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“PLACES TO GROW - A GROWTH PLAN FOR THE GREATER GOLDEN HORSESHOE” YORK REGION'S RESPONSE TO THE PROVINCE

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, August 27, 2004, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, subject to the following amendments to Recommendation 1:

1. Recommendation 2 contained in Attachment 1 be amended by inserting the words “and provide the necessary capital investment in infrastructure” between the words “efforts” and “to implement”.
2. Recommendation 8 contained in Attachment 1 be amended by replacing the words “Ravenshoe Road/Woodbine Avenue” with the words “Glenwoods Avenue, in the Town of Georgina”, and adding the words “to serve existing planned residential and employment lands” following the word “possible”.
3. Recommendation 17 contained in Attachment 1 be deleted and replaced with the following:

“17. The Provincial Growth Plan and the Greenbelt Plan should proceed concurrently.”
4. The following recommendations be added to the recommendations contained in Attachment 1:

“31. The Minister of Public Infrastructure and Renewal be requested to prepare growth plans for other urban areas outside the Greater Golden Horseshoe which would also encourage appropriate growth in those areas.

32. The Province be requested to provide more clarification as to the definition and feasibility of reaching the 40 per cent intensification target.”

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The recommendations contained in this report and compiled in Attachment 1 form the basis of the Region's response to the Province.
2. This report be forwarded to the Minister of Public Infrastructure and Renewal.

3. Regional staff continue to work with Provincial staff regarding the detailed comments on these discussion papers and initiatives.
4. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the local municipalities for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this staff report is to review and comment on the contents of the discussion paper *Places to Grow- A Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* and make recommendations to Committee and Council for submission to the Province as part of the Consultation process.

Staff will continue to provide comments and advice to the Province as information becomes available.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Places to Grow signals a significant shift in Provincial planning policy towards building a system of higher density, mixed use urban centres supported by an inter-regional rapid transit network in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Reversing over a decade of a diminishing Provincial role in GTA urban affairs, *Places to Grow* will form the building blocks of new legislation to guide growth and infrastructure investment throughout the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The recommendations in the document are consistent with York Region's Official Plan and on-going strategic initiatives to manage growth in a sustainable manner.

The Province's plan is an opportunity to work more closely with the Province to establish much-needed implementation tools, such as tax incentives and streamlined approvals.

Regional staff support the overall direction of the plan, and have developed a comprehensive set of recommendations, as summarized in *Attachment 1*. These recommendations outline issues and provide advice on how the Province must move forward, and more specifically, how the Province should implement the plan in York Region.

Key theme areas of these recommendations are that the Province:

- Fully support York Region's implementation of key strategies and programs already in place.
- Take an urban focused policy approach with the involvement of all Provincial ministries to ensure the long-term competitiveness of the GTA.
- Provide immediate investment, tools and incentives to York Region's four "emerging" urban centres to achieve Province' vision of 40% intensification and targets for transit, employment, infrastructure etc.

- Develop a comprehensive communications strategy with municipalities to address residents' issues on perceived impacts of intensification, emphasizing "public interest" over localized neighbourhood issues.
- Provide a streamlined planning process to implement the stated vision in priority growth areas. A process similar to the Oak Ridges Moraine Protection Act including pre-zoning of Priority and Emerging centres/corridors with Minister's approval not subject to appeal could be considered.
- Amend approval requirements for the *Environmental Assessment Act* to streamline approvals in Priority and Emerging Centres and corridors. The Province should eliminate the EA process for approved higher order transit infrastructure.
- Measure its own actions and implementation against the plan to achieve its vision.
- Complete 400-series highway expansions and other complementary programs such as Transportation Demand Management to meet approved and planned growth.

This report will serve as the basis for the Region's response to the Province on *Places to Grow*, and will be circulated to the nine local municipalities for information.

4. BACKGROUND

The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, David Caplan, released the discussion paper *Places to Grow - A Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Places to Grow)* on July 12, 2004. As well, the Province announced a schedule of consultation meetings that occurred during the last week of July. The comment deadline for the discussion paper is September 24, 2004. A final growth plan is proposed to be released in late 2004.

A brief summary of the Province's report follows below.

4.1 Overview of *Places To Grow*

Places to Grow proposes a detailed and comprehensive Provincial 30-year growth plan to provide a clear, long-term vision of growth management for the Greater Golden Horseshoe which covers 16 upper tier municipalities in south-central Ontario.

The proposed plan identifies 11 Priority Urban Centres that are in immediate need of investment to accommodate new economic and population growth in order to ensure a greater quality of life and protection of the environment in the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

Priority urban centres have been defined as "generally located in the established downtown areas of the fast growing metropolitan areas of the Greater Golden Horseshoe" and include downtown Toronto.

The proposed plan also identifies 15 "Emerging Urban Centres" - defined as having "some of the characteristics of priority urban areas" and will, over time, be developed as regional centres under the plan. All four of York Region's Centres are present in the plan

and include Vaughan Centre, Richmond Hill/Langstaff Gateway, Markham Centre and Newmarket Centre.

The proposed plan focuses on three key strategy areas, discussed in detail below.

4.1.1 Where and How to Grow

Based on past and current growth trends, the Province expects that the population for the Greater Golden Horseshoe to grow by almost four million people, bringing the total to over 11 million people by 2031. To shape where and how growth occurs in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the Province is proposing five main objectives to maximize existing opportunities to accommodate growth before looking for new growth areas:

1. Intensification and Compact Development: to promote the efficient use of land and infrastructure resources within existing designated urban areas throughout the Greater Golden Horseshoe by supporting compact form and intensification.

