

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, June 8, 2021

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: REQUEST FOR COMMENT: YORK REGION PROPOSED 2051 FORECAST AND LAND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

FROM:

Haiqing Xu, Deputy City Manager, Planning and Growth Management

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To advise Council on York Region's Proposed 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment. Staff have identified issues of importance to the City that should be considered through the Region's Municipal Comprehensive Review and the City's Official Plan Review.

Report Highlights

- York Region Council considered the Proposed 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment at its meeting on March 18, 2021.
- Local municipal Councils have been requested by York Region to comment on the Proposed 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment by July 15, 2021.
- The City of Vaughan faces tremendous growth amid elements that will impact the urban structure including: Whitebelt expansion, GTA West and employment land conversions.

Recommendations

1. That staff continue to work with York Region to address priority issues facing the City as discussed in this report, as the Region develops its first draft of the York Region Official Plan;
2. That this report be forwarded to York Region as part of the City's comments on the Proposed 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment; and

3. That a Special Committee of the Whole meeting be convened in Fall 2021, to launch the City of Vaughan's Official Plan Review in compliance with Section 26 of the *Planning Act*, and to provide an opportunity for public comment on York Region's proposed forecast.

Background

York Region must plan for 2.02 million people and 990,000 jobs in the Region by 2051

The Provincial Growth Plan contains population and employment growth targets that every Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area single and upper-tier municipality, including York Region, must plan for to 2051. York Region, through its Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR), will ensure appropriate lands are available to accommodate this growth through the allocation of population and employment to each of the local municipalities.

The Region is required by the Province to evaluate whether more land is needed for this growth by undertaking a Land Needs Assessment

The amount of land needed to accommodate this growth is determined by using a methodology called a Land Needs Assessment, at the time of the MCR. The Land Needs Assessment (LNA), at its most basic, is a series of steps that establishes how much land will be needed by the Region to meet its growth targets. It uses Provincial policy inputs like the 50% minimum intensification target in the Growth Plan, together with a number of underlying demographics, economic, and market-based assumptions to reach the amount of land required.

The LNA establishes whether there is a need for more land, and if so, how much. The location of lands is determined in accordance with criteria set out in the Growth Plan.

If the Land Needs Assessment finds that more land is required, the Region adds areas within the "Whitebelt" lands to the urban area

Whitebelt lands in the City as shown on Attachment 1 are rural areas located beyond the existing urban areas as defined in the Growth Plan and the Greenbelt Plan/Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, and not currently planned or serviced for urban development. Urban areas in Vaughan encompass roughly two thirds of the southern portion of the City.

The Growth Plan directs the highest share of growth in the GTHA to York Region

The Provincial Growth Plan assigns York Region the highest share of growth of any Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) single or upper-tier municipality: 22% of the projected population growth and 25% of the projected employment growth to 2051.

This represents a population of 2.02 million and 990,000 jobs to 2051 in York Region, which adds 800,000 people and 345,000 jobs over the next 30 years.

York Region staff has prepared a proposed forecast distributing growth to local municipalities, including Vaughan

York Region has prepared a growth forecast through its MCR to bring the Regional Official Plan into conformity with the updated Provincial Growth Plan. Part of this work is distributing growth across the nine local municipalities in York Region.

The aim of the forecast is to consider the path that growth may take to ensure the Region grows in a financially sustainable manner. The forecast looks at several inputs, including the result of the LNA and other strategic planning components like infrastructure planning, establishing appropriate areas for urban expansion, protection of Provincial corridors (i.e. GTA West), and Provincial policies that seek to achieve complete communities.

The results of the forecast indicate that Vaughan will accommodate a substantial portion of the Region's growth to the year 2051

Vaughan is forecast to grow to a population of 568,700 with 352,000 jobs. This accounts for almost one third (29%) of the Region's growth to 2051. Vaughan is expected to add in the next 30 years to 2051:

- 250,000 people
- 112,000 jobs

This represents a 74% increase in population and a 47% increase in jobs by 2051.

York Region Council was presented with the proposed forecast and Land Needs Assessment

On March 18, 2021, York Region Council was presented with the proposed forecast and Land Needs Assessment and passed the following resolution:

1. Council direct staff to consult on the proposed forecast and land needs assessment as outlined in this report and attachments, including preliminary urban expansion mapping in Attachment 4, as part of the Municipal Comprehensive Review.
2. To support the highest share of growth in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area to 2051, Council require senior levels of government to provide funding for the Yonge North Subway Extension and to expand the Region's Bus Rapid Transit and enhance Regional GO rail systems to support transit integrated communities.

