

## Plan 700 more homes in village

By Rebecca Ring

Rockwood is growing fast, and is expected to keep on growing. According to Canada's National Housing Agency, Guelph/Eramosa had 138 "housing starts" (new houses) in 2007, compared to 61 in 2006, a 126% increase. The City of Guelph saw a decrease of 2.3%, with 751 housing starts in 2007 compared to 769 in 2007.

Currently, there are plans to build almost 700 more homes in Rockwood if Guelph City Council approves sewage allocation, which will be decided in January.

County of Wellington and the City of Guelph have been working together to develop a strategy to accommodate growth under the provincial government's Places to Grow Plan. The area is expected to house a total of 321,000 people by 2031. Currently, the population of Guelph is about 115,000 and Wellington County is 85,000, totaling about 200,000.

The County's population, housing and employment forecast says that approximately 13% of its growth will be in Guelph/Eramosa, predominately Rockwood. By 2031, the township is expected to take on another 4200 people (33% increase), 1400 more households (34% increase) and provide 1300 more jobs (38% increase). In their report to council, MHBC planning says, "Forecast for growth in Rockwood includes a higher demand than supply for households and will be closely linked to the availability of wastewater capacity."

In his annual report to the Legislature, Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, Gord Miller, warns that, "Ontario's plans for growth and development are not reconciled with our priorities of preserving and protecting our natural environment. Because there is a new government with a new mandate, it's a good time to step back and take a thoughtful look at how sustainable

our present course is," says Miller.

"In my report I observe a conflict between our efforts to plan for economic growth and development while simultaneously protecting our environment; we are trying to have our cake and eat it too...Our growth plan for Southern Ontario communities has some laudable features, but in some areas it calls for development that would exceed the ability of the local environment to support it. Although Southern Ontario has many of Canada's fastest growing urban areas, our existing planning processes cannot protect ecosystems while accommodating the growing demands for infrastructure, roads and water."

Mayor Chris White agrees with these observations. "With today's technology, the river can handle the effluent for a population of 165,000. When that limit is reached, we can't put anymore effluent in the river, so where is it going to go?" he says, "The Commissioner's report points out physical limitations to growth, such as water supply, sewage and transportation. How can we grow beyond these limits?"

White sits on Guelph's Growth Management Committee, as do County representatives. Together, they are trying to establish a realistic limit, which they plan to take to the Province, which has the ultimate authority. "People come here for the small town lifestyle and don't want to see it become a huge suburb like Brampton or Mississauga." He says the issue is sprawl around Toronto, and continuing the sprawl outside of the Greenbelt is not the answer.

"Toronto needs to build up, not out. To sustain growth, there needs to be more density."

Regarding projected transportation needs, White says, "There is talk about a massive 400 highway. Where is it going? Through farms?" He adds that the numbers from the province are higher than the township and county can meet; "We have to give the province a push back because this is not sustainable growth."



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