

4

TAKING YORK REGION CENTRES AND CORRIDORS PLANNING TO THE NEXT LEVEL OF INNOVATION AND IMPLEMENTATION – A FRAMEWORK

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends that Council adopt the recommendations contained in the following report dated November 18, 2008, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

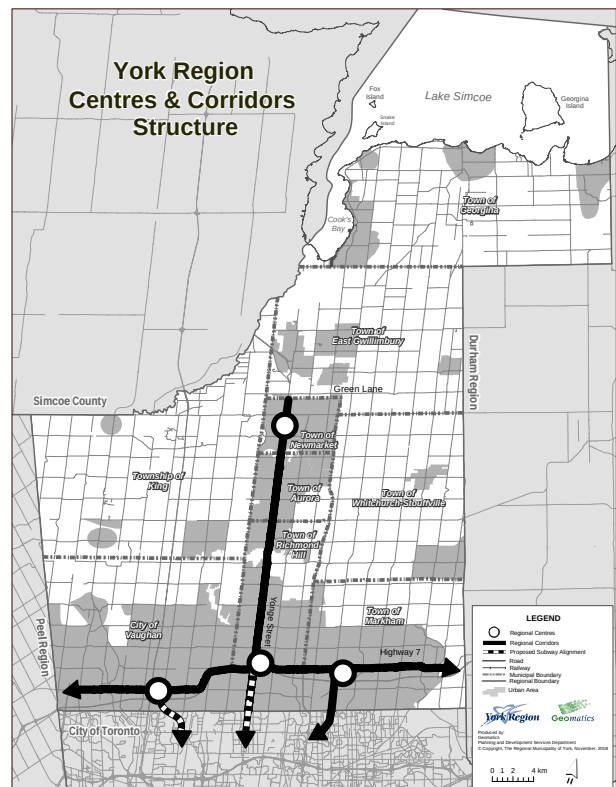
1. The following ten Guiding Principles be received, and serve as the basis for, a two-step project to further enhance planning for Centres and Corridors in York Region:
 - i. Conform to and build on the policy requirements of the Growth Plan and other new Provincial legislation; recognizing that the Region's existing urban structure of Regional Centres linked by Regional Corridors, and served by rapid transit, delivers the basic Provincial requirements.
 - ii. Create a climate for innovation and leadership in all areas of city-building; from infill and intensification, to alternative parking standards, to high quality public art and gathering places.
 - iii. Deliver a responsive policy and program framework for transit-oriented development supporting the extensions of the Spadina and Yonge Street Subways into York Region, including station-area development criteria.
 - iv. Acknowledge and expand on the role of Yonge Street as the historic, cultural and primary Regional Corridor.
 - v. Position the Region as a leader in urban design excellence through supporting and expanding on local municipal and industry best-practices.
 - vi. Leverage opportunities and partnerships for public investment in Centres and Corridors, including new municipal buildings and hospitals.
 - vii. Support and enhance local municipal planning to direct high-density developments to the appropriate locations (e.g. Key Development Areas).
 - viii. Contribute to the promotion of the Centres and Corridors as premier live-work locations for business headquarters, including clusters of "green" enterprises, and their employees.

- ix. Enhance existing communities by acknowledging and supporting local heritage, character and other unique attributes.
 - x. Explore opportunities to harmonize existing Regional and local operations within Regional Road rights-of-way, including streetscape improvements, beautification and sustainability.
2. The Action Plan, outlining detailed steps to bring the Regional Official Plan into conformity with Provincial legislation by June 2009 and, further, to deliver a renewed planning framework to take Centres and Corridors implementation to the next level by mid-2010, be endorsed.
 3. The Regional Clerk circulate this report for information purposes to the nine local municipal planning departments, and to the Provincial Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Energy and Infrastructure (formerly Public Infrastructure Renewal).

2. PURPOSE

The Regional Centres and Corridors structure will be taken to the next level of evolution, advancing leadership and support for city-building

Providing structure and balance to growth in York Region – now home to one million residents and nearly 500,000 jobs – is a network of Regional Centres linked by Regional Corridors, and served by rapid transit (see *York Region Centres & Corridors Structure Map*). This city-building model of development was first enshrined in the 1994 Regional Official Plan, and later enhanced in 2005 through the approval of Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA) No. 43. The urban structure continues to evolve since that time with the planned extensions of two subways into York Region, the implementation of Viva rapid transit, and local planning initiatives to shape compact development in the Centres and Corridors.



