

Town of Essex Draft New Official Plan

Welcome to today's Public Open House!

Please sign-in and join us.

About the Official Plan Project

The Town of Essex is preparing a new Official Plan to guide growth and land use planning for the next 25 years. The Official Plan will serve as the main tool to guide change, investment, and action across the city.

The Official Plan Review Process

Phase 1

Background, Visioning, and Policy Directions

1st public draft Official Plan and draft Colchester Secondary Plan

Consultation and engagement

Phase 2

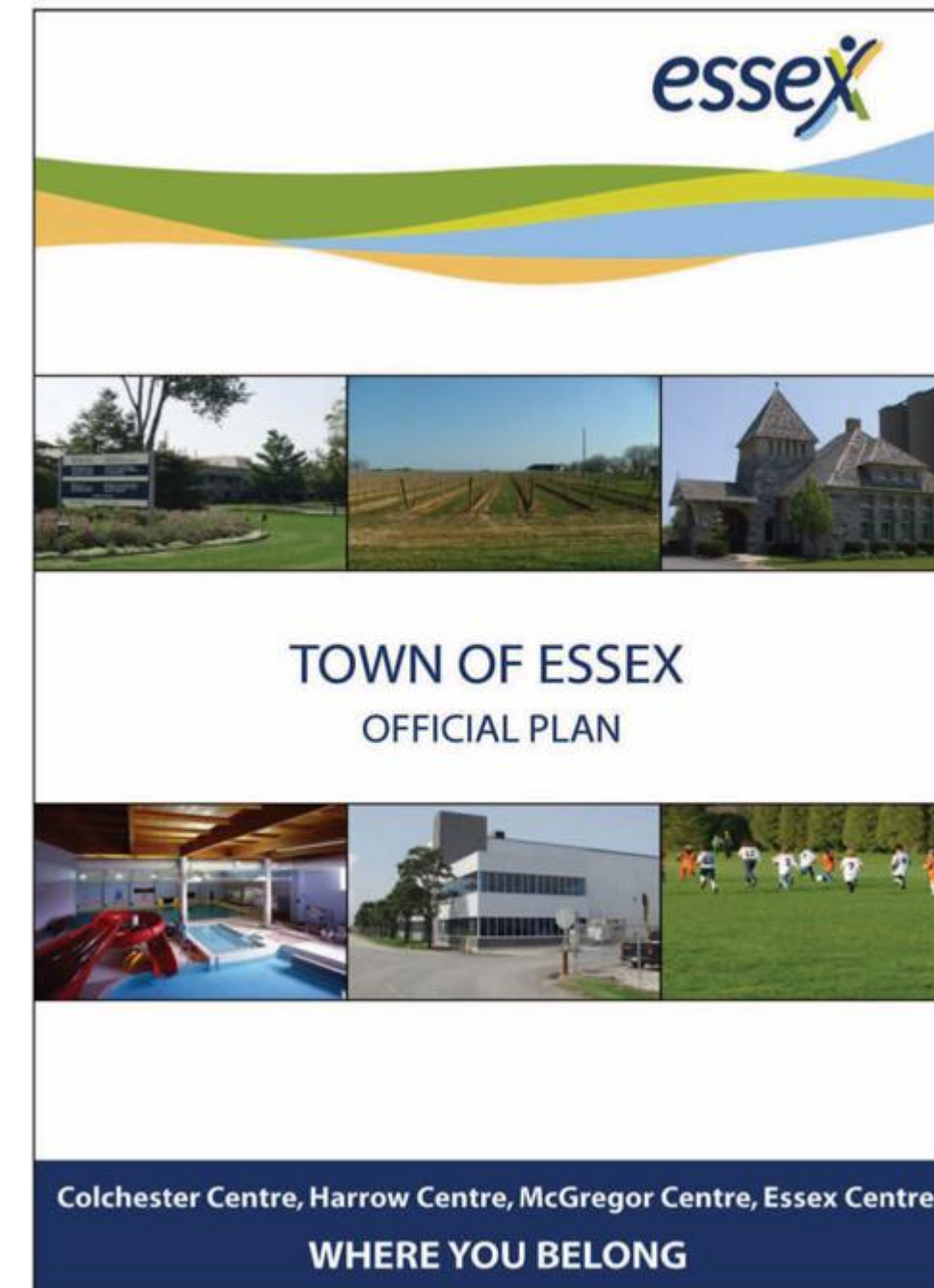
Settlement Area Review

Colchester Secondary Plan rethink

Additional consultation and engagement

Revised draft new Official Plan

WE ARE
HERE



The Town of Essex Official Plan is over 15 years old and has positively shaped growth and development in the Town since 2009.

Together with input from the community, First Nations, Council, and agencies, the new Official Plan will implement and work alongside other Town plans, studies, and guidelines to direct growth and development.



Alignment with Growth Management

The Official Plan applies to lands within the municipal boundary of the Town of Essex, including all Settlement Areas and the Agricultural System.

A Settlement Area Review, which considered limited expansions to the existing Settlement Areas, was conducted as part of the Official Plan Review. This resulted in the designation of specific lands in the Town for future growth.

Today, we're updating you on the

2026 Draft Official Plan

We have highlighted key changes made in response to your ideas and questions and are requesting your feedback before the Official Plan's adoption.

