

Thornhill Community Meeting

March 12, 2009

Heintzman House
135 Bay Thorn Drive
Thornhill, Ontario

Summary Notes

Attendance:

There were 58 participants at the community meeting.

Open House (6:00 pm to 7:00 pm)

- Participants were invited to walk around, view informative panels and ask questions to available staff.

Opening Remarks (7:00 to 7:15 pm)

- Welcome by Amanda Kennedy, DPRA
 - Introduction to the Town of Markham's Growth Management Strategy and the Transportation Strategic Plan.
- Councillor Valerie Burke and Councillor Erin Shapero welcomed the audience and provided opening remarks.

Comments from Participants

Note: Comments, questions and answers were not recorded verbatim

Question

Did the councillors ever come to the community and ask us if we wanted this growth? I don't remember it being a campaign issue. Was it a campaign issue?

Answer (by Councillor Shapero)

The three different levels of government are dealing with growth management issues. The issues and priorities around growth came down to us from the Region and from the province.

Question

Was growth an item in the election campaign? I don't remember any discussions about it.

Answer (by Councillor Shapero)

This undertaking is a huge challenge. We need community input on how to manage growth in Markham. I share your views and concern and as discussions unfold this evening we can talk further about this.

Presentation – Growth Management Alternatives (7:15 pm to 8:05 pm)

- Presentation by Valerie Shuttleworth – Director of Planning and Urban Design, Town of Markham
 - The provincial, regional and local context for growth
 - The approach that Markham has taken to plan for residential and employment growth

- Some of the options that the Town has been examining, including potential strategies for intensification

The presentation is available on-line at:

http://www.markham.ca/NR/rdonlyres/40639712-ADB1-4304-AB6C-F78A9D4747D7/0/GMS_communitypres_090311.pdf.

Questions and Answers

Questions were taken throughout the presentation by Valerie Shuttleworth, Director of Planning and Urban Design, Town of Markham

Note: Questions and answers were not recorded verbatim

Question

I see the whitebelt identified in the images on the presentation, but I do not see the red line moving at all. Can you explain the red line again and why it is not moving for the different options?

Answer

The red line was established as the built boundary by the province. The red line is constant for at least 10 years. Intensification will occur within the red line or beyond the red line. The red line does not move for the various options.

We are suggesting that within the growth options that some percentage of the development would be accommodated within the whitebelt and this would be beyond the red line.

Question

Councillor Burke asked if Valerie Shuttleworth could explain what LEED stands for. She indicated that some of the members in the audience might not know what it means.

Answer

LEED stands for Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design. It is an initiative that was established for certain development types. All new municipal buildings within the Town of Markham must strive for LEED Silver certification.

Question

What do you mean by density and height bonusing? What is this referring to?

Answer

Density and height bonusing is the provision of public benefits in exchange for increased height or density permissions. To encourage innovative development, the *Planning Act* allows municipalities to offer increased density on a development site in exchange for a specific public objective, e.g. a daycare facility, community center, recreational facilities, etc. This is known as "bonusing".

Question

Could you please go back to the GMS background study slide? With respect to intensification on Yonge street, I think that you should be clear on the importance of protecting heritage lands. Could you please insert a new slide on this? It is needed to explain the protection of heritage along Yonge and Arnold Street (for 1.2 km). Why was this not mentioned? This area

has to be identified as a Natural Heritage area and it is not clearly identified and protected from intensification.

Answer

I will make it more specific. Preservation of heritage areas is important and we recognize this.

Response

Put it in please as a needed study. Add it as an important feature right after the other heritage study. This is very important.

Question

What is the status of building the "CN Tower" on the 7171 Yonge Street lands?

Answer

That is the application at 7171 Yonge Street that has been appealed to the OMB [Ontario Municipal Board]. A public meeting is being held on Tuesday, March 24 to hear about the appeal.

Question

Councillor Erin Shapero added a clarification that if the purpose of the voting using the handheld devices is to elicit feedback from the public it is important to understand that 90% of the lands would be used for expansion. Residents must understand what percentage of the whitebelt lands this would include. Please clarify that if 90% of the lands were used for expansion, how much of the whitebelt lands would be used for expansion purposes?

Answer

Speaking to the slide on accommodating growth in Markham, we should explain how many hectares of land this would be: each concession block is 400 hectares.

Question

What happens if the municipality cannot conform to the growth projections based on the requirements of the province and region?

Answer

The Town of Markham can conform to the growth mandated by the Province and Region. We are now reacting to the growth requirements while taking into consideration the various costs associated with each option. The costs associated with the options include infrastructure and transportation. Not a lot of dollars are associated with conformity. We want to get an idea of how much it costs and this is a study that will be iterative.

Question

There is some development in the whitebelt is there not?

Answer

Current development in the whitebelt includes some golf courses, places of worship, cemeteries and farms. There are also some residential homes located in hamlets.

Question

Is the majority still farmland?

Answer

Yes

Question

If people vote to not build in the whitebelt what would happen? Would the lands remain in farming or would they go into the Greenbelt?

Answer

Most whitebelt lands are already owned by developers. There have been some studies done that document the state of farming and an interest to continue farming in the Markham area. Farming could become more established if there is no development in the whitebelt lands. Farming activities could continue on whitebelt lands through lease agreements between the developers who own the land and the farmers with an interest in occupying the land.

Question

If we do not build in the whitebelt what are the ramifications? Would it mean higher buildings in the growth centres?

