

13

THORNHILL YONGE STREET STUDY IMPLEMENTATION – CITY OF VAUGHAN OPA 669 AND TOWN OF MARKHAM OPA 154

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, August 25, 2006, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

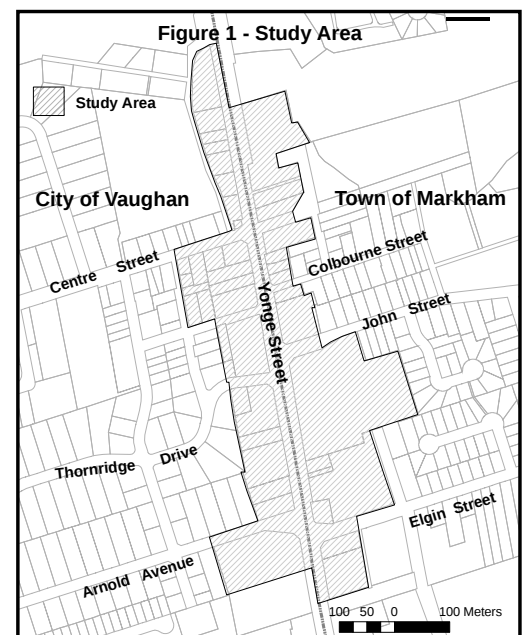
It is recommended that:

1. The Commissioner of Planning be authorized to issue a Notice of Decision to modify and approve in-part Vaughan Official Plan Amendment No. 669 under Section 17(36) of the Planning Act.
2. The Commissioner of Planning be authorized to issue a Notice of Decision to modify and approve Markham Official Plan Amendment No. 154 under Section 17(36) of the Planning Act.
3. Regional staff be authorized to appear before the Ontario Municipal Board to support the Region's position, as necessary and appropriate, in the event that the Region's Notice of Decision to approve Vaughan OPA 669 and/or Markham OPA 154 is appealed.
4. The Regional Clerk be directed to circulate a copy of this report and related attachments to the respective Planning Departments of the City of Vaughan and Town of Markham for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to:

- Explain the impetus, scope and recommendations of the Thornhill Yonge Street Study (the "study"), which was jointly initiated by Vaughan and Markham.
- Provide a high-level summary and analysis of the Official Plan Amendments (OPAs) initiated by Vaughan and Markham to implement the recommendations of the joint study.
- Recommend Regional approval of OPAs 669 and 154, which were each initiated and adopted by Vaughan and Markham, respectively.



3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Community Context

Yonge Street has been the “main street” and commercial and cultural heart of Thornhill since the community was established in 1794 as a hub of industry and trade. The street and immediate surrounding area has been shaped over the past three centuries through several waves of development and change. These are best characterized by the completion of a north-south stagecoach route in the mid 1800s, the Metropolitan Radial Commuter Railway in the early 1900s, and a wave of northward suburban settlement from Toronto that followed the Second World War.

While much of the residential neighbourhoods have evolved and changed gradually over time, much of Yonge Street’s traditional “main street” function has given way to automobile traffic and auto-oriented development. Although some historical buildings remain along Yonge Street, post-war development has generally not been sympathetic to its historic character. The original settlement fabric and character of the “main street” has been fragmented and diminished over the years by surface parking lots, strip plazas and increased traffic congestion.

3.2 Thornhill Yonge Street Study

The study was jointly initiated by the City of Vaughan and Town of Markham in the Fall 2002 to address, in a comprehensive way, the common development challenges and opportunities of the Thornhill core. The planning and design firm of Urban Strategies Inc. was retained by Vaughan and Markham to undertake the project.

The study area comprises approximately 20 hectares of land, spanning a one kilometre stretch of Yonge Street from the Don River Valley in the north to one block beyond the Arnold Avenue/Elgin Street intersection in the south (see *Figure 1 – Study Area*). The central focus of the study area are properties with frontage on Yonge Street; overlapping the Heritage Conservation District Boundaries established by Vaughan and Markham for their respective portions of the Thornhill community.

