

1.1 Build the Healthy City

In the past, economic development contented itself with the question of investment: if businesses were retained or grown, if new investment was drawn to the community, then economic development was seen as being successful. In recent years, this notion has been replaced by a more comprehensive view, one that combines elements of human development and sustainable development with more traditional economic concerns. This growing global approach has been branded the “healthy city” movement, and it posits a community that is economically strong, but also founded upon the highest possible quality of social, medical and environmental opportunity for

“Economic development has brought comfort and convenience to many people in the industrialized world, but in its wake are pollution, new health problems, blighted urban landscapes and social isolation. Growing numbers of the dispossessed are also being left on the sidelines as the disparity between rich and poor grows. In an effort to remedy these ills, people from disparate backgrounds in thousands of communities are joining together with government agencies under the Healthy Cities/Healthy Communities banner to improve the quality of life in their towns and cities.”

Dr. Leonard Duhal & Dr. Trevor Hancock
Healthy Cities, Healthy Children (1997)

every citizen or resident. The healthy city movement espouses and pursues a holistic approach to building community futures, where every effort is made to balance the full range of human needs within a built environment.

The US Centre for Disease Control has suggested that a healthy city is one “that continuously creates and improves both its physical and social environments, helping people to support one another in aspects of daily life and to develop to their fullest potential. Healthy places are those designed and built to improve the quality of life for all people who live, work, worship, learn, and play within

their borders -- where every person is free to make choices amid a variety of healthy, available, accessible, and affordable options.”

Within this context, healthy cities are seen as effectively integrating proactive action in six key areas:

- Physical determinants, including healthy bodies, medical care and physical activity
- Social determinants, including education, housing, public transit and childcare
- Environmental determinants, including healthy ecosystems, air and water quality and access to greenspace

- Economic determinants, including thriving local business, economic resilience and family-friendly workplaces
- Psychological and spiritual determinants, including healthy mind, healthy spirit, healthy lifestyle choices and self-actualization
- Cultural determinants, including community identity and cultural values of inclusion, diversity, pride, hope and participation

This economic development strategy contains many of these elements, but the healthy city concept rests upon their successful integration and coordination. To this end, Markham must pursue strategies and actions which serve to further the entire healthy city agenda.

1.1.1 Build a More Diverse Medical Sector: Leveraging Strengths in Traditional and Eastern Medicines

Markham is currently home to a world-class medical community, strongly linked to a range of both Canadian and multinational life sciences firms with operations in the community. However, the field of non-traditional and alternative medicines and healthcare is growing rapidly, in areas ranging from naturopathic and homeopathic medicine to the variety of traditional medical practices and applications flowing from non-Western communities (and particularly from parts of Asia). Markham is already home to organizations such as the Chinese-Canadian Medical Society, and is well-placed to pursue opportunities that arise from the intersection of established medical practice, traditional medicine and alternative health practices. Increasingly, this emerging field of health practice is creating significant business opportunities. From the rise of yoga and tai chi, acupuncture and reiki to the cutting edge research into traditional Chinese medicines, a new area of the economy is creating opportunities not only for high-level research and medical investment, but also for a range of small businesses focused on improved lifestyle and healthy living. Given its strong community connections to China and other centres of traditional and alternative medicine, Markham is strongly positioned to make itself a centre of both research and business activity in this arena.

Action: Engage the traditional and alternative health sector in programs to support and grow the sector from a business recruitment and retention perspective, while supporting efforts to better link established medical sector interests with these emerging opportunities.

Role & Timeline: Town in facilitative role, with medium-term timeline (ongoing from 2011-2014)

Key Partners: local medical and life science community, Chinese Canadian Medical Society, York BioTech, agencies providing support to small entrepreneurs including the Innovation Synergy Centre and the Small Business Enterprise Centre

1.1.2 Work to Prevent a Doctor Shortage: Building the Capacity of the Medical Community

Communities across Canada are facing chronic and problematic shortages of family physicians, specialists and emergency room doctors. Although detailed records for the GTA are not available, it is known that communities around Markham – including Uxbridge, Georgina and East Gwillimbury – are already affected by this problem which erodes quality of life, decreases access to health care and undermines quality of life. Given Markham's rapid forecast population growth, and existing efforts by local players such as the Markham-Stouffville Hospital to enhance physician recruitment efforts, the Town must become more actively involved in building up and safeguarding an adequate population of local doctors. With increasing national and international competition, a failure to recognize and address the challenge may undermine overall community health.

Action: Launch a coordinated community initiative to attract more doctors to Markham.

