

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

Application for Official Plan Amendment OP 25-02-1 Josif and Lidia Catana

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Director of Community Planning

RECOMMENDATION

1. That Oxford County Council not approve Application No. OP 25-02-1, submitted by Josif and Lidia Catana for lands legally described as Part Lot 7, Concession 7 (Blenheim), except Parts 3 and 6, Registered Plan 41R-3823, in the Township of Blandford-Blenheim, to amend the Official Plan to include a site specific policy to permit a special events facility as an On-Farm Diversified Use on the subject lands.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The Official Plan Amendment Application proposes to include site-specific policies to recognize an existing special events facility, approximately 960 m² (10,333.4 ft²) in size, as an On-Farm Diversified Use (OFDU).
- It is the opinion of Planning staff that the proposal is beyond the scale considered reasonable for an OFDU and is not consistent with the policies of the Provincial Planning Statement and does not maintain the intent and purpose of the Official Plan regarding permitted uses in prime agricultural areas.

IMPLEMENTATION POINTS

This application will be implemented in accordance with the relevant objectives, strategic initiatives and policies in the Official Plan.

Financial Impact

Consideration of this application will have no financial impacts beyond what has been approved in the current year's budget.

Communications




In accordance with the requirements of the Planning Act, notice of complete application regarding this proposal was provided to surrounding property owners on February 26th, 2025, and notice of public meeting was issued on March 27th, 2025. As of the date of this report, four letters of concern have been received by members of the general public. One letter of support from a member of the general public has also been received. Copies of each letter has been attached to Report CP 2025-136 for Council's consideration.

2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Oxford County Council approved the **2023-2026 Strategic Plan** on September 13, 2023. The Plan outlines 39 goals across three strategic pillars that advance Council's vision of "Working together for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future." These pillars are: (1) *Promoting community vitality*, (2) *Enhancing environmental sustainability*, and (3) *Fostering progressive government*.

The recommendation in this report supports the following strategic goals.

Strategic Plan Pillars and Goals

PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3
		
Promoting community vitality	Enhancing environmental sustainability	Fostering progressive government
Goal 1.3 – Community health, safety and well-being	Goal 2.2 – Preserve and enhance our natural environment	

See: [Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)

DISCUSSION

Background

Owners: Josif and Lidia Catana
935929 Blenheim Road, Drumbo, ON N0J 1G0

Agent: MHBC Planning
540 Bingemans Centre Drive, Kitchener, ON N2B 3X9

Location:

The subject lands are described as Part Lot 7, Concession 7 (Blenheim), except Parts 3 and 6, Registered Plan 41R-3823. The lands are located at the northwest corner of the Blenheim Road and Oxford Road 29 intersection. The subject lands are municipally addressed as 807417 Oxford Road 29.

County of Oxford Official Plan:

Schedule “B-1”	Township of Blandford-Blenheim Land Use Plan	Agricultural Reserve and Open Space
Schedule “C-2”	County of Oxford Development Constraints Plan	Erosion Hazard Lands

Proposal:

For Council’s information, the Township of Blandford-Blenheim served the owners of the subject lands with a Notice of Violation identifying the property as being out of compliance with the Township’s Zoning By-law in 2024. Specifically, the order identified the fact that a special events facility was operating on property that was zoned ‘General Agricultural Zone (A2),’ which is not a listed permitted use within the A2 zone.

In response to the Township Notice, the landowners have submitted Official Plan Amendment and Zone Change Applications that propose to recognize the existing facility as an On-Farm Diversified Use (OFDU). According to the information submitted, the facility that the owners are looking to formally recognize consists of three permanent event tents with a combined size of approximately 900 m² (9,687.5 ft²), a washroom facility approximately 60 m² (645.8 ft²) in size, a grassed parking area for 100 vehicles, and landscape areas between the parking and event space. The owners have advised that no additional buildings are proposed to be constructed.

The owners have advised that the facility is generally in operation between May and September with the majority of weddings being booked for Saturdays and, occasionally, for Fridays and Sundays. It has been advised that weekday events are currently rare. According to the applications, the facility has a maximum capacity of 250 people, and the owners have advised that the average event has between 160 and 180 attendees. The owners also advise that

weddings are serviced by external vendors, such as caterers and wait staff, and the site only supplies the facility space. In addition to weddings, the proposal for a special events facility would also include permitting retreats/workshops (limited to 50 people or less), corporate events, and milestone celebrations.

