



Town of East Gwillimbury

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES REPORT P2021-24

To: Council

Date: September 21, 2021

Subject: Official Plan Review Discussion Papers and Land Needs Assessment

Origin: Development Services, Planning Branch

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **THAT** Development Services Report P2021-24 dated September 21, 2021, entitled “Official Plan Review Discussion Papers and Land Needs Assessment” be received; and
2. **THAT** Council receive the Official Plan Review Discussion Papers and corresponding Land Needs Assessment for information, and that staff post the documents online to the Town’s Official Plan Review project webpage.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to present to Council the Official Plan Review Discussion Papers and corresponding Land Needs Assessment, which were developed as a result of the background study and public consultation that has been held throughout the course of the Official Plan Review project to date.

BACKGROUND

Purpose of the Discussion Papers

The Discussion Papers are intended to summarize, evaluate, and critically analyze key topics related to the Town and its Official Plan. Collectively, the Discussion Papers serve as the starting point for preparing options that will inform the subsequent development of the Updated Official Plan itself. There are six Discussion Paper topic areas in total - vision and guiding principles, complete communities and balanced growth, housing, community design, sustainability and climate change, and agriculture and rural lands.

The Discussion Papers specifically answer why each topic area is important, what the current policy framework on the topic is from the Province and Region, what has been heard from the public to date regarding the topic, what the key topic-related land use

issues are, and what some additional things to consider for the development of the Updated Official Plan may be.

A summary of each Discussion Paper topic area is provided further on in this report.

Purpose of the Land Needs Assessment

The Land Needs Assessment (also referred to as a Capacity Analysis) was prepared by N. Barry Lyon Consultants (NBLC), a leading real estate, land economics and housing market research firm, to evaluate the assumptions related to population and employment growth in East Gwillimbury and estimate the capacity of the Town's Designated Greenfield Area (DGA) and Whitebelt lands upon full build-out.

The Land Needs Assessment includes two background reports – one on residential/population growth and another on employment growth. Overall, the Land Needs Assessment is intended to inform the policy development and growth management approach of the Updated Official Plan by providing an analysis on projected market demands and the ability for the Town to accommodate forecasted growth to 2051.

The Land Needs Assessment is also a technical tool to assist the Region with their ongoing Municipal Comprehensive Review process by fully considering the growth opportunities in East Gwillimbury. The Land Needs Assessment makes specific recommendations on the amount of urban expansion that will be required for the Town across the planning horizon to 2051 by evaluating existing and forecasted population and employment densities and growth projections.

A summary of the findings from the Land Needs Assessment is also provided further on in this report.

Overview of the public consultation pursued for the Official Plan Review to date

Extensive public consultation has been held to date as part of the Official Plan Review project to inform the development of the Discussion Papers and Land Needs Assessment. The public engagement pursued as part of the Official Plan Review project thus far includes:

- Launch of the Project Specific Webpage – August 2020
- Councillor Interviews – September 2020
- Community Visioning Workshops – October 27, 2020
- Growth Management Council Presentation – March 23, 2021

- Discussion Papers Workshop/Special Meeting of Council – April 27, 2021
- Chat with a Planner on the Discussion Paper Topics – March to April 2021
- Community Workshops on each Discussion Paper Topic – June 2 and 3, 2021

The Discussion Papers and Land Needs Assessment will also be posted online to the project webpage (www.eastgwillimbury.ca/opreview) and will remain viewable for the duration of the project. All interested parties for the project will also be notified of the posting of the documents. Any additional comments that may be received will be reviewed and can be incorporated into the development of the Updated Official Plan document.

Additional public consultation will also be scheduled over the coming months as the options and recommendations for the Updated Official Plan are developed and presented for public review.

ANALYSIS

Summary of the six Discussion Paper topic areas

The Discussion Papers are divided into six topic areas that are intended to inform the subsequent development of the Updated Official Plan. The six topic areas are:

- 1) Vision and Guiding Principles
- 2) Complete Communities and Balanced Growth
- 3) Housing
- 4) Community Design
- 5) Sustainability and Climate Change
- 6) Agriculture and Rural Lands

The topic areas were developed as part of the public visioning and consultation process for the Official Plan Review project, and a summary of each Discussion Paper topic area is provided below:

1) Vision and Guiding Principles

Based on the input received from the community visioning exercises, public engagement, conversations with members of Council, and the direction from East Gwillimbury's Strategic Plan, a draft vision statement and guiding principles were developed to help guide the overall direction of the Updated Official Plan.

