

County of Elgin

OFFICIAL PLAN REVIEW PUBLIC MEETING

2024.03.26



PROJECT BACKGROUND

WHAT IS AN OFFICIAL PLAN?

An official plan is a municipality's official policy position (or statement) on land use planning and is typically composed of two primary parts:

- Land use policies;
- Land use schedules (or maps) that designate land through the municipality for various purposes (e.g. agricultural, residential, commercial, or industrial uses)

WHAT IS AN OFFICIAL PLAN?

Official plans are used by municipalities across Ontario to help them:

- Develop an overall road map for how development and infrastructure are to be implemented across the municipality
- Ensure a consistent approach to decision-making on land use planning and development applications
- Ensure best practices in development and land / resource management are employed

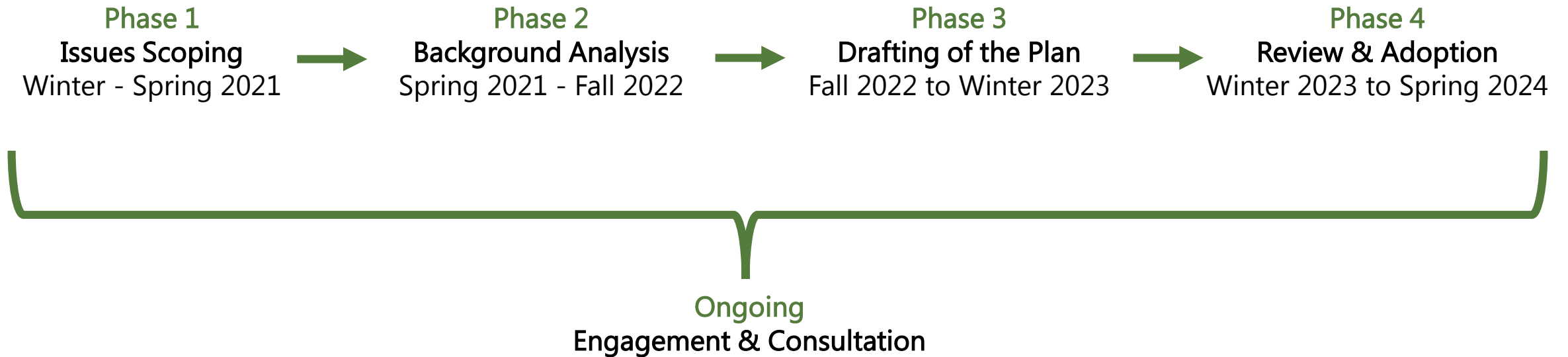
WHY IS AN OFFICIAL PLAN IMPORTANT?

- Official plans are statutory documents meaning that they are passed under the authority of an act (in this case the Planning Act)
- In Ontario the Planning Act requires that all decisions made by either County Council or a local municipal council conforms to the policies and land use designations of an official plan

WHY IS ELGIN COUNTY REVIEWING ITS OFFICIAL PLAN?

- The Planning Act requires that municipalities in Ontario review and update their official plans every five years
- It's been over 12-years since County Council adopted the current Official Plan and a lot has changed during that time (including the recent industrial announcement in St. Thomas)
- The County also wants to ensure there is enough land needed for new homes, businesses, and industry

