

## Midhurst Secondary Plan - A brief history

### The Issue

Despite major violations to the *Provincial Policy Statement* and the *Places to Grow Act*, on **January 19, 2012, the Minister of Infrastructure authorised a “Special Rule”** to permit the development of 300 hectares of farmland (the first phase of a plan to build 10,000 homes on 756 hectares of farmland) surrounding the village of Midhurst, just north of Barrie in the Township of Springwater, Ontario. This paves the way to convert a village of 3,722 people surrounded by farms, into a city the size of Orillia in an area where there is no meaningful employment.

### Violations to the *Places to Grow Act*

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|---|---------------|
| 1. Reduce urban sprawl and highway gridlock   | Non-compliant |
| 2. Protect prime agricultural land  | Non-compliant |
| 3. Focus population intensification in intensification areas  | Non-compliant |
| 4. Building compact transit-supportive communities  | Non-compliant |
| 5. Reduce dependence on the automobile  | Non-compliant |
| 6. Providing convenient access to intra- and inter-city transit                                       | Non-compliant |
| 7. Planning and investing for a balance of jobs and housing   | Non-compliant |
| 8. Encourage cities and towns to develop as complete communities where people can live, play and work | Non-compliant |
| 9. Directing growth to areas that offer municipal wastewater systems                                  | Non-compliant |
| 10. Municipalities are encouraged to ensure the informed involvement of local citizens                | Non-compliant |

### Timeline

- 1998      The Springwater Official Plan describes an area around Midhurst, in Springwater Township, as a “Study Area” and states that further studies should determine whereabouts in this study area, future development should occur. Prime farmland was to be protected.
- 2006      The *IGAP*\* report studies population forecasts and the assimilative capacity of the Nottawasaga watershed. *IGAP* recommends that Barrie should be the main focus of growth in the Simcoe area. It notes that in 2006 there was already an adequate supply of approved housing to meet Simcoe’s growth projections through 2031.
- May 2008      Hemson report includes a 2031 proposed total population for Springwater Township of 26,500 - a growth from 2006 of 8,400 people. (In 2009, the proposed population for Springwater was scaled back by the Province to 24,000).
- Nov 2008      Springwater Township ignores all of the above and adopts the Midhurst Secondary Plan (OPA 38) to add 23,500 people to Midhurst (a village of 3,722 people).

- Oct 2011      After three years delay, the County of Simcoe mysteriously approves the Midhurst Secondary Plan.
- Oct 2011      The Province appeals the Simcoe decision to the OMB stating its reasons.
- Jan 2012      Ontario Regulation 311/06 is released in which the Minister enacts a “Special Rule” to permit the first phase of the Midhurst Secondary Plan. (It does not mention Midhurst or OPA 38 by name, but the legal terminology can be deciphered to reveal that the “Special Rule” was for Midhurst).
- Nov 2012      The Province partially withdraws its appeal to the OMB, removing a major obstacle to development.

The general public (with the exception of a few individuals) were unaware of the extent of the proposed huge developments for their village until November 14, 2011, when the Township announced the **approval** of this unnecessary, unpopular and irresponsible plan.

*\* IGAP. Intergovernmental Action Plan co-funded by the Province, Simcoe County and it's municipalities to recommend where future development should take place in Simcoe County. The study involved ten consultants and cost \$3 million.*

## **Opposition**

The Midhurst Secondary Plan is opposed by:

- Simcoe County Federation of Agriculture
- Local dairy farmers
- Local developers and builders
- Midhurst Ratepayers Association (1,476 hand signed signatures on a petition)
- Margaret Atwood, author, activist
- David Donnelly, environmental lawyer
- Dale Goldhawk, radio broadcaster
- Environmental Defense
- Climate Action Now
- AWARE-Simcoe

## **Primary Objections:**

- Lack of meaningful public consultation
- Loss of 746 hectares of class 1, 2 and 3 farmland
- Loss of associated farming jobs and loss of work for small local developers and builders
- Inadequate assimilative capacity of the Minesing Wetlands and Nottawasaga River to handle the effluent
- Questionable long term viability of local groundwater to supply a new city
- No suggestions of industries to offer any meaningful jobs in the area
- Significant traffic congestion for commuters, along with associated carbon emissions

- Anticipated higher local taxation (e.g. Barrie, Vaughan, Mississauga)
- Unnecessary development: Already sufficient pre-approved development in Simcoe County, even before approval of the Midhurst plan to add an extra 23,500 people on farm land, over an hour's drive from the outskirts of the GTA.