

Letter to York Region Council  
Via clerks [regionalclerk@york.ca](mailto:regionalclerk@york.ca)

Regional Chair Emmerson and Regional Councilors  
York Region  
17250 Yonge Street Newmarket,  
ON L3Y 6Z1

From Claire Malcolmson  
Stop Sprawl York Region  
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RE 2021 Statutory Public Meeting on the Draft  
Official Plan  
Thursday, May 19, 2022 @ 9:00am  
Special Committee of the Whole

May 18, 2022

Dear Chair Emmerson and York Region Council,

I request that York Region delay approval of its Official Plan until after October, 2022, after there is more democratic debate, and after transparent and meaningful data is presented to York Region Councils and citizens.

I want the Official Plan to: Create the variety of housing that York Region residents need; create the conditions to be able to lower taxes and invest in existing communities; protect the Greenbelt, farmland, water quality, including Lake Simcoe; reduce traffic congestion; and create a safer climate for our future. The Draft OP does none of these things adequately.

There has been no public consultation that *explains to residents the implications* of what York Region Council is supporting in its Official Plan (OP). The pandemic is not your fault, of course, but if you are interested in transparency, and if you want meaningful public input, I believe that you should do in person consultation. People should see the maps, and understand the magnitude of the land you are proposing to plow for development (between 3035 and 4225 hectares). People should be able to choose between an expensive, environmentally damaging Official Plan, and an OP that would reduce environmental impacts, reduce GHG emissions, reduce cost of living for residents, commuters, families, and future generations.

Because there has been no choice offered, and no costing provided, you are, in effect, hijacking the future of York Region presumably to provide as much developer-enriching single family home development as possible. But those homes are no longer affordable to

most residents. I maintain that this is not a good plan for York Region residents; it's a plan that pleases developers and the provincial government, in service of developers. As elected officials, I implore you to do better.

I am hopeful that the next York Region Council will be more modern, and will care about the future of our environment, our children, quality of life, the climate, and housing affordability. That is what the moment demands, and YR Council today is not meeting the test. **Shaping the future of York Region should be THE municipal election issue.** Allow the election period to be used to help people understand their choices, and let the people elect representatives that will advance an Official Plan that is democratically supported by its residents.

Stop Sprawl York Region would like you to join the jurisdictions that are not meeting the province's aggressive OP conformity deadline: Simcoe County and Durham Region, and possibly Orillia. This morning you got some petitions that ask you to slow down the approval of the OP. I have another 20 signatures on paper from our Earth Day protest in Holland Landing, and the signatures will keep coming.

Let me be more specific about our concerns by explaining the contents of the petition. First, the 50 - 55% intensification decision was unambitious and creates problems. We would like you to reconsider that target. Everything else below flows from that decision.

Ontario is truly facing a housing affordability crisis. York Region's Affordability Strategy will not be updated until after the OP is approved. Why make a plan to address affordability AFTER you approve an OP that will result in building too many homes financially out of reach of York Region residents? Doing the Affordability Strategy after the OP has been finalized misses the opportunity to get the OP right by planning properly to build affordable housing. Failure to address affordability issues in the OP now will limit the ability to achieve: 1. your 25% target of new housing for low and middle income households (OP policy 1.4.7), and 2. York Region's population target, as evidenced in YR over the past ten years. This in turn makes your capital infrastructure planning more financially risky.

On climate change, sprawl is Ontario's tar sands. Sprawl negatively affects Lake Simcoe and other receiving bodies of water more than compact development. Sprawl locks in car dependent travel patterns and increases GHG emissions. It drives the so-called "need" for new highways. You know all of this, and you voted for the sprawliest plan you could.

York Region Council has planned for as much sprawl as allowed, and will *then* work on finishing the climate change plan. This is completely backwards, if Council wants to reduce per capita GHG emissions. Durham Region laid out the GHG impacts of their Land Needs Assessment scenarios.<sup>1</sup> York Region hasn't. Why? You should care. You should want

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<sup>1</sup><https://calendar.durham.ca/meetings/Detail/2022-03-18-1000-Durham-Region-Roundtable-on-Climate-Change-Meeting/0b3c8c8e-50e8-4753-a9ba-ae5b00eea7c6>

residents to weigh in. The absence of this information speaks volumes about the values of the majority of Council.

