



# Township of Essa New Official Plan

Engagement Summary #2  
June 2025



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## 1.0 Introduction

Like every municipality, the Township of Essa has an Official Plan, a key document that lays out where and how we plan to grow into the future, and guides where we live, work, and play. The Township's current Official Plan was put into effect on July 6, 2001. In 2020, the Township of Essa started developing a new Official Plan to bring the document into conformity with the latest provincial policies and community interests. The Official Plan Review was placed on hold in 2022 while the Township engaged with the Province and County of Simcoe to better understand the impact of legislative changes. Engagement on the New Official Plan resumed in August 2024.

A first round of engagement was conducted in the fall of 2024, as summarized in Engagement Summary #1. The outcomes of that round of engagement alongside background research informed the development of a set of key policy directions as well as criteria and data gathering around settlement boundary expansion in Essa, in order to accommodate future residential growth. The second round of engagement summarized in this report was conducted in June 2025 to gather feedback on these topics.

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## 2.0 What We Heard Overview

This summary provides an overview of the in-person and online public engagement held in June 2025. Please refer to the project website for summaries of past engagements that were completed in earlier stages of the review for the Essa Official Plan, which are also being considered and feedback brought forward into the current development of the new Official Plan: <https://www.essatownship.on.ca/official-plan-review/>

### 1.1 Community Session

An in-person session was held at the Essa Township offices in Council Chambers on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025 from 6:30-8:30pm. Approximately 35 people attended the session. Poster boards were set up for residents to share their input on the key policy directions and potential locations for settlement boundary expansions. The key feedback heard included:

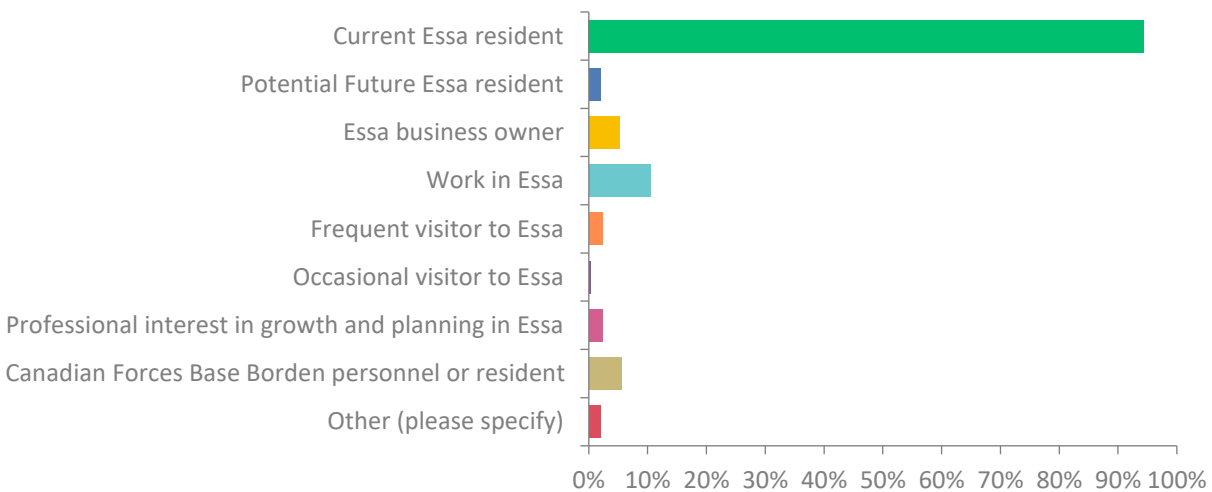
- Input from landowners about potential lands to be considered as part of the settlement area boundary expansion around Angus and Baxter.
  - Need for adequate parking to support residential growth.
  - Need for more commercial and retail access and supporting services for the growing community.
  - Importance of protecting the natural environment.
  - Need for allowing more flexibility in permissions for rural areas, to support more small-scale business growth.
  - Need for recreational spaces and interest in the approach to planning for access to parks and recreational areas.
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## 1.2 Online Survey #2

