

**PLACES TO GROW**

BETTER CHOICES. BRIGHTER FUTURE.

# **Simcoe Area: A Strategic Vision for Growth**

June 2009





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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose

In 2006, the Province released the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (the Growth Plan), which sets out a vision and policies to better manage growth, to plan for complete communities, and to protect the natural environment. Municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe are incorporating the Growth Plan's objectives, policies, and targets into their official plans, to guide local decisions in keeping with this vision.

The Simcoe area – comprised of Simcoe County and the Cities of Barrie and Orillia – is unique in that it is under intense development pressures and also contains extremely important environmental assets for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. As a result, the Province has developed a strategic vision for the Simcoe area to help manage growth in this complex area. This paper lays out a vision grounded in the Growth Plan for sustainable growth in the Simcoe area, aimed at boosting job creation and improving quality of life while curbing sprawl and protecting the natural environment and farmland.

The call for provincial action has been clear:

- Simcoe County has submitted a new Official Plan for provincial decision that, while containing many good policies, needs clearer growth management direction;
- the City of Barrie and the Town of Innisfil are engaged in a dispute over their shared political boundary that is hindering good local planning; and
- the Province has finalized the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, and successful achievement of its goals requires strong growth management and implementation of servicing and stormwater solutions.

This paper outlines the key priorities for ensuring sustainable long-term growth by:

- identifying key urban nodes to focus growth and intensification (see Figure 1), and allocating population and employment to these areas to curb sprawl;

- proposing strategic employment areas to optimize the Highway 400 corridor and create the conditions for investment in manufacturing jobs;
- proposing a resolution to the Barrie-Innisfil boundary issue, to provide certainty and allow Barrie to develop as the main urban centre;
- preserving the environment and reducing pressure on natural areas and watersheds;
- protecting the valuable farmland and recreational areas upon which the area's agricultural and tourism industries depend; and
- supporting key infrastructure priorities, including transportation and enhanced water, wastewater and stormwater management systems to protect the Lake Simcoe, Nottawasaga River and Severn watersheds.

Each component of implementation will involve public input and consultation. Your feedback on this overall vision and strategy is greatly appreciated. Information about how to get involved and provide your thoughts on achieving the Growth Plan vision in Simcoe County, Barrie and Orillia can be found at the end of this paper.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Urban Structure of the Simcoe Area**



## 1.2 Building Strong, Vibrant Communities

In June 2006, the Province put in place a new and substantive plan to better manage growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe: *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*. The Growth Plan sets out a 25-year vision to curb urban sprawl and instead create liveable neighbourhoods and communities, while protecting valuable natural areas, farmland, and water resources.

Over the next 25 years, the Growth Plan will:

- revitalize downtowns to become vibrant and convenient centres;
- create complete communities that offer more options for living, working, learning, shopping, and playing;
- provide housing options to meet the needs of people at any age;
- curb sprawl and protect farmland and green spaces; and
- reduce traffic gridlock by improving access to a greater range of transportation options.

The provincial planning framework in the Greater Golden Horseshoe also includes:

- the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, the Niagara Escarpment Plan, and the Protected Countryside areas of the Greenbelt Plan that permanently protect 1.8 million acres of land in the heart of the Greater Golden Horseshoe;
- a strengthened Provincial Policy Statement (2005); and
- the recently finalized Lake Simcoe Protection Plan that will protect, improve and restore Lake Simcoe and its watershed.

This provincial planning framework provides an unparalleled opportunity to plan now for environmentally sustainable and economically productive growth in one of the Province's fastest growing, and most ecologically cherished areas.

## 1.3 Managing Growth in the Simcoe Area

The Simcoe area, which includes the County of Simcoe and the Cities of Barrie and Orillia, is a fast growing area north of the Greater Toronto Area with busy urban centres, charming and historic villages, beautiful natural areas, and productive agricultural lands.

It is facing extensive growth pressures. The area is currently home to approximately 437,000 people, with known development proposals and applications which could have brought the population to over 1 million by 2031 in the absence of the Growth Plan. The Growth Plan establishes a 2031 population forecast of 667,000, and a 2031 employment forecast of 254,000 jobs. This represents steady and manageable growth, and will result in a population level approximately one-half of what otherwise may have occurred. The Growth Plan also redirects this growth to focus more on existing urban areas and less on new greenfield areas.

Growth can bring many benefits, such as new jobs, revitalized communities, and greater choices in housing, employment, services, and cultural activities. But left unmanaged, growth can have negative impacts: deteriorating air and water quality, traffic congestion, increased health costs, loss of valuable natural heritage and farmland, and higher infrastructure and servicing costs.

Over the past several years, the Province has been engaged with Simcoe area municipalities and local community groups on initiatives to address a range of growth management issues, including the Inter-Governmental Action Plan for Simcoe, Barrie and Orillia (known as IGAP), which resulted in a solid base of information regarding land use development and infrastructure, as well as assimilative capacity models for the Lake Simcoe and Nottawasaga River watersheds.

In December 2008, the County of Simcoe adopted an Official Plan (OP), which has been submitted to the Province for a decision. The Cities of Barrie and Orillia are currently working on Official Plan amendments to implement the Growth Plan. These Official Plans are critical documents for guiding long-term growth.

This Simcoe area strategy provides direction to municipalities and other stakeholders on how the Province's Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe can be achieved in the Simcoe area. It describes the key urban areas for growth, including five primary urban nodes and two proposed strategic employment areas. In addition, the strategy allocates population and employment growth such that all communities continue to grow while focusing higher rates of growth where it can best be accommodated. This paper also lays out critical issues that must be resolved in order to achieve a sustainable, long-term vision in the Simcoe area, such as a resolution to the Barrie-Innisfil boundary negotiations, protection of strategic employment areas, and coordination of water and wastewater servicing.

## 2 Guiding Principles

The vision for the Simcoe area set forth in this paper is based on the Growth Plan, and particularly the following principles:

**a) Sustainable growth in the Simcoe area.**

- Population and employment growth can bring significant benefits to the Simcoe area and to the entire Greater Golden Horseshoe. This growth needs to be carefully managed in order to protect the environment and to enhance the quality of life of existing and future residents.

