



Report to: Development Services Committee

Date: June 26, 2017

SUBJECT: New Provincial Plans – Release of the 2017 Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan

PREPARED BY: Policy and Research, Planning and Urban Design

REVIEWED BY: Marg Wouters, MCIP, RPP, Senior Manager, Policy and Research, (ext. 2909)

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) That the staff report and presentation entitled “New Provincial Plans – Release of the 2017 Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan” dated June 26, 2017 be received.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

On May 18, 2017, following a two-year review, the Province released an updated Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan), Greenbelt Plan, and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. Markham Council submitted comments to the Province on proposed amendments to the Plans in October 2016.

The key changes to the Growth Plan include revised transition policies for achieving increased density and intensification targets, and also additional responsibilities for upper-tier (regional) municipalities with respect to planning for employment areas, major transit station areas and housing. The policy framework for water resource, natural heritage and agricultural systems in the Growth Plan is now integrated with the approach and standards provided for in the Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. Markham Council requests for minor Greenbelt boundary adjustments have been approved.

Once the Plans come into effect on July 1, 2017, all Council decisions on planning matters must conform or not conflict with the Plans. York Region is required to bring its Official Plan into conformity with the 2017 Provincial Plans by 2022. Markham will initiate an exercise to bring the 2014 Official Plan into conformity with the new Provincial Plans once York Region provides sufficient direction on the areas of regional responsibility (e.g., local 2041 population and employment forecasts, urban settlement area boundaries, identification of employment areas, etc) through their municipal comprehensive review.

PURPOSE:

This report provides an overview of key changes in three Provincial Plans released by the Province on May 18, 2017 and the implications for Markham. The 2017 Growth Plan,

Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan come into force and effect on July 1, 2017.

BACKGROUND:

In February 2015 the Province initiated the Coordinated Review of four Provincial Plans, namely the 2006 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan), the 2005 Greenbelt Plan, the 2002 Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, and the 2005 Niagara Escarpment Plan. The Province undertook the required 10-year review of each of the four Plans concurrently. The Niagara Escarpment Plan does not apply to Markham and is not addressed in this report.

Following public consultation on a Discussion Document which initiated the review, a report was prepared by an Advisory Panel for the Coordinated Review (Crombie Panel), outlining a number of recommendations for strengthening the four Plans. In May 2016, proposed amendments to the four Plans were released for comment. Markham Council submitted comments to the Province on the Discussion Document in May 2016, and on the proposed amendments to the Plans in October 2016.

Four new Provincial Plans were released on May 18, 2017. A broad overview of the highlights of the four Plans as provided by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs is provided in Appendix 'A' to this report. Links to the 2017 Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plans, are provided in Appendix 'B'.

An overview of the key changes in the three Plans that affect Markham, and how they address Markham Council comments, is provided in this report. This overview is based on staff's initial interpretation of the new Plans, as well as commentary from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs website. Staff will be attending municipal information sessions being scheduled by the Province and meeting with Region staff to gain clarification on the implementation of the new Plans.

OPTIONS/DISCUSSION:

The Greenbelt Plan and Growth Plan provide significant direction in Markham for the protection of natural heritage and agricultural lands, as well as providing a strong, Provincially led framework for managing growth and creating compact, complete communities. Although equally important, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan has less of an impact in Markham, as it applies to a relatively small area in the City. These Plans provide the City with strong tools to protect the City's Greenway System and to manage growth in a sustainable manner. Key changes to the Plans are provided below.

Growth Plan 2017

The key changes in the Growth Plan include revised transition policies for achieving density and intensification targets, and also additional responsibilities for upper-tier (regional) municipalities with respect to planning for employment areas, major transit station areas and housing.

60% Intensification target and minimum 80 residents and jobs in Designated Greenfield Areas maintained but timelines have been adjusted

The 2017 Growth Plan maintains the higher intensification target of 60% Region-wide, and the higher minimum 80 residents and jobs per hectare requirement for Designated Greenfield Areas proposed in the draft Growth Plan. The planning horizon remains at 2041 and the Schedule 3 population and employment forecasts to 2041 also remain unchanged. However, the transition policies have been revised to provide for interim targets.

