

# The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole  
Planning and Economic Development  
April 11, 2019

Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner

## Planning for Intensification Background Report

### 1. Recommendations

1. Council direct staff to proceed with consultation on the following as outlined in this report and the attachments as part of the Regional Municipal Comprehensive Review:
  - draft intensification framework
  - draft major transit station area delineations and minimum density targets
  - draft additional strategic growth area delineations and minimum density targets
2. The Regional Clerk forward this report and attachments to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Clerks of the local municipalities.

### 2. Summary

The Growth Plan requires the Region to prepare an Intensification Strategy to demonstrate how intensification targets will be met. This report, along with attachments, provide the background analysis informing the preparation of the Region's Intensification Strategy which forms part of the Regional Municipal Comprehensive Review to update the Regional Official Plan. The report includes draft delineations and minimum density targets for major transit station areas and additional strategic growth areas.

Key Points:

- Accommodating growth through intensification in strategic locations in the Region maintains fiscal accountability through effective use of land and aligns growth with existing and planned infrastructure and services
- York Region is well-positioned to accommodate intensification due to infrastructure investment and the existing planning framework for Regional Centres and Corridors and other intensification areas in the Region
- Existing Regional and local municipal intensification official plan policies and strategies provide the foundation for the Region's Intensification Strategy

- Major transit station areas are a key component of the Region’s intensification hierarchy
- Staff will consult with local municipalities, Regional Planning Advisory Committee, Municipal Comprehensive Review working groups, the public, BILD and other stakeholders on the intensification framework, proposed major transit station area and strategic growth area delineations and minimum density targets as input to the York Region Intensification Strategy

### **3. Background**

#### **An Intensification Strategy is required to demonstrate how intensification will be directed to support the Region’s urban structure and Growth Plan objectives**

The Growth Plan requires York Region to develop an Intensification Strategy to achieve the minimum intensification target and intensification throughout the delineated built-up area. For the purposes of this report, the term Intensification Strategy is used in order to align with the terminology in the Growth Plan. The Region’s delineated built-up area is shown on Map 1 in Attachment 1.

Intensification provides important benefits including more efficient use of land and existing infrastructure, increased housing options, including affordable housing, support for a range of transportation options including transit and active transportation modes, contributions to climate change mitigation, complete communities and fiscal benefits to the Region and local municipalities through aligning growth with infrastructure investment.

Under the Growth Plan, among other objectives, the Intensification Strategy is to encourage intensification to achieve the desired urban structure, identify strategic growth areas as a key focus for development and prioritize planning and investment in infrastructure.

The Growth Plan intensification targets for York Region are as follows: at the time of approval of the current Regional Municipal Comprehensive Review and each year until 2031, 50 per cent of all residential development occurring annually are to be within the delineated built-up area; by 2031, and for each year until 2041, the intensification target increases to 60 per cent.

The Province is in the process of finalizing Amendment 1 to the Growth Plan. The discussion in this report refers to the policies in the 2017 Growth Plan. Among other potential changes, the amended Growth Plan could include a different intensification target for York Region. Future staff reports related to intensification will take into account any potential modifications to the Growth Plan that result from the Provincial review process.

This report is a summary of the content contained in Attachments 1 and 2.

## **The Growth Plan requires major transit station areas be delineated with minimum density targets**

Major transit station areas (MTSAs) refer to the area including and around existing and planned higher order transit stations and stops and generally comprise the area within a 500 metre radius of a transit station. Under the Growth Plan, York Region, in consultation with local municipalities, must delineate MTSA boundaries and set minimum density targets for MTSAs located on priority transit corridors. Priority transit corridors in York Region are identified in the Growth Plan and generally consist of portions of the Highway 7, Yonge Street and Davis Drive corridors; portions of the GO rail system and all subway stations.

MTSA densities in priority transit corridors must meet the Growth Plan minimum densities of 200 residents and jobs per hectare for subway stations, 160 for bus rapid transit stations and stops and 150 for GO Rail stations.

