

# The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole  
Planning and Economic Development  
December 3, 2020

Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner

## Regional Official Plan Update Policy Directions Report

### 1. Recommendations

1. Council endorse the policy directions summarized in this report and further described in Attachment 1 to support development of draft policies that will be presented to Council as part of the Regional Official Plan Update through the Municipal Comprehensive Review.
2. The Regional Clerk forward this report and attachments to the Clerks of the local municipalities, and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

### 2. Summary

This report summarizes preliminary policy directions for several topic areas as part of the Regional Official Plan (ROP) update being undertaken through the Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR). Attachment 1 presents more detailed information on policy directions. The preliminary policy directions presented in this report build on past direction from Council and direction on other areas will be forthcoming early in 2021.

Key Points:

- The ROP is being assessed to identify required policy and mapping updates to implement new Provincial Policies, including direction to plan for a York Region population of 2.02 million and 990,000 jobs by 2051
- A series of reports with preliminary policy directions have been presented to Council; this report builds on but does not reiterate direction outlined in those reports
- This report focuses on policy directions in the following six theme areas:
  1. Regional Structure
  2. Employment
  3. Agriculture
  4. Environment

5. Healthy Communities

6. Servicing

- Early in 2021, additional direction reports will be presented to Council, including:
  - Growth management/forecast
  - Housing directions
  - A second policy directions report addressing remaining topic areas for the ROP update
- Following consultation on the preliminary directions presented in this report, a draft ROP containing updated policies will be presented to Council in 2021

### 3. Background

#### **The Province Requires York Region to plan for 2.02 million people and 990,000 jobs by 2051**

Significant updates to Provincial Plans and policies have occurred since adoption of the current 2010 ROP. The Region is required to update the Official Plan to conform with this updated Provincial direction by 2022. In addition to significant policy updates, in 2020 the Province introduced a new planning horizon year of 2051 and provided corresponding new population and employment forecasts. Between 2020 and 2051, York Region's population is forecasted to increase from 1.21 million to 2.02 million people, and employment in York Region is expected to increase from 655,000 to 990,000 jobs. To support this population and employment growth, updated Official Plan policies will ensure that York Region residents maintain a high quality of life.

#### **The report builds on direction presented to Council through previous reports**

This report is one of a series of reports to support planning for growth through the MCR and ROP update. Policy directions for a number of topic areas have previously been presented to Council, including:

- [Planning for Employment Background Report](#) (May, 2019)
- [Planning for Agriculture Background Report](#) (June, 2019)
- [Planning for Density in New Communities](#) (June, 2020)
- [Natural Systems Planning Background Report](#) (June, 2020)
- [Planning for Major Transit Station Areas](#) (September, 2020)

Policy directions in this report and Attachment 1 are categorized under six topic areas:

1. Regional Structure
2. Employment
3. Agriculture

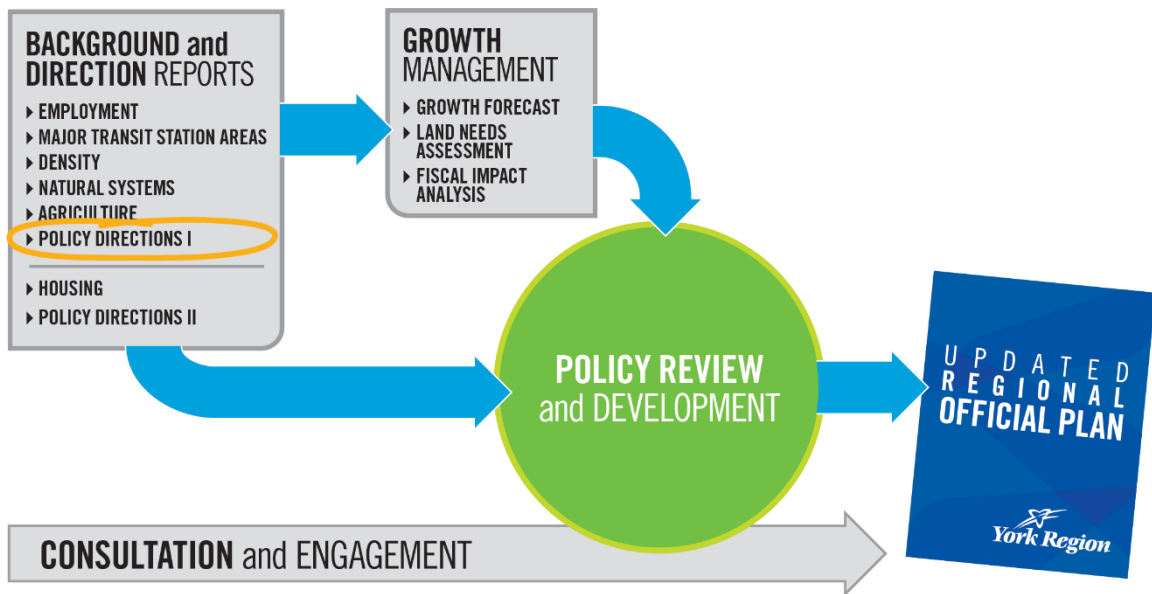
4. Environment
5. Healthy Communities
6. Servicing

Proposed policy directions summarized in this report build on, but don't reiterate, directions previously presented to Council. Attachment 1 provides details of updates to Provincial Plans and considerations to update ROP policies to implement the revised Provincial direction. Attachment 1 provides greater detail on preliminary policy directions than the body of this report, including a few minor policy topic areas not highlighted in the report; Woodlands/Canopy Targets, Human Health and Well-Being and Human Services, Cultural Heritage and Archaeology, Source Water Protection, and Solid Waste.

Additional reports with policy directions will be presented to Council in early 2021, including growth management/forecast, housing directions, and a second general policy directions report. An updated ROP containing draft policies will follow later in 2021.

**Figure 1**

**Municipal Comprehensive Review Components**



**4. Analysis**

**REGIONAL STRUCTURE**

**New Provincial Plan requirements necessitate updates to the Regional Structure**

The Regional Structure provides the foundational framework for how and where population and employment growth is accommodated in the Region while protecting valuable agricultural and natural areas. The current ROP provides policy direction guiding growth management and land use decisions in accordance with the Regional Structure. Policy

directions related to specific geographies are identified in the Official Plan through maps and schedules.

The revised Provincial Growth Plan requires the Region to designate employment areas, delineate major transit areas, and implement recently updated Agricultural System and Natural Heritage Systems mapping. This will result in a more detailed Regional Structure necessitating policy and mapping updates. To support these updates, the following factors are being assessed on how best to incorporate them in an updated Regional Structure in a way that effectively works with local Official Plans:

- Introducing an employment area designation at the Regional level
- Delineating and setting density targets for Major Transit Station Area's (MTSA)'s
- Confirming the role of Centres and Corridors in accommodating the magnitude of anticipated growth
- Connecting the Yonge Street Regional Corridor through Richmond Hill and Aurora having regard for the context being within the Oak Ridges Moraine
- Confirming Town, Village and Hamlet designations

### **Regional Official Plan policies on planning complete communities are proposed to be expanded**

The Provincial Growth Plan aims to achieve complete communities that provide the basic needs of residents in close proximity to their home. The current policy context in the ROP provides strong support for complete communities.

The existing policy direction on complete communities is proposed to be maintained, and where appropriate enhanced. Complete communities reduce auto dependency and associated traffic congestion and emissions, result in better live work balance, and create a sense of place for residents. The associated health benefits are described in the Public Health Benefits of Complete Communities Report, also on this Council agenda. Opportunities to draw a stronger connection between complete communities and health in the ROP are being assessed.

The concept of "15-minute neighbourhoods" is being revitalized in many jurisdictions. It is a planning term that can be interchanged with Complete Communities and is defined as a neighbourhood where people can get to most of their daily destinations within a 15-minute walk from their homes.

