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SIMCOE COUNTY DRAFT OFFICIAL PLAN

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends that Council adopt the recommendations contained in the following report dated November 24, 2008, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Council endorse the comments within this report for consideration by Simcoe County and the Province with respect to the new proposed Simcoe County Official Plan.
2. The Regional Clerk forward this report to the Clerk of Simcoe County, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.
3. Simcoe County be requested to notify the Regional Clerk of any future meetings in regard to the new Official Plan and notify the Regional Clerk of any actions taken by County Council, including adoption of the Official Plan.

2. PURPOSE

Simcoe County has prepared a draft of its new proposed Official Plan (OP) and has circulated the document to York Region for comments. This report identifies the Region's issues for consideration by Simcoe County and the Province with respect to the proposed OP, which requires a formal decision by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) after adoption by Simcoe County.

3. BACKGROUND

Simcoe County initiates a Growth Management Study, a Transportation Master Plan update, and a new Official Plan

Simcoe County is comprised of sixteen (16) towns and townships and does not include the cities of Barrie and Orillia and the First Nations community (*Attachment 1*). The first Simcoe County Official Plan was approved in 1999 and, in 2004, the County initiated its 5 year review of the OP. The background work for the preparation of the new OP included a growth management study referred to as the "Simcoe Area Growth Plan", a new Transportation Master Plan (TMP), and an update to the Natural Heritage System policies and mapping.

The Simcoe Area Growth Plan was completed in May 2008 and provides a framework for long-range planning by defining the amount, location, and character of growth to 2031 in the context, primarily, of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (the *Growth Plan*). The purpose of the TMP is to create a future vision for transportation, including the role that pedestrian, cycling, transit and road components can play in servicing future transportation needs.

The County held several Open House meetings toward the end of July 2008 and held the statutory Public Meeting for the Official Plan on August 13, 2008. The draft OP was then sent to York Region for preliminary comments. The draft OP was then circulated to internal York Region departments for comments. Staff prepared a preliminary comment letter (*Attachment 2*), which was based upon several York Region Council resolutions over the last few years. The comment letter also included notes on the completed TMP.

At the time of writing of this report, Simcoe County staff are in the process of preparing a report to Simcoe Council for final adoption of the new Official Plan. Once the OP is adopted, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is the approval authority.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The draft Simcoe County Official Plan represents a thorough document, including policies on growth management, density and intensification, transportation, complete communities, and protection of the environment. However, if approved in its current form, some of the policies within the new Simcoe County Official Plan could significantly impact York Region. The following sections provide an overview of some of the key areas of the proposed OP including the Provincial policy structure, transportation, and the Inter-Governmental Action Plan (IGAP). A number of sections build on earlier Council resolutions.

The Growth Plan Applies to Simcoe County

The *Growth Plan* is a Provincial plan that includes policies on intensification, density, transportation, infrastructure, and other planning matters. Simcoe County is within the “outer ring” of the *Growth Plan* and is therefore subject to the policies of the Plan. The *Growth Plan* provides a distribution of population and employment for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) to the year 2031, including 667,000 people and 254,000 jobs for the County of Simcoe, the City of Barrie, the City of Orillia and the First Nations Community combined. The 2006 population for the combined municipalities is 438,600 and the 2006 employment is 183,500. The *Growth Plan* forecasts therefore represent a population increase by 2031 of 228,400 people and an employment increase of 70,500 jobs.

Province Disputes Simcoe's Population and Employment Allocations

Although Simcoe County does not include the cities of Barrie and Orillia and the First Nations Community, Simcoe County has distributed the above noted population and employment numbers as shown in *Attachment 3*. While the "Simcoe Area Total" population and employment numbers (*at the bottom of Attachment 3*) match the Growth Plan numbers discussed above, the Province has notified Simcoe County that the County does not have the authority to make growth allocation decisions for the City of Barrie or the City of Orillia and the final apportionment of people and jobs to these communities to 2031 will be determined by the Province after due consultation and discussion with all the affected jurisdictions.

