Capability Class 1, 2 & 3 (Halton’s Land Base)



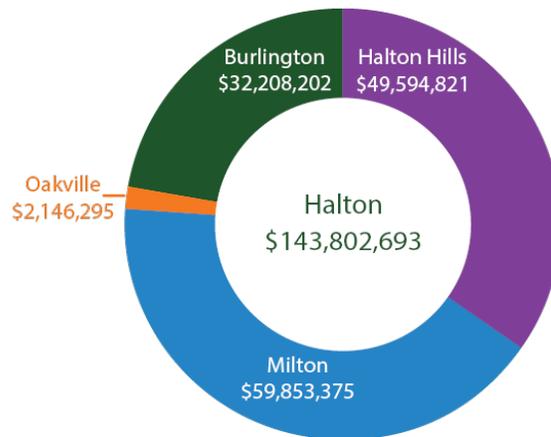
Note: Projections are based on Canada Land Inventory Soil Capability mapping at a 1:250,000 scale and are only estimates. Canada and Ontario estimates are based on Halton Specific Projection Numbers (NAD_1983_UTM_Zone_17N).

Based on an Ontario Farmland Trust study conducted in 2012 ([Farmland Requirements for Ontario’s Growing Population to 2036](#)), approximately 0.29 hectares (0.7 acres) of farmland per capita is needed to be completely self sufficient in food production. At the present time, Halton Region is not able to grow sufficient food on its existing agricultural land base to meet the entire food needs of its citizens. This vulnerability will only compound over time given population growth projections and availability of land.

Halton Region recognizes the important role that agriculture plays in driving the rural economy. According to the last Census of Agriculture (2016), gross farm receipts for Halton Region totaled \$143M (see Figure 4). Halton Region has already undertaken a number of initiatives to support the rural and agricultural community including the introduction of an Agricultural System through ROPA 38. Other initiatives to support the agricultural community with regards to economic development were instituted and include: the position of an Agricultural Liaison Officer, the formation of one of the first Agricultural Advisory Committees in the Province (1979), participation on the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance and the development and implementation of a Rural Agricultural Strategy.

This Discussion Paper will assist in updating the mapping and policies of the Agricultural System in ROPA 38 and will ensure consistency and conformity with the recently updated PPS 2020 and Provincial Plans including the recently released Provincial Agricultural System policies and mapping. The ROP will work in tandem with other initiatives to collectively strengthen the rural and agricultural sector.

Figure 4: Gross Farm receipts for Halton Region for 2016*



* Census of Agriculture statistics do not include gross farm receipts for mushroom production.

1.3 Relationship with other ROPR Components

Updates to the ROP need to reflect the many changes in the PPS and Provincial Plans since the last ROP review. The planning horizon and growth strategies are now being extended to 2041, with implications being reviewed for the Urban Systems through an Integrated Growth Management System (IGMS) Analysis with input from the Climate Change, Agriculture and NHS themes. The Agricultural and Rural component of the ROPR will have implications for each theme of the ROPR:

Integrated Growth Management Strategy (IGMS) – the prime agricultural areas of Halton Region are almost always adjacent to urban areas. This means that any expansions of the urban boundaries into prime agricultural areas can only be permitted if the expansion is evaluated through an Agricultural Impact Assessment and meets the criteria and tests in PPS policies.

Natural Heritage System – natural heritage and agriculture are often located in the same areas and require a balance in priorities to guarantee and strengthen their coexistence. New direction from the Province related to designating prime agricultural areas and showing the natural heritage system as an overlay will have an impact on the approach taken. The outcomes from the two topic areas require close alignment to ensure effective implementation.

Climate Change – A functioning agricultural system as well as NHS protection and enhancement are an important part of responding to climate change in terms of both adaptation and mitigation.

The addition of policies that promote sustainable farm practices and stewardship activities support the health of agricultural lands which act as valuable carbon sinks. Stewardship activities such as planting trees in unproductive areas that are not suitable for agriculture will contribute to an increase in carbon sequestration as well as prevent soil erosion and maximize water absorption especially during heavy rains. Further, the introduction of on-farm diversified and agriculture-related uses, provides the opportunity for additional revenue streams contributing to the overall viability of farm operations and, therefore, the long-term ability to invest in the adaptation to and mitigation of climate change threats.

North Aldershot Policy Area - In the ROP, North Aldershot is identified as a distinct policy area based on the North Aldershot Inter-Agency Review Final Report (May 1994) (the “North Aldershot Plan”). The North Aldershot Plan predates the last two reviews of the Official Plan and all current Provincial plans. Although there are Canada Land Inventory Class 1 soils throughout portions of North Aldershot, no Prime Agricultural Areas were defined or designated.

Three theme areas of the ROPR (IGMS, NHS and Rural and Agriculture System) deal with certain aspects of the North Aldershot Policy Area due to their interdependence on Regional structure issues (e.g., lands possibly required for growth management, constraints such as Prime Agricultural Areas and natural heritage system key features).

1.4 Climate Change

The Agricultural System plays an important role in mitigating climate change impacts given the carbon sequestration ability of soils and the increasing use of sustainable farm practices such as no-tilling, precision agriculture, windbreaks and cover crops.

In Halton, the ROP recognizes that within the Natural Heritage System located outside the urban area, farming operations and natural heritage protection can co-exist, thus offering an opportunity to promote environmentally progressive stewardship practices that do not inhibit agricultural production.

Updating the policy framework to increase permissions for agricultural operations is a positive step in allowing near-urban agriculture the flexibility to modernize and adapt to changing conditions.

Further information regarding the interplay between agriculture and climate change can be found in the Climate Change Discussion Paper.

2.0 Current Regional Official Plan Approach to the Rural and Agricultural System

In Halton's vision, the Region's future landscape will always consist of three principal categories of land uses: settlement areas, a rural countryside, and a natural heritage system. The goal for the agricultural system as articulated in the current ROP is to maintain a permanently secure, economically viable agricultural industry and to preserve the open-space character and landscape of Halton's non-urban areas.

The Agricultural System in the ROP (Section 92) consists of two components (See Figure 5):

1. Lands designated as Agricultural Area
2. Those parts of the Region's Natural Heritage System (RNHS) outside the Key Features or where the only Key Feature (KF) is a significant earth science (ES) area of natural and scientific interest (ANSI).

The Agricultural Area

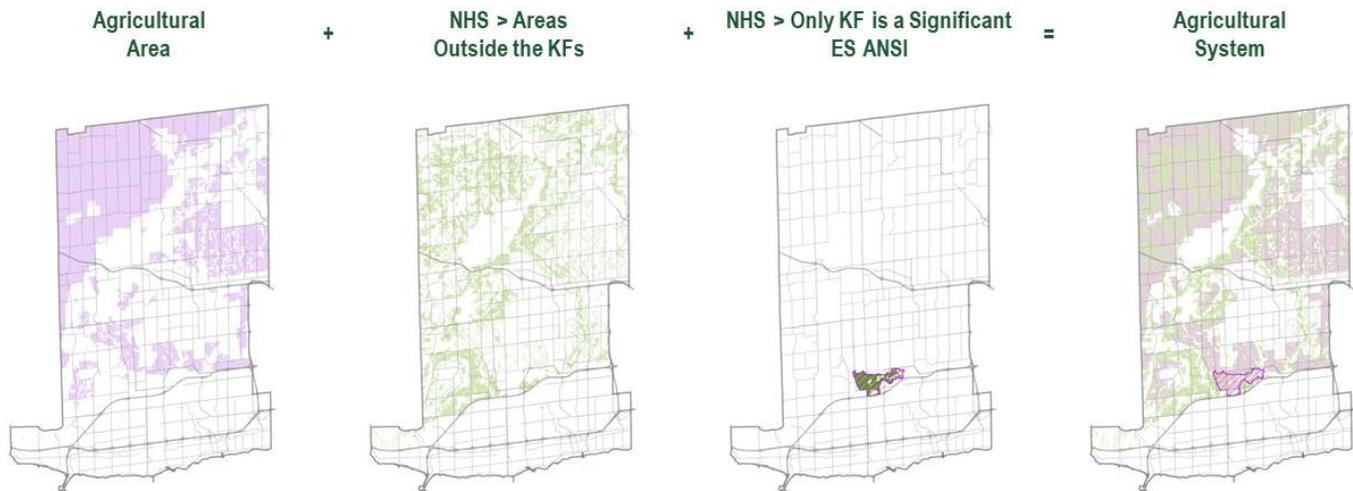
The Agricultural Area designation in the ROP, as shown on Map 1 – Regional Structure (Appendix 1 – Regional Official Plan Maps), is comprised of the Prime Agricultural Area and the Agricultural System outside of the Prime Agricultural Area as shown on Map 1E – Agricultural System and Settlement Areas (Appendix 1 - Regional Official Plan Maps). In the ROP, Prime Agricultural Areas are not designated; instead, these areas are identified as a constraint to development where development is subject to further conditions. The Prime Agricultural Areas and the Areas outside of the Prime Agricultural Areas have a similar level of protection and restrictions however, the ROP does include an additional set of policies for Prime Agricultural Areas which further restricts the removal or redesignation of land.

Areas of the Natural Heritage System Outside of Key Features

The second component of the Agricultural System are those parts of the Region's Natural Heritage System (RNHS) outside of Key Features which are subject to the goals, objectives, permitted uses and policies of the RNHS designation. However, agricultural operations are compatible uses and are promoted and supported within these areas. The Key Features of the RNHS are protected by Provincial policies and cannot be included within the Agricultural System. The objectives of the Agricultural

System identified in the ROP are to recognize agriculture as the primary activity and land use and to reduce fragmentation of lands suitable for agriculture. It is the policy of the Region to recognize and protect land within the system and to direct non-farm uses to the Urban Area, Hamlets and Rural Clusters.

Figure 5. Agricultural System Components



While an Agricultural System was introduced with clear goals and reflected in the current ROP, the term has not been defined. Recent updates to the PPS and Provincial Plans include a definition of “Agricultural System”. Consideration should be given to adding a “made in Halton” definition for “Agricultural System”, through the Phase 3 Implementation process.

3.0 Designation of Prime Agricultural Areas

3.1 Introduction

The PPS 2020 requires that prime agricultural areas be designated. The current ROP does not designate prime agricultural areas as a separate mutually exclusive land use designation (see Section 2.0 for details).

The overall planning vision of the ROP as amended by ROPA 38 was to deliver:

- Strong, vibrant, healthy and complete communities;
- An enhanced Natural Heritage System;
- A strong and sustainable agriculture industry; and
- A sustainable land use decision-making process.

Agriculture and natural heritage are often located in the same areas and require a balance in priorities to guarantee and strengthen their coexistence. The outcomes from the two topic areas require close alignment to ensure effective implementation.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing approved ROPA 38 on November 24, 2011. In consultation with the agricultural community in Halton, a number of significant changes to both the natural heritage and agricultural policy frameworks were introduced.

The product of the ROPA 38 process and later discussions was an overall Systems approach to agriculture and natural heritage that considered the best planning outcomes for both the Agricultural System and NHS. The Agricultural System is comprised of the Agricultural Area, which consists of the Prime Agricultural Area and Areas Outside of the Prime Agricultural Area and parts of the Natural Heritage System that are generally outside of Key Features or where the only Key Feature is a significant earth science area of natural and scientific interest.

The Agricultural Area (see Figure 6) is a designation in the ROP applied to land:

1. below the Escarpment Brow (the uppermost point of the Niagara Escarpment slope or face);
2. within the Niagara Escarpment Plan; and

3. in the Protected Countryside Area of the Greenbelt Plan

Below the Escarpment Brow, the Agricultural Area designation generally applies to all lands outside of the Key Features of the RNHS. In this area, it is noted that there is some overlap with the RNHS (outside of Key Features) and with the Protected Countryside designation in the Greenbelt Plan.

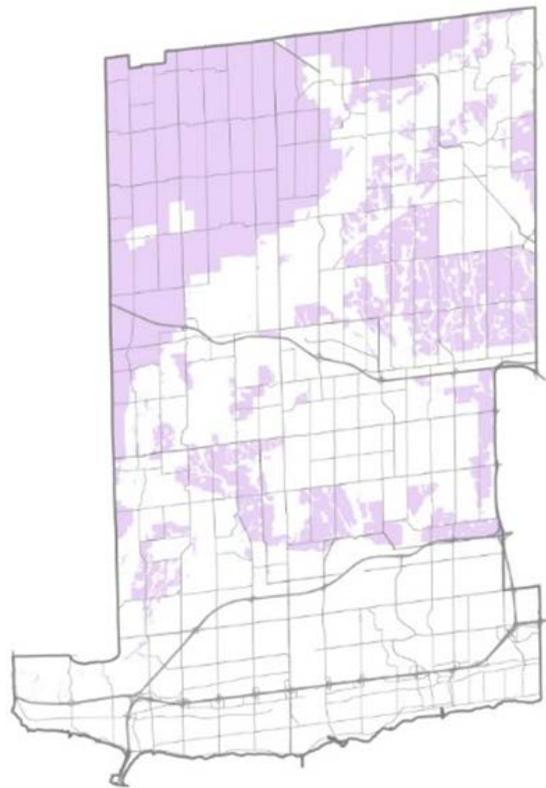
Within the boundary of the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area, there is overlap with the Agricultural Area of the ROP and some, but not all, of the Escarpment Natural Area. Above the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area in the Greenbelt Plan Area, all lands outside of settlement areas and Rural Cluster Areas are designated Agricultural Area in the ROP.

In the ROP, these areas are not designated as 'Prime Agricultural Area'. Instead, the ROP identifies the Prime Agricultural Area as a 'Constraint to Development' and provides policies for development within this area. Not designating the Prime Agricultural Area does not necessarily mean that it will not be fully protected through policy, as has been demonstrated through the implementation of ROPA 38.

In the current ROP, the Agricultural Area is protected through policy to the same level as the Prime Agricultural Area. The removal of land from Prime Agricultural Areas is further constrained by the requirement for further studies and by meeting several policy tests. In the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area, there is generally overlap between the identified Prime Agricultural Area and the Escarpment Rural Area in the Niagara Escarpment Plan. There is also overlap between the Agricultural System outside of Prime Agricultural Area and the Escarpment Protection Area.

The second component of the Agricultural System are those parts of the RNHS outside of Key Features (See Figure 7), as well as individual Key Features that are a significant earth science area of natural and scientific interest (See Figure 8). The Region deliberately established this category in the ROP to recognize that the greatly expanded

Figure 6. Agricultural Area Designation



RNHS now applies to lands that are currently an agricultural use. It is noted that the policy framework continues to permit agricultural uses in these areas.

