

6. Commercial Policy Review

This section evaluates the appropriateness of the existing commercial land use framework in the City's Official Plan along with other applicable policy documents, including the current and draft Regional Official Plans and the Regional Land Budgeting Exercise, in terms of their ability to address the future commercial land use needs of the City.

6.1 Review of Vaughan's Official Plan and Secondary Plan Commercial Policies

Official Plan Amendment 600 was approved by Vaughan City Council in September 2000 and by York Region in June 2001. A consolidated version of OPA 600 incorporates all amendments and modifications to the plan up to January 2003.

6.1.1 Goals and Objectives – OPA 600 Part B Section 2.3

Section 2.3 of OPA 600 contains general commercial goals and objectives for the City of Vaughan. These goals support a hierarchy of uses and encourage mixed uses, pedestrian traffic and distinctive building forms, very little of which has taken place to date.

- 2.3.i. To establish a hierarchy of commercial areas and facilities of various sizes and compositions to satisfy the needs of Vaughan residents and the traveling public.
- 2.3.ii. To foster the role and economic vitality of established commercial areas within Vaughan.
- 2.3.iii. To develop within Vaughan Centre and Vaughan Corporate Centre major commercial components serving Vaughan and the Greater Toronto Area and providing the widest possible range of commercial goods and services.
- 2.3.iv. To encourage mixed use development including residential, retail, office and recreational uses in Vaughan Centre and Vaughan Corporate Centre.
- 2.3.v. To promote shopping districts that cater to and encourage pedestrian traffic, and is characterized by distinctive building forms and specialty goods and services.
- 2.3.vi. To establish a primary commercial focus for each Urban Village Area at a scale appropriate to the Area's design population.
- 2.3.vii. To provide within the primary commercial areas of each urban village for a variety of appropriate uses, such as department stores, comparison shopping opportunities, offices, office buildings and entertainment facilities, and to ensure that the areas are developed in accordance with sound principles of urban design and in particular are well integrated with adjacent land uses.

2.3.viii. To provide for neighbourhood commercial centres to address the weekly needs of residents in one-stop shopping locations.

2.3.ix. To provide local convenience commercial uses to address the day-to-day convenience shopping needs of residents.

6.1.2 Urban Structure and Form – OPA 600 Section 4.1

Section 4.1.3.iii and 4.1.3.iv address the locations of local convenience commercial uses within neighbourhoods. These policies indicate that these centres will accommodate small groupings of local convenience type shops which may be permitted to locate at grade in residential buildings in a mixed use format. It is important to note that they are not required to be developed as part of a mixed use building. Their location should be determined through the block plan approval process and should preferably be close to local parks within medium and high density residential areas.

6.1.3 Residential Designations – OPA 600 Section 4.2.1

Commercial uses are permitted at varying scales in the following residential designations:

- *Low Density Residential Areas* (4.2.1.1.ii) permit local convenience commercial centres.
- *Medium Density Residential – Commercial Areas* (4.2.1.3.iv) permit small-scale retail and office commercial uses provided such uses face onto a primary street (at 0.25 times the area of the lot) or arterial road (at 0.5 times the areas of the lot). Generally the uses should be integrated within a residential development and building forms at grade level.
- *High Density Residential/Commercial Areas* (4.2.1.4.v) permits commercial uses either as a single use building or as part of a mixed use commercial-residential building. Commercial uses are limited to 2.0 times the area of the lot in addition to any residential uses on the site and are to front directly onto the public right-of-way with parking provided at the rear.

- *District Centres* (4.2.1.5i) are intended to provide a community focus within Vellore and Carrville and to provide the communities with opportunities for community-scale retail and commercial facilities. Commercial uses provided as part of a mixed use development in the *District Centre* are permitted to a maximum of 2.0 FSI in addition to any residential uses on the site. The following commercial uses are permitted within the *District Centre* designation (4.2.1.5.ii):
 - Department store
 - Food store
 - Drugstore
 - Retail store
 - Restaurants
 - Place of entertainment
 - Personal and business services
 - Business and professional offices
 - Service stations and gas bars

6.1.4 Commercial Designations – OPA 600 Part B Section 4.2.2

Vaughan’s current OP categorizes commercial areas into seven groups which form a general hierarchy of uses, each of which are examined in this section.

6.1.4.1 Vaughan Centre and Vaughan Corporate Centre

The *Vaughan Centre* and *Vaughan Corporate Centre*¹³ designations are intended to include commercial components to provide a higher order of goods and services, including department stores, specialty stores, major chain stores, restaurants, cafes, places of entertainment and amusement, nightclubs, personal service shops, hotels, business and professional offices. The designations were intended to encourage the development of pedestrian-oriented shopping districts and mixed-use developments, subject to the Secondary Plans for each area.

