

Draft Engagement What We Heard Report

Pictou Agriculture Policy

IMAGINE MOPC

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01 Introduction



About the Project

The Municipality of Pictou County recently adopted its first-ever Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use Bylaw, bringing comprehensive land use planning to the municipality for the first time. The new plans were intentionally designed with a “light touch” approach; however, after reviewing the documents the Province has directed the Municipality to update the documents to better protect agricultural land and align with provincial policy, with changes required by Summer 2026.

This project is focused on developing the required updates in a way that both meets provincial requirements and reflects the realities of farming in Pictou County. During earlier engagement, farmers shared concerns that planning could make an already challenging industry more difficult. At the same time, many also expressed worries about residential development encroaching on farmland and saw value in planning as a way to protect agricultural operations from land use conflicts.

Community engagement for this project built on those earlier conversations to support the creation of agricultural policy and regulations that support farmers rather than hinder them.

The Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) is the primary planning document for the Municipality. It establishes the vision, goals, and policies for growth and developments. It acts as the road map for guiding decision making related to what we build, where, and at what intensity. It considers many different topics, including (but not limited to) housing, economic development, agriculture, the environment, and infrastructure.

The Land Use Bylaw (LUB) is the companion document to the MPS. It puts the vision, goals, and policies into action through specific regulations related to development activities. The LUB sets out the land use zones (zoning), permitted uses for these zones, standards for development, performance standards, developments to be considered by development agreement, and developments to be considered by the site plan approval process, among other things.

How Will this Report Be Used?

This report services as a summary of what we heard from community members during the Draft Amendments phase of engagement. Feedback gathered during this phase - alongside previous technical reviews and, research, and existing policies and strategies - will be used to refine the proposed agriculture policies, which will be presented to Council in Summer 2026.

02 What We Did



Engagement Overview

The first phase of engagement was held in Winter 2026 and focused on understanding the key concerns and priorities for the community. Draft Agricultural Amendments were developed based on what we heard during that first phase. The Draft Agricultural Amendments were posted to the project website. Residents and community members were able to review the proposed amendments and provide feedback in one or more of the following ways: Interactive Draft Zoning Map, online feedback form, or by attending an in-person or online session.

Engagement activities were promoted through a variety of approaches, including:

+ The Municipality's website and social media
+ The project website
+ Direct emails and phone calls to identified stakeholders
+ Post in the Municipal newsletter
+ Advertising through the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture newsletter

How We Engaged



Online Feedback Form and Interactive Map

An online feedback form and interactive map were available for community members to share their feedback on the draft Agricultural Amendments. The online activities were open from April 17 to May 10, 2026. 2 comments were left on the interactive map and no feedback forms were submitted.



In-person Sessions

The project team hosted four in-person sessions across Pictou County. The sessions included a presentation that introduced the project, described the planning process, and why we are doing this project, followed by open discussion.

River John
April 27, 2026
Royal Canadian Legion Branch 108
Approximately 16 attendees

Merigomish
April 28, 2026
Merigomish School House Community Centre
Approximately 8 attendees

Scotsburn
April 29, 2026
Scotsburn Fire Department
Approximately 27 attendees

Eureka
April 30, 2026
Eureka Fire Department
Approximately 10 attendees



Online Sessions

The project team hosted an online session on May 6, 2026 for community members who were unable to join an in-person event. 3 people attended the online session.



Stakeholder Conversations

Invitations to provide feedback on the Draft Agricultural Amendments were sent to stakeholders who participated in the initial phase of engagement.



Emailed Feedback

The project team received one email from a community member. Feedback from the email is included in the **What We Heard** analysis.

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03 What We Heard



This section summarizes the feedback we received across all engagement activities, including the in-person engagement sessions and online feedback. The project team had robust conversations with participants at each of the sessions. Participants came with thoughtful questions and conversations, and many participants had the opportunity to clarify questions about how the agricultural amendments may impact their properties. All feedback received is valuable and inform the final version of the Agricultural Amendments.

Key Themes

The following are key themes that emerged through the Draft Amendments engagement phase.

Support for Protecting Agricultural Land

Similar to what we heard in the initial engagement phase, participants are supportive of protecting agricultural land and shoreline areas. Overall, we didn't hear strong opposition to the proposed approach and many in-person participants felt that the proposed policy amendments were balanced. Some participants recalled Pictou's strong historical ties to farming and agriculture and hope the policy amendments will help to encourage more farming in Pictou County.

Draft Amendments do not provide enough protection

Participants shared their concerns that the proposed policies do not provide sufficient long-term protection for agricultural land. They feel that the proposed policies may only slow development rather than actually prevent the permanent loss of farmland.

"I don't know why agriculture fell so far behind in Pictou County. We have good land."

Participants noted that not all productive farmland is currently being actively farmed, but those lands could be valuable farmland in the future.

Beyond the desire to protect agricultural lands from development, participants also shared concerns about protecting the health of agricultural lands, specifically regarding the use of pesticides, fertilizers, and biosolids.

There is a desire amongst participants for the Municipality to plan for long-term agricultural sustainability.

Draft Amendments are too restrictive to property owners

On the opposite side of the spectrum, participants shared concerns that the proposed policies are too restrictive. Many acknowledge the importance of protecting agricultural land, but do not think it should come at the cost of limiting landowner rights.

"I want farmland, but I want to protect the rights of the people who own land."

Participants were curious how the proposed policies would impact agricultural land that is not actively farmed.

Several participants shared that they are counting on eventually selling their properties to support their retirement. Participants worry about the impact these policies will have on the resale value of their land.

Discussion around Subdivision Limits

The proposed limit of being able to subdivide 1 lot per year was a key conversation point. Some participants felt this policy would be too restrictive for non-farming landowners. They shared concerns that this policy would limit housing opportunities, especially for property owners who plan to subdivide their property for family members.

Other participants felt the proposed limit would not be enough to prevent large-scale development over the long-term.

Participants shared suggestions for updating this policy, including:

+ to consider increasing the minimum lot size

+ to allow Council to make exemptions

Desire for More Localized Policies

Participants felt that the "one-size-fits-all" policy framework may not be appropriate for Pictou County. This approach does not reflect the unique local contexts. For example, there is a stronger farming presence in West Pictou than there is in the Merigomish area. Participants noted that there are areas on the draft zoning maps that are identified as agriculture, but are not currently being farmed and may have limited demand to be used for agriculture.

Participants suggested the agriculture amendments include separate treatments for "actively farmed" land versus "agricultural potential" land.

Need for Clear Mapping and Definitions

Participants requested more clarity around how land is classified and regulated, including how "active farmland" is defined and updated and how the Province determines active farming status. We heard interest in having more accurate maps of agricultural land.

Participants also asked questions specific to the draft zoning map, specifically asking about zoning on Pictou Island (currently all shown as "active agriculture") and Big Island (some parcels appeared to be missed or not zoned correctly).

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