

Additional Background Information

Initiatives Informing the Development of the Proposed Agricultural Action Plan:

Red Tape Red Carpet Initiative 2019

On September 23, 2019, City Council approved the 22 recommendations arising from the Mayor's Red Tape Red Carpet (RTRC) Task Force initiative to better serve customers as part of the City's commitment to continuous improvement. A draft implementation plan was presented at the October 8 Planning and Development Committee and approved by City Council on October 21, 2019. In relation to the agricultural sector, actions RT8 and RT9 or RTRC identified the need to:

Review the agribusiness rules, zoning, and definitions to encourage diversified use and help support economic sustainability for our rural/farming businesses.
(RT8)

Establish a rural-point-of-contact person who can navigate agriculture requests (business or otherwise) with other agencies. (RT9)

In relation to RT8, Burlington Economic Development (BED, prior to merging with Tourism Burlington) and Community Planning staff prepared a draft guide to support agri-businesses in navigating the development approvals process. However, due to the appealed status of the expanded permissions in the BOP, 2020, the guide remained in draft and was not formally approved. In relation to RT9, a Senior Planner in Community Planning and existing staff liaison to BARAAC was named as the interim rural-point-of-contact person, with the understanding that the Task Force would consider more permanent solutions for the longer term.

The Burlington Agricultural and Rural Affairs Advisory Committee (BARAAC) was engaged to provide further input on policies and processes relating to agribusiness, as well as how the proposed rural-point-of-contact role should be scoped. Over time, these discussions evolved to a focus on developing an agricultural action plan for the City of Burlington, to better capture the full spectrum of needs expressed by the agricultural sector.

Burlington Official Plan, 2020

The Burlington Official Plan, 2020 (BOP, 2020) establishes that the economic health and long-term viability of the agricultural system plays an important role in creating a healthy and environmentally sustainable city. The policies of the Plan are directed at providing the conditions for agriculture and the agricultural system to grow and prosper and to adapt to changing conditions. In relation to this goal, section 5.5.2 of the BOP, 2020 contains the following enabling policies:

a) The City will consider providing incentives and other forms of assistance to support the development of agricultural, agriculture-related and on-farm diversified businesses through the preparation, adoption and implementation of a Community Improvement Plan under Subsection 12.1.15 of this Plan.

d) The City will collaborate with the Region of Halton in implementing Halton Region's Rural Agricultural Strategy to support the long-term sustainability and prosperity of the agricultural system and the rural economy.

e) The City will consider the development of an urban agricultural strategy to identify and support appropriate agricultural uses in the Urban Area, in accordance with the policies in Section 4.9, Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture, of this Plan.

Burlington Brownfield Focus Community Improvement Plan, 2021

In 2021, the City approved a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) with a focus on brownfield remediation. Through this process, input from key stakeholders, CIP Project Team, and the public identified a number of other community improvement need areas where one or more CIPs could be developed by the City as part of a comprehensive CIP strategy to further advance the City's key policy objectives.

These other key community improvement need areas are outlined in section 4.3 of the Plan and include a description of "Rural Economic Development" opportunities in accordance with section 5.5.2 of the BOP, 2020. This future-oriented section of the CIP notes that such incentives could:

- help agricultural operations to adapt to economic and technological change and to adopt innovative new agricultural practices (Official Plan Policy 9.2.1a) (vii)) while also boosting rural employment;
- help promote agriculture-related uses and on-farm diversified uses that are compatible with agriculture and support the development of a more diverse, innovative and economically strong agricultural industry in the city (Policies 9.2.1a) (vi) and (viii)); and
- help diversify revenue streams and better position the agricultural industry to adapt to the impacts of a changing climate, thereby increasing the overall resiliency of the sector.

The CIP report also highlights that it is important to consider the future development of City-led programs to support Burlington's agricultural sector, given that the city may not meet eligibility requirements of some Provincial rural economic development programs. This is a result of Burlington's unique rural/urban context and the fact that "rural" municipalities are often defined by overall population, as well as the types of servicing available.

Halton Region Agricultural Working Group

Halton Region coordinated an Agricultural Working Group (AWG) from March to May 2021 as part of the Regional Official Plan Review (ROPR) consultation process. The AWG brought together representatives of the agricultural sector (including representatives of BARAAC) and regional staff with a shared interest in the vitality and success of agriculture in Halton.

The intent of the AWG was to provide a key forum for the constructive sharing of information and views about agriculture-related issues in the Region. The following recommendations (contained in a summary report prepared by the Region) were agreed upon to continue advancing with solutions-based discussion through the remainder of the ROPR process:

- 1. The Region will further develop the specific exemptions for agricultural uses and buildings within key features and vegetation protection zones, in consultation with all stakeholders;*
- 2. The Region will continue working with the agricultural community on the development of updated key feature mapping to ensure that the mapping is as accurate as possible in the next iteration of the ROP;*
- 3. The Region will continue to directly contact those that may be affected by updated mapping;*
- 4. The Region will prepare updated ROP policies, and through the Rural and Agricultural Strategy and the Natural Heritage Strategy, to further recognize the importance of agriculture, recognize farmers as good stewards and which remove barriers to agricultural investment wherever possible;*
- 5. The Region will explore opportunities to streamline the site plan process at the local municipal level;*
- 6. The Region will work with the Niagara Escarpment Commission and develop an operational guide that outlines the Region's role in the processing of Development Permit applications;*
- 7. The Region will consider developing a concierge service to provide direct assistance in navigating planning processes when applications to develop agricultural uses are submitted;*
- 8. The Region will update its EIA guidelines to provide greater clarity on triggers, scoping and the waiving of EIA's, with these guidelines based on an updated ROP policy framework;*
- 9. The Region will determine if there is an ability to allow for the waiving of fees related to the Regional role in the review of applications; and*

10. The Region commits to further consultation with the agricultural community as the policies in the ROP are updated.

Though these proposed actions have been impacted by the transition of Regional planning responsibilities to the local municipalities, they are still largely representative of issues raised by the agricultural sector and have therefore informed the development of the proposed Burlington Agricultural Action Plan.

