



Planning for Change

Stantec's Urban Places

For City of Richmond Hill

July 2021

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Purpose:

The role of change in
planning for Richmond Hill's
future

Section 1: Purpose

The role of change in planning for Richmond Hill's future.

City Plan 2041 is based on an in-depth assessment of existing conditions, intensive community engagement, analysis of the impacts of expanded transit access, and multiple other sources of information and perspectives.

Planning for Change documents the role that transformational economic, demographic, environmental, and technological changes will play over the next two decades in shaping Richmond Hill's future.



Managing change is about planning for qualities like enhanced economic opportunity and livability, while preserving neighbourhoods, natural areas and other places the community values.

This “playbook” plays three critical roles in this planning process:

1. Informing the Official Plan Update
2. Providing guidance to Council and Planning Staff to successfully implement the updated Official Plan
3. Adding additional perspective, gained from working with similar opportunities and challenges, to the public and development community in terms of a path to take for planning complete communities.



Dublin Ohio (outside of Columbus Ohio) and Bellevue Washington (outside of Seattle) represent suburbs that decided to focus growth toward lively, walkable, mixed-use centres. Both communities used community-based planning strategies to shape new planning policies that gained wide public support, enhanced livability, and strengthened their competitive position for a greater share of their region’s growing innovation economies.

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User's Guide to Planning for Change

Section 2

User's guide to *Planning for Change*

City Plan 2041 is being prepared by City of Richmond Hill staff with support from consultants. This playbook documents work related to transformational economic, demographic, environmental, and technological changes and how these might influence the planning policy development.

The work was conducted by Stantec's Urban Places for the City and reviewed with City Council, the Official Plan Update Committee, and the Richmond Hill community. It is intended as input into Phase II of the Official Plan Update process, building on work related to Phase I: Define Vision and Urban Structure. Phase II will focus on preparation of Key Directions Report, to be followed in Phase III by preparation of the Official Plan Update in the summer of 2022.

More specifically, this document serves as a playbook for how this Official Plan Update can function as a powerful tool for managing change, over the next two decades, in ways that enhance the Plan's ability to achieve City Council's core priorities for Richmond Hill's future—enhancing:

- A strong sense of belonging
- Balancing growth and green
- Getting around the city
- Fiscal responsibility

The playbook pursues this task by providing data, analysis, and recommendations that support the “Four Pillars” developed City Planning staff to translate Council's priorities into specific City Plan 2041 objectives for policy development and improvement:

- Growing our economy
- Attaining design excellence
- Promoting green and sustainable practices
- Protecting and enhancing the qualities and places we value

The “Four Pillars” (below) translate City Council's priorities (above) into four core objectives to guide planning for City Plan 2041.



Looking beyond Covid-19, the playbook is about “future proofing” City Plan 2041 to empower the Plan to manage change for public benefit. This approach informs each stage of planning for City Plan 2041:

- Setting the Stage—providing participants in the planning process with a sufficient understanding of the forces noted above so that the full community can work together to make informed decisions that promote managing change for community benefit.
- Identifying potential opportunities—and of course challenges (including preserving the valued character of existing neighborhoods)—that these changes pose for the Richmond Hill community.
- Providing recommendations for unlocking these opportunities—and addressing challenges—that extend from specific planning and urban design principles to suggestions for concurrent City planning processes, and implementation strategies.

Ironically, central to future proofing is that the overarching goal for managing transformational change is about building a future that more fully embodies familiar human values—creating policies and places that celebrate the five senses, human scale, individual choice, wellness, sustainability, equity, and of course sharing a sense of community.

From a physical planning perspective this playbook focuses on the places in Richmond Hill: centres and corridors some of which were previously developed for low intensity uses, like industrial and strip commercial uses, in response to past economic trends.

Much of the activities in these centres and corridors, are low intensity uses—like industrial and strip commercial uses that responded to earlier economic realities - are now outmoded. These centres and corridors are well positioned to accommodate the changes addressed above—and a large measure of the city’s growth over the next two decades—in ways that unlock a new era of opportunities for Richmond Hill.

As this playbook addresses the higher densities necessary to unlocking the full measure of opportunity inherent in focusing Richmond Hill’s growth over the next two decades toward outmoded centres and corridors, it does so in the spirit of a mantra first articulated by Urban Land Institute Fellow Maureen McAvey: **“Density without amenity is crowding. Density with amenity is community.”**

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Setting the stage:

Two decades of
transformational change –
2021-2041

Section 3: Setting the stage

Two decades of transformational change – 2021-2041

Today represents a critical point in time to write Richmond Hill's next chapter.

City Plan 2041 offers the opportunity to manage a perfect storm of economic, demographic, mobility, and environmental changes that, if well managed, can unlock significant benefits over the next two decades that are well aligned with the goals expressed by City Council and a wide spectrum of the community. The key is to plan.

*Since the Official Plan was first adopted in 2010, the focus for accommodating growth has shifted to the development of transit-oriented, compact complete mixed-use communities.
(Sketch from Richmond Hills Urban Design Guidelines.)*



Any discussion of change must start with an assessment of the foreseeable impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

While no one can yet know the full scope of these impacts, key emerging trends are visible that will help set the planning context for Richmond Hill and virtually every North American community—largely because these impacts confirm and accelerate trends already well underway before Covid struck, in particular:

- Growing interest in walkable places, particularly that offer access to nature.
- Growing interest in parks, Main Streets, outdoor dining, and similar places to experience shared community.
- The shift toward increased remote work and a corresponding drop in demand for traditional office space.
- The shift from auto-oriented, mass market retail toward “experiential” (unique merchandise, food, locally owned) retail, supported to a far greater extent by residents within walking distance.

While social distancing (above) represented a temporary response to the pandemic, the proliferation of outdoor dining across North America (below)—in warm and cold climates, which celebrates community and amenitizes the public realm, represents a valuable lesson to guide planning for walkable communities going forward. Many cities have changed local regulations to promote outdoor dining.



Section 3: Setting the stage

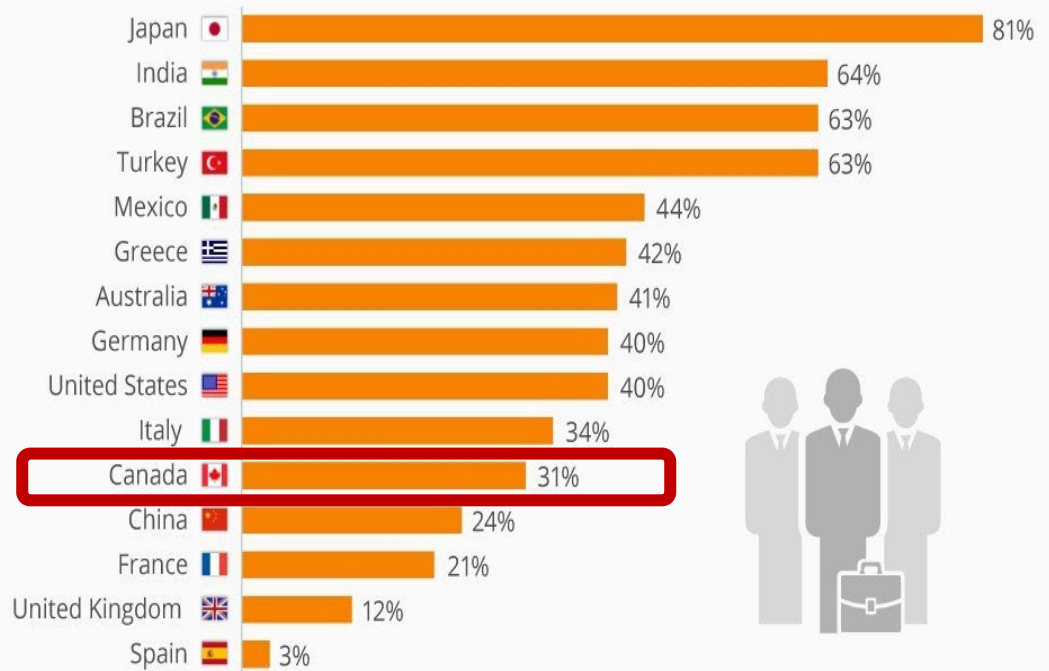
Economy: New Imperative

The Knowledge Economy Drives Growth

Today 70% of North American jobs require some college or equivalent higher education (The Chronicle for Higher Education) and over the next two decades roughly 90% of net new jobs will require this much education or more. In fact, for the first time in history, a majority of North American manufacturing jobs now require more than a high school education. Every major region in North America is competing for educated workers with the skills to attract jobs and investment.

The Countries Facing The Greatest Skill Shortages

Skills shortage as a % of firms with 10 or more employees in selected countries*

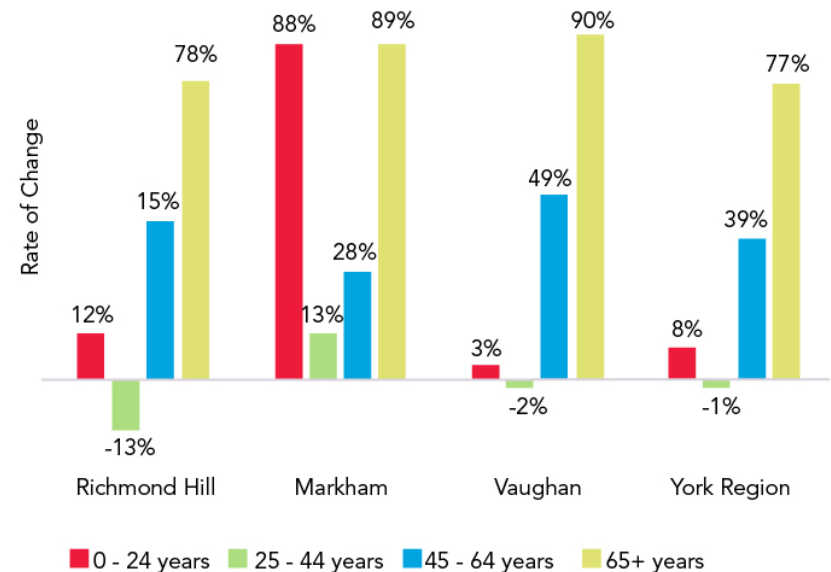


Every region in Canada, including the GTA, is competing for skilled (educated) workers in order to attract knowledge industry jobs and investment. Source: OECD (2018)

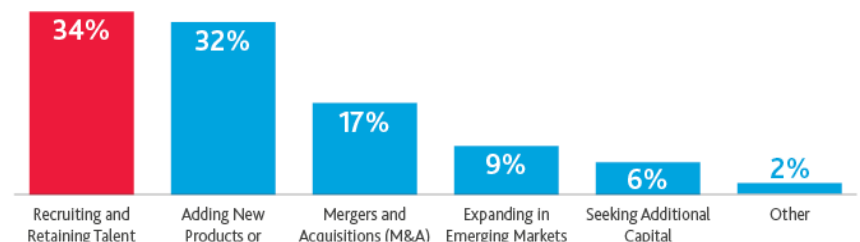
At the same time, an aging population and smaller families are translating into a dramatic slowing in workforce growth across the developed world.

