MEMO

TO: Jennifer Staden, MCIP, RPP, Senior Planner, Township of Springwater

FROM: Frank Marzo, MCIP, RPP, Manager, Municipal Planning, WSP Canada Inc.

SUBJECT: **Township of Springwater: Focused Study Areas for Growth**

DATE: **May 22, 2025**

Introduction

In Fall 2024 the Township of Springwater retained WSP Canada Inc. (WSP) to undertake a Growth Management Study (GMS). The team assembled by WSP is developing a framework that will guide long term population and employment growth in the Township while meeting Provincial and County requirements and aligning with the Township's strategic priorities.

Phase 1 of the GMS included a Background Report which summarized the existing planning framework and recent changes to provincial planning policy and legislation, including the new Provincial Planning Statement 2024 (PPS 2024). The Background Report also reviewed the forecasts and allocations that were prepared for the Simcoe County Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR), and the pending direction contained in Simcoe County Official Plan Amendment 7 (SCOPA 7). Lastly, the Background Report reviewed the Joint Land Needs Analysis and Study that was prepared by Hemson Consulting and received by Springwater Council on December 11, 2024, concluding that the growth pressures identified in the December 2024 Joint LNA can help to inform subsequent phases of the project.

This memo supplements the analysis provided in the Background Report and presents a series of study areas that will be further analysed as potential locations for growth. The study areas have been chosen based on a review of Provincial policy, Township priorities, and general planning principles. It is important to note that the amount land available for future growth will be determined through a land needs assessment (LNA) that considers long-term growth trends and economic drivers. It is possible that the study areas identified in this memo will not be needed for growth to the horizon of the Official Plan.

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Growth Drivers in Springwater

The preparation of population and employment growth forecasts has typically been undertaken at a County level. Beginning in 2006, population and employment forecasts for Springwater were provided by the Province through the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. In August 2020, the Province released updated forecasts to the year 2051 for all upper- and single-tier municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe and directed them to complete their municipal comprehensive reviews (MCR) by July 2022.

The updated Provincial forecasts noted that Simcoe County's population is expected to grow by 194,000 people to 555,000 by 2051. Much of this population growth will be driven by people moving north from the Greater Toronto Area.[1] In the same time period, the County is expected to add 81,000 jobs for a total of 198,000.

Simcoe County MCR Population Growth Allocations

Through the MCR process, Simcoe County allocated the forecast growth to its constituent lower-tier municipalities. The County's analysis noted that most population growth in Simcoe occurs in the Southern part of the County, in municipalities such as Bradford West Gwillimbury, Innisfil, and New Tecumseth.[2] Accordingly, Simcoe's MCR allocated 63% of population growth the "Southern Regional Market Area" that consists of all the municipalities located south of Highway 90.

The County's analysis considered the Township of Springwater to be a part of the "Northern Regional Market Area" and forecast that it would grow by 10,170 residents for a total population of 32,490 by 2051. This represents 5.2% of the overall population growth in the County. The County's housing forecasts calculated that Springwater would need to add a total of 5,130 housing units to 2051 in order to accommodate the forecast population growth. However, it was determined that there was sufficient community area land already designated for growth in the Northern Regional Market Area. As a result, the Simcoe County LNA concluded that the Township of Springwater does not have a demonstrated need for additional community area lands.

Previous Population Growth Forecasts

The growth allocations prepared for the Simcoe MCR do not align with several other forecasts that have been prepared for the Township of Springwater in recent years. For example, the Township's 2018 Growth Management Strategy forecast that the Township would grow to 37,800 people to 2031. This was based on full build out of residential lands within the Midhurst Secondary Plan

[1] Hemson Consulting Ltd. (March 2022) County of Simcoe Growth Forecasts and Land Needs Assessment
[2] Ibid.

Area within the 2031 planning horizon. This represents a significant difference from the County's MCR that forecast a lower total population over a longer time horizon.

Subsequent forecasts were prepared in 2021 as part of the Township's Long Term Fiscal Impact Assessment (FIA) which forecast growth to 2041. This report forecast a population of 32,761 to 2031, which is 5,000 less that the 2018 GMS. The difference in growth projections to 2031 between the 2018 GMS and the 2021 FIA could be due to the reduction in growth that occurred in the first part of the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to early 2021.

