

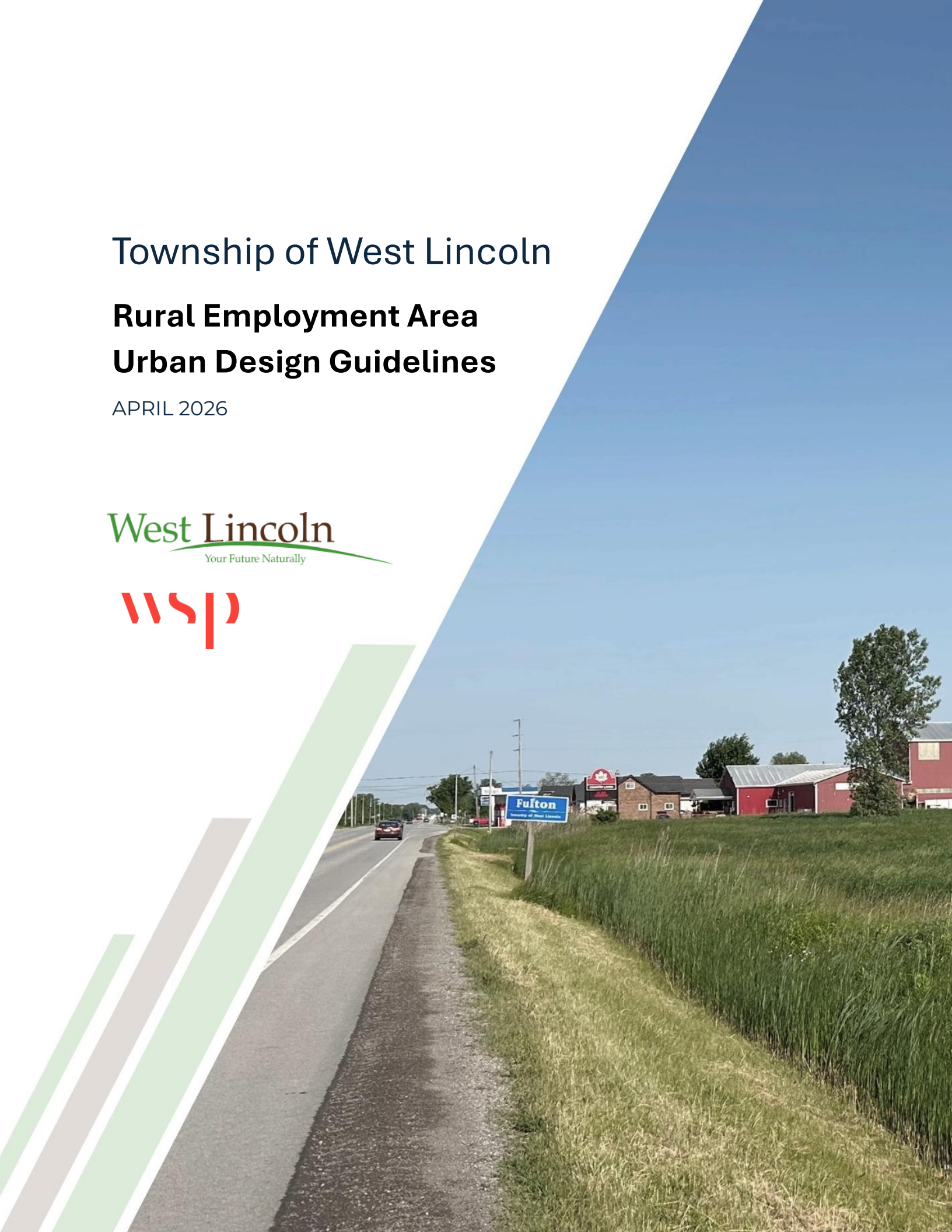
# Township of West Lincoln

## Rural Employment Area Urban Design Guidelines

APRIL 2026

West Lincoln  
Your Future Naturally

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# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Purpose

The Township of West Lincoln has retained WSP to prepare a Land Use Plan and accompanying reports for the Fulton Hamlet Rural Employment Study Area (the “Study Area”). The Study Area refers to the lands within the Fulton Hamlet Settlement Area located West of South Grimsby Road 18, East of South Grimsby Road 19 and North of Highway 20 (Figure 1-1).

