

Municipality of The District of Lunenburg
Public Hearing held by Municipal Council

in Council Chamber, 10 Allée Champlain Drive, Cookville, NS

Wednesday, July 29, 2026 – 6:00 p.m.

Attendance

Mayor Elspeth McLean-Wile

Deputy Mayor Chasidy Veinotte, District 10

Councillor Morgen Reinhardt, District 1

Councillor Martin Bell, District 2

Councillor Wendy Oickle, District 3

Councillor Pam Hubley, District 4

Councillor Cathy Moore, District 5

Councillor Alison Smith, District 6

Councillor Edgar Burns, District 7

Councillor Kacy DeLong, District 8

Staff

Tom MacEwan, Chief Administrative Officer

Alex Dumaresq, Deputy CAO

Tina Robichaud-Bond, Executive Assistant

1. Call to Order

Mayor McLean-Wile called the Public Hearing to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. Opening Remarks

Mayor McLean-Wile reported that this is a Public Hearing for Council to receive written and verbal presentations from citizens in attendance on the repeal and replacement of the Municipal Planning Strategy (035) and Land Use By-law (049).

2a Introduction of Council Members

Councillors for each district introduced themselves.

2b Review of Agenda and Rules of Conduct

Mayor McLean-Wile reviewed the agenda and read the Rules of Conduct that are to be followed by members of the public who wish to speak at the Hearing. The Rules of Conduct were also printed at the bottom of the Agenda.

3. Reports and Presentations by Planning Staff

Planning & Development staff including Jeff Merrill, Director of Planning & Development, Ella Gindi, Planner II, Rosemary Young, Planner I and Ezra Saunders, Planning Student, gave a

presentation on the Municipal-Wide Land Use Planning Project (attached to Minutes).

The presentation highlighted two changes from Draft 3 to Draft 4::

- Rural Agricultural Potential Zone replaced with Agricultural Protection Area creating a more flexible, property-specific approach to farmland protection and allowing additions/removals based on actual land conditions.
- Definition of “Recreation Vehicle” revised for clarity and to include older RV models.

Councillor DeLong arrived at 6:12 p.m.

4. Written and Verbal Presentations from the Public

4a Review of Written Submissions

Mayor McLean-Wile asked if any written submissions were received by the Municipality.

Ms. Gindi reported that seven written submissions, mostly relating to the agricultural protection area, were received and circulated to Council members, and two late submissions were received and would be attached to the Minutes.

4b Verbal Presentations by the Public

Mayor McLean-Wile asked if there were any verbal presentations to be made by anyone in the audience.

Rachelle Chicoine, resident of Bridgewater with land in Cherry Hill expressed concerns about the accuracy and age of the wetland mapping affecting her property. She emphasized that she had no intention of developing the wetland area but wanted to understand the true extent of the wetland and ensure any future activities remained outside required buffer zones.

Stephen O'Leary, President of Waters Edge Leisure Living and Wade Property Developments, expressed concerns about the proposed 30-metre watercourse setback requirement in the Plan, particularly its impact on existing waterfront lots that were designed and approved under previous regulations. Overall, Mr. O'Leary supported the goal of protecting waterways but argued that the proposed rules should be more flexible and allow case-by-case exceptions for properties with unique circumstances.

Mark Hoadley, with Waters Edge Leisure Living and Spear Lake Land Holdings stated that he generally supports a planning framework but raised several concerns about how some of the proposed regulations may affect existing developments and property owners. He stated that although he understood that environmental protection and planning regulations are important, the Municipality should provide greater flexibility, exemptions, or grandfathering provisions to

avoid negatively affecting existing subdivisions, property owners, and future housing development.

Diana Gilbert, Midville Branch, raised concerns about the availability and sustainability of groundwater resources in Lunenburg County as development continues. She questioned whether there are adequate regulations to ensure sufficient water was available before approving new developments or homes that rely on wells. Her main concern was that planning and development decisions may be proceeding without a clear understanding of long-term water supply capacity.

Hester Gibson, 3372 Northfield Road, expressed strong concerns about the changes to the definition of farmland and agriculture between Draft 3 and Draft 4, arguing that the new approach may not adequately protect agricultural land. Ms. Gibson felt that the definition of farmland and the database being used to identify and protect agricultural lands be reconsidered, and that the Municipality ensure that long-term farmland preservation remains a priority in the planning framework.

