

Part A

The Planning Context

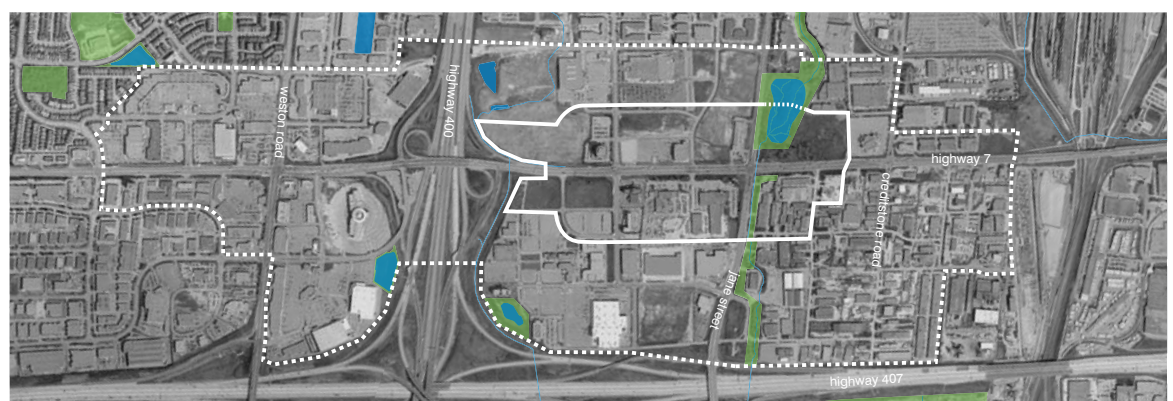
1.0 > VAUGHAN METROPOLITAN CENTRE FOCUS AREA STUDY

The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan was produced through a Focus Area Study conducted as part of the City's Growth Management Strategy, called Vaughan Tomorrow. The original study area included the entirety of the former Vaughan Corporate Centre (see Figure below). The study, led by Urban Strategies Inc. with City staff, involved three phases of work:

- Review of background materials and analysis of issues and opportunities;
- Development of a long-term vision, principles and structural framework;
- Preparation of the Secondary Plan.

The study commenced in November 2008 and involved extensive consultations from the outset. Staff members from the City, the Region of York, transit agencies, the School Boards and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority were engaged throughout the process. Landowners in the area were engaged early through a series of interviews and again in November and December 2009 as the structural framework and policy directions were taking shape. A public visioning workshop was held in May 2009, and public open houses were held in September 2009, March 2010 and April 2010, at project milestones. The study concluded with a public meeting held in June 2010. All materials presented at the public events were posted on the City's web site.

The first phase of the study concluded that the lands west of Highway 400 within the former Vaughan Corporate Centre should be addressed by Volume 1 of the Official Plan and be subject to a future Secondary Plan. The study team also recommended that the bulk of the active industrial uses east of Jane Street, along and south of Highway 7, within the VCC, remain an Employment Area and also be addressed by Volume 1. The area between these two areas is considered to have the greatest potential for change over the next 20-25 years and contains sufficient land to achieve the City's overarching objective for the area - to develop a "downtown".



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2.0 > POLICY CONTEXT

Provincial Policy Statement

The Provincial Policy Statement (PPS), enacted in March 2005, provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development. The PPS supports efficient use of land, resources and infrastructure. It encourages development patterns that support strong, livable and healthy communities by endorsing intensification as a means to accommodate growth and increase urban vitality. It promotes land use patterns, densities and mixes of uses that minimize vehicular trips and supports the development of plans and viable choices for public transportation. It addresses public health and safety through policies that direct development away from natural and human-made hazards where there is an unacceptable risk to public health or safety or of property damage. The Planning Act requires that Official Plans be consistent with the PPS.

Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Places to Grow)

Places to Grow, enacted on June 15, 2006, is a Provincial plan that directs how long-term growth and development should be managed in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Looking holistically at the municipalities around the west end of Lake Ontario, Places to Grow has created policies addressing transportation, infrastructure, land use planning, urban form, housing and natural heritage protection on a regional scale. One of its main objectives is to protect greenfields and reduce development sprawl through the intensification of the built-out area.

