

The Regional Municipality of York

Regional Council
Planning and Economic Development
March 18, 2021

Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner

Regional Official Plan Update Policy Directions Report

1. Recommendations

1. Council endorse the preliminary policy directions summarized in this report and further described in Attachment 1 to support development of draft policies regarding: Aligning Growth and Infrastructure, Agriculture and Rural Areas, Diversity and Inclusion and Mapping Updates that will be presented to Council as part of the Regional Official Plan Update.
2. Council endorse the preliminary agricultural mapping illustrated in Attachment 2 for continued consultation to support development of draft mapping that will be presented to Council as part of the Regional Official Plan Update.
3. 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). This is the second general Policy Directions Report presented to Council to inform development of an updated ROP, to be presented to Council in 2021. Attachment 1 and 2 provide further details summarizing Provincial planning updates and proposed policy directions on policy areas not previously reported to Council.

Key Points:

- This report focuses on policy directions in the following four thematic areas:
 1. Aligning Growth and Infrastructure
 2. Agriculture and Rural Areas

3. Diversity and Inclusion

4. Mapping Updates

- These are preliminary policy directions not previously presented to Council in past MCR background reports
- 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
- The content outlined in the aligning growth and infrastructure section of this report reflects the growth management principles outlined in the Proposed 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment report also on the March 18, 2021 Special Council agenda
- Following ongoing stakeholder consultation and public engagement on the preliminary directions presented in this report, a draft ROP containing updated policies will be presented to Council

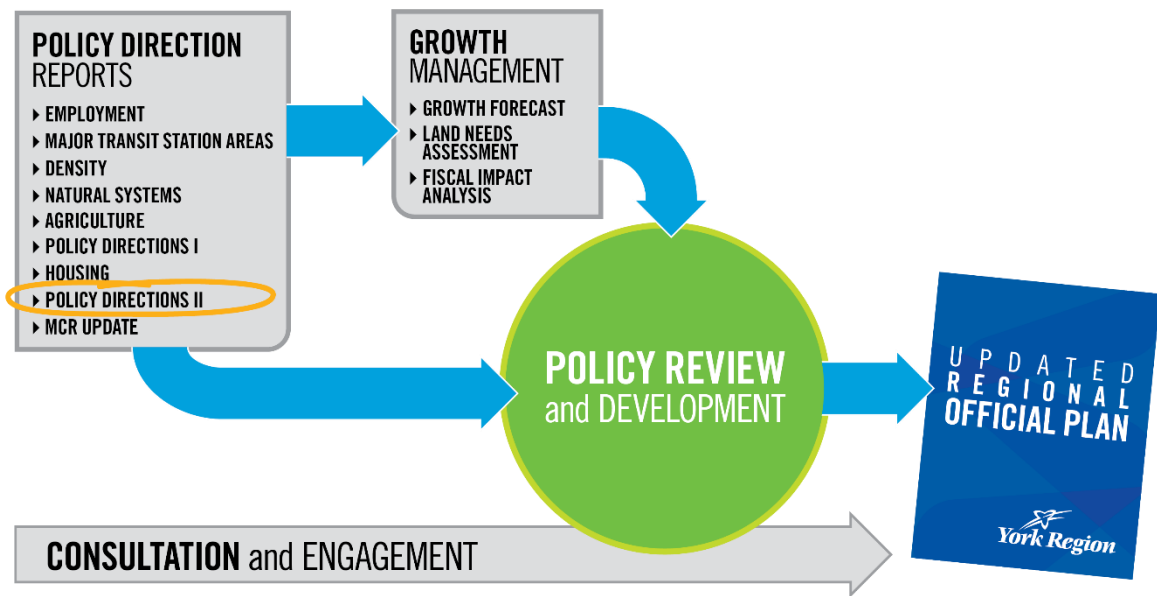
3. Background

Policy directions in this report support the development of a draft Regional Official Plan

Since adoption of the 2010 ROP, there have been significant updates to Provincial plans and policies. York Region is required to update the ROP through an MCR process to conform with these updates and new Provincial direction by 2022. The Province introduced a new planning horizon year of 2051, with 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 between 2019 and 2051, employment in York Region is expected to increase from 655,000 to 990,000 jobs. The allocation of these forecast numbers is outlined in the Proposed 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment report, which informs the policy directions outlined in the aligning growth and infrastructure section of Attachment 1. This report provides proposed policy directions and is one of the final reports that support development of a draft updated ROP (Figure 1). Draft policies will be developed in the coming months and an updated draft ROP is anticipated to be presented to Council in Q4 2021.

