

Burlington Economic Vision 2025 - Rural Strategy **Background Information & Interviews**

The development of a rural strategy for the City of Burlington was identified by Council as an integral component for achieving the City of Burlington's overall economic vision. This involves developing rural strategies as they relate to both an agricultural and recreation and tourism perspective. This background document will attempt to provide contextual information and data on the agricultural economy of the City while also looking at rural strategies employed by other comparable regions. Ultimately, it is hoped that this will provide a framework upon which to inform the development of actionable rural strategies moving forward that support achieving the City of Burlington's new economic vision.

In addition to this background analysis Economic Vision interviews were also conducted with rural stakeholders. The Key themes identified from these interviews and suggested tactics may be used to inform a rural strategy for Burlington. It is the recommendation of the Economic Vision development process that the rural strategy not be fully developed until the regional rural strategy is complete so that the 2 levels of rural strategy will be in alignment.

Rural Strategy Background Information

Burlington Rural Lands for Agricultural Use

Agricultural land is an important resource for Burlington, by producing local food while giving economic return to the producer and related industries. Burlington, in spite of being within the densely populated Greater Toronto Area (GTA) has the advantage of having a significant portion of its lands designated as rural. In total, these rural areas comprise approximately half of the City's total land mass. In the Northern part of the city lie the Niagara Escarpment and the Greenbelt Areas, both of which have been retained as rural lands and almost all of the land available for agriculture is within these two areas.

The following section provides a snapshot of the farming industry within the City.

Table 1 - Number of Farms and average size (hectares)

Year	Less than 4	4-27	28-52	53-72	73-96	97-161	162-230	227-307	308-452	453-647	Total farms	Avg. Farm Size
1996	22	48	15	9	5	7	4	0	2	1	113	45
2001	12	42	16	5	5	9	2	1	2	1	95	52
2006	9	34	15	5	2	8	2	1	2	1	79	55
2011	13	31	11	5	4	3	1	1	0	0	70	47

Source: Statistics Canada 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011 (Converted from acres)

As can be noted, the total number of farms has steadily decreased since 2001, whereas the average farm size has increased by approximately 2 hectares from 1996 to 2011. However, since 2006, average farm sizes have also been decreasing with a drop of approximately 15%. Also of note is that in 2006, 54 % of farms were categorized as being 28 hectares or less in size while in 2011, that figure was 62% indicating a steady decline in average farm size over a five year span.

Table 2 - Total Area Farmed and Ownership

Year	Total Area Farmed (ha)	Area farmed by owners		Area farmed by tenants	
		Area (ha)	%	Area (ha)	%
1996	5,046	3,078	61%	1,968	39%
2001	4,904	2,939	60%	1,965	40%
2006	4,306	2,778	65%	1,528	35%
2011	3,259	1,702	52%	1,487	46%

Source: Statistics Canada 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011

As can be seen, there has been a continued decrease in farmland in Burlington between 1996 and 2011 with the total area being farmed in Burlington decreasing by 35.4% since 1996.

Largest farms in Burlington by location

- Hutchinson Farm – 6202 Walkers Line
- Applevale Orchards – 5144 Derry Road
- Featherstone Farm – 6261 Guelph Line
- Uncle Scott’s Farm – 6583 Walker’s Line

The figure below shows the location of these large farms in Burlington from a geographic perspective. As can be noted, all farm locations appear in the north of the city.



Burlington Natural Heritage Information

The City of Burlington is situated between two defining geographical features – the Niagara Escarpment and the northern shore of Lake Ontario. This unique location gives the city tremendous economic potential from a recreation and tourism perspective. While the urban areas are located mainly in the areas south of the (Highway) 407, the agricultural, rural and conservation areas lie in the northern parts of the city. The city also maintains a proud green city heritage with more than 581 hectares of parkland. The Urban Forest Management Plan estimates that Burlington’s natural wooded areas cover over 3,800 hectares, with 3,150 hectares in the rural area.

Other green space can also be found in the Royal Botanical Gardens, Conservation Halton lands and private lands with public access, such as the Bruce Trail lands. As the largest botanical garden in Canada, The Royal Botanical Gardens owns and manages approximately 1,100 hectares of gardens and nature sanctuaries in addition to 27km of trails. Conservation Halton has almost 4,452 hectares of conservation lands within the Greenbelt protection area while the Bruce Trail, which follows the Niagara Escarpment from Georgian Bay to the Niagara River, spans more than 890 km of main trail and over 400km of associated side trails.