This report responds to this evolution by presenting Guiding Principles and an Action Plan to guide the next review and enhancement of the Region's Centres and Corridors structure, and related programs.

The adoption of the recommendations and strategy outlined in this report will initiate an action-oriented, multi-faceted work program to advance city-building in York Region as a component project of the Community Planning Branch's on-going *Centres, Corridors & Subways* program. Key to this work is providing a unifying structure to support the multiplicity of ongoing projects, studies and advancements across York Region to support city-building.

3. BACKGROUND

Approval of ROPA 43 in 2005 established the current Regional policy framework for Centres and Corridors, city-building

Initiated in mid-2002 by Regional Council, ROPA 43 was the first substantive Centres and Corridors framework update to the Regional Official Plan (Chapter 5 – Regional Structure and Growth Management) since 1994. Following a progressive and inclusive planning process, working closely with the local municipalities, Regional Council approved ROPA 43 in early 2005. The policies and related programs have supported and enhanced local municipal city-building initiatives, including the promotion of development that is compact, transit-supportive and pedestrian friendly. Important implementation-driven policy enhancements included:

- Increasing the Region's overall intensification target to 30 per cent (Policy 5.2.4)
- An overall, long-term density target of 2.5 Floor Space Index (FSI) for Regional Centres and Regional Corridors (Policy 5.3.4 and Policy 5.5.6, respectively)
- More prescriptive secondary plan criteria to support local municipal planning visions, with an emphasis on compact urban form, urban design and transit-oriented development for the Regional Centres and Regional Corridors (Policy 5.3.9 and Policy 5.5.12, respectively)
- A framework for implementation strategies and related tools to advance Regional Centres and Regional Corridors development (Policy 5.3.12 and Policy 5.5.16, respectively)
- The identification of Key Development Areas by the local municipalities, as priority locations along the Regional Corridors for compact, mixed-used development (Policy 5.5.4.)
- The definition of and new policy framework for Local Centres and Local Corridors, to support local community character, while achieving intensification at a different scale (Section 5.4 and Section 5.6, respectively)

Opportunity to build on accomplishments, in response to new and emerging initiatives since ROPA 43 approval

There have been substantial advances in city-building in the nearly seven years since ROPA 43 was initiated; creating opportunities to take Centres and Corridors to a higher level of implementation, including:

- The launch of Viva rapid transit services and the service requirements of subsequent phases.
- Regional Council adoption of Regional Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Guidelines.
- Identification of Key Development Areas in the Vaughan and Markham segments of the Highway 7 corridor, including robust construction activity in the Markham Centre, and high-density development approvals for the Vaughan Corporate Centre.
- The announcement of and funding for the construction of the Spadina Subway north to Highway 7 in the Vaughan Corporate Centre.
- The commencement of the Environmental Assessment process for the extension of the Yonge Subway north to Highway 7 in the Richmond Hill Centre.
- The initiation of local municipal planning studies to achieve additional intensification and transit-oriented development across the Yonge Street corridor, including a renewed policy framework for the Newmarket Regional Centre, and a comprehensive review of the Richmond Hill Centre.
- The approval of the Provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, and the release of the related Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan, and changes to the *Planning Act* under *Bill 51*.

Preliminary discussions with local municipalities have taken place to identify priorities, approaches to enhance planning implementation

Preliminary, informal discussions with local municipal staff have taken place to identify gaps in the policy-implementation continuum, and on approaches to continue Regional momentum and leadership in city-building. These initial discussions have centred around the following themes:

- Clarify existing density targets (e.g. 2.5 FSI) so that intensification occurs at the right scale, and in the right areas.
- Introduce further urban design criteria and/or requirements to assist local municipalities to achieve design excellence, and to enhance the compatibility between existing and new developments.
- Investigate the introduction of minimum densities, in appropriate areas, to support existing and planned rapid transit, including subways.
- Incorporate the Provincial density minimums, land use and design requirements for Mobility Hubs.
- Introduce and encourage incentives to implement transit-oriented development, including innovative approaches to parking and public open spaces.

- Enhance the design quality and function of Regional Roads in a way that is compatible with a pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented public realm.

