

# The Regional Municipality of York

Regional Council  
Planning and Economic Development  
March 18, 2021

Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner

## Proposed 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment

### 1. Recommendations

1. Council direct staff to consult on the proposed forecast and land needs assessment as outlined in this report and attachments, including preliminary urban expansion mapping in Attachment 4, as part of the Municipal Comprehensive Review.
2. To support the highest share of growth in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area to 2051, Council continue to advocate to senior levels of government for funding for the Yonge North Subway Extension and to expand the Region's Bus Rapid Transit and enhance Regional GO rail systems to support transit integrated communities.
3. Following consultation on this report, staff report back on phasing policies necessary to manage growth over the 2051 planning horizon as part of the draft Regional Official Plan.
4. 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

A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan) sets out population and employment forecasts and requires municipalities plan to achieve these forecasts by 2051. Part of this work includes determining if a settlement area boundary expansion is required to accommodate forecast growth. This report along with attachments 1 to 5 present land needs to 2051 as a result of completing the mandated provincial land needs assessment. Proposed population and employment forecasts by local municipality are presented for consultation as part of the Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR). This report is a summary of the content contained in Attachment 1 and provides an overview of the inputs, assumptions, and results of the provincial land needs assessment and distribution of population and employment to local municipalities.

Key Points:

- The Growth Plan directs York Region to support and plan for the highest share of growth in the GTHA

- Provincial Land Needs Assessment results in a need for 3,400 hectares of urban expansion, or 80% of the remaining Whitebelt, to accommodate growth to 2051
- Urban expansion needs are distributed by local municipality in line with Growth Plan criteria, Regional Official Plan policies, and an assessment of costs, risks, and opportunities in each geographic area
- Uncertainty regarding Provincial approval of the Upper York Water Reclamation Centre and timing of its phased implementation are key considerations when distributing growth
- Phasing infrastructure and development will be key to mitigate growth-related risks
- Given the history of significant growth directed to York Region by the Province, all Whitebelt lands will eventually be required at some point in time beyond the 2051 planning horizon and identifying the remaining Whitebelt as Future Urban is a consideration
- Consultation on the proposed forecast and land needs assessment will continue in Q2 and early Q3 in advance of a draft Regional Official Plan anticipated for Fall 2021

### **3. Background**

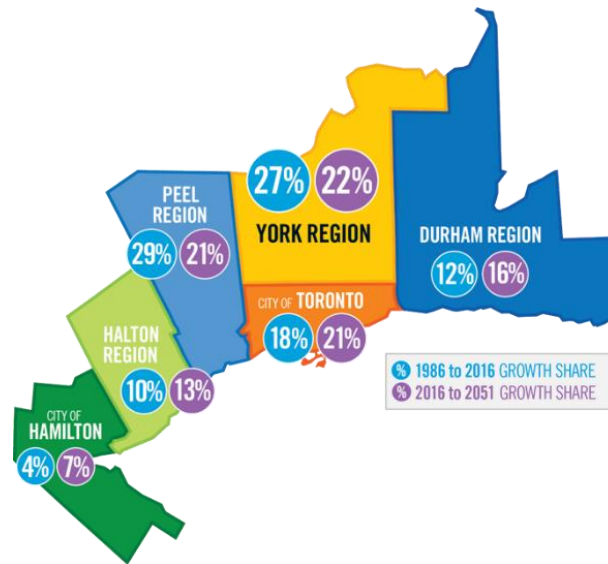
#### **York Region has a history of supporting and attracting significant growth**

Planning for and managing growth is a complex process taking into consideration Provincial growth targets, planning policy, socio-economic and demographic factors, market trends, as well as financial and servicing factors. Integrated land use, infrastructure, and financial planning has been undertaken in the Region since the 1994 Official Plan. Since then, several updates to the Regional Official Plan, regional forecasts, infrastructure Master Plans, and Development Charges by-laws have taken place. To ensure York Region continues to support and attract growth, Regional Council has invested more than \$4.8 billion in water and wastewater infrastructure and over \$2.8 billion in transportation, transit and rapid transit infrastructure, over the past 15 years.

#### **The Provincial Growth Plan forecasts a population of 2.02 million and 990,000 jobs for York Region by 2051**

The Growth Plan provides long-term direction to municipalities to plan for and manage growth, including where and how to grow, and includes population and employment forecasts upper- and single-tier municipalities must plan for. York Region is forecast to grow to a population of 2.02 million and 990,000 jobs by 2051. This represents growth of approximately 800,000 people and 345,000 jobs between 2021 and 2051. As shown in Figure 1, York Region is forecast to attract the highest share of growth of any Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) municipality by 2051, accounting for 22% of GTHA population growth. The Region is also forecast to accommodate 25% of employment growth.

