



Foundational Housing Analysis

York Region

Final Brief

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Executive Summary



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Executive Summary

To better understand how macro-economic conditions, as well as regional and local real estate development trends, are influencing current housing trends across the Region, York Region is embarking on the development of a Foundational Housing Analysis. This analysis, which is being prepared as background to the Region's municipal comprehensive review (MCR) update, will help inform York Region's updated Regional Official Plan (ROP) population and housing forecast to the year 2051. A critical consideration in the development of the 2051 housing forecast will be the need to strike the right balance between market demand and long-term housing policy objectives, particularly those related to housing supply and housing affordability.

This Brief provides the preliminary findings of the Foundational Housing Analysis, largely as it relates to how the growth of the Region's population and housing base has been tracking to its regional competitors, the reasons for the estimated shortfall, and where on-going unmet housing needs are likely to persist. Further, it provides a closer examination of anticipated residential real estate market demand, including potential barriers to housing choice, within the context of available housing supply. Core to this analysis is an examination of the following key questions:

- 1. Why has the population in York Region recently been growing slower than the near-term population estimates set out in the York Region 2010 Regional Official Plan forecast?
- 2. What are the near-term disruptive factors and longer-term growth drivers that are anticipated to impact growth trends across York Region?
- 3. How has the York Region housing market been evolving in recent years and what are the "strengths/weaknesses" of the York housing market within the context of the broader regional market area?
- 4. What steps are required to ensure that York Region is successful in meeting its population, housing, and employment growth objectives over the 2051 planning horizon?



- Q1. Why has the population in York Region recently been growing slower than the near-term population estimates set out in the York Region 2010 Regional OP forecast?
- A1. York Region's population has been growing slower than the near-term York Region OP population estimates largely because the Region lacks supply of affordable housing opportunities, particularly grade-related ownership housing and purpose-built rental accommodations.

Current Population and Housing Estimates for York Region have not Kept Pace with Near-Term estimates in the York Region 2010 ROP

- In accordance with the analysis provided herein, York Region's 2021 population and housing estimates are approximately 1,227,000 and 388,800, respectively. Comparatively, the Region's 2021 population and household estimates are approximately 87,000 persons below the York Region 2010 ROP population 2021 forecast and 36,000 households below the 2021 housing estimates which inform the York Region 2010 ROP
- York Region is tracking at 93% of its 2010 ROP population forecast. Comparatively, York Region is tracking below every other upper-tier and singletier Greater Toronto Hamilton Area (GTHA) municipality except Durham Region.
- Of the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) upper-tier and single-tier municipalities surveyed in this Brief, York Region was the only municipality that experienced a relatively slower annual population growth rate between 2016 and 2021 compared to the previous five-year period.

External Factors have Influenced the Distribution and Pace of Growth Across York Region Compared to what was Forecast in the York Region 2010 ROP

- The alignment of the forecast population and employment growth with major infrastructure projects is a key aspect of the Region's MCR. Delays to major infrastructure projects can have a significant impact on the timing growth and available supply of greenfield land for urban development.
- The Upper York Servicing Solution, originally estimated to be completed in 2016, has been delayed to 2026 at the earliest. This delay has constrained



development, particularly in greenfield areas, in East Gwillimbury, Newmarket and Aurora.¹

- Provincial Planning policy has also influenced the amount, type and location of development which has been accommodated across York Region over the past two decades.
- Since the release of the Growth Plan in 2006, GGH municipalities including York Region, have been in a continuous cycle of developing and defending growth management processes and OP Updates.
- The prolonged delay of York Region's 2010 ROP as a result of numerous appeals at the Regional and local levels in response to conformity requirements of the Growth Plan, 2006, have potentially delayed the timing of large-scale developments within several greenfield areas throughout the Region.
- While these delays do not appear to have limited the Region's ability to meet its near-term housing supply requirements on a Region-wide basis in accordance with provincial policy, it does appear that such delays have created housing supply shortfalls, particularly in greenfield areas, at the local municipal level.²

Annual Net-Migration in York Region has Underperformed Relative to the GTHA Average