PROJECT PROCESS



OFFICIAL PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

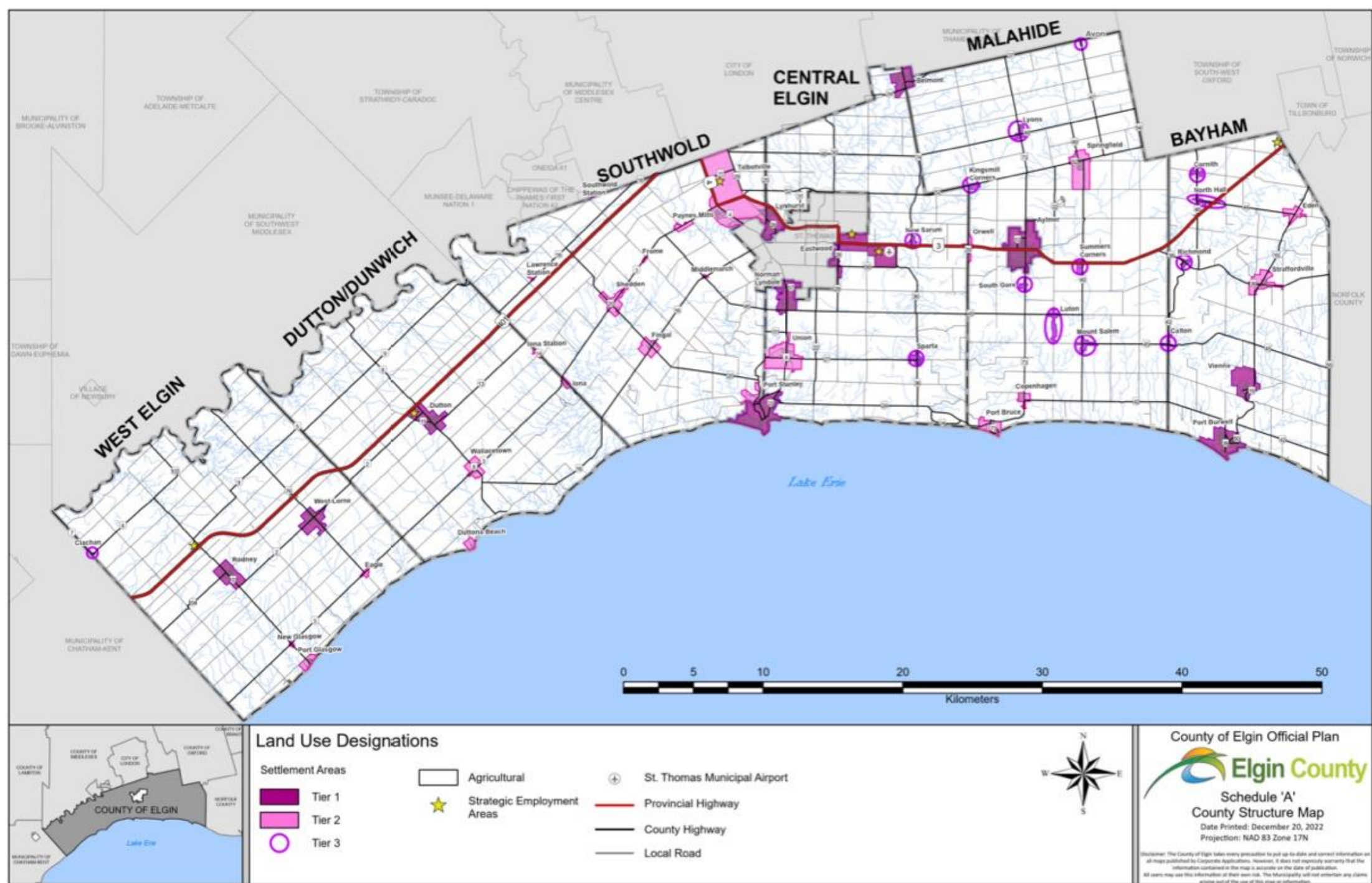
GENERAL CHANGES

- All policies and designations were updated to comply with all Planning Act amendments, the Provincial Policy Statement (2020), and all current provincial and national development guidelines.
- The existing 'community vision' has been replaced with an approach built around 10 strategic directions that serve as the basis for the Plan.
- A general housekeeping of language and terminology was conducted throughout the entire document. The approach to this housekeeping and editing was two part:
 - Improve the use of plain language to increase the accessibility and readability of the Plan by the public; and,
 - Reduce the overall length of the document by removing repetitive policies and redundant language, again to increase the readability of the Plan by the public.

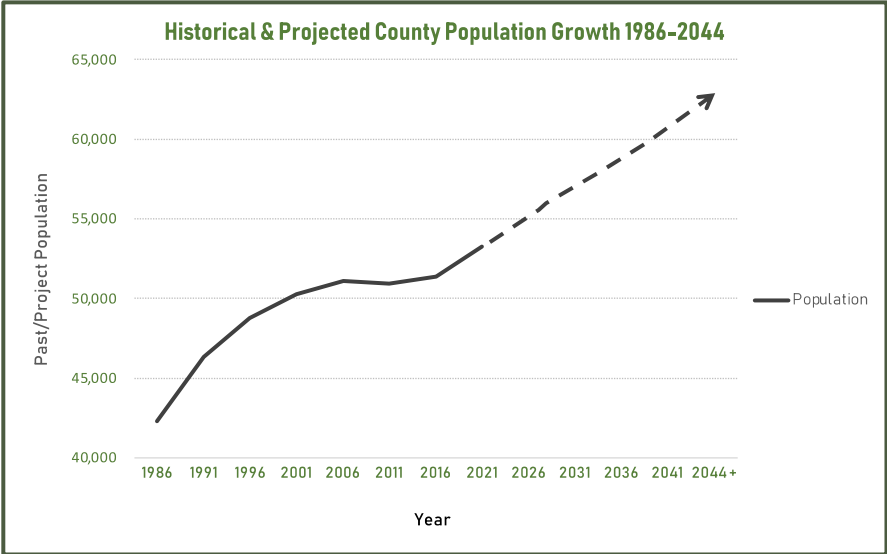
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

- Included an 'overview' of the County to provide context to the reader. This overview is largely based on the previous 'vision statement' contained in the current plan.
- Included a new explanation of the Ontario planning system and the relationship between the County Official Plan, local official plans, and the Provincial Policy Statement to assist the reader in understanding how the planning system works.
- Includes a new section outlining the structure of the Plan and how it should be read and cross-referenced.

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH MANAGEMENT



GROWTH RATES



Local Municipality	Gross Developable Land Needs (ha)	Surplus or Deficit of Land Supply
Aylmer	58.3	-20.8
Bayham	29.6	93.2
Central Elgin	105.9	36.7
Dutton Dunwich	20.6	47.5
Malahide	58.1	29.4
Southwold	33.0	75.8
West Elgin	19.5	81.3
Elgin County	324.9	343.3

* These figures were also reviewed and updated in the fall of 2023 to reflect the new industrial facility planned for St. Thomas

CHAPTER 2: GROWTH MANAGEMENT

- The schedules were updated to reflect the most up to date urban boundaries, including those from recently approved official plans like Southwold and Central Elgin.
- Maintains the existing hierarchy of settlement areas (i.e. Tier I, II, and III settlements).
- Only permits expansions of urban boundaries on full municipal services.
- Maintains the current approach to re-designation of rural lands and expansion of settlement areas.
- Includes a revised residential infilling and intensification target of 16% as opposed to the current 15%, to reflect the assumptions made by the County's Population Projections and Land Needs Assessment Report.

