

Municipal Planning and Agriculture

Municipal Governments are now required to develop municipal plans. Due to these new requirements, NSFA with support from NSFA's Agriculture Land Policy Committee has developed a resource to support County/Regional Federations of Agriculture and other farmers engaged in municipal planning discussions.

Municipal Planning Strategy

A Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) is a document that identifies the goals and objectives for a municipality. An MPS is developed through robust community consultation and must contain specific information as identified in the Minimum Planning Requirements Regulations made under Section 214(4) of the Municipal Government Act.

A Municipal Planning Strategy must include context for the goals, maps for future uses, and policy statements for residential uses, commercial and industrial uses, institutional uses, recreational facilities resources of land. An MPS must also include the steps and processes that must be followed to make future changes to the MPS. Each municipal plan must apply the *Statement of Provincial (SPI)* to their MPS. There is an SPI for Agricultural Land which includes identifying and protecting agricultural land, reducing neighbouring conflict and reduce topsoil removal.

In addition to the requirements, an MPS may include goals around zoning and land planning, engagement, development investment, natural environment, social well being, economic development and culture and heritage.

This document contains a series of “check boxes” you will want to consider talking with municipal planners about. This list certainly isn't exhaustive, just ideas to get conversations started about agriculture and municipal planning.

Agriculture Consideration

Your community

- Look and Feel

Consider how agriculture contributes to your community and what in the municipal planning strategy can foster that. Are there community/Farmers' Markets that sell local products? Is there potential to celebrate agriculture and food? Does the agriculture landscape draw people to your community?

- Growth Opportunities

What are the growth opportunities for agriculture in your community? This may include primary production, storage, processing, utilities and services. Consideration may also be given to:

- building farm storage;
- building processing facilities;
- markets at the farm gate; and
- general farm markets.

Goals & policies you can suggest to your municipality:

- ✓ Encourage growth in the agriculture industry.
- ✓ No net loss of agricultural land.
- ✓ Target population density away from agriculture activity.
- ✓ Enforce a “change-in-use tax” that is used when active agriculture land is developed for commercial or residential use.

Separation Distances

Minimum and maximum separation distances can be used to reduce land lost to agriculture activities, ensure continued access to water, limit complaints and generally provide security for the future of the agriculture industry in the region.

- From Road

Having a maximum set-back from the road for new houses and buildings will reduce the amount of agriculture land lost.

- Wells

A conversation with your municipality about the approval of new wells in agriculture activity areas is important. Many pesticides, fertilizers and other farming activities have rules around farming too close to a well. Though there may be environmental and other checks in place that determine a well is okay to drill, the new well may have an impact on the surrounding farm activity.

- Property line

Setbacks from property lines for buildings and other items is a conversation that you will want to have with your municipality. These setbacks may vary by residential, commercial and agriculture uses of the property. You may want to consider talking about setbacks from property lines for things like building structures (fixed and temporary), wells and fences.

- Between Houses

Particularly in areas with higher agriculture production, ensuring appropriate distances between houses is necessary to both reduce overall land lost.

Engagement

Ongoing engagement on municipal planning strategies is important for both the municipality and the farms.

- Community

Developing, implementing and changing the Municipal Planning Strategy can bring communities together. Engagement is important (and actually required under the Municipal Governments Act) to understand what citizens want for their community.

- Agriculture specific

An Agriculture Advisory Committee comprised of farmers will help inform the development and implementation municipal planning strategy and provide an agriculture lens to planning decisions. This committee, if active after the MPS is passed, can also inform any changes to by-laws or updates to the MPS. While agriculture organizations may exist, having a dedicated agriculture advisory committee written in the MPS will reduce perceived or real conflict of interest.

- Ongoing

Ongoing monitoring of municipal government activities will help you stay informed on municipal happening. You can do this by understanding your municipal government's processes including when they meet and how changes to MPS are made. Connecting with your municipal councilor or the municipal planners are important, too.

Red Tape

There are areas that are the responsibility of the provincial government which municipalities may want to be involved in as well. Some of these topics may include constructing ponds, animal welfare, noise makers and general farm practices. In these circumstances, you'll want to have a conversation with the municipality to find out why they want by-laws around those particular areas.

If you have any further questions about policies or require further support about municipal planning please contact:

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