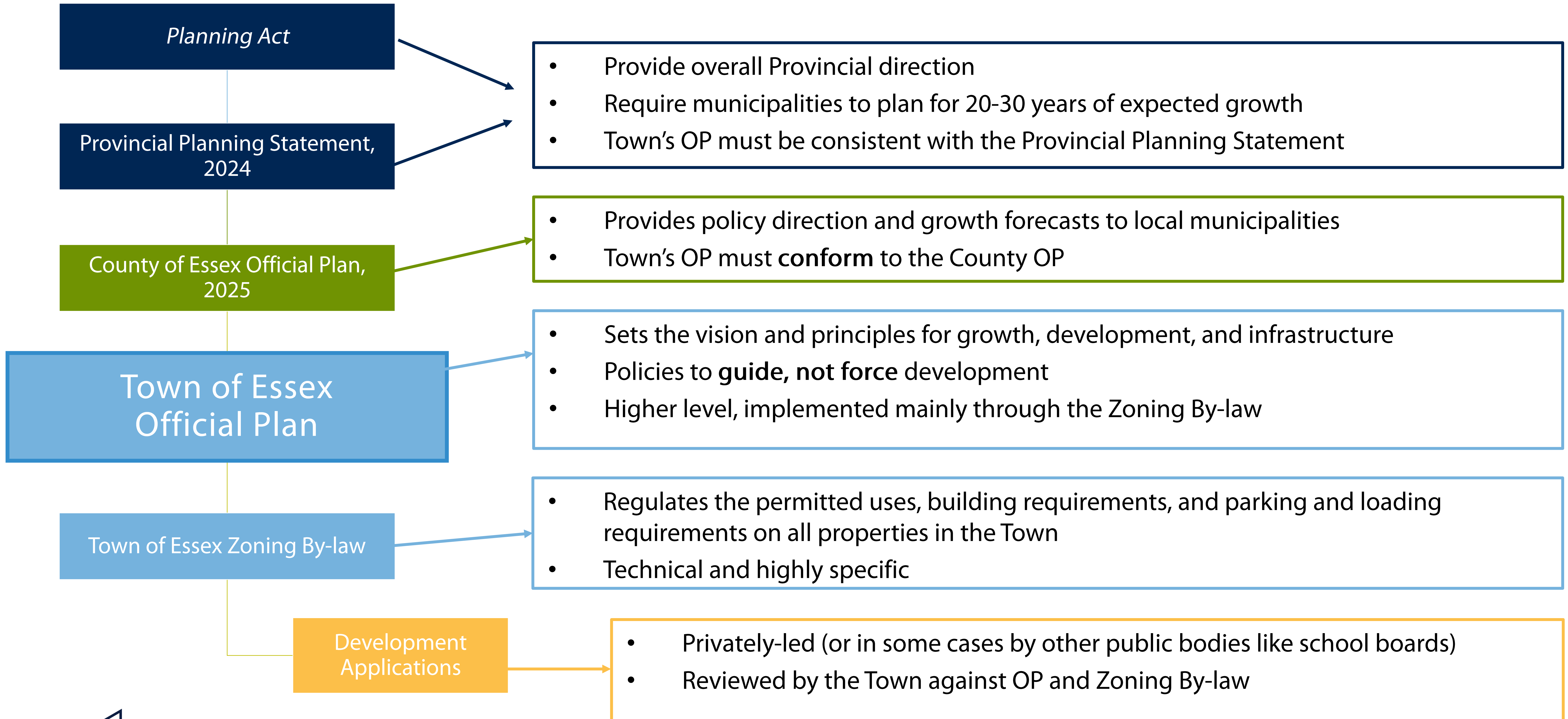
Please feel free to:

- Fill out a comment sheet
- Leave a sticky note on one of the display boards
- Come to Town or WSP staff with questions or comments

About the Official Plan Project

Why is an Official Plan Review Required?

Changes to provincial legislation, policies, and regulations, along with updates to the County of Essex Official Plan, require the Town to periodically review and update its Official Plan to ensure it remains consistent with the *Planning Act* and the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024, and conforms to County policy direction.



About the Official Plan Project

What is the Town's Official Plan?

- A long-range planning document containing goals, objectives and policies to guide land use, development and growth
- The Provincial *Planning Act* requires Official Plans to be updated every five years
- The new OP has updated existing policies and added new policies that reflect provincial and local directions

General Changes from Existing Official Plan

- Addition of a Land Acknowledgement at front of the Official Plan
- Reorganization of Official Plan by Town-wide policies and land use designations
- New explanatory text and glossary to support a more reader friendly Official Plan
- Updated Vision and Guiding Principles

Structure of the new Official Plan

Chapter 1: A Vision for the Town

Chapter 2: Climate & Air

Chapter 3: Growth & Structure

Chapter 4: Agriculture System

Chapter 5: Complete Communities

Chapter 6: Natural Heritage & Water Systems

Chapter 7: Development & Land Use

Chapter 8: Implementation

Chapter 9: Colchester Secondary Plan

Chapter 10: Area and Site-Specific Policies

Vision & Foundations

Sustainability &
Natural Resource
Systems

Growth & Land Use
Framework

Implementation
Tools

Detailed Planning

Let's Start with the Visioning Framework

A **vision statement** and **guiding principles** express the intent of future change over the next 25 years and provide a foundation for all policies in the Official Plan.

Vision Statement

“The Town of Essex in 2051 will be a vibrant community with a diversity of people, industries, and activities. The Town’s economy will be anchored by the dual sectors of agriculture and industrial employment, with a thriving tourism industry centred around wineries and the shores of Lake Erie. The Town’s Settlement Areas will be green, compact communities that are walkable and have easy access to housing, jobs, amenities, and recreation.”

Building on our Agricultural Strengths

Protect and strengthen the Town’s agricultural system by preserving prime farmland, supporting diverse and value-added agricultural activities, and promoting the long-term viability of the agri-food network.

Leveraging our Location for Employment Capitalize on the Town’s strategic location and infrastructure to support a diverse economy by attracting employment uses, strengthening regional connections, and growing tourism and agri-food industries.