- Between 2001 and 2015, a downward trend was experienced in average annual net migration levels across the GTHA. This can be largely explained as a result of two factors: 1) changes to federal immigration policy; and 2) structural economic changes and regional economic cycles.
- This downward trend in annual net migration was followed by a sharp rebound in average annual net migration levels across the GTHA between 2015 and 2019, as a result of changes to federal immigration policy and the gradual recovery of the GTHA economy following the 2008/2009 financial crisis.
- Between 2001 and 2017, York Region experienced a more pronounced downward trend in net migration relative to the GTHA average. Furthermore, the relative increase in international net migration levels experienced across the

¹ The Regional Municipality of York. Committee of the Whole Planning and Economic Development, June 13, 2019. Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner. Growth and Infrastructure Alignment.

² As set out in section 1.4.1. of the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020.



GTHA between 2016 and 2019 was not experienced to the same extent in York Region.

- A direct correlation can be drawn between increasing housing prices and declining net intra-provincial migration (i.e. migration to York Region from other areas of the Province) to York Region. During the 2005 to 2019 period, average resale house prices in York Region steadily increased. During this same time period, net intra-provincial migration to York Region steadily declined and has been negative since 2014/2015.
- A lack of housing supply across York Region related to certain housing products, most notably affordable grade-related housing and purpose-built rental accommodations, has limited the Region's recent population and housing growth potential.¹ This is further discussed in question number 3 below.
- Q2. What are the near-term disruptive factors and longer-term growth drivers that are anticipated to impact growth trends across York Region?
- A2. A range of broad factors and local conditions will continue to have a strong influence on the Region's relative performance regarding long-term population and employment growth. These broad factors and local conditions include:
 - Macro-economics;
 - Demographics;
 - Federal immigration and trade policy;
 - Provincial, Regional and local planning policy;
 - Provincial, Regional and local infrastructure investment;
 - Regional competitiveness, and
 - Availability of local affordable housing supply.

Over the near-term (i.e. 2020 and 2021), COVID-19 is anticipated to reduce immigration levels across Canada, including York Region, relative to recent

¹ In Canada, housing affordability is often measured through the shelter cost-to-income ratio. A ratio of 30% is commonly accepted as the upper limit for affordable housing. Households spending more than 30% on housing are generally considered in need of more affordable housing alternatives. This measure is applicable to both owner-occupied and rental dwellings.



historical averages. COVID-19 is also accelerating technological disruptions related to the nature of work and commerce which were already in play prior to the pandemic.

Employment Growth Opportunities in York Region will be Increasingly Geared Towards an Increasingly Knowledge-Driven Economy

 In recent decades, structural changes in the macro-economy have transitioned the Provincial and York Region economies away from goods production and towards service delivery within an increasingly knowledge-driven economy. These structural changes have been largely driven by increased outsourcing of domestically manufactured goods to emerging global markets combined with increased automation of manufacturing processes. Ultimately, these changes will continue to influence regional planning, economic development, and marketing initiatives across York Region.

York Region's Aging Population is Placing Downward Pressure on Population Growth and Labour Force Participation Rates

- It is important to recognize that the provincial population, including York Region, is getting older due to the large concentration of Baby Boomers.¹ The aging of the Regional population base further reinforces the need to attract younger population age groups to the Region, particularly those characterized as Millennials and Generation Z.²
- Not only is the Baby Boom age group large in terms of its population share in York Region, it is also diverse with respect to age, income, health, mobility, and lifestyle/life stage. When planning for the needs of older adults, it is important to consider these diverse physical and socio-economic characteristics relative to younger population age groups. On average, seniors, particularly those in the 75+ age group, have less mobility, less disposable income, and typically require increased health care compared to younger seniors (65-74 age group) and other segments of the younger working-age population. Typically, these

¹ Baby Boomers are generally defined as those born between 1946 and 1964.

² Millennials are generally defined as those born between 1980 and 1992. For the purposes of this study, we have assumed that those born between 1993 and 2005 comprise Generation Z.



characteristics associated with the 75+ age group drive the demand for relatively higher density housing forms (e.g. apartments and seniors' homes) that are in proximity to urban amenities (e.g. hospitals/health care facilities, amenities and other community services geared towards older seniors).

