

July 12, 2024 Blog

As I previously wrote, at the April 3 Zorra Council meeting there was an application for an Official Plan Amendment OP21-14-5 that “proposes to designate lands within the Village of Thamesford identified as a ‘Special Policy Area Requiring Secondary Planning’ for residential use and to expand the current Village boundary for similar purposes. Specifically, the lands are proposed to be designated ‘Low Density Residential’ and ‘Medium Density Residential’ to facilitate a range of housing types in Thamesford.”

The proposal “to expand the current Village boundary” is for an “additional developable area comprising approximately 4.4 ha (10.87 ac) that is outside of limits of the Village of Thamesford”. The expansion is for a piece of land that would end up between the proposed development (which is otherwise entirely within the existing boundary) and an existing drain. I think the proposed “rounding out” is reasonable as the land would essentially be landlocked for either agricultural or residential purposes.

Most of the application (21.93 acres) was already within the village boundary and zoned for future development, with the exception of the 10.87 acres. While the 10.87 acre expansion is modest, and reasonable given that it would be left stranded between the future development and a drain, and recommended by Planning Staff to be included and approved, Council was unanimous in wanting more units/density to justify it.

As a result, Zorra Council passed the following resolution: “THAT Council recommend that Oxford County Council defer application OP21-14-5 and ask the applicant to work with staff for the purpose of achieving increased density and explore affordable housing opportunities.” Agenda item 6b Report CP 2024-105 Application for Official Plan Amendment OP21-14-5.

When the application came back to Zorra Council on July 3rd the units/density had doubled. DOUBLED. It was at this point that Zorra Council recommended to Oxford Council approval of Application for Official Plan Amendment OP 21-14-5 – Ronald Wilson, and on July 10 Oxford Council approved it.

So, while a village boundary did expand and 10.87 acres of agricultural land was lost, the resultant density in the remaining 21.93 acres represents a reduced land pressure (at the original density) of 21.93 acres. So, in giving up 10.87 acres at this high density we have in fact save 21.93 acres of low density units elsewhere in Oxford.

I spoke to this at both Zorra and Oxford Councils as the way we should be planning and approving future development at the highest densities we can achieve within existing boundaries, and where there is existing water and wastewater capacity, in order to ACTUALLY preserve agricultural land and green spaces. I am hopeful that this demonstration that a Council demanding density can be successful can be an example for future development in all of Oxford.

At the July 10 Oxford Council meeting, three separate (previously budgeted) Transitional/Supportive Housing Projects were authorized by Council. Five low-mid acuity beds in Ingersoll, five separate low acuity beds in Ingersoll, and ten mid-high acuity beds in Woodstock. These are locations that offer supports for people to transition (they can only stay for 364 days max) to more independent living. If there is a way for municipalities to improve the issues of mental health, addictions, and homelessness, this is it.

Lastly, the new Zorra Municipal Centre (ZMC) is open and delivering services to residents. The “official” grand opening date will be announced soon for the fall.

As always, feel free to contact me on any issue:

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