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Shelburne is fastest growing community in Ontario: Census

By Brock Weir

Shelburne is billed as ?a people place, a change of pace,? but as far as development and growth is concerned that pace is leaving the rest of Ontario in the dust.

Data from the 2016 Canadian Census released last week shows that over the past five years, the Town of Shelburne has been the fastest growing town in Ontario, and the second in Canada.

?We anticipate additional growth over the next 10 years that will increase an additional 40 per cent in population, providing the planning and infrastructure plans are approved and in place,? said Mayor Ken Bennington in a statement. ?We continue to challenge our abilities to make Shelburne A People Place, a Change of Pace. To all those, both present and past that contributed to this success and growth, congratulations from the Town.?

While the Town continues to challenge its abilities in that respect, the fast pace of Shelburne's growth provides some challenges on multiple fronts, according to CAO John Telfer. Speaking to the Shelburne Free Press, he says while growth is on target due to Ontario's Places to Grow legislation, Shelburne's proximity to the Greater Toronto Area and low housing costs are an added attraction to young families.

?The Town has been planning for this type of growth over the last 10 to 12 years,? says Telfer. ?If you're in the Top 10 you have done very well and should be proud of your accomplishments as a Town. To be in the top two Canada-wide is just phenomenal and to be the top one in Ontario made us ecstatic.?

There are, of course, many benefits to growth like Shelburne's. For one thing, you can share the costs of ?basic essentials? like water, sewer services, police, fire, and recreation services over a ?larger mass,? says Telfer. Then there is the matter of making sure infrastructure is in place to manage the growth.

Having a long term plan outlining what you can do ? and when ? from a financial point of view is essential, says Telfer, in putting all the ?pieces together and trying to create an atmosphere that your growth is not exceeding your ability to service.?

?At last year's Economic Development Breakfast, one of the points that came up was, would you take rapid growth or sustainable growth?? recalls Telfer. ?I think what we're trying to accomplish is sustainable growth over a period of time but, in the same breath, you have to have to realise that the economy is driven by opportunity in the development community [such as the] case of buying groups that are able to put the financing together to make subdivisions happen quicker than you anticipate. I think the obligation on our end is to make sure we can comfortably handle those new developments within our current servicing, whether it be recreation, fire, police, etc., [and also look at] what additional steps will reflect from this additional growth? We all talk about the amenities we don't have in Shelburne; now we're talking about the amenities we will have in Shelburne.?

Looking at what needs to be done, Telfer says highway servicing is near the top of the list and this includes fast food, service shops, specialty department stores, and all things that will make Shelburne ?a point to stop at, not just drive through.?

?We want to make Shelburne sustainable in its own town so [people] don't have to spend all their money in Alliston or Orangeville for whatever the shopping requirement is,? says Telfer, noting that will serve as a stop gap between Highway 89 North and communities to the north, and 89 South and Highway 9.

As the Town grows, there is increased emphasis to look at the future allocation of wastewater as well as water storage and the second water tower, as well as longer-range issues such as looking into whether one ice pad is enough at the arena, increased movement in industrial parklands, and focusing on transit, which has come a serious focus for this Council.

With that being said, significant growth like this means Shelburne is bucking the trend experienced by so many municipalities closer to Toronto of having to consider a significantly aging population. In Shelburne's case, growth means the Town is experiencing a younger and younger demographic ? and that is a good thing, says Mr. Telfer.

?We did set up a Youth Advisory Group that will advise Council on future needs with students in high school and public school, as well as young families, on what they consider to be some of the priorities and activities they want to see in the Town as it continues to grow and Council will have an open ear to that,? says Telfer, highlighting an initiative spearheaded by Councillor Wade Mills, before noting the new growth figures also give Shelburne food for thought in how to sell the Town to potential new residents and businesses.

?You want to build on the fact that not only is it a place to live, but it is a place to bring your business,? he says. ?It is also a place to consider retirement. If you haven't heard of Shelburne, find out what it is all about, why are people heading this way? What can we provide to give you more knowledge of what our Town is all about? As far as sharing the secrets of what makes us successful, if they follow the history of what has happened over the last 10 years, they will tell that it takes good planning and good vision ? and money ? to implement the infrastructure necessary to get this kind of growth.?