

**Traditional Stereotypes and New Suburbanisms:  
A Comparative Study of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and East Woodbridge  
in Vaughan, Ontario**

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## **Abstract**

Urbanization is continuing around the world at a rapid rate, necessitating massive investment in developing the core infrastructure of emerging urban societies and overhauling outdated or overloaded systems (Addie, 2016). Residents of traditional suburban neighborhoods continue to experience firsthand the frustrations created by poorly designed suburban infrastructure and transit solutions.

To begin, this paper will examine the effects of traditional planning stereotypes on defining the new idea of suburban design and infrastructure. I will examine components such as suburban infrastructure, emerging urban areas, and the role of effective planning as determinants in defining a new suburban life. I will examine how suburban stereotypes, a term first coined by Richard Harris (2018), influence the infrastructure and ultimately the possible transit and movement solutions put in place for an area. In terms of emerging urban areas, Wu and Keil (2022) state that suburban stereotypes also influence the dynamics of how an urban periphery is defined. The authors present a movement away from traditional definitions of urban peripheries and towards diverse peripheries that produce diversified metropolitan landscapes (Wu and Keil, 2022). The role of effective planning is also crucial in diversifying the definition of suburban areas. According to Marcuse (2011), modern planning should involve the use of three different approaches: a technical one, a social reform one, and a social justice one. Planners must therefore be able to move beyond traditional viewpoints to create and accommodate diversification in suburban areas.

The goal of this paper is to examine, through the case study analysis of two neighbourhoods in the municipality of Vaughan, whether suburban infrastructure has evolved enough to meet the needs of emerging urban peripheries in comparison to traditional suburban stereotypes. As Addie (2019) has stated, suburban infrastructure is defined as a means of ordering suburban form and providing conditions essential to the life and functioning of a society. There is importance in researching this topic because the implementation of suburban infrastructure in creating new urban peripheries must include discussions involving all supporting players. To Addie (2016), this includes the conceptualization of a city and the nature of social justice within it, not just the infrastructure itself. Investment in infrastructure for the

long-term would drive expansion in other interconnected urban factors, such as construction, energy, transportation, and water and waste (Keil, 2013).

The paper reveals that suburban growth is not solely about the homes that are built, but also the socio-economic factors that support them, such as transit access, walkability, and work and social opportunities. As such, literature suggests that new urban design must be transit-oriented and part of suburban land use planning (Dock and Swenson, 2003). Defining suburban transit, housing, and social infrastructure solutions, and incorporating them into master plans before a community is built or expanded is becoming increasingly important. The paper concludes with a set of ideas on how to minimize the negative physical, mental, and emotional consequences of traditional suburban stereotypes, and provide incentive to implement the new determinants of suburban life instead.

## Foreword

The following paper is a culmination of research and study in my Area of Concentration as outlined in my Plan of Study (POS). The central objective in my Area of Concentration for my POS is to explore the relationship between traditional stereotypes and new determinants in planning for a new way of suburban living.

The three components of my Area of Concentration and the supporting Learning Objectives involve exploring and understanding conceptualizations of suburban infrastructure, emerging urban areas, and planning for suburban life. These components were the focus of my studies throughout my two-year MES-Planning academic experience through courses, workshops, site and field experiences, and in-the-field work experience with the Development Engineering Department at the City of Vaughan. These components in turn influenced the selection of my specific objectives for this major paper.

One of the specific objectives from my POS this major paper addresses is the exploration and definition of traditional stereotypes and new determinants of suburbanization, and how these definitions influence suburban infrastructure. This exploration of suburbanisms allows me to compare different characteristics used in the definition of suburbs in the past and which characteristics should define new emerging urban areas for the future. This is achieved through case study analysis of two different neighbourhoods in Vaughan, Ontario. One demonstrates traditional stereotypes of suburbia, East Woodbridge, and the other demonstrates new determinants for an emerging urban area, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. An examination of these neighbourhoods in terms of transportation, housing, and social infrastructure fulfills the specific POS objective of analyzing completed infrastructure of a built environment and its positive or negative impact on users' daily lives.

Another specific objective from my POS that my major paper explores is the examination of the characteristics of an emerging urban area. To achieve this, I gather ideas and theories regarding the definition of a suburb and emerging peripheral areas through literature review. I then apply these ideas and theories to my observations of the above neighbourhoods to define the importance of urban design in creating a viable area that meets the needs of a community. In addition, I can view how a site is being used and identify possible barriers preventing its current or future use. I also planned in my POS to examine and analyze master planned communities such as the VMC, to determine which components and factors foster new determinants that in

turn contribute to an improved quality of life for suburban residents in terms of physical and mental health. Another specific POS objective in emerging urban areas is to use my professional work experiences to further my knowledge of how development and infrastructure is evolving in the suburbs. My analysis of the type of developments observed in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre helps me see changes that were made or that are planned for future projects. It also allows me to explore the many and varied relationships with outside agencies that municipalities must cultivate in order to move forward with planned developments, especially ones that emphasize new determinants such as increased density and improved transportation options.

Lastly, a specific objective from my POS helps determine the role and duties of the urban planner in the creation of the above-named neighbourhoods. Contemplating the planner's role in the creation of these neighbourhoods helps me identify the positives and limitations of the role in influencing the end results of the built environment. It also allows me to take into consideration what suburban life could look like through the lens of equity, considering factors such as race, gender, education and income. These factors allow me to look for examples in my research that demonstrate how planners have addressed these inequalities, and if some groups are disadvantaged by planning choices. Finally, specific POS objectives that focus on the role of the planner will allow me to explore and emphasize the importance of increased participatory planning. This indicates whether the needs of the community, in this case the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, are continually considered and implemented.

This Area of Concentration study and specific objectives is finalized through this major paper, which is based on a mixed-method or multi-strategy approach, employing an interpretivist lens using case studies, master plan analysis, and site visits. Throughout this paper, I examine whether suburban transit, housing, and social infrastructure have evolved enough to meet the needs of emerging urban peripheries in comparison to traditional suburban stereotypes. This study builds on existing theoretical and academic conversations surrounding traditional versus new determinants in defining suburban life. I argue that emerging urban peripheries must be defined as more than just existing outside a geographical city centre. Lastly, I conclude through examination of the case study areas, that the role of the planner must include engaging in participatory planning and social reform. This final paper takes a critical look at the influence of traditional stereotypes on suburban planning and whether new determinants are being put into place.

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# 1. Introduction

Since the Second World War, Canadians have looked to the stereotypical image of the suburban home, with its manicured front lawn and white picket fence, as the ultimate measure of success. Shaped by marketing and government policy (Harris, 2020, p. 30), the idea of having a place to call your own that allowed you to escape the noise and crowding of the inner city was part of the so-called Canadian Dream. The ‘suburban way of life’ in North America, as defined by Harris (2018), implies a lifestyle that is car-dependent, focused on home ownership, and has connotations of domesticity (p. 29). These traditional stereotypes of the suburbs are now as “ubiquitously North American as supersized burgers and fries . . . [and can make one feel as if they] are somewhere, everywhere, and nowhere specific all at the same time (Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017, p. 107).

But while the traditionally held views of the suburbs have persisted for decades, there is an increasing area of research that suggests the need for new determinants in defining suburbia. Phelps et al. (2010), for example, suggest that we should abandon the idea of ‘suburb’ and adopt the idea of a ‘postsuburban’ world instead, since the idea of a classic suburb as an entity that exists only on the edges of a large urban center has been disappearing (Fishman, 2005). And Moos and Walter-Joseph (2017) envision suburbs that have higher densities, are transit-oriented and pedestrian friendly, and contain a variety of mixed-use buildings (p. 113), a direct contrast to the stereotypical image of a suburb, with low-density and auto-centricity as its defining features. Above all, scholars in this area of research emphasize that creating new determinants for emerging urban areas involves not just changing infrastructure but creating a new suburban way of life as well. Keil (2022) states that there has been a trend towards growing diversity in built forms and demographics in suburbia. And Harris (2022), believes that tied into the definition of emerging urban areas is how the urban periphery is approached through the consideration of social, economic, physical, and health factors. It is my opinion throughout this research paper that traditional suburban stereotypes have their purposes, but new determinants must be the benchmark by which future emerging urban areas should be built.

The goal of this paper is therefore, to use the ideas of suburbia presented in existing literature and apply them to the examination of a new emerging urban area’s development project. Literature review has led me to understand that the definition of a suburb is fluid: traditional suburban stereotypes exist, but so do ideas on how emerging peripheries should be

defined and what they should include. This paper will take ideas from existing literature surrounding traditional suburban stereotypes and new determinants both, expanding upon those ideas through an analysis of two neighbourhoods in Vaughan: East Woodbridge and the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. This paper, therefore, provides a link between the traditional and new determinants for defining a suburban area. As well, this paper contributes to the growing body of research that emphasizes the need for varied socio-economic and health factors to be considered in formulating new determinants. This paper also continues with the examination of traditional ideas, while also examining and evaluating the thinking behind new determinants to see if it has merit. By comparing characteristics of an old and new neighbourhood, this paper opens a discussion on what works, what needs to change, and if progress is being made in applying new determinants.

To address my research objectives, I have structured this paper as follows. The following section touches on the research methodology of this paper, which is based on a mixed-method or multi-strategy approach as summarized by Bryman and Bell (2019). Both qualitative and quantitative research data was gathered in the form of census data, statistics, municipal master plans, site visits, and interviews with informants. An extensive literature review of scholarly articles follows, where I explore discussions that examine both traditional and current thinking in terms of defining suburban areas. The literature review produced patterns around which I then centered my findings in the areas of suburban infrastructure, emerging urban areas, and planning for suburban life. The third section of this paper focuses on my case study findings and analysis of two neighbourhoods in Vaughan, one which shows traditional suburban stereotypes, East Woodbridge, and one which I feel is applying new determinants for suburban life, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Observations and analysis of these neighbourhoods were conducted based on the examination of existing suburban infrastructure, its place in defining an emerging urban area, and the role a planner has in determining the way of life that results. My research and analysis findings are then summarized around three specific elements found in both neighbourhoods: transit, housing, and social infrastructure. A discussion of the changing role of the planner follows my case study analysis, allowing for comments regarding the influence planners have in learning from traditional stereotypes and implementing new determinants. Finally, I conclude with an overview of what my research and analysis into the comparison of

traditional and new suburbanisms has produced. As well, I address any outstanding questions or issues that were raised during that analysis and provide possible solutions.

## **1.1 Research Statement and Supporting Questions**

The aim of this research paper is to explain, through case study comparison and analysis, how the effects of traditional planning stereotypes in neighbourhoods has led to the need for establishing new determinants in defining future suburban design and infrastructure. I do so by examining transit, housing, and social infrastructure frameworks in two neighbourhoods in Vaughan: East Woodbridge and the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. For this paper's purposes, an area will be defined as the geographical area that was examined and that contained traditional suburbanisms, and the geographical area that was examined and contained new suburbanisms. Drawing on the works of Moos and Walter-Joseph (2017) and Harris (2018) to help outline and define traditional suburban stereotypes and how they present themselves in the East Woodbridge neighbourhood, I will then contrast those traditional suburbanisms with the new suburbanisms that are presenting themselves in Vaughan's newest focus project, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. The examination of how these neighbourhoods, built forty years apart, have handled the movement and evolution of an area will inform the findings, discussion, and analysis portion of this paper. The importance of planning and finding increasingly diverse solutions to suburban sprawl is recognized by Wu and Keil (2022) who support the idea that a movement towards diverse peripheries produce diversified metropolitan landscapes. As well, Marcuse (2011) makes note of moving beyond traditional viewpoints to create and accommodate diversification in suburban areas.

There is importance in researching the aim of this paper because the implementation of suburban infrastructure must include actors from multiple disciplines. Creating new urban peripheries must also include discussions that take into consideration a variety of social, environmental, and economic factors. This 'intersection' of people, localities, and regions, as Simone (2004) calls it, is needed in the 'making of cities' (Caldeira, 2016), whether they are considered emerging urban or not. The concept of an emerging urban area, therefore, must include not just its built infrastructure, but also the new way of living that is being created by that infrastructure. To begin, it is necessary to understand how an emerging urban area is planned and ultimately built. It is also necessary to investigate how planning decisions for an area are made and what factors and schools of thought influence those decisions. In addition, it is imperative to

examine the area under development and contrast it to an area that has been established, and analyze how it is ultimately being used by all actors involved: that is, are the housing, transit, and socio-economic amenities adequate and contributing to a new suburban way of living for users? Thus, my overall research question is: Through its approach to transit, housing, and social infrastructure, is the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre providing a new definition of suburbanism and demonstrating a new way of living in the suburbs for its residents?

The following supporting background questions were taken into consideration and informed my research and analysis for this paper:

- What are traditional suburban stereotypes? How are they defined? Which communities in proximity to the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC) comply with traditional suburban stereotypes?
- What characteristics define an emerging urban periphery? How are they applied to new infrastructure projects?
- What is the role of the urban planner in helping a municipality establish an area that can be defined as a new suburbanism? What, in the built area, indicates who the planner is ultimately 'working' for?
- How well does the current and proposed infrastructure for a space support population growth and needs? What factors are still being disregarded (e.g. affordability)?

These supporting background questions ultimately come together through different methodologies that allow for the analysis of case study areas to answer the above posed main research question: Through its approach to transit, housing, and social infrastructure, is the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre providing a new definition of suburbanism and demonstrating a new way of living in the suburbs for its residents?

## **1.2 Methodology**

The research design and methodology used to conduct my research for this major paper is based on a mixed-method or multi-strategy approach which combines elements of both quantitative and qualitative research (Bryman and Bell, 2019). Quantitative research involves using data that can either be compared on a numeric scale, such as census data or statistics, and qualitative research involves describing qualities or characteristics of a research topic, and can be collected using questionnaires, site visits, and observations (Bryman and Bell, 2019). In terms of my research process, I have conducted and gathered data that will satisfy both qualitative and quantitative paradigms.

My research design and methodology began with a literature review of scholarly articles to explore discussions that examined both current and traditional thinking in terms of defining suburban areas. In undertaking the literature review, patterns and conversations centered around and on suburban infrastructure, emerging urban areas, and planning for suburban life. Throughout this paper and my analysis of the case study areas, I have referred to the literature review to both support my findings, and to build on these patterns and conversations within the context of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and East Woodbridge areas. My methodology continued with an analysis of planning-related reports, Master Plans, interviews with residents, and site visits of the case study areas to better understand whether traditional or new determinants of suburban life are being implemented into current emerging urban peripheries projects.

#### **i) Qualitative Research**

To gather qualitative data, I conducted a literature review to examine what recent academic conversations have revealed about my topic, and to determine any related themes (such as housing and transportation) and how those findings relate to my research goals. Qualitative data was gathered foremost from the case study area of Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC), in the City of Vaughan, but also from a nearby, long established neighbourhood to the west, namely East Woodbridge. I visited the case study areas multiple times over several weeks. Site visits were conducted at varying times of the day, and on varying days of the week. This allowed for a greater depth and breadth of qualitative data and accounted for variations and anomalies in movement patterns (ie. rush hour, late evening use, weekend versus weekday, etc). Qualitative data was also gathered through the analysis and review of planning-related reports and Master Plans from the municipality.

As I moved through the analysis and review of the qualitative data, I used an interpretivist methodology which can be defined as “a position that requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meanings that people attach to their actions and behaviours” (Bryman and Bell, 2019, p. 405). With an interpretivist approach, the selection and relevance of the narratives will be decided upon by the researcher. This approach allowed me to use previous experiences and gained knowledge to interpret the results of my literature review, case studies, and site visits. The approach also allowed me to explore specific factors when choosing information to analyze

in pursuit of my research question. An interpretivist approach towards my case study visits allowed me to conclude that those visits should be centered around the supporting areas of transportation, housing, and social infrastructure in addition to identifying traditional and new determinants of suburban life. Observations at site visits made note of factors such as traffic patterns, types of infrastructure (residential, commercial, social, industrial), road infrastructure, transit options, housing options and density, vehicle use, and pedestrian activity and interaction with the built environment. The question of whether there is a work-residential connection within the case study area was also explored and interpreted and contributed to the qualitative data amassed. For this major paper, the gathering of qualitative data is the main methodology, since quantitative data on the effects of transit and housing availability on suburban residents in emerging areas is not easily measured, would not provide sufficient data to support the theory, and would be extremely time-consuming to gather.

## **ii) Quantitative Research**

In addition to the collection of qualitative data, and despite the limitations indicated above, quantitative data was also collected and analyzed to support and extend my research question. Quantitative data was gathered through the analysis of census information and statistics, and through the review of GIS choropleth maps that focus on ethnicity, income, age, gender, and modes of transportation. Case studies of existing and emerging urban areas also yielded quantitative data from the municipality's Master and Secondary Plans for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Formally available information and data was also accessed from transportation companies such as the TTC, Viva, and York Region Transit, which provide transit solutions for the VMC. The type of quantitative data reviewed and analyzed from these organizations included information such as ridership frequency and numbers and helped determine the effectiveness of solutions put in place (ie. did ridership increase? Decrease?). Real estate websites were also perused to gather quantitative data on the cost of housing options in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Pre-observation of the proposed case study sites was also conducted to establish and gather general information such as orientation of the site, amenities available, and type and placement of transit solutions. Pre-observation visits were helpful in establishing currently available transit solutions and how they are being used by residents prior to the review of formal quantitative data.

