

MUNICIPAL COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW: PUBLIC CONSULTATION REPORT

York Region is undertaking a Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) process consisting of a review of the Region's population and employment forecasts, a land needs assessment and an update of Regional Official Plan (ROP) policies. This update will help to guide York Region's future growth and align with Provincial direction. As a key component to undertaking the MCR process to update the ROP, the work plan includes engaging the community through a series of public consultations.

Summary of Consultation Methods to Date

The report summarizes the public consultations conducted to date, as public engagement and targeted consultations will continue to inform the policies outlined in the update to the ROP. Through the MCR process, a series of campaigns, activities and survey questions were launched to engage the public and businesses to gather their feedback on how to plan for the future. The activities and events were regularly updated through the Municipal Comprehensive Review webpage, located on York.ca. Community consultation provides an opportunity for residents to provide feedback about the kind of place they want York Region to be now and in the future. This includes a targeted work plan for the MCR, with public consultations aligned with key reports to Council.

Consultation activities to date include diverse representation from:

- The public, including residents and business owners
- Regional Council
- Regional Committees and internal working groups
- Planning Advisory Committee
- BILD and development proponents
- Local Municipal Council and staff
- Indigenous peoples
- Boards and Agencies
- Various other stakeholders



WHAT WE HEARD: KEY THEMES

A number of key themes are evident from the consultations to date that help to inform York Region's long-range planning.

The public:

1. Wants compact, walkable communities that offer employment opportunities, community facilities, services, stores and places for social connection
2. Identified affordable housing as one of the most important components for building complete communities, but many residents identify they struggle with housing affordability in the current housing market
3. Want their communities to produce fewer emissions and are aware of the impacts of a changing climate on York Region

4. Identified the protection of forests, parks, trails and green spaces across communities and protecting agricultural lands from development as key priorities
5. Identified transit as the top regional service that will be relied on most in the future and support continued investment in public transit infrastructure, particularly subway extensions and GO transit frequency enhancements

ENGAGING RESIDENTS AND WORKERS

So far, residents and workers have been invited to participate in shaping the Region's diverse communities through a variety of consultation activities and events. Consultation methods include:

- An online survey asking residents about what they want for their communities now and in the future
- Guided walking tours with the Chief Planner to learn about growth and long term plans across York Region
- An interactive mapping tool to support public awareness of Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs), where they are located and what future growth could look like within MTSAs for feedback and public input
- Community Agency Forum to consult with agency staff that serve York Region residents
- Local municipal public information sessions and community events that are used by staff for MCR engagement
- Social media campaigns, including online polls and photo contests to engage the public and educate them on planning and development in York Region

Through these methods, staff are able to gather key findings from the public to inform the MCR process. These online tools are used in conjunction with staff attending public community events and local municipal open houses. A summary of the public consultation methods to date and the findings are provided in more detail below.

NEWSLETTERS

The Have Your Say: Your Community, Your Ideas, Your Future eNewsletter is the formal communication tool to inform residents, businesses, workers and stakeholders on both the technical updates and the consultation process. Residents and workers can subscribe to receive the newsletter to get regular updates on local events and social media campaigns. Over 350 subscribers regularly receive these updates.

MAJOR TRANSIT STATION AREA CONSULTATIONS

Staff developed an interactive map to support discussions with the public and stakeholders on Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs), which are areas generally within a 10-minute walk to an existing or planned York Region Transit vivastation, GO train or subway station. This provides an opportunity for residents and businesses to see where and how much growth is planned to occur within York Region over the long-term, specifically along major transit corridors and the growing role of public transit in the Region's city building initiatives.

