Examining the Impacts of Large Scale Development in the Township of Tay

Rural Planning and Development
School of Environmental Design and Rural Development
University of Guelph

Jonathan Pauk

Date

Wayne Caldwell
Advisor

Date

Harry Cummings
Advisory Committee
Introduction

Many rural communities throughout the province of Ontario have the benefit of various bodies of water that attract the establishment of large scale shoreline developments. Currently, the Township of Tay is experiencing an increasing amount of tourism-related development at an unprecedented rate in its history where the tourism and housing industry is creating significant growth opportunities throughout the Township. Thus, accurate shoreline mitigation and management starts with planning. Planners have the ability to help identify and protect natural shoreline environments. Appropriate shoreline policies help to mitigate development on popular shorelines and shift undesired development patterns. In addition, planners also have the ability to help identify alternative development strategies that better suit a particular area or region. As the demand for aesthetically pleasing developments along shorelines increases, so does the need for effective shoreline management strategies. Relatedly, in the Township of Tay and many other surrounding cottage county regions, municipalities must address the issue of large scale shoreline developments.

While municipalities carefully review proposed large scale developments, occasionally there is little regard that is given to consider how the development will shape the character of the municipality in the future. There are few land use planning strategies that exist which planners can use to mitigate the social and economic impacts of development patterns on rural communities, more specifically in shoreline areas. In some cases, large scale shoreline developments are not planned from a community-wide development perspective and driven by the monetary benefits on behalf of the developer. Utilizing the proposed Skyline development in Port McNicoll located along Georgian Bay as a case study, this paper will examine the current land use planning practices surrounding large scale developments, while offering best practices for large-scale shoreline development applications in rural communities.

Problem Statement

The shorelines in the Georgian Bay basin are among some of the most pristine and visually appealing in Ontario. However, these shorelines are under stress due to urbanization and increased shoreline development. Adapting to this increased development requires rigorous land use planning practices as well as commitment by planners to accurately manage shoreline development pressures. The purpose of this research paper is to offer recommendations to
planning authorities in Ontario that are currently experiencing an increase of shoreline development applications. Further, this research paper is hoped to provide a proactive approach to planning through a series of best practices to consider when planning for development along the shorelines in the Georgian Bay basin.

Goals and Objectives

Research objectives will be achieved by first introducing the issues surrounding large scale developments in rural areas followed by a statement of goals and objectives. Background information on the Township of Tay will include the area’s history regional growth patterns. Following this, a background on the proposed Skyline development in Port McNicoll will be presented and will investigate the importance of considering the character and long term goals of rural communities. The goals of this research paper are to: 1) analyze the applicable provincial and local policies that pertain to the Skyline development and 2) offer a series of best practices for large scale shoreline developments in areas of the Georgian Bay basin. Therefore, helping to ensure more effective land use planning practices along sensitive shoreline areas. It is anticipated that this report will help to reveal a more effective land use planning strategy that the municipalities in the Georgian Bay Basin region could consider implementing into their land use planning practices.

Planning Structure in Ontario

The Province of Ontario approaches planning matters through a policy driven system. This system utilizes a top-down approach in which the Provincial Government issues policy direction that the upper and lower tier municipalities must follow. The Planning Act is the primary legislation that governs provincial powers over all planning matters within Ontario. The Planning Act sets the foundation for land use planning in Ontario, including delegating powers to various levels of authority throughout the Province. One important section of The Planning Act outlines ‘matters of provincial interest’. This list covers a range of matters from protecting a variety of natural resources to maintaining infrastructure - all of which are matters the province wishes to continuously protect and enhance. Further, the Planning Act allowed for the creation of the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS). This document acts as the foremost policy statement to explain how the province wishes to develop its matters of interest. The PPS provides strict
Regional Trends in the Great Toronto Area

Rural communities throughout Ontario are experiencing significant land use changes as seasonal urban populations travel or relocate to cottage country regions to partake in leisure and recreational activities. Rural areas surrounding the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) have experienced an increase in large scale developments, especially along pristine shoreline areas to attract even greater seasonal urban populations.

