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#### **YORK REGION POPULATION UPDATE**

**The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, June 2, 2004, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:**

##### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that:

1. This report be forwarded to the Province and Regional Council urge the Province to expedite work on the 2031 GTA and City of Hamilton population and employment forecasts immediately.
1. Council receive York Region's latest population estimate (April 30, 2004) of 867,500 based on the undercount figure received from Statistics Canada.

##### **2. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to provide committee with an update on York Region's population based on recently received undercount information from Statistics Canada. This report also urges the Province to expedite work on the GTA and City of Hamilton population and employment forecasts immediately.

##### **3. BACKGROUND**

The York Region Planning and Development Services Department regularly prepares, monitors and updates population forecasts at the Regional, local municipal and community levels. Projected to the 2026 planning horizon, the current population forecasts were prepared by Regional staff based on the following assumptions:

- Long term birth and death rates.
- Immigration and migration rates.
- Amount of serviced urban land available for development.
- Historical absorption rates.
- State of the national, provincial and regional economy.
- Provincial and Regional growth management policies.

Developing relevant and timely population forecasts requires constant monitoring on the part of staff to ensure the above assumptions remain relevant. This includes comparing forecast growth estimates with on the ground development as well as analysis of annual demographic data and data from the Census. Since 1994, staff have updated the Region's population forecasts in 1999 and 2000 to reflect development within the Region and the

findings of the 1996 census. The release of the 2001 Census data provided regional staff with an opportunity to review and evaluate the current forecasts.

### 3.1 2001 Census

Conducted in May of 2001, the Census database is a collection of social and economic data that is updated every five years. Census data released by Statistics Canada includes coverage for York Region and its nine local municipalities.

The 2001 Census data was released in the series of eight products. Three staff reports that analyzed the Census data were brought forward to the Planning and Economic Development Committee. The April 3, 2002 report entitled “2001 Census Data” focused on the population and dwelling units and the March 5, 2003 report entitled “2001 Census Data Update” focused on the characteristics of the population including age and gender, marital status, immigration, languages, ethnic origins, visible minorities. The June 18, 2003 report entitled “2001 Census Data II” focused on the final releases education, employment, income, housing and religion.

Analysis of the Census data by staff reveal a number of important trends occurred in York Region over the 1996-2001 period. A key finding was that between the 1996 and 2001 period, York Region had a population growth rate of 24%, 4.6% higher than the growth rate for the 1991 to 1996 period.

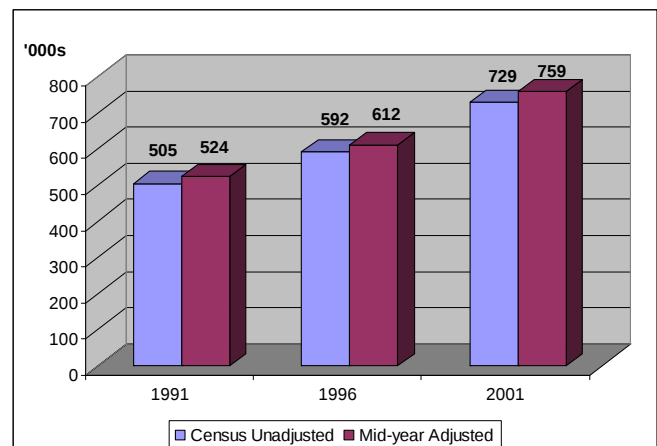
### 3.2 Census Undercount

Statistics Canada traditionally undercounts the total population; that is a portion of the population is missed on Census day. Some people are not counted since they may not receive a Census questionnaire (i.e. a household living in a separate apartment in a house), or they were not

included in the questionnaire that was completed (i.e. a boarder or lodger). Some people may be missed if they have no usual residence and did not spend the Census night in any dwelling. A small number of people are counted more than once (i.e. a student living away from home).

To determine how many individuals were missed or counted more than once on Census day, Statistics Canada conducts post-census coverage studies of a representative sample of individuals. The results of these studies and the estimates of the undercount are published separately and are not included with the initial release of Census data. Figure 1 displays the difference between the initial unadjusted Census releases compared with the final adjusted mid-year (July 1) figure for each Census year

**Figure 1: Census and Mid-year Adjusted Population in York Region 1991-2001**



1991 to 2001. Mid-year figures include both an adjustment for the undercount as well as an estimate of additional growth in York Region between Census day and July 1.