While robust immigration alleviates some of this challenge across much of Canada, the York Region's millennial workforce will grow far more slowly for the next 15 years than it has in recent decades. Data for Richmond Hill points to an actual decline in the millennial population between 2006 and 16. Meanwhile, the developed world is experiencing a talent shortage—demand for educated workers exceeds supply by roughly 10% and this gap is growing. No region in North America, including the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), can meet the demand for this educated workforce, particularly younger knowledge workers. More than 30% of Canadian firms with ten or more employees report that they cannot hire enough educated workers to meet their needs, compared to roughly 40% of similar US firms and similar findings for other developed economies. The result is an intensifying global competition to attract and retain younger “talent”, and jobs and investment increasingly follows this talent.

2006-16 Richmond Hill's millennial population declined...



...as tech increasingly prioritizes recruiting talent to fuel their growth



The shift to virtual work has not fundamentally changed this equation.

Interviews with HR and R&D for the tech and innovation companies that power the knowledge economy point to the growing importance of creating multifaceted live/work/play innovation communities that proactively invite talent to interact whether they work in an office or at home. A recent study of Kanata North, Ottawa's largest innovation cluster, which grew up in a former suburban industrial and office park located outside of Ottawa, pointed to a substantial decline in "innovation productivity" during the pandemic because workers had been isolated from each other and the informal interaction—the "creative collisions"—that represent an essential ingredient for innovation had ground to a halt.



Located just north of Toronto, the City of Richmond Hill business parks, including the East Beaver Creek Business Park, provide a variety of office, warehousing and manufacturing facilities, with easy access to highways and transit services

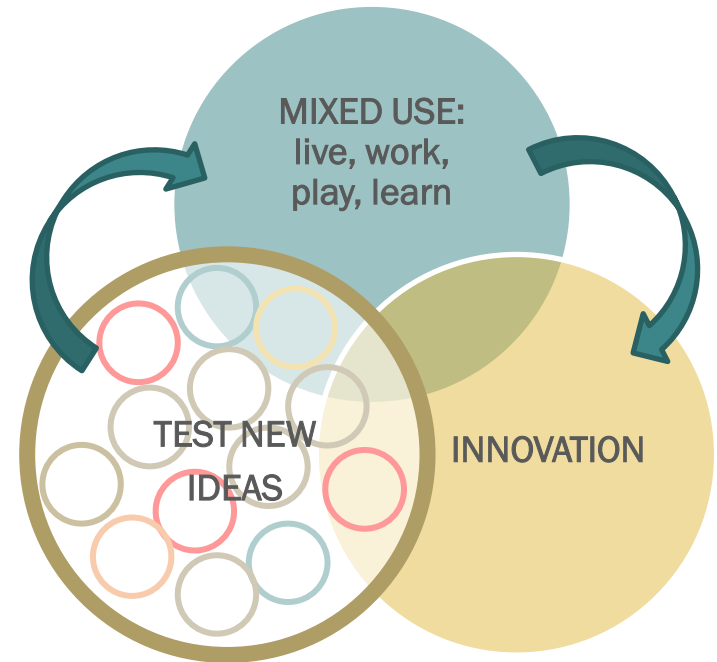
As traditional auto-oriented retail declines in a mall outside of Boston, its parking field is being transformed into a mixed-use, walkable “urban” neighborhood, with strong appeal to a diverse housing market.



As knowledge—particularly innovation—jobs and investment go where they can attract and retain the necessary talent, they are moving to “urban” locations—not necessarily downtowns or close-in city neighborhoods—but denser, walkable, mixed-use, amenitized, and community-rich centres and corridors that support a diversity of work/live/play/learn/innovate lifestyles.

Transit access, and the corresponding ability to be free from auto dependence, is also a major factor in attracting talent.

In fact, Kanata North’s business community is now working closely with the City of Ottawa to produce an Official Plan Update to guide transformation of what is today a large suburban office park into a mixed-use, walkable, amenity-rich—urban—innovation district in which residents and workers alike will not need to depend on their cars.



Kanata North’s R&D and HR Directors worked with Stantec’s Urban Places planners to transform an office park (top) into a lively mixed-use, walkable place to support a 21st century innovation ecosystem (bottom).

Section 3: Setting the stage

Demographics: Emerging opportunity

The great housing mismatch

In the five decades following the end of World War II, families with children dominated household growth across North America and played a determinant role in spurring the explosion of suburban growth in Richmond Hill.

A majority of the of Richmond Hill's housing stock consists of freestanding single-family houses, most lining leafy streets in well-maintained neighborhoods.

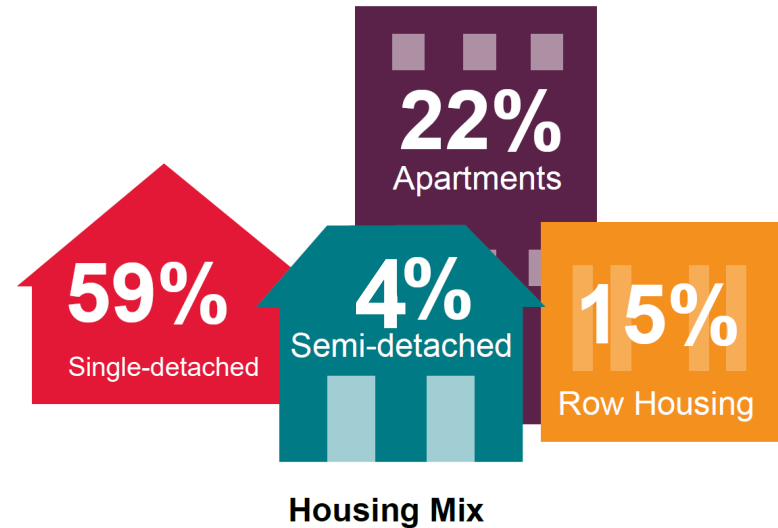


However, in recent years and continuing through the next two decades and beyond, demographic growth is shifting dramatically toward one- and two-person households (without children) and single parents with children, who both bring a very different set of housing preferences.

While immigrant growth represents an outsize share of Richmond Hill's growth, and a larger share of these households will likely include children, market demand is anticipated to shift heavily toward multifamily housing and townhouses over the next two decades.

As changing demographics reshape housing preferences, proximity to walkable Main Streets and transit will replace backyards and highway access as top housing choice criteria. In turn, this shift will provide the development engine that will unlock an unprecedented opportunity for Richmond Hill to create a series of mixed-use, amenitized, community-rich—walkable—centres and corridors that will play a critical role in attracting and retaining talent—and the jobs and investment that will follow.

*Top: Current breakdown of Richmond Hill's housing stock .
Below: Note on demographic shifts and how these shifts are creating demand for more multi-family and town houses in emerging centres and corridors Source: Richmond Hill Affordable Housing Background Study (March 2021) and York Region Foundational Housing Analysis (March 2021)*



Note on changing demographics.

Larger households (3+ members) are the predominant household group in Richmond Hill, however, the number of smaller households (2 members or less) are increasing at a significantly faster rate.

Households led by an individual 25 to 44 years are leaving the city or are delaying household formation.

Of the 273,000 households forecast growth between 2021 to 2051 in York Region 73% are expected to be built as medium and high-density housing—the primary building block for emerging centres and corridors.

Retail is following housing to walkable places.

The rise of online retail, together with the decline in the share of household income earned by the core markets for mass market retailers, is taking a toll on auto-oriented retail.

While malls and strip centres have emerged as the new frontiers for redevelopment, a new generation of mixed-use centres and corridors is providing a market for the revival of walkable “Main Street” retail— largely supported by nearby housing. Food and drink, ranging from various dining options to coffee to beer, have taken centre stage in this Main Street revival, in turn providing a new generation of amenity-based destinations that promote walkability. Roughly 50% of all new retail leases across the US in 2019 were for restaurants and related eateries. While many of these businesses are locally owned, a new generation of national retailers are also capitalizing on this trend. Walkable Main Streets in turn attract more residents, talent, jobs, and investment to redeveloping centres and corridors.

As auto-oriented, mass market retail declines in the face of accelerating online competition, a new generation of suburban “Main Street” retail is rising in response to changing preferences and growing nearby housing. Roughly one to two thousand new housing units, within a five-minute walk, can attract a critical mass of retailers to bring a block of Main Street to life. Bridge Park, redevelopment of former auto-oriented retail and office parks in suburban Dublin Ohio has redeveloped into a new mixed-use, walkable , center.



Aging demographics also present Richmond Hill, and many other suburban communities, with a new challenge. Shrinking household sizes are closely tied to an aging population, and suburbs are aging faster than cities.

Statistics Canada reported in 2017 that the share of Richmond Hill's population represented by folks 65 and older had increased by 47% since 2000 and is projected to continue to grow faster than all other age groups. As growing numbers of homeowners shift to fixed incomes, they become increasingly resistant to increasing property taxes—and the libraries, school, community centres and other public benefits that these property taxes fund. Finding alternative sources of real estate value such as new walkable, mixed-use Main Streets becomes increasingly important—particularly as office and auto-oriented retail investment decline. Similarly, preserving the value of predominantly single-family detached neighborhoods—for example by increasing access to nearby greenspace and new walkable Main Streets—becomes a higher priority.



High value mixed-use centers can provide a significant fiscal benefit to communities seeking to diversify their tax base during an era in which office and retail space growth are both slowing. Above: Redevelopment of Brentwood Town Centre, Burnaby BC has created a high-density, employment and shopping core in a former mid-century shopping mall. Image: Courtesy of Shape Properties

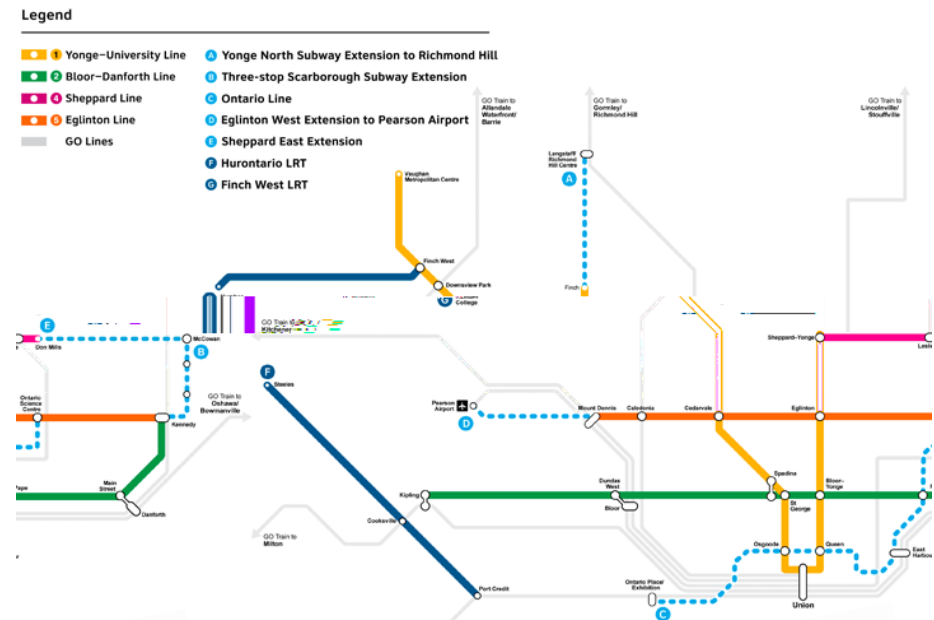
Section 3: Setting the stage

Mobility: Generational opportunities

Growing regional investment in transit is increasing the value of transit for Richmond Hill.

