



Pamela Duesling, RPP, is proud of her rural background. In 2009, she and her husband moved home to Norfolk County, Ontario, to take over the family farm. Their children are the seventh generation to grow up there.

Registered Professional Planner

PROFILE

NAME:

Pamela Duesling, RPP

LOCATION:

Paris, Ontario

POSITION:

**General Manager of
Development Services,
County of Brant**

Pamela Duesling, RPP, started her career in 2001 as a Development Planner and Economic Development Officer in Haldimand County. In 2007, she moved west to Northern British Columbia to take on her first senior leadership role as the Director of Community Development and Planning with the Town of Fort Nelson and the Northern Rockies Regional District.

When she returned to Ontario in 2009, she transitioned from Senior Planner to Director of Planning to General Manager of Development and Cultural Services in her home municipality of Norfolk County. A decade later, she moved to the County of Brant as the General Manager of Development Services to work with a progressive Council and dynamic Senior Leadership team in a fast-paced, growing rural municipality.

Duesling is a lifelong learner. She holds a BES in Urban and Regional Planning, an MAES in Local Economic Development from the University of Waterloo, a Diploma in Public Administration from Western University, and an MA Certificate in Municipal Leadership from Schulich Executive Education Centre at York University. She is currently a PhD Candidate in Rural Studies at the University of Guelph working with Dr. Wayne Caldwell.

Tell us about agricultural diversification and why you chose this topic for your PhD.

During my time working in Norfolk County, my colleagues and I experienced the shift of entrepreneurial farmers emerging out of the tobacco industry and looking to diversify into other crops and uses on their farms. My MAES thesis was devoted to the Norfolk County tobacco industry transition.

Almost 20 years later, the next generation of family farmers in rural Southern Ontario is continuing to seek opportunities to diversify. In 2016, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) created guidelines to assist planners in working with entrepreneurial farmers in prime agricultural areas. It is my desire to create a policy regime to assist rural planners in balancing farm preservation with entrepreneurial opportunities so that family farming may continue. "To preserve agriculture, it is not enough to preserve the land; society must also preserve the farmer."¹

A number of shifts are taking place in rural Ontario, at least partly spurred by the pandemic. What is the role and/or importance of diversification in economic development and sustainability, particularly as it applies to the County of Brant?

The County of Brant is a unique rural municipality in the fact that it is rooted in farming and agriculture but is also experiencing significant residential and industrial growth migrating from the GTA.

Rural municipalities in Southern Ontario which are on the ring of the Greater Golden Horseshoe can offer safe places to work with natural spaces to visit and recreate.

In 2020, the County of Brant experienced 713 new residential units of which 448 were single-family dwellings and approximately \$40 million dollars in industrial/commercial and institutional project growth. For a municipality of 37,000, this growth can have a significant change to local economic development and the sustainability of a rural community. Brant's Economic Development Strategy is focussed around growing a more diversified economy, driving investment to the County, building Brant's downtowns, and talking with a renewed focus on communication and engagement. Out of necessity, the transition to a new agriculture is also being developed.

You are also very involved with housing vulnerable populations. How has the pandemic influenced this significant issue? Where do you see areas for improvement?

I have a passion for developing attainable housing in rural communities. It is important that, as Planners, we create affordable and safe places for all our residents to call home. Too often, vulnerable rural populations are camouflaged, living in trailer parks or having to leave rural areas as there are limited housing options available. The pandemic has enhanced this issue, creating separation and social distancing requirements. I believe the opportunities are in creating partnerships with not-for-profit organizations and developers that specialize in attainable housing

with wraparound services. Building differently by creating unique housing typologies, such as additional residential units, or utilizing inclusionary zoning are possibilities not only for urban areas but also for rural communities.


What do you enjoy most about being a Planner?

The people! Being an RPP means that I get to work with a great industry of professionals and leaders. I have met some excellent colleagues in my career and am honoured to work alongside people who have a passion for building better communities and leaving this world a little better than we found it. I am most proud of my OPPI work with the Outreach Committee and the Student Liaison Committee. The planning profession is in good hands with brilliant and devoted future Planners.

Do you have a message for your fellow RPPs and future RPPs?

If there is one thing that I have learned over the last year during COVID-19 is that life can change quickly, so be passionate about what you do and love what you do. I am a Rural Planner and proud of my agricultural roots. My passion is leadership in rural community development. (Y)

¹Walton, Margaret. (2003). Agriculture in the Central Ontario Zone. Neptis: The Architecture of Urban Regions. P. 31. https://neptis.org/sites/default/files/smart_growth_issue_papers_agriculture/agriculture_nipl.pdf




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