

Event Barns

GHFFA Position Paper

By Pam Duesling PhD Candidate, MAES, MCIP, RPP, Ec D., CMM3



Introduction

- New Action Plan for Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance in 2020
- Action Plan recommends one Position Paper per year
- Staff Working Group recommended “Party Barns” as part of On-Farm Diversified Uses
- Pam Duesling hired to write the paper with input from Alliance, OMAFRA and municipal staff
- September 2021, Alliance endorses draft document and recommends circulation to Agricultural Advisory Committees for comment
- January 2022 revised draft will return to Alliance for endorsement

A Vibrant Future



Importance of Farm Land Preservation

- The Golden Horseshoe is the most densely populated and industrialized area in Canada
- Prime agricultural lands are a finite, limited resource and agricultural uses are to remain the principal use in prime agricultural areas
- Farmland preservation policies in Ontario have been reasonably supported, but the success of preservation, stewardship and entrepreneurialism varies by region and municipality



Family Farming & On-Farm Diversification

- Family farms have shown considerable resilience.
- Pluriactivity is when farmers and their families rely on non-agriculture or off farm sources of income. On-farm diversification is a form of pluriactivity.
- On-farm diversification not only includes implementing value added farming practices; it can also include new business on farm lands, some of which may not be directly related to agriculture at all.
- MMAH defines on-farm diversification in the PPS as “uses that are secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property, and are limited in area. On-farm diversification uses include, but are not limited to home occupations, home industries, agri-tourism uses and uses that produce value-added agricultural products”.



Event Barn Examples in the Golden Horseshoe

- Event barns can be one example of on-farm diversification where barns are transformed into spaces to host weddings, parties and other social events
- The Golden Horseshoe has many event barns some of which are legal (have completed all municipal approvals and permits) and many which are illegal venues (have not completed municipal approvals and permits)
- This paper illustrates three legal event barns in the Golden Horseshoe
 - Maple Meadows Farm & Event Center
 - Cambium Farms
 - Stonewall Estates
- LPAT Hearing - Graham Creek Country Estates
Clarington



Maple Meadows Farm & Event Center

Port Colborne, Niagara Region

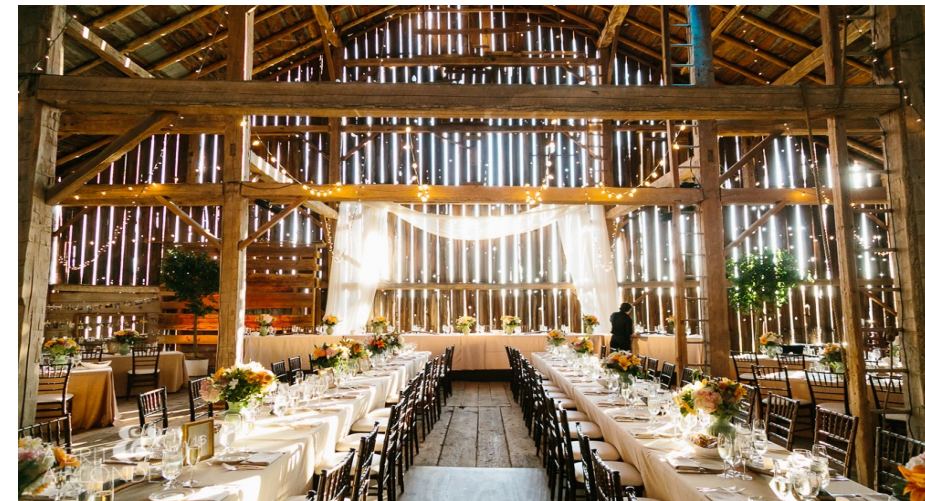
- Maple Meadows Farm is a 26 ha (65 ac) family farm
- The farm was purchased in 1999 and grew hay while the property owners worked off the farm
- Today the owners rent 22 ha (55 ac) to an organic farmer
- They began the event barn after various research and looking for opportunities for an additional revenue stream on the family farm
- In 2014 they completed a Zoning By-law Amendment to create a 2.8 ha (7 ac) unlimited event space
- Now host upward of 52 weddings per year between May – October
- Maximum of 200 guests
- Spent over 2 years and \$200,000 on renovating the beautiful 510m² (5,500 ft²) post and beam barn