Figure 7. RNHS outside of Key Features



Figure 8. Significant Earth Science Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI)



In many areas of the Region, the Agricultural System and the RNHS are shown as interacting layers. Despite areas of overlap, the ROP considers agricultural operations as compatible and complementary uses in those parts of the RNHS and provides policy language that supports and promotes agricultural operations in these areas.

3.2 Policy and Mapping Considerations

Current Approach

The Region's current approach to designations in ROPA 38 ensures that a systems-based approach is applied to the Agricultural System and NHS to fully protect the

agricultural sector and Halton's natural environment. As noted in Section 2 of this paper, ROPA 38 designates the NHS and the Agricultural Area but identifies the Prime Agricultural Area as a constraint to development. The policies for both the Agricultural System and NHS were written to ensure that the interaction between the systems was as protective and balanced as possible.

This approach was based on the fact that the term "designate" is not defined in the PPS. The Province's preferred approach to designating prime agricultural areas in official plans, and one that is followed by most municipalities, is to have "agriculture" or "prime agricultural area" as a category of land use identified on a land use schedule or map with corresponding policies in the official plan. Other approaches that achieve the same objectives of 1) mapping the lands and 2) provide for their protection and identify permitted uses through policies, may also be acceptable. The Growth Plan provides more direct policy guidance with respect to the designation of agricultural lands.

Provincial Policy Framework

There is Provincial policy direction to identify and protect prime agricultural land and prime agricultural areas.

Section 2.3.1 of the PPS 2020 states the following:

Prime agricultural areas shall be protected for long-term use for agriculture. Prime agricultural areas are areas where prime agricultural lands predominate. Specialty crop areas shall be given the highest priority for protection, followed by Canada Land Inventory Class 1, 2, and 3 lands, and any associated Class 4 through 7 lands within the prime agricultural area, in this order of priority.

This section is mandatory and indicates that prime agricultural areas shall be protected for long-term use for agriculture. In the case of this policy, long-term means, at a minimum, the planning horizon (25 years).

Section 2.3.2 of the PPS 2020 then provides further direction:

Planning authorities shall designate prime agricultural areas and specialty crop areas in accordance with guidelines developed by the Province, as amended from time to time.

Planning authorities are encouraged to use an agricultural system approach to maintain and enhance the geographic continuity of the agricultural land base and the functional and economic connections to the agri-food network.

This section requires that planning authorities designate prime agricultural areas in their Official Plans. While the term 'designate' implies that the creation of a mutually exclusive land use designation is required, other approaches that achieve the same objective could be considered.

Due to the interplay between the Agricultural System and the NHS further direction is provided in the Growth Plan. Section 4.2.2.2 of the Growth Plan indicates:

Municipalities will incorporate the Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan as an overlay in official plans, and will apply appropriate policies to maintain, restore, or enhance the diversity and connectivity of the system and the long-term ecological or hydrologic functions of the features and areas as set out in the policies in this subsection and the policies in subsections 4.2.3 and 4.2.4.

Section 4.2.6.2 of the Growth Plan indicates:

Prime agricultural areas, including specialty crop areas, will be designated in accordance with mapping identified by the Province and these areas will be protected for long-term use for agriculture.

These sections require all municipalities to designate prime agricultural areas in accordance with Provincial mapping and to protect these lands for long-term use for agriculture. It is noted that the policy references the protection of prime agricultural areas for the long-term, not permanently. It is also noted that later policies allow for the refinement of the agricultural system before it is implemented in Official Plans.

Section 3.1.1 of the Greenbelt Plan states, in part, the following:

Prime agricultural areas are those lands designated as such within official plans to permanently protect these areas for agriculture.

It is noted in the above that the intent of a prime agricultural area designation is to permanently protect these areas for agriculture within the Greenbelt Plan Area.

Natural Heritage System

The designation of the NHS in the ROP going forward is relevant to the question of how agricultural lands are to be designated because of the current approach that has certain lands designated NHS with prime agriculture as part of a constraint layer. Generally, based on the PPS 2020 and Provincial Plans, the NHS must be identified and protected, but not necessarily in a separate land use designation. In discussions with the Province, it was agreed that Key Natural Heritage Features of the NHS may be designated.

The Natural Heritage Discussion Paper expands on the topic of a NHS land use designation and should be referred to for more details.

3.3 Discussion

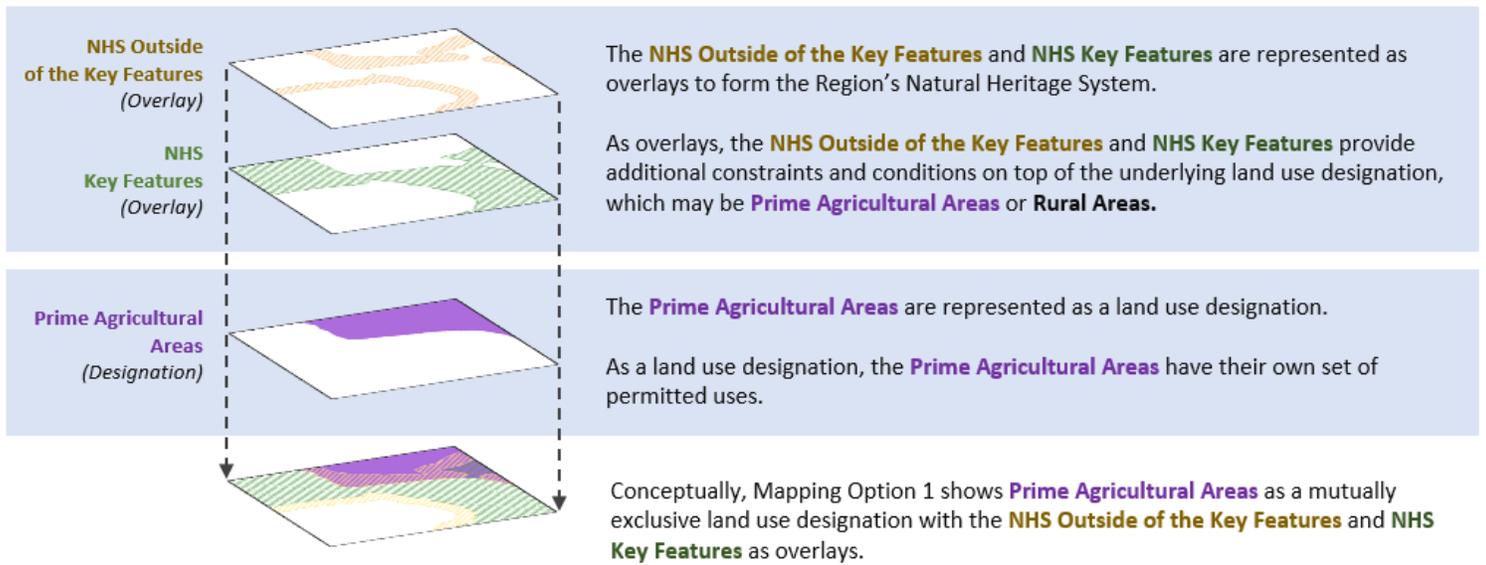
The Province is now requiring planning authorities to designate Prime Agricultural Areas in accordance with Provincial Plans and the updated Implementation Procedures for the Agricultural System in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (updated in 2020) developed by the Province. Provincial policies also require that Key Natural Heritage and Key Hydrologic Features be protected from new uses, development, and site alteration and that a Water Resource System (WRS) will need to be identified in Official Plans. As discussed in Section 3.2, there may be ways other than designation, to protect an area, especially through policy.

Not all of the rural area in the Region is considered to be prime agricultural land. As a consequence, a new 'Rural' designation may also be required for these areas, since there would be a need to apply a land use designation to those lands that are not considered to be within the prime agricultural area. The current ROP recognizes that there are non-prime agricultural lands; however, it does not provide for additional land use permissions on these lands, primarily because of the desire to maintain and provide for landscape permanence. Given the enhanced permissions in the PPS 2014/2020 for 'rural lands', this approach may need to be re-considered.

To address these requirements to designate Prime Agricultural Areas, four (4) options are being considered to determine the best approach in clearly representing the relationship between agriculture and natural heritage in the ROP given the requirements set out by the PPS and Provincial plans. Figures 9, 10, 11, and 12 below provide an illustration of the mapping options that are described in this section.

Figure 9. Mapping Option 1: Prime Agricultural Area with NHS Outside Key Features overlay and NHS Key Features overlay.

Option 1 Mapping Concept



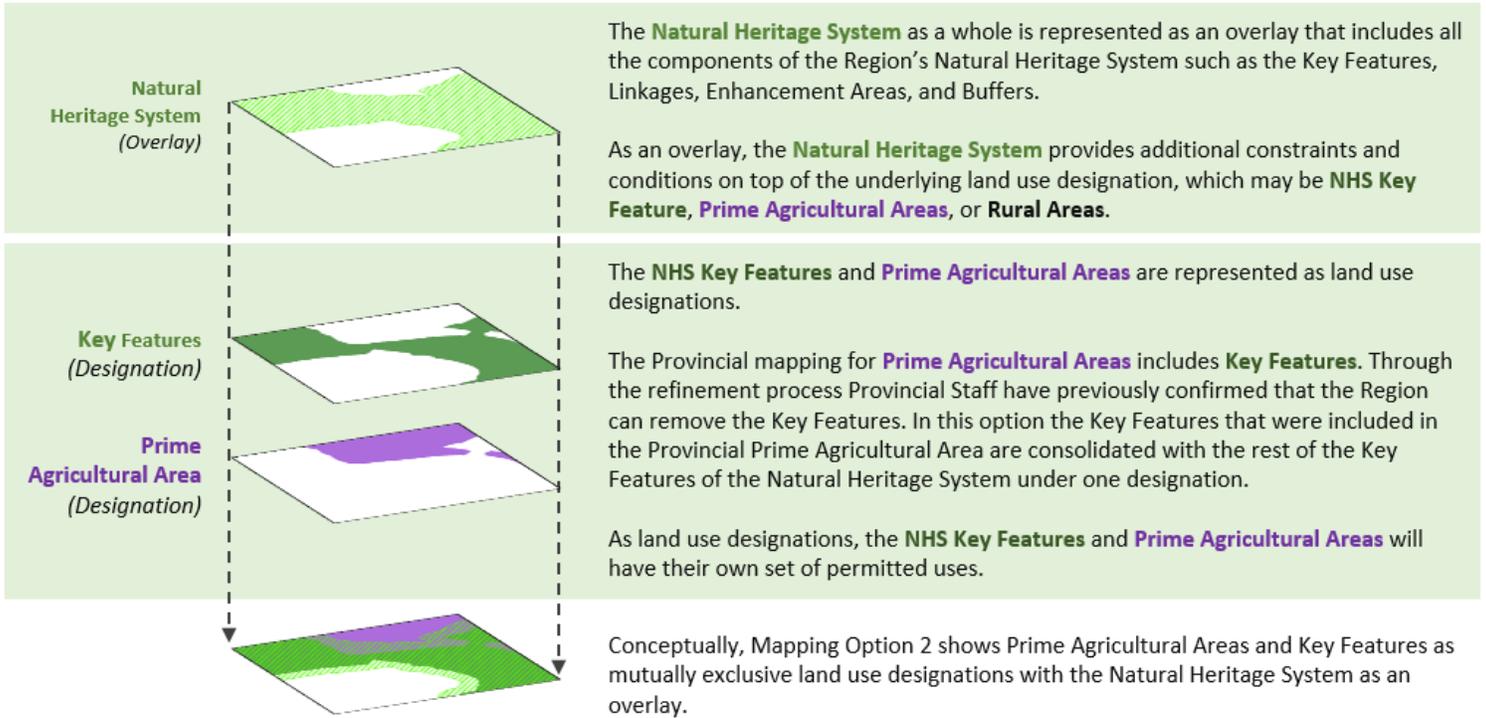
Option 1 Considerations



Pros	Map User Friendliness:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly identifies the extent of Prime Agricultural Areas Distinguishes between Key Features and Linkages/Enhancements/Buffers of the NHS since two separate overlays are used
	Provincial Direction:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meets provincial direction for designating Prime Agricultural Areas and identifying Key Features
Cons	Map User Friendliness:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 overlays makes the map look very busy Watercourse lines are not well represented as they cannot be mapped as a hatch
	Policy Application:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not depict the NHS as a system based approach Designation of Prime Agricultural Areas without the designation of Key Features could be perceived to place uneven emphasis on the protection of Prime Agricultural Areas over the protection of Key Features

Figure 10. Mapping Option 2: Prime Agricultural Area and Key Features are designated with a Natural Heritage System overlay. Key features that overlap with the Prime Agricultural Area are cut out of the Prime Agricultural Area and incorporated into the Key Features designation.