Guiding Principles
reflecting the
interconnected nature
of land-use planning

Elevating our Unique Communities

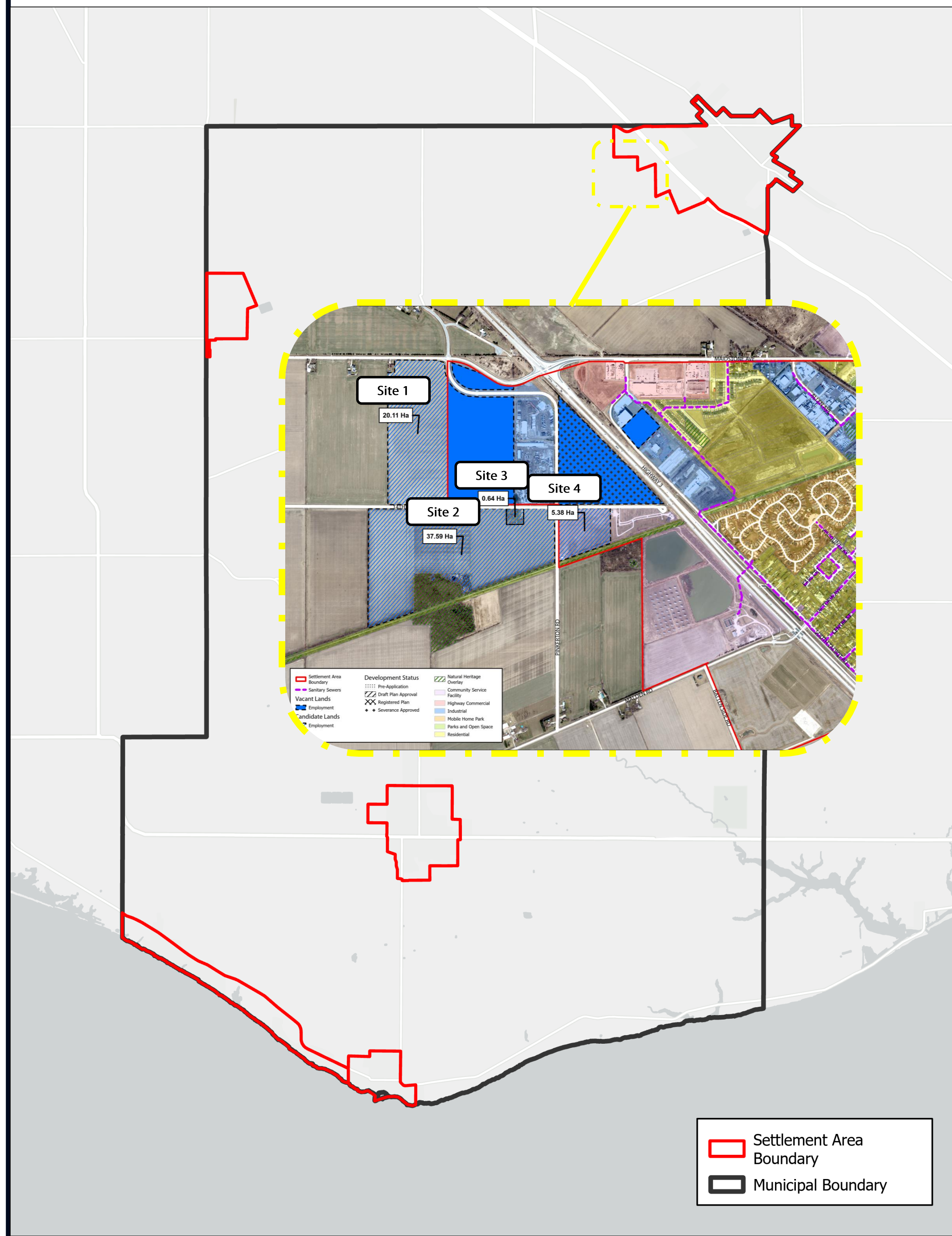
Support the development of complete, inclusive, and distinct communities by encouraging compact growth, a mix of housing and uses, strong public spaces, and protection of cultural heritage.

A Sustainable and Resilient Town

Promote environmentally sustainable growth by integrating climate change mitigation and adaptation into planning decisions and enhancing natural systems to improve resilience and long-term environmental health.

Growth & Development | Settlement Area Review

Settlement Area Boundary Expansion Location (Sites 1 and 4 below)



A Settlement Area Review was conducted as part of the Official Plan Review to identify areas outside the existing Settlement Area Boundary to direct growth in the future.

Key Changes (2026)

- Reviewed all Settlement Areas for growth capacity, land supply, intensification potential, and servicing.
- Surplus of lands designated for residential uses, no need to expand Settlement Areas for residential land.
- A boundary expansion for industrial employment lands in the Essex Centre Settlement Area was identified, due to highway access, existing industry, and planned servicing.
- Future reallocation opportunities – see Land Bank Concept

Settlement Area Boundaries:

- Define where growth can occur;
- Separate areas designated for growth from rural/agricultural land;
- Are mapped in the Official Plan schedules; and
- Can only be changed through an Official Plan Amendment.

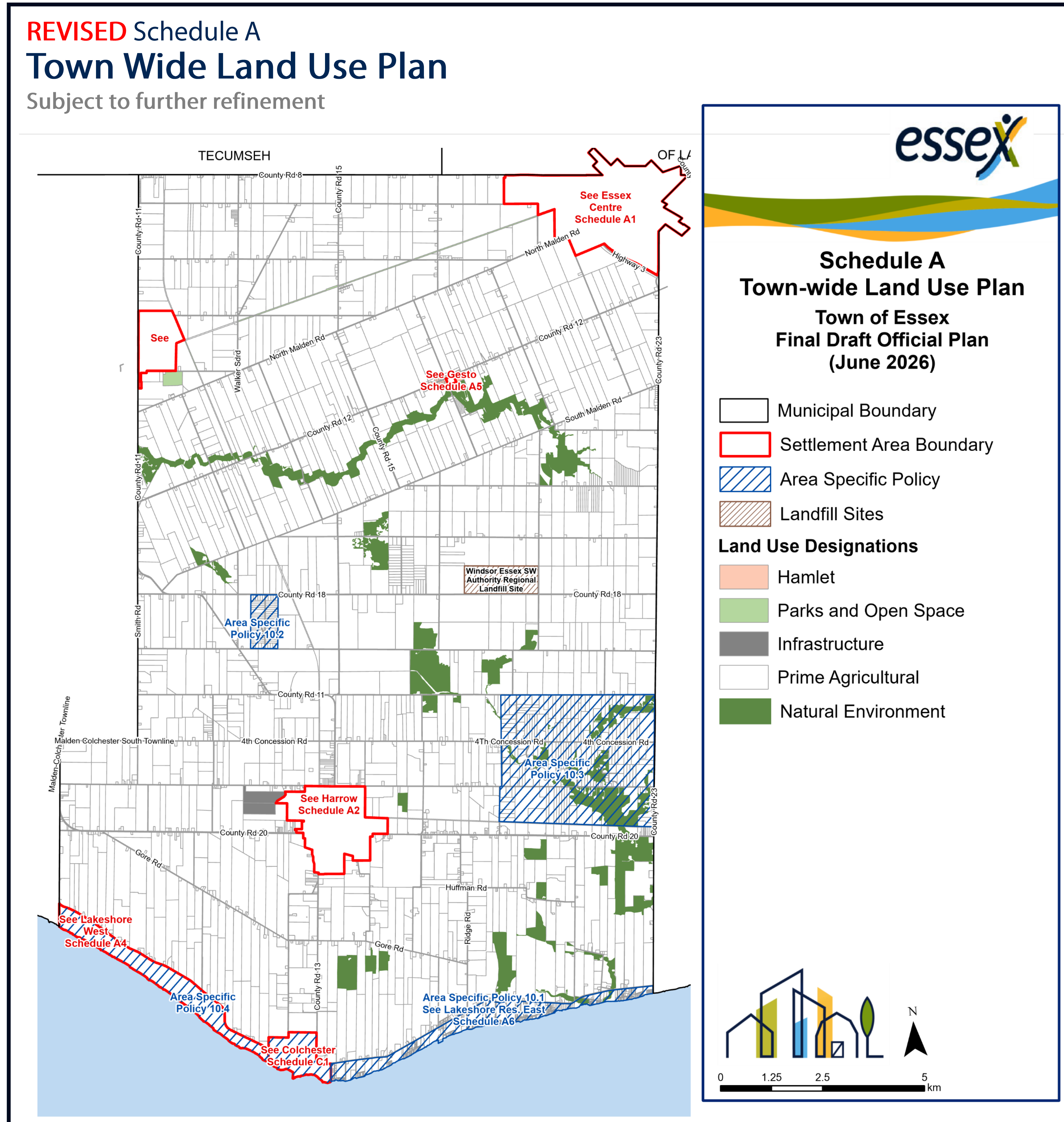
Land Bank Concept

Through the new Official Plan, lands are identified for future addition to the Town's Settlement Areas, when appropriate. This prevents the lands from being brought into the Settlement Area before they are needed, defers the conversion of existing agricultural lands, and gives the Town time to establish the necessary infrastructure to support their development.