Figure 1

Municipal Comprehensive Review Components



This report builds on directions presented through past direction reports to Council

The MCR process involves a series of background and direction reports to support planning for growth and updating the ROP. 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)
- [Proposed Employment Area Mapping and Employment Conversions](#) (October 2020)
- [Regional Official Plan Update Policy Directions Report](#) (December 2020)
- [Regional Official Plan Update Housing Challenges and Opportunitites](#) (January 2021)

Policy directions in this report and Attachment 1 are categorized under four thematic areas:

1. Aligning Growth and Infrastructure
2. Agriculture and Rural Areas
3. Diversity and Inclusion
4. Mapping Updates

Proposed policy directions summarized in this report build on, but do not reiterate, past directions previously presented to Council. Attachment 1 provides details of updates to Provincial plans and considerations for updated ROP policies to implement revised Provincial direction. In addition, Attachment 1 provides greater detail on preliminary policy directions than the body of this report and a number of policy topic areas not highlighted in this report, including excess soil, mineral aggregate resources and species at risk. Attachment 2 provides preliminary agricultural draft mapping to support proposed policy directions found in Attachment 1.

4. Analysis

ALIGNING GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Aligning growth, infrastructure and financial planning supports sustainable development

The coordination and alignment of infrastructure and financial planning with land use planning is important for sustainable growth management in York Region. An agile approach to growth management is proposed to respond to the changing nature and pace of development in a manner that optimizes growth in areas with existing infrastructure capacity before investing in new major infrastructure. The Proposed 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment report provides a preliminary distribution of growth to 2051 as a result of provincially mandated growth and provides considerations for integrated growth management that includes a fiscally sustainable approach to infrastructure investment.

To support fiscally sustainable investments in infrastructure, it is proposed that phasing policies be strengthened in the ROP. Phasing policies will optimize the timing of development to efficiently use existing and new Regional infrastructure. This will help maintain fiscal sustainability and provide for stronger alignment between population and employment growth, efficient operation of infrastructure and delivery of soft services that are essential for supporting population growth in new areas.

Another consideration for aligning growth and infrastructure is the potential to identify remaining agricultural/rural Whitebelt lands that are not required for growth to 2051 as future urban areas. This supports public knowledge and transparency about long-term development of those lands beyond the 2051 planning horizon. Ongoing coordination between Planning, Water and Wastewater Master Plan, Transportation Master Plan updates and Regional

capital budgets will be essential to effectively deliver on the policy directions outlined in Attachment 1.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AREAS

Policies are proposed which limit and provide guidance for non-agricultural uses on Agricultural designated lands

In the Region's Agricultural land use designation, there is pressure to allow new or redevelopment of existing non-agricultural uses that are often industrial, institutional, public, recreational or commercial uses. The current Provincial policy framework permits limited redevelopment opportunities of existing non-agricultural uses and strongly discourages new non-agricultural uses in the Agricultural area. Aligned with Provincial direction, it is preferred that non-agricultural uses be directed to settlement and Rural areas. The proposed policy directions permit modest opportunities for new or redevelopment of existing non-agricultural uses in line with Provincial direction to inform decision-making at the local municipal level.

Preliminary criteria have been developed for evaluating both new and redevelopment of existing non-agricultural uses in the agricultural designation that limit these opportunities. In particular, the following approaches are proposed for non-agricultural uses:

- New non-agricultural uses within the Greenbelt Plan area will be required to conform to the applicable Provincial policies in the Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan
- For new non-agricultural uses outside of the Greenbelt Plan area, within Whitebelt lands not required to address growth to 2051, criteria will align with Provincial policy direction
- Existing non-agricultural uses within the Greenbelt Plan area will have limited redevelopment, with the goal of bringing uses into closer conformity to applicable Provincial plans

All criteria are in conformity with Provincial plans and policies and aligned with Regional priorities, further examined in Attachment 1.

Proposed agricultural mapping refinements would add approximately 2,200 hectares of lands to the Agricultural designation

In 2017, the Province released draft agricultural mapping to implement the Agricultural System policies in the updated Provincial plans. Through the MCR, York Region has the opportunity to refine this Provincial mapping to better reflect the Regional and local municipal context in accordance with Provincial implementation procedures.

An agricultural consultant was retained to compare and assess differences between Provincial mapping and the Region's current agricultural mapping. The consultant

recommendations were presented to Council in [June 2019](#), identifying 19 study areas to be considered for inclusion in the Agricultural designation.

Consultation with local municipalities, stakeholders, members of the public and impacted landowners to discuss potential agricultural mapping changes has been ongoing. In October 2020, the Region undertook an online public engagement campaign and direct outreach to potentially impacted landowners on proposed changes.

In addition to the consultant recommendations, the following were considered in the analysis of agricultural refinement areas:

- Local municipal, landowner, stakeholder and public input
- Current and future Regional and local municipal planning contexts including potential re-designation of Whitebelt lands required for urban uses to meet the Provincial Land Needs Assessment Methodology
- Continuity of the agricultural system across municipal boundaries

Recommendations are summarized in Table 1 and shown on Attachment 2. The proposed mapping will also be available for viewing on York.ca/HaveYourSay.