Option 2 Mapping Concept



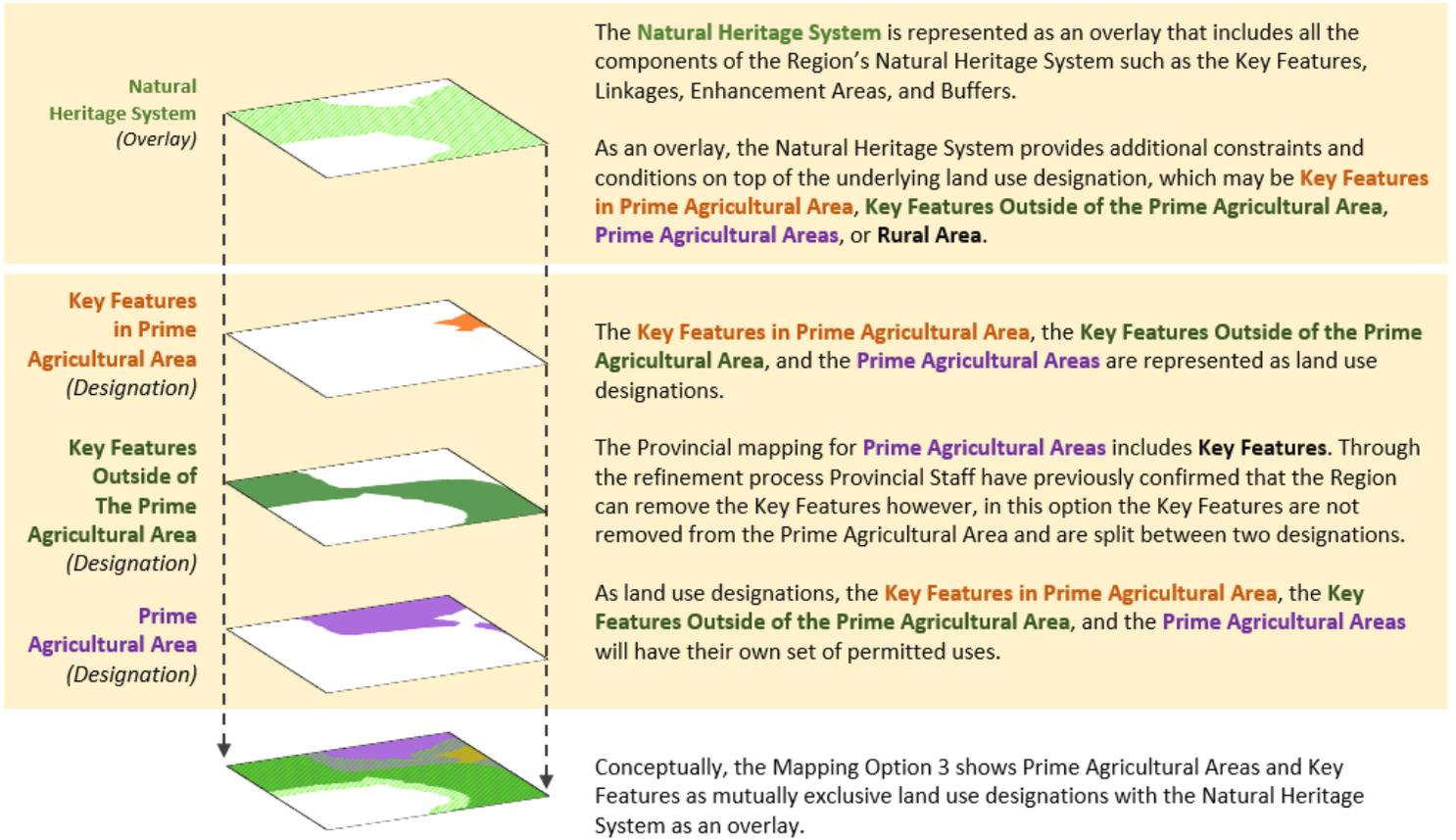
Option 2 Considerations



Pros	Map User Friendliness:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear visualization of how the Prime Agricultural Areas, NHS, and Key Features interconnect
	Policy Application:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balanced approach and clear representation of the NHS as a system with emphasis on the protection of Key Features and Prime Agricultural Areas Policies for Key Features are applied consistently through one designation (instead of 2 designations in Option 3)
	Provincial Direction:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meets Provincial direction for designating Prime Agricultural Areas and identifying Key Features Easiest method to identify Key Features in the RNHS, GBNHS, and NHSGP
Cons	Map User Friendliness:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not identify Linkages, Enhancements, and Buffers as a separate layer (they are included in the Natural Heritage System Overlay which includes the entire system)
	Policy Application:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detracts from the systems approach on which the RNHS is based on by creating two tiers; Key Features being treated differently from other components in the RNHS

Figure 11. Mapping Option 3: Prime Agricultural Area and Key Features are designated with a Natural Heritage System overlay. Key Features that overlap with the Prime Agricultural Area are designated separately as 'Key Features in Prime Agricultural Area.'

Option 3 Mapping Concept



Option 3 Considerations



Pros	Map User Friendliness:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear visualization of how the Prime Agricultural Areas, NHS, and Key Features interconnect
	Policy Application:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balanced approach and clear representation of the NHS as a system with emphasis on the protection of Key Features and Prime Agricultural Areas
	Provincial Direction:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meets provincial direction for designating Prime Agricultural Areas and identifying Key Features
Cons	Map User Friendliness:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not identify Linkages, Enhancements, and Buffers as a separate layer (they are included in the Natural Heritage System Overlay which includes the entire system)
	Policy Application:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detracts from the systems approach on which the RNHS is based on by creating two tiers; Key Features being treated differently from other components in the RNHS Policies for Key Features are applied through two designations. This will create duplications of policies given that the level of protection and permitted uses for Key Features within and outside of Prime Agricultural Areas is identical

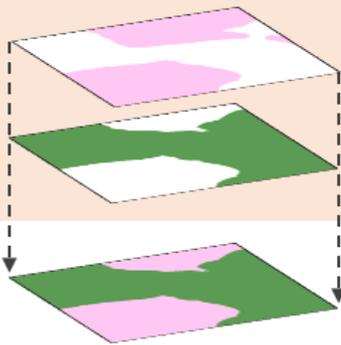
Figure 12. Mapping Option 4: Sustainable Halton - Existing Policy and Mapping Approach

Option 4 Mapping Concept

Map 1 – Regional Structure

Agricultural Area
(Designation)

Natural Heritage System
(Designation)



The **Agricultural Area**, which includes the **Prime Agricultural Areas**, and the **Natural Heritage System** are represented as land use designations. As land use designations, the **Agricultural Area** and **Natural Heritage System** have their own set of permitted uses.

Conceptually, Map 1 of the current ROP shows the Agricultural Area which includes the Prime Agricultural Areas and the Natural Heritage System which includes Key Features, Enhancement Areas, Linkages, and Buffers as mutually exclusive land use designations.

Map 1E – Agricultural System

Prime Agricultural Area
(Constraint)

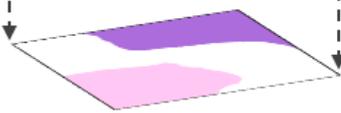


The **Prime Agricultural Area** is represented as a constraint layer. As a constraint layer, the **Prime Agricultural Areas** provide additional restrictions and conditions in addition to the underlying land use designation, which is **Agricultural Area**.

Agricultural System outside Prime Agricultural Area



The **Agricultural System outside Prime Agricultural Area** is the component of the Agricultural Area designation outside the Prime Agricultural Area.



Conceptually, Map 1E of the current ROP shows the components of the Agricultural Area designation.

Map 1G – Natural Heritage System

Prime Agricultural Areas in NHS Enhancements/ Linkages/ Buffers



The **Prime Agricultural Areas in NHS Enhancements/ Linkages/ Buffers** is the component of the **Natural Heritage System** designation that is within the **Prime Agricultural Area** and outside **Key Features**.

Enhancement Areas, Linkages and Buffers

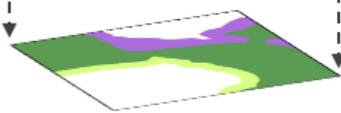


The **Enhancement Areas, Linkages and Buffers** is the component of the **Natural Heritage System** designation outside of **Key Features**.

Key Features
(Constraint)



The **Key Features** are represented as a constraint to development. As a constraint, the **Key Features** provide additional restrictions and conditions in addition to the underlying land use designation, which is **Natural Heritage System**.



Conceptually, Map 1G of the current ROP shows the components of the Natural Heritage System designation.

Figure 12. Mapping Option 4: Sustainable Halton - Existing Policy and Mapping Approach (Continued)

Option 4 Considerations



Pros

Policy Application:

- Continues Halton’s long-standing history of the protection of agriculture and natural heritage that is strongly enshrined in Halton’s planning vision

User Friendliness:

- Familiarity with Halton's approach as there has been extensive training done within and throughout the Region.

Cons

User Friendliness:

- Mapping is complex and requires reference to three separate ROP Schedules

Policy Application:

- Designation of NHS without the designation of Prime Ag could be perceived to place uneven emphasis on the protection of the NHS over protection of Prime Ag

Provincial Direction:

- While accepted and approved as an approach to ROPA 38, Provincial direction has indicated that Prime Agricultural Areas must be designated
- Provincial direction has indicated that the Agricultural System is made up of Prime Agricultural Areas and Rural Areas. The Agricultural Area designation does not fully conform with this structure

Discussion Question 1:

Four mapping options are presented for discussion.

- Should the updated ROP designate prime agricultural areas with a separate and unique land use designation?
- Are there any additional pros and cons that could be identified for any of the options?
- Do you have a preferred mapping option? If so, why?

3.3.1 The 'Permanent' Nature of the Prime Agricultural Area Designation

The [Rural Agricultural Strategy](#) (RAS) was introduced as a key action in the Citizens' Priorities – Halton Region's Action Plan 2011-2014. The aim of the RAS is to directly identify how the Region can, within its mandate and resources, positively influence the rural/agricultural area. It explains how to add value to those businesses currently operating and to attract new businesses that are compatible to the objectives of the Region for this area in a manner that will ensure that it continues to thrive over the long-term. The long-term commitment towards agriculture was further articulated in [Halton Region's Strategic Action Plan 2015-2018](#) with "Growing the Regional Economy" identified as a key priority along with the Implementation of the RAS.

ROPA 38 introduced the concept of a Regional agricultural system. The RAS states:

Research indicates that a successful agricultural system is comprised of a connected, permanent land base that supports a critical mass of prosperous agri-food businesses including input services, primary production, first level processing, infrastructure support, marketing opportunities and delivery. The system incorporates rural settlements and natural heritage systems.

The following is then recommended in Task A1.2:

Establish permanent boundaries to define the agricultural system having regard for natural features and intra and inter regional connectivity.

The [RAS Background Report](#) indicated that an aspirational opportunity existed (as part of the Provincial Plan Review then underway at the time of the report) to establishing an agricultural land preserve. It stated:

As an alternative approach, as part of the upcoming Regional Official Plan Review, policies could be implemented to establish permanent agricultural areas. Changes to the PPS in 2014 set up a process whereby this could be done.

This appears to be the basis for the recommendation made in the RAS.

While the basis for the recommendations made in the RAS Background Report is understood, there are no Provincial policies that would enable a truly 'permanent' agricultural area in Ontario. This is because Section 1.1.3.8 of the PPS 2020 permits the expansion of urban areas into prime agricultural areas, subject to criteria, which means that prime agricultural areas could be considered when undertaking a Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) in accordance with the Growth Plan. It is also noted

that Section 2.2.8.3(f) of the Growth Plan also permits the consideration of urban expansion into prime agricultural areas as well, while indicating that these areas should be avoided where possible.

At the present time, all of the Region's urban areas outside of the Greenbelt Plan area abut lands that are within the prime agricultural area, which means that the expansion of urban areas into prime agricultural areas will always need to be an option to consider when the Region is required to plan for the additional population and employment growth that is mandated by the Province. As a consequence, while the boundaries of the prime agricultural area designation can be fixed within the ROP, the boundaries can be re-considered when the Region initiates the next MCR.

Any settlement area expansion proposed through the IGMS (Integrated Growth Management Strategy) into Prime Agricultural Areas can only be permitted if the expansion is supported by an Agricultural Impact Assessment, and meets the criteria and policy tests contained in Provincial policy.

The IGMS Paper will present options for growth, including a no urban expansion option. If that option is chosen, agricultural land in Halton will be protected until the next MCR in keeping with Halton's planning vision. The Region can decide through the current MCR process that the expansion of the urban area is not warranted at this time, because mandated population and employment growth can be accommodated within the current urban boundary as intensification or within existing Designated Greenfield Areas. However, the PPS 2020, Section 1.1.3.9 states that municipalities may permit adjustments of settlement area boundaries outside a MCR provided that:

- a) there would be no net increase in land within settlement areas;
- b) the adjustment would support the municipality's ability to meet intensification and redevelopment targets established by the municipality;
- c) prime agricultural areas are addressed in accordance with 1.1.3.8 (c), (d) and (e);
and
- d) the settlement area to which lands would be added is appropriately serviced, and there is sufficient reserve infrastructure capacity to service the lands.

4.0 Mapping of Prime Agricultural Areas

4.1 Introduction

Mapping of Halton Region's Prime Agricultural Area needs to be updated as part of the ROPR exercise. There are differences between the Prime Agricultural Area as mapped by the Region and those mapped by the Province. These differences need to be resolved so the updated ROP has mapping that is supported by both the Region and the Province. ¹

Halton Region identified the Prime Agricultural Areas in the current ROP through the creation of a Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) study. The LEAR study was completed in 2009 and considered soil quality (Land Evaluation) and other non-soil factors in the Area Review (AR) portion of the study.

The Halton Region LEAR study (as with all LEAR studies) is based on the Ontario Ministry of Agricultural and Food (OMAFRA) document entitled 'Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) System for Agriculture' (June 2002). Halton is one of only four municipalities out of 21 in the Greater Golden Horseshoe that has completed a LEAR study.

LEAR studies are comprised of two components: a Land Evaluation (LE); and an Area Review (AR). The LE component provides a method of determining the importance of the soil resource and is generally based on the Canada Land Inventory (CLI) class. The AR component provides a method for identifying other locally (regionally) important factors that contribute to the suitability of the study area for agriculture.

The Halton LEAR study was based on an Evaluation Unit of Lots (lot and concession). The soils data was evaluated on both the dominant and subdominant component of the CLI associated with each soil polygon as defined within the 'Soils of Halton' (Report No. 43 of the Ontario Soil Survey) and with data provided by OMAFRA within the digital

¹ DBH Soil Services Inc. was retained through Meridian Planning Consultants to assist in a mapping audit that documents and illustrates the differences between the Provincial and Regional mapping of Prime Agricultural Areas in addition to providing options and comments with respect to the Provincial Prime Agricultural Candidate Areas, also identified by the Province.

soils data available on the Land Information Ontario (LIO) website operated through the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR).

The digital data contains the CLI class associated with each soil polygon, and the soils data is updated by OMAFRA as necessary. The LE component was evaluated on the basis that within the CLI, each soil class has a potential soil quality. The soil capability is identified within a seven-class system for mineral soil, with class 1 having no limitations while class 7 is unsuitable for agricultural cultivation. Figure 13 below illustrates the respective CLI class and the associated rating.

Figure 13 – CLI Class

Canada Land Inventory Class	Definition
1	Soils in this class have no significant limitations in use for crops
2	Soils in this class have moderate limitations that restrict the range of crops or require moderate conservation practices
3	Soils in this class have moderately severe limitations that restrict the range of crops or require moderate conservations practices
4	Soils in this class have severe limitations that restrict the range of crops or require special conservation practices or both
5	Soils in this class have very severe limitations that restrict their capability to producing perennial forage crops, and improvement practices are feasible
6	Soils in this class are capable of producing perennial forage crops, and improvement practices are not feasible
7	Soils in this class have no capability for arable culture or permanent pasture

The AR component was based on an assessment of three factors: property fabric/fragmentation; farm infrastructure; and conflicting land uses. Property fabric was measured as a count of ownership parcels within the evaluation and represented 33.3 percent of the AR score. Farm infrastructure was based on MPAC data property codes and represented 33.3 percent of the AR score. Conflicting land uses was based on existing land uses as defined by MPAC data and counted the number of conflicting land uses within 2 kilometres of the evaluation unit. Again, the conflicting land uses

represented 33.3 percent of the AR score. The LE component comprised 65 percent of the total LEAR score, while the AR component comprised 35 percent.