Essex County 2051 Growth Forecast

Year	Population	Households	Jobs
2021	21,900	8,380	6,800
2051	29,900	11,145	11,100
2021-2051 Growth	8,800	2,765	4,300

County of Essex has identified the need for 45.8 additional hectares of industrial employment lands by 2051



The Official Plan includes an updated Town Structure to allocate growth across:

- The **Settlement Areas**, which consists of Primary (Essex Centre, Harrow) and Secondary (Colchester and Lakeshore West, McGregor)
- The **Agricultural System**, including the Hamlet of Gesto

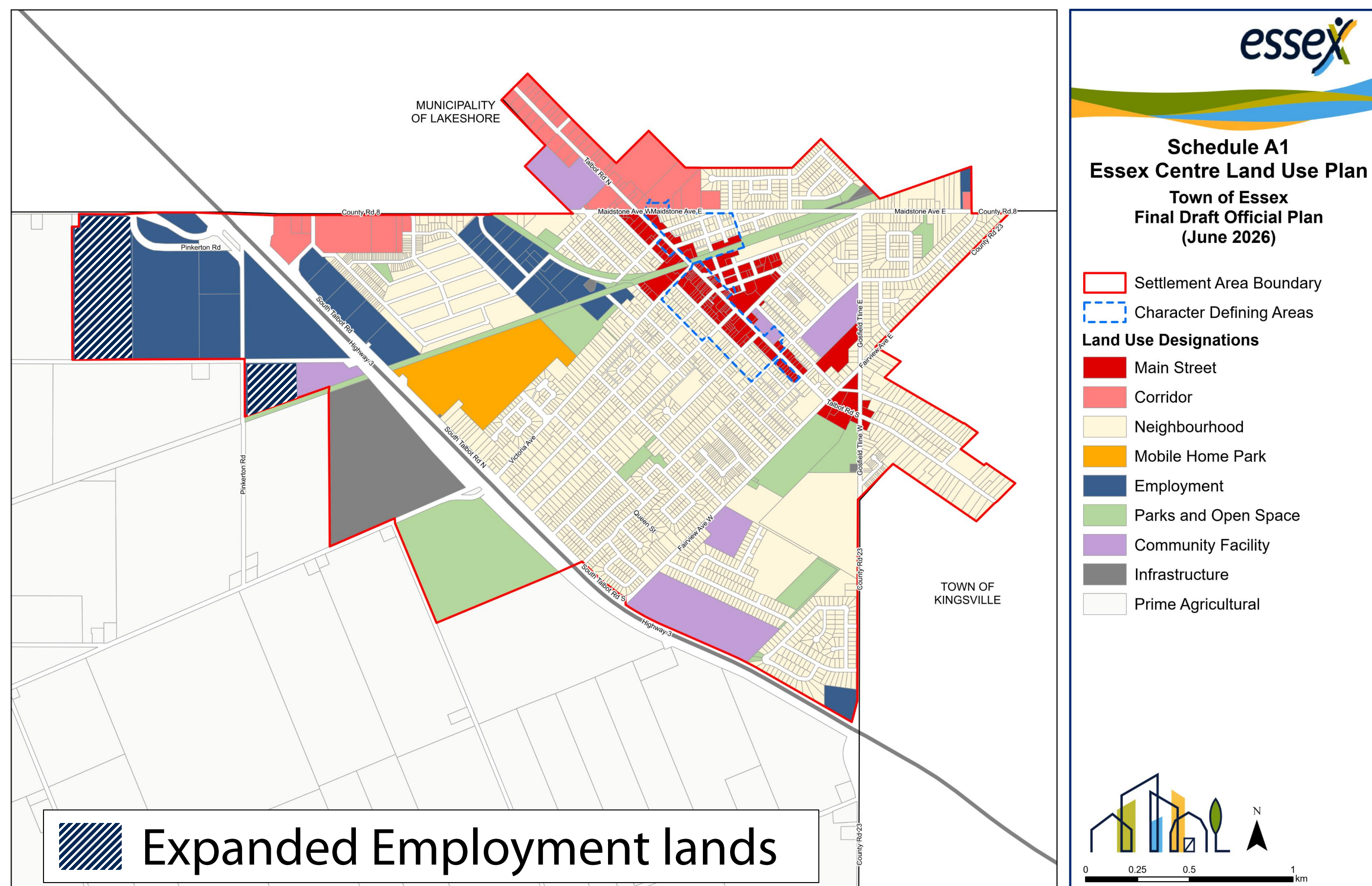
Key Changes (2026)

- Minor expansion of Essex Centre to designate more lands for industrial employment uses.
- Proposed Area Specific Policy applying to the Lakeshore West and Colchester Secondary Settlement Areas which limits residential density and requires flood management planning.
- Designation of all lands outside the Settlement Areas as Prime Agricultural, except for the Harrow lagoons and Co-An Park

