

Growth through 2051 will present challenges

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Land to accommodate growth in Ontario through 2051 will put pressure on municipalities like King Township. As York Region prepares its Official Plan, it has created a draft forecast and land needs assessment through 2051. York is suggesting a portion of King's future growth and urban expansion be designed on Whitebelt lands. King is forecasted to grow to 49,600 by 2051, and be home to 16,400 jobs. Part of York's OP review is the Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR), which includes long-term planning for growth, employment, agriculture, transit, housing and more. The growth targets mandated by the Province require regions allocate population growth to their lower-tier municipalities. York itself will grow to over 2 million people by 2051, a rise of roughly 800,000 between now and 2051. York's forecast and land needs assessment identifies that 80% of the Whitebelt land is earmarked for development. Whitebelt refers to lands outside of the greenbelt area that are not currently designated for urban development, but are available for expansion under the Growth Plan. There are many factors that make these lands suitable for development in the future, including water and waste water infrastructure. Population estimates and intensification also play a part. York assigns each municipality, including King, with intensification targets and greenfield density. For King, York proposes it will need 80 hectares of Whitebelt land for future community and employment uses. The intensification target is 35%, with 2,800 additional housing units. It's noted the built-up areas in York will take the lion's share of growth. In King, the designated settlement areas include King City, Nobleton and Schomberg. Nobleton also contains lands in the settlement boundary classified as 'DGA-Agriculture'. King's Whitebelt lands are primarily located along the southern border, south of Laskay flanking Highway 400. As noted, to accommodate future growth, the infrastructure has to be made available by York Region. While it's quite possible that King will grow to 49,600, where these new homes will go remains to be seen. King staff pointed out the 'distribution of this population within the Township will require further examination and consultation'. The growth forecast breakdown for King shows King City growing to 21,000 by 2051. Nobleton will reach 10,800 and Schomberg will grow to 3,600. The Whitebelt is expected to take roughly 3,500. Township staff noted the interest shown in King City and Nobleton could see the population exceeding those estimates. These are planning forecasts and the numbers will be dependent on the growth limits in each village. Staff pointed out that York is proposing that a new settlement area be created through the expansion of the Whitebelt adjacent to King to the south. The King Whitebelt would likely be a continuation of the building coming north from Vaughan. This, staff observed, presents a 'fundamental divergence in how growth is currently being planned in the Township'. Urban growth is currently directed to the three villages and King's Official Plan, adopted in 2019, sets out such a framework. Planning staff indicate it's preferable to stay within the village boundaries, instead of expanding to the Whitebelt lands. The focus has been on the villages and their cores and that's where the growth should occur. King City is well positioned to accommodate additional growth and there are already several applications on the books. Nobleton is unique in that its size is limited by the existing infrastructure, limited it to 10,800. Expanding the capacity to serve more than would be cost-prohibitive, according to the Region. Nobleton has two boundaries, the inner urban boundary and the outer village boundary. There are lands outside the boundary, designed as 'reserve' and while not currently contemplated for development through 2031, there may be land to accommodate growth, subject to review. Planning for Nobleton should have a longer-term vision, other than the capacity of existing infrastructure, staff said. 'Good planning should not be limited as a result of existing servicing availability nor be prevented from occurring based upon existing infrastructure technologies,' staff wrote. This has led a few landowners in the Nobleton area to ask for consideration in the long-term planning horizon. Consultants representing landowners of parcels on both sides of Highway 27 wanted the lands included in future studies, saying it's a logical extension of the village boundaries. King councillors are reluctant to include these lands. Mayor Steve Pellegrini said King doesn't want to increase any settlement boundaries. Nobleton's reserve lands are not serviced and a lot needs to be done to meet future growth. It was suggested that staff reach out to the community to get an idea on what the community would like to see done with these lands. Councillor David Boyd said while consultation is always good, he won't be the councillor who 'opens the floodgates' to Nobleton. York will determine where growth occurs depending on servicing, he said. He also said he's not comfortable exceeding the regional forecast of 49,600 for King as a whole. Councillors want to see population allocated across the municipality and they don't support adding 3,500 to the Whitebelt lands. Concerned Citizens of King Township welcomed staff recommendations. In his correspondence to the Township, CCKT Chair Bruce Craig said accommodating population growth within the villages will continue to support building complete, sustainable,

healthy and liveable communities, where community members can live, work, shop and access services, many of which are already established within the villages. Regarding employment growth in King, CCKT recognizes that there is considerable vacant land designated within the three villages to accommodate employment growth and contribute to the creation of "complete, sustainable" communities. In addition the core areas of all three villages allows for mixed uses and contributes to additional employment growth. CCKT believes it is preferable for employment growth to occur in the three villages and to a limited extent in the hamlets and rural areas. CCKT also supports retaining all designated agricultural and rural lands in King Township including lands within the Whitebelt, and therefore does not support designating 10 hectares of King's Whitebelt lands for a new employment area. In addition the Whitebelt lands are not connected to any of the three villages. CCKT does not support the creation of additional employment lands along Highway 400, which would require a conversion of lands within the Greenbelt Plan. We strongly believe that all Greenbelt lands need to be sustained for the long term greater good of Ontario and for the benefit of maintaining natural heritage systems and agricultural systems throughout the Greenbelt. In fact, we are hopeful the Greenbelt Plan will be expanded into Simcoe and other regions of central Ontario.