

JULY 9, 2025

PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

REPORT NO. PAC-003-2025

**FOLLOW-UP TO LOCAL MUNICIPAL REVIEW OF DRAFT AGRICULTURAL AREA
MAPPING**

**CHERIE MILLS
MANAGER OF PLANNING SERVICES**

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are four options, with the first three options being from Report No. PAC-001-2025 (March 5, 2025), presented to Committee for consideration:

Option 1

THAT the Planning Advisory Committee recommends that the properties identified by local municipalities for review and reconsideration, as reviewed and recommended by staff, be removed from the Agricultural Area designation and that the updated Agricultural Area mapping and the Draft Official Plan Amendment be presented to the Committee, as part of the statutory public meeting; **or,**

Option 2

THAT the Planning Advisory Committee recommends a transfer of \$80,000 from the Legal/Planning Reserve to retain a consultant to undertake sensitivity testing of some of the mapping variables used in the methodology for preparing the initial Agricultural Area mapping, as outlined in Report No. PAC-004-2024 (November 2024); **or,**

Option 3

THAT the Planning Advisory Committee recommends that the Agricultural Area Review be deferred and considered as part of the Counties Official Plan Update initiated in 2026; **or,**

Option 4

THAT the Planning Advisory Committee recommends that all of the properties identified by the local municipalities for review and consideration in Report No. PAC-001-2025 (March 2025) and all the properties identified by the Municipality of North Grenville in Report No. PAC-003-2025 (July 2025), be removed from the Agricultural

Area designation and that the updated mapping and the Draft Official Plan Amendment be presented to the Committee, as part of the statutory public meeting.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

For Options 1 or 4, there will be costs associated with the advertising of the statutory public meeting for the Official Plan Amendment and, if appealed, there will be legal and potentially planning consulting costs to defend Council's position at the Ontario Land Tribunal. Should Option 2 (methodological testing) proceed, authorization to use money from the Planning Reserve (currently at \$348,873) would be required. Option 3 has no cost at this time, but may result in higher costs for the Counties Official Plan Update.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Pillar 1: Invest in roads, bridges, infrastructure, and sustainable growth. **Goal 1.2:** Implement a balanced approach to planning; respectful of the reality our urban, rural, and agricultural roots. **Initiative 1.2.1:** Complete Ministry requirements for finalization of background studies required for the County Official Plan. **Tasks:** Undertaking Agricultural Area Review Study and creating a comprehensive public consultation program for each Phase of the study including notifying each impacted agricultural land owner of changes.

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

The Planning Act, the Provincial Planning Statement and the Counties Official Plan have land use planning policies encouraging the minimization of negative impacts of climate change. Preparing for the impacts of a changing climate includes maintaining agricultural lands, which are a non-renewable resource, encouraging opportunities to support local food, and promoting the sustainability of agri-food and agri-product businesses by protecting agricultural resources, minimizing land use conflicts, and supporting on-farm diversified uses.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

This report can be provided in alternative accessible formats on request. Under the Planning Act, accessibility is a provincial interest that the Counties shall have regard to for all facilities, services and matters to which the Act applies.

COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

This report has been posted on-line as part of the Planning Advisory Committee agenda. There is a dedicated study webpage on the Counties' website that is kept up-to-date and there has been a comprehensive consultation program for the Agricultural Area Review.

BACKGROUND

The objective of designating lands as Agricultural Area is to protect and preserve predominantly class 1 to 3 soils of a large enough land size to support viable agricultural operations now and in the future while limiting incompatible land uses.

Over the last few months, Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) have continued to contemplate the options for moving forward with the Agricultural Area Review, while seeking to resolve outstanding Committee concerns. PAC recommended deferral of the mapping options report in November 2024 (Report PAC-004-2024 - Options for Agricultural Mapping), and a 90-day deferral of the March 2025 supplementary report which discussed municipal consultations and addressed other PAC concerns identified at the November meeting, such as the amount of remaining land for potential development (by overlaying OP schedules), the status of the aggregate study, study consultation undertaken, and constraints to future settlement area expansion (Report No. PAC-001-2025). Subsequent to these reports and continued discussions with the Township of Edwardsburgh Cardinal and the Municipality of North Grenville, two local municipalities with outstanding concerns, staff are proposing four options for PAC consideration.

DISCUSSION/ALTERNATIVES

The four options presented, reflect the various directions provided by the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) and ideas identified by staff for moving the study forward. Report No. PAC-001-2025, from March 2025, is located in Attachment 4 to this report with the November 2024 Report (PAC-004-2024) found as an attachment to that report.

The first three options presented to the Committee are carried forward from the March report. A brief summary of Options 2 and 3 is below. Option 1 (staff's review of municipal requests) has been updated from the March report based on staff's review of the Municipality of North Grenville input and a new Option 4 (municipal requests) for Committee consideration is presented.

Option 2- Undertake Sensitivity Testing of Some Mapping Variables

Option 2 is to retain another consultant to undertake sensitivity testing of some of the mapping variables such as block size and the scoring threshold used in the methodology for preparing the initial agricultural mapping. Once the sensitivity testing is completed, the mapping scenarios would be reviewed, compared and potentially a preferred mapping scenario endorsed by PAC/Council. The sensitivity testing process was estimated at a consultant's cost of approximately \$80,000 with a potential timeline of 4 to 6 months.

Option 3 – Defer the Agricultural Area Review until the County Official Plan Update

Option 3 is to defer the Agricultural Area Review and undertake the updated mapping as part of the Official Plan Update to be initiated in 2026. Option 3 does not meet the Ministry's policy direction that the agricultural study be completed before the County Official Plan Update. It is noted approval of an Official Plan Amendment can be done by Counties Council whereas an Official Plan Update will require Provincial Approval.

