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ENHANCING YORK REGION'S URBAN STRUCTURE: A GUIDE TO DEVELOPING AREA MUNICIPAL INTENSIFICATION STRATEGIES

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the following:

- 1. The presentation by Dawn Seetaram, Planner, Long Range and Strategic Planning, be received; and**
- 2. The recommendations contained in the following report dated April 9, 2008, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, be adopted:**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council endorse *Enhancing York Region's Urban Structure: A Guide to Developing Area Municipal Intensification Strategies (Attachment 1)* for further refinement and consultation with the local municipalities.
2. The Regional Clerk circulate a copy of this staff report, along with *Attachment 1* to the local municipalities for review and comment.
3. The Regional Clerk forward a copy of this staff report, along with *Attachment 1*, to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this staff report is to summarize the components of *Enhancing York Region's Urban Structure: A Guide to Developing Municipal Intensification Strategies*. This "Intensification Guide" provides a high level framework for collaboration with the area municipalities to guide the completion of their local intensification strategies.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 YORK REGION CONTINUES TO ENHANCE THE PLANNED URBAN STRUCTURE

The Regional Official Plan (ROP) outlines a regional structure that includes a system of regional centres and corridors that act as a focus for residential, office and commercial development. Changes to the urban structure, a "city-building" process, and attaining the

type and intensity of built form and high density residential and employment development requires a coordinated strategy. In 2004, Council adopted the Region's *Centres and Corridors Strategy* that aims to strengthen the relationship between a compact urban structure in the centres and corridors, and transportation and transit.

Further initiatives that the Region has undertaken to promote intensification served by rapid transit include:

- *Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA 43)*, July 2005, that strengthens policies in the ROP regarding development in the Centres and Corridors.
- *Transit-Oriented Development Guidelines*, adopted by Regional Council in September 2006.
- *Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA 60)*, approved in February 2008, enables the Region to adopt Regional Community Improvement Plans and to participate in local community improvement plans.
- In March 2008, Regional Council adopted a plan to implement a policy to provide a 20-35% increase in servicing allocation for development proposals that meet specific criteria that include, among others:
 - Minimum LEEDTM silver standard (Gold standard developments are eligible for a 40% increase in servicing allocation)
 - Location within a Regional Centre or Corridor, or Local Centre
 - Meet the Regional Transit Oriented Development Guidelines

The completion of the area municipal intensification strategies using a consistent methodology will reinforce the linkage between higher density, mixed-use development and centres and corridors served by rapid transit. This strategy, based on the Intensification Guide, will further enhance the planned urban structure and advance the Region's city building process.

3.2 ONTARIO PLACES TO GROW PLAN SETS 40% INTENSIFICATION TARGET

In June 2006, the Ontario Government released the final Growth Plan, "*Places to Grow*" for the Greater Golden Horseshoe area which stipulates:

- "By the year 2015 and for each year thereafter, a minimum of 40 percent of all residential development occurring annually within each upper- and single-tier municipality will be within the built-up area."
- A density target of 200 people and jobs per hectare by 2031 or earlier applies to urban growth centres, specifically in the Regional Centres of Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill and Vaughan.

In the Fall of 2007, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal (MPIR) released the final proposed built boundary for the Greater Golden Horseshoe which was presented to Council in January 2008. MPIR intends to finalize the built boundary in the Spring of 2008.

3.3 BENEFITS OF INTENSIFICATION

Intensifying the Region's built-up areas results in a number of environmental, economic and community benefits

- Communities can be designed so that cost-effective and efficient transit, infrastructure, and human services systems can be operated and easily accessed. Well-designed streets and building locations give people the choice of walking and bicycling as opposed to reliance on automobiles.
- Higher density, mixed-use and transit-supportive development reduces greenhouse gas emissions and increases long-term resiliency to the impacts of climate change by utilizing land and infrastructure resources efficiently and reducing automobile dependency.
- Higher densities result in a greater proportion of row and apartment style housing. These types of housing structures provide a broader range of housing choices and affordability.
- A sense of place and vibrancy takes shape in the community as street activity increases, people have more personal contact with each other, and social cohesion is strengthened.
- Intensification can create financial efficiencies in service delivery. Cost-savings in transportation capital costs in Centres and Corridors could potentially translate into modified development charges.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Since 2001, the Region has embarked on a “city-building” initiative that promotes the development of a planned urban structure and strengthens the relationship between land use, transportation and transit. The crux of the Intensification Guide and the area municipal intensification strategies is not only to demonstrate conformity with *Places to Grow* targets, but also to construct a long-term framework to create a new generation of sustainable and quality compact development focusing on the Centres and Corridors. In this way, the Region and the area municipalities can approach long-term intensification within the planned urban structure using a consistent methodology and meet the Provincial *Places to Grow* targets.

