

2

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW NEW COMMUNITIES STRATEGY: BEST PRACTICES DISCUSSION PAPER

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the following:

- 1. The presentation by Karen Antonio-Hadcock, Senior Planner, Long Range and Strategic Planning, be received; and**
- 2. The recommendations contained in the following report dated October 1, 2007, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, be adopted:**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council endorse the “Next Steps Workplan” outlined in Section 4.2 of this report.
2. Planning Department staff circulate this report and the *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper (Council Attachment 1)* to all local municipalities, the development community, Regional partners and stakeholders for comment and discussion.
3. Planning Department staff distribute a copy of this staff report and the *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper* to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Renewal and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

2. PURPOSE

This report presents the *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper* to Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee and Council. The Best Practices paper is intended to stimulate discussion on the development of the potential New Communities of York Region, and provide a basis for future new community criteria.

The potential new communities of York Region could be located in the “whitebelt” areas of the Region. According to Provincial forecasts contained in the *Places to Grow Plan*, the Region is expected to have 1.5 million residents by 2031, as well as 800,000 jobs and 500,000 households. Based on the Provincial Growth Plan, the required densities of the whitebelt communities is 50 people and jobs per hectare. The Growth Plan also requires that communities be planned in a manner which contributes to creating complete

communities; creates street configurations which support walking, cycling, and the early integration and sustainability of transit service; provides a diverse mix of land uses including residential and employment; and creates high quality open spaces and urban design.

One of the key messages from the public consultation process is that if we are going to grow into the whitebelt, we need to set a new standard of integrating economic, environment and community with a focus on quality of life.

Through the Sustainability Strategy, York Region is committed to a sustainable approach to the forecasted growth. This approach requires a fresh approach to developing the Region's new communities. The *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper* is intended to stimulate the discussion on the elements of sustainable new communities for York Region, and form the future criteria that York Region will be developing for new communities.

3. BACKGROUND

At its meeting of February 22, 2007, Regional Council adopted Clause 3 of Report 2 of the Planning and Economic Development Committee dealing with the New Communities Workshop Feedback.

In addition to receiving the feedback from the New Communities Workshop, the report outlined a workplan for New Communities which included:

- Holding future public consultations and design charrettes to build on discussions from the workshop.
- Creating a best practices discussion paper that lays out how the Region's new communities could be different with respect to energy, waste, transportation, health, live/work relationship and other issues raised in the workshop.
- Establishing principles for new community development to be incorporated in the Regional Official Plan review. These principles will set the stage for developing future standards on new community development.

This report addresses portions of the endorsed workplan, and establishes an updated workplan for completing the New Communities strategy.

3.1 Regional Growth Context

According to Provincial forecasts contained in the *Places to Grow Plan*, the Region is expected to have 1.5 million residents by 2031, as well as 800,000 jobs and 500,000 households. To accompany these forecasts, the *Places to Grow Plan* has established parameters on where and how this growth will be distributed throughout the Region. Specifically, these include:

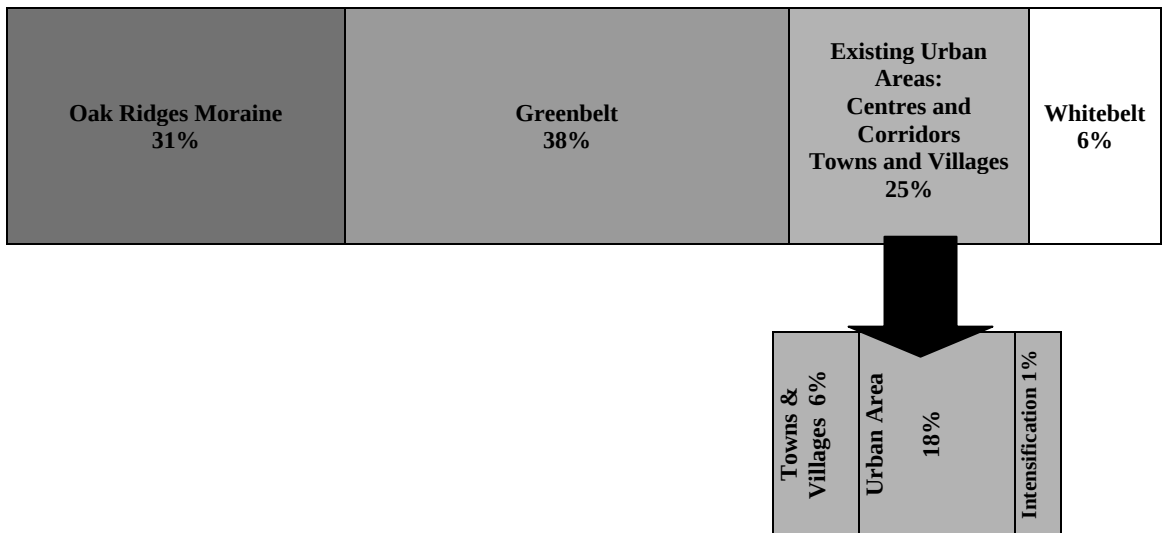
- Of the total new household units forecasted for the Region by 2031, just over 85,000 new household units or 40 % are to locate in existing developed areas.
- The remaining 60% or approximately 140,000 new units are expected to locate in new development areas including the Region's whitebelt areas. Whitebelt areas refer to the Region's last remaining undesignated greenfield areas outside the boundary of the Greenbelt Plan.
- The designated greenfield areas in the Region should be planned to achieve a minimum density target that is not less than 50 residents and jobs combined per hectare.

