



Agricultural Zoning By-Law Review Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

UNDERSTANDING ZONING AND THE REVIEW PROCESS

- 1. What is a zoning by-law? _____ 2
- 2. What is the difference between the Official Plan and a zoning by-law? _____ 2
- 3. What is a zoning by-law review? What does the process look like? _____ 2
- 4. Why is a review of agricultural zoning in the Townships in Oxford necessary? _____ 3
- 5. What is the agricultural zoning review trying to achieve? _____ 3

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND HOW TO PARTICIPATE

- 6. How has the public been informed and engaged throughout the review process? _____ 4
- 7. How can I submit feedback? _____ 5
- 8. If I disagree with the new zoning by-law, can I appeal it? _____ 6

GENERAL ZONING AND PROPERTY QUESTIONS

- 9. Will the zoning on my property change? _____ 6
- 10. Does this review approve new developments? _____ 6
- 11. Can I apply for a zoning by-law amendment during the review? _____ 6
- 12. What does “as-of-right” development mean? _____ 6
- 13. What do “legal non-conforming” and “legal non-complying” mean? _____ 7

PROPERTY TAXES AND ASSESSMENT

- 14. If my property is rezoned, will my property taxes change? _____ 7

AGRICULTURAL ZONES AND AGRICULTURAL USES

- 15. What are “agricultural uses”? _____ 8
- 16. How might lot area impact my property’s zoning? _____ 8
- 17. What is the proposed “Agricultural – Surplus Farm Dwelling (A3)” zone? _____ 8

ON-FARM DIVERSIFIED USES AND AGRICULTURE-RELATED USES

- 18. What are “on-farm diversified uses” and how will they be regulated through zoning? _____ 9
- 19. What are “agriculture-related uses” and how will they be regulated through zoning? _____ 9

RURAL RESIDENTIAL AND RURAL ENTREPRENEURIAL USES

- 20. What changes are being considered for rural residential zones? _____ 10
- 21. What are “rural entrepreneurial uses” and how will they be regulated through zoning? _____ 10

AGRIBUSINESS (AB) ZONE CHANGES

- 22. Why is the Agribusiness (AB) Zone being reviewed? _____ 11
- 23. What changes are being considered for the Agribusiness (AB) Zone? _____ 11
- 24. Will these changes affect existing businesses operating legally in the AB Zone? _____ 11
- 25. How will new agriculture-related or non-agricultural uses be reviewed without the AB zone? _____ 11

RENEWABLE ENERGY ZONING CONSIDERATIONS

- 26. What changes are being considered for renewable energy projects in agricultural areas? _____ 12

Understanding Zoning and the Review Process

1. What is a zoning by-law?

A: A zoning by-law is a legal document that a municipality uses to implement the policies in their Official Plan. It regulates how land may be used and developed within the municipality by establishing standards such as:

- Permitted land uses (e.g., agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial)
- Minimum lot sizes
- Building height and size
- Setbacks from property lines
- Lot coverage
- Parking and loading requirements

Zoning by-laws help ensure that development occurs in an orderly, compatible, and well-planned manner. For more information on Zoning By-Laws, please see the Province of Ontario's [Citizens' Guide to Land Use Planning](#).

In Oxford County, each Township has their own zoning by-law that implements Oxford's [Official Plan](#).

2. What is the difference between the Official Plan and a zoning by-law?

A: The Official Plan and your local municipality's zoning by-law work together but serve different purposes.

The Official Plan establishes the long-term vision and planning policies. It identifies where and how different types of land uses should occur and provides policy direction on matters such as agriculture, housing, industry, transportation, and environmental protection.

The zoning by-law implements the Official Plan by establishing specific rules and standards for different zones or in some cases, individual properties, including what uses are permitted and how development can occur (e.g. setbacks, lot sizes, dimensions, parking requirements, building heights, types of buildings permitted).

In simple terms:

- The Official Plan sets the policy direction.
- The zoning by-law implements those policies through detailed regulations

3. What is a zoning by-law review? What does the process look like?

A: A zoning by-law review is a comprehensive update to a municipality's zoning regulations (i.e. not for a specific property). The purpose of the review is to:

- Align the zoning by-law with the Official Plan
- Implement updated Provincial policies and legislation, including the Planning Act and Provincial Planning Statement, 2024
- Remove outdated regulations or clarify inconsistent regulations or their interpretation
- Improve the organization, readability, and usability of the by-law
- Address technical updates and clerical corrections

A zoning by-law review does **not** automatically change land uses across the municipality or approve new development.