The *Vaughan Centre* designation also laid the framework for the development of the Vaughan Mills Mall. The mall, intended to combine various retail concepts in an enclosed mall including power centre, factory outlet centre, super-regional mall and entertainment retail, has a minimum gross floor area of 100,000 m² (roughly 1.1 million square feet). Stipulations also required the mall to have a higher than average number of anchor tenants with space exceeding 1,850 m² (approx. 20,000 square feet) and a smaller proportion of space devoted towards tenants with less than 185 m² of space (approx. 2,000 square feet). In addition the policies also prohibited Department Stores

¹³ Although the Vaughan Centre and Vaughan Corporate Centre are included in the same subsection, they are distinct designations.

and Supermarkets from locating within the mall. These policies sought to allow for the creation of a new and distinct type of retail within the City, namely the type of Mills Mall more typically found in the US.

6.1.4.2 District Centres

Three *District Centres* are designated in OPA 600, as follows:

- Vellore-Urban Village District Centre at Major Mackenzie Drive and Weston Road;
- Carrville-Urban Village District Centre at Dufferin Street and Rutherford Road; and
- The District Commercial Centre in the Vaughan Centre Secondary Plan area on the northeast corner of the intersection of Rutherford Road and Highway 400.

OPA 600 stipulates that *District Centres* shall provide a focal point for the residential community and offer a wide range of goods, services and retail facilities, appropriate to the size and character of its trade area and that such facilities shall occupy approximately 40% of the area of a District Centre. More specifically *District Centres* should be planned to provide between 25,000 m² and 35,000 m² GLA of commercial space but not in excess of 40,000 m².

6.1.4.3 Neighbourhood Commercial Centres

Neighbourhood Commercial Centres are intended to provide for the weekly needs of the surrounding residents. Permitted uses include a food store, drug store, other retail stores, pharmacies, banks and financial institutions, business and professional offices, personal services, restaurants, service stations and gas bars, but shall not include a department store. They should be planned to be developed at between 5,000 m² and 15,000 m² GLA, and not to exceed 20,000 m². *Neighbourhood Commercial Centres* should generally be located near the intersection of arterial roads and may be developed in conjunction with medium density housing in areas also designated *Medium Density Residential-Commercial Area*.

6.1.4.4 Local Convenience Commercial

Areas designated as *Local Convenience Commercial* are intended to provide for the daily needs of local residents. Permitted on any arterial or primary street, preferably at a corner location, the location of centres is to be determined through the block plan approval process. Sizes of local centres may range from a single corner store to a maximum of 1,200 m². Permitted uses within local convenience commercial centres include retail stores, personal service shops, offices and similar uses.

6.1.4.5 General Commercial

The *General Commercial* designation is intended to permit uses including existing commercial uses, retail stores for the buying, leasing and exchanging of goods and services, restaurants, banks, and business and professional offices. This designation is largely intended to capture the types of development that do not clearly fall into one of the preceding designations.

6.1.4.6 Service Stations and Gas Bar

Permitted uses within this designation are those whose primary purpose is the sale of auto fuel, oil and lubricant and other related products, and those who provide repair and maintenance services for vehicles. Convenience retail uses may be permitted on the same site as an automobile gas bar, provided that such uses can be sensitively designed and integrated on the site, and in particular be compatible with surrounding development. Gas bars are generally limited to one per arterial road intersection.

6.2 Comments

Vaughan's commercial policies provide for the development of a significant amount of commercial space and provide an appropriate hierarchical structure given the trends outlined in the previous section. They also allow for higher density development and a mixed use environment on commercial sites at the upper levels of the hierarchy. There are, however, a number of issues which should be recognized. Firstly, the policies do not adequately address the more regional serving needs of the future population. While Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and Vaughan Mills are designated at the highest level of the hierarchy, the policies do not adequately delineate a strategy as to how they can be expanded to accommodate additional regional serving space, or whether additional regional facilities will be required outside of these areas. Secondly, the maximum size for neighbourhood shopping centres of 20,000 metres (215,000 square feet) is well above that which would normally be required for typical neighbourhood-related retailing and would compete with the District Centres for many of the same tenants. This is compounded at some intersections, where up to four neighbourhood centres would be permitted creating the potential for over 800,000 square feet of "neighbourhood" commercial space within one node. It is possible and likely that some neighbourhood nodes (e.g. the northeast corner of Dufferin and Major Mackenzie) may evolve into what are effectively district retail centres, but without the policies in place to encourage a broader mix of uses and intensification. It is also possible that not all of the designated sites may be developed or may not be developed to the maximum approved, which may require that the unbuilt approved space on these be accommodated elsewhere.

Given the extent of population that will be accommodated through intensification, it will be critical to develop a strategy and policies to accommodate commercial development in these areas.

