

Scope of Review

The United Counties of SDG initiated a review of the Official Plan in early 2025 for the purpose of ensuring alignment and conformity with the Provincial Planning Statement (2024), Planning Act, and other relevant legislation. As part of this exercise, several other key areas were reviewed for policy clarity, document structure, and alignment with best practices. A third focus of the exercise was also implementing recent official plan amendments (OPAs) that have not yet been consolidated.

This document will summarize the key changes being proposed through the 2026 United Counties of SDG Official Plan Review. Please note that, at the discretion of the County, some changes may be pursued over the course of multiple OPAs depending on the urgency/priority of the updates.

Technical Errors & Internal Document Section/Policy References

As part of the review, textual and technical errors have been addressed, as well as inaccurate or incorrect references to specific sections or policies within the document.

Updated References to Provincial Policy, Legislation, and Ministries/Agencies

The current iteration of the OP was adopted in 2018. While several housekeeping and other updates have been initiated since, some outdated references to provincial policy, legislation, and ministries remain. The changes seek to update all references to such materials/agencies in accordance with those currently in force/use.

For example:

- “Provincial Policy Statement” → “Provincial Planning Statement”
- Removal of references to repealed legislation such as the “Green Energy Act”
- “Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change” → “Ministry of Environment, Conservation, and Parks”

General Language Changes to Reflect Provincial Planning Statement Policy

Throughout the document there are narrative, non-policy, textual sections that have been revised to better align with and reflect the policy direction in the PPS.

Population, Dwelling, and Employment Projections (Section 2.1.3)

The United Counties of SDG undertook a Growth Management Strategy in 2022, which provided projections for population, dwellings, and employment County-wide, and for each constituent local municipality from 2021 to 2051 (30 Years). In late 2025, the County updated these projections in accordance with Ministry of Finance projections and methodology to reflect a 2026 to 2056 horizon. These projections have been reflected in the tables in Section 2.1.3 and will replace the current tables.

Settlement Area Boundary Adjustments (Section 3.2.1.7)

Policies in Section 3.2.1.7 have been completely revised to remove the requirement for a Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) as part of any adjustment or expansion to a settlement area boundary, in accordance with the policy direction in the PPS 2024. Despite this, the policy changes proposed still encourage good planning approaches to be employed when considering adjustments or expansions (e.g., evaluate availability of municipal water/sewer services, land needs, potential impacts on agricultural operations etc.)

Employment Areas, Uses, and Designations (Table 3.5, 3.5.2.3, & 3.5.2.4)

The current official plan sits in somewhat of a “gray area” when it comes to the direction provided in the PPS 2024 regarding Employment Areas. This is largely due to the use of a single “Employment District” in the OP to accommodate all employment/industrial activity in the County. The primary issue has to do with the land use permissions afforded within the current Employment District, which includes institutional uses and commercial uses. This is not consistent with Section 2.8.2 of the PPS 2024, which explicitly prohibits standalone residential, commercial, public service, and other institutional uses, and only allowing limited retail and office uses that are directly associated with a primary employment use.

Further to the above, Section 2.8.2.4 states that planning authorities shall assess and update their employment areas identified in official plans to ensure the designation used is appropriately aligned with the PPS. In doing planning authorities shall maintain land use compatibility between sensitive uses and employment areas, ensuring that the long-term function and integrity of the employment areas are preserved.

Employment Districts

Considering the above, the proposed changes to the official plan propose the utilization of a “two-tier” employment district designation system to guide employment uses and protect more significant employment areas, while still recognizing the localized nature of some employment uses/clusters that may not need as great of protection or identification as an “employment area” in the PPS – and thus would allow for more mixed uses in transitional areas, similar to what is currently permitted.