The *Greenbelt* and *Places to Grow* Plans identify very limited areas where development can occur to accommodate this significant growth. The objectives of compact communities, sustainable infrastructure and a linked natural heritage system present challenges that require an innovative and comprehensive approach to new community development.

3.2 Characteristics of York Region Communities

The potential new communities of the whitebelt in York Region are the last remaining available areas to develop greenfield communities. They provide the Region with a unique opportunity to make a lasting positive impact on how communities are developed.

There are 3 distinct areas within York Region which have a distinct policy approach as represented on the continuum below.



Within the **Oak Ridges Moraine** and **Greenbelt** the land use policies reflect the protection of the land base; protecting ecological features (natural heritage and water features and functions) and the rural/agricultural land base. There is also some limited permission for urban uses and expansion of towns and villages.

Within the **existing urban areas** there is approximately a 10 year supply of residential lands and a 13 year supply of employment lands in which land has been designated for new greenfield development. These areas also contain existing communities where limited intensification will occur. From 2015 and every year thereafter, 40% of all new growth will occur within these areas and the towns and villages. Intensification will be proportionally shared throughout the Region.

Within the existing urban areas, the **Regional Centres** (Markham, Richmond Hill, Vaughan, and Newmarket) and **Corridors** within the existing urban areas will be the focus of intensification (approximately 50% of all intensification). The density target in Regional Centres will be 200 people and jobs per hectare by 2031.

Within the **Towns and Villages** there is some limited existing residential and employment supply and they will receive a modest amount of intensification.

The last remaining lands (approximately 6%) within the Region are the **whitebelt areas**. The three main whitebelt areas are in north Markham, north Vaughan, and East Gwillimbury. These areas will also be subject to a different policy regime. The focus of these areas will be urban, with a view to balance the protection of the Greenbelt and natural resources, building communities, and providing necessary infrastructure. The Places to Grow Plan requires that these areas accommodate 50 persons and jobs per hectare. The densities in the Region's greenfield communities range from approximately 37 to 60 people per hectare. Most of the recently developed communities are close to or meet the Provincial density targets.

There is more to development in the new whitebelt communities than meeting the provincial density targets. The new communities of York Region should be designed to be state of the art communities, planned to be liveable, vibrant, walkable, inclusive and diverse communities. These compact and complete communities will be designed with priority on people and liveability offering a variety of housing choices, and transportation choices by providing opportunities for walkability and transit. They will be mixed use, live work communities with high quality, attractive urban design.

3.3 Sustainability Lens

The Region's Sustainability Strategy provides a long-term framework for making smarter decisions about growth management and undertaking municipal responsibilities that better integrate the economy, environment and community. The Sustainability Strategy will be the lens through which all corporate initiatives and new policy initiatives will be examined, and will play a coordinating function of compiling all of the Region's sustainability initiatives under one strategic plan. In this way, the Region can better evaluate and strengthen our progress in order to fully realize the Region's impact on sustainability planning. The sustainability lens will be applied to how we develop potential communities in the whitebelt.

The Region has embarked on a growth management strategy that incorporates sustainability principles. The values of “Sustainable Natural Environment”, “Healthy Communities”, and “Economic Vitality” (the themes of the Regional Official Plan (ROP)) will be simultaneously integrated into all growth-related decisions. In this way, the Region can effectively plan for complete and healthy communities over the next 30 to 50 years.

