



# Joint Urban Growth Node Consultations: Meeting #1

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## Comments and Feedback

### **“STRONGER TOGETHER”**

Meeting held on Wednesday, January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011  
Brian Orser Hall, Penetanguishene



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## BACKGROUND

- In June 2006, further to earlier provincial legislation known as “the Places to Grow Act, 2005”, the Ontario Government enacted the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*, which includes the County of Simcoe and outlines the Province’s vision for managing growth between now and 2031.
- In June 2009, the Province released a white paper entitled “Simcoe Area: A Strategic Vision for Growth”. This paper established the concept of a “Simcoe Sub-area” and a vision for sustainable growth in the Simcoe Sub-area to: help manage growth; boost job creation; improve quality of life; and, curb sprawl and protect the natural environment and agricultural lands.
- In September 2009, the Towns of Midland and Penetanguishene, in response to the Vision paper, requested that the Province designate both Towns as a Joint Urban Node. At that time, the two Town Councils agreed that if the Province designated the Towns as a Joint Urban Node, we would consider exploring a range of services in light of the designation, including land use planning, infrastructure, transit and economic development.
- On October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the Minister of Infrastructure released “Proposed Amendment No. 1 to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe” (GPA 1), which applies specifically to the Simcoe Sub-area, and outlines the Province’s intent to introduce legislation that builds on the “Simcoe Area” paper of 2009 and will affect several facets of land use planning between now and 2031.
- As requested, the Towns of Midland and Penetanguishene were designated as a Joint Urban Growth Node in the draft Growth Plan Amendment.
- The GPA 1 has been released for consultation and, similar to what was done previously, the Province is allowing for a comment period, and any submissions are to be submitted to the Ontario Growth Secretariat of the Ministry of Infrastructure by January 31, 2011. More information can be found online: [www.placestogrow.ca](http://www.placestogrow.ca).
- There is no specific definition for a “Joint” Urban Node, and the Province does not have a mandate for what a “Joint” Urban Node can or should do. As such, the Mayors and Councils of the two Towns have decided to explore, with the input of the residents of both communities, what a “Joint Urban Node” means and how the two Towns can capture the opportunities provided by the Proposed “Joint Urban Node” designation.
- Three (3) Public Consultation meetings will be held. The first meeting, which is the subject of this report, was intended to gather initial public input from both communities. The second meeting will generate discussion on the issues identified at the first meeting and identify future directions to be considered by the two Councils. The third meeting, to be

held in the spring of 2011, will report back on the findings and discussions between the two Towns on the future directions for the Joint Urban Node.

- Held on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at the Brian Orser Hall in Penetanguishene, the meeting attracted approximately 60 members of both communities along with members of Council and staff from both Towns. Advertised in both local newspapers and on each Town's website, the meeting was open to all residents of both communities. Approximately 40% of the attendees were from Midland and 57% were from Penetanguishene, with the balance from other municipalities.
- The meeting, co-chaired by Mayor Marshall and Mayor McKay, included opening remarks, a short background presentation by Town Planners Paul Hodgins and Wes Crown, and facilitated small discussion groups.
- This document reports the summarized results of the eight (8) discussion groups.

## COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

### Defining a “Joint” Urban Node

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*What does the “Joint” Urban Node mean to you?*

Residents, staff, and elected officials noted that at the core, a “Joint” Urban Node will focus on growth – both how much and where. A “Joint” Urban Node would also involve an effort on sharing resources and combining services in order to minimize the duplication of services, while maximizing efficiencies and eliminating waste. Our “Joint” Urban Node should consist of a shared vision that promotes cooperation yet maintains and celebrates the unique identities of both Towns. The end result should provide a competitive tax rate, a high quality of service, access to greater funding opportunities, and a stronger political voice.

### Previously Identified Areas for Collaboration

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*The Towns previously identified planning, infrastructure, transit, and economic development as areas where we could explore opportunities to collaborate. Are these areas that you see some opportunity and if yes, why?*

There was a consensus among those in attendance that all of the areas previously identified should be explored as opportunities for collaboration. The feedback that was received expanded on the necessity of exploring these opportunities in order to reduce duplication of effort, provide enhanced services, and keep taxes down.

It was important to the participants that the Towns cooperate and plan for the future. Some residents noted that services could be combined into one location, wherever space is best available. As long as the services were provided in an effective and cost efficient manner, traveling to Midland or to Penetanguishene for various services should not be a burden. It was recommended that the joint coordination of services begin with areas that don't necessarily involve *identities*, which would help to ease any emotional fear that residents may feel about a loss of the distinctiveness of their community. The Towns should also look at areas where shared services would provide the greatest benefits.

Some suggestions for the previously identified areas for collaboration are listed below.

