

9

URBAN BOULEVARD GRASS CUTTING SERVICE LEVELS

The Transportation Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated April 14, 2011 from the Commissioner of Transportation Services.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council endorse a revised standard for urban roadside grass cutting and related debris pick-up by increasing the number of urban boulevard grass cuts from 11 to 14 cuts per season commencing in 2011, at a cost of \$260,000 which will be covered through year end surplus funds in the 2011 Transportation Services budget.
2. Staff be directed to include an increase of \$260,000 in the upcoming 2012 draft budget submission to reflect this revised level of service as the new base.
3. Staff be authorized to continue the current practices of contracting roadside maintenance or partnering with participating local municipalities to maintain boulevards in urban areas.
4. Staff be authorized to continue to review potential options for shrub and flower bed maintenance with the local area municipal staff, and report findings back to council in 2012.

2. PURPOSE

This report responds to Regional Council's direction to develop business case(s) for enhanced grass boulevard maintenance options for consideration.

3. BACKGROUND

Maintained boulevards help keep our communities looking neat and tidy

Boulevard grass cutting and related debris pick up helps keep our communities looking clean and cared for. Routine, scheduled grass cutting and related debris pick up helps keep grass at an acceptable length which offers a neat and tidy appearance. A map of the current urban Regional Boulevards where grass cutting is carried out as seen in *Attachments 1-9*.

Grass cutting helps maintain noxious weeds in early spring

Since the use of spraying herbicides to maintain weed growth and multiplication has been restricted, a recognized best practice is to cut grass boulevard areas more frequently in the early spring to reduce the weed plants from growing and spreading seeds.

Grass cutting mulches fallen leaves in the autumn

During the autumn periods when the leaves begin to fall, additional grass cutting can help mulch the leaves to return the nutrients back to the boulevards and help keep the boulevard neat and tidy.

The volume of debris increases as rural roads become urbanized and as adjacent development occurs

Increased urbanization along Region roads has resulted in an associated increase in debris on Regional boulevards. This increase in debris along Regional grass boulevards can be attributed to increased use of the corridors by both vehicles and pedestrians.

During 2010 and early 2011 staff met with local municipal staff to review and analyze the current boulevard grass cutting service level

A number of issues were discussed with local municipal staff:

- The adequacy of the current Regional level of service of 11 cuts per season as approved by Regional Council in 2000.
- Varying boulevard grass cutting standards in each local municipality funded by the local municipalities resulting in inconsistent levels of service.
- Increasing quantity of urbanized Regional road boulevards.
- Inconsistent levels of service for shrub and flower bed maintenance on Regional boulevards carried out by the local municipalities.

Regional boulevards are maintained by Transportation Services staff, contractors, and or local municipalities, at Regional cost up to 11 times per season

In October 2000, Regional Council approved the current standard of up to 11 cuts per season and boulevard debris pick up prior to cutting. Table 1 summarizes the Regional costs over the period of 2008-2011.

Table 1
Urban Boulevard Roadside Maintenance Costs for Urban Areas
along Regional Roads 2008 - 2011

Municipality	2008 (\$)	2009 (\$)	2010 (\$)	2011 Estimated (\$)
Aurora	\$63,490	\$70,277	\$68,972	\$69,000
East Gwillimbury	8,245	10,009	12,064	12,000
Georgina	5,933	7,251	8,617	12,000
King	10,113	6,039	15,232	15,500
Markham	226,955	214,592	232,405	298,000
Newmarket	61,015	59,340	61,869	62,000
Richmond Hill	178,291	191,009	193,829	194,000
Vaughan	499,486	498,797	223,093	224,000
Whitchurch-Stouffville	5,707	4,523	5,274	5,300
Total Cost	\$1,059,235	\$1,061,837	\$821,355	\$945,800

Costs varied slightly each year as grass cutting areas were maintained by Regional staff, local municipal staff or tendered contracted services based on 11 cuts per season. The volume of spring debris pick up also varied from year to year. During past years there have been some drought periods where urban grass boulevard cut cycles were reduced and increased savings were experienced.

In addition to the Region's standard of 11 cuts per season, some municipalities have decided to cut boulevards more frequently at their cost

Each local municipality within York Region has slightly different level of service for grass boulevard maintenance.

Early in 2011 Transportation Staff met individual staff from each of the nine local municipalities to discuss boulevard grass cutting service levels and related debris pick up. Regional staff are currently part of the Town of Markham's boulevard maintenance task force.

Table 2 shows the varying service levels which were identified during these meetings, with information from neighbouring municipalities also shown for comparison.

