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CRITERIA FOR ENHANCED CENTRES AND CORRIDORS POLICIES – REGIONAL OFFICIAL PLAN UPDATE

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated March 2, 2009, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

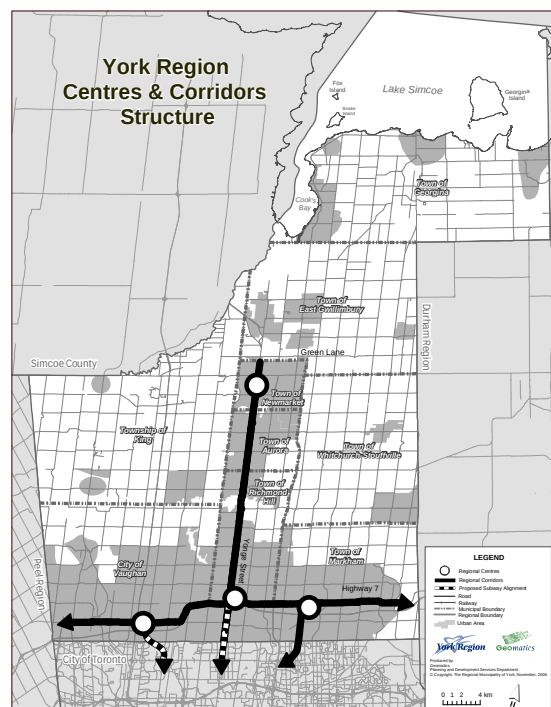
It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council endorse the draft criteria for York Region Centres and Corridors outlined in this report, as the basis for drafting enhanced policies as part of the Regional Official Plan (ROP) update.
2. The Regional Clerk circulate this report for information and comment to the local municipal planning departments, the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD – York Chapter), and the Provincial Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Energy and Infrastructure.
3. Staff report back to this Committee and Regional Council in June 2009 with draft policies, based on further discussions with and feedback from participants in the policy formulation process including Regional Departments, local municipal staff and the development industry.

2. PURPOSE

This report presents criteria for enhanced Regional Official Plan (ROP) policies for Centres and Corridors, based on the Guiding Principles and Action Plan adopted by Regional Council on December 18, 2008 under the report *“Taking York Region Centres and Corridors Planning to the Next Level of Innovation and Implementation – A Framework”* (Planning and Economic Development Committee Report No. 11, Clause 4).

This work is being undertaken as part of the larger, on-going Provincial Growth Plan conformity and Regional Official Plan review exercise, in consultation with Regional Departments, local municipal staff and other stakeholders.



3. BACKGROUND

York Region's Centres and Corridors structure is solid foundation for city-building, and is evolving with further investment and implementation

Established by the Regional Official Plan in 1994, and updated through ROPA 43 in 2005, the existing system of Centres and Corridors in York Region lays a solid foundation for efficient and effective city-building. This structure and related policy framework – including density targets, and directing intensification to Regional Centres and to Key Development Areas (KDAs) in Regional Corridors – has supported local municipal planning goals, and has created a climate for efficient, innovative and well-designed development. The adoption of the *York Region 2031 Intensification Strategy* by Regional Council on February 19, 2009 (Planning and Economic Development Committee Report No. 2, Clause 9) builds on this structure, and helps to set the stage for further advances in achieving compact and sustainable growth.

Further, significant investments in rapid transit services and infrastructure including two planned subway extensions, in concert with significant strides in planning implementation by the local municipalities, have combined to create an opportunity to take the Region's Centres and Corridors structure to the next level. Working towards a new benchmark of innovation and implementation, Regional Council in December 2008 adopted the following 10 Guiding Principles to direct the next generation of Centres and Corridors planning 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. KDAs - 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.

Staff have begun formal consultations, and have received excellent ideas

Consistent with the direction adopted by Regional Council in December 2008, staff are working towards delivering enhanced Centres and Corridors policies for consideration in June 2009. Consultation is a key part of this exercise, and the excellent feedback received to-date is setting the key parameters for the updated and enhanced policies. So far, formal consultations have been held with staff from Regional Departments including York Region Transit and Rapidco, and the local municipal planning departments.

