



To: Chair and Members
Committee of the Whole

From: Curtis Syvret
Manager of Planning

Lisa Marden
Director of Planning

Date: September 15, 2025

Subject: Amendment 6 to the Town of Huntsville Official Plan (Alternative Rural Residential Lot Standards)

Report: 13(2025)-24

Recommendation

WHEREAS Report [CPS-6-2025-7](#) was presented to the Community and Planning Services Committee on June 19, 2025, providing options for Amendment 6 to the Town of Huntsville Official Plan;

AND WHEREAS Resolution P39/2025-CPS referred the decision to the Committee of the Whole in September;

AND WHEREAS Town of Huntsville staff, through [Report DEV-2025-1](#), recommended that new rural residential lots have a minimum lot area of 1 hectare and a minimum lot frontage of 90 metres unless existing lots within 250 metres along the same road have a lesser frontage, in which case the minimum lot frontage may be reduced to be consistent with these existing lots or 60 metres, whichever is greater;

AND WHEREAS the Town of Huntsville staff recommended the adoption of additional policies intended to determine the appropriateness of proposed lots utilizing the alternative rural residential lot standards;

AND WHEREAS the proposed minimum lot area and frontages are in keeping with the intent of the Provincial Planning Statement, The District Municipality of Muskoka and Town of Huntsville Official Plans;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Amendment 6 to the Official Plan of the Town of Huntsville, as adopted by Town of Huntsville By-law 2025-51, **be modified** to

reflect the recommendation of Town staff in report DEV-2025-28, as detailed in Schedule "A" attached hereto and **be approved as modified**.

Origin

A recommendation report for proposed Official Plan Amendment 6 was brought forward to the June 19, 2025, meeting ([Report CPS-6-2025-7](#)) of Community and Planning Services Committee. Committee referred (through [Resolution P39/2025-CPS](#)) a decision on the matter to be considered at a Committee of the Whole meeting.

Background

In 2019, the Town of Huntsville adopted the Huntsville Official Plan (HOP) which included the requirement for new rural residential lots to have a minimum frontage of 2 hectares and 134 metres of frontage on a year-round maintained public road. Planning Council for the Town of Huntsville has since approved a number of rural residential consents that do not comply with the minimum lot area and frontage requirements of the HOP. As such, Council directed Town staff to review the rural residential lot creation policies in the HOP.

Upon review of the policies of Province and District, Town staff recommended a new reduced minimum lot area of 1 hectare and 90 metres of frontage with an option to further reduce the required frontage to meet the character of lots within 250 metres of the subject lands or to a minimum of 60 metres whichever is greater. Town staff also recommended the inclusion of policies intended to determine the appropriateness of proposed lots utilizing the alternative rural residential lot standards attached hereto as Schedule "A".

Planning Council opted to modify the draft official plan amendment text to further reduce the minimum lot area to 0.4 hectares and the minimum lot frontage to 60 metres, as well as to require a minimum 15 metre treed vegetation buffer abutting the public road. OPA 6 was adopted by Town of Huntsville Council on April 28, 2025, through By-law 2025-51.

On June 19, 2025, OPA 6 was brought before the District's Community and Planning Services Committee for consideration. Although Committee generally expressed a desire to allow area municipalities to determine their own policies, Committee also expressed concern with the potential environmental, servicing, access and character implications of lots with a minimum area of 0.4 hectares and 60 metres of frontage in the rural area. Further, Committee raised concerns that such a change would add unwanted pressure on other municipalities to allow reduced rural lot requirements and expressed a desire to have other councillors involved in the discussion. As a result, Committee directed staff to bring the application to Committee of the Whole for consideration.

Analysis

A detailed review and analysis of the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS), Muskoka Growth Strategy, as well as the Muskoka and Town of Huntsville Official Plans was conducted and included in [Report CPS-6-2025-7](#). To summarize, the policies of these documents generally limit urban sprawl by promoting infill and intensification, prioritizing development in areas with existing infrastructure, promoting compact and sustainable development, and protecting sensitive natural, agricultural, aggregate and forestry related areas. These policies work in unison to direct residential growth to settlement areas where a variety of housing types at varying densities can accommodate all ages and income levels.

An additional analysis has been conducted to address questions from Committee members and to provide additional clarification regarding the opinion and professional planning recommendation of District and Town staff.

Private Individual Wells and Septic Systems

The suitability for development utilizing private individual wells and septic systems is influenced by factors like soil type, system type, availability of ground water and onsite constraints but the province generally recommends a minimum lot size of 1 hectare for most septic systems. Specific setbacks from wells and other features are also crucial for proper functioning and safety. A further analysis of lot servicing constraints is included in [Report CPS-6-2025-7](#).

