

Vaughan Tomorrow: The Provincial Policy Context

April 2008

Contents

Introduction	1
Concurrent Processes	1
The Provincial Policy Statement, 2005	2
Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (2002) and the Greenbelt Plan (2005)	2
Places To Grow– A Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2006)	4
GENERAL INTENSIFICATION	6
URBAN GROWTH CENTRES	7
EMPLOYMENT AREAS	9
GREENFIELD AREAS	10
EXPANDING THE URBAN BOUNDARY	11
The Regional Transportation Plan	12
Questions and Implications for the Official Plan	13

Introduction

The City of Vaughan is about to turn the page and enter a new chapter in its story of its physical development. Once a loose affiliation of rural areas, historic villages, and suburban communities, it is now one of the fastest growing municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area and poised to evolve into a cohesive urban place. With its population projected to almost double between 2006 and 2031, Vaughan needs to think carefully about how it grows.

Recent changes to provincial land use planning policy and legislation have created a new era in planning for growth across the Greater Golden Horseshoe, including the Region of York and City of Vaughan. This paper will outline this new policy context and describe its implications for the City of Vaughan and the new official plan.

While planners and academics have understood for some time that intensification is key to curbing unsustainable suburban sprawl and protecting natural heritage, many Greater Golden Horseshoe municipalities have faced challenges implementing such policies. The Province has taken a bold step and created a suite of tools that will help municipalities plan for and achieve more efficient land use. These tools, listed below, and their implications for the new official plan are described in the sections that follow:

- Provincial Policy Statement
- Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Greenbelt Plan
- Places to Grow: the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe
- The Regional Transportation Plan

Concurrent Processes

While Vaughan is undertaking its growth management exercise, resulting in a new environmental master plan, official plan, and other master plans, the Region of York is also in the process of updating the Regional official plan which must be in conformity with the same set of provincial policies. Indeed, the official plan for the City of Vaughan must conform to that of the Region and both jurisdictions are cooperating as their processes unfold to ensure that information is shared accordingly. This will ultimately result in municipal policy documents that are well designed and tested for ease of implementation and long term relevancy.

As part of its growth management exercise, the Region is studying a number of alternative scenarios for long term accommodation of growth, in addition to the minimum 40% intensification scenario

required by the Province, and described in more detail below. Initial findings based on the 40% scenario have been released and are referenced here, where applicable, to provide order of magnitude estimates for growth in Vaughan. As the Region develops a preferred scenario in consultation with local municipalities and the public, those findings will be incorporated into the new official plan for Vaughan.

The Provincial Policy Statement, 2005

Since Vaughan's last major official plan review, the Province has released a new Provincial Policy Statement (PPS), which came into effect on March 1, 2005. This statement is the overarching guidance document with respect to land use in the Province of Ontario. The new edition requires that all municipal official plans "be consistent with" its policies, whereas previously they needed only to "have regard to" the PPS. The policies in the PPS (2005) support intensification and more compact, transit-supportive land use patterns; the protection of employment lands; the redevelopment of brownfields; the promotion and development of clean energy sources and conservation for improved air quality; among other important policies. The PPS also requires that upper and lower tier municipalities coordinate their land use planning efforts, particularly in the area of allocating population and identifying areas for intensification. As the City and Region work through their respective growth management exercises they will work closely together and with the Province. Many of the other policies in the PPS are expanded on in the other documents described below.

