West Lincoln

Cultivating West Lincoln
New Official Plan

Discussion Paper

An Agricultural Township

November 2026

Introduction

West Lincoln is a rural township where farming and the agriculture industry are an important part of everyday life. They help support the local economy, shape the landscape, and contribute to the community's rural identity. Farming in West Lincoln includes livestock operations, field crops, fruits and nuts, grape growing, greenhouse production, and more.

West Lincoln also has many historic buildings and landscapes, beautiful views, and important cultural places that help tell the story of the community and contribute to its unique rural identity. Schools, community centres, places of worship and other community facilities also make West Lincoln a great place to live by providing services and places for people to gather.

The Official Plan Review provides an opportunity to plan for West Lincoln's future growth. It can help support farming and agriculture, protect the Township's rural identity, heritage, archaeological resources, and important cultural places, establish engagement protocols with Indigenous communities, support community well-being, and foster a strong local economy.



Aerial view of agricultural lands in West Lincoln

Policy Context

The Province has created several plans to help manage growth and development, including the Greenbelt Plan, and the Provincial Planning Statement.

These plans guide where growth should occur and how land should be used across Ontario, including in West Lincoln. They also help protect agricultural lands and support the long-term success of farming and agriculture-related businesses.

Agricultural System

A system made up of interconnected elements that work together to create a viable and thriving agricultural sector. The agricultural system has two main components, an agricultural land base and an agri-food network.

The agricultural land base includes prime agricultural areas, specialty crop areas, and rural lands that together create a continuous and productive land base for agriculture. The agri-food network includes infrastructure, services, and assets that are important to the viability of the agri-food sector.

Provincial Planning Statement, 2024

Section 4.3 of the PPS 2024 is focused on protecting farmland and supporting a strong agricultural sector. It helps reduce conflicts between farming operations and other land uses, such as urban development. The PPS 2024 also supports the protection of important heritage sites, cultural heritage landscapes, and archaeological sites.

Greenbelt Plan

The Greenbelt Plan was first introduced through Provincial legislation in 2004 and most recently updated in 2017. The Greenbelt Plan is currently under review. The Greenbelt Plan builds on the PPS 2024 to:

- Protect against the loss and fragmentation of the natural environment and agricultural land base.
- Protect the natural heritage and water resource system.
- Provide a diverse range of economic and social activities with rural communities.
- Build resilience and mitigate climate change

The Greenbelt Area covers a small portion of West Lincoln which covers ‘Protected Countryside’, which contains specific policies how the land may be used.

Niagara Official Plan

A key focus of the Niagara Official Plan is protecting the agricultural system. This includes prime agricultural areas, specialty crop areas, the agricultural land base, and the agri-food network. The Niagara Official Plan supports a strong and resilient agricultural sector by protecting farmland and limiting non-agricultural development in agricultural areas. It also recognizes the changing needs of the agricultural industry by allowing a limited amount of residential development in rural areas under certain conditions.

The Plan contains detailed policies to reduce the loss and fragmentation of farmland and addresses matters such as minimum distance separation, agricultural impact assessments, lot creation, and land severances.

Emerging Policy Ideas

This section provides an overview of emerging policy ideas that could be explored through the Official Plan Review to protect and strengthen agriculture in West Lincoln.

Value-Added Agriculture and On-Farm Diversification

- Support agricultural tourism and supporting hospitality opportunities including farm stays, educational and recreational uses.
- Encourage home industries and on-site retail uses, including food preparation kitchens, workshops, and artisan products
- Support roadside stands and pick-your-own operations.
- Encourage value-added agricultural processing, packaging, and distribution facilities.



Palatine Hills Estate Winery in Niagara-on-the-lake, Ontario.

Protecting Agricultural Lands and Infrastructure

- Strengthen the agricultural land base and infrastructure that supports farming operations.
- Protect transportation corridors to continue supporting agricultural goods movement and farm-related trucking.
- Protect agricultural drainage systems and natural infrastructure that support agricultural production.
- Explore opportunities to reduce conflicts between through-truck traffic and local community activities while maintaining efficient agricultural transportation routes.



Vineyard landscape and adirondack chairs in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Supporting Innovation and Agricultural Sustainability

- Support investment in agri-technology, greenhouses, floriculture and other emerging agricultural sectors such as vertical farming.
- Encouraging flexible policies to allow for new and innovative farm infrastructure to enhance farm operations, including new barns, greenhouses, methane digester and renewable energy systems.
- Improve rural broadband and digital connectivity to support modern farming operations and business development.

Reducing Land Use Conflicts

- Maintain clear urban-rural boundaries between Smithville and surrounding agricultural lands.
- Encourage the use of physical buffer zones (e.g. berms), landscaping (e.g. vegetative screening) to reduce conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural uses.
- Minimize impacts related to nighttime light pollution, noise, odour, and other sources of conflict on normal farm practices.

Agri-Tourism Opportunities and Local Food Development

- Support the expansion of wineries, estate wineries, micro-breweries and micro-distilleries in appropriate locations across West Lincoln.
- Promote West Lincoln as an agri-tourism destination by leveraging its agricultural heritage, local food production, and rural character.
- Encouraging local food production and food-related businesses.

Adaptive Re-use and Rural Economic Development

- Encourage the adaptive re-use of existing buildings and sites to support economic development and agri-tourism and hospitality opportunities.
- Encourage the redevelopment of underutilized commercial and industrial sites in appropriate locations.
- Support development that makes efficient use of existing infrastructure and reduces pressure on agricultural lands.
- Preserve rural character and cultural heritage while supporting economic growth.

Additional Dwelling Units and Agricultural Workforce Housing

- Support a broader range of housing options such as additional dwelling units for agricultural sector workers and seasonal/temporary workers.
- Encourage housing forms that support aging in place and attainable homeownership in rural communities.



Machinery, forklift and truck at Jackson-Triggs Winery and vineyards in Niagara-on-the-Lake.