



STAFF REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The following executive summary provides a brief description about the report and the recommendation advises on any action being requested from Council.

Subject: County of Simcoe OPA 7 - Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) - Phase 1 (ERO Posting 019-6113)

Executive Summary:

Summary of the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) posting on the County of Simcoe OPA 7 and Town's draft submission comments.

Recommendation:

- 1. That Staff Report DSR-010-23 regarding County of Simcoe OPA 7 - Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) - Phase 1 (ERO Posting 019-6113) dated January 11, 2023, be received; and**
- 2. That staff submit the Town of Innisfil's comments to the ERO posting as outlined within this report.**

County of Simcoe OPA 7 - Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) - Phase 1 (ERO Posting 019-6113)



Staff Report DSR-010-23

To: Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Members of Council

From: Andria Leigh, Director of Planning & Growth

Date: January 11, 2023

Recommendation:

1. That Staff Report DSR-010-23 regarding County of Simcoe OPA 7 - Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) - Phase 1 (ERO Posting 019-6113) dated January 11, 2023, be received; and
2. That staff submit the Town of Innisfil's comments to the ERO posting as outlined within this report.

Background:

As outlined in previous update reports to Council, the County of Simcoe is currently undertaking a Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR), as required by *A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2020* (Growth Plan). A consulting team led by Hemson Consulting is assisting the County of Simcoe in completing the MCR. More information and a request to be added to the mailing list for updates can be found on the County's MCR webpage - <https://www.simcoe.ca/dpt/pln/mcr>. The Town's website also includes background information at www.getinvolvedinnisfil.ca/growth.

Council has received several update/information staff reports regarding the County of Simcoe Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) process. The most recent updates being Staff Report DSR-125-22 County of Simcoe Municipal Comprehensive Review – Update No. 5 and Staff Report DSR-161-22 Innisfil Growth Update which spoke to the adoption of Official Plan Amendment (OPA) No. 7 by County Council on August 9, 2022. OPA 7 is currently with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) for review, as they are the approval authority for the County of Simcoe and are required to issue decisions under the Planning Act. On December 5, 2022 the Ministry posted the County's Official Plan Amendment (OPA) No. 7 – Growth Management to the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) for comment. [County of Simcoe - Approval of a municipality's official plan | Environmental Registry of Ontario](#) As the approval authority, the Ministry can approve OPA 7 in its current form or modify OPA 7 through additions, deletions, revisions as part of their decision; the Ministry's decision once issued is final and is not subject to appeal. The posting has a comment period of 60 days that ends on February 3, 2023 and is the purpose of this report to obtain endorsement of the Town's comments for submission.

Analysis/Consideration:

On June 2, 2022 County Planning staff issued a Memorandum [MCR Supplemental County Memo - Phasing Approach \(simcoe.ca\)](#) outlining that Phase 1 of their process would identify the

population and employment growth for each municipality (“How Much to Grow?”) and Phase 2 would determine any settlement area boundary expansions needed to accommodate the required growth (“Where to Grow?”). Phase 2 would also address refinements to the Provincial natural heritage and agricultural mapping, climate change and watershed management policy development. Phase 2 was intended to be completed by the end of 2023 but will be impacted by Bill 23 the extent of which remains unknown at this time.

The Phase 2 process was to include the identification by the County, Town, and other stakeholders of the locations where the Town’s forecasted growth to 2051 and the required 104 hectares of settlement boundary expansions would occur. Staff Report DSR-161-22 noted that the Town and County had received settlement boundary expansion requests from Innisfil landowners totalling approximately 1,268 hectares. To date, determination of the most appropriate areas for settlement expansions has not been completed; however would be based on the Town endorsed local criteria [Criteria-for-Settlement-Area-Boundary-Expansions](#) Based on the Growth Plan and County policies, the majority of Innisfil’s population growth would be directed to Alcona, being the Town’s only Primary Settlement Area (PSA), and given the required density of the Orbit (Major Transit Station Area), a significant component would located within this area.

