

3

DRAFT ROPA 43 –REGIONAL CENTRES AND CORRIDORS STATUS AND NEXT STEPS

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, April 14, 2004, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services and also the following additional recommendations:

5. Consideration be given to holding the Statutory Public Meeting at the York Region South Services Centre located at 50 High Tech Road, Richmond Hill; and
6. The local municipalities be requested to assist in notifying the public of this Statutory Public Meeting.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received.
2. A Statutory Public Meeting under the *Planning Act* be scheduled for the evening of June 24, 2004.
3. The latest version of Draft ROPA 43, attached as *Appendix 1* to this report, serve as the basis for the public meeting.
4. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the area municipalities for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to:

- Present the latest draft of Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA) 43 – Regional Centres and Corridors, attached as *Appendix I*.
- Provide an update on the related consultation and planning process.
- Schedule a statutory public meeting under Section 17(15) of the *Planning Act* to receive further public input to ROPA 43 prior to adoption by Regional Council.

3. BACKGROUND

Focusing growth and infrastructure investment in centres and corridors has been a key goal of the Regional Official Plan since its adoption in 1994. This approach represents good planning and is central to the Region's Growth Management Strategy. A focus on centres and corridors also forms the basis for growth management across the entire GTA

region, as endorsed by Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario – GTA Caucus in their December 2003 report, “Centres & Corridors – Growth Management in the GTA.”

Regional initiatives including Vision 2026, Transportation Master Plan, York Region Rapid Transit Plan, and “Making it Happen! York Region Centres + Corridors Strategy” have reaffirmed the need for and benefits of more compact and concentrated development patterns as a means of supporting infrastructure investment and improving the overall quality of our communities. The changes proposed under ROPA 43 aim to build on the success achieved to date.

Regional staff in a report dated January 7, 2004 presented the first consolidated draft of ROPA 43 and an update of the planning process up to that time. Since that time, there has been:

- An urban design charrette attended by 40 municipal planning staff, professional design consultants, and development representatives.
- Discussions with area municipal staff.
- Seven presentations to local area municipal Councils (see *Appendix 2*).
- Six public consultation sessions, attended by 170 people.

The feedback generated from these consultation opportunities has been incorporated into the latest draft of ROPA 43. The specifics of this feedback, and how it led to changes in the ROPA are discussed in Section 4 of this report.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The idea of concentrating development in a network of centres and corridors to focus growth and infrastructure investment has been a key objective of the Regional Official Plan for the past ten years. Enhancements proposed under ROPA 43 support this goal and therefore represent good planning. The proposed policy framework includes six key enhancements that aim to:

- Establish and review **secondary plans** for Regional Centres and Regional Corridors (Section 5.3.9a).
- Create and review **urban design guidelines** (Section 5.3.9b).
- Coordinate development and **infrastructure investment** (Section 5.3.9c).
- Encourage the use of a wide range of **implementation tools** and strategies (Section 5.3.12).
- Focus higher density and mixed-use development in **Key Development Areas** (KDAs) (Section 5.5.4).
- Establish a long-term **density target of 2.5 FSI** (Floor Space Index, being the total floor area divided by the total lot area) for Regional Centres and locally-identified KDAs in the Regional Corridors (Section 5.5.7).

4.1 Feedback

Excellent feedback from the local municipalities, related agencies and the public has been received. This adds value to the planning process and is instrumental in ensuring better policy. The general consensus so far is that ROPA 43 represents good planning and will help to enhance the Region's urban structure. Common themes that were heard include:

- The Region's long-term vision is appropriate and necessary.
- More clarity is needed with regard to the intent of the proposed policies and how they should be interpreted.
- Policies should allow for the protection and enhancement of historical areas.
- Established residential areas should be identified as stable.
- Higher-density development should be focused in specific locations of the Regional Corridor, generally away from established low density neighbourhoods.
- More intensive development should be phased in a manner that coincides with transit improvements to minimize traffic impacts on existing roads.
- 2.5 FSI should be treated as a long-term target, and applied to key development areas and Regional Centres.
- New higher-density development should be well-designed, and positively impact surrounding property values.
- Local planning decisions to implement ROPA 43 (i.e. define Key Development Areas) should be supported by the Region.
- The public should be involved in determining how and where Key Development Areas are defined.

Minutes from the six public consultation sessions are attached as *Appendix 3* to this report.