**b) Protect the Lake Simcoe, Nottawasaga River and Severn watersheds.**

- Growth in the Lake Simcoe, Nottawasaga River and Severn watersheds will be managed according to the Growth Plan, the Provincial Policy Statement, 2005, and where applicable, the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, the Greenbelt Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, and the Niagara Escarpment Plan.
- Through carefully planned development and strategic investment in innovative green infrastructure and new technology, water quality and natural areas will be protected as the Simcoe area grows.

**c) Promote intensification and revitalize existing cities and towns.**

- Existing cities and larger towns will be the main focus of new growth in the Simcoe area. This will curb urban sprawl and ensure that existing communities remain financially viable; existing and future infrastructure investments are optimized; rural, agricultural, and natural areas are protected; and downtown areas and existing communities are revitalized.

**d) Create a diverse economic base.**

- The economy of the Simcoe area is closely integrated with that of the entire Greater Golden Horseshoe, but it is also important that the Simcoe area continues to develop its own economic base.
- People should have the opportunity to both live and work within the Simcoe area, without having to commute long distances.

- Opportunities should be seized to identify and support strategic employment areas for future high quality manufacturing and industrial jobs.
- The lands and resources on which the Simcoe area's tourism, recreational, and agricultural industries depend should be protected and sustained.

**e) Coordinate growth with infrastructure investments.**

- Decisions about growth planning and infrastructure investments must be coordinated and mutually reinforcing, so that growth pressures will not be created where they are not desirable.

# 3 Directions for Growth

## 3.1 Strong and Vibrant Urban Nodes

To curb sprawl and avoid costly and unsustainable growth patterns, growth in the Simcoe area needs to be focused in existing cities and large towns. Focusing growth in urban nodes is a central feature of the proposed Simcoe County Official Plan that is currently before the Province for a decision.

The five largest urban areas in the Simcoe area are the Cities of Barrie and Orillia, the Town of Collingwood, and the communities of Alliston in the Town of New Tecumseth, and Bradford in the Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury. These communities already contain a mix of uses and offer a wide range of community services. They are serviced by municipal water and wastewater, have the potential to attract a range of housing types and job opportunities, can accommodate growth through intensification, and have the potential to support high levels of transit use over the long term. The largest of these urban areas by far is the City of Barrie, the only municipality with an Urban Growth Centre identified in the Growth Plan.

Growth planning and infrastructure investment decisions should continue to support and reinforce the existing settlement areas of Barrie, Collingwood, Orillia, Alliston, and Bradford as the primary urban nodes of the Simcoe area, supported by smaller towns and villages. A significant amount of future population and employment growth in the Simcoe area will be directed to the primary urban nodes.

Focusing growth in these primary urban nodes will:

- revitalize existing town centres and main streets, so that communities continue to prosper and attract people, jobs, shops, and services;
- create critical masses of people and jobs that will support the introduction of new or enhanced community services such as schools, transit, and recreation facilities;
- create complete, compact communities that meet people's needs for daily living by providing convenient access to a mix of jobs, local services, and housing;

- reduce development pressures on rural and agricultural lands, thereby protecting valuable natural heritage, farmland, sensitive watersheds, and Lake Simcoe;
- reduce the need to build new infrastructure to service development in designated greenfield areas; and
- create economies of scale that are necessary to support high quality wastewater treatment technologies, and innovative green infrastructure solutions for water, wastewater, and stormwater management.

The municipalities that contain primary urban nodes will have an important role to play through their local official plans to shape and guide how this growth occurs.

## **City of Barrie**

The City of Barrie contains the Simcoe area's only Urban Growth Centre – downtown Barrie, as identified in the Growth Plan – and functions as the urban anchor for the Simcoe area. Barrie provides many of the regional public and private services and cultural and retail amenities, and offers urban services such as public transit. It presents the greatest potential in the Simcoe area to accommodate growth through downtown revitalization, higher density development and intensification, and to support higher levels of transit use, walking and cycling.

Barrie will be recognized as the anchor node of the Simcoe area, and will continue to function as the primary location for new population and employment growth and regional services. Barrie will also have the strongest focus in the Simcoe area on intensification and higher density development, and should achieve transit- and pedestrian-friendly urban form in all of its communities. Barrie is required to achieve or exceed the Growth Plan's targets of a downtown density of 150 residents and jobs combined per hectare, greenfield density of 50 residents and jobs combined per hectare, and intensification of at least 40 per cent of annual development inside the existing built-up area.

In order for the City of Barrie to grow and function as the anchor urban node of the Simcoe area, it will require a sufficient supply of land to accommodate future growth. The addition of new lands to the City of Barrie, that are contiguous with its current urban structure and can benefit from its urban services, is critical to the successful implementation of the Growth Plan vision for the Simcoe area.

To help ensure that the City of Barrie fulfills its role as the anchor urban node, the Province has introduced legislation to adjust the municipal boundary and add lands to the City of Barrie. See Section 4.2 for additional details.

It is important to note that any new lands that might be added to the City of Barrie would be subject to all provincial planning requirements of the Growth Plan, Provincial Policy Statement, and Lake Simcoe Protection Plan where applicable, including settlement boundary expansion criteria, achievement of intensification and density targets, servicing requirements including stormwater management, and more.

## **A Network of Communities**

The Simcoe area is home to many different communities characterized by a range of sizes, built forms, servicing needs, and servicing levels. While the majority of future growth will take place in the primary urban nodes and larger towns, small communities have their own unique characteristics and growth considerations, and will experience some limited growth in accordance with their current scale, function, and servicing capability.

An important role of the Simcoe County Official Plan is to clearly set out a hierarchy of settlement areas to ensure a strong network of communities that will support:

- primary urban nodes as the major growth areas and the major service and employment centres;
- infilling, redevelopment, and intensification within existing built-up areas, particularly in local downtowns and main streets;

- an appropriate mix of uses that focuses major services in the primary urban nodes so that residents do not have to travel far to access basic local services (such as a grocery store, school, post office, or doctor's office); and
- tourism or resource-based recreational activities by reducing development pressures outside of settlement areas.

