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# It's time to get growing already

## Comment

by Chris Simon

It may be time for a higher body to step into the Barrie and Innisfil land negotiations.

For the past few months, the two sides have been stuck in a stalemate. However, it now seems like one large factor may either push the two sides into an agreement, or force either the County of Simcoe or provincial government to find a solution. At last week's Innisfil council meeting, the town heard, apparently not for the first time, that other county municipalities were becoming upset with the apparent stall in land negotiations.

The county, its 16 member municipalities and the City of Orillia are all actively attempting to create a long-term growth plan for the region. Barrie has chosen to act as an observer, abstaining from becoming a voting member on any of the county's growth committees. It's sad, especially since the province has specifically requested municipalities in the region work together, to find out where populations will be allowed to grow, and how those people will be provided with social services.

Cooperation problems have also plagued land negotiations, at a detriment to every county municipality. At the heart of the issue are population distribution numbers, and servicing concerns.

The county's population is expected to rise by almost 230,000 over the next 25 years, reaching a total of 667,000 residents by 2031. Barrie's population is expected to climb by more than 41,000 residents, while Innisfil will grow by

over 15,000.

To accommodate the growth, over 100,000 residential units will be required across the county, as will thousands of new jobs.

But Barrie will run out of residential development lands within the next few years, unless the city can expand its borders. Innisfil also needs to start capitalizing on potential industrial growth areas within its boundaries, to meet the needs of the entire county.

Over the last few weeks, town council has heard several presentations on proposed large scale developments.

However, most of those projects can be closely examined until the county's growth plan has been passed, and each of the participating municipalities conform. That's still about a year and a half away.

There are still serious concerns from some municipalities that failure to find a negotiated settlement to the land negotiations will ultimately stall the growth plan.

Growth is coming to this region, whether current residents like it or not, the province has already dictated that. The key will be finding a solution that best services the existing and future

residents, with the least impact on social services, the environment and the overall population. The province has trusted our municipal politicians to find feasible answers to these problems.

But neither Barrie or Innisfil seems willing to budge on their positions, with reason. Both have genuine concerns over expanding their tax bases, while ensuring servicing costs stay sensible. Perhaps that's why it's time for the province to step in and set more stringent guidelines on the negotiations. They could act as an arbitrator, rather than a mediator.

Sometimes, when two sides cannot reach an agreement, it's healthiest to have a larger hand broker an agreement. It happens in civil court and work related arbitration cases all the time.

The town has already asked the county to step in to resolve population distribution issues between the sides, but any decision by the county would likely have legal ramifications. Barrie would no doubt question the legitimacy of the county's decision.

But a decision by an objective provincial arbitrator would take the bitterness and pressure off each of the municipalities to decide their own fate.

It could bode well for future negotiations, and give the province a solution to one of its most pressing concerns.

The county needs some progress and solutions. You cannot plan the fate of an entire region without everybody on board.

## Recreation centre delays should be questioned

### Letters From Our Readers

I read with interest your story about the delay in the Innisfil recreation complex.

I found it interesting that you didn't question how the roofers strike didn't impact finishing the roof of the administration building but it did the arena complex

itself. I am sure the public will be happy to know that the councillors and staff will be happily moved to their new location, while the recreation facility itself has undergone significant delays. Notwithstanding the different mechanical issues, this has nothing to do with a roofers or labourers strike. This has resulted in serious disruptions to plans for many organizations

including two new hockey organizations locating here in Innisfil along with minor hockey and skating leagues. While some delays are to be expected; the responses provide in your story are somewhat circumspect.

How did a one month strike turn in to the type of delays we are seeing now?

The comment about it will now be spring before the full complex is ready is

quite an eye opener and astounding.

Observations that the playing fields would be ready by spring should not be viewed as any great accomplishment as we have had the best fall weather that could be hoped for. Were there penalties built into the contracts for not finishing on time and are those savings going to be made public?

Sorry to sound so negative but your story held some surprises and confirmed disappointments that I had heard expressed. In fairness I think the councillors and staff should stay right where they are until the rest of the complex is finished so that everyone can be constantly reminded that things are just a "bit" behind.

Gary Findlay

## Huge hole in province's Places to Grow Act

The Province of Ontario's centerpiece Places to Grow plan has a mega-yacht sized loophole that allows a 96,000 person new town of so-called "second homes" to be built outside approved settlement areas. Testimony at the Big Bay Point mega-marina Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) hearing last week proves that Simcoe County could permit 30 developments the size of Big Bay Point without having to satisfy most of the province's smart growth principles.

The OMB also heard that the resort proposal for a 1,000 slip mega-marina and 2,000 units on Lake Simcoe represents bad planning and exploits a "semantic loophole" created in the County's Official Plan,

according to the expert witness testimony of the Innisfil District Association.

"Calling a development a 'resort' instead of settlement and lamely trying to limit occupancy to 300 days a year should not get developers a free pass to develop the shoreline of Lake Simcoe," said David Donnelly, the lawyer for environmental and residents' groups opposed to the development. "The loophole that exempts these mega-resorts from the province's planning rules is so large, you could sail a yacht through it that would make Thurston Howell III proud."

The proposed development was also described as 'premature' by association planner Al

McNair, who pointed out it should not go ahead until a new watershed management plan and water quality targets are developed for the lake.

The County of Simcoe's own growth management consultants concluded that the province has "overlooked" the effects of second home developments on the economy and the infrastructure and servicing needs of the county.

The Big Bay Point project is before the OMB in the absence of any studies, projections and planning policies in place for second home resort development for the Greater Toronto Area.

The impact of these developments on the urban structure and green lands of

southern Ontario could be huge.

Under the existing provincial rules, the proposed development at Big Bay Point would be strictly prohibited, except the developer is proposing to limit occupancy to unit owners to less than 300 days per year. This loophole allows the proponent to call the urban settlement of 4,000 plus people to be a resort. Prior testimony from the developer's expert stated that it could be left to a resident's committee to enforce the limited occupancy rules.

"The province, county and Town of Innisfil have allowed Big Bay Point to do an end run around the growth management plans for the county," said Dr. Rick Smith, executive director of

Environmental Defence. "I'd use the walk like a duck metaphor to describe this development, but that would be an insult to ducks.

"In my opinion, the county has not planned wisely in selecting the special development area designation for this second home resort community. I believe the county used (it) to avoid the issue of whether this community of 4,000 to 5,000 people is a settlement," said McNair.

"Failure to do these studies is grounds to send the proposal back to the province for a serious review of the county's population forecasts," said Don Avery, President of the association.

Jennifer Foulds, Environmental Defence and Campaign Lake Simcoe