Prior to the release of the undercount adjusted population figure by Statistics Canada, Regional staff estimated that approximately 39,000 people, or 5% of the Region's 2001 Census population were missed on Census day. In late March 2004, Statistics Canada released a York Region July 1, 2001 population figure of 759,320. This figure includes an adjustment for the undercount as well as an estimate of growth from Census day (May 15, 2001) to July 1, 2001. Based on this revised population figure, Regional staff have estimated the undercount to be 3.5%, or approximately 25,700. Using this revised undercount adjusted figure of 759,320 and CMHC housing completion data since July 1, 2001, staff estimate that as of April 30, 2004 York Region's population is approximately 867,500.

### **3.3 GTA and Hamilton Long-term Forecasts**

Since 1989 the GTA regions together with the Greater Toronto Co-ordinating Committee (GTCC) have co-ordinated the development and update of population and employment forecasts for the GTA. Co-ordinated GTA-wide forecasts were completed in 1993 (based on the 1991 census) and again in 2000 (based on the 1996 census). The Province, the City of Toronto and the four regions in the GTA rely on these forecasts as the basis for long-term land use, infrastructure planning, investment decisions and growth management across the GTA.

The 2001 Census release presented an opportunity to review the long-term growth forecasts for York Region and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Accordingly, York Region along with the Government of Ontario, the Region's of Halton, Durham and Peel and the Cities of Toronto and Hamilton contracted Hemson Consulting Ltd. to review and prepare a revised set of long term population, household, and employment forecasts to 2031 (Planning and Economic Development Committee Report *GTA and Hamilton 2031 Population and Employment Forecast Update*, April 2, 2003). These forecasts will reflect York Region's revised set of population projections prepared by staff in response to higher than anticipated pace of growth.

The recent introduction of Bills 26 and 27 by the provincial government has resulted in an unforeseen suspension of the GTA forecast exercise as the Province works to determine the potential impacts of the proposed greenbelt legislation. Originally scheduled to be completed by the summer of 2004, provincial staff have indicated that the forecasts could be delayed by 6 to 8 months.

## **4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS**

York Region's population forecasts are the product of a number of assumptions that are based on current social, demographic and economic trends and on regional and local policy. Forecasts have a long-term perspective and do not predict short term economic

and development cycles. These short term cycles can significantly affect the Region's actual population growth.

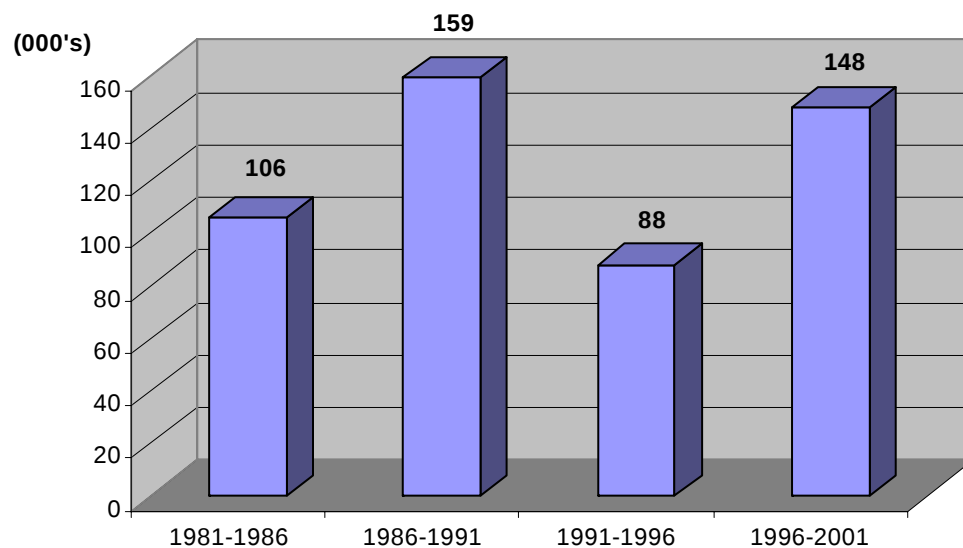
#### 4.1 Economic and Development Cycles

Economic and development cycles are the product of a combination of factors that are generally outside York Region's ability to control. Some of these factors include:

- The state of the global, national and provincial economies.
- Interest rates.
- Geopolitical events.
- Unforeseen domestic crisis (i.e.: SARS, Mad Cow, etc.).

