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## Settlement Area Review

Draft Final Report

May 2026



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

In Fall 2024, following the public release of the First Draft OP, Essex Town Council placed a pause on the project and requested that Town staff and WSP undertake further public consultation on the draft Colchester Secondary Plan, as well as to undertake Settlement Area Review. The latter task, which is the subject of this Report, was intended to take a closer look at the Town’s five Settlement Areas. This work was requested by Council to determine if the planned development and growth for each Settlement Area makes sense for the Town from a land use, servicing, fiscal, and community needs perspective, and to identify any opportunities for reallocating lands in Secondary Settlement Areas to Primary Settlement Areas. This work commenced in Spring 2025.

Over the last 12 months, in addition to work rethinking the Colchester Secondary Plan, WSP and Town staff have examined each Settlement Area in detail, looking at vacant land designated for residential and industrial employment growth, determining if there are constraints to development of those lands, and considering future servicing needs. The project team has also taken this exercise as an opportunity to implement direction from the new County of Essex OP around intensification of existing lands in the Town’s Settlement Areas. This Report summarizes that work.



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## 1.2 Purpose of this Report

The Settlement Area Review (“SAR”) is a process undertaken under the policy guidance of the County of Essex’s (“the County”) Official Plan (“OP”). This exercise is the evolution of a process previously mandated by the Province of Ontario (“the Province”) under the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020. The LCR was defined by the Province as a review of a municipality’s OP that integrated growth forecasting, land budgeting, and planning for infrastructure and public service facilities (including roads and other transportation, water and sewage services, and community services like libraries and schools).

With the enactment of the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 (“the PPS”), the Province has removed the LCR as a required process for adjusting the boundaries of settlement areas, allowing for scoped boundary adjustments outside of an Official Plan review. To guide this process, the County has included policy direction in its 2025 OP setting out a methodology for a SAR, which this report has followed.

This Report will include the following components:

- > A summary of the residential and employment land needs for the Town of Essex to 2051, based on the new County OP.
- > A detailed review of each of the Town’s five Primary and Secondary Settlement Areas, summarizing the available vacant residential and employment lands, locational and environmental barriers, and WSP and Town staff’s analysis of servicing capacity and other potential constraints.
- > An intensification analysis to identify opportunities in Essex Centre and Harrow for meeting the County’s 30% intensification target.
- > A Town-wide Residential Intensification Strategy demonstrating how the policies of the County OP will be met.
- > The identification and analysis of candidate lands for expanding the Town’s Settlement Area Boundary to accommodate industrial employment growth.
- > Recommendations for the Final Draft Official Plan for the Town.

# 2 POLICY CONTEXT AND GROWTH FORECASTS

As noted in Section 1 of this Report, this Settlement Area Review is being undertaken to complement the development of the new Official Plan for the Town, with direction from the County's new OP. This direction is summarized below.

## 2.1 Provincial Planning Statement, 2024

Since the commencement of the new Official Plan ("OP") project for the Town of Essex, and specifically since the completion of the Policy Directions Report for the new OP, there have been several key changes to the Province of Ontario's ("the Province") planning framework, which applies to the County of Essex and Town of Essex through the Planning Act and the new Provincial Planning Statement, 2024. These changes necessitate a review to identify any impacts on, and updates required to, the draft new OP for the Town.

Key changes to Provincial direction are summarized in Appendix A.



## 2.2 County of Essex Official Plan (2025)

Through the development of its new OP, the County provided findings, directions, and recommendations for lower-tier municipalities in County to accommodate the forecasted population and employment growth to 2051. Within the County, planning for growth is a shared responsibility between the County and its partner municipalities: Amherstburg, Essex, Kingsville, Lakeshore, La Salle, Leamington, and Tecumseh. The County, through its growth management work, determined how much new vacant land may or may not be needed to support housing and job growth; the lower-tier municipality, in this case the Town of Essex, will determine where those lands will be located.

The 2025 County OP establishes Low, Medium, and High growth forecasts to 2051 for population, households, and jobs for each of the lower-tier municipalities in Essex County. These forecasts are shown in Tables 4-1, 4-2, and 4-3 of the County OP. Policy 4.A.1.2 of the County OP indicates that the High scenario is to be used for all local municipalities.

Table 1: 2051 Growth Forecasts for the Town of Essex

	Population	Households	Jobs
<b>2021</b>			
	21,900	8,380	6,800
<b>2051</b>			
Low	26,200	10,305	9,700
Medium	28,300	10,780	10,500
High	29,900	11,145	11,100
<b>2021-2051 Growth</b>			
Low	4,300	1,925	2,900
Medium	6,400	2,400	3,700
High	8,000	2,765	4,300

The County identifies two types of Settlement Areas where growth should occur.

**Primary Settlement Areas (“PSAs”)** are those communities in the County where the majority of growth will be concentrated, and where most of the County’s housing, schools and other public service facilities, parks, commercial areas, and industrial areas are located. Primary Settlement Areas have full municipal sanitary sewer and water services, and support greater access to parks, schools, and multimodal transportation, including active transportation options.

**Secondary Settlement Areas (“SSAs”)** are generally smaller communities than Primary Settlement Areas. Secondary Settlement Areas may have full or partial municipal sanitary sewer and water services.

- > Importantly, policy 4.A.3.7 of the County OP explicitly states that Secondary Settlement Areas “shall not be the focus of growth or public or private investment in a municipality, and they should, at most, retain their existing historic development patterns.”
- > Residential intensification is permitted, however expansion of Secondary Settlement Area boundaries is not permitted.
- > Further, through policy 4.A.3.5, the County encourages local municipalities to undertake a Local Settlement Area Review (“LSAR”, what is being referred to more simply in this report as “SAR”) that could reallocate land from Secondary Settlement Areas to Primary Settlement Areas.

**Essex Centre and Harrow** are the Primary Settlement Areas in the Town.

**Colchester, McGregor, and the Lakeshore Residential West** area are the Secondary Settlement Areas in the Town.

Generally, intensification is encouraged within Primary and Secondary Settlement Areas, including various types of residential, community service, and transportation infrastructure growth. Intensification policies are provided in Policy 4.A.5.3.

Section 4.A.9 of the County OP sets out the methodology for an LSAR. The LSAR is the process through which local municipalities can do the following:

- > Identify where additional land requirements for employment and/or residential uses will be designated and added to a Primary Settlement Area.
- > Identify lands currently in a Primary or Secondary Settlement Area which are constrained for development and should be removed from the Settlement Area.
- > Identify appropriate locations where non-feasible lands can be reallocated to a Primary Settlement Area.

Whether adding or reallocating lands to a Primary Settlement Area, candidate lands being considered for inclusion in a Primary Settlement Area must be considered against criteria related to transportation, servicing, agriculture, natural heritage, and public service facilities. These criteria align with Provincial requirements under the PPS and are described in Section 7 of this report. The next section will establish the existing supply of lands in the Town and additional land needs, as directed by the County, and identify those lands in the existing supply which are constrained for development.

# 3 LAND NEEDS

As noted in the preceding section, through the development of its 2025 OP, the County developed forecasts for population, housing, and job (employment) growth in the Town to 2051, and assessed the Town’s vacant land supply for housing and employment.

### 3.1 County Land Needs Assessment (Baseline)

The County of Essex completed a comprehensive Land Needs Assessment (“LNA”) as part of its Comprehensive Official Plan Review to determine long-term residential, population-related employment, and core employment land requirements to the 2051 planning horizon. The assessment followed the Provincial Land Needs Assessment Methodology and included:

- > Establishing population, housing, and employment forecasts to 2051 (as described in Section 3 of this Report).
- > Reviewing the inventory of vacant undeveloped residential and employment lands in each local municipality, as of March 2023.
- > An evaluation of future needs under four growth scenarios. These scenarios - Status Quo, No Settlement Area Expansion, Balanced Growth, and Higher Density, tested varying assumptions for intensification and density for both housing and jobs.

Through this process, the County’s OP established any additional land requirement for residential and employment uses in each local municipality. Each local municipality is required to identify where that additional land should be accommodated through a SAR.

Table 2: Land Needs for the Town of Essex (2023 County of Essex Land Needs Assessment)

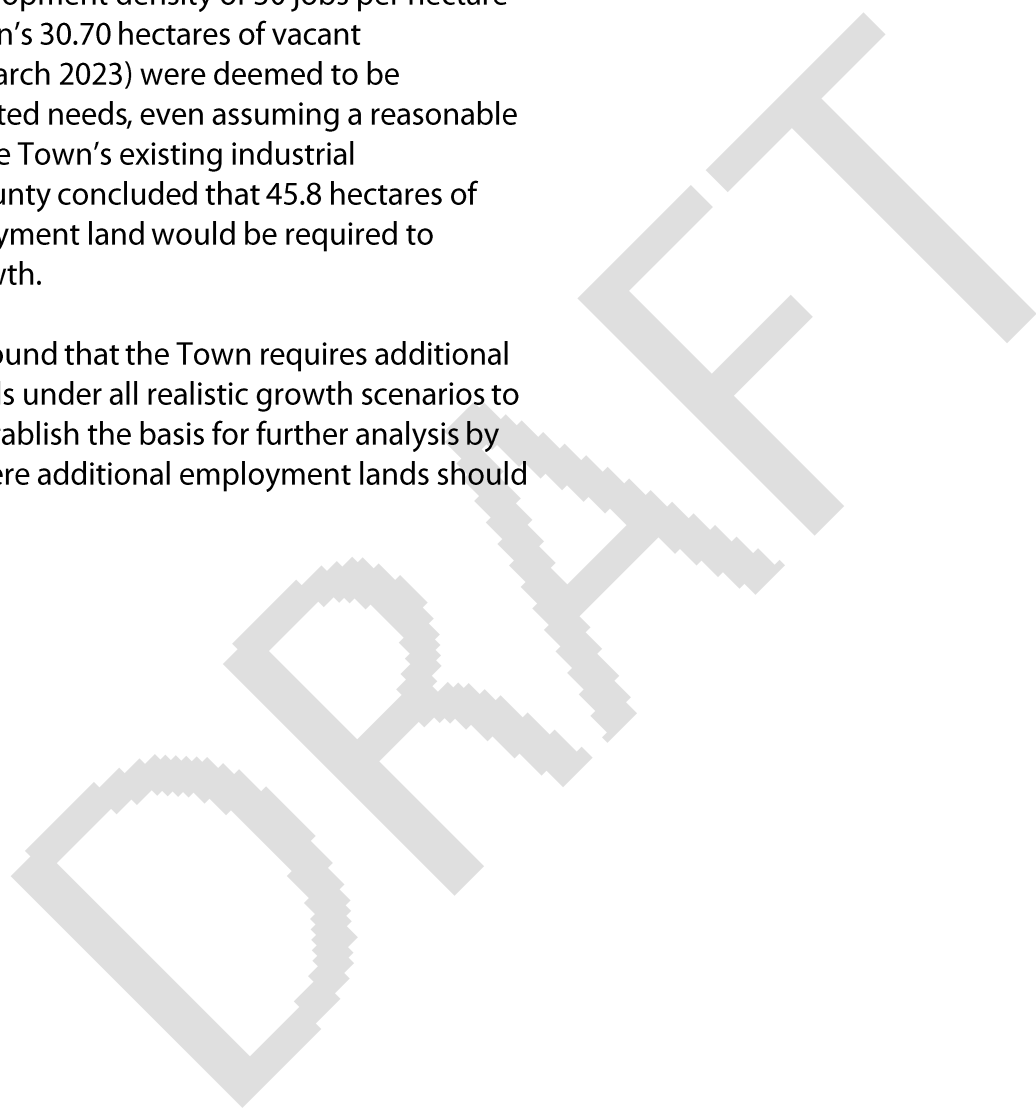
	Residential	Industrial Employment	Population-Related Employment
Land Needs for Growth to 2051	26.62 ha	76.5 ha	5.18 ha
Existing Vacant Supply (March 2023)	151 ha	30.7 ha	13.2 ha
Additional Land Needed	No additional land needed.	45.8 ha	No additional land needed.

As shown in Table 2, for the Town of Essex, the County’s LNA concluded that the Town has a sufficient supply of vacant land designated for residential uses to support growth to 2051. This conclusion was based on an assumed scenario where 30% of residential growth in the Town occurs through intensification, which the County defined as development not on vacant land. With approximately 151 hectares of vacant residential land identified in March 2023, Essex would be able to accommodate forecasted housing growth under the selected growth scenario. No residential settlement area expansion was identified to meet housing needs to 2051.

Similarly, population-related employment lands (i.e., supporting jobs not in industrial employment, like retail or service commercial uses) show a surplus. This conclusion was based on an assumed scenario where 300 sq. ft. is required per employee, plus an additional 35% to account for parking, loading, and landscaping needs. The Town has 13.2 hectares of vacant land designated for these population-related employment uses, while only 5.18 hectares are required.

Industrial employment lands show a deficit. This conclusion was based on an assumed development density of 30 jobs per hectare for industrial uses. The Town's 30.70 hectares of vacant employment lands (as of March 2023) were deemed to be insufficient to meet forecasted needs, even assuming a reasonable level of intensification of the Town's existing industrial employment lands. The County concluded that 45.8 hectares of additional industrial employment land would be required to support long-term job growth.

Overall, the County's LNA found that the Town requires additional industrial employment lands under all realistic growth scenarios to 2051. These conclusions establish the basis for further analysis by the Town to determine where additional employment lands should be designated.



# 4 DETAILED REVIEW OF SETTLEMENT AREAS

The Town of Essex has a unique Settlement Area structure that results in complexities for land use and infrastructure planning. Following amalgamation in the 1990s, the Town has two Primary Settlement Areas in Essex Centre and Harrow, which are both larger historical service centres with a mix of residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial uses. In addition, there are three Secondary Settlement Areas in McGregor, Colchester, and the Lakeshore West Residential area. The separation of these Settlement Areas requires each to have its own dedicated wastewater system (except for Colchester and Lakeshore West, which share a system), which increase potential servicing and development costs for the Town.

One of the primary objectives of the Settlement Area Review was to confirm the development potential of vacant lands in each of the five Settlement Areas. The WSP project team, along with Town staff, took an in-depth look to determine whether any constraints to development exist on those vacant lands which were identified through the County's Land Needs Assessment. Where any lands are undevelopable, for various reasons, there would be rationale for reallocating ("swapping") their land area to expand one of the Town's Primary Settlement Areas. This exercise is permitted under the Provincial Policy Statement, 2024, and the new County OP.

This section will present each Settlement Area, vacant land designated for residential or industrial development, and analysis of the opportunities or constraints in the Settlement Area to support the overall growth targets for the Town of Essex in the County OP.

