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OFFICIAL PLAN AMENDMENT NO. 672 THORNHILL CENTRE STREET STUDY

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, August 23, 2005, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The Commissioner of Planning and Development Services be authorized to give notice to approve Amendment No. 672 to the Official Plan of the City of Vaughan as recommended by Vaughan Council.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to recommend approval of the City of Vaughan's Official Plan Amendment No. 672 (OPA 672).

3. BACKGROUND

The lands subject to OPA 672 are shown on *Attachment 1* to this report. They include the lands on the north side of Centre Street from New Westminster Drive to just west of Loudon Crescent and the lands on both sides of Centre Street from just west of Loudon Crescent to the Hydro Corridor (just west of Dufferin Street).

The lands within OPA 672 currently contain the following land use designations under the Thornhill-Vaughan Community Plan (OPA 210), as amended: "Low Density Residential", "Service Station", and "Neighbourhood Commercial". In addition, the properties at the northwest corner of Dufferin and Centre Streets are currently designated "Prestige Office" under OPA 450.

The OPA 672 planning area is designated "Urban Area" in the Regional Official Plan (ROP) and identified as a Regional Rapid Transit Corridor under the York Region Rapid Transit Plan. The Regional impact of this status is outlined in Section 4 of this report.

3.1 The Thornhill Centre Street Study

On June 23, 2003, City of Vaughan Council directed that a Terms of Reference be prepared for a study of Centre Street in Thornhill-Vaughan (the Study) and, at the same meeting, enacted an Interim Control By-law to freeze development within the Study Area

to provide time to complete the Study (*Attachment 1*). The purpose of the Study was as follows:

- Provide an up-to-date Planning and Urban Design Policy Framework to guide development in the corridor.
- Update the vision, goals and objectives for development within the Study Area and its role and relationship within the Thornhill Community Plan.
- Determine the potential for additional land uses and development within the Study Area, and its implications for existing development within and in the general vicinity of the Study Area.
- Identify appropriate streetscaping measures to enhance existing and future development within the Study Area.
- Identify appropriate improvements to transportation infrastructure to enhance pedestrian, bicycle, public transit and auto movements to and within the Study Area.
- Provide input into the intended review of OPA 210.

On June 14, 2004 Vaughan Council approved an extension of the Interim Control By-law for a second year to complete the necessary legal documents to implement the findings and recommendations of the Study.

The Public Meeting was held on September 20, 2004, and staff addressed the issues raised at that meeting in a report to the Vaughan Committee of the Whole on November 29, 2004. Vaughan Council deferred approval and staff was directed to further address the issues at a future Committee Meeting. The matter was taken back to the Committee of the Whole on May 2, 2005 and Official Plan Amendments 671 & 672 were adopted by Vaughan Council on May 9, 2005. OPA 672 was subsequently modified by Vaughan Council and re-adopted on May 24, 2005.

Official Plan Amendment No. 671 (OPA 671) implements policies for the east end of the Study Area and includes the Promenade Mall lands and the lands north of Centre Street between New Westminster Drive and Bathurst Street. OPA 671 was forwarded to the Region and was approved by Regional Council on June 23, 2005. The appeal period ended without appeal on July 14, 2005 and therefore, OPA 671 is in effect.

3.2 Official Plan Amendment No. 672

The OPA 672 area has been divided into two areas which have been labelled as “The Western Gateway” and “The Centre Street Spine”. The following sections describe the land use policies of these two areas.

3.2.1 The Western Gateway

The “Western Gateway” refers to the lands in the four (4) quadrants around the Dufferin/Centre Street intersection (see *Figure 1*). There are a number of large undeveloped parcels in this area that provide the opportunity to establish a high quality focus and entry point to the Thornhill community from the west and north.

The Northwest Quadrant

OPA 672 designates the lands in the northwest quadrant as “Prestige Area” and establishes an overall average development density limit of 1.0 Floor Space Index (FSI), to limit the scale of future development and address limited traffic capacity within the area. The OPA aims to concentrate development close to the Dufferin/Centre intersection and transit service, with a lower density anticipated in the interior of the quadrant. In addition, the range of currently permitted uses (under OPA 450) has been expanded to include recreational and institutional uses within the Prestige Area designation.

In keeping with the planning objectives for the Western Gateway, OPA 672 includes urban design policies specific to the northwest quadrant as follows:

- The minimum height for buildings at key corner locations shall be two-storeys.
- Development density shall be concentrated close to the Dufferin/Centre intersection, and along the frontages of Dufferin Street and Centre Street.
- Pedestrian and vehicle crossings at the key intersection shall be well defined.
- Streetscape and street furniture shall be high quality and of unified design to clearly demarcate the gateway.
- Landowners should consolidate driveways and provide interconnected laneways, where appropriate, as sites develop or redevelop over time.

The Northeast Quadrant

The northeast quadrant of the Western Gateway is predominantly developed with established retail commercial land uses. The vacant site at the northeast corner of Dufferin and Centre Streets, formerly a gas station, has been redesignated to “General Commercial.” No other change to the range of permitted uses in this quadrant is considered necessary under the Study.