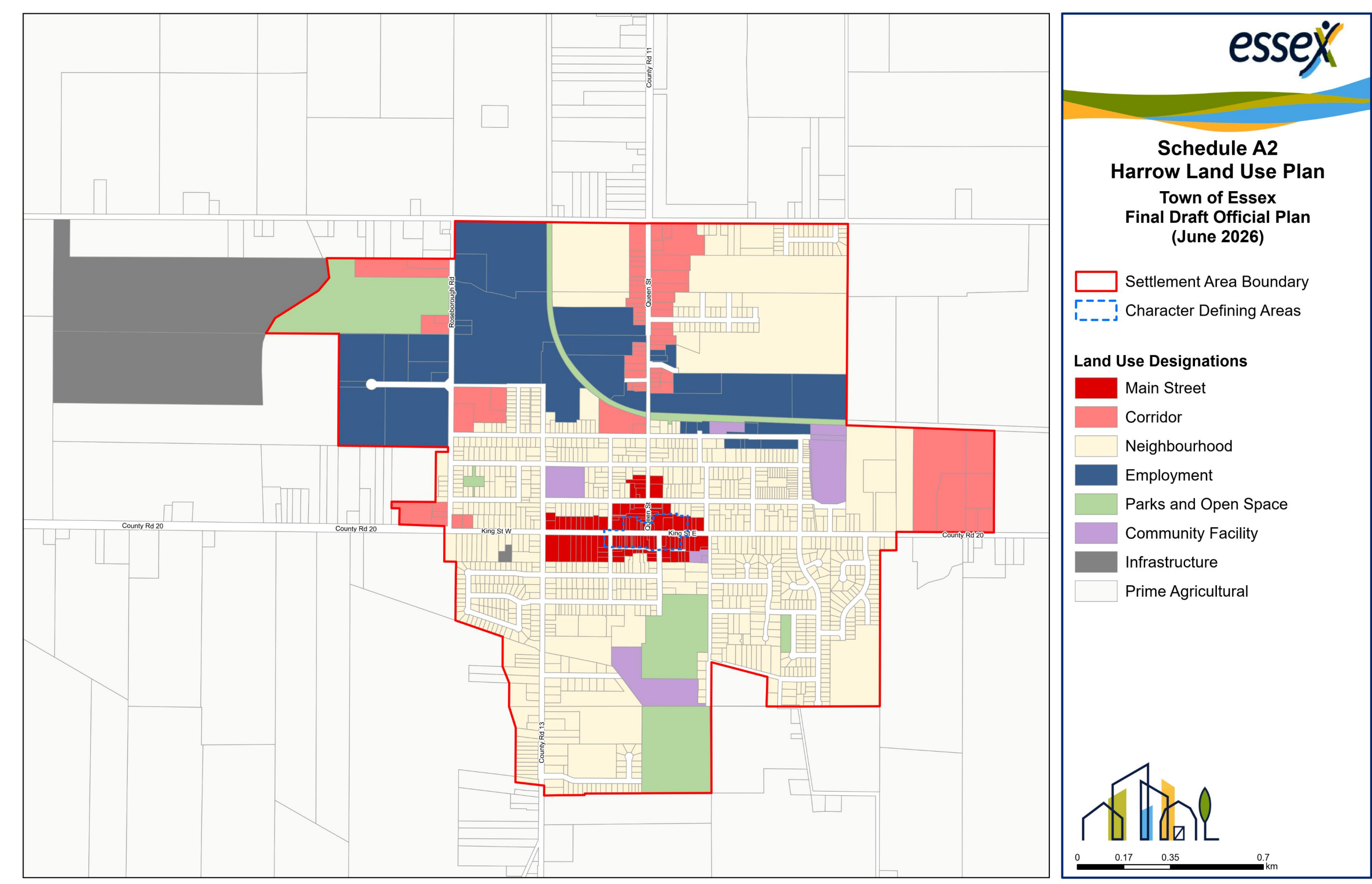
Area Specific Policies

- Area Specific Policies 10.1 (Lakeshore East), 10.2 (Rizzo Nicola), and 10.3 (Former Estate Residential lands) permit the continuation of existing land use contexts in the Agricultural System, including residential and recreational uses.
- Area Specific Policy 10.4 applies additional conditions to development in the Colchester and Lakeshore West Settlement Areas, requiring flood hazard assessments and limiting densities.

REVISED Schedule A1 & A2
Essex Centre and Harrow Land Use
 Subject to further refinement