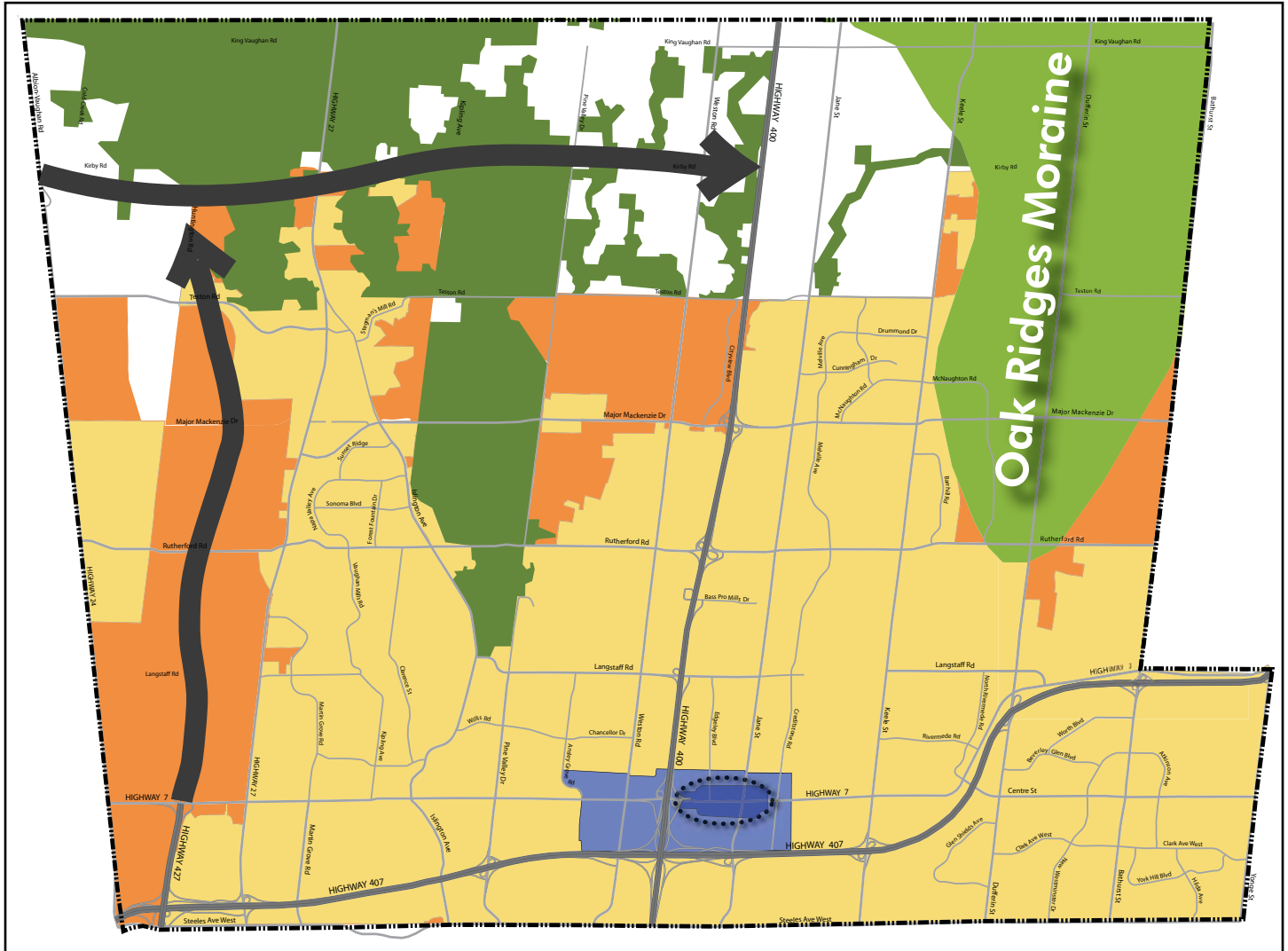
Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (2002) and the Greenbelt Plan (2005)

The Province initiated region-wide protection and preservation of important natural features and undeveloped areas in the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (2002) and the Greenbelt Plan (2005). These plans were the precursor to the significant provincial land use directives in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, which is described in the next section of this paper. The provincial legislation creating the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Greenbelt Plans requires that municipalities amend their official plans to be in conformity with their policies. The City of Vaughan has undertaken such an exercise for the lands that fall under the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (through OPA 604) but has yet to do so for the extensive Greenbelt lands in the City's boundaries. This official plan process will bring the City's policies into conformity with those policies.

The Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plans aim to protect agricultural lands, and lands performing vital ecological features, from urbanization. The policies in these plans effectively prohibit

any kind of activity on the lands designated by them except for agricultural, passive recreational, and traditional rural settlement area uses. In determining how Vaughan will grow to meet the population and employment targets set out in the Growth Plan, lands included in the Greenbelt can not be considered for future urban development. The result is that while these plans protect certain lands from urbanization in doing so they effectively require the City to look elsewhere for places to accommodate growth. As is evident in Map 1, there is little potential developable land remaining after the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine lands are accounted for.

