

Title: Alliston May be Outgrowing itself. Page 1/3

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Description: A Star newspaper article about Alliston and its growth in the late 80s. This article begins with an industrial profile of Alliston, followed by a detailed section on housing and housing growth in the area. The article then goes on to discuss a number of different topics including education, amalgamation, and sewage.

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Alliston may be outgrowing itself

Alliston '89

A few years ago Metro builders would have laughed at the idea they would be building homes in places as far away as Cobourg or Cambridge.

Now they are moving there in search of cheaper, serviced land. Many new-home buyers from the Greater Metro area, who cannot afford to buy closer to Toronto, are following.

New in Homes examines the effects of this exodus in six communities — Cambridge, Cobourg, Newcastle, Lindsay, Alliston and Port Hope.

Will these new subdivisions put a strain on education, water, sewage and garbage disposal facilities?

This week our series looks at Alliston.

By Cindy Kleinman
Special to The Star

The little town of Alliston is only about 30 minutes northwest of Metropolitan Toronto, but it might as well be another world.

With its massive trees, stately older homes and no-hurry pace, it's the perfect place to while away a lazy summer afternoon fishing in the Boyne River, which runs through the heart of the town.

But it appears the forces of change are catching up with this town of 6,200. Growth pressures, spilling over from Metro, have begun to affect the town, long known as the home of the annual Potato Festival. And if a plan put forward by the township of Alliston Affairs comes into effect, Alliston may finally cease to exist as a distinct urban entity.

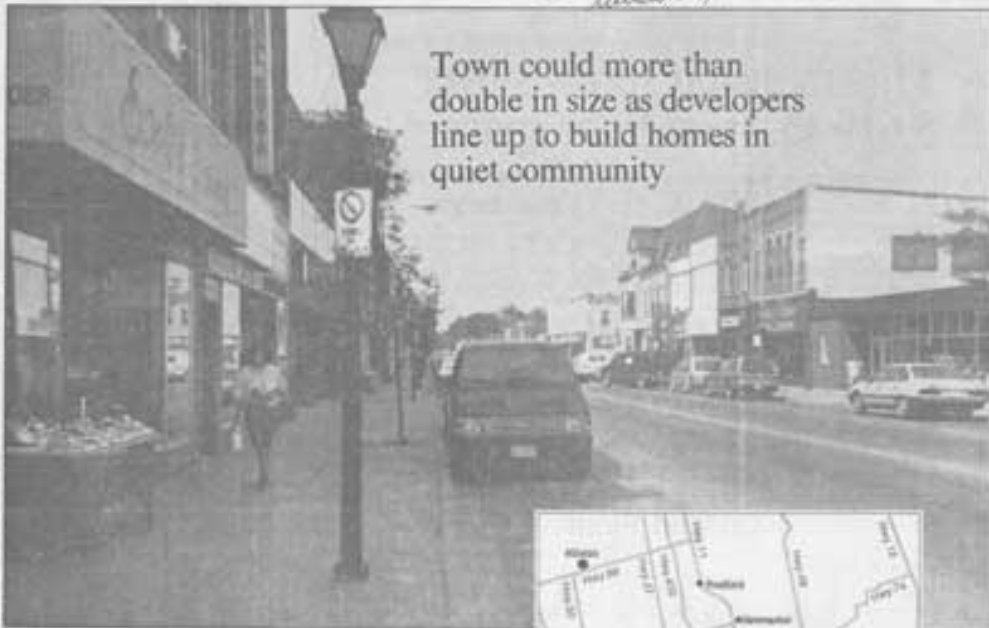
Major industries

The town was incorporated in 1891. "It was a grist mill and lumber mill kind of town," says mayor Rick Milne. While the Alliston Feed Mill is still in operation, over the years a variety of modern industries have moved in, settling mainly in the southeast end of the town. Honda of Canada Manufacturing Inc. is by far the largest, sitting just outside the town boundary in Tecumseh Township and employing about 1,200 people. Westinghouse Canada, pharmaceutical company Travertine Canada Inc., and Oetiker Limited, a Swiss manufacturer of hose clamps and accessories, are among the major industries in Alliston.