The Southwest and Southeast Quadrants

The two southern quadrants, largely under Provincial ownership, are essentially left over from the planning of Highway 407, with the exception of the recently built gas station on the southeast corner. The landowners in these quadrants have indicated a desire to examine a variety of development options for the lands. Therefore, OPA 672 applies a “Special Policy Area” overlay designation.

**Figure 1 –
Western Gateway**



The “Special Policy Area” designation requires that any proposal for development will be required to submit a comprehensive planning analysis; supported by a traffic study, a public participation component, rationale for proposed density and land use, a noise study, and a height and massing study. An amendment to the Official Plan would also be required. This approach is to ensure that development is of an appropriate type and scale, given the planning objectives of OPA 672 and the constraints (e.g. road capacity) of the immediate area.

3.2.2 The Centre Street Spine

From the eastern edge of the northeast quadrant discussed above to the west side of Concord Road, the current land use designations will remain in effect, as this is a newly-established residential area. However, the urban design, parking, and other general policies of OPA 672 will apply. The objective is to have an up-to-date policy framework which provides consistent treatment to the streetscape and public realm throughout the Centre Street corridor, and improve its appearance and attractiveness over time.

Between Concord Road and Vaughan Boulevard on the north side of Centre Street, OPA 672 introduces an “Office Commercial” designation. This designation permits small scale office uses, and religious institutions, day care centres, schools, and libraries.

Building densities along this segment of the Centre Street spine are controlled, indirectly, by limiting building heights to two and one half storeys. The one-half storey permitted in the roof must be incorporated in a pitched-roof design so that the building blends into the residential fabric of the adjacent area.

Between Vaughan Boulevard and New Westminster Drive, the land use designations currently in place under the policies of OPA 210 are retained. However, a number of uses that are permitted under the current General Commercial designation (e.g. automotive, garden sales and similar uses which require outside storage and display of merchandise) are no longer permitted under OPA 672. In addition, OPA 672 introduces new urban design and parking standards which will be implemented as infill and redevelopment proceeds over time.

Between Vaughan Boulevard and New Westminster Drive, there were two properties with “Service Station” designations in OPA 210, although only one has a service station located on it (1030 Centre Street). OPA 672 aims to encourage development which is street-related, pedestrian-friendly and transit-supportive; qualities which are not consistent with service stations. The Amendment deletes the Service Station designation from the property at 1102 Centre Street and replaces it with “General Commercial.”

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

As discussed in the following sections, OPA 672 has gone through a public consultation process, conforms to the policies of the Regional Official Plan (ROP) and represents good planning.

4.1 Local and Regional Corridor Policies

Centre Street is identified as a “Local Corridor” on Map 5 of the Regional Official Plan (as amended by ROPA 43, in effect January 7, 2005). As such, the policies of Section 5.6 are applicable. Centre Street has been identified as a VIVA rapid transit service route, with stations proposed at both Dufferin Street and the Promenade Mall. Policy 5.6.6 states:

“That those segments of Local Corridors identified through the environmental assessment process as locations for rapid transit services and facilities may be subject to and consistent with the Regional Corridors policies under Section 5.5 of [the ROP].”

Therefore, the Amendment area is being reviewed under the Regional Corridor policies of Section 5.5 of the Official Plan. Regional Corridors are considered the main arteries of the Region’s urban structure and provide for the movement of people and goods between the Regional and Local Centres to support their vitality.

Section 5.5.4 states that it is the policy of Council:

“That the Region work with the area municipalities in identifying the different conditions of each Regional Corridor on a segment-by-segment basis. This shall occur in a comprehensive manner that facilitates the identification of Key Development Areas within these segments, representing one or more of the following:

- a) areas with the greatest opportunity for compact and mixed-use development;
- b) areas assigned early priority for rapid transit services and infrastructure;
- c) areas abutting or adjacent to rapid transit stations; and,
- d) areas of the Corridor that intersect with other major transportation routes or facilities, including passenger rail and other surface transit services.”

“Key Development Areas” are to serve as places where compact and mixed-use development is to be focused. Key Development Areas are intended to have a density target of 2.5 Floor Space Index.

Council of the City of Vaughan has, through the Vaughan Centre Street Study, identified the different conditions within the study area and has established the OPA 671 lands at the Bathurst Street end of the corridor as the “Key Development Area”. The OPA 671 area is the location in which the compact and mixed use development will be focused. It is the area in which development will be permitted at a 2.7 Floor Space Index. Conversely, the Centre Street Spine has been identified by Vaughan Council as an area in which lower densities are preferable, given the desire to ensure compatibility with the abutting low density residential dwellings to the north of the study area.

Notwithstanding the fact that the City of Vaughan has elected not to classify any of the lands with the OPA 672 as a Key Development Area, there are other policies of Section 5.5 that are still applicable.