3.2.1 Study Objectives

The study, based on objectives set jointly by Vaughan and Markham, was initiated to create a framework for renewal, based on the following:

- Achieve a vibrant, mixed-use “main street”.
- Identify opportunities for heritage preservation as well as appropriate infill development and intensification on strategic sites.
- Create a unified urban design vision for the core, including private properties/buildings and the public realm (i.e. parks and the streetscape).
- Renewed strategies to revitalize and raise the profile of the commercial sector.
- Establish a Streetscape Improvement Program for the Yonge Street right-of-way, to be integrated with the design and construction of the Yonge Street Rapid Transitway.

3.2.2 Study recommendations

The study concluded with a final report dated June 2005, following nearly three years of consultation with businesses, residents and staff from the Region including York Region Transit and the York Region Rapid Transit Corporation. The key recommendations of the study call for the City of Vaughan and Town of Markham to:

- Attract a range of commercial uses with a focus on niche markets including food, lifestyle and boutique-style shops.
- Pursue the implementation of a \$7-million pedestrian-friendly, transit-supportive streetscape program in partnership with York Region through the design and construction of the Yonge Street Rapid Transitway. The program includes unique concrete and brick sidewalks, a raised 3.5 metre-wide landscaped centre median, and in-ground street trees.
- Create new public parks and plazas.
- Amend the Official Plan policies for the study area to broaden the mix of permitted land uses, and to encourage compact, mixed-use development at strategic sites to a maximum of three-storeys in “Heritage” designations and to a maximum of five and eight-storeys in the “Mixed Use” designations in Vaughan and Markham, respectively.

3.3 Official Plan Amendments to Implement Study

The Councils for the City of Vaughan and Town of Markham initiated OPAs 669 and 154, respectively, to implement the study recommendations through amendments to the secondary plan for their portion of the Thornhill core. These amendments, although made to existing planning documents in two separate municipalities, have the potential to create a more unified and consistent planning and development framework for the Thornhill community.

Common elements of each OPA include policies that:

- Designate the amendment area as a “Community Improvement Project Area” consistent with *Section 28* of the *Planning Act*.
- Prohibit the further establishment of drive-through facilities, gas bars/service stations, and single-storey, free-standing buildings containing retail uses, restaurants, banks, health clubs or commercial schools.
- Cap the Gross Floor Area of any individual retail store or restaurant to 1,000 square metres (approximately 10,000 square feet).
- Require a high quality of urban design, including building orientation to Yonge Street.
- Protect for a 36-metre right-of-way along Yonge Street, including a 5.2-metre Public Boulevard Pedestrian zone, which is consistent with the planned Regional Yonge Street Transitway.

3.3.1 Vaughan OPA 669

This amendment (see *Council Attachment 2*) was adopted by the City of Vaughan on June 26, 2006 and was received by the Region for review and approval on July 6, 2006. The OPA updates the City’s “Thornhill-Vaughan Community Plan” (OPA 210) by creating new land use designations for its segment of Yonge Street within the study area.

The new “Mid-Rise/Mixed Use” and “Heritage Main Street” designations are consistent with the study recommendations; broadening the range of permitted land uses, and capping heights at five and three-storeys, respectively.

3.3.2 Markham OPA 154

This amendment (see *Council Attachment 4*) was adopted by the Town of Markham on June 13, 2006 and was received by the Region for review and approval on June 26, 2006. The OPA updates the policies of the Town’s Secondary Plan (OPA 1) for its Thornhill Planning District, consistent with the study recommendations. Markham’s OPA to implement the study does differ from the Vaughan OPA, however, by allowing increases beyond the three and six-storey height limits in exchange for certain community benefits, consistent with the “bonus provisions” of *Section 37* of the *Planning Act*.

Under Markham OPA 154, development that provides specific community benefits prescribed by the Town may be eligible for a height “bonus” up to five storeys in the “Heritage Main Street 1” designation and up to eight-storeys in the “Community Amenity – Thornhill Yonge Street” designation. The criteria set out in OPA 154 that must be met in order to receive consideration for additional height and density are:

- Compatibility with adjacent land uses.
- Provision of on-site, publicly accessible park or plaza space, consistent with the Council endorsed Thornhill Yonge Street Study 2005.
- The property owner agrees to undertake and/or fund improvements to the public realm consistent with the Council endorsed Thornhill Yonge Street Study 2005.
- The property owner agrees to provide underground parking to strengthen commercial uses within the corridor.
- Provision of publicly accessible rear lane parking areas, with vehicular and pedestrian cross connections to existing and future parking areas on adjoining properties.
- Consistency with the urban design policies of the Thornhill Secondary Plan and the Council endorsed Thornhill Yonge Street Study 2005.

