

**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE   JUNE 21, 2004**

**THORNHILL CENTRE STREET STUDY (2003)  
FILE 15.92**

**Recommendation**

The Commissioner of Planning recommends:

1. That IBI Consulting Group's Final Report on the Thornhill Centre Street Study (Attachment #4), and background information be received.
2. That the Study's recommendations be endorsed as the basis for the preparation of secondary plan (OPA) policies for the Study Area.

**Purpose**

To present the results and recommendations of the Thornhill Centre Street Study conducted by the IBI Consulting Group, for the consideration of Council.

**Background - Analysis and Options**

Location

The Study Area has been defined to include the lands fronting on Centre Street from Bathurst Street in the east to the intersection of Centre Street with Highway 7 to the west. The Study Area also includes some lands fronting Dufferin Street north and south of the Dufferin/Centre intersection. The Study Area includes all of the lands subject to Interim Control By-law 255-2003, as well as additional properties.

Land Use Status

Existing Uses

For the purposes of the Study, the Centre Street corridor has been divided into three separate components characterized by variations in land uses, building heights and massing, and streetscape and connectivity:

1. Eastern Gateway/Town Centre
2. Central Spine
3. Western Gateway

Eastern Gateway/Town Centre

The area at the east end of the corridor, north and south of Centre Street between New Westminster Drive to the west and Bathurst Street to the east, has been identified in OPA #210 (Thornhill Community Plan) as Thornhill's Town Centre. This area is comprised of the following land uses:

- Regional Retail Shopping Centre (Promenade Mall)
- General Retail Commercial

- High Density Residential
- Institutional and community facilities

### Central Spine

West of New Westminster Drive, there is a varied mix of land uses, building heights and massing in the 'Central Spine' area of the corridor. The south side of Centre Street in the Central Spine is best described as a traditional suburban residential development with two-storey dwellings rear-lotted onto the street. The north side of Centre Street is a mix of commercial, professional office and residential development. This portion of the spine is geared toward vehicular movement, with little attention given to creating an attractive pedestrian environment.

The Central Spine area is comprised of the following land uses:

- Low Density Residential, single-detached houses
- Medium Density Residential, townhouses
- Business Office Commercial
- Retail Centres
- Highway Commercial, a service station

### West Gateway

The western edge of the Study Area was expanded through the Study process to include the large undeveloped parcels of land that frame the Dufferin/Centre Street intersection and extending west to the hydro corridor and Centre Street underpass at Highway 7. The Parkway Belt West Plan and the potential Highway #407 alignment and planned interchange location have historically influenced this gateway to Thornhill, preventing development of most of these lands. Immediately to the west of the Gateway is the utility corridor that parallels Highway #407. The West Gateway includes the following land uses:

- Low Density Residential, older single-detached homes
- Highway Commercial, service station
- Retail Centre
- Highway commercial, motel
- Vacant lands, zoned A Agricultural

The northeast quadrant of Centre/Dufferin is the site of a single-storey retail commercial plaza surrounding a vacant site where a gas station was formerly located. The northwest quadrant is vacant at the corner and includes an older, established motel further to the west. On the southeast corner is a new service station with a row of older residential buildings to the east. On the southwest corner are two substantial undeveloped landholdings under provincial ownership. On the east side of Dufferin further north and south of the corners are some additional vacant properties. The gateway has begun to develop as an auto-oriented, commercial node with little relationship to the street or land use integration with the surrounding community.

## Official Plan/Zoning

The Study Area is designated under OPA 210 (Thornhill/Vaughan Community Plan) as “Town Centre”, “High Density Residential”, “General Commercial”, “Medium Density Residential” and “Low Density Residential”. The lands are zoned R1 Residential (Single Detached), R3 Residential (Single Detached), RM1 Multiple Residential, RA3 Apartment Residential, C1 Restricted Commercial, C2 General Commercial, C5 Community Commercial, C6 Highway Commercial, and A Agricultural.