Answer

We did this study (referring back to slides) that compare differences in the height of buildings and approximately 10 to 12 storeys would be what is required to meet the needs within the current built boundary if we do not expand into the whitebelt. This would equate to building approximately 10 apartments per year for the next 25 years. In the last 5 years we have built less than 2 apartments per year. The difference would be developing 10 apartments per year.

Question

Is there a risk to safety? Specifically in Ward 1 South. Our residents' group and Bayview Glen had severe flooding in 2005 and again just a few weeks ago. I understand the importance of LEED certification and energy design. For flood water and stormwater management they must factor in changing climate situations. Are the studies on stormwater management techniques considering the climate of today or the climate of the future? The climate is changing and should be taken into consideration in studies not just basing the studies on the climate of today.

Answer (Director of Engineering)

We recognize that times are changing and we will be looking at what the future standards should be. We will be looking at future standards when predicting requirements for the communities.

Question

I assume that there is a plan to set the ground rules in which everyone would comply as to where intensification should be. What if a developer on Steeles wants to put high rises up in a non-intensification area?

Answer

The application that you are referring to is under consideration. We can not stop a developer from putting forward an application. We would have considered that site as having potential for intensification; that developer just got ahead of us. There was no policy in place. We should have policies in place and are currently working with the developer to look at the application. There is a lot more work to do with them. My hope is that they will conform to the parameters the Growth Management Strategy sets for him.

Question

You said 'Environment First' and I have no objection to this. Where are people and communities in this plan?

Answer

We have talked about the need to develop compact liveable communities, bringing in rapid transit and having mixed use. More work needs to be done. We will bring in services that the people and the communities require.

Question

If you are going to develop the walkable community I see some challenges. I have watched the small grocery stores disappear. Everyone has to use a car to get to the large big-box retail stores. In this walkable community model will we have the small store back in our communities? If not I do not see this strategy working.

Answer

We are hoping to shift the retail market with this process through encouraging more compact stores within walkable distances (no more big box in Markham). The establishment of big box retail outlets perpetuates total car dependency. This is difficult when there are no other options. It is difficult when that is the only retail in Town. The big box retail outlets have to be part of mixed use developments. It is going to be a big change for the retailers so we will have to work with them to make the shift.

Response (Councillor Shapero)

In the Whitebelt, although most farms are in developer ownership, they are still zoned for farming.

If Municipalities want to expand the greenbelt, this is possible. The Greenbelt Act was recently amended to allow expansion of the Greenbelt. This proposal could go forward to the Province. This would allow consideration of expanding the greenbelt to protect more land.

Question

Are all the staff reports on growth management available? Not just on-line because I would prefer hardcopies.

Answer

The reports are available.

Audience Polling Activity (8:08 to 8:25)

- Participants were provided with a hand-held polling device to respond to the list of questions posed.

Comments During the Polling Activity:

Question

Are there any staff members holding a key pad?

Answer

No staff members are participating in the polling.

Comment

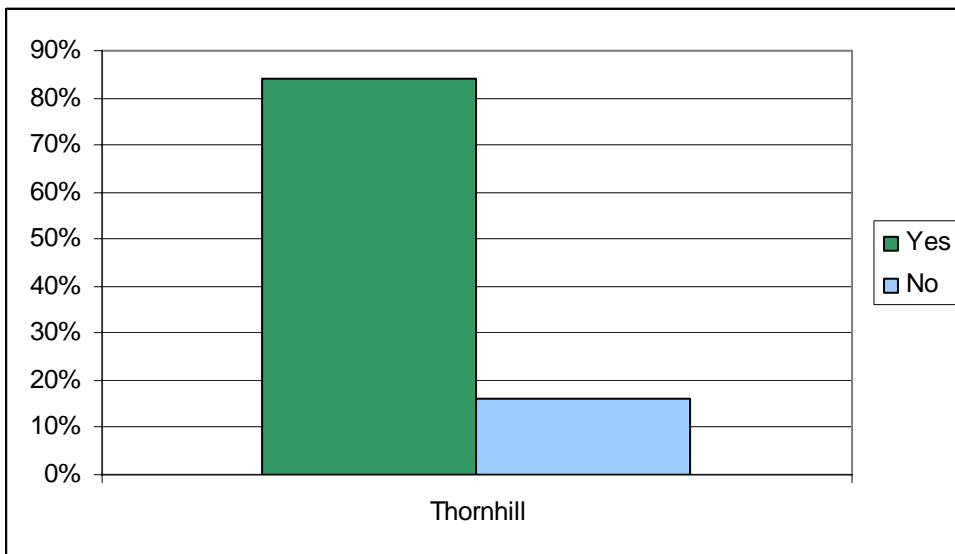
No intensification on Yonge Street. The Thornhill Heritage District should not be included in the intensification areas.

Polling Questions

Note: An interactive and innovative polling technology was used at the community meetings to elicit feedback from the participants. The polling tool allowed participants to answer multiple-choice question immediately followed by a presentation of the results. This polling exercise was one method used to gather feedback from participants attending the public events. The sample sizes were small and therefore, the results of the polling exercise are *not statistically significant*.