The Study Area was added to the West Lincoln settlement area boundary through the Region of Niagara Official Plan (ROP) and Township Official Plan Amendment No. 62 (OPA 62). The project will deliver an Official Plan Amendment (OPA) and Zoning By-law Amendment (ZBLA) to establish land use designations, policies and zoning regulations for a designated Rural Employment Area on the subject lands.



Figure 1-1: Study Area

To guide development and built form on these lands, and to help inform Official Plan policies and Zoning provisions, the project includes Urban Design Guidelines for Rural Employment Areas. Development in the Study Area will contribute to the Township’s overall employment base and provide services to the broader community. New development, and surrounding public lands, will be designed to improve safety, reduce land use conflicts, mitigate potential nuisances, and be aesthetically pleasing.

## 1.2 Project Timeline

On July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022, OPA 62 was adopted by the Council of the Township of West Lincoln. The changes introduced in OPA 62 incorporate updated population and employment growth forecasts to 2051 to conform with the Region of Niagara’s Official Plan. OPA 62 added additional lands to the hamlet boundaries of Fulton and changes the land use designation on those lands from ‘Good General Agricultural Area’ to ‘Hamlet Settlement Area (Figure 1-2). This change corresponds to the boundaries identified within the Niagara Region Official Plan.

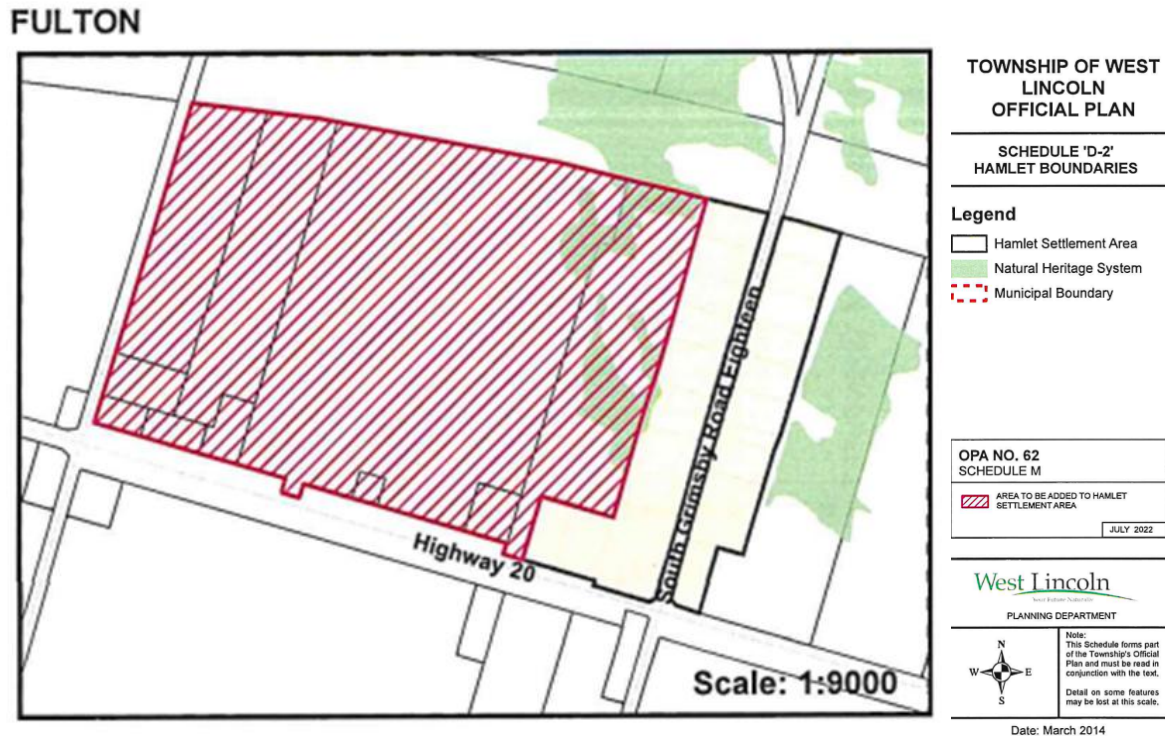


Figure 1-2: Extract from Township of West Lincoln Official Plan Schedule 'D-2' Hamlet Boundaries