The review process involves drafting and evaluating proposed zoning updates, consulting with the public and stakeholders, and considering feedback received throughout the process. Proposed changes are reviewed by municipal staff and presented to Township Council for consideration.

Any proposed zoning by-law updates must go through the public process required under the Planning Act, including public notice and statutory public meetings, before a decision is made. Township Council is responsible for making the final decision on whether to adopt the updated zoning by-law.

Even after a zoning by-law is updated, individual development proposals may still require separate planning approvals, permits, or technical studies depending on the type of development being proposed.

4. Why is a review of agricultural zoning in the Townships in Oxford necessary?

A: In February 2024, the Province of Ontario approved Official Plan Amendment No. 269 (OPA 269) for Oxford County. OPA 269 updated agricultural policies across Oxford County following a multi-year review process that included consultation with agricultural groups, residents, and the farming community.

Under the Planning Act, local municipalities are required to update their zoning by-laws to conform with approved Official Plan policies, and the rural Townships in Oxford have three years from the approval of OPA 269 to update their zoning by-laws to implement these amended agricultural policies. The current Agricultural Zoning By-Law Reviews apply to:

- Township of Blandford-Blenheim
- Township of East Zorra-Tavistock
- Township of Norwich
- Township of South-West Oxford
- Township of Zorra

5. What is the agricultural zoning review trying to achieve?

A: In addition to supporting greater alignment with the agricultural policies adopted through Official Plan Amendment No. 269 (OPA 269), the key objectives of the review include:

- Introducing new regulations for uses already permitted by the Official Plan, including:
 - On-farm diversified uses
 - Agriculture-related uses
 - Rural entrepreneurial uses
- Protecting agricultural land and normal farm practices (e.g. flies, dust, odour)
- Supporting agricultural viability and the rural economy by permitting uses which could provide additional job and business creation opportunities compatible with farming in the area
- Providing greater clarity within agricultural and rural zones
- Improving the readability and usability of the zoning by-laws
- Streamlining development application processes where appropriate

- Updating technical matters, including legislative changes and clerical corrections

While the zoning by-laws will generally follow a similar framework, each Township may establish different approaches regarding:

- Permitted uses
- Size and scale requirements
- Development criteria
- Approval processes

These differences may reflect feedback received from Township councils, staff, residents, and the agricultural community.

Public Engagement and How to Participate

6. How has the public been informed and engaged throughout the review process?

A: Public engagement and consultation are an important part of the Agricultural Zoning By-Law Review process.

In accordance with the Planning Act, statutory public notice requirements have been completed, including notices published in local newspapers to inform residents and property owners about the project and opportunities to participate.

In addition to the required notices, the County and Townships have undertaken broader public engagement efforts to help raise awareness and gather feedback from the community. This has included:

- Information posted online through municipal websites and project pages
- Public notices and advertisements in local newspapers
- Opportunities to contact planning staff directly with questions or comments

A public open house for the Agricultural Zoning By-Law Reviews was also held on March 6, 2025. The open house was advertised online and through newspaper notices and was open to all members of the public. The event provided an opportunity for residents, landowners, farmers, and other stakeholders to learn more about the proposed updates, ask questions, and provide feedback to staff.

Each Township will continue to proceed through the zoning review process according to its own timeline, including:

- Release of draft zoning by-laws
- Public engagement opportunities
- Statutory public meetings
- Council consideration and adoption

Residents are encouraged to participate throughout the process and provide comments specific to their Township.

7. How can I submit feedback?

A: There are several opportunities for residents, landowners, farmers, and other interested parties to provide feedback throughout the Agricultural Zoning By-Law Review process. Members of the public are encouraged to:

- Review draft zoning materials and mapping when they are released
- Submit written comments by email or mail
- Contact their Township’s development planner directly with questions or feedback (see contact information below).
- Attend public open houses, information sessions, and statutory public meetings
- Request to be added to the project notification list for updates

When providing comments, please reference your Township or the applicable file number so staff can identify which zoning review your comments relate to. The file numbers for the Agricultural Zoning Review for each Township are:

- Blandford-Blenheim Township — ZN1-24-25
- East Zorra-Tavistock Township — ZN2-25-01
- Norwich Township — ZN3-25-04
- South-West Oxford Township — ZN4-24-20
- Zorra Township — ZN5-24-12

Providing comments before Township Council considers adoption of the zoning by-law is important. Early feedback gives staff and Council the opportunity to review and consider comments before a final decision is made.