In general, policies to incorporate retailing in intensification sites should ensure that:

- Commercial space is oriented to pedestrian corridors, such as sidewalks; and where outdoor pedestrian movement is encouraged, retail space is not provided through interior malls;
- Commercial space is oriented around pedestrian connections to transit nodes;
- Mid-block and other pedestrian connections should be provided to ensure that access is easily facilitated from nearby streets, adjacent residential neighbourhoods, and nearby parking and transit facilities;
- A mix of commercial spaces be encouraged, including both larger format stores which can act as commercial anchors for the street, and smaller stores and services that create a diversity of retail experiences;
- Accommodation is made for large food stores, including supermarkets, which are essential to serve the day to day shopping within neighbourhoods and help to attract residential development to an area; and,
- Where feasible, on-street parking should be available to provide added market support and exposure for street front retailing.
- Building scale and orientation should ensure extensive sunlight penetration onto pedestrian retail corridors and precincts.

6.2.1 Village Cores

Vaughan's Village Cores are hidden gems in the City's retail structure and are overshadowed by the Big Box development and major malls in the City's retail structure. The cores can play an important role in terms of defining their surrounding neighbourhoods, providing for pedestrian and transit oriented retail opportunities, and, in some cases, acting as visitor draws to the City. As highlighted by the telephone survey, only about one in four Vaughan residents actually shopped at a Village Core over the past year. The Village Cores also did not score very highly in terms of shopping areas Vaughan residents felt represented their lifestyles. Each of the Village Cores has a unique history and strengths, as well as, different challenges to address.

6.2.1.1 Village Cores Commercial Space Composition

Figure 6.1 summarizes the commercial space composition at each of the four core areas. Some key observations can be drawn from this table:

- None of the core areas has a supermarket and with the exception of Maple have a very limited availability of food stores. This makes it difficult for them to truly adopt a neighbourhood serving role. In the case of the Maple Core, a small supermarket anchored neighbourhood plaza is also situated immediately to the west.
- Almost one-quarter of the commercial space in Maple serves a convenience retail function. This includes a large Shoppers Drug Mart at the intersection of Major Mackenzie and Keele. The remaining core areas have a significantly lower proportion of convenience retail space limiting their ability to serve weekly shopping trips by residents of the surrounding neighbourhoods.
- The Kleinburg and Thornhill Cores are much more oriented to comparison retail facilities than to convenience retailing, suggesting markets that extend well beyond the local neighbourhoods. Kleinburg relies very heavily on a tourist market, which makes it vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations and erratic tourist trends. Thornhill relies on passing automobile traffic, which is reflected in the commercial formats along Yonge Street.
- Approximately one-quarter of the space in Kleinburg comprises food service facilities. Compared to other popular heritage cores, such as Unionville, the variety of restaurants is more limited. The Doctor's House, however, caters to large functions and draws visitors to Kleinburg from across the GTA.
- The Woodbridge Core stands out in that it is the location of three major banks and the Italian Canadian Credit Union. The availability of banks assists in drawing neighbourhood support
- Services are essential to all of the cores, comprising between 55% and 68% of the total space inventory. Health care and personal services are particularly prominent in all of the cores.

- In general, vacancy rates are very low and indicative of healthily performing commercial areas. At 9%, the Woodbridge Core is slightly above the 5% frequently cited benchmark for a balanced market. This is not considered serious. However, it suggests that some weaknesses may have to be addressed. About 60% of the space in the Woodbridge Core is found in Market Lane – a modern plaza constructed behind the historic retail street. This space suffers from lack of exposure to passing traffic, and at the time of the inventory had three vacant retail units. An active BIA, which is currently lacking, could assist in marketing the core and attracting new businesses.

Figure 6.1
Village Cores - Distribution of Commercial Space by Store Category

| | Kleinburg Core | Maple Core | Woodbridge Core | Thornhill Core | Average of 4 Cores |
|--|----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Supermarkets | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Convenience and Specialty Food Stores | 0% | 16% | 5% | 4% | 8% |
| Beer, Wine and Liquor Stores | 0% | 0% | 6% | 0% | 1% |
| Pharmacies and Personal Care Stores | 1% | 7% | 2% | 3% | 4% |
| Total Convenience Retail Space | 2% | 23% | 13% | 6% | 13% |
| Furnishings, Electronics and Building Supplies | 0% | 4% | 7% | 16% | 7% |
| Fashion | 6% | 3% | 11% | 6% | 6% |
| General Merchandise | 0% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 1% |
| Other Retailers | 21% | 2% | 3% | 15% | 8% |
| Total Comparison Retail Space | 26% | 10% | 22% | 36% | 21% |
| Restaurant and Fast Food | 26% | 14% | 10% | 5% | 13% |
| Health Care Services | 9% | 18% | 8% | 12% | 13% |
| Banks and Financial Services | 3% | 1% | 16% | 5% | 6% |
| Cultural, Entertainment and Recreation | 0% | 2% | 0% | 1% | 1% |
| Insurance and Real Estate | 2% | 0% | 4% | 1% | 2% |
| Personal Care Services | 10% | 15% | 9% | 13% | 12% |
| Other Services | 19% | 13% | 9% | 17% | 14% |
| Total Services | 68% | 62% | 57% | 55% | 60% |
| Vacant | 4% | 5% | 9% | 3% | 5% |
| Total Space (%) | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Total Space (Square Feet) | 84,858 | 168,601 | 107,692 | 90,079 | 112,808 |

