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For distribution to Councils

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This letter addresses two issues related to York Region's Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR). The first addresses the framing and presentation of growth options in the MCR. The second is a specific to item Committee of the Whole June 8, 2021 Item H.2.4 regarding East Gwillimbury's request to add lands to their settlement area boundary, and the legal and practical constraints on all settlement area boundary expansions in the Lake Simcoe watershed.

## **1. MCR**

There are a host of persistent symptoms of poorly planned communities that could be remedied by the addition of hundreds of thousands of people to existing neighborhoods. In short those are environmental and social issues related to the impacts of planning in silos.

York Region began the MCR process with a survey, the results of which are below<sup>1</sup>. The Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition supports these goals entirely. It is our hope that York Region uses these priorities in the assessment of the various growth options that will be presented to the public.

What we heard:

- Transit is the top Regional service that residents indicate they will rely on most in the future and York Region should continue to invest in public transit
- Residents want compact, walkable communities that offer employment opportunities, community facilities, local services, stores and places for social connection
- Affordable housing is one of the most important components of building complete communities, however, many of us are facing housing market challenges
- Residents want our communities to reduce emissions and are aware of the impacts of climate change in York Region
- Residents want to protect our forests, parks, trails, agricultural lands and green spaces
- Residents want a variety of Employment Opportunities within their community

**Address social and housing needs of lower income individuals and families**

High rents, poverty, social isolation, and discrimination against homeless people are social symptoms of a society that doesn't take care to plan for the ups and downs of normal lives, where people are not always financially stable, and sometimes live alone. These issues are all related to the provision of appropriate housing. Poverty and homelessness advocates are increasingly focused on housing as the necessary first step for people to get back on their feet.

We know full well there will be some new suburbs in greenfields as the MCR is applied. But while that is the built form that most enriches developers, that is only one form of residential building that is needed. The MCR should aim to meet the housing needs and priorities identified by residents, listed above, while reducing impacts to the environment by focusing on infill and density first.

To that end we request that in the lead up to the presentation of growth options York Region must:

- Accept that the Land Needs Assessment (LNA) allows extensive flexibility for municipalities to develop their own options on how to accommodate the Growth Plan forecasts;

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.york.ca/wps/portal/yorkhome/yorkregion/yr/municipalcomprehensivereview/>

- Provide an assessment of what types of housing units people can afford - this is a requirement of the Growth Plan. The growth option chosen must improve housing affordability for more people in low income households;

-Provide an assessment of how people can be accommodated in houses which will be freed up as people age and either downsize or pass away. (The parents of the boomers and most boomers will no longer be with us by 2051 - this will free up 1 million ground related houses in the region which could accommodate 3 million people (at 3 people/unit).)

### **Protect Lake Simcoe and the natural environment**

The MCR presents an opportunity to build for environmental sustainability too. Increasing density and focusing on infill development where we already have infrastructure is a solution that benefits the environment, people and communities. There are innumerable and fiscal environmental arguments for this:

One, that we do not yet have 40% of the LS watershed in high quality natural cover as per the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan; achieving this target should be one of the MCR's objectives.

Two, Ontario is losing 175 acres a day of prime farmland. (Ontario Farmland Trust.) This is completely unsustainable if we are serious about food security.

Three, converting agricultural land to residential contributes to phosphorus pollution to Lake Simcoe through the construction phase and through stormwater pollution. The ecological impacts are worse if forested lands are converted to residential. We must only use greenfields as a last resort.

Four, density promotes less Single Occupancy Vehicle driving and better transit uptake. Greenfield development should be contiguous with existing bus and transit routes, and achieve the density required for frequent transit service (one bus every 10-15 minutes), 37 units per hectare / 80 - 100 residents & jobs combined.

Five, increasing density reduces the need for new roads, which are contributing to the salt pollution of Lake Simcoe. LSRCA says, "If recent rate of increase continues, chloride level (salt) in the lake will reach the chronic guideline level of 120 mg/L in 38 years."<sup>2</sup>

Six, it's cheaper for residents over time to live in denser communities, and it's cheaper for the municipality to administer and maintain.

We appreciate that the [Growth Plan 2019](#) requires the Region to plan for a minimum density target of 50 residents and jobs per hectare across the entire Designated Greenfield Area, and

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<sup>2</sup> Lake Simcoe Science Forum, 2021. MoECP.

that municipalities are encouraged to go beyond this minimum target, where appropriate. However, as noted above, this is below the density that is thought to provide viable transit at 15 minute intervals. 50 residents and jobs per hectare in new greenfields cuts off the opportunity to achieve viable transit to its residents, which was identified as the top priority according to your survey. 100 residents and jobs per hectare in new greenfields would be more appropriate.

