

# **Planning for Changing Suburbs: Vaughan's Urban Growth Centre**

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A Major Paper submitted to the Faculty of Environmental Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Environmental Studies.

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July 31, 2014

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## **Abstract**

Suburban development, in the last half century, has been the dominant style of urban expansion in Southern Ontario. The Greater Golden Horseshoe, which consists of Ontario's largest and most heavily populated regions, has experienced growth through urban sprawl over the last few decades. There are certain issues associated with this style of growth that are reflected in the environmental, economic and the social well-being of cities. There has been a shift in the way suburbs are being planned and the Province of Ontario has taken steps in recent years towards curbing sprawl through the implementation of policy that encourages compact growth. The policy document that sets out these growth initiatives is called the Places to Grow Act: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2006). This document "sets out policies and guidelines that direct municipalities how and where to grow". The same document also identifies the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre as an Urban Growth Centre with growth targets that the area must meet by the year 2031.

This major paper looks at the process of suburbanization and intensification, as well as the land use policy framework that governs the City of Vaughan and asks the question: is Vaughan developing and growing in the right direction? By looking at the works of Pierre Filion and the Expo City Development the paper argues that the City of Vaughan, while working successfully towards meeting the province's growth targets, lacks certain elements within their growth centre such as affordable housing and a civic centre/city hall (which was recently built away from the site). In the paper I apply Filion's criteria of what makes suburban town centres successful and apply them to the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre to distinguish if Vaughan's downtown centre is headed towards being successful.

## **Foreword**

This paper explores the three components of my Plan of Study – planning, suburban development and sustainability -- in order to fulfill the requirements of a Masters Degree in Environmental Studies. Firstly the paper touches on the component of planning where it outlines and describes the planning policies governing the City of Vaughan at both a municipal and provincial level. The next component, suburban development, is examined by investigating the rise of the suburbs, as well as the shift in the manner that suburbs are being developed. The third and final component, sustainability, is broken down and described in three separate areas: social, environmental and built form.

By examining these three components through a literature review, policy review and participant observation I completed a case study on the City of Vaughan's intensification initiatives, more specifically on its urban growth centre known as the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Through this case study I conducted a critique on Vaughan's efforts in creating its urban growth centre.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge the hard work and support of the faculty and staff within the Environmental Studies Program, specifically Professor Laura Taylor.

Also, I thank my friends and family who have provided endless encouragement and support along the way.

## **Introduction**

Urban settlement during the post-World War II era consisted mainly of suburbanization. This trend of building low-rise sprawling settlements around the urban fabric has been the dominant pattern of growth in Southern Ontario for over half a century. Vaughan has followed this trend of suburbanization and has become one of Southern Ontario's largest suburban municipalities. From a population of 15,597 inhabitants in 1960, Vaughan has grown (in 2011) to a population of 288,301 (City of Vaughan 2013). According to the City of Vaughan's website (2013), “[b]etween 2006 and 2011, Vaughan experienced a 20.7% population increase. Strong population growth has been a driving force behind the City's remarkable economic progress. Compared with the twenty largest municipalities in Canada, Vaughan ranks second in terms of population growth.”

In the past few years, there has been a shift in planning the suburbs, this shift was towards growing more compact, with higher densities and mixed-uses. This shift was reinforced by the Province of Ontario in their growth plan called The Places to Grow Act: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure 2006). Vaughan is identified in this plan as an urban growth centre and is expected to grow as the plan outlines.



Urban Growth Centres (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing 2006)

I have lived in Vaughan for the past 19 years and have witnessed the city becoming a large sprawling suburb within the Greater Toronto Area. However, over the last four to five years, I have seen changes in the way the City is being developed. The change began with seeing townhouse complexes being built along main roads. This higher-density style development was unusual for the area and caught my attention and I found myself becoming very interested in the way my city was growing and developing. Following the townhouse complexes was the advent of the mid-rise condominium to the area. These buildings began being proposed and constructed on main roads that were traffic corridors. These mid-rise buildings were taller and of higher-densities, and were like nothing the residents of have seen before. I became even more interested

in why this was happening and why Vaughan was choosing this path of growth and development. When I became aware of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre being proposed and built I knew that suburban intensification would be my area of interest in the MES program.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse suburbanization in Southern Ontario, and to look at how there has been a recent shift in the way our suburbs are being planned and built. In this paper I examine the works of Pierre Filion, Gunter Gad, Malcolm Matthew along with several other authors. The authors stated above have all contributed in the research and understanding of suburban downtowns. The paper focuses specifically on the City of Vaughan and how provincial policy is shaping growth in this municipality. I use the works of the authors stated above to describe what is happening in Vaughan by analyzing the City of Vaughan's main intensification site (the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre) on its environmental and social sustainability efforts as well as on its built form to determine if the City is heading in the right direction, and if this intensification node will be successful. The methodology used in this paper consists of a secondary source literature review on social and environmental sustainability, suburbanization and smart growth, a examination of the demographics of the City of Vaughan, a policy review on all relevant provincial and municipal policy documents, site visits and an interview with Councillor Sandra Rocco. A limitation that I encountered was the lack of published work on the city of Vaughan and its growth patterns, therefore much of the information on the City came from its website or archives.

## **Suburban Planning**

### **The Suburbs**

"Of all the ways in which Canadian cities have been transformed since World War II, none has had such far-reaching effects, or wrought such immense changes to the Canadian way of life, as Suburbanization (Smith 2006: 211)". Suburban development became prominent in the late 1940s during the postwar era. During this time there was an unprecedented shift of people and jobs from city centres to suburban areas. According to Smith (2006: 211), between 1951 and 2001, Canada's urban population increased by 16 million, an increase that accounted for 95 percent of the country's total population growth, which occurred mostly on the margins of existing cities; in their suburbs. The majority of the people moving to the suburbs during this period were economically mobile [and predominantly white] families that could afford the lifestyle the new suburbs were now offering. Hanlon, Short and Vicino (2010: 38) claim that the class-based nature of suburbanization was not simply that the middle-class groups were moving to the suburbs; these authors argue that the middle-class was created during this very process of suburbanization. The trend of suburbanization, as outlined above, has shaped most North American cities including Vaughan. Characteristics of suburban development were quite different from what people were used to in the large cities. The suburban characteristics were seen by many as desirable alternatives for families looking to escape the crowded, dirty, and crime-ridden cities to raise their children in perceived safety. The predominant attraction factors of the suburbs were space and the access to private property. By moving to the suburbs, middle-class families were able to own relatively large lots and build relatively large low-rise single family dwellings.

According to Smith (2006: 229), in the eyes of contemporary critics, suburban development is unsound in every respect- environmentally, financially, and socially. He adds, suburban growth is everywhere treated as though it can be sustained indefinitely. I agree with Smith's argument because, with time, continued suburban mass migration of people outwards away from the city centre into suburban regions produced a development pattern known as urban sprawl. Urban sprawl has many detrimental effects both economically and environmentally. The sprawling suburban development pattern means less people per square kilometre, and low density development for service provision is not ideal when taking into account various infrastructures such as sewer and water pipes. The costs of implementing and maintaining infrastructure such as sewers, roads and transit are expensive and when the infrastructure is servicing a limited amount of dwellings it becomes proportionally more expensive for local governments and citizens. Transit infrastructure might or might not be developed given its costs and the predominant automobile reliance of suburban residents. The economic pressures sprawl has on municipalities are massive, however, the effects it has on the environment are worse. Urban sprawl has caused people to live further and further away from each other and the city centre. This has resulted in larger and wider roads to be constructed to move people to and from work or where ever it is they are going – often cutting through low-income minority or immigrant communities who have settled in the in-between neighborhoods not being able to afford the downtown nor the suburbs. In the 1950s, the expressway was the artery for car dependent suburbs. Fuel was relatively cheap and allegedly abundant so being able to drive long distances to and from work seemed ideal. Since that period, there are far more vehicles on the roads and today's multi-lane expressways are crowded all hours of the day. Car dependence and its infrastructure have had massive negative environmental effects and produces large amounts of

carbon dioxide which is pumped into our atmosphere daily. Hanlon, Short and Vicino (2010: 165) echo the principles above when they describe sprawl as "a form of development that is very often too diffused to support public transit or easy walking. The heavy reliance on private auto transport imposes a significant environmental price in terms of air pollution, the space for roads, and massive parking lots to accommodate automobiles." Smith (2006: 231), adds to the argument on car reliance and its detrimental affects when he states pollution, travel time, operating expenses, injury, death, and emotional well being take there toll, suburban development could certainly achieve some improvement, by reducing by reducing travel distances. Traditional suburban development by many critics, as well as myself, is seen as being unsustainable, meaning this style of development cannot be continued because of the reasons mentioned above. A paradigm shift in the way the suburbs are being planned and built, to grow more compact and efficient rather than expanding outward, could address many of issues raised above.

Smith (2006: 229), explains large-scale suburban development was no panacea, nor could the mass suburb deliver all that the qualities it promised. The large-scale suburban developments of today are not so different from the original suburbs developed in the postwar era. Current suburban developments are still highly car dependent, offer very little affordable housing stock, have little or no character because of their homogenous forms and designs, and are often built in or too close to ecologically sensitive areas. Mumford (1961: 486) described them as:

a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up in inflexibility, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless pre-fabricated foods, form the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to a common mold, manufactured in

the central metropolis. Thus the ultimate effect of suburban escape in our time is, ironically, a low grade environment from which escape is impossible.

