**Provincial Policy Statement Comments**

Oct. 20th, 2019

I wish to provide the following comments regarding the proposed updates to the Provincial Policy Statement:

As per PPS:

# Part IV: *Vision for Ontario’s Land Use Planning System*

*The long-term prosperity and social well-being of Ontario depends upon planning for strong, sustainable and resilient communities for people of all ages, a clean and healthy environment, and a strong and competitive economy.*

Protection of prime agricultural farmland originally enshrined in the Provincial Policy Statement was meant to keep urban sprawl eating up all the most productive land in Ontario. However, the Provincial Policy Statement under review needs to address the fact that agriculture and rural communities are not homogenous across the province. Outside of commuting distances to the Greater Golden Horseshoe, we are starving for young people to fill our jobs, schools and provide vibrancy to our rural communities.

While supportive of farmers concerns (being one myself) there is a need to create an opportunity for small scale intensive farming and residential opportunities in rural Ontario in prime agricultural land. This is essential to long-term economic prosperity as addressed below in the PPS:

## *Long-Term Economic Prosperity*

* + - 1. *sustaining and enhancing the viability of the agricultural system through protecting agricultural resources, minimizing land use conflicts, providing opportunities to support local food, and maintaining and improving the agri-food network;*
    1. *Planning authorities shall designate prime agricultural areas and specialty crop areas in accordance with guidelines developed by the Province, as amended from time to time.*

*Planning authorities are encouraged to use an agricultural system approach to maintain and enhance the geographic continuity of the agricultural land base and the functional and economic connections to the agri-food network.*

From the PPS definitions section:

***Agricultural System:*** *A system comprised of a group of inter-connected elements that collectively create a viable, thriving agricultural sector. It has two components:*

1. *an agricultural land base comprised of prime agricultural areas, including specialty crop areas, and rural lands that together create a continuous productive land base for agriculture; and*
2. *an agri-food network which includes infrastructure, services, and assets important to the viability of the agri- food sector.*

***Agri-food network****: Within the Agricultural System, a network that includes elements important to the viability of the agri-food sector such as regional infrastructure and transportation networks; on-farm buildings and infrastructure; agricultural services, farm markets, distributors, and primary processing; and vibrant, agriculture-supportive communities.*

I don’t feel the PPS of recent years has created the “Agri-food network” outlined above. I recently came across a comment response sheet in my office files from when the provincial policy statement was being revised in the 90’s. It was outlining arguments against more restrictive policies, now in current use, on rural house severances that included no more than a house, well and septic. The concern at the time was a loss of people in the rural areas outside hamlets, villages and towns as farms became much larger and surplus houses were torn down. Fear was that people would move to larger urban centres causing schools, businesses and community services would close. All of which has happened, and look what we have lost in heritage and culture in the countryside as well. Perth County lost 400 rural houses over 10 years.

Huron County, where I live, is starting to look like Saskatchewan. Few, if any, houses on some roads, roads closed during the winter months, school buses that are picking up the few children living there traveling farther. The ridiculous run up in the price of land has made it nearly impossible for anyone other than someone already involved in a farming operation to purchase prime agricultural land. There are fewer, larger, and deeper pocketed farmers with financial leverage purchasing any available acre. Will 25 farmers own all million acres of Huron County 50 years from now? This is not good for sustainable agriculture or the viability of rural communities.

If there was an opportunity for a young person (under age 40) purchasing a 50 or 100 acre parcel to sever off 5 to 10 acres to sell for a residence plus a farm gate/intensive agricultural or agribusiness related operation – artisan chickens, market garden, farm repair or fabrication shops, boarding stable, landscaping, trucking company, meat goat operation, etc. – the person buying the larger portion of the land could then leverage the smaller parcel to put a down payment on the land portion, i.e. - $20,000/acre x 50 acres = $1,000,000 less $600,000 in revenue for a 5-10 acre parcel with existing house, building and small land base. A win/win situation for both young people. Our system needs to encourage both “Boutique” and “Big Box” agriculture into our economy.

Young people are needed to drive our economy, keeping schools open, supporting local businesses and supplying MUCH needed workers for the every part of the rural economy. How many “Hiring Now” banners can be festooned across the countryside? Those same farmers who want to run massive unimpeded acres are the first to complain when they can’t find someone to drive tractor or have to wait in a long lineup at the mill to unload grain because the mill is short of staff.

The PPS states:

*Ontario’s rural areas have diverse population levels, natural resources, geographies and physical characteristics, and economies. Across rural Ontario, local circumstances vary by region.*

If there can be a two zone concept for flood plain management, why could there not be a two zone concept for severances in prime agricultural land across the province outside the pressures of major urban areas to avoid massive blocks of land under cultivation devoid of heritage features, homes and people.

Many people looking to live in a rural area want to have a little piece of farmland. Perhaps it’s time to turn back the clock on how we have been managing prime agricultural land to make it more flexible for young farmers and families to repopulate our rural areas

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.