

OFFICIAL PLAN UPDATE

REPORT ON MAJOR POLICY REVISIONS

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CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF ARMOUR

P.O. Box 533
Burk's Falls, Ontario
P0A 1C0

Planning Consultant:

Robert J. Miller, MCIP
Registered Professional Planner

Background

The Armour Township Official Plan is a strong land use statement of Council dating to the late 1980's and early 1990's. It was brought into full force in April 1995 as modified by the Minister and by the Ontario Municipal Board.

A five-year review of the Official Plan was done in 2001 as required by the Planning Act. After agency review and public meetings, Armour Council resolved to make no changes to the document. The Armour Official Plan is a unique document with strong environmental policies and has functioned well over its first decade.

Update Now Required

The new Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) came into effect on March 1, 2005 and the Armour Township Official Plan is being revised to “be consistent with” the intent of the PPS. All municipalities in Ontario are required to do this under the regulations of the Planning Act.

Using the Official Plan

In working to update and improve the Official Plan, I would suggest that Council think about how the document is meant to be used. On a daily basis, any ratepayer or Councillor or staff should be able to consult the Official Plan for guidance in resolving land use issues and assessing proposed changes to the use of land in the municipality.

Disagreements about the intent of Official Plan policies are often before the Ontario Municipal Board and for this reason it is imperative that Council make its intended policies known in clear understandable English. The ease of understanding the policies is vital and their language must be as simple as possible to read crystal clear in their intent.

Major Issues Needing Revised Policies

There are many straight-forward and obvious “housekeeping changes” that will help bring the Official Plan into consistency with the PPS. But there are three major issues that demand strong new policy to maintain and improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of the municipality. They are:

1. Protection of local ecosystems, in particular wetlands and recreational lakes and rivers, from the effects of new development.
2. Simplifying procedures to allow more people to live in the rural areas of

the municipality. The existing consent policies are extremely difficult to work with. Low birthrates, school enrollment declines, and the wave of retirees are issues best met with straight-forward consent policies in the rural areas where people enjoy living.

3. The widening of Highway 11 caused the end of many small businesses along the highway corridor. Millions of dollars of assessment revenue was lost to the municipality. New policies should encourage commercial redevelopment between interchanges where road improvements and parts of the old highway have now provided accessible service roads with no seasonal load limits.

1. WATERFRONT AREAS

- In southeast Parry Sound District, and more-so in Muskoka, the best waterfront lands are already developed. What remains are lands difficult to access or with development constraints such as steep slopes or sensitive shorelines.
- Prices of waterfront lands are skyrocketing, thereby making alterations to difficult shorelines practical. The visual impact of such alterations often has a negative impact on the shoreline character.
- Smaller cottages are being replaced by larger year-round homes. Many family cottages have multiple generations of families using them.
- Winter use of waterfront dwellings is increasing.
- There is a growing tendency for guest sleeping cabins and boat houses.
- Shared or “fractional” ownership of waterfront dwellings is a booming trend in Muskoka and becoming common in Parry Sound.
- Commercial properties such as camps and resorts are being converted to condominium developments and fractional ownership plans with private road access.
- Recent research shows that phosphorus from septic systems is actually quite immobile in common geochemical conditions found on the Canadian Shield. Many biological lake capacity models, including those used in the Official Plan research, have defined capacity limits impossible to defend before the Ontario Municipal Board.

- The municipality does not have jurisdiction to control the intensity of activity on the water. This is under the jurisdiction of Transport Canada. Studies to determine surface area ratios per dwelling have not been done for the lakes in the Township in order to establish recreational carrying capacities that could translate for development limits for each waterbody.

The above issues regularly lead to problems such as:

- Decreased water quality and destruction of habitat
- Noise and light problems
- Boat and car traffic complaints
- Increased demand for Township services such as road maintenance, waste disposal and fire protection

The Technical Support Section - Northern Region of the Ministry of the Environment advises *“the composition of the [Armour Township] lakes and water quality may have changed over the past 10 years. . . . In order to determine the current development capacity of the lakes in Armour, lakeshore capacity studies will need to be completed.”*

Recommended New Policies

- Close all recreational lakes to new lots and condominium units until such time as lake development capacity studies have been completed. Such studies will involve Official Plan Amendments with lake-specific policies.
- Put all existing waterfront lots under Site Plan Control to ensure lot-specific conditions are implemented for development of existing vacant lots of record and major redevelopments.
- Require higher level sewage treatment systems for all new development on existing waterfront lots of record and for all major renovations or property redevelopments.

2. RURAL RESIDENTIAL CONSENTS

One of the more complex issues for the Planning Board and the Township Council and staff is applications for consent to sever land into smaller parcels. The present policies in the Armour Official Plan reflect a time when measured infilling between existing houses was the preferred approach. This is a numbers game and often involves dating the construction of houses to somehow define “existing”. These policies need to be simplified.

Section 1.1.4 of the PPS deals with Rural Areas in Municipalities as follows:

“Development that is compatible with the rural landscape and can be sustained by rural service levels should be promoted.”

The land divisions policies for consents in the rural community of Armour Township should be revised to:

- Maintain the characteristic appearance of the open natural landscape.
- Encourage a dispersed development pattern, and discourage the appearance of a continuous row of houses.
- Allow backlot consents in the rural community if they are at least 300m (1000 feet) from the lake shoreline.
- Encourage large lots in the rural community with wide frontages of at least 60m (200 feet) and areas of at least .8ha (2 acres) as per the policies in the current Armour Official Plan.
- Require the average lot area of the severed and retained parcels in the rural community to be not less than 10 acres except for smaller existing lots of record (2006), fronting on a road assumed and maintained year-round by Armour, which are allowed to be severed once if each new lot would have 60m frontage.
- Prevent consents in the rural community with frontage and access via private road only.
- Allow a second dwelling on lots that would otherwise meet all of the criteria for a consent containing the building envelope of the second dwelling.
- Prevent entrances that would create a traffic hazard in the opinion of the Armour Road Supervisor.
- Require all sewage disposal and water supply systems for any lot to be on-site.

3. COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION ALONG HIGHWAY 11

There will be pressure for new commercial ventures along the new service roads and especially at the new interchanges on Highway 11. We need to think

of these areas as sort of “economic development gateways” now that all other points of access to Highway 11 have been closed off.

One of the major requirements for business in the rural area is municipal road access with a heavy base unhindered by seasonal load limits. The following roads in Armour have been designated with a red “C” as commercial development corridors on the attached draft Land Use Plan:

- Berriedale Road from Rotarco to Pevensey Road (with MTO upgrade)
- Municipal lands on Highway 520 West
- Highway 520 South
- North side of Pegg’s Mountain Road (with possible base upgrade)