Based on the consultation to date, there is a consensus that, while the existing policies are effective, further enhancements should be made to:

- Evolve the 2.5 FSI (Floor Space Index) density target for Regional Centres to a minimum requirement, provided that it is recognized that Newmarket Centre is at a different stage in the development lifecycle, and that Markham Centre has large valleylands and open spaces that will not develop.
- Ensure that the highest densities and mix of uses are directed to the Regional Centres and Key Development Areas in the Regional Corridors, while encouraging infill in Local Centres and Local Corridors at a smaller scale.
- Maintain the existing Key Development Area criteria and policies, and encourage local municipalities to set their own minimum density targets for those areas.
- Add further detail to the implementation-related policies, including urban design and parking considerations.
- Address future Regional Corridors in a manner that allows for the evolution of these important corridors, while acknowledging any potential traffic capacity constraints and community character considerations.
- Ensure the protection of existing successful employment areas along and adjacent to the Regional Corridors (e.g. East Beaver Creek in Richmond Hill).

- Encourage a more coordinated and city-building type approach to Regional streetscaping character and requirements, especially along the Yonge Street Regional Corridor.
- Planned subway stations should be addressed through specific planning policies, including revised KDA criteria to direct transit-oriented development at and around stations.

4. ANALYSIS

Consultation and research underway to take Centres and Corridors policies to the next level

While the current Centres and Corridors policy framework is a solid foundation, we continue to move forward, building on what has been accomplished and learned through our shared city-building experiences. Working towards a renewed and improved approach, Planning staff have been conducting strategic research, and consulting with Regional Staff and local municipal planning departments to establish a consensus on opportunities and related actions. Further consultation, including a formal workshop with industry representatives, will be held in May 2009.

Criteria for enhanced policies have emerged through consultations to-date, research of best-practices

The opportunities and related policy enhancements discussed to-date with stakeholders has been based on the following four themes or categories: 1) Growth Plan Conformity; 2) Centres and Corridors Structure; 3) Density; and, 4) Implementation. Within these emerging themes, staff have developed criteria on which to base the enhanced Centres and Corridors policies of the ROP (see *Attachment 1* for consolidated list of criteria).

While the criteria are fundamentally rooted in the existing framework for Centres and Corridors set out in Chapter 5 – Regional Structure and Growth Management of the current ROP, they are designed to update and improve the current policies in ways that advance innovation and implementation throughout the planning and development process. The development of these draft criteria is supported by detailed background research and analysis undertaken by staff. Covering a range of topics including innovative approaches to planning implementation, the research will be later released as part of a series of Discussion Papers on approaches to Centres and Corridors planning and development.

Combining feedback received with best-practice research across York Region, and other jurisdictions with extensive research in this area, the criteria will serve as a basis to refine the current Regional policies and approaches to implementation. These criteria and related research, by subject area, follow below.

4.1 GROWTH PLAN CONFORMITY

The current Centres and Corridors structure and related policies deliver the basic policy requirements of the Provincial Growth Plan, which directs compact, mixed-use and transit-oriented development to urban growth centres and intensification corridors. Therefore, Growth Plan conformity requires only minimal policy changes, including the following:

- Harmonize the four Regional Centres with the Provincial Urban Growth Centres (UGC's), recognizing that existing Regional Centre boundaries extend beyond the outer limits of the UGC. This will include policies that encourage and manage additional development on lands between and/or adjacent to the Regional Centre and UGC boundaries.
- Require that the Regional Centres/UGC's will be planned to achieve a minimum gross density target of 200 residents and employees per hectare by 2031.
- Confirm that the Regional Corridors are Intensification Corridors, and will contribute to the overall minimum intensification rate of 40 per cent within the Built Boundary.

4.2 CENTRES AND CORRIDORS STRUCTURE

There is an increasing primacy of Regional Centres and Corridors, given the policies of the Growth Plan, the introduction of rapid transit services to those areas, and increasing thresholds of compact mixed-use development. This evolving role creates a significant opportunity to further distinguish the Regional system from the local systems of Centres and Corridors across the Region. Each system, and its related structure, has a specific role within the Region's larger urban structure. In recognition of this specialization within the larger system, it is increasingly important to further support local municipal planning efforts to enhance the character and vitality of Local Centres (e.g. King City) and Local Corridors (e.g. Leslie Street) in a manner that best reflects local context. Although appropriate and context-sensitive infill is desirable across York Region, concentrating the highest densities and mix of uses in the Regional Centres and Regional Corridors is optimal, given their higher-order role.