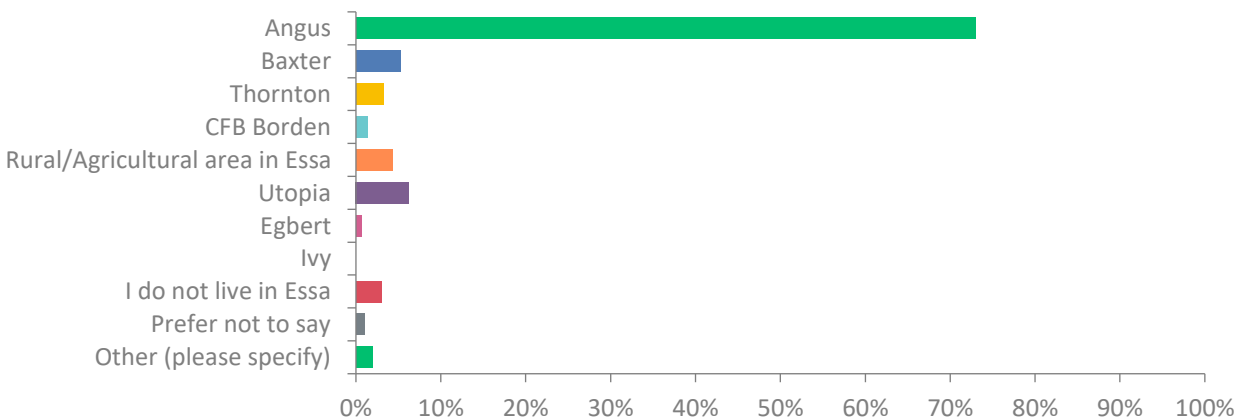
### Participant Profile

The second survey garnered over 300 responses as of this report (up to June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025), of which 184 were complete to the end of the survey. The survey will remain open until July 4<sup>th</sup>, when this engagement report will be updated. The participant profile shown in **Figure 2-2** shows the majority of participants being Essa residents (94%), along with a number of people who work in Essa (10%) and a few who have professional interest in growth and planning in Essa, own a business in Essa, are frequent or occasional visitors to Essa, are potential future Essa residents, or are Canadian Forces Base Borden personnel.



**Figure 2-1 Survey #1 Participants – Background**

There was some variability in the communities that participants who live in Essa resided in, with the highest number being from Angus (73%) followed by Utopia (6%), Baxter (5%), and the Rural area in Essa (4%). A summary of where respondents of the survey live is shown in **Figure 2-3**.



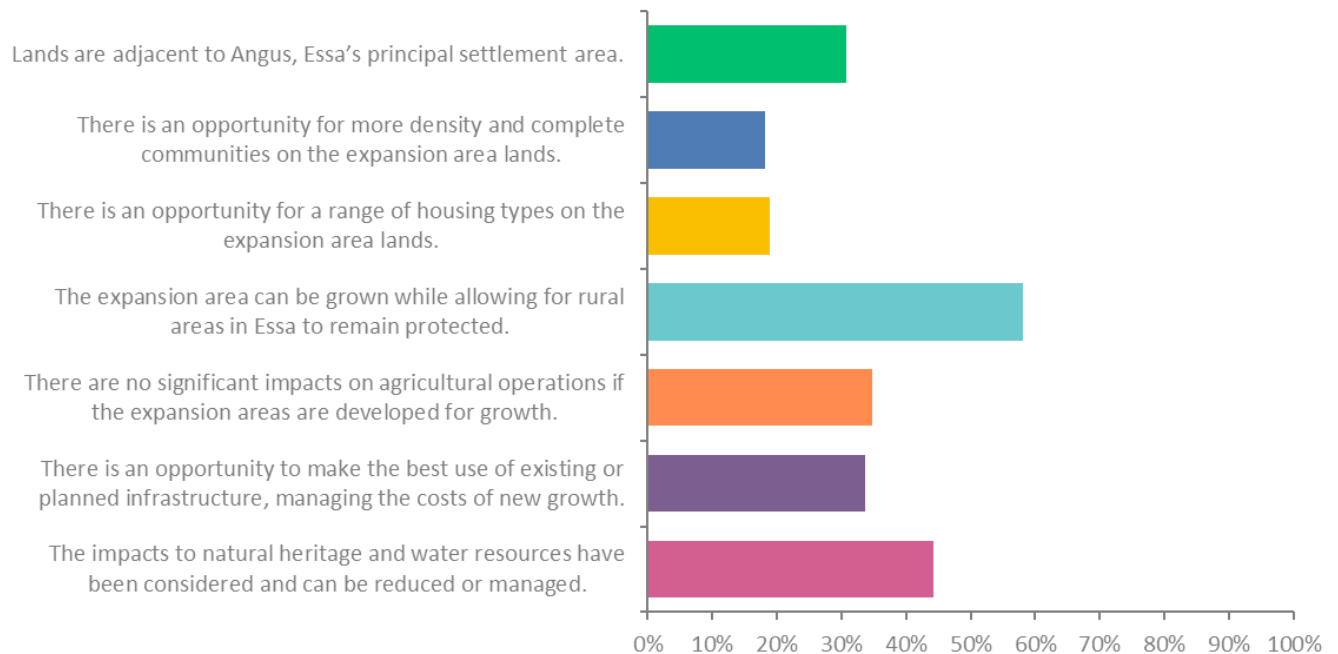
**Figure 2-2 Survey #1 Participants – Neighbourhood of Residence**