This approach recognizes the importance of protecting key Employment Areas for long-term industrial and goods movement activities, while also acknowledging that other employment uses occur at a smaller scale or in transitional contexts where they may not require the same level of protection or separation. The two tiers proposed to be used are defined as follows:

a) Tier 1 – Primary Employment District (PED)

Used to identify PPS-defined Employment Areas intended for long-term protection and industrial investment. This designation would have full alignment with PPS policies for permitted uses and compatibility protections.

b) Tier 2 – Local Employment District (LED)

Smaller clusters, individual parcels, mixed use or less significant employment areas in transition where industrial and employment uses are more compatible with mixed-use or sensitive contexts. This designation would largely function similarly to the current Employment District, though would restrict heavier industrial activities (Class III).

The table below provides a direct comparison of the use permitted in the current Employment District designation and those permitted in the new tiered system.

Current Employment District	(new) Tier 1 Employment District
• Class I, II, and III industrial uses • Transportation and distribution industries near transportation corridors • Office uses • Other associated retail and ancillary facilities. These may include limited employment supportive commercial uses serving the employment area (e.g. hotels, restaurants, fitness centres, financial institutions, convention centres, service commercial uses) as defined in the implementing Township Zoning by-law or through a site-specific zoning amendment • The following applies in the vicinity of Winchester and Chesterville Commercial: commercial uses which complement or are compatible with any permitted industrial use or commercial uses which are • deemed suitable by a Local Municipality.	• class I, II, and III industrial uses as generally defined in provincial guidelines • manufacturing, research and development in connection with manufacturing, warehousing, goods movement • ancillary uses and facilities, including retail and office uses directly associated with the primary employment use
	(new) Tier 2 Employment District
	• class I & II industrial, manufacturing and small-scale warehousing uses that could be located adjacent to sensitive land uses without adverse effects • limited office, institutional, commercial, recreational, or retail uses that support or are directly related to employment activities • limited sensitive land uses for where proposals are deemed suitable and compatible by the local municipality.

To complement the above changes proposed, the amendments would seek to replace the entirety of Section 3.5.2.4 with a series of new policies intended to reinforce the function of each Employment District Tier, providing stronger protections and restrictions for Tier 1 in accordance with PPS direction.

Commercial Districts

Further to the above, to reflect the County's intention to provide opportunities for transition opportunities between Commercial and Employment Areas, the updates also seek to introduce new policies at the end of Section 3.5.2.3 "Commercial Areas". These changes seek to address PPS Section 2.8.1.2 and allow for more flexibility for mixed commercial/industrial areas in fringe/transition areas, and generally include:

- limited permissions for light/class I industrial uses to be considered in fringe areas of the Commercial District by way of site specific zoning by-law amendment
- direction for the creation of a new zone or overlay that identifies light or mixed-use industrial zones and associated performance standards.

Employment uses outside of Employment Areas

In several cases, the Employment District designation has been applied within Prime Agricultural or Rural areas where the scope of permitted uses would not be consistent with the PPS.

In many cases, this has been done retroactively to recognize a pre-existing industrial/employment use and allow it to continue. The only issue is that these are not site-specific, but full-on designations, which would otherwise allow for the full breadth of employment uses in inappropriate areas, which is not entirely appropriate.

It is recommended that the County, in consultation with local municipal staff and landowners, see these lands redesignated to match the surrounding land use context OR employ a site-specific designation to maintain the owner's ability to continue as-is under the normal concessions in the Planning Act/OP for non-conforming uses.

Renewable Energy Generation and Storage (new Section 3.5.2.8)

With the Green Energy Act being repealed and land use planning permissions being downloaded from the province to municipal planning authorities for renewable energy systems (wind, solar, etc.), it is important to outline appropriate policies to address these uses. The changes contemplate the introduction of an all-new policy section specifically addressing renewable energy systems and storage, removing reference to these items from Section 3.5.2.7. The policies in this section seek to better align the official plan with provincial policy direction and legislation for land use regulations and planning approaches for renewable energy systems (wind turbines, solar, etc.), clarifying requirements and establishing review criteria for new applications.