3.4 What We’ve Heard from Our Residents and Stakeholders on New Communities

Through the public engagement and consultation process held on the Region’s Planning for Tomorrow Growth Management strategy in 2006 and throughout 2007, the Region has received some key feedback from Regional residents and stakeholders on the development of new communities. On September 27, 2007 Regional Council endorsed Clause 3 of Report 7 of the Planning and Economic Development Committee which provided a summary of the feedback from the 2007 Planning for Tomorrow Public Engagement and Consultation.

A brief summary of the feedback received includes:

- Concerns still exist on the pace and impact of growth.
- Quality employment needs to be provided for York Region Residents.
- Sustainability needs to be addressed in the development of new communities.
- A strong natural heritage system is an important component.
- York Region needs affordable housing.
- Human Services needs to be provided for the growing population.
- Intensification needs to be well designed and located.

In November 2006, a *New Communities Workshop* was held to discuss the creation of new compact communities in York Region, ensuring sustainable infrastructure, and completing a linked natural heritage system. As reported to Regional Council on February 22, 2007, there was consensus on the need for a coordinated, integrative approach to development in the whitebelt. Some of the main conclusions from the workshop were:

1. Take a new and innovative approach to community-building in the whitebelt by integrating sustainable infrastructure, a compact and intensified urban form and the natural heritage system.
2. Require that infrastructure planning emphasizes low-impact stream crossings, transit, sustainable storm water management and the natural heritage system as permanent “green” infrastructure.
3. Address the issues of energy, health, changing demographics, human services, affordability, walk/transit emphasis, green buildings and quality of life in community design.
4. Consider legislative changes (i.e. Planning Act, Building Code) as well as promoting awareness and education of the public and stakeholders.
5. Find innovative funding methods to address capital costs, up-keep and management.

6. Involve stakeholders from all sectors in communication and education which include additional workshops and studies to clarify specific sub-issues and produce recommendations.
7. Understand that this new approach could avoid expensive and time consuming conflicts.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Best Practices for New Communities Paper

The *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper* provides some of the best examples in sustainable community development. There are 42 best practices featured in the paper, which were selected to represent practices that raise the standards on how to build a neighbourhood, and best integrate economy, environment and community in neighbourhood development.

These compact and complete communities will be designed with priority on people and liveability offering a variety of housing choices, and transportation choices by providing opportunities for walkability and transit. They will be mixed use, live work communities with high quality, attractive urban design.

The Best Practices are organized in the following theme areas:

1. Sustainable Community Planning
2. Energy
3. Water Management
4. Green Buildings
5. Creating Liveable, Vibrant Communities
6. Sustainable Transportation
7. Green Space
8. Natural Heritage System
9. Sustainable Community Economics
10. Measuring and reporting progress

Each best practice catalogued is showcased through a project where the practice is applied and provides a brief description of the application, an outline of the key features, the sustainability features, and elements for consideration by York Region, and contact information for further information.

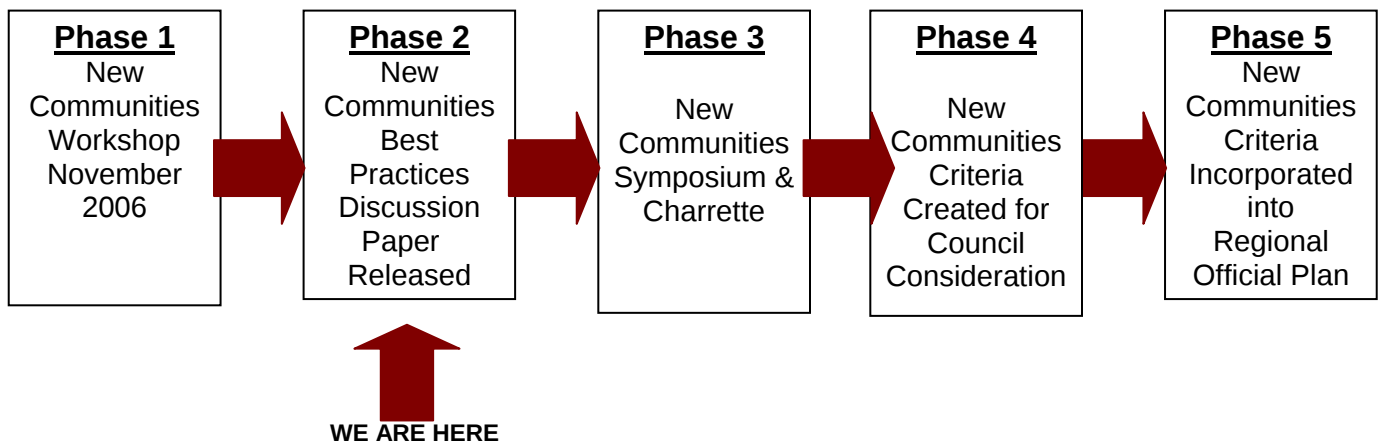
The best practices and elements for York Region consideration presented in the discussion paper will be used to assist in forming the basis for the development of criteria for the new communities of York Region.

