MUNICIPALITY OF PICTOU COUNTY

AGRICULTURAL LANDS POLICY

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

IMAGINE MOPC

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Municipality of Pictou County has recently adopted its first-ever Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use Bylaw, bringing comprehensive land use planning to the municipality for the first time. Because past planning efforts faced strong opposition, particularly from the agricultural community, the new plans were intentionally designed with a "light touch". However, the Province has since directed the Municipality to update these documents to better protect agricultural land and align with provincial policy, with changes required by Summer 2026.

Planning in Nova Scotia is carried out under the requirements of the *Municipal Government Act*. This Act contains six Statements of Provincial Interest (SPIs). The Statement of Provincial Interest Regarding Agricultural Land is outlined on the right.

PROJECT TIMELINE



PROJECT INITIATION + OPTIONS
Winter 2026

INITIAL ENGAGEMENT
Winter 2026

DRAFT AMENDMENT + ENGAGEMENT
Spring 2026

FINAL AMENDMENT + ADOPTION
Summer 2026

STATEMENT OF PROVINCIAL INTEREST

GOAL

To protect agricultural land for the development of a viable and sustainable agriculture and food industry.

BASIS

The preservation of agricultural land is important to the future of Nova Scotians. Agricultural land is being lost to non-agricultural development. There are land-use conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural land uses.

APPLICATION

This statement applies to all active agricultural land and land with agricultural potential in the Province.

PROVISIONS

1. Planning documents must identify agricultural lands within the planning area.

2. Planning documents must protect agricultural land. This can be done by:

    a. Giving priority to agricultural uses and avoiding uses that would erode the land;
    b. Limiting the number of lots to discourage non-agricultural development;
    c. Reducing land-use conflicts by setting appropriate distances between agricultural and non-agricultural development;
    d. Limiting topsoil removal on lands with the highest agricultural value.

3. Where agricultural land cannot be protected for food production (such as within urban areas), planning documents must explain why and direct non-agricultural development to lands with the lowest agricultural value.

To learn more about the project, please visit: **speakupland.ca/pictou-county-agriculture**

