

High-Intensity Growth – Urban Sprawl

Mayor and Council's (-1) focus on high-density development throughout Wasaga Beach is a means to an end. It's how they plan to pay a large portion of the cost of the A-L, help to re-fund the Obligatory reserves and pay the Town's expenditures related to these developments and capital projects.

To fund the low reserves and to pay for the A-L, development fees will be used. These are fees that developers pay the Town on a per unit-built basis. The mayor and council have increased fees this year to \$27,585 (single, semi). Further increases are being implemented in the 2022 budget and are expected to rise to \$32705, an increase of \$5118. Higher fees = higher house prices = fewer people being able to afford a home in Wasaga Beach.

Schedule K - Development Charges					
Residential - Singles & Semis	\$27,585.00	per unit	\$32,703.00	per unit	\$5,118.00
Residential - Rows & Other Multiples	\$22,931.00	per unit	\$27,186.00	per unit	\$4,255.00
Residential - Apartments	\$15,713.00	per unit	\$18,628.00	per unit	\$2,915.00
Residential - Leisure Lifestyle, Park Model Trailers and Chalets	\$14,185.00	per unit	\$16,817.00	per unit	\$2,632.00
Residential - Seasonal Park Model Trailers	\$7,092.00	per unit	\$8,411.00	per unit	\$1,319.00
Non-Residential	\$122.43	per sq. metre	\$136.63	per sq. metre	\$14.20
Residential - Beach Area Wastewater Works					
Single & Semi-detached	\$6,015.00	per unit	\$6,713.00	per unit	\$698.00
Rows & Other Multiples	\$5,000.00	per unit	\$5,580.00	per unit	\$580.00
Apartments	\$3,427.00	per unit	\$3,825.00	per unit	\$398.00
Non-Residential - Beach Area Wastewater Works	\$50.67	per sq. metre	\$57.00	per sq. metre	\$6.33

Links are available at the end of this post:

[Consolidated List of Fees and Charges - Summary of Proposed Changes](#)

How do other local municipalities compare? Orillia, which has a population of 32700, has a per unit fee of \$19,686.19 (single, semi). Orillia has a modern hospital, a new library, a new Recreation complex, 9 arenas according to [Orillia Ice Arenas](#), a refurbished and beautiful downtown area and a fantastic waterfront. The infrastructure is excellent. There is great shopping and a Costco. And Orillia's Town government is interested in what the public has to say and look for their input. [City of Orillia - Public Information Meeting November 30th](#). A telling comparison indeed!

In comparison, Wasaga Beach's population is approaching 24,000 and may get there by the end of 2021. In addition, there are approximately 7000 seasonal cottagers (31000 total). In comparison to Orillia, our population is about 27% lower than Orillia's, not including cottagers, 9% with cottagers included. Wasaga Beach will have a library and arena at the far east end of Town. We have, a dismal, decrepit and deteriorating Downtown and beach area, deteriorating infrastructure, not much in the way of shopping, a struggling commercial sector and a still to be finished mini-casino in a lousy location in the west end. And most importantly, unlike Orillia we have a mayor and council (-1) who do not seem to be interested in what we, the residents and taxpayers have to say. **Communication is 1-way, as social media has been shut down and Truth Corner is their 1-way communication and aggressive response tool.**

High-Intensity growth is not mandated by the Provincial Government for Wasaga Beach. In fact, our Town has been purposely disqualified from such plans. Mayor and council (-1) are pushing very hard to become a Primary Settlement Area (PSA) for high-intensity growth and have pushed through a bylaw as part of the initiative. They desperately need developer fees and therefore need to force growth. In October, at Simcoe County's Municipal Comprehensive Review, George Watson publicly suggested that Wasaga Beach should become a PSA. He was reminded and corrected by the conference host that the province is the decision maker, not Wasaga Beach. The MCR not to include the Town in their high-density plans for Simcoe County, for some very good reasons. The Town is in no condition to support massive residential growth. The town would have to petition the provincial government to make this change and they will likely not receive a friendly reception.

