

Joint Letter to the Councils of Markham, Vaughan, and York Region

May 4, 2021

The **Thornhill Community Coalition**, comprising the SpringFarm Ratepayers Association, Flamingo Ratepayers Association (in Vaughan), Grandview Area Residents Association, Ward One (South) Thornhill Residents Inc, Aileen-Willowbrook Residents Association, and Royal Orchard Ratepayers' Association (in Markham), are united in our concern about the numerous proposals for massive developments on both the east and west sides of Yonge Street along the proposed subway extension, from Steeles Avenue north to the Langstaff Gateway lands, and their collective impact on the quality of life for citizens.

As a collective, we request that Vaughan, Markham, and York Region Councils direct their respective planning departments to work together, in concert with local residents. This is imperative to achieve a coherent plan for new development along Yonge Street from north of Steeles to the Langstaff GO station in Richmond Hill (see Appendix A for the Draft Resolution).

ISSUES OF CONCERN

The Yonge Street north corridor (from Steeles Avenue north to Langstaff) is the focus of intense interest from development companies. A total of 28 condo towers [as of April 30, 2021] averaging 34 storeys each, and an additional 30+ condo towers at Langstaff Gateway will add approx. 27,000 new units and 40,000+ new residents to the area. We believe that urban intensification should consider not only residential housing stock but also office, retail, and green community space as well as environmental impacts.

Below we note the key issues and concerns which have prompted our six associations to unify as a Community Coalition. We request a coordinated development plan vis-à-vis these high-density condo proposals to achieve a vibrant and successful community.

KEY POINTS

- **Excessive condo construction needs to be managed** Developers have proposed 28 towers (approx. 12,000 new units) and Langstaff Gateway may also add 30+ condo towers (15,000 units). The population of the area would thereby increase by over 40,000 people.
- **Subway Extension uncertainty** The timing of the Yonge North subway extension is unclear. Funding for the Subway extension is uncertain. It is premature to allow developments predicated on future subway stations and their supporting structures to proceed at present.

- **Consideration of community impacts** We encourage discussion amongst municipal stakeholders re: how our respective communities can successfully welcome tens of thousands of new residents without overwhelming community services, facilities and the limited public green space.
- **Negative environmental impact** Healthy ecosystems contribute to healthy, economically sound communities. Development plans must consider environmental impacts. Yonge Street is built over the East Don River watershed and its tributaries; other local water courses include Pomona Creek and German Mills Creek. If damaged or disturbed, regeneration may be impossible.
- **Open and Green Space** Having reviewed the proposals submitted to date, we note that green space is wholly deficient. Connections for wildlife and green corridors are lacking.
- **Best Practices Case Study** We suggest the North York Civic Centre (NYCC) development as a successful comparative case study. NYCC embodied an integrated approach to work and healthy living, and a successful process of cohesive intensification planning.

Below please find more detail on each of the above listed areas of concern as well as Appendix A - *Proposed Resolution for Vaughan, Markham and York Region Councils* and Appendix B - *Current Yonge Street filed applications between Steeles Avenue and Highway 407*. The Community Coalition supports a concerted planning effort that facilitates an integrated approach with the goal of achieving a healthy and vibrant community.

Redevelopment Activity

The announced plans for the Yonge North Subway Extension have led to considerable redevelopment activity in an area that is already developed. The subway extension provides an opportunity for well-planned redevelopment over a five kilometre stretch of Yonge Street—or alternatively, given the current situation, a hodgepodge, uncoordinated disaster. A total of 28 towers are proposed to the Vaughan and Markham Councils (see Appendix B), averaging 34 storeys each, totaling almost 12,000 new units. On top of this, the Langstaff Gateway may add 30+ towers, totaling 15,000 new units. Together, these projects will add at least 40,000 new residents to this area across 60 towers. Of course, these proposed developments and new density refer only to Yonge Street or Yonge-adjacent applications. It is also reasonable to assume that these are only the first of many such applications, and they will create a precedent for developments along Steeles Avenue, Yonge Street, and further to the east and west of Yonge Street.