Under the Planning Act, providing written comments or speaking at a statutory public meeting may also help preserve a person’s ability to appeal the zoning by-law to the Ontario Land Tribunal following Council’s decision.

Please contact the development planner assigned to your municipality for questions regarding zoning, development applications, or specific questions about your property.

Blandford-Blenheim	Dustin Robson Development Planner	drobson@oxfordcounty.ca 519-539-9800 ext. 3211
East Zorra-Tavistock	Adam Gignac Development Planner	agignac@oxfordcounty.ca 519-539-9800 ext. 3214
Norwich	Amy Hartley Development Planner	ahartley@oxfordcounty.ca 519-539-9800 ext. 3204
South-West Oxford	Laurel Davies-Snyder Development Planner	ldaviesnyder@oxfordcounty.ca 519-539-9800 ext. 3217
Zorra	Spencer McDonald Development Planner	jsmcdonald@oxfordcounty.ca 519-539-9800 ext. 3205

For general questions about the agricultural zoning by-law review process, please contact the Project Lead, Emily Sousa, Policy Planner at esousa@oxfordcounty.ca or 519-539-9800 ext. 3213.

8. If I disagree with the new zoning by-law, can I appeal it?

A: The Planning Act defines who is eligible to appeal a decision. An eligible person may appeal the zoning by-law to the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT) after it is adopted by Council. The municipality will release a notice of decision that explains the specific date an appeal must be submitted by. In most cases, a person must have provided written comments or spoken at a public meeting before Council passed the by-law in order to appeal.

General Zoning and Property Questions

9. Will the zoning on my property change?

A: Many properties are expected to retain the same zoning category. However, some changes may occur, including:

- Renaming or reorganizing zones (e.g. A1, A2 based on the size of the property)
- Updating zone categories (e.g. Existing Residential “RE” to Rural Residential “RR”)
- Clarifying development permissions (e.g. types of uses permitted and on what lot size)

Property owners are encouraged to stay informed about the Zoning By-law Review and to review the proposed zoning maps once they become available. The maps will identify any proposed zoning changes affecting individual properties and explain the rationale for those changes. Updates, including the release of the mapping, will be posted on the project webpage.

10. Does this review approve new developments?

A: No. The review updates the written provisions in a zoning by-law and is not specific to any particular development proposal on a site. Individual development proposals may still require separate technical studies, public consultation, and approvals under the Planning Act, such as:

- Zoning by-law amendments
- Minor variances
- Site plan approval

11. Can I apply for a zoning by-law amendment during the review?

A: Yes. Property owners may continue to apply for zoning amendments for a specific property during the review process. However:

- A zoning amendment is a separate Planning Act application
- Application fees and supporting materials are required
- Applications are evaluated independently
- Applications are assessed against the policies and regulations in effect at the time of submission

The zoning review itself is not intended to facilitate individual rezoning requests. [Contact the development planner](#) assigned to your township for more information.

12. What does “as-of-right” development mean?

A: “As-of-right” development means a property owner can establish a permitted use or construct a building without needing a zoning by-law amendment, as long as all the zoning requirements can be met.

This means that if a proposed use is permitted in the zone and complies with the zoning by-law (such as setbacks, lot size, and building height), the owner can proceed directly to any other required approvals or permits, such as a building permit.

13. What do “legal non-conforming” and “legal non-complying” mean?

A: A property, building, structure, or use may be considered “legal non-conforming” or “legal non-complying” if it was lawfully established under previous zoning rules but does not fully meet the requirements of the current zoning by-law. Generally:

- Legal non-conforming refers to a use that was once permitted but is no longer permitted under the current zoning (e.g. a single detached dwelling on a property now zoned industrial)
- Legal non-complying refers to a building or structure that does not meet current zoning standards, such as setbacks, lot size, or building height requirements, even though the use itself may still be permitted (e.g. a house built closer to a property line than what the zoning permits).

In many cases, legally established uses and structures may continue to exist, although restrictions may apply to expansions, enlargements, or changes in use.

Property Taxes and Assessment

14. If my property is rezoned, will my property taxes change?

A: Not necessarily. A change in zoning does not automatically change your property taxes. Property taxes are based primarily on your property’s assessed value, which is determined by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC), along with the tax rates set annually by your municipality.

MPAC assesses properties based on how the property is actually used, not solely on its zoning. For example, portions of a property may be assessed differently if they are used for:

- Agricultural activities
- Residential uses
- Commercial storage
- Agri-food processing operations
- Commercial retail sales
- Industrial activities

Zoning determines what uses are permitted on a property, while taxation reflects how the property is being used.