At present, three-quarters of Richmond Hill residents commute out of the city for work, and two-thirds of those employed in the city commute into Richmond Hill.

Both commutes are heavily auto-dependent. In fact, the share Richmond Hill residents who drive to work has increased to 83.3% in 2016, up from 82.2% in 2011. During the same period, the use of public transit by Richmond Hill residents to get to work decreased from 16.4% to 14.6%. These trends correlate to several years of static transit investment in the GTA.



The subway extension to Richmond Hill along Yonge Street will connect emerging centres and corridors directly to the heart of the GTA's economy...and workforce.

Source: Metrolinx

However, over the past decade or so transit investment has been growing and is anticipated to continue to grow - supporting numerous expansions and service improvement projects across the regional transit system.

These investments are about to make a real difference for Richmond Hill. Relevant projects include: the recent roll out of the VIVA bus rapid transit alignment along Highway 7 and the Yonge street corridor; anticipated expansion of GO service to support 15–30-minute departures and a new Bloomington Station; as well as a planned expansion of the TTC Yonge Line to Richmond Hill Centre. Cumulatively, these improvements to the transit system have the potential to tangibly increase transit mode share within the community as well as support denser housing and jobs, specifically within Richmond Hill Centre and nearby lower density employment areas.



Richmond Hill Centre will be a 40-minute ride from Queen and Yonge Street in Toronto, cutting the current travel time roughly in half.

The accelerating pace of new mobility paradigms will bring particular benefits to emerging centres and corridors.

Universal access to automobiles transformed North America in the decades following World War II. The advent of new mobility paradigms—the rapid expansion of shared and micromobility today, followed by connected and then automated mobility over the next 20 to 25 years, is launching a mobility revolution that will increasingly reinforce the “pro-urban” impacts of the extension of transit and economic and demographic changes.

Note: these mobility innovations will not take the place of transit, which is intended for longer-haul trip, but instead enhance the convenience of using transit by providing first and last mile connections that make transit a more inviting mobility choice for a larger number of potential riders.

Shared mobility and micromobility are growing rapidly today.

The rapid growth of shared mobility services (e.g. Uber and Lyft) and micromobility (e.g. bicycles, e-bikes, electric scooters, electric skateboards) over the past decade demonstrates a benefit of the compact critical mass that takes root in centres and corridors.

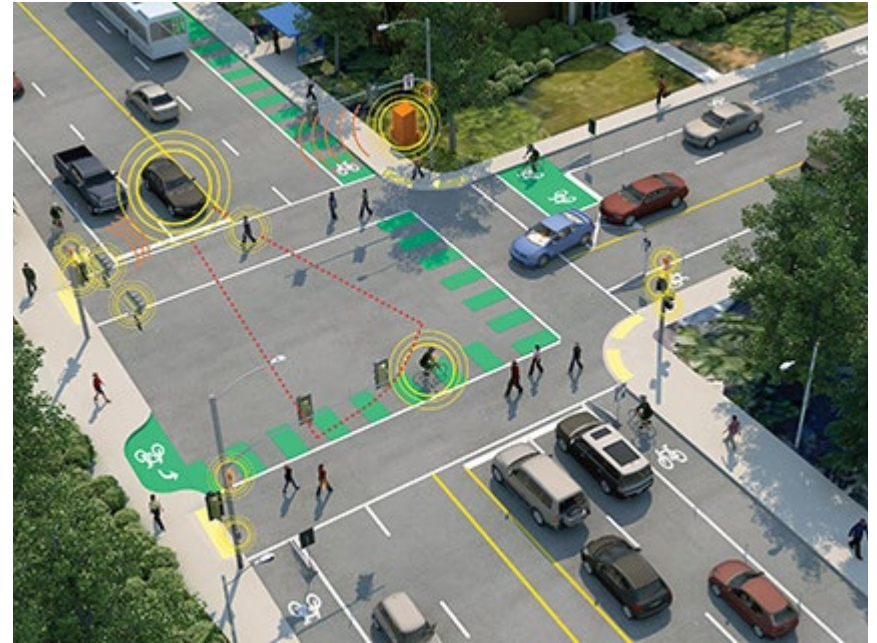
The resulting concentration of people and destinations supports on-demand, low-cost shared services that promote accessibility within and between these centres and corridors. Micromobility in turn enhances access from nearby neighborhoods, expanding the amenities, services, and opportunities to enjoy community for nearby residents.

Connected mobility will be the norm by the mid-2030s.

Noting that North America's automobile fleet turns over roughly every fifteen years, Stantec's Smart Mobility team projects that by the mid-2030s, while fully autonomous mobility will not yet be the norm, the large majority of vehicles on the road in North America will have sufficient on-board connected vehicle technology to enable Richmond Hill to reclaim a significant amount of roadway paving for pedestrians and greening.

This is because these connected vehicles will be able to travel, together with a significantly reduced number of legacy vehicles that lack this technology, in traffic lanes roughly two-thirds the width required for vehicles today.

These vehicles will also be able self-park, and they will park far more efficiently than we park vehicles today—freeing up significant space in existing parking facilities to support future development and reducing one of the major cost burdens of higher density development in centres and corridors—the need for structured parking.



Connected vehicles will not drive themselves, but they will be in communication with each other and do a better job than drivers do today of detecting pedestrians, objects in the road, and other critical information. They will be able to operate in narrower lanes and self-park more compactly than today's vehicles.

Autonomous mobility will become the norm by the mid 2040s.

By the mid-2040s Stantec's Smart Mobility team projects that shared autonomous mobility will be the norm.

While most vehicles on the road are projected to be autonomous by the 2040s, the ability to rely on shared versus owned mobility will significantly reduce annual mobility costs—in effect providing a subsidy for living in denser, mixed-use, walkable—and transit-served—places.

Places that offer the density of people and destinations to support on-demand, low cost, shared autonomous mobility will have a growing competitive advantage as places to live and work— particularly for younger residents and workers, households without kids, and retirees who have all demonstrated a growing preference for environments that support shared mobility and do not require owning a car.



Shared autonomous shuttle were recently tested in Chamblee, Georgia. Similar vehicles have been employed in pilots or under study for multiple suburban locations across North America.

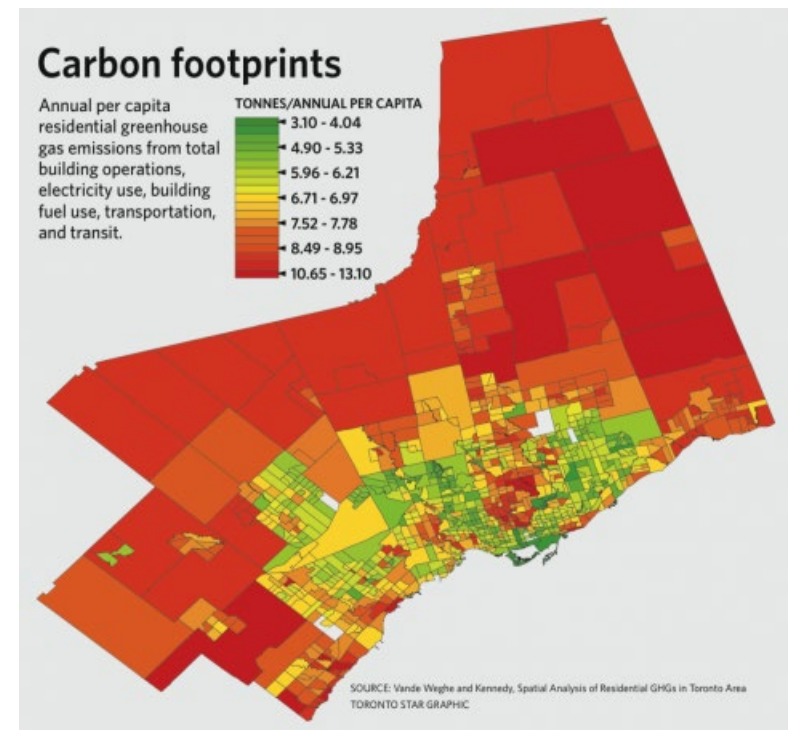
Section 3: Setting the stage

Environment: A growing imperative (and opportunity)

The accelerating pace of climate change is increasing pressures for more sustainable, and resilient, planning and development practices, while also creating new economic opportunities.

Focusing growth toward denser, mixed-use, walkable, and transit-served centres and corridors represents the single most effective strategy that Richmond Hill, or any community, can employ to substantially reduce per capita carbon footprints.

For example, annual per capita greenhouse gas emissions from total building operations, electricity use, building fuel use, and all forms of transportation are 250% to 400% lower in the Greater Toronto Area's core than its low-density, auto-dependent periphery.



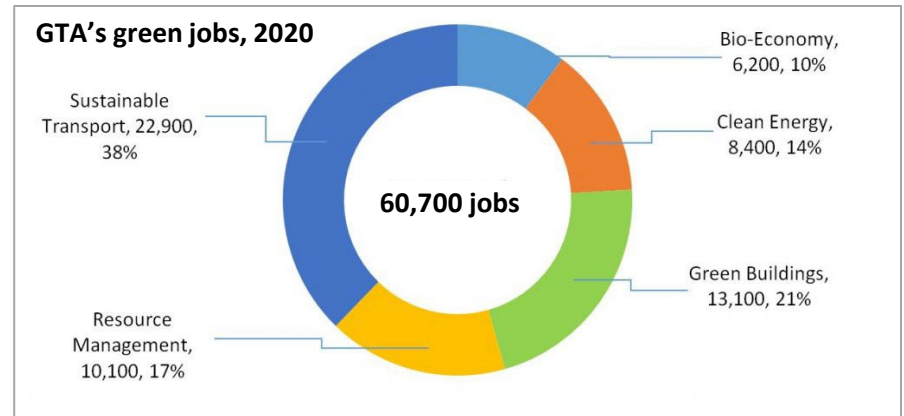
Per capita carbon (and other emission) footprints) decline sharply as density and walkability increase

Focusing development toward these centres and corridors also offers additional significant green benefits, including:

- Expanded opportunities to introduce far more efficient district-based—as opposed to building by building—sustainability strategies for managing energy, wastes, and similar factors that impact sustainability and resilience outcomes.
- Preserving the city’s natural environment by reducing development pressures on undeveloped areas.
- Creating new retail, food, and amenity destinations within walking distance of existing neighborhoods and reducing the need for auto trips.

Combined with high- performance sustainable design measures, these practices can showcase Richmond Hill as a living lab for sustainability.

Richmond Hill already has a strong foothold in the rapidly growing green economy. As the city enhances its ability to attract and retain talent and expands its transit connections to Toronto’s core, it can leverage these collective assets, together with the GTA’s global prominence as a center of green industry jobs and investment, to raise its profile as a center for green industry jobs and investment.



