



Best Practices in Rural Event Venues

Grey County, Ontario

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Certification

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Executive Summary

This report examines best practices for regulating rural event venues in Grey County, in response to increasing interest in uses such as wedding venues, agri-tourism destinations, and rural event spaces. While these uses present opportunities to support farm viability, diversify the rural economy, and enhance tourism, they also introduce planning challenges related to land use compatibility, servicing, and policy clarity.

A review of the provincial framework confirms that rural economic diversification is supported through the Provincial Planning Statement, particularly where development builds on rural character and is sustainable within existing service levels. However, in prime agricultural areas, uses must remain secondary to the agricultural operation and limited in scale. This distinction is critical in evaluating rural event venues, particularly where proposals begin to function as standalone commercial operations rather than on-farm diversified uses.

An analysis of Grey County's Official Plan and local zoning by-laws indicated that while some policy direction exists at the County level, including recent updates by way of Official Plan Amendment 23, rural event venues are not consistently defined or regulated. As a result, municipalities often rely on site-specific zoning by-law amendments and case-by-case evaluations. This approach provides flexibility but creates uncertainty, complex decision-making, and challenges in managing cumulative impacts. To reduce these challenges, the County is looking to provide a clear and consistent framework for evaluating proposals.

Case studies from Grey County and other municipalities, including Haldimand County, Essa Township, and Teeswater Township, highlight common issues and approaches. Successful applications, such as Spy Cider House and Distillery, demonstrate the importance of having clear and well-defined provisions that establish expectations for scale, ensure the use remains secondary to the principal agricultural operation, limit the size and frequency of events, and address servicing, access, and compatibility with surrounding rural uses. Whereas the Highland Estates proposal illustrates the challenges associated with larger, hybrid developments that include both event venues and overnight accommodations, particularly where policy direction is unclear, and community concerns are significant.

Based on this analysis, several key issues were identified. These include a lack of clear definitions, difficulty distinguishing between small-scale and commercial uses, the absence of thresholds for scale and intensity, land use compatibility concerns, and the increasing complexity of hybrid developments that include accommodations. Additional challenges relate to servicing capacity, protection of prime agricultural lands, inconsistent implementation across the two-tier planning system, and enforcement of approved conditions.

In response, this report recommends a coordinated, two-tier policy approach. At the County level, clear policy direction, definitions, and evaluation criteria should be established, along with a standardized framework for required studies. At the local level, recommendations for member municipalities should implement these policies through their Official Plans and Zoning By-Laws, requiring site-specific zoning by-law amendments for all rural event venues. By working together, both the County and the member municipalities can apply consistent performance standards for rural event venues.

Overall, the recommendation approach seeks to balance economic development opportunities with the protection of agricultural resources and rural character. By providing clearer policy direction and improving coordination between the County and its member municipalities, Grey County can support appropriate rural event venues while ensuring that land use impacts are effectively managed and community interests are protected.

Figure 1-1. Cover Photo of the Spy Cidery (Spy Cider House and Distillery, 2019)

1. Introduction

Grey County’s rural economy is characterized by a diverse range of activities that reflect evolving opportunities in agriculture, tourism, and rural enterprise. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in proposals for rural event venues, including wedding barns, concert spaces, and agri-tourism destinations. These proposals vary significantly in scale and intensity. Some are modest and align with policy considerations for on-farm diversified uses, while others are larger operations that may generate broader economic benefits but also introduce more complex land use conflicts. In certain cases, event venues are integrated with existing agricultural operations such as small-scale wineries or cideries, while in others, they are proposed on scenic rural or natural properties that are not active agricultural operations and may include other accessory uses such as camping or glamping.

This growing interest presents both opportunities and challenges for municipalities, including Grey County. On one hand, rural event venues can contribute to farm viability, support tourism, and enhance local economic development. On the other hand, they highlight important planning considerations related to land use compatibility, infrastructure capacity, environmental impacts, and potential conflicts with neighbouring properties. Existing policy frameworks, including permissions for on-farm diversified uses and agri-tourism, do not always provide sufficient clarity to address the range and scale of proposals currently being considered. These policies were generally developed to support small-scale, accessory activities that complement and remain secondary to the principal agricultural use. However, many contemporary proposals, particularly those involving weddings, event venues, and accommodations, operate at a scale and intensity that extend beyond what was originally contemplated.

This report will provide an objective and comprehensive assessment of these issues. It draws on a review of comparable municipalities that have faced similar development pressures. Case studies from the Town of The Blue Mountains, the Municipality of Grey Highlands, Haldimand County, Essa Township, and Teeswater Township illustrate a variety of regulatory approaches, including zoning provisions, licensing systems, and site-specific controls. These examples offer valuable insight into how municipalities have sought to balance economic development objectives with the need to minimize land use conflicts and protect rural character.

Building on this analysis, the report identifies key issues, evaluates policy alternatives, and presents recommendations tailored to the Grey County context. The intent is to support a clear, consistent, and defensible approach to managing rural event venues, enabling appropriate forms of rural diversification while safeguarding the long-term sustainability and compatibility of the County’s rural landscape.

2. Background

While rural event venues are not a new concept, they have seen a significant increase in popularity over the last 10 years. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant push for Canadians to stay and shop local. This change in habitats has resulted in an interesting growth and diversification within the rural event sector.

Just some of the rural event venue types we are currently seeing across the province include:

- Private island weddings (Muskoka District Rentals, n.d.);
- Laid-back outdoor weddings (Sara Monika, n.d.);
- Private and secluded yurts (GlampingHub, n.d.);
- Sleep in a bunkie next to Highland cows (AirBnB, 2026)
- Stay in a 26 ft geodesic/glass dome on the shoreline of a northern lake (Sunrise Eco-Resort, n.d.)
- Stay in a Japanese-style cottage, overlooking sixteen-mile creek, and complete with a cherry blossom orchard (Destination Ontario, 2026; Inn The Orchard, 2026)

To support the push to stay and shop local, Destination Ontario (and many local municipalities) has created tourist guides, including:

- Cideries worth a road trip in Ontario (Destination Ontario, 2026a);
- Farm Stays and Agritourism Vacations in Ontario (Destination Ontario, 2026b);
- Things to Do, Farm Experiences (Destination Ontario, 2026c);
- Spas and Wellness Retreats (Destination Ontario, 2026d); and
- Charming Small Towns (Destination Ontario, 2026e).

As a result, two conditions have created challenges for members of the public and municipal planners alike:

- Diversification within the sector has resulted in operations and proposals which don't fit clearly 'inside the box' (i.e. definitions) laid out in municipal official plans and zoning by-laws; and
- The number, size, and complexity of event venues proposed each year have increased.

To help alleviate this problem, we have prepared this Recommendation Report, which outlines the best practices for rural event venues. As part of this Recommendation Report, our team

completed a comprehensive review of the policies for rural event venues across Grey County, compared those policies with those of other rural municipalities, highlighted key issues and challenges, and prepared a detailed set of recommendations and best practices for future implementation.

2.1. AI Use Disclaimer

As part of this project, artificial intelligence (AI) tools have been used in a limited and supportive capacity to assist with research and communication tasks. The use of AI includes:

- An initial scan or first-pass review of Official Plans, Zoning By-Laws, and other policy documents to identify relevant themes and provisions, with all findings subject to subsequent review, interpretation, and validation by the project team; and
- Preparation of meeting minutes.

While a useful tool, it is important to note that AI-generated outputs have not replaced professional judgment, academic analysis, or planning expertise. All substantive analysis, conclusions, policy interpretations, and recommendations have been developed, reviewed, and finalized by the student team. Responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and appropriateness of all project deliverables remains with the student team.

3. Policy Review

In Ontario, provincial legislation and policies set the tone for development. The province outlines a series of goals and minimum requirements, and the municipalities prepare Official Plans which must be consistent with the provincial policies. While these are considered the minimums, municipalities can go above and beyond these goals and policies within their local official plan documents to address matters of importance to their communities, unless doing so conflicts with any policy in the Provincial Planning Statement (PPS).

Figure 3-1. Legislative Framework in Ontario



3.1. Planning Act

The *Planning Act* (Government of Ontario, 1990) was developed to manage land use planning conflicts within the province. It identifies several provincial goals, including the goal of promoting sustainable economic development (Section 1.1). The Planning Act also identifies several matters of provincial interest (Section 2), which include, but are not limited to:

- (a) the protection of ecological systems, including natural areas, features and functions;
- (b) the protection of the agricultural resources of the Province;
- (h.1) the accessibility for persons with disabilities to all facilities, services and matters;

- (o) the protection of public health and safety; and
- (p) the appropriate location of growth and development,

To support these goals, the province developed the *Provincial Planning Statement* (PPS; Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2024), which is a policy statement issued under the authority of Section 3 of the *Planning Act* and came into effect on October 20, 2024. The *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas, Publication 851* (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, 2016) provides additional policy guidance and is intended to explain the intent of some PPS policies and definitions related to permitted uses in prime agricultural areas

3.2. Provincial Planning Statement (PPS)

The Provincial Planning Statement provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development. Some of the key policies for rural areas in municipalities are outlined in Chapter 2.5 and include:

- “a) building upon rural character, and leveraging rural amenities and assets”;
- “e) promoting diversification of the economic base and employment opportunities through goods and services, including value-added products...”; and
- “f) providing opportunities for sustainable and diversified tourism, including leveraging historical, cultural, and natural assets”; among others.

The PPS also recognizes that growth and development should be considered firstly within rural settlement areas, then rural lands, and then prime agricultural areas. The PPS goes a step further to also state that on rural lands, “development that can be sustained by rural service levels should be promoted” (Section 2.6.2).

In prime agricultural areas (PAA's), permitted uses include agricultural uses, agricultural-related uses, and on-farm diversified uses (Section 4.3.2.1).

3.3. On-Farm Diversified Use

On-farm diversified uses (OFDUs) are a type of permitted use in rural areas intended to enable farm operators to diversify and supplement their farm income, and to accommodate value-added and agri-tourism uses in prime agricultural areas. The *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas* (Publication 851) provides direction on how these policies should be interpreted and applied (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, 2016).