The volatile nature of the above listed factors makes an accurate prediction of the Region's economic cycle extremely difficult. Changes in economic cycles can have a significant impact on both the pace of development and the pace of population growth in the Region. Figures 2 provides an illustration of how economic cycles have affected population growth in York Region since 1981.

**Figure 2: York Region Population Growth 1981-2001**

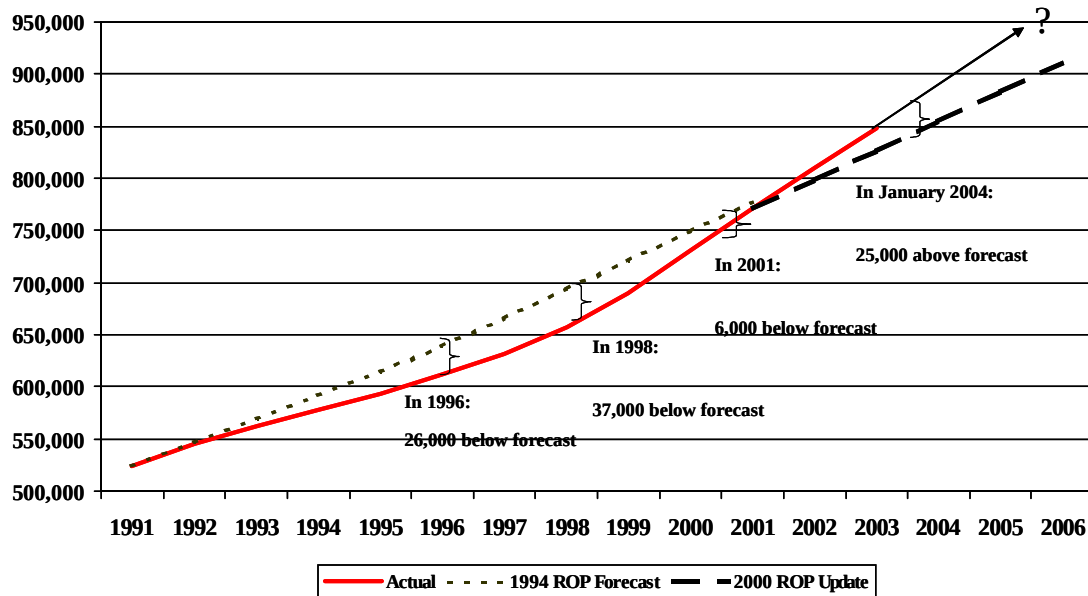


As Figure 3 illustrates, York Region's peak growth period was between 1986 and 1991 when the population grew by 159,000. The recession of the 1990's caused the Region's growth to drop to a low of 88,000 between 1991 and 1996. Improving economic conditions throughout the late 1990s, pushed York Region's population growth to 148,000 between 1996 and 2001. A significant amount of the growth between 1996 and 2001 occurred between 1999 and 2001 when population growth exceeded 40,000 persons per year, establishing a new Regional record.

#### 4.1.1 Population Growth Since 1999

Recent growth analysis shows that between 1999 and 2004 York Region has been experiencing a surge in development. Originally triggered by steadily improving economic conditions throughout the late 1990s, the development surge has in part been maintained by lower than anticipated interest rates.

**Figure 3: Actual vs. Forecast Population Growth in York Region 1991-2006**



As illustrated in Figure 3, this increased level of development activity has affected York Region's population forecasts. Throughout the 1990s actual population growth in the Region was significantly below forecasts rates. In 1996 York Region's population was 26,000 below forecast and by 1998 this had increased to 37,000 below forecast. As the development surge's effects began to take hold in 1999, York Region's actual population growth rates began to catch up with the forecast, closing to within 6,000 by 2001. Between 2002 and 2003 actual population growth rates accelerated taking York Region's population to 25,000 over forecast by January 2004.

