



Mississippi
Mills

Official Plan Amendment 28: Rural Villages and Rural Vitality

Focus Group Responses Report

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Official Plan Amendment 28: Rural Villages and Rural Vitality

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1.0 Report Overview:

To end the first public consultation phase for the Rural Village and Rural Vitality Project (Official Plan Amendment 28), the Mississippi Mills Planning Department held focus group sessions to gain more particular insight and perspective from local residents of Mississippi Mills.

The Municipality advertised the opportunity for residents to join the focus groups over the summer months during event visits and at the OPA 28 Open Houses that were held in Pakenham and Clayton. The call for interested local participants for the focus groups was also posted on the Municipality's social media platforms.

Due to a wide range of availability from the interested residents, the Municipality held three (3) separate focus group sessions. The focus group sessions were held at the Pakenham Public Library and were two hours in length each. The first two (2) sessions were held on Monday, October 21st from 2-4pm and from 6-8pm. The last session was held on Thursday, October 24th from 6-9pm.

A variety of questions were posed to the focus group participants which were focused on the villages and rural areas of the Municipality of Mississippi Mills. These questions stimulated both positive and critical thinking as the participants were able to reflect on what makes the villages and rural areas great and what could be improved.

In total, thirteen (13) residents attended the focus group sessions to share their input and perspectives. Planning Staff used this opportunity to gather personal feedback and insights into residents' views and experiences related to the villages and rural areas within of Mississippi Mills.

The focus group sessions followed a structured process where eleven (11) questions were posed to the participants, covering their opinions on the villages to their perspectives on on-farm diversified uses. As each question was asked, participants were encouraged to share their thoughts openly with the group, which led to many conversations and collaboration amongst the participants. Planning Staff documented the participants' answers on large sheets of paper, which provided a visual element that captured the group's feedback and ideas in real time. This approach allowed for both a record of discussion and a shared visual reference for everyone in the room.

Overall, the focus groups were very successful, and Planning Staff were able to gain valuable insight into residents' perceptions of the villages and rural areas of Mississippi Mills.

2.0 Focus Group Responses:

The following sections contain combined answers from the focus group participants who attended either October 21st or October 24th, 2024. The sections outline all the questions asked during the focus groups and the verbal responses are noted below. Please note, there were a few residents who wanted to participate in the focus groups but were unable to attend any of the in-person sessions. Staff provided the residents with the questions and the residents submitted their written responses back to Staff. The written responses are noted at the end of each question section.

2.1 Villages:

The focus group questions were split into themes, which included village and rural areas. There were six questions in the village theme and the questions were mainly based around what the focus group participants thought about the different villages within Mississippi Mills. Additionally, Planning Staff asked the focus group participants what barriers and opportunities they felt were apparent in the villages.

Question #1: When you think of Blakeney – what comes to mind?
Blakeney Park
Bridge
Walking trail – initiative of local people, fishing, interesting to see the commitment that people care
Mysterious and small – a hidden gem
Confederate flag next to park parking lot, torn down pride flag near the corner coming down Martin Street
Sub-element of Almonte
Not clear where it starts and stops
No character

Question #1: When you think of Blakeney – what comes to mind?

Blakeney is an artistic centre

Tourists look for the park, park is a historical centre

Water, waterfalls, waterside community, rapids

Close to Almonte, a shortcut to Almonte

History – a thriving community now hollowed out

No central node

Scenic

Community garden that contributes to the food bank

Good connections to the rail trail and other walking trails

Canadian Olympic Kayaking Team training site

No safe place to walk, not friendly for active transportation

Question #1: When you think of Blakeney – what comes to mind? (Written Responses)

Written Response #1:

- Blakeney is my home
- Small, quiet, surrounded by farming
- Park nearby that is a tourist draw
- Road infrastructure needs to be updated
- Heavy truck traffic
- Many home-based businesses (art studios, musicians, micro farms)
- Lack of a central meeting area
- Blakeney is not given as much time or consideration as some of the other villages

- Stuck
- Lack of water and sewage connections limits density
- Lack of pedestrian infrastructure

Written Response #2:

- The park by the bridge

Question #2: When you think of Clayton – what comes to mind?
Individuals
General store
Honour library
No cell service for the most part (Rogers is there now)
Need more cell companies to bring service + internet to the area
Landlines have poor reception
Public dock – gets lots of visitors in the summer, kids play in the water, swimming
Lack of access to recreational water, not a lot of places to swim/launch boats
Has a lot going for it – two active churches, a lot of community dances/dinners, snowmobile village
Amazing history
Community Hall
Linn Bower Seniors' residence
Union Hall
Baseball field

Question #2: When you think of Clayton – what comes to mind?