Many of the best practices presented in this paper take significant steps in moving the Regional sustainability agenda forward. Many of the ideas are beyond the jurisdiction of York Region, and beyond the realm of planning, and require a Regional role in partnerships, advocacy and education. It is not intended that York Region engage in undertaking each item listed for further consideration, but rather that this document stimulate meaningful discussion on how the Region's new communities can develop.

The best practice elements for consideration can be categorized into key 5 areas which the Region may wish to undertake appropriate action:

1. **Leadership:** Demonstrate leadership and commitment to sustainable community initiatives by piloting best practice elements in Regional projects.
2. **Advocacy:** Be an advocate for legislative and regulatory changes which would enable the development of more sustainable communities.
3. **Partnerships:** Engage key partners in assisting in the implementation of appropriate best practices.
4. **Criteria:** Creating strong and clear criteria for sustainable community development at a Regional and Local level assists in a successful program.
5. **Evaluation and Recognition:** Projects and decisions benefit from a sustainability evaluation and/or decision making tool and recognition of innovation.

4.2 New Communities Strategy Workplan



Following the release and distribution of the *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper*, a New Communities Symposium and Charrette will be held in early 2008 around the theme areas of the best practices paper. This will be both an active learning and design session; taking the lessons learned from the best practices and principles paper, and applying them to community design in York Region. The Symposium and Charrette will be open to local municipal staff, key stakeholders, the development community, and Local and Regional Councillors.

The Symposium and Charrette will be organized as a day long session comprised of a symposium in the morning where key speakers will present their message on sustainable community development, and the afternoon will consist of a charrette organized around the 10 theme areas of the best practices paper. The charrette will be an active session where participants can provide ideas on how to best integrate best practices into the new communities of York Region.

Currently, there are 18 policies within section 5.2.7 of the Regional Official Plan which inform how communities in the Region are developed. With the findings of the best practice paper, and the symposium and charrette, New Communities Criteria will be created to inform the development of the whitebelt and infill communities of York Region which will update the existing policies of the Regional Official Plan.

The criteria will be based on the best case studies reviewed in the best practices document, and the lessons learned through the New Communities Charrette. The criteria will be presented to Regional Council in Spring 2008 for consideration.

Staff will report back to Regional Committee and Council on the Symposium and the draft New Communities Criteria.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

This staff report addresses several goal areas of Vision 2026, including “Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture”, “Responding to the Needs of Our Residents”, “Managed and Balanced Growth”, “Infrastructure for a Growing Region” and “Engaged Communities and a Responsive Region”.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper has been undertaken within the existing staff complement and budget allocation for the Planning and Development Services Department.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities have been an integral component of the Region’s Growth Management program and will be the key implementers for new communities. The Best Practices for New Communities Paper will be circulated to local municipal staff for review and comment. All local municipalities will be invited to participate in the New Communities Symposium and Charrette and will continue to be consulted in the creation of criteria for new communities. Regional staff will work collaboratively with the local municipalities which have whitebelt areas (i.e. East Gwillimbury, Markham, and Vaughan).

7. CONCLUSION

York Region is committed to a sustainable approach to the growth forecasted by the Province in the *Places to Grow Plan*. This includes a new approach to how the communities of the whitebelt will be planned and developed.

The *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper* is intended to stimulate discussion on a fresh approach to the development of the potential New Communities of York Region, and provide a basis for future new community criteria. Regional staff will work collaboratively with local municipal staff and stakeholders to ensure successful implementation. This approach will ensure that whitebelt communities are liveable, complete communities, based on the principles of sustainability.

It is recommended that this report and attachments be circulated to all local municipalities, regional partners and stakeholders and the Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Public Infrastructure and Renewal. It is also recommended that the next steps workplan in section 4.2 of this report be endorsed by Regional Council.

For further information about this report, please contact John Waller, Director of Long Range and Strategic Planning at 905-830-4444 ext. 1525 or john.waller@york.ca.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is attached to this report.)