Cambium Farms

Caledon, Peel Region

- Cambium Farms is a 20 ha (50 ac) cash crop farm and landscaping business and the current property owners rent out their farm land
- They started weddings after a family member got married in the barn
- Cambium Farms continued to grow their business with planning application approvals in 2015, 2017 and 2018
- Cambium Farms can host up to 450 guests on site. The main floor of the barn operates seasonally from May – September and the Byre located in the lower level of the barn operates year round
- Before COVID they hosted 60-70 weddings per year
- Cambium Farms expects to host upward of 120-140 weddings per year in future
- Cambium Farms spent over half a million dollars on various government approvals and permits
- Cambium Farms has plans to expand their on-farm diversified uses generating additional local economic development with nearby wineries and breweries and perhaps overnight accommodations



Stonewall Estates

Lincoln, Niagara Region

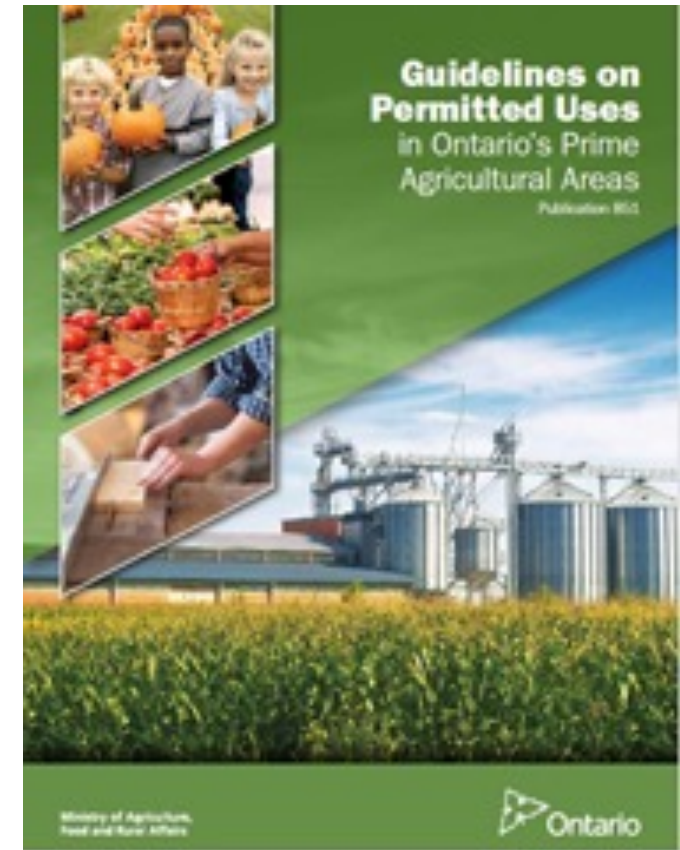
- Stonewall Estates is a 40 ha (120 ac) orchard and vineyard
- The farm was purchased in 2005 and is located beside 16 Mile Creek
- They began hosting weddings after a windstorm forced the owners to relocate two new barns to the property
- Stonewall Estates opened their doors in 2017 after spending approximately 3.5 years and half a million dollars on various government approvals and permits
- The event barn is approximately 235m² (2,530 ft²)
- The event barn hosts approximately 30 weddings per year and has a limit of 200 guests
- Stonewall Estates plans to open their winery in 2022



Event Barn Requirements

Public Land Use Planning Process

- The most complicated municipal requirements for establishing an event barn can be land use planning
- Each farm is unique and may have different requirements depending on the municipal policies and processes
- Each farm will also have different planning approvals depending geographically where the farm is located
- Municipalities must be consistent with Provincial policy including the:
 - Provincial Policy Statement (PPS);
 - Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe;
 - Niagara Escarpment Plan;
 - Green Belt Plan; and
 - Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan
- In 2016 OMAFRA created the Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas



Event Barn Requirements

Public Land Use Planning Process

Section 2.3 - Criteria for On-Farm Diversification Uses

It should be noted that all these criteria must be met:

