

# THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK

Planning and Economic Development Committee  
December 3, 2008  
Report of the  
Commissioner of Planning and Development Services

## **PLANNING FOR TOMORROW PHASE 3 PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT 2008 SUMMARY**

### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that:

1. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and local municipalities for information purposes.

### **2. PURPOSE**

This report summarizes Phase 3 of the Planning for Tomorrow Public Engagement process and feedback, and advises of the next steps in the Region's growth management initiatives. This is part of the Region's conformity exercise with the Province's Places to Grow Plan.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

#### **York Region's *Planning for Tomorrow* growth management initiative was established in 2005**

The Region's growth management initiative *Planning for Tomorrow* was commenced in 2005. The objectives established in the 2005 work plan included:

- To foster a public/stakeholder discussion on issues and choices facing the Region.
- To begin to create a broad public consensus on the public policy decisions that need to be made.
- To discuss issues and identify solutions.
- To ensure that decisions are evaluated against the triple bottom line sustainability; principles of economic development, social equity and environmental value.

#### **The *Planning for Tomorrow* public engagement and consultation program occurred in 3 phases, spanning 2006 to 2008**

The 2006 Phase 1 public engagement involved 5 Town Hall meetings, 8 separate meetings with stakeholders, as well as a Sustainability workshop, mailing list and interest

articles in local newspapers and website updates. The purpose of the Phase 1 engagement was to provide multiple opportunities for the public to:

- become informed about growth management in the Region
- discuss the issues
- raise new issues for consideration.

At its meeting on June 22, 2006, Regional Council endorsed Clause 2 of Report Number 6, which reported on the feedback and next steps of Phase 1.

In the spring 2007, Phase 2 of the public engagement was undertaken. The purpose of this round of public engagement was to consult and obtain feedback on the Regional growth scenarios, the preliminary assignment of forecasts to the local municipalities and the planning principles and questions.

As part of this Phase, Regional staff hosted 6 Town Hall meetings, as well as 23 additional consultation sessions with Regional stakeholders, partners and interested groups throughout May, June and early July 2007.

At its meeting on September 27, 2007, Regional Council endorsed Clause 3 of Report number 7 of the Planning and Economic Development Committee which reported out on the feedback and next steps of Phase 2.

At its meeting of May 15, 2008, Regional Council adopted Clause No. 7 of Report No. 6 of the Planning and Economic Development Committee, which outlined the steps and timing involved in the Phase 3 Public Engagement and Consultation program for the Region's *Planning for Tomorrow* - Growth Management Initiative.

Phase 3 builds on both Phases 1 and 2, as well as earlier work, including:

- Towards Sustainability in York Region Advisory Group (September 2005 to June 2006)
- Sustainability Symposium (March 2006)
- Natural Heritage Workshop (November 2006)
- Whitebelt Workshop (November 2006).

## **4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS**

### **4.1 Communication Tools and Meeting Attendance**

**The Region held meetings with a number of stakeholder groups, in addition to the wide range of consultation methods used during Phase 3**

The following communication tools were used during the Phase 3 consultation:

- Media Kit, including the key messages, a fact sheet, and media releases.
- Two separate ads in the local newspapers leading up to the 5 Town Hall meetings. All ads were identical and a copy has been included as *Attachment 1*.

- An information brochure was created and distributed. The brochure contained a summary of key information, Town Hall meeting dates, and methods for contacting Regional staff.
- Blast emails or letters were sent to all members of the Region's growth management mailing list. At the time, the list contained approximately 1,800 separate entries
- Letters were sent to First Nation representatives.
- Regional growth management website, containing the dates and locations for all Town Hall meetings, presentation and display material, and various methods for contacting Regional staff.
- Ads posted on local municipal websites, advertising the Town Hall meetings and linked to the Region's growth management website.

As a part of Phase 3, five Town Hall meetings were held in municipalities that contained large portions of Whitebelt or one of the Regional Centres: Markham, Vaughan, East Gwillimbury, Richmond Hill, and Newmarket. All of these meetings were open to any York Region resident or stakeholder.

Special consultation meetings have also been held with various stakeholder groups and local municipal Councils. At the time of writing this report, meetings have been held with York Regional staff, the Economic Development Officers of the local municipalities, the York Chapter of BILD (Building Industry and Land Development Association), the York Region District School Board and York Catholic District School Board and the Region's Agricultural Liaison Group. Future meetings have been scheduled with environmental groups and York Public High School Geography Department Heads. In addition, letters have been sent to First Nations in the area offering to meet and provide the Growth Management presentation, as well as representatives of the Human Services Planning Coalition soliciting their feedback. Regional staff can be contacted to discuss the work with ratepayers or citizen groups as required.

Invitations were extended to each local municipality to have Regional staff present the growth management work at local Council meetings. As a result of these invitations, presentations have been made to seven local municipalities: Aurora, Georgina, King, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, and Whitchurch-Stouffville. An additional presentation has been scheduled with the City of Vaughan Council for December.

