



## INTRODUCTION

There are three primary areas in the County where rural residential development occurs. These areas are identified in the County's Municipal Development Plan as:

- 1. Country Residential Policy Area:** The primary intent of this Policy Area is to promote country residential developments that conserve or consider the character of existing developments, the existing natural features of the landscape, and environmentally sensitive areas in accordance with Conservation Subdivision Design principles.
- 2. Agriculture Small Holdings Policy Area:** This area is 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 significant areas, rural small holdings and intensive agricultural operations and associated residential uses.
- 3. Hamlets:** The hamlets of Ardrossan, Antler Lake, Josephburg, North Cooking Lake, Half Moon Lake, Collingwood Cove, South Cooking Lake, and Hastings Lake are small, rural, unincorporated communities that include a limited number of land uses.

Hamlets are varied in their character, size, function and the range of services they offer to their residents and those in the surrounding rural area. They are a traditional form of rural living, with each hamlet reflecting its particular history and environment.

Hamlets may have a number of different housing forms and a variety of land uses, including local commercial, institutional, and recreational land uses. Some hamlets with a range of community facilities, and municipal sewer and water capacity (e.g. Ardrossan, Josephburg and South Cooking Lake), may realize additional development and a wider range of housing choices over time, while others with limited services are not expected to grow in population.

Country Residential development within the Capital Region is currently being evaluated as part of the Capital Regional Growth Plan review and update. Some aspects of Country Residential policy options within this paper may need to be deferred until the Regional Growth Plan Update is complete.

### WHAT DOES THE 2007 MDP SAY?

The policies relating to rural residential development are found in Chapter 5 of the Municipal Development Plan. Some of the key MDP objectives include:

- Promote the development of a broad range of housing types and locations, in both rural and urban settings.
- Provide for various age groups, family types, lifestyles and income levels.
- Minimize the consumption of agricultural land for residential purposes.
- Retain the character, amenities, and quality of life aspects of existing residential areas.

In 2012, Council adopted the Country Residential Area Concept Plan (ACP) for the Country Residential Policy Area, providing detailed guidance with respect to providing “a planning, infrastructure and servicing framework that progresses the development of country residential and compatible land uses.” The policies contained in this ACP may be able to be integrated into the updated MDP.

### ISSUES RAISED DURING THE MDP ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Many participants expressed concern about urban and rural sprawl and stressed that development should be concentrated in existing areas, such as urban areas or hamlets. They wanted to limit the fragmentation of farmlands and natural areas.

Participants cited the need for more complete rural communities where retiring farmers and families could stay close to their original farming home and continue to enjoy the benefits of a rural lifestyle. They emphasized the need for affordable housing, and seniors housing in these hamlets.

Infrastructure was raised as one of the biggest challenges with rural development. They noted that the cost of connecting to municipal water and sewer systems is a significant issue. Some participants suggested rural development did not necessarily require piped water or sewer, while others pointed out that most rural wells are not safe for drinking and individual septic systems have their own challenges such as leaks, odour, and maintenance. Also, the wear and tear on rural roads and the cost of running water/wastewater trucks was seen as being unsustainable.

Residents suggested a variety of different options for rural living, including a mix of larger parcels and smaller lots to provide for a wide range of lifestyles and needs.

Some residents suggested the County promote smaller lots (near hamlets) for families, as there are community amenities in the hamlets and schools that need more students. Other suggestions included “off the grid” green developments and density transfers to achieve more efficient rural development.

A few participants wanted to see significant growth of hamlets while expressing concern that the expansion of water and sewer systems in the hamlets makes this a costly proposition.

## POTENTIAL POLICY OPTIONS

*This section introduces some potential new policy options and expands on others already included in the MDP. These policy options can help the Municipality (and partners) to deliver the type of rural residential described above. 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. Servicing of Rural Residential Development

Currently the MDP requires rural residential development within the Country Residential Policy Area to connect to the County's municipal piped water and sanitary sewer systems.

The MDP does allow consideration for on-site private servicing of rural residential developments within the Agricultural Small Holdings Policy Area, on the condition that suitable environmental conditions exist for on-site water supply and on-site sewage disposal.

#### *Policy Change Options*

Policy options regarding rural residential water and sewer systems could involve:

- Maintaining current requirements.
- Allowing on-site water and sewer systems for all rural residential development.
- Modifying current requirements and providing for a variety of water and sewer systems depending on the form and scale of development, soil conditions, and location, etc.

Policy options for rural residential servicing may be subject to the completion of the review and update of the Capital Region Growth Plan.

### 2. Clarifying the Purpose of the Agriculture Small Holdings Policy Area

Although the purpose of the Agriculture Small Holdings Area is to allow for rural residential development, there is a concern that residences being built on varying sizes of parcels are detrimental for achieving the Policy Area's agriculture purposes as intended. In many cases, the parcels being subdivided are too small to support intensive agriculture use. Under the current requirements, the landowner proposing to subdivide is not required to justify how an agricultural use can be supported on the proposed subdivided lands.

#### *Policy Options*

The policy options with respect to Agriculture Small Holdings Policy Areas may involve:

- Including policy in the MDP that would require proponents of residential development in the Agriculture Small Holdings Policy Area to prepare a report to explain the potential future agriculture use parcel. The report could contain a checklist with options provided for different forms and scales of agriculture use of their lands. The requirement for such a report would highlight the need for applicants to seriously consider and justify agriculture use on their lands.

### 3. Transfer of Development Credits

Transfer of Development Credits is policy tool designed to maximize rural residential development on less sensitive lands within a defined area.

### *Policy Options*

The policy options with respect to Transfer of Development Credits may involve:

- Creating a Transfer of Development Credits program where an allocation of additional lots in excess of 50 lots per quarter section could be granted (up to a maximum of 65 lots per quarter section for example) to a 'receiving area', provided that the 'sending area' would only be allowed to develop to a maximum of 35 lots per quarter section.
- Another policy option to realize the averaging of density (50 lots per quarter section) over the entire Low Density Country Residential Area would be to allow an allocation of lots in excess of 50 lots per quarter section up to a maximum of 65 lots per quarter section until such time as the existing inventory of surplus density has been depleted. The surplus density inventory could be maintained by Strathcona County and subsequent applications would retain a maximum density of 50 lots per quarter section.

The decision on density transfer in the Low Density Country Residential Area will not be made until after the Capital Region Board has completed the review and update of the Capital Region Growth Plan.

## **4. Hamlets**

The discussion of hamlets in the current MDP is very limited. The MDP currently identifies the hamlets of Ardrossan, Josephburg and South Cooking Lake as growth hamlets; these communities are where the County will support a wider range of housing options to meet lifecycle shelter requirements and social needs. This compact form of rural residential living is much more environmentally responsive than other forms, but growth in these hamlets has been very slow for many years.

### *Policy Options*

The policy options with respect to hamlets may involve:

- Creating policy within the MDP to enable certain forms of development to be done within certain hamlets without requiring the completion of a new Area Structure Plan for the hamlet. This would pertain to enabling small-scale developments that cater to the local community (in appropriate locations).
- Allowing certain hamlets to expand their boundaries to enable further development.

Policy options for hamlets may be subject to the completion of the review and update of the Capital Region Growth Plan.