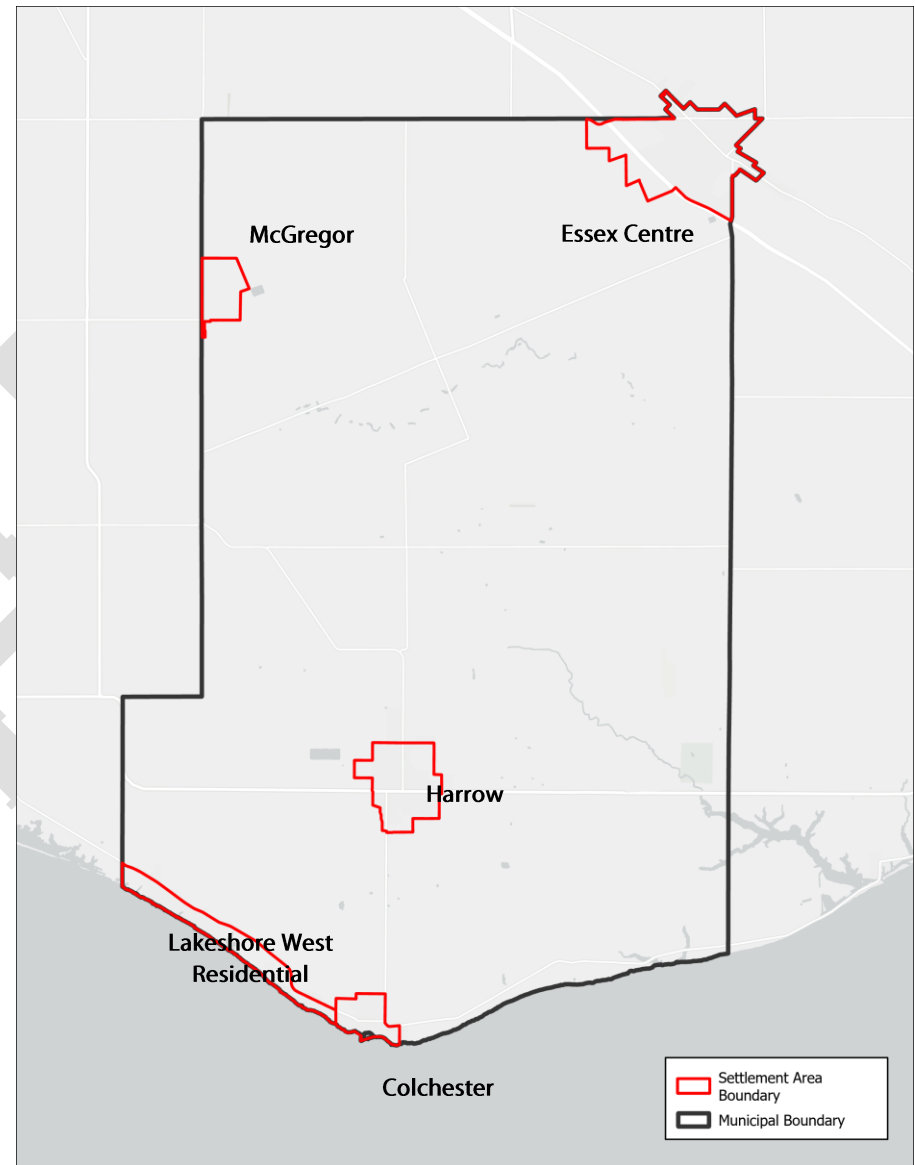


Figure 1 (right): Map of the Town of Essex showing its five Settlement Areas.

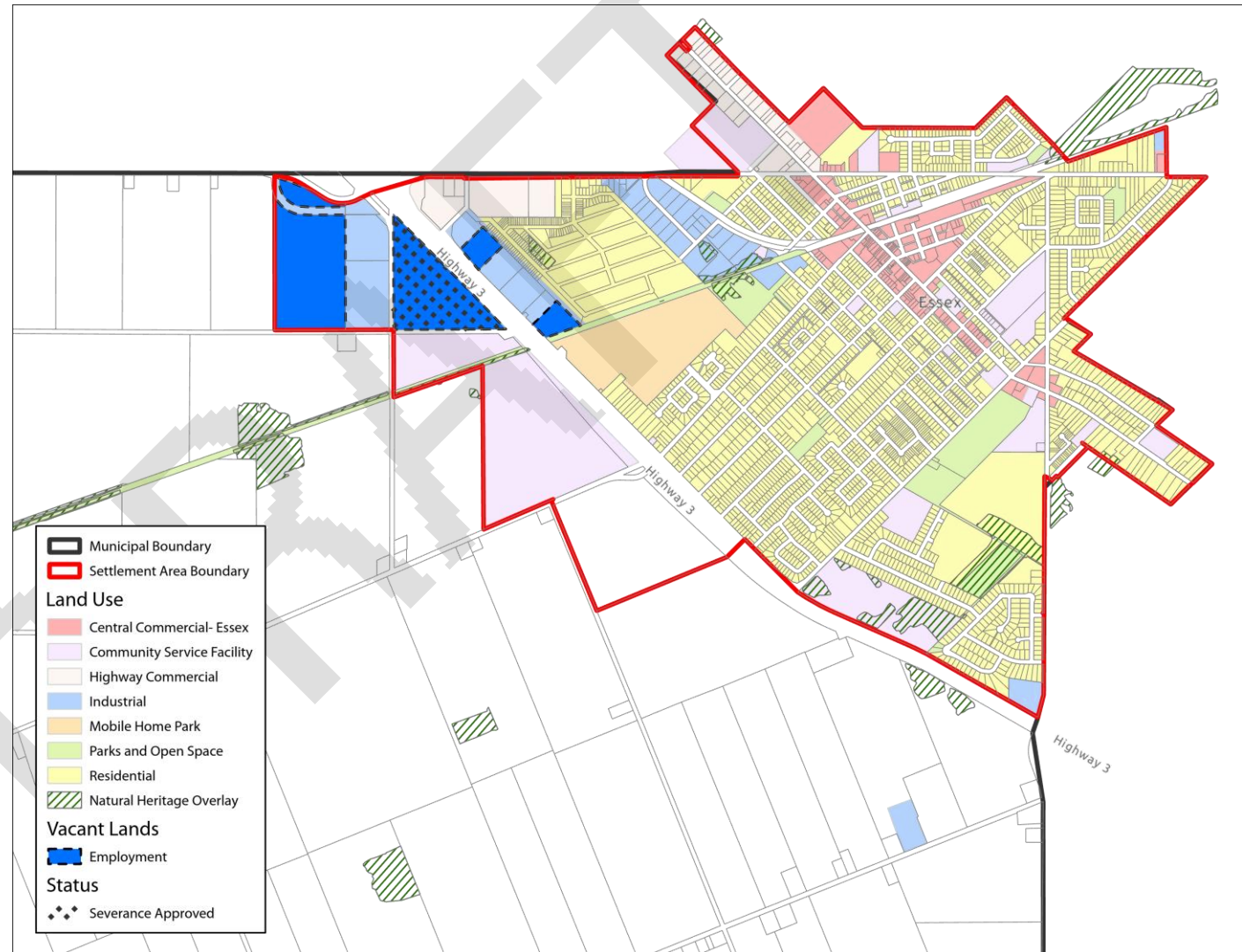
## 4.1 Essex Centre PSA

Essex Centre is located in the northeast corner of the Town, adjacent to the Municipality of Lakeshore and the Town of Kingsville, and is one of the Town’s two Primary Settlement Areas. It is the location of the broadest range of services and amenities in the Town, including the Essex District High School, Essex Public School, and other major community facilities.

There are two clusters of industrial employment lands in Essex Centre, the larger of which straddles the expanded Highway 3 south of the highway interchange with Maidstone Avenue.

The PSA is supported by full municipal services.

**Figure 2: Essex Centre Primary Settlement Area**



### 4.1.1 Vacant Land and Current Development Activity

There is a small amount of vacant residential lands in Essex Centre; however, these lands are subject to draft plans of subdivision and the proposed units from the development of these lands was accounted for in the Land Needs Assessment completed by the County of Essex. There are several vacant properties in the industrial employment cluster in the west end of Essex Centre around Highway 3. There is currently development interest on several of these properties, most notably the proposed Inspiration Business Park at 14978 14<sup>th</sup> Concession Road, which has an approved severance application to create five new industrial lots.

### 4.1.2 Development Potential

Along with Harrow, Essex Centre, as a PSA is the most appropriate location for further growth and development in the Town. With no remaining designated residential lands without planning approval in Essex Centre, new housing growth in the PSA will require intensification of existing lands. More analysis on this item can be found in Sections 1 and 6 of this Report.

There are no significant constraints to development of the remaining vacant industrial employment lands in Essex Centre. While the lands southwest of Highway 3 do not currently have wastewater service, the extension of sanitary sewers from the Essex Pollution Control Plant to the area is planned. The further buildout of this area for industrial uses may necessitate some upgrades to local access roads, but the location of the cluster adjacent to an interchange with the newly-twinning Highway 3 provides a direct route for goods movement in and out of the Town. This makes the area an ideal location for future industrial employment growth (see Section 7 of this Report for more analysis).

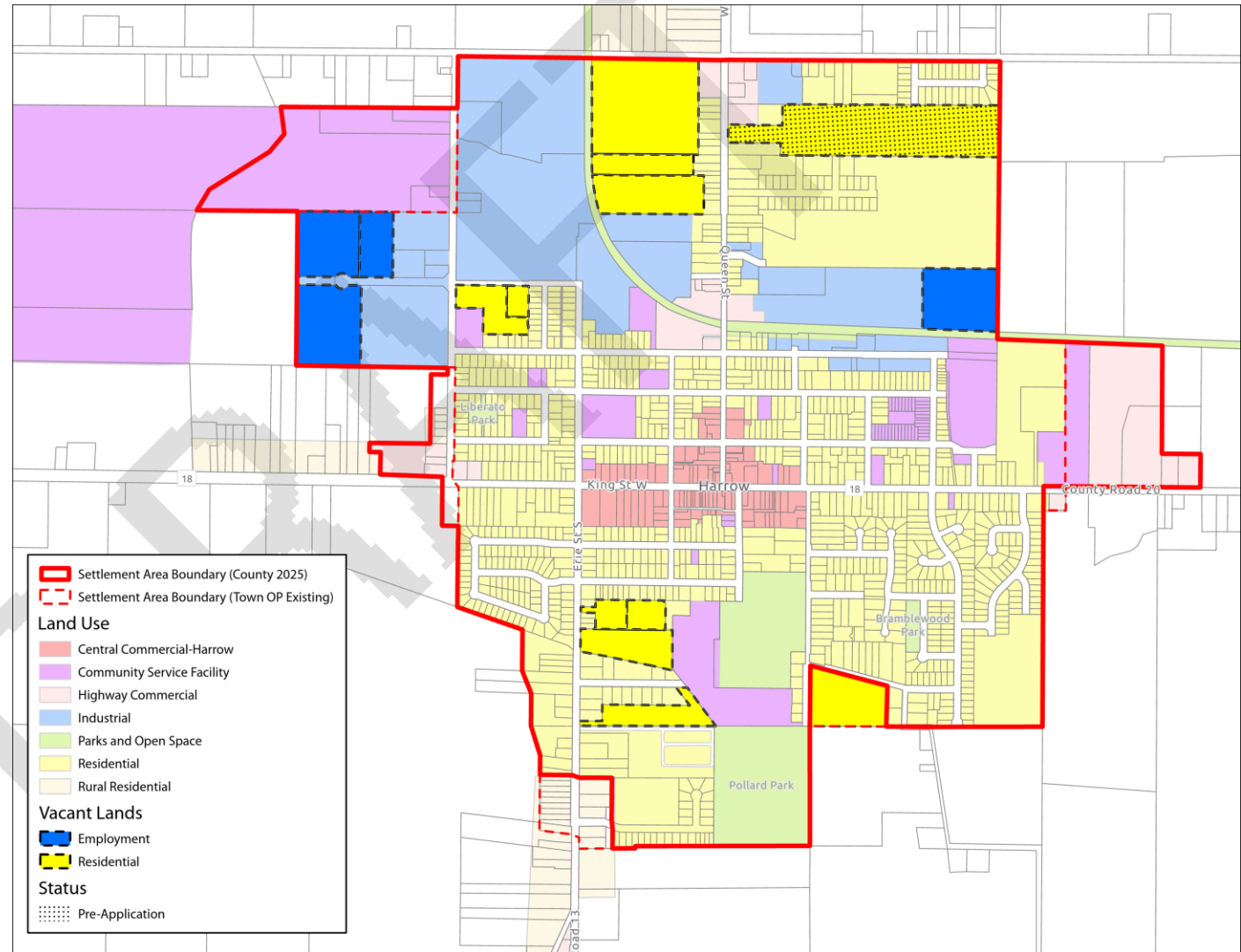
### 4.1.3 Recommendations

- > Retain all lands in the Essex Centre PSA in the new Official Plan.
- > Consider Essex Centre for all future industrial employment growth (see Section 7).
- > Support mixed-use and residential intensification in Essex Centre to support housing growth (see Sections 1 and 6).

## 4.2 Harrow PSA

Harrow is located in the geographic centre of the Town, and is one of the Town’s two Primary Settlement Areas. It supports a broad range of uses and businesses, including a cluster of industrial activity and community uses. Harrow has fully municipal services, with wastewater services via the Harrow Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Figure 3: Harrow Primary Settlement Area



#### 4.2.1 Vacant Land and Current Development Activity

There are substantial undeveloped residential and industrial lands inside the Harrow PSA boundary, although some parcels have limited frontage or access to public roadways (e.g., residential lands to the west of Queen Street in the north end of the Settlement area). Three large sites in the industrial cluster on Loricon Court remain undeveloped.

On the vacant lands designated in the Town’s in-effect OP, there are no active development applications, however, one site in the north end of the Settlement Area has been identified as a future phase of an existing subdivision development, and is in the pre-application phase.

It should be noted that the new County OP restructured the existing Harrow PSA boundary (see Figure 1 above) to reallocate a Residential-designated property with low development potential. This boundary adjustment will need to be reflected in the Final Draft OP for the Town.

#### 4.2.2 Development Potential

There are no significant constraints to development of the remaining vacant residential or industrial lands in Harrow. While some vacant lands have limited frontages to public roads, development of the lands is still feasible, albeit likely requiring more coordination between landowners and creative planning. Town infrastructure planning has not identified any servicing deficiencies that would preclude the development of vacant lands as planned.

#### 4.2.3 Recommendations

- > Retain all lands in the Harrow PSA in the new Official Plan.
- > Amend the Harrow PSA boundary to reflect the County OP.

## 4.3 McGregor SSA

McGregor is located in the northwest of the Town along the east side of Walker Road, roughly between 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Concession Roads. Notably, the historic service centre of McGregor is split between the Towns of Essex and Amherstburg on both sides of Walker Road. The SSA is supported by full municipal water and wastewater services, the latter via the McGregor Wastewater Treatment Plant (MWWTP), which is shared with Amherstburg. Development is currently paused in McGregor while an Environmental Assessment is completed for the MWWTP.