Overall, considering the proportion of lands designated as Greenbelt, Oak Ridges Moraine and existing urban areas, approximately 7% of the Region's land base remains for future intensification and “whitebelt” development. Of this remaining 7%, an estimated 1% will likely be available for intensification. It is this proportion of the Region's land base that provides the opportunity to showcase high quality, sustainable and transit-supportive intensification in key strategic areas within the planned urban structure.

The Intensification Strategy Guide has five objectives:

1. Demonstrate how the Region's area municipal intensification assignment will be met in terms of unit potential, density and design. Identify the locations and amount of intensification that will be planned for within the area municipality's built boundary by 2031. Also, identify where intensification will not be permitted.
2. Identify the key attributes in creating high quality, sustainable compact communities.
3. Promote communication to engage and raise awareness of intensification among stakeholders and the public.
4. Identify next steps to implement area municipal intensification strategies including reviewing current regional and municipal policy and conducting further detailed analysis on the identified intensification areas.
5. Develop a monitoring system that tracks progress towards the intensification vision, key attributes and unit targets.

The Intensification Guide (*Attachment 1*) is divided into two sections. The first section (*Section 2 in Attachment 1*) outlines the Regional Intensification Framework which acts as the basis for the Area Municipal Intensification Strategies. The second section (*Section 3 in Attachment 1*) contains the actual guide to developing the local strategies. This staff report section briefly summarizes the structure and content of the Intensification Guide.

4.1 REGIONAL INTENSIFICATION FRAMEWORK

Regional Intensification Principles Highlight the Components of Sustainable Compact Communities

The scope of the area municipal intensification strategies extends beyond the mechanics of measuring unit capacity to determining the components of sustainable and vibrant compact communities. In this sense, employing higher densities is only one of the key tools in developing the intensification strategies. This concept of sustainable high quality communities is enshrined in the following Regional Intensification Principles:

1. Connect the Regional Centres and Regional Corridors with rapid transit systems to stimulate compact and efficient growth.
2. Connect transit, land-uses and pedestrians by following the Region's Transit-Oriented Development Guidelines.
3. Ensure that buildings and streets are well-proportioned to one another to ensure walkability and efficient investment in infrastructure and land.
4. Provide access to the community through open space, trails, parks and other public spaces that are carefully placed, inter-connected and proportioned.
5. Improve the live/work relationship through a mix of intensified land uses.
6. Ensure a range of housing options and affordability.
7. Create a sense of place through cultural amenities, and architectural and design standards.

8. Connect quality and accessible human services to rapid transit and alternative modes of transportation.
9. Protect and restore natural heritage and trails within the built-up area.
10. Integrate sustainable design and construction of buildings such as community energy systems and sustainable waste management.

Area Municipal Intensification Assignments Require Approximately 85,000 New Units Region-Wide to Meet the Places to Grow 40% Intensification Target

The Region completed a preliminary intensification forecast which indicates that approximately 85,000 new units within the Provincial final proposed built boundary would be required to meet the 40% intensification target as specified in the *Places to Grow Plan*. Each area municipality will have a role to play in meeting the region-wide 40% target. Table 1 shows the Region's preliminary assigned intensification target for each area municipality. These assignments will be revised pending the release of the provincial final built boundary sometime in the Spring 2008. The local intensification strategies will demonstrate how each area municipality will achieve their assignment.

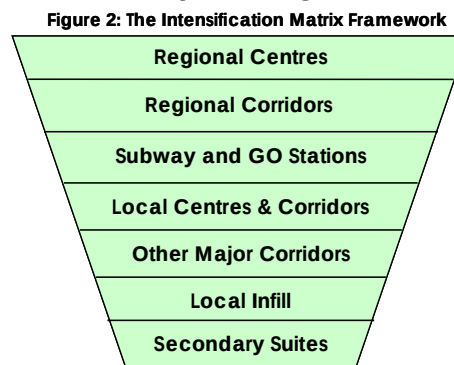
Table 1
York Region Preliminary Intensification Assignments Required to Reach 40% Intensification (2006-2031)

	Intensification Units
Aurora	2,800
East Gwillimbury	1,030
Georgina	2,690
King	920
Markham	29,790
Newmarket	4,360
Richmond Hill	11,530
Vaughan	30,210
Whitchurch-Stouffville	2,010
York Region	85,340

Source: York Region Planning Department, April 2007

Regional Intensification Matrix Framework Identifies Key Strategic Areas to Best Locate Intensification.

