

Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan (RPCIP): Engagement Summary

In consultation with the County of Brant Agricultural Advisory Committee, the County of Brant has prepared a draft Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan, or RPCIP to help strengthen Brant's rural economy, support farm viability, and keep rural communities active and welcoming.

Rural residents, farm operators, and rural business owners were invited to engage with County staff to review the draft Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan and share their feedback.

Engagement ran from January 6 to February 13, 2026. Participation included a survey, offered online and in print as well as a call-in option. In addition to the survey, 3 in person open houses were held in Onondaga, Oakland, and Glen Morris On January 28 and 29, 2026.

Engagement shows strong conditional support for the RPCIP. Participants prioritize farm viability and practical improvements while requesting clear eligibility rules, transparent decision making, and reassurance around farmland protection.

This report summarizes what we heard. It combines survey results, engagement metrics, input gathered at the open house events, and includes considerations based on engagement.

Promotion summary

County staff used multiple channels to build awareness and encourage participation

Promotion included:

- “Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan (RPCIP)” project webpage on Engage Brant (EngageBrant.ca/RPCIP)
- A postcard mailed to rural areas across the County to promote the project, survey, and open houses.
- Article in the County's January issue of the Economic Development and Tourism Newsletter
- Direct emails to Brant News and Engage Brant subscribers.
- Posters displayed in high traffic areas in County of Brant facilities.
- Weekly posts on County of Brant social media platforms.

Engagement metrics

- Over 700 Engage project page visits.
- 65 survey responses received.
- Project FAQs were viewed 51 times.
- A total of 60 participants attended 3 open house events

Open house feedback

In person open houses were held in Onondaga, Oakland, and Glen Morris in January 2026. There were 60 attendees that reviewed display boards, asked questions, and placed dot votes on priorities, concerns, and support needs.

Community priorities

The strongest priorities focused on strengthening the agricultural base and local food system:

- Supporting local food production and sales, 15%
- Supporting farmers to diversify income and stay viable, 13%
- Supporting agri-tourism and rural tourism, 12%

Reuse of existing rural buildings, improving the look and function of rural properties, and adding on farm housing also received support.

This signals strong interest in adaptation and diversification within an agricultural context.

Most useful grant types

Interest in grant types was evenly distributed. The strongest support was for practical and lower risk improvements. Four categories each received 8%:

- New or improved signage
- Landscaping, parking, and outdoor visitor areas
- ARU upgrades on farms
- Help with planning, building, or related application fees

Converting buildings to eligible commercial or tourism uses received 5%. Façade improvements received 3%. Only 2% selected none of these.

Larger capital projects received less interest which suggests caution around cost and complexity.

Main concerns

The top concerns reflect protection, fairness, and financial impact:

1. Impact on farmland or pressure for non-farm development, 10%
2. Possible impact on property taxes, 10%
3. Fairness of which areas or businesses are eligible, 7%
4. Administration of grants or decision making, 5%

Noise and community character were also noted.

Supports needed to apply

Participants were clear about what would help them move forward:

- Staff help to discuss ideas before applying, 13%
- Simple application forms, 13%
- Clear guidance about eligibility and examples, 12%

This aligns with broader engagement findings. People want a straightforward, supported process. They are looking for clarity before committing time and money.

Barriers to applying

The biggest barrier identified was that project costs remain too high even with a grant. This indicates that financial risk remains a key deterrent. Grant structure, funding levels, and timing of reimbursement may influence program participation.

Questions raised at open house events

Open house comments focused on eligibility clarity. Questions included:

1. Whether signage grants could support farms hosting occasional educational or agency tours
2. Whether solar panel installation could be eligible
3. Whether unused livestock barns could be converted into storage rental uses
4. How “permanent outdoor seating” is defined, and whether a pavilion would qualify

The eligibility questions mentioned reinforce the supporting open house feedback related to ‘Supports Needed to Apply’. They signal that residents are seeking practical clarity on how the policy applies to real world farm and rural business operations. Together, this feedback highlights the need for plain language definitions, scenario-based examples, and structured preapplication discussions to reduce uncertainty and build applicant confidence with the goal of increasing program participation.

These themes were also reinforced through the survey results, summarized in the next section.

Survey Responses Report summary

1. Who Responded

Of the 65 survey participants, respondents represent a mix of rural residents and agricultural stakeholders with the strongest participation in Paris and Burford.

Rural residents, 83% of respondents

- 30 live in a rural area that is not a farm
- 24 live on a farm

Agricultural and business stakeholders, 68% of respondents

- 17 are part of an agricultural society or farm organization
- 15 own or operate a farm business
- 8 own or operate a rural non-farm business
- 4 own or operate a rural tourism business

Geographic representation

- Paris, 28%
- Burford, 14%
- Scotland, 9%

With Glen Morris, Harley, Mount Pleasant, and St. George at 8% representation each.