Section 5.5.7 states that the implementation of rapid transit services should be initiated as early as possible in the Regional Corridors to encourage development and redevelopment consistent with the policies of this Plan. To this end, as noted above, Centre Street has been identified as a VIVA rapid transit service route and construction has begun on a station at the northwest corner of Centre and Dufferin Streets. The Region supports the City of Vaughan’s “Prestige Area” designation of the lands at this corner, as the integration of the VIVA station with a Prestige Area use is highly desirable and within the intent of the Official Plan.

Section 5.5.8 encourages the area municipalities to develop urban design guidelines for the various segments of the Regional Corridors, consistent with Policy 5.3.9 of the ROP. Policy 5.3.9.b) states that urban design guidelines should be created to achieve attractive, pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented places through:

- Sidewalk connections directly to streets and transit routes.
- Appropriate building massing and articulation.
- Appropriate parking design and standards including provision for above- and below-grade parking structures.

Official Plan Amendment 672 addresses the above requirements by including the following statement:

“To improve Centre Street as an attractive, pedestrian-friendly and transit-supportive corridor through the application of a comprehensive, co-ordinated and integrated approach to planning, transportation and urban design, based on a set of urban design policies consistently applied to new development and redevelopment.”

The Urban Design Policies of OPA 672 are extensive and are consistent with the criteria outlined in the ROP. In particular, the Region supports the area-specific policies for the four quadrants of the Dufferin Street and Centre Street intersection which require that

corner sites are defined with more intensive development and high quality architecture and serve as landmarks or gateway entry points.

Policy 5.5.17 states that new reverse lotting along the Corridor shall not be permitted. The proposed road network and designations of OPA 672 have been designed so as to preclude reverse lotting.

It is important to note that, although OPA 671 and OPA 672 were given separate numbers by the City, they cannot be viewed in isolation of one another. The two OPAs combine to implement most of the recommendations of the Thornhill Centre Street Study. Together, they conform to the policies of OPA 210 by protecting existing residential and general commercial areas and by creating opportunity for redevelopment and new development. OPA 672, along with OPA 671, also conform to the requirements of the York Region Official Plan by promoting compact development, increasing residential and employment growth, and supporting public transit service.

4.2 Provincial Policy Statement

On March 1, 2005 the Province's 5-year review of the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) came into effect. The PPS speaks to the importance of planning for healthy, liveable communities. Subsection 1.1.1 states that healthy communities are sustained by:

“... promoting efficient development and land use patterns which sustain the financial well-being of the Province and municipalities over the long term; [and] accommodating an appropriate range and mix of residential, employment ... uses to meet long-term needs...”

Furthermore, Subsection 1.1.3. speaks to land use patterns within communities being based upon densities and a mix of land uses which promote the efficient use of infrastructure and transportation systems and opportunities for intensification and redevelopment.

The proposed policy framework of OPA 672 is consistent with the Provincial policies set out in the PPS.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial impacts associated with this report. The planning framework of OPA 672 to encourage a more compact, mixed-use urban form will optimize City and Regional investments in existing and planned infrastructure in Vaughan's Centre Street corridor. For example, planned intensification along and adjacent to Centre Street will generate ridership and revenue to support Viva Rapid Transit service through that area.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The City of Vaughan has adopted OPA 672 and the recommendations of this report are consistent with the City's position. Regional staff have been active participants in the City's study process for both OPAs 671 and 672 and are satisfied that City and Regional planning objectives are mutually beneficial. The policies of OPA 672 establish a more current and responsive planning framework to address the changing dynamics of the City's Thornhill community in a way that recognizes and enhances the unique character of this neighbourhood.

The City will implement OPA 672 through such local planning instruments as land subdivision, zoning and site plan control. The Region is the approval authority for official plan amendments, in the event that an amendment to OPA 672 is required at a later date.

7. CONCLUSION

The lands subject to OPA 672 include the lands on the north side of Centre Street from New Westminster Drive to just west of Loudon Crescent and the lands on both sides of Centre Street from just west of Loudon Crescent to the Hydro Corridor (just west of Dufferin Street).

OPA 672 is the second of two Official Plan Amendments that were considered by the City of Vaughan Council on May 9, 2005. OPAs 671 and 672 were both adopted that night; however, due to a modification, OPA 672 was re-adopted on May 24, 2005. OPA 671 was approved by Regional Council and came into effect on July 15, 2005.

Notwithstanding the different adoption dates, the two OPAs together implement the majority of the findings and recommendations of the Thornhill Centre Street Study. OPA 672 conforms to the policies of OPA 210 by protecting existing residential and general commercial areas and by creating opportunity for redevelopment and new development. OPA 672 also conforms to the requirements of the York Region Official Plan, and when combined with OPA 671, they promote compact development, increase residential and employment growth, and support public transit service in the Centre Street Regional corridor.

The proposed policy framework of OPA 672 is also consistent with the Provincial policies set out in the PPS and represents good planning. Therefore, it is recommended that the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services be authorized to give notice to approve Amendment No. 672 to the Official Plan of the City of Vaughan.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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