The 2021 FIA forecast accelerated growth from 2031 to 2041 and a total population of 48,774 by 2041. Like the 2018 GMS, this report also represents a significant difference when compared with the County's MCR growth allocations.

The 2023 Development Charges Background Study contains the most recent forecasts prepared for the Township of Springwater. The Study based its 2031 forecast on the 2018 GMS and predicted that the Township's total population would be 37,800 by 2031. Similar to the FIA, it predicted an accelerated rate of growth after 2031 and a total population of 46,200 at buildout.

The discrepancies between the County's MCR allocations and the forecasts above will need to be explored through subsequent phases of the GMS.

Employment Lands

The majority of Simcoe's current and future employment is expected to be Population-Related Employment (PRE). This refers to jobs that serve local residents and such as retail, food, education, health care, and local government. Growth in PRE jobs correlates with growth in the overall population as more services are needed for a growing population. Moreover, PRE jobs are not located in employment areas but rather integrated into the communities that they serve.

Simcoe County's Land Needs Assessment noted that 50% of the 81,000 new jobs to 2051 will be population related employment.[3] Jobs that require employment lands (e.g., manufacturing, warehousing, etc.) are expected to account for 34,440 new jobs, which represents 42% of employment growth in Simcoe County to 2051. Remaining employment growth in the County is split between 'major office employment' (i.e., jobs in large, standalone office buildings) and rural employment (e.g., agriculture, aggregates, etc.). These two categories do not represent significant drivers of employment growth in the Township of Springwater.

[3] Hemson Consulting Ltd. (March 2022) County of Simcoe Growth Forecasts and Land Needs Assessment.

A large portion of employment lands jobs have been allocated to Bradford West Gwillimbury (25%) and Innisfil (23%)[4]. These municipalities have large areas of land designated for employment uses along Highway 400. Of the 34,440 new employment land jobs forecast by the County LNA, the Township of Springwater is expected to accommodate 1,100 new jobs that require employment lands (3.2% of the County's total).

Previous Employment Growth Forecasts

Similar to the residential growth forecasts, the employment forecasts contained in the 2018 GMS and 2021 FIA greatly exceed the employment growth allocations in the County's MCR. The County forecast a total of 9,190 total jobs in Springwater by 2051 – an increase of 2,490 jobs from 2021-2051, of which 1,100 would be on employment lands. The 2021 FIA forecast an increase of 3,599 total jobs from 2021-2041.

The discrepancy in forecasts could have a significant impact on the results of a future land needs assessment and the amount of employment lands that will need to be designated in order to accommodate this growth. These discrepancies will need to be explored through subsequent phases of the GMS.

Potential Shortage of Community Area Lands in Barrie

Although the 2022 County LNA that concluded new community area lands were not needed in Simcoe's Northern Regional Market Area, it is possible that the city of Barrie will face a shortage of community area lands to 2051. A 2024 Joint Land Needs Assessment concluded that:

> Barrie will likely face shortfalls in its Community Area land supply to meet residential demand under current DGA densities.[5]

Springwater is well positioned to absorb excess demand for residential growth from the City of Barrie. Lands to accommodate this potential growth will be explored in **Focused Study Area #1.** These are lands south of the Midhurst Settlement Area along Highway 26. They represent a logical expansion of the settlement area towards the City of Barrie that is driving the increased residential demand.

