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NEWS

Welcome to ‘Wild East’ Durham, where rapid growth runs rampant

Professor warns ‘the more you pave over land for houses, industry, parking lots and roads’ the more water for flooding

By Tim Kelly DurhamRegion.com

Ryan Pfeiffer / Metroland

Dan Hoornweg, an Ontario Tech professor, worries that unrestrained growth in Durham Region and throughout the GTA will have negative impacts on the climate. - Ryan Pfeiffer / Metroland



Think of Durham as the “Wild East,” the last outpost for unrestrained development in the GTA.

That’s how Ontario Tech professor Dan Hoornweg looks at it.

With other areas of the Greater Toronto Area nearing their maximum growth potential over the next few years, Hoornweg sees Durham’s nearly unlimited open areas of land as ripe for residential and commercial explosion.

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“Durham is the last big chunk of land in the GTA that’s going to be developed for residential areas. There is a lot of money involved for developers, for services, for municipalities in development fees. There is a lot driving what’s going on in Durham,” said Hoornweg.

The numbers bear out his statement.

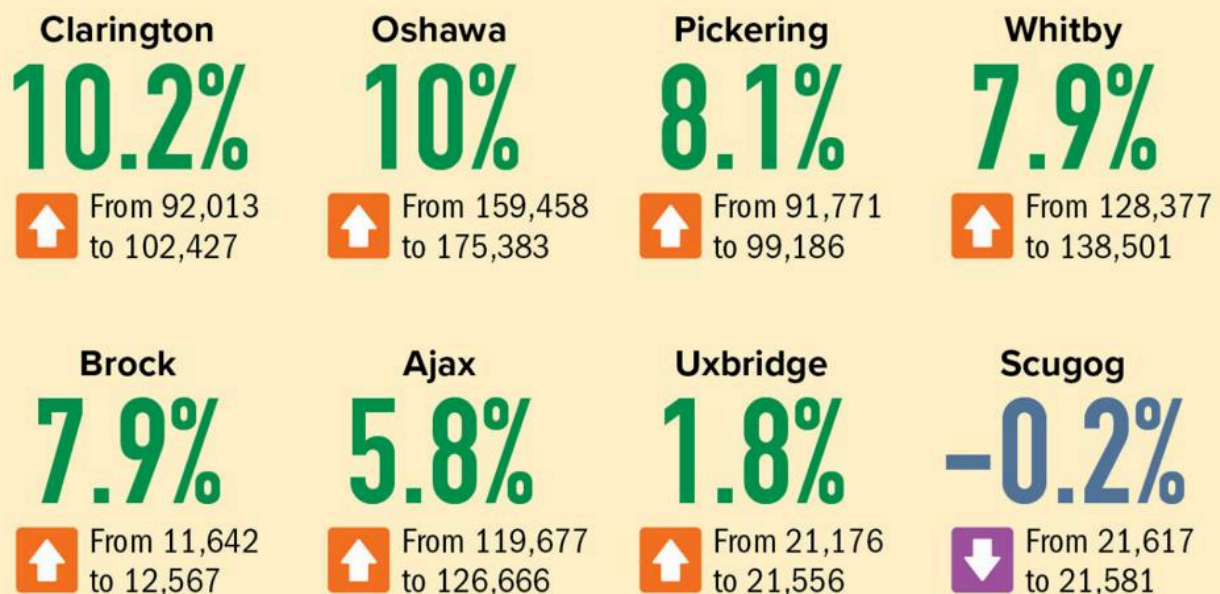
Clarington led the pack in Durham from 2016-21 with a 10.2 per cent growth rate according to census data from Statistics Canada. It was followed closely by Oshawa at 10 per cent. Pickering (8.1 per cent), Brock and Whitby (7.9 per cent each) and Ajax 5.8 per cent, all saw substantial growth, too, over the past five years. Only Uxbridge, at just 1.8 per cent growth, and Scugog, which actually saw a 0.2 per cent decline in population, were under five per cent.

The trend line since 2006, also from Statistics Canada, is that Durham has grown about 25 per cent in 15 years. The region's population was 561,258 in 2006, it increased 8.4 per cent to 608,124 in 2011, went up another 6.2 per cent to 645,862 in 2016 and by 2021 had increased another 7.9 per cent to 696,992. The numbers are well over 700,000 and climbing daily.

Durham Region Just Keeps On Growing



Between 2016 and 2021, Durham Region saw an 8% increase in its population. Here is a breakdown of that increase by municipality.



Source: Statistics Canada

Metroland graphic

Hoornweg, who is an associate professor of energy systems and nuclear science at Ontario Tech University, has his eye on specific issues related to growth, particularly when it comes to the environment.

“The more you pave over land for houses, industry, parking lots and roads, the more water you’re going to have for a flooding event,” worries Hoornweg about future growth in Durham.

And he said events like last month’s derecho (fast-moving, very destructive thunderstorm), that did severe damage in Durham, especially in Uxbridge, are likely to increase in frequency as growth-related intensity impacts attempts to lessen climate change.

“We ourselves, and our municipal and regional governments, are delusional when we say we have this Net Zero Carbon 2050 ambition. We have declared a climate emergency. I know the region did it, Whitby did it, others did it.

“But there is a complete cognitive dissonance (going on),” Hoornweg said.

He said with the rapid and continued development and increase in infrastructure, it won’t be possible to rein in climate change.

“We may start buying smaller cars and there might be a faster shift to electric vehicles (because of the increase in the price of gas) but the problem is that councils haven’t pushed for solid building codes for energy-efficient homes,” he said.

Jag Mohindra, a 73-year-old resident of Ajax, has lived in the same home in the GTA municipality for 41 years.

He remembers Ajax being a town of just 22,000 residents when he first moved in and said the expansion of the town by over 100,000 people in four decades has had good and bad impacts.

“The waterfront has really improved since we first came here,” Mohindra said.

He added that more services have been added as well, including more infrastructure, more transportation, more grocery stores and more places to shop which can be positives.

“But there is more congestion as well,” said Mohindra.

He said he notices these days, unlike four decades ago, “everybody is in a rush. People are so busy. People just walk in front of cars and don’t seem to care; they’re impatient.”

A bicycle rider who likes to use the waterfront trail, Mohindra is also discouraged by some of the sites he sees near the trail when he cycles there.

“Sometimes I go on Sunday morning and, around the creek area, there is lots of plastic garbage, food packages — it doesn’t give you a good feeling. I will pick up some of the plastic and litter,” he said.

Mohindra said he has noticed lots of newcomers coming to the area over the past few decades.

And he is expecting plenty more over the next few decades to come, as is Hoornweg.

“We will continue to see growth, high-density condos and townhouses being built, more traffic,” said Mohindra.

“We will continue to see the levels of growth we’ve seen in Durham, if not more,” added Hoornweg.



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