



PRESERVING ONTARIO'S HISTORY, ONE BARN AT A TIME

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Addressed to: Mayor, Council, & Planning Department

To whom it may concern

Our not-for-profit organization was formed in 2019 with the goal of conserving barns of cultural heritage significance in Ontario. In order to fulfill this goal, we have been conducting research and analysis on a variety of topics, including Planning Policy frameworks which either help or hinder the conservation of barns.

It has come to our attention that many municipalities are demolishing heritage barns during the process of severance of surplus farm dwellings. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with a brief summary of our findings regarding how existing Planning Policies at the Municipal and Provincial levels impact these cultural heritage resources. We hope that this will help to provide insight on how these policies may be managed in the future so that the conservation of significant cultural heritage resources can work in cooperation with planning for new development.

Barns have potential to be identified as significant cultural heritage resources and may be worthy of long-term conservation. According to PPS, significant cultural heritage resources shall be conserved:

2.6.1 Significant built heritage resources and significant cultural heritage landscapes shall be conserved.

Under *Ontario Regulation 9/06*, cultural heritage resources demonstrate significance related to legislated criteria including design/physical value, historical/associative value and contextual value

Although they may not have the same functionality they once did, we believe our heritage barns are an important part of Ontario's cultural history and rural landscape.

- They serve as landmarks in the countryside
- They have the potential to be reused and repurposed, sometimes into agriculture-related uses as municipalities search for value-added opportunities for farmers
- They have historic value for research of vernacular architecture and cultural history of areas and communities in Ontario
- They are a testament to the early farmers and pioneers in our province
- They convey an important sentiment and image to our urban counterparts about the hardworking farm community
- They contribute to agritourism in both a functional and an aesthetic way. Some European countries fund maintenance of rural landscape features such as buildings, hedge rows and fences for the very purpose of world-wide tourism and cultural heritage protection
- They are useful for small livestock or other small farm operations

We have recognized a growing trend in Ontario, where barns are seen as good candidates for conservation and adaptive re-use. Barns can be made new again and communicate their history while serving a new purposes. Barns can be made into single detached residences, Craft breweries, agro-tourism related destinations, and more.

In an effort to recognize the significance, historic and cultural value of these buildings, Ontario Barn Preservation was formed March 30, 2019. This not-for-profit organization is reaching out to barn owners, local and county historical societies, authorities, and the general public, to recognize the value of these amazing buildings. Often these barns are close to their original condition when they were built between the early 1800s and the early 1900s.

We understand the planning and building code regulations that municipalities enforce. There are often conflicting priorities, resources required for enforcement, and provincial goals and protection to uphold. The following provides a review of key policies of Provincial Policy Statement (PPS 2014), OMAFRA and Ontario Building Code regulations which creates difficulties in the conservation of barns. We hope these solutions from other municipalities that have implemented might be considered in your municipality.

POLICY ITEM 1: “New land uses, including the creation of lots, and new or expanding livestock facilities shall comply with the minimum distance separation formulae.” –Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) 2.3.3.3

POLICY ANALYSIS

Barns that remain with a dwelling on a smaller severed residential lot are already in compliance with MDS setbacks since there would be no new odour conflict. If this landowner wants to house animals a Nutrient Management Plan/Strategy is required for anything over 5 Nutrient Units (NU, this is equivalent to 15+ beef feeders, OR 5+ medium-framed horses, 40+ meat goats, or 5+ beef cows), and are required to have a plan for manure removal either on their own property or in agreement with another land owner as per the OMAFRA Nutrient Management Plan/Strategy Guidelines. Any livestock count under 5NU does not require a Nutrient Management Plan. Although the capacity of these heritage barns is generally above 5 NU, in practice it is unlikely an owner would exceed this number because heritage barns are not usually that large and owners of this type of property are likely to only have a hobby-size operation.

On the other hand, barns that do not remain with a dwelling on a smaller severed residential lot, but remain on the larger retained agriculture lot often immediately become a violation of the MDS setbacks should that barn house livestock, or potentially house livestock. However unlikely this may be due to the nature and condition of the barn for livestock housing, it is a possibility. Many barns could house up to 30 Nutrient Units, or more, depending on the size of the barn. This capacity would require a separation distance from the house on the new severed lot much larger than existing to allow the barn to remain standing. Thus barns on the larger retained agriculture lot have limited options to avoid demolition.

POSSIBLE RESOLUTION:

The MDS guidelines state that a building must be “reasonably capable of housing animals” in order for MDS to be triggered. Therefore, a barn that is in a decrepit state is automatically exempted from MDS as it cannot house livestock. Thus the barn can be severed off from the dwelling without MDS implications.

However, some barns are not in a decrepit state and are the ones that are worth saving. If the barn is to remain on the retained agriculture lot, it needs to be prevented from being used as a livestock facility to be exempt from MDS. This can be done by removing water, stalls, electricity to the barn and make it “incapable of housing animals”.

