



Town of
East Gwillimbury

DEVELOPMENT AND LEGAL SERVICES REPORT P2008-08

To: Committee of the Whole Council
Date: February 19, 2008
Subject: Countryside Strategy Workshop
Report on the Event and Findings
Origin: Development and Legal Services Department
Policy Planning Branch

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Development and Legal Services Department Report P2008-08 dated February 19 2008, regarding the Town's Countryside Strategy Workshop, be received;
2. THAT the outcome and findings of the break-out sessions from the Countryside Strategy Workshop be referred to the Town's Consolidated Official Plan Review and Update process;
3. THAT a copy of this report be forwarded to the York Region Planning and Development Department as partners in the forum, together with Council's expression of appreciation for their support;
4. THAT a copy of this report be forwarded to all those who attended the Town of East Gwillimbury's first Countryside Strategy Workshop.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with the detailed outcomes of the Countryside Strategy Workshop held November 27, 2007. The workshop was established to discuss and learn about trends and issues impacting the countryside and to identify actions and initiatives to help support the countryside area as part of the Town's overall Official Plan (OP) Review.

BACKGROUND:

The Terms of Reference for the Town's OP Review, which were approved in March 2007, identified the need to create a strategy to address the value of the countryside area in terms of farm-related uses, rural recreational uses and eco-tourism, improving the viability of farming and the protection of agricultural land base.

DISCUSSION:

The Countryside Workshop was held at the Civic Centre on November, 27, 2007. A comprehensive list of attendees is included in the Feedback Report attached as Appendix 1.

Sue Cumming, of Cumming and Company, was retained to engage the community stakeholders in the workshop discussion and facilitate the presentation portion of the workshop.

Mayor James Young opened the workshop in the Council Chambers by bringing greetings from the Town and thanking the attendees for their participation in the workshop. Robin Skinner then provided an overview of the Town's overall OP Review process and associated Countryside Strategy. She highlighted the provincial policy directions as they apply to the countryside area and outlined a few of the themes of the Town's Countryside Strategy, including

- Conformity with the Provincial Legislation (the Greenbelt Plan, Provincial Policy Statement and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan);
- Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment;
- Support for the Rural Economy.

Elbert von Donkersgoed, Executive Director of Greater Toronto Area (GTA) Agriculture Action Committee then gave a presentation on near-urban agriculture with many examples of best practices, new trends and initiatives that are being implemented towards improving the sustainability of near urban agriculture. This was followed by a presentation from Melissa Watkins, Executive Director of Ontario Farmland Trust, who discussed ideas for local food production and initiatives for supporting local farming efforts.

Roundtable discussions followed the presentations in the Holland Landing Room, providing an opportunity for group discussions on improving the viability of agriculture in the town, acceptable farm-related secondary uses, and tourism opportunities.

Forum Feedback

The key points that were frequently noted through the workshop discussions are summarized in 3 main theme areas below:

- Improving the Viability of Agriculture in the Town
- Consideration of Acceptable Farm-related Secondary Uses
- Tourism Opportunities

A comprehensive summary of the input received from the roundtable discussions and heard from the individual attendees is outlined in Sue Cumming's Feedback Report, which is attached as Appendix 1.

Next Steps

Town staff will review all of the comments and ideas heard at the workshop and take them into consideration as part of the policy work Town staff will be undertaking with respect to the Countryside, in consultation with York Region staff and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH). The findings of this workshop will help provide policy input as part of the Town's Greenbelt Conformity exercise.

Town staff will review all of the comments and try to accommodate a majority of the input received from key stakeholders. However, the range of uses and permissions identified in the attached Feedback Report have to be reviewed in accordance with the Provincial Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

As sponsors for the event, the costs of the forum were absorbed by the York Region Planning and Development Department, including the fees associated with securing the facilitator. This project did not require the commitment of any funds from the Town aside from the in-kind contribution of Town facilities to host the event together with staff support.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

The Countryside Strategy and workshop is aligned with the fourth Strategic Pillar of the Strategic Plan, Managing Growth to Ensure a Sustainable Community. It specifically refers to "continuing to support the agricultural and rural economy".