Where there are four or more MTSAs along the same priority transit corridor, the average of the targets for those MTSAs must meet or exceed the applicable minimum density target. For MTSAs in a priority transit corridor that do not meet the applicable density target, an alternative target must be established and confirmed by the Province. Upper-tier municipalities have the option of identifying additional MTSAs beyond those in priority transit corridors.

## **Strategic growth areas support the Regional urban structure and infrastructure investment**

Strategic growth areas (SGAs) are areas that have been identified as the focus for accommodating intensification and higher density mixed uses. SGAs include Urban Growth Centres (UGCs), Major transit station areas and other intensification areas. The Provincial UGCs are located within the four Regional Centres of Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, Richmond Hill Centre/Langstaff Gateway, Markham Centre and Newmarket Centre. Additional SGAs beyond UGCs and MTSAs must be delineated in the Regional Official Plan (ROP) and have a minimum density target. The Growth Plan does not specify minimum density targets for additional SGAs.

## **All levels of government continue to invest significantly in Regional Centres and Corridors**

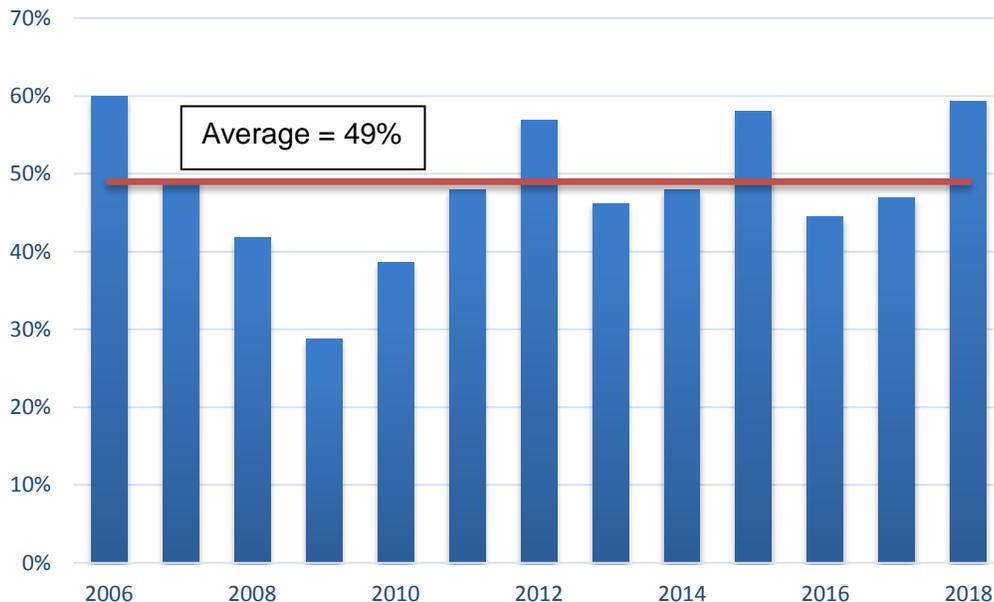
To date, over \$3 billion has been invested by all three levels of government in transit projects in York Region including: the Spadina subway extension to Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, the VIVA Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) System as well as road and streetscape improvements. Additional investment in transit is planned including further development of the BRT system and extension of the Yonge subway to Richmond Hill Centre. The Region continues to invest in water and wastewater infrastructure to service development. The Region has undertaken additional initiatives to promote and monitor intensification in the Centres and Corridors including annual progress updates on development and an office attraction program through York Link.

## 4. Analysis

### York Region has been averaging close to 50 per cent intensification

Since 2006, intensification in York Region has ranged from 29 to 60 per cent with an overall average of 49 per cent intensification within the built-up area (see Figure 1). All new residential units including low, medium and high density residential units in the built-up area count towards intensification.

**Figure 1**  
**York Region Intensification 2006 to 2018**



The Growth Plan intensification target is a Regional target. The housing unit forecast produced for the Region's growth forecast will determine the total Regional intensification units required to meet the Growth Plan intensification target. To achieve the Regional target, each local municipality contributes at different levels. A local municipality's intensification rate is related to a number of factors including the extent of intensification opportunities within Regional Centres and Corridors as well as local centres and corridors; the level of existing and planned transit and servicing infrastructure; and the geographic extent of the built-up area within the municipality. These factors are considered when developing local municipal intensification targets.