<u>COVID-19 will Continue to be Extremely Disruptive Over the Near Term and will have</u> <u>Long-Term Effects on the Economy</u>

- The recent downward impacts associated with coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on global and national economic conditions have been severe. Economic sectors such as travel and tourism, accommodation and food, manufacturing, energy, and financial have been hit particularly hard. Canada's GDP declined by approximately 39% in the second quarter of 2020 (April to June), even when economic activities improved in May and June as containment measures gradually loosened beginning in May 2020.¹
- In addition to its broader impacts on the economy, COVID-19 is also anticipated to accelerate changes in work and commerce as a result of technological disruptions which were already in play prior to the pandemic. As such, enterprises will increasingly be required to rethink the way they conduct business, with an increased emphasis on remote work enabled by technologies such as virtual private networks (VPNs), virtual meetings, cloud technology and other remote work collaboration tools. These trends are anticipated to have a direct influence on commercial and industrial real estate needs over both the near and longer terms.
- In light of these anticipated trends, it is important to consider the manner in which these impacts are likely to influence the nature of employment, by type as well as by place of work. Ultimately, increased emphasis on remote work enabled by improvements in technology may reduce the relative need for future commercial and institutional building space associated with the employment forecasts set out in Schedule 3 of the Growth Plan, 2019.

¹ Reuters Business News, August 28, 2020.



A Number of Positive Factors are Anticipated to Drive Long-Term Economic Growth Across York Region

- Despite the above-mentioned disruptive factors, the long-term economic outlook for the GGH, including York Region, remains positive.
- With its strategic location, diverse economy and growing skilled labour force base, the GGH is highly attractive on an international level to new businesses and investors. In turn, this continues to support steady population and housing growth within this region, largely driven by international net migration. The strength of the broader regional GGH economy presents a tremendous opportunity for York Region's economy and its residents within commuting distance to this growing broader regional employment market.
- York Region has been particularly competitive in its ability to distinguish itself as a hub for innovation and technology while encouraging ongoing entrepreneurship, small business development, and investment retention. These efforts have produced a diverse and growing local economy within the Region relative to other surrounding upper-tier/single-tier municipalities.
- York Region also boasts the highest concentration of residents in tech occupations within the Toronto-Waterloo Innovation Corridor, a technology supercluster which generally includes the municipalities within the GTHA, the City of Guelph (including surrounding area) and the Region of Waterloo.
- As a result of these broader growth drivers, as well as local investments and initiatives, in the long-term York Region is anticipated to remain attractive to new industry and residents.
- By the year 2051, York Region is expected to grow to approximately 2 million people in accordance with A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the GGH, York Region's employment base is also forecast to steadily increase over the next several decades. By 2051, York Region's employment base is forecast to reach 990,000, which represents an estimated increase of 446,000 jobs, in accordance with the Region's 2016 job base of 544,000.¹

¹ Statistics Canada Census, 2016.



- Q3. How has the York Region housing market been evolving in recent years and what are the "strengths/weaknesses" of the York housing market within the context of the broader regional market area?¹
- A3. York Region's housing market has been steadily shifting from low-density housing types towards medium- and high-density housing forms. The Region's recent success related to residential intensification can be largely attributed to significant infrastructure investments, as well as planning and economic development initiatives geared to promoting the relationship between city building and economic development within the Built-up Area (BUA).

While the current housing supply within York Region is sufficient to accommodate near-term demand at the Regional level, a lack of affordable grade-related homes is constraining the Region's growth potential. Across York Region there is also a limited supply of purpose-built rental units to address the significant growth anticipated in renter occupied dwellings.

York Region's Housing Market has been Steadily Shifting from Low-Density Housing Types Towards Medium- and High-Density Housing Forms

- Over the 2006 to 2019 period, York Region averaged approximately 8,300 residential unit completions per year.² Low-density housing completions (i.e. single and semi-detached) represented nearly two-thirds of completions from 2006 through 2010; however, this share steadily fell to 43% in more recent years between 2016 and 2019.
- Historically, York Region has accommodated a notable share of housing development activity within the broader regional market area. Over the 2006 to 2019 period, York Region accounted for the second largest housing unit share in the broader regional market area, second only to the City of Toronto. While a large regional market share of housing has been captured in York Region over

¹ For the purpose of this study, the broader market area is defined as the neighbouring upper-tier and single-tier municipalities of the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area as well as the Simcoe Area and Dufferin County.

² Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (C.M.H.C.) housing completions data.



the past two decades, the Region's share of new housing units declined from 25% over the 2006 to 2010 period to 19% over the 2011 to 2019 period.

York Region has Experienced an Increasing Share of Housing within the BUA Since 2006

- Since 2006, a notable share of residential development activity has been accommodated within the BUA indicating that there is a growing market for higher density residential intensification. Since 2006, the Region's share of residential development activity within the BUA has steadily increased, from 45% during the 2006 to 2010 period, to 54% from 2016 to 2019.
- The Region appears to be well on track to exceed its current intensification target of 40% for all housing development accommodated over the 2006 to 2031 period, having achieved 50% intensification from 2006 to 2019.

Major Transit Infrastructure Investments Combined with Planning and Economic Development Initiatives have been Key Factors in the Region's Success Related to Housing Intensification

- The Region's recent success related to residential intensification can be largely attributed to significant infrastructure investments, as well as planning and economic development initiatives geared to promoting the relationship between city building and economic development in these areas.
- To date, \$3.6 billion has been invested in Bus Rapid Transit, the Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension, and facilities and terminals to support Regional Centres and Corridors. The Province has committed a further \$5.6 billion of partial funding for the Yonge Subway Extension, out of a total of \$11 billion required from different levels of government to construct the subway and additional Bus Rapid Transit in the form of rapidways.
- Since the opening of the subway extension in 2017, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC) has experienced a significant increase in high-density residential growth, reinforcing the positive return on investment from this transit investment, as well as the planning efforts and economic development efforts concentrated in this area.
- In addition to the significant financial investments that have been made to highorder transit in York Region, the Region has focused its efforts on marketing strategies and initiatives, aimed to promote intensification and office attraction



with Transit Oriented Development (TOD). For example, the "York Link" campaign works together with the Centres and Corridors program to promote office development, with particular focus on cultivating the Region's growing knowledge-based economy.

Housing Supply Constraints are Impeding the Region's Near-Term Growth Potential

- Within the context of the broader regional market area, average housing prices for new detached units in York Region (average of \$1.7 million in 2019) are amongst the highest, second only to the City of Toronto (\$1.9 million). While York Region's new detached home prices are similar to Halton Region (\$1.6 million) and moderately higher than in Peel Region (\$1.3 million), prices in York Region are notably higher than in neighbouring municipalities of Durham Region (\$920,000), Dufferin County (\$970,000), and Simcoe County (\$680,000).
- While the current supply of total housing within York Region is sufficient to accommodate forecast near-term demand at the Regional level, a lack of housing choice exists related to affordable grade-related homes compared to most other upper-tier/single-tier municipalities examined within the broader regional market area.
- This lack of affordable grade-related homes, which could potentially be marketed to younger families as well as middle-income households, is particularly relevant for northern York Region municipalities.¹ In the near term, increasing greenfield housing development opportunities, particularly in northern York Region, should help to broaden market choice and provide more affordable, grade-related housing options for the Region.
- Looking forward, the Region will need to be proactive in working with private sector partners and senior government in offering a greater supply of graderelated housing options, largely marketed to young adults and moderate-income households, most notably in northern York Region.

¹ Middle-income households are defined as those with income of approximately \$60,000 and \$95,000 per year before taxes (in 2019 dollars).



York Region's Condominium Market has Experienced Strong Growth Over the Past 15 Years

- York Region has experienced significant growth in the condominium market development since 2006. Between 2006 and 2018, York Region's condominium housing base expanded by over 250%, from approximately 16,000 to 41,000 units, representing an average annual development activity of 2,100 units.
- Average prices of units under construction and pre-leasing are \$548,000 and \$657,000, respectively.¹ Recently constructed condominiums (last 10 years) have averaged 69 units (738 sq.ft.) in size, with the majority of these units having one and two bedrooms. As such, many of these units are not large enough to adequately accommodate families with children.
- While the strong rate of condominium development is a positive trend, additional housing opportunities will be required in the Region's primary rental housing market to address housing needs associated with lower- and middle-income households.

