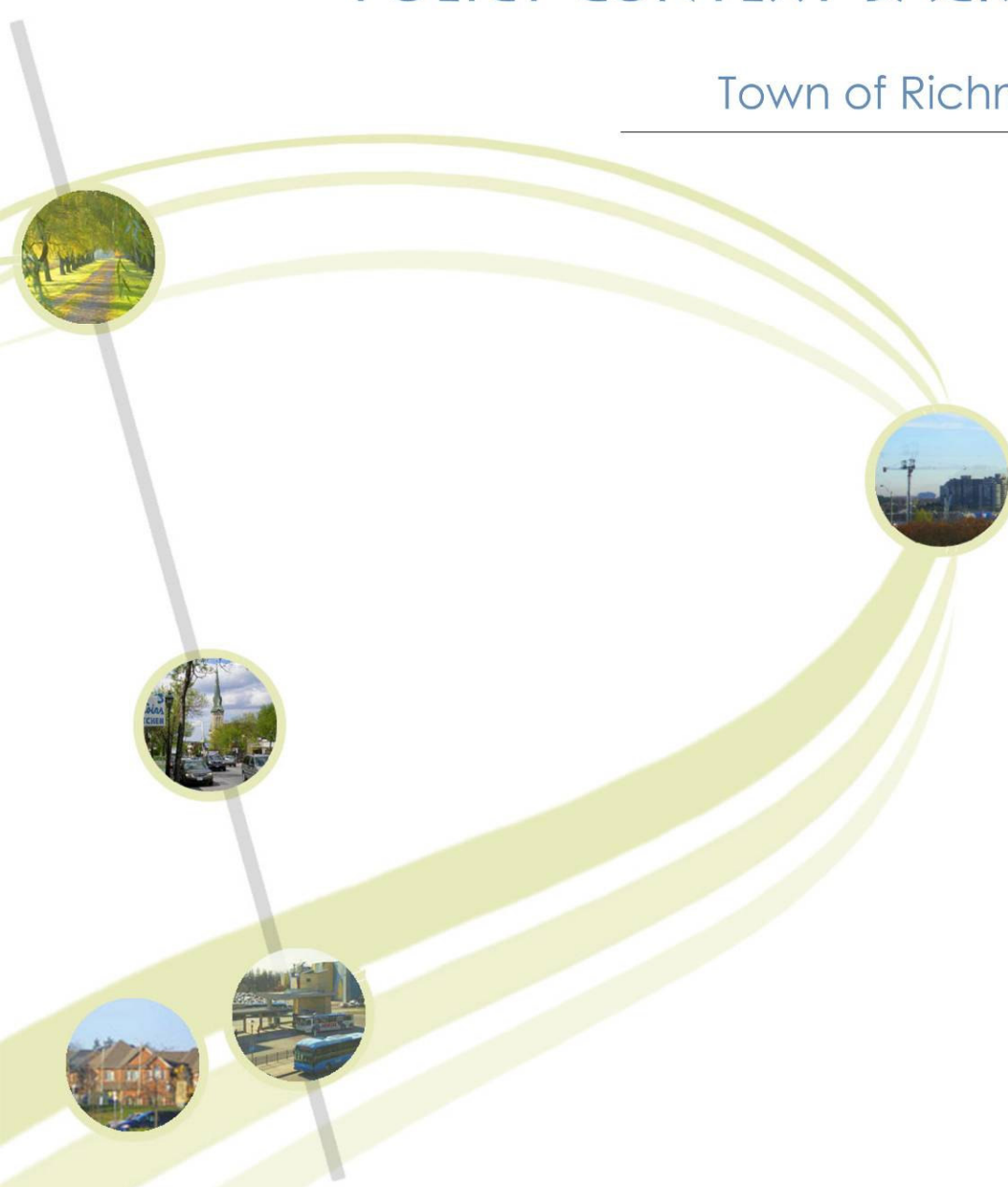


# POLICY CONTEXT BACKGROUND PAPER

## SUMMARY REPORT

### Town of Richmond Hill Official Plan

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May 2008  
Department of Planning & Development





Department of Planning & Development  
Planning Division

May 2008

Please direct information inquiries and publication orders to:

Planning Division  
P.O. Box 300  
225 East Beaver Creek Road  
Richmond Hill, ON  
Canada L4C 4Y5

Telephone: (905) 771-8910  
Fax: (905) 771-2404



## INTRODUCTION

Once considered a medium-sized town on the outskirts of Toronto, the Town of Richmond Hill is now at the centre of a thriving urban region. Current plans to develop Regional Centres and Corridors, key development areas, and new transit projects will intensify and change the face of growth and development within the Town's settlement areas. In order to deal with these changing circumstances effectively, the Town of Richmond Hill needs a new Official Plan (OP). The purpose of an OP is to establish a municipality's policies on how land shall be used for the long-term to help meet the specific physical, social and economic needs of its inhabitants. The Town must prepare for changing growth patterns as Richmond Hill faces a mature state of growth, shifting away from new greenfield subdivision development to the evolution of more compact communities.

The Policy Context Background Paper is the first in a series of background discussion papers for the Town's Official Plan (OP). The purpose of this background paper is to set out the existing legislative framework and policy regime through which the Town's new Official Plan will be developed, reviewed and implemented. The paper is divided into three major sections:

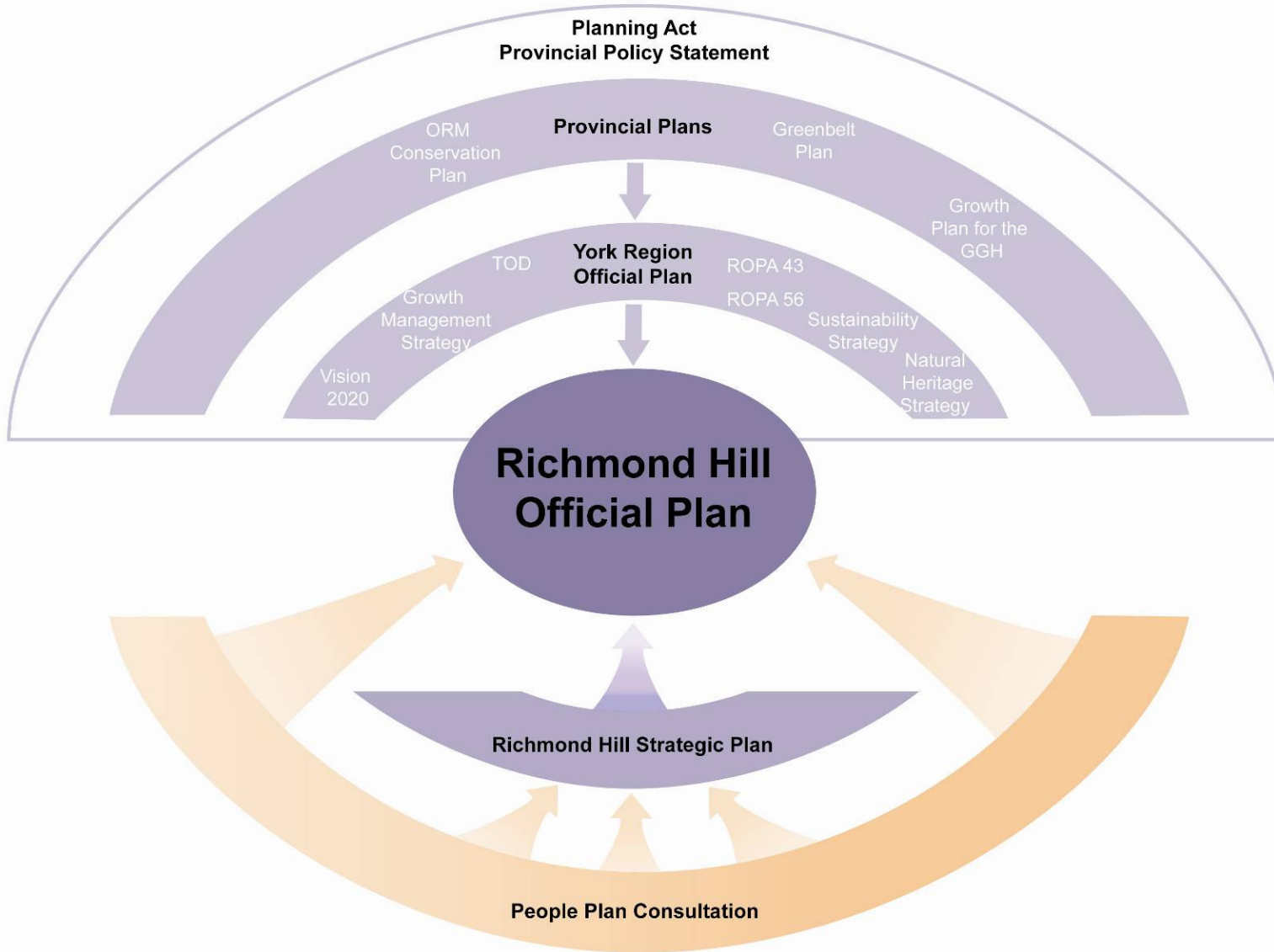
- A) Provincial Planning Policy Context;
- B) Regional Planning Policy Context; and
- C) Local Planning Policy Context – What Does this Mean for Richmond Hill.

