

**AUGUSTA TOWNSHIP**  
**MINUTES**  
**AGRICULTURE & RURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**March 3, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.**

**PRESENT**

Rob Jones, Conor Cleary, Jonas Cole, Mayor Doug Malanka, Councillor Samantha Schapelhouman, Deputy Mayor Jeff Shaver, Ray Morrison, Myron Belej, Brenda Visser

**REGRETS**

Adrian Wynands

**1. Call to Order**

Councillor Samantha Schapelhouman called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m.

**2. Approval of Agenda**

Agenda Approved

**3. Approval of the Minutes**

Minutes approved for the February 3, 2021 meeting.

**4. Disclosure of Interest**

**5. Business Arising from the Minutes**

**5.1 Minimum Area of Properties for Agricultural Use**

- The Planner described multiple inquiries received recently about setting up specialized agricultural operations on properties that are smaller than 12.3 acres.
- Augusta's zoning provisions state that "Agricultural Use" requires at least 49.42 acres, although specialized agricultural operations may proceed on Rural and Agricultural properties with at least 12.3 acres of land.
- Hobby Farms are permitted on Rural and Agricultural lots with at least 4.94 acres. Urban agriculture is a growing movement, and the Planner has received multiple inquiries from current and prospective residents about owning animals such as backyard chickens, horses and goats on smaller lots than 4.94 acres.
- In Augusta Township, lots with Rural and Agricultural zoning require a minimum of 2.0 acres to operate a home-based business in the Home Occupation or Home Industry use classes.
- Although properties could be rezoned to Agricultural Commercial (none in the Township) or Rural Commercial (two in the Township, neither of which are agricultural uses), most agri-businesses operate under Agricultural Use in a Rural or Agricultural zone.

## AUGUSTA TOWNSHIP

- Brenda Visser, Master Gardener and Owner of Flowers of the Field, described her own situation of managing a horticulture business that is growing in popularity, and wanting to expand with one or more new greenhouses in order to keep up with the demand. Although there had been sufficient land area for her to establish a Hobby Farm, grow a garden, install a greenhouse, set up a roadside stand and operate a home-based business, she would now need additional land to expand her business based on the zoning provisions or she would have to move.
- Committee members acknowledged that we want our local entrepreneurs to grow and to be successful.
- The Committee discussed that many people are looking for opportunities to move out of a larger urban centre to enjoy the rural life and start a modest agri-business.
- Farms generating a gross income of at least \$7,000 per year need to register with Agricorp under the Farm Business Registration (FBR) program. Land area is not the primary consideration.
- The Committee also considered how many kinds of profitable agri-businesses can and have been operated on smaller properties (e.g., specialty herbs, spices or plants such as saffron), and many urban greenhouses exist in European countries.
- Small agri-businesses typically do not have major concerns such as noise, odour or traffic associated with them. There are other active commercial operations near Flowers of the Field that involve noise and large trucks or equipment already.
- Committee members agreed that this matter should be brought forward for further discussion during the consultation for the forthcoming update of Augusta's Official Plan and Zoning By-law.
- Since this will take some time, the Planner and Committee members agreed that directing proponents to the Minor Variance application for lots smaller than 12.3 acres would be a good interim solution, with any applicants seeking a reduction in the application fee having the option to make a request to Augusta Council.

### 5.2 Tile Drainage Financing

- Discussion deferred to the next meeting.

### 5.3 Setbacks

- Crops Intended for Ethanol Production:
  - The Planner has emailed the Grain Farmers of Ontario regarding the Clean Fuel Standard and will update the Committee at or before the next meeting.
- Cannabis Production:
  - Discussion deferred to a future meeting.

# AUGUSTA TOWNSHIP

## 6. Other Business

### 6.1 Property Taxes for Augusta Farm Properties

- The Committee reviewed an article from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture publication, OFA Today, entitled “Working for Farmers Against Rising Farm Property Taxes”.
- The Chair had brought forward the article to open a discussion about the possibility of holding farm tax rates at current levels.
- The Treasurer pointed out that MPAC’s 2016 reassessment resulted in tax increases for local farmers.
- MPAC re-evaluates about every 4 years and amortizes rate changes over the subsequent 4 years.
- The Treasurer pointed out that there are two assessment rates: one for the farm portion and one for the residential portion. Both farmland and residential land have likely gone up in value since the last reassessment, so a corresponding increase in tax rates is also likely. However, the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville sets the levy rates, so the Township may wish to recommend that the farm tax rate be held for a four-year period.
- The Committee discussed how such a recommendation could benefit both smaller-scale farmers and larger-scale farmers, including those that may pay their taxes as corporations.
- The Treasurer was asked to draft a motion that could be discussed by the United Counties Council.

### 6.2 Speed Limits in Augusta Township

- The Mayor pointed out that an increasing number of petitions are being seen across the United Counties and was interested in whether this Committee was aware of any major concerns about speed limits in the Township.
- Some members shared stories about personal incidents they were aware of from driving around the Township.
- Committee members had some general discussion about speed limits, stop signs, speed awareness campaigns, photo radar and autonomous vehicles but not did reach a consensus about the need for any particular recommendation or action at this time.

## 7. Next Meeting – Wednesday, April 7, 2021 at 6:30pm

## 8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:46 p.m.