



# MARKHAM CENTRE SECONDARY PLAN UPDATE

## Development Options Engagement Summary

June 2021



The City of Markham has retained a multidisciplinary team to undertake the Markham Centre Secondary Plan Update. The team is led by Gladki Planning Associates, supported by DTAH, Greenberg Consultants, Stantec and Steer.

gladki  
planning  
associates

**dtah**

Greenberg  
Consultants  
Inc.



**Stantec**

**steer**



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# OVERVIEW

## This Engagement Summary provides an overview of findings from consultations on options for the future growth and evolution of Markham Centre.

The City of Markham is conducting a review of the Markham Centre Secondary Plan.

The Markham Centre Secondary Plan Update is a multi-year project with six core phases:

1. Initial Public Consultation
2. Existing Conditions Analysis
3. Visioning
4. Development Options
5. Development Concept
6. Secondary Plan

In 2019, the City began a conversation with the community on Markham Centre: what they loved, what could be improved, and what their hopes were for the area.

Next, the project team collected and analyzed data to understand the existing conditions of Markham Centre and identify the area's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

In 2020, a series of interactive virtual meetings were held on Zoom with nearly 200 participants, exploring different themes and issues most important to the community through small-group discussions. Working together, a Vision and Guiding Principles were developed to help inform Markham Centre's development over the next 20-30 years.

Drawing on the Vision and Guiding Principles, the project team then generated two development options exploring different mixes and locations of uses, densities, heights, road layouts, approaches to pedestrian and cycling mobility, and parks and open space networks. These options were shared with stakeholders and the public during March-June 2021, through the following consultation activities:

- Small-group workshops with Council Members
- One-on-one meetings with Markham Centre landowners
- A public survey and forum on Your Voice Markham, the City's online engagement platform
- A virtual public information meeting on Zoom, with small-group discussions in breakout rooms

This document shares the Vision and Guiding Principles for Markham Centre, outlines the two development options, and summarizes feedback received during consultation activities for the development options.



*In keeping with Public Health's recommendation of physical distancing and to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the City is adapting public and stakeholder engagement to online formats. In-person activities will resume when it is safe to do so, based on the guidance of public health authorities.*

# VISION

## Markham Centre is Markham's downtown.

It is the heart of the city and a vibrant, intensive, mixed use urban core.

As the centre of civic life and a hub of activity, it draws people from across Markham and the region to live, work, learn, play, and participate in the Markham community. Major public spaces, institutions and facilities solidify its role as a meeting place. Building on its success as a high-tech hub and locus of innovation, a range of businesses serve as an engine of economic prosperity and establish Markham Centre as an area of significant employment. Retail and entertainment uses further establish the downtown as a place to be. Together, this dynamic mix and range of uses create many reasons to come to Markham Centre, and many reasons to stay.

As well as a destination, Markham Centre is a home. A variety of housing provides options for people of all ages, household sizes and incomes to create a diverse and inclusive community. Markham Centre is composed of smaller neighbourhoods, each of which serve as a complete community for their residents, allowing them to meet their daily needs locally and within convenient walking distances.

Although they have their own character, Markham Centre's neighbourhoods form a well-connected and cohesive whole. The transportation system establishes a fine-grained pattern of linkages

and makes walking, cycling and transit attractive and viable alternatives to getting around by car. Excellent higher order transit links Markham Centre to the surrounding region. The transit routes and their interchange at the future Mobility Hub at the Unionville GO station serve as focal points for development intensity.

The Rouge River Valley and a network of parks and greenspaces also link Markham Centre's neighbourhoods. This network is foundational to the area's ecological integrity and the quality of life of people who experience it. Careful treatment of the area's natural heritage is part of a broader approach to sustainability which establishes Markham Centre as a model of environmental performance.

When taken as a whole, Markham Centre's parts – private spaces and public spaces, streets and buildings, green spaces and hardscapes – come together to create an attractive and vital place. These parts are diverse, ranging from quiet intimate corners to places of great energy and excitement. They contribute to a distinct sense of identity that celebrates the variety of the Markham experience, reflecting on its past and encapsulating the multi-culturalism which is central to its dynamism.



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

From the Visioning work in 2020, the following Guiding Principles were established:

- 1 Create a place that is the heart of Markham**
- 2 Support a diverse and prosperous economy**
- 3 Support arts, culture, and recreation**
- 4 Create an efficient and safe transportation system**
- 5 Create a great public realm**
- 6 Foster diverse built form**
- 7 Build neighbourhoods with access to all the things needed for daily life**
- 8 Realize the full potential of the Rouge River Valley as an environmental and placemaking feature**
- 9 Champion sustainability and environmental performance**
- 10 Plan for inclusive and diverse neighbourhoods**
- 11 Transition from suburban to urban**

The Vision and Guiding Principles provide the foundation for the development of the Markham Centre Secondary Plan.

They are a clear statement of Markham's ambitions for its centre and serve as a reference point for evaluating different options as the Secondary Plan process evolves. The Vision and Guiding Principles are based on an analysis of existing conditions, the identification of major opportunities and challenges, and many discussions with the public, stakeholders, and staff.

# DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

## What will the Vision and Guiding Principles look like in practice?

To start the discussion, our team generated two options that explore some potential directions and ideas for Markham Centre.