Source: urbanMetrics inc.

In summary, the core areas are generally performing well, however, in order for them to become more relevant to their surrounding neighbourhoods, with the exception of Maple, they require a larger amount of food and convenience retail space. With an above average vacancy rate, and a location with minimal non-local pass-by traffic, the Woodbridge Core requires a higher level of marketing, which may be advanced through

the creation of a BIA. Kleinburg is functioning reasonably well as a tourist destination, but is vulnerable due to its lack of neighbourhood serving retailers.

Policies guiding the development of the four Village Cores are contained in the Community Plans for the broader areas, as well as more recent Official Plan Amendments and other planning documents.

6.2.1.2 Woodbridge Core

The Woodbridge Core has been defined in the Woodbridge Community Plan (OPA 240) to include the neighbourhoods in the area generally bounded by Highway 7, Church Street, Islington Avenue and Kipling Avenue. Subsequently OPA 240 has been updated through more recent work, including the Woodbridge Historic Commercial Centre Plan (OPA 440) and the Woodbridge Heritage Conservation



Woodbridge Core

District Study, released in 2009. The commercial component of the Core is a much smaller area, occupying both sides of Woodbridge Avenue, including the Market Lane open air shopping centre. As defined in the Community Plan, the role of the Commercial Core is to provide “a strong retail service function for local residents, as well as a specialized tourist function”. In general, the policies have been structured to provide for a balance between creating a strong commercial core, protecting against the encroachment of commercial activities into surrounding residential neighbourhoods, and the protection of the heritage character of the area. The amount of retail floor space in the core has been capped, although in practical terms, there are only limited opportunities to add additional commercial space.

The plan also “encourages community involvement to strengthen the function and role of the retail commercial area”, in reference to the absence of a local Business Improvement Area (BIA). Generally building heights are limited and new development must integrate with the Woodbridge Avenue Streetscape.

As per OPA 440: New development within the “Mixed Use Commercial” designation, which applies to the core area, is subject to a number of specific design objectives:

- In order to maintain and provide for a continuous ground-related commercial façade, residential uses in new developments will not be permitted to front onto Woodbridge Avenue at street level.
- All development shall be of a low profile, street-oriented nature.

- Building heights should generally not exceed three storeys with an opportunity for a fourth storey to be incorporated into the roof area, depending on a compatible relationship to adjacent development.
- Mixed-use development shall be designed to minimize the impacts from the commercial component, including noise, vibration security, odours and lighting, on the residential part of the development.
- Parking areas may be provided in a combination of surface, underground or deck structures and will not be permitted in any front yard and screened from public streets by buildings or other means, such as landscaping.

In general, the Woodbridge core works well as a local serving commercial node, although there is some question with regards to the success of Market Lane. Often, retail space off of primary main street spines tends to underperform due to lack of exposure. This may be the case with Market Lane. On the other hand, the expansive parking areas in Market Lane offer an opportunity for residential intensification and longer term modifications to the retail layout. In general, residential intensification should be encouraged as a means of bolstering the local function of the core. At present there is little evidence that the

Woodbridge Core performs a tourism function. The formation of a BIA to assist in marketing the core within the context of the City's tourism strategy will be important to expanding the role of the Woodbridge core.



Store fronts with grade separation from sidewalk

From a design orientation, residential intensification on Woodbridge Avenue should include street related commercial space to ensure the continuity of the retail precinct. Commercial units should also be encouraged to have entrances at street level and avoid steps and railings which reduce both the exposure and accessibility of the units.

6.2.1.3 Kleinburg Core

The development within the Kleinburg Core Area is generally regulated through the Kleinburg-Nashville Community Plan (OPA 601) and the Kleinburg-Nashville Heritage Conservation District Plan. The more recent Kleinburg Core Area Policy Review (OPA 633) was prepared in order to provide a consistent regulatory framework to guide the village character. It resulted in the creation of a new Kleinburg-specific zone, C11 – Mainstreet Commercial.