Places to Grow identifies 25 Urban Growth Centres (UGC)s as strategic focal points for growth and intensification. The VMC is among them. UGCs will be planned as focal areas for investment in institutional and region-wide public services, as well as commercial, recreational, cultural and entertainment uses. UGCs like the VMC have been assigned a growth target of 200 people and jobs per hectare by 2031. The VMC's density in 2006 was approximately 20 people and jobs per hectare.

The VMC UGC is unique amongst the 25 designated urban growth centres as it has the greatest potential and is the least developed of all the UGCs. It is one of only two UGCs outside of Toronto that is planned to be served by a subway; it has excellent highway access; and it is not adjacent to low-density residential fabric, to which intensification needs to be sensitive.

Regional Transportation Plan (The Big Move)

Metrolinx is an agency of the Ontario government focused on developing and delivering improved regional transportation for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. In the fall of 2008, Metrolinx released its Regional Transportation Plan. The RTP builds upon the MoveOntario 2020 initiative and works in conjunction with Places to Grow by describing transit-specific policy direction for future growth in the region.

Complementary to the VMC's status as an Urban Growth Centre is its designation as an Anchor Mobility Hub in the RTP. This designation reflects the fact that the VMC will be the place where two rapid transit lines—the Spadina subway extension and VIVA's Highway 7 line—will intersect and converge with the regional bus network. Anchor Mobility Hubs are envisaged as the “anchors” of a successful regional transportation network and are recommended to achieve a density of 200-400 people and jobs per hectare. Mobility hubs are ideal locations to develop transit supportive residential and employment densities and should evolve as vibrant places of activity and major regional destinations.

Region of York Official Plan

The Region of York adopted a new Official Plan in December 2009. It identified the VMC as one of four Regional Centres, which are intended to “contain a wide range of uses and activities, and be the primary focal points for intensive development that concentrates residential, employment, live-work, mobility, investment, and cultural and government functions.” The Region's Official Plan calls for the preparation and implementation of secondary plans for Regional Centres that include:

- minimum density requirements and targets;
- a fine-grained street grid;
- urban built form massed, designed and oriented to people;
- a concentration of the most intensive development and greatest mix of uses within a reasonable and direct walking distance of rapid transit stations;
- a minimum requirement of 35% affordable new housing units;
- policies that sequence development in an orderly way;
- policies to ensure excellence in urban design and sustainable construction methods;
- requirements to reduce and/or mitigate urban heat island effects;
- policies that establish urban greening targets;
- provisions for an urban public realm;
- public art policies;
- policies to ensure connections and enhancements to local and Regional Greenlands Systems;
- policies to require innovative approaches to urban stormwater management;
- a mobility plan;
- requirements for new schools sites to be constructed to an urban standard; and,
- provisions for human services.

The Region's Official Plan also includes policies for Centres dealing with, among other matters: minimum and maximum parking standards; innovative approaches for the delivery of infrastructure; density and height bonusing; minimum densities; community energy plans; and parking management.

Vaughan Tomorrow and the new Official Plan

Vaughan Tomorrow is the City's growth management strategy, which has led to a new city-wide Official Plan and this Secondary Plan for the VMC. The Vaughan Tomorrow process, which involved extensive public outreach over two years, confirmed the objective to develop the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre as a vibrant and thriving downtown for the city.

The new Official Plan for the city establishes the boundaries for the VMC and, in doing so, divides the former Vaughan Corporate Centre area into three distinct places within the overall city structure. Lands west of Highway 400 within the former VCC, centred at Weston Road and Highway 7, are identified as a Primary Centre. The VMC extends from Highway 400 to Creditstone Road at its most easterly edge, with Portage Parkway and Highway 407 remaining the northern and southern boundaries, respectively. And lands east of Creditstone (and on both sides south of Highway 7) are designated an Employment Area.

The Official Plan states that the VMC will comprise distinct development precincts including residential neighbourhoods, office districts, employment areas and mixed-use areas, all linked by a robust system of parks, squares and open spaces and a fine grain grid pattern of streets. It establishes growth targets for the VMC of 12,000 residential units and 6,500 new jobs by 2031. And it states as a policy that the City shall encourage and facilitate the establishment of the following in the VMC:

- major offices;
- government offices;
- post-secondary educational institutions;
- cultural facilities;
- public institutions;
- major civic public spaces and parks;
- socially diverse residential neighbourhoods that contain a mix of housing types, including housing suitable for seniors and families with children;
- an open space and natural heritage system along the Black Creek corridor.