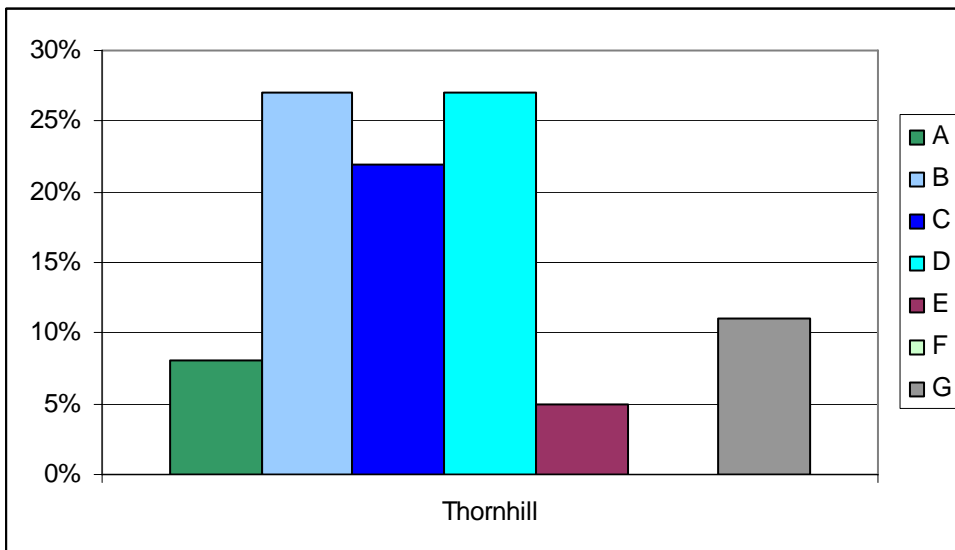
Question 1: Do you agree with the "environment first" approach to planning for new development

Figure 1: Thornhill, n =32



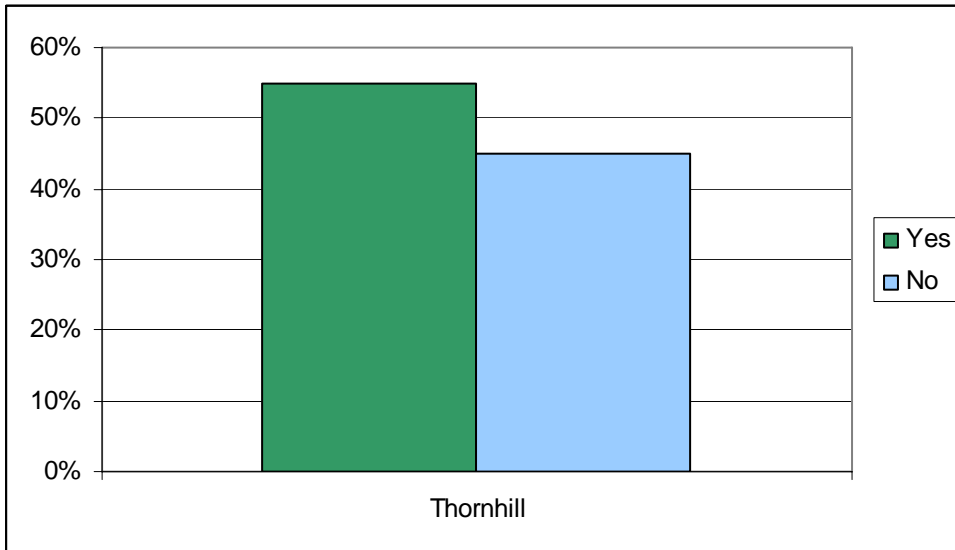
Question 2: What is the most important guiding principle:

Figure 2: Thornhill, n =37



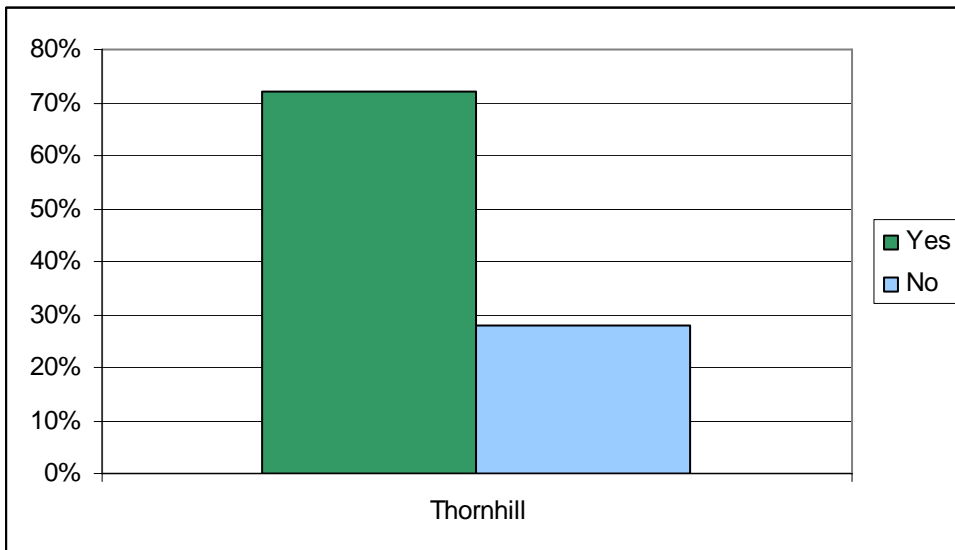
Question 3: Do you agree with accommodating the majority of new residential growth in the current urban area (Settlement Area)?

