

COMMUNITY DISCUSSIONS

Rural Character and Settlements Workshop

The third workshop focused on rural character and settlements; the areas consisting of farms, resource, forestry, and recreational lands, which support various uses such as resource activities, agricultural and associated activities, recreational uses, developments, and environmental conservation.

The objective of this workshop was to explore aspects of rural settlement areas while gaining an understanding of the components that contribute to rural character and how they can be supported for the future.

Participants noted that rural character can be attributed to various aspects:

- the surrounding natural heritage such as the Georgian Bay and Niagara Escarpment
- farms, homestead culture
- Meaford's small halls
- a sense of "times passed" owing to the historical character of the hamlets.

These key characteristics should be maintained into the future, especially in protecting natural areas and ensuring that water quality does not degrade with future growth.

Participants discussed:

- tension between acknowledging that housing should be encouraged in hamlets while paying attention to sense of place and how to foster sustainability with low-density living
- protecting the waterfront and greenspace
- maintaining public access to the waterfront, prioritizing connectivity between trails, sidewalks, and cycling paths
- desire for recreational facilities such as washrooms and playgrounds to be enhanced and maintained
- preserving greenspace and showcasing natural heritage features that can facilitate educational outreach
- development on the waterfront and greenspace was not seen as favourable
- linking local food production and tourism opportunities to connect people with the farming communities, providing both experiential and educational opportunities
- Meaford's agricultural community continuing to support local food production and eco-tourism opportunities
- creating and promoting events around Meaford's agricultural and farming sector, such as wineries and breweries, bike-friendly tours, racing events, cider festivals, and more.