

SUBJECT: Burlington Agricultural Action Plan
TO: Committee of the Whole
FROM: Development and Growth Management
Community Planning

Report Number: DGM-47-25

Wards Affected: All

Date to Committee: July 7, 2025

Date to Council: July 15, 2025

Recommendation

Approve the proposed Burlington Agricultural Action Plan, as provided in Appendix A of development and growth management report DGM-47-25; and

Direct the City Clerk to consider the request of the Burlington Agricultural and Rural Affairs Advisory Committee to include a representative from Burlington Economic Development & Tourism as part of the committee's composition, during the forthcoming terms of reference review for all city advisory committees.

Executive Summary

- The purpose of this report is:
 - to provide an overview of the proposed "Burlington Agricultural Action Plan" (attached as "Appendix A" to this report), including its purpose, objectives and implementation;
 - to recommend approval of the Agricultural Action Plan to support Burlington's rural economy and align with Vision to Focus 2022–2026; and
 - to recommend that the City Clerk consider changing the composition of the Burlington Agricultural and Rural Affairs Committee to include a representative from Burlington Economic Development and Tourism.
- Recent provincial changes have shifted agricultural planning responsibilities from Halton Region to the City, resulting in a greater onus on local municipalities to support the health and prosperity of the Agricultural System.

- The proposed Burlington Agricultural Action Plan (the “Plan”) presents a focused strategy to support and grow the City’s agricultural sector, while aligning with provincial policies.
- The Plan aligns with the community vision set out in the Burlington Official Plan, 2020, which emphasizes the need to conserve the character of the Rural Area and protect/enhance the natural environment while enabling the rural economy to evolve and change.
- The Plan builds on the former Halton Rural Agricultural Strategy, tailored to Burlington’s needs, and emphasizes collaboration, policy alignment, streamlined development processes, economic development, infrastructure support, and public awareness.
- The Plan is intended to function as a living document, to be reviewed and refined at the outset of each Term of Council to align with the Vision to Focus planning cycle.
- Metrics and monitoring will be established through a “State of Agriculture Report”, to be updated with each Census of Agriculture.
- Implementation details and resourcing will be confirmed through the larger ongoing process related to the transition of Regional planning responsibilities.

Recommendation Report

Overview of Proposed Agricultural Action Plan

The agricultural sector faces regulatory complexity, rural/urban land use conflicts, rising land costs, succession planning challenges and infrastructure gaps. The proposed Burlington Agricultural Action Plan outlines a comprehensive local strategy to strengthen and sustain the city's agricultural sector while aligning with updated provincial policies. The Plan is based on actions contained within the former Halton Rural Agricultural Strategy, which have been scoped, refined and prioritized to align with the Burlington context. The Plan emphasizes:

- collaboration;
- policy alignment;
- streamlined development processes;
- economic development;
- infrastructure support; and
- public awareness.

The Plan is intended to function as a living document which will be reviewed at the outset of each new Term of Council and Vision to Focus update. At this time, the actions and sub-actions within the Plan are intended to establish a set of key priorities to guide future work. As the City settles into its expanded planning responsibilities for Rural and Agricultural Systems post Regional transition, more detailed work plans will be developed to implement the actions, including timing and resourcing.

With respect to monitoring, a core action of the proposed Agricultural Action Plan is to prepare a "State of Agriculture Report" which examines key data from the Census, and other sources, to establish a baseline for Burlington. As the current Census cycle aligns with the municipal election cycle, the State of Agriculture Report would be updated every four years to support ongoing monitoring, and to inform refinements to the Plan where needed.

The City's jurisdiction is clearly defined through, and limited by, legislation and resources. Therefore, the proposed Plan focuses on actions that will specifically address local municipal concerns and not duplicate or infringe on actions more effectively dealt with by another agency or level of government. The Plan is designed to target actions, avoid duplication and focus in areas where the City can be effective in advancing its larger strategic objectives.

Background

Transition of Regional Planning Responsibilities

While the initial work to develop the City's Agricultural Action Plan was underway, the province implemented significant changes to Ontario's land use planning framework, including the removal of upper-tier planning responsibilities across several municipalities through Bill 185. In Halton Region, this change took effect on July 1, 2024 and the Regional Official Plan became an Official Plan of each of the four lower-tier municipalities. However, the Region also provides/provided several other programs and services to support the implementation of the Regional Official Plan, which were not part of its previous core responsibilities under the Planning Act.

Recognizing the impacts of the change to the Region's role in land use planning, the delivery of these programs and services was assessed by Regional staff. Recommendations resulting from this assessment were provided to Regional Council through report [CA-22-24 Updates on Service Delivery Post-Bill 23](#). Changes included sunsetting the Halton Agricultural Advisory Committee as of July 2024, the discontinuation of Regional agricultural support services (including the role of Agricultural Liaison Officer, the Rural Agricultural Strategy and funding for the Halton Region Federation of Agriculture) as of January 1, 2025, and the discontinuation of economic development services, except for the Halton Small Business Centre, as of January 1, 2025.

