

# STAFF REPORT



**TO:** Development Services Committee

**FROM:** Nathan Wukasch, Planner

**SUBJECT:** Growth Management Official Plan Update  
Nodes and Corridors Strategy

**DATE:** October 15, 2015

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

“THAT Development Services Committee recommends that Council receive the Growth Management Official Plan Update Report and provide staff with direction to proceed with a Nodes and Corridors Strategy to growth management and intensification in Wasaga Beach.”

## **BACKGROUND:**

In 2005, the Province of Ontario released the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Places to Grow). This legislation provides direction on where and how to grow on a broader scale, with the goal of creating healthy and balanced communities by intensifying growth within built up areas to better use existing infrastructure and public transit. The Growth Plan was amended in 2013 to create specific growth policies for Simcoe County: Wasaga Beach was allocated a population target of 27,500 people and an employment target of 3,500 jobs by 2031.

The County of Simcoe recently updated their Official Plan to include growth management policies that give direction to lower tier municipalities, such as Wasaga Beach. In addition, the Province issued a revised Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) in 2014.

The Town must establish a strategy for managing growth to be consistent with Provincial direction from the Growth Plan, the PPS 2014, and the Simcoe County Official Plan. The Town needs to create a plan on where to allow higher density growth to occur within the municipality, and amend the Official Plan to create policies to implement the plan. The Province identifies ‘intensification’ as the development of property at a higher density than currently exists through redevelopment, development of vacant or underutilized lots within developed areas, infill development, and the expansion or conversion of existing buildings.

## **DISCUSSION:**

Council’s priorities include the development of a ‘Main Street’ into a downtown core, and achieving a greater variety of housing types that includes rental or condominium apartments that are affordable for residents, seniors, and people with disabilities.

This report outlines a strategy which builds upon these Council priorities. Specifically, this report outlines a strategy to create a growth management plan which directs intensification to ‘nodes’ of growth in Wasaga Beach. The recommended approach would amend the policies of the Official Plan to direct that forms of ‘intensive’ and ‘mixed-use’ growth be concentrated in central nodes within the Town. The proposed strategy would assist the Town in achieving the above-mentioned priorities of Council.

The Town has historically developed as a cottage community in a linear manner along the beach, while respecting major natural heritage features such as the Nottawasaga River, wetland complexes, and the Provincial Park reserve area. The urban form of the Town is mainly low density residential housing with linear commercial/employment areas along the major roads within the transportation network. Consequently, the Town's commercial activity has concentrated in nodes at arterial road intersections and along corridors. These concentrations have occurred in a car-oriented, suburban form which is not generally pedestrian-friendly, and therefore lack a sense of place.

In order to meet provincial direction and Council priorities, Staff propose a growth management strategy that will be deliberate about intensifying growth and encouraging mixed-use activity in targeted nodes and corridors within the built boundary. The 'Nodes and Corridors' strategy will focus development efforts on areas of the Town that are desirable focal points for public and private investment. The Town will need to amend the Official Plan to put policies and mapping in place to support this strategy. By strategically designating where we want our growth to occur, we will also be establishing where higher-density growth may not occur in order to maintain the character of stable neighbourhoods containing low density residential housing.

Nodes are places where people and transportation routes congregate because of the concentration of commercial, employment and other service-oriented activities that bring people together. Corridors are important transportation routes through the Town that connect the nodes together, and often are areas which incorporate a mix of retail, employment, and residential uses along arterial/collector roads and transit routes.

There are four existing nodes of activity in Wasaga Beach, and one node that is designated for future development. The existing nodes include, from east to west:

- a) the Main Street Area (Beach Area One and Two/Main Street/River Road West),
- b) Old Mosley Village,
- c) the Schoonertown Area (Sunnidale Road to River Road West), and
- d) 45<sup>th</sup> Street/Mosley Street.

The fifth node is located in the area of Mosley Street and Highway 26/Beachwood Road/Lyons Court, and is currently planned for Service Commercial, District Commercial, and Industrial uses in the Official Plan. Their locations are mapped in Appendix A. Each of these nodes is unique, and may serve a different function for the community in the long-term growth management plan. The Mosley Street arterial road corridor links these nodes together in a linear manner, and contains a wide range of land uses that could be focussed in a more effective manner.

In this strategy, Staff propose to assess the Town's nodes for their strengths and weaknesses, and establish a hierarchy amongst the nodes, to prioritize where planning efforts should be focussed to encourage intensification activity. The goal is to strengthen each node and associated corridors, through policies to encourage compact mixed-use development including higher-density residential housing which transitions seamlessly into the surrounding low density neighbourhoods. Ideally, compact nodal urban form will eventually change people's travel habits away from car-oriented shopping to pedestrian and cycling trips. This is a long-term planning exercise: initial efforts will establish Town-wide intensification policies, but detailed planning policy work should focus on the node which is determined to be the highest-priority. In time, each of the Town's nodes have the

potential to become unique and vibrant centres that draw residents to a comfortable people-friendly environment within walking distance of their homes.

A separate report has been provided to Council recommending creation of a downtown area. Over the coming months, the Town proposes to engage the community in a discussion on where and how to grow. This conversation naturally revolves around the existing nodes. The goal is to establish consensus on where to focus compact mixed-use and intensification efforts, which includes downtown place-making for Wasaga Beach. In the highest-priority node, the goal would be to create a compact, transit-oriented, pedestrian-friendly area where higher concentrations of residential uses mixed with employment, retail and institutional uses are located. The Town's corridors would also be examined from a growth management perspective to determine the highest and best land uses for those areas. A key element for corridor planning is achieving mixed-use intensification, if appropriate, while maintaining the character of surrounding established residential neighbourhoods.

The advantages to the Nodes and Corridors strategy include the following:

- Defining existing nodes and creating a plan to improve them into compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly places.
- Focusing specific types of commercial activities to targeted areas to support market needs.
- Containing compact higher-density residential growth in conjunction with commercial activity in targeted nodes, both of which support each other.
- Enhancing existing nodes by creating a sense of place that encourages people to live, walk, shop, and support commercial activity.
- Limiting intensification from occurring in established low density neighbourhoods to maintain their character.
- Creating policies that encourage an appropriate transition between compact higher-density mixed-use development and surrounding lower-density stable neighbourhoods.

There will continue to be proposals for higher densities of development outside the existing nodes. The goal will be to focus the higher-density mixed-use activity in the nodes, and establish appropriate criteria for development outside nodes while maintaining neighbourhood character where possible.

## **CONCLUSION:**

This report outlines a Nodes and Corridors strategy to growth management for the Town of Wasaga Beach. The goal is to amend the policies of the Official Plan and develop a policy framework to focus where compact higher-density mixed-use development activity and investment will occur. This strategy will assist the Town in meeting certain priorities of Council. Staff recommend that Development Services Committee and Council direct staff to commence the Growth Management Official Plan Update with the establishment of a Nodes and Corridors strategy to intensification.

Respectfully submitted,

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Planner

# Wasaga Beach Growth Management Official Plan Update Nodes and Corridors Strategy

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