Some municipalities have had the livestock restriction written into the special conditions of the zoning amendment exception. Two examples are

1. that the barn not be permitted to hold livestock. For example *“A livestock use shall be prohibited in any farm buildings existing on the date of passage of this by-law.”*
2. The amendment can also be used to only restrict the quantity of livestock in the barn as such as 1.2NU (animal nutrient units) per hectare *“Notwithstanding their General Rural (RU1) or Restricted Rural (RU2) zoning, those lots 4.0 hectares (9.9 ac.) in size or less shall be limited to no more than 1.25 nutrient units per hectare (0.5 nutrient units per acre). Minimum Distance Separation Guidelines shall apply.”*

The Ontario Building Code does not differentiate between agricultural buildings for livestock vs. implements storage, therefore a change of use of this type is not clearly defined as a possibility through the building code. A change of use permit could also be undertaken to change the occupancy of the building from agriculture to part 9. However, this solution is costly and prohibitive for most Owners.

We feel that the best case of survival for the barn is to include it with the severed residential lot. If the barn is to be severed with the residential lot we feel that the barn best use is for animals within compliance with the MDS requirements. Some municipalities use a minimum lot size required for livestock (but you have to be willing to sever that lot size where appropriate). We recommend that these smaller lots be permitted to house animals. These lots are ideal for starting farmers, CSA's, and value-added farm operations. The owners of these smaller lots are often in a position to invest in restoration of our heritage barns.

POLICY ITEM 2: A residence surplus to a farming operation as a result of farm consolidation, provided that:

“1. the new lot will be limited to a minimum size needed to accommodate the use and appropriate sewage and water services;” - PPS 2.3.4.1c

POLICY ANALYSIS

Provincial policy has limited the lot creation size to only accommodate the water and sewage to maintain large lots and maximum land remaining for agriculture uses.

POSSIBLE RESOLUTION

Many municipalities use a minimum and maximum lot size rather than the above strict guideline to determine the lot line and review each severance on a case by case basis.

The Ministry of Environment provides “reasonable use guidelines” on lot size for sewage systems. These guidelines recommend that a lot should have a “Reasonable Use Assessment” be done to ensure that the lot is adequately sized for septic systems. A rule of thumb that has been used is clay soil lots should be a minimum of 2 acres, and a lot with sandy soil be 1 acre.

However, we would recommend that this statement be reviewed at a provincial level and we would encourage you to contact the provincial policy department to review this statement.

POLICY ITEM 3: Designation of severed lot to be zoned “non-farm” and permitted uses as “non-farm” dwelling

POLICY ANALYSIS

Provincial policy does not dictate the residential lot be “non-farm”. In fact, the PPS states that

"Proposed agriculture-related uses and on-farm diversified uses shall be compatible with, and shall not hinder, surrounding agricultural operations."

We would argue that the “non-farm” designation does create an incompatible use, encouraging non-farming residents, but it also limits the possible use of the small land for small scale farm operations within Prime Agriculture Zones.

POSSIBLE RESOLUTION:

Provide a zoning category for small lots that are sized to permit limited livestock, alternative and value-added agriculture operations. These can also be separate provisions within your existing rural or agricultural designations. For example Provisions for lots larger than 10 acres, and lots less than 10 acres.

POLICY ITEM 4: Change of Use for the building to not permit livestock.

POLICY ANALYSIS

A change of use to non-livestock building is a challenging proposition. The building code does not differentiate between livestock agriculture building and implement agriculture building. This change of use permit is quite simple and would not require any investment or structural upgrade by the owner.

If a change of use to a non-agriculture building is required, it would fall into part 9 of the building code (unless other uses are proposed). This upgrade would often require significant structural reinforcement and investment by the owner. Most owners would not be willing or in a position to invest this type of capital on a building that does not have function in a farm operation, nor for a residential property owner, also without a major purpose for the building other than storage, garage, or workshop.

This Change of Use requirement will most likely end with the demolition of the barn when required.

POSSIBLE RESOLUTION:

Change of use is only required to limit the use of the barn for livestock. This can be achieved by removing water and stalls from the building. The barn remains an existing agriculture building but unable to “reasonably house animals” (see issue 1 above for further details or options).

CONCLUSION

We hope that you will consider our review of Provincial and Municipal Planning Policy as it relates to any future Reviews of Official Plans, Comprehensive Zoning By-laws, and approaches to the conservation of built heritage resources related to agricultural use.

Too often we see these community raised historic structures in poor condition with loose boards flapping in the wind, roofs caved in, or just a mass of timbers and roofing decaying into the ground. On behalf of Ontario Barn Preservation, we encourage you to help find ways to prevent the further unnecessary demolition of our heritage barns especially in relation to surplus farm dwelling severances. It is our hope that barns of significant cultural heritage value are conserved for future generations.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions, and we hope to hear from you in the future.

Regards,

Jon Radojkovic, President

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