Pear trees – behind the Community Centre, harvested for the food bank

Road conditions are bad

Hub for snowmobilers (place to stop for gas, lunch)

Helpful, cheerful

Throughway – on a county road, bad traffic sometimes with the gravel pit trucks

Heavy traffic

Clayton Lake

Ice fishing, water sports, popular fishing destination

Small, intimate group of villagers

People know each other

Welcoming place

Public access to lake

Memorials, cemeteries

In home services (hairdressers for example)

Heritage buildings + historic farm buildings

River with access to Clayton Lake and Taylor Lake

Creative population

LCBO + gas pumps

Maple syrup

People living around Clayton still identify as being residents of Clayton

Question #2: When you think of Clayton – what comes to mind?
Cluster of homes on back roads
Campgroup
Volunteerism
No safe place to walk, not friendly for active transportation

Question #2: When you think of Clayton – what comes to mind? (Written Responses)
Written Response #1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local art scene • General store • Ball field
Written Response #2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General store

Question #3: When you think of Appleton – what comes to mind?
Flooding
Golf course
Curiosity to general store rebuild
North Lanark Regional Museum
Flower show, garden show
Boat launch (park, there’s always kids playing, families gather here, more recreational than just a boat launch)
Apple trees planted by volunteers at the park

Question #3: When you think of Appleton – what comes to mind?

Water based community

Very quaint and small

Associate more with Carleton Place than Almonte

No real reason to go

Off the beaten path

Use to bypass Almonte

Former textile mill – burned and demolished

Appleton marsh – wetlands have been impacted negatively

Bridge

Boutique Art Gallery

Fine dining

Bed & Breakfast

Soccer fields

Scenic route from Carleton Place

Community oriented – younger generation supporting older generation

No safe place to walk, not friendly for active transportation

**Question #3: When you think of Appleton – what comes to mind?
(Written Responses)**

Written Response #1:

- Beautiful
- Could benefit from central meeting area
- Destruction of the general store was a loss
- Soccer fields
- Museum
- Like Blakeney, people tend to drive through to go somewhere else
- Lack consistent pedestrian infrastructure and traffic management
- Close to Carleton Place

Written Response #2:

- The bridge

Question #4: When you think of Pakenham – what comes to mind?

5 Span Bridge + Park

Scoops Ice Cream (for sale now)

4 active churches, cemeteries

There may be a Hindu temple?

Shopping

General Store

Nicholsons

Ski Hill

Golf Course

Question #4: When you think of Pakenham – what comes to mind?
Fair grounds
OVRT for snowmobiles
Elementary school (only rural school in area – K-6)
Opportunities for part-time employment (only Pakenham and Almonte offer this)
Fulton’s Pancake House
Cedar Hill Christmas Tree Farm – offers seasonal employment
Fire hall, RCMP station
Centennial Restaurant
Not focused so much on Almonte – residents use Renfrew and Arnprior as well/just as much
Library
Arena
Amalgamation – no one likes it because Pakenham was independent prior to this
Garbage depot (metals, garden waste, etc.)
Car garages
Bank
Keepers Cafe
3 Apples Bakery (gluten free bakery, caterer)
Pharmacy
Five Span Feed n Seed (agricultural hub)
Many attractions (picnic areas, beach, water, fishing, ball diamond, curling club, skiing, golf)

Question #4: When you think of Pakenham – what comes to mind?
Hub for automobile, cycling and skidoo tours
Has character – tourism + agricultural focus to it
Very popular for the fireworks and parades
Feels like a big family
The community has been revitalizing itself, lots of young families are moving in, demographics are changing, now have to better serve a younger demographic
Very large daycare centre (serves a large area)
Throughway
Crossing the road needs to be safer, slow down the cars, needs lights at intersections on the main street
Historical
Fashion (nationally renowned designer)
Post office
Senior living
Has everything except for clean water
Hockey
More restaurants needed
Water + wastewater upgrades needed
Homes can't be sold due to water/servicing issues
Feels forgotten by Mississippi Mills
Mississippi Mills need to lobby Province for funding – offer grants to residents for septic systems
At least 49 full-time businesses

Question #4: When you think of Pakenham – what comes to mind?