The first two sections establish the land use planning policy direction from the Provincial and Regional perspective. The third section attempts to match these policies to Richmond Hill's local planning context. Common policy directives from the Province, the Region, and input from the Town's Socio-Economic Study and People Plan consultation process were analyzed to come up with major policy themes. These policy directives will help set the parameters and tone for developing the new OP.

The Town will build on and supplement this information with a series of topic-specific discussion papers that will provide further options for consideration:

- Urban Structure
- Environmental Policy Review
- Growth Management
- Economic Policy Review
- Housing and Residential Intensification
- Transportation
- Infrastructure
- Parkland
- Urban Design and Heritage

These options combined with ongoing public consultation through the People Plan approach will help shape the new OP. The resulting OP will be a reflection of policy direction from the top-down and local input from the ground-up, identifying the challenges, opportunities and standards for what the community in Richmond Hill truly wants to achieve.



**Top-down Bottom-up Approach**

## PROVINCIAL PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

### Ontario's Planning Regime

The Planning Act establishes the legislative framework for land use planning in Ontario. While the Province provides broad policy direction, municipalities play a key role in implementation. The Province provides guidance and advice to municipalities and the public on land use planning issues by: issuing Provincial Policy Statements under the Planning Act; developing Provincial plans; and providing one-window planning services to those municipalities where the Province remains the approval authority for planning applications. Municipalities are responsible for preparing official plans and zoning by-laws - the primary vehicles for implementing provincial land use policies and plans. The Town of Richmond Hill is part of a two-tier municipal governance system. While York Region (the upper-tier municipality) provides a coordinated and consistent approach to policy development through the Regional Official Plan, Richmond Hill (a lower-tier municipality) develops its own OP and zoning by-laws and reviews and processes development applications. Both Regional and local policies must be consistent with and conform to Provincial and Regional policies and plans.

The Provincial Policy Statement is the basis of the province's policy-led planning system and is the complementary policy document to the Planning Act. The PPS policies represent minimum standards and do not prevent planning authorities from going beyond those standards (unless doing so would conflict with other PPS policies). While the PPS is focused on desired outcomes, it does not prescribe the process that must be followed – allowing municipalities to adapt or use alternative approaches to achieving the same goal based on local circumstances. In response to growing concern over urban sprawl, traffic congestion, smog, and development pressure on sensitive environmental and agricultural lands, the PPS 2005 shifted the focus of provincial land use planning policy towards growth management. While the PPS recognizes the importance of growth and development (e.g. housing, employment) to a community's long-term economic prosperity, it also provides for the protection and conservation of resources and promotes more efficient and sustainable forms of urban development through intensification, compact form and mixed-use.

In addition to enhancing policy, the Provincial government established planning reform legislation to make amendments to the Planning Act and to provide additional tools to help municipalities better manage their communities through well planned growth. Changes to the Planning Act were introduced through the Strong Communities (Planning Amendment) Act, 2004 and the Planning and Conservation Land Statute Law Amendment Act, 2006. Some of the key changes to the Planning Act included:

- Recognizing and supporting municipal council decisions to contain growth within designated settlement area boundaries;
- Imposing a higher implementation standard of "shall be consistent with" the PPS;
- Process improvements that recognize the need for upfront consultation, complete information and up-to-date planning policy documents and regulations; and
- New/enhanced tools and flexibility to support sustainable development and complete communities such as increased protection of employment lands, exterior design control and provisions to encourage sustainable design, energy efficiency, transit and intensification/redevelopment.

## **Provincial Plans**

Under Ontario's land use planning system, the PPS policies are complemented by provincial plans or by locally-generated policies regarding matters of provincial interest. The Province has prepared a number of geographic-specific provincial plans that have and will continue to have a profound effect on growth and development in Richmond Hill – the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP), the Greenbelt Plan, and the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

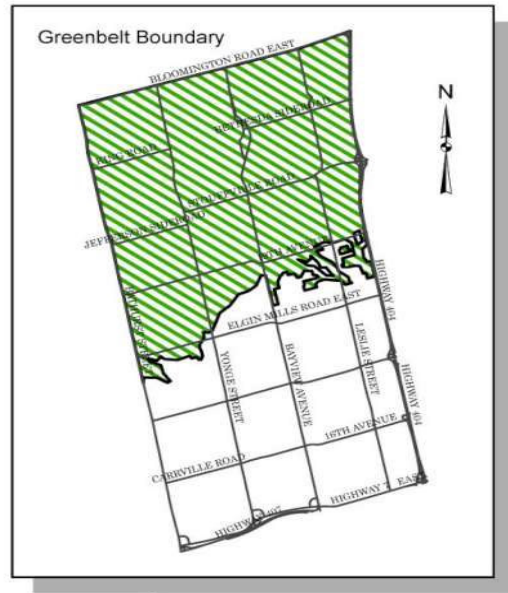
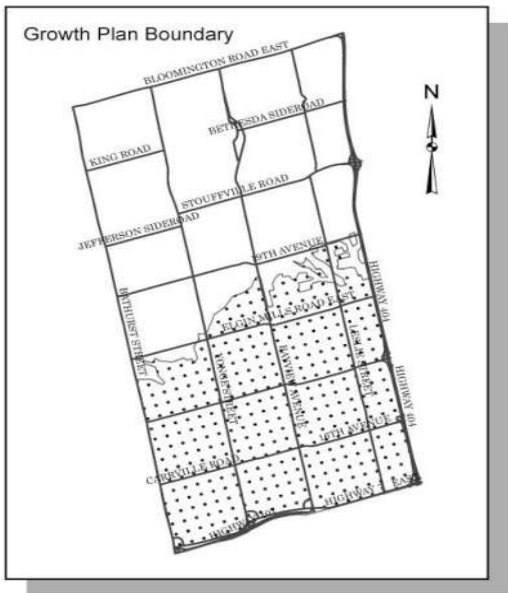
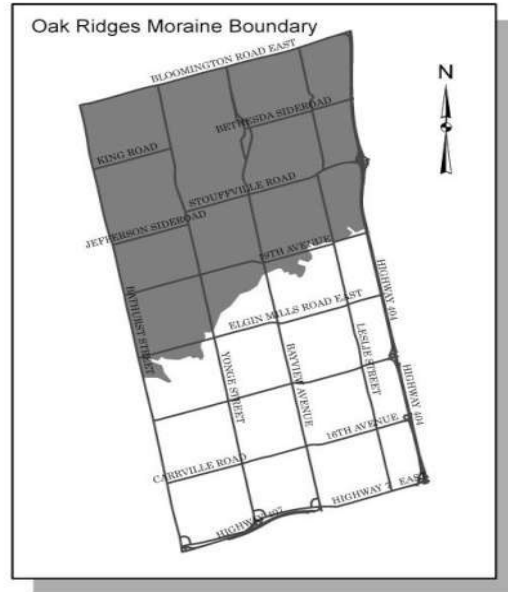
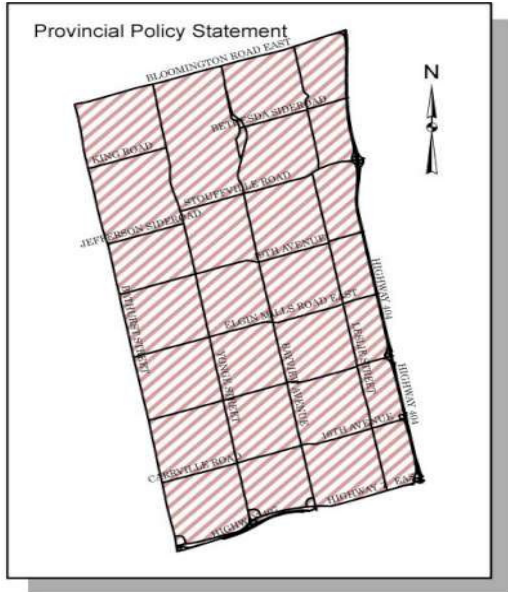
The Oak Ridges Moraine (ORM) is a unique concentration of environmental, geological and hydrological features and is one of Ontario's most significant landforms. Approximately 52% of Richmond Hill is located within the ORM, including the most urbanized part of the Moraine as well as a significant east-west natural linkage corridor. In 2001, the Province established the ORMCP as an ecologically-based plan to provide land use and resource management direction for the ORM, setting out permitted uses and restrictions on four land use designations. The ORMCP provides widespread protection of the ORM by: prohibiting development in key natural heritage features and sensitive hydrological features; promoting connectivity; and requiring municipalities to identify features and develop strategies to protect water quality and quantity functions. Although existing uses were allowed to continue, the ORMCP prohibits the creation of new settlement areas within the Moraine.

