



### INTRODUCTION

Almost two-thirds of Strathcona County's 1,265 sq. km. land area is used for agriculture purposes. The County's farming heritage dates back to over a hundred years ago when the excellent soils in the area formed the basis of a strong agriculture tradition.

The agriculture base in the County for many decades has consisted of traditional farms, such as large-scale field cropping and large intensive livestock operations. More recently, there has been a growing presence of non-traditional and part-time farms with a mix of specialty operations such as greenhouses, horticulture, vegetables, fruits, and specialized livestock.

The agriculture sector is an important economic driver, contributing to the County's economic, social and environmental well being in several ways:

- It creates jobs and economic wealth for farmers and businesses.
- It is important to the community character of Strathcona County.
- It offers a degree of local food security.
- It provides an alternative to an urban lifestyle.

### WHAT DOES THE 2007 MDP SAY?

The Municipal Development Plan is the County's policy document responsible for managing the land use and development issues related to agriculture.

The 2007 MDP's policies are designed to support good agricultural development, provide for the diversity of agricultural opportunities, reduce the fragmentation of large tracts of primary and unique agricultural lands, direct growth to areas with less impact on agriculture, and address potential land use conflicts.

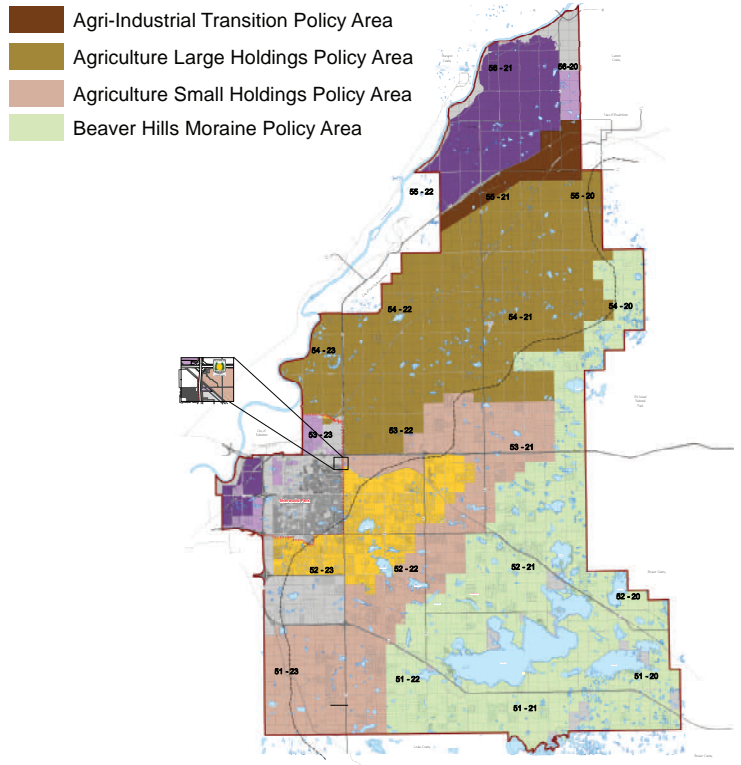
Chapter 14 – Agriculture, is broad in scope and is aimed at the protection and enhancement of agriculture lands and the agricultural industry.

## Geographic Areas Established for Agricultural Use

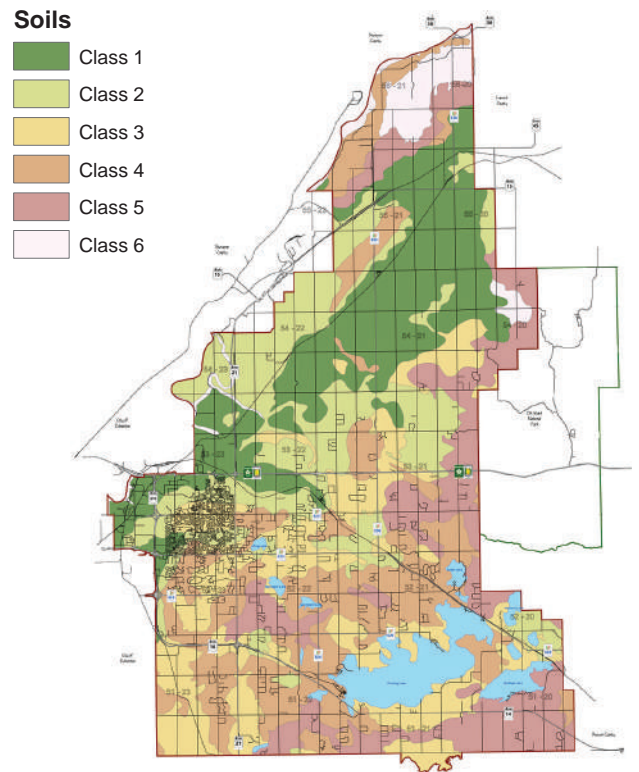
The MDP defines four geographic rural 'Policy Areas' (see Map 1), with specific policies on agriculture carefully tailored to the distinct characteristics of each Area. This customized approach has proven to be an effective way to protect agricultural and environmentally significant lands while providing flexibility in the management of residential development.