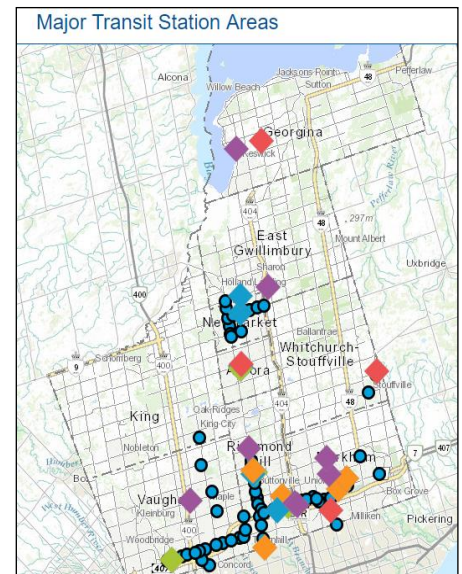
The interactive map has been used by a variety of stakeholders to gather information and allow participants to have their say about how the Region's long-term plans for the area match their vision for the future. The questions asked included:

1. What should be redeveloped and what should stay as it is today?
2. Are the boundaries that have been identified and posted appropriate?

3. What buildings types should be located near major transit stations?
4. Should the proposed minimum level of growth be adjusted and are they appropriate?
5. Additional comments

Key comments from the public in response to these questions included:

- Discussions on where higher density developments (such as an apartment or condominium) could support more effective transit use and support economic growth in a particular area and where lower density neighbourhoods should be maintained
- Discussions on specific adjustments to a proposed boundary or the minimum density target
- Discussions on the potential to include additional MTSAs
- Where complete community amenities, such as parks, open spaces, bike lanes and local bus networks should be maintained or developed to facilitate the creation of inviting public areas around transit and to accommodate an easier first/last mile for transit users



Throughout consultations, the map has been available online and staff have used this map in person to explain these concepts to residents based on where they live to facilitate discussions around MTSAs. Approximately 175 people viewed the map on their own, while an additional 150 (approximate) used the interactive map with Regional staff at various community events.

To date, Regional staff have attended five different community events to answer questions about intensification and MTSAs. These events included the York Region Family Fun Day hosted by Richmond Hill, Aurora Street Festival, Markham Open House, Lincolnville GO Public Open House and at the Richmond Hill Walk and Talk with York Region's Chief Planner. Through these events, staff were able to provide information to residents about MTSAs, how they support growth, how they impact their communities and provided the opportunity for feedback on where MTSAs are located across York Region.

Staff will continue to use this tool as an effective engagement method for discussing the appropriate level and type of development near MTSAs. Staff have promoted the use of the map through the MCR website, public events and the MyTransit Newsletter by York Region Transit (YRT). Staff will continue to engage local municipal staff to gather feedback on MTSAs and will share the feedback received through public consultations with the local municipalities throughout this process. Staff have been able to attend an open house in Markham to consult on MTSAs and will continue to work with local municipal partners to engage residents on this topic.

'IT'S YOUR PIC'

To engage the public, Regional staff ran four #itsyourpicYR photo contests on social media, including Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. Contestants were given the instructions to take one or more photos of a community gathering place within York Region and to hashtag the photo(s) #itsyourpicYR.



The four photo contest themes included:

1. Favourite Centre and Corridor
2. Favourite Cultural Institution
3. Favourite Urban Experience and Space
4. Favourite Countryside Activity and/or Agricultural Area

The It's Your Pic contest provided an interactive way to find out what residents value and provided an opportunity to share more information about these different locations across York Region. This social media campaign provided an opportunity for residents to highlight their favourite parts of their communities, while enjoying the natural heritage and built environment that York Region has to offer.

Over the four contests, there were close to 200 submissions, with favourite cultural institution having the highest number of contest participants with 120 photo submissions. Just over 91,000 people were reached through the campaigns, providing a fun and interactive way to engage with the public and increase awareness of the different initiatives happening across York Region.

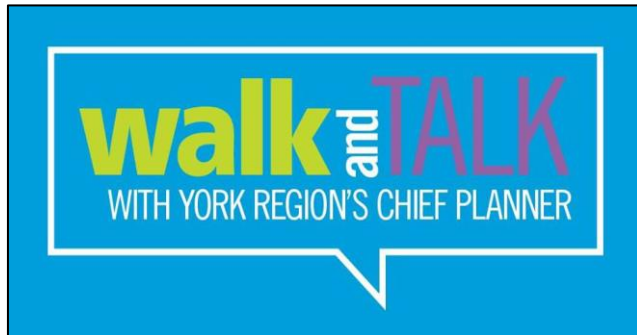
WALK AND TALK WITH YORK REGION'S CHIEF PLANNER

