

Waking Dream: Cornell, Langstaff Gateway and Planning New Suburbs in the GTA

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"If the centre no longer exists, it follows that there is no longer a periphery either.
Now all is city."

-Rem Koolhaas, (quoted in Marshall, 2006: 268)

Sometimes I wonder if the world's so small
That we can never get away from the sprawl
Living in the sprawl
Dead shopping malls rise like mountains beyond mountains
And there's no end in sight

-Arcade Fire, Sprawl II (Mountains Beyond Mountains)

"It's hard, this is all new to people. It's not for the faint of heart ...
It's not an easy thing to be an intensification champion."

-Building industry representative, and former municipal planner (Interviewed 3/26/14)

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the gaps between anti-sprawl policies and what has materialized on the ground in the Greater Toronto Area, a matter of particular import as the province's suite of growth management legislation is now being tested in its implementation phase.

As Toronto grew so did Markham as one of the sprawling bedroom communities along its border. But in the 1990s the town became among the first municipalities in Canada to adopt New Urbanism as a paradigm for suburban development, attempting to break away from decades of auto-centric urban sprawl. Andres Duany and his firm, Duany Plater-Zyberk (DPZ), were hired to develop Cornell, a greenfield site, as a Traditional Neighbourhood Design (TND) New Urbanist community, with a greater emphasis on compact development and walkability than conventional development. In 2005-06, the Province of Ontario passed new legislation that enshrined the same Smart Growth principles in the planning regime for Toronto and its surrounding region.

Even as questions were being raised about how successful were the ideals of New Urbanism generally, and the development of Cornell specifically, Markham hired Peter Calthorpe, also a founder of New Urbanism, but with a greater focus on orienting communities around transit corridors than Duany. Operating in the new provincial growth context, he planned Langstaff Gateway, a proposed Transit-Oriented Development (TOD); a suburban community in which only 35 per cent of trips would be by car.

This paper reviews literature on the paradigmatic "American Dream," that drove the dominant form of conventional suburban development and the New Urbanist ideals that aim to supplant it. It then proceeds to assessments of the nascent Cornell community and the planned Langstaff Gateway growth centre through interviews conducted with residents, politicians, members of the development industry and planners.

Few if any of the suburban municipalities around Toronto have been as amenable as Markham to introducing new suburbs and the new kind of lifestyle that comes with them. After deploying ideas for "better" suburban development for nearly two decades the city provides a unique case study through which to assess what has gone right and what has gone wrong on the ground. This paper then looks observes trends in changing suburbia, both in terms of the lifestyle of its residents and the built form in which they reside.

Intensification and transit-orientation are the new goals of the provincial planning regime but this paper will look at how realistic those goals are and, learning from Markham's example, what tools or other changes are required to close the gap between expert plans for more sustainable and successful suburbs and the realities of politics and the market. After nearly 20 years of trying, how successful have attempts to implement New Urbanist ideals for "better" suburban development been and what are the gaps between their ideals and the reality as it has materialized? How has the policy regime in Ontario addressed these shortfalls and what changes are required to ensure those gaps are filled?

FOREWORD

Though I have never lived in Markham, I have lived nearly my entire life within less than a kilometre of it. I grew up on Toronto's border with York Region – ostensibly the border between “the city” and “suburbia” – and spent a decade governing growth issues in the area, particularly as the province moved to enact several pieces of legislation that in tandem have the goal of reigning in urban sprawl and creating denser, more transit-oriented forms of suburban development.

Living in liminal neighbourhoods, I came to reject the typical urban/suburban dichotomy and to contemplate the connections between governance, the suburban built form and how people actually live in it. Accordingly, my Plan of Study and its concentration on “Suburbanism, Local Politics and Planning,” has been about attempting to understand how these elements interact with and affect each other. In considering how to build “better” suburbs than the now-dominant form built in the post-war era, all three sides of this equation must be taken into account.

This paper looks at attempts to implement such suburbs in the City of Markham through these lenses. Issues of scale and government structure are crucial in a region where municipalities are required to conform to provincial policy but may lack the legislative and financial tools to do so. Suburbanism, or the lifestyle of suburban residents, is equally crucial as any new built form (e.g. dense or high-rise development instead of single-family homes) must respond to the demographics and lifestyles of residents if it is to be successful.

Accordingly, I talked with actors from the relevant sectors — residents of Cornell, the city (and region)'s biggest New Urbanist community, planners from Markham and the region, and local politicians and building industry representatives — in order to understand how the forces of planning, the market and politics play into the changing face of suburbia, at least in the GTA.

Markham, and its progressive attempts to implement new suburban forms, even before the province made intensification a priority, provides a unique laboratory in which to explore how the various elements of my area of concentration influence another. It brings together a history of changing academic thought on suburbia with pressing and current policy issues that are now at the forefront of local planning concerns as municipalities move to implement them.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the 2.5 million people living in the City of Toronto found themselves outnumbered, for the first time, by 2.6 million suburbanites in the three surrounding municipalities (Statistics Canada, 2006). Even Toronto itself has been primarily suburban since its amalgamation in 1998. This is a trend that has been seen across the country, with 80 per cent of the past decade's population growth taking place in suburbs; "Canada is a suburban nation" (Gordon & Janzen, 2013: 214). In few places can this trend be seen as markedly as in Markham, once a suburb on Toronto's northeast border, and increasingly an urban community in its own right.

Only July 1, 2012 the Town of Markham, part of the larger York Region, changed its name to the City of Markham, a semantic shift emblematic of its own changes and those of many other North American suburbs. Today a community of more than 300,000 people – one of the fastest-growing and most diverse municipalities in Canada – Markham came into being in the 1970s as a patchwork of historical villages, some dating back to the region's earliest settlement, but with little beyond governance to bind them. At the time of its incorporation in 1971, the town's population was 36,684 (Statistics Canada, 2006a) and all of York Region housed only 165,940 people. Over the next generation, as Toronto grew so did Markham as one of the sprawling bedroom communities along its border. Things began to change in the 1990s as Markham adopted Smart Growth planning principles and began establishing a reputation as a high-tech node. IBM abandoned its Toronto campus in favour of Markham in 1995, and corporations like Honda and Motorola followed, setting up national headquarters in the suburb. High-rise condominiums started to dot the skyline and then even came dreams of having a hockey team in the National Hockey League. By 2012, the city's politicians decided

Markham needed a new name to reflect its evolving status; no longer a town, no longer a suburb of Toronto, no longer a *sub* of anything at all.

For more than 20 years, Markham has fought against the stereotypical “lost view” of suburbia as a homogenous, socially isolating place. The town was among the first municipalities in Canada to adopt New Urbanism as a paradigm for suburban development, attempting to break away from decades of auto-centric development. In the early 1990s Andres Duany and his firm, Duany Plater-Zyberk (DPZ), were hired to develop Cornell, a greenfield site that began development in the late 1990s. Duany also helped design a plan to create a unified downtown for Markham’s disparate communities in a new area dubbed Markham Centre.

When the Province of Ontario began passing a series of new laws aimed at curbing sprawl and reshaping development, they were largely practices in which Markham had been engaged for a decade. Even as questions were being raised about how successful were the ideals of New Urbanism generally, and the development of Cornell specifically, the town became even more aggressive. Peter Calthorpe was, like Duany, a founder of the Congress for the New Urbanism, but with a greater focus on orienting communities around transit corridors than his counterpart. His firm was hired by the town to further intensify Markham Centre and to plan Langstaff Gateway, a proposed development like no other in the town or larger region. Though Calthorpe’s ethos has long centred on transit *orientation*, Langstaff would be transit-*dependent*; a suburban community in which only 35 per cent of trips would be by car.

The variation and evolution of forms in North America, to say nothing of in other parts of the world, is a reminder that one cannot speak merely of the suburbs as a built form without

considering their accompanying suburbanism, or way of life. The preponderance of single-family homes in sprawling, post-war suburbia, for example, allows for a segregation and internalization of activity that “can be seen as the ultimate decentralization of urban activities” (Filion, 2013: 42). The paradigmatic “American Dream,” was supported by government facilitation of car and home ownership but is now shifting and in considering the feasibility of new forms, one must first consider what policy and demographic shifts may facilitate or obstruct its implementation. Few if any of the suburban municipalities around Toronto have been as amenable as Markham to introducing new suburbs and the new kind of lifestyle that comes with them and after deploying ideas for “better” suburban development for nearly two decades the city provides a unique laboratory in which to assess what has gone right and what has gone wrong on the ground. Trends in changing suburbia may be observed and challenges identified and addressed.

By assessing these gaps between the city’s aspirations and what has materialized on the ground, one may begin to speculate as to whether the ambitious Langstaff Gateway may come to fruition. Intensification and transit-orientation are the new goals of the provincial planning regime but this paper will look at how realistic those goals are and, learning from Markham’s example, what tools or other changes are required to close the gap between expert plans for more sustainable and successful suburbs and the realities of politics and the market. After nearly 20 years of trying, how successful have attempts to implement New Urbanist ideals for “better” suburban development been and what are the gaps between their ideals and the reality as it has materialized? How has the policy regime in Ontario addressed these shortfalls and what changes are required to ensure those gaps are filled?

2. METHODOLOGY

Markham provides an ideal location in which to study the success and challenges facing the implementation of new suburban forms, and New Urbanism in particular. Over the course of 20 years the town (now city) has made conscious efforts to transition from a Toronto suburb to an urban centre, both before and after the implementation of a new regional planning paradigm. A manifestation of Markham's early adoption of the Traditional Neighbourhood Design (TND), the Duany-designed Cornell can be seen as a measuring stick for the realities of New Urbanism. Under development since 1998, it eschews traditional suburban forms for denser housing, a more compact street grid and the relegation of streetfront garages to rear-facing laneways. Similarly, Langstaff Gateway provides a microcosm for exploring the potential for implementing Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) in the GTA, envisioning downtown-level densities and a mix of mid- and high-rise development on a suburban site where several modes of transit happen to converge. It is the most ambitiously planned of the provincial growth centres and is not merely a generic embodiment of Peter Calthorpe's New Urbanist ideals but was actually designed by he and his firm.

In its investigation of the successes and failures of New Urbanism to date in Markham and its attempt to ascertain the degree to which the stage has been set for further progress in advancing its ideals, a combination of research methods were used. A qualitative approach assists in triangulating an understanding of phenomena that are necessarily subjective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 5) and dependent on multiple points-of-view.

The first step was a review of literature on suburbs and suburbanisms, in terms of both historic trends and how Smart Growth and New Urbanism are shifting those trend lines. Data from the 2001, 2006 and 2011 census was used here, despite some minor challenges. Census Tract data was not available for 2001 (when Cornell was a brand new community), for example. Questions have also been raised about changes to the National Household Survey (i.e. “the long form census”) which was made not-mandatory in 2011. The population and other data employed here, however, are from the “short form” and not subject to these concerns.

A review of the provincial-led policy system in Ontario and the GTA, provides a necessary grounding of the circumstances and larger context into which the specific discussions herein fit. Documents crucial to this discussion include the *Provincial Policy Statement (2005)*, *Places to Grow (2006)* and the accompanying *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2006)*, *The Big Move (2008)* and the official plans of York Region (2010) and Markham (2013). More specific municipal planning documents and early evaluations of newer provincial policies are also significant here. The final piece of this background element is a history of suburbanization in Markham, describing how it has manifested within these larger policy and academic discussions. These elements provide an opportunity to evaluate the implementation of the new planning regime and understand what effects these policies are having (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 1008) in relation to the larger conditions (i.e. urban sprawl, autocentricity) that the provincial plans generally, and Cornell and Langstaff specifically, aim to address.

These qualitative methods were supplemented by qualitative data from sources including:

- Census data that assists in depicting growth and its impacts on Markham and the region.

- A CHMC survey of Cornell (2010);
- The Transportation Tomorrow survey (2006/2011), which provides a comprehensive basis for evaluating travel patterns across the region.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of the development, planning and political communities whose cumulative work has shaped and continues to shape Markham.

Interviewees included:

- Two members of Markham City Council;
- Three planning professionals including one at the City of Markham, a Calthorpe Associates planner who worked on Langstaff Gateway and a former York Region planner who worked on both Cornell and Langstaff.
- Peter Calthorpe was also interviewed and, due to his singular significance in these matters, is the only subject who will be identified by name;
- Three development industry representatives including a major commercial developer involved in another growth centre development; an official at the Building Industry and Land Development Association (who previously worked as a municipal planner) and a Langstaff landowner, who also has experience with New Urbanist development in Markham.

Unstructured interviewing can provide a greater breadth of data than more limited structured methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 5) so conversations could cover the specific variables of relevance to various interviewees while returning to the key themes underpinning this research. All interviewees were asked specifically whether they would want to live in Langstaff Gateway, assuming it developed as planned. Similarly crucial to contextualizing the qualitative data cited above, two group interviews were conducted, each with four residents of Cornell. Whereas studies of Cornell have been largely quantitative, this session provided an opportunity to speak with those who live and work in Cornell and hear their own views about their community and, by extension, to be able to judge to what degree their perceptions align or don't align with the views of the academic and professional communities. Residents were recruited from Cornell's active social media sites and, despite the small sample size, provided a

valuable cross-section of residents. Three were male (Residents B, F and H) and five female (A, C, D, E and G); Resident A operated a business in addition to living there; and most of the interviewees were long-time residents, including Resident H, who bought a home in Cornell before construction on the neighbourhood began.

While photographs cannot provide an "objective truth," they can provide empirical data in regards to documenting social life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 721) so site visits were also crucial to the research. It is necessary to see Cornell's built form to understand how it differs from conventional suburban design as well as from the TOD form envisioned for Langstaff. A visit to Langstaff was important to demonstrate visually the unique geographic constraints affecting the site and to provide a basis through which to view the planned changes.

By synthesizing these various methods one may gain a broad understanding of the changes underway in Markham and how they are perceived by the various parties involved. That said, there are clearly limitations to this study. Langstaff remains a plan that has to be realized to any degree in reality so one cannot prognosticate about its actual future except as an avatar for the policies, attitudes and other circumstances now in place. Cornell has been studied by academics and others (Lehrer & Milgrom, 1996; Gordon & Vipond, 2005; Skaburskis, 2006; Grant & Perrott, 2011) and a single focus group can be another piece of this larger whole, giving voice to those who have only before been counted, but it is clearly not a comprehensive evaluation of attitudes in the community. In a similar vein, in choosing a few ambassadors from each of the planning, development and political communities, the net is being cast wide but anyone of these groups could be worthy of a more detailed study of its own.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW: SUBURBS AND SUBURBANISMS

The present moment is a tipping point for the suburbs in the GTA and North America. It has been nearly two centuries since the first modern urban edge communities were created and the pattern ever since has been one of dispersion and outward growth. Prior to the middle of the 20th Century this dispersion was limited by the constraints of technology but with the rise of the automobile the pattern accelerated exponentially leading to myriad criticisms and the need to create new terms like Garreau's "edge city," and Fishman's "technoburb" to describe a form generally called "urban sprawl." While there are variations in definitions of urban sprawl, it is generally agreed that it consists of low-density, auto-dependent developments with segregated uses, outside of the urban core and lacking systematic planning (Bruegmann, 2005; Daugaard, 2010). As criticisms about the economic and environmental sustainability of sprawl mounted, concrete proposals for post-sprawl forms, focused on intensification rather than dispersion emerged. In the GTA, attempts to urbanize the suburbs began in the mid-1990s and are now at the point where their efficacy and implementability are being tested. The next section of this paper will address the new planning paradigm but first it will discuss the suburban revolution that brought us to this point.

3.1 CONCEIVING URBANISM AND SUBURBANISM

Wirth (1938) described urbanism as a force that was not limited by the boundaries of the city, itself a melting pot defined by its own heterogeneity. Urbanism was not merely the act of living in a city but a way of life bound up with it. Suburbs, with their relative lack of density and

(presumed) homogeneity were, in this context, regarded as literally less than urban; less than the city. Lefebvre (1970/2003: 113) saw the urban revolution as a planetary phenomenon that broke down the country-city dichotomy and addresses both the dominant modernism and ascendant neoliberalism of the late-1960s period in which he wrote. Humans have needs (e.g. for creation, work, play, speech, silence etc.), he says, to which dwelling forms no longer respond; "current reality" distorts them (Lefebvre, 1970/2003: 71). While he describes cities as congested, polluted, segregated and yet lonely (Lefebvre, 1970/2003: 92) he still finds use for the urban forms of the past; forms to which we now seek to return. "The urban can be defined as a place where differences know one another and, through their mutual recognition, test one another and in this way are strengthened or weakened," (Lefebvre, 1970/2003: 96) he says, concretely defining the term and echoing Wirth's comments on heterogeneity as an essential component; something he extends with the notion of isotopic (uni-functional) spaces. As for suburbs, they are "habitat receptacles, typified by a highly visible form of isotopy" (Lefebvre, 1970/2003: 129), full of uses pushed to periphery. At the time of writing, Lefebvre's revolution was just a hypothesis but "now the process of urban decentralization is being witnessed globally," and suburbanization may be defined as, not a separate force but as "the combination of non-central population and economic growth with urban-spatial expansion" (Ekers et al, 2012: 406-407). Harvey (1978: 114) similarly sees the separation of uses that defined modernist planning not as evidence of a competing urban-rural or urban-suburban dichotomy but rather as a "dialectical unity, a primary form of contradiction within the capitalist mode of production." This far-reaching urban way of life is effectively a "built environment for

consumption” consisting of both the physical framework for consumption (e.g. houses and infrastructure) as well as the consumer items that fill and facilitate them (Harvey, 1978: 106).

As the suburbs have become the most prevalent form of urban development, the need has arisen to conceive of *suburbanism* as “an inherent aspect of urbanism that is distinct yet inseparable from it” (Walks, 2012: 2). That said, one may have a suburbanism within an ostensibly urban area, or vice versa. Walks translates the thesis/antithesis notions inherent in Lefebvre’s work into six dimensions that push and pull against one another. An urban community tends to be heterotopic while a suburban one is more likely to have segregated land uses. Urbanism implies concentrated power while in suburbanism it is diffuse (Walks, 2012: 9) but the two do not always align with their presumably related physical forms so a segregating, isolating, diffused condominium may exist in a downtown, just as a dense, transit-oriented community may be possible in a peripheral space. Walks concludes (2012: 15) there is “the possibility for new, progressive forms of politics to emerge in the post-suburban metropolis, as the tensions between different dimensions of urbanism and suburbanism produce new hybrid urban spaces, ways of life and forms of political consciousness.”

3.2 THE DAWN OF THE URBAN AND THE SUBURBAN

Modern planning and urbanism can be traced back to the Industrial Revolution and the changes it wrought. In particular, the increasing pollution meant there was a desire (at least for those who could afford it) to move out to the more pristine, rural edge of the city while remaining tied to the urban centre; residential and employment-industrial uses became

physically separated. “There was this creation of a new kind of environment, a marriage of town and country, a place that was neither urban nor rural but had that character of both,” (Fishman, 2013) and the old dichotomy started to break down. Hayden (2003) describes these early suburbs as “Borderlands” and her larger typology of North American suburbs provides a useful guideline for tracing the evolution of suburbs, even though the patterns do not assert themselves quite as vociferously in Canada and the GTA. While these Borderlands were coming into being in the 1820s on the edges of Boston and New York, for example, Toronto was a much smaller and younger city.¹ By the middle of the 19th century, architects were formalizing urban and suburban development, reaching back to the past and employing Gothic Revival and Greek Revival designs as they reshaped the natural edge of the city. The most well-known of the “Picturesque Enclaves” (Hayden, 2003) from this era is Frederick Law Olmstead’s Riverside, Illinois. As with his New York Central Park, the shape is not a natural one and yet it evokes nature. Olmstead did not see suburbanization as a separate force or place from the city but rather a natural extension of the same phenomenon (Fishman, 2013).

In Europe, the same forces were at work and Ebenezer Howard sought to achieve a balance between the dichotomous town and country. Using industrial-era London as his model, Howard sought to “concentrate populations and provide open space between town rather than let cities sprawl (Hodge & Gordon, 2008: 227). His goal was not to abandon cities but to find a means for “redistributing the population in a spontaneous and healthy manner” (Howard, 1965: 45). Howard envisioned a built-up new town surrounded by a self-sustaining agricultural

¹ As modern planning took hold, Jane Jacobs argues, the changes wrought in Toronto were “differences in scale and quantity of planning, not differences in kind” from what took place in the United States (Jacobs, 1993: x).

significant as the invention of the airplane (Mumford, 1965: 30) and, presaging Fishman:

“Howard’s prime contribution was to outline the nature of the balanced community and to show what steps were necessary, in an ill-organized and disoriented society to bring it into existence.” (Mumford, 1965: 32)

As steam engines and electricity came to the fore, technology began to forever alter the suburbs. Dispersion from the core was driven by “Streetcar Suburbs” (Hayden, 2003) in which private developers built transit lines connected to the city (much as described by Howard) and the housing adjacent to them. These suburbs, by today’s standards, are still close to downtown, “offer livable patterns worth re-examining for their compact land use and good public transit” (Hayden, 2003: 73) and, as Fishman, indicates, may be seen as a peak form of suburban development that would soon be lost, but to which new ideals hearken back. The Garden City envisioned shared ownership of land and streetcar suburbs were built on private investment in infrastructure, neither of which is feasible in today’s neoliberal context, raising the question of how to return to these ideals. Despite these setbacks, Howard’s plans introduced crucial notions such as the idea of planning at the city-region level and of finite geographical and population boundaries (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001: 16; Miller, 1995: 167).

The most significant shift in suburban form and lifestyle came following the Second World War. The post-war era saw a population boom and the rise of the nuclear family as GIs returned home. Fordism was ascendant, shaping suburbs in Toronto as it did across North America. This was an era of mass-consumption and accumulation, increasingly powerful trade unions and government investment in infrastructure (Filion, 2001a). The increasing mass of the population could now easily live distant from the core while still being connected to it.

“(Pre-WWII) Residential decentralization was not centrally planned by different tiers of the

state but rather was more reflective of individual initiative as families tried to secure low-cost housing on the fringe of urban centres,” (Ekers et al, 2012: 411). Escape from the city, previously only available to the wealthy became more accessible following World War II with the Canadian government securing long-term mortgages and promoting autocentric infrastructure (Ekers et al, 2012: 12) for an exploding population. “The American Dream of a cottage on its own sacred plot of earth was finally the *only* economically rational choice,” (Kunstler, 1994: 105) in the 1950s and 60s. The confluence of forces that made this possible has been compared to Eisenhower’s “military-industrial complex,” (Greenberg, 2011: 38) and it was soon that the new “Sitcom Suburbs” (Hayden, 2003) were made normative and reproduced across the continent.

“Operating through a variety of channels (e.g., mass media, entertainment industry), the real estate industry (builders, developers, speculators), and government institutions (local and federal politicians), this ideology is continually (re)produced and reconstituted to maintain consumer demand and support the profitable investment of capital in the built environment.” (Anderson, 2010: 1081)

The most famous of these communities in the GTA context was Don Mills, north of Toronto. It was a prototypical (perhaps *the* prototypical) Fordist suburb (Ekers et al, 2012: 412). It has been described as “the most influential development in Canada during the Twentieth Century (Sewell, 1993: 80) and “the first planned and fully integrated post-war community in North America,” establishing a blueprint copied across the country (Toronto, 2009a). Rather than a bedroom community, Don Mills was designed with Garden City principles, with four residential quadrants arranged around a retail and employment centre, the nexus of which was the Don Mills Centre mall. Despite many laudatory aims, Don Mills was suffused with modernist principles, including its separation of uses and its lack of a simple street grid and green space.

The construction of the nearby Don Valley Parkway facilitated downtown commuting. The success of Don Mills led to two decades of greenfield experimentation and was copied across the country; “the age of the modern corporate suburb had arrived” (Sewell, 1993: 98/96).