Subway Extension timing

The proposed scale of development is predicated on the subway extension, yet the timing of the subway extension is unclear (the Province has announced 2030 as the completion date, but this will likely be delayed due to the Province's current financial crisis, and recent federal government funding promises for urban transit will not materialize for at least five years from now). It would be disastrous for many of these proposed developments to be approved and constructed prior to the subway extension's completion, as they would add thousands of people and cars to Yonge Street without the promised public transit relief.

Furthermore, Metrolinx's recent (March 22, 2021) update of its Initial Business Case, calls into question the number of "neighbourhood" stations (Cummer, Clark, and Royal Orchard) to be constructed, the Langstaff Gateway station, and in particular, Option 3, the routing of the northern end of the extension underneath existing homes. Funding from all three levels of government is still undetermined. As Metrolinx has committed to public consultations on these issues, it is therefore premature to even consider any developments predicated on future subway stations and their supporting structures until station locations are finalized following those public consultations and securing funding from all three government levels.

Community impacts

Yet, there currently appears to be no discussion directed at solving how our respective communities can successfully welcome tens of thousands of new neighbours without overwhelming community services, facilities and the limited public green space. Nor can we assume that all of these new residents will only take public transit in their daily lives; a massive increase in automobile traffic up and down Yonge Street will occur, contributing to traffic congestion at all major intersections. Local residential streets will also be inundated by drivers attempting to bypass this congestion, severely impacting the quality of life and safety of the residents living there.

Open and Green Space

In the past year, governments and citizens alike have realized the imperative of working from home within their communities, and the necessary value of recreational green spaces for healthy living, exercise, and recreation, whether as pedestrians or cyclists. Having reviewed the proposals submitted to date, we have seen that green space is wholly deficient. The City of Vaughan's Active Together Master Plan (May 2018, p. 67) standard for new parkland development is 2.0 hectares per 1,000 new residents in future growth areas, within 500 metres of each development site. Markham's Official Plan requires 1.2 hectares for every 1,000 new residents in high-rise/mixed use developments. At present, Thornhill does not have a sufficient number of parks and green spaces. It has been proven in the last year that Grandview Park and

Pomona Mills Park were overcrowded. Connections for wildlife, and green corridors also need to be considered. While some of the proposed projects offer the minimal amount of green space required by legislation, there are no new substantial, large community parks included to meet the Vaughan and Markham standards. Cash-in-lieu of parkland requirements are not a valid substitute and does nothing to help local residents impacted by all of these new developments. There is a huge difference between public parks and private-owned public-accessible space (POPs).

Jurisdictional Boundaries

While we recognize that the situation of overlapping jurisdictions is a complex one, compounded by the new subway development planning, the reality is that Yonge Street, the political boundary between Markham and Vaughan cities, does not prevent the free flow of pedestrians, cyclists, automobile traffic, sun, shadow, wind, or water. This reality must be incorporated into planning so that Yonge Street is a “seamless” boundary.

Environmental Impacts

Of major concern is the loss of natural heritage, the destruction of fragile ecosystems and declining biodiversity in Vaughan, Markham and in fact, much of York Region. Healthy ecosystems contribute to healthy, economically sound communities. Nature provides essential assets such as clean air, stormwater management, carbon sequestration and helps combat the climate crisis. These benefits are being disregarded. Yonge Street is built over the East Don River watershed and its tributaries. Other local water courses include Pomona Creek and German Mills Creek. The excessive use of Ministerial Zoning Orders (MZOs), the province's lack of public consultation on development proposals, proposed development in the Oak Ridges Moraine (contrary to O.Reg. 140/02), Bill 197 and the reintroduction of Highway 413 (supported by York Region) are all clear indicators of the provincial government's lack of concern for the protection and preservation of the environment in our area. Once these areas are paved and disturbed, it will be next to impossible to regenerate them. Local governments must consult with the public and community groups on the environmental impacts of the proposed developments. This is in the best interest of our local communities today and in the future.

Lack of overall co-ordination

We are concerned that there does not appear to be a sustained, coherent system or process to co-ordinate and rationalize development planning or construction timing. Our fear is that each municipality will decide on each proposal on its own, without regard to neighbouring

developments, and the cumulative impacts on the area. This is a recipe for decentralized disaster.