Role & Timeline: Town in organizational and facilitative role, with short-term timeline (ongoing from 2008-2010)

"Healthy economic development requires us to integrate social and economic development. In practice this means addressing the systemic bias that builds dependency on external sources for capital and demand. This does not mean total import substitution or a commitment to self-sufficiency. The key to any economic development strategy is to find a healthier balance through diversity. The aim is to correct a weakness that undermines our ability to create wealth using local means."

David J. Connell
Healthy Economic Development: A New Framework (1999)

Key Partners: community organizations, local hospitals and medical community, York Region, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

1.1.3 Celebrate Markham's Greenspace: Creating a Gateway to the Rouge Park

Healthy living is often directly linked to recreational opportunities, and Markham is well positioned in this regard, with a wide range of athletic facilities and park space.

However, the community is also located at a central location for both the Green Belt and the Oak Ridges Moraine. Markham envisions these natural systems as a sort of emerging “healthy city” opportunity to develop and promote new recreational activities and opportunities. Hiking, biking, orienteering and a range of other outdoor activities may be enhanced through access to this protected green space, and Markham should promote itself as an entryway to this environmental experience, with the notion of the community becoming a gateway to the Oak Ridges Moraine.

Action: Envisioning of the newly protected green space around the community as a significant opportunity for increased recreational options, positioning Markham as the Gateway to the Rouge Park and Oak Ridges Moraine.

Role & Timeline: Town in facilitating role, with medium-term timeline (ongoing from 2001-2014)

Key Partners: local environmental and recreational organizations, tourism interest within regional government

1.1.4 Construct a Healthy Built Environment: Using Urban Design to Promote Health

Markham should seek to promote its emerging healthy city identity through an increased focus on positive and innovative approaches to urban design. A continued focus on environmental design, green roofs and LEED certification should be complimented by a range of support structures for homeowners, developers, builders and institutions that focus on tools for improving human interaction with built space. In part, this includes a reimagining of the City’s built form from a healthy city perspective, emphasizing sustainability, recreation and the human scale. It may also involve the introduction of urban planning tools, such as Community Improvement Plan (CIP) incentives for environmental conversions or retrofits, or for green buildings.

Action: Establish a working group to explore ways in which the healthy city concept may be proactively introduced into urban design discussions within the community.

Role & Timeline: Facilitative role, with medium-term timeline (ongoing from 2011-2014)

Key Partners: Planning staff, environmental organizations, development community

1.1.5 Connect with Local Agriculture: Linking the City to the Country

Markham lies in close proximity to a range of agricultural lands, some even within its own boundaries. Amid rising fuel and transportation costs, and an increased interest in organics, food security and food purity, Markham should take steps to strengthen connections between its residents and the food that grows around them. Not only will this strengthen the market for local produce, but it will create a healthy awareness of food alternatives, it will serve as a means for generating support for rural life and the rural economy within the urban environment, improving the prospects for maintaining and preserving agricultural lands, agricultural heritage and traditional aspects of Markham's community living. It will enhance overall quality of life by deemphasizing the impacts of urban sprawl and intensification, while creating new economic opportunities for farm markets, food producers and wholesalers, and specialist agricultural businesses in areas like organics and heritage foods.

Consideration should also be given to projects like sky farming, where urban high rises or green roof facilities are converted to agricultural purposes. The GTA is the proposed home to a sky farm initiative that would see a 58-story building become a 420-hectare urban farm, and Markham may be well-positioned to attract such an investment.

Action: Develop and implement a plan to strengthen and promote local agricultural links to Markham, with a focus on creating niche businesses opportunities that enhance urban-rural connections and urban agriculture.

Role & Timeline: Municipality in lead role, with medium-term timeline (ongoing from 2011-2014)

Key Partners: regional agricultural community, agencies supporting small businesses including the Small Business Enterprise Centre

1.1.6 Create a New Food Culture: Linking Food to Environment and Health

Markham has become an early adopter of the Local Foods Plus program, which links local food growers and suppliers to institutional buyers, including the Town itself. Markham should position this program as the first step in a larger and more ambitious project. As the notion of the 100-Mile Diet takes hold and becomes more popular, Markham should work with local restaurants, supermarkets and greengrocers to create high-end, food-oriented opportunities that build on concepts such as the slow food movement and zero-waste restaurants (like Toronto's Jamie Kennedy Wine Bar). Not only will this contribute to Markham's development as a food and dining destination, it will lay the groundwork for an increasingly healthy community approach to food – and a host of related business opportunities.

Action: Work with the local food service sector to increase local sourcing, improve environmental performance and strengthen Markham's business opportunities in an industry that is undergoing a healthy revolution.

Role & Timeline: Town in facilitative role, with medium-term timeline (ongoing from 2011-2014)

Key Partners: food service and distribution sectors, including restaurants, wholesalers and grocers

