

**PLANNING
MARKHAM'S FUTURE**



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1.0 PLANNING MARKHAM'S FUTURE

1.1 THE PURPOSE OF THE OFFICIAL PLAN

The Official Plan is a statutory document under the Ontario Planning Act that sets out land use policy to guide future development and to manage growth. It provides a policy framework for Council decisions regarding the use of land, the provision of the municipal services required to support growth, and the phasing of development.

Markham's current Official Plan was originally adopted in 1976 and approved in 1978. A partial update of the Plan was adopted in 1987 and approved in 1993, and numerous amendments to the Plan have been adopted since 1993. This Plan replaces the previous Plan and provides direction for land use planning in Markham to 2031.

1.2 THE MARKHAM CONTEXT

Markham has a wealth of *cultural heritage resources* within its boundaries. While having been inhabited for over 11,000 years by Aboriginal peoples including ancestors of the Huron-Wendat, Iroquois (Haudensaunee) and Anishnabek Mississauga people, Markham also has a strong rural and colonial heritage, originating as an agricultural community served by the distinct villages of Unionville, Markham, Milliken and Thornhill. Remnants of this history remain to this day. Recognizing and preserving this cultural heritage is an important element of the City's identity.

Since incorporation as a Town in 1971, Markham has experienced significant growth, with a population increasing almost tenfold to just over 310,000 when the Town moved to City status on July 1, 2012. During this period Markham has also become a significant employment centre within the Regional Municipality of York (York Region) and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), accommodating more than 160,000 workers. York Region has also grown since 1971. Today, York Region is the third most populous Region in the GTA and Provincial growth forecasts to 2031 anticipate more population and employment growth for York Region than any other GTA Region.

Markham's continuing growth stems in part from its strategic position within the southern portion of York Region, adjoining the City of Toronto and its location within the Greater Golden Horseshoe, one of the largest urban complexes in North America. Markham is directly served by two 400-series highways (Highways 404 and 407), a series of designated Regional arterial roads, and inter-regional rail and bus service, including GO Transit, York Region Transit, and City of Toronto transit. Within this context, Markham's planning decisions have not been about whether to grow, but rather how to grow.

At the start of the 20th century, present-day Markham consisted of three primary villages: Thornhill, Unionville and Markham Village. Each village

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had several common characteristics exemplifying a compact and walkable community with a fine-grained urban fabric, defined by a grid pattern of streets connecting small blocks, centered around a main street. The main street was the heart of the village, containing civic functions and employment opportunities, as well as providing for retail, entertainment and commerce within a convenient walking distance. During the postwar years, Markham, like most municipalities in the GTA, expanded rapidly through a series of residential and industrial subdivisions and commercial developments that depended on the automobile for their success. In 1990, Markham embarked on a more sustainable model of development, going back to its historic village roots by planning for new compact, walkable communities such as Cornell, combined with *intensification* along major transit corridors and a new transit-based urban core Markham Centre, to accommodate additional growth.

The focus of this Plan is to continue in this direction, with the goal of achieving a more urban, sustainable, complete City. A *complete community* provides for all of the daily needs of its residents, providing convenient access to an appropriate mix of jobs, shopping and personal services, housing, recreation and open space. This Official Plan provides the land use planning, urban design and transportation framework for this vision for growth, by providing for a variety of housing and job choices, services, community facilities and open space, and a high-quality public realm, all accessible by a transportation network that includes non-automobile options such as transit, cycling and walking.

1.3 THE REGULATORY CONTEXT

Planning in Markham is directly influenced by senior levels of government. Both the Province of Ontario and York Region provide legislation-based direction for municipal planning. Federal Government influence on municipal planning is less direct, resulting from Federal land ownership and controls on certain forms of transportation and telecommunications activities rather than on legislation.

1.3.1 Province of Ontario

The provincial legislation and plans described below outline the Province's interests and direction with regard to planning and growth management in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, including York Region and Markham.