Town staff have reviewed a number of Ministry decisions made in 2022 on other Regional Official Plan Amendments and believe there is a high potential the Ministry when issuing their decision on County of Simcoe OPA 7 will include revisions, additions and/or deletions. This could include land use map schedule adjustments and/or settlement area boundary adjustments. Town staff also recognize that many of the settlement area expansion requests received during the County MCR process have been or will be submitted to the Ministry during this ERO posting period for the Ministry to include their lands within settlement area boundaries in the Town as part of the Ministry’s decision. Staff anticipate that the Ministry would seek Town guidance on specific locations and mapping to be incorporated should this be the approach taken by the Province. At this time, Town staff have not prepared any mapping but will indicate the Town’s willingness to work with Ministry staff to prepare the required mapping for the Ministry prior to issuing their decision.

Town staff met on several occasions with County Planning staff and their consulting team prior to the adoption of OPA 7 in order to ensure the Town’s growth allocations, intensification, and density targets would not be constraining to the Town’s vision and for most of the future growth to be concentrated around the Orbit and future Innisfil GO Station. Town staff were generally satisfied with OPA 7 and its ability for the Town to grow as a balanced, compact, and complete community while also providing local employment opportunities.

The Town of Innisfil is facing significant growth pressure and is at a crossroads in terms of evolving from a modest sized town into a significant transit-oriented sustainable community. Orbit’s compact urban form will help the Town to avoid the costs and inefficiencies associated with low density development and will have the added benefit of protecting Innisfil’s agricultural and natural heritage lands. The Town is also well poised to assist the Province in achieving it’s housing goals; with our willingness to grow being demonstrated through support for the Orbit as a Protected Major Transit Station Area (PMTSA) for higher density development.

The next section of the report focuses on two specific areas: (1) Town-supported Policies in OPA 7 and (2) Potential Amendments to OPA 7 for Clarification or Consideration.

Town-supported OPA 7 Policies to be maintained

There are a number of specific policies/guidance included within the County adopted OPA 7 that the Town supports. These include:

- Innisfil's population forecast to 2051 of 84,450 (growth of 39,740 or 89% from 2021) and an employment forecast to 2051 of 30,270 jobs (growth of 20,290 or 203% from 2021) which provides Innisfil with the largest population growth allocation of all the 16 lower-tier municipalities in the County of Simcoe;
- A minimum intensification target for 30% for designated built up areas;
- A designated greenfield area density target of 55 residents and jobs per hectare;
- A need for an additional 104.2 hectares of settlement area lands to achieve the required population forecast;
- No need for additional employment land area to achieve employment forecast (although further discussion on this is detailed below as it relates to the RVH South Campus MZO lands and Town Civic Campus);
- Identification of Alcona as a Category 1 (Primary Settlement Area) where a significant portion of the expected population and employment growth is to be directed;
- Identification of Cookstown as a Category 2 (Settlement Areas that have a delineated built boundary and existing or planned municipal water and wastewater systems) where the vast majority of the remaining growth beyond what has been allocated to Alcona is to be directed;
- Identification of Lefroy-Belle Ewart, Sandy Cove, and Stroud as Category 3 (Settlement Areas that do not have a delineated built boundary but which have existing or planned municipal water and wastewater systems) where the remaining growth should be directed;
- Identification of remaining settlements in Innisfil (Churchill, Fennell's Corners, and Gilford) being identified as Category 4 (Rural Settlements that have a municipal water or wastewater system (partial services) or have no municipal water or wastewater systems) and should be limited in expected growth;
- Designation of the Orbit as a Protected Major Transit Station Area (PMTSA), which will allow for the implementation of an inclusionary zoning requirement for the provision of affordable housing units;
- Requirement for Town to amend its Official Plan to include policies identifying the use of lands and the required densities in the PMTSA area (Section 3.2.14 of OPA 7);*
- Requirement for Town to undertake comprehensive planning and establish planning policies on how the PMTSA will develop as a complete community (Section 3.2.15 of OPA 7);*