NEED FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Countryside Strategy Workshop involved an extensive consultation process where stakeholders and leaders from the Town's countryside area were invited to attend the forum and provide input.

ATTACHMENTS

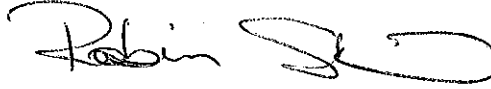
Appendix 1 – Sue Cumming's Countryside Workshop Feedback Report

Prepared by:



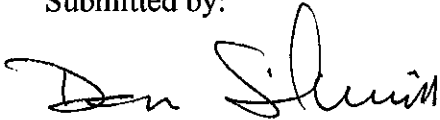
Robin Skinner, B.E.S.
Environmental Planner

Recommended by:



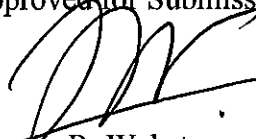
per Dan Stone, MCIP, RPP,
Manager of Policy Planning

Submitted by:



Don Sinclair, General Manager
Development and Legal Services

Approved for Submission:



Thomas R. Webster
Chief Administrative Officer

Encl.
(February 2008)



Town of
East Gwillimbury



Town of East Gwillimbury Official Plan Review COUNTRYSIDE WORKSHOP FEEDBACK REPORT

This report has been prepared by the independent facilitator. It is not intended as a verbatim account and is provided here as a record of the input.

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APPENDIX 1

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Town of East Gwillimbury

Countryside Strategy Workshop FEEDBACK REPORT

1. CONTEXT

The Town of East Gwillimbury is undertaking the review of its Official Plan to ensure sustainability as the community grows. The Official Plan Review will emphasize sustainable development, environmental design, employment land allocation and conform to the Greenbelt Plan and the Provincial "Places to Grow" Growth Plan. Key to the Town's future is planning for the important role of the countryside area. The Town of East Gwillimbury and the Region of York held a workshop on November 27, 2007 to discuss and learn about trends and issues impacting the countryside and to identify actions and initiatives to improve its viability. Sue Cumming, Cumming + Company an independent facilitator and public consultation consultant was retained to engage the community stakeholders in the workshop discussion.

The primary goals of the countryside workshop were:

- To bring countryside stakeholders together to share ideas and identify initiatives that could be considered for strengthening the countryside area;
- To learn from guest speakers on trends and influences associated with near urban agriculture and place to grow food;
- To seek specific input on ways to strengthen the viability of agriculture, to review what types of farm-related secondary uses could be considered appropriate for the countryside area and to discuss tourism and its potential for the countryside area;

Mayor James Young brought greetings from the Town. The workshop was organized with a presentation by Robin Skinner on the Consolidated Official Plan Review and Countryside Strategy. Ms. Skinner highlighted the provincial policy directions and overviewed the Official Plan Review Process. Elbert von Donkersgoed, Executive Director of GTA Agricultural Action Committee gave a presentation on near urban agriculture with many examples of best practices, new trends and initiatives that are being implemented towards improving the sustainability of near urban agriculture. This was followed by a presentation from Melissa Watkins, Executive Director of Ontario Farmland Trust who highlighted ideas for local food production and initiatives for supporting local farming. Roundtable discussions followed the presentations.

A number of communication materials were used at the workshop, the first being a participant guide which each person was provided with as a tool to assist with the table discussions. The second was a general comment form entitled. "Things I didn't get a chance to say" which provided an opportunity for further individual comments. This report prepared by the facilitator. The views and ideas expressed in this report serve to provide significant value in understanding the important directions that the public would like to see for the countryside area. Some of the ideas noted are Official Plan Policies ideas; others are strategic initiatives that the Town in conjunction with York Region and community partners could explore. The main body of the report includes a synthesis of the key points that were frequently noted through the workshop discussions in three key

areas as follows: improving the viability of agriculture, consideration of farm-related secondary uses and tourism opportunities. To ensure full transparency in the reporting of the input received through the workshops, the Appendix B includes the notes from each of the four workshop tables.