MUNICIPALITY OF PICTOU COUNTY

IDENTIFYING AGRICULTURAL LAND

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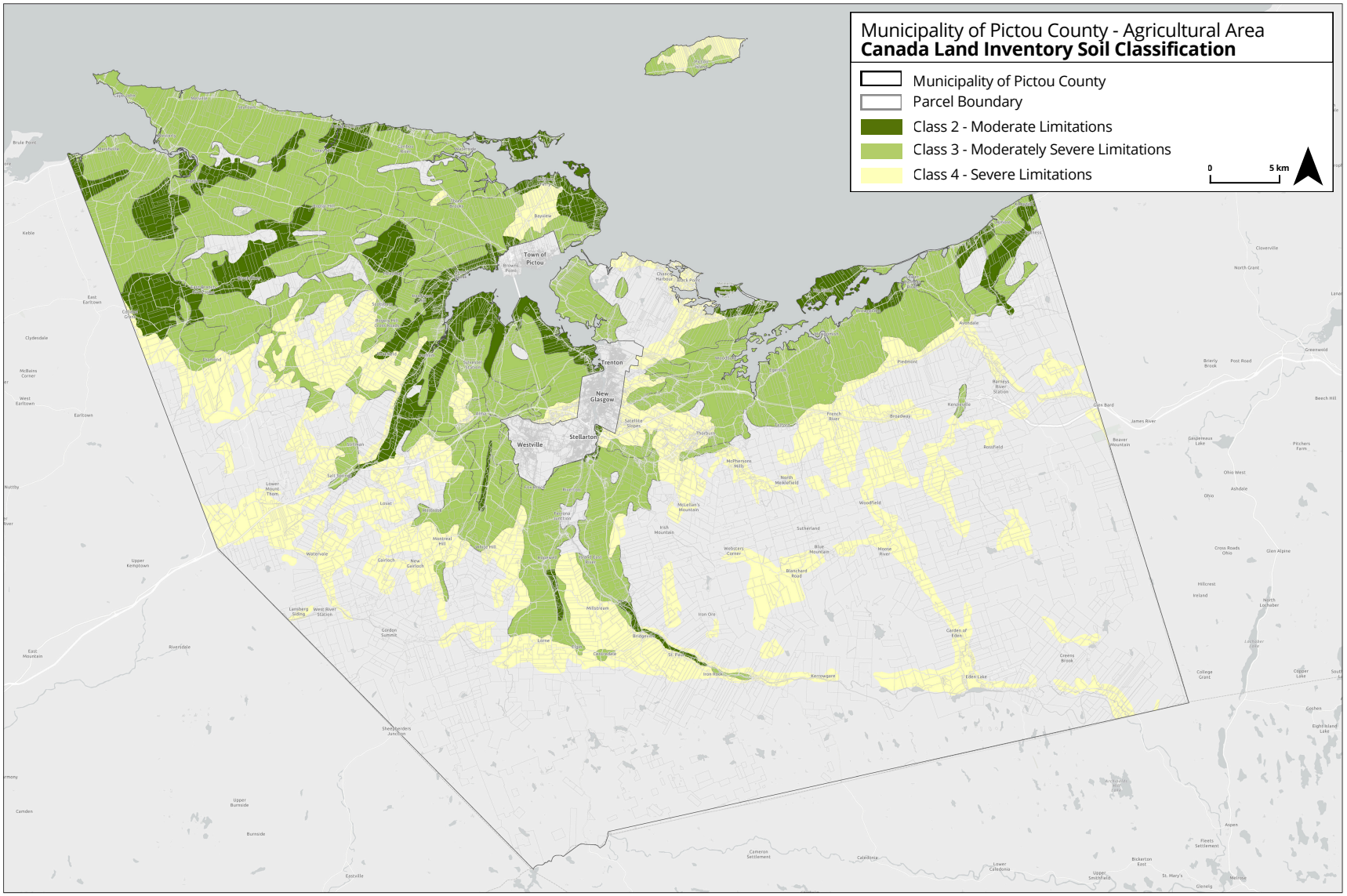


Figure 1. Class 2, 3, and 4 lands in MOPC

WHAT IS AGRICULTURAL LAND?

The *Municipal Government Act* defines "agricultural land" as:

Active farmland and land with agricultural potential as defined by the Canada Land Inventory as Class 2, 3, and Class 4 land in active agricultural areas, speciality crop lands and dykelands suitable for commercial agricultural operations as identified by the Department of Agriculture.

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IDENTIFYING AGRICULTURAL LAND

