PROACTIVE ‘MAINSTREET’ PLANNING IN THE HAMLETS, VILLAGES
& RURAL SMALL TOWNS IN THE COUNTY OF PERTH

A MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

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ABSTRACT:

The rural landscape across Canada is in the midst of some interesting times, which are being defined by change. How larger, upper-tier municipalities and their respective lower tiers plan for their small, rural hamlets and villages varies across the Province, but the need to foster change, adapt and be willing to proactively plan remain constants. This research takes a look at some of the rural villages and hamlets in the County of Perth in order to observe how these places are addressing the challenges of growth and development in the 21st century in order to remain economically and socially viable. Policy at the Provincial and local levels will have a great impact on how these rural landscapes move forward, but the greatest impacts will come in the form of these communities willingness to proactively plan, implement and follow through on economic development initiatives, and initiate locally-driven efforts to maintain and improve many aspects (social, economic and cultural) of these rich communities which are in need of attention.
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1.0: INTRODUCTION

At noon, January 24th of 1853, Perth County Council, which consisted of eight reeves and two deputy reeves, representing eleven townships, met in the courtroom at the new courthouse in Stratford. The total population of the County at this time was approximately 18,000, including Stratford, St. Marys and all other villages, as none were incorporated at this time (Johnston, 1967). The County of Perth was, however, organized and equipped with a Council prior to this time, in somewhat of a less tangible form. With township meetings for the four townships surrounding Stratford taking place as early as 1836, it was becoming clear that municipal government was making ground in what is now, and geographically speak, was also then, the County of Perth. In the early years (late 1820’s) the geographic area was being planned for by means of establishing major roadways (present day highway 7/8) and planning for railroads, albeit at the cost of assuming massive debts (Reidstra, 2003). The area at this time was home to (including members of the Six Nations) settlers from Ireland and Germany, with the first two settler families being the Fryfogel’s and the Seebach’s (Johnston, 1967). At the time of incorporation in 1853, the County of Perth was home to such villages and towns as Stratford, St. Marys, Mitchell and Shakespeare, among others.

The earliest decision making-bodies for the County of Perth would meet in the (now City) of Stratford, and the surrounding townships, much like they do today. It continues to prove evident many years later, many of the early decisions made by such bodies would remain of key importance today. Credit to some of these early members of council (reeves and deputy reeves), along with early settlers of the County of Perth is shown through the naming of many
of the hamlets, villages, wards, settlement areas and establishments in the county—such as Seebach’s Hill and the Fryfogel Inn (Johnston, 1967). The practice of naming roads, bridges and other features of the County after important members of the community continues on as normal practice today.

It is not a mere matter of happenstance that the County of Perth continues to exist, and in many senses, thrive, as a dynamic rural county within south-western Ontario today. Its respective municipalities (which now number four instead of the original eleven) have become home to more than 70,000 residents and have established themselves as some of the most productive agricultural municipalities in all of Ontario, with agriculture generating over $750 million in 2013 from gross farm receipts alone (StatsCan, 2011 & OMAFRA, 2013). In present day, the County of Perth and the municipalities which make it up are agriculturally productive, economically strong, culturally diverse, vibrant and well-planned. There are however, issues which are being faced by the County of Perth in terms of economic development, business attraction and retention, ageing and conflicting opinions surrounding existing land-use policy. Many of these key issues being faced are not necessarily specific to
Perth County, but rather, are the same challenges faced by small, rural municipalities throughout Ontario- such as aging, population loss, business and youth retention, and diversifying the economic base.

**Some preliminary figures of farmland/agricultural characteristics of Perth County:**

- 91% of Perth County area has Class 1, 2, and 3 soil capability for agriculture and is considered as prime farmland.
- 92% of Perth County area was farmed in 2006 (498,161 ac.).
  - total gross farm receipts:
    - 2001 = $555,081,128.00
    - 2006 = $702,715,748.00 (+26.6 %)
  - total farm capital:
    - 2001 = $2,842,655,094.00
    - 2006 = $3,733,820,496.00 (+32.2 %)  (Ontario Farmland Trust, 2011)

The following chapters aim to address some of the issues being faced in the County of Perth. By looking at a select few of the rural small towns in Perth County and closely examining the planning practice in each of them, this paper will draw links between planning policy and planning practice, but moreover, will take a close look at how these small towns, hamlets and villages can sustain themselves in the 21st century. Although a great deal of research has been conducted, and several initiatives taken, the fact remains that our rural places and spaces fall behind their urban counterparts not just in Ontario, but across Canada.

The literature surrounding rural small towns in Ontario is lacking. This work is aptly being titled “Proactive Planning” not to necessarily suggest that the county is not being proactive in achieving its goals, or to suggest it is home to economically and socially deprived communities.

Rather, it is home to communities which are underachieving, and are not necessarily being as
proactive as they could be in order to thrive in the future. The future for the many towns, hamlets and villages in Perth County can certainly be a bright one, but the struggles associated with their future planning and development must first be understood and dealt with.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Lastly, it should be noted that the completion of this paper would not have been made possible if I had never been given the initial opportunity to join the County of Perth’s planning department back in the summers of 2010 and 2011 through Director Dave Hanly, and currently, during my contract position with the County through Director Allan Rothwell. I would also like to thank the Professors and Faculty at the University of Guelph who make up the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, particularly my advisor Harry Cummings, Director Wayne Caldwell and committee member John FitzGibbon for all of your help and support along the way.
2.0 OVERVIEW

The profession of planning, and more specifically, rural planning and development within Canada is deeply rooted across this great nation. From the early influences of Thomas Adams to the present day scholars of Shucksmith and Bryant, among several others. The influence of the work has been profound, although often in subtle forms. The Canadian landscape continues to be largely agricultural, with over 167 million acres of farmland found across the Country. In Ontario alone, the 13.3 million acres spread throughout the province are not only a major economic contributor, and the number one economic contributor to the County of Perth (Cummings & Associates, 2000), but more profoundly, these landscapes have impacted each and every individual who has lived on these lands, in some form or another. The rural areas that make up Ontario are vast, rich and vibrant. These are the places in which some 2.6 million Ontarians live and some 90,000+ are employed (OMAFRA, 2011). Most importantly, these are the places in which we produce a great deal of the food we require to feed not only ourselves, but several other countries around the world.

The rural landscape, although vast, rich, and vibrant, has a number of continuous struggles associated with it. These lands (rural lands) are very different from their urban counterparts, yet they require many of the same ingredients for success. For example, both require a relatively stable population to remain competitive from an economic standpoint. The differences come largely in the form of population struggles. As urban centres continue to grow, their boundaries look to expand, pushing into what is commonly referred to as the “rural-
urban fringe”, and in the County of Perth, are generally lands synonymous with the Official Plan’s “Infilling” and “Settlement Areas” designations (County OP, 2015 Consolidation). This fringe area is becoming more and more difficult to define, but yet, it still exists, and the planning, policies and protection of the rural lands which straddle urban boundaries must be planned for in an appropriate manner in order for them to continue to be part of the rural success story the County should continue working to achieve.

Although these vast differences exist between the urban and the rural, there are a number of wants and needs as far as services, initiatives and overall liveability measures that are very much the same in both environments. Walkability, local food, affordable housing, education, safety, employment, social events, culture and opportunity for growth are all examples of common desires shared by both larger urban centres, and the much smaller towns, hamlets and villages which make up most of Ontario, and in this case, the County of Perth. Over the course of the coming chapters, many of the desired characteristics for rural areas/communities will be discussed as they relate specifically to Perth County (hereinafter referred to as the County of Perth, and Perth County interchangeably).

The “ideal” make-up of these hamlets and villages may differ from resident to resident, and in a broader sense, from municipality to municipality, yet, it is difficult to dispute the need for basic amenities such as municipal servicing, basic shopping provisions, employment, and some form of social engagement. In order to sustain, let alone prosper, the small towns, hamlets and villages of Perth County will have to make and adapt to changes moving forward. Changes in policy and strategy will be necessary, but also, the oft-less-tangible changes (public
engagement, small-scale community led improvement projects and so forth), will also be required. Small sized communities across Ontario will fade away if they are not being proactively planned for. As funding opportunities become more difficult to secure, it will become increasingly difficult for these small rural communities to remain viable. There will be successes and there will be failures, and at the end of the day, the communities which have worked the hardest, endured the road bumps, have been dedicated to change, and are equipped with the services and infrastructure required for the present and near-future, will be those who emerge as the vibrant, rural communities which will continue to define the settlement areas in the rural landscape of the County of Perth.
3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Small, rural villages and towns across Canada are continually facing a number of challenges due to the issues of depopulation, lack of funding, lack of opportunities and the overall ageing demographic which exists in so many of these areas (Spence, 2013). Improved rural policy, a more aggressive approach towards improving economic and social situations in these small towns, alongside with proactive planning can help to improve the situation in these depopulated, struggling small towns (Coates, 2013). This research will examine ways in which rural revitalization could play an important role in revitalizing the economies and social wellbeing of these areas. Furthermore, it will determine ways in which policy and proactive planning can help to shape more functional, contributory and all-around dynamic communities in Canada’s rural-small towns (with a particular emphasis on the County of Perth). Before doing so, this research will take a very in-depth look at the existing literature which surrounds this area of study. Though research which focuses directly on the topic of rural revitalization is limited within a Canadian context - the high-quality sources which contribute to the overall scope and focus of this research are plentiful. The following literature review aims to take these high-quality literary works and unveil how exactly they complement this study of rural revitalization as a means to improve depopulated rural areas.

The 2014 Provincial Policy Statement:

The 2014 Provincial Policy Statement released by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing states under section 1.1.3 that the “vitality of settlement areas is critical to the long-term economic prosperity of our communities” (PPS, 2014). Subsequent to this, it also states
that the vitality and regeneration of these areas shall be promoted. However, there remains a disconnect between the stated objectives found in the PPS and the actualities which exist in our small, rural towns. In particular, the notion of “building upon rural character, and leveraging rural amenities and assets,” has fallen short of the mark in the majority of Canada’s small, rural towns. It could be argued that the overlying interests in promoting the growth and development of the often nearby urban areas has been so predominant over the years that a major shift towards the promotion and enhancement of rural areas in order to play catch-up, is needed to keep afloat. The addition of micro-tourism opportunities and activities are just one example of a way in which one of Ontario’s small, rural communities has begun to enhance its overall appeal. To pay homage to a neighbouring County, and rural town, the small town of Ripley, in nearby Huron County provides a case in point of a community which has worked at “promoting diversification of the economic base and employment opportunities through goods and services, including value-added products and the sustainable management or use of resources...” a goal set forth in the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS, 2014).

There are four additional main points highlighted in the 2014 PPS which are worth of mention in this literature review. Under section 1.7 (Long-Term Economic Prosperity) subsections C, D, G and H each provide specific ways in which local initiatives can be taken in order to promote and stimulate local economy. The maintenance and enhancement of downtowns, encouragement of sense of place, provision of opportunities for sustainable tourism development and support of local food businesses are key elements from the PPS which will be used as recurring examples illustrating how small, rural communities in Ontario have done a good job of using PPS guidelines in order to improve the economic and social
outlook. These sections and a more detailed look at the PPS will be covered in a later chapter of this paper.