The collection of quantitative data means that my research methods are also inductivist in nature. The inductivist approach, according to Bryman and Bell (2019), is “an approach to inquiry that begins with a collection of data which are then used to develop theories, hypotheses, and concepts” (p. 405). This approach allows for the unbiased examination of social and statistical information about the case study areas and allows for conclusions about traditional and new determinants of suburbia and suburban life, which form the basis of this major paper. A constructivist approach also emerged as a methodology in my research process, which is defined as an area where “social phenomena and their meanings are continually being created by social actors” (Bryman and Bell, 2019, p. 403). This allowed me, as the researcher, to have space for new and unexpected perspectives to emerge, as well as notice commonalities and interconnections between the built environments in both traditional and new examples of suburbia when forming my conclusions. Additionally, GIS strategies were used in the research process to gather data that is specific to housing and transit in suburban areas. For example, choropleth maps were used to examine a range of data sets such as population density and income level which were then used in my research to form conclusions about traditional suburban stereotypes and determinants for a new suburban life.

### **iii) Rationale for Methodology**

Bryman and Bell (2019) argue that social scientists maintain the role of grasping the subjective meanings of people’s actions through an interpretivist approach. In addition, they suggest that a mixed-method approach combines elements of both quantitative and qualitative research. For this paper, this approach allowed for the collection of data from a wide range of sources, such as statistics, site visits, interviews, and observations. The use of this social science methodology was consistently evident in the literature reviewed for this paper. As such, I chose to use a similar mixed-methods approach for my research process. For example, many of the authors whose literature I reviewed used case studies and site visits of different cities for comparison and for the collection of qualitative and quantitative data. Hardy et al. (2011) examined transportation sustainability through government policy in Maryland. Similarly, Harris (2020) used Metropolitan Toronto and other large cities to consider how urban periphery is treated through a socio-economic lens. Nijman and Clery (2020) and Gilbert (2020) examined the consequences of urban sprawl, both positive and negative, in Miami and Mexico City respectively. Many authors also state the value of site visits, such as Newhouse et al. (2017), who

believe that site visits can be invaluable as one element of a larger evaluation design. The authors also note that results from site visits can be successfully blended with data from other sources, encouraging connectivity between data sets and topics (Newhouse et al., 2017). In addition, Patton (2015) asserts that the understanding of a topic is “enhanced when . . . observant evaluators go into the field . . . paying attention to what’s going on, systematically documenting what they see, and reporting what they learn” (p. 444). Observing this method in use in the literature confirmed the need to include case study site visits in my own research and the importance of forming conclusions based on my own observations.

In addition, Moos and Walter-Joseph’s (2017) book contains many GIS choropleth maps based on census data from a large variety of socio-economic factors. This signaled to me the importance of collecting and including quantitative data to support my research question. Moos and Walter-Joseph’s (2017) choropleth maps helped greatly to clarify the authors’ points about the suburban way of living, and I determined that analyzing quantitative data related to my research question would help readers of my major paper to gain clarity into my viewpoint as well.

Lastly, Filion (2017), Guney et al. (2019), and Keil (2017) all concluded that urban theory must be rewritten, and that there must be a move away from traditional planning paradigms. Reviewing the literature of these authors led me to the importance of beginning with the identification of typical views concerning urban periphery theories and then moving to explore beyond, compiling qualitative evidence to support a new proposed point of view. This literature supports my research approach of starting with the traditional and then presenting the new. It also supports my use of literature review to gather qualitative data, which is understandably necessary in any large social science research project. In addition, this approach also supports my chosen and preferred research method: a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data which I feel provides greater clarity for the reader.

All these methodologies assisted me in the research process, helping to form theories about what emerging urban areas could look like in the future and the parameters that planning for transit and other infrastructure for these new suburban areas should include. Using the mixed-methods approach allowed for a support on which to build further conversations that also informed my research and led to new viewpoints on how suburbia can be organized and built moving forward.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

In recent years there has been a fair quantity of literature analyzing the changing face of suburban life. There is also literature that has examined the infrastructure of urban peripheries, the qualities of the emerging urban center itself, and the role of planning in deciding which socio-economic determinants will define a new suburban way of life. In analyzing the literature, it became apparent that traditional stereotypes surrounding urban peripheries and suburban life are no longer proving effective in providing essential resources for the suburban resident: the built environment no longer matches the way people now live in the suburbs. Wu and Keil (2022) state that there is a movement away from traditional definitions of urban peripheries and towards diverse peripheries that are a part of diversified metropolitan landscapes (p. 4). These diversified landscapes will better fit an increasingly diverse population that is making suburbia their home.

Traditional stereotypes of suburbia have included infrastructure and transit solutions that fit a homogenous population. Keil (2022) states that there has been a trend towards growing diversity in built forms and demographics in suburbia. The classic view of the suburbs is of a low-density, automobile-oriented, predominantly residential, urban peripheral area (Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017). But in his research, Harris (2010) has attempted to expand the conceptual and empirical reach of the suburban so that it can be viewed as something other than just the white picket fence, American Dream scenario. However, Moos and Walter-Joseph (2017) point out that gains in this area may be hampered by the fact that most work focuses on central cities and their issues, even though most metropolitan areas are very highly suburbanized and most rapid growth is occurring in the urban peripheries. Previous literature has also established the physical, mental, economic, and environmental impacts of transit issues in urban areas, but less attention has been paid to the specific transit accessibility needs of urban residents and its impacts. With their research, Sener et al. (2016) have contributed to the emerging field of studies on health and transportation, revealing that transit use is associated with increased levels of physical activity and improved health outcomes. These authors also note the need for a link between health datasets and existing transit data to better assess specific transit needs of emerging urban peripheries. To that end, this major paper also aims to address how transit

planning is now more vital than ever to the establishment of successful urban periphery projects and the establishment of a new suburban life.

Drawing upon literature review, the following sections will focus on concepts relevant to the defining of suburban infrastructure, emerging urban areas, and the role of the planner in developing urban peripheries. The literature reviewed below was used to inform this paper and research analysis within the broader academic context.

## **2.2 Suburban Infrastructure**

Emerging literature defines current suburban infrastructure as a means of ordering suburban form and providing conditions essential to the life and functioning of a society (Addie, 2019). The term infrastructure itself is a combination of words that suggest a supportive role that upholds any social or technical arrangements that are in place (Addie, 2019). Conducting a literature review in this area includes an examination of the basic components that are to be found in a suburb, and the current challenges that these urban peripheries face. For example, Addie (2019) finds that since most suburbs are expanded along the edges of the existing urban perimeter, there is almost a constant need for new infrastructure to be built, which can lead to service crises. The implementation of suburban infrastructure in creating urban peripheries must also include discussions on all supporting players. To Addie (2016), this means not just the consideration of infrastructure itself, but the conceptualization of a city and the nature of social justice within it. Addie (2016) feels that this viewpoint is becoming increasingly important as urbanization continues around the world at a rapid rate, necessitating massive investment in developing the core infrastructure of emerging urban societies and overhauling outdated or overloaded systems. Such infrastructural investment would also likely drive expansion in other interconnected urban space supporting factors, such as construction, energy, transportation, and water and waste (Keil, 2013).

In the discussion and defining of suburban infrastructure, the literature also makes note of transportation and transit options and how they are affected by urban periphery growth. Since it has been established that suburban growth is not solely about the homes that are built but also the socio-economic factors that support them, movement and transportation options must be considered in defining suburban infrastructure. Literature suggests that new urban design must be transit-oriented and part of suburban land use planning (Dock and Swenson, 2003). This can be anything from road infrastructure and transit solutions and infrastructure, to considering who

is using the roads and why. Finding suburban transit solutions and incorporating them into master plans can be learned from international government policies and examples. For example, Hardy et al. (2011) looked at transportation sustainability through policy development. In Montgomery County, Maryland, an Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) is in place which requires the county's Planning Board to ensure that currently available transportation facilities can accommodate an increase in peak-period trips that new subdivisions will create *before* the subdivision is approved (Hardy et al., 2011). This highlights the importance of having such policies in place, which encourages discussion among the various actors involved in creating and ensuring transportation sustainability (Hardy et al., 2011).

In further defining suburban land use planning and infrastructure, one must also consider the challenges that urban peripheries present for residents in terms of quality of life in all areas, including transit accessibility. Increasing the walkability and access to transit in a community greatly increases the physical, mental, economic, and environmental health of its residents. In the Yonge Subway North Extension project for example, increasing walkability in the suburban neighborhood of Royal Orchard through additional subway stops will provide an effective way to increase daily physical activity for residents (Sener et al., 2016). In addition, Adlakha et al. (2018) found that having a transit stop within a ten-minute walk of one's residence strongly increases the likelihood of active commuting, further increasing mental and physical health benefits.

### **2.3 Emerging Urban Areas**

A basic definition of emerging urban areas can include the peripheral growth of existing urban areas and the increasing number of people moving to those peripheries (Harris, 2022). Closely tied into the definition of emerging urban areas is how the urban periphery is then approached (Harris, 2022) by considering social, economic, physical environment, and health factors. The success of these emerging urban areas is dependent on many factors. Harris (2020), for example, states that emerging urban areas are successful when there is strong governmental support. The author gives as an example the establishment of amalgamation in Toronto and its positive effects on its suburban municipalities such as North York and Scarborough (Harris, 2020). This amalgamation allowed for the building of regional infrastructure that in turn led to a compact linear pattern of development in urban peripheries instead of uncontrolled urban sprawl outward from the city core (Harris, 2020). If emerging urban areas are not built in a controlled

manner, municipalities will eventually find it difficult to provide infrastructure such as roads, sewers, water, and adequate movement and transportation options. By contrast, Gilbert (2020) examines the uncontrolled sprawl outward from Mexico City's city center, and how this led to the inability of the Mexican government to provide the necessary infrastructure to give basic services to its residents in the urban periphery. Additionally, Nijman and Clery (2020) have examined the metropolitan area of Miami, Florida, and the political, economic, and social ramifications of urban periphery development there. In Miami, urban periphery growth has come from in-migration, with suburban residential and employment centers having developed north and south of the city, which was once just a vacation destination (Nijman and Clery, 2020). This is due to Miami's governmental policy, the Urban Development Boundary (UDB), which has encouraged controlled expansion into suburban areas where people can live *and* work, while keeping high-priced residential properties along the Atlantic coast and downtown area, maintaining Miami's glamorous, world-class city image (Nijman and Clery, 2020).

The definition, creation, and rise of peripheral centralities is currently changing. According to Phelps et al. (2023), peripheral centralities can be defined through concrete examples in either spatial or morphological terms. The authors have identified four broad types of peripheral centralities: spatial or conceptual, residential, economic, and infrastructural, which they believe are interconnected (Phelps et al., 2023). Peripheral centralities are then defined as "those elements of the built environment that generate a measure of accessibility, connectivity and destination commonly associated with city centers" (Phelps et al., 2023, p. 1160). These elements include, but are not limited to, transportation infrastructures such as roads and airports, buildings such as shopping malls and office parks, and transit-oriented developments and extensions (Phelps et al., 2023).

Typically, peripheral centrality is classified by its non-central concentrations of employment, in other words, people do not work where they live (Phelps et al., 2023). But there are examples of change. Some publicly and privately developed communities have been designed from the beginning to be self-contained, and they have a strong balance of residential, employment and social opportunities (Phelps et al., 2023). In addition, logistics infrastructure has traditionally been suburbanized near corridors that become of major significance to a city's economy (Healey, 2015). This helps define peripheral centralities in terms of their main function and as movement corridors for people, which has important implications for the ultimate

planning of suburban communities (Healey, 2015). Viewing and considering the idea that peripheral centralities can be more than just residential areas opens possibilities in urban design that can significantly impact how a city's emerging urban area is used.

Peripheral centralities also have a role to play in global city formation. As Keil (2017b) states, global city formation has always also been about a city's centrality. This is because most global city economies are built on the readily recognizable built and social environments of the inner city (Keil, 2017b). A global city's push for relevance has also meant a focus on massive urban development of megaprojects and iconic cultural and architectural buildings. Thus, the geographical and functional focus of development has usually been the central city (Keil, 2017b). However, Keil (2017b) hypothesizes that "global city formation is dependent on the accelerated urbanization of the global city region" (p. 435). The author believes in the importance of the peripheral in urban development and argues that "suburbanization is a necessary and integral, constitutive element of the global city's centrality" (Keil, 2017b, p. 435). With this viewpoint in mind, the role of emerging urban areas can be increased in its significance. Currently, around the world, the realities of global urbanization mean that the central city and periphery are being remixed (Keil, 2017b). With new forms blending on the periphery, a different suburbia *and* a different city are the result (Keil, 2017b). At the same time, suburbanism can be defined as the "growing prevalence of qualitatively distinct 'suburban ways of life'" (Keil, 2017b, p. 435), with unique land use patterns, transportation, and socio-economic distinctions (Keil, 2017b). So, while it may appear that peripheral areas have opposing purposes and values to central areas, they are in fact being recognized as important arenas for experimentation and forward-thinking practices.

## **2.4 Planning for Suburban Life**

Planning researchers have argued that urban peripheries need to be rebuilt. For this to happen, planning itself needs to experience a paradigm shift to continue to be effective. According to Filion (2017), paradigms in planning are understood to be ways of thinking that influence how planning is practiced, and paradigm shifts in planning are the main points in the evolution of planning. Planning for a new suburban life therefore involves paradigm shifts for all actors involved, from planners to residents.

In addition, for planning for the new suburban life to happen, there must be both a recognition and a move away from traditional planning techniques. Filion (2017) states that

periods of crisis always follow periods of sharp transition, and this can erode confidence in current or prevailing paradigms of thinking. This then sets the stage for the traditional paradigms to be replaced (Filion, 2017). So, for new suburbanisms to be created, the planning profession must then undergo a radical redress in thinking to achieve consistency around the emerging paradigm (Filion, 2017). Simply stated, new ideologies about suburban life cannot be defined or brought to fruition if planning as a profession does not embrace and install change. At the same time, these changes would not endure if there was not already a stable, existing environment to support them (Filion, 2017). This stable environment usually comes through existing infrastructure, regulations, and incentives (Filion, 2017).

In addition, one must also consider the specific role of the planner in determining what suburban life could look like moving forward. Planners must be willing to compare traditional planning ideologies to modern planning ideologies and decide which methods will best suit the needs of the people using the space. According to Stein (2019), traditional urban planning emphasized the built environment for the benefit of capitalists and developers. But according to Hodge et al. (2021), it is currently more important to consider planning from a multi-disciplinary and participatory practices, as a more viable suburban life can be achieved through these approaches. Planners therefore need to consider a multitude of factors in creating a suburban lifestyle and the social, economic, and physical infrastructure that will keep it viable. Considering factors such as income, gender, and race will help planners acutely define the needs of a neighborhood and ensure equitable practices. And considering factors such as congestion, pollution, commute times, and transit's effects on mental and physical health will help deliver improved transit solutions that will increase user compliance. It is important to alert planners and politicians to local concerns and to bring local knowledge to the planning process (Hodge et al., 2021). In terms of future transit solutions and considerations, it is also necessary to make a conscious effort to adopt as many participatory practices as possible to ensure residents' concerns and needs are considered (Hodge et al., 2021).

Guney et al. (2019) also support the move away from traditional planning theories but recognize their importance in creating new visions of what suburban life can be. They examine these theories through the idea of 'massive suburbia' (p. 7) and emphasize that this includes not just the housing projects themselves, but their existing infrastructural, industrial, and commercial environments also (Guney et al., 2019, p. 3). They further suggest that the idea of 'massive

suburbia' has given rise to new theorizations of how urban is defined in general, hoping to change the perspective on suburbanization within the global context (Guney et al., 2019). Redevelopment is supported by the authors, but not just in the physical sense (Guney et al., 2019). They feel that any redevelopment that happens in urban peripheries must necessarily also involve issues of political economy, and engage not just the built, but the natural and social environments of large-scale housing projects (Guney et al., 2019). Similarly, Keil (2013) states that we are living in a suburban century, and that the building and rebuilding of peripheral urban areas must include the politics, financial mechanisms, and technologies of doing so. As part of this outlook, Keil (2013) theorizes that both traditional and emerging suburbanisms must be considered as contributing to particular ways of life in suburbia, and that urban theory needs to be re-worked from the outside in (Keil, 2017).

A further point raised in existing literature is understanding that suburban living has evolved beyond the idea that suburban areas are purely residential in nature. Instead, planners and all actors involved must realize that suburban areas share physical space and transit infrastructure with commercial and industrial land uses as well. This idea can help formulate a new vision for suburban design and transportation especially, since automobile dependent suburban subdivisions dominate in most Anglo-American cities (Guney et al., 2019). For example, Vishwanath et al. (2014) suggest a term called Personalized Public Transportation, which aims to make transit needs as accessible and personal as possible, all via smartphone use. Solutions such as these consider the way humans currently use an area and the tools and technology that are available to make movement through that area as efficient and enjoyable as possible. The vision for a 'new' suburban life must also be linked to encouraging and resolving transportation issues. The movement of people from one area to another will facilitate any new ideologies suggested for urban peripheries since, as Addie and Keil (2015) suggest, the lines between urban and suburban are blurring.