Top. The GTA is a global center for green economy jobs. Below: Facedrive, headquartered in Richmond Hill and named by Investopedia as one of the world’s “Fastest Growing Green Startups of 2020”, represents an example of the potential for Richmond Hill to leverage its location in the heart of the GTA to tap the fast-growing global green economy.

4

Opportunity:

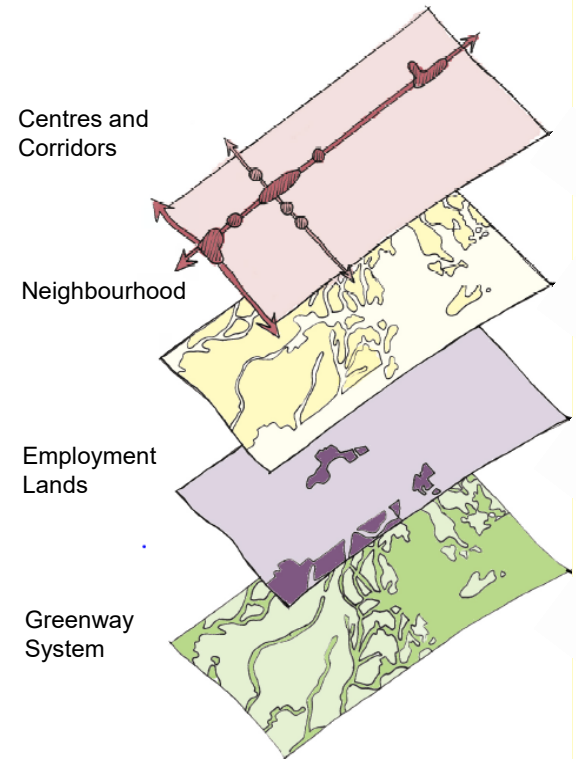
Unlocking Richmond Hill's potential to evolve toward a more complete community

Section 4: Opportunity

Unlocking Richmond Hill's potential to evolve toward a more complete community

City Plan 2041 builds on the strong foundation created by the 2010 Official Plan to leverage the transformative trends noted above toward enhancing Richmond Hill as a complete community which excels as a place that everyone may be able to live, work, play, learn—and increasingly in this age of knowledge economy dominance—innovate.

The 2010 Official Plan, directed growth to areas served by transit while preserving neighbourhoods and the natural and rural environment. City Plan 2041 builds on this foundation to shape more compact and complete communities.



Demographics are destiny

This Official Plan Update empowers Richmond Hill to initiate the process of managing change. The first step, which will trigger a series of additional benefits identified below, is to put housing market changes, closely tied to shifting demographics, to work by building a new generation of higher density, walkable, mixed-use, highly amenitized, and community-rich centres and corridors.

As noted above, today single family detached houses represent 59% of Richmond Hill's housing stock, while a majority of demand over the next two decades is projected to be for the multifamily and townhouse units that represent the core building blocks of mixed-use centres and corridors. This denser housing can support the compact critical mass of housing necessary to support a diverse mix of lively restaurants, shops, and similar amenities in these centres, which can line new walkable streets and be grouped around lively public squares.

Knowledge industry jobs and investment power economic growth and follow talent.

These vibrant places in turn significantly enhance Richmond Hill's competitive position in the region's rapidly growing knowledge and innovation economy by providing the live/work/play environments that attract and retain the growing educated workforce—talent—which is essential to attracting knowledge and innovation economy jobs and investment.

Nor is this an elitist vision for Richmond Hill's future. Repeated studies demonstrate that a growing knowledge and innovation economy is critical to expanding job opportunities for workers with a wide spectrum of skills. For example, the City of Buffalo projects that each knowledge industry job generates five additional jobs—in many cases for folks whose traditional jobs are disappearing.

Has the pandemic changed this equation?

It has not.

As urban observer Richard Florida has noted, while the combination of record low mortgage rates and the increased acceptance of remote work have triggered long-planned moves to nearby single-family neighborhoods (primarily by households with kids) in some regions, the long-term demographic trends and related housing market shifts that strongly support focusing growth toward intensive mixed-use centres and corridors—in cities and suburbs alike—remain firmly in place. And, in turn, explaining why “Big Tech” companies like Amazon, Google, Microsoft and Apple have invested heavily in Manhattan office space during the pandemic. Amazon’s vice president of work force development, Ardine Williams, told the New York Times that “talent attracts talent...[and] will continue to attract diverse professionals from around the world.”

If anything, the pandemic has accelerated the knowledge and innovation economies’ move from suburban office parks to urban innovation districts.

As noted urban economist and placemaker James Lima has noted “Capital (financial) follows talent (human capital) follows place.” As a case in point, take note again of the Kanata North innovation cluster’s R&D and HR directors. Asked for their goals for Kanata North’s future, they advocated with one voice for rapid transformation of their low-density suburban office park setting into a series of higher density, walkable, mixed-use—community-rich—centres and corridors. Even as their companies shift to more hybrid work models, these directors stress the growing importance of locating their companies in the midst of a higher density walkable, integrated live/work/play environment that attracts and retains talent, promotes the informal creative collisions that power innovation, nurtures the next stage of knowledge industry growth.

Section 4: Opportunity

Potential benefits

Focusing growth toward these centres and corridors, particularly when these places will offer access to transit, unlocks a series of benefits—described on the following pages—that contribute to building a more complete community—all achieved without touching a blade of grass in the city's existing neighborhoods,



Investment in the ION LRT in Kitchener-Waterloo has helped to unlock significant transit-oriented development potential along the LRT corridor while supporting more sustainable travel throughout the region.

Take advantage of the ability of critical compact mass in centres and corridors to support a new generation of amenity-rich walkable streets and squares lined with “third places”—the restaurants, cafés, breweries, and similar places in which people can gather and enjoy a sense of shared community.

Note that roughly 1,000 new housing units within a five-minute walk can bring a block of “Main Street” third places and unique retail to life. These amenity-rich centres and corridors would not only offer the quality of life sought by a growing share of the housing market over the next two decades, but also serve as a magnet for talent that in turn attracts jobs and investment. In addition, these centres and corridors will offer walkable, amenity-rich destinations for nearby existing neighborhoods.

Suburban Arlington Virginia focused intensive development around new Metro transit stations, stepping development down toward adjacent residential neighborhoods while providing sufficient density to support a new “Main Street” environment and walkability that connect these neighbourhoods to the Metro stations



Attract jobs to Richmond Hill.

While demand for traditional office space is far less certain following the pandemic, less office space does not translate into fewer jobs.

It translates into more people working from home or using hybrid models. Focusing growth toward walkable centres and corridors will make Richmond Hill into more of an economic center and a place in which a larger share of residents will also choose to work.

Shift new development away from places that participants in the planning process have said they want to preserve:

- -- Existing primarily residential neighborhoods.
- -- Natural and currently undeveloped areas.
- -- Other valued (i.e. landmark) places in Richmond Hill.

Expand housing options for residents to age in the community...

Particularly in places within a five-minute walk of a variety of retail and services, in addition to transit.

Expand affordable housing options for people of all ages and backgrounds...

By leveraging higher density mixed-income, mixed-use development in these centres and corridors.

Taking advantage of the fiscal benefit that higher density, mixed-use, centres and corridors offer to enhance Richmond Hill's tax base—

Richmond Hill's ability to focus growth toward higher value, mixed-use centers and corridors represents a significant opportunity to tap into new sources of revenue to support existing and planned investment in transit and transportation, water and wastewater services and management, parks and recreation facilities, trails and so much more. A stronger fiscal position also strengthens Richmond Hill's resilience and ability to adapt during a period of accelerating climate, economic, technological and other changes.

Expanding the amount and diversity of Richmond Hill's green and other public spaces.

Well planned, emerging centres and corridors will grow greener as they grow denser, creating a new generation of more intimate squares and greens enlivened by nearby retail, entertainment, cultural and community spaces.

Improving the trajectory of Richmond Hill's environmental performance.

Focusing growth toward transit-served, mixed-use centres and corridors, which promote more walking and generate far fewer auto trips than traditional auto-oriented neighborhoods, means that this growth will result in lower per capita carbon footprints. Denser, mixed-use, development also offers opportunities to share energy and waste operations, which further reduces environmental impacts.

Promoting public health by expanding walkability

Larry Frank, widely respected for his research for the US Centers for Disease Control, has reported widely on the health impacts of growing auto-dependency. He reported in the Journal of the American Planning Association that while the health impacts of increased air pollution and other environmental impacts generated by growing traffic are major contributors to an increasing array of health challenges, the most direct correlation between disease and mobility is auto-dependency and a corresponding reduction in walking.

He cites research demonstrating that each additional hour spent in a car per day is associated with a 6% increase in the odds of being obese, while each additional kilometer walked per day (a 10 to 20-minute walk for most folks) was associated with a 4.8% reduction in the odds of being obese. Obesity and inactivity both increase the risk of a series of common chronic diseases.

Has the pandemic reduced value of these potential opportunities?

It has not.

In an April 2021 article for *The Architect's Newspaper*, noted urban observer Richard Florida argues that while factors like the pandemic and the rise of remote work have challenged urban places, “We have a once-in-a-lifetime, no, once-in-a-century opportunity, to build our communities, our cities, back better. We are beginning a fundamental reset in the way we work and the way we live and the way we shop and how we go about our everyday lives.”

The pandemic triggered new interest in outdoor dining in Richmond Hill and nearby communities—a trend that can continue to enrich emerging centres and corridors.



5

Recommendations:

Managing change for
community benefit

Section 5: Recommendations

Managing change for community benefit

As Richmond Hill plans for managing transformational economic, demographic, environmental, and technological changes over the next two decades, it is critical to re-emphasize that transformation is about shaping a community that embodies core human values.

Central to realizing these values are planning and urban design strategies that support these values and policies and processes that ensure that these strategies are fully achieved and that the benefits these strategies unlock are shared inclusively and equitably across the entire community.

Top: A series of transit-served centres along Wilson Blvd in Arlington VA within a short walk of nearby single-detached housing, neighbourhoods.

Bottom: These centres accommodate a diverse mix of restaurants, cafés, and shops serving these neighbourhoods while also providing alternative forms of housing.



Planning for Richmond Hill's re-emerging centres and corridors requires integrating multiple perspectives.

A wonderful 1920's tree-lined Main Street we often envision will not come to life without sufficient nearby density to support 21st century shops and cafés. Achieving density requires a community engagement process that fosters a genuine understanding of density's benefits and makes clear how traffic, building height, and other perceived costs will be managed. Strong markets cannot unlock positive change without political support that empowers local government to partner with the development community to create the walkable streets, squares, parks and similar infrastructure of walkability. And a new mixed-use, walkable, amenity-rich centre or corridor will not be worth the significant necessary investment of energy, capital, and political capital if the result does not constitute a welcoming heart for the entire Richmond Hill community.

Hence these recommendations focus on the centres and corridors toward which City Plan 2041 focuses growth and change. Where relevant, this playbook will note how planning and urban design strategies and related policies and processes addressed below pertain to those other parts of Richmond Hill whose character and quality is already well-established, but the direct focus will be the centres and corridors ripe for transformational change.

The following recommendations recognize that the guiding planning and urban design approach for much of Richmond Hill—its established neighborhoods, treasured history, and natural open spaces—is to preserve and protect these places in ways that ensure that the forces for change are managed to preserve qualities already well understood, strongly supported and in place.

