



Report to: Development Services Committee

Meeting Date: October 28, 2019

SUBJECT: Updated Floodplain Mapping and Review of the Unionville Special Policy Area

PREPARED BY: Patrick Wong, Senior Planner, Natural Heritage, RPP, MCIP (ext. 6922)

REVIEWED BY: Lilli Duoba, Manager, Natural Heritage, RPP, MCIP (ext. 7925)

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report entitled “Updated Floodplain Mapping and Review of the Unionville Special Policy Area” be received;
2. That staff be directed to initiate a boundary review of the Unionville Special Policy Area and to prepare draft Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments;
3. That a community information meeting be held to notify all affected property owners of the updated floodplain mapping;
4. That staff be authorized to schedule a statutory Public Meeting to consider draft Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments;
5. And that staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to inform Development Services Committee of the updated floodplain mapping prepared by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and to obtain authorization to begin a review of the boundary of the Unionville Special Policy Area.

BACKGROUND:

Updated Floodplain Mapping has been prepared by TRCA

Floodplains are locations next to watercourses that are subject to flooding under major storm events. Provincial and municipal planning policy directs new development away from flood hazards in order to minimize risk to public health and safety. In Markham, the identification of floodplains is a responsibility of the TRCA. Periodically, updates to the floodplain mapping are completed to reflect changes in land use, vegetation cover, drainage patterns, topography and culvert/bridge crossings. The TRCA recently advised staff that an updated floodplain is available for the Unionville area. Portions of the Unionville floodplain are identified as a Special Policy Area in the Markham Official Plan 2014.

History and Purpose of the Unionville Special Policy Area

In 1990, Markham Council adopted an Official Plan Amendment to establish the Unionville Special Policy Area. Since 1990, two updates have been completed to the Special Policy Area as follows:

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- Modification of the SPA boundaries through Official Plan Amendment 153 to the Official Plan (Revised 1987), as amended – adopted by Markham Council in 2006 and approved by York Region in 2008
 - Modification of the SPA policies through the Official Plan 2014 – adopted by Markham Council in 2013. The SPA policies were brought into force and effect by the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal in 2016.

The current boundaries of the Unionville Special Policy Area are shown on Figure 1. A Special Policy Area (SPA) is described as an “area within a community that has historically existed in the floodplain and where site-specific policies [...] are intended to provide for the continued viability of existing uses [...] and address the significant social and economic hardships to the community that would result from strict adherence to provincial policies concerning development” (Provincial Policy Statement, 2014). The Unionville Special Policy Area is one tool that supports the continued vibrancy and economic viability of the Unionville community. Within the Unionville Special Policy Area, certain development rights are retained which can allow for development, such as new structures and building expansions which would otherwise be prohibited.

While the SPA provides for certain development permissions, steps are taken to minimize the extent of flood-related risk. All proposals for development or site alteration within the Unionville Special Policy Area must obtain permission from the TRCA. Requirements such as flood proofing and flood response plans are imposed on new developments. Sensitive uses such as those that serve vulnerable populations (e.g., schools, daycares, elderly homes) and emergency services are prohibited from locating within the SPA. Finally, site-specific requests to intensify or to increase the population within the SPA beyond the permissions of the underlying land use designation is not permitted.

DISCUSSION:

Description of changes to the Floodplain Boundary

Figure 2 shows a comparison between the previous and updated floodplain boundaries. Overall, minor changes were observed for the majority of the floodplain boundaries along the major river systems of the Rouge River, Bruce Creek and Robinson Creek. Noteworthy changes to the floodplain affecting multiple properties are identified below:

- A reduction in the floodplain associated with Fonthill Creek (runs from Toogood Park to the Millennium Bandstand) affecting approximately 70 properties.
- A reduction in the floodplain associated with the Rouge River near Prince William Drive, River Bend Road, Annina Crescent and Walkerton Drive affecting approximately 35 properties.
- An expansion in the floodplain along both the north and south sides of Highway 7, west of Main Street Unionville affecting approximately 50 properties.
- An expansion in the floodplain on the north side of Highway 7 at Kennedy Road affecting approximately 30 properties.

Unionville Special Policy Area Review will be completed in partnership with TRCA

Given the changes to the floodplain boundary, a review of the Unionville Special Policy Area is necessary. Staff’s review of the Unionville Special Policy Area will be based on the

Province's Procedures for Approval of new SPAs and Modifications to Existing SPAs under the Provincial Policy Statement, 2005. The following matters will be reviewed:

- Identification of SPA lands that are no longer encumbered by the floodplain and to be removed from the SPA;
- Review SPA lands that remain in the floodplain based on the updated flood depth and velocity information and determine the continued appropriateness of the SPA designation;
- Identify lands newly identified within the floodplain and determine the appropriateness of adding the lands to the SPA;
- Identify the emergency response measures for existing and proposed SPA lands.

Staff will also be working closely with TRCA staff to document the technical floodplain analysis including floodplain boundaries, flood depths, flow velocities, flood frequency, access and egress routes and floodproofing requirements.

Draft Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments

Based on the results of the Unionville Special Policy Area review, staff will prepare draft Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments to reflect the boundary changes. The current SPA policies were last updated as part of the Markham Official Plan 2014 and are already consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement, 2014. As it is not anticipated that any modifications to the SPA policies will be required, this review is expected to be limited to a boundary adjustment of the Unionville Special Policy Area.

Provincial Interest in Managing Flood Hazards

The Province identifies flood hazards as a matter of provincial interest in the Planning Act and the Provincial Policy Statement, 2014. Based on the increased risk associated with SPAs, the Province has established procedures for the review and approval of Special Policy Areas. Staff will be meeting with Provincial staff to obtain input into the review of the Unionville Special Policy Area. The Official Plan Amendment will be subject to approval by both the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The Province recently announced that it is conducting a review of its flood management practices and has named a Special Advisor on Flooding. Staff are monitoring this review and will ensure that any direction regarding Special Policy Areas are addressed in the draft Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments.

Community Information Meeting and Statutory Public Meeting

Given the number of properties affected by the updated floodplain mapping, staff recommend that a separate community information meeting be held for affected area residents. The purpose of the information meeting is to assist residents in better understanding the updated floodplain information, the Special Policy Area review process, and development criteria in the floodplain and Special Policy Area. TRCA staff will be invited to answer technical questions related to floodplain modelling. Notification will be provided through a direct mail-out to residents and advertised in the Markham Economist and Sun. Once a draft Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendment is prepared, staff will schedule the statutory public meeting as required under the Planning Act.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Not applicable.

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS

Not applicable.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

The review of the Special Policy Area policies ensures that the most accurate floodplain information is incorporated into land use planning decisions. It is aligned with the ‘Safe & Sustainable Community’ priority to protect public safety while supporting the continued economic viability of the Unionville community.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Staff from Fire and Emergency Services and the Engineering Department will be involved in the review of the Unionville Special Policy Area.

RECOMMENDED BY:

Arvin Prasad, RPP, MCIP
Commissioner of Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

- Figure 1: Map of Unionville Special Policy Area (Map 8, Official Plan 2014)
- Figure 2: Changes to the Unionville Floodplain

Figure 1: Map of Unionville Special Policy Area (Map 8, Official Plan 2014)