Growing community

Large number of rentals

Diverse population

Question #4: When you think of Pakenham – what comes to mind? (Written Responses)

Written Response #1:

- Major hub for goods and services
- Mount Pakenham is a frequent weekend destination
- Daycare and school are major service providers
- Excellent local businesses
- Rink, curling club, park, ball field
- More could be done to slow heavy traffic and speeding care traffic through the village
- Pedestrian connection between golf club, trailer park and village (along Highway 29) would increase safety

Written Response #2:

- Bridge
- Ski hill
- Home

Question #5: What are some opportunities for the Villages that would benefit the village residents and surrounding communities?

Accessible, public spaces like Metcalf Park in Almonte (public space helps enhance tourism)

More swimming, picnic tables

Full time job opportunities, there are very few job opportunities that are quality in the villages, need more jobs

More retention of high school graduates and young families

Small farming incentives – community gardens, market gardens

Farm based industries

Public washrooms (Pakenham is pretty good – has the library + Centennial Restaurant)

Fix septic issue in Clayton

Continuing small business programs

More daycares

Youth centres (is very successful in Almonte – there could be a branch in each of the villages)

Hand washing facilities

Transportation (issues for youth, could have a specific use for youth – could be linked to the youth centre)

Unused spaces in the communities – community halls are underused; it would be nice to see the halls used more often

Communities have to evolve – it is natural

Question #5: What are some opportunities for the Villages that would benefit the village residents and surrounding communities?

Lots of room across the board to create more of a tourism hub (beautiful landscape, water, etc.)

Municipality needs to be more encouraging

5-Span Park (could hire seasonal help – youth)

Accommodation is lacking – where are people staying when they visit?

Attractiveness for being a bedroom community – people still look to rural living; people see the value of rural living

Need more housing – water and sewer issues impact this, people want to live here

Ease severance restrictions

We need more community services so people can age in place – ensure the services are available (healthcare, social services, exercise, transportation)

Link to other communities

Economic attractions

Could capitalize on being a rural hub for snowmobilers (snowmobilers tend to not be comfortable stopping in Almonte, more likely to stop in Clayton or Pakenham)

Traffic/speed control

Could work with universities and colleges to offer remote access/learning/placements

More publicity and more internal communication

Programming and activities

Sports bar

More staff at community centres

Playgrounds

More boat launches

Question #5: What are some opportunities for the Villages that would benefit the village residents and surrounding communities?

River sports

Welcome wagons/baskets, baskets when babies are born

**Question #5: What are some opportunities for the Villages that would benefit the village residents and surrounding communities?
(Written Responses)**

Written Response #1:

- Service hubs, currently Mississippi Mills residents have to go to Carleton Place or Almonte for services
- Rotating Service Ontario or Service Canada would help villagers avoid lengthy trips
- Addition of central meeting places in Appleton and Blakeney
- More needs to be done to limit heavy traffic and speeding
- More municipal parks or facilities
- Highlight local businesses and artists (like the Crown and Pumpkin Tour does)

Written Response #2:

- Take advantage of all the great businesses and recreation facilities

Question #6: What barriers do you think there are to change in the Villages?

Why change? What is wrong with the way they are?

Need to keep the small town flavour, if there's too much it loses the charm

After Covid people stopped talking as much, this is the only community that is actually friendly

How do we keep people involved in the community? What happens when there's 1000 new homes on the edge of Almonte?

There is a divide between newbies and oldies

When you move to a quaint village you want that quaint lifestyle, but you may miss the conveniences of the city

Money/finances

Some people live here but don't use the amenities

Sometimes there's a lack of person power in the Municipality – need more municipal staff, volunteers do a lot of things in our communities but that is because there is a lack of staff

Volunteer demographics (not the same scale as it was)

Fatigue (people doing the same stuff all the time can lead to fatigue)

Differences in opinions and opportunities about recreation

Pakenham: water + wastewater impedes development of housing + community development

Need to make it safer (traffic issues, if people don't slow down, they won't see the village)

Natural heritage is under threat – this needs to be a priority

Hollowing out communities

Need to remove municipal red tape or barriers to development

Don't want to be labelled as a commuter town (don't want to be the next Stittsville)

Question #6: What barriers do you think there are to change in the Villages?

