



THE UNITED COUNTIES OF LEEDS and GRENVILLE

AGRICULTURAL AREA REVIEW STUDY

FINAL REPORT

August 8, 2024



**Leeds
Grenville**

Prepared by:

PLANSCAPE INC.
104 Kimberley Avenue
Bracebridge, Ontario P1L 1Z8
TEL: 705-645-1556
FAX: 705-645-4500
EMAIL: dvandenakker@planscape.ca

In association with

The Soil Resource Group
Guelph, ON
TEL: 519-820-3500
EMAIL: dking@srgresearch.ca

THE UNITED COUNTIES OF LEEDS and GRENVILLE

AGRICULTURAL AREA REVIEW STUDY

Table of Contents

Project Background.....	1
Purpose of the Report.....	2
Stage 1: Project Introduction.....	3
Stage 2: Technical Analysis	3
Study Area.....	3
Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) Process.....	4
Selecting an Evaluation Unit Size.....	5
Calculating the Land Evaluation (LE) Component	8
Area Review (AR) Factors Procedure.....	14
Weighting the Factors of a LEAR	15
Selecting the Threshold Score Through Scenario Comparison	16
Stage 3: Recommended Agricultural Area.....	22
Stage 4: Additional Individual Consultation.....	25
Official Plan Amendment and Final Agricultural Area Map.....	28

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Project Presentations

Appendix B: LEAR Maps

Appendix C: Agricultural Area Recommendations Maps

Appendix D: Draft Official Plan Amendment

Appendix E: Record of Refinements by Municipality

Appendix F: Technical Advisory Group Members

Appendix G: Individual Consultation Information Package

List of Tables

Table 1	OMAFRA Defined Capability Classes	8
Table 2	OMAFRA Assigned LE Point Value for each CLI Land Classification	10
Table 3	Lands in Production by MPAC Property Codes	13
Table 4	Refinement Codes	24

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Study Process Summary	2
Figure 2:	County Map	4
Figure 3:	LEAR Process Steps	5
Figure 4:	Counties of Leeds and Grenville Evaluation Unit Map	7
Figure 5:	Schematic Illustration of Fragmentation	11
Figure 6:	Schematic Illustration of Lands in Production	13
Figure 7:	Scenario Threshold Score Comparison Map	18
Figure 8:	LE Score County Map	19
Figure 9:	Area Review (AR) Factors Map (Fragmentation and Lands in Agricultural Production)	20
Figure 10:	Draft County LEAR Map	21
Figure 11:	Summary Refinements Map	27

Project Background

On July 29, 2022, the Counties of Leeds and Grenville (the Counties) released a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the preparation of the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville Agricultural Area Review, based on a modified Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) approach. In 2015, the Counties adopted its first Official Plan, approved by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in 2016. Due to a compressed timeline for the Official Plan preparation, it was not possible to review the status of the lands included in the Agricultural Area designation. As a result, the Agricultural Area designation consists primarily of the agricultural areas as designated in the local municipal Official Plans that were in place in 2015. At that time, it was known/suspected that the agricultural land mapping was not comprehensive and that some agricultural areas were missing. Many of these local official plans and their mapping were developed under previous provincial policies and varying definitions of prime agricultural lands.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing recognized this issue by modifying the Counties Official Plan to add policy 3.2.3 (a), which states: “The Counties, in consultation with the local municipalities and the Province, will undertake a comprehensive Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) or equivalent study to assist in identifying and designating prime agricultural areas in the Counties prior to the next review of this Plan under Section 26 of the Planning Act.”

The RFP was awarded to the consultant project team consisting of Planscape Inc. as project lead and Soil Resource Group (SRG) as soil specialists providing the Land Evaluation (LE) expertise required in the LEAR methodology.

A LEAR methodology tailored to the Counties, to identify any additional candidate Agricultural Area lands and to confirm the existing Agricultural Area boundaries, has been developed to address this provincial requirement.

For the purpose of this study, the 2002 Guide to Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) System for Agriculture and the 2018 Agricultural System Mapping Method Technical Document from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) has been used as the LEAR methodology with extensive consultation undertaken to provide local area knowledge of the mapping exercise. While the Agricultural System Mapping Method Technical Document documents a system used in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, it is “the most current LEAR guidance” recommended by OMAFRA based on a provincially led review. The consultation

process for this study has been comprehensive and constant with all stakeholders. The following key stakeholder groups have been educated and consulted:

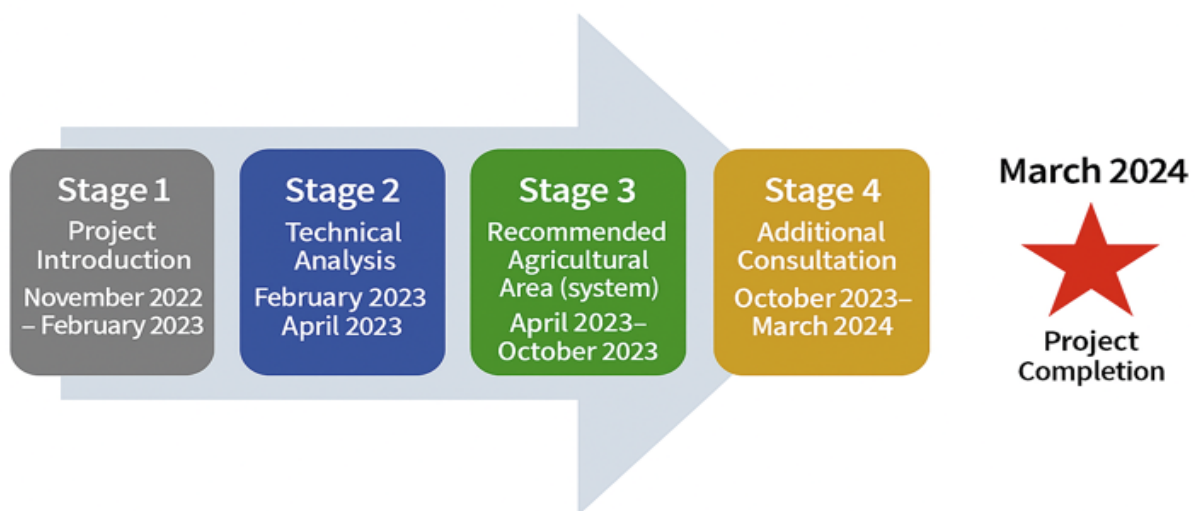
- Counties staff,
- OMAFRA staff,
- local municipal staff and Councils,
- the Technical Advisory Group (formed for this project),
- the agricultural community through meetings with the Leeds Federation of Agriculture and the Grenville Federation of Agriculture;
- the Counties Planning Advisory Committee (PAC); and
- the general public through public meeting including local area municipal meetings.

A five-month additional consultation process was added to the original project at the request of PAC. The details of the full consultation program are discussed in this report.

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to provide a fulsome project record of the creation of the “Agricultural Area” designation intended to form an updated Schedule A map of the Counties Official Plan. **Figure 1** illustrates an overview of the key project stages. It should be noted that Stage 4 was an additional stage requested by the Counties Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) to enable additional individual property owner consultation to be undertaken.

Figure 1: Study Process Summary



Stage 1: Project Introduction and Information Gathering

In November 2022, the project team began the project by gathering data, preparing a consultation plan, assembling the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and introducing the project to the Counties Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) and the public. Please note that the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) are the same group (the terms were used interchangeably during the study). Appendix A provides the presentations to stakeholders during this period of the study.

Counties staff launched the Agriculture Area Review page of their website to enhance consultation efforts and provide a repository for all project information ([Agriculture Area Review - Leeds & Grenville \(leedsgrenville.com\)](https://leedsgrenville.com/agriculture) or www.leedsgrenville.com/agriculture). The website page contained a “subscription” option and contact information for Counties staff to provide a consistent contact for stakeholder questions.

