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STRATEGIC EMPLOYMENT CORRIDORS AND REGIONAL OFFICIAL PLAN AMENDMENT 52

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the following:

- 1. The communication from Chad B. John-Baptiste, Senior Planner, Weston Consulting Group Inc., April 29, 2008, representing the Church of Pentacost Canada, owner of lands in the proposed 400 North Employment area, be received and referred to staff; and**
- 2. The recommendations contained in the following report dated April 24, 2008, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, be adopted:**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council confirm the importance of protecting strategic employment lands located along existing and future 400-Series Highways, recognizing that the combined requirements of the Provincial *Greenbelt* and *Growth Plans* substantially limit the availability of lands within York Region to accommodate 2031 Provincial growth targets.
2. Regional Council support, in principle, an expansion to the urban area to establish a strategic and Regionally-significant employment area within the City of Vaughan, adjacent to the Highway 400, as proposed under Regional Official Plan Amendment 52, recognizing that the regional market component of the comprehensive review process prescribed under the *Growth Plan* has sufficiently progressed.
3. Regional staff prepare a further report recommending adoption of Regional Official Plan Amendment 52 once the additional work that identifies the appropriate amount, staging, phasing and general timing of development, related to local market policy considerations, has sufficiently progressed to meet the municipal comprehensive review requirements of the *Growth Plan*.
4. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the planning departments of the nine local municipalities, the Regions of Durham and Peel, the City of Toronto and the Provincial Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Public Infrastructure Renewal.

2. PURPOSE

Employment land is critical to the economic vitality of York Region, and should be planned for in a manner that is comprehensive, strategic and forward-looking. This report sets out a framework for identifying future geographic areas of strategic, Regionally-significant employment areas outside of the current urban area and the *Greenbelt*; located within the future development or “white belt” areas of York Region as shown in the Provincial *Growth Plan*.

Within this strategic context, this report also outlines the planning rationale for a proposed urban expansion under ROPA 52 to establish a new employment area within the City of Vaughan on 800 gross hectares of land in the Highway 400 corridor. Further, this report establishes that the regional market component for the growth forecast is sufficiently progressed to propose that ROPA 52 be finalized and recommended for adoption in the Fall of 2008. The local secondary plan process, through OPA 637, will implement the Regional projections and structure for this area.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT CONTEXT

Protecting employment areas is an important direction of Regional Council, and is supported by Provincial legislation

Regional Council, on June 21, 2007, adopted the report entitled “Protecting Areas of Employment” (Report No. 6, Clause 10, Planning & Economic Development Committee), which outlined a strategic framework to support local municipal planning for employment lands. In doing so, Regional Council confirmed “that employment areas are a critical resource in York Region, and that these areas are vital to the economic strength of the Region.”

There is clear and strong language in the *Planning Act*, *Provincial Policy Statement* (PPS) and *Growth Plan* to enhance municipal planning and protection for employment lands, which are defined in the PPS as “areas designated in an official plan for clusters of business and economic activities including, but not limited to, manufacturing, warehousing, offices, and associated retail and ancillary facilities.” Key components of this Provincial legislation regarding employment lands include:

- Under Policy 1.2.1 of the PPS, planning authorities shall provide an appropriate mix and range of employment to meet long-term needs, and shall plan for, protect and preserve employment areas for current and future uses.
- Under Policy 2.2.6.5 of the *Growth Plan*, municipalities may permit the conversion of employment areas to non-employment uses only through a municipal comprehensive review.

- Under Section 22(7) of the *Planning Act*, municipal decisions to protect against the conversion of employment lands, where such policies are included in an official plan, are not subject to an appeal.

Strategic land supply required to accommodate 340,000 additional jobs in York Region by 2031

The 2031 population and employment targets, assigned to York Region by the *Growth Plan*, require strategic and comprehensive planning to ensure that there will be sufficient developable land in the right locations to accommodate this growth. This is especially critical in planning for employment, which has a wide range of market segments that have very specific land requirements in terms of size, configuration, transportation access and proximity to other related businesses.

Unique characteristics of employment lands, therefore, as well as the overall supply, are important considerations in the planning for York Region's long-term employment needs. The role of the 400-series highway corridors, and the limited supply of land with direct exposure to them, is especially critical in York Region's long-term planning, and forms the basis in this report for the identification of Regionally-significant employment areas beyond the existing urban boundary.