It is the understanding of Regional staff that policies allowing more height on the Markham side of Yonge Street by using density bonusing reflect greater development potential, relative to the Vaughan side. Unlike properties on the Vaughan side, Markham’s heritage buildings are generally more concentrated in one portion of the study area; creating additional opportunities for intensification at relatively greater heights. Furthermore, there are a greater number of existing taller buildings on the Markham side; setting a context for more compact development on appropriate sites.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The recommendations of the Thornhill Yonge Street Study and proposed OPAs are consistent with Provincial, Regional and local municipal planning objectives and will serve to improve the business, community and aesthetic conditions of the Thornhill core. Furthermore, the study and related policy changes represent a more unified and

comprehensive planning and development framework for the area – effectively putting the Thornhill community “back together again.”

Accordingly, Regional staff are recommending the approval of Vaughan OPA 669 and Markham 154; subject to minor modifications to each, and deferring a decision on OPA 669 with respect to those lands known as 7584 and 7610 to 7616 Yonge Street.

4.1 Provincial Policy

The proposed policies of Vaughan OPA 669 and Markham OPA 154 are consistent with provincial interests regarding planning and development. The *Provincial Policy Statement* (2005) articulates matters of provincial interest to which all municipal official plans shall be consistent with. The proposed OPAs are also consistent with the intensification policies of the recently-approved *Growth Plan*, and the enhancement of historical districts under the *Heritage Act*.

4.2 Regional Official Plan

The study and implementing OPAs are consistent with and will serve to advance Regional Official Plan (ROP) policies pertaining growth management, transit-supportive development and heritage preservation. More specifically, both Vaughan and Markham OPAs:

- Create Community Improvement Plans to conserve heritage resources (Policy 4.2.6).
- Encourage access to historic core areas by walking, bicycling and transit, and design parking areas that complement and preserve heritage areas (Policy 4.2.9).
- Accommodate population and employment growth through intensification (Policy 5.2.4).
- Identify segments of Regional Corridors where intensification will occur (Policy 5.5.4).
- Accommodate the road requirements for the planned Yonge Street Rapid Transitway (Policies 6.2.2. & 6.2.3).

4.3 Modification and Deferral

Although Vaughan OPA 669 and Markham 154 are consistent with Regional policies, Regional staff are recommending a minor modification to each, and that a decision regarding a portion of the OPA 669 lands be deferred. It is the opinion of staff that the modification and deferral will maintain the purpose and intent of the study and related OPAs, and will support their long-term implementation.

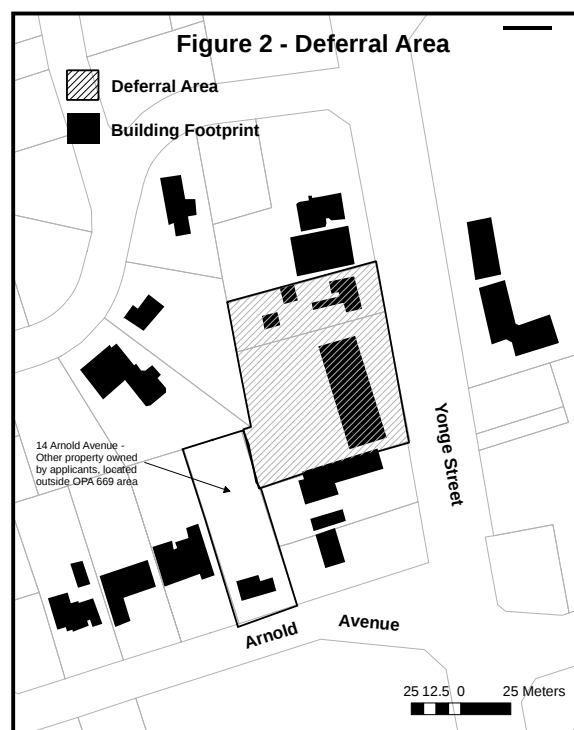
4.3.1 Modification

Regional staff are recommending that OPA 669 and OPA 154 be modified to add a specific reference to “York Region” as a participant in the preparation and implementation of the Community Improvement Plans (CIP) for the Vaughan and Markham segments of the Thornhill core. This was a recommendation of the Thornhill Yonge Street Study, as outlined in section 3.3 of this report. These proposed modifications are attached to this report as *Council Attachment 1* and *Council Attachment 3*.