**Figure 1**  
**Distribution of Historical and Forecast Growth by GTHA Municipality**



Given the magnitude of assigned growth, the MCR requires the Region to assess the distribution and trajectory of growth to ensure it proceeds in a financially sustainable manner. The current MCR has had greater emphasis on a collaborative and iterative approach to population and employment distribution wherein infrastructure capacity and timing considerations play a more prominent role in distributing provincial growth forecasts to local municipalities. The 2019 [Growth and Infrastructure Alignment](#) report provides a series of principles focused on a more integrated approach to growth management.

Municipalities, including York Region, are required to use provincial forecasts and other policies in the Growth Plan predicated on building complete communities that are well integrated with infrastructure investment as the basis for land use planning and managing growth. Updating Regional forecasts to conform to the Growth Plan and distributing that growth to local municipalities are key components of the MCR.

**Mandated Provincial Land Needs Assessment methodology determines the amount of land required to accommodate growth to 2051**

Municipalities are required to use the provincial Land Needs Assessment methodology to determine land needs to 2051. The methodology defines components, such as achieving the Growth Plan minimum intensification target, that must be assessed when determining the quantity of land needed to accommodate forecasted growth, including the need for any urban expansion. The land needs assessment methodology does not determine the location of these lands, rather this is informed by criteria in the Growth Plan and policies in the Regional Official Plan.

In addition to the Growth Plan, the Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, and Lake Simcoe Protection Plan provide direction on where and how municipalities can and cannot grow. The Region’s land needs assessment must conform with this provincial direction.

## **York Region has received 71 site-specific requests for urban expansion as well as requests from some municipalities**

Since the MCR began in 2014, prior to having to pause the process for significant Provincial policy updates, 71 written submissions have been received from landowners and consultants requesting re-designation of agricultural and rural land to allow for urban development. The Region has also received a Council resolution from the Town of East Gwillimbury requesting that the entirety of the Town's Whitebelt lands be re-designated for urban uses as well as requests from the City of Richmond Hill and the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville to re-designate areas of the protected countryside of the Greenbelt. In addition, the Township of King provided comments to the Province regarding the re-designation of the protected countryside of the Greenbelt. A map of all requests for urban expansion received through the MCR is found in Attachment 2.

## **York Region's forecast and land needs assessment is informed by several Municipal Comprehensive Review reports**

Provincial plans and the land needs assessment are implemented by the Region through a MCR and Regional Official Plan update. Between 2019 and 2021, a series of background reports were presented to Council addressing Employment Area Conversions, Planning for Intensification, Planning for Employment, Housing Opportunities and Challenges, Major Transit Station Areas, Planning for Density in New Communities, Natural Systems Planning, Planning for Agriculture, Aligning Growth and Infrastructure and Climate Change. Based on the foundational direction from Provincial Plans, these reports have informed the proposed forecast and land needs assessment presented in this report.

## **4. Analysis**

### **Land needs assessment incorporates Growth Plan targets, policy objectives, and market demand**

As outlined by the land needs assessment methodology, components municipalities must consider when planning for growth include market demand, Growth Plan policy targets for intensification and greenfield density, accommodating all employment types, determining community and employment land needs based on a demand-supply analysis, and planning for infrastructure needed to build complete communities to 2051.

To help inform the land needs assessment, Watson and Associates Economists Limited (Watson) was retained to undertake a detailed assessment of the Region's housing market. With input from Watson, the forecasts are informed by historical market trends as well as recent building permit activity, active development applications, socio-economic and demographic trends, as well as the demand for both rental and ownership housing. A critical consideration in defining the future market demand also includes housing affordability.

## Inputs and assumptions used in the Community Land Needs Assessment have been reviewed and supported by Watson Consulting

Community lands account for a significant share of the Region’s settlement areas and are where the majority of residential, personal services, retail, cultural, recreational, and human services uses are located. The forecast for community lands is predicated on policy targets in the Growth Plan. Population growth of approximately 800,000 people between 2021 and 2051 is translated to growth of approximately 276,000 units. This unit growth is allocated to the Region’s geographic land use categories, as outlined and defined in Attachment 1. The Growth Plan 50% intensification target determines units directed to the built-up area, a small amount of growth is assumed in the rural area, and the remaining growth is assigned to the designated greenfield area (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Housing Unit Forecast by Land Use Category (2021 – 2051)**

Land Use Category	Housing Growth	Growth Share
Built-up area	138,000	50%
Designated greenfield area	137,000	49%
Rural area	1,000	<1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>276,000</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: York Region Planning and Economic Development Branch

Watson's Housing Foundational Analysis Report (Executive Summary in Attachment 3) was an input to the Region's structure type forecast to determine 2051 community land needs in the land needs assessment. As outlined in their report, Watson provided a review of the Region’s preliminary forecast to 2051 and commentary on the key assumptions. Watson has concluded that the Region’s structure type forecast and associated 50% intensification target and designated greenfield area density assumptions:

