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Sent: Monday, May 04, 2015 12:28 PM
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Subject: May 7/15 Committee of the Whole "Planning & Economic Development" - Growth and Development Review

To the Mayor and Council, City of Vaughan

This submission is made in respect of your Agenda Item for the Committee of the Whole Council meeting scheduled for May 7, 2015 on the subject of the York Region Growth and Development Review 2014. The undersigned respectfully regrets being unable to make this presentation verbally and personally and to dialogue with Council, but previously scheduled important personal matters took precedence. I seek your indulgence and urge your interest in the following points that I wish to raise.

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It is a mixed blessing to learn of York Region's and Vaughan's success in achieving the steady growth outlined in the captioned report. On the one hand, growth is a blessing for what it can do economically and in terms of quality of community life. On the other hand, Vaughan becomes ever further out of reach for younger families and for newcomers to the GTA. I cite, by way of example, the following excerpt from the report itself:

The gap between the maximum affordable threshold of \$443,874 and average resale price of homes in York Region is increasing

The Provincial Policy Statement, 2014 and Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2006 include an affordable housing definition that establishes upper affordable housing price thresholds. In 2014, the year-end maximum affordable ownership price in York Region was \$443,874, compared to the average resale price (all unit types) of \$685,200. While the average resale price of homes (all dwelling types) increased by 10% over the 2013 price of \$623,582, the maximum affordable ownership price increased only by 5% (\$424,175 in 2013). This gap has been steadily increasing since 2006 (Figure 3). While affordable housing targets in the YROP-2010 are associated with new housing developments, resale units have been displayed as an indicator due to data limitations with new home prices.

Recently, I addressed you on a related issue as a former MPP and person well aware of York Region, the City of Vaughan, and the four Acts constituting Southern Ontario's greenbelt legislation, but also as Director "U-Live", an organizational movement created specifically to address the badly imbalanced supply/demand crisis in GTA housing and demonstrated by the growing general lack of affordability or availability of various residential housing configurations within reasonable proximity to the GTA. U-Live is an acronym for "urban living in viable environments". Some council members are aware of U-Live and of my personal involvement. The excerpt above amply illustrates that our expressed fears are demonstrably legitimized in York Region. The differential shown in

the report's Figure 3 graph illustrates how average resale prices are growing ever-increasingly beyond the affordable threshold. This is an artificially induced anomaly. Where, in Vancouver, demand and supply are imbalanced similarly and prices are rising exponentially, the reason is no available land...you can't develop and ocean or the Rockies! In the GTA, our barriers are based on policy.

U-Live has, since going public (<http://www.u-live.ca>), attracted the attention of farmers, landowners, conservationists, existing and would-be homeowners, and the development community, among others. Our stance is a simple one. We support greenbelt protections but we believe that the iron-fisted application of Official Plans is far too rigid and restrictive in the face of a GTA that will be home to 8-million people by 2030 and a Greater Golden Horseshoe estimated to be at 13-million by 2040. We believe that creating a balanced supply of affordably priced homes of varying configurations (family detached; semi-detached; town homes; senior residences; condos; rental apartments – low/medium/high rise) is a responsibility of both the Province of Ontario and the municipalities within the affected areas. The opportunity and, in fact, the imperative is immediate and now within a small window in time.

We do not believe that this must be achieved at the expense or through any relaxation of greenbelt protections correctly and currently designed to limit urban sprawl. In fact, we are recommending to the Greenbelt Review that protection be extended to cover all river valley lands within 50 kilometres of the CN Tower and that all four Acts be modified to cover additional territories of 50 kilometres beyond current boundaries, where feasible. The idea remains to achieve good conservation of green space but with people (and, notably, families) getting a fair shake in terms of how the legislation applies.

People must have, at least, an equal weight of importance to conservation, agriculture, recreation, and ecology. People, however, are not assigned that value within the four Acts which create greenbelt zones across the Greater Golden Horseshoe. In the name of quality of life and of the environment, we now review these Acts, as originally passed, for the first time in ten years. The review is a necessary undertaking smartly incorporated when the originating bills were authored and debated. Urgency is also an aspect of the current process and essential to the outcome by dint of the fact that this is also the last time we shall undertake such a review for another ten years! Meanwhile, to the specific issues of environment and quality of life, we force people to reside in far flung places like Cobourg, Haliburton, or St. Catharines while being employed within the GTA in order to secure homes they can afford and where they can raise families. And so, they spend four hours in their cars daily, sacrificing that family life they sought and creating additional GHG pollution. This doesn't make sense.