Energy storage systems, such as rural battery storage facilities, are becoming more popular as a complement to renewable energy generation – especially in rural areas. In order to appropriately address these uses in the County, new policies are introduced to establish land use permissions, criteria for separation distances, and development review criteria to ensure any potential impacts are appropriately considered and mitigated where possible.

Lastly, this new section provides more specific guidance for municipal review of these types of land uses, including establishing the ability for local municipalities to require one or more open houses as part of the development review process, and the requirement for certain technical studies and agreements to be addressed prior to development.

Housing Policies (Section 3.5.4)**Residential Land Supply (Section 3.5.4.1)**

In accordance with the requirements of Section 2.1.4 of the PPS, new policies have been added to the beginning of Section 3.5.4.1 of the OP to require the County and local municipalities to maintain at all times a supply of residentially designated and available lands to accommodate 15 years of development, and a maintain at all times a supply serviced and otherwise development-ready lands to accommodate a minimum three year supply of residential units.

Additional Residential Units (Section 3.5.4.3)

Significant changes to the *Planning Act* and PPS have been made in recent years in respect of “as-of-right” permissions for the development of additional residential units (sometimes referred to as secondary units, basement suites, garden suites, etc.). The current state of Section 3.5.4.3 of the OP does not adequately reflect the permissions for additional residential units in the Act and PPS and further, it does not reflect more recent permissions for these uses in rural and agricultural areas. Therefore, a full re-write of the section is proposed, which will:

- require zoning by-laws to permit 2 ARUs as-of-right, where the lot is serviced by municipal water and sewer and the zoning would normally permit a detached house, semi-detached house, or rowhouse, and it would not result in more than 3 total units;
- allow similar permissions for lots on Agricultural Resource Lands, so long as:
 - minimum distance separation (MDS) requirements are complied with;
 - impacts on agricultural operations are eliminated or mitigated;
 - appropriate water/sewage services are provided
 - the units are located within or in close proximity to the main dwelling
- In addition to the above, the changes also introduce policy to encourage local municipalities to update their zoning to permit ARUs on other lots where:
 - The zoning normal would permit a house and it would result in no more than 3 units on the lot;
 - The municipality is satisfied that appropriate servicing can be provided;
 - It would comply with zone standards applicable to ARUs

For the arrangement or form of units, the new policies clarify that where 3 total units are permitted, all 3 may be located within the same building, but only 1 shall be permitted in a detached structure or building separate from the main house.

Considering the scope of policy changes above, other ARU policies existing in the OP have been removed or relocated to this section (e.g., Section 5.3.2).

To align with the Planning Act and PPS, additional residential units were added as a permitted use within the Agricultural Resource Lands Designation.

Servicing Hierarchy (Section 4.3.3)

The servicing hierarchy policies in Section 4.3.3.1 have been updated to reflect PPS changes that support communal sewage and water servicing where viable. The proposed changes update the servicing hierarchy to reflect the following prioritization:

1. Full Water and Sewage Disposal Services – including public “decentralized” (communal) systems
2. Private Communal Systems
3. Individual On-Site Services, which may be used in special circumstances in settlement areas to “round out” development

Policies regarding partial services in fully serviced settlement areas remain relatively unchanged; however, a new policy was added to clarify that partial services will be supported within rural settlement areas where new development will be serviced by a combination one municipal service and one private on-site service. Further to this, the new policy also provides guidance to permitted infilling on existing lots of record that may be serviced by partial services *outside* of a settlement area.

Mineral Aggregate Operations on Agricultural Resource Lands (Section 5.3.2)

This section was updated to better reflect PPS policy updates that permit mineral aggregate operations as “interim uses” in the prime agricultural area, but that it is subject to:

- an OPA being approved by the County;
- an Agricultural Impact Assessment or equivalent being prepared; and,
- development conditions requiring reclamation/rehabilitation of disturbed sites.

On-Farm Diversified Uses (Section 5.3.3)

The wording of this policy was updated to reflect language changes in the PPS 2024, adding “electricity generation facilities and transmission systems, and energy storage systems” to the scope of “on-farm diversified” uses.