- Recognize the long-term population forecast for the GTHA is aspirational and therefore appropriately supports York Region not exceeding the long term 2051 population forecast of 2.02 million
- Reflect recent and anticipated shifts in residential building activity in York Region from low-density dwellings toward medium and high-density housing forms
- Recognize that the aging population is likely to drive demand for a significant share of affordable higher-density rental and ownership housing
- Appropriately consider the need to expand the supply of affordable home ownership options in medium-density housing, particularly entry-level townhouse products geared to low- and middle-income households

## **Growth Plan 50% intensification target supports Council's infrastructure investment and is consistent with the York Region market**

A fundamental metric informing community land needs is the Growth Plan minimum 50% Region-wide intensification target which York Region must plan to achieve. In addition to being a requirement of the Growth Plan, past direction from Regional Council provides support to plan for the Growth Plan's minimum intensification target. Planning for 50% intensification also supports Council's priorities when managing and planning for growth in the Region's centres and corridors by supporting investments in infrastructure, by offering a mix and range of affordable housing options in compact transit supportive communities, and by supporting market demand. The target further supports and builds on the Region's economic development success by advancing the Region's city building objectives and by helping attract new businesses and jobs for residents.

Planning for half the Region's growth in the existing built-up area demonstrates a continued commitment by the Region to intensification. Not only does it support past infrastructure investments, but it substantiates investments that will continue to be required to support growth to 2051. Being the only municipality in the Greater Toronto Area outside of Toronto with access to an existing and future subway and with over \$3.2 billion having been invested in rapid transit infrastructure by all three levels of government over the past 15 years, York Region is well-positioned to achieve this target. Planning for 50% intensification positions the Region for a better return on this investment through development charges. A significant share of growth in intensification areas demonstrates to senior levels of government that York Region is invested in and committed to city building and sustainable transit-oriented development.

York Region has significant potential to accommodate growth in the built-up area to meet or exceed the minimum 50% target. In planning for 78 Major Transit Station Areas, the Region has the potential to accommodate 505,000 people and 195,000 jobs or more in these locations. The planned growth potential for these areas significantly exceeds the forecast demand in the built-up area by 2051. Further, as of mid-2020, York Region had an estimated supply of 70,000 units under application in the built-up area. If built, these units would account for approximately 50% of the total forecast to 2051.

An intensification rate of 50% is consistent with what the market has been delivering on an average basis since 2006. Achieving 50% intensification over a sustained period to 2051 does require a significant shift in family households (couples with or without kids, lone-parent, multi-family households) into medium and high-density structure types. Planning for a 50% intensification target provides for a balanced mix of ground-related and higher-density housing options for York Region residents. Moving forward, staff will carefully monitor the intensification rate, greenfield supply, and phasing of new communities to ensure the pace of growth is consistent with Regional Official Plan objectives while maintaining the Region's financial sustainability.

## **Watson has identified 50% intensification is appropriate over the long term**

Based on analysis from Watson and Associates (Attachment 3), a 50% housing intensification target appropriately reflects recent development trends, active residential

development plans, and evolving longer-term demographic and socioeconomic trends within York Region. Watson notes that the Region could exceed a 50% intensification target in the near to medium-term based on the current supply of active development applications. Once servicing constraints in the designated greenfield area, particularly across northern York Region have been addressed, the likelihood of achieving greater than 50% over the long term is less certain. Watson, therefore, conclude that a 50% allocation of housing growth to the built-up area is appropriate.

Through their assessment of the Region’s forecast on housing affordability, Watson further identifies the appropriateness of the 50% intensification target in that it reflects a continued shift from low to medium- and high-density structure types across the GTHA. This shift, likely driven in part by growing affordability challenges in low density structure types, will continue to drive demand for a more diverse range of medium- and high-density options in the Region’s built-up area. Planning for higher-density rental and ownership units, particularly in areas supported by transit and with access to amenities, will also help support the growing number of seniors anticipated over the forecast horizon.

### **Distribution of employment growth by type reflects the changing nature of employment**

The outlook for employment by type in the Region incorporates a range of anticipated economic and workplace changes over the coming decades. Future trends are discussed in the Region’s 2019 [Planning for Employment background report](#). Considerations in the forecast to 2051 included an assessment of York Region’s historical and future growth shares by employment type within the GTHA market, as well as estimates of employment growth by sector based on varying degrees of economic shifts and levels of automation. Employment growth will be driven by continued shifts toward knowledge-based jobs, growth in eCommerce, and increases in work from home employment. Attachment 1 provides more detail on assumptions used to generate York Region’s employment forecast by type. The forecast employment by type results in the following distribution:

**Table 2**  
**Employment Forecast by Type (2021 – 2051)**

Employment Type	Job Growth	Growth Share
Major Office	92,000	26%
Employment Area	128,000	37%
Population Related	124,000	36%
Rural	1,500	<1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>345,500</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: York Region Planning and Economic Development Branch

## **Provincial Land Needs Assessment has determined a need for 3,400 hectares of urban expansion**

The key determinant for community and employment urban expansion needs is a demand supply analysis. A more detailed explanation of how urban expansion needs are determined is presented in Sections 4-6 of Attachment 1. A new component of the provincial methodology is for municipalities to consider additional lands beyond what is required by the demand-supply analysis in the form of a contingency. The intent is to account for long term vacancy and/or lands not being developed as planned over the 30-year horizon.

