What We Heard Report

Agribusiness and Agritourism Review Public Hearings

October 2022

Sturgeon COUNTY

Project overview

Sturgeon County is an agricultural powerhouse invested in positive growth for its residents and businesses. Council started the Agribusiness and Agritourism Review in March 2021 to look at how it can best support and grow local agribusiness and agritourism in the County. As it embraces the future and reflects agribusiness and agritourism land uses in its Land Use Bylaw, the County remains committed to respecting its agricultural history.

Project timeline

- **March 9, 2021**: Sturgeon County Council initiated the Agribusiness and Agritourism Review and passed the Agribusiness and Agritourism Review Task Force Bylaw (Bylaw 1538/21). This bylaw created a task force, which includes seven community members and Council representatives.
- **May 11, 2021**: community members were selected by Council after an application and interview process. The task force members were selected because of their expertise and experience in the agribusiness and agritourism sectors within Sturgeon County.
- **June 2021 to April 2022**: the task force worked with independent consultants to conduct the Agribusiness and Agritourism Review.
- **April 12, 2022**: Council accepted the Agribusiness and Agritourism Review Task Force Final Recommendations Report as information. Council instructed administration to bring forward amendments to the County's Land Use Bylaw that reflect the task force's recommendations.
- **May 3, 2022**: Council gave first reading of Bylaw 1597/22.
- **June 14, 2022**: Sturgeon County held a public hearing, allowing the community to provide feedback.
- Administration reviewed all feedback from the public alongside best practices, and recommended amendments to the proposed bylaw to Council.
- **Sept. 13, 2022**: Council gave second reading on the amended Bylaw 1597/22.
- **Oct. 6, 2022**: Sturgeon County held a second public hearing, allowing the community to provide feedback.



June 14, 2022 public hearing

What we heard summary

Council provided first reading on the Diversified Agriculture Amendments to Land Use Bylaw 1385/17 (Bylaw 1597/22) on May 3. It held a public hearing on June 14 to gather public input.

This version of the bylaw would have allowed event venues to be located on agricultural lands as a discretionary use, meaning operators could apply for an event venue and the permit/conditions could be appealed by affected parties. This item was the most concerning to those opposed to the proposed bylaw, as they didn't believe event venues were related to agriculture and didn't think they should be allowed on agricultural land.

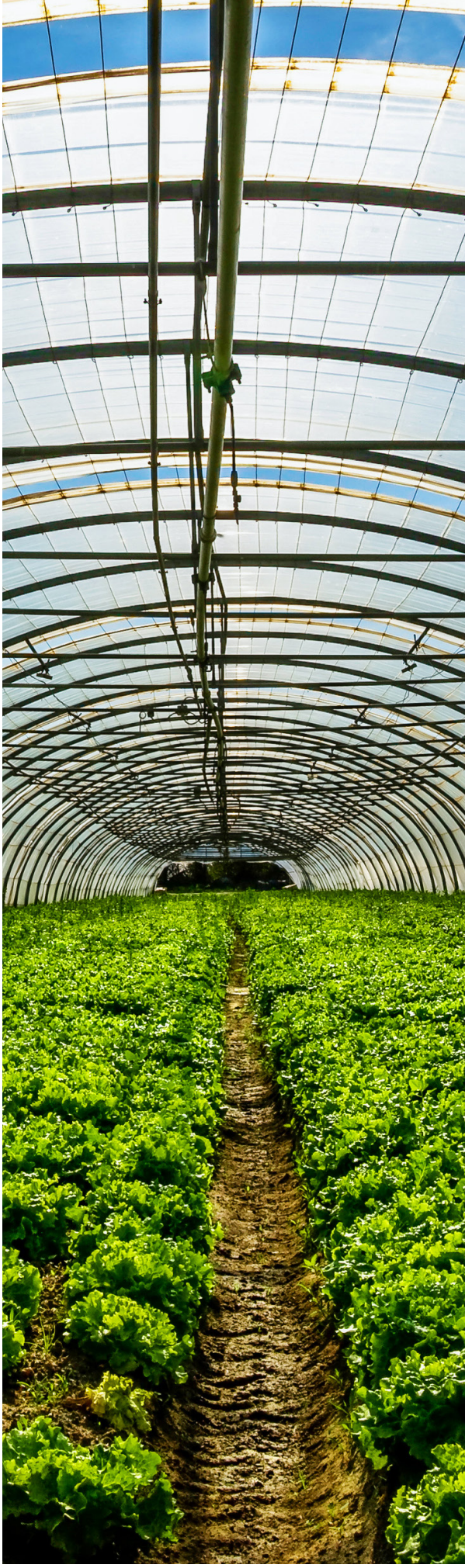
Some attendees were in favour of the proposed bylaw and some were opposed. Of those in **favour**, we heard support for allowing agricultural producers to diversify their revenue sources through agribusiness and agritourism activities, such as on-site processing, farm tables, educational activities and more, to maintain viability.