The draft vision statement is as follows:

“East Gwillimbury will evolve as a balanced, sustainable, and complete community, with a mix of housing options to meet the needs of a diverse population and a range of employment opportunities, public service facilities and commercial uses supported by appropriate municipal infrastructure and a well connected multi-modal transportation network. The Town’s unique villages will be supported as they grow and diversify with new compatible development and a mix of uses, while character giving natural areas and farmland are protected for the long term. East Gwillimbury will continue to support and celebrate a high quality of life for current and future residents and ensure that health, safety, equity, prosperity, and resilience are prioritized.”

The draft vision statement is further articulated by the following draft Guiding Principles, which are intended to be read as a whole with no priority of one over the other:

- To ensure that the growth and evolution of the Town prioritizes the protection and enhancement of the natural heritage system and its ecological and hydrologic functions, including appropriate protection for those lands included in the Greenbelt and the Oak Ridges Moraine.
- To foster a vibrant agricultural and rural community through support for farming and appropriate agricultural-related and on-farm diversified uses and to protect, maintain and enhance the rural character and function of lands outside of the settlement areas.
- To ensure that new development contributes to the creation of complete communities, including a diverse mix of uses to easily access daily needs, a range of housing options, a multi-modal transportation system, live-work and local employment opportunities and age-friendly design that provides opportunities for people of all ages, abilities, and incomes.
- To encourage and support the creation of a full range and mix of housing options to meet the needs of a growing and diversifying population, including a mix of densities, unit types and tenures, as well as affordable, accessible, and attainable housing options.
- To coordinate new growth with infrastructure planning and investment to support logical and sustainable development patterns, the creation of complete and successful communities and the achievement of the Town’s intensification and density targets.
- To create cohesive, vibrant, and connected urban communities through the promotion of successful, mixed-use historic main streets, attention to urban

design and architectural excellence and the protection of the Town's cultural heritage.

- To promote the creation of resilient and environmentally sustainability communities which recognize and respond to the impacts of climate change, including the promotion of green building technologies, green infrastructure, compact development, and reducing reliance on private vehicles.
- To provide opportunities for economic development, including support for new and existing economic generators, protection of employment areas, provision of appropriate infrastructure and services and the creation of strong and attractive commercial main streets.

The additional focus of the Vision and Guiding Principles Discussion Paper is to outline the Town's role in the land use planning process within Ontario. The Discussion Paper topic speaks to the role of the Official Plan document itself as being a tool to guide how the Town will grow and develop while keeping social, economic and environmental concerns in mind.

In this regard, the Official Plan is required to conform with the Region of York Official Plan, as well as conform and be consistent with a host of Provincial legislation, plans, policies and regulations, such as the Growth Plan and the Provincial Policy Statement. Overall, the Official Plan also complements the Town's Strategic Plan and provides the overarching policy framework within which growth and development within the Town is to proceed over the defined planning horizon to 2051.

The Official Plan can outline a broad range of community goals, objectives and policies that provide guidance to landowners and the community at large. This Discussion Paper topic area recognizes this framework and will ensure the Updated Official Plan is developed with an understanding of its role and ability to shape the Town moving forward.

2) Complete Communities and Balanced Growth

Growth management is recognized as a fundamental policy element of an Official Plan. It is the intent through this Discussion Paper topic to have the Updated Official Plan be developed with a thorough understanding of the Town's growth needs relating to population, employment and commercial needs.

This Discussion Paper topic centres around promoting complete communities, which are defined as mixed-use neighbourhoods that offer and support opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to conveniently access most of the necessities for daily living, including jobs, stores, services, housing, transportation and public service facilities. With

the intent being to support the development of complete communities, a key principles for growth management in East Gwillimbury will be to encourage mixed use development and plan for new communities that are compact, well-connected, and provide a range of housing and employment opportunities.

East Gwillimbury is characterized as a multi-centred community where there exists some level of separation among each settlement area. Over time, it is expected that Holland Landing, Sharon, and Queensville will grow into each other as development of the Whitebelt lands continues to 2051 and beyond. Mount Albert will continue to be unique, given its separation from the other communities and its context within the Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine features. The Urban Structure for East Gwillimbury will need to consider the natural heritage system, appropriate locations for residential communities, employment areas and major commercial and institutional uses. It is also key to maintain the identities of the existing settlement areas.

