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**PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING
MARKHAM'S AGRICULTURAL STRATEGY AND
ROUGE PARK'S DRAFT AGRICULTURAL POLICY & GUIDELINES
JANUARY 12, 2010
7:00 p.m.
Council Chamber**

Attendance

Mayor F. Scarpitti
Deputy Mayor J. Heath
Regional Councillor J. Jones
Regional Councillor J. Virgilio
Regional Councillor G. Landon
Councillor V. Burke
Councillor E. Shapero
Councillor D. Hamilton
Councillor C. Moretti
Councillor J. Webster
Councillor D. Horchik
Councillor L. Kanapathi
Councillor A. Chiu

J. Livey, Chief Administrative Officer
J. Baird, Commissioner of Development Services
A. Taylor, Commissioner of Corporate Services
J. Lustig, Director of Finance and Client Services
V. Shuttleworth, Director of Planning and Urban Design
L. Duoba, Senior Project Coordinator
A. Tari, Committee Clerk

The Public Information Meeting convened at 7:05 PM in the Council Chamber with Councillor J. Webster in the Chair.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Councillor John Webster welcomed everyone and explained the purpose of tonight's Public Information meeting.

The Mayor provided a brief history of how tonight's meeting evolved and emphasized that this meeting was scheduled in direct response to the Agriculture Community in the Rouge Park. He also pointed out the importance to hear comments and concerns from the farming community with respect to the Town's agricultural study.

2. ROUGE PARK IMPLEMENTATION TASK FORCE

Deputy Mayor Jack Heath briefly explained the purpose and recommendations of the Rouge Park Implementation Task Force.

3. ROUGE PARK AGRICULTURE

Mr. Alan Wells, Chair, Rouge Park delivered a PowerPoint presentation with respect to Rouge Park Agriculture outlining the draft Rouge Park Alliance Agriculture Policy and Guiding Principles.

4. AGRICULTURAL ASSESSMENT STUDY

Ms. Lilli Duoba, Senior Project Coordinator delivered a brief presentation providing the context of the Agricultural Assessment Study.

Ms. Margaret Walton, Planscape delivered a PowerPoint presentation outlining the findings of the Agricultural Assessment Study.

5. QUESTIONS

A number of questions were asked by members of the audience regarding the Rouge Park and the agricultural reserve that were answered by Mr. Wells, Ms. Walton and Town staff.

6. DEPUTATIONS

Dr. Terry O'Connor, addressed the Committee and stated that he supports in principle the recommendations outlined in the Town's Agricultural Assessment report. He would like to see the agriculture community be recognized in a more positive way and not be told what to grow. He indicated that it is essential for farmers to obtain long term leases. He briefly spoke of right to farm legislation and agricultural land zoning that have been introduced in many jurisdictions to deal with erosion of the arable land base and land use conflicts. He emphasized that farmers are good stewards of the land and small streams.

Ms. Kim Empringham, York Region Federation of Agriculture, addressed the Committee and spoke in opposition to planting trees on Class One agriculture lands. She indicated that she supports the expansion of a natural park in the Rouge Park area as long as it is not on Class One agriculture lands. Ms. Empringham commended Markham Council for allowing the Agricultural Community the opportunity to provide their views.

Mr. Mike Whittamore, Whittamore Farms addressed the Committee and stressed the importance of obtaining the correct facts from the agriculture community in making decisions that affect farming. He expressed that the future of farming as in industry is not artisan farms or agri-tourism.

Ms. Ruth Brock, Farmer and landowner, addressed the Committee advising that her family has farmed for seven generations and still do today on their land in Markham. She stated that they raise and sell hogs and spoke of the difficulty in making a living off farming in today's economy. Ms. Brock is not in support of the Foodbelt proposal.

Ms. Esther Lewis, long time dairy Farmer and landowner addressed the Committee and stated that she does not believe that the Foodbelt proposal is in her best interest. Ms. Lewis stated that they expect to sell their property in Markham and use it as their retirement fund. She indicated that her children still farm today however they purchased farmland outside of Markham.

Mr. Don Miller, Farmer and landowner, addressed the Committee advising that he is counting on his 100 acres to be his future retirement fund. He spoke of the difficulty to make a living on farming 100 acre lands and his inability to purchase additional lands because of the high land values.

