



Open Letter to the Oro-Medonte Community Regarding the City of Orillia Municipal Comprehensive Review and the City of Barrie's Boundary Expansion Request

February 3, 2025

As you may be aware through local media coverage, the Township is facing urban expansion pressure on its borders with the City of Orillia and the City of Barrie.

Council understands the impact of potential boundary expansions on our community. Addressing requests from our neighbouring communities in a proper manner continues to be a priority for Oro-Medonte Council and Township staff. As Mayor, I feel it is important to provide an update on where we are at with both municipalities, based on the facts as we know them.

City of Orillia Process

In May 2021, as part of the City of Orillia's Official Plan Update, the City looked at ways of accommodating additional population to 2051. As part of the City's process, a Technical Land Evaluation on lands that could be considered for settlement area boundary expansion was completed. The City also looked within its municipal boundary for opportunities to increase the density of development to accommodate the additional population. This process included community and stakeholder consultation, and completion of a number of technical studies which reviewed agricultural impact, water resources, community connectivity, emergency services, and municipal servicing requirements. Working with the City, the Township has been actively involved in the process to address traffic at the Line 15 and Bass Lake Sideroad area, pedestrian infrastructure, environmental impacts to Bass Lake and area wetlands, and the protection of prime agricultural lands.

As the review process has evolved, the areas for potential expansion have decreased, and now includes lands in both the Township of Oro-Medonte and Township of Severn. The City has determined that it will require a minimum of 279.5 acres of land for community facilities, schools, and employment, as well as additional land for residential expansion. It is important to note that additional land for residential expansion ranges from the possibly of no additional land required, to a 202 acre requirement based on intensification/density of development.

As a next step, the City of Orillia will be considering a staff report at a Special Meeting of Council on February 4, 2025, which will seek direction on intensification targets and confirm residential land needs. Following this, additional study/work will be required to further determine appropriate lands. The Township continues to work collaboratively with the City of Orillia to ensure well planned and coordinated growth that will benefit both Oro-Medonte, and the City of Orillia. More information regarding the process

including the staff report that will be discussed at the February 4, 2025 Special Meeting of Council, can be found here [Planning for the Future - City of Orillia](#).

City of Barrie Process

In contrast, the City of Barrie has chosen a different approach.

In late 2023, City of Barrie Mayor Nuttall made a presentation to Oro-Medonte Council, that included a proposal to expand the boundaries of the City of Barrie into the Township of Oro-Medonte for employment/industrial purposes.

The requested municipal boundary expansion includes lands east of Penetanguishene Road, south of Gore Road, west of Line 1 South, north of the Shanty Bay rural settlement area, and environmentally protected wetlands to the east. The area comprises of approximately 772 hectares (1,907 acres) of land and consists of active farmland and environmentally sensitive features. Additional lands were also identified for expansion into Springwater Township.

Township of Oro-Medonte Council was not supportive of the City of Barrie's proposed municipal boundary expansion as requested and presented.

In early 2024, in response to the City of Barrie's 2023 presentation and proposal, the Township of Oro-Medonte and the County of Simcoe engaged Hemson Consulting ("Hemson") to undertake a [Review of Barrie Employment Land Needs](#). The April 2024 review concluded that:

- 1) the City of Barrie has sufficient employment lands as outlined in their Official Plan; and
- 2) the proposed boundary adjustment lands in the Township of Oro-Medonte are not well suited for employment uses.

Assistance was requested from the Province of Ontario to address the City of Barrie's perceived requirement for additional employment/industrial lands, and in June 2024, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing assigned a Deputy Provincial Land and Development Facilitator to assist with discussions between the Township of Oro-Medonte, Township of Springwater, City of Barrie, and the County of Simcoe.

The intended purpose of the facilitated discussions is to develop mutually acceptable approaches to enable growth in the broader region, while fulfilling local objectives, and facilitating Provincial housing objectives. Council agreed to participate in the discussions on this basis

To date, a series of facilitated discussions have taken place. As a first step, it was agreed there is a need to determine whether additional employment and/or residential land is actually needed within and around the City of Barrie, Township of Oro-Medonte, and the Township of Springwater.

In September 2024, Hemson was engaged to undertake a Joint Land Needs Analysis and Study to complete this determination. On December 11, 2024, a Township staff report and presentation by Hemson was presented to Council. You are encouraged to take time to review this information available on the Township's website by visiting oro-medonte.ca/cbber.