The subject lands are approximately 39.3 ha (97.1 ac) and contain two separate building clusters. One building cluster contains a large single detached dwelling (circa 2015), two greenhouses, and the events facility structures (subject to ongoing applications). The dwelling, events facility, and greenhouses share the same driveway access to the subject lands from Blenheim Road. The second cluster is located in the southeast corner of the subject lands, fronting onto Oxford Road 29, and contains numerous older agricultural accessory buildings (i.e. the original farm cluster). The remainder of the lands are utilized for cash-cropping purposes.

The subject lands contain an area of significant woodlands, non-provincially significant wetlands, and areas to the west and south of the events facility that are regulated by Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA). Staff are satisfied that the proposed and existing development would not have any impact on these natural areas. Surrounding land uses are predominantly agricultural in nature.

Plate 1, Location Map and Existing Zoning, shows the location of the subject property and the existing zoning in the immediate vicinity.

Plate 2, Aerial Photography (2020), provides an aerial view of the subject lands and surrounding uses.

Plate 3, Aerial Photography (2020) – Zoomed In, provides an aerial view of the existing development on the subject lands.

Plate 4, Official Plan Designation Map, shows the designation of the subject lands and surrounding lands in the Official Plan.

Plate 5, Applicants' Sketch, identifies the location of the existing structures on the subject lands as provided by the applicant, as well as the proposed layout for the existing parking area.

Comments

2024 Provincial Planning Statement

The 2024 Provincial Planning Statement (PPS) provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development. Under Section 3 of the Planning Act, where a municipality is exercising its authority affecting a planning matter, such decisions shall be consistent with all policy statements issued under the Act. The policies of the PPS represent minimum standards and planning authorities, and other decision makers may go beyond these minimum standards to address matters of local importance, unless doing so would conflict with any PPS policy. The following outlines the key PPS policies that have been considered but is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

In Oxford County, all lands located outside of designated settlement areas are considered to be a prime agriculture area, with the applicable policies for such areas primarily contained in Section 4.3. of the PPS.

Section 4.3 of the PPS directs that planning authorities are required to use an agricultural system approach, based on provincial guidance, to maintain and enhance a geographically continuous agricultural land base and support and foster the long-term economic prosperity of the 'agri-food network' (i.e. elements important to the viability of the agri-food sector such as agricultural operations and primary processing, infrastructure, agricultural services, farm markets, distributors etc.). Further, that prime agricultural areas shall be designated and protected for long term agricultural use.

The PPS defines agricultural uses to mean the growing of crops, including nursery, biomass and horticulture crops, as well as the raising of livestock and animals for food, fur or fibre including poultry and fish, apiaries, agro-forestry, maple syrup production and associated on-farm buildings and structures, including accommodation for full-time farm labour when the size and nature of the operation requires additional employment.

Section 4.3.2 (Permitted Uses) of the PPS indicates that permitted uses and activities are: agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses, and on-farm diversified uses. Permitted uses within prime agricultural areas shall be compatible with and shall not hinder surrounding agricultural operations. Criteria for these uses may be based on provincial guidance or municipal approaches, as set out in municipal planning documents, which achieve the same objectives.

The PPS provides definitions for both agriculture-related use and on-farm diversified use:

Agriculture-related uses: means those farm-related commercial and farm-related industrial uses that are directly related to farm operations in the area, support agriculture, benefit from being in close proximity to farm operations, and provide direct products and/or services to farm operations as a primary activity.

On-farm diversified uses: means uses that are secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property and are limited in area. On-farm diversified uses include, but are not limited to, home occupations, home industries, agri-tourism uses, uses that produce value-added agricultural products, and electricity generation facilities and transmission systems, and energy storage systems.

Section 4.3.5 (Non-Agricultural Uses in Prime Agricultural Areas) of the PPS directs that 'non-agricultural uses' in prime agricultural areas may only be permitted for the extraction of minerals, petroleum resources and mineral aggregate resources or limited non-residential uses provided that:

- the land does not comprise a specialty crop area;
- the proposed use complies with MDS;
- there is an identified need for the land to accommodate the proposed use; and
- alternative locations have been evaluated and there are no reasonable alternative locations that avoid prime agricultural areas or are on lower priority agricultural land.

Further, impacts from any new or expanding non-agricultural uses on the agricultural system are to be avoided and, where avoidance is not possible, minimized, and mitigated as determined through an agricultural impact assessment.

With respect to the above noted reference to Provincial guidance in 4.3.2 of the PPS, the province has published a document entitled 'Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas' which provides further detail and direction on appropriate types of 'agriculture-related uses' and 'on-farm diversified uses' and associated review criteria, in accordance with the PPS policies. The document is also referred to as Publication 851.