Planning Act

The most direct control by the Province in regard to land use planning and policy is through the Planning Act, which defines municipal authority in land use planning matters. The Planning Act is designed to work in concert with other Provincial legislation affecting municipal government or land use (e.g., Municipal Act, Environmental Assessment Act, etc.), including the hierarchy of local government authority, which in Markham's case is established through the Region of York Act.



Founded more than 200 years ago, Markham proudly became a City on July 1, 2012.





The Official Plan will guide future development and manage growth over the next 20 years.

Provincial Policy Statement

The 2005 Provincial Policy Statement, issued under the Planning Act, provides principles and policy direction on matters of provincial interest relating to land use planning and development. These matters include building strong communities with an emphasis on efficient development and land use patterns, wise use and management of resources, and protecting public health and safety. The Planning Act requires that any decisions relating to planning matters “shall be consistent with” policy statements issued under the Act.

Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe

The 2006 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan) is a provincial plan that provides a framework for implementing the Province’s vision for building strong, prosperous communities within the Greater Golden Horseshoe to 2031.

The Growth Plan, which builds on the previously mentioned provincial initiatives, is intended to guide decisions on a wide range of issues related to growth management – land-use planning, urban form, transportation, infrastructure planning, housing, natural heritage and resource protection – in the interest of promoting economic prosperity. The Growth Plan is premised on the principles of building compact, vibrant and *complete communities*, developing a strong and competitive economy, protection and wise use of natural resources, and optimizing use of existing and new infrastructure to support growth in a compact, efficient form.

Complete communities demonstrate well-designed, compact urban development, accommodating both a mix and range of housing and jobs with convenient access to public transportation, while preserving and enhancing the natural environment where appropriate. To encourage development of *complete communities*, the Growth Plan promotes *intensification* within the *built-up area* with a focus on *urban growth centres* where the potential for development at transit-supportive densities is greatest. The Growth Plan identifies Markham Centre and Richmond Hill/Langstaff Gateway as *urban growth centres* and establishes policies and targets to promote intensive development and provide a focus for transit and infrastructure investments to support future growth.

Municipalities within the Greater Golden Horseshoe, including York Region and Markham, are required to bring their official plans into conformity with the Growth Plan. York Region must ensure that requirements of the Growth Plan are met by local municipalities, including Markham, including *intensification* within currently developed areas, minimum density targets, protection and designation of land for employment, efficient use of municipal services and preservation of the natural environment.

Greenbelt Plan

The 2005 Greenbelt Plan, established under the Provincial Greenbelt Act, identifies natural heritage and agricultural lands for permanent protection. The Greenbelt Plan incorporates lands within the Oak Ridges Moraine, and

To encourage development of complete communities, the Growth Plan promotes intensification within the built-up area with a focus on urban growth centres where the potential for development at transit-supportive densities is greatest.

complements and supports other provincial initiatives such as the Parkway Belt West Plan and the Rouge North Management Plan. While providing permanent agricultural and environmental protection, the Greenbelt also contains important natural resources and supports a wide range of recreational and tourism uses and opportunities. The range of uses contemplated for the Greenbelt is intended to support a vibrant and evolving agricultural and rural economy.

The Greenbelt in Markham includes approximately 5,200 hectares primarily in eastern Markham and in adjoining river valleys in northern Markham. Almost two-thirds of the Greenbelt lands in Markham are owned by the Federal and Provincial governments, and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan

The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, established under the Provincial Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, establishes a policy framework for protection of the ecological integrity of the Oak Ridges Moraine. Municipalities with lands in the Moraine are required to ensure that the policies of their official plans and the zoning of lands within the Moraine conform to the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. Urban development is not permitted within the Moraine, and permitted uses are strictly controlled. Within Markham, the Moraine extends over 600 hectares, adjoining the northern City boundary.

Regional Transportation Plan: The Big Move

The Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act provided for the establishment of Metrolinx, a regional transportation authority for the Greater Golden Horseshoe area. In 2008, Metrolinx approved a Regional Transportation Plan, known as “The Big Move,” which is a long-term strategic plan for an integrated, multi-modal, regional transportation system.