According to the Guidelines, OFDUs must be secondary to the principal agricultural use, limited in scale and area, and compatible with surrounding agricultural operations. These uses are

intended to supplement farm income while maintaining the agricultural function of the property and should not remove significant amounts of land from production or require major servicing or infrastructure (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, 2016).

Examples of OFDUs include agri-tourism activities, farm retail, home occupations, and other value-added uses that support agricultural operations, as illustrated in **Figure 3-2** below.

In the context of rural event venues, OFDUs represent a potential pathway for permitting event-related activities where they remain occasional, small-scale, and clearly secondary to farming operations. However, larger or more intensive event venues, such as those involving frequent events, permanent infrastructure, or commercial-scale operations, typically exceed the scope of OFDUs (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, 2016).

Figure 3-2. On-Farm Diversified Uses (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, 2016).



Value-added uses that could use feedstock from outside the surrounding agricultural area (e.g., processor, packager, winery, cheese factory, bakery, abattoir)



Home occupations (e.g., professional office, bookkeeper, land surveyor, art studio, hairdresser, massage therapist, daycare, veterinary clinic, kennel, classes or workshops)*



Home industries (e.g., sawmill, welding or woodworking shop, manufacturing/fabrication, equipment repair, seasonal storage of boats or trailers)



Agri-tourism and recreation uses (e.g., farm vacation suite, bed and breakfast, hay rides, petting zoo, farm-themed playground, horse trail rides, corn maze, seasonal events, equine events, wine tasting, retreats, zip lines)*



Retail uses (e.g., farm market, antique business, seed supplier, tack shop)*



Café/small restaurant, cooking classes, food store (e.g., cheese, ice cream)*

3.3.1. Municipal Policies for On-Farm Diversified Uses

Across the province, the designation of Agricultural lands and the uses that are permitted within them, are generally the same as Municipalities aim to conform to the same minimums within the PPS.

Within Official Plans, lands that comprise the Ontario Agricultural System are designated as Agriculture (or PAA in some municipalities). These designations prioritize the protection of agricultural lands and support the long-term viability of agricultural operations.

Development within Agricultural areas is generally limited to uses that support agricultural production and related activities, such as livestock, cash crops, and local food. Permitted uses include:

- Agricultural uses and normal farm practices;
- Agriculture-related uses;
- OFDU's;
- Farm dwellings;
- An accessory residential use associated with farming operations.

OFDU's can further include:

- agritourism activities;
- farm retail operations (produce outlets, wineries, etc.);
- seasonal events or farm-based experiences; and
- farm-related hospitality uses.

In most municipalities where small-scale home industries or retail operations are permitted as an OFDU, there are limits to both the size and proportion of usage, as well as the number of employees.

4. Grey County

Grey County is an upper-tier municipality located in southwestern Ontario, characterized by a diverse rural landscape that includes agricultural lands, small rural communities, and natural features such as the Niagara Escarpment and the Georgian Bay shoreline. Agriculture plays a significant role in the County's economy, alongside tourism and other rural economic activities.

Grey County is a powerhouse in agricultural diversity, with over 2,300 active farms generating more than \$460 million in annual revenue (Hatten, 2017). The region plays a leading role in Ontario's agricultural sector, ranking first in direct-to-consumer farm sales with over 400 producers selling directly to buyers (Made in Grey, n.d.). It is also a major hub for livestock and specialty crops, including beef cattle, sheep, and apples, producing approximately 24% of Ontario's total apple acreage (Made in Grey, n.d.). Beyond production, Grey County's agricultural strength is supported by initiatives such as Grey Agricultural Services, land use planning that protects prime agricultural areas, and programs that promote sustainability and biodiversity. This strong and evolving agricultural base reinforces the importance of maintaining policies that prioritize agricultural viability while carefully managing non-farm uses within the rural landscape.

In recent years, planning staff have received an increasing number of inquiries related to rural event venues, including wedding barns, agricultural tourism venues, and event spaces associated with wineries, cideries, and other farm-based businesses. While these uses can provide important economic opportunities for rural landowners, they can also introduce potential land use conflicts related to noise, traffic, servicing, and compatibility with surrounding agricultural and rural land uses.

Figure 4-1. Grey County Rural Areas (Grey County, n.d.).



Grey County operates within a two-tier municipal planning framework. The County establishes overarching land use policies through the Grey County Official Plan (GCOP), which guides growth, development, and land use across the region. Within the County, there are nine member municipalities responsible for implementing these policies through local official plans, zoning by-laws, and development approvals.

As interest in rural event venues continues to grow, municipalities are increasingly required to consider how such uses can be permitted while maintaining compatibility with surrounding agricultural and rural land uses. This study reviews existing policy frameworks and regulatory approaches to rural event venues, beginning with an examination of the Grey County Official Plan and related policy context.

As an upper-tier municipality, Grey County is comprised of nine member municipalities:

- City of Owen Sound,
- Municipality of Grey Highlands,
- Municipality of Meaford,
- Municipality of West Grey,
- Town of Hanover,
- Town of The Blue Mountains,
- Township of Chatsworth,
- Township of Georgian Bluffs, and
- Township of Southgate (Grey County, 2024).

Each member municipality has their own Zoning By-law, and some have a local Official Plan, which must conform to the GCOP. Grey County is the approval authority for local official plans, changes to the Grey County Official Plan, and all plans of subdivision/condominium, except for those within the City of Owen Sound. All municipalities in Grey County, except for the Town of Hanover and the City of Owen Sound, have rural and agricultural lands as described in this study.

Figure 4-2. Grey County Map, with member municipalities (Grey County, 2023).



4.1. Grey County Official Plan

The Grey County Official Plan (2019) provides the overarching policy framework guiding land use planning across the County for the next 25 years. As an upper-tier municipality, Grey County establishes policy direction that must be implemented through the Official Plans and zoning by-laws of its member municipalities. Grey County's countryside consists of farmlands, recreational areas, and resource areas. Farming, resource production, and tourism are critical to the County's economy. Given the County's location – close to the GTA and along the shores of Georgian Bay – and its natural features like the Niagara Escarpment and river valleys, Grey County is also experiencing increasing interest in rural tourism and farm diversification, including agritourism activities, farm-based hospitality uses, and rural event venues. As a result, the Official Plan contains policy direction intended to balance opportunities and the protection of the countryside with the need for continued economic growth. (Grey County, 2019).

Rural Lands

The Rural designation within the Official Plan permits a broader range of land uses compared to Agricultural areas while still maintaining the rural character of the countryside.

Permitted uses within the Rural designation include:

- Agricultural uses (i.e. all those permitted with Agricultural lands);
- Resource based recreational uses;
- Small-scale buildings and yards associated with skilled trades;
- Residential farm cooperatives;
- Agri-minimums;
- Institutional uses;
- Recreational or tourist-based rural clusters (i.e. cottages, yurts, etc.); and
- Small-scale special event venues (Section 5.4.1).

The above noted uses are subject to additional policies related to lot size, lot coverage, MDS, building code requirements, etc.

4.1.1. Official Plan Amendment 23

Through Official Plan Amendment 23 (OPA 23), Grey County introduced policy language recognizing small-scale rural event venues within the Rural designation. These venues may be permitted where they meet applicable policy requirements and demonstrate compatibility with surrounding land uses (Grey County, 2019). In practice, however, municipalities are not typically encountering challenges with small-scale venues that clearly function as on-farm diversified uses. Rather, it is the larger, more intensive event venue proposals that are creating difficulty.

The County initiated OPA 23 as a result of changes to the PPS 2024, and to clarify interpretation issues with respect to the Rural land use designation policies. In response to increasing interest in rural event venues, OPA 23 also added some policy direction regarding how these uses should be evaluated within the County's planning framework. The amendment establishes that such uses must remain appropriately scaled and consistent with the rural context, rather than functioning as standalone commercial developments.

OPA 23 also contains the concept of recreational or tourist-based rural clusters. While this term is not explicitly defined within the Official Plan, it relates to similar tourist-based uses that form an interconnected network, i.e. are generally reliant on one another.

The amendment also outlines more specific criteria that must be addressed when evaluating a proposal:

5.4.2 13) Small Scale special event venues, such as dedicated wedding, concert, or performance venues, may be considered subject to a site-specific amendment to the municipal zoning by-law, which addresses the following criteria:

- a) A description of the proposed facility, including the proposed indoor and outdoor event uses proposed,*
- b) How the size and scale of the use are compatible with neighbouring land uses,*
- c) How noise and light impacts will be mitigated to neighbouring land uses,*
- d) A description of the frequency and size of proposed events,*
- e) How the use will minimize the removal of land from active agricultural production and minimize impacts to future resource uses such as aggregate extraction,*
- f) How the use will be serviced in accordance with Section 8 of this Plan, and whether the servicing will be permanent or seasonal/portable in nature,*
- g) How the local road network will serve the traffic demands of the proposed use,*
- h) How parking or shuttle transportation needs will be addressed,*
- i) Whether the use is co-located with other complimentary permitted uses, and*
- j) How the use will minimize impact on surrounding natural heritage features as per Section 7 of this Plan and how these impacts will be mitigated.*

Small scale special event venues are encouraged to:

- a) Limit amplified noise or performance spaces to indoor or enclosed sections of the site to minimize impacts on neighbours,*
- b) Adaptively reuse existing buildings or structures on-site, provided the reuse does not significantly limit agricultural uses or other types of resource use onsite,*
- c) Consider which buildings and structures are permanently sited, versus which buildings and structures may be temporary or seasonal in nature (e.g., tents, porta-potties, etc.), and*
- d) Co-locate with agricultural uses or agricultural-related uses, which provide added agri-tourism opportunities on-site, such as wineries or cideries.*

Notwithstanding this section of the Plan, the following uses shall not be considered a small-scale special event venue, and therefore are not subject to this section of the Plan:

- i) Infrequent agriculturally focused events (i.e., annual or bi-annual), such as but not limited to; harvest festivals, maple syrup festivals, farm education events, or farm equipment demonstrations, etc., or*
- ii) Small event spaces co-located within an agricultural-related use (e.g., a tasting room within a winery or cidery), which are not intended for weddings, concerts, or large performances, but may hold short-term tours, tastings, or meetings, or*
- iii) One-off special events such as a single wedding or a family reunion in a temporary facility (e.g., a tent) and shall be permitted subject to any municipal policies or by-laws in place for such special events (Grey County, 2019).*

OPA 23 reflects an effort by Grey County to provide clearer guidance for evaluating rural event venues; however, the policies remain relatively high-level. The intent is for municipalities to rely on site-specific zoning by-law amendments and technical studies to assess small-scale special event venue proposals and manage site-specific impacts (Grey County, 2025).