Table 2
Municipal Urban Boulevard Grass cutting Level of Service
In York Region and Neighbouring Municipalities

Municipality	Level of Service
York Region	11 cuts per season
Aurora	15-20 cuts per season 10-14 day cut cycle
East Gwillimbury	14 day cut cycle as resources permit
Georgina	Cut standard grass height 3" - 4.5" max average of 15 cuts per season
King	14 day cut cycle as resources permit
Markham	13-14 cuts per season
Newmarket	14 day cut cycle
Richmond Hill	7 -10 day cut cycle or 17 cuts per season
Vaughan	Grass height not to exceed 10cm (4") and grass to be cut between 5-6cm. The number of cut will vary. The maximum has been 15 cuts (not average).
Whitchurch-Stouffville	22 cuts per season
Peel Region	8 cuts per season
Durham Region	12 cuts per season
City of Toronto	6 cuts per season

The urbanization of Regional road boulevards results in the need for higher levels of service with corresponding increase in costs

As growth continues in the Region, Regional roads transition from rural cross-sections into urban cross-sections. Between 2008 and 2011 the length of urban boulevards on Regional roads has increased by approximately 60 kilometres. These urban boulevards require increases in frequency of boulevard grass cutting, and much more intense debris pick-up prior to or in combination with the cuts. This results in estimated non-winter maintenance costs increasing from \$19/kilometre of rural boulevard to \$170/kilometre of urban boulevard.

Shrub and flower beds on Regional Roads boulevards are maintained by the local municipalities

Shrub and bed areas installed along Regional roads are currently maintained by the local municipalities as per the subdivision agreements.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

A number of service level options for Regional boulevards have been discussed with staff of the local municipalities

The following options have been considered by staff as a means of improving the urban boulevard grass cutting.

The first option is to maintain the current Regional Council approved practice

Under this option, the existing boulevard grass cutting level of service of 11 cuts would continue to be provided or funded by the Region. If municipalities continue to desire higher levels of service they would continue to be responsible for the additional costs.

Although this option would maintain the status quo, Regional staff do anticipate increased number of complaints regarding noxious weeds, and debris related issues.

The second option increases Regional boulevard grass cutting level of service to 14 cuts per season on a 2 week cycle starting the first of May until the end of October at the Region's expense

In reflecting the current local municipal levels of service as depicted in Table 2, the staff of all local municipalities have suggested a common base line of 14 cuts per season for Regional boulevards. Under this option the Region would provide or fund 14 cuts per season at a total estimated cost of \$1.25 million. The Regional annual Roads Operation budget would require an increase of \$260,000.

This proposed increase in urban grass boulevard cut cycle would better meet the average level of service with the local municipalities within the Region. This additional cut cycle would commence during the first week of May and continue on a 10-14 day cut cycle to better maintain dandelion and other weed growth. The increase cut cycle also includes debris pick up prior to cutting and this will also help to improve the tidy and clean appearance of Regional boulevards. Municipalities could still elect to provide a higher level of service at their cost.

The third option would vary the level of service for Regional boulevard grass cutting matching the local municipal level of service at Regional cost

Under this option, the Region would provide or fund a service level of each respective municipality. The impact to the Regional Roads Operating budget has been estimated at \$300,000 to \$400,000. The varied service levels range from 22 cuts per season to 14 cuts per season. This varied level of service would have the potential for more complaints as residents would see different levels of service along Regional boulevards, sometimes from one side of the road to the other.

A standard of 14 cuts per season is proposed in efforts to streamline boulevard grass cutting Service Levels on All Regional Roads

In reflection of the information on Table #2, and following the consultation with local staff Regional staff propose to maintain one consistent level of service on all urbanized Regional boulevards. It is proposed however that the consistent level of service be increased to a two week cut and related debris clean up cycle starting the first week of May and ending the last week of October each season. Staff have met with local municipal representatives and each municipality and the typical grass cutting season starts at the beginning of May and continues until the last week of October covering a 28 week season. Based on a proposed two week cut cycle the service level would be increased uniformly from 11 cuts per season to 14 cuts per season.

As the Regional boulevards continue to become urbanized the existing level of service does not address the increased need for debris pick up and grass cutting. In addition, the existing level of service does not address increased complaints from the public during the first two weeks of spring when weed growth excels. By the second week of May excessive debris and grass/weed growth result in these increased public complaints. The proposed 14 cut cycle of service level will help address the debris and tall grass/weed related complaints during the typical 28 week season.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Table 3 shows the varying cost implications depending on the varying service levels. The recommended 14 cut per season will increase the current 11 cut per season service level and streamline urban boulevard grass cutting Region wide.

Table 3
Cost Implications for Current Service Level
and Recommended Service Level

Regional Costs for Urban Boulevard Grass Cutting	Cost per Cut Cycle	Total Annual Cost
Current Council Approved 11 Cuts per season	\$86,000	\$1,000,000
Recommended 14 cuts per season	\$86,000	\$1,260,000

Cost implications for a 14 cut and debris related pick up cycle per season

Funding for this enhanced level of service were not included in the 2011 Roads Operating Budget. It is proposed that the additional \$260,000 will be covered through year end surplus funds in the 2011 Transportation Services budget. If no surplus funds exist in the 2011 Transportation Services budget, these funds will be funded by the Regional tax stabilization reserve.

