

## APPENDIX 'A'

### MEMO

DATE: April 12, 2017

FROM: County of Essex Agricultural Lot Size Study Steering Committee

TO: Local Municipal Councils

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.

The study, along with an administrative report, was presented to County Council at its meeting of March 1, 2017. The report recommended that County Council authorize administration to prepare an amendment to the County of Essex Official Plan that would implement the recommendations of the study. After considerable discussion, County Council requested that the local planners have an opportunity to discuss the study with their local Councils, and that the planners then return to the Steering Committee with comments for consideration.

The Steering Committee has prepared this memo in an effort to ensure that there is consistent information and details about the study being provided to each local Council. This will ensure that the conclusions and recommendations of the study are correctly interpreted and understood.

The following items are considered key points by the Steering Committee:

1. The study is comprehensive, scientifically based, and developed on sound planning principles with current data from respected sources.
2. The study recommendation for a 40 hectare minimum lot size applies only to lot creation in the agricultural designation. This does not imply that every lot being used for agriculture must now be a minimum of 40 hectares in size.
3. The proposed minimum lot size will have no impact on the ability of any individual to begin or continue a farming operation of any kind (including greenhouses, fruits and vegetables, cash crops, etc.) on any of the thousands of existing farm parcels of many shapes and sizes located throughout the County. There are a sufficient number of lots in varying sizes, for every type of agriculture, without requiring further fragmentation of the lot fabric.
4. There are almost 19,000 existing lots in the agricultural designation in Essex County. Less than 3%, or only 520 lots, are 40 hectares (100 acres) in size or larger.
5. The average farm operation size for all farming types, including greenhouses, is increasing and the principal crop in Essex County continues to be field crops, which requires larger land areas.
6. High-tech farming operations are becoming more common, and are generally established on larger holdings. Having to assemble several smaller parcels to create a large enough holding creates an impediment in the ability to attract these types of operations to the County. The availability of larger parcels provides the County with a competitive advantage.
7. The existence of additional smaller lots creates competition between farmers and non-farmers, thereby artificially escalating the price per hectare and results in an impediment to the agricultural community.
8. The cumulative effect of more severances is undoubtedly more residential uses in the agricultural area. There is an economic impact on the municipality through increased pressure for the provision of services over a wider area.
9. The protection of agricultural land has been evolving since the establishment of The Foodland Guidelines in 1978. Subsequent provincial policy through to today's Provincial Policy Statement has shifted to increased levels of protection through increased restrictions on severances.
10. The Provincial Policy Statement discourages lot creation in prime agricultural areas in order to maintain flexibility for future changes in the type or size of agricultural operations. In our view, the question is not whether smaller lot sizes can be justified, but rather, whether protecting larger lot sizes better protects agriculture in the County.

11. Agricultural land is a resource with an economic value. There are long term implications to that value depending on how the resource is managed. There is a need to protect the public interest and the public good by ensuring flexibility for agriculture in the future.
12. Agricultural land is a depleting resource that needs to be protected. Protection policies have evolved in the past for natural heritage lands, wetlands, woodlots and agricultural lands. A mix of agricultural lot sizes allows for better protection and preservation of the resource. Increasing the number of lots will not afford this protection.
13. The consultant undertook an extensive public engagement process to solicit the views of various local and provincial farming organizations, as well as hosting an open house in an attempt to obtain the views and opinions of the general public.
14. Any Official Plan policy can be reviewed and revisited. If the study recommendation was adopted through an Official Plan amendment, the impact of the policy can be monitored over the course of time and discussed during the next mandatory review and update of the Official Plan.
15. It is recommended that the County prepare a draft Official Plan amendment that reflects the conclusions and recommendations contained in the study, and proceed through a Planning Act process that would include holding a public meeting to hear comments about the proposed amendment.

The undersigned members of the Steering Committee (by the "Original Signed" notation) support the conclusions and the recommendations contained in the Essex County Agricultural Lot Size Study.

**ORIGINAL SIGNED**

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William King  
County of Essex

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Ray Duhamel  
Jones Consulting

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Larry Silani  
Town of LaSalle

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Allen Burgess  
Town of LaSalle

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Brian Hillman  
Town of Tecumseh

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Chad Jeffery  
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Danielle Truax  
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