### **3. Case Study: Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and East Woodbridge**

#### **3.1 Traditional Suburban Stereotypes**

As previously stated, the aim of this paper is to compare traditional suburban stereotypes and new determinants for defining suburbia and evaluate their roles in creating a new way of life in a suburb. Before this can be accomplished, however, it is necessary to provide some context. To that end, certain questions can be considered: what constitutes traditional suburban stereotypes? what constitutes new determinants for defining a suburb? what central arguments have been put forth by scholars and others in these areas? To begin, this section will focus on providing a brief, but in no way comprehensive, summary of some of the main arguments surrounding the idea of traditional suburban stereotypes.

In its simplest form, a suburb is often *very* simply defined as a geographical area located on the fringes of a city's urban center (Harris, 2018, p. 34). And, as mentioned in the introduction, the traditionally held view of the suburbs is of an area characterized by single-family homes in a low-density area far from commercial activity, with open spaces and lots of privacy (Clapson, 2003 and Forsyth, 2012). Moos and Walter-Joseph (2017) have named this view of the suburbs 'Classic Suburbs' (p. 108), and along with the previously mentioned characteristics, have included auto-centric. Lorinc (2006) confirms this reliance on the automobile, stating that 96% of suburban households own a car and use it to commute (p. 107). Other traditional suburban stereotypes present the suburbs as a collection of households that demonstrate ethnic, racial, and class homogeneity, exclusivity, and gendered domesticity (Korinek, 2000). For the purposes of this paper, it was determined that the case study area of East Woodbridge included and displayed many of these characteristics of a traditionally held view of suburbia.

Scholars such as Harris (2018) have examined both the positive and negative aspects attached to the idea of traditional suburban stereotypes (p. 29). Of course, whether a traditionally held stereotype is going to be defined as positive or negative has been argued by scholars such as Forsyth (2012) to be dependent on *who* is doing the defining. For example, a resident who values homeownership and privacy will find positive connotations in traditional suburban stereotypes. However, a resident who appreciates increased walkability, social interactions, and cultural opportunities in a neighbourhood, may believe traditional suburban stereotypes to be negative. Positive and negative interpretations of traditional suburban stereotypes can also hold

implications for government policy. For example, Forsyth (2012) believes that if suburbs are viewed as essentially white, middle-class, and elite, policy makers may not readily recognize or acknowledge problems found in African-American or low-income suburbs (p. 271). Similarly, if suburbs are seen as completely auto-dependent, new or more transit-oriented solutions for suburbs may be ignored (Forsyth, 2012, p. 271). Traditional suburban stereotypes have also historically been viewed negatively in terms of social and cultural diversity. Nineteenth-century London suburbs for example, were seen as “monotonous, featureless, [and] without character”, filled with residents who lived “petty lives without social, cultural or intellectual interests” (Thompson, 1982, p. 3). And Archer (2005) speaks of a theme of conformity that runs through traditional suburbia, with suburbanites stereotyped as status-conscious joiners who have submitted to mass consumerism, with a car in the driveway, a TV in the living room, and a comfortable but bland life devoid of larger meaning (pp. 283 – 285).

Perhaps all these connotations are the reason why many scholars feel that our attachment to using traditional stereotypes to describe the suburbs needs to be re-examined. Elvin Wyly, in his foreword to *Still Detached and Subdivided?* (Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017), writes that North American suburbia has become too familiar, once a universal reference point for planners, but now too old and obsolete (p. 8). To this end, there have been many scholarly theories put forth as to why traditionally held suburbanisms have persisted in society, even if they no longer suit the needs of residents in creating emerging urban peripheries. In a general sense, for example, Harris (2018) believes that they help us “make sense of our world, [express] the aspirations of people at [a] particular time” (p. 29): the stereotype “articulates an ideal, a vision, a goal” (p. 35). Huq (2013) agrees, stating that the traditional aspects of the suburbs defined above have fed into a “misleading . . . mythic image” (p. 194) that has persisted long after the world started changing (p. 194). And Bourne (1996) believes they persist because having a political and geographical boundary, which typifies traditional suburbanisms, is important to how people manage their lives, status, and well-being (p. 165). In addition, the persistence and commonality of traditional stereotypes continue because they have been “articulated and reproduced . . . by private agents, including land developers” (p. 29) and those who serve them, such as lawyers and real estate agents, showing a stereotype’s many avenues for perpetuation (Harris, 2018). Sometimes stereotypes persist through “sheer inertia” (p. 29) or the forcefulness of their reach, especially through the media (Harris, 2018). Marketing tactics (both online and in

print), and popular media outlets such as TV and newspapers, have both reinforced the positive and negative aspects of traditional suburban stereotypes (Huq, 2013). Lastly, planners themselves have contributed to the prevalence of these stereotypes by relying only on spatial factors such as density and distance in their definitions, leading to the idea that a suburb is geographically bounded and separate from a city's center (Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017, p. 22). Additionally, the authors cannot discount the fact that traditional stereotypes persist simply because any changes are perceived to be "a challenge to the very lifestyle some suburbanites have come to enjoy and value" (Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017, p. 24). This examination of why traditional stereotypes persist is important to this paper as it can help explain the difference between how users (ie.residents, workers, commuters, etc) of East Woodbridge and the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre view the idea of a suburban life, and how those attitudes manifest themselves in users' daily lives.

There has therefore been much examination on the part of scholars surrounding the definition and application of traditional suburban stereotypes. But how does one go about presenting a different image and definition of a suburb? What does it mean to envision new determinants for defining suburban life, and how can those determinants be applied to emerging urban peripheries? The next section of this paper will examine the main points presented by scholars in this area of study.

### **3.2 New Suburban Determinants**

Presenting a different image and definition of a suburb means envisioning new determinants for defining a new suburban life. But what do those determinants look like? What are they based on? According to previous critical literature, the baseline for new suburban determinants used to define emerging urban areas should differ greatly from traditional stereotypes of suburbia. Of the eight different residential suburb types that Moos and Walter-Joseph (2017) envision, their 'Transit-Oriented Suburb' is presenting as the most common contrast to traditional suburban stereotypes in terms of typology (pp. 108, 112). This type of suburb includes characteristics such as medium-to-high density, walkable areas, greater and easier proximity to transit to discourage automobile use, and mixed-use buildings (p. 108). New determinants should also make the suburbs more equitable, accessible, and diverse (Forsyth, 2012) and should encourage social opportunities (Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017, pp. 110 – 111). They should incorporate public spaces and interactive technology, and plan for children, youth,

and an aging population, all of whom are disadvantaged by traditional suburbanisms that promote automobile dependency (Harris, 2018, p. 33). For the purposes of this paper, it was determined that the case study area of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre included and displayed many of the characteristics of new determinants in defining a new suburban way of life.

In addition to the built forms that seem to dominate the characterization of traditional suburban stereotypes, scholars encourage the use of new determinants in defining new suburban life because the idea of what a suburb *is* bears re-examination. Harris (2018) states, “‘suburban’ models of any sort have become irrelevant” (p. 34). Addie and Keil (2015) have suggested that the lines between urban and suburban are blurring, necessitating the creation and application of more than one definition for a suburb. And while scholars such as Addie (2019) recognize the components of current suburban infrastructure, they also recognize the challenges these urban peripheries are facing; what worked before may not keep working. For example, most traditional suburbs, built along an existing urban perimeter, require new infrastructure to be constantly built to maintain service levels. New determinants for a new suburban way of life can, on the other hand, demonstrate a greater awareness of *future* services needed in an area based on the different built forms they encourage.

Addie (2016) also suggests that any new determinants should stem from as many conversations and partnerships between as many supporting players as possible in a development: residents, politicians, social agencies, environmentalists, and healthcare professionals. This is important, as global urbanization and rapidly emerging urban societies necessitate the need to overhaul outdated or overloaded systems (Addie, 2016). New determinants should also consider that suburban growth is not only about the homes that are built, but also about the socio-economic factors that support them. To Keil (2013) this means expansion and consideration of other interconnected urban space supporting factors such as energy, transportation, and water and waste. To Hess and Ong (2002), this means areas should be developed using mixed-use strategies to lower automobile dependence and increase walkability (p. 42). The authors also emphasize a variety of urban land uses to further enable people to pursue their preferences in an area they live in (p. 42). Lastly, globalization must also play a role in re-examining the idea of a suburb. Keil (2017b) believes in the importance of the peripheral in urban development, and the significance of emerging urban areas. With global urbanization, the central city and periphery are being remixed, and a different suburbia *and* a different city are the

result (Keil, 2017b). New determinants for a new definition of suburban life can therefore be recognized as important arenas for experimentation and forward-thinking practices.

Another reason scholars encourage the need for and use of new determinants in defining and creating suburbs is the need for change. While there is nothing new in terms of form in creating new determinants for a new suburban life, the drive for a new definition of a central periphery must come from awareness of a changing world, and be driven by changes in government policy, changes in planning policy, and changes in legislation. Traditionally described suburbs have often been maligned for being “irresponsible” (Harris, 2018, p. 33). Their characteristics make them unfriendly to pedestrians and cyclists, are costly to service due to their low density, and create and consume too much energy and materials (Miller, 2018, p. 33). They have been blamed for destroying farmland, increased pollution levels, and the effects of urban sprawl (Miller, 2018, p. 33). Many of these characteristics are linked to social and environmental issues that were not uppermost in mind when building traditional suburbs, especially in the post-war years in North American (Bourne, 1996, p. 166). However, recent years have brought increased awareness to social issues such as housing insecurity, unemployment, and an environment in crisis. Government policy such as Ontario’s *A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Ontario, 2019) aims to “increase housing supply, create jobs, and build communities that make life easier, healthier and more affordable for people of all ages” (Ontario, 2019, p. 1). It supports “the achievement of *complete communities* . . . and social equity” (Ontario, 2019, p. 2). Planners hoping to establish new determinants for a new definition of suburban life can then look towards these emerging policies as ways to diversify the strategies used in creating central peripheries. The world is ever changing, and clinging to old determinants simply because they have existed for a long time will leave cities at a disadvantage when planning new developments. In a changing world, it is important to examine how we live and the places we live in with a critical eye.

Any new determinants in defining the suburbs must also recognize the people who will live in an area and *how* they live there. The formation of new determinants for a new definition of suburban life enables people to choose an area in which they can comfortably live the life *they* have chosen, regardless of geography. It must be considered that the suburbs are a living thing, alive with residents, who are *people* after all (Harris, 2018, p. 34). There are “multiple dimensions of suburban ways of life that transcend the . . . stereotypes of the city/suburb divide”

(Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017, p. 8), due to the different ways people use an area which are just as important as where the area is. Roger Keil believes that “being urban is increasingly the shared condition of humanity, [and] for many if not most of us, this takes place in what we would recognize as a suburban space” (Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017, p. 10). Harris (2018) gives the example of a class of people in China who have migrated to the urban fringe because they aspire to own property (p. 31). While they may reside in a high-density area in a high-rise building rather than a detached, single-family home, they still have the same aspirations as post-war residents in the 1950s who were chasing the Canadian Dream (Harris, 2018, p. 32). And Shen and Wu (2013) have seen the emergence of “suburban living ideals” (p. 1823) in China, indicating people who used to “prefer a bed in the central city to a house in the suburbs” (p. 1823). These examples, and others around the world, especially in the Global South, all show variations on the North American suburban ideal (Harris, 2018, p. 32). But most important to note is that no matter what the manifestations of a suburban ideal may look like, whether high or low density, green space or urban square, auto or transit-centered, it is what people are *seeking*, removal from the urban core, their own living space, and a better address, that can be found anywhere (Harris, 2018, p. 32).

In completing the research for this paper, I have concluded that traditional suburban stereotypes tend to contribute to the idea that a suburb is most often simply defined as a geographical area, one that is on the outer edges of an urban core (Harris, 2018, p. 34). However, for new determinants to be applied and find success in future built projects, there is a distinct need to move away from defining the suburbs based only on geography. Research into new determinants has concluded that any space can be labelled as urban or suburban, suburban diversities are flourishing, and suburbanism is a way of life that can happen anywhere (Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017, p. 10). Based on these discussed contexts, I will, in the next section, examine how traditional suburban stereotypes and new determinants have contributed to ways of living in two different neighbourhoods in Vaughan, Ontario: East Woodbridge and the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.

### 3.3 Transportation, Housing, Social Infrastructure

The idea of building a business and commercial core for the newly minted City of Vaughan was proposed to City Council in 1998 (Vaughan, 2024). Initially called the Vaughan Corporate Centre (VCC), the area at the intersection of Jane Street and Highway 7 was meant to become a focal point to attract businesses and commercial development to the heart of Vaughan (Vaughan, 2024). Then, in 2006, the Ontario government announced the Spadina subway line would be extended into Vaughan, and the surrounding lands would be designated as an Urban Growth Centre (Vaughan, 2024). A Focus Area Study conducted as part of the City’s Growth Management Strategy began in 2008, and eventually the area was rebranded as the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre or the VMC (Vaughan, 2020). Development of housing and other infrastructure in the area began soon after the completion of the VMC subway station in 2017. With the VMC, the “City of Vaughan plans to create a downtown – an intense, dynamic community that in time will become the heart of the city, economically, culturally and physically.” (Vaughan, Sept 2023).

**Figure 1**

*Map of Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC) Development*

*Source: SmartCentres Canada (2024)*



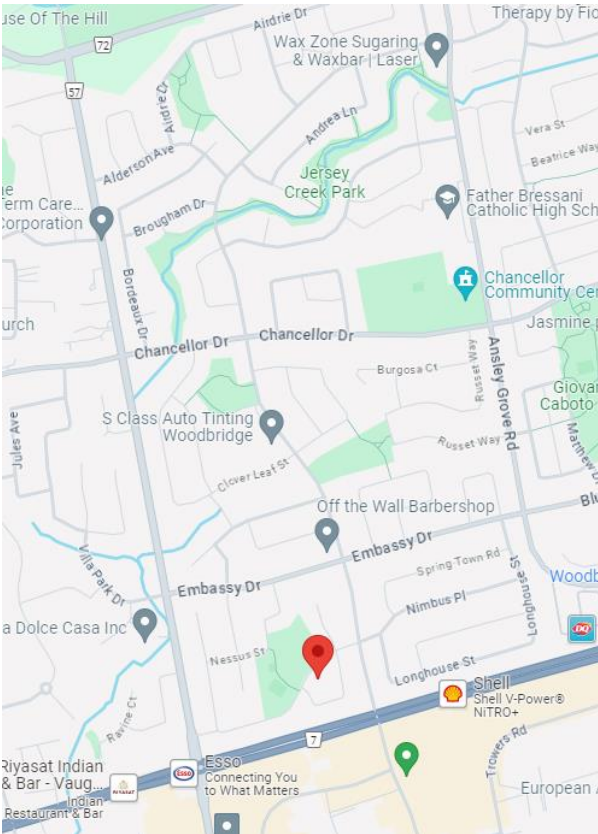
The VMC encompasses approximately 190 hectares (roughly 350 football fields), and will offer 1.5 million square feet of office space and roughly half as much of retail space. It will also have, upon completion, residential units housing 25,000 residents, and employment opportunities for 11,000 people, half of which will be office based (Vaughan, 2024). Within the

VMC, Vaughan hopes to reach its density and employment goals of 200 people and jobs per hectare by 2031 (Vaughan, 2024), which encourages the new determinant of creating areas where people *can* live where they work. According to the City of Vaughan’s *Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan (VMCSP)*, the boundaries of the VMC (Figure 1) are Highway 407 to the south, Highway 400 to the west, Portage Parkway to the north, and Creditstone and Maplecrete Roads to the east (Vaughan, 2024). However, the boundaries for this case study area are currently being reviewed for expansion and are once again being presented to the public for input (Vaughan, Sept 2023). In addition, several new government policies such as Bill 108 *More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019*), are compelling a review of the VMCSP once again to account for any future requirements (Vaughan, Sept 2023).

**Figure 2**

Google Maps Image of East Woodbridge Neighbourhood

Source: Google Maps (2024)



As part of the goal of this research paper is to determine how new emerging suburban thinking is influencing and impacting the creation of new suburbanisms through projects such as the VMC, it is necessary to analyze a neighbourhood that demonstrates traditional stereotypes as

defined by scholars such as Moos and Walter-Joseph (2017). Consequently, the area known as East Woodbridge was chosen as a contrast to the VMC. This neighbourhood, just a few minutes' drive directly west of the VMC along Highway 7, is bounded by Pine Valley Road to the west, Langstaff Road to the north, Ansley Grove Road to the east, and Highway 7 to the south (Figure 2). The homes and social infrastructure located within East Woodbridge are approximately forty years old.

An analysis of these case study areas was undertaken to interpret examples of both traditional stereotypes and new determinants for emerging urban areas. It was important that my research include concrete, visual representation of both these interpretations of suburbia and suburban life. This would allow for greater comparison and clarification of the traditional stereotypes and new determinants of emerging urban areas, and how the former has influenced the creation of the latter. To better focus my analysis, and to better clarify its results, both case study areas were studied and analyzed according to three major areas: transportation, housing, and social infrastructure.

### **3.3.1 Transportation**

Transportation planning and accessibility affects the socio-economic growth, quality of life, networking, and social interactions of all citizens in a city. The transportation system for a given city has great influence and impact on patterns of development, economic viability, and environmental issues, while maintaining socially acceptable qualities of life (Murray et al., 1998). The locations of adequate transportation infrastructure such as highways, subway and bus stations, and Bus Rapid Transit lanes (BRT), are the essence of planning the sustainability of transportation options (Murray et al., 1998). In addition, successful public transportation strategies ensure accessibility to as large a portion of the population as possible. Accessible transportation provides a better quality of life and exposes residents to possibilities outside of their immediate neighbourhood. It also provides greater job opportunities and allows for those who cannot afford a car (or do not want to own one), to explore and experience places and events beyond what is reachable by limited public transportation options (Ahn and Park, 2022).

In the beginning, as suburban areas developed, cities expanded in geographic size faster than they grew in population and amenities (Resnik, 2010). This gave rise to the traditionally held image of the suburbs as characterized by low population densities achieved through detached single-family homes, and auto-centricity achieved through the need to commute to

work, school, and all other activities by automobile (Resnik, 2010). All these transit-related traditional suburbanisms were observed in East Woodbridge. Site visits evaluated not just the type of transit available to residents, but also the built form related to the movement of residents, such as sidewalks, bike lanes, and traffic signage. To begin, sidewalks in East Woodbridge are narrow and sometimes in a state of disrepair due to their age. Curbs are not low or smoothed out enough to ensure easy access for those with mobility issues. No dedicated bike lanes exist. Stop signs are in place to discourage speeding along long stretches of road. And despite the fact that Aberdeen Avenue is the longest north-south corridor running through the area, it does not have a local bus route. The only local bus route is along Chancellor Road where the main social infrastructure is found, ie. high school, library, community centre. A new regional transit BRT lane has been built along Highway 7 but is busy only during rush hours. There were not many pedestrians and cyclists evident, but there was a great number of cars. Perhaps this is because, as Resnik (2010) points out, people who live in traditional suburbs find it difficult to travel even a short distance without using a car because of the remoteness of residential areas and inadequate availability of mass transit, walkways, or bike paths. This exact sentiment was expressed by Informants 3, 4, and 5 about the East Woodbridge neighbourhood. Informant 5 talked about how he drives everywhere, even if it is a few minutes' drive because "I can't be bothered" to walk and "it's just easier". He did complain though about the fact that car trips take longer now, due to increased wait times at intersections opening onto Highway 7 due to the BRT lanes. He also discussed the fact that his children were always driven to school or drove themselves. When asked why, he said the school is a 15-minute walk, and that riding a bike is not an option because "it is too dangerous" and "my kids would not think it looks cool". Informants 3 and 4 had similar answers to my questions, but added the caveat that as they are now older, they find it harder to walk longer distances and it takes too long. The prevailing attitudes are "I've always just taken my car" and "I'm too old to change now".

In opposition to the traditional stereotypes of the suburbs as automobile dependent, carbon producing, bastions of pollution (Harris, 2018, p. 33), the VMC has considered its transportation options seriously, and prioritized its completion. My observations have led me to believe that the VMC has adopted Moos and Walter-Joseph's (2017) vision of a 'Transit-Oriented Suburb', characterized in this case by high transit accessibility and use, and increased walkable areas that are pedestrian and cyclist friendly. It may seem obvious, but transportation

planning only becomes effective when public transit is readily available for use. To this end, a TTC subway station and a VIVA bus terminal are both located in the centre of the VMC (Figures 3 and 4). Along with the BRT stops, all areas of the VMC will eventually be within a 5-minute walk of a public transit option (Appendix B). Currently, ridership for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre subway station, is at 21,186 trips daily (TTC, 2022), which I feel is low compared to the number of people in the area (Appendix C). Pedestrian connectivity to transit options have also been prioritized in the VMC, with direct underground tunnels connecting the bus and subway stations, and the largest office buildings in the VMC evident (Vaughan, 2020, pp. 25 – 26).

**Figure 3**

*SmartVMC Viva Bus Terminal*

*Source: S. Kakalettris (2024)*



**Figure 4**

*VMC Subway Station (L) and Underground Transit Tunnel (R)*

*Source: S. Kakalettris (2024)*



Strategically carried out transportation planning is also most effective when it ensures that as an emerging urban periphery grows, it does not experience adverse effects to its growth due to transit issues such as extreme congestion. Both these situations have been applied in the VMC.

For that reason, I do not feel that the VMC would exist without the subway extension. Recall that the City of Vaughan had had a plan in place for the former VCC lands dating back to the late 1990s. The announcement that a new subway station was to be built in Vaughan was the impetus the City needed to move forward with that plan. So far, I have observed that within the boundaries of the VMC, the automobile is no longer ‘king’. The VMCSPP states that “street life is central to the vision for the VMC, and all development . . . including infrastructure and buildings, should promote walking” (Vaughan, 2020, p. 23). This objective is certainly working. Many pedestrians were present during all site visits, whether office workers moving between buildings, residents walking their dogs, exercising, shopping, or using community amenities. The VMC has “pedestrian priority zones” (Vaughan, 2020, p. 23), which were readily visible around the subway and bus stations, retail and entertainment areas, and community facilities. These pedestrian priority zones have a built environment that is extremely pedestrian and cyclist friendly. The sidewalks are very open and wide, with generous space at the curbs, which gently slope to allow for easy accessibility. The hard materials used make for even walking surfaces. Bicycle lanes are clearly marked, raised slightly above the grade of the road alongside the sidewalks, and have their own designated path. Bicycle racks are everywhere: in front of transit stations, office buildings, in laneways and mews, and in front of other social infrastructure buildings (Figure 5). Street furniture in all areas provides resting spots for pedestrians. These are all features prioritized in the VMCSPP (Vaughan, 2020, pp. 27 – 34).

### **Figure 5**

*Bike Racks in the VMC*

*Source: S. Kakalettris (2024)*



The streets in the VMC are narrow (22 metres), designed for slow speeds and considered part of a fine-grain street grid (Vaughan, 2020, p. 24 - 27) and this was noted in site visits and on site plans (Appendix D). On-street parking is minimal and costs a fee. Surface parking is only available on the periphery of the VMC, so one must walk into the centre core. Currently, surface lots are plentiful and available by the day or month, but renditions of the VMC for future phases show these surface lots will be replaced by housing and all parking will eventually be underground or in above ground parking structures attached to buildings (Vaughan, 2020, p. 34). The VMC has also designed its off-street parking facilities to accommodate, provide for, and encourage car-share programs, further discouraging reliance on the automobile (Vaughan, 2020, p. 35). In addition, the VMC is surrounded by four major ring roads, discouraging through traffic and heavy truck traffic, but still easily providing access to the rest of Woodbridge for residents.

Whether we like it or not, the suburbs remain a desirable form of development (Richards and Kerr, 2013, p. 10), and transportation issues must be prioritized for that development to happen in a thoughtful manner. In the VMC, it is my opinion that planners have used their knowledge, expertise, and community engagement skills to make educated, equitable, and sustainable decisions for transportation infrastructure that benefits citizens first (Murray et al., 1998). The VMC shows examples of the type of strategic consideration in transit planning that Hodge et al. (2021) support through advocating for the creation of a community plan that is both long-range and forward thinking in direction (p. 155). Similarly, Hess and Ong (2002) state that increases in land use intensity and integration along with greater pedestrian connectivity and proximity to transit decrease automobile ownership by making alternatives to driving more attractive (p. 35). This is also evident in the VMC. Overall, I feel that the expectations in creating new determinants that define a new suburban life have been met by the VMC in terms of transportation. Transit options are readily available, accessible, and varied enough in nature that residents will be able to decide how walkable their lifestyle will be. Residents may be choosing to live in a geographical suburb, but in the VMC this no longer also means living an automobile dependent lifestyle.

New suburbanisms for defining a new way of suburban life must also include awareness of social issues related to transit that affect the physical, mental, and emotional health of residents. Increasing proximity to public transit and giving residents the ability to choose how to navigate in a space is important, and the VMC has done this. Currently, over 89% of Vaughan

residents commute to work by car, and 24% have commute times of up to 45 minutes; only 10% use public transit (StatsCanada, 2021). The greater the proximity to transit options, the less likely people are to turn to the automobile as their main mode of transport. In addition, increasing the walkability of new emerging areas such as the VMC will provide positive physical and mental health outcomes, especially as transit has been proven to be “an effective way to integrate physical activity into daily routine” (Sener et al., 2016, p. 134). Adlakha et al. (2018) agree, having found that “the availability of a transit stop within a 10-minute walk from homes was strongly associated with an increase in the likelihood of active commuting” (p. 1847). Upon completion, the VMC will have over 40,000 people within walking distance of a transit stop which will greatly exceed targets (Vaughan, Apr 2023, p. 4). There is also growing evidence that removing barriers to transit accessibility will provide increased mental health benefits through personal time gained from shorter commute times. Lastly, Allen and Farber (2021) investigated the idea of ‘transport poverty’, where the ability to travel to daily activities or to work is hampered by long commute times, high travel costs, and low levels of transit service or accessibility. This ‘transport poverty’ can be alleviated for residents who live in suburban areas and especially those with a lower income, by reducing their dependence on the automobile (Allen and Farber, 2021). While it is still a highly personal choice, I believe that residents of the VMC are being given a greater opportunity to improve their quality of life through transit choices compared to residents who live in traditionally viewed suburbs.

Increasing transit options and accessibility in a new emerging urban periphery is not without its challenges, however. The biggest of these challenges continues to be congestion. While local roads in the VMC have very little congestion, the ring roads do, especially Jane Street and Highway 7, which have historically been known for their extreme congestion. And while congestion along these arterial roads is constant, congestion within the VMC occurs mainly during rush hours. Wait times to leave the VMC at the end of the workday can be very long, according to Informant 6, who works in the KPMG building. The trip home for this informant by car is almost double the trip to work, and she attributes this to volume and extended traffic signal wait times at Jane Street and Highway 7. Data obtained from the City of Vaughan via an information request indicates that 62,966 vehicles pass through this intersection during a peak 8-hour period, ie. 7-10 am, 11-1 pm, and 3-6 pm. My own timed study at the intersection indicated that the traffic light there changes every 4 minutes during peak times. In addition, it

was observed that the local road between the two transit stations is extremely busy during rush hours. This is because there are not enough passenger pick-up and drop-off (PPUDO) facilities for either station. The TTC has identified the need for 40 PPUDO facilities for the subway station *alone*, but only one is currently visible (Vaughan, 2020, p. 26). And while there are no PPUDO facilities on the local street in question (Vaughan, 2020, p. 26), there is lay-by parking with a 10-minute time limit that is enforced, but largely ignored by drivers, causing congestion.

Another challenge facing municipalities that want to redefine suburbanisms to encourage a new way of suburban life is NIMBYism and a lack of public participation in the planning process. In East Woodbridge, even though Informants 3, 4, and 5 knew about the BRT construction and were unhappy about it, none of them attended public meetings to voice their concerns and all were critical of the installation process. When asked how he became aware of the City's plans to construct the BRT, one informant said that he "heard it through the grapevine" and even though he experienced increased noise and inconvenience during the process, he "was not going to pick up the phone and complain". Regardless of resident involvement, Dock and Swenson's (2003) state that new urban design must be transit-oriented and part of suburban land use planning. Hardy et al. (2011) support this idea, providing examples of policy changes that require municipalities to ensure that current transportation facilities can accommodate an increase in peak-period trips *before* any new housing is built. A variation of this idea occurred in the VMC, as the subway extension was announced and opened before any other infrastructure or housing was available. And while Hodge et al. (2021) state that "the NIMBY response is frequently blamed for costly delays in formulating plans and by-laws and for holding up construction projects" (p. 387), "implicit in NIMBY is the desire to alert planners and politicians to local concerns, and to bring local knowledge, which is often invaluable" (p. 387). Planners must take NIMBYism and participatory planning into account when establishing new determinants, since, as Grant (2005) supposes, the role of the planner "involves exposing issues and options for those who make decisions and to those affected by the decisions" (p. 49).

Creating a new emerging urban periphery that prioritizes transit proximity and walkability will in turn encourage a new way of living a suburban life. Unlike East Woodbridge, residents of the VMC have increased opportunities to explore and access alternate modes of transportation and ways of navigating a space. Supporting infrastructure and changes to planning policies will create transportation options that are accessible, equitable, and sustainable and

which allow for improvements to citizens' social, economic, and physical conditions. Weiss et al. (2018) remind us that advancing accessibility in transit is important because it removes inequalities, and with its transit focus, the VMC has shown a commitment to doing just that.

### **3.3.2 Housing**

The idea of housing as a human right is enforced by the United Nation's *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which states "the right of every woman, man, youth and child to gain and sustain a safe and secure home and community in which to live in peace and dignity" (United Nations, 1948, Article 25(1)). However, Canada's current housing crisis may be eroding that right for many people. In one of its reports, the Toronto Regional Real Estate Board (TRREB) has indicated that the average selling price of a home in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) across all property types was \$1.3 million, a staggering 19% increase over the course of a year (TRREB, 2022), and prices continue to rise. At the same time, the Bank of Canada continues to raise interest rates in the hopes of curbing both the rising cost of living and inflation rates that have climbed to historic levels (Macklem, 2022). Wages unfortunately, have not kept up with the rate of inflation, rising less than 3% (Evans, 2022). These statistics indicate the need for housing policies that provide viable solutions as housing affordability continues to deteriorate (TRREB, 2022). However, while traditional actors such as governments have a role to play in setting housing policies and passing them into law, the role of local municipalities and their planners cannot be discounted in making sure those policies are manifested as new determinants that can help define a new way of suburban living.

Viable solutions to the housing affordability crisis will not however, be found in East Woodbridge. In examining East Woodbridge through site visits focused on housing typology, traditional suburbanisms were evident. In this type of stereotypical suburban neighbourhood or 'Classic Suburbs' neighbourhood (Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017), I expected to see housing typology that was predominantly single-family, detached homes, with a driveway, garage, and spacious front lawn on a generously sized lot, and I was not disappointed. I did not observe any townhomes, semi-detached, or condominium housing in this area. In addition, an interview with Informant 8 yielded the information that most homes are valued at an average of \$1.5 million, have four bedrooms, and are between 2-to-3000 square feet in size. The same interview yielded that there is a very limited number of basement apartments for rent in the area, so rental housing is not a viable option. And although their size varied, almost all the homes followed the same

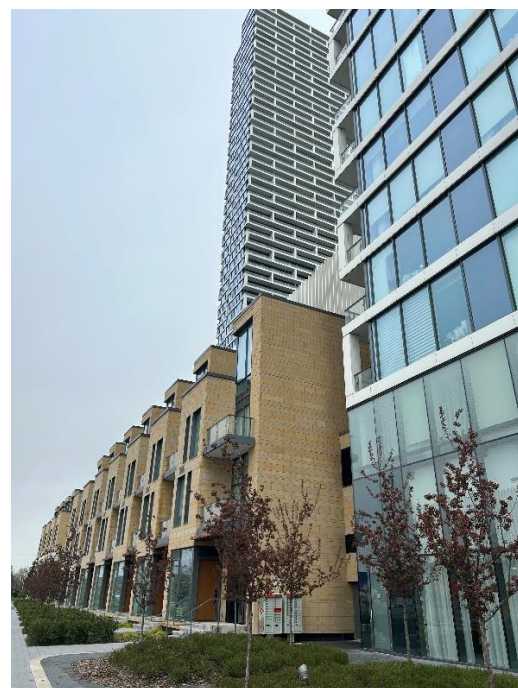
design aesthetic, adding credence to the traditional stereotype that the suburbs are monotonous, homogeneous and dens of conformity (Harris, 2018). Based on all these observations, the housing typology in East Woodbridge most definitely fits the image of a traditional suburban area. This picture of the traditional suburban utopia defined by home ownership and a ‘white picket fence’ however, may be rapidly disappearing under the weight of Canada’s housing crisis.

The housing crisis has necessitated a rapid shift in thinking towards a new way of building emerging urban areas in terms of housing options. While new determinants for defining suburbs have been advocated by scholars and academics for years, it is my opinion that the housing crisis has influenced greater acceptance of more varied forms of housing in the geographical suburbs. Compared to East Woodbridge, the VMC has adopted a completely different housing typology. The VMCSPP advocates for a wide variety of building types, including low-, mid-, and high-rise buildings with options such as townhomes and walk-up apartments (Vaughan, 2020, p. 64). There were, however, no low or mid-rise buildings observed. Housing typology here is almost 100% high-density, high-rise condominium towers, with a few condominium townhomes integrated into the podiums of some towers (Figure 6).

### Figure 6

*Housing Typology in the VMC; High Rise Towers (L) and Townhomes (R)*

*Source: S. Kakaletis (2024)*



The vast majority of these condominiums are for owner occupancy, with rental options available in only one building. This building, The Millway, is Vaughan's first purpose-built rental building, built specifically for long-term rental, and will provide 430 rental units, with hopes for additional rental tenured buildings (Vaughan, Apr 2023, p. 4). The relevance of having purpose-built rental units available is related to the demographic shifts expected to happen in the next 10 years among most age cohorts, especially the 25–34 age cohort and the 75-plus age cohort of baby boomers (BILD, 2023, p. 24). Purpose-built rental housing may be better equipped to handle demographic changes since a more balanced mix of unit types and sizes would be considered in a building of this type (BILD, 2024, p. 24). There are no single-family, detached homes in the VMC. There are no wide lots or spacious front yards, and no driveways for cars; all resident parking is underground. In fact, some of the condo units do not come with parking spaces at all. This is reflective of new determinants suggested for suburbia, which emphasizes high-density housing and space-saving measures that are meant to minimize the 'urban sprawl' that has traditionally characterized suburban neighbourhoods.