## Settlement Area Boundary Expansion – Evaluation Criteria

The following criteria have been identified to evaluate those lands that have potential to be serviced by municipal infrastructure and public service facilities, and be considered for future growth as they are connected to an existing settlement area in Essa and are not part of another municipality. Which are most important criteria to you in selecting new lands to be considered as expansion areas to support growth in Essa? Please select the top three that matter most.

There were 253 responses to this question summarized on **Figure 2-4**, with key criteria being:

- Allowing for rural areas in Essa to remain protected
- Impacts to natural heritage and water resourced have been considered and can be reduced or managed.
- No significant impacts on agricultural operations as a result of growth
- Opportunity to make the best use of existing or planned infrastructure
- Lands are adjacent to Angus, Essa's principal settlement area



**Figure 2-3 Evaluation Criteria – Issues that Matter Most to Participants**

In addition, participants noted the following key considerations for any expansion to the settlement area boundary:

- Desire to see affordable housing and not large estates or unaffordable 'McMansions'
- Designing areas that support local businesses rather than franchises or larger corporations
- Preserving agricultural function and food productivity of existing high-potential lands
- Adopting an environmentally conscious approach to new development, including through pre-fab or lighter footprint development

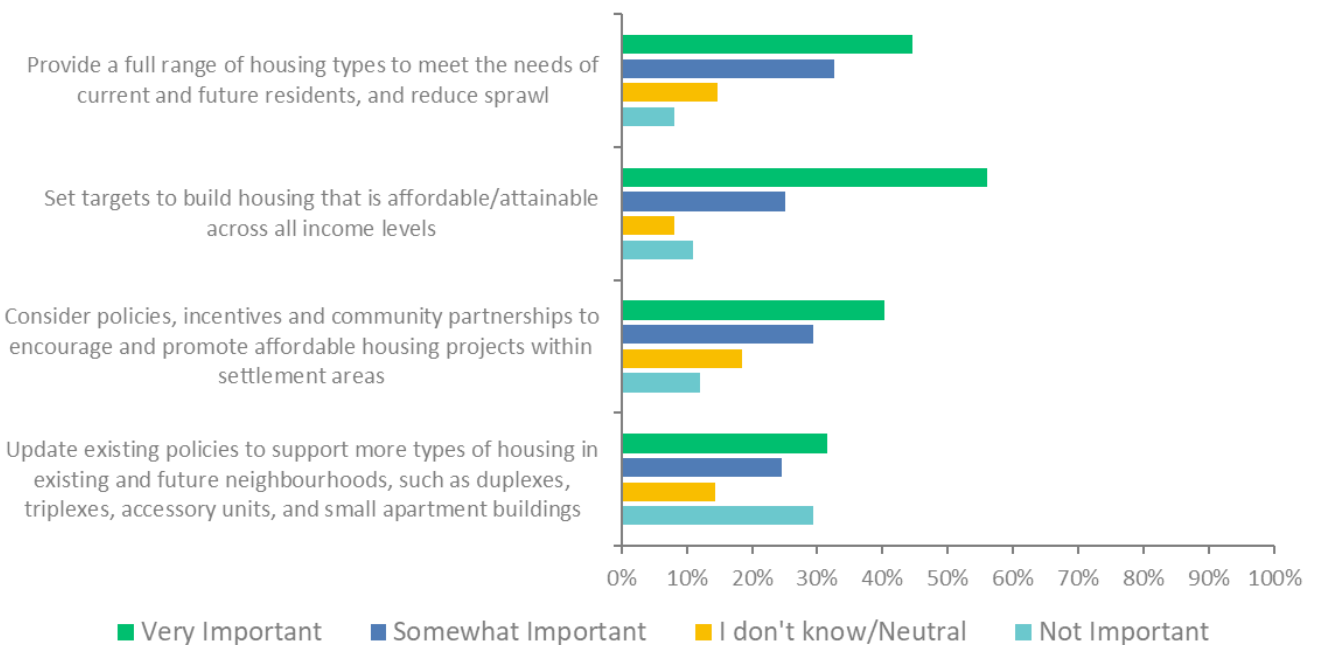
- More local and accessible retail options to reduce trips outside of Essa
- Allocating resources to address existing issues and infrastructure needs in the settlement areas before approving new growth
- Consideration of traffic and access routes and limiting the potential for more congestion
- Importance of infrastructure planning to support growth, including water resources which are already constrained, and electrical grid capacity given the existing limitations.

