



DEVELOPMENT SERVICES *Staff Report*

REPORT NO: DS-2024-15

TO: Council

SUBMITTED BY: Harold O’Krafka, MCIP RPP PLE

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REVIEWED BY: Greg Clark, Acting CAO

DATE: September 23, 2024

SUBJECT: Agricultural Advisory Committee Best Practices

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report DS-2024-15 be received for information; and,

THAT Council direct staff to include appropriate budget allocations to facilitate to the creation of an Agricultural and Environmental Advisory Committee within the 2025 Draft Operating Budget.

SUMMARY:

Council requested that staff provide information in respect of the best practices for Agricultural Advisory Committees in Ontario. Agricultural Advisory Committee’s are typically focused on agricultural policy development, but some do have roles in also reviewing development applications with an agricultural lens as well.

While Agricultural Advisory Committees are not commonplace for lower tier municipalities there are a few of them across Ontario.

The downloading of planning authority to the Township of Wilmot affords an opportunity for Township Council to consider enhancing the role of advisory committees – primarily in policy development.

While agricultural policy may not warrant sufficient content for a stand alone Agricultural Advisory Committee consideration could be given to blending the agricultural policy function together with an environmental policy function to expand the scope and impact of the committee. Indeed, the addition of an environmental policy function would allow the committee to provide insights and opinions into a wide range of Township projects – not limited to land use planning.

There are many different committee membership formats but typically in respect of agricultural committee's representatives from a range of producer groups are sought (Beef, Pork, Poultry) as well as a representative of Council. Expansion of a committee to include environmental expertise and interest would enhance the opportunity for fulsome input from a wide spectrum of Township residents and stakeholders.

BACKGROUND:

At its meeting of June 10, 2024 Council passed the following motion,

WHEREAS there is a desire to provide the agricultural community with an opportunity to provide advice and recommendations to Council on a range of agricultural issues that impact the Township of Wilmot; and,

WHEREAS the Township of Wilmot Committee Governance Policy outlines the appropriate procedure for the exploration and creation of new advisory committees.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT staff be directed to report back to Council at a regular Council Meeting in September 2024 on municipal best practices as it relates to the creation of an Agricultural Advisory Committee.

REPORT:

To better understand best practices with respect to the Agricultural Advisory Committees, staff conducted a municipal scan of 24 like sized municipalities in Ontario to find examples of Terms of Reference that could inform the consideration of the role such a committee could provide for the Township of Wilmot. This is the same list of municipalities scanned in respect of the procedural bylaw and included:

City of Brockville, City of Clarence-Rockland, City of Owen Sound, County of Frontenac, County of Prince Edward, Municipality of Leamington, Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc, Town of Amherstburg, Town of Collingwood, Town of East Gwillimbury, Town of Essex, Town of Grimsby, Town of Kingsville, Town of Lincoln, Town of Orangeville, Town of Tecumseh, Town of Wasaga Beach, Township of Centre Wellington, Township of Essa, Township of King, Township of Oro-Medonte, Township of Scugog, Township of Uxbridge, Township of Woolwich

Of the municipalities within the initial scan only Prince Edward County had an Agricultural Advisory Committee which meets a minimum of four times per year and is focused primarily on policy development.

The County of Frontenac does have a Food Policy Committee which appear to be structured much more from a Public Health perspective and lens.

Recognizing that local context is important as well an additional scan of local municipalities including the lower tier and upper tier municipalities within, and abutting Waterloo Region was also completed. Note that the Township of Centre Wellington and Township of Woolwich are within the comparators list above. The local municipalities reviewed were:

City of Kitchener, City of Waterloo, City of Cambridge, Township of North Dumfries, Township of Wellesley, Township of Perth East, Township of East Zorra-Tavistock, Township of Blanford-Blenheim, Mapleton Township, Township of Guelph Eramosa, Puslinch Township, City of Hamilton, County of Brant, Perth County, County of Wellington, Oxford County

Of these local comparators only the upper and/or single tier municipalities of the City of Hamilton, Oxford County and Brant County have Agricultural Advisory Committees. In reviewing the Terms of Reference for these committees they are primarily focused on Policy Development and not on the review of specific development applications.

In brief, the preliminary municipal scans identified that Agricultural Advisory Committees are not commonplace in Ontario. Within the list of comparators and local municipalities there are no lower tier municipalities having agricultural advisory committees and only a limited number of upper tier and single tier municipalities having them.

This is not to suggest that an agricultural advisory committee would not have merit for Wilmot, but it does suggest that Wilmot's current approach to the consideration of agricultural impacts of decision making by Council is consistent with other municipalities across Ontario.