3. Following consultation on this report, staff report back on phasing policies necessary to manage growth over the 2051 planning horizon as part of the draft Regional Official Plan.
4. The Regional Clerk forward this report and attachments to the Clerks of the local municipalities and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Vaughan Council received a presentation regarding the proposed forecast and Land Needs Assessment

As part of the consultation mandated by York Region Council, on May 12, 2021, the Committee of the Whole received a presentation from York Region staff on the proposed forecast and LNA to give Committee members an opportunity to learn and ask questions and discuss any matters of concern associated with the Region's work to-date.

Among questions asked at this meeting was a request for information related to the forecasts expected in the City's Secondary Planning Areas. This information has been provided on Attachment 2.

The proposed forecast results in 100% of the Whitebelt lands in Vaughan being included in the urban area to accommodate the land needs requirement

Vaughan has the second-largest amount of Whitebelt lands in York Region, second to Markham. The proposed forecast adds all 1,210 hectares of Vaughan's Whitebelt lands to the urban area (Attachment 1). Including these lands will make the Whitebelt lands become part of the settlement area, also known as the Built-Up Area.

Overall, the draft allocation is proposing to add a total of 80% of all Whitebelt lands in York Region to the Built-Up Area.

Previous Reports/Authority

Previous related reports:

"York Region Presentation on Proposed 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment"

[Item 8, Report No. 26, of the Committee of the Whole, which was adopted, as amended, by the Council of the City of Vaughan on May 18, 2021](#)

Analysis and Options

The proposed forecast and LNA presents an opportunity for the City to communicate to York Region areas of risk and areas of importance that should be taken into consideration through York Region's MCR

The following analysis provides the basis for these comments built on three themes:

1. Challenges
2. Risks
3. Response

1. CHALLENGES

Vaughan faces tremendous growth amid uncertainty

Vaughan faces significant challenges due to the levels of growth, driven by:

- Expansion of the Whitebelt and the fate of the GTA West
- 19 employment land conversions
- Major Transit Station Areas

Each of these drivers presents challenges that will need to be coherently addressed to build complete communities and meet both the City's statutory and policy obligations, the City's own service standards and goals and objectives, and Council's 2018- 2022 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan.

Building complete communities requires ensuring that appropriate transportation and servicing infrastructure, and community amenities like schools, parks, and community centres are provided for in the growth areas and their surrounding areas. Provincial, Regional, and City policies also reinforce the importance of protecting employment areas to ensure successful business operation is continued.

These growth pressures each present a challenge to successfully building complete communities. The quality of the response to them will have far-reaching implications to the future of the City and York Region

Development of the Whitebelt

York Region is proposing to add all of Vaughan's remaining Whitebelt lands as urban area to accommodate population and employment growth to 2051 (1,210 hectares). The final outcome of the proposed employment lands will be affected by the fate of the GTA West. Building in these Whitebelt lands relies on the next generation of servicing, specifically the Northeast Vaughan Servicing and West Vaughan Servicing projects

The proposed expansion of Whitebelt lands will add both community and employment lands to the Built-Up Area of Vaughan (see purple and yellow areas on Attachment 1). In the northern edge of Vaughan to the east and west of highway 400, community lands are proposed. To the west of highway 400, and along the GTA West alignment further employment lands are proposed. In the west, employment lands are added that extend Vaughan's employment area further north.

The timing and final amount of land designated as community and employment in the Whitebelt are uncertain. The timing will be driven by the completion of wastewater servicing projects in the northeast and northwest of Vaughan, which ranges from the mid 2020's to early 2030's. The final amount of land designated as community and employment will be affected by the fate of the GTA West. The proposed forecast shows Whitebelt lands adjacent to the proposed GTA West alignment as employment lands. If the GTA West does not move forward, it is uncertain what the total amount of community and employment lands in Vaughan's Whitebelt would be.

Questions were asked at the Committee of the Whole meeting regarding whether the Whitebelt lands are required to meet the Region's growth targets. The final amount of land is determined through the Provinces' mandated Land Needs Assessment methodology. Elements of the Land Needs Assessment such as the minimum density target set by York Region, the variety of unit types could be examined further by York Region to ensure lands are being planned in an orderly manner.

Employment Land Conversions

19 conversions have been approved in Vaughan, which removes the protection granted by the employment designation in York Region's Official Plan to maintain employment land use permissions. Some conversion requests represent large amounts of land that are not located near existing community amenities like schools, parks, and community centres. Approximately 365 ha of employment land was removed from the employment areas in York Region's Official Plan.

