

November 25, 2009.

Dear Regional Council member,

I am writing to you today to express some serious concerns with the way the Places To Grow legislation, the Growth Plan For The Greater Golden Horseshoe, and the provisions in the Provincial Policy Statement and the Planning Act are being implemented in York Region and in the Town of Markham.

Reasonable Beginnings

Several years ago when the Province first began the growth initiative, there was much talk about the minimum 40% intensification requirement in areas which were already built up and visuals, showing what 40% intensification would look like, showed buildings which appeared to be just a little higher and it all still looked quite reasonable and acceptable. **This is the scenario which was sold to the public.**

Overintensification

Down the road the harsh reality of intensification begins to set in as York Region assigns the majority of growth to the three southernmost municipalities, supposedly due to the smaller populations and more rural nature of the northern areas. The Region assigned 52% intensification to the Town of Markham, a level already 12% higher than the mandated minimum and developers are salivating at the sight of redevelopment plans which show multiple high rise condo buildings, 30 plus storeys high, replacing single and two storey retail sites next to low density residential neighbourhoods. Is this what the Province intended? I don't think so.

Later on we hear mention of 55% and 60% intensification from Town of Markham planners and now we have a 60% intensification proposal going before Council, 20% above the provincially mandated minimum. Then there is the adoption of Section 37, Height and Density Bonusing which pushes intensification levels up another 15 to 25 %. So now intensification in Markham, at 75-85%, looks nothing like the visuals we were shown just a few years ago and residents are left feeling they have been misled by planners at all levels. Is this what the Province intended? I don't think so.

All this to save the Whitebelt. Now we hear that even this much intensification is not enough, as we are told updated population projections from the Region will result in the loss of 50% of Markham's Whitebelt by 2031. At this point residents are beginning to recognize the trend and realise that future population updates will most likely take care of the other 50% of the Whitebelt. We can also see the way the process works. 40% isn't 40% at all, it's just the start of a climb towards 85% and higher. Population projections are replaced by updated projections. The process consists of gradual incremental steps so

as not to alarm the public and use of terms such as Section 37 instead of Height and Density Bonusing mystify and disguise. The overall effect is clear, **unprecedented acceleration of growth.** Is this what the Province intended? I don't think so.

Provincial policy says intensification must be compatible with surrounding land uses and we saw the original visuals representing 40% intensification and were not alarmed. So how is it we are now seeing 30 storey buildings next to 1 and 2 storey detached homes, excused by urban design features such as angular planes and podiums? **Provincial policy did not qualify compatibility with excuses for circumventing the policy.** As one of my neighbours put it, " Please don't ask me to pretend that there isn't a 36 storey condo tower behind that 6 story podium." Is this what the Province intended? I don't think so.

Time, Money and Unknown Consequences

The Province and Region are allowing too little time for planning to occur responsibly. Local municipalities do not have the time for studies to be done, which will best guide decisions. Too much time, money and resources are being spent providing for new complete communities and too little time, money and resources are being spent on existing incomplete communities, and especially on remediating the infrastructure deficit in older areas, deficits which have already lasted decades and which leave many residents exposed to risks such as flooding from failure of and surcharging of sanitary sewers, and storm sewers which are overwhelmed by even 2 year and 5 year design storms. **In Markham, we can't provide adequately for the areas we have now, while at the same time we are rushing madly into a future which will destroy our foodlands, countryside and the ability of whatever little greenspace we have left to absorb the increasing amounts of stormwater from increasingly intense rainfall events, courtesy of climate change.** What will be the environmental consequences of all this change? Have the studies been done? I do not think so.

Change Course

We need to slow down the process, change course slightly and plan for LOWER, MORE BALANCED, MORE EQUITABLE AND MORE SUSTAINABLE GROWTH WHICH PROTECTS THE URBAN AND SUBURBAN ENVIRONMENTS IN THE SOUTH AS WELL AS THE RURAL ENVIRONMENTS OF THE NORTH. and we need to give priority one to **PROTECTING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF EXISTING RESIDENTS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES** as well as **ENVIRONMENT FIRST** which seems to refer to the rural environment only. What progress have we made if we ignore and degrade one environment to save the other? We must strike a balance and look after both, proceed with caution and make sure we get it right.

Spread Growth

We need to spread growth in a more balanced and more equitable way so that municipalities such as Markham do not have to bear such a disproportionate share.

By 2031 the projected population for Markham will still be more than the combined populations of the six northern municipalities. How balanced is that? **If farmland has to be used up for growth, why does it have to be southern farmland of which there is so little left?** We need to protect local foodlands especially in southern York Region so they cannot fall into the hands of developers and preserve that land in perpetuity, just like parks are preserved. There is much more farmland in northern York Region available for urban expansion than in southern York Region. Using up southern farmland is just **increasing urban sprawl**, when preventing that is the whole point of the GPGGH.