In 2005, the Province developed the Greenbelt Plan to permanently protect agricultural, environmentally-sensitive and rural-settlement lands within the Greater Golden Horseshoe of Southern Ontario. The Greenbelt Plan identifies where urbanization should not occur and protects approximately 1 million acres of greenspace. The Greenbelt Plan includes the Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP) and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP) areas. It recognizes those specific plans' policies and provides additional policies for improving linkages and protecting lands in the remaining countryside. Within Richmond Hill, the ORMCP area makes up the majority of the designated Greenbelt Plan area. Only a small portion of stream corridors in the Rouge River watershed (extending into the North Leslie Secondary Plan area) is subject to the Greenbelt Plan's Protected Countryside policies.

Under the Places to Grow Act, the Province established the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan) in 2006 to provide a framework to guide municipalities as they plan for growth in their communities. The Growth Plan provides guidance to municipalities on where and how to grow by encouraging population and employment growth within existing settlement areas. As part of implementing the Growth Plan, built-up urban areas/boundaries within existing settlement areas have been identified for each municipality within the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Municipalities are required to identify the Settlement Area, the Built Boundary and Designated Greenfield Areas (the remaining portion of settlement area outside of the built boundary) in their OPs. Municipalities are also required to designate identified Urban Growth Centres (UGC) and corridors in their OPs. Major site specific directives in the Growth Plan that apply to Richmond Hill include: a designated Urban Growth Centre (UGC); and improved and proposed higher order transit along Yonge Street, Highway 7 and the Langstaff GO train line. The following intensification and density targets apply to York Region and/or Richmond Hill:

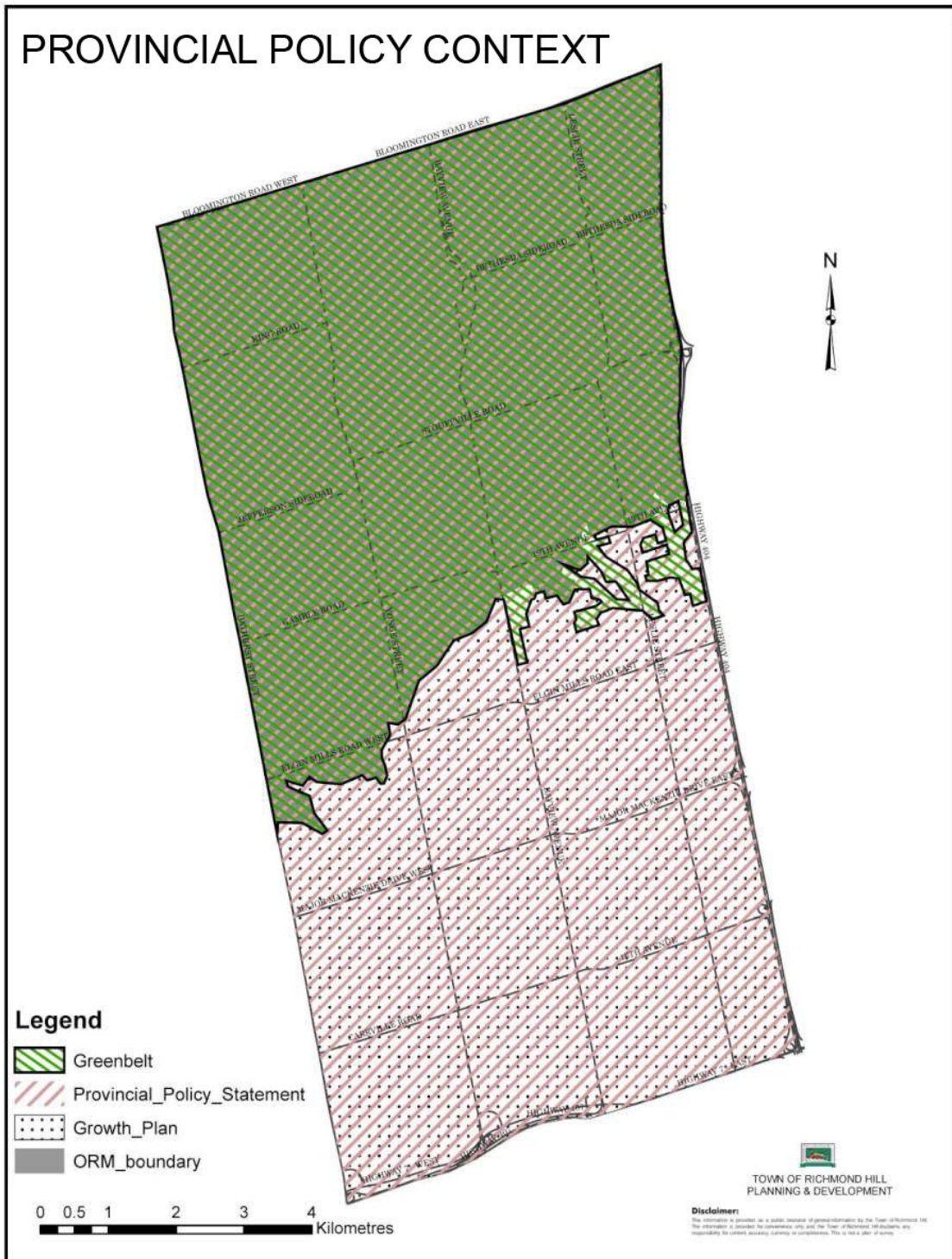
- Intensification target by 2015: 40% of new residential units must be located within the built boundary (applies to regions/counties/single-tier municipalities, i.e. York Region)
- Density target for Richmond Hill UGC by 2031: 200 residents and jobs combined per hectare
- Density target for Designated Greenfield Area: 50 residents and jobs combined per hectare (through phasing)

Each of these described provincial plans are implemented under the Planning Act, which requires local policy documents (i.e. OPs) and decisions on land use planning matters to conform to the provincial plans.



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# PROVINCIAL POLICY CONTEXT



## REGIONAL PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

### York Regional Official Plan and Recent Policy Direction

The Region of York adopted its first strategic plan in 1993 and updated it in 2002 resulting in the current Vision 2026. The Region's visioning documents have played a valuable role in guiding Regional Council and staff in the provision of services and the development of the Regional Official Plan (ROP). Results from the visioning exercise helped form the ROP's three theme areas: Healthy Communities; Sustainable Environment; and Economic Vitality.

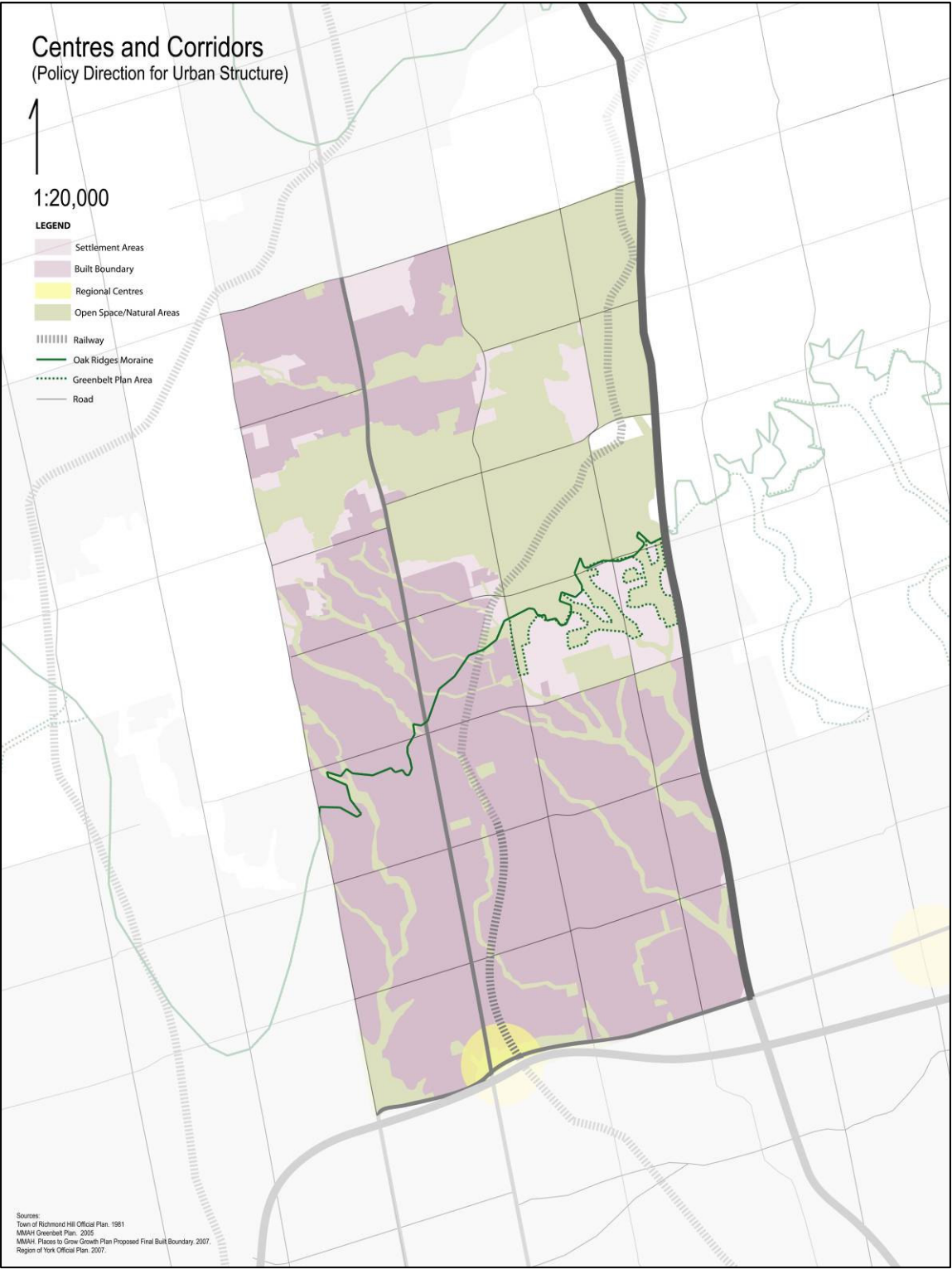
The purpose of the ROP is to manage growth by providing a set of policies to help guide economic, environmental and community-building decisions affecting the use of land. The policies in the ROP provide a framework for coordinated planning with adjacent municipalities within the Greater Toronto Area and help coordinate and set the stage for more detailed planning by the area municipalities. Over the past few years, there have been a number of key amendments to the ROP as well as studies to help inform the current ROP review and update. These include:

- Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA) No. 43 – Centres and Corridors
- York Region Transit-Oriented Development Guidelines
- Proposed Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA) No. 56 – Transit Policies
- York Region Sustainability Strategy
- York Region Natural Heritage Strategic Directions Paper



#### ***ROPA 43 – Centres and Corridors***

In 2004, York Region Council adopted Regional Official Plan Amendment (ROPA) No. 43 which articulates and implements the Region's planned urban structure of Regional Centres linked by Regional Corridors and the role of Local Centres and Local Corridors. York Region's Centres, which include the Richmond Hill/Langstaff Gateway Centre, are planned to become hubs of business, cultural, government and social activity. They will contain the highest concentration and greatest mix of uses in the Region, including a range of employment and housing opportunities. Development in these Centres will be compact, pedestrian-friendly and transit supportive. The two Regional Corridors (Yonge St. and Hwy. 7) extend to the limits of the Region, linking the Regional Centres and connecting them to the rest of the Greater Toronto Area and beyond. These corridors have great potential for more intensive and mixed-use forms of development served by rapid transit. Local Centres and Local Corridors are similar to their Regional counterparts in terms of mixed use activity and focus on transit, but are intended to serve a smaller area. Concentrating residents and jobs at specific locations is important to providing opportunities to live and work in the same area. It also provides efficient and effective transit services, a variety of housing opportunities, specialized human services, and economic vitality.



### ***York Region Transit-Oriented Development Guidelines***

In 2006, York Region Council adopted its Regional Transit-Oriented Development Guidelines as a tool to help transit-oriented development (TOD) in the Region. TOD is an approach to planning and design that recognizes the relationship between how we grow and our ability to provide efficient and effective transit services. The purpose of the TOD Guidelines is to advance the implementation of York Region's planned urban structure of Regional Centres linked by Regional Corridors served by public transit. The six themes or "lenses" of the TOD Guidelines include: 1) Pedestrians – encourage access, safety and comfort; 2) Parking – provide well-designed, attractive facilities that put transit first; 3) Land Use – attract the right type, intensity and mix of land uses; 4) Built Form – address transit through appropriate massing, density and height; 5) Connections – link buildings and the spaces between them to transit; and 6) Implementation – apply TOD approaches throughout the planning process.

### ***Proposed ROPA 56 – To Update Transit Policies***

In October 2007, York Region Council received an information report containing a proposed amendment to the ROP to update policies and maps related to "The Transit Network" under Section 6.2. The objective of Section 6.2 "The Transit Network" is to provide transit service that is convenient, accessible and equitable to all residents of York and to provide rapid transit services as early as possible linking the Regional Centres with adjacent urban areas. The amendment is largely technical in nature and maintains the intent of the existing policies. The amendment was prepared to recognize new conditions involving transit that have been approved or implemented, e.g. VIVA Phase I rapid transit service and service requirements of VIVA Phase II; announcement for the construction of the Spadina subway north to Vaughan; announcement of the planned extension of the Yonge Subway north into Richmond Hill; adoption of the Regional Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Guidelines; approval of the Provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe; and inclusion of the new planning implementation tools within the Planning Act under Bill 51. The ROP acknowledges that a transit system is an important component of an economic strategy to encourage business to locate in York Region and that it is an important tool in any environmental and energy conservation strategy.

### ***York Region Sustainability Strategy***

On October 31, 2007, York Region Council adopted the final version of the "York Region Sustainability Strategy: Towards a Sustainable Region." The purpose of the strategy is to provide a framework for making smarter decisions about growth management and municipal responsibilities by integrating the environment, economy and community. The strategy provides nine guiding principles for implementing sustainable programs and activities. One of the principles identifies the community, environment and economy as the "triple-bottom" line elements by which all programs and activities should be evaluated. The strategy then identifies six theme areas for which action is recommended: 1) Corporate Culture of Sustainability; 2) Healthy Communities; 3) Economic Vitality; 4) Sustainable Natural Environment; 5) Education, Engagement and Partnerships; and 6) Sustainability Implementation and Monitoring. Many of the recommended action items under healthy communities, economic vitality and sustainable natural environment have strong linkages to one another and provide direction for land use planning and design.

### ***York Region Natural Heritage Strategic Directions Paper***

On January 24, 2008, York Region Council endorsed the “Final Natural Heritage Strategic Directions Paper” which includes eight Natural Heritage Action Areas for the Region and the corresponding next steps. According to this strategic directions paper, natural heritage system planning requires the protection of remaining areas and restoration of degraded areas, with the goals of enhancing and strengthening the Natural Heritage System to ensure a sustainable York Region. The paper provides an overview of the existing Greenlands System which is a series of natural areas and linkages protected through the ROP. The second part of the paper discusses how natural heritage systems planning will be integrated with other provincial and regional initiatives to inform the Region’s decisions on growth and land use. The third part of the paper outlines a series of action items to help inform future decisions through natural heritage systems planning: 1) Update our Natural Heritage System; 2) Incorporate the Greenbelt Plan into the ROP (in conjunction with conformity for the Growth Plan); 3) Make Connections in New Communities; 4) Restore and Strengthen the Natural Heritage System (natural and non-natural corridors); 5) Adopt a New Approach to Infrastructure; 6) Establish a Regional Trail Network; 7) Advance the Greening Strategy; and 8) Continued Awareness and Dialogue.

### **York Region Growth Management Papers**

Over the next twenty-five years, York Region’s population and employment are expected to reach 1.5 million people and 800,000 jobs respectively. In order to plan for anticipated growth, the Region is developing the York Region Growth Management Strategy which incorporates direction from the Province’s Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. This strategy will help inform the Region’s Official Plan update as it is brought into conformity with the Greenbelt Plan and the Growth Plan. As part of the Growth Management Strategy, the Region held a series of Planning for Tomorrow public consultation meetings and developed a series of draft reports in 2007. The following is a summary of key points from those draft reports.

#### ***Population and Employment Forecasts***

By 2031, York Region’s population is expected to increase by an additional 547,000 people and Richmond Hill’s population is expected to increase by approximately 54,700 people. Demographic trends indicate that the average household size is decreasing, due to an aging population, more empty nesters and an increase in childless or single person households. This means that while more housing units will be required to accommodate the increase in population, each household will likely contain less people on average - further increasing the need for more housing supply. Under the 40% intensification within built-up areas scenario, the majority of population growth (73%) is anticipated in the Region’s urban areas of Richmond Hill, Markham and Vaughan.

By 2031, York Region’s employment is expected to increase by an additional 345,000 jobs at an annual growth rate of 3%. Addressing the Region’s employment growth is another challenge. Based on the 2001 census, the Region’s activity rate (percentage of total jobs to total number of residents) is 52% or 52 jobs per 100 residents. Richmond Hill’s activity rate is 39% and forecasted at 42.5% by 2031. Although Richmond Hill’s activity rate is expected to increase, its current rate is lower than activity rates of many other mature communities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe – highlighting the importance of designating and protecting the Town’s employment lands from future conversion. The draft reports also identify that 47% of the Region’s labour force commutes outside the region daily and that this live/work percentage is among the lowest in the Greater Toronto Area.

Not only does the Region need to preserve existing and future employment lands, but it needs to decrease the proportion of labour force employed outside the Region. A decreased live/work ratio means shorter commuting times and less traffic congestion overall. Another challenge is to attract a larger proportion of highly skilled jobs to match the anticipated labour force in the Region which is made of up highly skilled workers.

