



NEW OFFICIAL PLAN

Township of Essa

Rural Essa

Natural Essa

Growing Essa

Resilient Essa

Township of Essa

Background, Issues and Options Report

MAY

2025

Updated December 2, 2025

SGL
Planning & Design Inc.

DILLON
CONSULTING

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Version Tracker:

December 2, 2025 – Section 4.2.1 updated to include additional SBE requests and provide clarification.

1 Introduction



1.1 Essa Official Plan Review

The Township of Essa Official Plan (OP) is the primary tool for implementing the Township's goals and objectives relating to land use, growth, development and the environment. The current Essa Official Plan was approved in 2001 and is currently being updated to reflect current Provincial and County policy changes, as well as best practices and updated direction for new growth and development. The new Official Plan will be the key document to direct growth in Essa to the year 2051, guiding where and how people will live, work, shop and play. The new Official Plan will ensure the Township balances its anticipated growth while ensuring the important elements that contribute to Essa's community character and lifestyle are both maintained and enhanced.

To date, the OP Review Team has undertaken a collaborative process to lay the foundation for its new Official Plan. The process began with the refinement and finalization of the project workplan and schedule, along with the development of an engagement and consultation strategy to ensure inclusive public and stakeholder participation. Key early steps included early meetings to confirm issues and opportunities in order embed those matters early in the process. Background research and data collection have been conducted on a wide range of planning topics, including legislative and policy frameworks, residential growth and housing affordability, employment and agriculture, natural heritage and infrastructure, as well as emerging issues like climate change and sustainability.

In parallel with the research above the Township has engaged the community through multiple channels. An initial webpage and online survey were launched to inform the public and gather early input. Three targeted open houses/meetings were held with the rural/agricultural community, the settlement area community, and local school boards to collect diverse perspectives. A draft Vision and Principles report for the new OP was drafted based on early feedback and analysis. This report is based on the Council endorsed Vision and Principles.

1.2 Report Purpose and Structure

The purpose of this Background, Issues and Options Report is to present background information, current trends, policy direction, options and recommendations relating to key topic areas of the Official Plan Review.

The Report is structured as follows:

Section 1 introduces the Report.

Section 2 provides a summary of community engagement and feedback received to date as part of the Official Plan Review.

Section 3 presents the draft vision, key themes and principles for the new Official Plan.

Section 4 addresses current trends, policy direction and options for each of the following topic areas:

- Evolving Policy and Legislation Framework
- Settlement Area Boundary Expansion
- Residential and Housing
- Employment and Commercial
- Agriculture
- Community Design and Placemaking
- Natural Heritage and Source Water Protection
- Sustainability and Climate Change
- Transportation and Infrastructure
- Administration and Implementation

Section 5 provides next steps for the Official Plan Review.

2 What We've Heard



Community engagement and feedback is a key part of the Official Plan Review. To date, a series of in-person and online community engagement events have been undertaken, as well as ongoing outreach with key stakeholders including Simcoe County, Base Borden and Indigenous communities. These included the following activities:

- Pop-up Agricultural Community Event: August 22nd, 2024 (4pm-8pm) during the Barrie Fair (Essa Agriplex, Ivy)
- Settlement Areas Open House: September 25th, 2024 (5pm-7pm) at the Angus Recreation Centre, Angus, with over 50 attendees.
- Online Survey from August to October 2024, with 188 responses.

Continued opportunities for engagement will be provided throughout the Official Plan Review to help shape the new Official Plan and future of Essa over the next 25 years.

The new Essa Official Plan will be structured around the key themes of **Rural Essa**, **Natural Essa**, **Growing Essa**, **Resilient Essa** and **Connecting Essa**. These themes were developed as part of earlier engagement conducted to inform the new Official Plan in 2020. The following provides an overview of community feedback, based on the key themes of the Official Plan. In addition, the Township also received requests and communications from property owners regarding the land use designation of specific sites in Essa and opportunities for potential Settlement Area Boundary Expansion, as noted in Section 4.2.

	Issues	Opportunities
Rural Essa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing pressure to develop agricultural and rural lands • Fragmentation • Diversifying the agricultural industry • Land use conflicts with aggregate extraction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and diversify agricultural economy, local supply chain and identity • Support and encourage the growth of Value-Added Business and On-Farm Diversified Uses • Support the development of local supply chains and the growth of a functional regional agri-food network • Limit residential growth in agricultural areas • Broaden range of agricultural uses and promote value-added business and on-farm diversified uses including agri-tourism

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop policies to reduce land use conflicts
Natural Essa	Issues	Opportunities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fragmentation of natural features Increased pressure to develop; climate change Flooding risks Changing role of Conservation Authorities Tree loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement Provincial Natural Heritage System and County's Greenlands System Refine hazard lands based on updated mapping Incorporate LID/green infrastructure stormwater management policies Develop tree preservation direction
Growing Essa	Issues	Opportunities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing affordability Directing growth away from rural/agricultural lands Adequacy of services and servicing for certain types of growth (commercial, industrial) Accommodating County-adopted population (10,930) and employment (3,720) growth projections while maintaining small-town rural character/identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish an urban structure and settlement hierarchy Ensure full range of housing types and targets/ incentives for market-based, attainable and affordable options Plan for gentle intensification (e.g. Additional Residential Units) Develop an employment strategy Develop policies to implement Master Plans Develop Aging in Essa policies Plan for walkable mixed-use communities Adopt enhanced urban design, 'Made in Essa' growth approach Plan for complete communities
Resilient Essa	Issues	Opportunities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Official Plan pre-dates climate change considerations Recent storm events Need quality outdoor spaces that improve experiences and promote community interaction Increased By-law enforcement; tree loss Limited day care centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop climate change adaptation and mitigation policies Incorporate new community design guidelines and policies to build on Essa's unique sense of place Develop complete street concepts and healthy community design Plan for quality outdoor spaces Integration with Master Plans and Hazard Mapping

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider strategic land acquisition for community services • Develop a Community Planning Permit System Framework • Attract more supporting facilities (clinics, retail and recreational)
Connecting Essa	Issues	Opportunities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic reliance on car and impacts of car parking in some areas • Limited active transportation options (cycling and walking) • Limited bus connections between communities • Viability of transit limited by low population • Limited opportunities for active transportation • Need quality outdoor spaces that improve experiences and promote community interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect any planned upgrades to road network • Develop context-sensitive road design/complete streets • Protect key transportation and goods movements • Develop active transportation mapping and policies • Expand transit route opportunities; Integrate with Transportation and Trails Master Plan • Improve internet infrastructure • Improve active transportation; reinforce BCRY (Barrie Collingwood Railway) lands

3 Vision and Guiding Principles



3.1 Vision

The new Essa Official Plan will be structured around the key themes of **Rural Essa**, **Natural Essa**, **Growing Essa**, **Resilient Essa** and **Connecting Essa**. These themes, together with their associated issues and opportunities, have contributed to the formation of the following draft Vision Statement for the new Official Plan:

“To foster a thriving community of neighbourhoods that balance growth, evolve character, and minimize impacts by protecting agricultural functions, preserving natural environments, establishing good urban design, promoting resilient development, and enhancing transportation connections. Essa will be an inspired and cohesive community with residents connecting through better public spaces with social connections that foster resiliency and Essa’s identity for future generations.”

3.2 Guiding Principles

A set of guiding principles have been established under each key theme to direct and implement the new Official Plan:

1. Rural Essa

- a. Promote and protect the agriculture system as an important part of the Township’s economy and identity; and
- b. Support diversification of agricultural uses, a robust agri-food network and agricultural related uses including agri-tourism.

2. Natural Essa

- a. Protect environmental areas from development effects and incompatible land uses while improving access and connection to natural areas for passive recreational purposes; and
- b. Promote sustainable and climate resistant approaches to growth, infrastructure and facilities.

3. Growing Essa

- a. Focus growth to existing settlements areas based on available and planned services to preserve agricultural and rural lands;
- b. Support balanced and appropriate growth that provides for a range of housing options in tandem with commercial, employment, infrastructure and recreational growth;
- c. Implement the County of Simcoe's identified growth numbers for the Township of Essa; and
- d. Enable local economic opportunities that support local business, attract and improve service offerings and serve the rural community.

