

# Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville **Comprehensive Zoning By-law Update & Town-wide Urban Design Guidelines**

Draft Discussion Paper #2: Rural and Environmental  
Zones

April 17, 2026

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# 1. Introduction

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**The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville is a geographically diverse municipality, consisting of expansive rural and agricultural areas, natural features, as well as urban and rural settlements. Much of the land in the Town forms part of Ontario’s Greenbelt and the Oak Ridges Moraine. The Town’s new Zoning By-law presents an opportunity to analyze the policy objectives of the Province and Town to shape development, support agriculture, and contribute to the protection of the Town’s natural heritage system.**

The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville (the Town) has retained WSP Canada Inc. to review and replace the Town’s Comprehensive Zoning By-law (ZBL) with a new ZBL that is built around the Town’s updated Official Plan (WSOP) and complies with recent changes to Provincial Plans and policies.

## 1.1 Discussion Paper Overview

This Discussion Paper primarily focuses on the zoning regulation in the rural areas of Whitchurch-Stouffville, comprising lands that form the “Agricultural System” on Schedule A – Town Structure of the WSOP. This Discussion Paper also focuses on areas forming the “Natural Heritage System” and “Regional Greenbelt System” on Schedule A – Town Structure of the WSOP, both within and outside of urban area boundaries.

The objectives of this Discussion Paper are to:

- Establish key principles and zoning options for lands in the rural area and natural heritage system;
- Provide recommendations for agricultural uses, buildings, and structures and not inhibiting normal farm practices;
- Establish zoning options and recommendations to support the agricultural and rural economy; and
- Provide options to implement the policies of the WSOP and Provincial policy, including the Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

Specifically, this Discussion Paper explores the following topics:

- Zoning in the Oak Ridges Moraine;
- Zoning in the greenbelt;
- Supporting the agricultural economy;

- Supporting natural heritage protection and protection of people and property from natural hazards such as flooding risks; and
- Other specific zoning issues observed in the rural areas.

## 1.2 Rural and Environmental Considerations

The Town's geography is a layered and diverse composite of defined and managed areas for urban growth, active agriculture and rural lands, and important ecological and hydrological features. Each of these areas are subject to specific WSOP policies which establish long-term policy guidance, which may be implemented in the new ZBL. This Discussion Paper is structured to focus on the following key policy implementation topics. Section 6 of this Discussion Paper addresses various other rural zoning topics which have been identified by staff.

### Provincial Plans

Nearly the entire Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville is subject to the policies of one or more Provincial plans. The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP) applies to approximately 80% of the Town's land area and the Greenbelt Plan applies to the balance of lands in the northwest corner and southern edge of the Town. Further, lands located generally north of Bloomington Road are subject to the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan. The policies of these Provincial plans work together with the WSOP to protect and enhance the Town's rural and natural character and provide specific direction to be implemented in the Zoning By-law.

### Agricultural and Rural Areas

The policies and mapping of Provincial plans interact and overlap with the various agricultural uses, rural uses, Hamlets, and natural features that can be found throughout the Town. Supporting vibrant and active uses in agricultural and rural areas means considering appropriate zoning regulations that are adaptable to the farming community and the changing nature of the agricultural economy. The WSOP sets out policies which support the agricultural economy and recognize changes to farming practices. There is also a need to consider other development pressures in rural areas, such as kennels and other non-farm uses, and uses that support farming, such as farm help accommodations.

### Environmental Protection

The Zoning By-law plays a role in supporting the direction set out in the WSOP for environmental protection within the natural heritage system, both within and outside of urban areas. Across the Town the Zoning By-law needs to establish clear environmental protection zone(s) that can be applied to protect and enhance natural heritage and hydrological features, typically based on detailed study and mapping to delineate the extent of natural features. Specifically in rural areas, the Zoning By-law also needs to consider how environmental protection zoning interfaces with farming practices and other

zoning regulations which limit the intensity of development. In recent years, there have been significant changes to Provincial planning frameworks, including the *Planning Act* and Provincial Planning Statement (2024) which guide decision making around the natural heritage system.

The overall approach for this Zoning By-law is to reconcile the policies of Provincial Plans and the WSOP with updated zoning provisions. Provincial Plans and the WSOP often follow criteria-based policy which allows different uses to be established, subject to criteria such as mitigating environmental impact and limiting the scale of development. These criteria may be challenging to translate directly into zoning regulations where case-by-case evaluation is required through development process and supporting studies. However, there is opportunity for the Zoning By-law to restrict land uses and development within sensitive features. Policies are intended to achieve long-term planning objectives, including environmental protection and supporting the rural economy, while zoning regulations need to consider site-specific context and opportunities to allow for limited uses consistent with the overall policy vision.

The options and recommendations presented in this Report will be refined through consultation and the subsequent Zoning Strategy Report to determine the preferred zoning framework for rural and environmental zoning in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

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## 2. Zoning in the Oak Ridges Moraine

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The Provincial Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP) sets out policies for land and resource uses to maintain, improve, or restore ecological and hydrological functions within the Moraine. The ORMCP provides detailed land use and resource management policies to protect water resources, natural heritage features, and landform conservation areas. As part of Ontario's Greenbelt, the ORMCP works alongside the Greenbelt Plan to guide sustainable development and preserve natural functions across the Moraine. The current Whitchurch-Stouffville Zoning By-law contains dedicated zones and regulations to implement the policies of the ORMCP and WSOP.

This Discussion Paper focuses on how the Town's zoning framework within the Moraine needs to be updated to align with the intent of the ORMCP and WSOP and provide Town staff and the community with the tools to guide responsible and sustainable development.

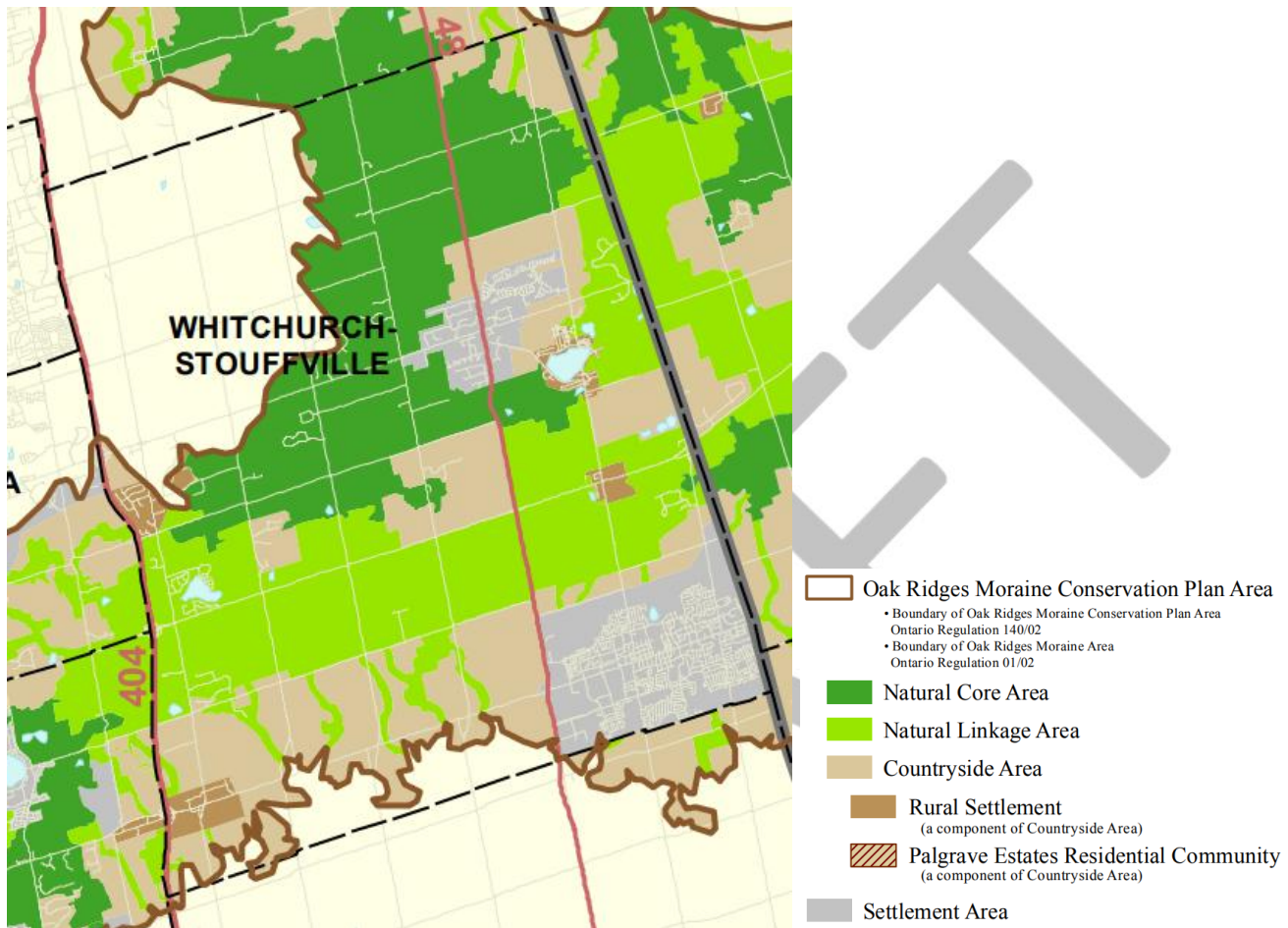
### 2.1 Current Policy and Zoning

The following provides an overview of the existing policy and regulations in place within the Oak Ridges Moraine that will guide the Zoning By-law.

#### 2.1.1 Provincial Policy and Legislation

The ORMCP was established under the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001* and was most recently updated in May 2017. The Oak Ridges Moraine is a significant landform (an irregular ridge) located within southern Ontario, which runs 160 km from the Trent River in the east to the Niagara Escarpment in the west, roughly parallel with Lake Ontario. The Moraine benefits from a unique concentration of environmental, geological and hydrological features. The *Planning Act* requires that decisions around planning matters conform to provincial plans, including the ORMCP.

The ORMCP identifies four geographic specific land use designations including the Natural Core Area, Natural Linkage Area, Countryside Area, and Settlement Area, which permit a mix of environmental, agricultural, aggregate, residential, and recreational uses that benefit from the unique characteristics of the Moraine. **Figure 1** depicts how the land use designations of the ORMCP are applied in Whitchurch-Stouffville.



**Figure 1 – Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan Land Use Designations**

The policies of the ORMCP are organized into four main parts which address the following matters:

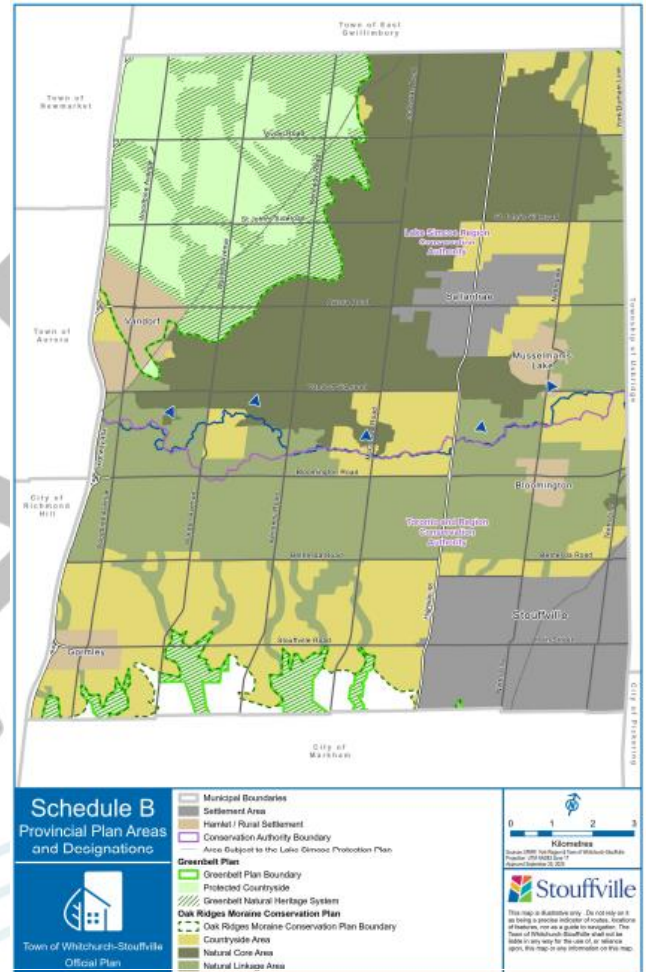
- Part I – General
- Part II – Land Use Designations
- Part III – Protecting Ecological and Hydrological Integrity
- Part IV – Specific Land Use Policies

Collectively, the designations and policies ensure that the ecological and hydrological integrity of the Moraine is protected, and the Moraine is maintained as a continuous natural landform.

## 2.1.2 Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville Official Plan

The policies and mapping in the WSOP (2025) are the primary ways in which the ORMCP is applied within Whitchurch-Stouffville. The following key sections of the WSOP guide development within the Moraine, along with other policies throughout the Plan:

- Section 2.10.2 guides the provision of infrastructure within the Moraine
- Section 3.2.1.1 and 3.2.1.2 provides direction for additional residential units and garden suites
- Sections 4.1.3 and 4.1.4 set out policies for Natural Core Areas and Natural Linkages
- Section 4.1.5 sets out policies for landform conservation areas within the Moraine
- Section 4.1.7 establishes policies for key natural heritage and hydrologic features
- Section 4.2.6 guides major development within the ORMCP area
- Section 5.2.5 guides the development of major recreational uses within the ORMCP
- Section 5.2.7 guides the development of small-scale commercial, industrial, and institutional uses
- Section 5.3.1 provides policies for aggregate resource extraction
- Section 7.4.2 guides lot creation within the ORMCP area



Schedule B (**Figure 2**) of the WSOP delineates the boundaries of land use designations contained in the ORMCP, alongside the Greenbelt Plan.