1. **Located on a farm;**
2. **Secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property;**
3. **Limited in area.** This criterion is intended to: minimize the amount of land taken out of agricultural production, if any; ensure agriculture remains the main land use in prime agricultural areas, and limit off-site impacts (e.g., traffic, changes to the agricultural-rural character) to ensure compatibility with surrounding agricultural operations. The guidelines recommend that the standard for the acceptable area occupied by an on-farm diversified use is up to 2% of a farm parcel to a maximum of 1 ha (2.5 ac). It should be noted there are additional detailed provisions on how to calculate area in these guidelines;
4. **Includes, but is not limited to, home occupations, home industries, agri-tourism uses and uses that produce value-added agricultural products; and**
5. **Shall be compatible with, and shall not hinder, surrounding agricultural operations (OMAFRA, 2016).**

Event Barn Requirements



Building Permits

- If an event space in an existing barn that is more than 5 years old and over 600m² requires a Change of Use building permit is required for a public hall which is deemed an assembly occupancy and requires an architect review and stamp
- Ontario Building Code:
 - Change of Use Building Permit and Compliance Alternatives to Existing Buildings – Part 10 & 11
 - New Construction – Various Parts of Code
 - Fire Protection – Part 3 (Section 3.1.17 is used to calculate occupancy load)
 - Plumbing – Part 7
 - Septic Systems – Part 8
- Efficient Water & Septic
 - Private Well & Septic System
 - 50,000+ liters per day permit to take water from environment is needed from MECP
 - Septic System Design uses 10,000+ liters per day than approval is needed from MECP
- Usually Event Barn Entrepreneur would require 2 Building Permits
 - Renovate the existing building
 - Septic

Event Barn Requirements

Development Charges

- Fees imposed on land development and redevelopment projects to help pay for municipal infrastructure and capital costs
- Development Charges are collected from developers/ property owners at building permit stage
 - calculated per square meter and apply to the gross floor area of a building
 - range from \$50m² to \$300 m²
- Theory behind Development Charges is that growth should pay for growth!
- Municipalities can utilize Development Charges as an incentive for directing development through reductions and exemptions (example – downtown cores, transit areas, high density areas or industrial/ commercial areas)
- Development Charges must be paid by the applicant or by a Council approved grant from the tax levy

Event Barn Requirements

Tax Impacts

- Municipal Property Assessment (MPAC) is responsible for assessing and classifying properties in Ontario
- These assessments are what municipalities utilize to base the property taxes
- MPAC receives copies of all building permits issued and can also receive copies of planning and other approvals
- When MPAC is made aware that a barn is no longer used for farming purposes and is instead an event venue, MPAC would inspect the farm and update the classification accordingly
- Ultimately there would be an increase in municipal taxes, some increases could be quite substantial
- Each property assessment will be different on its own merits



Position on Event Barns

Is it appropriate to establish event barns in Ontario and the Golden Horseshoe in particular?

Event barns should only be permitted if they can meet all the current government requirements and follow the OMAFRA Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas.

It is unlikely that event barns should be established today.



Position on Event Barns

#1 – Must be Secondary to the Farm

- Section 2.3 of the OMAFRA Guidelines
 - 1) located on a farm and
 - 2) Secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property
- It is at the discretion of each Municipality to confirm what a farm is
 - proof under MPAC or a valid farm registration number
- There is no requirement that the family farmer be the operator of the event barn
- Agriculture must remain the principle use of the property.
 - The OMAFRA Guidelines measure this in spatial and temporal uses not finances
- When an additional use on the farm requires too much space it should be re-located to an appropriate area of a municipality (example – industrial park/ downtown). Same is true of an event barn. The larger the use the more opportunity it is for it to be the main use of the property. Furthermore high water and sewage users such as banquet halls should not be on-farm diversified uses and would be better suited in an urban area.
- We must THINK FARM FIRST!

Position on Event Barns

#2 - Appropriate Size & Scale

- **Most important reason why event barns should not be considered an on-farm diversified use is because they are usually too large and do not operate at an appropriate size or scale to be considered a secondary use which can create compatibility challenges with surrounding agricultural operations and neighbours.**
- Section 2.3 of the OMAFRA Guidelines
 - 3) Limited in area
 - 2% of a farm parcel to a maximum of 1 ha (2.5 ac)
 - discounts for existing laneways shared between agricultural uses and on-farm diversified uses
 - 50% discount of the area of existing buildings to encourage the repurposing and retrofitting of existing barns
 - the gross floor area of a building be limited to 20% of the 2% for an on-farm diversified land use