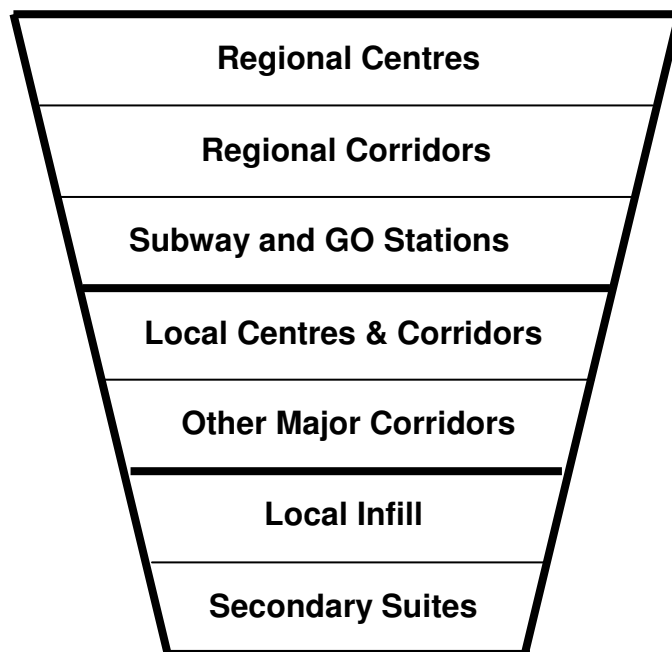
### ***Land Requirements***

Under the current pace of growth and based on Provincial and Regional population forecasts, growth is expected to be strongest within the next 10-15 years and then decline slightly due to demographic trends. Despite the slowing pace of growth, there will be a rising demand for housing due to the decline in the average number of persons per unit (PPU). Likewise, Provincial and Regional policies call for job creation to match labour force growth; this means that employment lands need to be identified and designated to provide current and future supply. Achieving the Growth Plan's 40% intensification target within the built boundary will require each local municipality to establish an intensification strategy and will continue the shift towards higher density development such as townhouses and apartments. The draft reports also state that constructing infrastructure (roads, water, wastewater, human services) to match the pace of growth within the Region will be challenging, as will the magnitude and timing of infrastructure investment.

### ***Residential Intensification***

Intensification is the development or redevelopment of a property, site or areas at a higher density than previously exists. Three forms of intensification include infill development, redevelopment (including brownfield and greyfield development), and additions or expansions to existing development. The three southern municipalities in York Region (Richmond Hill, Markham and Vaughan) are expected to absorb 84% or 71,500 of the total new intensification units.

### **York Region Intensification Matrix**



The ROP recognizes the benefits of intensifying the Region's urban areas and creating complete communities. These benefits range from efficiency and cost effectiveness of transit, to infrastructure and human services, a wider range of housing types, and amenities and employment closer to home. The Region is gradually increasing its residential density and diversifying its housing mix. As part of its intensification strategy, the Region's primary task is to ensure that compact development is directed to appropriate areas such as Regional and Local Centres and Corridors. The Region has developed an Intensification Matrix - a framework to help identify a range of potential intensification areas (e.g. centers, corridors, local infill) and identify the distribution of new intensification units to each type of area. Each area municipality is expected to complete its own Municipal Intensification Implementation Strategy - an action plan to outline how each area municipality will achieve their preliminary intensification assignment using the Intensification Matrix Framework.

### **Other Ongoing Initiatives**

In addition to the major policy initiatives identified in the background paper, there are a number of other ongoing initiatives that will likely influence the policy context for the Town's new Official Plan. OPs and Secondary Plans for adjacent municipalities, for instance, will have an effect on growth and development in Richmond Hill. The propensity to attract certain types of development and the associated spin-off effects are not limited to within the political boundaries of a single municipality. In many cases, municipalities can anticipate future types of development and trends similar to what may be taking place in a neighbouring municipality on the other side of the road. Transit initiatives, such as the proposed Yonge subway line extension and VIVA/YRT's Rapid Transit Vision, will influence how the Regional Centre and Corridors are planned and developed. Furthermore, site-specific strategies for the Regional Centre and Downtown Core will serve as test cases for the development of policies and design principles that may be adopted elsewhere in the Town as part of the new OP.

### **LOCAL PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT – WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR RICHMOND HILL**

The direction from Provincial and Regional land use planning policies is clear – municipalities particularly within the Greater Toronto Area need to respond to anticipated population growth and increasing development pressures by better managing growth and curbing urban sprawl. The legislation, policies, plans and guidelines reviewed in this background paper establish parameters for the Town's new OP, as local municipal policies and plans are required to conform to Regional and Provincial policies and plans. Despite the different purposes for these documents, the basic themes and goals espoused for land use planning and development are very much the same. Organized under the three pillars identified through the People Plan process – people, environment, economy – the following section mirrors the main Provincial and Regional policy themes as they apply to Richmond Hill's local planning context. These themes will provide key direction for developing policies in the Town's new Official Plan.



## **People**

### ***Plan for a Growing Population***

Richmond Hill is a rapidly growing community. During the 1990s, the number of household units and population doubled, making Richmond Hill one of the fastest growing large urban municipalities in the Province. In recent years, although the pace of growth has declined, the Town continues to grow at a stable rate. The Town's current population is approximately 181,000 people and Richmond Hill is expected to grow by an additional 54,700 people by 2031.

Currently Richmond Hill has a relatively young population; however, like many other communities it faces an aging population over the next 25 years. The Town has a high proportion of larger households due to multi-family living arrangements, although like the rest of the Region, it too will see a trend of declining household size. While the pace of growth is anticipated to slow down in the future, the demand for new household units will continue to grow at a rapid pace. Much of the Town's population growth comes from elsewhere in the Province, though a significant proportion comes from international migration thus contributing to the culturally diverse make-up of the Town.

The labour force in Richmond Hill is highly educated overall. Based on high average household incomes, the Town of Richmond Hill can be described as an affluent community. However, the proportion of those in the low income bracket is increasing and the lack of affordable rental and ownership housing is an issue. Predominant development in the Town has been single-family, detached dwellings; while housing stock is beginning to change it will need to diversify further in order to provide an array of housing types and prices to meet the needs of a growing community. Furthermore, constraints on the Town's land supply and provincial policies point to the need to develop compact communities with higher density development.

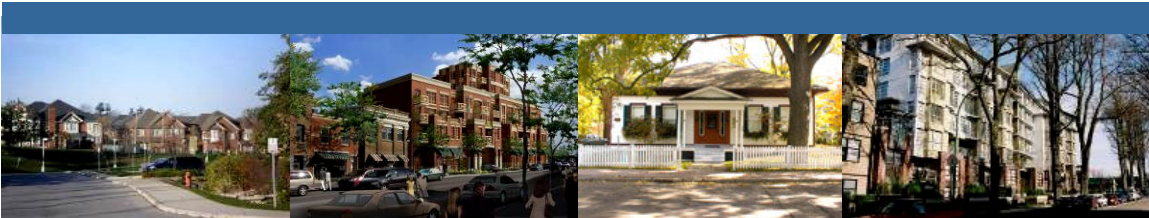
### ***Direct Growth within Settlement Areas***

Like many communities across the Province and the Greater Golden Horseshoe in particular, Provincial and Regional policy dictates that future growth must occur within defined settlement areas. Under the Planning Act, applicants can no longer appeal to the OMB if a municipality refuses to adopt or make a decision on an application to expand a settlement area boundary or establish a new settlement area. Expansions to settlement areas are limited to the time of a comprehensive review by the municipality when it updates its OP. Any proposed expansions are subject to provincial criteria and municipalities are only permitted to designate future land supply up to a 20-year time horizon. As mentioned previously, the Province has set an intensification target within the settlement areas. By 2015 a minimum 40% of new residential units must be located within already built-up areas based on a fixed built boundary identified through the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Since Richmond Hill has few Designated Greenfield Areas left to develop, the majority of its settlement area or growth will be contained within the Town's built boundary.

### ***Provide a Range of Housing Types and Densities***

In order to accommodate anticipated population growth, the Town needs to provide an appropriate range of housing types and densities to meet the projected requirements of current and future residents. Reaching the 40% intensification target will mean a dramatic shift from low density single-family, detached dwellings to medium and higher density residential developments such as townhouses and apartment buildings. As household sizes decline, the demand for higher density

and generally smaller sized units may increase as well. Those in multi-family arrangements may also welcome alternative dwelling types such as duplexes and secondary suites; the Planning Act now allows for municipal OP policies on secondary suites without the risk of appeal. Under Provincial policies, municipalities are required to establish and implement minimum targets for housing that are affordable to low and moderate income households; affordability is based on the regional market area as well as average incomes. By providing a range of housing types, the Town will be able to offer consumers more choice and enable residents entering different life stages (e.g. empty nesters on fixed incomes or young professionals starting their careers) to either remain in the Town or relocate to Richmond Hill. Provincial and Regional housing policies also support the location of new housing to areas where appropriate levels of infrastructure and public service facilities already exist. This enables the Town to maximize the use of its services and bring people closer to amenities already in place, such as parks, schools, shopping and employment. Although the Province's intensification targets apply to the entire settlement area, Regional policies focus the majority of intensification to Regional and Local Centres and Corridors.