3.3 MUMFORD, JACOBS AND THE SUBURBAN BACKLASH

“[North American suburbs are] still commonly represented as “non-places”: vast developments of largely identical housing types and residents where private life takes priority over public life” (Drummond & Labbé, 2013: 48). Though it has become the form of housing in which most North Americans now live, too often suburbs are described through a “lost view,” as “an abscess paralysing society” (Lupi & Musterd, 1996: 805). Others write of a “suburban sadness” and the larger intellectual view of the suburbs was “generally negative; certainly it was pessimistic regarding the essence of suburban life” (Bell, 1968: 143-45). This view has remained pervasive over the past half-century, summed up in Jane Jacobs’ dichotomous declaration that “Great cities are not like towns, only larger. They are not like suburbs, only denser. They differ from towns and suburbs in basic ways, and one of these is that cities are, by definition, full of strangers” (Jacobs, 1961: 38). And further:

“These thin dispersions lack any reasonable degree of innate vitality, staying power, or inherent usefulness as settlements...Thirty years from now we will have accumulated new problems of blight and decay over acreages so immense that in comparison the present problems of the great cities’ grey belts will look piddling.” (Jacobs, 1961: 521-22)

Mumford shared Jacobs’s disdain for modernism and its loss of human scale, saying suburbia “offers poor facilities for meeting, conversation, collective debate, and common action,” (1961:

513), all of which he regarded as crucial elements of the city. But he differed in that he made an effort to consider why, if the suburbs were so inferior to Jacobs' idealized lifestyle, more people were living there. Indeed, by Jacobs' (1961: 22) own admission, "I like dense cities best and care about them most," so she spent little time considering why so many chose to live elsewhere.

Mumford (1995: 165) writes in *The Ideal Form of the Modern City* that, "Architecture and city planning are the visible translations of the total meaning of a culture" sharing Jacobs' essential conclusions about the failures of suburbia. But in her diatribes against modern planning she included Ebenezer Howard, whose goal, she says was to "do the city in," in devising a Utopia that with a "paternalistic, if not authoritarian" ideology (Jacobs, 1961: 23, 26). Where she sees Howard as destructive, Mumford argues his contribution was the conception of a "*balanced community*, relatively self-contained and big enough to provide out of its own resources and activities all that might be needed for the citizen's daily life" (Mumford, 1995, 168-9).

Here Mumford and Jacobs break ranks substantially and he pierces her epistemological wall, returning to Howard and his notion of the urban as a sum of all its parts:

"The essential problem of modern planning is to conceive a series of self-contained units, each of which has an open passage to the next larger and more complex community, so that eventually it will achieve an articulate order leading from the life of the child to the life of the mature man, from the immediate day-to-day activities, involving neighbors, friends, family, and fellow workers, to occasional activities that will enlist the support of men and women in every part of the world or specialized activities that will call for the constant intercourse of special people or groups everywhere."
(Mumford, 1995: 170)

It is this same idea to which Fishman latched on and a century after Howard and decades after Mumford, only now do factors seem to be aligning so this idea may be implemented at a

regional scale. In the meantime, the post-war form has become dominant and entrenched and “We have become accustomed to living in places where nothing relates to anything else, where disorder, unconsciousness and the absence of respect remain unchecked... The great suburban build-out is over. It was wonderful for business in the short term, and a disaster for our civilization when the short term expired.” (Kunstler, 1994: 185, 245)

3.4 UNDERSTANDING THE SUBURBS: GANS & STRUCTURATION

As autocentric suburbs became increasingly successful, and as criticisms grew, attempts to understand and undermine the stereotypes began in earnest. The most significant of these was Herbert Gans' *The Levittowners* (1969). His sociological exploration of Levittown, PA, a nascent “Sitcom Suburb” found that many of the attacks leveled at such suburbs – that they lacked a sense of community, had a more conservative culture etc. – were unfounded misconceptions. At the same time, he drew important connections between the built form and the people living within it. Rather than suggesting the suburbs fostered certain attitudes he suggested that they drew in residents who were at life-stages where they prioritized a family life (familism) over work issues (careerism) that were more prevalent in the city itself. It may be that the post-war suburbs existed because of a society emphasizing familism rather than the other way around (Bell, 1968). While “experts” might find the suburbs sprawling, monotonous places with long commutes, “few actual or potential suburbanites share these attitudes” (Gans 1969: 290). Correspondingly, seeking to change attitudes through a different built form is undesirable, he suggests:

"Plans and policies aimed at changing peoples' behavior can therefore not be implemented through prescribing alterations in the physical community or by directives aimed at builders; they must be directed at the national sources and agents which bring about the present behavior...If [a planner] wants to change a social or physical component of the *community*, he must first determine whether it affects residents' crucial aspirations or values." (Gans, 1969: 290-1)

Gans, however, is too generous in his forgiveness of suburban sprawl's prime characteristics.

He misunderstood or underestimated the connections between mobility and suburbs, saying the necessity of auto ownership was "not very important: all it does is to make life a little more convenient for most of its inhabitants and less convenient for others" (Gans, 1968: 303). Frank Lloyd Wright similarly failed to foresee the environmental and social effects in his Broadacre City concept, which also required car ownership as a prerequisite. Nonetheless, the notion that "aspirations or values" must change before a new suburban physical form is imposed is a crucial consideration and one which, as will be shown, not all New Urbanists agree.

The larger question then becomes how a society and its values and aspirations may shift. Here, another sociologist, Anthony Giddens, offers a useful theoretical framework. Giddens (1984: 25) sought a middle ground between the notions of whether change is driven from the top down or vice versa. His theory of structuration instead suggests a duality in which structural properties of social systems are both the *medium and outcome* of practices they recursively organize. Agents and structures are thus acting upon one another and the simple routines of everyday life become laden with meaning. This notion echoes Lefebvre's description of how "movement produced by the urban, in turn, produces the urban. Creation comes to a halt to create again" (1970/2003: 118).

Everyday actions are the “prime expression of the duality of structure in respect of the continuity of social life” (Giddens, 1984: 282) so a resident of Cornell who is able to do something as banal as walking to the grocer instead of driving thereby perpetuates a new lifestyle that itself drives changes in suburbia. Giddens lists several factors that open the door to such a change. One example is a “loss of efficiency” which may be seen in the increasing

commute times since Gans dismissed the impacts of increased car use.

Another factor is the availability of a “credible alternative.” This could be the opening of a nearby grocery store or the addition of a new transit line that undermines the default of taking the car. Filion (2010) employs structuration in exploring the likelihood of

implementing new suburban forms and

argues that the entrenched physical form and existing governance make a wholesale change on par with what was seen in the post-war era unlikely. However, he sees the potential for alternatives to dispersion, particularly in amenable locations. While it might not be a full reversal, “positive impacts of such a partial transformation are not trivial, for they afford lifestyle options to people wishing for a non-suburban automobile-centered lifestyle and improve the environmental performance of the metropolitan region” (Filion 2010: 14).

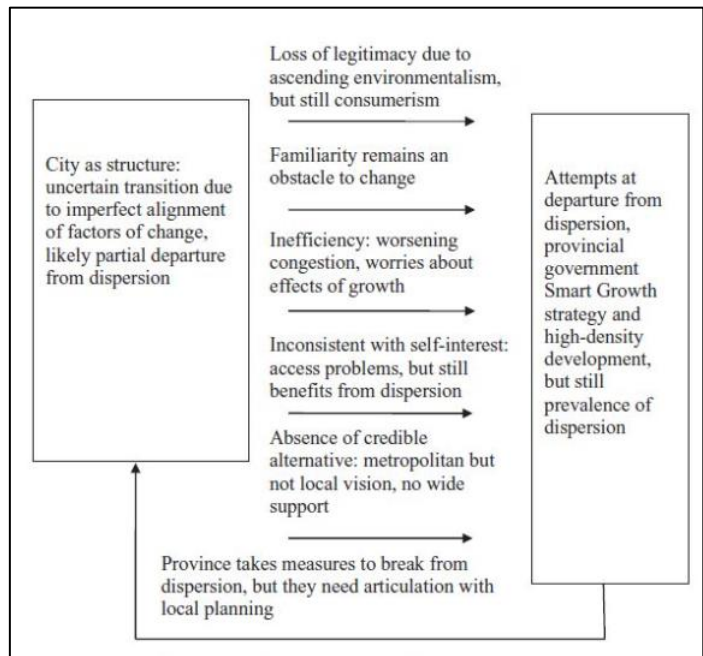


Figure 2 - Efforts to implement Smart Growth in terms of structuration. (Filion, 2010: 14)

4. LITERATURE REVIEW: NEW PARADIGMS FOR SUBURBIA

Criticisms of the emerging suburban form began in the 1950s and 60s, often coming from prominent urban thinkers like Jacobs and Mumford.

“While there was no exact moment when the lustre faded, growing dissent appeared simultaneously on several parallel tracks: inside the design and planning professions, among urban thinkers and critics, and as popular resistance within communities. It gained traction as reform-minded politicians joined these groups in rejecting assertions about ‘progress’ through urban renewal.” (Greenberg, 2011: 46)

As the sustainability discourse entered the fore in the 1970s, more concrete proposals for solving the problems associated with suburbia began to materialize. Jon Teaford (1997) wrote of an emerging “post-suburbia” which no longer embodied the “American Dream.” As employment uses moved into former bedroom communities, bringing traffic congestion and other “urban” problems, there was a “marriage of convenience” in which once-disparate lifestyles were being thrown together, forced to accept an “uneasy union.” A coherent presentation of alternative growth models coalesced in late 1980s and early 1990s, with the crystallization of Smart Growth and a more specialized subset sharing the same ideals, New Urbanism (NU), both of which share ideals of reducing vehicular travel (Cervero & Duncan, 2006: 475). Smart Growth broadly considers breaking down many of the patterns that have characterized post-war suburbia. Whereas that model included segregated uses, the dominance of single-family homes and auto-centric design, Smart Growth’s key principles include mixing land uses, compact building designs, walkable neighbourhoods, a strong sense of place and the provision of a variety of transportation choices (*Why Smart Growth?*, n.d.).

4.1 ONE CHARTER – TWO NEW URBANISMS

A group of planning professionals sharing these ideals convened in 1993, creating the Congress for the New Urbanism. They collaborated on the *Charter of the New Urbanism*, ratified in 1996 and updated in 2001. The charter provides a guideline for understanding what underpins the plans for both Cornell and Langstaff Gateway. Its authors “recognize that physical solutions by themselves will not solve social and economic problems, but neither can economic vitality, community stability, and environmental health be sustained without a coherent and supportive physical framework” (Congress for the New Urbanism, 2001). The first five principles are focused not on local development but regional planning, something that has changed substantially in Ontario since Cornell was planned, as discussed in the policy section of this paper. These include establishing finite boundaries for a region with multiple centres, balancing the rural and urban, promoting infill development and organizing the region around transit. The subsequent eight principles deal with “The neighbourhood, the district, and the corridor,” emphasizing these as the basic units of a successful, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use community. The final section, “The block, the street, and the building,” addresses the built form, including the proper defining of streets and public spaces, safety, the importance of civic buildings and recognition of the importance of heritage. Issues of social equity (e.g. having a broad range of housing) are also embedded in the principles. In short, the Charter generally formalizes, as crucial for new development, a multitude of factors described by Jacobs in her assessment of what made her Manhattan neighbourhood work. Emerging from this single set of ideals are the two primary schools of New Urbanism: Traditional Neighbourhood Development (TND), as embodied by Cornell, and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), as

embodied by Langstaff Gateway. Two of the charter's original signatories, Andres Duany and Peter Calthorpe, are directly responsible to the two Markham communities under consideration: Cornell was designed by Duany's firm, and Langstaff Gateway by Calthorpe Associates. Both are articulations of their authors' ideals but they were created in very different contexts. Cornell is a peripheral greenbelt development and Langstaff an infill project; Langstaff is dependent on transit whereas Cornell is distant from it; Cornell was designed in an era with minimal regional planning while Langstaff was created following a conscious shift in provincial policy towards regional intensification and transit orientation.

4.2 TRADITIONAL NEIGHBOURHOOD DESIGN

Though TOD has increasingly gained attention, TND has been the most prevalent form of New Urbanist development to date and indeed TND and New Urbanism may be used almost interchangeably in common discourse:

"New urbanism offers attractive attributes that can only be produced by increasing residential density, by mixing land use and by good urban design. The proponents suggest that their prototypes can do much to combat "sprawl." But market forces with the help of government programs have been encouraging conventional forms of suburban growth since the beginning of the twentieth century, and critics have been decrying these same forms since they first appeared." (Skaburskis, 2006: 234)

Skaburskis (2006: 234) frames TND not as an urban form, per se, but as an alternative to traditional, entrenched post-war suburban design in which residents are effectively trading large lot sizes for a "more satisfying community," raising a crucial question about the relationship between built form and those living in it. As previously discussed, Gans set forth that "Plans and policies aimed at changing peoples' behavior can therefore not be

implemented through prescribing alterations in the physical community or by directives aimed at builders; they must be directed at the national sources and agents which bring about the present behavior" (1969: 290). But the ideals espoused by the proponents of TND stand in stark contrast to this thesis. In *Suburban Nation* (2000), New Urbanism's ideals are described as a direct response to urban sprawl and aut centrality. Its authors, and Andres Duany in particular, set out the idea that the auto-mobile way of life may be changed by altering the design of the communities in which its residents live. "In suburbia, there is only one available lifestyle: to own a car and to need it for everything," they generalize (Duany et al, 2000: 25). The solution, therefore, is to design a community differently, and thereby create a different lifestyle. "We shape our cities and then our cities shape us," (Duany et al, 2000: 83) or, as Bressi puts it, it is "codes, more than consumer demand or developers' tastes, that need to be revised in order to bring a spirit of community to places where most North Americans live" (1992: 103). While acknowledging that "physical solutions by themselves will not solve social and economic problems," the *Charter for the New Urbanism* also speaks of how civic buildings can "reinforce community identity" and how neighbourhoods "form identifiable areas that encourage citizens to take responsibility for their maintenance and evolution" (Congress for the New Urbanism, 2001). Lehrer and Milgrom (1996: 50) more succinctly say that TND promotes the idea that, "community follows form," and focus on the crucial distinction between the two schools. As espoused by Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and their firm DPZ, TND is about creating communities around pre-car principles with structures and architecture reminiscent of a time when planning was more reflective of people-centric, European ideals:

"The traditional neighbourhood – represented by mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly communities of varied population, either standing free as villages or grouped into

towns and cities – has proved to be a sustainable form of growth.” (Duany et al, 2000: 4).

Accordingly, TND focuses a great deal on little things that, in tandem, make a community feel more liveable. These include front porches to promote interaction among neighbours, smaller setbacks and laneways, so homes are close to sidewalks and the curb, and garages hidden from view, and new development using the heritage architecture of the local community. Communities like Maryland’s Kentlands, and Florida’s Seaside have become the face of TND (and, by extension, NU); picturesque new towns that, at least on the surface, seem far more attractive than the cookie-cutter suburbs that have dominated for the past half-century.

Duany’s TND ideals have been assaulted on a number of fronts, ranging from the aesthetic to the philosophical. On a more superficial level, the thoughtful plans laid out in *Suburban Nation* are often produced in reality as little more than auto-centric suburbs with laneways and front porches (Drummond & Labbé, 2013: 47) or an ersatz heritage architectural style without the underpinnings (i.e. transit, regional growth planning) that would create a truly different kind of development. More broadly, NU communities may easily become places of social exclusion and “may provide an attractive mask behind which developers may continue suburbanization rather than intensifying the urban fabric” (Lehrer & Milgrom, 1996: 63). One community that seems to embody many of these criticisms is Celebration, a New Urbanist-style town developed by the Walt Disney Corporation on its lands outside Orlando. Its physical design (evocative of early-20th Century America) and marketing embody many of the TND ideals, of a particular physical form begetting a better community:

“There’s a reason Celebration is not a town, but a *community* in every positive sense of the word. While the population is diverse, the residents share a strong community spirit

and a desire for a friendship with their neighbors... Celebration is both an exciting new community and one that is familiar because its sense of friendship is timeless. It's a wonderful place to visit, and an even better place to call home." (Celebration, n.d.)

In his Gans-esque investigation of Celebration, Ross found, like Gans, that there was a sense of community in the town but attributed some of it to a kind of self-selection in that the well-publicized and unique community attracted many outgoing personalities. As a result, it wasn't so much Duany's proverbial porches fostering community as it was the kind of people drawn to them; it was their "values and aspirations" that brought them to Celebration. Most tellingly, Duany says to Ross that government intervention is an obstacle to realization of the movement's ideals and that "In order to make a place you have to control it," (Ross, 1999: 308). On the other hand, he seems to lament that the Ontario government allowed a single, private developer to take over a nascent Cornell (Duany et al, 2000: 200) suggesting perhaps the issue is more one of power and control rather than one of who wields it, per se. This is especially noteworthy since Cornell has ultimately proceeded over the years without Duany's direct involvement. Thus TND presents a contradiction: on the one hand it is a more progressive and sustainable form of development for suburbs and it attempts to introduce walkability and community into neighbourhoods where these elements have typically been neglected. On the other hand, it presents as reactionary in other respects, including a neoliberal notion that community can best be fostered through design, by unfettered private interests. So, while Gans and Duany take very different views of whether design can change behaviour, Markham's planners seem to ally themselves with Gans, hoping their work would produce desirable social outcomes in a suburban community that might not yet be ready for those outcomes (Grant, 2011: 191).

As if in response to Gans, Dittmar and Poticha argue that the stage has been set following a decade in which we have seen a “tectonic shift” in consumer and employer preferences (2004: 20). It was 40 years ago Lefebvre (1970/2003: 18) warned “the day is approaching when we will be forced to limit the rights and powers of the automobile” and rising oil prices, increasing traffic congestion this day may have arrived. This may not mean much for TND but it does present for TOD a synergistic opportunity to create more efficient and sustainable regions. It does not aim to supplant the existing form and culture of the suburbs but to offer “a new level of choice and freedom for those who want it” (Lefebvre, 1970/2003: 18).

Because it was a less radical form of NU, TND was adopted more readily by the development community, despite initial hesitation. As will be seen, Markham planners and developers found out Cornell was not as big a change as they suspected at the outset, but subsequent efforts to implement other NU plans met with varying degrees of success. Concurrently, Markham has continued to adhere to NU ideals but shifted its focus from TND to the potential of TOD.

4.3 TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

The other great school of New Urbanism is Transit-Oriented Development, as promulgated by Peter Calthorpe. Calthorpe’s work is more explicitly concerned with the Charter’s primary principles, imagining a polycentric region in which not just the internal community, but the larger region is increasingly oriented away from automobile use. In *The Next American Metropolis* (1993) and *The Regional City* (2001), Calthorpe and his co-authors show far less concern with the minutiae of design than his TND colleagues, and more with providing choices

that will alter how people live in the suburbs in a broader, ecological sense. More amenable to Gans's ideals than Duany, he argues, "it is just as simplistic to claim that the form of communities has no impact on human behaviour as it is to claim that we can prescribe behaviour by physical design" (Calthorpe, 1993: 9) and "ultimately, it is not one or the other but the way the two — physical forms and cultural norms — interact" (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001: 5). While Duany and his co-authors do speak about transit and some other more regional issues, Calthorpe's approach is far more holistic, focusing on broader ecological issues, from wetland preservation to green energy and the creation of a finite growth boundary, such as is now seen in the form of Ontario's Greenbelt (Lehrer & Milgrom, 1996: 54).

Rather than something entirely new, Fishman sees in TODs a return to the values and principles of streetcar suburbs (Fishman, 2001: ix). However, streetcar suburbs were developed in a pre-Fordist era, with private developers providing the infrastructure needed to facilitate their development. Since the rise of the automobile it has fallen on the public sector to provide the transit or, as is more often the case, road infrastructure. With the rise of neoliberalism the lack of public investment in the GTA, particularly from roughly from 1975-2005, was significant in perpetuating autocentric development. TOD may thus be seen as a revisioning of streetcar suburb ideals, but in a neoliberal context. There is a clear inherent tension given the need for *public transit* to facilitate *private development* in an era where government involvement is scant but while "we have lost sight of the need to align the vested interests of the transit operators with those of the developers, in fact they should be one and the same" (Greenberg, 2011: 252).

Robert Cervero (2006) reminds us that the provision of transit and the presence of density are necessary, but not sufficient to create a proper TOD. “Density is paramount,” (Tumlin & Millard-Ball, 2003: 14) but design and diversity are also crucial. Density is not merely residential quantity — nor merely an increase in building heights — but a proper mixing of uses, which is more about *diversity*. A proper mix of uses is “where you get the real payoff,” (Tumlin & Millard-Ball, 2003: 15) and is where other neotraditional communities often fall short.

While many factors influence our travel choices, “If land use primarily supports the auto, then increasing the costs of operating cars and allowing congestion to grow will only result in pain, not a fundamental re-orientation of travel behaviour” (Calthorpe 2001: 46). There are various considerations in how we might shift to a transit-oriented model but all transit-oriented development “must be mixed-use, transit-oriented, walkable and diverse” (Calthorpe, 2001: 53). Transit-oriented development offers a practical solution to sprawl, but not a panacea and:

“...should be seen as a new paradigm of development rather than as a series of marginal improvements. TOD cannot and should not be a utopian vision: it must operate within the constraints of the market and realistic expectations of behavior and lifestyle patterns.” (Dittmar et al, 2004: 9)

4.4 DEFENDING NEW URBANISM

In his defence of New Urbanism, Ellis (2002: 265) concedes a regional approach is key to reaping the full benefits of the plan and it is noteworthy that some of TND’s most prominent developments, including Cornell, were planned without such an approach.

In general, the concerns outlined by Lehrer and Milgrom and others to which Ellis responds seem more explicitly aimed at TND rather than TOD. Though the two schools existed from the outset, TND gained a greater foothold. TOD, by contrast is far more complex, requiring not just the participation and interest of a single developer or group of landowners, but an entire



Figure 3 -This map shows the residential NU grid in Oakville adjacent to conventional suburban retail. (Google)

regional governance plan. Though the first five principles of the Charter focus on these regional issues, they tend to be de-emphasized in the TND plans and certainly none existed in Ontario when Cornell was planned. It is also, as the name implies, contingent on major investment in public transit, something about which TND is rather *laissez faire*, even as it decries automobile use.

Ellis (2002: 267) takes umbrage with those who treat New Urbanist architecture as little more than a faux evocation of nostalgia and yet it is clear that this is often the case. In North Oakville, Ontario for example (like Cornell, designed by Duany Plater-Zyberk), a quick glance shows attractive homes with front porches and reduced setbacks on a tight street grid, with laneways instead of garages. It is clearly a NU plan and yet retail uses remain segregated in traditional “Power Centres” on the development’s edges. Without the mixed-use component, it is hard to regard this neighbourhood then as having done more than appropriate the movement’s most superficial elements, reducing NU to little more than a mutable architectural

style. As will be discussed, Markham's NU plans similarly demonstrate these significant superficial differences from other subdivision plans but without a central mixed-use component; it is hard to create a walkable community when a development does not include somewhere to which you may walk. Jane Jacobs listed old buildings as crucial to any successful urban environment (1961), providing a place for artists to live and new businesses to incubate. By definition, of course, no new community can have aged structures and there is a danger that over-prescribing an attempt to simulate such an environment creates an "artificial pastiche" with little room to evolve (Greenberg, 2001: 98). And yet, much of TND appears to emulate just such a simulacrum. Ostensibly "the central focus of New Urbanism is not 'style' but rather the spatial structure," (Ellis 2002: 274) and yet the *style* seems far more established than the spatial structure has been so far, raising the question of whether the central focus is an attainable goal.

5. POLICY & PLANNING IN ONTARIO, THE GTA & MARKHAM

Planning policy in Canada is provincially led. The division of federal and provincial powers in the country dates back to 1867 and the drafting of the British North America Act as the Dominion's first constitution. In Ontario, the hierarchy of the regime is formalized in Section 3.5 of the *Planning Act*, introduced in 2004, requiring all municipal decisions "shall be consistent with" provincial policy statements. The 2005 version of the *Provincial Policy Statement (PPS)* has set the relevant context in the matters to be discussed here (Ontario, 2005b) but it is worth noting that a new PPS came into effect on April 31, 2014. It generally continues in the same vein as the 2005 statement, advancing several new ideas. Whereas the 2005 PPS spoke to ideas of supporting active lifestyles and more compact urban forms, the 2014 version explicitly promotes transit and active transportation. The language about coordination between municipalities, boards and agencies is similarly clarified and the terminology of "mixed-use areas" and "placemaking" is introduced (Ontario, 2014a).

5.1 INTRODUCING SMART GROWTH: POLICY CHANGES SINCE 2000

The Progressive Conservative government first elected in 1995 planted the seeds for the overhaul of the planning structure that would occur under the subsequent Liberals. In the 1990s, civil protests drew attention to development on the Oak Ridges Moraine, a geological formation from which the headwaters of Toronto's rivers flow. Wrapping around the northern part of the city, it ran through several high-growth suburban municipalities, particularly including the Town of Richmond Hill. Increasing political tension and media attention lead to

the convening of an advisory panel in 2001 (Desfor et al, 2006: 145). Ultimately, the government passed the *Oak*

Ridges Moraine Conservation Act (2002) and signed a land swap deal with developers.