CHAPTER 3: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Restructured the economic development policies to focus on the County's three major economic priorities: industrial growth, agriculture, and tourism
- Identified employment areas that are of 'strategic importance' to the County due to their size and location, along with policies to protect these areas as well as county-wide important transportation corridors and facilities.
- Renamed the existing 'Tourism Corridors' to 'Scenic Routes' to better reflect their role and include a policy to encourage high-quality development along them.
- Expanded community improvement plan policies by clarifying what types of programming the County may jointly fund in conjunction with a local municipality

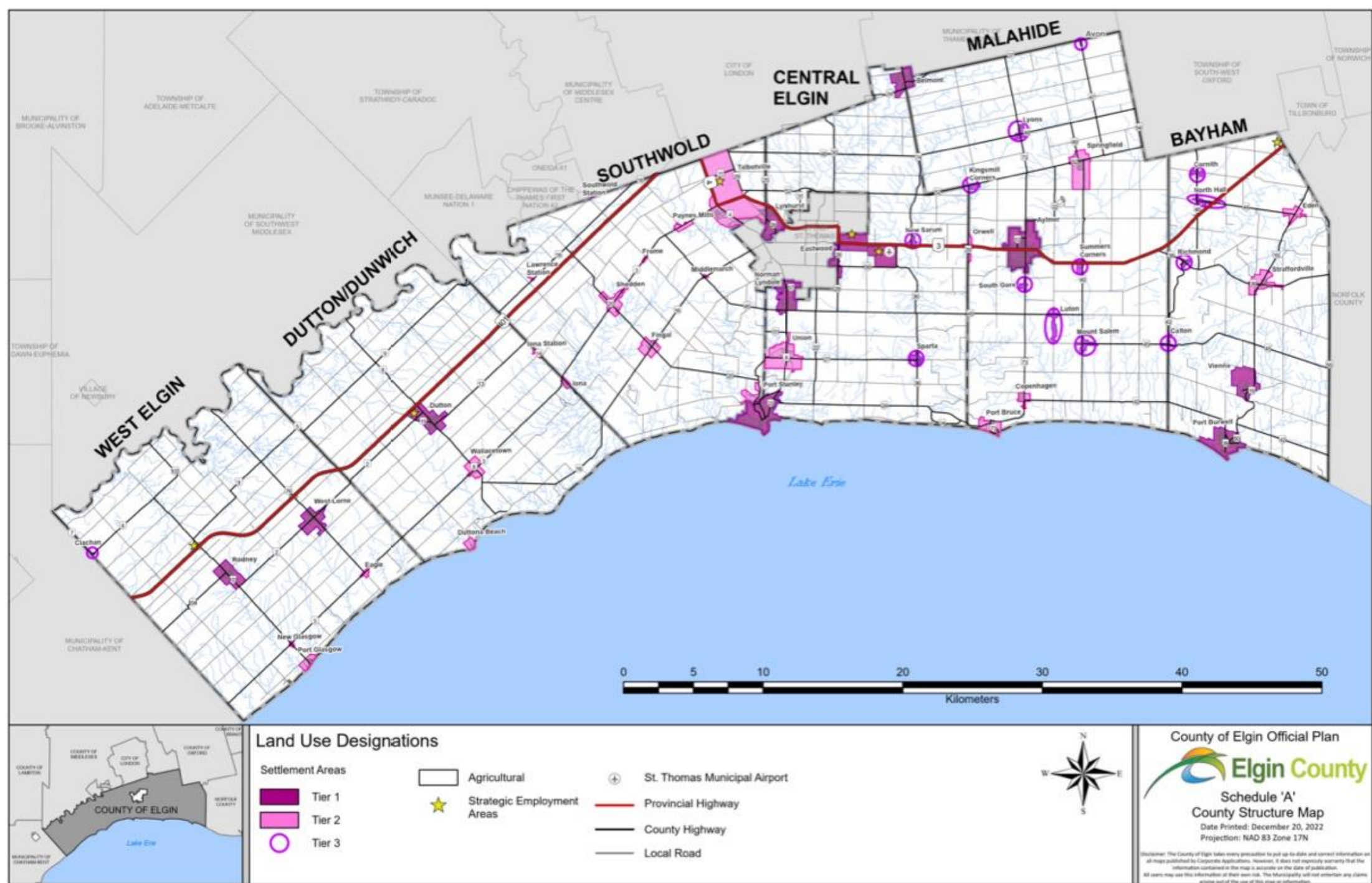
CHAPTER 4: HOUSING

- Created a new section entitled 'Housing' and consolidated a number of existing policies in this chapter reflect its critical importance to the County.
- Developed a new requirement for a mix of housing types in new subdivisions whereby a minimum of 30% of new dwellings must be another form of housing other than single-detached dwellings (i.e. semi-detached, row house, duplexes, apartment, etc.), and the conditions under which this requirement could be waived.
- Added new language around additional dwelling units to reflect recent changes to the Planning Act.
- Increased the Plan's affordable housing target to 55% of new homes as 55% of Elgin's population are classified as low- and moderate-income households

CHAPTER 4: HOUSING (CONT'D)

- Incorporated a new policy that requires local municipalities to incorporate policies in their official plans that address the conversion of rental housing.
- Introduced policies that encourage the County to explore affordable housing development for surplus lands and facilities.
- Introduced policies to encourage the creation of emergency shelters, transitional housing, and community housing.
- Introduced a policy to encourage coordination with higher levels of government to increase affordable housing supply in the County.

