



County of Brant Council Report

To: The Mayor and Members of County of Brant Council
From: Brandon Kortleve, Manager of Policy Planning, Policy Planning Division and Emily Stanley, Nethery Planning, Consulting Planner for Policy Planning Division
Date: April 14, 2026
Report #: RPT-0152-26
Subject: Omnibus Official Plan Amendment (OPA3-B-25) – Home-Based Industry and Business Policies
Purpose: For Approval

Recommendation

That Report RPT-0152-26, regarding updates to Phase 1 of the Omnibus Official Plan Amendment project, consisting of the home-based industry and business policies, be received as information;

And that the proposed by-law attached hereto as Appendix “B”, to amend the County of Brant Official Plan A Simply Grand Plan (2023) by adding new policies with respect to Home-Based Industry and Business, BE APPROVED.

Executive Summary

Supporting and enhancing the County’s economic development practices and policies is fundamental to its long-term growth, success, and sustainability. With over half of the County’s land located within the Agricultural System, agriculture remains an important economic driver and employment source. Providing agriculture and rural employment and enterprise opportunities that enable the County’s economy, while ensuring the protection of agricultural and residential lands from incompatible uses that may harm the established character of the County is paramount.

The purpose of this report is to seek endorsement of the proposed Official Plan Amendment to include new policies within the Economic Development and Prosperity section of Part 5 for Home-Based Business and Home-Based Industries uses. Consistent with the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024, the inclusion of these policies will strengthen the County's economic development framework and advance overarching goal of fostering a County that is an attractive place to live and work in.

Strategic Plan Priority

Strategic Priority 1 - Economic and Financial Resilience

Impacts and Mitigation

Social Impacts

This amendment is intended to promote inclusive communities by permitting home-based businesses and home-based industries as secondary uses on residential lands. The associated criteria ensure that these uses are compatible with surrounding land uses and built form.

Environmental Impacts

There are no environmental impacts associated with this report.

Economic Impacts

The amendment aims to establish policies that support home-based businesses and home-based industries across the County. These policies contribute to a vibrant local economy and entrepreneurship in rural areas by enabling residents to pursue innovative and small-scale economic ventures from their homes, while ensuring the established County residential character is preserved.

Report

Background

In mid- 2025, the County initiated an omnibus Official Plan Amendment (OPA) project to update select sections of the Official Plan to ensure policies remain current, effective, and aligned with provincial policy, emerging issues, and local implementation experience. The amendments are being advanced on a topic- by- topic basis, allowing for focused review and engagement outside of a comprehensive Official Plan review.

In partnership with the Economic Development team, in 2021 a Home-based Business Pilot Project was introduced to respond to COVID-19 and shifts in the economy, where its recommendations were intended to be carried out through new Official Plan policies, and implemented through the CPPS. The omnibus Official Plan Amendment project was then introduced to Council in June 2025 ([Report RPT-0243-25](#)), and a statutory public meeting was held on July 8, 2025 ([Report RPT-0243-25](#)) to share project information and to receive preliminary input from the public and stakeholders.

The first set of draft home-based business and home-based industry policies were presented for information at a statutory public meeting on November 11, 2025 ([Report RPT-0387-25](#)). Through the review process, the draft policies were circulated to the Province and public and no comments were received. Staff also considered implementation experience and issues identified through recent development applications and planning inquiries.

Minor adjustments were made to the proposed policies to improve clarity, consistency, and implementation. This report presents the final draft Official Plan Amendment for Council's consideration, along with an analysis and planning justification demonstrating conformity with provincial policy and alignment with County objectives.

Analysis

Implementation Barriers

The Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 supports rural economic development and employment opportunities while requiring land use compatibility and protection of agricultural and residential land uses. Municipal official plans play a key role in defining how home-based economic activities can be accommodated in a manner consistent with these objectives. There are currently no clear permissions or policy guidance in the County's Official Plan with respect to home-based business and industry. Interpretation of home-based economic activities has relied heavily on zoning standards, site-specific discretion, and case-by-case mitigation, leading to inconsistency and uncertainty for applicants, neighbours, and reviewing authorities. Experience through implementation has demonstrated the need for clearer Official Plan-level direction to better guide land use decision-making and support consistent outcomes.

Experience through the home-based business pilot project adopted in 2021, and recent planning inquiries and development applications has identified several implementation challenges, including:

- The need to distinguish between home-based businesses and home-based industries.
- The importance of appropriate thresholds for scale, employees, outdoor activity, and storage.
- Ensuring uses remain secondary to residential uses in both an urban and rural context
- Challenges managing incremental business growth, including lack of direction for how growing businesses may need to transition to commercial or employment areas

Collectively, these issues have set a foundation to develop home-based business and industry policies that balance rural economic opportunity with land use compatibility and protection of established residential and agricultural character.