If settlements in northern York Region are too small to add significant growth, then why not plan for **new settlements** to absorb some of the population growth being loaded onto southern municipalities. Add to those new settlements sufficient employment lands which will keep the majority of the northern population employed in the north. **People in northern York Region need good jobs and the same variety and range of jobs as is available to people who live farther south.** I disagree strongly with the discouragement of and limitations on non-resource based industrial and commercial uses in the north (Draft ROP 6.4.6). Resource based activities employ a very low percentage of Canadians in the modern world, which is why Mexicans and other foreign nationals come to Canada and York Region to do the labour intensive work on many farms. **The highly educated and skilled work force in northern York Region shouldn't have to commute long distances south to and through Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan and into Toronto to get good jobs in today's modern economy, because there aren't enough suitable jobs where they live. Instead of trying to reduce the Toronto-centric commute south, York Region planning policy is perpetuating and increasing it with policies like this. Moreover if more population growth was directed to new, compact, complete communities in the north, along with a full range of employment opportunities, York Region would not need all the new expensive transportation plans which bring so much traffic, noise and pollution to residents in the three southern municipalities.**

Set Upper Height and Density Caps For Small Retail Sites.

The Province started the intensification process at the lower limit of 40% but did not put an upper limit or cap in place. This needs to be changed **to protect the quality of life of existing residents and local communities in areas already built-up,** from the excessive demands of the development industry and from overexuberant planners. **Why doesn't the Region put an upper cap on intensification** especially outside the Yonge and Avenue 7 Corridors, and **especially where small scattered retail sites are being redeveloped next to existing stable low density neighbourhoods.** Regional planning wants intensification to be concentrated not scattered, but smaller retail sites are by necessity scattered as they each serve their respective communities and are mostly located along major roads or at intersections where people have easy access to them, locations which might be viewed as prime intensification sites if it wasn't for their small size, scattered nature and the fact that they are located next to stable low density residential neighbourhoods. Redevelopment and intensification of these small retail sites will inevitably result in a scattering of intensification and unless the Region wants to see

these sites here, there and everywhere with 30 storey condo towers sticking out like sore thumbs from the surrounding low density communities they serve, height and density restrictions or caps should be put in place.

I have eight questions which I would like you to respond to, although you are welcome to respond to any of the points I have made.

Will you please:

1. Work to extend the provincial deadlines to upper and lower tier municipalities to give planning staff more time to do the studies which will properly inform decision-making and to give the public more time to read, understand and respond to the emerging plans?
2. Work to spread growth in a more balanced way between the north and the south so that new settlements and employment lands can be established in the north, so that southern municipalities can save what little farmland they have left, so that suitable local jobs are provided for northern residents close to home and so that commuting south can be greatly reduced, resulting in the need for fewer expensive transportation changes, less traffic and less pollution?
3. Work with the Town of Markham and Markham residents to the effect that Markham does not have to increase its population by more than 25% over the next 22 years (a move which will still give Markham the second largest population in York Region, second only to Vaughan), and will not have to expand its urban area over first class farmland?
4. Support a 10 year moratorium on urban expansion in the Town of Markham to protect local foodlands, greenspace and rural heritage, while the Town works towards expanding its Greenbelt (see point 5 below)?
5. Encourage and enable the Town of Markham to work towards expanding its Greenbelt to include at least 75% of the Whitebelt as a permanent local Foodbelt and Natural Heritage System and to protect that land from development in perpetuity?
6. Support the creation of a 40 000 acre Rouge National Park, because greenbelts and whitebelts come and go, as we saw with the Toronto-Centred Region Plan of the early 1970s, but parks protect greenspace for ever?
7. Work to better protect existing residents and communities from over-intensification of small local retail sites by supporting height and density caps such as 6 storey maxima near stable low density residential neighbourhoods?
8. Work to better protect residents from the routing of new rapid transit LRT rail lines through the middle of existing stable low density residential neighbourhoods? Markham planners have placed these areas off-limits for intensification and they should be off-limits for provincial and regional transportation planners as well.

Existing residents and communities and their environment deserve to be respected and protected from the worst effects of over-intensification. We know we have to grow and we are willing to do our part to save Whitebelt farmland, but we are not willing to sacrifice our quality of life to over-intensification, especially when the farmland for which we are accepting thousands of new residents into our neighbourhoods remains unprotected and which in all likelihood will have disappeared by 2031, and when planning circumvents the written word of provincial legislation, policy and guidelines in order to push intensification beyond reasonable limits.

Sincerely,

Eileen Liasi.
Markham Resident

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