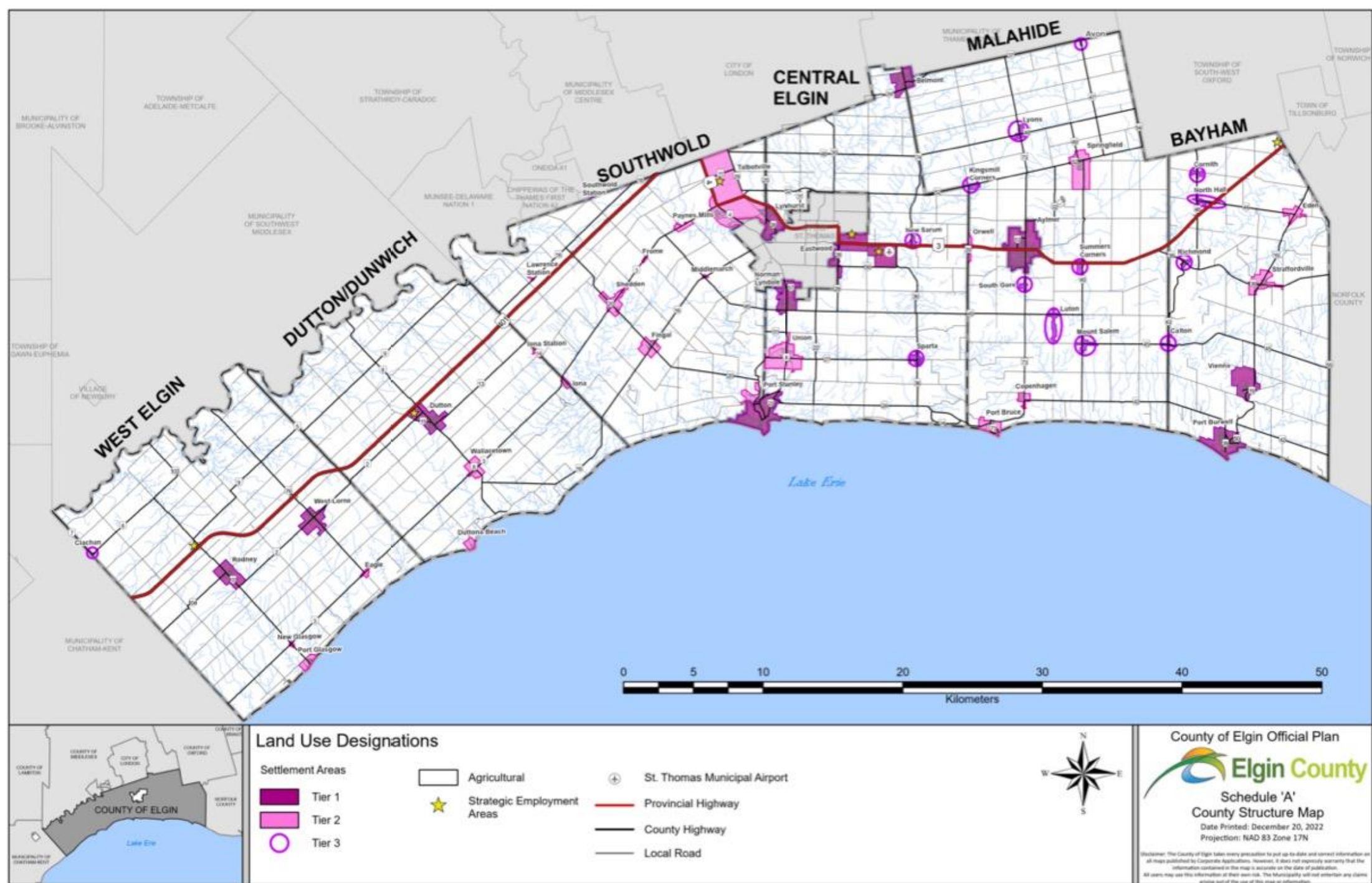
CHAPTER 5: THE RURAL AREA



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- Reorganized and re-drafted most policies to reflect the major changes to the Provincial Policy Statement. Since the original plan was adopted, provincial policies allow a greater mix of uses in the agricultural area (i.e agricultural related uses, on-farm diversified uses, etc.) and policies were redrafted to reflect this.
- Introduced a policy to protect 'rural character', particularly for non-farm development.
- Introduced policy that encourages new development to mitigate against the effects of climate change.
- Maintained existing minimum lot size of 40 ha for farm parcels as per provincial direction.
- Maintained existing prohibitions on residential lot creation and existing policies permitting 'surplus farm dwelling severances' as no substantive changes to provincial policy have been introduced since the original plan was adopted.

