

**TO:** M. Bragg, CAO

**FROM:** M. Misek-Evans, Corporate Manager of Community and Strategic Planning  
P. Michiels, Senior Policy Planner

**SUBJECT:** County of Oxford Vacant Lands Study, September 2009

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#### RECOMMENDATION

That County Council receive Report No. C-2 2009-225 and authorize planning staff to distribute the Draft 2009 Vacant Lands Study to County staff and the Area Municipalities, allowing a period of 30 days for review and comment.

#### PURPOSE

To provide County Council with the findings of the County Vacant Lands Study, September, 2009.

#### BACKGROUND

The County of Oxford Vacant Lands Study (attached as Appendix 1 to this report), updates the previous County of Oxford Vacant Lands Study, which was based on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 data and adopted in October 2008. The Vacant Lands Study evaluates the supply of residential and employment lands relative to forecast demand. The outcome of this evaluation is then presented in the context of the land supply objectives of the County Official Plan and the growth related policies of the 2005 Provincial Policy Statement (PPS).

The study inventories lands within the Large Urban Centres and the Serviced Villages as of April 1, 2009. These inventories are compared with the County adopted household and employment forecasts contained in the Oxford County Population, Household and Employment Forecasts (2001-2031), dated April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006, prepared by Hemson Consulting.

The growth related policies of the County Official Plan indicate that the County will provide for a supply of residential lands to satisfy anticipated demand for a broad range of dwelling types. For employment purposes, the County is to supply unconstrained and appropriately located industrial and commercial land to meet the anticipated short and longer term needs of business over the planning period.

The growth related policies of the 2005 Provincial Policy Statement, which came into effect on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005, require municipalities to ensure sufficient land is made available to

accommodate anticipated growth. Such growth is to be accommodated through intensification and redevelopment and, if necessary, designated growth areas, to allow for an appropriate range and mix of employment opportunities, housing and other land uses to meet the projected needs for a time horizon of up to 20 years. The PPS further requires that municipalities maintain at least a 10 year land supply through residential intensification and redevelopment and, if necessary, vacant lands that are designated and available for residential development. Municipalities are also required to maintain a 3 year supply of residential land with servicing capacity that is suitably zoned to facilitate residential intensification and redevelopment, or in draft approved and registered plans. The PPS also contains policies with respect to intensification, which require municipalities to establish and implement minimum targets for intensification and redevelopment within built-up areas. The 3-year and 10-year residential land supply targets are also reflected in the County Official Plan.

## COMMENTARY

### A – Overview of the Vacant Lands Study Process

The Vacant Lands Study identifies the amount of vacant land that exists within the Large Urban Centres of Woodstock, Tillsonburg and Ingersoll, the fully serviced and water only villages and the Future Urban Growth areas in the County, as of April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009. The study is updated annually.

Vacant Lands are classified into two primary categories: residential and employment. Residential lands consist of low, medium and high density residential lands, while employment lands consist of non-residential lands designated or zoned for industrial, commercial and institutional uses. The study also accounts for Future Urban Growth lands, although these lands are only included in the vacant land inventory where they are contained within a designated settlement boundary.

For residential lands, forecast demand is compared to estimated supply. The residential supply includes vacant parcels, as well as under-utilized lands with additional development potential. The demand for residential land is based on household forecasts which are used to determine the anticipated number of dwelling units of each density type over the study period. The study then examines whether the supply of land within the serviced settlement areas is adequate to accommodate the projected demand for residential lands during the next 3 year, 10 year and 20 year periods, as required by the PPS and the County Plan.

A similar exercise is undertaken for employment lands. Unlike the residential land supply, the employment land supply consists exclusively of vacant parcels, as under-utilized employment lands are deemed not to be generally available for development. The demand for industrial employment land is based on current employment forecasts to determine the number of additional employees and associated area of industrial land which will be required over the forecast period (2006-2031). The study then examines whether the supply of industrial employment land within the serviced settlement areas is adequate to accommodate the forecast demand over the next 20 years, as required by the PPS and County Plan. Given that the County does not currently have projections of population related employment, such as commercial and institutional, the study simply provides a summary of supply for these other categories of employment land.

## **B – Compiling the Vacant Lands Inventory**

The vacant lands inventory was initiated through the use of the Oxford County Land Related Information System (LRIS) and is comprised of parcels which are vacant or substantially vacant (may contain an abandoned barn or other structure related to the former use of the property) and under-utilized lands which may have potential for future infill development or substantial redevelopment or expansion.