### Option 1: Business as Usual

Demonstrates the implications of how Markham Centre will evolve based on its current trajectory:

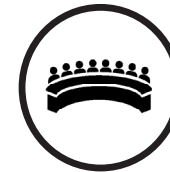
- Extends the scale of proposed development to adjacent parcels, taking into consideration existing land use designations
- Includes existing and presently planned parks only
- Applies current plans and policies
- Accepts those Environmental Assessments previously identified as “preferred” or “approved”

### Option 2: Preliminary Concept

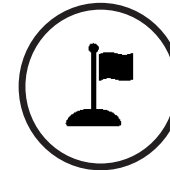
Tests out an alternative trajectory for Markham Centre based on 8 big moves:

- Prioritizing walking, cycling, and transit
- Creating a network of neighbourhoods
- Supporting varied built form and height
- Focusing on a transit node
- Establishing the Greenway as a key public space
- Establishing a network of parks and open spaces
- Fostering a range of high-quality public spaces
- Rethinking the civic district

To receive feedback on the options, our consultation included:



**Workshops with Council Members**



**Meetings with Markham Centre Landowners**

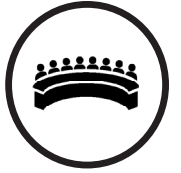


**Your Voice Markham Website (Online Survey & Forum)**



**Virtual Public Information Meeting**

# WHAT WE HEARD



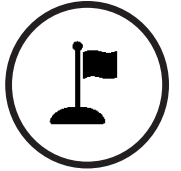
## Workshops with Council Members: May 18 - June 4, 2021

Three half-day workshops were held with small groups of Council Members to discuss big issues in Markham Centre including built form intensity, variations in height and density, growth projections, 15-minute neighbourhoods, the Greenway, the civic district, parks and open spaces, and the transportation network. Councillors emphasized that connectivity, variety, and community is critical in Markham Centre.

- **Each neighbourhood in Markham Centre should have a distinct sense of place.** Focal points or marker sites can serve as gateways to the neighbourhood through unique architecture, public art, Indigenous art, and placemaking.
- **Markham Centre needs a civic square for gathering and celebration.** The square should be anchored by civic facilities like a central library, community centre, museum, and/or performing arts centre.
- **It should be easy and safe to walk and cycle between neighbourhoods in Markham Centre.** Important components include separated bike lanes and a well-connected trail network that links destinations including the transit station and Main Street Unionville. In some instances, trails may traverse the valley lands, especially to make key connections.
- **Markham Centre needs a balance of people and jobs.** More jobs and employment/office uses should complement existing and planned residential uses.
- **There is opportunity to create an iconic, world-class rail station.** It should be well-integrated into development at the transit hub and surrounding area, rather than being a stand-alone building.
- **Street-level retail is needed within Markham Centre's neighbourhoods.** People should be able to walk to local stores, restaurants, and cafes.
- **There should be a mix of building heights and forms.** Transitions should ensure tall and mid-rise buildings respond to their immediate context and protect adjacent low-rise areas.
- **Active and passive parkland is needed to keep up with growing density.** Public spaces should be accessible through all modes of transportation and enjoyable in winter months, too. Existing public parkland, like the Civic Centre lands, should be protected.
- **The capacity of the transportation system is an important consideration.** People need to be able to move to, from, and through Markham Centre efficiently.
- **Consider Cornell as a cautionary tale for creating a walkable community.** Residents preferred to drive to bigger stores than walk to the local main street. The plan for Markham Centre should be based on realistic assumptions about how people want to live in this environment and the critical mass needed to support a true mixed-use community.



# WHAT WE HEARD



## Meetings with Landowners: April 20 - June 11, 2021

Landowners play an important role as implementers of the Secondary Plan. One-on-one meetings were held with Markham Centre landowners to present the development options, answer questions, receive feedback, and understand their plans for their lands. Written deputations have also been received.

- **In general, landowners feel the Vision and Guiding Principles of the Secondary Plan update align with their own interests and plans.** Some would like their sites to be prominent landmarks or gateways in Markham Centre.
- **The management of Tributaries 4 and 5 and alignments for the 407 Transitway and Viva Rapidway should be finalized as soon as possible.** These routes have important implications for individual sites and connectivity.
- **Most landowners feel the heights and densities proposed in the Preliminary Concept are too low.** The revised concept should reflect the buildings and parkland in their recent development applications and approvals.
- **Further detail is needed on the analyses conducted for demographic forecasting and transportation in Markham Centre.** Some landowners would like to review the assumptions for development and growth on their sites.
- **The tallest buildings should be located close to higher-order transit infrastructure.** Landowners support concentrating growth around the Unionville GO Station. Some landowners indicated that the areas around Highway 7 and Warden Avenue should feature a concentration of similar intensity, anchored by the Civic Centre.
- **Much of future development will be mixed-use and market-driven.** Right now, there is less interest in office uses.

### The Secondary Plan Update team met with the following landowners and stakeholders:

- Markham YMCA
- York University
- Orlando Corporation
- Kingdom Development Inc.
- 8330-8332 Kennedy Road
- Lifetime Developments
- Hilton Suites
- Brivia Group/LeMay
- New World Centre
- Dorsay Development Corp.
- IBM
- SmartCentres REIT
- Times Group Corporation
- The Remington Group
- Markham District Energy
- Metropia
- Delta Urban Inc.

# WHAT WE HEARD



## Your Voice Markham Website: May 20 - June 14, 2021

Six short videos were posted online to present the preliminary ideas and development options for Markham Centre. Mailings, Councillors' newsletters, and social media advertisements were used to spread the word. Approximately 30 community members shared their feedback through an online survey and forum on Markham's virtual engagement platform.\*