Following the development of Urban Design Guidelines, the project will implement the high-level design considerations into Official Plan policy and Zoning By-laws for the Study Area.

## 2 Design Guidelines

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### 2.1 Context and Objectives

These design guidelines are intended to be applicable to the Township's Rural Employment Area and may be used as a reference for similar rural-context employment or service commercial development. Rural employment areas will be characterized by low density uses that can be adequately serviced through private water and wastewater facilities and which have the potential to generate adverse impacts to adjacent sensitive land uses. Future rural employment areas in the Township will be able to reference these guidelines to inform development.

The guidelines will be implemented through Plans of Subdivision/Condominium, zoning by-law amendments and site plan control applications. Official Plan policies will establish which design aspects will be required to be implemented, and which may be encouraged. Development proponents should familiarize themselves with the guidelines prior to finalizing their designs to reduce the need for redesigns and resubmissions.

The objectives of the Rural Employment Design Guidelines are to:

- a. improve safety;
- b. reduce land use conflicts;
- c. mitigate potential adverse impacts; and
- d. be aesthetically pleasing

The Rural Employment Design Guidelines include Site Plan Guidelines, Built Form Guidelines and Public Realm Guidelines. The Site Plan Guidelines apply to the entire property and address building locations and orientations, parking, landscaping, fencing, lighting, and other features. The Site Plan Guidelines also address the layout of roads and lots in plans of subdivision. The Built Form Guidelines apply to the buildings located within the Rural Employment Area and address architectural elements, massing, heights, building materials and roof elements. The Public Realm Guidelines applies to public streets, sidewalks, and other elements within the public right-of-way, and to the interface between private sites and public roads. Where provided, they also apply to on-site outdoor amenity areas for employees. They emphasize safety, functionality, appearance, and comfort for the general public and those employed in the area.

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### 2.2 Site Plan Guidelines

The Site Plan Guidelines provide direction for the design and organization of development within the Rural Employment Area. These guidelines support functional, safe, and visually coherent employment development patterns while respecting the rural context of West Lincoln. The intent is to guide site planning decisions so that buildings, access, parking, loading, landscaping, and circulation are coordinated and contribute to a consistent approach to rural employment area development.

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- a. Block design should allow for a mixture of lot sizes, building types, and building scale and massing, to meet a variety of needs for employers of all sizes.
- b. A consistent setback pattern should be established along streets to define the street edge and contribute to a cohesive built form.
- c. An active street edge should be encouraged by placing public-facing and office or administrative buildings closer to the street.
- d. Block and street layouts should be designed to maintain and enhance views to landscape features, open space, and major road intersections, while supporting connectivity.
- e. A hierarchy of street design and landscape treatments should be created within the Employment Area, including coordinated lighting and signage.
- f. Key locations for gateway and landmark buildings should be identified through the development review process.
- g. Where future transit or shared-mobility service is contemplated by the Township/Region (e.g., community/on-demand transit or employer shuttle), potential pick-up/drop-off locations may be identified and integrated into site plans.
- h. Active transportation should be supported through direct, accessible walkways from sidewalks (where provided) and parking areas to building entrances; where appropriate, bicycle parking may be provided near building entrances.

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#### **2.2.1 Site Access & Circulation**

Access into, and circulation throughout the Rural Employment Area should provide safe and well-defined routes for all modes of transportation. Circulation can be clearly defined through the use of appropriate paving treatments, landscaping and signage, and, where applicable, lighting, to support safe and legible movement within the site. These elements will define distinct areas and improve the overall impression of the areas.