4. Resilient Essa

- a. Support healthy, complete and vibrant communities through quality design, active transportation and meaningful local places to live, work, and play;
- b. Improve access to community services and facilities, including child care, health care and recreational facilities; and
- c. Build on a community identity that embraces a small town feel with rural heritage.

5. Connecting Essa

- a. Improve mobility options for all residents by providing active transportation connections within neighbourhoods and between communities complemented by public transit;
- b. Promote a transportation network, informed by master planning, that safely and efficiently moves people and goods over the long-term, both for Essa and its adjoining municipal partners; and
- c. Strengthen digital connectivity by encouraging opportunities for internet infrastructure.

4 Issues and Options



4.1 Evolving Policy and Legislation Framework

The Official Plan Review was started in 2020, and then placed on hold in 2022 while the Township engaged with the Province and County of Simcoe to better understand the impact of legislative changes.

Since 2019, the Government of Ontario has introduced a number of legislative and policy changes that significantly affect how municipalities, including the Township of Essa, must plan for growth and development. These changes include updates to the Planning Act, the new Provincial Planning Statement (PPS), and the introduction of Bill 23 (More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022).

During the same time (August 2022), the County of Simcoe adopted Official Plan Amendment No. 7 (COPA No. 7). This amendment implemented the County's Growth Management Strategy and updated its Land Use Designations as part of the Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR). COPA No. 7 sought to implement the former provincial *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*. Key components of the amendment included updated policies on settlement hierarchies, population and employment forecasts, density and intensification targets, identification of Major Transit Station Areas, and the establishment of a framework for managing future growth and potential settlement area boundary expansions. COPA 7 included population and job targets for the Township, together with specific land area needs. The adopted amendment has yet to be approved by the Province.

The Township of Essa's Official Plan update will need to respond to recent changes and anticipate new changes to the changing County and Provincial planning landscape. Emphasis on housing supply, reduced regulatory barriers, and greater local flexibility will require the Township to modernize its planning framework while maintaining a clear vision for sustainable growth, infrastructure, and environmental stewardship.

Key impacts on Essa's Official Plan update include:

1. Focus on Housing Supply and Streamlining Development

Bill 23 and associated amendments aim to reduce barriers to residential development, including:

- Allowing up to 3 residential units "as-of-right" on most urban residential lots.

- Limiting site plan control for smaller residential developments (up to 10 units), reducing municipal oversight on urban design matters.
- Reducing or exempting development charges for affordable and rental housing.

Impact on Essa: The Township should consider revised policies that align with “as-of-right” permissions and streamline planning approvals for residential intensification.

2. Changes to Growth Management and Land Needs Assessment

- Updates to the new PPS including replacement of the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* reduces specific targets for intensification and density.
- More flexibility is given to municipalities in determining growth strategies, including potential boundary expansions and settlement area adjustments.

Impact on Essa: With the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* being no longer applicable, the Township has more discretion in accommodating growth through greenfield expansion or intensification. Any growth should still conform to the County of Simcoe’s growth allocation and direction in the absence of other specific growth-related data.

3. Reduced Role for Upper-Tier Municipalities

- Changes under Bill 23 propose limiting the planning authority of upper-tier municipalities like Simcoe County.

Impact on Essa: Essa may have increased responsibility in making local planning decisions and incorporating the County’s Official Plan if the province removes planning authority for the County as proposed. No date has been set for this to occur.

4. Public Consultation and Appeal Rights

- Changes to appeal rights (e.g., limiting who can appeal Official Plan decisions) and public consultation processes may affect how and when residents can engage in the planning process.

Impact on Essa: The Township may need to revise its consultation procedures and update Official Plan policies to reflect new notice, appeal, and decision-making frameworks.

5. Role of the Country of Simcoe and its Official Plan

The County of Simcoe has been identified as an upper tier municipality that will no longer have planning authority once the legislation is enacted at a future date yet to be determined.

Once the County loses its planning authority, the Township can expect the Province to direct that local official plans will be required to include former applicable County official plan policies (as directed by the Province for other lower tier municipalities where upper tier planning authority has been removed already). As a result, the new Essa Official Plan will be drafted to embed the current applicable policies of the Simcoe County Official Plan.

4.2 Settlement Area Boundary Expansion and Residential Land Budgets

As part of the Official Plan Review process, SGL and Dillon will work with staff at the County of Simcoe and Township of Essa to review infrastructure planning and develop viable growth options that align with the vision and principles of the Township's New Official Plan.

On August 9, 2022 the County completed Phase I of the Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) process with the adoption of County Official Plan Amendment 7 ("COPA 7"). While not yet approved by the Province, COPA 7 provides the most recent land needs assessment to meet growth allocation numbers assigned by the Province in the Growth Plan. In October, 2024 the Province replaced the Growth Plan with the 2024 PPS and released Ministry of Finance (MOF's) population projections to inform growth forecasts. Municipalities can continue to use the allocations to 2051 previously issued by the Province and implemented through COPA 7, provided they are higher than the October 2024 MOF's projections. In the event the MOF releases higher population forecasts for Essa, the growth strategy will need to be updated accordingly.

As per COPA 7, Essa requires an additional 134.8 hectares of new Community Area Land to accommodate 1,580 units, including 1,507 singles/semis and 67 rows (townhouses) as well as other community-related uses such as schools, parks and retail and commercial uses. At a density of 45 people and jobs per hectare, this translates into approximately 6,064 new people and jobs in Essa. Notably, the 134.8 hectares of new settlement area land needed is net of any development constraints, such as significant natural heritage and hydrological features.

To ensure sufficient land area is available to accommodate anticipated growth, any new settlement area lands should have anticipated constraints removed, including natural heritage/environmental protection areas and hazard lands. There may be other constraints not known at this time, such as archaeological, Species at Risk habitat and/or historical land uses that limit the full development potential of new settlement area lands and so it is recommended that Essa designate approximately 150 ha of new Community Area Land through this OP Review.

For employment growth, COPA 7 identified an increase of 600 jobs in Essa to 2051 that can be accommodated on the existing 30.1 ha of net land area available in Essa at an employment density of 20 jobs per hectare. Considering the 2024 PPS revised definition of employment, a reevaluation of vacant employment land in Essa was required and determined that the 187 hectares of total employment land, including approximately 117 hectares of vacant industrial lands, continues to be sufficient to accommodate Essa's allocated growth of 600 jobs.

4.2.1 Settlement Boundary Expansion Requests

Throughout the County's MCR process and the Township's Official Plan Review process, there have been a number of Settlement Area Boundary Expansion ("SABE") requests for consideration in Essa's growth approach as shown in **Appendix A**. A SABE request includes those areas of land that have been identified by landowners and private stakeholders as having potential to be included in future settlement boundary expansions. The full list of SABE requests (on a per land parcel basis) in Table 4.2.1 includes those received between 2020 and November 2025. Please note that a SABE request can include multiple land parcels resulting in a longer list of smaller land parcels as per Table 4.2.1. A SABE request does not mean a future inclusion in a settlement boundary will be granted, rather, each SABE undergoes technical evaluation against appropriate growth criteria that align with provincial, county and local policies and strategic objectives.

The total land area of the SABE requests and opportunities is approximately 900 gross hectares; however, netting out land areas with known environmental features and buffers not suitable for urban development yields a net SABE area of approximately 750 hectares (see Table 4.2.1 below). The County MCR process identified a Community Area Land need of 134.8ha, representing 15% of the total net land area being requested or identified as potential SABE areas. Table 4.2.1 lists each SABE request or opportunity in gross area as well as net area after known constraints have been removed and include eight around Angus totaling approximately 270 net hectares plus approximately 65 hectares for two properties adjacent to Angus in Base Borden; multiple properties around Baxter totaling approximately 330 hectares; three around Thornton totaling 55 net hectares; one around Utopia totaling 10 net ha; and, two along the southern limits of Essa to expand Cookstown and Alliston settlement areas that total 90 hectares.

