

Growth plan riddled with holes

I read with interest the Neptis Foundation's recent report concerning the loopholes within the provincial Growth Plan and wondered why it has taken Neptis so long to report on a situation that has been quite obvious to many rural residents of the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) for several years.

The government's original plan of Smart Growth relied on unrealistic dreams as to how growth should be controlled. However, when examining the cliché-ridden document, you find that there has been no true attempt to actually achieve the goals it purports.

A favourite on the government's wish list was what it terms 'Complete Communities.' These would be self-supporting communities where residents would live, work and play, making commuting to large urban centres no longer necessary.

Unfortunately, the government believed that these communities would simply evolve naturally, with no financial inducements or infrastructure support. The reality is that there are few true complete communities in southern Ontario.

The Toronto and Hamilton axis casts a deep shadow within the province and in this shadow are many towns and villages that are simply dormitories for people working in the two cities.

A semblance of what you would call a complete community could be Kitchener-Waterloo or cities and towns that are simply too far from Toronto/Hamilton to be commutable.

So what did our illustrious government do to accommodate the increasing population in the GGH? They came up with the concept of 'intensification.' In other words, the government determined that there would be more homes per hectare and we would all have to live closer to each other in highly serviced communities.

However, when it came to the 'crunch' they left it to the land developers to create this dream and businessmen being businessmen, the developers took the more profitable route and built high-end homes on land around our rural villages; land which they had been sitting on for many years. And almost overnight these underserved communities with little infrastructure were inundated with new homes and population.

If the new home developers had constructed affordable and appropriate housing for the growing population in places identified by the report as being desirable, there would be no housing shortage. But no, they took advantage of a naïve government and encroached on these rural towns and villages and began building as many as seven one million dollar plus homes on a space where in the past they would have built maybe just three. All in the name of intensification. They then went laughing to the bank with their additional bounty.

Meanwhile, the normal 'Joe' has been pushed farther and farther away from the Toronto/Hamilton axis looking for affordable and practical housing, which in turn has created an ever-increasing burden on our highways and the air we breathe.

While the government has created an admirable Greenbelt that will protect agricultural land surrounding Toronto and Hamilton, it has failed to fund true complete communities and has allowed sprawl to spread to communities that are simply incapable of handling it.

One has to wonder how much thought the government really put into their Growth Plan in allowing this inappropriate housing to be developed in locations that lacked the infrastructure to accommodate it. If it was not incompetence one might conjecture that it was collusion between the powers that be and the homebuilders.

Finally, King Township is a perfect example of this misguided plan. In the past five years the population has grown by 23%. It is now the 15th fastest growing community of between 5,000 and 200,000 inhabitants located in a census metropolitan area in Canada. What was a tranquil, rural landscape dotted with small villages is becoming a congested outer suburb of Toronto.

Mike Shackleford

Schomberg