
SUBJECT: Main Street Unionville Community Vision Plan -2014
PREPARED BY: Regan Hutcheson, Manager, Heritage Planning, ext 2080

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) That the Staff report titled "Main Street Unionville Community Vision Plan-2014", dated January 13, 2015, be received;
- 2) That the Main Street Unionville Community Vision Plan be endorsed in principle (subject to modifications in Appendix 'D' to this report) as a guideline for a future Secondary Plan for the area and that the City and other affected parties/ stakeholders be guided by the general direction of the Vision Plan when initiating or reviewing proposed changes in both the public and private realms of the Unionville Heritage Conservation District;
- 3) That staff be authorized to undertake the preparation of a new Secondary Plan for the Unionville Heritage Conservation District as is recommended in the new Official Plan, and the preparation of a Pattern Book to help guide the overall design of new multi-storey development specifically for the Hwy 7 and Village Core/ Crosby Arena focus areas;
- 4) That as part of the Secondary Plan exercise, staff explore opportunities for the focus areas and the parking optimization recommendations from the Vision Plan as well as take into account the staff and agency comments provided in Appendices 'A' and 'C' to this report;
- 5) That the Development Services Commission staff be authorized to initiate discussions with senior staff at the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) to determine the feasibility of introducing a parking platform in part of the floodplain lands east of Main Street, including the type of studies and analysis required to appropriately explore the concept;
- 6) That York Region be informed that the City of Markham does not support a grade separation at the Hwy 7- railway interface as it would have detrimental impacts on the local community from an economic, heritage conservation and aesthetic perspective;
- 7) That to facilitate the necessary cooperative efforts that will be required between property owners to achieve the Vision Plan, the Unionville BIA be requested to contact local commercial property owners to assess the interest in retaining and funding the services of a trustee or property development coordinator with commercial and residential development experience;
- 8) That staff be directed to prepare a new mandate and suggested member composition for the Main Street Unionville Committee (as described in this

report) which would be re-constituted as an advisory committee with the objective of overseeing and assisting in the implementation of the Vision Plan;

- 9) And that Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report provides an overview of the Main Street Unionville Community Vision Plan and seeks direction as to its status and implementation. The master plan study was initiated at the request of the Unionville BIA in early 2013 to address specific issues impacting the ongoing success and stability of historic Unionville, and to develop new opportunities and strategies to support and enhance the village. The study process involved extensive consultation, including a well attended five day charrette workshop held on the Main Street of Unionville.

The proposed Vision Plan offers a bold new strategy to further enhance this special area of Markham. The Vision Plan acknowledges that Unionville will face considerable challenges if it is to remain a vibrant commercial environment over the long term. The Plan evaluates these challenges in detail, identifies opportunities for improvement and recommends a set of interconnected solutions that can unfold over the next 20-30 years. The Vision Plan takes a high-level, long-range view of how to approach several related issues in a cohesive manner, and notes that solutions must be interconnected – there is no one single solution. As part of the larger, overall vision, individual focus areas were identified and targeted for in-depth study. Each area has its own challenges, issues and stakeholders, including “champions” who can help to realize the specific vision concepts. Opportunities for each of these focus areas are further explored in greater detail along with staff comments in Appendix ‘A’ of this document.

Overall the final Vision Plan has been generally well received by the public, including local organizations, with many people excited about the new opportunities. Apprehension about the concepts relate primarily to the village commercial area and the Crosby Arena proposals, and include concerns and fears related to insufficient parking, excessive traffic, impact of intensification, loss of heritage character, and potential changes to the arena complex.