- a. Shared driveways between sites should be used where feasible to minimize curb cuts, reduce sidewalk interruptions and increase green space.
- b. Pedestrian walkways must connect public sidewalks, parking areas and main building entrances. Walkways should be a minimum of 1.5 m wide and encouraged to be wider where higher pedestrian activity is expected.
- c. Universal accessibility should be incorporated to ensure barrier-free movement throughout the site.
- d. Walkways to main entrances should be emphasized through increased width and landscape features.
- e. Pedestrian walkways should use materials that are visually distinct from vehicular surfaces, using durable, functional finishes.

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- f. Where pedestrian-scale lighting is provided, it should be limited to key pedestrian areas and use down-shielded, dark-sky-compliant fixtures.
  - g. Landscaped traffic islands should define driveways, break up large parking areas and improve the organization of internal circulation.
  - h. Service lanes should be separated from employee/visitor parking and located at the rear or sides of buildings where visibility from public streets is minimized.
  - i. Truck movement should be accommodated safely with appropriate turning radii and queuing areas that do not obstruct walkways, drive aisles or public roads.
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#### **2.2.2 Landscaping**

Landscaping should enhance the edges of sites, improve the appearance of Rural Employment Areas, and reinforce a consistent streetscape character.

- a. Landscape treatments along property lines should be consistent within the Rural Employment Area and reflect rural West Lincoln character (e.g., hedgerows, wood fencing, visually permeable metal fencing).
- b. Native species are preferred. Non-native species may be accepted at the Township's discretion; invasive species are prohibited.
- c. Landscaping and grading should be used to screen parking, access roads and loading/servicing areas from public roads and adjacent residential lands.
- d. Accent plantings (small trees, shrubs, groundcover) should highlight building entrances, driveways and pedestrian routes.
- e. Blank façades should be softened using clustered tree and shrub planting.
- f. Landscaping should differentiate functional areas such as parking courts, forecourts and walkways.
- g. Planting strips must be provided between surface parking areas and streets and should include a mix of groundcover, shrubs and deciduous trees.
- h. Sightlines must be maintained by ensuring shrubs and fencing do not obstruct visibility.
- i. Driveway medians, major access routes and parking islands should incorporate high-branching street trees and low shrubs.
- j. Adjacent parking areas should include coordinated landscape strips, ideally 3.0 m on each property, with high-branching trees, coniferous trees and salt-tolerant shrubs.
- k. Where employment uses abut residential or open space, a minimum 6.0 m landscape buffer and a 1.83 m minimum privacy fence (2.4 m encouraged) should be provided.
- l. Landscaping should incorporate sustainable stormwater features and LID measures, such as bioswales, permeable paving, native planting and greywater reuse where feasible.

### **2.2.3 Parking Areas**

Parking areas should be safe, well-integrated, and visually minimized as part of the streetscape.

- a. Visibility of parking lots from public streets should be minimized using landscape screening, grading and building placement.
- b. Parking should generally be located at the side or rear of buildings; however, front-yard parking may be appropriate for certain employment uses, such as office components associated with manufacturing or industrial operations.
- c. Vehicular access points should be minimized to reduce conflict with pedestrian routes and improve circulation.
- d. Where possible, driveways should be consolidated with neighbouring sites.
- e. Large, continuous parking lots should be avoided. Use landscaping, traffic islands, pedestrian walkways and lighting to break them into smaller courts.
- f. Pedestrian walkways should connect parking areas to principal entrances and have priority over vehicular movements where the two intersect
- g. Lighting should support both pedestrian safety and vehicular circulation, using down-shielded, dark-sky-compliant fixtures.
- h. Walkways linking parking areas to public streets should be well lit and landscaped
- i. Secure, covered bicycle parking should be provided near building entrances or inside buildings.
- j. Ramps and service entrances should not detract from the building façade or adjacent landscape.

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### **2.2.4 Front Yards**

Front yards form a visual extension of the street and contribute to Employment Area character.