Given the magnitude of growth the Region is expected to accommodate, and strong evidence on the value of complete communities, applying complete community principles more broadly across the Region beyond new communities is important and such policies are being explored. Implementation tools beyond Official Plan policies, such as how to measure completeness, using metrics such as the 15-minute walkable neighbourhood are also being assessed.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

### **Updated employment planning policies will build upon the existing employment policy framework**

Employment areas play a strategic role in the York Region, and broader regional economy. Protecting employment lands for existing and future employment uses is important for a balanced long-term Regional Structure. The current policy context in the ROP provides a strong foundation for conforming to new provincial direction in this regard.

Provincial direction now requires the Region to designate lands, protect and plan for employment areas in the ROP, including setting minimum density targets. Provincial policies give municipalities the option to identify, but not designate, future strategic employment lands beyond the 2051 planning horizon.

Provincial requirements will result in updated policies and mapping to support a new Regional employment land use designation in the ROP. Policy considerations, as outlined in attachment 1, will include providing flexibility to local municipalities to reflect the area-specific context, permit a broader mix of employment uses while protecting the integrity of these areas for traditional employment uses.

Policies are also being considered to strengthen protection of employment lands over the long term, to address trends in the changing nature of employment and to better align land use planning and economic development objectives.

## **AGRICULTURE**

### **A change to the current Agriculture policy designation is proposed for limited and narrow river valley lands that extend the Greenbelt into existing and future urban areas within Markham and Vaughan**

There are a number of narrow, linear river valleys designated Protected Countryside in the Greenbelt (more commonly called Green Fingers) that extend into existing and future urban areas in Markham and Vaughan. These areas are currently designated Agriculture in the ROP (shown on Attachment 2).

With the assistance of an agricultural consultant, analysis was undertaken to consider the long-term agricultural viability of these areas given their existing or future context abutting designated urban area lands. With consideration of the consultant's findings, which include support for a Rural designation for the majority of these areas, staff are proposing a Rural or equivalent designation with permitted uses in line with and conforming to those permitted within the protected countryside of the Greenbelt Plan. Policies will recognize the unique natural heritage values of these river valley features in their urban context; they are part of the Regional Greenlands System and contain key natural heritage/hydrologic features that will continue to be protected. Policy options are being assessed that balance the important environmental considerations and provide local planning flexibility within the changing context of these lands abutting new urban areas. The designation would allow for

continuation of existing agricultural operations/productive lands as appropriate for all of these river valley areas.

### **Current agricultural policies align with the Province’s Agri-food Network to support local agricultural and food initiatives**

The ROP’s current agricultural policy framework, incorporates many components of the Provincial Agri-food Network. York Region’s Agriculture and Agri-food Sector Strategy also aligns with Provincial direction to provide opportunities to support access to healthy, local and affordable food, urban agriculture, food systems and food security planning.

The Province requires policies that strengthen economic connections to the Agri-food Network and encourage development of strategies to sustain and enhance the prosperity of the agri-food sector. Policy considerations will assess options to further improve this alignment including assessing, minimizing, and mitigating the negative impacts of development on the Agri-food Network.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

### **Enhanced Provincial direction on watershed planning will be proposed in updated Regional Official Plan policies**

As described in the Provincial Growth Plan, watershed planning provides a framework for the protection of water resources, the management of human activities, land, water, aquatic life, and resources within a watershed and for the assessment of cumulative, cross-jurisdictional, and cross-watershed impacts.

York Region has long-standing partnerships with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority to undertake watershed planning. The current policy context in the ROP recognizes the importance of watershed planning and includes requirements for watershed and subwatershed scale studies.

Policy considerations related to watershed planning include; incorporating climate change considerations, informing growth management and stormwater management and identifying and protecting water resource systems using watershed planning or equivalent environmental studies. Policies are also being considered to reflect updated Provincial requirements related to mineral aggregates, water resources, species and risk and urban river valleys.