Stephen O'Leary spoke a second time and raised concerns about the watershed feeder area overlay shown on the planning maps, arguing that it may be inaccurately or overly broadly applied in some locations. He suggested that the municipality should reconsider the mapping and associated regulations, particularly the application of the 30-metre setback requirement to areas that are not truly part of the watershed. He felt the designation itself was inaccurate and represented an overreach, urging the municipality to limit watershed protections to areas that are genuinely connected to and impact the watershed.

Ms. Gindi explained that the Municipality's watershed mapping was based on modern LiDAR technology. LiDAR data used laser and infrared technology to precisely identify natural drainage patterns, waterways, and the areas that contribute water to protected lakes and watersheds.

She noted that the municipality used this updated data to map the natural watershed boundaries for protected watersheds such as the Hebb Lake/Milipsigate (Petite Rivière) watershed, and that these boundaries were also relied upon by other organizations, including regional water utilities. She explained that the 30-metre setback requirement was intended to provide a natural buffer that helped filter contaminants before they entered waterways, helping protect drinking water sources and watershed health.

Rachel Fahlman, Bayport, expressed concerns that the new regulations could negate the investment she had already made in her property and limit her ability to develop the property as originally intended. She spoke in support of an exception process for properties that were planned and approved under previous rules and urged that exceptions be considered.

Mark Hoadley spoke for a second time, urging Council to consider the impact on existing property owners and developments that were approved under previous regulations and asking

that these particular circumstances be grandfathered to ensure owners and developers are not unfairly affected by regulatory changes introduced after investments and approvals were made.

Fay Pickrem spoke in support of exceptions or grandfathering situations where investments had already been made prior to the regulations change.

Mayor McLean-Wile asked three times if there was anyone else in the audience who would like to address Council on the proposed Agreement. There were no further comments.

5. Review of Approval Process

Mayor McLean-Wile reviewed the approval process, noting that Municipal Council could either call a Special Council meeting and make a decision at the close of this Hearing or the decision could be deferred to the next regular Council meeting. Council agreed to hold a Special Council meeting after the Public Hearing.

It was noted that Council has heard the concerns of the residents in attendance.

6. Closing of the Public Hearing

Mayor McLean-Wile declared the Public Hearing closed at 7:03 p.m.

Correspondence for July 29 Public Hearing
Late Submissions

Date received	Name	Page Number
2026.07.28	Justin Cantafio	1
2026.07.29	Leitha Haysom	5
2026.07.29	Diana Gilbert	6

Protecting Farmland as the Foundation of Food Sovereignty

Justin Cantafio

MODL resident and food systems policy practitioner working with farmers, landowners, and community organizations across Atlantic Canada

July 28, 2026

Mayor McLean-Wile and Members of the MODL Council,

I'm writing in support of meaningful and durable agricultural land protection within the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg's *Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law*.

The public concerns raised about the former Rural Agricultural Potential Zone deserve serious consideration. Landowners have questioned the accuracy of Canada Land Inventory mapping, the inclusion of forested or marginal areas, and the exclusion of some actively farmed land. Farmers have also emphasized that land-use restrictions alone won't address the economic conditions making agriculture increasingly difficult. These are legitimate concerns. They point toward the need for better agricultural assessment, clearer definitions, accessible appeal mechanisms, and stronger support for farmers.

They don't, however, diminish the need to protect land capable of supporting agriculture now or in the future.

Food sovereignty is the right of communities to shape their own food systems and retain meaningful control over the land, infrastructure, knowledge, and economic relationships required to feed themselves. A municipality can't guarantee food sovereignty through zoning alone. It can, however, permanently undermine it by allowing agricultural land to be fragmented and converted to uses that make future farming impractical or impossible.

Nova Scotia is already experiencing a serious erosion of its agricultural capacity. Between 2016 and 2021, the province lost approximately 21% of its farms, the largest decline among Canadian provinces. Between 2011 and 2021, total farm acreage declined by 29%, while land dedicated to crops fell by 12%. Nova Scotia farms have also recorded negative total net incomes on average since 2017, and farm families receive approximately two-thirds of their income from off-farm sources. These figures describe both a farm viability crisis and a land-use crisis.

In this context, it would be a mistake to define valuable agricultural land solely by whether it was actively farmed in 2018. Agricultural land moves in and out of production for many reasons, including farm retirement, poor market conditions, labour shortages, lack of succession planning, and the high cost of restoring fields and infrastructure. Hayfields may grow into scrub. Pastures may become young forest. A farm may cease operating while its soils, drainage, location, and historical use continue to give it agricultural potential.

