
Subject: Highway 48 Study Framework Plan and Policy Recommendations

Staff Report No. DS-055-22

Department: Development Services

Date: September 21, 2022

Recommendation:

- 1) That Council endorse in principle the Highway 48 Framework Plan (Attachment 3 to this report) and accompanying Appendix A and B (Attachment 4 and 5 to this report) to inform the Town's Official Plan Review.**

1. Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an overview of the Highway 48 Study and to present the Highway 48 Framework Plan and policy recommendations for Council endorsement to inform the Town's Official Plan Review.

2. Executive Summary:

The Highway 48 Study has been undertaken on lands within the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville and the City of Markham. The Planning Partnership was retained as a consultant for the project. Staff have worked alongside and in consultation with the project consultant, Stakeholders, Joint Working Group members, and Landowners to develop a Framework Plan and accompanying policy recommendations which reflect the reality of the Study Area.

The Framework Plan builds upon the approved development applications in the Study Area and provides coordination between the natural heritage network, infrastructure such as roads, and community needs such as schools. The policy recommendations identify general direction pertaining to urban design and provide additional policy support for future development in the Highway 48 Study Area.

3. Background:

Per Council direction, staff initiated the Highway 48 Visioning Exercise in January 2020. The purpose of the Visioning Exercise was to provide a high-level policy framework for

development interest in the original Highway 48 Study Area (see Attachment 1 – Highway 48 Visioning Exercise Study Area Map).

In January 2021, Staff were directed by Council to re-scope the Visioning Exercise to a Land Use Study. Through this update, the Study Area was revised to include the Gateway and Western Approach lands (see Attachment 2 – Highway 48 Revised Study Area Map).

The Highway 48 Land Use Study, referred to as the Highway 48 Study in this report, provides consideration to the recent Minister's Zoning Orders (MZO) approvals in the Study Area. To date, there have been 3 MZO's approved in the Study Area which include a majority of the Whitebelt lands located in the Study Area.

During the re-scope of the project to the current Highway 48 Study, the Project Consultant has used the Emerging Preferred Option, developed through the public consultation conducted for the Highway 48 Visioning Exercise, as a basis for the Preliminary Framework Plan. The Preliminary Framework Plan was revised following comments from the Joint Working Group, Stakeholders, and Landowners. Various iterations of the Preliminary Framework Plan have been revised over the course of the past 6 months. Staff are presenting Council with the final Framework Plan produced through extensive consultation.

Through the revised scope, the lands within the Study Area that are on the Oak Ridges Moraine have been eliminated from the Study however, they continue to be considered for infrastructure planning purposes to inform a potential road network.

In light of the detailed technical planning required for the lands associated with the MZO's, a Master Environmental Servicing Plan (MESP) is currently being undertaken by some of the landowners within the Study Area. This Study is being conducted to examine the potential servicing options, road connections and alignments and crossings associated with the natural heritage features.

As part of the process to develop the Framework Plan, the Project Consultant has explored additional community needs that were not previously contemplated for in the Highway 48 Study Area including the need for schools, trails, and parks. These are shown conceptually on the Framework Plan (see Attachment 3 to this report). Exact locations and all other specific details (such as exact size and specifications of parks) must be dealt with through the development approval process.

The Framework Plan was originally scheduled to go to Council on July 20, 2022, however, staff received a number of detailed comments from stakeholders and landowners in advance of that Council meeting. To fully review and address those comments, staff recommended deferral of the report to a future Council meeting. All comments received have now been reviewed and considered in the context of the Framework Plan. As such, the report is now being brought forward for Council endorsement as input to the Official Plan review process.

It should be noted as a point of clarification, that the Highway 48 Study and resulting Framework Plan is not a land use study, nor is it subject to any statutory planning processes. The Plan is intended to form the vision and basis for future development within the study area. Further, it provides recommendations to inform the Official Plan Review. The maps provided in the Framework Plan are not intended to reflect the exact delineation of certain boundaries. Mapping can be further refined either through the Official Plan Review process or site specific development applications. Additionally, the policy recommendations of the Framework Plan are recommendations only. Detailed policies will be determined through the new draft Official Plan. There are lands within the Study Area that will continue to require either site specific planning approvals or a more detailed Secondary Plan process to implement land use designations appropriate for future development.

Consultation

As noted above, the Highway 48 Study has included extensive consultation with the public, Stakeholder Committee, Joint Working Group, and Landowners in the Study Area.

The Joint Working Group was comprised of internal Town staff across a number of departments, as well as staff from the City of Markham and York Region.

Additionally, a number of stakeholders were consulted and provided comments over the course of the Study and included staff from the Ministry of Transportation Ontario (MTO), Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB), Metrolinx, and York Region District School Board (YRDSB).

Staff also provided opportunities for Landowners who expressed interest to provide comments during the project lifecycle. The Landowners engaged through this process included Landowners from both the Town and City of Markham. Furthermore, any members of the public who expressed interest to be included in the Interested Parties list for the project, received updates during key project touchpoints as well as opportunities to provide comments. A detailed comments matrix, which includes comments received by September 9, 2022, and responses to those comments forms Attachment 6 to this report.

4. Analysis and Options: Policy Recommendations & Framework Plan

TPP has prepared policy recommendations and an accompanying Framework Plan for the Highway 48 Study Area (see Attachment 3 to this report). The sections below provide further details on the Framework Plan and Policy Recommendations.

4.1 Framework Plan

The Framework Plan, Attachment 3 – Highway 48 Framework Plan, Map 4, page 19 is comprised of three elements, the Natural Heritage/Open Space System, Land Uses and Built Form, and the Transportation Network. Below is a brief overview of each element.

Natural Heritage/Open Space System

The vision for the Highway 48 Study Area builds upon the natural character of the area and seeks to integrate and enhance existing natural features while extending their presence and prominence within the community through the provision and location of parks and open spaces and Rouge Park in the future.

Through the Study, key components for the natural heritage/open space system were determined which include:

- A potential Recreational Trails network within the natural features buffer zones and intended to link to potential future parks and open spaces.
- A central Community Park located adjacent to the existing tableland woodlot on the west side of Highway 48, providing a focus for the community and potential location for a future community centre / library and fire station facility.
- An east-west pedestrian Promenade that runs along the south side of Sam's Way. The purpose of the Promenade is to provide a continuous green pedestrian connection extending from the Little Rouge Creek on the east side of Highway 48 to the Community Park / Woodlot on the west side.

Land Uses and Built Form

The Framework Plan contemplates Mixed Use, Urban Medium and High Density Residential Areas focused at the intersection of Highway 48 and Stouffville Road (Gateway Mixed Use Area) along Main Street (Western Approach Area Mixed Use). Lower intensity, primarily residential uses are focused toward the central portion of lands between Highway 48 and McCowan Road (MZOs).

The east side of Highway 48, including the Highway 48 Mixed Use Area and the Hoover Park Mixed Use Area is envisioned to become the focus for a new Mixed Use 'Main Street' environment that encompasses the lands on the north and south side of the Hoover Park Drive. Hoover Park Drive extends from the existing Community of Stouffville across Highway 48, with the potential to connect to McCowan Road to the west in the future. Along this corridor, mid- to high-rise forms of development, with non-residential uses located in the ground floor and residential uses located in upper floors, frame and define the street. This area is intended to have a more fine-grained scale of streets and blocks and thus the potential to become a more compact and walkable neighbourhood. In general, mid-rise buildings should line the public streets while high-rise buildings should mark prominent gateways, corners and intersections.

The Mixed Use Gateway Area (OPA 145), focused around the intersection of Highway 48 and Main Street, is intended to be developed as a higher density landmark at the entrance to the Community. Low- to mid-rise buildings, including townhouses and apartments are depicted in the Highway 48/Main Street Mixed Use Gateway Area Urban Design Guidelines and higher density developments are encouraged to reflect and provide sensitive transition to the scale of the existing built form along Main Street. While the Highway 48/Main Street Mixed Use Gateway Area Urban Design Guidelines identify a maximum mixed use building height of 10-storeys, the Highway 48 Framework Plan recommends that building height should also be considered in the context of the landmark location and in relation to the existing residential neighbourhoods to the northeast and future intensification along Main Street.

In the Main Street Built Form and Urban Design Guidelines (endorsed by Council), Main Street West from Ninth Line to Highway 48 (Western Approach Area Mixed Use), is anticipated to become intensified, with mixed uses, a variety of street-oriented building forms and a new fine-grained pattern of streets and blocks. Higher building forms are to be focused towards Highway 48 and at key corner sites and transition down to the historic part of Main Street towards the east.

The McCowan Corridor, as depicted in the Town's Commercial Study (endorsed by Council), which anchors the west end of the Highway 48 Framework Plan, provides the opportunity for a mixed-use focus that includes a significant commercial component.

Transportation Network

The Framework Plan reflects a new street network which forms part of the overall transportation network and is comprised of a connected grid of primary and secondary roads that includes the extension of Hoover Park Drive and Sam's Way to the West side of McCowan Road. Hoover Park Drive may potentially connect to McCowan Road, through the ORM lands and across Willowgrove Creek. Sam's Way connects to a new north-south road on the west side of Highway 48.

The street system also includes several north-south roads that provide connection from 19th Avenue in the City of Markham, to Stouffville Road at the north end. Jurisdictional considerations for Highway 48 are beyond the scope of the Framework Plan, however staff will report to Council on this topic later in Q3 2022.

The intent of the Framework Plan is to show optimal connections, including the extension of Hoover Park Drive and connection to this road from the south, through the ORM lands.

Connectivity will be further enhanced through the development of a network of pedestrian and cycling routes. The Framework Plan identifies a primary trail system which is located alongside elements of the natural heritage system and will, along with multi-use paths, cycling lanes, cycling routes and sidewalks within the public rights-of-way, provide opportunities for active transportation.

The development of the east of Highway 48 Mixed Use Area is intended to be transit-supportive, with higher density development and a mix of uses in a compact urban form. The high density node also provides the opportunity for a potential Transit Hub to be located within walking distance of existing and future neighbourhoods as well as the existing employment/business park area south of Sam's Way.

Select landowners are currently undertaking a Master Environmental Servicing Plan (MESP) for the Study Area. The purpose of the MESP is to address servicing needs including water, consider required infrastructure such as the road network and other engineering concerns such as grading, provide consideration for environmental features including crossing, and review stormwater management requirements. Additional consideration is also being given to requirements for Fire and Emergency Services, Parks and Leisure, and Public Works. The MESP will be providing refinements to the road network and will confirm exact street location and crossings.

4.2 Policy Recommendations

Accompanying the Framework Plan mapping are land use planning recommendations to support the ongoing design and development approvals identified within the Study Area. Where applicable, some of the recommendations from the recently completed Commercial Policy Review Study are reiterated in the Framework Plan to ensure consistency going forward.

The recommendations have been organized to address Lands within the Existing Settlement Area, Lands within the Expanded Settlement Area, and Future Urban Area (west of McCowan).

Below is an overview of the policy recommendations in the Framework Plan based on the areas defined in Map 5 (see Attachment 3 – Framework Plan, page 24).

Lands within the Existing Settlement Area

Gateway Mixed-Use Area

The Gateway Mixed-Use Area designation recognizes the prominence of the intersection of Highway 48 and Main Street, making it an ideal location for mixed-use development, including non-residential uses and medium to high density residential uses. Retail and service commercial uses are permitted as part of mixed-use development fronting onto Stouffville Road/Main Street, or as adaptive reuse of designated heritage buildings.

Policy recommendations for the Gateway Mixed-Use Area include consideration for requiring retail and service commercial uses at-grade in mixed-use buildings, required parkland contribution detailed through the Town's Parkland Dedication By-law (By-law Number 2002-118-FI), and establishment of an urban parkland hierarchy.

Western Approach Area Mixed-Use

The Western Approach Area Mixed Use designation permits a very broad array of land uses reflecting its existing eclectic development pattern. The designation does permit retail and service commercial uses and supports the delivery of those uses in a mixed-use built form or as stand alone buildings. This is an evolving commercial district that was, at one time, the location for moderately scaled stand-alone retail facilities, and smaller scale commercial facilities in a plaza format.

Policy recommendations for the Western Approach Area Mixed Use include consideration for retail and service commercial functions, loss of Gross Floor Area, a Secondary Plan/Block Plan process for new development, appropriate residential amenity plan, stronger requirements with mix-use with retail and service commercial uses prioritized along the Main Street frontage, required parkland contribution detailed through the Town's Parkland Dedication By-law (By-law Number 2002-118-FI), and establishment of an urban parkland hierarchy.

