

Good morning, Mayor Solomon, Council Members, and fellow residents of Grand Valley, Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to present my concerns regarding the proposed zoning by-law amendment, which seeks to allow rural non-farm development on prime agricultural land located at 034541 Concession Road 8-9. Today, I stand before you to offer a comprehensive, evidence-based argument against this amendment. The risks associated with approving this proposal are significant, spanning agricultural viability, environmental integrity, and long-term sustainability for both the community and the region.

I would like to begin by formally requesting that the discussion on this zoning by-law amendment be deferred due to a significant and critical discrepancy in the Council Planning Report. The report incorrectly classifies the lot in question, along with the surrounding areas, as general agricultural land, when in fact it is designated as prime agricultural land. This is a critical distinction that fundamentally alters the evaluation and legal implications of the proposed development.

The Official Plan for the Town of Grand Valley, specifically Section 5.12 – Agricultural Identification, explicitly states: "*Lands designated Agricultural are shown on Schedule A-1 and A-2. It is intended that this designation reflect Prime Agricultural Areas where soils are primarily Classes 1, 2, and 3.*" According to Schedule A-1, the lot in question and the surrounding agricultural areas are designated as prime agricultural land, which reflects the highest quality soil, primarily Class 1 under the Canada Land Inventory system. This classification denotes the land's exceptional agricultural capability and warrants stringent protection under local, provincial, and federal policies.

Furthermore, The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and the Provincial Growth Plan both emphasize the importance of preserving prime agricultural land, especially land with Class 1 soil. The Provincial Policy Statement mandates that prime agricultural areas be safeguarded for long-term agricultural use, underscoring the significance of the soil's classification when determining land-use permissions. This lot falls under those protections, and the classification as prime agricultural land must be correctly identified and heavily considered in any decisions regarding its future use.

Additionally, the County of Dufferin also classifies this area as prime agricultural land, reinforcing its importance and ensuring that the land is subject to the highest standards of protection under both county and provincial planning frameworks.

The failure to properly classify this land as a prime agricultural area in the report represents a significant oversight. This discrepancy must be corrected, with its implications carefully reconsidered before any decisions are made. The classification difference between general

agricultural land and prime agricultural land is not a minor issue; it directly impacts the range of permissible uses, the planning considerations required, and the legal and policy frameworks that must be applied.

Given the gravity of this discrepancy, I respectfully request that the Council delay any decisions on this matter until the report is revised to reflect the correct classification and that all considerations pertaining to prime agricultural land protections are given due weight in the decision-making process.

Introduction

I urge the Council to fully consider the far-reaching consequences of this decision, which would impact not only our agricultural economy but also our environment, water resources, and the overall sustainability of Grand Valley. In my presentation, I will reference the Grand Valley Official Plan, the Grand Valley Zoning By-law, the Dufferin County Official Plan, the Dufferin Climate Action Plan, the Grand River Conservation Authority Strategy, Agriculture Matters: A Guide for Municipal Councillors and Staff developed by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Phase II Report on Rural Non-Farm Development by Rural Planning & Development experts, Dr. Wayne Caldwell, and Claire Dodds-Weir, A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, and the Provincial Policy Statement. These documents collectively demonstrate that this zoning amendment contradicts the strategic goals and planning principles that guide sustainable development in our region.

Preservation of Prime Agricultural Lands

Agricultural land is a precious, finite resource that must be protected to ensure food security, economic stability, and environmental health. Once agricultural land is lost to development, it is gone forever, and its productivity cannot be regained. This proposed residential development would fragment and degrade agricultural land that has been designated for long-term farming use.

The Provincial Policy Statement clearly states: "Prime agricultural areas shall be protected for long-term use for agriculture". This is not merely a guideline, but a directive meant to safeguard agricultural lands for future generations. Approving this amendment would violate this core principle.

According to the Dufferin County Official Plan, growth and development must be focused in designated settlement areas to protect agricultural land. It states, "The majority of growth will be directed to the County's settlement areas to focus public and private investment in built-up areas and to preserve the agricultural area and conserve the natural heritage features and areas". The subject land lies outside of these designated settlement areas, and allowing this development would undermine the official plan's carefully structured growth strategy.