Any serious attempt to bring down GHG emissions starts with increasing intensification of development. Green housing retrofits and electric vehicles (already suffering supply chain issues) will not compensate for the built in, long term GHG emissions that stem from new sprawling development. We have to transition now to cleaner built environments. The extent of the sprawl and the intensification target should support your climate change action plan objectives. It would be more appropriate for the climate target setting to happen first and a development pattern selected that supports achieving the targets. Now, it's doomed to fail because it's backwards.

Water quality is something we must never take for granted. York Region is advocating for the UYSS, which is now illegal to approve and will add Phosphorus (P) to Lake Simcoe while we are trying to cut P loads in half. The UYSS' P pollution is proposed to be mitigated by unproven offsets. I explained the big picture and the risks for Lake Simcoe associated with approving a new STP on Lake Simcoe, which the *Lake Simcoe Protection Act* prohibits with good reason, in a meeting with the advisory panel on the UYSS which will provide confidential advice to the Minister of Environment. Given that the rationale for choosing an outlet for this wastewater will never be public, we have to rely on York Region to be cautious.

At a billion dollars, you really ought to stop and consider who benefits and who loses. Much of the need for the UYSS is the planned greenfield development in East Gwillimbury (EG) that would add **around 90,000 new residents** to EG, and pollute Lake Simcoe.

There has been no new coordination between municipalities, Regional governments and the province on water and wastewater servicing capacity around Lake Simcoe; the Region is dependent on infrastructure from Peel & Durham as well as infrastructure that is dependent on provincial approvals. The impacts on source water quality for Lake Simcoe as well as Lake Ontario, the source of drinking water for millions of residents in Ontario, does not appear to have been factored into the decision-making process. This approach, if you can call it that, is a developer-led race to the bottom.

Further, it appears that recent changes to the draft OP weaken York Region's commitment to protecting water quality. To this point, what is the rationale for the removal of the red highlighted parts of the OP in policy 3.3.4?

3.3.4 To require local municipalities to establish policies and programs to protect, improve or restore the water resources, **surface and groundwater systems**.

**That the preparation of comprehensive master environmental servicing plans as part of secondary plans, to protect, improve or restore water quality and quantity including hydrologic function of water systems will incorporate best management practices with a goal that water balance and hydrologic functions will be maintained as much as possible. These plans will emphasize water conservation and may include water reuse and innovative technologies.**

Relying on a polluting and illegal sewage system is a serious problem with the OP, and one that is going to create trouble for the Region, as there will be expectations of servicing the lands, regardless of environmental impact. You should not plan the greenfield expansion in EG, and you should not plan around a ghost sewage treatment plant.

Finally, in the south end of York Region Mayors and citizens are in the midst of battling unwanted Enhanced Minister's Zoning Orders (EMZOs) for extremely high densities forced on Richmond Hill and Markham from the province of Ontario; this legislated density is not reflected in the current draft Official Plan. How would the execution of these plans impact intensification and population targets elsewhere in the Region? How can you approve your Official Plan without understanding how this affects the rest of the Region?

In closing, we ask that York Region address the significant gaps between the wording of the OP and the implications of Council's direction. Do not rush your OP approval. *Give residents meaningful information about the cost and environmental impacts of Council's direction.* Ask them to weigh in on the question of how much to sprawl during the municipal election.

Again and again we come to you representing public interests; developers come with their profit-oriented interests, and the majority of this Council votes with the developers. You are not representing the public interest.

A number of Mayors and RC's have told me that the problems start with the province. I agree. But you have to do something about that, or you are just passing the buck and perpetuating the problems that compel me to come talk to Council so often. Write to the province, explain how you would like to address affordable housing and reduce environmental impacts of development, and make your letter public.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Claire Malcolmson

On behalf of Stop Sprawl York Region

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*We are a collective of community leaders, organizations, and people who care about the future of York Region.*