

Growth will benefit town— in time

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Staff Writer

The Town retained Hemson Consulting Ltd. earlier this year to study the fiscal impact on future operating and capital budgets resulting from various growth scenarios that could happen under Halton Region's Sustainable Halton Plan.

Hemson modeled 11 different scenarios involving different rates of non-residential and residential growth including two, which called for the creation of the small city of Hornby (population 43,500).

The feasibility test was the activity rate (AR), which is the total employment divided by the population. A 40-55 per cent AR is considered a reasonable target for a municipality.

According to a Town report: "An increasing activity rate indicates that the rate of non-residential growth is exceeding the rate of residential growth. Growth scenarios that move the town from its current activity rate of 38 per cent towards a rate of 50 per cent are anticipated to generate fiscal benefits."

The scenarios were ranked based on their AR and fiscal benefits to the Town.

The first scenario (non-residential growth only) with a 70% AR was rejected outright.

The next four in ranking all suggested a positive fiscal impact to the town— but after 2026. All of the scenarios predicted "fiscally challenging upward pressure on tax rates" until 2026.

Ranked in order of best to worst was:

- #5 (a population by 2031 of 90,000 with 250 hectare urban expansion— 56% AR)
- #3 (a population by 2031 of 70,000, which includes the build-out of the Maple Leaf lands in Acton— 51%AR)
- #7 (a population by 2031 of 110,000, with 370 hectare urban expansion— 52% AR)
- #6 (a population by 2031 of 110,000, with 250 hectare urban expansion— 49% AR)

The other scenarios that involved increasing the population to 130,000 or creating the city of Hornby would all have negative fiscal impacts on the town.

Hemson suggested that Halton Hills attempt to reach agreement with future developers to recover more of the cost of building infrastructure not funded from development charges.

Town is 'at a crossroads'

Town staff has prepared a Discussion Paper on growth to be debated at a council workshop on Saturday (Oct. 20).

Key points in the Discussion Paper:

- "Perhaps more so than any of the other three local municipalities in Halton, the Sustainable Halton process has significant long-term ramifications for the Town of Halton Hills. Indeed, the Town is at a crossroads and will have to make some strategic long-term growth decisions over the next few months."

- "At this point in the process, the Senior Management team recommends that council advise the Region that the Town is prepared to consider moderate growth to the 2031 planning horizon, as well as pursue alternative servicing strategies ..."

- Under the status quo scenario, the Town's population would start to decline after 2021, with a fixed total population aging in place— that would have long-term implications.

- "Communities that have little growth capability or are declining in population can be faced with economic, financial, and social challenges that are detrimental to quality of life... examples can include limited economic development opportunities and local job creation, the inability to finance new or upgraded community infrastructure and the inability to provide new housing opportunities. Under such a scenario youth have little incentive to remain ... business closures can be expected, the population "ages in place" and the community is at risk of further decline in social and economic vitality."

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