The Region has an estimated employment land inventory of 2,894 hectares of designated land. However, 28 percent of this total is constrained and presently unavailable for development (i.e. Queensville). The Region therefore has an estimated 12-year effective supply of employment land. These estimates are based on the report prepared by the Planning Department's Long Range and Strategic Planning Branch, "Planning for Tomorrow, Part 2, 2031 York Region Land Requirements", which was presented to the Planning & Economic Development Committee in 2007 (Report No. 4, Clause No.7). Employment land demand is based on a comprehensive analysis of a number of complex factors. The final analysis of the Region's long-term employment land-needs will consider many factors beyond land absorption, including job-growth trends.

400-Series Highway corridors are strategic locations for businesses critical to the Regional and Provincial economy

The York Region economy is worth an estimated \$37.5-billion (2004), and is larger than any of the Atlantic Provinces. The magnitude and importance of our economy is reflected along any 400-series highway – be it the 400, 404, 407 or 427. Visible are recently occupied glass-clad office towers that are home to national and international corporations, including Compaq and Lucent Technologies. Extensive manufacturing, storage and distribution facilities are also highly visible, which include Royal Group Technologies, Atlas Cold Storage and the Toronto Star. In addition to critical road transportation access for goods movement (e.g. just-in-time delivery), these corridors

provide business with invaluable exposure and the advantage of clustering with related industries to achieve synergies with other businesses.

Strong employment growth is diminishing the current supply of strategically-located employment lands within York Region

There is a limited supply of available, high-profile lands in York Region's 400-series highway corridors. These lands are, understandably, in high-demand and comprise a large proportion of the 120 net hectares of employment land being developed each year across the Region since 2001. Although the Region has an overall vacant employment land supply of 2,894 net hectares, the Region runs the risk of running out of large, high-profile and development-ready sites in the 400 corridors, which are in demand by high quality employment sectors. It is important to plan the staging and development of these 400 corridor lands so they are most effectively able to meet these demands.

This scenario is approaching a critical threshold in the City of Vaughan, which has nearly half of the employment-sector jobs within York Region. Employment land availability in Vaughan is particularly challenged due to the constrained nature of 628 net hectares of employment land in western Vaughan, pending the determination, and construction, of the ultimate alignment of the Highway 427 extension, north from Highway 7. This situation has prompted the City to identify and designate an additional employment land supply in the Highway 400 corridor, which is explained in Section 3.2 of this report.

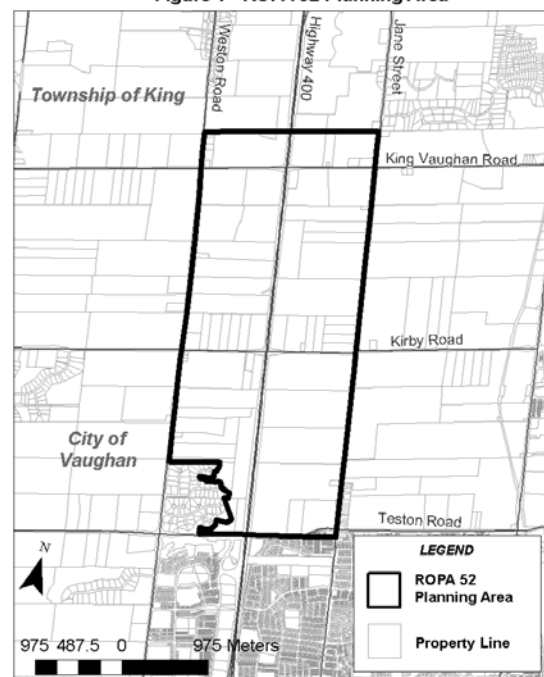
3.2 ROPA 52 PLANNING AREA

The subject lands are located along the Highway 400 corridor, within the "white belt"

The ROPA 52 planning area comprises approximately 800 hectares (2,000 acres), or about two concession blocks, of undeveloped lands. The area is bounded by Teston Road to the south, the King-Vaughan boundary to the north, Weston Road in the west and Jane Street to the east (see *Figure 1*). It is important to note, also, that the properties within the planning area are contiguous and relatively unencumbered. Further, many properties have both frontage on a Regional Road and direct exposure to the Highway 400.