Path Forward

Applicants seeking to establish a rural event venue within Grey County may be required to obtain several planning approvals depending on the scale and location of the proposed development. For example, this may include a(n):

- **Official Plan Amendment** through the County or member municipality, where the proposed use does not meet the current policy framework;
- **Zoning By-law Amendment** through the applicable lower-tier municipality where the use is not permitted within the existing zoning framework;
- **Site Plan Approval** to address matters such as building placement, parking areas, landscaping, lighting, and site access; and
- **Additional Technical Studies** to support a proposal on an as-needed basis:
 - **Traffic Impact Study** where the proposed use may generate significant traffic volumes on rural roads;
 - **Noise Study** where amplified music or late evening events are anticipated;
 - **Servicing Studies** to demonstrate adequate water supply and/or septic capacity; and

- **Environmental Impact Study** where development is proposed near natural heritage features.

These approvals and supporting studies allow municipalities to evaluate potential impacts and ensure that rural event venues remain compatible with surrounding agricultural and rural land uses.

Summary

The Grey County Official Plan supports opportunities for rural economic diversification while maintaining strong protection for agricultural lands. On-farm diversified uses and certain small-scale rural event venues may be permitted where they remain secondary to agricultural operations. Larger or more intensive event venues may require additional planning approvals. Through this policy framework, Grey County seeks to balance rural economic development with the protection of agricultural resources and rural land use compatibility.

4.2. Municipal Frameworks

The following section reviews how selected member municipalities regulate rural event-related uses through their official plan and zoning frameworks.

4.2.1. *Town of The Blue Mountains*

The Town of The Blue Mountains is located in Grey County along the southern shoreline of Georgian Bay. The municipality includes several small settlement areas as well as extensive rural and agricultural lands. Agriculture, tourism, and recreation are major economic drivers within the municipality, particularly due to its proximity to Georgian Bay, the Niagara Escarpment, and regional tourism destinations.

Land use within the municipality is designated/regulated through the Town of The Blue Mountains Official Plan (2016) and the Town of The Blue Mountains Comprehensive Zoning By-law 2018-65 (2018), which establishes permitted uses, zoning standards, and development regulations across the Town.

Official Plan Approach to Event Venues

The Town of Blue Mountains supports their agricultural sector by permitting agri-tourism uses within their Agricultural, Special Agricultural, and Rural land use designations (Section B4.1.2). This allows a larger variety of uses, including equipment exhibitions, farm tours, petting zoos, hayrides and sleigh rides, small-scale themed playgrounds, and small-scale educational facilities, subject to some minor restrictions related to parking, sewage, and compatibility. The Town of The

Blue Mountains also permits Estate Wineries and Farm Wineries within these areas (Section B4.1.3, and B4.1.4).

Zoning Approach to Event Venues

The Town of The Blue Mountains zoning by-law does not contain a specific land use category for rural event venues. Instead, activities commonly associated with event venues are interpreted through other land use categories such as agri-tourism uses, farm wineries, or assembly-related uses.

Because of this, larger or more intensive event venues are typically addressed through site-specific zoning by-law amendments. These amendments allow municipalities to establish regulations tailored to the individual property, including limits on building size, parking requirements, and operational considerations.

4.2.2. Municipality of Grey Highlands

The Municipality of Grey Highlands is located in the southern portion of Grey County and is characterized by a predominantly rural landscape consisting of agricultural lands, forests, natural heritage features, and small rural communities. Agriculture remains an important land use within the municipality, alongside growing interest in rural tourism, farm diversification, and recreation-related activities.

Land use within Grey Highlands is designated/regulated through the Municipality of Grey Highlands Official Plan (2017) and the Municipality of Grey Highlands Comprehensive Zoning By-law 2004-50 (2004), which establishes permitted land uses, zoning standards, and development regulations across the municipality.

Official Plan Approach to Event Venues

The Municipality of Grey Highlands does not permit any types of rural event venues as-of-right within any land use designations, regardless of type or size. The only type of venue that could be permitted without an Official Plan Amendment is a Resource Based Recreational Use within their Rural lands, subject to a site-specific zoning by-law amendment. Where resource-based recreational uses is defined as:

“shall mean those recreational uses where the prime reason for location by their very nature, require certain natural attributes for their location including the availability of large lots or land areas. Uses permitted may include passive and active recreational facilities and associated commercial and residential uses. Such uses shall be defined to include golf courses, water based recreation, campgrounds, lodges/resorts and skiing/snowboarding facilities.” (Municipality of Grey Highlands, 2017).

Zoning Approach to Event Venues

Within the Municipality of Grey Highlands, all rural event venues are addressed through a site-specific zoning by-law amendment. These amendments allow the municipality to regulate the scale and intensity of the proposed use and may include provisions related to building size, parking requirements, and operational considerations.

4.3. Learnings from Interviews with Planners

In addition to formal policy documents such as the Official Plan and zoning by-laws, interviews with County and member municipal planning staff provided important insight into how rural event venues are being interpreted and implemented in practice. These discussions indicated that in the absence of clearly defined and consistently applied policy frameworks, planners are frequently required to evaluate proposals on a case-by-case basis.

Across interviews, County and municipal planning staff consistently identified a common set of considerations that inform their review of rural event venue applications. These include potential noise impacts on surrounding residents, traffic generation and road capacity, the adequacy of private servicing, and overall compatibility with adjacent agricultural operations. Planners also emphasized ongoing challenges in establishing appropriate thresholds for size, scale, and frequency of events.

A key theme emerging from these interviews is the difficulty in classifying larger or hybrid proposals, especially those that incorporate multiple components such as event spaces, food services, and overnight accommodations. Planners noted that these types of developments do not fit neatly within existing policy categories, leading to varied interpretations across municipalities and, at times, within the same jurisdiction.

In practice, municipalities frequently rely on site-specific zoning by-law amendments and tailored planning approvals to regulate rural event venues. This approach allows flexibility in addressing unique site conditions but may also result in inconsistencies and uncertainty for applicants. As a result, there is a recognized need for clearer policy direction and standardized guidance to support decision-making related to evaluating rural event venues.

4.4. Grey County Case Studies

4.4.1. *Spy Cider House and Distillery*

Spy Cider House and Distillery is located at 808108 24th Sideroad in the Town of The Blue Mountains and operates as a farm-based cider production and agri-tourism destination. A recent expansion of the proposal involved the development of a new event building to support rural event functions such as weddings, corporate events, and community gatherings, and provide

additional agriculture-related storage areas (apples) and office space. The application was intended to expand on-farm diversified uses and enhance agri-tourism activities associated with the existing agricultural operation.

Planning Framework and Approvals

The proposal was reviewed under the Town of The Blue Mountains Official Plan and Zoning By-law, the Grey County Official Plan, and provincial policy related to on-farm diversified uses. A complete application was received in early 2025 and evaluated through Staff Report PBS.25.015. Supporting materials included a Planning Justification Report, Noise Impact Study, and other technical submissions.

The application required a site-specific Zoning By-law Amendment, as event venue uses are not permitted as-of-right. Through this process, a site-specific zone was established to permit event-related uses while regulating the scale and operation of the venue.

Key Planning Considerations

Several key planning considerations were identified through the review process:

- **On-farm diversified use status:** whether the event space remained secondary to the agricultural operation and met the size criteria per the GCOP;
- **Agricultural function:** ensuring the primary farm use, being specialty agriculture for apple production, was maintained;
- **Noise impacts:** potential impacts on neighbouring properties and mitigation measures;
- **Servicing:** reliance on private servicing to support event-related uses;
- **Traffic and access:** impacts on rural road infrastructure; and
- **Scale and intensity:** appropriateness of recurring events within an agricultural context.

Outcome

Staff recommended approval of the application through Staff Report PBS.25.015, and the Zoning By-law Amendment was approved by Town Council on June 2, 2025 (Town of The Blue Mountains, 2025). The proposal received strong community support, including multiple letters of support submitted during the review process.

Considerations

The Spy Cidery case illustrates how municipalities may use site-specific zoning by-law amendments to accommodate rural event venues within agricultural areas while maintaining control over their scale and intensity. By framing the proposal as an on-farm diversified use, the application was able to align with existing policy direction supporting agricultural viability and agri-tourism.

At the same time, the case highlights ongoing challenges in clearly defining the limits of on-farm diversified uses, particularly where event venues begin to function on a more commercial scale. While the intent is to review these proposals on a case-by-case basis through site-specific zoning by-law amendments, this approach underscores a broader gap in standardizing policy direction. Greater consistency is needed in how site-specific zones are structured, including the use of technical studies to inform and establish clear, defensible zoning provisions.

Figure 4-3. Spy Cidery (Spy Cider House and Distillery, 2019)



4.4.2. Highland Estates

The proposed Highland Estates development in Grey County provides a detailed local example of the policy and approval challenges associated with rural event venues that exceed the scope of existing agricultural and rural permissions. The proposal included a wedding and event venue supported by accessory accommodation in the form of cabins and tent sites. Given the scale and nature of the use, amendments were required at both the upper-tier and lower-tier levels.

At the County level, an Official Plan Amendment was required to permit a special event venue for up to 95 guests with accessory accommodation for up to 50 guests.