The core area generally includes the mainstreet commercial development on Islington Avenue and Nashville Road and adjacent residential neighbourhoods. The primary functions for the area are identified as “a focus for tourism and as a commercial area serving the local and neighbourhood shopping needs of the community”. Of importance to the core are its “heritage character, pedestrian friendly form of development and its connectivity with existing building form and residential areas”. The policies tend to restrict commercial uses to those which are limited in scale and are compatible with the heritage character of the core. Limited mixed use developments are permitted subject to specific requirements.

The Kleinburg core has traditionally played a strong tourist role owing to its heritage character, the McMichael Gallery, the Kortright Centre for Conservation and the Doctors House, which all contribute to draw visitors from across the GTA. In recent years, as urban development has enveloped the core, the appeal of Kleinburg as a rural village apart from the GTA has been diminished. The lack of a significant food anchor and congestion by visitor traffic has limited its appeal as a local shopping destination.

With additional residential development scheduled for the Kleinburg-Nashville area, it is likely that the Kleinburg core will see its function shift somewhat from being a tourist

destination to providing recreation and cultural amenities to the surrounding neighbourhoods. This would be a role similar to that played by Mainstreet Unionville. At present, Mainstreet Unionville benefits from a large surrounding suburban population. The current residential development in proximity to the Kleinburg Core, however, is more dispersed, particularly to the east and west.



Kleinburg Village Core

(Google Earth Image)

While intensification opportunities within the core are very limited, the historic residential development patterns in the area suggest that new residents will have above average incomes and, therefore, would support specialty retail and service facilities that may not be supportable in many other parts of the City. Over time, with the additional population planned for the Kleinburg-Nashville Community, there will likely be an increased demand within the Kleinburg core for both casual and formal eating establishments, personal services, and unique boutiques. The keys to preserving the success of the core will be to maintain high quality design standards, preserving the heritage character

of the area, ensuring an efficient traffic circulation pattern, strong vehicular and alternative transportation connections to the commercial core from the existing and future neighbourhoods, and the provision of adequate parking.

6.2.1.4 Thornhill Core Area

The Thornhill Core Area is situated on the west side of Yonge Street, generally between Arnold Avenue and Centre Street, and extending slightly beyond these two points. It has been guided by OPA 210 (Thornhill-Vaughan Community Plan) and updated through OPA 669, which implemented the recommendations of the Thornhill Yonge Street Study, and the Thornhill Vaughan Conservation District Plan.

Divided between Vaughan on the west side of Yonge Street and Markham on the east, the Thornhill Core Area has, in recent years, functioned primarily as an arterial commercial strip. In

part, its function has been influenced by its location on Yonge Street, which is a busy Regional arterial road connecting Toronto with Central York Region and Highways 407 and 7 to the north. While the neighbourhoods surrounding the core contain many homes of historical significance dating back to early settlement, the commercial core comprises predominantly modern commercial structures, with much of its heritage having been lost to development. Its attractiveness as a pedestrian corridor is reduced by busy traffic on Yonge Street and the more automobile oriented commercial plazas and buildings which dominate the area. The Core Area, however, does benefit from several bus transit routes, including



Thornhill Core (Vaughan on Left Side) (Google Earth Image)



Auto Oriented Retail Plaza Integrated with Older Residential Dwelling (Google Earth Image)

York Region’s VIVA service and a GO transit bus route. Longer term plans would be to enhance Yonge Street as a rapid transit corridor, including the construction of a subway line linking Finch Station and Highway 7.

The purpose of OPA 669 was to “establish a coherent urban design framework to guide the physical renewal and evolution of the Yonge Street Corridor in Thornhill from a post-war highway oriented commercial corridor to a more mixed-use pedestrian supportive mainstreet within the historic community of Thornhill”. To this end, the plan was based on 10 key principles, including:

- A reliance on transit as a catalyst for change;
- Encouraging additional residential development in proximity to the commercial core;
- Developing features to encourage pedestrian activity;
- Filling in gaps that break up a continuous commercial streetscape;
- Creating open-space public amenities to act as meeting and gathering places;
- Expanding and diversifying the retail sector;
- Promoting a connected open space network;
- Strengthening/protecting core assets, including existing heritage structures;
- Promoting design excellence; and,
- Reorganizing parking to enhance Yonge Street as a walkable commercial district.

Generally, where heritage and complementary properties do not exist, the Yonge Street frontage was designated as “Mid-rise/Mixed Use”. This designation encourages mixed use office/retail or residential/retail. New development on Yonge Street and public space areas is required to have commercial space on the ground floor. Similar to the policies with regards to the Woodbridge Core, at-grade residential uses are not permitted on Yonge Street. Other provisions included in the plan are the establishment of a Community Improvement Plan (CIP), the encouragement of a Business Improvement Area, and further study of the potential for on-street parking by York Region, Markham, and Vaughan.