## Strategic Directions

To implement the Growth Plan in the Simcoe area, the following strategic directions will guide next steps for the Province and municipalities:

- focus population and employment growth in the following five urban nodes: the settlement areas of Barrie, Collingwood, Orillia, Alliston, and Bradford;
- recognize the City of Barrie as the anchor urban node for the Simcoe area, the primary location for new population and employment growth, and the priority area for investment in major regional infrastructure; and
- take steps to resolve the Barrie-Innisfil municipal boundary issue by introducing legislation to adjust the municipal boundary for the City of Barrie to add new lands to Barrie that are contiguous with its current urban structure and can benefit from Barrie's urban services.

## 3.2 Focused Growth Allocations

Successful growth management and achieving the Growth Plan's vision in the Simcoe area requires that growth forecasts be appropriately allocated to the two separated cities and Simcoe County and its lower-tier municipalities.

The Province has finalized an allocation to the County and the Cities of Barrie and Orillia, shown in Table 1. The allocations in Table 1 are based on the forecasts in Schedule 3 of the Growth Plan. They allocate the full amount of the forecasts, including an amount that was left "unallocated" in 2008 when the Province, in consultation with Simcoe County, Barrie, and Orillia, disaggregated the Schedule 3 forecast.

**Table 1: Allocation of Population and Employment for Simcoe County, the City of Barrie, and the City of Orillia 2031**

	<b>2031 Population</b>	<b>2031 Employment</b>
Simcoe County	416,000	132,000
City of Barrie	210,000	101,000
City of Orillia	41,000	21,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>667,000</b>	<b>254,000</b>

Further, the Province has developed an allocation to the lower-tier municipalities in Simcoe County, in accordance with the guiding principles, urban structure, and strategic directions described in this paper.

As discussed in Section 3.1, growth will be focused in the primary urban nodes, and particularly the anchor node of Barrie. This is a key consideration for how the Simcoe area's growth is allocated. The allocation also respects demographic trends and the demands of the market, ensuring that an appropriate range and mix of housing is available and meeting the Growth Plan policies and needs of current and future residents.

Other considerations include:

- capacity to accommodate growth through infill and intensification;
- possibility of achieving higher development densities, so that more growth can take place on less land;
- the health of watersheds, receiving water bodies and source water bodies;
- availability of existing servicing, feasibility of providing new servicing, and opportunities for green infrastructure and innovation to promote environmental sustainability;
- potential negative impact on key natural heritage and hydrologic features, agricultural lands, or natural resources; and
- aspirations of local municipalities and their existing residents and businesses.

The allocations in Tables 2 and 3 provide for significant growth in the five urban nodes. The adopted Simcoe County Official Plan allocates significant growth to these nodes as well, however, this Simcoe area strategy accelerates achievement of the urban nodes by shifting an additional 40,000 population to the five nodes and away from smaller rural areas. One-third of the Simcoe area's future growth will take place in the City of Barrie.

On the employment side, the City of Barrie will continue to be the focal point for job growth, particularly in the service sector. The City of Barrie will accommodate approximately 40 per cent of the Simcoe area's future job growth. The downtown Barrie Urban Growth Centre will be the focal point for much of this employment growth, particularly major office and institutional development. The other municipalities containing primary urban nodes, as well as the two proposed strategic employment areas, will accommodate one-third of future job growth.

**Table 2: Population Allocations for Single- and Lower-Tier Municipalities  
in the Simcoe Area 2006-2031**

<b>MUNICIPALITY</b>	<b>2006 CENSUS</b>	<b>PROPOSED PROVINCIAL ALLOCATION</b>	<b>SIMCOE COUNTY OFFICIAL PLAN (Adopted)</b>	<b>DIFFERENCE</b>
<b>Municipalities with Urban Nodes</b>				
Barrie	133,500	210,000	227,500*	23,500
Orillia	31,400	41,000		
Bradford West Gwillimbury	25,000	52,000	49,700	2,300
Collingwood	18,000	33,400	30,200	3,200
New Tecumseth	28,800	60,000	49,000	11,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>236,700</b>	<b>396,400</b>	<b>356,400</b>	<b>40,000</b>
<b>Other Municipalities</b>				
Adjala-Tosorontio	11,100	13,000	14,200	(1,200)
Clearview	14,600	18,800	26,000	(7,200)
Essa	17,600	21,500	22,900	(1,400)
Innisfil	32,400	58,000	65,000	(7,000)
Midland	16,900	19,000	19,700	(700)
Oro-Medonte	20,800	27,000	28,100	(1,100)
Penetanguishene	9,700	10,500	12,300	(1,800)
Ramara	9,800	13,000	15,500	(2,500)
Severn	12,500	17,000	20,200	(3,200)
Springwater	18,100	24,000	26,500	(2,500)
Tay	10,100	10,750	11,300	(550)
Tiny	11,200	11,750	13,900	(2,150)
Wasaga Beach	15,600	26,300	35,000	(8,700)
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>200,400</b>	<b>270,600</b>	<b>310,600</b>	<b>(40,000)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>437,100</b>	<b>667,000</b>	<b>667,000</b>	<b>0</b>

NOTE: \*As listed in the adopted Simcoe County Official Plan.