At the local level, an amendment to the Municipality of Grey Highlands zoning By-law was required. The Zoning By-law amendment would have established a new or modified zone category to permit the use. This included provisions related to event functions, number and type of short-term accommodation units, parking requirements, setbacks, and buffering measures. Performance standards addressing noise, traffic generation, hours of operation, and minimum separation distances from sensitive land uses would also have been necessary to address compatibility concerns.

During the application review and circulation process, numerous comments were received from members of the public, both for and against the proposed development. Those in favour of the development consisted predominantly of local businesses. Those against were largely

neighbouring property owners who were concerned about the noise, traffic and environmental impacts of the proposed development.

Outcome

The refusal of the application reflects the complexity of interpreting and applying existing County and local policy frameworks to larger, hybrid proposals. It is noteworthy that these proposed applications were processed prior to the County adopting OPA 23 into its Official Plan. In this case, both County and Municipal planning staff recommended approval, concluding that the proposal was consistent with the intent of the County and Local Official Plans and represented an appropriate form of rural diversification, subject to conditions and further technical review (Hillyer, Taylor, 2025). However, Council ultimately refused the application, illustrating a divergence in how policy was interpreted and applied in decision-making. No matter the policy alignment, the impact of public opinion and comments received during the application review process has the potential to influence the Council's decision-making.

Considerations

While the proposal did not necessarily conflict with the broader intent of the policy framework, it raised concerns regarding scale, intensity, and long-term impact. As identified in the staff report, considerations such as the size of the proposed event venue, the inclusion of overnight accommodations, traffic generation, and potential compatibility impacts were central to the evaluation (Hillyer, Taylor, 2025). Council's decision suggests that these factors were viewed as extending beyond what would typically be considered ancillary or secondary to the rural context.

The case further demonstrates that, in the absence of clearly defined thresholds or criteria for large-scale, hybrid developments, decision-making relies heavily on interpretation. The staff report acknowledged the need to assess the proposal through site-specific zoning provisions and supporting technical studies; however, without more explicit policy direction, this approach can result in differing conclusions between staff and Council and contribute to uncertainty in the evaluation process (Hillyer, Taylor, 2025).

As a case study, Highland Estates illustrates the level of policy change that may be required to accommodate similar proposals in the future. It highlights the need for coordinated amendments between upper-tier and lower-tier planning documents, as well as the importance of clearly defined criteria to manage scale, intensity, and land use compatibility. This example reinforces the value of establishing a proactive and comprehensive policy framework to guide decision-making for rural event venues across Grey County.

5. Other Municipalities

5.1. Haldimand County

Haldimand County is located in southern Ontario along the north shore of Lake Erie, southeast of Hamilton and southwest of the Niagara Region, and operates as a single-tier municipality. The County is predominantly rural and includes several urban communities such as Dunnville, Caledonia, Hagersville, Cayuga, Jarvis, and Townsend, in addition to numerous rural hamlets and agricultural areas. Municipal water and sewer services are generally available in larger urban settlements, whereas the majority of rural properties rely on private wells and septic systems.

Agriculture is a dominant land use within the County, with extensive areas of prime agricultural land supporting crop production, livestock operations, and greenhouse agriculture. In recent years, the County has also experienced growing interest in rural economic diversification, including agritourism, farm-based experiences, and rural event venues.

Rural event venues in Haldimand County are subject to the Haldimand County Official Plan (2024), the Haldimand County Comprehensive Zoning By-law HC-1-2020, and applicable provincial planning policies, including the Provincial Planning Statement.

Agricultural Lands

Agricultural land use policy places a strong emphasis on protecting the long-term viability of agricultural lands while allowing for limited, appropriate diversification. Within this context, agricultural events that exceed the scale of an on-farm diversified use are subject to a more rigorous planning framework to ensure that agricultural priorities are maintained (Haldimand, 2024).

Specifically, larger-scale agricultural events are only permitted temporarily through a Temporary Zoning By-law Amendment. Where such events are intended to occur on a recurring or permanent basis, a full Zoning By-law Amendment is required and must be justified to the satisfaction of the County. Approval is contingent on meeting key criteria, including avoiding specialty crop areas, prioritizing locations on poorer quality soils where no reasonable alternatives exist, and directing such uses to lands that are already fragmented or less suitable for agricultural production due to topography. In addition, proposals must demonstrate compatibility with surrounding agricultural and sensitive land uses and minimize the amount of land removed from active agricultural production (Haldimand, 2024).

Together, these provisions reinforce the principle that larger-scale event uses should only be permitted where they do not undermine the agricultural land base and are carefully located and designed to mitigate potential impacts.

Agricultural events, that are beyond the scale of an on-farm diversified use, shall only be permitted on a temporary basis through a temporary Zoning By-law amendment. Where the event is of a recurring or permanent nature, a Zoning By-law amendment will be required and the use can be justified, to the satisfaction of the County, in accordance with the following criteria:

- i) The land does not comprise a specialty crop area;*
- ii) The use is proposed in an area of poorer quality soils and there are no alternative sites available on poorer agricultural land;*
- iii) The use is proposed in an area where the fragmentation of lands is evident or the topography of the lands is such that the site is less suitable for agriculture;*
- iv) The use is compatible with surrounding agricultural and sensitive uses; and*
- v) The use minimizes land taken out of agricultural production. (Haldimand, 2024).*

Notably, Haldimand County has established Zoning By-law HAL36.455, which provides clear and specific direction regarding what types of events are permitted within an agricultural context:

a) Section 28.1 (Permitted Uses) of the “Agriculture Zone (A)” shall also include:

- i) Overnight accommodations be permitted in the form of the four (4) modular units that currently exist on the site and the five (5) rooms in the clubhouse facility.*
- ii) Corporate meetings and team building events are permitted up to three (3) days in length and may occur up to ten (10) times per year.*
- iii) Receptions and similar social events are permitted up to ten (10) days per year.*
- iv) Cooking demonstrations are permitted up to five (5) times per year.*
- v) Fundraising events, including barbeques, car shows, craft sales, birds of prey demonstrations and similar events, may take place up to ten (10) days per year.*
- vi) The aggregate of all events is permitted to a maximum of forty (40) days per calendar year.*
- vii) The organizer will be required to obtain a clearance letter from the General Manager of Community and Development Services*

prior to the commencement of one of the above noted events.

The following details must be submitted for review:

- a) Submission of a written description of the events and anticipated number of attendees;*
 - b) Submission of a parking plan for the anticipated number of attendees;*
 - c) Description of any outdoor noise associated with the event including identification of the sources and intensities, and the hours at which they will occur;*
 - d) Description of any outdoor activities associated with the event and duration of same;*
 - e) Written clearance from the OPP and Emergency Services (EMS) prior to the event, if required (depends on the type/ scale of the event); and*
 - f) Notice to abutting property owners for any events where more than one hundred (100) people are expected to attend.*
- viii) The uses are to be limited in size and aerial extent to what exists on the date of passing of this by-law (Haldimand, 2020).*

Rural Lands

The Rural designation permits a broader range of land uses; however, these uses are generally directed to designated Hamlets and are not permitted as-of-right, requiring a development application and planning approval.

New commercial, industrial, institutional and agriculturally related uses may also be permitted within Hamlets in accordance with the following criteria:

- a) The use employs a small number of persons, does not require significant quantities of water, does not produce undue amounts of sewage waste and where serviced by an on-site sanitary sewage system, such system is designed and installed as per the Ontario Building Code and such use is compatible with surrounding uses;*
- b) The use will not generate undue noise, traffic, odour, fumes, dust or vibration to the extent of interfering with the ordinary enjoyment of surrounding properties;*
- c) Adequate on-site parking for the use must be provided;*
- d) The development should be buffered, where possible, from adjacent residential areas by planted, landscaped areas;*

- e) *The designation and development of land for industrial purposes shall be considered in accordance with the appropriate Provincial guidelines regarding separation distances between industrial and sensitive land uses; and*
- f) *To the extent possible, commercial, industrial and institutional uses shall be separated from residential uses and shall be consolidated into groups rather than scattered throughout the Hamlet (Haldimand, 2024).*

Establishing a Rural Event Venue in Haldimand County

Applicants seeking to establish a rural event venue within Haldimand County may be required to undertake a range of planning approvals and submit supporting studies depending on the scale and location of the proposal. These reports are noted in the Official Plan.

While certain agritourism uses may be permitted where they meet the definition of on-farm diversified uses, rural event venues are typically not permitted as-of-right within the Agricultural zone due to their scale and potential impacts.

Within the Rural Lands, a wider range of uses may be permitted, including rural residential uses and small-scale rural commercial activities. However, larger tourism or entertainment uses typically require a site-specific zoning amendment.

Site-Specific Zoning

Haldimand County has addressed rural event venues in several instances through site-specific zoning provisions. These amendments allow a specific property to operate an event venue while imposing conditions that regulate the scale and intensity of the use.

Typical regulations within site-specific zones may include:

- maximum building size,
- minimum parking requirements,
- limits on the number of events per year,
- maximum number of attendees per event, and
- restrictions on outdoor events or amplified music.

These site-specific zoning provisions allow the County to manage potential impacts while enabling rural economic diversification.

Summary

Based on the policies contained within the Haldimand County Official Plan and Zoning By-law HC-1-2020, rural event venues are generally not considered permitted uses within the Agricultural designation unless they qualify as on-farm diversified uses.

Larger or more intensive event venues that do not fit within OFDU classification typically require:

- a Zoning By-law Amendment;
- supporting technical studies; and/or
- Site Plan Approval.

Through this approach, Haldimand County seeks to balance opportunities for rural tourism and economic diversification with the protection of prime agricultural land and compatibility with surrounding rural land uses.

5.1.1. Haldimand County Case Study – Cottonwood Mansion Museum

The Cottonwood Mansion Museum case provides a clear example of how Haldimand has used site-specific zoning to recognize and regulate event-related activities within an agricultural context.

Figure 5-1. Cottonwood Mansion Museum (Cottonwood Mansion Museum, n.d.).



