Township of Southwold New Official Plan
Resources Background Report

Agriculture
Mineral Resources
Natural Heritage
Cultural Heritage and Archaeological Resources
Infrastructure
Protecting Public Health and Safety

PREPARED BY

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Update of 2007 and 2008 Reports
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 Agriculture
   1.1 Introduction
   1.2 Provincial Policy Statement 2005
   1.3 Overview of Agriculture in Southwold
   1.4 Soil Capability
   1.5 Trends in Agriculture
   1.6 Issues Identified in Public Consultation
   1.7 Policy Direction
       1.7.1 Severances
       1.7.2 On-Farm Economic Diversification
       1.7.3 Environment and Agriculture
   1.8 Summary

2.0 Mineral Resources

3.0 Natural Heritage

4.0 Cultural Heritage and Archaeological Resources

5.0 Infrastructure
   5.1 Sewer and Water
   5.2 Transportation

6.0 Protecting Public Health and Safety

7.0 Summary

Figures

Figure 1  Crop Production in Southwold 2006
Figure 2  Livestock Operations in Southwold
Figure 3  Soil Class Map
Figure 4  Farm Sizes in Southwold
Figure 5  Natural Heritage
Figure 6  Infrastructure
Figure 7  Water Systems Improvements
1.0 Agriculture

This agriculture review is a component of the background information needed for the preparation of the updated Township of Southwold Official Plan.

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of the agriculture review is to review current trends and issues in the industry and recommend a policy direction that may be required within the framework of current legislation. This review is intended to serve as the basis for developing planning policies to guide agricultural development in the Township.

1.2 Provincial Policy Statement 2005 (PPS)

The Province of Ontario has consistently identified the protection of agricultural land use as a matter of provincial interest. The PPS requires that municipal planning decisions be consistent with the policies it lists, which includes Section 2.3.3 - Agriculture, reprinted in it's entirely below.

"2.3 Agriculture

2.3.1 Prime agricultural areas shall be protected for long-term use for agriculture.

Prime agricultural areas are areas where prime agricultural lands predominate. Specialty crop areas shall be given the highest priority for protection, followed by Classes 1, 2 and 3 soils, in this order of priority.

2.3.2 Planning authorities shall designate specialty crop areas in accordance with evaluation procedures established by the Province, as amended from time to time.

2.3.3 Permitted Uses

2.3.3.1 In prime agricultural areas, permitted uses and activities are: agricultural uses, secondary uses and agriculture-related uses.

Proposed new secondary uses and agriculture-related uses shall be compatible with, and shall not hinder, surrounding agricultural operations. These uses shall be limited in scale, and criteria for these uses shall be included in municipal planning documents as recommended by the Province, or based on municipal approaches which achieve the same objective.

2.3.3.2 In prime agricultural areas, all types, sizes and intensities of agricultural uses and normal farm practices shall be promoted and protected in accordance with provincial standards."
2.3.3.3 New land uses, including the creation of lots, and new or expanding livestock facilities shall comply with the minimum distance separation formulae.

2.3.4 Lot Creation and Lot Adjustments

2.3.4.1 Lot creation in prime agricultural areas is discouraged and may only be permitted for:
   a. agricultural uses, provided that the lots are of a size appropriate for the type of agricultural use(s) common in the area and are sufficiently large to maintain flexibility for future changes in the type or size of agricultural operations;
   b. agriculture-related uses, provided that any new lot will be limited to a minimum size needed to accommodate the use and appropriate sewage and water services;
   c. a residence surplus to a farming operation as a result of farm consolidation, provided that the planning authority ensures that new residential dwellings are prohibited on any vacant remnant parcel of farmland created by the severance. The approach used to ensure that no new residential dwellings are permitted on the remnant parcel may be recommended by the Province, or based on municipal approaches which achieve the same objective; and
   d. infrastructure, where the facility or corridor cannot be accommodated through the use of easements or rights-of-way.

2.3.4.2 Lot adjustments in prime agricultural areas may be permitted for legal or technical reasons.

2.3.4.3 The creation of new residential lots in prime agricultural areas shall not be permitted, except in accordance with policy 2.3.4.1(c).

