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**Draft OMAFRA Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Prime Agricultural Areas**

**Planner: L. Maitland**

<b>TO:</b>	<b>CHAIR AND MEMBERS PLANNING &amp; ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE</b>
<b>FROM:</b>	<b>JOHN M. FLEMING MANAGING DIRECTOR, PLANNING AND CITY PLANNER</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>CITY OF LONDON RESPONSE TO DRAFT ONTARIO MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS GUIDELINES ON PERMITTED USES IN ONTARIO'S PRIME AGRICULTURAL AREAS MEETING ON MAY 4, 2015</b>

<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>
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That, on the recommendation of the Managing Director, Planning & City Planner, the following report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

<b>PREVIOUS REPORTS PERTINENT TO THIS MATTER</b>
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None.

<b>INFORMATION</b>
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In February 2015 the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) released a draft copy of the *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas* for input and discussion. The Ministry is seeking input from citizens and other stakeholders on the document by May 13, 2015. A copy of the draft guidelines is attached to this report.

The *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas* have been developed to assist municipalities in their interpretation of the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) 2015, specifically its policies relating to prime agricultural areas. The *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas* offer a number of best management practices. The guidelines aim to achieve two central objectives:

- 1) *maintaining the land base for agriculture*
- 2) *supporting a thriving agricultural industry and rural economy*

Throughout the guidelines three categories of permitted uses in prime agricultural areas are identified: "agricultural uses", "agriculture-related uses", and "on-farm diversified uses". Agricultural uses, as defined through the PPS, are those uses which involved "the growing of crops, raising of livestock and raising of other animals for food, fur or fibre." These uses are further defined and protected through the normal farm practices definition provided in *The Farming and Food Production Protection Act, 1998*.

Agriculture-related uses are "farm-related commercial and industrial uses that add to the vitality and economic viability of prime agricultural areas because they service the local agricultural community." These uses are directed to less-desirable land within the area and are limited to those that support the forms of agriculture practiced in the immediate area.

On-farm diversified uses are those which are secondary uses, limited in area, and located on farm parcels. These uses are undertaken to ensure the financial viability of those engaged in agriculture and necessarily on-farm diversified uses cannot hamper the ability of agriculture uses in prime agricultural areas.

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**Implications**

As the *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas* follow from the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) 2014 significant change in the planning structure or approach the City of London currently takes with regard to our agricultural areas is not required. A few issues for consideration are raised through the document.

The guidelines direct that changes in agricultural uses shall not trigger *Planning Act* applications (Zoning By-law amendment or Official Plan amendments). This requires London's Official Plan and Zoning By-law to accurately account for and permit the nature of agricultural uses in the area. As an example current zoning regulations would not permit a change on a site from fieldcrops to ginseng production given the coverage requirements in place in the Zoning by-law. Although this does not require an overhaul of agricultural zoning practices it does provide an impetus to keep an accurate record of the agricultural practices underway in the region.

The guidelines speak to the use of temporary zones for the trial of agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses. Although planning policy generally considers the impacts generated by these uses, there is room for additional policy development to guide the use of temporary zones in prime agricultural areas.

The City's policies and regulations for prime agricultural areas address the uses and situations seen in the City of London. The *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas* are set to offer additional assistance on PPS interpretation for future situations as they arise. As an example, the guidelines provide a framework for defining the "limited-in-area" requirement for on-farm diversified uses. This can be implemented through the London Plan and the subsequent processes to amend zoning regulations.

**Response**

The Ministry is requesting response to the following three questions, regarding the released draft *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas*. The following includes the responses provided by civic administration.

1. *What parts of the document do you find most helpful?*

Table 2 provides an excellent resource for the interpretation of the PPS. It allows for the consideration of uses and buildings in different contexts and therefore becomes a significant tool for the planner in analysing the distinctions of the provincial policy. As an example the appropriate zoning for a machinery repair shop may depend on the specificity of the users, the table provides guidance as to when it would be considered an agricultural use (exclusively on site), agriculture-related use (supportive of local agriculture) or an on-farm diversified use (other types).

2. *How could the document be improved?*

Temporary zones are referred to in section 2.5.2 (page 32) as a tool for testing new agricultural-related and on-farm diversified uses in prime agricultural areas. Further guidance or examples on criteria for the application of temporary zones in prime agricultural areas would be helpful.

Site plan control is referred to in 2.5.3 of the document and the application to uses which are not agricultural uses is in line with current practice. Of concern is the particular case of large scale greenhouse operations. Further guidance would be of assistance on the application of site plan control to these uses which, though agricultural uses, generate many of the impacts usually associated with industrial uses

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*3. Do you have any other comments about the document in general?*

The guidelines speak to the Provincial goal of achieving municipal consistency across jurisdictions in the implementation of agricultural planning policies. This goal can be appreciated as municipalities attempt to balance the needs to retain the quality of agricultural land while farms diversify into to non-agricultural businesses to maintain their financial viability.

<b>CONCLUSION</b>
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No further action is required. Staff will forward their comments to the Ministry and continue to monitor any changes arising from the input received through the commentary period.

<b>PREPARED BY:</b>	<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>
<b>LEIF MAITLAND PLANNER I, LONG RANGE PLANNING AND RESEARCH</b>	<b>GREGG BARRETT, AICP MANAGER, LONG RANGE PLANNING AND RESEARCH</b>
<b>RECOMMENDED BY:</b>	
<b>JOHN M. FLEMING, MCIP, RPP MANAGING DIRECTOR, PLANNING AND CITY PLANNER</b>	

March 30, 2015

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Attached – Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario’s Prime Agricultural Areas – Draft for input and discussion, February 2015

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