## 2.1.3 Existing Zoning By-law

Sections 3.18, 3.19, and 3.20 of Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO contains regulations that apply within the ORMCP. Section 3.18 addresses non-conforming buildings and uses, Section 3.19 addresses previously authorized zoning, and Section 3.20 addresses environmental protection and flood hazard zoning.

Section 4 sets out the zones that apply within the ORMCP, summarized as follows:

- **Oak Ridges Moraine – Countryside (ORM-C)** – applies to lands within the Countryside Area of the ORMCP
- **Oak Ridges Moraine – Linkage (ORM-L)** – applies to lands within the Natural Linkage Area of the ORMCP
- **Oak Ridges Moraine – Natural Core (ORM-NC)** – applies to lands within the Natural Core Area of the ORMCP
- **Environmental – Oak Ridges Moraine Area (ENV)** – applies to key natural and hydrological features within the ORMCP

Within the Moraine, Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO applies the Flood Hazard (FH) zone to lands subject to the regulatory flood line as determined by the Conservation Authority having jurisdiction or 30 metres from each side of a meanderbelt or waterway. There are some limited instances of other zones being applied within the Moraine, including existing employment areas and residential private service clusters (e.g., near Preston Lake). Overall, there is strong alignment between the mapping of the ORM and existing ORM zones.

As part of a housekeeping amendment in 2025, the regulations of Section 2.11 related to Landform Conservation Areas were removed from Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO, with the stated intent of allowing staff to review the applicable policies of the ORMCP through planning and development review.

Of 252 minor variance applications received by the Town since 2020, approximately 107 of these minor variances were sought within the ORM-C, ORM-L, or ORM-NC, representing nearly 42% of applications. Most of these minor variance applications dealt with permissions to construct a dwelling or expand or alter an existing dwelling on lot. This high rate of minor variances in the ORM zones indicates that regulations related to new and existing dwellings within the Moraine need to be comprehensively reviewed and updated. As such, the current zoning framework is not providing many as-of-right permissions, resulting in development applications for a wide variety of projects. While this approach allows for case-by-case review to ensure the proposed development conforms to the Plan, there is additional cost and time and opportunities to integrate as-of-right permissions should be explored through the new ZBL.

## 2.2 Analysis and Discussion

The following provides analysis of best and emerging practices with respect to zoning within the Moraine and a discussion of key considerations for Whitchurch-Stouffville. Overall, the current policy and legislative frameworks explored in Section 2.1 support a refreshed approach to zoning within the Moraine.

### 2.2.1 Best and Emerging Practices

Following implementation of the original ORMCP, the Town and other municipalities undertook updates to its zoning by-laws to implement the policies of the ORMCP. Some municipalities maintain standalone zoning by-laws that apply only in the Moraine (such as in Kawartha Lakes and Clarington), while other

communities have integrated specific zone categories into the overall zoning by-law. In updating its zoning in 2010, the Town integrated ORM zoning regulations into Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO.

This section provides a review of best and emerging practices from peer municipalities who have recently updated their zoning by-laws within the Moraine. This section focuses on King Township and New Tecumseth, who have recently updated and improved their ORM zoning following initial implementation after the ORMCP first came into effect.

## Township of King

In 2022, the Township of King prepared a new Countryside Zoning By-law, which integrated its former standalone ORM zoning by-law and rural zoning by-law into a consolidated by-law for all rural areas. The following elements of the Township's Countryside Zoning By-law support implementation of the ORMCP through zoning:

- Creating a standalone chapter that contains all applicable ORMCP-related zones and regulations that apply within the Moraine
- Implementing an overlay map of prime agricultural areas where additional farm-related uses, such as on-farm diversified uses, are permitted by the ORMCP
- Using a dedicated Oak Ridges Moraine Feature Protection zone to apply the most restrictive development permissions to key natural and hydrologic features within the Moraine
- Establishing tiered maximum lot coverage requirements in the ORM based on lot size
- Establishing minimum lot area and lot frontage requirements as “legally existing”
- Applying a dedicated Oak Ridges Moraine Aggregate zone to recognize existing mineral aggregate operations within the Moraine
- Setting out specific provisions that apply to development in the Oak Ridges Moraine, including provisions for previously authorized single detached dwellings, expansion and reconstruction of existing buildings and structures, and transition

In response to the Province's Bill 23, the *More Homes Built Faster Act (2022)*, which removed the ability to apply site plan control to developments under 10 units, the Township undertook a housekeeping amendment in 2023 to fulfill its obligation to implement the ORMCP for residential applications within the Moraine. The amendments removed wording related to site plan approval within the Moraine, particularly related to previously allowed dwellings. To replace site plan control for previously authorized dwellings, the Township established that the ORMCP conformity review occur through its existing Zoning Review Process, prior to the issuance of a building permit. This process allows for the review of applications (not otherwise captured by site plan control) against all applicable zoning and policy within the ORMCP. There are three approval streams available to applicants based on the anticipated impacts to the ORM.

## Town of New Tecumseth

In 2021, the Town of New Tecumseth prepared a new Comprehensive Zoning By-law (2021-128) which applies across the Town. The following elements of the Town's Comprehensive Zoning By-law support the implementation of the ORMCP through zoning:

- Establishing four zones that apply within the Moraine: ORM Countryside Agricultural, ORM Countryside Rural, ORM Environmental Protection, and ORM Natural Linkage Area
- Distinguishing zones between prime agricultural and rural areas within the ORM Countryside
- Setting out specific provisions that apply to development in the Oak Ridges Moraine, including provisions for conformity requirements, existing uses, buildings, and structures, and landform conservation areas
- Defining and prohibiting major development in the ORM zones

### 2.2.2 Discussion

The ORMCP provides a strong Provincial policy framework that takes precedence over local official plans and zoning by-laws where there is a conflict. Putting this policy framework into practice presents several challenges and opportunities. Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO implements a zoning framework in the Moraine that was originally put in place following implementation of the ORMCP. Many policies in the ORMCP are technical, subject to policy interpretation, and mapped at a regional scale, which may lead to uncertainty about what land uses or buildings are permitted on a site-specific basis. There are many factors to consider when attempting to implement criteria-based policies such as “maintain ecological functions” into enforceable zoning standards.

This is particularly relevant in the Natural Core and Natural Linkage designations. While Natural Linkages are meant to connect Natural Core areas, allowing for the movement of animals and connectivity of features and functions, these areas are often fragmented, intersected by roads, or contain existing farms and development which limit overall “connectivity”. When considering how to implement the ORMCP in zoning, it is important to consider the balance between ecosystem-based planning and parcel-based zoning frameworks. It is also important to recognize that zoning is a rigid tool that requires an amendment or variance to alter a regulation once in place.

## Development Permissions

As discussed in Section 2.1, approximately 42% of all approved minor variance applications in the Town apply within the Oak Ridges Moraine. This high rate indicates that the requirements of the Zoning By-law may be too constraining on Town-wide level and require refinement to reduce the amount of minor variance applications required going forward. Most minor variance applications within the ORM seek relief from the minimum lot coverage required and minimum yard setbacks, and particularly the minimum interior side yard requirements. For example, in the ORM-C zone, Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO sets a

maximum lot coverage of 10% for lots less than 2 hectares in size. Conversely, the Township of King permits a maximum lot coverage of 15% for lots less than 1 hectare in size.

Further, many provisions in Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO including Sections 3.18, 3.19, and 3.20 can be challenging to implement in a zoning context and require interpretation to understand what may or may not be permitted on a lot. The provisions of Section 4 of the By-law also appear to not provide flexibility for existing lots in the ORM, requiring a minimum lot area of 10 hectares and lot frontage of 100 metres throughout the Moraine, due to lot creation restrictions in the ORM. In the Township of King, the minimum lot area and lot coverage requirements are set at “as legally existing” to allow for redevelopment on existing lots, while continuing to regulate lot creation as required by the ORMCP. In the Town of New Tecumseth, minimum lot area requirements are set at 1 hectare for single detached dwellings.

The ORMCP also sets out detailed policies related to “major development” in the Moraine, which includes the creation of four or more lots, buildings or structures over 500 square metres in size, or the establishment of a major recreational use. The WSOP sets out detailed criteria that are required to be met prior to allowing major development, as defined. Zoning By-law 2010-010-001-ZO does not contain regulations or definitions related to major development.

## **Permitted Uses in Prime Agricultural Areas**

The ORMCP recognizes the importance of designating agricultural lands, including prime agricultural areas, to provide a continuous productive land base for agriculture and support the Agricultural System for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. As per the ORMCP, it relies on municipal official plan mapping to delineate prime agricultural areas.

Permitted uses within Natural Core Areas and Natural Linkage Areas allow agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses only in prime agricultural areas. In Countryside Areas, agriculture-related uses and on-farm diversified uses are permitted more broadly and are not limited to prime agricultural areas.

Further, the ORMCP sets out policies for small-scale commercial, industrial, or institutional development. This use category encompasses uses such as those related to commercial sales associated with resources in the area, portable mineral aggregate crushing plants, and schools or places of worship intended to serve nearby Rural Settlements. Within Countryside Areas, small-scale commercial, industrial, and institutional uses are not permitted within prime agricultural areas. The WSOP mirrors these permissions for this use category and provides direction for the Zoning By-law to establish appropriate regulations and development standards. Zoning regulations for small-scale commercial, industrial, or institutional development are addressed in Section 6.6 of this Report.

The ORCMP permits major recreational uses (such as golf courses, playing fields, and ski hills) outside of prime agricultural areas within Countryside Areas, subject to various criteria. The WSOP permits these uses subject to a zoning by-law amendment and various criteria to address the requirements of the ORMCP.

## Aggregate Uses

All existing mineral aggregate operations in the Town are situated within the Moraine and are zoned Employment Extractive (EX) in Zoning By-law 2010-001. The ORMCP and WSOP set out detailed policies for mineral aggregate operations and do not provide a basis to pre-zone for new mineral aggregate operations. The ORMCP requires that zoning by-laws do not contain provisions for mineral aggregate operations that are more restrictive than the ORMCP.

## Landform Conservation Areas

The ORMCP and WSOP set out comprehensive policies for development and site alteration within Landform Conservation Areas, which are areas with significant landscape character. Prior to a 2023 Housekeeping Amendment, Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO previously contained mapping and regulations related to development and site alteration in Landform Conservation Areas. Through a 2023 Town-initiated housekeeping amendment, these regulations and mapping were removed as they require significant policy interpretation at a site-specific level.

## 2.3 Options and Recommendations

The approach that is explored in this Discussion Paper is to reconcile the policies of the ORMCP and WSOP with the new Zoning By-law, in ways that provide clarity to Town staff and the community through the planning and development process. There are several recommendations and options to consider for implementation as part of the Zoning By-law.

## Zone Structure

**Recommendation | Update the ORM zone structure** – As a first step in refining zoning regulations to implement the ORMCP and WSOP, updated ORM zones should be established based on the WSOP.

An initial framework for ORM zones could be as shown in **Table 1**:

**Table 1 – Preliminary proposed Oak Ridges Moraine zone structure**

New Zone	Former Zone	Description
<b>Oak Ridges Moraine – Countryside (ORM-C)</b>	ORM-C	This zone would align with the current ORM-C zone within the Countryside of the ORMCP.
<b>Oak Ridges Moraine – Natural Core and Linkages (ORM-NCL)</b>	ORM-NC ORM-L	Given the strong alignment between the current ORM-NC and ORM-L zones and policies in the WSOP, there is an

New Zone	Former Zone	Description
		opportunity to consolidate these zones, streamlining interpretation.
<b>Oak Ridges Moraine – Key Feature (ORM-KF)</b>	ENV – Oak Ridges Moraine Area	To more clearly distinguish the intent of the ENV zone with the ORM, there is an opportunity to rename this zone to align with other ORM-related zones. The ENV – Oak Ridges Moraine Area zone is more permissive than the ENV zone variant that applies within settlement areas. This new zone is discussed further in Section 5 of this Report.

Further, there may be an opportunity to rename the current Employment Extractive (EX) zone to align with ORM nomenclature (e.g., Oak Ridges Moraine – Aggregate Operation (ORM-AO)) and organize with other applicable ORM zones for clarity in interpreting the By-law. This approach would transition the current EX zone from the Employment section to the ORM section; however, this change may require the establishment of a non-ORM mineral aggregate zone that could be applied should an aggregate operation be approved on lands outside of the ORM through a site-specific application.

Overall, there is strong alignment between the mapping of the ORMCP and the existing ORM zones. Following confirmation of the zone structure for both ORM and environmental protection zones, and geospatial analysis should be undertaken to confirm alignment between appropriate land use designations and zones.

## General Recommendations

Once the new zone structure has been established, there are several opportunities to explore with respect to permitted uses and zoning regulations in the ORM. These options and recommendations align with the policies of the ORMCP and WSOP and respond to trends currently being observed in the ORM – including the volume of minor variance applications. The regulations of Sections 3.18, 3.19, and 3.20 require a comprehensive update to streamline provisions, support clear interpretation, and support long-term zoning administration.

**Recommendation | Review and streamline regulations for existing dwellings and existing lots –**

Regulations that apply to existing dwellings and existing lots should be reviewed and refined to allow for a degree of flexibility for existing dwellings and construction of accessory dwellings in the ORM, while conforming to the policies of the ORMCP and WSOP. This could include setting the minimum lot area and lot frontage within the ORM as “legally existing”.