2. Priority Urban Centres: to support priority urban centres and emerging urban centres, located within existing and approved urban areas, as residential and employment anchors throughout the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

3. Future Growth Areas: to manage the amount of land required to accommodate future growth through the development of a more strategic approach to expansions of urban boundaries. Adjustments to expand urban boundaries in these areas over the next five years will only be considered under a number of conditions.

4. Economic Strength: to promote the economic vitality and competitiveness of our communities through innovative partnerships, supportive tools and maintaining strategic employment lands.

5. Small Towns and Rural Communities: to reflect the diverse and local needs of small towns and rural communities by providing tools to assist them in addressing their own unique growth pressures.

4.1.2 Infrastructure to Support Growth

The growth plan proposes a new approach for infrastructure planning and investment, including the following Provincial initiatives:

- Linking the costs of infrastructure more closely to urban form. The report states that “over 20 per cent of infrastructure capital costs could be saved over the next 25 years in the GTA by moving from lower density development to more compact and efficient development patterns”.
- Developing a 10-year Provincial infrastructure investment plan which will in turn assist York Region its long term planning for infrastructure.
- Optimizing the use of existing infrastructure.
- Shifting infrastructure costs to those who stand to benefit.
- Finding new funding alternatives, including “creative partnerships”.
- Identifying strategic infrastructure investments to support urban growth and development in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, while protecting the environment.

- Establishing a more integrated transportation network to improve the movement of goods and services and choices for people.
- Co-ordinating long-range Provincial infrastructure plans in partnership with the municipal and Federal governments and other partners.

Moving People

The Province states that transit is its main priority for moving people in the urban parts of the Greater Golden Horseshoe region. In order to support the development of priority and emerging urban centres, the following strategies are planned:

1. Build Urban Transit

A variety of higher order system expansions will be required over the next 30 years to support mixed-use and high density development in strategic urban centres and along corridors. Key transit expansions identified in the report include the extension of the subway system to York University and in the long term to the City of Vaughan, the York Region BRT, as well as transit extensions to support strategic urban centres.

2. Establish New Interregional Transit Services

The largest growth rate in travel demand in the Greater Golden Horseshoe is not in moving people to downtown Toronto or within individual communities, but in moving people across regional boundaries and connecting communities like Mississauga with Vaughan, Pickering with Markham, and Toronto with Richmond Hill. For example, the paper points out that just about as many people commute from Toronto to York Region, as those who commute from York Region to Toronto.

The Province's vision for the future is an interconnected, inter-regional system of transit corridors, providing a grid across the region – north to south and east to west. This system will feature a hierarchy of transit modes including Bus Rapid Transit, subways, and where appropriate, Light Rail.

3. Strengthen the GO Transit Rail System

The Province is proposing to expand GO's rail capacity, with the objective of increasing ridership by a minimum of 3% each and every year. Specific to York Region, *Places to Grow* calls for all-day, two-way service along all corridors including Bradford, Richmond Hill and Stouffville.

4. Build a Network of High Occupancy Vehicle Lanes (HOV)

The province's growth plan states that HOV lanes provide a powerful incentive for people to carpool, reducing congestion and improving efficiency on the provincial highway system. The province is planning to open its first HOV lanes on Highways 403 through Mississauga and 404 through Toronto and Markham. The province notes that these and other initiatives currently being under taken by municipalities is only the start of a broad network of HOV lanes, carpool lots and intelligent systems that will be required to make carpooling a viable option.

Moving Goods

1. A Strategic Goods Movement Network

The Province proposes focusing on some key parts of the transportation system including the 400 series highways and main rail corridors.

2. Future Economic Corridors

The Province proposes some potential future economic corridors including an eastern extension of Highway 407 but lists the Bradford Bypass and the 404 and 427 extensions as “not immediate priorities”.

The Province also recognizes that there is a need to increase investment in water and wastewater infrastructure. In order to address these infrastructure issues, the Province will be developing a long-term water and wastewater infrastructure investment and financing strategy as well as a *Sustainable Water and Sewage Systems Act* that will, among other things, make it mandatory for municipalities to assess full-cost recovery.

4.1.3 Protecting What is Valuable

The Province’s proposed growth plan intends to build on other government initiatives such as the Greenbelt Task Force, Planning Reform, watershed based source protection planning and the rural strategy by providing a range of tools to integrate resource protection in the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

This includes:

1. Protecting Water Resources

The Province is developing a comprehensive framework for protecting drinking water through source protection, greenbelt protection, nutrient management and long-term infrastructure planning. The Province will further promote integrated and coordinated protection of water resources on a watershed basis by:

- Requiring municipalities to take into consideration long-term impacts of growth and infrastructure needs when developing watershed-based source water protection plans.
- Directing development away from sensitive areas as identified in source protection plans.
- Regularly assessing impacts of land-use change on water quality, water quantity and related hydrological functions.

2. Protecting Natural Heritage and Greenspace Systems

The Province acknowledges that within the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt a number of tools are already in place to protect important natural features and systems. The Greenbelt Task Force will make further recommendations.

3. Establishing the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt

The Province established the Greenbelt Task Force in February of 2004. The Task Force will make recommendations on how the Province can most effectively establish a permanent greenbelt.

