

Regional Government Review

Strategic Considerations on the Future of North Simcoe

**Town of Midland Submission
May 15, 2019**



Executive Summary

The Heads of Council for North Simcoe, which includes the Mayors and Deputy Mayors and their CAOs for the Towns of Midland and Penetanguishene and the Townships of Tiny and Tay, recently came together for a discussion regarding the Regional Government Review (RGR), and more specifically the implications of the Simcoe County review and the potential implications to North Simcoe. Although this submission solely represents the thinking of the Midland representatives, there was considerable fruitful discussion respecting the best way to ensure the interests of North Simcoe are given appropriate consideration as any potential changes unfold through the governance review of Simcoe County.

Clearly, on a topic of such significance, we face a variety of opinions and considerations. As such, we also recognize that garnering the commitment and full support across such a diverse region represents a challenge. However, we (Midland) believe that a proactive and deliberate conversation needs to be had to set the course for the future of this region. Despite the fact the other North Simcoe communities have not signed off on this position paper, we do note that there is general agreement and support respecting the very positive work that has transpired amongst our respective communities. We also believe that type of cooperation and commitment will continue into the future, regardless of the outcomes of the regional governance review.

Midland continues to be the economic hub of North Simcoe, providing a vital collaborative commercial and health services centre for the North Simcoe area and beyond. The Town continues to lead in its financial commitment and support to strategic initiatives such as regional economic development as well as the Huronia Airport partnership with our neighbouring North Simcoe municipalities.

Given our shared geography on Georgian Bay, along with our economic and historic connections, Midland continues to be the go-to community for arts, culture, employment, and numerous other key opportunities. Despite the obvious leadership and financial responsibilities that Midland shoulders, we are fully committed to being collaborative with our neighbours, and more specifically welcome the numerous partnerships that have become the reality in North Simcoe.

While there are few details available to specifically respond to potential restructuring of Simcoe County and its municipalities, Midland continues to approach this review with a broad mind, and with the optimism that collaboration with the Advisors would result in the best possible outcome for our residents, businesses and taxpayers. We acknowledge that all of us are interested in achieving the best outcomes for North Simcoe and its constituents. Midland stands ready and willing to participate in addressing the challenges and opportunities that may arise from this regional governance review.

Midland would like to play an active part in shaping the future changes that may arise from any restructuring. It is our desire to have the best government system for Midland's constituents, as well as all of North Simcoe and the broader region of Simcoe County, including Barrie and Orillia.

This submission speaks to the strengths and weaknesses of the present system as well as the opportunities for change. Specific regard was given to the Terms of Reference of the Ontario Regional Government Review (RGR).

There are specific comments and suggestions in this submission for the benefit of the Advisors and the professionals undertaking this Review.

North Simcoe

This is a submission to the Ontario Regional Government Review (RGR) regarding a review of the efficiency and accountability of two-tiered Regions and the County of Simcoe.

The Town of Midland is an integral part of an area referred to as "North Simcoe" situated within the County of Simcoe. The Town has a history of collaboration and has used many opportunities to find stronger alliances and greater efficiency in the delivery of services.

It is our understanding that Simcoe County was included in this review given that it is one of the fastest growing areas in Ontario. While Regions were created in the early 1970's, Simcoe County was formed in 1843. A significant aspect of the County is the specific exclusion of both Barrie and Orillia from the formal County structure, albeit with some degree of participation in certain County delivered services.

Given the Province has directed this review and may make significant changes to the County of Simcoe – the Town of Midland would like to accept the challenge to participate in the dialogue that might lead to the evolution of local government in the broader region as well as more directly within North Simcoe. This submission reflects discussions that occurred between the Heads of Councils for North Simcoe and is an effort to draw out the collective experiences and thoughts regarding potential restructuring directions. At this point, Midland is providing our thoughts, and we look forward to responding in a more formal manner once specific direction is provided by the Province.

Given the significant differences within some of our regions - it is important to note that one size does not fit all and that some of our smaller municipalities do serve their communities efficiently and are accountable to their residents. We need to be creative with the technology and systems we have today to create local and regional governments that can best serve our diverse municipalities.