4.2 Policy and Mapping Considerations

In February 2017, the Province released a preliminary draft map showing prime agricultural areas in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. This map was based on a Provincial LEAR study with different weighting of LE and AR factors as well as different AR components as compared to Halton's LEAR study. The Provincial mapping also identified Candidate Areas or areas that could be placed in a Prime Agriculture Area designation, but which require an assessment to determine if the Candidate Areas 'fit' with the existing Prime Agricultural Area mapping.

In comparison to the Halton Region LEAR, the Provincial LEAR study also identified each soil class with a weighted rating with Class 1 having the best rating and Class 7 having the worst. In comparison to the Halton Region LE component, the Provincial weighted ratings differ for CLI classes 2, 3 and 4. The Provincial ratings are slightly higher resulting in higher LE scores.

The Provincial AR component was based on an assessment of two factors: Percent of land in agricultural production; and parcel fragmentation. The percent of land in agricultural production factor represents 30 percent of the total LEAR score (out of 100). The parcel fragmentation factor represents 10 percent of the total LEAR score. The Provincial LEAR is scored out of 100 points, with LE representing 60 points and the AR as 40 points. The Provincial LEAR was based on an Evaluation Unit of 1 hectare buffered out to 750 metres from the edge of the 1-hectare square.

Given the differences in how the LEAR studies were carried out, the Provincial mapping of prime agricultural areas differs from the mapping of prime agricultural areas in the current ROP. It was also determined that the Provincial mapping contains some technical errors and does not use the most current or best available data when compared to Halton Region mapping and data.

The result is that Halton Region's Agricultural System mapping comprises of 42,914 hectares, while the Provincial System identifies 41,657 hectares. It is also noted that Provincial prime agricultural areas also extended into hamlets, mineral aggregate operations and Key Natural Heritage Features. Figure 14 below shows the differences in the location of prime agricultural areas.

Candidate Areas identified by the Province were also reviewed and in this regard, multiple data layers were reviewed to determine the potential to place the respective

Candidate Areas into a Prime, Rural or other designation. Criteria used in the analysis of Candidate Areas included:

- Soil types (CLI);
- Presence of farm infrastructure;
- Slope/topography;
- LEAR score;
- Contiguity to other Prime Agricultural Areas;
- Evidence of recent production by aerial photos; and
- Consideration of Key Features, Mineral Resource Extraction Areas, Settlement Areas, other existing non-agricultural uses.

In the analysis it was found that most Candidate Areas were suitable for inclusion in the Prime Agricultural Area while those remaining areas may be added to a Rural or other designation. Draft mapping was completed for consultation with the Province and the public. Figure 15 identifies the Candidate Areas for discussion.

Figure 14 – Prime Agricultural Areas Comparison

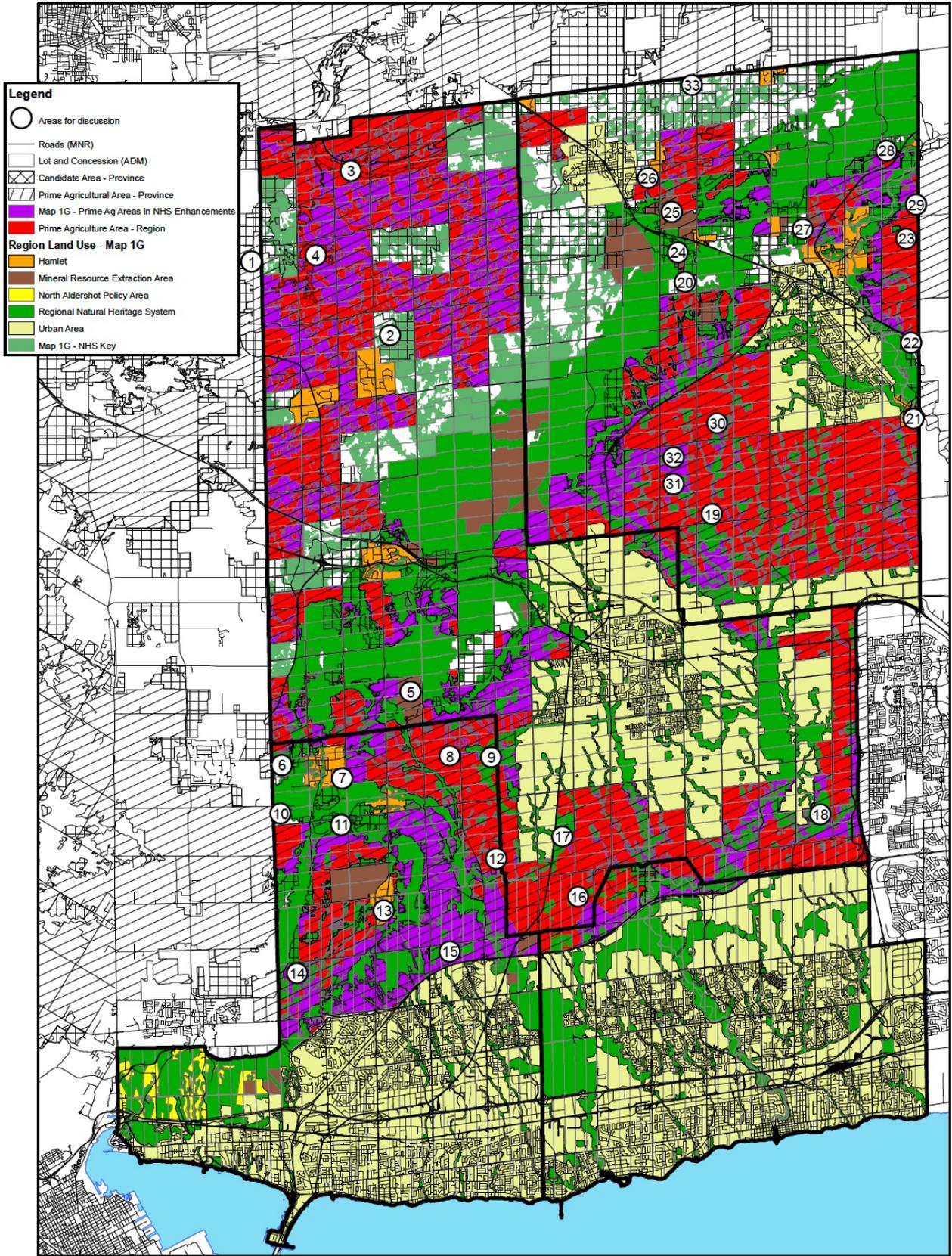
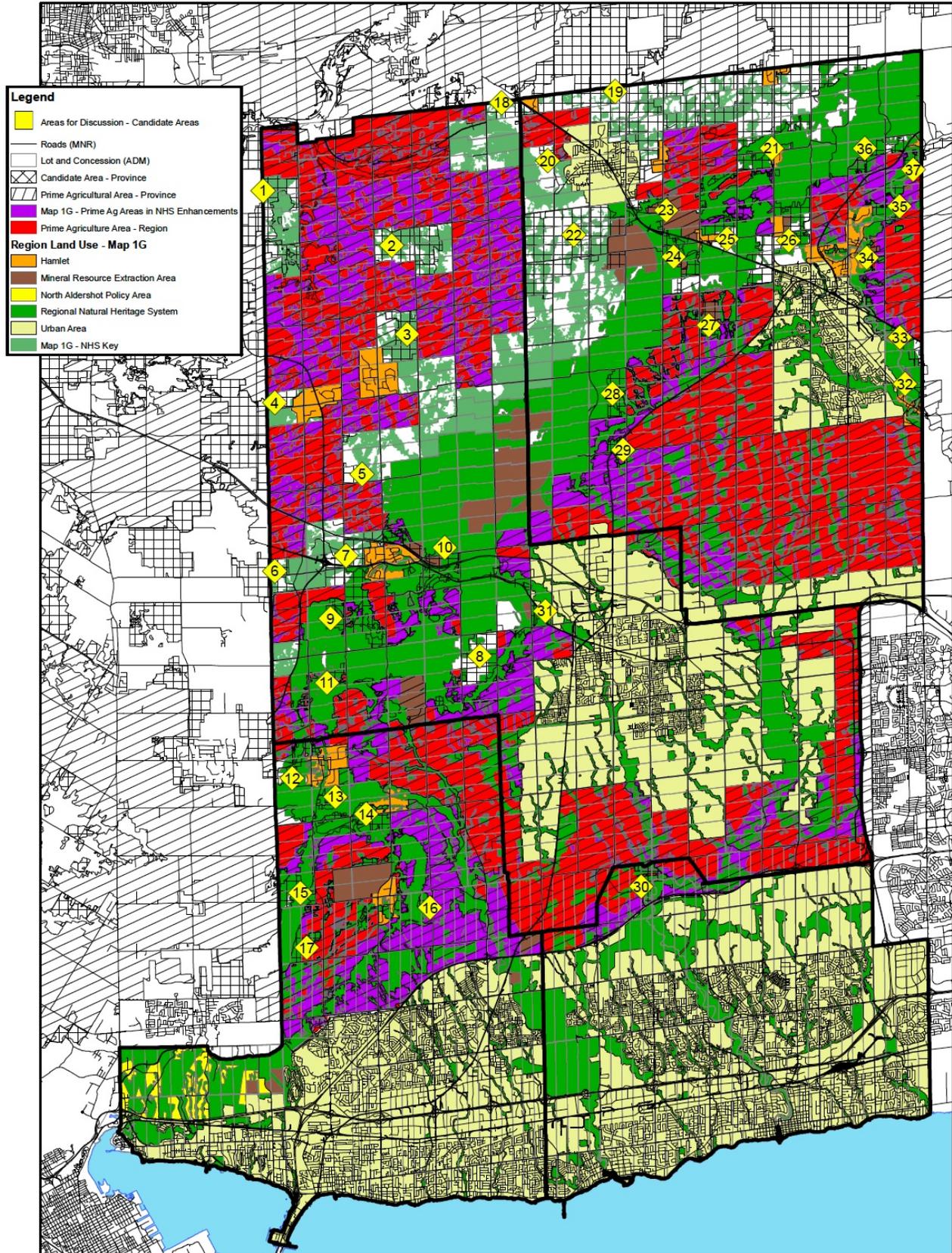


Figure 15 – Candidate Areas for Discussion



4.3 Discussion

While it is apparent that much of the Prime Agriculture Area mapping illustrated both within the Halton Region system and in the Provincial system are consistent, there are several differences.

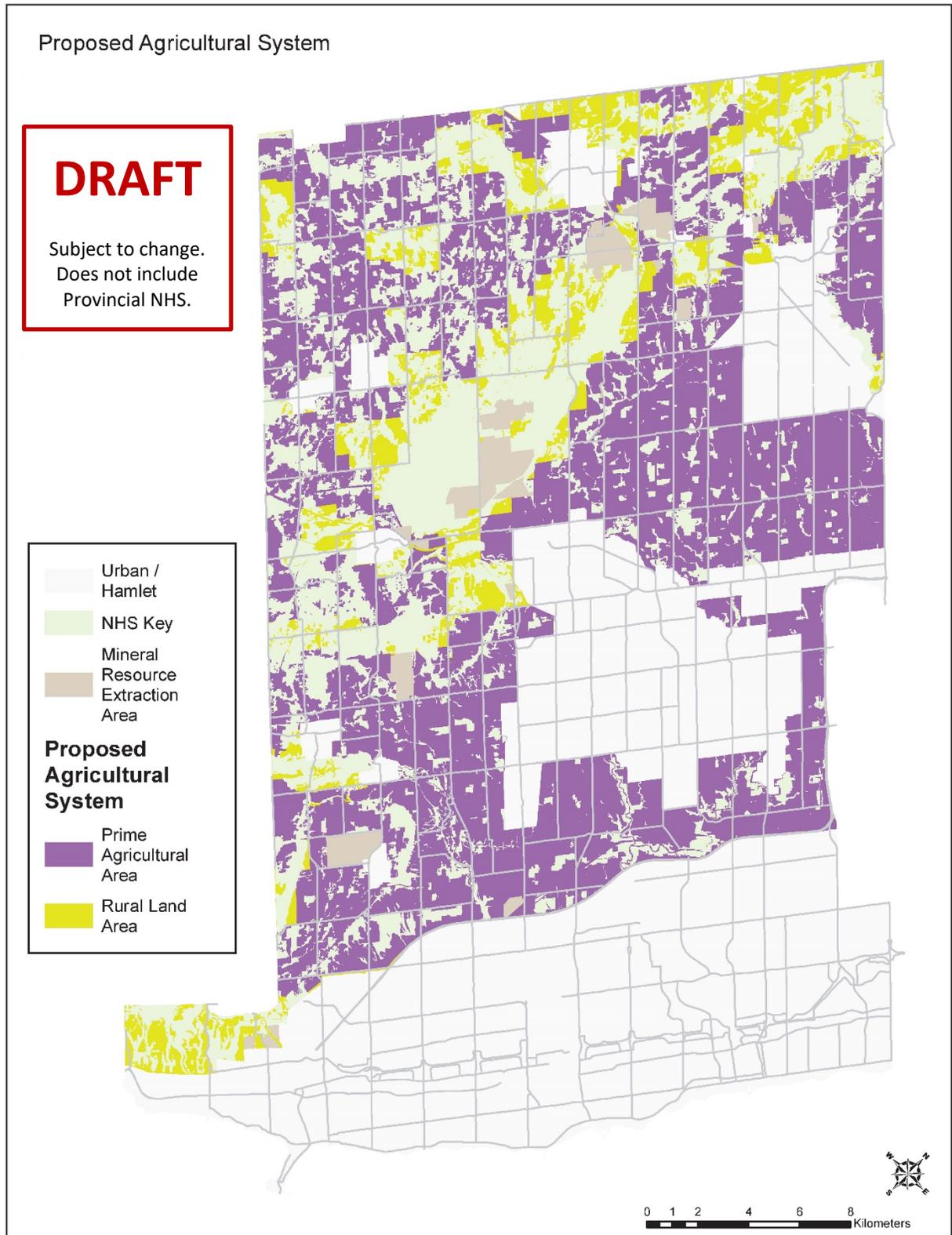
It appears that one of the main reasons for the differences is due to the methodology used in the respective LEAR studies (Evaluation Unit size, LE score weighting, and different AR factors).