In addition, an important consideration for rural residential lot creation is to ensure site conditions are suitable for the long-term provision of private individual well and septic system with no negative impacts to the environment or adjacent neighbours. Accordingly, the regulations and guidelines issued under the Ontario Water Resource Act require the completion of hydrogeological assessments for development utilizing private individual wells and septic systems. District policy requires the completion of a hydrogeological assessment for the creation of more than 5 (five) lots where some or all of the lots would be less than 1 hectare or where there is a known or suspected water shortage or water quality concerns.

For context, a Hydrogeological Study is undertaken to assess matters such as: groundwater infiltration and recharge, groundwater discharge and baseflow, groundwater elevations and flow paths, water quality and temperature, cumulative watershed impacts, cold water fisheries supported by groundwater discharge, and impacts to the District's drinking water sources. Additionally, it reviews the subsurface hydrogeological conditions to identify development suitability, constraints and mitigation measures to be implemented.

The proposed amendment to the policies of the Huntsville Official Plan as adopted by Planning Council would permit the creation of 0.4 hectare lots. The cumulative impact of increased numbers of wells can affect aquifers by lowering water tables and reducing aquifer pressure. Further, water quality can be impacted through the potential for

widespread aquifer contamination from sources like septic systems, and leaks, which can introduce bacteria, pathogens, and chemicals, rendering the water unsafe for consumption.

Although these concerns can be mitigated through the preparation of appropriate technical studies such as hydrogeological assessments, it must be understood that the reduced lot sizes will facilitate a level of development that could put pressure on aquifers impacting both existing and future residents.

Community Character

Growth in the District of Muskoka is intended to be managed in a sustainable manner which makes the most efficient use of land, infrastructure, public services and facilities. In Muskoka, there are two types of settlement areas – Urban Centres and Community Areas. It is a goal of the Muskoka Official Plan to focus growth in the settlement areas where full services are available and an adequate supply of land is available. The boundaries of each of the Urban Centres and Communities are identified on Schedule “A” of the Muskoka Official Plan and the policies recognize the unique character of each. These areas are characterized by a mix of uses, maximum or minimum permitted densities and area-specific policies to guide their development.

Rural areas are comprised of a mix of resource-related activities and limited low density residential uses. The rural areas are generally characterized by large tracts of undeveloped land for environmental protection, a limited number of large rural or rural residential lots and a sense of spaciousness. Smaller lots can lead to a more crowded, built-up environment, detracting from the open, natural feel of the rural area. Accordingly, lot size significantly impacts community character by influencing density, land use patterns, and the overall sense of place. Larger lots generally lead to lower density, preserving open space and natural landscapes, while smaller lots can result in higher density and a more developed, potentially less "rural" feel. The size of lots also affects the visibility of development, the potential for agricultural or resource-based activities, and the overall visual character of the landscape.

Community Areas, with their higher population densities, generally drive economic growth through concentrated industries, services, and job opportunities. Rural areas, while smaller in population, contribute significantly to key sectors like agriculture, resource extraction, and tourism, while also offering unique lifestyle benefits and opportunities for specialized industries.

In Community Areas such as Port Sydney, Utterson, and Novar, the HOP requires a minimum lot size of 0.4 hectares. These lot sizes were established to recognize the important roles Community Areas play in Muskoka’s economic and social landscape and help protect these areas by controlling density and preventing overcrowding, while also preserving open space and natural features. They ensure a balance between development and the preservation of community character and environmental resources.

The HOP also presently includes policies to permit estate residential development in Rural Areas. Estate residential development is a cluster of residential development for single detached dwellings on new internal roadways in the Rural Area. These policies include requirements to ensure development protects natural heritage features and local character. The HOP encourages a variety of lot sizes which reflect terrain and natural features on site but require a minimum lot size of 1 hectare and 60 metres of road frontage. It should be noted that Huntsville presently has no rural estate subdivisions or condominiums draft approved.

Should the minimum rural residential lot size also be reduced to 0.4 hectares, Huntsville runs the risk of losing the unique sense of place these Community Areas presently exhibit by permitting the same scale of development in all areas of the municipality.