MAP 1



- Built-up area
- Designated Greenfield
- Whitebelt
- Greenbelt
- Oak Ridges Moraine
- Vaughan Corporate Center
- Vaughan Corporate Center Node
- Approximate urban growth center boundary
- GTA West future transportation corridor
- Highway 427 extension corridor

These lands should, however, be viewed as a tremendous asset and not a liability. Not only do they provide vital environmental and life sustaining benefit by cleaning our air and water and supporting numerous plant and animal species, but they also add to the quality of life in Vaughan, particularly as the city matures into a more urban place. The Greenbelt lands should be considered for an extensive system of bicycle and walking trails that connect across the City and beyond for year-round active transportation as well as recreation. They could also provide a very local opportunity for teaching young and old alike about their responsibility to the natural environment.

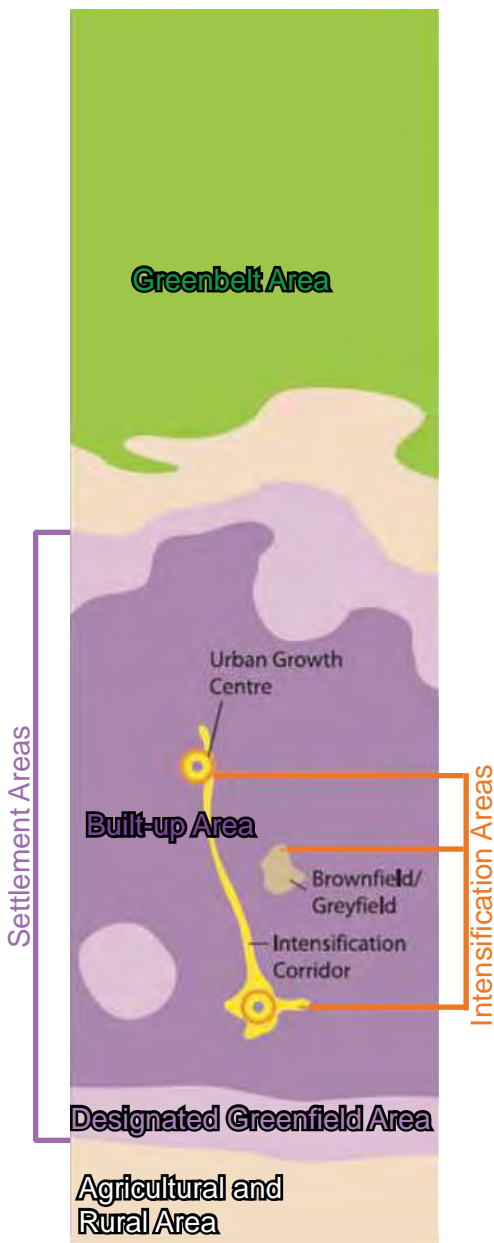
The policies in the official plan will help to make the Greenbelt lands a part of daily life of the City of Vaughan in order to preserve them and appreciate them. They will be the key component of a connected natural heritage and open space system across the City.

Places To Grow– A Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2006)

Places To Grow – A Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe was released in 2006 to implement the principles of the Places to Grow Act, 2005. It builds on, and strengthens, other related Provincial initiatives already described, and is the key policy driver for the growth management exercise and new official plan. The Growth Plan is a framework for managing growth in the Region over the next 25 years. It attempts to balance the needs of a growing population base and healthy economy with the parallel desire to protect lands for the future by changing the way the Greater Golden Horseshoe has grown to date. The Growth Plan is a significant departure from previous regional planning initiatives and extends to a level of detail and required local action not seen in recent memory.

The Growth Plan emphasizes:

- the efficient use of existing infrastructure and directs growth at higher densities and with a mix of uses to those areas best able to accommodate it;
- the creation of *complete communities* in both existing *built-up areas* and new developments so that residents can meet their basic needs close to home;
- the preservation of designated *employment areas* for future economic opportunity;
- conservation of natural heritage areas; and
- multiple modes of safe and efficient transportation to move around.



Growth Plan land-use terminology.