The document contains guidance for agriculture-related uses, being farm-related commercial and/or industrial uses, which may include retailing of agriculture-related products, livestock assembly yards, and farm equipment repair shops, if they meet all the PPS criteria for such uses.

The review criteria for on-farm diversified uses indicate that they shall be located on a farm that is actively in agricultural use and be secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property, be limited in area, and be compatible with and not hinder surrounding agricultural operations. Large-scale, repeated or permanent events are not on-farm diversified uses and should be directed to existing facilities such as fairgrounds, parks, community centres and halls, settlement areas or rural lands.

The general intent of the "limited in area" criterion is to minimize the agricultural land taken out of production if any, ensure agriculture remains the main land use, and limit off-site impacts (e.g. traffic and changes to the rural character of the property) to ensure compatibility with surrounding agricultural operations. The approach to the "limited in area" criterion is intended to achieve a balance between farmland protection and economic opportunities for farmers, improve consistency in approach, provide flexibility as such uses and owners change, and simplify implementation.

The guidelines indicate that the "limited in area" criterion should be based on the total area of the farm property occupied by the on-farm diversified use (i.e. buildings, outdoor storage, landscaped areas, well and septic systems, parking, new driveways etc.) and recommend that such area not exceed 2% of the lot area, to a maximum of 1 ha. Municipalities may choose to further scope the scale of on-farm diversified uses by limiting the number or place of residence of employees, number of businesses, percentage of products sold that are produced on the farm, the floor area of buildings and outdoor storage.

The guidelines indicate that, if the area of an on-farm diversified use exceeds these recommended thresholds, consideration should be given to the non-agricultural use policies and, further, that on-farm diversified uses that are proposed to grow beyond these limits, either incrementally or otherwise, are not supported. The guidelines note that some uses that meet other on-farm diversified uses criteria may not meet the compatibility criterion. For example, uses that attract large numbers of people onto the farm for non-farm events could result in soil compaction, or excessive noise and trespass issues that may be incompatible with agricultural operations. Commercial or industrial uses that have a large number of employees or attract a large number of customers may also not be compatible in the prime agricultural area. Finally, some uses may simply be better suited to settlement areas where municipal services are available.

For further clarity, Section 2.3.3 of the guideline document sets out various uses that would typically not be considered OFDUs, including:

- large-scale equipment or vehicle dealerships, hotels, landscape businesses, manufacturing plants, trucking yards;
- uses with high water and sewage needs and/or that generate significant traffic, such as large food processors, distribution centres, full-scale restaurants, banquet halls;
- large-scale recurring events with permanent structures;
- institutional uses (e.g., churches, schools, nursing homes, cemeteries);
- large-scale recreational facilities such as golf courses, soccer fields, ball diamonds or arenas.

Finally, the guidelines indicate that, since the PPS requires settlement areas to be the focus for growth and development, large-scale industrial and commercial buildings that are more appropriate to locate in settlement areas are not permitted in prime agricultural areas and, as such, recommends that municipalities cap the gross floor area of buildings for on-farm diversified uses at a scale appropriate to prime agricultural areas.

Official Plan

The subject lands are located within the Agricultural Reserve and Open Space designations according to the Township of Blandford-Blenheim Land Use Plan, as contained in the Official Plan. The Open Space designation represents a strip of land abutting the Nith River and does not impact the lands where the events facility is located. The policies of the Agricultural Reserve designation permit a wide range of agricultural uses and farm buildings and structures necessary to the farming operation, including accessory residential uses required for the farm. Agriculture-related uses and secondary uses, such as On-Farm Diversified Uses (OFDUs) and home occupations, may also be permitted, if they comply with all applicable review criteria.

The County, as part of broader agricultural policy updates recently approved by the Province (i.e. in early 2024), has established comprehensive, locally tailored, Official Plan policies and criteria for such uses to further clarify and expand upon the PPS policies and guidelines for such uses. As such, the review criteria for permitted uses in prime agricultural areas specified in these policies serve as the municipal approach, as set out in municipal planning documents, that achieves the same objective as provincial guidance with respect to such uses, as permitted by the PPS.

Section 3.1.4.3 speaks to Secondary Uses, which are comprised of on-farm diversified uses and rural home occupations, together with Agricultural Related Uses, are intended to provide opportunities to strengthen and diversify the rural economy, by allowing for the establishment of businesses and services that support or improve agriculture in the area, supplement and diversify farm incomes, and/or provide home based employment opportunities for farms and other rural residents (i.e. home occupations on rural residential lots). Such uses must be compatible with and not hinder agricultural operations, be appropriate for rural services, not undermine or conflict with the planned function of rural settlements and meet various other development criteria.