## Key Policy Directions for the New Official Plan

### Housing and Residential Areas

Tell us how important the following policy directions are to supporting growth and housing supply in Essa.

There were 191 responses to this question summarized on **Figure 2-5**. The policy directions highlighted as being of highest importance were relating to increasing the supply of affordable/attainable housing, increasing the range of housing types in settlement areas, and reducing sprawl.



**Figure 2-4 Housing and Residential Areas – Key Policy Directions**

In addition, respondents noted the following considerations for housing policy:

- Addressing the housing crisis and increase in unhoused residents, particularly in Angus
- Considering the safety of new development particularly for duplexes and triplexes, and developing standards for infill development
- Providing adequate recreational space for new residents
- Providing more senior and assisted living options
- Policies or regulations to address abandoned properties

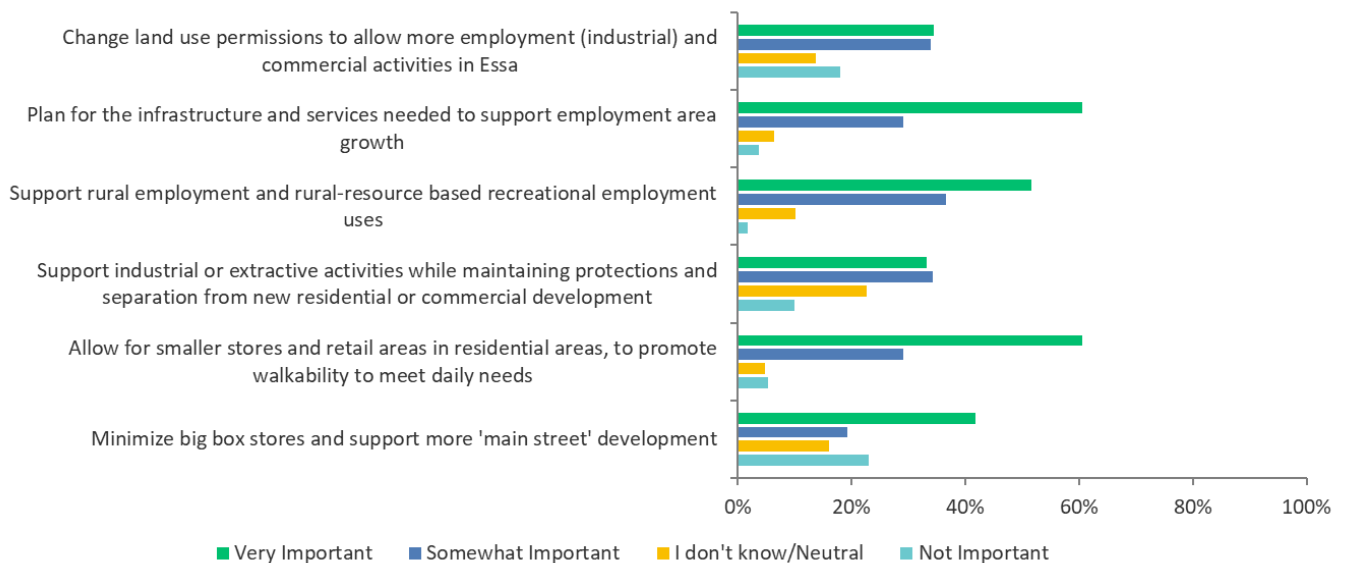
- Planning for schools and services to support growing communities
- Ensuring sufficient parking for new residential development
- Locating an expanded site for the local food bank.

## Employment and Commercial Areas

Tell us how important the following policy directions are to supporting employment and businesses in Essa.

There were 191 responses to this question, as summarized on **Figure 2-6**. The most highly rated issues in terms of importance were: planning for adequate infrastructure to service employment area growth, allowing more retail and smaller stores in residential areas to promote walkability, and supporting rural employment and rural resource-based recreational employment uses.

