



## PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

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To: Mayor and Members of Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh Council  
From: Meghan Tydd-Hrynyk, Planner & Denise Van Amersfoort, Manager of Planning  
Date: May 5, 2026

**Re: Bill 98, Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act, 2026 - Proposed Planning Changes**

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### RECOMMENDATION

That the Council of the Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh receive the report by Meghan Tydd-Hrynyk dated May 5, 2026 titled Bill 98, Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act, 2026, for information.

### Background

The Province has introduced Bill 98, Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act, 2026 which includes changes to the Building Code Act, Planning Act, Municipal Act and City of Toronto Act. The proposed legislation reflects a continued focus on modernizing Ontario's planning framework, reducing complexity, improving consistency across municipalities and enabling faster, more predictable approvals to help get more homes built and infrastructure delivered.

Bill 98 received first reading on March 30, 2026. The commenting period for the corresponding Regulations for the changes to the Planning Act was open until April 26, 2026 on the Environmental Registry of Ontario. This deadline has since been updated to May 14, 2026.

In addition to Bill 98, the Province has introduced proposals for a series of changes to the planning framework in Ontario; a summary of the changes and related ERO postings is included in Appendix 1 to this report.

### COMMENTS

This report focuses on the proposed changes to the Planning Act and the corresponding Regulation and provides an overview of the changes most relevant in Huron County.

### Contents of an Official Plan

Under Bill 98, all Official Plans in Ontario are required to follow the "new official plan framework" which includes prescribed chapters, sections and schedules and limits which land use designations can be used.

The County of Huron provided comments on proposed changes to Official Plan structures in November of 2025, noting that the Official Plans in Huron County are designed to provide flexible and streamlined land use planning direction which effectively implements the Provincial direction in our rural and small urban areas and responds efficiently to development.

Local Official Plans maintain standardized land use designations presently. The proposed list was prepared in consultation with the Ontario Professional Planners Institute and includes many of the same designations used presently (eg. Mixed-Use Areas, Parks and Open Space, Natural Environment, Prime Agricultural Areas, Shoreline Areas, etc). There will be shifts required to accommodate the new list of designations including, for example, from 'Industrial' to 'Employment Areas' and 'Major Facilities' and from 'Residential' to 'Neighbourhoods' (which will include residential, small scale commercial and institutional uses).

The main impact will be the staff time required to rewrite the ten (10) Official Plans and prepare new schedules (mapping). As proposed by the Province, all local Official Plans will be required to adopt the standardized Provincial framework by January 1, 2029. With reduced staffing levels in the Department as a result of budget decisions, this may require the hiring of consultants to complete this work in the required timeframe.

### **Upper Tier Official Plans and Secondary Plans**

In addition to the changes to the official plan framework, the Province continues to consult on additional changes for upper tier Official Plans, such as the County Official Plan, and Secondary Plans. Proposed modifications include limiting duplication between upper tier and lower tier Official Plans, identifying when Secondary Plans can be used and separating Secondary Plans from the primary Official Plan so they would exist as a standalone document.

It is recommended that Council provide feedback that while Secondary Plans have not been widely used within Huron in recent years, they are an excellent and flexible planning tool for guiding change in defined areas. Secondary plans being prepared in accordance with Planning Act standards would remove the duplication of integrating the Secondary Plan direction into the local Official Plan.

In terms of upper tier plans, the recommended feedback is that upper tier Official Plans do not require land use designations to be effective in providing high level, regional direction. The County of Huron Official Plan is a higher order policy document which is limited in length (45 pages) and detail but provides critical, overarching policy direction to ensure consistent interpretation and application of Provincial direction within Huron County. Huron was the first County in Ontario to have an Official Plan (approved in 1973); the County OP has never been subject to a privately initiated Official Plan Amendment and Huron's OP has never contained land use designations over its' 50-year implementation. Maintaining land use designations in the local municipal Official Plans rather than at the County level avoids duplication and is a long standing approach that has been proven to be efficient and effective and should be allowed to continue.

Should Huron be forced to include land use designations in the County Official Plan, there would need to be further discussions with partner municipalities to develop an approach that would be more efficient and practical than maintaining two tiers of designations.