Section 3.1.4.3.2 of the Official Plan indicates that OFDUs are intended to provide reasonable opportunities for farmers to diversify their farming operation and/or supplement their income from farming, by allowing for certain small-scale business activities to be established as a secondary use on their farm. The policies further direct that such uses may be permitted on an agricultural lot in accordance with various policy criteria, including limitations on the type, size, scale, and area of such uses, primarily to ensure such uses are:

- clearly secondary to the principal agricultural operation on the lot and limited in area;
- are compatible with, and do not hinder, surrounding agricultural operations;
- protect prime agricultural areas for the long term;
- are appropriate for rural infrastructure and public services; and
- do not undermine or conflict with the planned function of settlements.

Generally, the policies contained in the Official Plan direct that OFDUs will only be permitted on an agricultural lot that is being actively farmed and must be clearly secondary to the agricultural operation on the lot in terms of size, scale, and importance. The policies contained in the Official Plan permit the following uses as an OFDU, provided they meet all applicable policy criteria:

- A rural home industry;
- A value-added agricultural facility serving a number of local area farms;
- A value retaining facility;
- A farm-related tourism use;
- A smaller scale agriculture-related use;
- A farm winery; or
- A ground-mounted solar facility.

Additionally, the Official Plan policies specifically identify the following uses that shall not be permitted as an on-farm diversified use:

- Retail uses, office, medical/dental clinics and restaurants;
- Residential uses or accommodation, except for limited, short-term accommodation, including farm vacation rental or bed and breakfast;
- Institutional uses;
- Recreational uses and special event facilities;
- Large scale commercial and industrial uses; and
- Other uses that may attract large numbers of customers or other people, generate significant traffic or not otherwise be appropriate for rural infrastructure or services, create compatibility or enforcement issues, undermine or conflict with the planned function of rural settlements, or otherwise not be consistent with the applicable policies of the Plan.

Wholesaling or retailing are not permitted, except where it is clearly ancillary to the permitted OFDU and limited to small portion of the total gross floor area, the goods or merchandise offered for sale are produced, processed or fabricated on the farm lot, or it is restricted to the sale of farm inputs (e.g. feed, seeds, or fertilizer) primarily to farm operations in the area.

The area used and/or occupied by an OFDU (including buildings, areas for loading and unloading product, driveways and parking, well and septic systems etc.) will be limited to the minimum area required for the use and will not exceed 2% of the total lot area, to a maximum of 0.8 ha (2 acres).

The policies state that the maximum gross floor area of all buildings and/or structures used for the purposes of an OFDU shall be regulated through the provisions of the Township Zoning By-law, provided that the cumulative gross floor area of all buildings and/or structures used or occupied by an OFDU shall not exceed 557 m² (6,000 ft²), except for limited, minor exceptions as set out in the policies. Further, proposals for such uses shall include a detailed description of the proposed use and be accompanied by a detailed site plan and such uses shall generally be subject to site plan control.

In addition to the foregoing, the OFDU shall directly involve the farmer living on the same lot as the use and may also involve any other permanent residents on the lot, and up to two employees who do not reside on the lot. A limited number of additional seasonal employees may be permitted for a farm-related tourism use.

Concerning on-site services for OFDUs, existing or proposed individual on-site water services and individual on-site sewage services shall be demonstrated to be adequate or will be made adequate to serve the proposed OFDU and shall be in accordance with the requirements of the County and Area Municipality, including the applicable policies of Sections 3.2.7.2, Water Quality and Quantity and 5.5, County Servicing Policy.

OFDUs that require individual on-site sewage services that have a design capacity in excess of 10,000 litres per day shall generally not be permitted. On-farm diversified uses must also be appropriate for other rural infrastructure and public services (paramedics, fire, etc.).

Proposals for new or expanding OFDUs which would exceed the number of employees, gross floor area, or site area restrictions will not be permitted unless they comply with the agriculture-related use policies. Reasonable exceptions to the gross floor area and/or number of employees may be considered on site specific basis for a value retaining facility, value added agricultural facility, and/or smaller agriculture-related use, where Area Council is satisfied that such use could not reasonably be located within a rural settlement. Proposal that cannot comply with the agriculture-related use policies (Section 3.1.4.3.3) shall be directed to be located, or relocate, in a settlement or must comply with the applicable policies for non-agricultural uses.