The higher 60% Region-wide intensification target (compared to 40% under the 2006 Growth Plan) and proposed increase in Designated Greenfield Area minimum density to 80 residents and jobs per hectare (from 50 residents and jobs in the 2006 Growth Plan) were among the City's main concerns with the draft Growth Plan, given the lack of adequate transition policies for implementation. This concern was shared by York Region and many municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

In addition to a concern that the targets were not achievable in Markham, there was also concern that the requirement for Council decisions to have regard for the higher DGA density in planning decisions immediately upon approval of the Growth Plan would disrupt detailed planning well underway for the 2031 Future Urban Area in north Markham, which is based on 70 residents and jobs per hectare.

The approved Growth Plan now requires the DGA density target of 80 residents and jobs combined per hectare to be applied to new lands designated in the future, and provides for an interim DGA density target of 60 residents and jobs combined per hectare to apply at the next upper-tier municipal comprehensive review, to be completed by 2022. Upper-tier municipalities may request alternative targets to the interim targets. These revised transition policies in the 2017 Growth Plan appear to allow for the Future Urban Area planning to proceed under the current density assumptions, however, staff will be seeking clarification from the Province and York Region on how the interim density target is to be implemented.

With respect to intensification, as of 2031 the intensification target will be increased from 40% to 60% of residential development annually occurring within the built boundary. At the next upper-tier municipal comprehensive review municipalities will be required to achieve an interim intensification target of 50%. While there is provision in the Plan for the Minister to update the built boundary mapping, which delineates Designated Greenfield Areas from lands subject to the intensification target, there is no detail provided on when or if an update will occur within the planning horizon of the Plan. As with the interim DGA density target, staff will be seeking clarification on how the interim intensification target is to be implemented.

Planning for Major Transit Station Areas along Priority Transit Corridors

Policies regarding new minimum density targets for Major Transit Station Areas have been revised to apply to those on Priority Transit Corridors or subway lines, as identified on Schedule 5 Moving People – Transit or as further identified by the Province. Upper-tier municipalities are to delineate the boundaries of these Major Transit Station Areas, in consultation with lower tier municipalities. Upper-tier municipalities may request alternative density targets for these areas through a municipal comprehensive review.

Priority Transit Corridors in Markham as shown on Schedule 5 are limited to the Stouffville GO corridor between Steeles and Markham Centre, and the Highway 7 corridor westward from Markham Centre, through the Richmond Hill/Langstaff Gateway. A future Yonge Subway extension into York Region is not shown on Schedule 5.

Additional upper-tier responsibilities for Employment Area protection

A number of policy revisions have been made regarding employment. A new policy has been introduced that requires upper-tier municipalities, in consultation with lower-tier municipalities, the Province and appropriate stakeholders, to establish an employment strategy that establishes minimum density targets (jobs per hectare) for all Employment Areas, and opportunities for the intensification of Employment Areas on sites that support active transportation and are serviced by transit. The upper-tier employment strategy would be implemented through a municipal comprehensive review. The Growth Plan also now requires upper-tier municipalities to designate all Employment Areas, including any Prime Employment Areas, in official plans and protect them for appropriate employment uses over the long term.

The new Prime Employment Area designation is intended to specifically protect lands for employment uses that are land extensive or have low employment densities and require locations near or adjacent to major goods movement facilities and corridors, including major highway interchanges. Examples of these types of employment uses include manufacturing, warehousing and logistics. Prohibited uses in a Prime Employment Area include residential, institutional and other sensitive uses, as well as retail and office uses that are not associated with the primary employment use.

In Employment Areas that are not designated as Prime Employment Areas, municipalities must prohibit residential uses and limit other sensitive uses that are not ancillary to the primary employment use; and either prohibit major retail in total or, where a size or scale threshold for permitted major retail uses has been established, prohibit any major retail uses that exceed the threshold.