Alongside this recommendation, the zoning applied to existing estate residential developments within the ORM should be reviewed case-by-case to understand if any updates are required. At the time of original implementation, residential zoning was not applied to residential subdivisions within the ORM to support ORMCP conformity.

**Recommendation | Review permitted uses and defined terms –** All defined terms that apply within the Moraine should be reviewed to reflect changes in the ORMCP.

**Option | Establish regulations for major development –** There is an opportunity for the Zoning By-law to implement ORMCP policies for major development by establishing a maximum building gross floor area within the ORM zones of 500 square metres. Should a development come forward seeking to exceed this threshold, this application could be handled through a minor variance process. Provincial policies regarding major development may also be regulated through land use permissions, lot requirements (which restrict lot creation), and other measures. Major development could also be addressed through any potential future ORM permitting process developed by the Town.

The WSOP and ORMCP provide clear direction that permitted uses within the ORM Countryside designation varies based on whether the lands form part of a prime agricultural versus rural area. The King Township and New Tecumseth Zoning By-laws both take steps to distinguish permitted uses between rural and prime agricultural areas. There are options to consider in the Zoning By-law that will allow for varied permitted uses in rural and prime agricultural areas which will allow for more flexible development permissions, as contemplated by policy.

**Option 1 | Establish two variants of the Oak Ridges Moraine Countryside zone –** This option aligns with the approach followed in New Tecumseth which establishes “Rural” and “Agricultural” variants of the ORM Countryside zone. It allows permitted uses to be calibrated specifically to each zone, since the ORMCP conditionally permits certain uses in prime agricultural areas within the same designation.

**Option 2 | Implement a new prime agricultural areas overlay map –** This option aligns with the approach followed in King Township which uses an overlay of the prime agricultural areas to enable additional permitted uses in the ORM Countryside zone. This approach streamlines the overall number of zones, while providing clear direction for when certain uses can be permitted.

All requirements related to the ORM should be clearly organized in one section alongside the permitted uses and lot and building requirements for ORM zones to create a user-friendly by-law.

## Zoning Administration

The Zoning By-law is one tool that can be used by the Town to implement and realize the policies of the ORMCP (such as policies related to landform conservation areas). Many policies of the ORMCP require case-by-case review of proposals to understand the implications of the ORMCP on proposed development or uses and guide development review. In consideration of Provincial legislation which limits the Town's ability to apply site plan control for developments under 10 units, there is also an opportunity to consider additional processes that enable landowners and the Town to collaborate to ensure conformity with the ORMCP.

**Option | Implement Oak Ridges Moraine administrative review and permit process** – To supplement the framework set out by the new Zoning By-law, there is an opportunity for the Town to consider a new administrative and/or permit process that applies to development and site alteration within the Moraine. As a next step, it would be beneficial to consult with other municipalities about their challenges and solutions to administering the policies of the ORMCP while minimizing barriers to property improvement.

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## 3. Zoning in the Greenbelt

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**The Greenbelt Plan provides for long-term protection of agricultural land, forests, wetlands, and other natural areas across the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Outside the ORMCP, most remaining rural lands in Whitchurch-Stouffville are within the Greenbelt, generally located in the northwest corner and southern edge of the Town. Today, the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville Zoning By-law applies agricultural and environmental protection zones to areas subject to the Greenbelt Plan.**

This Discussion Paper focuses on how the Town's zoning framework within the Greenbelt needs to be updated to align with the intent of the Greenbelt Plan and WSOP and provide Town staff and the community with the tools to guide responsible and sustainable development.

### 3.1 Current Policy and Zoning

The following provides an overview of the existing policy and regulations in place within Greenbelt that will guide the Zoning By-law.

#### 3.1.1 Provincial Policy and Legislation

The current Greenbelt Plan came into effect on July 1, 2017 and outlines policies to protect the agricultural land base, guide where urban development should take place, and protect and enhance the area's natural and hydrological features and functions. The Greenbelt Plan builds on the policies of the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024, while the *Planning Act* requires that decisions around planning matters conform to provincial plans, including the Greenbelt Plan.

The Greenbelt Plan establishes the Protected Countryside designation to enhance the extent of protected lands covered by ORMCP and Niagara Escarpment Plan, while also improving linkages between these areas and the surrounding major lake systems and watersheds. Within the Town, the Greenbelt Plan sets out three geographic specific policies that apply within the Protected Countryside designation: the Agricultural System, the Natural System, and Settlement Areas, as well as general policies that apply throughout the Protected Countryside.

The Agricultural System of the Greenbelt Plan has two components:

- the agricultural land base, which includes prime agricultural areas and rural lands that are designated in local municipal official plans, and

- the agri-food network of services and assets that are important to the viability of the agri-food sector.

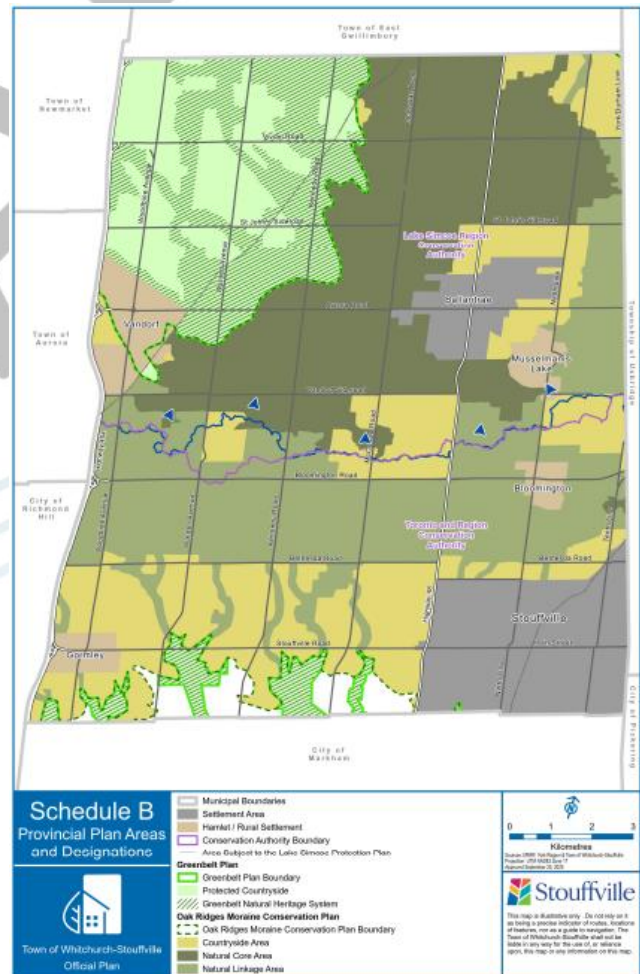
The agricultural land base is intended to provide a continuous productive land base for agricultural activities to occur.

The Natural System of the Protected Countryside is made up of a Natural Heritage System and a Water Resource System that together protect ecologically and hydrologically significant features, areas and functions. The Natural Heritage System is an overlay that applies on top of the prime agricultural area and rural lands designations contained in official plans. As such, permitted uses are those set out within the prime agricultural area and rural lands policies and designations of official plans, subject to the Natural System policies of the Greenbelt Plan.

### 3.1.2 Town of Whitchurch Stouffville Official Plan

The policies and mapping in the WSOP (2025) are the primary ways in which the Greenbelt Plan is applied within Whitchurch-Stouffville. The following key sections of the WSOP guide development within the Greenbelt, along with other policies throughout the Plan:

- Section 2.10.3 guides the provision of infrastructure within the Greenbelt
- Section 3.2.1.1 and 3.2.1.2 provides direction for additional residential units and garden suites
- Section 4.1.2 sets out policies for the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System
- Section 4.1.6 sets out policies for the Regional Greenlands System, which includes the Greenbelt Plan, among others
- Section 5.2.5 guides the development of major recreational uses within the Greenbelt
- Section 5.2.7 guides the development small-scale commercial, industrial, and institutional uses
- Section 5.3.1 provides policies for aggregate resource extraction
- Section 7.4.3 guides lot creation within the Greenbelt



Schedule B (**Figure 3**) of the WSOP delineates the boundaries of land use designations and overlays contained in the Greenbelt, alongside the ORMCP. The policies of the Greenbelt Plan Natural Heritage System apply (Section 4.1.2) as an overlay above the Protected Countryside designation.

Further, the Greenbelt Plan sets out specific policies to enable the creation of secondary dwelling units outside of the Natural Heritage System.

### 3.1.3 Existing Zoning By-law

Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO applies a range of zones within the Greenbelt Plan area which recognize the predominantly agricultural and environmental functions in the Greenbelt Plan area:

- Agricultural (AG) – applied to lands generally subject to the Protected Countryside designation of the Greenbelt Plan
- Environmental Protection (ENV) – applied to delineated natural and hydrological features
- Flood Hazard (FH) – applied to lands situated within the flood plain

As part of a Town initiated zoning by-law amendment to establish a zoning framework for additional residential units (ARUs) in Whitchurch-Stouffville, a new map (Schedule 65) was added to Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO to identify where different ARU permissions apply within the Town. Permissions for ARUs differs within the Greenbelt (and ORM) from those within settlement areas. The permissions for ARUs within the Greenbelt differ between lands inside and outside of the Natural Heritage System overlay.

## 3.2 Analysis and Discussion

The following provides analysis of best and emerging practices with respect to zoning within the Greenbelt and a discussion of key considerations for Whitchurch-Stouffville. Overall, the current policy and legislative frameworks explored in Section 3.1 support investigating different approaches to zoning within the Greenbelt, included specific zones or mapping that identifies the different designations and overlays set out by the Greenbelt Plan.

### 3.2.1 Best and Emerging Practices

This section provides a review of best and emerging practices from peer municipalities who have setup dedicated zoning frameworks that apply within the Greenbelt Plan area. Other communities within the Greenbelt generally apply base agricultural and environmental zones, as applicable, within the Greenbelt Plan area.

## Township of King

The Township of King Countryside Zoning By-law (2022) establishes a Greenbelt Natural Heritage System (GNH) zone to recognize the important natural heritage function of lands within the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System, while continuing to permit appropriate land uses as contemplated by the

Township's Official Plan. The GNH zone contains regulations to regulate dwellings on existing lots of record where zoning would have permitted one when the Greenbelt Plan came into effect. The permitted uses of the GNH largely mirror those permitted by the general Agriculture zone. The By-law also contains regulations to prohibit development and site alteration in key natural and hydrologic features, including a 120 metre buffer, as shown on separate schedule, unless in accordance with an approved site plan.

## Town of Halton Hills

The Town of Halton Hills Zoning By-law (2010) sets out a series of dedicated zones to implement the policies of the Greenbelt Plan, including the:

- **Protected Countryside Natural Heritage System One (PC-NHS1) Zone** – which applies to lands within the Greenbelt that are within a key natural heritage or hydrological feature, as identified by the Province. The limits of this zone include a 30 metre vegetation protection zone as required by the Greenbelt Plan.
- **Protected Countryside Natural Heritage System Two (PC-NHS2) Zone** – which applies to lands within the Greenbelt Plan area that are within the Natural Heritage System (i.e., the overlay).

The Zoning By-law also establishes two Environmental Protection zones (EP1 and EP2) that apply to lands designated in the Official Plan as “Greenlands”. The permissions between the corresponding PC-NHS and EP numbered zones (e.g., EP1 and PC-NHS1) are identical.

The PC-NHS1 zone permits limited and existing agricultural uses and dwellings given that it is applied to defined features. The PC-NHS2 zone permits a much broader range of uses, including existing uses and on-farm diversified uses, recognizing that this zone applies effectively as an “overlay” above the based Protected Countryside (PC) zone. A dedicated Holding provision (H2) applies to lands zoned PC-NHS1 require completion of a scoped Environmental Impact Study to permit the construction of new single detached dwellings, replacement or expansion of existing permitted buildings that increase the ground floor area by 50% or more, and construction of accessory buildings located more than 20 metres from the main building on a lot.

### 3.2.2 Discussion

Much like the policies of the ORMCP, many of the policies of the Greenbelt Plan are criteria-based and require site-specific determinations to understand the cumulative impacts of a proposed development and site alteration. Overall, most peer municipalities reviewed did not take dedicated approaches to implement the Greenbelt Plan in zoning – unlike dedicated zoning frameworks found in the ORM found in all applicable communities.

Based on the analysis outlined in Section 3.1 of this Discussion Paper there appears to be, at a minimum, a basis and requirement for the Zoning By-law to contain zones or mapping that distinguish the applicable policy areas of the Greenbelt Plan from other areas in Whitchurch-Stouffville. For

example, permissions for additional residential units can vary for lands within the natural heritage system in the Greenbelt, compared to other geographies in the Town. The WSOP also recognizes the importance of the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System overlay in forming part of the Town's overall Natural Heritage System, subject to further study. Section 5 of this Discussion Paper explores approaches to environmental protection zoning throughout the Town in detail.

### 3.3 Options and Recommendations

The approach that is explored in this Discussion Paper is to reconcile the policies of the Greenbelt Plan and WSOP with the new Zoning By-law, in ways that provide clarity to Town staff and the community through the planning and development process. There are several recommendations and options to consider for implementation as part of the Zoning By-law.

To help identify lands subject to the designations and overlays set out by the Greenbelt Plan in the Zoning By-law, where different zoning regulations may apply, there are several options that can be considered. The approach ultimately carried forward in the Zoning By-law needs to consider that:

- The WSOP does not provide a basis to zone lands subject to the Greenbelt Plan Natural Heritage System in a restrictive “no development” zone given the ability to allow development, including farming practices, and site alteration subject to criteria and further study.
- The WSOP establishes a Significant Environmental Area designation that applies to defined natural features and areas within the Town, including the Greenbelt Area, where development and site alteration is generally not permitted. Zoning options related to the Significant Environmental Area designation are discussed further in Section 5 of this Discussion Paper.