In 2002, the government convened five “Smart Growth Panels” charged with providing advice on future development in

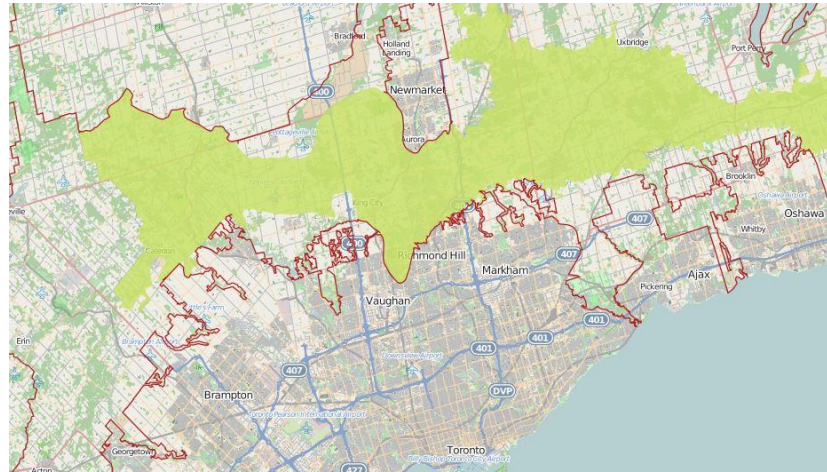


Figure 4 - The Oak Ridges Moraine runs east-to-west to the north of Toronto, and is a prominent landform in York Region. (Neptis Geoweb)

several regions of the province but perhaps really “to buy time and defuse demands for action on urban sprawl” (Desfor et al, 2006: 146). Whatever its original intentions, this work came to fruition through a series of substantial pieces of legislation that directly reflected the principles of Smart Growth and New Urbanism. The PPS 2005 reinforced the legislative hierarchy and some amendments to the *Planning Act* were aimed at reining in the powers of the OMB over municipalities (e.g. requiring them to “have regard” to council decisions), albeit only to a degree and largely unsuccessfully.

More significantly, The *Greenbelt Act* (2005) built upon the foundations of the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act*, setting aside 1.8 million of agricultural land and establishing a finite growth boundary around the GTA (and implementing the primary principles outlined in the *Charter of the New Urbanism* [2001]). Crucially, 69 per cent of York Region’s land mass falls within the Greenbelt and/or Oak Ridges Moraine protection zones (York Region, 2010). Other

principles from the *Charter's* first section, "The Region: Metropolis, City, and Town," were enacted through the anti-sprawl *Places to Grow Act* (2006) and its accompanying *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (2006)², which set out specific guidelines and population projections for the period out to 2031.³ Its most salient features are the requirement that municipalities direct a minimum 40 per cent of all new growth to within existing municipal boundaries, the establishment of density targets for all new development and designating 25 urban growth centres (UGCs). Four are in York Region: Markham Centre, Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, Richmond Hill Centre-Langstaff Gateway and Newmarket Centre. Significantly, while Newmarket Centre and some other UGCs are existing cores, York Region's three other centres are all greenfield sites. All new development must to be at a density of at least 50 people and jobs per hectare but those minimums were set at much as four times higher in UGCs (depending on their classification), where more intense, development should be directed. Finally, the government created a Greater Toronto Transit Authority, soon reconstituted and renamed through the *Metrolinx Act* (2007), and charged with transit planning and implementation in the GTA. Metrolinx began implementing \$11-billion worth of "Quick Win" transit projects and, in 2008, unveiled *The Big Move*, a \$50-billion, 25-year transit. These transit and transportation initiatives will be discussed further in the next section of this paper but all these moves were a crucial foundation as "Local efforts at creating convenient, less auto-dependent neighborhoods and communities will be most successful within a regional framework that provides the transit infrastructure and that encourages a denser pattern of

² Though there are other growth plans now in effect, "Places to Grow" is used interchangeably to refer to the legislation and the GTA growth plan itself.

³ Amendment 2 to the Growth Plan (Ontario, 2013) adjusted these initial targets and set new, generally higher ones for 2041.

development with mixed uses” (Southworth, 1997: 4). The emphasis on the region as a planning unit is therefore crucial. Robert Fishman (2001: xvi) describes the city-region as “the necessary scale on which to confront our society’s economic, ecological and social problems,” (2001: 2) and TND’s proponents seem to agree, arguing that regional planning “manages urban growth at the scale of people’s daily lives and “planning at the scale of a single town or city is rarely effective” (Duany et al, 2000: 139). While TOD plans demonstrate this principle in reality, TND plans often do not, however. Markham’s own planning efforts were not co-ordinated regionally prior to *Places to Grow* and certainly Cornell and other New Urbanist plans in Markham were effectively new kinds of subdivision plans and not regional nodes of any kind.



Figure 5 - Map of the Growth Plan, showing the Greenbelt, the urban area of the GTHA and the designated UGCs. (Ontario, 2006)

The new planning regime was “one of most brilliant, relatively clear and simple” plans Peter Calthorpe said he has seen (4/7/14) but there was widespread agreement among interviewees that the

policy shifts were following pre-existing market patterns rather than vice versa:

- “It’s obviously so many forces coming together. There’s the market conditions, what tenants need and want, what customers want, what their expectations are, what you can afford to build and what the market demands. So the changing in policy is great but it has to match market conditions.” (Commercial Developer, 3/27/14)

- “I don’t think they were doing it because there was policy pressure or that’s what municipalities were wanting them to build. I think it was completely market driven (in the early 2000s) ... The policy framework was responsive but I think the market, to be honest, really lead.” (Former York Region Planner, 3/6/14)

5.2 OFFICIAL PLANS

Section 12 of *Places to Grow* also required municipalities to update their official plans (OPs), their overarching policy documents, to conform to the new legislation, and to continue updating them every five years. As a lower-tier municipality, Markham’s official plan must conform to York

Region’s. The provincial legislation

also allows municipalities to create “Secondary Plans” that allow for more detailed planning of specific districts. Markham has frequently made use of these plans, with 49 put into effect in 35 years (Markham, 2012: 18) and, they have been a crucial part of Markham’s adoption of New Urbanist principles, according to a Markham planning official.

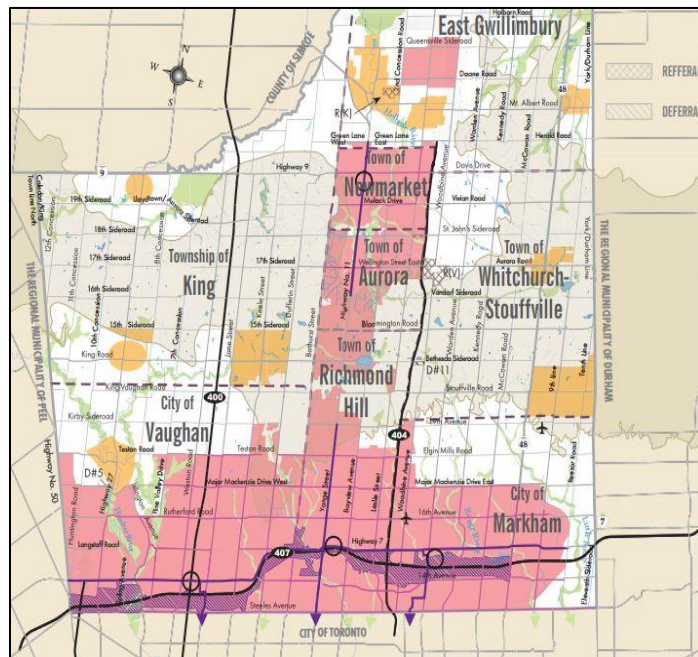


Figure 6 - The pink inverted-T shape shows the urban structure of York Region as set out in its OP. (York Region, 2010)

York Region's conformity exercise culminated in its new official plan (York Region, 2010)⁴, designating "sustainability" as its key lens, drawing together principles of "A Sustainable Natural Environment," "Healthy Communities," and "Economic Vitality" (York Region, 2010, 4). Other key moves include:

- Establishing the provincial 40 per cent intensification target as a minimum for its municipalities; (York Region, 2010: 1-2).
- Drawing together previous plans, including a Centres and Corridors policy of growth concentration and new master plans for infrastructure; (York Region, 2010: 6).
- A requirement that 25 per cent of all new housing be "affordable,"⁵ rising to 35 per cent in regional centres. (York Region, 2010: 40).

Markham's new OP, *Planning Markham's Future*, passed in December, 2013 setting out "a long-term vision for the continued development of Markham as a vibrant and liveable city"

(Markham, 2012: 1) based upon four key themes:

- Protecting the natural environment;
- Building complete communities;
- Increasing travel options;
- Maintaining a vibrant and competitive economy (Markham, 2013: 6).

The most contentious and significant OP debate Markham had surrounded its growth management strategy. Left over between the Greenbelt lands and the defined built boundary

⁴ The plan was appealed to the OMB and, as of this date, it remains before the board. The result is that while the OP is largely in effect, sections under appeal are not yet in effect. The region has also passed three amendments setting out growth boundary expansions for Markham, Vaughan and East Gwillimbury respectively, and a fourth amendment setting out the principles and boundaries governing the Richmond Hill Centre-Langstaff UGC. Only Regional Official Plan Amendment 4 was not appealed to the OMB.

⁵ The Regional Official Plan (2010: 41) utilizes the PPS definition of "affordability" as a unit that costs 30 per cent or less of its owners' income. While noting an increasing gap between high and low earners, the Region's report considered "the maximum household income of a moderate income household," as approximately \$109,000. Based on this calculation, an affordable house in York Region cost \$410,987, or more than \$2,700 per month in 2011 (York Region, 2012). The region found only 21 per cent of homes sold in 2011 fell within this definition.

were 2,000 hectares of land for potential future development, known as the “whitebelt.”

Though 40 per cent was the minimum intensification target designated by the province and York Region, Markham considered setting a 100 per cent intensification target, opening up no new whitebelt land. Two local councillors lead the effort, branding the whitebelt lands as the “foodbelt,” prime agricultural lands that could be “a special place in the GTA consisting of beautiful productive farmland... [that could] co-exist in harmony with the surrounding natural heritage system & urban communities in perpetuity” (Burke & Shapero, 2009: 23).⁶

Following a robust public debate, Markham council decided, in a 7-6 vote, to accept a compromise staff recommendation of 60 per cent, still well in excess of the provincial minimum and higher than any other municipality governed by the Growth Plan. Council also adopted a motion asking the province to add 1,000 acres of the whitebelt lands to the Greenbelt during its 2015 review of that legislation. While questions of developer influence on the process were raised by some residents, Councillor Erin Shapero, who led the foodbelt charge said it was still “...a victory for Markham residents...It’s maybe not everything, but ... It’s still a very large area” (O’Toole, 2010). Opinions vary, however, on how practical the goal was:

- “Intensification has not been a huge problem...I was willing to vote for 100%...mainly to drive transit and say, OK for the next 10 years it’s inside the urban boundary. We’ll open it up at some point in time... I agreed to the 60% compromise because we have a ‘valve’ with ground housing.” (Markham Councillor A, 3/10/14)
- “(100% was) not realistic and it’s not what Markham is. Markham is a diverse community and we’re a family community and we need a component of family-oriented housing... (60%) was a very aggressive model.” (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14)

⁶ It could certainly be argued that this notion, as with the broader resurgence of the urban agriculture and local food movements can be traced back to Howard and his notions of farmers being able to serve urban dwellers as a built-in market (1965: 61).

- “It was kind of a pipe dream really. We had all these ideas (like) agro-tourism...I think that all levels of government needed to help. The municipality can’t do it alone ... The developers were high-fiving each other (after the vote), I’m still sore about that.” (Markham Councillor B, 3/25/14)

5.3 ASSESSING PROGRESS SO FAR

It is still too early to offer a full evaluation of how successful this new policy regime has been. A scheduled 2013 review of the Moraine legislation, for example, was pushed back to 2015 to coincide with the review of the Greenbelt and similar legislation governing the Niagara Escarpment. In March 2014 the province released a proposed series of technical performance indicators for measuring the *Growth Plan*, as required by the legislation (Ontario, 2014b). A five-year assessment by the province of its own efforts found:

- Though all upper-tier and single-tier municipalities had completed their conformity exercise, only 6 were approved and 12 were under review at the OMB;
- 67% of new housing units built between 2009 and 2011 were within built boundaries and a broader range of housing types was being seen;
- Residential densities and transit use were both showing upward trends (Ontario, 2011).

While the findings are generally positive, some are vague and others perhaps indicators of trends already underway. A more sceptical evaluation, issued 8 years into the 25-year plan by the Neptis Foundation argued the amount of greenfield land being opened to potential development is more than projected and whereas the province required all municipalities to direct a *minimum* of 40 per cent of all development to within the built boundary, only two actually achieved this and virtually every municipality treated it as a maximum (Allen & Campsie, 2013: 2). Upper tier municipalities were allowed to allocate growth within their

territory, creating further inconsistencies.⁷ There is a lack of clear guidelines and disputes at the Ontario Municipal Board about interpretation of language creating “a patchwork of different approaches to growth management across the region” (Allen & Campsie, 2013: 3). Also contentious have been arguments about whether sufficient land is available to provide ground-related supply through to 2031. While the province has effectively left the whitebelt lands as an “if needed” supply, the home building industry seems to regard it as a frustratingly untapped resource and necessary to provide “balanced growth initiatives for new communities that do not compromise affordability and competitiveness while utilizing growth plan principles to create complete, livable and sustainable neighbourhoods” (OHBA & BILD, 2013: 2). Though the development industry (particularly through its organization, the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD)) has argued that available land for development is insufficient and “The *Places to Grow* plan has done a number of things but one of the things you can’t deny it’s done is increase the value of land significantly in the Greater Toronto Area” (Industry Development Representative, 3/26/14). In response developers have urged the province to relax its deadlines, explicitly identify the whitebelt as a future growth area, separate employment densities from residential communities and better align transportation and land use planning (Malone Given Parsons, 2012). However, Allen and Campsie (2013: 4) find land already open to development is adequate to meet the needs out to

⁷ The Region of Waterloo set a minimum of 45% and Port Hope is at 50%, making them the only two municipalities to go above and beyond the minimum, however this is slightly misleading. In two-tier municipalities (such as York Region) the Neptis report only looks at the minimums *set by the upper tier*, which the lower tiers were free to exceed if they wished. So, Markham is listed at 40% though its council opted for 60%. Neighbouring Vaughan set its target at 45% but is similarly listed at 40%. On the one hand, these excesses are encouraging. On the other it shows the patchwork state of the *Growth Plan*.

2031. While the development industry's argument that a constrained land supply has guaranteed higher home prices seems logical, there is no consensus on this:

"Smart growth and other regulation are seen to be placing upward pressure on land and housing prices. This is an area of lively debate, with some suggesting that markets are being strangled by urban consolidation policies (i.e., smart growth). In fact, it is difficult to prove an impact in either direction, given the challenge in isolating the effect of the (urban growth boundary) or other planning policies from the many other complex factors that shape local housing markets." (Blais, 2010: 48)

Acknowledging it would be "premature to speculate on [the plan's] ultimate effects on development patterns," Allen and Campsie (2013: 4) warn "it has been undermined before it even has a chance to make an impact." It is especially hard to make an assessment since it cannot be truly said the plan is fully implemented, with so many municipalities finding ways around the minimum targets.

In terms of precedents, one may look back to the early-1990s plans of the Office for the Greater Toronto Area to introduce a nodal strategy that is noteworthy for, among other things, being the first indications of Langstaff Gateway as a regional node (OGTA, 1991; 1992). A building industry representative (3/16/14) who worked on the planning for the centre in the then-City of North York said that while it is still not fully built-out, it has been a successful project with restaurants and people on the street, kids in the parks and transit being well used. Filion's own prior assessment (2009) found the same, to a point, and he argued the planned nodes have been a mixed-success, achieving substantial residential densities but falling below the job targets envisioned. While non-auto modal shares were higher than in other suburban areas (and higher in North York than the other centres), they were still well behind downtown levels (Filion, 2000: 155). The nodes would have struggled more if not for the condo boom seen

across the city in the past decade and while North York Centre is built around a subway station, the general lack of ongoing transit investment remains an issue (Filion, 2010: 517) as does the challenge of the office market:

“Optimistic employment forecasts representing the ‘self-containment’ coveted by local politicians and planning officials alike have not materialized. The vast majority of new employment opportunities that have been created outside central Toronto have occurred in auto-oriented, widely dispersed, outer suburban locations...” (Levy, 2013: 165)

5.4 DEVELOPMENT CHARGES

While the relationship between Development Charges (DCs) and sprawl could be a detailed research project on its own, it does bear some mentioning here. Taxes imposed on new development in Ontario are governed by the *Development Charges Act* (1997). Amendments to the Act by the PC government of the mid-1990s reduced the list of facilities and services for which municipalities could tax developers to ensure that “growth pays for growth.” DCs are a crucial source of revenue in the municipalities around Toronto and many claim the structure is not adequate to fund necessary infrastructure. Peel Region has been among the most vociferous proponents of this view, with an ongoing campaign for the region to receive its “fair share” of funding (Fair Share Task Force, 2011), particularly as the DC Act is now under review.

While all the 905 regions⁸ have seen increasing DCs in recent years, some of the highest are in York Region and Markham. Both levels of government impose charges so the total cost for a

⁸ Colloquially, the divide between the City of Toronto and the surrounding regions is described as being between the “416” and “905” based on the telephone area codes corresponding to the city and suburbs respectively.

new, detached home is more than \$65,000 and a small apartment about \$30,000 per unit⁹.

Markham also introduced innovative area-specific charges to recognize the different infrastructure needs of different neighbourhoods. The City of Markham received special mention from Metrolinx for its consideration of trip generation and Transportation Demand Management (TDM)¹⁰ factors in calculating road DCs and York Region was similarly cited for discounting DCs in response to TDM measures (Metrolinx, 2014: 4, 10, 15).

However, there is evidence that the way DCs are structured directly disincentivizes the planning aims of the municipality, particularly since they generally don't reflect the differences in infrastructure load between a peripheral greenfield development and a core infill development which, for example, will not require the construction of new roads and sewers (Thompson, 2013: 14-15). Blais argues that the current system not only encourages inefficiency but leads to efficient infrastructure users subsidizing those that are less efficient. This results in distortions of the market, leading to "perverse cities" (Blais, 2010: 8).

"A market that operates in this manner is the opposite of what planning calls for. Planning in its many guises – smart growth, new urbanism, sustainable development – has set about to achieve compact, mixed-use cities with efficient development and to curb urban sprawl." (Blais, 2010: 11)

The logical progression is that consumers may choose suburban homes, assuming the cost is cheaper because they are not priced correctly. The actual costs are being spread out across many homeowners and other indirect costs (e.g. car ownership) are not being factored in (Blais, 2010: 38). Moreover, it is cheaper for developers to develop greenfield sites, even while

⁹ On a detached home, the Markham portion is \$22,424 and the regional portion is \$40,751. There are additional charges for the school board and area-specific charges are calculated separately, on a per-hectare basis.

¹⁰ TDM measures are any moves or combination of moves to encourage non-auto use, from the instillation of bicycle racks to carpooling programs.

the local government passes planning policies with the opposite goal (Blais, 2010: 92-99).

Planning objectives and price signal thus need to be more closely aligned (Blais, 2010: 163) or

sprawling forms will continue. Opinions differ as to how to address DCs, however:

- “The industry clearly understands it has a role. They firmly believe the only way we’re going to solve this is by a collaborative, honest conversation around the issues rather than saying it’s just the developers making a whole bunch of money ... This is not a sustainable future we’re in...You have to pay for your services.” (Development Industry Representative, 3/26/14)
- “DCs are still quite challenging in York Region ... I just think it’s not a one-size-fits-all....it is turning into a deterrent to development in many ways.” (Commercial Developer, 3/27/14)
- “Development Charges are a problem, from the developer’s perspective.” (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14)

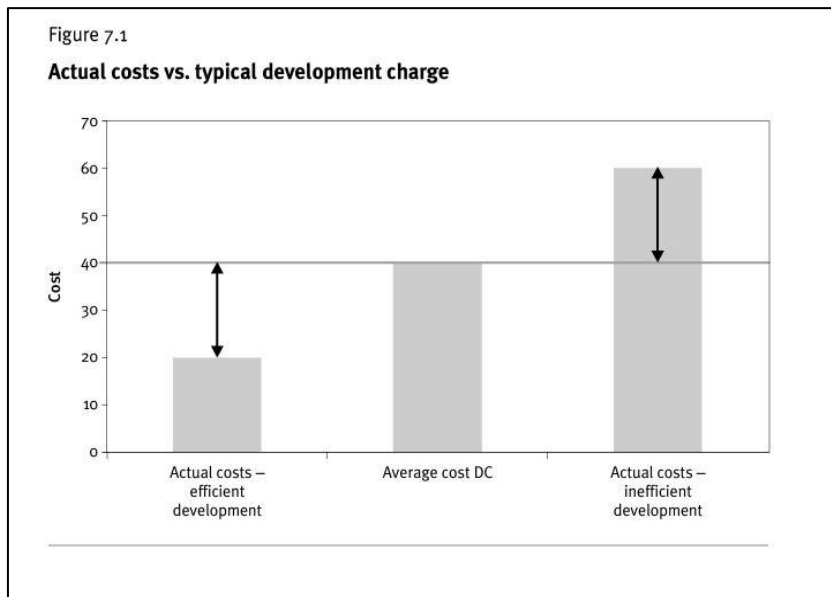


Figure 7 - DCs that do not accurately reflect the varying costs of infrastructure create inefficiencies. (Blais, 2010: 96)

As part of an ongoing consultation process on updating the DC legislation, Metrolinx submitted a paper outlining how DC reform can encourage more transit-friendly development. Among the key suggestions are:

- Implementing a regional DC to fund GO Transit and increasing the amount municipalities can use to fund local transit (All four regional municipalities voted in support of such measures in 2009.);
- Having DCs reflect the form and location of the new development;
- Suggesting a methodology that encourages non-auto use by taking into account the trip generation, mode share and trip length impacts of a new development.

Most significantly for these purposes, Metrolinx proposes encouraging TOD development by discounting this charge in special policy areas. This could include areas using TDM programs like Smart Commute (a carpooling matchmaker) or reducing on-street parking (Metrolinx, 2014: 12-14), but would certainly apply to something as holistically designed as Langstaff Gateway. Such a program would also help resolve a crucial planning paradox. The Provincial Policy Statement promotes affordable housing as a key principle and York Region's official plan (2010) requires 25 per cent of units in all new development fall within its definition of "affordable," rising to 35 per cent in its centres and corridors. This is an obvious challenge since the region aims to have a greater percentage of cheaper units in its prime, transit-oriented areas. Metrolinx proposes that "Developers wishing to build affordable housing within 'Special Policy Areas' immediately surrounding existing or future rapid transit would be eligible for a GO Transit/Metrolinx DC discount." (Metrolinx, 2014: 15). This may provide some comfort to BILD, whose members objected to a proposal by the province to implement a special DC to fund transit expansion at the expense, as BILD would have it, of affordable housing (BILD 2013a). They previously objected to a move by the province to implement Inclusionary Zoning, which would have allowed municipalities to require the provision of a percentage of affordable units as part of the planning approval process, arguing it would be "a barrier to overall housing affordability and supply" (OHBA, 2010: 1-2). At the present time, however, there is neither Inclusionary Zoning, nor any other legislative tools that allow municipalities to enforce these goals and, as an industry official said, providing affordable housing is not the industry's job.