New simplified colour scheme for land use schedules

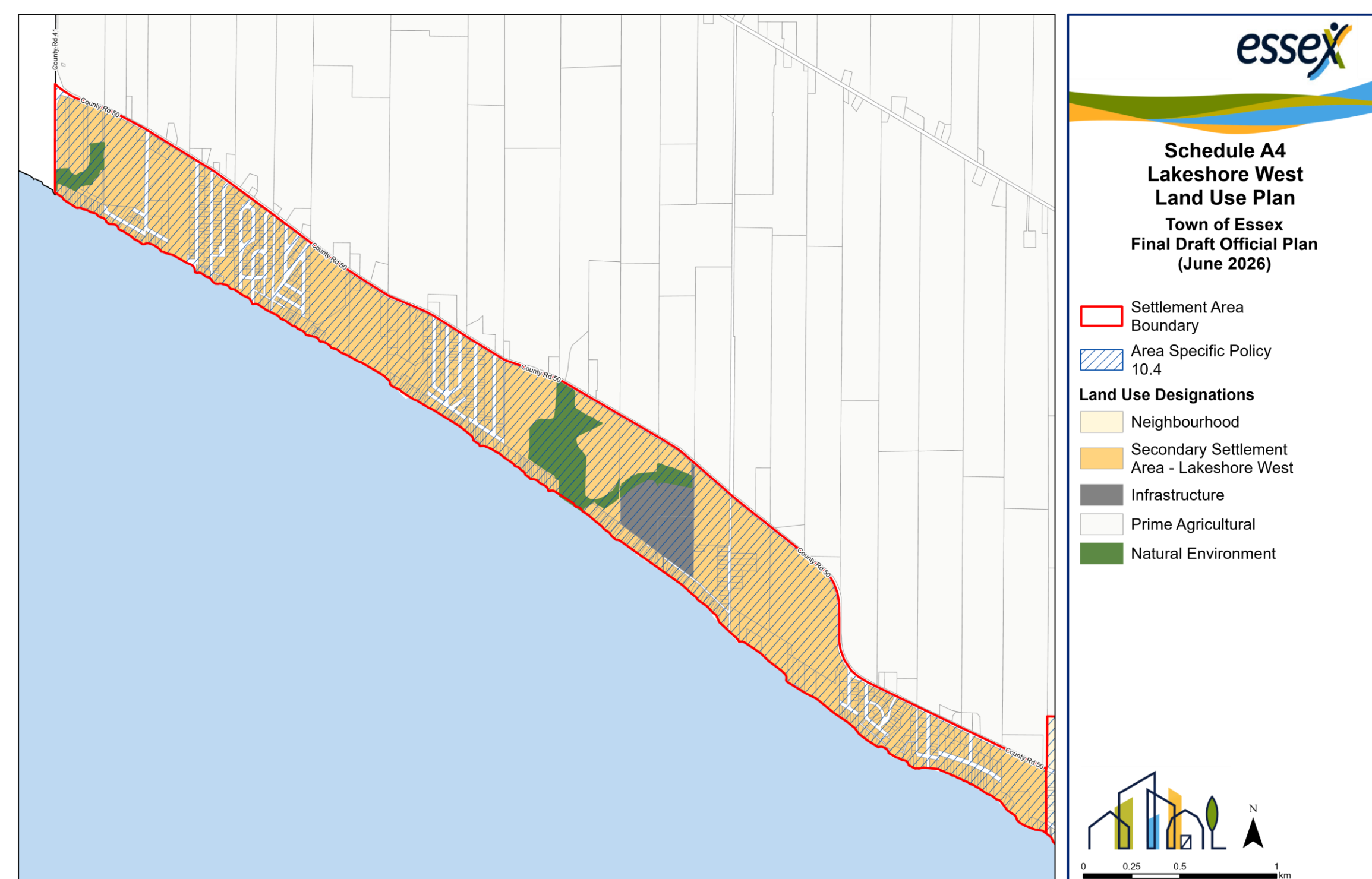
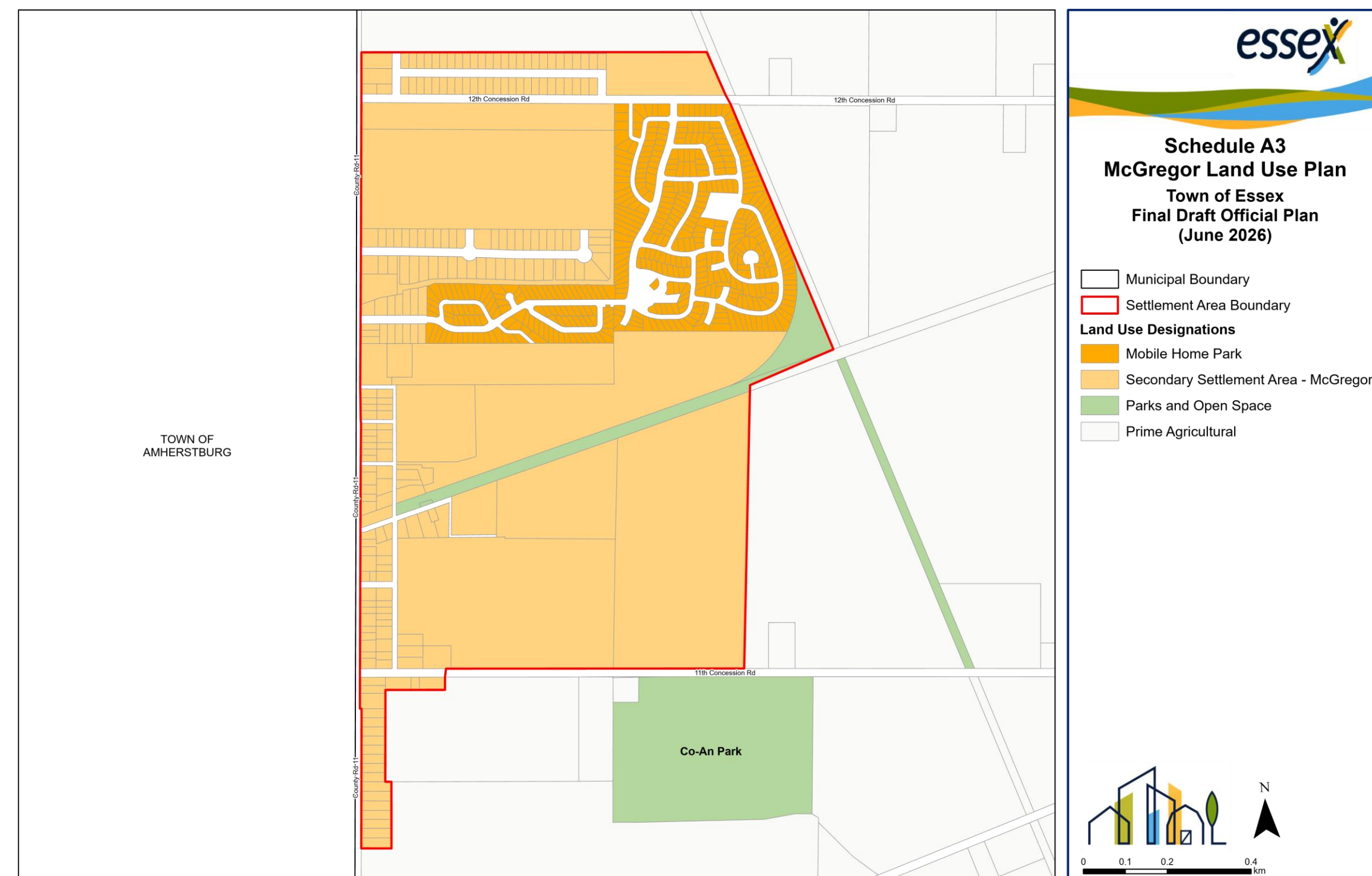


Essex Centre and Harrow are the Town's **Primary Settlement Areas**, and the focus of investment and amenities. They support residential, employment, commercial, and community uses.

- Key Changes (2026)**
- 'Highway Mixed-Use' and 'Highway Commercial' merged into 'Corridor', broadening permitted uses (including high density residential) along these corridors in Harrow and Essex.
 - 'Urban Residential' renamed to 'Neighbourhood', with revised permissions supporting intensification through varied housing.
 - To align with the County of Essex Official Plan, 'Industrial' becomes 'Employment'.
 - A new 'Infrastructure' designation protects assets serving water, wastewater, electricity, and utilities.

REVISED Schedule A3 & A4 McGregor and Lakeshore West Land Use

Subject to further refinement



Along with Colchester, McGregor and Lakeshore West are the Town's **Secondary Settlement Areas**.

They support a range of uses but are not the focus of growth beyond the development of existing designated lands.