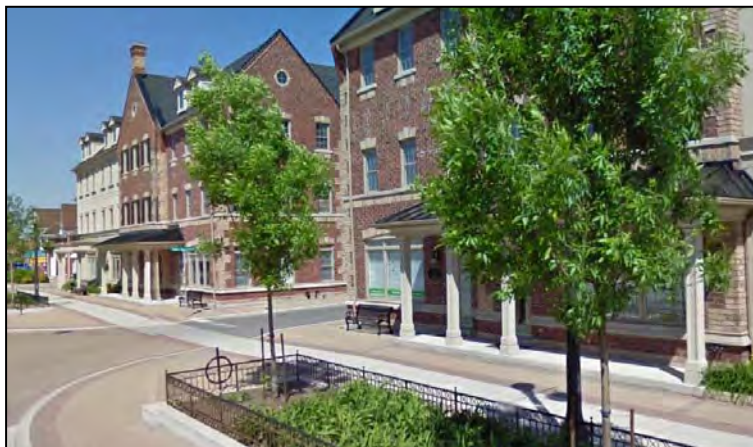
Generally, the policies provided for in OPA 669 will address many of the issues facing the Thornhill Core. We would add that other factors evident in many successful pedestrian main streets are strong transit connections and the proximity of high income neighbourhoods, both of which are present with respect to the Thornhill Core. The core also benefits from a number of high/medium density residential projects along Yonge Street.

Several elements that are lacking within the core include: the lack of a large employment base to fuel day-time shopping and services; large retail anchors, which help to attract regional support; and significant institutional uses, such as government buildings or post-secondary schools. While these elements are not essential ingredients in successful pedestrian cores, their addition would enhance the market for commercial uses along Yonge Street and expand activity over a larger timeframe during the day and over the week. Retail anchors can take a variety of formats and will vary from location to location. For example, in North Toronto, the Sporting Life Store has a significant influence on retail traffic and commercial rents along Yonge Street. Pusateri's gourmet food store draws customers from across the Toronto Area to the Avenue Road and Lawrence Area. Large format Shoppers Drug Stores, Rabba Fine Foods, Mountain Equipment Co-op, and Winners are other examples of retailers that anchor pedestrian areas. Some flexibility should be incorporated into zoning and Official Plan policies to allow suitable anchor tenants.

On-street parking is generally an important ingredient in successful pedestrian areas by reducing the need for on-site parking and enhancing the exposure and accessibility of store fronts to passing traffic. On street parking can also have the effect of reducing driving speeds, thereby, enhancing the attractiveness of the area for pedestrians and cyclists. It is recognized, however, that Yonge Street is a Regional Road and that further study would be required to ensure that required traffic flows can still be achieved with on-street parking within the Thornhill corridor.

6.2.1.5 Maple Core Area

Like the Thornhill Core, the Maple Core has been subject to considerable redevelopment, with many historic commercial buildings having vanished. Like Thornhill, it is situated in an area with high traffic volumes, particularly along Major Mackenzie Drive, which is a main east-west route connecting to Highway 400. However, in recent years, Maple has had a much better history of attracting pedestrian commercial forms than Thornhill.



Maple Core Area – Major Mackenzie Drive west of Keele Street (Google Earth Image)

The current commercial structure along Maple Commercial Core faces the following challenge: commercial development along the Major Mckenzie Drive and Keele Street is not well-balanced. This means that The extent of the designation and commercial development varies on opposite sides of the radiating streets. The most prominent commercial district is on the north side of Major Mckenzie

Drive west of Keele Street, with lesser commercial concentrations on Keele north of Major Mackenzie. Very limited commercial development exists elsewhere on the cross roads. This dispersion of commercial space detracts from the sense of the core as a concentrated and easily definable area, such as a “four corners” district, or as a two-sided commercial street.

Since OPA 350, several urban design initiatives and other OPA amendments have guided development of the Maple Core Area. In 1996, Council commissioned the Maple Streetscape and Urban Design Guidelines Study. This study was to respond to the recent rapid growth experienced in the community and the lack of a unifying urban design plan. The study area extended well beyond the historic core and included adjacent neighbourhoods. A key objective of the plan was to create a pedestrian friendly environment.

Among the recommendations of the study were:

- Consistent street setbacks and heights;
- Eliminating gaps in the streetscape through uninterrupted building façades;
- Pedestrian friendly streetscape and amenities;
- Intensified development along Keele Street and Major Mackenzie Drive.
- Parking behind buildings with lots joined to reduce driveway entrances; and,
- Limited on-street parking.

