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Friday September 25, 2009

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## Sprawl still here, needs maintenance: planner

Regional News

October 04, 2008 09:47 PM

David Fleischer

You didn't see balloons falling from the sky and there was no great fanfare, but the one-millionth York Region resident settled here during the summer.

In less than 25 years, our population will hit 1.5 million.

Planning for Tomorrow is the region's blueprint for accommodating that growth and envisioning what our communities will look like in the years to come.

"What we are discussing tonight will affect the future of York Region," said Richmond Hill Mayor Dave Barrow, the de facto host of a public meeting two weeks ago.

The meeting was one of several hosted by the region last month to show its plans to the public and hear what you have to say.

"Every municipality in the region will experience some growth and we want that growth spread so people can live near where they work," the region's growth manager, John Waller said, adding the public's role in the plan is as important as the project itself.

"The key message we've heard from people is that intensification has to go in the right place, has to fit, has to be compatible with existing uses and it has to meet the highest design standards," he said, summing up the region's recipe for success.

Mr. Waller listed the region's sustainable efforts to date, from Viva rapid transit to a greening strategy, but conceded that beginning.

"Have we done enough? No, we haven't" he said.

You don't need a degree in planning to see the condo market is increasingly important and the numbers bear that out. population increasing nearly 60 per cent between 2006 and 2031 while the number of housing units climbs 80 per cent end of the nuclear family but it is indicative of fewer people living together in big houses.

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"We need to build in a different way than we have in the past," Mr. Waller said.

Of course, you can't just build.

You need "soft infrastructure" such as hospitals, schools and libraries to go along with all those homes and that is not a region, alone, can bear.

"We can't grow at the pace we've been growing without a significant infrastructure investment," Mr. Waller said.

Even then, we are talking about a paradigm shift where people grasp that suburbia no longer means picket fences and land. The good news, according to Mayor Barrow, is that the changes are under way.

"People have embraced the idea that sprawl is not over but it is more well-contained than it was," he said.

"People understand that we have to (build) up." Attendees were mixed between those representing organizations and those representing themselves.

Thornhill resident Jeffrey Stone wanted to make sure the various municipalities talk to each other about development and infrastructure.

While York Region Environmental Alliance chairperson Gloria Marsh said we need to stop building more strip malls, Jane emphasized the need for social planning, in her role as head of the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness.

"There's always a local flavour, but the regional issues, like affordable housing and the environment, keep coming up," Waller, during the last of a series of public meetings, which was held in Richmond Hill.

An autumn report to regional council will sum up comments from the meetings.

An updated series of meetings takes place in the fall and winter with the region's official plan set for change in 2009.

You can view the presentation at [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca) and e-mail comments to [futureyork@york.ca](mailto:futureyork@york.ca)

*The eight principles governing the Planning for Tomorrow document:*

- Environment
- Growth
- Economy
- Intensification
- Human services
- Infrastructure
- Quality of place
- Fiscal responsibility

*By the numbers*

- 69 — Percentage of York Region land protected as part of the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt
- 930,000 — The number of people living in York Region in 2006
- 1,507,000 — The region's projected population in 2031
- 84 — Percentage of new housing going to Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan

By definition:

- INTENSIFICATION - It's a scary word, but all it really means is building something where there already is something opposed to an undeveloped field. Your neighbour tearing down his house and building a new one? That's intensification replacing that old strip mall with a mixed-use development, be it three storeys or 30.
  - HOUSING UNIT - This can be a single-family house, condo unit or basement apartment. If it's built to house people with land increasingly scarce, you can see why we need to build towers with hundreds of units in a space that normally have three or four houses.
  - WHITEBELT - Everybody knows about the "greenbelt" where environmentally sensitive lands are protected. And probably living somewhere that's within the current built boundary. Whitebelt lands are basically everything else where there's nothing now, but there can be something later. These are in northeast Markham, northwest Vaughan and East Gwillimbury.
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