Section 3.1.4.3.3 considers the objectives and criteria for agriculture-related uses within the Agricultural Reserve designation. The intent of the policies is to:

- ensure that all agriculture-related uses:
 - are directly related to farm operations in the area,
 - require a location in close proximity to those farm operations,
 - support agriculture, and
 - provide direct products and/or services to farm operations as their primary activity;
- minimize the amount of agricultural land which is developed for agriculture-related uses;
- ensure that new agriculture-related uses are directed to rural settlements wherever feasible to support the planned employment and/or service function of the settlements in the County; and
- ensure that agriculture-related uses are compatible with and do not hinder surrounding agricultural operations and other nearby land uses.

The Official Plan policies outline various uses that shall not be permitted as agriculture-related uses:

- Retail uses, offices, and restaurants, except where explicitly permitted by the Official Plan policies;
- Residential uses or accommodation;
- Institutional uses;
- Recreational uses;
- Banquet halls and special event facilities;
- Mechanics shops, automobile and recreational vehicle dealerships, distilleries, trucking operations, wrecking yards, contractors' yard, landscaper business, well drillers, excavators, building suppliers and other general commercial and industrial uses; and
- Other uses that may attract large numbers of customers or other people, generate significant traffic or not otherwise be appropriate for rural infrastructure or services, create compatibility or enforcement issues, undermine or conflict with the planned function of rural settlements, or otherwise not be consistent with the applicable policies of the Plan.

Further, agriculture-related uses shall not undermine or conflict with the planned employment and/or service functions of settlements in the County. As such, the proponent is required to demonstrate that the proposed agriculture-related use is not suitable for, and/or cannot reasonably be accommodated within a settlement.

According to Section 3.1.5, it is an objective of the Official Plan to only permit new non-agricultural uses where such uses do not conflict with the 'Goal for Agricultural Policies', as set out in Section 3.1.1, to preserve and protect prime agricultural areas for long term viable agricultural use and avoid or minimize potential impacts on agricultural operations, and direct non-agricultural uses to settlements wherever possible.

Non-agricultural uses include commercial, industrial, institutional, infrastructure, public works yards, recreational, and residential uses that are not directly related to, or supportive of agriculture. Within the Agricultural designation, the use of prime agricultural land for agricultural, mineral, petroleum and environmental resources will be given a higher priority in land use decision making than its use for non-agricultural uses.

To maintain the agricultural land resource for agriculture and related uses, and ensure new commercial, industrial and institutional uses develop on an appropriate level of services and are directed to settlements to support their planned service and employment functions, new non-agricultural commercial, industrial and institutional uses will not be permitted within the Agricultural Reserve, except in accordance with the policies of Section 3.1.7.2.

Section 3.1.7.2 directs that proposals to amend the Official Plan to permit the establishment of new non-agricultural uses in the Agricultural Reserve must provide compelling evidence to demonstrate that the proposed non-agricultural use cannot be located within a settlement and that the following considerations have been addressed:

- Justification analysis which shows that:
 - there is a demonstrated need within the planning period for additional land to be removed from agricultural production and re-designated for the proposed use,

- given the nature and capacity of undeveloped lands within settlements and/or within other appropriate land use designations;
 - nature of the proposal and whether the use requires special locational requirements or physical features that are only available in prime agricultural areas;
 - the amount of land proposed for the new development is the minimum required for the immediate needs of the proposed use; and,
- Agricultural impact analysis, which demonstrates:
 - the lands do not comprise a specialty crop area;
 - there are no reasonable alternatives which avoid prime agricultural areas;
 - there are no reasonable alternatives on lands with lesser agricultural capability or on lands left less suitable for agriculture by existing or past development;
 - MDS I is satisfied; and,
 - Impacts from the new use on nearby agricultural operations are mitigated to the extent possible.
 - The level of servicing planned or available is consistent with the servicing hierarchy established in Section 5.5.3 of this Plan for individual on-site water and individual on-site sewage services.
 - The proposed use shall be compatible with and not hinder surrounding agricultural operations and nearby land uses.
 - The proposed use shall not create traffic hazards, and the road infrastructure shall be capable of accommodating the new use or expansion.
 - The proposal is consistent with Environmental Resource Policies and Cultural Heritage Policies.
 - The proposal will not conflict with Resource Extraction Policies.
 - The proposal is acceptable regarding the ability to achieve the Goal for Agricultural Policies as set out in Section 3.1.1, the precedent to be established for other sites within the County and the ability to implement planned land uses in the vicinity.

