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VAUGHAN HIGHWAY 400 NORTH EMPLOYMENT LANDS SECONDARY PLAN STUDY- PRELIMINARY INFORMATION REPORT

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, November 11, 2005, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide preliminary information on the City of Vaughan-initiated *Highway 400 North Employment Lands Secondary Plan Study* (the “Study”) including its objectives, process and applicable policy considerations.

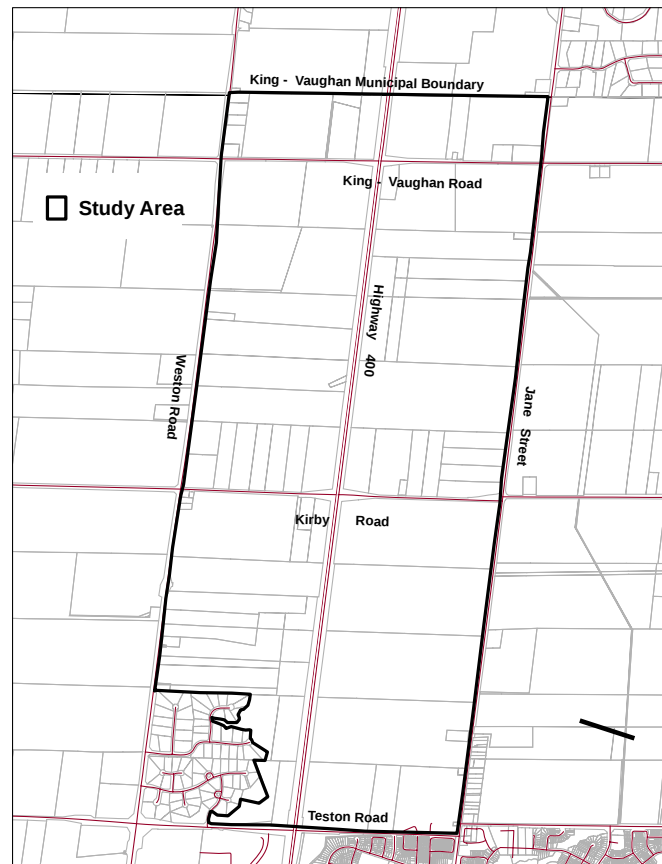
3. PROJECT INFORMATION

3.1 Site Location and Planning Context

The lands comprising the study area total approximately 2,000 gross acres; bounded in the north by the Vaughan-King municipal boundary, Teston Road to the south, Weston Road to the west and Jane Street to the east (see *Figure 1*). An existing estate residential development located in the northeast quadrant of Teston and Weston Roads is excluded from the study area.

The study area abuts and is outside the current Regional and City urban boundary, and is unserviced. These lands are designated “Agriculture Policy Area” and “Regional Greenlands System” in the Regional Official Plan, and “Agriculture Area” and “Valley and Stream Corridor” in the Vaughan Official Plan (OPA 600).

Figure 1 – Study Area



Recent Provincial planning legislation related to growth management in the Greater Golden Horseshoe will have some impact on Regional and local planning within the study area. The *Draft Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (February 2005) shows the study area as “Conceptual Designated Growth Area” and “Greater Golden Horseshoe Study Area.” An updated, final version of the Growth Plan is anticipated for release in December 2005 or January 2006. The *Greenbelt Plan* (February 28, 2005) is in effect and designates a portion of the study area “Protected Countryside.”

3.2 Description and Purpose

The study was initiated by the City in February 2005 for the purpose of bringing on-stream a viable supply of “prestige” employment land with direct access and exposure to Highway 400. The City’s desired employment uses for this area include head offices and related, ancillary commercial development.

The primary impetus for investigating a further, future employment land supply is that 682 net hectares (1,685 net acres) of the City’s current 1,367 net hectare (3,377 net acres) vacant employment land inventory – almost half – is constrained pending the final determination of the Highway 427 alignment north of Highway 7.

Planning for prestige employment lands along and adjacent to 400-Series Highways is a strategic approach for which there are several examples across York Region, including those major office employment nodes located along the Highway 404 corridor in Richmond Hill and Markham. Consistent with this approach, Regional Council in December 2004 requested the Province through its then-proposed *Greenbelt Plan* to recognize the importance of securing future employment lands in strategic locations along the 400-Series Highways.

Locating employment development along major highways not only represents a higher degree of compatibility than with residential uses, but also provides a high level of visibility and transportation access desired by large-scale and international businesses.

3.3 Process

The City in June 2005 assembled a multi-disciplinary consulting team led by the planning firm of Macaulay Shiomi Howsen Ltd. to undertake the study in consultation with various stakeholders including the Region, Province, related agencies and the public.

The consulting team has to-date held two informal consultation and information-gathering sessions with Regional staff, including one attended by staff from the Provincial Ministries of Public Infrastructure Renewal (responsible for the *Growth Plan*) and Municipal Affairs & Housing Provincial. The first in a series of formal, public information sessions was held on November 9, 2005 to present the basis of the study and to receive feedback for further, subsequent phases of the study process. No recommendations or findings have been made to date.

The next step in the study process will be the preparation of a draft land use plan and related infrastructure requirements. It is anticipated that a draft secondary plan will be prepared and presented for formal comments in the first quarter of 2006.

Amendments to the Regional and local Official Plan will be required to implement the secondary plan.