The Growth Plan employs a specific nomenclature that is important to understand when applying its policies. Areas that have urban-type designations in upper-tier (e.g. Region of York) official plans are considered *settlement areas*. Within *settlement areas* the Growth Plan further differentiates between those areas that are already built-up (as of June 2006) (yellow on Map 1) and those areas that are designated for development but are not yet built –known as *designated greenfield areas* (orange on Map 1). In addition to the *settlement area* lands, are the lands identified and protected under the province’s Greenbelt Plan (described above) (green on Map 1). The not yet designated rural areas between the Greenbelt and the settlement areas have come to be known as “whitebelt” areas because of their colour on the Places to Grow maps (and shown as white on Map 1). Other terms defined in the Growth Plan are identified in italics in this report.

The basis for the management of growth in the Growth Plan is a forecast for future levels of population and employment across the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The Growth Plan forecasts that York Region will be home to a total of 1,500,000 people and offer 780,000 jobs by the year 2031. It is up to the Region to then allocate the forecasted population and employment numbers to the local municipalities and these numbers are forthcoming. Until the final figures are released by the Region it is safe to say that the City of Vaughan, strategically located at the south end of the Region, abutting Toronto, and well connected by 400-series highways and the planned subway extensions, will be expected to accommodate a large amount of that growth. Early Regional estimates suggest Vaughan’s population in 2031 could be 422,000, and average annual increase of 2.3%¹. Similarly, Vaughan will be expected to make up a significant share of the regional employment growth, approximately 122,000 more jobs than existed in 2006, with an average annual increase of 2.3%².

While the Growth Plan allows for “different approaches to managing growth that recognize the diversity of the communities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe”³, it also sets out specific policies that will guide municipalities in doing so.

1 Report to the Regional Municipality of York Planning and Economic Development Committee by the Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development; April 4, 2007: Planning for Tomorrow Part 1: York Region Population and Employment Forecasts

2 Report to the Regional Municipality of York Planning and Economic Development Committee by the Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development; April 4, 2007: Planning for Tomorrow Part 1: York Region Population and Employment Forecasts

3 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, 2006

GENERAL INTENSIFICATION

Much of the success of the Growth Plan hinges on its requirement for municipalities to intensify their existing urban (*built-up*) areas. At a minimum, 40% of all residential development must be accommodated through *intensification* of the *built-up area* as of the year 2015, and every year thereafter (policy 2.2.3.1). The *built-up area* (land within the *built boundary*) has been determined by the Province in conjunction with the local municipalities and can generally be described by the areas of Vaughan that were built upon as of June 2006.

Intensification has steadily been increasing in York Region, even prior to the release of the Growth Plan. The Region reports an *intensification* rate of 16.7% between 1990 and 2003, increasing to 18.4% between 2001 and 2005, relative to the 1990 built boundary⁴. This suggests that there is some natural *intensification* happening without specific intervention as the Region matures. Furthermore, if the Region-wide average is in the order of 18%, it is possible to infer that the natural rate of *intensification* in Vaughan may be closer to 20%. In fact, in 2006 Vaughan received over 60% of the regional total of applications for medium and high-density intensification applications (greater than 2.0 FSI within the Growth Plan *built boundary*)⁵.

Despite these trends towards *intensification*, under the minimum required 40% *intensification* scenario, Vaughan will be required to locate in the order of 30,000 residential units inside the *built boundary* between 2006 and 2031⁶. Some of these units have already been planned, and some even constructed.

The *built-up* areas of Vaughan include many different types of places: some already denser than others, some more capable of accommodating additional development than others. Together, through the new official plan (Vaughan Tomorrow) process, the key places in Vaughan where *intensification* should be directed will be identified. Appropriate *intensification areas* will generally be places with good existing infrastructure for water and waste water servicing, roads and transit, such as main corridors, major transit station areas, large underused sites and those ready for redevelopment including *brownfields* and *grey-fields*. In Vaughan, some places are obvious *intensification areas*, such as the Highway 7 and Steeles Avenue corridors. The extent to which other places such as the village centres and GO stations can or should be *intensification areas* will be established through this process.



A new townhouse development in Maple.



New high-rise condominiums at Thornhill Town Center.