Questions regarding property assessment should be directed to [MPAC](#).

Agricultural Zones and Agricultural Uses

15. What are “agricultural uses”?

A: The Oxford County Official Plan defines agricultural uses broadly to include activities such as:

- Crop production
- Livestock operations
- Horticulture
- Aquaculture
- Apiaries
- Agro-forestry
- Maple syrup production
- Associated farm buildings and structures

The Agricultural Zoning By-Law Review proposes to adopt this definition consistently across the rural Township zoning by-laws and include provisions for Class I Anaerobic Digestors where permitted, under the Official Plan. Agricultural uses are generally permitted within Agricultural Zones.

16. How might lot area impact my property’s zoning?

A: Agricultural zones (A1, A2) are being reviewed to align with the lot area policies in the Official Plan. Under the Official Plan:

- Agricultural lots less than 16 hectares (40 acres) are considered undersized agricultural lots (A1 zone).
- Larger agricultural parcels generally reflect full-sized farm operations (A2 zone).

As part of the review:

- The zoning category of some properties may change (e.g. A1 to A2) to better their existing lot size.
- Vacant undersized agricultural lots may be rezoned to a new category (A1-Z) that would require a future zoning amendment before residential development can occur.

These changes are intended to implement existing Official Plan policies and clarify existing development rights.

17. What is the proposed “Agricultural – Surplus Farm Dwelling (A3)” zone?

A: The proposed A3 Zone is intended to implement Provincial and Official Plan requirements related to surplus farm dwelling severances. Where a surplus farm dwelling is severed from a retained agricultural parcel under specific conditions, Provincial policy requires that no new residential dwellings be permitted on the retained farm parcel.

The proposed A3 Zone would:

- Continue to prohibit future residential dwellings on the retained farm parcel (i.e. an existing requirement from the Province of Ontario)
- Make zoning rules and planning decisions across Townships more consistent
- Avoid the need for individual site-specific zoning provisions, making the zoning by-law simpler to use and understand

This zoning would generally only apply to surplus farm dwelling severances (i.e. an agricultural lot containing two or more dwellings built prior to 1995).

On-Farm Diversified Uses and Agriculture-Related Uses

18. What are “on-farm diversified uses” and how will they be regulated through zoning?

A: On-farm diversified uses are small-scale uses that are secondary to the principal agricultural operation on a farm property. Examples may include:

- Farm-related tourism
- Value-added agricultural activities
- Rural home industries
- Small-scale agriculture-related uses
- Seasonal indoor storage within existing farm buildings

These uses are intended to support farm viability by allowing farmers to diversify income while remaining compatible with agriculture and limiting the amount of farmland removed from production.

The Official Plan requires that a zoning by-law amendment be approved to permit an on-farm diversified use. Through the zoning reviews we are considering adding criteria:

- Eligible farm properties
- Maximum size of buildings or structures
- Lot area requirements
- Parking requirements
- Compatibility with surrounding agricultural operations

The zoning review is intended to implement existing Official Plan requirements; however Townships may choose to apply additional restrictions or exclude certain types of uses above and beyond Official Plan policies.

19. What are “agriculture-related uses” and how will they be regulated through zoning?

A: Agriculture-related uses are commercial or industrial uses that directly support agriculture and need to be near farm operations. Examples may include:

- Value-retaining facilities for agricultural commodities grown on neighbouring farms (e.g. cold storage for apples)
- Value-added facilities for agricultural commodities grown on neighbouring farms (e.g. abattoir for local meat processing)

The Official Plan encourages these uses to locate on lots that are already developed for agriculture-related uses or non-agricultural uses or undersized agricultural parcels where possible to minimize the loss of prime agricultural land.

The zoning reviews are considering regulations related to:

- Types of permitted agriculture-related uses

- Size and scale limitations
- Parking requirements
- Opportunities to permit some of these uses within existing Agribusiness (AB) zones

The intent is to support agriculture while protecting farmland and encouraging efficient use of existing developed properties.

