

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. A river flows through the center, winding between agricultural fields. The fields are a mix of brown and green, indicating different stages of crop growth or types of land use. There are some buildings and structures scattered throughout the landscape, particularly near the river. The overall scene is a typical rural setting.

Wellington Rd. 7 Community Feedback Consultation

Elora 7 OP Inc. retained Junction Group Inc. to conduct a series of focused interviews concerning the proposed development of 350 Wellington Rd. 7, Centre Wellington Ontario. In the fall of 2022, key community stakeholder discussions were held. These interviews supported an increased community-focused depth of understanding related to the development of the Wellington Rd. 7 property.

Five questions were developed to create the broadest context for respondent feedback.

1. What do you see as the strengths of this neighbourhood?
2. What are your overall thoughts on the types of investments, improvements, and efforts we need in this neighbourhood to create a better place to live, work and play?
3. What are important factors affecting the housing market in your community? How should we address these issues through new development?
4. Specifically, when you look at the proposed development site, what do you think it should include?
5. What would you like Elora 7 OP Inc. to learn from other developments in Centre Wellington / Elora (both positive and negative)?

A summary of the respondent themes and ideas is outlined in this report. All interviews were conducted in confidence, and the comments and quotes found here are not attributed, protecting the privacy of the respondents. Interviewees selected from the surrounding community represented residential, business, organizational, political, and not-for-profit community sectors. All respondents had a significant and longstanding relationship to the communities of Salem and Elora, with some having lived there for decades.

Location

The development site is located on Wellington Road 7, in Centre Wellington, more specifically in the Elora/Salem area. Outside of what residents characterize as central Elora, but with the ability to be connected to the community on the east side of the Wellington Rd 7, this property is uniquely situated for new development. To the west agricultural lands are home to active farms, and a well-known sunflower farm, which attracts an abundance of tourists, is located to the south of the property. The Elora Gorge is south of the subject lands. North of the property is the community of Salem. Outside of the traditional residential areas of Elora and Salem, but close enough to walk to, this parcel of land has many possibilities in the eyes of residents.



Significant components of the neighbourhood:

- Walking distance to the historic downtown, shops, restaurants, and services.
- Walking distance to community facilities, including the curling club, the art centre, community centre and arena.
- Adjacent to well-established neighbourhood with many amenities, including parks and trails.
- The unique character of the natural beauty of the area.

“Unique mix of agriculture, rural and urban.”

“Prime development land.”

“People love living here... there is a strong sense of community pride.”

Neighborhood Character

Known for its quaint small-town character and natural beauty, Elora is a community in Centre Wellington that is bursting with activity in all seasons. The town attracts tourists from across Ontario who come to be close to nature, for outdoor activity, and to enjoy the unique shops and restaurants in the downtown or partake in one of many festivals and events. The streets are bustling with visitors and residents alike, especially on the weekends. The community is brimming with pride, volunteerism, and cultural heritage.



■ *"Elora has a unique vibe."*

Residents describe Elora as neighbourly – a safe, clean and a low crime town. People take care of their properties, public spaces, and each other. It is a friendly place, where people greet one another, volunteer, and take an active role in many aspects of community planning.

Recreation facilities, an art gallery, museum, parks, and trails can be found in Elora. Speciality shops and small retailers meet the daily shopping needs of the residents and larger shopping centres are close by in Fergus. Housing is predominantly single family detached homes, with little by way of apartments or rental accommodations.

■ *"Significant natural and cultural heritage features."*



The natural beauty of the area is something that residents are proud of and strive to protect. Elora has many environmental organizations which aim to protect the Elora Gorge, enhance trail networks,

Neighborhood Character

protect trees, and maintain a safe supply of drinking water. Trail networks connect Centre Wellington from Elora to Fergus and can be used for daily activities or for leisure and recreation. There is an abundance of outdoor activities and adventures in the area.

“a unique place, built and natural heritage.”

Bounded on three sides by agricultural land this area is home to active farming operations. The Elora community celebrates local farmers through their farmers markets and festivals. The downtown is full of locally owned restaurants that source food from the farm community, prepared by local chefs. The grow local, buy local philosophy is central to the community.

The site is in what has been described as the outskirts of Elora. The lands are located on the west side of Wellington Rd. 7 and as a result are somewhat disconnected from the community of Elora. That said, the site is seen as a natural expansion area. Some respondents would prefer to see no new development in Elora but recognize that these lands have been designated for growth.