Temporary inactivity isn't the same as permanent unsuitability.

The Province's Statement of Provincial Interest reflects this distinction. It applies to active farmland and land with agricultural potential. It directs municipalities to identify agricultural lands, limit lot creation where necessary, give priority to uses that retain future agricultural possibilities, and direct non-agricultural development toward land of lower agricultural value. The purpose is explicitly intergenerational: protecting a finite land base for a viable and sustainable agriculture and food industry now and in the future.

Draft 4 narrows the Agricultural Protection Area to active farmland identified through a 2018 provincial project where at least 60% of the actively farmed area consists of Class 3 soil. It removes the previous four-hectare minimum while continuing to allow up to six lots within the protected area.

The revised Agricultural Protection Area could therefore cover less than 1% of MODL lands. That's simply not enough land to constitute a credible long-term agricultural protection strategy, particularly when the area is selected using a narrow snapshot of active farming from 2018. Just because a framework complies procedurally with provincial requirements doesn't mean it won't fall well short of protecting the land base needed for future food sovereignty.

Importantly, without information about the size, configuration, and remaining agricultural usefulness of these parcels after subdivision, Council can't yet determine whether the policy will meaningfully prevent fragmentation.

Information presented at First Reading appears to reinforce this concern. Nearly three-quarters of the identified parcels are under five acres, and almost nine in ten are ten acres or smaller. This suggests that much of the land within the proposed Agricultural Protection Area is already highly fragmented, and that a uniform allowance of up to six subdivisions is a poor substitute for assessing whether each property can retain a viable agricultural land base.

The consequences of additional subdivision will vary substantially according to parcel size and configuration. A six-lot allowance has a very different meaning on a large working farm than on a smaller parcel. Fragmentation also extends beyond the

acreage physically occupied by houses. New driveways, private roads, septic systems, property boundaries, drainage systems, land speculation, and conflicts between agricultural and residential uses can progressively make farming more difficult. Once multiple residential lots have been created, reassembling them into a viable farm is simply unrealistic.

Farmland protection must also be paired with farmer protection. Municipal and provincial governments should support succession planning, land access for new farmers, farm labour and housing, field restoration, shared infrastructure, local processing, institutional procurement, land banks, and tax policies that reward genuine agricultural use. The [Growing at Home report](#) emphasizes that strong regional food systems create employment, keep money circulating regionally, strengthen local infrastructure, and improve resilience to climate change and inflation. Direct and regional food markets (e.g., independent retail, food hubs, and farmers' markets) can also help producers retain a larger share of the food dollar that would otherwise be captured by corporate intermediaries.

This is where farmland protection intersects with community wealth building. Agricultural land is productive economic infrastructure. When it supports working farms, it can sustain livelihoods, local suppliers, processors, markets, restaurants, and other rural businesses for generations. Its value can't be measured only through the immediate property-tax revenue created by cottages or rural residential development. Land use conversion may produce a short-term increase in assessed value while eliminating much greater long-term productive capacity.

I therefore encourage Council not to grant final approval to the Agricultural Protection Area until it can demonstrate:

1. How much active and potentially productive agricultural land would be protected or excluded.
2. Whether six permitted subdivisions could materially fragment smaller protected areas.
3. How landowners can obtain independent, credible agricultural assessments where maps are inaccurate.
4. How historical agricultural use, pasture, hayfields, fallow land, scrubland, and restorable fields will be evaluated.
5. How development will be directed away from the best available agricultural land.
6. What parallel measures MODL will pursue to improve farm viability, land access, and succession.

I recognize that the Municipal Planning Strategy will be a living document and that Council intends to continue supporting local agriculture. However, that flexibility makes it even more important to establish a precautionary baseline now, since future

amendments can relax or refine protections but can't readily restore farmland after it has been fragmented and converted.

MODL doesn't need to resolve Nova Scotia's entire farming crisis through one planning process, but it does need to avoid making that crisis harder to reverse. Development decisions made today will shape who can farm, who can access land, and whether future residents can be fed from within the region.

Farmland protection should therefore be approached as essential food-system planning, rural economic development, and intergenerational stewardship. Once productive land has been divided, paved, and converted, the community doesn't simply lose open space. It loses choices. It loses food sovereignty.

I appreciate your time and consideration in reviewing this letter, and look forward to pragmatic, future-focused leadership from Council on this crucial matter.