Rural Residential and Rural Entrepreneurial Uses

20. What changes are being considered for rural residential zones?

A: Some existing residential zones may be grouped or renamed as part of the review. Rural residential zones are being reviewed to:

- Better distinguish between lots located inside and outside of settlement areas, which would clarify settlement area boundaries and support appropriate infill within existing settlements already mapped in the Official Plan
- Clarify permitted uses for rural residential lots inside and outside of settlements
- Reflect servicing limitations

21. What are “rural entrepreneurial uses” and how will they be regulated through zoning?

A: Rural entrepreneurial uses are small-scale businesses or industries permitted on rural residential properties outside settlement areas. Examples may include:

- Home occupations
- Rural home industries
- Small tradesperson workshops
- Arts or craft studios
- Professional services (e.g. accounting, legal services)

These uses are intended to remain secondary to the residential use of the property. These uses are already permitted in the Official Plan, and this exercise is intended to create consistency between the Official Plan and the zoning by-law.

The zoning reviews are considering regulations related to:

- Types of permitted rural entrepreneurial uses
- Maximum size for buildings and structures
- Employee limits
- Parking and loading requirements
- Outdoor storage and signage
- Compatibility with surrounding rural uses (e.g. farms, residences)

Each rural entrepreneurial use would generally require a site-specific zoning amendment application.

Agribusiness (AB) Zone Changes

22. Why is the Agribusiness (AB) Zone being reviewed?

A: The Agribusiness (AB) Zone is being reviewed to better align Township zoning by-laws with current Provincial and Official Plan policies for prime agricultural areas.

Many existing AB-zoned properties were established before the current provincial policies came into effect and continue to support rural businesses and the agricultural economy. At the same time, some uses currently permitted in the AB Zone may no longer align with current agricultural land use policies. The review aims to balance:

- Protection of prime agricultural land
- Support for agriculture-related businesses and rural employment
- Reuse of existing developed properties, and;
- Consistency with Provincial and County planning policies

23. What changes are being considered for the Agribusiness (AB) Zone?

A: Through the reviews we are exploring opportunities to retain the current AB Zone for existing properties that were established prior to the current policy framework. Existing AB-zoned properties are recognized as potential locations for agriculture-related businesses because they are already developed and may help reduce pressure to develop productive farmland.

As part of the review, staff are considering:

- Permitting additional **agriculture-related uses** in the AB Zone, such as certain types of food processing facilities
- Potentially permitting **agricultural uses** (e.g. cropping, livestock) in the AB Zone, subject to applicable zoning regulations such as Minimum Distance Separation (MDS) requirements.

No final decisions have been made at this stage of the review.

24. Will these changes affect existing businesses operating legally in the AB Zone?

A: Existing legally established businesses would generally be recognized through the zoning by-law and continue to operate as is. The review is not intended to prohibit lawfully existing uses (i.e. uses that have been established through a previously existing zoning by-law, zoning by-law amendment, and/or the issuance of a building permit).

Any proposed zoning changes for this review will be reviewed carefully, and there will be opportunities for public input before any zoning by-law is adopted by township Council.

25. How will new agriculture-related or non-agricultural uses be reviewed without the AB zone?

A: The process for permitting new agriculture-related or non-agricultural uses that may have previously been permitted in the AB zone will depend on the type of use proposed.

New agriculture-related uses that meet all the criteria in the Official Plan will require a zoning by-law amendment to permit the use in its own specific zone exclusive to the specific agriculture-related uses proposed.

New non-agricultural uses proposed to be in the agricultural area will need to undergo the planning process for non-agricultural uses, as required by provincial policy and the Official Plan, requiring (but not limited to) an official plan amendment, agricultural impact assessment, and zoning by-law amendment to permit the use.

Renewable Energy Zoning Considerations

26. What changes are being considered for renewable energy projects in agricultural areas?

A: The review is considering updates to provide clearer rules and guidance for renewable energy projects in agricultural and rural areas, in accordance with recently approved Official Plan policy updates.

Proposed zoning updates being explored include:

- Permitting roof- and wall-mounted solar panels on existing buildings in Agricultural and Rural Residential zones, in accordance with the Ontario Building Code
- Permitting small-scale ground-mounted solar installations on farms as an on-farm diversified uses, subject to Official Plan criteria and a zoning amendment application
- Permitting ground-mounted solar installations in Rural Residential zones at certain scales
- Recognizing Class I Anaerobic Digesters as agricultural uses, subject to Official Plan policies and Minimum Distance Separation (MDS) requirements

In addition, the review proposes to clarify that “Energy Storage Systems,” as defined by the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 (e.g. battery storage systems), are not automatically permitted as infrastructure uses. Instead, these types of projects would continue to require planning review processes, such as an official plan amendment and zoning by-law amendment, to ensure their impacts are properly evaluated at the local level before development may occur.