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DRAFT CRITERIA FOR BUILDING NEW COMMUNITIES IN YORK REGION

(The staff recommendations contained in Clause 2 of the Report were adopted by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting on March 26, 2009.)

The following report dated February 2, 2009, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, is submitted to Council without a Committee recommendation.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council endorse the draft criteria for building new communities in York Region outlined in *Attachment 1* for discussion and inclusion in the Regional Official Plan update.
2. Planning Department staff circulate this report to all local municipalities, the development community, Regional partners and stakeholders, and the Ministries of Energy and Infrastructure and Municipal Affairs and Housing for comment and discussion.
3. Planning Department staff report back on the input received and changes required to the draft policies as part of the Regional Official Plan update process.

2. PURPOSE

This report presents draft criteria for new communities to Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee and Council. Once finalized, the criteria will be included in the updated Regional Official Plan. The criteria support the recent planning initiatives of the Provincial government, and have been based on the feedback received from the *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper* released in November 2007 and the feedback from the Best Practices for New Communities Workshop held in December 2008.

3. BACKGROUND

York Region chooses a sustainable approach to growth

It has been recognized that new lands within the whitebelt areas of Markham, Vaughan, and East Gwillimbury will be necessary to meet the Province's population and employment growth forecasts to 2031. York Region will be growing to 1.5 million residents by 2031, as

well as 800,000 jobs and 510,000 households. Based on the Provincial *Growth Plan*, the minimum required density for new communities and employment areas 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.

York Region has taken a sustainable approach to the growth challenges ahead. The Region's Sustainability Strategy, which was approved in 2007, 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 has informed the Region's growth management strategy and specifically to development in the whitebelt.

York Region and the local municipalities have been progressing toward a more sustainable approach to development including:

- York Region's minimum LEED Silver requirement for new Regional facilities
- York Region's Sustainable Development through LEED allocation bonusing program
- East Gwillimbury's Energy Star Program and LEED Silver Standard for all new Town facilities and all new industrial, commercial, institutional and high-rise residential buildings
- Vaughan's Energy Star policy for all residential subdivisions
- Newmarket's Ecologic subdivision of LEED platinum homes
- Markham Centre's performance measures, district energy facility

The draft criteria for building new communities in York Region builds on these initiatives and provides a comprehensive and coordinated approach to implementing sustainable community elements across the Region.

Phase 4 of the New Communities Strategy Workplan has been completed

In December 2007, York Region released the *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper*. This paper was intended to simulate discussion on the development of the potential new communities of York Region and provide a basis for future new community criteria. The paper includes 42 best practices organized into 10 theme areas:

- Sustainable Community Planning
- Energy
- Water Management
- Green Buildings
- Creating Liveable, Vibrant Communities
- Sustainable Transportation
- Green Space
- Natural Heritage System

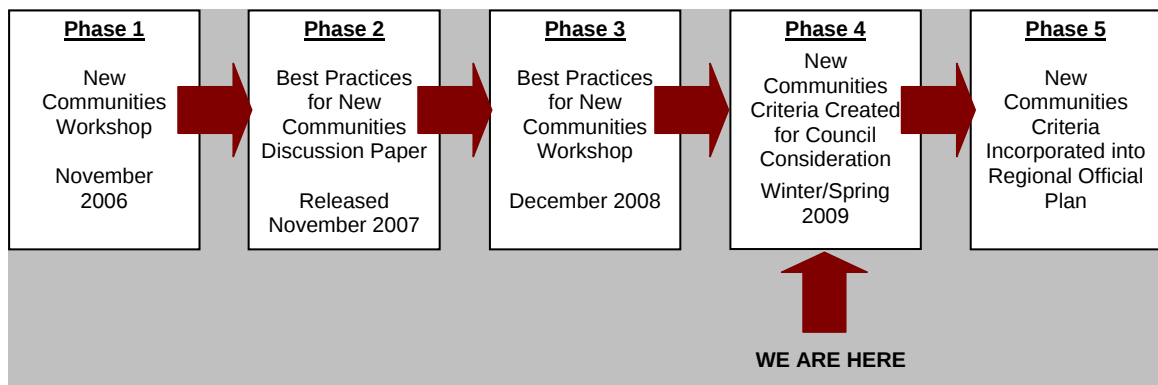
- Sustainable Community Economics
- Measuring and Reporting Progress

On December 13, 2007, Regional Council endorsed Clause 2 of Report 10 of the Planning and Economic Development Committee, which included the updated “Next Steps Workplan” for the New Communities Strategy (*See Figure 1*).

The Workplan is made up of 5 phases, which includes the *New Communities Workshop* and the *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper* as Phases 1 and 2. The *Best Practices Workshop* was held on December 5, 2008, therefore completing Phase 3 of the Workplan.

We are currently in Phase 4 of the New Communities Strategy. In this phase, the draft criteria will be presented to Planning and Economic Development Committee and Regional Council for consideration, and circulated for comment prior to incorporation into the Regional Official Plan.