TABLE 4.2.1: Potential SABEs in Essa

SABE #	Settlement Area	Location	Gross Area (Approx Ha)	Net Area (Approx Ha)
1	Angus	62 BRENTWOOD ROAD	35	7.64
2	Angus	ROLL NO 432103000109400	117.69	95.69
3	Angus	32-60 BRENTWOOD ROAD	4.08	2.78

4	Angus	9078 MCKINNON RD	41.61	28.44
5	Angus	9055 5TH LINE	27.91	27.91
6	Angus	6034 30TH SIDEROAD	10.33	5.64
7	Angus	8769 5TH LINE	23.9	16.39
8	Angus	8512 6TH LINE	38.8	22.53
9	Angus	8569 5TH LINE	29	31.32
10	Utopia	5892 30TH SIDEROAD	13.43	9.57
11	Thornton	7092 COUNTY ROAD 27	28	20.63
12	Thornton	6958 COUNTY ROAD 27	29	28.01
13	Thornton	6538 COUNTY ROAD 27	12	6.1
14	Baxter	118 DENNEY DRIVE	1.17	1.17
15	Baxter	114 DENNEY DR	42.11	42.11
16	Baxter	240 MURPHY ROAD	42.53	42.53
17	Baxter	6070 COUNTY ROAD 21	0.85	0.85
18	Baxter	432101000719013	5.04	5.04
19	Baxter	432101000719014	2.13	2.13
20	Baxter	122 MURPHY ROAD	49.46	48.88
21	Baxter	6995 COUNTY ROAD 10	31.51	23.51
22	Baxter	116 MURPHY RD	0.03	0.03
23	Baxter	6541 COUNTY RD 21	6.56	4.57
24	Baxter	119 MURPHY ROAD	1.63	1.63
25	Baxter	6657 COUNTY RD 10	10.44	10.44
26	Baxter	127 MURPHY ROAD	19.28	19.28
27	Baxter	117 MURPHY ROAD	17.67	17.67
28	Baxter	12 PROSPEROUS WAY	3.05	3.05

29	Baxter	10 PROSPEROUS WAY	2.59	2.59
30	Baxter	9 STANDARD RD	1.64	1.64
31	Baxter	7 STANDARD RD	1.6	1.6
32	Baxter	5 STANDARD RD	1.59	1.59
33	Baxter	3 STANDARD RD	0.8	0.8
34	Baxter	2 STANDARD RD	1.59	1.59
35	Baxter	4 STANDARD RD	1.64	1.64
36	Baxter	8 STANDARD RD	1.73	1.73
37	Baxter	3 PROSPEROUS WAY	1.73	1.73
38	Baxter	4 PROSPEROUS WAY	2.02	2.02
39	Baxter	2 PROSPEROUS WAY	1.81	1.81
40	Baxter	6563 COUNTY RD 10	29.42	28.27
41	Baxter	1 PROSPEROUS WAY	1.87	1.87
42	Baxter	3 PROSPEROUS WAY	1.93	1.93
43	Baxter	5 PROSPEROUS WAY	1.79	1.79
44	Baxter	7 PROSPEROUS WAY	1.41	1.41
45	Baxter	9 PROSPEROUS WAY	1.13	1.13
46	Baxter	11 PROSPEROUS WAY	1.34	1.34
47	Baxter	13 PROSPEROUS WAY	25.66	25.66
48	Baxter	ROLL NO 432101000711544	0.43	0.43
49	Baxter	25 DENNEY DRIVE & 47 DENNEY DRIVE	31.51	30.59
50	Angus	6361 5TH LINE	36.8	29.82
51	Cookstown Border	5557 11TH CONCESSION & 4772 HIGHWAY 89	67	55.67
52	Alliston Border	5426 3RD LINE	39	34.74
Total Land Area (Gross Ha) of SABE Requests			902.24	

	Total Net Land Area (Approx Ha) of SABE Requests	758.93
	Total Community Land Area Need (Ha) (COPA 7)	134.8
	Difference (Net Land Area – Community Land Area) (Ha)	624.14 (surplus)

4.2.2 Growth Evaluation Criteria and Methodology

To assess the areas of interest for future growth, Growth Evaluation Criteria were developed that align with the 2024 PPS and overall best practices in growth management in the County. The Criteria consists of a set of mandatory and informative criteria and each SABE request undergoes a two-phase review: Phase 1 Review involves a review of the SABE request against a set of Mandatory Criteria based on need, servicing and location. The SABE request must meet all Mandatory Criteria in the Phase 1 Review to proceed to Phase 2 Review. The Phase 2 Review involves an assessment and ranking of each remaining SABE request according to a set of Informative Criteria based around land use, agricultural, servicing and environmental considerations.

Phase 1 Review – Mandatory Criteria:

- There is a demonstrated need for additional land according to the Ministry of Finance's Ontario Population Projections, as appropriate.
- The expansion does not result in land area capacity that would exceed that needed to accommodate the range and mix of land uses over the planning horizon of the Official Plan.
- There is sufficient capacity in existing and municipally planned infrastructure and public service facilities, informed by applicable master plans and/or environmental assessments under the Environmental Assessment Act, as appropriate.
- The expansion cannot result in land being added to a settlement if that land is situated in another municipality.
- Expansion into a Specialty Crop Area is prohibited.
- The expansion area must be located immediately adjacent/contiguous to an existing Settlement Area.

Phase 2 Review - Informative Criteria:

- The expansion area should be located immediately adjacent/contiguous to Angus, Essa's principal settlement area.
- The expansion area is located where development would support achievement of the Township's density targets and meet the policy intent of the Township's Official Plan.

- The expansion area is located where it can support a range and balance of housing (including affordable housing) and employment options.
- The expansion area will contribute to achieving compact, walkable, sustainable and healthy communities that enhance a sense of place.
- The expansion area provides an appropriate rural interface.
- Prime agricultural areas are avoided where possible by considering and evaluating alternative locations. Where prime agricultural areas cannot be avoided, consider lower priority agricultural lands.
- The expansion area complies with the minimum distance separation formulae (MDS).
- It should be demonstrated how any adverse impacts on the agricultural system including agricultural operations from expanding settlement areas will be avoided and if avoidance is not possible, minimized and mitigated, through an agricultural impact assessment or equivalent analysis, based on provincial guidance.
- The expansion area would be located to maximize the use of existing infrastructure and public service facilities. The infrastructure and public service facilities needed would be financially viable over the full life cycle of these assets.
- The expansion area has appropriately considered matters related to sustainability and climate change.
- The expansion area adequately protects and avoids development within natural heritage and water resources, in accordance with the Township of Essa Official Plan, Simcoe County Official Plan, and provincial and federal requirements.
- The expansion area will avoid, or if avoidance is not possible, minimize and mitigate any potential negative impacts on watershed conditions and the water resource system including the quality and quantity of water.

4.2.3 Evaluation of Growth Options

All SABE Requests will be subject to the initial Phase 1 Review of the mandatory criteria. As there is a demonstrated need for additional land based on the outcome of the County's MCR Phase 1 process, all SABE Requests would already meet the land need Criteria 1 and 2.

- As per the Angus Infrastructure Master Plan (IMP), Angus is the Township's primary settlement area considered to be a complete community providing full municipal servicing with planned capacity for growth. The IMP Addendum #1 notes a residual wastewater system capacity of approximately 870 equivalent residential units in the near term, with further water and storage capacity available for at least 720 further ERU, once future wastewater capacity upgrades outlined in the IMP are completed. There is a water supply servicing gap of 300 ERUs and a need for additional water storage for additional development to proceed in the near term.

The water infrastructure needs to service projected growth over the 25-year horizon to 2051 in Angus include:

- a. A new well at Mill Street with an estimated capacity of 4,400 m³/d (approximately 1,590 equivalent residential units of capacity), and
- b. Constructing a single elevated storage system at the Mill Street site (approximate capacity of 4,200 m³ for the 25-year buildout, filled to 50% for maintenance purposes until additional capacity is required).

With respect to wastewater infrastructure, two key projects were identified in the Angus IMP preferred master servicing options:

- a. Expand existing MBR Wastewater Treatment Plant: Through upgrades to the existing WWTP, expand capacity and continue discharge to Nottawasaga River;
- b. Wastewater Collection Upgrades: Sanitary Network Upgrades in Area 1 & 2 – to support the collection system needs.