Mumford (1961) clearly perceives the suburbs as being a bland, monotonous place to live where diversity does not exist. I agree with Mumford's claims, which date back to the early 1960's, because I believe he accurately describes the monotony of past and current suburban areas. Since the advent of the suburbs after the post war boom there has not been any significant change in the way suburbs are being designed and built; until recent. Richard Harris (2004: 51) who writes about Canadian suburbanization argues that

Canadians had come to think of suburbs as the best places for children, whether because of the larger houses and backyards, the quieter streets, or the cleaner air. Since so many families were moving to the suburbs, they became the best places to find others who shared this commitment. If suburban families have sometimes turned their backs on wider social responsibilities, they have also pursued their own search for community.

Harris (2004) talks about the rise of the suburbs as people seeking a better and safer environment to raise their families. He also mentions that other like-minded families followed suit creating a homogenous place to live. One of the biggest critics against the suburbs was Jane Jacobs. In her classic *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs (1961: 445) does not mince her words when she argues that suburbs are "thin despotisms [that] lack any regrettable degree of innate vitality, staying power, or inherent usefulness as settlements."

### **Vaughan Development History**

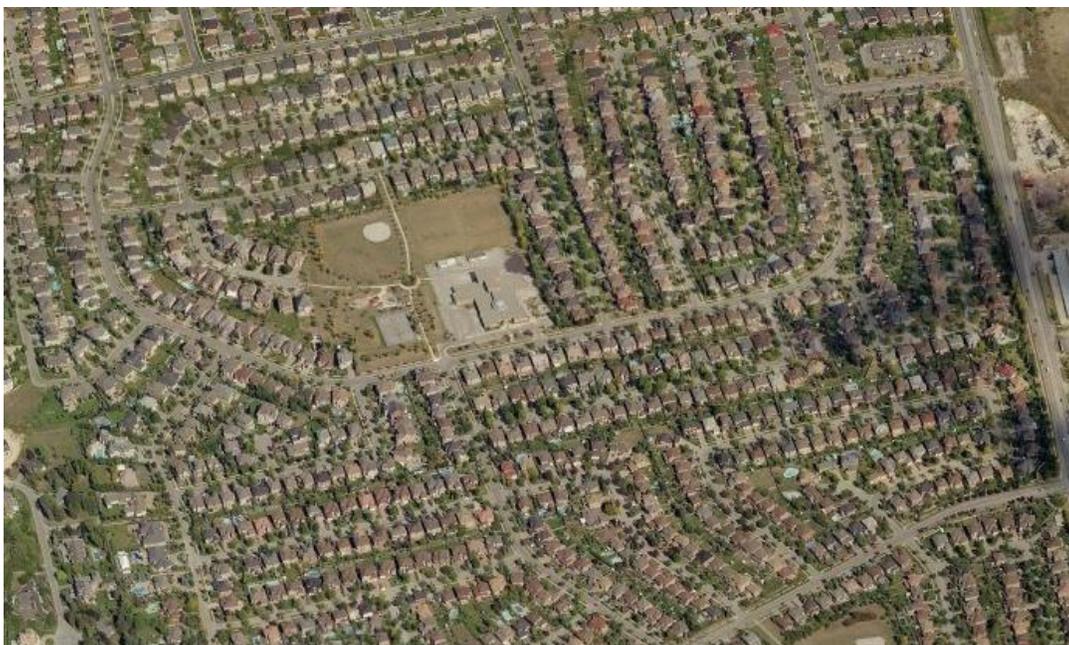
In order to understand how Vaughan is exhibiting the paradigm shift in suburban planning it is important to look at its history and demographics. Like many other Suburban cities in the Greater

Toronto Area, the City of Vaughan exhibits many of the negative characteristics of the suburbs stated above. Vaughan has grown into a large suburban municipality immediately north of the city of Toronto; many well-to-do families have made it their home. Vaughan was made a settlement in the period between 1775 and 1783. According to the City of Vaughan's Archives (2000) Vaughan's first European settlers were British Loyalists from the 13 American colonies (later the United States of America) in rebellion against King George III in 1775. In the aftermath of the war, thousands of these Loyalists left their homes and immigrated to British territory in Upper Canada. Many settled in Vaughan Township. Others followed between 1812 and 1814, when Britain and the United States once again were at war. Of British Protestant descent, these early pioneers laid the groundwork for the Vaughan community.

According to the City of Vaughan Archives (2000), the township has changed relatively little, from the mid 1800s when the number of inhabitants stood at 4300 to 1935 when it contained 4873 residents. After the Second World War there was an influx of immigration and by 1960 the population, according to the City of Vaughan's archives (2000), stood at 15,957. The influx of population consisted of mainly European immigrants from Italy and other Eastern European countries. The City at this time took on a new mind-set according to the City of Vaughan Achieves (2000), one that embraced the concept of commercial and industrial development.

Over the past few decades "Vaughan has experienced unprecedented growth in its residential, industrial and commercial sectors. Much of its appeal is due to low taxes, a readily available labour force, and access to major transportation routes. (Active Together Master Plan 2013: 2)" The municipality is characterized by cookie-cutter suburban developments that carve through forests and other environmentally sensitive areas. The houses are low-rise single family dwellings on large lots and often with two or more car-garages. These single-family housing

subdivisions are connected to one another by wide arterial streets for automobiles. Along these streets are commercial plazas where services/tenants in leased units are usually a bank, hair dresser, dry cleaner, restaurants or pharmacy --and always a large parking lot to accommodate cars and convenience. Major streets lead to larger commercial areas which contain big-box retail outlets such as hardware stores, supercentres such as Wal-Mart, or large grocery chain stores. These areas are usually located in close proximity to an expressway. Along the expressways are industrial areas such as distribution centres and various manufacturing industries. Vaughan has developed in this fashion for the last several decades and all signs point out that it would have continued doing so if not for the shift in the style of suburban planning aided by the province's Places to Grow Act. Since the establishment of the Places to Grow Act, Vaughan has capped its urban boundary and has focused on growing by increasing density instead of sprawling outwards. Below is a photo of Sanoma Heights, one of Vaughan's larger "cookie-cutter" subdivisions, it exhibits the traditional suburban style of development Vaughan has been following.

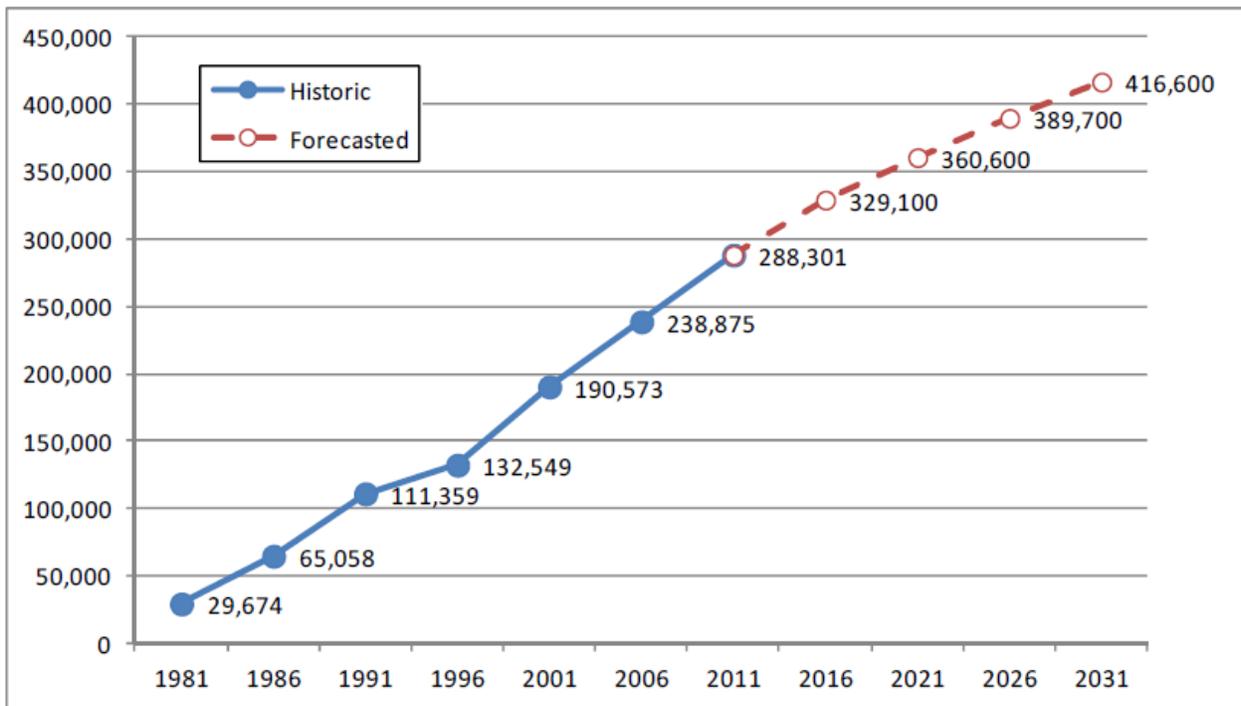


Typical Suburban Development in Vaughan (Bing. Maps 2012)

## Demographic Changes

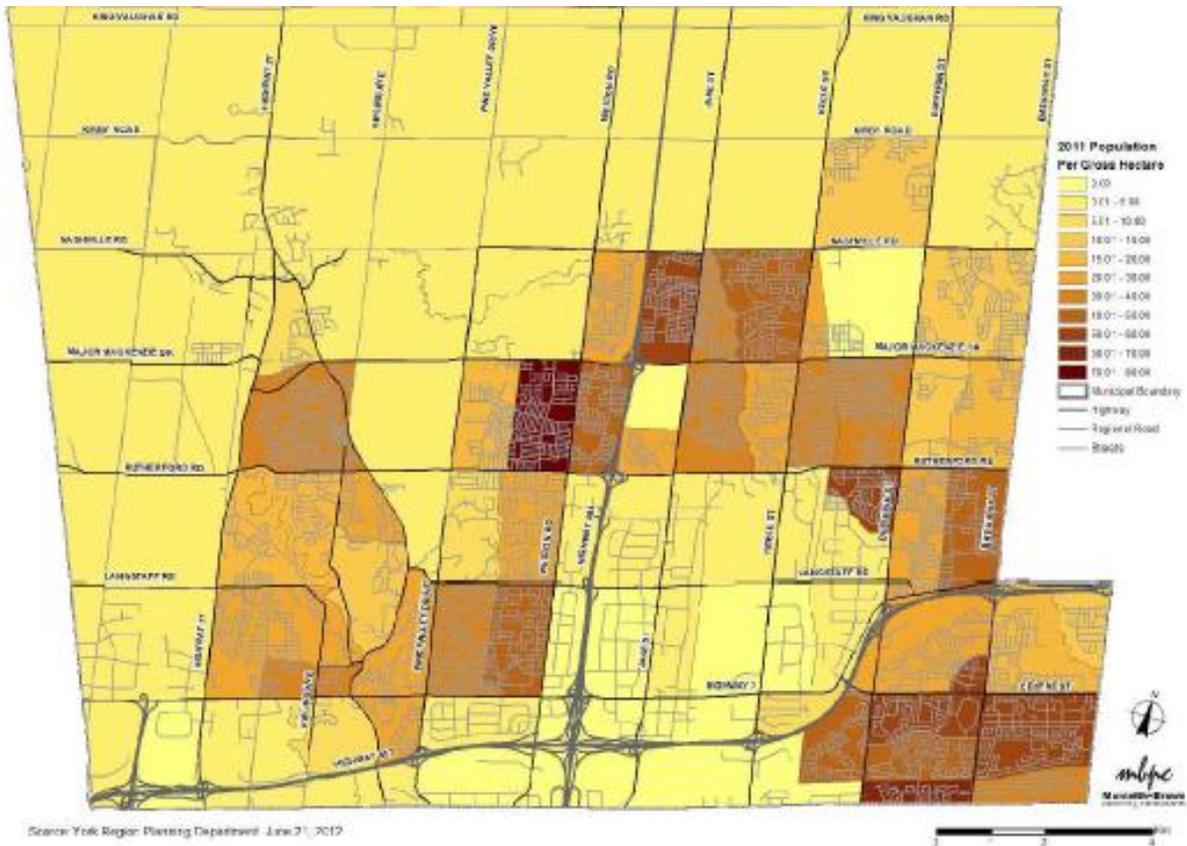
### Population

The City of Vaughan has grown rapidly in the last thirty years. From 1981 to 2011 the City has grown from a population of 29,674 inhabitants to 288,301 inhabitants. The graph below illustrates the rapid growth of the City's population and offers a predicted population figure for the year 2031 of 416,600 inhabitants.



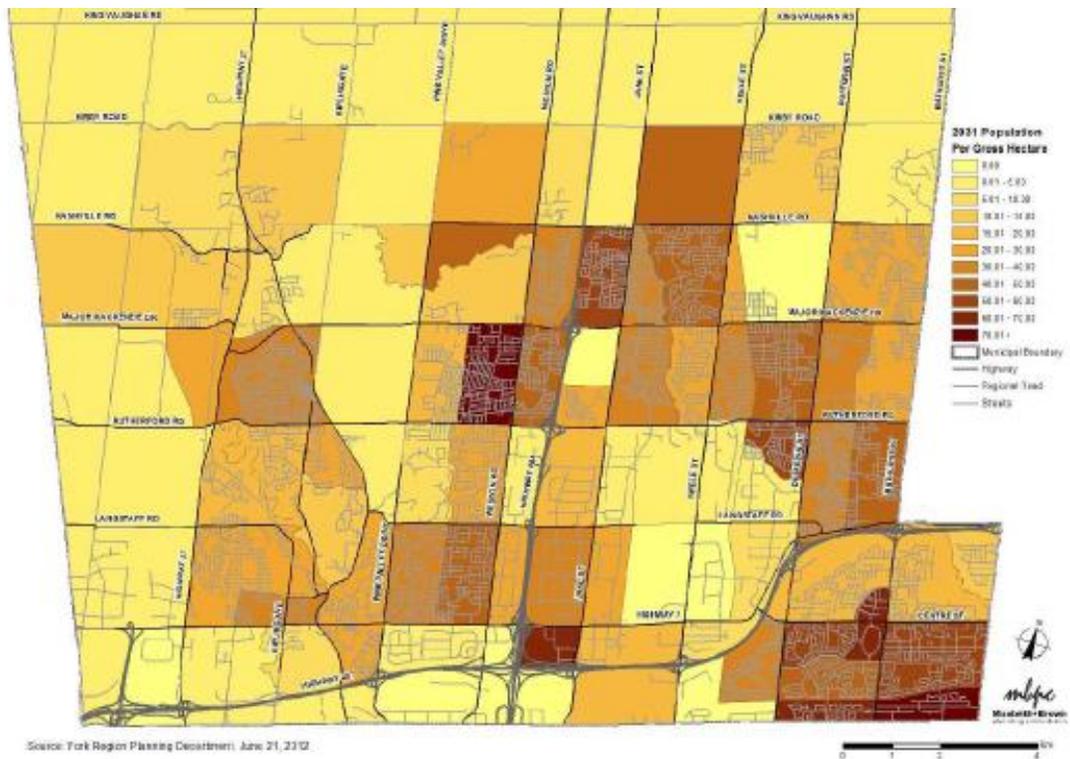
City of Vaughan Historic and Forecasted Population Growth (Active Together Master Plan 2013)

According to the Active Together Master Plan (2013: 12) the City of Vaughan will accommodate this growth through both greenfield development and infill/intensification, which will come in the form of compact development (e.g. condominiums and townhomes). The Active Together Master Plan identifies four areas where Vaughan will increase its densities to achieve its growth. 1) The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre; 2) Primary Centres, which consist of mixed-use high and mid-rise buildings that are pedestrian friendly and transit supportive; 3) Local Centres, which are mixed-use areas abutting communities; and 4) Primary Intensification Corridors, which are regional corridors such as Highway 7 and Yonge Street. Below are maps identifying where the City of Vaughan intends to facilitate its growth. The first map shows current areas of density and the second shows forecast areas of growth.



Vaughan Population Per Hectare 2011 (Active Together MasterPlan 2013)

Vaughan Population Per Hectare 2031 (Active Together MasterPlan 2013)



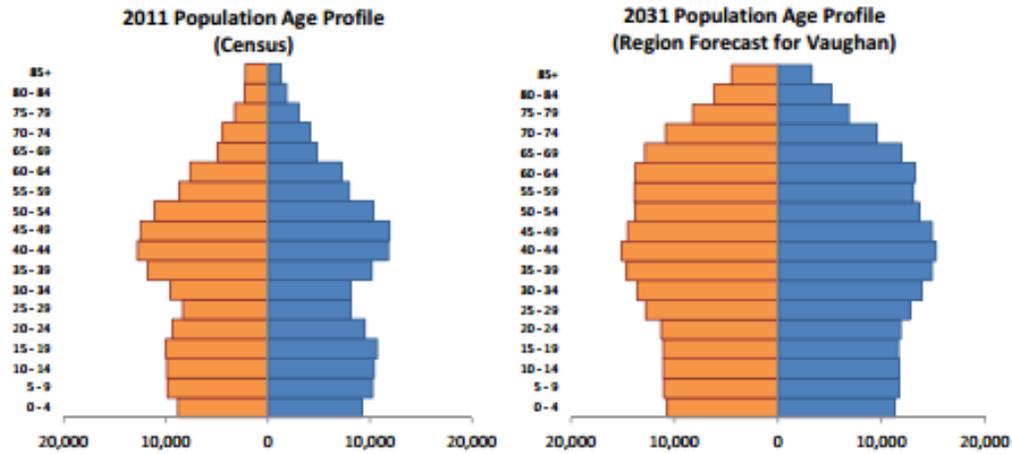
The maps above illustrate where Vaughan will focus growth in future decades. The maps identify the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, and its surrounding areas, as the sites to accommodate the City's future growth. This proves that the City of Vaughan is committed to growing in a compact style and that the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is at the forefront of facilitating this growth. The chart below organizes and clarifies the graph and maps above and shows the projected growth and population change of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and its surrounding areas.