Need to protect the village culture and character

Need to manage growth, encourage cautious growth

Cell service in Clayton

Internet

Need to have a will and vision, if there's no vision, where will we go next? Where do we want to be in the next 20 or 30 years?

Public resources/servicing

Lack of community promotion

Existing boat launches are in poor condition

Parking

Amalgamation issues – need to highlight recourses in villages with those in Almonte

**Question #6: What barriers do you think there are to change in the Villages?
(Written Responses)**

Written Response #1:

- Zoning restrictions
- Lack of municipal services
- Lack of walkable areas
- Heavy and dangerous traffic
- Local opposition to density and unplanned growth

Written Response #2:

- Basic infrastructure
- Red tape
- Money

2.2 Rural Areas:

The second theme for the focus group questions encompassed the rural areas of Mississippi Mills. These questions were formed with the intent of discovering what the focus group participants thought of the rural areas in the Municipality. Additionally, the topic of on-farm diversified uses was introduced and discussed amongst the group within this section of questions.

Question #7: When you think of the rural areas in Mississippi Mills, what comes to mind?
Day trips
Quiet
Farming
Chopped up
Proximity to fire services – by the time firefighters get there your house will be gone
Lack of information – what’s available to you, where you are, what the benefits are
Lack of sense of community
Enjoying the new local newspaper – Community Voice
No industry = no pollution, this is a good thing, clean air
Clean water (except Pakenham)
Lack of policing
Questionable or good wi-fi depending on where you are
Lot severances
Urban biased policies
Fibre-optic ability
Community

Question #7: When you think of the rural areas in Mississippi Mills, what comes to mind?

Hubs and trails on properties that people share together

Small communities of friends

Country roads

Adventure

The great outdoors

Forests, crownland, county forests, designated wetlands

Hunting and fishing

Unmaintained, unmanaged natural areas where people walk on trails, drive snowmobiles, lots of recreational opportunities

Roadside stands and other unique businesses

Access to fresh fruits and vegetables

Healthy living

Plant nurseries

A lovely place to live

Peaceful

Stars

Far apart from neighbours, but still close as a community

Helpful

Bugs

Many roads required

No demands from residents

Question #7: When you think of the rural areas in Mississippi Mills, what comes to mind? (Written Responses)

Written Response #1:

- Backroads
- Sugar bushes
- Mill of Kintail
- Private walking trails

Written Response #2:

- Farms
- Walking trails

Question #8: What do you think draws people to the rural areas?

Quiet

Quaint and ideal

Slower

Outdoors (hunting, fishing, hiking)

Good reputation

Come back home (people who left and return)

Good and helpful people

Equity refugees (people moving here from Toronto, Ottawa, etc.)

The fall colours

Tranquility

Open space

Question #8: What do you think draws people to the rural areas?

Sports and leisure opportunities

Adventure

Vegetable stands and events

Maple syrup and related events, sugar bushes

A way to slow down, decompress, escape

Beer, breweries

For the drive

Tourism

Studio tours, local talent and artists (Maple Run Tour, Crown and Pumpkin, Fall Colours Tour)

White Lake studios

Curiosity

Seasonal attractions (strawberry picking, pumpkin picking, tree farms)

Picnics

Rivers

Beaches

Water sports

More economical living

Lots of services

Animals

Sense of community

Come for business opportunities, business growth

Question #8: What do you think draws people to the rural areas? (Written Responses)

Written Response #1:

- Peace and sanctity

Written Response #2:

- Friendly
- Relaxed
- Private areas

Question 9: When thinking about on-farm diversified uses, what types of uses would like to see in the rural areas?

Maple syrup

Wagon rides

Cheese production – there was a past cheese factory near Union Hall, artisanal cheese (Back40), sheep cheese

Anything related to food, there needs to be strong promotion to eat local and buy local

Bed & Breakfast

Selling milk for Hershey's factory

Dependent on the individual – need to support the individual to do so. Loans, grants, help with promotion

Bureaucratic aid – need to help to help people succeed

Skilled workers

Community commercial kitchen

Partnership with Algonquin College (cheese classes, apiary)

Kasda Farm as an example (they offer bouquets of flowers, goat yoga, puppy yoga, DIY flowers)

Question 9: When thinking about on-farm diversified uses, what types of uses would like to see in the rural areas?

