

Policy Brief:

Agriculture and Rural Development

Rural areas, generally characterized as having large lots and low density development, include all lands located outside of the built-up portion of a city. These lands are mostly serviced by on-site wells and septic systems. The Rural Area is composed of at least four distinct parts:

1. The area adjacent to the urban part of the city.
2. The airport area, which also includes numerous shoreline developments.
3. The aggregate area located at the base of the Precambrian Shield line.
4. The Precambrian uplands area located above the Precambrian Shield line.

In order to prevent premature outward development and incompatible activities in proximity to each other, to reserve the land for future uses, and protect environmentally sensitive lands, provincial policies only permit "limited" residential development in rural areas.

A New Economic Engine in the Rural Areas

In addition to accommodating long term urban growth, rural areas also have the potential to accommodate future developments that require large and affordable lots, such as solar farms.

What might the next development requiring a large and affordable piece of property be?

Rural areas also have substantial volume of sand and gravel deposits, which could see increased market demand in the future. Gravel pits and quarries require large tracts of land and adequate

separation from nearby sensitive land uses, such as residential uses. Therefore, not only would each residential severance reduce the overall size of a parcel, but the creation of a new sensitive land use would impact the ability for gravel pits to open or expand.

Rural areas encompass 74% of the total land mass, yet only contain 12% of all lots in the City.

Agriculture also has a bright future in the north. Farming is the quintessential rural land use requiring large tracts of land and adequate separation from nearby sensitive uses. With soaring land prices in Southern Ontario, many farmers have looked north. The Mennonites have sought the cheaper pastures of the north and relocated to the region, bringing unique farming practices and products. In fact, they indicated that the agricultural lands east of the Sault, had been more productive than originally anticipated.

Demand for locally sourced food is also on the rise, as it is often fresher as well as grown with fewer chemicals and fertilizers, and not transported large distances from farm to table. Smaller farms located closer to markets are more environmentally sustainable than very large farms located at significant distances from markets.

The agriculture industry can also lead to numerous spin-offs and value added activities that can further bolster the local economy. A thriving agricultural sector develops a strong sense of local pride and tourism related activities, such as the Cherry Festival in Traverse City and various pancake breakfasts and tours offered by local maple syrup producers.

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Much like other rural land uses, agricultural activities can be significantly impacted by unchecked rural residential development. Every new rural residential lot makes a larger rural lot with agricultural potential smaller and creates a new nearby sensitive land use that can impact a farmer's ability to have livestock. Current provincial regulations require all new and expanding livestock facilities to be a specified distance away from all nearby dwelling units.

At present, small scale farming is not necessarily profitable. Some local farmers have been forced to sever a portion of their lot and sell it for residential uses to generate revenues in order to keep the farm in operation. Current Official Plan and Zoning regulations allow for on-site markets where farmers can sell produce and the City has supported local farmers markets, which have seen increased success in recent years.

There is more to do! Other jurisdictions permit non-agricultural related uses to occur in association with an active farm. Things like contractor's yards, woodworking and public storage have been expressly permitted to give small scale farmers an opportunity to generate additional revenues. As part of the new Official Plan, the City will be looking at allowing a number of appropriate non-agricultural related uses in association with active agricultural uses.

The Algoma District contains 280 animal raising and crop yielding farms. Farm revenues were the third highest in Northern Ontario.

The Rural Residence

Impacts associated with rural residential development is a recurring theme. Large rural residential lots are divided into smaller lots with less potential for future developments. In addition, the rural residence is classified as a "sensitive use" which can impact the ability for agricultural and aggregate uses to locate or expand. The relatively low density of rural residential development is also more costly to service than that of urban residential development.

The average lot size in the rural areas is 21 times larger than in the urban area.

All that said, there is certainly a place for rural residential development, albeit on a limited basis. The opportunity for a rural residential lifestyle is appealing to many, hence limited development will continue to be supported. Current regulations allow for the creation of two new rural residential lots, plus the remaining parcel. By not impacting existing land uses, such as agriculture and aggregate extraction, this policy intends to balance the need to accommodate some rural residential growth while maintaining the future development potential and character of the area.



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