6. TRANSIT & CHALLENGES IN THE GTA

It is impossible to discuss planning and Transit-Oriented Development in the GTA without

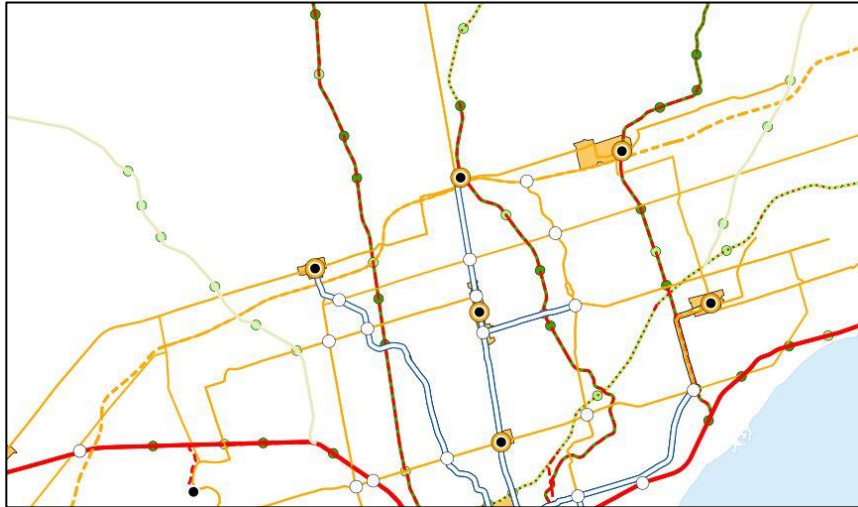


Figure 8 - The existing and proposed Big Move is overlain here with the planned UGCs. One may observe the convergence of transit at Langstaff Gateway, in the upper centre. (Neptis Geoweb)

discussing transit itself. A full examination of transit planning and regional governance is beyond the scope of this paper but the issues that bear upon Langstaff Gateway's challenges reflect on the larger region as well.

Transit provides a point of convergence between transportation itself, land-use and governance and a means to evaluate how well these elements align:

“Urban transit lends itself well to an evaluation of the overall performance of a metropolitan area’s system of government because it has features that link it to all of the arguments for consolidation. The performance of the local transit system is closely related to the land-use pattern encouraged or allowed by local governments.” (Friskin, 1991: 270)

During the post-war era the city avoided many of the pitfalls of American cities that saw flight to the suburbs and an abandonment of the inner city. The government of Metropolitan Toronto developed its suburbs in conjunction with transit lines, including a subway system built primarily from the 1950s to the 1970s, “thanks to an enlightened (provincial) government which, year after year, co-operated with the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto in providing both capital construction and operating subsidies sufficient to support the TTC and its

ambitious subway expansion policy” (Levy, 2013: 85). However, transit expansion slowed in the 1980s, just as growth exploded in new suburbs and the era of co-operation came to an abrupt end in the 1990s under the PCs. The seeds of the larger problem had been planted decades earlier, however:

“The creation of (regions) effectively put Metropolitan Toronto into a straitjacket in terms of providing fully integrated transportation facilities to serve a high-growth-city-region, a situation exacerbated by the skeletal GO Transit commuter rail service with its single focal point in the Toronto core and its part-time schedule.” (Levy 2013: 153)

6.1 GTA TRANSIT PLANNING IN THE 21st CENTURY

York Region remains primarily autocentric despite seeing its transit ridership triple from 7.7 million in 2001, when local services were amalgamated into YRT (York Region Transit, 2012) to 22 million (York Region, 2013). . The most recent data shows that 86 per cent of all trips in the region are made by car and 65 per cent of all trips are by automobiles with only the driver in the car (Transportation Tomorrow, 2011). The region has aggressively pursued rapid transit expansion, first by helping fund the extension of the TTC’s Spadina subway extension north of the municipal border into a planned growth centre, Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. The region also received \$1.4 billion in provincial funding to construct a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system branded “Viva.” Viva’s first phase, launched in 2005, involved running modern buses on express routes in mixed traffic, with the long-term plan being to construct bus lanes (“rapidways”) along key corridors. The first rapidway, along Highway 7 in Markham, opened in mid-2013 and the entire first-phase of the system is expected to be operational by 2019. But with no further transit funding earmarked for York Region there is a functional disconnect as growth continues

in a denser form than before, but without ongoing transit expansion to service it there is a “tension in the system” (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14).

The provincial Liberal government elected in 2003, has indicated an interest in shifting transportation in the region from cars to transit and other modes in response to increasing traffic congestion and reports showing this “gridlock” is costing the region \$6 billion or more in lost productivity (Toronto



Figure 9 - York Region's new "rapidways" include upgraded stations and painted roadways. The towers of Markham's Leitchcroft district form the skyline to the east in this view from Bayview Avenue. (Author Photo)

Board of Trade, 2011).

Looking at the provincial plans and projections showing the population of the Greater Golden Horseshoe will grow from 7.8 million in 2006, to 11.5 million by 2031 (Ontario, 2012), it is clear the aim is not just to build more transit and off-set the population growth coming to the region but also to change the behaviour of residents.

The most significant moves in this direction was Metrolinx's development of *The Big Move* regional transit plan (2008), consisting of 52 projects across the GTA, at a total cost of \$50 billion over 25 years. *The Big Move* regional transit plan (RTP) was introduced to ameliorate the impacts of growth on further traffic congestion, ensuring that while there are, in absolute terms, more drivers on the road by 2031, there will also be many more people taking transit

and other modes. An attempt by the PCs to introduce something similar, the Greater Toronto Services Board, designed by the government to be a weak body (Filion, 2001a: 98), quickly failed due to internecine political battles (Desfor et al, 2006: 143). The *Metrolinx Act* spells out the organization's purpose as to "support transit-supportive densities," and create a "transportation network that links urban growth centres through an extensive multi-modal system anchored by efficient public transit..." (Ontario, 2006: 8), clearly a response to *Places to Grow's* call for an "integrated and efficient transportation system needed to support a vibrant economy and way of life," (Ontario, 2006a: 23). However, it is noteworthy that the two plans are from different ministries with different goals and, moreover, that the two plans are at different scales. Whereas the *Growth Plan* covers the entire Greater Golden Horseshoe, *The Big Move* is only about the smaller Greater Toronto Area. More significantly, about \$35-billion of *The Big Move* remains unfunded at this time. On April 14, 2014, Premier Kathleen Wynne unveiled a plan to fund \$15 billion of transit and transportation projects in the region through more conventional means. Her plans included drawing funds from the existing HST and gas taxes. More funds would come through debt financing and the implementation of High Occupancy Toll lanes on certain highways (Brennan & Kalinowski, 2014). Her subsequent re-election, as head of a majority Liberal government, provides reason for optimism in this area but the drawn-out process and its still-uncertain results suggest it remains politically untenable to implement the full-scale measures required to achieve the desired ends. In the meantime, municipalities are being asked to plan TODs, the timetable for the facilitating infrastructure is unclear, as will be particularly shown to be the case in Langstaff Gateway.

Even with the complete fulfillment of *The Big Move* and the *Places to Grow* visions, a substantial gap remains between the province’s transit ridership goals and what seems achievable in such a short term in regards to behavioural change. Ideal realizations of the new land use paradigm established by *Places to Grow* and a full roll-out of *The Big Move* are *necessary*, but are not *sufficient* to achieve the modal split targets in Langstaff Gateway. Because downtown Toronto is more developed, the suburbs are where change is crucial.

6.2 MINDING THE GAP

There are many practical and political challenges that lie ahead for establishing a post-

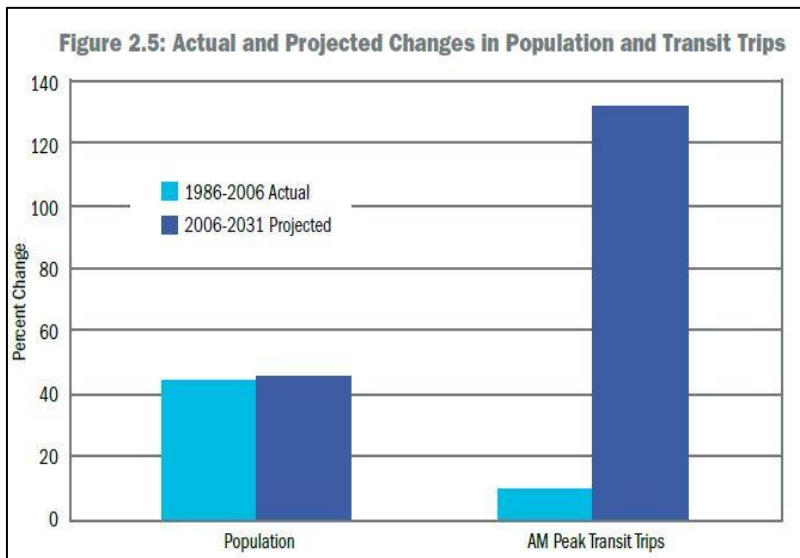


Figure 10 - The substantial disparity between projected population and transit ridership growth rates. (Soberman 2010: 9)

suburban GTA and the greatest challenge may not be in funding and building transit or encouraging developers to build denser development. Rather, it is clear that various carrots and sticks will be required to encourage suburbanites to adopt a new

kind of lifestyle than that to which they have become accustomed and to forsake cars in favour of transit and other modes. In this context, the question is, not merely whether it is possible to build denser suburbs but rather “If you build it, and they come, what next?”

Between 1986 and 2006, transit use in the GTA increased 11 cent but *The Big Move* envisions a 132-percent increase in transit usage over a similar 20-year span, between 2006 and 2026 (Soberman, 2010). Putting the 132-percent increase alongside the projected nearly-50-percent increase in population shows how much work needs to be done to get both new and current residents to use transit more. "Even the densest mixed-use developments will have only a limited impact if financial incentives discourage residents and employees from taking transit. To achieve the greatest success in reducing vehicle trips, projects need to encompass transit-oriented development and transportation demand management" (Tumlin & Millard-Ball, 2003: 15). In the local context, this is a reminder that the province must accomplish two goals in its implementation of revenue tools: generate sufficient funds to construct *The Big Move*, and incent behaviour change to promote non-auto modes of travel. In his 2010 study, prepared for the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, Soberman states, "Achieving such dramatic change in travel behaviour is a daunting task, one that requires not only doing the right things like investing in new infrastructure, but doing the right things right." If the province fails to invest adequately in new infrastructure, and/or "do the right things right," severe traffic congestion is a likely result, along with its negative impacts on the regional economy.

Though Metrolinx was established to plan a regional transit network, there is a political tension given its lack of legislative authority. The Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) creates a potential obstacle to regional co-ordination of both infrastructure improvements and a change in the region's transit culture. Though Metrolinx oversees 15 transit agencies, a power imbalance is created by the fact that the TTC carries 85 per cent of the GTA's transit riders (Toronto, 2010) Clearly a more coherent, cohesive single voice is needed if true regional

transportation objectives are to be met. An effective regional transit agency “must have jurisdiction over the entire functional urban area rather than just the central municipality,” as well as pooled finances and operate outside the day-to-day political cycle (Mees, 2010: 160) and all these counts Metrolinx so far falls short. While “the standard election cycle and the sustainable funding support essential to implement large-scale, long-term infrastructure projects appear to be fundamentally incompatible,” (Levy, 2013: 162), and while local elected officials remain obligated to represent local concerns over more pragmatic regional projects that might benefit them less directly (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001: 62), the creation of Metrolinx has done nothing to remove politics from the equation.

The TTC was long praised for how it used its bus system to feed its subway system (and, by extension, walking to feed both, at either end), but as ridership has bled beyond the system’s edges — as commuters now move from inside the city to beyond its borders and vice versa — this model is fraying and needs to be re-established on a larger scale. While the regional municipalities are urbanizing and now have official plans that conform to *Places to Grow*, transit planning has failed to replicate the success Metro achieved by providing consistent service across a wide area, rather than concentrating density in select nodes (Mees, 2010: 103).

Metrolinx is mired in problems described (and largely avoided in Toronto) decades ago:

“A politically fragmented metropolitan area typically provides few incentives for local decision makers to consider the impacts of their service structure. The creation of institutions with legal responsibility to perform area wide functions and to coordinate their activities with each other and with those of local agencies means that the costs and benefits of alternative patterns of metropolitan development and alternative servicing arrangements are more likely to become the subject matter of local political debates.” (Friskin, 1991: 289).

As with the nature of transit-oriented development, it is important to remember that the *quality* of the transit is at least as important as the mere provision of service (Filion & McSpurren 2007). While houses and cars have long been sold as lifestyle products, the same will need to be done with transit if suburbanites are expected to trade the prototypical car-and-detached-house lifestyle for something different (Former York Region Planner, 3/6/14). In this regard, he said, Viva has been making a conscious and successful effort to “reimagine the suburban imaginary” with its branding (as have developers selling TOD, particularly in Markham Centre). What’s being sold is not simply a way to get where you are going but rather a quality of life “You relate to them on a personal level; a lifestyle,” he said of the advertisements. “They’re selling a Mercedes Benz.”



Figure 11 - These images from the Viva website demonstrate its lifestyle-centric aesthetic. (Vivanext.com)

6.3 THE YONGE SUBWAY EXTENSION

Of all the planned transit projects crucial to serving Langstaff Gateway, none is more important than the proposal to extend the TTC’s Yonge subway line 6.8 kilometres north, to

Highway 7. Langstaff's plan envisions a 65-per-cent non-auto modal share, which is "unheard of, and the only way you're

going to get it is with the Yonge subway...everything coming together, it's the only way you can even hope" (Markham

Planning Official, 3/28/14). Like the under-construction Spadina extension, this would extend

Toronto's subway system beyond the municipal border at Steeles Avenue. While Steeles

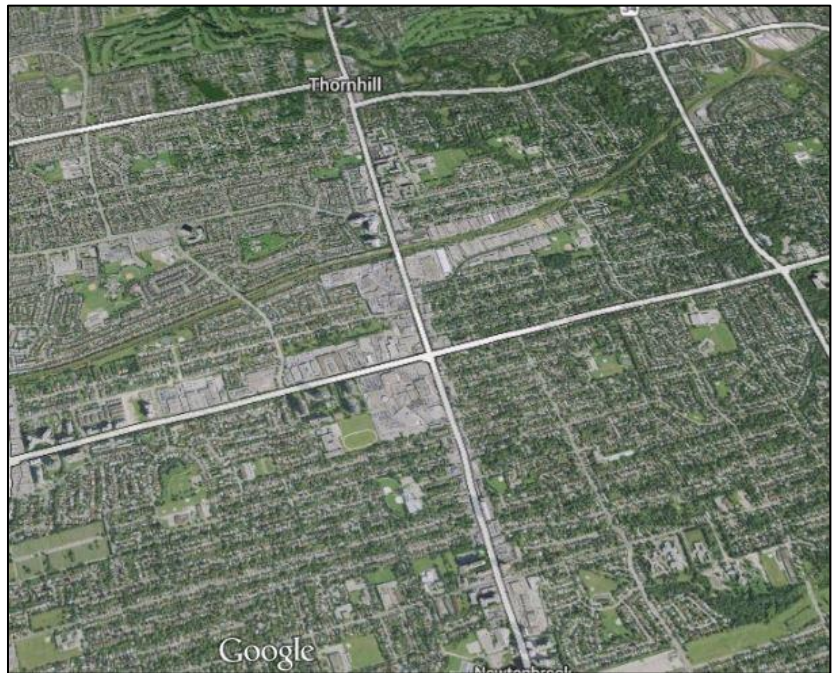


Figure 12 - The municipal border between "suburban" York Region and "urban" Toronto is indiscernible at Yonge and Steeles. (Google)

remains a boundary between Toronto and York Region (and the two lower-tier municipalities, Markham and Vaughan) it is obsolete in terms of on-the-ground reality. Though one side of Steeles is ostensibly the "city" and the other side a "suburb," there is no significant difference in built form or street layout between the two sides. Indeed, when it comes to density, the York Region side may be ahead of Toronto in that Markham (2008/2012) and Vaughan (2010/2012) have created new secondary plans for the district, and high-rise development along Yonge Street is already underway. Toronto's side, by contrast, is dominated by a mall and strip-mall retail and a new secondary plan study is just underway.

The extension looked to be on the fast track in mid-2007 with a bold provincial move in regards to transit planning. York Region had received \$1.4 billion of “Quick Win” money from the Liberal government’s first round of transit funding and was proceeding to Viva rapidways both east-west along Highway 7 and along Yonge Street, north from the municipal border. But less than a week before York Region was set to expropriate lands for the Yonge lanes, on June 15, Premier Dalton McGuinty announced an ambitious, “almost unprecedented” (Levy, 2013: 269)

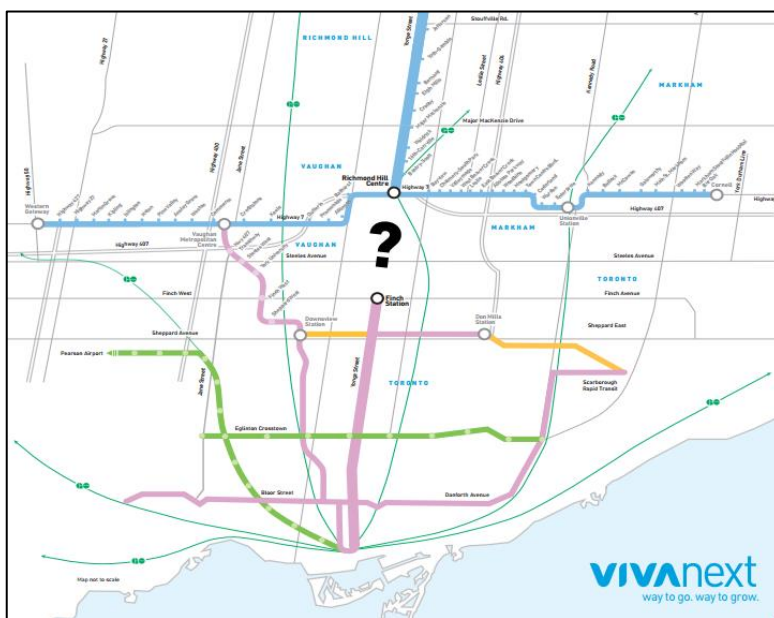


Figure 13 - This map, prepared by York Region, shows the Yonge extension as the "missing link" in the regional transportation network. (Vivanext, 2011)

transit plan called Move2020; an \$11.5-billion plan that would become the foundation of the subsequent *Big Move*. Most significantly, in addition to providing the balance of funding for Viva to complete its first phase, McGuinty listed the Yonge subway extension as among 15 top-priority projects.

To date, the federal contribution has not materialized but York Region did not wait to change course. Less than a week later, its June 21 council meeting, the region halted the expropriation plan and moved to begin an environmental assessment for the subway (York Region, 2007a). By April 2009, York Region had selected an alignment and completed the process (Vivanext, n.d.). However, two substantial obstacles remained: It was the City of Toronto’s subway and

the extension was not one of their priorities and with the Move2020 money spent, there was no source for the \$3-billion the subway required.

In particular, Toronto has prioritized a Downtown Relief Line to take pressure off the Bloor-Yonge station, which is operating over capacity, and Metrolinx has also launched a Regional Relief Strategy consultation process to address the broader range of concerns and potential solutions with relieving the stress on the downtown pinch-point (Metrolinx, 2014a) before adding new subway stops at the top of the line. Thus, projects that only became significant in regards to the Yonge extension have now surpassed it on the priority list, making the timing of the extension unclear.¹¹ The subway extension is not a sufficient condition to realize the ambitions of either Markham or the province but without the subway and other transit investments, the regional centre cannot develop as planned.

6.4 FUNDING THE BIG MOVE

At least as significant as Metrolinx's lack of authority is its lack of dedicated funding. The hope with the first wave of *Big Move* projects was that residents would see the progress made with new transit and then be more amenable when how to pay for the rest of the plan arose.

Metrolinx initially planned to release its investment strategy in 2011 but that date was pushed back until May 2013. The report suggested a combination of four tools that would provide the \$2-billion per year required to build *The Big Move*. But the government did not act on the

¹¹ It is worth noting all three of the major political parties made a Yonge extension part of their 2014 election platforms but none provided any concrete timeline for doing so. Obviously the re-election of the Liberals provides continuity of the pre-existing process, however.

Metrolinx suggestions. Instead Premier Kathleen Wynne convened a Transit Investment Advisory Panel to evaluate Metrolinx's tool package and make their own recommendations. But despite two sets of potential tool packages, the necessities of politics interfered and by March 2014, Premier Wynne signalled that her government would enact no increase to either the HST or the gas tax (Brennan, 2014), as recommended. Instead she proposed to fund \$15-billion worth of transit over 10 years in the GTA by drawing from existing taxes while leveraging debt financing and bonds. While the potential allotment of funds is encouraging, the methodology is clearly even less effectual than the two proposed sets of tools, and the funding only three-quarters of what *The Big Move* requires.

Missing from all these discussions, as demonstrated with Move2020, is a lack of federal involvement. The government in Ottawa continues to regard transit is outside its purview, though it has intermittently funded projects on a piecemeal basis, including the Spadina extension and Toronto's new Scarborough subway. Several interviewees noted the lack of federal presence as an ongoing issue one saying, Ottawa is "still not connecting economic activity to infrastructure investment and more broadly to city-building" (Former York Region Planner, 3/6/14). Levy is even more forthright in blaming the lack of federal involvement – Canada is the only G8 country with no federal transit funding or plan – on "an archaic government structure in which cities are treated as 'creatures of the province(s)' rather than as national economic engines" (Levy, 2013: 119).

7 THE FOUNDING, CREATION & CHANGING FACE OF MARKHAM

The modern settlement of Markham began in 1794, with the acquisition of 64,000 acres by William Berczy, a German who led several families north from Pennsylvania to settle land in what was then Upper Canada. Falling within today's Markham borders are a series of hamlets, villages and towns that developed with various degrees of autonomy over 200 years, before being brought under a single administrative umbrella in 1971. The largest among these were Markham Village, Unionville and Thornhill.

At the core of the region was the growing City of Toronto, incorporated in 1834. The city which

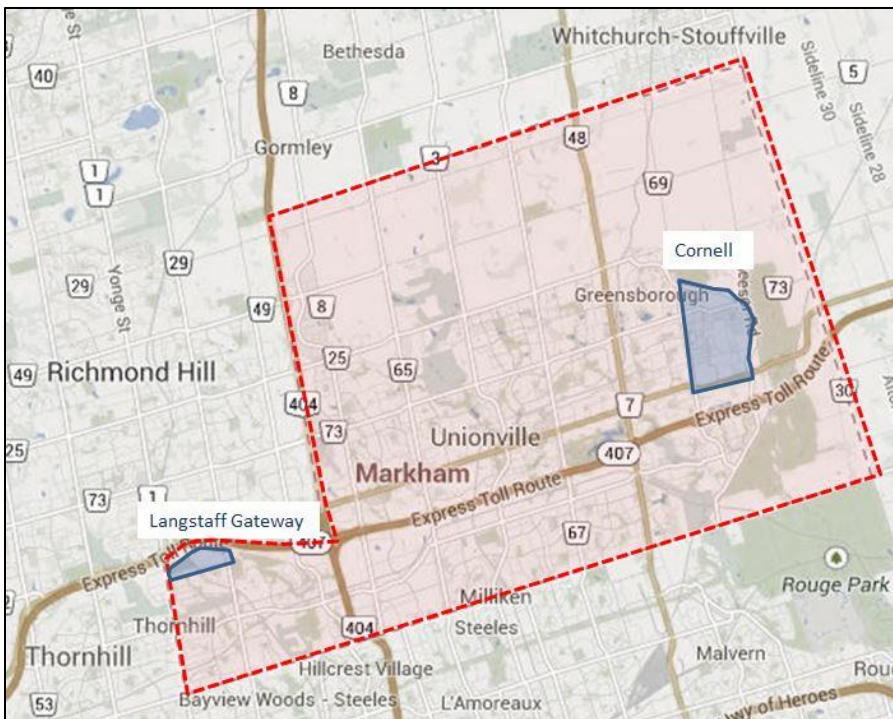


Figure 14 - Markham is located directly north of Toronto. The blue areas identify the two communities discussed in this paper. (Google)

grew from the shores of Lake Ontario was surrounded by several smaller boroughs and cities consolidated in “a bold and far-sighted move” under Metropolitan Toronto, in 1953 (Greater Toronto Task Force, 1996: 31). The

individual councils and mayors of Toronto, North York, Scarborough, East York, York and Etobicoke remained in place to manage local affairs (as did local school boards) but Metro

took charge of regional concerns like transit, sewage treatment, arterial roads and regional planning. The model was “one of North America’s most ambitious, innovative, and generally successful experiments in urban governance” (Levy, 2013: 257) and it was one the province would emulate – but with a crucial difference – in creating four regional municipalities around Metro Toronto, in 1971. After years of planning scaled to the region, “for the first time since the establishment of Metro, the metropolitan region was without an agency with the power to ensure planning consistency at the metropolitan scale” (Filion & McSpurren, 2007: 508). Metro was lauded for sustaining its central city and for its success, at least in comparison with other North American cities, in developing along transit lines and ensuring a mix of affordable and high-rise housing not just downtown but in its suburbs (Friskin, 1991: 272). Growth there was supported by the old city’s tax base and the suburbs were filled in, as the province had hoped, through metropolitan planning (Solomon, 2007: 64; Friskin 1991: 272), on modernist principles (Desfor et al, 2006: 133). Though the success was not complete, “Toronto was producing one of the densest, most vibrant, lived-in city centres on the continent” (Greenberg, 2011: 69).