Of those **opposed**, we heard concerns related to event venues in agricultural areas and the impacts this could have on residents' quality of life and infrastructure. Specific concerns included noise, increased traffic, and the potential for trespassing.

What we did in response

Administration reviewed all feedback from the public alongside best practices, and recommended amendments to the proposed bylaw. This included not allowing event venues on agricultural land, and creating a new land use district that would allow more intensive agricultural uses and event venues.

Council accepted these amendments and directed that a second public hearing be held to hear from the public.



October 6, 2022 public hearing

What we heard summary

Council provided second reading on the updated proposed bylaw on September 13, 2022 and held a second public hearing on October 6 to gather public input.

Council heard from 15 speakers and received 30 written submissions from residents in Sturgeon County and other jurisdictions in the region.

We heard support for allowing agricultural producers to diversify their revenue sources through agribusiness and agritourism activities from those both in favour of and opposed to the proposed bylaw.

Those in **favour** of the proposed bylaw support the approach to not allow event venues or commercial events that are not focused on agriculture – such as weddings, retreats, ceremonies and corporate functions – in agricultural areas. We heard that this approach will protect residents' quality of life, specifically as it relates to the increased noise, increased traffic, the potential for trespassing and public safety concerns.

Of those **opposed** to the proposed bylaw, some think it is too restrictive while others don't think it is restrictive enough.

Those that think it is too restrictive told us that event venues or commercial events that are not focused on agriculture should be allowed in agricultural areas. While these types of operations would be allowed in a new land use that supports event venues and more intensive agricultural uses, we heard concerns that the application process to have lands reclassified for this new land use would be a significant barrier for many operators. We also heard from some individuals that they could lose their jobs if their employer – a local agribusiness and agritourism operator – didn't proceed with having the property reclassified to allow the business' current activities.

Those that think more restrictions are needed told us they want additional rules for agribusiness and agritourism operators, such as defined hours of operation and attendance limits, so they can maintain their quality of life.