Regional Retail Area

The Regional Retail Area is a purpose planned large format retail centre that accommodates large footprint "box" stores. It is relatively new in the community and is functionally an auto-oriented built form. It is successful, and has achieved its intended purpose, which was to stem the flow of retail spending to locations outside of the municipality. It is now the primary retail centre within the community.

Policy recommendations for the Regional Retail Area include consideration for higher density forms of residential development, maintaining retail and service commercial functions to accommodate growth, ensuring the appropriate design of public realm, including parks, open spaces, public buildings and streetscapes, loss of Gross Floor Area, required parkland contribution detailed through the Town's Parkland Dedication By-law (By-law Number 2002-118-FI), and establishment of an urban parkland hierarchy.

Highway 48 Mixed Use / Hoover Park Mixed Use Areas

As a result of the employment conversion requests in the Hoover Park Drive area, there is an opportunity to include residential uses, office uses, retail and service commercial uses.

Policy recommendations for the Highway 48 Mixed Use / Hoover Park Mixed Use Areas include consideration for the lands to be identified as Employment Lands Conversion Areas, higher density forms of residential development, maintaining retail and service commercial functions to accommodate growth, ensuring the appropriate design of public realm, including parks, open spaces, public buildings and streetscapes, loss of Gross Floor Area, required parkland contribution detailed through the Town's Parkland Dedication By-law (By-law Number 2002-118-FI), and establishment of an urban parkland hierarchy.

Business Park Area

The Town's Business Park Areas which are located generally south of Main Street and south of Sam's Way and are not subject to employment lands conversion requests and are considered to be important Employment Lands within the Town.

Policy recommendations for the Business Park Area includes consideration for policies to be subject to the Business Park Area designation policies, Section 12.7.12 of the Community of Stouffville Secondary Plan.

Lands within the Expanded Settlement Area

Lands Subject to Minister's Zoning Orders

The lands that are subject to the MZO are effectively zoned for future development. The MZO's identify:

- The list of permitted and specifically prohibited land uses; and,
- Reference back to the specific category in the Town's Zoning By-law that establish regulating elements of each zone.

It is important that Whitchurch-Stouffville has the opportunity to influence the development of these lands to ensure that Town focused objectives are achieved with respect to community design and the delivery of appropriate community facilities, a road pattern and a public park system. The tools available to the Town are Draft Plan of Subdivision/Condominium and, for some forms of development, Site Plan Approval.

Policy recommendations for the Lands Subject to Minister's Zoning Orders includes consideration for development applications to include the requirement for urban design briefs, an area specific Development Charge or updated Development Charge By-law that fully considers the needs of the future population within the area, a Community Benefits By-law which articulates the community benefits and associated costs, and the use of the Town's Parkland Dedication By-law and/or Section 42 of the Planning Act.

Residential Areas

Residential areas form a significant portion of the lands on the west side of Highway 48 and are subject to the MZO approval.

Policy recommendations for the Residential Areas includes consideration for permitting smaller scale retail and service commercial uses, limiting the scale of Convenience Commercial facilities, required parkland contribution detailed through the Town's Official Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law (By-law Number 2002-118-FI), and appropriate public parks system to be established through planning approvals.

Urban Medium Density Residential Areas

Urban Medium Density Residential Areas provide the opportunity for more compact forms of housing whose unique massing may be distributed throughout the community to reinforce focal areas and provide transition between higher and lower density forms of development.

Policy recommendations for the Urban Medium Density Residential Areas includes consideration for policies to be subject to Urban Medium Density Residential Area (Section 12.7.6A) and Urban High Density Residential Area (Section 12.7.6B) with the exception that Townhouse Dwelling Units shall not be permitted, required parkland contribution detailed through the Town's Parkland Dedication By-law (By-law Number 2002-118-FI), and establishment of an urban parkland hierarchy.

McCowan Corridor

The McCowan Corridor are lands that have been identified in the Regional Official Plan as part of a Settlement Area Boundary Expansion and generally consist of lands on the east and west sides of McCowan Road.

Policy recommendations for the McCowan Corridor includes consideration for the Regional retail Area, Residential Area, and Urban High Density Residential Area.

Regional Retail Area

The Regional Retail Area lands have been identified in the Regional Official Plan as part of a Settlement Area Boundary Expansion. It is anticipated that these lands will form part of a crucial district required to meet the Town's growing need for retail and service commercial land uses to 2051 and beyond. Further, and in keeping with the desire to promote mixed use forms of development, higher intensity residential land uses, as well as other community supporting land uses are appropriate.

Policy recommendations for the Regional Retail Area includes consideration for higher density forms of residential development, maintaining retail and service commercial functions to accommodate growth, ensuring the appropriate design of public realm, including parks, open spaces, public buildings and streetscapes, loss of Gross Floor Area, required parkland contribution detailed through the Town's Parkland Dedication By-law (By-law Number 2002-118-FI), and establishment of an urban parkland hierarchy.

Residential Area

Residential Areas are situated between McCowan Road and the Willowgrove Creek, south of the MZO lands.

Policy recommendations for the Residential Areas includes consideration for permitting smaller scale retail and service commercial uses, limiting the scale of Convenience Commercial facilities, required parkland contribution detailed through the Town's Official Plan and Parkland Dedication By-law (By-law Number 2002-118-FI), and appropriate public parks system to be established through planning approvals.

Urban High Density Residential Area

Urban High Density Areas are identified as a transition between the Regional Retail Area along McCowan Road and the Residential Area adjacent to the Willowgrove Creek.

Policy recommendations for the Urban Medium Density Residential Areas includes consideration for policies to be subject to Urban Medium Density Residential Area (Section 12.7.6A) and Urban High Density Residential Area (Section 12.7.6B) with the exception that Townhouse Dwelling Units shall not be permitted, required parkland contribution detailed through the Town's Parkland Dedication By-law (By-law Number 2002-118-FI), and establishment of an urban parkland hierarchy.

Future Urban Area (West of McCowan)

The lands located west of McCowan, identified as Future Urban Area (West of McCowan) are considered to be an important future area for the accommodation of retail and service commercial land uses, as articulated in the recommendations of the Commercial Policy Review. As such, despite the lands being outside of the study area, and in keeping with the desire to promote mixed use forms of development, higher density residential land uses, as well as other community supporting land uses are appropriate.

Policy recommendations for the Future Urban Area (West of McCowan Road) includes consideration for the Town to work with the Region towards the inclusion of the lands within the Settlement Area Boundary of the Community of Stouffville, the Future Mixed Use Area be designated in the Regional Retail Area designation, and Future Mixed Use area be planned through an Amendment to the Town's Official Plan.

Further details on the policy recommendations is included in Attachment 3 – Framework Plan.

4.3 Next Steps

TPP has completed the work program related to the Highway 48 Study. In terms of next steps, the Framework Plan and policy recommendations will now help to inform the basis for the Town's vision for the Highway 48 Study area. The policy recommendations will help inform the policies of the Town's new Official Plan.

In considering the Framework Plan and policy recommendations, Staff will coordinate between the Official Plan Review consultants, and the Highway 48 Study consultants, to appropriately incorporate the policy recommendations for the new Official Plan. As the Framework plan is not intended to be a land use plan and is only giving guidance for

determining future land designations and the appropriateness of future development, Staff are considering to include the Framework Plan as an Appendix to the Draft Official Plan Schedules.

Through the development approvals process for applications for lands within the Study Area, Staff will now have the ability to use the Framework Plan as the basis for determining the most appropriate community amenities, such as community facilities and trails and required parkland.

5. Financial Implications:

None at this time.

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.
4. Asset Planning, Maintenance and Development
Successful stewardship of the infrastructure and facilities required to support a growing community and vibrant economy.

7. Attachments:

1. Highway 48 Visioning Exercise Study Area Map
2. Highway 48 Revised Study Area Map
3. Highway 48 Framework Plan
4. Appendix A – Public Workshop #1 Online Survey What We Heard Report
5. Appendix B – Natural Environment Overview Memorandum
6. Comments Matrix

8. Related Reports:

- July 20, 2022 – DS-037-22 – Highway 48 Study Framework Plan & Policy Recommendations (Deferred)
- January 19, 2021 – DS-001-21 – Highway 48 Visioning Exercise: Re-Scope and Contract Amendment
- February 4, 2020 – DS-004-20 – Highway 48 Corridor Visioning Exercise Update
- July 16, 2019 – DS-034-19 – Highway 48 Corridor Visioning Exercise

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