- Direct link to Township staff report - bit.ly/40EyufH
- Direct link to Hemson Consulting presentation – bit.ly/40QZx94
- Direct link to Joint Land Needs Analysis and Study – bit.ly/3CkCpGF

The report concluded the following:

- Barrie is challenged in meeting the residential density targets as outlined in the Municipal Comprehensive Review completed in 2019 and Official Plan approved in 2022.
- Historical growth patterns suggest that the density of residential development occurring in the City of Barrie is not as it was originally anticipated/planned for.
- Barrie’s rate of housing growth will need to increase to meet the City’s Housing Pledge of 23,000 units by 2031 and long-term forecast. The historic rate of growth from 2006-2021 has been 625 units. To achieve this pledge, the City would require a substantial increase in housing starts, an average of 2,300 units per year from 2022-2031.
- The City will need between 265 hectares (654 acres) and 630 hectares (1,557 acres) to accommodate residential and community land needs (commercial, small-scale employment, parks, institutional development such as schools, etc.).
- If a land annexation is being contemplated, an additional range of 125 hectares (309 acres) to 300 hectares (741 acres) of employment land be considered.

The December 11, 2024 Hemson report outlines two broad options for addressing the City of Barrie’s request – maintain municipal boundaries and consider a Cross Border Servicing Agreement, or adjust municipal boundaries. Next steps were also identified including consideration for further review moving the process to Stage 3. To view Hemson’s presentation to Oro-Medonte Council, please see bit.ly/40QZx94.

Following receipt of the same report from Hemson, through a motion of Council, the City of Barrie identified:

“That an updated request to include the Little Lake Area Lands in addition to the 4000 acres of gross land, be forwarded to the Province of Ontario and Provincial Land Facilitator with a request for this matter to be dealt with in an expeditious manner”

On January 22, 2025, Township staff presented a report to Oro-Medonte Council which provided an overview of the December 11, 2024 Hemson Report, and recommendations for next steps. The report highlights a number of issues and questions which need to be addressed including:

- The Township questions Barrie’s unfounded assertion of the need for additional land – 4000 acres.
- Given the lower density of development occurring in its built-up areas and greenfield areas, the City of Barrie’s population targets outlined in its Official Plan do not appear attainable.

- In February of 2023, the City of Barrie pledged to “facilitate the construction” of 23,000 housing units by 2031 or 2,875 units per year between 2023 to 2031. The City of Barrie has reported that 3,422 dwelling units started between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2024. An over 40% shortfall of 2,328 units over the two-year period. To review building progress in Barrie, please see [Building Progress in Barrie | City of Barrie](#). As outlined in the Hemson Report, achieving this target would “far exceed any single year’s peak housing start during Barrie’s growth surge in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s, and would be four times the recent annual average of 600 units per year between 2006 and 2021.” Even if Barrie was to acquire additional lands for development, it would be unrealistic to assume these lands could be brought to market and developed prior to 2031.
- The need for housing in the area is being met by all municipalities in the Barrie Census area – Barrie, Innisfil, Essa, Springwater and Oro-Medonte.
- The April and December 2024 Hemson reports clearly identify Barrie does not need additional employment lands.

In the best interest of Oro-Medonte and the Simcoe County region, Council determined that an appropriate next step is to inform the Provincial Land Development Facilitator that Oro-Medonte is prepared to continue to be involved in facilitated discussions.

Further, Council has indicated that Stage 3 of the process be amended to include answers to a number of the points discussed above, and objectively affirm the City of Barrie’s land requirements. Council also informed the Provincial Land Development Facilitator that given findings of Hemson reports, employment lands should no longer form part of the Stage 3 review, given employment lands requested by the City of Barrie are unsubstantiated.

The Township has clearly articulated and indicated on multiple occasions that the City of Barrie is the hub for our region, and that we are willing to work with the City to find an amicable solution to address the City’s need to grow as a major urban centre.

The Township is of the view that following a process, that is grounded in proper land use planning, including substantiating the type of land requested (i.e. employment/industrial lands), with an outcome allowing all communities to prosper, is in the best interests of all parties, and the Province of Ontario. There is no rush to get this work done. Ample land is available in Barrie for growth. Let’s get it right. We firmly believe discussions should be concentrated on the Province of Ontario’s mandate to build more homes faster, and remain focused on providing the best solution for the Simcoe County region for the long term.

For additional information and background regarding the City of Barrie Boundary expansion request, please visit oro-medonte.ca/cbber. Information provided on this page is factual, timely, and accurate.

Mayor Randy Greenlaw
Township of Oro-Medonte