For community lands, the forecast demand in the designated greenfield area (greenfield areas as shown in Attachment 1) is compared with the potential for development (supply) by 2051 within existing designated greenfield areas. Designated greenfield area supply is determined based on active development applications, secondary plans for vacant lands with no application, and an estimate for apartment growth in those areas. Compared to the demand of 137,000 units in Table 1, the Region's designated greenfield area has an estimated supply potential of approximately 101,000 new units by 2051. Consistent with what the market is delivering as outlined in the [June 2020](#) Planning for Densities in New Communities report, a density of 60 people and jobs or 17 units per hectare was used to translate urban expansion needs from units to land area.

On the employment side, the determinant of an urban boundary expansion is a demand supply analysis in employment land areas. Employment area supply is informed by Council endorsed boundaries from [October 2020](#) as a result of Council's decisions on employment land conversion requests. Density assumptions on vacant lands and an estimate for employment growth within existing space then informed the potential for growth in approved employment areas. Compared to employment area demand of 128,000 jobs in Table 2, the Region's employment areas have capacity for approximately 90,000 new jobs.

Table 3 identifies the urban expansion lands needs resulting from applying the provincial land needs methodology.

**Table 3**  
**Community and Employment Urban Expansion Land Needs to 2051**

<b>Geography</b>	<b>Land Need (Hectares)</b>
Community Land	2,300
Employment Land	1,100
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,400</b>

Source: York Region Planning and Economic Development Branch



## **Timing and delivery of infrastructure are key considerations informing both the pace and distribution of growth to 2051**

Availability and timing of delivery of Regional infrastructure plays an important role informing the pace and distribution of growth to 2051, particularly in the short and medium term. As a result of significant investments made by Council over the last two decades, the Region can service population growth of approximately 223,000 people (or approximately 75,000 units) with infrastructure already in place. Capacity for growth exists in all nine local municipalities, within Centres and Corridors, as well as a number of greenfield communities throughout the Region.

Planning to accommodate growth of approximately 800,000 people and 345,000 jobs over a 30-year planning horizon requires significant investment in new infrastructure. Major infrastructure projects required to accommodate growth to 2051 include upgrades to the York Durham Sewage System conveyance and pumping stations, the initial construction and future expansion of the Upper York Water Reclamation Centre, northeast and west Vaughan water and wastewater upgrades, as well as the Yonge north subway extension.

The preliminary timing of these new large-scale projects has informed assumptions on the pace of growth to 2051. For example, projected timing for the Upper York Water Reclamation Centre, northeast and northwest Vaughan projects, and the Yonge North Subway Extension informed an anticipated increase in the pace of growth overall as well as in the affected municipalities over the next decade and beyond.

## **Upgrades to the Region's transportation and transit network are essential to accommodate planned growth**

In addition to the Yonge North subway extension, a \$5.6 billion investment scheduled to be operational by 2030, significant investments in roads, transit, and rapid transit is required to accommodate the provincial growth forecast for the Region. Based on a cursory analysis of growth to 2051, extensions to existing Highway 7 and Yonge Street Rapid Transit corridors as well as new Bus Rapid Transit infrastructure on Jane Street, Major Mackenzie Drive, and Leslie Street have been identified to serve the needs of both existing and future York Region residents. All of these bus rapid transit projects are currently unfunded and together translate to an estimated \$5.4 billion in new transit infrastructure. Assuming, on a preliminary basis, an estimated Regional contribution of 27% (based on Yonge Subway extension and existing Public Transit Infrastructure Fund agreements in Ontario), approximately \$1.4 billion of this cost is likely to be incurred by the Region.

Timing and delivery of these projects will be important to achieve the Region's 50% intensification target and to provide further opportunities for job growth and talent attraction in the Region. Particularly with the millennial workforce, access to transit and other amenities are necessary to attracting and maintaining talent.

Funding from Senior levels of government will be essential to enhance the Region's Bus Rapid Transit system through the projects listed above. Further expansions and upgrades to the GO rail network will also be important to support intensification as well as growth in greenfield and urban expansion areas to support transit integrated communities.

## **Planning for a designated greenfield area density target of 60 people and jobs per hectare reflects what the market is delivering and allows for more accurate infrastructure planning**

To forecast growth in the Region's urban expansion areas, the designated greenfield area density has implications on infrastructure timing and delivery, determining pipe size, planning for new roads and road improvements, and estimating future transit ridership. It also has impacts on how the Region calculates development charge rates and estimating development charge revenue and tax levy growth. If planned growth and densities do not match market realities, development charge rates may not achieve effective cost recovery. For these reasons, it is important to be as accurate as possible about densities and associated growth anticipated in urban expansion areas. As illustrated in the June 2020 [Planning for Density in New Communities](#) report, recently built communities in the Region's designated greenfield area are achieving an average of 62 people and jobs per hectare. Since the York Region market is delivering over 60 people and jobs per hectare in existing greenfield areas, assuming the minimum 50 density in the Growth Plan would not support infrastructure or financial planning compared to the market reality.

