



# Key Issue Summary – Agricultural Lands

Public Engagement Support document

Municipality of Annapolis County

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## **Agriculture Land is Important**

Farming land is essential for the East End Planning community and the County of Annapolis. With its rich Class 2, 3, and 4 soils, this area not only provides fresh food but also generates jobs and strengthens the local economy. Additionally, preserving farmland protects natural areas, manages stormwater, and supports wildlife habitats, benefiting the environment as a whole.

As we look toward future development in the East End, it's crucial to protect existing farmland from encroachment. By adopting smart land-use policies, we can sustain productive agricultural land while fostering activities that complement farming. This strategy is vital for ensuring a stable food supply and promoting a flourishing local economy for our farmers and community members

## **The County of Annapolis' Farming Goals**

The County of Annapolis has established an Agricultural Zone in its planning documents to protect valuable agricultural soil. This zone limits the subdivision of large lots to allow the creation of up to two new parcels each year. The County is dedicated to preserving farmland while encouraging activities that support the agricultural community. Permitted activities include farming, forestry, and agricultural businesses, such as farm equipment services and food processing.

To further protect our environment, Council has established a 50-foot buffer along watercourses to safeguard marshlands. They collaborate with the Department of Environment to enforce regulations that promote healthy soil and clean water. Construction in these areas is restricted unless designated for farming and compliant with strict guidelines.

By supporting these initiatives, we can work together to ensure a sustainable future for agriculture in Annapolis, benefiting both farmers and the community as a whole.