Provincial mapping of the Prime Agricultural Area was compared to Regional mapping. Areas of discrepancy identified in Figure 14 were investigated to determine if these areas should be included in Regional mapping using the methodology found in the [Implementation Procedures for the Agricultural System in Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe](#). Wherever possible and appropriate, these areas were included. The CLI Soil Class, LEAR Score, aerial views indicating production, and the presence of farm infrastructure were used to inform the decision. There were a number of technical errors that prevented some of these lands from inclusion. In many cases, key natural heritage features as well as mineral resource extraction areas were picked up on Provincial mapping in error. Rationale is required by the Province for any particular area (prime) identified that is not brought into Regional mapping.

The Province also identified a number of candidate areas for review as identified in Figure 15. These areas could be brought in as prime or rural lands on Regional mapping. A similar exercise was initiated to evaluate each candidate area by considering the CLI Soil Class, LEAR score, aerial views indicating production, the presence of farm infrastructure and topographic considerations. Similar to the evaluation of prime agricultural lands, technical errors were identified in candidate areas where key natural heritage features and mineral resource extraction areas were erroneously picked up.

Draft mapping of the Agricultural System is illustrated in Figure 16.

Figure 16. Draft Proposed Agricultural System Mapping



5.0 Agriculture-Related Uses in Prime Agricultural Areas

5.1 Introduction

Broadened permissions in the PPS, 2014, that carried forward into the PPS 2020, provide the opportunity to introduce farm-related commercial and farm-related industrial uses that support the Agricultural System. In Halton Region, many of the farm support businesses have consolidated and/or left the area as the number of farms have consolidated and decreased in number. Broader permissions for agriculture-related uses would provide the opportunity to re-introduce much needed farm-related commercial and farm-related industrial uses to support and strengthen the agricultural sector in Halton Region. The re-introduction of farm support businesses could possibly reduce costs for Halton farmers who currently access these services outside of the Region.

This section explores the extent to which the ROP should permit agriculture-related uses and under what conditions/restrictions or criteria.

The current ROP does not specifically permit agriculture-related uses, however the Region's [On-Farm Business Guidelines](#) do support these uses under certain conditions. The PPS 2020 permits a broader range of agriculture-related uses in prime agricultural areas than the PPS, 2005.

The current ROP permits a number of secondary uses which includes home industries, retail uses where the majority of commodities for sale are produced or manufactured on the farm, agriculture-related tourism uses, small-scale businesses (provided that the uses are permitted by specific Local Official Plan policies) and horticultural trade uses provided criteria are met.

While the ROP does not specifically permit agriculture-related uses, Section 100(21) does permit (if located on a commercial farm and secondary to the farming operation):

Small-scale businesses that provide supplementary income to the farming operation provided that:

- **Such uses are permitted by specific Local Official Plan policies and Local Zoning By-laws;**
- **Their scale is minor and does not change the appearance of the farming operation;**

- **Their impact such as noise, odour and traffic on surrounding land uses is minimal and will not hinder surrounding agricultural uses; and**
- **They meet all Regional criteria as stated in the On-Farm Business Guidelines adopted by Council.**

Guidelines are intended to provide more detailed directions on the implementation of ROP policies. The On-Farm Business Guidelines includes clarification on the types of uses that may be considered as on-farm businesses.

Section 2.3 of the Guidelines identified four categories of on-farm businesses:

- Agricultural;
- Agriculture-related;
- Secondary; and,
- Horticultural trade uses.

Section 2.5.1 of the Guidelines further identifies examples of agriculture-related uses as per below:

Agricultural-Related Uses: On-Farm Businesses “are small scale on-farm uses that are related to the on-site commercial farm operation and benefit from being in close proximity to it. These uses may also service the agricultural community at large.” Specific examples (as part of a commercial farm) are provided and include (but are not limited to) the following:

- **Retail uses (sale of farm product);**
- **Agriculture-related tourism uses (tours, mazes, farm vacations, educational tours, agricultural festivals, socials; or equine shows);**
- **Agriculture-related home industries (blacksmith shops, metal working shop); and,**
- **Small scale agriculture-related businesses (equine training, processing).**

Some of the above uses could be considered on-farm diversified uses, which are dealt with in Section 6.0 of this Discussion Paper.

5.2 Policy Considerations

The PPS 2014 incorporated a change with respect to how an ‘agriculture-related use’ is defined. In this regard, an ‘agriculture-related use’ was defined in the PPS, 2005 as follows:

Agriculture-related uses: means those farm-related commercial and farm-related industrial uses that are small scale and directly related to the farm operation and are required in close proximity to the farm operation.

The PPS, 2020 defines the term as set out below:

Agriculture-related uses: means those farm-related commercial and farm-related industrial uses that are directly related to farm operations in the area, support agriculture, benefit from being in close proximity to farm operations, and provide direct products and/or services to farm operations as a primary activity.

The PPS 2020 definition permits these uses to support ‘farm operations in the area’, as opposed to supporting only the ‘farm operation’ on the same property. The changes in terminology with respect to agriculture-related uses have also been made in the updated Greenbelt Plan (2017), Niagara Escarpment Plan (2017) and the Growth Plan in 2019.

To assist planning authorities, in 2016, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) published the [Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario’s Prime Agricultural Areas](#) (OMAFRA Guidelines). The OMAFRA Guidelines provide the following examples of agriculture-related uses:

- **Apple storage and distribution centre serving apple farm operations in the area;**
- **Agricultural research centre;**
- **Farmers’ market primarily selling products grown in the area;**
- **Winery using grapes grown in the area;**
- **Livestock assembly yard or stock yard serving farms operating in the area;**
- **Processing of produce grown in the area (e.g. cider-making, cherry pitting, canning, quick-freezing, packing);**
- **Abattoir processing and selling meat from animals raised in the area;**
- **Grain dryer farm operations in the area;**
- **Flour mill for grain grown in the area;**
- **Farm equipment repair shop;**

- **Auction for produce grown in the area;**
- **Farm input supplier (e.g., feed, seeds, fertilizer (serving farm operations in the area)).**

Examples of uses that would typically not be agriculture-related uses because they do not meet PPS definitions or criteria include:

- **Large food processing plants, large wineries and other uses that are high-water-use or effluent generators and are better suited to locations with full municipal services**
- **Micro-breweries and distilleries**
- **Contractors' yards, construction companies, landscapers, well drillers, excavators, paint or building suppliers**
- **Sewage biosolids storage and composting facilities for non-agricultural source material**
- **Antique businesses**
- **Art or music studios**
- **Automobile dealerships, towing companies, mechanics shop or wrecking yards**
- **Rural retreats, recreational uses and facilities, campgrounds or fairgrounds**
- **Conference centres, hotels, guest houses or restaurants**
- **Furniture makers**
- **Institutions such as schools or clinics**
- **Seasonal storage of boats, trailers or cars**
- **Veterinary clinics**
- **Trucking yards**

For a use to be considered as an agriculture-related use, it must be a farm related commercial use and/or a farm related industrial use that satisfies all of the criteria below:

- **Is directly related to farm operations in the area;**
- **Supports agriculture;**
- **Benefits from being in close proximity to farm operations; and**
- **Provides direct products and/or services to farm operations as a primary activity.**

In addition to the above, it is noted that Section 3.1.3.1 of the Greenbelt Plan also permits agriculture-related uses with specific reference to the [Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas](#).

5.3 Discussion

The changes in policy in the PPS 2020 need to be addressed in the updated ROP, which does not specifically permit agriculture-related uses. While the Region's On-Farm Business Guidelines developed in 2014 currently support some agriculture-related uses, the agriculture-related uses identified in the [Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas](#) are for the most part more extensive and are not dealt with by the Region's Guidelines. The following are specific criteria for agriculture-related uses:

1. Farm-related commercial and farm-related industrial uses

Farm-related commercial uses may include uses such as retailing of agriculture-related products (e.g., farm supply co-ops, farmers' markets and retailers of value-added products like wine or cider made from produce grown in the area), livestock assembly yards and farm equipment repair shops if they meet all the criteria for this category of uses.

Farm related industrial uses may include uses such as industrial operations that process farm commodities from the area such as abattoirs, feed mills, grain dryers, cold/dry storage facilities, fertilizer storage and distribution facilities, food and beverage processors (e.g., wineries and cheese factories) and agricultural biomass pelletizers if they meet all the criteria for this category of uses. Many of these uses add value to the agricultural commodities produced in the area. Residential, recreational and institutional uses do not fit the definition of agriculture-related uses.

2. Shall be compatible with and shall not hinder surrounding agricultural operations

"Surrounding agricultural operations" are interpreted in these guidelines to include both the property on which the use is located and the area of potential impact around the property. The area of impact may vary depending on the use. To be compatible with and not hinder surrounding agricultural operations, agriculture-related uses should meet a specific list of criteria.

3. Supports agriculture

This criterion limits uses to those primarily focused on supporting agriculture. For example, a grain elevator used by farmers in the area supports and benefits area farms.

4. Provides direct products and/or services to farm operations as a primary activity

This criterion requires that agriculture-related uses directly service farm operations as a primary activity.

“Direct products and/or services” refers to uses that serve an agricultural need or create an opportunity for agriculture at any stage of the supply chain (e.g. seed or fertilizer supplier, farm equipment repair, value-added food and beverage processing and distribution or retail of agricultural commodities grown in the area).

Serving farm operations must be a primary function or main activity of the business. As a rule, general purpose commercial and industrial uses should be located outside of prime agricultural areas (i.e., in settlement areas or rural lands).

5. Benefits from being in close proximity to farm operations.

To meet this criterion, agriculture-related uses must benefit from or need to be located near the farm operations they serve. Benefits may include more effective or efficient operations due to access to feedstock, roads suited to slow-moving farm vehicles, reduced transportation distance and risk of spoilage and marketing opportunities associated with being part of an agricultural cluster.

It is recommended that agriculture-related uses be specifically identified as a permitted use in the ROP. However, municipalities do have the ability to be more restrictive than the Provincial Policy direction.

Discussion Question 2:

- A. Should the ROP permit the agriculture-related uses as outlined in the Guideline on Permitted Uses in Ontario’s Prime Agricultural Areas in its entirety?
- B. What additional conditions or restrictions should be required for any agriculture-related uses?
- C. Should some uses only be permitted in the Rural Area as opposed to Prime Agricultural Lands?

6.0 On-Farm Diversified Uses and Agri-Tourism Uses In Prime Agricultural Areas

6.1 Introduction

The PPS 2014 introduced a new category of use called “on-farm diversified uses” and modified its definition of agri-tourism which is a type of on-farm diversified use. The PPS 2020 carries forward these definitions and associated policies. On-farm diversified uses are secondary to the principal agricultural uses of the property and are limited in area. The introduction of on-farm diversified uses are intended to enable farm operators to diversify and supplement their farm income, as well as to accommodate value-added and agri-tourism uses in prime agricultural areas.

This section explores the extent to which the ROP should permit on-farm diversified uses and under what conditions/restrictions or criteria.

A wide variety of uses may qualify as on-farm diversified uses based on the PPS definition, as long as they are related to agriculture, supportive of agriculture, or able to co-exist with agriculture without conflict.

In addition to the “standard” types of on-farm diversified uses and under the current Provincial policy framework, agricultural lands may be used for events such as weddings, banquets, corporate retreats, religious facilities and other quasi-commercial/institutional uses in certain circumstances. These events could be considered on-farm diversified uses under the category of agri-tourism uses as broadly defined by the PPS.

Approaches to permitting these “event” types of uses vary across the GGH. For example, wedding/banquet facilities have been permitted by some municipalities as a temporary use to determine if they can operate in a compatible manner with the neighbouring agricultural uses and rural character of the area (Innisfil, Bradford West Gwillimbury). Rezoning and site plan control may be required before considering the use in conjunction with a farming operation.

There are a number of similar uses permitted in Peel and York, all of which are secondary to other permitted uses on the property. The Niagara Escarpment Commission recently permitted a camp to convert to a wedding/banquet facility in Caledon, a decision upheld by the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (LPAT). Conversely,

a proposal to permit such a use in King Township was refused by the OMB on the basis that it was a commercial use that should be located in a settlement area. (OMB Case No. PL130137).

6.2 Policy Considerations

The PPS 2020 provides the following definition for an 'on-farm diversified use':

On-farm diversified uses: means uses that are secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property, and are limited in area. On-farm diversified uses include, but are not limited to, home occupations, home industries, agri-tourism uses, and uses that produce value-added agricultural products.

The PPS 2020 further expands the definition to add:

Ground-mounted solar facilities are permitted in prime agricultural areas, including specialty crop areas, only as on-farm diversified uses.

A definition for 'agri-tourism' uses is included in the PPS 2020:

Agri-tourism: means those farm-related tourism uses, including limited accommodation such as a bed and breakfast, that promote the enjoyment, education or activities related to the farm operation.

The key element of the above definition of agri-tourism uses is that such a use must 'promote the enjoyment, education or activities related to the farm operation'.

In 2016, OMAFRA published the [Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas \(OMAFRA Guidelines\)](#). Examples of on-farm diversified uses could include:

- Value-added uses that could use feedstock from outside the surrounding agricultural area (e.g. processor, packager, winery, cheese factory, bakery, abattoir)
- Home occupations (e.g. professional office, bookkeeper, land surveyor, art studio, hairdresser, massage therapist, daycare, veterinary clinic, kennel, classes or workshops)
- Home industries (e.g. sawmill, welding or woodworking shop, manufacturing/fabrication, equipment repair, seasonal storage of boats or trailers)

- Agri-tourism and recreational uses (e.g. farm vacation suite, bed and breakfast, hayrides, petting zoo, farm-themed playground, horse trail rides, corn maze, seasonal events, equine events, wine tasting, retreats, zip lines)
- Retail uses (e.g. farm market, antique business, seed supplier, tack store)
- Café/small restaurant, cooking classes, food store (e.g. cheese, ice cream)

The OMAFRA Guidelines also indicate that the following uses would typically not be on-farm diversified uses based on the five criteria discussed below:

- Large-scale equipment or vehicle dealerships, hotels, landscape businesses, manufacturing plants, trucking yards;
- Uses with high water and sewage needs and/or that generate significant traffic, such as large food processors, distribution centres, full-scale restaurants, banquet halls;
- Large-scale recurring events with permanent structures;
- Institutional uses (e.g., churches, schools, nursing homes, cemeteries);
- Large-scale recreational facilities such as golf courses, soccer fields, ball diamonds or arenas.

