



Report to: Development Services Commission

Report Date: February 5, 2013

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**SUBJECT:** Interim Report for the Cornell Centre Precinct Plan, (November 26, 2012)  
**PREPARED BY:** Catherine Jay, Manager Urban Design

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1) That the report dated February 5, 2013, entitled “Interim Report for the Cornell Centre Precinct Plan, (November 26, 2012)”, be received;
- 2) That the presentation titled “ Cornell Centre Precinct Plan”, be received;
- 3) That the draft Cornell Centre Precinct Plan be released for public comment;
- 4) That Council direct Staff to report back on the final Cornell Precinct Plan upon the completion of further technical studies (including Transportation Analysis and Retail Market Analysis) and after further public consultation, with stakeholders and the Cornell Advisory Committee; and,
- 5) That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this report is to:

- Inform Council of the final draft of the Cornell Centre Precinct Plan, dated November 26, 2012 (attached in Appendix A)
- Inform Council of Staff next steps for the Cornell Centre Precinct Plan’s completion and implementation.

**BACKGROUND:**

Cornell is a master planned community designed in the 1990’s by Andres Duany and the firm of Duany Plater-Zyberk. Cornell was designed according to the principles of New Urbanism. The principles of New Urbanism promote a walkable, high quality connective public realm and mixed-use community at a human scale. The overall vision for Cornell includes a number of connected and complete neighbourhoods centred on a retail corridor along Bur Oak Avenue.

Since the 1990’s, the vision for Cornell Centre has undergone an evolution. The original planning principles of Cornell are still relevant and formed the basis of the Cornell Secondary Plan (2008) and have informed the development of the Cornell Centre Precinct Plan. In the

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context of the land use designations of the Secondary Plan, a precinct plan is being brought forward to strengthen the vision for Cornell Centre and to establish detailed design guidelines. The Cornell Centre Precinct Plan was initiated by Markham in 2011.

**DISCUSSION:****The Precinct Plan ensures the long term vision of the Cornell Centre Secondary Plan is realized and implemented.**

The Precinct Plan concept and accompanying design guidelines for public realm and built form will provide a framework to guide the development approval process for landowners, developers, stakeholders and City Staff. The principles and guidelines within the document enable staff, developers, and consultants to implement with a high degree of certainty the policies of the Secondary Plan and the overall vision for Cornell Centre.

**Urban Strategies Inc., an integrated urban design and planning firm was contracted by the City to develop the Precinct Plan.**

In January 2011, Urban Strategies was retained by Markham. The Terms of Reference and the scope of the program required Urban Strategies to:

- Confirm and refine the policies of the Secondary Plan for Cornell Centre in the context of the Growth Management Study endorsed by Council in 2010, with a focus on intensification at key nodes and corridors including Cornell Centre;
- Align recent development proposals and infrastructure requirements with the Secondary Plan and the Precinct Plan vision; and,
- Provide greater detail and certainty through an effective development framework and design guidelines.

**The Precinct Plan refines the Vision for Cornell Centre and establishes design guidelines for the Public Realm and Built Form.**

Cornell Centre is envisioned as a pedestrian-oriented, mixed use community that is well served by transit. Markham's endorsed Growth Management Study identifies Cornell Centre as a key intensification area. A fine grain of streets and blocks help to connect extensive parks and open space network. The employment area in the east end of Cornell Centre is seen as a high quality employment area supporting future employment. The mixed-use retail/commercial centre is located at the intersection of Highway 7 and Bur Oak Avenue with the "Main Street" retail along Bur Oak Avenue. The greatest heights and densities are located at the corner of Highway 7 and Bur Oak Avenue. Areas of transition adjacent to existing residential neighbourhoods will have lower heights and densities.

The public realm consists of publicly accessible spaces that define Cornell Centre's urban form and function. The streets, boulevards, lanes, parks and open spaces, community facilities and

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public art are all elements that comprise the public realm. An accessible, high quality public realm will ensure Cornell Centre is a liveable, successful place.

The built form and design guidelines build on principles in the secondary plan that apply to all development in Cornell Centre. The framework established by the guidelines ensures a high level of design excellence can be achieved. The built form guidelines provide direction with regards to siting and orientation, relationship to the street, access and circulation, parking and loading and open space.

