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RENAMING OF HIGHWAY 7 PUBLIC CONSULTATION RESULTS

(Regional Council at its meeting on February 16, 2012 referred this clause to staff to report back to the Transportation Services Committee on refining the process for renaming Highway 7 following a meeting with Regional Chair Fisch and the Mayors of Markham, Vaughan and Richmond Hill.)

The Transportation Services Committee recommends that:

- 1. The recommendations in the following report dated February 1, 2012, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Community Planning not be adopted.**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Council rename Highway 7 (Y.R. 7) along its full extent within York Region to Avenue Seven (Y.R. 7) in accordance with Council resolutions from the City of Vaughan and the Town of Markham.
2. The Regional Clerk forward this report to the Clerks of the Towns of Markham, Richmond Hill and the City of Vaughan.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides a summary of the comments received during the Public Consultation Process conducted in 2010 and 2011 regarding the renaming of Highway 7.

3. BACKGROUND

In June of 2007, a City of Vaughan Council resolution requested the Region rename Highway 7 to *Avenue Seven*. At the same time, a similar Council resolution was received from the Town of Markham. Both requests stated Highway 7 should be renamed to reflect the changing nature of this urban arterial road. There has been no similar resolution on renaming Highway 7 from the Town of Richmond Hill.

The term “Highway” is typically used to reflect a major roadway that connects two or more destinations, with limited access and high operating speeds. Highways are intended

to provide connections between destinations for automobile and truck traffic. Highways are not typically considered as destinations in themselves, and are capable of carrying reasonably-heavy to extremely-heavy traffic. On the other hand, “Avenue” is the term typically used along with “Boulevard”, “Street”, “Road” etc. to describe a high capacity urban arterial road that accommodates all modes of transportation. Most successful “Avenues” are often seen more as destinations than connections to somewhere else. Over the past few years, the function of Highway 7 has been changing from a “Highway” to more of an urban thoroughfare, with frequent traffic lights, numerous bus routes, increased automobiles, more pedestrian activity and traffic congestion. The renaming of Highway 7 to Avenue Seven is seen by many as an important symbolic move to reflect the changing nature of this corridor and the communities through which this road passes.

At its meeting of October 22, 2009, Regional Council endorsed a report recommending that public consultation be conducted regarding the proposed renaming of Highway 7.

This report summarizes the results of that public consultation process.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

In order to obtain public input, early in 2010, notices were published in local newspapers advertising the date and location of three Public Consultation Centres (PCCs). A postcard size flyer was delivered to all registered property owners with a Highway 7 address. These postcards were circulated two weeks prior to the PCCs and provided information including meeting dates and locations, a website address where they could complete an on-line survey and contact information. Additional public consultation was conducted in 2011 using Twitter and Facebook social media tools

Public Consultation Centres were hosted in each of the three local municipalities affected by the potential renaming of Highway 7

The Public Consultation Centres (PCCs) for the Highway 7 renaming project took place over three evenings between 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. as noted in Table 1.

Table 1
Public Consultation Centre Dates

Date	Location	Municipality
Monday, January 18	Woodbridge College 71 Bruce Street	City of Vaughan
Tuesday, January 19	Alexander Mackenzie High School 300 Major Mackenzie Drive West	Town of Richmond Hill

Wednesday, January 20 Markville Secondary Town of Markham
School
1000 Carlton Road

The purpose of the PCCs was to provide the public with information regarding the project and obtain feedback regarding the proposed name change. Generally, the PCCs were poorly attended with a total of forty-two attendees signing the register.

Comments from approximately 500 people regarding the renaming of Highway 7 were collected using a website, online survey and social media tools

In addition to the PCCs, an opportunity was provided for members of the public to contribute to the process by submitting comments on-line through a website created specifically for the renaming of Highway 7. The website address was included on the post cards circulated prior to the PCCs.

The website provided local residents with background information and plans for the renaming process, a collection of frequently asked questions, links to relevant organizations and documents, and a blog which provided updates on the consultation process. In addition, an on-line survey was available on the website for residents to provide input in a quick and efficient manner. Approximately two-hundred responses to the on-line survey were received.

In order to gather additional public input, a four week social media campaign was launched in September of 2011. Through the social media effort, an additional 258 public comments were collected.

The feedback received through the Public Consultation Centres and website indicated that 63% of the participants preferred to leave the name as Highway 7

Table 2 summarizes the 219 general comments received from the three PCCs and the project website.