Although it is the intent of the policy that all appropriate agencies and/or governments will have a role in the CIP process, staff from the Region, Vaughan and Markham agree that a specific reference to “York Region” will add some clarity to the intent of the policy. Further, leveraging community improvements such as enhanced streetscaping – estimated to cost \$7-million – may impact to some degree the design, timing and cost of the Yonge Street Rapid Transitway. As such, the Region is an important stakeholder in the implementation of the new vision for the Thornhill segment of Yonge Street.

4.3.2 Deferral

A site-specific letter of objection to Vaughan OPA 669, dated August 3, 2006 has been submitted to York Region on behalf of Thornhill Village Plaza Inc. and M4 Developments Inc., being the owners of a one-hectare property comprising 7584 and 7610 to 7616 Yonge Street, and 14 Arnold Avenue. The Arnold Avenue portion of the property is located outside of the OPA 669 planning area; and is therefore not included in the deferral (see *Figure 2 – Deferral Area*). The owners submitted Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendment applications to the City on March 2, 2005 to permit an 11-storey seniors’ condominium apartment building on the subject property. A Statutory Public Meeting was held on June 8, 2005. The City has not yet made a final decision on the applications.



The policies of OPA 669 would designate the subject property as “Mixed-Use/Mid Rise,” and “Heritage Mainstreet,” which would limit building heights to a maximum of five- and three-storeys, respectively. The site is currently designated “Neighbourhood Commercial” under OPA 210. The related zoning category caps the maximum permitted height at three-storeys. A single-family dwelling, retail plaza and heritage building currently occupy the site. It is the Region’s understanding that the heritage building would be retained and incorporated into the proposed development.

Deferring a decision on this property will enable the balance of the OPA 669 policies to proceed, and provide an opportunity for City and Regional staff to work with the applicants, as appropriate, with respect to the related site-specific OPA and rezoning applications.

4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026

Regional approval of Vaughan OPA 669 and Markham OPA 154 will serve to advance the goals of Vision 2026, in particular, “A Vibrant Economy,” “Housing Choices for Our Residents,” and “Managed and Balanced Growth.”

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. In the event that Vaughan OPA 669 and/or Markham 154 is appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board, Regional staff resources may be required to support the Region’s position.

The majority of the estimated \$7-million cost of the streetscaping improvements recommended in the Thornhill Yonge Street Study will be financed primarily by the City of Vaughan and Town of Markham. These costs could be augmented through Community Improvement Plans under *Section 28* of the *Planning Act* and/or through developer agreements under *Section 37* of the *Planning Act* (*Section 37* agreements are only contemplated by Markham OPA 154).

Regional contributions, if any, to the proposed streetscaping improvements are yet to be determined, and would require a further report to the Regional Transportation and Works Committee, as appropriate. The manner and extent to which the Region will participate in and fund these proposed improvements will be determined, in large part, through the detailed engineering and design of the Yonge Street Rapid Transitway. This work will be on-going through 2007.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Thornhill Yonge Street Study and related amendments to the Vaughan and Markham Official Plans are an important locally-initiated planning exercise to advance the jointly-held planning objectives for the Thornhill core. This process was comprehensive, forward-thinking and results-oriented. Regional staff from Planning and Development Services, Transportation and Works, York Region Transit and York Rapid Transit Corporation participated throughout the study process at various stages.

7. CONCLUSION

The Thornhill Yonge Street Study was jointly initiated by the City of Vaughan and Town of Markham in the Fall 2002 to address, in a comprehensive way, the common development challenges and opportunities of the Thornhill core. The study concluded with a final report dated June 2005, following nearly three years of consultation with businesses, residents and staff from the Region including York Region Transit and the York Region Rapid Transit Corporation.

Vaughan OPA 669 and Markham OPA 154 are Council-initiated amendments to implement the study recommendations; which call for the creation of a vibrant, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly and transit-supportive Thornhill “main street.” Regional staff recommend approval of these amendments; subject to minor modifications to each, and deferring a decision on OPA 669 with respect to those lands known as 7584 and 7610 to 7616 Yonge Street.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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