The lands are currently located outside of the urban boundary of the City and Region, and are partially located within the

Figure 1 - ROPA 52 Planning Area



Greenbelt Plan, and are shown as “White Belt” or “Places to Grow” under the *Growth Plan*. There are approximately 500 hectares of developable land within the planning area, once the *Greenbelt* and other environmentally-constrained lands are removed. These environmental features, including the *Greenbelt*, are predominately located in the western half of the planning area.

The Highway 400 north corridor has been studied and identified by the City of Vaughan as a “prestige” employment area

The Council for the City of Vaughan initiated the *Highway 400 North Employment Lands Secondary Plan Study* in February 2005 for the purpose of bringing on-stream a viable supply of “prestige” employment land with direct access and exposure to the 400 corridor, in response to the constrained nature employment lands in western Vaughan. The City wanted to attract head offices to this new employment area, in addition to “clean” and well-paying manufacturing industries, and commercial uses to serve the immediate area.

The City retained a multi-disciplinary consulting team led by the planning firm of Macaulay Shiomi Howsen Ltd. to undertake the study, in consultation with a range of stakeholders including the Region, Province, related agencies and the public. Forming a significant component of the study was a land use planning analysis, and an employment land-needs analysis conducted by the firm Hemson Consulting Ltd. The study was completed in the Spring of 2006, and concluded that the subject lands were best-suited for employment development, and that there would be a market demand for those lands. The study area would generate approximately 22,000 jobs, based on a 50 jobs per net hectare target, which is consistent with the *Growth Plan*, plus a suitable vacancy rate of approximately 10 per cent.

Regional staff prepared a preliminary information report on the City’s study for the December 2005 meeting of the Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee. In that report (Report No. 10, Clause 5), staff supported the study, stating that “planning for prestige employment land along and adjacent to 400-Series Highways is a strategic approach for which there are several examples across York Region.” The report also took care to note that the then-draft *Growth Plan*, and related “Sub-Area Growth Strategies”, may have some impact on the timing and implementation of the study. In particular, staff reported that “the Region’s supply of employment land and 2031 employment and population forecasts will be important considerations when evaluating the study results against Provincial, Regional and City policies.”

City of Vaughan Council adopted Official Plan Amendment 637 to implement the study findings, and requested York Region to initiate an expansion to the urban area

The City initiated an amendment (OPA 637) to the Vaughan official plan to implement the study recommendations, which were to designate approximately 500 net hectares of

land for employment uses, and to designate approximately 12 hectares of land for residential development to “round-off” an existing estate residential subdivision which abuts the planning area to the southwest. The balance of the 800-hectare amendment area was designated to remain in a natural state, consistent with the provisions of the *Greenbelt Plan*.

Upon City Council’s adoption of OPA 637 on June 26, 2006 – ten days after the *Growth Plan* came into effect – the Region was requested to initiate a Regional official plan amendment to incorporate the lands into the Region’s urban area. The Region, as the approval authority for OPA 637, received the Amendment for review on July 6, 2006, and then commenced ROPA 52.

The Region held a statutory public meeting under Section 17(15) of the *Planning Act* to consider the proposed ROPA as part of the October 4, 2006 meeting of the Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee. In the related information report (Report No. 8, Clause 4), staff provided an overview of the proposed Amendment, and summarized the planning considerations that would form the basis of the Region’s review and ultimate decision. Prominent among these considerations was conformity with Provincial legislation, including the urban boundary expansion criteria of the *Growth Plan*, and the Region’s 2031 population and employment forecasts.

Provincial comments

Provincial staff from the Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Public Infrastructure Renewal, have been consulted in the planning process for the Highway 400 North lands from the onset. Staff from the City and Region have met with the Province on several occasions, and have received detailed and constructive feedback. Although generally supporting the intent of establishing the corridor as an employment area, the Province has been consistent that the proposed urban area expansion should not be approved until the comprehensive review exercise, including 2031 population and employment projections/assignments, and the balance of the criteria set out in Section 2.2.8 of the *Growth Plan* has been satisfied. Another key point they raised is how the proposed *GTA West Transportation Corridor* could be accommodated (e.g. show options for a potential future alignment) within the ROPA 52 lands, pending the determination of the preferred alignment through the environmental assessment process. The Province’s position is outlined in the letter dated December 23, 2005 (see *Attachment 1*).

