

## **Bluewater Shoreline Residents' Association**

### **Review of the Draft Revision of the Huron County Official Plan (September 2009)**

#### **1. Introduction**

The Bluewater Shoreline Residents' Association commends Huron County on the draft revision of the Huron County Official Plan. We have noted that several ideas from the public input sessions have been incorporated into the changes in the Plan. We appreciate the County's efforts to develop community involvement and to incorporate ideas coming directly from the community.

As a community organization representing more than 2500 residents, we look forward to ongoing community consultation and involvement in the future..

In section 2 below, we highlight portions of the revision that are particularly positive, and consistent with our view of the future in Huron County.

In section 3 below, we highlight five issues from the draft Official Plan that cause concerns. Our five major concerns are the following: lakeshore residential settlement areas, renewable energy, livestock operations, Lake Huron, and the pillars of the Huron County economy. We ask for reassessment of these five areas, and we point out the question of "settlement areas" and "the pillars of the economy" are especially bothersome to us. Specifically,

- We are particularly concerned that the Official Plan seems to institutionalize the idea that some settlement areas will receive more services than others, even though the rates of taxation are the same. Lakeshore Residential areas are defined as "settlement areas" and pay full residential taxes, but receive fewer services than other settlement areas. This, despite the fact that, as the Official Plan states, there are increasing numbers of people who are converting or building permanent houses on the lakeshore.
- We are also concerned that the draft Official Plan emphasizes the importance of the agriculture sector to such a disproportionately high degree that it may downplay the importance of the other major sectors of our county economy, many of which will be among the significant wealth producers and employers of the future. We believe that the future of the county depends on economic diversification, not on intensification.

#### **2. Sections of the Draft Official Plan Supported Strongly by Bluewater Shoreline Residents' Association (quotations from the Plan followed by our comments)**

##### Section 1 – Introduction

"It is recognized that climate change, and rising energy prices, combined with health issues related to obesity, and inactivity, aging and mobility in addition to environmental health concerns such as air and water quality are all issues which require attention."

*Comment: Environmental health concerns have consistently been rated by BSRA members as their most important issues.*

## Section 2 – Agriculture

“Huron’s residents wish to see regulation limited to that which is necessary to protect and enhance the community. The community noted that global competitiveness means that Huron’s farmers need to retain flexibility to respond to changing economics and management practices. This can be achieved through support for agriculture with limited and appropriate regulation.”

*Comment: We think that greater government support for agriculture is required to make the industry more profitable. The problem is not regulation so much as political support for agriculture. In particular, we believe that regulations designed to protect the environment, particularly the quality of ravine and lake water, need to be enforced.*

“Agricultural lands may be removed from the prime agricultural area, only if it has been determined through demonstrated need, and there are no alternative locations for the proposed use that avoid prime agricultural land.”

*Comment: We support.*

“Municipalities may only remove land from prime agricultural areas for expansion of a settlement area boundary through a supportive comprehensive review.”

*Comment: We support.*

“New and expanding livestock facilities will comply with Nutrient Management legislation. In accordance with the Natural Environment policies of this plan, landowners have a role to play in protecting the quality and quantity of water through good stewardship and adoption of best management practices.”

*Comment: One of the most urgent and important issues, from the perspective of Lakeshore Residents, is that the pollution of surface waters and lake water must cease.*

*Further Comment: We wonder if the Plan should link with organic farming and viticulture for future positioning and economic planning. It seems appropriate to reposition the County’s image to secure our future.*

## Section 3 - Community Services

“Huron’s residents value the variety and quality of community services offered in the County; and recognizes the importance of community partnerships and co-operation.

*Comment: BSRA is strongly committed to establishing and supporting community partnerships.*

“Other modes of transportation including walking and cycling, and the corresponding trails, lanes and paths are encouraged.”

*Comment: Strong support.*

“Lanes, trails, roads and paths used for walking and cycling will be integrated into the transportation systems and strongly promoted.”

*Comment: Strong support.*

“Alternative energy systems and renewable energy systems shall be permitted throughout the County in accordance with Local Official Plans and Provincial Regulation.”

*Comment: It will be important to protect the health and well-being of all citizens and to respect the natural environment.*

#### Section 4 – Economy

“Four economic sectors represent the pillars of the Huron County economy: agriculture; manufacturing; tourism; and cultural/creative industries.