### ***Define the Urban Structure***

The new OP will define the future urban structure and will provide guidance on where intensification will go and how it will be implemented. These policies will be based on a combination of Provincial and Regional policy direction and local input from the community during public consultation for the Town's OP. As mentioned previously, the majority of intensification will be focused on Regional and Local Centres and Corridors. Richmond Hill's Regional Centre (Richmond Hill/Langstaff Gateway), for instance, is a designated Urban Growth Centre (UGC) under the Growth Plan. The density target for UGCs in the larger municipalities outside of Toronto is 200 residents and jobs per hectare. Aside from the 40% intensification target within the built-up area, the Growth Plan also sets a density target of 50 people and jobs per hectare in designated greenfield development areas. The Region has developed an Intensification Matrix indicating the proportion of intensification units to be allotted to strategic development areas.

Intensification is not limited to just high-rise apartment or office tower development. Through efficient land use patterns and design, there are opportunities to intensify the urban structure at a human scale. Numerous Provincial and Regional policies encourage compact form and mixed use developments that help maintain a sense of place. Regional policies for the Regional and Local Centres and Corridors, for instance, direct municipalities to delineate the boundaries in their OP and develop secondary plans for each of these areas. A list of secondary plan criteria is also provided ranging from setbacks and frontage, to mix of uses, cultural heritage protection, public spaces, streetscaping, and community design. The ROP acknowledges that each centre and corridor will have its own unique characteristics and that they may evolve naturally over time. The ROP also recognizes that infill and intensification may occur incrementally and so initial development should not preclude the fuller achievement of compact communities. Specific standards such as approximately 30 hectares for the boundary of a Local Centre and a long-term

density target of 2.5 Floor Space Index for Key Development Areas is provided in the ROP. Options to support implementation are also mentioned such as: designating Regional Centres as Community Improvement Program (CIP) areas under section 28 of the Planning Act to qualify for funding; and utilizing density bonusing under section 37 of the Planning Act to achieve net community benefits to support compact form.



"Image Source: Ontario Growth Secretariat, Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal"; Town of Richmond Hill

### ***Promote Transit-Supportive Development***

Based on Provincial and Regional policies and public input from the Town's Strategic Visioning process, transportation will be a major planning and design issue for the Town. The Planning Act and PPS both highlight sustainable development that is pedestrian oriented and supports public transit to be a key provincial interest. Multi-government transportation initiatives such as Metrolinx (formerly the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority) and the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe identifies major transit projects and improvements with direct impacts on Richmond Hill; these include increased frequency and proposed expansion of the Langstaff GO train route north to Stouffville Road and the proposed expansion of the Yonge Street subway from Toronto to the Regional Centre at Yonge and Highway 7. In addition, there is an opportunity to create a transportation/mobility hub at the Regional Centre and there are plans to enhance the bus rapid transit system and eventually use light rapid transit on the Regional Corridors. To help support these initiatives, Richmond Hill will need to plan for transit-oriented development along its Regional and Local Corridors. In fact, the Region requires each affected municipality to designate these major transit spines in their OPs.

## **Environment**

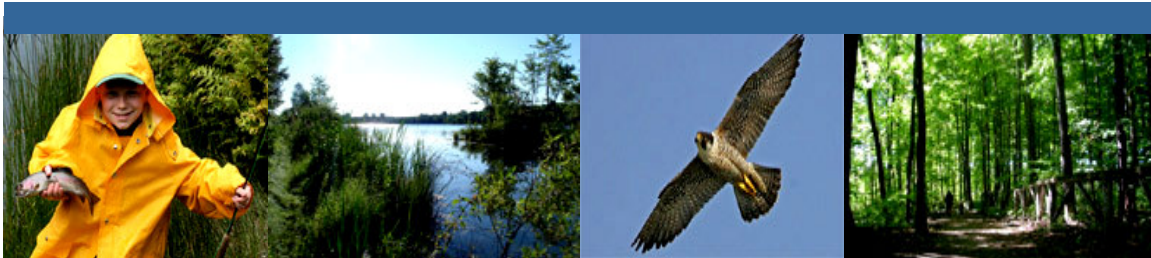
### ***Protect Natural Heritage Features and Water Resources***

Richmond Hill's natural environment and its location on the Oak Ridges Moraine are some of the Town's greatest assets. A healthy natural environment contributes to quality of life and attracts new businesses. Within the Provincial and Regional land use planning framework, there are numerous environmental policies and criteria that the Town must adhere to when developing OP policies and reviewing a development application. For instance, the PPS states that development and site alteration shall not be permitted within significant natural heritage features or areas (e.g. wetlands, woodlands, valleylands, wildlife habitat, fish habitat, areas of natural and scientific interest, habitat of endangered and threatened species) unless no negative impacts can be demonstrated through an environmental analysis. This restriction also applies to lands adjacent to natural heritage features or areas. Likewise, municipalities are required to identify and protect, improve or restore the quality and quantity of its water resources. Municipalities must protect

drinking water supplies and restrict development and site alteration where sensitive or vulnerable groundwater and surface water features exist.

Within the Greenbelt Plan and ORMCP areas, policies also require upper-tier planning authorities to undertake watershed plans, water conservation plans and water budgets. Examples of other criteria provided in these plans include: minimum vegetation protection zones (to act as environmental buffers between development activity and key natural heritage and/or hydrologically significant features); targets for pervious and impervious surfaces within a subwatershed; and limits on the net developable portion of a site containing a significant landform.

Outside of the Moraine, the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe indicates that the Province will be undertaking sub-area assessments to identify natural systems that may need additional policies for protection; once identified these areas and policies will have to be incorporated into the Town's future policies.



Across Richmond Hill, the ROP and the Town's current OP and secondary plans provide protection for significant environmental features through Environmental Policy Area and Environmentally Sensitive Area designations. Further protection to environmental features, functions and landscapes is also provided through the Region and Town's tree cutting by-laws and site alteration by-laws. The Region has also set a forest cover target of 25% with the objective of increasing natural cover in urban areas to intensify the urban canopy cover. Conformity with provincial plans and the consolidation of regional and local policies for environmental protection will comprise a major component of the new OP.

***Maintain and Enhance Connectivity***

In addition to protecting core environmental features and their functions, it is important to provide linkages between these features and maintain connectivity. Linking natural features and areas provides an opportunity for wildlife to move through the system, encourages biodiversity and increases environmental resiliency by allowing the benefits of a healthy system to offset adverse impacts from another location. The Region's Greenlands System was the first step in identifying core areas and linkages for environmental protection. Since then Provincial Plans and policies as well as natural heritage studies by the TRCA and LSRCA have refined and refocused natural heritage systems planning. The Region is now developing a Natural Heritage Systems Strategy that will build on the Greenlands System and provide a more fulsome approach to establishing and maintaining natural areas and corridors. Policy initiatives that both the Region and the Town will need to undertake include: examining where natural corridors are fragmented; evaluating the most beneficial locations for linkages and how to secure them; identifying where the system can be strengthened through ecological buffers and strategic restoration or enhancement; and determining the most appropriate types of ecological buffers and widths – especially in urban areas.

Another component of maintaining connectivity through the natural system is to reinforce the linkage between the natural environment and the human environment. Provincial policies support the promotion of healthy, active communities through the provision of pedestrian or non-motorized routes and open spaces. The Region has made a commitment to establishing a Regional Trail Network that connects the natural heritage system with local municipal trails; this initiative provides residents and visitors with an opportunity to experience the natural heritage system firsthand. The Town's OP policies will need to integrate this Regional Trail Network with its own plans for pedestrian accessible green spaces and parks, as well as local trails and bicycle pathways.

***Mitigate Impacts through Sustainable Design and Infrastructure***

Natural environment features within the Town are not limited to the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt. Within the settlement areas, the Town must develop policies to protect what natural features remain and improve sustainability overall. The Region's Natural Heritage Discussion Paper notes that existing settlement areas will be intensifying development through implementation of the Growth Plan and, therefore, priority should be given to intensifying the natural heritage system within these areas. Municipalities are encouraged to establish an urban open space system within the built-up areas which may include green roofs, communal courtyards and public parks; this will require the Town to examine both natural and non-natural corridors for their enhancement potential and develop policies for implementation. The Region, for instance, has policies to support reforestation programs and encourages plantings to enhance the Regional Centres and Corridors.

Besides intensifying growth and the natural heritage system, the Town will be exploring opportunities to promote sustainable design and infrastructure through its OP policies. As built-up areas are intensified, the Growth Plan directs municipalities to implement OP policies and strategies that support conservation objectives related to water, energy, air quality protection, integrated waste management, and cultural heritage. For example, policies to support and implement innovative stormwater management techniques may be tied to redevelopment and intensification. New provisions under the Planning Act, such as exterior design control through site plan approvals and expanded criteria for Community Improvement Plans, allow municipalities to promote building designs and construction techniques that maximize energy efficiency and minimize adverse impacts to the environment.