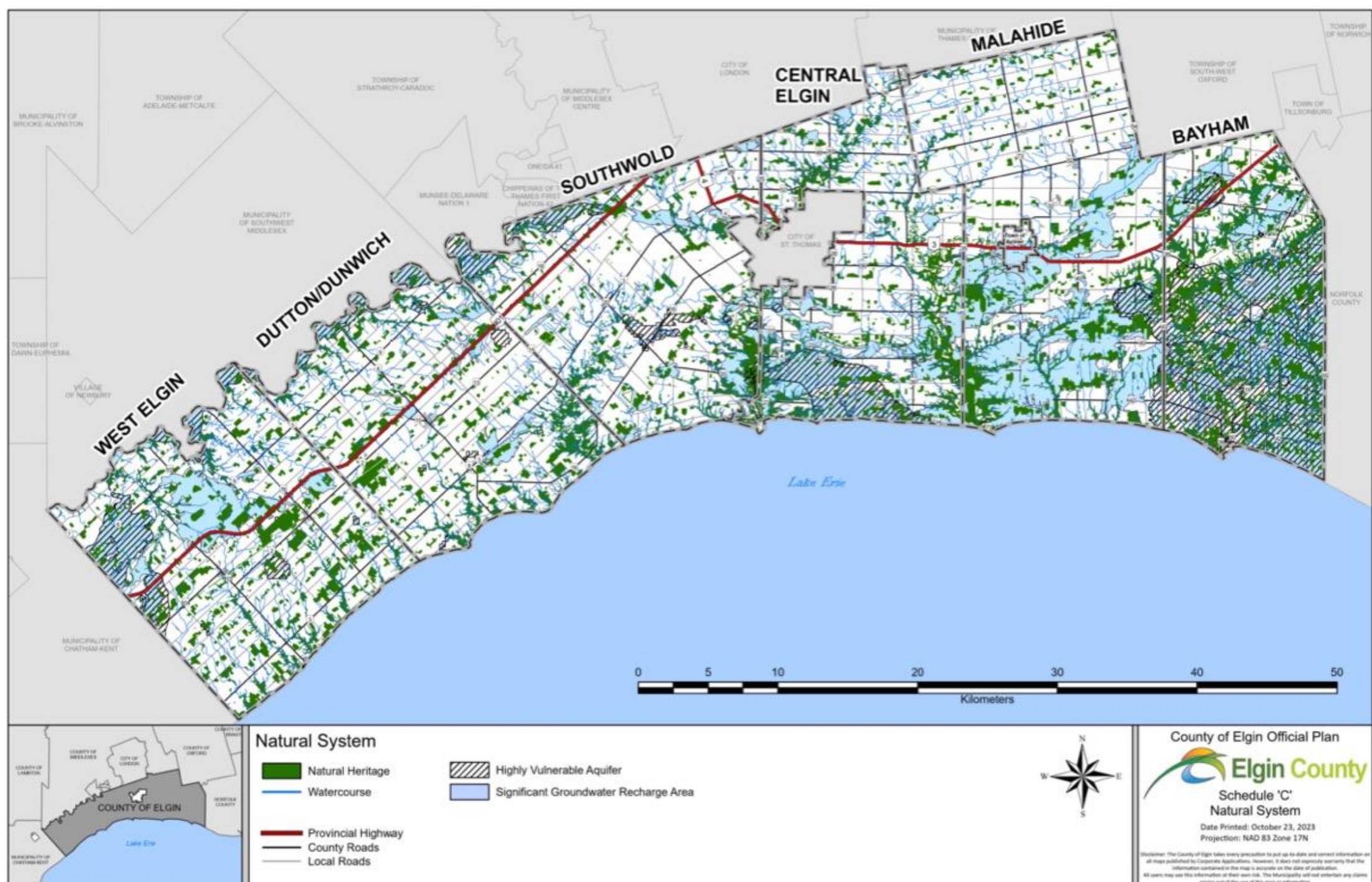
CHAPTER 6: SETTLEMENT AREAS



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- Clarified that local official plans will be relied upon for most development policies in settlement areas
- Introduced new a policy to protect 'urban character' of the County's towns and villages.
- Established a new minimum net density of 20 units / ha in fully serviced settlement areas, and when this may be waived.
- Introduced policy that encourage new development to mitigate against the effects of climate change.