**Fostering Rural Change:**

“With the demise of dominant productivist agricultural models and the emergence of diverse consumer and societal demands for rural space, spatial planning has the potential to move centre-stage in the regulation of the countryside and managing rural chance processes.” (Campbell, 2003)

The growing desire for rural living is something which (Smith, 2007) states leads to increased competition for rural resource use. This statement is particularly interesting in the case of rural, small-town Canada as so many examples exist wherein the desire for rural living is spoken of, but cannot easily be seen. Essentially, the erosion of so many of these places is occurring based on this so called desire not being acted upon. Residents are simply not moving to the countryside, businesses are out-migrating into the larger urban area, and the population decline continues to climb. Granted, land prices are at such a high-cost (from 15-25,000 per acre) (MLS & ReMax, 2014) is not simply not feasible for one to enter the farming occupation. The urbanites with the desire for rural living however, are not those who wish to farm, or purchase large farms. Slightly bigger lots, with some land for planting in a rural, or at least semi-rural setting is what is desired according to much of the literature. Within Perth County, this previously mentioned population loss has not been as detrimental as in some of the surrounding counties/municipalities, losing just 31 residents from 2001-2011 (County-wide average). Nevertheless, it must be taking into consideration when making planning decisions.
and approving or not approving various development projects within each of the rural municipalities. Gallent and Tewdwr-Jones, 2000, discuss how purchasing power among in-migrants is higher than that of local residents. The issue here, they cite, is that the prices will rise beyond the reach of locals. Interestingly enough, there is no connection made between the out-migration of talent and youth and the in-migration of similar talent and youth. Rather, the argument is made that this in-migration, which results in a form of rural-gentrification, is a hindrance. Rather than view it as such, it could be easily argued that it is an especially good thing. Research has shown that talent and youth are out-migrating due to lack of opportunity at home (Higgins, 2008). With an influx of new talent, money and opportunity there becomes an infusion of capital and social improvement to the area. Neighbourhoods become improved, businesses perform better and there is a rise in the overall access to services. Clearly, one of the key differences between the Canadian context and the English (UK) context has proven to be the ability to draw in, and hold onto, new residents. In the County of Perth, initiatives have been launched to not only keep current residents, and young residents in particular, but also to promote workplaces and job opportunities within the immediate area. The Perth County Business website launched by the County’s economic development department aims at addressing the issue of losing residents to larger urban centres through the provision of jobs (Sainsbury, 2015).

Within the study of rural gentrification, (Smith, 2002) has emerged as a prominent scholar whose works have focused on the phenomena as it exists in England in particular. Smith’s work will complement the work of this research in many ways, and four of his main ideas relating to rural gentrification will be referred to as they relate to the small, rural
communities found in this case in Perth County. Smith’s four main ideas which will be followed are the idea of the place-specific temporalities of rural gentrification, the social differences of rural gentrification, the different forms of rural gentrification and finally, what Smith refers to as “thinking outside the box: of conventional definitions of rural gentrification (Smith, 2002). These are important aspects found within Smiths’ literature which complements the work of this research particularly well. As the direction of rural communities in Perth County continues to become defined by opportunity and promise (connectivity, jobs, affordable housing, social networking opportunities and so forth) due largely to the initiatives and efforts of the economic development committee, growth and revitalization, will help to spark the changes needed for Perth County to move forward as the home of more resilient, proactively planned-for communities.

It was previously mentioned that this research will take a look at how proactive planning can help to shape rural communities in a way which benefits their long term economic situation, along with their overall social appeal. In “Exclusive Rurality,” (Shucksmith, 2011) takes a close look at what he refers to as the dark side of sustainability. By this, Shucksmith means the rural communities’ becoming increasingly exclusive places is something which has been celebrated by residents of these very communities. The issue of house prices becoming unaffordable in rural communities has become a major issue in rural England, yet within Perth County and indeed in much of Ontario and across Canada, the opposite is true. This is something found within the literature which could be of particular importance. There exists a much higher desire in England to reside in the rural areas, and as they have become more exclusive, there has been a resulting rise in the price of housing (Kilpatrick, 2011). In Canada,
there is said to exist a desire for the rural idyll, yet it isn’t reflected in the current situation found in the majority of the rural communities. In the municipalities that make up the County of Perth, the available housing stock, vacant storefronts and existing, unbuilt plans of subdivision are some of the examples which help to illustrate that this ‘rural idyll’ has yet to really prove true. Granted the rural idyll generally applies to more agricultural/rural settings where a newcomer can buy a small hobby-sized farm, or a few acres upon which to build the house they desire, there are examples within the County of Perth where such lands have become available, only to be bought up by neighbouring farmers as opposed to those supposedly seeking out these types of properties. The role of policy comes into play when discussing housing type and availability, and the argument for permitting the severance of surplus farm dwellings within the County persists as one of approaches to boosting rural population and attracting, perhaps, urbanites, to our rural areas in order to contribute to this revitalization of rural communities which is desired by not just community members, but by the policy-makers and decision-makers alike.

A Look at In-Migration:

“In-migration should be perceived as a valuable resource, and rural communities should focus on the development of relocation programmes that target skilled migrants who have the right characteristics and attributes to integrate into their community” (Kilpatrick et al., 2011).

In-migration is one of the ways in which rural development can occur in small Canadian rural communities. With an influx of migration to rural areas, there exists opportunity for rural
communities (Kilpatrick, 2011). In more remote locations, an influx of residents with new skills, entrepreneurial capacity and political capital can represent an opportunity for rural communities (Kilpatrick, 2011). The situation in rural Australia is comparable with the situation in much of rural Canada in that there exists a shortage of skills. Skill shortages present an ongoing critical challenge for rural community and rural industry sustainability (Hall, 2007). As Han & Humphreys, 2005 suggest “many small rural communities with ageing populations and limited opportunities for young people are not attracting skilled workers, but have a flow of skilled people through the community such as locums, seasonal workers or contractors.” Within Perth County, the available pull factors need to be assessed and utilized as the tool they are in order to boost the number of seasonal farm workers to not only support the local economies, but to help promote these dynamic rural communities we are blessed to have- the Village of Milverton, Millbank, Atwood and Sebringville area being of few examples- communities with much to offer for seasonal labourers who, if the opportunity existed, may be able to eventually relocate and establish a greater opportunity for themselves and their families within one of Perth County’s rural areas.

In order to improve the economic and social situations in these small, rural communities, there must be many pull-factors drawing in new residents. (Florida, 2003), suggests that “Innovative communities have higher proportions of residents who have lived elsewhere, and professionals who come to live and work in rural communities have the ability to boost economic activity”. Our focus is far too often on catering specifically to the needs of the existing, when it should be broadened to include the needs of the new residents we are hoping to pull in to the community. Thus, in small, rural communities in Perth County, and
Canada-wide alike, there should be a goal of attracting these skilled newcomers who can make positive contributions to the economic, social and environmental development of the immediate community. The importance of newcomers taking on a leadership role within the community is also something worth noting. As (Johns, 2004) suggests, skilled newcomers can take on a leadership role using their networks to help the community access information and resources. Such opportunities exist in communities throughout the County of Perth in the form of social groups (Junior Farmers, Perth County Federation of Agriculture and Perth County Visitors Association). Essentially, community networks are critical in influencing community development. In Ontario, these networks must be established and promoted in order to spark the necessary change in these smaller, rural communities which are in economic and population decline.

There remains the issue of small rural communities not being overly open to welcoming in newcomers. With this being the case, many communities are not enabling themselves to make the most of new opportunities. According to McGranahan & Wojan, 2007, “rural community norms may stifle the creativity of newcomers”. In a study conducted by Kilpatrick et al, 2011, six Australian and one Canadian site were used to examine how rural communities can optimize economic, social and environmental outcomes from mobile skilled workers, and how these workers can be encouraged to stay for extended periods. The sites chosen did not exceed 12,000 people, and varied in terms of size; location and rural industry base (Kilpatrick et al, 2011). This paper does something similar by taking communities under 5,000, or rather, entire municipalities which are at most, 14,000 residents large.
The results of the study showed that the benefits rural communities derive from mobile skilled workers were “many and varied”. Although broadly grouped under economic, social and environmental, the benefits included “participation in the community, use of professional skills, provision of local employment and training opportunities, introduction of new perspectives, increased quality and choice of services, recreation and other activities, and access to external networks” (Kilpatrick et al, 2011). Another common theme found through this study was the importance held by the mobile skilled workers in feeling a sense of belonging (sense of belonging in this case referring to the “positive community settings that assist them to develop social networks, such as a formalised welcome or induction process, or an invitation to join a community group” (Kilpatrick and Loechel, 2004). Such studies found in existing literature point out something not yet discussed in this particular research- the need for developing community groups in order to attract new, and keep existing skilled workers and young people in the immediate community. Clearly, the roles played by resident retention and fostering of a sense of place are great, and may well be the key to keeping existing (young) residents, and attracting skilled workers to small, rural communities in Ontario. Perth has taken steps towards making this happen, through introducing/forming such groups/committees as the visitors association and the revitalized Perth County Junior Farmer group.
A Sense of Place & Belonging:

“A sense of place results gradually and unconsciously from inhabiting a landscape over time, becoming familiar with its physical properties, accruing history within its confines.”

--Kent Rydon

A recurring theme throughout the existing literature surrounding the concept of rural gentrification and the overall improvement of economic and social situations facing smaller, rural communities is that of a sense of place/sense of belonging. Sense of place and sense of belonging each have their place within the study of, in this case, rural-social geography as they relate to the specific area of research being conducted here- rural revitalization. As explained previously in this section, residents, both existing and future, have a certain sense of place and belonging they feel towards their community- this being just as true in the County of Perth as in other (surrounding) areas. In the case of the works by Kilpatrick et al, 2011, it is this sense of place/belonging which was mentioned as being increasingly important for mobile skilled workers. The gradual progression from a sense of place to that of belonging could come from increased involvement in community groups, or simply in the development of more social networks. Regardless, there is a close tie between this sense of place and the overarching goal of this research which aims to promote rural gentrification as a means to not only improve ones’ sense of place and belonging, but as a way in which to improve long-term economic and social conditions of the hamlets, villages and small towns of Perth County.

In the literature titled “The Struggle to Belong: Dealing with Diversity in 21st Century Urban Settings” by (Snel, 2011), there is a great deal of discussion of the phenomena of
gentrification as a process. The focus of the literature is on displacement of original residents in gentrified areas and makes a good comparison between the different styles, or approaches to gentrification. Classified as American or European, the study looks at both the positive and negative effects of gentrification, and discusses the differences between market-led and policy-led gentrification. Taken into consideration the scope of this particular research, on rural gentrification, each type can be looked at from the point of view of what it brings to the rural community. Although relevant, it is important to note that this study is not focused on rural gentrification insofar that it dismisses the notions of retention and attraction of new residents.

While the focus of gentrification tends to be on displacement, this study, as it will become increasingly evident, places more emphasis on policy and initiatives which can aid in the retention of both residents and businesses alike as a means to improve the stability and overall appeal of Perth’s dynamic small rural communities. In smaller rural communities within Ontario, we are able to examine the level of which gentrification exists, whether it stemmed from a market based approach rather than a policy based approach, and closely examines the level of success it has achieved in the immediate community. Ultimately, has the rural gentrification which has occurred in the area had a positive or negative affect on the existing community members’ sense of place and belonging? This will help in determining how successful gentrification would be when used as a tool to help improve the conditions in rural Ontario’s small towns and communities.
Policy and Practice- Rural Gentrification:

Literature surrounding the study of rural gentrification has only a limited existence within the Canadian, and in particular, within the Perth County perspective. However, there is a great deal of literature surrounding this field of study as it relates to rural England. The causes and effects of the process itself have been well documented by Shucksmith and Gallent (2009). Gentrification from its original, urban source is generally associated with the movement of new residents to a poorer area of town, often resulting in an inability for existing locals to remain in their own neighbourhoods and communities due to the increasing unaffordability. Mark Shucksmith and Nick Gallent however, cite that in rural England, locals may have “gentrified” themselves by securing better paid jobs and changing their aspirations, ...”in line with socio-economic changes which have taken place in the country as a whole” (Shucksmith & Gallent, 2009). The protective policies in rural England have “thwarted much-needed development’. The same could be said from a Canadian or even strictly Perth-based perspective. As strict policies remain the norm, so too do the communities resistance and inability to host necessary change in order to improve the economic and social situation which can pose challenges from an economic development standpoint.

The issue of affordable housing in Perth County has only become an issue due to the increasingly limited number of employment opportunities in these communities (Higgins, 2008). The rural areas are highly affordable to many urbanites, as the property prices, along with taxes are generally lower. By improving employment opportunities in these areas, we can eliminate the issue of affordable housing. In these areas facing depopulations, drawing in new
residents with the necessary skill sets to make positive contributions to the area is one of the ways in which rural communities are able to improve the economic and social situations. One such way Perth County has gone about doing this is through the Perth County business program, as mentioned earlier in this section.

