

**Special Meeting of Council – Barrie’s Official Plan
Dr. C. Gardner’s Verbal Address**

Date: February 4, 2019

Time: 7pm (1st item on the agenda)

Location: City Hall Council Chamber

Good evening Mayor Lehman and esteemed councils members, and thank you for the opportunity to address you as part of this special meeting of council on the renewal of your Official Plan. I would like to commend you and Andrea Bourrie, your Director of Planning and Building Services, for commencing your planning with this open public session. I would also like to commend the excellent City staff presentation this evening.

I speak as **your Medical Officer of Health**, and for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. I have been with the Health Unit since 2005. For most of this time I have had a professional interest in and a passion for what community planning and the way we design and build our communities can do for our health – to serve literally and figuratively as a foundation for the health of all who live, learn, work and play in our community. I have also been a **citizen of Barrie**, a cycling and walking commuter, an urban hiker who frequently enjoys trekking year round the Ardagh Bluffs, a father whose sons have attended school and college here, an attendant of night courses at Georgian College and College Boreal, a member of the Barrie Canoe and Kayak Club, and a board member of the Bayside Mission. I have both a professional and a personal stake in Barrie’s wellbeing.

I have been blessed to serve a visionary and supportive Board of Health, and to work with excellent and dedicated staff. We in turn have had a very productive and **collaborative working relationship** with the council and the staff of the City of Barrie, addressing the public health issues of the day. For over a decade we have worked in collaboration to plan for and shape Barrie’s design for health. In 2008 the then councillor Jeff Lehman

was a keynote speaker at the annual conference of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies hosted by the Health Unit.

Over the years we have provided **our input** into your:

- Official Plan,
- Parks and Recreation Master Plan,
- Intensification Plan
- Annexed Land Plan,
- Multi-Modal Active Transportation Master Plan and its Advisory Committee,
- the Age Friendly and Youth Friendly Community initiatives,
- your Transit Plan,
- Natural Heritage Plan,
- and your application as a cycle friendly community to the Share the Road Cycling Coalition,
- and held workshops together on Active Transportation and Active School Travel.
- We have also worked together to plan for, mitigate and adapt to climate change, with City staff participating in our Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment, and Health Unit staff participating in Barrie's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy Workshop.

All of this joint work has been time well spent, given **the impact of the built environment on health**. We have always been a walking species, we thrive when we are in environments that support and invite walking, and we suffer ill health when we are in environments that impede and discourage it. We in public health have had a long history of failing to prompt people through our public messaging to take up more walking and other forms of physical activity. Thus we have come to realize, and we have ever mounting evidence to show that we need the design of our communities to support walking, cycling and other forms of active transportation as a part of our daily routine of coming and going to work, school, shopping and play. Only some people will successfully heed the

call for enough recreational activity to be healthy. We now know that the only way to get the majority of people to be active is by making it easy, inviting and safe to walk and cycle – and to use transit, as every transit ride reduces traffic, and begins and ends with a walk.

We know that the design of neighbourhoods either causes us to have diabetes (90% of neighbourhoods in Ontario do so), or protects us from it. Our neighbourhoods and communities need to be compact, complete and connected – with the places that we go to (our work, schools, shopping, and recreation) folded within every neighbourhood close enough to walk from our homes (some 400 to 800 meters), with street design that favours and protects cyclists and pedestrians, and reduces traffic by providing favourable alternatives, and with sufficient density to enable all of this. Our communities also need to have access to a full range of housing options and costs, and to healthy and affordable food (including community gardens to allow people to grow their own). We also need public spaces such as parks and town squares, and recreational, educational and cultural facilities, as we are social beings and we need places to spend time with family, friends and neighbours. There also needs to be lots of green space in our daily lives, as this has both health and environmental benefits.

With such changes we can triple or more the walking and cycling that we do, drop our driving in half, reduce traffic injuries, help our children move about freely and safely again, allow people to age in place, and improve our physical and mental health. The case for such change has been made by many, including the Ontario Professional Planners Institute and the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada. Many others have called for the same changes for other reasons, such as environmental protection, energy efficiency, housing affordability, economic opportunity, reduced municipal infrastructure cost (particularly with increased density), and improved quality of life.

Barrie has an excellent foundation of planning to build on:

- Its Strategic Priorities
- Official Planning Process – including youth engagement

- Its Affordable Housing Strategy – which is critical given the challenge of housing insecurity
- Barrie's Intensification Strategy
- Its Multimodal Active Transportation Master Plan
- Its Climate Change Adaptation Strategy
- And its Community Engagement Focus with its *Integrated and Coordinated* Effort Pillar
 - This is an excellent priority, building public involvement both for the present plan and beyond with its implementation. This will allow for the insights, energy and creativity of groups and citizens to help shape their community for the better over time. A planning document such as an official plan can have universal positive health impacts on the community. Targeted approaches are also required to ensure equal opportunity to access those health benefits for all citizens. Intentional collaboration and consultation with people who are marginalized, especially those living in low income, can help develop targeted solutions within the universal approach.

Barrie also has excellent features that we can leverage and build on:

- Its blue space, with the city wrapped around Kempenfelt Bay, with superb public walking and cycling access, and the potential to connect this with complete and safe walking and cycling routes from all parts of the city (including ravine routes).
- Its abundant green space – the Ardagh Bluffs, Sunnidale Park, and various ravines and treed areas, with the potential to be better connected as recreational and active transportation routes.
- The many wide streets and numerous lanes that can be converted into a complete, barriered cycling and walking network throughout the city, extending the road diets that have been successfully done to date.
- And the local services for vulnerable populations that can be maintained and enhanced were they are needed – within walking distance of where such people live.

Another important opportunity would be the use of neighbourhood health data (which the health unit is happy to provide) to perpetuate throughout the city that which has been found to be working in some neighbourhoods:

- On this point, the most complete and connected parts of the city have twice as much walking and transit use as the city overall.
- Assess to food retail, community services, transit and employment training opportunities could be enhanced in areas found to have higher food insecurity.
- Better setbacks, and traffic calming and reduction measures could be done to reduce traffic associated air pollution for the quarter of Barrie's population now so affected.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I have been happy to live, work, learn and play in Barrie, and as both a public health physician and as a citizen I am inspired by Barrie's great potential for healthy living and quality of life. The Health Unit is keen to play its part in helping to make it so. Thank you once again for this opportunity to participate in the shaping of our future.