Best Practices

A best practice comparative case study to this process of intensification would seem to be the development of the North York Civic Centre. Here there was evidence of an enlightened, cohesive process. Plans included:

- Protecting local residential streets from incursion by use of ring roads
- Creating enriching community amenities including a theatre, art gallery, pool and fitness facility, community meeting rooms, a spacious library, outdoor skating rink, welcoming outdoor public spaces for community festivals, farmers' markets etc.
- Green space was set aside
- Local schools were enlarged and renovated
- Employment opportunities were also built; this is not just a "bedroom community"

Need for Collaborative Action

Unlike the North York experience, the current plans for the intensification of our area offer only massive residential condominium towers, with no office space and only minimum commercial (retail) space and green space. While Markham and Vaughan Councils and their staff are working diligently within the *Planning Act* to assess each project as it is presented to them, we have no indication of consistent efforts within each city, much less between them, to ensure that the new community can be vibrant and successful. It is imperative that city planners and elected officials from each of the adjoining cities work collaboratively with each other and with local residents' associations, to create a solution that would facilitate a well-orchestrated plan, embodying an integrated approach to work and healthy living.

On behalf of the undersigned associations, we are prepared to work alongside such a group for the betterment and long-term successes of our communities.

Board of Aileen-Willowbrook Residents Association (Markham)

Board of Flamingo Ratepayers Association (Vaughan)

Executive of Grandview Area Residents Association (Markham)

Executive of Royal Orchard Ratepayers' Association (Markham)

Board of SpringFarm Ratepayers Association (Vaughan)

Executive of Ward One (South) Thornhill Residents Inc (Markham)

cc.

Keith Irish, City of Markham Ward 1 Councillor

Frank Scarpitti, Mayor, City of Markham

City of Markham Clerk's Office

City of Vaughan Clerk's Office

Don Hamilton, Markham Deputy Mayor and Regional Councillor

Jack Heath, Markham Regional Councillor

Joe Li, Markham Regional Councillor

Jim Jones, Markham Regional Councillor

Alan Shefman, City of Vaughan Ward 5 Councillor

Maurizio Bevilacqua, Mayor, City of Vaughan

Mario Ferri, Vaughan Deputy Mayor and Local and Regional Councillor

Linda D. Jackson, Vaughan Local and Regional Councillor

Gino Rosati, Vaughan Local and Regional Councillor

Appendix A - Proposed Resolution for Vaughan, Markham, and York Region Councils

Whereas York Region's Official Plan¹ states the following:

"5.4.32 That secondary plans, consistent with criteria in policy 5.4.6, shall be prepared by local municipalities for the following key development areas:

- a. all planned subway stations outside of the Regional Centres;
- b. lands immediately adjacent to transit terminals, including GO Transit terminals and gateway hubs; and,
- c. other key development areas identified by local municipalities.

5.4.33 That minimum densities for key development areas be established within secondary plans, consistent with:

- a. a 3.5 floor space index per development block at, and adjacent to, the Steeles West Station on the Spadina Subway Extension, and the Steeles Station on the Yonge Subway Extension;
- b. a 2.5 floor space index per development block, at, and adjacent to, the 407 Transitway Station on the Spadina Subway Extension, and the Clark and Royal Orchard Stations on the Yonge Subway Extension; and,
- c. an appropriate floor space index per development block for lands at or adjacent to other rapid transit stations and/or other select areas, as determined by the local municipality, in consideration of community context and character."

Whereas Map 1 of the York Region Official Plan designates Yonge Street as a Regional Corridor, and Yonge Street between Steeles Avenue and Highway 407 as a Subway/Subway Extension.