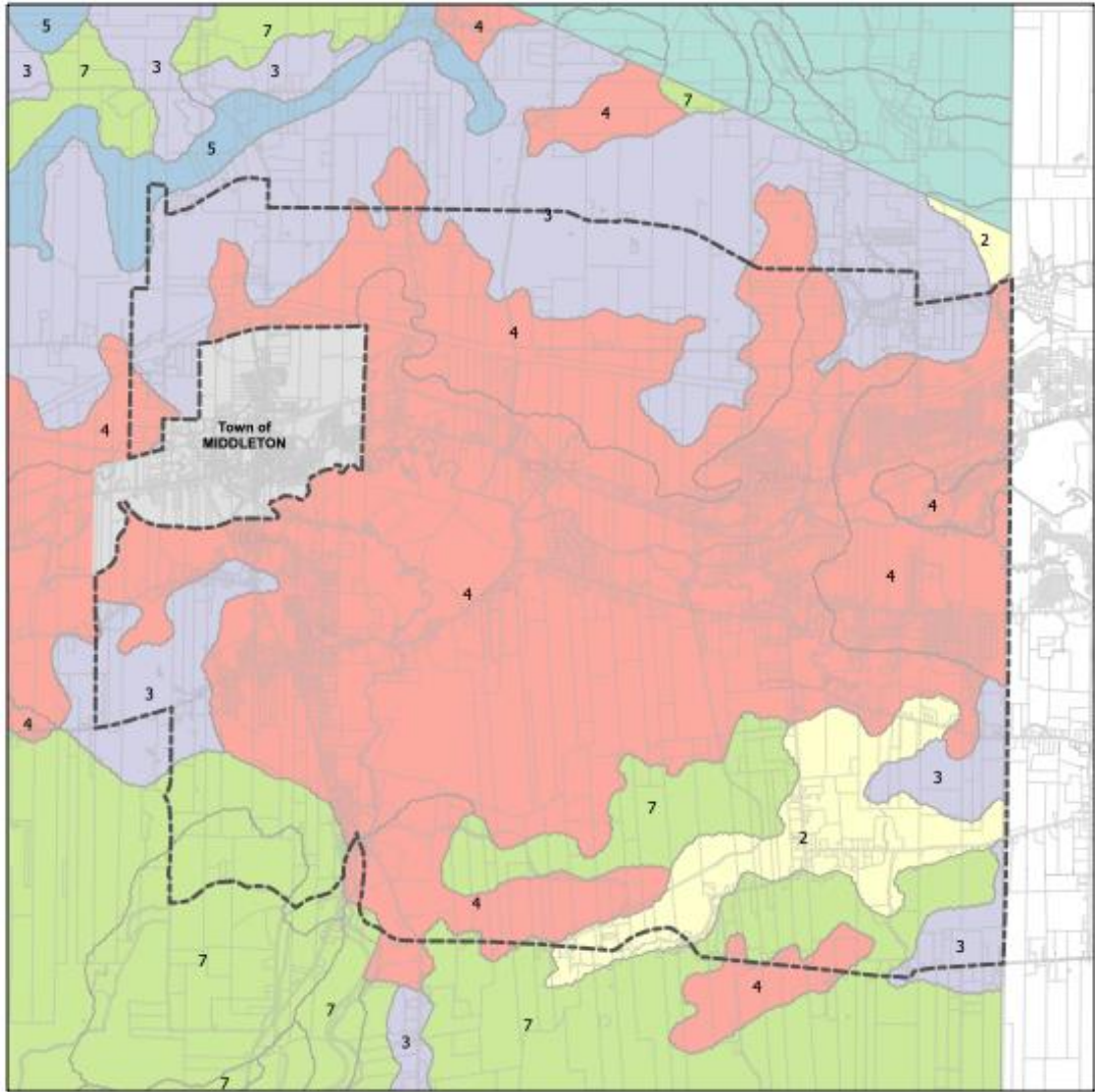
### East End Planning Area Goals

The East End Planning review focuses on safeguarding farmland while promoting new opportunities in agriculture. To minimize conflicts with residential areas, the proposed policies include:

- Strengthening the existing Agricultural Zone, which currently limits land use to farming and forestry.
- Allowing housing only for farmers or essential worker accommodations.
- Permitting new businesses that enhance or support farming and forestry, helping to generate additional income.
- Implementing guidelines that discourage the subdivision of large lots unless a portion of road frontage is preserved.
- Establishing a policy for re-zoning lots from Agriculture to Mixed Use, contingent on the owner demonstrating that the land is no longer viable for agriculture.
- Allowing green energy initiatives as a supplementary use to farming, enabling properties to meet their energy needs on-site.
- Prohibiting non-farming activities such as aquaculture and fur-raising, and banning the sale of topsoil, except for reasonable applications.

This approach aims to designate the most fertile farmland for agricultural use, supporting strong land-use policies that foster economic growth and benefit local farmers and the community.

AGRICULTURE

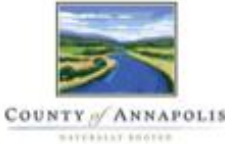
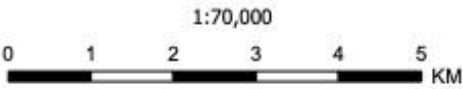


**Agriculture Land Classifications - Soil Classification**

East End Planning Area

**Legend**

- East End Planning Area Boundary
- Property Data July 2024



**FIGURE 1 AGRICULTURE LAND CLASSIFICATIONS EAST END**

## Supporting Agricultural Growth

The East End Planning Area is home to valuable farmland, primarily made up of Class 4 soils essential for sustainable agriculture. This land supports a variety of crops, contributing significantly to our community's agricultural productivity. Farmers and local residents can recognize the unique potential of these soils to enhance the community farming practices and ensure food security. Class 2 and 3 soils are also recognized by the province as important for food production. To safeguard these resources, a review of the existing Agriculture Zone in the East End is being proposed. This zone will continue to protect farming and forestry while allowing for responsible land use options.

### *Key Policies for Sustainable Agriculture*

- **Protect Topsoil:** Stopping soil removal for commercial purposes.
- **Boost Small-Scale Farming:** Supporting smaller farms and farming projects.
- **Energy Options:** Encouraging sustainable energy use in farming.
- **Animals in Residential Zones:** Allowing certain farm animals in community areas.
- **Runoff Management:** Promoting practices to limit pollution from farm runoff.
- **Consider Subdivision Implication:** Develop policies that recognize the significance of large agricultural zoned lands, fostering collaboration among property owners. This approach should aim to support farmers in maximizing their land's potential while allowing for sustainable, large-scale agricultural practices that benefit the entire community..

### *Strengthening the Agricultural Economy*

Farming is changing, and policies need to support these shifts. Traditional farming is still vital, but adding small farm-based businesses and new approaches can help rural areas thrive. Flexible policies could:

- **Support Farm Businesses:** Allow small farm-based companies to grow.
- **Encourage Agri-Tourism:** Promote activities like farm tours and stays.
- **Enable Direct Sales:** Help farmers sell and process food directly on-site.

The rural landscape is changing rapidly, thanks to improved transportation and greater internet access. In recent years, many younger individuals have returned to rural regions, and non-farming residents are increasingly moving in, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic.

As more people embrace rural living, these trends can create diverse income opportunities. New farmers and small farm businesses often establish strong connections within their communities by hiring family members and neighbors. This local engagement fosters the growth of small businesses, which can sometimes expand into medium-sized enterprises.

Research indicates that businesses located close to their owners' homes tend to grow more quickly, especially with the support of family, including the owner's partner. By embracing these developments, the East End area can bolster its agricultural sector while meeting contemporary needs for sustainability and community support.

