



*land use planning
&
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March 17, 2021

Chair Wayne Emmerson and Members of Council

Region of York

17250 Yonge Street

Newmarket, Ontario

Dear Chair Emmerson and Members of Council:

Re: Item F.2 York Region Special Council Meeting – March 18, 2021

REGIONAL OFFICIAL PLAN UPDATE – POLICY DIRECTIONS REPORT

**AND SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO THE POSITION OF LSLA REGARDING ITS
REQUEST FOR CONSIDERATION OF THE ASSESSMENT OF PROTECTED
COUNTRYSIDE FOR REDESIGNATION TO SETTLEMENT AREA IN THE GORMLEY
GO STATION AND HWY.404 CORRIDOR**

Further to my earlier correspondence and deputations in January 2021 related to the January 14, 2021 Committee of the Whole Meeting and the Council Meeting of January 28, 2021, I am again requesting that Regional Council direct staff to:

- 1) carry out a review of parts of the COUNTRYSIDE AREA designated lands for consideration of redesignation to SETTLEMENT AREA from the City of Richmond Hill and the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville and;
- 2) for Regional Staff to engage with landowner/stakeholders including farmers and members of the community in the affected area for input to the MCR process.

Once again, I am disappointed to see that the Regional Official Plan Update - Policy Directions Report before you today for consideration does not address this matter. The Agricultural and Agri Food Sector Strategy Report from 2017 is now out of date with respect to this geographical area of the Region and at the time it was prepared it combined the areas of Aurora and Richmond Hill, which together only represented 3% of the Region's cropland. Now, at least 5 years later from the time that information was

obtained, I expect the cropland area has been even further reduced and the Richmond Hill component is less as a result of the further urbanization in the area.

The broad findings and recommendations from the 2017 study are not relevant to the more specific issues affecting this area of Richmond Hill. All the policies and the direction proposed is intended to protect and maintain a viable agricultural economy. There is no direction or recommendations to address areas where agriculture is no longer viable or no longer exists. There are no policies or direction to evaluate this possibility or potential over the long term yet the MCR policies are to provide direction and land use policy to 2051.

This area contains two GO Stations (Bloomington and Gormley) and mainly non-farming uses, and the remaining agricultural related activities have become less economically feasible to maintain for reasons we have detailed previously. The direction that Regional staff continues to promote in the Policy Directions Report for, the Agriculture theme area, is a “one size fits all” package of policies that continues to ignore the differences between areas that are no longer viable as ongoing farming, and legitimate agricultural lands and rural farming community areas that have not been directly affected by encroaching and surrounding urban development.

Figure 52 in the study, re Age of Farm Operators, has not been given significant importance. The average age of farm operators is increasing each year. The number of retirement age farm operators over 55 years of age in 2016 was already well over 90% while those under 35 years of age was only 6%. At this rate there will be no farm operators left to farm the land and no exit strategy for those who are retiring.

As I noted in my earlier presentations to you, I believe that the COUNTRYSIDE land use designation is no longer appropriate for this area of Richmond Hill and Whitchurch-Stouffville. This specifically results from the demise of farming and the agricultural community coupled with the expansion of transit and the urban development surrounding this area which has impacted on the ability to maintain a rural character and the continued viable farming community.

At this time, we are asking that the matter be studied as part of the long-term planning process (2051) for this geographical part of the Regional Official Plan. This is an appropriate request as part of a Municipal Comprehensive Review and is currently being undertaken as part of the City of Richmond Hill City Plan 2041 (Municipal Comprehensive Review).

The continuation of the existing rural policies for these lands is no longer appropriate for an area that has been impacted by urbanization and is becoming surrounded by urban development. Now is the time, through the Regional Plan Comprehensive Municipal

Review process, to study this issue and reassess the area to look ahead with policies for the future since the new Regional Official Plan is supposed to plan for 2051.

PLEASE ADD A RECOMMENDATION UNDER ITEM F.2 TO DIRECT STAFF TO PREPARE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PROTECTED COUNTRYSIDE AREA FOR POTENTIAL REDESIGNATION TO SETTLEMENT AREA IN THE GORMLEY GO STATION AND HWY.404 CORRIDOR

The study of this issue, as part of the Municipal Comprehensive Review, in no way undermines current Provincial policy and in fact is the specific direction that we have been given by the Province through our discussions with provincial representatives, as the appropriate manner in which to deal with the issue.

Please make sure that Regional Staff engage with landowner/stakeholders including farmers and members of the community from the affected area for input to the regional planning process. Thank you.

Yours truly,



Michael S. Manett, MCIP, RPP.

cc. LSLA
Paul Doner
Whitchurch-Stouffville