**Table 3: Employment Allocations for Single- and Lower-Tier Municipalities  
in the Simcoe Area 2006-2031**

<b>MUNICIPALITY</b>	<b>2006 CENSUS</b>	<b>PROPOSED PROVINCIAL ALLOCATION</b>	<b>SIMCOE COUNTY OFFICIAL PLAN (Adopted)</b>	<b>DIFFERENCE</b>
<b>Municipalities with Urban Nodes</b>				
Barrie	64,300	101,000	114,100*	7,900
Orillia	19,700	21,000		
Bradford West Gwillimbury	8,000	18,000	16,200	1,800
Collingwood	10,800	13,500	14,400	(900)
New Tecumseth	19,700	26,500	26,300	200
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>122,500</b>	<b>180,000</b>	<b>171,000</b>	<b>9,000</b>
<b>Other Municipalities</b>				
Adjala-Tosorontio	1,600	1,800	2,100	(300)
Clearview	4,400	5,100	5,800	(700)
Essa	7,700	9,000	10,300	(1,300)
Innisfil	5,700	13,100	13,100	0
Midland	12,000	13,800	16,000	(2,200)
Oro-Medonte	4,700	6,000	6,200	(200)
Penetanguishene	5,300	6,000	7,000	(1,000)
Ramara	1,900	2,200	2,500	(300)
Severn	3,900	4,400	5,300	(900)
Springwater	5,000	5,600	6,700	(1,100)
Tay	1,500	1,800	2,000	(200)
Tiny	1,400	1,700	1,900	(200)
Wasaga Beach	3,100	3,500	4,100	(600)
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>58,200</b>	<b>74,000</b>	<b>83,000</b>	<b>(9,000)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>180,700</b>	<b>254,000</b>	<b>254,000</b>	<b>0</b>

NOTE: \*As listed in the adopted Simcoe County Official Plan.

### 3.3 High Quality Job Opportunities

The Simcoe area has a diverse economic base that includes agriculture, resource-based industries, small and large manufacturing operations, research and creative industries, and a strong service sector. Major individual employers include Honda Canada, which employs more than 4,000 people in two plants; CFB Borden, which employs approximately 3,250 military members and 1,500 civilians; and Casino Rama, which employs approximately 3,700 people.

The City of Barrie is also home to Georgian College, a post-secondary institution with satellite campuses in Orillia and Collingwood. Georgian College offers a wide variety of technical and engineering programs resulting in over 2,000 graduates per year that contribute to a ready and skilled labour force for the Simcoe area and the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

In order to grow this economic base and provide for future prosperity, it is essential to plan carefully and strategically for employment in the Simcoe area. The Growth Plan addresses this challenge through policies that direct employment growth to urban areas. It also calls for the planning and protection of employment areas for existing and future economic opportunities.

Future population growth will continue to be balanced with job growth so that the Simcoe area continues to develop its own thriving economic base, and out-commuting to the rest of the Greater Golden Horseshoe is minimized. This means directing employment growth to the five urban nodes identified in Section 3.1 and recognizing the downtown Barrie Urban Growth Centre as the focus for major office and institutional development.

Focusing job growth in the primary urban nodes, and particularly in the existing built-up areas, provides many advantages such as:

- bringing employment centres close to population centres, thereby enhancing quality of life and productivity by reducing commutes, the cost of transportation (e.g., fuel consumption) and negative environmental impacts (e.g., congestion, air pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions);
- helping to further attract skilled labour to the urban nodes;

- supporting existing local stores and businesses and increasing the likelihood of attracting smaller, related businesses and services to the area;
- reducing development pressures on rural and agricultural lands;
- taking advantage of existing infrastructure such as transit, roads, and sewers, rather than relying on costly new services or extensions of services; and
- creating the economies of scale necessary to enable green infrastructure investments.

A key part of remaining economically competitive is to optimize the goods movement network for industrial activities. The Growth Plan encourages municipalities to designate and preserve lands within settlement areas in the vicinity of major highway interchanges, rail yards, and airports, as areas for manufacturing, warehousing, and associated uses.

The Growth Plan also commits the Province to an analysis of the regional economy and identification of provincially significant employment areas, including prime industrial lands. In May 2008, the Province released *Planning for Employment in the Greater Golden Horseshoe*, which proposed a set of criteria for identifying strategic employment areas.

The Highway 400 corridor is the Simcoe area's most significant transportation and goods movement corridor and a key link in the Greater Golden Horseshoe's goods movement network. The lands along the Highway 400 south of Barrie offer high potential to support the creation of quality jobs in the manufacturing and industrial sectors.

In particular, two specific nodes along Highway 400 will be identified as strategic employment areas that are important for supporting job growth and economic prosperity for the Simcoe area as well as the rest of the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Innisfil Heights and the portion of the Highway 400 corridor in the vicinity of the Simcoe County Road 88 (see Figure 1) interchange have the potential to house clusters of manufacturing and industrial employment that serve major markets and are in close proximity to a skilled labour force.

To recognize and provide a policy framework for the development of these strategic employment areas, the Province intends to propose an amendment to the Growth Plan. The proposed amendment will identify these two strategic employment areas and establish a clear policy framework with strict criteria for the appropriate size, location, uses and phasing of these manufacturing and industrial lands, including servicing considerations.

Two other employment districts are identified in the adopted Simcoe County Official Plan, along the Highway 11 corridor north of the City of Barrie, which are important for the Simcoe area. The Lake Simcoe Regional Airport and Rama Road Corridor are locally important. These areas will also be recognized through the proposed Growth Plan amendment.

The importance of the Simcoe area's agricultural industry must also be a consideration when planning for long-term job growth. Nearly half of the Simcoe area's land base is agricultural and the agricultural industry remains a productive and vibrant industry, particularly in the south and central portions of Simcoe County. Just over 2,400 farms were in operation in Simcoe County in 2006, accounting for about 4 per cent of the farms in Ontario, with cash receipts in 2006 of over \$326 million. It is estimated that the agricultural sector in Simcoe County employed over 9,800 people in 2006.

To support agriculture, land use planning and infrastructure decisions must protect the land base upon which the industry depends, minimize the amount of land consumed by development, and support the viability of agriculture-related businesses. Focusing population and employment growth in the five primary urban nodes will reduce pressures for the conversion of agricultural land to urban uses.

