

5

OFFICIAL PLAN AMENDMENT NO. 66 TOWN OF AURORA

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated June 5, 2007, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services be authorized to give notice to approve Amendment No. 66 to the Official Plan of the Town of Aurora, subject to the modifications set out in *Attachment No. 1*.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to recommend approval of the Town of Aurora's Official Plan Amendment No. 66 (OPA 66), subject to the modifications set out in *Attachment No. 1* to this report.

3. BACKGROUND

This section provides a brief description of the history and the purpose of the amendment.

3.1 History

In 2003, the Town of Aurora completed the 5 year review of its Official Plan. One of the priority items resulting from the review was to complete an "Employment Land Retention Strategy", which was adopted by Aurora Council on February 8, 2005 and approved by York Region on May 24, 2005. In addition, the Five Year Official Plan Review process recommended that the "Industrial" and "Commercial" policies of the Official Plan be updated and that an "Economic Development" section be added to the Official Plan. On June 21, 2005, Aurora Council approved the Terms of Reference for the Official Plan updates and the addition of new Economic Development policies and on September 27, 2005, Aurora Council authorized Meridian Planning Consultants Inc. to do the work.

The above noted update work resulted in the adoption of OPA 66 by Aurora Council on August 22, 2006. The amendment was forwarded to York Region for approval and, over the following months, York Region Staff worked with staff from the Town of Aurora to gain a more thorough understanding of the policies of the plan, resolve some issues and propose modifications to the plan. At its meeting of May 22, 2007, Aurora Council

endorsed the modifications to the plan and requested that the Region approve OPA 66 as modified in *Attachment No. 1* to this report.

3.2 Purpose of the Amendment

The main purpose of OPA 66 is to provide consistent, up-to-date policies for all employment and commercial areas within the Town and to strengthen the viability of these areas while achieving a desirable ratio of residential to employment lands (*Attachment Nos. 2 & 3*). In addition, the goals and objectives of the Town's Economic Development Strategy related to land use are proposed to form a new section in the Official Plan. OPA 66 is also intended to consolidate several existing site specific commercial and industrial Official Plan Amendments.

The following subsections identify some of the key policies of OPA 66.

3.2.1 Industrial Uses

Some of the key proposed changes to the Official Plan include referring to “Industrial areas” as “Employment Areas”, stand alone offices are to be permitted in all employment designations, and reducing the industrial designations to three categories as follows: “Business Park - OPA 30”, “Business Park - OPA 52”; and “General Industrial” (Industrial Parkway area).

3.2.2 Commercial Uses

The commercial hierarchy is to consist of Regional Commercial Centre, Community Commercial Centre, Existing Special Policies for the Historic Core Convenience Commercial Centres, and Service Commercial Areas.

3.2.3 Economic Development

OPA 66 proposes to add a new section to the Aurora Official Plan in order to provide a policy framework that supports economic development initiatives and facilitates the implementation of the Town's Economic Development Strategy.

The new Economic Development section sets out several economic development objectives, including “recognizing the important relationship between planning, economic development, and environmental preservation in sustainable development and healthy communities.” Lastly, the new section establishes several policies to ensure that the goals and objectives are achieved.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

OPA 66 proposes up-to-date policies for all employment and commercial areas in the Town of Aurora. The proposed policies are consistent with recent Provincial legislation such as the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and the Provincial Growth Plan. Notwithstanding the above, it is important to note that this amendment is not the Town's Growth Plan conformity exercise, which will occur at a later date.

As described in the following sections, Regional staff considers the proposed OPA to conform to Provincial and Regional policy and to represent good planning.

4.1 Provincial Policy Statement

The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development. These interests include the following:

1. Promoting efficient development and land use patterns which sustain the financial well-being of the Province and municipalities over the long term (Policy 1.1.1 a);
2. Accommodating an appropriate range and mix of residential, employment (including industrial, commercial and institutional uses), recreational and open space uses to meet long-term needs (Policy 1.1.1 b); and,
3. Supporting long-term economic prosperity by maintaining and, where possible, enhancing the vitality and viability of downtowns and mainstreets (Policy 1.7.1 b).

In addition to the above, the PPS includes a section specifically addressing Employment Areas, including policies that promote economic development by providing for an appropriate mix and range of employment, providing opportunities for a diversified economic base, planning for, protecting and preserving employment areas for current and future uses, and ensuring the necessary infrastructure is provided to support current and projected needs. This section of the PPS also states that planning authorities may permit conversion of lands within employment areas to non-employment uses through a comprehensive review, only where it has been demonstrated that the land is not required for employment purposes over the long term and that there is a need for the conversion.”

OPA 66, as proposed to be modified, is consistent with the Provincial interest. The overall objective of the OPA is to ensure that Aurora has an appropriate range and mix of land uses, including employment and commercial. The OPA includes specific policies in order to strengthen the viability and vitality of the Historic Core, which is Aurora’s downtown mainstreet.