Secondary Residential Dwelling Units

The Town of Huntsville's Community Planning Permit By-law permits up to 2 accessory dwelling units within the rural and rural residential precincts, in the Rural Area designation of the Huntsville Official Plan. Together with the significant reduction to required lot frontage and area requirements adopted by Planning Council, these permissions could further exacerbate the other issues identified within this report and [Report CPS-6-2025-7](#) related to;

- Cumulative impact of additional units on private wells and septic systems;
- Environmental impacts;
- Character of rural area;
- Long term sustainability; and
- Financial impact on Municipalities;

Policy Objectives

In reviewing the minutes of Huntsville's Planning Council meetings regarding OPA 6, one of the main topics of discussion centred around the desire to reduce the rural lot sizes to 0.4 hectares and 60 metres of frontage to allow residents to sever lands for their family members or to sell portions of their lands to maintain their homes. This is seen as an affordable alternative to purchasing an existing rural lot or as a means to support residents.

In land use planning, there is a goal to create comprehensive policies to ensure that the overall needs of the community are being met in the long term. There is sometimes the desire to create a policy to address a specific issue, but the outcome can result in negative impacts to the community as a whole.

While the goal of the OPA 6 policy is laudable, it may inadvertently detract from development in the Urban Centre or Community Areas, further exacerbating the housing crisis by promoting a single type of housing (single family dwellings). Instead, staff would recommend a more incremental change to the policies to avoid unintended

consequences, and that the Town's Planning Council continue to consider one-off applications for deviations of required lot sizes on their merits.

Other Considerations

A detailed analysis of affordability and long-term sustainability, demographics, climate change implications, availability of rural residential lots and environmental impacts were included in [Report CPS-6-2025-7](#).

The District is a party in an active OLT matter which involves a number of the issues referenced herein and related to this report. To date the District's position has been supported by the Town and Town staff. Council's position as it relates to OPA 6 may significantly impact or alter the District's position with respect the OLT matter.

Alternative Options for Supporting Housing Creation

As detailed in Staff [Report CPS-6-2025-7](#), there are a number of alternative options for supporting housing creation that staff would encourage the Town of Huntsville to consider in lieu of reducing the lot standards for the entire rural areas which may have extensive negative repercussions. These include:

- Increasing density and height maximums within Urban Centres;
- Reducing or eliminating parking minimums;
- Incentivizing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) within Urban Centres and serviced Communities;
- Introducing a Municipal Vacant Home Tax; and
- Applying specialized taxes on vacant land within serviced Urban Centres.

District staff would also note that the work completed by the Town's professional planning staff to address the concerns of Town Council already represent a significant reduction in the rural lot size standards. Town staff have recommended a reduction in Rural Residential Lot Area minimums from 2.0 hectares to 1 hectare, an overall reduction of 50%. District staff are supportive of this reduction, but are unable to support a further reduction to 0.4 hectares. Staff would also note that this does not prevent Town Council from considering further exceptions to the standards on a case-by-case basis, in exceptional circumstances and where it may be appropriate.

Circulation and Public Meeting

Notice and circulation requirements, as well as details pertaining to the outcome from the statutory public meetings are detailed in staff [Report CPS-6-2025-7](#).

As the approval authority, the District may approve, or approve with modifications, or refuse to approve all or parts of the official plan amendment and give a notice of decision.

Alternative (Not Recommended)

As an alternative to the staff recommendation, District Council could choose to approve Amendment 6 to the Official Plan of the Town of Huntsville as adopted by the Town of Huntsville By-law 2025-51. Staff are not recommending this alternative for all of the reasons outlined in this report.

Financial Considerations

No impacts on the 2025 Tax Supported Operating Budget and Capital Budget and Forecast are anticipated as a result of this report. Should an Alternative option be selected, it is anticipated that there will be increased pressure on the District's annual capital and operating budgets (both Rate and Tax Supported), particularly related to the implementation of the Low Volume Road policy, when considered by Committee and Council. This concept was discussed in more detail in the Affordability and Long-Term Sustainability section of Report CPS-6-2025-7.

Communications

Notice of the public meeting and adoption for OPA 6 was circulated by the Town of Huntsville to required agencies and all property owners in accordance with the requirements of the Planning Act, R.S.O.1990, as amended. On January 15, 2025, a public meeting was held to hear input on proposed OPA 6 and Community Planning Permit By-law Amendment Application CPPA/39/2024/HTE (Alternative Rural Lot Creation Standards). OPA 6 was adopted on April 28, 2025, by By-law 2025-51 and the Notice of Adoption circulated accordingly. A Notice of Decision will also be provided in accordance with the Planning Act.

Strategic Plan

The District assesses the impact or influence of the information or recommendations included in staff reports toward achieving Council's [Strategic Plan objectives](#).