New Regional boulevard grass cutting and debris pick up service level costs would increase up to approximately \$1,260,000 or an additional \$260,000. The funding source for the proposed increase in level of service would translate into a 0.3% increase in the overall 2012 Roads Operating budget.

Implications regarding all municipalities throughout the Region

Depending on the Regional Council's decision on whether to expand the proposed improved service level to other municipalities, and the cost sharing responsibilities to be worked out with other municipalities, there could be substantial financial implications to the Region and local municipalities as estimated.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

A higher consistent level of service provided or funded by the Region for all local municipalities, would result in cuts to the costs to the local municipalities who are currently cutting more than the Regional Council approved 11 cuts per season.

A higher level of service for grass cutting and debris pick-up will ensure that Regional corridors within each municipality are well maintained and visually pleasing for motorists and pedestrians.

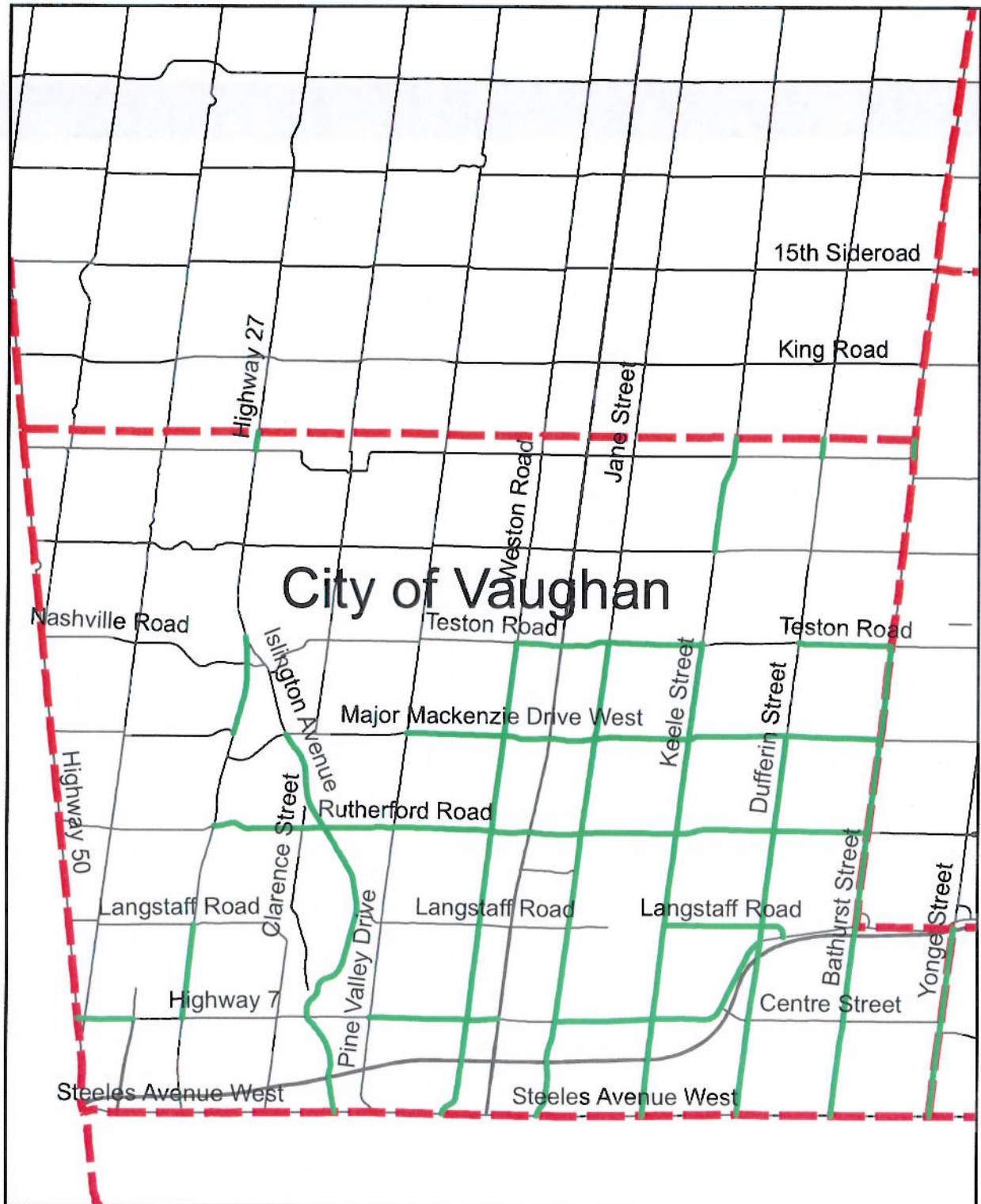
7. CONCLUSION

It is recommended that Regional Council receive this report for information. It is also recommended that Regional Council consider the options explored in this report and approve increasing the service level of boulevard grass cutting and related debris pick up on Regional roads from 11 cuts cycles per season to 14 times per season. This increased service level will result in Regional boulevards being cut every two weeks from the first week of May to the last week of October.