The Updated Official Plan will need to locate and develop policies for future residential, employment, and population related employment uses, while recognizing unique ways of maintaining existing community identities, such as through the use of urban separators. It is also critical to ensure consistency and conformity with the Provincial Policy Statement, Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan, and Regional Official Plan, which amongst other things, encourages high development standards, promotes the provision of human services, directs new development in an orderly and logical manner, develops intensification and density targets, preserves the natural environment, and protects for employment and economic development opportunities.

It is a priority of the Updated Official Plan to ensure that there is an appropriate balance of residential and employment growth, and that land around key goods movement corridors like the 400-series highways are protected for economic development and employment. In addition, the Updated Official Plan will focus on the protection and revitalization of commercial main streets as key economic corridors that enhance the livability of communities.

This specific Discussion Paper topic is also most interconnected with the work of the Land Needs Assessment in terms of evaluating land for residential and employment uses while ensuring an appropriate growth management strategy across the planning horizon. The intent is for the Land Needs Assessment and Discussion Papers to complement each other and provide a thorough background and direction for the development of the Updated Official Plan.

3) Housing

The Housing Discussion Paper focuses on ensuring the availability of a full range and mix of housing options to meet the current and future needs of residents of all incomes, ages, lifestyles, and abilities. It is recognized that a diversity of housing types will assist the Town in welcoming new residents and make it possible for them to stay within their community as their needs and preferences change. Providing for a sufficient supply of affordable housing is also an important goal, with a minimum of 25 percent of new housing units required to be affordable across the Region.

East Gwillimbury has multiple areas that may accommodate some intensification and higher density forms of housing, such as the Green Lane Secondary Plan area. Intensification will play an important role in providing a full range of housing forms, while also contributing to more dynamic centres, support for local businesses, and more efficient use of infrastructure. With the introduction of new housing development and intensified housing forms, it will be increasingly important to support measures which ensure that new development builds on and supports the existing community character, provides public benefits, and contributes to a higher quality public realm. Beyond intensification areas, it is also important to recognize market demands and the need to provide an appropriate mix of housing to accommodate future growth projections and family housing needs.

The Discussion Paper topic also recognizes the need to support residential intensification opportunities and second units. The topic speaks to the policy changes from Provincial Bill 108: More Homes, More Choice Act, in addition to the changes to Section 37 of the Planning Act, which introduced the requirement that municipalities authorize in their Official Plans and Zoning By-law the use of 'additional residential units' in detached, semi-detached and row houses, as well as in an ancillary building or structure like a coach house. This enables three residential units on a property. The Updated Official Plan must develop updated policies relating to additional dwelling units to be consistent with Provincial requirements.

The Discussion Paper topic also provides a demographic overview of the Town to inform the policy development of the Updated Official Plan, which highlights the following:

- Incomes are above average vs. the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area as well as Ontario overall

- Housing is generally more affordable for residents, with fewer residents paying a disproportionate amount of income towards shelter costs, due also to the fact that incomes are above average
- Housing is primarily single-detached, at approximately 83% of all units
- Freehold ownership is the predominant tenure at about 89% of all units

Consideration with regards to affordable housing, inclusionary zoning, additional dwelling units, special needs housing and more are planned to be accounted for via unique policy approaches that are rooted in market-based evidence, achieving housing outcomes, and remaining consistent with Provincial and Regional policy. The Land Needs Assessment also recognizes the need for a mix and diversity of housing to be established within the planning framework to 2051, which links to this topic area.

4) Community Design

The Community Design topic area focuses on ensuring that as new development and infill occurs, it is developed in a manner that ensures high quality architectural design and supports the overall vision and fit within East Gwillimbury.

The Official Plan community design considerations are related to compatible housing and built forms with appropriate transitions at the edges of residential communities and abutting Natural Heritage Systems. Further, new development must support a built form that transitions from higher to lower densities, promotes a mix of housing sizes, and creates attractive streetscapes. Community design policies are geared towards creating an attractive streetscape, protecting, and enhancing heritage resources and focal features, promoting public art, creating a sense of place, preserving scenic features, and improving pedestrian comfort.