4. Protecting Agricultural Resources

The Province proposes to protect prime agricultural areas including specialty crop lands from urban encroachments and land use conflicts by:

- Establishing a Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt for selected lands within the Greater Golden Horseshoe.
- Reviewing the land-use planning system through the planning reform initiative to find a balance that protects the land base in the long term and allows farmers to have the flexibility to change their operations over time.
- Promoting approaches to future growth areas that support compact form within settlement areas and focusing growth around centres and along corridors in order to reduce development pressures on agricultural lands; and setting targets for intensification, density, housing mix and phasing of development.
- Promoting initiatives such as nutrient management, stewardship, and farm practices to protect and enhance agricultural uses, value-added agricultural activities, and where appropriate, supporting infrastructure for agriculture.
- Promoting research and development in the agricultural sector leading to value-added opportunities.
- Supporting the work of the Provincial Agricultural Advisory Team as it relates to the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

5. Mineral Aggregate Resources

The Province is proposing to conserve aggregate resources through an increased focus on reuse and recycling and by reducing demand through more compact urban form and more efficient use of infrastructure.

4.1.4 Implementation: Moving Forward

The Province acknowledges that action is required on several fronts to ensure the growth plan is implemented in the most effective manner and includes significant effort from all levels of government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and residents of the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

The Province calls for implementation through:

1. Provincial Leadership and Partnership: the Province will work to ensure its programs and investments in the Greater Golden Horseshoe are based on the growth plan. The Province will assist and collaborate with stakeholders, including municipal governments, to implement the plan.

2. Effective Implementation Tools: the Province will evaluate, implement and recommend regulatory and fiscal tools and programs to assist municipalities and other stakeholders with implementing the growth plan.

3. Legislative Framework: the growth plan may require legislation to ensure the implementation of clear roles and responsibilities, and consistency with various other acts.

4. Monitoring and Review: the Province will monitor the implementation of the plan and assess its impact on quality of life and the performance of communities.

5. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Places to Grow is a critical element in the Province's overall policy for municipal planning and infrastructure in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Along with the Provincial government's ongoing Planning Reform, and review of the Provincial Policy Statement and the Greenbelt Protection Act and Plan, *Places to Grow* represents perhaps the most significant statement of Provincial planning policy since the Toronto Centred Region Plan of 1970. Reversing over a decade of a diminishing Provincial role in GTA urban affairs, *Places to Grow* illustrates the Province's recognition of the need to take a leadership and visionary role in the current and future development of Canada's most important economic engine.

York Region is well positioned to implement *Places to Grow* from a policy perspective as the Provincial document builds upon the Region's existing key strategic growth management directions including the Regional Official Plan, York Rapid Transit Plan, the Greening Strategy and the Housing Supply Strategy.

Places to Grow also directly supports the Region's Centres and Corridors Strategy – *Making it Happen!* and proposed Regional Official Plan Amendment 43- Centres and Corridors.

However, important pieces are yet to be defined by the Province including:

- A detailed implementation strategy specifying information around timing.
- Funding to support the plan.
- Streamlining of Provincial approvals and elements around the financial tools that municipalities will have to implement the plan.

As well, the Provincial document fails to address:

- Waste management.
- Human services planning (also a cornerstone of the Region's recent initiatives).
- Urban design
- Built heritage.

All of these issues are also critical elements of a comprehensive growth plan.

While the Region's recommendations to the Province are specific to the *Places to Grow* discussion document, they continue to be consistent with many of the Region's recommendations to the Province through previous reports to Council.

The following sections provide detailed discussion of the key components of *Places to Grow* and key recommendations to the Province on moving forward and are organized using the same section headings as the Provincial document.

5.1 Where and How to Grow

The province's growth plan states that over the 30 year period between 2001 and 2031, the Greater Golden Horseshoe will grow by almost 4 million people. Current population growth forecasts estimate 11 million people will be living in the Greater Golden Horseshoe by 2031. Updated forecasts are currently being prepared for the Central Ontario Smart Growth Planning district. This work is expected to be complete by September 2004 and it is recommended that:

1. The Province incorporate the revised and updated population forecasts into the Greater Golden Horseshoe's growth plan.

York Region's current forecast anticipates an additional 485,000 people will arrive in the Region by 2031. The Region's forecast and local municipal distribution will be updated upon completion of the Central Ontario Smart Growth Planning district exercise.

Both *Places to Grow* and the Regional Official Plan recognize that a more efficient use of land will be required in order to accommodate the projected 30-year growth rate. Achieving a sustainable and liveable urban environment over the long term will require the implementation of Smart Growth principles of intensified compact development within a system of regional centres that are linked by rapid transit corridors. The plan also contains a number of economic initiatives that are designed to ensure the continued economic vitality and attractiveness of the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

York Region not only recognizes that intensification and rapid transit development go hand-in-hand, but that rapid transit will help reduce gridlock and contribute to a cleaner environment and increased quality of life. The Region is currently in the process of implementing these principles through the following initiatives:

- York Region Centres and Corridors Strategy – *Making it Happen!*
- Proposed Regional Official Plan Amendment 43 – Centres and Corridors
- Transportation Master Plan
- York Region's three phased rapid transit plan
- Draft Economic Strategy
- Review of financial tools to facilitate development in Centres and Corridors.

It is recommended that:

2. The Province fully support the Region's efforts to implement the following strategies and initiatives:

- York Region Centres and Corridors Strategy – *Making it Happen!*
- Proposed Regional Official Plan Amendment 43 – Centres and Corridors
- Transportation Master Plan
- YRTP's "Quick Start" and BRT Plan
- Draft Economic Strategy
- Review of financial tools to facilitate development in Centres and Corridors.