Circulation to the Waterloo Federation of Agriculture

While Wilmot Township does align with other municipalities in its general approach to decision making, Wilmot has taken a different path than the other Townships in Waterloo Region when it comes to circulation of development applications within the agricultural resource area.

Specifically, the Township of Wilmot is the only local municipality who circulates development applications within the agricultural resource area directly to the Waterloo Federation of Agriculture for comment, via our local Wilmot Township representative(s), and has for many decades.

While typically this has not led to many responsive comments it remains nonetheless part of our consultation process which goes beyond the minimum requirements of the Planning Act.

Examples of Lower Tier Agricultural Advisory Committees

Staff have been able to find examples of lower tier Agricultural Advisory Committees being the Municipality of Clarington, the Township of Tay, the Township of Springwater, the Town of Georgina, the Town of Pelham and the City of Burlington.

The Town of Georgina Committee would seem to be the most active committee meeting almost monthly due to its function in reviewing not only policy but development applications as well. The other committees are more policy focused and meet two to six times per year – more frequently if needed.

Volume of Work to be Considered by an Agricultural Advisory Committee

As highlighted earlier in this report, through the review of the Terms of Reference of noted Agricultural Advisory Committee's it is apparent that typically they are found at the upper tier and focused on policy planning much more than development planning. The reason for this is that development planning decisions are typically informed by the broader agricultural policy and development applications themselves are not specifically the creators of such policy.

Within Wilmot Township there are significantly fewer applications within the agricultural resource area and as such the volume of work to be considered by an Agricultural Advisory Committee might be limited with the potential of several months of time between applications. Such a sporadic volume of work might make it difficult to formulate a regular committee structure such as the Committee of Adjustment and may suggest a structure more like that of the Fence Viewers or Livestock Evaluators Committees.

Given the low volume of development applications within the agricultural resource area in Wilmot and given the existing enhanced circulation of same it is the opinion of staff that as a stand-alone committee an Agricultural Advisory Committee for Wilmot Township would need to meet quarterly at most.

Impact of Provincial Downloading of Planning Authority

Another consideration in respect of the formation of an Agricultural Advisory Committee may be the long-anticipated proclamation of the date for the downloading of planning authority by the Province from the Region to the Township.

While this will not necessarily impact the number of development applications in the agricultural resource it will significantly expand and impact the responsibility of the Township for Policy Planning. In this respect there would certainly be merit to considering a committee structure that would provide for input into the implementation of policies that impact the agricultural community.

The Region of Waterloo itself has not used an Agricultural Advisory Committee for input into policy planning but historically has employed an Ecological and Environmental Advisory Committee. Indeed, across the scan it is significantly more typical to find Environmental Advisory Committees to Council. Locally Woolwich Township has an Environmental Advisory

Committee and this would be a logical step forward for Wilmot Township given the significant and valued input our environment focused groups such as the Nith Valley Ecoboosters provide on a regular basis.

Wilmot, several decades ago, employed an Environmental Advisory Committee with some success which most notably was the inaugural “Groundwater Festival” held in New Hamburg in the mid 1990’s.

And to this point staff would suggest that there would certainly be merit to Council considering a blended advisory committee which focuses on both Environmental and Agricultural Policy implementation as well as a range of development applications.

The benefit of course is that environmental considerations impact a significantly greater number of applications across both the urban and rural areas of the Township and provide sufficient volume of work for a joint advisory committee to meet more regularly. Again as identified earlier, the work of the committee would not be limited to planning matters but also other operational matters such as Environmental Assessments.

Corporate Services staff have prepared a ‘draft’ terms of reference for a blended committee which combines aspects of the Woolwich Environmental Advisory Committee with the Town of Pelham Agricultural Advisory Committee for the consideration of Council as Attachment A.

Additional consideration to the ideal membership size and blend of skills and groups represented can be given should Council direct staff to proceed with budgeting for the formation of a committee within the 2025 draft Operating Budget.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE TOWNSHIP OF WILMOT STRATEGIC PLAN:

The creation of an Agricultural and Environmental Advisory Committee could achieve all five goals of the Wilmot Strategic Plan including Good Governance, Quality of Life, Economic Prosperity, Environmental Protection and Community Engagement.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

While we continue to wait for the specifics of the delegation of planning authority staff have been working collaboratively with our regional partners on implementation strategies. Included in that review will be inclusion of staff resources during budget deliberations to address the additional volume of work which will be generated through the download.

As part of that analysis the creation of an Environmental and Agricultural Advisory Committee could be brought forward formally together with the anticipated staff costs associated with managing the committee including evening meetings, agenda and minute preparation, circulations, site visits, committee mileage, IT resources for meetings etc...

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A: Draft Terms of Reference for Agricultural and Environmental Advisory Committee