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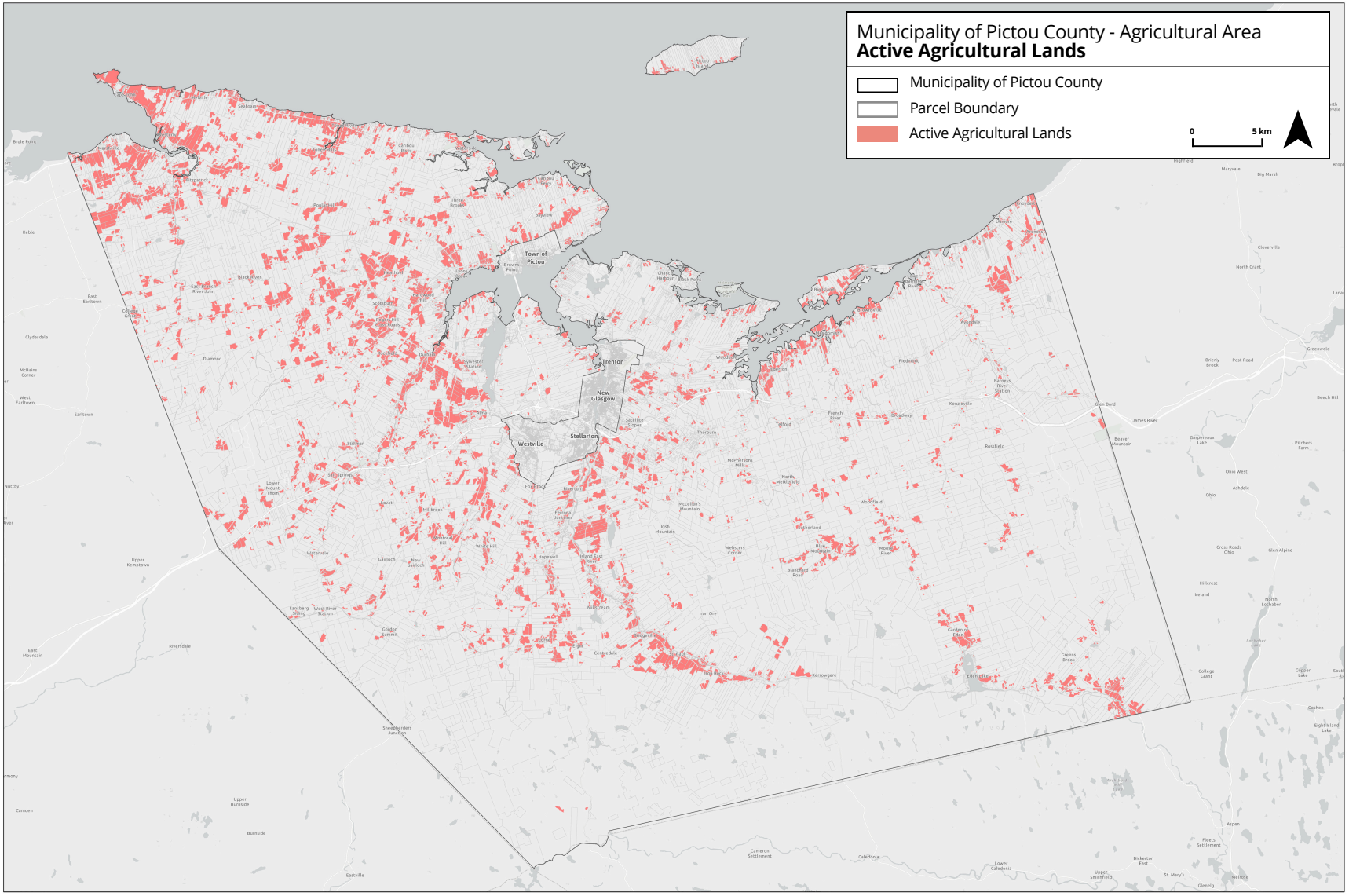


Figure 2. 'Active agriculture' identified by the NS Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Land Inventory Project and Agriculture and Agri-food Canada's Annual Crop Inventory

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PRELIMINARY OPTIONS

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PRELIMINARY OPTIONS

Since the SPI Regarding Agricultural Lands recognizes that "not all areas can be protected for food production", there is some flexibility to exempt lands from agricultural protections if there is a strong reason to do so.

Keeping this in mind, we have explored three different options for defining "agricultural land" to identify an agricultural area where any agricultural protection regulations would apply.

All three versions contain:

- Class 2 soils;
- Class 3 soils;
- Actively farmed areas on Class 4 soils;
- All specialty crops.

All three versions exclude:

- Areas that are sewer-serviced;
- Zones that are applied to achieve a specific purpose;
- Very small parcels (<1 acre);
- Parcels between 1 to 5 acres if less than 50% of the parcel contains good soils.

It is important to note that the following options are not the only options, nor are they mutually exclusive. They are merely a starting point for future exploration.