The Young and Bernard Key Development Area with large vacant parcels and commercial parking lots represents an opportunity to create a mixed-use centre with walkable connections to the adjacent neighbourhoods.



Section 5: Recommendations

Building a foundation

Focusing growth to the City's Centres and Corridors begin to unlock opportunities that are offered by the change discussed in the preceding sections of this Playbook. To capitalize on those opportunities and achieve the City's vision, three major implementing actions need to be taken:

1. **Create** public/private partnerships that leverage private market investment to achieve important community benefits.
2. **Promote** compact critical mass that supports lively streets and public spaces as destinations for the entire community.
3. **Enact** policies that ensure development expands innovation, economic opportunity, and social equity.

The following pages discuss these actions and their relevance for Richmond Hill's future.



Amazon's proposal to reshape suburban Pentagon City development in Arlington Virginia utilizes funding partnerships with local government together with compact critical mass to transform an auto-oriented mall and office complex into a new mixed-use, walkable Arlington neighborhood. A robust equity agenda, which was negotiated with the developer and is formally recognized as a requirement for public investment, combines affordable housing with workforce readiness and job training initiatives. This equity agenda extends the benefits of this new centre to the full spectrum of the Arlington community.

Public/private partnerships are central to transforming development into community building.

Without a strong market foundation, transformative redevelopment is not feasible.

Today and for the foreseeable future, this market is driven by housing and flourishes when this housing is developed in a mixed-use environment that also includes retail, jobs, arts, and other uses. However, the market can rarely create all the essential elements that build a community. Public investment may be essential to help pay for the walkable streets, new squares and green public spaces, innovative green technology, and similar components of the “civic infrastructure” which ensures that centres and corridors emerge not as privatized enclaves but 21st century neighborhoods and districts that enrich all of Richmond Hill.

This public funding should not constitute grants. Instead, it can represent prudent investments that unlock Richmond Hill’s ability to take a leadership role in leveraging demographic and economic transition to create significant economic and fiscal as well as civic value. Redevelopment increases both the assessed value per square foot and the density of this development, generating a compound increase in fiscal value. These investments continue to pay rich dividends over time that benefit the entire community.



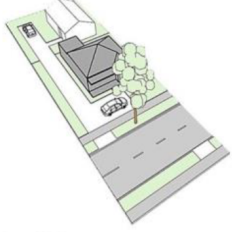
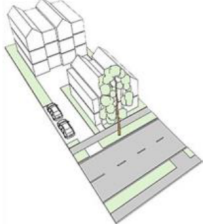
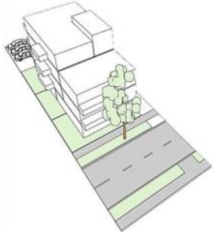
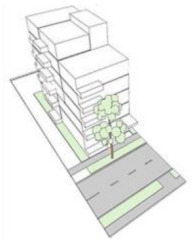

Amazon’s proposal for development of Pentagon City includes cultural facilities, community spaces, pedestrian “streets” that break up the megablock and a public park that spirals up the outside of a new meeting facility.

Compact critical mass ensures that these centres and corridors accommodate enough people and jobs to support transit and to bring them to life as places that enrich all of Richmond Hill:

The table to the right suggests minimum threshold densities, within a 500 to 800 meter radius of transit stops, that are necessary to support and justify various forms of transit, based on experience from across Canada. Many of the centres and corridors addressed in the OPU are far smaller than this and require higher densities to avoid putting pressure on nearby, far lower density, traditional neighborhoods.

Note that while key threshold are required for transit, they also support broader forms of vitality. Thresholds of about 72 units per hectare (similar to that required for BRT or LRT) represents the minimum threshold for bringing a block of a walkable Main Street to life, Greater densities will be required to support a lively new public realm of parks and public squares, create a critical mass of mixed-income housing—and provide as many folks as possible the opportunity to live and work near transit, and achieve similar goals.

The MTO's density thresholds to support transit service.

TRANSIT SERVICE TYPE	AVERAGE DENSITY THRESHOLD	WHAT'S IT LOOK LIKE?
Basic Transit Service (One bus every 20-30 minutes)	22 units per ha /50 residents & jobs combined	Predominantly 1-2 storey detached and semi-detached units 
Frequent Transit Service (One bus every 10-15 minutes)	37 units per ha /80 residents & jobs combined	Predominantly 2-3 storey townhomes 
Very Frequent Bus Service (One bus every 5 minutes)	45 units per ha /100 residents & jobs combined	Predominantly 3-4 storey apartment or stacked townhomes 
Dedicated Rapid Transit (BRT or LRT)	72 units per ha /160 residents & jobs combined	Predominantly Mid-rise (between six and 8 storey) mixed-use and/or apartment buildings 
Subway	90 units per ha /200 residents & jobs combined	Predominantly High-rise (above 8 storey) mixed-use and/or apartment buildings 

These centres and corridors, which offer so much promise as engines of innovation and economic opportunity, must also be engines of equity that offer greater opportunity to the full spectrum of the Richmond Hill community.

Inclusion and equity do not happen naturally. While Richmond Hill already maintains a strong commitment to affordable housing, a full commitment to inclusion and equity will require robust public and private partnerships to address, at a minimum:

Support entrepreneurs and small businesses who can bring unique diversity and richness to an emerging Main Street, but who will need financial, training, and often other forms of assistance to launch successful businesses in an environment characterized by high development costs and corresponding business rents. Among the many rewards is an environment that represents the broader diversity—and creative energy—of all of Richmond Hill.

Expanded workforce readiness and training

initiatives—specifically geared to the growing knowledge and innovation economy opportunities these centres and corridors will attract and nurture. Rich in talent and amenity, these dense new environments are particularly attractive to tech and innovation companies. However, without proactive, funded, initiatives to expand workforce readiness and training, this economic opportunity is restricted to folks with access to higher education. With these initiatives, these places become engines of economic equity that benefit the full spectrum of the community.



The Bathurst Street and Highway 7 area presently hosts a VIVA bus rapid station, and in the future will also host an interregional 407 Transitway station. When redevelopment of the current golf course and surrounding area is proposed, the resulting centre can offer businesses and residents the benefit of excellent regional transit accessibility.

Section 5: Recommendations

Planning and urban design strategies for targeted centres and corridors

**1. PLAN FOR GENUINE WALKABILITY—
the essential first step toward
achieving the fundamentals of
complete community—enhanced
livability, economic opportunity,
public health, sustainability, and
community:**

Start with the basics.

Walkable routes are tree lined, well-lit at a pedestrian scale, and rarely require pedestrians to cross more than four lanes of automobile traffic. Ideally, walkable streets are complete streets that accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists and other micromobility, and if appropriate transit in addition to automobiles and trucks.

Invite walkability in every season.

Winter cities cannot afford to take winter off, and Canadian cities are particularly adept at inviting people to gather in public places during cold and snowy months. Edmonton, for example, has adopted the mantra “climate is our ally” and treats winter as an opportunity to reconnect with the fun and whimsy of childhood. In warm months, while the shade of trees and awnings is welcome, water features—particularly those that invite children of all ages to play—represent one of the most effective ways to attract people during warm and humid months.

Left: Early infill development at Kanata North (reemerging as a walkable urban innovation district in the suburbs of Ottawa) focuses on creating a walkable winter environment
Right: New active retail and restaurants added as “liner development” in front of existing 1970s office building.



Provide the programmed destinations, within a five-minute (400 meter) walk, that invite people to walk.

The basics set the stage, but people are far more likely to walk if they are purposely heading to a destination. And most people are likely to head to this destination if it is within a five-minute walk. A walkable Main Street, lined with retail (including restaurants, cafés, bars) tops the list of walking destinations. Other uses that animate the street—artists’ work/sell spaces, dance studios, and similar activities—can help bring a street or public space to life and draw pedestrians. And of course, other uses that are integral to daily life—jobs, schools, parks and recreation and similar activities also invite people to walk. Compact critical mass that collects as many destinations as possible within a five-minute walk is the most effective tool for promoting walkability.



Develop “walkable density”, sufficient to deliver the market necessary to support these programmed destinations.

As noted above, achieving the right densities, within a five-minute walk, is generally central to attracting the critical mass of retailers necessary to bring a block of walkable Main Street to life. While retail strongly benefits from a mix of nearby jobs, housing, and other uses—for example cultural attractions, residents within walking distance spend significantly per capita than office workers or other potential patrons. While artists and cultural uses that do not require market support can help enliven a Main Street, a critical mass of housing within a five-minute walk represents the starting point for creating a Main Street, square or similar active retail destination.

Encourage a mix of rental and for-sale housing—

Rental housing significantly reduces the time required to achieve the critical mass of residents required to bring walkable Main Streets to life. In turn the more rapidly a new centre or corridor develops a vibrant public realm, the more rapidly it becomes competitive for for-sale housing and other uses.

New walkable centre, Rockville MD (a suburb of Washington DC) mixes housing, office, and a new public library to support walkable retail



Promote “walkable design”.

Putting in place the basics, programming, and sufficient density establishes the foundation for creating walkable centres and corridors represents the science, getting design right represents the magic. Once the basics are in place—trees, lighting—the design mission for the public realm is to create a distinctive character that conveys its unique qualities and personality. Each new Main Street, square or similar destination place is another important building block for Richmond Hill’s composite public realm.

Each place should celebrate its own special character—is it primarily intended to attract people during the day or at night? Does it offer the opportunity to celebrate a particular part of Richmond Hill’s diversity mosaic? Does it make innovative use of public art, including the work of local craftspeople, or host performances? There are many special qualities to celebrate. For buildings, and the activity that spills out of buildings, the message is much simpler: are building façades sufficiently transparent so that the activity within is visible and animates the public realm and, where possible, can this activity (dining, shopping, arts) spill out into the public realm to actively engage passersby?



Walkable design mixes inviting shops, restaurants, and similar places whose visible character and spirit animate the public realm together with activity, such as sidewalk dining, that spill outside and directly engages passersby.

A note on getting walkable density right

Start with achieving sufficient density to attract a critical mass of retailers to set up shop, but then quickly move on to how buildings meet the public realm. The right programming—ice cream, coffee, beer, unique apparel or housewares, art, and/or other uses that stimulate the five senses and animate a sidewalk, square or park—represents an essential foundation. Allowing these activities to spill out into the public realm when the weather is right, tangibly enhances the public realm’s experiential quality. With the right density and programming, then design can do its job.



Bridge Street District, a new centre in suburban Dublin Ohio, hosts a weekly farmer's market.

Planning and urban design strategies

2. PROMOTE CONNECTIVITY that reinforces and expands the value of walkability and fosters 15-minute communities.



5-minute immediate neighborhood

Proximity to many of the services and amenities that we use several times a week, for example a local Main Street featuring a variety of food/coffee/beer options and small parks that promote incidental meetings with friends and a chance to enjoy a sense of community, along with gyms, daycare, barbershop, and other services that define neighborhood convenience.

10-minute extended neighborhood

Amenities and services that we are likely to use regularly or would not necessarily expect to find in our immediate neighborhood, for example a supermarket, schools, specialty shopping.