5.1.1 Focusing on Growth Centres

Places to Grow identifies 26 regional centres throughout the Greater Golden Horseshoe, including York Region's four centres located in Markham, Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Newmarket. These 26 centres have been divided into two categories; Priority Urban Centres and Emerging Urban Centres and have been expanded beyond the 17 Regional Centres identified in the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario (GTA Caucus) to include centres such as Kitchener/Waterloo and downtown Barrie, but exclude Etobicoke Centre in Toronto.

The plan also contains an overall intensification target of 40 per cent for municipalities. To achieve this target, a significant amount of infrastructure investment is required. Key to implementation is creating a favourable market environment for private sector investment in higher density, mixed use development projects, including apartment rental housing. Under the current plan, it appears that the bulk of infrastructure investment would be directed to Priority Centres, however the Province must also consider the role of corridors that link these centres and incorporate this role in the growth plan.

The Province has designated all four of York Region's approved Regional Official Plan Regional Centres as "Emerging Urban Centres". However, given the level of growth expected and the high level of intensification envisioned by *Places to Grow*, it is strongly recommended that:

- 3. Emerging Centres and Corridors in York Region receive funding and infrastructure investment at a level necessary to achieve the Province's vision for growth and intensification, as well as the Region's planned growth and infrastructure plans.**
- 4. The Province develop an overall investment strategy for areas outside the urban centres, to ensure that continuing growth in these areas reflects and supports the Province's growth plan.**

One of the main obstacles to achieve intensification is public misunderstanding of what compact communities will look like, often reacting to proposals with immediate resistance. In addition to significant infrastructure investment, public awareness of the social, economic and environmental benefits of intensification is required to implement the desired growth patterns. This requirement is currently absent from *Places to Grow*. It is recommended that:

- 5. The Province, in consultation with its municipal partners, develop a comprehensive communications strategy to address residents' issues regarding the perceived impacts of intensification on communities with an emphasis on the overall "public interest" over localized neighbourhood issues.**

The Region is supportive of the economic development principles contained in *Places to Grow*, and strongly supports a cluster-based approach to business location and

development; something the Region currently takes an active role in promoting. However many new employment lands are typically low density. The role and function of employment areas needs to be re-examined with relation densities, clustering of businesses, and location in relation to place of work. The Region encourages:

6. The Province to adopt a vision for employment areas that encourages diversity of employment types, and development that is more compact and provides for higher employment densities. Where possible, office type development should be directed to centres and corridors.

5.2 Infrastructure to Support Growth

Places to Grow is clear that we must maintain the infrastructure we currently have, and, at the same time, ensure that we accommodate new development in an effective manner. For example, the discussion paper states that the costs of providing the infrastructure we need for growth is tied directly to how and where we grow. *Places to Grow* endorses infrastructure investments that protect the natural environment by supporting a pattern of development that emphasizes a compact urban form.

York Region supports the principles of sustainable development and will continue to work with our local and provincial partners in providing cost-effective and sustainable infrastructure solutions. The Region is also supportive of the discussion paper's vision that places a priority on transit and other non-vehicular modes of transportation including cycling and pedestrian routes. York Region is also supportive of the long-term goal of moving towards non-carbon based sustainable energies as envisioned by the discussion paper. Detailed comments regarding these and other points are addressed later in this report, beginning in Section 4.2.1.

During the last of the public consultation townhall meetings, the Province also released a framework document for financing and procuring infrastructure projects entitled "Building a Better Tomorrow." The framework is built around five fundamental principles:

- The public interest is paramount.
- Value for money must be demonstrable.
- Appropriate public control/ownership must be preserved.
- Accountability must be maintained.
- The process must be fair, transparent and efficient.

Regional Staff are currently reviewing this document and will provide further comments or recommendations where appropriate at a later date.

5.2.1 Higher Order Rapid Transit

Places to Grow signals a fundamental shift from a road and highway-based system of planning and development to a transit-first system. Stating that "transit is our main priority for moving people," the discussion paper endorses investment in higher order rapid transit systems and notes that these systems will provide the strongest incentive to

build compact, mixed use development within the network of Priority and Emerging Centres throughout the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

York Region has already recognized that higher order transit systems are a necessary element to achieve stated intensification targets by serving as a catalyst for alternative forms of development. To this end York Region has pursued a number of initiatives including:

- The creation of York Region Transit in January 2001.
- The development of a three phased rapid transit plan.
- York Region Centres and Corridors Strategy.
- Proposed Regional Official Plan Amendment 43- Centres and Corridors.

York Region's efforts to establish a rapid transit system within its Regional Corridors are in line with and supportive of the Province's vision. Beginning with "Quick Start", the Region is currently on track to implement a 20-year rapid transit plan that will feature a complete modern Rapid Transit System by 2011. This is conditional upon both the Province and Federal government fulfilling their funding commitments for the final two phases. York Region Council committed to provide its share of phase 2 funding on September 18, 2003. As recommended earlier in this report, areas with Emerging Urban Centres and Corridors, such as York Region, must be given the level of infrastructure investment required to fulfill the Province's Growth Plan. Furthermore, it is recommended that:

7. That the Provincial and Federal governments fund Phase 2 of York Region's 10 year Business Plan of the Rapid Transit program to support emerging urban centres and corridors.

5.2.2 Movement of People and Goods, Economic Corridors

In addition to providing support for local rapid transit initiatives, *Places to Grow* notes that an integrated regional transportation system is required to effectively move people across the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

York Region has been working with GO Transit, the TTC and the Regions of Peel and Durham to ensure we develop seamless transit systems across the GTA.