The Vision Plan presents 18 recommendations (Appendix ‘E’) some of which are short term while others are more long term in nature. The staff report includes the following primary recommendations:

- 1) that the Vision Plan document be endorsed in principle for use by the City and stakeholders,
- 2) that a secondary plan exercise be initiated as well as the development of a Pattern Book (a historically inspired architectural guidebook for the design of new multi-storey buildings that reflect and respond to their context), to direct the design of infill development,
- 3) that the Main Street Unionville Committee be constituted as an advisory committee to assist with the Plan implementation,

- 4) that a grade separation at Hwy 7 and the railway tracks is not supported, and
- 5) that high-level negotiations be initiated with the TRCA regarding potential parking infrastructure in the floodplain and with the BIA and commercial landowners regarding the retention of a privately-funded trustee/ property development advisor to explore cooperation between owners in the commercial area and to advance shared interests.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Main Street Unionville Community Vision Plan study process and to seek direction as to the future implementation of the final Vision Plan.

BACKGROUND:**Initiation of the Study**

In January 2013, Council responded to a request by the Unionville Business Improvement Area Board (UBIA) and authorized the Main Street Unionville Precinct Master Plan study at a cost of \$250,000. The consulting team of Torti Gallas and Partners Inc., Michael Morrissey and an alliance of independent sub-consultants were engaged to develop a strategic vision focused on historic Main Street Unionville. The overall objective of the study was to create a plan to help guide future decisions by all involved in the historic Unionville community, and find the appropriate balance to protect this unique heritage environment while ensuring its economic vitality and prosperity.

The study explored a variety of current issues and objectives including:

- the need or desire for additional development;
- the need for more parking, and how to achieve it;
- the need for additional public infrastructure to serve both local requirements and visitors;
- the desire for less restrictions on certain land uses in the area;
- the opportunities to further utilize the floodplain area;
- the opportunities to assist the local business community along both Hwy 7 and Main Street;
- potential future partnerships with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the School Board, adjacent residential groups, festival organizers, sports organizations and the Unionville Curling Club;
- how to balance the desires and requirements of visitors and the business community, with the needs and expectations of local residents;
- how to continue to protect and enhance an extremely unique and fragile historic village and all its attributes within a thriving and ever-growing City of Markham.

There were four key stages of the Study

The study process was divided into four key stages:

Stage 1 – Existing Conditions Analysis and Consultation

The Study team reviewed existing documentation and conditions as well as conducted numerous meetings with key stakeholders, including community representatives and Markham staff members, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the community in preparation for a five day Charrette. A market analysis and examination of population and demographic characteristics was also undertaken.

Stage 2 – Five Day Charrette

A charrette is a combination of an on-location design studio and an old fashioned town meeting that allows interaction by all involved. The study charrette was undertaken over five days in the first week of June 2013 in the Crosby Memorial Arena on Main Street Unionville. This process allowed the public and staff to watch concepts being developed, and to participate and engage with the design master plan team throughout the event. The team identified ten key focus areas starting at Hwy 7 and moving north to Toogood Pond. Each focus area was designed and developed to demonstrate conceptual improvement opportunities for both private and public lands and through potential public/private partnerships with groups such as the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), the school board, the Arena and the Curling Club, and to explore retail and streetscape enhancement in the core area.

Stage 3 – Preliminary Concept Master Plan

Based on the feedback from the Charrette presentations, the consulting team worked to refine and test specific concepts and to focus more detailed work on some of the key areas such as Hwy 7, the commercial core and the Arena sports area. The purpose of producing these dynamic urban designs was to reflect the physical embodiment of a renewed vision for a comprehensive, mixed-use, pedestrian intense Main Street area.

Stage 4 – Final Concept Master Plan

Based on the feedback from presentations on key focus areas, the consulting team prepared the final concept master plan document.

Extensive feedback has been received through the consultation program

There has been great interest in this study by members of the public. Opportunities to provide input and suggestions have included a variety of mechanisms:

Main Street Unionville Committee

This committee, comprised of representatives from different groups and organizations, was created by Council to provide on-going input during the study process.

Community Charrette

The five day charrette included eight specific stakeholder in-take sessions focused on a series of theme topics. There were four formal presentations each allowing feedback sessions, including a closing presentation on a Sunday afternoon in which over 300 people attended. Also, during the charrette, a voluntary survey was conducted to obtain feedback from participants.