15-minute city

Destinations that are integral to our lives but require a larger catchment area to support, for example work, major parks and recreation, cultural life, a library, and civic life.

Paris' 15-minute initiative. A 15-minute walking city supports a lifestyle that offers multiple choices for living, working, playing, and innovating. It starts with a 5-minute neighborhood that provides a rich sense of community.

...and micromobility.

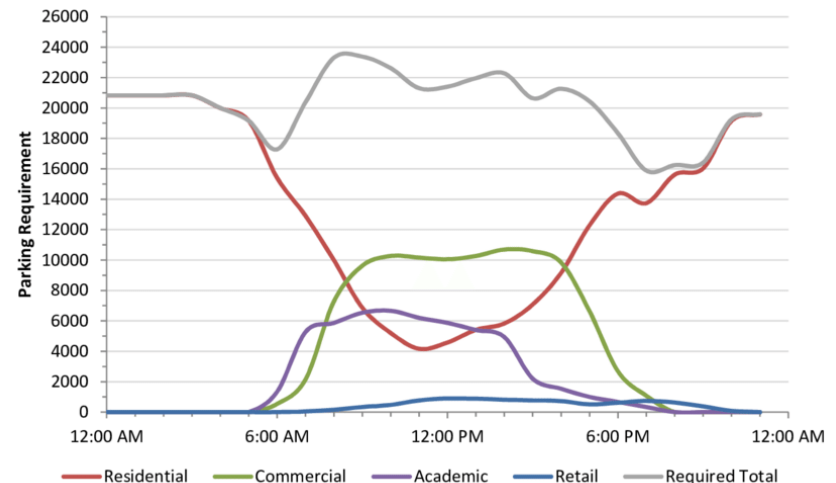
Growing use of bicycles, e-bikes, electric scooters, electric skateboards in practice has not reduced the importance of compact critical mass or slowed interest in living or working in highly amenitized walkable places. Instead, the growth of micromobility has increased access to mixed-use, walkable centres and corridors from nearby traditional neighborhoods and other nearby places—transforming these new higher density environments into amenities that enhances quality of life for the surrounding community.

Promote “park once” development.

The Victoria Transport Policy Institute (VTPI) reports that for suburban and lower density urban communities the number of parking spaces can readily exceed the number of registered vehicles by a factor of five or more.

In addition, VTPI estimates that suburban off-street parking spaces require roughly twice as much square footage as their “compact urban” counterparts. Compact, mixed-use centres and corridors that offer multiple live, work, shop, play and other destinations within a short walk enable park once policies that significantly reduce costs—in terms of dollars and land—required to support growth. More people walking—and stopping at local businesses as they travel from one destination to the next, represents a second benefit.

*Left. Examples of popular forms of micromobility.
Right. How different uses can share the same 100 parking spaces based on their different peak requirements. Locating these uses within a five to ten-minute walk of each other further reduces the amount of parking required..*



Make transit the handmaiden of walkability.

Most people will readily walk five to ten minutes to reach transit for “amenity” trips to shop, visit a restaurant, enjoy a park, or to reach a similar destination. Work and similar “essential” transit trips will support a longer walk—generally around 15 minutes. In effect, transit plays a significant role in enabling people to walk because the alternative convenient transit access is reliance on multiple vehicle trips.

Ratehub.ca demonstrates the financial benefit of walkable access to transit. The site reports that the typical cost to own and operate a vehicle in Canada tops \$11,000 per year. If transit access can enable a household to own one less vehicle, transit serves as a significant subsidy for living in or near a transit-served centre or corridor. From a different perspective, walkability defines the development benefits of transit. The most significant development impacts associated with transit generally occur within a five-minute walk from the station and drop off considerably beyond a ten-minute walk.

The Viva transit stop enabled car-free access to Richmond Hill’s main north-south and east-west spines—and to other nearby walkable destinations.

Source: York Region Transit

Plan for mobility innovations.

As noted above (Setting the Stage), the growth of shared, connected, and then autonomous, mobility over the next 20 to 25 years will usher in a period of rapidly evolving mobility paradigms that in turn will have significant impacts on Richmond Hill's growth and development—along with every other community across North America and much of the developed world. While much remains unknown about these paradigms, Stantec's smart mobility group has identified a series of likely impacts that should shape planning today. The most important message? Well planned and managed, these new paradigms should reinforce the opportunities for Richmond Hill noted above.

Shared autonomous vehicles ("robo-taxis") are currently being tested across North America, including an emerging suburban center in Chamblee Georgia



Promote policies that minimize the need to invest in expensive structured parking.

The growing use of shared mobility services is already cutting parking demand in urban cores for hotels, office buildings, and many other uses. The amount of space required to meet parking requirements for emerging centres and corridors will begin to drop by end of this decade as the prevalence of "connected", self-parking vehicles—which need less space per vehicle to park—increases. By the mid-2040's, shared—as opposed to owned or leased—autonomous vehicles will become the norm for communities like Richmond Hill. These vehicles will rarely park. These changes raise the importance over the next two decades of periodically updating parking strategies and regulations, along with the value of repurposing existing parking facilities to accommodate more vehicles.



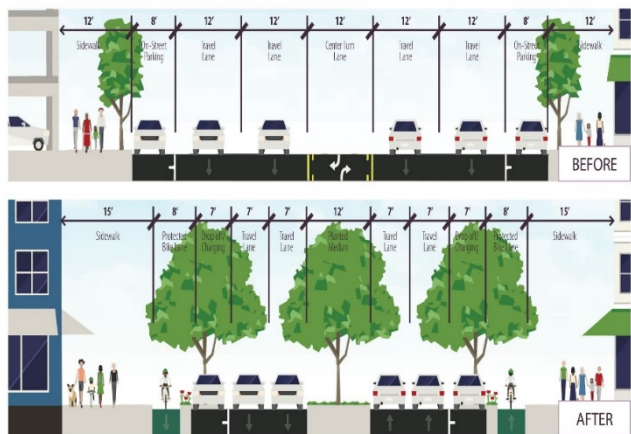
Numerous developments within Richmond Hill's employment areas include large, expensive and inconsistently utilized parking facilities. Better aligning parking with future demand will minimize this inefficient investment.

Avoid building expensive additional vehicular lanes or widening streets

Connected and then autonomous vehicles, which will be in constant communication with nearby vehicles, will require reduced travel and parking lane widths—reducing typical street ROWs by 25% to 40% and creating significant opportunities to widen sidewalks, add exclusive bike lanes, and green Richmond Hill's streets.

Continue to support expanded transit.

Transit for trips, as opposed to any types of autonomous vehicles, will continue to be far more efficient and less costly for trips of more than a few kilometers. In turn, shared autonomous vehicles can be coordinated with transit to provide first and last mile connections that makes using transit more accessible to a larger service area.



Connected and autonomous cars can travel in narrower lanes, freeing up street ROWs for sidewalk, trees, bikes...and people

Recognize that demographics, not mobility innovations, will shape our communities for the foreseeable future.

While initial speculation suggested that by the early 2040s autonomous mobility might promote a new era of sprawl—duplicating the impact of universal access to automobiles after World War II—more considered analysis points to the reverse effect. In the years after WW II, families with kids and a growing middle class shaped demand for decades of suburban growth dominated by single family houses. As noted above, demographics going forward present a very different prognosis: more than two decades of sustained growth for mixed-use, amenitized, urban places. By the early 2040s, shared autonomous mobility will enhance the competitive position—of denser, mixed-use, amenitized centres and corridors. While today a five-minute walk defines the “amenity shed” that attracts people to live and work in these places, the era of shared-autonomous mobility will extend this amenity shed to all the jobs, restaurants, cafés, breweries, culture, parks and other attractions of Richmond Hill's higher density, mixed-use centres and corridors will be within easy reach of residents via on-demand, low cost shared autonomous vehicles. At the same time, as noted in the two points below, the costs of higher density development will drop as the need for expensive structured parking declines.

Planning and urban design strategies

3. CREATE A PUBLIC REALM for centres and corridors that enriches individual lives and celebrates shared community

Start with streets and squares.

Replicate the familiar building blocks of public realm across Richmond Hill and across North America. Lively Main Streets have proven to be the most effective ways to build social as well as economic value in an era that places a high premium on enhanced walkability.

Create a complete public realm.

Incorporate a hierarchy that extends from quiet places that invite individual contemplation or a shared conversation to places that invite interaction among a familiar community—neighbors sharing a local street or the equivalent of Miami’s “Domino Park” which invites older Cuban Americans to share their passion for the game—and to highly interactive Main Streets and public squares that invite all of Richmond Hill to participate in weekend festivals.

“Green square” proposed as a focus for community life for a new higher density, mixed-use centre proposed for Leesburg Virginia, a historic town outside of Washing DC that is reversing decades of traditional suburban growth to focus growth toward emerging centres and corridors.



Make public realm truly public by design...and policy.

Whether owned by the public sector or not, the streets, squares, parks and other components of this public realm do not qualify as public unless they are accessible to all without qualification.

Transform public realm into common ground.

Program and design Main Streets and public squares to proactively invite inclusion and interaction.

Create place that everyone can call “mine”.

The mission of public realm has long been “beautification”—achieved through the artful use of nature, public art, paving and similar tools. Today—as Richmond Hill celebrates its rich diversity, struggles like communities across the North America with issues of inclusivity, and competes in a knowledge-driven economy that places a very high premium on community—the mission of public realm has expanded: it is about using the same tools along with new tools like digital public art to tell the stories of everyone who calls Richmond Hill home. At the same time, public realm traffics in both the joys and tensions that accompany diversity—functioning as a place equally appropriate for celebration and protest.



This interactive public art installation in Montreal invited people to interact with the art—and each other—to enjoy “an infinite interplay of light and reflection” animated by church bells.

Proactively invite diversity.

A variety of food and retail options, a community centre or library, festivals and programs targeted to specific communities, are all ingredients of a public realm that everyone in Richmond Hill can call “mine”. Promote interactive community through programing, design, and events, for example:

- With the right invitations, kids across the full spectrum of backgrounds play together—on a warm day a fountain full of kids from every background, laughing and splashing, discover each other—and so do their diverse parents.
- Street furniture can be fun—and inclusive—as well as utilitarian. Local artists can design unique benches. Bus shelters can substitute swings for fixed seats.
- The power of interactive public art to turn strangers into neighbors is rapidly expanding—for example strangers can use their phone to “collaborate” in orchestrating, water, light, and sound. Digital feeds used as sculpture can tell people in a public square, or across an entire neighborhood, what they are tweeting about at any point in time.
- Interactive events—“tactical urbanism”—can transform a Main Street into a weekend festival, bring diverse people together around a shared interest in music or dance, or create a Thursday evening beer garden in a local square.
- These and similar tools can “democratize” the public realm. Rather than freezing its character at the point at which street trees, paving, and lighting are installed, this approach enables people to make the public realm a stage which constantly hosts the theatre of life—often magical, sometimes unnerving, but never dated.

Weekly Jazz in the Plaza event at the Richmond Hill Centre for Performing Arts during the summer brings diverse folks across the Richmond Hill community together.