The idea of minimizing big box stores and supporting more 'main street' development received overall positive responses, with over 60% of respondents classifying this as Very or Somewhat Important, and 22% of respondents classifying this as Not Important. Policies relating to allowing more employment and commercial activity, or supporting industrial or extractive activity received mixed responses, also received an overall positive response, although with lower rates of respondents noting these as Very Important.



**Figure 2-5 Employment and Commercial Areas - Key Policy Directions**

In addition, participants noted the following considerations for employment and commercial policies:

- Need for a wider array of retail and commercial services to support job growth
- Considering the types of industries that are being drawn to Essa and the potential environmental impact
- Support for some big box stores to provide options within Essa

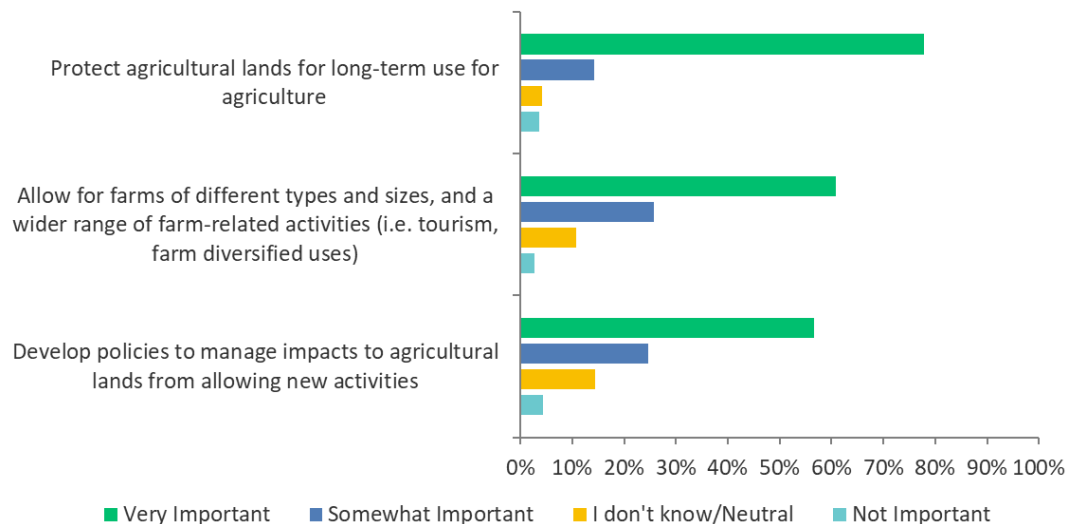


- Limiting gas stations and other uses in Angus which are already well-served
- Incentivizing a more vibrant business culture and longer hours in the main areas of Angus
- More commercial development along Highway 89.

## Agricultural Areas

**Tell us how important the following policy directions are to supporting agricultural activity in Essa.**

There were 191 responses to this question, as shown on **Figure 2-7**. Protecting agricultural lands for long term use was highlighted as a key policy direction with 78% rating it as Very Important. The other two directions received similar responses to each other, with between 56-60% of respondents classifying these as Very Important.



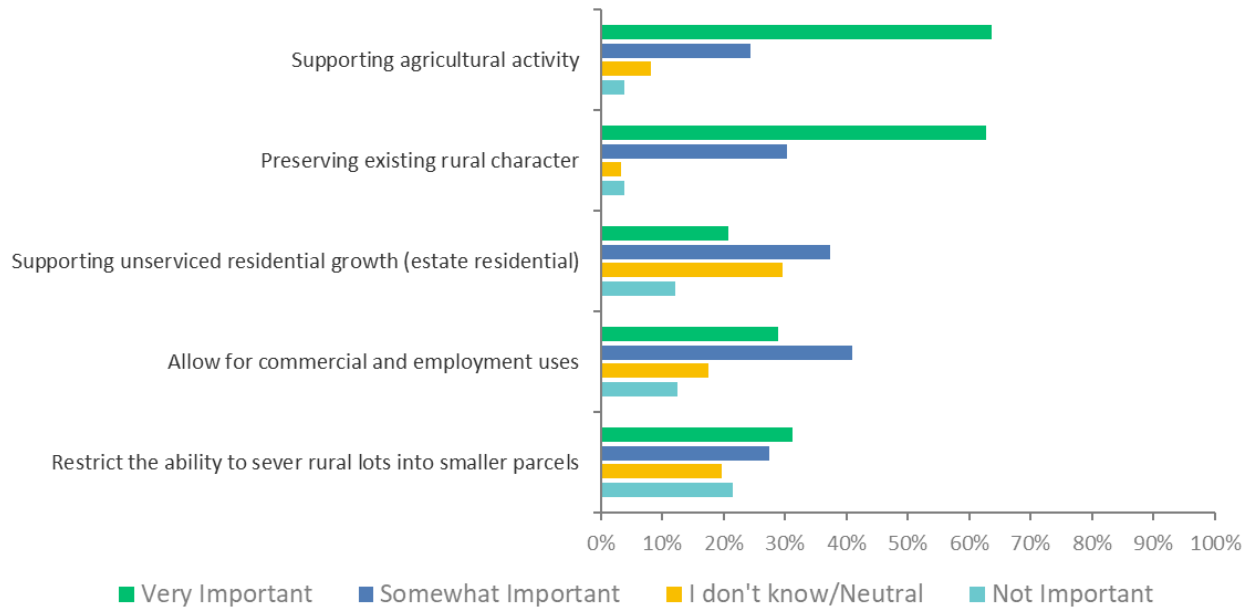
**Figure 2-6 Agricultural Areas - Key Policy Directions**