Also included in the discontinuation of Regional agricultural support services is the Region's membership with the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA). For context, the GHFFA is a partnership between the regional municipalities and Federations of Agriculture in Niagara, Peel, Halton, York, and Durham, and the cities of Hamilton and Toronto, Conservation Authorities, the Greenbelt Fund, Durham College and Niagara College, the Holland Marsh Growers and members of the food industry. The partnership is focused on identifying pathways for a more integrated and coordinated approach to food and farming viability in the area to ensure that the Golden Horseshoe retains, enhances and expands its role as a leading food and farming cluster.

The GHFFA is currently structured based on upper-tier municipalities representing the interests of their corresponding lower-tier municipalities, with each partner contributing an annual membership fee to support the activities of the Alliance (\$35,000 for Halton Region). This includes the maintenance of the [ConnectON](#) agri-food asset mapping, preparation of [research/position papers](#), commenting on provincial policy proposals, and various [initiatives to promote local food](#). For example, in recent years the City of Burlington has had the opportunity to engage in the development of two very timely position papers- one on Event Barns in Ontario and one on Urban Agriculture. These papers contain valuable insight from across Ontario which Burlington can leverage to inform its own policies and programs.

By pooling resources and prioritizing initiatives based on shared needs, GHFFA members benefit from expanded access to niche subject matter expertise while avoiding duplicative

efforts. Due to the loss of regional-level agricultural support services, access to multi-jurisdictional peer to peer networks and think tanks such as the GHFFA are more critical than ever to support long term agricultural viability in Ontario. This is especially relevant within the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, where heavily populated urban areas may have conflicting and/or competing needs in relation to rural areas.

When report CA-22-24 was brought forward, both the [Halton Region Federation of Agriculture](#) and the [Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance](#) delegated to express their concerns to Council. In response, Regional Council passed a motion to continue its membership in the GHFFA until the end of the current term of Council in 2026, to allow more time for the transition of agricultural support services to local municipalities. Through report CA-22-24, the Region also committed to:

- identify opportunities to continue supporting agriculture and rural communities where appropriate and in the context of the delivery of other Regional services; and
- work with the Local Municipalities to provide support, including through a transition plan if required, as they identify their approaches to delivering programs and services appropriate for their community.

On this basis, the proposed Agricultural Action Plan includes a proactive action to pursue membership with the GHFFA. However, as the GHFFA is currently comprised of upper and single-tier municipalities, the organization would need to develop a new fee structure for lower-tier municipalities seeking individual membership. Given the time sensitivity, Burlington planning staff have initiated these conversations through the Halton Area Planning Partnership (HAPP) and the GHFFA and will report back to Council on potential options/feasibility as more information becomes available.

Burlington Response to Transition of Regional Planning Responsibilities

On March 18, 2025, report [DGM-09-25 Transition of planning responsibilities from Halton Region](#) was brought to City Council to provide information on the City's ongoing efforts and next steps to implement Bill 185. The report provided information about the transition of the Region's planning responsibilities associated with various aspects of the Regional Official Plan. The report also provided an overview of the outcome of Halton Region's service delivery review and noted the discontinuation of Regional agricultural support services.

In response to the issues raised within report DGM-09-25, the Burlington Agricultural and Rural Affairs Committee (BARAAC) submitted a [written delegation](#) and appeared before Council to speak to the committee's concerns. BARAAC communicated its appreciation of the City's efforts to increase rural and agricultural representation to date but noted heightened concerns regarding the long-term vitality of the rural area within the context of the new provincial

planning framework. The delegation identified economic development, infrastructure needs, policy integration, and public awareness and advocacy as key issues and proposed the following solutions:

“Once approved, we urge the City to expedite and fund the implementation of the Burlington Agricultural Action Plan based on the following priorities:

1. Review the BARAAC Terms of Reference to ensure it aligns with the City’s added responsibilities post-Bill 23. Update the committee’s composition to include a representative from Burlington Economic Development.
2. Create a dedicated role, as per action RT9 of the Red Tape Red Carpet initiative, akin to the former Special Business Area Coordinator, to focus on rural economic development and agricultural system management within the next two years.
3. Collaborate with stakeholders to develop a rural infrastructure plan addressing internet connectivity, drainage, road design, and electrical servicing policies.
4. Launch a public awareness campaign highlighting the importance of agriculture to Burlington's economy and sustainability.”

To better understand the needs of the rural and agricultural community from an economic development perspective and to identify possible synergies, Burlington Economic Development and Tourism (BEDT) has committed to engaging in focused discussions with the committee. It is further recommended that this request be formally considered by the City Clerk during the terms of reference review for all City advisory committees, being led by Legislative Services later in 2025.