Baxter is a partially serviced settlement with municipal water, private wells and private septic.

Based on the Township staff report (PW001-23), the proposed Baxter WWTP is intended to service Brookfield's 253-unit subdivision development. The WWTP is developer funded and intended to be transferred to Township ownership. While the plant is designed with some contingency, it is not intended to service additional residential units. It is understood that there is no intention for additional capacity in this plant at this time. Significant future development in this geography would require additional infrastructure.

Thornton is partially serviced with municipal water (well) and private sanitary services.

Utopia is a residential development area on private services.

Based on the criteria of sufficient capacity in existing and municipally planned infrastructure and public service facilities, the SABE requests outside of those adjacent to Angus do not meet the criteria and are not being carried forward into the Phase 2 analysis. Those adjacent to Angus will require additional analysis to determine if there is sufficient capacity to accommodate settlement boundary expansion growth, within the context of the supported growth based on wastewater and water infrastructure needs described above.

Role of Angus as a Primary Settlement Area:

The location criteria require all SABE requests to be located within Essa Township and immediately adjacent/contiguous to an existing Settlement Area.

Angus is considered a complete community offering the widest range and mix of housing types, community services and a mix of institutional, commercial and employment uses.

Avoidance of Agricultural Lands:

Each Phase 2 SABE Request will also be reviewed in terms of avoidance of prime agricultural areas or, where not possible and lower priority agricultural lands, compliance with Minimum Distance Separation Formulae and avoids adverse impacts to agricultural operations or, where avoidance not possible, such impact is minimized through an Agricultural Impact Assessment.

Servicing:

Each Phase 2 SABE Request is being reviewed to confirm sufficient capacity within the existing and planned municipal servicing network and to maximize the use of existing infrastructure and public service facilities to ensure financial viability over the full life cycle of these assets. The Angus IMP identified the near-term needs with some residual wastewater servicing capacity, but a gap in water servicing. The IMP noted the need for a more complete stormwater servicing review to inform development planning, and a few Schedule A+ road maintenance projects to support the need for increased capacity including crack and seal or surface treatments, mill and overlay, and reconstruction.

Environmental Informative Criteria:

The review of each SABE request will consider matters related to sustainability and climate change; adequate protection and avoidance of development within key natural heritage features and hydrologic features; and, avoidance, or if avoidance is not possible, minimize and mitigate any potential negative impacts on watershed conditions and the water resource system.

The application of this criteria will use the County's newest Natural Heritage Mapping which should be available to local planning departments week of April 7 (updated wetland, woodland using LiDAR imagery).

4.2.4 Preferred Growth Options

Following application of the Growth Evaluation Criteria for the SABE requests, the preferred Growth Options for Essa include:

Option 1: Angus Only

With approximately 330 ha of potential SABE land area for Angus, including the identified Base Borden lands, expanding only the principal settlement of Angus would satisfy the land needs identified for Essa for the planning horizon of the New Official Plan. Focusing future growth to Angus reinforces previous growth strategies for the Township and has the benefits of contributing to an existing complete community with a mix of land uses, including employment and aligning with the Servicing Master Plan for the Township. Concentrating further growth in Angus would also better support future transit services.

Notably, minor infilling and redevelopment could be expected in Thornton and Baxter, pending appropriate and planned servicing.

Option 2: Angus and Baxter (dependent on servicing)

While locating most growth in Angus, secondary growth in Baxter could be considered as part of planned infrastructure expansion to provide full services. Any expansion of the settlement boundary or redesignation to residential land would only be considered if the planned infrastructure required for growth is established through an approved Township Master Plan or Environmental Assessment process, and based on the projected 25-year horizon upgrades for Angus as identified in the IMP and IMP Addendum.

By directing some future growth to an expanded Baxter on full services, the Township benefits from encouraging a more complete community for an improved mix of uses, including commercial and employment which are currently limited in Baxter. Community facilities already exist in Baxter, including a school, parkland and churches. Baxter is also the closest settlement to large employers in the Alliston area.

Policies for limited growth to round out rural settlement areas could be considered in accordance with the Provincial Policy Statement 2024. Unserved residential development would not be permitted on agricultural lands, unless directly associated with agricultural uses.

4.3 Residential and Housing

Trends in Essa

The Township of Essa is committed to supporting the current under-supply of housing being experienced in the Township and across the Province. Essa is currently being threatened with a loss of agricultural lands due to lower density developments within its

settlement areas. A balance must be struck to provide an increase in housing stock while also preserving agricultural land and resources. Council is generally in favour of mixed-use developments and attracting investments to Essa and they also recognize that specific attention needs to be paid to aging residents. The Township should also consider support for affordable housing, including the already permitted up to two additional residential units (ARUs) throughout residential, agricultural and rural zones. Minimum and implementable affordable housing targets could also be included in new policies.

Current Provincial and County Direction

The Province of Ontario has a goal to build at least 1.5 million homes by 2031 and the PPS 2024 provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development within Ontario. Chapter 2 of the PPS speaks to building homes as well as sustaining strong and competitive communities. Specifically, sections 2.1 and 2.2 of the PPS require an appropriate range and mix of housing options and densities to meet the projected needs of current and future residents based on the population and units allocated by Simcoe County.

The provision of housing units should cater to affordable to low and moderate income households to meet the social, health, economic and well-being requirements of residents as trends change over time. New growth and development, grounded by Simcoe County's growth management process and implementing COPA 7, should be based on the County's population increasing significantly over the next 25 years, growing by 194,000 people—from 361,000 in 2021 to 555,000 by 2051—driven primarily by in-migration from the Greater Toronto Area. Approximately 63% of this growth is projected to occur in the Southern Regional Market Area, with the majority concentrated in the rapidly growing communities of Innisfil, Bradford West Gwillimbury, Essa, and New Tecumseth. The County growth data, adopted by County OPA 7, represents the best available and locally specific data to inform growth for the Township.

The County's employment base will grow by 81,000 jobs, from 117,000 in 2021 to 198,000 in 2051. About 34,340 new jobs will require Employment Areas for their activities.

Section 4.1 of the SCOP echoes the goals of the former PPS and outlines a list of policies for achieving complete and healthy communities including but not limited to, access to community services and facilities, the design of streetscapes and built forms, transit-supportive developments and providing a mix of housing types and densities.

Section 4.3 of the SCOP encourages local municipalities to establish policies in their Official Plans to provide supportive communities for residents to age in place, reduce unmet housing need, reduce housing inequality, improve housing quality and provide for an efficient delivery of affordable housing. Local municipalities such as Essa are encouraged to have regard for the County's 10-Year Affordable Housing and Homelessness Prevention Strategy. The County of Simcoe also has a target that a minimum of 10 percent of all new housing units created each year will be affordable units.

Current Essa Policies

Residential policies in the current Essa Official Plan dictate that single detached dwellings will dominate the Township's housing market with the potential for some forms of higher density housing types (e.g. townhouses and low-rise apartments). Residential land use designations within Essa include: "Residential", "Residential – Future", "Mobile Home Residential", "Estate Residential" and "Residential Recreational". The main growth centres within the Township are Angus, Thornton and Baxter while areas like Utopia, Ivy, Egbert and Colwell will experience limited growth.

Options and Recommendations

- Promote and provide for a full range of housing types, tenures, built forms and densities to meet the needs of current and future residents. Rely less on single detached homes for growth to make homes more attainable and avoid sprawl through target-based policies, i.e. no more than 65% of new housing units be single detached dwelling in proposed plans of subdivision and/or condominium,
- Plan for and establish targets for market-based attainable and affordable housing options using County targets and according to a metric on how attainable and affordable housing units are defined (e.g. [Simcoe County and City of Orillia Housing Attainable Supply Action Plan](#) and [Affordable Residential Units for the Purposes of the Development Charges Act, 1997 Bulletin](#)).
- Align policies and incentives with County's Housing and Homelessness Plan.
- Consider policies, incentives and community partnerships to encourage and promote affordable housing projects within settlement areas.
- Opportunities to update policies to encourage gentle intensification and accessory residential units in existing residential areas and as part of greenfield sites

4.4 Employment and Commercial

Trends in Essa

Major employers in Essa today include the Canadian Forces training base (CFB) Borden, alongside a mix of construction materials manufacturing, transportation (trucking), and farm suppliers. Essa is projected to grow by an additional 3,460 jobs by 2031 to 13,090 jobs by 2051 (Hemson Consulting Limited, 2022) with 600 of these jobs projected to occur within employment lands. The Simcoe County Land Needs Assessment did not identify any additional employment land needs to accommodate this growth beyond those already

designated in the Township (Hemson Consulting Limited, 2022). There is demand for more accessible retail and commercial uses in proximity to residential areas, as well as a greater diversity of businesses and services to support the growing population.