196

visits to the Your Markham Centre webpage

36

new registrations on Your Voice Markham

263

total video views

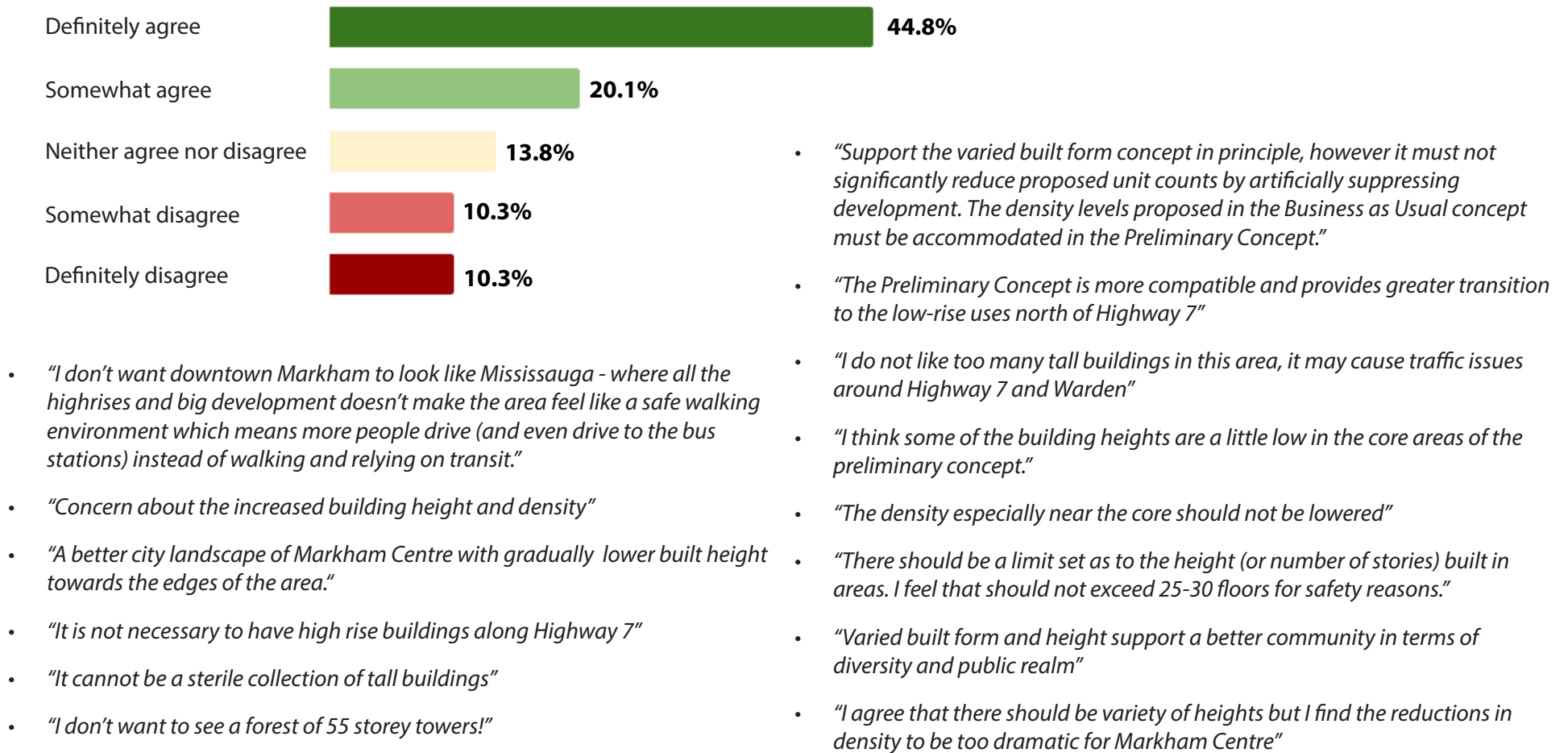
- **Markham Centre should not be a collection of only tall buildings.** If the greatest density is at the transit station, heights should be gradually lowered toward the edges, transitioning to low-rise areas. Mid-rise buildings will create diversity, balance, and harmony.
- **In addition to the transit node, there needs to be secondary and local nodes.** Density must be high enough to support surrounding services. The area near Warden and Highway 7 is conducive to height, although traffic congestion must be managed carefully.
- **A walkable civic presence can be fostered near the transit hub.** Instead of moving the Civic Centre, the new civic district should have a strong community presence through uses such as a high-quality library, recreation centre, museum, gallery, performance centre, and plaza.
- **Downtown Markham needs much more green space.** Resources should be directed toward the development and maintenance of parks and public spaces that complement the naturalized Greenway. There should be public seating, washrooms, bike parking, and recreational facilities.
- **Street life should be lively, supported by retail, restaurants, and services.** There is appetite for pedestrian-only roads with patios, art, and live music.
- **A well-connected, all-season environment will encourage other modes of transportation besides driving.** Cycling facilities must be protected from road traffic to ensure safety for riders of all ages and abilities. Local buses, safe track crossings, and walking trails away from busy roads can connect each Markham Centre neighbourhood and shorten commutes.

\*As of June 14, 2021



## Varied Built Form and Height

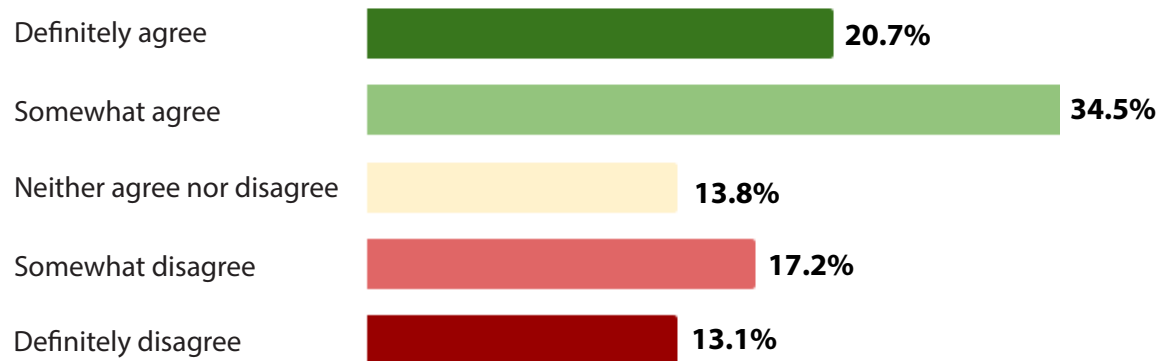
To what extent do you agree with a Big Move to support varied built form and height?





## Transit Node Intensification

To what extent do you agree with a Big Move to focus built form intensity at the transit node?