**Addressing Ageing: An Opportunity Rather than a Hindrance?**

Much literature surrounding depopulated rural communities and their need to attract new residents to aid the ageing demographic tend to ignore the fact that where retiree age residents live, exist opportunities for economic and social growth. There are a number of urban areas in Ontario alone which have high populations of 65+ people, and enjoy a high-quality of life index with good employment opportunities. Although generally much larger than their rural counterparts, these cities with a high percentage of older, retirement age residents have carved out niches which allow them to prosper. Stratford, Peterborough, and Elliot Lake, Ontario are all examples of places which have a relatively high percentage of older residents, yet are rich in opportunities for new, younger residents. In the Municipality of North Perth (for a localized example) there are over 1,000 residents who are over the age of 75- according to the most recent, 2011 statistics from Statscan. Given this, the municipality has nearly 10% of its population in the more senior demographic (75+), and lowering that age to 65 would capture yet another 10% of the total population of North Perth. Clearly, planning and housing stock must take this into consideration moving forward.

Rural areas with ageing populations need to focus on the needs of these older residents. By addressing this as an opportunity rather than a hindrance, these rural communities could
allow themselves to prosper. Indeed there will remain a need for communities to attract younger professionals (residents), but the incoming entrepreneur should recognize the needs of the existing demographic, and seize it as an opportunity. Elliot Lake, for example, became highly successful in their campaign to attract retirees after 95% of the mining jobs were lost in the span of only two years (May, 2011). Although mining may not be the primary activity taking place in the rural communities looked at in this research, the idea of addressing and even attracting an ageing demographic can be looked at as a positive, rather than the negative it is so often associated as being.

Although this research takes a focus on proactive planning/policy changes and implementation as a means to enable small rural communities in Ontario to improve both economically and socially, it certainly takes into account the given situation in these communities. The ageing demographic in these communities is front and centre when it comes to the merging of a rural gentrification success plan and the addressing of an ageing demographic. The Strategy for Positive Aging in Nova Scotia is an example of a very thorough plan which identifies “societal actions” aimed at achieving nine goals. The goals being: Celebrating Seniors; Financial Security; Health and Well-Being; Maximizing Independence; Housing Options; Transportation; Respecting Diversity; Employment and Life Transitions; and Supportive Communities (Strategy for Positive Aging in Nova Scotia, 2003). The plan itself does not specifically state that it is for rural areas, yet a similar plan which incorporates goals and objectives towards improving the economic situation while attracting newcomers could promote the necessary growth in Ontario’s small, rural communities.
Educational Attainment & Increased Mobility: Higher Education in Rural Areas

The migration patterns within rural small-town Canada show that out-migration is highest among those aged 20-24 (Bollman, 2002). Yet, interestingly enough, the rate of in-migration was highest for the 25-29 year age class. In terms of the total net migration however, rural small towns were net-losers of youth (under 25 years of age) but net gainers in all age classes above 25 (Bollman, 2002). A link is also shown between the various levels of educational attainment- the higher the educational attainment, the higher the rate of out-migration. Considering individuals with higher educational attainment are more mobile, there is an obvious need to provide the necessary higher education offerings in these rural small towns in order to develop and retain educated, more mobile residents.

As rural small towns become more connected, they can become better able to retain residents. The rise of distance education (higher education offerings) could be a positive contributor to not necessarily in-migration, but in slowing the rate of out-migration. If those below age 25 were provided with more options for post-secondary study within their immediate community, there may well be fewer residents leaving to pursue educational opportunities. Although this could be a positive thing for small, rural towns in Ontario, it remains a fact that innovative communities tend to have a higher number of residents who have lived elsewhere (Florida, 2003). It could be suggested then, that the real disconnect and higher levels of out-migration of youth come at the times in which opportunities are being sought after but fail to exist within the rural small town in which the resident was wishing to return to.
The Role of Agriculture:

The issues of abandonment and depopulation are at the forefront of this research which is seeking to use revitalization measures as a means to help improve the economic and social situations in rural, small town Ontario. Although the one issue of the policies surrounding the severance of surplus farm dwellings in the County (currently prohibited) is often pointed to as being the reason why agricultural communities are struggling to maintain their population base and so forth, the root of the problems runs much deeper than this singular issue/policy. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2006) does a good job of outlining the issues associated with depopulation, and makes a number of suggestions regarding both rural development and the structure of rural economies (FAO, 2006).

According to the FAO, revitalization of rural areas suffering from depopulation can occur in three different forms:

1. Revitalization through nature- preservation of biodiversity;

2. Revitalization through recreation- preservation of quality of life and biodiversity;

3. Revitalization through economic development- develop rural areas for economic reasons and create synergies with other sectors such as the agro-processing industry and tourism.

(FAO, 2006)

Gentrification in small, rural communities can complement the revitalization of rural areas by addressing each of the three forms mentioned above. Firstly, gentrified areas tend to
have a higher level of walkability and are ‘greener’ than other non-gentrified areas (Budak, 2014). Secondly, the idea of recreation and preserving the quality of life can be addressed through increased public engagement. Before gentrification occurs, there is generally a need for volunteer efforts, which as pointed out by Kilpatrick et al, 2011, is something desired by newcomers and more mobile residents. Lastly, the idea of revitalizing through economic development is more easily accomplished in an environment that is now ‘beautified’ and host to more residents taking on more public responsibility. It is at this point that neighbourhoods begin to improve, and new, more mobile, skilled and young residents are drawn into the area.

**Community Responses & Policy Options:**

An inventory of neighbourhood initiatives prepared by Kalache et al, 2005, shows that the policy options and community responses are numerous as well as effective. The problem associated with this study, along with so many others dealing with the topic of gentrification is that it is a) from an urban perspective, and b) focusing on the negatives associated with the process itself. Within the rural context however, the scenario is much different. There is a desperate need in many small, rural Ontario towns and communities for a population boost, an influx of in-migration and an improvement in the number of opportunities available in terms of not only employment, but within the social existence of these communities as well. Gentrification, as pointed out by (Kalache, 2005) can transform a struggling real estate market into a thriving one and can bring forth neighbourhood renewal. While seen as overtly negative aspects associated with urban gentrification, these are some of the types of changes that, if
occurring in the depopulated small, rural communities that make up much of Ontario’s landscape, could greatly benefit the economic and social situation facing these places.

The idea of letting renewal benefit everyone is also something which can be found in recent literature. As suggested by (Dyer, 2005), those who struggle in bad conditions deserve to benefit from the improvements. Though this is the case in many urban settings where gentrification has occurred, it is not necessarily the case for rural settings in Ontario. What is the same however is the idea that existing residents should benefit from improvements to their community. Should gentrification occur in struggling, depopulated rural areas in Ontario, it could allow for improvements to occur while meeting the needs of both existing residents and the community’s ability to draw in new, more ‘mobile’ residents who are looking to move into a rural setting.

Ontario’s Rural Roadmap (2014) is a key document which addresses many of the issues facing rural Ontario today. Its focus is primarily on ‘investing’. The roadmap outlines how the ministry of rural affairs aims to invest in people, infrastructure, business and regions. Key issues which have been discussed previously in this literature review are also discussed in the ministry document. Rural health care, aging, skills training and youth and attracting and integrating newcomers are all part of the ministry’s plan to improve rural Ontario. One example of a way in which small, rural communities are changing for the better is illustrated through Blyth and Wingham, Ontario and their work in developing business retention and expansion strategies and skills gap analyses. These towns are taking the necessary initiative to identify innovative
ways in which they can “attract newcomers and provide specialized training to existing residents looking for work” (MRA, 2014).

Conclusions:

Though the process of rural gentrification is just one step towards improving the overall landscape in many of Ontario’s small, rural communities, it is a step in the right direction. When combined with proactive planning, resident initiative, improved policy and an active campaign to attract new rural-dwellers, it has the potential to help shape a more promising future for these communities. This literature review has proven a highly valuable resource as far as outlining the various ways in which municipal and provincial governments have worked towards improving Ontario’s rural communities. Furthermore, it has incorporated many different ideas and concepts found within the discipline of rural social geography, and applied them to a more specific, refined area of research. Revitalizing the economies and the social environments in these small rural communities is not a quick fix. The ideas and strategies outlined throughout this review are meant to be key stepping stones towards creating more sustainable, both economically and socially, rural communities.

Additionally, this literature resource has helped highlight the fact that there exists limited information and quality literature surround the topic of rural revitalization from a Canadian context. The concept itself has been documented highly in both the UK (England in particular) and within Europe. The works of scholars such as Phillips, Shucksmith, Kilpatrick and others is enabling this research to take place outside of the traditional English/European context and into one which is site specific to Canada. The phenomena of rural gentrification in
particular, but of rural revitalization in general, shares common threads regardless of where it is
taking, or has taken place. This research is now able to move forward looking at rural
gentrification from a Canadian-specific case, while suggesting it be used as a tool to foster
improvement in the many and varied small rural communities which make up Ontario, and
Canada as a whole.
4.0: HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The work done by those in the field of rural planning and development within a Canadian context have conducted a tremendous amount of research on topics surrounding rural planning, and have been instrumental in forming much of the policy planners rely on today (from the broader scope of The Planning Act, The Provincial Policy Statement, Nutrient Management Act and Official Plans to more localised visioning papers and community improvement plans).

Perth County’s history is both long and proud. The County coat of arms provides the necessary insight into the County’s history and pride. A shield divided into four quarters, showing a sheaf of wheat and one or two ploughs (representing agriculture) on the left side, and a train and beehive (representing industry) on the right side. The crest above the shield shows a beaver, and the wreath surrounding the coat of arms is made up of maple leaves (Riedstra, 2003). The old County motto of “Perseverance and industry” is as applicable today as it was in the 1880’s when the motto and coat of arms were both formed. Moving forward in this paper, the motto should serve as a reminder of the mentality which continues to exist in...
the County of Perth. A great deal of both perseverance- and a continued support of industry, are required to allow the County of Perth to continually evolve as the place rich in agriculture and industry it has become. Moreover, the more recent motto of “cultivating opportunity” serves to remind oneself of the continued goal of Council, staff, and the hard working individuals that make up the County of Perth. Several backgrounds studies have been done which deal specifically with the County of Perth, and the communities which make up the county. Furthermore, community improvement plans, housing market studies, amendments to local and the County wide Official Plans have reflected the changing needs of the County of Perth.

In 1997, the County of Perth went from fourteen municipalities, (11 townships, 2 towns and one village down to four municipalities. This was a reflection of the changing needs of not just the County of Perth, but the direction the Government was headed in. Counties and local municipalities across Ontario were affected by this change, and as a result, the structure of Council was changed. Although these changes affected the structure of local Councils, the County of Perth functions as a 10 member council with eight of the members being directly elected Mayors and Deputy Mayors of their respective municipality/township plus appointments from the local Councils for their third representative (County Councillor). Additionally, local councils for each of the four municipalities, a County Land Division Committee, local Committees of Adjustment, an Accessibility Committee and Public Advisory Committees operate within the County of Perth in the present day.
This study intends to focus on a select group of smaller, semi-rural towns, hamlets and villages within the County of Perth. These select few places (covering the four municipalities) will be discussed in further detail in a later chapter of this paper, as it is important that each of the four member municipalities be represented in this study in order to be a true representation and reflection of the situation in the County of Perth. Secondly, it is important to note that these settlement areas are different in nature for a number of reasons, which will
be touched on in the coming pages. Normally, it could be suggested, a study should choose similar places to compare, contrast, and draw conclusions upon. This paper will suggest that this is not necessary the best approach. The small places which make up the Counties in Ontario are very different in their nature. Some are very small (under 1000 people) while others are (within the scope of rural Ontario) large; with populations of 5000 or greater. The age structure is similar in many of these places, as well as the difficulties experienced in each. Yet, the level of service provided in each differs, the level of development varies and the overall success of each community is inconsistent across the board. A more in-depth description of each of the four will now be provided so as to raise awareness of the situation facing each of the case-study sites for this research. Additionally, the much smaller settlement areas which make up the County of Perth (typically Hamlets and Villages) will formulate an important part of this paper, just as they formulate an important aspect of the County. The importance of these much smaller, even more (general more rural) communities will be discussed in great deal in various chapters of this paper.
5. **THE TOWNSHIP OF PERTH EAST:**