- a. A 6.0 m setback is recommended for street-oriented buildings; however, greater setbacks may be appropriate where front-yard parking or other functional site requirements are proposed.
- b. Where front-yard parking is provided, the setback should not exceed 18.0 m, accommodating a landscaped edge, a single parking row, a drive aisle and a walkway.
- c. Planting strips must include salt-tolerant groundcover, low shrubs and deciduous trees.
- d. Tall shrubs or fences above 1.2 m that obscure pedestrian views along the street are discouraged.
- e. High-branching trees should define property edges and major internal routes.
- f. Accent planting and signage should mark driveway entrances while respecting sightline requirements.

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- g. Low fencing or shrubs may be used to enhance front yard edges.
  - h. Outdoor display areas should be avoided, but where necessary must be located behind the front façade, limited to 20% of the site area, and include landscape treatment.
  - i. Outdoor storage is not permitted within the minimum front yard setback.
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#### **2.2.5 Compatibility and Screening**

The design and placement of buildings, parking, servicing and storage should mitigate impacts on adjacent lands and public streets.

- a. Side yards may contain limited single-loaded parking behind the front façade, generally not exceeding 50% of the side yard.
  - b. Where employment uses abut residential zones, a minimum 6.0 m landscape buffer and a 1.83 m privacy fence is required.
  - c. Planting strips should contain high-branching deciduous trees, shrubs and groundcover.
  - d. A minimum of 25% of each planting strip should be landscaped, with more encouraged near loading or servicing areas.
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#### **2.2.6 Fences, Outdoor Storage & Services**

Outdoor storage, loading, delivery and service areas are necessary functional components of employment uses but should not detract from the public realm or rural environment.

- a. Outdoor storage must be located in rear yards and screened by building placement, fencing, berms or landscaping. It is not permitted in front yards or along arterial/collector roads.
- b. Side-yard outdoor storage is permitted only on interior side yards, behind the front building façade, and where screening can obscure views. It is not permitted on exterior side yards.
- c. All visible servicing, loading and outdoor storage areas must be screened using fencing, landscaping, berms or grading to create an opaque screen at least 1.8 m in height.
- d. Loading, storage, parking and service areas should be located within buildings or rear yards where possible and screened from public view.
- e. Loading docks should be recessed and screened, and where street-facing exposure cannot be avoided, minimized in width and offset from driveway openings.
- f. Loading and service areas may be shared between adjoining sites and screened using fences, walls, structures or landscaping.
- g. Service entrances should be clearly identified with signage to discourage use of main entrances for deliveries.
- h. Service and refuse areas must not encroach into required landscape setbacks.

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- i. Enclosures must be constructed of materials matching or complementing the building façade. Gates may use durable materials suitable for frequent operation.
  - j. Refuse enclosures must be large enough to accommodate the peak demands of industrial users.
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## 2.3 Built Form Guidelines

The built form guidelines for Rural Employment Areas provide criteria that reflect the Township's expectations for architectural quality within the private realm. These guidelines complement the Township's Official Plan and Zoning By-law and are intended to support high-quality, coordinated built form and streetscape character. They apply to private-realm buildings, expansions and infill development within the Rural Employment Areas.

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### 2.3.1 Gateway Buildings

Gateway locations in the Rural Employment Area should contribute to a high-quality built environment and clearly indicate the entrance to the Rural Employment Area. Buildings placed at prominent edges or intersections, such as along Regional Roads or at key entry points to the Employment Area, can help create a recognizable identity and support wayfinding and placemaking in the area.