The conversion of lands within Employment Areas or Prime Employment Areas to non-employment uses may only be permitted through a municipal comprehensive review, which the Growth Plan now defines more specifically as being an upper-tier (regional) comprehensive review. The Growth Plan further clarifies that any change to an official plan to permit new or expanded opportunities for major retail in Employment Areas may only occur through a municipal comprehensive review.

Requirement for upper-tier housing strategy

A new housing section in the Growth Plan requires upper-tier municipalities to develop a housing strategy that will support the achievement of the density and intensification targets in the Plan and a mix of housing options, as well as identify affordable housing targets. The housing strategy is to be used as the basis for planning any new settlement area expansions.

A new policy also requires municipalities to consider the use of available tools (e.g., inclusionary zoning) to require multi-unit residential developments to incorporate a mix of unit sizes to accommodate a diverse range of household sizes and incomes.

Integrated approach to watershed planning, natural heritage and agriculture policies

The policy framework for water resource, natural heritage and agricultural systems are now integrated with the approach and standards provided for in the Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, which is considered an improvement to the Growth Plan. The standards identified for natural heritage protection are generally consistent with the City's 2014 Official Plan.

Many of Markham's comments on the draft Provincial Plans regarding clarity on roles and responsibilities related to mapping and guidelines have been addressed in the 2017 Growth Plan. The Province will be mapping a Natural Heritage System which will need to be incorporated in the 2014 Official Plan.

2017 Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation PlanGrowing the Greenbelt

The 2017 Greenbelt Plan provides for some additions to the boundary including Protected Countryside parcels (all outside of York Region) and the inclusion of urban river valleys. The Urban River Valley designation in Markham includes only the publicly owned lands along the urban portions of the Don River (East Branch), Rouge, Berczy, Bruce, Robinson and Mount Joy Creeks. The Urban River Valley designation generally defers to the protection policies of local official plans and does not apply the protection policies contained in the Greenbelt Plan.

A new policy has also been introduced that speaks to the potential for the Province to consider opportunities to grow the Greenbelt. The Province intends to undertake a process, including public consultation, to expand the Greenbelt on the outer edge in the near future.

Markham Greenbelt boundary refinements approved

The Province has released minor Greenbelt boundary adjustments to address "mapping accuracy, align with municipal official plans and existing urban boundaries, and respond to landowner requests". The two minor Greenbelt boundary adjustments requested by Markham Council (i.e., in Greensborough and at 2780 19th Avenue) have been approved. Mapping adjustments have also been made to confirm that the lands at 2780 19th Avenue are not subject to the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

The Province did not undertake any boundary refinements in the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan area and retained the policy allowing the refinement of the outer boundary to the 245 metre above sea level contour. These refinements, once confirmed, will still be 'deemed' to be subject to the Protected Countryside of the Greenbelt Plan, however, the Province has provided new exceptions to clarify where the Greenbelt Plan policies would not apply.

No changes appear to have been made to the Natural Heritage System (NHS) overlay in the Greenbelt Plan area in Markham, or further guidance provided on how requests for refinements to the NHS should be evaluated, notwithstanding the request by Council that a clearly defined process be put in place by which adjustments to Greenbelt Plan mapping can be reviewed and amended.

Key new policies and clarification

The agricultural policies have been enhanced including a requirement for the Province to map the Agricultural System (this would also include lands outside of the Greenbelt), and consideration of the agri-food network. The policies regarding permitted uses within 'prime' agricultural lands, which include all of Markham's 'Countryside' lands, have been improved by providing for greater flexibility and clarity related to agricultural uses and operations. New requirements have been added to require an Agricultural Impact Assessment for consideration of non-agricultural uses as provided for in the Greenbelt Plan (also included in the Growth Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan). The improvements to the agricultural policies are also included in the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

The natural heritage protection policies including requirements for vegetation protection zones and required evaluations have been clarified and retained. Some of the standards related to agricultural uses have been relaxed, which supports the comments provided by the City's Agricultural Advisory Committee and is considered an improvement.