Key Changes (2026)

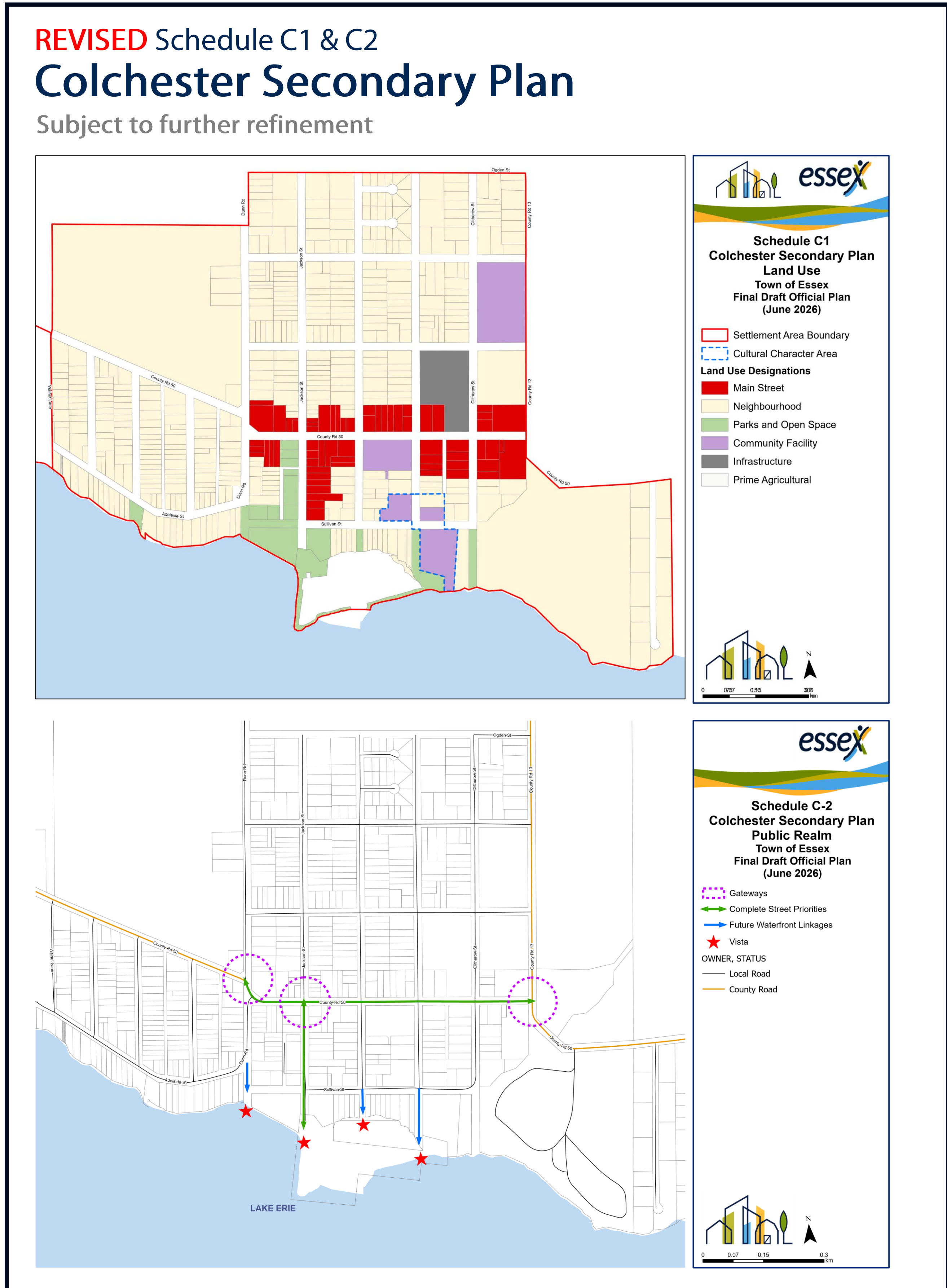
- McGregor Secondary Settlement Area development remains paused pending a wastewater upgrade decision with the Town of Amherstburg.
- The Town-owned site of the Colchester South Wastewater Treatment Plant re-designated Infrastructure, and those lands set aside in the Land Bank for future designation.
- In Lakeshore West and Colchester, housing densities are capped through Area Specific Policy 10.4 to a level supported by the capacity of the current wastewater system, with minor upgrades.

Heavy Rainfall Events

The ongoing overland flooding issue in the Lakeshore West Settlement Area has been carefully considered. A proposed area-specific policy requires a flood hazard assessment and risk mitigation for new development.

Flood hazard assessments must:

- Evaluate all flood risks.
- Identify mitigation measures to ensure that the proposed development will not increase flood risk for neighbours or new residents of the development.
- Address any other criteria that may be provided by the Town.



Key Changes (2026)

New Vision (below) and Guiding Principles:

- Support the animation of Colchester with a mix of uses.
- Maintain and build on what makes Colchester special.
- Achieve a high-quality, safe, and beautiful public realm.
- Protect and enhance the shoreline and environment.
- Support the agri-tourism and recreational tourism industries.

Revised policies to:

- Focus on Colchester’s small-town character, environment, and shoreline.
- Better align development permissions with infrastructure and servicing limits.
- Support new connections to the waterfront and encourage shoreline restoration, but respect private land rights.
- Support an appropriate mix of uses, but remove stand-alone commercial permissions outside Main Street areas.
- Shift from a tourism-heavy vision to a resident-first, community-focused strategy.



Excerpt from New Vision Statement

“The vision for the Colchester Secondary Plan is to build on what makes Colchester special to support a sustainable year-round community that is connected to nature and Lake Erie through active living, and includes a variety of pedestrian-friendly land uses and buildings that maintain Colchester's small-town feel and the needs of its residents...

...The Colchester Secondary Plan will guide growth and development in the Hamlet to ensure Colchester remains connected to its past while remaining inclusive to the needs of present and future residents and visitors.”

Complete Communities

Chapter 5 sets out policies that strengthen direction to support **complete communities** across the Plan, including in Settlement Areas, through land use mix, density, and infrastructure alignment.

Complete Community (Official Plan Definition)

“Places within Settlement Areas that offer and support opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to conveniently access most of the necessities for daily living, including an appropriate mix of jobs, local stores, and services, a full range of housing, transportation options, public service facilities and greenspaces. Complete communities are age friendly and may take different shapes and forms appropriate to their contexts.”



Summary of First Draft (2024)

The first draft of the new Official Plan implemented new policies and goals to:

- Support a range of transportation choices, including active transportation (walking and cycling);
- Achieve a range of parks within easy walking distance of the Town’s residents;
- Encourage compact, mixed-use development (e.g., housing above retail), a vibrant public realm, and universal accessibility; and
- Conserve cultural heritage resources including built heritage, archaeology and cultural heritage landscapes.
- Encouragement for the growth of industrial uses supporting the broader Windsor-Essex economy, and green economy innovation.

Key Changes (2026)

- Implementation of a Residential Intensification Strategy, as required by the County of Essex Official Plan, which supports the accommodation of growth, where possible, through:
 - development of vacant or underutilized lands;
 - redevelopment of existing sites and buildings; and
 - infill development;
- Designation of all existing Highway Commercial lands as Corridor, with mixed-use permissions.
- New policies protecting Employment lands for manufacturing, warehousing, and related uses.
- Encouragement and permitting of a greater range of employment-related uses throughout Settlement Areas.

