



Richmond Hill Naturalists

Chair James Young and Committee Members
Planning & Economic Development
Regional Municipality of York
17250 Yonge Street
Newmarket, Ontario
L3Y 6Z1

December 1, 2009

Dear Chair Young and Committee Members,

RE: **Regional Official Plan**

Since 1955, our organization has been actively and continuously improving southern York Region, through tree planting, education, restoration and participating in planning and environmental assessments. The Richmond Hill Naturalists (RHN) have also volunteered with the York Regional Forest, and are proud of the Region's FSC certification program.

Your draft official plan is encompassing all your public consultation and comments back from the public. Incorporating all the new legislation and future forward thinking has been put together into a well informed document by staff at York Region.

However, on further consideration, we are concerned that the *environment first* may be taking many steps forward, but may be displaced when development applications are placed on the table. In your draft official plan on page 15 -17, significant woodland study and regional forest official plan 2008 mentions "... much of the remaining woodland cover is fragmented and lacking in interior habitat areas, maintaining and enhancing significant woodlands and integrating them into the Region's communities is extremely important." Yet, page 17; 38 speaks to loss or threat of removal in areas, after determination of no species significance within a significant woodland.

Many urban areas or areas slated for urban expansion will now be under even more pressure for removal of our dwindling woodland cover. Many of the forests in York Region are no longer of the previous quality or quantity and have lost species through fragmentation and human impacts. There is now potential for restoration to improve this and create better functioning of existing woodlands. Many of the woodlands include other areas, of marsh, wetlands, springs and aquifers and therefore should be evaluated contextually as well.

Conservation landforms outside areas protected by the Oak Ridges Moraine Act, must be considered with provisions to protect landscapes and views as these are essential to our identification within our local communities.

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One property, as an example, is the David Dunlap Observatory located in Richmond Hill. The forest is covered by York Region's Significant woodland study but if studied in detail would probably not meet the requirements to protect all of the site's woodland. Some of the trees were purpose planted to protect the site, others donated by the Ontario government, planted by the University. 9,000 trees were planted by community members and are culturally and historically important. Even hedgerows and windbreaks are important in the overall plan. These constitute a cultural woodland and form ecological land conservation with the urban context.

Thus, under the new Official Plan, the site would allow consideration for development, removing these trees and perhaps planting on the site or elsewhere. We need to restore exactly what is lost, a larger tree would be replaced by many smaller trees, within the same community that removal occurred.

This Dunlap site also encompasses an important natural science land form - a drumlin and is of one of the last remaining in southern York Region and is the reason it was chosen to site Canada's largest telescope dome. This is historically, culturally and scientifically important and should be protected.

Other woodlots that have been previously fragmented, especially in growth areas would likely disappear along with viewsapes and landscapes.

"Places to Grow" needs to be balanced with sustainable communities with green infrastructure to support growth. Natural Heritage Systems are currently being used and TRCA targets areas to restore many small parcels of greenspace to assist in protecting communities from flooding and improving quality of our living environments. Consider reviewing the environmental section, ensuring that a detailed ecological plan is in place to prevent further loss of trees, fragmentation, loss of greenspace and reaching York Region's targets for Greening. Please defer implementation until these matters are addressed.

Thank you,

Marianne Yake
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