

<b>To:</b>	Warden Matrosovs and Members of Grey County Council
<b>Committee Date:</b>	April 23, 2026
<b>Subject / Report No:</b>	PDR-CW-17-26
<b>Title:</b>	Addendum to PDR-CW-05-26, Rural Event Venues
<b>Prepared by:</b>	Cassandra Dillman, Intermediate Planner
<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Scott Taylor, Director of Planning
<b>Lower Tier(s) Affected:</b>	All Municipalities in Grey County except for the City of Owen Sound and Town of Hanover

## Recommendation

1. That PDR-CW-17-26 regarding a University of Guelph Student project entitled ‘Best Practices in Rural Event Venues’ be received; and
2. That staff be directed to use the student report as a resource to inform future planning policy recommendations; and
3. That the student report be shared with member municipalities across Grey County.

## Executive Summary

The County partnered with a team of students from the University of Guelph Masters of Rural Planning and Development program to undertake a study to inform best planning practices and considerations for rural event venues. The project was completed as part of coursework for their Masters of Planning and will benefit the County and member municipalities.

Background research, a review of other municipal approaches, interviews with local planners, were completed to inform the study. The recommendations from this work may be used to inform future County or municipal planning policy updates.

## Background and Discussion

From January to April 2026, County Planning staff worked with students from the University of Guelph Masters of Rural Planning and Development program on a student project:

- Best Practices in Rural Event Venues completed by Ashely Feeney, Bailey Cole and Negin BamouEIFard

A link to their report can be found in the Attachment section of this report.

## Summary

Grey County has a diverse rural economy. Land uses in the countryside include farmland, natural areas, recreational areas, and areas for resource extraction. The County is also a tourist destination. From wedding barns to rural concert venues, staff receive many inquiries for rural event venues. Yet, managing the opportunities and challenges that stem from these diverse rural business opportunities can be difficult.

Based on direction from the Provincial Planning Statement (PPS) and the Grey County official plan, the County promotes a diverse rural economy, opportunities for sustainable tourism, and permits a wide range of on-farm economic opportunities. Permitting and operating rural event venues can also cause concern within our communities. Members of the public have expressed concerns such as noise, traffic management, servicing, environmental impacts, and emergency service access. Balancing these needs when designing, siting, permitting, and operating a rural event venue is crucial to its success.

To support the County and member municipalities regarding the review of rural event venue proposals, the student team undertook the following research:

- a policy review and jurisdictional scan of other municipal approaches,
- a review of existing County and Municipal policies and background documents,
- a review of provincial policy including the PPS,
- interviewed local planners, and
- identified key issues and recommended best practices.

The student report contains several best practice recommendations that staff can consider, including those listed in Table 1 below.

Best Practice	Summary
<b>Require Site-Specific Approvals Rather Than As-of-Right Permissions</b>	A consistent best practice is to avoid permitting rural event venues as- of- right in rural or agricultural zones. Instead, venues should proceed through site- specific Zoning By- Law Amendments (ZBLAs). This allows municipalities to tailor permissions to site conditions.
<b>Clearly Distinguish On- Farm Diversified Uses (OFDUs) from Commercial Event Uses</b>	Best practice is to clearly identify when an event remains a secondary, farm- supportive use versus when it functions as more of a standalone commercial operation. Larger or more frequent events, that go beyond ODFU scale and sizing, should be treated as independent land uses requiring higher levels of scrutiny.
<b>Establish Clear Performance Standards Through Zoning</b>	Include clear quantitative performance standards, embedded directly into site-specific zoning, such as maximum number of events per year, maximum number of attendees per event,

	permitted hours of operation, limits on outdoor events or amplified sound, and minimum parking requirements.
<b>Use Technical Studies to Shape Zoning Provisions</b>	Use study findings to directly inform zoning provisions. For example, noise studies inform hours of operation and sound mitigation measures, traffic studies inform parking requirements, access design, and event caps, and servicing studies to confirm capacity limits for events. This approach improves defensibility and consistency and aligns technical evidence with land use permissions.
<b>Manage Compatibility Proactively</b>	Effective rural event venues address compatibility concerns up front, not reactively. Best practices include locating event spaces away from nearby dwellings where possible, prioritizing indoor events or enclosed structures, providing buffering, setbacks, and landscape screening, and limiting lighting spillover and evening activities.
<b>Treat Overnight Accommodation as a Separate and Distinct Issue</b>	The report highlights that best practice is to regulate accommodation separately from event uses, rather than assuming it is a natural accessory. Small scale beds and breakfasts within existing dwellings may be appropriate if clearly defined and limited. Cabins, glamping, or multiple accommodation units significantly increases intensity and servicing demands.
<b>Apply Consistent Evaluation Criteria Across the County</b>	A key best practice is alignment between County and local municipal policy. County level policies should establish common evaluation criteria, while local municipalities should implement those criteria through local official plan polices, zoning, and approvals. This reduces uncertainty, prevents conflicting interpretations, and supports fair decision making
<b>Plan for Long Term Enforcement and Compliance</b>	Successful municipalities anticipate that event venues may evolve over time. Best practices include embedding clear limits and definitions in zoning using site plan agreements or holding provisions.
<b>Encourage Early Pre- Submission Consultation</b>	Early engagement can clarify expectations for applicants, identifies required studies early, reduces processing delays, and can improve project design before public review. Consultation may need to occur with County and municipal staff (i.e. planning, fire department, building, transportation, and public works), Indigenous communities, Ministry of Transportation, and/or the local conservation authority. Pre- submission consultation is particularly valuable in rural

	contexts with private servicing and sensitive neighbouring uses.
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*Table 1: Summary of Student Recommendations*

The report concludes that the issue is not whether rural event venues should be permitted, but how they should be regulated consistently, transparently, and with enforceability, to balance rural economic diversification with agricultural protection and community compatibility.

## Legal and Legislated Requirements

There are no legal or legislative considerations at this time.

## Financial and Resource Implications

The work completed by the student consulting team is largely without cost to the County and done as part of the coursework for their Masters degree. County staff are grateful for the students' efforts in this regard and would note that having to pay a consultant to complete a similar guideline would likely cost between \$25,000 - \$35,000.

## Relevant Consultation

- Internal: Planning and Economic Development, Tourism, and Culture staff
- External: Municipal staff, and relevant stakeholders

## Appendices and Attachments

[Best Practices in Rural Event Venues Guelph Student Project](#)