
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper poses the following question:

“How is south Simcoe County and particularly the Bradford Bond Head Planning Area positioned to accommodate future settlement area growth when evaluated against past and current Provincial land use planning policies and initiatives, development opportunities and constraints elsewhere with south Central Ontario, and other forces influencing where growth should best occur?”

Bond Head Development Corporation has retained a team of consultants to investigate the planning, environmental, transportation, servicing, economic, demographic and other aspects of its proposals for the *Bradford Bond Head Planning Area*, and to provide professional advice on all these matters and on the land use, urban design, engineering and other characteristics of the proposal.

With the benefit of research to date and initial input from this consulting team, this paper provides an overview of the emerging Central Ontario context within which the proposal for the *Bradford Bond Head Planning Area* is advanced.

3.5 Million People in Central Ontario

Rapid population growth will continue in Central Ontario during the 2001 to 2035 period with up to 3.5 million additional people expected to live and work in Central Ontario by the year 2035. This growth is inevitable. Long-range plans must be made now to identify new areas capable of accommodating 1.6 million of these 3.5 million people not currently accounted for in local and regional Official Plans.

Concomitant employment growth that keeps pace with residential growth is essential to ensure continuing economic prosperity of the Central Ontario Region. Consequently, lands will also need to be identified to accommodate the essential employment, institutional and recreational needs of the ultimate population. Since a serious shortage of land designated to accommodate such uses is emerging, proactive action is required now to secure the necessary infrastructure improvements and planning approvals to accommodate new growth. Such forward-thinking action will avert the risk of significant increases in housing costs, and associated adverse impacts on the economic prosperity of Central Ontario.

To accommodate future population growth, the urban envelopes of some existing major centres will have to be expanded, and some smaller communities beyond the Niagara Escarpment Planning Area and the Oak Ridges Moraine will need to become major centres.

Growth Pressures Beyond the GTA, Particularly in the Central Northern Corridor

There will be a continued outward shift of Central Ontario population beyond the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), with the most rapid growth expected to occur in the northern corridor associated with York Region and Simcoe County. Simcoe County's central location, highway infrastructure and natural and recreational amenities have all contributed to its attractiveness to migrants from the GTA.

In its report entitled "MTO Demographic & Economic Trends Shaping the Future of Highway Travel in Simcoe County (June 2001)", Hemson Consulting noted that "*Simcoe's population is growing rapidly mainly due to migration from the GTA...For the past three decades, Simcoe County has consistently been growing faster than Ontario as a whole and for the past 15 years has grown at a faster rate than the GTA...Growth within Simcoe County has been highly concentrated in the southern areas of the County along the Highway 400 corridor and in close proximity to the GTA.*" This rapid growth in south Simcoe County is a testament to the attractiveness of this area as a place to live and work, and as an alternative to living within the GTA.

Influences on Urban Settlement Patterns

The Central Ontario Region of today has an extremely integrated economic and spatial structure, the settlement organization of which can be sourced to many forces: regional geographic features; regional scale infrastructure investment; locations of external markets; and public and private operating cost factors that drive economic investment and location decisions.

The shape and structure of Central Ontario also reflects deliberate provincial policy initiatives and policy on a wide range of matters such as the protection of certain geographic lands and features from development, to decisions on improvements and investment in expressways, transit routes and sewer and water infrastructure. The spatial configuration of regional transportation infrastructure (highways/transit) continues to exert a particularly strong influence on urban settlement patterns. As well, current and ongoing provincial initiatives to protect the Niagara Escarpment, the Oak Ridges Moraine, and the proposed Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt from development pressures, will also influence the future shape and structure of settlement patterns in Central Ontario.

Local decision-making could also have an ever-increasing influence on the ability to expand existing settlement areas given the enhanced powers bestowed on municipalities to govern their own fates, as proposed in the Provincial Government's planning reforms.