*Note: Both of these requirements will be addressed through the current Orbit Secondary Plan and Master Servicing Plan processes that are currently underway and expected to conclude in the Spring 2023

- Requirement of a density target of 170 residents and jobs per hectare for the PMTSA (Orbit)
- Addition of 37 ha of land to the Alcona Settlement Area (the MZO lands approved for the Orbit)

The Town's submission will identify our on-going support for the above policies that should not be removed from OPA 7 when a Ministry decision is issued. As noted in this report the decision issued by the Ministry is final and not appealable and therefore ensuring the Town's position on these policies remaining within OPA 7 is imperative.

Potential Amendments for Clarification or Consideration

There are also number of areas where Town staff believe that additional clarification or policy amendments would be of assistance in achieving the Provincial mandate for building more homes, streamlining the process from approvals to construction, and ensuring cost efficiencies and affordability for current and future taxpayers. These include:

- Clarity regarding the population and employment forecasts and if these are intended to be a "cap" on population and employment. This clarity will assist the Town in working to continue to grow as a community and to achieve the identified forecasts and the Province's housing goals;
- Continued recognition of the Innisfil Heights employment lands as a designated Economic Employment District without the opportunity for residential land conversion, to ensure the Town can continue to promote job creation and economic growth and achieve the employment forecast of 30,270 jobs by 2051;
- Designation of the RVH South Campus and Town Civic Campus as an Economic Employment District, in recognition of O. Reg. 37/22 and the Master Plan process (Town staff will prepare mapping to include with our submission identifying the area to be designated). This will provide an additional hub to support job creation and achieve the Town's employment forecasts. This was discussed with County staff but was not included within OPA 7 when adopted by the County;
- Inclusion of additional policies in Sections 3.2.14 and 3.2.15 of OPA 7 to:
 - i. Require the proposed GO Station to open as soon as possible and be concurrent with or precede any new residential development;
 - ii. Promote a major post-secondary or other community-serving institution to be located within the Orbit;
 - iii. Provide financial support for the necessary infrastructure to accommodate the growth, including water and wastewater servicing.
- Inclusion of additional Provincial policy or infrastructure supports for both flood management and water-quality preservation would assist the Town in accommodating growth quickly and efficiently recognizing that the Town of Innisfil is

supportive of maintaining the high quality of the water in Lake Simcoe and is within a flood-prone area.

In addition to the above recommendations, there are several servicing or infrastructure-related suggestions that Town staff are proposing to include in the Town's submission; given that development initially requires significant capital investment by the developer and that the Town has significant on-going operating costs associated with servicing/infrastructure. It is recognized that in the Town of Innisfil, water and wastewater servicing/infrastructure is the responsibility of InnServices and not the Town of Innisfil. However given that servicing infrastructure and the financial implications are a key constraint to accelerating development providing comments from the broader growth and development context is considered appropriate and would assist the Town in achieving its growth targets. The below recommendations would also be consistent with Section 3.2 (Policies for Infrastructure to Support Growth) of the Growth Plan.

- Additional Provincial measures in streamlining the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) review and approvals process including implementing measures to increase their capacity to provide approvals in a more expedited manner than the current 6 month to 1 year timeline;
- Prioritization in the consultation and approvals process to address municipal servicing capacity constraints that will release additional settlement area lands for future development in an expedited manner;
- Provincial funding for growth-related infrastructure expansions that would assist in accelerating future growth opportunities and maintain the affordability for taxpayers;
- Financial support to provide for the generation, transmission, and distribution of an adequate supply of electricity to support growing communities and help accelerate further growth;
- Promotion of opportunities for consideration of regional infrastructure servicing, Inn Services (which is an established independent water and waste water utility company in the Town of Innisfil) is already in the position to work with other municipalities to address regional infrastructure challenges.