2. IMPROVING THE VIABILITY OF AGRICULTURE IN THE TOWN

A key aim of the countryside workshop was to learn from the stakeholders ideas for improving the viability of agriculture in the Town. The following highlights the ideas that were identified frequently by workshop participants as suggestions to be considered.

1. Create a policy framework and zoning for the Town that provides more flexibility to allow additional activities to support agricultural operations including consideration of permissive policies for secondary uses, processing and production, roadside stands, farmers markets and agric-tourism uses;
2. Develop policies and initiatives to encourage non-farm small business usage -- food products and processing, bed and breakfast establishments, road side stands and farm-gate retail, farm vacation packages;
3. Update the Official Plan to reflect the Greenbelt Plan;
4. Undertake economic impact assessment for agriculture to determine economic influences and market evaluation as input for agriculture business planning;
5. Develop a way to provide better knowledge and resources to farmers including research, identification of available funding and financial support, assistance with paperwork, insurance/liability issues;
6. Facilitate partnerships amongst the various stakeholders to build capacity for holding events, for marketing the countryside (possibly through the Town's web site), for collaborating on programs and making connections;
7. Develop capacity to for taking markets to farmers and farmers to markets;
8. Promote the Town as an environmentally and agriculturally connected destination area;
9. Develop a Rural Economic Development Plan and resource it through Town staff;
10. Implement Local Food Policy - Buy locally programs. Start with a municipal local procurement policy.
11. Develop an educational program for schools and the general community on where food comes from, promoting awareness of local food production and interest in farming;
12. Develop an apprenticeship programs for skill development to encourage young people to get involved in farming;
13. Establish an agriculture committee for the Town;
14. Ensure that infrastructure (roads and road widths, signage, mailbox placement etc.) doesn't restrict agricultural operations.

3. FARM-RELATED SECONDARY USES

The following highlights a number of ideas and activities identified by workshop participants around what types of farm-related secondary uses could be considered appropriate for the countryside area.

1. Infrastructure to create value-added packaging, on-farm processing; light manufacturing - production, processing and packaging;
2. Activities that would promote agricultural products with more local buying, local selling of produce i.e. Farm markets on farms and co-operative farm market;
3. Uses that would support organic and sustainable farm businesses;
4. Environmental businesses and initiatives;
5. Destination bed and breakfast establishments and agri-tourism accommodation;
6. Incidental dining and eating establishments and wineries;
7. Programs that would create capacity for family farming vacations, summer camps for kids and educational programs;
8. Campground development;
9. Alternative power generation uses.
10. Temporary housing;
11. Organized trails systems for ATVs, hiking and biking tours;
12. Seasonal events, hay rides, harvest time events, etc
13. Differentiate between prime and secondary agricultural uses and operations.

4. TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

The following highlights tourism opportunities identified by workshop participants:

1. Farm holidays with farm bed and breakfast establishments;
2. Encourage inter-municipal links, links to other attractions and festivals and farm tours;
3. Utilize Town's web site to add event calendar and tourism opportunities and link to York Region tourism listings;
4. Link existing recreation and agriculture by packaging seasonal and outdoor winter activities and restaurant and accommodations in the area;
5. Create educational programs and tours - family adventures - experience farm life - work on farm weekends;
6. Focus on culinary interests with incidental eating establishments and wineries;

7. Explore opportunity to develop a tourism farm circuit similar to studio tours;
8. Facilitate more local accommodations;
9. Hold festivals around harvest time;
10. Promote East Gwillimbury Agricultural Businesses at existing venues and already established events - i.e. Markham Fair;
11. Support campground development.

5. INDIVIDUAL COMMENTS

In addition to the workshop discussion, participants were provided with a comment form to record "things that they didn't get a chance to say". The following captures the individual comments noted on this form and in the individual workshop booklets.

