



Friday, November 21, 2025

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Provincial Planning Branch
777 Bay Street, 13th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3
Submitted online

Re: WOWC Submission to Consultation on Simplifying and Standardizing Official Plans (ERO 025-1099)

The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) represents 15 counties and 117 municipalities across rural Western Ontario – communities that are ready to build, grow, and support your government's housing and economic goals. As the economic engine of Ontario, the WOWC region is a critical piece of the Province's prosperity and growth. Our region is poised for tremendous opportunity, with over \$40 billion in new economic investments and the creation of 30,000+ jobs resulting from the rapid growth of the electric vehicle and clean energy sectors.

The WOWC welcomes the opportunity to comment on proposals to simplify and standardize Official Plans (OPs). Our member counties and municipalities collectively cover a large geographic area, support significant agricultural and natural heritage systems, and manage diverse rural and small-urban settlement patterns.

Standardization has the potential to improve clarity and predictability. However, any reforms must recognize that rural planning differs fundamentally from the planning context in large urban municipalities. The OP remains a key tool that allows counties to address unique servicing, environmental, and growth challenges.

1. Standardization should establish a framework—not prescriptive content

A more uniform structure for OPs (e.g. some consistency in headings, ordering, or definitions) may improve provincial review efficiency. However, prescribing detailed policy content would undermine rural autonomy and limit the ability of counties to address region-specific issues such as:

- Agricultural land fragmentation
- Aggregate resource management
- Seasonal population fluctuations
- Rural settlement area boundaries and village revitalization
- Limited servicing capacity and reliance on private systems

WOWC requests that the Province consider developing a provincial guideline (in further consultation with municipalities) that provides for a suggested general framework/outline for achieving greater potential standardization of OPs across the Province and also potentially



identify various municipal best practices for simplifying and standardizing OP structure and content in differing municipal contexts, versus adopting an overly rigid or prescriptive approach for standardized OP structure, text, and/or planning direction.

In general, any Provincial efforts to streamline OPs should prioritize clarity and coordination, while allowing municipalities the flexibility to tailor and adapt the general Provincial policy direction provided through the PPS to reflect diverse local contexts and address the unique challenges, opportunities, and land use considerations in each community. Rigid limits on structure, length, and policy detail risk overlooking the nuances of planning and the need to balance multiple priorities, potentially undermining the integrated approach envisioned by the Provincial Planning Statement (PPS).

2. Protect the two-tier planning system

Upper-tier municipalities play a vital, well-established role in coordinating regional matters such as transportation networks, watershed and natural heritage systems, servicing strategies, and long-term growth, population and employment allocations.

Any standardization framework must:

- Recognize distinct roles in two-tier systems
- Avoid duplication of content between county and local OPs
- Respect local variation in division of responsibility

A clear and complementary division of policy responsibilities strengthens both tiers and supports more efficient planning outcomes. The WOWC recommends that the Province explicitly reaffirm the role of upper-tier OPs in coordinating regional growth and infrastructure and coordinating and managing various other land use planning matters across municipal boundaries and with other levels of government, as generally set out in Section 6.2 of the PPS.

3. Provide transition support and reasonable timelines

Counties are at different points in their OP review cycles. Any transition to a new standardized framework must be practical, well-supported, and achievable.

The WOWC recommends:

- A minimum transition period of **24 to 36 months**
- Provincial funding to support municipalities undertaking OP updates
- Guidance materials, templates, and policy direction released well in advance

Rapid or frequent changes risk creating additional costs and delays. Transition requirements should align with regular OP review cycles and minimize disruptions to municipal planning programs.



Conclusion

The WOWC supports efforts to improve clarity and efficiency in the planning system. However, reforms must avoid prescriptive Official Plan content that limits local autonomy or reduces the ability of rural and two-tier municipalities to address their distinct planning challenges. A flexible, framework-based approach—supported by guidance, clarity, and adequate transition resources—will best achieve the Province’s objectives while respecting local realities and strengthening municipal-provincial partnerships.

Our member counties and municipalities remain committed partners in supporting housing delivery, economic growth, and sustainable communities across Western Ontario.

Respectfully submitted,

Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus