

City of Markham

Mayor Frank Scarpitti

Meeting with the
Unionville Residents Association

February 6th, 2017
(7:00 - 8:30 PM)
Markham Pan Am centre

*Summary of Mayor's response given in red italics after
the question or series of questions*



State of Markham

In 2010 Markham Council endorsed a growth alternative for Markham with an “environment first approach” to guide future residential and employment growth to 2031.

<http://www.markham.ca/wps/portal/Markham/BusinessDevelopment/PlanningAndDevelopmentServices/PlanningStudies/growthmanagement/>

Question 1:

Now that six and half years have passed, is Markham on track relative to population, employment, competitiveness, infrastructure, green space etc. ?

Summary of Response: Q1: Markham is doing well and is on track re objectives.

Markham Centre Update

The City's Markham Centre Advisory Committee recently met for the first time since June 2015. Currently, the city is modeling for 22,860 units (or about 45,000 people). There are apparently already zoning approvals for 18,000 units.

<http://www.markham.ca/wps/portal/Markham/BusinessDevelopment/MarkhamCentre/TheMarkhamCentreStory/PerformanceMeasures> /

York University is coming. Many developments are in the pipeline. Yet the Mobility Hub Study, now led by Metrolinx, is still not complete and on it depends a new east precinct plan, secondary plan and park plan. A complete planning framework for the area is not expected for 3 to 5 years.

Question 2a: What is the current status of the plan, budget and schedule for the implementation of the Mobility Hub? What is the City doing to accelerate the process?

Question 2b : Any update of the York University in terms of site planning and next step ?

Markham Centre Update

Summary of Response:

Q2a: Expect Phase 1 (conceptual plan) later this year. Much of the hub will be underground, as land is to be raised on either side of tracks, with transit and shopping underground.

Q2b: Agreement with province on financials and milestones finally received after much effort. Site plan application in late 2017. Ground breaking ceremony later this year. Construction starting 2018.

“Key Worker” / Affordable Housing

- Average Markham single family house prices surged to \$960,118 in the summer of 2016, which requires a household income of \$161,662. <https://www.thestar.com/business/2016/08/12/buying-a-home-in-the-gta-requires-a-six-figure-income.html>
- A Remax study has shown Toronto house prices will increase by 17% in 2017. <http://blog.remax.ca/canadas-housing-market-outlook-for-2017/>
- Average household income in Markham is \$100K; median income is \$86K; 20% of our population has a household income below \$40K. <http://www.markham.ca/wps/wcm/connect/markhampublic/f2d7a93f-7d78-430b-8097-799c855fdo5/Quick-Fact-Supplementary-Graph-2014.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=f2d7a93f-7d78-430b-8097-799c855fdo5>

Question 3:

What is Markham’s housing strategy for key workers (e.g. hospital cleaners or low income workers)?

“Key Worker” / Affordable Housing

Summary of Response:

Q3: City does what it can by assisting affordable housing projects, such as Tony Wong Place, with fee support. Region constructing at Unionville and at 22 Water St. and also investing in state of good repair at existing units. Bulk of problem largely up to senior levels of government.

[See also Questions 14 and 23]

Main Street Unionville

During the 2017 budget consultation, there were requests to allocate money for public washrooms and east side parking . Neither was approved.

Question 4a: What is city's plan regarding washrooms, in addition to the public consultaton session at the end of February?

Question 4b: What is the strategy to improve public parking, both short term and long term? Can Section 37 money be used?

Question 4c: The new owners of the Queen's Hotel plan to develop their site for residential uses. There are also plans in the works for the Mariani site. What can the City do to use this as a catalyst for a complete redevelopment of the west side of Main Street?

Main Street Unionville

Summary of Response:

Q4a: Challenging project. Also looking at leasing space in an existing building.

Q4b: A parking project would be eligible for S37 funds as it is a community asset. City determining how much S37 money has accumulated. Need TRCA approval which can be challenging. City will install more signage with parking directions.

Q4c: Queens Hotel proposal is in with staff. Awaiting Mariani proposal. City moving forward to put in the zoning as per vision plan.

Intensification

The province launched a land use review in 2015. One recommendation is to increase the requirement for new development within the urban boundary from 40% to 60%

Question 5a: Does Markham support the new intensification target?

Summary of Response: Q5a: Most problematic is the proposed requirement to increase whitebelt development densities from 50 to 80 people+jobs/ha. This density must be met overall despite any earlier construction at the 50 level. Could force high rises on Elgin Mills, but with no nearby transit and road infrastructure. Markham is a signatory to Hazel McCallium report to Province identifying these problems.

Bill 73

Bill 73, passed in May 2016. It will allow the City to use alternative dispute resolution methods prior to OMB appeals. It also allows the City to properly define “Minor Variance” in Committee of Adjustment appeals. And York Region now has the power to establish a Local Appeals Body in place of the OMB for appeals of CoA decisions.

Question 5b : What is Markham doing with regard to Alternative Dispute Resolution and OMB appeals?

Question 5c: What is Markham doing to better define “Minor Variance”?

Question 5d: Will Markham or York Region establish an Local Appeals Body?

Bill 73

Summary of Response:

Q5b: Not dealt with yet.

Q5c: Province expecting to study and define “minor variance”. If not satisfactory, Markham will establish local definition.

Q5d: York Region has not dealt with this yet. Need all 9 communities to agree, otherwise not cost-effective.

OMB Review

In addition to the Bill 73, which improves the OMB process to an extent , Ontario is just now completing a more thorough review of the OMB's jurisdiction and procedures.

<http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page14965.aspx>

Question 6: Does Markham support the OMB becoming a true appeals tribunal, so as to only accept or reject council decisions, with no authority to impose its own solutions?

Summary of Response: Q6: Yes

Tree Preservation

The Mayor ran on a platform of increased tree planting. Preserving the current tree canopy seems to be at least as important as planting new trees. The community has detected a pattern of illegal tree cutting followed by “slap on the wrist” or “cost of doing business” fines for perpetrators. A review of the tree preservation bylaw is not planned for another two years.

Question 7a: What is the City doing to ensure that illegal cutting carries appropriate consequences that act as a real deterrent?

Question 7b: What policies is the City considering to encourage the preservation of trees on large development sites like York Downs, Unionville Home Society and Briarwood Farm?

Tree Preservation

Summary of Response:

Q7a: City will hold a workshop to review Tree Bylaw. The workshop was initially planned to discuss relief for property owners for “nuisance trees”, eg those impacting a structure. Workshop will be expanded to include learnings from Gainesville. Suggestions made by citizen deputants at General Committee, February 6, sound good.

[In response to a question from the floor, Legal Department advises that all approaches to strengthen the bylaw must comply with the law, eg holding back Building Permits is not possible, as applicant can go to court and get it.]

Q7b: All developments have a Tree Preservation Bylaw that is reviewed and approved by staff. But not every tree can be saved, so there is a compensation formula. Markham also plants a lot of trees under Trees for Tomorrow program.

Illegal Signs

Markham's streets are littered with illegal temporary signs.

Question 7c: What is the city doing to discourage this practice and to properly prosecute repeat offenders?

Question 7d: Will the City hire more bylaw officers to improve enforcement of these and other bylaws?

Question 7e: Would the city consider a program to allow volunteers to remove illegal signs?

Summary of Response:

Q7c: Markham has a very restrictive sign bylaw compared to other cities. Tried to ban some sign types but ran afoul of Charter of Rights.

Q7d: Not addressed.

Q7e: Legal advise is that this is not possible. Risk to residents and liability to City.

Council Procedures

In November City staff recommended procedural changes for City Council and its committees, including limitations on deputations and fewer evening meetings.

Question 8 : What is the status of the update to council procedures?

Summary of Response: Q8: Citizen access to Council is much better than 20 years ago, with email and social media.

New deputation limits of 5 minutes per individual or group. Limit of 2 x 5 minutes for Councillor questions. Fewer evening meetings to avoid making key decisions when Councillors are fatigued.

Train Whistles

Council has agreed to spend a further \$5.6 million to upgrade 13 crossings between Kennedy Road & Major Mackenzie, as part of the train whistle cessation program

Question 9: What is the status of the train whistle cessation program?

Summary of Response: Q9: Design underway. Construction sequence under development.

Snow Ploughing

(Note questions 10a to 12b were skipped due to lack of time).