The Intensification Matrix Framework contained in *Attachment 1* identifies key strategic areas where intensification can be best accommodated and describes each matrix level.



The triangular shape of the Matrix Framework signifies that densities and built form types will vary. For example, higher densities and building heights will occur in the Regional Centres and Corridors relative to the other matrix levels. Locating higher densities in these key strategic areas allows for financial efficiencies in the delivery of hard and soft services such as transit, water and wastewater, and human services. In this way, the market for transit ridership can be maximized and capital costs can be better recovered on a long-term basis.

In March 2007, Regional staff presented a preliminary draft intensification matrix to the area municipalities that contained a listing of potential intensification areas and estimated unit yields. This draft matrix will be used as a tool to complete the area municipal strategies (*Appendix 2 in Attachment 1*).

4.2 YORK REGION GUIDE TO AREA MUNICIPAL INTENSIFICATION STRATEGIES

The Intensification Strategy has the added, and perhaps, more important benefit of clarifying how and where each area municipality will intensify. The public often views intensification with some wariness, if not alarm. This will help clarify where intensification could occur and where it is not permitted. This will also clarify how intensification will fit with surrounding areas, the appropriate scale, and high quality design. The area municipal intensification strategies include five components:

Step 1: Urban Capacity Study

- To identify and map intensification areas within area municipalities and calculate their unit potential.

Step 2: Building the Next Generation of Compact Communities

- To highlight the key attributes of high quality, sustainable and compact communities.

Step 3: Engagement and Awareness

- To engage and communicate with Regional and Local Councils, key stakeholders and the public about where intensification will occur and where it will not occur.

Step 4: Implementing Intensification Strategies

- To illustrate the next key steps in completing the local intensification strategies.

Step 5: Monitoring Intensification

- To develop an intensification monitoring system in collaboration with the area municipalities to measure, track and verify achievements, with a separate assessment for the Regional Centres and Urban Growth Centres.

Relationship to Vision 2026

The Intensification Guide supports the Vision 2026 goal areas of “Housing Choices for our Residents”, “Managed and Balanced Growth” and “Infrastructure for a Growing Region”. In addition, the Intensification Guide also supports the “Healthy Communities” theme area of the *York Region Sustainability Strategy: Towards a Sustainable Region*.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The completion of the Intensification Guide and on-going area municipal collaboration is being conducted within the existing Planning and Development Services Department staff complement and with approved budget allocation.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Area municipal collaboration is the foundation for meeting the intensification targets as specified in the *Places to Grow Plan*. The draft intensification strategy will be refined through ongoing consultation with the area municipalities with the goal of creating a consistent methodology. The Municipal Technical Advisory Committee, established to provide input into the Region’s Growth Management program, will act as the conduit for refining the Intensification Guide, completing the area municipal intensification strategies, and subsequently, implementing and monitoring intensification.

7. CONCLUSION

The purpose of *Enhancing York Region’s Urban Structure: A Guide to Developing Area Municipal Intensification Strategies* is not only to demonstrate achievement of the *Places to Grow* 40% intensification target, but also to provide a long-term framework for a new generation of sustainable compact development focused in the centres and corridors. In this way, the Region and the area municipalities can approach long-term intensification within the planned urban structure of centers and corridors in a consistent manner.

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The first section on the Intensification Guide is the Regional framework which includes principles of intensification. A matrix framework identifies the key strategic areas that are best suited to accommodate intensification. It is important to direct intensification to

key strategic areas served by the Region's public and rapid transit network to ensure financial efficiencies in infrastructure investments. By locating the highest densities in these areas, the market for transit ridership can be maximized and capital costs can be better recovered on a long-term basis.

The Guide to Area Municipal Intensification Strategies includes five components including an urban capacity study, attributes of sustainable compact communities, engagement and awareness, next steps to implementing the area municipal strategies and developing a Regional intensification monitoring system.

The provincial 40% intensification target not only represents a specific number of units that must be constructed by 2031, but also a new approach to planning and designing the Region's built-up areas. This approach involves identifying areas best suited to accommodate intensification, strategically arranging buildings and streets in a proportioned fashion and emphasizing the connection between people, uses and transit. In this way, the Region and its area municipalities can work together to meet and, hopefully, exceed the lifestyle choices and expectations of our residents and workers.

For more information on this report, please contact Dawn Seetaram, Planner at Ext. 1570, or John Waller , Director of Long Range and Strategic Planning, at Ext. 1525.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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