Based on this and other feedback received, the following is the approach being recommended to refine the Centres and Corridors structure in York Region:

- Reinforce Regional Centres as having the highest densities and greatest mix of uses within York Region.
- Establish a renewed and comprehensive policy structure for the Regional Centres, and adjacent lands that may be included within the revised Regional Centre boundary, in the form of Secondary Plan requirements to ensure a densely organized, cohesive, and integrated community. This policy structure would require:

- A diverse mix of uses within the Centre, and accompanying densities and built form, creating vibrant precincts with enhanced live-work-shop opportunities tied to “transit first” priorities.
 - An integrated mobility plan and implementation strategy that includes innovative and progressive Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs.
 - A fine-grid road network with essential internal/external linkages to ensure the prosperity of the Centre, and that complements the “transit first” priority objective.
 - A community/human services plan that integrates essential services with development.
 - A detailed phasing/staging plan for development, which includes triggers based on infrastructure availability.
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- Maintain that the highest densities within the Regional Corridors are directed to locally-designated Key Development Areas (KDAs), based on criteria in the Regional Official Plan.
 - Designate future subway stations and Mobility Hubs (as designated in the Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan) as KDAs, with specific enhanced density and transit-oriented development (TOD) requirements.
 - Require the protection of key existing employment uses in the Regional Corridors, through the acknowledgement that planned employment uses within Centres and Corridors, including major office uses, are important components of the urban structure.
 - Direct local municipalities to plan for development and redevelopment in designated Local Centres and Local Corridors, in a manner consistent with Regional and local intensification area policies, and the overall Regional Centres and Corridors framework.
 - Designate new Regional Corridors, based on planned expansions to the Regional Rapid Transit Network (e.g. segment of Davis Drive in Newmarket).
 - Establish a strategic framework for the designation in the future of additional Regional Corridors, in consultation with the local municipalities.
 - Acknowledge the role and function a larger system including linkages with 400-Series Highways, rail lines, and other major transportation corridors and nodes, in supporting the Region’s Centres and Corridors structure.

4.3 DENSITY

The current density target of 2.5 FSI (Floor Space Index) for Regional Centres and Regional Corridors is appropriate as a broad policy objective, based on the consultations and research to-date. Based on the experiences of the local municipalities in the planning and development of the southern three Regional Centres, 2.5 FSI should be established in policy as a minimum density requirement. The research and analysis undertaken by Regional staff in this area has shown that 2.5 FSI will meet and exceed the Growth Plan target of 200 residents and employees per hectare. This approach to density supports local municipal planning to exceed the Provincial target over the long-term build-out of these emerging Centres, while it is recognized that the Centres are at different stages of development.

Based on the above, the following is recommended:

- Set a minimum density target of 2.5 FSI for each designated development site within the Regional Centres.
- Maintain 2.5 FSI as a long-term target for Regional Corridors, and require local municipalities to establish appropriate minimum density targets for Key Development Areas (KDAs) in the Regional Corridors in a manner in keeping with the Regional urban structure, and that reflects local conditions.
- Establish a framework, using a modified KDA approach, to introduce appropriate minimum densities (e.g. at or closer to 2.5 FSI) at future subway stations (graduated based on a 500 m/1 km setback) in the planned Spadina and Yonge Subway Extension corridors, in collaboration with the local municipalities and transit partners.

4.4 IMPLEMENTATION

There has been considerable discussion with local municipal planning staff on ways that the Regional Official Plan (ROP) could further support local planning implementation. The ROP currently outlines a suite of implementation tools that are “encouraged”, to assist in Centres and Corridors implementation. These include innovative financial tools, alternative parking standards and the use of *Section 37* of the *Planning Act* to secure community benefits in exchange for additional height and density.