Rural Ontario Municipal Association Conference 2022

In 2022, Mayor Meed Ward participated in delegations with representatives from two provincial ministries as part of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) conference:

Delegation 1: Deputy Minister Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark and ADM Craig Brown, Policy Division, Ontario Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry to discuss Red Tape reduction, and a coordinated approach to approvals.

Delegation 2: Minister Lisa Thompson of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, joined by Oakville North Burlington MPP Effie Triantafilopoulos and Burlington MPP Jane McKenna, to discuss thinking differently and inclusively about farmers “in the City” when engaging with the agricultural sector.

These delegations were informed by a set of advocacy priorities developed by BARAAC and resulted in a commitment by the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry (so called at the time) and the Niagara Escarpment Commission to engage in future discussions with the City of Burlington on process improvement.

Climate Resilient Burlington Plan 2022 – 2032

Climate Resilient Burlington (CRB) is a climate adaptation plan identifying actions to manage the highest projected risks of warmer, wetter and wilder weather. Stakeholders, which included BARAAC, assessed the highest climate risks for Burlington, identified actions to manage these risks, and prioritized 32 actions for implementation. This work involved the completion of a “Climate Change Vulnerability & Risk Assessment”, which captured a detailed analysis of key risks to Burlington. In relation to the agricultural sector, action 5-1 of CRB identified the need to:

“Pursue approval to develop a Burlington Agricultural Action Plan that includes a climate lens and considers opportunities to complement partner agency initiatives.”.

Rural economic development and on-farm diversification are critical elements of building agricultural resiliency in the face of increasingly extreme and unpredictable weather conditions. Enabling farmers to grow and expand their operations in a manner that is nimble and cost-effective enhances their ability to adapt to the effects of a changing

climate. Other measures typically captured in an agricultural action plan, such as investments in rural infrastructure and on-farm stewardship, can also help to insulate farmers from the effects of extreme weather by mitigating/minimizing the impacts of flooding, erosion, drought etc.

Vision to Focus 2022-2026

In 2022, the City completed a risk assessment of its Strategic Plan – Vision 2040. This process allowed staff involved in delivering the outcomes of the City’s strategic objectives to qualitatively describe what success looks like, including the associated outcomes. Under the theme “A City that Grows” in relation to the objective “Burlington’s Rural areas economically and socially active”, staff identified the following key risk:

Succession and transition issue for farms not properly addressed, creating a barrier for new farm entrants (family or other)

To address this risk, it was recommended that the City develop an agricultural action plan and support Halton Region in implementing its Rural Agricultural Strategy (see Appendix A: Risk Confidence Chart – A City that Grows). As a result, the updated Vision to Focus now includes “Develop a Burlington Agricultural Action Plan with a climate lens” as Action I under Focus Area 3. This action complements Action 5-1 of the Climate Resilient Burlington Plan.

Examples of Complementary Initiatives Led by Other Agencies/Organizations:

Grow Ontario: a provincial agri-food strategy

- A Provincial plan to strengthen the agri-food sector, fuel economic growth, ensure an efficient, reliable, and responsive food supply and address ongoing agri-food sector vulnerabilities through new innovations.
- Outlines actions to build consumer confidence, support farmers and processors, increase yields, promote Ontario-grown food, grow the agri-food talent pool, and strengthen the food supply chain – while increasing the commercialization and adoption of innovative new technologies and practices that enhance competitiveness, add productivity, create economic growth, and strengthen the sector.

New Horizons: Ontario's Agricultural Soil Health and Conservation Strategy

- A Provincial plan to guide collaborative soil health research, investments and activities until 2030. The strategy’s vision is: Healthy agricultural soils contribute to a vibrant agricultural sector, productive economy, sustainable environment and thriving society.
- Outlines actions to address Soil Management, Soil Data and Mapping, Soil Evaluation and Monitoring and Soil Knowledge and Innovation.

Enabling Opportunity: Ontario's Rural Economic Development Strategy

- A Provincial plan to ensure rural communities are best positioned to take advantage of opportunities and address challenges.
- Outlines actions to address safe and strong rural communities, business development and attraction, and growing the rural workforce.

Golden Horseshoe Food & Farming Alliance Action Plan 2021 – 2026: A Vibrant Future

- The Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (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.
- Outlines 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.

Halton Region Rural Agricultural Strategy

- A [former] Regional plan to sustain and grow a prosperous rural community and permanent agricultural system within Halton Region.
- Outlines actions to establish and sustain a Regional Agricultural system; protect the integrity of the rural area; enhance rural and agricultural prosperity; contribute to well-being and quality of life for Regional residents; and support vibrant rural communities.