Additionally, A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe warns of the importance of protecting agricultural land: "The finite supply of quality agricultural lands must be protected to ensure a vibrant rural and productive agricultural economy and a secure food supply for future generations". Allowing this residential development would chip away at the agricultural capacity of Grand Valley, threatening long-term food security and local economic resilience.

The removal of even a small portion of land from agricultural production has long-lasting consequences. The Phase II Report on Rural Non-Farm Development points out that *"Rural non-farm development impacts agriculture by physically removing agricultural land from production, fragmenting the agricultural land base"*. This fragmentation weakens our agricultural economy and undermines our community's ability to rely on farming as a sustainable and profitable industry for future generations.

Land Fragmentation and Conflicts Between Farmers and Non-Farm Residents

When non-farm residential development is introduced into agricultural zones, conflicts between residents and farmers are inevitable. Farming practices—such as spraying pesticides, applying manure, and using machinery—often lead to complaints from non-farm residents, resulting in restrictions that limit farmers' ability to operate.

Agriculture Matters: A Guide for Municipal Councillors and Staff explains the inherent conflict: *"Non-agricultural land uses located within lands designated for agriculture can negatively impact the ability of surrounding agricultural operations to expand or introduce new agricultural activities"*. Non-farm residents are not accustomed to the realities of agricultural life, and their proximity to active farmland creates ongoing tensions that ultimately restrict farming activities.

The Phase II Report on Rural Non-Farm Development highlights the seriousness of this issue, stating, *"The most significant impact of rural non-farm development on agriculture is*

the introduction of minimum distance separation as a result of a residential use being established in the countryside" Ontario's Minimum Distance Separation (MDS) formulae require buffer zones between agricultural operations and residential properties. By approving this amendment, the Council would be limiting the future expansion of farming operations in the surrounding area due to MDS requirements, thereby crippling the flexibility and long-term viability of local farms.

The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS), 2020 further mandates that *"New land uses in prime agricultural areas... shall comply with the minimum distance separation formulae"*. This means that if the proposed residential development is allowed, it will restrict the ability of surrounding farmers to expand livestock operations, ultimately hindering agricultural growth and sustainability in the area.

Environmental Risks: Flooding, Soil Erosion, and Water Contamination

The property in question is prone to flooding and introducing residential development on this land poses serious environmental risks. The Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) Strategy 2024 explicitly states, *"Development shall generally be directed to areas outside of hazardous lands, including those that have been identified as flood-prone or erosion-prone areas"*. Building homes in a flood-prone zone increases the risk of flood damage not only to the new residents but also to neighbouring properties, including active farmland.

The Dufferin Climate Action Plan provides further evidence, noting that *"Dufferin County is expected to see a 10.4% increase in total annual precipitation by 2050... Extreme precipitation and shorter, highly intensive storms can increase flooding risk and pose threats to people, property, and ecosystems"*. Climate change will only exacerbate these risks, making residential development in flood-prone areas unsustainable and dangerous.

The Grand Valley Official Plan supports this concern, stating, *"Development and site alteration shall be directed away from areas of natural or human-made hazards where there is an unacceptable risk to public health or safety or of property damage"*. It is evident that the risks associated with developing in flood-prone areas are significant and well-documented.

The Provincial Policy Statement is clear: *"Development shall not be permitted in a floodway regardless of whether the area of inundation contains high points of land not subject to flooding"*. The risks are too great, and this development would violate provincial guidelines aimed at protecting public safety and the environment.

Water Resource Protection and Septic System Risks

Introducing residential development, especially with a septic system, in an area prone to flooding and with high water tables poses a significant risk to water resources. Contamination of groundwater would threaten not only new residents but also the surrounding farms that rely on clean water for irrigation and livestock.

The Grand Valley Official Plan emphasizes the importance of protecting water resources, stating, *"To protect the quality and quantity of source water, groundwater, and surface water systems throughout the Town"*. A septic system on flood-prone land risks contaminating these vital water sources.

The Provincial Policy Statement further mandates that *"Planning authorities shall protect, improve or restore the quality and quantity of water"*. This underscores the importance of comprehensive environmental assessments before considering any development on such sensitive lands.