### **Observations and Issues Arising From the Public Participation Process**

In addition to the Terms of Reference, the Precinct Plan work was guided by a team of Markham staff as well as York Region staff. Three open houses were held and several group and individual meetings with stakeholders and landowners. Information gathered from all consultation has been evaluated and the issues and recommendations are indicated below:

#### **1. Height and Density**

The potential for greater density along identified transit corridors is an objective identified for intensification areas throughout Markham, including Cornell Centre. Through the Precinct Plan, an analysis was undertaken to determine the capacity for greater height and density within Cornell Centre.

The Cornell Secondary Plan includes requirements for minimum densities as determined by floor space index (FSI) and maximum height. Although the Precinct Plan proposes greater heights than the Secondary Plan in some locations, it respects the densities allowed for in the Secondary Plan since the floor space index will be capped in order to not increase the overall unit count. The Precinct Plan achieves this by prescribing a built form and massing that does not increase the number of planned units within Cornell Centre, based on the Growth Management Strategy modelling forecasts.

The intent of the planned function of Cornell and Cornell Centre is based on New Urbanism and a human - scaled walkable community. These principles are strengthened with building designs with podiums and streetscapes that are at a human scale, creating an inviting public realm that will ultimately encourage people to walk rather than drive to their destinations within the community. For this reason the Precinct Plan is placing a greater emphasis on podiums and street related buildings with permission for taller point towers to achieve density forecasts.

**Recommendation #1:** While the Precinct Plan considers an increase in height in key locations the plan is not recommending an increase in the unit count. If greater FSI and density are to be contemplated in the future a review of both the need for increased community services and school board requirements would be necessary. Transportation analysis should be updated as discussed below.

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## **2. Transportation**

A Transportation Study was completed in 2007 as a background document for the Secondary Plan. The current Secondary Plan's land use and population were finalized on the basis of the 2007 Study. In order to confirm the number of units and the overall population being proposed in the context of current transportation capacity modelling, a review and update to the 2007 Study will be required to determine if the future transportation services can support the proposed density of development and higher transit modal split. The Study findings will be used to inform the Cornell Centre Precinct Plan and Updated Cornell Secondary Plan. Other transportation matters such as a parking business plan for Cornell, transit service and Transportation Demand Management will be addressed as part of the study.

**Recommendation #2:** That an update to the 2007 Transportation Study be undertaken, in consultation with York Region to:

- 1) assess the transportation impact of the most current development statistics resulting from the draft Cornell Centre Precinct Plan and Growth Management Strategy forecasts to inform the Updated Cornell Secondary Plan, and identify any necessary phasing requirements.
- 2) develop a transportation improvement strategy and a development phasing plan to ensure transportation services can meet the transportation demand,
- 3) confirm a street and block network to ensure connectivity for pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and drivers, while balancing the operational needs of the future VIVA bus rapid transit.

## **3. Greater Flexibility for Development Permissions**

In general the landowners have indicated that they are satisfied with the long term vision. The issues being raised are how best to implement the vision on a phased basis. The landowners are claiming there is limited current demand for high density residential in Cornell Centre and as such they would like the ability to develop the land now with "interim" uses. They request more flexibility to do what they feel is viable today and are concerned with restrictions on the types of use and prescriptive urban design standards. Staff are of the opinion that the Precinct Plan should be approved with the appropriate policies to implement the long term vision. However, some phasing opportunities which do not undermine the future implementation of Cornell Centre can be explored.

**Recommendation #3:** That the Precinct Plan be finalized and brought back to Council for final approval and staff continue to work with individual applicants to explore solutions and phasing options through the planning application process which do not undermine the long term implementation of Cornell Centre.

## **4. Viability of Bur Oak Avenue as Retail Main Street**

Some of the Cornell landowners hired Altus to prepare a Retail Market Study for Cornell Centre. Altus, along with the landowners gave staff a presentation of the findings of the study. The overall findings indicated that Cornell Centre could support large format retail along Highway 7

but not the Main Street retail along Bur Oak that staff and Urban Strategies are reinforcing. The current Secondary Plan envisions a high quality public realm that is reinforced by the Main Street retail along Bur Oak. The success of the retail district is integral in ensuring the principles of walkability, sustainability and mixed use developments are incorporated into Cornell Centre.

**Recommendation #4:** That a peer review of the Altus retail market study on the viability of the commercial components of the Precinct Plan be undertaken by the City to confirm the feasibility of a Main Street retail district to be located along Bur Oak between Highway 7 and Rose Way.