Our further understanding is that Simcoe County was included in this Review given that there is a need to provide a regional governance framework which includes improved co-ordination with the urban centres of Barrie and Orillia and to recognize the Provincially-designated growth centres within Simcoe County – namely: Alliston, Bradford, Alcona, Collingwood and Midland/Penetanguishene.

In some cases – certain two-tiered regions may need to evolve into single-tier municipalities – or alternatively – regions that have municipalities of significant size and capacity may need a more streamlined approach with less regional services. In our opinion, Simcoe County with Barrie and Orillia would be too large an area to become a single-tier municipality providing efficient and accountable governance.

Where regions remain as two-tier systems – it is important to determine whether the lower-tier municipalities can assume sufficient responsibilities to warrant streamlining the regional tier to improve regional governance and service delivery by avoiding duplication while increasing effectiveness. In other words – there may be a better distribution of the current services that can provide more efficient service delivery.

Where the local municipality is sufficient in size (population) to assume the majority of the community's requirements, then a region can focus on major

broader regional services and provide the overall strategic direction to ensure greater prosperity across Ontario.

It is important to note that Midland currently collaborates with our neighbour, Penetanguishene, on a number of services including Building Services, Transit Services and Fire Management (Fire Chief & Executive Assistant). Since both of our communities have undergone municipal service delivery review exercises, they are now positioned to continue exploration of additional opportunities to create efficiencies. Various discussions respecting fleet/automotive mechanical services; procurement services; landscape gardening services; utility meter reading and data extraction as well as potential human resources services are underway at various stages of consideration.

In terms of the four municipalities in North Simcoe – we have established a shared economic development focus through the Economic Development Corporation of North Simcoe (“EDCNS”) as well as a joint tourism approach through “The Heart of Georgian Bay” tourism initiative (these initiatives also include the Town of Penetanguishene and Townships of Tiny and Tay). Another key asset in North Simcoe is the Huronia Airport which is co-owned by Tiny, Penetanguishene and Midland. Currently the three communities are collaborating on a business review of the Airport operations to determine what, if any, changes should be considered to enhance this key asset and position it for future economic prosperity.

We need to acknowledge that the rural components of regions are fearful of the threat of losing their identity and level of attention given to rural matters as we continue to see the growth pressures migrating toward urban centres. There is also a concern in the rural and less serviced areas of the potential for higher taxes without reasonable access or need for certain services in the rural areas.

Simcoe restructuring should take advantage of all the experience of two-tiered regions over the last 45 years. While smaller municipalities often have greater community and volunteer engagement, there are very real challenges funding a broader range of services.

In addition to RGR, there are significant changes being made to the health care system in Ontario. Changes to the health system should be co-ordinated with the

local and Regional Government Review so that the affected municipalities and regions can best serve all the needs of their residents.

The education system is also a very important component of our communities and regions and should be similarly harmonized. An excellent example of this synchronizing would be the development of effective and comprehensive community hubs. Midland already serves this key role with the benefit of these critical community services.

The Chigamik Community Health Centre in Midland is an exciting new regional facility whose mission is to provide culturally relevant holistic programs and services to equip our communities to achieve optimal health and well-being through awareness, health promotion and illness prevention.



Part 1 – North Simcoe as a new Lower-Tier Municipality in a Regional Structure

In understanding Midland and the North Simcoe area – we have recognized four “sectors” for collaboration. As a brief overview, we offer up the following observations:

Business Innovation & Entrepreneurship – Our strategy is that while our harbours were historically the path to our area and the launching point to other areas in Canada and the USA – these harbours can now be “the path to the future” as we transform our lives – including commerce:

Industry – significant existing and emerging industries continue to provide employment opportunities for residents of North Simcoe within a growing Manufacturing sector;

Cottaging – the area serves as a large summer/vacation destination with significant surrounding economic and community involvement with area cottagers;

Boating – there are an estimated 5000+/- boats in the Georgian Bay area of North Simcoe, serving in many cases, as “floating cottages” and having a positive impact on local commerce.