Under the current snow windrow assistance program, a width of only one car is ploughed for each driveway.

Question 13: What would it take for the City to clear the complete width of each driveway?

Summary of Response: Q13: It would be very costly to clear the entire width for all driveways in the program.

Vacant Houses

Vacant houses seem to be increasingly common in Ward 3. Some are not well maintained. They diminish the vibrancy of our community. Vancouver has implemented a vacant house tax.

Question 14: Is Markham considering a vacant house tax?

Summary of Response: Q14: Mayor is not in favour of a foreign buyer tax, as per Vancouver, as Markham promotes itself overseas as a destination, Not getting a lot of foreign buyers. There are not many vacant houses in Markham. If there is a maintenance issue, call Bylaw Enforcement.

Councillor Rea has a Notice of Motion to discuss foreign buyers tax at upcoming Council meeting. Markham has no legislative authority to implement such a tax.

[See also Questions 3 and 23]

Questions from Audience

Q15: Municipal Authority. Is it possible for City of Markham or Region to ally with other cities and regions, eg Halton, Durham to approach the province about allowing municipalities more authority over their own management and certainly more control over our own challenges?

Summary of Response: Q15: Yes. Markham is getting together with other GTA municipalities to ask for power to impose new revenue tools, like City of Toronto has.

Q16: Briarwood Farms. What is the status of development of the old Briarwood Farm site on 16th Ave at Normandale?

Summary of Response: Q16: The project is on hold. The owner is not proceeding. But the previous plan (13 single family homes) was reasonable and compatible with the context. Much better than 40 townhouses.

Questions from Audience

Q17: People-Centred Development. We are still building in York Region like its 25 years ago. We are no longer a “sub” urban community. How can we change development to become more people-centred and not car-centred – like in downtown Toronto, New York, London?

Summary of Response: Q17: Disagree with premise. We are building very differently than 25 years ago. Look at Cornell. Cathedraltown, Angus Glen communities. These are people centred.

Q18: Road Expansions. When will the Regional arterial road lane expansions be occurring?

Summary of Response: Q18: Environmental Assessments underway for 16th, McCowan, Kennedy, but there is no money in 10 year capital program to construct most of this, except 16th Woodbine-Leslie. We need to find construction dollars somehow.

Questions from Audience

Q19: Secondary Suites/Rooming Houses. Please comment on bylaws to approve secondary suites and inclusive zoning.

Summary of Response: Q19: He supports secondary suites such as laneway homes, but not basement apartments. But province had dictated that City must zone for them “as of right”. He worries that most owners will not license. Recognizes they will add some relief to housing affordability issue.

Rooming Houses will be defined in Official Plan but not allowed as of right. Proponents will have to apply. New student housing for York U. will be built in Markham Centre, although most students will commute.

Q20: Crosby Washrooms. Was Crosby Arena considered for the public washroom solution?

Summary of Response: Q20: There are public washrooms at this location today.

Questions from Audience

Q21: Yonge Subway Extension. Can we estimate the time to have Yonge Subway extension to Highway 7? I strongly hope all York Region mayors and council fight hard and work with provincial and federal government for funding.

Summary of Response: Q21: The Region has received \$50M from province and needs \$40M from feds to get to a 30% design. This would allow us to get good quality estimate from contractors on price to construct. One of the reasons the Spadina Subway has such a cost overrun is that they appropriated money based on a rough estimate.

Q22: York Down GC. What is status on this redevelopment and why is it taking so long to get staff report and public meeting?

Summary of Response: Q22: Application was deemed complete in October and is now being reviewed by all departments. Staff report not yet ready.

Questions from Audience

Q23: Comment from Bruce Tilden, Markham Realtor, on Foreign Home Ownership:

Although the Toronto Real Estate Board report states that only 5% of region-wide house sales are to foreign buyers, the number is higher in Markham. In his observations, the great majority of home purchases are by people not resident in Canada, and 60 – 80% of these houses convert to rental homes within days, usually at low rents so that the homes don't stay vacant.

These foreign owners are using this as an investment with no intent to resell, so this restricts availability.

Summary of Response: Q23: No response from Mayor requested.

Thank You!

Thanks to Mayor Scarpitti
for meeting with the
residents of Unionville.