Protection of Natural Heritage

Outlined below are some of the plans and systems in place designed to ensure the preservation and protection of these rural lands and which are relevant from the City of Burlington’s context.

The Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) is an agency of Ontario’s Ministry of Natural Resources and works to preserve the Niagara Escarpment through the **Niagara Escarpment Plan**, which includes policies for land use designations and development criteria. It is the first plan of its kind in Canada for large scale environmental land use balancing protection, conservation and sustainable development to ensure the long term sustainability of the Escarpment as a natural resource for future generations. Land use restrictions within the Escarpment areas are divided into seven designations, the first three of which offer the most protection, namely the Escarpment Natural Area (areas containing natural and cultural heritage features), the Escarpment Protection Area and the Escarpment Rural Area. For each of its land use designations, The Plan outlines the objectives, permitted uses and policies, which through the Ontario Planning Act, authorizes each municipality to plan for land use within its own boundaries.

The Royal Botanical Gardens, which was created to serve as both a regional tourism site and an environmental agency, protects and restores approximately 991 hectares of

nature sanctuaries. It has diligently engaged in research projects and conservation efforts intended to pursue environmental sustainability and ensure the preservation of its stewarded lands and the unique ecosystems within them.

Conservation Halton manages more than 4045 hectares of nature land, of which more than 75% is forested land located in its conservation areas and resource management sites. These forests are designated for conservation and preservation purposes primarily with only relatively small portions (approx. 5%) designated for passive recreation use such as hiking and nature appreciation.

The **Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System** is a collaborative initiative of ten local government and non-profit organizations in the Burlington-Hamilton area. Together, the partner organizations own or manage almost 1,900 hectares of natural lands in this area and work together to protect, connect and restore the natural lands, and to deliver sustainable recreation opportunities. The City of Burlington is one of the partner organizations that work with the System to ensure the protection and sustainability of these natural lands.

The Region of Halton recently introduced a natural heritage systems based approach under the Regional Official Plan Amendment 38 (**ROPA 38**). Halton's **Natural Heritage System** (NHS) is made up of both the regional Natural Heritage System and the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System. The regional Natural Heritage System is a systems approach to protecting and enhancing natural features and functions while the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System also takes a systems approach to protecting natural features and functions, specifically within the Greenbelt Plan Policy Area.

The City of Burlington is currently updating the Official Plan which includes a conformity exercise with ROPA 38 and the identification of natural heritage system policies and mapping. Currently, within Burlington, the natural heritage system comprises 7,816 hectares, which when compared with Burlington's total land area of 18,737 hectares, constitutes approximately 42%.

Rural Strategies of other economic regions

Waterloo Region

Waterloo region has a total land area of 138,420 hectares. Although it is predominantly a rural municipality, with agriculture the principal land use, the Region exists outside of the existing Greenbelt Area and subsequently, the protectionism of rural lands this affords. However, the region recognizes the role agriculture plays in its economic development and the necessity of ensuring the long-term viability of this sector. Within the Region itself, the Regional Official Plan (ROP) contains planning policies to direct the growth and change in the region over the next 20 years including directing and managing growth in rural areas and establishing fixed borders between designated urban and rural areas for development opportunities.

There are policies in place related to protection of countryside land, agriculture-related uses, secondary uses and expansion of existing employment uses within the countryside line. More specific policies relate to recreational and tourism uses and rural institutional uses including the establishment of rural/mixed-use and agricultural clusters within the region. These policies are intended to protect the countryside from unnecessary urbanization and sustainably managing resources to meet the needs of current and future generations.

For example, in 2007, the Region implemented an Environmentally Sensitive Landscapes (ESLs) framework, the first of its kind in Ontario, to protect more than 15,000 hectares of environmentally sensitive lands. ESLs are areas in the Region that have significant environmental features such as wetland, rivers and creeks, habitats of endangered species. They also include areas with farms, villages and outdoor recreation areas. The policy is intended to ensure the preservation of the unique rural features of these areas by limiting the amount and type of development that is allowed. To date, four ESLs in the region have been designated: The Laurel Creek Headwater, The Blair-Bechtel-Cruickston, The Beverly and The North Dumfries Carolinian ESLs.

In addition, The Region strives to maintain green spaces in its individual cities. For instance, The City of Waterloo has an environmental strategy in place with areas of focus in green space sustainability (including parks and trees) and sustainable planning and growth to guide the design and development of supporting a livable city. The city maintains a trail network over 150 kilometers long, spanning the entire city from uptown Waterloo through parks, woodlands and more. There are large parks within the city such as Bechtel Park, RIM Park and Waterloo Park as well as smaller ones in residential neighbourhoods, aimed at fostering the city's unique rural/urban dynamic.