Table 2
Comments Received

Comment	Number and Percentage of Responses
Maintain the name Highway 7	137 (63%)
Agree with a name change and not in favour of Avenue Seven	59 (27%)
Agree with a name change and in favour of Avenue Seven	23 (10%)

Based on the comments collected, 63% of participants had a preference to maintain the name Highway 7 as is, 27% agreed that a name change should be considered yet were not in favour of the name Avenue Seven and 10% of participants agreed with the proposal to rename the road to Avenue Seven.

Additional public consultation conducted in 2011 using social media tools (Facebook and Twitter) indicated that 80% of the responses collected were in favour of a proposed name change

Almost 80 percent (204 responses) of the responses collected through social media seemed to be in favour of a name change for Highway 7. Several alternative names were offered as suggestions.

Table 3 summarizes the most popular alternate road names suggested during the social media campaign.

Table 3
Alternate Road Names – Social Media

Alternate Names	Number of Times Suggested
7th Avenue, Seventh Avenue or Avenue 7	52
York or York Region (Avenue, Boulevard, Parkway, Promenade)	26
Jack Layton (Road or Boulevard)	10
15 th Avenue	6
Broadway	4
Terry Fox	4

An illustration of all of the street name suggestions received through the public meetings, website and social media efforts are illustrated in Figure 1. Avenue 7 was the most popular name suggested during the public consultation.

Through the Public Consultation Centres and Social Media Campaign many comments were received from the public both against and in favour of a name change for Highway 7

During the PCCs and social media campaign the public offered several comments on both sides of the Highway 7 renaming issue. Some residents expressed concerns about the cost and need for the road renaming project. Others felt that renaming the road is an important step towards signalling the transformation ahead and the overall future vision for the corridor.

As Highway 7 evolves into an urban main street, the number of businesses and residents impacted by the name change will increase substantially

According to a search conducted using canadapost.ca, there are 175 business and residential mailing addresses across the full extent of Highway 7 within York Region. Eighty four of the addresses are in the Town of Markham, 14 in the Town of Richmond Hill and 77 within the City of Vaughan. These numbers do not take into account address points with multiple businesses or residential tenants.

As Highway 7 redevelops into the urban main street of York Region, the number of Highway 7 address points will increase substantially. New development will include much higher densities with many residents or businesses occupying different suites at the same address point (building up versus building out).

As time moves on, more and more residents and businesses would be impacted by a name change. In order to minimize impacts and costs, it is recommended that any proposed name change be implemented simultaneously with the opening of the first section of vivaNext rapidway in 2014.

A new name for Highway 7 to Avenue 7 will symbolize the transformation about to take place along this very important corridor

Highway 7 is going through a significant transformation from provincial highway to an urban main street. The name Highway 7 implies that the corridor provides for long distance through trips for all types of traffic including heavy vehicles. This use is not compatible with the new vision for the corridor.

Highway 7 is no longer the route of choice for long distance trips to travel from one end of the Region to the other. Provincial facilities are designed to carry the load for those types of trips. Highway 7 is transforming into our main street, a destination in itself. A place that you travel to instead of through.

The name Highway 7 does not reflect the vision for this corridor that is currently under construction. Changing the name is an important symbolic step that re-enforces the vision for the corridor for existing and future residents, businesses and travelers to York Region.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Costs to host Public Consultation Centres and conduct analysis of responses were included in the 2010 Transportation Services Operating Budget.

Replacement of approximately 200 street name signs is estimated to cost \$300,000 (net of routine replacements required for maintenance). Sufficient funds are available in the approved 2012 Transportation Services operating budget.

Any costs to be incurred by residents and businesses along Highway 7 as a result of the proposed name change are expected to be minimal. It is not anticipated that the Region or the local municipalities would compensate area residents or businesses for any portion of these costs.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Public meetings were held in each of the three municipalities affected by the potential renaming of Highway 7. A website was also created where residents who were not able to attend a public meeting could review the documentation and post comments. Information regarding the PCCs and the website was shared with each local municipality.

Council resolutions requesting a name change from Highway 7 to Avenue Seven were received from the Town of Markham and the City of Vaughan.

7. CONCLUSION

This report provides information on the renaming of Highway 7 and a summary of the comments collected during the PCCs, on-line survey and social media campaign conducted in 2010 and 2011. Based on the analysis conducted by Regional staff, there appears to be public support to rename Highway 7.

During the public consultation efforts, many names for the roadway were suggested if the renaming process was to go forward. Some comments were received regarding implementation costs, confusion for users of the roadway and a general concern about the necessity to rename the road. Other comments were received from residents who felt that renaming the road made sense as we transform a highway into an urban street.

For these reasons, it is recommended that Highway 7 be renamed to Avenue Seven.

For more information on this report, please contact Steven Kemp, Director, Traffic Management and Intelligent Transportation Systems at Ext. 5226.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.