- **Economic Development**

Cooperation in the area of economic development was noted as an essential part of being a “Joint” Urban Node. The Towns need to develop “Open for Business” friendly policies. The Towns would be stronger working together, and they could better attract new development and investment if certain programs and measures were put into effect. The Towns should create a joint plan and action strategy for economic development, and consider the possibility of a joint industrial park. They should

consider establishing a level of “commonality” through an identical tax structure or incentive program to encourage new business, and they should also promote the expansion of existing employment firms. The Towns should also engage the local residents to help support existing businesses and help attract new business. There may also be an opportunity for a common BIA.

As part of an economic development strategy, the Towns should also enhance their efforts in tourism. For example, special events could be jointly coordinated, and regular events should be planned so as not to compete with one another (i.e. evening music events are currently held in both Towns at the same time during the summer months). The Towns could also investigate the possibility of a joint insurance plan to host events that are too costly to host individually.

- **Planning**

Comments were made about how joint planning could be a great benefit to both Towns, and that common zoning could be put in place. This would be helpful, especially to businesses assessing where to locate; it would reduce confusion and competition.

- **Transit**

Feedback on transit was slightly mixed. While residents believe that it is important to ensure there is a link between the two Towns, there is concern that population may not be adequate to sustain a full transit service. It was noted, however, that cooperation is needed between the two Towns to find a cost-effective transportation solution. The Towns may need to look at new, innovative models for transportation (accessible transit, taxis, etc.). The Towns should also work together to encourage the Province to extend the Go Transit line to North Simcoe.

## **Identifying Potential Shared Services**

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*Are there other areas that you think we should explore?*

A range of potential shared service areas were discussed, including:

- **Administration**

- **By-laws:** Having consistent or shared by-laws would reduce confusion and duplication.
- **Equipment:** The Towns should consider vehicle sharing, based on attrition or need.
- **Purchasing:** Future purchases should be made in a uniform and consistent way to take advantage of bulk discounts and shared equipment (e.g. copiers, software, etc). Staff in either Town would have familiarity with available equipment if loaned or if shared services take place.
- **Staffing:** There may be potential for cost savings if the Towns consider ways to reduce duplication of staff by reducing the staffing levels and/or sharing staff, as well as training workshops.

- **Arts, Culture, and Heritage**
  - The Towns should have a shared cultural plan as well as common cultural support programs.
  - Penetanguishene could consider a “French village” along its Main street, to build on the bilingual nature of the area.
  - The Towns should work collaboratively on their Heritage programs.
  - The Towns should have open doors for immigration.
- **Police (with substations)**
  - The OPP contract with the Town of Penetanguishene is up for renewal, and this may be an opportunity to initiate a joint police force.
- **Fire (with substations)**
  - Similar to the way that the County locates their ambulance services, the Towns should research how best to provide Fire based on a formula of mutual aid. The formula would take into account where the calls are routed, based on the Department in closest proximity (regardless of which Town the address is in).
- **Health Care Services**
  - The area is underserved and could use additional health services, such as a medical walk-in clinic. The Towns may be able to encourage a joint medical clinic.
- **Housing**
  - There are lots of housing plans on the books but not much uptake. The Towns should create a joint housing strategy to serve our area.
- **Hydro**
  - Hydro services are provided by two different providers: MPUC and Powerstream. There is potential for cost efficiencies if shared services can be negotiated.
- **Insurance**
  - By combining our separate insurance needs, the Towns may be able to gain a reduction in cost and enhanced insurance package.
- **Libraries**
  - The Towns should investigate the ability to provide shared library services so that residents can use their library cards in both municipalities.
- **Public Works**
  - Roads: The Towns should collaborate on a joint roads maintenance plan.
  - Sewer and Water: The Towns should move towards shared sewer and water services, as these areas are Provincially regulated.
- **Schools**
  - The Towns may have an opportunity to share the school facilities and space, and may be able to collaborate to deliver a better educational outcome.

- **Tourism**

- The Towns should focus on the shoreline as their biggest strength. Views and access to the waterfront should be maintained and enhanced for the public wherever possible.
- As a common tourism destination, the Towns should cooperate on promoting the area via a common tourism image. They should promote each other and nearby attractions.
- Events and festivals should be held jointly (i.e. joint winter carnival, annual fireworks display, Battle of Georgian Bay, etc.)
- The Towns should encourage the development of destination packages for events with dinners and hotel stays.

A great deal of emphasis was also placed on the ability of the Towns to have a single, strengthened political voice to the Province. In working together, the Towns may also have better access to sources of funding that would help to enhance services and programs for all residents.

## **Potential Barriers to Collaboration**

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*What could stand in the way of the Towns working more collaboratively?*

There was good discussion on the barriers that could potentially impact the ability of the Towns to work collaboratively.