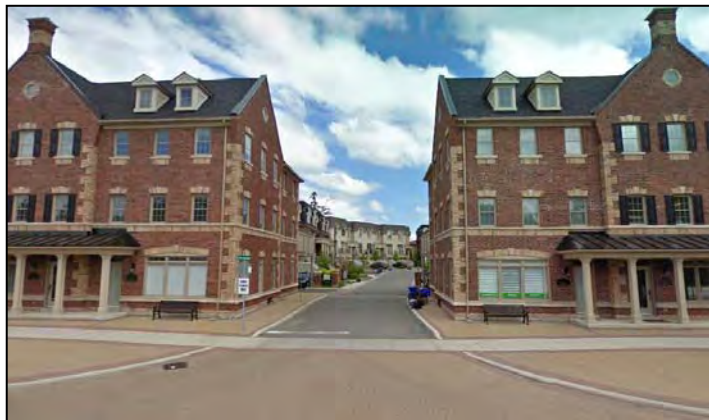
These guidelines are evident in development that has since occurred in the core, including a limited number of on-street lay-by parking spaces.

In 2003, the City commissioned A Heritage Review of the Maple Streetscape and Urban Design Guidelines Study by Phillip H. Carter Architect and Planner.

The objectives of this study related to preserving the

authenticity of heritage resources. In general, the study recommended that the application of design standards should allow for diversity in building formats, setbacks and landscaping, in keeping with the true character of the village. The author also stressed that a modest scale of development and minimal signage was important to maintaining the village character.

More recently, the City has commissioned the Maple Heritage Conservation District Study as a means of further preserving and enhancing the heritage buildings and overall character of the former Village.



Residential infill behind mixed-use buildings on Major Mackenzie Drive
(Google Earth)

The Maple Core benefits from its proximity to the Civic Centre and the future Civic Centre, currently under construction, as well as, the Maple Community Centre. These major municipal institutions draw visitors to the community. Although they are physically separated from the commercial core, they are within a reasonable walking distance. There are also considerable opportunities to intensify the commercial core, including a number of vacant parcels, plazas with parking fronting onto the street and non-heritage large lot single family dwellings.

While Maple is the most successful of the cores in terms of fulfilling a neighbourhood serving function and attracting pedestrian friendly mixed-use commercial formats, further infilling is required to establish a more cohesive commercial core. Its situation at the crossroads of two major arterial roads can be used to this advantage by offering retailers superior access to both the surrounding neighbourhoods and four-directional arterial road traffic. As with the other cores, further residential intensification will enhance its attractiveness to retailers. Due to the proximity of the new hospital site, the Maple Core would also be attractive to health care practitioners. To the extent possible, the creation of strong linkages between the major Civic attractions and the commercial core, would enhance the character of the commercial core as a pedestrian area.

6.2.2 York Region's Official Plan Commercial Policies

York Region's current Official Plan was first approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in October 1994. The current office consolidation incorporates approvals of deferred or referred policies and designations by the Minister and/or the Ontario Municipal Board and subsequent approvals through to June 2008.

6.2.2.1 Section 3 – Economic Vitality

As part of the Economic Vitality Strategy, the Regional OP suggest that, where it would support the corridors and centres strategy, consideration should be given to intensifying and mixing uses in older employment areas as they begin to redevelop.

This section of the Official Plan also stipulates that retail facilities in excess of 30,000 gross leasable square metres (323,000 square feet) are required to complete a Region-wide impact analysis. Municipalities are also encouraged, through this section, to plan for retail facilities that are integrated into communities and place an emphasis on community and design with consideration being given towards:

- the meshing of the proposal’s street grid and pedestrian system into the community;
- the mix of residential and office commercial land uses on each part of the proposal;
- the integration of the parks, natural areas and other public spaces into the community;
- the relationship of the proposed buildings to the street;
- the distribution of floor space densities across the site; and
- the avoidance of large expanses of parking areas.

6.2.2.2 Section 5.3 – Regional Centres

Vaughan is identified as one of the Region’s four Regional Centres, each of which are planned to become hubs of business, culture, government and social activity. These Centres are intended to support the highest development densities in the Region with long-term targets of 2.5 FSI.

6.2.2.3 Section 5.4 – Local Centres

Municipalities within the Region are required to identify Local Centres within their boundaries. These centres are identified to be concentrations of uses that serve the adjacent community. They may include residential, service, commercial and office activities. Local centres should be comprised of the greatest mix of uses in the Region following the Regional Centres.

6.2.2.4 Section 5.5 – Regional Corridors

The Regional Corridors connect the Regional Centres and include Yonge Street and Highway 7. Municipalities are required by this provision to identify areas along these corridors that have the greatest opportunity for compact and mixed use development.

6.2.2.5 Section 5.6 – Local Corridors

The Regional OP promotes intensification and residential and employment growth supportive of local communities along the Local Corridors. This includes establishing a mix of uses, including residential, commercial, retail, offices and services.