Figure 3: Thornhill, n =38



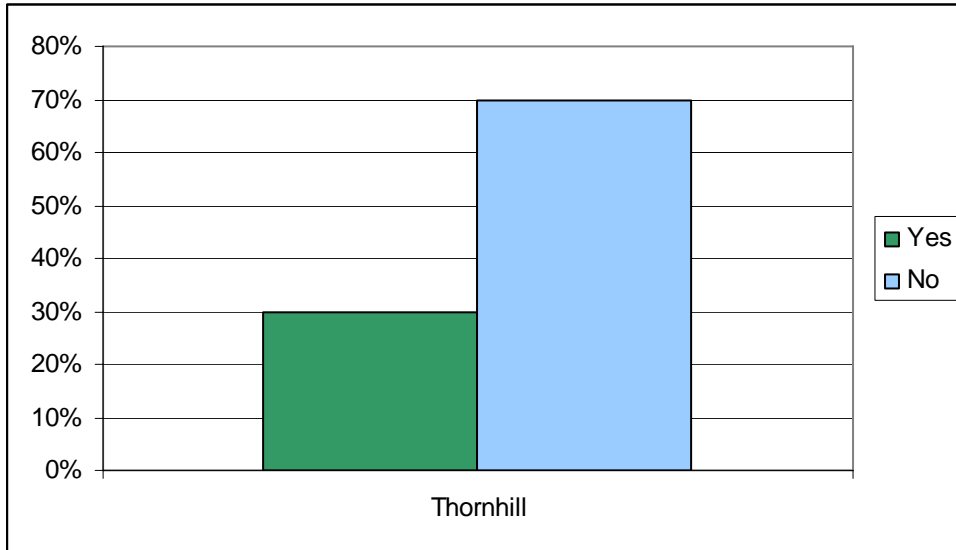
Question 4: Do you agree that the Town should balance residential intensification with the development of additional lower density housing to ensure a diverse housing mix?

Figure 4: Thornhill, n =40



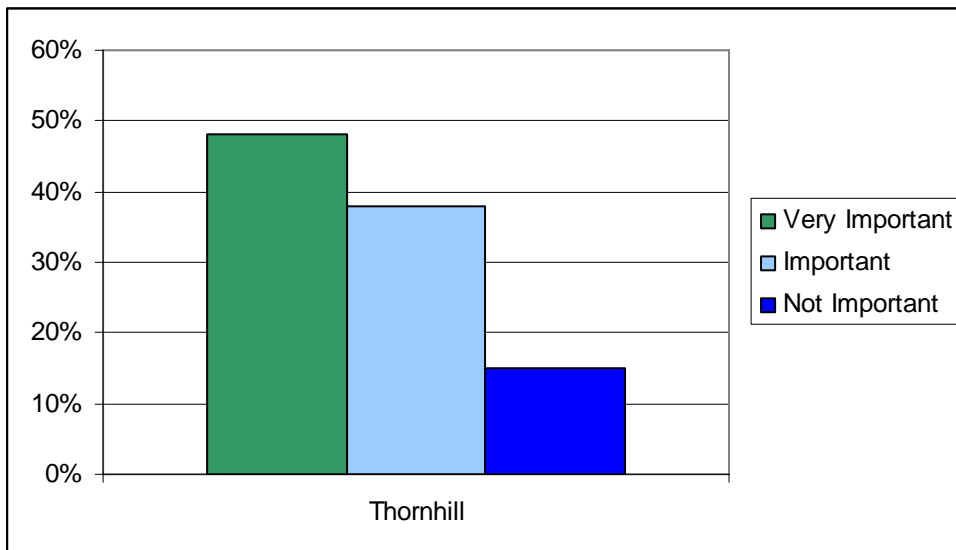
Question 5: Do you agree with expanding the Town's urban area into the Whitebelt to accommodate lower density residential growth?

Figure 5: Thornhill, n =40



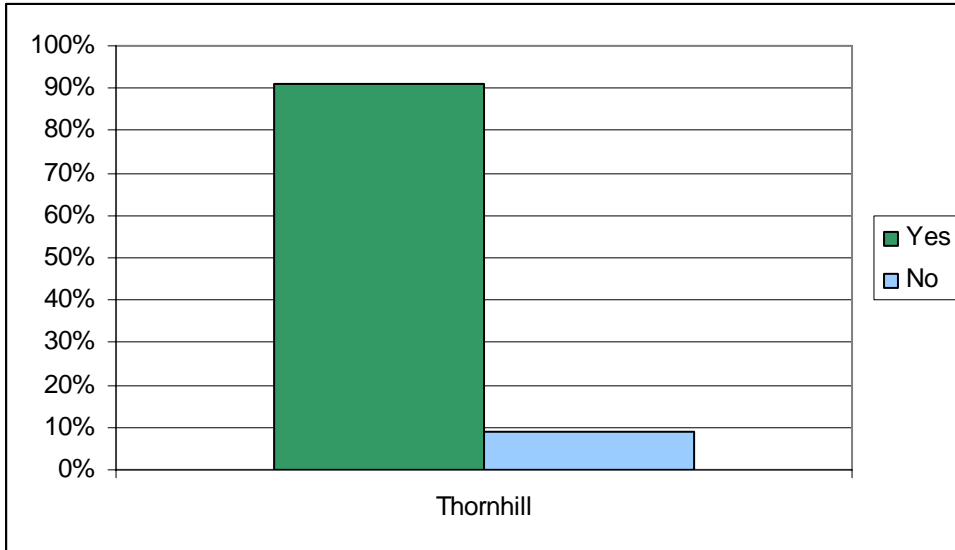
Question 6: How important is it to have a mix of housing types (e.g., single-detached, semi-detached, townhouses, apartments) in new development?