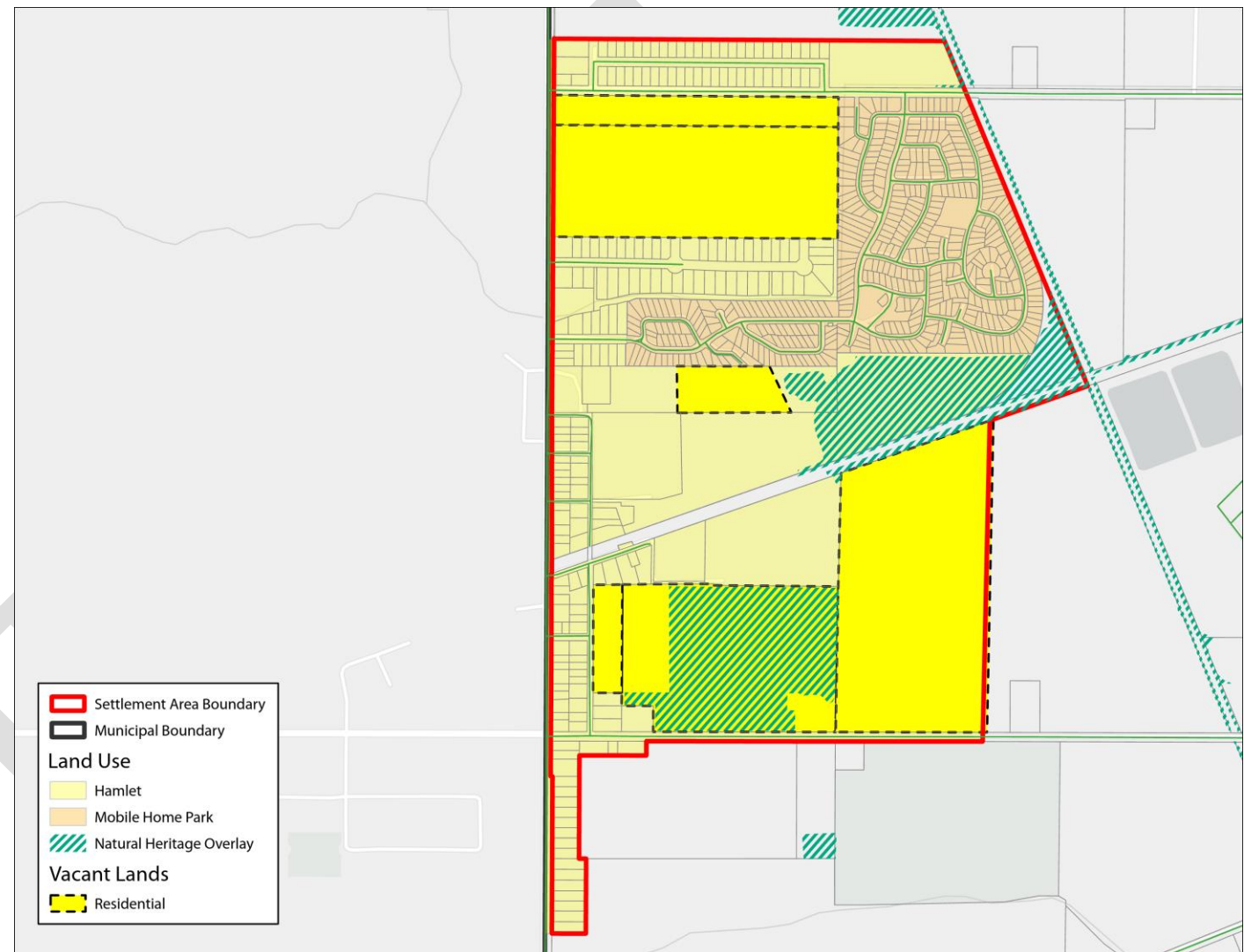


Figure 4: McGregor Secondary Settlement Area

### 4.3.1 Vacant Land and Current Development Activity

Through the preparation of the new County OP, it was noted that approximately 51 hectares of vacant residential land were available in the McGregor SSA. These lands were previously designated in the Town of Essex Official Plan, and no changes to those designations or new residential lands were introduced through the new County OP. Given the ongoing EA for the MWWTP, there are no active applications in McGregor, but there are several large undeveloped lots with potential for “rounding out” of the existing residential cluster in the SSA.

It should be noted that most lands in the McGregor are designated Hamlet, which permits a mix of residential, commercial, and institutional uses, but this analysis assumes that most of these lands would be developed for residential uses.

There are no vacant industrial lands in the SSA.

### 4.3.2 Potential Constraints to Development

As noted above, the capacity of the MWWTP is the largest constraint to development in the McGregor SSA, with development in McGregor currently on hold. The EA being currently undertaken for the MWWTP will identify expansion options for the plant. If the Town, along with the Town of Amherstburg, elects to invest in upgrades to the MWWTP, existing vacant lands would be available for development. Should the two Towns decide not to proceed with expansion of the MWWTP, the remaining vacant lands could be considered for reallocation to another of the Town’s Settlement

Areas, but at the time of this Report, and the new Official Plan, removing residential development permissions from these lands for servicing reasons would be premature.

In our analysis of McGregor’s development potential, the project team also looked at several existing woodlots that are located on vacant residential lands. While these woodlot features are sizeable, they are identified in the County and ERCA Natural Heritage System as Natural Environment Overlay. This means that development may be permitted on the woodlots, subject to an Environmental Impact Study demonstrating that there will be no net loss on the features or their ecological functions. Consequently, although these lands are constrained by natural heritage features, there may be opportunities for development that appropriately mitigate impacts to the Natural Heritage System, as determined through an Environmental Impact Study.

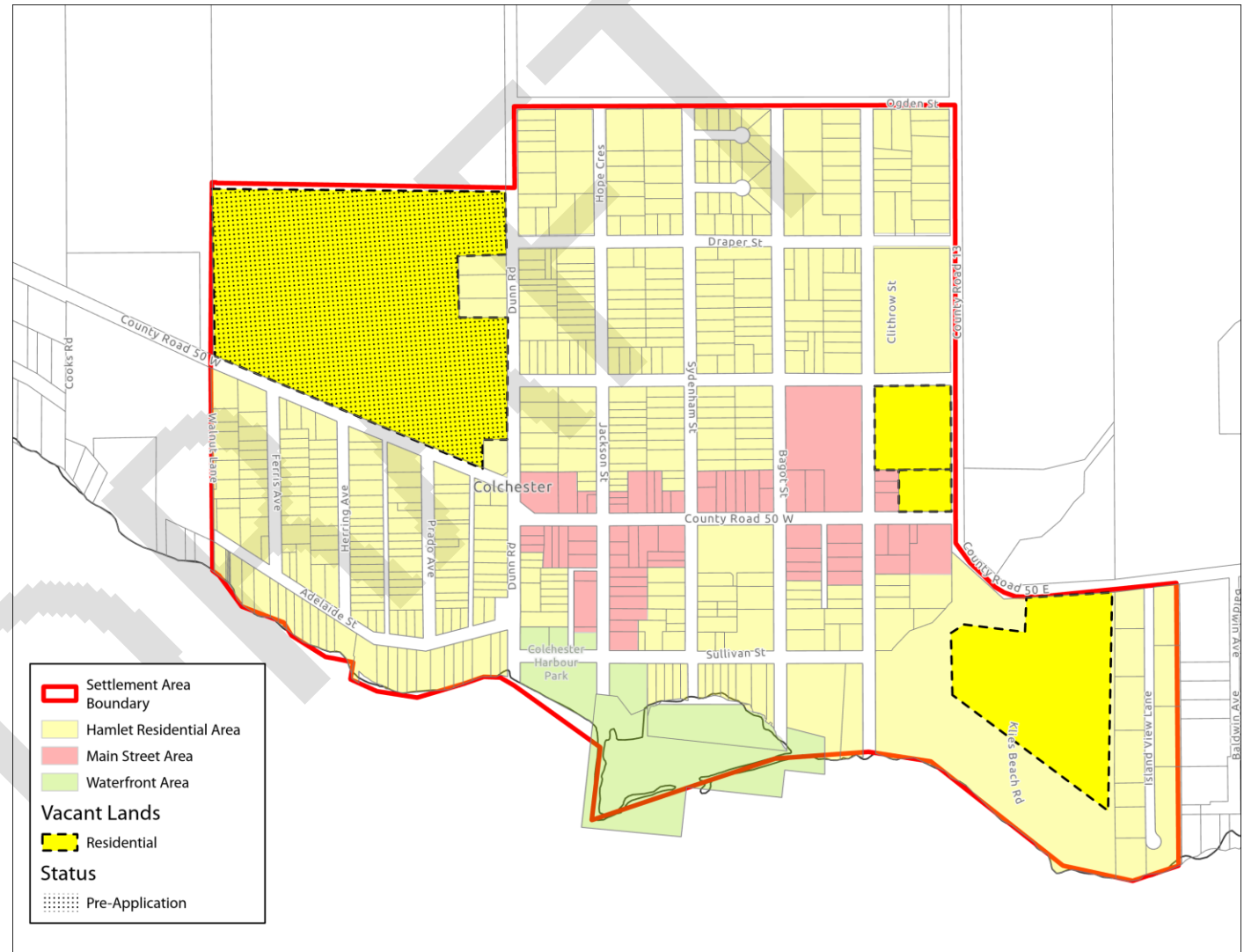
### 4.3.3 Recommendations

- > Retain all vacant lands designated Hamlet in the McGregor SSA in the new Official Plan, but consider noting that further development in the SSA will be contingent on the expansion of capacity at the MWWTP.
- > Following the completion of the EA for the MWWTP, if Essex Town Council, in collaboration with the Town of Amherstburg, decides not to move forward with expanding the MWWTP, the Town can consider reallocating vacant land area from McGregor to one of the Town’s Primary Settlement Areas, or adding the area to a land bank (see Section 8 below for more).

## 4.4 Colchester SSA

Colchester is located in the south of the Town, on the shore of Lake Erie, along County Road 50, and adjacent to the Lakeshore West. Most of the SSA has full municipal services, with wastewater services via the Colchester South Wastewater Treatment Plant (CSWWTP). Lands fronting on County Road 50 east of County Road 13 have only municipal water services, with private septic systems.

Figure 5: Colchester Secondary Settlement Area



#### 4.4.1 Vacant Land and Current Development Activity

There are several vacant residential lands in the Colchester SSA. One property is the site of a proposed development called Colchester Bay, which initially consisted of a mix of low- to high-density development, but has been amended in subsequent concept plans to reduce the overall site density. It should be noted that this development proposal is currently still in the pre-application phase.

There are no vacant industrial lands in the SSA.

#### 4.4.2 Development Potential

Based on Town infrastructure planning, including the completed Environmental Assessment for the expansion of the CSWWTP, there is available capacity in the wastewater system to support low-density development on the remaining vacant lands in the Colchester and Lakeshore West SSAs, with upgrades to certain pump stations required as development occurs.

The development of remaining lands in the Colchester SSA could theoretically proceed within the current design capacity of the wastewater system, but this development may need to be limited to low-density typologies to avoid expansion to the CSWWTP. However, future upgrades to the wastewater system may still be required should actual wastewater flows exceed the facilities rated capacity.

Should the CSWWTP be upgraded, higher development densities would be enabled on the remaining vacant lands, however development form in Colchester will also be driven by updated policies in the Colchester Secondary Plan, which have been developed in consultation with the community and will be brought forward alongside the Final Draft Official Plan.

Lands in the east of the Colchester SSA which do not have municipal wastewater services are not currently developable, however, a pump station and extension of the sanitary sewer to a small portion of these have has been identified, although not funded. Furthermore, the Province of Ontario has signalled an intention to review permissions for development on partial and/or private communal services. Given these two considerations, it would not be rationalized to remove those lands with partial services from the Colchester SSA.

Lands in the west of the Colchester SSA are impacted by the Lake Erie Flood Prone Area and some limited Inland Flood Prone Areas. These areas are susceptible to flooding and erosion hazards as well as unstable slopes and dynamic beach conditions. Development and site alteration can only be permitted in areas impacted by these natural hazards where the effects and risk to public safety are minor and can be mitigated in accordance with provincial standards.

Based on mapping from the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA), sections of the Colchester SSA may be impacted by the Lake Erie Flood Prone Area. In addition, the Klies Beach area is adjacent to a valleylands feature, which represents a natural heritage component that is subject to protective policies that limit or restrict development, except where it has been demonstrated that there will be no negative impacts on the natural features or their ecological functions.

A woodlot is also present on the Colchester Bay lands and is identified within the County and ERCA Natural Heritage System as Natural Environment Overlay. This designation recognizes the ecological value of the feature and requires that any proposed development be supported by an Environmental Impact Study (EIS). Through the EIS process, it must be demonstrated that there will be no negative impacts, including no net loss of ecological features or functions.

Taken together, these natural heritage features and hazard areas represent important components of the local ecosystem, contributing to shoreline stability, habitat connectivity, and biodiversity. Their presence introduces potential environmental constraints that will have to be considered through the development of remaining vacant lands in Colchester, but does not necessitate removal of any lands from the SSA.

#### 4.4.3 Recommendations

- > Retain all lands in the Colchester SSA in the new Official Plan.
- > Continue to plan for low-density housing development in Colchester, following a phased approach that keeps development within the design capacity of the area's wastewater system. This may require setting limits on overall site density, and/or allocating wastewater capacity to proposed developments under the *Municipal Act* and holding developments without allocations.
- > Implement other policy direction through the revised Colchester Secondary Plan

## 4.5 Lakeshore West Residential SSA

The Lakeshore West Residential SSA extends west from the Colchester SSA to the Town’s municipal boundary, south from County Road 50 to the shore of Lake Erie. The area originally developed with clusters of cottages, but is now supported by full municipal water and wastewater services, the latter via the Colchester South Wastewater Treatment Plant (CSWWTP).

Figure 6: Lakeshore West Residential Secondary Settlement Area



#### 4.5.1 Vacant Land and Current Development Activity

Through the preparation of the new County OP, it was noted that approximately 68 hectares of vacant residential land were available in the Lakeshore West Residential SSA. These lands were previously designated for residential development in the Town of Essex Official Plan; however, no changes to those designations or new residential lands were introduced through the new County OP. As shown on Figure 5, there is substantial development interest in the Lakeshore West Residential SSA, with development proposed or considered on several of the remaining vacant lands at various stages in the development application process.

There are no vacant non-residential lands in the SSA.

#### 4.5.2 Potential Constraints to Development

Through the SAR, the project team collaborated with Town staff to analyse the development potential of the remaining vacant residential lands in the Lakeshore West Residential SSA, looking at servicing capacity and capability, as well as potential natural heritage and flooding constraints.

Based on Town infrastructure planning, including the completed Environmental Assessment for the expansion of the CSWWTP, there is available capacity in the wastewater system to support low-density development on the remaining vacant lands in the Colchester and Lakeshore West SSAs, with upgrades to certain pump stations required as development occurs.

The development of remaining lands in the Lakeshore West Residential SSA could theoretically proceed within the current design capacity of the wastewater system, but this development may need to be limited to low-density typologies to avoid expansion to the CSWWTP. However, future upgrades to the wastewater system may still be required should actual wastewater flows exceed the facilities rated capacity.

Should the CSWWTP be upgraded, higher development densities would be enabled on the remaining vacant lands, but are not recommended at this time.

The project team also conducted a preliminary examination of potential flood hazard and natural heritage constraints on vacant lands. Based on mapping data from the County and Essex Region Conservation Authority, there are some lake-based flooding impacts that would need to further study to confirm available unaffected lands for development and natural heritage features that may need to be conserved prior to development being approved.

In addition to the available County and Conservation Authority mapping, it has been identified that some lands within the Lakeshore West Residential Area have been subject to significant overland flow flooding, which has impacted access to County Road 50 as well as impacts to individual properties. To ensure that new development does not further exacerbate overland flow flooding, development proponents will be required to complete flood hazard assessments. The flood hazard assessments will evaluate existing flood risks, quantify flood impacts of proposed development, and identify mitigation measures to ensure that the proposed development will not exacerbate flooding in existing areas. Mitigation measures shall be implemented to ensure that flooding in existing areas will be managed to a level that is 'like or better' than existing flood conditions.

Additional guidance for the flood hazard assessments will be evaluated as part of Master Servicing Study being completed by the Town. This evaluation may recommend site specific criteria for developers to use as a guide to complete flood hazard assessments.

Additionally, the CSWWTP poses a constraint to development in two ways. The site of the CSWWTP is incorrectly designated for residential uses, and should be redesignated to an infrastructure designation. Further, based on Provincial guidelines for land use compatibility, development should be restricted within a minimum buffer of 150 metres around the CSWWTP sewage lagoons.

