

September 15, 2021

York Region Council
17250 Yonge St,
Newmarket, ON
L3Y 6Z1

Re: Reports F1, F2 Alternate 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment Scenarios

Dear Mayors and Regional Councillors,

The alternative forecast and land needs assessment scenarios before you today do not go far enough to address climate change, minimize municipal debt or make transit supportive, affordable communities viable. York Region Housing reports have clearly indicated there is more than enough land allocated for the next 10 years of growth. More intensification and strong phasing policies can help manage growth and limit the premature expansion of costly infrastructure.

In fact, York Region has enough designated housing supply for the next 20 years. York Region housing staff update provided on May 20, 2021 indicated a designated housing supply of 170,000 units enough to accommodate 20 years residential growth. Further, secondary plan approvals in 2010 provide 10+ years of ground related supply. There is no shortage of designated housing supply.

Young people and seniors need more affordable housing options in York Region as ground related housing is too expensive for the average income earner. There are many different ways to support growth and provide housing such as increasing intensification around urban transit stations and on Main street, and by increasing the amount of supportive housing built each year. The Region may want to bring in inclusionary zoning percentages of 30% to ensure more affordable housing is built.¹

Sprawling low density houses are not an affordable housing option but they do tend to increase land speculation, drive up taxes and municipal debt. Maintaining new growth within existing urban boundaries is a fiscally responsible and climate friendly way to manage future growth as fewer kilometers of very expensive infrastructure, pipes, transit and roads are needed.

¹ <https://thetyee.ca/Analysis/2021/06/09/Use-Zoning-To-Benefit-Those-Who-Need-It-Most/>

Past experience in York Region indicates a tendency to overestimate housing needs with the market population growth falling short of forecasts. By increasing the planning timeline from 20 years to 30 years the provincial Growth Plan may exacerbate growth shortfalls. In 2051, the baby boomer cohort will be moving on (leaving behind around 700,000 housing units in the GTHA, mainly single family homes) and it is difficult to determine immigration rates over the next 30 years.² A prudent approach may be to phase planning in 10 year increments to ensure the Region is not planning for growth that does not materialize. Extending infrastructure prematurely for growth that may not happen puts a financial burden on taxpayers and future Councils.

Additionally, supporting a compact growth scenario means less whitebelt prime farmland would be paved over. We are losing 175 acres of prime farmland to development in Ontario daily, an unsustainable amount. According to research, limiting sprawling growth also supports economic and environmental health as it reduces climate change impacts and supports alternative transportation options which are not only cleaner but more affordable.³ Supporting walkability and creating a more connected street network makes our cities more resilient.⁴

In the report before you, York Region planning staff note that many municipalities are ignoring the provincial greenfield and intensification targets choosing to go beyond. In Halton Region an overwhelming option chosen in public consultations was an 80% target.

As elected municipal leaders I urge you to manage threats affecting the health, wellbeing and prosperity of the Region of York by deferring this report and supporting staff in preparing higher density targets of 60%, 70% and 80% as alternative growth scenarios for Council's future consideration.

Sincerely,

Susan Lloyd Swail, MES Pl.
Nobleton, ON

cc. Paul Bottomley, Paul Freeman

² <https://ontarioplanners.ca/inspiring-knowledge/y-magazine/current-journal.aspx>, pg 19.

³ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/reducing-street-sprawl-could-help-combat-climate-change/>

⁴ <https://www.pnas.org/content/117/4/1941>