Regional staff organized a number of guided 'Walk and Talk's' with York Region's Chief Planner to educate the public on York Region's urban structure. This provided residents with the opportunity to hear more about what York Region is doing to promote complete communities through York Region's city building initiatives and to hear about the programs and services we provide every day to support effective planning. The topics covered during the guided tours included discussions on economic development, heritage lands, transit and infrastructure development, parks, walking trails and open spaces, as well as neighbourhoods. In addition, these tours provided staff with the opportunity to gather feedback and comments from residents through in-person and survey methods, which included promotion of the MCR webpage and other opportunities for residents to inform York Region's planning process.

Tour areas included:

- Vaughan Metropolitan Centre
- Markham Centre

- Yonge Street in Richmond Hill
- Aurora Downtown



Members from the public who attended any one of the four tours were invited to participate in a post-tour survey to gather feedback on their experiences and what they learned from the Walk and Talk.

There were a total of 64 participants surveyed after attending one of the four walking tours to date. Every member surveyed after the walking tours answered “yes” to whether they found their walking tour insightful and 98% of participants would recommend a York Region event to a friend. The top findings for what participants enjoyed about the walking tour were what they learned from the discussion topics, the flow of the tour and the information that they learned about York Region.

The walking tours are promoted through a number of different ways. The top hits for where respondents had heard about these events were the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) website, the York Region website and from a friend or colleague. The event was promoted on the OPPI website and offered to planners as a continual professional learning opportunity. More walking tours, including Newmarket, are scheduled for Fall 2019 to continue sharing with residents and gathering their feedback on how we plan for the future.

HAVE YOUR SAY: KEY ONLINE SURVEY FINDINGS

Throughout 2019, Regional staff ran the Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) ‘Have Your Say’ Online Survey. The survey was posted on the MCR webpage on York.ca, which provided the opportunity for members throughout the community to engage and have their say in the planning process. The survey was promoted to the public through social media campaigns and by Regional staff at a variety of public events and community forums.

The survey had 176 respondents for the main survey. However, staff also promoted a series of mini surveys targeted to complete communities, climate change and housing. An additional 60 respondents participated in the complete communities’ survey, 22 respondents in the climate change survey and 32 respondents participated in the housing survey.

The community survey covered seven thematic areas, with a number of key findings identified:

- Residents want compact walkable communities that offer employment opportunities and active recreational and cultural events
- Over 75% of respondents identified they felt they are spending too much of their income on housing costs, identifying the need for a greater mix of housing types and lower interest rates to help them in achieving homeownership
- Residents want to protect green spaces across their communities, particularly forests, parks and trails, as it is an inexpensive way to have fun and help them feel more active and relaxed

- Respondents had a relatively strong understanding of climate change, identifying health effects and property damage as key impacts resulting from climate change
- To support and strengthen agriculture and the Agri-Food industry, respondents identified the need to protect farm land from development
- A growing support for the use of public transportation, particularly if it is faster than using a car to go to work and community activities and if it is closely located to where they lived

The first portion of the survey asked for background information on the survey participants, which helped provide a better understanding of where they are from, where they work and age demographics of respondents. The survey provided representation from all nine local cities and towns relative to their population sizes. The largest proportion of respondents were from Markham and Vaughan, with relatively large responses from Aurora, Newmarket and Richmond Hill. Approximately 20% of respondents did not live in York Region, but may work or support residents who do live in York Region. Almost three quarters of respondents work in York Region, with the largest portion working in Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Markham and Vaughan. The largest portion of respondents was within the 35-44 age groups and followed by 45-54. The lowest representation of age groups was 18-24 and people aged 18 and below, which will be included in targeted consultations planned for Fall 2019. Similar themes and findings came from both MCR Community Wide Survey and the mini surveys. The thematic areas and the corresponding findings from the surveys are outlined below.