### 4.5.3 Recommendations

- > Retain all vacant lands designated Lakeshore Residential in the Lakeshore West Residential SSA in the new OP, except for the site of the CSWWTP, and lands within the 150 metre buffer area from the CSWWTP.
- > These lands, which amount to approximately 16 hectares, can be reallocated to another Settlement Area at a future time (see Section 8.6 of this Report).
- > Continue to plan for low-density housing development in the Lakeshore West Residential SSA, following a phased approach that keeps development within the design capacity of the area's wastewater system. This may require setting limits on overall site density, and/or allocating wastewater capacity to proposed developments under the *Municipal Act* and holding developments without allocations.
- > Require that proponents of new development in the Lakeshore West Residential SSA complete flood hazard assessments to ensure that stormwater management designs for the developments do not exacerbate overland flow flooding.

# 5 EXISTING RESIDENTIAL INTENSIFICATION OPPORTUNITIES

The County OP has established a policy directive for 30% of residential growth to take place through intensification, and the County Land Needs Assessment based was based on the assumption that this target will be met.

To comprehensively review the residential land supply in the Town’s Settlement Areas, it is necessary to verify if the 30% target is feasible within the Town’s Primary Settlement Areas (PSAs) as currently planned. This involves confirming that there are sites within these areas that could reasonably accommodate increased residential density, either through redevelopment of existing properties or infill construction on underutilized parcels.

Please note: this exercise, summarized here in Section 5, is not a direction that any of the sites examined are required to develop.

An assessment of land use and existing development permissions, with particular attention to permitted building heights, has been conducted. In addition, recent development activity has been reviewed to provide real-world examples of intensification potential. By analyzing site density in terms of units per hectare and extrapolating these densities across various potential intensification sites throughout the Town, it is possible to estimate the capacity for additional residential units within the PSAs. This approach ensures that the County’s intensification targets are both realistic and achievable given current planning frameworks and market trends.

Section 6 contains the Residential Intensification Strategy, which is different from this existing opportunities analysis – it outlines the recommended actions for the Town to support, encourage, and incentivize intensification on a Town-wide level.

**Table 3: Comparison of the Existing Opportunities Analysis vs. the Residential Intensification Strategy**

	<b>Existing Residential Opportunities Analysis</b>	<b>Town-wide Residential Intensification Strategy</b>
Directive County OP policy	Policy 4.A.9.3(f)	Policy 4.A.5.3.
Purpose	Identify and analyze intensification opportunities to check if the 30% target can be supported based on current development permissions. If the 30% target cannot be feasibly met based on existing permissions, the Residential Intensification Strategy will need to address how the deficiency will be addressed.	Recommend actions to be taken in the Town’s Official Plan, Zoning By-law, and other Town planning processes to support intensification. This Strategy will consider the findings of the Existing Residential Opportunities Analysis and outline an approach to meeting any deficit of intensification opportunities.

## 5.1 County Assumptions (2023)

As noted above, the County’s 2023 LNA was based on a scenario which assumed a 30% residential intensification rate, i.e., that 30% of housing growth to 2051 would be built through redevelopment or infill of already developed lands in the Town’s Primary Settlement Areas. Put into real numbers, this equates to **830** of the 2,765 new residential units needed in the Town by 2051.

The County also assumed that these units built through intensification would only be medium-density (townhouses or duplexes) or high-density (apartments, either in residential-only or mixed-use buildings). This is still a reasonable assumption, given that lands suitable for intensification in the Town are not typically designated for low-density uses.

Through this SAR, it is important to confirm the potential for these 830 units to be developed through intensification of lands in the Town’s Primary Settlement Areas of Essex Centre and Harrow.

## 5.2 Recent Development Interest

In order to confirm the assumed 30% intensification rate, several recent development proposals or concepts in the Town have been examined. These projects, while providing a small sample size, can help WSP and the Town estimate the future density and uptake for other potential intensification sites.

Table 4: Recent medium-/high-density development interest in the Town

	41 Centre St, 27-36 Queen Street, Harrow	45 Wellington Street, Harrow	47 Wilson Avenue, Essex Centre	22 Victor Street, Essex Centre
Description	Six-storey mixed-use building	Residential redevelopment of part of the former Harrow High School site	Mixed-use redevelopment of former Home Hardware Site in Essex Centre	Redevelopment of a portion of the former Weston Bakery site
Status	Proposed	Proposed	Proposed	Complete (2021)
Maximum Building Height	6 storeys	6 storeys	6-7 storeys	6 storeys
Gross Site Area	0.27 hectares	1.3 hectares	1.28 hectares	0.57 hectares
Total Number of Units	52	160	200	57
Site Density	193 units per hectare	123 units per hectare	156 units per hectare	100 units per hectare

## 5.3 Analysis

The developments highlighted in the previous section make up a small sample size. Nevertheless, some trends can be observed in these developments that are helpful to forecast where additional intensification may occur in the Town, and to confirm if the County's 30% intensification assumption for growth to 2051 can be absorbed in the Town's Primary Settlement Areas.

**Development interest:** There is moderate ongoing interest from the development community in intensification through redevelopment in both Harrow and Essex Centre, mostly on larger sites with a lapsed use. It is reasonable to assume that this modest trend will continue, but that land assembly and/or redevelopment of buildings with existing operating uses is unlikely.

**Building height:** Development is being proposed within six-storey height range, which is the in-effect Town OP's maximum permitted height in the Town Centre designations in Essex and Harrow. This indicates that a six-storey maximum building height is not a deterrent to medium- and high-density development in the Town.

**Density:** An average site density of ~140 units per gross hectare can be observed in the examples above, which aligns with typical densities for five- to six-storey buildings in comparable municipalities across Ontario.

### 5.3.1 Methodology

The observed average site density is significantly higher than the minimum 80 units per net hectare directed for high-density development in policy 4.A.6.2 of the County OP. In order to be prudent and realistic with intensification projections, an average 100 units per gross hectare is assumed for high-density intensification sites.

To determine the feasibility of intensification supply opportunities in the Town supporting the 30% intensification target of 830 medium- and high-density units, WSP did the following:

- > Identified sites that have potential for medium- and high-density redevelopment. As the County's LNA included all vacant lands designated Residential in its residential land supply, intensification sites in the Town will only be identified for lands currently designated for commercial or mixed-use development.
  - While some intensification will be planned for and encouraged in Colchester, this analysis will focus on Essex Centre and Harrow.

- > Assumed average site densities to determine the amount of land that would be needed for the 830 medium-/high-density residential units to be built through redevelopment. In the absence of any recent medium-density intensification in the Town, 50 units per gross hectare will be assumed for medium-density sites.

Two of the developments listed above (41 Centre St, 27-36 Queen Street and the former Harrow High School) were not included in the assumed development pipeline in the County's 2023 LNA, so the 212 proposed units in these developments can be counted toward the 830-unit target.

### 5.3.2 Site Selection

Based on the recent development trends in the Town, as well as broader typical trends, there are several types of potential intensification sites in Essex Centre and Harrow:

- > Vacant lots, which have no formal building or use (and which may include brownfield sites requiring remediation before safe development).
- > Lands which may be determined to be surplus in the future, including surface parking and other Town-owned lands.
- > Underutilized sites, where the buildings and uses only use a small amount of the lot area, leaving opportunity for redevelopment on the remaining portion(s). Some of these sites may include surface parking associated with the on-site use.

Figure 7 and Figure 8 below show these intensification sites within the Centre Commercial designations in Essex Centre and Harrow. These lands have been proposed to be designated Main Street Mixed-Use designation in the draft new Town OP, with permissions for both residential and commercial uses, and building heights of up to six storeys.

Please note that WSP is not recommending whether these specific sites should or will be redeveloped in the future, and the Town's new Official Plan will not require them to be redeveloped.

This exercise will just verify whether any future medium- and high-density housing market demand driven by the County's growth forecasts can be met within certain development permissions.

Figure 7:  
Intensification  
opportunit s Essex  
Centre

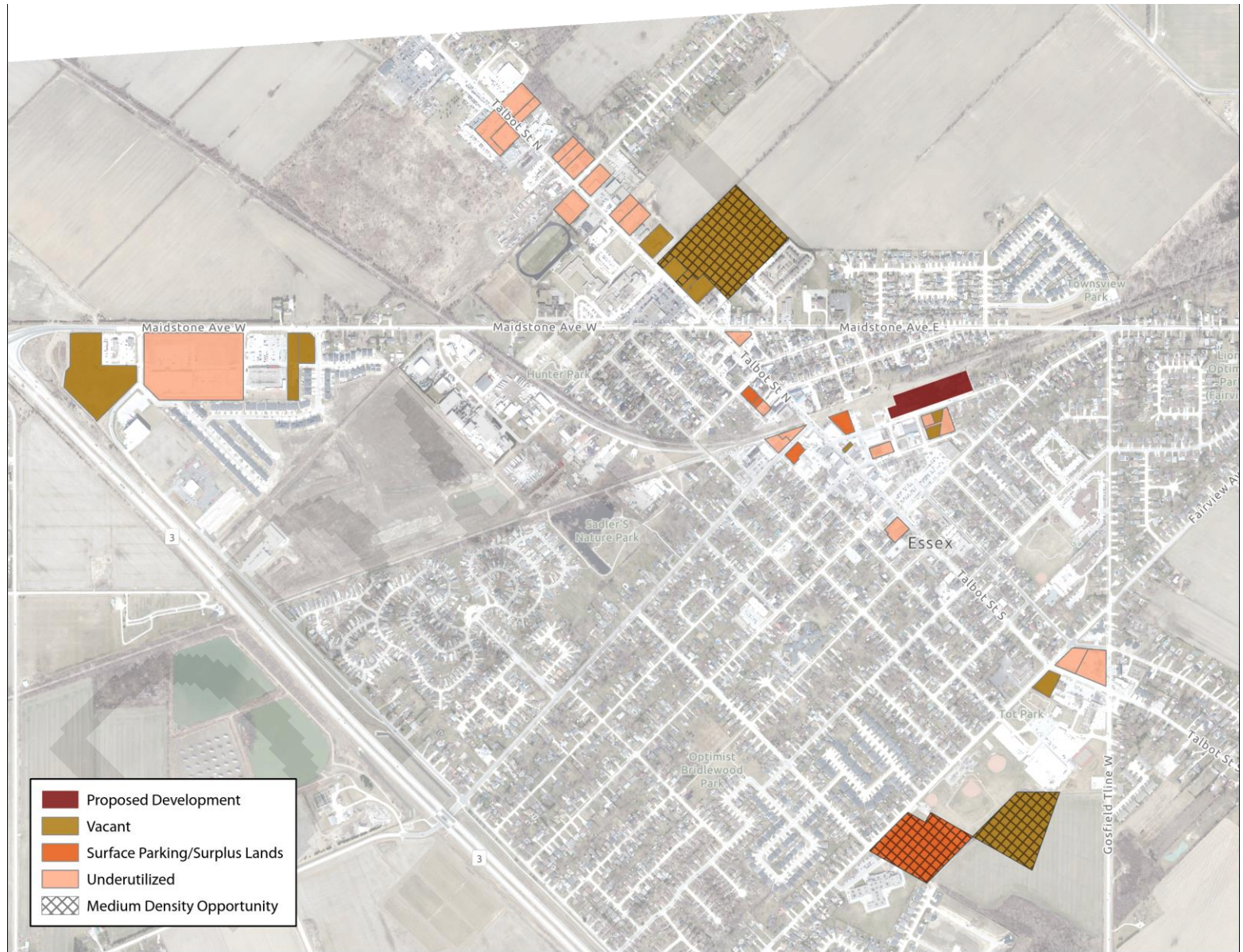


Figure 8:  
Intensification  
opportunities in  
Harrow

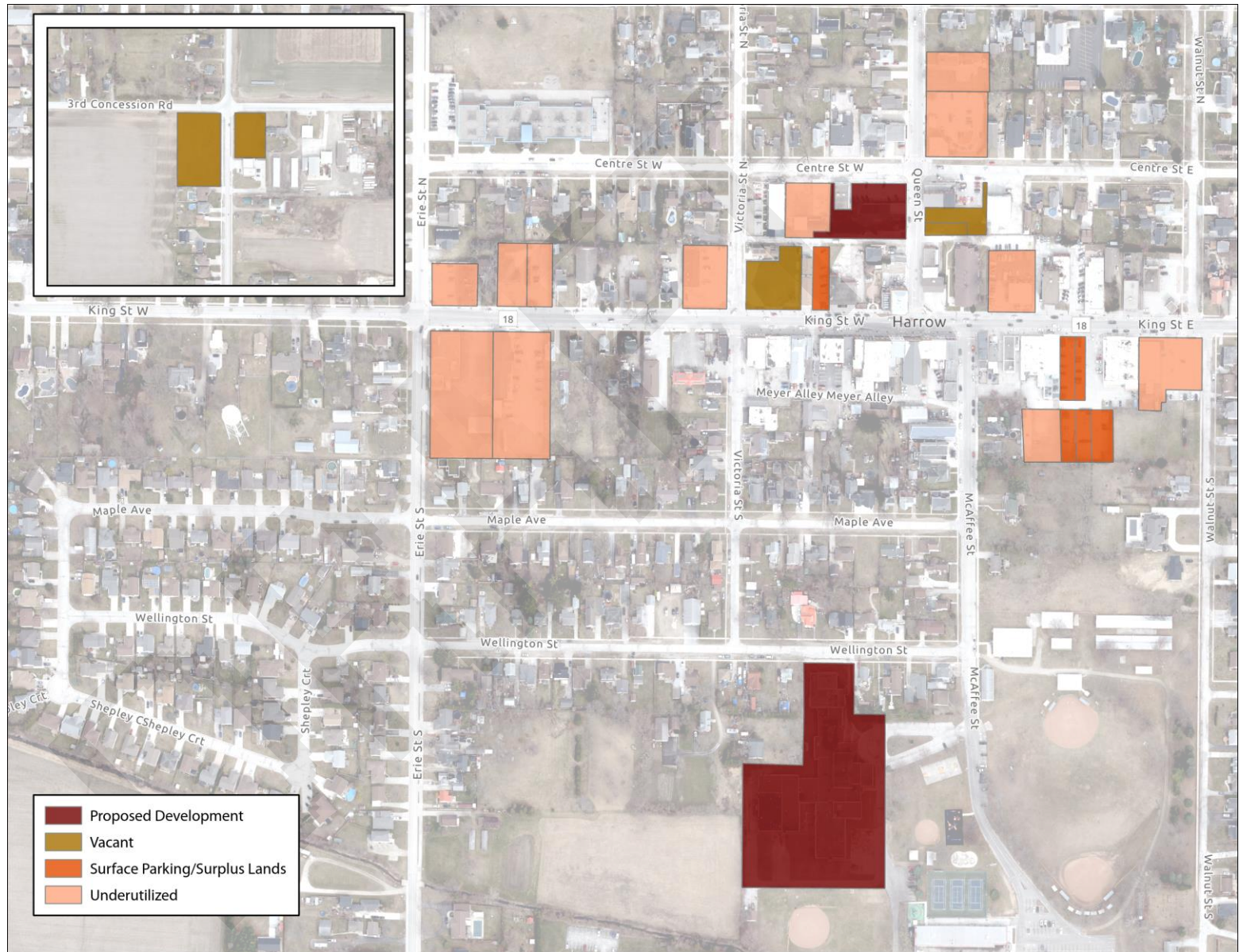
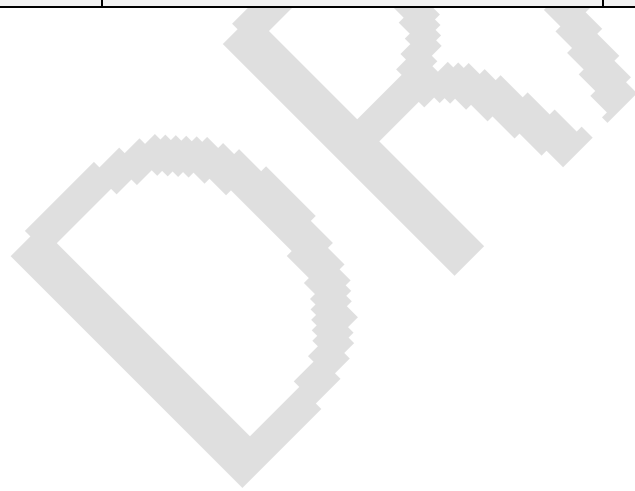


Table 5 shows the estimated number of units available through intensification in mixed-use and commercial areas in Essex Centre and Harrow, based on the methodology established above. This analysis shows that even assuming a modest uptake on intensification opportunities in the Town’s two Primary Settlement Areas, the 30% intensification rate, representing around 830 medium- and high-density units, can be supported.