**Option 1 | Establish dedicated zones within the Greenbelt Plan area** – This option aligns closely with that taken in the Township of King and Town of Halton Hills zoning by-laws within the Greenbelt. This option would see dedicated zones established to recognize the distinct policy areas of the Greenbelt Plan, supporting clear interpretation of zoning regulations.

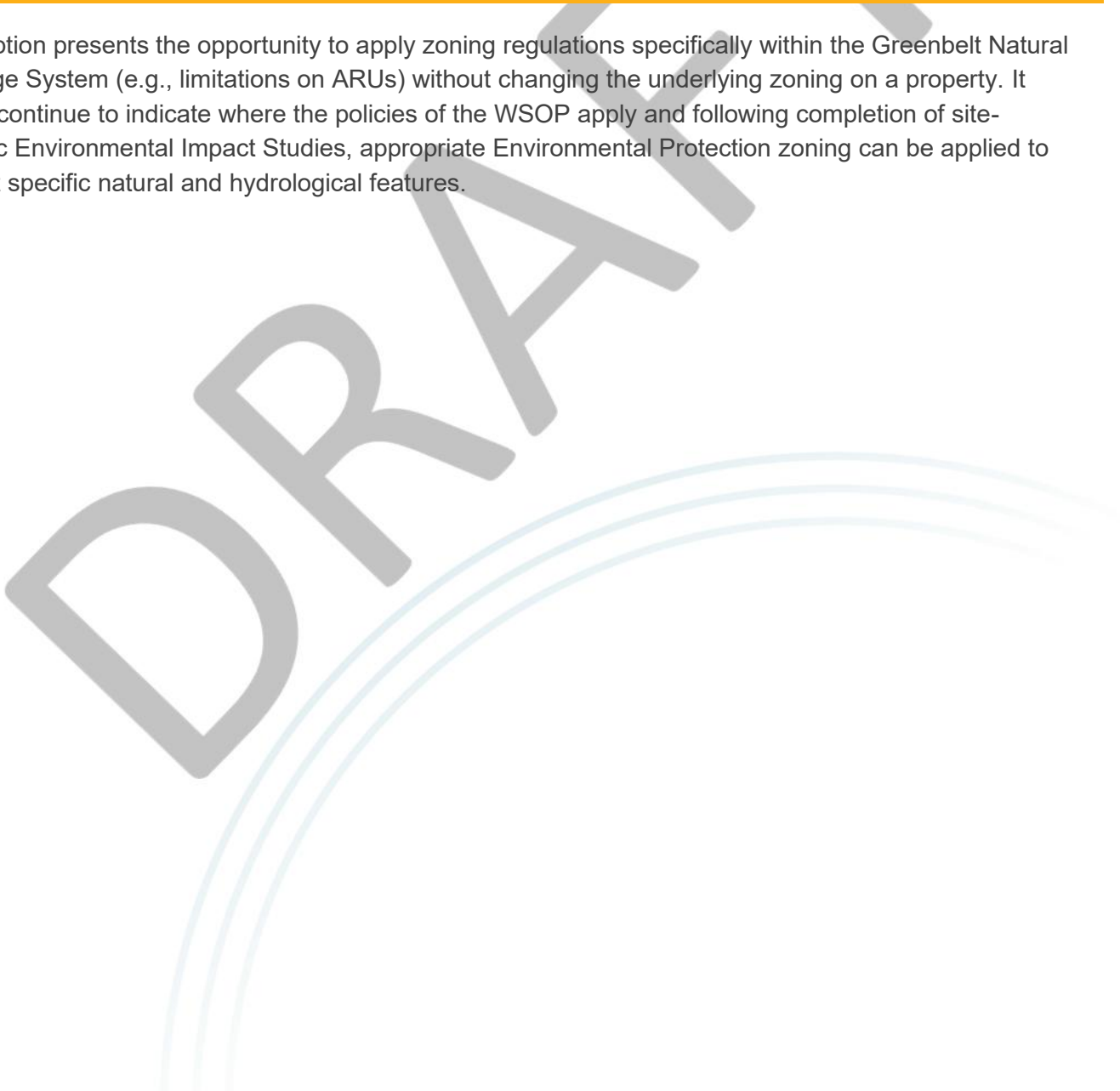
The proposed zones and their application for this option could include:

- An “Agricultural” zone that applies to lands within the Protected Countryside designation of the Greenbelt Plan (serving as the general agricultural zone in the by-law).
- An “Agricultural – Greenbelt” zone that applies to lands within the Greenbelt Plan Natural Heritage System, with permitted uses and lot and building requirements closely aligned with the Agricultural zone, recognizing the range of permitted uses permitted by the Greenbelt Plan and WSOP.
- A “Environmental Protection” zone (as discussed further in Section 5) that could be applied to lands designated Significant Environmental Area in the WSOP or identified through a site-specific application where development and site alteration is generally not permitted.

This option presents the opportunity to clearly identify lands forming part of the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System and distinguish them from general Agricultural lands. It would not be the intention of the Agricultural – Greenbelt zone to restrict all development, but rather closely align with the policies for the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System.

**Option 2 | Implement mapping overlays within the Greenbelt Plan area** – This option aligns with the approach taken to-date in Whitchurch-Stouffville where there is a need to distinguish between different policy areas in the Town. This option would see the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System policy overlay added as a zoning overlay to indicate where a property is subject to specific policies or zoning regulations.

This option presents the opportunity to apply zoning regulations specifically within the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System (e.g., limitations on ARUs) without changing the underlying zoning on a property. It would continue to indicate where the policies of the WSOP apply and following completion of site-specific Environmental Impact Studies, appropriate Environmental Protection zoning can be applied to protect specific natural and hydrological features.



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## 4. On-Farm Diversified Uses and Agriculture-Related Uses

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**On-farm diversified uses and agriculture-related uses play a role in sustaining the agricultural economy. These uses allow farmers to supplement traditional crop and livestock production, improve long-term farm viability, support local supply chains, and encourage reinvestment in rural areas. Many communities across Ontario are implementing modern zoning regulations to enable different types of on-farm diversified uses and agriculture-related uses, while maintaining primary agriculture functions.**

This Discussion Paper explores the Town’s current agricultural zoning regulations for different types of uses in agricultural areas, examines how other communities are enabling agriculture-related uses and on-farm diversified uses, and proposes options and recommendations to be considered for Whitchurch-Stouffville’s unique context.

### 4.1 Current Policy and Zoning

The following provides an overview of how existing policy and regulations support the consideration of on-farm diversified and agriculture-related uses as part of the Zoning By-law.

#### 4.1.1 Provincial Policy and Legislation

The Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 provides direction for enabling on-farm diversified and agriculture-related uses through zoning. Policy 4.3.2.1 permits on-farm diversified and agriculture-related uses in prime agricultural areas, while Policy 2.6.1 permits these uses in rural areas. These uses are required to be compatible with, and not hinder surrounding agricultural operations, and criteria may be established to achieve these objectives.

On-farm diversified uses are defined to mean:

*“uses that are secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property and are limited in area. On-farm diversified uses include, but are not limited to, home occupations, home industries, agri-tourism uses, uses that produce value-added agricultural products, and electricity generation facilities and transmission systems, and energy storage systems.”*

Agriculture-related uses are defined to mean:

*“those farm-related commercial and farm-related industrial uses that are directly related to farm operations in the area, support agriculture, benefit from being in close proximity to farm operations, and provide direct products and/or services to farm operations as a primary activity.”*

The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan provides further direction for establishing agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses in the Moraine. These uses are only permitted within prime agricultural areas in the Natural Core Areas and Natural Linkage designation and within the Countryside designation.

The Province finalized the Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario’s Prime Agricultural Areas in 2016 to provide further guidance to interpret the policies of the Provincial Planning Statement regarding uses permitted in prime agricultural areas, including on-farm diversified and agriculture-related uses. The Guidelines provide examples of the types of uses that constitute on-farm diversified and agriculture-related uses.

### 4.1.2 Town of Whitchurch Stouffville Official Plan

Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 of the WSOP (2025) set out policies for agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses, respectively.

Agriculture-related uses are permitted in both agricultural and rural areas of the Town, subject to criteria, and the Zoning By-law is directed to establish detailed permitted uses and provisions for agriculture-related uses. Agriculture-related uses include uses such as produce and livestock processing, farm equipment repair shops, farm input suppliers (feed, seeds, fertilizers, etc.), and grain drying operations.

On-farm diversified uses are permitted in both agricultural and rural areas of the Town, subject to criteria, to ensure that the use is secondary to the principal agricultural use on the lot. On-farm diversified uses include uses such as value-added operations, small-scale retail uses, small-scale breweries and distilleries, and agri-tourism use. The WSOP sets out detailed policies for agri-tourism uses and provides direction to the Zoning By-law to establish detailed standards.

Section 6.10.6 outlines special provisions that apply within the rural and agricultural areas of the Town and recognize existing uses that would not otherwise be permitted by the policies of the WSOP. Several of these special provisions allow for certain existing commercial and industrial uses, and some major recreational uses, to continue to operate on specific properties.

### 4.1.3 Other Aligned Initiatives

The Town is undertaking a concurrent Agri-Tourism Strategy & Toolkit to determine the most effective approach for supporting agri-tourism in Whitchurch-Stouffville. This project will explore policy and zoning tools that might be required to foster economic development opportunities, informed by consultation with the agricultural and economic development sectors. Recommendations stemming from the Strategy & Toolkit will be considered as the Zoning By-law Update progresses.

#### 4.1.4 Existing Zoning By-law

The Agricultural (AG) zone in Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO permits a range of uses, such as agricultural uses, including those with buildings and structures, a bed and breakfast establishment, farm produce sales outlet, home industry, and home occupation. Specific provisions apply to these uses to limit the scale and intensity of the use. For example, a farm produce sales outlet has a maximum size of 100 m<sup>2</sup> and is only permitted on a lot greater than 25 hectares. Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO does not contain explicit regulations or zones to enable agriculture-related uses as-of-right.

## 4.2 Analysis and Discussion

The following provides analysis of best and emerging practices with respect to agriculture-related uses and on-farm diversified uses and a discussion of key considerations for Whitchurch-Stouffville.

### 4.2.1 Best and Emerging Practices

This section provides a review of best and emerging practices from peer municipalities who have setup zoning frameworks that regulate agriculture-related uses and on-farm diversified uses within their communities.

#### Township of King

The Township of King Countryside Zoning By-law (2022) establishes a range of zones that permit agriculture-related uses, including the:

- **Agriculture Related (AR)** zone which permits a range of agriculture-related uses and is applied through site-specific zoning by-law amendments
- **Rural Employment (RM)** zone which permits agriculture-related uses and existing employment uses on a site-specific basis
- **Hamlet Employment (HM)** zone which permits agriculture-related uses and employment uses within the Township's Hamlet areas

Within these zones, the range of agriculture-related uses includes wineries and micro-breweries, farm implement sales and service uses, crop storage and distribution, and commercial greenhouses. The overall approach in the Countryside Zoning By-law is to require site-specific zoning by-law amendments to apply one of the various zones that enable agriculture-related uses outside of the ORM. The zones enable a range of specific agriculture-related uses, instead of permitting "agriculture-related uses" as an overall use.

The Countryside Zoning By-law permits a wide range of on-farm diversified uses across the Countryside. The By-law defines the term on-farm diversified use and specifies specific uses that qualify as-of-right, such as agri-tourism, farm micro-breweries, farm produce outlet, and on-farm shop or café. These uses

are associated with comprehensive general regulations that regulate the scale of the use, ensuring that they remain secondary to the principal agricultural use.

## Town of New Tecumseth

The Town of New Tecumseth Zoning By-law (2021) defines the term “agriculture-related use” which aligns with the Provincial definition. The use is not permitted as-of-right. The By-law also establishes a Rural Highway Commercial and Rural Industrial zone which permits a range of specific uses that can be considered as agriculture-related uses, including bulk feed and agricultural supply outlets; however, these also permit a range of commercial and industrial uses that would be outside of the definition of agriculture-related. These two zones are applied on a site-specific basis and to reflect existing uses.

The Town’s Zoning By-law defines the term on-farm diversified use, which is not listed as a permitted use in the agricultural zones. It also defines specific types of uses, such as agri-tourism.

## County of Brant

The County of Brant Zoning By-law (2016, as amended) defines and permits agriculture-related uses in the Agricultural zone, as-of-right and subject to criteria. The By-law also defines key terms such as farm-related industrial and farm-related commercial uses to provide further clarity and to ensure that agriculture-related uses are part of a principal farming operation. The criteria to establish an agriculture-related use address the following matters:

- Located outside of the Natural Heritage system and establish of a vegetation protection zone
- A maximum lot coverage of 30%
- Requirements that the majority of product processed, preserved, or packaged be from farm operations in the surrounding area
- Requirements to address Minimum Separation Distance (MDS)
- Requirements for site plan control

The County’s Zoning By-law permits a wide range of on-farm diversified uses within the Agricultural zone by listing “on-farm diversified use” as a permitted use, subject to criteria to ensure they remain secondary to the principal agricultural use.

### 4.2.2 Discussion

Agriculture-related uses are intended to support the general farming community and are not necessarily directly linked or accessory to an individual farm operation like an on-farm diversified use. Provincial and Town policy provide a basis to introduce a framework in the Zoning By-law to guide the establishment of agriculture-related uses and on-farm diversified uses.