The Policy Areas are defined according to the scale and form of agriculture operations allowed, their proximity to urban development, their Canada Land Inventory soil class rating, (see Map 2) and other physical, environmental characteristics. These Areas are:

- 1. Agriculture – Large Holdings Policy Area:** An area that allows for the development of large/extensive agricultural operations on large, un-fragmented parcels greater than or equal to 32.3 hectares (80 acres).
  - 2. Agriculture – Small Holdings Policy Area:** An area intended to serve as a transition from higher density development in the west to a lesser density of rural and agricultural uses in the east/southeast, towards Elk Island National Park and the Beaver Hills Moraine. This policy area also provides for conservation of environmentally sensitive areas, rural small holdings and intensive agricultural operations and associated residential uses.
  - 3. Agri-Industrial Transition Policy Area:** A transition area between heavy industrial activities within Alberta's Industrial Heartland and the remainder of Strathcona County.
- The intent of this Policy Area is to provide for synergy with neighbouring heavy industry, where there is considerations for intensive agricultural operations, agri-industrial operations and synergistic processing of agricultural goods.
- 4. Beaver Hills Moraine Policy Area:** An area that accommodates agriculture, residences tied to agriculture and low impact recreational uses. The primary intent of this Policy Area is to preserve the Beaver Hills Moraine ecosystem and landscape.



Map 1: MDP Rural Policy Areas



Map 2: Soils Rating Map (Canada Lands Inventory)

### General Agriculture Policy

Some of the more general policies in Chapter 14 of the 2007 MDP that protect and enhance agriculture lands and the agricultural industry include:

- Minimize non-agricultural development in areas where agriculture is the predominant land use.
- Continue to promote the development of extensive/large agriculture operations within the Agriculture – Large Holdings Policy Area.
- Minimize the fragmentation of agricultural land by limiting further subdivision within the Agriculture – Large Holdings Policy Area in order to maintain and further promote the development of large agricultural operations.

### ISSUES RAISED DURING THE MDP ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Participants in the MDP public engagement process emphasized the importance of agriculture to the County's identity and stressed the need to reduce the spread of urban development into prime farmlands.

They also felt there was a need for more education and promotion of agriculture, not only for youth, but for all residents and visitors. They also would like to see an emphasis on the promotion and development of agri-tourism, market gardens, community gardens, and equestrian facilities. Ideas to help grow the equestrian sector included shared facilities, equestrian arenas, condominium horse stalls, trails, pasture lands, and local veterinarians.

### AGRICULTURE MASTER PLAN

The Agriculture Master Plan (AMP), approved by Council in June 2015, contains several potential actions as part of an implementation strategy relating to agriculture land use and development, as well as many relating to governance, communications and economic development. Many of the potential actions proposed by the AMP will require staff to undertake follow up work outside of the MDP update process with respect to their feasibility and the best method of potential implementation.

### POTENTIAL POLICY OPTIONS

*This section introduces some potential new policy options and expands on others already included in the MDP and AMP. These policy options can help the Municipality (and partners) to address agriculture related items. These options are intended to promote discussion about the best options for Strathcona County and may eventually guide new or refined MDP policy and land use bylaw changes.*

#### 1. Agri-Tourism

Policy options for the development of Agri-Tourism are included in the *Sustainable Tourism Policy Options paper*.

#### 2. Agri-Business

**Agri-industrial:** These uses are currently contemplated within the Agri-Industrial Transition Policy Area, an area between the Heartland heavy industrial complex and agricultural lands to the south. Examples of agri-businesses include seed cleaning plants, greenhouses, and food processing plants.

**Agri-commercial:** The AMP recommends "policies that allow for and encourage a wide range of commercial agricultural activities on agricultural land to allow for on-farm sales and other activities that draw people (services, events) should be pursued by Strathcona County - particularly for sectors such as equine where there seems to be considerable promise."

There may be opportunities for agri-business (both agri-industrial and agri-commercial) within appropriate policy areas of the County. The MDP could establish policy that summarizes under which conditions this type of development would be allowed, and the Land Use Bylaw would provide the regulatory requirements.

***Policy Options***

The policy options with respect to agri-business may involve:

- The updated MDP could establish policy to allow for 'Agri-Business' to accommodate appropriate activities such as an agriculture supply business, equestrian supply business or food processing business.
- Different approaches and implementation tools could be used, including revisions to either of the AG Agriculture General or AGI Agri-Industrial district, conceptual schemes, ASPs, and so forth. The amendments could be tailored to the particular Policy Area, soil classification and zoning.

**3. Use of an Agriculture Impact Assessment (AIA)**

An AIA would describe a proposed development, the on-site and surrounding land uses, and the physical and economic components of the agriculture resource base. It would identify the direct and indirect impacts of the proposed development on agriculture and outline optional methods of reducing any adverse impacts.

Introducing a requirement for an AIA could be helpful in areas such as the Agri-Industrial Transition, Agricultural Small Holdings or Agricultural Large Holdings Policy Areas to help determine where the best locations for development would be, and what measures would be required to mitigate impacts.

***Policy Options***

The policy options with respect to the preparation of an AIA may involve:

- Providing the policy framework and rationale in the MDP for requiring an AIA, describing the process for implementing the assessment in different Policy Areas, and under different situations.
- An explanation of the AIA criteria would be included in the MDP.
- The requirement for an AIA would be dependent upon the type of development being applied for, the 'Policy Area' within which the application for development is proposed, the soil classification of the subject lands, and the current zoning in place – or a combination of these.
- Amendments to the Land Use Bylaw, County Policies and the requirements for Area Structure Plans would provide further details in terms of implementing the AIA.

**4. Establishment of a Transfer of Development Credits Program**

Policy options for the development of a Transfer of Development Credits program are included in the *Rural Residential Policy Options paper*.