**Table 5: Intensification potential in Essex Centre and Harrow**

Intensification Site Type	Potential High-Density Units (100 uph per gross hectare)	Potential Medium-Density Units (50 uph per gross hectare)	Total Potential High-and Medium- Density
<b>Essex Centre</b>			
Proposed Development	200	-	200
Surface Parking/Surplus Lands	58	146	204
Underutilized	318	-	318
Vacant	246	535	781

Intensification Site Type	Potential High-Density Units (100 uph per gross hectare)	Potential Medium-Density Units (50 uph per gross hectare)	Total Potential High-and Medium- Density
<b>Harrow</b>			
Proposed	212	-	212
Surface Parking/Surplus Lands	34	-	34
Underutilized	78	-	78
Vacant	120	-	120
<b>Total (Essex Centre and Harrow)</b>	<b>1,266</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>1,947</b>



There are additional intensification opportunities in the Town that were not included in the analysis above, as supply and/or uptake for these opportunities is harder to predict. These include:

- > Parcels currently designated, or to be designated, for mixed-use development, which currently support active uses utilizing the majority of the parcel. There has not been demonstrated interest in redevelopment of these types of lands.
- > Parcels designated Main Street in Colchester which largely support existing single-detached dwellings, but which permit mixed-use development up to three storeys tall.
- > Vacant or underutilized parcels designated Residential in all Settlement Areas, which may hold potential for infill or severance.
- > Development of Additional Residential Units on fully-serviced residential lots throughout the Town.

These opportunities are reasonable forms of future potential intensification in the Town, and may supplement the future intensification supply shown in Table 5, but are not predictable enough to rely on to ground-truth the 30% intensification target. They can, however, be supported through the Residential Intensification Strategy, which is outlined in the following section.

# 6 TOWN-WIDE RESIDENTIAL INTENSIFICATION STRATEGY

In addition to setting the 30% intensification target to accommodate medium- and high-density residential growth in the Town, the County OP also requires that the Town develop a Residential Intensification Strategy (“the Strategy”) as part of its new OP which sets out various actions and policies to support intensification in the Town.

Section 4.A.5.3 of the County OP sets out a detailed list of items that are required to be considered and address through the Strategy. Many of these criteria can be supported through the OP, but can also be supported through further detailed planning, most specifically through the Town’s Zoning By-law. Several items are not able to be directly addressed by the OP, but the Strategy below will outline the proposed tools and processes the Town can use to address them.

Table 5 presents each criterion in Section 4.A.5.3 of the County OP, along with the high-level strategic action to address the criterion. The table is followed by details of each strategic action.

Table 6: Summary of Town-wide Residential Intensification Strategy

County OP Policy	Strategic Action
<p>Section 4.A.5.3. Intensification strategies shall be prepared as part of all local municipal Official Plans and Secondary Plans, and be implemented through Zoning By laws, Community Improvement Plans and other supporting documents.</p> <p>Updates to local municipal Official Plans shall include an intensification strategy that:</p>	
<p>a) identifies the importance of complete communities and ensuring community services are provided to support intensification generally and intensification areas specifically;</p>	<p>Draft OP: Guiding Principles, Growth Management,</p>
<p>b) provides development standards to support the achievement of complete communities, permit and facilitate a compact built form and all forms of intensification throughout the built-up area, and avoid or mitigate risks to public health and safety;</p>	<p>Draft OP: Widely permitting mixed-use development in Main Street and Corridor designations.</p> <p>Further implementation through the Zoning By-law, including pre-zoning for mixed-use.</p>
<p>c) includes intensification targets and strategies for areas with full services;</p>	<p>Draft OP: Town Structure</p>
<p>d) identify the location and boundaries of local growth centres and mixed use corridors, that are considered priority areas for development and intensification;</p>	<p>Draft OP: Main Street areas and Mixed-Use Corridors identified for the highest level of intensification</p>
<p>e) provides strategies to achieve higher densities than what currently exist;</p>	<p>Draft OP: Permit six-storey buildings and a mix of uses widely in mixed-use designations, flexible residential designation.</p> <p>Further implementation through the Zoning By-law by expanding typology permissions, building envelope, etc.</p>

County OP Policy	Strategic Action
<p>f) identify an appropriate design and scale of development and the transition of built forms to adjacent areas;</p>	<p>Draft OP: Policies to encourage transition and appropriate scale at a high level.</p> <p>Further implementation through the Zoning By-law through lot and building standards, including height, lot coverage, and setbacks.</p>
<p>g) provide a diverse mix of land uses at densities that support existing or planned public transit and active transportation infrastructure;</p>	<p>Draft OP: Widely permit high-density mixed-use development in Main Street and Corridor designations.</p> <p>Further implementation through the Zoning By-law, including pre-zoning for mixed-use.</p>
<p>h) supports the provision of affordable housing for both ownership and rental forms of housing;</p>	<p>Draft OP: Encourage the provision of affordable housing in all new development, direct for the divestment of surplus Town-owned lands for affordable housing.</p> <p>Further implementation through Community Improvement Planning.</p>
<p>i) revitalize and, where appropriate, conserve cultural heritage resources in areas that reflect local heritage, character, and streetscapes;</p>	<p>Draft OP: Carried forward and new cultural heritage policies, and new policies to support public realm and streetscaping improvements that reflect and enhance built heritage resources,</p>
<p>j) identify other major opportunities for intensification, such as infill, redevelopment, brownfields, and the expansion or conversion of existing buildings and greyfield sites;</p>	<p>Draft OP: Identify high-opportunity intensification sites, especially underutilized commercial lands that could be re-developed for mixed-use.</p> <p>Further implementation through pre-zoning of high-opportunity sites.</p>

County OP Policy	Strategic Action
k) identify the timing and efficient provision of municipal water and wastewater systems/services and their fiscal impacts on the local municipality; and,	Draft OP: No action, other than policy supporting the efficient provision and use of municipal services.  Primary implementation through the Town's ongoing Master Servicing Plan.
l) identify updates to the local municipality's Zoning By-law to pre-zone sites for intensification which shall be implemented within one year of adoption of the intensification strategy.	New/updated Zoning By-law following the adoption of the new Official Plan.

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### **6.1.1 Complete communities**

The Town's new OP will identify achieving complete communities as a primary goal of the Town, including through the new Vision and Guiding Principles. One of key elements of this policy direction is ensuring that the uniqueness of the Town (with two Primary Settlement Areas) is considered, and that a "one size fits all" approach is not applied, recognizing the distinct needs of each Settlement Area.

### **6.1.2 Development standards to support complete communities and compact built form**

The Town's new OP will expand permissions for mixed-use development through the achieving complete communities as a primary goal of the Town, including through the new Main Street Mixed-Use and Corridor Mixed-Use designations in Harrow and Essex Centre. These designations will encourage compact and efficient development which supports the public realm and incentivizes walking.

Much of the work to implement this County OP direction will lie in the Zoning By-law, which will require amendment to add mixed-use flexibility in these areas, including through pre-zoning

### **6.1.3 Intensification targets and strategies for areas with full services**

The Town's new OP will include a brand new Town Structure section, which outlines specifically how growth is to be distributed across the Town's Settlement Areas. This section will set a hierarchy for growth that prioritizes the Primary Settlement Areas, identifies intensification targets across all serviced Settlement Areas, as well as addressing the role of the Town's rural areas as areas of low-/no-growth to support agriculture and other rural uses.

### **6.1.4 Location and boundaries of local growth centres and mixed use corridors**

The new Town Structure will identify the Main Street Mixed-Use areas in Harrow and Essex Centre as the primary growth centres of the Town, with the highest levels of intensification and the Corridor Mixed-Use areas as secondary areas of mixed-use intensification, but targeted for lower densities than Main Street Mixed-Use areas.

### 6.1.5 Strategies to achieve higher densities

The Town's new OP will permit six-storey buildings and a mix of uses widely in the new mixed-use designations. Additionally, the Residential designations will be highly flexible, permitting a broad range of housing typologies and densities, and not setting maximum built form standards. This approach to presentational policies reflects emerging best practices for OPs, which allows for more detailed regulation of neighbourhoods through zoning and avoids unnecessary limiting of intensification in the OP.

Through the Town's updated or new Zoning By-law following the adoption of the new OP, built form regulations can be amended to permit denser development than currently existing in all Areas of the Town, through broader housing typology permissions, building envelopes, etc.

### 6.1.6 Appropriate scale of development and transition

The Town's new OP will encourage transition from higher-density forms to lower-density forms, and will identify the appropriate scale of development in different areas of the Town, but at a high level.

The primary implementation of built form compatibility and appropriate scale should occur through the Zoning By-law, via lot and building standards, including height, lot coverage, and setbacks.

### 6.1.7 Uses and density to support public transit and active transportation

As noted above, Town's new OP will expand permissions for mixed-use development through the new Main Street Mixed-Use and Corridor Mixed-Use designations in Harrow and Essex Centre. While the Town currently has minimal transit service, encouraging higher densities in the centre of Harrow and Essex Centres will be transit-supportive, rationalizing the future expansion of transit services.

Further implementation can occur through the Zoning By-law, including pre-zoning for mixed-use. Additionally, the Town can connote to expand on-road and off-road active transportation facilities in collaboration with a variety of partners, and work with neighbouring municipalities and the County to look for opportunities to expand transit services in conjunction with intensification.

### 6.1.8 Affordable housing for both ownership and rental forms of housing

The Town's new OP will encourage the provision of affordable housing in all new development, and include the affordable housing targets set in the County OP.

It should be noted that achieving the development of affordable housing purely through land use direction in the OP is extremely difficult, as the Town has no statutory planning tools available to require affordable housing units. Nonetheless, there are other processes to support affordable housing development which will be referenced in the new OP, including Community Improvement Planning, partnering with the County and not-for-profit housing organizations. The OP can also direct for the divestment of surplus Town-owned lands for affordable housing.

### 6.1.9 Cultural heritage resources

The Town's new OP carry forward existing OP cultural heritage policies, as well as include new cultural heritage policies that reflect updates to the Ontario Heritage Act. New urban design policies can also direct for public realm and streetscaping improvements (both public and private) that reflect and enhance built heritage resources.

Further implementation can continue to proceed through processes outside the OP, including the Town's heritage planning framework, and streetscaping/urban design guidelines.

### 6.1.10 Identify other major opportunities for intensification

Beyond encouraging and permitting high-density mixed-use development in the Primary Settlement Areas, the Town's new OP can identify high-potential intensification sites, in Essex Centre and Harrow, including some or all of the sites identified in Section 1 of this Report. This policy direction can focus on underutilized commercial lands that could be re-developed for mixed-use development.

Further implementation can occur through pre-zoning of high-potential sites in consultation with landowners and the community.

### 6.1.11 Timing and efficient provision of services and their fiscal impacts

As noted in the table above, the Town's new OP can direct for the efficient and phased provision and/or expansion of municipal services, however the identification of timing, location, capacity, and fiscal impact must be undertaken through a separate process.

At the time of writing, the Town of Essex is undertaking a Master Servicing Plan to provide a comprehensive and strategic framework for municipal water, wastewater, and stormwater servicing. The Master Servicing Plan will include appropriate technical analysis, policy direction, and recommendations to identify the infrastructure investments required over the coming years to support anticipated growth and development. The Master Servicing Plan will be directly informed by this Settlement Area Review and the planned densities and levels of intensification identified within the Settlement Areas

### 6.1.12 Identify updates to the Zoning By-law

Following the adoption of the Town's new OP, it is recommended that the Town commence a study to update its Zoning By-law. The study should include preliminary work to identify methods for implementing this strategy and the new OP, including but not limited to:

- > Considering new permissions in residential neighbourhoods to support intensification, including a broader range of housing typologies (semi-detached and townhouse dwellings, multi-unit development like triplexes and fourplexes, low-rise apartment buildings, and additional residential units).
- > Pre-zoning lands in the Main Street and Corridor designations, where appropriate.
- > Examining parking requirements for residential uses (stand-alone or in-mixed-use developments) across the Town, to determine if any zoning amendments could support increased intensification.

# 7 SETTLEMENT AREA EXPANSION (EMPLOYMENT)

As noted in Section 3 of this Report, the County of Essex’s Land Needs Assessment, and subsequently the new County OP, identified an industrial employment land deficit of 45.8 hectares in the Town of Essex. This means that, assuming future industrial development happens at certain densities, the Town needs 45.8 more hectares of land designated for industrial development to meet industrial job need forecasts for 2051. These newly designated lands will be required to be added to one of the Town’s Settlement Areas.

In considering expansion to Settlement Areas to support new growth, a combination of Provincial policy and the County OP require the Town to consider the following:

- > If the expansion can be limited to Primary Settlement Areas which have full municipal water and wastewater services, and stormwater management facilities.
- > The impact on prime agricultural areas, and whether the expansion can reasonably avoid higher priority agricultural lands and specialty crop areas.
- > If the development of the expansion lands can be supported by the necessary infrastructure and public service facilities, in a phased, orderly, and efficient manner.
- > If the expanded lands can support transit, active transportation, and goods movement (freight).
- > If natural heritage features will be negatively impacted.

The project team worked through the criteria above iteratively to first shortlist the candidate lands shown in Figure 9 below, then to analyse those candidates lands for their suitability for expansion.

## 7.1 General Location

Identifying the general location of where to target a Settlement Boundary expansion was driven by several considerations related to the criteria listed above.

- > **Primary Settlement Areas:** per direction from the County OP, Harrow and Essex Centre, as PSAs, are the most appropriate Settlement Areas to consider for expansion.
- > **Amount of land needed:** The 45.8 hectares needed to support industrial employment growth to 2051 is relatively small, about the equivalent of a standard agricultural lot. For efficiency and simplicity, it makes sense to only expand one Settlement Area.
- > **Goods movement access:** With the newly-expanded Highway 3, Essex Centre has much better access for goods movement and other freight traffic serving industrial uses.
- > **Vacant land and landowner interest:** As noted above, Harrow has several large parcels designated for industrial employment but still undeveloped. While there is one large industrial parcel in Essex Centre with no active development interest, proportionally, more of the industrial employment lands are built-out.

Based on the considerations above, Essex Centre was identified as the most appropriate location for a Settlement Area boundary expansion.

A lack of demonstrated development interest from several landowners of existing industrial lands was considered by the project team and Town staff.

Ultimately, while WSP agrees that it is desirable to avoid designating lands for industrial employment uses which then remain undeveloped for years, this is the nature of long-term planning. The employment growth forecasts driving the need for employment lands are for the 2051 horizon – much can change in the interim that would incentivize landowners to develop or sell their lands for development.