### **Projection Methodology**

Population and employment forecasts are important tools for planning authorities to plan communities. As required under Provincial Planning Statement, 2024, planning authorities must base population projections on Ministry of Finance forecasts with modifications, as appropriate. The proposed changes are an update to the 1995 Projection Methodology Guidance, including the Land Needs Assessment methodology.

For Huron, Land Needs Assessments are important exercises, undertaken at the time of local Official Plan Five Year Reviews and may result in changes to settlement area boundaries. Flexibility to adapt Land Needs Assessments to rural contexts is important moving forward. In terms of employment lands, the County last completed an Employment Lands Study in 2015 with Watson & Associates Economists; this study requires updating to meet the direction in the 2024 PPS and proposed methodology for forecasting employment areas.

### **Complete Application Requirements - Prescribed Professionals**

Continuing from Bill 17 (Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, 2025), the Province is seeking input on identified additional 'prescribed professions' for the purpose of a complete application. To date, professional engineers have been deemed to be 'prescribed' which means that municipalities are required to accept studies for the purposes of a complete application prior to any peer review.

In Huron, technical studies are often received from the following professional designations: Ontario Land Surveyor, Architect, Licensed Technologists, Licensed Archaeologist, Landscape Architect, Registered Professional Planner, Professional Geoscientist, Professional Hydrologist, and Professional Geomorphologist. It is recommended that this list be provided to the Province as comments with the notation that the County supports engagement with Indigenous Nations as a mandatory requirement for the Provincial Standards and Guidelines for Consultant Archaeologists.

For the purpose of this change, it is noted that a municipality may still choose to peer review a study from a prescribed professional after the application is deemed complete; in this instance, municipal Councils will continue to be subject to the decision-making time limitations under the Planning Act.

### **Complete Application Requirements – List of Studies**

The Province is proposing to create more clarity and predictability regarding complete applications requirements across Ontario. Currently, municipalities determine which studies are required to support development applications.

Feedback is sought on a proposed list which includes two types of studies and when they could be required: core studies and contingent studies. Core studies are those that could always be required and address fundamental planning matters such as environmental impacts, servicing capacity, transportation impacts and public health and safety. Contingent studies could only be required when a specific on-site or surrounding condition exists such as lands near an airport, rail corridor, significant natural hazards, or on-site environment features.

For Core Studies, the following are included: Environmental Impact Study, Environmental Impact Assessment, Functional Servicing Report, Geotechnical Report, Hydrogeological Report, Planning Justification Report, and Transportation Impact Study.

Contingent Studies include: Aeronautical Report, Aggregate/Mineral/Petroleum Impact Assessment, Agricultural Impact Assessment, Air Quality/Odour Study, Arborist Report, Archaeological Assessment, Contaminant Management Plan, Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment, Economic Viability Assessment, Electromagnetic Field Management Plan, Financial Impact Analysis, Human-made Hazard Impact Study, Impact Assessment for Waste Disposal Sites and Former Landfills, Lakeshore Capacity Assessment/Water Quality Impact Assessment, Land Use Compatibility Study, Minimum Distance Separation Formulae, Natural Hazard Impact Study, Noise/Vibration Study, Rail Safety and Risk Mitigation Report, Servicing Options Report, Wildland Fire Assessment, and Wind Study.

In terms of the impact for Huron, the County's complete application requirements are very similar to the lists proposed by the Province. If approved, studies which will need to be removed from the County and local Official Plans include: urban design review, residential market justification study, Section 59 Notices under the Ontario Clean Water Act, snow storage plan, shadow study, lighting study and public consultation strategy.

### **Minimum Lot Size for Urban Residential Land**

Bill 98 introduces a regulation-making authority to allow the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to set a minimum lot size on parcels of urban residential land, outside the Greenbelt Area. A parcel of urban residential land is defined as a parcel within a settlement area that is zoned for residential use and is fully serviced by public water and wastewater.

On-going consultation proposes to set the minimum residential lot size at 175 square metres (1884 square feet). A municipality would not be able to deny a lot creation application for a lot of this size, even if it does not conform to the minimum frontage or depth requirements.

The proposed lot size is considerably smaller than the average lot size in established, fully serviced neighbourhoods across Huron. Huron eliminated minimum lot depth requirements for fully serviced areas as part of the Housing Friendly Review, relying on lot frontage and area to inform lot sizes. For context, in Goderich, the minimum lot size is currently 450 square metres for a single detached dwelling and 190 square metres for the interior unit of a rowhouse (no side yards). For a lot size of 175 square metres, with forty percent coverage, the maximum building footprint would be 754 square feet.