### **Present growth options:**

The Region has already said “Provincial Land Needs Assessment results in a need for 3,400 hectares of urban expansion, or 80% of the remaining Whitebelt, to accommodate growth to 2051.” However, this is a gross misrepresentation of the process, because each stage of the Land Needs Assessment Methodology hangs on inputs that are very uncertain, and/or largely within the control of municipal government. For example, the ability of existing neighborhoods to accommodate the projected demand units of single and semi-detached homes is entirely a function of municipal zoning choices. As a consequence, any proper application of the methodology produces a very broad range of plausible “land needs” - which certainly includes an estimated land need of zero. It is up to York Region to make a decision on the question of Settlement Area Boundary Expansion that is consistent with its obligations to tackle problems like car dependency and carbon emissions.

We understood that York Region was going to present residents a number of growth options. We would appreciate a confirmation of this. No boundary expansion, or a “Hard Urban Boundary” should be one of the growth options presented to the public through the MCR.

In the presentation of growth options, how will residents assess the effect of the options? How can this level of planning be understandable to the residents? How will **each growth option** that York Region presents benefit the community and the environment, both in existing communities and in new greenfield communities? We recommend using questions such as these to make the options make sense to non-planners. Will the growth option:

- Increase or decrease access to public transit?
- Increase or decrease the proportion of affordable housing?
- Increase or decrease public greenspace on a per capita basis?
- Increase or decrease the extent of agricultural land?
- Increase or decrease the extent of natural areas (forests, wetlands, valleys, grasslands)?
- Increase or decrease property taxes?
- Increase proportional salt from roads polluting our waterways?
- Increase or decrease personal vehicle GHG emissions from Simcoe County?

- What are the costs of servicing each of the growth options (infrastructure building and maintenance, and taxation required to maintain each option, on a per household basis)
- For employment lands, provide a breakdown of vacancy rates in existing employment lands.

### **Slow down the process:**

No municipality met the timelines for the first Growth Plan conformity exercises and many exceeded it by years; there were and are no repercussions. No one got sent to planning jail.

In a pandemic it is entirely appropriate to slow down and take time to understand the needs and interests of residents, not developers. The various growth options must be explained and explored with the public, and their feedback sought on the options.

A letter sent to municipalities from MMAH threaten that the province will take over the conformity exercise should municipalities not meet the deadline of July 2022 for the completion of the MCR. We would like to remind the Region that they are accountable first to the residents who live there, not developers or the province's timeline.

### **2. Concerns with greenfield settlement boundary expansion requests and wastewater servicing:**

As an environmental organisation concerned with pollution affecting Lake Simcoe, and with defending the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, we want to point out a few problems with the way York Region seems to be proceeding in the MCR. Below we outline a number of legal and planning policy issues that must be acknowledged and followed.

Settlement area expansions, and the development of new greenfields contribute significantly to the phosphorus pollution of Lake Simcoe, as you know. Research shows that the longer a site is left stripped bare, the more it pollutes the lake. Thus our request for a serious effort to avoid greenfield development and a push for intensification.

But there is no wastewater servicing solution, and until there is, York Region must not approve further settlement area boundary expansions in the Lake Simcoe watershed. York Region must recognize that there is a possibility that there should be no more greenfield developments and that a significant amount of development must be directed away from the Lake Simcoe watershed.

This is consistent with recommendations made July 12, 2018 by the provincially appointed multi-stakeholder Lake Simcoe Coordinating Committee, and the Lake Simcoe Science Committee, which wrote in a joint **advice letter to the Minister of the Environment**:

*“Consistent with many advice letters since 2009, the committees are concerned about the impact of the **Growth Plan on Lake Simcoe**, in particular phosphorus loads and natural heritage cover. We recommend that no further growth beyond the 2041 projections be allocated to the Lake Simcoe watershed until we are confident that there is no further impact on the assimilative capacity or ecosystem health of the watershed. The impacts of new growth are currently being managed by innovative programs such as the Lake Simcoe Phosphorus Offset Program (LSPOP), Low Impact Development (LID) treatment train tool, and stormwater management guidelines. The effectiveness of these programs must be monitored, and the programs maintained. Future growth should avoid greenfields and should focus on intensification and infill.”*