To ensure a high standard of design in the VMC, the Official Plan calls for a detailed Secondary Plan, excellence in public infrastructure design, tall and mid-rise building guidelines and a Design Review Panel to advise on development applications.

Community Sustainability and Environmental Master Plan (Green Directions Vaughan)

Green Directions Vaughan, the City's Community Sustainability and Environmental Master Plan, is a comprehensive document that outlines a series of goals and many supportive actions with implications for the future of the VMC, including the following:

- Initiate a feasibility study to examine the opportunities for development of a district energy system in the VMC;
- Through the Official Plan, create a Vaughan in 2031 that has more intensification with increased height and density and mixed use in thoughtfully development nodes and along transit corridors;
- Develop sustainable development evaluation criteria;
- Ensure that a mix of housing types are provided in Vaughan and that affordability is a consideration in planning;
- Continue to apply energy efficient building standard options for new developments in the city;
- Through Official Plan policies, develop a more walkable and transit-friendly community with adequate public spaces and a finer grain network of streets;
- Through creative urban design, enhance social cohesion by creating more common indoor and outdoor public spaces, public art, parks and open space, and central hubs for arts, culture, and recreation.

Previous Official Plans for the VMC

The first complete Secondary Plan for the former Vaughan Corporate Centre was Official Plan Amendment 500, approved in 1998. The Plan envisioned a new central focus for higher intensity land uses with an identifiable core and a mix of uses. In particular, the VMC was envisioned as a focal point of business activity and major commercial development. The Plan identified two major land use designations, the Corporate Centre Node and the Corporate Centre District.

The Node was identified as the focus of higher order uses. A wide range of land uses were permitted in the Node, including offices, hotels, institutional, civic, cultural, retail, medium and high density residential, and community facilities. A block pattern was identified on a 100-metre by 100-metre grid. The maximum building height was 25 metres, except on designated Gateway Sites, where there was no maximum height limit. The overall density target for the Node was 5.0 FSI.

The Corporate Centre District was intended to be significantly less dense than the Node. OPA 500 encouraged land uses that require visual exposure, good vehicular accessibility and large development parcels. A range of uses was permitted in the District, including industrial uses and major entertainment facilities, but residential uses were not permitted. The road block pattern was adjustable and called for a grid of 100-metre by 200-metre blocks. The maximum building height

was 15 metres, except for theatre or office uses. The density limit was 0.6 FSI (0.75 FSI where density is transferred), significantly lower than inside the Node.

A central feature of OPA 500 was a ring road encircling the Node that was intended to divert truck and other through traffic from Highway 7, allowing it to become an urban, pedestrian-friendly avenue. OPAs 528 and 529 added important elements to the original transportation network of OPA 500, specifically a bridge over Highway 400 at Portage Parkway, more direct road links between the ring road and Highway 400 (Links 4 and 5), and a 23-metre wide transit right-of-way that would allow for a rapid transit link to the Spadina Subway Line.

OPA 663, which was approved in 2008, responded to rapid transit service on Highway 7 and introduced the Corridor designation, applied to former District areas straddling Highway 7 and Jane Street. A range of land uses was permitted in the Corridor, similar to those permitted in the Node, and transit-oriented minimum and maximum densities were established.

Draft Streetscape and Open Space Master Plan

In 2006, the City completed a Draft Streetscape and Open Space Plan for the former Vaughan Corporate Centre Node. It recommended an integrated streetscape and open space hierarchy based on the planned grid of streets. The network included parks, squares, esplanades and three types of streetscapes. Guidelines for Highway 7 (Avenue 7) were intended to guide its transformation into a grand avenue. The ring road was designed as primarily a through traffic road with less pedestrian emphasis. A greenway and transit square was envisioned on Millway Avenue, in conjunction with the future subway station. Jane Street was seen as a wide green corridor with a strong parkway character. Guidelines were also included for local streets and mews streets.