Current Provincial and County Direction

The PPS (2024, Section 2.8) identifies the importance of planning for intensification in employment areas and encouraging a mix of uses and compact development to support complete communities. Land use compatibility between employment area functions and adjacent areas will need to be reviewed and policies developed to guide development in line with the PPS (2024).

Current Essa Policies

With respect to employment and commercial uses, the existing Official Plan identifies Institutional, Industrial, Commercial and Commercial Recreational land use designations. The policies for these will need to be reviewed in conjunction for alignment with the PPS (2024) as well as overall land use planning to develop complete communities in Essa.

The current Commercial policies are oriented towards grouping commercial sites and concentrating activity in areas that support the traffic and access needs of the community. As Essa grows, there will be a need to consider how mixed-use development and more integrated forms of smaller commercial activity can be accommodated in the Township. The Official Plan also identifies policies relating to the separation of commercial uses from sensitive environmental areas or hazard lands where flooding is a risk, which would need to be carried over into the New Official Plan.

The existing Industrial policies include three main designated areas for employment-focused activity:

- Angus Industrial, located in southern portion of Angus with access to County Road 10;
- Baxter Industrial, located south and west of Baxter, also with access to County Road 10 and with railway access;
- County Road 56 Industrial, located adjacent to County Road 56 and Highway 90, with railway access.

The permitted Industrial uses include ‘non-obnoxious’ forms of industry (manufacturing, assembly, processing, fabrication, storage, repair, warehousing and research establishments), as well as accessory retail. The Current OP identifies policies about land use compatibility for new industrial development as well as the criteria for approval of new sites, including relating to servicing capacity. Given the evolving nature of manufacturing and trade, planning for the employment areas in Essa will need to consider adaptability and intensification of existing sites, and potential to accommodate parcel consolidation if needed to support larger manufacturing operations in the future.

Options and Recommendations: Employment

- Currently, there is a surplus of land designated for employment beyond the minimum area identified in the County's employment land needs assessment. The Township can choose to maintain current employment land area or reduce the amount of employment lands to an area not less than the County's minimum land needs assessment number.
- The employment policies in the Official Plan need to be revised to reflect the need for a broader range of employment opportunities through consideration of changes to existing employment designations or addition of new ones that would support mixed uses as well as prestige employment. The potential for lot consolidation as well as adaptability of employment functions to consider new and emerging trends and maintain attractiveness to large employers will be a key consideration for the New Official Plan, and a potential competitive advantage.
- The Essa Official Plan will need policies to support infrastructure planning and servicing of employment areas.
- Integration between the employment and transportation policies will be key as noted in the Town's Transportation Master Plan (2024), given the need to support employment lands to thrive in connection with supply chain logistics and access to major transportation routes and rail access.
- The overall employment policy framework needs to be updated in conformity with the PPS (2024) to guide investment and development, as well as the protection of employment areas from conversion applications. This includes alignment with the definition of employment areas and activities, clearly stating objectives for the employment areas, developing policies to identify employment areas that are targeted for intensification, intended function of employment areas and types of activities permitted, and stating the criteria for redesignation.
- There is also an opportunity to broaden the range of uses permitted within the Agricultural land use designation to support rural employment and rural-resource based recreational employment uses, and encourage more diversification of employment in the rural areas of Essa.
- The current policies relating to aggregate and other extractive industrial activities need to be updated to consider growth pressures in Essa that may lead to land use compatibility concerns, and include additional policies relating to buffering from other sensitive uses.
- The importance of supporting aggregate activities will be carried forward into the new Official Plan, identifying the types of permitted activities and ways to protect natural heritage and ecological features, while supporting the sustainability and continuity of these activities.
- The new Official Plan could also contemplate enabling policies for further by-laws and policies to address the use of excess soils and mitigate against the importation of contaminated soil to aggregate sites.

Options and Recommendations: Commercial

- Complete communities require a broad and balanced range of commercial and service facilities. The commercial policies in Essa's Official Plan need to be enhanced to encourage mixed-use development and the provision of new commercial and service uses as part of new residential development, to attract expanded commercial uses to balance residential uses and to support more complete communities with reduced automobile needs in accessing daily services.
- The addition of policies for a range of commercial uses may include some new land use designations and updates to the definitions in the Official Plan, such as the development of neighbourhood and rural commercial areas to support the development of commercial activity and concentration of commercial functions in line with the Simcoe County OP (2023) and the PPS (2024).
- Given the particular focus on residential development in Angus and Baxter, the Official Plan will need policies to support a wider range of commercial activity in these communities to support accessibility to daily services and amenities.
- It will be important to consider the function and continued growth of the commercial area in Thornton, alongside supporting main street activity and vibrancy in this community.
- Reinforce commercial centres, create opportunities to establish 'main' streets, plan for big box stores only where appropriate and complementary, complete neighbourhoods and encourage walkability in all settlements where applicable and appropriate.

4.5 Agriculture

Trends in Essa

There is growing pressure in Essa to develop agricultural and rural lands, alongside the ongoing fragmentation of agricultural land. Land use compatibility conflicts between agricultural uses and adjacent land uses (e.g. aggregate, residential) are likely to emerge more significantly as the population grows, and more people who have not previously resided in rural communities move into the area. The agricultural sector is an important economic engine in Essa and will need to diversify to remain competitive, with strong interest expressed by those in the industry in promoting agri-tourism.

Current Provincial and County Direction

The Province released mapping for a Growth Plan Agricultural System in 2018. This mapping was to be incorporated into the County of Simcoe Official Plan as part of the ongoing Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR). With the repeal of the Growth Plan in

October 2024, municipalities are no longer required to implement the Growth Plan Agricultural System. However, the Provincial Planning Statement (2024), Section 4.3 (Agriculture) still requires municipalities to identify an Agricultural System based on Provincial guidance. the new OP schedules will need to satisfy this policy.

The County of Simcoe Official Plan includes agricultural policies in Section 3.6. These policies will need to be carried forward into the new Township of Essa Official Plan.

Current Essa Policies

The Essa Official Plan includes agricultural policies in Section 6, and rural policies in Section 7. The primary objective of the agricultural policies is to promote and protect agriculture as an important part of the Township's economy and identity.

Options and Recommendations

- To address increasing development pressure on agricultural lands, Prime Agricultural lands, including Specialty Crop areas, shall be designated and protected for long-term use for agriculture, in accordance with Section 4.3.1.2 of the PPS, 2024.
- The Official Plan will need to recognize different sizes, types and styles of farms. There are opportunities to broaden the range of uses in agricultural areas, including agricultural-related businesses, value-added activities, agri-food strategies, agri-tourism, and on-farm diversified uses.
- The policies need to be updated to ensure non-agricultural uses pose minimal impacts on agricultural uses, provide adequate buffering, cluster non-agricultural uses, and exhaust other alternative locations.
- The Township is required to identify an Agricultural System in accordance with Section 4.3 of the PPS, 2024. The Township could consider voluntarily adopting the Growth Plan Agricultural System, as refined by Simcoe County as part of the MCR, to fulfill this requirement.
- Agricultural policies in the new Essa Official Plan will require revision to be consistent with PPS 2024 policies (e.g. lot creation, lot adjustments, removal of land from prime agricultural areas, non-agricultural uses, supporting local food and the agri-food network) and Simcoe County Official Plan policies.
- An Official Plan Schedule depicting the Agricultural System is recommended to provide clarity and guide development. In accordance with PPS Section 4.3.5.2, impacts from any new or expanding non-agricultural uses on the Agricultural System may require an Agricultural Impact Assessment or equivalent analysis.