It should be noted that the public also provided significant feedback on the consultation process itself. Specifically, Regional staff were told that:

- The statutory public meeting should be held in the evening to allow more people to attend.
- The Region should consult on a regular basis (e.g. host public forums) with the public to discuss a wider range of planning matters.
- Regular "planning bulletins" should be posted on the Region's website.
- Mailings, newspaper notices and internet postings need to be higher-profile, and more frequent to notify the public of future consultation sessions.

4.2 Latest Draft - Modification

The latest version of ROPA 43 was circulated to the area municipalities for review and comments on March 18, 2004. It aims to address and incorporate the comments received to date from the area municipalities and the public, as outlined in section 4.1 of this report. These comments affirmed the general intent of the draft policies and improved the policy by clarifying the language and the organization of those policies to better convey the message.

Language in the draft was also changed to clarify:

- 2.5 Floor Space Index (FSI) is a “long term target” applicable to Key Development Areas and Regional Centres (Section 5.5.7).
- The importance of Regional Centres and Regional Corridors in the context of the Region’s entire urban structure (introductory text of Chapter 5.2).
- The role of local centres and local corridors (introductory text of Chapter 5.4).
- The importance of protecting and enhancing historical areas (introductory text of Chapter 5.5).
- The criteria for establishing Key Development Areas (Section 5.5.7).
- That identifying Key Development Areas will be a local exercise through the Secondary Plan process, in consultation with the Region (introductory text of Chapter 5.5).
- The scope and intent of urban design criteria in local secondary plans (Section 5.3.9b).

4.3 Next steps

The current draft is the summary of extensive consultation input. While more discussion is invited and planned, the draft ROPA 43 is mature enough to have the Regional Planning & Economic Development Committee formally hear from the public at a statutory public meeting. A final recommendation on ROPA 43 will not be made at that time. This meeting is intended to provide a further opportunity for the area municipalities and the public to shape the proposed policies. The key dates in the ROPA 43 approval process are:

- **June 24, 2004:** Statutory Public Meeting
- **September 2004:** final comment deadline for local municipalities and agencies
- **November 2004 (tentative):** final ROPA approval from Regional Council

Comments can still be provided to Regional staff through September 2004. ROPA 43 will continue to be changed to reflect the comments received, up until the time that a final draft is considered by Regional Council for approval. Based on the current process, a final draft could be ready for consideration by Regional Council in November 2004.

4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026

The changes proposed under ROPA 43, and the Centres + Corridors Strategy as a whole, contribute to all eight goal areas of Vision 2026. In particular, enhancing growth in centres and corridors advances “Quality Communities for a Diverse Population,” “Managed and Balanced Growth,” and “Infrastructure for a Growing Region.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Region’s Centres and Corridors Strategy identified several potential financial initiatives that could be undertaken to promote development in Regional Centres and Corridors. These initiatives included the review of the current development charge structure. The firm of Hemson Consulting Ltd. Has been retained to undertake a review of financial strategies and options for encouraging intensification in Regional centres and corridors.

Financial initiatives in conjunction with the other action areas of the Region's Centres + Corridors Strategy including the proposed policies of draft ROPA 43 will work towards achieving a more compact, mixed-use urban structure. This, in turn, will optimize Regional investments in existing and planned infrastructure. This includes higher-order transit services, water supply and wastewater treatment capacity, and human services.

Enhancing development in areas served by higher-order transit also creates further potential to attract prestige employers to the Region. This will generate net benefits including increased assessment revenue and job creation.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipal planning staff are taking an active role in shaping the draft policies of ROPA 43. The latest version of the draft policies reflect, in large part, the comments received from the local municipalities. A key objective of the ROPA 43 process has been to provide clear and supportive policy direction to bolster city-building efforts at the local level, which occurs through local Official Plans, zoning by-laws, site plan control, and programs.

7. CONCLUSION

The idea of concentrating development in a network of centres and corridors to focus growth and infrastructure investment has been a key objective of the Regional Official Plan for the past ten years. Although this is a long-term vision, immediate action is required to bring about sustainable development patterns. This concept is also the basis for the growth management model for the entire GTA region. Enhancements proposed under ROPA 43 support this objective and therefore represent good planning.

The current ROPA 43 draft reflects the latest comments received from local municipal staff, councils and the public. Changes made to the draft policies attempt to clarify the scope and purpose of the ROPA in a way that strengthens the city-building efforts of local municipalities. Based on these changes, it is recommended that a statutory Public Meeting under the *Planning Act* be held on the evening of June 24, 2004.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(A copy of the attachments referred to in the foregoing is included with this report and is also on file in the Office of the Regional Clerk.)