Thank you,
Justin Cantafio

*PS: One technical issue also deserves clarification. The executive summary of the July 14th staff Request for Decision says the revised framework provides a process for addressing inaccurate soil mapping through qualified professional studies. The detailed staff report then says the process allowing professional soil studies was removed because few qualified professionals are available. That internal inconsistency is worth flagging. **A fair protection regime needs a credible ground-truthing process, but the shortage of professionals shouldn't become a reason to exclude potentially important land by default.***

Feedback on the Land Use Strategy

From Leitha Haysom [REDACTED]

Date Wed 7/29/2026 4:40 PM

To MODL Mayor <mayor@modl.ca>; MODL Planning <planning@modl.ca>; Morgen Reinhardt <morgen.reinhardt@modl.ca>; Martin Bell <martin.bell@modl.ca>; Wendy Oickle <wendy.oickle@modl.ca>; Pam Hubley <pam.hubley@modl.ca>; Cathy Moore <cathy.moore@modl.ca>; Alison Smith <alison.smith@modl.ca>; Kacy DeLong <kacy.delong@modl.ca>; Edgar Burns <edgar.burns@modl.ca>; Chasidy Veinotte <chasidy.veinotte@modl.ca>

CAUTION: This email originated from an external sender.

Good afternoon Mayor and Council,

I apologize for the lateness of this submission.

I'd like to start by saying I recognize the hard work that has gone into this strategy, and I appreciate the thoughtful effort that has been put in by council and staff to undertake such a significant task. I also want to recognize your exemplary work to engage the community - I believe you have set the gold standard for community engagement.

So I say that to recognize that I am here weighing in very last minute with one point of concern:

There was a significant shift in the piece around agricultural land. It seems to be a relatively major change with little rationale for the reduction. I don't believe it currently meets the provincial mandate to protect agricultural land, although ultimately the province will decide their own standards. But during the community engagement, a big part of the discussion was about food security, our collective right to be able to produce our own food (whether that relates to the number of chickens one has or the protection of agricultural land, it ultimately speaks to the name community concern). That is missing from the hard work you've done here. I hope that you will revisit this part of the land use bylaw.

Best,

Leitha Haysom
Corussetown

Will you please tell me what your knowledge is of local water supplies, and how you might apply this, in terms of planning?

I am motivated to ask this now because of a large development going in at the end of Lower Branch Road, where I understand each house will be dependent upon its own well.

My questions

What do you know about the aquifers in Lunenburg County?

Are there diagrams or plans of these, in terms of both area and depth?

Do you keep a record of any swales or boggy areas, etc, which feed aquifers?

Can you regulate against the potential loss of these?

Is planning permission granted independent of water supply?

I understand that water is a Provincial responsibility. Do you regularly check with the Province re. planning?

I read recently that of 21 of the world's largest aquifers, 15 of them were seriously depleted, and that was in 2015.

And...if Nova Scotia is to host a million more people by 2050, where will the domestic water supply come from - and do we know