In Huron, the impact will be to ensure that smaller lot sizes (and thereby increased density of established areas) are appropriately serviced with stormwater management infrastructure. It is recommended that Council provide comment that continued funding for infrastructure upgrades will be required to facilitate this new lot size in established neighbourhoods.

### **Parkland Dedication**

The Province is consulting on a proposal to prescribe criteria for developer-identified parkland and related implementation matters for the conveyance of parkland as part of the development proposal. The criteria include lands which are accessible, visible and comfortable to facilitate public use and in particular, must be accessible and readily visible from the public realm and must be of a size and shape capable of servicing park or public recreation purposes. Ineligible lands include those which are contaminated or contain human-made or natural hazards.

The proposed criteria align well with current practice across the County. Lands within and adjacent to natural heritage features are eligible on the condition that a park would not interfere with or compromise the natural area; this is positive from staff's perspective as it enables the creation of urban forest environments, similar to Maitland Woods in Goderich.

### **Communal Water and Wastewater Systems**

Amendments are proposed to the Municipal Act, 2001, and Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002, to enable regulations that set out requirements for municipal consent of non-municipal communal drinking water and wastewater systems (public utility) and to require municipalities to consent if requirements are met.

Municipalities, while required to provide consent, would be able to require certain conditions be met, including the requirement to enter into an agreement or impose limits if necessary to ensure the safe, sustainable operation of the utility. For local municipalities, both fiscal and operational capacity is required to support and/or take on these systems.

In Huron, there are limited communal systems as there are 15 fully serviced settlement areas, an additional 9 settlement areas with municipal water, and a large section of the shoreline serviced by municipal water. Communal systems can be considered at the time of development.

### **Electric Vehicle Equipment in Private Parking Lots**

Bill 98 prohibits zoning bylaws from requiring electric vehicle supply equipment in connection with parking facilities.

In Huron, several private companies have opted to provide electric vehicle charging stations within their parking facilities including Tim Hortons (Exeter), The Old Mill, Cowbell Brewing, McGavin Farm Supply, Deer Park Lodge, White Squirrel Golf Club, etc. Based on the proposed amendments, this will continue on a voluntary, market-based approach rather than as a zoning requirement.

### **Site Plan Control**

The Province is consulting on the utility of Site Plan Control as a land use planning function as there is concern that the process, which is intended to be limited to a 60-day review period, is leading to delayed approvals and increased costs.

To date, the Province has made numerous changes to the Site Plan Control function including changes in Bills 60, 17, 185, 23 and 109. Changes include removal of municipal ability to apply site plan control to residential buildings with less than 11 units, removal of ability to regulate external design, removal of the ability to require a pre-consultation meeting, removal of ability to require building standards that exceed Ontario Building Code, and required delegated approval to staff.

Current proposed reforms include: removing the tool entirely, limiting the number of resubmissions, scoping the review process to a standard checklist of functional aspects of a site, requiring a municipal arbitration process for applications that have exceeded the 60-day timeline, and establishing different processes for larger and more complex developments from less complex.

For Huron, site plan control is most commonly used for new commercial and industrial development and for larger residential developments (greater than 10 units). The County developed a Site Plan Servicing Guide with input from local municipal staff, municipal engineers and the representatives of the development community to create consistency, shared understanding and predictability in the site plan process. This Guide also distinguishes between 'major' and 'minor' site plan review processes which helps to expedite less complex site reviews. Local municipal staff prioritize attendance at preconsultation meetings to provide consistent and integrated responses early in the review process and a cloud-based application portal (CloudPermit) is used to ensure re-submissions are reviewed in an efficient and coordinated manner.

Within Huron, the most complex site plans of recent, include on-farm events facilities and specifically, the ability to meet Ontario Fire Code requirements. Residential site plan approvals have been very efficient – for example, a new apartment building in Clinton was approved within 2 months of submission and the municipality received a letter of thanks from the developer.

It is recommended that Council provide feedback to the consultation indicating that Site Plan Control is a critical tool for municipalities in reviewing new development. Many rural municipalities do not have enhanced building bylaws and thus the site plan control process is the only mechanism for addressing stormwater management. The process in Huron has been thoughtfully designed and is implemented efficiently.