### Housing and Agriculture: The Role of Secondary Suites

Secondary suites are small, separate living spaces in or near a home. These suites provide affordable housing for farm workers or family members, like younger generations or seniors who want to stay in their homes. This type of housing is especially useful in farming communities.

#### ***Benefits of Secondary Suites***

- **Support Family and Workers:** Provides housing for farm families or employees.
- **Affordable Options:** Offers an affordable place to live in rural areas.
- **Flexible Lots:** On large rural properties, secondary suites allow more housing options while keeping land use manageable.

#### ***Concerns With Secondary Suites***

- Traffic and parking issues in neighbourhoods.
- Possible drops in property value.
- Risk of misusing farmland for housing.
- Changes to the look and feel of the community.

Research indicates that many policies regarding secondary suites are outdated. Rising living costs and the diverse needs of families make it increasingly common to allow secondary suites and more than one residential building on a single lot. This flexibility provides property owners the chance to create their ideal living arrangements while also considering the preservation of viable agricultural land for the future of farming. Secondary suites can significantly contribute to supporting rural and agricultural communities by effectively balancing the benefits and concerns.

### Promoting Small-Scale Farming

Urban growth makes it harder for new farmers to find affordable land. One way to address this is by dividing large farm lots into smaller, easier-to-manage parcels. This approach offers several benefits:

- **Encourages New Farmers:** Helps people start farming and grow local food.
- **Supports Sustainable Practices:** Allows activities like beekeeping and raising chickens.
- **Stronger Local Food Networks:** Builds connections between small farms and local communities.

### **Why Small-Scale Farming Matters**

While large-scale farming is essential, many farmers and community members are exploring smaller homesteads to pursue self-sufficiency. Homestead-style farming encompasses raising poultry, keeping bees, and growing food in greenhouses. These small farms not only provide fresh produce but also support local farmers' markets and stimulate the economy by engaging businesses that sell tools, seeds, and supplies.

Homesteading encourages a lifestyle centered on sustainability and community. Small farms often foster strong relationships with neighbors, creating local food networks that benefit everyone involved

### **Challenges and Solutions**

Small-scale farming can lead to debates, especially when it involves keeping animals like chickens. Smart zoning rules can make sure small farms work alongside big ones without reducing the land's productivity. Policies could also promote access to community gardens, seed libraries, and farmers' markets<sup>1</sup>

Some areas use policies like those in the County of Annapolis, which limit how often land can be split (once per year) or allow only a percentage of a lot to be subdivided. These guidelines keep room for larger farms while supporting smaller homesteads, balancing the needs of both types of agriculture.

By encouraging small-scale farming, we can help new farmers, build local economies, and strengthen food security for everyone.

### **Sustainable Energy Sources in Agriculture**

Using renewable energy like solar, wind, and bioenergy can help farms be more efficient, save money, and protect the environment. Planning policies that support these energy sources can make the agriculture industry<sup>2</sup> more sustainable.

#### **Solar Energy**

- Solar power can be very useful for farms.
- Solar panels can pump water for irrigation, cutting down on fuel and electricity costs.
- Panels installed on farm buildings can provide power for lights, cooling, and equipment<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://healthyfoodpolicyproject.org/key-issues/zoning-for-urban-agriculture>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sare.org/resources/sustainable-production-and-use-of-on-farm-energy/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://extension.psu.edu/harnessing-renewable-energy-a-sustainable-future-for-farming>



## Wind Energy

Wind turbines work well in areas with strong winds.

- Generate electricity for farm use, like powering machinery or grain dryers.
- Reduce the need for outside energy sources, which helps control costs.

## Bioenergy

Bioenergy uses farm waste to make energy.

- Leftover crops, manure, and other waste can produce biogas.
- This gas can heat buildings, power farm equipment, or even serve as fuel for vehicles.

## *Benefits of Renewable Energy*

Adding renewable energy sources can have many benefits. In addition, the province of Nova Scotia offers grant opportunities for residential homes looking to add solar panels to their roofs.

- Lowers energy costs for farms.
- Cuts down greenhouse gas emissions, helping fight climate change.
- Provides a steady energy supply, especially for farms in remote locations.

By using green energy, farms can save money, help the environment<sup>4</sup>, and stay productive long-term.

## Keeping of Animals in Residential Areas

Many towns and cities implement regulations for maintaining a limited number of farm animals in residential neighbourhoods. These guidelines help ensure that livestock rearing does not disturb the community. Here are some common practices to follow for responsible animal husbandry in agricultural settings.