4.6 Community Design and Placemaking

High-quality community design helps to ensure the preservation and enhancement of the unique elements that characterize Essa as a community. Community design involves consideration of both the public and private realm and includes providing functional and pedestrian-oriented streetscapes, compatible and accessible site design, high-quality built form and connected parks and open spaces, as well as protecting natural and cultural heritage. As Essa continues to grow, it is a priority of the Township to maintain its small-town rural character and identity, while also supporting the creation of a vibrant community through high quality development, active transportation improvements and providing meaningful public spaces for residents and visitors.

Placemaking goes hand in hand with good community design and planning for successful, sustainable and complete communities. Placemaking is a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design and management of public spaces. It involves a collaborative process of reimagining public spaces as the heart of a community and providing direction for their ongoing evolution. An update to the Official Plan provides the opportunity to introduce new community design and placemaking policies that will provide direction for new development and redevelopment in accordance with the vision for the Township and the character of its unique communities. Community design policies should reflect the values, needs and aspirations of Essa's residents while promoting sustainable development and enhancing quality of life.

Current Essa Official Plan Policies

A few design policies are interspersed throughout the current Essa Official Plan, applying to the Town's Residential, Commercial, Institutional and Industrial designations. These current policies provide very high-level direction to ensure development is compatible with the character of adjacent lands or existing area development with respect to elements such as views, privacy, sunlight, height, landscaping and circulation.

Current Provincial and County Direction

The PPS supports the achievement of compatible, compact, mixed use complete communities that are accessible and reflect a high quality of life for people of all ages, abilities and incomes. Complete communities accommodate an appropriate range and mix of land use types, housing options, transportation options, employment, public service facilities, recreation, parks and open space and other uses to meet long-term needs. The Provincial Planning Statement encourages compact built form and mixed land uses that encourage the efficient use of land and the creation of walkable, pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods.

Echoing the Provincial Planning Statement, the Simcoe County Official Plan prioritizes the development of complete and healthy communities, as well as age-friendly planning.

Municipalities with primary settlement areas are directed to ensure the development of high-quality urban form and public open spaces through site design and urban design standards that create attractive, inclusive and vibrant places for residents of all ages and abilities that support walking, cycling and transit for everyday activities.

Section 4.1 of the Simcoe County Official Plan “Healthy Communities and Housing Development” prioritizes accessible design; the integration of community spaces and natural settings for recreation; publicly accessible built and natural settings; and safe pedestrian and cycling access through the design of streetscapes, orientation and traffic flow in downtowns, main streets and other activity areas. Section 4.8 “Transportation” sets out policies for the design of development, where the application of a complete streets approach, transit-supportive design and local municipal design guidance is encouraged to be incorporated into local municipal official plans, specifically for main street and downtown areas, as well as in the design of public facilities and streetscapes. Section 4.10 “Age Friendly Planning” encourages the provision of age-friendly social and physical environments. Local municipalities are specifically encouraged to develop official plan policies that support residents to age in place in both urban and rural communities, integrating affordable age-friendly housing, community facilities and support services. The County also encourages the use of universal design guidelines and best practices to inform local municipalities of evidence-based elements and standards for components of the built environment including age-friendly policies to assist in creating healthier and safer communities.

Options and Recommendations for Essa

- Introduce direct language throughout the Official Plan around placemaking, accessibility and the creation of age-friendly, complete communities.
- Introduce a set of community design policies applicable for each land use designation relating to the design of both the public and private realm.
- Establish specific design guidance for development and redevelopment in the Town’s settlement areas including Angus, Thornton and Baxter based on the established character of each area, as well as a unified vision for future improvements and growth.
- Establish urban design standards that create attractive, functional, and well-connected streetscapes, such as pedestrian-friendly sidewalks complete streets, public gathering spaces, and appropriate building heights and setbacks.
- Establish policies to protect and celebrate Essa Township’s cultural and architectural heritage, including designated heritage buildings, districts, and culturally significant landscapes.

- Provide specific design guidance for enhancement of the public realm including streetscapes, the design of gathering spaces, active transportation, parks and open spaces and natural heritage features.
- Provide policies emphasizing approaches that achieve healthy and complete communities through design, active transportation, improved safety and providing meaningful places live, work and play.

4.7 Natural Heritage and Source Water Protection

Trends in Essa

The Natural Heritage System adds to Essa's rural character and provides for a natural open space landscape. Essa residents have expressed a strong interest in improving community access to natural areas, including trails for active transportation. Natural systems across Ontario and in Essa are vulnerable to climate change impacts, including extreme heat, flooding, and increase in invasive species.

There is ongoing development pressure on natural heritage and water resources as the Township grows, resulting in the fragmentation of natural areas and threats to drinking water sources. Tree protection and growing the tree canopy across Essa has been emphasized as a key community priority.

Current Provincial and County Direction

The PPS (2024) includes policies for natural heritage, natural hazards, and water. Bill 23 (2022) introduced changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act*. As part of these changes, conservation authorities can no longer provide comment to municipalities on natural heritage.

The Province released mapping for a Growth Plan Natural Heritage System in 2018. This mapping was to be incorporated into the County of Simcoe Official Plan as part of the ongoing Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR). With the repeal of the Growth Plan in October 2024, municipalities are no longer required to implement the Growth Plan Natural Heritage System. However, the Provincial Planning Statement (2024), Section 4.1 (Natural Heritage) requires municipalities to identify a Natural Heritage System based on Provincial guidance. As such, Simcoe County has developed a Natural Heritage System, called the Greenlands System, which the Township is required to implement within its jurisdiction.

The *Clean Water Act* (2006) was enacted to protect existing and future sources of drinking water. It requires Source Protection Plans to be developed. The Township of Essa is within the Nottawasaga Valley Source Protection Area. The applicable Source Protection Plan is the South Georgian Bay Lake Simcoe Source Protection Plan (Last amended

September 25, 2024). The Township is required to include source water protection policies within their Official Plan.

Current Essa Policies

Natural heritage and natural hazard policies are primarily addressed within Section 21 (Environmental) of the current Official Plan. The Official Plan pre-dates the *Clean Water Act* (2006) and thus does not include source water protection policies.

Options and Recommendations

- The Official Plan will reflect the intent to protect environmental areas from development effects and incompatible land uses needs.
- There are three existing Official Plan categories applying to environmental areas with policies for conservation and ecosystem management:
 - Flood Prone Areas – Major rivers, streams and defined flood plains
 - Wetlands – All major wetland areas
 - Significant Areas – Nottawasaga River and Allandale Lake Algonquin Bluffs Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI)
- The New Official Plan will need to implement the County's Greenlands Natural Heritage System (policies and mapping). The Provincial Natural Heritage System (consisting of the Growth Plan Natural Heritage System) is no longer required to be implemented by the Township as the Growth Plan was repealed in October 2024. The Township does have the option to voluntarily include the Growth Plan Natural Heritage System as part of the Township's mapping.
- Policies will need to provide for the protection, maintenance and enhancement of water, related resources and aquatic ecosystems on an integrated watershed management basis.
- There is a requirement for the Official Plan to include source water protection policies and mapping for clean drinking water in accordance with the South Georgian Bay Lake Simcoe Source Protection Plan.
- The definitions and schedules within the Official Plan should be updated in accordance with the County Official Plan and the PPS, 2024. This will include Schedules that depict known natural features and areas, and natural hazards using available Provincial, County, Local, and Conservation Authority mapping (e.g. wetland, Area of Natural and Scientific Interest, flood hazard areas).
- The New Official Plan will need to implement the County's Greenlands System (i.e. the County's Natural Heritage System) within the Township's jurisdiction.