Policies previously referencing the Rouge Park have been updated to reflect the Federal Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP) and confirm that once the lands are in Federal ownership they become subject to the Rouge National Urban Park Act and Management Plan.

NEXT STEPS

Once the Provincial Plans come into effect on July 1, 2017, all Council decisions on planning matters must conform or not conflict with the Plans. Upper- and single-tier municipalities are required to bring their Official Plans into conformity with the 2017 Provincial Plans by 2022. Markham will initiate an exercise to bring the 2014 Official Plan into conformity with the new Plans once York Region provides sufficient direction

on the areas of regional responsibility (e.g., local 2041 population and employment forecasts, urban settlement area boundaries, identification of employment areas, etc) through their municipal comprehensive review.

The Province has committed to the preparation of a number of guidance documents this year as follows:

- Mapping of a region-wide natural heritage system
- Collaboration with stakeholders to develop an agricultural system that supports the viability of the agri-food sector and consistently protects farmland across the Greater Golden Horseshoe
- A standard land needs assessment methodology
- Guidance on watershed planning and on addressing climate change

In addition, municipal information sessions have been scheduled to assist municipalities with implementing the Plans. City staff will be attending these information sessions, and meeting with Regional staff to confirm the implications of the new Plans, as well as the next steps in the Region's 2041 Municipal Comprehensive Review, and report back to Council as appropriate. Staff will also endeavour to provide input to the guidance documents being prepared by the Province.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

There are no direct financial implications related to the recommendations of this report.

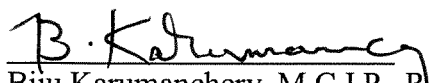
ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:


The 2017 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the Greenbelt Plan and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan support the City's current efforts to manage growth and provide improved protection of natural features and agricultural lands, both key elements of the Safe and Sustainable Community strategic priority.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Comments on the proposed amendments to the Plans were solicited from all Commissions during the consultation phase of the Coordinated Review.

RECOMMENDED BY:


Biju Karumanchery, M.C.I.P., R.P.P.
Director of Planning and Urban Design


Jim Baird, M.C.I.P., R.P.P.
Commissioner of Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix 'A': Ministry of Municipal Affairs Highlights of New Plans

Appendix 'B': Links to 2017 Growth Plan, 2017 Greenbelt Plan, and 2017 Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

Filepath: Q:\Development\Planning\MISC\MI554 Greenbelt and ORM Conservation Plan Provincial Review\2016 – PROPOSED AMENDMENTS\DSC 26jun17 New Provincial Plans.docx

APPENDIX 'A'

MINISTRY OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS HIGHLIGHTS OF CHANGES TO THE FOUR PROVINCIAL PLANS (Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Plan, Niagara Escarpment Plan)

Building Complete Communities

- Adding more direction in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe on the objectives of a complete community: supporting health and wellbeing, high-quality compact built form with open spaces, access to local food and a mix of housing options for all incomes and household sizes.
- Further curbing urban/suburban sprawl by increasing the intensification target and raising densities in Designated Greenfield Areas, while allowing for some flexibility in these targets to recognize unique circumstances of some communities.
- As of 2031, the intensification target will be increased to 60 per cent of residential development annually directed to delineated built-up areas. At the next municipal comprehensive review, to be completed by 2022, municipalities will be asked to achieve an interim intensification target of 50 per cent.
- The Designated Greenfield Area density target of 80 residents and jobs combined per hectare would apply to new lands designated in the future. An interim Designated Greenfield Area density target of 60 residents and jobs combined per hectare will apply, beginning in 2022, to the current Designated Greenfield Area. Alternative targets may be requested to the interim targets.
- Requiring minimum density targets for major transit station areas along priority transit corridors and existing subways. These minimum targets are:
 - 150 residents and jobs combined per hectare for GO train service
 - 160 residents and jobs combined per hectare for light rail transit (LRT) and bus rapid transit (BRT)
 - 200 residents and jobs combined per hectare for subways.
- Continuing to ensure that municipalities plan for enough land and a range of housing types to accommodate growth, directing it to existing built-up areas and where transit can best serve all residents and businesses.
- Reflecting the needs of a growing region, new provisions will require municipalities to consider the appropriate range of, and unit sizes in, apartments, condominiums and townhouses to accommodate a diverse range of household sizes and incomes.
- Introducing a new “prime employment area” designation to protect areas for employment uses that are land extensive or have low employment densities and require locations near or adjacent to areas, such as freight corridors or airports, including manufacturing, warehousing and logistics. Retail, residential and other sensitive land uses not associated with the employment use cannot be located in these areas. Retail and office uses will be directed to areas accessible by existing or planned transit.
- Requiring all conversions of employment lands to non-employment uses to be approved by the province.