## **Opportunities, costs, and potential risks influence the location of urban expansion**

Over the long term, all the Region's Whitebelt lands will be needed to accommodate growth. Applying the Provincial land needs assessment methodology to the Region's Growth Plan forecast has determined that approximately 80% of Whitebelt lands are needed for anticipated growth to 2051. Available Whitebelt lands are shown in Attachment 1 and consist of three distinct geographies in southeast, southwest, and northern York Region. In consultation with local municipal staff, these lands were classified into potential community and employment areas based on their connectivity to existing community/employment areas and prioritizing lands adjacent to or near existing or provincially planned 400 series highways for employment purposes.

Considerations impacting the geographic distribution of urban expansion are discussed in detail in Section 6 of Attachment 1. Satisfying Growth Plan criteria, ensuring logical planning boundaries, building complete communities that provide for live and work opportunities, delivering fiscally sustainable infrastructure, and supporting the Regional structure are important considerations. A preliminary assessment of the costs, risks, and opportunities associated with each available geography is summarized below:

- Regional water, wastewater, and transportation infrastructure costs per capita (at full buildout) of Whitebelt lands are lowest in the southeast (\$4,600), higher in the southwest (\$6,900), and highest in northern York Region (\$7,600)
- Growth in the southeast capitalizes on downstream water and wastewater infrastructure the Region has invested in over the last 10 years as well as access to the expanded Highway 404 and planned GO expansion.
- Growth in the southwest also leverages the downstream water and wastewater infrastructure investment over the last 10 years. It also includes significant job growth

potential which builds on existing strengths in transportation/logistics along Highway 427 and the future GTA west corridor as well as recent GO rail expansion. That said, the timing of both residential and job growth in this location may be contingent on the timing of the GTA west corridor by the Province.

- Growth in northern York Region may provide more affordable housing options than southern York Region, particularly for specific market segments such as young families and seniors. There is uncertainty surrounding the timing of the delivery of the Upper York Water Reclamation Centre as the Region awaits approvals from the Province, and phased implementation of the Water Reclamation Centre is required to address full buildout of the remaining Whitebelt lands. Currently it is estimated that the Water Reclamation Centre would be in place by early 2028 (contingent on receiving approval no later than 2021) and an expansion would be required by the early 2040s, subject to a future Class Environmental Assessment.
- Lands in north and central East Gwillimbury and in southeast York Region were identified as most suitable for agriculture
- North York Region is located within the Lake Simcoe watershed. Since 2009, through the release of the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, the Province has been committed to protecting the ecological health and natural heritage of the watershed. Additional protection and mitigation measures are required in this portion of the Region.

Based on this analysis, the proposed distribution of urban expansion is shown in Table 4. Detailed mapping is provided in Attachment 4. Site-specific requests for urban expansion were also considered - the results of which are presented in Attachment 2.

**Table 4**  
**Proposed Urban Expansion by Municipality to 2051 (Hectares)**

Municipality	Available Whitebelt	Proposed Urban Expansion	Community Land	Employment Land
East Gwillimbury	960	245	180	65
King	80	80	70	10
Markham	1,490	1,490	1,270	220
Vaughan	1,210	1,210	500	710
Whitchurch Stouffville	375	375	280	95
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,115</b>	<b>3,400</b>	<b>2,300</b>	<b>1,100</b>

Source: York Region Planning and Economic Development Branch

## **Location of urban expansion lands to meet the 2051 forecast are proposed in a way that minimizes potential risks to the Region**

The proposed distribution of urban expansion lands (Table 4) reflects Growth Plan and Regional Official Plan criteria, as well as the assessment of costs, risks, and opportunities in each potential whitebelt geography. The proposed distribution:

- Maximizes urban expansion in areas with higher certainty of timing of the provision of water and wastewater infrastructure
- Provides well-located future employment lands along Highway 427, the planned GTA West Corridor, Highway 404, and adjacent to the ROPA 3 employment lands in Markham
- Allows for the connection of the Green Lane Corridor, Sharon, and Holland Landing communities in East Gwillimbury
- Aligns the amount of growth in northern York Region with the ability to deliver the multi-phase infrastructure required to support it thereby reducing potential misalignment of development charges collections over the forecast period
- Supports ongoing agricultural uses to the extent possible given that lands in northern East Gwillimbury were identified as some of the most suitable remaining whitebelt lands for agricultural uses in the Region

## **Timing and uncertainty of servicing in northern York Region is a key factor informing the distribution of urban expansion land needs to 2051**

Growth in northern York Region is dependent on the Upper York Water Reclamation Centre. Conditional on timely provincial approvals, the Water Reclamation Centre is currently scheduled for completion in 2028 and will provide capacity for 90,000 people in East Gwillimbury and Northwest Newmarket while also freeing up capacity for growth in Newmarket and Aurora. The initial phase will service existing population as well as growth of approximately 45,000 people in East Gwillimbury's existing urban area but does not provide capacity for growth in the Town's Whitebelt lands.

