



York Regional Council Highlights



Meeting held on
February 22, 2007



The Regional Municipality of York

York Region initiatives honoured by OPWA, ORMF, TABIA and Government of Ontario

Six awards were presented to The Regional Municipality of York at York Regional Council from the Ontario Public Works Association (OPWA), the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation (ORMF), the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas (TABIA) and the Government of Ontario.

The Ontario Public Works Association, a diverse, non-profit organization of public works practitioners, presented:

- The 2006 **Bruce Brunton Award** for York Region's National Public Works Week public education campaign
- The 2006 **Environmental Project of the Year Award** for York Region's St. John's Sideroad and McKenzie Wetland Project
- The 2006 **Transportation Project of the Year Award** for York Region's innovative Viva Rapid Transit initiative

The Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, a group that provides support and encouragement for activities that preserve, protect, and restore the environmental integrity of the Oak Ridges Moraine presented:

- The **Moraine For Life Award**, recognizing the Region's proactive approaches when working within the sensitive ecological environment of the Oak Ridges Moraine and our efforts to ensure strong, more effective stakeholder relationships, with respect to the York Durham Sewage System

The Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas (TABIA) presented an award developed in partnership with the Ontario Business Improvement Areas Association and the Ontario Government:

- The 2006 **Ontario Mainstreet Accessibility Award**, for outstanding leadership and vision for improving accessibility within diverse communities

The Government of Ontario presented:

- The **Heather Crowe Award** for York Region's campaign to reduce the number of children in the Urdu, Farsi and Russian communities who begin smoking

Markham By-pass road name change

York Regional Council today approved a motion to re-name the recently completed third phase of the Markham by-pass the Don Cousens Parkway, in honour of long-serving, retired Town of Markham Mayor Donald Cousens.

The \$10.8 million roadway extends south from Major Mackenzie Drive to Highway 407 and is designed to accommodate increased traffic around the developed area of eastern Markham. The by-pass was officially opened in October 2006; this name change will take place in April.

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More than 17 million riders depend on YRT/Viva annually

York Regional Council today released the 2006 ridership statistics for York Region Transit (YRT) and Viva, York Region's rapid transit system. Following are the highlights for 2006:

- More than 17 million passengers chose to park their cars and take YRT/Viva in 2006, an increase of 1.8 million riders that is equivalent to an additional 3,500 residents taking YRT/Viva to and from work every day for the year
- YRT/Viva ridership climbed 12.4 per cent in 2006, reflecting the highest growth in the Greater Toronto Area
- From September to December of 2006, ridership increased by 14.7 per cent over the same period in 2005, when Viva was first launched and had achieved a similar increase in ridership
- Every weekday, approximately 69,000 trips are made on the YRT/Viva system

York Region strives to constantly improve the ever-growing transit system. System enhancements rolled out in 2006 included:

- Introduction of an additional 260,000 service hours
- Eight new buses added to our fleet and six buses replaced
- 210 upgrades to bus stops
- Enhanced accessibility for users

York Region operates two public transit services, the conventional YRT service and the Viva bus rapid transit service that was launched in September 2005. YRT also operates the door-to-door Mobility Plus service for individuals with disabilities. YRT Mobility Plus services reported a ridership increase of 10.4 per cent in 2006.

For information on YRT/Viva routes and fares, please visit www.yrt.ca or call toll-free at 1-866-MOVE-YRT (668-3978), locally at (905) 762-2100 or TTY line at 1-866-276-7478.

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York Region endorses new category of Class Environmental Assessments for transit projects

York Regional Council today endorsed a new category of Class Environmental Assessments (EA) for transit projects, and has agreed to become a municipal proponent.

A Class EA is a planning process approved under the *Environmental Assessment Act* for specific groups of projects. A Class EA allows projects within the group to be implemented without further approval under the *EA Act* provided the planning process in the Class EA is followed. The types of projects allowed to be covered by a Class EA are recurring, usually similar in nature, usually limited in scale, have a predictable range of environmental effects and are responsive to mitigating measures.

The Class EA process is defined and approved by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment. It was developed for road, water and wastewater projects by the Municipal Engineers Association (MEA) and has been in existence since 1987. The process has been updated numerous times, most recently in 2000.

Until now, municipalities have not had a Class EA process for transit projects, forcing them to conduct lengthier and more costly Individual EAs.

In 2005, an Environmental Advisory Panel created by the Ontario government recommended that the Ministry of the Environment work with the MEA to create a Class EA for transit. The MEA created a sub-committee that included York Region, which came up with recommendations for a transit Class EA. The group drafted a recommendation which included:

A definition of municipal transit

- A glossary of transit terms
- The integration of transit and/or transportation master plans with the *Planning Act*
- Description of the projects, purpose and alternatives
- Description of the environment, potential effects on the environment and mitigating measures
- The schedules of project types

The new transit Class EA will bring needed efficiencies to the EA process, including significant cost savings for participating municipalities. Formal approval will take place pending a review by the Ministry of the Environment.

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Next steps for a York Region Natural Heritage System endorsed

York Regional Council received a report of the results and feedback from the York Region Natural Heritage System Workshop held on November 1, 2006. This initiative represents one step towards fulfilling the June 2006 recommendations of the Towards Sustainability in York Region (TSYR) Advisory Group on how to make the Regional Official Plan and Infrastructure Master Plans more sustainable. The TSYR's first key recommendation endorsed by Regional Council states:

- The Region, and its local municipalities, in consultation with the Conservation Authorities should complete a linked Natural Heritage System that identifies key natural heritage areas to be protected from development and enhanced. The Region should also develop a transportation master plan that respects the integrity of an interconnected, regional Natural Heritage System.