City of Markham Website

The City created a specific webpage for this project, which was updated on a regular basis with information on upcoming meetings and provided access to all documents presented at meetings. The webpage also had a “Feedback Button” that allowed respondents to provide their comments on any aspect of the study, and this method was well used.

Consultation Sessions with Organizations/Land Owners

Throughout the study process, consulting team members met on an as-needed basis with specific community organizations and landowners who occasionally required more information or clarification of concepts. This provided an opportunity for the team to obtain further insight into issues of concern.

Public Information Meetings

Four public information meetings were held with the broader community to review the progress of the work after the Charrette. The final concept presentation was in June 2014 at a non-statutory public meeting in the Council Chambers.

Heritage Markham Meetings

As the study area is within the Unionville Heritage Conservation District boundaries, Heritage Markham provided feedback to the consultant on the study findings on a regular basis.

A full summary of the public consultation program is found in Appendix B.

Land Use/Zoning issues were extracted from the study and addressed separately

Originally, the issues related to policy and by-law restrictions on specific land uses in the commercial core area of historic Unionville were to be part of this study. However, given timing considerations, changes to the Secondary Plan and Zoning By-law for the commercial area were addressed independently by the Planning Department taking into consideration the advice and recommendations provided by the study’s retail consultant. On March 5, 2014, Council approved the necessary modifications to allow additional permitted uses and to remove specific restrictions on restaurant use.

OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:**A new vision for Main Street Unionville**

The proposed plan for the historic Main Street Unionville area offers a bold new strategy to further enhance this special area of Markham. The plan envisions how this area could develop over the next 20-30 years.

During the final stage of the study, it was decided to re-name the final study master plan to better reflect the actual purpose of the document. Rather than referencing a “Precinct Master Plan”, the document is now titled “Main Street Unionville Community Vision

Plan” (October 2014) as it provides a comprehensive vision both for and from the community.

The final document is well organized, clearly written and visually stimulating in its presentation of themes, images and concepts. It includes four specific components: an *Executive Summary*, a section on the *Ground Work* for the study, *The Plan* including specific details on the key focus areas, and *The Way Forward* (recommendations).

The Vision Plan acknowledges that specific components of Unionville will face considerable challenges if the village is to remain vibrant over the long term. The Plan evaluates these challenges in detail, identifies opportunities for improvement and recommends a set of interconnected solutions that can unfold over the next 30 years. The Vision Plan takes a high-level, long-range view of how to approach several related issues in a cohesive manner, and notes that solutions must be interconnected – there is no one single solution. As the Vision Plan explains, this document addresses the need to “gently grow” Unionville into a functioning contemporary village by addressing the following matters:

- Providing space for enhanced retail opportunities, relevant to local residents’ day-to-day lives as well as to visitors;
- Providing residential opportunities within the core Main Street Unionville area for full time residents;
- Developing enhanced public spaces, such as squares and plazas to augment the existing successful social and festival culture;
- Re-imaging existing community and sports facilities while preserving their functions;
- Addressing the ongoing parking issues in the district in a workable, sustainable manner;
- Revitalizing the streetscape elements on Main Street Unionville
- Augmenting the system of pedestrian movement through the district to extend the traditional walk along Main Street further north and south while providing new, interesting and exciting walking routes;
- Establishing stronger connections to the Rouge River, Toogood Pond Park and Crosby Arena;
- Establishing a vibrant mixed-use, Gateway district along Hwy 7 to the south.

In response to staff feedback, the Vision Plan does acknowledge that all the proposed concepts and images are conceptual in nature and implementation in the case of municipal projects and improvements will depend upon future feasibility studies, available funding, staff resources and civic priorities. The unique layout and design of buildings and streetscapes will require review and approval of plans in the early stages of planning/design by various departments throughout municipal government to ensure public services and infrastructure (such as parks and recreation, arts and culture, waste collection, water and sewers, storm water management, snow ploughing, public washrooms, etc) can be delivered, operated, maintained and accessed in an efficient and cost effective manner.