Along with dedicated lanes for buses on highways, the report endorses a strengthening of GO Transit's role and the construction of High Occupancy Vehicle Lanes (HOV) along the 400 series of Highways. These are initiatives that York Region supports along with initiatives designed to move goods more effectively across the Golden Horseshoe such as the plan's support for the Strategic Goods Movement Network.

It is the Region's understanding at this time that the planned extensions of Highway 427 to the CP Intermodal Terminal (Highway 50 and Rutherford Road in western Vaughan) and the extension of Highway 404 to Ravenshoe Road will go forward. These extensions support currently approved and planned growth, service employment lands, and provide linkages to the Province's planned economic corridors. In the case of Highway 404

however, the extension terminus should be Woodbine Avenue/Ravenshoe Road to accommodate the approved growth in the lands on the south side of Lake Simcoe in the Keswick Area. With regard to the Bradford by-pass, the Province has indicated this is not an “immediate priority”. Regional Council has on a number of occasions supported the Province in seeking a link between the Highway 400 corridor and Highway 404 and the Bradford By-pass is shown within the Region’s approved Transportation Master Plan as a key road improvement required by the 2031 period.

Places to Grow indicates a Provincial intention to pursue a Provincial “east-west link in the 400 series highway system across the GTA”. The available space for this major highway is very limited in any corridor south of Highway 9 and further Provincial thinking (including whether the Bradford Bypass should be considered for this linkage function) must occur sooner rather than later if the Province intends to pursue this right-of-way.

Regional Council therefore requests:

- 8. The Province confirm that extensions of Highway 427 to the CP Intermodal Terminal (Highway 50 and Rutherford Road) and the extension of Highway 404 to Ravenshoe Road/Woodbine Avenue will go forward as soon as possible.**

Furthermore, it is recommended that:

- 9. The Province immediately consider the routing of the provincial east-west link in the 400 series highway system across the GTA and specifically in York Region.**

5.2.3 Transportation Demand Management (TDM)

A strong TDM program is an essential element in the overall policy objective of reducing the number of vehicles travelling on the provincial highway and road network. TDM initiatives are typically directed at managing home-to-work and work-to-home commutes during the AM and PM peak periods when the demand on the transportation system is highest.

Places to Grow recognises the need to build a network of high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes that would provide a powerful incentive for people to carpool, reducing congestion and improving efficiency. However, this physical infrastructure must be supported by programs and services that provide the ability for commuters to identify and meet potential carpool partners so that they can match their rides. Municipalities in the GTA and Hamilton are embarking on such a TDM project, the Smart Commute Initiative, a public-private partnership project. The Initiative is aimed at encouraging commuters to change their mode of transport from single occupant vehicles to multi-occupant modes of transport such as public transit, carpools and vanpools and non-motorised forms of transport like walking and cycling. As well, the Initiative is aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emission from work related commuting in the GTA and Hamilton area.

York Region has taken an active and leading role in implementing the Smart Commute Initiative. As a start, on July 7, 2004 York joined with the Towns of Markham and Richmond Hill in establishing the Smart Commute 404-7 Association, a transportation management association (TMA) of private and public sector companies centred around the intersection of Highways 404 and 7. In 2001, York Region was instrumental in joining with the City of Toronto and York University in establishing the first TMA in Ontario, the Black Creek Regional TMA.

The Smart Commute Initiative is an extremely good complement to the proposed Provincial strategy for reducing congestion. Given that the Government of Canada is already providing significant funding to the Initiative, staff recommends that:

- 10. The Province support region-wide and comprehensive TDM strategies in *Places to Grow* as a critical element to reduce congestion on the Greater Golden Horseshoe highway network.**
- 11. The Province support the Smart Commute Initiative as a complementary project to the Provincial strategies on moving people and participate in the Initiative by providing sustainable funding to enhance the Initiative.**

In addition, the HOV lanes must be supported by a network of commuter parking lots so that carpoolers, vanpoolers and transit vehicles can pick-up and drop-off passengers. Therefore, staff recommends that:

- 12. The Province begin a program to identify and construct commuter parking lots across the GTA and Hamilton area in support of the Provincial strategies on moving people.**

5.2.4 Housing

Providing a broad range of housing types and affordability ranges is a critical element of community infrastructure. York Region has taken the initiative on this issue through the development of the Region's Housing Supply Strategy. Regional staff have taken note of the Province's intention to encourage the construction of more appropriate and affordable housing through capital funding under the Federal-Provincial Affordable Housing Program. However, additional commitments from both the Province and the Federal government are required and it is recommended that:

- 13. Both the Province and the Federal governments provide stable, long-term and sufficient funding to develop affordable housing in both the private and public sectors.**
- 14. Both the Province and the Federal government return to the more favourable tax environments that permit and encourage the construction of rental housing.**
- 15. *The Planning Act* be changed to support and encourage the development of affordable housing and permit second suites as-of-right.**

5.3 Protecting What is Valuable

5.3.1 Natural Heritage

Places to Grow is very clear that the protection of valuable natural resources and city-building are not mutually exclusive. From the Province's report, "We must protect and enhance our valuable resources as part of managing growth."

Concentrating growth and infrastructure investments in strategic locations, such as existing urban areas, redirects development pressure away from those places we want protected. Among the resources highlighted in the report for protection include the York Region portions of the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Holland Marsh.