	2011		2021		2031		Population Change (2011-2031)
	Population (Census)	% of City-wide Pop.	Population (Forecast)	% of City-wide Pop.	Population (Forecast)	% of City-wide Pop.	
Carrville	43,800	15%	59,700	17%	65,800	16%	22,000
Kleinburg/Nashville	5,000	2%	20,500	6%	24,900	6%	19,900
Maple <i>(see Note 1 below)</i>	59,500	21%	61,700	17%	75,300	18%	15,800
Thornhill/Concord <i>(see Note 2 below)</i>	66,200	23%	73,800	20%	84,700	20%	18,500
Vaughan Metropolitan Centre	--	--	17,800	5%	28,100	7%	28,100
Vellore <i>(see Note 3 below)</i>	35,700	12%	47,400	13%	58,700	14%	23,000
Woodbridge	78,100	27%	79,600	22%	79,100	19%	1,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>288,300</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>360,400</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>416,600</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>128,300</b>

Population Forecasts by Community 2011-2031 (Active Together Master Plan 2013)

**Age**

The following graph and chart illustrates the age distribution for the City of Vaughan. According to the 2011 Census the City's median age is 37.9 years and when compared to the 2006 Census (35.9 years) Vaughan's population seems to be aging as a whole. The City's population shows steady growth amongst all age groups however it is obvious that the population is "greying" a trend which most of Canada is currently facing.



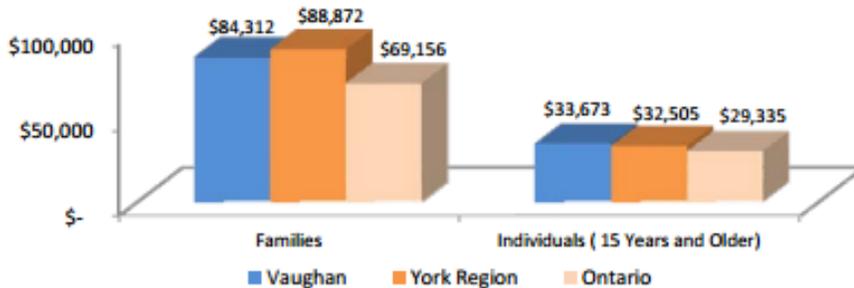
Population Age Distribution (Active Together Master Plan 2013)

Age Group	2011		2021		2031		Growth (2011-2031)	
	Census	%	Forecast	%	Forecast	%		
0 to 19	79,100	27%	84,300	23%	90,200	22%	11,100	14%
20 to 34	53,000	18%	72,100	20%	76,200	18%	23,200	44%
35 to 49	70,900	25%	78,600	22%	89,300	21%	18,300	26%
50 to 59	38,100	13%	52,000	14%	54,400	13%	16,300	43%
60+	47,100	16%	73,400	20%	106,400	26%	59,300	126%
<b>Total</b>	<b>288,300</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>360,400</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>416,600</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>128,300</b>	<b>44%</b>

Population Age Distribution Chart (Active Together Master Plan 2013)

### Income

The graph below illustrates the median income for families and individuals across the municipality, region and province. Vaughan's family income of \$84,312 is considerably higher than the province's average of \$69,156 though it is slightly lower but somewhat on par with the region's average of \$88,872. Vaughan's individual income of \$33,673 is higher although on par with the region's average of \$32,505 and the province's average of \$29,335.



Median Income (Active Together Master Plan 2013)

## **Vaughan's Governing Planning Policies**

### **Provincial Planning Framework**

The paradigm shift in suburban planning, pushing for compact growth and incorporating aspects of downtown development, has put pressure on suburban municipalities to amend their planning policies accordingly. The City of Vaughan is governed by several layers of land use policy at both the provincial and municipal level. To have a strong understanding of how land use in Vaughan is governed it is important to know the system in which Vaughan's land use planning functions within. This section will identify the relevant land use planning documents and highlight key guidelines affecting Vaughan's growth strategies. In Ontario, land use planning is a top-down model meaning that each policy document must consider what the document above it outlines. The Planning Act, which, according to the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (2010), "sets out the ground rules for land use planning in Ontario and describes how land uses may be controlled, and who may control them," is at the top of Ontario's planning system. Following the Planning Act is the Provincial Policy Statement, a statement of the province's policies on land use that, according to the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (2010), "provides direction for the entire province on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development, and promotes the provincial 'policy-led' planning system". These two land use policy documents lay down the framework and governing rules of how Ontario's planning system functions.

Other land use policy documents are focused more on physically governing land use, meaning they outline what can be built in particular areas and therefore also identify areas to be protected from development. These land use planning documents, which follow the Planning Act and the Provincial Policy Statement, are Provincial Plans, Regional Plans and Municipal Plans.

A few provincial acts which are relevant to this paper are the Greenbelt Act (2005), Places to Grow Act (2006) and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act (2001). These Acts are area specific and set out land use legislation for all development within them. This paper will focus mainly on the Places to Grow Act (2006) because it sets out growth targets for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and is one of the reasons why Vaughan is experiencing an important change in density.

### **Regional and Municipal Policy Framework**

Regional plans follow and adhere to the superior provincial plans and legislation. This is when land use planning in Ontario begins to narrow down and become more specific in what it sets out to accomplish. However, these plans are still broad because they are looking at land use planning at a regional level. Vaughan adheres to the York Region Official Plan which focuses primarily on regional matters such as the conservation of natural areas, infrastructure management and transportation, to name a few.

Subsequent to regional plans are the municipality's land use plans. Each municipality has an Official Plan and these plans focus more narrowly on land use planning within the respective municipality. Vaughan has an Official Plan which focuses on matters such as land use designations, heritage preservation, and development guidelines. Official Plans must adhere to all regional and provincial plans that come before them. There are also Secondary Plans at the municipal level which focus very narrowly on one specific area. Secondary Plans follow a municipality's Official Plan and add an extra layer of land use policy to a specific area. Secondary Plans are usually implemented in areas that are undergoing particular development pressure or in areas specifically targeted for growth. Finally the last forms of land use control are

Site Specific Guidelines and zoning. Site Specific Guidelines are determined and implemented by the municipality to control matters comparable to built form, streetscape and building massing. Zoning is site specific as well and aims to control standards such as building height, density and setbacks.

The land use planning system which Vaughan functions within can be expressed as an inverted pyramid. Provincial plans would be at the top and the most broad then tapering down to regional plans and finally to municipal plans where it is most narrow and site specific. Vaughan's shift towards incorporating higher densities and mixed-uses comes from the top of this pyramid where the province dictates growth targets. It is then filtered down to the regional level and from there gets downloaded to the municipality where policy becomes built form. There are many layers of land use policy that control development in Vaughan therefore it is important to identify and analyze them in order to distinguish which of these plans are causing the city's change in density. It is also important to discover if what is being built follows the policy created or are some sections being ignored, which is an unfortunate reality for policies regarding social sustainability.

### **Ontario's Growth Plan**

The Places to Grow Act: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure 2006) is a key land use policy document in this study. According to the Guide to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure 2006), the plan aims:

- to create more liveable communities where people are close to shops, parks, jobs, and other services;

- to revitalize downtowns to become vibrant and convenient centres;
- to create complete suburbs that offer more options for living, working, shopping and playing;
- provide competitive economic conditions to keep Ontario a top place to invest in and to attract quality jobs;
- to curb sprawl and minimize the pressures on our farmlands and natural areas;
- to reduce traffic gridlock by improving access to a greater range of transportation choices; and
- to get better use from public investments in facilities such as school, transit systems, roads and sewers.

This Growth Plan ambitiously aims to accomplish many objectives that relate to bettering the environment, economy and quality of life. To achieve these objectives the growth plan outlines four major sections which are: 1) where and how to grow; 2) infrastructure required to support growth; 3) protecting what is valuable; and 4) implementation of growth. When looking at the change in density and land uses in Vaughan, section one of the growth plan on where and how to grow is the most valuable in describing what is going on. According to the Guide to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure 2006), this first section deals with growth forecasts, managing growth, general intensification, urban growth centres, major transit station areas and intensification corridors, employment lands, designated greenfield areas and settlement area boundaries.

In the City of Vaughan, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is identified as an ‘urban growth centre’ in the growth plan. The growth plan simply describes an urban growth centre as a

vibrant place for people to live, work and play. The Guide to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure 2006: 13) states that:

the importance of vital downtown cores is not a new concept. Historically, our communities developed in centres and along corridors, which evolved into the downtowns and main streets of cities and towns today... These core areas are meeting places, locations for cultural facilities, public institutions and major services, and transit hubs. They are important economic growth generators, attracting new talent and investment, and they play a key role in supporting the economy of the surrounding area.

The Growth Plan expects that 'urban growth centres' will be growth targets and to achieve such growth by the year 2031. In the case of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe stipulates that this specific urban growth centre must achieve 200 residents and jobs combined per hectare. The plan also states that intensification corridors will serve as locations for large office and commercial development to achieve residential and employment densities and will be planned to accommodate local services, including commercial, recreational, cultural and entertainment uses.

### **Municipal Policy in Depth**

The Places to Grow Act: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure 2006) sets out growth targets for the City of Vaughan. The responsibility to grow and plan to meet the targets the province specifies rests in the hands of the municipality. To see how Vaughan has taken on this responsibility, one can examine the municipality's land use planning documents. Vaughan's land use planning documents are collectively part of the City's

growth strategy titled The Vaughan Tomorrow Growth Strategy (2007). The City's growth strategy includes the expected Official and Secondary Plans as well as a collection of other policy documents and guidelines.