## **Strategic Directions**

To implement the Growth Plan in the Simcoe area, the following strategic directions will guide next steps for the Province and municipalities:

- focus employment growth in the five urban nodes identified in this strategy;

- focus major office and major institutional development in the primary urban node of Barrie, particularly the downtown Barrie Urban Growth Centre;
- encourage smaller-scale, mixed use developments serving the local population, including smaller office, commercial and institutional developments, to locate in other existing downtowns and main streets to strengthen town centres and create places with a good balance of jobs and homes;
- protect the Simcoe area's agricultural lands to support the area's agricultural industry through minimizing urban expansions and the impact of urban development on agricultural operations; and
- the Province will identify the two strategic employment areas described in Section 3.3 to be protected for industrial and manufacturing activities that require large lots and goods movement access.

### **3.4 Compact and Complete Communities**

The Growth Plan generally defines complete communities as communities that meet people's needs for daily living throughout an entire lifetime.

Complete communities in the Simcoe area will provide benefits such as:

- a greater mix of housing choices close to employment opportunities so that people can live and work in the same area;
- a wider range of local services such as grocery stores, post offices and restaurants close to where people live;
- making transit, walking and cycling realistic options for more people;
- creating attractive, vibrant main streets and commercial centres that serve the surrounding neighbourhoods; and
- supporting new and expanded community services, as well as arts, culture, and recreation facilities.

A key characteristic of complete communities is a more compact urban form. To achieve more compact communities, the Growth Plan has established a minimum requirement for intensification. By 2015, and each year thereafter, the City of Barrie, City of Orillia, and County of Simcoe must each accommodate at least 40 per cent of each year's residential growth through intensification in their built-up areas. The Growth Plan also requires that new development taking place in the designated greenfield areas of each upper- or single-tier municipality will be planned to achieve a minimum density of 50 residents and jobs combined per hectare.

To conform to the Growth Plan, municipalities are responsible for determining how intensification and density should be accommodated and distributed within their municipality to meet the provincial targets, as well as planning and designing the compact, walkable urban form to realize these targets and objectives. This will be a key element that will have to be incorporated into municipal official plans.

Generally, all municipalities are required to meet the Growth Plan targets. However, the Growth Plan recognizes the differences in growth and urban form between rural communities and more urban ones. The Minister may permit an alternative target to recognize municipalities with few and small settlement areas and lower forecasted growth.

## **Strategic Directions**

To implement the Growth Plan in the Simcoe area, the following strategic directions will guide next steps for the Province and municipalities:

- the City of Barrie must meet or exceed the Growth Plan's policies and targets, namely to achieve a:
  - minimum intensification rate of 40 per cent of new residential development each year in the built-up area;
  - minimum density of 150 residents and jobs combined per hectare in the Urban Growth Centre; and
  - minimum density of 50 residents and jobs combined per hectare in designated greenfield areas.
- Barrie should achieve transit- and pedestrian-friendly urban form in all of its communities.

- All other urban nodes, as well as other large and mid-sized communities will be planned:
  - as complete communities, with a mix of employment, housing types, public spaces, stores, and services to support vibrant neighbourhoods;
  - to facilitate intensification, such as infill and development of vacant and underutilized lots, throughout the built-up area; and
  - to enable walking, cycling, and the early integration of transit services.

### **3.5 Preserving Rural Assets and Reducing Sprawl**

The Simcoe area has many vibrant rural areas that are essential to the long-term prosperity, quality of life and environmental health of the area. They are also home to many rural residents as well as some businesses and employers, and they are the basis for much of the Simcoe area's recreational and tourism industries. The Simcoe area's valuable rural assets must be wisely protected and managed as part of planning for future growth.

Provincial policy limits growth and development in rural areas and unserved or partially serviced communities, and directs it to settlement areas, particularly those that offer full municipal water and wastewater systems. Rural settlement areas such as towns, villages, and hamlets, are the focus for rural growth with the majority of growth being directed to larger cities and towns with full services. The Growth Plan encourages municipalities to plan for an appropriate variety of cultural and economic opportunities (such as commercial, institutional, community facilities, and jobs) within these rural settlement areas to serve the needs of surrounding rural residents and businesses.

The Simcoe area's well-known and diverse resource-based recreational industry presents some unique challenges for managing growth and development in rural areas. Ski hills, marinas, and so on, are a critical part of the Simcoe area economy. It is important that they continue to thrive and prosper. However, development associated with these activities must be carefully managed to ensure that it does not threaten or overwhelm the very resources on which these industries depend. A critical role of municipal official plans is to provide appropriate planning direction and limits on development associated with tourism and recreational activities.

While new multiple-lot residential development is directed to settlement areas, seasonal or second homes in the rural area have been an important part of the economy of the Simcoe area. Demand for these types of units is growing, but there is also an increasing trend toward permanent occupancy of what were once seasonal residences, creating significant challenges to providing services.

Multiple-lot residential development in the rural areas may only occur in accordance with the Growth Plan's policies, and only as a necessary component of a resource-based recreational activity located in the rural area. Such development should generally be limited to areas where full municipal or communal services are available, and where there will be no negative impacts on the natural environment or agricultural lands.

## **Strategic Directions**

To implement the Growth Plan in the Simcoe area, the following strategic directions will guide next steps for the Province and municipalities:

- in addition to the focus on key urban nodes outlined in Section 3.1, land use planning and infrastructure decision-making in the Simcoe area should continue to focus growth and development in urban settlement areas such as cities and towns and in rural settlement areas such as villages and hamlets;
- major growth should be directed to communities with full municipal water and wastewater services;
- strong protection should be provided for the resources on which the Simcoe area's tourism and recreation industries depend. Development associated with resource-based recreational activities should be directed to settlement areas where possible, in accordance with the Growth Plan; and
- where development associated with a resource-based recreational activity is proposed in a rural area, consideration should be given, among other matters, to impacts on the resource, capacity of the recreational activity, and the manner in which water and wastewater services will be provided.

## 3.6 Healthy Lake Simcoe, Nottawasaga River and Severn Watersheds

One of the most attractive qualities of the Simcoe area is the abundance of open, green spaces enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. The Province has taken several steps to ensure these places continue to thrive and be protected in the face of rapid growth pressures.