The Regional Municipality of York (“York Region”) was among the new upper tier municipalities created surrounding Toronto. York Region, stretching from Toronto’s northern border 55 kilometres up to Lake Simcoe, today has a population of 1.1 million spread across its nearly-1,800 square kilometres. It contains nine lower-tier municipalities, each roughly comparable in terms of governance to the constituent municipalities that formed Metro. While each is responsible for local planning, streets, fire services etc., their planning must conform to regional policy and the region is in charge of arterial streets and the primary infrastructure. But despite the similarities in governance, the regions were not Metro:

“What worked so well in supporting Toronto’s immediate suburbs fell short in the suburbs outside Metro. The local communities were too poor to finance their regional services on the basis of pooled taxes alone...” (Solomon, 2007: 69).

The subsidization that had worked between Metro and its municipalities fell apart at the larger scale. Without an urban core (or cores) to sustain growth the young municipalities relied on development charges – levies on all new development to pay for infrastructure – to fill their coffers, no matter what concerns planners might have had about the form they were promoting (Ekers et al, 2012: 412). Growth thus became the *sin qua non* of these suburbs in which sprawl flourished at a far greater level than it did within the Metro borders. “These new suburbs were more segregated, generally excluding apartment structures and, most particularly, social housing” (Filion, 2001a: 95).

TABLE 1 – POPULATION GROWTH IN MARKHAM (Statistics Canada, 2001; 2006; 2011)

	2001	2006	2011
Population	208,615	261,573 (+25.4%)	301,709 (+15.3%)
Density per sq. km	981.9	1,230.5	1,419.3
Median Age	37.2	38.1	39.6
Married/ Common Law	105,350 (50.5% of population)	137,830 (53% of population)	155,450 (51.5% of population)
Houses – detached	N/A ¹²	67.3%	64.1%
Houses – row	N/A	11.1%	12.1%
Apartment over 5 stories	N/A	8.1%	10.2%

¹² Rather than built form, the 2001 census data looks at housing based on tenure; ownership versus rental. One may nonetheless derive a picture from the fact that 87.2% of Markham dwellings were owned in 2001 and fewer than 13% rented.

The 1978 provincial Parkway West Belt Plan designated a greenbelt around the region, about 5 kilometres north of the Toronto border, in the south end of York Region. The plan's stated goals were to define the boundaries of urban areas, link urban areas while improving

movement of people and goods, reserving land for "future flexibility" and providing a linked open-space system (Ontario, 1978). But as growth moved north it failed to serve as a substantial barrier and was gradually "battered into little more" (Sewell, 1993: 212) than a corridor that now

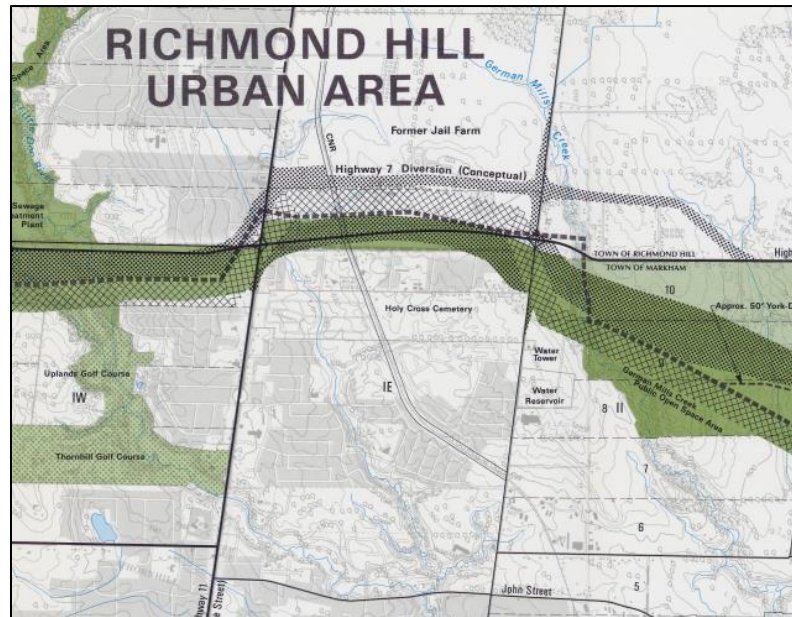


Figure 15 - The green parkway breaks slightly north in the centre of this map to wrap around Langstaff Gateway. The "Highway 7 diversion" shows the road's current alignment and the cross-hatched area the extant hydro corridor. (Ontario, 1978)

includes Highway 407 and hydro towers. The province's efforts to replicate the growth patterns that had worked well in Metro fell apart and "the government homogenized the Greater Toronto Area to make it more of a soup" (Solomon, 2007: 72) with reduced overall densities. The same ideas that had once relatively constrained growth evolved into a governance model that exacerbated sprawl (Desfor et al, 2006: 143).

Moreover, as the new suburban municipalities were created, border lines were sometimes arbitrarily drawn. While never an independent political entity, the village of Thornhill had grown along Yonge Street (also Toronto's main street, as it goes straight down to Lake Ontario) for 200 years. With a new municipal boundary drawn down the middle of Yonge, half

of Thornhill became a rump in the eastern corner of the (then) Town of Vaughan and the other half, a similar status in western Markham.¹³ Neither Vaughan nor Markham had a central core or other civic entity around which these disparate communities could rally. It was from these historic villages, amalgamated into new amorphous unions, that suburban growth spread, with each 1 ¼-square mile concession block as the typical unit of planning (Gordon & Tamminga, 2002: 324)¹⁴, swallowing up and blending historic distinctions.

Also significant for Markham in this period was the federal government's exploration of the need for a new airport east of Toronto, handling some of the increasing load from Pearson International Airport, on the city's west end. In 1972, more than 18,000 square acres of land was expropriated for the Pickering Airport, primarily in Durham and the Town of Pickering but also stretching into Markham and York Region. More than 40 years later, the land has remained largely in stasis, with agricultural land leased to farmers but in June 2013, the federal government announced the airport will open by 2027 and designated what lands will be required (Transport Canada, 2013) with a significant portion of the surplus going to the creation a new national park, Rouge Park. The province also retained lands along the Pickering lands' borders, part of which was released to Markham for the creation of what would become the community of Cornell in the 1990s. Of the creation of Markham and York Region one can say it is emblematic of Phelps *et al's* description of suburbs "constructed within a thin

¹³ Another reminder of the complex governance: the Yonge Street right-of-way is the purview of York Region. Therefore, Markham and Vaughan have to deal with the region if they want to make changes even as benign as streetscaping improvements, since the road is not theirs.

¹⁴ It is worth noting that Gordon and Tamminga cite only Unionville and Markham Village as Markham's historic communities, though Thornhill was founded the same year as Unionville and 30 years before Markham Village. Though it is in the west end of Markham, it is more centrally located in the region. This goes to show the extent to which perceptions of what constitutes "Markham" are subjective and nebulous, even 30 years after the town was created.

institutional setting with communities being incorporated and acquiring formal government structures some time after their initial development, straddling existing government jurisdictions, and eventually being woven into a more complex set of intergovernmental relations at the urban regional scale” (2010: 378-9).

7.1 EVOLVING GOVERNANCE IN THE GREATER TORONTO REGION

The fragmented governance of the region remains a longstanding, largely-unaddressed concern and Calthorpe could be speaking of the GTA when he writes, “The region’s political structure remains just as it was decades ago ... (but) it is nearly meaningless to think in old city-suburb terms” (Calthorpe, 2001: 28). The report of the Greater Toronto Task Force (1996), also known as “The Golden Report,” in reference to the force’s chairperson, Dr. Anne Golden, was arguably the closest the region came to addressing these issues. Commissioned under the New Democratic provincial government of the early 1990s, it reiterated the longstanding praises of the Metro model and argued that “embedded in these principles are some lessons worth reapplying” (Greater Toronto Task Force, 1996: 31). It found the existing legislation constrained municipalities and the local governments were “divided, uncoordinated and lack the collective sense of purpose needed to address critical, region-wide issues ... The artificiality of the current political boundaries renders them too large for some purpose, too small for others” (Greater Toronto Task Force, 1996: 33/167). The task force recommended the amalgamation of the four regions and Metro into a single government, while expanding the powers of local municipalities. In the report’s vision, there would also be an indirectly-elected

regional council with as many as 30 members. However, before it was published in 1996, the New Democrats were swept out of power in favour of the Mike Harris-led Progressive Conservatives who would spend from 1995 to 2003 implementing an explicitly neoliberal regime branded as the “Common Sense Revolution.” That government rescinded more progressive planning legislation (Desfor et al, 2006: 134), cut transit funding and amalgamated the existing Metro municipalities into a single City of Toronto over the objections of its residents and constituent governments in 1997-98. It is also significant that much of the new government’s support came from the suburban “905” regions around Toronto and that amalgamations of the two-tier systems were not repeated there, though one might have expected the same alleged concerns about duplication and waste to apply (Filion, 2001a: 96).

While the amalgamation of Toronto superficially addressed some of the duplication and other issues raised by The Golden Report, it ignored the larger issues raised by the task force about the needs for regional co-ordination of everything from transit to economic development. Indeed, many of the specific status quo aspects of Metro praised in the report (i.e. shared social costs, a commitment to public transit, provincial assistance) were undone by the Harris government in its first year, before the report was released. Instead, the legacy of the 1990s was an assignment of greater responsibility to municipalities without a corresponding increase in municipal powers and a single amalgamation that did nothing to ameliorate regional conflicts and competition, and arguably exacerbated them, particularly between the inner city and its suburbs (Desfor et al, 2006: 137; Thompson, 2013: 22-23).

7.2 THE GTA GROWS AND SPRAWLS

Growth came to Markham and the regional municipalities in the 1970s and without an equivalent to the Toronto Transit Commission or Metro binding the diffuse regions together, auto-centric development became the norm. Federal programs that subsidized rental housing construction ceased later in the decade so when rapid growth came to the regions, it was almost entirely in the form of single-family houses, without the pockets of high-rise and social housing that dotted Metro. Between 1986 and 1996, 74 per cent of all homes built in Markham

	Base Scenario (Expectation Without Growth Plan)				Region of York Proposed Allocation			
	Single & Semi	Row	Apt.	Total	Single & Semi	Row	Apt.	Total
1986–96	74%	3%	23%	100%	74%	3%	23%	100%
1996–06	59%	19%	22%	100%	59%	19%	22%	100%
2006–31	51%	19%	30%	100%	35%	19%	46%	100%

Figure 16 - The changing face of housing in Markham. (Hemson Consulting, 2009: 6)

rowhouse construction accelerated in the decade that followed and high-rise construction is on the increase but still, by the 2011 census nearly 70 per cent of all housing in Markham was single-family housing (Statistics Canada, 2011).

In the early 1990s, Markham decided to try something different. Writing in 2000, TND's great proponents described the town as "what may be the international epicentre of anti-sprawl activity," while also warning that "some of the town's best efforts are being contested by a clever and recalcitrant homebuilding cartel" (Duany et al, 2000: 200). As has been shown, there is a gap between the "metropolitan institutions on the one hand and functional territories on the other...Suburban governance thus is about accounting for both the

were detached or semi-detached homes (Hemson Consulting, 2009).

Rowhouse construction accelerated in the decade that followed and high-

converging and diverging patterns of peripheral development” (Ekers et al, 2012: 409). The market finds its way into this gap and when it comes to matters of capital influence on suburbanization, a key factor is the involvement of the development industry in the political process. In the GTA, this can be clearly seen in the involvement of industry corporations and individuals in municipal election campaigns. This is true, in Markham as much as anywhere else in the 905. Robert MacDermid’s study of the 2006 municipal elections in the GTA argues industry involvement is so extensive that it effectively acts like a political party, binding common interests together:

“The development industry is by far the most important financier of the majority of winning candidates’ campaigns in all municipalities with the exceptions of Toronto and Ajax. Given that real estate development is the prime purpose of municipal politics and property taxation its principal source of revenue, that is not surprising.” (MacDermid, 2009: 9)

While a councillor interviewed for this paper said she does not accept corporate donations (Markham Councillor B, 3/25/14), lest she be seen as beholden to them rather than citizens MacDermid found about 36% of all 2006 donations to Markham candidates were from corporations in 2006 and 21% of those from developers; less than some other 905 municipalities but above the GTA average (2009: p. 14/30).

7.3 MARKHAM CHANGES COURSE

Markham employed traditional suburban development through the 1970s and 1980s but reconsidered its approach under the auspices of planning commissioner Lorne McCool and

Tony Roman, the mayor from 1970 to 1984. Facing an urban expansion, McCool convinced council to pursue NU principles in approving new development.

“Markham in the 80s was very much following a suburban pattern of development ...What changed? In the early 90s it changed significantly. It wasn’t only Markham ... between the provincial policy of the day encouraging affordable housing and a more compact urban form and the fact that the lot prices were so rapidly escalating, there was a push on for more compact development.” (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14)

It was in this same period that Markham began establishing a reputation as a centre for high-tech businesses. IBM Canada moved its offices north from Toronto and, since the mid-1990s, has occupied a massive campus in the city’s south. Just to the north, Markham built a new civic



Figure 17 - As dense Markham Centre grows to the east, north of the highway, the Markham Civic Centre, in the upper left, is isolated from its surroundings by landscaping and parking lots. (Google)

Civic Centre designed by Arthur Erickson that opened in 1991, forming a hub alongside Markham Theatre and Unionville High School. The civic campus, surrounded by large parking lots and oriented towards them, remained suburban in design.

Markham then decided to develop the area around the civic centre as “Markham Centre,” a new downtown to unify the

growing city.¹⁵ The other significant move was the adoption of New Urbanist Traditional Neighbourhood Design as a new development standard. Eleven new secondary plans would

¹⁵ Unlike Langstaff (or Cornell), Markham Centre is designed to be a proper downtown for a city that has not had one through the first 40 years of its existence. Though located on the regional BRT line and designed with many sustainable features, it is not a TOD to nearly the same degree as Langstaff. Further, as a greenfield site, it does not share Langstaff’s unique constraints. Interestingly, Duany worked on the initial design of the centre and Calthorpe’s

pass in the mid-1990s (Gordon & Vipond, 2005), the most significant of which would be Cornell. All the other plans have since developed more as New Urbanist-hybrids (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14) with the same increased densities as Cornell and a greater mix of uses than conventional suburbs, but without a true mixed-use component.

7.4 MARKHAM: PLANNING IN THE NEW PARADIGM

Many interviewees made a point of mentioning that York Region and Markham were ahead of the planning changes enshrined in the new Ontario legislation. One described the 1994 York Region Official Plan as the “Rosetta Stone,” in its move to begin directing growth more towards existing centres and corridors (Former York Region Planner, 3/6/14). While the designation of four regional centres was a crucial move forward, it is noteworthy that in the 1994 OP, “Richmond Hill Centre” does not include Langstaff Gateway. The 2002 regional Transportation Master Plan marks a shift away from roads towards transit, eventually culminating in the implementation of Viva. Markham did not have to change its approach in any significant way with *Places to Grow*, the planner said and others agreed:

- “You could say that Markham was leading, the region caught up, the region leapt forward, the province caught up and now Markham is moving forward with Langstaff and we’re playing catch-up again.” (Former York Region Planner, 3/6/14)
- “A lot of what we’ve done, the Growth Plan basically mirrors or mimics it.” (Markham Planner, 3/25/13)

team updated the plans after their work in Langstaff. The first residential phases of the development, as well as some employment uses, are now open and it thus may be regarded as something of a halfway point – geographically, chronologically and conceptually – between the extremes of Cornell and Langstaff described herein and, as such, will not be discussed in detail here.

- “To give Markham credit, we were actually a bit ahead of *Places to Grow*. We started planning for Markham Centre in 1991.” (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14)

Under the current projections, York Region’s population is expected to climb from 2006’s 1 million to 1.79 million by 2041. Lower-tier projections only go to 2031 right now, and under those Markham’s population was

set to rise from 273,000 in 2006, to at least 421,600 by 2031.¹⁶

A recent study by Emporis (2014) found that Toronto was narrowly ahead of New York when it came to high-rise construction, but more notable was Markham’s presence on the list. With 12 high-rises

under construction, Markham was

tied with Burnaby, a Vancouver suburb, and not far behind Chicago, with its 14 towers, and Houston’s 18. More high-rise projects are making their way through the planning department already and looking at what is envisioned in the not-too-distant future for Markham Centre and Langstaff, it is fair to say Markham is among some very impressive company; two Canadian suburbs are producing as many high-rise buildings as American city centres.

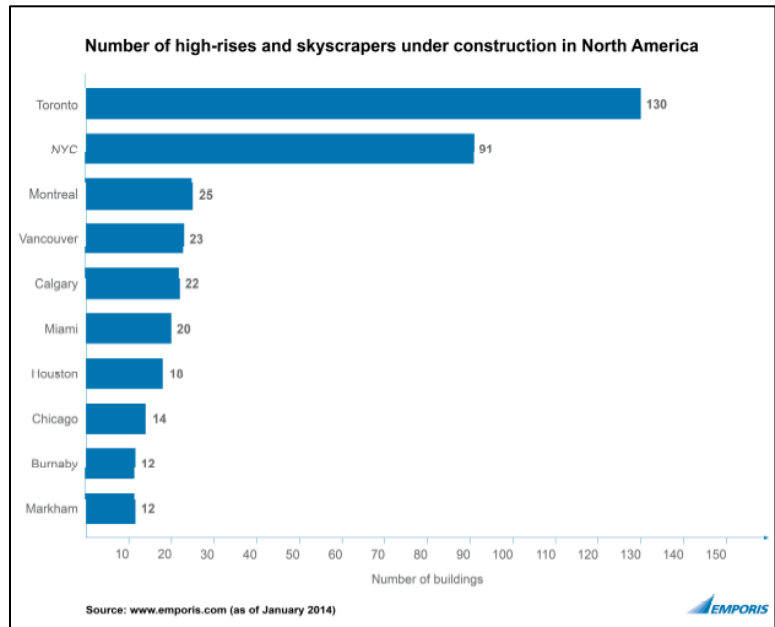


Figure 18 - Toronto and Markham are in impressive company when it comes to high-rise development. (Emporis, 2014)

¹⁶ Though lower-tier projections were not included in Amendment 2 to the *Growth Plan*, it is worth noting that York Region’s target was adjusted from 1.5 million in 2031 upwards by 90,000 people. It is reasonable to assume Markham and the other south-York Region municipalities will bear a significant share of the increase.

8. CORNELL: TND COMES TO MARKHAM

From Niagara-on-the-Lake to Oakville to Markham, there are many communities designed with New Urbanist principles spread out across the Greater Golden Horseshoe area. While Markham alone has instituted multiple NU-style secondary plans, Cornell remains the “major New Urbanist precedent in Ontario” (Gordon & Tamminga, 2002: 331). As a result, it has been well-studied since its inception and used as a barometer for the success of TND (Lehrer & Milgrom, 1996; Gordon & Vipond, 2005; Skaburskis, 2006; Grant & Perrott, 2011).

Cornell occupies the nearly-4 kilometre square bounded by Highway 7 to the south, 16th Avenue to the north, Ninth Line to the west and the Don Cousens Parkway to the east. There is no further development to the east, which is entirely agricultural or parkland, stretching into Durham Region. A traditional subdivision borders it to the west, eventually reaching historic Markham Village. The expropriation of primarily agricultural land by the federal government in 1973 for a future airport (i.e. The Pickering Airport) set the stage for development in eastern Markham. The provincial New Democratic Government moved, in the early 1990s, to divest itself of adjacent peripheral lands, releasing them to Markham for sustainable development and what a Markham planning official (3/28/14) described as an “affordable housing demonstration project.” The province’s involvement was crucial with a former regional planner (3/6/14) saying they provided risk mitigation for private developers wary of the experiment.

Then-planning commissioner Lorne McCool had already introduced New Urbanist ideas to council (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14) who were amenable to the ideas as they saw, through the 1980s, that the traditional suburban style of development was becoming less

tenable as lot prices rose and the province increasingly emphasized compact development. The town retained Duany-Plater-Zyberk (DPZ) to design the 1,250 acre community that would become known as Cornell. Though New Urbanism was a new concept for the region, an eight-day charette lead by Duany ended with a new plan for Cornell and a standing ovation from residents (Gordon & Vipond, 2005: 44). Duany's salesmanship was crucial to sealing the deal both for council and for the public who were wary of having dense "affordable" housing near their subdivisions but "From the minute Duany came on, he convinced council and the public that there were better ways. It became easy for council to endorse the Cornell plan because it had full public support" (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14).

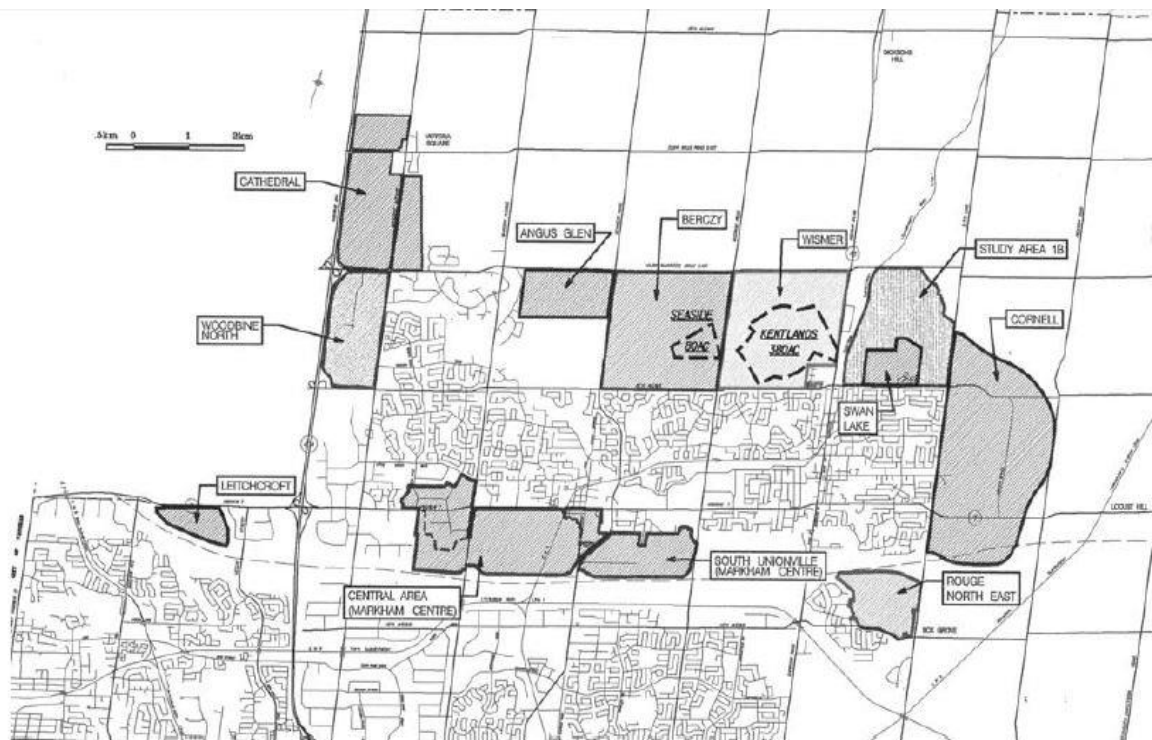


Figure 19 – Markham's Post-Duany secondary plans are primarily for peripheral development. Cornell, the largest, is on the far right and Langstaff, the secondary plan for which was not adopted until 2011, is not pictured but located just west of Leitchcroft, in the lower left. (Gordon & Vipond, 2005: 42)

The secondary plan for Cornell passed in 1995 and zoning was moving forward when the NDP were ousted in favour of the PCs. As part of their previously discussed neoliberal agenda, that government decided to sell the land (Gordon & Vipond, 2005) and Law Developments, a “powerful conventional developer” took over, meaning DPZ were not around to ensure its development adhered to the original plans as “a fairly pure application of the neighbourhood concept,” (Duany et al, 2000: 199-200).