The intent of this stage was to begin thoroughly educating and consulting all stakeholders on the project purpose and methodology of the study to encourage participation throughout the project.

Stage 2: Technical Analysis

The following section describes the methodology used for the Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) exercise which was finalized following the project introduction and information gathering process. The results of the LEAR were the foundational information layer for the recommended Agricultural Area to be included in the Official Plan.

Study Area

The study area was the full geographic boundaries of the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville. The Counties is comprised of 10 local area municipalities as shown on **Figure 2**. Not all of the geographic lands in the United Counties of Leeds & Grenville are suitable for inclusion in the agricultural system. The following areas were excluded from the lands considered in the study:

- Settlement Areas
- Provincially Significant Wetlands (PSWs)
- Large Water Bodies

- Ontario Provincial Parks
- National Parks

Figure 2: County Map



Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) Process

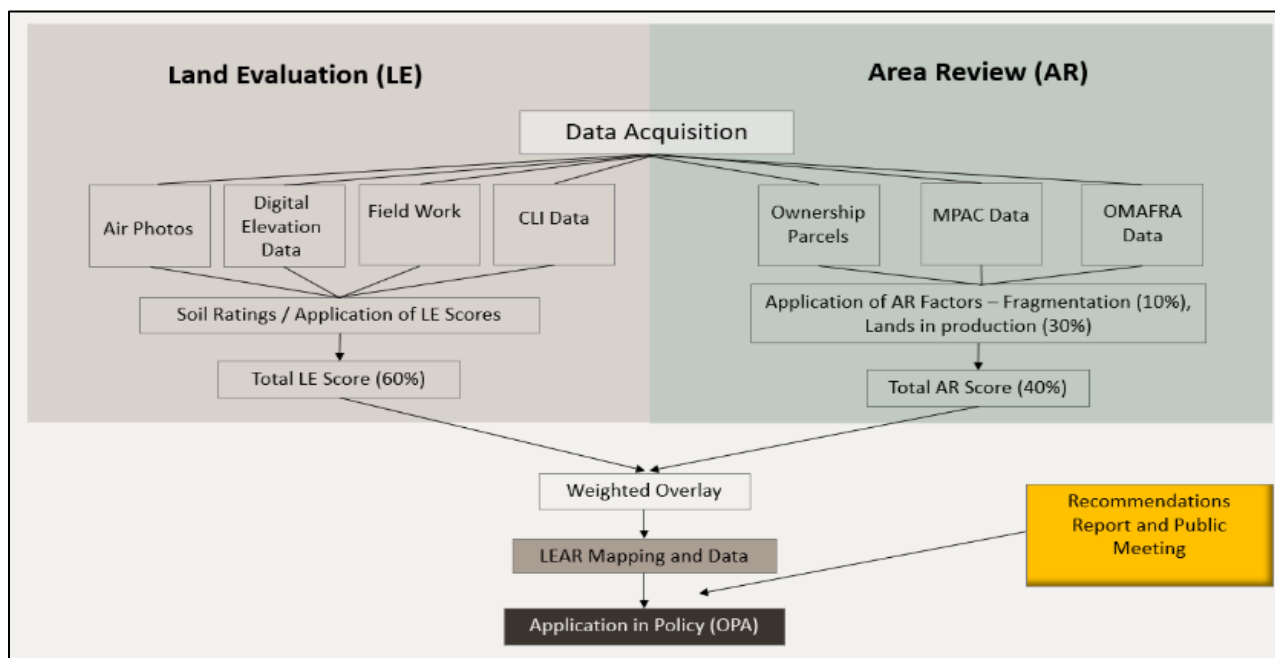
The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) requires municipalities to protect prime agricultural areas. The PPS defines prime agricultural areas as areas where prime agricultural lands predominate. This includes areas of prime agricultural lands and associated Canada Land Inventory Class 4 through 7 lands, and additional areas where there is a local concentration of farms which exhibit characteristics of ongoing agriculture. Prime agricultural areas may be identified by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food using guidelines developed by the Province as amended from time to time. A prime agricultural area may also be identified through an alternative agricultural land evaluation system approved by the Province.

The Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) approach has been approved by the Province.

The LEAR system was developed by the Province and the methodology requires factors to be selected and weighted to reflect local circumstances. The LEAR system is comprised of Land Evaluation (LE) factors and Area Review (AR) Factors. The LE factors apply to physical components such as soil quality, while the AR factors apply to socio-economic considerations such as fragmentation and recognition of surrounding lands in agricultural production. The inclusion of socio-economic factors allows for more than just the soil capability to be evaluated, which would be done if the prime agricultural areas were simply defined as areas of Class 1, 2 and 3 soils.

Figure 3 below illustrates the key study process steps for conducting a LEAR as finalized in Phase 2.

Figure 3: LEAR Process Steps



Selecting an Evaluation Unit Size

The Evaluation Unit forms the basis for the data collection and is the geographic unit in which LEAR scores are applied. In the OMAFRA 2018 Agricultural System Mapping Method, “the method of using a grid of consistently sized evaluation units” was selected as the best option because the grid method is both rigorous and adaptable to a wide variety of geographic

contexts and survey patterns. The grid method increased the ability of scores to reflect complex landscape features”¹.

100-acre polygons were recommended and used as the standard unit of evaluation. There was an evaluative exercise undertaken regarding the grid size selection and public consultation that sought to obtain feedback on the size of the evaluation unit. The 100-acre polygon was ultimately selected. It was recognized that farm sizes in the Counties are often smaller than 100-acres.

The 100-acre blocks are noted as evaluation units. Evaluation areas are also used in this study to refer to the 100-acre unit plus a 750m boundary surrounding the unit. The additional boundary allows for the effective calculation of Area Review (AR) factors that depend on the information outside of the unit for context. For example, the methodology calculates the fragmentation of lands surrounding the 100-acre unit as opposed to within it to represent the value of surrounding farms on the unit itself. This provides a calculation of the relationship to supportive factors around the unit that can impact the score of that 100-acre unit.