The County of Essex

Agriculture is one of the most predominant features distinguishing the economy of Essex County in comparison with other areas in Ontario. Over 80% of the land in the County is farmland providing tremendous opportunities for diversified farming activities related to food production. As the southernmost county in Ontario, its lands fall well outside of the Greenbelt Protection Areas. However, a significant portion of the county's lands are designated solely for agriculture and agri-tourism purposes.

The long term success of the County directly revolves around its ability to maintain rural and agricultural strategies for ensuring the long term sustainability and protection of its agricultural resources. The Official Plan for the County has policies in place to protect prime agricultural areas and encourage a broad range of agriculture related activities to ensure that this industry continues to thrive and innovate. In addition, the plan recognizes the importance of preserving the natural heritage resources within the County by encouraging identification, conservation, protection and enhancement. One example of these types of plans can be seen in one of the largest agricultural communities within the County, namely Leamington, as seen below.

Municipality of Leamington

Leamington is primarily an agricultural community with most types of agriculture being present in the area. The municipality has over 240 hectares of greenhouses producing tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and flowers. Agriculture is expected to remain the primary economic driver and therefore, the land use plans and policies for the municipality were established with the objectives of preserving prime agricultural land for agricultural purposes, allowing farm operators to engage in a wide range of agricultural activities including greenhouse farming and restricting the amount of non-farm development in areas designated "Agricultural".

Rural Interviews Key Themes

As part of the new Economic Vision for the City of Burlington, Council identified the inclusion of a rural economic development strategy as priority for inclusion. To support the development of this strategy Economic Vision interviews were undertaken with 10 stakeholders in the City of Burlington to obtain their perspectives on developing the rural strategy. The following key themes were aggregated from these interviews:

- Leverage the Bruce Trail and surrounding areas, enticing more attraction in rural Burlington. Address parking Issues around the Conservation Halton and Bruce Trail Areas which are current deterrents to higher tourism => Cars are currently being ticketed by the Police for parking in the vicinity of cycling and hiking trail heads.
- Better support farmers and the Farming Community through providing subsidies, funding, and incubator/co-op farming programs (in connection with Universities and Colleges) to encourage increased participation in the agricultural sector, particularly among the younger generation. Look into implementing educational and awareness programs promoting our agricultural sectors and create better partnerships between the city and the community to support local farmers and produce => For example, consider having a permanent Farmer's Market in the downtown area.
- Develop avenues for ensuring the long term sustainability of our natural heritage and rural areas as we move towards build out in the future => For example, consider partnering with green industries for promoting sustainable development in agricultural production. In addition, look to promote alternative forms of urban development within the city such as planning suburban neighbourhoods to be denser create less sprawl and instead having more complete, walkable communities.
- Further push recreational tourism here in Burlington, taking advantage of our large rural areas, natural heritage and trail systems. Look at more opportunities around cycling and hiking. Leverage the presence of facilities like the Milton Velodrome to bring in more traffic into the area => Look into the possibility of creating a cycling Master Plan for the City with direct linkages to these trail systems which could potentially help to take some of the burden off our internal transit issues.
- Make better use of our great natural amenities for generating greater tourism into Burlington => Taking advantage of the Lake, pier, Waterfront and

Escarpment and having more social and cultural events based around these areas. Create a park with the potential to host large events in the rural area to take the pressure off Spencer Smith and host events that increase the rural tourism profile.

- Create more opportunities around Natural Heritage Sites and look to better acknowledge the heritage aspects of our community, e.g. through historical tourism and sponsoring events like Heritage Walks
- Build more opportunities around agri-tourism, eco-tourism and farming tourism (e.g. like having experiential farms) here in Burlington. Look to form new partnerships and maintain/strengthen existing ones with the Conservation Authorities and regulatory bodies to protect and leverage our unique natural heritage, while creating a system of infrastructure around these initiatives.
- Look into the potential of opening up sections of the Greenbelt for more economic development opportunities, striking a balance between protection and preservation of our strong rural identity and creating the opportunities for increased tourism through our parks and natural areas.
- Protect our agricultural and rural lands against large residential development = > fewer large mansions and more overall land supply for agricultural production. Perhaps look into implementing bylaws and regulations looking to cap sizes of residential properties in designated rural areas.

It should be noted that we were unable to engage with regional stakeholders during the development of this rural strategy and that the themes presented here are the result of the opinions aggregated from stakeholders internal to Burlington.

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