As one respondent stated, ‘there is no neighbourhood there yet, you have to create a neighbourhood.’ The importance of developing a community that is home to new residents and connects with existing neighbourhoods is key to its overall success.



“We are a great place. I love living here.”

The erosion of housing affordability in Ontario is felt in Centre Wellington and the Elora / Salem communities. Respondents are aware that they are not unique in the housing crunch but note that housing in Elora is less attainable than housing in other larger markets. The high cost of housing in the town is attributed to its desirability as a place to live, the predominance of the single family detached housing and the conversion of homes to short term rentals. It is difficult to find an affordable home to purchase in Elora at all income levels. Low-income households and those who wish to rent have greater difficulty.

“Young families and seniors are being priced out of the market.”

Through the consultation process it was widely agreed that Elora needs to increase housing supply, especially attainable and rental housing. Mixed use housing developments, townhomes, stacked townhomes, low and medium rise apartment buildings are all viewed as potential solutions to provide more housing. There is an openness to look at built forms that are not common in Elora to help bring more housing units to the market, especially on this site, as it is outside of the historic downtown and divorced from established neighbourhoods.

The need for work force housing in Elora was highlighted in many conversations. People know that the service workers who are relied upon to keep the tourism economy running smoothly are not able to find housing in the community. It was also noted that other service, health care and administrative workers are not able to secure housing in Elora. Respondents would like to see attainable housing built to enhance the quality of life for these households, reduce the environmental impact of commuting and support the local economy.

“People who are born and raised here are being pushed out.”

The Town of Centre Wellington has been working to address housing affordability issues through the Healthy Growth Committee. Residents have had an opportunity to provide input and feedback through council and the committee over the past few years. Respondents have mixed views on the approach the town is taking, but all agree that something needs to be done to address the housing needs in the community.

Feedback Recommendation Summary – Housing Needs

1. Create vibrant mixed-use communities that include a range of housing types.
2. Offer housing to meet the needs of young families and seniors.
3. Deliver attainable housing for the Centre Wellington workforce.
4. Provide affordable rental opportunities within new developments.

“It is good for all of us to have a housing mix.”

“More supply would help bring prices down.”

“To grow a community we need a mix of housing types.”

“There is a real shortage of attainable housing in Centre Wellington.”

“The hospitality sector is huge. Employees have no where to live.”

Zoned Highway Commercial, the property allows for a mix of commercial and residential uses to be developed. Respondents were pleased with the recommendations from the healthy growth committee to try to encourage attainable housing on these sites in Centre Wellington. There were mixed ideas about what specifically should be included in this site.



Everyone agrees that the lands should include residential development. The residential development should focus on creating attainable and rental housing—what Elora needs most. This community should avoid a built form and design that looks like it could belong anywhere in Southern Ontario—it needs to be built in response to the existing community.

“Do not take away from the commercial downtown. We want to keep a vibrant core.”

What varies is the degree to which people believe the new community should include a commercial component. Some respondents believe that the new community should include commercial elements that can service the daily needs of new residents, such as a neighbourhood restaurant and/ or a convenience store. Others believe that the everyday needs can be met through existing commercial in the downtown. They have a desire to have new residents become integrated with and support the existing business community. This group of respondents feels that service-related businesses such as a hairdresser, tailor, or accountant would be more appropriate in this location. It is the opinion of all respondents that this parcel of land should not include any chain retailers or big box stores.

Access to existing commercial could be difficult for new residents in this community due to the need to cross the county road. For this reason, many agree that having onsite commercial opportunities would

be optimal. However, if the community can be built in a manner that connects to local trails and has safe pedestrian routes into historic Elora having commercial on site becomes less critical.

While some respondents have a vision for the site of commercial on grade with residential above and parking in the rear, others are open to a variety of built forms. As discussed in the design and integration section of the report, residents would like to see the character of Elora maintained in any new development. Whether the new community is townhomes, low rise apartment buildings, or single family detached, thoughtful design is of utmost importance.



“Honestly, I don't think we need more commercial.”

Elora has managed to maintain its small-town values, historic character, scenic beauty, and sense of community, while maintaining a prosperous economy. Any new development, in any zoning category, should add to the overall success of the town by demonstrating that the new project holds Elora values. Respondents believe that growth should address the needs of the community in a manner that is complimentary to the existing town of Elora and the surrounding agricultural lands.