Cottonwood Mansion is a historic 1860s estate that operates as a house museum offering tours, educational programming, and a range of events, including weddings, rentals, and community gatherings. These activities are generally small-scale and tied to the heritage function of the

property, such as intimate weddings, cultural programming, and scheduled events that activate the site while maintaining its historic character.

Through Zoning By-law Amendment 1344-HC-23, Haldimand County rezoned the property to a site-specific Agriculture (A.8) zone to formally recognize the existing museum use and its associated activities. The amendment permits a museum and accessory uses, including special events, but introduces a key limitation by restricting such events to a maximum of 10 days per year. It also requires site plan control, ensuring that operational and site-specific considerations are addressed through detailed review.

Importantly, the amendment was intended to reflect and legitimize activities already occurring on-site, acknowledging that the property functions as a cultural and tourism asset within the agricultural area. Rather than treating events as a standalone commercial use or attempting to fit them within agricultural definitions, the municipality clearly framed them as an accessory to the primary museum use.

This case demonstrates a structured and controlled approach to event permissions. By explicitly permitting events as an accessory use, limiting their frequency, and tying them to the principal institutional function, Haldimand County was able to support heritage tourism while maintaining compatibility with the surrounding context.

Figure 5-2. Cottonwood Mansion Museum (Cottonwood Mansion Museum, n.d.).



5.2. Essa Township

Essa Township is located within Simcoe County, in central Ontario, immediately east of Barrie. Essa Township is comprised of 3 communities, Angus, Baxter, and Thornton, plus several smaller

hamlets (Township of Essa, 2012). One of its communities (Angus) has municipal servicing, but the remainder are privately serviced. Its demographics are predominantly middle-aged (i.e. 25-64), with the vast majority working at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Borden.

Rural event venues in Essa Township are subject to the *Official Plan of the Township of Essa* (The Corporation of the Township of Essa, 2001), the *Zoning By-law 2003-50* (The Corporation of the Township of Essa, 2003), and the *County of Simcoe Official Plan* (County of Simcoe, 2013). Essa Township is predominantly comprised of and designated as Agricultural (Schedule A of their OP).

Figure 5-3. Essa Agriplex, a large-scale event venue (2026).



Rural Lands

Section 7.2 of the Essa Township OP allows most types of development within the rural designation. Permitted uses include:

- *those uses permitted in the Agricultural designation,*
- *uses such as forestry, resource management, small-scale industrial, and commercial uses which are agriculturally-related,*
- *home occupation and home industry, farm produce stands, bed and breakfast establishments,*
- *single detached dwelling on existing vacant lots,*

- *Non-agricultural uses such as highway and service commercial, tourist commercial, public use, institutional, kennels, private club and open space may also be permitted,*
- *In filling in accordance with the policies of Section 26.3.1.k is also permitted, and*
- *A garden suite is also a permitted use and is subject to the policies of Section 6.3.14.*

Section 7.3.5 of the Essa Township OP also permits the following uses, subject to an amendment of their ZBL:

Minor non-agricultural rural uses such as highway and service commercial uses, tourist and recreational commercial uses, public uses, institutional uses, private clubs and open space uses may be permitted subject to an amendment to the Zoning By-law.

With the clarification that:

For the purposes of this Section, the term “minor” shall be generally defined as a use having low traffic generation, no nuisance effects on surrounding uses, a scale consistent with existing uses, and no negative environmental impact there shall be recognition of the cumulative impacts of these non-agricultural uses to the surroundings.

While uses are somewhat flexible with the Rural designation, the Essa Township OP includes a strong statement that: *Agricultural uses which exist within the Rural designation shall be preserved and protected from incompatible land uses and shall take precedence over all other land uses* (Section 7.3.1)

Establishing a Rural Event Venue in Essa Township

Applicants seeking to develop a rural event venue on lands that are currently designated as rural may be required to produce the following:

- Agricultural Justification Report (Section 7.3.6) describes why a location within a settlement or a business park area is not more appropriate
- MDSF (Section 7.3.2) to demonstrate that the proposed development would not interfere with or hinder existing or future agricultural operations
- Zoning By-Law amendment (Section 7.3.5) for certain use types
- Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment (Section 13.2.4) where structures or landscapes are identified in the Township’s Cultural Heritage Resource Inventory;
- Archaeological Assessment (Section 13.2.6) where the property contains archaeological resources and/or there is a moderate to high potential for resources;

- Environmental Impact Study (Section 21.3.1.c) where development is proposed within or adjacent to lands designated as Environmental, a natural heritage or a natural hazard feature;
- Permit from Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority (Section 21.3.1.g) where development is occurring within their regulated areas;
- Detailed Hydrogeological and Engineering Design Studies (Section 25.1.c) for certain types of sewage facilities;
- Contaminated Sites Assessment (Section 27.2.1) where sensitive uses are proposed, and contamination may be present; and
- Stormwater Management Plan (27.2.3) at Council’s discretion.

Zoning By-Law

While home occupations are a permitted use within the Agricultural Zone, they are severely limited in their extent, and most rural event venues would not be considered a home occupation. Therefore, event venues would not be a permitted use within the agricultural zone, except where they are considered an OFDU.

The Township of Essa has taken a blanket approach with its rural zone, which has the same permitted uses described in Section 7.2 as their agricultural zone. As such, a rural event venue would not be considered an as-of-right permitted use within the Rural zone. However, as discussed previously, they can be permitted through a ZBA.

Summary

Based on the policies contained within the Essa Township OP and their ZBL, rural event venues are not considered permitted uses within the agricultural or rural designation unless they are considered an OFDU. While the Essa Township OP allows rural event venues within rural lands, as per their OP, they are not considered an as-of-right use, and a site-specific ZBA is required for all proposals. While Essa Township’s OP does not provide a clear list of additional studies and requirements for rural event venues, it provides general policies and requirements for all types of development.

5.3. Essa Township Case Study

5.3.1. Ivy Ridge

Ivy Ridge Weddings and Events offers “dream weddings in the historic spirit of Ivy Ridge” with dedicated ceremony, cocktail, and dinner spaces. They mainly focus on weddings; however, they also host other social or corporate events and large parties (Ivy Ridge Weddings & Events, n.d.).

Located at 7511 9th Line in Essa Township, their event space is nestled into the side of a woodland and surrounded by agricultural uses. The Ivy Orange Hall (a community center) and the Essa Agriplex (hosts fairs and shows) are both located nearby. Within the community of Ivy, there are some lands designated as R1 Low Density Residential; however, outside of the main intersection (9th Line and 20th Sideroad) the remaining lands are generally zoned Rural (Schedule A of the ZBL; Township of Essa, 2003).

Figure 5-4. Ivy Ridge Wedding Space (Ivy Ridge Weddings & Events, n.d.).



As described in **Section 5.2** above, no rural event venue types are permitted within Essa County as of right. In order to permit their current use of the property, Ivy Ridge Weddings and Events (also known as The County Event Facility) sought a ZBA (2020-28).

East Part Lot 21, Concession 9 (7511 9th Line) Country Event Facility (2020-28)

Notwithstanding any provisions of this Zoning By-law, By-law No. 2003-50, to the contrary, on those lands zoned “RL-2” on Schedule “A” of this By-law an on-farm diversified use in the form of a Country Event Facility shall be permitted in addition to all other uses permitted within a “RL” Zone subject to the following:

(1) for the purposes of this subsection a Country Event Facility is defined as a building designated in accordance with the Ontario Building Code to accommodate group gatherings for wedding ceremonies, wedding receptions, wedding showers, engagement parties, anniversaries, birthdays, family reunions, art shows, seminars, debate forums and similar uses;

(2) on those lands zoned “RL-2 Zone”, the following special zoning regulations shall apply:

- Maximum building area – 350 m²
- Minimum number of parking spaces – 70
- Maximum number of events per operational season is in accordance with the current Site Plan Control Agreement applicable to this property
- Maximum cumulative number of persons permitted at one time – 230 (inclusive of all persons related to an event)
- Overnight accommodations, including camping, are prohibited in conjunction with any permitted events (Section 7.4.2.1).

Through this ZBA, the Township of Essa provided a new definition for ‘County Event Venue’ with a description of the permitted uses within the use type. Ivy Ridge also obtained permission to hold events for up to 230 people, but did not obtain permission to accommodate overnight visitors. The Township of Essa opted to use the Site Plan Control process to manage other common issues with rural event venues, like the total number of events per year. Although this document is not publicly available, it can also be used to prescribe restrictions related to parking, traffic, noise, lights, nuisances, etc.

Figure 5-5. Ivy Ridge Wedding Space (Ivy Ridge Weddings & Events, n.d.).



Considerations

Ivy Ridge Wedding & Events has an ideal location within a rural event cluster. It has maintained its boutique atmosphere, where limited services are offered. Many of the structures located at Ivy Ridge and showcased on their website are open-air, whether it be the gazebos or barns within large open doors. While the site-specific ZBA did not require a noise assessment, this is likely due to their location and the existing compatibility with nearby uses.

5.4. Teeswater (Bruce County) Case Study

5.4.1. The Post and Beam

The Post and Beam is “an exclusive, luxurious riverside retreat for private events” located in Teeswater, Ontario (The Post & Beam, 2024a). They offer event space for corporate retreats, weddings (including accommodations), private events, and holiday rentals, in addition to partnering with other local businesses to offer ‘package’ deals for golfing, cannabis or beer tours. In total, they have 10 rooms and accommodation for up to 20 people.

The Post and Beam, which is located at 33 Andrew Street, is at the end of a residential street, with approximately 20 other homes. While it is located within the urban boundary of Teeswater, it fits into the rural event venues category due to its size (approximately 9 ha), location along natural features, and agriculturally-related current and historic uses (as shown in Figure 5-6 below). The remaining properties along Andrew Street are zoned R1 Low-Density Residential. R1 zoning permits single detached dwellings, duplexes, accessory residential uses (ARUs), and Home Occupation – Domestic and Professional, as well as Home Occupation – Bed & Breakfast Establishment, among other uses (Section 8.2 of the ZBL).