Adding further action and detail to the existing suite of implementation tools in the ROP would bolster the Centres and Corridors vision and related infrastructure, including the implementation of the Viva rapid transit network and subway extensions to Highway 7. Further discussions with the local municipalities, and a dialogue with the development industry, are required to finalize the Region’s policy framework for Centres and Corridors implementation. The following will form part of that discussion:

- Requiring local municipalities to apply *Section 37* of the *Planning Act* to achieve community benefits – including those prescribed by the Region, as related to rapid transit infrastructure and affordable housing – in exchange for additional height and density in the Regional Centres and Regional Corridors.
- Requiring local municipal zoning by-laws to establish alternative parking standards that reflect and support increasing levels of transit service. This includes setting performance-based standards in the form of reduced minimum and also maximum standards. This approach recognizes the impact that parking supply and design has on the form and function of development.
- Establishing a framework to work towards a renewed Regional streetscaping strategy, with an emphasis on the southern “subway segment” of Yonge Street, to support the achievement of a transit-oriented and pedestrian-friendly public realm in the Regional Centres and Regional Corridors.
- Reinforcing the need to provide a range of affordable housing choices for residents in close proximity to community facilities and transit, including a suite of tools to promote affordability through the development process.
- Exploring partnership opportunities with the local municipalities and other agencies, to provide affordable housing and other Regional infrastructure in strategic areas. This includes, but is not limited to, the designation of Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Areas and related instruments (e.g. public financing, grants, etc.) under *Section 28* of the *Planning Act*.
- Optimizing coordination in the planning and delivery of essential infrastructure, including transit improvements and road network connections, among the Region, local municipalities, senior governments and related agencies.
- Creating comprehensive implementation guidelines for Regional Centres and Regional Corridors – including subway station areas – undertaken in collaboration with the local municipalities and the development industry. The guidelines will have a focus on parking management and design, transit-oriented development (TOD), urban design, and also include standards for:
 - Accessibility for pedestrian/cycling mobility.
 - Energy and water conservation (e.g. LEED® or equivalent), including district energy, waste heat utilization, and solar orientation/solar access protection.
 - Management of wind tunnel effects.

Next Steps

Regional staff will continue to consult on the criteria outlined in this report, which will form the basis of draft policies to renew the planning framework for Centres and Corridors in York Region. Contributing to this dialogue will be the circulation of this report, and background Discussion Papers (Density, Height and Density Incentives, Parking, Community Improvement) under a separate cover, to the local municipalities and development industry representatives for further discussion.

The next step in the process will be a workshop with participants, including the development industry, which will be hosted by the Regional Planning Department in May 2009. Ideas arising from the workshop will be incorporated into the draft policies, which will be tabled for public review and comment in June 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

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. It should be noted that achieving compact and transit-supportive development in Centres and Corridors supports significant infrastructure investments by the Region and senior government levels in these strategic areas. During the last review of the Region’s Development Charge by-law update in 2007 the Region also indicated that the impact of growth costs and development charges within Centres and Corridors would be reviewed in the next full development charge update. Refining the planning and implementation framework for Centres and Corridors will serve to optimize these investments, and create a higher level of certainty and clarity for private sector investors and businesses, as well.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

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 have been and will continue to be consulted through the policy enhancement process currently underway by Regional staff. The criteria that will form the basis for renewed policies for Centres and Corridors have been based, in large part, on the comments received from the local municipalities to-date.

7. CONCLUSION

The Region's Centres and Corridors structure is sound, and has been an effective growth management tool since first established in the Regional Official Plan in 1994. The Centres and Corridors are the foundation for, and focus of, the Regional urban structure, based on a city-building model. This approach directs growth away from natural and agricultural lands, creates complete and sustainable communities, and supports strategic infrastructure investments for the future, including rapid transit and renewable energy.

Refinements to the Region's urban structure and approach to city-building, as proposed in this report, will ensure that Regional policies for Centres and Corridors remain current, effective and innovative. This is especially important, to support the extensions of two subway lines into York Region and the strides in city-building made by the local municipalities.

This report sets out and recommends the endorsement of criteria on which to base renewed Regional Official Plan policies for Centres and Corridors in York Region. These criteria are consistent with the Guiding Principles adopted by Regional Council in December 2008, and incorporate feedback received to-date from Regional Departments and local municipal planning staff.

Draft policies will be tabled for public review and comment in June 2009, following further consultation with participants including the development industry, which will include a workshop to be hosted by the Regional Planning Department in May 2009.

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.