OPTION A

This option covers the largest area and consists of lands that are both currently zoned Rural General (G1) or Rural Mixed Use (G2). The current G1 and G2 Zones are intended to recognize the wide mix of uses found in rural, unserviced areas. They are quite flexible as a result. The main difference between the two is that the G2 Zone is intended to provide a transition between the rural and serviced areas of the municipality, so it prohibits intensive uses such as industrial uses and mineral-related uses.

OPTION B

This option excludes the Rural Mixed Use (G2) areas, recognizing that these areas are a transition to denser, more "urban" communities in the municipality. However, this approach also means some of the higher-class soils in the municipality - such as the Class 2 soils around Scotsburn and Harwood Mill - are excluded from the defined agricultural area.

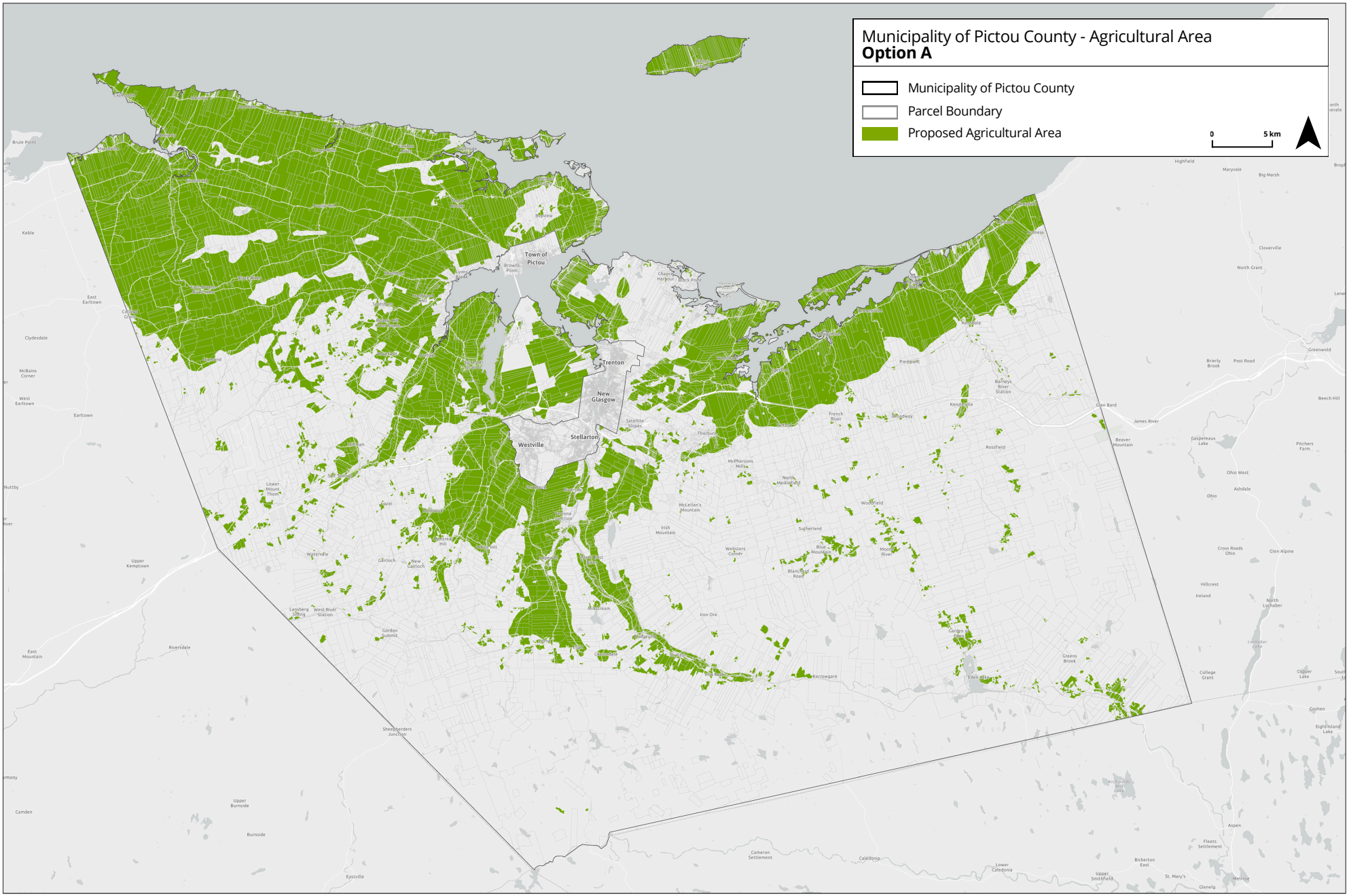
OPTION C

This option builds on Option A to explore what it would look like if the areas along roads (in this case a 200-metre buffer) were excluded. An approach like this could remain flexible to development along roads, while protecting backlands for agricultural purposes. However, it does lead to substantially more fragmentation of agricultural lands.

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PRELIMINARY OPTION A

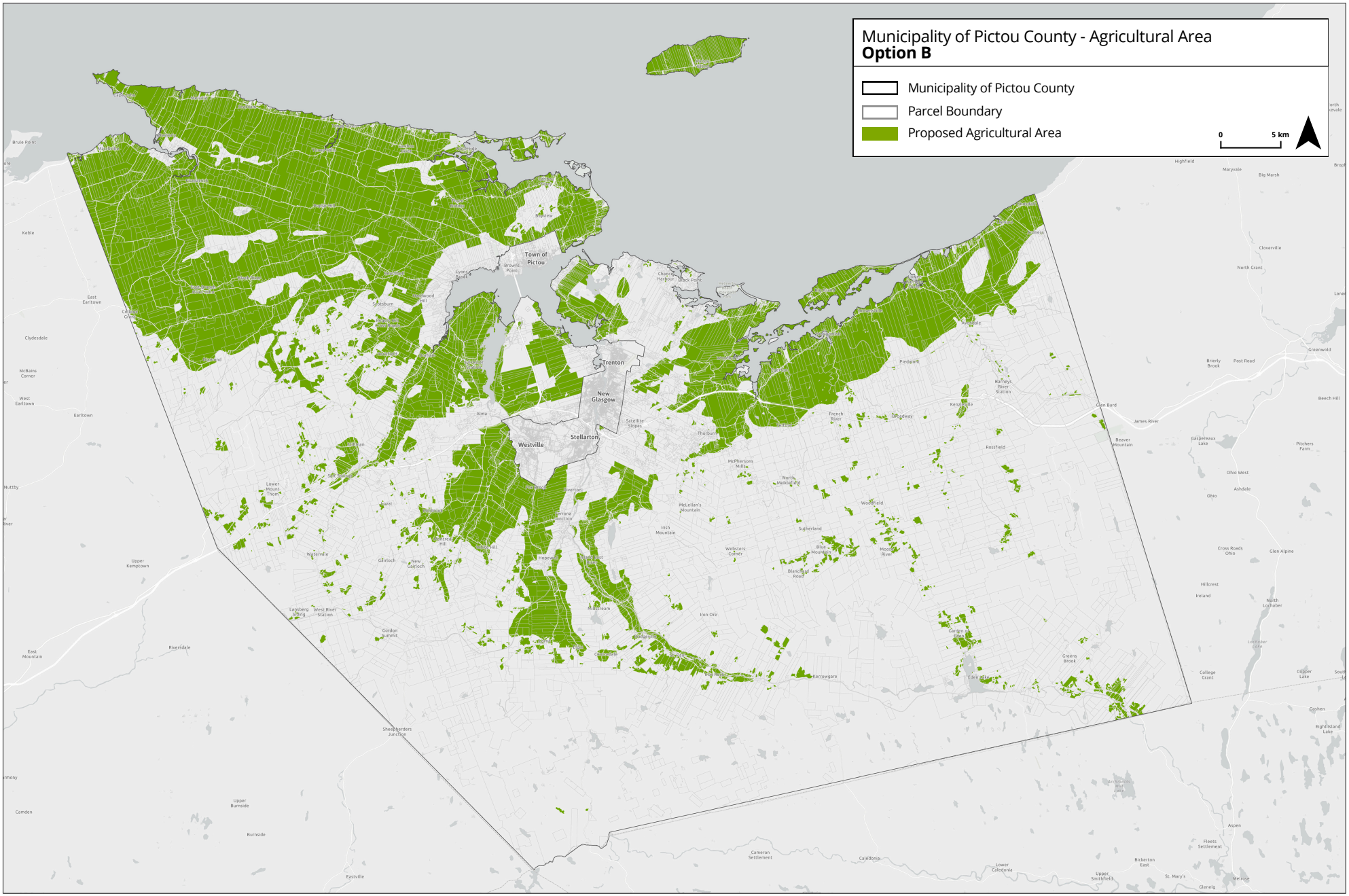
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PRELIMINARY OPTION B