Table 1
Refinement Study Areas Considered for Re-designation

| Study Area (see Attachment 2) | Preliminary Recommendation | Municipality |
|--|--|---|
| 4, 17, 24 and 31 | No new Agricultural designation in areas currently identified as Whitebelt | Georgina, Whitchurch-Stouffville, Vaughan |
| 1, 11 and 16 | Scoped portion of area identified for re-designation to Agriculture | Georgina, East Gwillimbury, Whitchurch-Stouffville |
| 35 | Local Municipal request to include Candidate lands | King |
| 2, 3, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 21, 27, 39 and 41 | Re-designation to Agriculture | East Gwillimbury, Georgina, King, Richmond Hill, Whitchurch-Stouffville |

Local Agricultural and Rural Lands within Regionally identified Towns and Villages where servicing capacity does not exist will be further reviewed in consultation with local municipalities

In some limited instances, there are lands designated as agriculture or rural in local municipal official plans that are identified as Town and Villages in the ROP. These communities include Sutton, Pefferlaw and Nobleton with unserviced areas identified in Attachment 2. Further consultation is required to determine an appropriate designation and/or means of identifying these lands in the ROP in the event they are not forecasted to accommodate growth to 2051 given their limited opportunity to be serviced and/or developed.

Specialty crop areas are essential for food-related agriculture

Specialty crop areas play an important role in growing food-related agricultural crops and should be protected to support York Region's Agriculture and Agri-food sector. The proposed policy directions discourage the use of lands in the Holland Marsh specialty crop area for uses that do not require its muck soils for food production, including the growing of cannabis and other non-food related crops. With finite muck soils, a unique soil type found in the Holland Marsh, the protection of this area for food sources that utilize muck soils is important to support this agricultural sector.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The Municipal Comprehensive Review recognizes diversity and inclusion as a core principle to updating the Regional Official Plan

Council has continued to demonstrate a commitment for creating communities that are welcoming and inclusive, places where diverse communities can live with respect and dignity. Inclusive communities is a core principle of planning for complete communities. Planning for complete communities support people of all ages, stages and abilities to live, work, play and thrive in their communities, an integral part for the long-term success of York Region.

Provincial policy has maintained that municipalities must approach managing growth in a manner that recognizes the diversity of communities, while working to improve accessibility and reduce land use barriers for full participation in society by all residents. To build on this direction and continue to create strong, caring and safe communities, it is proposed that inclusion be highlighted as a core principle of planning for communities in York Region. This will be expanded upon in the updated ROP by identifying diversity and inclusion as a key component to interpreting and implementing ROP policies, engaging communities in planning related matters and in planning for communities.

Public consultation focused on policy directions presented to Council in the [December Policy Directions Report](#) and outlined in this report will continue into Spring 2021. As previously outlined in the October 2019 report [An Update on Public Consultations for the Municipal](#)

[Comprehensive Review](#), targeted consultations of under-represented communities through traditional engagement methods and focused engagement with Indigenous Communities is underway. New methods for engaging under-represented communities will continue to be explored to promote inclusive and representative engagement through the MCR process.

MAPPING UPDATES

Updated mapping will support readers to understand the Regional Official Plan in a visually accessible manner

Mapping is important for implementation of the policies of the Official Plan. It also supports visualization of the Regional structure and key themes of the ROP. Updates to Provincial plans require new mapping including delineation of built up areas and mapping of greenfield areas, settlement areas, major transit station areas (MTSAs) and employment areas. In addition to the Agricultural mapping, Provincial policy direction requires updates to natural heritage and water resource system mapping. Proposed directions for mapping include general updates, adding new mapping to meet Provincial conformity and simplify content. To simplify the presentation of mapping in the updated ROP, an assessment of mapping options and formats will be undertaken to avoid duplication and provide easier interpretation through accessible and easy to view formats. Additional analysis on mapping directions, including information on how mapping updates will support regional designations and refinements at the local municipal level, will be provided in subsequent reporting to Council.

5. Financial

To support the amount of 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 is required. Implications are explored in the separate forecast and land budget report. Developing policies which manage growth in a fiscally sustainable way, including aligning growth with investment in infrastructure, is of paramount importance to maintain the long-term fiscal health of York Region.

6. Local Impact

Local municipalities are key partners in updating and implementing the ROP, particularly as local staff provide expertise and experiential knowledge from implementing ROP policies in their local municipal contexts. Regional and local municipal staff work closely throughout the MCR process through regularly scheduled local municipal working group sessions where there is an opportunity for ongoing input and feedback into the policy review and development process. Local staff have been engaged on the topic areas presented in this report and Regional staff will continue to work with local municipal staff throughout the MCR process. Local municipal staff input has informed the proposed agricultural refinements

outlined in Attachment 2. These and previous policy directions are informing the policy development process. Local municipal staff have planning knowledge of their local municipal context which will help inform draft policies to be presented to Council in Fall 2021.

7. Conclusion

To meet Provincial conformity requirements set through Provincial planning documents, ROP policies and mapping updates are required. This is the second omnibus report summarizing preliminary policy directions, further described through Attachment 1, which will be the basis for continued consultation as work continues on development of a draft ROP. The policy directions in this report support effective land use planning across the Region's local municipalities. Continued reporting to Council on policy directions, culminating in a draft ROP, will guide efficient growth and development across York Region.

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.

Recommended by:



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Approved for Submission:



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Chief Administrative Officer

March 5, 2021
Attachments (2)
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