Options 1 and 4 - Continued Local Municipal Consultations and Proposed Mapping Revisions

In response to the direction for further municipal consultation, the supplementary report (Report PAC-001-2025 in Attachment 4) advised that prior to the report deadline, comments were received from 9 local municipalities of which 6 municipalities did not identify specific properties for review (refer to Attachment 1).

Staff reviewed the municipally identified properties recommended for removal in the Township of Edwardsburgh Cardinal, the Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands and the Township of Rideau Lakes according to the criteria of the LEAR based Agricultural Area Review such as soil type, agricultural lands in production and fragmentation by residential uses. The staff recommendations on each request are found in Attachment 1 to this report (detailed maps of each property are found in Attachment 4 to this report).

The requests of the Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands and the Township of Rideau Lakes, were recommended by staff to be removed from the Agricultural Area mapping, most often due to being small existing residential lots, being not farmed, and located on the fringe or edge of the Agricultural Area designation.

For the Township of Edwardsburgh Cardinal, there were two large areas that were requested by the Township to be removed from the Agricultural Area mapping to

enable future expansion of the settlement areas in Johnstown and Cardinal. The Township requested the lands not be designated primarily due to infrastructure improvements that have been made to accommodate future growth south of Highway 401 and their concern adding another layer of approval may constrain economic growth. The original Township submission is found in the March report which is Attachment 4 to this report. The staff report notes these requested areas are much larger than Johnstown and Cardinal, and there are already rural lands adjacent to Johnstown and approximately 50 hectares in Cardinal to accommodate growth. Further, in these areas, the soils are generally Class 2 and study criteria scores range from 67 to 77.

Staff recognize the need to assess potential growth needs and recommended that these areas be referred to the Growth Management Strategy (GMS) for coordinated consideration for future settlement area expansion in the Counties. If needed and selected as a growth area in the Counties, and as settlement expansion areas over agricultural lands are permitted, where required, the Official Plan Amendment(s) for creation of the Settlement Area expansion(s) over agricultural area lands could be completed.

There are three other areas that the Township recommended for review. After applying the study criteria, one of these areas was also recommended by staff for removal, one area was recommended for removal with minor changes to keep a small portion of currently farmed lands along the road in the Agricultural Area designation while removing another small area along the river (a logical boundary) to give the farmer rural severance potential, and additionally, the third area was recommended for removal, with staff further recommending the removal of several other isolated areas that will no longer meet the 250-hectare minimum block size as per the study.

Subsequent to the March deferral, in further discussions, the Township of Edwardsburgh Cardinal advised that they only support the removal of all 5 areas requested by the Township, without the staff recommendations, with the exception of the Township supporting the modification of the area near the river. The Township is not in favour of removing the isolated parcels that no longer meet the study's 250-hectare minimum block size (approximately 99 hectares). Removing the five areas as recommended by the Township will account for approximately 13.4% of the proposed and existing Agricultural Area designated lands in the Township and is approximately 3.9% of all lands in the Township. The existing Agricultural Area designated lands are not impacted by this exclusion.

A map that shows the current and recommended Agricultural Area designation lands and identifies the 5 areas the Township has requested be removed is attached (Attachment 2) and is reflected in Option 4.

The Municipality of North Grenville Council have endorsed that the new Agricultural Area designation lands in the Municipality be setback 300 metres from County and municipal roads. The Municipality suggests the 300 metre setback protects larger tracts of lands deemed to be agricultural (as per the objectives of LEAR) while facilitating existing and future residential use of lands within the 300 metre exemption setback.

These buffer lands (1375 ha.) will account for approximately 12.2% of the amount of proposed and existing Agricultural Area designated lands and is approximately 3.8% of all lands in the Municipality. As a result of the buffer, there will be areas that will no longer meet the study's 250-hectare minimum block size (approximately 189 hectares). The existing Agricultural Area designated lands are not impacted by this exclusion. A map showing the lands impacted by the buffer is attached (Attachment 3) and is reflected in Option 4.

Staff reviewed the Municipality of North Grenville request against the criteria of the LEAR based Agricultural Area Review such as soil type, lands in agricultural production and fragmentation by residential uses. Staff are recommending that these areas remain in the Agricultural Area designation. Upon review, it was found that although many of the lands were generally located on the edges of agricultural blocks that the soil classifications were mainly classes 2 and 3 with some class 5 and study criteria scores greater than 60 on the frontages of larger lots with many of the lands being part of an existing farm. While providing a 300 metre setback along some roads may allow for further severances, from a planning perspective, it will also lead to increased fragmentation of agricultural areas and conflict between agricultural and residential uses.

Attachment 1, which reflects Option 1 to this report, which also appeared in the March report, has been updated to add the Municipality of North Grenville request and staff's review.

In conclusion, from the analysis of all properties identified by local municipalities for review, the recommendation in Option 1, as supported by the criteria of the study, is preferred by planning staff. However, other options, including Options 2 and 3 have been carried forward from previously deferred staff reports, and a new Option 4, that

reflects the recent requests by local municipalities, have been provided for Committee consideration.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Updated Summary of Municipal Comments Received

Attachment 2 – Map of Township of Edwardsburgh Cardinal Requested Changes

Attachment 3 – Map of Municipality of North Grenville Requested Changes

Attachment 4 - Report No. PAC-001-2025: Supplementary Report to Report PAC-004-2024 (Options for Agricultural Mapping)

The report set out above has been reviewed and the information verified by the individuals listed below.

CHERIE MILLS
MANAGER, PLANNING SERVICES

JUNE 23, 2025
DATE

BILL GUY
INTERIM DIRECTOR, PUBLIC WORKS

JUNE 24, 2025
DATE

AL HORSMAN
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

JUNE 27, 2025
DATE