

August 31, 2015

Dear Mayor Lehman and the Councillors for the City of Barrie:

As medical officer of health for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit I am writing in support of intensification and mixed use corridors within the City of Barrie, as described within the Mixed Use Corridor (MU2) zone attached to Staff Report PLN018-14. The content of the report accurately cites a range of health benefits to be achieved with increased mixed use design within Barrie. For a number of years the Health Unit has been working with municipalities to promote changes in the design of our communities to support more walking, cycling and use of public transit as a means of improving population health. <sup>1</sup> On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015 I presented in support of intensification and mixed use corridors to the Infrastructure, Investment and Development Services Committee.

It is becoming increasingly clear from research that increases in obesity, diabetes and a number of other health conditions are related to community design promoting driving over walking, cycling and public transit use, and that changes are needed in the design of our communities to improve health. <sup>1, 2, 3</sup> Rates of obesity and diabetes for the citizens of Simcoe Muskoka (including Barrie) have been increasing, with diabetes rates anticipated to rise from 10% in 2011 to 16% by 2026 if we do not change the status quo, including the way in which our communities are built. <sup>4</sup>

Physical activity is a highly effective means of reducing such conditions as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, strokes, a number of types of cancer, falls and fractures in the elderly, and depression. <sup>2, 3</sup> Community design can increase physical activity by providing supports for people to safely walk, cycle and use public transit for transportation to school, work, shopping and accessing community services. Community design can also improve health through improved air quality, road safety, access to healthy nutrition, social connectedness and mental wellbeing. <sup>1, 2, 3</sup>

Mixed use and intensification are important aspects of healthy community design, as they bring destinations of interest within walkable distances of people's homes. <sup>1, 2, 3</sup> A Health Unit survey of citizens of Barrie in 2010 found that the majority viewed access to grocery stores, recreation

<sup>1</sup> Healthy Community Design – Policy Statements for Official Plans:

<http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/JFY/OurCommunity/healthyplaces/Healthydesign.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> Improving Health by Design in the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area: A Report of the Medical Officers of Health of the GTHA \* May 2014 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: <http://www.peelregion.ca/health/resources/healthydesign/pdf/moh-report.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Healthy Built Environment Linkages Toolkit: <http://www.phsa.ca/our-services/programs-services/population-public-health/healthy-built-environment>

<sup>4</sup> Ontario Diabetes Database (2011). Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES). Toronto, Ontario 2013. Rosella LC et al. 2010. A population based risk algorithm for the development of diabetes: development and validation of the Diabetes Population Risk Tool (DPoRT). J. Epidemiology Community Health, doi:10.1136/jech.2009.102244. Survey data from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), Statistics Canada, Annual Content (2011/12). Ontario Share File, Distributed by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

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and community centres, libraries, green spaces, schools, places of work, restaurants and public transportation within 1 kilometer from home to be important. <sup>5</sup>

Low income populations have additional challenges to their health, in part related to reduced access to community services. <sup>6</sup> In reviewing the proposed mixed use corridors I note that they are well located to bring shopping, education, employment and service opportunities within walking, cycling and transit distance to neighbourhoods within Barrie with a high percentage of people of lower income. Clearly this would be important to the health of the community.

The City of Barrie is to be commended for its vision of a healthy, complete community through its Official Plan, Urban Design Guidelines, Growth Management Strategy, Multi-modal Active Transportation Master Plan, the development of its public transit system, and now with the intensification and mixed use corridors proposal.

Sincerely,

**ORIGINAL Signed By:**

Charles Gardner, MD, CCFP, MHSc, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health

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<sup>5</sup> Data Sources: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS), Cycles 5-6 (May-Dec, 2010), Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. Data collected on behalf of the health unit by the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at York University, Toronto, Ontario. Sample Size = 200

<sup>6</sup> Between Health and Place: Understanding The Built Environment. Lisa Marie Williams. Wellesley Institute, May 2013:  
<http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Between-Health-and-Place.pdf>