Further studies underway to address the growth plan

The Region, City and the area landowners’ consultants are completing technical studies and analysis to finalize the justification of ROPA 52 in the context of the *Growth Plan*. This work will also be used to support OPA 637. The key deliverables of this work are:

- **Population and employment projections** - Hemson Consulting Ltd. is preparing a sub-regional/local employment needs analysis for the planning area on behalf of the City to address growth forecasts allocated and the timing and phasing of development in accordance with *Places to Grow*. The component dealing with ROPA 52 is being accelerated to provide support for the adoption of the ROPA in the Fall of 2008. It will be co-ordinated with the Vaughan official plan review process.
- **Infrastructure requirements** - The Region's Master Plans are being updated to accommodate future growth. A Master Servicing & Transportation Strategy for the planning area is being undertaken by Cole Engineering on behalf of the area landowners. This work will recommend a servicing scheme for the area, including transportation, and water and waste water facilities. This work will also recommend options to accommodate the proposed *GTA West Transportation Corridor*.

A more detailed description of this and other ongoing work, including timing and how these studies will align, is provided in Section 4.4 of this report.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 NEW PLANNING CONTEXT

Provincial plans enhance the need to protect employment lands for the long-term

New Provincial Plans have dramatically changed the context for planning in York Region. The Green belt Plan boundaries have resulted in three "whitebelt" areas within the Region, and the wise management of these very limited lands is extremely critical to the Region given the new 2031 population and employment numbers assigned to York in the *Growth Plan*.

With respect to employment land management, the *Growth Plan* acknowledges the need to provide "opportunities for businesses to locate in the GGH (Greater Golden Horseshoe) as fundamental to using land wisely and ensuring a prosperous economic future. Therefore, it is important to ensure an adequate supply of land for employment areas and other employment uses". Further the Province directs municipalities (Section 2.2.6) to promote economic development and competitiveness by providing for an appropriate mix of employment uses; provide opportunities for a diversified economic base including maintaining a range and choice of suitable sites for employment use; planning for, protecting and preserving employment areas; and, ensuring necessary infrastructure. The *Growth Plan* also instructs the Region to optimize the use of existing land supply to avoid over designation of new land for future development. The Region is responsible for implementing the above policies, and balancing the related policy considerations within its regional context.

4.2 A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO EMPLOYMENT LANDS

Existing and planned 400-Series Highway corridors should be first-priority in identifying future employment lands beyond the existing urban area

The long-term vitality of the York Region economy demands high-profile, accessible locations for employment. The importance of the 400 corridors to the economy is undeniable, and is undisputed by the Region, the local municipalities and the Province. Strategically identifying those geographic segments of the 400 corridors located within the “white belt” as future, strategic employment areas is a proactive approach that provides a level of certainty and consistency in long-term, Region-wide planning for employment growth. It is important that the Region strategically advance these lands, staging them in a responsible manner that maximizes the opportunity they offer for a continuous supply of employment lands in the north GTA.

The map, “Strategic Employment Lands, and Corridors, Outside of the Urban Area” (see *Attachment 2*), identifies the network of 400 corridors in York Region, and reflects how these corridors have become the central focus of the Region’s existing employment community. The map also conceptually identifies “Strategic Employment Lands” outside of the existing urban area and the *Greenbelt*, which the Region should protect, given their strategic location and limited supply of future developable land in the post-*Greenbelt* reality.

Lands within the *Greenbelt*, adjacent to the 400-Series Highways, in particular the 404, are also well-positioned as logical employment areas, should additional “white belt” lands along the 400 corridors be created as a result of future amendments, if any, to the *Greenbelt Plan* by the Province. This approach was included in the 24 recommendations to the Province, in response to an early draft of the *Greenbelt Plan*, (Clause No.7, Report No.11, of the Planning and Economic Development Committee (*December 16, 2004*)).