In setting a refreshed direction for urban design policies there are several themes which must run throughout the policies of the Updated Official Plan in order for them to be relevant, comprehensive, and defensible. Urban design in the context of East Gwillimbury must consider the following:

- Preservation – applying to the safeguarding of built and cultural heritage as well as the natural environment and landmarks
- Compatibility – relating to the integration of new development within existing contexts and ensuring sensitivity and appropriate transitions
- Connectivity – regarding how pedestrians (and vehicles) connect and move within the community

- Legibility – meaning to promote an easy to navigate urban environment with a coherent pattern
- Sustainable Urban Form – in terms of ensuring new buildings are designed efficiently and that protection of the ecosystem is maintained

The Community Design topic area also explores the development of neighbourhood nodes and planning for public service facilities to ensure the vitality of communities as they grow. The topic recognizes that the Updated Official Plan can promote the creation of mixed use neighbourhood nodes, the revitalization of existing communities, and the preservation and restoration of unique heritage assets and historic main streets to ensure communities grow in a safe, economically-resilient, sustainable and inviting manner through high quality public realm design.

5) Sustainability and Climate Change

It is a priority of the Official Plan Review to ensure that the design of future development occurs in a manner that promotes the highest sustainability and servicing efficiency standards.

The Updated Official Plan policies will be used to reduce per-capita consumption of non-renewable resources such as water throughout future development within Town. These policies will complement the Town's Thinking Green Development Standards and further alignment of the Updated Official Plan and Infrastructure Master Plans will encourage new, innovative, and leading-edge community and infrastructure design standards to be implemented. Incorporation of these policies and strategies (passive solar orientation, energy efficiency, green building design, Low Impact Development, etc.) remains a priority undertaking for both the Official Plan Review and Master Plan projects.

In addition to sustainable development, the Updated Official Plan will also develop policies related to the promotion of healthy communities and the mitigation and resilience to climate change.

A supportive, inclusive and healthy community ensures the well being of residents by providing access to basic needs as well as a high quality living environment where there is walkability and active transportation, access to public health services, a vibrant economy and healthy natural ecosystem. The Updated Official plan will develop a policy framework that supports and nurtures the happiness, health, and well being of residents. Physical, social, and mental well being are the necessary components of public health, and the built environment should be designed to ensure access to healthy food, clean air and water, safe environments, and opportunities for physical activity. This will be

done by considering the community structure, street connectivity, streetscaping, building orientation, land use mix, the provision of parks and trails and access to service and amenities. Effective policies in the Updated Official Plan will also need to respond to emerging trends from COVID-19 as well as promote the avoidance of chronic disease and the protection of a healthy aging population.

The Updated Official Plan will also develop policies on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and recognize that sustainable community development and climate change mitigation should focus on protection of the natural environment, promotion of the natural heritage system, encouragement of sustainable transportation, responding to heat islands, and promoting renewable energy. Building resiliency to weather patterns is also key, by promoting strategies such as effective stormwater management and emergency responsiveness.

6) Agriculture and Rural Lands

East Gwillimbury has over 46,170 acres of Provincially protected greenspace under the Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. This equates to approximately 75% of the Town's total land area. Even at full build out of the community area, the Town is expected to be over 80% greenspace based on the Provincially protected greenspace plus the existing local Natural Heritage System. The Updated Official Plan will not be proposing significant changes to the existing Natural Heritage System, as that mapping was thoroughly reviewed and completed as part of the approval for the current Official Plan.

The Town has a strong historic, cultural and economic identity related to agriculture, with agriculture expected to continue to play an important role in East Gwillimbury's rural economy and lifestyle. The protection of agricultural lands is a priority and the key policy considerations for the Updated Official Plan regarding Agriculture and Rural lands will be to continue to support and ensure the success of the rural area and farming industry.

To do so, the Updated Official Plan will focus policy development on the consideration of agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses, as well as ensuring the maintenance of farm parcels capable of functioning in a viable manner. The Updated Official Plan will need to ensure the range of permitted uses on rural and agricultural lands support the rural industry without negatively impacting the agricultural character and growth management goals of the Town.

The Updated Official Plan will implement provincial policies and comply with OMAFRA Guidelines to:

- Review and update permitted rural, prime agricultural, and agriculture-related uses
- Provide a consistent approach for permitting on-farm diversified uses and agri-tourism uses (such as weddings, events, etc.)
- Develop policies to regulate large scale agricultural buildings that take prime agricultural land out of production (cannabis production facilities)

Summary of the Land Needs Assessment

The Land Needs Assessment is intended to work in collaboration with the Discussion Papers to provide an informed basis for the development of the Updated Official Plan. Many of the Discussion Paper topic areas align with the technical evaluation of the Land Needs Assessment, and together they provide the context for recognizing how the Town will grow while doing so in a manner that is responsible, efficient, and sustainable.