The subject lands are located within an identified Sand and Gravel Resource Area. These identified areas are where high-quality sand and gravel deposits exist and where potential future extraction activity is most likely to occur. The intent of the policies within the Official Plan concerning Sand and Gravel Resource Areas is to minimize potential future conflicts between extraction operations and other uses.

To proactively plan for the protection of known aggregate deposits, including Sand and Gravel Resource Areas, the Official Plan discourages incompatible land uses, such as non-agricultural uses. Section 3.4.1.3.1.3 of the Official Plan outlines that new non-agricultural commercial, industrial, or institutional non-farm rural residential and/or active recreational uses shall not be permitted within the Quarry Area designation, and within the Limestone Resource Area and the Sand and Gravel Resource Area.

Zoning By-law

The subject lands are currently zoned 'General Agricultural Zone (A2)' according to the Township of Blandford-Blenheim Zoning By-law, which permits a wide range of agricultural uses, including farm buildings and an accessory dwelling, and requires a minimum lot area of 30 ha (74.1 ac) and a minimum lot frontage of 100 m (328.1 ft). The current zoning does not list a special events facility as a permitted use.

While the Township of Blandford-Blenheim Zoning By-law does not specifically list a special events facility in Table 5.18.2.1 – Parking Standards, a reasonable comparative would be an assembly hall, which requires one parking space per 10 m² (107.6 ft²) of gross floor area or one parking space per four seats, whichever is greater. At a capacity of 250 people, assuming 250 seats would result in the need for 62.5 parking spaces. At a size of 960 m² (10,333.4 ft²) the parking calculation would result in the need for 96.6 parking spaces. As the gross floor area calculation is the greater of the two, 96 parking spaces would be required.

Agency Comments

The Township Chief Building Official has indicated that the Township only has record of a building permit for the single detached dwelling. Any detached structures over 15 m² (161.4 ft²), septic system, and/or tents over 60 m² (646 ft²) require building permits.

The Township Director of Public Works has indicated they have reviewed the submitted Traffic Impact Study and have no concerns. It was indicated that traffic will typically be at off peak times and the driveway is visible in both directions.

The Township Director of Protective Services has advised that the following will be required:

- Fire inspection
 - Fire safety plan
 - Including posting of emergency procedures throughout all public buildings
 - Fire route signage – including no parking signs to ensure no parking in laneway
 - Fire route-ensure proper turning radius for fire apparatus
 - Fire extinguishers
 - Including training of all staff
 - Monthly checks of extinguishers along with annual inspections
 - Emergency lighting
 - Water supply
 - With dry hydrant connection
 - Size of water storage to be determined by owner's engineer
 - Routine fire inspections scheduled with Township Fire Prevention Officer
 - Please inform the applicant that this operation is subject to compliance with the township noise by-law 2357-2023
 - Please inform the applicant that any use of fireworks must comply with the township fireworks by-law 2423-2024

The Oxford County Public Works Department, the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA), Rogers Canada, and Canada Post have indicated no concerns with the proposal.

Township of Blandford-Blenheim Council

Township of Blandford-Blenheim Council recommended denial of the proposed Official Plan Amendment Application and voted to deny the accompanying Zone Change Application (ZN 1-25-01) at the Township's regular meeting of Council on April 16th, 2025.

During the Public Meeting held on April 16th, 2025, two members of the general public spoke about concerns that they had with the proposal which included, but were not limited to, noise, traffic, and the impact of the use on their property value.

Township Council also raised a number of questions with the applicants and the applicant's agent, ranging from an apparent discrepancy between the venue capacity stated in the applications (250 person maximum) and the facility's website (500 person maximum), to who farms the lands (the owner or a renter), and whether the existing single detached dwelling and greenhouses, were utilized as part of the venue or not (note: this would substantially impact the land area indicated in the application as being used for the purposes of the special events facility).

Planning Analysis

2024 Provincial Planning Statement

Section 2.3 of the PPS directs that prime agricultural areas shall be protected for long-term use for agriculture. Permitted uses and activities within a prime agricultural area include agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses, and on-farm diversified uses.

Planning staff have assessed the proposed recognition of the existing events facility in accordance with the PPS policies and provincial guidelines pertaining to permitted uses in prime agricultural areas. The subject lands do not comprise a specialty crop area as defined by the PPS but are actively farmed and the majority of lands are located within a prime agricultural area consisting of Class 2 type soil based on the Canada Land Inventory. The existing events facility appears to comply with the Minimum Distance Separation (MDS) requirements and the continuation of the facility in the existing location is not anticipated to hinder surrounding livestock operations with respect to MDS.