Vision Plan Overview

The overview section of the Vision Plan explores the groundwork upon which the plan was created over 18 months. It explores the top issues that need to be tackled as well as the Plan's Vision Statement and goals, with a desire to sustain the Main Street socially, economically and environmentally. The Vision Statement proclaims that *"Main Street Unionville shall become a vibrant, thriving and successful heritage village that is a regional destination, but serves local needs."*

Parking was identified as a key issue and the Plan advocates for a "park-once" shared parking type policy and implementation program (where parking is determined on an area basis rather than on individual lots). This document also details the open and transparent public consultation process, including the very successful Charrette, which occurred during the study process and allowed issues to be explored and addressed. An analysis of sustainable urban retail in the Unionville context is also fully explored and summarized. This includes the need to improve the physical constraints affecting retail expansion (small buildings and lots, limited parking), the need for a retail anchor store(s), and to restore to the core area the ability for residents and visitors to pursue a traditional shopping experience combining daily needs, specialty items, and dining options.

Challenges and opportunities are also analyzed, including specific challenges facing each focus area. Some of the overall study area challenges include:

- Small lot sizes and multiple landowners
- Local floodplain limits buildable land area and type of uses
- Physical barriers to expansion, growing businesses and adding residential uses
- Limited access behind Main Street for service vehicles/loading
- Individual, inefficient parking lots
- Preservation of heritage character/features

Opportunities noted in the study include the heightened momentum for action given the interest in this study; the recently renovated Stiver Mill signaling public investment and confidence, and support for heritage conservation; recent modification of zoning provisions to allow a greater variety of specialty and every day permitted uses; and a commitment by local property owners for re-investment.

In addition, the Vision Plan proposes that Unionville can learn from other places whether it be other villages working to achieve new urbanism type goals, heritage preservation and healthy commercial streets, or other projects that have innovatively worked with floodplain conditions and integrated environmentally sustainable solutions. Of particular note is Poundbury in England, which is a traditional village concept, built from scratch, but possesses a number of similarities to Unionville. The Poundbury case study highlights the importance of introducing the correct regulatory framework, such as form-based codes and a Pattern Book (i.e. a historically inspired architectural guidebook for the design of new buildings that reflect and respond to their context). The objective is to achieve new multi-storey, infill development in the desired form, proportion, scale and style that is consistent with historic Unionville and the Vision Plan.

The Vision Plan and its focus areas

As part of the larger, overall vision, there are individual focus areas that were identified and targeted for in-depth study. As the Plan notes, each area has its own challenges, issues and stakeholders, including “champions” who can help to realize the specific vision concepts. It is also important to note that some focus areas could be implemented independently while other focus areas are dependent on projects/improvements necessary in at least one other area, such as the village commercial core concepts where parking for west side development is proposed to be provided elsewhere. The various individual focus area proposals are conceptual in nature, but are considered implementable based upon the experience of the consulting team and after extensive consultation with civic officials, property owners and members of the public. To implement any of the individual proposals would still require further planning approvals and public consultation. The focus areas are:

- Hwy 7 Gateway and Corridor
- Stiver Mill Area
- Main Street Village Core – West Side South
- Main Street Village Core – West Side North
- Main Street Village Core – East Side
- Village Square – Main Street and Carlton Road
- Crosby Community Centre
- Toogood Pond Park and Amphitheatre

Opportunities identified in the study for each of these focus areas are further explored in greater detail, along with staff and agency comments, in Appendix ‘A’.

Public feedback

Overall the final Vision Plan has been generally well received. On a number of occasions, specific concepts that were initially recommended by the consultant were modified after receiving constructive feedback from segments of the community (e.g. the concern of parents regarding the proposed enhanced connectivity and development opportunities with the school property or the desire by local sport teams to retain the arena/sports fields in the core area).

The Unionville Ratepayers Association and Unionville Villagers Association through joint correspondence both generally support the broad direction established in the focus areas. The Unionville Historical Society provided preliminary comments in April 2014, but nothing formally since this date. The Heritage Markham Committee generally supports the concepts proposed in the Vision Plan, but did note the need to ensure existing heritage buildings are retained, that the Stiver Mill area appeared to offer too many components, and that the proposed level of intensification in the core area could potentially overwhelm the character and 19th century village charm of Unionville.