The primary factors in deciding on lands for the Settlement Area expansion should be based in planning policy.

## 7.2 Shortlisting of Candidate Lands

Four candidate sites have been identified in Essex Centre, based on the following factors:

- > **Municipal boundary:** An expansion of the Essex Centre Settlement Area boundary within the existing Town boundary is limited to lands southwest of Highway 3.
- > **Highway access:** Lands were targeted with easy access for goods movement to the interchange of Maidstone Avenue with Highway 3.
- > **Contiguity:** Lands were selected that are adjacent to existing lands designated Industrial, to create a contiguous cluster of planned employment uses.

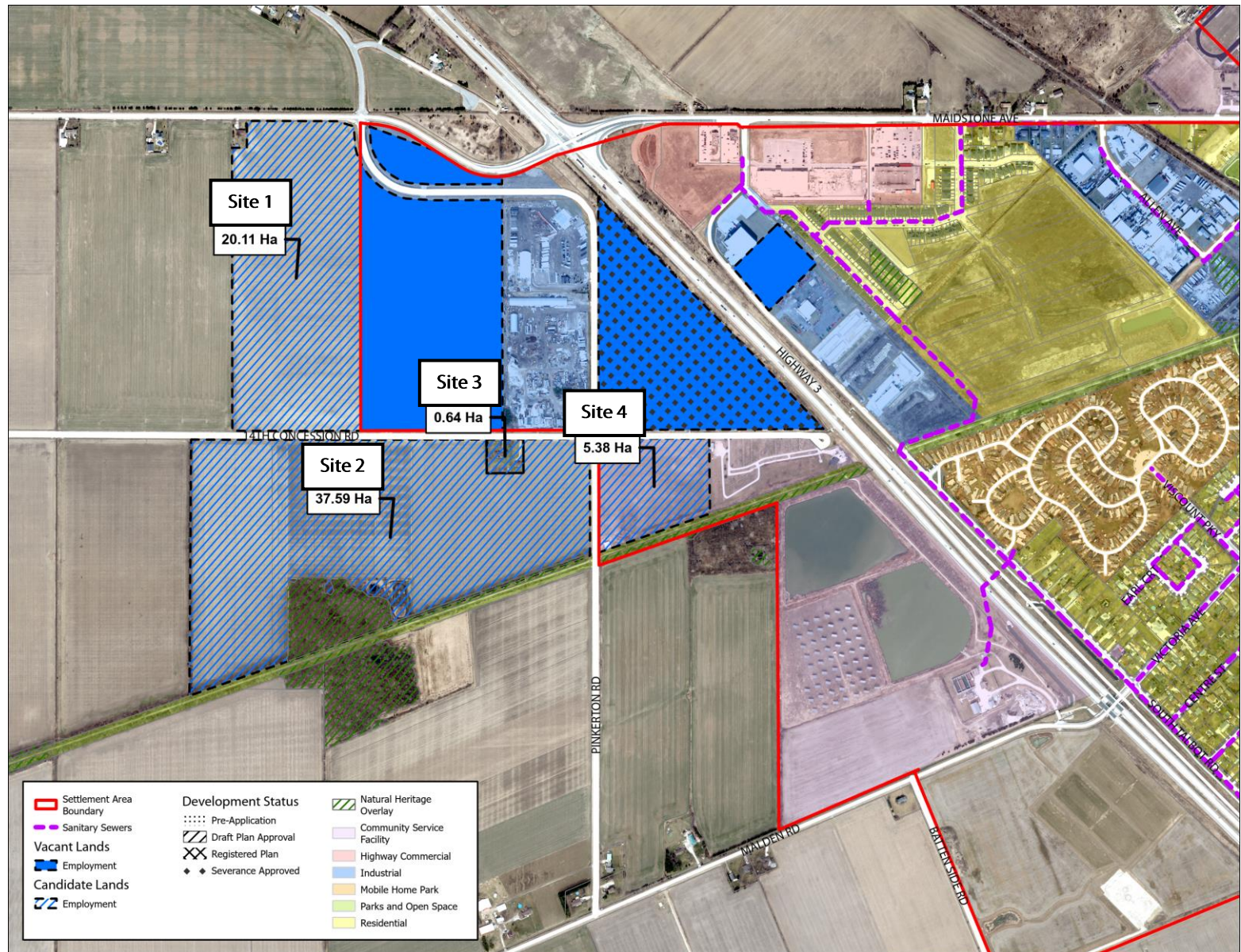
This analysis resulted in the shortlisted candidate lands shown in Figure 9 below. The combined area of these lands is approximately 64 ha, so through the detailed analysis of the candidate lands, the most appropriate sites will be chosen to meet the ~45 ha land need. This could be undertaken in two ways:

- > Designate 45 ha of the candidate lands Industrial, which would require the designation of only part of some lands, leaving the remainder designated Agricultural – this is sometimes referred to as “split designation”.

- > Current best practice is to avoid split designation and designate entire parcels at once wherever possible. If this approach is taken, it may not be possible to designate all 45 ha of needed land. In this case, subject to consultation with the County of Essex, the remainder of the 45 ha could be identified in a land bank policy for future designation, triggered by development of remaining vacant industrial employment lands.

The final step in determining lands to be included in the Settlement Boundary expansion is to assess the potential impacts of the candidate lands on the agricultural system, and natural heritage system, and to determine the level of existing or planned infrastructure support for the lands, including servicing and transportation.

Figure 9: Candidate lands for Settlement Boundary Expansion (Employment)



### 7.3 Candidate Land Assessment

The candidate lands shown above in Figure 9 have been assessed against Provincial and County criteria, with the findings summarized in Table 7 below.

With regards to the impacts of the candidate lands on the agricultural system, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness released the Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) Guidance Document (AIA Guidance Document) in 2026, which outlines best practices for satisfying provincial policy requirements. In the case of settlement area boundary expansions, the AIA Guidance Document states that “For settlement area boundary expansions where provincial approval is not required, the relevant municipality is responsible for determining if an AIA has been satisfactorily completed” (p.8). The County of Essex is the approval authority for Official Plans and Official Plan Amendments in the Town of Essex and is thus responsible for this determination.

According to the AIA Guidance Document, an AIA should consider the following potential impacts to the agricultural system: loss or deterioration of agricultural land; fragmentation of agricultural

operations; change in landform, elevations and slope; minimum distance separation formulae conflicts; traffic and safety issues; compatibility issues; nuisance impacts (e.g., noise, dust, lighting) associated with the non-agricultural uses; trespassing, vandalism, pets at large and litter/garbage disposal; change to ground or surface water quality or quantity; impact to the agri-food network; community impacts; and cumulative impact to the viability of the agricultural system in the area.

Where impacts are identified and are deemed unavoidable, the AIA Guidance Document suggests measures to minimize and mitigate impacts, such as using vegetative screens and buffers, setbacks and fencing, road/roundabout design, appropriate signage, and community education on normal farm practices.

In addition to the assessment provided in Table 7, a secondary evaluation of agricultural impacts has been provided in Appendix B, which outlines examples of measures that have been taken or may be taken to avoid, minimize, or mitigate against negative impacts to the agricultural system.

Table 7: Assessment of candidate lands for Settlement Area boundary expansion

Criteria	Assessment
<p>Avoid prime agricultural areas if possible, and if not, avoid higher priority agricultural lands and specialty crop areas.</p>	<p>The PPS requires province-wide adoption of the agricultural system approach, which seeks to maintain and enhance a geographically continuous agricultural land base. To this end, the PPS directs municipalities to avoid prime agricultural areas when allowing a settlement area boundary expansion and, where avoidance is not possible, to consider reasonable alternatives on lower priority agricultural lands in prime agricultural areas.</p> <p>In the case of the Town of Essex, with the exception of certain lands along waterways, the entirety of the Town of Essex land base consists of Class 1, 2, 3, or Organic soils under the Canada Land Inventory, which are classified as prime agricultural lands. Thus, it is impossible for expansion of any of the Town’s Settlement Areas to avoid prime agricultural areas.</p> <p>Within the Town, Class 1 soils (the highest priority) are only located in the south around Harrow and Colchester. While there are no formally designated specialty crop areas, the Town’s viticulture and tender fruit industries are also generally located in the south of the Town, alongside the relatively few existing greenhouse operations. These areas represent the least appropriate lands for expansion, from the perspective of agricultural protection.</p> <p>Class 3 soils, which are assigned the lowest priority, are not situated adjacent to any Settlement Areas and therefore do not represent suitable candidates for the expansion of settlement area boundaries. By contrast, all lands surrounding Essex Centre, including the candidate parcels, are classified as Class 2. When considered against the alternative lands listed above, this classification indicates that these areas are among the most suitable for expansion based on land availability and adjacency to a settlement area boundary.</p>

Criteria	Assessment
	<p>Further, with regards to the specific location of the expansion lands, the PPS directs that “when more than one policy is relevant, a decision-maker should consider all of the relevant policies to understand how they work together”. When taken into consideration together, the criteria used to assess the candidate lands for Settlement Area boundary expansion, as listed in this table, support the designation of the candidate lands for expansion. There are also no distinguishing factors between the four potential sites in terms of soil quality and agricultural potential.</p>
<p>Avoid or mitigate negative impacts on existing agricultural operations</p>	<p>Where impacts to the agricultural system cannot be avoided through a settlement area boundary expansion, the PPS requires confirmation that the expanded settlement area complies with the Minimum Distance Separation formulae (MDS) and directs that an Agricultural Impact Assessments (AIA) be completed for proposed non-agricultural uses in prime agricultural areas to determine methods of minimizing and mitigating the impacts to the extent feasible.</p> <p>The MDS formulae establishes minimum setback distances for new development from livestock facilities and anaerobic digesters. Within the 1,500-metre recommended study distance from the candidate lands, our team found no livestock facilities or anaerobic digesters. Consequently, the expansion lands comply with the MDS formulae.</p> <p>With regards to the requirement for an AIA, further mitigation of negative impacts on surrounding agricultural lands from new development in the candidate lands, including separation distances or physical measures like berming, plantings, or fencing, can be guided through policies in the new Official Plan, but should be dealt with on a site-by-site basis. Similarly, future development may be subject to the completion of a site-specific AIA, which will provide a more accurate vision of the impacts at the time of proposed development, thus providing for more effective minimization and mitigation of potential impacts.</p>

Criteria	Assessment
<p>Avoid negative impacts on natural heritage features.</p>	<p>There are no significant natural heritage features in the candidate lands which have been designated Natural Environment Designation in the County OP. Site 3 is marginally impacted by lands designated Natural Heritage Overlay. As discussed above in Section 4 of this Report regarding Natural Heritage overlay lands in McGregor, these natural heritage features are not disqualifying for development, but must be considered and the ecological function of the feature must not be negatively impacted.</p> <p>This assessment can be done through the future development of the lands, however, should there be an option to avoid adding the Natural Heritage Overlay lands to the Settlement Area, it is worth consideration.</p>

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Criteria	Assessment
Supporting infrastructure for the expansion lands (servicing)	<p>The candidate lands, and all other industrial lands southwest of Highway 3, are not currently connected to Town water or wastewater services.</p> <p>Through the existing development proposal for the Inspiration Industrial Park at 14978 14th Concession Road, the Town has been actively planning for the extension of municipal services for the subject site. This includes a watermain extension from South Talbot Road across Highway 3, which was included in the Town’s 2026 Capital Budget, and the construction of a lift station and force main connecting the site to the Essex Pollution Control Plant.</p> <p>These planned capital improvements support the feasibility of the cluster of existing Industrial lands southwest of Highway 3 reaching full build-out, and the designation of additional Industrial lands in the area would make even more efficient use of these investments.</p>
Supporting infrastructure for the expansion lands (transportation)	<p>As noted above, the candidate lands were shortlisted in part for their proximity to Highway 3. In addition to just distance, the four candidate land sites are well-located to be able to maintain a route for freight truck traffic to Highway 3, via Pinkerton Road and County Road 8, with no sensitive uses along the route, or other drivers of high non-freight traffic. It should be noted that the Country Meadows Cemetery at 14997 14<sup>th</sup> Concession Road is also located on this route, however, the cemetery is not expected to draw significant vehicular traffic.</p> <p>All of the candidate lands have frontage on Pinkerton Road and 14<sup>th</sup> Concession Road. Site 1, which forms part of the same parcel as adjacent lands already designated Industrial to the northeast, also has frontage on County Road 8. All access roads are paved, but Pinkerton Road and 14<sup>th</sup> Concession Road may pose limitations to freight truck traffic due to their narrow roadbed and shoulders. Improvements to both roads could be necessary through the development of the candidate lands, subject to assessment by the Town.</p>

Criteria	Assessment
<p>Phased and orderly development and general site assessment</p>	<p>Designation of any of the candidate lands would represent phased and orderly development, as all four sites are adjacent to existing, planned, or designated industrial development, in addition to the existing or planned infrastructure support noted above.</p> <p>As noted above, given that the candidate lands amount to approximately 64 ha against the 45 ha needed to meet 2051 industrial employment growth, it is necessary to cut down the lands further for final recommendation. A site-by-site assessment is below.</p> <p>Site 1 (20.11 ha), as noted above, forms part of the same parcel as lands already designated Industrial. While the existing landowner of these lands has not expressed interest in developing them for employment purposes, or selling them to an interested proponent, the combined parcel has high feasibility, with a generally regular lot shape and direct frontage on both the north and south lot boundaries.</p> <p>Site 2 (37.59 ha) is the largest parcel in the candidate lands, but has more limited access than Site 1, as well as the Natural Environment Overlay lands noted above. Site 2 also surrounds Site 3 on three sides, and may require buffering between future industrial uses and the existing residential use on Site 3, if Site 3 does not develop for industrial purposes.</p> <p>Site 3 (0.64 ha) supports an existing residential use in the form of a single-detached dwelling. If designated Industrial, the residential use could continue as legally existing, and could present compatibility issues with development of Site 3.</p> <p>Site 4 (5.38 ha) forms part of the same parcel as the Country Meadows Cemetery. It has high potential to be developed in tandem with the Inspiration Industrial Park and make use of that site’s servicing improvements with less additional capital investment required than the other candidate lands.</p>

## 7.4 Recommendations

Based on the assessment above, WSP recommends that Sites 1 and 4 be designated Industrial and added to the Essex Centre Primary Settlement Area.

While these lands amount to approximately 26 ha, much lower than the 45 ha required for 2051 forecasts, this action can be rationalized for two reasons:

- > Substantial undeveloped Industrial lands remain in Harrow and Essex Centre, so there is sufficient supply to meet the forecasted employment growth in the next 10 to 15 years.
- > At the time of the County's Land Needs Assessment, the job output of the Inspiration Industrial Park was unknown. This means that the job growth from that site's development will contribute to meeting upcoming employment growth forecasts along with the undeveloped lands.

We also recommend that policy direction be included in the new OP for the newly-designated lands to guide the development of the entire cluster of Industrial lands southwest of Highway 3 holistically, requiring coordination of servicing, road, signage, and lighting improvements, inner road networks (public and private), and future transit and active transportation connections, including to the nearby Cypher Systems Greenway.

Finally, WSP recommends that, subject to the approval of the County of Essex, this Settlement Area Review form the justification for the designation of Sites 2 and 3 to Industrial at a future time, when existing vacant lands have been developed. This would allow for the Town to complete the designation through a housekeeping amendment to the OP. This approach would be incorporated into the new OP as formal land bank policy, similarly to the approach for the reallocated Lakeshore West Residential SSA lands described above.

