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STATUTORY PUBLIC MEETING INFORMATION REPORT FOR A PUBLIC MEETING REGARDING THE TOWN OF RICHMOND HILL'S REQUEST TO AMEND MAP 6 OF THE YORK REGION OFFICIAL PLAN

Pursuant to Section 17(15) of the Planning Act, as amended, the Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee held a Public Meeting to inform the Public and receive comments in regard to the following:

A request by the Town of Richmond Hill to redesignate the lands outside of the Urban Area in the Town of Richmond Hill from "Agricultural Policy Area" to "Rural Policy Area" on Map 6 of the Regional Official Plan.

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the following:

- 1. The presentation by Augustine Ko, Senior Planner, Community Planning, be received;**
- 2. The following deputations be received:**
 - (a) Jack Goldhar, Toronto, on behalf of Hyde Development;**
 - (b) Lyn Watt, resident, Gormley; and**
 - (c) John Doner, landowner, Gormley.**
- 3. The recommendation contained in the following report February 17, 2006, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, be adopted:**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

- 1. Staff receive and review comments from the public meeting and responses to the circulation regarding the proposed Amendment and prepare a further report with recommendations for consideration at a future Planning Committee meeting.**

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide details of the request by the Town of Richmond Hill to redesignate the lands outside of the Urban Area in the Town of Richmond Hill from “Agricultural Policy Area” to “Rural Policy Area” on Map 6 of the Regional Official Plan (ROP).
- Provide background information for the statutory public meeting to be held under the *Planning Act*.

The purpose of the proposed Regional Official Plan amendment is to:

- Replace the “Agricultural” designation with a “Rural” designation in the Regional Plan since the Province of Ontario has confirmed that there are no provincially significant agricultural areas within the Town of Richmond Hill

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Description of Application

The Council of the Town of Richmond Hill has requested that the Region amend the Regional Official Plan by changing all their lands currently designated “Agricultural Policy Area” to “Rural Policy Area”.

The lands subject to this request are within the Oak Ridges Moraine and subject to the land use and environmental policies of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP).

The request by the Town does not seek to permit additional uses, nor less stringent environmental provisions than those provided by the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Regional Plan. The request supports the high standards of environmental protection established by the Moraine Plan and supported by both the Region of York and the Town of Richmond Hill.

3.2 Location

There are two areas that are subject to this proposed amendment. Area 1 involves the lands south of King Road and north of Jefferson Road, and bounded by Yonge Street to the east and Bathurst Street to the west.

Area 2 lands are bounded by Bloomington Road to the north, Highway 404 to the east, the northern boundary of the North Leslie Secondary Plan to the south and Bayview Avenue to the west. Figure 1 illustrates the location of Area 1 and 2.

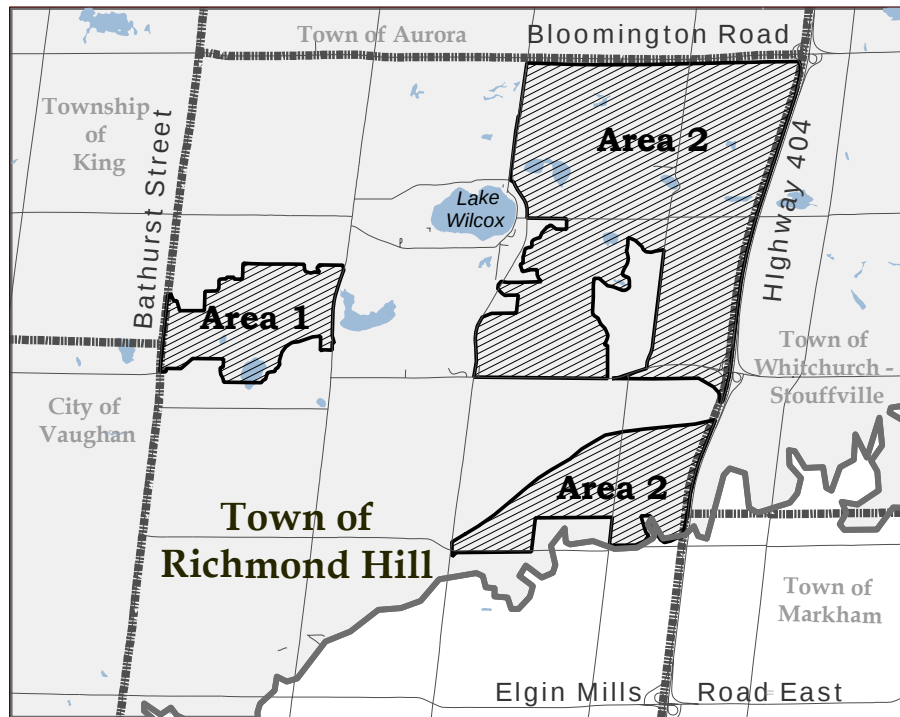


Figure 1: Location Map

3.2.1 Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan Designations

Area 1 is designated “Natural Linkage Area”. Area 2 is designated “Natural Core Area”, “Natural Linkage Area” and 468 hectares (1,157 acres) is designated “Countryside Area”. Attachment 1 illustrates the ORMCP designations within the two areas.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The proposed amendment, as requested by the Town of Richmond Hill, is to redesignate all the “Agricultural Policy Area” lands within the Town to “Rural Policy Area.” The proposed amendment will generally have the following effect:

- Passive recreation uses will be permitted on the subject lands where they satisfy the environmental policies of the ORMCP.
- Major recreational uses will be permitted only in the “Countryside Areas” where they satisfy the environmental policies of the ORMCP.

The proposed amendment will not permit additional land uses beyond those already permitted by the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Regional Plan. If the proposed amendment is approved, development applications under the “Rural Policy Area” will still have to fully comply with the stringent environmental policies of the ORMCP.

The ORMCP prescribes policies to protect the ecological and hydrological integrity of the Moraine. Every application for development or site alteration shall identify planning, design and construction practices that ensure that no building or other site alterations impede the movement of plants and animals among key natural heritage features, hydrologically sensitive features and adjacent land within Natural Core Areas and Natural Linkage Areas. Minimum areas of influence and minimum vegetation protection zones relative to Key Natural Heritage Features, if applicable, need to be evaluated.

The amendment, if approved, would permit the Town of Richmond Hill to approve major recreational facilities. These may include soccer fields, baseball diamonds, golf courses and their accessory uses within the “Countryside Area”.

The lands within Area 1 and Area 2 are fragmented in ownership, contain many parcels less than 100 acres in size, numerous non-farm uses, and are not considered prime agricultural lands by the Province. The existing uses in Area 2 include parks and open space uses, golf courses, a waste transfer station, construction aggregate operations, an asphalt plant, an electricity transmission corridor and a railroad corridor. In addition to the mix of uses and fragmentation of ownership, the lands are traversed by key natural features that cannot be farmed. For these reasons, the redesignation from “Agricultural Policy Area” to “Rural Policy Area” are based on good planning principles.

4.1 Hierarchy of Plans

The two areas, subject to the proposed amendment, have layered land use designations. In addition to the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, the lands are also subject to the land use designations contained on Map 6 of the ROP. The intent of the proposed ROPA is to change the land use designation from agricultural to rural in the Regional Plan based on the Province’s position that these lands are not provincially significant agricultural lands. The proposed ROPA will provide consistency between Provincial, Regional and local policy documents.

4.1.1 The Regional Official Plan

The Regional Official Plan contains guidelines for evaluating applications to amend the Regional Plan prior to its five year review. Section 7.7.1 – Amendments to the Plan states:

“That in considering amendments to this Plan, Regional Council shall be guided by the following:

- a) the need for the proposed change;*
- b) the effect of the proposed change on the need for regional services and facilities;*
- c) the implications, if any, that the amendment may have for other parts of the Plan; and*
- d) the impact of the proposed change on the ability of the Region to achieve the goals, objectives and policies expressed in this Plan, or on other regional policies, programs or interests.”*

A subsequent staff report will evaluate the proposed Regional Official Plan amendment against the criteria contained in Section 7.7.1 of the Regional Official Plan.

4.1.2 The Town of Richmond Hill Official Plan

The subject lands are currently designated “Rural” and “Hamlet” by the Town of Richmond Hill Official Plan.

Town of Richmond Hill Official Plan Amendment No. 218 is currently with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for approval.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no Regional financial implications.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The request to amend the Region’s Official Plan originated at the local municipal level. The Town of Richmond Hill supports the redesignation of the lands from “Agricultural Policy Area” to “Rural Policy Area”.

7. CONCLUSION

It is the intent of this report to provide information on the proposed Regional Official Plan Amendment for the public meeting being held in accordance with the requirements of the Planning Act.

The Town of Richmond Hill has requested an amendment to the Regional Official Plan. The proposed amendment would redesignate all of the lands in the Town that are currently designated “Agricultural Policy Area” to “Rural Policy Area” on Map 6 of the Regional Plan. The justification behind the proposed amendment is: as confirmed by the Province on two occasions, there are no Provincially significant agricultural areas within the Town of Richmond Hill and the “rural” designation is more consistent with the non-agricultural uses on the subject lands.

The proposed amendment would generally have the effect of:

- Permitting passive recreation uses on the subject lands where they satisfy the environmental policies of the ORMCP.
- Permitting major recreational uses only in the “Countryside Area” where they satisfy the rigorous environmental policies of the ORMCP.

This amendment will not permit additional uses to those already permitted through the ORMCP and the Regional Plan. All new land uses will be required to fully satisfy the rigorous environmental policies of the ORMCP that are supported by the Region of York and the Town of Richmond Hill.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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