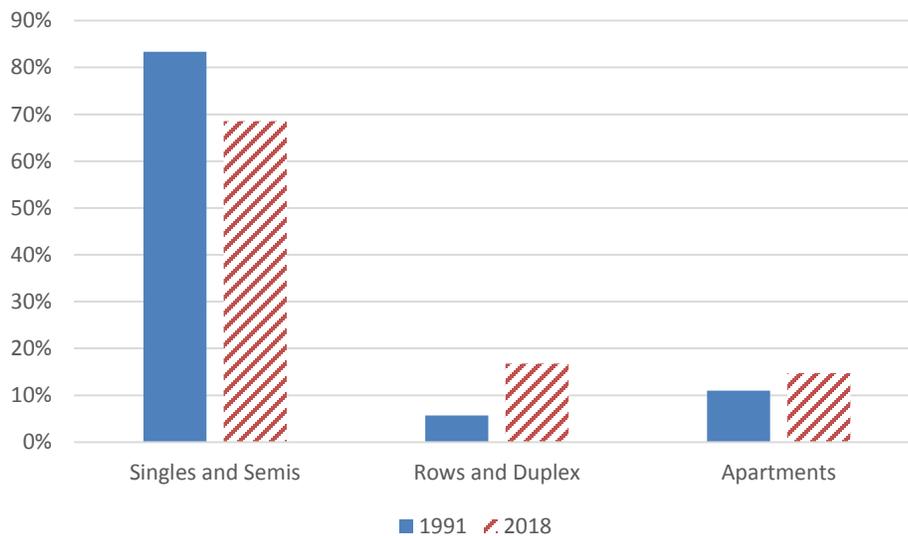
### York Region's shift to higher density forms of housing will improve the overall housing mix

In recent years, the GTHA and York Region housing markets have seen an increasing share of medium and high density housing units due to a number of factors including affordability, demographics and the influence of land use planning policy. While the Region's overall

existing housing stock remains concentrated in lower density housing forms, this shift in housing growth to higher density forms is slowly improving the overall mix of housing in the Region. In 1991, single and semi-detached units formed approximately 83 per cent of the Region’s total housing stock; rows, apartments and duplex units collectively accounted for a 17 per cent share. In 2018, the share of single and semi-detached units was about 69 per cent, with increases in the shares of medium and high density housing to approximately 31 per cent of the Region’s housing base (see Figure 2). Increased levels of medium and high density housing development contribute to a more balanced Regional housing stock with a greater variety of housing types.

**Figure 2**

**York Region Housing Stock Comparison – Share of Total Housing Stock**



Increased demand for higher density housing forms is anticipated to continue due to aging of York Region’s population, housing affordability, continuing diversification of the population and the creation of vibrant and attractive communities in the Region’s intensification areas through investment in transit, community facilities, amenities and quality built environments. A more diversified housing mix with increased medium and high density housing will result in more transit supportive communities and more affordable housing choices.

**The proposed approach to achieve the Growth Plan intensification target builds on the Region’s existing framework for intensification**

York Region’s framework for intensification was established through the Region’s Centres and Corridors Strategy developed in the mid-1990s and the 2009 Regional Intensification Strategy. The ROP implements the Strategy and sets out the planned urban structure that focuses on the Regional Centres and Corridors while also providing policy direction on key principles and attributes for intensification areas.

Local municipalities have produced intensification strategies and incorporated elements of the Region’s intensification strategy through their respective official plans and secondary

plans. Regional Centres and Corridors, GO stations, local centres and corridors and other intensification areas are identified as key locations to accommodate local municipal intensification targets as allocated in the ROP. Local municipal intensification strategies will be considered in the development of new local municipal intensification targets to 2041 as part of the forthcoming growth forecast for the Regional Municipal Comprehensive Review.

Intensification in strategic locations maximizes efficiencies in infrastructure delivery, human services provision and transit ridership. Under the ROP, strategic locations are based on an intensification framework that recognizes the primacy of the Regional Centres in accommodating the highest density and scale of development. The updated intensification matrix in Figure 3 sets out strategic locations for intensification within the Region. Major transit station areas can be located within a number of the components of the matrix as shown below.