The LRIS is also used to exclude lands that, due to their nature, are unsuitable for future development, such as lands zoned or designated Open Space or Environmental Protection, parking lots and open storage areas committed to existing uses, parcels with a building permit issued for new building construction as of April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008, environmental constraint areas e.g. flood plain, licensed sand and gravel pits, landfill sites etc., under-utilized lands without direct access to an open public road or less than 0.5 acres in size, committed expansion areas and County or Area Municipality owned lands that are unlikely to be developed e.g. parks, patrol yards, stormwater blocks etc. A detailed methodology is provided in Section 2 of the Draft Vacant Lands Study, which is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

Using the LRIS-generated vacant lands inventory as a base, the Planning staff then review the results in relation to the parcel fabric, aerial photography, environmental constraints, land use designation and zoning, and known development activity within the Area Municipality. Where required, data is also verified by site visits. Final input, comments and sign-off on the parcels selected as vacant lands is generally provided by Area Municipal staff for their respective municipalities. This review often results in eliminating under-utilized land parcels where further development is unlikely to occur, such as committed open storage and parking areas for existing businesses, for example.

The final step of inventory preparation is to classify the inventory by time period:

- For residential lands, the 3-year, 10-year and 20-year periods;
- For employment lands, the short-term and longer-term periods.

In the case of employment lands, short-term lands are existing vacant lots that are serviced and zoned for industrial, commercial or institutional uses. Longer-term lands are existing vacant lots in industrial, commercial or community facility designations, but not yet zoned accordingly.

## **C – Comparison of Residential Land Supply and Demand**

The supply of residential lands, classified according to the 3-year, 10-year and 20-year timeframes are summarized as follows:

### **3-Year Supply**

All Large Urban Centres and Serviced Villages have a margin of residential land supply compared to currently projected demand, with the exception of East Zorra-Tavistock. However, a residential plan of subdivision has recently been approved in the Village of Innerkip which would more than address the deficiency in the 3 year supply that existed in the Township as of the April 1, 2009 study date. The following table shows estimated supply compared to the estimated demand based on household forecasts.

Municipality	Estimated 3 Year Supply – Total Units	3 Year Demand – Total Units <sup>1</sup>	Margin (+/-)
Woodstock	2,085	765	+173%
Tillsonburg	937	295	+218%
Ingersoll	762	235	+224%
Blandford-Blenheim	276	115	+140%
East Zorra-Tavistock	58	70	-17%
Norwich	347	95	+265%
South-West Oxford	77	60	+28%
Zorra	145	130	+12%

<sup>1</sup> Source: Oxford County Population, Household & Employment Forecasts (2001-2031), Hemson Consulting Ltd., April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006

Note: The projected demand for the Townships was applied to the supply in the fully serviced and water only villages because the majority of the growth is expected to occur in those settlements.

### 10-Year Supply

The large urban centres and Townships in Oxford County all have a margin of residential land supply compared to the forecast 10 year demand. However, in some cases, there may be a need to re-designate lands between residential densities on a site specific basis, to respond to market demand over this period.

Municipality	Estimated 10 Year Supply – Total Units	10 Year Demand – Total Units <sup>1</sup>	% Margin (+/-)
Woodstock	3,455	3,340	+3%
Tillsonburg	6,732	1,250	+439%
Ingersoll	1,673	970	+72%
Blandford-Blenheim	927	280	+231%
East Zorra-Tavistock	1,038	315	+230%
Norwich	1,201	480	+150%
South-West Oxford	451	240	+88%
Zorra	610	490	+25%

<sup>1</sup> Source: Oxford County Population, Household & Employment Forecasts (2001-2031), Hemson Consulting Ltd., April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006

Note: The projected demand for the Townships was applied to the supply in the fully serviced and water only villages because the majority of the growth is expected to occur in those settlements.

### 20-Year Supply

With the exception of the Town of Ingersoll and the Township of South-West Oxford, the municipalities within the County have sufficient land supply contained within the designated settlement areas to accommodate forecast residential growth over the next 20 years. Although, the City of Woodstock had a deficiency in the 20 year residential land supply as of April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009, it should be noted that the recently approved North Woodstock Secondary Plan, together with the remainder of the recently annexed land in the north/northwest of the City, should be sufficient to accommodate the current 20 year demand. However, in some cases, there may be a need to re-designate lands between residential densities on a site specific basis, to respond to market demand over this period. In Ingersoll, steps will eventually need to be taken to designate additional lands for residential development to accommodate forecast growth over the latter part of the planning period. The Township of South-West Oxford may also need to consider designating additional lands for residential growth purposes over the longer term.

