



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor Scarpitti and Members of Council

From : Jim Baird, Commissioner of Development Services
Valerie Shuttleworth, Director of Planning and Urban Design

Date: November 17, 2009

Subject: Follow Up Information Related to the Agricultural Assessment Study

BACKGROUND:

On November 3, 2009, Development Services Committee deferred a staff report on the Agricultural Assessment Study to receive additional information from staff. This memo attaches the November 3, 2009 staff recommendation (Appendix 'A'), and provides staff comments and additional suggested resolution clauses pursuant to the discussion by Committee on November 3, 2009.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That the staff report entitled "Agricultural Assessment Study Final Report and Recommendations" dated November 3, 2009 be received;**
- 2. And that the staff recommendation contained therein (Appendix 'A') be endorsed.**
- 3. That upon endorsonation of the Town's Growth Management Strategy, staff undertake pre-consultations with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Region of York staff to discuss a potential municipal request to Grow the Greenbelt in Markham, which would include lands contained in the proposed Greenway System including the enhancement lands forming the east-west linkage, as discussed by Development Services Committee on November 3 and November 17, 2009;**
- 4. And that staff report back to Development Services Committee on this matter;**

5. And that the Town invite staff from the Provincial Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to a Part A session of Development Services Committee in early 2010 to present applicable Provincial programs and opportunities that the Town and its agricultural partners could consider.

The following discussion themes address the comments raised by Committee on November 3, 2009.

Item #1: Agricultural Area

A request was made from Development Services Committee to identify the acreage of agricultural lands in Markham in relation to the urban area (including future) and the endorsed Greenway System. The following chart outlines the land acreage data for the agricultural and Greenway System.

LAND ACREAGE

	Hectares	% of the Total Land Area
TOTAL LAND AREA MARKHAM	21,200	100%
Current Settlement Area	11,500	54%
Outside of the Current Settlement Area (Rural)	9,700	46%

MARKHAM'S "WHITEBELT" PER PROVINCE & REGION	2,330	11%
Proposed New Community Lands 2031	900	4%
Rural Hamlets	90	.4%
'Whitebelt' Not Required to 2031		6%

REMAINING NON URBAN LANDS (POST 2031)	8,710	41%
Natural Heritage Network Lands (agriculture uses permitted outside of features)	4,251	20%
Agricultural and Greenway Agricultural lands including Whitebelt not required to 2031	4,459	21%

TOWN WIDE (Urban and Non Urban)		
Greenway System (including enhancement lands)	7,557	36%
Greenway System plus remaining Agricultural lands (Growth Management Strategy)	10,519	50%

In summary, if Council endorses the staff preferred Growth Management Strategy, approximately 8,710 hectares (41% of the Town) will remain in a specific 'Agricultural' designation and the proposed 'Greenway System' designation (in the non urban area). This provides for an exclusive agricultural designation or a natural heritage network (agriculture permitted outside of features) designation on 41% of the Town's land base post 2031. The total combined Town-wide Greenway System (including the urban Greenway lands) and remaining (2031 planning horizon) agricultural lands would be

approximately 10,519 hectares or 50% of the total land area in Markham. The attached map identifies the preferred growth alternative being recommended by staff, and the associated Greenway System and “whitebelt” lands that could remain in agriculture to post 2031.

Item #2: Growing the Greenbelt

Development Services Committee on November 3, 2009 expressed interest in potentially “Growing the Greenbelt”, in particular to include lands proposed to form part of an enhanced Greenway System.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs has outlined a process and criteria by which they will consider municipal requests to grow the Greenbelt. The ultimate discretion rests with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing as to whether an expansion proposal would be supported. The Ministry identified six criteria (excerpts from the Provincial Growing the Greenbelt Paper) identified below, which must be met before a request will be considered.

1. Municipal Request. The request must be from a regional, county or single-tier municipal government and be supported by a council resolution. In a region, the lower-tier host municipality (eg. Markham) in the proposed expansion area must support the request through a council resolution. Municipalities will need to provide documentation and supporting rationale as to how they have addressed the criteria. Council will need to demonstrate what measures it has taken to engage the public, affected landowners, key stakeholder organizations and public bodies about growing the Greenbelt in its municipality and recommend that this process take place through a comprehensive review such as the 5 year Official Plan review.

2. Additions to the Greenbelt. The request must identify a proposed expansion area that is adjacent to the existing Greenbelt or demonstrates a clear functional relationship to the Greenbelt area and how the Greenbelt Plan policies will apply. However, lands that are not immediately adjacent to the Greenbelt may also be considered for expansion where it can be demonstrated that there is a clear functional relationship to the Greenbelt.