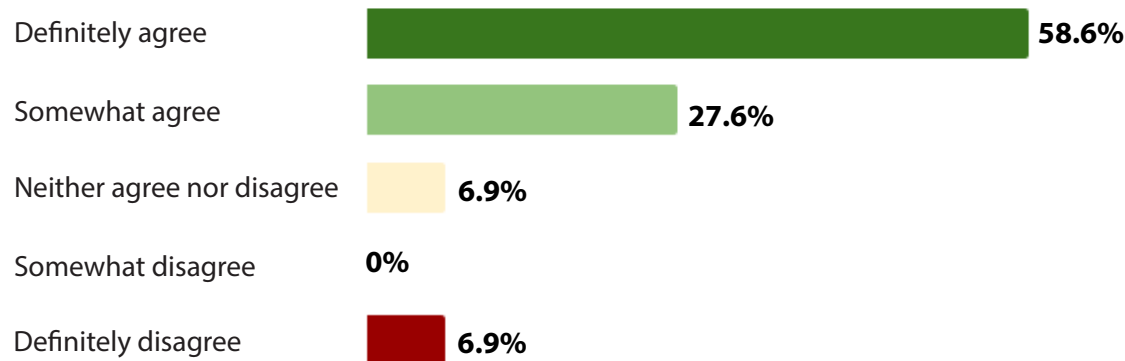


- *"It makes sense to have the highest density near the highway/GO stations and away from existing low-rise residential buildings."*
- *"There does need to be secondary and local nodes as well as a transit node. The Prelim. Concept is good"*
- *"Support greater intensity around Unionville GO Station"*
- *"Consider how to achieve a smooth view of building transition from the transit node to the outside residential area."*
- *"Please consider to have at most mid-rise buildings in scattered areas/roads/streets, thus to have a community in harmony."*
- *"Agree with a transit node that becomes a new landmark destination for the City"*
- *"Because of the location of Historic Unionville, the area near the GO station needs special attention. Although density is important it can be achieved without excessive height. The area at the intersection of Warden and Highway 7 is more conducive to height. Focus height in this area."*
- *"This will facilitate transit-oriented development by reducing travel distances to transit and encouraging non-auto modes of transport to stations."*
- *"The main 'transit node' focuses on a GO station which only takes people to Toronto. I think there should be a bigger focus on more local commutes."*
- *"The high density explosion in one area of Markham puts a lot of pressure on our resources, e.g., water, electricity, etc."*
- *"Agree that taller buildings should be centered around those transit nodes so they are within walking distance for those who will need access to transit."*



## Pedestrian and Cycling Network

To what extent do you agree with a Big Move to enhance connectivity and prioritizing walking, cycling, and transit?

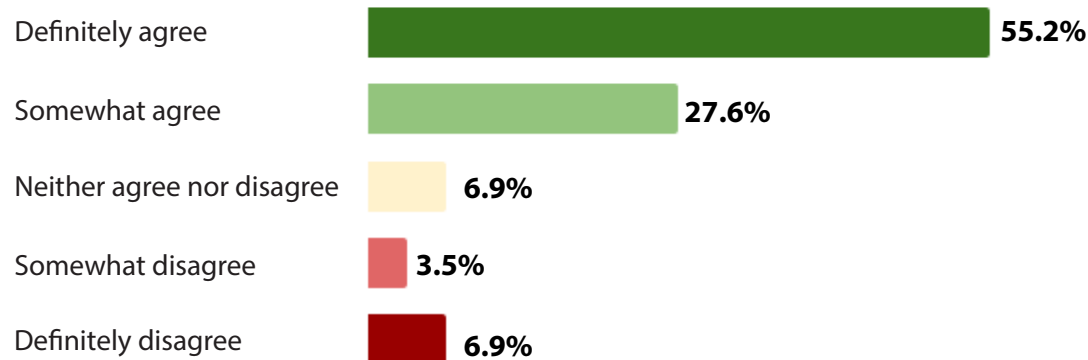


- *"I like prioritizing walking. We need more walking trails that aren't near busy roads. We should also have something like in downtown Toronto or Ottawa where there are pedestrian-only roads with patios, public art, and live music."*
- *"Make sure the collector road rights-of-way are wide enough to allow at least 3.5 meters for active transportation on each side."*
- *"All cycling facilities must be protected from road traffic through curbs, vertical separation, or by separate ROWs. Anything less that does not offer protection from traffic will discourage first-time cyclists (people who we are trying to move to cycling) from using them, as they will be perceived as unsafe. They must also be maintained well as with normal roadways (regular snow clearing, resurfacing, etc.)"*
- *"Please ensure safety features on cycling lanes to protect from cars. I would suggest one lane per direction at the main hubs to discourage driving into that area."*
- *"Agree with allowing public to be able to have access to the Rouge River valley lands, similar to provincial and York Region parks. Let the public enjoy and appreciate nature."*
- *"I support improving the connectivity for active transportation but am concerned with development increasingly approaching the natural areas."*



## Neighbourhoods

To what extent do you agree with a Big Move to create a network of neighbourhoods?