Community Strategic Plan Alignment:

The report also reflects the Strategic Plan objective (1.1) under Grow to “Plan for and Manage Growth”: “We will follow a planned approach to growing the Town and developing amenities while balancing urban, rural, and agricultural spaces. We will urbanize densely within designated areas, preserve, and protect green spaces, respect and maintain agricultural land.”

Thus far, the Town's “Our Place” Official Plan has only had a growth outlook to the year 2031, so any amendments to the County's Official Plan through the MCR, such as any settlement boundary adjustments or refinements to the Agricultural System or Natural Heritage System mapping, would then need to be implemented by an amendment to the Town's Official Plan.

Financial Consideration:

The Town operates in a fiscally prudent manner. Servicing capacity and the financial capacity to pay for growth related infrastructure is a key constraint to development. Provincial funding support for the expansion of growth-related infrastructure would accelerate future growth and assist in achieving the Province's housing goals.

Growth-related studies and master plans will establish the cost and timing of programmed infrastructure and other improvements needed to support growth. This will include the required Town Official Plan Update needed to implement OPA 7.

Local Impact:

Executed well, growth can enhance the quality of life for residents and attract employment opportunities that contribute to overall community prosperity. Protection of Innisfil's valued farmland, natural heritage, and Lake Simcoe are essential ingredients in Innisfil's comprehensive growth strategy.

The scope of the County's MCR includes an assessment of potentially all lands within the Town of Innisfil outside of settlement areas (Agricultural System, Natural Heritage System). The proposed changes will guide the doubling of the Town's population over the next 30 years.

Innisfil is a growth-friendly community, ready and willing to grow and intensify in order to achieve the Province's housing goals. Additionally, the Town as part of a local growth management framework has approved criteria to identify settlement area expansion locations.

Options/Alternatives:

Council is welcome to provide any additional comments when considering the information contained in this report for inclusion in the Town's submission. Any comments from Council will be summarized and incorporated into the Town's submission to the Ministry on the ERO posting for their consideration prior to issuing their decision.

Alternatively, Council could make the decision not to submit comments through the ERO posting; however the Town is then at risk of our interest not being understood and incorporated into any Ministry decision. Given that a decision issued by the Ministry is final and not appealable, the Town would be required to "live" with whatever decision has been made.

Conclusion:

From 2016 to 2021, the Town of Innisfil achieve a population growth of 18.5%, Placing Innisfil among the Top 50 fastest growing communities in Canada. Innisfil is facing significant growth pressure and is at a crossroads in terms of evolving from a modest sized town into a significant transit-oriented sustainable community. Orbit's compact urban form will help the Town to avoid the costs and inefficiencies associated with low density development and will have the added benefit of protecting Innisfil's agricultural and natural heritage lands.

The Town has been an active participant in the County's MCR process to shape the future growth of Innisfil to the year 2051 with input from Council, residents, community stakeholders and the development community.

Through 2022, the Province has taken a proactive role in planning and legislative amendments to ensure its mandate to build more homes and streamline the approvals process is met. There are a number of precedents in 2022 on Regional OPA decisions by the Ministry where substantive amendments to the final OPA documents were made by the Province as a result of input received. The Town, through our ERO submission, can ensure that Town interests are known and ideally considered prior to the Ministry rendering a decision on OPA 7, as the decision is final and not appealable. On this basis, submission of the Town's comments as outlined in this report to the current ERO posting prior to February 3, 2023 would be considered appropriate.

Prepared By:

Andria Leigh, Director Planning & Growth

Approved By:

Oliver Jerschow, CAO

Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Criteria for Settlement Area Boundary Expansion Consideration

[Criteria-for-Settlement-Area-Boundary-Expansions.pdf \(innisfil.ca\)](#)

Reference Material: [Community Strategic Plan](#)