It is evident that many rural communities throughout southern Ontario are experiencing growth pressures from large urban centers, especially for those communities in close proximity to the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH). Illustrated in the map on the right is the number of rural settlement areas in the GGH. Most (78%) of the rural settlement area land is located in the Outer Ring and 22% is located in the Inner Ring (The Neptis Foundation, 2014). This illustrates the number of vulnerable rural communities in proximity of large urban centers, more specifically the communities along the coast of Georgian Bay. In addition, as stated by Wayne Caldwell, these rural communities will face levels of growth that will see them undergo a significant transformation. The seventeen (17) Counties and Regions in closest proximity to Toronto for example are forecast to grow by more than 45% between 2006 and 2031 (Caldwell, 2010). This illustrates the growth pressure struggles for rural communities will continue be a common trend in the future and must be accurately planned for. Both population growth and increased land use development have many associated economic benefits. However, the increase of permanent and seasonal residents creates a greater demand for municipal services and consequently putting more stress on
shoreline environments. Thus, increase development pressures will force municipalities to be proactive in planning to ensure adequate servicing for community members.

**Township of Tay Background**

The Township of Tay has a mix of both urban and rural areas and is located in south-central Ontario that has a land area of 139 km² and a population density of seventy (70) people per square kilometer (Statistics Canada, 2012). The Township of Tay is comprised of four small urban communities that have both recreational and seasonal development along their shorelines. With a population of 9,736 in 2011, the Township of Tay saw a minor decrease (0.1%) in population size since 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2012). This can likely be attributed to the trend of the Township’s large aging population which many rural communities in Ontario experience. The Township of Tay’s waterfront is complemented by the Tay Trail that utilizes a former Canadian National Railroad (CPR) right-of-way. In addition, a large number of marinas, residential developments and numerous cottages have been constructed along many areas in the Township. The rural areas of the Township include approximately forty different farming operations that amount to more than ten thousand acres (Fegarty, 2012).

The local government in Township of Tay is a two-tiered municipal government consisting of an upper tier, the County of Simcoe and lower tier, which includes seventeen local municipalities. The Township of Tay is responsible for land use planning, emergency services, recreational programs and park maintenance. The four settlement areas in the Township of Tay include Waubaushene, Victoria Harbour, Port McNicoll and Waverly. This research paper will focus on the settlement area of Port McNicoll - the second largest settlement area in the Township of Tay. Port McNicoll is a former CPR port that was originally constructed as a port for the CPR’s Great Lakes Service located on Georgian Bay.
Case Study

In May 2011, Skyline Development Inc. submitted an application to the Township of Tay for a Zoning By-Law Amendment and Site Plan Application for a proposed yacht club. The design for the property aims to reclaim a brownfield area along the waterfront that is along approximately 11 kilometers of shoreline as shown in the image on the right. In addition, it includes a network of open space linked to Tay Shore Trail. The mixed-use development proposes to include over 1,400 new homes that range in size and styles. The development also includes 352,000 square feet of commercial, civic and cultural uses, 108,000 square feet of traditional neighbourhood conveniences, recreation-oriented shops and services, specialty retail shops, cafes, restaurants, and entertainment uses and approximately 244,000 square feet of other office, civic and cultural uses. The proposed yacht club is located on the west side of the harbour as shown in the images below.

(Skelton Brumwell & Associates Inc., 2012)

Social, Environmental and Economic Impact Analysis

Land use planning is a unique mechanism that can be used to coordinate comprehensive decisions about the use of land and resources. Land use planning in its entirety is planning for a better future for communities. Land use planners must seek a balance between the social, environmental and economic goals of communities. Addressing these needs at the time of development proposals will help to ensure effective management of shorelines.
The increase in large scale developments often attempt to create and commercialize an artificial deception of the existing community, such as the case study investigated above. The initial response of many residents in Port McNicoll is the possibility of the new nearby large scale development will reduce their wellbeing, lessen their access to local services and degrade their own immediate environment due to the impact of increased seasonal population that the development will draw.

The resentment towards this type of development is partly due to the expectations that residents have for their surrounding land uses. Homeowners near the subject lands expect to be able to keep their view of the lake and natural heritage features. In addition, some residents may believe that the increased nearby development will result in lower quality municipal services for them. In general, residents can be resistant to change and uncertainty concerning their neighbourhood and neighbours. As stated by Whitehead et. al (2015), “residents may be worried about whether the market might respond to development by reducing the prices of existing dwellings as a result of increased supply, or whether demand might decrease as a result of the degradation of local attributes. These issues are core to the longer-term acceptability of new development” (Whitehead, Sagor, Edge, & Walker, 2015). This may further add to the resentment of the large scale development. In addition, as the images on the right illustrate, many of the elements of the proposal have attempted to brand the local lifestyle into the proposed development by using architectural elements of the existing buildings downtown Port McNicoll. By doing so, developers inherently change the way of life that drew people to the area in the first place (Chipeniuk, 2008). For the local residents in Tay, this further contributes to the resentment towards large scale development projects in their community.