For agriculture-related uses, most other peer municipalities take approaches that setup zone(s) and permitted uses for agriculture-related uses that can be applied on a site-specific basis. Many of the criteria required by Provincial and Town policy requires site-specific interpretation and analysis and may be difficult to translate directly into enforceable zoning regulations (e.g., requiring that most product processed be from farm operations in the surrounding area). Further, the Town's layered policy context including the ORM and Greenbelt Plan require careful consideration of all policies in assessing the merits of establishing an agriculture-related use.

For on-farm diversified uses, the WSOP and Provincial policy and guidelines provide a strong basis to broadly enable these uses as-of-right in agricultural and rural zones, subject to criteria. These criteria can include matters such as maximum floor area, maximum area of operation, and parking requirements.

This could be achieved through a dedicated zone(s) which recognizes existing industrial and commercial uses, like the approach taken in King Township, and applied to existing uses and through future applications.

## 4.3 Options and Recommendations

The approach that is explored in this Discussion Paper is to reconcile the policies of Provincial policy and the WSOP with the new Zoning By-law, in ways that support the agricultural economy and provide a clear framework to Town staff and the community through the planning and development process.

### Establishing a Framework for Agriculture-Related Uses

The Town's Official Plan establishes policies which would permit existing commercial and industrial uses to be zoned to recognize the use, subject to criteria. There are several recommendations and options to consider for implementation in the Zoning By-law. In the absence of pre-zoning for agriculture-related uses as-of-right in the rural area, there is an opportunity for the Zoning By-law to define a series of agriculture-related uses and set out criteria for the uses which could be applied on a site-specific basis through a zoning by-law amendment.

**Option | Establish dedicated zone(s) to recognize existing agriculture-related uses in the rural area** – Dedicated zone(s) can be established which enable a range of different uses such as farm service and supply establishments, farm products processing, and agri-business uses as agriculture-related uses. This zone(s) would be applied only on a site-specific basis through a zoning by-law amendment or to lawfully existing agriculture-related uses.

In applying this zone(s), consideration will need to be given to whether existing industrial and commercial uses in the rural area meet the definition of agriculture-related use or if the existing use is not farm-related in nature. These instances should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

**Option | Enable agriculture-related uses in the rural area, subject to criteria** – Agriculture-related uses could be permitted within rural zoned properties, outside of prime agricultural areas subject to comprehensive criteria such as lot size, lot coverage, and environmental protection requirements.

## Criteria for Agriculture-Related Uses

There are a range of criteria which could be applied to agriculture-related uses to ensure compatibility with surrounding agricultural uses. Consideration should be given to advance the criteria set out in the WSOP in the Zoning By-law, where feasible. For example, requiring compliance with MDS, setting requirements for site plan control, or establishing a maximum lot coverage for agriculture-related uses could support the review of site-specific proposals and the application of the zone(s) which permits agriculture-related uses. In the absence of specific criteria for agriculture-related uses in the Zoning By-law, Provincial policy and WSOP would continue to guide site-specific applications and zoning by-law amendment processes.

**Option | Set out specific criteria for agriculture uses to guide development review** – Any criteria for agriculture-related uses should be clearly enforceable or measurable from a zoning compliance perspective and should work alongside the criteria set out in Provincial policy and WSOP.

## Establishing a Framework for On-Farm Diversified Uses

In line with the WSOP and Provincial policy and guidelines, the Zoning By-law should broadly enable on-farm diversified uses in the rural area. Within the ORM and Greenbelt, on-farm diversified uses are specifically permitted within the prime agricultural area.

**Recommendation | Enable on-farm diversified uses across the rural area, subject to criteria** – To enable on-farm diversified uses and provide a degree of flexibility for emerging types of uses, it is recommended that the Zoning By-law implement a dual approach by defining both “on-farm diversified use” but also specific types of uses that would qualify, such as agri-tourism, farm produce outlets, and farm shop or café. This approach could allow for a pathway through a minor variance process for emerging types of businesses that could qualify as on-farm diversified but not specifically listed.

Alongside use permissions for on-farm diversified uses, it is recommended that comprehensive criteria be established in the general regulations to ensure these uses remain secondary to the principal agricultural use.

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## 5. Natural Environment

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**Part of a comprehensive response to a changing climate includes the promotion of environmental protection and enhancement. Most of the Town’s landscape is provincially significant and must be protected and enhanced to ensure that it will sustain life, maintain public health and safety, and provide a high quality of life for current and future generations. The Zoning By-law plays a role in implementing the direction set out in the WSOP for natural areas. The approach embedded into the Zoning By-law needs to consider both the urban and rural contexts of Whitchurch-Stouffville to balance responsible development and vibrant agriculture with environmental protections.**

This Discussion Paper focuses on how the Town’s zoning framework for natural features and hazardous lands within both urban and rural contexts can be updated to better implement environmental protection, flood protection, and related policies. The following sections consider zoning options and recommendations for lands within the natural heritage system, as well as natural hazard where there is an identified regulatory constraint or flood risk.

### 5.1 Current Policy and Zoning

The following provides an overview of how existing policy and regulations support the protection of natural and hydrological features and functions as part of the Zoning By-law.

#### 5.1.1 Provincial Policy and Legislation

The *Planning Act* provides broad direction related to matters of Provincial interest, including the protection of ecological systems and conservation of natural resources. The *Planning Act* also establishes the authority for preparing a zoning by-law, including the types of regulations that can be enforced through zoning.

The Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 (PPS, 2024) provides direction for the long-term protection of natural heritage features. The PPS, 2024 specifically prohibits development and site alteration in significant wetlands and development and site alteration is only permitted in significant woodlands and valley lands, amongst other features, subject to further study.

The Lake Simcoe Protection Plan is a legislated, watershed-based strategy designed to protect and restore the ecological health of Lake Simcoe and its surrounding watershed. Established under *the Lake Simcoe Protection Act*, 2008, the Plan addresses environmental challenges such as climate change,

invasive species, nutrient pollution, and habitat loss. The Lake Simcoe Protection Plan is in effect on lands in Whitchurch-Stouffville, located generally north of Bloomington Road.

The *Conservation Authorities Act* aims to guide municipalities in protecting natural heritage and water resources through science-based planning. Conservation Authorities provide advice to municipalities on natural hazard management and help to regulate development and other activities in areas affected by water-based natural hazards through a permit process. Under the *Conservation Authorities Act*, Conservation Authorities are granted permitting authority within their regulated area to ensure that development does not have an adverse effect on natural features and will not be at risk from or negatively impact natural hazards. Natural hazard lands located within the Town fall under the jurisdiction of two Conservation Authorities, which include the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

As discussed in Sections 2 and 3, the Provincial Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan also provide policies regarding environmental protection and hazardous lands. These policies have been implemented in the Town's Official Plan.

### 5.1.2 Town of Whitchurch Stouffville Official Plan

The WSOP sets out comprehensive policies and mapping to achieve the guiding principle of environmental protection and improvement, as well as improving climate change resilience. To inform the WSOP, the Town completed a Natural Heritage Resources Study (2022) to assist in informing policies and mapping. The Study was intended to provide a basis to update policies and mapping and set out other implementation considerations to support ecosystem planning and natural heritage protection and enhancement.

The Natural Heritage System which forms part of the Town Structure (**Figure 4**) comprises significant natural heritage features and water resources, including woodlands, wetlands, and watercourses. Section 2.7 provides direction to protect the Natural Heritage System's key natural and hydrological features, their associated protection zones, and linkages. The WSOP also recognizes the Natural Heritage System being inclusive of agricultural lands and other existing uses, and the need to support agricultural uses, while protecting and enhancing the System.

Section 4 of the WSOP sets out detailed and comprehensive policies related to the natural environment, including defining the Natural Heritage System, water resources, and natural hazards. The following provides an overview of key considerations for the Zoning By-law:

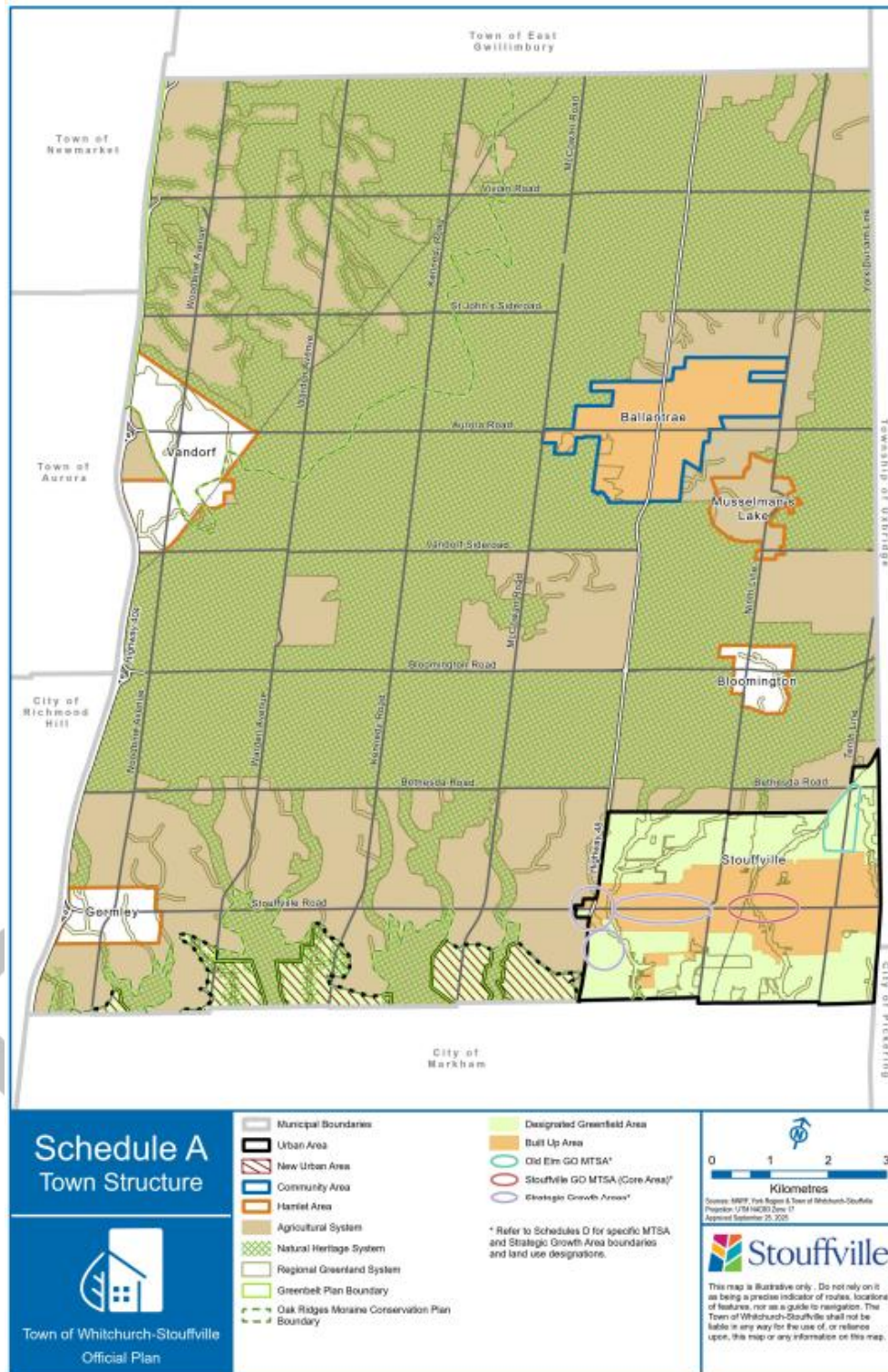
- **Section 4.1** defines all the components that form part of the Natural Heritage System and sets out general policies. Each element of the Natural Heritage System, such as the Regional Greenlands System, woodlands, and wetlands, are subject to specific policies. There are a range of land use permissions enabled in different elements of the Natural Heritage System, many of which are subject to policy criteria or further study. Sections 4.1.15 and 4.1.16 set out policies for development and site alteration within and outside of settlement areas.

- **Section 4.2** sets out policies for water resources, including source protection planning and wellhead protection areas.
- **Section 4.3** provides policies related to natural and human made hazards, including natural hazards, flood plains, and the kettle lake drainage area.
- **Section 4.4** establishes policies to guide implementation of the Natural Heritage System.