A Langstaff developer, who is also building one of Markham’s TND communities, said his own development was a huge risk going in, partially because the laneways, added park space and other amenities required the provision of “one-third more of everything” (3/12/14). What he



Figure 20 - The difference between the conventional development in the west and the surrounding New Urbanist street grid may be easily observed. (Google)

realized as his development grew (and something he says Cornell’s initial developer missed) was that homeowners would pay a premium for just such features that created the feel of a better neighbourhood. Though his own development also

includes a golf course, he said the TND homes garner a premium of anywhere from \$200,000 to \$1 million over homes in neighbouring conventional neighbourhoods.

8.1 SITUATING CORNELL

Cornell's location is significant, as it was a new, peripheral development on Markham's eastern border. The land on the Pickering/Durham Region side of the border remains undeveloped and is now part of the Rouge National Urban Park. A conventional subdivision is across Ninth Line, to Cornell's west. Highway 7, Markham's main east-west route and home to its Viva Bus Rapid Transit system lies to the south. From the subdivision's central east/west road (Cornell Park Road) down to the transit line is just over 1 kilometre, or about a 15 minute walk. Most of



Figure 21 - Duany's master plan for Cornell shows the still-barely-developed commercial district in red and a preponderance of park space throughout. Note the agricultural and park lands to the east. (Urban Strategies, 2012: 8)

Cornell's development to date has been to the north and east, meaning Ninth Line's streetscape is largely vacant, aside from Markham Stouffville Hospital. The hospital has been present since 1990 and recently expanded but it remains largely isolated; the community cannot be described as transit-oriented.

There were seven neighbourhood zones in Duany's initial Cornell plan and only four (by nearly 10 builders) are substantially built today: Cornell Village, Cornell Rouge,

Grand and Upper Cornell. When fully developed, Cornell will eventually stretch down to the transit terminal and Highway 7 with a new (and arguably its most urban) neighbourhood,

Cornell Centre (Urban Strategies, 2012). While Cornell will include more than 10,000 homes at full build-out, many studies (including the CMCH report discussed in the following pages) have focused primarily, if not entirely, on the Cornell Village neighbourhood, a 1-kilometre square with nearly 1,900 homes. There have been longstanding plans to build a Viva transit terminal in Cornell Centre and York Region decided to locate the terminal on Highway 7, between Ninth Line and Don Cousens Parkway, a kilometre away from the existing community. Construction is finally expected to begin in 2014 though it had been planned to open as early as 2005 (Gordon & Vipond, 2005: 45). However, a Markham planning official said (3/28/14) that it would be some time before that area would develop as envisioned. Developers are saying there is no demand for small retail at-grade or apartments in the area, nor any demand for transit, he said. Over the years, other developers have built conventional retail that is drawing people from the area, creating challenges for the envisioned Main Street on Bur Oak and imminent commercial development on Highway 7 will emulate the style of the rest of Cornell, but be conventional in design, he said. The hospital has also yet to develop a peripheral hub of related uses and designated employment lands in the area are as much as a decade from developing, he said. The situation was also noted by Councillor A (3/10/14), who said "The most important thing about New Urbanism should be the calculation of the distance from where you're building these houses and rapid transit.... Cornell is further away from rapid transit ... than any other community we had going." Indeed, of all the NU communities in Fig. 23, only two (Leitchcroft and Markham Centre) are located directly on the Highway 7 corridor; the rest are all peripheral. Interviewees described Cornell as a mixed success, with an attractive residential core but lacking the mixed-use component or transit use that would make it a proper NU community:

- “I’m a huge fan of Cornell but ultimately I don’t think it’s been a huge success ... Cornell is a success other than that we underestimated the car (and) it’s importance in suburbia.” (Markham Councillor A, 3/10/14)
- “It seemed like a fairly typical exurban, New Urbanist project...once you got into the residential neighbourhoods they were really pretty nice places with good design but ...my memory is that a lot of the corner store, it was really trying to do the corner store retail thing and I remember as we were driving around thinking that it was really struggling in that department ... One thing I was really stuck by though was the amount of live/work product that seemed to really be working.” (Calthorpe Planner, 3/20/14)
- “For the most part the road and block patterns have been followed, the 100% lane-based continues to be followed so I would say Cornell has been a tremendous success. The residents love it ... (the commercial sector) is not perfect by any means but it’s an option for small businesses and it is real, it’s walk-to for the residents. It’s not exactly thriving.” (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14)

8.2 SUCCESSES AND FAILURES OF TND IN MARKHAM

Research to date substantiates this assessment, showing Cornell has produced a denser, more attractive form of suburban development but, by virtue of its relatively remote location, limited impacts in terms of reducing vehicular traffic and promoting a markedly different lifestyle. To paraphrase Lehrer and Milgrom (1996), it may well be a new, even improved, form of *suburbanism* but shows few indicators of being an *urban* community. “There is,” in other words, “little urbanity in New Urbanism,” (Southworth, 1997: 43), or at least in TND.

The population of Cornell has grown from virtually nil to nearly 10,000 in just over a decade. One may see its population is younger and its families larger than the rest of the city, on average and that while it lacks high-rise development (and has not much more mid-rise development), its ground-related housing is much denser than what is typical.

TABLE 1 – GROWTH IN MARKHAM AND CORNELL (Statistics Canada: 2006; 2011)¹⁷

	Markham (2011)	Cornell (2011)
Population	301,709	9,921
Pop density/km ²	1,419.3	1285.1 ¹⁸
Median age	39.6	36.4/33.2 ¹⁹
Married Couples + common law	155,450 (51.5% growth since 2006)	4,835 (48.7% growth since 2006)
TOTAL number of households	90,535	2,930
Households with children	39,690 (44%)	1,410 (48%)
TOTAL private dwellings	90,530	2930
-detached	58,045 (64%)	1250 (43%)
-row	10,935 (12%)	965 (33%)
-apartment	7,225 (8%)	170 (6%)

Rather than beginning from a central core, development has largely proceeded west, contiguous with the existing development. The initial mixed-use commercial centre, The Mews is visually attractive but commercially unsuccessful (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14). The retail strip along Bur Oak Avenue is designed as a central spine, but still largely on the fringe.

¹⁷ This table combines data from the two census tracts that comprise Cornell. CT data was not available for 2001 and due to rapid population growth in the area, the CTs were redrawn in 2006 and 2011, making direct comparisons impossible. In 2006, for example, Cornell's eastern tract was entirely undeveloped and the census shows a population of 34. In 2011, it was 2,628.

¹⁸ The apparently low density numbers in Cornell can be attributed to the disparity between the undeveloped eastern half and the nearly developed western tract. In the latter, the density was 2,732.9, nearly twice Markham's average. The still developing eastern tract, with a 2011 density of only 526.3, will soon show similar intensity.

¹⁹ The two numbers reference the east and west CTs that comprise Cornell.

Though the community's own designers assert, "It is near impossible to imagine *community* independent of the town square or the local pub," (Duany et al, 2000: 60) there is, 15 years after its initial development, no pub or drinking establishment in Cornell. A Markham councillor told Grant (2011: 186) that The Mews failed to achieve its ends because "people do



Figure 22 - The mixed-use Mews in Cornell Village was designed with a cafe and other retail services in mind but now houses professional offices at grade, including two obstetricians on this block.

what they do in suburbia. They got in their cars. Instead of going to the local store and pub they went to the bigger stores and to Main Street Markham where there are nicer pubs." A dry cleaner was among the businesses to fail and the same fate befell the local coffee shop, so often cited as a bellwether of a walkable neighbourhood. Indeed, Grant points out it was explicitly used in developer ads for Cornell (2011: 191) and it is cited by Gordon and Vipond as a prime attraction of

the new community (2005: 47). Today there is a small coffee shop in the back of the Mews (chain) convenience store but proper cafes require a car trip. Having a viable retail sector in a New Urbanist development "may just be a time lag rather than an insoluble problem," (Ellis, 2002: 269) but if so, it is clearly a substantial time lag. As a result of the struggles in achieving the critical mass required to sustain a proper retail/office town centre, residents must remain auto-oriented, despite the internal efforts to encourage other modes (Southworth, 1997: 39).

Proper phasing is a key to implementing retail uses since a critical mass of local consumers is required to sustain new businesses; Markham planners and staff acknowledge this was a factor in developing Cornell's retail sector (Grant & Perrott, 2011: 180, 186).

Florida's Celebration was able to ameliorate this, implementing retail in its initial phases, with the deep pockets of its owners, the Walt Disney Company subsidizing new retailers. Cornell may



Figure 23 - A typical residential street in Cornell shows the small setbacks and front porches that characterize its design.

achieve a more viable retail sector at full build-out but it has not yet rebounded from the failure of its first-wave businesses and there is little hope Cornell Centre will do better, at least in the short term.

A 2010 study by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation aimed to ascertain how "successful" New Urbanist communities were in achieving their ends, especially in relation to their traditional suburban counterparts. Three such community pairs were studied, including Cornell, which was compared to Woodbine North. Despite the criticisms that have been lobbed at Cornell, the study found concrete and measurable improvements, including:

- A substantial difference in built form with only 36 per cent of homes in Cornell single-detached houses. Woodbine North, by comparison, was 64 per cent single-detached.
- The gross density in Cornell was only slightly higher than Woodbine North but there was noticeably more public/green space, and 93 per cent of Cornell streets had sidewalks, whereas less than one-fifth of Woodbine North streets did.



Existing Built Form in Cornell:

1. Cornell's laneways provide liminal spaces for both cars and for children to play.
2. Mail boxes are housed in a distinctive gazebo at the end of one of Cornell's many parks.
3. Textbook Duany: A (new) clock tower terminates a view in Grand Cornell.

(Author photos)

- New Urbanist community respondents said they walked and biked much more than their conventional counterparts and they were also much more satisfied with the design and quality of their neighbourhoods.
- New Urbanist residents were 24 per cent less likely to own more than one car and, moreover, drove less than they had in their prior neighbourhood.

The conclusions include that, “ it is the design of the [New Urbanist neighbourhoods] that are responsible for the higher walking and modal shares ... rather than a self-selection bias among residents currently living in the [neighbourhoods]” (CMHC, 2010: 10). Whether the built form substantially influences behaviour may well be a subject for further research but it at least shows that more active transportation methods can be encouraged *within the community*, a laudable achievement, if only at the neighbourhood scale.

8.2 INTERVIEWS - LIVING IN CORNELL

Echoing Gans’s discovery that suburbanites largely did not share the qualities attributed to them by experts, scholars have raised questions about the degree to which Cornell and other NU communities have achieved their ideals and while there is evidence New Urbanist residents don’t necessarily share the same concerns (Fisher & Tomalty, 2010; Ross, 1999), Cornell residents seem very aware of where their community has succeeded and failed. Meetings with interviewees took place in two focus group settings; with Residents A through D on April 23, 2014 and Residents E through H on May 6, 2014.

The aesthetic attractiveness of the neighbourhood and its relative affordability were what attracted residents, rather than its NU ethos, per se. “I loved it. I thought it had the little Victoria replica charm, everybody had a big front porch, it just had everything,” one said

(Resident D, 2014). Several took pride in its unique character with one saying “Cornell has always been a community within a community, even as they noted their friends described it as “the *Stepford Wives* meets *Pleasantville*” (Resident D, 2014). They gave similar descriptions of their first impressions, taking note of how many people with children seemed to be walking on the streets and, in particular, the preponderance of parks; nearly 15 in total (Resident B, 2014). While one (Resident D, 2014) said she can take her children to several different parks before lunch another (Resident B, 2014) said he has at least four within an easy walk and that was a

key factor for him, having grown up in a home that fronted onto parkland. All felt it was worth trading off a large backyard, with one resident (D, 2014) who is soon moving out of Cornell saying her real estate agent discouraged her from highlighting her relatively



Figure 24 - The streetscape on Bur Oak Road shows a mixture of professional offices with apartments above, and ground floor apartments that look like vacant storefronts without signage. (Author photo)

large yard in the old part of the development since many newcomers have no desire to maintain a lawn.

Residents described an active community, with several Internet social groups and described how community events seem to show Cornell at its best:

Resident G: “When an ambulance shows up on this street, you get an entire neighbourhood cooking meals for that family for two weeks”

Resident E: “I didn’t know I was falling into that sort of community but that’s made me stay.”

They repeatedly noted how the community comes alive during Christmas, the annual Cornell Garage Sale and especially Halloween. This latter holiday, in particular, attracts residents from other neighbourhoods (Resident F said he has seen buses full of visitors arrive to partake) with Cornell's close houses and a well-connected street grid perfectly suited to trick-or-treating.

The lack of success in the retail sector was well-observed by residents, especially those lured to the community by its promise of a mixed-use centre:

- "They were selling it as pods with a [hub] over here and a [hub] over there and it seems that goal kind of got sold out a little bit in the way of development." (Resident H, 2014)
- "Before we moved in we went, walked around, sat in the park, had a cup of coffee and then the first couple of months when we lived here there was live music and that place was licensed for a shot while so you'd go and have a drink, listen to music and have dessert but there weren't enough houses in the development to sustain it....and that was the perfect space because now it's a travel shots clinic." (Resident D, 2014)

This touched off a discussion of other business that failed: a bank, a grocer, a jewellery store, a pet shop, a shoe store. Several residents (A & D, 2014) described the brief hope that arose when an empty commercial business was "staged" by real estate agents as a faux café, complete with patio seating. Ultimately, it became a dentist office. A business owner who lives in one of the live-work units on Bur Oak Drive (Resident A, 2014) was frustrated at the lack of a bank and a Canada Post outlet. She offered several insights into what has not worked in this area, noting that she is one of three chiropractors on the same street and that too few units were zoned for food service or retail use. Moreover, the live/work units were developed so owners could choose how to use them several chose to use the ground floor as an apartment. The result is that the streetscape is lined by professional offices and apartments that present as empty storefronts. Long-time residents observed that the retail opened too early, when there

was inadequate residential to support it, something accentuated by its location within the community. City zoning laws apparently prevented business owners from putting up signage on the main street, forcing an impossible degree of self-sufficiency Resident A said even today she finds people who come in saying they had no idea the Bur Oak strip was there. There is a sense that either by virtue of its uniqueness and/or its location, Cornell is not woven into the surrounding fabric.

The lack of destinations was a key theme: "I go for my physio, my massage and my nails but there's no other services to keep me there and then walking down the street I'm, like, what am I looking at? ... You want to go somewhere; you don't want to just walk aimlessly" (Resident C, 2014). One resident noted that her family walks often go to the local gas station, the best convenience store in the area and that when she was on maternity leave the only place to go for a coffee was the hospital cafeteria (Resident D, 2014). There appear to be literally only two

convenience stores in which food can be obtained with no bakery, sandwich shop or anything else within Cornell. "What neighbourhood doesn't have a single pizza shop," the same resident asked. "How could you expect people to walk to anything when you literally can't get anything?" On the other hand,

professional services appear to be disproportionately represented, particularly including nail salons, obstetricians and yoga studios. If Cornell has failed in this regard, New Urbanists can at



Figure 25 - Cornell's laneways make for more attractive streets but the peeling paint and lack of snow plowing demonstrate they can also become forgotten or neglected spaces. (Author photo)

least take heart from the notion that residents do want a walkable neighbourhood and would prefer to leave their cars at home. Interviewees cited central Toronto neighbourhoods like the Beach and Junction as self-sufficient, walkable urban spaces, even while acknowledging it was likely too late to achieve something similar in Cornell:

“In a perfect world, I’d like to walk to a roadhouse. I’d like to go to dinner with my husband, get a babysitter and both of us walk there, walk home. I’d like to walk to a local butcher and get fresh meat or a vegetable stand. That’s ideal. That was my dream, and not all that happened.” (Resident G, 2014)

Cornell’s laneways presented an interesting set of contradictions. Residents were happy to have them as an out of-the-way place to park cars and as for an off-street places for kids to play but they also, paradoxically, drew attention away from the street front. Suburbanites who usually meet out front as they go to their cars or shovel the driveway, now meet in a less hospitable environment. As the community has aged, one resident (Resident D, 2014) said, they have become like a “personal junkyard,” and more like urban alleys, for some residents.

Cars are also a factor in parking, another tricky paradox of Cornell. A business owner (Resident A, 2014) pointed out that while a few anchor stores might stimulate retail development, there isn’t enough parking to sustain them given the dearth of spots on the street. Similarly, the Canadian winter snow and ice eat up parking spots and several noted there was nowhere for visitors to park their cars when they came to visit. The neighbourhood might have been designed for pedestrians, but as long as there are so many cars its inability to accommodate them causes issues. When one interviewee (Resident G, 2014) commented on the trouble dropping off children in cars at the local school, another (Resident H, 2014) drily responded, “It’s a *walking* community.” Finally, cars also reared their heads when it came to commuting.

Aside from Resident A, who owns a live/work unit, the others described long commutes and the necessity of owning two cars. While they complained about the traffic around their nascent neighbourhood, two residents shared sentiments about the value of home:

- “It’s the price you pay for living out here, that’s how I see it.” (Resident C, 2014)
- “We always said we felt happier coming home to our cute little neighbourhood that I could handle the horrible commute.” (Resident D, 2014)

The rush-hour-only GO transit was cited for its inflexibility and unreliability and Residents A, B, C and D all said they had never taken York Region Transit nor had any inclination to do so. The only people with kind words about transit were Resident H, who said the shuttle to the local GO station was good, and Resident G, whose elderly father used the local buses to run errands.

There was a clear sense from residents that the community is evolving as it ages and not necessarily for the better. There was a sense that even if the New Urbanism and its sense of community were factors at first, they seem to be less significant now:

Resident C: “Every community’s got its own thing. We’ve got a back lane, that’s our thing. We’ve got a hospital nearby...

Resident D: “...we’ve got gingerbread on our houses...”

Resident C: “...it’s just a different looking community....”

Resident D: “...but I don’t know it goes so much beyond the look. I think the original people who bought, bought into the New Urbanism but the people who are coming now don’t even know what that is. That’s not why people are coming to Cornell; they’re coming because it’s the last affordable piece of land.”

Resident A said fewer than one-third of live/work units are actually owned and operated by those who live there. “Some people are able to own there, live there, work there. Some people just bought it as an investment....they never come and cut the grass; they don’t take care of it. You can tell there’s just no pride.” And yet, perhaps because of the affordability amidst Markham’s rising house prices, they noted the resale market remains very hot and new units –

even dense, stacked townhomes – sell very quickly.²⁰ Some old suburban attitudes also remained prevalent with more than one interviewee expressing concern about the taller buildings proposed for Cornell Centre and its potential effects on the existing neighbourhood:

- “There was a plan to put a...co-op, low-cost housing, subsidized....That was met with, you can imagine, people here were terrified of what that was going to do to their property values. Not only are you increasing density, it’s something that could potentially lower your value.” (Resident D, 2014)
- “I personally am not a fan of [rental apartments] only because I have small children and statistics say if you live in an area where you have a lot of rentals, a lot of strangers, there’s more incidents or problems with kids...I’m not as worried about condos; seems like more of an investment in the community.” (Resident G, 2014)

Resident G acknowledged the need for builders to adopt to the changing demographics of the neighbourhood as it ages but it still serves as a reminder, that despite its positive attributes and aims, Cornell residents are very much suburban in their lifestyle and regard their community as a suburb, even if a suburb superior to older forms in certain ways.

²⁰ A late-April 2014 survey of the Realtor.ca website showed 44 resale listings for sale in Cornell at an average price of \$614,701. In March 2014, the average Markham home sold for \$695,988 (TREB 2014), indicating Cornell’s prices are below the city’s average, but not significantly so.

9 LANGSTAFF GATEWAY: AN URBAN VISION IN SUBURBIA

Whether Langstaff Gateway achieves its ambitious ends or half-achieves them, like Cornell, remains to be seen as no shovels have yet gone in the ground. As of mid-2014, it is an



Figure 26 - Calthorpe's massing model for Langstaff Gateway, looking east. The intersection of Yonge Street and Highway 407 can be seen at the bottom left. (Markham, 2009)

ambitious plan with an uncertain future. What seems like an isolated *terra incognita* “enjoys an unprecedented level of planned and existing transit service, a level unique perhaps to non-downtown North American urban areas.” As a result, Markham’s plans for Langstaff Gateway are not merely to create a New Urbanist neighbourhood, nor a TOD that simply meets provincial targets but

rather a community that will: “Demonstrate, to all of North America and beyond, that combining targeted residential densities with integrated transit infrastructure, in a mixed-use state-of-the-art ecologically designed community, will lead to dramatic improvements in sustainability” Markham, 2009: 6). In short, Markham is trying, once again, to build a kind of suburban community that has not been built before.

9.1 LOCATING LANGSTAFF

Geographically, Langstaff has virtually nothing in common with Cornell. Whereas Cornell is a 1,200-acre, peripheral greenfield development abutting a natural corridor, Langstaff Gateway



Figure 27 - This map combines the Richmond Hill and Markham plans for the urban growth centre, its boundary delineated in red. The planned subway route is in light blue and the GO rail line in green. Yonge Street runs along the left edge and Highways 7 and 407 cut east-west across the middle. (York Region, 2011)

is merely 116 acres, an isolated island amid a fast-urbanizing region. For all its transit-intensity, “The Langstaff Study Area is surrounded by edges and barriers that...serve to isolate the site from neighbouring communities” (Markham 2009: 20). Yonge Street, its western border, has been the region’s main road since being driven

north from Lake Ontario by John Graves Simcoe in the 1790s. Highway 7 stretches east from Sarnia to Ottawa but sections were downloaded to municipalities by the province in the 1990s and York Region’s is actually called Regional Road 7. Viva’s first BRT lanes opened along this corridor in 2013 and a Canadian National Railways (CNR) corridor, most crucially used by the GO commuter service, bisects the site. Highway 7 also serves as a municipal border between

the City of Markham to the south and the Town of Richmond Hill to the north and the City of Vaughan lies on the west side of Yonge Street. Despite this centrality, the intersection has not always been a busy one. From 1913 to 1968 its northeast corner housed the Langstaff Jail Farm, a Toronto correctional facility. In an ironic inversion of suburban ideals, criminals from the city were sent up to the farm do to agricultural work instead of festering in the city's aging Don Jail. Toronto owned the land in Richmond Hill, and sold it for \$75 million in 1982 to a private developer who then flipped the land, earning a large profit (Lorinc, 2010).

Infrastructure would also play a crucial part in isolating the Langstaff site. The Yonge-Highway 7 intersection was substantially altered in the 1990s with the construction of the Highway 407 toll road. In addition to new ramps and bridges for that structure, Highway 7 itself was taken from at-grade road to above-grade, with its own ramps. Highway 407 was driven through a long-preserved greenway, once envisioned as a growth boundary for Toronto (Ontario, 1978). The Parkway Belt West Plan prevented the development of nearby land until the highway alignment was determined in the early 1990s. It was as a result of this that the centrally-located but then-undeveloped lands in Richmond Hill Centre were opened to development. In addition to the highway, a corridor of hydro towers stretches across the region; the combination of the two highways and the corridor sever the Markham and Richmond Hill halves of the centre. To Langstaff's south, stretching across the entire concession block, is a cemetery owned by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto. On all four sides, the site is blocked off. What is left of Langstaff Road East is a single, winding, 2.4-km stretch from Yonge Street to Bayview Avenue. As a result, and particularly since the only road provides no external connections, Langstaff has remained apart from its surroundings. Its interior is filled primarily

with light industrial businesses, selling patio stones or offering auto repair. There are a few scattered houses (presumably home to those who work there) and nothing taller than two stories, save for a cell tower. A parking lot for the GO station is the only public facility and the CNR right-of-way allows for pedestrian access beneath the highways, via the GO platform.