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

DRAFT CRITERIA FOR ENHANCED CENTRES AND CORRIDORS POLICIES – REGIONAL OFFICIAL PLAN UPDATE

Policy Area	Policy Criteria	Enhanced Policy	New Policy
Growth Plan Conformity	Harmonize the four Regional Centres with the Provincial Urban Growth Centres (UGCs), recognizing that existing Regional Centre boundaries extend beyond the outer limits of the UGC boundaries		✓
	Add a density target of 200 residents and employees per hectare for each of the four Regional Centres/UGCs		✓
	Confirm that the Regional Corridors are Intensification Corridors, and will contribute to a minimum intensification rate of 40 per cent		✓
Centres and Corridors Structure	Reinforce Regional Centres has having the highest densities and greatest mix of uses, including high-density major office employment, within York Region	✓	
	- Establish a renewed and comprehensive policy structure for Regional Centres, in the form of Secondary Plan requirements, to ensure a densely organized, cohesive, and integrated community. Required as part of this structure would be: - a diverse mix of uses, and related densities and built form, to create vibrant precincts with live-shop-work opportunities tied to “transit-first” priorities - an integrated mobility plan and implementation strategy, including Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs - a fine-grid road network with essential internal/external linkages, to ensure the prosperity of the Centre, and to support the “transit first” objective - a community/human services plan that integrates essential services with development - a detailed phasing/staging plan for development, which includes triggers based on infrastructure availability	✓	
	Maintain that the highest densities in the Regional Corridors are directed to locally-designated Key Development Areas (KDAs), which will include future subway stations and Mobility Hubs as designated in the Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan	✓	
	Require the protection of existing key employment areas in the Regional Corridors, recognizing that planned employment uses, including major office, are important components of the urban structure		✓
	Direct local municipalities to plan for development and redevelopment in designated Local Centres and Local Corridors in a manner consistent with Regional and local intensification area policies, and the overall Regional Centres and Corridors framework		✓

Policy Area	Policy Criteria	Enhanced Policy	New Policy
Centres and Corridors Structure (cont.)	Designate new Regional Corridors, based on planned expansions to the Regional Rapid Transit Network (e.g. segment of Davis Drive in Newmarket)	✓	
	Establish a strategic framework for the designation in the future of additional Regional Corridors, in consultation with with local municipalities		✓
	Acknowledge the role and function of a larger system including linkages with 400-Series Highways, rail lines, and other transportation corridors and nodes, in supporting the Regional Centres and Corridors structure		✓
Density	Set a minimum density target of 2.5 FSI for each designated development site within the Regional Centres	✓	
	Require local municipalities to establish appropriate minimum density targets for KDAs in a manner in keeping with the Regional urban structure, and that reflects local conditions	✓	
	Establish a framework to introduce appropriate minimum densities (e.g. at or closer to 2.5 FSI) at future subway stations (graduated based on a 500 m/1km setback) in the planned Spadina and Yonge Subway Extension corridors, in collaboration with the local municipalities		✓
Implementation	Require local municipalities to apply Section 37 of the Planning Act to achieve community benefits – including those prescribed by the Region, as related to rapid transit infrastructure and affordable housing – in exchange for additional height and density in the Regional Centres and Regional Corridors		✓
	Require local municipal zoning by-laws to establish alternative parking standards that reflect increasing levels of transit service. This includes setting performance-based standards in the form of reduced minimum and also maximum standards		✓
	Establish a framework to work towards a renewed Regional streetscaping strategy, with an emphasis on the southern “subway segment” of Yonge Street, to support the achievement of a transit-oriented and pedestrian-friendly public realm in the Regional Centres and Regional Corridors		✓
	Explore partnership opportunities with the local municipalities and other agencies, to provide affordable housing and other Regional infrastructure in strategic areas. This includes, but is not limited to, the designation of Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Areas and related instruments (e.g. public financing, grants, etc.) under Section 28 of the Planning Act	✓	
	Provide for a range of affordable housing choices for residents in close proximity to community facilities and transit, including tools to promote affordability through the development process		✓

Policy Area	Policy Criteria	Enhanced Policy	New Policy
Implementation (cont.)	Optimize coordination among the Region, local municipalities, senior governments and related agencies in the planning and delivery of essential infrastructure		✓
	- Create comprehensive implementation guidelines for Regional Centres and Regional Corridors – including subway station areas – in collaboration with the local municipalities and development industry. The Guidelines will have a focus on parking management and design, transit-oriented development (TOD), urban design, and also include standards for: - Accessibility for pedestrian/cycling mobility - Energy and water conservation (e.g. LEED[®] or equivalent), including district energy, waste heat utilization, etc. - Management of wind tunnel effects		✓