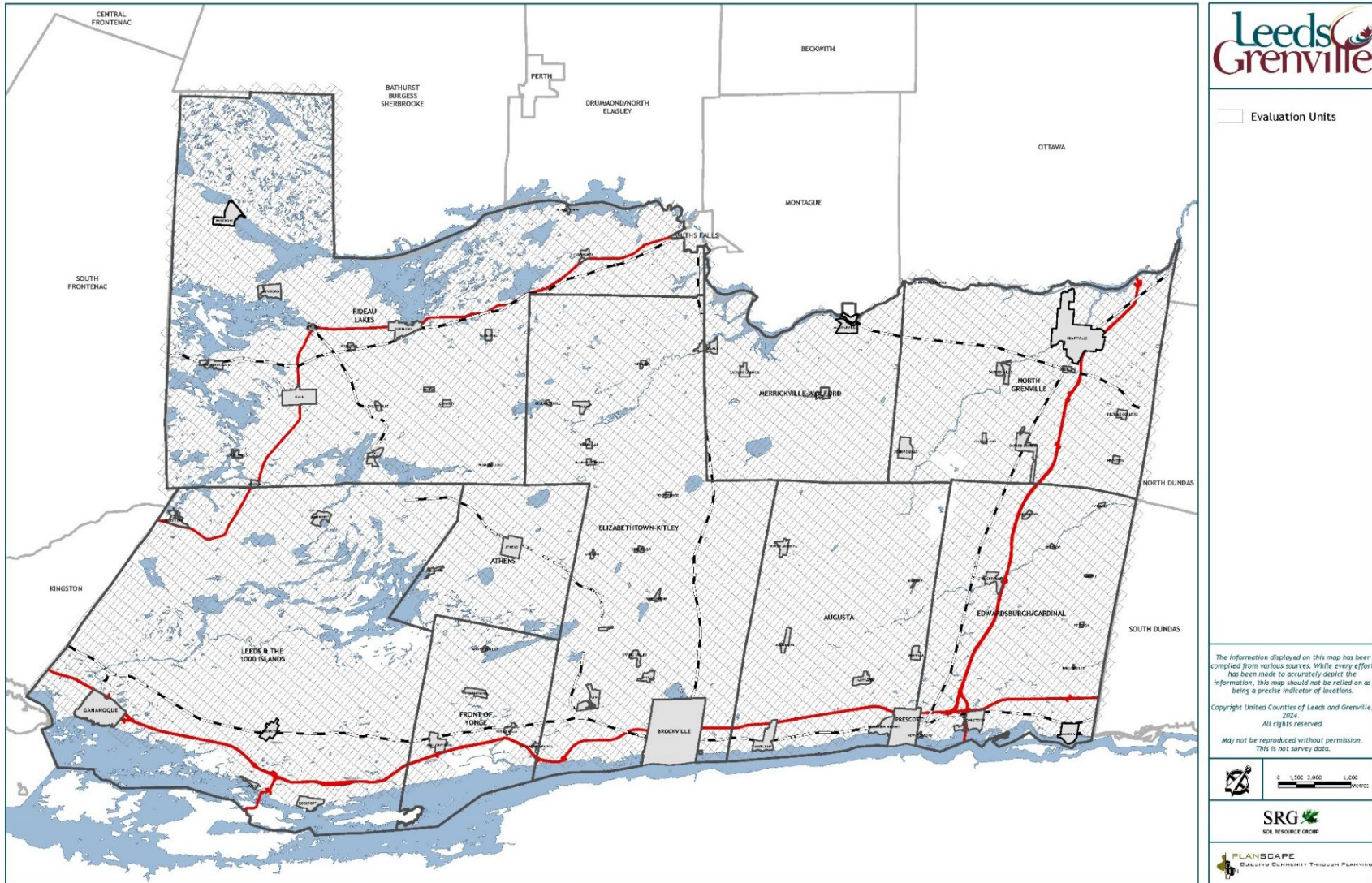
A Geographic Information System (GIS) program was used to overlay 100-acre polygons over the entirety of the geographic area of Leeds and Grenville. Sections of the grid were removed for areas excluded from the study as noted previously. The evaluation unit grid minus the excluded areas was defined as the area within which the LEAR was completed.

Provincially significant wetlands (PSWs) were removed after the recommended Agricultural Area designation was finalized. This allows a cohesive mapping system for the Official Plan, prevents compromise of PSWs through farming but still recognizes that PSWs are not a conflicting land use to agriculture.

Figure 4 illustrates the application of the 100-acre grid on the boundaries of the United Counties of Leeds & Grenville study area.

¹ Agricultural System Mapping Method, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs – Technical Document – January 2018 Pg. 7

Figure 4: Counties of Leeds and Grenville Evaluation Unit Map



Calculating the Land Evaluation (LE) Component

The Land Evaluation (LE) component reflects the capacity of soil to grow crops as defined by the Canada Land Inventory (CLI) system. Soil ratings were determined within the standard sized evaluation unit of 100 acres.

The Canada Land Inventory (CLI) system “is the recognized system in Ontario for classifying areas with mineral soils according to their inherent capability for growing common field crops”². The system does not classify soils for horticultural or other specialty crops.

The Canada Land Inventory (CLI) has two main components:

1. the capability class, and
2. the capability subclass.

The capability class indicates the general capability of the soil for growing common field crops. There are seven capability classes identified, and thirteen subclasses. The seven capability classes as defined under the CLI are listed in **Table 1** below:

Table 1: OMAFRA Defined Capability Classes

Class	Description / Characteristics
Classes 1, 2 and 3	Capable of sustained used for growing common field crops; all or most crops can be grown.
Class 4	Marginal for sustained use for common field crops; choice of crops that can be grown is limited.
Class 5	Capable of use only for permanent pasture and hay.
Class 6	Capable of use only for unimproved pasture.
Class 7	No capability for agriculture.

² [Use of Soil and Canada Land Inventory \(CLI\) Information for Agricultural Land Use Planning in Ontario \(gov.on.ca\)](http://gov.on.ca)

The Soil Resource Group (SRG) utilized the most recent soil database from the Ontario GeoHub Soil Survey Complex Digital Information to identify agricultural soil capability classes as the basis for the LE analysis.³

Land Evaluation (LE) Calculation

The assessment of the LE was based on a GIS intersection of the evaluation unit grid and the OMAFRA soils database. Soil attribute information within each evaluation unit was used to calculate the LE score value using the following steps:

1. GIS analysis was used to calculate the respective area of each soil polygon within each Evaluation Unit (EU),
2. The area of each soil series in a complex soil polygon was calculated within the EU,
3. Percent occurrence of each soil series within each EU was calculated,
4. A point value was assigned to each CLI class by following the direction of the OMAFRA Agricultural System Mapping Method, Technical Document, January 2018 (**Table 2**),
5. The relative percent occurrence of each soil series was multiplied by the respective point value for each CLI class,
6. The calculated weighted values for each soil series in each EU were added to provide a total LE score out of 100 for each EU, and
7. The score out of 100 is the LE value for each EU.

³ [Soil Survey Complex | Soil Survey Complex | Ontario GeoHub \(gov.on.ca\)](#)

Table 2: OMAFRA Assigned LE Point Value for each CLI Land Classification

CLI Class	LE Point Value
Class 1	1.0
Class 2	0.9
Class 3	0.8
Class 4	0.6
Class 5	0.5
Class 6	0.4
Class 7	0.0

It is noted that the OMAFRA Agricultural System Mapping Method, Technical Document, January 2018, has in certain circumstances, assigned a 0.9 LE point value to organic soils, as organic soils have great potential to support the production of high value specialty crops under the right conditions. The LE assessment in Leeds Grenville that was employed in this study used an LE point value of 0 for organic soils in recognition of comments heard during consultation. These soils are often described as “muck” soils with low drainage potential and often shallow depth to bedrock and do not represent a specialized agricultural opportunity in the study area.

Establishing the Area Review (AR) Factors of the LEAR

The LE component involved evaluating the soil resources for agriculture. In contrast, Area Review (AR) looks at other non-soil related conditions and practices that may have influence on agriculture. The LE component is typically given a higher weighting factor in the LEAR methodology than the AR component as soil resources tend to be the most important factor in identifying prime agricultural areas and are typically a “fixed” resource. Selecting and weighting the factors to use in the calculation of a LEAR requires that the context and key characteristics of an area be considered.

Two factors were identified for the Counties of Leeds and Grenville that represent characteristics that impact the viability of agricultural lands. These factors were identified in recognition of the comparatively small farm parcel sizes (in comparison to the typically larger sizes in other parts of the province where the LEAR methodology was developed) and the importance of farm infrastructure that improves agricultural land viability. The first factor is fragmentation, to reflect the importance of lands that are being actively farmed regardless of their land classification, and the second factor is “agricultural lands in production”. The “agricultural lands in production” is especially important in the Counties given the relatively

small amount of Class 1 lands identified. This factor accounts for the local improvements made that allow for viable agriculture despite the land Class. The AR scores enable a reflection of an agricultural area that is mutually supportive of agricultural practices in general.

