
Subject: The Future of Thornbury – A Call for Thoughtful Growth

Mayor, Councillors, and Staff,

I stand before you today as a concerned member of this community—a homeowner and investor in the Town of Thornbury.

My purpose here is simple: I ask each of you to envision the future of Thornbury, not just in the next few years, but over the next decade and beyond. What do you see? Personally, I envision a vibrant Main Street and surrounding area, thriving with sustainable, year-round businesses.

After watching the January meeting of the Building and Planning Committee, I felt compelled to speak with you today and offer a perspective that I believe must be seriously considered.

Thornbury Needs Smart, Long-Term Growth

This town requires updated infrastructure and sustainable development to thrive. As one of the partners in two commercial properties—Harbour Mews and the New Orleans Pizza/Post Office buildings—positioned at what you might call "center ice" in our community, I have a vested interest in seeing Thornbury succeed.

My partners and I run a successful commercial rental business with fantastic tenants. We are not developers, nor do we aspire to be. However, we are deeply invested in this town's future, both financially and personally, as I plan to retire here, like many residents before me. I see my role in this town as a steward, ensuring that the next generation has the opportunity to enjoy a thriving, prosperous community.

Without the right **Official Plan**, looking beyond the short term, Thornbury will stagnate. Growth is necessary for any town's survival. Change is an inherent part of that growth.

Why the Right Development Matters

Our town's **Strategic Plan** already acknowledges the need for thoughtful increases in building heights—rising from 3 to 4 or 5 stories—along the Highway 26 corridor. This is not about sprawling into valuable farmlands where municipal services and amenities don't exist. Instead, the right kind of growth belongs in our town's core, where density makes sense.

There are significant challenges to building anywhere today—rising construction costs, lumber and steel prices, interest rates, regulatory hurdles, and even potential tariffs. However, this council has an opportunity to shape a sustainable path forward by removing some of the self-imposed roadblocks that make development unfeasible.

Key Challenges Hindering Development in Thornbury

1. **Development Charges (DCs) Are Too High** – Thornbury and other communities in the Blue Mountains have among the **highest development charges in Ontario—possibly all of Canada**.

2. **Lack of Scaling in DCs** – Unlike other municipalities, our DCs do not scale with unit size or bedroom count, making apartments and condos unaffordable to build.
3. **Uncertainty in Council Approvals** – The lack of clarity on what can or will be approved discourages developers from taking risks. This has already led to lost opportunities for this town.
4. **Main Street Development Requires Residential Density** – Street-level retail cannot thrive without sufficient residential density above it. Developers need at least 4-5 stories to make projects financially viable when retail exists on grade.
5. **Infrastructure Servicing Capacity** – declining to move ahead on servicing capacity is an obvious challenge to future town growth.

Other Municipalities Are Already Acting

Many cities across Ontario are reducing barriers to development:

- **Mississauga** has reduced DCs and eliminated DCs altogether for 3-bedroom units
- **Vaughan** has reduced all DCs.
- **Toronto** now allows 6-story developments on main streets without excessive approvals.

In contrast, **Thornbury's development charges remain uncompetitive, deterring investment and growth.**

What This Means for Our Community

Without the opportunity to build at reasonable densities:

- ✓ No additional development charges or property tax revenues will be generated.
- ✓ Downtown parking lots will not provide the revenue needed to sustain this town.
- ✓ Local businesses will continue to face seasonal struggles.

On the other hand, if development is encouraged:

- ✓ The tax base will increase, benefiting municipal services.
- ✓ More residents will support local businesses, stabilizing the economy year-round.
- ✓ Thoughtful, sustainable growth will preserve Thornbury's charm while ensuring its future.

A Call to Action

I am a full-time Financial Advisor and Wealth Manager, entrusted with guiding over 200 families—many of whom live in this very town. In estate planning, I often begin meetings by reminding my clients:

“None of us are getting out of here alive.”

While lighthearted, the message is clear—**what we leave behind matters.**

We are here today because of the vision and efforts of those who came before us. It is now our responsibility to build upon that foundation. Growth does not mean losing our identity; it means securing our future.

Mayor and Councillors, I urge you to consider: **What will be your legacy?**

We can resist change and risk stagnation, or we can **embrace thoughtful development** and secure a thriving future for generations to come.

I leave you with this final thought:

“There is no FUTURE in the PAST.”

Respectfully,

David Totten