CHAPTER 7: THE NATURAL SYSTEM



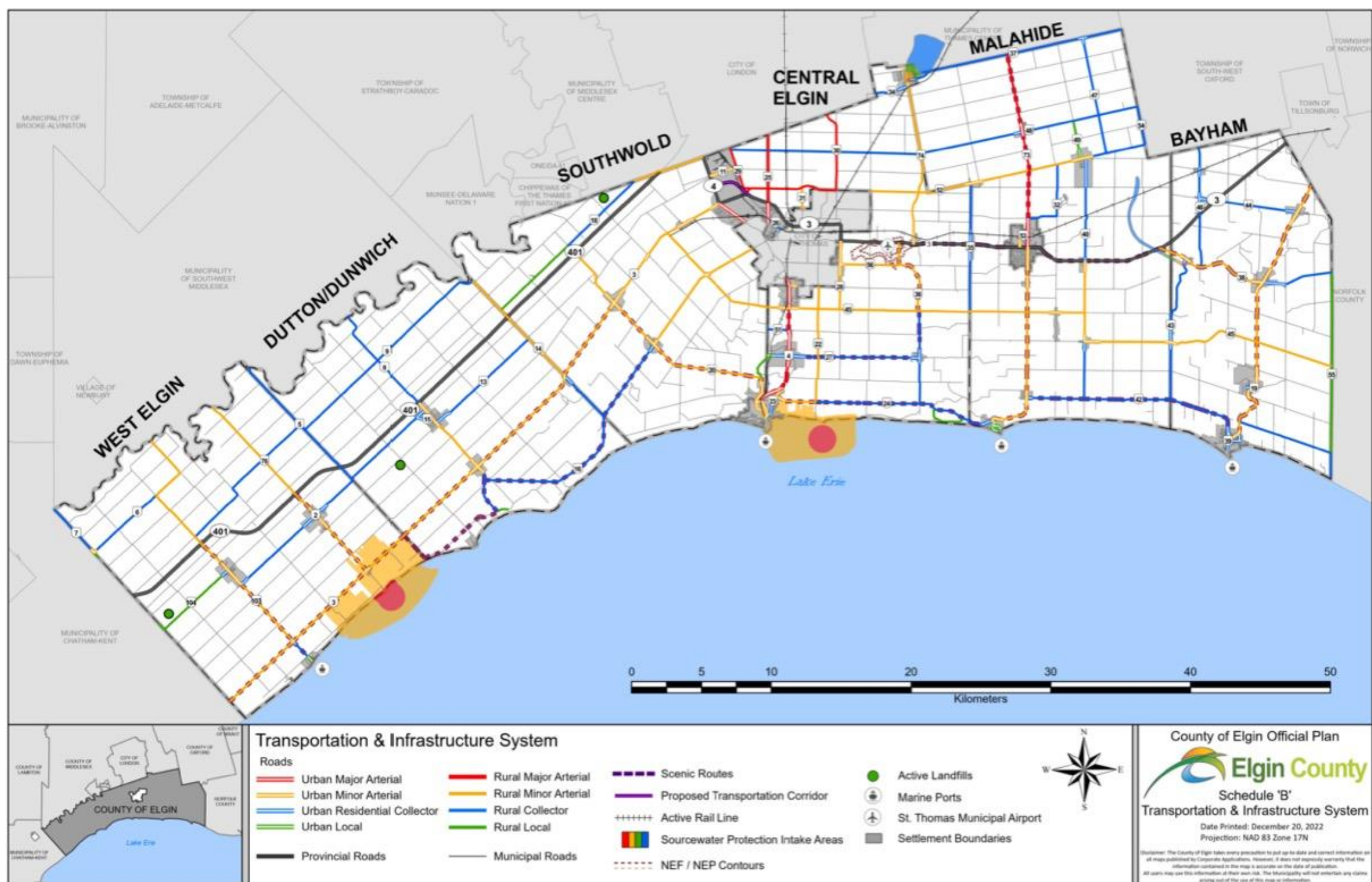
CHAPTER 7: THE NATURAL SYSTEM

- Schedules incorporate the mapping contained in the 'Elgin County Natural Heritage Study' while maintaining minimum compliance with provincial policy regarding the protection of natural heritage areas.
- No changes were made to the levels of protection for natural heritage features or the features that are protected.
- Clarified how development proposals within the Natural System will be evaluated.
- Expanded upon the watershed planning policies and introduce policies that encourage the development of subwatershed studies and require that watershed considerations be taken into account when conducting an environmental impact assessment.
- Introduced a forest coverage target of 30% of the land base by 2044

CHAPTER 7: THE NATURAL SYSTEM (CONT'D)

- Clarified that the limits of the Natural System designation are not precise, and that refinements of these boundaries do not require an amendment.
- Incorporated a new requirement for compensatory restoration when natural areas are destroyed through development.
- Incorporated a clarified requirement for hydrogeological assessments and cumulative impact assessments for subdivisions serviced by groundwater.
- Incorporated a clarified requirement a geotechnical assessment for subdivisions on septic systems to protect groundwater.

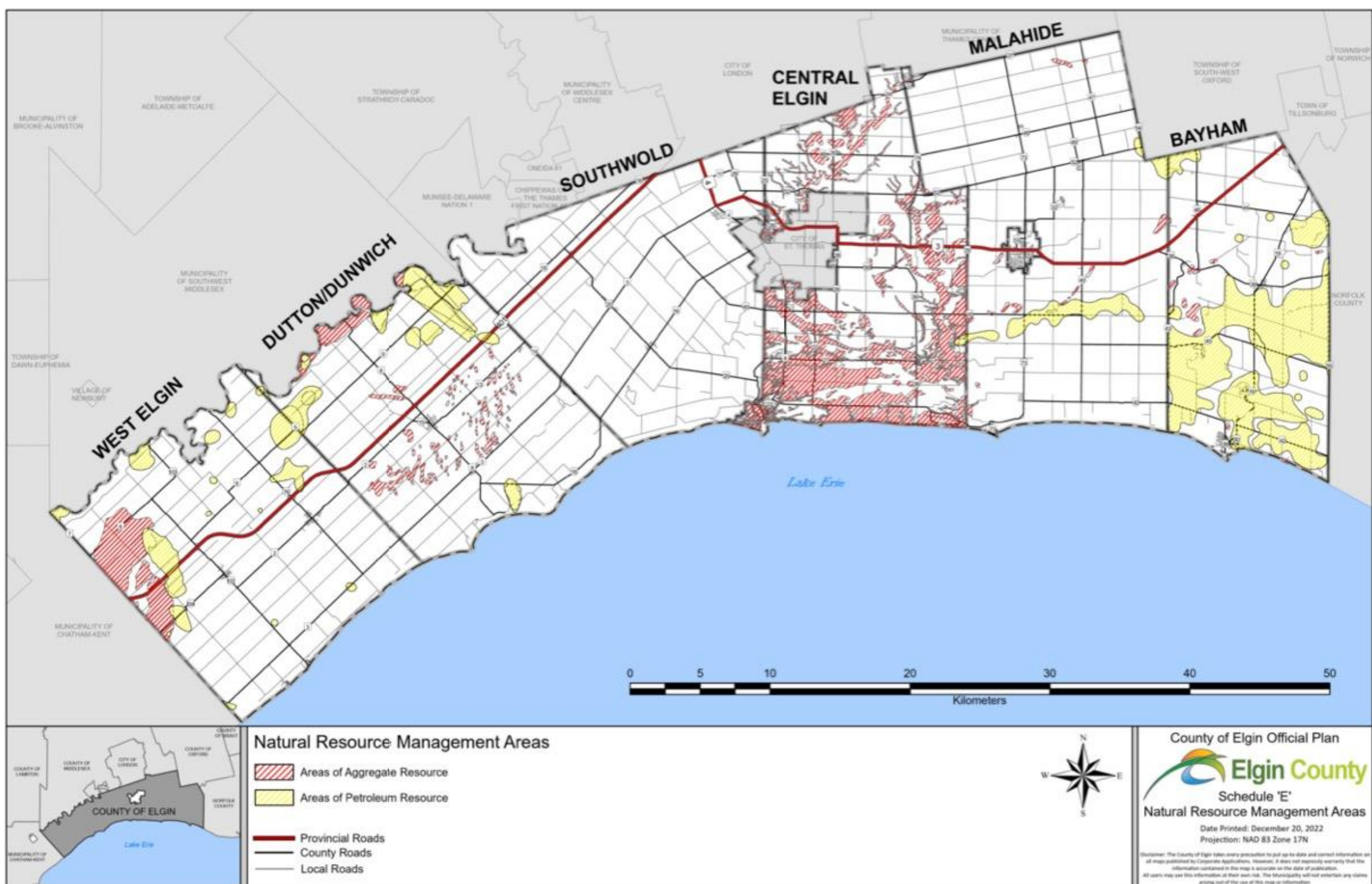
CHAPTER 8: TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE SYSTEMS



