



April 18, 2008

Mr. John Waller
Director, Long Range and Strategic Planning Branch
Planning and Development Services Dept.
York Region
17250 Yonge Street
Newmarket, ON, L3Y 6Z1

Dear Mr. Waller:

RE: Watershed planning study context for York's potential growth scenarios

TRCA staff have analysed a set of potential growth scenarios for York Region, representing 30%, 40% and 50% intensification assumptions, as you provided to us on March 7, 2008. We have compared these scenarios to the scenarios modelled in our Rouge and Humber watershed planning studies and provide the following comments and recommendations.

Overall, York's potential growth scenarios represent less growth than was assumed in the Rouge and Humber watershed planning studies, which examine a full build-out of the watersheds. While there were 2-6% increases or decreases in assumed areas of development or natural cover within certain sub-basins, these differences would not be significant from a modelling standpoint. Therefore, we do not feel there is a need to do more detailed analysis at this time.

There are several sub-basins worthy of special consideration in further stages of growth planning. Berczy and Eckardt Creeks in the Rouge watershed and Rainbow Creek in the Humber watershed are already under stress due to accelerated rates of erosion and impacts to aquatic habitat. Our modelling results showed that maintenance of existing conditions would not be possible even with implementation of the most innovative concepts in community design and stormwater management. Robinson Creek in the Rouge watershed supports sensitive aquatic habitat associated with a local recharge system, therefore maintenance of recharge volumes and flow directions will be an important consideration affecting the density of development and stormwater management plans.

Regardless of the growth scenario ultimately selected, our watershed plans recommend that all new development, in greenfield areas as well as intensification of existing urban areas, should include a full suite of sustainable community measures. Of particular importance will be the incorporation of additional natural cover and improved water management practices, such as porous pavement, bioswales and rain harvesting, that help maintain current infiltration and runoff rates.

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These plans also suggest that development should proceed in a phased manner, at a pace that allows for revegetation projects to take hold, the effectiveness of new technologies to be tested and opportunities to make any necessary adjustments. This means that the higher the intensification level the higher the proportion of lands remaining in a countryside form for a greater period of time. This allows greater time to study the impacts of each phase of development and prepare effective mitigation and compensation strategies for application in the future. The time lag also permits greater opportunity to undertake upstream rehabilitation projects and enhance connections between the remaining natural heritage areas, which will strengthen the watershed's resilience to development impacts. Furthermore, intensification and redevelopment initiatives offer the opportunity to achieve net gain toward the restoration of degraded systems, by incorporating renaturalization, stormwater management practices and other improved community design concepts in existing urban areas. These "sustainable community retrofits" are also a strategic recommendation of the watershed plans. More detailed recommendations for new policy directions and other complementary initiatives can be found in the Implementation Guides that accompany the watershed plans.

Once the preferred growth scenario has been determined for York Region, TRCA staff recommend that further analysis of that scenario be done to confirm the relationship to the watershed planning study results. A particular focus will be the predicted effects on the terrestrial natural heritage system, water balance and associated stream flow regime and aquatic habitats.

Thank you for considering the new scientific findings and strategic recommendations of the watershed plans in your growth planning work. These land use planning decisions will be significant in determining the future health of our watersheds.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sonya Meek".

Sonya Meek, B.E.S., MSc.
Manager, Watershed Planning
Ecology Division

cc. D. Martin-Downs, Director, Ecology Division, TRCA