Vaughan has released several land use planning documents in recent years, in addition to the Official and Secondary Plans, which aim to further guide development in a way that is beneficial to its residents and local businesses. Vaughan's planning documents include: Vaughan Vision 2020 (2007); The Environmental Master Plan (2009); The Active Together Master Plan (2013); The Transportation Master Plan (2012); The Employment Sectors Strategy (2010); The Water and Sewer Master Plan (2010); The Long-Term Financial Planning Model (2008); and The Storm Water/Drainage Master Plan (2011). Each of these documents offers policy and guidelines to their respective subject matter and development within the city must be consistent with these documents in order to be approved. Of the documents listed above, the most relevant to this paper are Vaughan Vision 2020 (2007), The Active Together Master Plan (2008), The Environmental Master Plan (2009) and The Transportation Master Plan (2012) because they define Site Specific Guidelines for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.

When examining the City of Vaughan's Official Plan's land use designation maps, it is clear that the City is focusing their intensification initiatives along the Highway 7 corridor. Highway 7 crosses Vaughan from East to West along the southern reaches of its boundaries. Along the Highway 7 corridor, the City has designated lands to be used for high-rise mixed-use, mid-rise mixed-use, commercial, high-rise residential and downtown for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Highway 7 has been receiving a large amount of development pressure in the last decade in response the City began amending its Official Plan to accommodate growth. Vaughan's Official Plan amendments 500, 528, 529, 663 and the Vaughan Corporate Centre

Urban Design Guidelines (1997) laid the foundation for the Vaughan Metropolitan Secondary Plan which is now the lead policy document governing the development of the city's downtown centre. The Official Plan amendments evolve over time and each one progressively allows for more density. The earlier amendments identified the area as an intensification node. The subsequent Official Plan Amendments were influenced by the Province's Places to Grow Act which, as outlined in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, sets out growth targets.

The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan strives to be transit oriented, “walkable, accessible, diverse, vibrant, green, and beautiful” (City of Vaughan 2010: 16). The plan goes on to describe what each of these principles are and one principle in particular caught my attention. The plan's principle to be “diverse” includes a goal of reaching targets for affordable housing. According to the Vaughan Metropolitan Secondary Plan (City of Vaughan 2010: 17), "housing will be provided for families at all income levels, and more than a third of new housing units will satisfy criteria for affordability." I have investigated two developments in and around the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and prices are nowhere near affordable --in fact I found them to be quite excessive and over market value with prices starting around \$400,000 for a one bedroom of just over 700 square feet. This is something I will investigate further into the paper when examining social sustainability.

## **Shift in Planning Suburbs**

The suburbs are currently undergoing a shift in the way they are being planned and built. The shift in the planning paradigm the suburbs are seeing is due to several factors, of these factors one of the most significant challenges are the ones affecting the environment. Urban sprawl is one of the many environmental challenges the suburbs have produced in the last half century. Following the strictly dormitory suburbs, according to Pamela Blais (2000: 6), one of the large factors encouraging sprawl was having more routine activities such as personal financial services, manufacturing and information technology to low-cost suburban locations. Blais (2000) contends that these services and light-industrial activities have increasingly located farther from the central city than ever in the past, following cheaper real estate and labor/client pools, which fueled sprawl. Governments at all levels are realizing that metropolitan cities and suburban cities cannot continue to grow and develop like they have in the past because of the negative environmental effects associated with sprawl. There have been reforms in land use policy that are pushing a new style of development which is known as smart growth. Smart growth contains many objectives and ideally aims 1) to preserve open spaces, environmentally sensitive areas and farmlands, 2) to support mixed-use development, 3) to support transit oriented development, and 4) to build and offer a variety of housing types. Smart growth is articulated around an increase in density. This means that growth by expansion must be limited. The introduction of the Greenbelt Act in 2005 set the boundaries for where the Greater Golden Horseshoe can develop and grow. The Places to Grow Act followed up with the specifics of where and how the growth will take place. The two provincial plans work in unison to produce growth by increasing densities and controlling the expansion of urban boundaries.

In response to the Places to Grow Act, suburban municipalities like Vaughan had to adopt smart growth strategies in order to meet the newly-established growth targets identified in the Act. When Vaughan had its five-year review of its Official Plan, the City was mandated to incorporate the objectives of the Places to Grow Act into their planning vision and documents. Rethinking and renovating the suburbs has become a priority in planning agendas because of the pressure the province has placed on municipalities through the Places to Grow Act and the Greenbelt Act. This shift of policy "has become a major political platform upon which local and provincial agendas have called for new urban reforms to stop sprawl and facilitate compact growth" (Bunce 2002: 178). The challenge of growing more densely is which theories and practices are best suited for planning and redesigning the suburbs.

### **Suburban Town Centres and Nodal Development**

The new planning paradigm that the suburbs are adopting calls for compact transit oriented growth, containing mixed-uses developments and a mix in the socio-economic population of such areas. What does this kind of growth look like in the suburbs? I believe that this style of growth in the suburbs is best represented by intensified suburban regions containing town centres or downtowns that are used as centres of employment, residence, finance, culture and transit. In the chapter *Emerging Urban Forms in the Canadian City* in the book *Canadian Cities in Transition New Directions in the Twenty-First Century* by Jill Grant and Pierre Filion, the authors address the advent of new urban forms in Canadian Cities. Amongst the urban forms Grant and Filion discuss is the suburban town centre. The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre would be what Grant and Filion classify as a suburban town centre. Grant and Filion (2010: 312) describe suburban town centres as planned intensification nodes, which are located in large suburbs on the periphery of major city regions. They describe that local authorities attempt to

mimic the dynamics of traditional downtowns, and typically include retail, office space, public-sector institutions and services, and housing. This style of suburban development, suburban town centres, is what Grant and Filion call nodal development. Nodal development, as Grant and Filion explain (2010: 312), "is a keystone of metropolitan regional planning across North America, often linked to the ideal of transit-oriented development." However according to Grant and Filion, (2010: 312) even with these transit options available it has been shown, in other suburban nodal developments across the Greater Toronto Area, that workers and residents remain dependent on the automobile. Grant and Filion add that nodes suffer from Canadians' enduring reliance on driving for shopping, and that much of the space in nodes serves the automobile which has deleterious effects on walking. The City of Vaughan in my opinion is presented with a challenge converting the site into a downtown core mainly because the area is heavily car oriented with a large amount of truck traffic. The area is currently nothing more than empty fields and big box retail with limited entertainment and employment sites -- mostly consisting of light industrial and manufacturing.

How did this style of nodal development emerge? Two additional authors who discuss suburban downtowns and nodal development are Gunter Gad and Malcolm Matthew in their chapter called *Central and Suburban Downtowns* from the book *Canadian Cities in Transition the Twenty-first Century*. Gad and Matthew in their works talk about the advent of suburban downtowns and what brought on this style of development. Gad and Matthew begin by describing how an increase in population growth through the 1940s began to facilitate the large-scale peripheral expansion of built-up areas. Gad and Matthew (2000: 261), explains that this later expansion consisted mainly of residential areas that contained schools, commercial strips along arterial roads and a carefully planned hierarchy of shopping centres. They go on to

describe other features of this peripheral expansion such as industrial areas which accommodated factories and distribution warehouses. The suburbs in the 1970s, as the two authors point out, were insufficient in providing enough diverse jobs and lacked higher-order services such as specialized educational institutions and hospitals, and specialized entertainment facilities. This coupled with the large distances between the suburbs and specialized downtown services and the lack of quality public transit is, according to Gad and Matthew, what brought on the creation of suburban downtowns. Gad and Matthew (2000: 262), add, suburban downtowns were intended to be mixed-activity nodes that were to be compact in physical form and pedestrian oriented to replicate the traditional activities and qualities of downtown and to generate a sense of community identity. Gad and Matthew describe the challenges the suburbs met while expanding further from the downtown core. The increasing distance between suburban areas and services only offered in the downtown core such as high-order jobs and city halls, lead to the emergence of centres within suburban areas.

### **Suburban Downtowns in the Greater Toronto Area**

Suburban downtowns have been in Canada since the 1950s, however the scale and scope of what is found in these centres have changed and grown over the last half century. In Filion and Gad's chapter *Urban and Suburban Downtowns: Trajectories of Growth and Decline* from the book *Canadian Cities in Transition Local Through Global Perspective* the two authors summarize the Greater Toronto Area's suburban downtowns. According to Filion and Gad (2006: 180), in the late 1950s and early 1960s planners proposed intensified development centres which would contain high-rise residential and office buildings. Filion and Gad also add that these proposed development centres were built around particular subway stations in order to encourage the use of public transportation. The two intensification centres mentioned above are along the Yonge

line at St. Clair and Ellington. Filion and Gad move on to describe an additional two major suburban centres which emerged in the Greater Toronto Area, the North York Centre and the Scarborough Town Centre. Both of the downtown centres mentioned above are connected by rail transit lines and are considered by Filion and Gad as mature suburban downtowns. What can be taken from analysing the earlier suburban centres is, a suburban downtown's success is a result of amalgamating resources typically found in the downtown core in one place within the suburbs and more importantly, in my opinion, is the presence of a rail connection to a larger transit network. The suburban downtowns mentioned above are much closer to Toronto's city centre than Vaughan's downtown. This further stresses the importance of the subway extension which will link the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre to the TTC's subway network. Filion and Gad very briefly talk about the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. They describe the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and the Markham City Centre as being the two city centres in the outer periphery of the Greater Toronto Area which will "adhere to the principles of new urbanism and smart growth" (Filion and Gad: 180). The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is being planned and developed under a different paradigm of suburban planning than past Greater Toronto Area suburban downtown centres, and it is also at the urban fringe which proposes a different set of challenges.

