

I have been listening to comments from farmers about this issue, and have collected some notes to share today. With your approval Mr. Chair, I would like to share this 3 page document.

I would like to thank Grey County Council for directing the County Planning Department to seek further public consultation about sections of OPA Amendment 11. We would urge the planning department to go even further, as per this brief letter that I will read from the Grey County Beef Farmer's Association (GCBFA), ***In accordance with their Motion on Monday October 3, 2022, The GCBFA is preparing to address Grey County Council, Grey County Planner, and the Grey County Agricultural Committee to express their concerns for Amendment 11. Although not arguing a position with the amendment at this time, the GCBFA would echo concerns from others in the community talking about the potential to "industrialize rural and agricultural land" in the whole of Grey County, including Grey Highlands.***

***Before council, decides to move forward on the suggested Official Plan Amendment 11, GCBFA is requesting further consultation be conducted with other commodity and agricultural groups in Grey County, allowing all to fully understand and address the impact created by this amendment. Respectfully GCBFA.***

I would like to thank and commend Planner Taylor and the planning department for their efforts on Amendment 11. It has taken significant work, so, the last thing you probably want to consider is further delays. But, these amendments will impact all of the county, and the consequences need to be clearly understood before a final decision is rendered.

I would like to point out that the change detailed in Item # 90, to allow OFDUs on smaller parcels was based on a request, as it says in the rationale, "from farmers with the support of a planning consultant". As earlier comments from the planning department stated, that suggestion came from a representative, and farmers have pointed out to me that he lives in Wellesley ON. Based on what I have heard from local farmers, I would say that most are not in agreement with this suggested change.

Amendment 11 is to come back to County Council on Oct 13 - the last time they sit before the election. Perhaps as deputy warden McQueen has suggested, items # 15, 17, 18, 90, 91, 92, should be pulled from Amendment 11. The other items could be approved, and then the OFDU related amendments can be given the due diligence that they deserve – and ensure that the core principals of the PPS - Protection, Compatibility and Appropriateness, are met. If it is not possible to deal with the OFDU related sections separately on Oct 13, we do hope that the current council will decide to defer this decision on OPA 11 until the new council is established.

I would also like to call attention to the decision made on Wednesday afternoon at the Grey Highlands Council meeting. Importantly, Council unanimously denied an official plan amendment proposal that was also seeking to revise the definition of small scale to permit OFDUs on lots between 10 and 20 HA within the rural designation.

As you know, I work at Grey Ag Services. Our office strives for neutrality on issues such as these. So today, I will act as a conduit for the voices of others who feel they have not been given the opportunity to speak to this issue. We hope that these comments that I share today will be respected, heard, and considered before final decisions are made by County council.

I should add, I do live in rural Grey Highlands, and my husband farms. On my 12-minute drive to work, in one small portion of Grey County, I drive past 6 relatively new OFDUs, either already built or in progress.

OFDUs, as most people feel they were originally intended, enabled an established farmer needing to generate additional income, to start an on-farm business. Most of the businesses were ag related, and supported the local ag community – like the shop that did some welding, fixed your tractor etc. That system works well!!

OFA has reiterated today that with that clause, *“but not limited to”*, an OFDU can be almost anything, and that is what we are experiencing now in Grey County – many of the new C4s are industrial manufacturing facilities. There are concerns whether the C4 is truly secondary to the ag operation, OFA clarified today that it only needs to be secondary to ag spatially (and temporally according to the guidelines).

Every issue has two sides. On the positive side, these OFDUs that are being established have created jobs for some individuals, and the merits of local manufacturing have never been more evident than during Covid. The price of farms escalated over the past few years, due to many factors, but in part, that increase was due to the demand for land to house OFDUs. That spike in farm prices ended up being a wonderful retirement package for retiring farmers.

However, on the flip side, this escalation in farm real estate prices also created bidding wars between existing Grey County farmers and those that wanted to build the OFDU. The end result was that only a few could afford the farms, so plans for expansion, and succession were dashed. Some farmers have expressed that they feel like they are being “squeezed out”.

Some Southgate farmers that I spoke to were in a different mindset regarding OFDUs, versus many Grey Highlands farmers. Southgate had their onslaught of C4s 10-20 years ago (or earlier), so they seemed to be more accepting of it, but it was noted that there were growing pains to get to where they are today, and some question what will occur over the next decade. Many of the C4s are servicing area farm operations. They are pleased with how the farms have been cleaned up, and the farms are viewed as much more productive now than they ever were. It was noted that the roads are in disrepair!! Many of the roads across Grey County were not constructed to endure the amount, or type of additional traffic that they are experiencing from the OFDUs.

Grey Highlands, perhaps more than any other municipality at the moment, is experiencing a tsunami of C4's. Change is hard, but when listening to the farmers, I believe that their concerns are broader than just a knee jerk reaction to Change.

One of the guidelines for OFDUs that OFA listed for us earlier was – *“shall be compatible with, and shall not hinder, surrounding ag operations”*. Planning policies should ensure that farm businesses/OFDUs do not change the rural character of the area. I think the nature of Grey Highlands, and perhaps other areas, are quite different than Southgate. They attract more tourism. Perhaps the more industrial C4s are less compatible with picturesque rural landscapes.

Some of the concerns shared around the individual and cumulative impacts of more industrial OFDUs included:

- Road issues, as mentioned earlier.
- Noise concerns. If the density of the OFDUs increase, it is anticipated that so will the cumulative impact of these noise concerns.
- There are concerns over potential risks to our environment – air pollution, water contamination, possible chemical spills etc.

- In turn, there are safety concerns, highlighted by an explosion on Grey Rd 12 a couple of years ago at an industry that refurbishes propane tanks. Volunteer fire fighters reported that they had no idea what type of fire they were fighting, because they were not informed as to the nature of the industrial process.

In the *On Farm Business Policy Review* written by Grey County, it reports on page 26 that *“the large scale on farm businesses that were industrial in nature, were typically those regarded as having a negative impact on the neighbouring environments”*. Farmers stated that these potential negative impacts should be monitored on an on-going basis, instead of relying on a complaint based system.

There is a lot of passion and energy in any conversation about the more “industrial in nature” OFDUs. Some feel that these industries that have nothing to do with agriculture are better suited within an industrial park.

The increase in C4 applications is changing the rural fabric across the county. Allowing them on smaller acreages, in addition to larger farms, will be a further blow to the healthy diverse agricultural sector.

As OFA has said, it is feared that Amendment 11 will open the gates to the severance of larger “rural” farms into smaller parcels. This could increase the density and proliferation of these “industries”, create industrial hubs in our countryside, and exacerbate current issues.

If the demand for land for OFDUs drove up the price for larger farms, it is anticipated that prices for smaller parcels will escalate as well, making them even more unattainable for new farmers starting out. Those smaller acreages are very farmable to those that have the intent of starting something like a market garden.

To wrap this up, there is conflict already occurring with the existing proliferation of OFDUs. Why exacerbate the problem further by creating more opportunity for the industrialization of our rural landscape? I will give the farmers the last word - “farmers produce food, not auto parts.”

Thank you for listening!