Figure 1: New Communities Strategy Workplan



Residents and stakeholders are supportive of creating new, innovative standards for York Region’s new communities

Throughout the New Communities Strategy Workplan, York Region has engaged both residents and stakeholders with its website and a number of consultation sessions. This includes the Region’s *Planning for Tomorrow: Growth Management* initiative held throughout 2006 – 2008, the *New Communities Workshop* of 2006, and the *Best Practices Workshop* held in 2008.

Feedback was also collected after circulating the *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper* in late 2007. The *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper* provided a comprehensive summary of innovative best practices currently being used in community development throughout Canada, featuring several York Region

projects, and some international projects. The *Best Practice* document has served as a foundation for discussion on the creation of the draft criteria.

Regional planning staff have provided updates to Regional Council on the feedback received on the development in new communities through a number of staff reports. Most recently, Clause 7 of Report 1 of the Planning and Economic Development Committee was endorsed by Council on January 22, 2009. This report provides a summary of what was heard at the *Best Practices Workshop*.

Overall, residents and stakeholders have been encouraging in the creation of criteria for York Region's new communities. Many agreed that our new communities need to be built differently and that innovation needs to be encouraged. It was also suggested that these communities have strong pedestrian environments, be serviced by transit, and include a sufficient mix of housing types to allow for residents to age in place. Other suggestions included the use of alternative energy sources and conservation methods, closer live/work relationships and a better integration of the natural environment into our communities.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

New communities criteria is supported by key Provincial Policy

The *Planning Act* and *Provincial Policy Statement* have been recently amended to give municipalities additional tools to influence and reshape their communities to develop in a compact, integrated and more sustainable way. The *Places to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* is founded on the principles of building compact, vibrant and complete communities and optimizing the use of existing and new infrastructure to support growth in a compact, efficient form.

Some of the key policies include:

- Section 2 (Provincial Interest) of the *Planning Act* includes items such as: the supply, efficient use and conservation of energy and water; the adequate provision of a full range of housing; and, the promotion of development that is designed to be sustainable, to support public transit, and to be oriented to pedestrians.
- Section 41 (Site Plan Control) of the *Planning Act* enables municipalities to work with development proponents to secure sustainable design features on building exteriors, such as green roofs, permeable paving, and solar panels.
- Section 51 (Plan of Subdivision Approvals) of the *Planning Act* provides that the design of subdivisions can include blocks set aside for stormwater management, district heating, and can include the consideration of the optimization of the supply, means of supplying, efficient use and conservation of energy.
- The *Provincial Policy Statement* was revised to include stronger policies that will support transit, improve air quality, and promote the use of alternative and renewable

- energy. Some of these policies include promoting transit-supportive land use patterns and densities, locating housing and jobs closer together, and development designs and orientations that maximize the use of alternative and renewable energy.
- The *Growth Plan* also provides a definition for the term “complete communities,” which provides the foundation for future greenfield development.

All three Provincial documents lend support to the creation of criteria for York Region’s new communities that emphasize sustainability and innovation.

Draft criteria for new communities will make York Region’s whitebelt communities state-of-the-art

The development of sustainable new communities is essential to achieve a complete community in which to live, work, and play. The location, composition, density, and design of new development projects can have a significant cumulative impact on a community’s ability to sustain a healthy economy and reasonable cost of living; to provide effective and accessible public services; to secure adequate choice and opportunity for present and future generations of residents; to protect our environment; and, to ensure we all continue to enjoy a high quality of life.

York Region’s whitebelt lands are the last available areas where greenfield communities can be developed. The Region has a unique opportunity to make a lasting positive impact on how future communities will be developed.

While development in these areas will be dictated by the policies of the Provincial *Growth Plan*, there is more to development in the new whitebelt communities than simply meeting the provincial density targets. The new communities of York Region will be state-of-the-art and planned as vibrant, walkable, energy efficient, inclusive, diverse and green communities. These compact and complete communities will be designed with priority on people and liveability, offering a variety of housing 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 Regional Official Plan already contains criteria for the development of new communities. The criteria needs to be updated to reflect current sustainability thinking, such as energy conservation, and to further emphasize walkability and transit integration.

The *Growth Plan* requires that a minimum density target of 50 people and jobs combined per hectare be achieved for the greenfield areas. Some areas within the existing built and approved greenfield areas are currently achieving densities lower than the *Growth Plan* requirement, and others are achieving densities close to the required density. In order to achieve the overall greenfield area density target, the community lands within the whitebelt will have to be built to exceed 50 people and jobs per hectare. The community lands within the whitebelt will have to be built to a minimum average density of 20 units

per hectare, equating to approximately 70 people and jobs per hectare, representing a more compact built form than traditionally built in York Region.

