

Simcoe County receives planning clarity on growth areas

Intensification and co-ordinated planning to set the pace for development in Barrie, Orillia and neighbouring communities

STAFF WRITER
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An amendment to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe affecting the county of Simcoe and the cities of Barrie and Orillia will help provide clarity and certainty to the area's construction industry, according to the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario.

“It really provides some more detail as to how growth in Simcoe County is going to proceed, so it's very important because it provides clarification to municipalities, developers who have purchased land and the public as to where applications might be able to proceed,” explained RCCAO executive director Andy Manahan.

He noted that this is the first amendment to the plan since it was released in 2006. It's been a long road getting to this point; many area municipalities had put official plans forward for approval by the province but “because of some debates over where growth should go everything was put on hold,” he recalled.

Around a year ago, it was announced that a provincial facilitator was going to attempt to find a deal, and the amendment, announced on Jan 19 by Infrastructure Minister Bob Chiarelli, resulted from that process.

“A couple of months ago... the facilitator tabled her report and I guess over the last couple of months the province looked at it post-election and decided they would sign off on it,” Manahan said.

The most important thing the construction industry needs to know about the announcement is that there will be managed growth in the future, he said.

“Rather than applications that could happen all over the countryside, let’s say, the province has decided to get better bang for the infrastructure dollars that are invested,” he said. “They’re saying we want to ensure growth is more in the intensification kind of mold so that there’s higher densities for residential development that’s going to occur rather than lower densities kind of half-haphazardly in various parts of Simcoe. That’s a very important clarification.”

The plan will be implemented in phases, where the county and the lower-tier municipalities will put phasing policies in place so that there’s orderly growth. The local municipalities have already held public consultation meetings and there are likely to be more in the future.

“The onus is still on local municipalities to do things in a proper fashion,” he said.

However, they will work within a framework that outlines primary settlement areas as well as employment areas.

It also sets out the green belt, Manahan noted.

“Now we know that above, kind of North of the green belt and east of the Niagara escarpment, here’s where orderly growth and construction can happen.”

Manahan said that the broader workforce, beyond just the construction sector, will benefit from the amendment.

“Even though I represent both labour and management in construction, I think more importantly, it’s employment for society as a whole,” he said.