



Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville Council Report

Item 1

Subject:	Highway 48 Visioning Exercise: Re-Scope and Contract Amendment
Staff Report No.	DS-001-20
Department:	Development Services
Date:	January 19, 2021

Recommendation:

- 1) That Council authorize staff to rescope the Highway 48 Visioning Exercise to the Highway 48 Corridor Land Use Study; and**
- 2) That Council authorize staff to undertake a contract amendment for the current agreement with The Planning Partnership to rescope the terms of the current Highway 48 Visioning Exercise to the Highway 48 Corridor Study; and**
- 3) That Council authorize staff to revise the terms of the funding agreement between the Town and FLATO Developments to acknowledge the revised scope of the Highway 48 Visioning Exercise; and**
- 4) That Council authorize Staff to facilitate the formation of a landowners group for the Highway 48 Visioning Exercise; and**
- 5) That Council direct staff to continue to liaise with staff from the Region of York and the City of Markham in the Highway 48 Corridor Land Use Study.**

1. Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Council on the current status of the Highway 48 Visioning Exercise and to seek authorization to revise the project scope to account for a change in the planning circumstances.

2. Executive Summary:

The Highway 48 Visioning Exercise project is currently being undertaken on lands within the Town and the City of Markham. The Planning Partnership was retained as a consultant for the project. However, due to recent approvals for development within the project area through two Minister's Zoning Orders and two employment area conversion requests, staff feel it has become less meaningful to continue the visioning exercise, whereas proposed and currently ongoing development applications within the area and its vicinity, including lands in the City of Markham, require better coordination. A revised project scope will encourage a cohesive and comprehensive development approach for the Highway 48 Corridor.

3. Background:

Staff have been actively working on the Highway 48 Visioning Exercise with the participation of key stakeholders including the City of Markham and the Region of York. The Planning Partnership was retained by the Town to undertake the work on this project. In recent times, the areas of the Highway 48 Corridor, Gateway and Western Approach have seen increased development interest. This interest in these areas has required planning staff to re-evaluate planning and land use in this area.

Highway 48 Visioning Exercise

With the participation of the City of Markham and the Region of York staff, the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville has been working to create a comprehensive vision for the future development of the Highway 48 Corridor through the Highway 48 Visioning Exercise. The purpose of this project is to develop a Conceptual Land Use Vision for the study area that considers places to live, work, shop and play.

To achieve the goals of the Visioning exercise, the project was to address the following:

- Identify areas that could be considered for potential future settlement area boundary expansions;
- Identify natural heritage features and linkage areas, and their respective vegetation protection zones requiring protection;
- Develop scenarios through consultation and analyses to identify a preferred concept plan in support of the vision for the Town's Gateway Mixed Use Area (OPA 145), the SmartCentres business park, shopping and mixed-use area, including options for land use, transportation, transit, pedestrian connectivity, and municipal services;
- Have consideration for the employment land conversion requests that are being considered in the Hoover Park Drive and Highway 48 corridor area through the Region's Municipal Comprehensive Review; and,
- Undertake a preliminary review of the preferred concept plan in the context of the overall growth strategy, density targets and land budgeting.

The original scope of work included undertaking a high-level analysis taking into consideration all relevant environmental, social and economic factors to determine the optimal capacity for development including:

- Environmental analysis
- Transportation analysis
- Servicing analysis
- Land use concepts / scenarios

The initial work program for the Study was developed to include an interactive process that is grounded in community engagement. The work plan was organized into three phases (Background, Preliminary Scenarios, and Preferred Scenarios). The original intent was that the final potential land use scenario would be developed through input from the consultation process, Town staff, stakeholders, and civic leaders. Three land use concept options were subsequently identified through Phase 1 of the work program (<https://www.cometogetherws.ca/highway48>).

Under the current work program for the Highway 48 Visioning Exercise, a draft Vision and Guiding Principles were developed to guide the creation of land use concepts for the project study area.

Vision Statement:

The Highway 48 Corridor is envisioned to become a vibrant, mixed-use community that is connected to its natural and built heritage.

It will build upon the social, cultural and economic assets of the community of Stouffville and bridge urban and rural areas, link neighbouring communities and extend the regional greenway systems.

Guiding Principles:

- Protect and enhance the natural environment.
- Provide opportunities for a mix and diversity of uses, including commercial/retail, employment, residential, community and institutional.
- Enhance connectivity of new and existing communities through streets and the open space system.
- Promote active transportation and transit-supportive development.
- Create a sense of place.
- Promote design excellence.

A high-level desktop analysis was also carried out to understand opportunities and constraints with respect to the natural environment, transportation and planning.

Consultation that has taken place to date includes meetings with the Joint Working Group, landowners and stakeholders, as well as a public consultation component. The public consultation included two virtual workshop sessions on the original three concepts, held on April 30, 2020, which attracted participation of approximately 116 people. Additionally, an online survey was launched on May 20, 2020 to gather public feedback on the options. Participants were asked to provide feedback on various elements (Highway 48, street pattern, natural heritage, parks and green space, and land use) for each land use concept option. Hard copies of the survey were also made available through the municipality. In total, 184 people responded to the survey.

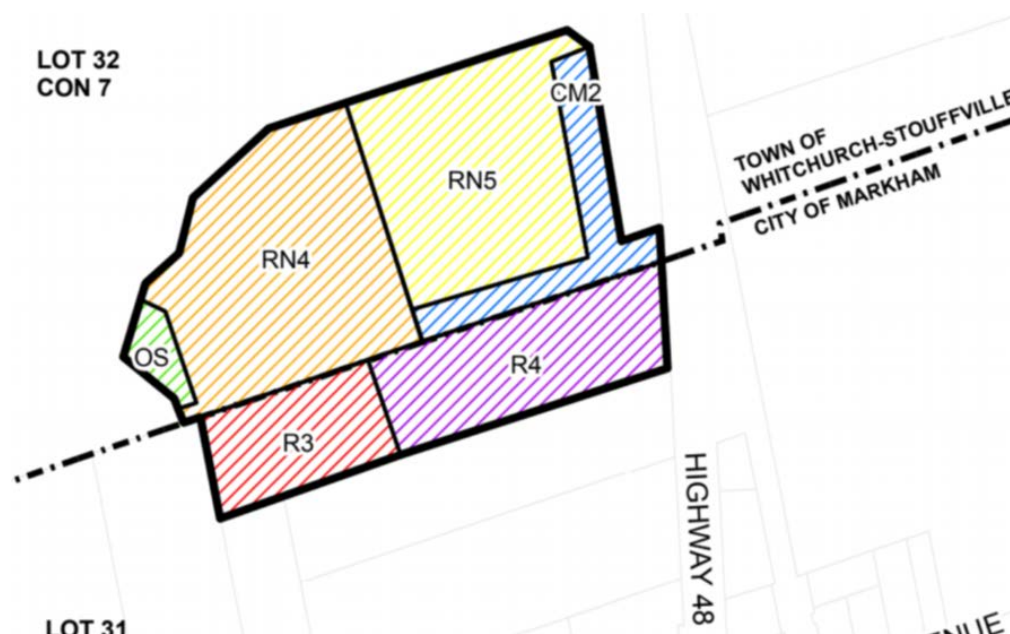
Currently, the project is in Phase 2, Preliminary Scenarios. Following the Virtual Workshop on April 30, 2020, The Planning Partnership developed a 'What We Heard Report' and presented the findings to Council on May 19, 2020.

On May 25, 2020, The Planning Partnership also provided a project update to the Markham Development Services Committee with a presentation on the study, including an overview of the study area, purpose, guiding principles and planning considerations and the three proposed development concept options.

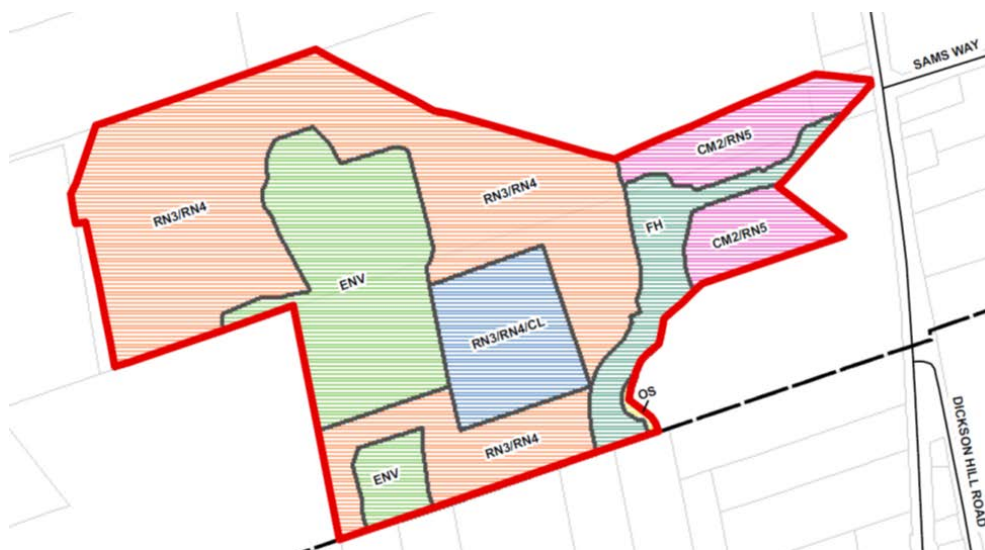
Minister's Zoning Orders

Two Minister's Zoning Orders (MZO) have been issued on lands owned by FLATO since the commencement of the Highway 48 Visioning Exercise, both within the project Study Area and both within the Town's "Whitebelt" lands. The "Whitebelt" lands are not encumbered by the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan or Greenbelt Plan policies but are outside of the Town's settlement area.

On April 24, 2020, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing issued a [MZO](#) for an age-friendly community of 550 apartment units with commercial at grade in five mid-rise buildings and 101 townhouse units on 8.4 hectares of land located within the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville and an additional 154 units within the City of Markham, immediately south of the Town's municipal boundary. Following the approval, FLATO has submitted a Draft Plan of Subdivision to the Town and is working to fulfill planning approval requirements.



On October 30, 2020, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing issued a second [MZO](#) for an additional 1,964 residential units, commercial uses and a school. Similar to the first MZO, the proposed development in the second MZO by FLATO does not include lands located within the Greenbelt or the Oak Ridges Moraine. The developable areas are limited to the “Whitebelt” areas. This is currently still at the pre-consultation stage.



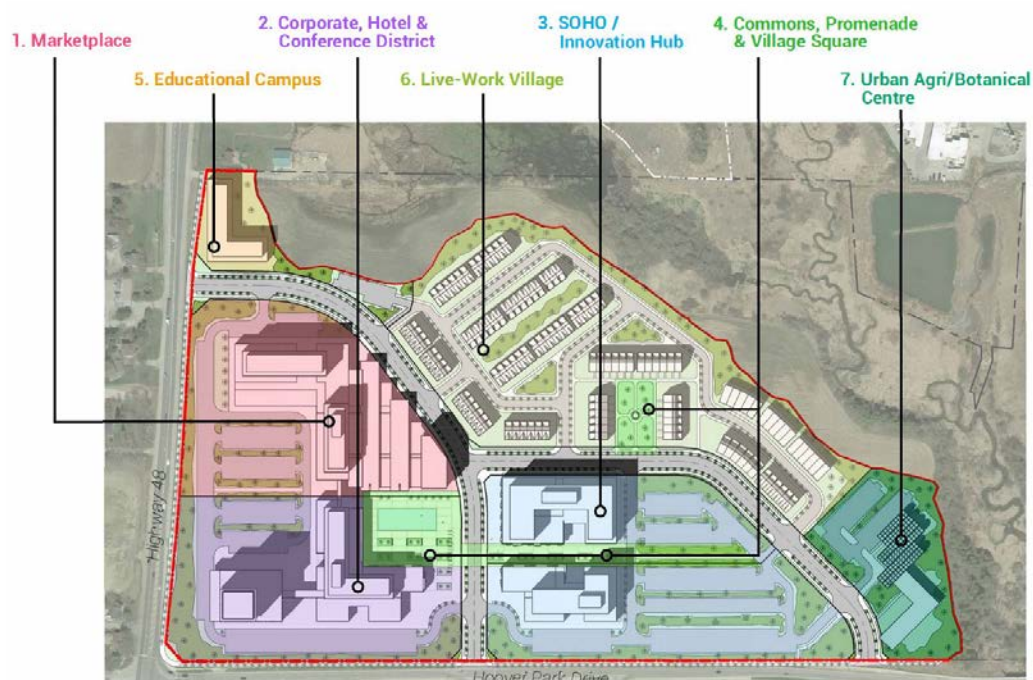
The approval of the two MZO requests will essentially eliminate a large portion of “Whitebelt” lands that exist within the Highway 48 Visioning Exercise project study area. Additionally, these approvals will add a substantial population to the Highway 48 Corridor area that had not been previously contemplated.

Employment Area Conversion Requests

In 2019, two employment area conversion requests in the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville were submitted to the Region of York to be contemplated as part of its Municipal Comprehensive Review process.

1. Corebridge Employment Conversion Request

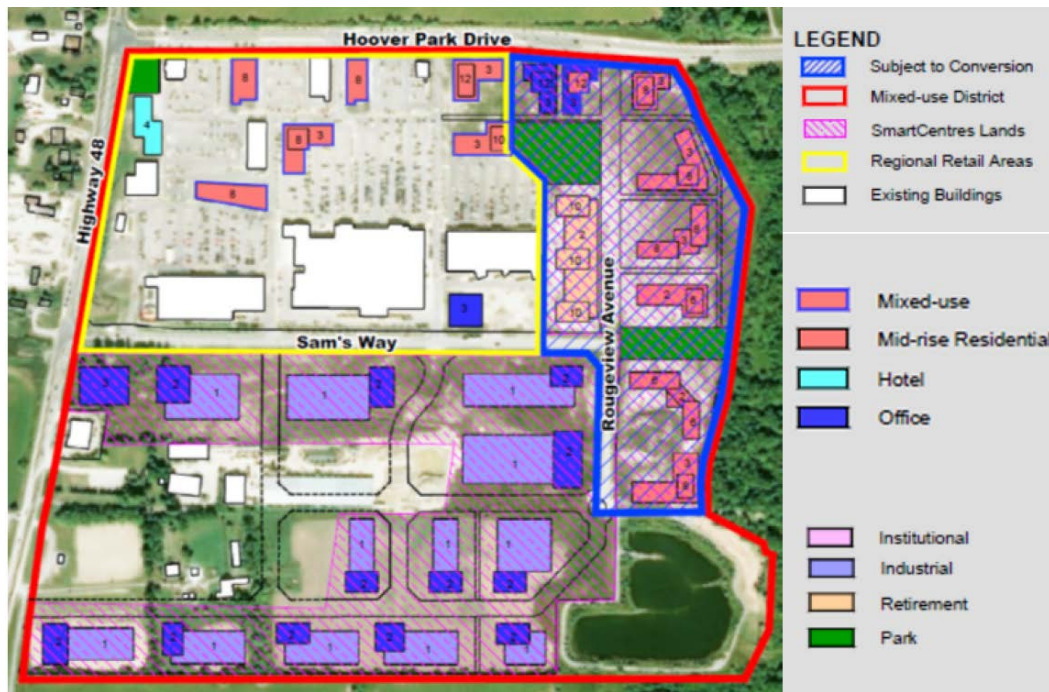
The Zhawd Corporation (Corebridge) submitted an employment land conversion request to the Region of York for the property located at 12049 Highway 48 in the Community of Stouffville. Corebridge submitted the request to the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville seeking Council support of the proposal. The proposal contemplated a mixed-use development consisting of office, institutional, retail and residential space. This is considered an employment land conversion due to the introduction of the non-employment residential uses.



2. SmartCentres Employment Conversion Request

SmartCentres submitted an employment land conversion request to the Region of York for the property located in the south east quadrant of Hoover Park Drive and Highway 48 in the Community of Stouffville. SmartCentres submitted the request to the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville seeking Council support of the proposal. The proposal contemplates a mixed-use development consisting of office, retirement and

residential space. This is considered an employment land conversion due to the introduction of residential uses.



Despite the broader Highway 48 Visioning Exercise, both landowners have developed their own vision for the corner of Highway 48 and Hoover Park Drive. Both employment conversion requests are proposing mixed-use development. As Highway 48 serves as a gateway into the Town from the south. From an urban design perspective, it is vital that the development should be cohesive and connected to all other proposed developments in the study area.

Gateway and Western Approach

In addition to the substantial planning activities that are taking place in the Highway 48 Corridor, there are a number of planning applications in the Gateway and Western approach lands that are seeking higher densities than had been previously contemplated.

This includes pre-consultations for:

- Southwest corner of Highway 48 and Stouffville Road
- 5847 and 5859 Main Street
- 5945 Main Street

This also includes draft plan and site plan applications for:

- Greco: 800 apartment and townhouse units
- Gallo: 5,448 m² of commercial and 31 apartment units
- Topfar: 309 apartment units with commercial at grade
- Norstar: 147 townhouse units
- York Region: 97 apartment units
- Joy Square: 75 townhouse units

- LivGreen: 91 apartment units with commercial at grade
- Gennum: 61 apartment units

4. Analysis and Options:

Highway 48 Project Update

As mentioned above, The Planning Partnership has drafted a “What We Heard” report to summarize the overall findings to date. General findings included:

- Concerns for existing traffic volumes and implications on potential development
- Interest in active transportation
- Interest in opportunities to enhance and benefit from the natural heritage and open space system
- Appetite for the development of a civic place to create a sense of place
- Support of commercial development

Over the summer months, the Highway 48 project was paused temporarily in order for staff to assess next steps in light of the comments received from the public and to monitor for the results of the Minister’s Zoning Orders. Staff have now had the opportunity to fully assess the impacts of not only the Minister’s Zoning Orders, but also the increased interest in additional density for the lands in the Gateway and Western Approach lands. The Minister’s Zoning Orders have effectively eliminated a substantial portion of “Whitebelt” lands that were in the study area, leaving only several small pockets. As a result, there are very few lands left that can be considered for future development, given the remaining lands on the west side of Highway 48 are within the Oak Ridges Moraine. As a result, staff see little justification for proceeding with the Highway 48 Visioning Exercise as was previously considered. Additionally, the lands in the Gateway and Western Approach areas are creating land use impacts that had not been previously contemplated in policy.

Revised Project Scope

As discussed above, the continued interest in the Highway 48 corridor has encouraged landowners to seek creative means to obtain approvals for development in the study area. In reassessing the direction of the Highway 48 Visioning Exercise, in light of all of the above, Town staff see a need to change the scope of the project as it no longer accurately reflects the current landscape of the study area. Planning staff now see the need to refocus the project from a visioning exercise to a land use planning exercise. The purpose of the updated work will be to ensure that the layout and design of the different applications are considered comprehensively and within the context of the guiding principles established through the public consultation process. The Planning Partnership will also work with the Town to ensure that the feedback and concerns shared by the community are taken into consideration as the plans move ahead. The main areas of focus are described below.

Revised Study Area

With a rescoped project to accommodate the realities of today's planning landscape, Planning staff recommend a change to the project Study Area. Attachment 1 to this report identifies the current study area, while Attachment 2 identifies a revised study area. Of particular note, staff recommend eliminating the Oak Ridges Moraine lands from the study area. With no current opportunities for development, and with planning approvals essentially in place for a bulk of the Whitebelt lands, it is appropriate to remove ORM lands from the study area. That being said, the revised map still reflects ORM lands as road network connections will continue to be considered throughout the study area and the context of the surrounding lands will be an important consideration. At the moment, Markham staff have yet to confirm the study area for the rescoped study within the City of Markham's municipal boundary.

Also of note, is the addition of the Gateway and Western Approach lands to the Study Area. As noted above, there are significant development applications in both planning areas that is causing increased density not previously contemplated in policy.

Land Use Policy

In revising the study area, planning staff see a need to revise the scope of the project to deviate away from a visioning exercise to a land use planning exercise. The Visioning Exercise as it currently stands, was not intended to result in any actual Planning approvals to create land uses. It was to identify a vision for the corridor and establish parameters for future development only. Additionally, as mentioned above, development interest in the Gateway and Western Approach lands is causing a need to revisit the policies of those planning areas to ensure a comprehensive planning approach is considered.

A rescoped project to a land use planning exercise could accomplish several matters that will provide a land use framework/community structure for the long-term development of the area. Revisions to the scope of the project will:

- Ensure the Highway 48 corridor, Gateway and Western Approach areas are all being planned cohesively and comprehensively;
- Review existing land use policy that may not reflect today's reality and determine the need for possible updates;
- Properly coordinate and phase necessary infrastructure requirements (roads, water and wastewater, etc.);
- Address other community amenity needs that were not previously contemplated (community recreation needs, schools, trails and parks); and,
- Provide input to the Region's MCR for lands currently designated as Whitebelt lands.

Planning staff have been working closely with The Planning Partnership to determine a proper work program under a rescoped project. These discussions are currently ongoing to ensure the Town can achieve what is needed to properly address the land use planning issues for the area. In essence, the consultants will work to consider the major

development applications in the revised study area, assess their implications for land use in the study area, and will provide recommendations on a potential land use concept and land use policies for the study area that result in a more comprehensively planned area. The scope of the project will continue to include consideration for the whitebelt lands in terms of how they are impacted by the surrounding land uses associated with the study area.

The rescoped project would account for the roads network, open space network, distribution of land uses, arrangement of built form and massing, and the character of key nodes and corridors, and will include a conceptual land use/built form diagram. The rescoped project will result in draft land use policies and next steps that could be undertaken by the Town to address the land use policy issues. This takes a much more coordinated approach to the land use planning for the area.

Landowners Group

Under the revised scope, Planning staff are recommending that the major landowners within the new project study area consider forming a Landowners Group. The purpose of this group will be to find opportunities to create a cohesive and connected landscape through site design. The landowners group will also be supporting the research required for attaining servicing to the study area by means of financial contribution. Planning staff can provide assistance in the initial formation of the group and can be available to act as a liaison for the Town. The participation in the landowners group is certainly optional, but would be advantageous in coordinating the planning and infrastructure for the community within the new study area.

Project Name

As the project is no longer considered to be a Visioning Exercise, Town staff recommend that the project name be updated to 'Highway 48 Corridor Land Use Study' to reflect the revised project scope.

Municipal Participants

The City of Markham has been actively involved in the key project milestones through the joint working group. The revised project scope will provide an opportunity for the City of Markham to coordinate with the Town during the phasing of infrastructure which would include roads, water and wastewater. The servicing of these lands potentially may necessitate new or upgraded Regional infrastructure. In order to appropriately coordinate key infrastructure discussions, the Town will actively work alongside both the City of Markham and the Region of York as key partners in these discussions. Additionally, the revised scope provides a joint opportunity to address community needs including schools, trails, parks and recreational needs, as well as community requirements such as a coordinated emergency services management. The Town will be able to create a cohesive and coordinated development with the City of Markham's participation.

The Region of York staff have also been participating in the Visioning Exercise. Town staff provided a brief update to the municipal partners and the Town's intent to rescope the Visioning Exercise at the joint working group meeting on December 21, 2020. Town staff will continue to work closely with both City of Markham and York Region staff on this project.

5. Financial Implications:

As previously reported in DS-034-19, FLATO Developments (FLATO), a landowner in the Highway 48 corridor study area agreed to fund the entire project cost. As there is a need to rescope the project due to changing circumstances within the study area, FLATO has once again agreed to fund additional costs required to undertake the revised study.

An agreement was previously prepared and executed between the Town and FLATO, whereby it was agreed that FLATO would fund the full cost of the Highway 48 Visioning Exercise. In discussions with staff, FLATO has agreed to provide additional funding to complete the revised project. As such, there is a need to revise the terms of the agreement between the Town to acknowledge the amended terms of the project.

For the project re-scope and contract amendment, developers have agreed to contribute \$50,000 to the revised project. This will be in addition to the remaining funds for the project. Although there will be financial contribution from developers for the project, they will not have any control of the project process or outcomes of the study and will be consulted in the same manner as the non-contributing landowners.

As previously mentioned, it is expected that a landowners' group will be established, and FLATO will be participating in that landowners' group. Details of cost sharing will be determined between FLATO and the participating landowners. Staff can facilitate the creation of a landowners group.

6. Alignment with Strategic Plan:

1. Expanding the tax base through a growing, diversified economy
Building and maintaining a tax base that supports the highest quality program and service delivery.
 - Update the Economic Development strategy and continue to attract businesses to locate in WS
 - Identify expansion areas for Industrial / Commercial growth

7. Attachments:

1. Current Highway 48 Visioning Exercise Study Area

2. Draft Revised Highway 48 Land Use Study Area

8. Related Reports:

1. February 4, 2020 – DS-004-20 – Highway 48 Corridor Visioning Exercise Update

Author: Zahrah Khan, Policy Planner II
Meaghan Craven, Manager, Policy Planning

For further information on this report, please contact the Department Head: Haiqing Xu, Director, Development Services at 905-640-1910 or 1-855-642-8697 ext. 2431 or via email at haiqing.xu@townofws.ca.