Farmers markets

Breweries

Make rural areas more attractive to bring tourism

Farm tours

Wineries

Farm interaction with process – pick-your-own, berry farm, immersive farm experience, photoshoot opportunities (sunflower farm, lavender farm), pumpkin patch

No paintball

Elderly and in-home/travelling services

Winter activities

Four-season attractions

Family farm events

Dog daycare

Diversified uses of road allowances

We have to consider the history of these uses in order for them to work

Poultry

Cidery

Farm goods

Glamping

Question 9: When thinking about on-farm diversified uses, what types of uses would like to see in the rural areas? (Written Responses)

Written Response #1:

- Local energy generation (solar or wind)
- Local breweries
- Micro-farms
- Artisanal production
- Music ventures and gathering areas

Written Response #2:

- Wineries
- Agri-tourism
- Farm markets

Question #10: What other opportunities are there in the rural areas?

Lumber industry

Tourism (4 season)

Something more targeted, tourist weekends

Potential in the road right of ways (7B, 7C) closed for hiking, cross country skiing, etc.

Group insurance, have an association (like skidoo associations), insurance co-op

Small businesses, home based businesses

Innovation and creativity – it depends on the individual and what they want to do, the municipality should be more open to new ideas and encourage it

Personal liability for at-home businesses

A specific Municipal department that helps people get their new business going with a more rural + village focus

Question #10: What other opportunities are there in the rural areas?

Co-ops (community gardens, housing, etc.)

Rural-focused affordable housing grant program

Using and working with other municipalities and communities (Ottawa, CP, Arnprior, etc.)

Equal spread of services

Collaboration of events amongst municipalities

A fair for all of Mississippi Mills

Protect unique identities of each area

Communities made through neighbourhoods

Getting to know the rural communities

Rural cooperatives – collectively market goods to each other, fostering rural collaboration, outside of the villages, stimulate gatherings

Farm baskets – monthly or weekly combination of multiple farms

Allowing people to grow crops under sharecropping, allotment farming, shared farming spaces, garden parcels on municipal property/unopened road allowances

Lower tax rates

More land for more opportunities

New technologies

Working from home

Municipal assistance in marketing

Question #10: What other opportunities are there in the rural areas? (Written Responses)

Written Response #1:

- Assist in the continued ownership of farms by families
- When large areas of forested land are up for sale, the municipality could assist in maintaining local natural areas with the Mississippi-Madawaska Land Trust

Written Response #2:

- More hiking trails

Question #11: What barriers do you think there are to change in the rural areas?

Province, we need to know what effect Doug Ford will have on us

Growth management

Missing services

Transportation for tourists and locals

Lack of activities in surrounding municipalities

Scope of activities

Sense of isolation and isolation during emergencies

Communication – word of mouth or social media are not always viable in the rural areas, there is a need to rely on home phones or newspapers which are often neglected

Severance policies – should allow severances that permit lots that are big enough to shield neighbours from view

Multi-jurisdictional areas – provincial, municipal, crown limitations

Lack of in-home services for aging in place and for seniors who are living remotely

Zoning and planning applications

Question #11: What barriers do you think there are to change in the rural areas?
Certain uses require services that are not present in a rural context
Community fear of new technology (battery, solar, etc.)
Telecommunications
Provision of health care

Question #11: What barriers do you think there are to change in the rural areas? (Written Responses)
<p>Written Response #1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many of the same barrier to change in the villages also apply to the rural areas • Environmental sensitivity of these lands is also an important and justified barrier to unnecessary or unwarranted change
<p>Written Response #2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as the villages

3.0 Conclusion:

Overall, the focus groups were informative, collaborative and offered valuable feedback and insight in regard to the Official Plan Amendment 28 project. The data that was collected during the focus groups will be used to assist Staff with developing and implementing clear and uniform provisions and policies that best reflect the values of the residents of Mississippi Mills. Through the open discussions, Staff gained a deeper understanding of local sentiments, preferences and concerns. This insight will help ensure that decisions regarding Official Plan Amendment 28 are made thoughtfully, with the goal of benefiting everyone residing in the villages and rural areas of Mississippi Mills.



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