

# **Response to the Canadian Federation of University Women, Markham/Unionville**

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**Received on September 25, 2022**

**1. The high-density developments proposed for York Region all aspire to having residents use active and/or public transit for personal and professional modes of transportation, thus ensuring that there will be little impact on the current traffic patterns. How would you as our representative plan for the worst-case scenario should this model not come to fruition?**

The GTA is probably the fastest growing region in North America. York Region and Markham are assigned population growth targets by the provincial government. The option of less growth to be assigned to Markham does not exist.

Further, according to provincial regulation, at least 50% of that growth must be accommodated within the current urban boundary. That means new communities like that envisioned in the Markham Centre Secondary Plan.

Markham is also planning new communities outside the urban boundary to be relatively dense with a focus on townhouses and mid-rise apartment buildings.

All of the new communities are being built at a density that makes public transit viable. Also, these new communities include extensive cycling and pedestrian infrastructure and are designed so that retail shops, parks and other community facilities are within walking distance of most homes. They are meant to be what is known in the planning world as “complete communities”.

Further, in the most-dense areas, like Markham Centre, new condo buildings are being built with less parking than in the past. Many new units will have no parking at all and most others will have only a single space.

Experience in other jurisdictions shows that “if you build it, they will come”. That is, if you build complete communities, with fast, frequent, affordable transit and lots of networked biking and walking infrastructure, people will indeed change their travel habits. I was heartened to see in YorkRegion.com reference to a survey by the David Suzuki Foundation that there is strong support for public transit in the suburbs of Toronto, presumably including Markham.

The greatest challenge is to retrofit our more mature communities. The city’s Active Transportation Master Plan is designed to address this issue, to some degree, by improving walking and cycling infrastructure in those communities. However, the lack of accessible retail and other amenities will continue to mean that driving will remain the primary transportation option there.

Recently York Region presented their latest Transportation Master Plan to Markham Council. Most of the congestion we all experience is on Regional roads. When asked how it addressed traffic congestion, York Region staff replied that it did not and could not. Changing our community design paradigm seems to be pretty much the only option available to us.

**2. The region’s official plan 2022 indicates a full range of housing types as a major element of the plan. As an elected official would you advocate to create new legal housing units in the ready supply of single-family dwellings in existence now?**

There are approximately 46 zoning bylaws in different areas of Markham. There is a project to reduce this to a single bylaw. Under provincial law any such change in zoning will require that secondary suites be allowed as of right in all single-family homes, semi-detached homes and townhomes, depending on some restrictions around parking availability and the like. Of course, the building and fire codes will also apply.

Our current mature neighbourhoods probably house fewer people than when they were first built. They have all the necessary infrastructure in place (roads, sewers, electricity etc). The Committee of Adjustment approves most applications for a secondary suite now, but the \$6000

application fee is a deterrent to legal construction. Markham has approximately 8,000 illegal secondary suites, including many that do not meet the building and fire codes. Secondary suites are probably the fastest and cheapest way to expand the much-needed supply of affordable housing and rental housing.

I support “as of right” zoning for secondary suites (with certain restrictions, particularly with regard to parking availability). I also support a program to identify the 8,000 illegal suites and bring them into compliance to make them safe.

**3. As Petteri Taalas, Secretary General of the World Meteorological Organization and Joyce Msuya deputy executive director of the United Nations Environmental Program wrote in the forward to the IPCC’s Special Report and Global Warming of 1.5 degrees in October 2018 “Every bit of warming matters. Every year matters and every choice matters.” How would you use your position to advocate for choices that will mitigate against the devastating consequences of climate change? The regional plan calls for dramatic urban growth but warming climate is worse in cities due to the urban heat island created by high concentration of concrete, asphalt and buildings themselves. Will you advocate for more green spaces, parks, green roofs, more trees and the latest in green technologies to build housing?**

In a word, yes. However, dense urban development has a much smaller per capita environmental impact than low-rise suburban sprawl: less driving, less need for infrastructure like roads, sewers etc. But we do need to ensure that these new dense communities do indeed meet strict environmental standards of all sorts, largely captured under the new sustainability metrics program being co-developed by Brampton, Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Markham. Markham’s Greenprint, Energy Plan and the new parks plan (currently under development) must also be rigorously applied to all new development.

**4. Are extensions of urban development onto Greenlands, Water**

## **Resource or Agricultural Systems justifiable?**

Again, in a word, no. Properly planned and managed, Markham, and indeed the GTA, have sufficient land for growth for many decades to come without encroaching on environmentally sensitive lands or farmland. That may mean further modifications to our traditional built forms of both residential and commercial buildings, road patterns etc. but it can be done. It must be done.

Unfortunately, the recent York Region Official Plan does anticipate further building on prime farmland and the Greenbelt. This is not necessary to meet our growth targets. I will advocate for carefully phased expansion further into farmland in Markham, to give us time to develop and advocate for other housing solutions, so that later phases do not happen.