Natural Heritage Features and Areas (Section 5.5)

The United Counties of SDG undertook the preparation of a Natural Heritage Study in 2021, which outline a number of recommendations and changes to the official plan and general planning approaches used in effectively addressing the Natural Heritage System in the United Counties. In accordance with County Council direction in 2021 and the Recommendations of the Natural Heritage Study, Section 5.5 is proposed to be completely replaced with an all-new set of policies that align more closely with the direction provided in the PPS, provincial legislation, and best practice.

One of the main changes is implementing a “Natural Heritage System (NHS)” approach to planning policies in the OP, clarify the purpose and function of the NHS and addressing “Core Areas” and “Linkages” within it. These two components are not currently present in the official plan. The changes to NHS policies encourage the protection and preservation of core areas and linkages from development, and identifying policy approaches to address informed decision-making where avoidance of these features may not be feasible.

Beyond the above additions of Core Areas and Linkages, the new section generally constitutes a restructuring of the existing natural heritage policy framework in the OP, providing an easier to follow set of policies and criteria related to development and site alteration within or adjacent to these features. All natural heritage features within the NHS identified by the PPS have been addressed in the new policies.

Additionally, clearer policy direction has been provided with respect to Environmental Impact Studies, including where and when they are required, the process for screening and potential waiver of their requirement, as well as minimum required content and scope. The intent is to provide a more open and transparent policy framework for staff and applicants to follow regarding investigating potential impacts on the NHS.

Community Improvement (Section 8.12.5)

The current official plan policies regarding community improvement planning were outdated and too general to effectively address this important economic development tool. The entire section has been rewritten to clarify:

- criteria and process for identifying and designating Community Improvement Project Area(s) (CIPAs);
- municipal powers under Section 28 of the planning for carrying out a community improvement plan (land acquisition, holding, or development/improvement)
- that a local municipality and/or the County itself may prepare a community improvement plan, but that it is limited to dealing with those matters prescribed in the Planning Act

Site Plan Control Policy Updates to Align with Section 4.1(1.2) of the Planning Act (Section 8.12.10.1)

Per Section 4.1(1.2) of the Planning Act, residential development resulting in less than 10 residential units are exempt from the requirement to obtain site plan approval, so long as the parcel of land is beyond 300 metres of an active railway line, and beyond 120 metres of a wetland, shoreline of the St. Lawrence River, or other waterbody/watercourse.

Public Consultation Requirements for Plans of Subdivision (Section 8.12.13.1)

Despite the Planning Act no longer requires a public meeting prior to an approval authority's consideration of a decision on a plan of subdivision, the County and local municipalities wish to keep the public informed and involved in major developments. To this end, policies have been added to Section 8.12.13.1 requiring one or a combination of the following engagement activities to be carried out in partnership with the local municipality prior to considering a decision:

- Public meeting
- Public open house
- Online consultation and/or,
- Other form of consultation acceptable to the County and local municipality that effectively informs and obtains the views of the public on the proposal.

This change also improves transparency for developers who may wish to clarify the process for development approvals of this nature.

Public Consultation Policies (Section 8.12.14)

This section is currently written in a narrative prose and can be difficult to identify specific policy directions for public consultation. The section has been largely re-written in a numbered policy format to more closely align with the Section 6.2 of the PPS and to clearly state the County and local municipalities' commitments regarding public consultation as part of the planning process.

Official Plan Amendment No. 27 – Major Open Space Designation in Rural Area and Conservation Lands Overlay

Consolidation of the amendments adopted under OPA No. 27 were undertaken as part of the redlining process. These amendments have already been approved and will not be subject to further revision or amendment at this time.

Official Plan Amendment No. 28 – County Roads/Transportation Policies

Consolidation of the amendments adopted under OPA No. 28 were undertaken as part of the redlining process. These amendments have already been approved and will not be subject to further revision or amendment at this time.