The PPS policies pertaining to OFDUs require, along with meeting other criteria, that such uses be secondary to the principal agricultural use and limited in area in order to minimize the amount of land taken out of agricultural production, ensure agriculture remains the main land use, and limit off-site impacts. The related provincial guidance indicates that the area required for the OFDU shall include all land occupied by, or no longer available for agricultural production as a result of, the OFDU, including buildings, outdoor storage, landscaped areas, private services, and parking. However, it is noted that, as permitted by the PPS, the County of Oxford Official Plan sets out more specific, locally developed and Provincially approved, size/area and other scale criteria for such uses, which are reviewed below.

Based on the site plan and information submitted by the applicant, the existing site area associated with the events facility (i.e. buildings, parking, landscaped areas etc.) is approximately 0.7 ha (1.7 ac), which equates to 1.8% of the total lot area. This would meet both the recommended maximum site area criteria set out for such uses in the provincial guidance

document (i.e. 2% of lot area to a maximum of 1 ha), as well as the locally established maximum site area criteria for such uses set out in the Official Plan (i.e. 2% of lot area to a maximum of 0.8 ha). However, it is noted that questions were raised by Township Council at the public meeting as to whether all areas utilized and/or available for special events (e.g. dwelling/grounds and greenhouses) are reflected in the application. For comparison, the area of the property occupied by the entire building cluster (i.e. dwelling, greenhouses, proposed special event facility, parking and landscaped areas etc.) is approximately 2 ha (4.9 ac). Regardless, other scale related aspects of the event facility (e.g. building size, number of employees patrons, and guest) are beyond the scale intended for an OFDU by provincial policy and guidelines, as more specifically addressed by the locally developed and Provincially approved Official Plan criteria. It is also unclear as to whether agriculture remains the principal use of the property and to what extent the landowners are involved in the farm operation/farming. Some questions with respect to land use compatibility (e.g. off-site noise concerns) have also been raised. Further, it is the opinion of staff that an event facility, such as that being proposed, would fall into the same categories as a banquet hall or large-scale recurring event with permanent structures, which are identified in Provincial guidelines as uses that would typically not be permitted as an OFDU. In keeping with this direction, similar OFDU use restrictions are also contained in the County Official Plan.

The definition and policies for agriculture-related uses in the PPS indicate that such uses are farm-related commercial and farm-related industrial uses that are directly related to farm operations in the area, support agriculture, benefit from being in close proximity to farm operations, and provide direct products and/or services to farm operations as a primary activity.

Considering the overall nature and scale of the existing special events facility, it is the opinion of Planning staff that the use does not enhance or support the agri-food network, is not limited in scale, could successfully operate within a settlement area, and would not meet the definition and applicable criteria for an On-Farm Diversified Use or Agricultural Related Use, as set out in the PPS and associated Provincial guidelines and locally developed criteria. As such, the use is not consistent with the PPS policies for permitted uses in a prime agricultural area and, therefore, would be considered a non-agricultural use in a prime agricultural area. Provincial policy directs that Planning authorities may only permit non-agricultural uses within prime agricultural areas for extraction of aggregates and resources or limited non-residential uses that meet specific policy criteria.

Official Plan

Staff have evaluated the proposal in accordance with the review criteria in the Official Plan for OFDUs. The intent of the Official Plan policies for OFDUs is to ensure that the use is clearly secondary to the principal agricultural operation, compatible with and does not hinder surrounding agricultural uses, protects prime agricultural areas, is appropriate for rural infrastructure, and does not undermine or conflict with the planned function of settlements.

In this case, the events facility is located on an agricultural property, within the same building cluster as the existing single detached dwelling and making use of the same driveway, which are some of the basic locational requirements to be considered as an OFDU.

However, in keeping with both provincial guidelines and local policy objectives, the Official Plan policies specifically prohibit 'special events facilities' as an OFDU. As such, it is clear that such facilities are not considered to be an OFDU. Even other uses that may be permitted as OFDUs (i.e. are not prohibited), can only be considered if they meet all applicable policy criteria, including various specific and very intentional limitations on size and scale (e.g. maximum site area, building size, number of employees, patrons, and guests etc.). For comparison purposes, this proposal has also been reviewed in relation to a number of these criteria, as follows.