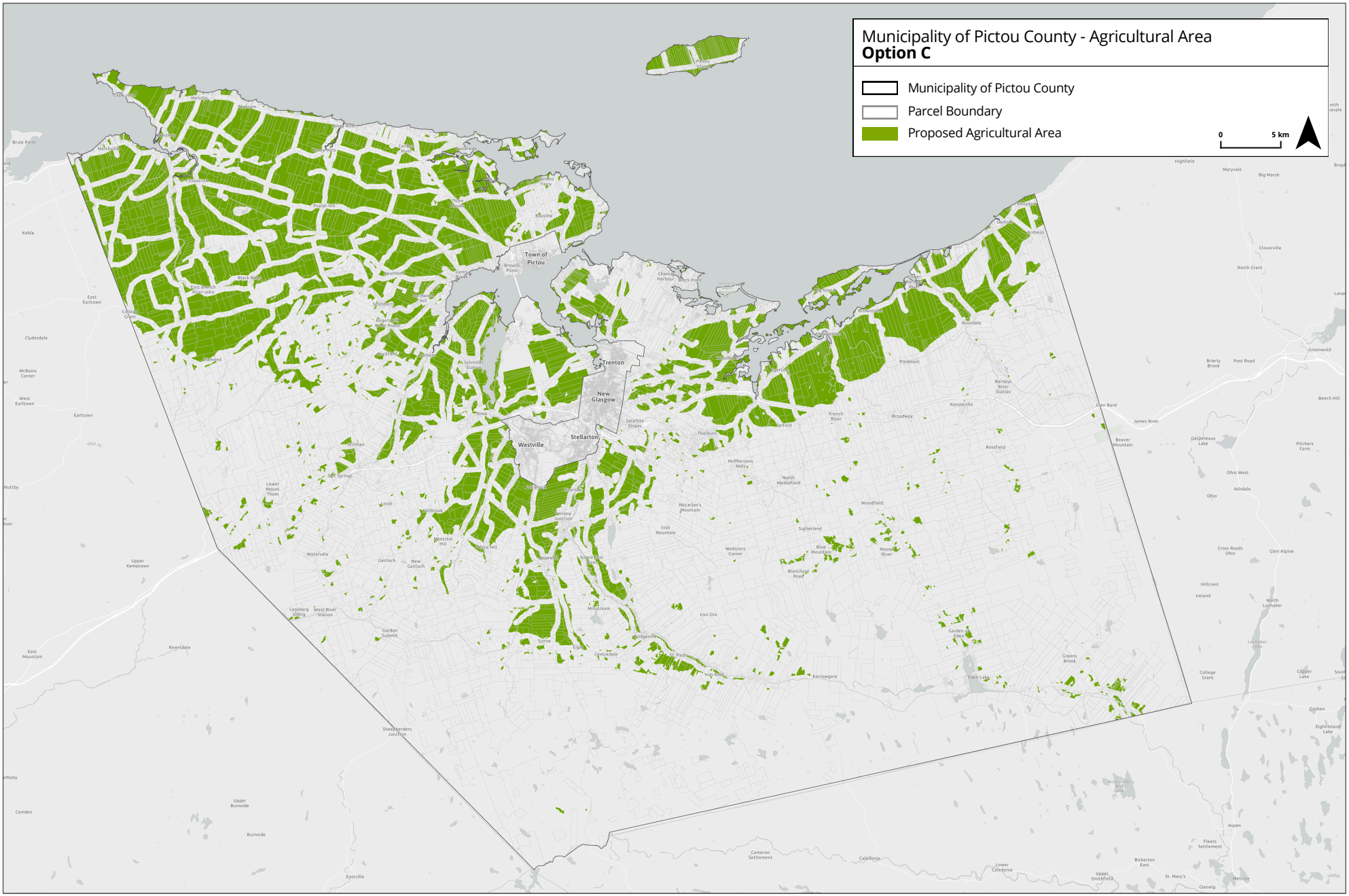
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PRELIMINARY OPTION C