Similar to the push for sustainable buildings and site design, there has also been a push to adopt a new approach to infrastructure planning, design and construction with a genuine connection to the natural heritage system. A common goal of the Region's master plans for water and wastewater, transportation, and pedestrian/cycling pathways, is to minimize, mitigate and monitor impacts and examine opportunities where infrastructure projects can be a catalyst for protecting and enhancing the natural heritage system. For instance, YRT/VIVA's bus rapid transit plans include the use of energy efficient vehicles and its design principles incorporate planted medians. Furthermore, the PPS policies support the use of alternative or renewable energy systems within settlement areas, rural areas and prime agricultural areas in accordance with federal and provincial requirements. When undertaking lot creation and redevelopment, the PPS also requires environmental and servicing capacity to exist to support future growth and development. The Town's OP policies for environmental protection must not only consider the impacts to features and their functions, but to the cumulative impacts of our activities in the long run.



### ***Promote Stewardship and Innovative Approaches to Implementation***

Enhancing and maintaining Richmond Hill's natural environment will require support from all levels of government, the public and the private sector. Landmark plans such as the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Greenbelt Plan provide protection for particularly sensitive and significant environmental features. However, the Region, the Town, and the conservation authorities need to work together to identify and adopt an updated natural heritage system and identify critical gaps within the system. Available planning tools may be explored to help secure target areas for restoration and enhancement through the development process. Stewardship among land developers, residents and local businesses may also be required to help fund or provide in-kind resources to restore and maintain these natural spaces. Moreover, the Town may explore opportunities for demonstration projects that utilize state-of-the-art infrastructure construction techniques to minimize impact on the environment. Smaller scale pilot programs within target communities or neighbourhoods could be used to test the effectiveness of low impact designs and green technology and identify gaps or barriers to implementing such techniques in the Town's planning policies and zoning by-laws. By proactively investigating new sustainable design technology and practices, the Town may succeed in engaging local residents and businesses and creating more livable, energy efficient communities with smaller ecological footprints.

## **Economy**

### ***Understand the Local Economy***

In order to plan for Richmond Hill's long-term economic prosperity, the Town needs to improve its understanding of the regional and local economy in order to address industry requirements and skills availability. The Town's recent Socio-Economic Study provides insight on the Town's economic characteristics. For instance, Richmond Hill has a relatively high labour force participation rate (70%) and low unemployment rate (5.4%) in comparison to the rest of the Province and the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). The largest industries providing employment in Richmond Hill include business services (including professional, scientific and technical), retail trade, finance and insurance, manufacturing, health and social services. The most common occupations among Richmond Hill's residents include business, finance and administration, sales and services, management, natural and applied science and related fields, and trades, transportation, and equipment operators.

The economic base within a community is comprised of industries which are export-based (contributing to the needs of other communities) as opposed to community-based (which serves local needs). The larger the economic base, the more potential for the community to expand. Richmond Hill's proportion of economic base jobs is lower than other municipalities, due to a concentration of jobs in adjacent municipalities (i.e. Toronto). However, Richmond Hill compares favourably with municipalities that have a higher proportion of jobs in the Greater Golden

Horseshoe and is well positioned to add significantly to its business and health services economic base. The recent creation and future expansion of business parks in close proximity to Highways 404, 7 and 407, the development of the Regional Centre and Corridors, and improvements in transportation infrastructure (i.e. BRT, proposed LRT, and proposed subway) should help to offset competition from nearby municipalities. Thus, policies in the new OP should include provisions to support employment growth within the Town; these may include setting targets for the activity rate, designation of employment areas, and ensuring that infrastructure is available to serve these areas.



Similar to the Canadian economy, the majority of Richmond Hill's economy is driven by small businesses (86.5%) employing less than 20 people. While medium-sized businesses (10.2%) employing 20-99 employees and large businesses (2.4%) with 100-499 employees account for a smaller portion of the local economy, Richmond Hill has become the location of choice for a number of major employers with more than 500 employees including their corporate headquarters. According to the Socio-Economic Study, while industrial vacancy rates have increased slightly, office vacancy rates have declined suggesting a possible shift away from manufacturing towards professional or office-based jobs. As part of developing its new OP, the Town will have to further investigate changes in local business activity and emerging industries or trends in employment. The Region, for example, has highlighted in its growth management reports the need to acquire more highly skilled jobs to match its highly educated labour force. Richmond Hill has a highly educated population with the most common fields of post-education graduates being in commerce, management, and business administration, followed by applied science technologies and trades, social sciences, and engineering and applied sciences. Perhaps the Town can look at companies specializing in these fields to determine what form of employment land development would be most suitable to attract these types of jobs and corporations. The Socio-Economic Study indicates that the Town is a leader in wholesale trade and the professional, scientific and technical services, illustrating that the Town must accommodate and adapt to a wide range of land and infrastructure requirements. There may be opportunities for the Town to plan for, market and further create a niche for these particular services.

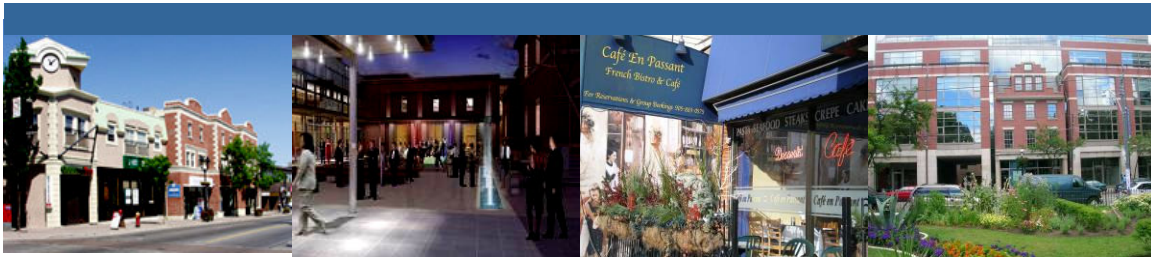
### ***Protect Employment Lands***

Ensuring there is enough employment land in the Town to provide jobs and economic growth will be a key objective in the new OP – especially amidst pressure to convert employment lands into residential and commercial development. The PPS encourages the provision and protection of employment areas for an appropriate mix and range of employment. It only allows the conversion of designated employment areas to non-employment uses through a comprehensive review; this review must demonstrate the land is not required for long-term employment purposes and that there is a strong need for conversion. The Growth Plan also protects designated employment areas from conversion – particularly from major retail uses - and promotes major office and institutional development to be located in areas with frequent or higher order transit services.

Additional protection for designated employment lands is provided under the Planning Act if a municipality has OP policies in place to deal with employment land conversions. The Act removes an applicant's right of appeal to the OMB when council refuses or fails to adopt/pass an OP or zoning by-law amendment that proposes to remove any land from an area of employment, even if other land is proposed to be added. Appeals on the designation of employment lands or conversion policies can only be made at the time of a five-year OP review. Recently, the Town adopted OPA 246 to prevent the conversion of lands within its designated employment areas.

### ***Promote Live-Work Opportunities through Mixed Use***

According to York Region's growth management reports and the Town's Socio-Economic Study, Richmond Hill's 36-39% activity rate (proportion of jobs to the number of persons living in Richmond Hill) is low compared to similar-sized municipalities within the Greater Golden Horseshoe. In fact, a lower than average activity rate exists overall in York Region and the Region has recognized the need to increase activity rates. Among Richmond Hill residents, for instance, approximately 37% work in Toronto, 21% in other areas of York Region (mainly Markham and Vaughan), 4% in Peel (mostly Mississauga) and 2% in other areas of the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Among employees who work in Richmond Hill, 79% of the workers live elsewhere (mainly Toronto, Markham, Vaughan and other municipalities in York Region). While Richmond Hill's activity rate is expected to increase, the Town needs to decrease the proportion of labour force employed outside Richmond Hill and attract workers that currently reside or want to reside in the Town. An increased activity rate means lower commute times and less traffic congestion overall.



Just as residential development is expected to intensify and there is an interest in intensifying the natural heritage system, the Town must also look at opportunities to intensify its employment lands. This intensification can occur within designated employment areas and through the integration of employment in the Regional and Local Centres and Corridors. In fact, the ROP has set an overall, long-term target resident-to-employee ratio of 1:1 in the Regional Centres. It also requires municipalities to identify employment targets for their Local Centres in order to balance the live/work ratio. Within the Regional Corridors, municipalities are encouraged to have a mix of commercial, housing, employment and institutional uses. They are also encouraged to think long-term by identifying existing areas that may not develop immediately but have potential to develop in the future. That said, the Town must ensure it provides opportunities for all types of employment - as encouraged by Provincial and Regional plans and policies - including head offices and warehouses that typically require large sites and/or ground related development for loading and distribution.

Regional policies to promote residential and employment growth also extend to Local Centres and Corridors. Within Local Centres, municipalities must identify the commercial core and recognize the potential for commercial and tourist activity. Along the Local Corridors, municipalities must

establish a range of residential and commercial land uses, including retail, office and mixed uses and services. Density performance standards are also encouraged to promote mixed use residential and commercial building forms, with particular attention to providing pedestrian accessible retail or commercial activity on the ground floor. Where a building is mainly a single use, the creation of public spaces at-grade is promoted.