*Comment: We recognize agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism as important parts of the economy. While we believe that cultural/creative industries are becoming an important part of Huron’s future, we believe that there are several other additional “pillars” in the economy that should be included. If we look at the numbers of businesses or at the numbers of people employed, we believe that this statement is neither accurate nor helpful. See section 3 below.*

“The maintenance, enhancement and coordination of physical infrastructure such as water, sewer, road, rail, port, marina, air and communication services such as internet and wireless technologies are critical for the economy’s growth.”

*Comment: Strong support for improvements in communication services.*

#### Section 6 - Natural Environment

“Growing environmental concerns are at the forefront of public opinion in Huron County, in Canada and around the World. Global climate change and issues related to air and water quality are examples of concerns that directly impact overall environmental health and require action,”

*Comment: We have expressed on several occasions that we believe there are other jurisdictions around the world that are able to control surface and lake water quality to a higher standard than Huron county does. We need to learn from these jurisdictions.*

“The community values a healthy environment including the quality of the water and air, a diversity of native plants, wildlife and the beauty of natural landscapes. The community indicated their willingness to protect and enhance the environment in order to improve where they live.”

*Comment: Strong support.*

“Huron residents recognize that their quality of life is dependent on a healthy watershed. A watershed includes the air, ground and surface water, soil, plants, animals, and humans. A healthy watershed requires that the integrity and function of the environment be maintained or restored. The stewardship of all aspects of a healthy watershed is a shared responsibility of the entire community.”

*Comment: BSRA has strongly supported the watershed approach to improving the health of our environment and the quality of life in Huron County. Our stewardship extends to the birds and bats in the air, the animals on the surface, and the aquatic life in our streams and Lake Huron.*

“The community is committed to the protection and enhancement of natural landscapes, the sustainable use of natural and biological resources, in addition to strategies and actions which increase forest cover improve forest health and achieve water quality targets. The pursuit of a healthy environment must be community based and pro-active.

*Comment: Strong support. The idea of “natural landscapes” must include the visual appeal of our physical environment.*

“The protection and improvement of sourcewater functions, drinking water supplies and the health of watercourses are critical to the long-term well-being of both residents and the environment.”

*Comment: Our watercourses generally are not healthy, and they appear to be deteriorating. We must make improvements.*

## Section 7 – Settlement Patterns

“In the agricultural industry there has been important growth in the size and intensity of farming operations. At the same time, there has been a desire of many to live within the County’s rural area. This desire for a rural lifestyle has also had an impact on the lakeshore where there has been considerable development of seasonal and permanent residences and conversion of existing cottages for year round occupancy. This development, along with a better understanding of the relationship between water quality and rural development patterns points to the need for responsive environmental standards.”

*Comment: Very strong support. It is important that this Plan recognizes the Lakeshore Residential areas as settlement areas, both seasonal and permanent. It will also be important to re-consider whether some settlement areas are entitled to more residential services than others. See section 3 below.*

“The Lake Huron shoreline is important because of the recreational, residential, ecological and tourism services it provides. The goal of the community is to protect, enhance and restore the quality of the shoreline and public access to Lake Huron. Previous development has placed considerable stress on the lakeshore environment. This stress requires that future development consider existing development and demonstrate environmental sensitivity. All development existing and proposed is encouraged to minimize negative impacts and improve the natural condition of lakeshore through stewardship and community partnerships.”

*Comment: Support. However, the plan should make reference to the importance of the quality of the LAKE as well as the lakeshore.*

“Lakeshore Residential Areas are Settlement Areas which permit a mix of seasonal and permanent residential development. Limited growth is permitted in these areas however, unlike other settlement areas lakeshore residential areas are not intended to contain a full range of uses. Development will be limited to residential uses and will occur based on the availability of appropriate services.”

*Comment: While Lakeshore Residential Areas will not “contain a full range of uses”, it is only fair that they have the same amenities for residential uses as other settlement areas. Otherwise, they should pay residential taxes at a lower rate. See sections 1 above and 3 below.*

“Any consideration for the expansion of existing Settlement Areas or the establishment of a new Settlement Area will require a supportive comprehensive review.”

*Comment: Support*

“All development will protect surface water and ground water, and will incorporate water pollution control and water conservation measures.”

*Comment: We feel strongly that water pollution control is one of the most important issues facing the community.*

“Community energy planning is encouraged and may be pursued by local municipalities to assess future energy needs and options.”

