

Simcoe County Council



Rescue Lake Simcoe Charitable Foundation  
120 Primeau Dr.  
Aurora, ON L4G 6Z4

Submission to Simcoe County

Regarding the Municipal Comprehensive Review, 2021 - 2022

June 4, 2021

Dear members of Simcoe County Council,

The Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition is very concerned about the impacts of growth and phosphorus pollution on Lake Simcoe's health, and nowhere are we more concerned than here, with Simcoe County's Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR). This moment in time presents an opportunity for the County to plan for a resilient future, one that includes kids swimming in Lake Simcoe safely, one that enables many more people to use the bus for daily errands and visits, and go for a hike in nature. But this will not happen if you use the same old ways of doing things.

In this MCR I implore you to accept responsibility for planning for our delicate, and frankly worrying future. This is a future that we KNOW is impacted by climate change, and one that we should anticipate will be less socially and financially stable than the past. You need to build for community and environmental resiliency. Naturally I mean you should stop allowing the destruction of forests and wetlands. But I also mean that you need to plan for people whose overpriced housing is already impacting their ability to take care of other needs, wants, and plans. The South Simcoe Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan identifies housing as an area of risk, prioritized in four of its five geographic hubs<sup>1</sup>. This is not just going to go away without a change in approach to planning for housing.

The solution you must advance in this MCR is something that should have been a greater priority since the Growth Plan came into being - add density to your existing Towns. Strategic density improves environmental and community health outcomes. Both are needed.

We do not need isolated ghettos for low-income residents, as every planner knows. We need to efficiently absorb people into existing communities in granny suites, secondary suites, laneway housing, and other creative market-based mechanisms that spread the wealth among the many individuals providing extra housing options. Zoning needs to encourage middle density in strategic locations to support vibrant, walkable communities. Increasing density strategically can improve people's lives by increasing the viability and frequency of public transit. It can make it more likely that services locate in a

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<sup>1</sup> The South Simcoe Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan, Presentation to Council, May 26, 2021. Pg 14.  
<https://innisfil.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Id=553>

neighbourhood. It is undoing the north and south ends of Barrie, typified by low density commercial, nearly inaccessible except by car.

We have been following the work in Halton, Hamilton and York Region on the identification of growth scenarios for residents to consider, and we very strongly encourage Council to pursue the same approach in Simcoe County.

York Region and Durham Region started the MCR process with a public survey on priorities. Simcoe County does not seem to have a set of priorities or principles against which to gauge the appropriateness of various growth scenarios. In the absence of such, I have pulled the 2016 Official Plan goals and suggest that you could use these as guiding principles in the MCR.

The goals of this Plan (2016 Official Plan) are:

To protect, conserve, and enhance the County's natural and cultural heritage;

To achieve wise management and use of the County's resources;

To implement growth management to achieve lifestyle quality and efficient and cost-effective municipal servicing, development and land use;

To achieve coordinated land use planning among the County's local municipalities and with neighbouring counties, districts, regions, and separated cities, and First Nations lands;

To further community economic development which promotes economic sustainability in Simcoe County communities, providing employment and business opportunities; and

To promote, protect and enhance public health and safety.

### Questions for Council

1. Will you commit to evaluating the growth options presented by your planners against Simcoe County's Official Plan goals?
2. Contained in this question is a request that Simcoe County present growth options. Will Council endorse the presentation of growth options? How could the public make choices about future development if different growth scenarios are not presented?
3. Will Council endorse the presentation of an option in which settlement boundaries are fixed?
4. Will Council use other criteria such as those listed below in an effort to present the effect of various growth scenarios to its residents? If not, why not?

### Suggested additional criteria for interpreting the effect of various growth scenarios

I would suggest that in addition to using the Official Plan goals, in this MCR, Simcoe County should establish some other criteria against which to evaluate the effect of various growth scenarios.

How will each growth option Simcoe County presents benefit the community, both in existing communities and in new greenfield communities? Will it:

- Increase or decrease access to public transit?
- Increase or decrease the proportion of affordable housing?
- Increase or decrease public greenspace on a per capita basis?

- Increase or decrease the extent of agricultural land?
- Increase or decrease the extent of natural areas (forests, wetlands, valleys, grasslands)?
- Increase or decrease property taxes?
- Increase proportional salt from roads polluting our waterways?
- Increase or decrease phosphorus loads to receiving bodies of water?
- Increase or decrease personal vehicle GHG emissions from Simcoe County?
- What are the costs of servicing each of the growth options (infrastructure building and maintenance, and taxation required to maintain each option, on a per household basis)

### Land Needs Assessment challenges and opportunities

The Land Needs Assessment (LNA) allows extensive flexibility for municipalities to develop their own options on how to accommodate the Growth Plan forecasts. Conducting the following analyses in the lead up to the presentation of growth options is critical for ensuring that the population is allocated to 2051 without providing more permits than necessary. This is significant as the first goal of the Official Plan is to “To protect, conserve, and enhance the County's natural and cultural heritage.” If this is a goal the County intends to demonstrate efforts towards achieving, then the County must not approve an oversupply of land to accommodate growth to the 2051 planning horizon.

- Provide an assessment of what types of housing units people can afford - this is a requirement of the Growth Plan. The growth option chosen must improve housing affordability for more people in low income households;
- Provide an assessment of how people can be accommodated in houses which will be freed up as people age and either downsize or pass away. (The parents of the boomers and most boomers will no longer be with us by 2051 - this will free up 1 million ground related houses in the GTA region which could accommodate 3 million people (at 3 people/unit).)
- For employment lands, provide a breakdown of vacancy rates in existing employment lands.

We note that Simcoe County residential land budget to 2031 is characterized by an oversupply 75,080 units that are permitted but not built.<sup>2</sup> These have been assumed to be occupied according to Hemson’s

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<sup>2</sup> “ii. Updated Building Permits

- As provided by the County, updated building permit information is complete to December 31, 2019 and has been incorporated into the update. Development for which building permits have been issued is considered part of the growth in units to 2019 from a 2016 Census base. For the purposes of this analysis, it is assumed that the units have become occupied by usual residents.“

And Table 1 - Simcoe Residential Land Budget by Municipality 2019-2031, which shows an oversupply of housing of 75,080 units.

Source: Hemson, Memorandum Re: SC – Update to residential land budget. Oct 6, 2020.

work so far. They are not. This makes no sense. Arguably those 75,080 permitted units could accommodate most of the growth to 2051, at 3 people per unit, after analyzing the points above. The rest could be accommodated in infill within existing settlement boundaries across the County.

Finally, I refer you to the Simcoe Muskoka Health Unit's recommendations, "Healthy Community Design: Policy Statements for Official Plans" 2014, for further support for using planning to promote better health, community and environmental health outcomes.

We are in a climate crisis and a housing crisis, and Lake Simcoe is threatened. This MCR matters a lot. It is not just an administrative update, as described by staff, it is an opportunity to improve the lives of residents now and in the future. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Claire Malcolmson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Claire Malcolmson

Executive Director

Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition

*The Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition is a lake-wide member-based organization, representing 26 groups in the Lake Simcoe watershed, that provides leadership and inspires people to take action to protect Lake Simcoe. [www.rescuelakesimcoe.org](http://www.rescuelakesimcoe.org)*