Figure 6: Thornhill, n =40



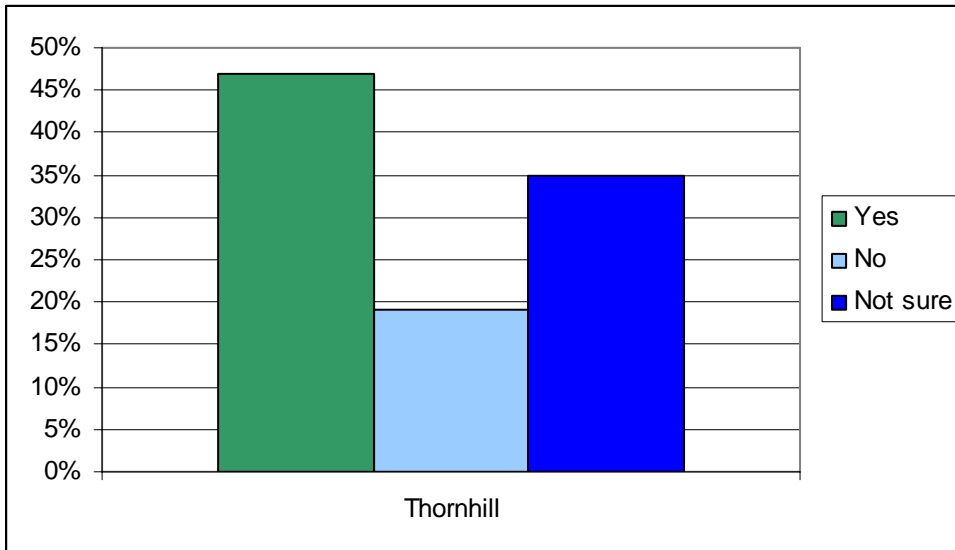
Question 7: Do you agree generally with the approach of distributing residential intensification to key locations with proposed rapid transit services?

Figure 7: Thornhill, n =43



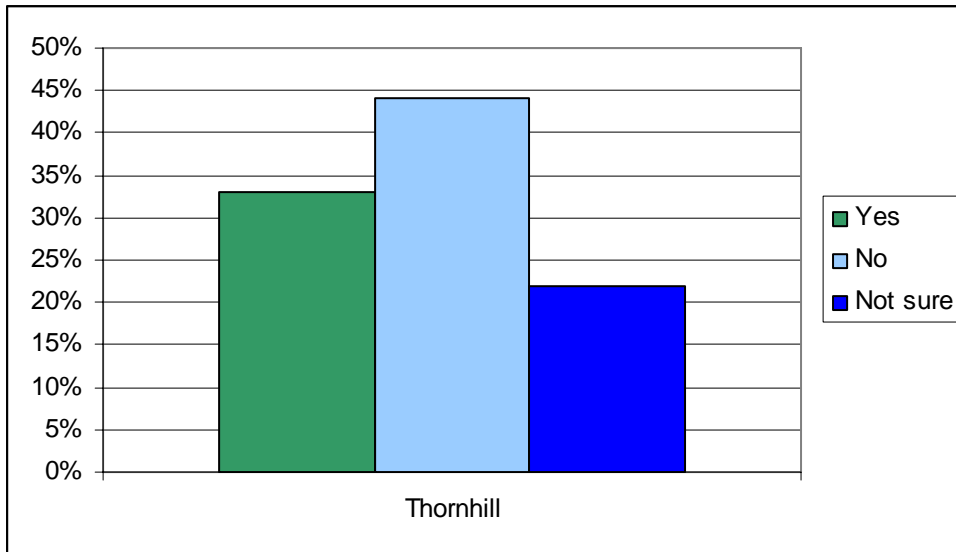
Question 8: Do you agree with the intensification areas identified?

Figure 8: Thornhill, n =43



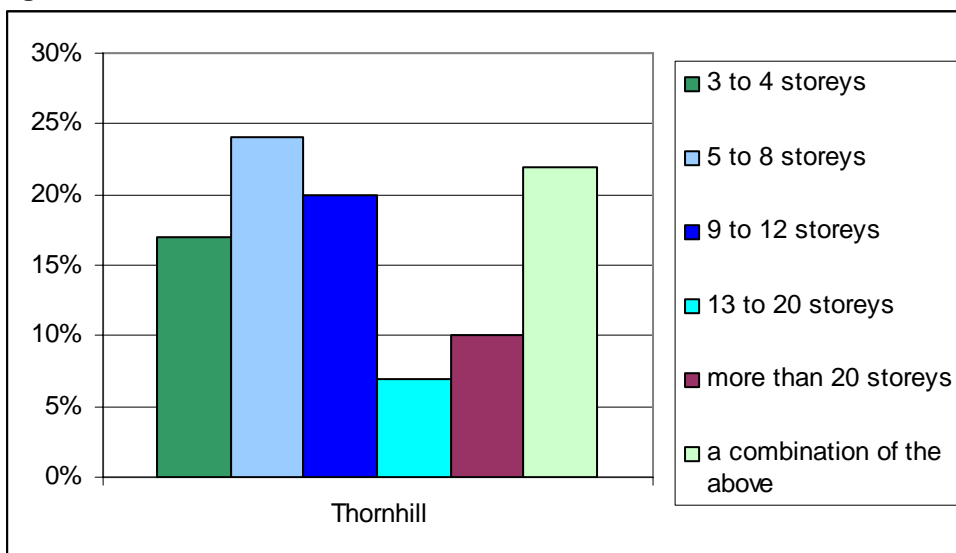
Question 9: Are there any additional intensification areas that should be considered?