Vaughan's Official Plan land use designations for these lands have not changed, and applicants that have been granted employment land conversion requests will still proceed with a development application(s) through the usual development approval process. There may be cases where the magnitude of a proposal will require a more detailed policy response, such as a secondary plan or block plan, to ensure there are appropriate land uses, community services, transportation, amenities, and buffering from adjacent employment uses.

Ministers' Zoning Orders (MZO's)

It should be noted that six Minister Zoning Orders have been approved in Vaughan since 2018. It will be critical that MZO's are considered and planned in the context of the wider area of which they are part.

Vaughan is already being planned for significant intensification in MTSAs and centres + corridors like Highway 7

Vaughan has an extraordinary number of Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs) and centres and corridors, all of which have substantial development potential. The potential growth within the City's 23 MTSAs, based on current VOP 2010 policies, is an additional 182,000 people and jobs, for a total of 259,000 people and jobs.

Vaughan also has a number of high-density centres and corridors that are currently subject to Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (LPAT) proceedings or site-specific Official Plan reviews that will render substantial densities. For example, areas at the LPAT include Yonge-Steeles Corridor Secondary Plan and Vaughan Mills Centre Secondary Plan. Secondary plan reviews are now being undertaken by the City for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC), Promenade Centre, Concord GO Centre, and Weston Road and Highway 7.

Past experience indicates growth will exceed what is planned

Vaughan's experience with growth over the last ten years shows that forecasted growth has the potential to be exceeded, and the City must be prepared to plan for this density. The VMC for example, is estimated to be 194% more residents and 254% more jobs than what was originally envisioned in the secondary plan.

Growth management in Vaughan will need to respond to key regional challenges over the next 30 years

York Region's Land Needs Assessment identified several key challenges that need to be considered as the City and Region update their respective growth management policies:

- York Region is becoming more unaffordable for families; most affordable units are not suitable for families
- York Region is growing slower, and it's attributed to rising unaffordability
- York Region is expecting substantial intensification in Vaughan
- York Region and the City should address the needs of families
- Policy action can be taken by the City and York Region to address these challenges

York Region’s Annual Monitoring report found York Region is becoming more unaffordable for families

York Region’s 2019 monitoring report advised that only 11% of new ownership housing units were affordable, 99% of which were studio or 1-bedroom condominiums and not suitable for families. The report also found that only 3% of new housing was classified as purpose built rental housing. The affordable housing threshold was \$535,169 in Vaughan in 2019. In York Region the threshold (which is also used for housing commitments and monitoring in local municipalities where the Region-wide threshold is exceeded, like Vaughan) was approximately \$484,000.

York Region’s forecast assumes that there will be a shift of greater numbers of families moving into higher density structures. The shift is driven by unaffordability in ground related homes and an increasing demand for higher-density homes.

York Regions’ analysis has shown a direct correlation between housing unaffordability and slow growth. York Region as a whole has a declining share of residential activity. It’s the only municipality in the Greater Golden Horseshoe that has seen its growth rate slow in the last five-year period. The LNA found that York Region may have difficulty reaching its 2051 forecast without further initiatives to address affordability. The recommended actions included:

- Expanding the supply of purpose-built rental housing
- Expanding the supply affordable home ownership in the medium-density market, targeting units priced below \$650,000
- Expanding the supply of low-density home ownership options priced between \$650,000 and \$950,000 by encouraging smaller detached homes

York Region is expecting substantial intensification in Vaughan

Over one third of all units being forecast across York Region in the next three decades are apartments in the Built-Up Area (101,500 units). As mentioned above, Vaughan is already planned for substantial intensification growth. The addition of Whitebelt lands and conversions has the potential to add significant growth to the urban area.

2. RISKS

There is a risk that the City becomes underserved on several levels

The amount of potential growth that is directed at Vaughan creates a risk that many parts of the City will become underserved for parks, schools, and infrastructure. Vaughan is expected to accommodate the second highest share of population growth in York Region (29%), with a 2051 population of 568,700. This total is based on an intensification rate of 56%.

It will be critical that infrastructure like new road networks and services are planned and paid for to ensure orderly growth in these areas that does not lead to significant decline in adjacent employment areas. Policy responses will need to be developed to ensure appropriate transition and land use compatibility will occur.

There is a risk that employment areas will be under pressure for more employment land conversions

Significant changes to land use permissions have recently been made through MZO's and employment land conversions, most frequently on the edge of employment areas. Landowners in adjacent employment lands will see a significant increase in land value as an incentive to pursue the conversion of their own employment lands to community lands in the next Municipal Comprehensive Review.