Beyond the hydro corridor and cemetery, mature suburban neighbourhoods flank Langstaff to the south and southwest. A strip of big-box retail uses occupy the Richmond Hill lands to the immediate north but just beyond are condominium towers and denser, quasi-New Urbanist housing in the Bayview Glen neighbourhood. Its internal road network represents “a

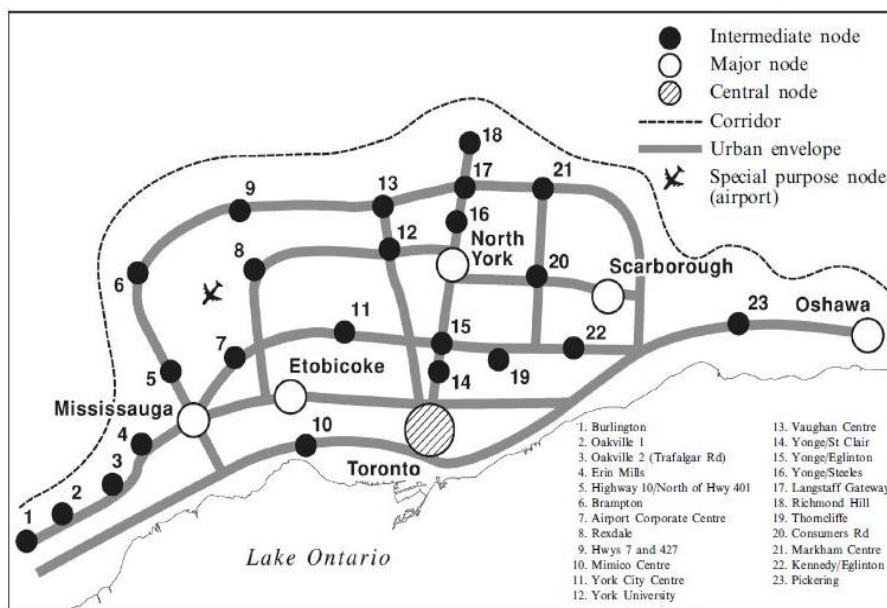


Figure 28 – This 1991 map (OGTA) identifies Langstaff (17) and Richmond Hill Centre (18) as regional nodes, as well as the municipal border at Yonge & Steeles (16).

compromise between a prewar grid and postwar curvilinear models”

(Taylor & Van Nostrand, 2008: A-31) and along with its mix of housing

types, it can be seen as a step towards a proper transit-oriented regional

centre. When the

planning for Bayview Glen took place in the 1990s there was no thought of integrating it with the isolated Markham lands to the south, nor was there any sense the centre was less than whole without them (Former York Region Planner, 3/6/14).

The Richmond Hill Centre/Langstaff area was first identified as a potential node in the report, *Growing Together* (OGTA, 1991), and its successor, *GTA 2021* (OGTA, 1992).²¹ Those working group reports submitted to the province, envision well-established urban nodes that “are largely self-supporting in employment, housing and social, educational and health services,” each with a downtown core established along a transit line (OGTA, 1992: 28). However, the two nodes are listed separately on the schematic map, their precise definitions unclear, and for two decades Langstaff Gateway would remain firmly below the radar. As previously mentioned, York Region’s 1994 OP would only designate “Richmond Hill Centre” as a node, and the accompanying map is ambiguous about its borders.

9.2 REIMAGINING LANGSTAFF

When the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* was unveiled, Langstaff Gateway/Richmond Hill Centre was one of the 25 designated growth nodes; the only one split between two municipalities. Even so, York Region was eyeing the site for a bus maintenance facility and it wasn’t until 2007 that Markham convinced the region to look elsewhere and make better use of Langstaff as a TOD. In the intervening years, a consortium of developers assembled all the land on the site with one primary owner, Condor Properties²² owning all the

²¹ It is worth noting that while the 1991 report estimates the GTA’s population will hit 6 million by 2021, this number was already surpassed by 2011. The current Growth Plan estimate is for 7.8 million people in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area by 2021 and 8.6 million by 2031.

²² The development industry in the GTA can be convoluted, with many corporations having subsidiaries, affiliates and even shell corporations that are created, for liability reasons, for a single subdivision; keeping track of how they are related can be a challenge. Condor’s vice-president, for example is Romeo DeGasperi who also serves as a co-CEO of Con-Drain Ltd. That company, founded by Alfredo DeGasperi, is one of the biggest providers of

lands west of the CNR tracks and Angus Glen (also developers of the largest NU community in Markham after Cornell), the eastern lands. Calthorpe Associates won the town's request for proposals and, as Duany had 15 years earlier, proceeded to exceed expectations. Despite the future uncertainties—and the fact that all the infrastructure was converging in the Richmond Hill half of the centre—Calthorpe's team felt "the opportunities afforded by the Langstaff site prevail over apparent adversities" and that it could be not an important site just for Markham and the region, but globally (Markham, 2009: 30).



Figure 29 - The Langstaff plan with its east-west linear park system, two subway stops (orange boxes) and rail line bisecting the site. Note the cemetery to the south and parking-friendly big box stores, across two highways and a hydro corridor, to the north. The highest densities (orange blocks) are to the west and in the centre and office uses (purple) provide a buffer along the busy Highway 407. (Markham, 2009)

infrastructure (i.e. roads, sewers and water mains) in the GTA and Canada. In addition to Condor, its development subsidiaries include Countrywide Homes and Metrus. All are very active in Markham and York Region and Metrus is a substantial landowner in the Town of Richmond Hill, including all the lands in the Richmond Hill Centre mobility hub. Thus, while Condor and Metrus are legally separate corporations, Con-Drain is heavily involved in the development of the larger UGC and can maintain traditional "big box" retail in the Richmond Hill Centre until the TOD lands in Markham kick-start redevelopment.

The UGC designation and Toronto's long history of building high-rise in its suburban areas convinced Calthorpe (4/7/14) that high-rise was the natural path to follow for Langstaff. The main challenge was creating connections between the isolated site and its surroundings. But despite its apparent isolation, it was inherently part of the adjacent Thornhill and Richmond Hill communities and its location made development inevitable:

"You can't get a better location. With the shifting nature of Toronto, if you take a look at the aerial map of the Golden Horseshoe or the GTA, that's smack dab in the middle. It's got access to downtown, to the airport, to the northern region, to the eastern region..." (Langstaff Landowner, 4/12/14)

The final plan for Langstaff envisions a unique, 21st-Century community housing 32,000 residents and 16,000 jobs.²³ The highest densities — with towers as high as 50 storeys permitted — are designated for the site's west end, adjacent to the Langstaff-Longbridge subway stop, and in the site's centre, close to the GO station and the mobility hub, located in the Richmond Hill half of the centre. Because the subway terminus and other infrastructure is located in the north half, Calthorpe envisioned a "transit concourse" that will allow pedestrians to transfer between the two halves and a circulator system to bring Langstaff residents into the mobility hub itself. In the short term, this would likely be a bus but Calthorpe proposed a cutting-edge personal rapid transit (PRT) system as a long-term solution.²⁴ The community is laid out with a linear park system binding it together from the east to the west, opening up into larger park zones at the east and west, along with a central park area. The urban structure will ramp up and over the rail tracks that now bisect the site. Commercial offices and a potential

²³ Richmond Hill's half of the centre targets a further 16,000 residents and 16,000 jobs and the town took issue with both Markham's density ambitions and its straying from a 1:1 job ratio in Langstaff (York Region, 2011).

²⁴ PRT is a new technology still being rolled out but in use at several locations, including Heathrow Airport. It works effectively like an on-demand automated car that can take a few occupants between points on a track, in its own right-of-way.



**Existing built form in
Langstaff Gateway:**

1. Residential bungalow
2. Typical low-rise industrial on Langstaff Road.
3. Stone storage yard and cell tower, looking east from near the site's centre.



(Author photos)



Pictures depict (clockwise):

1. Entrance from Yonge St.
2. GO Station, looking north
3. Langstaff Road, looking west
4. Entire north-south length, as seen from Ruggles Ave.
5. Langstaff Road, curving along the base of Hwy. 407

(Author photos)

district energy plant²⁵ would be located along Highway 407. Despite the three points where density is most concentrated, most of the streetscape is envisioned as something more Parisian, with mid-rise development and ground-floor retail throughout. In addition to the futuristic PRT and district energy (already in use in Markham Centre) other cutting-edge technology envisioned includes an envac garbage system that will keep garbage trucks off the narrow roads by using underground pneumatic tubes that transport garbage and recycling materials to a central depot. "Once you realize you've been vaulted up into this category of density all kinds of things become logical, viable options," a Calthorpe planner (3/20/14) said. Calthorpe (4/7/14) similarly said "The higher the density the better on every level."

Because it is so contingent on future transit, Langstaff is governed by a complex phasing regime. The first third of its 5,000 housing units are already allocated but the next 5,000 may only proceed with the announcement of full funding for the subway and the final 5,000 when all the planned transit infrastructure is built. In addition to these benchmarks, modal share targets must be achieved before the next phase can proceed. At full build-out, Langstaff is designed so only 35 per cent of trips out of the area are by car, comparable to the modal share seen in downtown Toronto (Markham, 2009). While suburban condominiums often come with free and excessive parking, Langstaff has strong constraints on how many spots are permitted, with one parcel, for example, allowing for up to 920 residential units but no more than 420 parking spots (Markham, 2009: 114); these downtown-type ratios can be seen throughout the

²⁵ District energy is a local-scale system of heating and cooling that also converts surplus heat into electricity that can sustain a neighbourhood and feed back into the larger grid. Markham District Energy provides this service both to Markham Centre and the Cornell Centre district, including Markham Stouffville Hospital.

development. The concentration of transit along the west side means density is also concentrated there but that asymmetry helped foster a greater diversity of uses with “a bustling urban centre in one area and quieter more residential blocks in another,” (Calthorpe, 4/7/14). The parking maximums are an indicator of the crucial paradigm shift Calthorpe sought to introduce by discouraging driving. Whereas planning has long been about the constraints of the road system, he decided to flip that on its head, force the issue and look entirely at the capacity of the transit systems. “You could go down to a very low density and still overload (Bayview and Yonge) ... when the pot runs over, excess trips go to transit so why not let it run over a lot and literally fill up the transit.” While planning to street capacity has long been normative, Markham was a rare municipality that understood this new idea (Calthorpe, 4/7/14):

- “It does assume a different lifestyle from a normal, suburban lifestyle and even, to a certain extent, an inner city, downtown style lifestyle.” (Markham Planner, 3/25/13)
- “The Langstaff project is such a unique one in a way and I think it required everyone to expand their ideas of how best practice urban design should be applied. But the density of transit amenity there and the sheer residential density, it felt like a new kind of animal a little bit.” (Calthorpe Planner, 3/20/14)
- “Langstaff could be a model community. Their biggest challenge is transportation and getting people in and out of it.” (Development Industry Representative, 3/26/14)
- “I see it as York Region’s answer to Cityplace (a major downtown high-rise development). It’ll be a mix and a vibrancy that’s all based on the people that live there and not necessarily the car ... Nowhere in York Region can you actually not need a car and this will be one of the first...and it’s also connected to Yonge Street and the existing retail there. It’s already a vibrant area.” (Langstaff Developer, 4/12/14)

Staff and council were surprised by the downtown scale ambitions but a traffic study by IBI Group confirmed that the numbers in the plan were achievable, contingent on all the planned transit. The town signed off because, “A world-renowned urban design architect showed physically how it could be handled, (and) a world-class transportation group said, yes, it can be handled” (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14).

9.2 PUTTING THE “T” IN LANGSTAFF’S TOD

The process of realizing all the planned transit has been complicated and there is no timeline or

funding at present; a substantial

obstacle given that “Its whole

raison d'être is transit and if that

transit doesn't come online then

that presumably makes it a very

different project” (Calthorpe

Planner, 3/20/14). Following the

Growth Plan's designation of the

UGC, *The Big Move* further

established it as an Anchor

Mobility Hub (Metrolinx, 2012),

maintained the Yonge subway extension as a next-wave priority and added other projects that

will serve the area:

“A mobility hub is more than just a transit station. Mobility hubs consist of major transit stations and the surrounding area. They serve a critical function in the regional transportation system as the origin, destination, or transfer point for a significant portion of trips.” (Metrolinx, n.d.)

A nascent mobility hub already exists as York Region Transit/Viva, has a terminal in Richmond

Hill Centre. About 100 metres south is the GO rail station. *The Big Move* eyed substantial

system-wide improvements to GO rail service, including all-day, two-way service on the

Richmond Hill line. In April 2014, Premier Wynne went further, promising service every 15

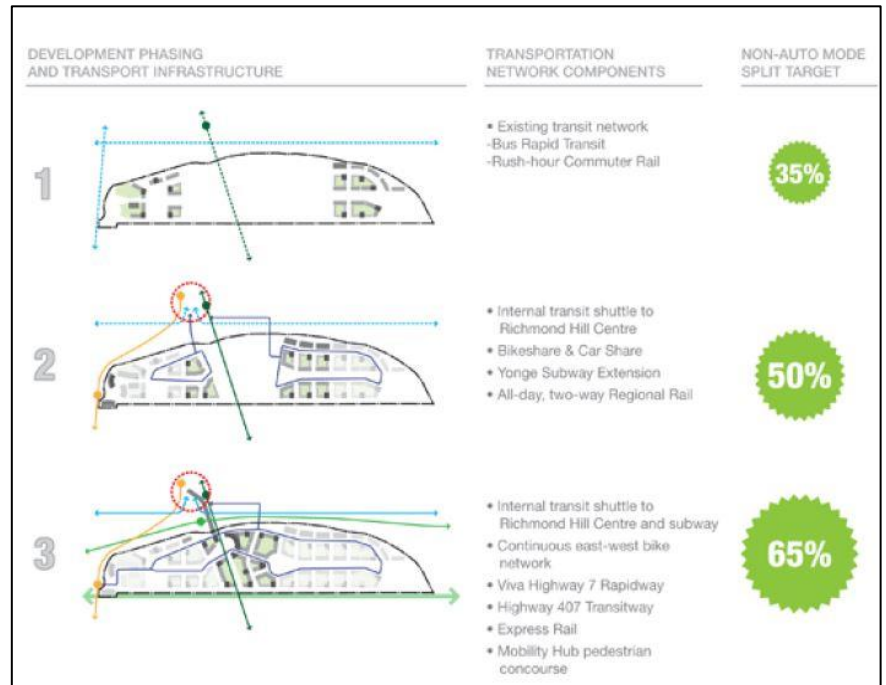


Figure 30 - Development in Langstaff can only proceed as infrastructure and modal share targets are achieved. (Metrolinx, 2013b)

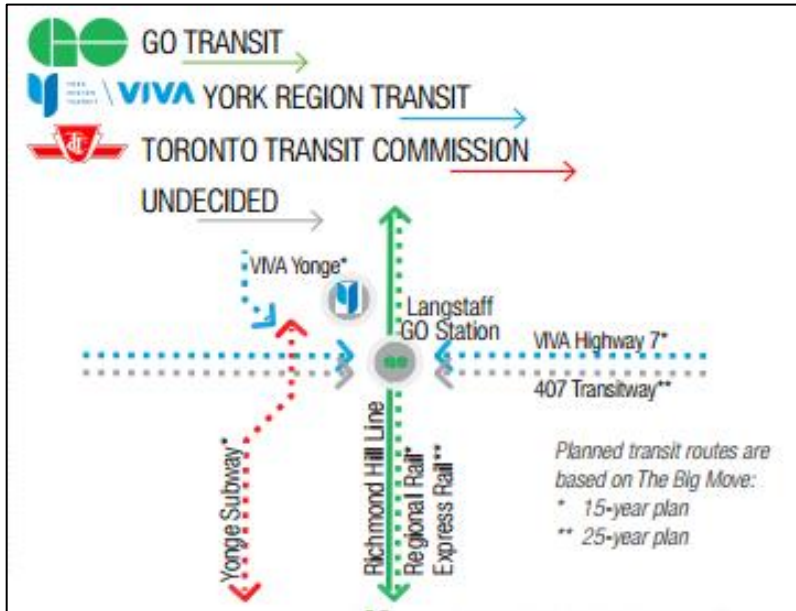


Figure 31 - The planned convergence of transit in the Langstaff-Richmond Hill Centre mobility hub. (Metrolinx, 2012)

minutes on every GO line by 2024 (Brennan & Kalinowski, 2014).

Today, the rail line offers only rush hour service; 5 trains heading to Toronto in the morning and 6 return at night (GO, 2014). The province also began preliminary work on a line dubbed the 407

Transitway to run in a right-of-way preserved when the province

built the highway. The plan is to build a regional BRT service, with potential future conversion to LRT. The first 23-kilometre phase will stretch across York Region, interfacing with the Richmond Hill Centre mobility hub and an under-construction extension of the Toronto Spadina subway line, further west along Highway 7 at Vaughan’s UGC, Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Projected to open circa 2023, the line is expected to carry 70,000 to 80,000 riders per day by 2031 (Delcan & IBI, 2010). Local politicians have taken to calling the embryotic hub “Union Station North” (Fleischer, 2008b).

Langstaff exemplifies many best-practice TDM measures, including the aforementioned parking restrictions. Tumlin and Millard-Ball warn that transit agencies (like GO) encourage car use with free parking (2003: 4), though this should also be less of an issue for Langstaff, which will partially be built on an existing GO lot. Properly executed, mixed-use TOD should provide greater ridership per acre than a parking lot and spread out trips beyond peak periods. Other

crucial factors that will be present in Langstaff include ground-floor retail, provision for pedestrians and cyclists, and the



Figure 32 - The future transit concourse where the CNR tracks pass under the highways, looking from the existing GO station to the final subway station, where the existing movie theatre can be seen. The YRT bridge over the tracks can also be seen on the right. (Author photo)

hiding of

garages from

the street. Reduced lane widths and other pro-pedestrian design elements in Langstaff should help as “walkability is maximized when streets are designed to accommodate lower traffic volumes in the first place. The key, then, is to factor the reduced trip-making benefits of TOD back into the street design” (Tumlin & Millard Ball, 2003: 5). The Calthorpe plan (Markham, 2009: 24) asserts that “the Age of Industrialization is over,” as is the idea that “bigger is better. Recalling Jacobs’ emphasis on roads and urban spaces as being primarily about people, it asserts that while cars are still occasionally necessary, a TOD cannot exist without pedestrians; “The focus is always on people.”

10 ANALYSIS AND INTERVIEWS

10.1 Interviews - New Urbanism and New Suburbanism

Both TND and TOD are forms of New Urbanism but while the latter has the potential to be genuine urban form, the former remains primarily suburban. All interviewees with an opinion on Cornell described it as a success, if a qualified one. There was a strong consensus it was an attractive, desirable neighbourhood and that the residential component was achieving its aims, with densities more than twice what is seen in conventional developments. The catch however was the degree to which its mixed-use component lagged behind. This was further substantiated by residents, some of whom were lured to Cornell specifically because of the promise of a true mixed-use community; a promise that has not materialized:

- “For the most part the road and block patterns have been followed, the 100% lane-based continues to be followed so I would say Cornell has been a tremendous success. The residents love it ... (The retail is) not perfect by any means but it’s an option for small businesses and it is real, it’s walk-to for the residents.” (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14)
- “The planning of the houses was great...It is a beautiful community because they found a style of house and they’ve kept it throughout Cornell, that concept really has worked...The houses are closer together, they like that. The other thing that has worked out nicely is that there’s a lot of young families there ... I’m a huge fan of Cornell but ultimately I don’t think it’s been a huge success.” (Markham Councillor A, 3/10/14)
- “The only thing I can really see is that it’s lacking that transit ... (the live/work component) hasn’t transpired, what they were hoping and I’m not sure why that is. It’s a shame because they’ve got it all set up for that.” (Markham Councillor B, 3/25/14)
- “The most recent time that I toured Cornell I was struck by the commercial aspect of things. It seemed like a fairly typical exurban, New Urbanist project...once you got into the residential neighbourhoods they were really pretty nice places with good design but ... I remember as we were driving around thinking that it was really struggling in (the retail) department.” (Calthorpe Planner, 3/20/14)

A commercial developer (3/27/14) whose company usually designs big box retail said its own experiments in creating a more pedestrian-oriented project in Thornhill showed the challenges of trying something different in the region:

“People really gravitate towards the main street feel and park on the street and it has a lot of good energy but it wasn’t a slam dunk from day one...It’s a different form of development for a lot of people and even some tenants have to get used to it and figure out how to make their business work in that type of format ... It’s not just a matter of our willingness to do something different, it’s a matter of whether we can sell it to the tenants.”

One Markham politician concluded, “Cornell is a success, other than that we underestimated the car (and) its importance in suburbia” (Markham Councillor A, 3/10/14). One may conclude that the problems seen in Cornell are not unique but emblematic of NU, or at least TND, in general. The housing market is clearly willing to exchange density for other qualities but the dominance of aut centrality is pervasive in peripheral, greenfield developments, even in NU-friendly communities like Markham; the retail and office sectors of the market are less, or even unwilling to make the same trade-offs:

- “I feel like in general New Urbanism has been great at delivering the residential side of things but not as great at handling the retail. And I think that’s one area where the academic understanding of New Urbanism has been slow to catch up with the realities of the way retail works in our communities... You can design the store there it’s just going to be vacant or have some kind of marginal use if you don’t come to grips with the fact that retail wants to be out on the busy street ... The jury is still out on the discipline’s ability to evolve in response to these changes.” (Calthorpe Planner, 3/20/14)
- “Well most of (Cornell’s first stores) have all failed...The banks are gone, the centrepiece coffee shop, pub in the old Cornell is gone. The various small businesses have struggled...Well, look around, what do you think the reason is? The people in suburbia know that the largest Loblaws stores with the lower prices are in suburbia too – they’re 3 kilometres away and why would you want to walk over there for milk, which is \$4.98, when over at Loblaws it’s \$2.98?” (Markham Councillor A, 3/10/14)
- “Seventeen years later we finally put our retail in (in our TND development). You can’t do the dream of the internal village centre...a convenience store needs 2,500 units just to survive.” (Langstaff Landowner, 4/10/14)

- “It’s like cooking a great meal, you just have to mix it properly ... I think that a lot of early New Urbanist plans were too idealistic about retail.” (Calthorpe, 4/7/14)

While Cornell and Langstaff are both NU projects, there was agreement among the experts that Cornell was clearly a more suburban form (i.e. demonstrating auto-centricity, isotopy etc.) with a Markham planning official (3/28/14) saying, “To me it’s more dense suburban and more urbane. It’s not high-density.” However, a development industry representative (3/26/14) pointed out that there is no going back from the positive lessons of Cornell and we will not return to forms of development that turn their back on the street. The Langstaff developer (4/10/14) agreed that the questions about the acceptance of TND at least have been resolved: “It was one of the big worries but it’s the only way in the new urban expansion to bring forth townhouses and smaller lots. It was a gamble. Now it’s more the norm.”

10.2 The Future of TND

Given its market success and improved densities TND could provide a more attractive and sustainable form of greenfield development; a less sprawling sprawl. Despite Duany’s aims, however, entrenched aut centrality makes it extremely difficult to develop a key ingredient of urbanism — an internal, mixed-use core — at least in the short term and particularly in peripheral locations. Phasing remains a key challenge for NU communities, with a build-out period far longer than what is seen in traditional subdivisions. This is because while conventional development is more homogenous and can install arterial-oriented retail once a critical mass of residential development is achieved, NU communities face a chicken-egg paradox that may be unresolvable, at least in the TND context.

“Pedestrian scale within the neighbourhood...has a partner in transit systems at the regional scale,” (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001: 51) and while Cornell has arguably achieved the former, it is several years — at least — from achieving the latter. Just as Cornell was about to break ground, Southworth looked at some of NU’s earliest communities, Duany’s Kentlands and Calthorpe’s Laguna West, and found only 9% of neotraditional residents used transit regularly (1997: 42). He argued that transit infrastructure must be provided at the outset if reducing car use is a genuine goal. This did not happen in Cornell and, as with the unsuccessful retail sector, it may be that the opportunity to achieve a significant change has passed. Even if Cornell Centre develops as planned in the long term, the land to the east will remain agricultural, ensuring Cornell’s place on the urban edge.

When Cornell and Markham are fully built-out the landscape may seem different but 15 years into Cornell’s growth it remains an island amidst car-oriented suburbs. In his defence of New Urbanism, even Ellis concedes the potential of the community cannot be realized if it is not part of a regional land-use and transportation plan. To criticisms of NU as merely a newer form of sprawl he responds that 95 per cent of North American growth is currently in the suburbs and since NU cannot change that, “the constructive route is to make sure that new suburban growth mixes uses, provides a wide range of housing types, contains walkable streets and is more transit friendly” (Ellis, 2002: 280). These are no doubt laudable goals but as long as New Urbanist projects are primarily this kind of development it is hard to refute the notion they are more a New *Suburbanism* (Lehrer & Milgrom, 1996) than a true introduction of urbanism. Cornell certainly has more walkable streets but is no more transit-friendly than the neighbouring, traditional subdivision, at least pending the uncertain development of Cornell

Centre. Its mix of housing types is more diverse than a traditional suburban subdivision but there is a larger gap between Cornell and what is envisioned for Langstaff Gateway or even Leitchcroft than between Cornell and its adjacent conventional neighbourhoods.