For more information on this report, please contact Paul Jankowski, General Manager, Roads at Ext. 5901.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The nine attachments referred to in this clause are attached to this report.)

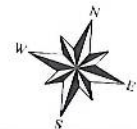
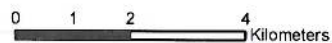


Urban Boulevard Maintenance City of Vaughan



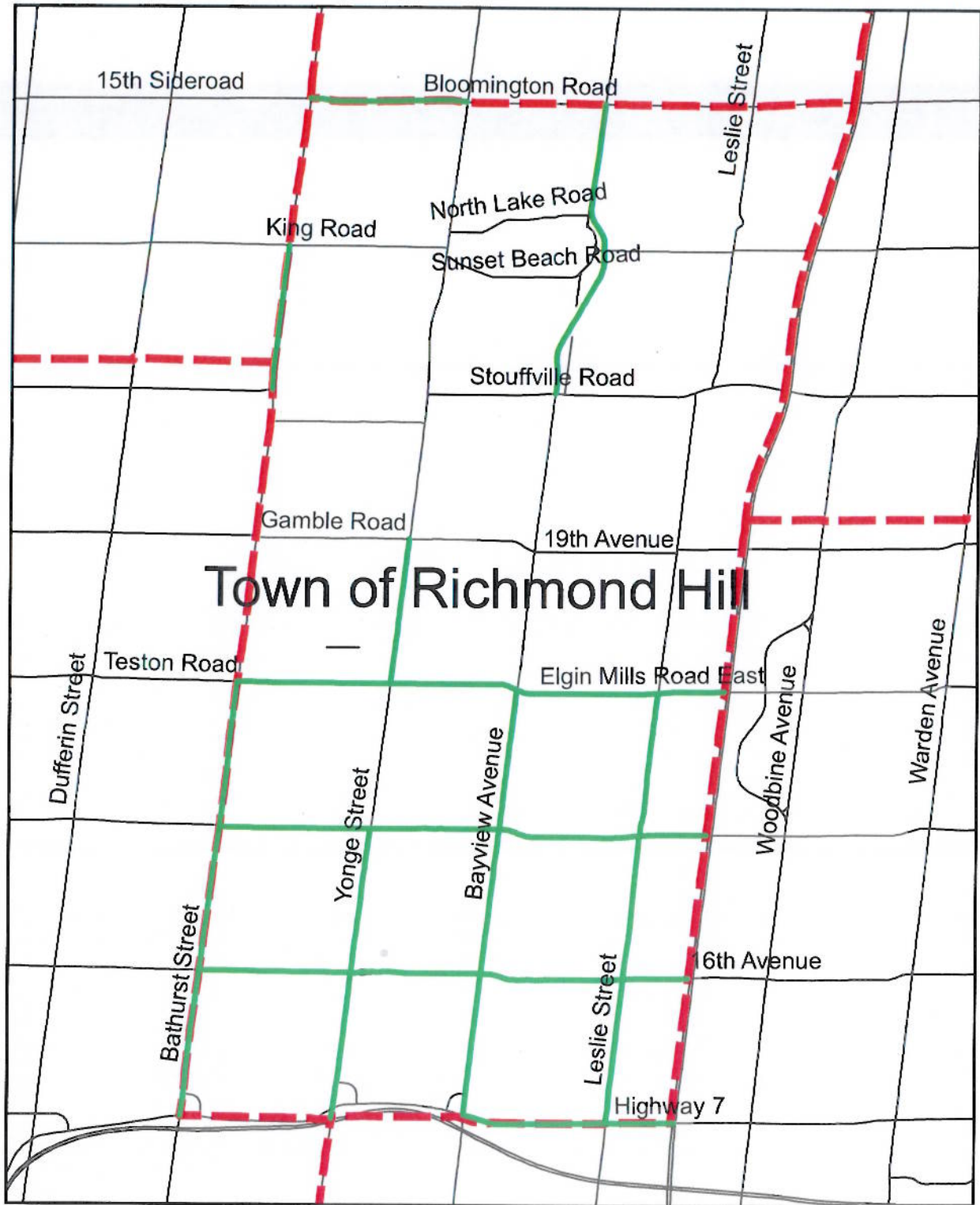
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Grass Cutting Corridors ———



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**Urban Boulevard Maintenance
Town of Richmond Hill**