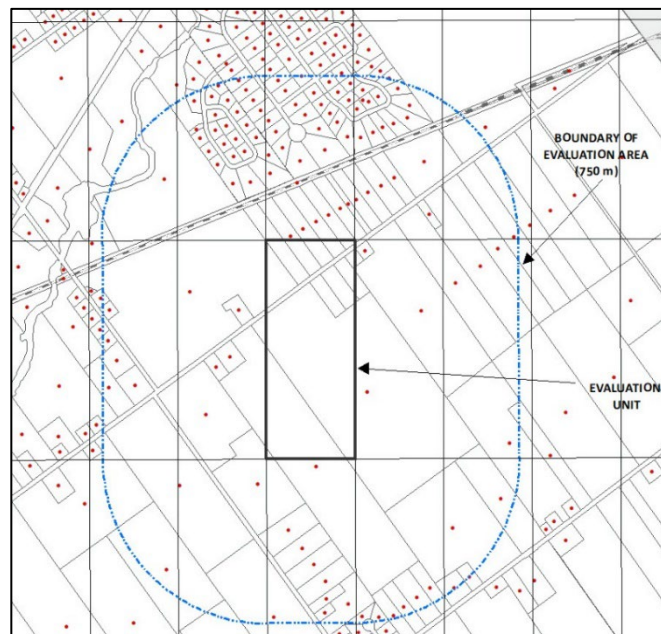
1. Fragmentation

Fragmentation describes the extent that land in each Evaluation Unit has been divided into smaller units. The greater the number of parcels within an Evaluation Unit, the lower the AR score. Smaller parcels are generally indicative of non-agricultural uses, such as residential development, which can limit the use of any remaining larger parcels of land from many forms of agriculture. The LEAR methodology counts the number of discrete parcels within each Evaluation Unit to provide a measure of fragmentation. Refer to **Figure 5** illustration.

“Fragmentation accounts for parcel size differences, while looking at the larger landscape for more holistic area evaluation. Assessing fragmentation at a landscape scale avoids the problem of overly discounting small parcels which are otherwise surrounded by a more intact agricultural landscape. This method also avoids making assumptions about the agricultural viability of any individual parcel based on its size”⁴.

Fragmentation was assessed by counting the number of parcels within the evaluation unit.

Figure 5: Schematic Illustration of Fragmentation



⁴ Agricultural System Mapping Method, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs – 2018, Pg. 8.

Fragmentation scoring was assessed by counting the number of parcel centroids within the evaluation area surrounding each evaluation unit. Each centroid was located at the centre of each parcel. The scores were then converted to percentiles and multiplied by the weight factor of 10 to contribute to the final score. The weight of 10 points was assigned as per OMAFRA's Guidelines, as to provide a small but adequate weight to help determine if the evaluation unit qualifies as high, medium or low impact on agricultural lands.

2. Lands in Production

The definition of *prime agricultural areas* includes areas where there is a local concentration of farms which exhibit characteristics of ongoing agriculture. The area of land that is actually in agricultural production is an excellent indicator of agricultural potential. Stakeholders have emphasized that lands in agricultural production should be prioritized by the province. For this reason, "lands in production" was given a relatively high weighting of 30 points. For the purposes of this study, lands in production are based on MPAC Property Code classifications as the most efficient means of identification.

Lands in agricultural production score is based on the percentage of area in agriculture within 750m surrounding an evaluation unit, calculated by the following equation:

$$\frac{\text{Area in Agricultural Production}}{\text{Evaluation Area (387.43 Ha)}} * 100 = \% \text{ Area in Agriculture}$$

The area in agricultural production is calculated by tallying the amount of land in production within the evaluation area. Refer to **Figure 6** illustration. The percentage of the area in agriculture was then multiplied by the weight factor of 30 to contribute to the final score.

Figure 6: Schematic Illustration of Lands in Production

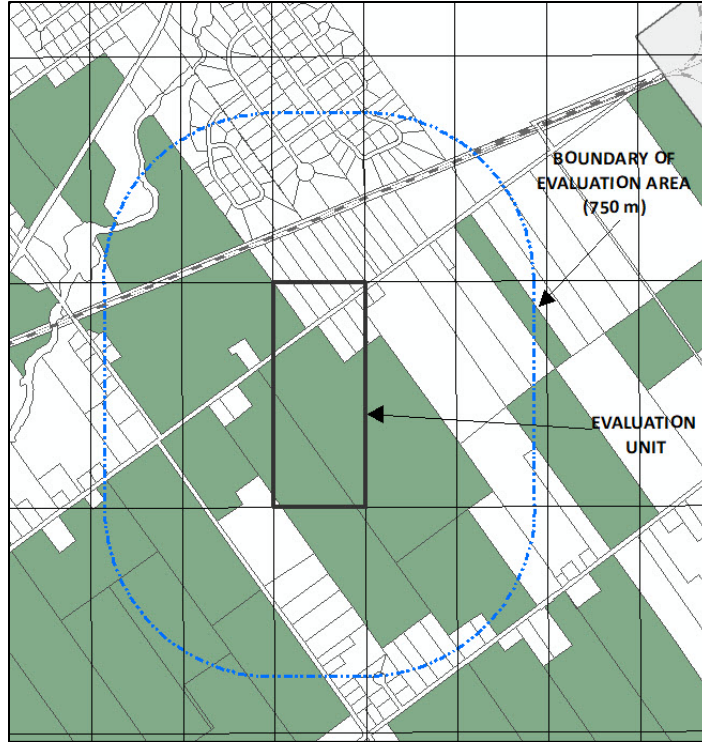


Table 3 below lists the lands by type that are included as an agricultural use and therefore counted as lands in production for the LEAR.

Table 3: Lands in Production by MPAC Property Codes

PROPERTY CODE	PROPERTY DESCRIPTION
134	Land designated and zoned for open space
140	Common Land
200	Farm property without any buildings/structures
201	Farm with residence – with or without secondary structures; no farm outbuildings
210	Farm without residence – with secondary structures; with farm outbuildings
211	Farm with residence – with or without secondary structures; with farm outbuildings
220	Farm without residence – with commercial/industrial operation

PROPERTY CODE	PROPERTY DESCRIPTION
221	Farm with residence – with commercial/industrial operation
222	Farm with winery
223	Grain/Seed and feed operation
228	Farm with gravel pit
230	Intensive farm operation – without residence
231	Intensive farm operation – with residence
234	Large scale poultry operation
235	Government – agriculture research facility, predominately farm property
240-5	Managed forest property
260	Vacant residential/commercial/industrial land owned by a non-farmer with a portion being farmed
261	Land owned by a non-farmer improved with a non-farm residence with a portion being farmed
262	Land owned by a farmer improved with a non-farm residence with a portion being farmed
521	Distillery/brewery
527	Abattoir/slaughterhouse/rendering plants
528	Food processing plant

Area Review (AR) Factors Procedure

The Area Review portion of the study was completed using the LEAR methodology based on OMAFRA’s Agricultural System Mapping Method and input from consultation. The steps taken are outlined below:

1. Review all applicable research including previous LEAR studies.
2. Select appropriate Area Review factors.

3. Acquire spatial data for the Area Review including lot / concessions, MPAC parcel fabric for fragmentation, and percentage of lands in production, and the creation of 100-acre grid based on the boundary of the United Counties of Leeds & Grenville.
4. Fragmentation – perform count of ownership parcels within each Evaluation Unit manually.
5. Percentage of Land in Production – query farm property codes to find parcels that are in production. OMAFRA provided the equation used to calculate the percentage area.
6. Calculate scores for each Area Review Factor.
7. Create Area Review mapping layers.

Weighting the Factors of a LEAR

According to the Province’s Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) Methodology, 2018, “scores from the LE and AR components are weighted and combined to provide an overall LEAR score for each evaluation unit in the Study Area. The highest scoring evaluation units represent areas with the greatest agricultural potential”⁵.

The typical weighting is 60% LE and 40% AR and was determined to be an appropriate weighting for this study. Further, the 40% AR weighting was divided into a 10% weight for fragmentation and a 30% weight for lands in agricultural production.

In summary, the weightings selected for the United Counties of Leeds & Grenville are:

1. Soils (Canada Land Inventory Soil Capability for Agriculture) (LE Factor) – 60%
2. Fragmentation (AR Factor) – 10%
3. Percentage of Land in Agricultural Production (AR Factor) – 30%

⁵ [Land Evaluation and Area Review \(gov.on.ca\)](https://www.gov.on.ca)

Selecting the Threshold Score Through Scenario Comparison

Once all factors were scored individually (and mapped for clarity), a scoring inclusion threshold was determined that represents the lands being recommended to form the basis of the prime agricultural lands within the County.