The Land Needs Assessment specifically noted the following totals for the full build-out of East Gwillimbury's developable lands, including all of the Whitebelt:

- Total population in the range of 135,000 persons
- Total employment base in the range of 55,000 jobs
- A combined population and jobs in the range of 190,000

The Land Needs Assessment also states that including the Town's Whitebelt lands within an appropriately defined Settlement Area boundary for consideration for urban development would allow East Gwillimbury to meet its market potential over the planning horizon to 2051, and ultimately represents good planning.

The Land Needs Assessment evaluated Regional growth allocations and recognizes that as municipalities in the south of York Region continue to focus on intensification, East Gwillimbury will play an increasingly important role in the Region by servicing demand for larger sized, ground-oriented residential units. East Gwillimbury has a high availability of land and is a market where pricing for new housing is going to be more attainable relative to the municipalities in the southern part of the Region. If additional Whitebelt lands are not included as part of the urban expansion to 2051, there would be significant market implications within the Town and Region as a whole. As the supply of low-rise, ground-oriented housing is restricted, pricing will be expected to rise at an even

faster rate, putting home ownership out of the reach of a growing portion of the population.

The Land Needs Assessment specifically outlined the following market projections:

- Affordability concerns will lead to a shift towards increased densities over time
- Townhouse will become more popular over time as an affordable alternative to single-detached homes
- Single-detached development is likely to become denser as lot sizes shift downwards from 36' to 40' towards 25' to 30'
- Some small-scale apartment development may occur as the local population ages and the housing needs of the older population changes

In addition to the technical evaluation, the Lands Need Assessment outlines additional core policy considerations that support inclusion of the Town's Whitebelt as Urban Area. These considerations include the new expanded planning horizon to 2051 (from the previous 2041), the evolving urban structure of the Town and need to comprehensively plan for interconnected communities, the potential for new private-led incremental settlement area expansions under the Growth Plan and outside the Region's MCR process, and the need to match significant infrastructure investments such as the Bradford Bypass.

The Land Needs Assessment ultimately validates and supports Council's endorsement to include the balance of the Town's Whitebelt as Urban Area and shows that there is a clear and strong planning justification to do so and allow the Town and its infrastructure to be planned comprehensively to 2051.

Next Steps – Preparation of the Updated Official Plan

The Updated Official Plan, once prepared, will be subject to further public consultation and review. The Planning Act requires an open house and public meeting to be held to receive feedback on the draft Updated Official Plan. Once the draft Updated Official Plan is developed over the coming months, these engagement initiatives will be scheduled as well as additional non-statutory public engagement opportunities such as online review forums, chat with a planner opportunities, and workshops.

Town Council's adoption of the Updated Official Plan is anticipated in early 2022. After Town Council's adoption of the Updated Official Plan, it will be forwarded to the Region of York for final approval.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report, however the Updated Official Plan and determination of an ultimate growth scenario will provide the input into the Development Charges Background Study and calculation of development charges, which is the main source of funding growth-related infrastructure.

NEED FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Extensive public consultation has been undertaken to inform the development of the Discussion Papers and Land Needs Assessment, as outlined previously in this report. The Discussion Papers and Land Needs Assessment will be posted online to the project webpage (www.eastwillimbury.ca/opreview) and will remain online and viewable for the remainder of the project. All interested parties for the project will also be notified of the posting of the documents and any additional comments that may be received will be reviewed and can be incorporated into the development of the Updated Official Plan.

The next step in the Official Plan Review process is the development of the Updated Official Plan itself. Once the draft Updated Official Plan is prepared, thorough public engagement will again be pursued, which, as mentioned, will include a public open house and public meeting in addition to other non-statutory engagement initiatives.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

The recommendations of this report align with the following Strategic Priorities:



Responsible
Growth &
Environmental
Protection

Ensure that communities are built in a respectful manner, with resident and business quality of life protected



Build
Complete
Communities

Effectively manage new and existing assets to deliver exceptional services to residents while ensuring a sustainable community



Quality
Programs &
Services

Provide programs and services that are inclusive, affordable, and accessible to all residents



Culture of
Municipal
Excellence

Ensure strong fiscal responsibility and program delivery
Enhance Customer Service focused culture with increased engagement and communications

CONCLUSION

The Official Plan Review Discussion Papers and corresponding Land Needs Assessment incorporate the background study and public feedback received throughout the project to date and will be used as a starting point to inform the options and development of the draft Updated Official Plan, which will again be subject to further rounds of public engagement once it is prepared over the coming months.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Official Plan Review Discussion Papers

Appendix 2 – Land Needs Assessment Report

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