Low Activity Rate

Regarding the activity rate, which is the ratio of jobs to residents, while the *Growth Plan* does not specifically address activity rates, it references the need to create communities with a "balance" of jobs and housing. As noted in *Attachment 3*, Simcoe's activity rate in 2006 was 35.4 % and Simcoe's growth allocations for 2031 support a lower activity rate of 31.8 %, which is very low when compared with activity rates in the GTA. In comparison, the York Region activity rate in 2006 was 50% and the growth allocations for 2031 support an activity rate of 53%. In Innisfil, the projected activity rate is only 20% (one job for every five residents). The low activity rates, particularly in the southern communities, do not appear to strike a balance between jobs and housing and will likely result in increased commuting to the south, having not only an impact on Provincial Highways and York Region roads, but also an impact on traffic patterns. It is estimated that southbound traffic from Simcoe County to York Region will increase by more than 50% by 2031 from 2006.

Intensification & Density Target should be the same as the GGH

The *Growth Plan* sets specific intensification and density targets to be achieved by all municipalities within the GGH as follows:

- A minimum of 40% of all residential units must be accommodated within the built-up area after 2015.
- New greenfield development must achieve a density of 50 residents and jobs combined per hectare (ha).

The Minister of Energy and Infrastructure may permit an alternative minimum intensification target and an alternative greenfield density target for municipalities in the outer ring. The *Simcoe Growth Plan* notes that "there are several rural municipalities where denser, urban-type development would be physically unsuitable and inconsistent with the small-town character of these locations". As a result, the intensification target brought forward by Simcoe County into the draft OP in all but the larger six municipalities (New Tecumseth, Bradford, Innisfil, Collingwood, Penetanguishene, and

Midland) is proposed to be 20 % and the greenfield density target is proposed to be 32 residents and jobs per hectare; significantly lower than the *Growth Plan* targets. Acknowledging that the Minister may permit alternative targets, the targets established in the draft Simcoe County OP are too low, compared to targets required to be met by the GTA municipalities immediately to the south.

The low intensification and greenfield density targets proposed in the draft Simcoe County OP, in combination with the high growth numbers of the *Growth Plan*, represent significant challenges in the Simcoe area in the context of the *Growth Plan*. The intent of the *Growth Plan* is to direct a significant portion of new growth to the built-up areas and to build compact, transit-supportive communities that reduce dependence on the automobile and utilize existing municipal infrastructure efficiently. It is therefore recommended that the standard intensification and density standards that are required across the GGH continue to also be applied across Simcoe County.

Expanding the Greenbelt to the North

With respect to the Greenbelt, only small portions of the south end of the County are within the Greenbelt (the Holland Marsh and the Oak Ridges Moraine). However, the County contains vast areas of Provincial and Regional Areas of Scientific Interest (ANSIs), Provincially and locally significant wetlands, woodlands, Class 1, 2, and 3 and Organic soils, linkages, agricultural lands, and aggregate resources. As previously noted by York Region Council, Simcoe County should be subject to the same environmental standards as in the GTA. It is recommended that the Province extend the same environmental planning policies set out in the Greenbelt Plan to Simcoe County.

Transportation Policies in the draft Simcoe County Official Plan

Simcoe County has included the following policy within its draft Official Plan:

“The County will encourage and support the planning, corridor protection and the early construction of the following transportation facilities:

- (a) Highway 400/404 Link (“Bradford Bypass”) as a goods movement and transit corridor; ...”

On March 20, 2008, York Region Council recommended that the Ministers of Energy and Infrastructure, Transportation, and Municipal Affairs and Housing be presented with a brief on the urgent need for action on the Bradford Bypass. York Region continues to strongly support the immediate need of the Bradford Bypass and offers its support in working with the Province in implementing this important transportation link. Further, in August 2008, the Town of East Gwillimbury prepared a staff report and sent a Council resolution to Simcoe County stating that the County should consider placing a higher level of policy emphasis on the requirement for the Bradford Bypass.

