



## Information on Severances in Thames Centre

Prepared By: Erin Besch, County of Middlesex, Planner

Severances in the rural area of Thames Centre are limited by a number of factors, but most specifically by the 'prime agricultural area' designation of lands outside settlement boundaries. This designation is identified within the *Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 (PPS)* and speak to lands that are comprised of specialty crop areas and/or Canada Land Inventory Class 1, 2, and 3 lands. These areas receive the most stringent policies within the PPS, as agricultural lands have been deemed a provincial interest and shall be protected for long-term use. For clarity, Middlesex County has designated all lands outside settlement boundaries as prime agricultural lands.

Through the PPS, municipalities are provided with only a few options for severance in the prime agricultural area. Firstly, lot creation for farm parcels may be permitted, provided they are sufficiently large to maintain flexibility for future changes in the type or size of agricultural operations. Through the County of Middlesex Official Plan, the minimum farm parcel size has been determined to be 40 hectares or 98.8 acres, and this has been reflected within the Thames Centre Official Plan as well. Commonly referred to as a farm split, these severances are only permitted where both the severed and retained lots would equal the minimum size. It is noted that these severances are not brought forward often as large tracts of 80 hectares, or more are becoming less common in the Municipality.

The second severance type permitted under the PPS is lot creation for agriculture-related uses, provided the lot is limited to a minimum size to accommodate the use and private services. The Thames Centre Official Plan provides further direction that these agricultural uses can be commercial or industrial, but due to the nature of the business, must be located in close proximity to the agricultural operations which it serves, i.e. cannot reasonably be located within a settlement area. Examples include the separation of a grain

handling operation from a larger farm parcel, or a severance to establish a farm equipment service facility.

Finally, the only residential lot creation permitted by the PPS, County and local Official Plans in the prime agricultural area is for residences surplus to an agricultural operation due to farm consolidation. This severance type is common in Thames Centre and is intended to allow farmers to dispose of additional residences to alleviate the burden of finding a renter or having the dwelling fall into disrepair. A number of criteria are required to be met to qualify for the severance, including the farmer having at least one other farm parcel and dwelling, and the dwelling in question must be a minimum of 10 years old. The parcel must be kept as small as possible to accommodate the dwelling and private services, and the inclusion of cultivated agricultural land must be kept to a minimum. Other considerations include the habitability of the dwelling, ensuring the well and septic system are operational, access to the farm parcel, etc. Although it must be demonstrated that farm consolidation has occurred as part of the initial application process, many of the other considerations can be added as conditions of approval to ensure the applicant isn't incurring significant costs prior to approval of the application. Common conditions include drainage reapportionment, county road widening dedication and completion of a survey to outline the new property boundary.

Although the surplus dwelling process results in the creation of a new lot, the PPS, County Official Plan and Thames Centre Official Plan all prohibit additional residential uses on the remnant farm parcel, and this is achieved through the requirement for a zoning by-law amendment.

It is also of interest to note that 'reverse' surplus dwelling severances are becoming more and more popular for those landowners who wouldn't otherwise qualify as they only own one farm parcel and one dwelling. This severance requires the applicant to retain a purchaser of the farmland who would qualify for the severance, and this information must be included as part of the initial application process. To ensure alignment with the policy requirements, the farmland must be transferred to the specific farmer, or the severance will fail.