Vaughan and York Region will need to develop a strategy to ensure appropriate policy responses are made to ensure orderly development will occur. Employment land conversions may only occur during a Municipal Comprehensive Review, which can take place every five or ten years. This requires a thoughtful approach to build safe community environments while also protecting businesses that are not compatible with community uses.

3. RESPONSE

Meeting the challenge requires a coherent strategy

Lands within the city have been affected by MZOs and employment land conversions, and planned Whitebelt expansions. Ensuring the successful development of these areas into complete communities should be guided by principles identified in the City's overall growth management strategy and translated into effective policy through the Official Plan Review (OPR) and other Master Plan processes.

The Region and the City can address the need for new homes to meet the needs of all residents

In consideration of this significant growth—and the need to attract young families to maintain growth, which is connected to affordability—it is imperative that York Region and the City examine effective policy for encouraging family-sized units and amenities in the urban area. This is especially important in high-growth nodes along centres and corridors. The OPR, Master Plans, and other growth-related studies all play a role in creating the policy framework necessary to encourage family-sized units and amenities that will be vital to the success of Vaughan and York Region.

A fundamental policy direction of the York Region Official Plan is “housing diversity and affordable housing to offer Regional residents housing choices and for attracting a

diverse and skilled labour force”. York Region intends to build on this framework through the MCR.

The strategy and policy response can be achieved through the Official Plan Review, Master Plans, and other growth-related studies

The OPR updates and builds on the vision of Vaughan Official Plan 2010. That vision, informed by seven background papers that form the foundation of the Review, guides the development of the policy response to these new parts of the City’s evolving urban structure. Master Plans and other growth-related studies will work together with the OPR to create a cohesive and sustainable framework for growth.

Phasing and flexibility will be key tools in the strategy to manage growth

Managing the timing and pace of growth will ensure that communities are built with the necessary servicing and amenities to become complete communities. York Region will be developing phasing policies at this stage of the MCR, and staff will be representing the City’s issues and comments to ensure they are effectively addressed and reflected in the implementing planning documents. Through the Official Plan Review, policies such as phasing can be considered to ensure orderly development occurs.

Community building needs to be maintained in consideration of the densities the City is expected to adhere to

The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced the importance of adequate amenities that support intensification and growth. Climate change has also reinforced the need for complete communities. The push for density, more broadly, is to mitigate the impact of urban growth on climate change by minimizing land consumption. To be successful, this cannot not be at the expense of livable communities.

A Special Committee of the Whole meeting will provide the opportunity for the public to comment on York Regions proposed forecast and formally launch the City’s Official Plan Review

The *Planning Act* requires a Special Committee of the Whole meeting to occur before amending the Official Plan. This Special Committee of the Whole meeting can coincide with the opportunity to provide a venue for the public to learn more about the connections between the City’s Official Plan Review to update its Official Plan, and York Regions’ proposed forecast, which is part of York Region’s Municipal Comprehensive Review. This will provide useful context for comments to be made from the public as well as communicate the next phases of York Region’s Municipal Comprehensive Review and Vaughan’s Official Plan Review.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact associated with this report. Matters relating to the financing of the City's obligations to facilitate growth to 2051 will be addressed through the OPR and Growth Management Strategy update together with periodic updates of the Development Charges By-law.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The York Region Proposed 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment provides for the amount of growth of people and jobs to the year 2051, and the amount of land required to accommodate the growth.

It is important to note that growth in a local municipality does not only impact the individual municipality, but York Region as a whole. Specifically, this growth will have a direct effect on neighbouring municipalities.

Conclusion

Staff recommend that a Special Committee of the Whole meeting be convened in the Fall of 2021 to meet its obligations under the *Planning Act* to launch the Official Plan Review. This will provide opportunity for Council and the public to express their views on York Region's proposed forecast in the context of work being undertaken by the City to update Vaughan's Official Plan. Staff also recommend that this report be forwarded to York Region as part of the City's comments on the Proposed 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment. Staff will continue to work with Regional partners to advance this work relating to the Municipal Comprehensive Review and Official Plan Review to guide growth in the City and Region to 2051.

For more information, please contact Fausto Filipetto, Manager of Long-Range Planning at Fausto.Filipetto@vaughan.ca or at 905-832-8585, extension 8699.

Attachments

1. Map of Key Planning Areas.
2. Area Specific and Block Plan Areas (Approved and Underway) 2051 Horizon - Population and Employment.

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