- Consider providing a policy that allows for the Township to have technical reports (e.g. an Environmental Impact Study) peer reviewed, at the applicant's cost.
- Consider providing minimum ecological buffer widths to natural features (i.e. development or site alteration cannot occur within a certain distance from a natural feature).
- With respect to the need for an Environmental Impact Study, there is an opportunity to provide additional direction on when an EIS is required, and to include a policy that the Township will consider developing updated EIS Guidelines. These guidelines could be a stand-alone document.
- The Township should work with the NVCA to consider any additional policies needed to support by-laws and guidelines to protect green spaces, including a tree protection by-law and Ecological Offsetting Guidelines.
- Source Water Protection policies will need to be added to conform to the *Clean Water Act*, 2006. This can follow an approach similar to that used in the Simcoe County OP, Section 3.15.
- Provide Source Water Protection Schedules to conform to the *Clean Water Act*, 2006, and policies of the NVCA. This can follow an approach similar to that used in the Simcoe County OP, Schedule 5.2.4 (Wellhead Protection Areas and Surface Water Intake Protection Zones), Schedule 5.2.5 (Highly Vulnerable Aquifers), and Schedule 5.2.6 (Significant Groundwater Recharge Areas).
- There is an opportunity to add a Schedule depicting natural hazard lands (e.g. areas prone to flooding or erosion). Mapping may be available from the conservation authority.
- Consider opportunities to strengthen policies for water protection, in line with other lower-tier municipalities in Simcoe County.
- Introduce policies that complement and support community partners seeking to improve the natural environment (e.g. South Simcoe Streams)

Note: Ensure Provincial Planning Statement (2024) water policies (Section 4.2 'Water' of the PPS) are addressed within the Official Plan update. It is recommended that these policies be addressed in a separate section of the new Official Plan rather than within the proposed Source Water Protection section, to reflect the different policy framework.

4.8 Sustainability and Climate Change

With climate change becoming an increasing concern, the new Essa Official Plan must be updated to directly address the mitigation of climate change impacts and provide direction for sustainable development practices.

Current Essa Official Plan Policies

Given the age of the current Essa Official Plan, the document pre-dates climate change considerations and sustainable development practices.

Current Provincial and County Direction

Both the Provincial Planning Statement and Simcoe County Official Plan place a strong focus on climate change and sustainable development. The current Provincial and County policy framework seeks to not only mitigate the impacts but also prepare for and adapt to the impacts of climate change. The Province and the County direct future planning to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prepare for the impacts of a changing climate through a collective range of approaches, including but not limited to:

- Achieving compact, transit-supportive and complete community development;
- Incorporating climate change considerations in the development of infrastructure;
- Supporting energy conservation and efficiency;
- Promoting green infrastructure, low impact development and active transportation; and
- Protecting the environment and improving air quality.

Options and Recommendations for Essa

- Introduce new policy guidelines and framework for climate change adaptability and resiliency in Essa, as well as energy efficiency, conservation, demand reduction and management.
- Opportunity to weave climate change and energy considerations throughout the entire Official Plan, relating to but not limited to:
 - Low-impact development and green infrastructure standards
 - Transportation, active transportation and transit
 - Parks, open spaces and recreation facilities
 - Agricultural and rural lands
 - Climate change mitigation strategies to prevent flooding
 - Sustainable building design

- Other municipalities have introduced policies that encourage the creation of a sustainability checklist for development alongside a set of specific criteria. The New Official Plan could consider implementing a sustainability checklist as well as a set of associated criteria.
- The use of green rating and certification standards such as LEED should be encouraged for new developments to mitigate the impacts of climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Consider the role of community hubs and strategic land acquisitions that would create placemaking opportunities and economic development (e.g. former Ontario seed farm).
- Libraries play a critical role as a community meeting place and social programming. Further, libraries can promote other placemaking initiatives (e.g. urban agriculture, language and diversity, children programs, etc). Placemaking policies should support and reinforce libraries as community hubs and shared spaces.
- Schools form an important part of the community fabric. Policies should consider streamlining the establishment of new schools while balancing urban design and transportation impacts.
- To protect areas of cultural and historical significance while still allowing for investment and growth, consider enabling the establishment of Heritage Conservation Districts for Thorton's main street and other areas within Angus.

4.9 Transportation and Infrastructure

Trends in Essa

As Essa grows, there is an increasing need for servicing of community and employment areas to support thriving areas for people to live, work, and play. As a significant proportion of future growth will be directed toward the community of Angus, the servicing capacity in this area is a key aspect of planning for future development. As per the Angus Infrastructure Master Plan (IMP 2022; Addendum #1 2024), there is residual wastewater capacity to accommodate planned growth in the amount of approximately 870 equivalent residential units (ERU), but a 'servicing gap' of approximately 300 ERUs of water supply capacity. Four strategic initiatives to address this gap for water servicing were identified in the Angus IMP Addendum #1 (2024), as follows in order of priority:

1. Construct a new Well at Mill Street Well Field
2. Maximize the existing Mill Street Well 1
3. Replace the Centre Street Wells

4. Site and Develop New Well Field(s)

In addition, Angus will require an additional 4,199 m³ of storage to service the forecasted populations for Angus, to address fire storage and storage capacity for Maximum Daily Demand (MDD) Ultimate Build-Out population. The existing water system in Angus is currently beyond 80% operating capacity, and new storage will be required to support any additional future development. This will entail constructing new storage at the Mill Street site, as well as at a greenfield site south of Angus.

The recommended wastewater servicing improvements for Angus include expansion of the existing Wastewater Treatment Plant, sanitary collection network upgrades to service development, and an increase to Sewage Pumping Station #1 pump capacity, per the Angus IMP.

The existing transportation system will need to evolve to support a wider range of mobility modes, including cycling and pedestrian infrastructure, as well as transit. This will be important for connecting all areas of Essa, as well as supporting intensification and mixed-use communities in Angus.

Climate change is impacting infrastructure servicing in Essa, particularly with respect to flooding and the need to improve stormwater management and the management of water resources to reflect a changing climate.

Additional study will be needed to confirm stormwater management and green infrastructure potential.

Current Provincial and County Direction

The PPS (2024) provides more updated guidance on infrastructure management and planning that need to be reflected in the policies of the New Official Plan. The Simcoe County OP (2023) includes policies relating to servicing and transportation as well as stormwater management that would need be brought forward into the Official Plan (see Options and Recommendations section below for more detail). The Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority (NVCA) regulates development on hazard lands and provides direction relating to stormwater management, thus Essa policies will need to be developed to align with NVCA guidance.

Policies relating to multimodal transportation and Transportation Demand Management in Section 4.8 of the Simcoe County OP (2023) will need to be reflected in Essa's New Official Plan, including with relation to supporting the development of active transportation (cycling and pedestrian connections) adjacent to higher density and mixed-use areas; prioritizing transit where appropriate; and integrating an accessibility focused approach to support more equitable mobility. The County OP also includes policies relating to managing congestion and supporting future studies relating to highway and major transit

connections, which would be pertinent to considering future infrastructure needs in Essa as the population grows.

Current Essa Policies

The servicing policies relating to water and sewage (wastewater) in the current OP are fairly general and provide guidance on development considerations relating to these services. The stormwater management policies provide direction on considerations for new development and point to the need for a Township-wide Stormwater Management Plan to detail further guidance.

The transportation policies guide the provision of a road network that is primarily automobile focused, and considers access to the rail network for industry and employment activities. The current Official Plan categorizes Arterial Roads, Collector Roads and Local Roads. Official Plan Review will analyze current minimum road widths, access requirements and any planned upgrades to the road network. There are no current policies that apply to the development or design of active transportation facilities or multiple modes of mobility. The Essa Transportation and Trails Master Plan developed in 2024 provides direction on the objectives and design of transportation infrastructure that will need to be reflected in the Official Plan policies.

Options and Recommendations

Infrastructure: Water and Wastewater

- Update and create policies consistent with servicing policies in the Provincial Planning Statement (2024), and the Simcoe County Official Plan.
- Opportunity to establish a full range of modernized servicing policies, including the servicing hierarchy in support of the Township's growth strategy and settlement hierarchy in alignment with Section 3.6 of the PPS.
- Consider policy direction for required water and sewage infrastructure master plans per County of Simcoe Official Plan 2023, Section 4.7.8.
- Provide policies to require planning for infrastructure in a manner that is financially sound and lifecycle based, promotes optimization and efficiencies, and is founded in watershed framework in alignment with Section 3.6.1 of the 2024 PPS.
- Create policies to promote the development of sewage and water service systems that conserve and protect ground and surface water quality and quantity as per County of Simcoe Official Plan 2023, Section 4.7.1.
- Develop policies to guide the approval of settlement area boundary expansions based on available servicing capacity, with respect to connectivity to areas with existing wastewater capacity, addressing the water supply and storage deficit in Angus, and need for transportation and stormwater infrastructure. Once priority areas of growth are identified, servicing opportunities and constraints may need to be updated to align with growth plans.

