

REPORT #: PLN-2024-52

DATE: 19-Nov-24

TO: Mayor and Members of Council

SUBJECT: **Information Report to Update on Progress of Growth Management Exercise including Public Consultation Efforts**

PREPARED BY: Mana Masoudi, Senior Planner

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Report PLN-2024-52 titled "Information Report to Update the Progress of the Town Growth Management Exercise and summary of Public Consultation Efforts" be received for information.

2. PREAMBLE:

The Town launched its Growth Management Project to guide growth to 2051 by holding a Section 26 statutory Public Meeting on June 25, 2024. The Project consists of two parts: Part 1 addresses intensification within the existing settlement boundary and Part 2 will explore potential settlement boundary expansions.

Since the June 25 Public Meeting, the Town, in partnership with WSP and Watson Consulting, have advanced Part 1 of the Project, including the following key activities:

- Hosting of growth management visioning workshops on October 16, 2024;
- Completion of foundational work for the first two OPAs in Part 1 including the provision of three Major Transit Station Area (MTSA) boundary options; and,
- Completion of the Growth Management Strategy – Growth Review and Allocations Background Report.

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the completed tasks, and to outline next steps in the Growth Management Project.

3. BASIC DATA PERTAINING TO THE MATTER:

Launched on June 25, 2024, the Town's Growth Management Study (GMS) is divided into two concurrent parts, targeting completion of the overall project by Q1 2026. Part 1 "Intensification First" focuses on intensification within the current settlement boundary through four thematic Official Plan Amendments (OPAs): Major Transit Station Area, Intensification Strategy, Employment Land Conversion, and Highway 400 Employment Lands.

Part 2 “Settlement Area Boundary Expansion Review” (SABE) explores boundary expansions while having consideration for infrastructure capacity and applicable policies contained in other provincial plans.

While both parts of the Project were initiated simultaneously and will be advanced in parallel, Part 1’s OPAs comprise the majority of the overall timeline, with completion targeted for Q2 2025. The following key tasks, scheduled for completion over the summer and fall, were completed by staff and the project team. These include:

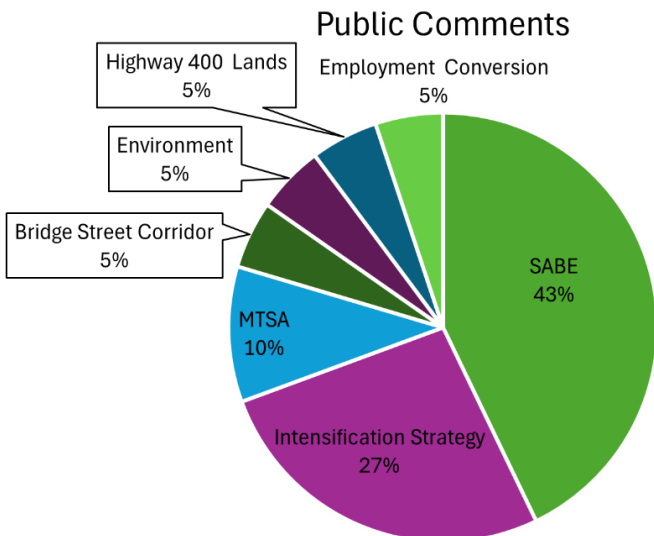
- 1) Policy review and direction setting (report previously provided to Council)
- 2) Hosting of first round of public consultation (visioning workshop)
- 3) BWG demographic, economic, and socio-economic profiling and growth driver assessment
- 4) Analysis of Simcoe County growth forecasts for BWG through 2051 and Land Needs Assessment review
- 5) Preliminary growth allocation by area within Town (Intensification OPA)
- 6) MTSA boundary delineation and foundational work (MTSA OPA)

The findings associated with the list of items above are summarized in the ensuing sections of this report.

3.1 – Visioning Workshop Findings and Summary

On October 16, 2024, the Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury (BWG) held two Visioning Growth Workshop sessions (3:00-5:00 pm and 7:00-9:00 pm) as part of the Growth Management Strategy (GMS). This was to gather public input on the GMS including intensification in residential areas, growth around the Bradford GO Station and Bridge Street, employment conversions, and urban boundary expansions. Workshop advertising began a month prior, including email blasts, social media posts, Town newspaper ads, and distribution of posters and pamphlets by Town staff.

