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# PLANNING

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Journal

## RURAL ONTARIO



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## CONTENTS

### Features

A tale of two ruralities .....	1
Mennonite social planning perspectives .....	3
Waterfront property owners .....	5
Agriculture diversification .....	7
Rural prosperity .....	9
Indigenous planning .....	11

### Commentary

OPJ helped redefine planning .....	14
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Ground-related housing supplies .....	16
Diversity beyond ethnoculturalism .....	19
Restructuring First Nation housing .....	21

### Departments

President's message .....	25
Social media .....	25
Provincial news .....	27
Urban design .....	28

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### Say Hello to OPPI's NEW Website!

If you haven't visited OPPI's website in a while, you should. OPPI has updated its website to better serve members and the public. Our website has a new look. The content is reorganized and is responsive so you can visit on your smartphone, tablet and laptop with ease. To speak to a wider audience, OPPI is introducing easily identifiable and relatable stories through case study examples on the homepage. These case studies illustrate the importance of the work RPPs do and speak to issues that transcend the planning profession. Visit the new [ontarioplanners.ca](http://ontarioplanners.ca) today!

### Thanks to OPJ contributors over the years

OPPI would like to thank members for supporting the *Ontario Planning Journal*, which has served the profession well over the past 30+ years. First started in 1987, the *Journal* has been the premier publication for Ontario's planning profession and has featured the work and informed opinions of RPPs across



Ontario. This issue will be the last one. In the new year, members and subscribers will receive the first issue of OPPI's new publication, *Y Magazine*. *Y Magazine* will feature the discussions RPPs are engaged in and the informed choices and inspired communities that result.

### Write for the Planning Exchange blog!

Since 2015, OPPI has offered its Planning Exchange blog, facilitating the exchange of planning knowledge, best practices and dialogue about important issues. It runs on your contributions. OPPI is always looking for great topics to highlight, and members to write. Do you have any experience with the LPAT that you want to share? Are you conducting interesting research and want to profile it? Do you have informed opinions on issues of the day in which planners can play a vital role? Is OPPI missing an emerging topic or theme that members need to know about? If you are interested in contributing, please contact OPPI's Education Manager, Ryan Des Roches at [education@ontarioplanners.ca](mailto:education@ontarioplanners.ca). Submit your post today!