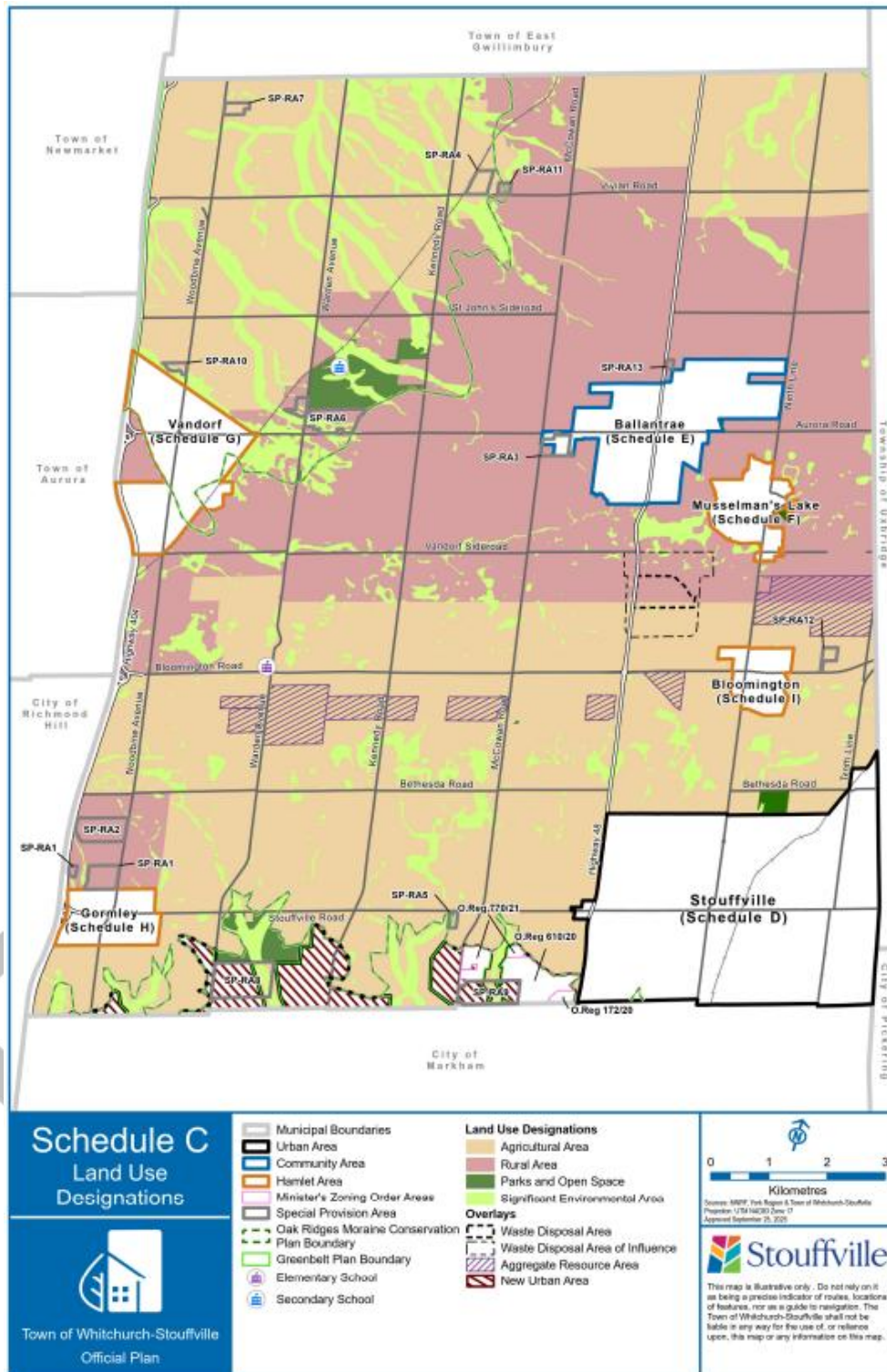
Section 6.3 contains policies for the Significant Environmental Area land use designation which is applied to specific features and areas to limit permitted uses as shown on Schedule C (**Figure 5**). The uses permitted by this designation are limited to:

- Conservation uses and passive recreational uses
- A single detached dwelling on an existing lot of record (subject to an Environmental Impact Study)
- Development required for stream bank erosion and conservation management, subject to criteria
- Existing roads and utilities, subject to criteria

Overall, the policies of the WSOP provide a comprehensive basis for the Zoning By-law to establish zoning regulations that apply to different elements of the natural heritage system and areas subject to natural hazards. Some features and areas have specific policies which do not allow development, while others allow for some forms of development subject to criteria and further study.



**Figure 4 – Whitchurch-Stouffville Official Plan (Schedule A – Town Structure)**



**Figure 5 – Whitchurch-Stouffville Official Plan (Schedule C – Land Use Designations)**

### 5.1.3 Existing Zoning By-law

Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO applies a series of zones and regulations that work together to regulate and limit development in natural features and natural hazard lands. Section 4 of the By-law contains the permissions for each zone as shown in **Table 2**. There are three variations of the Environmental Protection (ENV) zone which relate to different geographies in the Town and one Flood Hazard (FH) zone.

**Table 2 – Overview of Environmental Protection and Natural Hazard Zones**

Current Zone (Section 4.1)	Description
<b>Environmental Protection (ENV)</b> Outside Oak Ridges Moraine Area	Applied to natural features outside of the ORM area and permits a range of agricultural uses, single detached dwellings and accessory uses, home occupations and industries, and limited on-farm diversified uses.
<b>Environmental Protection (ENV)</b> Oak Ridges Moraine Area	As introduced in Section 2 of this Report, this zone is applied to key natural heritage and hydrologic features identified by the Greenbelt Plan and permits a more limited range of uses than the ENV zone outside of the ORM. Many of the permitted uses in this zone are also subject to the regulations of the ORM provisions.
<b>Environmental Protection (ENV)</b> Stouffville / Ballantrae Musselman’s Lake Settlement Area	Applied to natural features within settlement areas, this zone permits only parks, fish, wildlife, and forestry management, and parks. This zone does not permit development.
<b>Flood Hazard (FH)</b>	Applied to the regulatory floodplain limits established by the applicable Conservation Authority or 30 metres on either side of a watercourse or meanderbelt, this zone permits agricultural uses (including buildings and structures) and un-serviced parks. Agriculture buildings and structures require a permit from the Conservation Authority.

Discussion Paper 7 prepared as part of this Project provides a detailed analysis of minor variance and zoning by-law amendment applications. This analysis found that nearly 57% of all variance applications were for properties zoned ENV, FH, or one of the ORM zones. Most of these variances correspond with policies from the 2004 Official Plan, as well as the ORMCP which require additional approval from the Town and the Conservation Authority for developments which threaten sensitive land uses, waterways, or have increased risk of property damage from natural disasters such as flooding. Within the ENV and FH zones, the largest share of applications were for permission to construct accessory structures, with the second most popular application being permission to construct a new dwelling, either in disturbed or undisturbed areas on a lot.

## Environmental Protection

Section 2.3.3 provides an overview of how the boundaries of the Environmental (ENV) zones were determined and how they are to be interpreted. As stated in this section, the ENV zones represent key natural heritage features and hydrologically sensitive features which refine the policies of the (now former) Official Plan. The extent of the mapping is derived from a series of Provincial, Regional, and Local sources. Within the Ballantrae and Musselman's Lake settlement areas, mapping has been based on the approved Environmental Management Strategy, adjusted where development has already occurred or approved.

Section 2.3.3 enables refinements and adjustments to the ENV zone boundaries without an amendment to the by-law, based on approved environmental studies. Where an ENV zone boundary has been altered, the land formerly subject to this zone is interpreted as being subject to the immediately adjacent zone. Further, where an approved study identifies a new area outside of the ENV boundaries requiring protection, the zoning of said new feature is interpreted to be ENV.

Section 3.20 provides additional regulations that apply to the ENV and FH zones located within the ORMCP, as discussed in Section 2 of this Report. Specifically, Section 3.20.3 notes within the Ballantrae-Musselman's Lake and Stouffville settlement areas where there are approved studies, the standards of the approved studies prevail over the requirements of Section 3.20.1 and 3.20.2.

## Natural Hazards

Section 2.3.1 clarifies that the boundaries of the Flood Hazard (FH) zone align with the regulatory flood line, as determined by the applicable Conservation Authority or 30 metres from each side of the meanderbelt of a watercourse. Section 3.20.4 reiterates within the ORM, the FH zone represents hydrologically sensitive features and that where detailed mapping is not available, the FH zone represents 30 metres on either side of the meanderbelt. Where the boundary of the FH zone is reduced or removed, the zoning of the land formerly subject to this zone is interpreted as being subject to the immediately adjacent zone.

Section 2.7 sets out regulations for flood vulnerable areas. Where the suffix "f" follows a zone, new buildings or additions to existing buildings may only be permitted subject to a permit being approved by the applicable Conservation Authority.

Section 3.20.5 prohibits development and site alteration within 120 metres of the boundaries of the meanderbelt within the FH zone unless an approved study confirms no adverse effect on the feature. Section 3.20.6 notes that the Town may require both hydrological evaluation and natural heritage evaluation to confirm no adverse impact, as required by the ORMCP.

## Wellhead Protection Areas

Section 2.11.1 and 2.11.2 establish provisions that apply within Wellhead Protection Areas and High Aquifer Vulnerability areas, as shown on Schedule 58-61 and 63. Generally, these provisions prohibit the storage of materials and substances that could impact water quality and apply as an overlay above the base zoning requirements.

## 5.2 Analysis and Discussion

The following provides analysis of best and emerging practices with respect to environmental zoning and a discussion of key considerations for Whitchurch-Stouffville.

### 5.2.1 Best and Emerging Practices

This section provides a review of best and emerging practices related to environmental zoning in peer municipalities both in an urban and rural context.

#### Township of King

The Township of King Countryside Zoning By-law (2022) uses of a series of zones, overlays, and regulations to apply environmental zoning within the Township's rural area, which includes its Hamlet areas. These zones, overlays, and regulations include:

- Section 3.44 establishes regulations for development within the Conservation Authority Regulated Areas, which are shown on the zone schedules (Schedule A). The overlay limits certain sensitive uses on lands identified by the Township and Conservation Authority.
- Schedule B-1 depicts the wellhead protection areas, subject to additional regulations to limit permitted uses where there could be an impact to wells.
- Schedule E delineates mapping of Natural Heritage Features and their associated 120 metre buffer, as mapped in the Township's Official Plan, with the goal of supporting implementation of Provincial plans and Township Official Plan through zoning.
- An Environmental Protection (EP) zone has been setup to be applied where the limits of a Natural Heritage Feature (and associated buffers) have been determined through an Environmental Impact Study or where they exist today.

Overall, the approach to environmental zoning in King Township is to apply a layered approach to regulation that reflects further refinements to feature boundaries on a site-specific basis while also providing user-friendly tools such as overlays to support zoning implementation and interpretation.



## 5.2.2 Discussion

Provincial policies and the WSOP provide a strong basis for the Zoning By-law to contain specific and detailed zones and regulations related to zoning in the natural heritage system and natural hazards. There is no single, accepted approach to implementing a Natural Heritage System through a zoning by-law amongst Ontario municipalities. Rather, the approach taken by each municipality needs to be based on each unique individual local and regional context.

### General Approach to Regulation

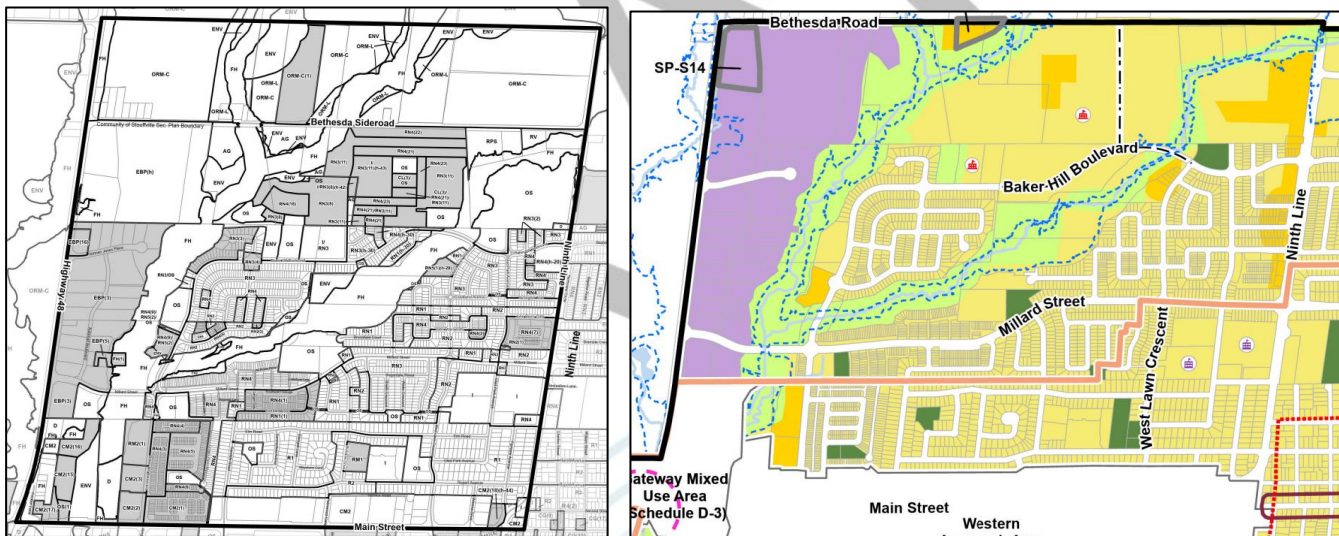
Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO applies a layered approach to natural heritage and natural hazard zoning within the urban and rural areas. The ENV and FH zones work alongside the ORM zones to implement the policies of Provincial policy and the WSOP. The following elements of existing regulation should be considered and refined in preparing the Zoning By-law:

- Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO contains many regulations which enable flexibility in the determination of ENV and FH zone boundaries. This approach can present challenges with zoning administration by allowing mapping changes without formal amendment processes. It can also provide ambiguity to landowners in understanding the types of regulations that apply to their property. Descriptions of each zone should be clearly written to provide an understanding of how they were applied.
- Many existing regulations are tied to the completion of detailed environmental studies to refine the boundaries of ENV and FH zones. Section 34 of the *Planning Act* clearly establishes the role of zoning to restrict development or land use, but not the requirement of studies. Studies may be required via the use of a holding symbol, but a zoning by-law should not directly require a study. Requiring studies is a component of the WSOP and applied through site-specific development applications and planning processes.
- The approach to nomenclature in the ENV zones can also present interpretation challenges by using the “ENV” zone code in three different geographies. This approach requires the user to know which area of the Town they are referring to when consulting the zone mapping which simply identifies the ENV zone without the geographic identifier.
- To support interpretation of the By-law where multiple zones apply to a lot, clear regulations should be introduced to address instances of split zoning.