Supporting a Viable Agricultural Sector

- Aligning plan policies with the Provincial Policy Statement to provide for greater flexibility for the types of agriculture-related uses allowed on farmland.

- Mapping the agricultural system across the Greater Golden Horseshoe including considerations for agricultural viability, and incorporating the system across all four plans.
- Clarifying the requirements for agricultural uses in natural heritage systems to reduce the burden on the agricultural sector and support productive farmland.

Protecting Natural Heritage and Water

- Establishing Greenbelt-level protections for natural heritage systems — such as wetlands, woodlands and rivers — beyond the Greenbelt, with the province taking the lead in mapping those areas. Municipalities will be required to plan for and protect these systems in their municipal official plans.
- Requiring that municipalities complete watershed planning before planning settlement area expansions, infrastructure or major developments that could affect those watersheds.

Growing the Greenbelt

- Adding publicly owned lands in 21 major urban river valleys and associated coastal wetlands to the Greenbelt.
- Adding five parcels of land identified by the City of Hamilton, the Region of Niagara and the Town of Halton Hills to the Protected Countryside of the Greenbelt.
- Introducing a new policy in the Greenbelt Plan that speaks to the potential for the province to consider opportunities to grow the Greenbelt. The province will undertake a process, including public consultation, to expand the Greenbelt on the outer edge in the near future.

Responding to Climate Change

- Requiring municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe to include climate change policies in their official plans.
- Requiring municipalities to develop storm water management plans and conduct climate change vulnerability risk assessments when planning or replacing infrastructure.
- Encouraging municipalities to develop greenhouse gas inventories, emission reduction strategies, and related targets and performance measures.

Planning for Infrastructure

- Providing municipalities clearer direction for a more integrated approach to land use and infrastructure planning.
- Providing more specific direction to municipalities to better protect corridor lands reserved for future goods movement (rail or road) and other future infrastructure, such as hydro or utility lines.

The government has also made [minor Greenbelt boundary adjustments](#) to address mapping accuracy, align with municipal official plans and existing urban boundaries, and respond to landowner requests. The Niagara Escarpment Plan land use designation maps have also been updated to refine boundaries using the latest land data and improved Geographic Information Systems.

Next Steps

The Niagara Escarpment Plan (2017) will come into effect on June 1, 2017. The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2017), the Greenbelt Plan (2017), the Greenbelt Boundary Regulation and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (2017) will come into effect on July 1, 2017.

Once in effect, all decisions on planning matters must conform or not conflict with the four plans. Municipalities are expected to review and update their official plans to conform with the updated plans. Upper- and single-tier municipalities' conformity work is to be completed by 2022.

To support municipalities, the province has committed this year to:

- Provide information sessions for municipal staff and stakeholders to familiarize them with the updated plans and explain how they will be implemented
- Identify and map a region-wide natural heritage system
- Collaborate with stakeholders to develop an agricultural system that supports the viability of the agri-food sector and consistently protects farmland across the Greater Golden Horseshoe
- Develop a standard land needs assessment methodology
- Develop guidance on watershed planning and on addressing climate change

- [Advisory Panel and Advisory Panel Report](#)
- [Executive Summary of the Advisory Panel Report](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [Proposed Minor Changes to the Greenbelt Boundary](#)

Source: Ministry of Municipal Affairs website