Diana Gilbert

Midville Branch



Welcome to the Public Hearing

Municipal-Wide Land Use Planning Project

July 29, 2026



Agenda

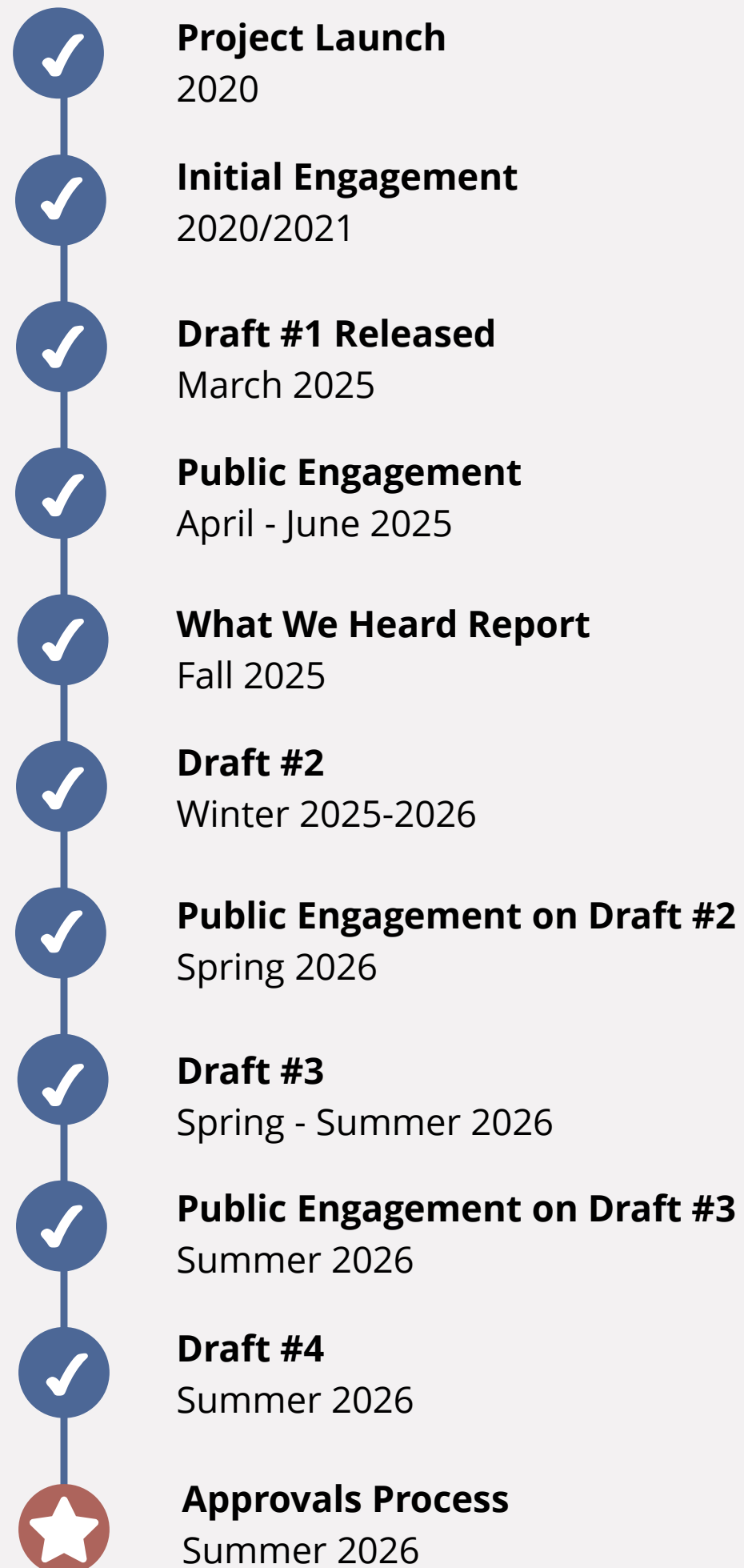
- 1 Background on the project
- 2 What's changed between Draft #3 and Draft #4
- 3 Overview of Draft #4
- 4 Next Steps

Background

Why is this project needed?

- In 2018, the province required that all lands must be zoned and address the **provincial statements of interest**.
- A **Municipal Planning Strategy** and **Land Use By-law** are being introduced.
- The plan can and will be changed over time as needed





Where are we in the process?

- Council passed first reading of Draft #3 on June 9, 2026
- Following a public hearing on June 25, 2026, Council directed planning staff to revisit and revise Draft 3 of the Land Use Planning framework
- Council passed first reading of Draft #4 on July 14, 2026
- Public information session held on July 21, 2026
- That brings us to today's public hearing

How did we get here?

4 drafts



Public
engagement at
each phase of
the project

Draft Engagement: Spring 2025 - Summer 2026

Radio Ads & Newspaper Ads
More than **75** Social Media posts
5 postcards sent to households
Engage MODL webpage
94 documents posted to Engage
36,100 Engage Visits

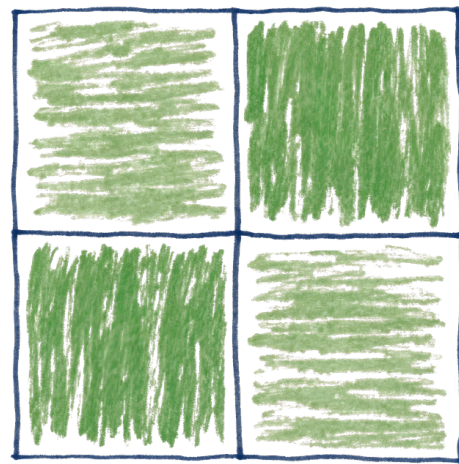
Information Boards
Sticky Note Comments
Feedback Frames
Survey
Emails
Online Comments