Written submissions

Submission	Position	Comments
1	Opposed	Writer represents a local agritourism operator. They told us the proposed bylaw is too restrictive and will put farms out of business. They support agricultural activities on agricultural land and expressed concern about commercial events not being allowed on agricultural lands, as they think commercial events – such as weddings, corporate events and retreats – can be agricultural in nature. They suggested allowing 10 weddings per season and indicated "minimal site visits" should be defined. They said it is too expensive for operators to provide additional reports that may be required for rezoning and permitting. Further, they noted "ceremonies" should be allowed as to not infringe on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Submission	Position	Comments
2	Not identified	Writer inquired about tax impacts to rezone property to new land use district.
3	Opposed	Writer works for a local agritourism operator. They told us they want commercial events to be allowed on agricultural land. They expressed concern that small family farm businesses won't be sustainable with minimal site visits, and think commercial events – such as weddings, corporate events and retreats – can be agricultural in nature. They suggested allowing 10 weddings per season.
4	In favour	Writer lives near an existing event venue in Sturgeon County. They support not allowing commercial events on agricultural land. They noted a decreased quality of life due to the nearby event venue as a result of people trespassing on their property, people trampling crops, noise and parking.
5	In favour	Writer lives in Nova Scotia and works in the experiential tourism sector across Canada, including in Alberta. They support the bylaw and farm tourism and believe farms should be encouraged to diversify. They suggest on-site corporate events be required to serve foods produced on farm.
6	Opposed	Writer lives in Edmonton and values experiences at a local agritourism operation. They view the bylaw as red tape and see positive impacts of agritourism operations for the economy.
7	Opposed	Writer represents Alberta Farm Fresh Producers Association. They expressed that requiring some operations, such as small family u-picks and market gardens, to apply for rezoning/ permits to allow for more intensive agriculture activities could cause financial barriers for producers and lead to business closures. They also noted that limiting commercial opportunities would decrease the returns operators would see on their investment into diversification. They also noted concerns about the bylaw being unenforceable due to privacy/ FOIP concerns.
8 to 13 and 20 to 30 (17 total)	Opposed	Writers work for a local agritourism operator. They told us they will lose their jobs if the bylaw is approved.
14	In favour	Writer lives near an existing event venue in Sturgeon County that is operating without proper approvals. They support not allowing event venues on agricultural land. They noted a decreased quality of life due to the nearby event venue as a result of people trespassing on their property, noise, traffic issues and parking.
15	In favour	Writer lives near an existing event venue in Sturgeon County. They support not allowing event venues on agricultural land. They noted a decreased quality of life due to the nearby event venue as a result of noise and traffic issues.

Submission	Position	Comments
16	Opposed	Writers live near an existing agritourism operation in Sturgeon County. While they support not allowing event venues on agricultural land, they told us additional restrictions are needed to protect residents' quality of life. They suggested measures include restrictions on noise, setting a maximum number of visitors allowed per day and setting hours of operation. They don't believe the bylaw adequately addresses the intensity of operations, and are concerned about enforcement. They also want to see a requirements for all neighbours surrounding a potential agribusiness, agritourism or event venue operation be in support prior to approval.
17	Not identified	Writer has family who live near an existing event venue in Sturgeon County. They support this bylaw with appropriate details, regulation and enforcement. They have concerns over even venues on large parcels of land and want to see definitions in the bylaw that are not open to interpretation. They note the importance of enforcement for event venue, agribusiness and agritourism and suggest a more proactive approach instead of complaint-driven enforcement.
18	Opposed	Writer represents a local agritourism operator. They told us their business will likely shut down if the bylaw is approved.
19	Opposed	Writers live in Strathcona County. They suggest Council vote in favor of diversified agriculture and to reflect best practice in other jurisdictions. They suggest revising the bylaw to allow commercial events such as weddings (up to 10 per year), retreats, ceremonies and corporate functions on agricultural land. They believe such events can be focused on agriculture. They expressed that requiring some operations to apply for rezoning/permits to allow for more intensive agriculture activities could cause financial barriers; they suggest making this an affordable process. Further, they noted "ceremonies" should be allowed as to not infringe on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Oral submissions

Submission	Position	Comments
1	Not identified	Speaker inquired about process to apply for rezoning to new land use district.
2	Opposed	Speaker lives near an existing agritourism operation in Sturgeon County. While they support not allowing event venues on agricultural land, they told us additional restrictions are needed to protect residents' quality of life. They suggested measures include restrictions on noise, setting a maximum number of visitors allowed per day and setting hours of operation. They don't believe the bylaw adequately addresses the intensity of operations, and are concerned about enforcement. They also want to see a requirements for all neighbours surrounding a potential agribusiness, agritourism or event venue operation be in support prior to approval. *Speaker also submitted a written submission; see submission 16.*
3	Opposed	Speaker lives near an existing agritourism operation in Sturgeon County. While they support not allowing event venues on agricultural land, they told us additional restrictions are needed to protect residents' quality of life. They suggested measures include restrictions on noise, setting a maximum number of visitors allowed per day and setting hours of operation. They don't believe the bylaw adequately addresses the intensity of operations, and are concerned about enforcement. They also want to see a requirements for all neighbours surrounding a potential agribusiness, agritourism or event venue operation be in support prior to approval. *Speaker also submitted a written submission; see submission 16.*
4	Opposed	Speaker lives in Parkland County and voiced support for a local agritourism operation. They don't think the bylaw supports diversified agriculture and is too complex for small farm businesses. They expressed that the costs apply for rezoning/ permits to allow for more intensive agriculture activities could cause financial barriers that could lead to business closures, effectively threatening food security and leading to only large producers being able to survive.
5	Opposed	Speaker represents a local agritourism operator. They told us their business will likely shut down if the bylaw is approved. *Speaker also submitted a written submission; see submission 18.*