Identifying future, strategic employment areas supports comprehensive Regional and local planning beyond the existing urban area

Looking beyond the urban boundary to identify future employment areas along existing and planned 400 corridors will strengthen long-term planning at the Regional and local level. This approach will support, at a high level, local planning for employment lands and provide a strategic focus for on-going official plan reviews in Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Markham and East Gwillimbury.

At the Regional planning level, this strategic approach to employment land planning is consistent with and will support the delivery of a Regional Employment Land Strategy by the Planning Department’s Long Range and Strategic Planning Branch. A framework for the strategy was introduced in a report to the April 9, 2008 meeting of the Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee, entitled “York Region Employment

Land Area Analysis” (Report No. 4, Clause No. 4). That framework outlines six guiding principles for the strategy, including:

- Taking a long-term strategic approach to employment lands.
- Identifying and preserving strategically significant employment lands.

A more long-term approach to employment planning could further advance Provincial employment policies

The approach recommended in this report is consistent with the Provincial employment area policies of the *Provincial Policy Statement* (PPS) and the *Growth Plan*. Specifically, the Region’s approach embodies long-term planning and protection for employment areas, which is the explicit requirement of Policy 1.2.1 of the PPS (and the equivalent of the *Growth Plan*, in Policy 2.2.6.2).

Staff understand that the Province is expected to release this year an employment land discussion paper to stimulate the development of a more substantive, long-term policy framework for employment lands. The paper is needed and timely, and staff will endeavour to work with Provincial staff at the appropriate time to ensure the Province’s long-term view is compatible with and supportive of the strategic approach recommended in this report. Further, it is the opinion of staff that the Province should consider a longer, 30-year planning horizon for employment lands, rather than the current 20-year horizon. A longer horizon will position municipalities to better plan for and respond to the cyclical and location-sensitive employment market, and ensure that when new businesses want to come to York Region, that employment lands are development-ready, which is a key consideration for new business.

4.3 REGIONAL OFFICIAL PLAN AMENDMENT 52

Strategic approach to ROPA 52 is consistent with employment policies of the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS)

The strategic identification, and future adoption of ROPA 52, as a Regionally-significant employment area is consistent with the municipal planning requirements for employment lands set out in Policy 1.3 of the PPS. In particular, ROPA 52 represents the planning, protection and preservation of employment lands for future uses, as required in Policy 1.3.1(c). The requirement, under Policy 1.3.1(d), to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is provided, will be met through the Region’s future approval of OPA 637, and finalization of the related development phasing programs through the City of Vaughan’s block planning process.

ROPA 52 supports the intent of the Growth Plan

Section 2.2.8 of the Provincial *Growth Plan* contains eight policies or tests that must be satisfied prior to the approval of a settlement area boundary expansion, as proposed under

ROPA 52. A complete listing of these tests, and an explanation of how ROPA 52 will satisfy each, is outlined in *Attachment 3*.

Two parts of Section 2.2.8.2 of the *Growth Plan* are highlighted for purposes of discussion and they state:

“A settlement area boundary expansion may only occur as part of a municipal comprehensive review where it has been demonstrated that:

- a) sufficient opportunities to accommodate forecasted growth contained in Schedule 3, through intensification and in designated greenfield areas, using the intensification target and density targets, are not available:
 - i) within the regional market area, as determined by the upper – or single tier municipality, and
 - ii) within the applicable lower tier municipality to accommodate the growth allocated to the municipality pursuant to this plan.”
- ...
- c) the timing of the expansion and the phasing of development within the designated Greenfield area will not adversely affect the achievement of the intensification target and density targets, and other policies of this Plan.”

In the context of the municipal comprehensive review, the work completed to date by the Region addresses the regional market component of the 2.2.8.2 i), and on this basis, it is proposed ROPA 52 be finalized and recommended once the joint work currently underway to satisfy the local *Places to Grow* policy components of the municipal comprehensive review, noted above in Policy 2.2.8.2 ii) and c) is sufficiently progressed. The exercise is anticipated to be completed over the Summer of 2008.