Communication continues with each local municipality through the Technical Advisory Committee that discusses the population and employment projections, intensification targets, land budget and growth scenarios.

**More than 171 individuals attended the Town Hall meetings; 45 evaluation forms were returned, the majority ranked the meeting as "Excellent"**

Each of the five Town Hall meetings held the same format, 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. - Open house, 7:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. - Presentation and 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. - Facilitated Discussion.

A total of 171 attendees registered at the five Town Hall meetings. While Regional staff endeavoured to have as many attendees as possible register, there were some individuals who did not wish to register, or households or agencies with multiple representatives where only one representative signed on behalf of all attendees. Regional staff estimates that the total attendance was approximately 10% higher than the registered count.

A total of 45 evaluation forms were returned throughout the five Town Hall meetings. When asked how they would rate the elements of the meetings, or how Regional staff responded to their questions, over half replied “Excellent”. 91% of all respondents indicated that the meeting helped them to understand the major growth management decisions that face the Region and how it relates to them and their community.

*Attachment 2* summarizes the feedback received through the evaluation forms.

## **4.2 Phase 3 Messages and Feedback**

### **Phase 3 focused on the selected preferred growth scenario of 40% intensification and the policy directions that emerged from the previous phases**

The primary goal of the Phase 3 public consultation was to collect the public’s feedback on the preferred growth scenario and broad planning policies. This included a discussion of the 40% intensification requirements and forecasted 2031 numbers associated with it, such as the breakdown of population, jobs and new residential units by local municipality. Staff also collected feedback on the following broad policy directions:

- Protecting Our Environment
- Managing Growth
- Diverse Economy
- Intensification
- Human Services: Quality of Life
- Infrastructure
- Quality of Place: New Communities
- Fiscal Responsibility

### **Residents were especially interested in the placement of intensification, affordable housing, and high quality jobs in York Region**

Regional staff recorded the feedback received at each Town Hall meeting, and posted the results on the Region’s growth management website. The detailed notes have been appended as *Attachment 3*.

The feedback received at the 5 Town Hall meetings covered a wide spectrum of issues within York Region. Meetings held with various stakeholder groups and Local Councils mirrored many of the discussions held at the Town Hall meetings. The main issues heard throughout the Phase 3 of the public consultation and engagement process included:

## **Location and Form of Intensification**

Residents expressed interest in where intensification would occur, as well as where intensification will not occur. Questions arose as to what intensification would look like, emphasizing that intensification should be at the appropriate fit and scale for the community.

## **Housing Preferences and Mixed Use**

Residents questioned the form of development that continues to occur in York Region. Examples included big box, strip malls and single detached dwellings. Many felt that we are missing out on opportunities for better development, as it is unlikely these new structures will be torn down once better standards are in place. It was suggested that York Region advocate more mixed-use development, such as commercial and residential uses together. Residents also questioned why the current housing preference is still single detached dwellings, and how we can change this preference among both developers and homeowners.

## **Better Community Design**

Residents supported the creation of complete communities, but noted that the elements of these communities need to be properly defined. York Region was urged to create better communities that are walkable, pedestrian-friendly and include local shops, bike lanes, piazzas, and employment along transit lines. There is a need for careful phasing and sequencing of land for future development, especially within the Whitebelt.

## **Best Practices in New Development & Retrofits**

Residents urged the use of best practices in new development across York Region, as well as retrofits of existing buildings. Suggestions included updating the building code and requiring “green development” and environmental technologies. Increasing the efficiency of electrical and water systems, along with conservation, were cited as being very important to accommodate the forecasted growth.

## **York Region Needs More Affordable Housing**

The lack of affordable housing in York Region was discussed at a number of the Town Hall and stakeholder group meetings. It was noted that many people who work in the Region cannot afford to live here, and that poverty is still an issue. Second suites were suggested as a possible way to alleviate the demand for affordable housing, however there needs to be more dialogue at the community level to address NIMBY-ism.

## **Provision of Human Services**

Residents expressed the need for adequate Human Services in York Region. We need to ensure that there is sufficient funding to enable these services to keep pace with the

forecasted growth. This includes services for new Canadians, not just schools and hospitals. York Region was urged to plan for culture, diversity and heritage.

### **High Quality Jobs for All of York Region**

Residents noted that York Region contains a highly educated work force, and thus requires a large proportion of high quality jobs to ensure short commuting distances. Of the new jobs forecasted within York Region by 2031, the majority should be high quality in nature. Many also highlighted the need to distribute high quality jobs across all of York Region, not just the southern municipalities.

### **Protection of our Natural Heritage & Agricultural Lands**

Residents continue to emphasize the importance of natural heritage and agriculture in York Region. Many commented on the need to preserve agricultural lands, and ensure that the 69% of York Region that is protected from development remains protected. In areas such as the Whitebelt where future development will occur beside green space corridors, it is important that the environment be protected and enhanced.