3. Embraces the Greenbelt Purpose. The request must demonstrate how the proposed expansion area meets the intent of the vision and one or more of the goals of the Greenbelt Plan. The Greenbelt Plan aims to enhance urban and rural areas and overall quality of life in the Protected Countryside. While providing permanent agricultural and environmental protection, and supporting a strong agricultural and rural economy, the Greenbelt Plan also provides for a wide range of recreation, tourism and cultural opportunities.

4. Connections to Greenbelt Systems. One or more of the Greenbelt systems (Natural Heritage System, Agricultural System and Water Resource System) must be identified and included in the proposed expansion area and their functional relationship to the existing Greenbelt system must be demonstrated. The area identified for Greenbelt

expansion must be based on the same provincial scale systems approach that was used in the Protected Countryside of the Greenbelt Plan.

5. Complements the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. A

municipality's request to expand the Greenbelt may be considered by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, while the municipality is engaged in its associated Growth Plan conformity exercise. The proposed area for expansion cannot impede the implementation of the Growth Plan.

6. Timing and Relationship to Other Provincial Initiatives. A municipality's request to expand the Greenbelt may be considered by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing while complementary provincial initiatives are being developed. Municipal requests to grow the Greenbelt will need to identify the relationship to relevant provincial initiatives and demonstrate that the proposed expansion would complement and support them, and would not impede their planning or implementation.

The Province has outlined a detailed process to assist municipalities with the review of a potential request for a Greenbelt expansion. The Town will begin the preparation of a new Official Plan once the final Growth Management Strategy is endorsed by Council. This is the recommended tool the Province suggests for the review of Growing the Greenbelt. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing requires pre-consultation with municipalities in advance of requests being submitted to the Province. Should Council wish to further explore 'Growing the Greenbelt' options in Markham, we suggest the following be considered by Development Services Committee:

That upon endorsement of the Town's Growth Management Strategy, staff undertake pre-consultations with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Region of York staff to discuss a potential municipal request to Grow the Greenbelt in Markham, which would include lands contained in the proposed Greenway System including the enhancement lands forming the east-west linkage, as discussed by Development Services Committee on November 3, and November 17, 2009.

And that staff report back to Development Services Committee on this matter.

Item # 3: Recommendations to the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Rural Affairs

Development Services Committee requested staff review the wording of recommendation 6 of the November 3rd report, encouraging the Province to continue to support local agricultural to be more specific. The original proposed recommendation read as follows:

And that the Town encourage the Provincial Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to provide new opportunities for financial support to encourage farming innovation, agricultural best practices and support food security objectives.

This recommendation was intended to provide general support for the Provincial programs underway to assist the agricultural economy. Through discussions with staff Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Rural Affairs it is clear that there are many Provincial incentives and programs which have been created to support agriculture and some of these programs would most certainly apply to the local farming industry in Markham. It would be very helpful for the Town to hear first hand from the Ministry how these programs could be applied, particularly as the Town moves forward with the Community Sustainability Plan and other potential agricultural initiatives. We offer the following additional recommendation for consideration by Development Services Committee:

And that the Town invite staff from the Provincial Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to a Part A session of Development Services Committee in early 2010 to present applicable Provincial programs and opportunities that the Town and its agricultural partners could consider.

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix 'A' Staff recommendations for November 3, 2009 report.

APPENDIX 'A'

Staff recommendations for November 3, 2009 report.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) That the staff report entitled Agricultural Assessment Study Final Report and Recommendations, dated November 3, 2009 be received;
- 2) And that the Agricultural Assessment Study Final Report be endorsed in principle as the basis and framework for policy directions to be included in the Town's Growth Management Strategy for implementation through the Town's new Official Plan;
- 3) And that staff in the Sustainability Office review opportunities to implement applicable project components of the recommended Agricultural Strategy through the Green Print – Community Sustainability Plan and report back to Council;
- 4) And that staff in the Finance Department review the study recommendations with respect to possible financial incentives and report back to Council;
- 5) And that staff in the Economic and Cultural Departments be forwarded the Final Agricultural Assessment Report to review and consider with respect to future economic and cultural strategies as outlined in the report;
- 6) And that the Town encourage the Provincial Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to provide new opportunities for financial support to encourage farming innovation, agricultural best practices and support food security objectives.
- 7) And that the report be forwarded to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Region of York and the Rouge Park Alliance.
- 8) And that Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.