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**REGIONAL OFFICIAL PLAN AMENDMENT NO. 50
TOWN OF RICHMOND HILL –
AMENDMENT TO MAP 6 FROM AGRICULTURAL TO RURAL**

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, April 6, 2006, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services be authorized to issue Notice of adoption of Regional Official Plan Amendment No. 50, as appended to this staff report as Council *Attachment 1*.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide a recommendation with respect to the request by the Town of Richmond Hill to redesignate the lands located 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).

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. The proposed amendment is supported by the Province of Ontario 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.

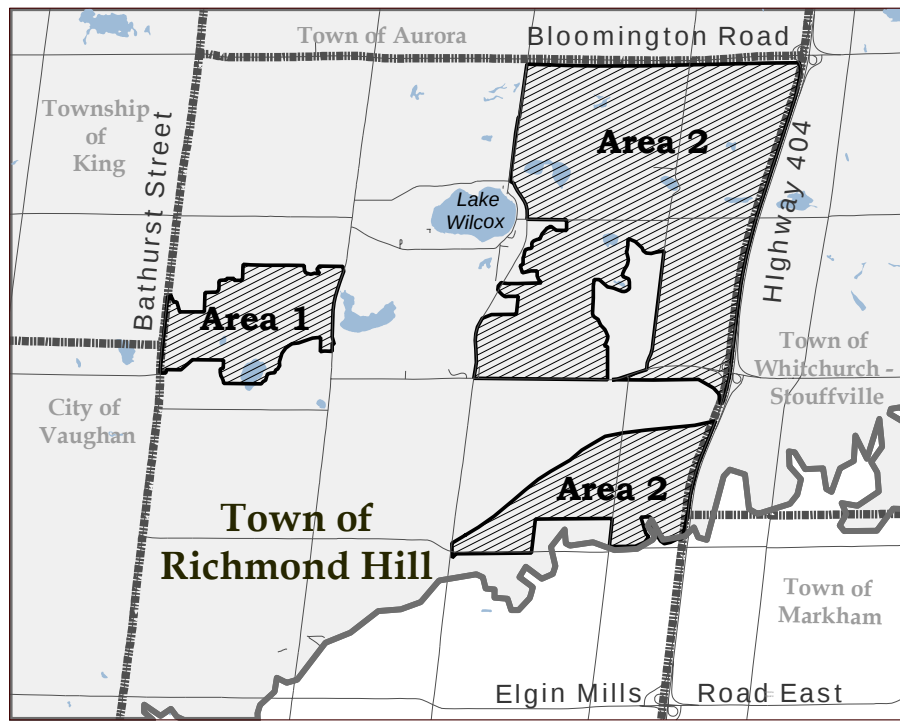


Figure 1: Location Map

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”. These ORMCP designations are not affected or changed in any way by the approval of ROPA #50. The associated policies continue to apply in addition to the Regional policies.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

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.

4.1 Statutory Public Meeting

Three deputations were made at the statutory public meeting held before York Region’s Planning and Economic Development Committee on March 1, 2006. Regional staff subsequently met with two of the deputants whose issues included:

- The loss of development rights and potential income as a result of policies and designations imposed by the ORMC Plan in 2002.
- Proliferation of estate residential development within the proposed “Rural Policy Area”.
- Only allowing uses permitted by the ORMC Plan within the “Core” and “Linkage” areas on lands that are subject to the West Gormley OMB hearing.

Regional staff advised the deputants that the proposed Regional Official Plan amendment does not permit any additional uses than what is permitted by the ORMC Plan, and the Region does not have the authority to change the ORMC Plan to allow further development rights.

The third deputant, farms a significant amount of land in the area, and informed the Committee that there are ongoing issues with respect to trespassing, conflicts with urban or non farm uses and profitability of farming in general.

4.2 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.”*

Need for the Proposed Change

The lands within Area 1 and Area 2 are fragmented in ownership, contain many parcels less than 100 acres in size, and there are numerous existing non-farm uses. 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.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food, on August 12, 1994 and on July 24, 2002, confirmed that there are no provincially significant agricultural areas within the Towns of Richmond Hill, Aurora and Newmarket. A “Rural Policy Area” designation reflects more accurately the existing uses on the subject lands.

Effect of the Proposed Change on the Need for Regional Services and Facilities

The proposed change in land use designations will not have an effect on the need for Regional services and facilities.

The Implications on Other Parts of the Plan

The mechanics of the proposed amendment is to change from one designation to another without modifying associated policies. Therefore, there are no implications on other parts of the Official Plan.

The Impacts

The goals, objectives and permitted uses of the ORMCP continue to dictate any future permitted uses. The opportunity to locate and develop major recreational facilities and passive recreational uses are in accordance with the policies of the ORMCP. The proposed amendment will have a minimal impact on Regional policies and programs.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

Action areas of Goal 1 of Vision 2026 include “*Ensuring the development of a range of activities, recreational opportunities and exciting community places*”. ROPA 50 provides opportunities for additional passive and major recreational uses in close proximity to the “Urban Area”, consistent with action areas of Goal 1.

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

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. Justification for the proposed amendment is:

- The Province has confirmed on two occasions, there are no Provincially significant agricultural areas within the Town of Richmond Hill.
- The "Rural Policy Area" designation is more reflective of 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 that are supported by the Region of York and the Town of Richmond Hill will be required to fully satisfy the rigorous environmental policies of the ORMCP.

The Regional Legal Department should prepare the related by-law to adopt ROPA 50.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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