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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DEVELOPMENT CONTROLS

The SPI Regarding Agricultural Land outlines several development control tools that municipalities can use to protect agricultural land. The tools that MOPC could include in its approach to agricultural protection are outlined below.

1 *LIMITS ON PERMITTED USES*

Prohibiting certain land uses that could interfere with agricultural operations or could fragment agricultural land. For example, in West Hants, commercial uses are permitted in their General Resource Zone, but not in any of their agricultural zones.

2 *LIMITS ON SUBDIVISION*

Placing controls on subdivision (the creation of new lots) enables some residential development but limits the amount. Approaches may include:

- Allowing homes only on existing lots;
- Limiting how many new lots can be subdivided from an existing lot;
- Prohibiting subdivision along new public or private roads;
- Requiring large minimum lot sizes.

3 *SEPARATION DISTANCES*

Setting a minimum distance between new development and existing agricultural operations can help reduce the risks of impacts and complaints due to noise, smells, etc.

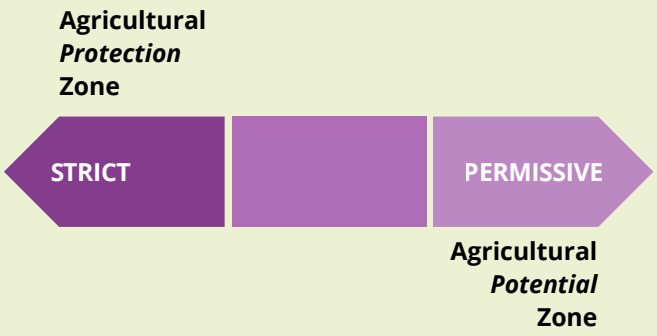
4 *LIMITS ON TOPSOIL REMOVAL*

Prohibiting the removal of topsoil from agricultural lands. While the current MOPC planning documents already prohibit the removal of agricultural topsoils, it is allowed if it is incidental to development or is at specifically identified topsoil removal businesses that existed before the planning documents were adopted.

IDENTIFICATION & NAMING APPROACH

A final consideration is the approach to identifying and naming the agricultural areas in the Land Use Bylaw. The agricultural areas could be:

- Identified by an "overlay" on top of their existing zoning. This means that agricultural lands that are zoned as Rural Mixed Use (G2), for example, would stay in this zone and instead be identified by an agricultural overlay that sets out specific agricultural regulations on top of the original zoning regulations.
    - This allows for more nuanced regulations but it is more complex for property owners to understand what is possible on their land.
- Given their own zone(s). For example, agricultural lands that were previously zoned Rural General (G1) would be "rezoned" to an agricultural zone.
    - This clearly communicates the intent of the land but does not allow for much nuance in the regulation.



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