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- Incorporated the new county road design standards arising from the County's draft Transportation Master Plan.
- Clarified and streamlined policies around how development that is not proposed on full municipal services is to be justified and assessed.
- Included source water protection mapping on land use schedules since these plans were not in place when the current Plan was adopted.
- Clarified setbacks from railways to reflect national guidelines not in place when the current Plan was adopted.
- Introduced policy for development adjacent to linear infrastructure (i.e. hydro lines, pipelines, etc.) to clarify how regulations of the respective operators will be incorporated into development.
- Incorporated the Noise Exposure Forecast / Noise Exposure Projection (NEF/NEP) contours around St. Thomas Municipal Airport on land use schedules as data layers are now available.

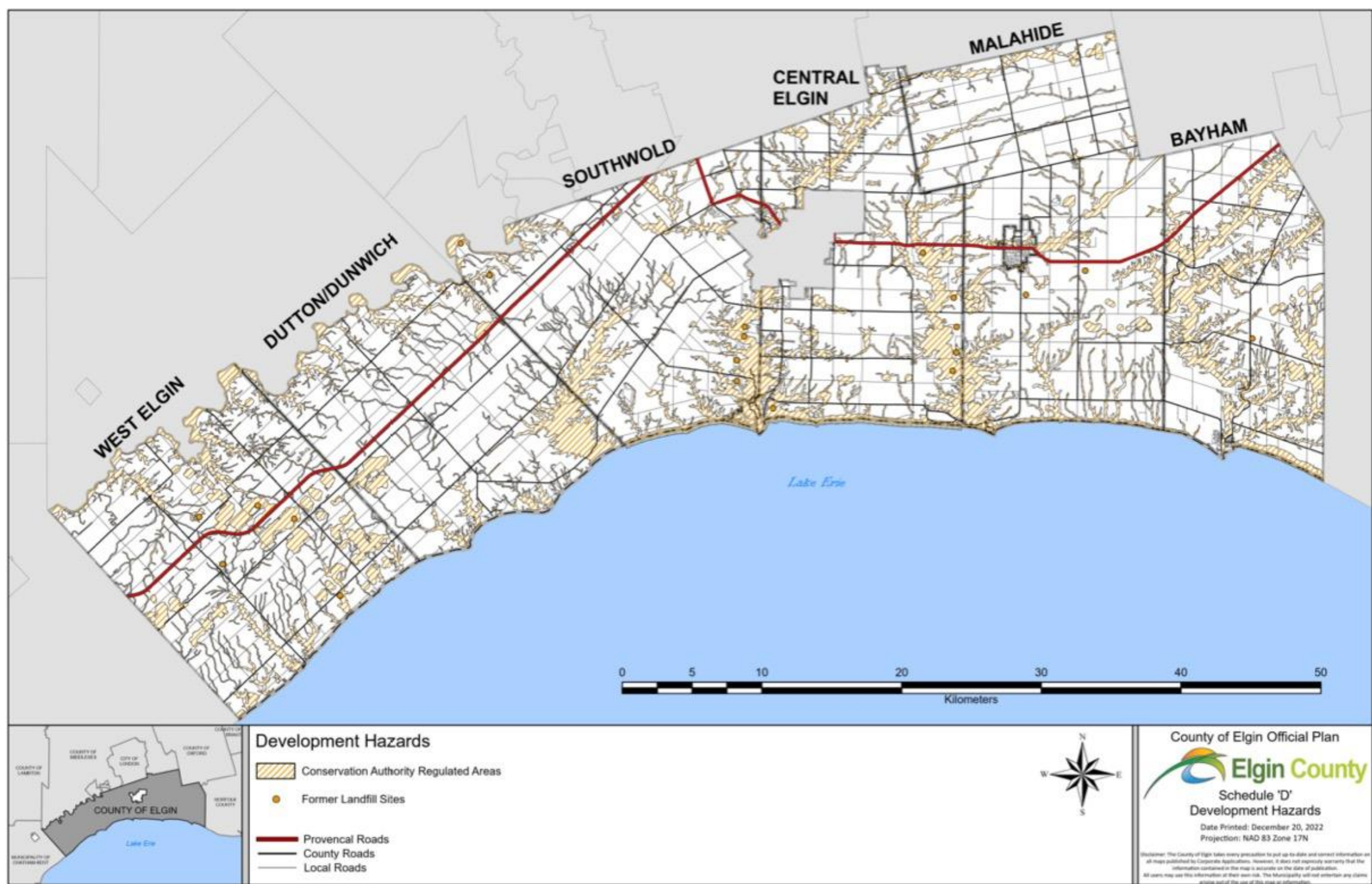
CHAPTER 9: NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AREAS



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- Clarified language around when development is permitted in areas of natural resource potential in accordance with provincial policy.
- Otherwise existing policies were reorganized and clarified but not substantively altered.