The key objectives of the workshop were to discuss how to protect and enhance the Region's Natural Heritage System and to have better infrastructure planning decisions that are more environmentally sensitive. It is intended that the workshop's proposed action items will be carried out in partnership with local municipalities, Regional stakeholders and partners. These ideas will also be used as part of the updates to the Regional Official Plan and Infrastructure Masters Plans.

The report endorsed by Regional Council includes a "Next Steps Workplan," in Section 4.6. The key recommendations include updating the Regional Natural Heritage System and identifying better and innovative management practices in infrastructure planning to protect and enhance the natural heritage system.

New Communities Workshop proposals obtain Regional Council endorsement

York Regional Council received a report of the results and feedback from the York Region New Communities Workshop held on November 22, 2006. Similar to the Natural Heritage System initiative (above), this initiative represents another step towards fulfilling the June 2006 recommendations of the Towards Sustainability in York Region (TSYR) Advisory Group on how to make the Regional Official Plan and Infrastructure Master Plans more sustainable. Specifically, one of the TSYR's recommendations is to explore with all stakeholders the issues and opportunities in developing new greenfield communities.

According to Provincial forecasts contained in the *Places to Grow Plan*, York Region is expected to have 1.5 million residents by 2031, as well as 780,000 jobs and 500,000 households. To accommodate these forecasts, the *Places to Grow Plan* and the *Greenbelt Plan* have established parameters on where and how this growth will be distributed throughout the Region:

- Of the total new household units forecasted for the Region by 2031, just over 80,000 new household units, or 40 per cent, are to locate in existing developed areas
- The remaining 60 per cent, or approximately 140,000 new units, are expected to locate in new development areas including the Region's whitebelt areas. Whitebelt areas refer to the Region's

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remaining undesignated greenfield areas outside the boundary of the Greenbelt Plan

The main ideas that emerged from the workshop include:

- integrating compact communities and sustainable infrastructure with the natural heritage system
- requiring infrastructure to employ more sustainable and green practices
- addressing the issues of health, energy, changing demographics, human services and transit, and
- involving all stakeholders from diverse disciplines to refine details and produce recommendations

The ideas generated from this workshop and the Natural Heritage Workshop, will be used to establish standards for new community development, formulate new policy in the updates to the Regional Official Plan and Infrastructure Master Plans, and provide input to the upcoming Sustainability Strategy.

York Region Welcome Resource Centre for local immigrant information and core services endorsed

York Regional Council endorsed a model for the York Region Welcome Resource Centre for local immigrant information and core services. The report indicates that community groups working together to create the service delivery model for a Welcome Resource Centre will receive a provincial grant of \$1.3 million to implement their plan.

Five community agencies – COSTI, Catholic Community Services of York Region, Centre for Information & Community Services, Job Skills and York Region Neighbourhood Services – worked together on the York Region Welcome Resource Centre project.

The working group developed a new way to centralize both services and information for York Region newcomers. Through a coordinated, collaborative network of York Region human services providers, immigrants will have better access to information and core services in a timely manner.

Regional Council also authorized staff to accept a funding agreement to create a Municipal Online Information Portal, if the Region's funding application is successful.

The York Region Welcome Resource Centre working group is one of six initiatives of the Inclusivity Action Plan, a program developed by York Region's Human Services Planning Coalition.

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Regional Council supports the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) position regarding the federal government's approach to affordable housing and homelessness

York Regional Council has agreed in principle with the FCM position that a multi-pronged national housing policy involving a rebalancing of expenditures among different levels of government should be developed and that, in the meantime, the federal government should continue funding programs addressing affordable housing and homelessness.

The federal government, in fact, has recently committed to the continuation of several housing and homelessness programs. In addition, Regional Council agreed to ask the provincial government to release federal funds for affordable housing that are currently held "in trust."

2007 YorkLink Directory helps people easily find local community services

The Regional Municipality of York released the 2007 edition of its community services directory at Regional Council today. *YorkLink: A Community Services Directory* provides comprehensive information on over 700 community service providers and related government agencies in York Region.

The 2007 edition of *YorkLink* contains the same detailed index that was introduced in the 2006 edition, and also features the return of the service category listing. This at-a-glance listing categorizes agencies into 28 areas of service and allows you to quickly scan the list to find the agency you are looking for.

YorkLink includes translation assistance in many languages spoken in the Region: Arabic, Cantonese/Mandarin, Farsi, French, Hindi, Italian, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Tamil, Urdu and Vietnamese. Translation assistance is available by calling 1-877-263-6867.

YorkLink is available online through the York Region Web site at www.york.ca. A printed copy is available free of charge by calling (905) 830-4444 or 1-877-464-9675, Ext. 2151, or by emailing yorklink@york.ca. In addition, *YorkLink* is now available in an accessible pdf format for people with visual disabilities.

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The next Regional Council meeting will be held Thursday, March 29, 2007 at 9:30 a.m.

The contents of this summary are for information purposes only. Actual text of Council resolutions and official copies of reports to Council can be obtained from the York Region website at www.york.ca under Regional Government.