MCR MINI SURVEY QUESTION

As mentioned, a number of mini surveys have been released and will continue in the future due to their success. One of the campaigns occurred in August of 2019, where the public was asked this question on social media: **“Where would you place a new condominium complex in York Region? Please rank the pictures below (1 being the best and 5 being the least optimal location).”**

The survey question had wide reach with 503 completed responses and the majority of respondents between the ages of 55 to 64 and 65+. Of the total respondents, over 50 provided commentary on the post, with the majority having a positive or neutral sentiment towards the survey question. The top rated choice was the photo identified as Centres and Corridors, with 82% of respondents ranking it number 1. Interestingly, the second ranked photo was a picture of employment lands. This may be as a result of residents and workers looking for a better live-work balance. As expected, 71% of respondents (313/503) voted the photo of farm land as the least optimal location (number 5) for a new condominium complex in York Region.

COMPLETE COMMUNITIES SURVEY RESPONSES

According to respondents, there are a number of critical elements for creating a place where residents and workers can live, work and play. In building complete communities, residents identified a number of themes:

- Support for active recreational and cultural opportunities was the highest priority for building complete communities now and as residents’ age in their community
- Providing community supports and supporting social connection was important to respondents in ensuring complete communities across York Region
- Building mixed-use, compact communities supports the desire for more walkable communities and help to provide a healthier lifestyle for residents and supporting them to age in place

- Protection of green spaces, forests and other trails were a key priority to the public, particularly to support a healthier lifestyle
- Few respondents walked, cycled or took public transit to work or school, however, a much higher number of respondents were *likely* to walk, cycle or take public transit to get to other destinations (such as to get groceries, to go to the park or to visit friends)
- To make walking, cycling or taking public transit more desirable, respondents stated they would be more likely to do it if these other modes were faster than driving a personal vehicle
 - In particular, they would be more likely to use public transit if it operated more frequently and if more destinations were located in their community or neighbourhood

Responses provide support for building compact communities where residents can live, work and play by easily walking in pedestrian friendly areas and by living close to their work, school, local parks, grocery stores and public transit lines

COMPLETE COMMUNITIES POLL

In addition to the 'Have Your Say' online surveys completed, Regional staff released a poll to the public through the MCR webpage that received 310 responses. The question asked was, **"As we plan for the future, what element of a complete community is most important to you? (Check all that apply)."** The top answers identified by respondents were:

1. Affordable housing options
2. Employment opportunities
3. Climate change

The complete communities' poll aligns with the findings from the 'Have Your Say' online survey and help to focus efforts in building complete communities based on what is most important to the public. Regional efforts focus on all identified areas, as they are interconnected in providing complete communities for residents and workers.

TRANSPORTATION

When asked to look ahead 20 years, respondents identified the top things needed to improve how residents get to school, activity and work destinations:

- Increased transit frequency and subway extensions were the top ranking choices, supporting continued investment in public transit infrastructure
- All the top answers shifted away from the use of automotive vehicles, supporting bus lanes, bicycle lanes, a greater number of two-way GO Rail lines and other modes of public transit with more stops and increased frequency

HOUSING

Reflective of the current housing system, approximately 90% of respondents stated they wanted to own a house and 10% wanted to rent in the next 7-15 years. One of the main themes coming from this section was the need for a greater mix and range of housing options for all residents, throughout various ages and stages. Other findings identified through the survey included:

- Over 70% stated they were spending too much of their income on housing costs (rent, mortgage, taxes, condo fees and utilities), aligning with key affordability challenges outlined in York Region's annual [measuring and monitoring report](#)
- To appeal to residents to live in the Region's centres and corridors, an increased focus needs to be on adding employment opportunities with more public transit options and more pedestrian-friendly areas to support residents to live there
- A greater mix of housing types, lower interest rates and more accessible mortgages were the top answers to help respondents achieve the goal of home ownership
- The top benefits of renting identified were no maintenance fees, more disposable income and no taxes

EMPLOYMENT

The survey identified that strong employment outcomes were dependent on social connections and being able to live close to work. On the theme of employment, survey respondents stated:

- They ideally wanted to work in their communities (within walking distance of their homes), in a location easily accessible by transit or work at/from home, all supporting more environmentally friendly commuting patterns
- To remain a leader in the technology sector through to 2041:
 - The top answer respondents identified was the need to be within walking distance to communities to network and connect with like-minded professionals
 - The second ranking answer was for more shared work spaces to increase productivity, innovation and collaboration