The OMAFRA [Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas](#) also identifies five criteria that need to be met for a use to be considered an on-farm diversified use:

1. **Located on a farm** – This means that an on-farm diversified use cannot be the primary use of the property and that the farm property has to actively be an agricultural use.
2. **Secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property** – The OMAFRA Guidelines deal explicitly with what a secondary use is on a farm property. In addition to indicating the agricultural uses must remain the dominant use of the property, it is further indicated that this is to be measured in spatial and temporal terms. The OMAFRA Guidelines also indicate that large-scale, repeated or permanent events are not on-farm diversified uses and should be directed to existing facilities such as fairgrounds, parks, community centres and halls, settlement areas or rural lands.

3. **Limited in area** – The OMAFRA Guidelines indicate that this criterion is intended to minimize the amount of land taken out of agricultural production, to ensure that agriculture remains the main land use in prime agricultural areas and to limit off-site impacts to ensure compatibility with surrounding agriculture operations. The limited in area standard for the acceptable area occupied by an on-farm diversified use is up to 2 percent of a farm parcel to a maximum of 1 ha (10,000 m²).
4. **Includes, but is not limited to, home occupations, home industries, agri-tourism uses and uses that produce value-added agricultural products.**

It is noted that other uses could be considered by virtue of the inclusion of the word 'includes'.

5. **Shall be compatible with, and shall not hinder, surrounding agricultural operations.**

“Surrounding agricultural operations” are interpreted to include both the property on which the use is located and the area of potential impact around the property. The areas of impact may vary depending on the use. Some uses that meet other on-farm diversified uses criteria may not meet the compatibility criterion. Commercial or industrial uses that have a large number of employees or attract a large number of customers may also not be compatible in the Prime Agricultural Area. In addition, some uses may be better suited to settlement areas where municipal services are available (PPS Policy 1.6.6). Municipalities should consider how effectively any impacts can be mitigated before allowing different uses in Prime Agricultural Areas.

It is recommended that on-farm diversified uses be specifically identified as a permitted use in the ROP. However, municipalities do have the ability to be more restrictive than the Provincial Policy direction.

6.3 Discussion

A key factor that flows from the PPS and the OMAFRA Guidelines is scale. For example, any uses that have high water or sewage needs and/or generate significant traffic would not be considered to be an on-farm diversified use. However, a use that did not create these impacts could be considered an on-farm diversified use, provided the building used was also available for agricultural purposes at other times.

In addition, if the use were a large-scale event with permanent structures, this similarly would not be considered to be an on-farm diversified use. However, the adaptive re-use of agricultural buildings is supported by the OMAFRA Guidelines meaning again that it comes down to scale and impact.

To deal with the scale issue regarding on-farm diversified use events, it is suggested that the construction of new permanent structures in the prime agricultural areas for this use not be permitted (thereby encouraging the adaptive re-use of existing farm buildings) and that size limits be placed on temporary structures (tents), as well as, a maximum area of the agricultural use to be occupied by the facility (e.g. up to 2 percent of the farm parcel to a maximum of one hectare).

With respect to permanent buildings, it would be beneficial if existing barn buildings could be rehabilitated to provide for such on-farm diversified uses. In order to hold a gathering in a building, the building must meet commercial occupancy standards. This can result in the need for considerable expenditure. However, the use of under-utilized existing structures for alternative uses will prolong their life and maintain the cultural landscape of Halton Region.

One method that municipalities could consider would be to license uses such as events. The licensing process would assist in ensuring that the operation was compatible with the adjacent agricultural activities through monitoring of complaints regarding noise, odour, traffic, trespass etc. and a licence for future years could be refused based on non-compliance. Locational requirements could also be included in the ROP (or Local Official Plan), such as having frontage on a Municipal collector road.

Regional or local policies could also consider Site Plan Agreements to address matters such as lighting, sewage disposal, parking area surfaces, waste disposal, transportation and other issues, which may cause compatibility problems.

On the basis of the above, it is suggested that the Region consider permitting on-farm diversified uses including agri-tourism uses in prime agricultural areas and on rural lands. There is a clear demand and these types of uses have the potential to contribute

to the economic viability of the agricultural system in the Region of Halton, particularly if operators undertake practices that support local sustainability such as:

- Sourcing food and beverages locally wherever possible;
- Sourcing horticulture (flowers, shrubs and landscaping) locally; and
- Coordinating demands such as accommodation, transportation and equipment locally.

Discussion Question 3:

- A. Should the ROP permit on-farm diversified uses as outlined in the Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas in its entirety?
- B. What additional conditions or restrictions should be required for any on-farm diversified uses?
- C. The Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas limit on-farm diversified uses to no more than 2 percent of the farm property on which the uses are located to a maximum of 1 ha. As well, the gross floor area of buildings used for on-farm diversified uses is limited (e.g. 20 percent of the 2 percent). Are these the appropriate size limitations for Halton farms?

7.0 Cemeteries in Prime Agricultural Areas

7.1 Introduction

In Ontario, new cemeteries in rural and agricultural areas in close proximity to large urban areas tend to be substantial commercial operations with a full suite of services that are on relatively large sites and serve an extensive population primarily from the nearby urban area. The old style county cemeteries of the past were often solely for the use of members of a particular small church or community. This being the case, a further look at cemeteries in agricultural areas, including prime agricultural areas and rural lands is required.

Within settlement areas, cemeteries are viewed as being part of a complete community and are planned to be permanent uses with a 100-year planning horizon. The Growth Plan (2019) defines “complete communities” as:

Mixed-use neighbourhoods or other areas within cities, towns, and settlement areas that offer and support opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to conveniently access most of the necessities for daily living, including an appropriate mix of jobs, local stores, and services, a full range of housing, transportation options and public service facilities. Complete communities are age-friendly and may take different shapes and forms appropriate to their contexts.

7.2 Policy Considerations

Based on the PPS 2020, cemeteries are explicitly identified as a permitted use on 'rural lands', but not in prime agricultural areas.

Section 1.1.1 b) of the PPS 2020 recognizes the need to plan for cemeteries as set out below:

Healthy, liveable and safe communities are sustained by:

- b) accommodating an appropriate affordable and market-based range and mix of residential types (including single detached, additional residential units, multi-unit housing, affordable housing and housing for older persons), employment (including industrial and commercial), institutional (including places of worship, cemeteries and long-term care homes), recreation, park and open space, and other uses to meet long-term needs;**

The Region, in response to Minutes of Settlement through ROPA 38 proceedings, 2005 agreed to consider cemetery related issues during its next 5-year review. The PPS did not specifically allow cemeteries in rural areas in municipalities. Section 1.1.4.1 a) set out the following permitted uses:

In rural areas located in municipalities:

- a) Permitted uses and activities shall relate to the management or use of resources, resource-based recreational activities, limited residential development and other rural land uses;**

The PPS, 2020 in regard to rural uses states in Section 1.1.5.2:

On rural lands located in municipalities, permitted uses are:

- a) the management or use of resources;**
- b) resource-based recreational uses (including recreational dwellings);**
- c) residential development including lot creation, that is locally appropriate;**
- d) agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses, on-farm diversified uses and normal farm practices, in accordance with provincial standards;**
- e) home occupations and home industries;**
- f) cemeteries; and**
- g) other rural land uses.**

The Greenbelt Plan (2017) also permits cemeteries on rural lands, where the use is considered to be an institutional use (Section 3.1.4 and 4.1). The Niagara Escarpment Plan (2017) includes cemeteries within the definition of 'institutional use' which are permitted exclusively in the Escarpment Rural Area, however the cemetery must 'serve the immediate community', which implies that cemeteries that serve the broader Region and beyond would not be permitted.

The PPS 2020 does not explicitly permit or prohibit cemeteries in prime agricultural areas. However, the Province's view on cemeteries in prime agricultural areas was clarified in the guide "An Introduction to the Provincial Policy Statement, 2014: Rural Ontario":

The Provincial Policy Statement, recognizes cemeteries as an important component of healthy communities (policy 1.1.1 b) and clarifies that cemeteries (and a wide variety of other uses) are permitted on rural lands (policy 1.1.5.2). In prime agricultural areas, limited non-residential uses such as cemeteries may only be permitted if a set of criteria can be met (policy 2.3.6.1 b).

Even though cemeteries are not listed in Section 2.3.6.1, (Non-Agricultural Uses in Prime Agricultural Areas) of the PPS 2020, the above Provincial guide, related to the

previous version of the PPS (2014), identifies cemeteries as a use that could be considered in prime agricultural areas if certain criteria are met.

Section 2.3.6.1 of the PPS 2020 establishes an appropriate policy basis for the consideration of cemeteries through a Regional Official Plan Amendment process, if they are not under consideration at the time of urban expansion. These criteria are listed below (Section 2.3.6.1 b):

1. **the land does not comprise a specialty crop area;**
2. **the proposed use complies with the minimum distance separation formulae;**
3. **there is an identified need within the planning horizon provided for in policy 1.1.2 for additional land to be designated to accommodate the proposed use; and**
4. **alternative locations have been evaluated, and i. There are no reasonable alternative locations which avoid prime agricultural areas; and ii. There are no reasonable alternative locations in prime agricultural areas with lower priority agricultural lands.**

On the issue of need, sub-section 3 above references Section 1.1.2 of the PPS 2020, which reads as follows:

Sufficient land shall be made available to accommodate an appropriate range and mix of land uses to meet projected needs for a time horizon of up to 25 years, informed by provincial guidelines. However, where an alternate time period has been established for specific areas of the Province as a result of a provincial planning exercise or a provincial plan, that time frame may be used for municipalities within the area.

Within settlement areas, sufficient land shall be made available through intensification and redevelopment and, if necessary, designated growth areas.

Nothing in policy 1.1.2 limits the planning for infrastructure, public service facilities and employment areas beyond a 25-year time horizon.

To assist planning authorities with this issue, the OMAFRA [Guidelines for Permitted Uses in Prime Agricultural Areas](#) (2016) speak to the elements to be considered to justify the need for a non-agricultural use in a prime agricultural area. Section 3.2.2 of the Guidelines state that:

Identification of need for a proposed limited non-agricultural use requires appropriate justification which is usually provided through a planning report and justification study. The scope of this study depends on the

proposed use and starts by identifying the specific geographic market or service area for the proposed use. It usually includes information on and analysis of:

- **The demand for the product or service;**
- **An inventory of current suppliers/competitors;**
- **How much of the current and future projected demand is met within a given market or service area;**
- **Distance to markets or clients;**
- **Economic impacts of the proposed use; and,**
- **A preliminary assessment of the potential impacts on agricultural operations in the area.**

7.3 Discussion

There is Provincial policy support for cemeteries on rural lands including non-prime agricultural lands. Cemeteries could be added as a permitted use on non-prime agricultural lands in the Region without the need for an Official Plan Amendment, subject to criteria.

The PPS 2020 provides opportunities to expand settlement areas based on an assessment of land needs for a municipality to meet projected needs and permits the consideration of prime agricultural lands as part of this process. In this regard, prime agricultural areas that would be transitioning into an expanded settlement area may be an option for siting new cemeteries. This is provided that they are not located on specialty crop areas, there is no reasonable alternative on lower priority agricultural lands and that the [Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas](#), Section 3 are met.

As a component of complete communities, cemeteries are generally most appropriate within settlement areas. Directing new cemeteries primarily to settlement areas and encouraging the retrofitting of existing cemeteries supports the long-term protection of finite agricultural resources.

Cemeteries may be permitted as non-agricultural uses in prime agricultural areas subject to criteria outlined in the PPS 2020 and Provincial Plans. However, historically Halton Region has had a clear vision regarding agriculture. This vision and associated policies continue to support the protection of prime agricultural lands and areas for their highest priority use – agriculture.

Discussion Question 4:

To what extent should the updated ROP permit cemeteries in:

- A) Urban areas
- B) Rural areas
- C) Prime agricultural areas

What are the criteria, e.g. factors, that are important to you that should be considered when evaluating cemetery applications for each of the above?

8.0 Additional Considerations

8.1 Agricultural Impact Assessments

8.1.1 Introduction

An Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) is a study that is used to identify potential impacts of non-agricultural uses on the agricultural system and recommends ways to avoid, or if avoidance is not possible, minimize and mitigate adverse impacts. The AIA serves as a means of protecting agricultural resources/agricultural land base from inappropriate conversion to other uses and from the introduction of incompatible uses that may negatively affect surrounding agricultural operations.

Halton Region has a long standing history of protecting agricultural activities from potential adverse effects with ROP policies that specifically require an AIA dating back to the 1995 ROP and the previous iteration of the Agricultural Impact Assessment Guidelines dating back to 1985. The Region's [AIA Guidelines](#) were updated following the adoption of Halton Region's Official Plan in December, 2009 (ROPA 38). These guidelines are similar to the Provincial [Draft Agricultural Impact Assessment \(AIA\) Guidance Document](#) which was posted on the Environmental Registry for public consultation until July 2018. These are currently under review by the Province to provide additional guidance and to bring these up to date with the recent update of the PPS 2020 and the Implementation Procedures for the Agricultural System in Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe (March 2020). Once the Province has released the final document, it will be taken into consideration for the preparation of an AIA required by Provincial Plans and the ROP and for any updates to the Region's AIA Guidelines.

8.1.2 Policy Considerations

The Growth Plan (2019), Greenbelt Plan (2017), and Niagara Escarpment Plan (2017) (NEP) provide direction for when an AIA is required. Under the Growth Plan, AIAs are required: where there is a need for a settlement area boundary expansion (GP 2.2.8.3); where agricultural uses and non-agricultural uses interface outside of settlement areas to ensure compatibility with surrounding agricultural operations (GP 4.2.6.3); for the development, optimization, or expansion of existing and planned infrastructure corridors and supporting facilities (GP 3.2.5.1); for applications within prime agricultural areas for new mineral aggregate operations (GP 4.2.8.3).

The Greenbelt Plan (2017) includes similar direction and requires AIAs for settlement area boundary expansions, mineral aggregate operations, general infrastructure, and non-agricultural uses. The NEP requires AIAs for mineral aggregate operations and for

linear infrastructure and also provides general policy guidance for new development adjacent to prime agricultural areas to incorporate suitable methods to avoid, minimize and mitigate land use conflicts. For policies that do not directly require an AIA but require a proponent to avoid, minimize or mitigate impacts to agriculture, the Province encourages the use of an AIA to fulfill these policies.

The ROP and the supporting Guidelines state that an AIA may be required to accompany development applications that have the potential to impact agriculture and may also be required as part of a secondary plan process on lands that abut or are in close proximity to agricultural areas, for proposed non-agricultural use applications including infrastructure that may have an impact on agricultural operations, and for new and expanded mineral resource extraction areas.

8.1.3 Discussion

Existing Requirements

Through updates to the Provincial Plans in 2017 and 2019, the Province now includes explicit references to the use of an AIA to assess the impact of development on agricultural operations.