Acknowledging the linkage between efficient growth patterns and protection of valuable resources is a sensible and practical approach—one that has been a key tenet of the Regional Official Plan since 1994. The three themes of the ROP—Sustainable Natural Environment, Economic Vitality and Healthy Communities—are linked and interconnected through the policies of the Plan. Recognizing the importance of these linkages, the Region has undertaken several initiatives to protect and enhance the natural environment, including:

York Region Greening Strategy and Greenland Securement Strategy

- Oak Ridges Moraine Tri-Regional Strategy
- York Region Tree By-law and the current efforts to achieve a new Forest conservation By-law.
- The Significant Woodlands Study
- Water for Tomorrow
- Water and Waste Water Master Plan.

The green infrastructure system is well defined in York Region and these Regional initiatives are consistent with and advance the Provincial directions outlined in *Places to Grow* and in the Province's Greenbelt Protection area planning

5.3.2 Agricultural Resources

In November of 2003, the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario together with the GTA Federations of Agriculture, the Provincial and Federal governments released a proposed GTA Agricultural Action Plan. Drafted after extensive consultation with representatives from the agricultural, planning and business sectors, the proposed Action Plan identifies 34 implementable directions and clear actions in four key areas:

- Economic Development
- Education and Marketing
- Land Use Policy
- Accountability and Responsibility.

The intent of the Action Plan is to ensure the GTA agricultural industry remains competitive in the face of economic and land use pressures. The Action Plan is expected

to be finalized and released in the fall of 2004 and given the Province's support of both the direction and intent of the plan it is recommended that:

16. The Province incorporate the GTA Agricultural Action Plan into its long term growth plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

5.3.3 Establishing the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt

The Province established the Greenbelt Task Force in February of 2004 and recommendations on a permanent greenbelt plan are expected in the Fall of 2004. It is strongly recommended that:

17. Completion of the Greenbelt Plan should follow the creation and adoption of a Provincial Growth Plan.

5.4 Implementation: Moving Forward

Effective implementation of *Places to Grow* will require a number of co-ordinated actions across a variety of jurisdictions and provincial ministries. To this end, the Province must take a leadership role and adopt an urban-focused policy approach within all ministries to affect positive change. This approach would ensure that any investment decisions made by provincial ministries support the stated objectives within *Places to Grow*. In addition to requiring municipalities to measure themselves against the plan, the Province must also measure its own actions and implementation against the plan in order to ensure achieving its vision. It is recommended that:

18. Include clear and measurable criteria to justify urban boundary expansions; including the achievement of intensification targets and population to employment ratios set by the Provincial growth plan.

19. The Province adopt an urban-focused policy approach within all ministries and prioritize investments in infrastructure, government institutions, facilities and services in the 26 urban centres identified in *Places to Grow*.

20. In addition to requiring municipalities to measure themselves against the plan, the Province must also measure its own actions and implementation against the plan in order to ensure it achieves its vision.

5.4.1 A New Planning Framework is Required

Municipal implementation of *Places to Grow* is fundamental in the discussion of growth management. This requires the Province taking a strong leadership role; one which includes legislation and regulations to ensure that new planning policies are incorporated into municipal documents in a manner that is consistent, timely and provides incentives for implementation (i.e. financing tools).

In designating areas as "Priority" and "Emerging" Centres the Province must look for ways to streamline planning, investment, funding and approval processes. In addition, streamlining these processes, along with measuring implementation of both municipal

and Provincial plans and initiatives should have a positive impact on human services and improve the overall quality of life in our communities.

A planning framework for *Places to Grow* could be modelled after the implementation portion of the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001*. This legislation required municipalities to change their plans, establish clear tight timelines for compliance exercises and established the Minister as the approval authority with no appeal of his/her decision. The regulations clearly outlined Provincial expectations, including the timing, methods and contents for municipal implementation efforts. It is recommended that:

21. The Province enact legislation requiring Greater Golden Horseshoe municipalities to adopt the principles of *Places to Grow* in the form of official plan amendments that:

- Designates the “Priority” and/or “Emerging” urban centres within their boundaries.
- Identifies Key Development Areas (as contemplated within ROPA 43) as places for intensification, in keeping with the Provincial policies for Centre-focused development and intensification.
- Establishes long-term density targets for Priority and Emerging Urban Centres, Key Development Areas and connecting corridors.
- Identifies and protect short, medium and long-term transit corridors.
- Places infrastructure investment priority in existing urban areas, with emphasis on Centres and Key Development Areas.
- Establishes urban design criteria to achieve an urban landscape that is attractive, creates a sense-of-place, supports transit, and provides safe and pleasant places for pedestrians and cyclists.

22. Consistent with the process followed for the *Oak Ridges Moraine Protection Act*, the Province’s implementation plan should specify that:

- Greater Golden Horseshoe municipalities are required to adopt official plan amendments and appropriate zoning by-laws within a specific and reasonable timeline.
- Key Development Areas within Priority and Emerging urban centres and connecting corridors be pre-designated and pre-zoned for compact, mixed-use, transit-supportive development. With this framework in place, future development in these sites would proceed through either site plan approval and/or development permitting.
- The Minister is the Approval Authority; and that decisions are final, and are not subject to appeal

5.4.2 Sustainable Funding and Fiscal Tools

As the *Places to Grow* paper notes, there are currently a number of fiscal tools available to municipalities that can be used to implement some of *Places to Grow*’s recommendations. However, to achieve the planned urban form, implement the infrastructure proposals, and build a liveable, sustainable urban environment, new fiscal policy arrangements and financial tools will be required. As the Region stated in its June

13, 2002 report entitled “Update on Fiscal Policy and Growth Management in York Region”, a number of fiscal policy initiatives have been undertaken by Regional Council including:

- Bringing multi-residential tax ratios to the same level as single family dwellings.
- Undertaking a study to review the impacts of financial tools, including development charges and tax policies, on the Region’s urban form.
- Implementing full cost pricing for service delivery.
- Implementing a Municipal Capital Facilities By-law for housing.
- Pursuing an innovative Public Private Partnership (PPP) to deliver rapid transit services to York Region residents under the York Region Rapid Transit Plan.