Of the electronic feedback responses provided through the website, the highest number of responses (38.6%) were specifically opposed to a permanent link between the Main

Street area and the public school property to improve road connectivity (which was later revised).

Feedback has indicated that a number of people believe that redevelopment and enhancements are long overdue and were impressed with the Plan's design process, ideas, and creativity. There has been minimal public commentary on the concepts for Hwy 7, the Stiver Mill area, the Carlton Road intersection, and for Toogood Pond. Most comments have been related to the village commercial core and Crosby Arena properties, and have focused on the following issues:

Parking

- fear that parking opportunities will become worse with the proposed development concepts.
- apprehension regarding the impact of introducing on-street parking on neighbouring streets as suggested in the Vision Plan to address required parking.
- concern about lack of cooperation by existing property owners to achieve parking solutions.
- what if the TRCA refuses to support a parking platform in the floodplain

Traffic

- fear that the current traffic congestion on Main Street, particularly at rush hour, will only get worse if new development is introduced.

Intensification

- concern regarding the effect of too much development and the potential detrimental impact to the character of the core area/village
- questions as to whether new residential intensification will actually help local merchants given that residential units already in existence within a short distance.
- anxiety with reference to potential impacts on adjacent residential neighbourhoods
- concern about inappropriate height, massing and architectural design of new infill
- unease regarding the possible occupation/ build-out of every available open space and who really benefits from this development.

Heritage Character

- concern and anxiety regarding the potential loss of village character/ quaintness/ uniqueness/ charm and its existing appeal to visitors (tourism).

Retail Vacancies

- the need to address high property taxes and high commercial rents, commercial vacancies, the issue of short term tenants, seasonal nature of businesses, finding the correct mix of retail products attractive to customers/imaginative retailing

Arena

- desire to retain/improve existing sports facilities, not redevelopment

Some of these issues can be addressed or minimized during the implementation of the Vision Plan while others are dependant on separate processes or are outside the scope of the study.

Final Recommendations of the Vision Plan

The Vision Plan presents 18 recommendations (see Appendix 'E') some of which are short term while others are more long term in nature. Of these, the key recommendations that would appear applicable in the immediate short term are detailed below followed by staff's recommendation:

- a) **Vision Plan (#1)** – *acceptance by Council of the Main Street Unionville Community Vision Plan as the long-term, general consensus vision for this area of Markham over the next 30 years.*

Staff is recommending that the Vision Plan be endorsed in principle as a guideline for a future Secondary Plan for the area (subject to the minor changes summarized in Appendix 'D'), and that the City and other interested parties be guided by the general direction of the Vision Plan when reviewing or initiating proposed changes in both the public and private realms of the Unionville heritage area.

- b) **Citizen Involvement (#17)** – *consider maintaining the Main Street Unionville Committee with a new mandate of overseeing the progress of the vision, reviewing the impact of recent Official Plan and zoning changes and advancing public improvements to the area.*

Staff is recommending that the Main Street Unionville Committee be re-constituted as an advisory committee with a new mandate of overseeing the implementation of the Vision Plan. The new committee would include representatives of the BIA and community organizations, and could also include some individual **Village Champions (Recommendation #14)** to help spearhead specific projects or initiatives in order to realize the Vision. The Committee could also help identify and prioritize projects that are within the City's jurisdiction. The Unionville Ratepayers Association and Unionville Villagers Association are supportive of this recommendation.

- c) **Regulatory Documents (#2)** – *creation of the necessary regulatory framework to deliver the Vision including a new Secondary Plan based on the Vision and a Pattern Book to guide infill architecture.*

Staff is recommending that Council authorize the undertaking of a Secondary Plan for the entire Unionville Heritage Conservation District which is also a policy direction in the new Official Plan. Coupled with the Secondary Plan would be the commissioning of a Pattern Book to help guide new multi-unit development specifically for the Hwy 7 and Village Core/ Crosby Arena focus areas. The Pattern Book would codify examples of specific architectural designs and features desired in the community. Funding is available to initiate these projects in 2015. In preparation of these documents, staff would be guided by the staff and agency comments provided in Appendices 'A' and 'C'. Community and Fire Services staff would also be consulted during the development of these documents to ensure early input into the planning process.