While much of the development has been designed to consider many environmental aspects, there are still concerns about what impacts it will have on the surrounding area socially. As mentioned above, the Township of Tay is a relatively small rural municipality with limited small scale residential development along its shorelines. A vast majority of the Township’s
shorelines consist of small cottages and open park space. A large scale development of this nature will dramatically increase the growing number of seasonal residents in the Tay area. As stated by Gosnell and Abrams, a development of this nature may be referred to a notion called “Amenity Migration.” This term refers to “the movement of people based on the draw of natural and/or cultural amenities, can be thought of as both driver and outcome of this transition, resulting in significant changes in the ownership, use, and governance of rural lands, as well as in the composition and socioeconomic dynamics of rural communities” (Gosnell & Abrams, 2005). Thus, the social impacts must be carefully evaluated before the final approval is given and building permits are issued. In addition, the associated impacts and repercussion of amenity led development strategies present a significant challenge to the social structure of rural communities (The Banff Center, 2012). The target audience of the development is evidently geared towards upper-class individuals that enjoy yachting on a recreational basis. With commercial mega-developments offering overnight representations of existing rural destinations, communities often fall victim to the reform of their communities through this sudden influx of development (Gill, 2012). The attractiveness of shoreline development may play a more direct role in the different kinds of residential development. For example, the development proposal features many recreational amenities such as the yacht club and a number of park spaces that act as the centerpiece for seasonal and permanent residential development. Large scale shoreline developments such as this however, are dependent on residential market forces that can affect success, and resort developers must pay close attention to economic trends, demographic shifts in population distribution, changing lifestyles, development regulation, and land supply (Phillips 1986). It is currently unknown exactly how this development may affect the shoreline in the future with regard to the already sensitive residential market in the Township. The importance of planning for this type of social and economic change is important in order to ensure that Georgian Bay’s natural shoreline areas are effectively managed.

As mentioned above, it should be recognized that the Skyline development is the largest project that has been proposed to the Township of Tay and the environmental impacts of the project must be carefully planned for and extensive research should be committed to. Thus, the developers of this particular project should apply what they learn from the Skyline development once all phases have been built out and try to create building solutions that have less negative impacts on the surrounding environment. If the developers do not learn from past development
projects, they will likely need to deal with social and economic changes. Potential costs of the proposed development may include: 1) pressure on municipal services; 2) pressure on road infrastructure; 3) the ability to foster community (social, economic and environmental costs); 4) the additional supply of housing and services may cause overall lower property values. This ultimately will reduce the wellbeing among those already living in Port McNicoll. The costs mentioned above will drive many population changes in rural localities.

It is evident that both marina and shoreline development is increasing in many areas surrounding the Georgian Bay basin. It appears that local businesses and governments are interested in increasing revenues from residential taxation and mooring fees. Local builders would thrive from the business it would give them and local recreational would be in support of the proposed yacht club as it would increase the public’s enjoyment of amenities in the region. This trend will likely continue as the amenities and the attraction of the Trent Severn Waterway is suitable for recreational boat users. Additionally, as shoreline development and growth in the region continues, an interdisciplinary approach is needed for the planning for the protection of shorelines and its wide range of impacts. An understanding of the economic drivers and negative environmental impacts of shoreline development is critical from a planning, regulatory, and development perspective.

**Applicable Policy Analysis**

**Provincial Policy Statement**

The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) was issued under Section 3 of the Planning Act and it is intended to provide policy direction for land use matters which are of Provincial interest. Planning Authorities are to be consistent with the PPS when exercising any authority. The PPS was created as a mechanism to control and help manage land use development. The PPS (2014) “sets the policy foundation for regulating the development and use of land” and “supports the provincial goal to enhance the quality of life” (OMMAH, 2014, p.1). Further, it states the minimum standards related to land use planning and development by providing positive directions, limitations and prohibitions as well as enabling and supportive language that can be interpreted by municipalities that are bound by the document. This portion of the research paper will review the PPS as it relates the proposed development proposal. Some of the more specific policies related to the proposal are reviewed below.
Among other matters, the PPS seeks to promote the development of communities that are socially, economically and environmentally strong and settlement areas will be the focus of growth. The Village of Port McNicoll is recognized as a settlement area. The settlement area policies in the PPS among other policies, encourage intensification and redevelopment and encourage development based on the suitability of planned or available infrastructure and promote redevelopment of brownfield sites. There are policies related to a wide range of uses within settlement areas as well as the efficient use of land. The subject lands of the proposed Skyline development utilize a brownfield site that was a formerly used for shipping and rail transport. The Official Plan and Zoning By-Law Amendments subject to this application seek to introduce commercial, tourism and employment uses through the development of a hotel, associated commercial uses, residential dwellings and the opportunity to accommodate for a cruise ship dock. A park and trail system will be implemented as part of the overall development of the pier and the hotel development area will be planned to integrate and compliment these recreational amenities. The site will be developed on full municipal services and will be accessed by a municipal road developed in conjunction with the draft plan of subdivision for ‘Cargill Pier’. Relating to natural heritage, there are no significant natural features that exist on or near the site with the exception of the Hogg Bay which is recognized as a Provincially Significant Wetland. However, no development is planned within the wetland and an appropriate buffer has been established in order to protect this natural feature from development.