2. Awareness and Understanding of the RPCIP

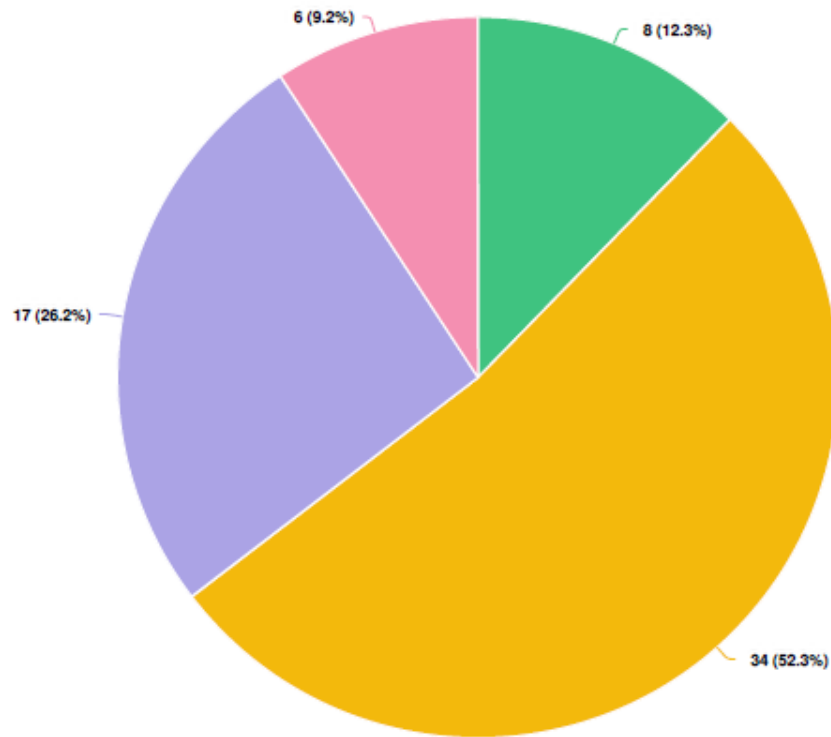
Awareness was low at the start of engagement. While many respondents grasped the general intent, a significant portion lacked clarity on eligibility, funding levels, and decision making.

Awareness

- 66% had not heard of the RPCIP
- 31% had heard of it but did not know details
- 3% knew quite a bit

Clarity of understanding

Q4 How clear is your understanding of what the RPCIP is trying to do?



Question options

Very clear. Somewhat clear. Not very clear. Not clear at all.

3. Importance of draft plan goals

Respondents strongly support goals tied directly to farm viability, local food systems, and adaptive reuse.

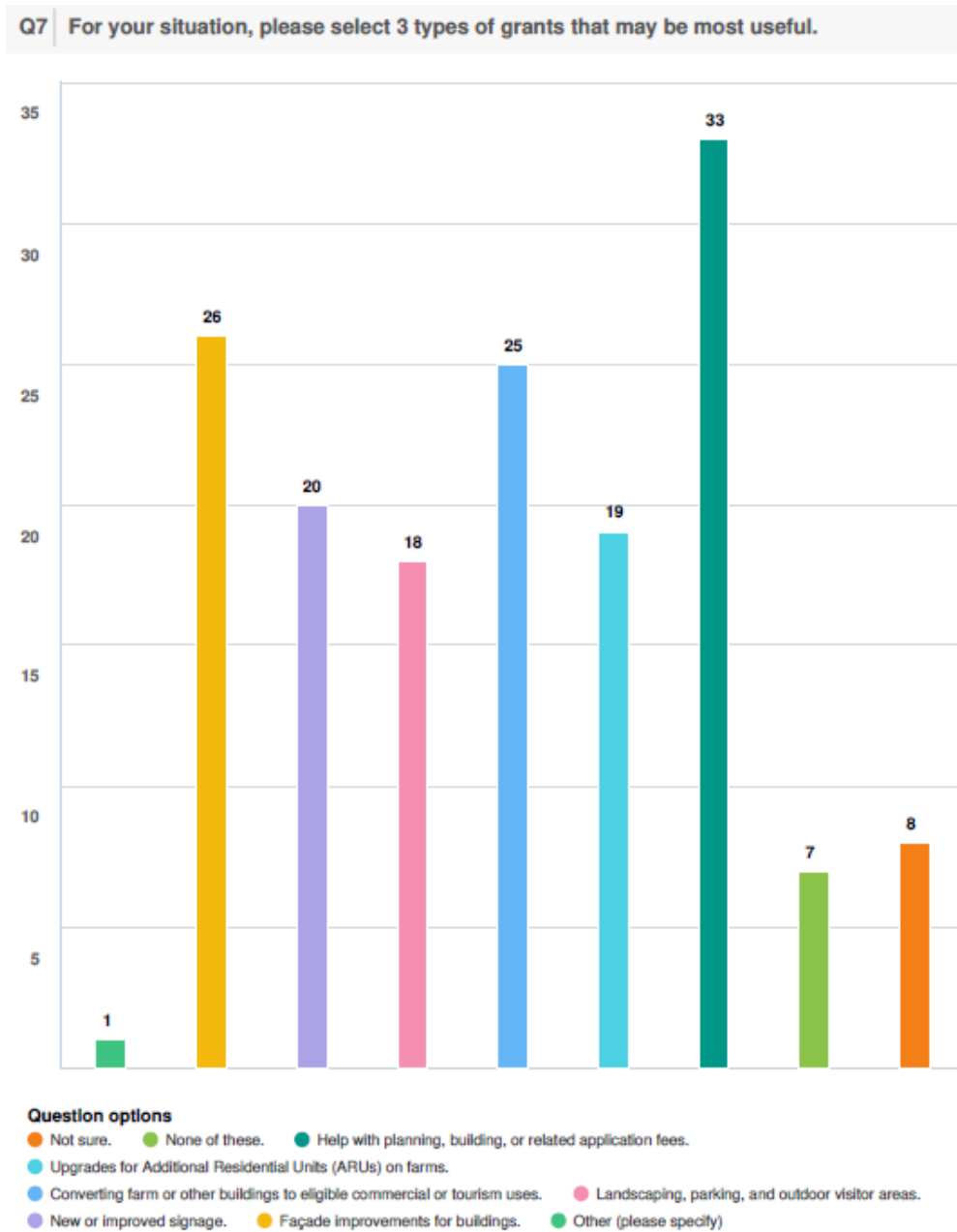
Strongest “Very Important” rating selections