As well, there is a lot of farming, mainly corn, beef cattle and soy, Milne says.

By the mid-1960s, Alliston was beginning to feel the growth pressure radiating from Metro Toronto, Milne says.

"Traditionally we had a population growth rate of 2.2 per cent," says junior planner and zoning administrator Stephen Naylor. "That's now gone by the board. Expansion is happening very, very fast in town."



SMALL TOWN: Alliston is a quiet community of 6,200 residents 50 minutes' drive north of Metro. New houses there sell for \$100,000 to \$150,000 less than in Toronto.

For example, the town council is currently facing applications to build approximately 1,300 residential units, Naylor says. There are only 2,600 residential units — attached and detached homes, townhouses, apartments and condominiums — in all of Alliston now, he adds. If each proposal were approved, the town's population would more than double in size.

The growth pressure is directly attributable to the inexpensive (as judged by Toronto standards) housing prices, Naylor says. Houses sell for about \$130,000 to \$150,000 less than what you'd get in Toronto, he estimates.

Gregory Rizzardo, manager of the Alliston-based developer and builder, Previn Court Homes, has seen what that rate means. The company built 43 freehold townhouses on Tupper St. E. last year and offered them on the market at an average price of \$150,000. They sold out in one month, Rizzardo says.

The 90 detached homes the company built on Hutchinson Dr. in 1987 — 2,000 to 2,300 square feet on 50-foot lots, selling from \$140,000 to \$160,000 — were sold out in three months, he says.

Approximately 43 per cent of the buyers are from Toronto, Rizzardo says. Many are first-time

homebuyers who can't afford to get into the Metro market.

They include people like Sally Freitas, her husband Joe and their baby daughter. They wanted to move out of their Don Mills apartment, but couldn't afford to buy a home in Metro. "We started looking for a home in the core of Toronto and went out and out and out," Freitas says.

Last summer they bought a three-bedroom townhouse in Alliston for \$114,900. Now, while Joe continues in his job as a sales representative for a custom metal fabricator in Metro's west end, Freitas can walk to her medical secretarial job at Alliston's Stevenson Memorial Hospital. This has saved them the expense of having to buy a second car, she says.

Trading up

Some of the other new-home buyers in town are people who are trading up, says mayor Milne.

"I've spoken to people in our new subdivision who have sold their house in Toronto for \$225,000 and come up and bought one of our houses for \$180,000, which I think is a lot of money, and they think it's a steal," Milne says. "They don't mind the hour's drive back and forth."

But those moving to Alliston get

Town could more than double in size as developers line up to build homes in quiet community

more than just an affordable home, says town councillor Diana Gaston. They also get to be part of a small community, where people know their neighbours' names, where people really get behind the fishing derby (the rainbow trout in the Boyne River in the spring and the August Potato Festival).

Sally Freitas says Alliston is especially good for her daughter Jani, because now she has a backyard in which to play and lots of neighbourhood children to play with.

Finding day care was no trouble, Freitas says. A neighbour takes care of 20-month-old Jani for \$75 per week. In Toronto, when she looked into private care, she found it would cost at least \$150 weekly — putting it out of her price range, she adds.

But when Jani starts school in a couple of years, the Freitas

family will learn about one of the problems accompanying growth — overcrowding at the elementary level. Alliston Union Public School, the only public elementary school in the town, had "nine or 10 portable classrooms a year ago," says Ken Smolgrave, the Alliston public school trustee on the Simcoe County Board of Education. "Now there are 15."

Those portables have cut down on the amount of playground space available to the approximately 800 youngsters in the school, he says. As a result, "We're operating spill recesses," Smolgrave says.

The board has received Ministry of Education approval to build a new elementary school in the north part of Alliston, where much of the growth is occurring, he says. But the board hasn't yet purchased property. Once the site is obtained, construction will have to begin almost immediately in order to open for the 1991 school year, Smolgrave adds.