32 Total Public Engagement Events
28 In-person Open Houses & Information Sessions
4 Online Sessions
At least **1049** In-person Attendees

South Shore Expo
New Germany Community Cafe
Drop-In
4 Farm Visits
4 Stakeholder Engagements

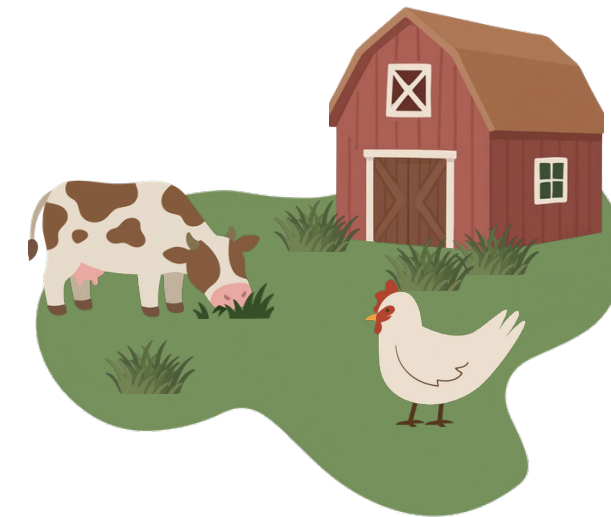
What's changed between Draft #3 and Draft #4

Agricultural Protection Changes



Draft #3:

**Rural Agricultural
Potential Zone**

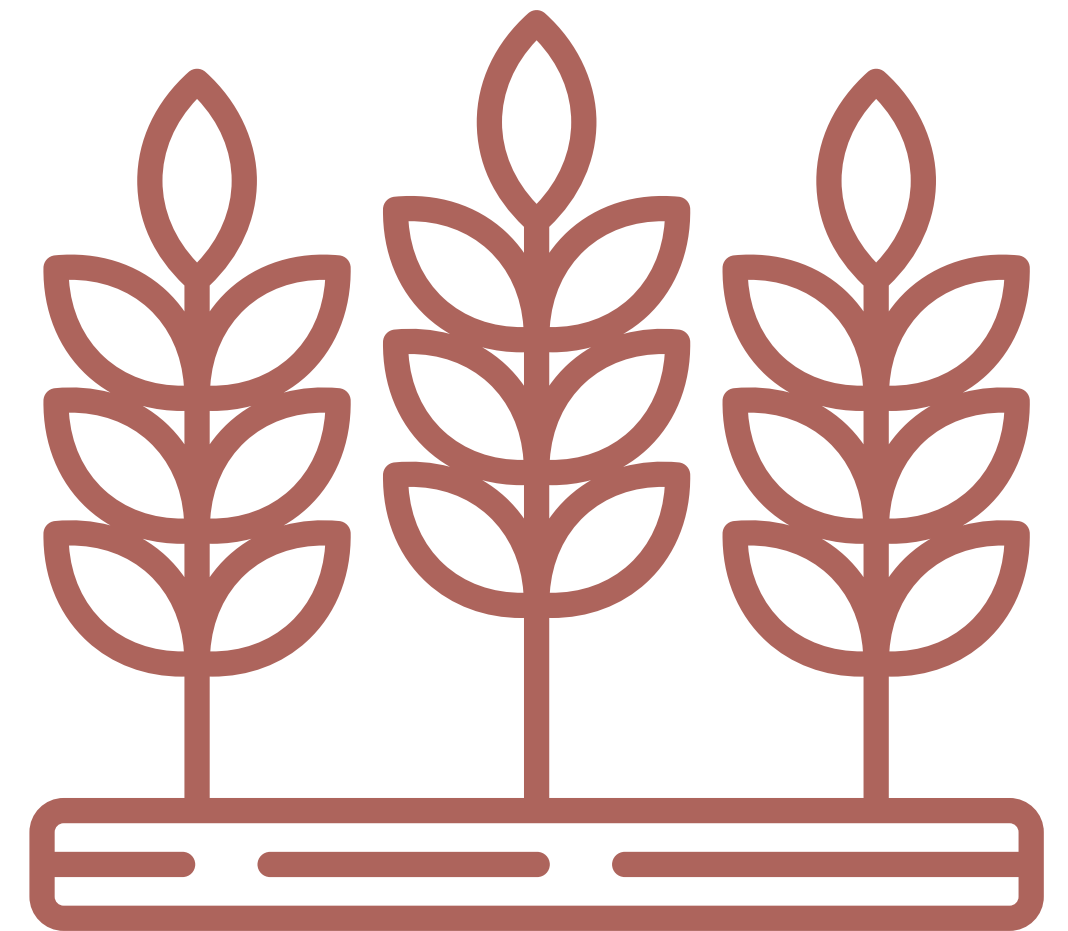


Draft #4:

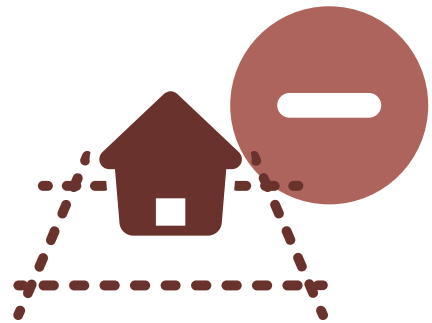
**Agricultural
Protection Area**

Agricultural Protection Area

- **Protects active farmlands containing Class 3 soils**
- **All uses in the underlying zone are permitted except cluster developments which are prohibited in the Agricultural Protection Area**
- **Limits subdivision within the Agricultural Protection Area to a maximum of six lots.**
- **Regulates the removal of topsoil.**



Agricultural Protection Area



Permits property owners to request removing their property from the Agricultural Protection Area if they can demonstrate

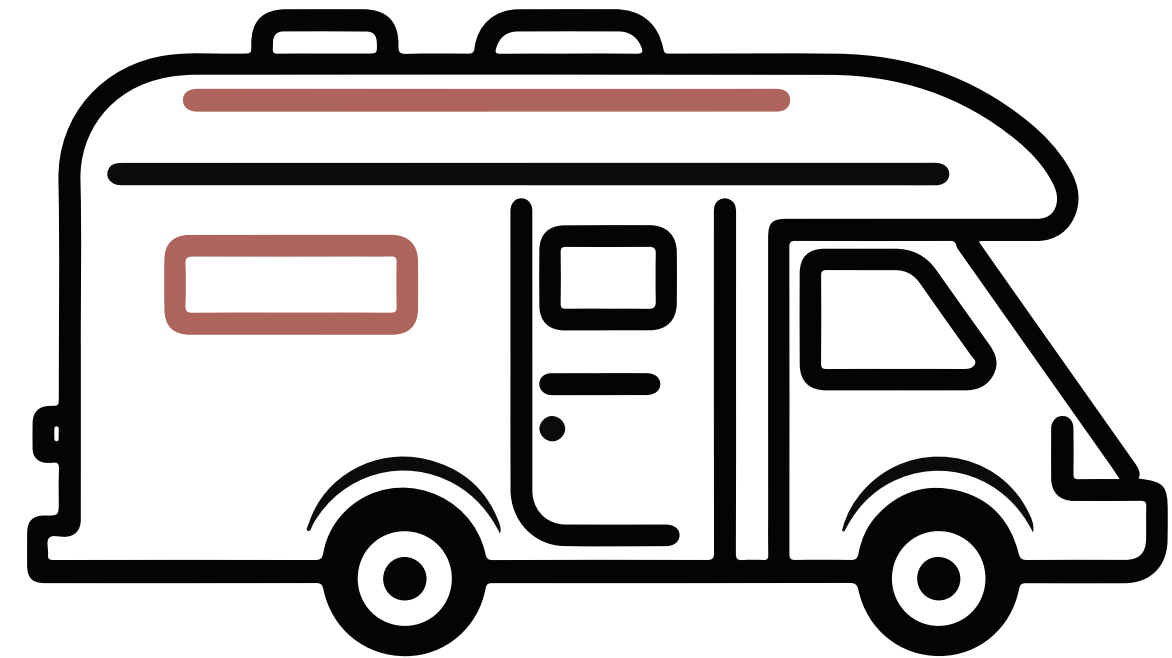
- **that their farm was inactive prior to the date of the by-law or,**
- **if the lands can be partially or fully serviced by municipal water and/or sewer services**



Permits a property owner to request that their property be added to the Agricultural Protection Area.

Recreational Vehicles

Draft #4 clarifies that a recreational vehicle includes units manufactured to recognized recreational vehicle standards, **including** older models.



What's in Draft #4

What are the Zones?

