



# YORK REGION

## FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE

SERVING THE FARM COMMUNITY SINCE 1940

**C6**  
**COMMUNICATION**  
**COUNCIL – June 22, 2021**  
**CW - Report No. 32, Item 9**

June 8, 2021

Mayor and Members of Council  
City of Vaughan  
2141 Major Mackenzie Drive  
Vaughan ON L6A 1T1

Via email: [clerks@vaughan.ca](mailto:clerks@vaughan.ca)

Dear Mayor Bevilacqua and Members of Council:

**Re: Committee of the Whole Report (June 8, 2021) titled Response to York**

**Region's Request for Comments on Regional Official Plan Amendment 7**

The York Region Federation of Agriculture is a non-profit organization that represents its 650 registered farm business members in York Region on matters that affect their farms as well as decisions that will affect agriculture in the future.

To truly support and promote agriculture, it must go beyond just words in policies and translate into action taken to protect the agricultural land base into the future. Blanket redesignation of Prime Agricultural areas is precedent setting and would result in the depletion of the significant natural resource afforded to us in the form of rich agricultural soils.

This correspondence is in response to the staff report received by Committee of the Whole at its meeting of June 8, 2021 regarding proposed Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA) No. 7. As noted in the report, ROPA No. 7 is a privately initiated amendment which proposes to redesignate lands within the Greenbelt from "Agricultural Area" to "Rural Area". While we generally support staff's position opposing this privately initiated ROPA for a proposed blanket redesignation of the subject lands, we have some additional concerns and offer the following comments:

- While YRFA concurs that a blanket redesignation of the "Agricultural Area" to "Rural Area" is not advisable or appropriate, we are also concerned that proper consideration needs to be given to appropriate acreage, lot configuration, designation and zoning to ensure that agricultural activities are supported and sustained.

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- The staff report includes reference to the Provincial Policy Statement and specifically refers to the protection of Prime Agricultural Areas for long-term use for agriculture. We concur that the protection of agricultural lands and the promotion of urban agriculture opportunities, which include private agricultural businesses, must be taken into account when considering any redesignation of Prime Agricultural lands within the Protected Countryside of these Greenbelt fingers. We note that the PPS specifically speaks to the designation of prime agricultural areas and retaining such designations to ensure that agricultural activities are sustained. The vision of the Greenbelt Plan is to protect quality agricultural areas, provide flexibility for appropriate farm uses, and strengthen the agricultural system by considering the impacts of development on agricultural areas and planning for local food and near-urban agricultural uses.
- The applicant's ROPA 7 submission states that urban uses surrounding the "Greenbelt fingers" is sufficient justification for the redesignation of these lands. It contends that the location of such urban areas would cause agriculture to no longer be sustainable or viable. It is our opinion that agricultural and agriculturally-related uses can continue to exist though surrounded by future urban areas and that such agricultural and agriculturally-related uses are both viable and suitable for these areas, especially given its proximity of the urban market.
- The applicant's ROPA 7 submission states that agricultural activities would not be viable as these would be "small, fragmented parcels". In 2016, there were 712 farms of various sizes across the Region. *As stated in York Region's Edge Planning Background Report, "Farms between 4 to 52 hectares represented 59% of farms in York Region in 2016, (12% of farms were smaller than 4 hectares, and 29% were larger than 52 hectares.)"* Contrary to the applicant's position, small farms are just as viable and sustainable as large farms. The ROPA 7 subject lands in Block 27 contain 23 ha of agricultural land and Block 41 contains 48 ha. This land area can easily sustain viable agricultural activities.
- The applicant's ROPA 7 submission also refers to the development of "complete communities". It is our position that agriculture, and in specific urban agricultural opportunities, are indeed part of what would constitute a complete community and that urban agriculture needs to be protected and promoted. We concur with City staff that the "Rural Area" land use designation in the York Region Official Plan would be overly permissive for lands in the Greenbelt Area. A blanket redesignation to "Rural Area" would broaden the extent of urban uses, including active parkland and other recreational and institutional uses, into lands within the Protected Countryside of the Provincial Greenbelt Plan and would have significant negative implications on the protection of Prime Agricultural lands and ultimately on the ability to provide for and promote urban agriculture.



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- As noted in staff's report, York Region is currently refining the Agricultural System mapping and policies through its Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) process. The long-term agricultural viability of the Greenbelt fingers in the City of Vaughan and the City of Markham are being reviewed by Regional staff as part of this MCR process. It is YRFA's opinion that the review of agricultural viability of these areas would be more appropriately considered as part of the MCR process and should include appropriate municipal staff as well as representatives of the agricultural sector. It is also our opinion that any consideration of redesignation of prime agricultural lands should be subject to a process similar to that of the review of the Region's Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) study. This type of process is referenced as an Agriculture Impact Assessment in the Region's Planning for Agriculture Background Report of June 2019.

We understand that Regional staff is considering potential redesignation of these areas to Rural or an equivalent designation but we also note that, at present, these are only proposed and no approvals are in place. It is a stated objective in the York Region Official Plan to protect Agricultural and Holland Marsh Specialty Crop Areas for the future to ensure a sustainable agricultural industry. The York Region Edge Planning Background Report speaks to the importance of farmland not only for the production of food and its direct economic benefits but also its benefits to surrounding urban residents in the form of such things as water filtration, carbon sequestration, pollination, and on-site farmers markets. YRFA will continue, in discussions with the Region, to advance its position that to truly protect for agriculture into the future, the designation of prime agricultural areas needs to remain.

Yours truly,

Kim Empringham  
Secretary/Treasurer/Director  
York Region Federation of Agriculture  
york@ofa.on.ca