The Township of Perth East is the second largest of the four municipalities in the County of Perth. It is home to over 12,000 residents, is roughly $700\text{km}^2$ in size, and has settlement areas of Shakespeare, Gadshill, Millbank, Rostock and Milverton (among others) and borders the separated City of Stratford (pop. 32,000) (StatsCan, 2011). Perth East is a unique municipality which has a rich history in agriculture and industry, and is home to the largest Mennonite population within the County of Perth, a group which comprises approximately 4% of the County’s population (PDHU, 2011). Demographically speaking, the township has a median age of 36.1, and has seen its population grow by 0.4% from 2006 to 2011. The largest community within the Township is Milverton; a community with a rich and unique history within the County and home to a number of longstanding unique businesses within the region— from carriage builders (horse and buggy and millwright businesses) to the famous “Anna Mae’s” restaurant and bakery, Perth East differentiates itself from the rest of the County, and indeed much of the region through its unique demographic make-up and rich, diverse history.
Historically speaking, Milverton was a major settlement centre for the County of Perth. It was founded in 1848 when shoemaker Andrew West, came from New York State, settled on a farm and a year later, opened a hotel (Perth East, 2012). In the 1970’s, it was a thriving community with all of the necessary amenities – from elementary and high schools, churches and places of worship, a small but vibrant downtown, employment and industry, shopping and affordable housing; Milverton, became rather quickly, a self-sufficient community (Johnston, 1967). Present day amenities in the village include an elementary school, local restaurants, bakeries, cheese plants, quilt shops, a lumber store, banking and more. Annual events include the Milverton Rodeo and yearly quilt fundraiser/community sale. Although succeeding in many regards, more could be done from a planning/policy perspective in order to minimize the threats being posed by the ageing population, declining population, inability to retain youth and draw in new residents. Milverton is a community within not just Perth East, but within the County which has a great deal of potential to not just remain a strong community, but to take on an even more important role. It is important to note that Milverton has also experienced growth of approximately 5% from 2006 to 2011 (Statscan, 2011), and continues to grow at a sustainable rate.
6. **MUNICIPALITY OF WEST PERTH:**

The Municipality of West Perth and the Town of Mitchell in particular, are located along the banks of the Thames River, and are thus home to over 10 kilometres of trails and an array of year-round outdoor activities. The Municipality itself was formed in 1998 (the time of amalgamation in Perth County- before which it was made up of Logan, Hibbert and Fullarton Townships) and the Town of Mitchell. Presently, it is home to (including the aforementioned) the smaller settlement areas of Bornholm, Dublin, Fullarton, Staffa and Mitchell, among others. With a population of just under 9000 (2011 census), West Perth is the third largest of the four member municipalities of Perth County. The Town of Mitchell is one of the major urban centres in Perth County. While it is an urbanized settlement area, the Town itself is relatively small in size, roughly (6 km²) and surrounded entirely by prime agricultural lands. West Perth was also home to the site of the 100th International Ploughing Match, which saw over 65,000 people come to the area (Perth County, 2014). Historically speaking, Mitchell served as a shipping point on the continuous line of the Buffalo and Lake Huron tracts (Johnston, 1963).

West Perth is home to a number of wetlands and rehabilitated ponds (West Perth Wetlands). There are a number of rare species of birds found in the area, and the annual events are plentiful. The Town of Mitchell has a population of 4,448 (2011 census) and is serviced with municipal water and sewer systems. As a small town, Mitchell has quite a lot to offer for its current and future residents. There are elementary and high schools, shopping, a golf course, affordable housing and a good number of services. Mitchell is home to a number of historic buildings as well, and has done a good job at preserving a number of them for future uses.
“The Historic Hicks House” Downtown Mitchell, ON.
-An example of preserving buildings of historical significance, despite not holding “heritage” status.

The West Perth Municipal Library – Mitchell, ON. A historic building with modern upgrades. Libraries present a continued challenge for small, rural communities as usership and resources allocated to keeping them in operation have become issues.
7. MUNICIPALITY OF NORTH PERTH:

The largest of the four member municipalities making up the County of Perth, the Municipality of North Perth is home to over 13,000 residents. The Town of Listowel is the main urban centre for the municipality, but the Municipality is also home to such hamlets and villages as Monkton, Britton, Newton and Atwood (among others). North Perth has seen the highest amount of development in the County of Perth in more recent years. The Town of Listowel, from 2006 to 2011 has shown growth of nearly 9% (2011 census). There have been 750 dwelling units constructed over the course of a 10 year period (from 1998-2008) (Perth County, 2009) which, for a mid-sized community is quite substantial. Nevertheless, North Perth as a municipality has maintained its historic appeal while incorporating the varied new forms of growth and development which have allowed it to be both economically and socially stable in present times. North Perth’s Master Growth plan, revised in 2014, provides a comprehensive approach to planning through providing statistical information including population projections and so forth, while ensuring the needs of the communities within the municipality are being appropriately addressed.

Historically, land was subtracted from Wallace and Elma wards in order to make room for the (then Village) of Listowel. Similarly, land was subtracted from Mornington Ward to make room for the
settlement area of Milverton (Perth East). The Town itself, named after the same-named place in the south-west of Ireland was established primarily due to the desired need to have an urban settlement area in the northern part of the County. In present day, it remains one of the major urban centres for the County of Perth.

For the purposes of this paper, Listowel is not the primary settlement area which will be focused on when discussing North Perth and its small, rural communities. The reasoning behind this is that a diverse group of towns, hamlets and villages were chosen in order to be more representative. Listowel, being the largest of the towns in the County of Perth, while it has its struggles, is not entirely an accurate reflection of the places facing challenges. Atwood however, a very small hamlet of roughly 650 people, is a great example of a settlement area which, highly rural, has faced, and continues to face a number of difficulties in continuing to be a semi-urban area which is able to provide services, employment and an overall high standard of living to its residents. Gowanstown would also be a good example of a rural community within the Municipality of North Perth which is reflective of a more typical settlement area within the County of Perth which has struggles that differ from the larger centre of Listowel.

Presently, the municipality of North Perth is in a rather exciting period. It is experiencing the greatest growth within the County, has done a good job of providing affordable housing and services to residents and is home to some unique downtown and mainstreet spaces. The North Perth Master Growth Plan as previously mentioned, deals specifically with issues of safety, accessibility and walkability. The municipality is also welcoming a brand new school to the area, with space for upwards of 565 students. While a good news story in some regards, the
development of the new school is also the basis upon which Elma Public School and the current Central Public School in Listowel are being closed. The project itself illustrates the changing landscape of the future of schooling and education in our rural areas.

Image Source: McDonald, 2015

The Atwood Men’s Club – an older (and very small) building on the east side of the road in Atwood’s ‘downtown/mainstreet’
THE NORTH PERTH MASTER GROWTH PLAN:

First released in 2010, and updated in 2014, the North Perth Master Growth Plan is a comprehensive approach to managing growth and development in the Municipality of North Perth. Completed by IBI Group Limited, the Plan itself is a 100+ page report which looks at calculated growth projections, development permits issued, number of dwellings and buildings constructed, and an overall forecasting of potential growth (both low and high-end) in order to better plan for Perth’s largest municipality. The study, which focused on the urban centre of Listowel, also looked at other, smaller, more rural communities of Atwood, Gowanstown, Trowbridge and Monkton. The study takes a look at supply versus demand in terms of the existing land inventory, and identifies land needs based on both a population projection method, and a land absorption rate method. Additionally, the plan itself takes a look at some of the surrounding counties, as well as the local tier member municipalities of Perth, to draw similarities and comparisons to North Perth.

Of particular interest to this paper, the Master Growth Plan, while not an Official Plan, acknowledges the role of the urban fringe, as well as included a good breadth of information and forecasting material for the villages and hamlets which make up the municipality of North Perth. Items such as new lot creation and servicing also make up a key component of the
study; both of which are of great importance to the type of work this paper has aimed at contributing towards.

If used properly, the North Perth Master Growth Plan will be an effective and helpful tool for planning, economic development, public works and beyond, for years to come. Although not completely inclusive, or necessarily perfected, the Plan provides a high volume of data which can be used in ‘proactively planning’ for the small towns, hamlets and villages in the County of Perth. In an era where data specific to our smaller communities is difficult to achieve, and largely, no longer released by Statistics Canada, this is particularly useful. The County of Perth, upon reviewing the Plan, and making the desired changes, may see the need for similar plans to be prepared for each of the townships/municipalities in the County of Perth so that they too, can have a comprehensive guide for growth and development in their respective community. Subsequent spin-off studies could then be prepared at an even more localized level should the staffing, funding, or feasibility exist to complete them. It is these types of studies which will greatly contribute to the overall well-being of the planning for, in particular, the smaller communities which make up the County of Perth.
In addition to the commissioning of the North Perth Master Growth Plan, the municipality also commissioned a study for the downtowns in North Perth. This study, also released in 2014, took community feedback from residents of Monkton, Atwood and Listowel and developed a plan to better meet the needs of current and future residents of North Perth to better address their needs. Basic amenities such as furniture, lighting and signage also formed part of this study, and has found some success in actually being implemented in parts of the North Perth communities.

Furthermore, what was good about this study was that it provided a number of site specific examples of ways in which improvement could be brought to the communities of North Perth. From looking at the existing lighting in parks in Listowel, to community information kiosks, to a community sign with a digital display, the report indicated numerous ways in which these communities could work towards improving the downtown streetscape through these very specific approaches. Once again, this is a great example of something which was commissioned by the municipality, at their cost, as an effort to proactively plan for the future of their communities. The process of developing the streetscape plan itself was categorized into four areas – phases one through four, which begin with concept development and masterplan preparation and end with the actual implementation phase. The study is another great example of a tool which has been prepared for the municipality and could be used to
proactively plan for both the present and the future of the smaller communities which make up
the County of Perth.

Lastly, it should be recognized that the municipality of North Perth has also undertaken
studies on the following (to cite some specific examples - *list is not exhaustive):

1) Listowel Greenway Master Plan (2009)
3) Labour Market Analysis
4) Business Retention & Expansion Study
5) Retail Gap Analysis

By undertaking these types of studies, it is clear that the Municipality of North Perth is
committed to change, growth, prosperity and overall resident well-being, safety and happiness
in their community. The studies, as previously mentioned, can form effective tools to help with
the proactive planning for these communities. While they are not always used, it becomes very
evident when they are, and their impact is often measurable, whether it is through the planting
of new trees, revitalization of a park, adding of seating and lighting on a street block, or
otherwise. Moving forward, these (studies and useful literature) should become a clear
example of a useful tool for planning and development in the small, generally rural or semi-
rural communities in the County of Perth.
9. THE TOWNSHIP OF PERTH SOUTH:

The Township of Perth South is a very unique township/municipality within the County of Perth. The main reason behind this being that the township itself is not home to any ‘major’ urban centre. Where North Perth has serviced urban areas of Listowel & Atwood, Perth East Milverton & Shakespeare and West Perth Mitchell, Perth South is almost entirely rural due to the fact that the Town of St. Marys (although geographically in the township) has been politically separate since 1853. Despite this, Perth South has remained a very important player within the County, and continues to prove (agriculturally speaking) a prominent piece of the County’s economic puzzle. Perth South is a dynamic community in its own regard. Perhaps more than any of the other three member municipalities of the County of Perth, Perth South’s struggles are evident. The tax base is limited, services are, in parts, minimal and the development, although occurring, is typically very small scale and does not bring many new jobs to the area. Provincial policy surround lot creation in unserviced settlement areas is something which impacts the Township, and is discussed later on in this paper. Additionally, the push for the severance of surplus farmhouses was a particularly heated topic for the township in 2011, and continues to be controversial today.