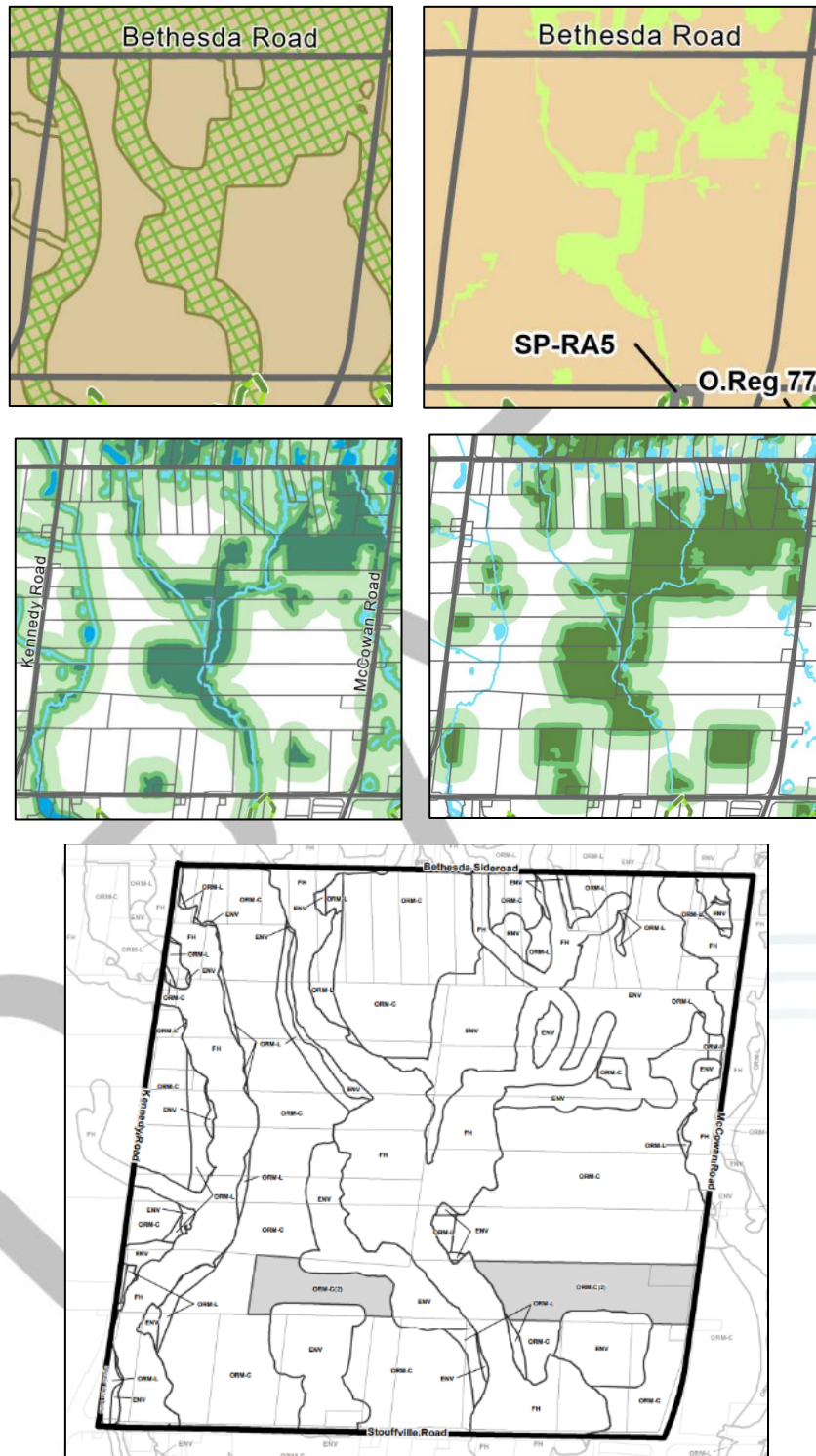
## Mapping Alignment

Within the rural areas of the Town, there are discrepancies between the Natural Heritage System mapping of the WSOP and zoning. The Flood Hazard (FH) zone is used predominantly to reflect natural hazard lands and key hydrologic features, while the ENV zone is applied to features and associated 30 metre vegetative protection zone buffers. Overall, there are inconsistencies between the mapping of the WSOP (both the Natural Heritage System on Schedule A, Significant Environmental Area designation on Schedule C, and detailed Natural Heritage and Key Hydrologic Features on Schedule K) and Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO with respect to the Natural Heritage System.

Within the urban areas of the Town, there appears to be stronger alignment between the mapping of the WSOP and zoning. This is to be expected given that many of the natural heritage features within settlement areas have been determined through site or area-specific environmental studies that have comprehensively determined the extent of features and corresponding limits of development. There is strong alignment between the FH zone and the regulatory flood line in the WSOP (shown as an overlay above other land use designations within settlement areas).



**Figure 7 – Example of mapping alignment between the WSOP and Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO within respect to the Natural Heritage System in the northwest corner of Stouffville**



**Figure 8 – Example of mapping alignment between the WSOP and Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO with respect to the Natural Heritage System in the rural area**

## Natural Hazards Policy Alignment

Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO takes a restrictive approach regulating development within the floodplain through implementation of the FH zone. This zone is restrictive, permitting only agricultural uses (including buildings and structures) and un-serviced parks. This zone applies to both the urban and rural areas of the Town. The WSOP provides a strong basis to implement regulations for natural hazards in the Zoning By-law. Section 4.3.1.1 acknowledges that the delineation of hazardous lands and sites will be confirmed through the development application review process or additional studies, in consultation with Conservation Authorities.

In this context, the applicable Conservation Authority may require a permit to build within their regulation limit, which is intended to encompass hazardous lands and sites and wetlands. Some recent zoning by-laws in Ontario have illustrated the Conservation Authority regulation limit as a convenience feature in the Zoning By-law, as an overlay or an appendix map. However, the Conservation Authority's regulation limit will not correspond to the Natural Heritage System, since the Natural Heritage System may include other features that are not reviewed by the Conservation Authority (e.g., woodlands). In addition, the Natural Heritage System may not correspond with the Conservation Authority's regulation limit as there are areas of the Town where the regulation limit extends beyond the natural features. The regulation limit is also subject to change and updated mapping may be made available from time to time.

## Wellhead Protection Policy Alignment

Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO identifies specific uses that are prohibited within wellhead protection areas (WHPAs), such as the storage of petroleum fuels, road salt, and other contaminants. The WSOP identifies a similar but more extensive list of uses that are subject to specific requirements in WHPAs. Section 4.2.4.1 identifies the list of uses that may be permitted subject to an approved Source Water Impact Assessment and Mitigation Plan. Overall, it appears that the WSOP is more permissive than Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO by allowing uses in WHPAs subject to further study. Schedule N of the WSOP delineates the WHPAs and associated travel time zones that are subject to different policies. Similarly, Schedule 68 of Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO delineates the WHPAs. There appears to be minor differences between these two maps (**Figure 9**), with WSOP being the more current version.

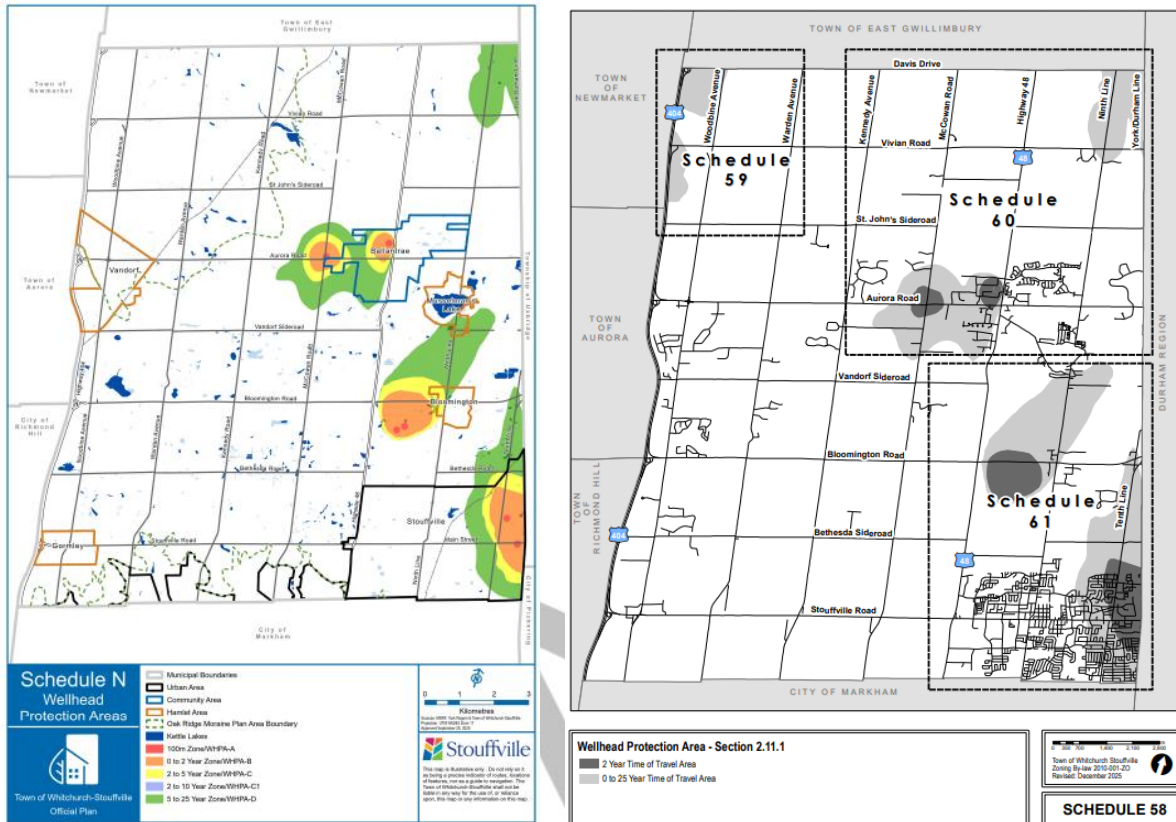
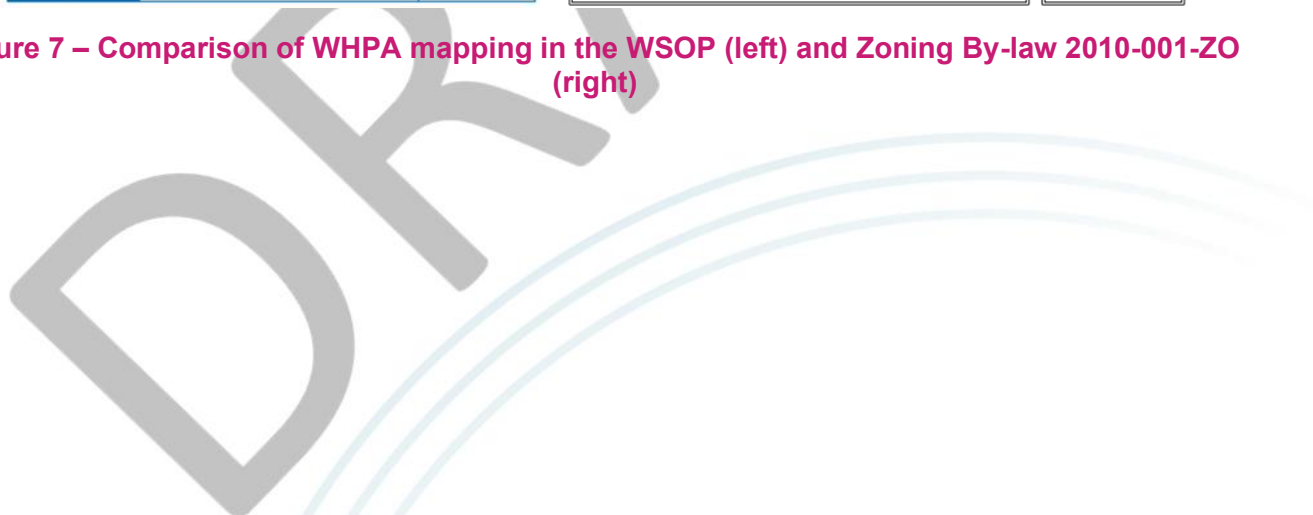


Figure 7 – Comparison of WHPA mapping in the WSOP (left) and Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO (right)



## 5.3 Options and Recommendations

The approaches that are explored in this Discussion Paper reconcile the policies of Provincial policy and the WSOP with the new Zoning By-law, in ways that support environmental protection and provide a clear and enforceable framework to Town staff and the community through the planning and development process. There are several recommendations and options to consider for implementation in the Zoning By-law.

### Environmental Zoning

**Recommendation | Update the environmental protection zoning framework** – As a first step in refining zoning regulations to implement Provincial policy and WSOP, updated zones should be established. At a minimum, one restrictive Environmental Protection zone in which buildings and structures are generally not permitted except related to conservation.

An initial framework for environmental protection zones could be as shown in **Table 3**. Leaving the zoning as status quo does not take steps to advance the intent of the WSOP and does not refine how environmental zoning is administered in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

**Table 3 – Preliminary proposed environmental protection zone structure**

New Zone or Overlay	Former Zone or Overlay	Description
<b>Environmental Protection (ENV) Zone</b>	ENV Zone – Settlement Areas  ENV Zone – Outside of ORM	This zone would be setup as a restrictive zone that prohibits buildings and structures, except related to conservation uses. Options and recommendations for zoning within the Greenbelt are addressed in Section 3.3 of this Report.
<b>Oak Ridges Moraine – Key Feature (ORM-KF) Zone</b>	ENV – Oak Ridges Moraine Area Zone	To more clearly distinguish the intent of the ENV zone within the ORM, there is an opportunity to rename this zone to align with other ORM-related zones. The ENV – Oak Ridges Moraine Area zone is more permissive than the ENV zone variant that applies within settlement areas or other rural areas. Mapping of the ORM-KF would be reviewed align with the WSOP.