An expansion of the Water Reclamation Centre is anticipated in the early 2040s and will provide capacity for growth of an additional 45,000 people in East Gwillimbury and Newmarket. The expansion is also required to provide wastewater capacity for some Whitebelt lands. A further expansion of the plant is likely to be required to achieve full buildout of the remaining Whitebelt lands in the Town. Timing of this expansion is not yet known but is likely to occur beyond 2051. The timing and uncertainty surrounding the initial stage of Upper York as well as future expansions present significant risks to the Region and have resulted in the proposed higher levels of Whitebelt growth in southern York Region where infrastructure is more certain and less costly to meet the amount of growth required by the Land Needs Assessment.

The proposed distribution of growth presented in Table 4 would not require the final expansion of the Upper York Water Reclamation Centre (likely beyond 2051), a project estimated at \$200 million. This distribution of growth also results in a more achievable growth

outlook for the Town of East Gwillimbury with respect to annual population growth and therefore allows the Region to plan for a more accurate recovery of development charges collections both within the 2051 horizon and beyond.

### **Growth is contemplated only where permitted by Provincial Plans and in locations with existing or planned water-wastewater capacity**

Requests have been received from the City of Richmond Hill, Township of King, and Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville requesting consideration of site-specific employment uses in the Protected Countryside of the Greenbelt. York Region's [Potential for Employment Lands along 400 Series Highways](#) report from October 2020 provides further information on these requests. As discussed in a [January 2021](#) memo, Provincial policy in the Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conversation Plan prohibits expanding settlement areas into the Protected Countryside of the Greenbelt. As such, these requests were not considered as part of the MCR. Further, the application of the Provincial Land Needs Assessment concludes that the Region can meet its employment land needs with existing urban lands and a portion of Whitebelt lands.

Population and employment growth beyond the existing and planned infrastructure capacity in Nobleton and Mount Albert have also not been considered. Preliminary estimates indicate that expanding the water and wastewater capacity in Nobleton beyond the 10,800 people currently contemplated in an ongoing Environmental Assessment would be cost prohibitive, requiring an infrastructure investment in the range of \$100 to \$200 million. This would not be financially sustainable given the amount of additional growth that could be realized. In addition, at the time of writing this report, discussions were ongoing between landowners, Town of East Gwillimbury staff, and York Region staff regarding the potential to expand the servicing capacity in Mount Albert from 6,000 to 8,000 population. However, because no agreement has been reached with respect to whether such an expansion would be feasible, the current servicing capacity of 6,000 has been maintained for the purposes of the proposed forecast.

### **Forecasts to 2051 for each local municipality reflect recent growth trends, Land Need Assessment urban expansion needs, vacant greenfield areas, and market demand for intensification**

Proposed 2051 population and employment forecasts for the nine local municipalities are shown in Table 5. Details on the method and background information used to prepare the forecasts is included in Section 8 of Attachment 1. The forecasts are the product of a number of assumptions based on recent demographic, market, and economic trends, housing and employment land supply, market demand for intensification, as well as regional and local policy. Regional staff have consulted with local municipal staff in preparation of the proposed forecasts and incorporated changes based on their feedback.

**Table 5**  
**2051 Population and Employment Forecasts by Local Municipality**

Municipality	2051 Population	2051 Employment
Aurora	84,900	41,000
East Gwillimbury	105,100	37,400
Georgina	71,900	21,900
King	49,600	16,400
Markham	619,200	309,200
Newmarket	110,700	57,600
Richmond Hill	317,000	122,600
Vaughan	568,700	352,000
Whitchurch Stouffville	92,900	31,900
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,020,000</b>	<b>990,000</b>

Source: York Region Planning and Economic Development Branch

The forecast update also includes proposed local municipal intensification targets, designated greenfield area density targets, and employment area density targets to 2051. These are found in Section 9 of Attachment 1. Through official plan updates, local municipalities are to plan to achieve these targets which are minimums. The Region’s forecast distributes intensification across the nine local municipalities based on reasonable assumptions however the market will ultimately determine actual growth. Local municipalities should plan for intensification areas recognizing existing and planned investments in transit.