An exercise was undertaken to compare the “60 score” to the “70 score” to confirm that the 60-inclusion threshold was the most appropriate score. It is important to note that the lands included based on the inclusion scoring threshold represent just the first step for identifying the lands to be identified as “Agricultural Area” in the Official Plan. The LEAR layer is then refined as per local conditions and a set refinement protocol. This process is discussed later in this report. After testing the two scenarios, a threshold score of 60 was selected - meaning all lands that scored 60 or higher (when the LE and two AR factors were scored) formed the base mapping layer of land for the recommended “Agricultural Area” designation from the technical LEAR process. These lands form the basis for consultation in the next phase of this study to capture local stakeholder input.

It should be noted that applying the 70-threshold during the evaluation of the scoring thresholds resulted in significant removal of land from the existing designated prime agricultural lands in the Official Plan, and by default, eliminated many actively farmed lands from inclusion. As discussed later in this report, a refinement process was undertaken that committed to only using lands below the scoring threshold to “round out” or “connect” in a minimal way lands that scored above the threshold. It was determined that the 70-inclusion score removed too many lands that could support viable agricultural areas. In returning to the original purpose of the study to “identify and designate” agricultural designations in the Counties, the study team is confident that the 60-score threshold provided the appropriate level of inclusion of lands. An informative illustration of this consideration is to use Figure 7 to view an area that is currently designated Agricultural Area in the Official Plan (black outline) and then noting that there are several large areas that include lands that scored between 60 and 70 within that existing designation. Should the 70 score have been selected, those lands would have been eliminated from inclusion in the updated recommendation. The impact of those removals would have compromised the integrity of many agricultural areas throughout the Counties.

Figure 7 provides a comparison of the 60 and 70 score thresholds. Lands included as prime agricultural lands based on a scoring threshold of 60 are shown in the darker brown and orange colours, the lands scoring over the 70 threshold are shown in orange only. The darker brown lands representing scores of 60 to 70 represent approximately 80,000 ha of land.

Figures 8 and 9 show the layers of AR and LE criteria that combined, result in the creation of the draft LEAR map that is shown on **Figure 10**. When viewing Figure 8 and 9 it is important to note that the scoring shown in the legend is in the context of the LE scores represent 60% of the overall LEAR score and the AR scores as out of 40%.

Appendix B of this report provides the LEAR maps by local municipality generated through the technical LEAR process. These maps were then refined through extensive consultation that resulted in the Refined LEAR maps as illustrated in Appendices B10 through B18.