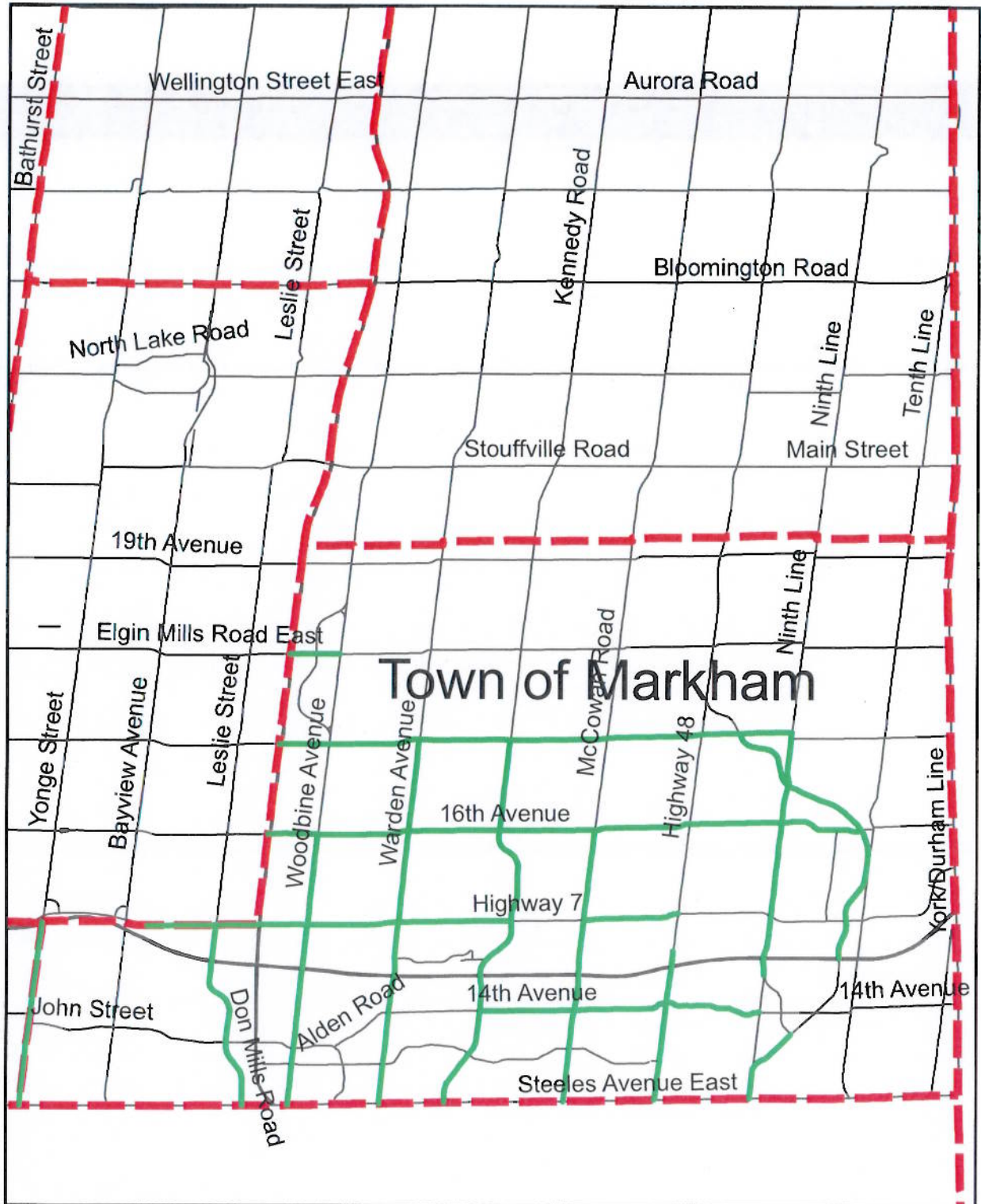
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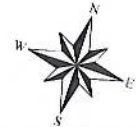