Overall, approximately 70 people participated in both workshop sessions. Each session began with a GMS background presentation covering timelines and next steps, followed by a panel discussion by Town and WSP staff. Attendees then engaged in a rotating "knowledge café," seated at five stations each focused on an Official Plan Amendment (OPA) theme. Town and WSP staff facilitated discussions, provided interactive boards, and offered commenting sheets for additional feedback. The public feedback provided in the additional 20 commenting sheets given back to staff is summarized below:



OPA Theme	Comment Sheet Input Summary
Bridge Street and MTSA	Request to address Bridge St. traffic and enhance in-town transit options.
Employment Conversion	Consider Employment Conversions at the same time as boundary expansions
Environment	Request to consider policies for energy efficiency and green development.
Highway 400 Lands	Include a hospital or trauma centre at the intersection of highway 400
Intensification Strategy	Enhance the Town’s appeal to outsiders while fostering a sense of community.
SABE	Comments on protecting Brownlee Dr. Protect and add more greenspace.

Through the knowledge café exercise, participants expressed a desire to balance expansion with green space preservation, infrastructure readiness, and community identity. Below is a quick summary of the general input provided by participants at the different OPA stations:

- In the Settlement Area Boundary Expansion (SABE) discussions, residents prioritized protecting rural and agricultural lands while supporting infrastructure improvements.
- The Intensification Strategy highlighted concerns about density and green space loss, with a preference for mixed-use development and walkable, connected hubs.
- Feedback on the Major Transit Station Area (MTSA) emphasized careful planning for traffic and transit expansion, favoring mid-rise buildings and mixed-use spaces.
- The Bridge Street Corridor was seen as a vital growth area requiring thoughtful urban design and traffic management. A number of participants expressed concern with the impact of traffic on Bridge Street and the possibility of a “traffic relief valve” in the area.
- Feedback on the Employment Lands consisted of the stressing of strategic planning for essential services, including suggestions for medical facilities such as hospitals near Highway 400.

3.1.2 – Major Transit Station Area (MTSA) Boundary Options

The Simcoe County Official Plan Amendment No. 7 (SCOPA No. 7) provided a general delineated area for the Town’s Major Transit Station Area which also consists of the Bridge Street Corridor. Using the data and limitations prescribed through policy (such as 500 m to 800 m buffer from the MTSA) and through engagement with members of the public during the consultation efforts underway three potential options were developed for the MTSA Boundary. Each of the options below eliminate areas within the *Greenbelt Plan* or Holland Marsh. They are as follows:

Option 1 - Maximized Areas



Option 1

- All parcels within an 800m radius of the GO Station
 - Excludes lands in the Greenbelt
 - Excludes lands outside the Settlement Area Boundary
 - Includes lands that are within the LSRCA Regulated Area
- Most extensive option, greatest potential for intensification and redevelopment
- A large portion of central Bradford would no longer be subject to Parking Minimums

Option 2 - Medium



Option 2

- All parcels within an 800m walkshed of the GO Station
 - Excludes lands in the Greenbelt
 - Excludes lands outside the Settlement Area Boundary
 - Includes lands that are within the LSRCA Regulated Area
- Mainly captures commercial & mixed-use areas but still includes significant portions of residential neighbourhoods
- Density could be more spread out and still meet the required 150 people / jobs per hectare

Option 3 – Least Area



Option 3

- Parcels with the 800m walkshed AND part of the Downtown CIP
 - Excludes lands in the Greenbelt
 - Excludes lands outside the Settlement Area Boundary
 - Includes lands that are within the LSRCA Regulated Area
- Properties along S Side of Scanlon Ave were included
- St. Marie Catholic School Included
- Would require high density on MTSA lands outside the LSRCA regulated area to achieve 150 p+j / ha

Regarding the delineation of the MTSA boundary, staff notes that since June of 2024 (per Bill 185), the *Planning Act* prohibits municipalities from establishing minimum parking requirements on development of lands within those boundaries.