In those portions of the Simcoe area that lie within the Niagara Escarpment Plan area, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan area, and the Greenbelt Plan area, these provincial plans continue to provide a strong level of protection. Outside of these areas, the forests, wetlands, streams, wildlife habitats, and other significant natural features should also be protected through official plan provisions that conform to the Growth Plan and are consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement.

Achieving very high servicing standards for future growth and development will be critical to protecting the quality and quantity of water in the Lake Simcoe and Nottawasaga River watersheds. Three of the primary urban nodes and the two proposed strategic employment areas lie within the Lake Simcoe watershed, and the anchor urban node of Barrie is located on the particularly sensitive Kempenfelt Bay.

### **Lake Simcoe Protection Act, 2008**

The government is committed to taking strong action to protect the health of Lake Simcoe, now and in the future. The Lake Simcoe Protection Act became law in December 2008 and the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan was finalized in early June 2009.

In the near-term the plan will focus on the issues most critical to the health of Lake Simcoe including:

- improving water quality, including reducing loadings of phosphorus to the lake;
- sustaining surface and groundwater resources;

- improving the health of the ecosystem by protecting and rehabilitating important areas such as vegetated buffers along shorelines, tributaries, and wetlands; and
- addressing impacts of invasive species and climate change.

The Lake Simcoe Protection Plan includes restrictions on development in and around key natural heritage features and key hydrologic features outside of settlement areas. Specific policies for development within settlement areas also support the plan's overall aim to reduce phosphorus loadings to Lake Simcoe and to rivers within the watershed. These include policies to minimize and mitigate urban run-off by requiring comprehensive stormwater management plans, and encouraging implementation of innovative green measures.

The Lake Simcoe Protection Plan sets a significant phosphorus reduction target in order to improve water quality. Wastewater servicing and operation as well as the management and control of stormwater runoff are key areas of municipal responsibility where action will be required to achieve the target. Water and wastewater servicing must be planned, managed, and coordinated very carefully to ensure that these standards are upheld.

This Simcoe area strategy supports and helps to implement the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, 2008 and Lake Simcoe Protection Plan. Growth in the watershed municipalities will be capped in accordance with the Growth Plan's overall growth projections and allocations. Focusing growth in serviced settlement areas optimizes infrastructure investments and enables economies of scale for improved technology.

In planning for population and employment growth in the Lake Simcoe, Nottawasaga River, and Severn watersheds, existing and planned servicing capacity of settlement areas, cost-effective servicing options, and environmental impacts (e.g., water quality, water quantity, natural heritage, and air quality) will be recognized and taken into consideration.

## Strategic Directions

To implement the Growth Plan in the Simcoe area, the following strategic directions will guide next steps for the Province and municipalities:

- key natural heritage features and hydrologic features outside the Greenbelt Plan area, Oak Ridges Moraine Plan area, Niagara Escarpment Plan area, and the Lake Simcoe watershed will be protected by official plan provisions that conform with the Growth Plan and are consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement;
- inside settlement areas, the densities and urban form of development should maximize environmental sustainability and minimize the ecological footprint; and
- a watershed-based water, wastewater, and stormwater management framework, including innovative green infrastructure solutions, should underlie all future growth and development.

# 4 Supporting the Vision

## 4.1 Simcoe Area Land Budget

The Growth Plan requires that municipalities include within their approved settlement area boundaries a sufficient supply of land to accommodate population and employment growth for a maximum of 20 years. This timeframe ensures sufficient land is available to meet growth needs while preventing the designation of excessive amounts of land and the associated urban sprawl.

Historic land use decisions were not subject to the same rigorous tests, and previous work in the Simcoe area has concluded that there is more than enough land within approved settlement area boundaries to accommodate the next 20 years of growth, but that this land is not necessarily in the appropriate locations, where future demand will be highest and where development can be most efficiently serviced. Generally, land surpluses exist in the northern municipalities, and shortages exist in the southern municipalities, particularly the City of Barrie. There is a need to rationalize and align the land supply with demand in a manner that meets the requirements of the Growth Plan and other provincial policies for, among other things, urban form and density.

A land budgeting exercise will be necessary for the Simcoe area, based on the population and employment forecasts and density and intensification targets of the Growth Plan, the directions contained in other provincial plans and policies, and the directions proposed in this strategy. Simcoe County has proposed to undertake a land budget for the County in the near future. Ultimately, a Simcoe area-wide land budget will be needed to identify the urban land needs for up to 20 years as well as land deficits and surpluses for the County and its member municipalities, and the Cities of Barrie and Orillia.

Where the land budgeting exercise concludes that greenfield lands are designated in inappropriate locations due to historical planning decisions, it will be necessary to realign and phase the land supply in accordance with current growth management objectives. A number of options exist to do this:

- re-designation of settlement area boundaries or introduction of long-term phasing policies to match land supply with forecasted population and employment growth to meet Growth Plan policies;
- official plan phasing policies that clearly identify which lands are surplus to the 20-year land needs, and which put in place strict tests and conditions, including the need for a subsequent municipal comprehensive review and single-, upper- and lower-tier official plan amendments, before development could occur in these surplus areas; and
- official plan policies that require strong zoning provisions to be put in place at the lower-tier levels to ensure that new development does not take place on lands that have been deemed surplus to the 20-year land needs of the Simcoe area.

Within areas that are determined to be part of the Simcoe area's 20-year land needs, official plans will need to include phasing policies directing where and when development will occur. This includes promoting infill and redevelopment; prioritizing intensification and development to areas where access to employment, commercial services, and public facilities already exist; and ensuring progress is being made on intensification and density targets prior to releasing new lands for greenfield development.

## 4.2 **Barrie-Innisfil Boundary Resolution**

The City of Barrie has a long history of municipal boundary adjustments. Lands have been annexed from adjacent municipalities on nine separate occasions beginning in 1954 and most recently in 1987. Four of these boundary adjustments have involved the Town of Innisfil.