Figure 7: Scenario Threshold Score Comparison Map

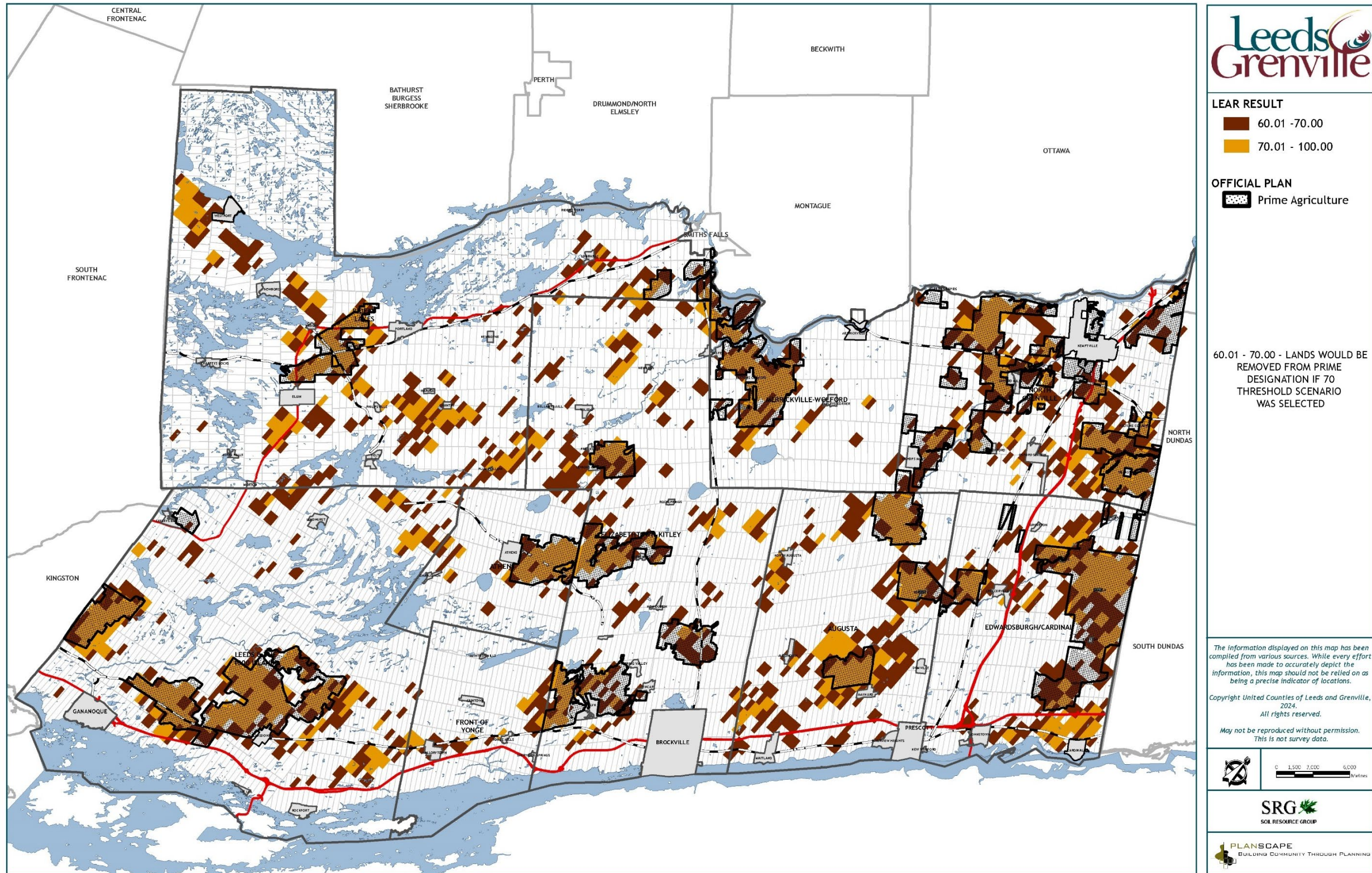


Figure 8: LE Score County Map

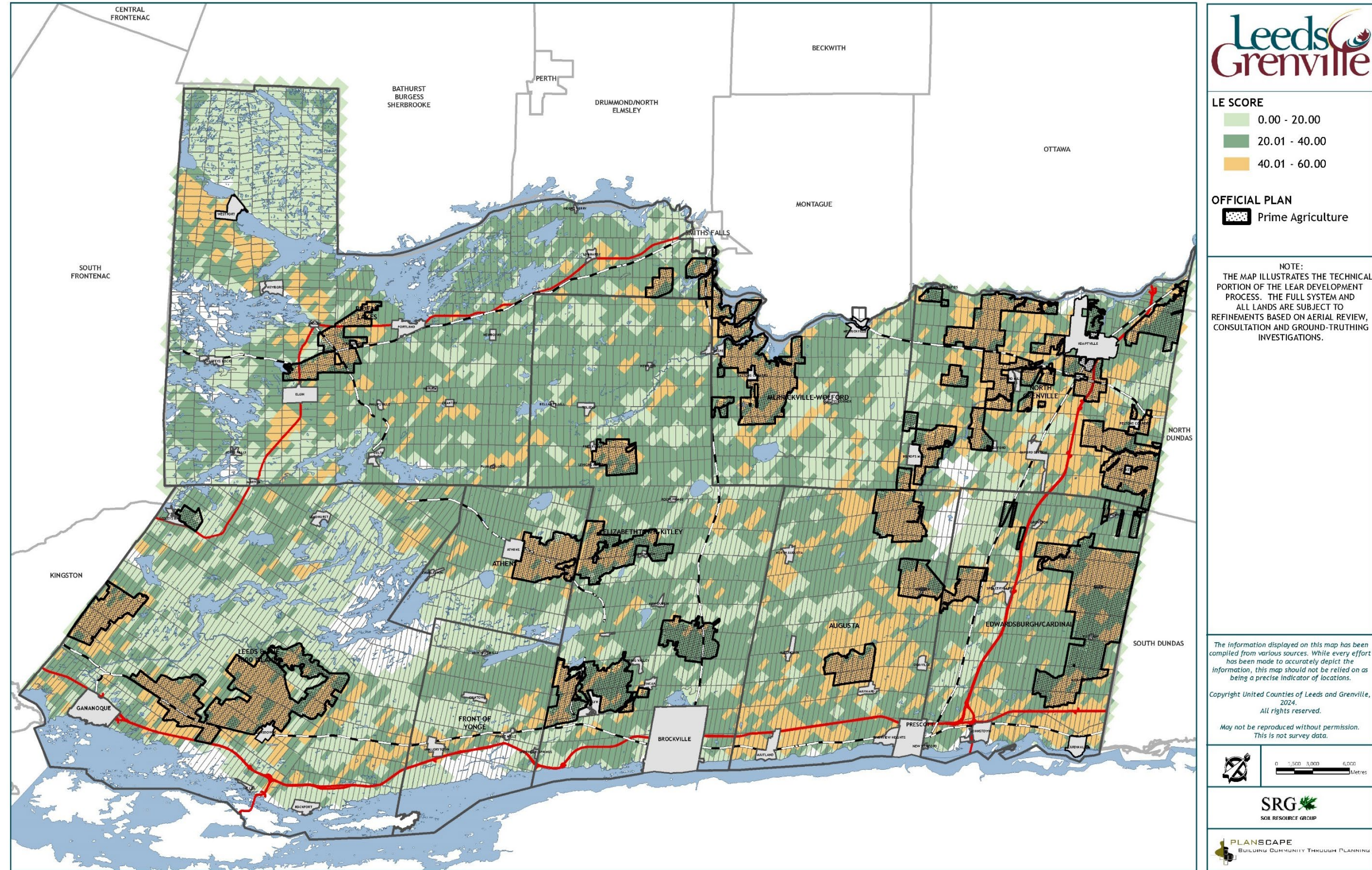


Figure 9: Area Review (AR) Factors Map (Fragmentation and Lands in Agricultural Production)

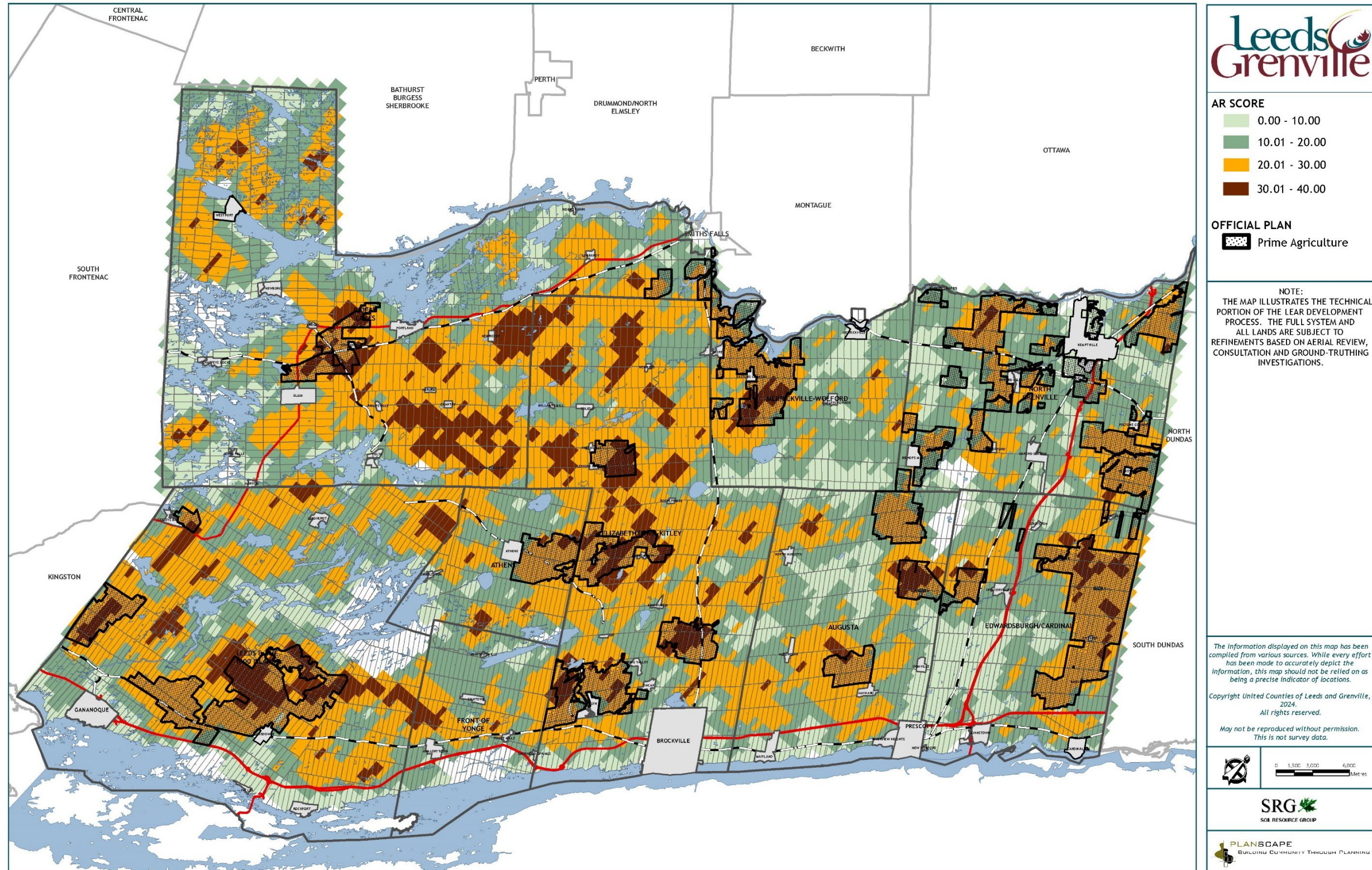
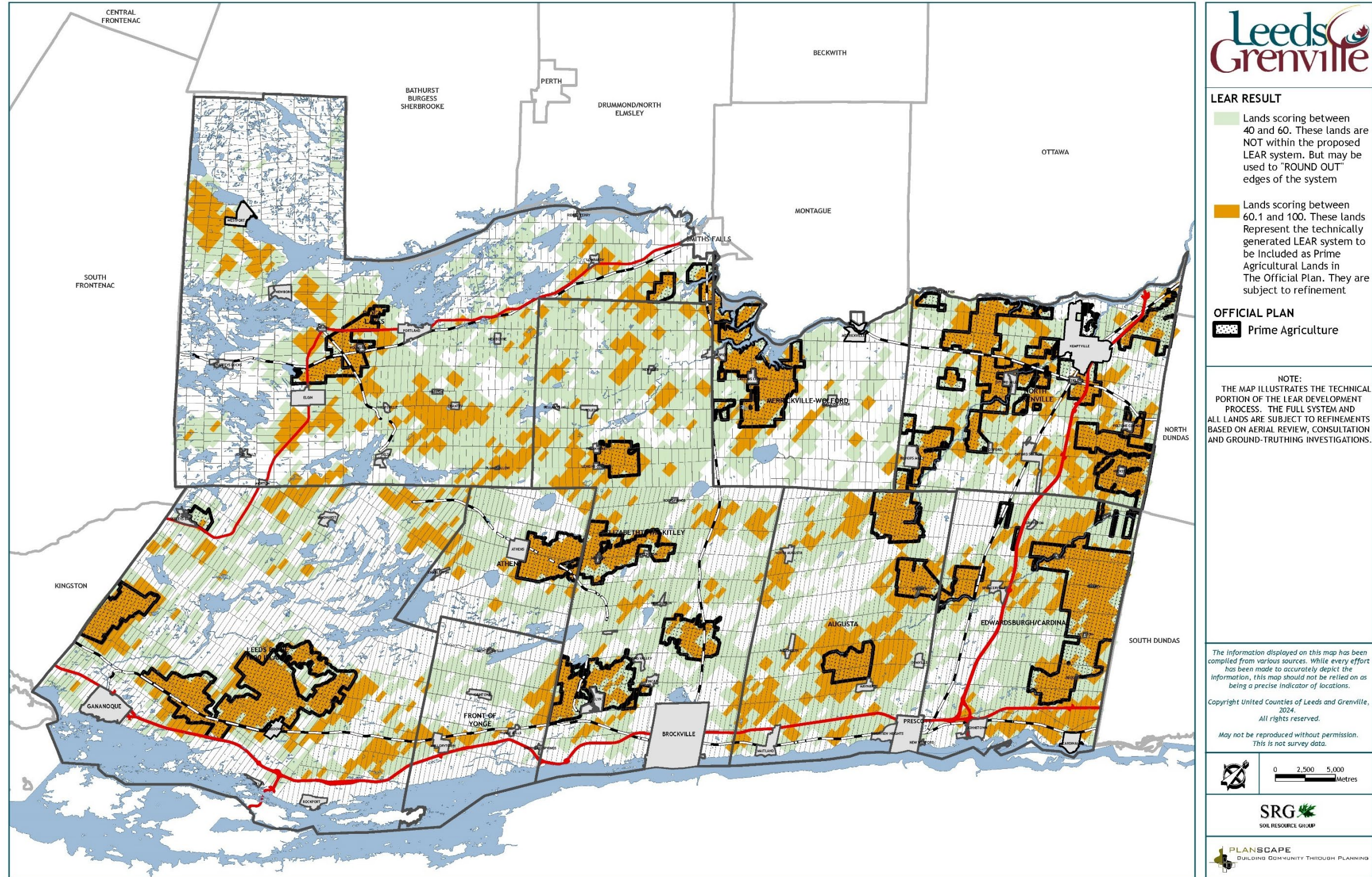