Submission	Position	Comments
6	Opposed	Speaker voiced support for a local agritourism operation. They believe there is a general lack of clarity in the bylaw, with contradictory/unclear definitions as to what farm table dinners and weddings would be considered as and what "minimal site visits" would refer to. They believe the bylaw uses vague language and would like to see clear targets for operators.
7	Opposed	Speaker lives in Sturgeon County. They support diversified agriculture, but feel bylaw needs more clarity, particularly as it relates to the intensity of operations. They think more consideration is needed for the impacts to properties surrounding diversified agriculture operations.
8	Opposed	Speaker lives in Strathcona County. They suggest Council vote in favor of diversified agriculture and to reflect best practice in other jurisdictions. They suggest revising the bylaw to allow commercial events such as weddings (up to 10 per year), retreats, ceremonies and corporate functions on agricultural land. They believe such events can be focused on agriculture. They expressed that requiring some operations to apply for rezoning/permits to allow for more intensive agriculture activities could cause financial barriers; they suggest making this an affordable process. Further, they noted "ceremonies" should be allowed as to not infringe on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. *Speaker also submitted a written submission; see submission 19.*
9	Opposed	Speaker lives in Strathcona County. They suggest Council vote in favor of diversified agriculture and to reflect best practice in other jurisdictions. They suggest revising the bylaw to allow commercial events such as weddings (up to 10 per year), retreats, ceremonies and corporate functions on agricultural land. They believe such events can be focused on agriculture. They expressed that requiring some operations to apply for rezoning/permits to allow for more intensive agriculture activities could cause financial barriers; they suggest making this an affordable process. Further, they noted "ceremonies" should be allowed as to not infringe on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. *Speaker also submitted a written submission; see submission 19.*
10	In favour	Speaker lives near an existing event venue in Sturgeon County that is operating without proper approvals. They support not allowing event venues on agricultural land and considering these venues as commercial in nature. They noted a decreased quality of life due to the nearby event venue as a result of noise, trespassing and traffic issues.

Submission	Position	Comments
11	Opposed	Speaker works for a local agritourism operator. They told us they will lose their job if the bylaw is approved. *Speaker also submitted a written submission; see submissions 8 to 13 and 20 to 30.*
12	Opposed	Speaker works for a local agritourism operator. They feel the County is shutting down their way of life and limiting their ability to perform weddings and ceremonies. Further, they said limiting the performance of "ceremonies" infringes on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.
13	Opposed	Speaker works for a local agritourism operator. They support diversified agriculture. *Speaker also submitted a written submission; see submissions 8 to 13 and 20 to 30.*
14	Opposed	Speaker works for a local agritourism operator. They support agricultural activities on agricultural land and expressed concern about commercial events not being allowed on agricultural lands, as they think commercial events – such as weddings, corporate events and retreats – can be agricultural in nature.
15	In favour	Speaker lives near an existing event venue in Sturgeon County. They support the bylaw but are concerned with how it will be implemented for existing businesses. Their main issues with event venues relate to quality of life for neighbours as a result of noise and traffic issues.

Next steps

The proposed bylaw will go to Council for further consideration and possible approval in fall 2022.

For the latest information, visit **sturgeoncounty.ca/AgriReview**



Sturgeon
COUNTY

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