

King provides input into York Official Plan

By Mark PavilonsEditor

While generally supportive of York's revamped Official Plan, King Township staff and council want to retain local planning authority. York has been updating its OP through what's called the Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) process and part of that involves getting input from municipalities. The updated York Region Official Plan will guide growth throughout the Region to the year 2051 and will bring the Region's Official Plan into alignment and conformity with Provincial Plans. The Township must then bring the Our King Official Plan into conformity with the Region's no later than one year from the date that the Province approves the Region's Official Plan. The Province's "A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe" (Growth Plan) sets out the population and employment forecasts for Regional and single-tier municipalities that are within the designated growth areas in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH). The Growth Plan requires upper- and single-tier municipalities to plan to achieve these forecasts within their jurisdiction. York Region is forecasted to grow to a population of 2.02 million people and 990,000 jobs by 2051. This represents a growth of approximately 800,000 people and 345,000 jobs between 2021 and 2051, which is the highest proportion of growth in the GGH. The draft forecast and lands needs assessment pegged growth for King to hit a population of 49,600 and 16,400 jobs by 2051. The draft also contains a proposed target of 35% intensification and a goal of 30 residents and jobs per hectare. The ROP places priority on building complete communities, sustainable growth initiatives and ensuring financial responsibility. In terms of land use designation, Schomberg, King City and Nobleton remain as towns and villages in community areas of the ROP. The plan also identifies "local centres and corridors" and "major transit station area" other than in King with the latter in King City. The draft plan also predicts 750 rental units be built in King by 2051 and a density of 55 jobs per hectare within King City. That target drops to 25 jobs per hectare in Nobleton and Schomberg. The plan also sees a minimum intensification of 4,600 new residential units by 2051. Local municipalities, according to York, are encouraged to plan for these densities. Employment targets are pegged to be concentrated in King City and adjacent to Highway 400. They're geared toward commercial, retail and other services or knowledge-based uses. The ROP does identify specialty crop areas, agriculture, rural areas and the Holland Marsh area. King staff have looked at specifics in the ROP and how they will impact King's future planning. Forecasts are provided in 10-year increments. Medium density development, commonly referred to as the "missing middle," provides for a wide range of housing types and directs them to the villages. While King staff are largely supportive of the ROP recommendations, they note it's critical for York to ensure policy framework provides for the appropriate local planning process to occur, and that infrastructure such as water and sewers be provided in a timely manner. Future growth in King will be directed to the villages, staying away from whitebelt lands. King will have to conduct a review and studies to see just where growth can be accommodated in the three villages. A section of the ROP calls on any urban boundary expansions to be done through a Regional review. King staff contend this may hinder local authority and they want the Region to revise this, allowing urban uses to be at the municipality's discretion. King staff also ask that York considers adding provisions for the sustainability of complete communities and community areas. They want additional flexibility built in to these provisions to encourage environmental protection. They also want the ROP to include tools for creating a green development standards program, including bylaws and incentives. Township staff also want the definitions widened for agri-tourism opportunities. The bottom line is King wants to ensure planning control at the local level is not hindered. Mayor Steve Pellegrini noted it's much better to have control in our own hands. While some residents may not want further intensification, he said it's up to council to balance the wants and needs. He pointed out that King has completed its own OP and has not increased local settlement areas or boundaries one inch. "We want a King solution, not a York one," the mayor observed. Steve Naylor said staff recommendations provide for greater flexibility and local options. The conformity exercise will continue over the next 12 to 18 months, which will include public input. Councillor Bill Cober stressed that local autonomy is very important. Development pressures will continue in years to come and major decisions should be made at the local level.