The risk of groundwater contamination, exacerbated by the area's flooding issues, is simply too great to ignore. Environmental protection must take precedence, especially in a community that relies heavily on agriculture and its associated water needs.

Climate Resilience and Sustainable Development

Agricultural lands play a critical role in climate resilience by providing natural systems that help manage water, maintain biodiversity, and produce food sustainably. Converting these lands to residential use undermines our ability to adapt to the changing climate.

The Dufferin Climate Action Plan stresses this point, stating, *"Natural areas and agricultural lands will provide a significant contribution to the region's resilience and our ability to adapt to a changing climate"*. Allowing this zoning amendment would weaken our climate resilience, reduce our ability to manage stormwater, and diminish our agricultural productivity.

A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe echoes these concerns: *"The finite supply of quality agricultural lands that feed the region and beyond must be protected to ensure a vibrant rural and productive agricultural economy and a secure food supply for future generations"*. This amendment jeopardizes both the present and future food security of our region by fragmenting essential agricultural lands.

In the course of researching this matter and engaging with experts in the field, it became abundantly clear that the proposal to amend the zoning by-law in such a significant way has raised serious concerns among specialists and authorities alike. It is alarming that an amendment of this magnitude, in what both the town, county, and province have deemed as prime agricultural land, was not immediately flagged by planning officials as being in direct conflict with the guiding documents and legislation that prioritize farmland preservation and sustainable development.

I had the privilege of consulting Dr. Wayne Caldwell, a highly respected professor in Rural Planning and Development at the University of Guelph. Dr. Caldwell's expertise spans over three decades, with a distinguished career-long affiliation with the County of Huron. He is a Fellow of the Canadian Institute of Planners, a Registered Professional Planner with the Ontario Professional Planners Institute, and a renowned expert in rural land use planning, agricultural preservation, and conflict resolution in rural communities. After carefully reviewing the proposed zoning by-law amendment, Dr. Caldwell provided the following professional assessment:

- **Significant Variance from Zoning Requirements:** The subject property is only 1,500 square feet (0.13 hectares), while the by-law stipulates a minimum lot size of 0.4 hectares (1 acre). This represents a major divergence from the zoning by-law, which raises serious concerns related to precedent and health standards, especially in terms of adequately locating a septic system. Such a small lot size may not meet the necessary health requirements for nitrate levels, among other concerns.
- **Minimum Distance Separation Issues:** Dr. Caldwell highlighted that Minimum Distance Separation regulations could pose a significant barrier, particularly regarding any future agricultural operations or livestock facilities near the proposed development. The presence of a residential property in such close proximity would directly hinder agricultural growth and development in the area.
- **Environmental Concerns:** The area directly across the road from the subject property is classified as a natural environment zone. Dr. Caldwell noted that this should be of significant interest to both the Conservation Authority and the municipality, given the potential environmental impacts of any residential development in such a sensitive area.

Dr. Caldwell's evaluation underscores the gravity of the situation and confirms that this amendment not only violates zoning laws but also threatens the agricultural and environmental integrity of the region. His concerns mirror those expressed by many other

experts in the field, and it is difficult to comprehend how such a substantial deviation from planning principles has reached this stage of consideration without being identified and addressed by planning officials.

Conclusion

The proposed zoning by-law amendment (Z03-2024) is fundamentally at odds with the core principles outlined in the Dufferin Climate Action Plan, Grand Valley Official Plan, Provincial Policy Statement, 2020, Grand River Conservation Authority Strategy 2024, and Dufferin County Official Plan. These documents provide a clear and consistent framework for protecting agricultural land, avoiding environmental hazards, and ensuring sustainable growth within designated settlement areas.

By approving this amendment, the Council risks fragmenting valuable agricultural land, creating long-term conflicts between farmers and non-farm residents, increasing flood risks, and threatening the quality of our water resources. The impacts would not only undermine the agricultural character of Grand Valley but also jeopardize its long-term environmental sustainability and resilience to climate change.

I urge the Council to reject this zoning amendment and uphold the principles of sustainable land-use planning that have been carefully designed to protect the future of Grand Valley.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Dickson