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The Conservation of Rural Character in Community Design

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Ontario Planners: Vision · Leadership · Great Communities

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In fall 2002, OPPI commissioned a study of the conservation of rural character from Planscape and Senes Consulting. *Key Learnings: A Primer for Discussion on The Conservation of Rural Character in Community Design* is a document that contains a brief summary of the background information documented by the consultants, and areas for discussion by OPPI members.

During a concurrent session at the OPPI Conference held at Deerhurst in September 2003, OPPI sought input on the following topics from members who have experience and knowledge in the areas of rural development, heritage conservation, environmental planning, and agriculture:

- What elements of rural character should be and can be preserved?
- What are the most urgent priorities for change in the way Ontario rural communities are planned and managed?
- What planning and development requirements and standards get in the way of preserving rural character and how could they be changed?
- What planning tools can be used to conserve the character of Ontario's rural communities?
- What groups should be involved in efforts to conserve rural character, and what should their roles be?
- What recommendations should OPPI put forward to government or other groups on this important topic?

Themes emerging from the input at the conference session include:

- The need to further define what rural character is
- Recognition that one definition will not fit all rural areas
- The need for strong planning policy together with strong political will to protect rural character
- Preserving downtowns and small town streetscapes as part of preserving rural character
- The need for broad community buy-in and participation
- The need for a commitment to the preservation of a working agricultural landscape
- Lots of Ontario examples of good preservation efforts
- The interrelationship between the physical, cultural and economic aspects of rural areas
- Caution about the dominance of the urban view of protecting rural character

This material will be further analyzed and presented as an appendix to the Key Learnings document. [The appendix will be available by mid-November.](#)

The appendix will also help to frame the second document of the Rural Character project:

- *Options for Further Research on the Preservation of Rural Character.*

The Further Research document will be prepared by OPPI with some specialized input. Expect this document by the end of November 2003.

The final component of the Rural Character project will be a report outlining *Recommended Action for OPPI* – as a voice on this important planning and community design issue. It is expected that the OPPI Recommendations report will be released in February 2004.

Additional comments on the Rural Character project can be directed to OPPI via submissions@ontarioplanners.on.ca.

