

A political point of view

New public growth forum dates set



Warden Tony Guergis
By Tony Guergis
Warden, County of Simcoe

As you can see all around you every day, Innisfil and Simcoe County continue to grow at a rapid rate. Home construction dots the landscape, new businesses are moving into the area, and cultural and recreational amenities are being added to neighbourhoods enhancing our lives.

As I have talked about before in this column, we are anticipating more than 200,000 people will move to this region over the next 25

years and many of those new residents will call the Town of Innisfil home.

I see growth as a wonderful opportunity to rejuvenate our workforce and build vibrant and healthy communities, but only if we plan correctly. That's exactly what we are doing at the County of Simcoe, with input from residents, municipal and business leaders and planners.

The Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal (PIR) has projected the County of Simcoe's population to hit 406,000 by 2031, with Barrie growing to 180,000 and Orillia to 41,000.

Additional growth of 40,000 remains unallocated but is expected to go to communities in South Simcoe.

That 40,000 is an important factor to remember as we conclude

the growth-management steering process and update our Official Plan, the key planning document that will guide growth in county municipalities over the long term.

This is a watershed year because we will complete the Official Plan in a few months.

The county was pleased to take the leadership role in this process and both the PIR and the municipal affairs and housing ministers have told local politicians to work together or risk losing out on grants for roads, bridges and other infrastructure to support a growing population.

We have undertaken a huge task requiring remarkable commitment and dedication from committee members and co-operation from local municipalities. The Growth Plan will be completed by June and we are now looking ahead to

the implementation phase.

I would like to commend the municipalities of Simcoe County for their commitment to this process. Working together co-operatively ensures we are making planning decisions that will benefit all residents of the county. That is a proud achievement.

I must also recognize the key role that the province has played in providing award-winning legislation to us, to direct our process.

The merits of the Places to Grow legislation were recognized in 2007 when Ontario was awarded the Daniel Burnham Award from the American Planning Association. It's the first time a plan from outside the United States has received this prestigious award. Additionally, the 2007 Canadian Institute of Planners awarded the provincial Growth Plan one of their distinctions as well.

We continue to consult widely with residents, municipal and business leaders and planners to gain feedback on how they think growth should be handled in this region, how they want to revitalize downtown areas, create new employment opportunities, improve transit and transportation systems, strengthen public amenities and recreational spaces.

A new round of public forums are now scheduled. Join us on April 24 in Midland, April 25 at the County of Simcoe Administration Centre in Midhurst and April 29 in Alliston. For more information visit www.growth.simcoe.ca.

We want to implement a Growth Plan that will reap the benefits of growth for this region while avoiding pitfalls such as traffic gridlock, urban sprawl, loss of farmland, loss of green

spaces and dwindling natural heritage areas.

More than anything, the County will continue to be a great place to live where communities are based on the pillars of a strong economy, clean and healthy environment and social equity. Clean air, water and land will continue to characterize the region and farming will remain productive, diverse and sustainable.

There is no question in my mind that growth in this region is a good thing and we will have a plan in place to ensure growth works well for us and our precious environment.

As always, I welcome your questions and ideas. To find out more visit our website and share your thoughts by completing an online comment form. Better yet, come out to one of our public forums in April.

Council passes Cookstown intersection makeover funding

By Chris Simon

The traffic lights will be coming on a little differently in Cookstown. Innisfil council passed a plan to replace the traffic signals at the Queen and King street intersection for \$418,882. As part of the plan, Georgian Paving and Construction will do the work, which is expected to begin once the spring thaw starts.

"I'm not sure of the exact date, but it'll be sometime

after the snowmelt," said planning and development director Rob McAuley.

The funding will be paid for mostly through the Ministry of Transportation's Connecting Link Program. The town has already received about \$342,000 for the project through the ministry program. However, staff will also seek about \$125,000 in additional funding from the province, said town engineering

technologist Grant Shellswell in a statement to council.

"At this time, the MTO is not in a position to confirm if the additional funding requested will be made available," he said.

But regardless of ministry funding, the project needs to proceed, said Shellswell.

"The existing traffic signals in Cookstown have deteriorated to a point that maintenance of the signals is costly and progressing to the point that repairs will result in a rebuild of the signal infrastructure," he

said. "The existing infrastructure is in need of replacement prior to the system's failure."

In addition to the traffic signal replacement, the project will include improvements to the intersection's sidewalk, pedestrian signals and storm sewers. Others were also

pleased by the plan.

"I was very happy to see

this, it was well thought out," said councillor Rod Boynton.

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