- **Poultry:** Chickens, ducks, guinea hens, turkeys, and similar birds are often allowed but with limits on numbers. Rules also cover where to place and how to maintain coops.
- **Small Livestock:** Animals like goats, sheep, or pigs might have rules about how many are allowed, how much space they need, and how waste is managed.
- **Beekeeping:** Guidelines make sure beekeeping is safe. These include rules on where hives can go, how many are allowed, and creating natural barriers to protect neighbours.
- **Rabbits and Small Mammals:** Rules can be similar to those for poultry, focusing on numbers and proper housing.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://dairyfarmersofcanada.ca/en/sustainability/renewable-energy>

These regulations aim to support small-scale agriculture while keeping neighbourhoods peaceful and protecting the environment<sup>5</sup>.

### Managing Agricultural Runoff

Runoff from farms can hurt ecosystems and drinking water supplies<sup>6</sup>. Many of the homes in the East End community use on-site services, making water quality and potential pollution even more important. Some policies that are under consideration to help reduce storm water runoff include:

- **Buffer Zones:** Planting vegetation near water sources can effectively trap runoff and enhance water quality. Additionally, it is essential to limit certain types of development within designated areas surrounding these water bodies. This approach not only protects our precious natural resources but also supports sustainable agricultural practices that benefit both farmers and the community.
- **Site Plans:** Requesting stormwater management plans for new agricultural developments. These plans are a common requirement in many municipalities and are straightforward to create. They evaluate the natural stormwater flow on agricultural land and design the development to capture and gradually release water, ensuring that runoff remains at pre-development levels. This approach helps sustain the environment and supports the community's agricultural needs.

### Balancing Agriculture with Other Land Uses

Protecting farmland is important, but not all land can be used for farming. Sometimes, other activities might be allowed if they don't harm the environment.

- **Gravel Pits or Poor Soil:** The province regulates quarries. A part of the review we are considering rezoning these uses from agriculture to mixed-use and permitting them in areas that make sense.
- **Development Rules:** When a proposed development in the Agriculture Zone can demonstrate that it is more viable than traditional agriculture, we may allow this type of development through a tool called a Development Agreement or by considering a re-zoning. Both alternatives will require public engagement, and Council. This process ensures that the interests of farmers and community members are considered in any developmental changes.
- **Environmental Site Assessments:** Municipal assessments are essential for determining the suitability of land for a proposed development. They ensure that any proposed projects do not harm the land or affect the surrounding community. This process gives farmers and community members confidence that agricultural initiatives are being thoughtfully evaluated and designed for sustainability.

By carefully planning, we can balance farming with other land uses while protecting the environment.

### Policy Recommendations for Agriculture

- **Protect Farmland:** Strengthen zoning to stop farmland from being rezoned for other uses. Work with local groups to map farmland for better planning.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://ncfreshproducesafety.ces.ncsu.edu/what-are-the-requirements-for-small-and-medium-scale-farms/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://ezfloinjection.com/article/how-to-prevent-agricultural-runoff/>

## AGRICULTURE

- **Control Development:** Use site plans and agreements to balance farms, green energy, housing, and protect water from agricultural runoff.
- **Allow All Types of Farming:** Support all farm sizes and styles unless they cause harm to neighbors or the environment.
- **Stop Land Splitting:** Limit dividing farmland for housing to keep farms intact.
- **Reuse Farm Buildings:** Allow unused farm buildings to be repurposed for activities like markets or workshops without extra approvals.
- **Green Energy:** Encourage renewable energy as part of farming operations, following clear rules.
- **Extra Income Options:** Allow farms to add businesses like bed-and-breakfasts, farm stores, breweries, or small workshops. Support agriculture tourism with flexible business policies.
- **Flexible Zoning:** Allow mixed farm and non-farm activities to support creativity and economic growth without rezoning farmland.
- **On-Farm Business:** Encourage small businesses like home crafts, industries, and tourism that add value to farm products.
- **Small-Scale Industry:** Permit businesses if a percentage of their work supports farming or is directly related to the farm.
- **Lot Use Rules:** Use lot size or frontage percentages to apply fair limits on farm building areas.
- **Mixed-Use Projects:** Allow mixed developments in agricultural zones with site plans, soil checks, and by-law compliance.
- **Unified Rules:** Align zoning with provincial and local policies to avoid conflicts and improve planning.
- **Stormwater Management:** Use best practices like buffer strips, wetlands, and sediment control to manage farm runoff.
- **Homesteads with Animals:** Permit small farms with animals in rural and farm zones if they meet criteria through site approvals.