CLIMATE CHANGE

70% of respondents were well aware or had a fair understanding of climate change and its impact on York Region's communities. Climate change themes identified were:

- Respondents wanted York Region to focus its efforts on creating compact cities that produce fewer emissions by providing better access to public transit, cycling and walking paths
- Respondents indicated climate change will impact them in the future through property damage due to extreme weather events and through health effects from extreme heat or extreme cold
- Although almost 45% of respondents stated they had a car emergency kit, a similar number of respondents stated they were not prepared for an emergency but with this survey will take steps to get better prepared for an emergency

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM

Respondents identified strong support for preserving farm land and supporting access to the natural environment. Other themes included:

- Respondents stated protecting farm land from development was the most important component to support and strengthen the protection of agricultural lands and a thriving agri-food industry in York Region

- The best way to encourage people to be farmers in the future is to provide financial incentives or partnership options to decrease costs of inputs (not including land)
- Factors limiting the exploration of nature in York Region included:
 - no public washrooms,
 - poor connections to other natural areas,
 - not aware of the natural spaces in the community, and
 - being located too far away from home
- The top benefits of exploring the outdoors included feeling active, relaxed and calm, as well as an inexpensive way to have fun and exercise

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

As residents look to the future, the Regional services they predict residents will rely on most are ranked:

1. Transit
2. Housing
3. Long Term Care
4. Water
5. Police Services

The survey findings for this section help to affirm some of the key themes identified through other consultation methods, as transit and housing continued to be top categories identified by the public as requiring Regional support and investment.

OTHER CONSULTATION EFFORTS

Staff attended a variety of different public and cultural events, setting up engagement booths to promote the community survey and interact with the public to discuss a variety of planning topics. There were a number of other consultation efforts undertaken through community events and social media campaigns. Regional staff have attended a number of community events across the local municipalities in York Region to educate about the MCR process and to gather feedback across stakeholders. Regional staff will continue to leverage opportunities in partnership with local municipal staff and community –based events to continue to engage the public in new and innovative ways.

Events to date have included:

- Richmond Hill Seniors Day, where staff interacted with over 30 residents and promoted the community survey
- Community Open House organized by East Gwillimbury staff members. Regional staff attended the April 2019 Open House and surveyed over 40 respondents. They engaged community members by asking, **“As we plan for the future, what element of a complete community is most important to you?”**

At the Community Open House, the top choices identified by respondents were:

1. Employment opportunities
2. Affordable housing
3. Natural heritage and agriculture

- Earth Day Event: In April 2019, Regional staff provided a survey question to 94 respondents at an Earth Day Event located at The Region’s Administrative Centre. The question asked was, **“What, in your opinion, should York Region focus on to reduce the effects of Climate Change on communities?”**

The top choices identified by respondents were:

1. Focus on creating compact cities that produce fewer emissions because there is better access to public transit, cycling and walking paths (36%)
2. Build new/retrofit existing infrastructure including roads, transit ways, water and sewage pipes to withstand existing and future effects of climate change (33%)
3. Maintain and create more green spaces (19%)
4. Reduce carbon emissions (12%)

COMMUNITY AGENCY FORUM

The Community Agency Forum held on May 30th, 2019 was a joint effort between Regional departments and York Regional Police for feedback, information-sharing and engagement with agencies that engage with York Region residents. Invitations were sent to community agencies across York Region, with the intended purpose to gather feedback to help the Region in providing direction on how communities grow and develop. The Community Agency Forum engaged community agency representatives and the thousands of York Region residents they support. It provided participants the opportunity to identify additional trends or gaps that have not been historically considered when planning to deliver community and health services to residents, helping to strengthen Regional social planning and efforts to create complete communities.

There were four breakout sessions with approximately 65 community agency representatives working through focused conversations, and were asked a series of questions with the objective of determining what the Region should focus on when planning for growth, reviewing and updating programs and services to best serve residents.