- Supporting local food production and sales, 56

- Supporting farmers to diversify income and stay viable, 53
- Improving buildings and properties, 35
- Reuse of existing rural buildings, 34
- Additional farm housing, 32
- Supporting agri-tourism and rural tourism, 31

4. Preferred grant types

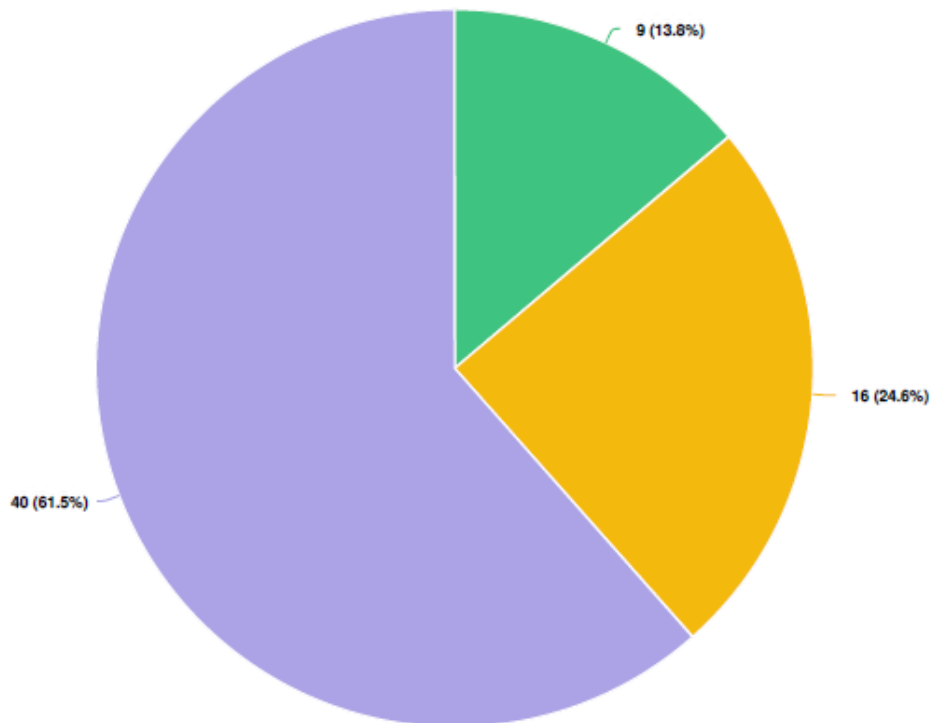
There is interest in tangible property improvements. At the same time, the spread across categories reinforces that rural needs vary by property type and business model.



5. Level of confidence and trust

Most respondents are still unsure about the program and are still forming an opinion. The feedback indicates a need for clearer information before they feel confident.

Q9 | Do you have any concerns about the draft RPCIP?