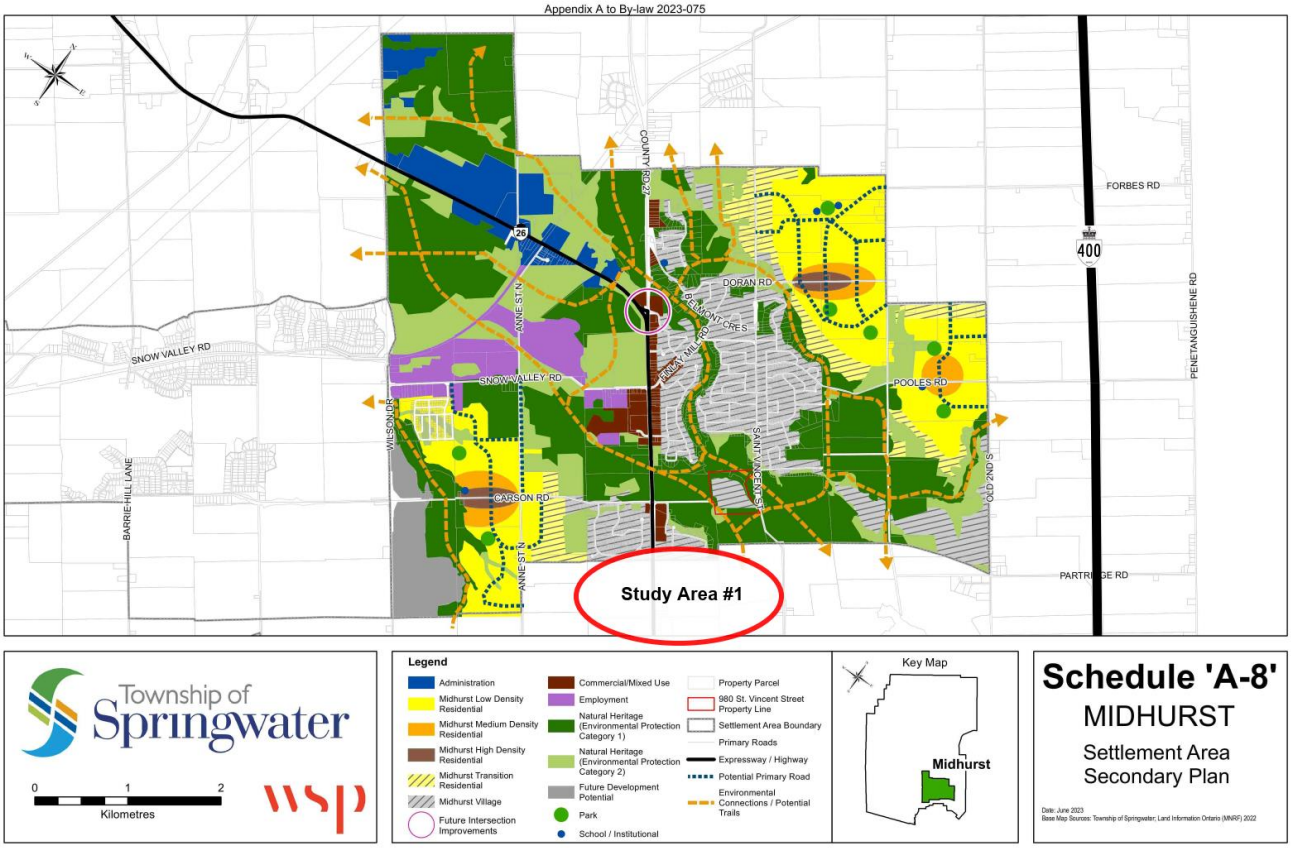
It will be necessary to ensure that Midhurst grows as a complete community that provides opportunities for both residential and employment growth. Planning for the long-term development of new employment areas at the same time as residential expansions will help to ensure balanced development and the creation of complete communities. **Focused Study Area #2** represents a potential location for additional employment lands in Midhurst. This location is

[4] Hemson Consulting Ltd. (May 2022) Revised County of Simcoe Growth Forecasts and Land Needs Assessment

[5] Hemson Consulting Ltd. (December 2024) Joint Land Needs Analysis and Study – Summary of Stage 2 Findings

well positioned to leverage Highway 400 – a major goods movement corridor, and it will be evaluated concurrently with Focused Study Area #1.

Focused Study Area #1 – South Midhurst



Focused Study Area #1 consists of lands on both sides of Highway 26, immediately south of the Midhurst Settlement Area. The Study Area is contiguous to the existing Settlement Area and borders the Town of Barrie to the south. Lands in the Study Area are currently designated either ‘Agricultural’, ‘Rural’, or ‘Highway Commercial’. These lands are located between settlement areas in Springwater and Barrie.