Municipality	Estimated 20 Year Supply – Total Units	20 Year Demand - Total Units <sup>1</sup>	% Margin (+/-)
Woodstock	3,455	6,255	-45%
Tillsonburg	6,732	2,345	+187%
Ingersoll	1,726	1,800	-4%
Blandford-Blenheim	927	515	+80%
East Zorra-Tavistock	1,038	590	+76%
Norwich	1,201	915	+31%
South-West Oxford	451	465	-3%
Zorra	1,404	905	+55%

<sup>1</sup> Source: Oxford County Population, Household & Employment Forecasts (2001-2031), Hemson Consulting Ltd., April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006

Note: The projected demand for the Townships was applied to the supply in the fully serviced and water only villages because the majority of the growth is expected to occur in those settlements.

It should be noted that a secondary planning process has recently been completed for approximately 122 ha (301 ac) of land in north Woodstock. The secondary plan identifies the planned use of the lands as residential with a mix of densities and a portion of these lands have also recently been designated for residential purposes to allow for the development of a residential subdivision. These lands will serve to address some of the deficiency in the 20 year supply. As well, the City of Woodstock and the Town of Tillsonburg also have areas of land located immediately outside their corporate boundaries designated for future urban growth purposes and intended for future residential development.

An over-supply of residential lands is beneficial for long term planning purposes as it provides for:

- Greater than anticipated household growth;
- Land price competition;
- Choice of locations; and
- Equity of distribution.

It also mitigates the effect of property ownership limitations, i.e. where vacant lands are held by few property owners, who may limit access for development.

#### D – The Supply of Employment Lands

The following table provides a summary of the overall supply of employment land for the period 2009-2029, together with a comparison of the industrial employment land supply to forecast demand for the Large Urban Centres (Woodstock, Tillsonburg and Ingersoll) and the five Townships. Given that the County does not have projections available for commercial or community facilities/institutional employment land, the study only provides a summary of supply for these categories of employment land.

Municipality	Supply vs. Demand	Industrial	Commercial	Community Facility/Institutional	Total
Woodstock	Supply	483.7 ha (1,195.2 ac)	45.2 ha (111.7 ac)	11.7 ha (28.9 ac)	540.6 ha (1,335.8 ac)
	Surplus/Deficiency	+ 73.2 ha (180.9 ac)	n/a	n/a	n/a
	<b>Margin (+/-)</b>	<b>+ 15%</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>
Tillsonburg	Supply	141.1 ha (348.6 ac)	20.8 ha (51.4 ac)	11.4 ha (28.2 ac)	173.3 ha (428.2 ac)
	Surplus/Deficiency	- 29.7 ha (422.5 ac)	n/a	n/a	n/a
	<b>Margin (+/-)</b>	<b>- 21%</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>
Ingersoll	Supply	49.4 ha (122.1 ac)	15.4 ha (38.1 ac)	0 ha (0 ac)	64.8 ha (160.1 ac)
	Surplus/Deficiency	- 250 ha (617.7 ac)	n/a	n/a	n/a
	<b>Margin (+/-)</b>	<b>- 506%</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>
Blandford-Blenheim	Supply	25.1 ha (62 ac)	0.8 ha (1.9 ac)	0 ha (0ac)	25.9 ha (64 ac)
	Demand	16.5 ha (40.8 ac)	n/a	n/a	n/a
	<b>Margin (+/-)</b>	<b>+52%</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>
East Zorra-Tavistock	Supply	17.5 ha (43.2 ac)	0 ha (0 ac)	0.0 ha (0.0 ac)	17.5 ha (43.2 ac)
	Demand	17 ha (38.3 ac)	n/a	n/a	n/a
	<b>Margin (+/-)</b>	<b>+3%</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>
Norwich	Supply	24.5 ha (60.5 ac)	1.8 ha (4.4 ac)	0 ha (0 ac)	26.3 ha (65 ac)
	Demand	26.9 ha (66.5 ac)	n/a	n/a	n/a
	<b>Margin (+/-)</b>	<b>-9%</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>
South West-Oxford	Supply	27.7 ha (68.4 ac)	0.7 ha (1.7 ac)	0 ha (0 ac)	28.4 ha (70.1 ac)
	Demand	10.5 ha (25.9 ac)	n/a	n/a	n/a
	<b>Margin (+/-)</b>	<b>+ 164%</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>
Zorra	Supply	5.2 ha (12.8 ac)	3.7 ha (9.1 ac)	0 ha (0 ac)	8.5 ha (21.0 ac)
	Demand	8.6 ha (21.2 ac)	n/a	n/a	n/a
	<b>Margin (+/-)</b>	<b>- 40%</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>

Note: The projected demand for the Townships was applied to the supply in the fully serviced and water only villages because the majority of the growth is expected to occur in those settlements.