## Rural Areas

**How important are the following opportunities for the rural areas? These are areas in Essa with lower agricultural potential, but where some farming is still possible and there is a more natural landscape.**

There were 191 responses to this question, as shown in **Figure 2-8**. The most highly rated issues were supporting agricultural activity and preserving existing rural character. There was low support for supporting unserviced residential growth, with the majority of respondents rating this as Somewhat Important (37%), Not Important (12%) or Neutral (30%). There was some support for allowing for commercial and employment uses, with the majority of respondents rating this as Very Important (29%) or Somewhat Important (41%).

The policy of restricting the ability to sever rural lots into smaller parcels received mixed responses, with 31% selecting Very Important, 27% Somewhat Important, 20% staying neutral, and 21% selecting Not Important, the highest rate for this selection out of all the policies.



**Figure 2-7 Rural Areas - Key Policy Directions**

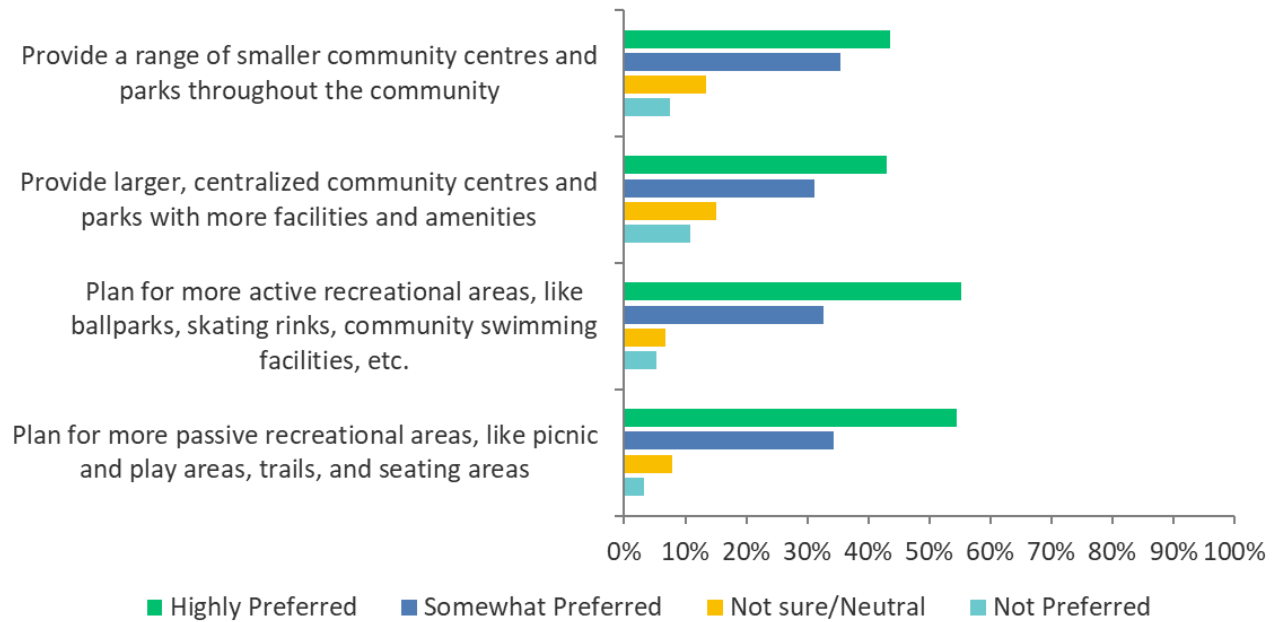
In addition, participants noted the following considerations for agricultural and rural area policies:

- Supporting smaller scale food production and community gardens
- Protecting agricultural land from industrial or commercial expansion, such as trucking operations or outdoor storage facilities.
- Allow severing of rural lots into smaller parcels to keep residents in Essa, particular on land with low agricultural potential.