**Figure 3**  
**York Region Intensification Matrix**



### **Region’s Urban Growth Centres continue to diversify and thrive**

Under the Growth Plan, the Region’s four Urban Growth Centres – Markham Centre, Newmarket Centre, Richmond Hill Centre/Langstaff Gateway and Vaughan Metropolitan Centre – are to be planned to achieve a minimum density of 200 residents and jobs per hectare by 2031. Development in the Regional Centres (which contain Urban Growth

Centres) is part of regular reporting for the Centres and Corridors monitoring program as well as ROP monitoring.

Markham Centre is the most advanced York Region Urban Growth Centre having a land use planning framework in place since the mid-1990s and a starting greenfield condition. Vaughan Metropolitan Centre has experienced an unprecedented increase in new development arising from the opening of the Spadina subway. In Richmond Hill Centre/Langstaff Gateway, development continues to progress in Richmond Hill Centre and the first preliminary development concepts are coming forward for the Langstaff portion of the UGC. Newmarket UGC will come close to meeting the employment component of the Growth Plan density target with the opening of York Region's new office building at 17150 Yonge Street in 2020; the required residential development to meet the population portion of the density target will take longer to be realized.

While development of the UGCs continues, it may be challenging to meet the density target of 200 residents and jobs per hectare by 2031 due to the amount of development required over the next 13 years, the need for transportation infrastructure improvements in Richmond Hill/Langstaff Gateway as well as water and wastewater servicing upgrades required to realize the full potential of Newmarket Centre and Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.

### **Other factors are contributing to high levels of intensification in the Region**

A range of demographic and land use planning factors contribute to high levels of intensification. The aging of York Region's population will result in more non-family households (e.g. single person households) and a higher demand for apartment units. There will also be the need to provide more family-size apartment units in order to meet Growth Plan intensification and density targets. Housing affordability is an issue that is becoming more pronounced in York Region. Medium and high density housing forms, which are provided in intensification areas, provide more affordable housing options. The continuing diversification of the Region's population and transition from a suburban to a more urban character will result in demand for a wider range of housing types.

The continued enhancement of the Region's Centres and Corridors and other intensification areas with community facilities and amenities will increase their attractiveness and lead to increased levels of residential and non-residential development. Enhancing the liveability of the Centres and Corridors will help in attracting younger skilled labour to the Region through the creation of attractive urban living and working environments with good access to transit.

### **Draft major transit station area delineations and density targets reflect reasonable expectations for intensification**

There are 57 MTSA's in York Region within priority transit corridors as shown in Attachment 2. The majority of these stations are located in Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill and Vaughan. Nine of the stations are shared between adjacent local municipalities. There are also two stations shared with the City of Toronto. Thirteen additional MTSA's beyond those required in priority transit corridors are being proposed in consultation with local municipal staff, based on their location on a Regional corridor, the level of anticipated intensification

and their potential to become a required MTSA as part a potential future priority transit corridor. In total, 70 MTSA are identified in the Region.

The delineation of MTSA were based on a series of guiding principles including: reinforcing the planned regional and local municipal urban structure, providing for a range and mix of land uses (for MTSA outside of employment areas) and connecting adjacent MTSA where possible. The MTSA delineation principles are outlined in a guidance document prepared by York Region staff. MTSA will be illustrated through a Visualizing Density project to be produced later in 2019 as part of the Regional Municipal Comprehensive Review.

Regional staff with input from local municipal staff developed the draft MTSA delineations and minimum density targets. Draft minimum density targets for the MTSA were determined taking into account a number of factors including the applicable required Growth Plan minimum density target and the existing and the potential build-out density.

Draft MTSA delineations and minimum density targets are provided in Attachment 2. The Planning Act provides for restricting official plan and zoning appeals for areas identified as Protected MTSA at both the Regional and local municipal levels. It is intended that all MTSA in the Region be identified as Protected MTSA.

All York Region major transit corridors meet or exceed, on average, the applicable Growth Plan minimum density.

