

June 29, 2022

York Region Council  
17250 Yonge St,  
Newmarket, ON

RE: York Region Official Plan

Dear Chair, Mayors, and Members of York Region Council,

As our regional government we look to you to support affordable and sustainable growth within our cities and towns that improves our quality of life. I urge you not to support development on the provincially protected Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt.

York Region lies in the heart of Ontario's Oak Ridges Moraine. The moraine's underground water systems are vital drinking water resources for hundreds of thousands of people, farms, and towns. The moraine provides the baseflow for over sixty-five rivers and streams in the Greater Toronto area. Climate change makes these groundwater resources even more vulnerable and valuable. The Region of York was a key partner in advocating for Oak Ridges Moraine legislation as Council was aware of the importance of protecting and improving water resources post Walkerton. It is unfathomable that Council is considering overstepping provincial policy that protects clean water resources. Do you want your legacy to be the Council that sells out the Oak Ridges Moraine?

Building on the Oak Ridges Moraine supports a pattern of growth that will end up costing taxpayers, rather than supporting local or regional economic development. The key is making better use of existing employment areas to develop concentrated employment zones as noted in Pamela Blais's report, Planning for the Next GGH, "*.... it is no longer sufficient simply to extrapolate past trends forward in a linear fashion, without regard to the dynamics of change. In the current context of rapid, disruptive technological change, such an approach is a less informed and potentially risky basis for land use planning.*"<sup>1</sup> "*The economic geography of the GGH is characterized by clustered core employment.*" Suburban style warehouse development along highways is open to automation, limiting job creation and local economic impact. Further, reports from University of Toronto's Institute for Municipal Finance and Governance and Smart Cities Research have indicated that growth costs us all, it does not pay its way. Taxpayers end up subsidizing growth, as the Region [increases debt](#) limits to borrow more money.<sup>2</sup> It is time to change our ways to prioritize growth in existing urban areas.

As we plan for the future, our past is useful to help us avoid past failings. The quality of life of many residents has diminished as the region not met housing targets, specifically low-income housing needs. Today the majority of housing in York Region is expensive single-family housing. Traffic congestion is worsening, homelessness is on the rise. According to the York Region food bank food insecurity has

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<sup>1</sup> <https://neptis.org/publications/chapters/what-kinds-economic-activities-should-we-be-planning>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ontariocanada.com/registry/view.do?postingId=37267&language=en>

increased<sup>3</sup>. The amount of greenspace and farmland per capita is decreasing. The growth patterns of the past are inequitable and unsustainable.

Unfortunately, York Region's OP continues past growth patterns by supporting the proposed 413 highway. If highway lead growth supports prosperity York Region is the gleaming beacon for highway lead planning as the following provincial highways cross York Region, highway 404, 427, 407, 400, 412, 409. It is likely York Region has more km of highway access than any other region in Canada. Today the international trend is to tear down highways to invest in cities for people. Supporting and planning for growth around a proposed new multi billion-dollar highway we do not need perpetuates unsustainable growth that leads to debt and creates more traffic<sup>4</sup>. There are better solutions, such as making better use of existing roads and highways like the 407, incenting people to live near where they work, providing discounted transit during rush hour, developing safe cycling networks to employment areas, among other solutions.

As you vote on the 2050 Official Plan, I ask you to consider how the York Region Official Plan addresses major regional issues such as housing need for low-income people, reducing traffic congestion (rather than creating traffic by supporting new highways), climate change, water quality, loss of greenspace and agricultural lands. Planning for tomorrow does not mean more roads, more pipes, more jobs disconnected from communities and less money for housing vulnerable people. Planning for a prosperous healthy tomorrow requires government decision-making to reassess how we build our communities to improve peoples' lives by making better use of our existing infrastructure and resources, improving accessibility, and protecting the vulnerable, and lowering our carbon footprint.

I hope my comments are helpful as you approve plans for 2050.

Respectfully,

Susan Lloyd Swail

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Nobleton, ON

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<sup>3</sup> <https://fbyr.ca/wp-content/uploads/FBYRYorkRegionReportonHunger2020.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.vtpi.org/gentraf.pdf>