The housing typology presented in the VMC not only demonstrates new determinants for suburbia but will ultimately promote a different way of living in the suburbs than East Woodbridge does for its residents. As previously discussed in the transportation section above, interviews with Informants 3, 4, and 5 indicated high automobile dependency, with a choice to drive being made even when they could easily walk. The VMC on the other hand, is being marketed as a high-density, transit-oriented example of a suburb, meaning that all amenities such as transit, retail, green space, social spaces, and even employment, are all within walking distance. This will encourage a lifestyle that is less auto-centric and more community-based, as people will ultimately live, work, and play there. Even the purpose-built rental building emphasizes its amenities: BBQ areas, squash courts, yoga studios, co-working spaces, indoor and outdoor lounge areas, and even guest suites (The Millway, 2024). All these amenities are aimed at promoting a certain lifestyle and way of living. Potential residents can imagine, and possibly accept, living in a smaller space if they think they are not 'giving up' the luxuries of having a larger home (ie. hosting large family gatherings, space to work from home, having guests visit). And since the demand for residential development has already far exceeded the planned targets for the VMC (Vaughan, Apr 2023, p. 3), this may be an indication that people are not necessarily giving up on the dream of owning a home in the suburbs; they are just adjusting their ideas of

what that home will look like and the life they will lead because of it. “[We] have to accept that the white picket fence is gone,” states Leo Spalteholz, a Victoria housing analyst, “but we should be able to figure out how we can make it affordable to have a comfortable home, in a condo at least” (Craigie, 2024, p. 235). It is my opinion that the VMC’s approach to housing typology is providing people with the opportunity to do this.

In the middle of such a housing crisis, it is not just academics and scholars who are encouraging the redefinition of suburbia and the use of new determinants in planning. Housing issues have become mainstream, and unsurprisingly, everyone has an opinion about the solutions. In his book, journalist and author Gregor Craigie (2024) explores housing situations and solutions in twenty different cities and countries around the world, including in the GGH. Many of the book’s discussions reflect ideas already put forth by scholars as being essential to creating new determinants that will help define a new suburban life with housing at its core, such as improving government policy and forming partnerships with private sector developers and companies. In addition, some of the housing strategies suggested include the re-introduction of co-op housing, housing subsidies, key worker housing, and innovative modular and 3-D printed homes (Craigie, 2024). The issue of the ‘missing middle’ in housing has also gone mainstream. The ‘missing middle’ in housing refers to a type of housing, such as townhomes, rowhouses, and multiplexes that fill a gap between detached single-family homes and high-rise apartments (Gendler, 2020). Vaughan’s awareness of its own ‘missing middle’ housing challenges is apparent in its wish to see the continued integration of other building typologies into the VMC (Vaughan, Apr 2023), and its collaboration with the Ontario government that brought about a Minister’s Zoning Order to relocate an existing retail store to make room for housing (Al-Shibeeb, 2020). However, the municipality appears to be struggling on this point, since low and mid-rise construction is lagging compared to high-rise (Vaughan, Apr 2023). This issue is further exacerbated by the fact that previously approved development applications for mid-rise buildings are being revised for high-rise development instead (Vaughan, Apr 2023). And the VMC is still not attracting enough families, for whom ‘missing middle’ housing is most attractive. Over 40% of residents are single (Realosophy, 2024), and there is a continuing trend towards smaller units and less unit mix diversity, with 57% of units being 1-bedroom, 41% being 2-bedroom, and only 2% being 3-bedroom (Vaughan, Apr 2023).

In examining the VMC and researching its background, it occurred to me that the issue of gentrification, which has plagued other city centres, has been avoided by the City of Vaughan. As previously stated, the area of the VMC had been earmarked as a downtown core for years, with industrial, commercial and office uses set to be the dominant form of land occupancy. But when the subway expansion was announced, and the need to develop a plan to go with it arose, the area found, in my opinion, a new and better use. Planners applied what I believe to be new determinants for a suburban area and developed policies that set out to create a new way of living suburban life. They considered Phelps et al.'s (2023) views on peripheral centralities that include elements such as transportation infrastructures, mixed-use buildings, and transit-oriented developments, (Phelps et al., 2023, p. 1160), all of which have been added to the VMC. In many cases of gentrification, residents voice concern over the loss of housing *and* the loss of a social support system. Bolton (2022) believes this is what makes gentrification a form of 'exclusionary displacement', as many low-income households can no longer afford to live in their own neighbourhoods. In the Vaughan Corporate Centre, there was no housing, so residents were not displaced. And businesses could remain or relocate within the VMC because it has planned for mixed-use built forms. The VMC is not "gentrification for yuppies with cars" (Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017, p. 14). In my view, a form of reverse gentrification has occurred: people are brought *in* and given the opportunity to establish a new way of living in the geographical suburbs of their choosing. The next few paragraphs, however, ask the reader to consider if everyone has an equal opportunity to choose the VMC and be part of a new way of suburban living.

### ***Affordable Housing: A Still Lacking New Determinant?***

As suggested by scholars, one of the new determinants that is necessary for redefining emerging urban areas is not just the infrastructure in a place, but the conceptualization of a city and the nature of social justice within it (Addie, 2016). One social justice issue at the forefront today is affordable housing. The standard definition of affordable housing is housing that "costs less than 30% of before-tax household income" (CMHC, 2020). Waterston et al. (2015), like Addie, also believe that "addressing the issue of housing need more broadly requires coordinated and collaborative effort among key sectors, including . . . social services, educators, and all levels of government" (p. 4). As was previously stated, scholars believe that applying new determinants should make the suburbs more equitable, inclusive, and accessible to all.

Access to affordable housing is important for many reasons, one of which is the promotion of greater overall health and well-being (Kottke, 2018). According to Kottke (2018), adults who are housing insecure are more likely to experience psychological distress, substance use, and intimate partner violence. In addition, children experiencing housing insecurity display less prosocial behaviour and can have difficulty advancing in school (Kottke, 2018). In terms of health, people with housing insecurity experience more hospital visits, illness, injury, and higher mortality rates than those who are housing secure (Kottke, 2018). High housing costs are also one of the most frequently cited causes of food insecurity and poor nutrition (Krieger and Higgins, 2002).

Lack of access to affordable housing also has an impact on economic development. The Toronto Region Board of Trade (Jan 2020) in partnership with Toronto-based NGO Woodgreen Community Services published a series of reports looking at the link between affordable housing and essential workers who earn less-than-average wages, such as those in the hospitality, health, and social services sectors. The results of the study concluded that many workers cannot afford to live where they work, and a lack of affordable housing results in an essential worker ‘brain drain’ which leaves employers struggling to find a qualified workforce (Toronto Board of Trade, Jan 2020). In addition, workers who must allocate too much of their budget for housing have fewer expendable funds to spend on food and other consumer goods. If people live in housing that is affordable for them, it means they can then afford to eat in restaurants and shop in local stores, keeping more money in the community (Toronto Board of Trade, Jan 2020). Also, if residents move into homes they can afford, they begin paying property taxes, widening the city’s tax base (Toronto Board of Trade, Jan 2020), meaning more public funds are available to improve or increase infrastructure.

**Figure 7**

*Toronto’s Affordability Rent Bands*

*Source: Toronto Region Board of Trade and Woodgreen (2020)*

TORONTO HOUSING NOW INITIATIVE — Affordability Rent Bands <sup>6</sup>		
Sample Professions	Average Annual Income	Affordable Rent Level
Dental Assistants, Social Service Workers, Secretaries	\$54,880	\$1,372 (100% of CMHC average market rent)
Security Guards, Factory workers, Data Entry Clerks	\$43,920	\$1,098 (80% of CMHC average market rent)
Hotel Receptionists, Personal Support Workers, Nannies, Daycare Workers	\$32,920	\$823 (60% of CMHC average market rent)
Cashiers, Retail Sales Associates, Cab Drivers	\$21,960	\$549 (40% of CMHC average market rent)

As stated previously, East Woodbridge exemplifies the type of housing that is a main characteristic of traditional suburban stereotypes. In addition, according to Informant 8, a real estate agent, the median list price of a home in East Woodbridge is \$1.5 million, and a one bedroom, one bathroom basement apartment in a detached home in this area has a rent of \$2,100 a month. It did surprise me to find such high numbers for monthly rent for an area that is geographically considered to be a suburb. To put these numbers in perspective, the Toronto Board of Trade (Jan 2020) reports that a person with an average annual income of approximately \$55,000, such as a hygienist or secretary, has an affordable monthly rent level of about \$1,400 a month, which is 100% of the CMHC average market rent (p. 5), meaning this is the amount that can safely be allocated for housing. Someone with that income would not be able to afford to rent in East Woodbridge. This information has led me to believe that East Woodbridge does not offer the accessibility, equity, and inclusivity that comes from affordable housing and that is encouraged by proponents of defining new determinants for suburbs.

In my very first visit to the VMC, I was struck by the overwhelming number of condominium towers that have been built or are in the process of being built. My next thought was to wonder if any of those units had been designated as affordable housing. As previously stated, the VMC, in contrast to East Woodbridge, currently only offers condominiums and a few townhomes as housing options. Rental units are currently only available in one building, and start at \$2,450 for 600 square feet (The Millway, 2024). This is higher than rents in East Woodbridge. Condominiums for sale start at \$660,000 for 1 bedroom, one bath, and roughly 500 square feet, and rise to over \$1 million for 1,000 square feet (Realosophy, 2024). For some perspective, Canada's poverty line is \$37,000 for a two-adult, two-child family, and in 2022, 10% of Canadians were found to be living below this line, an increase from 2021 (StatsCanada, May 2024). The high cost of housing affects people in surprising ways, as an interview with Informant 7 revealed. He and his partner bought a 1-bedroom condo in the VMC, and really enjoyed living there. However, after a year in the condo, it made more financial sense for them to rent it out and move in with family in order to reduce their living costs. So far, I feel that the one aspect that East Woodbridge and the VMC have in common is that neither area could be considered affordable for most people.

Despite not being able to consider the VMC affordable at this time, it is my opinion that its planners have made a commitment to provide affordable housing in its Secondary Plan. One

of its overarching policies is to promote diverse neighbourhoods with a “significant proportion of affordable housing” (Vaughan, 2020, p. 54). And of the 12,000 residential units the VMC is intended to accommodate, “35% of new housing units shall be affordable, . . . [comprised] of compact housing forms [ie. high density] and include intrinsically affordable units for low and moderate income households” (Vaughan, 2020, p. 55). A perusal of sub-committee meeting and public open house minutes, shows that Vaughan’s planners continue to re-iterate their commitment to ensuring that the part of the VMC set aside for affordable housing remains, despite the pressure of increasing interest in buildings geared towards homeownership (Vaughan, Apr and Sept 2023). The minutes from these meetings express concern that residential development activity for profit has exceeded the targets set out in the VMCSPP for residential units and number of residents (Vaughan, Apr 2023, p. 3). But they also express a wish to deliver on the City’s strategic priority to “develop the VMC as a complete and balanced community” (Vaughan, Apr 2023, p. 5). The inclusion of affordable housing in the VMCSPP is reflective of the municipality’s wish to apply new determinants for suburbs and its promotion of social equity and partnerships with other actors involved. However, despite this commitment, I do not feel that they have yet achieved their mandate.

Through my observations of the case study areas and my perusal of the VMCSPP, I have concluded that overall, in terms of housing, the VMC is demonstrating and applying the characteristics of new suburbanisms that will lead to a new way of defining suburban life. Compared to East Woodbridge, which demonstrates traditional suburbanisms, the VMC has focused on providing different alternatives to the traditional typology of single-family, low-density residential areas. It has instead embraced the high-density, space-saving housing solutions championed by Harris (2010) and Moos and Walter-Joseph (2017). In addition, housing was planned with and around other suburban infrastructure, making it easier to adopt a new way of suburban living, as will be discussed in the next section. The VMC has also created a suburban landscape that challenges the status quo (Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017, p. 30), adding to the definition of a new suburbanism.

### 3.3.3 Social Infrastructure

#### *Employment, Retail, Cultural, and Community Services*

While a comparison to traditional examples of transportation and housing stereotypes of suburbia have helped planners realize the need to create new determinants to define future suburban infrastructure, it is worth restating that redefining suburbia must also include the way that people live their lives in a space (Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017, p. 107). To begin, assumptions are often made about traditional suburbs based on location, built features, or transportation characteristics. However, assumptions have also been made regarding how and why traditional suburban neighbourhoods came to be built. Some motivators previously mentioned include the influence of the media and marketing campaigns, government policy, and the interests of private developers. The prevailing assumption seems to be however, that traditional suburbs are a private, singular, for-profit venture. Forsyth (2012) states that the single use private buildings “designed as objects in a landscape” (p. 275) are most often funded and built by short-term investors, which can include real estate investment trusts and large-scale home builders. In such cases, the builders of the suburb are selling a dream, but dreams also need to make a profit. Residents buy the homes, the developers make a profit, the municipality gains a wider tax base, and everyone is happy. At most, new residents will want to know that there is a school, grocery store, and bank nearby, but will have accepted the fact that any other community, social, or cultural amenities will need to be driven to, as has been the experience of my informants # 1 – 5. As is typical of the definition for a ‘Classic Suburb’ as defined by Moos and Walter-Joseph (2017, p. 108), master plans for such a neighbourhood would not have emphasized including community amenities in the space and the impact that would have on how residents live their lives in their neighbourhoods.

My observations of the traditionally suburban neighbourhood of East Woodbridge were, therefore, not surprising. A walkthrough of the neighbourhood revealed that the few amenities located within its borders are government built and supported by taxpayer dollars, ie. all are City of Vaughan facilities. Within the boundaries of East Woodbridge, there are four elementary schools, a high school, a church, a community centre, and a library. Except for the elementary schools, all other social infrastructure is located along one main intersection, Ansley Grove Road and Chancellor Avenue, on the eastern edge of the neighbourhood. Informants 3, 4, and 5 were asked if they have ever made use of these community amenities and their responses were all

negative. Except for the church, and the high school, which informant 5's children attend, they have not regularly made use of community amenities. When asked why not, answers ranged from "I don't have time for that stuff" to "I'm not a person who joins things" to "I like being at home". Granted, the ages of the informants may have influenced their answers, but when I stepped inside the library and the community centre on a Saturday visit, both were not as busy as I expected them to be. Perhaps the age of the neighbourhood and the facilities themselves could be contributing to the low attendance, as people continually look to the newest, the shiniest, and the best in an experience. Unfortunately, all these observations and attitudes perpetuate the negative connotations noted by Harris (2018) which label suburban residents as living "petty lives with no social, cultural, or intellectual interests" (p. 32) and by Huq (2013) who notes that the suburbs have historically always been seen as a "cultural void or desert" (p. 6).

A perusal of the VM CSP shows that Vaughan is hoping to change that image with the VMC. Vaughan aims to create residential neighbourhoods that are well served by community services, recreational facilities, schools, and libraries (Vaughan, 2020, p. 49). It also welcomes public agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other institutions responsible for community and social services, and will assist them in securing suitable sites and spaces within the VMC (Vaughan, 2020, p. 49). It also hopes to integrate the spaces needed for community services with other uses mixed-use buildings (Vaughan, 2020, p. 49). Analysis of the VMC through site visits revealed that the VMC has already made good progress in the achievement of these objectives, as I observed multiple community services already in place and in use, and all walkable.

**Figure 8**

*Community Amenities in the VMC*

*Source: S. Kakalettris (2024)*



To begin, all the community amenities that have already been built exist in mixed-use buildings. The VMCSPP emphasizes this, stating that no stand-alone facilities will be permitted: all retail, community or employment uses are to be incorporated into the ground floors of other buildings (Vaughan, 2020, p. 62). For example, the David Braley Vaughan Metropolitan Centre of Community is a multi-level facility that forms the podium of a private development building, and is collaboratively owned by the City of Vaughan and the YMCA of Greater Toronto (Figure 8). This Centre of Community houses City of Vaughan offices, a library hub and full library branch, and YMCA facilities such as a gym and swimming pool, both of which were very busy during weekend site visits. The Centre also has a City of Vaughan Events area, with performing arts studios and community kitchens. Pedestrian traffic in and out of the Centre was steady, and a wide range of ages were using the facilities. The Centre fronts onto the intersection of two local roads, is visible from the VIVA bus station, and a 5-minute walk from the subway station. There is also a YMCA not-for-profit child care facility attached to the Centre. The library services include a full-service branch on the second floor, and a ‘quick stop’ facility on the first floor. This quick stop offers popular book, music, and movie titles, has easy access from the street, and is self-serve. Perfect for grabbing a book for your morning commute. Other community facilities have not been built yet, but have been included in the VMCSPP, and are currently under development. This includes planning for five neighbourhood schools and more as population growth dictates, a cultural arts centre, and hotels. The inclusion of such social and community amenities in a development show the VMC’s commitment to adopting new determinants for defining a new suburban life.