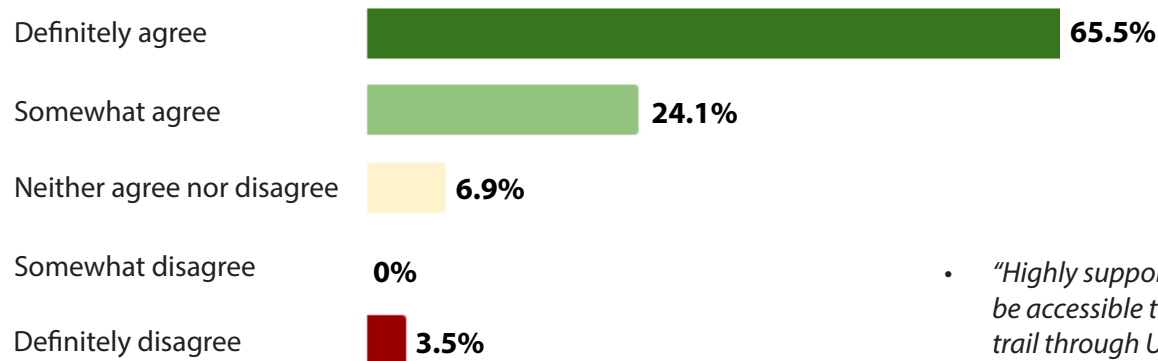


- *"Love the public square idea."*
- *"Walking trails and cycling to connect each square/community like the urban park and water system connecting the Meadowvale Trail, Lake Aquantain Trail and Glen Erin Trail system in Mississauga."*
- *"Absolutely agree with this principle. Population densities in all of these neighbourhoods must be high enough to support the services, grocery stores, restaurants, etc., otherwise they will fail."*
- *"Provides more opportunity for street life"*
- *"Make all the neighbourhoods linked for active modes of transportation with paths/sidewalks and crossings over the tracks to allow easy flow."*
- *"Connected neighborhoods are a must."*
- *"Make safe track crossings, notably between Bill Crothers and the school sites on the west side of the tracks."*
- *"The current YRDSB school boundaries do not support this vision. Residents should have the option to attend the closest school in proximity to their house. All parents are frustrated that we have to transit to school instead of walking to schools closer to our homes."*
- *"I think the areas should be better connected, instead of being separate 'islands'"*
- *"great idea of having a series of connected squares!"*
- *"Making it possible for everyone to live in walking distance to restaurants and other services is very important"*



## Greenway System

To what extent do you agree with a Big Move to establish the greenway as a key public space?

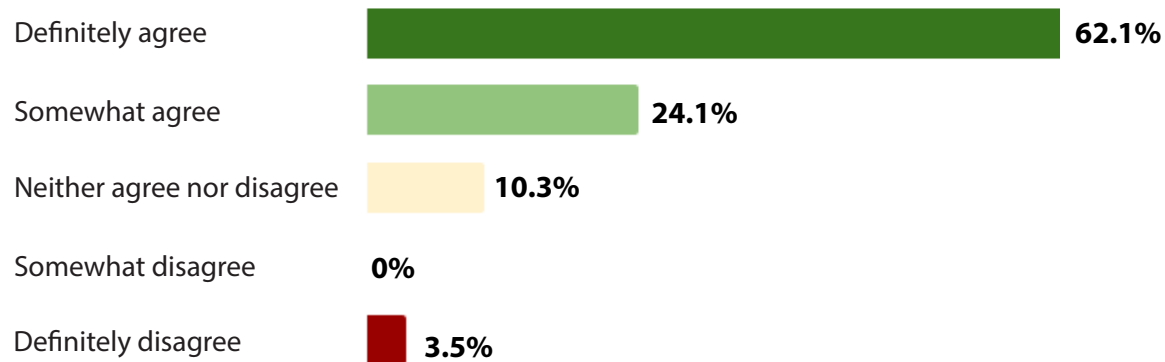


- *"Having more walking trails with benches will be nice."*
- *"More focus on protecting greenspace, waterway and wildlife"*
- *"It is a good idea, but I don't know how long it will take to complete. In midtown, there are a lot of trails, big parks, amenities for residents' easy access. However, living here, we find nowhere to walk after a busy day work. We can only walk on sidewalks and breathe vehicle exhaust."*
- *"There is a significant shortage of park space under the Business as Usual approach. The Preliminary approach at least makes a good effort to address the problem."*
- *"As long as the Greenway is not peppered with high rise structures and thousands of houses, I would agree."*
- *"Highly support establishing the greenway as a key public space. It can be accessible through a trail network (as with the Villages and Valleys trail through Unionville) or at the very least, a very visible and legible trail adjacent to the greenway that connects parks and neighbourhoods."*
- *"As part of the initiative to encourage walking, cycling, and public transport, there also needs to be sufficient public seating and bicycle parking in all parks, plazas, and open spaces. Other amenities like public washrooms need to be considered too."*
- *"The greener the better."*
- *"This is a MUST have! The greenway provides so much opportunity for residents to be able to stay healthy and walk/bike around, enjoy nature, get fresh air, improve awareness and importance of nature."*
- *"A mature connected trail system supports physical and mental health, and not just during a pandemic"*
- *"I hope that while we create green spaces, we minimize our disturbance of the already threatened natural habitats."*



## Parks and Open Spaces

To what extent do you agree with a Big Move for a variety of parks and open spaces?