### **Two major transit station areas warrant requesting an alternative density target**

Two MTSA –the Bathurst and Highway 7 BRT station and King City GO Station warrant alternative minimum density targets. These MTSA do not reasonably meet the Growth Plan minimum density requirements because of the extent surrounding lands are constrained by natural heritage features, utility corridors, or the lands are not likely to undergo more than minor intensification due to their context. The alternative minimum density targets were developed by examining potential build-out densities and are identified in Attachment 1.

### **Three additional strategic growth areas are being considered**

SGA include Urban Growth Centres and major transit station areas. The Region has the option to identify additional SGA planned for higher density growth located either in or outside of the built-up area. Three additional areas – Vaughan Mills Primary Centre and Carrville Centre in Vaughan and the Yonge Street portion of the Aurora Promenade have been identified for consideration based on their place in the local municipal urban structure, anticipated scale of development and other factors. Delineations and density targets for additional SGA will have regard for existing designations in local municipal official plans. Draft delineations are shown in Attachment 2.

## **Staff will consult on the proposed intensification framework, MTSAs and SGAs**

Staff are planning to broadly consult on the proposed intensification framework, major transit station area and additional strategic growth area delineations and minimum density targets with local municipalities, the Regional Planning Advisory Committee, Municipal Comprehensive Review Working Groups, the public, BILD and other stakeholders. Consultation methods will include meetings, presentations to local municipal staff and/or councils, public open houses and/or events, York.ca, and through social media. To date, Regional staff have held numerous meetings with local municipal staff on the development of the major transit station area delineations and minimum density targets (Appendix 2 to Attachment 1 provides a list of these meetings).

## **An Intensification Strategy will follow in 2020**

This report provides background work leading to the development of the full York Region intensification strategy which is scheduled for completion in the first quarter of 2020. The Intensification Strategy will include the local municipal intensification targets, proposed final MTSA and SGA delineations and minimum density targets, policy direction for updating the ROP based on the Growth Plan policies, as well as an implementation strategy for the Region and local municipalities. Local municipal intensification targets will be first introduced in the draft forecast and land needs assessment report, which is currently scheduled for late 2019.

## **5. Financial**

Planning for Intensification has been undertaken within the existing staff complement and budget of the Planning and Economic Development Branch.

Growing through intensification provides fiscal benefits to the Region through the optimization of existing and planned infrastructure and services. The Region will continue to manage growth in a fiscally sustainable way which includes aligning growth with investment in infrastructure. The extent of fiscal impact will be assessed through the fiscal impact analysis as part of the Regional Municipal Comprehensive Review.

The Intensification Strategy feeds into the growth forecast as part of the Regional Municipal Comprehensive Review which will form the basis for the next Development Charges by-law update required to be adopted by 2022. Achievement of the Growth Plan intensification targets will require a continued shift in the Region's housing market towards medium and higher density housing forms.

## **6. Local Impact**

Local municipal staff are part of a Local Municipal Working Group and have provided comments and feedback throughout the Regional Municipal Comprehensive Review process to date. Regional staff worked closely with local municipal staff in the development of draft

MTSA delineations and minimum density targets as well as in the determination of additional strategic growth areas in the Region.

The Intensification Strategy will establish local municipal intensification targets to 2041 and will update the framework for intensification. Local municipal official plans will need to conform to the new local municipal intensification targets and intensification policies in the updated ROP, once approved.

## **7. Conclusion**

The Growth Plan requires the Region to prepare an Intensification Strategy to demonstrate how intensification targets will be met. This report, along with the attachments, provide the background analysis informing the preparation of the Region's Intensification Strategy.

York Region is well-positioned to accommodate the Growth Plan intensification targets. Significant investment in transit including the subway extension to Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, the planned Yonge Street subway extension and BRT lines combined with the Centres and Corridors planning framework at the Regional and local municipal level will support and attract increased levels of intensification in the Region. Other factors including housing affordability, aging of the population, and the continuing diversification of the Region's households will result in increased demand for medium and high density forms of housing.

Staff are planning to consult on the proposed intensification framework, the draft MTSA's and draft delineations and minimum density targets, as input to the Region's Intensification Strategy and updated official plan.

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

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Attachments (2)  
eDOCS #9211858