The draft criteria for new communities are included as (*Attachment 1*) to this report. The criteria will be required to be met for all new development within the whitebelt communities of Vaughan, Markham, and East Gwillimbury, and will inform any new development within the existing urban areas around the Region.

The draft criteria are categorized into the following six categories and generally described below:

General Development: New Development areas will be required to complete a detailed secondary plan which implements the criteria.

Community Design: Describes the composition and design elements of communities including requiring an average minimum density of 20 units per hectare, providing a variety of housing types and appropriate mixture of uses; creating quality communities for people.

Energy and Green Buildings: Requires the completion of local community energy plans which maximizes energy efficiency and the use of renewable technologies on a municipality, community and site scale. The policies provide for the phase in of green building standards, such as LEED and move toward Zero Carbon buildings, which are net energy contributors.

Water Management: Requires the creation of comprehensive water management plans which examines all water systems in a coordinated manner, and integrates the use of innovative water management technologies such as green roofs, naturalized stormwater management and permeable pavement.

Transportation: Requires that communities be designed to reduce dependency on automobile for travel and prioritize transit, walking, cycling, and ensure that transit is provided in the initial stages of development.

Greenspace: Requires that active recreational facilities, people related meeting places, urban squares, parks, outdoor seating and informal gathering spaces, and an enhanced, linked natural heritage system be integrated into the design of the community.

The new communities criteria will be supported by a guideline document which will provide more detail on the criteria and provide guidance on implementation. Following the circulation of the criteria for review and comment, the finalized criteria will form part of the Region's new official plan.

Regional staff will consult with local municipalities and implementation partners about draft new communities criteria

The draft criteria will be circulated to the local municipalities for their review and comment. Staff will be working closely with the three whitebelt municipalities of Markham, Vaughan, and East Gwillimbury on the criteria.

The Town of East Gwillimbury, as a part of their Consolidated Official Plan Review and Update, is preparing a set of sustainable development policies and a rating system/checklist for evaluating and measuring the sustainability of all forms of development within the Town. Regional Staff will work with Town staff to ensure that the Regional and local policies have an appropriate interface and ensure that they are complementary and compatible.

Implementation partners such as the development industry and other Regional stakeholders will continue to be consulted following Regional Council's consideration of the draft criteria and prior to their finalization and incorporation into the Regional Official Plan.

York Region's new community criteria will be supported by other Regional initiatives

Based on the lessons learned from *Best Practices for New Communities Discussion Paper* and the feedback received, it is apparent that there may be a larger role that York Region should play in supporting the development of sustainable new communities to complement the new communities criteria. This role may include some of the items listed below:

Leadership: Demonstrate leadership and commitment to sustainable community initiatives by piloting some of the criteria for new communities in Regional projects.

Education/Knowledge Base: Develop Regional staff capacity to assist local municipalities and development community, and encourage local municipalities to develop the internal capacity of planners, building department staff particularly plan reviewers, and building inspectors to facilitate the implementation of the new communities criteria.

Advocacy: Be an advocate for legislative and regulatory changes which would enable the development of more sustainable communities in the *Planning Act* and Building Code.

Partnerships: Engage key partners in assisting in the implementation of new communities criteria. Partnerships with the Canadian Green Building Council (CAGBC) could be created for training, education, and advancement of LEED standards, with local utilities providers to create local community energy plans and green energy projects, and other private/public partnerships for projects.

Evaluation and Recognition: The development and implementation of a sustainability evaluation and/or decision making tool would assist in being able to quantify the benefits of sustainable community features. Recognition of excellence and innovation can also be a key driver in ensuring the successful implementation of new communities criteria, and assist in fostering healthy competition and innovation in the private and public sectors.

Relationship to Vision 2026

This staff report addresses several goal areas in 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 draft new community criteria have 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* was circulated to all local municipalities for review and comment, and many local municipal staff participated in the *New Communities Workshop* in November 2006 and the *Best Practices Workshop* in December 2008.

The draft criteria for new communities will be circulated to local municipal staff for review and comment. Consultation with the local municipalities will occur prior to the finalization of the new communities criteria in the new Regional Official Plan. 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 challenges ahead. This includes a new approach to how the communities of the whitebelt will be planned and developed.

This report proposes that York Region’s new communities will be state-of-the-art; compact, vibrant, inclusive and diverse communities which prioritize people, sustainability, liveability and resource efficiency. These complete, green communities will offer a variety of housing, employment and mobility choices and have an integrated, robust greenlands system. They

will be mixed use, live-work communities with high quality urban design that attracts residents and workers alike. The draft criteria for new communities will ensure that York Region's new communities achieve this vision.

It is recommended that Regional Council endorse the draft criteria for new communities outlined in (*Attachment 1*). It is also recommended that this report and its attachment be circulated to all local municipalities, regional partners, stakeholders, and the Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Energy and Infrastructure.

For more information on this report, please contact John Waller, Director of Long Range and Strategic Planning at (905) 830-4444 Ext. 1525.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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