- d) **Parking Optimization (#6) and Parking Linchpin (#7)** – *parking is identified as one of the biggest challenges to redevelopment and a number of parking recommendations are suggested. Also the parking platform concept in the floodplain is the linchpin of the Village Core Area proposals and without it, redevelopment becomes very difficult.*

Staff is recommending that the parking optimization recommendations be considered as part of the Secondary Plan development, and that Markham senior staff be requested to initiate discussions with senior staff at the TRCA to determine the feasibility of introducing a parking platform in part of the floodplain lands east of Main Street, including the type of studies and analysis required to appropriately explore the concept. As the parking deck would be located primarily on private property, the participation by the affected landowners will be a key factor if this concept is to move forward. Overall, there is a need for Main Street property owners to work together to achieve integrated and coordinated parking solution.

- e) **Trustee (#3)** – *to work with the land owners in the Core Area and possibly the Hwy 7 area to put in place a Trustee or Development Manager to facilitate the necessary cooperative efforts between owners to achieve the Vision.*

Individual property owners will need to work cooperatively together (perhaps similar to a mall environment) if success is to be achieved and would benefit from the services of a property/development advisor with commercial and residential expertise. Staff is recommending that landowners be contacted by the UBIA to assess the interest in participating in the creation of this privately funded position. The role of the City, the UBIA and individual property owners as well as a funding model would require further investigation and discussion.

In addition, based on feedback provided by staff and stakeholders during the study process, staff recommends that the Region of York be informed that Markham does not support a grade separation at the Hwy 7- railway interface as it would have detrimental impacts on the local community from an economic, heritage conservation and aesthetic perspective (**Study Recommendation #12**).

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS

Not Applicable

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

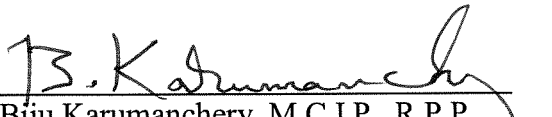
Certain options, opportunities and recommendations in the Vision Plan align with a number of the City's strategic focus areas including Growth Management (intensified but complementary residential/retail growth opportunities in a heritage district); Environment (sustainable options, trail connections, streetscape trees); Parks, Recreation, Culture and Library Master Plan/Public Safety (development options at Stiver Mill, Toogood Pond

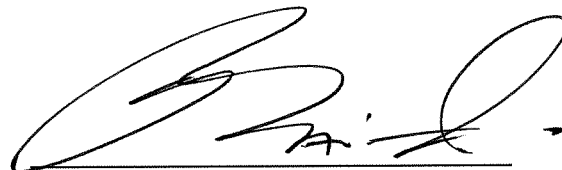
and the Crosby Community Centre area, trail portals and connectivity); Municipal Services (option for a municipal parking structure); Accessibility (accessible washrooms and elevator from Main Street to floodplain parking area).

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Feedback throughout the study process has been received from staff in the Community and Fire Services Commission (Fire, Library, Culture, Asset Management, Operations, Recreation Services) and the Development Services Commission (Building, Economic Development, Engineering, Planning, Heritage and Urban Design). The Heritage Markham Committee also was consulted on a regular basis.

RECOMMENDED BY:


Biju Karumanchery, M.C.I.P., R.P.P.
Acting Director, Planning & Urban Design


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

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix 'A'	Overview of Vision Plan Focus Areas – Staff Comments
Appendix 'B'	Public Consultation
Appendix 'C'	Correspondence- TRCA and York Region District School Board
Appendix 'D'	Required Modifications to Vision Plan
Appendix 'E'	Study Recommendations

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