Whereas Goal 1 of the 2010 Vaughan Official Plan states "...This Official Plan seeks to maintain the stability of existing residential communities, direct well designed, context-sensitive growth to strictly defined areas, and provide for a wide range of housing choices and a full range of community services and amenities within each community" (p. 24);

The City of Markham's 2014 Official Plan section 1.4.2 (p. 1-9) states:

"Markham's Community Sustainability Plan is a 50- to 100-year plan created by the Markham community. It is an overarching plan to achieve an environmentally, economically, socially and culturally vibrant community, containing a vision, priorities and a governance framework to create a healthy, vibrant and sustainable community." and section 1.4.3 (p. 1-10):

¹ see Appendix C for other relevant statements

“The key elements of the Council endorsed Growth Alternative to 2031 include:

...

d) an intensification strategy based on:

a hierarchy of preferred intensification areas, served by higher order transit

the exclusion of significant residential intensification from established, low-density residential areas, designated employment lands and heritage districts;

...

h) support for the further application of **sustainable community design**, transit investment, infrastructure improvement, a diversity of housing and employment opportunities, contributing to a resilient economy;”

Whereas planning is underway for the Yonge Street North Extension of the Yonge Subway line into York Region, creating additional development and redevelopment proposals from developers along Yonge Street between Steeles Avenue and Highway 407, at or near the five subway stations;

Whereas proposed development projects will add at least 40,000 new residents to both sides of Yonge Street between Steeles Avenue and Highway 407, with consequent demand for schools, commercial and office space, traffic, transit, parks, and other public amenities;

Whereas Metrolinx’s recent (March 22, 2021) update of its Initial Business Case, calls into question the number of “neighbourhood” stations (Cummer, Clark, and Royal Orchard) to be constructed, the Langstaff Gateway station, and in particular, Option 3, the routing of the northern end of the extension underneath existing homes. Funding from all three levels of government is still undetermined. As Metrolinx has committed to public consultations on these issues, it is therefore premature to even consider any developments predicated on future subway stations and their supporting structures until station locations are finalized following those public consultations. Yonge Street and the future subway extension falls under multiple overlapping jurisdictions, namely the boundary between the cities of Vaughan and Markham, a Regional Road managed by York Region, and because of the subway under Metrolinx and the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC);

Whereas it is not good planning to have radically different approaches to development across a major arterial road (Yonge Street) from one City to another;

Whereas proposed developments are being submitted to the respective City Councils in Vaughan and Markham with neither co-ordination nor any impact assessment on their

combined implications for affected established neighbourhoods and the overall impact in traffic on Yonge Street;

Whereas there are inconsistent zoning or planning controls between the both sides of Yonge Street and even on each side, what does exist does not take into account the future development of subway stations;

Whereas the proposed developments submitted to date are far in excess of allowable height and density limits; and

Whereas the proposed developments submitted to date do not provide sufficient on-site or adjacent public open space and parkland, nor other public community amenities and facilities to accommodate both the new and existing area residents, and that Vaughan developed its own Yonge Steeles Corridor Secondary Plan, and its Council approved it in 2010 but the plan is under LPAT appeal:

Therefore, be it resolved that

The Councils of York Region, the City of Markham and the City of Vaughan direct their respective planning departments to create a co-ordinating group with the recognized Residents and Ratepayers Associations on both sides of Yonge Street between Steeles Avenue and Highway 407 to create a Master Plan for rational, appropriate, and consistent development in relation to the future Yonge Street North (Subway) Extension, including heights, densities, traffic control, provision of parkland, and public amenities; and that such a Master Plan be presented to all three Councils for approval, prior to the approval of any development proposals on Yonge Street between Steeles Avenue and Highway 407. The plan also needs to ensure that the developments respect and protect the local environment.

Appendix B

Current Yonge Street filed applications between Steeles Ave. and Highway 407

Location (Owner)	# of buildings	Allowed Density (FSI)	Proposed Density (FSI)	Proposed Height (storeys)	Proposed # of residential units	Proposed Additional Population ²
100 Steeles W Vaughan (Salz)	4	3.0	8.4	18, 18, 49, 54	1,765	2,648
180 Steeles W Vaughan (Mizrahi)	6	3.0	6.46	16, 16, 25, 29, 39, 45	2,080	3,120
2 Steeles W/ 7028 Yonge Vaughan (Gupta)	3	6.0	14.3	50, 56, 65	1,890	3,137
36-60 Steeles E & 37-63 Highland Pk Markham (Zonix)	4	2.5 1.5	3.94	13,13,8,8	871	1,310
72 Steeles W/ 7040 Yonge Vaughan (Humbold)	4	6.0/0.0 (parkland)	10.95	38, 44, 56, 60	2,620	3,930
7080 Yonge Vaughan (Chestnut Hill)	2	6.0	9.84	20, 40	652	978
8136-8188 Yonge & 5 Uplands Ave. Vaughan (Constantine)	1	3.4	3.4	10	281	422
10 Royal Orchard Blvd. Markham (Greenpark)	4	2.0	9.4	25, 31, 39, 59	1,560	2,340
Langstaff Gateway Master Plan (Markham)	32 develop- ment blocks	n/a	8.4 (median re: all blocks)	4-59	15,164	32,000 residents + 15,000+ jobs
SUBTOTAL	60				26,883	49,885