# 8 CONCLUSIONS AND KEY DIRECTIONS

This Technical Report represents the completion of the Settlement Area Review for the Town of Essex and will be implemented through the Final Draft Official Plan to be brought to the community and Council in Summer 2026. Further implementation is intended through other Town land use, capital, and asset management planning exercises, including an update to the Town’s Zoning By-law, the ongoing Master Servicing Plan, Community Improvement Plan(s), and future amendments to the Official Plan.

Given the importance of this work in informing broad planning and investment decisions for Council, we consider it important to summarize the various conclusions and recommendations in this Report.

## 8.1 Residential Land Needs and Supply

As summarized in Sections 3 and 4, the Town’s population is forecasted to grow by 8,000 people, between 2021 and 2051, requiring an additional 2,765 housing units. The County’s Land Needs Assessment exercise confirmed that the Town has a surplus vacant land to support this growth within its existing Settlement Areas, assuming 30% of the housing growth (830 units) occurs through intensification.

The review of existing intensification opportunities in Harrow and Essex Centre summarized in this Report confirmed that the 30% target can be supported within the 2051 horizon, assuming existing development trends continue.

## 8.2 Settlement Area Boundaries

One of the primary directions of the SAR was to make a detailed and informed assessment of each of the five Settlement Areas in the Town. WSP and Town staff examined vacant residential and employment land supply in all Settlement Areas, looked at servicing and natural heritage constraints, and considered implications for Town investment.

Ultimately, the most defensible path forward for the Final Draft OP is to maintain the Settlement Areas as currently delineated in the Town’s in-effect OP, with several key exceptions below. Based on current servicing capacity, development in all vacant lands outside of McGregor is feasible **at planned densities**, and there is not a planning justification for reallocating lands from Secondary Settlement Areas to Primary Settlement Areas.

**Recommendation:** Retain all Settlement Area boundaries as delineated in the new County OP.

## 8.3 Servicing and Stormwater

As noted earlier in this Report, the Town will have several investment decision points regarding upgrades to wastewater services in the Colchester/Lakeshore West Residential and McGregor SSAs. It has been confirmed that the full build-out of Lakeshore West and Colchester is possible with current wastewater service capacity, provided that development is low-density.

**Recommendation:** Establish area-specific policies in the Final Draft Official Plan to plan for development in Colchester and Lakeshore West that fits existing wastewater capacity, which could include density limits and a clear capacity allocation framework. Should the Town decide to invest in improvements to the Colchester South WWTP, these policies can be revisited through a future housekeeping amendment.

**Recommendation:** Require that proponents of new development in the Lakeshore West Residential SSA complete flood hazard assessments to ensure that stormwater management designs for the developments do not exacerbate overland flow flooding.

**Recommendation:** Development should continue to be frozen in McGregor until the Environmental Assessment for the McGregor WWTP, but the Final Draft OP can include policy direction enabling the future reallocation of undeveloped lands to a land bank (see below), should the Town decide not to invest further in wastewater upgrades.

## 8.4 Residential Intensification

Sections 5 and 6 of this Report examined existing residential intensification potential in Harrow and Essex Centre, and developed strategic actions for supporting and encouraging residential intensification throughout the Town.

**Recommendation:** Carry forward and revise policies in the First Draft OP to the Final Draft OP which support intensification by setting density and intensification targets, permitting mixed-use development broadly in the Harrow and Essex Centre downtowns and corridors, allowing for six-storey development in those areas, and applying urban design and built form guidance to ensure compatibility with and transition to low-density neighbourhoods and built heritage resources.

**Recommendation:** Align the preparation of the Final Draft OP with the Town's ongoing Master Servicing Plan, and use the development permissions and density targets in the new OP to inform the outcomes of the Master Servicing Plan following the OP's adoption.

**Recommendation:** Following the adoption of the new OP, the Town should undertake a study to prepare a new or updated Zoning By-law which implements the OP intensification policies at a more granular level, including considering broader typology permissions across the Town and considering pre-zoning lands designated in the OP for mixed-use development.

## 8.5 Industrial Employment Lands

The background work and detailed review of the Town's Settlement Areas fed into an analysis of opportunities to meet the County OP's directive to designate 45 additional hectares of land for industrial employment. This exercise, summarized in Section 7 of this Report, found that lands to the southwest of Highway 3 in Essex Centre are the most appropriate for Settlement Area boundary expansion.

**Recommendation:** Designate 26 hectares of new land Industrial as recommended in Section 7.4, and identify the remaining required industrial employment lands in a land bank policy for future designation when necessary.

**Recommendation:** Include new policies for the expanded industrial employment cluster southwest of Highway 3 to plan for the area holistically and align development and infrastructure improvements.

## 8.6 Land Banking

Throughout this Settlement Area Review, WSP and Town staff have wrestled with the central issue of the Town having five disparate Settlement Areas, all with dedicated infrastructure requiring both capital investment and ongoing maintenance. There is sufficient vacant land to support residential growth to 2051, and our team has found that continuing to permit the development of all existing Settlement Areas with viable servicing capacity, rather than removing development permissions from undeveloped lands, is the most defensible outcome.

That said, the project team has identified two instances through this work where lands can be "banked" – approximately 16 hectares of residential lands in Lakeshore West which are constrained from development by the Colchester South WWTP, and approximately 20 hectares required to be added to the Town's Settlement Areas for employment uses, but which are not recommended for designation at this time.

As part of the preparation of the Town's new Official Plan, the 16 hectares of land located adjacent to the Colchester South Wastewater Treatment Plant will be redesignated from a Residential to a non-residential designation. This redesignation will enable the Town, at a future time, to reallocate the equivalent 16 hectares of residential land to an alternative Settlement Area on unconstrained lands.

There is an opportunity to leverage work that has been undertaken through this Settlement Area Review and the broader Official Plan Review project to set up a policy framework in the new OP that allows the Town to designate these lands through a Settlement Area boundary expansion at a future point in time. This policy framework would be intended to allow for a streamlined review process akin to a housekeeping amendment, although a certain level of assessment of agricultural and natural heritage impacts, servicing, and community services would still be required for any newly rural lands redesignated for urban uses.

This land bank policy would also provide an alternative for the Town should the further development of McGregor via wastewater

**Recommendation:** Include a new land bank policy in the Final Draft OP which identifies 16 hectares of residential lands and 20 hectares of employment lands to be added to the Town’s Settlement Area boundaries. In consultation with the County, this policy should clearly set out the requirements and process for a), adding further allocation to the land bank should other residential or employment lands be deemed unviable, and b), using the land bank to expand a Settlement Area in the future.

infrastructure upgrades be decided against. The area of vacant lands in McGregor could be added to the land bank, allowing for future designation in Harrow or Essex Centre.

The land bank approach, while not a commonly used policy tool, makes sense for the Town’s unique and challenging Settlement Area fabric. Building an allocation of unviable residential lands, while viable vacant lands and intensification sites develop to support interim growth, could support a defensible and well-thought-out expansion of “rounding out” Essex Centre in the future, including on lands not currently inside the municipal boundary, allowing for more connections and walkability in that Settlement Area.

## 8.7 Next Steps

This Report is being brought to Essex Town Council along with recommended policy changes to the Colchester Secondary Plan. These two documents, along with required changes for consistency with the new Provincial Planning Statement, will form the basis of revisions to the Final Draft OP.

The Final Draft OP will be brought to the community and Council for consultation and adoption in late Spring/early Summer 2026.

# APPENDIX A: PROVINCIAL POLICY CONFORMITY REVIEW

Since the commencement of the new Official Plan (“OP”) project for the Town of Essex, and specifically since the completion of the Policy Directions Report for the new OP, there have been several key changes to the Province of Ontario’s (“the Province”) planning framework, which applies to the County of Essex and Town of Essex through the *Planning Act* and the new Provincial Planning Statement, 2024. These changes necessitate a review to identify any impacts on, and updates required to, the draft new OP for the Town.

Please note that the tables below only summarize those new/amended provisions in the *Planning Act* or policies in the PPS, 2024 which are directly relevant to the Town’s new Official Plan and require addressing. Other changes (e.g., to provisions in the *Planning Act* related to zoning that do not require amendment to an Official Plan).

## 8.8 Planning Act

The following legislation has been enacted by the Ontario Legislature since the completion of the Policy Directions report for the Town’s new OP:

- > *Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024* (Bill 185)
- > *Homeowner Protection Act, 2024*, (Bill 200)
- > *Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, 2025* (Bill 17)
- > *Working for Workers Seven Act, 2025* (Bill 30)
- > *Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act, 2025* (Bill 60)

Section No.	Summary of Provision	Impact on the new Official Plan
<i>Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024 (Bill 185)</i>		
Various	Removal of planning responsibilities from certain upper-tier municipalities and downloading of those upper-tiers' Official Plans to the lower-tier municipalities	Does not apply to Essex County or the Town of Essex
ss. 16 (22) to (24)	Prohibition of parking minimums in Protected Major Transit Station Areas (PMTSAs)	Does not apply. The Town has no PMTSAs.
ss. 17(24), 17 (36) and 34 (19)	Appeal rights changed to be limited to public body, persons specified through a regulation under the <i>Planning Act</i> , and the registered owners of the lands impacted by the Official Plan (or amendment) and Zoning by-law Amendment.	No required change to draft new Official Plan. All registered owners of land in the Town will have the right to appeal the new OP once approved by the County.
ss. 22 (OPs), 34 (ZBLs), 41 (Site Plan), and 51 (Plan of Subdivision)	Removal of ability of municipalities to require pre-consultation prior to submission of a development application.	Section x of the draft new Official Plan will require update to make pre-application consultation optional, rather than mandatory.
s. 22(7.1), s. 22(7.2) (Relates to s. x of the PPS, 2024, below)	Allowance of appeals of OPAs to alter settlement area boundaries unless the proposed added lands are in the Greenbelt area. This type of appeal was previously restricted.	The draft new OP will require a robust policy framework and set of criteria for boundary expansion requests.
ss. 34 (10.12) to (10.14), s. 41	Repeal of fee fund provisions originally enacted through Bill 109,	No impact to draft new OP.
s. 34.1	Repeal of Community Infrastructure Housing Accelerator tool.	No impact to draft new OP.

Section No.	Summary of Provision	Impact on the new Official Plan
s. 35.1 (2) Relates to O. Reg. 299/19	Expansion of Minister’s powers to regulate Additional Residential Units.	Does not impact new OP, as O. Reg. 299/19 is implemented through zoning.
s. 41(7.1), s. 51(32)	“Use it or lose it” provisions allowing for municipalities to place time limits on site plan and plan of subdivision approvals, after which the approvals lapse. This may be subject to additional future regulations by the Minister.	There is no requirement for Official Plan policy to enable these provisions, but for consistency and clarity of process, the provisions should be referred to in Chapter x of the draft new OP.
<b>Homeowner Protection Act, 2024 (Bill 200)</b>		
s. 47	Removal of limitations of Ministerial powers around Provincially designated Transit-Oriented Communities	Does not apply, as the Town has no Transit-Oriented Communities.
<b>Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, 2025 (Bill 17)</b>		
s.16(3.2.1)	Prohibition on OPs restricting development of elementary or secondary schools on any fully serviced lands designated for residential uses.	Schools are already permitted widely in community areas in the draft new OP.
s.17(21.1)	New provision requiring municipalities to get written approval from the Minister before adding any new requirements for a complete OPA, ZBA, site plan, plan of subdivision, or consent application.	Any new requirements for studies, reports, or other submissions which are not currently in the Town’s in-effect OP will require approval from the Minister. These changes will be flagged as soon as possible if present.
ss. 34(1.4) to (1.7)	New provisions enabling the Province to enact regulations providing relief from minimum setback requirements.	Does not impact new draft OP, as this is a zoning matter.

Section No.	Summary of Provision	Impact on the new Official Plan
<b><i>Working for Workers Seven Act, 2025 (Bill 30)</i></b>		
s. 62.0.4	New provision exempting any development related to training or skills development funded by the Provincial Ministry of Labour from the provisions of the <i>Planning Act</i> .	No impact to draft new OP.
<b><i>Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act, 2025 (Bill 60)</i></b>		
s. 28	Upper-tier municipalities are now permitted to enact Community Improvement Plans and Project Areas and provide funding.	Policies related to CIPs in the Town's new OP can be adjusted to encourage collaboration with the County on CIP development and CIPA identification.

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## 8.9 Provincial Planning Statement, 2024

The table below summarizes policies which represent a change from the PPS, 2020. Those PPS, 2024 policies which carry forward PPS, 2020 direction have not been included as they are already implemented through the draft new OP for the Town.

Some PPS, 2024 policies are directive, using “shall” or “shall not”, which represent requirements. Other policies are supportive or enabling, using “should”, “encourage”, or “promote”, and allow for more flexibility in implementation.

Section No.	Directive or Supportive	Summary of Policy	Impact on the new Official Plan
ss.2.1.1, 2.1.2	Directive	Population and employment forecasts are to be based on Ministry of Finance Ontario Population Projections, but municipalities can continue to use previous Provincial forecasts.	No impact. Town can continue to use growth forecasts provided by County of Essex.
s. 2.1.1.5	Directive	Land supply in lower-tiers must be based on the forecasts of their respective upper-tier.	
s. 2.1.3	Directive	Growth horizons of new/updated Official Plans are required to be within 20 and 30 years. Planning for infrastructure, public service facilities, Strategic Growth Areas, and employment areas can extend beyond 30 years.	The Town cannot add additional land to its settlement areas to accommodate residential growth past the 30-year horizon. This does not preclude reallocation of existing land within the Town’s settlement area boundaries.

Section No.	Directive or Supportive	Summary of Policy	Impact on the new Official Plan
s. 2.1.1.6	Supportive	<p>Municipalities are encouraged to plan for complete communities, defined as:</p> <p>“Complete communities: means places such as mixed-use neighbourhoods or other areas within cities, towns, and settlement areas that offer and support opportunities for equitable access to many necessities for daily living for people of all ages and abilities, including an appropriate mix of jobs, a full range of housing, transportation options, public service facilities, local stores and services. Complete communities are inclusive and may take different shapes and forms appropriate to their contexts to meet the diverse needs of their populations.”</p>	<p>The current draft new OP contains language supporting complete communities. Land use permissions, particularly in Harrow and Essex Centre, will be reviewed for the Final Draft OP to ensure complete communities are supported.</p>
S. 2.2.1.b).2	Directive	<p>Additional language has been added to housing policies carried forward from the PPS, 2020, which requires municipalities to permit and facilitate all types of residential intensification, “including the development and redevelopment of underutilized commercial and institutional sites (e.g., shopping malls and plazas)”</p>	<p>Language can be updated in the draft OP to more explicitly reflect this language, but support is present. Notably, two of the ongoing intensification projects in the Town are of this type (developments on the former Harrow High School and Home Hardware sites).</p> <p>One additional area of consideration is surface parking lots: the Town may consider where municipal lots in Essex or Harrow are surplus and could be sold conditionally for housing development (as has already occurred in Harrow with the lot at 35 Queen Street).</p>

Section No.	Directive or Supportive	Summary of Policy	Impact on the new Official Plan
s. 2.3.1.1	Supportive	Language has been added where growth should be focused in settlement areas – in Strategic Growth Areas, inclusive of Major Transit Station Areas.	<p>A Strategic Growth Area (“SGA”) is a useful tool for large urban areas where a main street, downtown, or major transit station should be planned for greater density. They allow for the comprehensive planning of densities and heights that may necessitate improvements to infrastructure and public service facilities (e.g., planning for new parks and schools or upgrading sanitary services).</p> <p>In WSP’s opinion, the Town does not need to establish any Strategic Growth Areas as policies guiding growth to Primary Settlement Areas, as well as intensification policies, accomplish the same level of planning. An SGA would be redundant.</p> <p>Major Transit Station Areas are intended to be delineated around higher-order transit (subway, commuter rail, etc.), so do not apply to the Town.</p>
s. 2.3.1.5	Supportive	PPS 2020 encouraged a compact built form and density that efficiently used land for Designated Growth Areas (“DGAs”, i.e., greenfield). The PPS, 2024 encourages planning authorities to establish density targets for DGAs.	No action needed. The Town is already required by the County OP to assign minimum density targets for greenfield growth in the parent OP.