Although this study focuses on the ‘downtowns/mainstreets’ within the villages, hamlets and towns of Perth County, the Township of Perth South is included not simply because it is one of the four member municipalities, but because it does, in some sense, have main facilities and buildings which, for the purposes of this study will be grouped in under the umbrella of ‘main street/downtown’. There are several small rural communities within Perth
South- including Sebringville (half), Kirkton (home to the original Eaton’s bicycle shop), Woodham, Rannoch and Avonton, among others. Secondly, provincial policy, as well as local County plans and zoning by-laws will be touched on as they relate to the Township. Other areas of this study, including sense of place, growth and development and youth retention apply to the Township of Perth South just as they apply to the other three member municipalities.
10. COUNTY OF PERTH OFFICIAL PLAN:

First adopted in 1998, the County of Perth’s Official Plan (“OP”) was formed in large part through a comprehensive review process of the several local Official Plan’s which had been in existence in the County prior to, and in some cases, continue to exist, post amalgamation. While the numerous Wards and their respective larger urban settlement areas had their own Official Plans to work with, the County itself did not have an overarching plan for the entire geographic area constituting the County of Perth. After a long and detailed process, the County of Perth had its OP adopted by Council in December of 1997, marking the completion of its first County-wide Official Plan. Despite the release of this OP, the local Official Plans of Mitchell, Listowel and Milverton remained in place, and continue to today. Each of these lower-tier (municipal) OP’s are required to be in conformity with the County Official Plan however, as per Section 14 of the Planning Act, R.S.O, 1990.

The overarching message found within the County of Perth’s Official Plan is relatively easy to uncover. The County aims to maintain its longstanding dedication and devotion towards agriculture and farming. Explicitly stated in the County’s OP (Agriculture Section):

“Agricultural land use activities have been and continue to be the predominant land use activity in Perth County. These agricultural activities and the industry associated with same are of major importance to the local municipal and county economies. Perth County’s good land base for agriculture, its favourable climatic conditions, and its skilled farm work force are all contributing factors to the importance of agriculture in Perth County” (County OP, 2015 Consolidation).
It is, in part, the stronghold on agriculture, through the implementation of stringent policies which has helped Perth to not only remain at the forefront of agricultural production from an economic standpoint, but has allowed it to become a place which clearly states its strong devotion towards agricultural lands, and farming practice, above all other land uses. While this paper is not focusing specifically on agriculture, it is the quintessential backbone of the County of Perth, and as such, the policies and views pertaining to its protection must be understood before discussing matters such as the improvement of small, rural settlement areas, hamlets, villages and towns within the County. While specific policies, which will be discussed in greater detail below, do exist for the County’s settlement areas, hamlets, villages and towns do encompass a broader view than just “Agriculture” or “farming”, it is fair to say that the agricultural policies found within the OP are the heart of the document itself, and in turn, pump life into the various other sections such as “Hamlet/Village Residential”, “Infilling”, “Settlement Area” and “Natural Environment”.

The strict policies surrounding agricultural lands in the County of Perth can be used as an effective tool to enhance the other areas in need of attention. This could better be explained by thinking of the County of Perth as a glass, with agriculture at the very top (as shown below). As the County’s biggest economic contributor, employment sector, land user and creator of opportunity- agriculture has earned its place at the top of the glass. The diagram shown below better helps to illustrate this point:
The top down approach illustrated from the glass diagram provides the necessary background into the type of place Perth County is. With (essentially) everything flowing down from agriculture, and to a large extent, the manufacturing sector (and other prominent industries) found in many of the urban areas, we can better understand why certain policies exist in the Official Plan. The question of how they can help Perth to achieve its goals, and most importantly, how they can be built upon, and used to (as this paper outlines) proactively promote the changes needed to launch Perth and its respective small rural hamlets, villages and towns to where they need to be in order to be both viable and manageable in the world of tomorrow, remains.
Perth County’s stronghold on the agriculture industry should be commended. It would, as this paper will suggest, be easier to follow the path of least resistance and join many of the surrounding counties, and indeed much of the province and nation in respect to permitting the severance of surplus farm dwellings- to cite one specific and controversial example. As municipalities, and the province as a whole, continue to move towards these less restrictive permissions, so too will they be moving towards a disadvantageous stage with respect to the future of the agriculture industry in their respective region. Lot fragmentation, creation of rural residential lots, impedances on a farm operations ability to grow, and an overall introduction of incompatible uses could pose a problem for the municipalities allowing for these types of severances. While the argument often arises of “what makes Perth unique” in respect to land use planning, it could, and this paper suggests should be stated that, admittedly, Perth is not necessary unique at this point in time.

Although Perth is consistently among the top three producers (Ontario-wide) of dairy, hog production, poultry and cash crop operations (OMAFRA, 2014 & StatsCan, 2001- 2011)- it does not appear to be truly unique when compared to neighbouring Huron or Oxford Counties, to choose two nearby examples, even though it is much smaller in geographic size. This notion of uniqueness, however, could change in the future should Perth continue to diligently promote the protection of agriculture, as other municipalities and counties stray further away from these protective measures. Admittedly, this is but one of several issues (policies) which regulate the farming and agriculture industry as a whole- and will not, on its own, be a make-or-break type of policy which defines the face of agriculture. Despite this, what the current prohibitive policy does is very clearly illustrate Perth’s longstanding desire, and achievement
within agriculture not only within Southwestern Ontario, but across the province, and within Canada as a whole. The current policy in Perth is also in line with the overall goals set out in the Official Plan, and keeps the long-term best interests of agriculture in mind. Hard-nosed policies which draw criticism in their earliest years can later draw praise as being not only appropriate, but also visionary. This policy (surplus farmhouse severances) and similar policies surrounding agriculture will be discussed in greater detail throughout this section.

To further illustrate the need of improving settlement areas as opposed to merely changing policy which impacts farm lots, the question of why one would choose to locate in one of the hamlets and villages in the rural parts of the County, when they could (potentially, with a different policy) live on a 1 acre farm parcel arises. While the PPS (2014) encourages all sorts of initiatives to take place within these smaller settlement areas, it also provides the flexibility to create non-farm residential lots under certain conditions. Contradictory in and of itself, the PPS should strengthen its hold on what goes on in the rural areas that define our province. The “rural idyll” as explained earlier in the literature review of this paper discussed how although the desire for rural living does not exist to the same extent in Ontario as it may in other parts of the world, it does nevertheless, exist. Does, however, the ‘rural idyll’ necessarily mean living on a 1 acre parcel of a severed lot from a farm, or does it, more simply put, refer to living in a rural setting, preferably with some basic amenities within walking distance while still maintaining the sense of place one is provided with in a country setting? It could, and this paper would suggest, should be argued that the latter is perhaps the more appropriate ideal that urbanities may be seeking when pursuing their dreams of country living. This being the case, the rural hamlets, villages and small towns need to be the focus of
attention from policy through to implementation. Basic service provision (water and sewer) already being in place in number hamlets, villages and small towns helps, but items such as walkability, employment opportunity and social connectedness lag behind. It is very clear, and it well documented (particularly by the County of Perth Economic Development Department’s) initiatives in the County of Perth, that perhaps our efforts need to be directed towards these places, and not always focused on the already highly successful and productive farm properties themselves.
11. ANALYSIS OF PERTH COUNTY’S OP & THE 2014 PROVINCIAL POLICY STATEMENT:

Prior to the adoption of the County-wide Official Plan in 1998, a total of fourteen local Official Plans existed for the numerous wards which defined the County prior to amalgamation in 1998. With a newly structured government in 1998, the County saw the need (and according to the Planning Act) was required to help plan for its land use through the overarching Official Plan it uses today. The County Official Plan was written in accordance with the Provincial Policy Statement, and is reviewed on a 5 year basis. This section of the paper aims to conduct a brief analysis on a select few of the policies found within the County of Perth, some of which have been alluded to in earlier sections. Additionally, this paper will take an in-depth look at certain policies within the Provincial Policy Statement and provide insight as to how it could change to better reflect the changing needs of rural Ontario in particular.


Within the County of Perth’s official plan (“OP”), certain policies exist which differ from the policies which are found in some of the surrounding counties, as would be expected. Although Perth shares many similarities with Huron, Oxford and Wellington counties for
example, the policies surrounding rural planning and development in each of these places are not necessarily the same. This will become particularly relevant when discussing the County of Perth’s prohibitive policy (mentioned in the previous section) surrounding the severance of surplus farm houses. The second policy from the Perth County OP which will be discussed will be one which deals with on-farm diversified uses. This policy was selected based on the current (proposed) updates to certain provincial publications. Lastly, the policy surrounding communities which rely on horse drawn vehicles will be looked at. These types of policy are interesting in the sense that they speak specifically to the Amish and Mennonite communities in the County of Perth, and have (in the past) had impacts for provincial policy and have resulted in updates to the Minimum Distance Separation Formula which include special provisions for these types of communities.

**Policy #1 – Surplus Farmhouse Severances: Perth County OP- 5.5.16**

Historically and as previously mentioned in this paper, the County of Perth has long had a tremendous focus on agriculture, and its preservation/conservation. Perth’s policies have always reflected this, and, it is hoped, will continue to do so in the future. The County as a whole is made up of over 90% Prime Agricultural lands with soils classed as 1, 2 or 3 under the Canada Land Inventory (Perth County Official Plan, 2013). This fact, along with the longstanding, impressive statistics showing the critical importance of agriculture as the number one industry in the county, have manifested themselves into the formation of such a strong set of policies within Perth County’s OP.
Considering the information above, it should come as no surprise that the County aims to protect agriculture through its land use policies. Each of the surrounding counties of Huron, Oxford, Wellington and others also have sections in their official plans which ensure protecting agriculture is of critical importance. The Provincial Policy Statement also requires that agricultural lands be protected (Provincial Policy Statement, 2014). In this section however, we will look at the one policy which is continually on the minds of those involved in (and impacted by) planning for the County of Perth. Whether they are members of local municipal councils, County Council, the Planning and Development Department staff, agricultural organizations or members of the farming community, the policy surrounding the severance of surplus farm dwellings has become the discussion point of the decade for Perth County.

Section 5.5.16 of the County of Perth OP (Non-Farm Residential Development) reads:

“New non-farm residential development, excepting single-detached dwelling uses that may be permitted by Section 5.5.15 of this Plan, shall not be permitted in the “Agriculture” designation. Consents involving the creation of new non-farm residential building lots shall not be permitted”. (Perth County Official Plan, 2013) The last sentence speaks to the issue surrounding surplus dwellings. By severing a residence, one would be creating a non-farm
residential lot, which is one of the reasons why the policy reads to prohibit the lot creation from occurring.

Historically, a number of wards within the County of Perth (a total of six) permitted the severance of surplus farmhouse dwellings in their local Official Plans prior to adoption of the County Official Plan in 1998. Needless to say, this has been a controversial issue in the county since that time, and continues to be very divisive today. Presently, Perth County is conducting its Five-Year-Review of the OP, and as part of this, Council requested that it review the policies surrounding surplus farmhouse severances (Perth County Council, 2013). Also important to note, is that in 2011, this matter (surplus farmhouse severance policy) was brought before the Ontario Municipal Board, which ultimately sided with the County of Perth’s position and allowed the County’s prohibitive policy to remain in place (Ontario Municipal Board, 2011). The County of Perth is the only County in the entirety of Ontario (and perhaps beyond) which completely prohibits these types of severances. Although the future of the policy is in the hands of Perth County Council, the recommendation of continuing to prohibit these types of severances has continued to be brought forward by the County’s Planning Department.

What the Provincial Policy Statement ("PPS") states:

When discussing policies found in the County’s OP, it is important to also take a look at what the PPS states. Ultimately, the PPS is the guiding document which must be complied with by the County (other guiding documents such as the Greenbelt Plan, Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and so on do not directly impact the County of Perth). A synopsis of what the PPS states helps to provide some of the basis under which the County of Perth has
formed many of its policies, including the more restrictive ones. Also important to note, is that any municipality is within their means to go beyond the scope of the PPS (s. 4.9) (Provincial Policy Statement, 2014) as it merely sets out the minimum standards which must be followed.

