

## **Clarington's Official Plan is under review**

### **And here's why you should care**

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By Jennifer Stone

CLARINGTON -- By 2031, there will be about 65,000 more people living in Clarington.

Where will they go? How will the Municipality preserve green space and curb sprawl? What would people like the community to look like by then?

Two documents under review are going to help answer those questions. Both the Region's and Clarington's Official Plans are being updated. And in Clarington, planning director David Crome hopes residents will take time to provide their opinions on how they'd like to see the anticipated growth move forward.

"(Clarington's) Official Plan is a framework for the Municipality in terms of how growth will proceed," Mr. Crome said. "It sets the stage on how tax dollars will be spent."

And while builders tend to be quick to make their opinions known on how they'd like to see the Municipality proceed with growth, Mr. Crome said it's important for the public to make their feelings known as well. The more residents let the Municipality know how they'd like their community to look in the future, the more the Official Plan will reflect residents' priorities and wishes, Mr. Crome said.

"The stronger the public influence, the better the OP will be."

Clarington will face some challenges. The municipality's three lakeshore communities -- Newcastle, Bowmanville and Courtice -- are all, under provincial legislation, allowed to expand. But how they expand will be dealt with in the OP, including setting urban boundaries. Details like how future growth could be phased in are among the input Mr. Crome hopes to glean from the public.

A recent round of information sessions showed several consistent priorities from the public. For example, most said the lifestyle in Clarington was to their liking. Concerns tended to revolve around ensuring infrastructure kept pace with growth and farmland being taken out of production.

Maintaining farmland and green space is a key component of both provincial legislation and the guidelines to be put in place by the official plan.

"In North America, there's this deep-seeded sense that cities are bad, that the country is good, and that we want to escape from cities to the suburban environment," Mr. Crome said. "What we wound up having is the worst of both worlds."

That's because cities wind up not functioning as intended and there ends up being "countryside that isn't really countryside." To combat this, planners are looking at a concept known as Smart Growth.

"The idea of Smart Growth is to increase density in urban areas, have less private amenity space (like big yards) and high quality public amenity space," Mr. Crome explained. Also involved is a good transit system and a better mix of land uses.

"I think people understand the idea, the concept, but it's not why they came to Clarington, so it's a hard sell," Mr. Crome said.

But some segments of the population -- the aging population seeking different housing choices, newer Canadians more accustomed to multi-residential dwellings and many young professionals -- are more likely to embrace the idea, he said.

Clarington's official plan review is a three-year project to be completed in phases. At each step, there will be opportunities for public input. As well, over the course of this summer, a community survey will be conducted to better gauge community opinion on what the plan should include. It's important for people to participate, the planning director said.

"Everyone should think about what sort of community they want to live in 25 years from now," Mr. Crome said.