History, Arts, Culture & Entertainment – we have a rich cultural diversity throughout our area including: Midland Cultural Centre, Discovery Harbour, Martyrs’ Shrine and Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons. It is critically important that there is recognition of our Francophone and Indigenous communities as key components of North Simcoe. Recent efforts to broaden the focus on a “regional” cultural initiative appear to be making positive strides.

Health and Social Justice – Midland (and North Simcoe) house a wide range of services to meet the needs of the entire area. Many of these services are complimentary and delivered in association with the regional services provided in Barrie and Orillia.

Natural Environment – Our environment is shaped by our rich heritage and natural geographic amenities such as Georgian Bay, Wye Marsh, etc.

North Simcoe Population – Employment

2001 census 42,727

2016 census 47,646

Note: It is important to identify that there are 15,600 existing seasonal / part time residents in Tiny & Tay Townships who own property and participate in the activities of the area. Tiny and Tay residents migrate into Midland for commercial, health and related social/community services.

2031 Places to Grow population projection for all of Simcoe North is 57,400 with an employment projection of 23,300 jobs.

Places to Grow has planned for a 2031 population of 667,000 for Simcoe County, Barrie and Orillia. The employment projection for Simcoe County area is 254,000 jobs.

Midland / Lower-Tier Responsibilities

We see the main functions of a lower-tier municipality to include the following responsibilities:

- Parks & Recreation & Culture;
- Local Water / Wastewater Distribution;
- Roads / Sidewalks / Trails;
- Building (*Ontario Building Code*) Services;
- Secondary Planning / Zoning / Community improvement / Site Planning;
- *Municipal Act* Regulations (ie. Property Standards – Licensing -Tax Collection).

We also would recommend the consideration of a new function to promote the collaboration of “Community Health Hubs” for a wide range of services – including wellness. Community hubs are important and represent a convergence of positive opportunities for a community to come together to meet a wide range of needs.

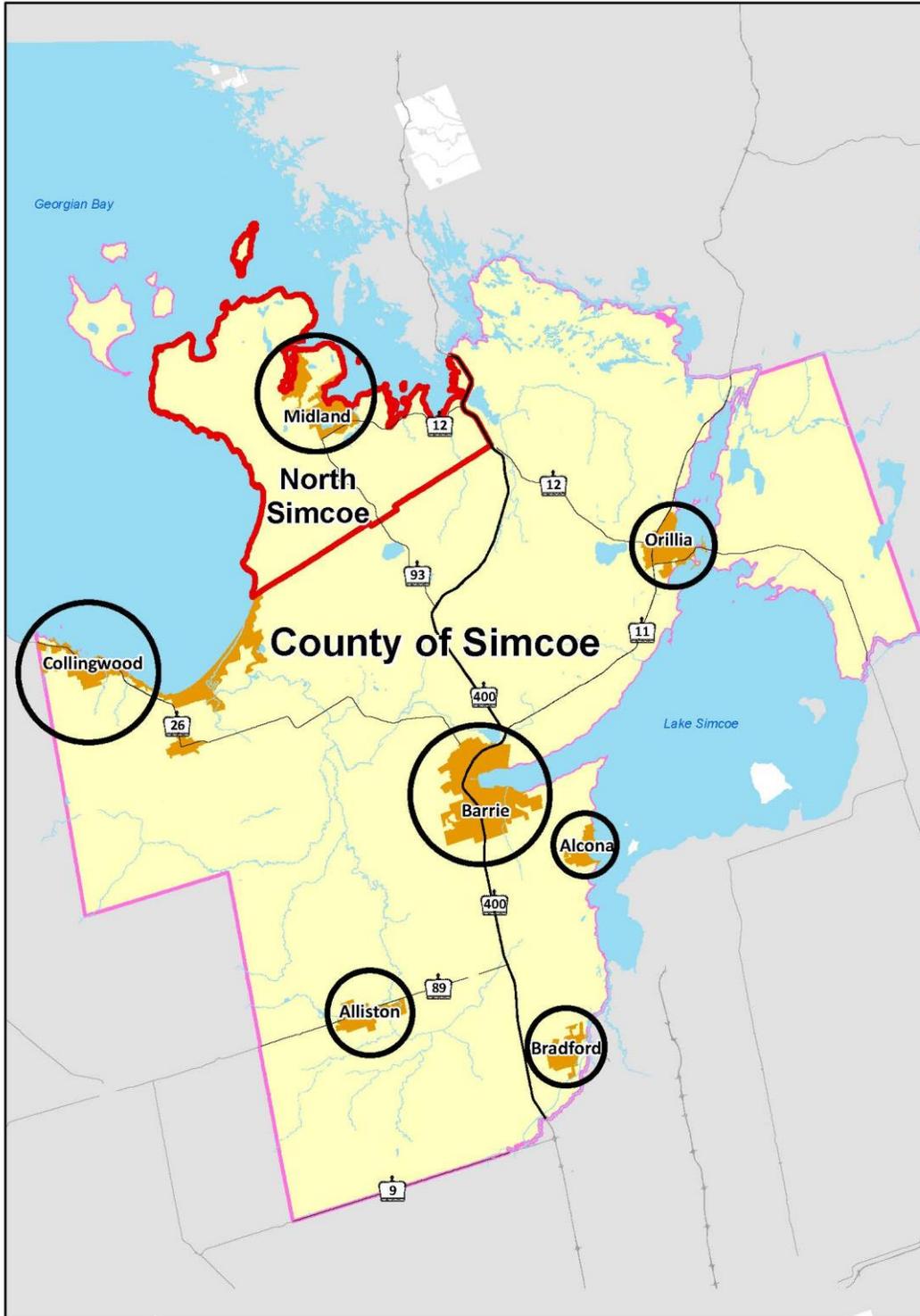
Lower-tier municipalities have traditionally undertaken matters which become important to a community. Examples of this are the physician recruitment / retention initiatives, seniors / wellness facilities and programs, etc.