Figure 9: Thornhill, n =36



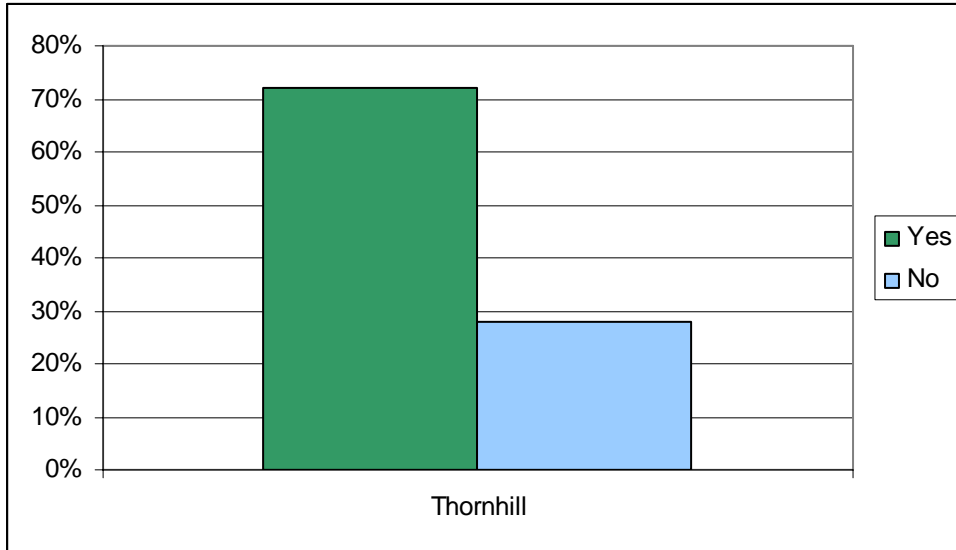
Question 10: If a significant amount of intensification were to be in the form of apartment buildings, what building height would you prefer?

Figure 10: Thornhill, n =41



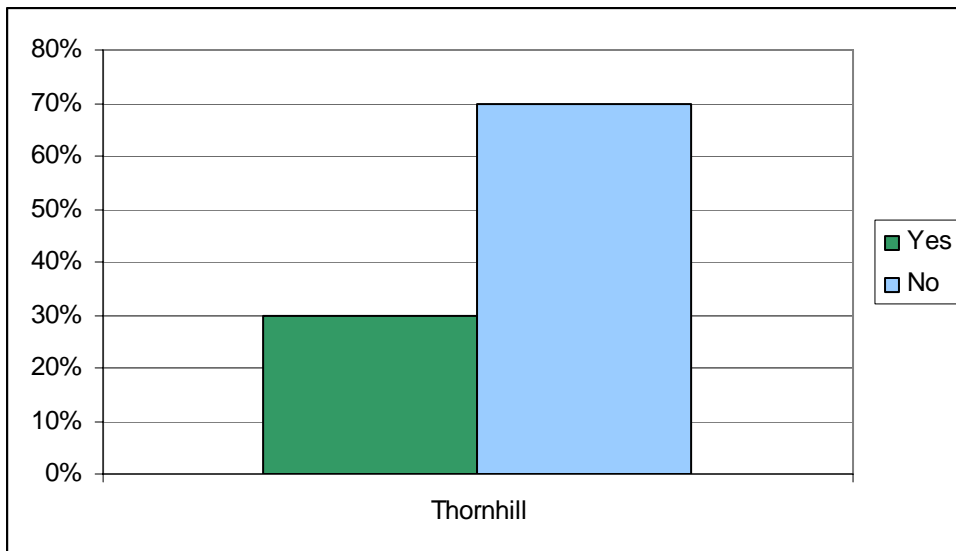
Question 11: Do you agree with reserving land to accommodate employment growth over the long term?

Figure 11: Thornhill, n =36



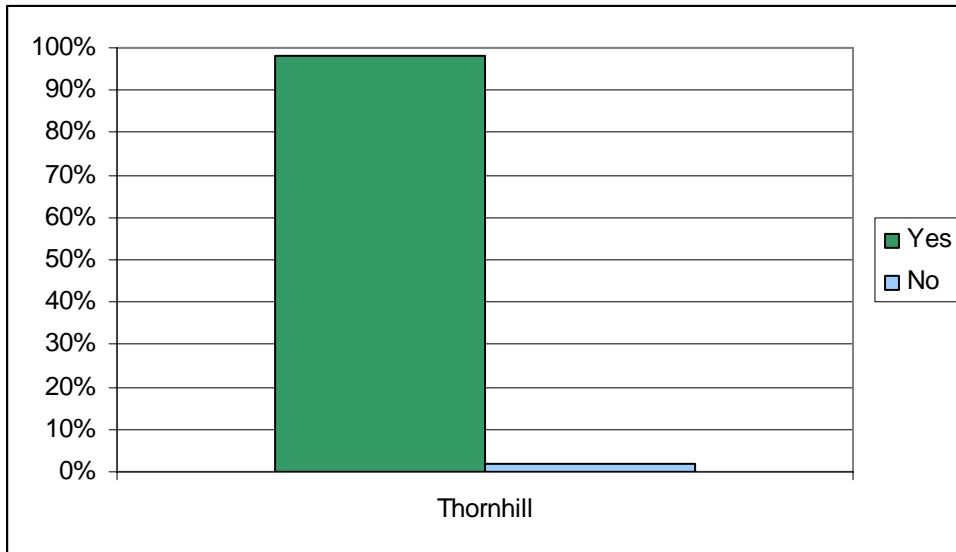
Question 12: Do you agree, that in addition to intensification, employment should be accommodated in the Whitebelt to ensure an adequate supply of land?

Figure 12: Thornhill, n =40



Question 13: Do you support adding more jobs within the current urban area (Settlement Area) through intensification in existing business parks?

Figure 13: Thornhill, n =40



Question 14: Do you support adding more jobs within the current Settlement Area by having some types of employment in new residential development (e.g., ground floor commercial uses in apartment buildings)?

Figure 14: Thornhill, n =41



Presentation – Master Servicing Study (8:30 pm to 8:45 pm)

- Presentation by Allen Wu (Senior Development Engineer, Town of Markham)
 - Update on the Master Servicing Study

The presentation is available on-line at:

http://www.markham.ca/NR/rdonlyres/E210A2C6-5D6A-4C48-AAF1-B3624DB133E8/0/GMS_servicingstudy_090311.pdf.

Questions and Answers**Note: Questions and answers were not recorded verbatim**

Question

What is meant by green roofs?

Answer

‘Green roofs’ refer to the promotion of gardens, planters, soil on roofs to evaporate water to eliminate water going into the stormwater sewer systems.

Presentation – Markham Transportation Strategic Plan (8:45 pm to 9:00 p.m.)

- Presentation by Brian Hollingworth, IBI Group
 - Update on the status of the Transportation Strategic Plan

The presentation is available on-line at:

http://www.markham.ca/NR/rdonlyres/EF429246-6356-4E64-8195-6FB88E22BF7C/0/GMS_transportationplan_090311.pdf.

Questions and Answers**Note: Questions and answers were not recorded verbatim**

Question

Are any of the transportation plans in priority order?

Answer

They are starting to prioritize some of the projects.

Question

What do they mean by Steeles Ave rapid transit?

Answer

This would most likely be a light rail network. Like a “modified street car.”

Question

For roads, accessibility is also a key issue. How do you get to the transit station? We need accessible options to travel through the communities. Please don’t just say walking as people also get around town by using wheelchairs, scooters, etc. They also have to navigate around the Town.

Response

Very good point. That needs to be addressed.

Closing remarks by Amanda Kennedy, DPRA (9:00 p.m.)

At 9:00 p.m., when the meeting was scheduled to end, Amanda Kennedy (DPRA) provided some closing remarks. Participants were welcome to leave, and those that were interested in continuing the conversation were invited to stay longer and ask additional questions of the presenters.

Closing remarks included comments about the

- Workbooks
- Comment forms
- Timeframes for engagement
- Next steps

Additional Questions & Answers (9:00 to 9:30 p.m.)**Note: Questions and answers were not recorded verbatim**

Question

With respect to the available sewer capacity, we have concerns about the current retention system. There have been suggestions that we use raw sewage holding tanks. Is that what the Region means about retention systems? Will we see more of these raw sewage storage tanks?

Answer (Director of Engineering)

There are capacity problems in the Region. The Region is temporarily storing it just to hold it but not to allow for more development. Markham Council has restricted development to 2013 when extra capacity is available.

Question

Have holding tanks been suggested for the Shoppes on Steeles?

Answer (Director of Engineering)

That is one of three options. We have not made comments on any of these three options. I understand that the use of holding tanks is being removed as one of the options.

Question

I agree with the importance and benefits of walking, biking, taking a bus but the reality is that people will still take a car. The plan seems over optimistic, but with good intentions. The reality is that even with fuel prices, we are an oil producing country. We will still be a driving society. I don't know if you are factoring in the use of cars in your plans because people will still use cars.

Answer (Brian Hollingworth)

There have been many investments made in transit. There has been a 17% increase in transit use. VIVA is trying to provide a service similar to cars so that people want to take it.

Question

A lot of things require a vehicle to function (i.e. small businesses).

Answer (Brian Hollingworth)

We are not anti-car. The plan is meant to provide people with options; new sidewalks, grocery stores in the community and making it easier to get to work.

Question

Are you taking into account cost effectiveness when prioritizing transportation options? Some options are very expensive.

Answer (Brian Hollingworth)

Yes, Metrolinx and the Province are looking at this.

Comment

I'm concerned about liveability, i.e. the extremes of intensification/densification, about building at a scale that is not conducive to liveability. Have to change the model of development; can't build lower density development in the Whitebelt.

Answer (Director of Planning)

It wasn't mentioned during the presentation, but the Town of Markham is legislated by the Province to develop all new communities Markham with a minimum of 50 people and jobs per hectare. For example, the Cornell community is 52 residents and jobs per hectare. We want to build new communities with jobs and people in the communities. The developers' proposals are for 30 storey buildings. We have to determine where and if they are appropriate before the applications come in. To be clear, Council has not made the decision to move into the Whitebelt.

Question

With respect to the Planning Act, Section 37 and height and density bonusing: most residents feel that we have enough height and density and we don't want developers to think they can get more. Community members feel this way without higher storey buildings on Yonge Street.

Answer (Director of Planning)

We are looking into the options for Yonge Street. Council has not made a decision yet. We have not used Section 37 provisions in Markham. We want to investigate options because of the benefits to community. We are going to review Section 37 to see what the community benefits might be and if we want to go that way we need to identify community benefits before we use Section 37. The right parameters have to be in place to make that work. The most important thing, with density and bonusing aside, has to be good planning. We are in the process of reviewing Section 37 and options for Markham.

Response

Community benefits are no substitute for good planning. Developers are moving from Toronto to Markham and trying to build bigger and taller buildings that we do not want.

Answer (Director of Planning)

We have to deal with intensification. We need to do some local area studies to see what the community benefits could be. We don't want to get into negotiations with developers without more information. We may have options with Section 37 without compromising good planning. We are learning from Toronto but also looking at other municipalities.