New Zone or Overlay	Former Zone or Overlay	Description
<b>Wellhead Protection Areas Overlay</b>	Wellhead Protection Areas Overlay	The existing policies and mapping of Wellhead Protection Areas would be reviewed against the WSOP to ensure alignment.

To resolve the mapping discrepancies between the WSOP and Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO there are several considerations and options to explore:

- Within urban areas, Provincial policies and WSOP provide a strong basis to zone lands designated as Significant Environmental Areas in the restrictive ENV zone.
- Within the ORM, Provincial policies and WSOP provide a strong basis to carry forward existing ENV zone mapping and apply the more permissive proposed ORM-KF zone. In cases where site-specific studies have determined the full extent of features, the ENV zone can be applied. Further, lands designated as Significant Environmental Areas in the WSOP should be placed in the ENV zone.
- In the remaining rural areas, Provincial policies and WSOP provide a strong basis to zone lands designated as Significant Environmental Areas in the restrictive ENV zone. As discussed in Section 3.3 of this Report, the approach to zoning in the natural heritage system within the Greenbelt requires careful consideration.

These proposed steps to mapping of the various environmental zones balances the requirements of Provincial policy, the WSOP, and potential landowner concerns in instances where the restrictive ENV zone is not justified. The overall approach to mapping in the Zoning By-law should be applied in defined zones where the limits of development are known, and more flexible zones and overlays where further development can occur or further study is required.

To further support implementation of the Natural Heritage System set out by the WSOP, there is a further option to map the NHS as an overlay on a standalone map (similar to the approach in King Township) to implement the policies of the ORMCP which limit development on or within 120 metres of the Natural Heritage System.

**Option | Implement a new Natural Heritage System overlay map** – This would translate the key natural and hydrologic features, as shown on Schedule K of the WSOP, into a new zone map that serves as a convenience feature for the user, showing both the feature and buffer areas. Regulations could be applied to lands within or adjacent to these features.

## Natural Hazard Zoning

In recognition of the WSOP policy that addresses the extent of natural hazards and provides direction to engage with Conservation Authorities to confirm the limits of hazardous lands and sites, there is an opportunity to implement a refined zoning framework for natural hazards. Under either option it is important to acknowledge that hazard lands are typically subject to more restrictive zoning as they are intended to protect people and property from flood risk.

**Option 1 | Status quo** – This approach would continue to use the FH zone to regulate development within the floodplain. Permitted uses in the FH zone should be reviewed to confirm alignment with the WSOP particularly as they related to conservation uses and flood and erosion control works. Should this option be supported, there may be further opportunities to refine the boundaries of the zones based on updated floodplain data, as may be available from the Conservation Authorities. Further consultation is needed to assess the appropriateness of the current mapping.

**Option 2 | Introduce a new Conservation Authority Regulatory Limit overlay and apply ENV zone to lands removed from the FH zone** – This approach requires several steps to implement and would see the removal of the FH zone in its current form. The first step would be to implement a new Conservation Authority Limit overlay on a schedule with associated regulations. These tools would be the primary way of addressing natural hazard lands in the Zoning By-law. The second step would be to apply the ENV zone to lands previously zoned FH, particularly in urban areas, and on a case by case basis in the rural areas (as discussed earlier in this section).

Both options have associated pros and cons and varying levels of effort required to implement. Option 1 would maintain the status quo and leave delineation of the FH and ENV zones as they exist now. Option 2 takes a hybrid approach to apply appropriate ENV zoning where the boundaries of the feature are known, while acknowledging that all development within the Conservation Authority regulatory limit is subject to receiving a permit. Under Option 2, a map of the Conservation Authority regulatory limit would be included as an overlay schedule and serve as a convenience feature to the reader. Regulations would be implemented to direct development through a permit application process. Consideration should be given to how changes to regulated area mapping are implemented through housekeeping amendments.

Under either option, the mapping and associated regulations of the floodplain (-f) suffix should be reviewed to ensure relevance and minimize layered regulations, where possible.

The Town should also consider taking steps to update natural hazard mapping on a regular basis as new mapping data becomes available through Town-initiated housekeeping amendments to the Zoning By-law.

## Summary of Environmental and Natural Hazard Zoning

Overall, the approach followed for the Town's Zoning By-law will need to consider changes to both environmental zoning and floodplain zoning, to inform a comprehensive approach for the natural heritage system and natural hazards. The Zoning Strategy Report will further refine the analysis and recommendations of this Report to determine where each zone and overlay should apply, and the steps needed to be taken to implement the preferred approach.

### Wellhead Protection Areas

There is an opportunity to more closely align the mapping and regulations of the Zoning By-law with the WSOP. The mapping of the WSOP is more up to date and its policies provide some level of additional flexibility for permitted uses, subject to further study, when compared to the current zoning regulations. King Township enables the identified uses within WHPAs subject to further study.

**Recommendation | Update wellhead protection area mapping and regulations** – This would involve updating the mapping of WHPAs in the Zoning By-law to match that in the WSOP. Regulations should also be revised to reflect the travel time areas of each WHPA and identify that uses may be permitted subject to further study.

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## 6. Other Rural and Natural Environment Zoning Topics

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Across the rural area, there are several other topics and issues to be considered in the Zoning By-law. This section provides an overview of what Provincial policy and the WSOP requires, how the issue is addressed in zoning today, and considerations to explore.

### 6.1 Agriculture Uses

Provincial policy provides a clear definition of agriculture to ensure that normal farm practices are permitted in agricultural areas. The Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 defines agriculture as “the growing of crops, including nursery, biomass, and horticultural crops; raising of livestock; raising of other animals for food, fur or fibre, including poultry and fish; aquaculture; apiaries; agro-forestry; maple syrup production; and associated on-farm buildings and structures, including, but not limited to livestock facilities, manure storages, value-retaining facilities, and housing for farm workers, when the size and nature of the operation requires additional employment”. Notably, this definition of “agriculture” includes associated on-farm buildings and structures.

The WSOP carries forward the definition of agriculture from Provincial policy. The Official Plan explicitly permits agricultural uses and normal farm practices in both the Agricultural and Rural designations.

Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO establishes a definition for “agricultural uses, buildings and structures”, which means “land, buildings, or structures used for: i) growing crops, including nursery and horticultural crops ii) raising livestock and other animals, including horses, poultry and fish iii) aquaculture iv) tree farms and syrup production. Section 4 of the By-law permits both “agricultural uses, buildings and structures” and “agricultural uses, no buildings and structures” the AG, ENV, ORM-C, ORM-L, and ORM-NC zones. The By-law also only prohibits “agricultural uses, buildings and structures” on lots less than 0.8 hectares in size or on any lot within a registered plan of subdivision. The effect of this regulation appears to limit agricultural buildings and structures on small lots and in areas approved for future development. This approach also distinguishes between agricultural use with and without farm-related buildings and structures.

**Recommendation** | Provincial policy, including the ORMCP, distinctly permit agriculture uses and normal farm practices. The definition and permissions for agriculture in the Zoning By-law should be reviewed to implement the policies of the WSOP and to provide for normal farm practices, including buildings and structures.

There is also an opportunity to comprehensively review the types of uses permitted within the new agricultural zone(s). For example, the Township of Woolwich Zoning By-law identifies specific types of farm buildings and structures that may be permitted, based on a range of lot sizes. Generally, larger lot sizes permit a broader range of uses,

## 6.2 Cannabis Cultivation and Processing

Following completion of a study of cannabis cultivation and production facilities, Town Council adopted Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments related to these uses. Section 5.2.3 of the WSOP sets out policies and criteria for the development of cannabis cultivation and cannabis processing facilities. These uses require a site-specific zoning by-law amendment to be established, subject to criteria.

Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO defines the terms “cannabis processing”, “indoor cannabis cultivation”, and “outdoor cannabis cultivation”, which are not permitted uses in any Rural zone. Cannabis processing is also not permitted as-of-right in any Employment zone. The By-law sets out further specific regulations for these uses addressing matters such as lot size, setbacks, and restrictions on permitting these uses on a lot with a dwelling unit.

**Recommendation** | It is recommended that the definitions and regulations from Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO for cannabis cultivation and cannabis processing facilities be carried forward in the Zoning By-law as they were recently updated through a 2022 Town-initiated zoning by-law amendment.

## 6.3 Farm Help Accommodations

Farm help accommodations are dwellings used for the permanent or seasonal housing of farm employees who work at or support the principal agricultural use on a farm. The WSOP (2025) permits farm help accommodations in both the Agricultural and Rural Area designations, subject to criteria set out in Section 5.2.6. The criteria address instances where farm help accommodations are on the same lot as on-farm diversified and agriculture-related uses as well as criteria to address land use compatibility.

Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO permits an “accessory farm dwelling unit” in the AG, ENV, ORM-C, ORM-L, and ORM-NC zones, subject to specific provisions in Section 3.5 of the By-law. This use is permitted on farms greater than 10 hectares in size and is not permitted to be severed from the lot.

**Recommendation** | The permissions for accessory farm dwelling units should be reviewed through the new Zoning By-law to address the new criteria set out by the WSOP and to ensure alignment with the requirements of the ORMCP and Greenbelt Plan. There is also an opportunity align terminology with the WSOP.

## 6.4 Kennels

Kennels support animal care services within the community but can also raise land use concerns related to noise and compatibility with surrounding properties. As a result, municipalities often regulate kennels to balance operational needs with other community objectives. The Town's Business Licensing By-law, in part, regulates licensed kennels which are used for non-medical care and grooming, keeping, and breeding of dogs. The definition of kennel under the Business Licensing By-law specifically excludes a veterinary clinic. The By-law allows kennels to be constructed and operated:

- On a lot greater than 5 hectares in size;
- On a lot zoned "Rural" in the zoning by-law; and
- Further than 100 feet from the lot line of an adjacent parcel.

Section 5.2.4 of the WSOP sets out criteria for kennels and animal hospitals which are permitted in the Rural Area designation, subject to criteria. The criteria require kennels and animal hospitals to be on lots greater than 2 hectares in size and to be located away from property lines to address compatibility with adjacent uses.

Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO sets out a definition for kennels, which are distinguished from other similar uses such as veterinary clinics and animal daycare centres. Kennels and animal daycare centres are not permitted as-of-right in the Zoning By-law. Veterinary clinics are permitted as-of-right in certain commercial zones.

The licensing by-law and WSOP provide clear direction that kennels are intended to only be permitted in Rural areas. There is an opportunity for the Zoning By-law to establish some regulation and direction for kennels. For example, the King Township Countryside Zoning By-law permits kennels only within the Agriculture Related zone, which is applied on a site-specific basis. It also establishes a series of general regulations for kennels, which address compatibility matters including minimum lot areas and setbacks. King Township provides a further definition of an "agricultural animal clinic" which cares for animals associated with normal farm practices. This use is permitted as of right as an on-farm diversified uses, consistent with Provincial guidelines. The Province's Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas (Publication 851) identify that kennels could qualify as an on-farm diversified use as a home occupation.

**Option 1** | Consider establishing general regulations for kennels in the Zoning By-law to guide site-specific applications. Kennels could be permitted in the zone (as discussed in Section 4) that permits agriculture-related uses and applied through site-specific amendments. Alongside this option, there is an opportunity to consider definitions for agricultural animal clinics, which may differ from “animal hospitals” as permitted (but not defined) in the WSOP.

**Option 2** | Consider establishing general regulations for kennels in the Zoning By-law which could be permitted as-of-right on lands subject to the Rural designation in the WSOP. This could be achieved through an overlay map which shows areas subject to this designation.

**Option 3** | Consider permitting kennels as an on-farm diversified use, subject to criteria, that limit the size and scale of the use.

## 6.5 Lake Simcoe Protection Plan

As discussed in Section 5.1 of this Report, the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan is in effect on lands in Whitchurch-Stouffville, located generally north of Bloomington Road. Zoning By-law 2010-001-ZO does not contain any specific regulations or mapping related to the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan. The WSOP sets out general policies which require conformity with the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan but does not provide detailed policies that would inform potential zoning requirements.

**Recommendation** | To inform the draft Zoning By-law, there is an opportunity engage with key stakeholders on the need for zoning requirements on lands subject to the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan.

## 6.6 Small-Scale Commercial, Industrial, and Institutional Uses

Section 5.2.7 of the WSOP guides the development of small-scale commercial, industrial, and institutional (ICI) uses, which are permitted in the Rural Area designation, within the Countryside Area designation of the ORMCP or Protected Countryside Area of the Greenbelt Plan. The WSOP sets out comprehensive criteria on which to evaluate a proposed ICI use and provides direction for the Zoning By-law to set appropriate standards to ensure the use is small-scale and in keeping with the rural character of the area. To facilitate future development of small-scale ICI in the Rural designation, the Zoning By-law should consider different approaches.

**Option 1** | Consider establishing a dedicated zone that would enable small-scale ICI to be applied on a site-specific basis through a planning and development application. This process would allow for review against the criteria of the WSOP and be tied to an approved site plan.

**Option 2** | Consider permitting a limited range of small-scale ICI uses in a rural zone and implement use-specific criteria to guide the establishment of the use. Small-scale ICI uses could include commercial sales or services related to resource management, supporting aggregate uses, and schools, places of worship, community halls, and cemeteries.

In developing a preferred approach to regulating small-scale ICI uses, careful consideration should be given to the types of uses permitted, alignment with the proposed agriculture-related use zoning framework, and providing enforceable criteria to guide development.