### **Site Plan Control - Prohibition on Mandatory Municipal Enhanced Development Standards and Green Building Standards**

Bill 98 removes municipal authority to require Enhanced Development Standards at the lot level outside of buildings that are not required for health or safety. For example, permeable pavement cannot be required but stormwater management can continue to be required as it is a safety feature. The changes clarify that green building standards are voluntary.

This is not anticipated to have a significant impact in Huron; staff will implement this change by directing the removal of landscape plan, lighting plan, and waste/recycling facilities as site plan requirements.

### **Removing Authority for Consent Conditions**

This change involved a proposed regulation which would have the effect of removing Council's authority to require certain measures as conditions of land division approval.

Enhanced development standards (eg. permeable surfaces, vegetative landscaping, infiltration measures, tree planting standards, etc) vary amongst Ontario municipalities. This proposed change would limit mandatory requirements at the lot level (outside of buildings) to those required for health, safety, accessibility of protection of adjoining lands (eg. stormwater management).

In Huron, enhanced development standards have not been implemented readily. Some examples would be tree planting plans as a condition of Plan of Subdivision approvals, and re-planting plans to compensate for the removal of trees at the time of consent. It is recommended that Council submit comments clarifying that tree planting requirements for the purpose of shade is a health and safety consideration as shade is essential in mitigating heat-related illnesses, supporting comfortable public spaces and supporting climate resilience in urban areas.

### **Electronic Submission of Information under Planning Act**

This change would remove the requirement for information to include original and/or certified copies and would allow required notices to be submitted electronically to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

This change will support the goal of streamlining and expediting review of land use planning matters. Continued shift to electronic notification is supported.

### **NEXT STEPS**

The Planning and Development Department will continue to monitor for implementing regulations relating to multiple, recent bills and provide information to Council.

'Original signed by'  
Meghan Tydd-Hrynyk, Planner

'Original signed by'  
Denise Van Amersfoort, Manager of Planning

**Appendix 1: Table of Related Environmental Registry of Ontario Postings**

<b>Posting</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>Comments Due</b>
<a href="#"><b>026-300</b></a>	Consultation on all aspects of Bill 98	April 29, 2026
<b>Standardized Official Plans</b>		
<a href="#"><b>025-1099</b></a>	Summary of proposal in Bill 98 with proposed structure for all official plans	N/A
<a href="#"><b>026-315</b></a>	Consultation on possible changes that could relate to specific requirements for secondary plans and Site and Areas Specific Policies (SASPs)	April 29, 2026
<b>Communal Servicing</b>		
<a href="#"><b>026-0302</b></a>	Consultation on potential regulations to set out requirements for municipal consent of non-municipal communal drinking water and wastewater systems and to require municipalities to consent if requirements are met	April 29, 2026
<b>Projection Methodology</b>		
<a href="#"><b>026-0304</b></a>	Consultation on proposed update to the Projection Methodology Guideline	April 29, 2026
<b>Complete Applications</b>		
<a href="#"><b>026-314</b></a>	Consultation on potential regulation to add additional professions as “prescribed” for complete application requirements	May 14, 2026
<a href="#"><b>026-313</b></a>	Consultation on proposed regulation to provide a comprehensive list of studies that may be required as part of a complete application	May 14, 2026
<b>Minimum Lot Sizes</b>		
<a href="#"><b>026-0311</b></a>	Consultation on proposed regulation to establish a minimum lot size in serviced urban residential areas at 175 m2	May 14, 2026
<b>Site Plans</b>		
<a href="#"><b>26-310</b></a>	Consultation on “bold and transformational” changes to site plan control, possibly including eliminating site plan approvals	May 14, 2026
<b>General</b>		
<a href="#"><b>026-309</b></a>	Consultation on proposed regulation removing authority to require, as a condition of land division approvals, mandatory enhanced development standards at the lot level (outside of buildings), that are not specifically required for health, safety, accessibility or protection of adjoining lands (e.g., stormwater management)	May 14, 2026
<a href="#"><b>026-0305</b></a>	Consultation on proposal to facilitate electronic submission of information as part of the <i>Planning Act</i> process electronically	May 14, 2026