Position on Event Barns

#2 - Appropriate Size & Scale

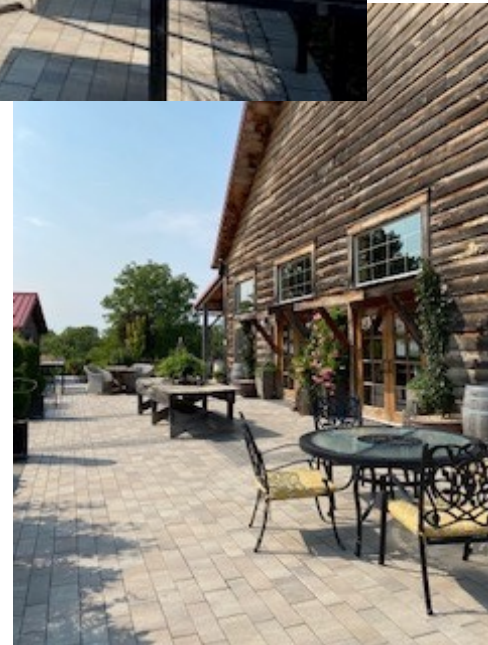
Comparison of Event Barn Examples - Size & Scale Chart

Event Barn Name & Location	Size of Farm	OMAFRA On-Farm Diversified Use Suggested Size and Scale 2% farm 20% of 2% gross floor area	Municipally Approved Size & Scale
Maple Meadows Farm & Event Center, Port Colborne, Niagara Region	26 ha (65 ac)	Land 0.5 ha (1.3 ac) On-Farm Diversified Uses 1,000 m ² (10,764 ft ²) 50% Discount Floor Area 255 m ² (2,745 ft ²)	Land 2.8 ha (7 ac) Event Barn 510 m ² (5,489 ft ²)
Cambium Farms, Caledon, Peel Region	20 ha (50 ac)	Land 0.4 ha (1 ac) On-Farm Diversified Uses 800 m ² (8,610 ft ²) 50% Discount Floor Area 683 m ² (7,352 ft ²)	Land 8 ha (20 ac) Event Barn 1,365 m ² (14,692 ft ²)
Stonewall Estates, Lincoln, Niagara Region	40 ha (120 ac)	Land 0.8 ha (1.98 ac) On-Farm Diversified Use 1,600 m ² (17,222 ft ²) *Note – no 50% discount as event barn is new construction	Land Approximately 0.8 ha (1.98 ac) Event Barn Approximately 235m ² (2,530 ft ²) *Note – additional on-farm diversified uses and agriculture related uses were also approved but not yet built out



Lessons Learned from Stonewall Estates

Lincoln, Niagara Region



Position on Event Barns

#3 - Expensive & Timely

- Event Barns are expensive and take time to create
- Family farm entrepreneurs are encouraged to conduct research and have a fiscal business plan to support the establishment of an event barn
- There can be significant costs and time associated with:
 - land planning approvals including consultant costs, application fees, various studies and securities;
 - Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT);
 - Building permits including fire codes, engineering/ architect drawings consultant costs, construction costs and servicing septic/ well;
 - Development Charges; and
 - MPAC review and ultimately increase in municipal taxes
- Heritage barns and preservation
- Food premise permit / license from local Health Unit.
- Special Occasion Permit under Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario
- Overall, it is unlikely that a family farm entrepreneur will propose a size and scale of an event barn that meets all the OMAFRA Guidelines and is fiscally advantageous

Recommendations & Next Steps

- 1) Municipal Planners/ Economic Development Officers Work Together
- 2) Training & Education for Municipal Planners and Economic Development Staff
- 3) Update to the OMAFRA Guidelines with Maximum Floor Area Thresholds for Event Barns
- 4) Municipal On-Farm Diversification Official Plan Policies & Zoning Provisions
- 5) Simplified Site Plan Process
- 6) Policy Correction in the Niagara Escarpment Plan
- 7) Opportunities to Lower or Exempt Development Charges
- 8) Managing Relations with Neighbours & Municipal Enforcement
- 9) More Research on Cumulative Effects of Event Barns in the Agricultural Area



Conclusion



Event barns should only be permitted if they can meet all the current government requirements and follow the OMAFRA Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas.

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