Feedback Recommendation Summary - Highway Commercial

1. Commercial uses should not directly compete with the historic downtown.
2. Chain and franchise retail outlets are not desirable.
3. A mix of housing and service commercial should be built on the site.
4. Safely connect the community to downtown Elora to reduce the need for commercial on site.

“Retain the look and feel of the community.”

Residents of Elora pride themselves on the character of their small town, the natural beauty of the place, support of local artisans, farmers and entrepreneurs, the shared history and sense of community. Growth, if not done correctly, threatens the very heart and soul of Elora. Respondents would like developers to give careful consideration to the town of Elora, understand it, and create new communities that enhance present the community.



“Elora is a happening place. I hope we don’t lose the charm and uniqueness.”

Cookie cutter subdivisions, found in anywhere Ontario, if built in Elora will erode the sense of place. Community leaders, dedicated residents and local community groups have fought for years to maintain the elements of Elora that give them the reputation of being ‘the most beautiful town in Ontario’. The way that a new development looks, and feels is important to respondents.

The land parcel on Wellington Rd. 7 is somewhat separated from the historic downtown, but if designed and built well it will be a natural extension of the community. Respondents see this parcel of land as a gateway into Elora, giving visitors arriving from the north a first impression of the community.

This parcel of land also has the unique ability to tie together the historic downtown, with the agricultural community, linking the two important places together.

Architectural features, natural materials and landscape design can be used to create a sense of place and a connection to Elora. Buildings should not exceed 5 storeys in height and should be situated close to Wellington Rd 7 creating an interesting street frontage that engages people. The county road is busy and a truck bypass. Boulevard trees, and other design techniques should be used to create a pedestrian scale and give people a sense of safety when walking along or crossing this road.



“People like what we have and we do not want it to become like other cities.”

Behind the main buildings, fronting onto the county road the pedestrian scale should be continued the development should include trees and greenspace. Perhaps a central park feature where residents can come together. Residents want to see a lot of green features within the design of the community.

Central to the comments made by all respondents is that the new community should reflect the character of Elora and should be designed in a way that promotes people coming together and connecting with one another.

“Very concerned about aesthetics, heritage, and design.”

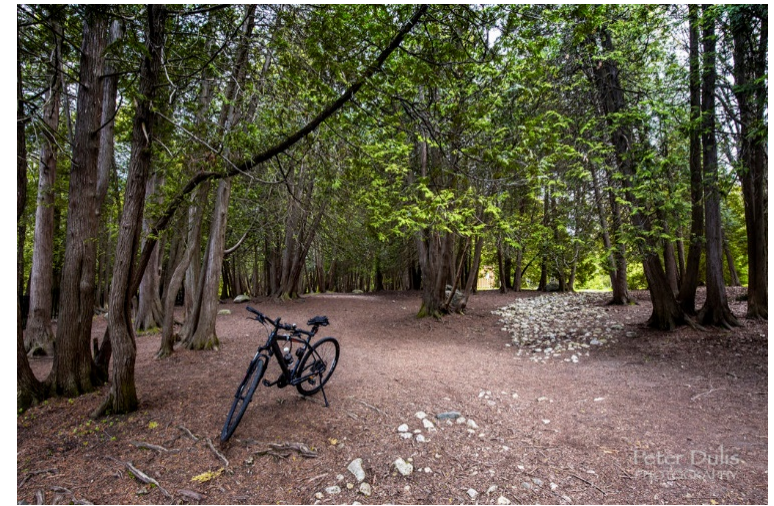
Feedback Recommendation Summary - Integration and Design

1. Reflect the small town feel and character of Elora through design.
2. Create a connected community.
3. Design an interesting, architecturally pleasing community that responds to Elora.
4. Develop a gateway feature along Wellington Rd. 7.
5. Include greenspace and trees within the community.

“Elora is a perfect location: it has all the amenities and charm and we really want to keep it this way.”



This site is seen as both removed from and part of the Elora community. Wellington Rd. 7 creates a barrier. It is a busy regional road, with heavy truck traffic and no safe pedestrian crossing. Within walking distance to all the amenities that Elora has to offer the visual and physical barrier of the road will discourage people from using active transportation. This community will rely on vehicle use unless pedestrian and cycling linkages can be created as part of the development. More than a traffic light will be required to create a desirable connection to the established Elora community. A safe and welcoming link between the new community and the established community of Elora is needed to entice people to walk across the county road.