## Terms of Reference

The purpose of the Thornhill Centre Street Study is to provide an up-to-date planning and urban design policy framework to guide development in the Study Area. There have been several applications for zoning and Official Plan Amendments within the corridor since the approval of the Thornhill Community Plan 17 years ago. It is appropriate to review the vision and update the policies governing development in the corridor, considering the changes that have occurred, and the major transit initiatives now being contemplated by York Region.

On June 23, 2003, Council directed that Staff prepare a Terms of Reference for a study of Centre Street in Thornhill-Vaughan, between Dufferin and Bathurst Streets, and enacted Interim Control By-law 255-2003 for a period of one year to provide time to complete the Study. The Terms of Reference provide for the consulting team to define the limits of the Study Area appropriately to address planning matters in a comprehensive fashion.

The components to be examined by the Study, as outlined in the Terms of Reference approved by Council on August 25, 2003, are Land Use Planning, Urban Design, Market and Development Analysis, and Transportation.

On June 14, 2004, Council approved an extension of the Interim Control By-law for a second year, to permit completion of legal documents pursuant to the findings and recommendations of the Study.

## Public Consultation

An important component of the Study was the establishment of a Stakeholder Consulting Group (SCG), to ensure full community awareness and participation in the process. The SCG is composed of representatives from each of the following groups: Thornhill Community residents, the Beverley Glen Ratepayers Association, landowners/landowner representatives, York Region Representatives, and City Staff.

The role of the SCG was to inform, express interests and concerns regarding the Study Area, and to routinely communicate back to their respective constituent groups regarding progress of the Study and SCG deliberations.

The recommended land use option is the result of an extensive public consultation process. Two Public Open Houses and eight Stakeholder Consultation Group (SCG) meetings were held to ensure the interests of the various stakeholders and residents were addressed.

A group of approximately 25 SCG members regularly attended the meetings. The meetings focused on the following tasks:

- reviewing existing land use and transportation conditions and identifying issues concerning the Study Area;
- an overview of the YRTP and an overview of current development applications in the corridor;
- reviewing the current state of the Centre Street corridor and participation in a visioning exercise;

- developing a set of urban design principles derived from the corridor-visioning exercise considering the existing transportation system, and the implications of current development applications on the transportation system;
- discussing future land use options for the corridor;
- presentation of estimated traffic impacts associated with land use options;
- reviewing a revised set of urban design principles, discussion of the urban design structure and urban design concepts for various sections of the corridor, and discussion of a revised set of land use options; and,
- discussion of a preferred land use option, and its planning basis.

### **Staff Review and Comments**

#### **Overview of Recommended Land Use Plan**

The recommended land use plan is based on five broad land use principles:

- reinforce the Thornhill Town Centre as a Local Centre
- protect stable residential areas
- concentration at gateways
- connectivity of the Town Centre
- recognize diversity along Centre Street

The recommended land use plan has been structured to address the three distinct sections of the Centre Street corridor study area: Eastern Gateway/Town Centre, Central Spine, and the Western Gateway.

The Eastern Gateway/Town Centre has the greatest development potential within the Centre Street corridor, and thus has the most significant opportunity for change and improvement. The Study's recommendations build upon the original vision for the Town Centre, and provide an updated policy framework to enable it to fully achieve its role as the main residential and commercial focus for the Thornhill community.

One of the most important aspects of the proposed Plan is the establishment of a "Main Street" within the Town Centre. The 'Main Street' is proposed to develop on a north/south axis linking the Liberty development in the Town Centre North to the Promenade Mall in the Town Centre South, using the existing North Promenade road connecting to a new road through the Metrontario/FirstPro property. This street will provide a traditional 'main street' shopping experience as an alternative to the existing shopping mall. The street will be built at a human scale to encourage pedestrian use, and will include retail uses at grade, with residential or office uses above. Development fronting onto Main Street will begin concurrently with the initial phase of development in the Town Centre North. Medium and high density residential development in the Town Centre will support existing and future commercial development, as well as future transit plans. The 'Main Street' will be conveniently served by the existing transit terminal at North Promenade and Centre Street, and by the upgraded transit services planned by YRTP on Centre Street.

The Plan also encourages additional residential and commercial development west of Main Street, where a seniors residential complex is proposed, and east of Main Street where a large retail development is proposed, including a Walmart. The Plan includes a grid of streets designed to address the long term needs of development within the Metrontario/FirstPro property, and provides a policy framework to guide the preparation of a set of urban design guidelines with which private applications will comply.

The Central Spine area is largely predetermined by the stable residential and commercial land uses that exist within the corridor. Therefore, the Study recommends a more modest set of policies to improve this part of the corridor. Some development opportunities exist which can be used to improve the appearance of Centre Street through upgrading its streetscape, and introduction of low-scale mixed office/residential land uses primarily in the street section between Vaughan Blvd. and Concord Road.

The full development of the Western Gateway depends largely upon the inclination of the Ontario Realty Corporation (on behalf of the Province of Ontario) to reach agreement with the operators of the Highway 407 ETR, and free up their lands for development. The Study proposes the introduction of medium density residential development in the southwest and southeast quadrants of the Dufferin/Centre intersection. In the northwest quadrant, the Prestige Office designation is to remain generally unchanged, consistent with Council's recent zoning amendment, but adding permissions for recreational and institutional uses within this area. On the northeast quadrant, the General Commercial designation is to remain unchanged, and consistent with the policies of Official Plan Amendment 210. The Study's recommended urban design policies focus on streetscape improvements, and achieving a better relationship to the street for future development /redevelopment.

#### Town Centre Policy Recommendations

The Study recommends that the Town Centre sub-area be divided into two categories: Town Centre North and Town Centre South. The Town Centre South is to be identified as a "Special Policy Area" and be subject to further review should major redevelopment or intensification be considered. In the interim, the policies of Official Plan Amendment Number 210 will govern this portion of the lands.

The Town Centre North is to be governed by a new set of policies developed through the Centre Street Study. It is recommended that for this portion of the Town Centre, the permitted uses should include a mix of medium and high density residential, mixed use, commercial, and institutional uses.

Within the Town Centre North (excluding the Main Street portion) and High Density Residential Designations, the following residential uses and policies are recommended:

- (i) Street, block and stacked townhouses and apartment buildings;
- (ii) Maximum height of buildings at 14 storeys or 44 metres, whichever is less;
- (iii) The Maximum FSI is 2.0 or 180 uph, whichever is less; and
- (iv) Individual retail uses in buildings with a ground floor area in excess of 2,500m<sup>2</sup> are prohibited; notwithstanding, an exception is permitted for one large retail use near the Bathurst and Centre Street intersection, with a maximum floorplate of 10,500m<sup>2</sup> GFA.

Within the Town Centre North "Main Street" Designations, the following uses and policies are recommended:

- (i) Mixed use (residential/retail; retail/office or residential/office) development along Main Street of the Town Centre;
- (ii) Maximum height along "Main Street", excluding corner buildings, at 4 storeys with a permitted step back from the street to 6 storeys;
- (iii) Corner buildings at a minimum of 2 storeys and maximum of 8 storeys or 29 metres;
- (iv) Maximum density for stand alone residential use at 125 uph, and for mixed use at 1.5 FSI with no uph limit; and,
- (v) Individual retail uses in buildings with a ground floor area in excess of 2,500m<sup>2</sup> are prohibited.

Uses specifically excluded within the Town Centre are drive-thru facilities and retail uses that require outdoor storage.

New parking standards are also recommended for the Town Centre as follows:

- (i) For retail commercial uses - a maximum of 4.75 spaces/100m<sup>2</sup> and a minimum to be considered at the time of zoning;
- (ii) For office uses - a maximum of 3.0 spaces/100m<sup>2</sup> of GFA and a minimum to be considered at the time of zoning; and,
- (iii) For all apartment residential uses - a minimum of 1.75 spaces per unit, including visitor parking.

### Centre Street Spine Policies

It is recommended that the General Commercial Designation in Low and Medium Density Designations of OPA 210 continue to govern this area, with the introduction of a new “Mixed Use 1” designation along the north side of Centre Street between Vaughan Boulevard and Concord Road. Within the “Mixed Use 1” designation, the following policies will apply:

- (i) Permitted uses will include:
  - Street, block and stacked townhouses and low-rise apartment buildings
  - Small scale office uses
  - Mixed use residential and office development, and
  - Select institutional uses, such as day care, schools, etc.
- (ii) The maximum height shall be 3 storeys or 11 metres, whichever is less.
- (iii) Stand alone residential development shall have a density of up to 44 uph. In a mixed use or office building, the maximum FSI is 0.5 with no cap on the number of residential units.
- (iv) Development incentives to encourage lot and access consolidation such as a density increase to a maximum of 64 uph for stand alone residential and 1.0 FSI for mixed use development with a frontage greater than 45m.
- (v) A consolidation of individual driveways will be required within any form of redevelopment.

### Western Gateway Policies

The “General Commercial” and “Prestige Industrial” Designations are to remain as per OPA 210, with the exception that recreational and institutional uses are recommended as additional permitted uses within the Prestige Industrial designation.

Medium Density Residential has also been proposed for in the two southern quadrants.

### Urban Design

The Study has developed a set of urban design policies to promote street-related development, pedestrian connections, continuity of form, and integration of different land uses in the Study Area.

Built form policies include essentials such as building height, setbacks, and “build-to zones” that all define the street edge. The relationship to the street is described through massing, building spacing, building depths, as well as active window and entrance locations provisions.

## Transportation

The transportation analysis undertaken as part of the study considered the current traffic scenario, and the ten and twenty year horizons of planned development in the Study Area, including the proposed development of surrounding lands (including Liberty Development). The Study concluded that the planned transportation system improvements should be augmented as follows, in order to support the proposed Plan:

- a southbound dual left-turn lane at the Dufferin Street/Centre Street intersection;
- an exclusive northbound right-turn lane at the Dufferin Street/Centre Street intersection;
- a mid-block signalized intersection on Centre Street between New Westminster Drive and Vaughan Boulevard to service the existing and future commercial turning movements;
- the provision of a major collector road or minor arterial roadway, built to public road standards, from Centre Street to Beverly Glen Boulevard between Bathurst Street and New Westminster; and
- the Bathurst Street improvements may be required prior to the 10 to 20 year timing that is currently planned. Operations along Bathurst Street and the critical intersections in the Study Area should be monitored, as development within and adjacent to the Study Area proceeds to identify the need to widen Bathurst Street in advance of what is currently planned.

## Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2007

The proposed plan and land use policies are consistent with the priorities set by Council in Section 3.2.2 of the Vaughan Vision, to “Encourage land use designations and urban form to support transit usage”.

## Conclusion

The Thornhill Centre Street Study is now complete. The City’s consultants have fulfilled the requirements of the Terms of Reference approved by Council. The public consultation process has enabled local stakeholders to be actively involved throughout the process in articulating expectations regarding future development in the Centre Street corridor, and their concerns, particularly with respect to traffic, environmental, and community service impacts. These have been appropriately addressed by the recommended land use plan and its proposed policy framework.

Upon review of IBI’s Final Report, Staff are satisfied that the recommendations contained therein should be endorsed. Should Committee concur, the recommendations of the Study should be approved and direction should be given to proceed with the preparation of an Official Plan Amendment consistent with the Study.

## Attachments

1. Location Map
2. Thornhill Centre Street Study 2004 - Terms of Reference
3. Proposed Thornhill Centre Street Plan
4. IBI Thornhill Centre Street Study (Councillors Only)

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Respectfully submitted,

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