Expanding the Regional urban area for employment land is consistent with the Regional Official Plan

Criteria for Regional urban area expansions are set out in Policy 5.2.3 of the Regional Official Plan (ROP) - describing nine specific tests that must be met. Like in the case of Provincial policy, the adoption of ROPA 52 to expand the Region's urban area will be consistent with these tests following the completion of the above noted work.. In particular, completion of that exercise will better align ROPA 52 with the requirement, under Policy 5.2.3(a), to be consistent with Regional population and employment forecasts and the Regional Official Plan employment numbers for the City of Vaughan will need to be revised to support the new land area and related employment numbers. A complete listing of the ROP criteria, and a description of how ROPA 52 would conform to each, is included in this report as *Attachment 4*.

To recognize the Regional significance of the Vaughan 400 employment lands, it is proposed that the site will be designated as “Regionally Significant Employment Area” on Map 5 of the Regional Official Plan. This new Regional Official Plan land use designation will be applied on a “go forward” basis for all new Regionally significant employment areas located beyond the existing urban area. Prior to the adoption of ROPA 52, Regional staff will establish the appropriate parameters that define a Regionally significant employment area.

4.4 NEXT STEPS

The local component of the municipal comprehensive review will trigger recommendation to approve Regional Official Plan Amendment 52

The completion of the analysis required to sufficiently satisfy the urban expansion criteria of the *Growth Plan* and Regional Official Plan will trigger staff’s recommendation to adopt ROPA 52. This work is well-underway to recommend the adoption of ROPA 52 in the Fall of 2008. In the meantime, Regional Council’s adoption of the strategic approach to identifying Regionally-significant employment areas beyond the current urban area, and in-principle support for the urban expansion proposed under ROPA 52, will provide a level of certainty in the planning process and guidance to move forward.

Sequence of key deliverables leading to urban area expansion, local Official Plan Amendment approval, and development of the lands

Completing the remaining local market policy component of the Region’s comprehensive review process is the first in a series of steps to bring about the planning approvals and infrastructure delivery required to facilitate the development of the ROPA 52 planning area. There has been significant progress on this work, and staff are confident that the following key deliverables will be aligned over the next several months in order to move forward with the adoption of ROPA 52:

- **Population and employment distributions to the local municipalities** are being finalized by the Regional Planning Department’s Long & Strategic Planning Branch as part of the Region’s growth management exercise, which is expected to be complete in the Fall of 2008. The Region’s exercise is considered to be sufficiently progressed to satisfy the regional market component of the municipal comprehensive review. At the same time, Hemson Consulting Ltd. is conducting an employment land-needs analysis on behalf of the City of Vaughan as part of its official plan review process but is accelerating the portion of the work dealing with ROPA 52 to address growth forecasts allocated and the timing and staging of development in accordance with *Places to Grow*. This work will also provide the basis for amending the Vaughan employment numbers in the Regional Plan to support ROPA 52.

- **Infrastructure requirements** for the area will be determined, in part, through the updating of the Regional Transportation, and Water and Waste Water Master Plans. These will be substantially complete later this year. Concurrent with this process, a Master Servicing & Transportation Strategy Study is being undertaken by the firm of Cole Engineering, on behalf of the landowners within the ROPA 52 planning area. This study will determine and recommend options for the delivery of the required infrastructure for the planning area, including the proposed *GTA West Transportation Corridor*. Regional staff have been working with the landowners' consultants to ensure that their study is consistent with the methodology and assumptions used in the Regional Master Plan process. A draft of the landowner-initiated study is expected this Spring.
- **Regional approval of OPA 637** will build on the work described above to expand the City's urban area, and establish detailed land uses, staging and timing for the new employment area. OPA 637 will need to establish, at a minimum, the following:
 - Designations and policies that protect for the GTA East West Transportation corridor.
 - Land use designations and policies that limit development to employment uses only.
 - Local land use designations and policies, including suitable building heights and floor space index, that support and replicate the Region's designation of this area as a Regionally Significant Employment Area.
 - A phasing plan that identifies the amount and timing of development that matches the availability of required road, transit, water and sewer servicing infrastructure.
 - Provision for adequate community infrastructure typically located within employment areas.
 - Policies that implement the Region's Transit Oriented Development Guidelines and provide for suitable pedestrian and cycling paths, linkages and routes.
 - Sustainable development policies.
 - Natural Heritage policies in accordance with the Greenbelt Plan.
- **Development phasing and urban design standards** will be implemented for the new employment area through the City's Block Plan process, which will commence following OPA 637 approval. This framework will be based on the high-level principles set out in OPA 637, which include urban design excellence, and establishing an attractive interface (e.g. linear landscaping, tree plantings, etc.) between buildings and the Highway 400.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct fiscal impacts associated with this report, while there are long-term economic benefits to securing lands in the 400-Series Highway corridors as employment lands

