

# TOWNSHIP OF ESSA OFFICIAL PLAN UPDATE STATUS REPORT

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Township of Essa's Official Plan was approved by the County of Simcoe and is dated July 6, 2001. Over the past years this Plan has served the Township well through its policy direction and the regulation of growth. The Ontario Planning Act provides that at least every 5 years the Council of a municipality should undertake a review to determine whether or not the policies are consistent with Provincial Policy, and new emerging planning practices, and to provide the public with an opportunity to comment on the policies and land use designations of the Official Plan. While the review, under normal circumstances, would have occurred in 2006, two upper level initiatives to which the Township's Official Plan must be in conformity with, delayed the Official Plan Review. These initiatives were the Provincial Government's Places to Grow, a Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and the development of a new County of Simcoe Official Plan.

## 2. PLACES TO GROW, A GROWTH PLAN FOR THE GREATER GOLDEN HORSESHOE

In 2006, the Ontario Government issued a document entitled "Places to Grow".

### a) Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe under the Places to Grow Act 2005.

This Plan is a framework for implementing the Government of Ontario's vision for building stronger, prosperous communities by better managing growth in this region to 2031. This Plan is to guide decisions on a wide range of issues relating to transportation, infrastructure planning, land use planning, urban form, housing, natural heritage and resource protection. The Plan specifically:

- promotes intensification and establishes municipal targets;
- promotes density and job creation targets;
- directs growth to settlement areas;
- provides protection and policy for natural systems, prime agricultural areas, mineral aggregates, and water resources, energy, air quality and water management.

Both lower and upper tier municipalities are to implement the policies of the Growth Plan and Official Plans were to be brought into conformity by June 2009. This date was extended to June 2010.

### 3. SIMCOE COUNTY OFFICIAL PLAN

The County of Simcoe, during this period, was pursuing the preparation of a new Official Plan for the County. With the adoption of the new Official Plan in the fall of 2008 which was considered to be in general conformity with the Provincial Growth Plan, individual municipalities, including the Township of Essa, proceeded with their Official Plan Updates to bring local plans into conformity with both the Growth Plan and the newly adopted County Official Plan.

### 4. SIMCOE AREA: A STRATEGIC VISION FOR GROWTH

The County of Simcoe Official Plan must receive approval from the Approval Authority, that being, the Ontario Government. The Approval Authority has raised several concerns respecting the County Official Plan and numerous objections were also received from the public. Resulting directly from the Provincial concerns, the Province in June 2009 issued a paper entitled "SIMCOE AREA: A STRATEGIC VISION FOR GROWTH". This issuance of this paper was premised on the fact that:

- (i) Simcoe County has submitted a new Official Plan which they believe needs clearer growth management direction;
- (ii) The City of Barrie and the Town of Innisfil were engaged in a political boundary dispute;
- (iii) The Province had finalized the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan.

As a result, the paper:

- (i) Identifies key urban nodes to focus growth, intensification and allocates population and employment numbers in these areas to curb urban sprawl;
- (ii) Proposes strategic employment areas;
- (iii) Proposes a resolution to the Barrie/Innisfil dispute;
- (iv) Preserves the environment and reduces pressure on natural area and watersheds;;
- (v) Protects valuable farmland and recreational areas;
- (vi) Supports infrastructure priorities including transportation, enhanced water, waster water and stormwater management systems to protect Lake Simcoe, Nottawasaga River and Severn watersheds.

This paper while increasing population allocation to the designated urban nodes provided a further population reduction to the other municipalities in Simcoe County.

## **5. ONTARIO MUNICIPAL BOARD**

When reaching a decision on the County of Simcoe Official Plan, the Approval Authority has a legislated time limit in which they are to make their decision. This time limit has expired and the County of Simcoe has appealed this non-decision to the Ontario Municipal Board. The decision reached at the future Ontario Municipal Board Hearing or resolution thereof could have impacts on the local municipalities, including the Township of Essa, and, as such, in order to protect their interests many of these municipalities have appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board to receive Party Status and be involved in any subsequent meetings, hearings, etc. pertaining to the County Official Plan.

## **6. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?**

What does this mean to the Township of Essa and the Official Plan Update? As of March 2010, we are no further ahead in being able to finalize the update to our Official Plan. An amendment, resulting from the paper entitled "Simcoe County: A Strategic Vision for Growth", to the Growth Plan is to be released for public review this year and the approval of the County Official Plan as indicated will be subject to an Ontario Municipal Board Hearing. As such, until a Resolution of the above is reached, it remains unclear as to what the implications will be to the Township's planning program and Official Plan. Thus, at this stage, the Official Plan Update Program is basically on hold pending the resolution of the County's Official Plan.