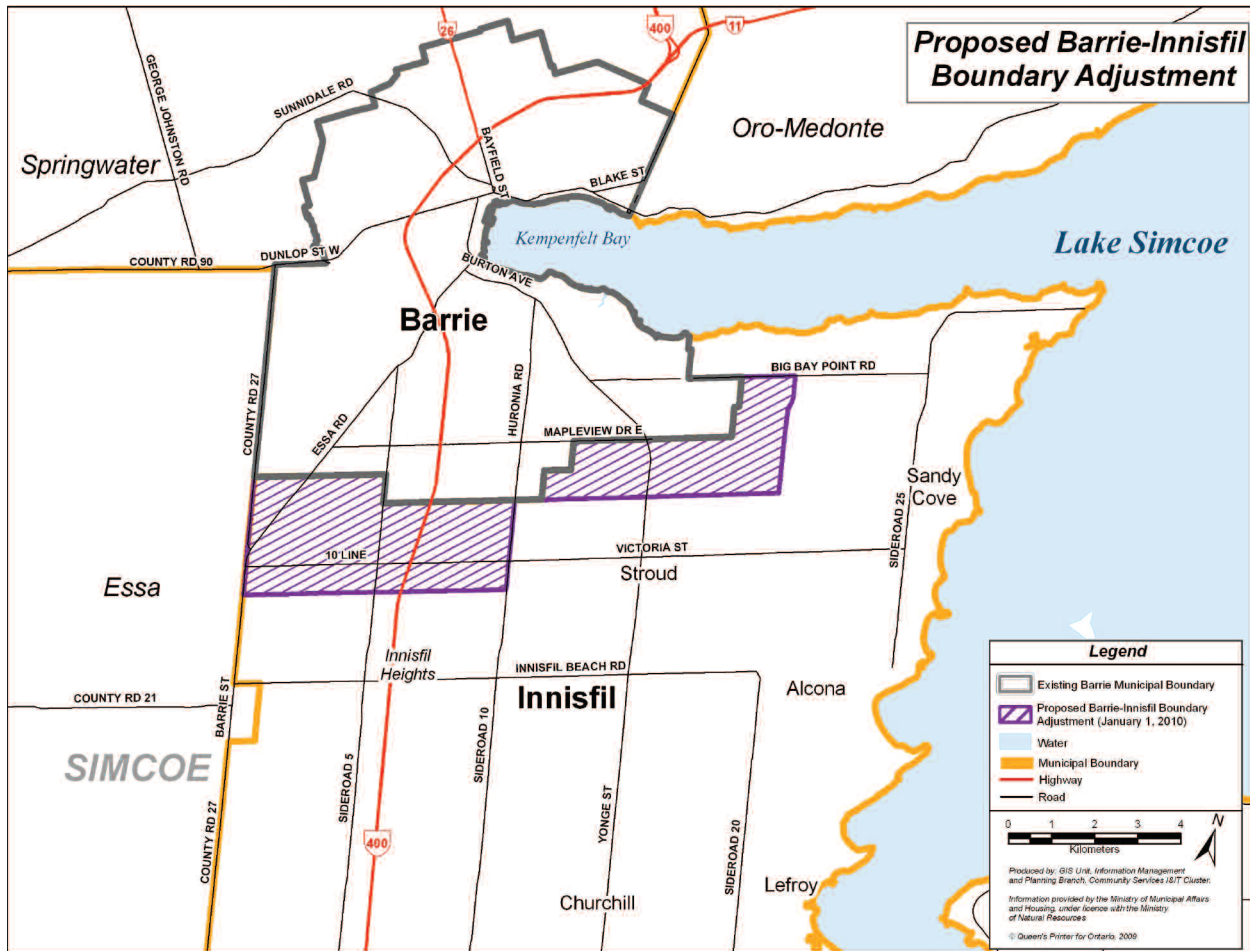
In response to ongoing and forecasted growth in the Barrie area, attempts have been made in recent years by the City of Barrie, Town of Innisfil, and County of Simcoe to determine a local solution to the Barrie-Innisfil boundary. This included facilitated discussions among the municipalities by the Office of the Provincial Development Facilitator (OPDF) from 2006 to 2008. A proposed solution was ultimately tabled by the OPDF in February 2008 for consideration by the municipalities. However, in the end, no consensus could be reached amongst the municipalities on a local solution to the Barrie-Innisfil boundary.

The Barrie-Innisfil boundary issue has frustrated long-range growth management for the City of Barrie and the Simcoe area. The Province is now prepared to take an active role in attempting to resolve this impasse. The resolution of the municipal boundary is a critical element in the overall strategic vision for the Simcoe area as it will help to ensure that the vision and objectives of the Growth Plan can be realized.

The Province is proposing an adjustment to the Barrie-Innisfil municipal boundary. The proposed municipal boundary adjustment, shown in Figure 2, would see approximately 2,293 gross hectares of land added to the City of Barrie on January 1, 2010. These lands are expected to satisfy the City's land requirements until the year 2031 and beyond. The lands would retain current land use designations until such time as the City of Barrie proceeds through a land use planning process to determine the future use of the lands. In considering where and how it will grow, Barrie is required to ensure consistency with the Provincial Policy Statement and conform to the Growth Plan, both of which are aimed at curbing sprawl. These include policies and targets for intensification and density in its Urban Growth Centre and designated greenfield areas, including the lands proposed for annexation. The Lake Simcoe Protection Plan also applies to lands within the Lake Simcoe watershed.

The proposed municipal boundary adjustment was developed in consideration of work undertaken by the City of Barrie, Town of Innisfil, and County of Simcoe in support of the discussions facilitated by the OPDF and each municipality's preparation of its respective new official plan.

**Figure 2: Proposed Barrie-Innisfil Boundary Adjustment**



### 4.3 Water, Wastewater, and Stormwater Management

As noted in Section 3.6 on Healthy Lake Simcoe, Nottawasaga River and Severn Watersheds, and the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, 2008, the Province is committed to taking strong action to protect the health of Lake Simcoe now and into the future.

Coordinated investments in water and wastewater are needed to ensure that population and employment growth is accommodated in a way that maintains the health of the local watersheds. This may present an opportunity to develop an approach to servicing that would allow coordinated decisions on stormwater management; water extraction, use and return; and would recognize the inherent linkages between water, wastewater, and stormwater.