CHAPTER 10: DEVELOPMENT HAZARDS



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- As a result of Bill 23, a new policy was introduced to clarify how conservation authority (CA) regulations will be dealt with should the provincial government create regulations that exempt CA permitting when a Planning Act approval occurs.
- Removed references to CA shoreline management plans as these plans will be implemented primarily by respective CA's and local municipalities.
- Otherwise existing policies were reorganized and clarified but not substantively altered.

CHAPTER 11: CULTURAL HERITAGE

- Clarified that cultural heritage protection is primarily a local matter, but that archaeological protection is a primarily county matter due to its cross-jurisdictional nature.
- Simplified language around how to determine an area of archaeological potential (using the Province's simplified checklist) and therefore when assessments are required.
- Introduced new policies around Indigenous archaeological resources and requirements for engagement with Indigenous communities.
- Introduced policies around unexpected archaeological discoveries and protocols for addressing unexpected discoveries.
- Introduced a policy that County could create an archaeological management plan to reduce requirements of developers to complete assessments

CHAPTER 12: REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

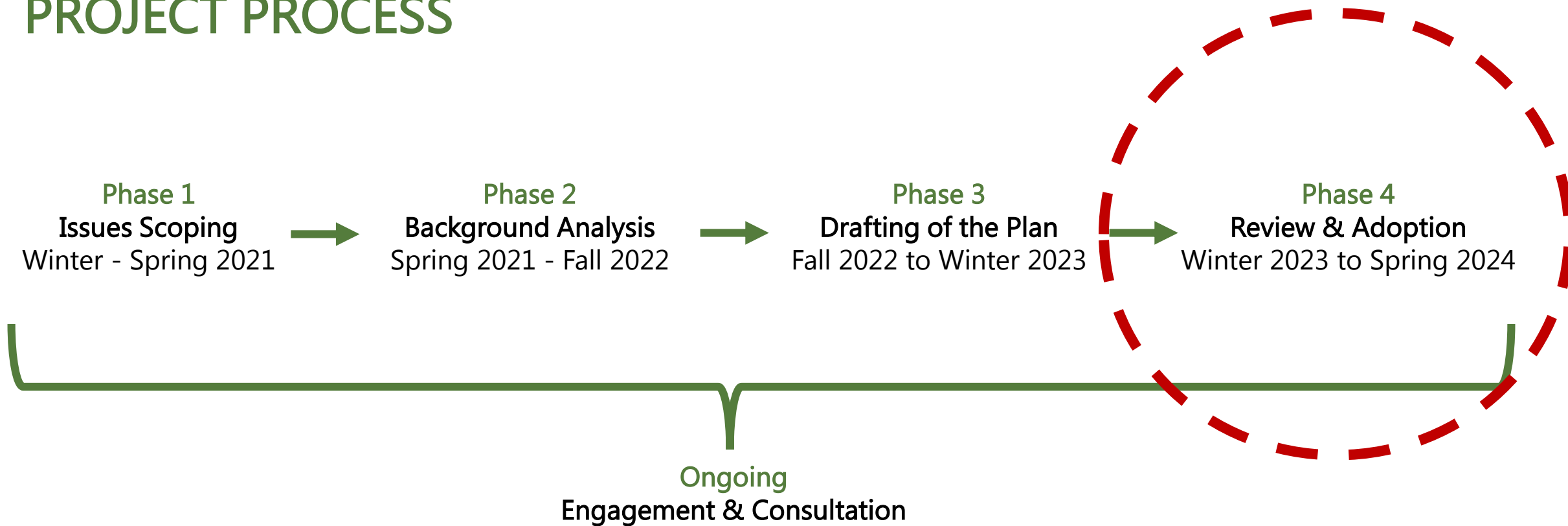
- Expansion of existing policies on how development applications are to be reviewed. No substantive changes have been introduced, primarily clarification.
- Introduced policies on when and how exempted condominiums and part lot control exemption applications will be considered and evaluated.
- Clarified when a severance may be applied for versus a plan of subdivision.
- Expanded the list of studies that may be required to form part of a complete application.
- Clarified that the County will determine who is qualified to prepare required studies.
- Expanded Indigenous consultation policies including the creation of an engagement protocol to assist with the County and local municipalities 'duty to consult'.
- Overall primarily a reorganization and clarification of existing policies.

CHAPTER 13: IMPLEMENTATION & ADMINISTRATION

- Introduced policies to establish a Planning Advisory Committee as required by previous changes to the Planning Act
- Incorporated a new policy that requires annual reporting to County Council on achieving the goals and objectives of the Plan.
- Overall primarily a reorganization and clarification of existing policies.

NEXT STEPS

PROJECT PROCESS



NEXT STEPS

- The Draft Official Plan has been posted online for commenting since February 14th and after today the commenting period will end
- Staff will then consolidate the comments received and prepare a staff report outlining for County Council any final recommended changes
- The finalized plan will then be brought to a regular council meeting for adoption before being sent to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for approval
- Approval by the Ministry is anticipated within 3-4 months

THANK YOU!