### **Identity Loss**

A big potential barrier identified was that of “identity” and, specifically, the threat of identity loss. Many residents noted that some of the community citizens feel there are different cultures and histories in the Towns, and this mindset may contribute to an “anti-change” attitude that prevents collaboration between the Towns. There is a need to protect the Francophone community, and to ensure that the communities do not feel a “Little brother – Big brother” attitude that has been historically identified by the community residents.

In order to manage this barrier, the respective cultures and identities of the Towns should be acknowledged and addressed, and that they should be addressed and acknowledged as strengths that enhance the area.

### **Power Struggle**

Participants also indicated that there may be a power/ego struggle on the part of the municipal Councils that could prevent additional collaboration and cooperation. The desire to maintain and protect the individual communities with continued inter-municipal competition could be a major potential barrier to working as a “Joint” Urban Node.

### **External Factors**

External factors, such as the micromanagement of our municipalities by the Province or County, could provide additional barriers to working collaboratively. Micromanagement by the Province or County, even by the delaying of decisions that impact work at the local level, could be a damper on developing our “Joint” Urban Node and may also limit our options for collaboration.

The participants expressed their desire to maintain local control, which provides better access to local Councils.

Other external factors may include Unions, which may believe there is a risk of job losses, and may argue against the collaboration and cooperation of the two Towns. There may also be some concerns from neighbouring municipalities that currently use services provided by the Towns. The Towns will need to ensure that financial contributions from nearby municipalities reflect a fair share, so there is no increased financial burden on the residents of the Towns.

### **Lack of Awareness**

Attitudes of community residents, staff, and elected officials may be another potential barrier to working collaboratively. Arguably, there are people that are content with the status quo. There may also be apathy and resistance to change in the community. There may simply be a lack of understanding about the benefits that would exist with additional collaboration and cooperation. Suggestions were made to ensure education played a major role throughout the development of the “Joint” Urban Node, so that everyone in the community understands how it will affect them. Education and awareness could start with highlighting the ways that the two Towns already work collaboratively and cooperatively.

Participants noted the importance of sharing the information from all of the consultation sessions, and encourage greater participation in the process. It will also be essential to have industry and the business community understand how they can cooperate and cross-promote each other to achieve economic advantages.

### **Long Term Planning**

Lack of proper planning for this process was identified as a potential barrier to working collaboratively. It will be essential to properly research and think about the various avenues and areas for collaboration to ensure that the full benefits of cooperation are achieved. This will add an additional burden, in terms of time and resources, in order to rationalize a model for shared service provision.

Short term accomplishments were identified as necessary to enhance the transition process of working collaboratively. The Towns will need to create something co-operatively soon, in order to establish credibility for the joint planning initiative and the “Joint” Urban Node as a whole. A suggestion was made for the Towns to create a formal commitment about how they will co-habitate and cooperate and that it be binding on future Councils. Any changes to this commitment in the future will have to be discussed by the new Councils and will be subject to public scrutiny.

## Issues Prioritized

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*Let's rank the issues identified so far from highest priority to lowest priority, with #1 being the highest.*

There was no clear consensus on the priority issues among those in attendance at the meeting. In some cases, it was felt that issues that should be prioritized would be tangible services such as: Police, Fire, Public Works, Water, and Parks. Other issues identified as priorities were more “people-driven” and included: political will of both Councils, direction to staff and increased staff understanding, and the establishment of joint committees. There may also be potential to share resources (ex: I.T. function).

In several instances, joint planning, festivals/events, and economic development were also identified as key areas. In the short-term, suggestions were made to encourage Department Heads from both Towns to meet and coordinate their efforts, while also getting volunteers to help where possible. Other groups should also be encouraged to work together, including special event organizers from both Towns.

## CONCLUSIONS

There was considerable discussion and thoughtful suggestions from the first meeting on the “Joint” Urban Node. Residents, staff, and elected officials alike were optimistic about the potential forms of collaboration and cooperation among the two Towns. Those in attendance expressed a desire to move directly into action and avoid unnecessary government studies and research. They were encouraged by the fact that the two Councils have already begun working together, and they felt that similar feedback sessions would be necessary and helpful in this transition to working collaboratively.

The issue of the amalgamation of the two Towns was raised in one manner or another in most of the discussion groups. Although there was considerable support for the amalgamation of the two Towns, the consensus was that amalgamation should not be a precursor to the two municipalities working together as a joint urban node and should not be the focus of discussions at this time. Amalgamation, as with all issues raised in this consultation process, will be reviewed and analyzed by the two Councils to determine the feasibility and effectiveness of the issue and its ability to meet the opportunities presented by the Joint Urban Node.

Our geography and proximity currently provide an ability for the Towns to work together, yet, our desire to strengthen our communities and achieve a better quality of life for all residents provide the common foundation to move towards our designation as a “Joint” Urban Node. As expressed by many at the meeting: *we will be stronger together than apart.*