The Province will continue to work with municipalities to address the significant infrastructure deficit in the municipal water and wastewater sector, and make investments in stormwater management. There is an opportunity to implement innovative green solutions; some will be small and local, while others will have applications in many other areas across the province, potentially stimulating both local and provincial green businesses.

The Lake Simcoe, Nottawasaga River and Severn watersheds could provide the ideal location for implementing innovative green infrastructure solutions across the full spectrum of land uses, ranging from urban residential and commercial development to rural resource-based recreational uses.

There are many possible green infrastructure solutions to help accommodate growth while protecting the Lake Simcoe and Nottawasaga River watersheds. These include, among other measures:

- enhanced stormwater interception and treatment,
- phosphorus modelling and controls,
- planting of wind breaks and vegetation retention,
- upgraded sewage treatment technology, and
- lot level controls.

Existing strategic assets such as the Collingwood to Alliston pipeline, and large water and wastewater plants, should be optimized to provide vital water and wastewater services while protecting stressed water sources. Such solutions must also support implementation of the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, the desired urban structure for the Simcoe area, and optimal fiscal management of infrastructure.

## 4.4 Transportation

The Simcoe area's transportation system should be based on a hierarchy of options for moving people that seeks first to minimize transportation demand, and then to maximize modal share for active transportation, followed by transit, then multi-occupant vehicles, while minimizing trips by single-occupant vehicles. For moving goods, the transportation system should be planned and coordinated to optimize

goods movement through the Simcoe area, particularly to serve strategic employment areas, and to link these areas to major markets.

Growth will be focused in areas that are most likely to achieve higher modal splits for active transportation and transit. This includes urban nodes that offer local transit service, have the densities, mix of uses, and urban form to support walking and cycling, and provide access to regional transit services such as GO Transit.

New development should be planned to minimize travel demand and automobile-dependence. The design of roads, particularly main streets, as well as public facilities, subdivisions, commercial facilities, recreational uses, and major trip generators will promote walking, cycling and transit use.

The transportation network should give priority to connecting the Simcoe area's primary urban nodes with one another, and to the anchor urban node of the City of Barrie, particularly by transit. Inter-regional transit is already provided by GO Transit, including both bus and rail service between the City of Barrie and the City of Toronto. GO train service from Barrie to Union Station via Bradford runs four trains during the morning and afternoon peak periods. The GO2020 strategic plan calls for more frequent train service to Bradford with selected trips for Barrie and all-day twice hourly bus service to Bradford with bus service to Barrie.

New investments in transportation infrastructure should contribute to achieving the hierarchy of transportation options described above and the urban structure and growth objectives outlined in this paper. The priority for new provincial expressway investment would be to optimize the capacity of the existing provincial highway network, including improving the capacity of Highway 400.

Simcoe County's adopted Official Plan recommends significant road expansions, including new highways, extensions and bypasses. Any future transportation infrastructure must conform to the Growth Plan. To ensure a coordinated and integrated approach to transportation and land use planning, an area transportation study is recommended that would focus the role of the transportation system to implement the Growth Plan.

## 4.5 Coordinated Servicing

As the Simcoe area grows, the need for coordination amongst municipal governments on a wide range of issues will continue to increase. Currently, the Simcoe area comprises the two single-tier municipalities of Orillia and Barrie as well as the County of Simcoe and its sixteen lower-tier municipalities. Each has its own areas of responsibility for service delivery. Several options have been considered in the past to improve coordination of service delivery, ranging from identifying efficiencies within current service arrangements, new or expanded inter-municipal agreements, creation of service districts and area-wide consolidation of service delivery. Suggestions have also been made to restructure governance in the Simcoe area. While complicated and often controversial, identifying opportunities and mechanisms to improve the efficiency and coordination of service delivery must be part of the long-term dialogue around growth planning in the Simcoe area.

# 5 Next Steps

The Province has developed this Simcoe area strategy to help manage growth in this complex area with multiple municipal governments. This strategy aims to communicate the key issues and opportunities in a transparent manner, and to help coordinate provincial initiatives and decision-making to support and guide municipal growth management efforts in the Simcoe area.

The evolution of the Simcoe area will take place over many years to come. Directed by the Growth Plan, this evolution can bring more services, more job opportunities, more vibrant and liveable communities, and a better quality of life to existing and future residents.

This document outlines important strategic directions that will need to guide decision-making at all levels to ensure the successful implementation of the Growth Plan in the Simcoe area. This includes decisions related to infrastructure investment, social services planning, the preparation and approval of official plans, transportation planning, and economic development strategies, just to name a few.

Most critically, there are a number of immediate next steps that are needed to guide the growth and development of the Simcoe area:

- The Province will take steps to resolve the Barrie-Innisfil boundary issue in accordance with the strategic directions set out in this paper, by introducing legislation to adjust the municipal boundary.
- The Province and its partners will implement the recently finalized Lake Simcoe Protection Plan.
- Pursuant to the process set out in the Places to Grow Act, 2005 the Province will prepare and propose a Simcoe area-specific amendment to the Growth Plan that:
  - implements a nodal urban structure for the Simcoe area;
  - incorporates population and employment forecasts that support that urban structure, and additional policies for directing the forecasted growth to nodes;
  - identifies strategic employment areas and provides a policy framework for their development; and

- provides for phasing policies that implement the results of the land budgeting process and manage the supply of land available for development.
- Municipalities will adopt municipal official plan amendments that conform with the Growth Plan.
- The Province will undertake a Simcoe area infrastructure plan, including a strategy for water and wastewater in the Simcoe area that includes mechanisms for coordinating service delivery.
- The Province will undertake an area transportation study that conforms with the Growth Plan.

# Seeking Feedback

Implementing a collective vision for growth based on a strong provincial framework involves many decision makers and many different actions. Each element of implementation will involve public and stakeholder consultation. But we also want to know what you think about the overall vision outlined in this paper. Tell us what you think.

Please send your comments and feedback on this document by September 2, 2009 to:

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