Figure 10: Draft County LEAR Map



Stage 3: Recommended Agricultural Area

This stage of the study involved the refinement process of the LEAR mapping exercise discussed in Stage 2. The technical scores map (the LEAR mapping) was shared in June 2023, with a public meeting held on June 21, 2023. Site visits to requested properties were conducted as well as road tours of areas of interest to verify aerial imaging with in-person data. The following consultation elements were held during the project:

- May 11, 2023 - Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meeting and presentation
- May 25, 2023 - Counties Planning Advisory Committee meeting and presentation
- June 21, 2023 - Public Information Session
- June 22, 2023 - Site Visits with interested parties
- August 1 – 16, 2023 - Distribution of refined maps to local municipalities for additional comment
- August 23, 2023 - Leeds Federation of Agriculture meeting and presentation of refined maps
- August 29, 2023 - Grenville Federation of Agriculture meeting and presentation of refined maps. Please note this scheduled event was cancelled due to lack of interest/availability.
- August 31, 2023 - Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meeting and presentation
- September 6, 2023 - Planning Advisory Committee meeting on refined mapping

Comments were collected at the public meetings, through an on-line survey tool, at each consultation event and through individual comments, with each comment specifically considered as the refinements were made. Members of the TAG can be found in Appendix F.

A structured approach was taken for making the map refinements. The process aimed to create consistent priorities for refinement decision-making that respect the provincial LEAR process, the fundamental integrity of an agricultural area and the feedback received throughout the process.

The criteria considered for each refinement are listed below and formed the refinement protocol used:

1. Exclude **isolated** lands scoring 60 or more. (Isolated lands are lands which are less than 250 continuous hectares.)
2. Include current Official Plan prime agricultural designation areas except where edge refinements to clip to an identifiable boundary or to avoid an identifiable natural heritage feature are more appropriate.
3. Exclude lands that are actively farmed but scored below the 60-score threshold except where they serve to create a boundary refinement. For example, if the 60 scoring land cuts through an actively farmed field, the refinement will move the edge of the boundary to the edge of the field or property line rather than bisect an actively farmed field.
4. Exclude identifiable natural heritage features such as a woodlots or wetlands where appropriate. Where the feature is located centrally in a contiguous agricultural area, it will be kept as part of the area (as removing it would compromise the larger area base).
5. Exclude existing fragmentation along road frontages where it is appropriate to use the road as the agricultural area boundary.
6. Include, at the request of landowners, where appropriate, lands that do not meet the 60-score threshold. An example of this are the Community Pasture lands that do not meet the scoring threshold but provide an important component of the agricultural fabric of the Counties. It is recognized that the LEAR methodology does not sufficiently represent the value of these lands, so they have been included where a property owner has requested that they be identified in the prime agricultural designation.

For ease of identification on the refinement maps, refinement codes were created as a labelling system. **Table 4** below provides the code and the accompanying explanation of that code. The most applicable code is noted next to each refinement, but it is important to understand that there is very often more than one reason for the refinement. The codes have been created to facilitate stakeholder understanding of the rationale behind the refinement but are not intended to be a complete explanation. There is professional judgement, stakeholder input and multi-faceted criteria that were applied for every refinement in the system. Appendix C illustrates the resulting refined LEAR maps generated through the refinement process.

Appendix E provides a table list of all of the refinements by local area municipalities based on their local and policy knowledge.

Table 4: Refinement Codes

Refinement Code	Refinement Circumstance / Description
Ref – 1	To extend Prime Agricultural Lands over lower scoring land to establish the agricultural system as defined by the province
Ref – 2	To account for active production or agricultural investment that scores less than 60
Ref – 3	To refine Prime Agricultural Lands to an identifiable boundary
Ref – 4	To create a continuous agricultural land base across municipal jurisdictional boundaries
Ref – 5	To reflect pre-existing non-agricultural designations or uses
Ref – 6	To reflect land that is primarily Natural Heritage System – limited or no agricultural production is occurring
Ref – 7	To include lands at an owner’s request
Ref – 8	To include lands scoring greater than 60
Ref – 9	To exclude parcels that are isolated from other agricultural lands or operations
Ref – 10	To exclude lands with conflicting land uses
Ref – 11	To exclude areas subject to significant fragmentation
Ref – 12	Refinement as a result of local area municipal staff, agency, or stakeholder request

The original study process intended for the final recommended agricultural area map to be presented following the Stage 3 consultations. However, on September 6, 2023, the Counties Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) provided direction to staff to undertake additional individual property owner consultation. This recommendation was based on concern brought forward by Committee members that individual property owners may not be fully informed of

the project or the potential impact to their property. Out of this recommendation, Stage 4 - Additional Individual Consultation was added.

Stage 4: Additional Individual Consultation

Following the September 6, 2023 recommendation from PAC, Counties staff and the consultant team created a Stage 4 consultation plan to address PAC's concerns. An information package was assembled, and an over 2,000 property owner mailing list was created. The mailing list was formed from a property query of any property owner that may be impacted by a change in designation because of the study. All property owners that were either added or removed from the existing Agricultural Area designation were sent the information package to inform them of the project, provide "frequently asked questions" information, advise them of the County staff contact for the project and to ask them to review the project webpage and reach out with any questions or concerns (Appendix G). To supplement this process, the refined mapping was uploaded to the Counties GIS viewer so residents could search their property and view the following layers of information:

- The original LEAR scores (so they could visually see the technical LEAR layer that formed the foundation of the refined mapping);
- The existing agricultural area designation; and
- The recommended agricultural area designation (the refined LEAR mapping that included the changes from Stage 3 of the project).