This background has provided excellent direction to Regional staff at this preliminary stage, and has helped to shape the Guiding Principles and Action Plan being recommended through this report, as the next step in evolving Centres and Corridors planning framework.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Guiding Principles

Principles have been drafted to guide the next stage in the evolution of Centres and Corridors planning. They reflect opportunities emerging through recent advancements in city-building, and respond to the preliminary feedback received from local staff. Staff are recommending that the following ten principles be endorsed, to guide the next generation of planning for Centres and Corridors in York Region:

1. Conform to and build on the policy requirements of the Growth Plan and other new Provincial legislation; recognizing that the Region's existing urban structure of Regional Centres linked by Regional Corridors, and served by rapid transit, delivers the basic Provincial requirements.
2. Create a climate for innovation and leadership in all areas of city-building; from infill and intensification, to alternative parking standards, to high quality public art and gathering places.
3. Deliver a responsive policy and program framework for transit-oriented development supporting the extensions of the Spadina and Yonge Street Subways into York Region, including station-area development criteria.
4. Acknowledge and expand on the role of Yonge Street as the historic, cultural and primary Regional Corridor.
5. Position the Region as a leader in urban design excellence through supporting and expanding on local municipal and industry best-practices.
6. Leverage opportunities and partnerships for public investment in Centres and Corridors, including new municipal buildings and hospitals.
7. Support and enhance local municipal planning to direct high-density developments to the appropriate locations (e.g. Key Development Areas).

8. Contribute to the promotion of the Centres and Corridors as premier live-work locations for business headquarters, including clusters of “green” enterprises, and their employees.
9. Enhance existing communities by acknowledging and supporting local heritage, character and other unique attributes.
10. Explore opportunities to harmonize existing Regional and local operations within Regional Road rights-of-way, including streetscape improvements, beautification and sustainability.

Action Plan

A forward-looking Action Plan is being proposed to evolve the planning for, and implementation of, Centres and Corridors beyond the thresholds established by ROPA 43, and in response to the Provincial Growth Plan and other new legislation. The Action Plan and its component parts will deliver on the Guiding Principles, in a manner that provides leadership and support to local municipal planning initiatives, and guidance for the continued momentum in the marketplace towards transit-oriented development.

This work will be accomplished in two steps, each with a related Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA): 1) Bring the Centres and Corridors policies into conformity with the policy requirements of the Province by June 2009; and, 2) Deliver a renewed, progressive planning framework to take York Region’s Centres and Corridors implementation to the next level, by mid-2010.

Step 1: Ensuring policy conformity with the Growth Plan, other new Provincial legislation, since ROPA 43 approval

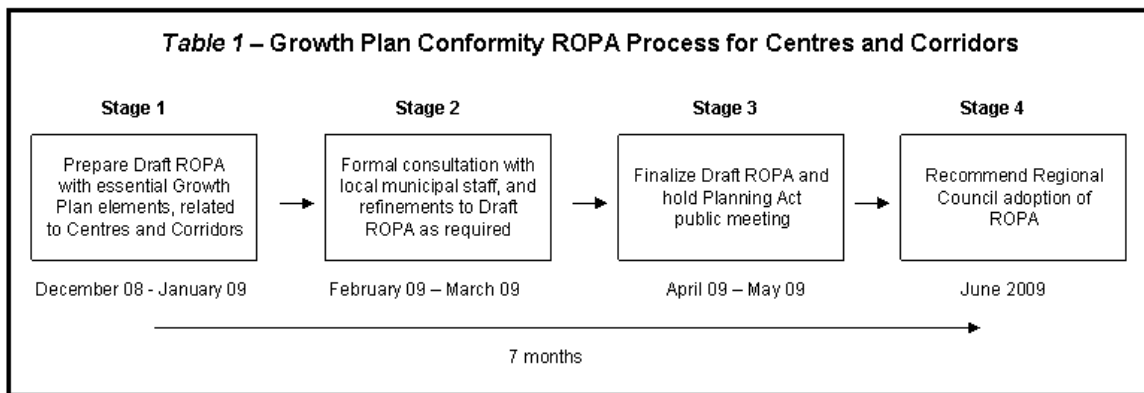
Upper tier municipalities, including York Region, are required to conform to the policies of the Growth Plan by June 2009. The current Regional Official Plan (ROP), as updated through ROPA 43 in 2005, is already delivering on the basic policy premise of the Growth Plan; which is to direct growth to existing built-up areas, supported by a network of Urban Growth Centres (UGC), Intensification Corridors and higher-order transit services. The Region’s existing urban structure of Regional Centres linked by Regional Corridors, and served by rapid transit, is well-positioned to conform to the specific policy requirements of the Growth Plan with minimal changes to the existing policy framework contained within Chapter 5 – Regional Structure of the ROP. There are also new *Planning Act* tools introduced by the Province in 2007 through *Bill 51*, which will be reflected in this conformity Amendment.