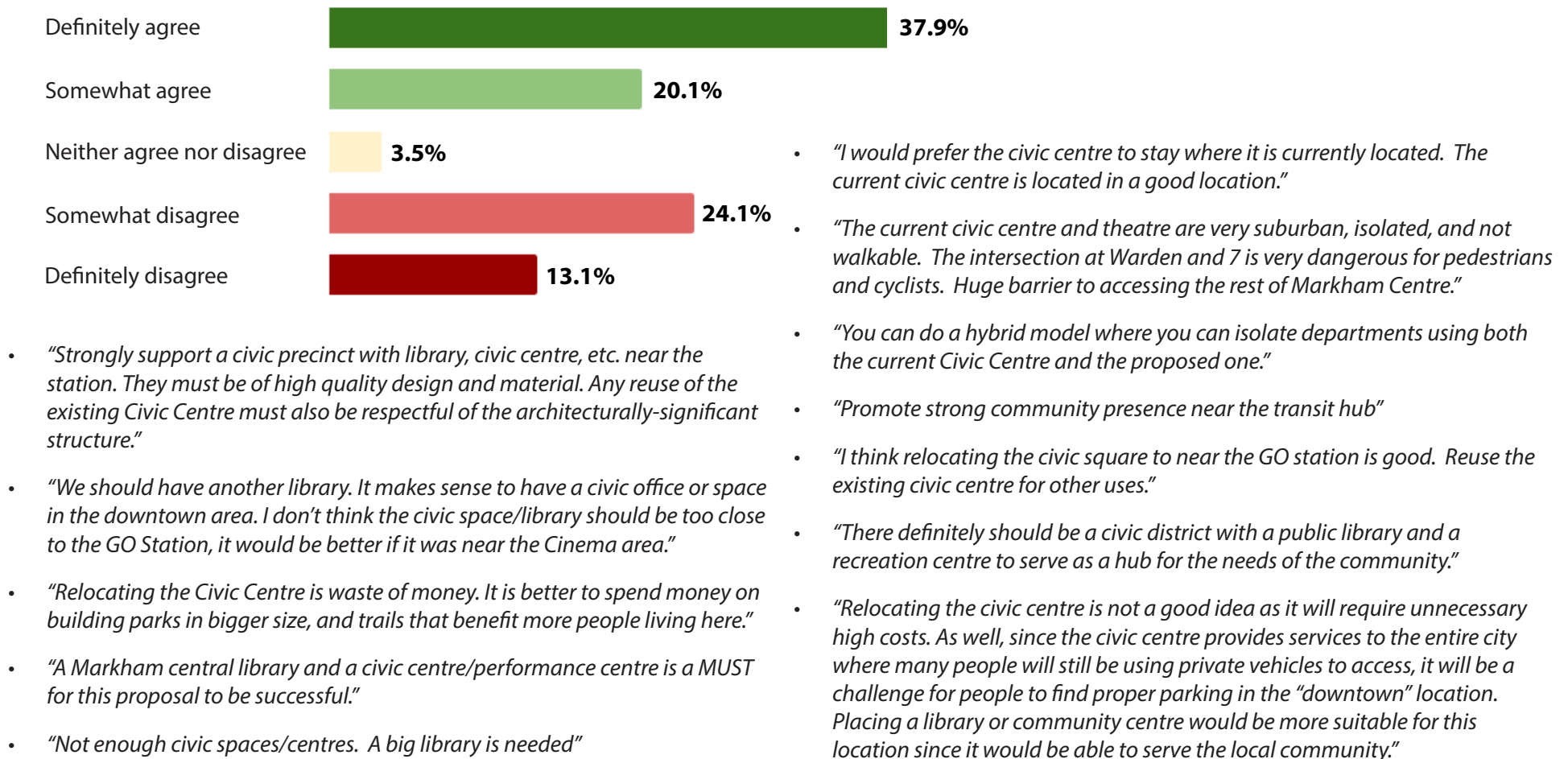
- *"We need more parks, picnic areas, and dog parks."*
- *"Love the public squares idea."*
- *"The proposed amount of green lands or open spaces are terribly small!"*
- *"Hydro corridors could be used for sporting facilities. The City needs to push Hydro One to allow for these uses."*
- *"Important to provide adequate parks and trails within the community"*
- *"Kids should be able to walk to parks and sports fields"*
- *"More trails, picnic areas, bike trails, walking trails needed to enjoy nature."*





## Civic Precinct

To what extent do you agree with a Big Move to rethink Markham's civic district?






# WHAT WE HEARD

## Virtual Public Information Meeting: June 10, 2021

A public meeting was held via Zoom to share the preliminary ideas and development options for Markham Centre. Councillors' newsletters, social media advertisements, and mailings to approximately 13,500 addresses were used to spread the word. There were 53 participants in small-group breakout rooms, and 96 views on the City of Markham's YouTube livestream. The discussion focused on built form types and intensity, transportation, 15-minute neighbourhoods, parks and open spaces, and the civic district.

 **City of Markham**   
@cityofmarkham

Markham Centre is evolving!

Participate in planning its future at our upcoming public information meeting on June 10.

We'll explore some preliminary options based on last summer's visioning work.

Visit [yourvoicemarkham.ca/YourMarkhamCentre](https://yourvoicemarkham.ca/YourMarkhamCentre) for more info

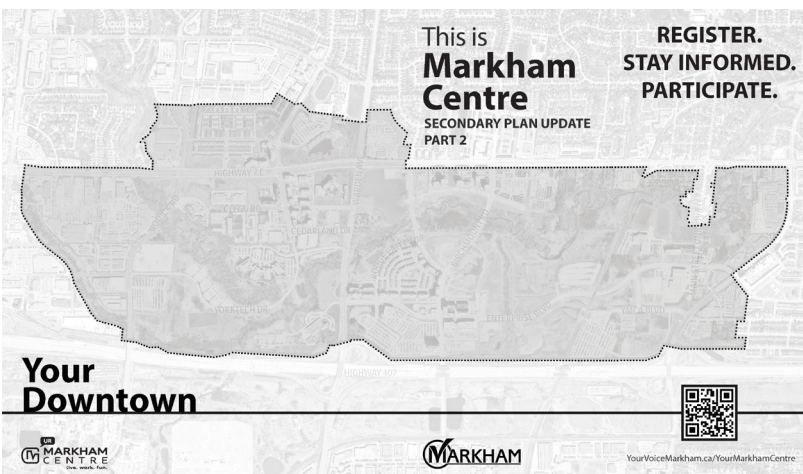


**Markham Centre serves the City's diverse communities as a vibrant, urban and mixed-use downtown.**

**At 7pm on June 10, 2021, join the online conversation on the development options for Markham Centre through [YourVoiceMarkham.ca/YourMarkhamCentre](https://YourVoiceMarkham.ca/YourMarkhamCentre)**

**The Zoom link will be posted on [YourVoiceMarkham.ca](https://YourVoiceMarkham.ca) by 6pm on June 10, 2021.**


**STAY TUNED! STAY CONNECTED!** 





**This is Markham Centre**  
SECONDARY PLAN UPDATE  
PART 2

**REGISTER. STAY INFORMED. PARTICIPATE.**

**Your Downtown**



  [YourVoiceMarkham.ca/YourMarkhamCentre](https://YourVoiceMarkham.ca/YourMarkhamCentre)

**WHAT IS HAPPENING?**

Join the conversation about the **Markham Centre Secondary Plan Update!**

Since the adoption of the first plan in the 1990s, the City has imagined Markham Centre as a vibrant, urban place with a mix of amenities and activities to support an amazing quality of life.