## **4.3 Next Steps and Policy Directions for Going Forward**

Feedback from the public and stakeholders will be used to update Regional Official Plan policies. A comprehensive review and update of the Regional Official Plan will be undertaken that will incorporate the updated population and employment forecasts by local municipality, an urban boundary expansion, key elements from the York Region Sustainability Strategy and updated infrastructure master plans for water, wastewater and transportation. An amendment to the Regional Official Plan will also be created as a part of the Greenbelt conformity exercise.

Based on the feedback from the public and stakeholders, the following policy directions are recommended:

### **Protect and enhance the Region's Natural Heritage System**

The identification of an enhanced linked natural heritage system is underway and will be incorporated into the Regional Official Plan. Additional refinements to the Regional Official Plan will include the incorporation of the Greenbelt Plan and the Lake Simcoe Protection Strategy, as well as the identification and protection of additional natural heritage features.

### **Finalization of a detailed Intensification Strategy**

Local municipalities are required to undertake housing intensification strategies that identify the locations, unit capacity and appropriate mix of unit types to accommodate the approximately 87,000 intensification units region-wide. The Region will require detailed intensification policies in each local municipal Official Plan. The use of innovative

measures to encourage intensification, and particularly affordable housing, will be encouraged.

To further examine the issue of housing affordability and need within York Region, the Housing Needs Study and Housing Supply Strategy will be updated in the 2009/2010 budget years.

### **Strengthen Regional Official Plan policies regarding community design with best practices**

The Region will hold a Best Practices for New Communities workshop in December. Feedback and recommendations from this workshop will be used to prepare updated development criteria that will be incorporated into the updated Regional Official Plan. New communities will be more compact, more complete, include a new generation of sustainable community design and be fully integrated with infrastructure design emphasizing transit and walking.

### **Accommodate urban boundary expansion with Regional Official Plan amendment**

An urban boundary expansion into the Region's whitebelt lands will be required in order to achieve the 2031 forecasts and will include both additional residential and employment lands. Land requirements will be based on the Region-wide 40% intensification target and meeting the Provincial 50 people and jobs per ha target. New development in the whitebelt areas will be carefully phased and based on a new generation of community design.

### **Identify Agricultural and Rural lands for long-term protection**

A review of Agricultural and Rural lands in the Region is currently underway. This review will determine the long term Agricultural and Rural land designations. Consultation will take place over the winter and study completion is anticipated by June 2009. Results will then be incorporated into the Regional Official Plan through the Greenbelt Conformity Amendment.

## **4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026**

The nature of the growth management strategy speaks to all of the goal areas of Vision 2026, but especially to the goals of "Managed and Balanced Growth", "Infrastructure for a Growing Region" and "Engaged Communities and a Responsive Region".

Vision 2026 contemplates the on-going updates required by the changing context of planning in South Central Ontario. Moreover, Vision 2026 stresses the requirement for ongoing stakeholder involvement and engagement.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The direct costs of the Phase 3 Public Consultation were undertaken within the approved Planning Department budget allocations and staff complements for 2008. These costs included newspaper advertisements, equipment rental and printed materials distributed to all individuals and groups on the departmental mailing list and participants at each Town Hall and public engagement meetings.

Regional staff will be conducting a 25 year fiscal impact analysis of the preferred growth scenario. This analysis will provide an idea of the costs of growth including an examination of revenues and expenditures, capital and operating costs and impacts on the tax levy.

## **6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT**

Regional Staff have worked with local municipalities on the determination of the built boundary, urban growth centres, growth scenarios and allocation. Growth management presentations were made to eight local municipalities as a part of Phase 3: Aurora, Georgina, King, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Vaughan and Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Discussions will continue with the local municipalities through the Technical Advisory Committee and on an individual basis. A number of local municipalities are currently undertaking their own growth management and official plan update work and are consulting with Regional staff on an on-going basis.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

Regional Planning Committee and Council approved a three phase growth management public engagement and consultation process in 2005. Phases 1 through 3 were held in spring 2006, spring 2007 and fall 2008, respectively. In Phase 3, a number of meetings were held across York Region. This included 5 Town Hall meetings and approximately 20 meetings with various stakeholder groups and Local Councils throughout the fall of 2008.

The key issues raised throughout the Town Hall meetings included the location and form of intensification, housing preferences and mixed use, better community design, best practices in new development and retrofits, more affordable housing, provision of human services, creating high quality jobs across the Region, and the protection of our natural heritage and agricultural lands. Recommended policy directions to respond to these issues are discussed in this report.

The next steps in York Region's growth management initiative will be to update the Regional Official Plan in 2009. The feedback collected throughout Phase 3 of the consultation process will help provide the direction for this initiative.

For more information on this report, please contact Barbara Jeffrey, Manager Land Use Policy and Environment at (905) 830-4444, Ext. 1526, or John Waller, Director of Long Range and Strategic Planning at Ext. 1525.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

Recommended by:

Approved for Submission:

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Commissioner of Planning and  
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December 3, 2008

Attachments

1. Example Ad in Local Newspapers
2. Summary of Town Hall Meeting Evaluation Form Results
3. Feedback Notes from Town Hall Meetings

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