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To: Mayor and Council

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RE: County of Essex Agricultural Lot Size Study – Council Feedback

Report No.: PDS-2017-015

AIM

To review and discuss the key points of the County of Essex Agricultural Lot Size Study with Kingsville Council and gather feedback from Kingsville Council for review and consideration by the Steering Committee.

BACKGROUND

During the review of the recently approved County of Essex Official Plan (2014), it was identified that there were inconsistent minimum sizes related to the creation of agricultural parcels throughout the County. The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs requested that the County include a 40 hectare minimum agricultural lot size. However, as part of the Official Plan review, County Council determined that a separate analysis was required to assist the County in determining the most appropriate minimum parcel size for all types of agricultural lots on a County-wide basis. In the interim, the existing lower-tier Official Plan agricultural lot creation policies would remain in effect. The Jones Consulting Group and AgPlan Ltd. were retained by the County to complete the study. The Manager of Planning Services and the local planners from each of the lower tier municipalities, formed a Steering Committee to review the progress of the study and provide guidance throughout the project.

Upon completion of the research and analysis, the study recommended that in the absence of conclusive evidence that smaller agricultural lot sizes would improve the agricultural industry in the County, and/or maintain flexibility for future changes in the type or size of agricultural operations, that the Provincial standard of 40 hectares (100 acres), as recommended by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, be maintained. The Steering Committee reviewed the study at length with the consultants, and concurs with its methodology, conclusions and recommendations.

DISCUSSION

After presentation of the conclusions and recommendations to County Council a great deal of discussion took place. There appeared to be some misunderstanding about the recommendations along with a lack of consensus from County Council about implementation of the recommended 40 ha (100 ac.) minimum parcel size. Based on discussion with the Steering Committee and a review of the Council meeting minutes the conclusion that was drawn was a need to review a number of the key points that the study made (See Appendix 'A') with each of the local Councils. From this review it is hoped that a discussion will occur that will provide addition local input which the Steering Committee will review with the County Planner and then a supplementary report will be presented to County Council.

Kingsville Council may recall that in late 2015 and early 2016 the Kingsville Comprehensive Zoning By-law underwent a significant review and update by way of a housekeeping amendment. One of the key items addressed in that amendment was the fact that the Kingsville Official Plan approved in 2012 required a minimum lot area of the creation of a new farm lot of 40 ha (100 ac.) This unfortunately was not reflected in the Comprehensive Zoning By-law approved in 2014 which only required a minimum of 20 ha. (50 ac.). As part of the amendment the by-law was updated to be consistent with the Official Plan. While this did spark some brief discussion Council ultimately approved the amendment. The conclusions and recommendations of the lot size study have simply reinforced that Council made the appropriate decision.

In reviewing the minutes of the County Council meeting it is my professional opinion that much of the push back on supporting the 40 ha (100 ac.) parcel size for new farm lots is based on an outdated understanding of the agricultural operations, what the true nature of most farm split severance requests are and the fact that local towns and municipalities generally dislike most provincial direction in the establishment of local policies. Unfortunately, planning takes a great deal of direction from the provincial level however I do understand and often share Council's frustration at times.

While I generally agree with the points that are outlined in the attached memo (Appendix 'A') I believe the most important point that Council needs to understand is the extremely limited nature of large farm parcels 40 ha.(100 ac.) or larger in the County. These remaining parcels need to be treated no differently than any other limited resource. We protect trees, birds, animals, wetlands, open space, aggregate, the loose of productive farm land and other natural resources. The County as a whole and Kingsville itself have an existing wide variety of farm parcel sizes available, there is no added need or competitive disadvantage to any Town or Municipality to set a higher expectation and preserve what few large farm parcels remain.

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN

There is no specific link to the Strategic Plan however support for maintaining a 40 ha (100 ac.) agricultural parcel size does support preservation of the agricultural land resources in Kingsville which in turn supports the ongoing long-term health and viability of the local agricultural economy.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are no financial considerations raised by this report or recommendations.

CONSULTATIONS

Kingsville Council as part of the report presentation.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council receive the attached report outlining the rationale for support of a 40 ha (100 ac.) new farm parcel lot size minimum and provide input to the Manager of Planning & Development Services to share with the County of Essex Agricultural Lot Size Study Steering Committee for report back to Essex County Council.

Robert Brown

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Peggy Van Mierlo-West

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Chief Administrative Officer