In terms of retail, office, and other employment opportunities, East Woodbridge continues to demonstrate traditional suburbanisms, as there are no office buildings in the area, and only a few small ‘mom and pop’ businesses across two small strip malls. Most large-scale retail businesses, and the jobs that go with them, are well outside this neighbourhood in ‘big box’, outdoor malls, all accessed by car. Again, not surprising. On the other hand, the VMC has, in my opinion, progressed well with its retail, office, and employment opportunities. Two office buildings with retail opportunities on the ground floor have already been built and are occupied. One is the KPMG Tower, with 15 floors, 300,000 square feet of office space, and 65,000 square feet of retail and amenity space on the ground floor. Tenants include a major bank, a large law firm, and two head offices of major companies. This building offers direct underground access to

both the subway and bus stations. The other is the PwC-YMCA Tower, which houses the Centre of Community mentioned in the previous paragraph, the offices of PricewaterhouseCoopers and Scotiabank, and 6,000 square feet of retail space on the ground floor. This facility also offers direct underground access to the VMC subway station.

Retail and service opportunities are also well represented in the VMC. Retail tenants observed included two banks, multiple restaurants, small coffee shops (no chains, surprisingly), laundromat, car detailing service, and a large chain drug store, all incorporated into existing buildings (Vaughan, 2020, p. 62). A small real estate office, dentist's office, and law office could provide secretarial and hygienist assistant jobs. One surprising observation, however, is that most of the retail space available is not yet occupied even though the office towers have been occupied since 2021. This is perhaps a carry-over consequence of COVID. Another is a lack of any grocery or variety stores, meaning residents will, for now, still have to drive to get groceries. Regardless, by 2031, the VMC hopes to be home to 5,000 office jobs and 1,200 retail and service jobs. Providing work opportunities in the VMC is important to the City as it wants to ensure that any development supports a live-work balance in the VMC (Vaughan, 2020, p. 54). Fishman (1987) once called this a "technoburb" and defined it as "a peripheral zone . . . that has emerged as a viable socio-economic unit . . . [where] residents look to their immediate surroundings rather than the city [core] for their jobs and other needs" (p. 184). Whatever name they have been given now, the idea of giving people a chance to live where they work and perhaps develop a different way of living in the suburbs is contributing to the creation of new determinants for defining the suburbs and is present in the VMC.

One other aspect of creating new determinants for defining the suburbs that I feel is important is the willingness of municipalities to form collaborations with outside partners, social agencies, and public or private corporations. Demonstrating commitment to this collaborative approach, analysis of the VMC has revealed that it has made extensive use of commercial, political, and private partnerships with outside agencies. This is again in sharp contrast to East Woodbridge, where all social infrastructure is paid for with tax dollars. For example, recent media releases detail collaborations and investments for an elementary school and a performing and cultural arts centre. The Ontario government, and both York Region school boards have committed \$48 million to building a joint elementary school in the VMC that will add over 1,000 pupil spaces and 50 child care spots (Tabachnik, 2024). This comes from the province's Bill 98,

*The Better Schools and Students Outcomes Act*, which encourages building schools faster and is the largest investment ever made in a single year (Tabachnik, 2024). In addition, a collaboration with QuadReal Property Group was announced that will work towards building a performing and cultural arts centre within the VMC and will facilitate funding, design, construction, and operation (Vaughan, March 2024). As previously outlined, the City has created partnerships with the TTC, York Region Transit, KPMG, PwC, the YMCA, and Metrolinx, and works diligently to attract new businesses and industries to the VMC. They have even attracted an institute of higher learning: Niagara University has already set up a satellite campus in the VMC. The biggest of these collaborations, however, is between the City and the real estate investment trust, SmartCentres. SmartCentres was the landowner upon which the VMC is based and is developing the entire 100-acre VMC site (SmartCentres, 2023). As a result, the SmartCentre name is everywhere: on the bus terminal, on surface parking lots, on the official names of the office buildings which they own, and on some of the condominium developments. Even the official name of the section of the VMC that I have been analyzing is SmartVMC. It can be expensive for a city to provide such extensive facilities on its own, as its tax-base is not unlimited. An opportunity to work with partners to create social amenities that lead to a new definition of the suburbs and create a new way of living in the process is good business sense. Grant (2005) sees this as good urban form with a common benefit, where planning for the greater good considers the needs and characteristics of all people, creating a new suburbanism that promotes equity, accessibility, and diversity (Forsyth, 2012).

Having read through the VMCSPP ahead of my visits, it was surprising to see so many cultural and community amenities already well established and well used. This is because the first line of the VMCSPP's section on Community Services, Cultural Facilities and Public Art states, "community services, such as schools, libraries, community centres, [and] social services . . . are not expected to be included in the initial phases of downtown development in the VMC" (Vaughan, 2020, p. 49). Because of this, I was expecting to see an emphasis on housing development only. But as has been detailed above, this was not the case. The importance of forming partnerships and the role of the planner in securing them will be further discussed in a later section of this paper.

## *Parks and Green Spaces*

In recent years, the benefits of getting outside to a natural environment have gained greater attention. Research demonstrates that being outside and experiencing nature can improve both our physical and mental health (UCDavis, 2023). ParticipACTION, a non-profit organization that encourages physical activity by Canadians, states that being outside in nature can decrease stress and anxiety, increase immunity, and foster greater social interaction (ParticipACTION, 2022). Research from Japan has yielded the idea of *shinrin-yoku*, or forest-bathing (Morita et al., 2007). Forests and other natural environments are considered therapeutic landscapes, that is, places associated with the maintenance of health and well-being (Morita et al., 2007). Exposure to these green elements increases liveliness and decreases levels of hostility, stress, and depression (Morita et al., 2007). Therapeutic landscapes can also be psychological environments (locales that promote a sense of place) such as communal gardens or parks that contain a variety of green environmental elements (Morita et al., 2007).

Spending time outdoors also increases the desire to seek out and deepen social connections (Keniger et al., 2013). In turn, these improved social interactions can lessen feelings of isolation and loneliness, while boosting mental wellness in general (Keniger et al., 2013). In fact, Keniger et al. (2013) believe that in today's society, interacting with nature is very important for human quality of life, especially as it improves social cohesion in a community. Social cohesion involves the interpersonal dynamics and sense of connection among people that help define quality of life (Jennings and Bamkole, 2019). The presence of urban green spaces encourage positive social interactions and social engagement, and invites feelings of trust, belonging, and acceptance (Jennings and Bamkole, 2019) which in turn encourage positive health benefits.

In my suburban neighbourhood, my parents, Informant 1 and 2, walk daily through the many green spaces available, and friendliness and a sense of community is what my parents have described in interviews as added bonuses to being outdoors. During site visits to the East Woodbridge neighbourhood however, there was very little evidence of therapeutic landscapes beyond the usual open park spaces, and even less evidence of those green spaces offering a sense of social cohesion. The five area parks observed were empty on each visit that I paid to the neighbourhood, even on weekends. The parks in this neighbourhood also do not appear to be

destinations or gathering places for community events. Permanently available activities in the parks are few, apart from soccer fields and play structures for young children. A notable exception are the tennis courts in the largest park, and only since they were repaved, according to Informant 5, who lives across from the park. Visits to the area were made in both colder and warmer months to compare activity levels, but warmer weather had no effect on activity observed. This use, or lack thereof, of neighbourhood green space was not surprising to me, as I have experienced this characteristic of traditional suburban life firsthand.

It could be deduced that these parks and green spaces are underused due to the fact that the median age in East Woodbridge is 42 years old, and the number of residents between the ages of 0 and 14 years of age is only 15,490 out of total population of 106,810 (StatsCanada, 2021). But it may also be that traditional suburbanisms have entrenched themselves here. Moos and Walter-Joseph (2017) feel that in postwar suburbia, social ideals still tend towards the “exclusionary and patriarchal” (p. 37) and still perpetuate the popular image of suburbia. Smith (2006) corroborates this, stating that the sense of freedom, space, and privacy that the suburbs convey cannot be easily relinquished by residents of an area. This reluctance stems from the fact that many postwar-era suburbs were conceived and marketed as a way for residents to escape the crowds, noise, and lack of privacy found in the inner-city urban core (Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017). In the East Woodbridge neighbourhood, very few people were observed out in front of their homes, let alone socializing there. In talking with Informant 3, a longtime resident of the area, it was disclosed that he “prefers to relax in my own backyard, where I have privacy, and I won’t be bothered by my neighbours” and “people don’t stand around outside talking”. The informant stated that this is “typical” behaviour for his neighbourhood. Therefore, in an area like East Woodbridge, which displays traditional suburbanisms, social and health challenges can arise. Jennings and Bamkole (2019) suggest this happens, especially when urban dwellers, and I feel that East Woodbridge is decidedly ‘urban’ at this point, experience limited opportunities for time spent in nature, due to a preference for indoor activities. Coupled with an increase in socially isolating technological advances such as online shopping, social media, and straight-to-your door delivery services, and a preference for solitary activities over social ones, this limited exposure to urban green spaces further reduces opportunities for social engagement and cohesion (Jennings and Bamkole, 2019).

In sharp contrast to East Woodbridge and its traditional suburbanisms, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre's (VMC) green space plans go against traditional stereotypes of urban green space prevalence and use. This creates a new suburbanism that not only recognizes but embraces the importance of being in nature and its health and social benefits. In designing communities for active living, Fallis et al. (2015) determined that the environmental features that showed the most co-benefits to a community were park proximity, mixed land use, trees and greenery, accessibility and street connectivity. And throughout their book *Still Detached and Subdivided?*, Moos and Walter-Joseph (2017) advocate for a more social, interactive and user-friendly built environment than that which is found in traditional postwar-era suburban neighbourhoods such as East Woodbridge.

Fallis et al. (2015), like others before them, have also found that parks in a neighbourhood increase physical and mental health benefits. However, as we saw in East Woodbridge, just having parks and green space in a neighbourhood does not ensure their use. Instead, with the VMC, the City of Vaughan has committed to creating what Fallis et al. (2015), call 'activity-friendly environments. An initial perusal of the VMC Secondary Plan (VMCSP) indicates planning for multiple green spaces which will meet two of the city's objectives for the VMC: namely the development of a generous and remarkable open space system, and the inclusion of natural features within that development (Vaughan, 2020, p. 22). To meet these objectives, the VMCSP states that there will be social gathering places, neighbourhood parks, naturalized spaces, public squares, and private amenity spaces and that "everyone who lives in the VMC should be within a 5-minute walk of a park" (Vaughan, 2020, p. 22). According to the latest version of the VMCSP, there will be at least 17 different urban, environmental, or neighbourhood parks within the VMC (Vaughan, 2020, p. 92). The City has also engaged in a renewal of the Black Creek environmental areas in the VMC, both located along Jane Street, north and south of Highway 7. If the environmental assessment proves feasible, these environmental areas will also form parkland for the enjoyment of VMC residents.

The most anticipated of these parks will be the City's 'crown jewel', Edgeley Pond and Park (Vaughan, May 2024). The green space plan for the VMC, focuses on many factors that Jennings and Bamkole (2019) feel encourage social cohesion in parks. These factors include proximity, easy access through quality transportation options, functional playgrounds, availability of sidewalks, and an open park design that encourages active recreational activities

(Jennings and Bamkole, 2019). Having attended the official opening of the first phase of Edgeley Pond and Park on June 12, 2024, I was impressed with how easy it was to access as a driver and a pedestrian. The entrance I accessed was on a minor road, Maplecrete Road, which already contains four large high-rise buildings, collectively called Expo City, one of the precincts in the VMC. In my time at the park, I observed many residents walking to the park from these existing high-rises, and they were of varying ages and family dynamics (ie. an older couple, a family with young children, an older female using a walker, dog owners walking their dogs, people on e-bikes and scooters).

**Figure 9**

*Future Plans for Edgeley Pond and Park*

*Source: City of Vaughan (Sept.28.2017)*

## Park Programming

- Active use focused on strata park area
- Flexible lawn area north of Zzen / Midvale and east of The Met
- Dog off-leash area east of The Met
- Walking trails in valley
- Adult exercise equipment along MUP
- Multiple park entry points along Jane St and future Maplecrete Rd extension

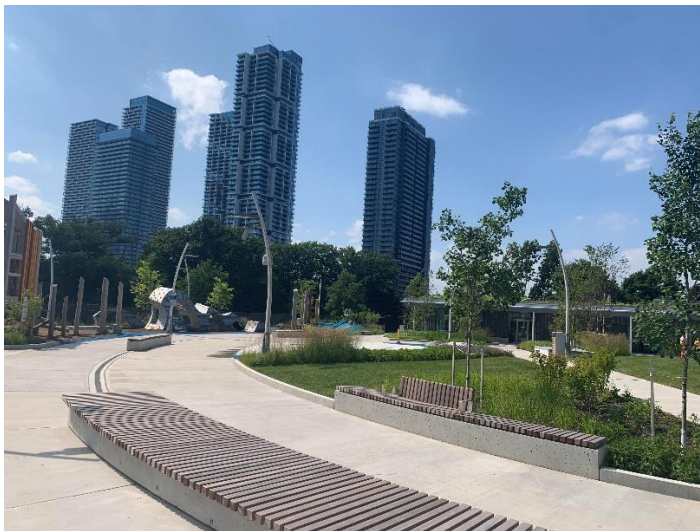


In addition to street frontage and convenient access points, the VM CSP indicates that all neighbourhood parks should have the following amenities: an accessible playground, a splash pad, shade trees and other plantings, a pavilion or shade structure, furnishings, hard surfaces for gatherings, public art, outdoor recreation facilities such as those for tennis, skateboarding, or skating, and lighted walking and cycling paths (Vaughan, 2020, p. 44). The first phase of Edgeley Pond and Park has all these things (Figure 10). The park impressed me with its attention to detail and the inclusion of so many options in what I consider to be a very small space. There were ramps and only a few stairs for easy access by foot, and bike racks were readily available. Furnishings such as long benches and individual chairs encourage lingering. There was more than one play structure, and native plants and trees were abundant. A walking trail looping in the centre of the park will serve as a skating trail when it is flooded in the winter. Most impressive of all was the community pavilion, a low, one-storey structure that houses washrooms and change rooms, two community-use rooms with full kitchens available for renting, access to the parking garage over which it is built, and even a parking spot for the Zamboni! This park was created to

### **Figure 10**

*Phase One of Edgeley Pond and Park*

*Source: S. Kakalettris (2024)*



include all the amenities I would normally expect to see in the private backyard of a single-family home. All materials used were beautiful and thoughtfully chosen, and the park did not look at all utilitarian in design. All these factors will hopefully prompt a change in perspective in the role that urban green spaces play in our cities (Jennings and Bamkole, 2019). A new ideal for

the urban park is that it will be viewed as a place for social gatherings and leisure activities (Jennings and Bamkole, 2019) instead of just a token open space in a neighbourhood, which has historically been its traditional suburban role.

The rest of the City's plans for Edgeley Pond and Park are in my opinion both ambitious and exciting (Figure 9). The City's website section devoted to the VMC indicates that the vision is "to build a sustainable open space at the centre of the VMC that will function as a hybrid of vital stormwater management infrastructure and create an innovative public space design" (Vaughan, June 2024). Edgeley Pond and Park will be located in what the City calls the Black Creek Corridor area of VMC (Appendix E). It hopes to create a park that will "showcase design innovation, generate spaces for active and passive recreation, and deliver a first-of-its-kind destination for Vaughan and York Region" (Vaughan, June 2024). Plans indicate that Edgeley Pond and Park will include an off-leash dog park, a multi-use path (MUP) for walking, jogging, or cycling, adult exercise equipment, ample parking and lighting, a skating loop, a flexible lawn area, picnic tables, space for public art, and natural valley trails (Vaughan, Sept 28 2017). Input from public meetings indicate that the public feels that the site's location, access, and connectivity are key, as is the subway's proximity, a five-minute walk away (Vaughan, Feb 21 2017). Having places to walk was a priority, as was creating flexible spaces for different types of programming (Vaughan, Feb 21 2017), as almost all residents live in high-rise buildings. The design of the Black Creek Corridor and Edgeley Pond and Park will support Larson and Hipp's (2022) view that publicly accessible parks and green spaces provide a cost-effective alternative to traditional health improvement strategies (p. 100). This encourages and provides residents of this new type of suburb to establish a much healthier way of living, something that is not encouraged in traditionally stereotypical neighbourhoods like East Woodbridge.

Overall, Vaughan is to be commended for its determination to keep its commitment to ensuring parks and green spaces are protected while the VMC project progresses. Parkland for the project "has been dedicated on the basis of 5% of the gross land area for residential areas and 2% for commercial and employment areas, or 1.0 hectare for each 300 dwelling units, or a combination thereof, whichever yields the most favourable supply of parkland" (Vaughan, 2020, p. 42). This is very generous, but there is one caveat. I was not surprised to have my observations show that, as is typical within any new development, the progress of parks and green spaces in the VMC has been slow compared to the progress of its housing aspects. For example, the plans

for Edgeley Pond and Park were finalized in 2018, with a final public meeting and approval by Council. Even accounting for the delays experienced because of COVID, only Phase One, a small neighbourhood park, has been completed.