Figure 5-6. The Post and Beam Event Space (Bruce County, 2026).

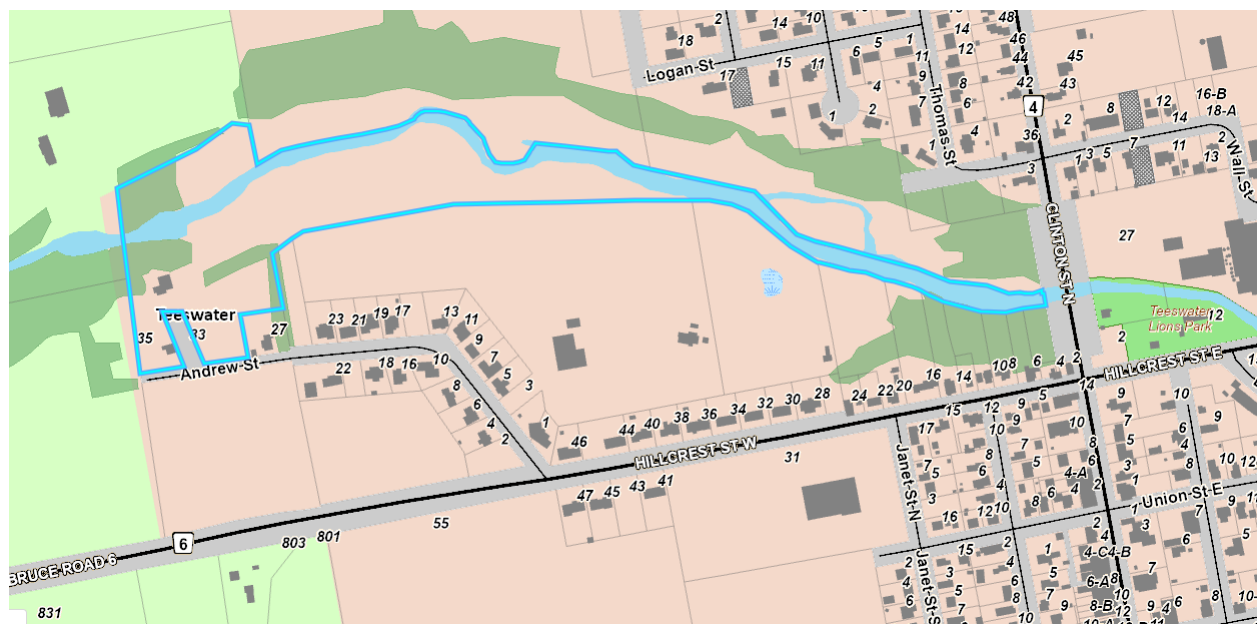


Figure 5-7. The Post and Beam Event Space (The Post & Beam, 2024a).



To support the use of the property as a rural event venue, a site-specific ZBA was obtained (By-law No. 2023-20),

South Bruce By-law No. 2023-20 (Dalgard and Billings,– Con 7 Pt Lot 18 Plan 144;Park Pt Lot15 Andrew St Pt;Blk J Water Course And Tail;Race Over 2-144 [33 Andrew St], Teeswater)

8.5.4 Notwithstanding their 'R1' zoning designation, those lands delineated as 'R1-4-H' on Schedule 'A' to this By-law shall be used in compliance with the 'R1' zone provisions contained in this By-law, and shall comply with the following regulations which shall prevail in the event of conflict:

(i) Outdoor weddings and similar outdoor ceremonies shall be a permitted 'Home Occupation – Domestic and Professional Use' and shall comply with the following regulations which shall prevail in the event of conflict with Section 3.9 Section 3.8 of By-law No. 2011-63:

a) The maximum number of people permitted per ceremony shall be 100, including but not limited to guests, vendors, the property owners and two (2) assistants.

b) The ceremonies, including set-up and clean-up, shall be permitted Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday between the hours of 10:00 am and 8:00 pm local time.

- c) Portable washroom facilities shall be provided.*
- d) The ceremonies shall not include a reception; and*
- e) The 'H' Holding Zone provision may only be removed by Council once the following conditions have been met:*
 - a. A traffic analysis has been received to the satisfaction of the Zoning Administrator and Operations Manager at the Municipality of South Bruce and the recommendations of that report (if any) have been implemented to the satisfaction of the Zoning Administrator and Operations Manager.*
 - b. The number of off-street parking spaces has been confirmed to the satisfaction of the Zoning Administrator and Operations Manager at the Municipality of South Bruce; and*
 - c. A detailed Site Plan has been received to the satisfaction of the Zoning Administrator and Operations Manager at the Municipality of South Bruce and the details of that Site Plan have been implemented to the satisfaction of the Zoning Administrator and Operations Manager, including but not limited to installation of off-street parking in accordance with II. above.*

Through this site-specific ZBA, the Post and Beam obtained permission to hold ceremonies (i.e. events), with up to 100 people in attendance. The ZBA required that traffic and parking be considered, but did not include any noise provisions. While it specifically prohibits 'reception' type events, this is a somewhat vague use type that is not defined. Instead, they rely on Section 3.9, which outlines that "The Home Occupation - Domestic and Professional Uses shall not create or become a 'nuisance' in regard to noise, odours, vibrations, traffic generated or parking."

While the site-specific ZBA provided permissions for the Post and Beam to hold wedding ceremonies, it does not consider their use as an overnight accommodation. Bed and Breakfast Establishments, which are a permitted use within the R1 and subsequently R1-4-H zone only permit up to 3 guest rooms or 6 guests; the Post and Beam currently have 10 rooms for up to 20 guests (The Post & Beam, 2024b). Based on their current accommodation options, they would fit under the definition of a Hotel/Motel within the ZBL which permits over 6 guest rooms, recreational facilities, restaurants, etc.

Considerations

The Post and Beam has a less-than-ideal location at the end of a rural residential road with lots of neighbours in close proximity. While they initially received a ZBA to permit weddings and corporate events, they have since expanded their business model significantly to also include motel-like accommodations and other services. As not all documents are publicly available (i.e. Site Plan Approval and any other contracts), it is difficult to determine whether additional agreements have since been implemented that permit these additional uses. Nevertheless, this case study is a prime example of the challenges faced by municipalities in the approval of varying and growing rural event venues and the challenges of ensuring compliance.

Figure 5-8. The Post and Beam Event Space (The Post & Beam, 2024a)



6. Ontario Building Code

In addition to the relevant planning policies at the provincial, county and local level, rural event venues are also subject to the Ontario Building Code (OBC; collectively Government of Ontario, 1992; Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2025a-b).

The OBC was implemented to regulate the construction, demolition, conversion, and general use of buildings to address ongoing and future/potential risks to public health and safety and property across the province. In 2025, the OBC received significant updates to ‘catch up’ to modernizations in construction, including changes to construction methods, building types and uses.

Where the use of a building or structure is primarily agricultural occupancy, there are fewer requirements to be met under the OBC; most of which relate to fire protection, occupant safety, hazardous substances, and structural loads (Volume 1, Part 2). However, the OBC classifies building types based on their occupancy; and therefore, once a building has more than 1 person per 40 m², the building is considered a major occupancy, and the agricultural exemptions no longer apply (Volume 1, Part 2, Section 2.1.2.2(2)).

This can pose significant challenges to those looking to open a rural event venue, specifically those intending to upgrade or use existing agricultural facilities like barns. As the use type has changed, the structure or building now has substantially more requirements to be met under the building code (Volume 1, Part 3). This includes fire protection and safety, accessibility and barrier-free design, height and area of rooms, window and door/exit designs, roof coverings, glass, plumbing, food, among others.

7. Discussion

7.1. Feedback from Online Sources

A review of online sources, including local news articles and municipal planning materials, highlights several recurring concerns related to rural event venues within Grey County and surrounding municipalities.

A key issue identified is the appropriateness of rural event venues within agricultural areas, particularly in relation to on-farm diversified use policies. In Grey County, a proposed wedding venue was refused after planning staff and council determined that the use did not meet the criteria for an on-farm diversified use and was not appropriate within the agricultural designation (CollingwoodToday, 2024a).

Compliance and enforcement challenges are also evident. In Grey Highlands, a rural event venue sought retroactive planning approvals after being constructed and operated without the required permits, raising concerns about the municipality's ability to regulate development and ensure compliance with planning policies and regulations (CollingwoodToday, 2024b).

Noise impacts are consistently identified as a concern in both public discussions and municipal processes. In the Town of The Blue Mountains, municipal staff reports highlight noise associated with event-based uses as an ongoing issue requiring consideration through by-law enforcement and regulatory controls (Town of The Blue Mountains, 2024).

7.2. Feedback from Highland Estates, Spy Cider House and Distillery

Feedback gathered from the Highland Estates and Spy Cider House and Distillery project examples reveal several consistent themes related to policy clarity, process coordination, and the management of land use impacts.

The Highland Estates proposal highlights the challenges that arise when existing policy frameworks do not clearly address the scale and nature of rural event venues. A key issue identified through both the application materials and stakeholder feedback was the absence of clear direction on whether the use should be classified as an on-farm diversified use, a resource-based recreational use, or a standalone commercial operation. This resulted in differing interpretations between the County and local municipality, particularly regarding the need for an Official Plan Amendment. The lack of alignment created uncertainty in the review process and contributed to complexities in decision-making (Cole, 2026).

From a land use compatibility perspective, the Highland Estates application raised significant concerns related to noise, servicing, and the intensity of use. The proposal had been operating

without full approvals prior to the application, which negatively affected public trust and heightened community opposition. Noise impacts emerged as the most prominent issue, requiring detailed technical review and the use of peer-reviewed acoustic studies to support the evaluation. Despite staff recommendations that considered the proposal acceptable with conditions, Council ultimately refused the application, reflecting the weight of public concerns and the perceived risk of setting a precedent for similar developments (Cole, 2026).