## **Vaughan's Urban Town Centre**

The Places to Grow Act (2006) identifies the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre as an urban growth centre in its Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The Places to Grow Act describes urban growth centres "as focal areas for investment in institutional and region-wide services as well as commercial, recreational, cultural and entertainment uses" (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure 2006: 14). The plan also mentions that these growth centres will accommodate a significant share of population and employment growth. Since its enactment the Places to Grow Act: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2006) has been the guiding document promoting growth in specific areas and in specific ways. The region it governs is the fastest growing metropolitan area in Canada and one of the fastest in all of North America. The plan aims to provide leadership and guidance to municipalities as they plan for growth in their communities. Vaughan is one of these municipalities, and it has done much work planning and implementing the province's plans into their designated urban growth centre.

The City of Vaughan, since the introduction of the Growth Plan, has been given the responsibility by the province of Ontario to plan for their designated urban growth centre to ensure that the specified growth targets are met. As the Places to Grow Plan (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure 2006: 14) outlines, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre has a growth target of 200 residents and jobs combined per hectare. The City of Vaughan has responded to the Growth Plan with their site specific Secondary Plan, as mentioned in previous sections of this paper, called the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan.

## The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Site

The site that was chosen to be Vaughan's downtown centre is located along Highway 400 and Highway 7. This area currently contains major commercial entities such as Wal-Mart, IKEA, AMC movie theater, Future Shop, a large heavy equipment dealer, several small individually owned industrial units, and one office building.



Vaughan Metropolitan Centre at Full Build Out (City of Vaughan 2010)

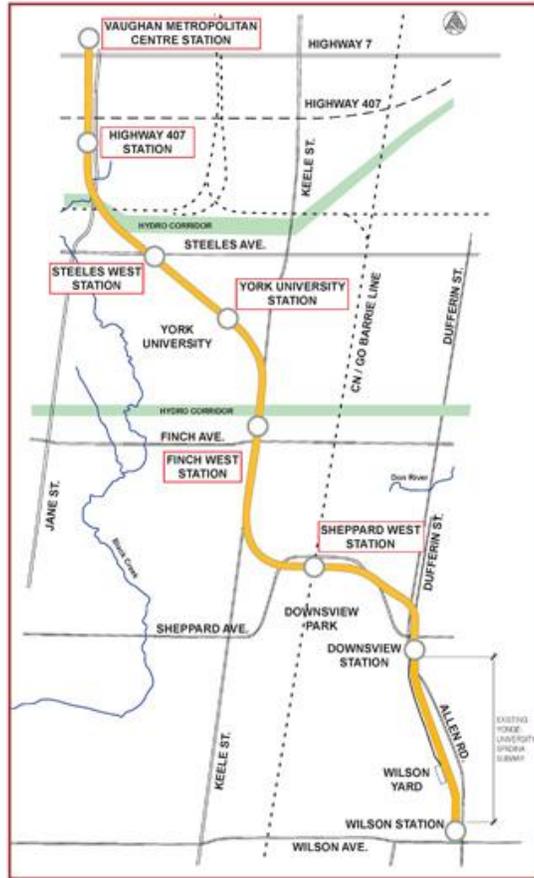
The site for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre directly abuts one of the largest industrial areas in the region that houses the MacMillan Rail Yard, operated by CN Rail, which is the largest rail yard in Canada. According to the City of Vaughan Planning Department (2010), “place making is a large factor which municipalities must address in order to create an identity for the site.” In the

Vaughan Metropolitan Centre there are no recognized heritage sites, points of interests or pedestrian infrastructure because the area consists of vacant lands surrounded by big-box commercial plazas and light industrial buildings. Creating a sense of place is a primary task which the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre must focus on; this issue will be discussed in the sections below.

### **VMC's Transportation Infrastructure**

Transportation is a key component for a city to function smoothly when an effective multi-modal transportation infrastructure is incorporated into an area it attracts investment and development. High-density development – as it is proposed for Vaughan Metropolitan Center -- depends on a detailed and efficient transit network in order for people to move from where they live to the city centre for work, shopping or recreation. Vaughan has successfully secured the extension of the Yonge-University-Spadina line, which is now under construction (with an anticipated service date of 2016). The Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension (TYSSE) project, without a doubt, was one of the key factors in the designing of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (which will be the last subway station of that line). Without the inclusion of the subway project, the scale of the Vaughan Metropolitan Center project would not be as grand as it currently is. The Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension (TYSSE) is a joint project funded by the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario, The City of Toronto, and The Regional Municipality of York. According the Toronto Transit Commission (2010), “the Government of Canada has committed \$697 million; The Province of Ontario has provided \$870 million; The City of Toronto will contribute \$526 million and York Region will contribute \$352 million. The estimated final project cost is \$2.6 billion.”

 Toronto-York Spadina  
Subway Extension



Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension Project (City of Vaughan 2013)

The extension of the Yonge-University-Spadina line is what separates the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre from other urban growth centres located in suburban municipalities. The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will have the benefit of being directly linked to the City of Toronto's downtown core. Vaughan will become the terminus of the Yonge-University-Spadina line, however, the transit options do not end there. The York Region Transit Authority has begun construction on their Highway 7 rapidway which consists of dedicated bus lanes. The bus lanes

will cross east to west from one side of Vaughan to the other linking transit hubs and entitled intensification corridors in the 905. The Places to Grow Act (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure 2006: 5) emphasizes the need for efficient transit when they talk about automobile usage in Ontario: Increasing numbers of automobiles are travelling over longer distances resulting in clogged transportation corridors, including those that provide access to our critical border crossings. Traffic congestion and the delay of goods movement costs Ontario upwards of \$5 billion in lost GDP each year... this plan addresses these challenges through policy directions that identify and support a transportation network that links urban growth centres through an extensive multi-modal system anchored by efficient public transit and highway systems for moving people and goods. However, the Places to Grow Act fails to mention the environmental degradation that is caused by excessive automobile use and how efficient transit networks will aid in the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan responds to the Places to Grow Act's need for efficient transportation in its section "Streets and Transportation." The Secondary Plan calls for integrated multi-modal transit which will be centred around the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre subway station. The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan (City of Vaughan 2010: 34) highlights that "all streets in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre shall be designed for the safety, comfort and convenience of cyclists and in addition to the bike routes major parks and open spaces shall include multi-use recreational trails linked to the street network to enhance connectivity for cyclists". The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre does not lack transit options, it will be supported by a well-connected transit network that will encourage investment and high-density mixed-use development.



VMC Transit Network Map (VMC Secondary Plan 2013)

### Creating an Identity: Sense of Place

In order for the City of Vaughan to create a successful downtown centre they must build a place that people can identify with; people have to want to be there for the place to thrive. While vacant land allows for the production of a vibrant built form to arise and to generate commercial and recreational activities, the problem becomes how to reconcile the smaller scale of new amenities with the large-size commercial and industrial fabric of the area. The City of Vaughan

must create a sense of place – one of a vibrant metropolitan centre – at the site for it to be successful. Such sense of place can be rooted in a mixed land use that offer commercial and residential services as well as cultural centres or institutions. In an interview with Councillor Sandra Yeung Racco, who is Councillor of Ward 4 where the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is located, the Councillor mentioned that the City is only dealing with a handful of land owners in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. She went on to describe how with fewer stakeholders it has been easier to get everyone onboard to create Vaughan's vision of their downtown centre.

The Places to Grow Act (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure 2006: 5) describes something similar to the idea of place making (and sense of place) when they describe how urban growth centres should contain "cultural amenities that offer the kinds of recreational activities that attract knowledge workers." Although the plan is quite vague regarding the types of proposed cultural amenities, it is clear that such amenities are linked to the creation of a sense of place, or a particular identity for this new area.

The City of Vaughan Council has recently agreed to pass a motion to tell the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation (OLG) that they are interested in building a casino in Vaughan – and the proposed site for the casino is in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. While a casino comes with a promise of a large tax base increase and jobs for the City, such perceived benefits are however contested. In the recent yet failed proposal of a casino in Toronto, the group No Casino Toronto contended that a mega-casino (as they all tend to be) would generate unpleasant parking deserts and traffic, and low-paid jobs. Moreover, in their view, the social problems linked to the development of the casino industry (gambling, crime, etc.) surpass its economic benefits (No Casino Toronto 2013).

The problem with the development of a casino as core element of the Vaughan Metropolitan Center is that it completely disregards the careful planning and consultation that the City of Vaughan and its residents have done for the past few years regarding the urban design, streetscape, heights and densities of the site. A casino in Vaughan is not a sure thing yet, however, if this does become a reality in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre it will have to be done with careful consultation with local residents because it might change the identity and landscape of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre with what is envisioned. What is currently being proposed is an 800-room, five-star hotel, a 500,000-square-foot convention centre and an arts and entertainment centre that would include a casino.