With respect to other transportation policies within the Simcoe County draft Official Plan, the following is recommended:

- The policies of the Official Plan should reinforce the Simcoe Transportation Master Plan by encouraging local municipalities to explore collaborating with external municipalities to foster inter-regional transit linkages.
- The policies should also provide direction to consider the Transportation Master Plans and Official Plans of neighbouring municipalities to promote and improve important external transportation links.
- Even with the planned improvements, the County's Transportation Master Plan has determined that there remains a deficient north-south transportation network crossing the York-Simcoe boundary. Significant growth is planned in southern Simcoe County, which will result in a strong southern orientation of trips. As such, the policies of the OP should identify the need for the ongoing protection for, and identification of an extension of Highway 427 through to Barrie.
- The policies of the OP should recommend coordination of conventional transit services with adjacent regional municipalities. This policy would further support the identified need in the Transportation Master Plan for a future transit service within Bradford West-Gwillimbury and opportunities to connect to the existing Viva Rapid Transit system in Newmarket.
- The policies should ensure that the timing of development is phased with the availability of infrastructure (roads, transit, water, and wastewater).

The Inter-Governmental Action Plan (IGAP)

The Simcoe County draft Official Plan currently does not contain a direct policy connection to the work that was completed through the Inter-Governmental Action Plan (IGAP), including the Assimilative Capacity (AC) model. The relevant recommendations of the IGAP could provide a valuable basis for Simcoe County's growth management policies and for monitoring the health of Simcoe's environmental systems and it is suggested that these recommendations be integrated into the policy objectives of the Official Plan.

Simcoe County may also want to consider adding policies within its new OP to acknowledge the pending Lake Simcoe Protection Act and Plan, which may be proclaimed later this year. The Act, and the Plan that will follow, will have an effect on the manner that water and wastewater is treated, and also on the way we collectively plan for communities within the Lake Simcoe watershed and abutting areas.

It is noted that there is no comprehensive County master plan for water and wastewater servicing and that such a plan could be an important tool to coordinate water and wastewater planning. In addition, as recommended in the IGAP, York Region would support the County assuming overall responsibility for water and wastewater planning and infrastructure delivery and maintenance. This would help ensure coordination of infrastructure projects, including the delivery of infrastructure appropriately phased with the staging of development, and would assist in financing and ensuring the highest quality of water and wastewater systems.

In this context, York Region has maintained high environmental standards throughout recent Environmental Assessment (EA) projects and has committed to provide the highest level of sewage treatment in our water pollution control plants discharging into Lake Simcoe and Lake Ontario. The Region's current and future projects, including the Upper York Sewage Servicing Individual EA (IEA) project, will continue to reflect these high standards. York Region is committed to ensuring the long term sustainability of Lake Simcoe and/or Lake Ontario.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

While there may not be any immediate financial implications associated with the policies of the new Simcoe County OP, the significant growth in population and employment, and low activity rate forecasted within the plan may result in long term transportation infrastructure costs due to the increased use of Regional roads. Improving the Provincial 400 series highway network, including widening of Highway 400, the Bradford Bypass and extension of Highway 427, will critically help towards reducing the potential impacts.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

As discussed in this report, some of the policies within the new OP have the potential to impact the local municipalities within York Region, particularly in the form of traffic congestion and its associated environmental consequences.

As noted earlier, the Town of East Gwillimbury sent a Council resolution to Simcoe County stating that the County should consider placing a higher level of policy emphasis on the requirement for the Bradford Bypass.

7. CONCLUSION

The draft Simcoe County Official Plan represents a thorough document, including policies on growth management, density and intensification, transportation, complete communities, and protection of the environment.

In its current form, however, some of the policies within the new Simcoe County Official Plan could significantly impact York Region in areas such as transportation, traffic, and environmental sustainability. As such, as Simcoe County works toward adoption and final approval of its Official Plan, the County should consider the comments and recommendations within this report and work together with York Region to resolve any outstanding matters.

To ensure that York Region is kept informed of the approval process, it is recommended that Simcoe County also be formally requested to notify the Regional Clerk of any future meetings in regard to the new Official Plan and to notify the Regional Clerk of any actions taken by County Council, including adoption of the Official Plan.

For more information on this report, please contact Michael Mallette, Senior Planner, at (905) 830-4444, Ext. 1506 or Heather Konefat, Director, Community Planning, at Ext. 1502.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The three attachments referred to in this clause are attached to this report.)