## Community Design and Public Spaces

**There is an opportunity to develop policies to support healthy, thriving communities in Essa through design. The New Official Plan will have policies to support age-friendly and pedestrian friendly communities, and celebrate Essa's cultural and architectural heritage. There are options for how we design community services and facilities. Tell us which of the following options you would prefer most.**

There were 191 responses to this question, as shown in **Figure 2-8**. All the policies generally received favourable ratings of being Highly or Somewhat Preferred. In particular, policies relating to growing access to both active and passive recreational areas had approximately 55% of respondents selecting Highly Preferred and 33-34% selecting Somewhat Preferred.



**Figure 2-8 Community Design and Public Spaces - Key Policy Directions**

In addition, participants noted the following considerations for the design of healthy communities:

- Access to heated swimming facilities and amenities for small children, as well as areas catering to youth such as a stake park, outdoor basketball courts, etc.
- Walkable communities that promote community cohesion
- More trails and connections between areas
- Improvements to recreational areas outside the higher density areas such as Ivy, Baxter, and Utopia
- Need for a seniors' centre or recreational facility
- Greater focus on accessibility and planning for people with disabilities
- Co-locating recreational and commercial areas to provide easier and more convenient access for families
- Managing speeding and promoting more pedestrian-friendly design in high-traffic areas
- Potential for a new park adjacent to the existing Fishing Park
- Consideration of school safety zones and managing traffic near schools to prevent speeding and support pedestrian safety.

## Natural Heritage and Water Resources

Essa's New Official Plan will include updates to environmental policies, including to:

- **Protect environmental areas from the impacts of development**
- **Protect, maintain, and enhance water resources**
- **Provide buffers around natural features to limit the proximity of new development**

- **Require an Environmental Impact Study where new development is proposed in proximity to natural features**
- **Support partnerships with local organizations working to improve and protect the natural environment**

**Do these policies generally represent the important issues for natural heritage protection in Essa?**

There were 184 responses to this question, with 75% selecting Yes, 5% selecting No, and 20% staying neutral. Additional comments included:

- Increasing tree canopy to help address air quality concerns
- Consideration for a bird sanctuary in Essa
- Policies to protect and integrate environmental considerations into all new development
- Improving recycling and waste management policies and procedures
- Protecting forest cover and limiting impacts to woodlands
- Promoting local beautification and community-based programming relating to environmental protection and maintaining clean public spaces
- Protecting wildlife corridors
- Supporting more native tree and plant growth
- Managing impacts to water resources from all new development, given the high water table.

## **Sustainability and Climate Change**

**Essa's New Official Plan will include updates to sustainability-related policies, including to:**

- **Adapt to extreme weather, as well as increasing number of hot days and increased risk and frequency of flooding**
- **Support energy efficiency and conservation**
- **Encourage integration of sustainability measures into new developments, such as shade, stormwater management, and integration of green space**
- **Develop new community hubs that provide services to neighbouring areas and can support the community in the event of a major storm or weather event.**
- **Plan for new schools and walking routes to the schools that connect to neighbourhoods, reducing the need to rely on personal vehicles.**

**Do these policies generally represent the important issues for sustainability and climate change in Essa?**

There were 184 responses to this question, with 79% selecting Yes, 6% selecting No, and 15% staying neutral. Additional comments included:

- Addressing flooding and the need for flood protection in existing communities
  - Providing timely snow removal in large snowfall events
  - Supporting public transportation growth and access
  - Incorporating more cycling and walking paths on main routes
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- Addressing water pooling near trails to prevent the growth of mosquito populations
- Providing shade protection in parking lots
- Wastewater treatment prior to discharge into creeks
- Developing a climate change adaptation plan and emergency response plan in the event of the need for evacuation of communities.