Policy Changes – October 2025

The October 2025 draft policies represented the first comprehensive effort to establish a clear Official Plan policy framework for home-based businesses and home-based industries. Drawing on lessons from the Home-Based Business Pilot Project and early CPPS implementation, the draft introduced:

- Preliminary directions related to function, scale, and appropriate location.
- Initial references to compatibility considerations and provincial guidance, including the D-6 Land Use Compatibility Guidelines.
- Direction encouraging businesses that exceed the intended scale of home-based permissions to relocate to appropriate commercial or employment areas.

Feedback during this phase focused primarily on clarity, enforceability, and the need for more objective thresholds to support predictable and defensible decision-making.

Policy Changes – April 2026

The April 2026 draft consolidates and refines the October 2025 policies into a more coherent, operational, and implementation-ready framework. The refinements expand the explanatory purpose statements for home-based economic activities, clarify the distinction between home-based businesses and home-based industries, and introduce quantitative thresholds to reinforce the intent of these uses as secondary activities. These thresholds are important to

reduce uncertainty about limitations and ensure that other objectives of the official plan, such as protection of residential character and of agricultural lands, are still achieved.

Key refinements include:

- Clear differentiation between home-based businesses, which are intended to operate within a residential context, and home-based industries, which are directed to rural and agricultural areas where greater separation can be achieved.
- Introduction of measurable limits related to site area, building area, employees, outdoor activity, and storage to provide greater certainty around scale and compatibility.
- Clarification of the relationship with On-Farm Diversified Uses (OFDU), establishing that OFDU policies take precedence where applicable.
- Introduction of registration or licensing tools to support monitoring, compliance, and future policy refinement. While the policies enable these tools, they will be explored further for potential implementation.

Together, these refinements are intended to strengthen implementation while maintaining flexibility for small-scale entrepreneurship and incremental business growth.

Policy Directions and Justification

This Official Plan Amendment introduces a new framework for home-based businesses and home-based industries that supports local entrepreneurship and rural economic development while maintaining land use compatibility and protecting residential and agricultural character.

Key policy directions include:

- Establishing a clear distinction between residential-scale home-based businesses and rural home-based industries.
- Reinforcing the principle that home-based economic activities are secondary to a lawful residential use through objective and measurable criteria.
- Applying provincial compatibility tools, including the D-6 Guidelines, to inform mitigation and setback requirements.
- Recognizing business evolution by encouraging transition to appropriate commercial or employment areas when growth exceeds home-based permissions.
- Supporting effective implementation through registration, licensing, and monitoring tools.

These changes are intended to improve clarity, predictability, and implementation outcomes and represent a refinement of policy delivery rather than a change in the County's overall growth management or economic development direction. A detailed planning rationale supporting these policy directions is provided in Appendix A: Detailed Planning Rationale and Justification.

Comments Received

The draft home-based business and home-based industry policies were circulated to the Province, stakeholders, and the public as part of the omnibus Official Plan Amendment process. No formal comments on the proposed policies were received.

Internal staff review, including Economic Development input, and implementation experience informed the refinements reflected in the final draft policies. Economic Development staff noted that permitting home-based economic activity across the County of Brant is an important economic development tool that supports a more diverse economy and expanded employment opportunities for residents. Since 2020, rising industrial and commercial rents,

along with the increasing cost of purchasing land and undertaking leasehold improvements, have created significant barriers to entry for entrepreneurs seeking dedicated business space. Allowing appropriately scaled businesses to operate from residential dwellings or properties removes this barrier, supports job creation at a time when local unemployment has been above the provincial average, and provides an effective business-incubation pathway. Home-based businesses can begin without the burden of rent and other fixed costs, freeing cash flow for reinvestment and service expansion before transitioning to commercial space when financially viable. This approach also encourages businesses to remain local as they grow, strengthening the County’s downtowns and retaining economic activity within the local economy.

Summary and Recommendations

While the County’s Official Plan supports economic development and rural entrepreneurship, experience applying existing policies has demonstrated the need for clearer and more flexibility, as well as more guidance to manage home-based businesses and industries effectively. In particular, the need to address the lack of distinction between different types of home-based economic activities and the absence of objective thresholds.

The proposed amendment integrates a series of refinements into a cohesive, accessible, and internally consistent policy framework that supports small-scale entrepreneurship while ensuring land use compatibility and protection of residential and agricultural character.

The amendment is consistent with the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 and reflects good planning practice by strengthening implementation tools and improving predictability without altering the County’s broader policy direction. Staff therefore recommend that Council adopt the amendment as drafted in Appendix B of this report.

Attachments

- Appendix A – Detailed Planning Rationale and Justification
- Appendix B – Draft Official Plan Amendment By-Law (OPA3-B-25)

Reviewed By

Jeremy Vink, Director of Planning

Copied To

- Alysha Dyjach, General Manager of Development Services
- Dan Namisniak, Manager of Development Planning

By-law and/or Agreement

By-law Required	Yes
Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and /or Clerk	No