Similarly, resourcing needs for the City’s expanded Agricultural and Rural Systems portfolio are being reviewed through a comprehensive process which involves an assessment of all changes arising from the transition of Regional planning responsibilities to the local level. The Agricultural Action Plan will help to inform this process by establishing a set of key priorities for supporting long term agricultural resiliency in Burlington. As a result, Priorities 1 and 2 of the BARAAC delegation are not addressed within the proposed Agricultural Action Plan, while Priorities 3 and 4 are linked to specific actions within the Plan.

Analysis

As established in the [Burlington Official Plan, 2020](#) (BOP, 2020), the protection and strengthening of the rural community is the City’s overarching goal in planning for the rural area. This means conserving the area’s rural character and protecting and enhancing its natural environment while enabling the rural economy to evolve and change. The health and prosperity of the Agricultural System is recognized as integral to these efforts.

In addition to supplying food, fuel and fibre, diversified farms also provide opportunities for agri-tourism. This enables residents and visitors to enjoy and learn about agriculture, while supporting the local economy. The stewardship activities of farmers also provide important environmental benefits, such as the protection of natural heritage and water resources.

The City's policies are designed to help the Agricultural System grow and prosper, while adapting to changing conditions. This includes direction to consider the development of a Community Improvement Plan, support the implementation of the Region's Rural Agricultural Strategy, and consider the development of an urban agricultural strategy. The proposed Burlington Agricultural Action Plan was developed in response to these directions, as well as several other relevant initiatives (refer to "Appendix B" to this report for details):

- [Red Tape Red Carpet Initiative](#)
- [Burlington Brownfield Focus Community Improvement Plan](#)
- [Rural Ontario Municipal Association Conference](#)
- [Climate Resilient Burlington Plan](#)
- [Vision to Focus 2022-2026](#)

The proposed Agricultural Action Plan would support the implementation of several related strategic goals and objectives under these initiatives, while also setting in place a consistent framework to measure and assess progress across related City service delivery areas. Further, given the province-wide nature of the Agricultural System, there are a variety of existing plans and strategies in place which would complement the City's efforts (refer to "Appendix B" to this report for details):

- [The future of rural Canada: A report for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities](#)
- [Grow Ontario: a provincial agri-food strategy](#)
- [New Horizons: Ontario's Agricultural Soil Health and Conservation Strategy](#)
- [Enabling Opportunity: Ontario's Rural Economic Development Strategy](#)
- [Golden Horseshoe Food & Farming Alliance Action Plan 2021 – 2026: A Vibrant Future](#)
- [Halton Region Rural Agricultural Strategy](#)

Through discussions with BARAAC, it was determined that the ideal approach would be to tap into and align with existing initiatives. In particular, the Halton Region Rural Agricultural Strategy was identified as a core focus, given the document's direct relevancy to the City of Burlington. Further, this document was developed by the Region of Halton to be consistent with, build on and complement the original Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA) Action Plan. Staff therefore worked with BARAAC to compile a scoped set of actions adapted from the former Halton Rural Agricultural Strategy, followed by a prioritization exercise, which ultimately formed the basis of the proposed Agricultural Action Plan.

Community Engagement and Communications

As an advisory committee of Council, BARAAC played a critical role in the development of the proposed Agricultural Action Plan. As outlined in its Terms of Reference, BARAAC's [mandate](#) is to advise and assist in the implementation of Burlington's agricultural and rural goals, objectives and policies. The committee does this by soliciting and coordinating the interests and concerns of Burlington's agricultural industry and rural community and communicating those interests and concerns to Council, and by responding to requests for advice from Council and City staff. The committee's mandate also includes raising community awareness and understanding of agricultural and rural issues as they relate to the City and its activities.

As detailed in this report, BARAAC has been directly engaged in various strategic initiatives over the past several years. While the need to develop an action plan for agriculture was established through the Council adoption of the new Official Plan in 2018, the specific needs of the agricultural sector have been further defined through City-led projects on red tape reduction, climate resilience, economic development and long-term strategic planning. Each of these initiatives also included extensive consultation with the general public. In addition, BARAAC has led its own efforts to engage with the broader community on agricultural priorities through participation in the Burlington Rural Form and the Food for Feedback Community Engagement BBQ in both 2023 and 2024.

Recommendation Details

BARAAC noted that the agricultural community is facing increasing challenges, many of which require immediate attention and long-term integrated planning. The proposed Agricultural Action Plan, attached as "Appendix A" to this report, will position the City to transform these concerns into opportunities for economic growth, innovation and resiliency, supported by evidence-based decision-making. As stated by the committee, agriculture is a cornerstone of Burlington's identity and sustainability goals. By investing in this sector, the City will not only protect farmland but also foster a thriving rural economy, strengthen food security, and enhance climate resiliency.