4 Report to the Regional Municipality of York Planning and Economic Development Committee by the Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development; April 4, 2007: [Planning for Tomorrow Part 3: York Region Residential Intensification Strategy](#)

5 Report to the Regional Municipality of York Planning and Economic Development Committee by the Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development; April 4, 2007: [Planning for Tomorrow Part 3: York Region Residential Intensification Strategy](#)

6 Report to the Regional Municipality of York Planning and Economic Development Committee by the Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development; April 4, 2007: [Planning for Tomorrow Part 3: York Region Residential Intensification Strategy](#)

The new official plan for the City of Vaughan will need to encourage intensification generally throughout the *built-up area* (policy 2.2.3.6b) and focus growth to identified *intensification areas* (policy 2.2.3.6c) in accordance with the requirements of the Growth Plan. The official plan will also describe the form and scale the *intensification* will take, including setting minimum densities for the identified *intensification areas*. Considerations for the actual implementation of the *intensification* targets will include not only where significant *intensification* should be directed but what kind of mix of uses and unit types will be appropriate in the various areas, the scale of the development (height, density) and basic principles around its built form to ensure that new development in existing areas is appropriate, attractive and a welcome addition to the urban fabric.

URBAN GROWTH CENTRES

The Growth Plan has recognized the Vaughan Corporate Centre Node as an *urban growth centre*. The 25 *urban growth centres* identified in the Growth Plan are to be the focus for more intense growth and significant public and private investment. They should be places where institutional, cultural, commercial, retail, entertainment and residential uses come together. These varied uses should be arranged in a compact urban form, linked by an attractive public realm, supportive of major transit infrastructure, such as the planned Spadina Subway extension (policy 2.2.4.4.b). The Growth Plan requires that by 2031 the Vaughan Corporate Centre Node *urban growth centre* should achieve a minimum density of 200 people and jobs per hectare (policy 2.2.4.5.b). A sample of what this density might look like is shown in the image below.



Hypothetical downtown depicting the Growth Plan's density targets for urban growth centres of approximately 200 residents and jobs combined per hectare. Photo Source: Ontario Growth Secretariat, Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal

The current OPA 500 language allows up to approximately 2.0 times coverage on lands designated as Corporate Centre Node (generally along Highway 7). While 200 people and jobs can be represented by many combinations of people and jobs totaling 200, and these can be accommodated in a wide variety of residential and employment unit types, assuming 'typical' development patterns, the development required in the Vaughan Corporate Centre Node *urban growth centre* by the Growth Plan is in the order of 2.1 times coverage⁷. This required average density is only slightly higher than currently planned. The challenge will be actually achieving it and the policies in the new official plan will have to support this location as a focus for growth and both public and private investment.

More so than other intensification areas, the Vaughan Corporate Centre Node *urban growth centre* is to become a centre for major office employment, capable of attracting provincially, nationally or internationally significant employment uses (policy 2.2.4.4.c). The boundary of the Vaughan Corporate Centre *urban growth centre* is a sub-area within the Vaughan Corporate Centre (as defined in OPA 500) surrounding the planned subway station. This smaller *urban growth centre* boundary determines the extent of the area used to calculate the minimum 200 people and jobs per hectare.

The official plan will have to include strong policies to attract and maintain the desired types and amounts of development not only to meet the provincially mandated density targets but also to make this emerging area of the City an important place with a distinct identity and function in Vaughan. Current planning for the Corporate Center envisions it as primarily a corporate office park with a total of about 5,000 residents and 30,000 jobs. These policies were passed prior to the announcements of the subway extension and its identification as an *urban growth center*. In light of these changes, a more balanced mix of population and employment is probably appropriate. The Vaughan Corporate Centre will be the subject of one of four focus area studies that are being undertaken as part of the City's growth management process, to be initiated in the spring of 2008. That study will inform the detailed official plan for the Vaughan Corporate Centre *urban growth center*.

The official plan, and other City policy documents and actions will also need to demonstrate Vaughan's own commitment to the Vaughan Corporate Centre in order to convince other strategic investment to occur in this location over others. These policies will have to be balanced against those for other *intensification areas* to ensure that the growth results in healthy, complete communities and successful places in all areas of the City. Scattered higher density development does little for placemaking, while strategic concentration can provide the basis for a vibrant urban precinct.