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EXISTING CONDITIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

As Vaughan enters the second decade of the 21st century, it faces a unique opportunity to create a transit-oriented downtown by leveraging planned growth and the VMC's strategic location within the GTA. While there are many positive attributes about the VMC, the area's surroundings lack the characteristics found in typical and successful downtowns, notably a strong natural feature or waterfront, stable neighbourhoods and visible cultural heritage. The VMC Secondary Plan seeks to overcome the many challenges posed by existing conditions.

The industrial setting

The VMC is embedded in the heart of a major regional industrial area located within a multi-modal transportation network, and the oldest uses within the VMC are industrial. The lands east of Jane are made up of small, individually owned properties with low-scale manufacturing and industrial service uses. This area is close to the MacMillan Rail Yard and has contributed to Vaughan's industrial economy for decades. While portions of the area east of Jane may transition to other uses over time, particularly along Jane Street, a fundamental change in land use over much of the area would require a great deal of land assembly and environmental clean-up and therefore is not likely in the foreseeable future. The industrial uses in the southwest quadrant of Highway 7 and Jane Street, on the other hand, are expected to relocate in the short to medium term to make way for transit-oriented development.

To overcome the VMC's industrial and highway setting, the Secondary Plan proposes naturalized open spaces, parks and streetscapes that will establish an attractive setting for development. It calls for the creation of complete neighbourhoods within the VMC to support vitality in the future downtown core. Appropriate land use transitions at the highway and industrial edges of the VMC are also planned.

Barriers

The VMC is bordered by two 400 series highways. These, together with Highway 7 and Jane Street, provide excellent road access and visibility to the VMC. As important as this access is to the surrounding industrial uses, the infrastructure and the traffic it accommodates create significant barriers and an inhospitable environment for pedestrians and cyclists. The rail yard to the east and hydro corridor to the south create additional barriers that compound the VMC's isolation.

The road and open space networks, land use and built form policies, and design guidelines of the Secondary Plan seek to mitigate the impacts of the highways and traffic generally and help turn Highway 7 and Jane Street into transit-oriented and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes over time.

Natural heritage

Given the lack of natural features in the VMC, the Black Creek corridor has the potential to become a prominent naturalized feature. Black Creek and storm sewers to the north drain into two online storm water management ponds northeast of Highway 7 and Jane Street. The two ponds are connected in two separate locations via a small stream corridor and a large Cattail Marsh. The ponds are encompassed by landscaped slopes. The Black Creek corridor has several features not commonly found in highly urbanized areas, including a small swamp dominated by native Bur Oak and Green Ash. A small ravine parallel to Jane Street supports mature native Red Oak and Sugar Maple with associated American Beech.

The Secondary Plan capitalizes on and enhances the environment of the stormwater retention ponds and Black Creek tributary, through policies that describe an environmental open space system, making them an anchor within a comprehensive network of open spaces extending across the VMC.

Land use

The VMC in 2010 contains an 8-storey office building, three mid-rise hotels and a number of low-rise, low-density uses, including large-format retail and heavy industrial facilities, all served by surface parking and suburban in their site organization. Although most of the development west of Jane Street was built this century and may remain for the foreseeable future, much of the VMC remains vacant, creating the opportunity for significant intensification and the development of destinations and places befitting a downtown. In fact, there have recently been a number of proposals for high-density residential development in the area.

Transit initiatives

Major rapid transit initiatives are sparking development interest in the VMC and are the primary impetuses for the VMC Secondary Plan. The extension of the Spadina Subway Line to the VMC is expected to be completed and operational by 2015. VIVA service on Avenue 7 will be upgraded as the corridor intensifies, with long-term plans for dedicated transit lanes and upgrading from busses to light rail vehicles. A planned bus terminal linked to the subway station will contribute to the creation of a major multi-modal transit hub at Highway 7 and Millway Avenue. The 407 bus transitway being planned will have a stop just south of the 407, one subway stop from the VMC.

The planned investments in rapid transit set the stage for significant growth in the VMC. The Secondary Plan seeks to focus population and job growth so that the critical mass of a downtown can be established in the next 20-25 years. The plan also sets out a framework and policies intended to lead to an attractive public realm, distinct and diverse neighbourhoods, and beautiful architectural and cultural legacies.