



**Meeting Date:** June 18, 2025

**Prepared By:** Stephanie Bergman, Manager of Planning and Development

**Submitted by:** Stephanie Bergman, Manager of Planning and Development

**Report No:** PLA-38-2025

**Subject:** County Official Plan Review Engagement

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**Recommendation:**

THAT Report PLA-38-2025 re: County Official Plan Review Engagement be received;

AND THAT staff be directed to provide input on the identified areas of interest to the County of Middlesex for consideration as part of the ongoing County Official Plan Review.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this report is to provide a status update on the County's Official Plan Review process and highlight opportunities for further engagement.

**Background:**

The current Middlesex County Official Plan was approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in July 2023. The Plan establishes an upper-tier policy framework to which lower tier official plans must conform.

The County initiated [the Official Plan Review](#) at a Special Meeting of County Council in January, 2025. In response to the Notice of Special Meeting circulated to the Municipality of Middlesex Centre, staff sent a letter (Attachment 1) requesting that Middlesex Centre be fully engaged throughout the Official Plan Review process.

The topics to be considered through the Review include:

- Changes in Provincial legislation and policy, including the new Provincial Planning Statement 2024;
- Transportation;
- Agriculture;
- Population and Housing Forecasts;
- Drinking Water Source Protection;

- Natural Heritage;
- Economy and Strategic Direction;
- Development;
- Housing;
- Additional considerations;

The County has engaged a team of consultants to assist in undertaking the review. The Review will result in a County Official Plan Amendment, which will be forwarded to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for approval. The targeted date for adoption is not clear.

### **Analysis:**

Ensuring that the County Plan is consistent with the new Provincial Planning Statement is an essential first step in providing a degree of policy certainty to area municipalities. Middlesex Centre staff have been following the progress of the Review, and have identified several areas that Middlesex Centre may wish to provide further input on, as outlined below:

#### Maintain Flexibility and Local Decision-Making

The County Official Plan provides a policy framework and directions which are then implemented at the local level through the Middlesex Centre Official Plan as well as the Zoning Bylaw. The current County Official Plan contains a certain degree of flexibility for local decision-making. For example, population projections included in the County Official Plan are intended to be guidelines, and changes to these projections at the local level does not require an amendment to the County Plan. This level of flexibility should be maintained within the Official Plan Review to allow for appropriate level of local decision-making.

#### Rural Land Mapping/Economic Development Opportunities:

Prime Agricultural Lands, defined within the Provincial Planning Statement as specialty crop areas and/or Canada Land Inventory Class 1, 2, and 3 lands, predominate in Middlesex Centre and throughout the County. Prime Agricultural Areas are defined as prime agricultural lands, Class 4 through 7 lands and additional areas with a local concentration of farms which exhibit characteristics of ongoing agriculture.

The County Official Plan contains a policy that all land located outside of settlement areas is designated as prime agricultural area. The alternative to this policy approach would be a mapping exercise to specifically identify prime agricultural areas, which may identify areas of the municipality that may be better suited to more transitional rural uses.

This has the potential to welcome new employment and leisure opportunities within the Municipality. For example, municipal staff receive inquiries nearly daily

for sites for different forms of recreation and leisure developments, such as spas, recreation facilities, etc., which would generally not be permitted outside of settlement areas, regardless of whether or not the sites are used for agricultural purposes. Potential areas may include areas along Gainsborough Road adjacent to the City of London boundary, and similarly areas along Medway Road east of Adelaide Street abutting the City of London boundary. These are main arterial roadways that may not be classified as prime agricultural land, and where there may be an opportunity to support new assessment growth that would otherwise not be possible due to the current framework.

It should be noted that the City of London has proposed an expansion to their [Urban Growth Boundary](#) in these locations. Exploring the agricultural designation may support more appropriate transitional land uses, while also supporting economic development opportunities for the Municipality and County as a whole.

The County Official Plan Review is the appropriate time to ensure the current policy framework reflects the goals and objectives of the Municipality and County. The appropriate review and analysis would need to be undertaken prior to consideration of any changes.

#### Next Steps

Should Council wish to proceed with exploring the potential opportunities, staff would follow up with the County to request these items be addressed as part of the ongoing County Official Plan Review process.

#### **Financial Implications:**

Exploring options for protecting agricultural lands while supporting additional economic development opportunities has the potential for increasing and diversifying Middlesex Centre's tax base.

#### **Strategic Plan:**

This matter aligns with following strategic priorities:

- Balanced Growth
- Vibrant Local Economy

#### **Attachments:**

Attachment 1: County OP s. 26 Notice Response Letter