Given the ambitions of their ideals it seems likely Ellis, Duany and their cohort would hope that an evaluation of a successful NU community would find more than merely a slight improvement from a sprawling suburb or even that it demonstrates “an effective method to encourage compact development on greenfield sites,” (Gordon & Vipond 2005: 51). However, Cornell is clearly an improvement and yet not a true paradigm shift in lifestyle, as envisioned. As the Langstaff developer (4/10/14) said of his TND projects, “In the suburbs, New Urbanism is about making the community more attractive to walk in. You’re not necessarily going to destinations; you don’t have that infrastructure right at the beginning. What it really does is getting people out of their home, and interacting with neighbours and knowing neighbours.”

Given the peripheral nature of most of Markham’s NU communities, one can conclude that the communities further afield from the main transportation routes (i.e. transit on Highway 7 and Yonge Street), the more trouble they will have achieving the full range of NU ideals. Langstaff, a more central, transit-oriented infill project should have greater prospects for success. Time, of course, is a major factor in the development in any community and “In time, both neotraditional developments might also support successful centers, but because of the land use patterns and density, they will never be as convenient as (an established inner suburb)” (Southworth, 1997: 40). A perennial place on the urban periphery will likely continue to work against Cornell’s development even as it matures.

10.3 Interviews - The New Growth Regime in Ontario

Interviewees agreed that *Places to Grow* enshrined an extant process, rather than singlehandedly changing on-the-ground reality on its own:

- "I don't think (developers) were doing it because there was policy pressure or that's what municipalities were wanting them to build. I think it was completely market driven at that time ... The policy framework was responsive but I think the market, to be honest, really lead." (Former York Region Planner, 3/6/14)
- "We certainly were ahead of the development industry; there was reluctance at the start ... a nervousness as to whether or not it would sell, the New Urbanist concept. But it didn't take long before everybody started doing it." (Markham Councillor A, 3/10/14)
- "The market was getting there first (but) the government changes really did solidify it ... "There's nothing more powerful than an idea that has its time." (Development Industry Representative, 3/26/14)
- "The changing in policy is great but it has to match market conditions. ... I think people are ready. There are a lot of towers going up in the 905." (Commercial Developer, 3/27/14)
- "It's getting better in that every year ... the issues of Smart Growth and liveable communities becomes a little more mainstream and every years brings a new project that comes online that people can talk about and go look at and visit." (Calthorpe Planner, 3/20/14)

At a general level, this bodes well for the prospects for intensification, even if not across the entire *Growth Plan* area, certainly at natural nodes, like Langstaff Gateway. There is a consensus that Gansian "values and aspirations" are changing and that many of the elements that long fuelled suburban dispersion are no longer extant. Even the expectedly conservative development industry representatives interviewed agreed the younger generation places less emphasis on car and home ownership than their predecessors.

There is a sense that what is being seen is not an aberration but rather a shift driven by necessities. The longer the condo boom in the GTA has gone on, the more concerns there have

been about being a bubble that will soon burst, but a development industry official (3/26/14) said it is not a bubble, but a fundamental shift in the region's urban form. Ground-related homes might still be the proverbial "American Dream" but "you can happily settle for something different if it's priced right and you can see yourself living a fairly good life" (Former York Region Planner, 3/6/14). As Calthorpe said (4/7/14), "The inertia is tremendous in terms of people's expectations and vested property rights (but) I think the (change) is economics; more people see there's a healthy lifestyle that actually costs less in terms of times and money; that's a win too."

Immigration is a big factor in the growth of the GTA, and particularly of Markham where more than 70 per cent of the population are now considered visible minorities (Black, 2013). Many new immigrants, especially from Asia, don't carry with them negative North American preconceptions about dense, high-rise housing (Markham Councillor A, 3/10/14). Slowly but surely, average household size in Markham is also dropping, from 3.5 in 1996 to 3.4 in 2001, to 3.2 in 2011 (Statistics Canada 2006; 2011). Markham's diversity means ground-related family housing will remain a crucial part of the mix (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14) but "That's just one phase of life and one market segmentation" (Calthorpe, 4/7/14).

In the next year, the provincial government will conduct a review of the Greenbelt (and Oak Ridges Moraine) legislation. There is strong public support for the Greenbelt but it has quite possibly resulted in increased home prices for GTA residents who may not grasp the impacts of public policy on the market and its connection to intensification, according to the development industry representative (3/26/14) and there are battles yet to be fought:

- “I’m glad I won’t be in politics when the pressure comes back on the Greenbelt. I don’t think it’s *Places to Grow, per se* (driving up prices) I think it’s the Greenbelt and the Oak Ridges Moraine. It’s an extraordinarily good policy; it was the right thing to do but the reality is going to make it more difficult. You’re going to either live in a condo or you live in Parry Sound.” (Markham Councillor A, 3/10/14)
- “I still maintain the province has a responsibility to educate the public, not to change behaviour but to tell them, we’re trying to build higher density ... Public meetings are viral at best. The public is angry because the only thing people like less than sprawl is intensification.” (Development Industry Representative, 3/26/14)

Increased density might not create higher prices (indeed, the point of Cornell was to demonstrate the opposite) but when the density is driven by constrained land supply, the causes and effects become intrinsically linked: “If you’re going to have a greenbelt, you have to have density within the line. You can’t have it both ways” (Calthorpe, 4/7/14).

As with Transportation Demand Management, we can see a means to use policy to shift public attitudes before attempting to introduce a denser urban form; “we need to find ways to change people’s attitudes,” by encouraging intensification and transit use (Markham Councillor A, 3/10/14). But, as with TDM, it must be a concerted effort. Markham’s mayor likens it to a contract where the province must hold up its end if municipalities are legislatively obligated (and wilfully providing) theirs. “He and council are delivering in spades the Smart Growth vision, so we’ve got TOD without transit” (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14).

10.4 Next Steps: Buttressing Ontario’s Growth Policies

So long as the province maintains tight control over municipal affairs, it is up to them to provide further tools to achieve the ends outlined in the *Growth Plan*.

Most obviously, transit-oriented development will not come without transit and Metrolinx has been assigned the lead role in that regard. As outlined, Metrolinx fails in nearly every respect as a proper transit authority; it has developed a plan but has neither funding, nor planning authority nor insulation from the changing winds and parochialism of politics. Premier Wynne's plan to implement revenue tools – particularly after two rounds of consultation with the public and experts – is a step forward but inadequate in the face of the goals the RTP and *Growth Plan* aim to achieve. With a new mandate as head of a majority government, she has virtually free reign to act on prior recommendations and adopt best practices so time will tell how much she is able to accomplish. The existence of Metrolinx should ameliorate the possibility that *The Big Move* will end up as yet another GTA transit plan that never came to fruition but its future remains uncertain and at best, its timeline is in danger of not being met.

Extrapolating from Mees' general guidelines for a proper transit authority (see p.51) it is clear that in Ontario:

- The provincial government must implement revenue tools that firstly provide the necessary \$2-billion in capital funding for *The Big Move*. It must be dedicated and transparent funding (Transit Investment Strategy Advisory Panel, 2013). Encouragingly, the advice given to the Wynne government made these points clear and it was upon the actual enactment of the tools that there has been failure. Beyond the ongoing provincial initiatives, Canada remains the only G8 country with no federal involvement in funding transit. The 1867 constitution did not anticipate Canada as an urban nation (much less a suburban one) and it is clear federal non-involvement in urban issues like transit and housing are not sustainable. Municipalities only reap 8 per cent of the tax dollar across Canada (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2007) and it is unreasonable and untenable to ask them to bear the responsibility of such a substantial shift just as it is simultaneously irresponsible and negligent for a federal government to profess there is no national interest in the infrastructure needs of the cities driving its population and economic growth. A federal transit strategy and/or funding plan is crucial to the success of reduced aut centrality and more sustainable (sub)urban forms.

- That said, the tools suggested by the Transit Panel (to say nothing of the Premier's compromises) are too conservative in that they not only fail to raise sufficient funding but also come with no TDM impacts. A gas tax, for example, is necessary to link the concepts of building transit and disincenting car use. The revenue tools should not be seen as merely a fundraising scheme but a part of a holistic approach to making transit a viable choice for those who own a car. This is a crucial area in which public policy must help change values and aspirations if residents are to choose a different lifestyle.
- Metrolinx must be removed from the political process and be charged with making transit planning decisions for the whole region and it is also clear the exiting board is not adequate for this task. Metrolinx's first board was comprised of politicians who were dismissed in favour of a bureaucratic board as part of a merger with GO Transit. Some sort of hybrid that gives local representatives a voice on a board often regarded as secretive will be crucial to making it accountable.

On a larger scale, this should be emblematic of a better cross-ministry approach to regional growth. A reconstituted Metrolinx should ensure its planning decisions are aligned with and supportive of the objectives of the *Growth Plan*. It is clear that the same sort of thinking needs to be seen in other ministries as well. Several interviewees mentioned the challenges building a different kind of school in Langstaff, for example; an urban model within a building, sharing library, gym and other facilities with a community centre. The provincial funding formula uses DCs to fund the acquisition of a multi-acre lot with a field and requires updating as the Langstaff model will not be the last of such proposals as intensification becomes normative. A Markham planning official (3/28/14) said, "The province has done a fabulous job in long-term strategic planning, what's lacking is the implementation, the capital funding." As one example, he pointed out that Metrolinx designated Markham Centre as a mobility hub but the city had to conduct its own mobility hub study since no word had come from Metrolinx about when they would do the one they were supposed to.

It may not be necessary to return to the letter of the mid-gos Golden Report but it would certainly be wise to return to its spirit and consider what the optimal governance model for the

region is, in the interests of aligning transportation, planning, education, environment and other interests across various levels of government:

"I've said many times I don't know whether there should be something called York Region. There probably should be Toronto Region, or Metro (and) get rid of the regions. But that's a long way away." (Markham Councillor A, 3/10/14)

10.5 Rethinking Development Charges

The province is in the midst of a review of the *Development Charges Act* and other planning legislation and it similarly requires adjustments to align with the government's planning objectives and prevent perversions.

There was no dispute amongst interviewees about DCs being high but there was less consensus regarding what to do about it. The Markham planning official (3/26/14) said they have infrastructure to build but deal with a development industry that warns that they are in danger of pricing themselves out of the market by passing those costs onto new homeowners. The building industry representative (3/26/14) countered, asking "Is it fair to build infrastructure that's in the ground for 100 years on the back of the mortgage of the first homeowner?" Either way, DCs must be adjusted to meet planning objectives:

"As currently structured, the DC is a deeply flawed tool with respect to development patterns, one that encourages wasteful and expensive development patterns, thus raising the total cost of servicing. Instead of supporting planning objectives, the DC functions to undermine them. It subverts market rationality, eliminating or reducing natural market incentives for smaller lots or for development on cheaper-to-service land first. The DC effectively renders developers, and subsequently consumers, indifferent to cost variations." (Blais 2010: 100)

It also bears upon affordable housing, something intrinsically bound up in the ideals of both NU and the provincial policy regime. A Langstaff developer pointed out the exorbitant per-unit

costs in Markham are making it difficult to maintain cost-competitiveness. One may see something of the same situation affecting Langstaff in Fainstein's description of Brooklyn's Atlantic Yards development; also a transit-oriented, urban infill project:

"Within the broader concerns of regional planning Atlantic Yards is identifiable as the logical place for very dense development. If the New York region continues, as expected, to add population, then new residents must either further contribute to exurban expansion or to densification of the center. While unquestionably there are many parts of the suburban ring that could tolerate higher densities, very few locations could provide adequate mass transit to support a large population increase, so greater sprawl would be the outcome of further peripheral settlement." (Fainstein, 2008: 774)

As previously mentioned, an industry representative said it is not their responsibility to provide affordable housing but Fainstein reminds us that this is not so much an absolute truth as a local attitude. Though it is clear BILD would stand opposed (as they did in 2011), the province could introduce something akin to London's form of inclusionary zoning where the government requires a certain percentage of units be affordable. As foreign as it might be to Ontario, it is merely standard procedure in London. Fainstein's description (2008: 774-777) of British developers suggests they are more invested in their communities (literally and figuratively) than their GTA counterparts seem to be and there is no reason to think a similar attitudinal shift could not happen in Ontario with the proper policy framework.

10.6 The Inevitability of Langstaff and Reasons for Optimism

A single-family home in the suburbs may have been the "only economically rational choice," (Kunstler, 1994: 105) in the post-war era but there is evidence that is no longer the case.

Automobile dependency has not generally been factored in (to say nothing of broader costs to

health and the environment) by homebuyers, preventing them from making a rational economic choice and while a government-mandated breakdown of actual “sticker” costs would at least be a start (Thompson, 2013: 10/12), there is increased evidence of awareness of these issues. The realtor.ca website run by the Canadian real estate industry now includes walkability scores in its house listings, as a simple and superficial example of changing mores. A survey of GTA residents by the Pembina Institute (Burda, 2012) that found “price is key to location decisions: 79% said price influenced their choice of location, and 81% said that if home price were not an issue, they would give up a large-lot home to get a smaller residence in a walkable area with good transit.” The same report found that while single family homes are often portrayed as a simple market choice, that homebuyers would trade big yards for “walkable, mixed-use neighbourhoods, short commutes to work, and easy access to frequent rapid transit” (Burda, 2012: 1). This was partly borne out in Cornell, though its location means long commutes and a lack of rapid transit, but providing these options in suburban communities, particularly given the obstacles discussed here, is the challenge ahead.

All interviewees were asked whether they would want to live in Langstaff, assuming it materialized as planned. While all interviewees worked in the suburbs in one capacity or another, most didn't live there. It was clear that life-stage was a factor and that most at least felt Langstaff was far preferable to conventional suburban development. There was a sense that Langstaff and TOD were not built to respond to the forces that created the existing suburbs, but to provide something new for a generation with different values and aspirations:

- “I've got 3 transit lines directly right out in front of my front door, we don't have a car, we shop at the local farmer's market almost exclusively so that's how I live and so if I were in the Toronto area, I'd feel the need to be downtown Toronto somewhere. But, if

someone said, hey you need to be out from the historic core and Langstaff was built remotely like the proposal, I would live there, sure ... I just could never live in a single family home in a really tidy suburb, it's just not me but the thought of living in a really hyper-dense mixed-use environment with transit options, that's really appealing." (Calthorpe Planner, 3/20/14)

- "Not at this point in my life. I'm more of a backyard, cottage guy right now..." (But should appeal to younger people, empty nesters etc.) (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14)
- "I like where I live now in Toronto. If you can replicate that, I think it would be an exciting, interesting neighbourhood. It needs to have all that transportation facility, it needs to have all that accessible. The problem is the people who move in first and the rest will follow..." (Development Industry Representative, 3/26/14)
- "I would have bought in Cornell ... It goes to my culture, which is on-ground housing. [pause] My wife says we can go into a condo but I'm not sure." (Markham Councillor A, 3/10/14)
- "I still have it stuck in my mind that the city is downtown Toronto. And me living in Langstaff or Cornell, even though they're centres in their own right ... I would still feel I was living in a place, in my mind, without urbanity... I mean something that's a little bit worn, a little bit weathered, a little bit contrived, I'm going to have some random experiences ... as long as it was built with a sales centre in front of it, I'll never consider that the city." (Former York Region Planner, 3/6/14)
- "The city certainly has aspirations (another TOD) will be a true community in terms of the mix of housing types ... I'm an urban person. I live downtown right now so that's my preference. I like being on transit and I like walking." (Commercial Developer, 3/27/14)
- "If it was as it's planned I think it would be quite nice. Peter Calthorpe designed a little bit of Paris in there ... if I was going to downsize I would definitely want to be somewhere you could walk to things; you could walk to restaurants, get your groceries, get on transit. So, I guess my answer is yes." (Markham Councillor B, 3/25/14)
- "Absolutely. I think it's going to be like a European city where you can eat, sleep shop, enjoy and all by foot and still be connected to the broader picture of the GTA." (Langstaff Developer, 4/12/14)
- "I would, are you kidding? We're about to be empty nesters in the fall, so that would be my choice." (Calthorpe, 4/7/14)

As can be seen, several of the city residents questioned whether true urbanity could be manufactured outside the organic core. Calthorpe countered that Langstaff has asymmetry and other quirks that will provide it character and, more generally, "I don't think it's that difficult. If you start with good bones...then you're going to get a good outcome. The architecture can be good or bad but that's true of any city, but they're still healthy cities"

(4/7/14). The planner from his office similarly said, “We don’t need it to be downtown. We just need it to be mixed-use, walkable, linked to transit – so I think it’s OK if some of these places are not, like mini-downtowns” (3/20/14). These attitudes are reflected in the findings of the Neptis study, suggesting that even if the built form has not caught up to the shifting aspirations of GTA residents it may yet. TND could, at a minimum, provide a relatively sustainable alternative to past practices in greenfield development but it is in the success of TODs (or lack thereof) that the ability of the region to plot a different future will truly be seen; and of course those TODs depend on a sustained, concerted deployment of new transit.

As for Langstaff Gateway itself, though the convoluted circumstances surrounding transit make the timelines unclear, there was general agreement its development as a new kind of suburban community was inevitable, even if its final character was to be determined:

- “(Langstaff) is so strategically placed I really firmly believe that at some point in time, the high-speed rail will be going along that corridor...I do believe there will be a subway so that multi-modal facility there...I do not think it’s a pipe dream. I can’t tell you though when it will be ready, whether it’s a little ahead of its time ... ” (Development Industry Representative, 3/26/14)
- “It will develop... (but) it’s early days, it hasn’t been put to the market.” (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14)
- “Absolutely (it will develop). I think it’s going to be like a European city where you can eat, sleep shop, enjoy and all by foot. And still be connected to the broader picture of the GTA.” (Langstaff Developer, 4/12/14)

Given the uncertainty surrounding funding for *The Big Move* and the projects therein that affect Langstaff, it is clear that the community will be nowhere near its hoped-for buildout by 2031, though the city has room in its urban corridors, and especially in Markham Centre, to absorb growth while Langstaff develops in the short term (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14). The Calthorpe planner (3/20/14) said that despite the reliance on the public sector to

provide transit, they have found that, in an inversion of the “build it and they will come” ethos, dense development can force the government’s hand, bringing transit where it’s needed even if one would ideally want the transit first and development second. The Langstaff landowner (4/12/14) agreed saying, “I think what it’ll be is as (the province/Metrolinx) see us as a certainty they’ll have to (build the transit).”

In the meantime, concerns remained about development continuing with the adequate infrastructure. Uncertainty over the timing of transit “messes us up big time ... It causes tension in the system because (transit is) the only way we can justify the quantum of development” (Markham Planning Official, 3/28/14). A similar point was made by a former regional planner (3/6/14): “The whole point of infrastructure investment and the whole point of Langstaff and Cornell, is that we’re city building...on a regional scale ... Suburban bone structures don’t have the tensile strength to hold the type of density we’re putting on them without infrastructure.” He was particularly frustrated given that the same risks and questions that greeted the first experiments with NU are no longer problems: “(Langstaff) is dependent on infrastructure so there’s risk inherent there in the absence of committed and sustained infrastructure funding. So, the province yet again has a role to play. And the risk isn’t market uptake, as with Cornell. The risk is being able to support what there is a market for. Quite ironic.” A Langstaff developer (4/12/14) agreed the risk was different than what he had to confront in TND and the biggest issue with high-density development was the need to pre-sell 70 per cent of units to solidify financing. “It’s a little bit of chicken and egg and really if we want the subway we’re going to have to show we’re serious but on the other hand I don’t know why the province is waiting.”

II. Conclusions

Markham has long battled against stereotypical “Lost View” perceptions of suburbia, something that has accelerated in recent years with the increasing heterogeneity of its population, the increasing density of its housing and its efforts, both on the ground and symbolically, to distance itself from post-war notions of suburbia. At the same time, it must be acknowledged, there are obdurate and entrenched physical forms (i.e. single-family homes) and lifestyle components (i.e. aut centrality) that cannot simply be replaced in a single stroke, or even in a generation. “Sitcom Suburbs,” remain the prevailing and normative model for suburbia but Hayden (2003) eloquently reminds us that suburbs and suburbanisms have changed with time and are not monolithic. Correspondingly, Filion (2010) and Walks (2012) have shown there is real potential to implement both new kinds of suburbs and new kinds of suburbanisms in situations where amenable conditions prevail.

The goals of New Urbanism are laudable, particularly in their attempts to hearken back to forms of development that sustained communities before the advent of the automobile facilitated sprawl that has become increasingly unsustainable both environmentally and economically. The *Charter for the New Urbanism* formalizes and adapts much of what Jane Jacobs saw working so well for her neighbourhood in the context of a neoliberal age and attempts to bring it to another context, that of the peripheral suburb. The good news is that since the *Charter* was first written, demographic and economic shifts have created greater synergies, as consumers increasingly show a willingness to trade the cars and big yards of the

previous generation for more compact development and urban centres, be they in the city proper or in new developments sharing the same facilities.

However, after two decades it is fair to say, at least in the GTA, that TND has failed to achieve its goals. Piecemeal attempts at more compact communities have created greenfield developments more compact, attractive and (in theory) walkable than the prevailing post-war subdivisions. But the New Urbanists' naiveté about the modern retail-commercial market has been exposed and a more walkable community does not add up to much if there is nowhere to which to walk, leaving the car as the primary mode of transportation. TND is not a complete failure but Cornell cannot be said to have attained the full range of goals for which its creators hoped. Also lacking has been an integration of NU ideals into a larger regional plan but over the past decade this has happened in Ontario. The groundwork has been laid in the GTA to insert within the suburban fabric substantial pockets of TOD, learning from the mistakes and challenges of TND and ensuring the potential envisioned by New Urbanism is not lost.

There is a chicken/egg paradox embedded in the entire policy/market framework in Ontario and so long as they hold such tight reins in regards to policy and funding it is incumbent on the provincial government to continue along the same trajectory or the infrastructure will be inadequate to sustain a normative shift in suburban form and lifestyle. Given the substantial changes already enacted, further policy changes (i.e. better DC regime, revenue tools etc.) should be relatively easy to enact by a majority government with the political will to do so.

The retail and commercial sectors will almost certainly present a challenge in Langstaff, as they have everywhere in suburbia, but likely not as severely as in Cornell. Its location on Yonge

Street makes Langstaff a far more natural location for employment than Cornell and even if Calthorpe exaggerates in saying its convergence of transit is reminiscent of central Manhattan, there is no growth node in the GTA with as much inherent potential upon which to build.

Though New Urbanism has long held the promise of a new and better and suburban form, and been criticized for falling short, Langstaff Gateway and TOD have the potential to truly achieve this in a way which Cornell and TND have not. There is an observable shift in the long-prevailing winds that have driven sprawl and the stage is set for change in a way that it was not back in the 1990s. However, this research shows that even if the potential for change is real, achieving the vision will require further policy actions and continued commitment by the province, where power resides. The GTA is well-positioned to evolve into a 21st Century, transit-oriented, polycentric city but still must overcome obstacles long-observed in suburbia, particularly in regards to scale and governance. As an early adopter of New Urbanism, Markham has a head start on paving the way but only by recognizing and confronting the failures of NU to date and by closing gaps in the policy framework, will willing municipalities like Markham be able to lay down a new path for others to follow.

List of Acronyms:

BILD -Building Industry and Land Development Association

BRT -Bus Rapid Transit

CNR -Canadian National Railways

DC -Development charge

DPZ -Duany Plater-Zyberk

NU -New Urbanism

PPS -Provincial Policy Statement

ROP -Regional Official Plan

RTP -Regional Transportation Plan (aka *The Big Move*)

TDM -Transportation Demand Management

TND -Traditional Neighbourhood Design

TOD -Transit-oriented Development

TTC -Toronto Transit Commission

UGC -Urban Growth Centre

YRT -York Region Transit

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Interviews

Markham Councillor A	Interviewed at Markham Civic Centre on March 10, 2014
Markham Councillor B	Interviewed in Thornhill, ON on March 25, 2014
Former York Region Planner	Interviewed in North York, ON on March 6, 2014
Markham Planning Official	Interviewed at Markham Civic Centre on March 28, 2014
Markham Planner	Interviewed at Markham Civic Centre on March 25, 2013
Development Industry Representative.	Interviewed in North York, ON on March 26, 2014
Commercial Developer	Interviewed in Vaughan, on March 27, 2014
Residential (Langstaff) Developer	Interviewed by phone on April 10/12, 2014
Calthorpe Planner	Interviewed via Skype from San Francisco, CA
Peter Calthorpe	Phone interview from Berkley, CA on April 7, 2014

Group Interview 1 – Cornell, ON on April 23, 2014

Interviewees A, B, C & D

Group Interview 2 – Cornell, ON on May 6, 2014

Interviewees E, F, G & H