*Comment: We are particularly impressed with European approaches to the Co-operative development and profit-sharing of energy resources. We believe that decisions about the exploitation of energy resources are community decisions and that whole local communities, not remote energy companies, should both make the critical decisions and plans, and should benefit from any profits generated.*

### **3. BSRA Major Concerns and Suggestions**

#### Concern 1: Lakeshore Residential Settlement Areas

“Lakeshore Residential Areas are Settlement Areas which permit a mix of seasonal and permanent residential development. Limited growth is permitted in these areas however, unlike other settlement areas lakeshore residential areas are not intended to contain a full range of uses.”

*Comment: For many years, lakeshore residents have believed that they do not get a fair share of the municipal/county services which are generally provided for residential life in Huron County. The plan’s section on Settlement Patterns may imply that Lakeshore Residential areas will not be given equal consideration with other Settlement Areas. If this is the intention, it is unfair. This concept must be clarified.*

#### Concern 2: Renewable energy systems such as wind, solar and biomass facilities

“The County encourages the Province to regulate renewable energy systems to address local issues and ensure the appropriate protection of the public and the natural environment.”

*Comment: Protection of “the public” must include protection for nearby residents, for members of the larger community, for the tourist industry, and for natural and scenic landscape environments.*

#### Concern 3: Livestock Operations

*Comment: While it may be important that “fair and equitable standards” be applied to large and intensive livestock operations, it is also critically important to maintain high standards for waste management. We must learn from mistakes made in other jurisdictions and take the necessary steps to protect our environment. We should relate waste management to the production of energy and to the reduction of surface water pollution.*

*We are not just seeking good waste management programs. The County should reach for the highest standards of responsible waste control and become a leader in Ontario. We need both government commitment to endorse these standards and financial backing. This goal is consistent with national environmental objectives. It impacts not only the land but the lake and more importantly, the residents, our children and our grandchildren.*

Concern 4: Lake Huron:

*Comment: While it is generally conceded that Lake Huron is a fundamentally important part of life in Huron County, the condition of the Lake itself receives little attention in the Official Plan. Huron County brands itself as Ontario's West Coast, but it does not sufficiently protect the water quality that draws people to this west coast. The Plan should incorporate guidelines for the protection, use, and promotion of Lake Huron itself. To omit comment about the Lake is to ignore a fundamental part of Huron County's history and future.*

Concern 5: The "Pillars" of the Huron County Economy

"Four economic sectors represent the pillars of the Huron County economy: agriculture; manufacturing; tourism; and cultural/creative industries."

*Comment: According to the January 2009 Report of the Huron Business and Development Corporation, agriculture and mining comprise 33% of the businesses in Huron County. Agriculture is the largest of the industrial sectors in our economy. But it is not the only large and important industrial sector. Trade, personal and business services, construction and utilities, finance and real estate are also very important. In fact, between 2001 and 2007, the number of agricultural enterprises in the county declined while the number of enterprises in personal business and other services, construction and utilities, finance and real estate, and manufacturing actually increased.*

*As stated in the HBDC report, between 2001 and 2007 four major sectors of the Huron County economy also increased their employment rates (finance, insurance and real estate; personal, business and other services) while agriculture and government services, education, health, and retail trade declined.*

*Agriculture supports 17% of the jobs in the county, while manufacturing supports 16%, wholesale/retail 15%, other services 15%, business 11%, and construction 8%. While sales and service jobs continue to offer significant job opportunities in Huron, the greatest growth in job opportunities is occurring for skilled trades, transportation equipment operators and natural and applied science positions.*

*This view of the Huron County economy calls into question the whole structure of section 4 of the draft Huron County Official Plan. The draft Plan emphasizes agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and cultural/creative. In doing this it ignores the obvious importance of trade, personal and business services, construction and utilities, finance and real estate. It may also negatively affect our ability to raise support for these sectors. Further, the effect of placing agriculture in section 2 of the draft Plan (before the "pillars of the economy" are even identified) distorts what should be a more balanced view of the county's present structure, and, more important, the directions it needs to take for the future. By overemphasizing agriculture as the sole focus for the County, we miss the value of the natural amenity of the Lake and coastline and the future value therein.*

*For these reasons, we recommend that the county reconsider the structure of section 4 of the draft Official Plan and that it reconsider the sequencing of sections 2 and 4.*