Mr. Chris Burkholder, Burkholder Farms, addressed the Committee advising that he is a sixth generation farmer who farms and sells his crops locally. He stated that their crops are safe and also help improve our environment. Mr. Burkholder believes that farmers should not be told what they should grow on their lands. His crops can also be used in producing bio-fuel and clean energy. He also suggested that Municipalities consider installing wider paved shoulders so that when farmers need to transport their large equipment they do not take up two lanes of traffic.

Ms. Helen Roman-Barber, Romandale Farms, addressed the Committee stating she is not in support of expanding the whitebelt lands into the Greenbelt. The Provincial Growth Plan applies and we can't turn back time. She believes that the Farm economy is no longer viable in Markham.

Mr. Wells advised that the intention of the Rouge Park Alliance policy is not to dictate to farmers what they can and cannot grow but to remain being good stewards of the land.

Mr. Gus Schickendanz, 10206 Warden Avenue spoke as a farmer, developer and builder stating that he is not in support of a permanent foodbelt. He believes farming is a very competitive business and very difficult to make a living from it. Mr. Schickendanz provided some examples of public policy leading to constraints and shortages.

Ms. Marion Matthias, Thornhill resident addressed the Committee and spoke in support of a policy that will protect the whitebelt. She believes that the current urban boundaries need to have improved infrastructure before allowing further development.

Mr. John Kay, 9529 Reesor Road addressed the Committee advising he is a small scale farmer who is not in support of tree planting on Class One agricultural lands.

Mr. John Doner, Gormley Ontario, addressed the Committee advising that he currently farms with his sons and that his family has been farming since 1806. He provided some statistics for farm economics and the decline in number of farmers. Mr. Doner believes that the real concern is not the available lands for farmers but the economics and the inability to replace the aging knowledge base.

Mr. Donald F. Given, Malone Given Parsons on behalf of the North Markham Landowners stated concerns with respect to creating a Foodbelt. His clients would like to continue to work with the Town and the Region in moving to complete the process that has been underway for a few years.

Mr. Frank Markowitz, 10228 McCowan Road, farmer egg producer, addressed the Committee and stated concern with the proposal to create a Foodbelt. He spoke about the difficulty for farmers to make a decent living off of farming alone, and government should not interfere with his right to sell his land for a fair price.

Mr. Ira Kagan, Kagan Shastri Barristers and Solicitors, addressed the Committee on behalf of various developers in north Markham and spoke in opposition to designating the whitebelt into the Greenbelt. Many economic factors affect agriculture. He believes that assisting the farmers that already exist would be more beneficial and by providing long-term leases on publicly owned lands.

Ms. Lori Stahlbrand, Local Food Plus, addressed the Committee and spoke in support of the Foodbelt proposals and protecting agricultural lands.

Mr. Tom Farrar addressed the Committee requesting that all landowners be treated the same.

Mr. Jim Robb, Rouge Duffins Greenspace Coalition addressed the Committee stating concern that if the whitebelt lands are not protected that there will not be sustainable communities. He quoted from a letter by a Kitchener-Waterloo resident regarding sustainable agriculture and development.

Ms. Maureen Flynn, Wingsong Wildlife Preservation Alliance addressed the Committee and spoke in support of preserving lands for farming, natural heritage and wildlife habitat.

Ms. Sarah Baldwin, Larkin & Associates, addressed the Committee with respect to the Agricultural Assessment Study requesting that the policies allow cemeteries on appropriate lands. She inquired of the Regional LEAR process and was directed to the Region of York for additional information.

Mr. Tupper Wheatley, Milne Park Conservation Association addressed the Committee and suggested that the Rouge Park Implementation Task report requires additional public input.

Ms. Debra Lapp, 7284 Reesor Road addressed the Committee and spoke in support of the recommendations outlined in the Rouge Park Implementation Task Force report particularly with respect to the houses in the park.

Mr. Jose Etcheverry, 28 Sir Kay Drive addressed the Committee indicating that he would like to see the farming communities in Markham continue. He believes that the various levels of government need to protect current and future generations of farmers.

Mr. Adam Poon, 175 Manhattan Drive, addressed the Committee regarding the existing farming communities in Markham and believes that it is important to find ways for them to be more efficient, and to have government economic development support.

The Committee thanked everyone for attending and advised that all the feedback received at tonight's meeting will be considered as part of the long-term strategy.

ADJOURNMENT

The Pubic Information Meeting adjourned at the hour of 11:25 PM.