The ROP, like the 2005 and 2006 Provincial Plans, is less direct with its requirements for an AIA with many policies that do not necessarily require an AIA but where an AIA could be used to effectively satisfy the requirement. In the ROP, policy 101(2) requires an AIA for any applications for non-farm land uses in the Agricultural Area that has the potential to have an impact on adjacent agricultural operations. It is this policy that provides the basis for requiring an AIA where the policies of the ROP do not directly cite the use of an AIA:

- **Settlement Area Boundary Expansions:** policy 77(7) requires that before an expansion can occur it must be demonstrated that impacts from the expansion on agricultural operations adjacent or close to the Urban Area are mitigated to the extent feasible.
- **Mineral Aggregate Operations:** policy 110(8) requires that impacts of proposals to designate new or expanded Mineral Resource Extraction Areas on the surrounding agriculture and rural communities be assessed.
- **Infrastructure:** it is the objective of the Region to ensure that the planning, development and design of the transportation system take into account social, economic and environmental factors as well as the needs of the agricultural community. ROP Policies 172(13) and 176(1) require that the design, construction,

operation and maintenance of all utility corridors and generating facilities minimize community impact.

- **Prime Agricultural Areas:** policy 139.9.2(3) requires that the removal of land from Prime Agricultural Areas only be permitted where it has been demonstrated that there is no negative impact to adjacent agricultural operations.

To better align with the requirements of the 2017 and 2019 Provincial Plans, there is an opportunity through the ROPR to more directly require an AIA in the above policies.

Discussion Question 5:

Do the AIA policy requirements in the ROP sufficiently protect agricultural operations in the Agricultural Area and Rural Area? If not, what additional requirements do you think are needed?

Additional Requirements

There are other non-agricultural uses not identified above where the completion of an AIA would meet the requirements of Provincial and Regional policies. The ROP does include a general policy (ROP 101(2)) that requires an AIA for non-farm land uses that have the potential to impact adjacent agricultural operations. While this policy does capture all non-agricultural uses, there may be circumstances where inclusion of a direct reference to the requirement for an AIA may be beneficial.

Renewable Energy Projects

In 2018, the Province repealed the Green Energy Act. Through the Green Energy Repeal Act, the siting of renewable energy projects is now within the jurisdiction of municipalities and subject to Provincial plans and policies and municipal official plans and zoning bylaws. However, the PPS 2020 definition for on-farm diversified uses has been expanded to include ground-mounted solar facilities being permitted in prime agricultural areas. This type of renewable energy project would not be subject to an AIA. Further guidance is expected in the next reiteration of the Provincial AIA guidelines. The Climate Change Discussion Paper explores how the ROP should encourage planning and development of renewable energy projects. Under the current ROP, it is the goal of the Region to ensure the conservation and wise economic use of energy and to minimize adverse effects caused by its provision. In the agricultural area,

a renewable energy project could take agricultural land out of production and could have adverse impacts on adjacent agricultural operations.

Institutional, Commercial, and Industrial Uses

Under the Greenbelt Plan (2017) rural lands in the protected countryside are intended to be the primary locations for a range of recreational, tourism, institutional (including cemetery) and resource-based commercial/industrial uses. Where non-agricultural uses are proposed, policies 3.1.4.4 and 4.1.1.3 state that the completion of an AIA should be considered. While the ROP does include the general policy for requiring AIAs for non-agricultural uses, more explicit references to an AIA for institutional, commercial, and industrial uses on rural lands may be considered.

Discussion Question 6:

Should the requirements for an AIA be included in any other new or existing ROP policies?

8.2 North Aldershot Policy Area

The North Aldershot Policy Area is unique. The general permitted uses for this designation include agricultural and agriculture-related uses, residential uses, home occupations and cottage industries, watershed and wildlife management uses and recreational uses.

While agricultural uses do occur within the North Aldershot Policy Area, the lands are not considered to be a prime agricultural area, which is typically made up of large tracts of contiguous land that have the most productive soils and climate to support viable agriculture. The North Aldershot Policy Area cannot be considered a rural settlement area in the Halton Region context either, since rural settlement areas are identified as hamlets or rural clusters, which has never been applied to North Aldershot. This means that, based on current settlement boundaries, the only other category that can apply is rural lands, as shown on Figure 16 of this Discussion Paper.

A separate discussion paper focusing on the North Aldershot area explores these matters comprehensively.

8.3 Special Needs Housing in the Agricultural System

8.3.1 Introduction

Special needs housing provides residential accommodation that has been modified to meet the needs of someone who requires alternative care and/or to help someone to live independently. The special needs housing policies in the ROP do not apply throughout the Region, as such, they are being reviewed to determine if and under what circumstances they should be permitted outside of the Urban Area.

Section 280 of the ROP defines 'special needs housing' as follows:

Means any housing, including dedicated facilities, in whole or in part that is used by people who have specific needs beyond economic needs, including but not limited to, needs such as mobility requirements or support functions required for daily living. Examples of special needs housing may include, but are not limited to, housing for persons with disabilities such as physical, sensory or mental health disabilities, housing for the elderly, group homes, emergency shelter, housing for the homeless, and independent permanent living arrangements where support services such as meal preparation, grocery shopping, laundry, housekeeping, respite care and attendant services are provided. It does not include households that receive community based support services in their own home.

The above definition of special needs housing is expansive and indicates that housing for special needs can include any form of housing. The definition also provides a number of non-exclusive examples including a group home, which is not defined by the ROP.

All references to 'special needs housing' are found within Sections 85 and 86 of the ROP, which is within the 'Housing' section. It is noted that these sections are located within the part of the ROP that deals with the Urban Area designation. There are no policies permitting such housing outside of the Urban Area including within settlement areas such as hamlets.

8.3.2 Policy Considerations

With respect to housing for special needs, the PPS 2020 provides direction regarding the provision of an appropriate range and mix of housing options required to meet the social, health, economic and wellbeing requirements of current and future residents including special needs requirements. The PPS 2020 does not distinguish between urban and rural areas for these uses. The PPS 2020 indicates that healthy integrated and viable rural areas should be supported by building upon rural character and

leveraging rural amenities and assets. There are a number of circumstances where special needs housing is located in rural areas for this very reason.

While it is noted in Section 1.1.4.2 that within the rural areas, rural settlement areas shall be the focus of growth and development, that doesn't mean that existing dwellings or new dwellings (on existing lots) are prohibited outside of rural settlement areas. The PPS 2020 does not prevent a planning authority from permitting special needs housing in rural areas provided that the special needs housing includes all housing options.

Ontario Human Rights Code

There has been considerable discussion about the implications of planning policy and zoning on the siting of special needs housing in Ontario. One of the documents reviewed is the 2012 Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) document entitled ['In the Zone: Housing, Human Rights and Municipal Planning'](#).

One of the examples of discriminatory practices identified in the Guide includes the enactment of zoning bylaws that restrict affordable housing development that serves people identified by code grounds (e.g. group homes) in certain areas while allowing other housing of a similar scale. The following is further indicated in the guide:

Affordable, supportive and group housing – with or without support workers – are still residential uses.

On the basis of the above, any zoning by-law or official plan policy that attempts to restrict residential dwellings on the basis of who is living in that dwelling (whether there is an element of care provided or not) may be vulnerable to challenge on human rights grounds. This is not to say that reasonable controls on the use of a residential dwelling cannot be considered, however, prohibiting the use of a residential dwelling as a housekeeping unit by individuals who may require special care may be argued to be discriminatory.

8.3.4 Discussion

The ROP could include detailed policies that expressly permit special needs housing in the rural area subject to local approval where the criteria included in the OMAFRA [Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas](#) along with other issues such as land use compatibility, traffic and servicing are dealt with at the local level. Alternatively the ROP could be silent on the issue of special needs housing in the rural area. Reliance would be placed on the PPS 2020 alone if an application were submitted in future.

Discussion Question 7:

Should special needs housing be permitted outside of urban areas and under what conditions?

9.0 Next Steps

The overall goal of the Rural and Agricultural System component of the ROPR is to address Provincial policy conformity and Regional issues as they relate to land use matters in the ROP.

This Discussion Paper summarizes the key findings of background research and analysis and identifies the principal areas where the ROPR could address Rural and Agricultural System issues and outlines potential policy considerations for the ROP.

The discussion paper will form the basis for consultation with municipalities, conservation authorities and the public as part of the Regional Official Plan Review. Following public consultation, a policy directions report will be brought forward to Council to guide policy drafting work for the Rural and Agricultural System in the Regional Official Plan as part of Phase 3 of the Regional Official Plan Review.

Discussion Question 8:

Are there additional considerations or trends that Halton Region should review in terms of the Rural and Agricultural System?

Acronym Glossary

AR	Area Review
CLI	Canada Land Inventory
CWA	Clean Water Act
ESA	Environmentally Significant Areas
GBNHS	Greenbelt Natural Heritage System
GGH	Greater Golden Horseshoe
HRFA	Halton Region Federation of Agriculture
IGMS	Integrated Growth Management Strategy
LIO	Land Information Inventory
LEAR	Land Evaluation and Area Review
LPAT	Local Planning Appeal Tribunal
MCR	Municipal Comprehensive Review
MNR	Ministry of Natural Resources
NEP	Niagara Escarpment Plan
NHS	Natural Heritage System
NHSPC	Provincial Greenbelt Plan's Natural Heritage System for the Protected Countryside
OFB	On Farm Business
OHRC	Ontario Human Rights Commission
OMAFRA	Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
OMB	Ontario Municipal Board
OPA	Official Plan Amendment
PPS	Provincial Policy Statement
RAS	Rural Agricultural Strategy
RNHS	Regional Natural Heritage System
ROP	Regional Official Plan
ROPA	Regional Official Plan Amendment
ROPR	Regional Official Plan Review
VPZ	Vegetation Protection Zone

Glossary of Terms

Agricultural Impact Assessment: A study that evaluates the potential impacts of non-agricultural development on agricultural operations and the Agricultural System and recommends ways to avoid or, if avoidance is not possible, minimize and mitigate adverse impacts. (Greenbelt Plan)

Agricultural system: The system mapped and issued by the Province in accordance with this Plan, comprised of a group of inter-connected elements that collectively create a viable, thriving agricultural sector. It has two components: 1. an agricultural land base comprised of prime agricultural areas, including specialty crop areas, and rural lands that together create a continuous productive land base for agriculture; 2.) an agri-food network which includes infrastructure, services, and assets important to the viability of the agri-food sector. (Greenbelt Plan)

A system comprised of a group of inter-connected elements that collectively create a viable, thriving agricultural sector. It has two components:

- a. An agricultural land base comprised of prime agricultural areas, including specialty crop areas, and rural lands that together create a continuous productive land base for agriculture; and
- b. An agri-food network which includes infrastructures, services, and assets important to the viability of the agri-food sector. (PPS 2020)

Agricultural uses: means the growing of crops, including nursery, biomass, and horticultural crops; raising of livestock; raising of other animals for food, fur or fibre, including poultry and fish; aquaculture; apiaries; agro-forestry; maple syrup production; and associated on-farm buildings and structures, including, but not limited to livestock facilities, manure storages, value-retaining facilities, and accommodation for full-time farm labour when the size and nature of the operation requires additional employment. (PPS, 2020)

Agri-food network: Within the agricultural system, a network which includes elements important to the viability of the agri-food sector such as regional infrastructure and transportation networks; on-farm buildings and infrastructure; agricultural services, farm markets, distributors, and primary processing; and vibrant, agriculture-supportive communities. (PPS, 2020)

Agri-tourism uses: means those farm-related tourism uses, including limited accommodation such as a bed and breakfast, that promote the enjoyment, education or activities related to the farm operation. (PPS, 2020)

Agriculture-related uses: means those farm related commercial and farm-related industrial uses that are directly related to farm operations in the area, support agriculture, benefit from being in close proximity to farm operations, and provide direct products and/or services to farm operations as a primary activity. (PPS, 2020)

Commercial farm: means a farm which is deemed to be a viable farm operation and which normally produces sufficient income to support a farm family. (Current ROP)

Cottage industry: means an activity conducted as an accessory use within a single detached dwelling or in an addition to the dwelling or an accessory building not further than 30 m from the dwelling and serviced by the same private water and wastewater systems, performed by one or more residents of the household on the same property. A cottage industry may include activities such as dressmaking, upholstering, weaving, baking, ceramic-making, painting, sculpting and the repair of personal effects. (Current ROP)

Designated growth areas: means lands within settlement areas designated in an official plan for growth over the long-term planning horizon provided in policy 1.1.2, but which have not yet been fully developed. Designated growth areas include land which are designated and available for residential growth in accordance with policy 1.4.1(a), as well as lands required for employment and other uses. (PPS, 2020)

Existing use: As it applies to a Section of this Plan means the use of any land, building or structure legally existing, or approved under a Parkway Belt land use regulation, on the day of adoption of this Plan or the amendment to this Plan giving effect to the subject Section by Regional Council or, in the case of the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area, the day of approval of the Niagara Escarpment Plan or an amendment to that Plan or, in the case of the Greenbelt Plan, a use which lawfully existed on December 15, 2004. An existing use, building or structure may expand or be replaced in the same location and of the same use in accordance with Local Zoning By-laws. For the purpose of horticultural trade uses, they are considered existing uses provided that they are recognized as legal uses under Local Zoning By-Laws or through the issuance of a development permit by the Niagara Escarpment Commission; such a process must commence within one year and be completed within five years of Regional Council adoption of the Amendment introducing such uses in the Plan. (Current ROP)

Home industry: means a small scale use providing a service primarily to the rural farming community and which is accessory to a single detached dwelling or agricultural operation, performed by one or more residents of the household on the same property. A home industry may be conducted in whole or in part in an accessory building and may include a carpentry shop, a metal working shop, a welding shop, an electrical shop, or blacksmith's shop, etc., but does not include an auto repair or paint shop or furniture stripping. (Current ROP).