Question options

● Not sure ● No ● Yes

Top concern themes

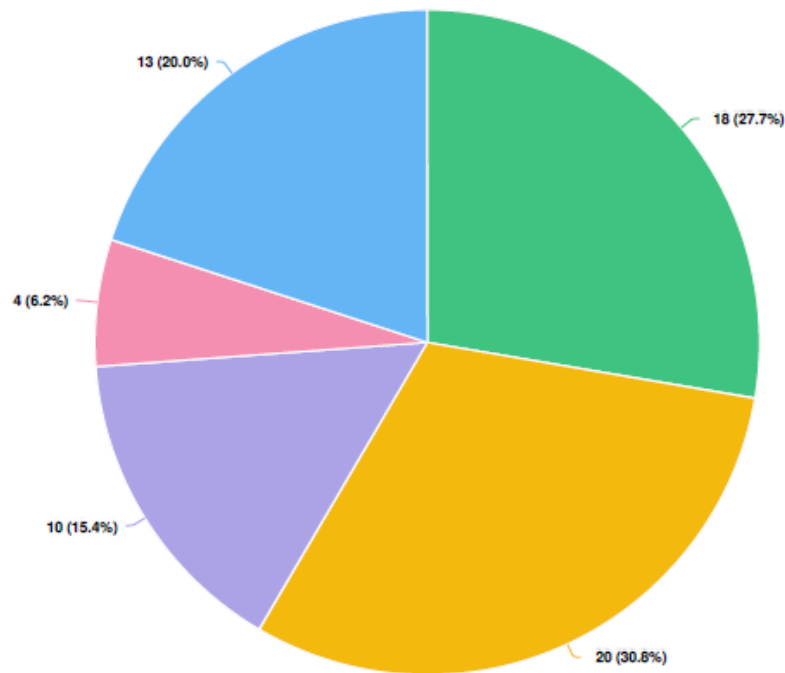
Among those who identified concerns, the main themes were:

- Impact on farmland or pressure for non-farm development
- Traffic, noise or nuisance from tourism or commercial uses
- Possible impact on property taxes
- Administration of grants or decision making
- Fairness of which areas or businesses are eligible
- Effect on community character

Land Use Safeguards

A majority believe existing planning policies mostly or somewhat address land use concerns. This indicates moderate confidence in the current planning framework.

Q12 The draft plan sets rules for eligibility, including that projects must comply with the Official Plan, Zoning By-Law, and conservation regulations. Does this address any concerns you may have about land use?



Question options

● Not sure
 ● Not at all
 ● Not really
 ● Somewhat
 ● Yes, mostly

The data suggests the primary issue is not resistance to the RPCIP concept, but ensuring residents clearly understand how it will operate and how safeguards will be applied.

6. Application readiness and barriers

There is demonstrated interest in applying with nearly half of respondents reporting that they are very likely to apply. Additional respondents indicate they are somewhat likely.

The primary barrier is cost with many respondents indicating that projects may still be too expensive even with a grant. The second major barrier is uncertainty about eligibility.

The table below summarizes supports requested, likelihood to apply, and key barriers.

Supports needed	Likelihood to apply	Main Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear eligibility guidance, 50 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 45%, Very likely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 36%, The project cost is still too high even with a grant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simple forms, 38 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17%, Somewhat likely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 24%, I do not think my property would qualify.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff assistance before applying, 35 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17%, Not at all likely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15% Prefer the ‘wait and see’ approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help with technical requirements, 26 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14%, Not sure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5% Uncertain long-term benefit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Predictable timelines and decisions, 21 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8%, Not very likely 	

These findings confirm that clearer rules, scenario-based examples, and structured preapplication support will likely increase participation.

Key themes and insights

These themes are drawn from the open-ended survey responses.

Protect rural land and rural life

Many comments link rural prosperity with farmland protection and maintaining rural character.

Focus on practical improvements

Participants described projects like farm store expansions, signage, site improvements, small event spaces, ARUs, and upgrades to existing buildings as their focus for the program.

Fairness and access

Respondents want assurance that small scale and family operations can access funding and that repeat recipients do not dominate the program.

Clear rules and a trusted process

Participants asked for clear definitions of eligibility, a clear application process, and decisions that avoid loopholes.

Suggested additions to eligibility

Respondents suggested areas like renewable energy, well and septic upgrades, heritage barn restoration, environmental stewardship, advertising support, farm stands, and targeted programs such as migrant worker housing.

Considerations based on community engagement

1. Put clarity first

Create a simple eligibility guide with scenario-based examples.

2. Add a preapplication step

Offer a short “idea check” with staff before people invest time and money.

3. Build trust through transparency

Publish general timelines and evaluation criteria, with maximums for how long the process may take at each phase, for each incentive program.

4. Reinforce land use safeguards in plain language

Clearly explain how Official Plan and zoning compliance will be reviewed and enforced. This could be built into the “idea check” preapplication step as well as program materials using plain language explanations of how Official Plan and zoning compliance will be checked and enforced.