Urban Boulevard Maintenance Town of Markham



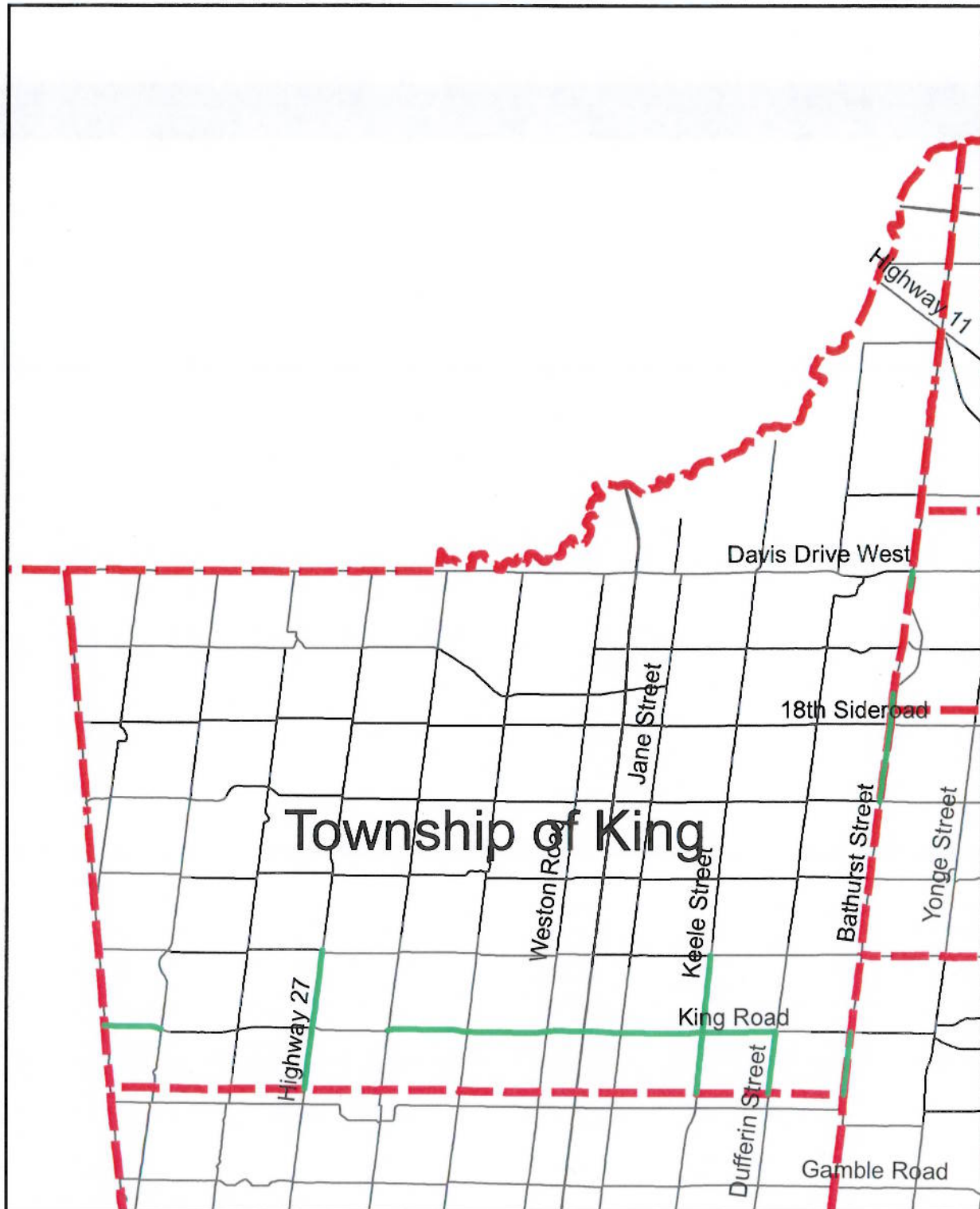
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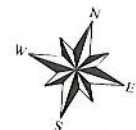


**Urban Boulevard Maintenance
Township of King**



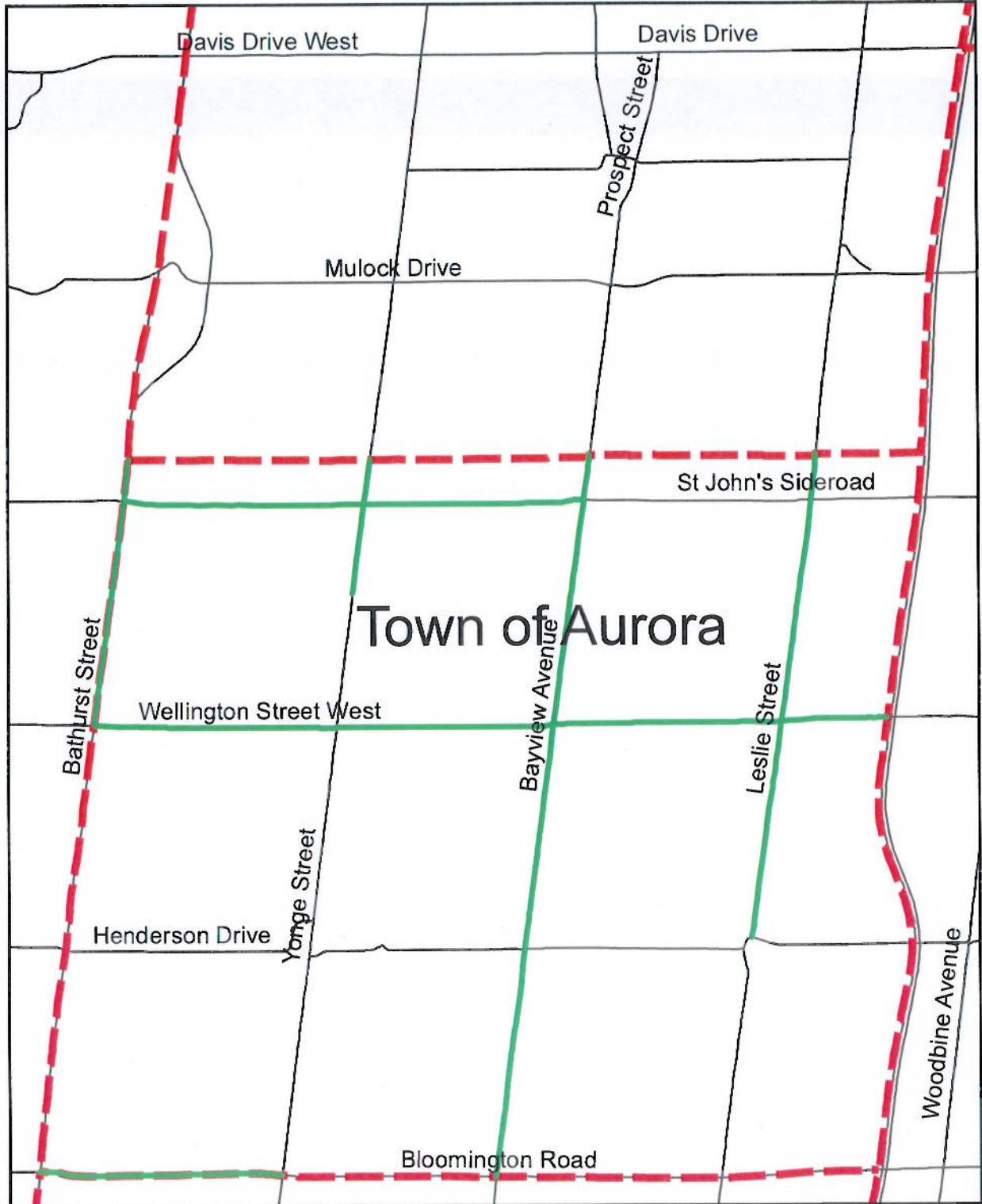
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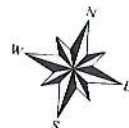


