



NEWS

## 'This is for their benefit in the long run': Wastewater treatment plant necessary for growth, says Erin mayor

A phased building module will help prevent environmental impacts

By **Tabitha Wells** Orangeville Banner  
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Over the past several months there have been multiple rallies, calls for more action from environmental groups, and a plea for the federal government to step in and put an end to the [proposed wastewater treatment plant](#).

With so many vocally against it, why is the town continuing to pursue the development?

According to Mayor Allan Alls, it's a necessity. With the greater Golden Horseshoe slated to grow by more than five million people by 2051, [Erin will be part of it](#).

"Our septic systems are outdated and you cannot grow on septic systems, the province won't let you do that anymore," said Alls.

Although septic may serve the current residential and business demands, Alls says it cannot meet demands for more growth.

"We've had to turn industry away because we had no way to deal with waste," he explained.

It's even played a role in pushing some existing businesses away, like Steen's Dairy.

"It was the largest private dairy producer in southern Ontario, and they had to leave Erin as they expanded because there was no waste removal," added Alls.

Nick Colucci, director of infrastructure services, made a similar point, noting growth in Erin is inevitable.

“The wastewater treatment plant is critical for the sustainable growth of Erin,” said Colucci. “The wastewater plant will help plan the growth of not only our community but also the economy as we will be able to welcome new businesses.”

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Alls says the inability to attract commercial businesses and infrastructure keeps the property taxes at a much higher rate for residents.

“We have bills we have to pay and they keep going up every year,” said Alls. “We don’t have enough businesses and commerce here to correct the ratio.”

Currently, the residential burden for the tax bill is somewhere around the 89 per cent mark, he explained. Commercial businesses typically pay about 2.4 per cent higher than a residential tax payer.

With projected growth of 10,000 more urban residents over the next 20 to 30 years, the need for both the treatment plant and greater tax balances grows as well.

The plant also won’t be built to completion in the beginning. It will be finished in stages, rather than built to accommodate the 2051 growth projections right from the start.

Alls explained this provides the town more control over monitoring the environmental impact, allowing them to take action and make changes before things become dire.

He added the town’s consultants have also informed him that the plant will have the strictest effluent systems in all of North America.

“We’ll have lots of time to monitor the effect of this plant on the river and the environment,” he said. “We’re fully committed to give full protection to our environment and it remains at the forefront of our discussions.”

At this point, even if the province had not mandated growth projections for municipalities, Alls says growth is necessary due to a lack of housing flexibility.

“There’s no place for old people to go here, there’s no place for younger people to buy here,” he said. “There’s no happy middle, no lower income homes, and no places for seniors.”

Alls has lived in the area for 48 years, noting while he loves Erin’s small and quaint feel, he also wants it to be a place where everyone can remain.

“Growth is going to impact it, I’d be less than honest if I didn’t tell you that,” he said. “We all want to keep our lives just like they are now, but that doesn’t happen. Things evolve.”

The makeup of the community will also change, but that’s not a bad thing, Alls added. And in order for that all to happen, the wastewater plant has to become a reality.

“I’m hoping the community will recognize this is for their benefit in the long run, but it takes people time to adjust to change and I understand it,” said Alls.

***STORY BEHIND THE STORY:*** *Town of Erin leadership insists the wastewater treatment plant is necessary for growth. The Advocate decided to speak to the Town to see what negative impacts they feel not having one has on the town.*

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