² Assuming an average multiplier of 1.5 persons per unit, as per the City of Vaughan Development Charges Background Study (June 2018)

Appendix C – York Region Official Plan

“5.3 Intensification York Region’s urban structure will intensify into a new generation of sustainable and quality compact areas, with a focus on the Region’s Centres and Corridors. These areas will provide a diverse and compatible mix of land uses, including residential and employment uses, to support vibrant neighbourhoods.

Intensification will occur in strategic locations in the built-up area to maximize efficiencies in infrastructure delivery, human services provision and transit ridership. These strategic locations are based on an intensification framework that recognizes that the highest density and scale of development will occur in the Regional Centres followed by the Regional Corridors. **Local municipalities will identify smaller intensification areas within these strategic locations to accommodate a significant portion of future residential and employment growth.**

Planning effectively for intensification ensures clarity and certainty as to where development should occur. Planning and design in intensification areas will provide well-designed public open spaces that create attractive and vibrant places; support walking, cycling and transit for everyday activities; and achieve an appropriate transition of built form to adjacent areas. It is also essential that human services and affordable housing locate in intensification areas. In this way, the services themselves become part of the urban community.

Intensification will further enhance the planned urban structure and advance the Region’s city building initiative.”

“5.4.6 That comprehensive secondary plans for Regional Centres and key development areas along Regional Corridors be prepared by local municipalities and implemented in co-operation with the Region and related agencies. These secondary plans shall include:

- a. minimum density requirements and targets established by the Region and the Province;
- b. the establishment, implementation and/or continuation of a fine-grained street grid that incorporates sidewalks and bicycle lanes;
- c. an urban built form that is massed, designed and oriented to people, and creates active and attractive streets for all seasons with ground-floor uses such as retail, human and personal services;
- d. a concentration of the most intensive development and greatest mix of uses within a reasonable and direct walking distance of rapid transit stations and/or planned subway stations;
- e. a minimum requirement that 35 per cent of new housing units be affordable, offering a range of compact housing forms and tenures, and intrinsically affordable units for low and moderate income households;

- f. policies that sequence development in an orderly way, co-ordinated with the provision of human services, transit and other infrastructure;
- g. policies to ensure excellence in urban design and sustainable construction methods, including winter design;
- h. requirements to reduce and/or mitigate urban heat island effects, by considering the use of green and white roofs, greening to provide shade and light-coloured surface materials;
- i. policies that establish urban greening targets, which may be achieved through urban forest canopy, green walls, requirements for on-site greening;
- j. provisions for an urban public realm, including passive and active parks and meeting places, such as urban squares, which incorporate art, culture and heritage, and that contribute to a sense of place and clear identity;
- k. policies that encourage the inclusion of public art in all significant private sector developments and that require the dedication of 1 per cent of the capital budget of all major Regional and local municipal buildings to public art;
- l. policies to ensure natural and recreational connections and enhancements to and within local and Regional Greenlands Systems;
- m. policies to require innovative approaches to urban stormwater management, including alternatives to conventional retention ponds, low-impact development, green roofs, and water capture and reuse
- n. a mobility plan that addresses the criteria in policy 5.6.12 in this Plan with an emphasis on delivering a weather-protected system of pedestrian and cycling paths and facilities;
- o. requirements for new school sites to be constructed to an urban standard, including the consideration of alternative site size and design standards, multi-storey buildings and shared facilities; and,
- p. provisions for human services that meet local community and Region-wide needs”