1. Sign By-law needs to be relaxed.
2. We need an economic advisor for agriculture who is experienced and progressive.
3. Distribute copies of the presentations to the Business Development Committee.
4. Invite public health as a stakeholder. There are health implications of developing a local food system/economy.
5. A vision for Agriculture in East Gwillimbury might be a good place to start.
6. On matter of Campgrounds, bring outside people to the Town as an alternative to cottaging (less gas, less time on the road). Select a site as a permanent weekend getaway. It has a low impact on the environment, is consistent with the Greenbelt Plan and good for East Gwillimbury businesses and farm sales.
7. On matter of Trailers/RV's these are purchased by upper income people and sales are going up. There are a number of sites being planned in Toronto.
8. East Gwillimbury isn't that good for agriculture. Need a direct link with environment. Enter schools - what about an Apprenticeship Program. Current generation of farmers is not here.
9. Planning decisions should incorporate goals of public health. To make the case for agriculture, we need to protect our farmland because it protects our health and food security.
10. Push Province to look broader, farmland is not only within the Greenbelt area. There is no protection for areas north of the Town and this creates leapfrog effect and eventually it will squeeze agriculture out of the Greater Toronto Area.
11. Farm holidays with farm bed and breakfast establishments are a great idea for the area.
12. Encourage developers to provide agri-reserves within their plans and promote multi-use of this reserve.

13. Facilitate the development of a facility for food production in the Town with the potential for grants.
14. Implement improvements for road standards, signage geared to farmers where farming is very active.
15. Organic small farms are very important to our community.
16. Stop making every road a commuter road. Create tax benefits to landowners for retaining natural areas and linkages.
17. Provide discussion forums for agricultural community to come together. Encourage co-ops, education on power generation and farmers markets.
18. Conduct agricultural economic assessment impact study. Hire a local economic development officer. Create form a website link to encourage more involvement between stakeholders.
19. Town needs to be better prepared to look at progressive ideas.
20. Host an agriculture trade fair.
21. Help to facilitate discussions between landowners and trail establishers.
22. Ask Province to explain lot creation permissions in the Greenbelt Plan.
23. Look into tax incentives to create public use of lands.
24. Develop a local food resource, database and marketing program.

Town of East Gwillimbury

COUNTRYSIDE WORKSHOP FEEDBACK REPORT

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - Chart of Key Ideas
APPENDIX B - Record of Table Discussions
APPENDIX C - Workshop Participants

APPENDIX A

Town of East Gwillimbury Summary of Key Ideas emanating from Countryside Workshop

Improving Agricultural Viability	Farm-related Secondary Uses	Tourism Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create a policy framework and zoning for the Town that provides more flexibility to allow additional activities to support agricultural operations including consideration of permissive policies for secondary uses, processing and production, roadside stands, farmers markets and agric-tourism uses; ▪ Develop policies and initiatives to encourage non-farm small business usage -- food products and processing, bed and breakfast establishments, road side stands, farm-gate retail, farm vacation packages; ▪ Update the Official Plan to reflect the Greenbelt Plan; ▪ Undertake economic impact assessment for agriculture to determine economic influences and market evaluation as input for agriculture business planning; ▪ Develop a way to provide better knowledge and resources to farmers including research, identification of available funding and financial support, assistance with paperwork, insurance/liability issues; ▪ Facilitate partnerships amongst the various stakeholders to build capacity for holding events, for marketing the countryside (possibly through the Town's web site), for collaborating on programs and making connections; ▪ Develop capacity to for taking markets to farmers and farmers to markets; ▪ Promote the Town as an environmentally and agriculturally connected destination area; ▪ Develop a Rural Economic Development Plan and resource it through Town staff; ▪ Implement Local Food Policy - Buy locally programs. Start with a municipal local procurement policy. ▪ Develop an educational program for schools and the general community on where food comes from, promoting awareness of local food production and interest in farming; ▪ Develop an apprenticeship programs for skill development to encourage young people to get involved in farming; ▪ Establish an agriculture committee for the Town; ▪ Ensure that infrastructure (roads and road widths, signage, mailbox placement etc.) doesn't restrict agricultural operations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promote organic and sustainable farm practices and environmental businesses and initiatives; ▪ Support uses for value-added packaging and processing; light manufacturing – production, processing and packaging; ▪ Encourage bed and breakfast establishments; ▪ Encourage farm work programs and summer camps for kids on farm; ▪ Promote campground development; ▪ Consider temporary housing; ▪ Promote incidental eating/dining establishments; ▪ Organized trail system for ATV's, hiking and biking tours; ▪ Permit and support wineries; ▪ Create seasonal events, hay rides, harvest time events, etc ▪ Differentiate between prime and secondary agricultural uses and operations; ▪ Support farm markets on farms and co-operative farm market; ▪ Support alternative power generation uses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Farm holidays with farm bed and breakfast establishments; ▪ Promote trails network – inter-municipal links, links to other attractions and festivals and farm tours; ▪ Utilize Town's web site to add event calendar and tourism opportunities and link to York Region tourism listings; ▪ Link existing recreation and agriculture by packaging seasonal and outdoor winter activities and restaurant and accommodations in the area; ▪ Create educational programs and tours – family adventures – experience farm life – work on farm weekends; ▪ Focus on culinary interests with incidental eating establishments and wineries; ▪ Explore opportunity to develop a tourism farm circuit similar to studio tours; ▪ Facilitate more local accommodations; ▪ Hold festivals around harvest time; ▪ Promote East Gwillimbury Agricultural Businesses at existing venues and already established events – i.e. Markham Fair; ▪ Support campground development.