Employment areas in the 400-Series Highway corridors enhance the Region's status as a preferred destination for business and industry, and serve to strengthen its overall economic competitiveness. Taking this strategic approach optimizes the location, profile and value of lands within existing and planned 400-Series Highway corridors. In effect, it establishes job- and assessment-generation as a first principle of development for lands that are logical destinations for employment. Not only is this approach good for the Provincial and Regional economy, but it also creates live-work opportunities that are sought by residents in new and emerging communities.

Development of the Regional Official Plan Amendment 52 planning area will not occur until the required infrastructure is available and fiscal impacts are assessed

A fiscal impact analysis will be undertaken by the Regional Finance Department following the completion of the owner-initiated Master Servicing & Transportation Strategy Study, being undertaken to assess the infrastructure requirements of these future employment lands. The conclusions and recommendations arising from this work will be reflected in the recommendation report that will be prepared to support Regional Council approval of the associated local Official Plan Amendment document, OPA 637.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Identifying Regionally-significant employment lands beyond the existing urban area supports local planning

The strategic approach being proposed through this report is intended to support and guide local municipal planning for future employment areas in the 400 corridors. With at least four municipalities currently engaged in official plan reviews, this approach is timely and will assist in local planning implementation. Further, it provides an enhanced level of consistency and clarity across the Region, as municipalities begin to look for new employment areas beyond their current urban boundaries.

In-principle support for Regional Official Plan Amendment 52 bolsters Vaughan's employment land planning

Pending the adoption of ROPA 52, Regional Council support for Vaughan's planned employment area provides a heightened level of certainty to the City's planning process, which was initiated over three years ago with the *Highway 400 North Employment Lands*

Secondary Plan Study. Further, the identification of ROPA 52 as a Regionally-significant employment area, as shown on the map “Strategic Employment Lands, and Corridors, Outside of the Urban Area”, bolsters the City’s long-term planning by providing a broader, strategic context for the Amendment.

Regional staff have been working closely with City staff and the landowners’ consultants, and there is agreement that given the common goal of encouraging future employment lands on 400-Series Highways, in addition to the status of this application, there should be a formal recognition of the strategic importance of these lands, pending the further work required by the comprehensive review. This report has been prepared in recognition of the appropriateness of this action.

Relationship to Vision 2026

True to the forward-looking and public-interest focus of *Vision 2026*, this report looks at employment areas in a long-term and strategic manner, and addresses the need for this and future generations of York Region residents to have access to a range of employment opportunities. In doing so, the recommendations of this report will serve to advance all eight goal areas of Vision 2026, and, in particular, “A Vibrant Economy,” and “Managed and Balanced Growth.”

7. CONCLUSION

The Highway 400-Series corridors are strategic locations for economic development and are vital to the current and long-term competitiveness of the York Region economy. Identifying those segments of the Highway 400-Series corridors outside of the current urban area and the *Greenbelt* as future employment areas will strengthen York Region’s employment structure, and reinforce on-going planning for employment areas by the local municipalities.

This strategic approach, including the recognition of these lands being endorsed “in principle” for employment purposes, provides a substantive context for the future approval of Vaughan’s Highway 400 North employment area. It also provides a level of certainty and clarity for proceeding with the planning process for this future employment area.

Based on the adoption of this report, Regional staff will be focussing on ensuring the local market policy considerations of the comprehensive review has sufficiently progressed. This will enable the Region to proceed with the adoption of ROPA 52 in the Fall of 2008 – bringing the lands into the Region’s urban area. This work, including population and employment projections/assignments, will satisfy the urban expansion criteria of the Provincial *Growth Plan* and the Regional Official Plan.

For more information on this report, please contact Sean Hertel, Senior Planner, Community Planning at Ext. 1556, or Heather Konefat, Director of Community Planning at Ext. 1502.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The four attachments referred to in this clause are included with this report.)