While it represents a logical extension of the Midhurst Settlement Area, and a connection with built-up areas in Barrie, the lands on the west side of Highway 26 are designated “Agriculture” and are cultivated. An evaluation of this area will need to carefully consider Section 4.3 – Agriculture of the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024. Notably, PPS 2024 policy 4.3.2 directs that:

> Planning authorities are required to use an *agricultural system* approach, based on provincial guidance, to maintain and enhance a geographically continuous agricultural land base and support

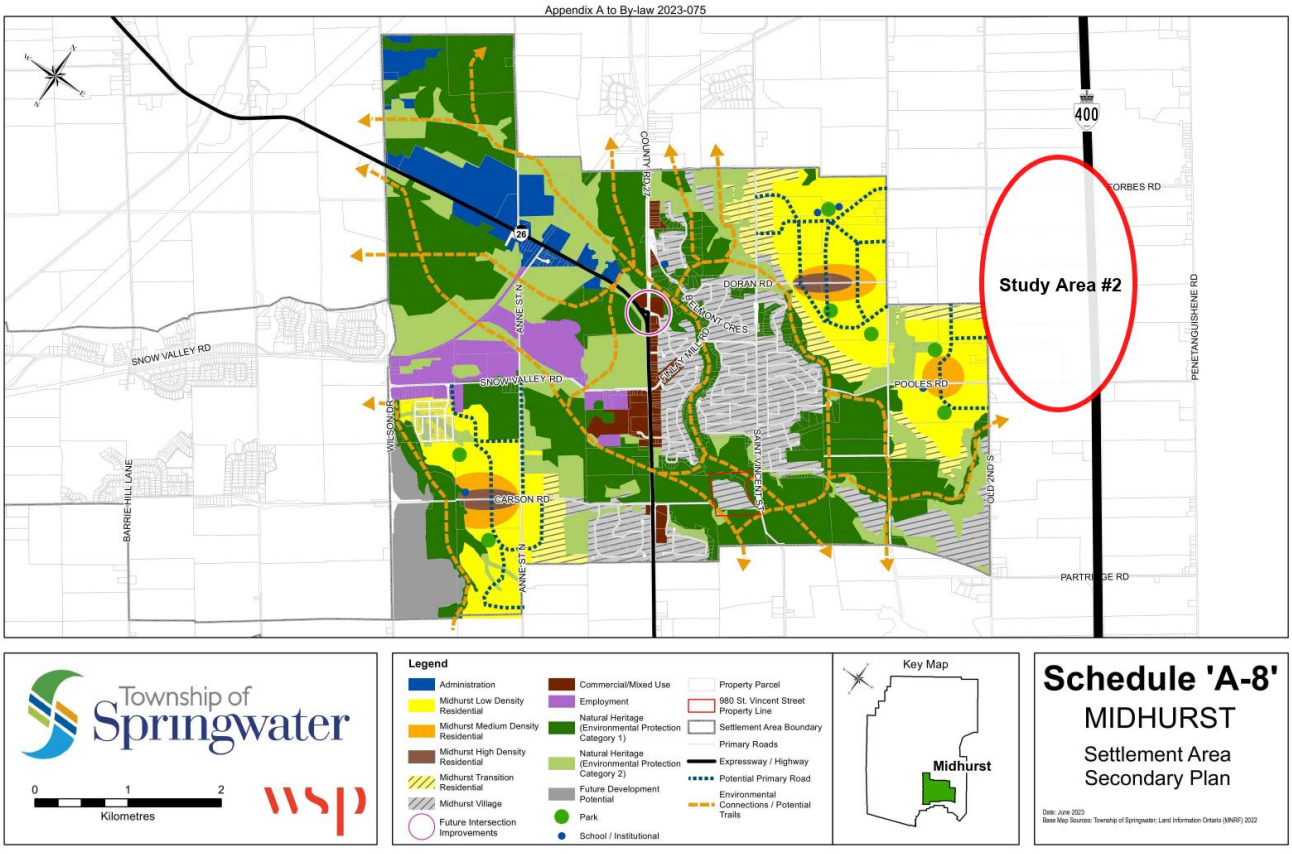
and foster the long-term economic prosperity and productive capacity of the agri-food network.