The 2014 PPS speaks to the importance of agriculture to Ontario, as it had done in previous (2005) and (1996) statements as well. Additionally, new/amended definitions were placed in the most recent update- of particular relevance, the update to prime agricultural land and new addition of prime agricultural area. It seems as though the province is working towards greater protection of our agricultural resources, yet some of the other publications, for example, the on-farm diversified uses work, in a sense, seem to go against this protective approach. For example, the latest PPS included classes 4 through 7 soils when defining prime agricultural lands. Under this new definition, the County of Perth would be a prime agricultural area. The section which deals with the severance of surplus farmhouses (s. 2.3.4.1 c)) however, still permits such severances to occur, provided that:

“1. the new lot will be limited to a minimum size needed to accommodate the use and appropriate sewage and water services; and

2. the planning authority ensures that new residential dwellings are prohibited on any remnant parcel of farmland created by the severance. The approach used to ensure that no new residential dwellings are permitted on the remnant parcel may be recommended by the Province, or based on municipal approaches which achieve the same objective; and...” (PPS, 2014).
Within the counties surrounding Perth, the severance of surplus farm houses is permitted, yet, there are numerous criteria which need to be met in order for the application to Sever to be approved. The question which should come to mind in these circumstances is that if the policies within the PPS, and within local OP’s are considered ‘good’ policies and represent ‘good’ planning, why do such criteria exist? There are certain areas of planning policy which this paper suggests, should be more ‘black and white’. A well written policy which represents good planning should not require a lengthy number of criteria following it. Despite the PPS allowing for the severance of surplus farmhouses, the ever-important point of the PPS’ policies being ‘minimum standards’ comes to play. Going beyond the PPS is something which municipalities are able to do, and this is exactly the case for what has occurred in the County of Perth.

The second policy to be discussed in this paper is one which, although not unique to Perth, does speak to some of the characteristics of the County, particularly in Perth East and North Perth where there are relatively high Amish and Mennonite populations who rely on horse drawn transport. In addition to discussing the County’s OP policy on institutional and public uses, as well as what the PPS states on this topic, the MDS guidelines will also be discussed, as they are of particular relevance to this section.

Policy #2 – Institutional and Public Uses – Perth County OP s.5.5.11

Within Section 5 (Agriculture) of the County’s OP there is a section which deals specifically with institutional and public uses (5.5.11). This is an interesting section of Perth’s OP as new institutional use and public uses, “with the exception of landfill sites and sewage treatment facilities, shall not be permitted in the “Agriculture” designation (Perth County OP,
2013). However, new institutional uses shall be permitted to locate “in settlement areas subject to the applicable “Settlement Area” policies” of the Plan (Perth County OP, 2013). The abovementioned segments of the OP may not be overly interesting on their own, but the detail provided in the “notwithstanding” paragraph found later in section 5.5.11 recognizes, and considers the needs of the Amish/Mennonite communities found in the County.

According to section 5.5.11, notwithstanding the “shall not be permitted” paragraph details mentioned above, new churches, schools and cemeteries are permitted within the “Agriculture” designation ... “where such schools, churches, cemeteries service the immediate rural community which relies on horse drawn vehicles as their primary means of transportation subject to the following criteria” (Perth County OP, 2013). The criteria speak to items such as lot size for each of the three uses (schools, churches and cemeteries), MDS provisions, the preference of leases as opposed to severances, the need for perpetual care of the cemetery and so forth.

As mentioned above, the Minimum Distance Separation (“MDS”) formula is of particular relevance to this section of the OP. Currently under review, the MDS document, as prepared by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, is yet another important tool for land use planners. In short, Minimum Distance Separation aims to ensure non-compatible uses (such as residential uses) are appropriately separated from livestock operations, due to the odours which are normally associated with said operations (OMAFRA, 2015). What is interesting here is that land uses, according to the MDS are either a “Type A” or a “Type B”, the former being used for uses which have lower densities of people, activity, and habitation, with
type B being used for subdivisions, settlement area expansions and essentially, any form of residential development (OMAFRA, 2015).

What is unique in the County of Perth is that it has received amendment applications to permit the construction of schools, churches and cemeteries which are in the “Agriculture” designation, but are also in areas which are reliant on horse drawn transport. The County OP, not permitting such uses in the “Agriculture” designation, has not approved these applications; yet, reflections of current needs within the County have been addressed through the receipt of them. The MDS takes a unique approach to cemetery setback, and in the most recent version of the MDS (not yet finalized) there is a section under guideline #38 which speaks to communities which rely on horse-drawn vehicles as their primary means of transportation. This section reads as follows:

“with respect to MDS I – except for cemeteries which are intended to serve a community which relies on horse-drawn vehicles as a primary means of transportation, new or expanding cemeteries are always treated as a Type B land use because they are not closed and receiving low levels of visitation” (OMAFRA, 2015).

This policy represents an element of respect and recognition in a way, as it aims to help communities which rely on horse-drawn vehicles as they face the challenges associated with operating what tend to be smaller sized farms, viable. Being represented both provincially and locally (in the Perth County OP) is a small success story for these types of communities, but a great deal of work must go into ensuring their long term sustainability is still needed.
Policy #3 – On-Farm Diversified Use Policy:

For this final section, on-farm diversified use will be discussed as it relates to land use planning in Ontario. While the PPS is fundamental in setting the policy around this topic, the guidelines from OMAFRA will form the bulk of this discussion. The types of uses being permitted on prime agricultural lands are critically important, and striking a balance between what is an acceptable use and what is not an acceptable use can be difficult.

In the County of Perth OP, on-farm diversified uses are covered, in part, under section 5.5.7 (Secondary Farm Occupations). As the province works toward finalizing the permitted uses on prime agricultural lands document, changes will likely be in store for the County OP. For the time being, secondary farm occupations cover a number of the same issues. One of the greatest discrepancies between Perth County’s OP and what is being proposed as the permitted size of “on-farm diversified uses” in the draft permitted guidelines. Where the county permits a maximum floor area not to exceed 375m² the province has proposed no more than 2%, up to a maximum of 1 hectare (OMAFRA, 2015). With the provinces proposed area, a farm parcel of 100 acres could have two acres of their land devoted to the secondary occupation, or the ‘on-farm diversified use’.
**Recommendation:**

While the PPS proves a useful tool for municipalities across Ontario, the problems with it need to be addressed. While this paper focused mostly on Perth’s OP and a select few policies from the PPS, there are many more general problems which have not been discussed. There is such an effort being demonstrated across the province, and in particular, in counties such as Perth, which work toward ensuring prime agricultural areas are being protected. Despite this, the PPS states that “all types, sizes and intensities of agricultural uses and normal farm practices shall be promoted and protected in accordance with provincial standards” (PPS, 2014). The problem here is that the statement itself is, to a degree, false. How can the province- and in turn local municipalities promote all types, sizes and intensities of agricultural uses when there are policies in place to ensure farm parcels are not broken up and farm operators looking to intensify their operations are being restricted by MDS setbacks due to surrounding non-farm development which has been permitted?

Secondly, this idea of diversifying on-farm uses is troublesome. Farmland and particularly prime agricultural land should be used for the production of food. While it is important to support farmers looking to establish wineries, breweries and small-scale manufacturing operations (as examples), the question of whether or not farmland is the best place for these uses must be asked. A farmer growing hops in his field, but bringing in the other required ingredients to make his farm-fresh brew, which is to be processed (industry) and bottled (manufacturing) in a large industrial building is, at the end of the day, taking up prime agricultural land for a non-agricultural use. The problem and difficulties associated with
attracting new businesses to manufacturing and industrial lands surrounding small, rural settlement areas persists. By permitting farmers to add industrial types of uses to their prime agricultural lands, we are only contributing to the struggle. What should and should not be permitted on prime agricultural lands is a very fine line with very real repercussions. Yet despite all of this, there is a great need to support farmers moving forward, and in doing so, it is important to enable them to continually remain economically viable and diverse in the sense that they need to be permitted to make changes in order to meet the changing needs and demands of their industry.

**Relevance to the Proactive Planning for Perth’s Hamlets & Villages:**

The connection between the policies surrounding agriculture and the proactive planning for the rural hamlets and villages in the County of Perth is strong. The planning for these areas should be a reflection of the agriculture industry itself. Where a strong agriculture industry exists, one should expect to see the surrounding hamlet/village/town doing relatively well. Unfortunately, there has been a disconnect between the two, and the reflection is not an accurate depiction of the strong agricultural industry. In part, this has to do with the policies surrounding both agriculture and the settlement areas. Businesses are, in some instances, locating on the farm land instead of in the settlement area where they are desperately needed. Affordable housing is generally available in these smaller hamlets and villages, but the lack of employment opportunity, social connectedness and overall appeal of these small places are lagging behind where potential residents would want to see them. As the diagram earlier in this section showed, agriculture, at the top of the glass, is where everything else flows from.
The idea of "reinvestment and revitalization" at the bottom of the glass, with arrows is to demonstrate that the flow of capital, as well as efforts (community and otherwise) need to be put directly back into the settlement areas (hamlets and villages) instead of waiting for the flow of capital and efforts to trickle down from the higher-level (major economic drivers) of agriculture and other industry. There needs to be some sort of buoyancy in the model for approaching planning the County of Perth. This section of the paper argues that there is not a problem with the ordering of this model, but more so that the reinvestment and revitalization has not occurred at an appropriate level at the hamlet/village level.

**Conclusion:**

It is an exciting time to be involved in field of rural planning and development in Ontario. Throughout this section, a select few policies from the Perth County OP were discussed, as well as related policies from the PPS, and even some relation of the MDS to one of the policies was touched on. This is but a glimpse of what is happening in the world of rural planning and development in Ontario today. There are reviews being conducted on fundamental documents such as the MDS, Permitted uses on prime agricultural lands, the Greenbelt Plan, the Oak Ridge Moraine Plan and the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe which are being dealt with under the “Our Region, Our Community, Our Home” document (MMAH, 2015). Continued work is being done to improve not only the understanding of planning and its impact on our province, but also to ensure its long term best interests are being addressed.
While this section of the paper provided a mere glimpse of rural planning and development in Ontario (and primarily in the County of Perth) it has worked to show how several tools, and multiple hands, are involved in the decision making processes which ultimately determine how we use our land. From policy at the local level, to the Councils and committees involved, to the overarching documents at the provincial level; there are strong relationships which hold our communities together, while shaping them for the future. Moving forward, these relationships will continue to play a major role in helping to determine the future of agriculture and land use planning within the province of Ontario.
ON-FARM VALUE ADDING STUDY:

In April of 2015, a group of University of Guelph students prepared an on-farm value adding study, which served as a review of the policy surrounding agriculture and, more specifically, the on-farm diversified uses policy found in the 2014 PPS. While the study went over the provincial policy statement as well as the County of Perth Official Plan, it also drew useful comparisons between the two policy sets.

Studies such as this, similar to the previously mentioned plans and studies conducted in the Municipality of North Perth, are yet another source of information which can be used as a tool not just proactively plan for the communities making up the County, but to bring to light some of the many changes which are going on at the provincial level, and detail what these changes might look like in our respective municipalities. The collaborative efforts of, in this case, students of rural planning and development and the County of Perth (Economic Development & Planning Departments) should be promoted.

Lastly, this study listed a number of recommendations which should be thought of as useful considerations for the County. Three recommendations which are of particular interest, for the purposes of this study, and the long-term interest in ‘proactively planning’ for Perth, are as follows:

- “Consider implementing a Community Improvement Plan to support value-adding initiatives to facilitate new businesses.”
• “Continue to promote local food and products and to provide more public education to consumers about where their food comes from – two pillars of local food movement” (BR+E) and the advantage of a number of farmers markets”

• “Leverage collaboration along the value chain through the promotion of partnerships and municipal support for such initiatives”. (Dempster et al, 2015)
12. **The Rural Villages in the County of Perth:**

As is the case in small rural areas across Canada, and in particular in Ontario, the struggles to maintain stable populations, and grow, have proven to be a great challenge in rural Ontario (Van Brenk, 2013). Perth County is no exception to this and has experienced changes throughout the county in relation to population loss in rural areas—school closures, church closures, service loss, vacancy rates and more being prime examples of such. While the County has an Official Plan in place to help steer the direction of the small rural hamlets and villages which make up the County, the challenges extend beyond what an official plan is capable of doing. Promoting growth from an economic standpoint is a real challenge for the county, as is youth retention, service provision and business retention and expansion (Perth County Economic Development, 2014).