The Plan builds on the policy direction provided in the Province’s Growth Plan, by articulating a direction for a 25-year transportation system with an emphasis on the development of an integrated transit network. Together with other provincial plans, the Regional Transportation Plan supports the development of more compact and *complete communities* with increased travel choices within the Greater Toronto Area. The Plan also identifies Markham Centre and the Langstaff Gateway as Anchor Mobility Hubs with significant levels of planned transit service and development potential.

Parkway Belt West Plan and Minister’s Zoning Orders

In addition to the Provincial plans noted above, The Provincial Parkway Belt West Plan, 1978 approved under the Ontario Planning and Development Act, and three Minister’s Zoning Orders also control the use of over 5,000 hectares of land in Markham. Most of the lands within the Parkway Belt West Plan are occupied by Highway 407, major electrical transmission corridors, a major hydro transformer facility and Milne Dam

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Conservation Park.

The three Minister's Zoning Orders, which supersede Markham's land-use policies and zoning by-laws, are in place to protect the proposed Pickering Airport and Parkway Belt West lands, and to provide for a cemetery in south Markham. Decisions relating to the use of these lands are made by the Province.

1.3.2 York Region

Markham is one of nine local municipalities within York Region. York Region is the approval authority for Markham's Official Plan. The Markham Official Plan must conform to the York Region Official Plan, which includes policies to guide land-use planning consistent with the requirements of the Growth Plan, at a regional level.

The Regional policy represents a shift towards a growth management model that complements the Provincial policy and encourages development within the existing urban areas of the Region. The York Region Official Plan promotes Regional Centres and Corridors as the primary locations for the most intensive development within the Region. The Regional Official Plan identifies Markham Centre and the Richmond Hill/Langstaff Gateway as Regional Centres and Yonge Street and Highway 7 in Markham as Regional Corridors and establishes policies and minimum density targets to achieve complete, diverse, compact, vibrant and integrated centres and corridors.

Specifically, the York Region Official Plan includes population and employment growth forecasts and targets established by the Region for Markham and other local municipalities, and Regional requirements for managing growth, including minimum densities, *intensification* targets, phasing of growth, and identification of additional lands for urban development.

The York Region Official Plan was approved by the Province in 2010 and is currently under appeal.

1.3.3 Federal Airport Zoning Regulations

Federal Airport Zoning Regulations have been established under the Aeronautics Act for two locations in Markham: lands in the vicinity of the Toronto Buttonville Municipal Airport in the western portion of the City, and lands in the vicinity of the portion of the Pickering Airport Site located in northeast Markham.

The Regulations are intended to prevent lands adjacent to or in the vicinity of an airport or airport site from being used or developed in a manner that is incompatible with the safe operation of an airport or aircraft, including the restriction of certain land uses and limits on building heights. The Toronto Buttonville Municipal Airport is expected to close by 2015, at which time the Regulation on the affected lands will be lifted. Once plans and runway designs are finalized for the proposed Pickering Airport Site, it is anticipated that the extent of the lands in Markham covered by the

The York Regional Official Plan promotes Regional Centres and Corridors as the primary locations for the most intensive development within the Region.

Regulation will be reduced. Markham will work with the Federal government to determine whether regulations on all or a portion of these lands can be lifted, as planning for the Rouge National Park proceeds.

1.4 MARKHAM'S STRATEGIC DIRECTION

1.4.1 Strategic Priorities – Building Markham's Future Together

In 2007, Markham Council identified six strategic priorities for the City, with a goal of ensuring that Markham continues to be a vibrant, successful and sustainable community. These six priorities were confirmed as Markham's strategic direction, known as Building Markham's Future Together.

The six priorities comprising Building Markham's Future Together include:

- Managing growth
- Improving transportation and transit
- Protecting the natural environment
- Providing municipal services
- Providing for recreational and cultural services and facilities, and ensuring public safety
- Celebrating diversity

Building Markham's Future Together is being implemented through a number of action plans and studies, including this Official Plan. Although this Plan relates primarily to the priority of Managing Growth, the recommendations of the action plans for the other five priorities are reflected to varying degrees in this Plan.