1. The Province has as you know made it illegal to approve the Upper York Sewage Solution through Bill 306<sup>3</sup>. To our knowledge there is no other servicing solution for Upper York until a decision is made to route sewage south via the York Durham pipe to Lake Ontario, and of course, until the thing is actually built and operational. As reflected on pg 2 of in [Regional Council Planning and Economic Development, March 18, 2021, Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner: Proposed 2051 Forecast and Land Needs Assessment](#), this constraint is acknowledged by the Region.
2. The LSPP has a designated policy that deals with settlement area expansions:  
**LSPP 4.1-DP** For a proposed *settlement area* expansion, establishment of a new *settlement area* or a *development* proposal outside of a *settlement area* that requires an increase in the existing *rated capacity* of a *sewage treatment plant* or the establishment of a new *sewage treatment plant*, an environmental assessment of the undertaking shall be completed or approved prior to giving any approvals for the proposal under the Planning Act or the Condominium Act, 1998.
3. Despite these barriers to development, in Map 1B which appeared in the York Region Committee of the Whole, June 8, 2021 Item H.2.4<sup>4</sup> [East Gwillimbury](#) shows a massive

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-42/session-1/bill-306>

<sup>4</sup> <https://yorkpublishing.escrimemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=1eb6004e-6e53-4b38-87de-4f3a79ffbe1b&Agenda=Merged&lang=English&Item=48&Tab=attachments>

expansion of greenfield area, identified as “New Community Area”. The East Gwillimbury OP review is asking to swallow up all their white belt lands whereas the Region is actually only saying 25% (a difference of 715 Ha). Whitebelt lands are farmland, which we need. Of course the Region needs to approve the designation of land use and urban boundary expansions. For the reasons above, EG’s request seems both wildly premature, ill considered, and an inappropriate process.

It makes no sense unless the plan is to spend any and all greenfield development potential by 2051. Therefore we question why the Town of EG is pushing this forward and not the developers that would benefit. Who is this for? Did residents ask for more greenfield development? How does a responsible local government propose to “spend it all”, leaving no growth potential for the future? Despite the fact that we do not want this growth, these questions must be asked. More questions flow from this criticism:

- a. Has EG identified the increases in rated capacity that would be needed from the expansion?
- b. Has EG done an environmental assessment of the impacts of that increase in rated capacity?

As the Region and East Gwillimbury planning staff (and we would hope the Mayor at least) know, they can’t approve a settlement area expansion under the *Planning Act* without doing this. The fact that this request has been made at all is worrying disregard for the law and the health of Lake Simcoe.

4. The Growth Plan<sup>5</sup> also places limits on development with respect to the assimilative capacity of receiving bodies of water:

**GP 3.2.6.2** Municipal water and wastewater systems and private communal water and wastewater systems will be planned, designed, constructed, or expanded in accordance with the following:

- c) a comprehensive water or wastewater master plan or equivalent, informed by watershed planning or equivalent has been prepared to: i. demonstrate that the effluent discharges and water takings associated with the system will not negatively impact the quality and quantity of water; ii. identify the preferred option for servicing growth and development, subject to the hierarchy of services provided in policies 1.6.6.2, 1.6.6.3, 1.6.6.4 and 1.6.6.5 of the PPS, 2020, which must not exceed the

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/document/growth-plan-greater-golden-horseshoe/infrastructure-support-growth>

assimilative capacity of the effluent receivers and sustainable water supply for servicing, ecological, and other needs; and iii. identify the full life cycle costs of the system and develop options to pay for these costs over the long-term.

This analysis of assimilative capacity has to be rolled into the examination of LSPP 4.1-DP as well.

There is a solution to this problem and it is already in the Growth Plan. The Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition has been saying to municipalities and the province for months that municipalities are going to have to get together to figure out how to accommodate a fair distribution of growth without destroying Lake Simcoe. **Growth Plan policy 3.2.6.2. 4)** says: Municipalities that share an inland water source or receiving water body will co-ordinate their planning for potable water, stormwater, and wastewater systems based on watershed planning or equivalent to ensure that the quality and quantity of water is protected, improved, or restored.

We want a clean Lake Simcoe and we want a sustainable future. Your decisions will seal the lake's fate, or not. Please do what will make you and your residents proud now and in the future.

Thank you for taking our feedback.

Sincerely,



Claire Malcolmson

Executive Director, Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition

SIGNATORY ORGANIZATIONS:

Margaret Prophet, Executive Director, Simcoe County Greenbelt Coalition

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*The Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition is a lake-wide member-based organization, representing 27 groups in the Lake Simcoe watershed, that provides leadership and inspires people to take action to protect Lake Simcoe. [www.rescuelakesimcoe.org](http://www.rescuelakesimcoe.org)*