Infrastructure: Stormwater

- The New Official Plan will need to be updated with policies in the PPS related to drainage, water resources, and stormwater management.
- These updates would include incorporating Low Impact Development (LID) techniques to manage stormwater and mitigate climate change.
- The policies will also need to reflect the latest Provincial guidelines by integrating stormwater management with sewage and water services, promoting best practices, and considering watershed-scale impacts.
- Opportunity to provide policy direction for best practices in stormwater including green infrastructure and low impact development that considers the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events as per 3.6.8 in the PPS.
- Enhancing policies for climate change adaptation and resilience is crucial, with requirements for climate controls in stormwater management, such as infiltrating rainfall and implementing innovative measures.
- There is an opportunity to establish dedicated funding mechanisms for stormwater management, including conducting a Stormwater Fee Study to ensure sustainable funding. These updates aim to optimize stormwater systems and enhance climate resilience.

Transportation: General

- Update and create policies consistent with transportation policies in the Provincial Planning Statement (2024), Connecting the GGH: A Transportation Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the Simcoe County Official Plan and Transportation Master Plan, and the Township of Essa Transportation and Trails Master Plan (2024).
- Create policies to support transportation demand management strategies (PPS 2024, Sec. 3.2)
- Include language reflecting “all ages and abilities” for transportation infrastructure (PPS 2024, County OP) in policies concerning signage, sidewalk and trail design and surfaces, parking standards, and transit stop design.
- Consider policies and schedules that encourage land use patterns supportive of walking (e.g school walking trains, travel zones0)
- Support policy surrounding air fields, rail corridors, and other air and rail facilities in the Township that align with the incompatible land use policies in PPS 2024 (Sec. 3.4)

Transportation: Roads

- Include a roads Schedule depicting roads by classification, including any planned roads.
- Create policies to protect major goods movement facilities and corridors in line with the PPS.

- Prioritize transit, walking, cycling, and goods movement over single occupant automobiles, per the Simcoe County OP (Sec. 4.8.6)
- Review the minimum road widths for Provincial Highways and County Roads, in alignment with the Simcoe County TMP.
- Review municipal road classification structure (currently comprised of Collector Roads and Local Roads), minimum road widths, access requirements, and planned upgrades identified in the 2024 Essa TMP.
- Consider truck routes that serve employment lands in Barrie, Innisfil and Alliston.
- Include complete streets policies and/or include reference to the development of a complete streets policy that balances the needs of freight and passenger movement through all modes, including through use of multi-modal level of service (MMLOS) guidelines.
- Create policies to prioritize safe and energy efficient people and goods using zero- and low-emission vehicles (PPS 2024, Sec. 3.2; Connecting the GGH), including through:
 - Supporting adoption of zero- and low-emission vehicles, including active transportation and electric and hydrogen-powered cars, trucks, and transit vehicles.
 - Developing a strategy for zero- and low-emission charging and fueling stations.

Transportation: Active Transportation

- Include an active transportation Schedule based on Essa TMP (Figures 29-31)
- Prioritize the use of active transportation for short trips, particularly around LINX stops (Connecting the GGH, Sec. 4.3).
- Support the development of the trails identified in the Essa TMP through new policy, recognizing the benefits of active transportation for human health, environmental well-being, and ability to support residents of all ages and abilities.
- Support identification of further recreational resources and trails in the Township that would support connections between settlement areas and neighbouring municipalities.
- Encourage higher densities and mixed-use developments in settlement areas to support higher active transportation use.
- Identify guidelines for providing active transportation amenities and facilities, including lighting, seating, and signage.
- Identify policies for how cycling parking is provided in the Township.

Transportation: Transit

- Work with Simcoe County to further expand LINX service in Essa. Potential connections identified in the Essa TMP include:
 - CFB Borden through Angus (via Mill Street);
 - Angus and Baxter to Alliston (via 5th Line and/or County Road 10);
 - Thornton to Barrie and Innisfil (via Essa Road and Innisfil Beach Road);

- Between Thornton, Angus, and Baxter.
- Support Simcoe County as it develops a more integrated transit system, and identify additional regional, fixed-route, or on-demand services that could operate within or into Essa (County TMP).
- Support Simcoe County in the development of a park-and-ride study, which is expected to include a lot in Angus and a lot in Alliston (County TMP).
- Preserve space around former and existing remaining rail corridors where there is potential for future increased freight or passenger rail service. Examples may include:
 - Consider policies reserving future station space along the CP Rail corridor in Baxter, which could be along a future GO Rail service that continues past Alliston and Bolton.
 - Consider policies reserving the remaining BCRY corridor, particularly east of the junction with the CP Rail corridor and in the area around the junction, to support possible future improved connections between the Barrie line corridor and the CP Rail corridor.
- Proximity to larger urban centres provides opportunities to identify planned/potential transit routes and multi-modal integration:
 - Proposed busway with trail identified south of Highway 90 with a proposed Station in Angus.

4.10 Administration and Implementation

Section 28 of the Essa Official Plan contains various administration and implementation policies that address how to interpret and apply the various policies of the Official Plan, as well as the application of other planning and regulatory tools.

These policies will be updated to reflect best practices and current legislation. This should include direction for Council consideration of future requests made under the Province's Zoning Order Framework.

4.10.1 Community Planning Permit System.

The Essa Official Plan does not currently contemplate a Community Planning Permit System. A Community Planning Permit System (CPPS) is a land use planning tool that municipalities can use in place of a Zoning By-Law. This tool can streamline the development process by combining multiple processes into one application and approval (Zoning, Minor Variance and Site Plan Approval) while supporting local priorities through providing opportunities to incentivize community benefits. The Township of Essa has expressed a desire to implement a CPPS and the new Official Plan provides an opportunity to establish enabling policies to support CPPS as a tool to implement the Official Plan. The new Official Plan would need to acknowledge the CPPS as a strategic planning tool to promote redevelopment, intensification, growth and resiliency.

The new Official Plan will need to include enabling policies covering the following requirements prior to council passing a Community Planning Permit By-Law (CPP By-Law), as described in Ontario Regulation 173/16 :

- Identify the area to which the Community Planning Permit System applies;
- Set out the scope of the authority that may be delegated and any limitations on the delegation, if the Township intends to delegate any authority under the Community Planning Permit By-Law;
- Specify goals, objectives, and policies of the Community Planning Permit Area;
- Set out the types of criteria and conditions that may be included in the Community Planning Permit By-law;
- Identify the classes of development or redevelopment that may be exempt;
- and
- Specify complete application requirements.

The Township has identified the following 5 key principles the new Official Plan will reflect:

1. Rural Essa;
2. Natural Essa;
3. Growing Essa;
4. Resilient Essa; and,
5. Connecting Essa

The five guiding principles will play a crucial role in helping the Township identify areas where the CPPS can be most beneficial. With the flexibility the CPPS offers, the Township will be better equipped to plan, preserve, and strategically guide the growth of the municipality.

We would recommend the new Official Plan include a policy enabling the municipality to identify one or more areas, including the entire Town, as a community planning permit area. We recommend that the new Official Plan provide enabling policies to establish a community planning permit by-law and that a review of the references to the municipal zoning by-law be reviewed to add a CPPS as a tool the municipality may use to implement the Official Plan.

5 Next Steps



This Background, Issues and Options Report will be used as a guide for the update and development of policies in the new Essa Official Plan. This document will form the basis of the next round of public engagement before any new policies are drafted.

A draft framework for the new Official Plan will be prepared, focusing primarily on format, layout and structure of sections and policies. Building on this Report, the first draft of the new Official Plan will be prepared, taking into account all information collected to date, all public and stakeholder comments, as well as all applicable Township master plans and studies.

Running parallel to the development of new policies, new mapping for the entire Township will be developed. Clearly articulated mapping will help make it easier for residents to use while making daily life easier for Township Staff. Mapping, including thematic and overlay schedules, will take into account the structure and format of the new Official Plan.