Basic changes will form the core of the Provincial conformity Amendment, which is designed to bring the Centres and Corridors policies of the ROP into conformity with the Growth Plan and other legislation by June 2009. Although it is expected that additional

changes will be made throughout this process, the basic foundations of the Amendment will be:

- Defining the four Regional Centres as “Urban Growth Centres” (GP Policy 2.2.4.3).
- Assigning a minimum density target of 200 residents and jobs per gross hectare to the Urban Growth Centres (GP Policy 2.2.4.5.b).
- Adding policies to the Regional Corridors framework (ROP Section 5.5) to incorporate the definition of and requirements for “Intensification Corridors” (GP Policy 2.2.5.1).
- Adding policies to Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 – Regional Infrastructure, to incorporate the policy requirements for “Major Transit Station Areas” (GP Policy 2.2.5.1 & 2.2.5.2).
- Establishing minimum densities, which will be expressed as Floor Space Index (consistent with changes to the *Planning Act* under *Bill 51*, effective January 1, 2007).

Conformity will be achieved through a basic and streamlined Amendment process, in consultation with local municipal staff, to deliver a ROPA for Regional Council adoption in June 2009. This basic and streamlined process, and associated deliverables, is described in *Table 1*, below.



Step 2: Evolving Centres and Corridors to the next level within York Region

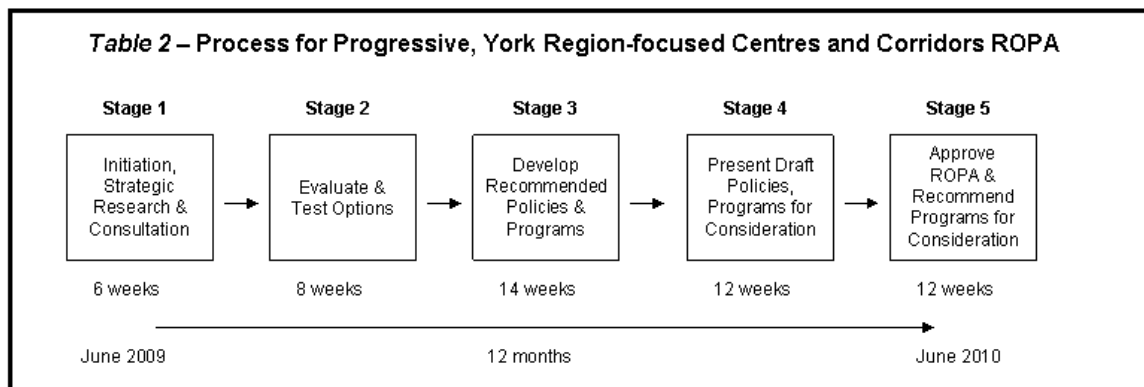
It is critical to move beyond the basic policy requirements of the Growth Plan, to continue the Region’s supporting and leadership role in the planning for and implementation of Centres and Corridors within York Region. Local planning initiatives to achieve further intensification, combined with a new wave of rapid transit and subway investment, have created synergies to leverage further Regional planning innovation in the Centres and Corridors policy-implementation continuum.

Moving forward to meet this opportunity, a “step 2” Amendment is being proposed to take Regional planning for Centres and Corridors to the next level, beyond Growth Plan

conformity. Through a more comprehensive, forward-looking and consultative approach, the key thrusts of this process will be:

- Progressive urban design and transit-oriented development criteria.
- Positioning Yonge Street as the primary Regional Corridor, in a manner that leverages both transit-oriented development, and the enhancement of local community heritage and identity.
- Innovative implementation approaches and tools, including alternative parking standards and other incentives.
- Inclusive workshops and focus groups with a wide range of participants, including residents, local municipal representatives, and the development industry.

This renewed and progressive planning framework, comprising a York Region-focused ROPA and related program enhancements for consideration, will be delivered through a five-stage process over an approximate, 12-month period following the completion of the Provincial conformity exercise for Centres and Corridors. The target completion date is mid-2010; given the number and scope of the required steps, and the June 2009 completion date for the Growth Plan conformity exercise. This process, associated timelines and deliverables are summarized in *Table 2*.



