

DEPUTATION REQUEST

REGIONAL COUNCIL

OCTOBER 21, 2021

Subject: Yellow Belts Warrant Higher Intensification Rate

Spokesperson: Cheryl Case

Name of Group or person(s) being represented (if applicable):

Brief summary of issue or purpose of deputation:

York Region's projected community land need is vastly exaggerated because it is premised on a vast underestimation of the capacity of existing BUAs to accommodate new single- and semi-detached homes. York Region's "Yellow Belt" neighborhoods have considerable untapped capacity for adding large numbers such houses through modest bylaw changes.. However, Watson's "Foundational Housing Analysis" largely or completely disregards this potential (and that of new garden homes), and assumes, incorrectly, that "minimal additional low-density housing supply opportunities will be available within the BUA once the current supply has been exhausted. Accordingly, this shortfall will need to be accounted for in the DGA." Community Land Need should be revised to factor out this foundational error.

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Attn: Regional Clerk
Paul Bottomley, Manager of Policy, etc., Planning and Economic Development

**Re: Item F.1 Alternate 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment Scenarios in
Response to Consultation
Special Council Meeting – October 21, 2021**

I am writing in relation to the York Region staff report Alternate 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment Scenarios in Response to Consultation. I am concerned that undercalculation of capacity to generate additional single and semi detached housing in already built up areas is resulting in Community Land Need findings that recommend a substantial Settlement Area Boundary expansion. It is my opinion that the legislation in the More Homes More Choice Act, 2019 and Growth Plan results in a vision where a significant supply of demand can be accommodated in existing “yellow belt” neighbourhoods.

What is the “Yellow Belt”

The term ‘yellow belt’, for these purposes, refers to neighbourhoods zoned and regulated, either directly or indirectly to limit the available housing type to be exclusively or predominantly single family detached housing. “Yellow belt” zones and regulations do so by making it infeasible to split lots as to create an additional single detached house on a lot, to convert a single detached house into a semi detached house, to construct a laneway or garden suit, or to develop townhouses, or “missing middle” options (such as walk-up apartments). The term ‘yellow belt’ was coined by Urban Planner Gil Meslin in 2016, who noted the common practice of municipalities designating these areas as yellow in their Official Plan land use planning maps.

This belt amounts to most residential areas in cities across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area prohibiting the development and availability of denser housing types. This has a direct and negative impact on young people, immigrants, racialized people, and women - demographic

groups who are less often able to afford larger single family home options. Increasing housing density in 'yellow belt' neighbourhoods also encourages a more ecological use of land, in alignment with direction from the Greenbelt, Ontario Growth Plan, and More Homes More Choice Act, 2019.

I see that there exists a great level of capacity to accommodate more projected growth in Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area 'yellow belt' neighbourhoods than has been described in previous Land Needs Assessment reports. Across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, yellow belt neighbourhoods are found in new and older neighbourhoods alike. While denser housing development is prohibited, these same lots are often approved for redevelopment into larger single family homes. While the conversion of bungalows into larger single family homes exacerbates the housing affordability and land crisis, conversion to increase the number of homes will help alleviate it. Each case of a bungalow converting into a larger single family home is a lost opportunity to create a more affordable housing option and to reduce the demand to build in protected greenbelt or farmland areas. My investigation of Toronto, Hamilton, Peel, York, Durham, and Halton finds the pattern of single family house conversions into larger single family homes very concerning. It is likely, in the absence of zoning change, that large swathes of neighborhoods currently characterized by modestly-sized bungalows, will be turned over into very high square-footage "McMansions" within the next 30 years.

Without intervention, municipalities will lose out on a great opportunity to benefit from the ability for 'yellow belt' neighbourhoods to contribute to alleviating the affordability and land crisis. In many cases, there has been an uptick in the rate in conversions to larger single family homes. Over a 30 year period, the continuation of this pattern will result in further income and social stratification, and the failure to protect valued Greenbelt and farmland areas.

In contrast, municipalities undoing the limitations of 'yellow belt' bylaws and policies will unlock a much healthier Ontario. One with increased availability of more affordable housing, as well as better economic and ecological relations with our natural heritage resources, environment, and food economy. This future is in alignment with Ontario's Greenbelt and Growth Plan policies. Undoing the limitations includes supporting and celebrating the delivery of garden and or lane way suites, the splitting of single family detached homes into smaller single or semi-detached homes, and in some cases also enabling the development of apartments of under 4 storeys. There are many 'yellow belt' neighbourhoods with the potential to contribute to this more sustainable future.

Impact of the "Yellow Belts" on Land Needs Assessment

The supply of 'yellow belt' lots existing in built up and settled neighbourhoods within suburban Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area municipalities have the capacity to generate a large number of additional single and semi detached houses (inclusive of laneway and garden suites). This reality is not reflected in the present land needs assessment analysis for regions within this Area. To accomplish affordability and land preservation goals, it is crucially important to incorporate the capacity for such development.

York Region is an example of a municipality with substantially more capacity to accommodate growth demand over the next 30 years through modest changes to its 'yellow belt' neighbourhood bylaws and policies. This capacity is found predominantly in large single family lots occupied by bungalows and "split-levels" across post-war York Region neighbourhoods. The current Land Needs Assessment studies appear only to anticipate the addition of single and semi detached houses where the land is currently vacant. This has resulted in the

significant under calculation of capacity, and in my opinion does not align with the Provincial Policy Statement and Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. This undercalculation of capacity to accommodate growth in existing 'yellow belt' neighbourhoods has resulted in the *Foundational Housing Analysis*, conducted by Watson and Associates Ltd, stating that there is "minimal additional low-density housing supply opportunities... available within the BUA" and as such "this shortfall will need to be accounted for in the Designated Greenfield Area."

It is apparent that the substantial underestimation of the number of single- and semi-detached homes (including laneway and garden suites) that can be reliably generated within the existing settlement area of York Region has resulted in a substantial overestimation in the amount of Designated Greenfield Area that is required to meet projected housing demand. It is likely that projected need for additional Community Land is attributable largely if not entirely to this underestimation.

To reduce burdens to expand the Urban Settlement Area Boundary, protect valued natural heritage resources, and promote housing affordability it is recommended that an updated assessment be prepared. This updated assessment would provide a more accurate estimation of existing capacity within "yellow belt" neighbourhoods by conducting and reporting the findings on studies which:

- responds to the More Homes More Choice Act, 2019 requirement to legalize laneway and garden suites by projecting the number of laneway and garden suites within the existing built up area, and designated greenfield area,
- factors in the impacts of adjusting residential zoning in "yellow belt" neighborhoods calculated to engender the creation of more single- and semi-detached houses. This includes the elimination of prohibitions on semi-detached homes. Also, adjustments targeting built form constraints (minimum lot frontage, minimum lot sizes, interior side setbacks, minimum parking requirements) that make it easier to replace existing bungalows and other modest homes with a single very large house, while not enabling these same lots to increase housing supply through the development of modest single- or semi-detached houses ,
- provides a clear breakdown on the number of units each housing type is projected to be accommodated within the existing built-up area, and designated greenfield area, and
- provides a clear break down on the projected number of units that may result from increasing housing supply on single family single or semi detached lots by enabling lot splitting on larger lots and/or the conversion of single detached homes into semi-detached homes.

It is my opinion that the above study would result in a reduction in the projected demand for DGFA and additional Community Land Area. Instead, the findings would be that a significant supply of demand would be accommodated in BUA.

Yours truly,



CP Planning
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