As a result of the designation of additional land for industrial purposes as part of the East Woodstock Secondary Planning process, the City of Woodstock currently has a sufficient supply of industrial land relative to forecast demand to 2031. The Town of Ingersoll and, to a lesser degree, the Town of Tillsonburg, appear to have an insufficient supply of industrial land relative to forecast demand to 2031, under a high growth scenario. In this regard, the Town of Ingersoll should immediately consider options to obtain and designate additional land to ensure an adequate supply of industrial employment lands will be available to accommodate forecast growth over the planning period. The Town of Tillsonburg may also need to consider options for

designating additional lands for industrial employment purposes to ensure the Town maintains its ability to accommodate forecast demand over the longer term.

Three of the five Townships appear to have sufficient land available to accommodate forecast demand for industrial employment land within their Serviced Village areas. The exceptions are the Townships of Norwich and Zorra, which have slightly less industrial land than would be required to meet projected demand. These Townships may need to consider designating additional lands for industrial employment lands over the longer term to accommodate forecast demand. In this regard, it should be noted that both Townships contain Future Urban Growth designated lands within their Village boundaries which is identified for future employment purposes, some of which may eventually be considered for redesignation to industrial purposes. The Village of Norwich also contains a considerable amount of underutilized industrial land that may eventually become available to accommodate some of the projected demand. Finally, it is also recognized that the Township of East-Zorra Tavistock has only a slight oversupply of vacant industrial employment land, however, the Village of Tavistock currently contains a considerable amount of underutilized industrial land on the northwest side of County Road #59. If these lands were to be severed, or otherwise made available for development, they would augment the existing industrial land supply considerably.

In many cases, the majority of the vacant employment lands in the Serviced Villages are privately owned, which may impede their availability for development, due to such issues as lack of land owner interest, land banking and price speculation. In this regard, it should be noted that one of the eight recommendations contained in the Economic Base Analysis & Rural Development Strategy, Matthew Fischer & Associates Inc, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006, was for each Township to begin to plan for the acquisition and development of a modest inventory of industrial land in the Serviced Villages to accommodate growth.

The City of Woodstock and the Town of Ingersoll also have areas of land located immediately outside their corporate boundaries designated for Future Urban Growth purposes that are intended for a mix of commercial and industrial uses.

There is no long-term supply of land designated for institutional development in the Large Urban Centres or Serviced Villages, however, certain minor institutional uses such as schools, churches, day-care facilities and small retirement homes are permitted in residential designations, Service Commercial and Commercial Area designations. Also, by Official Plan policy, major institutional uses require an Official Plan amendment prior to their establishment in the large urban centres.

An over-supply of employment lands is necessary for long term planning purposes as it provides for:

- Greater growth potential than anticipated;
- Opportunity to accommodate single large commercial or industrial developments;
- Future demand for recreational uses and additional open space; and
- A variety of economic development opportunities for each area municipality.

## **SUMMARY**

The Draft County of Oxford Vacant Lands Study, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, provides the County and Area Municipalities with a current indication of the supply of vacant residential and employment lands in each of the serviced settlement areas, water only villages and Future Urban Growth areas.

The Vacant Lands Study is updated by Planning and GIS staff on a yearly basis in order to ensure that a current inventory of land supplies in the County is maintained. This serves to provide the County and Area Municipalities with the information necessary to evaluate their position with respect to the County Official Plan and Provincial Growth policies on an on-going basis and allow ample time to react to unexpected changes in land consumption or market conditions which might have an impact on long term land supplies.

Planning staff recommend that the current update of the Vacant Lands Study be distributed to the County and Area Municipalities for a 30 day review period, to allow an opportunity for additional comments or submissions to be considered prior to final approval of the document.

"Paul Michiels"

Paul Michiels,  
Senior Policy Planner

"Margaret Misk-Evans"

Margaret Misk-Evans, MCIP RPP  
Corporate Manager

"M. R. Bragg"

M.R. Bragg  
CAO

PM/pm

Dated: September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009