“Density requires some form of connectivity. It should not be focussed on cars.”

Considering the residents' movements in this new development were essential to respondents. Pedestrian movements were described as key to the success of the development. Many respondents described the location as 'walkable' and discussed the location's strengths from an active transportation perspective.

Critical, deliberate planning is needed to make the site easy to navigate for pedestrians. The building should be designed at a pedestrian scale, easy access to sidewalks should be planned for residents. How residents and the community can move from the new development to the established community through the site was discussed. Trails for walking and cycling are abundant in this community. Making connections to the trail networks and limiting the use of the county road will be key to integrating new residents into the existing community. Creating a connection and upgrading the trail under the bridge in Gorge Park is an example of how the site can connect to amenities and the historic downtown.

“Formalize and strengthen walking trails.”

Respondents would like to see an improvement in active transportation infrastructure, particularly on Wellington Rd. 7. A safe connection, including sidewalks and bike lanes along this stretch of the county road is needed to facilitate new residents accessing the trail network. Additionally, as the new community will create more vehicular traffic, infrastructure upgrades should be considered to manage future congestion.

"It will be hard to get across the road."

Traffic flow into and out of the site will require careful planning to ensure safety for all users of the road. The county road is a truck bypass route and special attention should be paid to the existing traffic use and planning for the future. While respondents prefer to see people walking and cycling, people will have and use cars, so it is important to plan for them.

Adequate parking needs to be provided for the uses that are in the development. On street parking is not desirable, driveways and parking lots are a better way to accommodate vehicles. If active transportation is a viable option, it is hoped that households will only have one vehicle.

Feedback Recommendation Summary - Movement and Parking

1. Create an environment that engages people on a pedestrian scale.
2. Strengthen active transportation infrastructure and connections in the area.
3. Provide onsite parking for residents and visitors.
4. Promote alternative modes of transportation including, cycling, transit and walking.

"...the biggest worry is vehicle traffic."

The residents of Centre Wellington care deeply about the environment. They have remarkable natural environmental assets such as the Elora Gorge, lush agricultural lands, forests, and the Grand River. The people of Elora work together to protect the natural environment through organizations that they have founded including Elora Environment Centre, Neighbourwoods, Tree Trust, Save our Water, Friends of the Grand River, and Grand River Agricultural Society. Given the communities commitment to the Environment it is no surprise that this became a theme throughout the interviews.



“The urban forest is very important to our community.”

Respondents advocated for sustainable building practises that will reduce the carbon footprint of the community and reduce energy and water consumption. In the building and design of the development respondents would like to see green building material and practices employed. Ideas brought forward



include the use of solar panels, green roofs, cisterns, electric vehicle charging stations, and bicycle parking.

Maintaining trees that are on the property, planting new trees and creating greenspaces within the development are of great importance to the respondents. Boulevard plantings, lining Wellington Rd. 7 with trees and encouraging gardening on the site were presented as ideas to integrate plantings into the development.

Elora residents depend on ground water to supply drinking water to the town. It is important that well heads are protected and that the ground water is not negatively impacted through new development. The developer must confirm, without a doubt, that potable water will be available for the new community. Respondents would like the developer to work with the Town to ensure that the site is appropriately serviced in a sustainable manner that is not a cost burden to the municipality.



“Have water kept on the site and recharging back into the ground.”

Protect and enhance, this was the underlying message, when it comes to the environment. People want to move to Elora in part for the natural beauty of the place. It is important that growth does not degrade the natural environment that people value and hold dear.

Feedback Recommendation Summary – Environment

1. Protect and enhance the natural environment.
2. Reduce the carbon footprint of the development through green design
3. Utilize green building materials for new homes
4. Create greenspaces and plant trees throughout the development site.

“Low impact development standards to be adopted in our community.”

Wellington Road 7 – Community Consultation Feedback Recommendation Summary

1. Create an architecturally pleasing and exciting community that connects with and relates to the existing community.
2. Consider a mixed development that has a variety of housing types including attainable and rental housing.
3. Focus the commercial element on small scale retail or service businesses that compliment, not compete with downtown.
4. Promote active transportation through the design of the community and site function.
5. Build in an environmentally sustainable manner, include greenspace and trees.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Peter Dulis, peterdulisphotography.com for providing the photographs used through out the document. Thank you to everyone who gave their time to participate in the interview and provide their thoughts on growth and development in Centre Wellington. It was a pleasure and a privilege to speak with each of you.