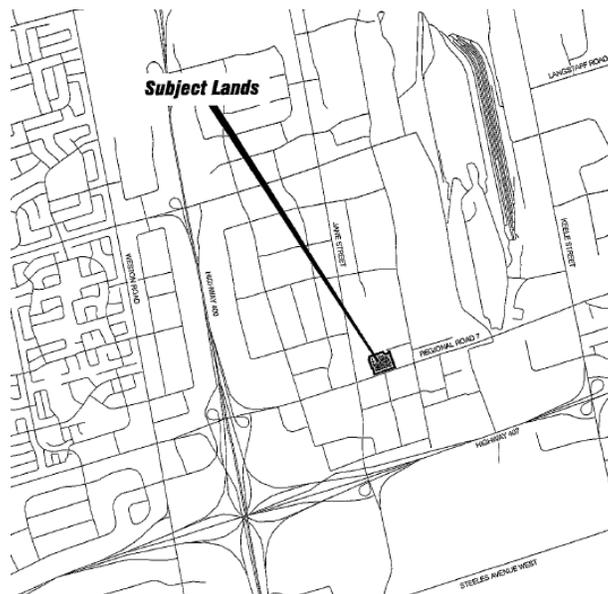
There might already be a missed opportunity for Vaughan to develop its Metropolitan Center. The City of Vaughan has recently built a new city hall complex directly next to the old city hall building (opened in 2011). I believe that the City would have benefitted if they would have built the new city hall building with its state-of-the-art technology and LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification as the center point of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre because it would give the area a new civic identity and allow it to become the heart of Vaughan. City halls represent the core of the City where decisions are made and where people go when they need to get information or dispute an issue. City Hall in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre would have been a very accessible site for citizens and visitors to conduct their relations with the city given its key location and possible amenities. It is essential for the City of Vaughan to create a vibrant and well functioning downtown centre so that the city can attract growth and jobs. This missed opportunity may have negatively affected the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, something the City cannot afford to do when there are many other municipalities in the GTA competing for expansion and growth business.



City of Vaughan City Hall (City of Vaughan 2013)

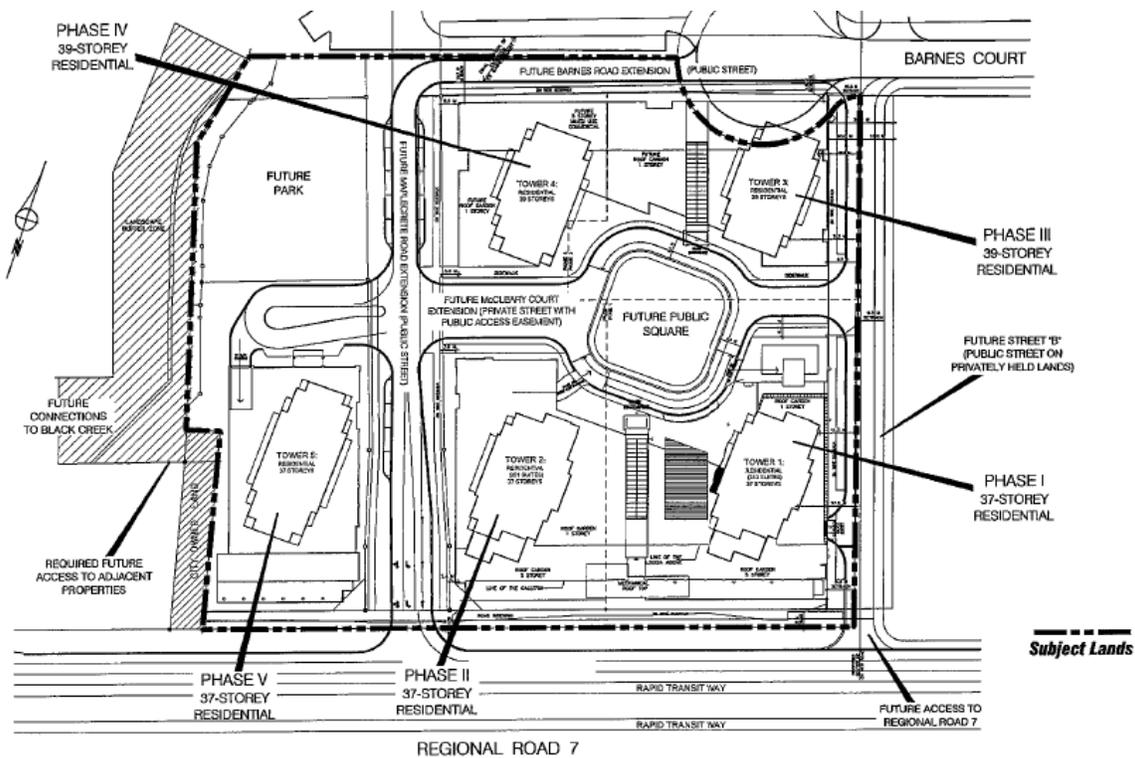
### **Expo City Development**

The Expo City Development, by the Cortel Group, is located at the East end of the Vaughan Metropolitan Site on the North East corner of Jane street and Highway 7. The Development in its entirety, once fully built out, will consist of five mixed-use towers of 37 stories with commercial uses at grade. The developer is currently constructing the first phase of the development which fronts Highway 7.



Location Map (Vaughan Planning Department 2012)

The first tower currently being constructed consists of 353 residential units and 1620m<sup>2</sup> of ground floor commercial area. The building will also boast a podium ranging from one to five storeys which will house the commercial uses. The lands which the Expo development is being constructed on are zoned C9 Corporate Centre Zone. The City of Vaughan's comprehensive zoning by-law 1-88 points out that lands with such zoning are able to facilitate a mixed-use development "provided that where a building is constructed fronting onto Regional Road No.7 a minimum of 60% of the gross floor area at the ground floor level shall be composed of commercial uses which provide individual external at-grade pedestrian access to such use" (By-Law 1-88: 50). The building will also contain sustainable features including green roofs, which will comprise of 14.1% of the entire roof coverage; permeable paving; a storm water collection system for irrigation; LED lighting; and pedestrian-scaled corridors and amenity areas to encourage pedestrian activity.



Expo City Site Plan (Vaughan Planning Department 2012)

The site's Zoning By-law Amendment (File Z.06.051 and Draft Plan of Subdivision (File 19T-00V21) were approved through a settlement at the Ontario Municipal Board on September 4, 2008. The subject lands at the time were owned by Royal Empress Gardens Ltd. and were subsequently taken over by Royal 7 Developments Ltd. The Ontario Municipal Board's ruling approved the applications and granted the developer to construct five high-rise residential buildings with "unlimited building height for the tower portion of the buildings" (DA.11.058: 5). The reasoning behind the unlimited height restriction for the towers is because the Ontario Municipal Board ruled that the development would possess the status as a landmark location.



Phase 1 Expo City (Pietro Scola 2013)

The Expo City development is a large scale high-density development that one would typically see within the downtown core. Instead it is being built at the urban fringe in a municipality that has only seen suburban style development since its beginnings. Is this the right way to go? Will this suburban downtown or suburban town centre as Filion calls it support such high densities? When it comes to the Expo City development and the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre as a whole I believe that the proposed plans for the area and the Expo City site are ambitious. Also I believe that there will be difficulty building a downtown from a greenfield site that is abutting an industrial area. However, I have also believe that the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will function well and attract growth and jobs for the City of Vaughan. The Expo development is the first step in the right direction for the City's downtown centre. It will establish a precedent for the type of development that the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre desires and help the City achieve its growth target set out by the Province in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

Filion in his book *The Urban Growth Centres Strategy in the Greater Golden Horseshoe: Lessons From Downtowns, Nodes, and Corridors* points out some important factors why Expo City development is not such a lofty ambitious project for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. According to Filion (2007: 20) the difference between nodes that are successful and others that have not seen their desired growth targets met is if the node is developed along a subway line. He goes on to mention the success of the North-York Centre and Yonge-Eglinton node and how having a subway link was monumental to their success. He adds that "the nodes that failed to materialize lacked these conditions for development. Many such nodes existed only as planned designations deprived of adequate public transit access" (2007: 20). Filion also mentions (2007:20) in addition to efficient transit another aspect that aids in the success of a suburban

town centre is including the municipalities City Hall as a key element of the downtown. As mentioned in previous sections of this paper, Vaughan missed out on the opportunity of building their new City Hall in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. This is a factor that may compromise the success of Vaughan's downtown however, I believe that with the underground subway link the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will still attract growth and that the Expo City development, with its size and density, is the right way to build in this area.

As mentioned in the sections above, a constraint that most suburban town centres face is the surrounding areas inherent reliance on the automobile. The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre as well as the Expo City development will, like downtown style developments, contain underground parking. This is absolutely essential in my opinion because the area surrounding the site is suburban, which translates into greater automobile reliance. At grade parking will consume precious pedestrian space and discourage walkability. The City of Vaughan realized this and took action to avoid at grade parking in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Vaughan together with the Toronto Transit Commission made a wise choice in creating the subway station one stop before the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (Highway 407 Station) to be equip with 600 parking spaces (TTC, 2011). Being the new terminus of the Yonge-University-Spadina the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will host many commuters looking to start and finish their journey's to downtown Toronto. By minimizing parking at the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre site this will direct commuters to the 407 Station to park and ride keeping Vaughan's downtown walkable and pedestrian friendly.

## **Social Sustainability**

Sustainability is a term that is used often, however, it is unclear what is actually meant when a document mentions things like "working towards a sustainable future". I believe sustainability can never be reached because it is more of an attitude or model than it is an end goal. This section describes or deconstructs sustainability into three categories: environmental, social and built form/landscape.