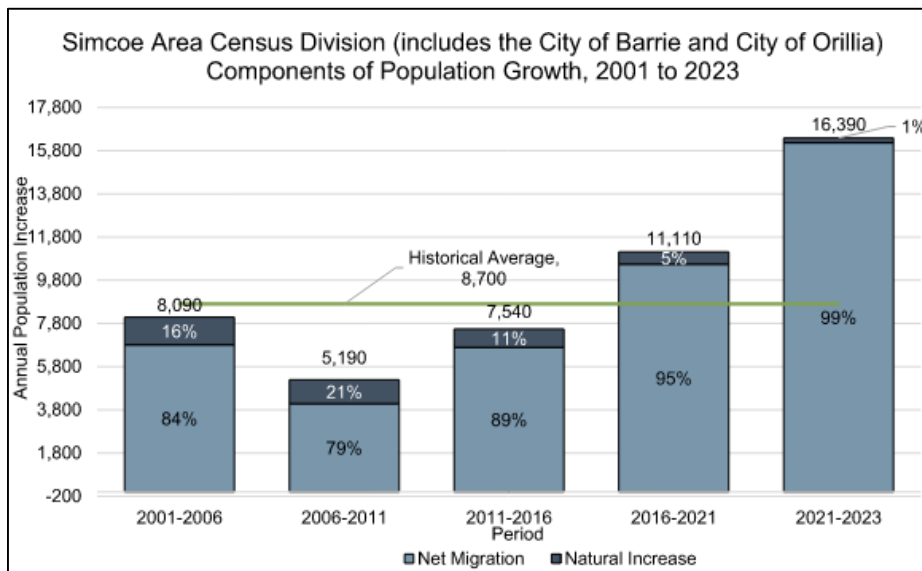
3.2 – Growth Review and Allocations Background Report

As foundational work for GMS, Watson and Associates Ltd. prepared a Background Report summarizing the County’s Municipal Comprehensive Review findings for BWG. Their report includes an overview of long-term economic and population growth projections within the context of regional trends and recent provincial planning reforms. It also provides high-level preliminary growth allocations across the Town’s urban and rural areas (Bradford, Bond Head, and the remaining rural area). Future reports for Intensification Analysis and Employment Strategy will follow in Q4 2024. Watson’s Background Report is included as Attachment 5.1 to this report. A high-level summary of the key findings is provided herein for brevity.

3.2.1 - Regional and Town Population Growth Trends and Forecasts

According to Simcoe County’s Official Plan Amendment No. 7, BWG is projected to reach a minimum population of around 83,500 and 30,900 jobs by 2051. Population growth occurs through two key components: natural increase (i.e., births less deaths); and net migration. The report identifies population growth in the County of Simcoe and BWG as largely driven by net migration rather than natural increase.

Between 2001 and 2021, the Simcoe Area Census Division (C.D.), which includes BWG, added approximately 8,000 people per year. This number then doubled to 16,400 people per year since 2021 driven mainly by migration.



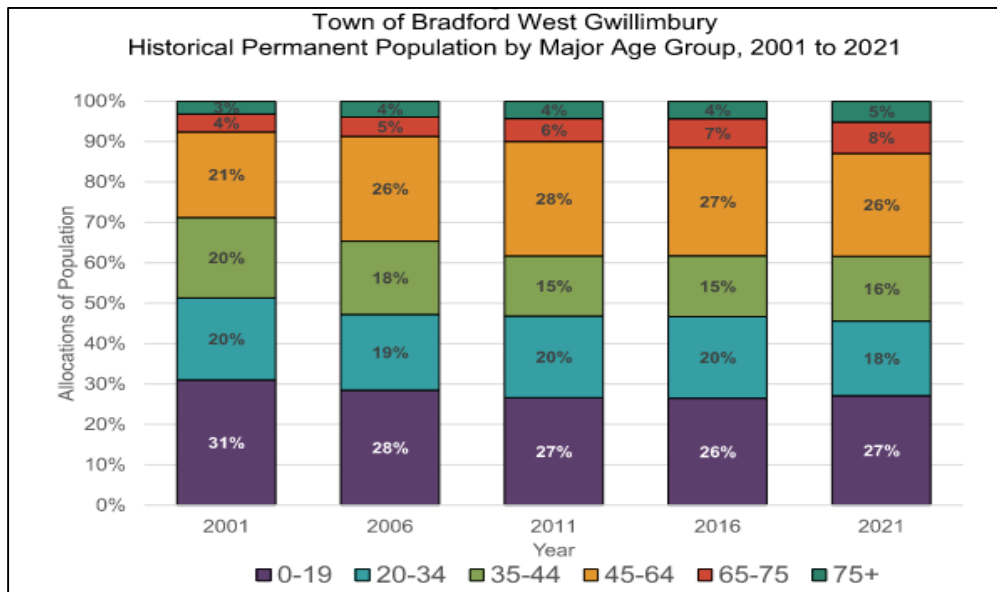
The Watson Report identifies BWG as accommodating 15% of Simcoe County's population growth over the past five years, with this share expected to rise to 17% by 2051. BWG’s population has grown from 23,100 in 2001 to 48,600 in 2024, an increase of 25,500. From 2016 to 2021, BWG saw a 4.0% annual growth rate, outpacing both the County’s 2.2% and the Provincial average of 1.4%.