Overall themes York Region should focus efforts:

- Increase accessibility related to services, transportation, housing, well-paying jobs
- Improve affordability related to transportation and housing
- Improve safety and security to strive towards violence free communities
- Increase education and outreach on transportation, services, health care, mental health
- Create partnerships and collaboration opportunities for organizations to improve supports and services
- Improve mental health and quality of life for vulnerable populations
- Provide holistic services by using a community hub approach
- Improve elements of a complete community related to housing, transportation, employment opportunities, walkability and providing greenspaces

During the Community Agency Forum, attendees were also asked to participate in a dotmocracy activity that asked the question, **“What component is most important for supporting the work you do in the community and the York Region residents you support?”** The top answer identified by respondents as the most important component to support their work and the residents they serve is affordable housing options. A summary of the findings was shared with participants and results will be used to inform several plans and strategies being reviewed and updated. This also helps to support relationship-building and engagement with community partners and Regional staff.

ENGAGING LOCAL MUNICIPAL STAFF AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Regional staff engage with local municipal staff and other stakeholders through a variety of working groups, consultation meetings and outreach initiatives. In addition, the Chief Planner has made presentations to local municipal councils about the MCR. Regional staff have maintained a commitment to build effective relationships with local municipal staff as key partners in the planning process. Through the MCR Local Municipal Working Group, Regional staff have worked with local municipal staff to gather valued feedback and input on planning for the future. The feedback provided from residents through the various public consultation methods has been presented and shared to the MCR Local Municipal Working Group. Local municipal staff remain key partners in the consultation process and efforts will continue to collaborate on opportunities to engage with the public together. Through technical consultations, staff will consult local municipal staff throughout the MCR process on a policy specific basis and throughout the update of ROP policies.

Staff are also able to engage with members of the public and Regional Council through the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC). The York Region PAC is a committee appointed by Regional Council pursuant to the *Planning Act*. The mandate of the Planning Advisory Committee is to provide Regional Council and staff with advice regarding key land use planning matters in York Region.

Staff also engaged all internal departments through a number of working groups and presented to all Regional Committees on the MCR process. Staff will continue to engage committees and working groups throughout the update of the ROP and its corresponding policies. In addition, staff are completing technical engagements with local municipalities and the development industry on a topic specific basis. This includes landowner engagements, meetings with the development industry and consulting on employment conversions.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will continue to engage the public through the consultation methods outlined in this report and will also continue technical consultations throughout the MCR process. A new survey will be released in the coming months to continue to engage residents and workers on how York Region will plan for growth.

In addition, staff are planning to hold consultation sessions on a variety of policy specific topics, including MTSAs and employment conversions. Staff also have planned Council education sessions for Vision, employment planning and growth management, as well as consultations with the development industry and are continuing to run social media campaigns to engage the public.

Targeted Consultations

Although the input of many residents was captured through the various methods identified, there were a number of residents with lower representation. This included:

- Seniors
- Newcomers to Canada
- Youth
- Persons with Disabilities

As people who are traditionally under-represented using traditional engagement methods, staff will be proceeding with a series of targeted consultation sessions prior to the adoption of the ROP to ensure a diversity of

perspectives are incorporated throughout the MCR process. Staff will incorporate the findings from the targeted consultation sessions in the final MCR reports. Staff will attend community events hosted by agencies, local municipalities and other partners to find ways to engage the public and educate on the MCR process.

Engagement with Indigenous peoples will be distinct from any broader public or stakeholder communications and the engagement program and will operate in a parallel process to other MCR consultations. Building on initial MCR engagement in 2014, staff will be engaging with Indigenous peoples to inform the development of the ROP. Throughout this process, staff aim to continue existing relationships and build new relationships with Indigenous peoples across York Region.

Application of Public Consultation Findings

The information and analysis provided from the public consultations will inform the priority areas and policy subject areas articulated through the update of the ROP. Public engagement and continued community engagement will continue to remain a key priority throughout the development and implementation of Vision, 2019-2023 Strategic Plan and the ROP beyond the MCR process. These findings provide a clear direction for staff to help inform the long-term planning through a clear articulation of the vision that residents have for the future of York Region.