York Region's Supply of Purpose-Built Rental Housing is Relatively Limited

- Across York Region there is also a limited supply of purpose-built rental units to address the significant growth anticipated in renter occupied dwellings. York Region's purpose-built rental inventory was largely constructed over the 1960 to 1980 period, and since that time the Region has seen limited purpose-built rental development.
- Vacancy rates in purpose-built rental housing in York Region have historically been lower than the provincial average and are currently at 1.0% (compared to the provincial average of 2.0%), indicative of a very tight market in purpose-built rentals.
- The Region's limited supply of affordable grade-related housing options is one factor that has contributed to the Region's limited household growth in younger adults over the past two decades.

¹ Urbanation data, September 2020.



- Q4. What actions are required to ensure that York Region is successful in meeting its population and housing growth objectives over the 2051 planning horizon?
- A4. The following actions are recommended to ensure that the Region is successful in meeting its long-term population and housing growth objectives:
 - Understand the broader factors that are influencing economic and demographic growth trends across the GGH, but continue focusing on local growth initiatives that are within the control of York Region;
 - Continue emphasizing the importance of Placemaking in local planning and economic development;
 - Work with public and private partners to provide a more diverse supply of housing, including purpose-built rental housing options, across a broad range of income groups;
 - Explore approaches to increase the supply of affordable housing across York Region to avoid future labour shortages and improve the Region's economic competitiveness; and
 - Continue Emphasizing an Integrated Approach to Long-Term Growth Management

These actions are discussed further below.

Continue Focusing on Local Issues that are within the Control of York Region

• While it is important to understand the broader macro-economic and global factors that are anticipated to influence both near-term and longer-term growth trends in York Region, it is also important to recognize that the Region has limited control to influence many of these inputs when planning for its future. In contrast, York Region has considerable control to influence its competitive position by focusing on the interconnection between local job creation and housing choice.



When considering the Region's regional competitive ranking, York Region has considerable control and ability to position itself in a positive manner. This requires the Region to continue marketing itself as a hub for innovation, equipped with the human capital that is required to encourage on-going innovation, entrepreneurship, small business development, and local investment retention. This is becoming increasingly relevant during the current pandemic and will be progressively pertinent in the post-pandemic period as continued structural changes in the economy and technological disruption continue to enable work at home employment opportunities and remote learning.

Continue Emphasizing the Importance of Placemaking in Local Planning and Economic Development Initiatives

- A key objective of both the provincial Growth Plan and the York ROP is to build healthy and complete communities in a manner that enhances livability and economic prosperity, while protecting what is important to residents and local businesses.
- These long-term objectives emphasize the importance of measuring performance against quantitative metrics such as population and employment growth, as well as broader city building indicators related to housing, neighbourhood design, transportation, environment, health, social engagement, financial sustainability, and opportunity. While it is beyond the scope of this study to examine all the broad indicators outlined herein, this Foundational Housing Analysis specifically focuses on the role of housing as a key building block to the Region's long-term growth management objectives.
- With these broad city building objectives in mind, "place making" is increasingly recognized as an important planning component in creating diverse and vibrant communities, which in turn can help attract local population and job growth provided that other necessary infrastructure requirements are met. This is particularly relevant for mixed-use environments that integrate a broad range of housing options by type, tenure, and affordability with retail, office, and institutional uses as well as other population-supportive amenities (e.g. entertainment and cultural activities). Such areas should be planned to achieve a compact, transit-supportive, and pedestrian-oriented environment with access to public open space and other civic infrastructure.