Rural Zones: Rural General Zone, Rural Residential Zone, and Rural Village Zone

Environment and Recreation Zones: Conservation Zone, Protected Watershed One Zone, Protected Watershed Two Zone, Recreation and Parks Zone

Growth Centre Zones: Mixed Use Serviced Zone (MUS)

General Provisions

There are also general provisions that may apply.

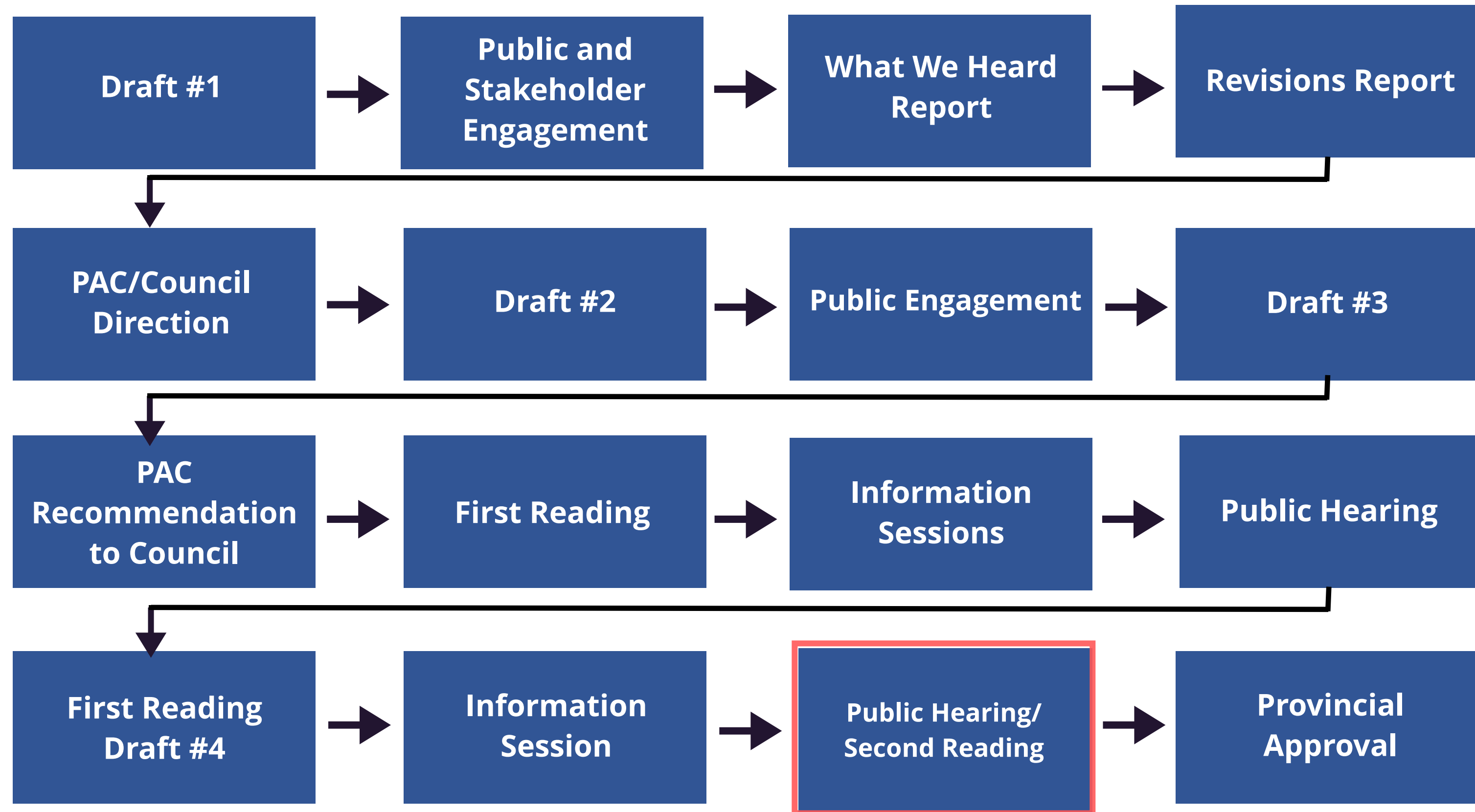
For example:

- There is a 20-meter horizontal setback from inland watercourses and wetlands.
- Habitation of an RV is permitted for more than 180 days with a permit.



Next Steps

Next Steps



Thank you for attending the Public Hearing

For more information, scan the QR code or visit:

engage.modl.ca/modl2040