## Transportation and Infrastructure

**Essa's New Official Plan will include updates to transportation and infrastructure-related policies, including to:**

- **Plan for water and wastewater infrastructure servicing to support growth, while being financially sound**
- **Protect and conserve ground and surface water quality and quantity**
- **Plan for any settlement area boundary expansions only to areas with existing or planned servicing**
- **Integrate sustainable stormwater management to reduce the impacts of extreme weather**
- **Plan for green infrastructure that integrates more natural areas into development, streets, and public spaces**
- **Develop transportation routes that promote walking and cycling**
- **Provide improved cycling infrastructure including cycling routes, parking, and signage**
- **Preserve lands around the railway corridor to allow for future expansion for freight or passenger rail service**
- **Plan for improved transit connectivity particularly between key settlement areas like Angus, Thornton and Baxter**

**Do these policies generally represent the important issues for transportation and infrastructure planning in Essa?**

There were 184 responses to this question, with 87% selecting Yes, 4% selecting No, and 9% staying neutral. Additional comments included:

- Consideration of where traffic calming/speed bumps are located, and focusing on school zones
  - Increasing access to public transportation, for example between Angus and Alliston to support access to employment opportunities
  - Better integration across all systems including trails, County Roads, and local roads
  - Improving sidewalks and pedestrian access on main roads
  - Improving access to GO transit, and planning for a future station location such as at 5<sup>th</sup> Line
  - Consideration of new trails alongside the rail corridor
  - On-demand transit options within Essa
  - More consistent water quality monitoring and sharing of the results with the community.
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## Do you have any additional questions or comments related to growth in Essa or the Official Plan Review?

Additional input received for this question beyond the comments already summarized in previous sections included:

- Need for improvements to road maintenance and overall state of waste management in Essa
- Need for more dog parks and places for people to go with their pets
- Taking lessons and best practices from other growing communities
- Development of more medium and high density housing and mixed use communities, to draw Federal funding similar to other communities in Ontario
- Taking a measured approach to growth, and not rushing to overbuild communities
- Desire for more public meetings and opportunities to provide input
- Importance of preserving the natural and rural character of Essa
- Need for improvements to the Station 2 Fire Hall
- Overall need for more jobs, retail and commercial areas in Essa
- Desire for a trail connection between Utopia and Angus
- Need for more accessible transportation for seniors and people with disabilities who cannot drive
- Request for ongoing engagement with the Simcoe County District School Board as the New Official Plan is developed.

## 2.3 Correspondence

A number of residents shared their input on the Official Plan and settlement area boundary expansion via email to the Township. These comments and lands proposed to be brought into the settlement area in Essa were tabulated for consideration and evaluation as part of the next step in the process, to be conducted over summer 2025.

# 3.0 Next Steps

The results of the engagement as presented in this report are being used to inform the development of the Draft Official Plan and preliminary selection of lands to be brought into the settlement boundary. The Draft Official Plan will be brought forward for community feedback in the fall of 2025, along with a third online survey.

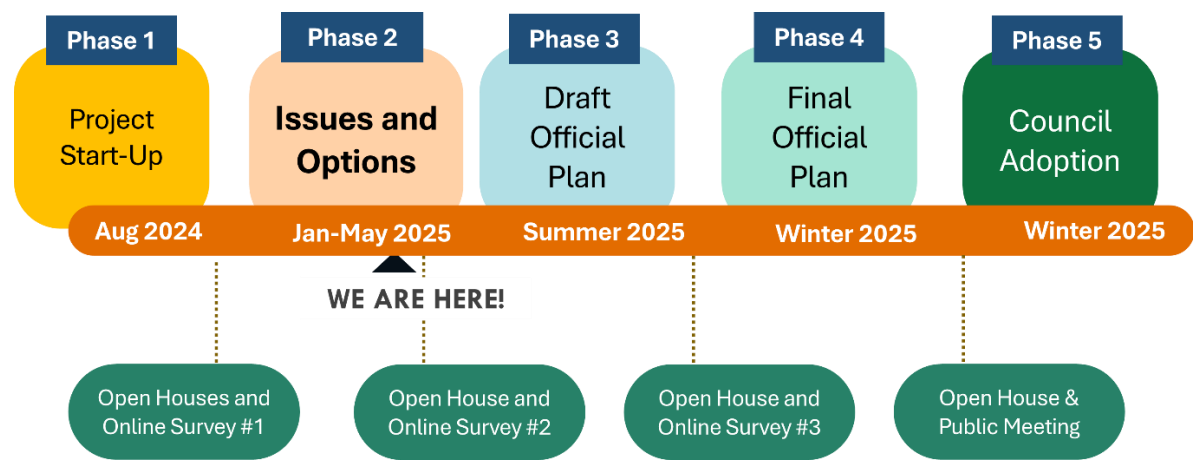


Figure 2-9 Project Timeline and Next Steps