**Urban Boulevard Maintenance
Town of Aurora**



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Urban Boulevard Maintenance Township of Newmarket



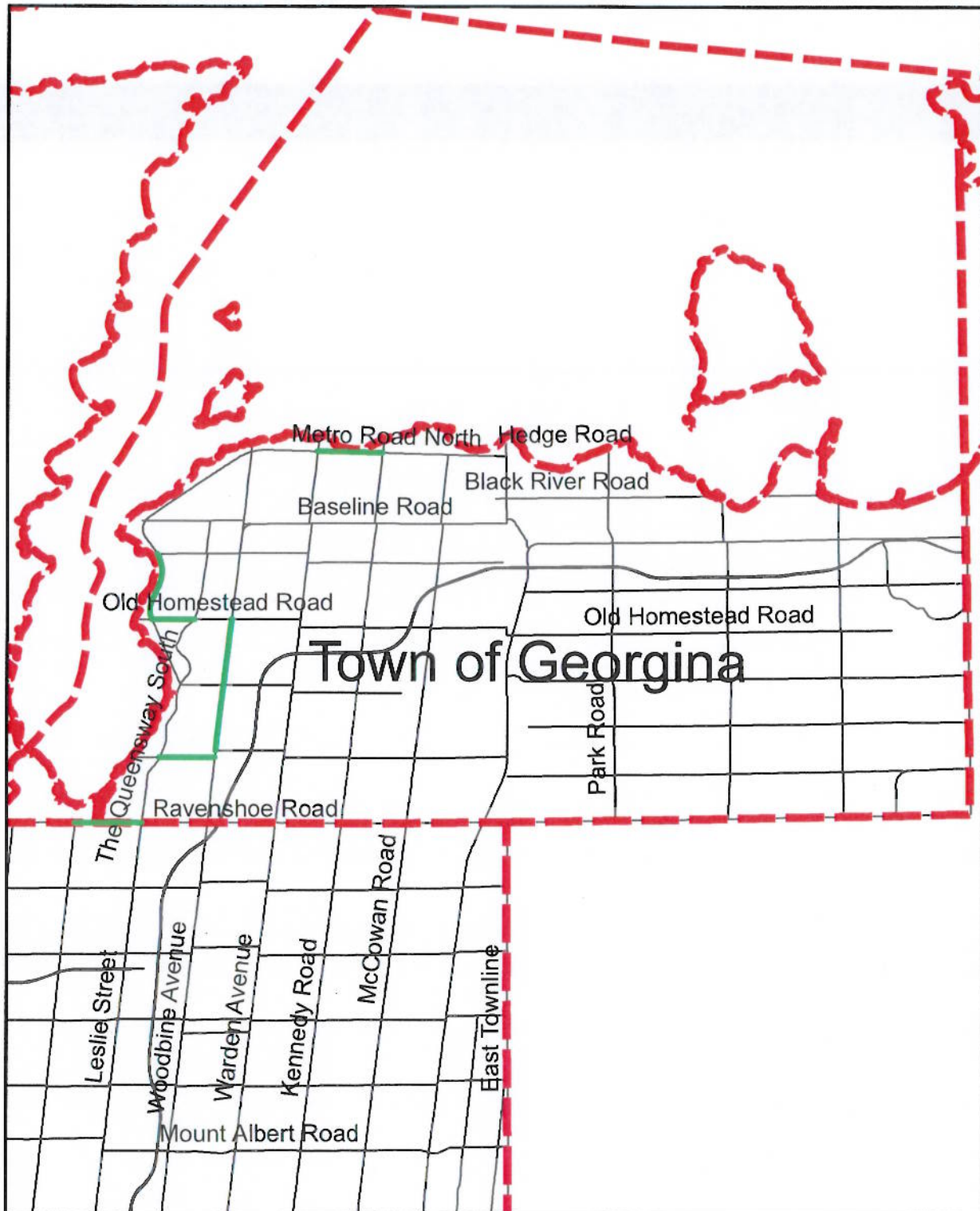
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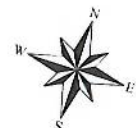
Urban Boulevard Maintenance Township of Georgina



