

## 2024 Rural Summit

The City of Ottawa has been exploring ways to improve the provision of services and simplify the “red tape” for the residents and communities of rural Ottawa through the process of the Rural Summit. Ottawa has endured many changes and challenges since the last Summit in 2008, including a new Official Plan, Zoning By-laws, Strategic Plan update, Covid and the Rural Economic Strategy update, make this the ideal time for the Summit. Ottawa is 80% rural, farming/agriculture representing a large portion of our local economy. It is recognized that it is time for change and the “one size, fits all” is no longer true!

The Summit’s objective is to recommend improvements to the provision of City of Ottawa services and to have dedicated resources in rural Ottawa and strengthen the power of the Agriculture & Rural Affairs (ARAC) Committee of Council.

Results of the 2024 Rural Summit from numerous public consultation meetings/workshops and surveys that took place resulted in the following mandate for the City as presented by Mayor Sutcliffe and the Rural Councillors on November 2, 2024.

- 1. Water Rate Review and Ditching Improvements:** The City has heard the message from rural residents that the water rate system is unfair and have committed to review the process of assessment. The ditching & drainage budget is to be doubled in 2025 and collaborate with a Councillor-led working group will focus to enhance ditch infrastructure and safety, addressing the safety hazards posed by noxious plants and standing water in rural ditches;
- 2. Strengthening Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee (ARAC) Mandate:** ARAC which is the committee of Council that focuses on rural issues making recommendations to Council will be given more decision-making power on rural matters. Proposed changes will be submitted at the end of 2024 and expected implementation in Q2 2025 following Council approval. Please note that decisions and recommendations from ARAC still will need Council approval.
- 3. Enhancing the Rural Affairs Office:** Starting January 2025, ensure focused rural perspective in decision-making, increased resources in the Rural Affairs Office, a Rural Lead will be assigned in each department – this should decrease the number of people/departments that one would need to talk to, to get questions answered on all City department and avoid the frustration of being transferred from one department to another when trying to research City services, planning, permits etc.;
- 4. Improving Rural Paramedic Response:** The City will explore new deployment locations and explore the Offload Delay process (ambulances waiting for extended periods of time while awaiting a patient to be admitted to the emergency room due to unavailability of beds) in hopes of improving the response time of ambulance response times to the next call. There will be 23 new paramedics added both 2025 & 26. Use of a new dispatch system should reflect an improved response time for calls;
- 5. Dedicated Rural Programs for Intersection Signals:** The rural areas will have their own dedicated budget line for rural specific intersection signal requests beginning in 2025, thus eliminating a rural/urban competition for funding;

6. **Rural Lens for Infrastructure:** Diverse rural needs will be addressed to recognize rural needs. Beginning by the end of 2024; the “one size fits all” solution will no longer be the “go to”;
7. **Streamline Planning for Rural Applications:** Work to begin in 2025 delegating authority for minor rezoning applications to ARAC & reviewing and streamlining the severance application process;
8. **Developing a Balanced Rural Growth Strategy:** Scheduled review for 2025 to review current densification pressures, explore opportunities for balanced development across the villages and starting in 2025 focus on what’s best for rural Ottawa through collaboration with rural councillors;
9. **Advocating for Rural Priorities with the Province:** As rural wards are part of the City, we are not always able to apply for grants and emergency responses. The City will be advocating for the recognition of Ottawa as a rural city;
10. **Commitment to the Next Rural Summit:** The City of Ottawa has committed to hosting another Rural Summit in 2027-28, and to listen, review and adjust their processes based on Rural feedback.