**Addressing gaps in housing affordability through ownership and rental options will be important to meet the 2051 forecast**

As noted by Watson, shifting demographics and housing affordability continue to result in a greater proportion of growth occurring in GTHA Regions such as Durham and Peel and in municipalities outside of the GTHA such as Simcoe and Dufferin because of their ability to offer more affordable housing options. Watson has indicated that despite an anticipated shift in housing mix to medium and higher density forms of housing over the 2051 forecast horizon, housing affordability will continue to challenge the growth rate in York Region and could impact the Region’s ability to achieve its 2051 forecast.

Despite identifying that a structure type mix shifting toward medium- and high-density structure types appropriately considers shifting demographic and affordability trends – particularly for young families and seniors, Watson identified a need for the Region to

increase its supply of medium-density housing, primarily entry-level townhouse products geared to low- and middle-income households. They also identified a significant need for rental housing over the 30-year horizon (close to 90,000 units) reinforcing the need for a comprehensive multi-stakeholder approach to increase the range and mix of affordable housing options. This builds on material presented to Council in [January 2020](#) and will continue following the MCR.

Affordability challenges and the need for significant increases in rental supply, infrastructure uncertainties that continue to exist in northern York Region, and recent slower than forecast growth rates highlight the importance of prudent growth management to mitigate potential impacts of slower than anticipated growth.

### **Integrated growth management is necessary to mitigate growth-related risk**

Planning for growth to 2.02 million people and 990,000 jobs over a 30-year planning horizon will require integrated and agile growth management. Achieving provincial forecasts requires average annual growth of 26,100 people per year. As shown in Table 6, this figure exceeds short term historical average annual growth (2010-2020) in York Region and is slightly above longer-term averages over the past 35 years.

**Table 6**  
**Forecast vs Historical Average Annual Population Growth**

Historical Short Term (2010-2020)	Historical Long Term (1986-2020)	2051 Forecast
16,500	24,900	26,100

Source: York Region Planning and Economic Development Branch

The Region’s fiscal capacity is strongly tied to the pace of growth. As a result, there are a number of financial risks associated with planning for growth and paying for required infrastructure. Slower than anticipated growth could have the following impacts:

- Slower than anticipated cost recovery through development charges to pay down outstanding development charges debt and reduction in the amount of development charges revenue available to fund new infrastructure – for example a sustained 10% reduction in collections over ten years versus the forecast could require capital deferral of up to \$300 million
- Increased costs for operating infrastructure put in place too early to operate efficiently
- Tax levy or rate increases for existing residents and businesses to support ongoing operation and maintain service levels
- Reduction in contributions toward asset management reserves and insufficient funds for the Region’s future capital replacement and rehabilitation

## **Phasing of urban expansion and agile growth management will help maintain financial sustainability**

Integrated growth management requires a phased and agile approach to growth. This involves regularly re-aligning Regional plans, programs, and processes with the Region's fiscal reality. Through MCRs every 5 to 10 years between now and 2051, Master Plan updates, and annual Capital Plan and budget reviews, there are opportunities to re-calibrate Regional plans and strategies with actual growth and development charges collections. Aligning capital spending with population thresholds targeted to specific years in the Capital Plan and capitalizing on existing infrastructure can help maintain borrowing capacity. Giving special consideration to projects which may have a shorter payback period is another consideration.

Phasing is a tool to manage the timing and location of growth, particularly over the extensive 30-year planning horizon. Based on the distribution of growth to each municipality in Table 5, and assuming a 27% share of anticipated Regional rapid transit costs, an estimated \$11.6 billion in new infrastructure would be needed by 2051. This means growth cannot happen everywhere at once. Through a collaborative and iterative approach to land use planning in line with the timing and availability of infrastructure, the Region's forecasts incorporate a phased approach to growth. The Region's ability to adapt to the changing nature and pace of growth and further adjust and/or phase capital spending as necessary to maintain fiscal sustainability will be important.

## **Phasing strategies for urban expansion areas will be enhanced in the draft Regional Official Plan and co-ordinated with infrastructure Master Plans**

The amount of urban expansion and associated population and employment growth to 2051 is unprecedented. To achieve its 2051 forecasts, York Region will be required to accommodate over 130,000 people and 50,000 jobs in new whitebelt areas. This is in addition to growth of 115,000 and 35,000 jobs in the Region's 2031 new community areas that were brought into the urban boundary through the 2010 Regional Official Plan for which construction is just starting. Together, these growth areas consist of almost one third of the Region's total growth to 2051 with most of these areas being dependant on new infrastructure. Ensuring this growth materializes in a controlled and phased manner will be critical to deliver complete communities for new residents with timely provision of services such as schools, libraries, community centres, and other personal services, in addition to roads, transit, and pipe infrastructure. It will also be important to support a return on previous infrastructure investments in the Region's intensification areas.

To properly manage this amount of growth across diverse geographies of the Region will require strong phasing policies in both Regional and local municipal Official Plans. A more detailed approach for phasing policies will be outlined in a third policy directions report in late Q2 2021. Preliminary considerations for phasing policies include staging urban expansion areas based on the alignment of capital spending, achievement of population thresholds, prioritizing areas which have a higher level of certainty to maximize return on investment, and a requirement to provide a logical progression of development. Consideration may also



be given to tying the timing of growth in urban expansion areas to the sustained achievement of the Region's annual intensification target.

