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Shelburne

Head south of Grey County on Highway 10 and you can't miss Shelburne, one of the fastest growing municipalities in Ontario.

The Town of Shelburne is experiencing unprecedented growth, expanding at better than twice the rate of the rest of Ontario. Hundreds of new homes are being built, recreational amenities are expanding, services improving, and business and commercial development is on the rise.

Will the growth push up Highway 10 into Grey County?

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How Much Growth?

"The official forecast for growth for the past few years is 2.8 % per year. We've experienced actual growth at 15%," John Telfer, CAO for the Town of Shelburne says. He has worked at the municipal office since 2003 when Shelburne's population was 3800. "The population now is 7150 and growing. I expect it will be up to 8200 at this time next year."

Telfer's arrival in 2003 was the same year that Ed Crewson became Shelburne's long standing mayor. Crewson stepped away from municipal politics in last November's municipal election and Ken Bennington, formerly deputy mayor, was elected to the top spot.

Crewson attributes Shelburne's growth in part to his Council's success in recruiting industry. "Recruiting KTH was the single biggest decision of my time as mayor," Crewson says.

KTH is an auto parts manufacturer that supplies Alliston's Honda plant. "They were being courted by Mt. Forest and others. We were better located, closer to Alliston but our land was un-serviced and more expensive." Crewson recalls the Shelburne site being \$15,000 /acre while Mt. Forest was offering serviced land at \$11,000/acre.

"We bought the land and paid the servicing cost of about \$300,000," Crewson explains. KTH opened in Shelburne in 1998 and is the single largest employer in Dufferin County with about 450 positions. That was a turning point for the Town Of Shelburne.

Since then, KTH has expanded three times, and new manufacturers have arrived and existing businesses have grown. For instance, **Dufferin Windows and Fines Home Hardware** have both operated for a long time in Shelburne and one of Grey county's largest businesses, **Ice River Springs, opened a sister business in Shelburne**, Blue Mountain Plastics. The company operates a facility that recycles plastic from municipal recycling programs into new water bottles. The plant employs about 100 people.



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Housing Starts

Perhaps more visible to the casual observer is the housing boom which has been steady for the past decade.

"Our new residents are coming from Brampton, Mississauga and other parts of the GTA - they can get more home for their money and they're only one hour from work," Mayor Ken Bennington says. Bennington was on council with Crewson for 16 years; eight of those as Deputy Mayor.



"In the past 10 years, we've had almost 1000 new homes constructed in Shelburne," CAO Telfer says. Currently there are two major housing sub-divisions under development: one on Highway 10 north and one on Cty 124 north.

But it hasn't all been smooth sailing. "We had a dip in development in 2008-09 because we just weren't ready. The next set of [housing] subdivisions was not ready; the servicing needs were not met." Telfer explains that housing developments need provincial approvals and that takes about three years. In development, "You've got to look forward. I'm looking to 2020-25 now," Telfer says.

Commercial development

Tim Horton's has already arrived and construction is planned also for a new 120,000-square foot commercial plaza on 30 acres at the east end of town.

And, as in almost all towns that grow, there is a challenge to keep the downtown vital as big box and malls get built around the edges of town. "We're already knee-deep in that," Mayor Bennington says. He says he doesn't have a quick answer, but adds, "I think all the housing will create a commercial boom. People need places to shop, restaurants. That's next."

"My business is doing well," Brenda Marshall, owner of Pazzaz, a ladies wear retailer in downtown Shelburne, says. "But it's certainly not growing at the rate of the housing in Shelburne." Marshall believes many of the new homeowners are commuters. "They shop where they work, they drive all week and on the weekend they don't want to shop." Marshall says it takes them a while, sometimes years, to discover their new town.

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Steve Bowles agrees that Shelburne needs more jobs. He is a member of the town's Economic Development Committee (Telfer describes the committee as the "ears on the ground"). Bowles owns and operates an auto sales and service business and a car wash in Shelburne. He agrees that the newcomers are largely commuters and says businesses need to adapt to satisfy their needs. His own Dufferin Auto is a Monday to Friday operation and he is considering extending his hours and services to meet new needs. Like the grocery store offering longer hours or more variety, business needs to adapt to a new market, he says.