The vision has been to balance development, protect nature, build a pedestrian-friendly place, and connect to transit. We have advanced greatly toward that vision the last 20 years! Markham Centre has successfully attracted development at significantly taller and denser scales than originally planned.

It is time to revisit and update the plan so we can ensure our downtown vision keeps pace with good community planning and the community's wishes.

**PROJECT UPDATE**

In the summer of 2020, we held 3 virtual engagement sessions and one visioning workshop. With your help, we developed a vision and the guiding principles. The vision is for Markham Centre to be the heart of the city and a vibrant, intensive, mixed-use urban core.

With this vision in mind, we prepared development options for Markham Centre that explore different ideas for the future, including: variations on built form, height and density, land use, parks and open spaces, community amenities and transportation networks.

We are now seeking your feedback on these options! Please join us virtually on Thursday, June 10, 2021, to learn more about the development options and share your ideas.

**Jun 10** Virtual Public Information Meeting  
7 - 9 pm

*Please register to attend this event at [YourVoiceMarkham.ca/YourMarkhamCentre](https://YourVoiceMarkham.ca/YourMarkhamCentre)*

Unable to attend the virtual public meeting? Visit [YourVoiceMarkham.ca/YourMarkhamCentre](https://YourVoiceMarkham.ca/YourMarkhamCentre) to join the conversation online. If you have any questions, please contact us at [YourMarkhamCentre@markham.ca](mailto:YourMarkhamCentre@markham.ca).