Key Dates & Milestones

- **Q4 2023- Q2 2024:** background research and public engagement
- **Q3 2024:** Transition of Regional planning responsibilities to local municipalities/Halton Region Service Delivery Review
- **Q1 2025:** Discontinuation of Halton Region agricultural sector support services

- **Q1 2025:** Update on transition of Regional planning responsibilities/BARAAC delegation to Council
 - **Q2 2025:** Agricultural Action Plan finalization
 - **Q3 2025:** Proposed Agricultural Action Plan brought to Council for approval
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Implications

- The City's jurisdiction is clearly defined through, and limited by, legislation and resources. Burlington's plan must focus on actions that will specifically address local municipal concerns and not duplicate or infringe on actions more effectively dealt with by another agency or level of government. The plan is designed to target actions, avoid duplication and focus in areas where the City can be effective.
- Some components of the proposed Agricultural Action Plan will be undertaken as part of existing work plans within the Community Planning department (e.g. rural and agricultural policy review). Potential resource implications for actions which are not already captured within an existing work plan will be determined through future work planning processes.
- As noted in this report, many agencies across multiple levels of government are working to support and promote rural and agricultural economic development. Where critical actions can be more appropriately addressed by working with others, partnerships will be established. Potential collaborators include the Halton Region Federation of Agriculture, Halton Public Health, Conservation Halton, the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance, the Greenbelt Foundation, the Niagara Escarpment Commission, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA) and other municipalities within Halton Region.
- With the City now responsible for the Region's Agricultural and Rural Systems portfolio, related staff portfolios from across the corporation are being examined to assist with matters such as rural servicing, environmental issues, aggregate extraction, rural economic development, and agricultural liaison and advisor support roles. Currently, Community Planning policy staff oversee the City's Agricultural and Rural portfolio. However, with only a portion of one full-time employee (FTE) dedicated to this area, sufficient resources are not in place to accommodate the full range of new responsibilities.
- In the near-term, the City and Economic Development will need to work together to support the City through early implementation of its new planning responsibilities and the Agricultural Action Plan. In the longer term it is expected that new responsibilities related to Agricultural and Rural Systems will require policy changes and organizational

structure changes in concert with approaches related to Water Resources, Natural Heritage and Aggregate Resources.

- As set out in report DGM-09-25, staff will report back at future committee cycles (with the first update being targeted for Q3 of 2025) with a strategy and workplan for resourcing needs to implement what were previously the responsibilities of Halton Region. This will include an analysis of cost recovery through development application fees as well as the potential for a phased roll out that aligns business cases with future budget cycles. The Agricultural Action Plan will help to inform this process by establishing a set of key priorities for supporting long term agricultural resiliency in Burlington.

References

- [Burlington Agricultural and Rural Affairs Advisory Committee Terms of Reference](#)
- [MO-10-19 - Red Tape Red Carpet Task Force recommendations](#)
- [Burlington Official Plan, 2020](#)
- [ECDEV-03-21 - Red Tape Red Carpet \(RTRC\) Update Q1 2021](#)
 - [ECDEV-03-21 - Appendix A - RTRC Implementation Plan Dashboard Q1 2021](#)
- [Burlington Official Plan, 2020](#)
- [Burlington Brownfield Focus Community Improvement Plan 2021](#)
- [Highlights from Rural Ontario Municipal Association \(ROMA\) virtual conference 2022](#)
 - [Delegation Presentation 1](#)
 - [Delegation Presentation 2](#)
- [CS-06-22 Risk to Strategy – Vision 2040 final](#)
 - [CS-06-22 Appendix A - A City That Grows](#)
- [Climate Resilient Burlington Plan 2022 – 2032](#)
 - [Climate Change Vulnerability & Risk Assessment](#)
- [Vision to Focus 2022-2026](#)
- [CA-22-24 Updates on Service Delivery Post-Bill 23](#)
 - [Halton Region Federation of Agriculture Delegation](#)
 - [Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance Delegation](#)
- [DGM-09-25 Transition of planning responsibilities from Halton Region](#)
 - [March 18, 2025 BARAAC delegation re: DGM-09-25 Transition of planning responsibilities from Halton Region](#)

Strategic Alignment

- Designing and delivering complete communities
 - Providing the best services and experiences
 - Protecting and improving the natural environment and taking action on climate change
 - Driving organizational performance
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Appendices:

- A. Proposed "Burlington Agricultural Action Plan"
- B. Additional Background Information

Notifications:

N/A

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and approved by the Commissioner, Head of Corporate Affairs, Chief Financial Officer, and Commissioner of Legal and Legislative Services/City Solicitor.