#### 4.2 Improvements for Monitoring York Region's Forecasts

The York Region Planning and Development Services Department monitors population growth on a monthly basis by applying Census persons per unit values to CMHC housing completion data. The result is then applied to the Census derived base. Uncertainty regarding the Census undercount has in the past produced a number of revisions to previously released mid-year and year end estimates between 2001 and 2003.

Continual monitoring of growth in York Region is a key element of the Region's growth management strategy and ensures that services are efficiently provided and phased appropriately. A variety of data sources are required by Regional staff to effectively

identify emerging growth related impacts on infrastructure and social services. To assist the Region in obtaining relevant and timely data in an efficient manner, staff have undertaken work to develop a new development tracking database.

The proposed database will be fully integrated with the Region's GIS network and will allow staff to:

- Track development from beginning to end (proposal to building permit).
- Monitor the development progress of Official Plan Amendments.
- Track building permits in the Region.
- Monitor servicing allocation in the Region.
- Generate population and household forecasts by traffic zone.
- Generate employment forecasts by traffic zone.

In addition, Regional staff will be undertaking more detailed analysis of birth, death and migration rates. More regular forecast updates will also be produced and these forecasts will in the future be produced within a range. This range will be based on assumptions regarding the estimated pace and phasing of development within York Region and will feature both a high development estimate and a low development estimate.

#### **4.3 Next Steps**

Regional staff will continue to pursue the above initiatives with our local and GTA municipal partners. However the suspension of work on the GTA and City of Hamilton long term population and employment forecasts is delaying staff's efforts to develop a revised set of population and employment forecasts for York Region and the local municipalities. Regional and local municipal staff rely on these long-term GTA forecasts for this work. The forecasts are required to assess the adequacy of York Region's supply of vacant employment and residential lands. Given the rapid growth currently occurring within York Region, it is recommended that York Region Council urge the Province to expedite work on the GTA and City of Hamilton population and employment forecasts immediately.

#### **4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026**

Effective and timely population data is a crucial element for the implementation of the goals of Vision 2026. Population information provides the basic information feedback necessary for the monitoring and development of the programs and services that address the needs of York Region's population and the labour force.

### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no short term financial implications associated with this report. In the medium to long term however, the continuation of the development surge currently being experienced by York Region and the rest of the GTA is anticipated to present significant financial challenges to the Region as it provides services and infrastructure in response to rapid population growth. Regional staff intend to continue monitoring the current situation and report back to council as required with regular updates.

## **6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT**

Local municipal staff rely on accurate and timely population data for the effective phasing of services. Population projections and forecasts are also required for long term planning and growth management as well as yearly budgetary exercises. Regional staff intend to continue working with the local municipalities in ongoing forecast initiatives and to ensure coordination of forecasting activities.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

York Region staff develop long term population forecasts based on a number of assumptions. Regional staff along with our local municipal and GTA partners continue to monitor growth in the Region and GTA to ensure the accuracy of the forecasts and when required prepare revisions. Data extracted from the Census database provides the base on which future forecasts are developed. In March 2004, Statistics Canada released an undercount adjusted July 1, 2001 figure of 759,320 for York Region. The undercount has resulted in minor adjustments to York Region's population estimate since the initial release of the 2001 Census. Using this undercount figure along with CMHC housing completion data, staff estimate that as of April 30, 2004, York Region's population is approximately 867,500.

Regional staff regularly update forecasts to ensure accuracy. However, a suspension of work on the GTA and City of Hamilton long term population and employment forecasts by the Province is delaying Regional staff's efforts to develop a revised set of population and employment forecasts for York Region and the local municipalities. Due to the rapid growth currently occurring within York Region, these forecasts are needed to assess the adequacy of the Region's supply of employment and residential lands. It is recommended that Regional Council urge the Province to expedite work on the GTA forecast exercise immediately.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.