3.4 Planning Considerations

The Region's review of the final study recommendations and related Regional and local Official Plan Amendment applications will require a comprehensive planning analysis of Provincial, Regional and City policies. Forming a large part of this analysis will be the applicability of the Provincial *Growth Plan* (draft) and *Greenbelt Plan*, and the urban expansion criteria of the Regional Official Plan. In particular, the Region's supply of employment land and 2031 employment and population forecasts will be important considerations when evaluating the study results against Provincial, Regional and City policies.

3.4.1 Provincial Policy

The *Provincial Policy Statement* (March 2005), *Greenbelt Plan* and *Draft Growth Plan* will have some bearing on this planning initiative, as described in section 3.1 of this report. Further, continued consultation with Provincial staff will better define the role and impact that this growth management legislation will have on the study and, ultimately, its approval and implementation.

An important implication of the Provincial legislation is that it prescribes new, increased population and employment projections for upper tier municipalities to 2026 and beyond to 2031. The *Draft Growth Plan*, specifically, forecasts for York Region 740,000 jobs by 2026 and 780,000 jobs by 2031. This exceeds the Region's current 2026 employment forecast by 44,000 jobs. Key in the analysis of the City's study, therefore, will be determining the Region's ability to accommodate this projected employment growth given current constraints and future expectations.

A further implication is the proposed creation of "Sub-Area Growth Strategies" (SAGS) under the *Draft Growth Plan* to manage and direct future growth within each upper-tier municipality. Further information is required on the scope and timing of the SAGS to determine how proposed urban expansions to accommodate future population and employment fit within Regional and Provincial planning policy.

The clarifications required regarding these key Provincial growth management initiatives, and their full implementation, may delay somewhat the proposed study timeframe, as described in section 3.3 of this report. Regional and City staff are endeavouring to work closely with Provincial staff to ensure that the issues outlined above are addressed in a timely and effective manner relative to the study purpose and process.

3.4.2 Regional Official Plan

The study will be evaluated through a comprehensive analysis of all Regional Official Plan (ROP) policies. A starting point in this analysis will be the urban expansion criteria set out in Policy 5.2.3, which are:

- a) Regional population and employment forecasts;
- b) The need for expansion relative to other lands available for development in the area municipality;
- c) The role of the new development lands identified in area municipal growth management strategies;
- d) The capability of the area municipality to provide growth within the urban area;
- e) An analysis of options for growth direction and sequencing with respect to environment, agriculture and the implications on the availability of servicing including water, sewer, road and transit networks, and human services;
- f) The protection of and integration with the Regional Greenlands System;
- g) The amendment is large enough (i.e. a concession block) with clear and identifiable boundaries, such as concession roads, major natural features, rail or major utility corridors, to assess the creation of new communities at the Regional level;
- h) The role of the development lands is supportive of an urban structure of centres and corridors with transit-supportive densities; and,
- i) Other policies of the Regional Official Plan.

Specific issues that will form part of this broader analysis include Regional infrastructure improvements, including Regional Road improvements, transit access, water and wastewater, and the potential for an additional Highway 400 interchange.

This review approach and related criteria represents a full-spectrum analysis consistent with the ROP themes of “Healthy Communities,” “Sustainable Natural Environment” and “Economic Vitality.”

3.4.3 Regional Employment Land Supply

The retention and attraction of employment opportunities within York Region is an important policy objective; one clearly enshrined in the ROP and Vision 2026, the Region’s Strategic Plan. To that end, Regional planning staff are preparing a *Vacant Employment Lands Strategy* based on a Region-wide analysis contained in the Planning and Economic Development Committee Report entitled “York Region Vacant Employment Land Inventory,” as adopted by Regional Council on September 22, 2005.

Key findings of the Inventory include, that:

- York Region has a 11.8 year supply of vacant land, excluding those constrained lands in Vaughan, as described in section 3.2 of this report;
- The average annual absorption rate of employment lands built for employment uses was 119 net hectares (295 net acres) between June 1, 2001 and January 1, 2005; and,
- The limited supply of strategically-located lands along the 400-Series Highway needs to be preserved over the long-term for employment uses.

The findings of this Inventory and ensuing *Vacant Employment Lands Strategy* will figure prominently in staff's analysis of the Vaughan study and related amendments. Now in the early stages of development and consultation, the Strategy will address regular monitoring of the Region's supply, the need for strategically-located sites, and the potential for additional employment lands along the 400-Series Highway corridors. Through this strategy and related analysis it may be determined that the current boundaries of the study are not large enough to accommodate the long-term employment needs of the City and Region as a whole.

It is essential to take the long-term view in assessing employment land requirements in Vaughan and the balance of the Region as a whole. Aiming to match long-term employment needs with projected population increases, in particular, is key in ensuring long-term economic vitality and healthy communities.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The City of Vaughan has initiated the *Highway 400 North Employment Lands Secondary Plan Study* to investigate the feasibility of re-designating approximately 2,000 gross acres of vacant, agricultural lands in the northern segment of the City's Highway 400 corridor for "prestige" employment uses. The primary impetus for the study is the constrained nature of nearly one half of the City's current vacant employment land inventory, pending the determination of the Highway 427 alignment north of Highway 7.

The study will result in a draft secondary plan and related Regional and local Official Plan Amendment applications. The Region is participating fully in the study process and will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the resulting recommendations and proposed policies. A draft secondary plan and related amendments are anticipated for review in the first quarter of 2006. The completion and implementation of Provincial growth management legislation may have some impact on this timeframe.

Staff will report to the Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee throughout the study process, as appropriate and required.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.