So why force this high-Intensity growth into Wasaga Beach? Wasaga Beach has almost no commercial or industrial based taxation income, which is critically important to any Town's finances. Residential taxes make up approximately 96% of our Town's tax revenue. Compared, Orillia's tax base is 62% residential, which would be similar to most municipalities. Given the current state of the infrastructure, it seems that the residential tax base isn't strong enough to pay for the many infrastructure improvements that are needed. So, their answer is to force in high-intensity growth and then push development fees upwards to pay for the A-L, refund reserves et all. With the income from developer fees, the Town will try to get capital projects and infrastructure improvements done, while at the same time fulfilling the infrastructure requirements for these new high-density subdivisions. So, the cycle repeats; raise taxes and developer fees again. And don't forget the downtown, where the Town is poised to spend millions, in support of Slate.

So how can the Town fast-track growth? The mayor and council (-1) can shorten the time to get shovels in the ground, by changing and/or eliminating Provincial restrictions.

- The Town can approve zoning changes to properties. For example, a property that is zoned R (residential) 1 is limited to single-detached dwellings. A rezoning to R1, R3 and R4 would allow for high-density, including semi-detached, town homes and apartment complexes to a max of 6-stories. The Town is also variance friendly, so it seems that there are almost no restrictions for developers. Could we see 8 or more story apartment buildings in the future in Wasaga Beach? You bet we could.
- The Town and developers can seek a Ministerial Zoning Order. Under the *Planning Act*, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has the authority to issue a minister's zoning order (MZO) over any property in the province, determining the development plan for that property even if it overrules a municipal zoning bylaw. There is no process for appealing an MZO.
- The developer and perhaps municipality can petition the Ontario Land Tribunal, who are mandated to adjudicate matters related to land use planning, environmental and natural features and heritage protection, land valuation, land compensation, municipal finance, and related matters.

Read up on the Rivers End development on Sunnidale Rd. to see how the Town and their developer friends can avoid or change the restrictions.

In the resident's corner locally is the NVCA, Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority. They are governed by the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP). The NVCA's mandate is to ensure the conservation, restoration and responsible management of Ontario's water, land and natural habitats through programs that balance human, environmental and economic needs. Development proposals across Wasaga Beach are reviewed by NVCA as part of the municipality's planning process. If the development plan is going to encroach upon protected natural resources and impact the watershed, the NVCA's role is to mitigate the impact and provide their recommendations to the Town and the developer. In some cases, this means that the development will not be approved to proceed. In others, the development is allowed to proceed, but with restrictions in place to protect the watershed. The NVCA would then issue a permit to proceed. In some cases, the local municipality can override, or choose to ignore the NVCA's decision.

It makes no sense to me that a municipality would have this amount of authority over zoning, where it has such a significant impact on the environment. The town's high-density priorities are contradictory to the NVCA's primary mandate! And unfortunately, there is commercial real estate agent who is on Town Council and the NVCA's Board. It appears to be a conflict of interest, without recusing oneself.

A local group of residents formed in 2021 (savebeachwood.ca) to fight a local development rezoning request that would allow for a high-density development in the west end. The property would be rezoned from R1 – single home residential to, R1, R3 and R4, which would allow for pretty much anything else, including 6-story apartment buildings and perhaps more with variances. The NVCA has twice ruled against the developer, who wants to cover 5.88 hectares of protected land with 1.2 – 1.5 meters of fill. This would essentially cover up 3.8ha of coastal wetlands, natural hazards – flood plain and erosion control and destroy all living creatures on the property. The west end isn't even in one of the Town's 5 Nodes of Intensification, but the mayor proclaimed at the public meeting that "we can change that".

So is any protected land in Wasaga Beach safe from development, given the mayor's attitude towards the protection of our environment. As further proof of her position on the environment, the mayor and asst. mayor voted against declaring a **Climate Emergency Declaration** in Wasaga Beach. The other 5 councilors voted for it and it was adopted. Unfortunately, the Council is likely to vote 6-1 or 5-2 on rezoning applications that impact the environment. Its all about money.

In summary, high-density development is being push hard by mayor and council (-1) in Wasaga Beach to raise revenues, in part to replenish low reserves and to eventually pay off our very large debenture. Wasaga Beach seems very developer friendly. However, with regards to the environment, not so friendly at all.

<https://wasagabeach.civicweb.net/document/37049/3.2.1%202022%20Proposed%20Changes.pdf?handle=AF61FBC5BFD54D33A426094F247506ED>

<https://arena-guide.com/city/orillia/>

<https://www.orillia.ca/Modules/News/index.aspx?newsId=7cd4f411-93d2-43d5-9390-fc4ff8dfbaee>