In addition to the above however, the following initiatives are required from the senior levels of government, including:

- Review of current property tax and development charge legislation to promote compact, mixed-use development.
- Review of DC legislation to ensure new development pays its fair share of capital cost of growth and to be more favourable to transit.
- New tools such as TIFs to promote intensification of centres and corridors to encourage such things as affordable housing, as well as encouraging redevelopment of brownfields and greyfields.
- Providing municipalities with a portion of the gas tax, PST, and GST.
- Restoration of long-term and sustainable funding for transit and housing.
- Location efficient mortgages.
- Income tax credits for renters and landlords to encourage the construction of rental housing.
- Tax-exempt status for municipal bonds to encourage investor participation.
- Creation of municipal economic development corporations.
- New funding models for human services.

The *Places to Grow* paper highlights a number of these above tools as possible options to achieve the envisioned urban environment and the Region is supportive of the direction the Province is moving in this suite of financial tools, however, more detail is needed. There are currently discussions underway between the Region, local municipalities and the Province around using tools like TIFs to help finance capital infrastructure such as rapid transit, parking garages, etc. Additionally both the Provincial and Federal governments have made encouraging progress by pledging a portion of the gas tax by 2005. It is recommended that:

23. The Province provide municipalities with the necessary financial tools to achieve the Province’s Growth Plan, including more detail on timing, deliverables, commitments to funding and financial tools, roles and responsibilities.

5.4.3 Making the Process Work

York Region is the fastest growing large municipality in Ontario. This growth is an important component of the Ontario economy and is a direct result of the growing population in Canada and Ontario. New and expanded municipal infrastructure and services are required to provide the necessary services to accommodate new residents and businesses and York Region is dedicated to ensuring that growth occurs in an environmentally sustainable manner.

However, significant delays have been experienced by York Region in delivering the necessary municipal infrastructure due to impediments during the Environmental Assessment process and other required environmental approvals and permits. Delays in the approval of municipal infrastructure projects can often result in other unplanned and unmitigated environmental impacts.

The Provincial approval process (e.g. Environmental Assessments) for municipal infrastructure must be reviewed to better reflect the priorities outlined in *Places to Grow* including transit, roads, water, wastewater as well as solid waste projects. This review must strive to streamline the Environmental Assessment process for priority projects like transit, recognizing the overall net environmental benefit of putting transit in place as early as possible. In situations where a full Official Plan process has identified the urban structure, it may not be necessary for a full Environmental Assessment for infrastructure initiatives such as rapid transit.

It is recommended that:

- 24. The Province amend the *Environmental Assessment Act* and other necessary approvals to streamline their processes and applications (see prior York Region Council resolution in Attachment 3) in Priority and Emerging Growth areas, and consider eliminating it altogether for approved priority projects for higher order transit infrastructure in the Greater Golden Horseshoe.**

5.5 Growth Management Issues not Discussed in *Places to Grow*

As previously indicated there are a number of issues that have not received discussion within the *Places to Grow* document.

5.5.1 Waste Management

While solutions to the Waste Management issues of the largest municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe are currently in place, there may be a need to comprehensively reconsider this issue in the near future and make plans for more sustainable future handling of these materials that do not involve international transportation. The Province must be involved in decisions of this magnitude and have policy principles in place through the comprehensive growth management plan for this issue. It is recommended that:

25. The Province develop a more sustainable waste management policy as part of its growth management plan.

5.5.2 Human Services

The York Region is a leader in recognizing the importance of adequately planned and funded human services within the development of communities and the current mismatch between development approvals and funding of human services. The Province must recognize this area as one that requires support at the Provincial level.

The primary focus of *Places to Grow* is on the provision of hard infrastructure services and the protection of the natural environment. These are worthy goals that York Region supports and strives to achieve through its actions and initiatives. However, the area of human services or “soft services” such as community-based health care, hospitals, schools, social services, early childhood learning, employment support, non-profit and voluntary community support organizations is equally important in the development of safe communities and a high quality of life. It is recommended that:

26. The Province recognize the importance of human services planning in its ultimate growth plan and that new models of funding based on population and principles of adequate, equitable, affordable, stable, flexible and accountable funding be introduced to encourage the location of major public services in centres and along corridors for both Emerging and Priority Urban Centres.

Staff support the proposed approach to monitoring and measuring municipal plans against a community liveability index, and recommend that:

27. The liveability index include measures relating to the need for human services (i.e. utilization of health care, hospitals, schools, child development measures, poverty ratios, employment rates, etc.)

5.5.3 Urban Design

High quality urban design and streetscaping initiatives are other elements required for the development of safe, liveable and desirable communities. In addition to building community identity by creating a “sense of place” for both residents and workers, streetscaping and urban design initiatives help attract additional private sector investment within urban centres and along transit corridors. York Region is continuing to pursue the promotion of high quality urban design through its *Toward Better Regional Streets Study* (formerly Seven Lane Streetscaping Study) as well as participating in local initiatives. It is recommended that:

28. The Province recognize the role of urban design as an essential infrastructure component within its ultimate growth plan and give municipal partners the tools to permit the achievement of appropriate urban design standards.

