

## 5. Stakeholder Comments

In order to better understand the unique issues affecting commercial development within the City a series of interviews with local stakeholders were conducted. Workshops and meetings were also held with Vaughan residents, business representatives, local planning staff and other consultants working on the Official Plan Review to further understand issues affecting planning for commercial uses within the City. The following are some of the key issues raised with regards to the City's commercial structure.

- **The City's commercial policies should be focused on encouraging the right type of development rather than appearing restrictive and onerous to commercial development in general.**

Although the City has an existing commercial hierarchy there is a distinct sentiment among the development community that it is not being used effectively to help direct growth in a suitable or desirable manner. As a result it is felt that any new policies should be permissive rather than regulatory, focusing on what can be built, while including clear direction regarding competition, size, character and format.

There is a substantial market in the City and if clear policies are laid out as to what is expected of developers, those that want access to the market will adapt. Integral to designing effective new policies is an understanding of the specific requirements of different developers and retailers. Each has their own requirements and objectives. Policies that are proactive and anticipate these can often be more successful than others. However, the City needs to be aware that some developers may choose to locate in neighbouring municipalities as a result of what they perceive to be more favourable policies.

- **Each of the Village Cores in Vaughan has unique issues and futures with regards to commercial development.**

While all four Village Cores have similar histories as rural service centres, surrounding urban development has led them down very different paths. In part because of the McMichael Gallery and its long standing rural setting, Kleinburg has functioned much more as a visitor destination rather than as a neighbourhood serving retail destination. Minimal intensification opportunity exists within the core and its heritage character would make significant change less desirable. Although the total future population of the Kleinburg-Nashville-community has yet to be determined, there is a sentiment that commercial uses serving this area should remain local in nature and not detract from the tourist/heritage function of the Village Core and the rural nature of northwest

Vaughan. The Woodbridge core has already been subject to some residential infill and modern commercial development. It currently functions as a mixed use neighbourhood commercial destination for the surrounding population. There is a concern that Market Lane is struggling and it was questioned whether this reflects on the viability of adding new commercial space to the core. To the extent that residential intensification can be undertaken in and around the core, potentially on Kipling Avenue, an opportunity exists to strengthen the Woodbridge core through the addition of more residential population within easy walking distance of the core commercial area.

Of the four cores, Maple has undergone the greatest change through surrounding urbanization. Much of the original four-corners at Major Mackenzie and Keele are indistinguishable from the original rural settlement. However, new commercial development has taken the form of street-related retail, with some above-grade residential uses that function as a vibrant neighbourhood serving core. Large-scale supermarkets on Major Mackenzie Drive west of the Village Core augment the smaller-scale food stores available in the core.

- The Thornhill Village Core is part of a larger retail cluster, including more contemporary commercial and mixed-use development around Yonge Street and Steeles Avenue, and strip commercial development to the north towards Highway 7. Together the Yonge Street commercial corridor, which is divided between Vaughan and Markham, has considerable potential for future change owing to its location at a principal arterial gateway into York Region and a future subway line. Although the adjacent areas along Yonge Street are not part of the Village Core, intensification in these areas will ultimately benefit commercial activity in the core itself. While some heritage properties still exist on Yonge Street, the most significant heritage structures exist in the residential communities outside of the commercial precinct. The Yonge Street frontage comprises a mix of high density residential, single storey commercial plazas, golf course frontage, car dealerships, and underutilized sites. The lands at the Yonge Street and Steeles Avenue intersection offer significant potential for residential and commercial intensification; this opportunity should be given careful consideration given the subway extension proposal. The outcome would translate into a cohesive residential and street front retail environment that also acts as an efficient transportation node.

- **There is a perception that Vaughan is generally over retailed.**

The magnitude of the power centre uses at Highway 7 and 400 have come to dominate many peoples' view of Vaughan's commercial character. Many interviewees and workshop participants suggested that, although Vaughan is a growing market, most of the national retailers who want to locate in the City are already there. It was difficult for them to imagine how any new retail could be

accommodated within the City. In our opinion, this is a perception that needs to change, in part because the perception of Highway 7 and 400 as a perennial (misuse of the word) power centre node is counter productive to the ultimate vision for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and also because it gives a false impression that the 140,000 new residents anticipated for Vaughan by 2031 can adequately be served through only minor additions to the commercial space supply at the local level.

- **Many commercial sites are currently underdeveloped and there are significant opportunities for intensification. However, uncertainty surrounding how surrounding lands will be developed has created roadblocks for a number of developments.**

There is a clear desire on the part of both the City and developers to see existing commercial lands intensified before additional space is designated for development. However some developers have suggested that uncertainty regarding the future of surrounding lands has been a barrier to attracting more diverse tenants and uses to their sites. In the case of the VMC the future of the Toromont lands were specifically sited as an obstacle to intensification and master planning of sites. In addition, developers suggested that, although the extension of the Spadina subway line will be a catalyst, it will be hard to capitalize on it as a selling point until its funding and infrastructure plans become clear.

- **Parking will be a critical issue in the success of any future plans for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.**

Respondents indicated that a large amount of surface parking is not necessarily required, but that innovative parking solutions that recognize the City's dependence on automobiles are needed. Finding these solutions cannot be the responsibility of developers alone. The City needs to recognize the costs associated with both structured and underground parking and develop incentive packages to assist developers to provide economically viable parking solutions.

- **Concerns have been raised with regards to the potential costs associated with the development of the VMC and how they will trickle down and affect businesses.**

Some concerns were raised by the development community about the possibility that, as the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre evolves, taxes and other land value-related costs will significantly increase, thus increasing commercial rental rates. Suggestions were made that this will make it difficult to attract tenants to the area.

- **Future commercial development in the City should provide residents with positive experiences by adding to and enhancing the public realm.**

There is a desire within the City for future retail development to take on a more urban format with an emphasis placed on good design principles and enhancing the public realm. Future retail development should mix uses, be integrated into existing neighbourhoods and be accessible by non-automobile forms of transportation. Developers recognize the market benefits of mixing uses, however some have suggested that long term agreements with tenants, parking requirements, financing, and lack of certainty about surrounding developments are barriers in the current planning environment.

- **The time frame surrounding the redevelopment of the VMC is seen by some as a major hurdle that will need to be overcome.**

Both developers and the City staff stressed that the time frame for the redevelopment of the VMC will be one of the greatest challenges to success. Many developers, landowners and clients are unwilling to hold on to land for the time frames that will be required to complete the vision for the VMC. In other cases obligations to existing tenants prohibit redevelopment of existing sites for the next decade. In both cases the City will need to develop a careful understanding of these issues and incorporate them into any phasing plans.