Planning and urban design strategies

4. PROVIDE CHOICES that invite people to live, play, shop, create, work and innovate in new centres and corridors—and Richmond Hill.

Tap the potential for higher density, mixed-use, walkable centres to expand options for living; playing, shopping, creating, working and innovating—where possible within a five-minute walk of each other to unlock the synergies that enhance the value of offering many choices.

The developer of Belmar, a new mixed-use centre that has replaced a former shopping center in a Denver Colorado suburb, transformed the pedestrian-facing edge of a parking structure into artists' working galleries that made artists part of the Belmar community—and draws sizable crowds to First Friday gallery walks, who then patronize the developments restaurants.



Living.

Align Richmond Hill's housing choices with the community's changing needs.

For example, take advantage of this opportunity to expand Richmond Hill's ability to invite existing residents to age in the community, welcome younger residents, and make Richmond Hill more affordable to people of all ages.

Fill niche gaps that include families who want to raise their children in a mixed-income and mixed-use environment, people who want to walk to work or seek a place that better supports live/work, or households who seek an urban environment but who have special ties to the Richmond Hill community.

Playing, shopping, creating... hanging out.

Unique retailers, restaurants, breweries, entertainment venues, and similar businesses that fail to take root in "drive to" locations, can thrive in walkable places that offer a supportive mix of contemporary "Main Street" businesses.

Top: Richmond Hill is already witnessing expanded housing options in response to growing demand for townhouse and multifamily housing. Bottom. Covernotes is a café, and a place to meet new and old friends.



These same places can also appeal to niche food markets and mass market retailers with a more urban focus. A mix of arts and culture broadens a walkable place's appeal and can enhance its value. These uses can occupy street facing spaces that lack retail tenants. Bow Market, in Somerville Massachusetts (next to Boston) has become a hub for the creativity and collaboration that brings together creative folks ranging from chefs and comics to DJs and designers from across the Boston region. All of these distinctive uses represent important sources of amenity for nearby residents—including those who live within an emerging centre or corridor and nearby neighbors.

Working and innovating.

As noted above, knowledge industry companies competing for increasingly scarce talent are relocating to mixed-use, walkable, and amenity-rich centres and corridors.

The growth of hybrid work models has increased the value of these locations as innovation communities in which talent can live, work, socialize, and innovate—all within a short walk of each other. These environments are also increasingly attractive to sole practitioners and start-ups who can find intellectual capital and community nearby. These new companies represent a growing source of knowledge industry job creation.



Top: Bow Market, Somerville Massachusetts attracts a diverse mix of artists, makers, chefs and other creative entrepreneurs.

Bottom: Venture X collaborative workspace in Richmond Hill.

Planning and urban design strategies

5. FOSTER AUTHENTICITY that makes emerging centres and corridors essential parts of the larger Richmond Hill community.

Seize the opportunity to create social and cultural, as well as economic, assets for the larger community.

The most important part of authenticity is to represent the full spectrum of the Richmond Hill community. As noted above, an increasingly diverse society requires places to make a proactive effort not just to accommodate everyone, but to invite everyone if it is to be a place where everyone feels welcome. The common ground discussion above suggests a variety of tools for making a place genuinely inclusive.

*Memphis Tennessee's Downtown Partnership launched a pop-up retail initiative, housed in converted shipping containers, to offer local creative entrepreneurs and opportunity to enliven local shopping areas.
Credit: Downtown Memphis Commission*



Embody Living culture.

Authenticity involves respect, not mimicry of the past. For large scale redevelopment, embodying the ever-changing present is the most important goal. Program in the people who make Richmond Hill unique.

Draw on the artists, musicians, performers, makers, chefs, culture innovators and others who represent the community's creative and constantly evolving spirit to bring new inspiration every day to each centre and corridor. The result is a place that, despite when it was developed, is always current and a centre of life for the larger community.

Use local ecosystems as a palette for public realm design.

Green design is not just about embracing standard sustainable best practices, but about designing the public realm with natural materials that reflect and celebrate Richmond Hill's natural setting.



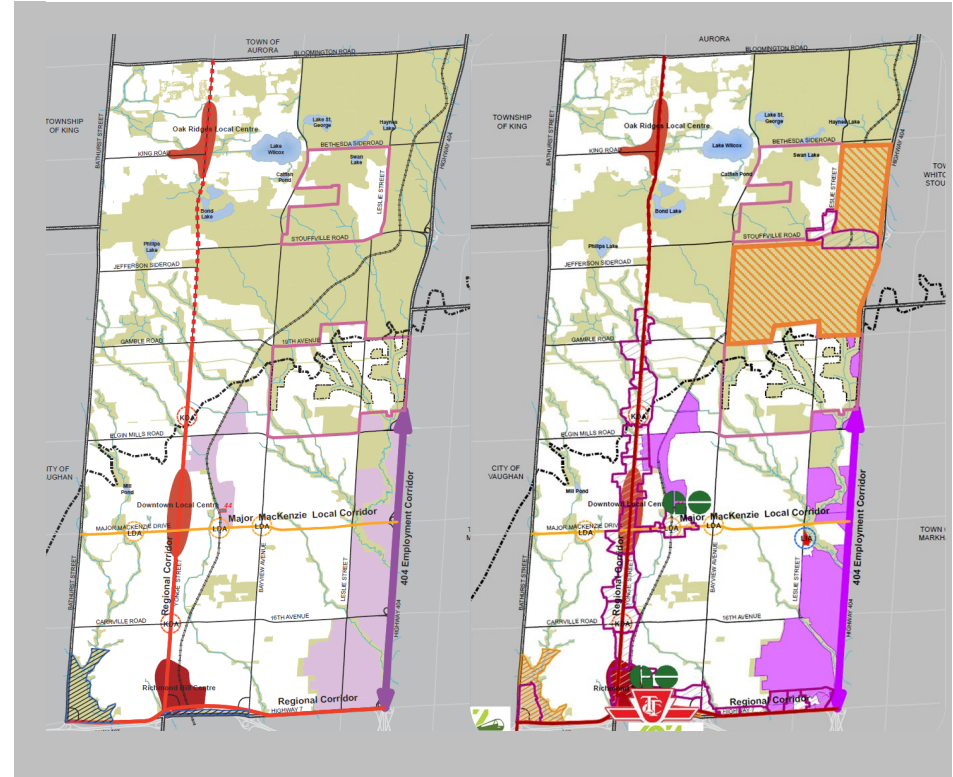
*Top: Richmond Hill's Cultural Summit celebrates—and showcases—the community's creative energy
Bottom: Mill Pond Park provides the entire community with an accessible opportunity to celebrate nature.*

Section 5: Recommendations

Suggestions for concurrent plans

The City is currently engaged in, or has recently completed, a series of significant planning initiatives.

Each of these provide perspective and content that inform City Plan 2041. At the same time, an assessment of the following initiatives suggests recommendations that should be revisited and possibly refined to reflect the letter and spirit of the Official Plan Update (OPU) focus on considering the impacts of change addressed in this playbook.



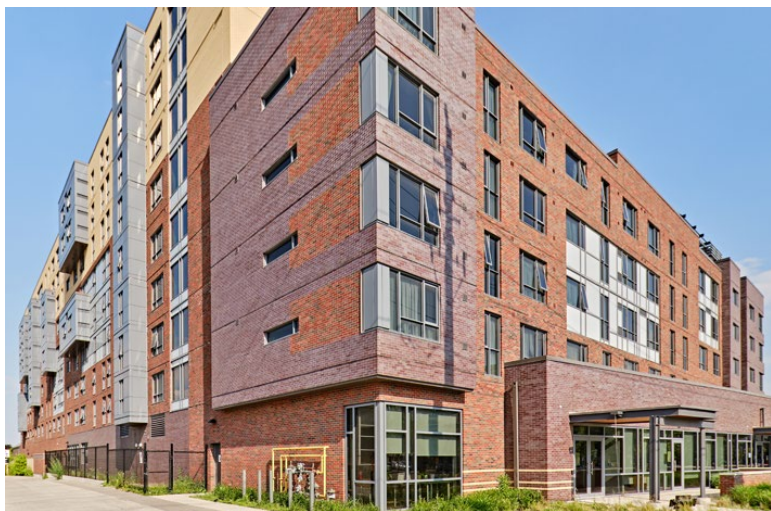
Left: The 2010 Official Plan provided a strong urban structure which focused growth to areas served by transit and proposed a hierarchy of centres and corridors.

Right: This Official Plan Update, City Plan 2041, builds on this foundation to develop a more detailed understanding of these centres and corridors and how they can serve to enhance quality of life and economic opportunity across Richmond Hill.

Affordable Housing Strategy.

OPU land use policies that support more and denser centres and corridors suggest a reassessment of how Richmond Hill's affordability targets should align with overall supply goals (unit demand, housing form, tenure) and these targets should be framed for emerging centres and corridors in Richmond Hill.

The OPU's policy changes may also support additional development and funding tools to incentivize and/or regulate a portion of units for middle and lower-income housing in higher density centres and corridors, specifically within Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs) where legislation supports inclusionary zoning opportunities.



Community Energy and Emissions Plan.

Land use and density targets support Richmond Hill in development of a more carbon-efficient housing stock and support less carbon-intensive transportation options (transit and pedestrian-supportive densities and land use). Creation of denser centres and corridors within the OPU is consistent with current land use directions of the CEEP to: support district energy implementation, direct a majority of development to intensification areas, and provide incentives for more energy efficient buildings.

The CEEP identifies multiple strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions that provide synergies with the OPU's pillars, including investment attraction of green-tech business and provision of renewable energy systems within built form.



Left: Richmond Hill HUB, affordable housing and youth centre on Yonge Street.

Right: Markham District Energy—a good model and potential partner.

Comprehensive Zoning By-law.

The Zoning Bylaw is the key implementation tool for the OPU and will be updated following the approval of the OPU. Key considerations will be alignment of zoning regulations to support new housing, mixed-use development, jobs and other uses appropriate for each centre and corridor.

Related zoning parameters and conditions should also support appropriate massing and design—including associated updates to Site Plan Control bylaws and associated guidelines to promote activated street frontages, public realm quality, architectural expression, livability and local vitality.

Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan.

The Richmond Hill Centre is identified as an Urban Growth Centre by the Province as well as a Regional Centre in both the York Region Official Plan and the Richmond Hill Official Plan. Recent BRT, and planned subway and GO Transit investment (along with new provincial policy related to lands surrounding transit stations) will help to support market demand for employment and higher-density housing.

The Secondary Plan, currently in process, focuses on ensuring that higher densities support higher quality urban design and public realm as well as identify and incentivize social and public facilities (e.g. community centres, parks) to support complete community building. As the only area in Richmond Hill to support two subway stations, the Secondary Plan also focuses on ensuring that the Centre is a live/work/play...and innovate...destination—a model for the City's intensification initiative that brings a new vitality to Richmond Hill. The Centre should act as an economic engine that provides jobs for residents of the City to no longer need to commute out of Richmond Hill to work, and to accommodate new workers and visitors who can capitalize on the subway system.



Well planned and guided by new zoning, Richmond Hill Centre will create a new live/work/play...and innovate destination for Richmond Hill. It will also add a 21st century livable, mixed-use, walkable, and transit-served neighbourhoods to Richmond Hill's stock of great places to live and work.