Home occupation: means an activity that provides a service as an accessory use within a single detached dwelling or in an addition to the dwelling or in an accessory building not further than 30 m away from the dwelling and serviced by the same private water and wastewater systems, performed by one or more residents of the household on the same property. Such activities may include services performed by an accountant, architect, auditor, dentist, medical practitioner, engineer, insurance agent,

land surveyor, lawyer, realtor, planner, hairdresser, desk top publisher or word processor, computer processing provider, teacher or day care provider. (Current ROP)

Key features: means key natural heritage and hydrological features as described in the ROP. (Current ROP)

Minimum distance separation formulae: Formulae and guidelines developed by the Province, as amended from time to time, to separate uses so as to reduce incompatibility concerns about odour from livestock facilities (PPS, 2020)

Municipal comprehensive review: A new official plan, or an official plan amendment, initiated by and upper- or single-tier municipality under section 26 of the Planning Act that comprehensively applies the policies and schedules of A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. (Growth Plan, 2019)

Natural heritage system: A system made of natural heritage features and areas, and linkages intended to provide connectivity (at the regional or site level) and support natural processes which are necessary to maintain biological and geological diversity, natural functions, viable populations of indigenous species and ecosystems. The system can include key natural heritage features, key hydrologic features, federal and provincial parks and conservation reserves, other natural heritage features and areas, lands that have been restored or have the potential to be restored to a natural state, associated areas that support hydrologic functions, and working landscapes that enable ecological functions to continue (Based on PPS, 2020 and modified for the Growth Plan, 2019)

Natural heritage system for the growth plan: The natural heritage system mapped and issued by the Province in accordance with this Plan (Growth Plan, 2019)

On-farm diversified uses: Uses that are secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property, and are limited in area. On-farm diversified uses include, but are not limited to, home occupations, home industries, agri-tourism uses, and uses that produce value-added agricultural products. Ground-mounted solar facilities are permitted in prime agricultural areas including specialty crop areas, only as on-farm diversified uses. (PPS, 2020)

Prime agricultural area: An area where prime agricultural lands predominate. This includes areas of prime agricultural lands and associated Canada Land Inventory Class 4 through 7 lands and additional areas where there is a local concentration of farms which exhibit characteristics of ongoing agriculture. Prime agricultural areas are to be identified by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs using guidelines developed by the Province as amended from time to time (Based on PPS, 2020 and modified for the Growth Plan, 2019)

Prime agricultural lands: Specialty crop areas and/or Canada Land Inventory Class 1, 2 and 3 lands, as amended from time to time, in this order of priority for protection (PPS, 2020).

Rural lands: Lands which are located outside settlement areas and which are outside prime agricultural areas. (PPS, 2020)

Specialty crop area: Areas designated using guidelines developed by the Province, as amended from time to time. In these areas, specialty crops are predominantly grown such as tender fruits (peaches, cherries, plums), grapes and other fruit crops, vegetable crops, greenhouse crops, and crops from agriculturally developed organic soil usually resulting from:

- a) Soils that have suitability to produce specialty crops, or lands that are subject to special climatic conditions, or a combination of both;
 - b) Farmers skilled in the production of specialty crops; and
 - c) A long-term investment of capital in areas such as crops, drainage, infrastructure and related facilities and services to produce, store or process specialty crops.
- (PPS, 2020)

Water resource system: A system consisting of ground water features and areas and surface water features (including shoreline areas), and hydrologic functions, which provide the water resources necessary to sustain healthy aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems and human water consumption. The water resource system will comprise key hydrologic features and key hydrologic areas. (A Place to Grow, 2019)

References

A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe

<https://files.ontario.ca/mmah-greater-golden-horseshoe-place-to-grow-english-15may2019.pdf>

Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) Guidelines

[https://www.halton.ca/Repository/Agricultural-Impact-Assessment-\(AIA\)-Guidelines](https://www.halton.ca/Repository/Agricultural-Impact-Assessment-(AIA)-Guidelines)

Farmland Requirements for Ontario's Growing Population to 2036

<https://ontariofarmlandtrust.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Farmland-Requirements-Report-Ontario-Farmland-Trust.pdf>

Greenbelt Plan

www.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=18549

Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas

<http://www.omafr.gov.on.ca/english/landuse/facts/permitteduseguide.pdf>

Halton Region's Strategic Action Plan 2015 – 2018

<https://www.halton.ca/Repository/Halton-Region-Strategic-Action-Plan>

Implementation Procedures for the Agricultural System in Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe

<http://www.omafr.gov.on.ca/english/landuse/imp2019.pdf>

In the Zone: Housing, Human Rights and Municipal Planning

<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/zone-housing-human-rights-and-municipal-planning>

Niagara Escarpment Plan

https://files.ontario.ca/appendix_-_niagara_escarpment_plan_2017_-_oc-10262017.pdf

On-Farm Business Guidelines

<https://www.halton.ca/Repository/On-Farm-Business-Guidelines>

Planning Act

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90p13>

Provincial Draft Agricultural Impact Assessment

<http://www.omafr.gov.on.ca/english/landuse/aiagd.pdf>

Rural Agricultural Strategy

https://www.halton.ca/getmedia/0767fc9b-eeca-4400-adeb-606acb47f280/LPS-Rural_Agricultural_Strategy.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf

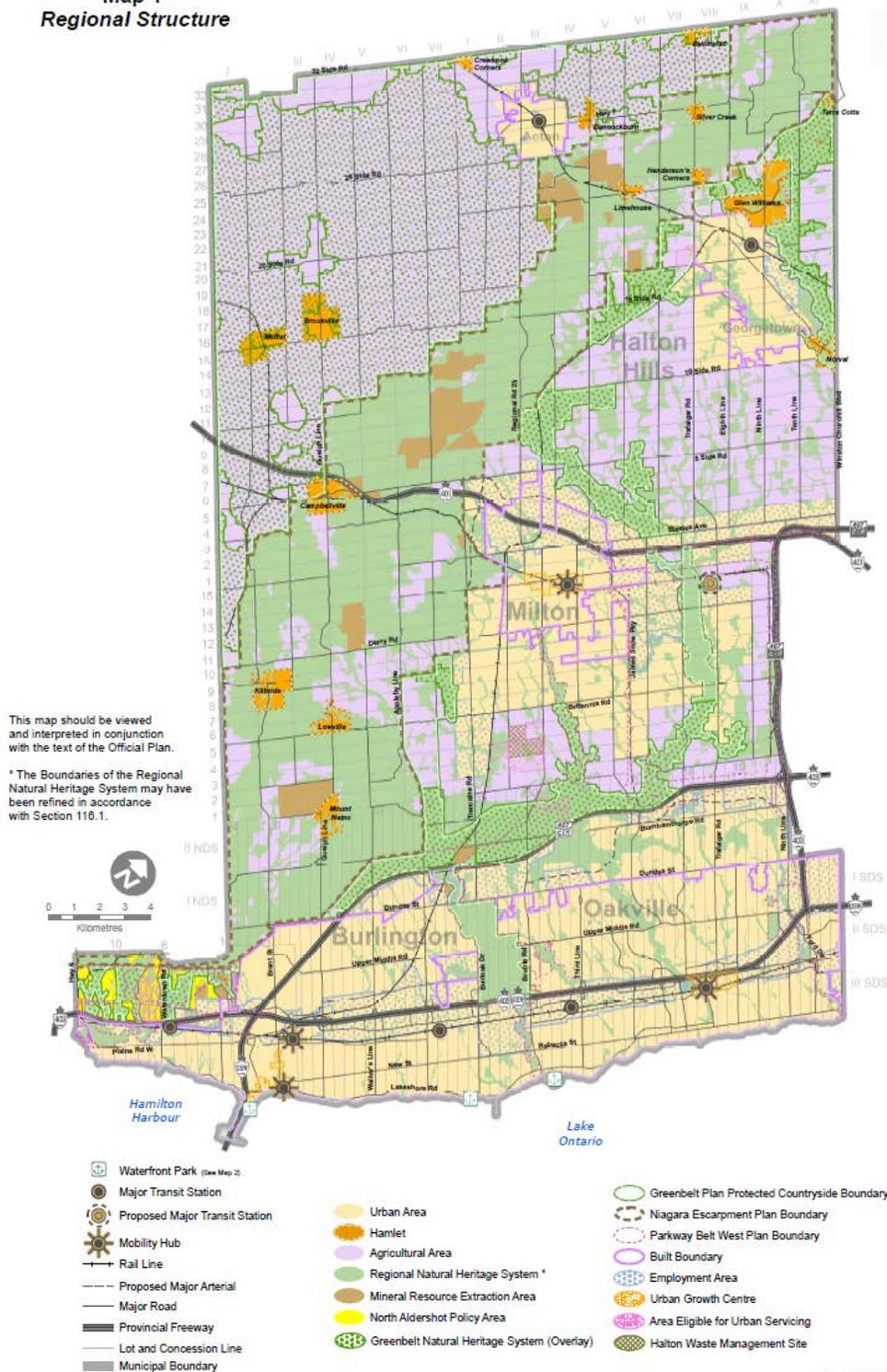
Rural Agricultural Strategy Background Report

https://www.halton.ca/getmedia/391c53f1-3297-4d58-abcf-306f86a1defa/LPS-Rural_Agriculture_Strategy_Background_Report.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf

Appendix

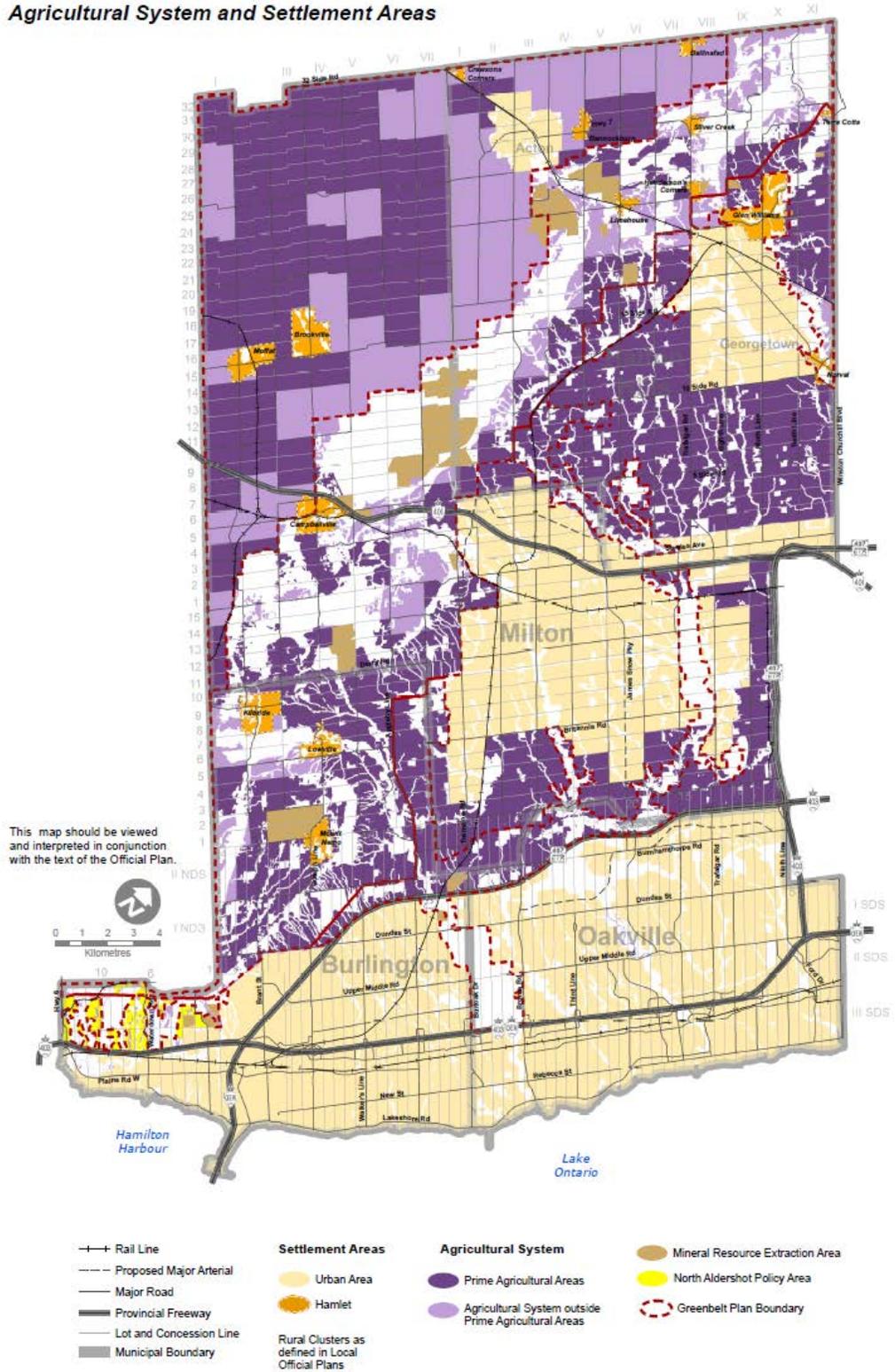
Appendix 1 – Regional Official Plan Maps – Map 1 and Map 1E

**Map 1
Regional Structure**



June 19, 2018

Map 1E
Agricultural System and Settlement Areas



June 19, 2018

Appendix 2 – Discussion Questions

We would love to have your feedback on options discussed around the Rural and Agricultural System in Halton. Here is a summary of reflection questions posed throughout the discussion paper. Please take a moment to answer these questions and provide your valuable insight into these issues:

1. Mapping options

- A. *Should the updated ROP designate prime agricultural areas with a separate and unique land use designation?*
- B. *Are there any additional pros and cons that could be identified for any of the options?*
- C. *Do you have a preferred mapping option? If so, why?*

2. Agriculture-related uses

- A. *Should the ROP permit the agriculture-related uses as outlined in the Guideline on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas in its entirety?*
- B. *What additional conditions or restrictions should be required for any agriculture-related uses?*
- C. *Should some uses only be permitted in the Rural Area as opposed to Prime Agricultural Lands?*

3. On-farm diversified uses

- A. *Should the ROP permit on-farm diversified uses as outlined in the Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas in its entirety?*
- B. *What additional conditions or restrictions should be required for any on-farm diversified uses?*
- C. *The Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas limit on-farm diversified uses to no more than 2 percent of the farm property on which the uses are located to a maximum of 1 ha. As well, the gross floor area of buildings used for on-farm diversified uses is limited (e.g. 20 percent of the 2 percent). Are these the appropriate size limitations for Halton farms?*

- 4. *To what extent should the updated ROP permit cemeteries in:*
 - A) *Urban areas*
 - B) *Rural areas*
 - C) *Prime agricultural areas*

Explain the criteria e.g. factors that are important to you, that should be considered when evaluating cemetery applications for each?

- 5. *Do the AIA policy requirements in the ROP sufficiently protect agricultural operations in the Prime Agricultural Area and Rural Area? If not, what additional requirements do you think are needed?*

- 6. *Should the requirements for an AIA be included in any other new or existing ROP policies?*

- 7. *Should special needs housing be permitted outside of urban areas and under what conditions?*

- 8. *Are there any additional considerations or trends that Halton Region should review in terms of the Rural and Agricultural System component of the ROP?*