Environmental sustainability is an increasingly popular term that most are accustomed to these days. I understand sustainability as the capacity and will to insure the reproduction of a healthy environment for humans, non-human species and ecosystems. Sustainability applies also in reducing emissions and decreasing our ecological footprint. Other aspects of sustainability such as social, built form and economic, must work in parallel with environmental sustainability to achieve a better and more "sustainable" place to live. For example, Bullard (2007) describes how sprawling suburbs increase travel times and as a result increase CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Bullard (2007: 30) suggests compact development and sufficient transit to mitigate the environmental degradation caused by automobile-dependent sprawl. Bullard (2007) illustrates how built form effects the environment and suggests that by altering and densifying the built environment and implementing and promoting alternative (i.e., less fuel dependent) transportation modes, we can produce healthier ecosystems. Sustainability does not stop at environmental sustainability, there are other aspects that play an important role in achieving sustainability, all of which work together in producing a healthier place to live.

In order to achieve sustainability, in regards to planning, physical changes to the built environment must occur. The built environment is the material end result of planning policy and

yields the results of good and bad decisions by their respective governments. One of the most challenging ways to induce sustainability into a community is to plan for and build an environment that promotes all aspects of sustainability. The most important area where the urban landscape should be altered in order to move towards a more sustainable future is the suburbs. Suburban areas are inherently not sustainable mainly because of their sprawling layout over farmlands and ecosystems and daily car dependency. However, Durham-Jones and Williamson (2009: 9) observe the changing nature of the suburbs and contend that "bit by bit, beneath the static image of uniform tract houses, many suburbs are undergoing significant physical, social and cultural change." Local governments are beginning to realize that suburbs need to change into a place where people won't have to strictly rely on automotive transportation and can live in more compact denser forms of housing and mixed uses. Altering the built form of the suburbs by introducing high-density mixed-use buildings and efficient transit networks is an important way in making the suburban built environment more sustainable. There are more people working and living in suburbs now more than ever before, and therefore it is imperative that planners and local governments aim to redevelop their suburbs with sustainability in mind.

Social sustainability is becoming a common concern in many planning documents. Its presence in official documents has shown the direction contemporary planning is taking – or wish to take. Social sustainability is one of the contributing factors in urban planning's shift from a top down technocratic style to a more inclusive style. However, Marcuse (1998) is one who believes sustainability as a concept is less convincing when concerned with social and economic aspects of planning and that its primary focus should be aimed towards the environment. Marcuse (1998: 108) points out that sustainability should be rescued as a goal for environmental policy primarily and if need be used for social policy as a criterion not a replacement for social

justice. If planning is to become more inclusive, which is currently its outlook, then social sustainability and social justice should be a top priority for planners and decision makers. Ways in which social sustainability can be made a crucial priority for planners and decision makers is for them to introduce key principles into policy. Such policies could strive for allocating affordable housing in desirable areas, improved transit networks in marginalized neighbourhoods, and transparency and inclusiveness in public consultation processes. For example, the Vaughan Metropolitan Secondary Plan points out that thirty percent of the housing will be affordable. However, since units in the first development at the site went on sale there has been absolutely no affordable housing. This is an issue that will be addressed in following sections.

### **Social Sustainability: Affordable Housing in the VMC**

The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre has strong growth policies, transit networks and development interest, however, there is one issue that it seems is being considerably overlooked. The issue is the lack of affordable housing that the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is currently displaying. The Places to Grow Act defines affordable as “housing for which the purchase price results in annual accommodations costs which do not exceed 30 per cent of gross annual household income for low and moderate income households” (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure 2006: 33). The Places to Grow Act, under the section Community Infrastructure, states that "municipalities will establish and implement minimum affordable housing targets in accordance with the policy 1.4.3 of the Provincial Policy Statement, 2005" (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure 2006: 24).

The Provincial Policy Statement (2005) in the said section outlines that municipalities have the authority to establish minimum affordable housing targets. Therefore we must look to

the City of Vaughan's Secondary Plan for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre to see what the minimum affordable housing target is for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. It appears that the province has downloaded the responsibility of providing affordable housing to the municipality. I believe the provision of affordable housing should be enforced from a provincial level so that developers cannot swindle their way out of providing affordable units in their developments. Developers operating in Ontario have the option to appeal land use planning decisions made by a municipal council at a legislative tribunal called the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). When proposed developments are appealed and reach the OMB, the developer has far more resources and disposable income to have the development approved by the province. Since the Province of Ontario is pro-growth most disputes that arrive at the OMB are settled in the favour of the developer. This is how taller and denser buildings are approved in areas that cannot support high-density, also through this process is how affordable housing can be ignored and forgotten.

The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan, section 8.1.4 states that:

the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is intended to accommodate a minimum of 12,000 residential units, in order to accommodate a significant proportion of Vaughan's projected population growth to 2031. A minimum of 35% of new housing units shall be affordable. The affordable housing shall comprise a range of compact housing forms and tenures and include intrinsically affordable units for low and moderate income households (City of Vaughan 2010: 51).

Vaughan's target of 35% affordable housing seems reasonable because one third of the developed area appears as a suitable balance between providing affordable housing options for citizens who need it and the developer making its profits.

Affordable housing is a difficult subject to balance between municipal needs and private interests. The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Secondary Plan also contains policies on affordable housing where it states that “housing will be provided for families at all income levels, and more than a third of new housing units will satisfy criteria for affordability” (City of Vaughan 2010: 17). While there are policies on affordable housing within the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre's guiding documents, the challenge resides in the implementation of such policies. Developers are not keen on affordable housing within their developments. This is exactly the case in the residential condominiums that are currently being constructed in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.



Expo City Development (Expo City, Cortel Group 2012)

The development Expo City at the corner of Highway 7 and Jane Street does not include any affordable housing units in their development. The development consists of two 37-storey residential towers and is situated at the eastern side of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. The units have a high price point, with one bedroom units starting at over \$400,000, which is well out of the limits of being considered affordable. A quote from the developer Cortel Group (2012) on their brochure stating "the good life where designer labels luxury spas and gourmet eateries are right outside your door"-- further ensures that the developers are reluctant to include affordable units in their building. The City of Vaughan must work with the developers to ensure the City

meets the outlined minimum affordable housing target or the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre will lack mix and diversity in income and social groups.

## **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that after the introduction of the Places to Grow Act: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure 2006) development trends in Southern Ontario have changed. Post World War II suburban style development of exclusively dormitory suburbs is no longer seen as being a sustainable method of development according to the Province of Ontario. The paper examined the process of suburbanization and how it became the dominant model of urban expansion in the post World War 2 era. I also described the issues of suburban development along with strategies for growing smarter. In addition I also examined the population growth and demographics of the City of Vaughan. It also briefly discussed issues of sustainability and the importance of including social and environmental sustainability policies in land use planning documents. Suburban development brought on significant environmental and social issues. Sprawling car-oriented suburban developments mean longer commutes and increased amounts of time and distance automobiles have to travel. This heavy automobile use and over-reliance is a large contributor to the degradation of the environment from the emissions produced by automobile vehicles. The social issues produced by suburbs are found in the homogeneity of the people living within them and limited diversity of services. Suburbs are often too exclusive and are not accessible to lower-income groups and socio-economic polarization ensued – as often the case within the Greater Toronto Area. Through the careful planning, added transportation infrastructure and strict social sustainability policies, the suburbs can however potentially be transformed into a more sustainable place.

The paper also reviewed the policy framework that governs the City of Vaughan. It looked at all relevant policy from the provincial and municipal level of governments and

provided an explanation of how and why the City of Vaughan is growing into a suburb that is incorporating higher-densities and mix-use developments. The two main policy documents are the Places to Grow Act: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure 2006) and the Vaughan Metropolitan Secondary Plan (City of Vaughan 2010). The Places to Grow Act identifies the City of Vaughan's Vaughan Metropolitan Centre as an urban growth centre which means it must meet the issued growth targets that the provinces sets out in its growth plan. The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre's Secondary Plan deals with site specific polices and guidelines of how the area will meet the provinces growth targets. As well as detailed polices and schedules of open spaces/parks, transportation routes, streetscape and urban design.

The paper also presented a case study on Vaughan's urban growth centre, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. This section looked at the site's transit infrastructure; identity, and how it must reinvent itself; how it will compete with neighbouring suburban downtowns; affordable housing issues; and finally the Expo City development to determine if Vaughan is heading in the right direction in its pursuit of growth. The paper brought up ideas from Filion's works, and these ideas were applied to the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. It was determined that the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is, as Filion calls it, a suburban town centre, according to Filion these development nodes need sufficient transit links to become successful and support high densities. The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is very fortunate to have underground subway access to Toronto's subway network which, I believe, will make this suburban downtown a success.

It is difficult to retrofit suburban areas from low-rise, sprawling, car oriented places into high-density mixed-use areas because of the existing development, streetscape and single use areas the suburbs typically contain. The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre has potential to become a

vibrant downtown centre, it is in an area where the streetscape can be completely reinvented and it has underground connectivity to the City of Toronto. However, it is located next to one of the largest industrial areas in the Greater Toronto Area, and it lacks affordable housing. Its new City Hall is located far from this new growth centre and while searching for its identity, it may consider a casino which is still pending on consultation and Council approval. I believe the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre project will become a satellite downtown within a suburban municipality that will compete with other city centres much alike itself. Also, I agree with Filion that this node will inevitably become successful because of the subway link to Toronto and the densities that this form of efficient transit can support. Vaughan is on the right track in their pursuit of growth, and the Expo City Development is setting the proper precedent for the area.

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