Socio Economic Study.

The Socio-Economic Study was undertaken in 2019 to support background research related to population growth, demographic change, housing needs and employment growth within the community.

It informs land use policies within the OPU. Additional analysis may be appropriate to develop forecasts as the current report is largely focused on past and present conditions and does not account for future trends or the impacts of COVID-19

Transportation Master Plan Update.

Richmond Hill is currently updating its Transportation Master Plan (TMP) to establish a future vision for all travel modes within the City to the year 2041.

The plan will guide the future of the City's road, walking and cycling networks, including recreational trails. Development of the plan will need to align with the OPU, which will provide essential input toward policies related to land use, density, and walkability. Successful implementation of both the TMP and OPU will require close alignment once the OPU is complete.

Yonge and Bernard Key Development Area Secondary Plan.

Yonge and Bernard represents a Key Development Area, with access to frequent rapid transit, a bus terminal, and existing retail. This Secondary Plan is near complete and is subject to final decisions from the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal.

The Plan provides a new planning approach for Richmond Hill. Most notably, it does not specify a maximum building height for its high-rise buildings, but rather relies on a combination of design policies—including the use of angular plane and maximum density permissions to control height. This Plan also relies on the use of Holding By-law provisions to ensure that growth is phased with the provision of infrastructure and the implementation of active transportation. Furthermore, this plan provides strong policy direction regarding the use of low-impact development techniques along the streetscape. The city may be well served in considering this approach in other areas.

The Plan provides detailed streetscape policy direction that supports goals for sustainability, greater social interaction and economic competitiveness.



Section 5: Recommendations

Project approval process

This Official Plan Update is moving forward during a new era of planning in Ontario as a result of significant amendments to the Planning Act since 2010.

Most notably, these changes mean that certain decisions by approval authorities (including Richmond City Council) may no longer be overturned by the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal. These decisions include: the identification of Protected Major Transit Station Areas—including the prescription of maximum and minimum height and density—

and a decision to refuse a request for a private official plan amendment application within two years after the approval of a new official plan (or major amendment to it). The decisions that Council makes through this Official Plan Update will hold much more weight in relation to future development applications than previously. Also, the provisions that permitted height or density bonuses in exchange for community benefits such as park improvements and affordable housing are set to expire. As a direct result, there will be much more certainty among the public and developers regarding how areas will develop over time.

No plan—no matter how well researched, how much the community has engaged, or how wise its recommendations—is worth the effort if it is not faithfully implemented. Like any good plan, City Plan 2041's policies are interrelated and support each other. Land use, design, mobility, sustainability and other issues can not successfully be addressed in silos. This means that faithfully implementing this plan applies to all of the Plan's policies when making planning decisions, be they be big ones like zoning by-law changes or small ones like minor variances.

Nor, at the same time can any plan fully anticipate future conditions. This conundrum is nowhere more apparent than at the point of considering an Official Plan Amendment (OPA) in response to changing circumstances or unanticipated opportunities.



The suburban Newton Massachusetts approved the Northland Needham Street development in suburban Newton Massachusetts (adjacent to Boston), which replaced a strip retail plaza adjacent to single family neighbourhoods because this new centre provided a new network of walkable streets and public parks, together with mixed-income housing, that embodied the letter and spirit of the Town's Plan.

While the intent of the OPU is to provide updated policies to guide planning decisions to 2041, many projects pose unexpected opportunities and challenges. In periods of rapid change, the magnitude of these opportunities and challenges increases.

The question for this playbook is: how can Richmond Hill address OPAs to ensure that the results strengthen the City's commitment to managing change for community benefit—particularly for emerging centres and corridors?

There is a critical difference between how communities that view themselves as “urban” or “suburban” approach development approvals. For suburban communities, the process approaches development as a series of individual projects, each of which should be evaluated on its own merits. For urban communities, the process approaches development much more as a continuum of projects, each of which represents a building block for achieving a more complete community.

As Richmond Hill increasingly focuses growth toward higher density, walkable, mixed-use—urban—centres and corridors, it will be critical to bring a fundamentally urban perspective to the process of evaluating and approving requests for official plan amendments. In considering OPAs, public benefit requirements, or other development requirements, the City and the project proponent should work together to become partners in community building,

Approach every OPA process as an informed, creative opportunity for the City and project proponent to work together to enhance the project's value to Richmond Hill. Start with the letter and spirit of the City's plans.

These plans represent a significant investment of time, energy, creativity...and dollars by Council, City staff, the larger community, and key stakeholders. These plans establish criteria that ensure that projects will contribute to building a more complete community. Respecting each plan's findings should be the starting premise. The goal for any OPA process should be a better outcome for Richmond Hill.

A note about the essential role of public realm

New centres and corridors should not emerge as private realms, but as public destinations that invite the entire community to enjoy lively new streets, squares, and parks. This public realm enhances both public and private value. Lively, well-designed public spaces enhance the appeal of new housing, retail, and workspaces. Robust public policies that require these streets, squares and parks ensure that future development will be planned, designed, and built to enhance the quality, character...and value...of adjacent developments as well as the larger Richmond Hill community. The City accounts for cost of providing a robust public realm through development charges, parkland dedication, and Community Benefits charges.

Develop clear, public criteria for considering and approving OPAs.

While the Official Plan focuses on the community's goals, and how specific projects can contribute to achieving these goals, a project proponent may propose amending the OP to reflect new circumstances or unanticipated opportunities. By providing a list of criteria for assessing and evaluating proposed amendments—developed by the City's Planning Department and approved by Council—the City can guide the proponent in properly framing its request and provide the larger community with a clear understanding of how the City implements its OP and why it grants OPAs.

Official Plan amendments should be negotiated.

The response to an OPA application should not be "yes" or "no", but - using data and adopted criteria, the City and the project proponent can negotiate a better outcome that may involve alternative public benefits or additional public investment to achieve the City's goals. A public discussion of net benefits can also be valuable in building public understanding and support for an OPA. The costs of obtaining and analyzing data in support of an application for an amendment and in response to the stated criteria to evaluate it are insignificant compared to the costs of an inadequately informed decision. Fully informed with data, the result can often represent a better outcome for all parties involved.

The City's "Four Pillars" (page 8 above) suggest appropriate criteria for granting evaluation of an OPA's appropriateness:

The Four Pillars:

- Growing our economy
- Attaining design excellence
- Promoting green and sustainable practices
- Protecting and enhancing the qualities and places we value

Examples of criteria stemming from the Four Pillars could include:

- Enhanced—more inclusive and inviting—public realm
- Job creations and/or spinoff economic benefits
- Expanded or deeper housing affordability
- Enhanced environmental performance—including climate change mitigation
- Improved compliance with Provincial/Regional policy
- Greater alignment with infrastructure investment.
- More responsive to updated transit and/or Provincial/Regional plans

Fully document the costs and benefits before formally approving an OPA

Every OPA triggers costs as well as benefits—that may be real, or perceived. A request for a density increase to support the cost of additional affordable housing units may, but usually doesn't, generate noticeable traffic impacts. A project proponent may argue that a more privatized plaza is a better alternative to a new Main Street as a development's signature public realm, but analysis could determine that the Main Street generates more public as well as private value. Increases in building height are often controversial, but visualization studies can indicate the degree of impact and help determine if the benefits outweigh the costs. These analyses can be carried out by City staff or independent consultants. Independent organizations like the Urban Land Institute can also assemble interdisciplinary teams to assist the City. Again, the benefits of these analyses far outweigh the potential costs of undertaking the additional work.

City Plan 2041 represents an opportunity for Council, a wide range of City staff, the larger Richmond Hill community, and key stakeholders to work together in a data-driven process to shape the right future for Richmond Hill in a manner that integrates policy and placemaking for community benefit.

Consider every project approval that requires an OPA on its own merits.

Establishing new policies to guide development is the Official Plan's job. The OPU process provides the right opportunity for extensive, interactive, participation by Council, City staff, the larger community, and key stakeholders to work together to identify the right policies for Richmond Hill. The results of this work should not be overturned without a strong rationale and inclusive process.



Official Plan Update

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[Workshop.](#)

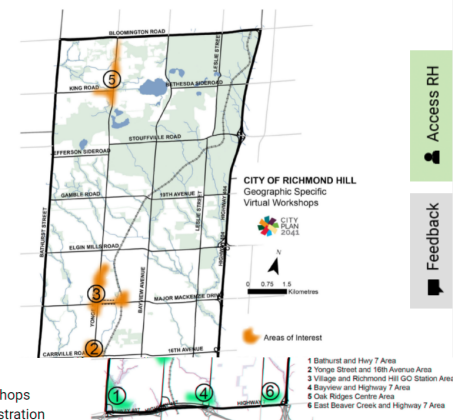
Area-specific Workshops

We invite you to join us to discuss the vision, character and function of the areas listed below (see key map).

At these workshops, you can also:

- Hear from City staff about Provincial and Regional direction,
- Share your knowledge about the local context,
- Work together in these interactive workshop to discuss how these areas can develop over time to address current and future needs of our City,
- Ask your questions about planning for the future in Richmond Hill,
- Following the workshop, provide more detailed suggestions by taking our online surveys.

Please register for any or all of the workshops that are of interest to you. Advanced registration



6

Closing comments

Section 6

Closing comments

City Plan 2041 represents a change for Richmond Hill to translate the next two decades of rapid change into a period of unprecedented opportunity. My colleagues and I have been pleased and honored to participate in the process of crafting this playbook to support preparation of the OPU. City Council and staff have built a process that encourages remarkably diverse stakeholders to generously look beyond personal concerns toward shaping a shared future.

The result is a planning process that goes far beyond regulating private development and guiding public investment. It envisions building on the City's rich history, living culture, and natural setting to build a more complete community in ways that will enhance economic, social, and environmental value for everyone who lives, works, does business, or invests in Richmond Hill.



David Dixon FAIA
Stantec's Urban Places Fellow

This playbook suggests six overarching messages to support creating this more complete community:

1. City Council and the city's planners are committed to using City Plan 2041 to "future proof" Richmond Hill as it faces two decades of transformational change.
2. Council's priorities, the Four Pillars that grow from these policies, and the OPU process offer an excellent foundation for empowering the City to manage these changes for community benefit.
3. Emerging from the pandemic, the accelerating pace of knowledge industry growth, demographic shifts, mobility innovations, and climate change converge to reinforce the benefits of focusing growth toward higher density, mixed-use, walkable, green centres and corridors.
4. This strategy sets the stage for leveraging change to generate unprecedented economic, social, health, equity and similar benefits for the entire community.
5. City Plan 2041 can achieve these benefits by calling for the right density, public realm, equity, public/private partnership and similar policies, supported by guidelines that promote walkability; lively new public spaces; expanded choices for living, working and playing; connectivity; and authenticity.
6. City Plan 2041 builds on the city's rich and diverse present, while also embracing its ability to adapt to an ever-changing future. The OPU articulates values and goals that should inform future amendments that new ideas and circumstances will bring forward.



David Dixon FAIA, Stantec's Urban Places Fellow.

Richmond Hill's annual Cultural Summit—a symbol of the inclusive sense of community that the City is bringing to planning for its future.