⁷ Based on assumption of 100p+100j, 100m²/res unit, 2 p/unit, 43.5 m²/j, 32m²/parking space, 1 space/unit, 0.5 space/ job

EMPLOYMENT AREAS

In addition to focusing office employment to the Vaughan Corporate Centre Node *urban growth centre*, the Growth Plan also provides municipalities with stronger support for designating and protecting other strategically located *employment areas* for all types of employment uses. Areas such as existing or planned higher-order transit stations or areas with existing frequent transit service should be planned to accommodate major office development (policy 2.2.6.4). Areas in the vicinity of major highway interchanges or rail yards, such as those in Vaughan are also to be designated and protected for more intensive employment uses such as manufacturing, warehousing and associated ancillary retail and commercial activities (policy 2.2.6.9).

As previously mentioned, Vaughan will be expected to plan for and accommodate a significant share of the regional employment growth to 2031. In order to ensure that there is adequate supply of *employment areas* in appropriate locations as describe above, the Growth Plan sets strict criteria that must be met in order for a municipality to change the designation of an *employment area* to allow non-employment uses, including retail (policy 2.2.6.5). There is often pressure to convert these lands to retail and residential uses precisely because of their prime location proximate to highways and major arterials. On the other hand, in order to curb sprawl, there are similarly strict criteria that must be met before new lands outside the *settlement area* (“whitebelt” lands) can be designated for any use including employment (policy 2.2.8.2). It is therefore important that Vaughan’s official plan process review all existing designated *employment areas* and determine their appropriateness for expansion or conversion, and to calculate the long term demand and supply in order to identify which “whitebelt” lands may be best suited for employment uses in the long term. Such a review will also have to account for the potential further extension of Highway 427 beyond its planned terminus at Major Mackenzie Road, and the possibility that the still conceptual GTA West Corridor shown in the Growth Plan may connect to Highway 400 in the north end of Vaughan. Planning appropriately for these major routes may tie up lands for potential employment or other uses long into the 20-year planning horizon.

GREENFIELD AREAS

The designated *greenfield* areas in Vaughan are those that are within the *settlement area* but outside the *built-boundary* and will accommodate a maximum of 60% of the residential growth in the City to 2031. These areas are required to be built out at a minimum density of 50 people and jobs per hectare to create compact, transit-supportive, walkable places that offer people real options for living, working and meeting their daily needs in their neighborhoods (policies 2.2.7.1, 2.2.7.2).

A sample of what this density might look like is shown in the image below.



Hypothetical streetscape depicting the Growth Plan's density targets for designated greenfield areas of approximately 50 residents and jobs combined per hectare. Photo Source: Ontario Growth Secretariat, Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal

Employment areas in *greenfield* areas are also required to be designed as compact, walkable, transit-supportive places. The 50 people and jobs per hectare calculation does not necessarily apply to each subdivision but rather will be calculated as the required minimum average density across all the designated *greenfield* lands in the Region (policy 2.2.7.3). Early analysis by the Region suggests that gross residential densities for registered plans of subdivision have increased by about 20% between 1971 and 2006⁸. The regional average as of 2006 was approximately 11.5 gross units per hectare (which translates to roughly 37.3 gross people per hectare) in registered residential plans of subdivision. Analyses of specific communities in Vaughan also provide a picture as to what densities are being achieved today. The application for plan of subdivision for Block 39 has a density of ap-

⁸ Report to the Regional Municipality of York Planning and Economic Development Committee by the Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development; April 4, 2007: [Planning for Tomorrow Part 4: York Region Residential Area Analysis – Preliminary Report](#)

⁹ Report to the Regional Municipality of York Planning and Economic Development Committee by the Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development; April 4, 2007: [Planning for Tomorrow Part 4: York Region Residential Area Analysis – Preliminary Report](#)

proximately 54 people and jobs per hectare and Maple has a density of about 47.7 people and jobs per hectare⁹. These two communities constitute part of the growth that will be assessed in the *greenfield* area across the Region to achieve a minimum 50 people and jobs per hectare.

However, as some *greenfield* communities have already been approved at lower densities others may need to be approved at higher densities to achieve the minimum average. Policies in the new official plan will need to be developed to support achieving that minimum density and may require setting a higher minimum density target. What that target should be and where it may apply will be determined through the process.