APPENDIX B

RECORDED FLIPCHART POINTS FROM THE TABLE DISCUSSIONS

The following are the transcribed notes from the table discussions
As they were recorded verbatim from the flipcharts.

TABLE # 1

Ideas for improving the viability of agriculture in East Gwillimbury

- Further promote and support Farmers Market
- Sponsor, hold young farmers programs promoting jobs, careers, application of new technologies.
- Research what proportion of agricultural land is food specific - lots of sod, horse, etc
- Encourage local culinary with local food (wines)
- Provide better knowledge and scientific resources to farmers.
- EG can become a leader in unique Agricultural Zoning
- Update Official Plan to reflect/mesh with Greenbelt Plan

Consideration of farm-related secondary uses

- Field trips, educational (seasonal events - hay rides, Halloween, Harvest time, etc)
- Incidental eating/dining establishments
- Winery
- Driving, walking, hiking and biking tours
- Wide open for secondary users, scale, bed and breakfast
- Differentiate between prime and rural or secondary agricultural

Tourism opportunities in the countryside area

- Educational programs and tours for agriculture (food, horticulture, etc)
- Culinary (incidental eating, winery, etc)
- Walking, biking to bring the community together, possibility to have paths through private lands
- Build more of a tourism exposure

TABLE # 2

Ideas for improving the viability of agriculture in East Gwillimbury

- Business assessments - financial viability (50/50 - town could cover 25%)
- EDO - encourage businesses to support agricultural industry
- Traffic patterns and agricultural traffic.
- Infrastructure (roads and road widths) that reflects agricultural operations including transport of goods, signage on roads.
- Public education.
- Flexibility in terms of policies and regulations.
- Farmers markets (markets to farmers and farmers to markets)
- Issues with health regulations
- Opportunities for cooperation
- Fostering partnerships
- Marketing (Town's web site, etc)
- Agricultural reserve - model farm i.e. Ottawa)
- Development levies to reserves for agricultural and environmental initiatives
- Promote agricultural in schools.
- Agricultural education summer camp
- Agricultural week tied into a Harvest Festival

Consideration of farm-related secondary uses

- What are appropriate secondary uses?
- Taxation impact - processing and value-added
- Packaging etc - co-operatives
- Trail system to get ATV's out of fields (permits and penalties) (look into issues of privatization, trails for bikes etc)
- Support destination bed and breakfast establishments

Tourism opportunities in the countryside area

- Public education (internet)
- Website to identify areas of destination
- Link and partnerships between existing recreation and agricultural (eco-agricultural tourism packages)
- Work on a farm weekends - experience rural life bed and breakfast establishments
- Family adventures - attractions for adults and kids\
- Hold an agricultural trade fair
- Promote East Gwillimbury Agricultural businesses at existing venues (i.e. Markham fair)
- Protection for farm practices