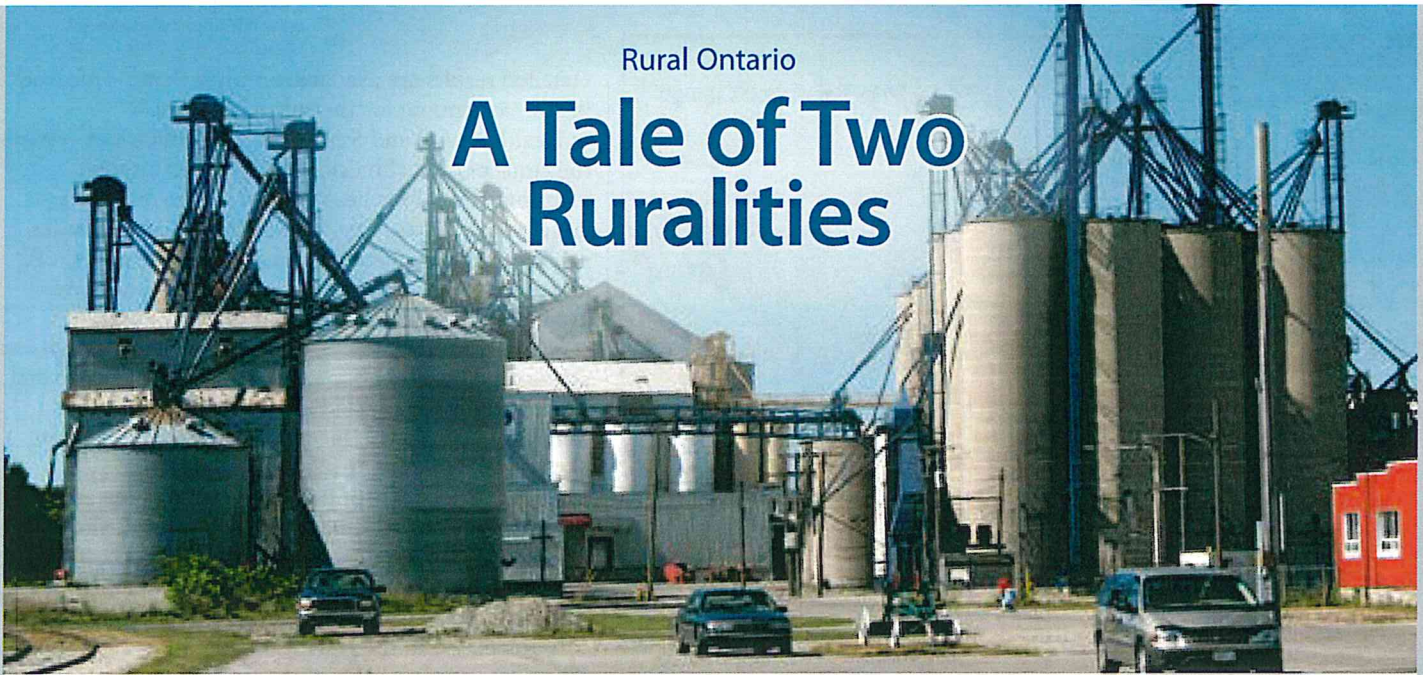


Further information is available on the OPPI website at [www.ontarioplanners.ca](http://www.ontarioplanners.ca)

Cover photo: courtesy of Wayne Caldwell



# A Tale of Two Ruralities



By Wayne Caldwell, RPP

**T**here are two realities within rural Ontario. One is a reality of growth. The 14 counties and regions in closest proximity to the City of Toronto, for example are forecast to grow by more than 2.6-million people or a collective 39 per cent over the next 25 years (2041). The other reality is one of near zero growth and in some instances population decline. In fact, the 20 counties and regions with the lowest growth rates in the province are forecast to collectively grow by only 1 per cent or 17,000 people. Indeed, 10 of these communities are forecast to have zero or negative population growth over this time period.<sup>1</sup>

While it is important to remind ourselves that non-metro Ontario was home to more than 2.5-million residents in 2016 (more than in each of Canada's six smallest provinces<sup>2</sup>), it is also important to remember that there is significant variability in population change between 2011 and 2016 even within counties and regions. The implication is that in some instances while towns and villages are growing the rural landscape is increasingly depopulated (see Figure 1).

These differences impact the practice of planning in fundamental ways. In a growth scenario, planners will spend a larger portion of their time responding to the physical aspects of development—processing applications, developing plans, managing and directing growth, allocating land uses, planning for transportation and infrastructure, protecting the environment and generally dealing with the rural-urban interface and related transitions.

In a low or no-growth scenario, additional community priorities require a response. How do we stimulate economic activity, enhance our small towns and villages, encourage population growth (immigration) and plan for a disproportionately large concentration of elderly? What does a healthy rural

community mean in a no growth scenario and how does this relate to the need to use and manage our agricultural, forestry and scenic resources in an environmentally friendly way?

Rural planning by its nature is multidisciplinary and robust enough to serve as a catalyst to address the range of issues identified above. It includes rural, remote and small town communities and the interface with large urban centres (the fringe). On top of this there are layers of geography reflecting regional differences that exist across the

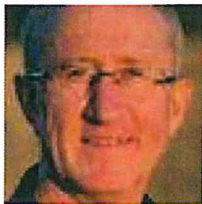
province pointing to the merits of place-based policy.

This issue of the *Journal* provides an opportunity to consider what planning means in these diverse circumstances with a specific focus on those areas of the province outside the direct influence of large urban centres. The selection of rural focused articles are summarized as follows:

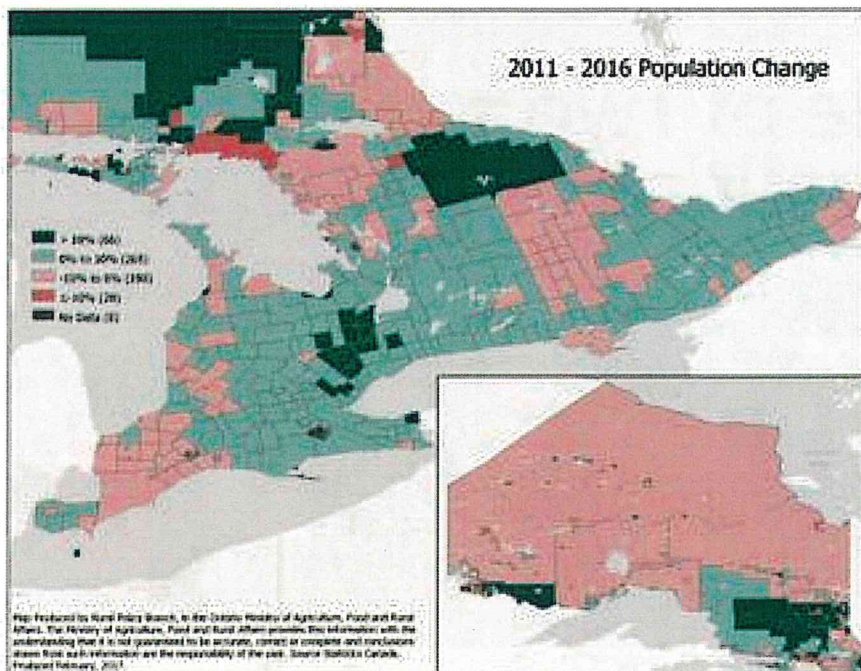
The article by Sara Epp considers local food systems in northern Ontario and the settlement of Mennonite farmers in a number of northern communities. While this movement has placed demands on municipal services, it has contributed to both economic and population growth and diversity.

Likewise, the article by Howes and Rees demonstrates the potential to build economic opportunities connected to waterfront property owners. They note that within nine eastern Ontario upper-tier municipalities there were nearly 100,000 waterfront property owners. This sector was studied and the results demonstrate the potential for municipalities to work with this group to enhance local economies and the vitality of small towns and villages throughout the region.

A third article written by Pam Duesling, the director of planning in Norfolk County and a farmer herself, reflects on the changes in policy that are occurring across rural Ontario that are leading to enhanced







Population change  
in Ontario

diversification on the farm—from wedding venues to micro-breweries. While noting the benefits that this can have on the farm, she also issues a word of caution, making sure that we continue to plan for the well-being of downtowns that may be affected by these trends.

This perspective leads naturally to the article by Collins, Doncaster, Geerts, and Puterbough. Within their article they identify a number of tools to support economic diversification and community development focused on the agri-food sector. As they note, this sector is an important economic driver, contributing almost \$40-billion in gross domestic product to Ontario's economy while supporting more than 800,000 jobs.

The article by Burnham, Bastedo and Longboat demonstrates the essential importance of using appropriate planning processes when working with Indigenous communities. The authors encourage planners to reframe their own understanding of planning and use community-led planning approaches, to reclaim decision-making ways that have been obstructed by colonial dominance.

While these articles capture a range of topics, they are just a sample of current issues, policy and planning practice relevant in rural Ontario. Additional topics could have been considered. At the University of Guelph, for example, we have recently completed three major studies intended to assist planners in their work with rural communities. These topics and links to further information are offered below:

**Measuring Farmland Loss—Official plan** amendments that convert prime farmland to non-farm uses have been identified and documented across most of the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The results provide insight into the effectiveness of the *Greenbelt Plan*. Since 2005, for example, the conversion of prime farmland within the Protected Countryside has virtually stopped. This is in direct contrast to the period prior to 2005.

Detailed results are available on my [website](#). This work is now continuing for the entire province.

**Healthy Rural and Small Town Communities—**While the concept of healthy communities has brought planning and public health together, the focus has largely been urban. The Healthy Rural Communities project has been completed in partnership with OPPI and a number of rural health units. The [results](#) are available online and include a toolkit for rural municipalities. While it includes elements of design and active transportation for example, it also brings a rural lens to actions connected to safe and affordable housing, planning for special age groups and climate change, among a number of other topics.

**Enhancing Local Food—**Surprisingly, there are many communities across rural Ontario with limited access to local food. The Enhancing Local Food project identifies and analyzes issues of local food access and how this impacts food sovereignty/security. While the project was completed in the Northern Ontario context the recommendations and actions are relevant for communities across Ontario. These [findings](#) are available online and include a toolkit.

This article points to the divergent needs of those areas within rural Ontario facing enormous growth pressures compared to those areas that are and will struggle to maintain their existing population. These differences call for planning policies that accommodate this reality. Thanks to the contributing authors, insight has been provided that can help contribute to the betterment of rural and small town Ontario.