EXPANDING THE URBAN BOUNDARY

The amount of intensification in the built up areas and the densities achieved in *greenfield areas* will both have significant impacts on the amount of “whitebelt” lands needed to accommodate growth in Vaughan to 2031 and how much is left over for growth beyond that period. The area north of Teston Road in Vaughan has one of the main sections of “whitebelt” in the Region (approximately 2,780 developable hectares, including south King)¹⁰. Expanding the *urban boundary* into the “whitebelt” requires that strict criteria be met including demonstrating need for the lands not exceeding a 20-year supply. A key component of the new official plan will be to determine how much “whitebelt” land Vaughan will need to accommodate its population and employment targets to 2031 and, given other constraints, where the best places to expand the *urban boundary* will be.

¹⁰ Report to the Regional Municipality of York Planning and Economic Development Committee by the Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development; April 4, 2007: [Planning for Tomorrow Part 2: 2031 York Region Land Requirements](#)

The Regional Transportation Plan

The Greater Toronto Transportation Authority – now Metrolinx - was established to coordinate transportation planning at the scale of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, including York Region. The organization is mandated to provide support in the development, planning and financing of the multi-modal transportation networks envisioned in Places to Grow, through the creation of a Regional Transportation Plan. To date, seven white papers have been released for consultation:

Paper 1: Towards Sustainable Transportation

Paper 2: Mobility Hubs

Paper 3: Active Transportation

Paper 4: Transportation Demand Management

Paper 5: Moving Goods and Services

Paper 6: Roads and Highways

Paper 7: Transit.

All of these concepts, mobility hubs in particular, will have implications for Vaughan and most will be dealt with in greater detail during the preparation of the City of Vaughan's Transportation Master Plan, which will be initiated in the Spring of 2008.

Vaughan will be the recipient of a significant amount of infrastructure investment under Metrolinx's mandate – both the Spadina and Yonge subway extensions go through the city. Metrolinx is mandated to see that the infrastructure and its associated funding is put in place, but also to ensure that the appropriate land use policies are in place at the municipal levels to justify and ensure the success of these projects. Land use patterns that are supportive of such significant investments in transit include the concept of mobility hubs around higher order transit stations being developed by Metrolinx, and their inherent multi-modal, mixed use compact urban form. The Regional Transportation Master Plan will also echo the importance of protecting lands adjacent to key goods movement corridors for appropriate development (particularly employment areas).

Questions and Implications for the Official Plan

In reviewing the provincial policy context in which the new official plan is being undertaken, many questions or implications for the official plan arise and will be addressed as the Vaughan Tomorrow process continues.

- How can the protected Greenbelt and Moraine lands be used to Vaughan's advantage? To what extent can a bicycle and walking path network through these areas be a new layer in the city's transportation system?
- Where should intensification in the city be directed?
- What are appropriate minimum densities for intensification areas?
- What will these new parts of existing areas look like? How will they fit in?
- How can the character and quality of life in stable neighbourhoods be maintained as the city intensifies?
- Beyond establishing minimum densities how can intensification of the Vaughan Corporate Centre be promoted through the official plan?
- Given the opportunity for future employment lands adjacent to new highways, are any of Vaughan's existing employment lands appropriate for conversion to other uses?
- With limited potential greenfield lands (i.e. "whitebelt") and major transportation corridors planned or envisioned, how much population growth can be accommodated outside Vaughan's built-up areas?
- What are the right minimum density targets for greenfield areas?
- How do we promote the creation of complete communities that offer places to live in all stages of life, work, shop and play?
- Where are the future not-yet-planned transit hubs where growth can be concentrated?
- Should Vaughan work with the Region to develop a transit-first policy in new areas to establish good habits? How can the communities be designed to support efficient transit?

Many upper and lower-tier municipalities face major challenges planning for the Growth Plan's requirements and other provincial policy considerations and will certainly be forced to make some of the same major changes to the status quo that Vaughan will have to make. Even when the new official plan conforms to the Growth Plan it will be imperative for the City to review other policies and procedures (zoning by-laws, building permits, provision of human services, municipal servicing, economic development etc.) to ensure these do not pose further obstacles to its implementation.