The separate school board is also looking for a site to build a new elementary school in the town's west end, says Hon. Gaston, the town's trustee on the Simcoe County Roman Catholic Separate School Board. The current school, St. Paul's, has eight portable classrooms in its yard to help accommodate the 340 students expected

in September. That's an almost 30 per cent increase in the number of students over last year, Gaston says.

"It looks like we're going up at least two classes," he estimates. "That seems to be the pattern for the last few years."

Even if a new elementary school can be built in time for the 1990 school year, as is planned, Gaston predicts that it won't be long before it also has a portable classroom or two.

Both Smolgrave and Gaston say the overcrowding at the elementary school level hasn't hurt the quality of education. "We're looking at creative seating, environment of learning and keeping everybody together in one building," Gaston says. "It's the teachers and the support of the community that's the key factor."

Schools aren't the only area feeling the pinch of increased growth. "A lot of developers in the area are waiting for municipal services in the area to be upgraded," says Diego Rizzardo of Previn Court Homes.

What they're in fact waiting for is the completion of the \$10 million expansion in the town's sewage treatment plant in December, Naylor says.

But a private planning consultant the town hired has determined that even with the expansion, the town will only have sewage capacity for about 1,200 units, Naylor says. That's not much help for a town with a population of about 6,200 residential units.

Received approval

Many of those proposals will have to wait five or 10 years, by which time the town hopes to have been approved for a second sewage treatment facility, Milne says.

In the meantime, Previn Court Homes has already received council approval for 228 of the soon-to-be-releasable 1,200 units of sewage capacity, Naylor says. The rest of the capacity will be divided between industrial/commercial and residential projects, with a view to maintaining the current 60/40 per cent split between residential and industrial/commercial tax assessment, he adds.

The limited sewage capacity is slowing down development in the town, Naylor admits. "That's one reason the South Simcoe study is going on now," he says.

It's a study of the municipalities that make up the southern part of Simcoe County — Alliston, Elmira, Tecumseh, Adolph, Tecumseh, Swanton, West Gwillimbury, Cookstown, Tottenham, Bradford and Innisfil. It's being conducted by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, which has set up a steering committee made up of ministry officials and representatives of the municipalities involved. The idea is to see if some of the towns, townships and villages should be annexed to form larger municipalities, Milne says.

"We've had a number of annexation proposals put forward to us over the last number of years," says Meredith Berendson, director of the Municipal Boundary Branch of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. "We advised the municipalities that we'd look at the area in a comprehensive way, looking at the pressures for develop-

Please see ALLISTON page E2



Continued from page E1

ment and the servicing problems."

Among the possibilities the committee is looking at is the annexation of Alliston, the villages of Beeton and Tottenham and the township of Tecumseth. Demographically, it would make the new municipality 52 times bigger than Alliston is currently, expanding it from 551 acres to over 29,000 acres, Naylor says.

Don Taylor, the chief negotiator for the ministry's Municipal Boundaries Branch and chairman of the steering committee, held a public meeting on the proposal in July just outside of Alliston. It drew between 800 and 900 people, the majority of whom opposed the four-community annexation, Milne says.

The town has made an alternative proposal, he says. "What we're saying is, don't make it all one. Cut it in half, because that's quite an area you're taking in to make us one," Milne says. He'd rather see Alliston joined with the north half of Tecumseh Township. This would give Alliston the land it needs to continue growing but would still be manageable, he says.

The ministry will prepare a report, with the committee's assistance, likely by the end of August, Beresford says. That report will be submitted to the minister of municipal affairs, John Sweeney. There is "no timetable" for the minister's final decision, she adds.

The town will wait to hear the results of that report before applying to the Ministry of the Environment for a new sewage treatment plant, Naylor says. As well, a request for a new water well for the town, which was made to the Ministry of the Environment six months ago, will likely have to wait for the study to be completed, Naylor adds.

"We're not at a critical level yet with water as we are with sewage," he says.

Once the study results are known, there will no doubt be a lot of changes, one of which is whether the new municipality will be called Alliston, Naylor says.

After almost 100 years of slow, steady growth, Alliston may find that, according to the provincial government at least, the town has outgrown itself, Milne says.