Question

Are Richmond Hill and Vaughan at 52% intensification for development?

Answer (Director of Planning)

We don't have the exact numbers in front of us at this time; but they are both over 40%.

Question

Why are you considering 55% to 60% intensification?

Answer (Director of Planning)

We feel that it is a balanced approach. We have looked at the numbers and we think that is the highest we could go. We are positioned to accommodate growth without serious impacts. We can do 55% to 60% intensification. We want to minimize growing into the whitebelt.

Question

The high transit area is Yonge Street. The developers are drooling at the options. They want the area. Places to Grow did not do this. Put it on paper to ensure protection of the heritage area on Yonge Street.

Answer (Director of Planning)

We want good solid policy to back us up at the OMB [Ontario Municipal Board]. As long as there are areas identified to accommodate the growth. We would win at the OMB [Ontario Municipal Board]. We can say no to developers with 52% intensification as the maximum.

Question

What if the utilities conflict with resident wants/needs? Are there conflicts between what the people want and the utilities need? Are there any planned expansions in identified areas in infrastructure for the future? Are they responding to the needs identified by the residents in terms of location?

Answer (Director of Engineering)

We would not get into the details about where the infrastructure would be located. Capacity is what is being studied. We are not sure what the future needs are to accommodate growth and this is what is being identified.

Question

With respect to the Langstaff development, will the trees stay there?

Answer (Director of Engineering)

Yes they will.

Closing Remarks (9:30 pm)

Amanda Kennedy (DPRA) thanked everyone for coming and welcomed participants to fill out comment forms and pick up workbooks.

Comments:

This section includes hand-written comments that were received after the Community Meeting.

There were 11 comment sheets received.

Comment Sheet #1

Limit number of questions between presentations.

Very informative presentations; maybe shorter to allow more questions.

Up front and candid answers were appreciated; Thank-you.

Comment Sheet #2

Not sure of additional intensification areas but feel it may be possible to spread out more intense housing farther than the few spots I noticed on the map; not that I feel they should be amidst ground level housing areas. I feel some sights can accommodate 20+ storey buildings, but would not like to see all new high density housing be at maximum height.

Comment Sheet #3

I think the growth plan is beneficial to Markham as well as to the other centres being targeted for intensification. Not everyone has the capability to understand how important sustainable development is. We need this plan...it's VITAL!!

Polling was a very effective tool by the way.

Comment Sheet #4

Councillor should encourage growth.

The community is rather uneducated in regards to the issues of sustainability and its related effects. Markham needs to implement an aggressive growth strategy that takes intensification into consideration.

What about vertical agriculture?

Intensification is good!

This plan is vital!

Yonge Street for intensification – well supported by transit

Employment growth? What type of employment?

Comment Sheet #5

Before expanding intensification, when is the City going to repair, up-keep the existing infrastructure (i.e. water pipers, new waste pipes, stormwater problems). Fix what we got before expanding.

Comment Sheet #6

What and how is Shoppes on Steeles being scaled down as you work with the developers? The last plan made was not encouraging. The context of this presentation was very unsatisfactory. I really learned nothing. Your idea of development is just going to end up in the same old suburban nightmare. Your comments about getting people to be able to walk in their communities is a joke.

Case in point to live in German Mills. I can currently walk to Shops on Steeles to do groceries, errands (post office). The plan as in hand now sounded like the retail would be greatly diminished. Thus giving me no choice but to get in my car and drive to what I can currently do walking. Why don't you spend some time getting the Subway extended up Yonge Street. In the end no one wants to want to take a bus in -20 degree temperatures. On top of that more buses equals more pollution, traffic etc.

Your plan for the 'Hy and Zels Plan' (the developer) also sounds like one similar to the Shoppes on Steeles – more people and no infrastructure – this is what it seems to be the trend and your presentation did not/does not address this adequately (traffic, sewers, schools, crime, etc).

Comment Sheet #7

I have lived in Thornhill/Vaughan for 38 years. I am concerned that our community of Uplands in Vaughan will pay a high price with intensification. I believe we should be better informed by our neighbour Markham and the Region. Our community already will get a transit parking lot servicing this project area. I believe money from the developers should benefit the whole area of development areas. I believe the scope of this project should be continually reviewed.

Does anyone question the low level of industry and manufacturing which is need for real economic growth. Uplands should have a voice in the Langstaff gateway intensification area. I am also concerned with the timeline and rush to plan. Why have not the people of our community and the Province had more input if this is the development and growth model we support.

Look at Leslie and Bayview 407. I question that water is really available to support intensification. I do not believe there is enough of a water table for sustainable growth even with water conservation. It will require more water from either Lake Ontario or Simcoe to support this.

Our communities already have water restrictions. Water sustains life it has to be there. I fear intensification will be controlled by developers that will just pay fines if they don't conform to the plans.

As I have been told by both Ministry of Natural Resources and Ministry of the Environment in Ontario our planning process not changed for 50 years. People who live here are irrelevant. Their health and safety etc. This is a real concern.

Comment Sheet #9

Intensification need not be restricted to identified locations.

Comment Sheet #10

We already have a "severe" traffic problem especially "in the winter both in the areas" (unsure if words in quotation marks are correct) at Don Mills & Steeles, therefore intensification is ok to areas where there is no existing problems or a subway exists!!

Comment Sheet #11

We need to protect important pockets e.g. Heritage but the executives of residence groups do not actively seek specific input on concerns at yearly general meetings. These executives represent themselves. They might at times mobilize on a specific issues but not this one.