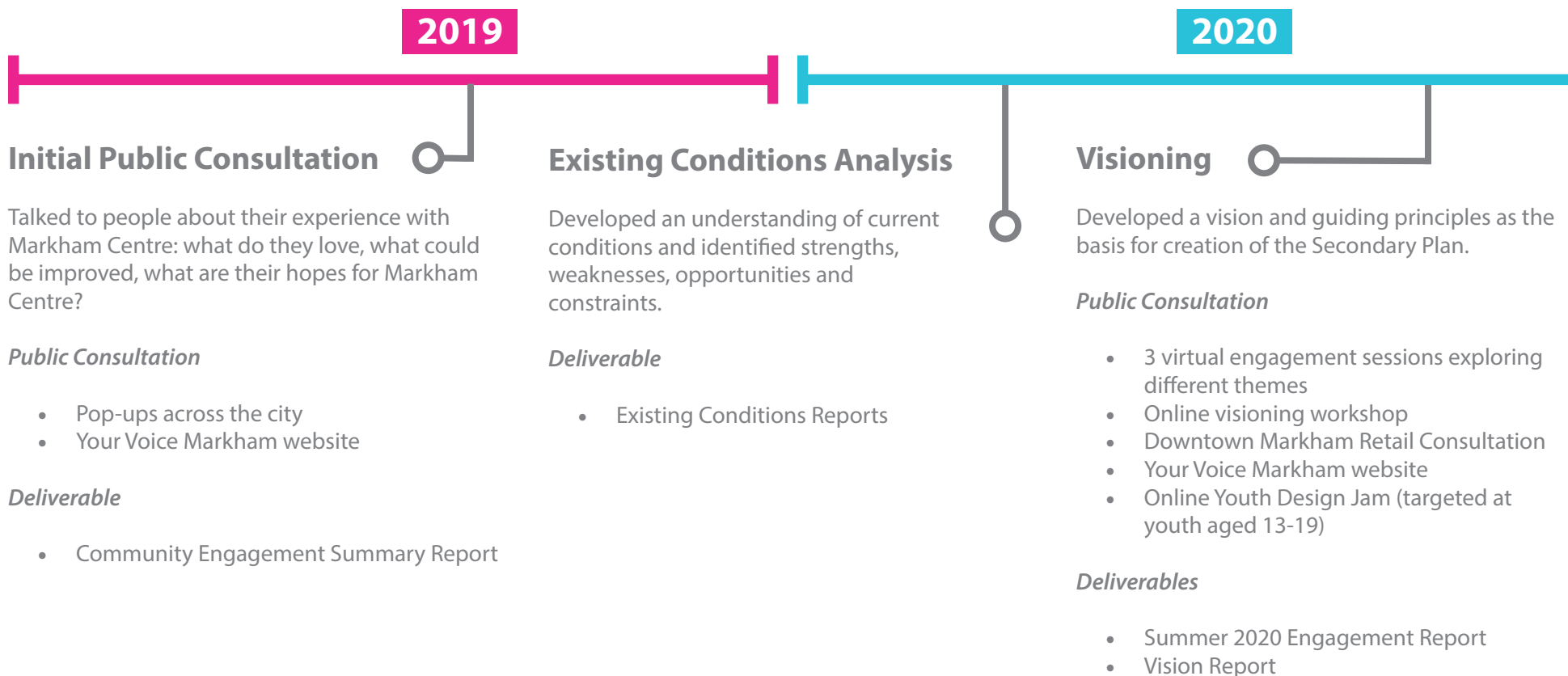


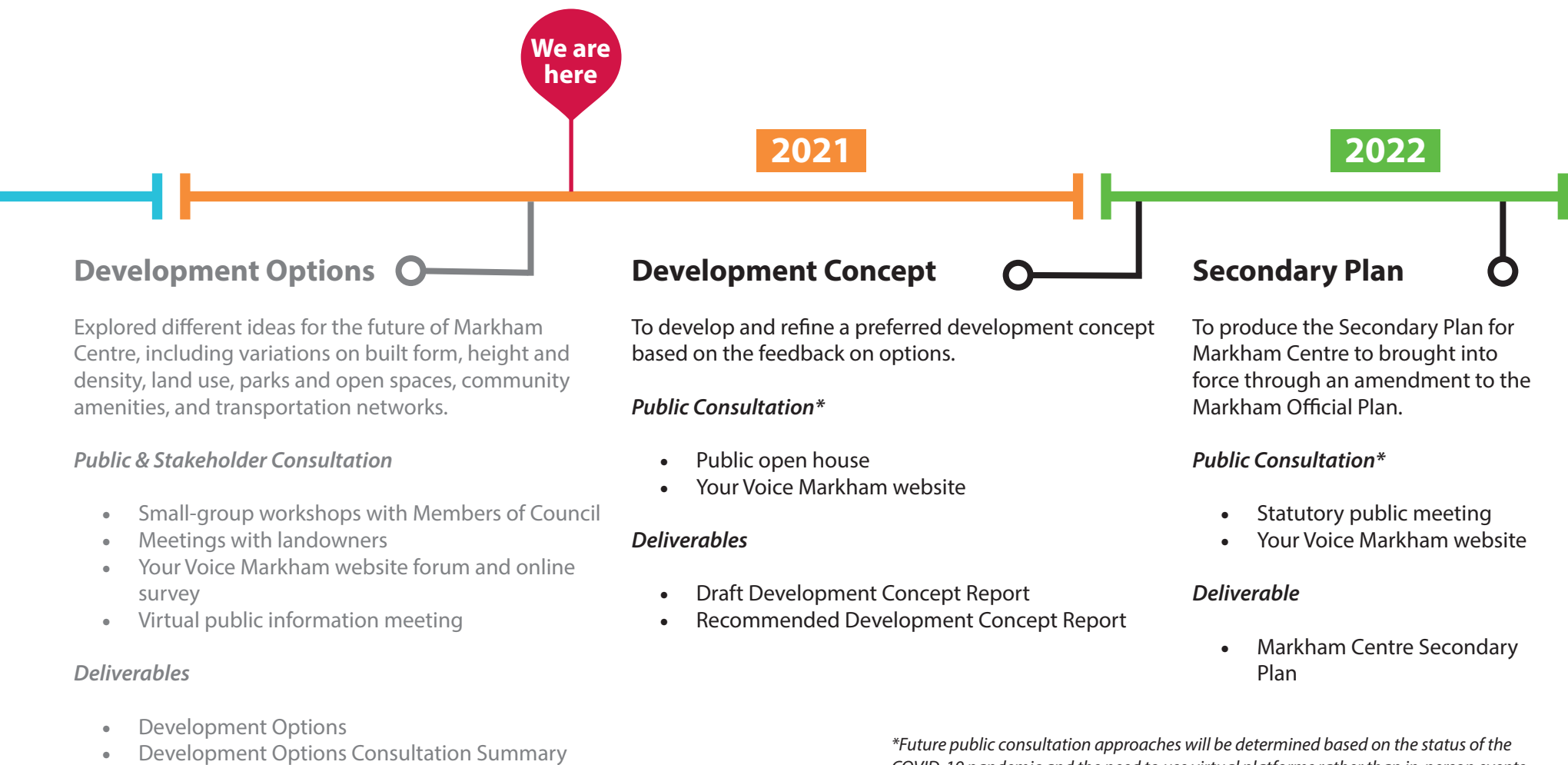
- **Markham Centre should have a variety of built form and height.** This was seen as a key contributor to the pedestrian experience. Some participants preferred the Preliminary Concept, indicating that it will not put stress on infrastructure; others preferred the Business as Usual option in order to spread out density. Many residents are concerned with proposed heights of 40+ storeys in new developments. Mid-rise buildings were cited as a natural transition between areas with greater density.
- **Concentrating intensification near the transit station was seen as sensible.** Many participants felt that areas further from this hub can have lower density, and good transit connections will help lessen road congestion. Participants had mixed views about development intensity along Highway 7 and at the intersection of Warden Avenue and Highway 7.
- **The Greenway is a key asset, especially in a post-COVID world.** Participants indicated that parks should be positioned around the Rouge River, and density should be directed away from it. Guided walks and programming were suggested to promote engagement with the valley lands.
- **There must be large, programmable parks with recreational facilities for play and sports.** Participants shared that green and open spaces should be appealing to a mix of different age groups. An open, accessible trail system should connect the network of open spaces within Markham Centre and beyond its boundaries. There was interest in the nearby hydro corridor being repurposed.
- **Safety is crucial for fostering active transportation in Markham Centre.** Secure crossings across Highway 7, separated bike lanes, and well-connected, well-maintained paths and trails will help encourage cycling and walking year-round. Having more options for active movement and transit will shift travel away from the car.
- **Transit should be strengthened in Markham Centre in anticipation of growth.** At the transit hub, the GO line, Viva Rapidway, and 407 Transitway stops should be located close to each other to facilitate easy transfers. There should be more frequent bus service, and convenient routes that link transit lines and density nodes.
- **Community members strongly support the idea of 15-minute neighbourhoods.** Streetscapes should be engaging and pedestrian-friendly, with spaces for both small- and large-scale retail like cafes, grocery stores, and big-box stores. Other uses, especially locally-accessible child care facilities and schools, are needed in Markham Centre. Participants liked urban squares being the focus for each neighbourhood, and suggested these be surrounded by mid-rise built form.
- **A civic district should be located near the transit node, anchored by uses such as a public square, library, and community centre/arts & culture facility.** The civic square should be a destination for celebration and gathering, and perhaps be located close to the edge of the Greenway. Some participants felt the existing Civic Centre should remain in its location, while others suggested converting it to a large community centre or arts facility and moving some or all City offices closer to major transit. There was agreement that employment, office, and retail uses should complement the civic uses near the transit station.

# NEXT STEPS

## Markham Centre is for everyone - and everyone has a role to play in mapping its future.

The process to update the Markham Centre Secondary Plan is a public one. The entire Markham community has the opportunity to provide direction and feedback at critical junctures during the project. The next phase involves developing and refining a preferred concept, based on the feedback summarized in this report. The public will be consulted on the draft development concept in fall 2021.





*\*Future public consultation approaches will be determined based on the status of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to use virtual platforms rather than in-person events.*