This tool provided a convenient, fulsome and visual way for residents to view the project status as well as review their specific property.

From this mailing, approximately 276 residents reached out to County staff. County staff logged and responded to each inquiry forwarding refinement requests to the consultant team for tracking and response. Each commentor was responded to and further refinements were made based on local area knowledge.

It is important to note that where there was flexibility to remove properties from the recommended agricultural area designation, they were removed. The approach taken was a direct response to PAC concerns about individual property owner rights and their advocacy for rural residential development. To protect the integrity of the study, no lands were removed that would compromise the integrity of a larger agricultural area. Said differently, the protection of agricultural areas (i.e. blocks of predominantly agricultural lands 250 ha or greater) continued to guide this refinement stage, however, refinements on the edge of identified areas where requested were accommodated where possible. The result is a more property-specific refinement of the recommended Agricultural Area designation that still protects larger agricultural areas (as is the intent and purpose of protecting agricultural lands into the future).

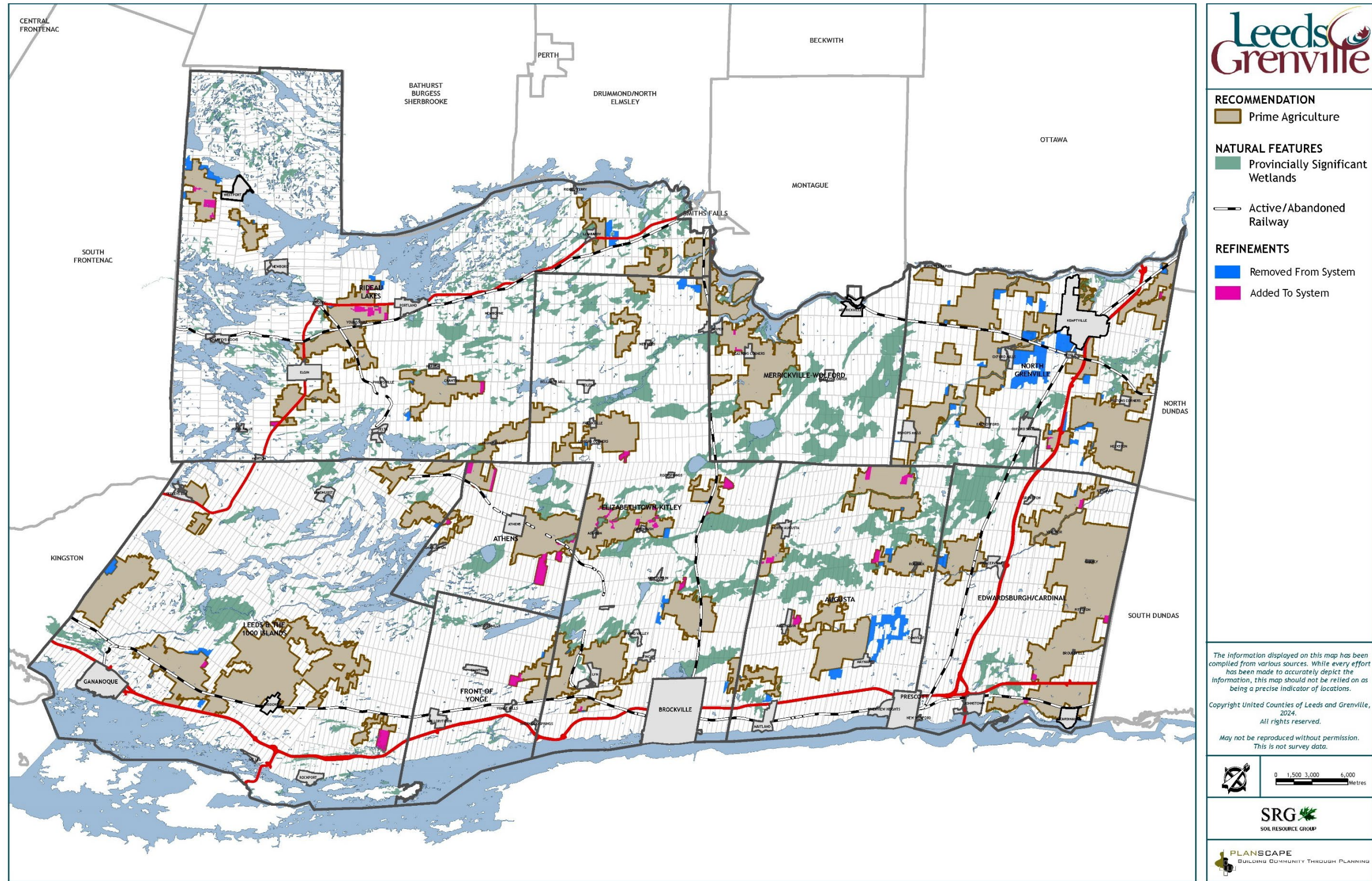
The final component of Stage 4 was a commitment to do local area municipal meetings to ensure all residents had the opportunity to attend an in-person meeting with staff and the lead consultant. All municipalities were contacted to see if they would like a meeting to be held in their jurisdiction. Meetings were held as follows:

- February 6, 2024: Augusta, Edwardsburgh-Cardinal, North Grenville
- February 7, 2024: PAC and Rideau Lakes

Each meeting consisted of a group presentation followed by individually scheduled sessions with the lead consultant. The individual sessions allowed one-on-one time to review the mapping, the property in question and the information layers that inform the recommendation. 57 residents participated. Almost all residents spoken to were satisfied with the result of their time in these sessions.

The commenting period remained open until March 11, 2024. **Figure 11** below illustrates a summary refinement map showing the lands removed from the refined LEAR mapping in blue and lands added in pink, based on local area knowledge and additional consultations.

Figure 11: Summary Refinements Map



Official Plan Amendment and Final Agricultural Area Map

At the February 7, 2024 meeting, final mapping and a draft Official Plan Amendment were presented to the PAC. The PAC indicated that they were not ready for the study conclusions to come forward to Council. On June 5, 2021 the PAC recommended the report be finalized.

Appendix D of this report provides the drafted Official Plan Amendment that supports the Agricultural Area designation in policy with minor amendments to the February 7 version to reflect public input. The Official Plan permits refinements at the local Official Plan level. The policies reflect current provincial guidance.

In Planscape Inc.'s professional opinion the final Agricultural Area recommendation represents the province's directed LEAR methodology, and both recognizes and reflects PAC's support for individual severance rights and residential rural development where possible. All efforts have been made to reflect local area knowledge of land conditions as an acknowledgement of the unique characteristics of the Counties.

It is further acknowledged that it is not possible to discuss every parcel of land with every landowner. That process would be very prohibitive in terms of the resources required for such an undertaking. It is also important to recognize that the current best practice has been employed through this study and that defining lands for agricultural policy protection is never intended to take place at the property level.

A balance has been sought through this study to maintain professional technical standards based on OMAFRA guidance to identify agricultural lands for policy protection while being sensitive and responsive to local concerns. Agricultural lands are subject to continual threat from rural development as a cumulative impact. It is impossible to assess the impact of one property severance in the totality of the entire County, but it is well known that the cumulative impact of individual severances has a compounding negative effect on the viability of agricultural productivity and prosperity in an area. Policy protection for agriculture has been mandated by the Province of Ontario to prevent the continual cumulative rural development threat to agricultural resources.

The final Agricultural Area recommendation represents the core / minimum lands necessary to protect the agricultural potential and value of the agricultural resources of the Counties of Leeds and Grenville in the long term.