## **HEALTHY COMMUNITIES**

### **Regional Official Plan policies on climate change, energy and sustainable buildings will be maintained**

Provincial Plan updates require municipalities to prepare for impacts of climate change through land use and development patterns as well as develop Official Plan policies and actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, address climate change adaptation goals, and

energy and water conservation. The current policy context in the ROP provides strong support for climate change, energy and sustainable buildings.

It is proposed that existing policy direction related to climate change, energy and sustainable buildings be maintained to ensure continuing support for implementation of Regional and local initiatives in these areas. Following finalization of the Region's Climate Change Action Plan, and Regional Community Energy Plan, the need for any further ROP policy updates will be considered.

## **SERVICING**

### **Master Plans for Transportation and Water & Wastewater are being updated concurrently with the Official Plan to address servicing needs to accommodate growth to 2051**

Provincial Plans focus on integrating planning for growth and infrastructure. The Transportation Master Plan (TMP) and Water and Wastewater Master Plan (WWMP) are being updated concurrently with the ROP to ensure alignment with fiscally sustainable growth management. They are anticipated to be finalized by early 2022.

The TMP is being reviewed for flexibility to respond to current and emerging issues, policy changes and mobility trends in the future, leading to an interconnected system of mobility with multiple transportation options for residents and businesses. The WWMP is being updated to identify the preferred municipal servicing solution and associated infrastructure needs to support projected growth to be set out in the ROP. A policy framework to support implementation of the master plans will be included in the ROP to ensure alignment between growth and infrastructure planning.

### **Policy options for private communal servicing systems for residential and employment developments are being explored**

A private communal water and wastewater system is a shared service owned by private landowners, typically through a condominium corporation, whereby an environmental compliance approval by the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) is required to provide water and/or wastewater services for multiple lots/units.

The current ROP only permits new private communal water and wastewater systems to service existing communities where health issues exist due to failed individual septic systems.

When communal systems are used for residential developments, they can impose increased financial risk to the Region and increased health and safety risk to residents and the environment, as outlined in a [June 2020 Council report](#).

The 2020 Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) introduced a more permissive policy framework for private communal systems, identifying private communal systems as a preferred form of servicing for settlement areas outside of Urban Areas for multi-unit/lot developments.

Staff are assessing the implications of the new PPS direction on the Region, to determine how to update policies to mitigate potential risks to the Region and conform to new Provincial direction. At this time, two sets of policies for private communal systems are being explored that differentiate between residential and employment developments:

- Continue to limit private communal systems for residential developments, given the risk to the Region and its residents
- Consider private communal systems for employment developments on an interim basis until full municipal serving is available

## **5. Financial**

To support growth to 2051, an integrated growth management approach to land use planning and infrastructure delivery will be required to manage the capital plan in line with objectives of the Council approved Fiscal Strategy. To meet population and employment forecasts, timely delivery of growth-related servicing will be required. Developing policies which manage growth in a fiscally sustainable way, including aligning growth with investment in infrastructure, is of paramount importance to ensure fiscal health of the Region.

## **6. Local Impact**

Local municipalities are key partners in updating the ROP. Regional and local municipal staff work closely throughout the update of the ROP and MCR process. Regularly scheduled local municipal working group sessions provide opportunities for local staff to provide input throughout the process, including feedback on the topic areas presented in this report. Local staff are aware of the directions included in this report and are generally supportive. Staff will continue to work with local municipal staff throughout the policy development process.

## **7. Conclusion**

Updated ROP policies and mapping are required to conform to Provincial plans and policies. Existing ROP policies are being reviewed to determine where updates are required. Preliminary policy directions summarized in in this report and further described through Attachment 1, will be the basis for further consultation and ongoing policy development for the updated ROP. Staff will continue to engage with local municipalities, and internal and external stakeholders throughout the ROP update process. Additional reports will be presented to council providing policy directions on additional topic areas moving towards the development of a draft ROP.



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For more information on this report, please contact Sandra Malcic, Director, Long Range Planning at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 75724. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

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Attachments (2)  
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