Part of the key driver of that growth is due to the Town’s strategic location and proximity to the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GTHA), and Barrie C.M.A., making it a desirable destination especially for families and working-age adults relocating from the GTHA seeking more affordable grade-related housing options. This accessibility to both Toronto and Barrie, along with BWG’s

direct connection to Highway 400, has made BWG unique within Simcoe County as a growing residential hub.

The Watson Report also highlights that, alongside population growth through net migration, the Town must prepare for an aging demographic. Between 2021 and 2051, the 75+ age group is projected to be the Town’s fastest growing demographic, making it increasingly reliant on net migration rather than natural increase for growth.

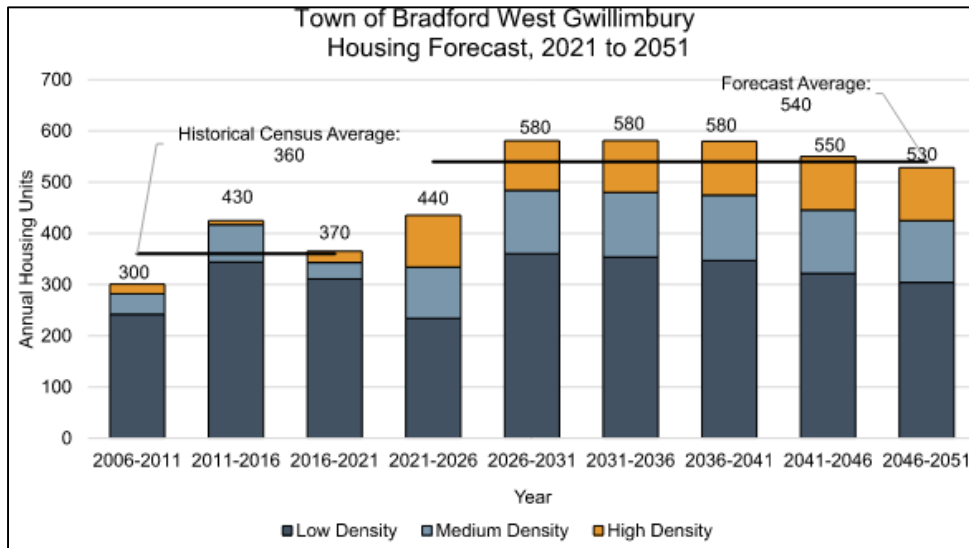
This demographic shift will also drive demand for medium and high-density housing, including seniors' and affordable housing. Additionally, the aging population is expected to place downward pressure on labor force participation and economic growth for the Town and County.



3.2.2 - Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury Housing Forecast

Between 2021 to 2024, new housing development in BWG has primarily consisted of low-density housing at 81%, with medium-density at 12% and high-density at 7%. Over the 2021–2051 period, the housing mix is projected to shift to approximately 20% high-density, 22-23% medium-density, and 58% low-density units, reflecting increased demand for affordable housing as well as a growing 65+ population.

Considering recent development trends, active applications, the Town’s 44% intensification target within the built-up area (BUA), and demand for affordable and senior housing, the Watson report projects BWG will add approximately 2,200 units (440 annually) from 2021–2026. This rate is expected to increase to 3,000 units (580 annually) from 2026–2031, remaining steady through 2041. After 2041, annual growth is projected to gradually decline due to an aging population, with an average of 550 units annually from 2041–2046 and 530 units from 2046–2051.



A key aspect of growth planning and building complete communities is supporting job creation as BWG’s population increases. The Town currently offers diverse employment opportunities, anchored by a strong agricultural sector and a robust manufacturing base, including some of the County’s largest industrial businesses.

