Getting along in a bigger city tests Barrie councillors

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Harvie/Big Bay Point Road

City staff recommendation for design includes:

- Harvie/Big Bay Point bridge over Hwy. 400
- Removing the railway between Big Bay Point Road Bayview Drive and Fairview Road
- West of Bryne Drive, four lanes and intersection improvements
- Bike lanes
- Sidewalks on both sides
- Five lanes now, with seven lanes between Bryne Drive and Bayview Drive in the future
- Land protected for a future interchange

Barrie council faces big-city issues as it returns to work this month following a summer recess.

The first issue to come up, today (Sept. 8), will be building height and density along major roads such Duckworth Street, Bayfield Street, Essa Road and Yonge Street.

"There is always a concern from residents when medium-density developments are proposed in stable residential neighbourhoods," said Mayor Jeff Lehman.

"Nobody thinks there should be tall apartment buildings in the middle of a low-density suburb. One of the reasons this zoning has been developed is to focus intensification where it's appropriate."

Places to Grow — a 2006 provincial policy designed to discourage urban sprawl and promote more-compact urban growth — requires Barrie to put 40 per cent of its population growth inside existing built areas, although the city is also planning new neighbourhoods for the lands it annexed from Innisfil in 2010.

Barrie has worked to implement its October 2008 intensification study, which set out the corridors, as well as intensification focuses in the city core and at major intersections, including Duckworth/Grove, Bayfield/Grove, Yonge/Little, Yonge/Big Bay Point and Dunlop/Anne.

Barrie's strategy to encourage higher-rise buildings — as tall as eight storeys for buildings with ground-floor commercial — on busier roads would also encourage walkability.

"We've seen some successful mixed-use development already, for example, at Big Bay Point and Sandringham," Lehman said, pointing to a three-storey building that features two restaurants as well as services including a tutoring centre.

On Sept. 14, councillors are looking at renaming Bayview Park, on Dunlop Street east of Mulcaster Street in honour of Sam Cancilla, a businessman and former councillor who died earlier this year, as well as discussing the site plan for the new south high school. The Simcoe County District School Board requested a bump-up to council after planning staff said the design did not adhere to the city's planning, development and urban design policies.

On Sept. 28, councillors are to discuss the Big Bay Point/Harvie highway crossing.

"This project can make a big difference in everyone's life in the south end and it's a critical piece to help correct the mistakes of the past that have led to the congestion on Mapleview Drive," Lehman said.

"Nothing irritates people more than being stuck in a jam through endless traffic lights. Another crossing of Hwy. 400 is the only way we can make a real difference."

He explained connecting the east-west roads will give drivers another option. They now must go north to Essa Road and Fairview and make their way down to Big Bay Point Road if they want to avoid Mapleview.

"Staff are recommending protecting land for an interchange in the long term, but rather than holding up the bridge, proceeding to design right away. I think that's a good call. The sooner we can do this project, the better."