Section No.	Directive or Supportive	Summary of Policy	Impact on the new Official Plan
s. 2.3.2	Directive	<p>Municipal Comprehensive Reviews have been removed from the PPS. The establishment of new settlement areas or expansions to existing settlement areas can happen at any time.</p> <p>Although not explicitly stated in THE PPS, 2024, boundary expansions and new settlement areas can also be privately initiated provided they satisfy the tests outlined in policies 2.3.2.1 and 2.3.2.2.</p>	<p>Language will need to be revised and added to direct the process of boundary expansion requests and capture the relevant language in the County OP around settlement area expansions.</p> <p>More specifically, any landowner bringing forward a boundary expansion request through an OPA will have to at minimum, meet the tests in 2.3.2.1 and 2.3.2.2.</p>
Ss 2.8.1.2 and 2.8.1.4	Supportive	<p>PPS 2020 encouraged compact mixed-use development with compatible employment uses.</p> <p>THE PPS, 2024 provides greater detail and encourages industrial, manufacturing, small-scale warehousing, major office, and major institutional development adjacent to sensitive land uses and in major transit station areas and other Strategic Growth Areas.</p>	<p>Policies need to be revised to encourage and permit a greater range of employment-related uses throughout settlement areas.</p>

Section No.	Directive or Supportive	Summary of Policy	Impact on the new Official Plan
Definitions – Employment Area	N/A	<p>A new definition for “employment area”, which aligns with the <i>Planning Act</i>, is included which limits employment uses to manufacturing, warehousing, goods movement, associated retail and office, and ancillary facilities.</p> <p>The definition explicitly excludes institutional and commercial uses, including retail and office uses, that are not ancillary to the employment use.</p>	<p>This change is one of the most significant changes found in the PPS, 2024, as it limits the uses that can be newly developed in designated Employment Areas.</p> <p>The Town does not have any designated Employment Areas in its in-effect OP, however, lands in the Industrial designation are currently supporting uses that meet the new PPS, 2024 definition. It is recommended that these lands be codified as designated Employment Areas, which will require directing any commercial, office, or institutional uses elsewhere in the Town.</p>
s. 2.8.1.3	Directive	<p>In addition to land use compatibility policies, this policy is added to protect lands within 300 metres of employment areas.</p>	<p>The Town does not have any defined employment areas, however, land use compatibility policies in the draft should be confirmed against policies in THE PPS, 2024.</p>

Section No.	Directive or Supportive	Summary of Policy	Impact on the new Official Plan
s. 2.8.2.5	Directive	<p>Municipal Comprehensive Reviews have been removed from the PPS and lands may be removed from employment areas at any time. Language has also been revised from “conversions” to “removals”.</p> <p>Additionally, criteria for employment removals no longer considers the applicability of “provincially significant” or “regionally significant” employment lands and these terms are no longer found in the PPS.</p> <p>Sub policy (d) of policy 2.8.2.5 adds criteria that require planning authorities, and proponents, to demonstrate that the municipality has enough employment lands to accommodate employment growth for the horizon of the OP.</p>	<p>Language will need to be revised and added to direct the process of Employment Area removal requests and capture the relevant language in the County OP around settlement area expansions.</p> <p>More specifically, any landowner bringing forward a request to remove Employment Area lands through an OPA will have to, at minimum, meet the tests in 2.8.2.5.</p>
s. 3.6.2	Supportive	<p>This policy now clarifies that municipal sewage and water services include centralized and decentralized systems.</p> <p>It should be noted that the PPS, 2024 does not include a definition of “decentralized systems”, so this policy is slightly ambiguous.</p>	OP policy to be updated accordingly.

Section No.	Directive or Supportive	Summary of Policy	Impact on the new Official Plan
ss.4.3.2.4 - 4.3.2.6	Directive	<p>These policies permit a residential principal dwelling on a lot associated with an agricultural operation in prime agricultural areas and two additional residential units on the same lot subject to criteria:</p> <p>At least one unit must be attached to or integrated into the primary dwelling;</p> <p>The additional units must comply with MDS criteria and not hinder nearby agricultural operations;</p> <p>Be minimal in scale and within the cluster of farm buildings or close to the primary dwelling; and</p> <p>Have appropriate services and address any public health or safety concerns.</p> <p>It should be noted that policy 4.3.2.6 considers these additional units from farm worker housing, which is considered an agricultural use.</p>	OP policy to be updated accordingly.
ss. 4.6.1 and 4.6.3	Directive	<p>These policies provide protections for “protected heritage property” and “cultural heritage landscapes”. “Protected heritage property” is a defined term that does not include properties listed under the Ontario Heritage Act, whereas PPS 2020 did provide for the protection of listed properties.</p>	OP protections for listed properties may remain, however, language may be revised to encourage, and not compel, to be consistent with the PPS, 2024.

# APPENDIX B: SCOPED AGRICULTURAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The following table builds on Table 2 in the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA) Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) Guidance Document, which provides examples of measures to address potential impacts to the agricultural system when considering new development. The below has been modified to demonstrate how negative impacts to the agricultural system were avoided or minimized through the Settlement Area Review for the Town of Essex. Mitigation measures listed below may be implemented through future development application review, policy additions, or economic development efforts.

Potential impacts to the agricultural system	Avoid	Minimize	Mitigate
<b>1. Loss or deterioration of agricultural land</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Limited the Settlement Area boundary expansion to the Town’s identified industrial employment land deficit only (i.e., a scoped employment expansion rather than permitting broader boundary adjustments), limiting the overall extent of conversion from the agricultural land base.</li> <li>– Targeted expansion to Essex Centre (a Primary Settlement Area) where growth is intended to be concentrated and where the expansion can be made contiguous to an existing industrial cluster, which avoids the need to introduce new, isolated employment areas in the rural/agricultural landscape, which helps to prevent further compatibility challenges.</li> <li>– Avoided the Town’s highest priority agricultural areas in the south (where Class 1 soils and tender fruit/viticulture/greenhouse activity are more prevalent) by selecting lands around Essex Centre, which are Class 2 soils and not within Specialty Crop Areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Selected Sites 1 and 4 for recommendation and deferred other candidate lands (Sites 2 and 3) through a land banking approach, minimizing the amount of land being converted now while still planning for the 2051 horizon.</li> <li>– Prioritized sites that can leverage planned municipal servicing extensions already being advanced for nearby industrial development, reducing the need for additional infrastructure corridors and associated disturbance across agricultural lands.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Official Plan policies can provide guidance on edge planning measures to be implemented through Site Plan Control.</li> </ul>

Potential impacts to the agricultural system	Avoid	Minimize	Mitigate
2. Fragmentation of agricultural operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Prioritized lands adjacent to existing designated industrial lands to create a contiguous employment area, avoiding “leap-frogging” patterns that would fragment the surrounding agricultural land base.</li> <li>– Limited the expansion to one Primary Settlement Area (Essex Centre) rather than multiple settlement areas, avoiding additional breaks in the continuity of agricultural operations across the Town.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Minimized the length of new urban–rural interfaces by selecting lands that are contiguous with an existing industrial area.</li> <li>– Avoided splitting any existing farm operations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– See Potential Impact #5, traffic and safety, for mitigation of road impacts associated with fragmentation</li> </ul>
3. Change in landform, elevations, and slope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Candidate lands were selected in an area intended for industrial growth near Highway 3, where development can proceed without relying on significant re-grading to overcome known natural hazard constraints identified elsewhere in the SAR (e.g., shoreline flood/erosion/valleyland constraints in southern settlement areas)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Future development is intended to occur through the normal development approvals process with detailed grading and stormwater design, allowing site works to be designed to minimize unnecessary alteration while still achieving functional employment lands.</li> <li>–</li> </ul>	
4. Minimum distance separation formulae (MDS) conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Screened the candidate lands for MDS constraints and found no livestock facilities or anaerobic digesters within the 1,500 m study area, supporting a location choice that avoids MDS conflicts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Where future, site-specific circumstances arise, separation and buffering can be addressed at the site plan/subdivision stage to minimize land use conflicts while maintaining the intent of MDS and agricultural compatibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Vegetated buffers can be required, as needed, through the Site Plan Control process.</li> <li>– The Town could support investment in manure management systems that reduce odour potential.</li> </ul>

Potential impacts to the agricultural system	Avoid	Minimize	Mitigate
<b>5. Traffic and safety issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Candidate lands in Essex Centre were selected due to superior goods movement access associated with the Highway 3 corridor and interchange connectivity, avoiding routing heavy truck traffic through more sensitive rural/agricultural road networks and settlement main streets.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Shortlisted sites with direct frontage on existing paved roads (Pinkerton Road/14th Concession) and a feasible freight connection to Highway 3 via Pinkerton/County Rd 8, minimizing the need for new road corridors through agricultural land.</li> <li>– Acknowledged potential road limitations (narrow roadbed/shoulders) and flagged that any upgrades would be assessed through the development process, supporting designs that minimize conflicts with farm equipment movements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Through area-specific planning:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ If access to farm buildings, fields or transportation routes is affected, provide acceptable alternative routes and access points (e.g., tunnel or over-pass).</li> <li>○ Mitigate conflicts between slow-moving farm vehicles and traffic.</li> <li>○ Ensure road signs are installed to increase road user awareness.</li> <li>○ Incorporate farm vehicle needs in road design .</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>6. Compatibility issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Focused expansion on lands adjacent to an existing/planned industrial area, consequently avoiding the introduction of industrial permissions in locations surrounded by predominantly agricultural uses, or by other sensitive uses, without an existing employment context.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identified locations where compatibility can be planned comprehensively through coordinated servicing, lighting, signage, and internal roads, allowing impacts at the urban–rural interface to be minimized through integrated design rather than piecemeal development.</li> <li>– Note that site-specific measures (e.g., buffering/berming/plantings/fencing) to address incompatibility can be addressed through future development review to minimize impacts on adjacent farm operations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Through the Official Plan, the Town can direct for:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Best practices for road salt management</li> <li>○ Edge planning</li> <li>○ Warning clauses in development agreements</li> <li>○ Public education on normal farm practices</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Potential impacts to the agricultural system	Avoid	Minimize	Mitigate
<b>7. Nuisance impacts (e.g., noise, dust, lighting)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Selected an expansion area oriented to Highway 3 and an existing industrial context, avoiding the placement of new employment lands in locations where nuisance effects would be more likely to conflict with established agricultural operations and rural residential clusters.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recommended policy direction to plan the expanded industrial cluster holistically (including lighting/signage/road network coordination), supporting design approaches that reduce spillover effects (glare, dust, noise) on adjacent agricultural uses.</li> <li>- The exact nature of potential nuisances will only be known at the point of development; consequently, appropriate measures to minimize impacts on adjacent farm operations will need to be addressed at that time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regulate hours of operation and practices occurring onsite to reduce impacts</li> <li>- Edge planning</li> <li>- Minimize noise, dust and odour conflicts through design and operations</li> </ul>
<b>8. Trespassing, vandalism, pets at large and litter/garbage disposal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- • Avoided establishing multiple separate expansion areas; concentrating the expansion in one location reduces the amount of new edge conditions where trespass/litter issues can arise along multiple rural interfaces.</li> <li>- The nature of the expansion area, as an industrial area, is unlikely to generate significant concerns in this area, as compared to a residential area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- By planning for a coordinated employment cluster, future approvals can integrate edge treatments (e.g., perimeter fencing/controlled access) in a consistent manner to minimize trespass and related biosecurity risks for nearby farms.</li> <li>- Planned for a location that avoids the most valuable prime agricultural areas in the Town, thus minimizing the impact on higher priority lands.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Official Plan policies can direct for:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Installation of signage</li> <li>○ Fencing</li> <li>○ Garbage bins</li> <li>○ Fines</li> <li>○ Commitment to repair damage</li> <li>○ Education on trespass issues including biosecurity risks</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Potential impacts to the agricultural system	Avoid	Minimize	Mitigate
<b>9. Change to ground or surface water quality or quantity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Candidate sites were assessed to ensure no significant constraints from designated natural heritage features, supporting avoidance of areas where water-related ecological functions are more likely to be sensitive to development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– •Future development will be supported by planned municipal infrastructure expansion and will require detailed stormwater/servicing design through the approvals process, enabling site-specific measures that minimize impacts on drainage patterns and water quality relied on by adjacent agricultural operations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Protect water supplies (stormwater management, wetlands, etc.)</li> <li>– Provide alternative water supply</li> <li>– Improve maintenance of drains</li> <li>– Monitoring programs</li> </ul>
<b>10. Impact to the agri-food network (i.e., agricultural infrastructure, services and assets)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The general location and site shortlisting emphasized proximity to Highway 3 and avoidance of sensitive routes, supporting goods movement for industry while avoiding undue pressure on rural roads that also support farm transportation and agri-food logistics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– By leveraging planned servicing investments and existing road frontages, the expansion minimizes the need for new linear infrastructure that could interfere with agricultural drainage works, field access patterns, or farm vehicle movements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identify alternative services if key assets are impacted</li> <li>– Support farmers to use new locations</li> <li>– Create directories or strategies for agri-food network</li> </ul>

Potential impacts to the agricultural system	Avoid	Minimize	Mitigate
<b>11. Community impacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The SAR confirmed there is no residential land need requiring settlement area expansion (to 2051) and therefore avoided additional residential boundary expansions that could have increased pressure on the agricultural land base.</li> <li>– Targeted employment expansion specifically to address the identified industrial employment deficit while maintaining the broader settlement area structure, thus avoiding unnecessary land conversion beyond what is justified for long-term jobs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Minimize uses that would have negative community impacts</li> <li>– Recommended a phased approach (initial designation of Sites 1 and 4 with remaining need addressed via land bank policy), minimizing near-term conversion while still supporting long-term community economic objectives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Local job recruitment</li> <li>– Retraining</li> <li>– Support agricultural economic development initiatives</li> </ul>

Potential impacts to the agricultural system	Avoid	Minimize	Mitigate
<p><b>12. Cumulative impact to the viability of the agricultural system in the area</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Applied an agricultural system lens, acknowledging that most of the Town is prime agricultural land, and therefore focused on choosing the most suitable/least sensitive available context (i.e., away from Class 1/tender fruit and viticulture industries) rather than expanding into the highest priority agricultural areas.</li> <li>- Avoided adding lands with comparatively greater natural heritage constraints, where possible (noting Site 3's Natural Heritage Overlay influence) and prioritized sites with fewer such constraints for recommendation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Minimized the extent of expansion recommended at this time (Sites 1 and 4 totaling approximately 26 hectares) and deferred additional candidate sites for future consideration, reducing cumulative impacts in the near term while maintaining the ability to respond to confirmed need later.</li> <li>- Flagged that detailed edge measures (buffering/berming/plantings/fencing) are best determined at the time of development, allowing minimization/mitigation to respond to actual farm operations and conditions present at that time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mitigate impacts addressed above</li> <li>- Support agricultural economic development initiatives</li> </ul>