*Wayne Caldwell, MCIP, RPP, is a member of OPPI and professor in Rural Planning and Development at the University of Guelph. His works centres on rural and small town communities and his three most recent books focus on rural resilience, farmland preservation and attracting newcomers to rural communities. He is a passionate advocate for the betterment of rural communities and previously served as President of OPPI and is a current member of the Greenbelt Council. He invites comments and inquiries from planners and students who share his interest in rural well-being.*

#### Endnotes

- 1 Population forecasts (reference scenario) have been obtained from the Ontario Ministry of Finance. <https://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/projections>
- 2 Rural Ontario Institute (Rural Ontario's Demography: Census Update 2016 released March 2017)

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# Rural Economic Development

By Katherine Howes & Terry Rees

**T**he Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations (FOCA) is a federation of over 500 community associations located in over 100 rural municipalities across Ontario. Since 1963, FOCA has represented these associations and their member families, to protect thriving and sustainable waterfronts across Ontario. FOCA knows that waterfront property owners, both seasonal and permanent, are a significant force in Ontario. The property taxes from this cohort alone generate an estimated \$75-billion annually, directly supporting local government programs and infrastructure. Cottage-related household expenditures in rural communities amount to considerably more than that each year.

Despite this significant footprint, a comprehensive review of this sector has never been conducted to determine how this part of the rural population could be more thoughtfully embedded into local economic development.

In 2017-18, FOCA undertook a study to articulate the significance of waterfront property owners as vital economic contributors to rural communities in Ontario. In partnership with the University of Guelph's School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, FOCA conducted a study of eastern Ontario, where tourism and a thriving cottage industry play key economic roles. Increasingly seasonal residents nearing retirement are spending more time at their second homes, with some choosing to relocate there permanently. Within the study are there are nine upper-tier municipalities, and in 2012 it was estimated that there were 95,587 waterfront property owners, representing 35.4 per cent of all residential properties.

The study results indicate widespread optimism among waterfront property owners regarding potential opportunities to engage in rural economies, while identifying challenges, such as poor high-speed internet coverage and lack of professional networking opportunities. Key informant interviews with economic development staff revealed that engaging waterfront property owners in economic development opportunities beyond their role as a consumer had rarely been considered and municipalities were struggling to find ways to engage with waterfront property owners.

The study found that more than half of those surveyed either worked from their waterfront community or have considered doing so. Those individuals are mainly motivated by greater access to

the outdoors and a strong connection to living on the waterfront. Half of respondents have owned their cottage or waterfront property for over 25 years, which contributes to a strong connection to place. However, respondents indicated some barriers to working from

their cottage: gaps in technology (internet, cell service); insufficient municipal services (garbage pick-up, winter road maintenance); and a lack of professional networks or peer motivators in the area.

This study supports a recommendation for place-based development with diverse opportunities to integrate waterfront property owners into local community networks, to develop new business ideas, and to revitalize rural economies. Lake associations have been identified as important communication partners in this endeavour. To better inform municipal rural economic development strategies recommendations include the need for more data about seasonal waterfront property owners, as well as further studies quantifying urban outmigration.

Recommendations for the three key stakeholders participating in this study—the waterfront property owners, FOCA, and eastern Ontario municipalities—are summarized as follows:

**Waterfront Property Owners**—Owners can take a more active role in establishing or participating in local economic development committees in their local municipality.

**FOCA**—The federation has a role in bridging the gap to build stronger engagement between waterfront



Katherine Howes



Terry Rees



Research meeting





OMAFRA WEBRES Rural Symposium poster presentation, March, 2018

property owners and municipalities, to better connect owners with local economic development personnel, programs, and chambers of commerce. Also, FOCA has a role in fostering local networking opportunities to connect owners with peer mentors who have successfully made the shift to rural work/life, as well as rural economic development organizations that can support and connect owners with local opportunities.

Municipal government—Municipalities need to continue to invest in rural high-speed internet service and other year-round programs and services, to increase the appeal for owners to relocate (or start) their businesses in rural communities. To better include Waterfront Property Owners in rural economic development initiatives, Local economic development advisory committees with waterfront property owner membership should be created to help bridge the communication gap and help to advocate the interests of owners in community economic development.

The development of small and medium enterprises in rural communities is of great interest to both economic development staff and to land use planners. Some considerations to allow this development to occur include: the availability of suitable commercial properties, zoning by-laws, available servicing for residential properties, and the implications for a growing year-round population.

To increase the diversity and viability of their rural economies, rural municipalities should proactively engage waterfront property owners in local economic development.

*Katherine Howes is a MSc. Candidate in Rural Planning & Development at the University of Guelph and a land use planner at D.M Wills Associates in Peterborough. Terry Rees is executive director, Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations.*

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