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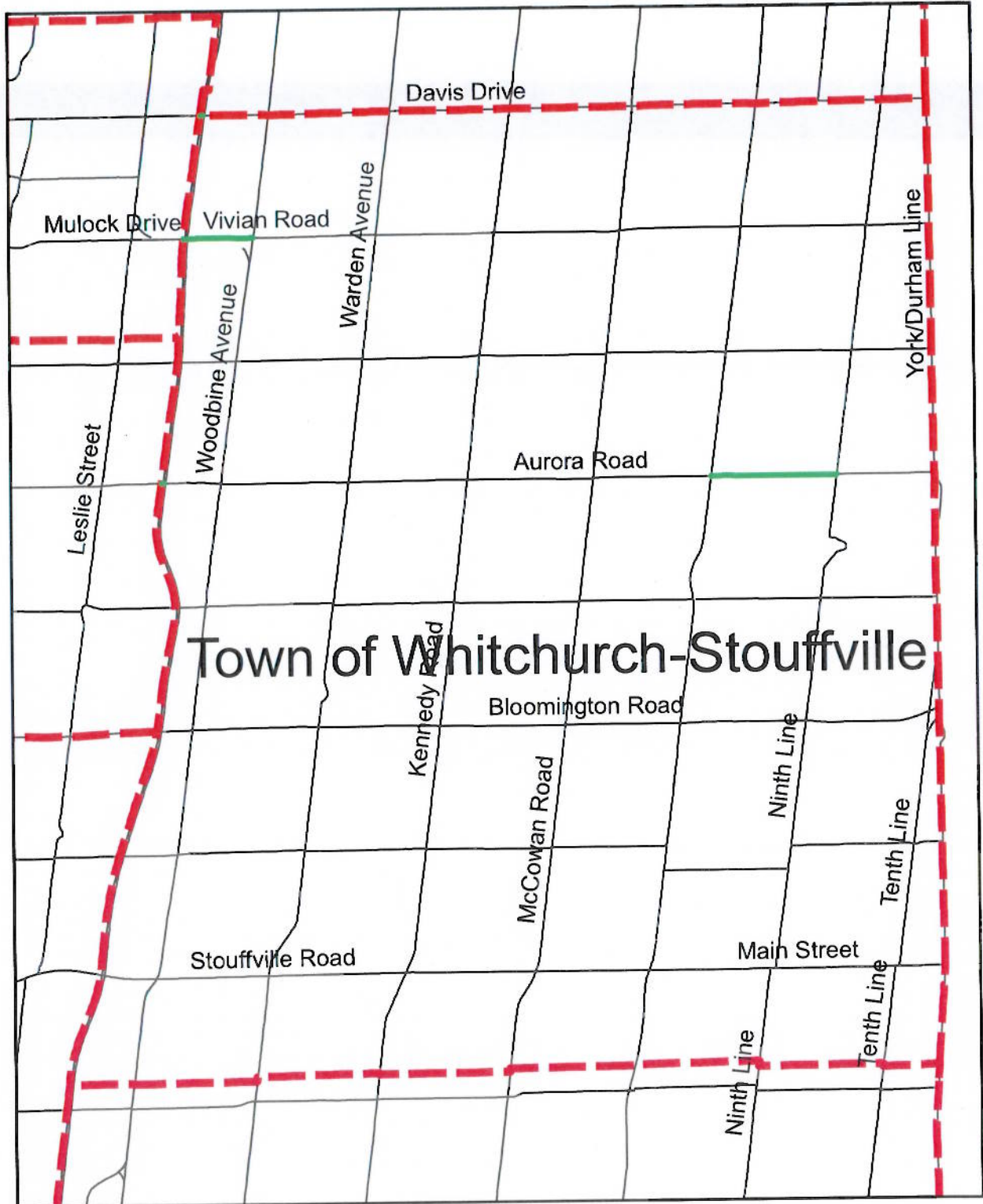
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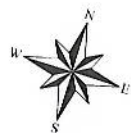


Urban Boulevard Maintenance Township of Whitchurch-Stouffville



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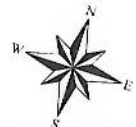


Urban Boulevard Maintenance Township of East Gwillimbury



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