Next Steps

Regional staff will proceed to draft a “step 1” ROPA to conform with the Centres and Corridors-related policies of the Growth Plan and other legislation, followed by circulation to the local municipal planning departments for review and comments. Regional staff will make changes to the draft ROPA, as appropriate, and hold a statutory public meeting under the *Planning Act* in the Spring of 2009. Regional adoption will be recommended in June 2009. This will trigger the beginning an approximate, 12-month process for a “step 2” ROPA to take York Region’s Centres and Corridors to the next level of implementation. The target completion date for the “step 2” process and related products is mid-2010.

This work will be carried out and managed by the Community Planning Branch, as a core project of the Branch's *Centres, Corridors & Subways* program, in collaboration with key staff from Regional Departments. There are also project synergies to be leveraged with the "Planning for Tomorrow" growth management exercise, Master Plans, environmental assessments, and road construction projects. For example, the Centres and Corridors project will play a role in the deployment and implementation of intensification targets, arising from the preferred growth scenario to 2031 and beyond, as reported to the Planning & Economic Development Committee in September 2008 (Report No.8, Clause No.8). An approach to bring the balance of the ROP (e.g. population and employment projections to 2031) into Growth Plan conformity, beyond Centres and Corridors, will be outlined in a separate report to this committee in January 2009

Relationship to Vision 2026

Advancing Centres and Corridors implementation through the enhancement of Regional Official Plan policies and related programs, contributes to the achievement of all Vision 2026 goals. In particular, city-building implementation through Regional leadership on transit-oriented development will serve to advance "Managed and Balanced Growth" and "Engaged Communities and a Responsive Region."

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Action Plan to deliver an enhanced policy and program framework for Centres and Corridors implementation will be achieved with in-house staff and resources

The Centres and Corridors project, and component deliverables outlined in the Action Plan, will be managed and carried out by the Community Planning Branch within the Branch's existing (2008) budget and staff resources. An enhancement of \$50,000 is being requested in the Department's 2009 Business Plan and Budget for the project, to facilitate the retention of consulting services on an as-needed basis (e.g. market analysis, design charrette, etc.). Partnership opportunities with other Regional Departments and Branches will be explored to leverage potential joint project deliverables while offsetting costs.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The local municipalities have achieved significant strides in city-building, and will be engaged throughout the project to ensure that proposed Regional policy and program enhancements are responsive to local planning implementation to advance Centres and Corridors. Regional staff have had preliminary, informal discussions with local municipal planning staff to help determine focus areas and a strategy for this work. The Guiding Principles and Action Plan for the project, being recommended through this report, reflect the feedback received from those discussions.

Local municipalities are primarily responsible for planning implementation through such instruments as secondary plans, zoning by-laws and site plan control. In recognition of this important function, the local municipalities will be consulted throughout the two-step planning process; at a staff level, and through more formal and inclusive consultations such as focus groups and workshops. Participation and input from the local municipalities will be especially critical throughout the “step 2” Amendment process, which will take Regional planning policies beyond the thresholds of the Growth Plan. Specifically, local municipal input will be received and incorporated within Stage 1 and Stage 3 of the planning and consultation process, as illustrated in *Table 2*.

7. CONCLUSION

This report sets out Guiding Principles and an Action Plan for a project to renew the planning framework for Centres and Corridors, and to recommend enhancements to related programs. This will be accomplished in two steps, each with a related Regional Official Plan Amendment: 1) Bring the Centres and Corridors policies into conformity with the Provincial policy requirements by June 2009; and, 2) Deliver a renewed, progressive planning framework to take Centres and Corridors implementation to the next level, by mid-2010.

Each step of this work will be carried out and managed by the Community Planning Branch, as a core project of the Branch’s *Centres, Corridors & Subways* program, in collaboration with key staff from Regional Departments. Key to this work will be providing a unifying framework to support and leverage synergies among ongoing projects, including local planning studies, to support city-building.

Advancing the implementation of Centres and Corridors is vital to the vibrancy and carrying capacity of the Region’s urban structure; creating a sustainable and attractive milieu for living, working, civic pride and investment. Strides in city-building by the local municipalities and the development sector, since the approval of ROPA 43 in 2005, is an opportunity to evolve the Centres and Corridors to the next level of implementation. In particular, there are city-building synergies to leverage with the planned extensions of the Spadina and Yonge Subways to Highway 7 within York Region.

As next steps, Regional staff will proceed to draft a “step 1” ROPA to conform with the Centres and Corridors-related policies of the Growth Plan and other legislation, followed by circulation to the local municipal planning departments for review and comments.

For more information on this report, please contact Heather Konefat, Director of Community Planning at (905) 830-4444, Ext. 1502, or Sean Hertel, Senior Planner, at Ext. 1556.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.