Also not surprising to me was finding that Fallis et al.'s (2015) statement that decisions at the local government level can impact the progression of parks and green spaces was true. The authors opine that almost always, more pressing municipal issues will take precedence over the creation of parks and green spaces. And for almost all government officials today, that pressing issue is housing. This is evident in the VMC as well. With all the condominium and apartment buildings already evident, building housing has taken precedence over the creation of green space in the VMC. A VMC Sub-committee Report stated, "efforts are being undertaken to maintain a healthy balance between current population trends and available hard and soft infrastructure, including . . . parks, open spaces, and facilities" (Vaughan, April 2023, p. 1). Development interest and activity in the VMC surrounding housing has already far exceeded initial projections, and the risk of growing too quickly in this one area means the VMC may not develop into a complete community with a healthy balance of social infrastructure (Vaughan, April 2023, p. 4). Still, even as it faces obstacles to prioritizing the fulfillment of its green space objectives, Vaughan has not lost sight of the fact that designing community environments that make physical activity attractive and convenient will produce additional long-term, important benefits (Fallis et al., 2015). This shows commitment to creating a new suburbanism that includes improved physical and mental health for residents.

### *Urban Squares*

Besides parks and green spaces, the VMCSPP has also focused its objectives and policies towards incorporating other open spaces throughout its borders. These open spaces are considered just as effective at creating activity-friendly, social environments as parks are (Fallis et al., 2015). Renamed urban squares, the VMCSPP has identified a comprehensive list of design principles for their creation. These open spaces should create an urban experience that enhances the everyday experience of commuters, residents, workers, and visitors (Vaughan, 2021, p. 46), providing a place to walk, read, use a laptop, meet friends, eat lunch, and people watch (Vaughan, 2021, p. 26). Pedestrian access should be directly available from all surrounding streets and buildings (Vaughan, 2021, p. 46). Lastly, these urban squares should be universally

designed, able to be used by all ages and abilities (Vaughan, 2021, p. 46). All these guidelines encourage use of the square, which in turn fosters greater social interaction and a greater sense of belonging and community, contributing to a new ideal for suburbanism.

Much literature already exists on the importance of including urban squares in the planning of a space. Hatefishojae et al. (2021) believe that urban squares play a crucial role in the presence and participation of people interacting with each other, and provide opportunities for people to engage in social interaction, especially those in apartment buildings. For those residents, the common outdoor space becomes an opportunity for increased recreational activity (Glaeser and Sacerdote, 2000). The presence of an urban square increases the attachment to and use of that space, thereby increasing the presence of people and enhancing their social interactions there (Marzbani et al., 2020).

Observations during site visits corroborate the VMC's goals to create activity-friendly environments (Fallis et al., 2015). One of the standout features of the VMC, and considered its unofficial centre, is Transit Square. This urban square was created to be a setting for civic events, public art, and commercial activity (Vaughan, 2021, p. 22). In my opinion, it has succeeded. The square is aesthetically pleasing, with large areas of grass interspersed with small pavers (Figure 11). It has furniture such as free-standing Muskoka chairs and built in benches. Lighting is abundant, making the square both accessible and safe to use at night. During site visits, I observed people sitting in the square and socializing. During one of my visits, the square was being prepared for a City-sponsored free open air concert. And not only is the square easily accessible to all workers in the buildings that border it (KPMG, PWC, SmartCentres Home Base), but it is also sandwiched between the SmartCentre VIVA Bus Terminal on one end, and the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre subway station on the other. This means that people getting off a bus or subway, especially if they live in the surrounding buildings, will pass through the square and be encouraged to linger, further encouraging social interaction and engagement with their surroundings.

**Figure 11**

*Transit Square, an urban square example in the VMC*

*Source: S. Kakalettris (2024)*



It must be noted that all observations of open spaces and urban squares in the VMC were a stark contrast to the East Woodbridge neighbourhood. Having classified this neighbourhood as ‘Classic Suburban’, according to criteria set out by Moos and Walter-Joseph (2017, p. 108), I was not surprised to find that it does not have anything that could be considered an urban square or community gathering spot. The existence of traditional suburbanisms in East Woodbridge

means these neighbourhoods are not made to linger in; they are made simply to provide a place to live and to provide privacy as a reward for home ownership (Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017). So, whether for an official event, or just for a place to take a quick mental break, it is my opinion that the inclusion of the urban square is essential to promoting social cohesion and interaction (Keniger et al., 2013). The VMC's planners have obviously taken a new view of how to use and incorporate public open spaces, which will help Vaughan further establish the VMC as a model for a new suburbanism.

And while Transit Square garnered most of my attention, I was able to notice the care and attention that has been dedicated to all the streetscapes in the VMC. The mews, laneways, and local streets all have guidelines that include the use of furniture, lighting, paving, and trees to create a pleasing space (Vaughan, 2021, p. 32). The streetscapes include a variety of seating options, bike racks, and wide, smooth wide walkways and dedicated cycling paths. Greenery has been added in what seems to be every available spot: along main roads and walking paths, near transit stations, and behind and in front of all buildings. The VMCSPP considers trees to be “a distinguishing visual element in the VMC's identity” (Vaughan, 2021, p. 32) and this helps create the feeling of a lush green oasis. East Woodbridge's streetscape on the other hand, had the obligatory, builder-installed trees lining city-owned boulevards and poor lighting. These aspects of the VMC not only create a beautiful space, but also ensure a place that people want to go to and spend time in, helping the VMC establish the example of a new suburbanism that will change the way people live in and use the suburbs.

In addition to aesthetics, the above noted features of the VMC's streetscape design also make it highly accessible to all ages and abilities (Vaughan, 2021, p. 22). This contrasts with traditional neighbourhoods like East Woodbridge, where accessibility is low and ironically not conducive to walking. The observed streetscapes remind me of the recommendations made by Moos and Walter-Joesph (2017, p. 121) that encourage built environments to consider the future needs of an aging population. The authors suggest items such as increased walkability, community spaces at main intersections of grid-arranged smaller streets, the inclusion of local shops, and mixed land-use with street furniture, art, and vegetation. All these aspects are present in the VMC. According to Moos and Walter-Joseph (2017), and I agree, an aging population would benefit from these new suburbanisms found in the VMC because “an alternate future for

our suburbs means . . . embracing those positive values associated with earlier suburban living but with potentially radical changes to the physical suburban landscape” (p. 121).

Among scholars in this research area, there is consensus that proximity to green space is necessary (Keniger et al., 2013). Prioritizing the role of natural environments and green space access along with quality in planning, policy and decision-making across diverse disciplines, will ultimately lead to a healthier, happier population in a rapidly urbanizing world (Larson and Hipp, 2022). Through my observations, I believe that the VMC’s planners have heeded this advice. The VMC’s parks, along with its green and open spaces, are obviously meant to be used in ways that differ greatly from the use of green spaces in traditional suburban neighbourhoods, defining a new suburbanism and a new way of living in the suburbs.

### ***The Natural Environment and Sustainability***

If there is a move towards increasing humans’ exposure to the green environment for its social, physical, and mental health benefits, there is also a move towards designing those green environments with humanity. Essentially, this design movement encourages ethical and moral considerations when dealing with landscape design to be conscious of one’s effect on the environment (Han, 2016). The author states that, “landscape is humanistic as well as scientific” (Han, 2016, p. 2) and believes that the way we choose to express and interact with landscape “shows respect for life forms other than humans, and exercises ethics and wisdom in living in harmony with other life forms” (Han, 2016, p. 2). Ford (2016) opines that we are called to “reconcile the needs of humankind with sound knowledge and respect for the natural processes of our environment” (p. 2) in order to mitigate the environmental changes currently taking place. Overall, both authors implore planners, landscape architects, and designers to prioritize and respect the environment in their planning practices. Since Moos and Walter-Joseph (2017) have pointed out the environmental damage that can be done by continuing with the traditional idea of sprawling suburban landscapes, the VMC has tried to embrace the opposite to create a new suburbanism that is more conscious of the effects of suburban development on the environment.

Taking into consideration the effects of creating large-scale housing developments on the natural environment does not appear to have been a priority for planners or residents in traditional postwar-era suburbia. My observations of East Woodbridge support this, as do my

interviews with Informant 3 and 4. Both spoke about the amount of green space surrounding their homes 40 years ago, and about the rapid rate of housing development that followed. However, when asked if they felt the natural environment could have been dealt with in a more environmentally responsible manner, both informants felt that “that’s the way things were then” and that “nobody thought about that [the environment] the way they do now”. As immigrants moving to East Woodbridge from the city’s outer suburbs, they regarded housing development as a way of fulfilling their dreams of “owning my own house with a big backyard” and saw nothing wrong with “cutting down some trees if that meant I could get my house”. Unfortunately, these attitudes continue to persist, and are a by-product of the traditional stereotypes associated with postwar-era suburbs. And even though there is an increasing body of evidence showing the adverse effects of urban sprawl on our health and the environment, policies designed to combat that sprawl are still met with resistance. Resnik (2010) believes this is mainly because landowners, developers, and politicians often made choices based on their own personal or economic interests rather than for the public good.

However, in contrast to this traditional suburbanism, Vaughan has endeavoured to create a new definition of suburbanism that includes a commitment to sustainability, ecological stewardship, and what Resnik (2010) calls ‘smart growth’. Smart growth is defined as a policy framework and urban development pattern that is characterized by high population density, walkable and bikeable neighbourhoods, preserved green spaces, mixed-use development, proximity to mass transit and limited road construction (Resnik, 2010, p. 1854). Smart growth is meant to offer residents a high quality of life, the convenience of local amenities, and increased potential health benefits (Resnik, 2010). To show its commitment to sustainability, Vaughan’s VM CSP outlines over 22 policies governing the project’s effects on the environment (Vaughan, 2020, pp. 36 – 39). As an example, all the structures observed in the VMC have urban agriculture or ‘green roofs’, from the community pavilions, office buildings, and parking garages. The incorporation of green roofing is beneficial in mitigating the ‘urban heat island effect’, caused when closely packed buildings and paved surfaces amplify and trap atmospheric heat, increasing the temperature in an area (Climate Atlas, 2024). The City of Vaughan has also incorporated the idea of urban forests to mitigate extreme temperatures, since “a single tree can actually modify the local microclimate, making the vicinity noticeably cooler” (Matte, 2023). Vaughan also encourages the implementation and use of renewable energy sources such as solar,

wind, and geothermal in the VMC, and lighting, waste, and water solutions are focused on energy conservation (Vaughan, 2020, pp. 32, 37). In addition, all public buildings in the VMC will be designed to achieve a LEED™ Gold or higher rating, which is an industry standard for excellence in environmental design (Vaughan, 2020, p. 38). As a future urban planner, I can appreciate the fact that Vaughan is considering the latest environmental research and applying it instead of continuing to follow traditional stereotypes and suburbanisms that do not contribute to building a different and better emerging urban area.

Another area that shows Vaughan’s commitment to the natural environment and sustainability is its determination to integrate the existing Black Creek natural site into its plans (Appendix E). The benefits of this determination are twofold: preserve the natural heritage of the site and mitigate the effects of flooding in the area through stormwater management (Figure 12). As Black Creek was already considered highly degraded and subject to flooding (Vaughan, 2020, p. 40), the City could have easily found a less onerous solution than rehabilitation. In the end, planners decided that preservation and rehabilitation of the Black Creek would provide the best opportunity in the VMC to create a community amenity space that could also help with stormwater management, all while helping to restore the ecological functions of Black Creek (Vaughan, 2020, p. 40). The City is working with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and the Ministry of Transportation to establish new areas of active naturalization and develop or improve stormwater management facilities (Vaughan, 2020, p. 39).

## Figure 12

*Black Creek Corridor Rehabilitation Plans*

*Source: City of Vaughan (Sept.28.2017)*

### Stormwater Functionality Managing SWM in the Park

- Black Creek corridor renewed along west side
- Central island and established foliage to be preserved
- Mix of hard and soft edges to reshape basin for flood control
- Water quality to be provided at all inlets by OGS and LID treatment train approach
- New outlet structure to integrate with urban plaza at northeast corner of Jane + Hwy 7



One of the hallmarks of re-imagining an emerging urban area is the willingness of governments to develop partnerships with other agencies to ensure the best built environment for residents (Harris, 2020). Creating an emerging urban area that includes environmentally sound practices encourages residents to be more conscious of their ecological footprint and for some, can give a ‘feel-good’ reason for choosing a new suburban lifestyle. It also occurred to me that ecologically, Vaughan made an excellent choice in placing the VMC where it did, as it was already classified for industrial and commercial use and thus, already paved over and built up (Vaughan, 2020). Contrary to traditional stereotypes of housing development in suburbia, the City is *adding* back natural elements into a landscape that was devoid of them for a long time. The City is also to be commended for preserving the Black Creek and turning it into a planned showpiece for the VMC. They have committed to finding a way to work with the natural environment, and in doing so are announcing its value and consideration for all future development projects. All of these aspects of the VMC contribute to a new suburbanism, one in which the importance of considering and minimizing humans’ impact on the environment will become mandatory for the future (and hopefully mitigate some of the mistakes of the past).

#### **4. The Role of the Planner**

According to Filion (2017), paradigms in planning are understood to be ways of thinking that influence how planning is practiced, and paradigm shifts in planning are the main points in the evolution of planning. Planning for a new suburban life, therefore, involves paradigm shifts for all actors involved, from planners to residents. This paradigm shift can come through in many ways, but I will examine here the continued commitment of a planner to a project, the need to form partnerships with outside agencies, and the need for and importance of increasing participatory planning.

My analysis of both case study areas, the VMC and East Woodbridge, has led me to conclude that new determinants for defining emerging urban areas should also include greater accountability and involvement on the part of the planner. By this I mean that the development of an emerging urban area from idea to completion and beyond, should be an ongoing process for the planner. Traditionally, the planner’s role in the creation of suburban areas appears to be straightforward and on the side of profit: create as much detached housing as possible, add in a park or two, and acknowledge auto-centricity. The East Woodbridge neighbourhood certainly

demonstrates this. During site visits homes were observed to show traditional typology, with housing taking precedence over the inclusion of any other type of infrastructure. In addition, residents of East Woodbridge were asked to share their general opinions of their neighbourhoods, and Informant 5 commented, “My neighbourhood has not changed in thirty years.” East Woodbridge is a very well-established neighbourhood, and no new infrastructure, apart from a BRT line on Highway 7, has been built in the area. Since East Woodbridge has, and continues to display, many traditional suburbanisms, one is left to wonder if the planner’s involvement in such neighbourhoods has a finite end date and if it is there for the benefit of capitalists and developers rather than the people (Stein, 2019).

By contrast, the planners involved in the creation of the VMC are demonstrating ongoing involvement and commitment to the development of the area. It has been little more than half a decade since the VMC began development, but its planners continue to take the opportunity to reflect on and reappraise initial plans. Not surprisingly, this means that the VMCSPP is currently on its fourth rendering. Consistent development activity updates have been created since 2019, and secondary plan updates are approaching Phase 3 (Vaughan, April 2023). A recent VMC Subcommittee Report (Vaughan, April 2023) states that since the VMC’s approval by the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT) in 2015, development interest in the VMC has exceeded expectations (Vaughan, April 2023). Concerns have also been raised about provisions made for social infrastructure that is necessary to support a complete community, which is the City’s vision for the area, such as parkland, schools, and community facilities. City planners understand the need to work with other city departments to find solutions to current challenges within the VMC (Vaughan, April 2023), ensuring they do not create plans in isolation. Learning from other municipalities and how they approach issues in their emerging urban areas is also important. Part of my responsibilities at the City of Vaughan involve gathering and analyzing data on how other municipalities have approached infrastructure problems, and visiting sites to examine if the solutions will work for Vaughan. Craigie (2024) has a similar suggestion for Canada’s housing crisis, urging governments to examine solutions that may be considered unconventional, but that have proven successful in other countries.

Leaving room for improvement is also necessary in planning, and the VMCSPP includes a section on implementation, where a biennial program has been established to monitor and report on the level of development in the VMC in areas of traffic volumes and transit ridership, travel

patterns of pedestrians and cyclists, employment generated, and amount of existing floor space remaining or existing (Vaughan, 2020, p. 85). This ongoing reappraisal of development and the VMCSPP ensures the continued involvement of planners in achieving the vision that was set for the VMC by the City. However, the question of *who* planners work for will, in my opinion, never have a definitive answer. Despite planners' commitment to the City's vision of the VMC, housing ultimately took precedence over social infrastructure. As shared in the housing section, the VMC is facing unplanned for demand in housing and density. So, the decisions that the planning department ultimately made benefitted the City: that is, a larger tax-base and increased revenue for all of Vaughan. Regardless of who benefits first, if planners approach their role with a new mindset, they can more readily ensure the success of a project, its equitability, and the vision behind it, ultimately benefitting all residents in the built space.