6.2.2.6 Comments

The regional policies are broadly based and provide the Vaughan with considerable flexibility in terms of structuring its commercial hierarchy. The City should request that the market studies required for the development of commercial centres over 30,000 square metres also address more local municipal issues, such as the effect on the Village Cores and that sufficient market is available to support commercial development in intensification areas. Within Vaughan’s Official Plan, there should also be a

requirement to assess the implications of smaller centres (i.e. 15,000 square metres to 30,000 square metres) proposed for sites not currently designated for commercial uses and not part of an intensification development.

6.2.3 York Region Draft Official Plan Commercial Policies

The Draft York Region Official Plan was released for discussion and review in June 2009 and is expected to be submitted for Council's adoption in the fall of 2009.

6.2.3.1 Chapter 4 – Economic Vitality

The Region's Draft OP includes stronger language than its predecessor regarding the protection and preservation of employment lands. Policy 4.3.12a states specifically that major retail and non-ancillary commercial/retail uses are not permitted on employment lands and that the conversion of employment lands is expressly not permitted prior to the completion of a municipal comprehensive review.

Section 4.4 specifically addresses planning for retail trade within the Region. The overriding objective of this section is to "ensure retail is well-designed and appropriately integrated into communities so that residents can meet their daily needs through walking, cycling and transit." This section also contains and continues the provision from the previous Official Plan that any retail development over 30,000 square metres (approximately 323,000 square feet) is required to complete a Regional impact analysis.

6.2.3.2 Chapter 5 – An Urbanizing Region: Building Cities and Complete Communities

This section of the Draft OP includes the Region's goals and objectives with regards to accommodating the significant growth projections it faces. Retail and commercial uses are addressed throughout this chapter reinforcing the previously stated objective of developing more compact forms that are pedestrian-oriented, street oriented, mixed-use, transit-supported and, where appropriate, multi-storied.

The policies of the current OP regarding the development of Regional and Local Centres as focal points of community activity, living, working and shopping and as the most intensively developed areas within the Region and community respectively are also reiterated within this section.

6.2.4 York Region 2031 Land Budget

The York Region 2031 Land Budgeting exercise was released in January 2009. Based on the York Region population forecasts, the document estimates the amount of land that will be required by the municipality for residential and employment uses. Commercial space is addressed through two of these estimates – population-related employment and major retail employment.

6.2.4.1 Population Related Employment

The Land Budget forecasts that by 2031 Vaughan will need to accommodate approximately 11,220 additional population related employment jobs in the built-up area, 8,270 in designated Greenfields and 3,530 in the Whitebelt areas. These projections are based on the Region's estimated residential growth distribution.

6.2.4.2 Major Retail Employment

The Region also projects that major retail employment in Vaughan will grow by 6,000 jobs and that this growth will be accommodated on Whitebelt lands. Major retail uses are described as big box power centres and major shopping centres. Four big box power centres, (in Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Markham and Newmarket/East Gwillimbury) and 6 major shopping centres (in Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Markham, and Newmarket) are identified in the report.

The Region developed these forecasts by calculating the number of jobs in major retail uses in 2006 per capita. The per capita ratios were then applied to the 2031 population forecasts to develop the estimated 6,000 additional jobs in major retail employment. Land requirements were then assumed based on these projections and an assumed 50 jobs per hectare density, which resulted in a required 296 hectares in the Region as a whole and 120 hectares in Vaughan specifically. The Region also assumed that all of this growth would take place in the Whitebelt area.

6.2.4.3 Comments

At typical retail densities, 120 hectares translates into some 3.2 million square feet of major new retail development. This is clearly inconsistent with how Vaughan has planned its future commercial structure through OPA 600 and the recommendations of the land budget completed by Urban Strategies. Sufficient land is not available in the greenbelt to accommodate this amount of space in Vaughan and significant intensification opportunities exist, such that only a portion of future residential growth will need to be accommodated within the whitebelt. The placement of a large single use retail centre in the white belt would not be practical given the principals of smart growth that are enshrined in Provincial and municipal policies.

This does, however, emphasize the inadequacy of OPA 600 to address the need for additional regional serving commercial space to serve the new population in Vaughan.

We would note, however, that the Region's land budget did not anticipate the extent of intensification opportunities available in Vaughan.

The Region's commercial land needs were also calculated based on employment projections and not through a market demand analysis, as was undertaken in this study. As a result it fails to recognize the existing and proposed retail facilities in Vaughan, policy directional shifts and changing trends. It also fails to acknowledge opportunities

for intensification and redevelopment within the existing built boundary to accommodate these projections.

Vaughan currently has three regional or super-regional serving nodes – Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, Vaughan Mills and the Promenade, as well as other sites identified for intensification. It will be important to determine how much additional commercial space can be physically accommodated within these areas to ensure that the City is able to continue to provide an adequate amount of regional serving commercial space to serve its new population.