### **5. VIVA Transit Terminal**

The Precinct Plan shows two alternative locations for the VIVA Transit Terminal. The Secondary Plan indicates the location of the Transit Terminal as south of Highway 7 and east of Cornell Centre Boulevard. As part of the review process, an alternative viable location was incorporated into the Precinct Plan. The second option for the Transit Terminal is identified south of the hospital, north of Rose Way and west of Bur Oak. These two options are currently being pursued by VIVA. In March 2013 a decision regarding the final location is expected to be made by the Board of Directors of the York Region Rapid Transit Corporation. Markham Council has previously identified a future mobility hub in the Highway 407 and Havelock Rail Line location, premised on the future Hwy 407 transit way and Go rail service on the CPR Havelock line. VIVA anticipates that it will serve the new hub location in future (post 2031 based on current Metrolinx forecasts). The Cornell terminal will remain in place providing a transit interconnection for the VIVA and YRT local service primarily focused on Highway 7 and north Cornell YRT routes.

**Recommendation #5:** That the decision by the YRRTC Board of Directors regarding the location of the VIVA Transit Terminal be incorporated into the final Precinct Plan.

### **Recommended Next Steps**

In order to finalize the Cornell Centre Precinct Plan the following next steps are recommended:

1. Council to receive the Cornell Centre Precinct Plan and authorize its release for public comment;
2. A comprehensive Transportation Study be undertaken, in consultation with York Region to address transportation capacity requirements and density provisions of the Precinct Plan and future Secondary Plan update;
3. That staff continue to work with individual applicants to review applications under the current Cornell Secondary Plan provisions and having regard to the City's Growth Management Study, Draft New Official Plan and the draft Cornell Centre Precinct Plan.
4. A peer review of the Altus Retail Market Study on the viability of the commercial components of the Precinct Plan be undertaken by the City.
5. That further public consultation be undertaken upon completion of any further studies.
6. The decision by Viva's Board of Directors be incorporated into the final precinct plan.

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**FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS AND TEMPLATE: (external link)**

This Precinct Plan study is funded under and approved Capital Budget account.

**HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS**

Not applicable

**ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:****Growth Management**

By design, Cornell is a sustainable and complete community. By implementing the principles of new urbanism within Cornell Centre, the core commercial area will also be designed to be a sustainable community. The Precinct Plan aligns with the New Official Plan and provides greater detail from the policies found in the New Official Plan and Chapter 6 Urban Design and Sustainable Development.

**Transportation/Transit**

The City's overall transportation vision is to develop a transportation system that increases mobility options for all users, including pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders and which promotes travel demand management. The Precinct Plan implements the new transportation vision by emphasizing walkable streets and integrating more pedestrian and transit oriented land uses with improved pedestrian, cycling, and transit access.

**Environment**

A co-ordinated strategy for a sustainable community includes a strong and healthy environment. The Precinct Plan reinforces the policies of the secondary plan to deliver enhanced parks, open space, woodlots, natural features and stormwater management facilities.

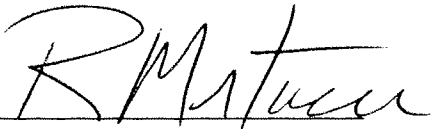
**BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:**

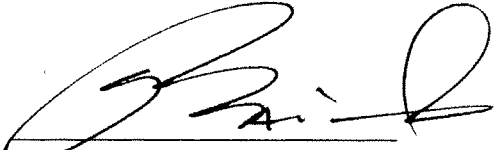
Internal departments have been involved throughout the development of the Precinct Plan and will continue to be involved as required. Planning and Policy, Development Engineering, Urban Design, Operations and York Region Planning and Transportation have been consulted and their respective comments have been incorporated where appropriate into the document.

**CONCLUSION**

The Cornell Centre Precinct Plan is consistent with the policies and land uses in the approved Secondary Plan but some refinements to the Secondary Plan will be necessary. These are restricted to minor land use refinements and some proposed height increases. The Plan reduces the requirement for grade related commercial all along Hwy 7 and focuses it to an area around Hwy 7 and Bur Oak. The Precinct Plan also provides for a refinement of built form and massing that provides an increase in height, but controls FSI so as to not increase density. The refinements suggested by the Precinct Plan will be addressed through a City initiated Secondary Plan Amendment once final approval is received.

**RECOMMENDED**

BY:   
Rino Mostacci, M.C.I.P., R.P.P  
Director of Planning and Urban Design

  
Jim Baird, M.C.I.P., R.P.P  
Commissioner of Development Services

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Appendix A – Cornell Centre Precinct Plan