Building Markham's Future Together identifies six strategic priorities for the City implemented through a number of action plans and studies, including this Official Plan.

1.4.2 Community Sustainability Plan – Greenprint

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.

The Greenprint vision is: "Markham: leading the way together to liveable neighbourhoods, healthy people and continuing prosperity." The Plan serves as an umbrella document for informing municipal decision-making across all areas of Markham, including land use and growth management, to ensure a coordinated approach to achieving sustainability.

1.4.3 Managing Growth – Council Endorsed Growth Alternative to 2031

The primary action plan for the Managing Growth priority is to develop a vision for sustainable community growth. Following a comprehensive growth management exercise involving extensive public consultation, Council in 2010 endorsed a Growth Alternative that accommodates population and employment forecasts to 2031, consistent with the

Provincial Growth Plan and the York Region Official Plan.

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

- a) accommodating the population and employment forecasts for Markham identified in the Regional Official Plan;
- b) continuing environmental protection in the form of a Greenway System to be integrated with lands for growth and agriculture;
- c) emphasizing *intensification* within the *built-up area* and limiting outward growth to future urban area lands;
- 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; and
 - the *intensification* of designated employment lands consistent with accommodating forecast employment growth;
- e) an extension to Markham's urban area of approximately 900 hectares of future urban area lands to accommodate additional dwelling units and jobs;
- f) provision for a diverse mix of housing and jobs supportive of improved live-work opportunities;
- g) an enhanced context for continued agricultural activity in Markham;
- 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;
- i) alignment with the transportation initiatives proposed by Metrolinx and York Region; and
- j) providing the basis for infrastructure and financial analysis and the opportunity to relate these to development phasing.

In 2010, Council endorsed a Growth Alternative that accommodates population and employment forecasts to 2031, consistent with the Provincial Growth Plan and the York Region Official Plan.

The Council endorsed Growth Alternative to 2031 forms the basis of this Official Plan.

1.5 THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS PLAN

The Official Plan is organized into two parts:

- Part I – Goals, objectives, policies and maps that pertain to Markham as a whole
- Part II – Secondary Plans, providing more detailed planning policies for specific areas of Markham

Part I is comprised of the following Chapters:

- Chapter 1, Planning Markham's Future – introduces the Plan, its policy context and organizational structure.
- Chapter 2, A Framework for Sustainable Growth – describes Markham's vision for accommodating growth to 2031, the strategic goals and objectives of the Plan, and the resulting City structure.

- Chapter 3, Environmental Systems – provides policies related to the protection of the natural environment areas and features including water systems, the *urban forest* as well as addressing environmental hazards.
- Chapter 4, Healthy Neighbourhoods and Communities – provides policies relating to elements of *complete communities*, including housing, community infrastructure, parks and open space, and cultural heritage and archaeological resources.
- Chapter 5, A Strong and Diverse Economy – provides policies relating to the retention and development of Markham's economy, including office, industry, institutions, retail, tourism and agriculture.
- Chapter 6, Urban Design and Sustainable Development – provides guidance in shaping the urban form of Markham communities as they continue to develop into more sustainable *complete communities*.
- Chapter 7, Transportation, Services and Utilities – provides policies relating to the transportation system, with an emphasis on increasing travel choices, and the provision of municipal services, including water and wastewater, utilities and energy.
- Chapter 8, Land Use – provides the land use designations and policies that determine where, and under what conditions various uses can be located.
- Chapter 9, Area and Site Specific Policies – provides special policies for areas and sites that require policies that vary from one or more provisions of this Plan.
- Chapter 10, Implementation – outlines policies for the implementation of this Plan.
- Chapter 11, Interpretation – provides direction on interpretation of the Plan including defined terms used in the Plan.

Operative Parts of the Plan

Chapters 2 through 11, and maps in Part I, as well a Part II, constitute the operative portions of the Official Plan. Chapter 1 of Part I, appendices, photos, illustrations, and graphics are provided for information purposes and are not operative parts of the Official Plan. Terms in italicized text are defined in the Definitions section of Chapter 11.