TABLE # 3

Ideas for improving the viability of agriculture in East Gwillimbury

- Zoning flexibility (for second uses, processing, new buildings)
- Held with paperwork when building code is too restrictive
- Open to roadside stands
- Assistance with distribution, selling, paperwork, etc.
- Farmer's market - East Gwillimbury need cornerstone farmers
- Agri-tourism circuits
- Include restaurants, bakeries, etc.
- Municipal requirements for local purchases
- Insurance/liability issues
- Reduce commuter traffic (signage and speed limit)
- Design roads differently
- Mailboxes are in the way of equipment

Consideration of farm-related secondary uses

- On-site processing is difficult and expensive, against regulations, supply management limits
- Organic/sustainable
- Bed and breakfast establishments
- Accommodations
- Farm work programs
- Summer camps for kids

Tourism opportunities in the countryside area

- Yes
- Support campground development
- Trails - bike, hike and horse
- Farm vacations

- Tours, farms and studios, food
- Farm circuits
- Need more accommodations
- Festivals around crop seasons

TABLE # 4

Ideas for improving the viability of agriculture in East Gwillimbury

- Economic impact assessment for agriculture (know where stand, economic influences, and build business planning around this)
- Town should consider adopting a local food procurement policy - Local food at all municipal events
- Equations in schools and general community on where food comes from including promotion and awareness, apprenticeship programs for skill development.
- Proper labeling of products
- Agriculture committee for Town
- Rural economic development - economic development staff within town
- Allow temporary housing on farm lots - license requirements
- Second dwelling - retirement mobile home
- Map drainage and water resources

Consideration of farm-related secondary uses

- Temporary housing
- Light manufacturing equals production (produce, process, package)
- Value added product
- Maximize footprint and sewage capacity
- Restaurants (Stadtlanders), chip trucks, farm markets on farm, farmer's market (co-operative), and power generation - taxes.

Tourism opportunities in the countryside area

- Tourism equals opportunity
- Bed and breakfast
- Farm holiday
- Package - restaurants accommodations, outdoor winter activities
- Website = event calendar/tourism opportunities
- Promote York Region tourism listings
- Trails network - inter-municipal links, link to other attractions, festivals and farm tours

APPENDIX C

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

The follow individuals are commended for their enthusiastic participation which created the opportunity for sharing ideas and identifying opportunities for future consideration.

Participants:

Mr. Ken Rogers, York Region Cattlemen's Association
Mr. Gary Johnson, York Region Farm Fresh Association
Mr. Gerald Kellington, York Federation of Agriculture
Jordan Coates
Jonathan Arnold, Shady Lane: Organic Soil Solutions
Doug Crone
Ray Valitis, Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs
John Eaton, Business Development Committee
Susan Swail, Friends of Greenbelt Foundation
Victor Doyle, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Heather Konefat, Regional Municipality of York
John Waller, Regional Municipality of York
Brenda McGowan, York Region Economic Development
Don Howard
Wilf Rose, Rose Family Farm
Craig Evans, Pheasant Run Golf Course
Bernard Cupples
Andrew Sheridan, Michael Sheridan Communications for the EG Chamber of Commerce
Robin Kelly, Queensville Farm Supply
Mayor James Young, Town of East Gwillimbury
Councilor Marlene Johnston, Town of East Gwillimbury
Councilor Virginia Hackson, Town of East Gwillimbury
Councilor Jack Hauseman, Town of East Gwillimbury
Councilor Cathy Morton, Town of East Gwillimbury

Town Staff:

Dan Stone, Manager of Policy Planning
Robin Skinner, Environmental Planner
Carolyn Kellington, Manager of Community Planning and Development
Chris Cannon, Planner

Presenters:

Elbert von Donkersgoed, Executive Director of GTA Agricultural Action Committee
Melissa Watkins, Executive Director of Ontario Farmland Trust

Facilitator:

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