As the Socio-Economic Study indicates, Richmond Hill has a growing and thriving economy driven by small businesses – most of which serve the local community. Yet spending by Richmond Hill residents exceeds sales of local businesses implying that they are importing retail goods and services from other communities. In addition to increasing employment activity, Town policies must recognize the connection between where people live, the movement of goods and people, and the proximity of places to shop, dine, and do business. For instance, the Region's policies direct the location of Local Centres to be in the vicinity of highest capacity transportation facilities including public transit. In fact, municipalities are required to concentrate new employment opportunities along Local Corridors within 200 metres of a transit stop. Methods to reduce or slow traffic in the Centres and improve parking lots are also encouraged to support local businesses. Keeping in mind the potential spin-off effects from one activity to the next, a mix of land uses and the location of employment generating uses are promoted along transit routes and around transit stations. The establishment of design criteria to maintain the character of buildings and enhance the visual appearance of streetscapes through lighting and sidewalks is also encouraged. By developing policies to facilitate the movement of people along key areas of employment activity and by enhancing their visual appeal, the Town can provide desirable and accessible places for people to do business and help sustain Richmond Hill's local economy.



### ***Support Economic Growth with Efficient and Sustainable Infrastructure***

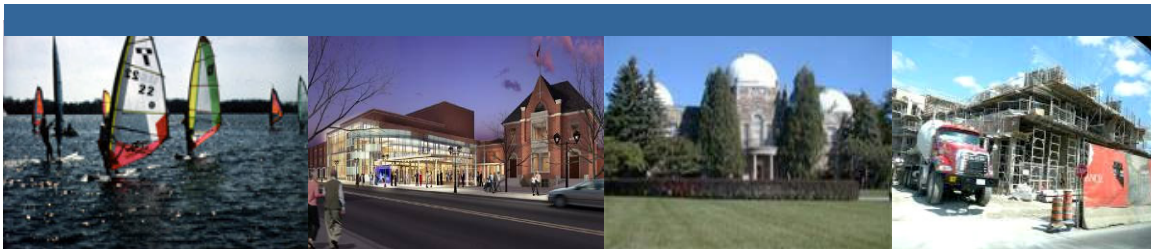
Another important factor in economic growth is the provision of efficient and sustainable infrastructure. As mentioned previously, the Growth Plan and the Region have made transit an integral part of proposed Centres and Corridors and contains policies that promote transit-oriented development. The promotion of transit and transit-oriented development may result in a number of economic-related benefits to the Town, such as: reduced traffic congestion (i.e. faster commute times and delivery of goods); livelier, pedestrian friendly streets which increases customers for area businesses; more affordable housing choices for residents with a variety of incomes, occupations and life stages; and cost savings from efficient energy use. Initiatives to encourage sustainable and efficient water and wastewater systems would also benefit the economy, as it would reduce water and waste consumption as well as adverse impacts to the environment. Communications is another type of infrastructure critical to a growing economy. The Region has noted that it would explore opportunities with area municipalities, and public/private utility providers to establish, maintain or upgrade communication and transmission facilities that support the vision for the Regional Corridors. The incorporation of alternative and renewable energy in new and

existing neighbourhoods would also help the environment and reduce energy costs overall. Therefore, consideration should be given to the long-term cost benefits of sustainable infrastructure when developing policies for the new OP.

***Promote Key Development Areas and Key Attractions within the Town***

Promoting key development areas and attractions within the Town will encourage growth and development in places where the Town wants to grow, as well as encourage the preservation of features that the Town wants to protect. The Town must work with other levels of government and business to promote the Town's economic vitality. For instance, both the Province and the Region has said that the majority of intensification will be in the Regional and Local Centres and Corridors. The Town and the Region could work together to expedite key industrial/commercial development through the approvals process. They could also promote partnerships and investment from senior levels of government, Chambers of Commerce, Boards of Trade, and Business Improvement Areas (BIAs). To engage the public, the Town should promote the economic and environmental benefits of intensification within urban areas. The business community and the general public could be encouraged to adopt techniques that reduce water usage and energy consumption; it may even result in the development of new and innovative techniques with positive economic, environmental and/or social impacts.

In addition, the Town should continue to promote and market its natural and cultural heritage strengths, such as the Oak Ridges Moraine, heritage districts, parks and artistic and cultural activities. The Region's policies state that municipalities should revitalize and preserve traditional mainstreet areas by conserving cultural heritage resources and reinforcing the character of the mainstreet. The new OP should recognize the connection between the Town's cultural and natural heritage sites and marketability. A vibrant community and healthy environment attracts people who want to buy homes, companies and employees who want to work there, and tourists that inject dollars into the local economy. The Town should actively promote the availability of its local heritage sites, countryside, trails, recreational and open spaces, as well as the more vibrant places for gathering, dining, shopping and entertainment. Planning to protect valuable resources and encouraging a diverse mix of land uses then becomes part of the Town's economic development initiatives.



***Provide a Clear and Transparent Development Approvals Process***

Official plans are intended to guide future growth and development in a municipality based on the community's vision. That vision must be articulated through clear policies and standards that meet their objectives. If growth is to occur and the economy to flourish, those who take an active part in the development of the Town (e.g. developers, consultants, municipal employees, elected officials, and the public) must have a clear understanding of the land use planning policies and be able to navigate through the planning process. Thus, the policies must be clear and consistent, the

process transparent, and the decisions made accountable. The Province's Planning and Conservation Land Statute Law Amendment Act incorporated a number of provisions and tools to help municipalities clearly define and achieve their land use planning goals. For example, municipalities must update their OPs every five years to ensure that its policies: conform to provincial plans; have regard to matters of provincial interest; are consistent with the PPS; and confirm or amend their "areas of employment" designations. Zoning by-laws are also required to be updated within three years of a new OP being approved.

Other provisions in the Act place an emphasis on early and upfront public consultation and the Town has already adopted some of these provisions. For instance, municipalities must hold a pre-application consultation meeting at an applicant's request and a municipality can pass a by-law requiring applicants to consult with them prior to submitting an application. Public open houses must be held for OP and zoning by-law updates and the need for better information upfront is being addressed through the new complete application requirements. Under the latter provision, the Town has the ability to require applicants to submit information or material critical to assessing a proposal before the timeline for review and appeal is triggered. Other new tools under the Planning Act include the ability to establish zoning with conditions, set minimum as well as maximum standards in zoning by-laws, and impose a streamlined development permit system for a defined geographic area.

Recent reforms to the OMB have also reinforced support for municipal decisions and the local planning approvals process. For instance, the OMB is now required to have regard to any decision made by a municipal council, there are restrictions on introducing new information that was not made available to Council during the review process, and third party appeals and party status are limited to those persons or groups that made an oral or written submission to Council. New reforms also allow municipalities to set up their own Local Appeal Bodies (subject to prescribed conditions) to hear stand alone appeals of minor variances and consents. By developing the OP from the ground up (starting with broad-based consultation), providing clear direction on land use, and taking advantage of new planning tools to achieve its objectives, the Town will be better equipped to encourage development and still manage growth in a way that achieves its long-term vision.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Town of Richmond Hill is at a turning point. Working within the land use planning framework set by the Province and the Region, it must now develop an Official Plan to guide its future growth and development well into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Unlike the last century when it was faced with a seemingly endless supply of greenfield land for development, the Town must focus new growth within its settlement areas. This change in direction offers up new and exciting opportunities for Richmond Hill to create, enhance and promote features that make the Town unique.

The purpose of this paper is to set out the legislative framework and background policy context through which the Town's new OP will be developed. Major policy themes were identified and applied to the local context under the three pillars of the People Plan Richmond Hill consultation approach.

### People

- Plan for a Growing Population
- Direct Growth within Settlement Areas
- Provide a Range of Housing Types and Densities
- Define the Urban Structure
- Promote Transit-Supportive Development

### Environment

- Protect Natural Heritage Features and Water Resources
- Maintain and Enhance Connectivity
- Mitigate Impacts through Sustainable Design and Infrastructure
- Promote Stewardship and Innovative Approaches to Implementation

### Economy

- Understand the Local Economy
- Protect Employment Lands
- Promote Live-Work Opportunities through Mixed-Use
- Support Economic Growth with Efficient and Sustainable Infrastructure
- Promote Key Development Areas and Key Attractions within the Town of Richmond Hill
- Provide a Clear and Transparent Development Approvals Process

Ongoing consultation, research and analysis will continue to build on these themes as land use planning policies for the new OP are further explored and developed. Richmond Hill's OP will be a merging of Provincial and Regional policy direction from the top-down and local input from the ground up based on the community's vision. In fact, the decision to develop a new Official Plan signals a commitment to the people of Richmond Hill – a commitment to understand the Town better, a commitment to discuss land use issues with the community, and a commitment to plan for a more vibrant, community-oriented and prosperous community – a place for people.....it's just around the corner.