- a. The existing rural and natural context of the area should be carefully considered and integrated into all gateway building designs.
  - b. Gateway buildings should incorporate articulated façades on all exposed elevations to address public views.
  - c. Gateway building articulation may include wall plane projections or recesses, massing elements, high-quality cladding materials, and fenestration that emphasize arrival points.
  - d. Buildings that front onto major rural roads, including Regional Roads, should be designed as prominent focus buildings at key entry locations.
  - e. Corner gateway buildings should be sited to reinforce the street edge and address both adjacent frontages.
  - f. Where a building occupies a corner location, parking should be located internal to the site and not along either street frontage if possible.
  - g. Rural Employment Area subdivision or site planning processes should identify which blocks or lots require gateway and landmark building treatment and landscape enhancement.
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### 2.3.2 Built Form & Massing

Buildings in the Rural Employment Area should provide varied massing and architectural expression while supporting the functional needs of employment uses.

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- a. Where permitted uses include related office or similar structures, increased building heights may be encouraged, particularly on gateway lots.
  - b. The arrangement and massing of buildings along streets should promote visibility into the site, clearly identify building entrances, and support safe pedestrian circulation.
  - c. Long, uninterrupted blank walls visible from public areas are discouraged; however, where required for functional employment uses such as processing or warehousing, façade articulation, material variation, or landscape treatment should be used to reduce visual impact, where feasible.
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#### **2.3.3 Building Façades & Entrances**

Buildings facing public roads should incorporate high-quality façade articulation, and entrances should be visually emphasized, especially at prominent or corner sites.

- a. Long, unarticulated façades or façades composed of a single material parallel to the street are discouraged.
  - b. Any blank walls visible from public areas should incorporate architectural detailing, material changes, or colour variation; at minimum, a planting strip scaled to the façade should be provided.
  - c. Long frontages facing the street should include multiple vertical wall plane breaks, articulation, or fenestration patterns to break down massing.
  - d. Main entrances should face the street, be clearly visible, and align with walkway connections.
  - e. Entrances should be emphasized through canopies, awnings, recesses, or other architectural details.
  - f. In multi-tenant buildings, multiple ground-floor entrances are encouraged, each clearly defined.
  - g. Steps and ramps should be architecturally integrated into the building design.
  - h. Access ramps should be located as close as possible to the primary barrier-free route.
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#### **2.3.4 Building Materials & Window Treatments**

Building façades should use durable, high-quality materials and incorporate windows or glazing appropriate to the Rural Employment Area.

- a. Façades facing streets or public views should incorporate enhanced detailing and durable cladding materials.
- b. Preferred cladding materials include architectural precast panels, stone, brick, glazing, modular metal panels, and stucco, with other materials considered if consistent with the architectural intent.

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- c. Street-visible side façades should receive design treatment equal to that of the front façade.
  - d. A higher proportion of glazing is recommended for office or customer-facing areas on the ground floor, with additional glazing encouraged on upper storeys.
  - e. Clear glazing should constitute approximately 30% of the office portion of façades facing the street; where this cannot be met, additional architectural features should be provided.
  - f. Wall detailing should integrate functional elements, such as vents or downspouts, within the overall façade composition.
  - g. Cladding materials should be visually compatible with neighbouring buildings.
  - h. Materials should be chosen based on durability, maintenance efficiency, and energy performance.
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#### **2.3.5 Roofs**

Roof forms contribute to the overall streetscape and character of the Rural Employment Area and should align with the architectural style and functional needs of employment buildings.

- a. Roof massing, pitch, and articulation should reflect the building's architectural style.
  - b. Roof heights and forms should be compatible with adjacent structures.
  - c. Sloped roofs should use a consistent colour and material to support visual continuity.
  - d. Parapet walls should be designed to reinforce the building façade and screen rooftop mechanical equipment.
  - e. Mechanical equipment should be integrated into the roof design or screened with materials complementary to the building.
  - f. On sloped sites, façades and rooflines should step or articulate to reflect grade changes.
  - g. Roof designs are encouraged to incorporate solar panels or green/white roof systems to support energy efficiency.
- 

#### **2.4 Public Realm Guidelines**

A high-quality public realm helps attract employers and employees to Rural Employment Areas and contributes to the unique identity of the Township of West Lincoln. The public realm within the Rural Employment Areas should be designed with safety, functionality, appearance, and comfort as key objectives. The following guidelines apply to the public realm in Employment Areas:

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- a. The public realm shall be designed to be safe, sustainable, and vibrant, and reflective of the rural context of West Lincoln through the incorporation of traditional or rustic elements, as appropriate.
- b. Built form should frame the public realm and be designed to contribute to the success of these spaces.
- c. Pedestrian-friendly infrastructure and design is encouraged to provide safe linkages within Rural Employment Areas and, where appropriate, to adjacent areas. This may include defined walkways, sidewalks where provided, and landscape treatments that complement built form.
- d. All development of the public realm will consider adjacent public realm and land uses and be designed to complement the existing and intended context.
- e. The private-public interface should be enhanced with private spaces and activity areas, including building entrances and patios oriented toward public areas.
- f. The public realm should be buffered from utilities, building service areas, parking, mechanical equipment, and ventilation systems that may be visually intrusive.
- g. Streets within Employment Areas should follow these guidelines:
  - i. Provide consistent and complementary pedestrian-scaled streetscape elements, including landscaping, lighting where provided, and signage.
  - ii. All new streets and street redevelopment should reflect and correspond to the adjacent built form or open space context.
  - iii. To promote a safe, pedestrian-friendly environment, all streetscape design should incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles (CPTED) and consider Universal Design elements that meet or exceed accessibility standards.

## **3 Implementation**

These Guidelines establish the Township of West Lincoln's expectations for the design of Rural Employment Areas. The implementation of the Guidelines will principally be done by Township staff through the development review process. Informally, these Guidelines will also be implemented through the development proponents who will consult them for reference with respect to submitting an application or the urban design report / brief that may accompany proposals explaining how the objectives of the Guidelines are met.

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### **3.1 Development Review**

The Rural Employment Area Design Guidelines include recommendations, rather than requirements, and there may be numerous ways to achieve the objectives of the guidelines without strict adherence to the recommendations. These Guidelines will be implemented through the review of various tools provided under the Planning Act, including official plan amendment and zoning by-law amendment processes, subdivision, condominium, consent processes and minor variance process, as applicable.

These Guidelines have applicability with respect to all development processes and should be considered at each stage of the development review process including pre-application consultation.

An urban design report / brief would typically be submitted with a planning application to demonstrate how a proposal meets the intent of the design guidelines. This may include the following details:

- Existing design context, including an assessment of lands within approximately 400 m of the development;
- Site plan and development vision;
- Review of site layout and lotting (as may be proposed);
- Review of proposed public realm improvements, trails, parks/squares/open space, connectivity and pedestrian circulation;
- Review of building height, massing, articulation and related matters as shown in building elevations and other drawings;
- Review of landscaping, grading and proposed parks/squares/art;
- Review of public/private road sections;
- Identification and review of views/vistas, gateways, and landmarks
- Review of parking areas, access/driveways, loading and related facilities;
- Review of sustainability elements/approaches; and
- Recommendations for the implementation of these guidelines.

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Township staff will review the submission make recommendations to improve alignment with the design guidelines.

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## 3.2 Relationship with Other Policies and Requirements

The Township Official Plan and Zoning By-law will continue to be the primary tools to guide development and include policies and regulations that must be followed in accordance with the *Planning Act*. It is recommended that the Rural Employment Area Design Guidelines be referenced in the Official Plan to direct proponents to review the guidelines and implement its recommendations to the extent possible.

Of the Township's various related plans, by-laws and guidelines, the zoning by-law is the most closely tied to these Guidelines from an implementation perspective. The Township's zoning by-law is the principal regulatory tool for regulating building height, setbacks, massing, and other related matters. Many of the topics addressed in zoning overlap with the topics discussed in these Guidelines and it is recommended that the zoning by-law be amended to reflect the recommendations of the Guidelines.

It should be noted that these Urban Design Guidelines do not replicate or replace other requirements of the Township or any other approval body. Compliance with these guidelines will not exempt projects from any other required approvals.

These Guidelines shall work in tandem with and support the urban design objectives of the Official Plan policies and the various projects and reports identified above by providing further design guidance and detail.