In contrast, the Spy Cider House and Distillery application demonstrates a more supportive and streamlined approval process, largely due to stronger alignment with policy intent and positive community reception. The proposal was generally consistent with the concept of an on-farm diversified use and did not present the same level of conflict with surrounding land uses. Council supported the project due to demonstrated economic benefits and an established track record of events without complaints (Cole, 2026).

The Spy case also illustrates how municipalities can manage these uses through site-specific zoning provisions, including controls on the timing and frequency of events. However, it also revealed challenges in existing policy and regulatory tools. Staff identified challenges in defining key terms such as “special event venue” and distinguishing these uses from broader commercial activities. (Cole, 2026).

Across both case studies, several key lessons emerge. First, there is a clear need for more precise and consistent policy language to guide the classification and evaluation of rural event venues. Ambiguity in definitions for small to large-scale operations that do not fall under an OFDU can lead to inconsistent interpretations. Second, coordination between the County and local municipalities is critical to ensure a unified approach to approvals, required studies, and policy application. Third, managing operational impacts such as noise, traffic, and frequency of events requires clearly defined performance standards that can be implemented and enforced over time.

Overall, these examples demonstrate that while rural event venues can support economic diversification, their successful integration into rural areas depends on clear policy direction, strong inter-municipal coordination, and proactive management of land use impacts.

8. Key Issues

8.1. Key Issue #1 – Clear Definitions

A primary issue is the lack of clear definitions. Presently, rural events are often interpreted through related categories such as on-farm diversified uses, agri-tourism, tourist commercial uses, assembly uses, or resource-based recreational uses. This creates uncertainty for applicants, staff, and councils. It can lead to inconsistent interpretations between approval authorities. Clear definitions are needed for rural event venue, special event venue, agri-tourism, and associated accessory uses to establish a common understanding and improve decision-making consistency.

However, the challenge may not rest solely with the absence or quality of definitions themselves, but also with the inherently large classification of event venues. Rural event venues often span multiple use categories depending on their scale, frequency, location, and operational uses. For example, a single venue may function as an agricultural use when tied to farm operations, a tourism use when attracting visitors, and an assembly use when hosting large gatherings. This overlap makes it difficult to neatly classify event venues within a single definition, even where definitions do exist.

As a result, the issue may be less about creating entirely new definitions and more about recognizing that event venues do not fit cleanly into one category. A more efficient approach may involve clarifying how event venues are to be interpreted across multiple use permissions or establishing a framework that identifies when and how a use transitions between categories. Without this clarity, even well-defined terms may continue to produce ambiguity and inconsistent application across municipalities.

8.2. Key Issue #2 – Distinction Between Small-Scale Farm & Large-Scale Commercial

A related issue is the need to distinguish between small-scale farm-based events and larger commercial operations. Provincial policy supports on-farm diversified uses only where they are secondary to the principal agricultural operation. Many recent proposals, however, include weddings, catering, amplified music, and overnight stays in a way that begins to function as a standalone commercial business. Policy should more clearly identify when a proposal remains an on-farm diversified use and when it becomes a separate commercial land use requiring a higher level of review by the County and its member municipalities.

It is recommended that the County establish a clear policy framework that distinguishes between small-scale, farm-based events permitted as on-farm diversified uses and larger, standalone commercial event operations. This framework should introduce defined criteria and thresholds

that determine when an event use remains secondary to the principal agricultural operation and when it transitions into a commercial land use.

Key considerations should include the scale and frequency of events, number of attendees, extent of built form, provision of services such as catering and overnight accommodations, parking requirements, and the degree to which the use generates traffic, noise, and other off-site impacts. Where these factors exceed defined thresholds, the use should no longer be considered accessory to agriculture and should instead be classified as a commercial or assembly-type use.

The policy should also require applicants to demonstrate that on-farm diversified event uses remain clearly subordinate to and supportive of the agricultural operation. For proposals that meet or exceed the established thresholds, a higher level of planning review should be triggered.

8.3. Key Issue #3 – Scale and Intensity

The third key issue is the lack of clear thresholds for scale and intensity. Municipalities are frequently left to determine on a site-specific basis what is an acceptable number of events, parking, hours of operations, and building size and type. This creates uncertainty and raises concerns about precedent. Grey County would benefit from clearer policy direction on scale, frequency, and intensity so that proposals can be assessed more consistently across the County.

8.4. Key Issue #4 – Land Use Compatibility

Land use compatibility is also a central issue. The case studies presented in this report identify noise, traffic, lighting, servicing, and neighbourhood impacts as the main concerns brought forth by the community and municipality staff. These issues are especially significant where venues are located closer to residences or active farm operations. Stronger compatibility criteria are needed to guide setbacks, buffering, event timing, outdoor vs indoor activity, and other operational impacts.

8.5. Key Issue #5 – Overnight Accommodations and Ancillary Uses

Another key issue is the treatment of overnight accommodation and ancillary uses. These hybrid developments that look to incorporate cabins, camping, glamping, bed and breakfast, or other accommodations create more intensive use of the land, and create additional servicing, environmental, and other compatibility concerns. Policy should clarify whether and where such uses would be permitted, or considered, and whether they should be evaluated separately from the event venue itself.

Specific attention should be given to bed and breakfast uses within the existing residential building on the property. A modest bed and breakfast in an existing dwelling may be appropriate as an accessory use in rural contexts, particularly where it remains clearly secondary and limited

in scale. However, policy should prevent this type of use from gradually expanding into a larger inn, lodge, or motel-style operation. Clear limitations should be established on matters such as the number of guest rooms, whether meals will be provided, if new accommodation buildings are permitted, and when a proposal exceeds the scope of a bed and breakfast and must instead be treated as a commercial accommodation use.

8.6. Key Issue #6 – Servicing Capacity

Servicing capacity on privately serviced rural lands may become another issue. Event venues and associated accommodations can place significant demands on existing wells, septic systems, stormwater facilities, and rural roads. Grey County should provide clearer direction by establishing defined thresholds and criteria that trigger the requirement for technical studies, such as servicing capacity, hydrogeological, traffic, and noise assessments and explore when temporary servicing, such as portable toilets, may be considered. This direction should specify when such studies are required based on factors such as event size, frequency, site intensity, and introduction of features like overnight accommodation or permanent event structures, ensuring that potential impacts are appropriately evaluated and managed.

8.7. Key Issue #7 – Protections of Agricultural Land

Protection of agricultural land remains a key policy concern. In prime agricultural areas, event-related uses must not undermine the long-term viability of farming, remove significant land from production or create conflicts with normal farm practices. Policy should continue to clearly distinguish between opportunities that support farm viability and uses that are more appropriately directed to rural or settlement areas.

8.8. Key Issue #8 – Planning Structure

There is also an implementation challenge with Grey County’s two-tier planning structure. The Highland Estates example showed that inconsistent interpretation between the County and its member municipalities can complicate the approval process. Clearer County-level policy and shared guidance would help create a more consistent approach across all the member municipalities.

8.9. Key Issue #9 – Enforcement and Compliance

Lastly, enforcement and compliance should be considered. Several case studies show that even where approvals are granted, municipalities may face challenges in monitoring event frequency, noise, attendance, and unauthorized expansion of uses. Grey County and member municipalities should consider whether zoning, site plan control, licensing, or other tools are needed to better manage operations after their approval.

9. Recommendations

Based on the review of the current policies within Grey County and other comparable rural municipalities across Southern Ontario, the following approach is recommended for regulating rural event venues:

County Level

Rural event venues, including a range of types, scales and operational characteristics, should be permitted within rural designations, subject to a site-specific Zoning By-Law Amendment and appropriate supporting studies. The County Official Plan should establish overarching policy direction, including evaluation criteria and a standardized list of potential studies (i.e. noise, traffic, servicing, environmental), while allowing flexibility for refinement at the local level.

Evaluation criteria could include, for example, the scale and intensity of the proposed use (e.g., maximum number of attendees, frequency of events), the extent of built form and permanent infrastructure, and whether the use remains secondary to a principal agricultural or rural use. Additional considerations may include compatibility with surrounding land uses (including minimum separation distances and buffering), impacts on rural road networks and access, adequacy of private servicing (wells, septic systems, stormwater management), and potential noise or nuisance effects on nearby sensitive receptors. Environmental constraints such as natural heritage features, floodplains, and topography should also be assessed, along with the extent to which the proposal minimizes the removal of land from active agricultural production.

By establishing these types of criteria at the County level, Grey County can support a more consistent and transparent approach to evaluating rural event venue applications, while still allowing municipalities to tailor site-specific zoning provisions based on local context and technical findings.

Local Official Plan Level

Local municipalities should permit rural event venues within rural areas where appropriate, subject to a site-specific Zoning By-Law Amendment and supporting studies. Local Official Plans should provide clear direction on required and optional studies, as well as criteria related to scale, intensity, compatibility, and servicing. This will support consistent and transparent decision-making aligned with County policy.

Local Zoning By-Law Level

Rural event venues should not be permitted as-of-right in any land use zone. Instead, all proposals should proceed through a site-specific Zoning By-Law Amendment process. Zoning By-Laws

should include clear and explicit definitions for rural event venues and related uses, along with standardization provisions that can be applied through site-specific exceptions to regulate scale, intensity, and operational impacts.

Best practices for zoning by-law implementation include establishing a consistent suite of core provisions that are applied to all approved event venues, with flexibility to refine them through site-specific zoning. These provisions may include maximum attendance limits, caps on the number of events per year, and defined hours of operation (particularly for amplified sound). Zoning should also address built form by limiting the size, location, and permanence of event-related structures, and clearly regulating accessory uses such as food service areas or accommodations.

Additional best practices include requiring minimum setbacks, buffering, and landscaping to protect adjacent agricultural and rural residential uses, as well as specifying parking standards, access requirements, and internal circulation. Zoning provisions can also incorporate performance-based standards informed by technical studies, such as noise limits at property lines, demonstrated servicing capacity for private wells and septic systems, and requirements tied to road capacity or traffic impacts.