2.3.5 Removal of Land from Prime Agricultural Areas

2.3.5.1 Planning authorities may only exclude land from prime agricultural areas for:
   a. expansions of or identification of settlement areas in accordance with policy 1.1.3.9;
   b. extraction of minerals, petroleum resources and mineral aggregate resources, in accordance with policies 2.4 and 2.5; and
   c. limited non-residential uses, provided that:
      1. the land does not comprise a specialty crop area;
      2. there is a demonstrated need within the planning horizon provided for in policy 1.1.2 for additional land to be designated to accommodate the proposed use;
      3. there are no reasonable alternative locations which avoid prime agricultural areas; and
      4. there are no reasonable alternative locations in prime agricultural areas with lower priority agricultural lands.
2.3.5.2 Impacts from any new or expanding non-agricultural uses on surrounding agricultural operations and lands should be mitigated to the extent feasible.”

1.3 Overview of Agriculture in Southwold

Agricultural practices in Southwold Township closely reflect those practiced in the region. The predominant crops are corn, soybeans and wheat, while among livestock operations, beef, swine, dairy and poultry are most common.

Corn and soybean production account for the largest portion of land in production within the Township and the larger region. These crops form a significant portion of the 22,457 hectares (55,491 acres) of total cropland usage in Southwold.

Figure 1 - Crop Production in Southwold
- Statistics Canada

Livestock operations in the Township are fairly typical of those across the region, with operations keeping primarily beef cows, horses, dairy cows, chickens and pigs. Trends in agriculture are for the total number of livestock farms to be
reduced, with the total number of animals holding steady or rising. Recent activity in Southwold varies depending on the type of livestock.

Over the last five years in Elgin County, beef and chicken have seen significant growth in terms of the total number of animals in production, with a small drop in the total number of farms reporting production of these animals. Despite these gains, Southwold chicken farms are considerably smaller than the average size across the broader region, as are Southwold dairy farms. Figure 2 shows livestock operations, 2007.

Figure 2 – Livestock Operations in Southwold
While farm sizes for Southwold beef, horse and sheep farms have similar numbers of livestock on average as do the County and region, swine production in the Township is more intense on average than that of the broader region. The 10 reporting swine operations in 2006 recorded a total number of over 15,000 pigs.

Gross farm revenue in Southwold exceeds $55,000,000 annually (second highest in Elgin County). This is an average gross revenue of more than $240,000 for each active farm in the Township, and includes 26 farms with revenues over $500,000 each. Farm capital (farm machinery and equipment, livestock and poultry, land and buildings) in Southwold has an estimated value of $360,000,000.

1.4 Soil Capability

The Canada Land Inventory (CLI) mapping shows the varying potential of a specific area for agricultural production. Figure 3 shows that the majority of lands within the Township are Soil Class 2. These lands have moderate limitations that restrict the range of crops that can be grown in the soil. Very little land within the Township is outside the range of the prime agricultural land classifications of Class 1, 2, and 3. Based on this analysis and discussions with the provincial Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs, the entire Township is considered to be a prime agricultural area for the purposes of the Official Plan.
1.5 Trends in Agriculture

Trends in agricultural activity within the Township of Southwold closely reflect the ongoing changes evident at the regional and Provincial levels. The total number of farms is dropping, matched by increases in average farm areas; the average age of farm operators continues to increase; the percentage of women operators is increasing, although the total number of operators is decreasing.

The major explanation for the growing size of farms in Ontario, is the increased productivity of farm labour. Improvements in technology have made it feasible for a smaller number of farm operators and workers to farm additional land. Smaller farm properties are purchased and consolidated into the larger operations. Elgin County saw the total number of farms drop by 7% from 1,608 to 1,489 between 2001 and 2006.

In seeming conflict with this trend, there was growth in the number of small farms. In Elgin the total number of farms under 70 acres grew 6% to 478. The number of farms between 70 and 559 acres shrank by 18% to a total of 834, while those 660 acres and larger grew by 26% to 177.

FIGURE 4 – FARM SIZES IN SOUTHWOLD

Source: Statistics Canada, 2006