This section of the paper aims to focus on some of these key issues facing the rural hamlets and villages which make up the County of Perth. By addressing the role of the County’s Official Plan and the Provincial Policy Statement, this paper will look at ways in which these key documents reflect the needs facing these rural areas throughout the county. Furthermore, some of the initiatives taken on by some of the municipalities within the County will be looked at as well as some smaller scale success stories, in order to illustrate examples of how some of the County’s and in turn, the province’s goals and initiatives can, and have, worked out in some of the rural areas making up the County of Perth.
The images above showing (from left to right) a family run lumber business in Sebringville, the welcome sign to the Village of Millbank and the original Mennonite meeting house in Gowanstown. [SOURCE: Perth County Economic Development, 2014]

**Background- The Select Few… Community Profiles:**

While there are numerous hamlets, villages, towns and even a city which make up the County of Perth, this section of the paper will focus on a select few to provide an overview, or snapshot, of the more typical situation found in some of the hamlets and villages within the County. The criteria upon which these places were chosen are as follows:

- Population of under 750 people (as of 2011 census (where available)/planning dept. estimates)
- Must be immediately surrounded by agriculture (ensuring it is truly ‘rural’)
- Must have a ‘mainstreet’ or an identifiable (small) cluster of mixed uses (commercial, residential, industrial, retail, etc.)
- Should represent a true reflection of a ‘typical’ rural hamlet or village within the County of Perth
Given the criteria above, the communities of Sebringville (Perth South) Millbank (Perth East) and Gowanstown (North Perth) have been chosen. Choosing these three also helps to spread the representation geographically and politically across the county and not just in any one of the member municipalities.

**Sebringville (Perth South/Perth East):**

Sebringville is a small community with approximately 650 residents (Perth County Planning Dept, 2001). There are approximately 200 homes within the community, as well as furniture and appliance store, restaurant/diners, antique shop, hardware shop(s), a post office, regional OPP station, fire hall, churches and more. In short, there is quite a lot of mixed-use in Sebringville given its small population. The community itself it located (8) eight kilometers west of Stratford, making it a short and convenient commute into the City for residents working, shopping or requiring services offered in the City of Stratford. Sebringville is one of the largest of the three sites chosen for this paper, and as such, tends to offer slightly more than the two examples which follow (Millbank and Gowanstown).

**Figure 1.4 (Sebringville)** accessed from Perth County’s online Web GIS tool (2010 aerial)
Sebringville. Although some small pockets of residential development exist further back from the main road, the bulk of the housing is directly off the main road (Huron Road) with the entire surroundings being agricultural land. There is also a large plot of land within the village of Sebringville which has been set aside as “Future Development” by the Township/County (as indicated by the blue star).

**Key Struggles:**

When discussing some of the key struggles faced by these small rural communities, it is sometimes difficult to narrow them down to be as specific as one might like. A big reason for this is the lack of census data now available for these smaller communities. With the long-form census gone, it is more and more difficult to derive key information regarding population loss and so forth specific to a small community- as it is now only available for the entire municipality. More detailed information can however come from the building department and building officials who work for these smaller communities. By looking at the number of building permits issued, number of demolition permits issued, and so forth, we can get a clearer picture of what is happening in an individual community.

Specific to Sebringville, a key challenge has been promoting development and growth while at the same time protecting and promoting agriculture. The Township of Perth South located its municipal offices in an even small rural community (St. Pauls) and has seen less growth (population wise) than any of the other municipalities in the county. With a population loss of 3.4% from 2006-2011 (StatsCan, 2011), the Township is well aware of its struggles relating to population. In the community of Sebringville however, there have been some
positives among these struggles. Two new businesses have moved from the City of Stratford into Sebringville within the past year alone (Perth County Economic Development, 2014); a small number of new homes are being built, and from an aesthetic standpoint, the village remains appealing.

**Future Outlook:**

For the village of Sebringville, the future remains somewhat uncertain. On one hand, the issues surrounding population loss are felt more severely in the municipality in which the village is located, but not specifically in the settlement area of Sebringville itself. On the other hand, proposals for development are few in number, and have proven to be, in some instances, too grand in scale for the village to handle (from a servicing and maintaining the community’s character perspective). The provision of services (i.e. water and sewage capacity) could well be an impacting factor for Sebringville moving forward. Combine this with an increasing average age, reduced number of farms immediately surrounding the village and the loss of jobs, and the uncertainty facing the future of the village remains.

**Millbank (Perth East):**

Millbank is an interesting small community within the Township of Perth East. Located 28 kilometres north of Stratford, it is in the heart of the County’s Amish/Mennonite community and historically, was a major commercial centre for the county as it was home to a saw mill, flax mill, woollen mill, two carriage shops, three blacksmith shops, four hotels, two drug stores and more (Millbank and Area Business Association, 2009). Presently, the village of Millbank offers a hardware store, a handful of furniture stores, an apiary, a cheese factory and a hugely popular
restaurant famous for its home cooking, baking and jams, Anna Mae’s (Millbank and Area Business Association, 2009).

Interestingly enough, the village is much more spread out than many other similar sized communities in the county, which tend to be developed along one main road. As was the case with the example of Sebringville, mentioned above, Millbank is entirely surrounded by agriculture and is a very agriculturally-dependant community, with a large Amish and Mennonite population. Immediately to the east of the village of Millbank is the county’s border with Wellesley Township; an area with approximately half its population belonging to either Amish or Mennonite populations (Anna Mae’s, 2014).

**Key Struggles:**

Although many of the struggles in the village of Millbank are similar to those experienced in Sebringville, there are added challenges in this community. It is a community which is heavily reliant on horse drawn transport, which can, at times, present challenges from...
a planning standpoint. The whole issue of compatibility and land-use conflicts can come into play when planning for communities such as Millbank. While there are certain struggles associated with public engagement and outreach from a planning standpoint, the main struggles for a community such as Millbank come in the form of how viable their smaller sized farming operations and associated business will be for them moving forward.

**Successes & Future Outlook:**

Before discussing the future outlook of the village itself, it is important to pay dues to some of the communities great success stories, which help to illustrate just how strong and dynamic some of the communities immediately surrounding us can be. As mentioned in the section above, the Amish and Mennonite community is strong in Millbank, and as such, they have been instrumental in shaping the area. The reliance on horse drawn transport continues, as does a business which caters to this market (see figure 1.6). Creekside Carriages is a great example of how diversification, secondary farm businesses, on-farm diversified uses, or whichever abovementioned term may apply to the associated carriage making business, is a critical step towards ensuring not just agriculture and farmers, but entire communities will have a future which is both sustainable and economically viable.

The other success story for the village of Millbank is found in the form of Anna Mae’s, a restaurant which has been part of the community since 1978 (Anna Mae’s, 2014). The business
itself currently employs between 70-80 employees, many of which hold Amish and Mennonite Heritage. Not only is Anna Mae’s a great example of a local business, it is a true testament to the strength of small rural communities. Arguably, the restaurant has helped turned the village of Millbank into the attraction it is now known as, all while maintaining the historic roots the community was founded upon. On the left (figure 1.7) shows a number of the staff from the ever-popular Anna Mae’s Restaurant and Bakery.

Millbank is a great example of a small rural community which understands its past, and continues to build on it. They are not, however, unwilling or resistant to positive change. This, in large part, is the reason why the community has continued to show some growth and positive development over the course of recent years.

**Gowanstown (North Perth):**

The smallest of the communities selected in this paper, Gowanstown represents a common situation in many rural areas across Ontario. With only a few dozen homes, the community itself has a population of less than 200 (Perth County, 2012). Despite this, there is a public school, municipal building, bakery, post office and car dealership in the village. Situated just 5 kilometers north of Listowel (a much more substantial town of over 5,000 residents) has enabled residents of Gowanstown to access services and goods in the nearby town, while continuing to live in the smaller, more rural setting. There is also a Mennonite meeting house...
located in the village, which serves approximately 142 members (as of 2003) (Global Anabaptist, 2014).

**Key Struggles:**

Given Gowanstown’s particularly small population and size, the challenges it experiences are different from communities which are larger, such as Millbank and Sebringville. While Millbank and Sebringville have a sufficient number of amenities for the immediate population (i.e. some services, a store, restaurant and number of businesses), Gowanstown does not. As mentioned above, there is a bakery, post office and handful of other amenities in the village, but these places cater more to those who “pass through” or make a trip to Gowanstown specifically for these purposes (a person traveling from Listowel for some fresh baked breads for example). These businesses are not merely supported by those who live in the village of Gowanstown. Although the majority of services and amenities which may be desired by residents do not exist in Gowanstown, its rural status with affordable homes make it an option for those who do not wish to live in the larger community of Listowel (as an example). Figure 1.8 (above) shows the development patterns of
the village of Gowanstown. Although small, the village itself benefits from its close proximity (just 5 kilometers) to Listowel. Being fully serviced has allowed the area to grow and serve as somewhat of an expansion of the larger more urban centre of Listowel.

Future Outlook:

As is the case in so many of the rural villages and hamlets which make up the county, the future of a place such as Gowanstown is relatively uncertain. Yet, as the town of Listowel continues to grow and expand, and the Municipality of North Perth the same (at approximately 10% growth in a ten year period) (StatsCan, 2011) there could be great opportunity for the village. The difference between Gowanstown and some of the other examples discussed in this paper is the relative age of the community, and the homes which make it up. While places such as Sebringville and Millbank have a very old housing stock with a handful of newer homes available, the subdivisions found in Gowanstown are new, affordable and fully serviced. This community may not face the same challenges as Sebringville and Millbank for this exact reason. The protection of cultural/heritage types of sites will not necessarily apply to the same extent here as it would in the other rural villages- as discussed in the final section (PPS discussion).

The County Official Plan & Role of the Provincial Policy Statement:

The County Official Plan, along with each of the municipal zoning By-Laws, can contribute to the relative success or failures within a community. If policies are too restrictive, it can present major problems for those who use the land (the residents, business owners, farmers and so forth). Conversely, if policies are too lax, or zone provisions too permissive, the
long term best interests of these communities, and in turn, the municipalities and county as a whole, could experience greater difficulties down the road. Considering the above, it is of critical important that the county and its lower tier municipalities give the official plan and local zoning by-laws the due time they require and deserve in order to serve as functional planning tools.

Within the County Official Plan, and the Provincial Policy Statement (“PPS”), there are some specific policies which speak to the ways in which rural settlement areas, and in particular, their downtowns and mainstreets, should be supported. Although this paper does not focus specifically on downtowns and mainstreets, they are a very important piece of the puzzle when it comes to planning for these areas. In the case of the both Sebringville and Gowanstown, the communities were planned along a main road (one leading directly west of Stratford, the other immediately north of Listowel). Although this is the case for many small rural communities, it does not necessarily impact their ability to prosper as settlement areas in the future; in fact, proximity to major County roads and highways could well be utilized as a tool to attract new residents and business owners alike.

**Provincial Policy Statement (2014) – Section 1.7: Long Term Economic Prosperity:**

Although the long term economic prosperity is of great importance to the province as a whole, as to the County and the rural municipalities within it, this section of the PPS is not (arguably) visited and utilized from a planning standpoint as often as it should be. This paper has placed a great deal of emphasis on the smaller scale success stories within the County (particularly in the example of Millbank) yet, a great deal of similar sized communities continue
to struggle with attracting investment and providing opportunities to encourage a sense of place (1.7d) and to promote the redevelopment of brownfields sites—where they exist (1.7e) to cite two specific examples.

Section 1.7d) of the PPS speaks to the necessity of promoting sense of place through the built form and cultural planning, and by conserving features that help define character (PPS, 2014). While the notion of sense of place can be less tangible than say, brownfield redevelopment projects, it is a very important aspect of community planning. In the section above speaking to the Village of Gowanstown—the post office was mentioned as a community feature. The “post-office” in this community however, has turned into a meeting place for residents, and does not serve its original purpose. Nevertheless, it is an example of a historic building which has been maintained, serves a cultural aspect of the community, and could well help residents to define their ‘sense of place’ within the village. Similarly, the communities of Millbank and Sebringville share this sense of place through diversified use of the built environment. Many of these small rural communities have done a good job of preserving features which help define character, but this is not something which has been necessarily planned for. The community of Sebringville is a good example of a rural community which could see a real transformation should a proposal come along to develop the lands which are set aside for future development. These challenges are very real for small rural communities, and given this fact, it is important that the objective of the PPS (section 1.7d) is understood and addressed.
The next section of relevance (1.7e) is an interesting one which may not be applicable for all small rural communities. While some of the smaller rural communities may not have brownfield sites, others do, and in many cases, these sites can become a form of blight on the community. This policy itself does not necessarily apply in the small rural communities discussed in this section of the paper, but it is important to note as it applies, and is a major issue in other communities which make up the county (geographically speaking), the Town of St. Marys being a good example of this. Opportunity is being lost in these places where there is an unwillingness or lack of funds available to the town to acquire and redevelop brownfields sites. These lands, for the most part, have become frozen in time, and represent generally large parcels of land being unusable by the village, municipality, Town or county.