The Most Appropriate Locations for Growth

Both the Provincial Policy Statement and the proposed provincial planning reforms direct urban settlement, beyond that already committed in local and regional Official Plans, to locations:

- that will assist in keeping Central Ontario economically prosperous;
- where regional-scale infrastructure such as highway and transit works are or can be provided most efficiently;
- where impacts on sensitive environmental features or resources identified for protection can be avoided; and
- where the resulting urban framework can be fashioned to minimize urban sprawl through balanced community and transit-supportive design.

Major urban development, beyond that already committed in local and regional Official Plans, should be directed to those areas of Central Ontario that possess the optimum set of existing and programmed attributes as established by provincial policy initiatives.

In comparison to other areas of Central Ontario located beyond the GTA, the *Bradford Bond Head Planning Area* and, to a lesser extent, south Simcoe County in general, is extremely well positioned to accommodate expanded urban settlement when evaluated against past and current Provincial policy directions, servicing opportunities and constraints, the location of existing and committed regional transportation infrastructure investment, and external economic forces that influence where new growth should best occur.

Location is Key

As noted in Hemson Consulting's June 2001 report for MTO, "*Bradford is immediately adjacent to the York Region boundary and could easily be defined as part of the GTA, given the GO rail service into Bradford.*"

The high degree of integration between the *Bradford Bond Head Planning Area* and the GTA is reflected in the 2001 Census of Canada wherein the *Planning Area* and the Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury as a whole comprise part of the Census Metropolitan Area for the GTA. The *Bradford Bond Head Planning Area*, situated at the southern edge of Simcoe County, is located at the northerly terminus of urban growth extending north from the GTA. As such, the *Planning Area* constitutes a logical extension of the current growth pattern as it extends northward through York Region beyond the protected areas of the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Holland Marsh, along three major economic corridors, namely Highways 400, 404 and future 427. Based on its location relative to the GTA, the *Planning Area* finds itself under increasing development pressure as a consequence of its location on the edge of Canada's largest urban area.

Jobs Are Crucial

In its “Draft Simcoe County: Population, Household & Employment Forecasts Update (Jan. 2004)”, Hemson Consulting noted that a significant amount of marketable employment land is needed as the population in Simcoe County continues to grow. Hemson Consulting also confirmed that lands to support well-designed and attractive employment uses should be secured along the 400-series highways in locations that are large enough to provide for a wide range of uses and site sizes. Such potential employment locations should be concentrated around Highway 400 and the future Bradford By-pass, according to Hemson Consulting.

Given its strategic location at the junction of Highway 400 and the future Bradford By-pass, and its location relative to other thriving employment centres, the *Bradford Bond Head Planning Area* is extremely well positioned to attract needed employment opportunities and high quality jobs to south Simcoe County to support the present and future work force. Quite apart from its positioning relative to existing and planned transportation infrastructure, the *Planning Area* presents the first real opportunity for employment growth and investment north of the established employment areas located in the City of Vaughan along Highway 400, due to the intervening provincially protected Oak Ridges Moraine.

The work of the Smart Growth Panel (2003) accords an important future economic role to the *Bradford Bond Head Planning Area* based on recommended transportation and transit infrastructure improvements. These planned works will improve connectivity and accessibility to and from the *Planning Area*. In addition to its location at the junction of Highway 400 and the planned Bradford By-pass connecting the *Bradford Bond Head Planning Area* to both Highways 404 and 427, the *Planning Area* is strategically situated at the fulcrum of an east-west economic corridor identified by the Smart Growth Panel. As a result, the *Planning Area* finds itself in the enviable position of being the sole location north of Highway 407 and south of Lake Simcoe possessing such economically significant locational attributes. Clearly, among all other areas of Central Ontario beyond the GTA, the *Bradford Bond Head Planning Area* is the best location within Simcoe County and one of the best in Central Ontario to attract employment growth and foster the development of a jobs-led expanded community.