Based on the site plan and information submitted by the applicant, the total area associated with the existing events facility is approximately 0.7 ha (1.7 ac) or 1.7% of the total parcel size, which is below the maximum of 0.8 ha (2 ac), or 2% of total lot area, permitted by the OP. However, the policies also require that the area be limited to the minimum area required for the proposed OFDU. Further, the gross floor area of all buildings used for the events facility is approximately 960 m² (10,333.4 ft²), which exceeds the permitted maximum gross floor area of 557 m² (6,000 ft²) by 403 m² (4,333.4 ft²), or over 70%.

The Official Plan policies also state that the OFDU shall directly involve the farmer living on the same lot as the OFDU and may also involve any other permanent residents on the lot and up to two employees who do not reside on the lot. In this case, other than owning the event facility, it is not clear to what extent those living on the lot will be directly involved in farming and the running of the event facility. It is noted that the applicant has advised that the event facility business would limit permanent employees to those who reside on-site, while those renting the facility would be responsible for contracting workers for the event (caterers, photographers, etc.). While the majority of additional staff working on-site would be on contract through the party renting the facility, the number of staff that would be required for the average event could be considerable. It is not unreasonable to expect a typical wedding event to have a considerable number of additional contract staff (e.g. caterer, wait staff, bar staff, photographer, officiant, event coordinator, decorator, music provider etc.). While not permanent staff, these contract workers will have a similar impact as permanent staff, considering that the events are recurring weekly from May to September. As such, Planning staff are of the opinion that the number of off-site employees that could attend the site for a typical special event would not be in keeping with the intent and purpose of the OFDU policies in the Official Plan.

Further, it is the opinion of planning staff that the proposed use would attract large numbers of customers/guests and other people (i.e. up to 250 customers/guests and contracted services) to the site, which could create compatibility or enforcement issues, undermine or conflict with the planned function of rural settlements, and not otherwise be consistent with the objectives of the plan, which are also identified in the policies as reasons for a use not being permitted as an OFDU.

For the above reasons, it is the opinion of planning staff that the proposed event facility use and scale are clearly not intended to be permitted as an OFDU. Further, the OP policies specifically state that uses that would exceed the scale restrictions for an OFDU shall not be permitted unless they comply with the agriculture-related use policies. Proposals that cannot meet those policies shall be directed to locate or relocate in a settlement or must comply with the applicable policies for non-agricultural uses.

In this regard, it is also the opinion of staff that the use does not comply with the applicable policies for agricultural related uses, as it has not been demonstrated that the use is directly related to agricultural uses in the area and provides direct support to farm operations as a primary activity. As such, Planning staff are of the opinion that the proposal to recognize the existing events facility would be considered a non-agricultural use, which should generally be directed to locate or relocate in a settlement area (e.g. on lands designated for commercial purposes with appropriate services).

In light on the foregoing, Planning staff are of the opinion that the existing events facility does not meet the definition of an OFDU, as the use is specifically prohibited as an OFDU by the Official Plan policies and is not small scale, in accordance with the applicable criteria. As the use has been proposed as an OFDU, the applicant has not provided justification (i.e. planning justification, agricultural impact analysis etc.) to address the applicable PPS and OP criteria that would apply to consideration of a non-agricultural use in a prime agricultural area. Even so, it is not certain that the proposed event facility would be able to meet all of those applicable criteria, given the fact that the use is located within an identified Sand and Gravel Resource Area and it has not been demonstrated to staff that there are no alternative site options within a designated settlement and that such use could not reasonably be located in a designated settlement.

As such, staff are of the opinion that the proposal is not appropriate from a planning perspective and should not be supported.

CONCLUSIONS

In light of the foregoing, Planning staff are of the opinion that the nature, size, and scale of the proposed special events facility are not consistent with policies of the PPS and Official Plan with respect to an On-Farm Diversified Use.

As such, it is the opinion of staff that the proposed site-specific amendment to the Official Plan to allow for a special events facility as an On-Farm Diversified Use cannot be supported from a land use planning perspective and should not be approved.

SIGNATURES

Report author:

Original signed by _____
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Departmental approval:

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Original signed by _____
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Director of Community Planning

Approved for submission:

Original signed by _____
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ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 – Plate 1, Location Map with Existing Zoning
- Attachment 2 – Plate 2, Aerial Photography (2020)
- Attachment 3 – Plate 3, Aerial Photography (2020) – Zoomed In
- Attachment 4 – Plate 4, Official Plan Designation Map
- Attachment 5 – Plate 5, Applicant's Sketch
- Attachment 6 – Public Comments