To improve consistency across applications, municipalities and/or the County may also develop standard zoning templates or schedules for rural event venues that outline typical provisions, which can then be tailored through site-specific exceptions. This approach supports greater predictability while still allowing flexibility to respond to unique site conditions. Overall, embedding these best practices within zoning by-laws helps ensure that rural event venues are appropriately scaled, compatible with their surroundings, and supported by clear, defensible planning controls.

9.1. Grey County Official Plan

OPA 23 to the Grey County OP already provides for some additional event venue usage types within rural lands, including on Agricultural land, and as OFDUs. However, larger-scale rural event venues may require a site-specific OPA.

Moving forward, we recommend that Grey County:

- Continue providing definitions for rural event venues and associated land-use types;
- Consider implementing the idea of rural event clusters by including a definition, and/or identifying suitable areas where they might be preferred;
- Add in language that requires all local municipalities to adopt policies into their OP that are related to rural event venues, specifically that require:
 - A site-specific ZBA for all rural event venues; and

- A list of mandatory and supplementary studies and reports.
- Continue to permit rural event venues within rural land designations, subject to a site-specific ZBA and the completion of necessary studies (as determined through pre-consultation).

At the County level, we recommend that the following reports be identified to support all Rural Event Venues:

- Planning Justification Report;
- Traffic Management Plan;
- Hydrogeological and Servicing Studies; and
- Noise Impact Assessment.
- Detailed site plan, showing all structures, setbacks, parking areas, signage, lighting, garbage storage areas, servicing (well, septic, stormwater, etc.), mapped natural heritage features, fencing, etc.

Where additional site-specific features are present, within the property or on nearby properties, the following additional reports may also be required:

- Agricultural Impact Assessment;
- Minimum Distance Separation (MDS) Setbacks;
- Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment;
- Archaeological Assessment;
- Environmental Impact Study and/or Arborist Report;
- Contaminated Sites Assessment; and
- Stormwater Management Plan.
- Landscaping Plan

As for all development within the County, additional permits and approvals may be required from other levels of government, including but not limited to:

- Permit/Approval from regulating conservation authority; and
- Environmental Compliance Approval, from the MECP.

The number and scope of supplemental studies and approvals required should be discussed during a pre-consultation meeting with the County and the local municipality.

9.2. Local Municipal Official Plans

As seen through our review of the Town of The Blue Mountains OP and the Municipality of Grey Highlands OP, most (if not all) of the local municipalities within Grey County do not contain any policies, definitions, or requirements for rural event venues.

For the local municipalities, a similar approach as described in **Section 9.1** is recommended. In order for the approval process for rural event venues to flow smoothly, for both the planners and the public, County and Local OPs must be updated concurrently to reflect the same goals and objectives, and the local OP builds upon the County OP. As such, we have provided the following recommendations:

- Update definitions for rural event venues and associated land-use types to match those used within the County OP, add in new and diverse definitions as the economy changes;
- Add in language that requires all rural event venues to complete;
 - A site-specific ZBA; and
 - A list of mandatory and supplementary studies and reports.

The list of required and supplementary studies and reports, and additional approvals, as described in **Section 9.1** should remain the same within the local OP.

9.3. Local Zoning-Bylaws

Similar to the local OPs, most local ZBLs within Grey County do not contain policies, definitions, or requirements for rural event venues. To support the proposed changes to the County OP as described in **Section 9.1**, and the proposed changes to the Local OP's as described in **Section 9.2**. The following additional updates are recommended:

- Continue permitting OFDUs in agricultural areas, in accordance with provincial legislation;
- Continue to require site-specific zoning by-law amendment for rural event venues. For clarity, rural event venues should not be considered as an 'as-of-right' use; and
- Ensure that definitions are clear, consistent with local and county OP's, and are updated frequently to ensure that they represent the current economic market and event types.

Within a site-specific ZBA, it is important to include the following details:

- Type of rural event venue (including a definition if it is not already a pre-defined use);
- The portion of the property to be used as part of the rural event venue;
- The type of events;

- The maximum number of events to be held each year (using Spy Cider as an example, allowing for a maximum of 22 events per year would allow the venue to hold an event each weekend during the peak season);
- The maximum number of occupants at each event should be established based on the site-specific factors such as lot size, parking capacity, servicing limitations and proximity to sensitive uses;
- Whether the event venue will also be utilizing other as-of-right zoning permissions, such as the bed & breakfast or hotel provisions (including a specification on the number of rooms and their location). As a guideline, properties that will be utilizing an existing residential dwelling should be limited to the existing by-law for bed and breakfast use. If additional permanent or temporary structures are being introduced, those limits need to be established based on site-specific factors such as lot size, parking capacity, servicing limitations and proximity to sensitive uses; and
- Whether additional studies are required before lifting a holding provision (i.e. noise assessment, traffic impact assessment, etc.).

In many situations, it is also advisable to prepare a contract between the rural event venue and the local municipality. This contract should outline any additional concerns and how the event venue intends to address those concerns over the short and long-term. This agreement could include further details on how the business intends to comply with other local bylaws, such as garbage, noise, property standards, etc. In some instances, the preparation of pamphlets for both nearby residents and facility attendees is a great opportunity to educate, show respect for, and truly appreciate the local community.

9.4. Best Practices for Applicants

Applying for a site-specific Zoning By-law Amendment can be a complex process that requires careful planning, coordination, and communication. The following best practices are intended to help applicants better understand expectations, avoid common challenges, and improve the overall efficiency of the review process. Taking a proactive and informed approach from the outset can help streamline approvals and lead to stronger, more successful development proposals.

1. Engage Qualified Professionals Early

- Work with a Registered Professional Planner (RPP) to guide and manage the application process;
- Retain additional experts as needed, such as engineers, environmental consultants, acoustic specialists, or architects; and

- Ensure all studies and materials are prepared by qualified professionals.

2. Participate in a Pre-Submission Consultation Meeting

- Meet with municipal planning staff early to confirm project requirements and to identify potential concerns;
- Consult with both the County and member municipalities, where applicable; and
- Be honest, open, and up front about project goals, priorities, and hurdles.

3. Understand the Policy Framework

- Review the County and member municipality Official Plans, the Zoning By-law, and other applicable legislation (i.e. provincial planning statement, noise bylaws, etc.);
- Ensure your proposal aligns with applicable policies and demonstrates good planning; and
- Clearly demonstrate through your application how your proposal fits within the broader planning context.

4. Be Realistic About Timelines and Budget

- Recognize that planning applications can take time, especially if revisions or additional supporting materials are needed;
- Budget for application fees, consultation costs, and supporting studies; and
- Allow flexibility for unexpected delays or additional work.

5. Prioritize Meaningful and Early Public Engagement

- Speak with neighbours and project stakeholders early in the process;
- Clearly communicate your proposal and listen to feedback; and
- Demonstrate in your application how community input has been considered in your design.

6. Design with Context in Mind

- Ensure the proposal 'fits' within the surrounding land uses and community character;
- Consider building height, proposal scale, and its compatibility with adjacent properties; and
- Address potential impacts such as privacy, shadowing, and noise.

7. Minimize Impacts on Infrastructure and Natural Features

- Incorporate design approaches that reduce strain on infrastructure;
- Consider low-impact options such as advanced septic systems and permeable paving; and
- Limit tree removal and protect natural heritage features, wherever possible.

8. Prepare a Complete and High-Quality Submission

- Submit all required materials as outlined by the County and member municipality during the pre-consultation process;
- Ensure plans and reports are clear, consistent, and professionally prepared; and
- Double-check submissions to avoid delays caused by incomplete applications or errors in submission materials.

9. Be Responsive and Collaborative

- Respond to municipal and agency comments promptly;
- Be open to revising plans and addressing feedback; and
- Maintain clear and ongoing communication with staff.

10. Anticipate Council and Public Considerations

- Understand that Council decisions are influenced by planning merit and public input;
- Be prepared to clearly explain the purpose and benefits of your proposal; and
- Consider how your application will be perceived by the broader community.

11. Think Long-Term

- Consider how the proposal will function, evolve, and/or grow over time;
- Plan for servicing, maintenance, and future compatibility with surrounding uses; and
- Demonstrate long-term sustainability and good planning practices.

12. Overall Approach

- Focus on early planning, clear communication, and thoughtful design;
- Take a proactive and collaborative approach throughout the process; and
- Going beyond minimum requirements can help strengthen relationships, creating a smoother and more efficient approval process.

10. Conclusion

Rural event venues represent a growing and evolving component of Grey County's rural economy. As demonstrated throughout this report, these uses can support farm viability, enhance tourism, and contribute to local economic development. However, they also introduce complex planning considerations, particularly where proposals increase in scale, intensity, or deviate from traditional agricultural or OFDU's.

The review of provincial policy, Grey County's existing framework, and comparable municipalities highlights that the primary challenge is not whether rural event venues should be permitted, but rather how they should be regulated. Current approaches, which rely heavily on case-by-case evaluations and site-specific zoning amendments, provide flexibility but lack consistency and clarity. This can result in uncertainty for applicants, inefficiencies in the approval process, and difficulties in managing land use compatibility and long-term impacts.

The case studies further reinforce the importance of clear policy direction. Projects that align with agricultural uses and are supported by well-defined conditions are more likely to be approved and accepted by the community. In contrast, proposals that exceed existing policy frameworks or lack clear classification can face significant opposition and uncertainty. These examples demonstrate the need for a more proactive and coordinated policy approach.

Moving forward, Grey County can strengthen its policy framework by establishing clear definitions, thresholds for scale and intensity, and consistent evaluation criteria. Improved alignment between the County and its member municipalities will be critical to ensuring a unified and transparent approach. In addition, stronger tools for managing operational impacts and enforcing conditions will help maintain compatibility with surrounding rural and agricultural uses.

In conclusion, a clear, consistent, and coordinated policy framework will enable Grey County to support appropriate rural event venues while protecting agricultural land, maintaining rural character, and addressing community concerns. By proactively addressing these issues, the County can better position itself to manage future development pressures and support sustainable rural growth.

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