Under provisions of the Planning Act, submissions that affect a planning matter “shall be consistent with” the PPS. The PPS is built around three fundamental planning matters, namely, “Building Strong Communities”, “Wise Use and Management of Resources” and, “Protecting Public Health and Safety.” It is clear that the Province of Ontario requires that planning decisions support the development of strong communities, maintain and clean and healthy environment and, support and maintain economic vitality. However, rarely are these developments planned for or undertaken from a community wide development perspective, but more so from an isolated development perspective wherein developers seek to protect their investment through regulations which support their version of a rural idyll (Stefanick, 2012). Regarding the Skyline development in Port McNicoll, applicable PPS matters relating to the subject application include: Section 1.1 provides a series of policy directions geared to managing growth to realize efficient
land use development. In particular, focusing growth to Settlement Areas as directed in Section 1.1.3 below:

Settlement areas are urban areas and rural settlement areas, and include cities, towns, villages and hamlets. Ontario’s settlement areas vary significantly in terms of size, density, population, economic activity, diversity and intensity of land uses, service levels, and types of infrastructure available (OMMAH, 2014, p.7).

In this regard, the subject application must seek approval for development within a settlement area, on full municipal services and is adjacent to the existing built up area of Port McNicoll. In addition, the proposed development includes a mix of housing types that in total introduces a broader range of unit types to the Port McNicoll community. The proposed development must be reviewed against are Section 1.5: Public Spaces, Parks and Open Space, Section 1.7 Long-Term Economic Prosperity and Section 2.0 Wise Use and Management of Resources. As proposed, the development of the site provides for economic development opportunities, utilizes an underutilized brownfield site, can be properly serviced, is within a settlement area, provides for residential intensification and meets the policies with respect to natural and cultural heritage. Thus, the proposed development can be considered to be consistent with the intentions of the PPS.

The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe

Tay Township is subject to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan). The Growth Plan was approved by the Province in June 2006 and is intended to guide building compact, vibrant and complete communities. The Growth Plan directs most growth to built-up areas of a community, intensification, transit supportive densities, protecting valuable natural resources, various economic policies and policies that relate to the development of complete communities.

The proposed development assists the Township in building a complete community by providing a mixture of land uses in an area scheduled to be part of a fully serviced plan of subdivision. Fully serviced areas are where the Growth Plan directs major growth. Port McNicoll is one of two fully serviced settlement areas within the Township and thus the development proposed is in an appropriate area. Services that will be utilized by the subject lands will be provided by the extension of the existing infrastructure that already exists in the community.

The development of the subject lands will add a greater diversity of uses to the community and provide potential for economic growth and employment as well as some
additional residential uses. The proposed hotel facility will require both full time and part time staff. In addition, supporting commercial businesses are expected to develop as a spin off from the hotel to service its users and the visiting public. The development of the subject lands will create an opportunity to accommodate a docking point for a commercial cruise vessel. If developed, this cruise line would generate additional economic benefits as a result of increased tourism. Locating both non-residential and residential uses on site and integrating them with proposed public trails and park space with help Port McNicoll move toward a more complete community as envisioned by the Growth Plan.