U-Live's submission to the Greenbelt Review is herewith included for your perusal. We present this communication plus our Submission in hopes your Council will make representation to the Greenbelt Review supporting our two main points affecting municipalities:

1. Residential (White Belt) lands should be afforded the greatest possible latitude in terms of what individual municipalities may and may not do by way of residential building configuration;
2. Official Plans shouldn't be "engraved in stone" i.e. where feasible, reasonable incursion into contiguous greenbelt lands should be an option in achieving the goal of balance and accommodation;

It is U-Live's position that the above-captioned report more than amply demonstrates the urgent need for measurable action on your part.

Presented respectfully and with my standing offer to meet with or appear before Council at any time to discuss at greater length or to meet individually at any mutually convenient time. Please see below for our Submission and visit our website to inform yourselves more fully about U-Live.

Peter Shurman

Director - U-Live – <http://www.u-live.ca>

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I write on behalf of Urban Living In Viable Environments – or ‘U-Live’, an initiative that seeks to maintain Greenbelt protections afforded to important green spaces while accommodating responsible residential development in the areas covered by the legislation.

We believe that extending space reserved for conservation activities, agriculture, working ecosystems and recreation makes sense. However, we also believe that municipalities and the province have a responsibility to eliminate the conditions that are artificially inflating real estate prices in the GTA.

It is no secret that the GTA and surrounding regions are experiencing a housing supply shortage. This shortage has led to astronomic real estate prices and an affordability crisis for homebuyers for no reason other than an artificially induced imbalance in demand and supply.

Our submission is simple. We urge the province to protect all river valley lands within 50 kilometers of the CN Tower and to expand the Greenbelt lands outward from the GTA by roughly an additional 50 kilometers. However, we cannot underscore sufficiently the requirement to allow municipalities to modify their Official Plan commitments for settlement lands. Much more broadly interpreted use of defined White Belt areas is required so that single-family and multi-family homes, low-rise and high-rise condominiums/apartments may be accommodated. So too is increased latitude with respect to the use of Greenbelt-designated lands that directly interface with residential areas in the Official Plans of our cities and towns.

Reforming the Greenbelt Plan to include provisions that will accommodate single and multi-family homes will go a long way to resolving the affordability crisis home buyers are facing today. This is essential.

Media routinely reports on the skyrocketing real estate prices in the GTA. In February an article described prospective homebuyers who slept in their cars on a -20c night in East Gwillimbury – about 50 kilometers from downtown Toronto - just to secure a place in line for yet-to-be-constructed family dwellings in the \$350-thousand+ range.

In a similar vein, a TD Bank report on the affordability of housing stated that homes in the GTA now cost 6.1 times the average family income, up from 4.8 times that income in 2006.

Beyond economic reports, people talk about housing in the GTA and Toronto every day. Phrases like “I can never buy a home here”, “I’m waiting to inherit my parents’ home” are commonplace. These conversations are about artificial and exponentially growing demand with supply of single-family dwellings at virtually zero.

Our leaders talk about reducing greenhouse gasses, while government policies are forcing people to commute to Toronto from Niagara, Cobourg, Gravenhurst and points even further afield, just to get to work.

We discuss the need to spend quality time with our families, for parents to meaningfully interact with their children and we point to the importance of a high standard of living within our communities. Yet, provincial legislation continues to force families to live ever further away from their sources of employment, leading to longer commute times, fewer hours spent at home, and an overall poorer quality of family life.

We urge the Review Committee to reject the “foregone conclusion” approach. Leaving things ‘as-is’ means that GTA residents at all stages of life are being denied the opportunity to live affordably. The Province needs to expand the protections of river valley lands and allow municipalities to make their own decisions as to how to use their land to accommodate the population influx that they will experience over the next few decades. For Ontario to legislate otherwise, borders on criminal.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Shurman

Director