The Town’s current employment activity rate (jobs-to-population ratio) is 26% and is anticipated to rise to 34% by 2051. Employment growth is projected across various sectors: industrial (29%), commercial/population-related (24%), institutional (17%), with the remaining 29% in work-from-home and no fixed workplace roles. BWG’s ability to attract diverse industries, especially in Employment Areas will play a crucial role in the growth in this industry. The Bradford Bypass will provide a key east-west route to support employer and labor force growth and can contribute to that growth.

A detailed Employment Strategy Report will be released later this year that will also include a review of the timing and phasing of Employment Area lands as well as the demand and appropriate timeframe for the need of the Highway 400 Reserve Lands.

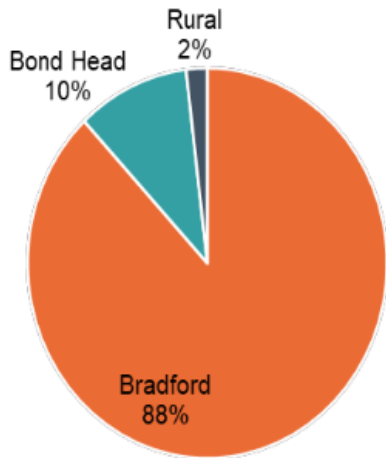
3.2.3 – Preliminary Allocation by Area

From 2019 to 2023, the Bradford Urban Settlement Area accommodated 88% of new housing in BWG, while the Bond Head Settlement Area accounted for 10%, with all activity occurring in the past two years. The Rural Area contributed 2% of housing activity.

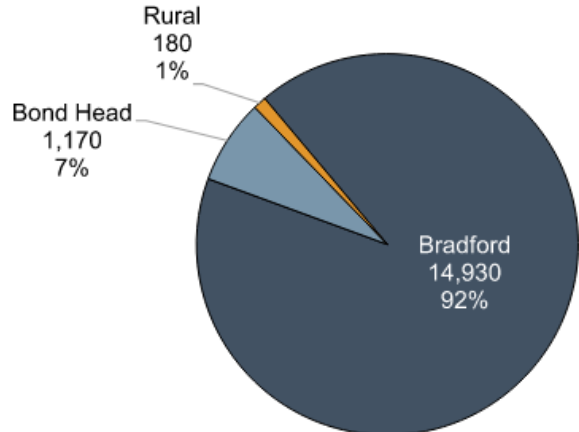
Within the BWG Urban Area, designated greenfield areas made up the majority of recent housing starts, while the Built-Up Area (BUA) accounted for 115 new units annually, with recent new housing units comprising of 37% low-density, 47% medium-density, and 17% high-density.

The Town's prescribed residential intensification target for the BUA is 44%, which would total over 6,600 units from 2024 to 2051. To meet this target, BWG will need to achieve an annual average of 246 units in the BUA—more than twice the recent annual average. This will require more emphasis on medium- and high-density housing units over the forecast horizon. Furthermore, this shift towards more medium- and high-density housing will also align with anticipated demand towards an increasing share of affordable and attainable housing options in the Town.

Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury
New Housing Unit Activity by Settlement Area and Rural Area, 2019 to 2023



Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury
Housing Growth Allocations, 2021 to 2051



Source: Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.

Between 2021 and 2051, Bond Head is expected to account for 7% of BWG's housing growth, while the Rural Area will decrease to 1%. The Bradford Urban Area will accommodate 92% of housing growth, supported by full municipal services, community amenities, and opportunities for both intensification and greenfield development. Further details on growth allocation by policy area in the Bradford Urban Area will be provided in Watson's upcoming Intensification Analysis Report.

3.4 – Next Steps

The next steps involve further analysis by Watson to assess intensification potential and employment opportunities within BWG's designated Employment Areas. The upcoming Intensification Analysis Report will explore intensification prospects in the MTSA and identify strategic growth areas (SGAs) for short- and long-term intensification across the Town. The Employment Strategy Report will provide insights into projected absorption levels in Employment Areas, expected sectoral growth, and demand for Highway 400 Reserve Employment Lands.

4. EFFECT ON TOWN FINANCES:

There are no direct impacts on the Town's finances with Council's receipt of this report for information. The costs associated with the Growth Management Project through preparation of materials by the consulting team working on behalf of the Town are borne through the capital project budget for the Growth Management Project.

5. ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 5.1 – Watson Report on Growth Allocations