### **Identifying the remaining Whitebelt as Future Urban beyond 2051 is a consideration**

With the Provincial Land Needs Assessment requiring 80% of the Region's Whitebelt to accommodate growth to 2051, it may be appropriate to clarify that the remaining 20% of Whitebelt lands will likely be needed for future growth beyond 2051. Eighty percent to 2051 can be supplied by existing and planned infrastructure investments, and more closely matches the ability to recover growth-related costs through development charges in the future. This also acknowledges the final phase of the Upper York Water Reclamation Centre will likely be required and is expected to be post 2051. Identifying the remaining 20% of the Whitebelt lands as "Future Urban" beyond 2051 acknowledges the reality of the future long-term function of these lands.

### **It will be important for public agency partners to support growth to ensure complete communities**

Cooperation by other public agencies and the private sector will be necessary to achieve the 2051 forecast. The Province, local municipalities, the development industry, Metrolinx, conservation authorities, and the public are important stakeholders in supporting and managing growth. Fast-tracking critical infrastructure to support growth in the Region will require action by the Province. The overdue approval of the Upper York Water Reclamation Centre is necessary to unlock population growth potential in northern York Region and required to accommodate the assigned growth to 2051. Continued funding for planned Bus Rapid Transit and Yonge North Subway Extension projects are necessary to accommodate higher-density growth in the Region's urbanizing areas.

The development industry can play an important role in mitigating financial risks to the Region by entering into prepaid development charges credit agreements in advance of Regional infrastructure in exchange for a development charges credit at the time of registration/site plan approval. This is one example of risk sharing the Region will consider moving forward.

### **Consultation on the draft forecast and provincial land needs assessment results will occur in advance of the draft Regional Official Plan anticipated for Fall 2021**

This report presents preliminary urban expansion mapping (Attachment 4) and population and employment forecasts by local municipality as a result of the 2051 Growth Plan forecast and outcome of the Provincial Land Needs Assessment. Over the spring and summer months, York Region staff will be consulting with local municipalities, the public, development industry, and other stakeholders on the information presented in this report. More detail on consultation is provide in Attachment 5.

The Regional Official Plan update will continue over the coming months. Forecasts by local municipality and urban expansion mapping will be finalized and presented with the draft Regional Official Plan. Final forecasts are required to align infrastructure with forecast growth

through Water Wastewater and Transportation Master Plans and to inform an updated Development Charges By-law.

## **5. Financial**

Regional population and employment forecasts will be updated to conform to Provincial 2051 forecasts. The growth forecast will be used to inform the next update of the Regional development charges bylaw; the current bylaw is set to expire in mid-2022. The misalignment of growth forecasts with infrastructure delivery and the actual rate of growth could result in financial implications to the Region and local municipalities, including impacts to the development charges bylaw.

Work associated with updated population and employment forecasts is included within the approved Planning and Economic Development budget. Consulting services from Watson and Associates Economists Limited to perform a Foundational Housing Analysis are being utilized as part of the approved MCR work plan and budget.

## **6. Local Impact**

The Region's forecast and land needs assessment to 2051 have direct implications on local municipalities. As presented in Table 5, a key component of the MCR involves distributing updated population and employment forecasts to local municipalities. The results of the Provincial land needs assessment methodology identified a need for 3,400 hectares of urban expansion across five of the Region's nine local municipalities.

Local municipalities are key stakeholders in their forecast assignments and planning for future communities in growth areas. Local municipal staff are working alongside the Region to update local official plans to reflect the policies in the Regional Official Plan generated through the Regional MCR once approved. Under the Planning Act, local municipal official plans are required to be updated to conform to the Regional Official Plan within one year of it coming into effect. Detailed planning for urban expansion areas will be the responsibility of the local municipalities, in consultation with the Region. It remains important that the Region and local municipalities plan for these areas to be complete communities.

## **7. Conclusion**

Planning for and managing growth is a complex process that involves many considerations. Growth forecasts are developed and allocated to the Region's nine local municipalities based on the Provincial Growth Plan growth targets, planning policy, demographic factors, market trends, as well as financial and servicing factors. Results of the Provincial land needs assessment methodology identify a need for 2,300 hectares of community land and 1,100 hectares of employment land to accommodate growth to 2051. This equates to approximately 80% of the Region's Whitebelt lands.

Planning for this growth will require a more focused and financially sustainable approach to managing growth and infrastructure delivery. Further, staging and phasing of capital investments in line with actual rather than forecast growth will be necessary for a more agile and coordinated approach to achieving the Region's long-term vision of building strong, caring, safe complete communities in a financially sustainable manner.

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For more information on this report, please contact Paul Bottomley at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 71530. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.



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Attachments (5)  
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