My research and analysis of the case study areas has also led me to conclude that for today's planner, establishing new determinants for defining emerging urban areas needs to include a focus on developing partnerships with outside agencies. Such partnerships prove especially useful when a city's vision for a built space includes social infrastructure such as parkland and community centres or hubs, which can be costly to bring to fruition. It was surprising, yet not, to see that all of the VMC's already built community amenities carry partnerships with outside agencies, which may have contributed to their 'quick' completion, as development of the VMC did not start until *after* the subway station officially opened in 2017. At other times, these types of social infrastructure are in danger of being omitted from original plans mainly because the demand for housing is greater than the demand for jobs or social spaces in an area. A recent Sub-committee meeting re-states the issue of increased housing demand, but also re-commits to protecting the social infrastructure that was set out in the VMCSPP (Vaughan, April 2023). As was previously discussed, recent media releases have pointed to Vaughan's ability to form partnerships with developers, corporations, and NGOs to ensure that social infrastructure is built alongside the demand for housing, not as an afterthought. This ability on the part of the planner and willingness on the part of the City to explore other avenues of funding will be instrumental in helping Vaughan achieve its vision of the VMC as a thriving urban 'downtown'.

Recognizing the need for such partnerships will ultimately benefit the citizens who reside in an area and will help shift the image of planning from one for capitalist gain to one for socialist gain (Stein, 2019). So of course, traditional relationships with other levels of

government still exist. The plans for the VMC were created with several government policies in mind, such as Metrolinx's *Regional Transportation Plan (The Big Move)*, Ontario's *Places to Grow Plan*, and York Region's *Region of York Official Plan* (Vaughan, 2020, pp. 6, 7). So while planners cannot ignore nor abandon traditional partnerships, they can surely explore new relationships in addition to traditional ones. All in all, if future planners do not shift their mindset to realize that creating social infrastructure is as integral to a subdivision as creating housing in an area, then emerging urban peripheries will never progress, and the traditional suburbanisms will remain firmly entrenched.

It is important therefore, for planners to be willing to compare traditional planning ideologies to modern planning ideologies in order to decide which methods will best suit the needs of the people using an area. But it is also important, according to Hodge et al. (2021), to consider planning from a multi-disciplinary viewpoint as well as include participatory planning practices, as a more viable suburban life can be achieved through these approaches. Planners must consider a multitude of factors in creating a new suburban lifestyle, such as income, race, gender, traffic congestion, and the physical and mental health impacts of commuting. But they must also find it necessary to bring local knowledge to the planning process, thereby making a conscious effort to adopt as many participatory practices as possible to ensure residents' concerns and needs are considered (Hodge et al., 2021).

In the VMC, participatory planning practices are evident in the extensive consultation process that took place at all levels of development. Public information meetings, public presentations, and community consultations have been continuously held as a way of informing residents and gathering their feedback in all areas since plans for the VMC were formulated in 2008 and continue today. A review of the VMC dedicated website [www.myvmc.ca](http://www.myvmc.ca) shows that residents can quickly and easily find information on the VMC specifically, on everything from development progress to environmental studies to minutes of public meetings. And while public meetings may not always be well attended, the feedback that is received is used by the City. In plans for Edgeley Pond and Park for example, residents were given a set of 3 different design concepts and based on their feedback, one was chosen. Residents were consulted about what they wanted to see in the park, and plans were altered. Most telling is the comment made by one resident, who when asked to give feedback on the park's design, asked that the City "use foresight to imagine what the city will look like in 20 – 30 years" (Vaughan, Feb 21 2017).

These collaborations increase participation from the public and residents, which is beneficial to planners, as participatory planning is a highly suggested practice in re-creating the suburbs and establishing new determinants. Emerging urban peripheries should include key features of community plan-making, and should fulfill not just legislative requirements, but meet community aspirations as well (Hodge et al., 2021). Ultimately, the need for planning comes from the fact that citizens, elected officials, and other stakeholders share a common desire to improve their community's built, social, cultural and natural environments (Hodge et al., 2021). The role of the planner is also considered essential, as "planners manage the way all stakeholders interact to address all issues so as to develop a path . . . to achieve their goals" (Hodge et al., 2021, p. 18).

A final suggestion for increasing participatory planning in the VMC and future projects centres around the issue of housing affordability. Collaborating and working with housing advocacy organizations (HAO) are one such way that planners can encourage such collaborations. HAOs are successful in their endeavours because of several factors: they possess personal contacts and political knowledge and skill, and they understand and know how to work within a political environment (Yerena, 2019). It is understood that local governments cannot afford, politically speaking, to tackle housing challenges on their own, and HAOs have grown to play a prominent role in proposing policy change that addresses the housing crisis (Yerena, 2019). It is important that the experiences and viewpoints that housing advocacy organizations bring from residents be considered part of the partnership in finding solutions to the housing crisis through participatory practices. Through all these practices, the positive effects of participatory planning, including empowerment, inclusion, and power sharing will be felt, as planning is a process of social co-operation (Hodge et al., 2021).

## **5. Conclusion**

Traditionally accepted suburban stereotypes were established in the post-World War II era and have persisted to the present day. Examples of the traditional definition of the suburbs are prevalent and easy to find. Look to any recently built subdivision or emerging urban area in the GGH, and it will be evident that housing needs continue to take precedence over the idea of creating a balanced, community-centred area with a variety of local amenities. The automobile remains the main mode of transportation, while other transit options remain inadequate or

underused. My examination of the case study areas has led me to surmise that the existence of traditional suburbanisms has influenced the creation of new suburbanisms simply because the traditionally viewed standards of suburbia will no longer work. Rising land prices, a housing shortage, environmental concerns, and a deterioration of quality of life due to punishing commute times have all led to the necessity for change. However, a growing body of research has also emerged that encourages and promotes the use of new suburbanisms and new determinants in defining a new idea of suburban life: creating a new ‘white picket fence’ dream as it were. Through my research and case study analyses, I have concluded that it is extremely important to not only adapt, but also actively use, these new determinants moving forward, as it is important for built environments to evolve to best meet the needs of an evolving population. In general, the East Woodbridge neighbourhood analyzed in this paper demonstrates all the hallmarks of a classic, traditional suburban neighbourhood: low density, auto-centric, and predominantly residential (Moos and Walter-Joseph, 2017). In contrast, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre neighbourhood demonstrates consistent use of suggested new determinants for suburban life: increased density, mixed-use infrastructure that encourages socialization and community, and most importantly, the benefits of easier transit accessibility and walkability, echoing Moos and Walter-Joseph’s (2017) sentiment that “the suburban can no longer . . . be depicted purely as detached and subdivided” (p. 115).

The use of new determinants in defining suburban life will also make room for more evolutionary and visionary planning. Considering these new determinants will further nurture such planning, as they encourage continued partnerships between planners, governments, the public, and private sector companies. It will also increase participation from the public and residents, which is beneficial to planners, as participatory planning is a highly suggested practice in re-creating the suburbs and establishing new determinants. Emerging urban peripheries need to include features of community plan-making and meet community aspirations as well (Hodge et al., 2021). Planning that uses new determinants will best suit the needs of a growing population, since, as Addie and Keil (2015) have suggested and it bears repeating here, the lines between urban and suburban are blurring. According to Hertel and Keil (2013), the arrival of post-suburbanization means that the emerging urban periphery is being increasingly integrated into the urban (p. 13). Hertel and Keil (2013) also believe that just like the first ‘master planned’ communities in North America were created to meet a need for residents in the post-war era,

emerging urban peripheries must meet the needs of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century populace (p. 13). In terms of planning practices, these authors state, “the values and process of planning, then, should be a public interest enterprise that transcends urban and suburban divides; intervening in a region that is, increasingly, looking and functioning like one city” (p. 13).

And since nothing and no one is perfect, it is important to note that there are some areas where I feel the VMC falls short in its efforts: namely in the previously mentioned lack of affordable housing and rental opportunities, and in discriminatory transit accessibility. Hulchanski (2007) has done extensive research on transit accessibility in Toronto and concluded that lower-income residents who need the most access to transit are living in neighbourhoods that are located furthest from transit. I fear that this discriminatory transit accessibility may be continuing in the VMC. While highly accessible for transit, it is not highly accessible for low-income earners, creating the possibility that they may settle in less transit accessible neighbourhoods. Despite these shortcomings, I have concluded that the VMC is a forward-thinking, well-thought-out materialization of recent research and theories.

Having determined in this paper that the VMC is providing a new definition of suburbanism and demonstrating a new way of living in the suburbs through commitment to transportation, housing, and social infrastructure, what barriers need to be considered in moving forward with these new suburbanisms? In a word, attitude. The divide between ‘urban’ and ‘suburban’ within the GGH is the product of years of misunderstandings, neglect, and prejudices, but they cannot be ignored (Richards and Kerr, 2013, p. 10). Private developers, and most planners, still struggle with the emergence and implementation of new planning policies meant to bring an urban image of living to a suburban geographical setting (Richards and Kerr, 2013, p. 10). And despite evidence of a suburban market for walkable, compact, mixed-use communities, developers have been reluctant to undertake, or unsuccessful at delivering, such projects (Dunham-Jones, 2005, p. 64). Examples of sustainable and complete communities like the VMC in suburban locations are therefore few because developers dislike the risk of using an untested form of development over a highly profitable known one (Richards and Kerr, 2013, p. 10). Systemic change is challenging, therefore, because we need to redefine not only how we plan and build, but how we think and what we base our lifestyle expectations on (Richards and Kerr, 2013, p. 10). And therein lies the second challenging attitude. The implementation of new planning policies in emerging urban areas and its resulting intensification has created frustration

and angst amongst those already living in a traditional suburb (Richards and Kerr, 2013, p. 10). Real or perceived threats in the form of reduced property values, increased traffic congestion, and loss of privacy means that developers and planners are sometimes met with opposition when trying to implement change (Richards and Kerr, 2013, p. 10). This is sometimes because residents living in traditional suburbs undergoing change adopt a “this is not the life I signed up for” attitude, making emerging planning policies difficult to implement. Because there are numerous factors that enable residents to choose a geographical area in which they can comfortably live the life *they* have chosen, only time will tell if the VMC project is successful in its goal of creating a balanced, walkable, social-oriented idea of suburbia and the life that goes along with it.

Of course, expanding on the research in this paper is always possible. Due to the geographical size of the VMC, the parts of the VMC development that exist south of Highway 7 were not included. The scope of information would have been too large for this paper to examine properly and suffice it to say that much of this part is unbuilt except for a few condominium towers. The centre section of the VMC, or the SmartVMC as it is officially called, was chosen due in part to its visibility from, and proximity to, all major arterial roads and highways that surround it, and the fact that it contains two major transit hubs. Vaughan seems to be centering the rest of the VMC around this core, and it demonstrates the most ambitious parts of the VMC’s development plans. The types of information gathered for this paper could also have been expanded upon. No information was gathered from BIPOC groups or young people. Surveys and questionnaires administered randomly to people moving about the VMC and attending multiple public information meetings would have yielded a wider body of data and would have provided a wider variety of information. Future research could take the form of gathering data and information on the daily lives of long-time residents of the VMC, and whether living in the VMC has created a new way of living in the suburbs for them compared to how they lived before, ie. do they walk more? Are commute times down? What are some of the disadvantages they still experience?.

The results of this paper have led me to conclude that creating a new definition of suburbanism is not only about defining a place with words or geographical features. It is also about defining a lifestyle. Traditional suburban stereotypes have in part become stereotypes because the examples used to define them have all shown residents living a certain type of life:

auto-centric, single family, and homogeneous. On the other hand, the VMC is providing a new definition of suburbanism and demonstrating a new way of living in the suburbs through commitment to transportation, housing, and social infrastructure. Through a new vision and new objectives, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is offering residents who live outside what is considered the geographical city core a chance to live a lifestyle that has not been suggested before in an emerging urban periphery. I feel that they have succeeded. Having had the opportunity to work for the City of Vaughan in their Development Engineering department for the last year, I have become aware of the fact that municipalities look to each other for ideas and for successes. With the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, I believe that Vaughan will be setting the standard for creating a new way of living life in the geographical suburbs and contributing to the definition of what it means for a place to be 'urban'. Vaughan has taken what was once a half-empty, commercial and industrial filled landscape with no specific use, and turned it into a visionary example of what the suburbs *can* be.

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## **7. Appendices**

### **7.1 Appendix A: Informants**

Informant 1 – Caucasian, male, late 50s, resident of Richmond Hill suburb

Informant 2 – Caucasian, female, mid 50s, resident of Richmond Hill suburb

Informant 3 – Caucasian, male, late 60s, resident of East Woodbridge

Informant 4 – Caucasian, female, early 70s resident of East Woodbridge

Informant 5 – Caucasian, male, early 50s resident of East Woodbridge

Informant 6 – Caucasian, female, early 50s, works in the VMC in the KPMG building











Informant 7 – Caucasian, male, late 20s, resident in an apartment building in the VMC

Informant 8 – Caucasian, female, real estate agent, 15 years experience in the GTHA

## 7.2 Appendix B: Transit Network for VMC

### SCHEDULE B > TRANSIT NETWORK

#### LEGEND

- |   |   |   |                                 |
|---|---|---|---------------------------------|
|  | subway entrances                        |  | spadina subway alignment        |
|  | potential highway 7 rapidway stations   |  | future spadina subway extension |
|  | potential jane street rapidway stations |  | spadina subway station box      |
|  | 5 minute walking radii                  |  | highway 7 rapidway              |
|  | blocks adjacent to subway               |  | potential jane street rapidway  |
|  | bus station                             |  | potential viva station          |
|  | see policy 6.3.2                        |  | major parks and open spaces     |



## 7.3 Appendix C: TTC Subway Ridership, 2022

### Toronto Transit Commission Subway Ridership, 2022

SUBWAY LINE / Station	Station ridership Station usage	SUBWAY LINE / Station	Station ridership Station usage
<b>LINE 1 Yonge-University</b>	<b>670,106</b>	<b>LINE 2 Bloor-Danforth</b>	<b>404,397</b>
Bloor-Yonge	155,186	Bathurst	26,234
College	42,883	Bay	24,260
Davisville	13,973	Bloor-Yonge	131,995
Downsview Park	8,845	Broadview	25,057
Dundas	72,637	Castle Frank	12,470
Dupont	22,327	Chester	9,995
Eglinton	59,802	Christie	15,179
Eglinton West	6,569	Coxwell	19,148
Finch	59,364	Donlands	11,481
Finch West	20,950	Dufferin	27,837
Glencairn	16,118	Dundas West	21,509
Highway 407	9,042	Greenwood	13,568
King	40,664	High Park	11,802
Lawrence	27,847	Islington	21,331
Lawrence West	22,975	Jane	15,349
Museum	14,399	Keele	17,108
North York Centre	23,768	Kennedy	31,249
Osgoode	27,396	Kipling	31,220
Pioneer Village	14,789	Lansdowne	19,541
Queen	38,827	Main Street	24,918
Queen's Park	39,543	Old Mill	9,319
Rosedale	4,787	Ossington	25,828
Sheppard West	22,694	Pape	24,708
Sheppard-Yonge	61,349	Royal York	18,568
Spadina	15,703	Runnymede	15,374
St. Andrew	39,775	Sherbourne	28,870
St. Clair	33,574	Spadina	102,255
St. Clair West	38,700	St. George	27,760
St. George	108,290	Victoria Park	13,611
St. Patrick	27,617	Warden	12,635
Summerhill	16,269	Woodbine	18,615
Union	91,601		
Vaughan Metro Centre	21,186		
Wellesley	26,152		
Wilson	25,511		
York Mills	30,088		
York University	30,112		
Yorkdale	8,900		

SUBWAY LINE / Station	Station ridership Station usage	SUBWAY LINE / Station	Station ridership Station usage
<b>LINE 3 Scarborough</b>	<b>22,872</b>	<b>LINE 4 SHEPPARD</b>	<b>39,482</b>
Elesmere	1,068	Bayview	8,149
Kennedy	19,254	Bessarion	4,269
Lawrence West	8,968	Don Mills	26,093
McCowan	2,331	Leslie	5,920
Midland	1,293	Sheppard-Yonge	34,532












This table shows the typical number of customer-trips made on each subway line and the number of customers travelling to and from each station platform on an average weekday in Fall 2022.

As of Fall 2022, there were 69 TTC subway stations. Five stations serve two subway lines, and so are listed twice, once for each subway line.

## 7.4 Appendix D: Street Network in the VMC

### SCHEDULE C > STREET NETWORK

#### LEGEND

- |   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
|  | arterials (width to be consistent with region of york official plan) |  | mews (15-17 m) or local streets (see Policy 4.3.16)                  |
|  | minor arterial (33 m)  |  | colossus drive overpass corridor protection area (see policy 4.3.10) |
|  | major collectors (28-33 m)   |  | major parks and open spaces  |
|  | special collector (33 m)   |  | see policy 4.3.2   |
|  | minor collectors (23-26 m)   |  | see policy 4.3.17  |
|  | local streets (20-22 m)  |  | see policy 6.3.2   |
|   |  |  | see policy 4.3.20  |



# 7.5 Appendix E: Floodplain and Environmental Open Spaces in the VMC (Black Creek Corridor Rehabilitation)

## SCHEDULE J > FLOODPLAIN AND ENVIRONMENTAL OPEN SPACES

### LEGEND

- environmental open spaces
- black creek remediation area (see policies 5.6.4 - 5.6.10, and 3.6.4 of Volume 1)
- existing watercourses (future alignment to be determined)
- existing floodplain (see policies 5.6.4 - 5.6.10)
- see policy 6.3.2

