

Minutes

Agricultural Advisory Committee

June 4, 2025

1. Call to Order

The Agricultural Advisory Committee met electronically on the above date. The Chair called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. with all members present, with the exception of Councillor Brian Milne and Member Gail Ardiel.

2. Introduction of Members - new member

The Committee members introduced themselves.

3. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Delegations

4.a Experimental Acres Project Summary 2025

9:09 a.m. Member Gail Ardiel joined the meeting.

Emily McKague of Grey Ag Services presented a summary on the six members participating in the Experimental Acres Project for 2025 and the scope of their projects. She gave a background on the Experimental Acres Project history noting that it is funded by Grey County. She shared that it ran as a pilot in Grey County in 2023 and was administered by Wellington County staff who started the program. In 2024, Grey Ag administered the project and that they are now in their second year of running the project. The project aligns with Grey County's Climate Action Plan goal to increase the number of acres under sustainable best management practices building climate resiliency and decreasing our carbon footprint. Within the six members, the project sizes range from a quarter of an acre up to 230 acres across the County with a broad span of farm production types.

The Committee noted the importance of the program where Emily stated that there were 15 applications for the project this year.

Megan Myles, Climate Change Coordinator for Grey County, noted the great collaboration with Grey Ag Services on this project. She shared that a blind scoring method using a rubric is used to select the project members. She noted the growth and awareness of the program and the potential for a knowledge sharing network amongst farmers in the area.

The Committee commended the County for the collaborative work with the project members and noted how easy it is to participate in the program with the low amount of paperwork and collaboration with the County.

5. Items For Direction or Discussion

5.a Planning Verbal Update - Beaver, Coyote and Tree By-law Consultations

Director of Planning, Scott Taylor, noted there was a diverse range of opinions regarding the forestry by-law. He noted the department is still open to comments and to reach out if there is anything more to add.

He noted one of the comments that keeps coming up is the County's potential shift away from the circumference limit harvesting within private wood lots. After these comments have been gathered, he shared that staff will gather everything and look to see what changes need to be made to the draft by-law before preparing a finalized version.

Director Taylor went on to discuss comments received regarding the Beaver and Coyote by-law noting that comments received included concerns for less lethal ways of containing beavers and coyotes in the area as well as comments from trappers themselves and the processes they follow as well as the compensation they receive. He shared that the agricultural community has noted that these are essential programs and that the County needs to continue on with them.

Once again he noted that all comments will be gathered to prepare a further information that will hopefully be presented to Council for consideration in the fall.

Member Simon DeBoer left the meeting at 9:22 a.m.

5.b Planning Update - Official Plan Amendment 23

Director Taylor discussed the history of Official Plan Amendment 23 noting that the Agricultural Advisory Committee had a discussion on the early draft in September of 2024 at a previous meeting. He gave a summary noting that this amendment was looking at changes to the rural designation policies clarifying terminology and permitted uses. He noted that there were no appeals to this official plan amendment and the changes are now in effect after Council's approval.

Member Blair Freeman joined the meeting at 9:31 a.m.

Comments were shared regarding concerns about certain development types creating an environment in the Town of The Blue Mountains that the agricultural community finds it difficult to support. Director Taylor provided information on the terms that were added into the County Official Plan in 2019 (residential farm cooperative and agri-miniums) and the original intent for them being included into the Official Plan. He noted the changes included in Official Plan Amendment 23 further clarify the intent of staff for the use of lands going forward including higher criteria and requiring the farm elements.

The Committee shared concerns about the proposed Thornbury Acres project in the Town of The Blue Mountains.

6. Round Table Discussion

6.a Sector Trends and Challenges

The Committee participated in a round table discussion on current sector trends and challenges within Grey County where the Committee shared comments about the major ice storm at the end of March affecting tree health in the County. It was noted that the devastation and clean up will be ongoing for years to come. The Committee noted that the apple orchards benefited from the lake effect in the Town of The Blue Mountains.

The Committee asked if the County could comment on the County's plan for the living snow fence project. CAO Randy Scherzer noted that the Climate Change and Transportation departments are working closely to improve the uptake of this program including the compensation model to local farmers for using some of their production lands. He noted that the program has been supported in terms of planting the trees, but there are still some challenges that are being faced including the production area that is being removed from farming lands. He noted that there will be more updates to come in the future and opportunities to build the program while working with the farming community.

The Committee noted the importance of the research that needs to be done in order to ensure a living snow fence project is done successfully in Grey County.

Councillor McQueen left the meeting at 9:55 a.m.

The Committee discussed new technologies in drainage into more managed wetland areas and if more demonstrations might be happening in the County this year where it was noted that conversations are happening.

The Committee discussed options for control on wild chervil and what the County is doing to maintain and limit spread of wild chervil. It was noted by Randy Scherzer the challenge the County is faced with on controlling wild

chervil on private lands. Staff would like to explore options on how spread can be mitigated.

6.b Transportation Services Update

Randy Scherzer, CAO, took a moment to introduce Grey County's new Deputy CAO, Niall Loble.

Randy gave an update on the 2025 road projects that the County has planned sharing a map and timeline of each anticipated project. He noted that this information is posted on the County website as well as on Municipal 511 for reference.

He noted that all of the County's construction projects were under budget for 2025, so the Transportation department was able to add an additional scope to the Grey Road 9 project.

7. Correspondence

There was none.

8. Other Business

Carrie Davenport left the meeting at 10:19 a.m.

The Committee was happy to announce a notice of motion that went to the Town of The Blue Mountains Council to reduce a provincial tax rate on Ontario-made craft cider. It was shared craft cider was taxed at a rate of 60.4% which was the same as fine wines and is putting cidery businesses out of business. The motion was approved by Council, and the province was then approached to have the craft cider tax rate reduced to the same as craft beer which is roughly 34%. The province has since approved this and it will come into effect on August 1, 2025.

Lorie Smith of Grey Ag Services shared that Grey Bruce Farmers week 2026 is the 60th anniversary and will be held between January 7th to 12th. She shared that Grey Ag Services is celebrating their 25th year anniversary in business as well.

She shared that the Forage Expo in Bruce County will be held on June 26th from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Trelford Farms near Paisley.

Lastly, she shared that the Grey Soil and Crop is having their crop walk in conjunction with the Ontario Canola Growers Association on the morning of July 23rd near Strathaven looking at an organic dairy operation and then in Fairmount in the afternoon looking at Canola.

Gail Ardiel shared that it is Local Food Week from June 2nd to June 8th and encouraged everyone to eat local and support the farmers in our area.

9. Next Meeting Date

Wednesday, September 3, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.

10. Adjournment

On motion of Committee member Ardiel and Warden Matrosovs, the Agricultural Advisory Committee adjourned at 10:22 a.m. to the call of the Chair.