Lastly, there is an important role played by the County Official Plan amongst all of this. Being that the OP is a tool to guide (among others) growth and development within its member municipalities, it is something which must be both comprehensive and proactive. The County OP has sections which deal specifically with economic development, cultural heritage and community facilities, resources and services. These are three examples of how the county has recognized the importance of these aspects of planning and subsequently, included them in the Official Plan. Furthermore, there have been committees and decision-making bodies formed which not only work with the policies, but proactively secure funds and grants from the provincial level in order to physically change the (in this case) rural hamlets and villages which make up the County – façade improvement grants being one such example.
13. INITIATIVES AND APPROACHES TO FUTURE IMPROVEMENT:

As a last effort for this paper to leave behind some potential suggestions for improving the situation being faced in the small hamlets and villages of the County, some final thoughts which could be implemented over the long term of the County’s Planning initiatives and suggestions for higher-level governments, are found below. Each of the suggestions were chosen based on being feasible (community events), having already been engaged in (win this storefront), having been successful in other surrounding municipalities (trails and walkability), and lastly, based on needs and desires of the larger community. The suggested initiatives are as follows:

**Location of Government Buildings:**

Where the services are available, and it is feasible to do so, government buildings and associated government services, should locate in these smaller hamlets and villages. Firstly, the services provided are not exclusive to urbanites, nor do they need to be situated in cities and towns which already have a great demand for public spaces and office space. With many of the rural hamlets and villages being easily accessible from the nearest city or town, having services locate in them would reflect the government’s commitment to strengthening the economy, maintaining mainstreets, promoting efficient development, leveraging rural amenities, encourage redevelopment, promote diversification of the economic base and employment opportunities through goods and services and essentially enabling the long-term economic prosperity of these communities. As an example, a government building which employs twenty people would have an immediate impact on the community. Monies would be spent in the
community, there would be a new physical body presence in the community, opportunity for heightened social engagement would occur, and spin-off impacts could include employment opportunity, beautification, social events and gatherings, and possible related and unrelated business retention. Furthermore, this shows a devotion to rural communities, rural people and an overall commitment to enhancing and maintaining rural character.

Unlike schools, a number of government service buildings do not rely on any one specific population (school-aged children/families with young children) but rather, provide services for a wide-range of the population. Through locating government services – i.e. a service Ontario building, a building department, planning services and health care services) locate in a rural area would not only be feasible, but would also force urban residents to visit the rural community in order to complete their errand. This could be one of many possible ways to improve the situation, both economic and social in the hamlets and villages in the County of Perth.

**Win This Storefront Initiative:**

Surrounding communities of Uxbridge, and most recently, Huron East, have successfully run initiatives to improve the

![Image Source: Huron East](www.huroneast.ca) showing the ‘win this space’ initiative which has been successful thus far in the Huron East communities of Seaforth and Brussels.
mainstreets in their communities, while bringing in a new business, potential employment, and overall improvement to the community. With many of the hamlets, villages and small towns in the County playing host to a large number of vacant storefronts, it has become clear that attention is needed to address this issue. By offering a “free” store for a year, the County can allow a (potentially) local resident the opportunity to establish themselves as a viable business in the community, provide a service (shopping, dining, or otherwise) and ultimately, improving the landscape. Once the year is up, if the business venture has been successful, there would be a good chance the business owner would wish to negotiate a lease agreement, or perhaps purchase the building in which they have operated their business.

**Housing Agreements:**

The issue of vacant housing stock, as well as rental stock which has typically attracted poor quality tenants has been an ongoing issue in many of the rural areas making up the County. Whether they are surplus farmhouses, or cheaper rental homes along the mainstreets of the hamlet/village, the issue of vacant housing is, and has been persistent, and without any sort of initiative in place to fill these homes with people wishing to be in them, this will continue to be an economic and social problem for the communities in the County. Just as the ‘win a storefront’ initiative proved successful, a similar type of effort could be a potential option for filling some of the vacant homes. Again, this is an issue which may not necessarily be failing due to a lack or absence of policy, but moreover a lack of effort and no proactive approach in place to address the concern.
Community Events & Activities:

Another area often overlooked is the importance of having community events and actual activities taking place in the community. Community gardens, markets, social gatherings, clubs, active parklands and themed parades are all great ways to not only engage the current community members (of all ages) but also has the potential to pull in other members of outside communities who otherwise might not visit and spend time and money in that community. Dynamic and vibrant communities in rural settings are often defined by what activity, or the level of activity that goes on in them. Those communities which have done a good job of hosting activities and events to encourage social interaction will prove to be more resilient in terms of keeping themselves afloat and even in attracting new investment/development. These rural hamlets and villages should also be diversifying themselves from their urban neighbours in order to become home to something which would draw urbanites to visit. From larger parks, to unique on-farm diversified uses which do not hinder agriculture, to specialty shops and markets, there are a number of ways in which hamlets and villages can leverage themselves into a better situation.

Walkability & Trails:

Lastly, there is an opportunity for the hamlets and villages in the County to improve the level of community member engagement through improving the overall walkability of the community, including the provision of trails, where possible. A great success story is likely to follow on this front as it relates to the Guelph to Goderich (G2G) Rail Trail. The idea of getting
community members out and active in their community is very important not only from a social standpoint, but also from a community health standpoint. Money spent on improving walkability and creating outdoor activities (i.e. walking, hiking, bicycle) type of trails comes back to the community by way of having less money spent on health-related issues – for example, as a result of fewer ambulance calls coming in due to improved physical health in the community and fewer visits being made to (non-local) walk-in-clinics due to respiratory and other ailments which can be, at the very least, improved when members affected by such ailments have an opportunity to exercise in their immediate community (Speck, 2013).

**Meeting Objectives:**

Meeting the objectives of this paper is not meant to be an overly onerous task. Realistic goals and expectations are set throughout this paper, but the efforts need to be put forward by members of the community before any of the goals will be reached. For example, social programs and engagements alone are not effective if the participation is not there. From the policy side of things, however, there is a need for policy to be taken further than it has been in the past. While County policies and Provincial Policy Statement policies must be abided by, they are lacking the ‘teeth’ they need in order to achieve this goal of being ‘proactive’. Section 1.7 of the PPS is an excellent example of this. While there are no real problems with the policies making up this section, the policies, unfortunately, are not easily seen in action in the hamlets and villages making up the County. The language of “providing opportunities” is used through the PPS, yet the question of how we are providing these opportunities needs to be asked. What is it that is being done in the rural hamlets and villages in the County of Perth that
brings the County to the level it needs to be at in order to have sustainable rural communities which are both vibrant and desirable places to work, live and to conduct business in. The language used in the PPS, are discussed earlier in this paper, needs to be more strict, meaning (as an example) instead of *should be supported*, shall be supported could be used, and instead of merely *providing the opportunity*, the province as a whole, and in this case, the County needs to be proactive in how these opportunities are being provided.

**Bringing Documents to Life:**

Over the years, a number of quality publications have emerged which are specific to the County of Perth, and in many cases, have taken a look, at some depth, at the hamlets, villages and small towns in the County. From the recent North Perth Master Growth Plan, to the older Economic Impacts of Agriculture studies, to the data and information provided through statistics Canada and OMAFRA, there is a wealth of information on the County itself. The problem has been that these studies, while important and very worthwhile, tend to be submitted, reviewed, and not ever used to their full capability.

Key findings, recommendations and next steps are often components of these studies, but until they are actually followed, the studies/publications are all for nought. This paper has also aimed to bring to the surface some of the important aspects of other related studies, and once again, put forward some sort of recommendations and next steps. Moreover, and the more likely scenario, is that this study will be reviewed, mused, but will fail to act as a working document which contributes towards the idea of being proactive in the attempt to rejuvenate, revitalize and bring new life into some of the hamlets, villages and small towns in the County.
Until such time as the documents which have been prepared are used as tools to proactively plan for the communities in the County, the notion of ‘proactive planning’ will either fail to occur, or will occur at a much slower rate than would be appropriate and possible under the current circumstances.

It is the final hope of this study that it, along with other comprehensive studies done in the past, are collectively used as a means to assemble a County-wide plan on how to revitalize the many hamlets, villages, rural settlement areas, and lastly, where appropriate, small towns that make up the County of Perth. As illustrated by the earlier diagram (page 51) – everything needs to flow from Agriculture as the top economic driver, employer and basis for development in the County, but the idea of addressing the small hamlets and villages through revitalization and reinvestment needs to not be forgotten at the bottom of the pyramid. The character found in the hamlets and villages is not found elsewhere in the County, nor will it be replaced elsewhere. Although their historical function and presence may not be returned to, and is no longer serving as the function of them today, they can be planned for as communities of tomorrow, instead of utilizing them as places of the past which have little to offer.

Summary

While the focus of this study has been on the proactive planning for the rural hamlets and villages in the County of Perth, what has been uncovered is more or less a snapshot in time of the past and current situation in these places. From the (in some instances) lacking employment opportunities, to the aging population, the poor walkability and the limited services and social connectedness, there are certainly areas for improvement. Despite these
challenges however, many of the communities have risen to the challenge and maintained a certain quality of life in these rural and semi-rural areas. The policies surrounding the planning and development in these rural settings play a very important role which should not be understated. Policies surrounding agriculture, mainstreet planning and long-term economic viability are all examples in both localized and provincial planning documents which are of key importance, but must be understood, questioned, and not simply adhered to, but must in reality achieve the broader goals they set out to accomplish.
14. **CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The County of Perth, and the small rural communities found throughout it, are a good representation of the current situation across much of rural Ontario. Struggles with population loss, aging, economic development and youth retention are not individual to the County. These are issues being faced across the province, and throughout the country (Van Brenk, 2013). While we cannot easily change the demographic situation through any one policy or plan, we can be proactive in our approach to addressing, and planning for, these ongoing challenges. This section of the paper has taken an overview and essentially, a snapshot in time, of three small, rural communities which illustrate how small scale initiatives and planning efforts can make a difference in ensuring their future is more than just a consideration in future planning efforts. The role of the economic development officer has been critical in addressing some of the challenges faced, but in order fully address these problems, a collaborative approach is needed. Policy, community initiatives and a willingness to change are a few of the key examples of how these rural areas will grow in the future. In the present time, these rural hamlets and villages across the County of Perth, and indeed across Ontario, should embrace their identities while working towards a more promising future from economic, social and cultural standpoints.

With many of the basic tools already in place (services, housing stock, mixed use zoning, basic amenities) there are reasons to believe that the future of these rural hamlets and villages can be positive. While data clearly shows declining populations and the associated struggles are constant stressors on some of these communities, as does a reading of the landscape reveal the loss of hard services (rural schools, churches, businesses, etc.) they are not challenges
which cannot be addressed through *proactive planning*. We will not change the fact that our urban areas are growing while our rural areas are shrinking (population and geographically speaking). There may well be a desire for urbanites, retirees and otherwise to relocate to a hamlet or village within the County of Perth, but the challenge is finding out where these populations are, and how do we actively work to get them to make the move. These areas do not necessarily require all of the amenities they may have once had. In fact, it is of this thinking which makes us run afoul in trying to stimulate the economies and social situation in these places; by over-planning, over-thinking and being unrealistic in our hopes and expectations. For example, in many senses, it is no longer reasonable to have an (immediate) school and church in every small rural community when the population is simply not there.

The numbers associated with a community’s needs uncover a number of truths. If a school cannot be supported by a stable student population- so be it, but what *can* be supported? What type of use would make the most sense for the existing school building? How might we encourage appropriate development to take the place of uses which are no longer present? These are some of the questions which must be looked at when striving to proactively plan for communities. We will not reverse the trends of depopulation and (some) service loss, but we can counter them by introducing appropriate development and services. The financial struggle will likely persist, but the question of what can be done with the existing landscape and the available monies must be looked at, and well planned for in order to allow the hamlets and villages to remain as viable communities for current and future residents to live in and enjoy.
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