Jobs or housing – which comes first in a community's development? "It's a bit of a chicken and egg dilemma," Mayor Bennington says. And, like his CAO, Bennington says readiness for development, looking ahead, is required. "Having the capacity for water and sewage and having a growth plan in place is essential."

Is Grey County Next?

"I don't envy or fear the growth in Shelburne," Southgate Mayor Fosbrooke says. "There certainly is a migration north and Southgate wants to plan for it by making the best informed decisions."

According to Fosbrooke there is some housing development in Dundalk and already many in the community commute to the GTA daily. Southgate has the youngest average population of any municipality in Grey County.

"There is an anticipation of growth in Dundalk and our "projections for infrastructure development do include growth. How much? and how soon? we don't know, but we want to be ready," she adds.

Fosbrooke is a first-time Mayor and several on her Council are also new to their role. "We're still getting our feet wet at council," she says, but looks forward to "having discussions at council about longer-term decisions such as promoting the Dundalk and economic development.

"We're [council] all in favour of growth. It's the degree to which we want to see that short and long term and how that needs discussion. I don't look at growth as a negative thing. When the tax base goes up, that's a good thing for everybody. We are asking, 'what Shelburne has done well, what could we do better.' "

Some of the components to sustainable development that she mentions include high speed internet, active communities that are walkable, services and recreation for residents and infill or intensification of the town of Dundalk. "We certainly don't want urban sprawl on good agricultural land," she says.

But development isn't going to happen quickly in south Grey. Hwy 89 seems to be a "psychological barrier" Fosbrooke says. It certainly demarcates the snowbelt; as the highlands rise north of Hwy 89, so does the snow.

And snow may not be the only barrier to development in Grey County.

Welcoming a Changing Population

Geography aside, successful development requires an area to be welcoming to new arrivals too – whether they are from Brampton or Sri Lanka. "We've done our best to make people feel welcome. Shelburne is certainly more diverse than it used to be and that makes our community richer," Crewson says. "We're not afraid of change and not going to make Larry Miller comments."

Crewson is referring to Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound MP Larry Miller's comments on an Owen Sound radio show where he advised niqab-wearing immigrants to, "Go back where you came from." Miller later apologized.

And even tiny Flesherton in Grey Highlands has still not entirely scrubbed its previous reputation. Many people still associate the Village as the home of a white supremacist publishing business, even though that business has been closed for decades.

And sometimes the racism is not even that pointed. A few years ago a group of employers in Grey and Bruce Counties, facing a lack of skilled workers decided to start an employment initiative, [LiveGreyBruce](#). Employers such as Caframo, Chapman's, County of Grey and the hospital corporation Grey Bruce Health Services are all ["participating employers"](#) in a group of about 100. The private initiative is not a job board. Instead, job seekers can submit a résumé which is circulated to participating employers. Prospective employees are not applying to a specific job posting, only to a chance to work in Grey and Bruce Counties. Employers can review résumés and extend interview opportunities as required.



The initiative seeks to encourage people who grew up in the area and left, to return by offering them employment. Expatriates appreciate the weather, driving distances and rural culture, and may be willing to return if work was available. The unfortunate outcome of this plan, even if it is inadvertent, is that it works against diversity. It denies new immigrants and reinforces a "locals only" approach.

For its part, the Town of Shelburne has used a program called [CIRRO, developed by OMAFRA](#), to be beneficial in assisting Shelburne to encourage and welcome a more diverse population. A CIRRO education was mandatory for all Town staff and most of council participated also. "It helps us to develop cultural sensitivity, to understand cultural differences," Mayor Bennington says. The program is a strategic planning process designed to assist communities in developing and implementing a newcomer attraction and retention strategy.

CAO Telfer says the [New Residents Guide](#) that is available on the Town website is also useful for people no matter where they come from. South Asians from Brampton, new immigrants to Canada or even people not accustomed to rural life find helpful information from the guide.

"People can't show up here expecting GO transit, lots of restaurants and bare roads in the winter," Telfer says. Rural realities are different from urban or even suburban living. And, he says, the Town makes a point to meet and greet new residents. "We visit the new subdivisions when they have community BBQs for example, we do presentations for new residents, wherever they are from," he says. They want to know where to find a doctor, when to sign up the kids for soccer. Says Telfer, "A diverse community is a stronger community. Diversity makes our community more vibrant."