

Subject: Agritourism Strategy and Toolkit Project Kickoff

Staff Report No. DS-016-26

**Department/
Commission:** Development Services Commission
Office of the CAO

Date: May 6, 2026

Recommendation:

- 1) That Council receive Report DS-016-26 for information.

Report Highlights

- The Agritourism Strategy and Toolkit project has formally commenced.
- The Town has retained Bannikin Consultants to undertake a comprehensive policy and zoning review, robust stakeholder engagement, and the development of a practical and actionable Agritourism Strategy and Toolkit.
- The resulting Strategy and Toolkit will provide clear guidance to farmers, landowners, investors and staff, and support Council's strategic objectives related to sustainable economic development, on-farm diversified uses, and tourism attraction.

1. Purpose:

The Agritourism Strategy and Toolkit Development project has commenced in Q2 of 2026 following completion of the procurement process. This report provides an overview of the objectives of the Agritourism project and advises of opportunities to provide input into the Agritourism Strategy and Toolkit.

2. Background:

Agritourism supports agricultural viability, visitor experiences, and economic development by enabling farm- based businesses such as on- farm retail, experiences, special events, wineries and cideries, and value- added food production. When supported through clear

policy and guidance, agritourism can attract private investment, create employment, and contribute to non-residential economic activity.

The Town's Official Plan (approved September 25, 2025) establishes the land-use foundation for agritourism. Section 5.2 – Policies for Specific Uses in the Agricultural System recognizes on-farm diversified uses as secondary to agriculture and supports diversification that contributes to farm viability, subject to compatibility and scale. Section 6.2 – Agricultural System Land Use Strategy generally permits agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses within Agricultural and Rural Areas, reinforcing agritourism as an appropriate economic activity when aligned with long-term protection of the agricultural land base. The Agricultural System geographically is covered by the Greenbelt Plan, and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP) and is also comprised of the Natural Heritage System overlay, which includes the ORMCP Natural Core Area, Natural Linkage Area, and the Greenbelt Plan Natural Heritage System. Given these Provincial policies and the associated restrictions, it can be challenging for farmers and prospective investors to navigate the complex policy regime within the Town.

In addition to the complex policies in place, the Town's Zoning By-law can also present a hurdle to potential agritourism opportunities as the By-law has not yet been updated to reflect the Town's Official Plan. The Town is currently undergoing a Comprehensive Zoning By-law update. Upon completion of the Agritourism Strategy, the proponent shall deliver practical, actionable recommendations to incorporate into the Zoning By-law update to enable additional on-farm diversified uses and develop an agritourism policy that streamlines processes and is aimed at reducing red tape to support agribusiness and tourism growth.

The 2025–2028 Stouffville Visitor Plan identifies agritourism under the “Develop” objective as a priority experience area, calling for the creation of market-ready products that drive visitation, increase visitor spending, and support local businesses. The Plan emphasizes improving visitor readiness and providing coordinated tools and supports to tourism stakeholders, including rural and farm-based operators.

Council's 2022–2026 Strategic Plan, through the service theme “A Town That Grows,” commits to fostering economic development and explicitly supports sustainable cultivation and tourism opportunities, including wineries, cideries, and rural tourism uses. The Strategic Plan also recognizes the importance of expanding and diversifying the Town's economic base to support growth and service delivery.

The Economic Development Strategy (2021–2025) further reinforces this direction by identifying the Rural Economy and Tourism as key pillars, with actions focused on supporting sustainable cultivation, agritourism, and rural businesses. The Strategy recognizes these activities as opportunities to attract investment, support entrepreneurship, and grow the Industrial, Commercial and Institutional (ICI) tax base, helping to balance the Town's overall assessment mix and reduce reliance on residential taxation to support growth.

Together, the Official Plan, Visitor Plan, Strategic Plan, and Economic Development Strategy provide a strong and consistent policy foundation for agritourism as a tool to support agricultural viability, attract investment, grow tourism, and contribute to a more balanced tax base. The development of a Stouffville Agritourism Strategy and Toolkit will help translate this existing and complex policy direction into practical, investment-ready guidance, supporting responsible agritourism business growth, increasing ICI-supported economic activity, and helping to reduce the long-term residential tax burden associated with supporting growth in the Town.

To advance this Strategy, the Town initiated a consultant-led project that includes:

- A review of agritourism-related policies within the Official Plan and applicable Provincial policies;
- A zoning assessment focused on providing permissions for on-farm diversified uses;
- Targeted stakeholders and community engagement; and
- The development of an Agritourism Strategy and a practical implementation Toolkit.