Township of Tay Official Plan

The purpose of the Official Plan for the Township of Tay is to provide a vision for the Township as a community of communities. The Plan provides guidelines for future development for both the public and private sectors with respect to land use designations and the principles of development (MDB Insight, 2015). In addition, the Official Plan contains a statement of goals, objectives and policies that are used to guide future growth and land use within the Township. The current Official Plan was adopted by Council on July 8th, 1998 and approved by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs on February 23rd, 1999 (The Corporation of the Township of Tay, 2017). The Township of Tay Official Plan designates the shoreline areas within the settlement areas which suggests that development is encouraged in this area. The overall intent of the Official Plan in this regard is to utilize existing settlements as the setting for urban uses and development. Related policies promote compact urban forms of development. Furthermore, it suggests that growth in these areas should be limited and states that it is not intended to contain a full range of services. Although all Official Plan policy has some bearing on the Zoning By-Law policies that pertain to this development. For example, Section 4.6 provides policies on Open Space and specifies intent for a range of leisure activities that includes preservation of natural features, maintenance and enhancement of vistas, beaches and waterfront lands. The proposed zoning will enable these intents through the proposed zones in the development.

As mentioned above, the Township’s Official Plan provides guidelines for development and the future of the Township. However, this poses limitations in that amendments can be made to the documents and these regulations are open to interpretation by the permitting agencies. It appears that applications can be made to fit into certain policies to push through development.
Thus, careful analysis of proposed zoning regulations must be done to ensure that the intent of the Zoning By-Law is maintained and the character of Port McNicoll is preserved.

**Best Practices for Large Scale Developments in Rural Communities**

Policies and planning mechanisms are necessary to support comprehensive decisions about shoreline development and rural economic development. These policies and mechanisms can vary and their effectiveness depends on the relationship between levels of government. All levels of government must work together to ensure that land use planning is consistent and by extension shoreline development is properly managed. Implementing shoreline preservation policies alone is not enough to ensure that shorelines will be protected and rural communities will prosper. A strong land use planning system establishes mechanisms to complement shoreline protection policies to promote good stewardship of the land. Policy development promotes an effective land use planning system. However, it is how these additional mechanisms are put into practice in conjunction with protection policies that establish the long term sustainability of this system.

The practical purpose of this report was to consider potential best practices that may be applied in the future or transferred to other regions that have similar challenges. Human activities involving shoreline development should be done in a way that consider the full range of social, economic and environmental impacts. Trends such as altering shorelines for aesthetic reasons and unwise large scale development can interrupt both social structure development and natural shore processes. Thus, accurate planning practices must be carried out and considered to address the wise management of shorelines. Furthermore, in regard to promoting effective land use planning practices, it is important for planners to act proactively towards the constantly changing environment, especially for issues concerning shoreline environments in the Georgian Bay basin region. It is difficult to find solutions to existing land use problems. Thus, it is important to have a proactive approach that aims to minimize the negative social, economic and environmental impacts that large scale shoreline developments may have on rural communities in the future.

For the municipalities in the Georgian Bay basin region, it would be beneficial for municipalities to implement a suitable action plan that incorporates land use planning, policy and an understanding of the shoreline developments at a regional scale. For practitioners in Ontario, it is suggested that the use of a document of this nature will help to minimize the impacts on
residents and surrounding property owners. In addition, it will assist municipalities and conservation authorities to implement proactive planning practices to help ensure long term sustainability for the region.

It is also important to note that the characteristics of rural shoreline communities in the Georgian Bay basin region vary significantly and that each type has a different ability to accommodate human development along their shorelines. Some municipalities in the region are stable and can withstand large types of development. Other municipalities are fragile and can be easily devastated by developments of this nature. Thus, it is important for planners to accurately know the nature of their respective municipality to help make wise development decisions for safe and sustainable enjoyment of the recreational elements of Georgian Bay’s shorelines.

Conclusion

The intent of this report was to provide community members, practitioners and municipalities with an understanding of the complexities of large scale shoreline developments and how sensitive rural communities can be to human-induced changes. Altering any elements pertaining shorelines should only be attempted after careful assessments of social, environmental and economic impacts have been completed.

Shorelines will continue to be desirable places to live, work, and play. The increase in shoreline development has created the need to consider large scale developments from a variety of angles before granting approval of such proposals. This paper has examined the proposed Skyline development in Port McNicoll and has illustrated that planning for large scale shoreline developments will continue to be a challenging issue for many rural municipalities in Ontario.

Based on the assessment of Ontario’s policies reviewed in this report, it has been illustrated that planning for shoreline protection is recognized by Ontario’s legislation. This report has analyzed the applicable policies that are associated with the development and has offered a series of best practices for practitioners in the Georgian Bay basin region. Land use planning and the protection of shoreline areas will continue to be an on-going concern of public interest in the Province of Ontario. It is anticipated that the implementation of these best practices will lead to stronger land use planning system when for planning for large scale developments in rural communities.
Works Cited