This report includes information or recommendations that impact or influence the following Strategic Plan Objectives:

- [Objective 1 Taking action together](#) – Preserve and protect our natural environment, take climate action and be more resilient to its impacts.
- [Objective 3 Housing for everyone](#) – Create more safe, attainable, and sustainable housing to call home – and transportation between our places and spaces.
- [Objective 5 Community health and wellbeing](#) – Connect residents – all ages, stages, and circumstances – to the health and social supports they need.
- [Objective 6 Service alignment](#) – Modernize municipal services and deliver them in the way that makes most sense – best value, efficiency, and outcomes for residents.

- [Objective 8 Future thinking](#) – Plan and invest so that we have the services and infrastructure our residents and communities need – now and in the future.

Summary and Conclusion

The current Town of Huntsville Official Plan policies requiring larger minimum rural lot sizes were adopted in 2019 in an effort to direct development to urban centres and community areas, while minimizing sprawl, maintaining natural heritage features, and minimizing long term costs to the municipality. At the direction of Town Council, Huntsville staff proposed amendments to these policies to lessen the restrictions on rural lot sizes, while ensuring that new development is occurring in keeping with the principles of the PPS, Muskoka Growth Strategy and to avoid the promotion of sprawl. Town Council then further modified these policies to further reduce the minimum rural lot size standard prior to adoption.

District staff concur with the Town of Huntsville staff that the proposed OPA, as originally drafted by Town of Huntsville staff, would conform with the intent of the PPS, MOP and HOP by appropriately directing the majority of year-round growth to the serviced urban areas, while still permitting limited rural lot creation. The Town Staff's approach provides a balance between the reducing lot sizes, but not so significantly as to negatively impact private wells and septic systems and the community character. As such, District staff would recommend that Official Plan Amendment 6 be modified, as detailed in Schedule "A", to reflect the amendment as proposed by Town staff, and approved as modified.

Respectfully submitted,

Curtis Syvret, Manager of Planning;
Lisa Marden, MCIP, RPP, Director of Planning; and
Arfona Zwiers, BSW, M Ed, Commissioner of Community and Planning Services.

Schedule "A"

SECTION 5 THE AMENDMENT

5.1 Section C 8. 7 – "Rural Residential" is hereby amended with the insertion of the following new Sections immediately after Section C 8.7.5 and renumbering the remaining Sections accordingly:

- C 8.7.6 Notwithstanding Section C 8.7.4, consideration may be given to the creation of new rural residential lots that would not satisfy the applicable lot area and frontage requirements provided that:
- a) Supporting documentation is provided to satisfactorily demonstrate why the applicable lot standards cannot be met in consideration of the size of the lot and available road frontage;
 - b) The proposed lots will not adversely affect the function of roads they front on or are accessed by, and it is confirmed that an entrance permit has been or may be issued by the relevant road authority;
 - c) All Natural Heritage Features and Areas, including appropriate buffers, are maintained in current ownership to preserve natural heritage values, or a technical report or supporting information is submitted to satisfactorily demonstrate that the proposed lots are appropriately sized to protect the features and areas in accordance with all applicable policies and standards;
 - d) The proposed lots shall have a minimum lot area of 1ha and a minimum lot frontage of 90m, unless existing lots within 250m along the same road have a lesser frontage, in which case the minimum lot frontage may be reduced to be consistent with these existing lots or 60m, whichever is greater;
 - e) The proposed lots shall be consistent with the character of existing lots within 250m along the same road; and
 - f) The proposed lots shall be sufficient in area and frontage to provide an appropriately sized envelope to permit Development for their intended use that:
 - i. Conforms to all applicable OP policies;
 - ii. Conforms with all applicable yard requirements and development standards as outlined in the Community Planning Permit By-law;
 - iii. Can be serviced in a sustainable manner in accordance with all applicable standards; and

- iv. Is compatible with all surrounding non-residential rural uses as listed in Part C.8. 7.3; and Maintains appropriate setbacks and buffers to natural and human constraints within or adjacent to the lot;

C 8.7.7 Development and Site Alteration on all rural residential lots created with reduced lot areas and frontages in accordance with Section C 8.7.6, must be authorized through a Community Planning Permit to ensure:

- a) All actions and recommendations in approved supporting technical reports are implemented;
- b) A minimum 15m wide treed vegetative buffer is maintained or established along the public road, except in the location of an approved entrance and driveway;
- c) A minimum 20m setback for all buildings and structures is applied along the lot line abutting the public road; and
- d) The lot coverage calculation shall exclude all natural heritage features and areas and associated buffers.

C 8.7.7 Further to Section C 8.7.6 and C 8.7.7, no changes to the reduced rural residential lot standards contained in C 8.7.6.(d) shall be permitted without an Official Plan Amendment.