Climate & Air

Chapter
2

Summary of First Draft Policy Updates (2024)

New dedicated policies around mitigation and adaptation strategies to respond to climate change including:

- Efficient built form
- Transportation
- Building emissions
- Energy generation
- Food production systems
- Green infrastructure

Agricultural System

Chapter
4

Summary of First Draft Policy Updates (2024)

Updated Agricultural System policies to protect key farmland including:

- Redesignation of 'Rural Residential' and 'Estate Residential' lands to Prime Agricultural (existing residential uses are still permitted)
- Prohibiting non-agricultural uses in specialty crop areas
- Continuing support for the growth of tender fruit and viticulture industries
- Guidance for commercial greenhouses and cannabis cultivation in the Town
- Support for the expansion of the agri-food network, including agritourism
- Permits up to two additional residential units, as required by Provincial policy, subject to meeting outlined conditions

Implementation

Chapter
8

Summary of First Draft Policy Updates (2024)

Implements tools for the new Official Plan's policies, including:

- Official Plan and Zoning By-law amendments and other zoning tools like Holding by-laws;
- Refined policies for Community Improvement Plans to better support affordable housing;
- Enabling policies for a future Community Benefits Charge bylaw;
- New policies to guide consultation and engagement on planning matters in the Town; and
- New glossary to define terms used throughout the Official Plan.

Key Changes (2026)

- New Town policies for Settlement Area boundary expansions.
- Removal of pre-consultation requirements for development, following Provincial direction in Bill 185 (*Cutting Red Tape To Build More Homes Act*)
- New policies supporting "use it or lose it" by-laws, which let the Town set deadlines on site plan approval and allocation of municipal services, so unused permissions expire.

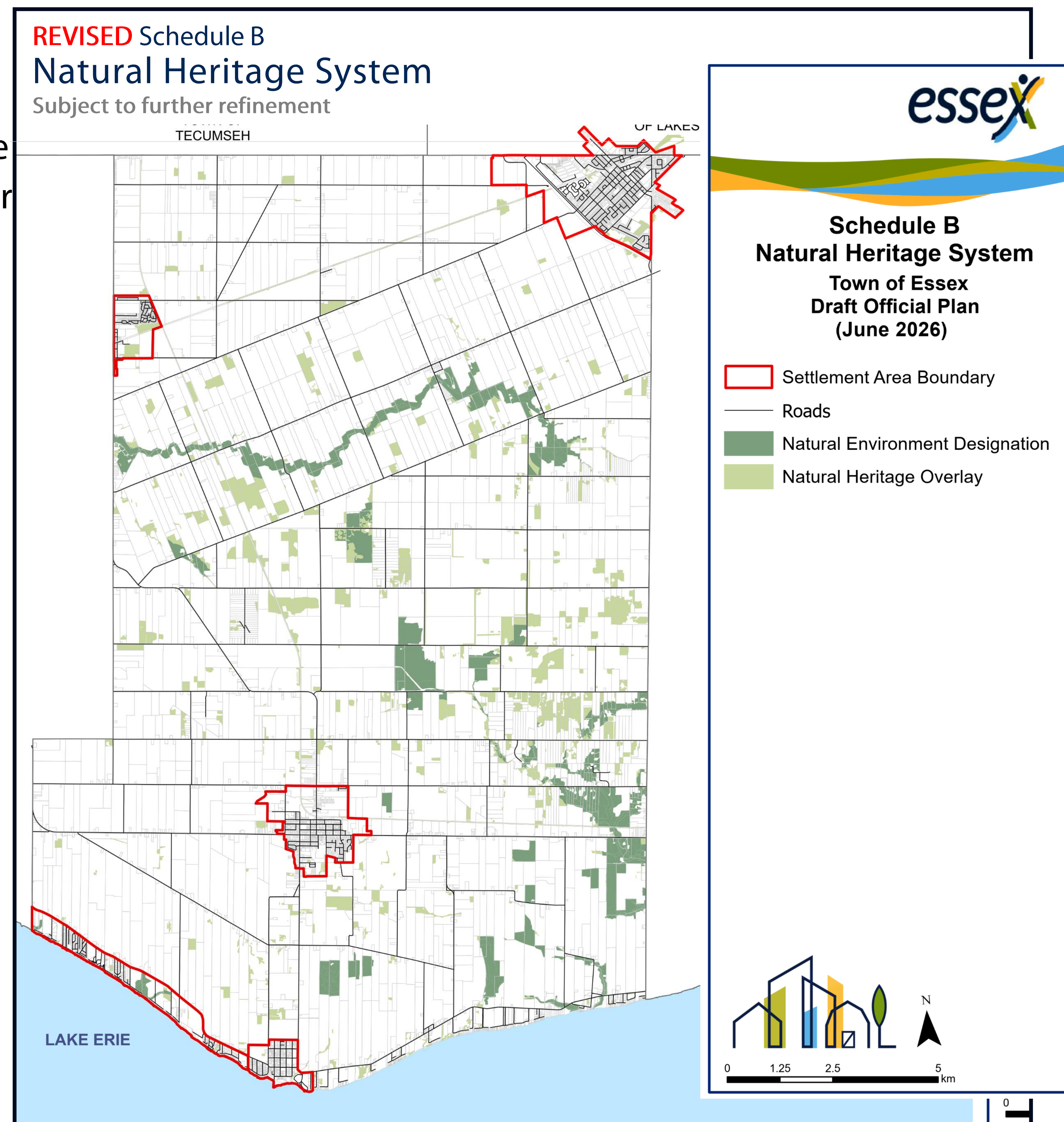
Natural Heritage & Water Systems

The Official Plan includes policies to protect the Natural Heritage System, which includes woodlands and wetlands, drinking water resources, hazardous lands, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. These policies are brought together in one chapter, reflecting the close integration of the environment and climate change.

Summary of First Draft Policy Updates (2024)

- Implements Essex Region Natural Heritage System Strategy policies and mapping
- New policies to guide restoration of natural heritage features or linkages through the development process
- Implementing the Essex Region Source Protection Plan

No Major Changes Since 2024 Draft



How to share your input!

Your input on the 2026 draft Town of Essex Official Plan will help inform revisions and changes before it is released for consideration by Council.

Once adopted, the new Official Plan will be forwarded to the County for approval.

What's to come?

Statutory Public Meeting of Council

➡ Target: Summer 2026

Release Final Draft Official Plan

➡ Target: Fall 2026

Council Consideration of Final Draft Official Plan

➡ Target Fall 2026

Share your input!



Ask questions today, or email them to the Project Team, at officialplan@essex.ca



Fill out a comment card and leave it here today



Visit the project webpage at www.essex.ca/officialplan