5.5.4 Built Heritage

The approved Regional Official Plan and the Official Plans of the Region’s area municipalities place high emphasis on the conservation of the Region’s cultural heritage.

However, *Places to Grow* does not address these important elements of community structure such as historic districts and buildings. Like natural resources, these aspects of our heritage also need protection from current and future development pressures and enhancement with the context of existing development.

The need to protect and enhance the historic qualities of our communities forms an important part of Proposed ROPA 43 - Centres and Corridors. The draft policies recognize the need for new, more intensive development to respect and enhance areas such as established communities, historic main streets and other historic properties. To achieve this, ROPA 43 proposes that new, more intensive development be directed to Key Development Areas determined by the local municipalities; enabling communities to decide where change should and should not occur. It is recommended that:

- 29. Future Provincial growth plans should address the historic aspects of our communities and treat them as important resources for future generations; on parity with significant forest and wetland areas.**

5.6 Technical Errors

The Region notes a number of technical errors in maps contained in *Places to Grow* which require correction or clarification by the Province. Errors on maps include:

- North Leslie planned growth area not shown.
- Planned employment lands along the 404 corridor not shown.
- Highway 404 shown as existing to Queensville.
- Maps show designated settlement area west of Bathurst Street in York Region, in fact the approved settlement area extends from Bathurst Street on the west to Bayview Avenue on the east.
- High order transit shown going along Bayview Avenue in York Region not Yonge Street.
- ORM Settlement Area designation on the west side of Leslie Street north of Stouffville Road
- Maps show economic corridors east and west but not north.
- Maps haven't shown potential extension of the Richmond Hill rail line to the Vandorf area.
- Mapping does not show north/south transit connection from Don Mills subway station to Markham Centre.

It is recommended that:

- 30. The Province review the Region's list of technical mapping errors and provide clarification, and further, that the Province be requested to consult with Regional staff regarding the mapping information before *Places to Grow* is finalized as a provincial growth Plan.**

5.7 Next Steps

This staff report, as endorsed by Council will be forwarded to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal to form the basis of the Region's formal comments on the discussion paper *Places to Grow*.

Staff will continue to provide comments and advice to the Province as information becomes available on such topics as how to encourage intensification, affordable housing and mixed use development along centres and corridors in the Region.

5.8 Relationship to Vision 2026

The proposed growth plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe supports and compliments all eight goal areas of Vision 2026, including Quality Communities for a Diverse Population; Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture; A Vibrant Economy; Housing Choices for Our Residents; Managed and Balanced Growth; Infrastructure for a Growing Region, and; Engaged Communities and a Responsive Region.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Province's proposed growth plan will support the Region in achieving its objectives in city-building and transit, affordable housing, the protection of agricultural lands and the protection and securement of key environmental lands.

The Province's proposed growth plan may require a future Official Plan Amendment to implement the Province's proposed intensification target of 40 per cent. Aside from this, only changes of a minor technical nature will be required to the Regional Official Plan.

Decisions regarding the financing of urban services have a direct impact on urban growth. Municipal financial tools and tax policy will be explored in more detail to encourage the private sector to build the compact urban form that is now being promoted by the Province. Currently, the Region has a limited ability to impact fiscal policy as many of the tools presently available, such as property taxes and development charges, and building of rental units, are governed and defined by Provincial and Federal legislation.

7. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities have made significant strides and have demonstrated leadership in advancing the kind of growth called for in *Places to Grow*. Implementation tools like tax incentives are needed now to further strengthen local municipalities' ability to implement good planning through and beyond zoning, site plan and official plan policy controls. The Region will continue to work closely with the local municipalities to develop a suite of implementation tools to more fully implement local plans. The local municipalities have played a key role in developing a smart growth plan for York Region through the York Region Centres and Corridors Strategy - *Making it Happen!* and proposed ROPA

43 – Regional Centres and Corridors. This work is a good launching-point for further collaboration with the Province. The Province, through *Places to Grow*, has underscored the need for and importance of implementation tools to advance Regional and local planning objectives.

8. CONCLUSION

Places to Grow represents a significant Provincial commitment to ensuring that Greater Golden Horseshoe municipalities have the tools to accommodate an estimated additional 4 million residents over the next 30-years in a manner that is sustainable from social, environmental and economic perspectives.

The recommendations of the Province's document are consistent with York Region's Official Plan and on-going strategic initiatives to manage growth in a sustainable manner. Further, the plan represents a welcome opportunity to work more closely with the Province to establish much-needed implementation tools, such as tax incentives and streamlined approvals. As such, the Region supports the directions contained within the document subject to the comments made within this report.

Clarification is required on the implications of York Region's four Regional Centres being classified in the Province's plan as "Emerging Urban Centres," rather than "Priority Urban Centres." It is imperative that York Region's centres be given the same level of infrastructure investment as other centres to ensure the full implementation of the Region's Centres and Corridors Strategy, which is consistent with the goals of the Province's growth plan.

In addition, municipalities require the fiscal and tax capabilities to manage the proposed new and complex systems over the longer term.

Staff look forward to working with the Province throughout the development of a more detailed growth plan and related implementation strategies.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(A copy of the Attachments has been forwarded to each Member of Regional Council with the September 8, 2004 Planning and Economic Development Committee Agenda. A copy of Attachments 1 and 3 is included with this report.)