Work with Public and Private Partners to Provide a More Diverse Supply of Housing, Including Purpose-Built Rental Housing Options, Across a Broad Range of Income Groups

- To maintain a well-balanced, strong community and ensure long-term sustainability, it is vital that York Region offer a wide range of housing options for a broad range of income groups. Housing affordability is a key component of quality of place and directly linked to population and economic growth potential, and municipal competitiveness.
- Housing affordability is determined by a range of community, regional and provincial/national level factors that influence supply and demand for housing, cost of residential development, and ownership carrying costs and rental market rates. Many factors are national/provincial in nature which York Region has limited influence. This includes such factors as the regulatory environment, dollar exchange rate and interest rate policy.
- There are a range of housing affordability factors specific to the municipality and ones over which York Region has some influence or control. This incudes market choice of housing stock by built form and tenure (including the provision for purpose-built rental housing), the availability of developable residential lands, municipal servicing, and land use permissions.
- Working with public and private sector partners, York Region should continue to ensure that the long-term housing forecast is aligned with anticipated demand by household income, age group and household size.
- While York Region's median household income is relatively high, the Region has experienced an erosion in home ownership affordability over the past 10 to 15 years, similar to the broader regional market area.
- The Region generally offers relatively few affordable home ownership options in both the new and re-sale housing market, limiting market choice for medium- and lower-income households. The aging of the population, combined with the continued erosion of housing affordability, is anticipated to place increasing demand for affordable housing products across York Region.
- The Region will also need to offer a greater supply of purpose-built rental housing to accommodate growing needs across all age groups and income levels, but particularly the 75+ age group driven by the Region's aging Baby Boomers. If not appropriately addressed, these housing barriers could have the



potential of constraining the Region's competitive position by limiting its ability to attract talent (i.e. skilled labour) and reducing its livability over the longer term.

• Despite the feasibility challenges of purpose-built rental developments, over the last few years a select number of new private-sector rental developments have been constructed in York Region. These projects have been possible, in part, through the use of a range of municipal financial incentives and planning tools made available by York Region, area municipal partners, and upper levels of government.

Address the Interconnection Between the Region's Competitive Economic Position and its Longer-Term Housing Needs by Market Segment

- Addressing the interconnection between the Region's competitive economic position and its longer-term housing needs by market segment is critical in realizing the Region's future forecast population and employment growth potential, as well as the Region's ultimate goals related to prosperity, opportunity, and livability.
- The Region recognizes that the accommodation of skilled labour and the attraction of new businesses are inextricably linked and positively reinforce one another. To ensure that economic growth is not constrained by future labour shortages, effort will be required by York Region and its local municipalities to continue to explore ways to attract and accommodate new skilled and unskilled working residents to the Region within a broad range of housing options.
- Attraction efforts must also be linked to housing accommodation (both ownership and rental), infrastructure, municipal services and amenities, as well as quality of life attributes that appeal to the younger mobile population, while not detracting from the Region's attractiveness to older population segments.

Continue Emphasizing an Integrated Approach to Long-Term Growth Management

• In recent years, York Region has begun to incorporate an integrated approach to land-use planning, servicing, and financial management within the broader context of Regional growth management.¹ Moving forward, this integrated

¹ The Regional Municipality of York, Committee of the Whole Planning and Economic Development. Report to the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner. Growth and Infrastructure Alignment. June 13, 2019.



approach to growth management must also embrace the Region's economic development principles to ensure the Region achieves its long-term economic growth potential in a financially sustainable manner.

- Given the level of infrastructure investment required to accommodate anticipated long-term residential and non-residential development across York Region, the Region will need to ensure that the prioritization and staging of capital is wellaligned with anticipated real estate market trends. It is recognized that if major capital projects are not well-aligned with market demand, the Region will be at risk of accelerating further debt accumulation. This potential risk could increase with a prolonged economic downturn and/or slow economic recovery resulting from COVID-19, reduced revenue associated with slower growth, and lower revenues required to pay for growth-related capital. In turn, delays to major infrastructure investment would reduce the Region's competitive position relative to the broader regional market area by limiting new business development and housing choice.
- To minimize these financial risks, the Region's Fiscal Strategy recognizes the need to align near-term development priorities with locations that offer development capacity within existing infrastructure.
- Through a balanced approach that incorporates economic and real estate market demand factors against broad provincial and regional interests, the Region will be better equipped to identify where financial incentives and planning tools are potentially needed to stimulate residential and non-residential development activity where market forces alone are not delivering a desired outcome.

Following this Brief, the Foundational Housing Analysis Report is scheduled to be finalized in late 2020 and will provide an analysis with respect to long-term housing demand by structure type, tenure and affordability within the context of the Region-wide housing forecast prepared by York Region staff as part of the current ROP Review.