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFA) recently provided a communication to all municipalities in Ontario that reiterated the need to undertake and agricultural system approach and protect the agricultural land base.

Moreover, PPS 2024 policy 2.3.2.1 provides criteria that must be satisfied when proposing expansions of settlement area boundaries. Study Area #1 will be evaluated against the criteria found in PPS 2024 – including the need to designate and plan for additional land.

An updated LNA is being undertaken as part of the Township's Growth Management Study. This LNA will be completed by Watson Economists Ltd., who will determine how many hectares of land (if any) can justifiably be added to the Township's existing settlement areas. If there is no demonstrated need for additional lands (based on population growth projections and existing land supply), then a proposed settlement area boundary expansion will be unable to satisfy provincial criteria.

Focused Study Area #2 – East Midhurst



Study Area #2 represents lands east of the Midhurst Settlement Area to Highway 400. This area is well positioned to take advantage of the Highway ramp at Forbes Road and provide businesses with access to a major goods movement corridor. Recent growth in employment lands jobs throughout Ontario has been driven by businesses focused on warehousing, logistics, and good movement. These sectors are best able to leverage a location with easy highway access. As mentioned above, Bradford West Gwillimbury and Innisfil are forecast to see significant growth in employment lands jobs due lands being designated for employment along Highway 400.

The selection of this study area as a potential new employment area aligns with PPS 2024 policy 2.8.2.2 which states that:

> Planning authorities shall protect *employment areas* that are located in proximity to *major goods movement facilities and corridors*, including facilities and corridors identified in provincial transportation plans, for the *employment area* uses that require those locations.

The lands in Study Area #2 appear to be well aligned with Provincial direction regarding employment planning, as well as general planning principles regarding the appropriate location of employment uses. The development of a protected employment area along Highway 400 in Springwater could support the Township's long-term employment base and ensure that there are jobs available for new residents moving to Midhurst and the broader Springwater area. This would advance the Township's objectives related to developing complete communities that can provide a range of housing and jobs for residents.

Despite the apparent advantages of the Highway 400 lands for employment uses, the growth management study will need to balance other considerations such as infrastructure availability, servicing costs and the protection of agricultural lands. When considering a settlement area boundary expansion, the PPS 2024 policy 2.3.2.1 (b) states that:

> Planning authorities shall consider… if there is sufficient capacity in existing or planned infrastructure and public service facilities.

The lands adjacent to Highway 400 in Springwater do not currently have municipal servicing. Notwithstanding plans for upgrades to the Midhurst Interim and Ultimate Wastewater Treatment Facility, there are no plans to extend servicing to Study Area #2. Future phases of the Growth Management Study will involve a more detailed review of potential servicing options for these lands, as this is required by the PPS.

In addition to servicing considerations, the Growth Management Study will need to consider the need for additional employment lands in the Township. Similar to Study Area #1, the projected need for additional employment lands

will be evaluated through the preparation of a new LNA for the Township. However, it is important to note that planning for infrastructure and employment lands can be undertaken beyond a 30-year horizon.

Conclusion

The Township's Growth Management Strategy to-date has identified two focused study areas that will be evaluated as potential locations for settlement area boundary expansions. Lands south of Midhurst will be evaluated for their potential to accommodate residential uses, driven primarily by the excess demand for community area lands in the City of Barrie. Lands east of Midhurst, adjacent to Highway 400 represent a key asset for the Township as it seeks to attract employment land uses such as manufacturing, warehousing, and logistics.

Before a detailed evaluation can begin, the consultant team will complete a LNA that will quantify the amount of land needed for future growth in Springwater. Provincial planning policy requires that any settlement area boundary expansions demonstrate a justified need for additional lands. If Provincial criteria are not met, planning authorities are unable to approve proposed expansions.

The Township's Growth Management Study is well positioned to examine the growth trajectory of Springwater and prepare a roadmap for long term growth. As the Township seeks to develop complete communities, it is important to balance the need for residential lands, employment opportunities, agricultural protections and investments in infrastructure. The growth management framework will guide long term population and employment growth in the Township while meeting Provincial requirements and aligning with the Township's strategic priorities.

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