Following a competitive Request for Proposal process, a consultant has been retained and the project is now underway.

3. Analysis:

3.1 Consultant Retention and Project Initiation

Staff have executed a consulting agreement with Bannikin, the highest-ranking proponent through the RFP evaluation process. The project formally commenced in March 2026, with initial work focused on background research, policy review, and development of the engagement framework. Bannikin was selected based on their specialized experience in agritourism, rural economic development, and municipal policy.

3.2 Scope of Work

The consultant's scope of work includes:

- Policy and zoning analysis related to agritourism and on-farm diversified uses;
- Identification of regulatory challenges and opportunities;
- Stakeholder and community engagement to inform local priorities;
- Clear recommendations for policy clarity and implementation (where applicable); and,
- Preparation of an Agritourism Strategy and user-friendly Toolkit to support operators and guide municipal implementation.

3.3 Community and Stakeholder Engagement Opportunities

Community and stakeholder engagement is a key component of the project and will include opportunities for input from:

- Farmers and agricultural landowners;
- Existing and prospective agritourism operators;
- Tourism and business organizations;
- York Region and external agencies; and
- Members of the general public.

Engagement activities may include interviews, workshops, surveys, and/or public information sessions. These opportunities are intended to gather input on current barriers, validate opportunities, and ensure the Strategy and Toolkit are practical, locally informed, and aligned with community expectations. The engagement activities are expected to be undertaken over the course of coming weeks.

Staff will use a combination of Town communication channels to promote engagement opportunities and encourage participation. Council will be kept informed as key milestones and engagement activities progress, and feedback received will help inform the development of the Agritourism Strategy and Toolkit.

3.4 Agritourism Strategy and Toolkit

Based on findings and recommendations from the background research and community engagement, an Agritourism Strategy will be prepared, outlining:

- Recommended approach (Agritourism Policy and/or zoning amendments)
- A framework for implementation aligned with the Town's Official Plan and provincial legislation
- Public and stakeholder Agritourism Toolkit engagement plan
- Administrative and monitoring procedures
- Eligibility criteria for on-farm diversified uses

The Agritourism Toolkit will be designed for current business owners and future investors to create, scale, or enhance their agritourism offerings in Stouffville. It will be realistic and conform to the policies and plans governing Stouffville's land use policies. The toolkit is meant to be an easy to use and practical document that will help users get started. It will include:

- Guidance on establishing on-farm diversified uses;
- Zoning and regulatory compliance information; and
- Business and marketing best practices.

3.5 Next Steps

Over the coming weeks, the consultant will complete stakeholder engagement and policy analysis, followed by the preparation of draft strategy and toolkit materials. Staff anticipate presenting the draft and final Agritourism Strategy and Toolkit to Council in June 2026 and September 2026 for information and/or consideration.

4 Options:

4.4 Option A (Recommended)

The Council receive Report DS-016-26 for information.

5 Financial Implications:

The project is proceeding within the approved 2026 budget allocated for the Agritourism Strategy and Toolkit Development initiative. There are no additional financial implications associated with this information report.

6 Broader Intergovernmental Impacts and/or Considerations:

The Region of York Economic Strategy Division is contributing financially to the budget for this project. In addition to the Stouffville-based toolkit, the consultant will be producing a York Region-based toolkit as part of the project. Creating the two toolkits simultaneously will leverage synergy between the Town and the Region. The toolkits will also align with York Region's Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Strategy. Regional staff will also be providing input and resources on the project as part of the steering committee.

7 Communication:

Town staff has prepared a webpage (www.townofws.ca/agritourism) to promote the project, and inform the public of engagement opportunities. Town staff will also be promoting engagement opportunities through social media platforms.

8 Alignment with Strategic Plan:

1. A Town that Grows
A Town that grows in support of complete communities
2. A Healthy and Greener Town
Increase Offerings and Opportunities for Active Living
3. An Engaging Town
Increase Community Engagement & Outreach

9 Attachments:

None.

10 Related Reports:

None.

Report Author: Hena Kabir, Director Planning Services

Report Contributors: Tim Hayward, Policy Planner III
Cristina Liu, Economic Development & Tourism Officer

For further information on this report, please contact the Department Head: Dwayne Tapp, Commissioner of Development Services at 905-640-1900 or 1-855-642-8697 ext. 2431 or via email at Dwayne.tapp@townofws.ca.

Review Confirmation:

Reviewing Division	Review Required?				Reviewed By
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	
Finance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	
Legal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	
Communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	
Clerks	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	