There may be assets as a result of municipal restructuring that will become available for community health purposes. Our Provincial acute and preventative healthcare requires comprehensive integration throughout our governance system. This is also applicable to our education and economic development strategies.

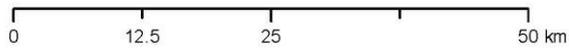
Further to the collaboration that has occurred to-date between the municipalities in North Simcoe – there will be greater opportunities for municipalities and the new “regional municipality” to explore joint delivery of certain services and / or the sharing of a service where there is additional capacity in one municipality to assist another municipality(s).



North Simcoe and Major Urban Areas



- Major Urban Area
- Simcoe County
- Other Ontario Municipality



Part 2 – North Simcoe in a Regional Municipality of Simcoe

Simcoe County needs to be more regionally coordinated with a governance system that includes Barrie and Orillia and the other provincially identified growth centres. Our district residents need direct representation that is accountable for the delivery of those services.

Provided the lower-tier municipalities could be of a size to deliver most of the municipal services – the regional level of government could be streamlined, and any existing duplication could be reduced or eliminated.

There is also an opportunity for smaller municipalities within a region to share services so that the region does not have to provide any unique service to any one – or a few – municipalities. An example would be for a number of municipalities to create a “Planning Board” to provide community planning services comparable to the larger municipalities within a region.

Planning needs to be better defined for both the regional and local levels to prevent duplication and redundancies. The region should focus on regional strategic planning connecting the important investments required for infrastructure and large-scale regionally significant matters, whereas the local planning function should be in community planning where communities are planned as a secondary planning process with implementing zoning, subdivision, etc.

Regional Responsibilities

- Regional Planning and Major Infrastructure;
- Regional Economic Development – Tourism - with local liaison (business retention);
- Public Health – Social Housing;
- Police (currently delivered across North Simcoe by the South Georgian Bay OPP Detachment);
- Emergency Services - Fire / Ambulance;
- Transit;
- Solid Waste – Recycling;
- IT / Heritage / Forestry
- Court Services

Conclusion

Midland believes that a proactive and deliberate conversation needs to be had to set the course for the future of this region. We also believe that the type of cooperation and commitment that we share with our neighbouring communities lays a strong foundation for the future. We look forward to continued dialogue with the provincial government to advance the outcomes of the Regional Government Review.

Participants

Town of Midland:

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Mike Ross, Deputy Mayor

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Facilitator:

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