In addition, one of the primary goals of the OPA is to promote economic development and competitiveness by planning for, protecting and preserving employment areas for current and future uses. It is noted that, as modified, the policies of the OPA with respect to the conversion of employment area lands to non-employment uses utilizes the more up-to-date and more restrictive policies of the Growth Plan, which is discussed below.

4.2 The Growth Plan

The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe is “a framework for implementing the Government of Ontario’s vision for building stronger, prosperous communities by better managing growth in this region to 2031.” The Plan is concerned with building “complete communities” that are “well-designed, offer transportation choices,

accommodate people at all stages of life and have the right mix of housing, a good range of jobs, and easy access to stores and services to meet daily needs”.

The Growth Plan’s Section 2.2.2 – Managing Growth ensures that employment growth will be accommodated by ensuring the availability of sufficient land for employment uses, by planning and investing for a balance of jobs and housing to reduce the need for long distance commuting and to increase the modal share for transit, walking and cycling, and by encouraging cities and towns to develop as complete communities with a diverse mix of land uses.

Section 2.2.6 of the Growth Plan ensures that an adequate supply of lands providing locations for a variety of appropriate employment uses is maintained to accommodate the growth forecasts of Schedule 3 of the Plan. In addition, Section 2.2.6 states that municipalities will promote economic development and competitiveness.

OPA 66 accomplishes much of what the Growth Plan requires in terms of protecting employment lands and ensuring the availability of sufficient land for employment. The OPA will help Aurora ensure a balance of jobs and housing, while reducing the need for long distance commuting and will help to ensure that Aurora develops as a complete community. The OPA promotes economic development and competitiveness through land use policies and through a new Economic Development Policy section to the OP.

Therefore, the OPA, as proposed to be modified, is considered to be consistent with the provisions of the Growth Plan.

OPA 66 is not the Town’s conformity exercise with respect to the Growth Plan.

4.3 Regional Official Plan

The York Region Official Plan states that economic vitality is a cornerstone of the Plan. A higher quality of life depends on economic activity and the opportunities for meaningful work. The economic vitality goal of the Regional Official Plan is to “create a competitive and adaptable economic environment that encourages investment and a diversity of employment opportunities.”

The York Region Official Plan establishes an employment target of 33,000 jobs for Aurora by 2026 and based upon preliminary forecasts, it is expected that job growth in Aurora will continue to increase. The activity rate in OPA 66 (as modified) is proposed to be 1 job for every 2 residents, which is consistent with the growth management work that the Region is currently undertaking and OPA 66 provides a solid policy framework within which to achieve these targets.

The desire to ensure economic vitality and a high quality of life is one of the key reasons that the Town of Aurora embarked on the study and adopted OPA 66. The OPA represents a critical component in the strength of Aurora’s goal to be a balanced community; a community in which there is a balance of employment and housing

opportunities where employers can access a local supply of labour. Therefore, OPA 66 conforms to the York Region Official Plan.

4.4 Proposed Modifications

As noted earlier in this report, Regional staff has been working with the Town of Aurora to clean up and refine OPA No. 66. Some of the modifications found in *Attachment 1* to this report are housekeeping matters and some are the result of new policy language from the Growth Plan. The modifications have been supported by Aurora Council, as noted in *Attachment 4*. The modifications deal with activity rates, employment land supply consistent with the direction of the Regional Official Plan, the location of high intensity employment uses, and preservation of employment land in accordance with the Growth Plan.

4.5 Relationship to Vision 2026

“*Creating Vibrant Urban and Rural Communities*” is an action area for Goal 1 – Quality Communities for a Diverse Population of Vision 2026. Creating vibrant urban communities includes “promoting liveable, sustainable, and safe communities”, “revitalizing and promoting compact community cores”, “promoting high-quality urban design” and “encouraging pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented neighbourhoods”. The proposed OPA is designed to address these areas and thereby enhance the quality of life in the Town of Aurora. The proposed OPA is therefore consistent with the above noted action area of Vision 2026.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The policies found within OPA 66 will strengthen Aurora’s economic vitality, which in turn strengthens the Regional economy.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Town of Aurora has adopted OPA 66 and has recommended modifications to the OPA. The recommendations of this report are consistent with the Town’s position.

7. CONCLUSION

OPA 66 proposes up-to-date policies for all employment and commercial areas in the Town of Aurora. The proposed policies are consistent with recent Provincial legislation such as the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and the Provincial Growth Plan. Notwithstanding the above, it is important to note that this amendment is not the Town’s Growth Plan conformity exercise, which will occur at a later date.

Regional staff considers the proposed OPA to be consistent with Provincial and Regional policy and to represent good planning.

For more information on this report, please contact Michael Mallette, M.C.I.P., R.P.P., Senior Planner, Community Planning Branch, at 905-830-4444 ext 1506 or michael.mallette@york.ca.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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