

From: glchurchill

Sent: Friday, October 22, 2021 3:22 PM

To: Clerks Richmondhill clerks@richmondhill.ca

Cc: Clement Chong clement.chong@richmondhill.ca

Subject: Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan comments

Dear City Clerk, The Corporation of Richmond Hill,

I am writing in reference to the upcoming October 28, 2021 public meeting on the Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan (RHCSPP). I'd like my comments to be included in the record and I would also like to register myself to make a verbal presentation at the October 28, 2021 meeting. Thank you.

My name is Graham Churchill. I live at 12A Mackay Drive, Richmond Hill, just outside the RHCSPP study area in South Richvale. I have lived at this address since 2005. As the Richmond Hill Centre boundary is almost next to my home, I have a vested interest in ensuring that the City makes wise decisions that do not negatively impact my property or that of my community. I grew up in the Beaches area of Toronto and have lived in several other Toronto communities. Before moving to Richmond Hill in 2005, I spent 9 years living in the UK where I had a global job that took me to cities all over the world and which informed many of my ideas for good and bad urban design. My experience from traveling internationally taught me that great cities pay attention to two imperatives: (1) they create strong urban spaces where people can walk and mix and interact as a community; and (2), they pay attention to the efficient movement of large numbers of people.

Both imperatives are required for economic success today. We live in a world where wealth is created by the application of innovation. Innovation is created by the serendipitous collision of ideas. Urban centres facilitate these serendipitous collisions by implementing piazzas, parks, walking and meeting spaces, and other points of community interaction. When I lived in London, England I used to describe the city as the "world's largest village", a place where you could go to a local pub and have a chance encounter with anyone and learn almost anything. While London is a massive city, it retains small scale communities and neighbourhoods with pubs everywhere.

Overall, I think the RHCSPP does a good job in applying good urban design principles. In particular, I commend the team at the City and at Urban Strategies for putting forward such a thoughtful plan. I also think Richmond Hill City Council deserves credit for supporting the plan's development. Many of your proposals are excellent. In particular, I like your ideas for turning the storm water management pond into a public space, the inclusion of bike lanes and public spaces, cross streets over the rail corridor, a tighter network of streets, height limitations to ensure proper transitions into existing neighbourhoods, and the use of the hydro corridor for an urban park.

But while there is much that is good in the RHCSP, there are also many problems – most of which have to do with the second imperative for great cities – the efficient movement of large numbers of people. The GTA is one of the fastest growing areas in North America and is expected to grow by an additional 2.9M people by 2046. The decisions we make today will have a long-lasting impact on the livability and economic vibrancy of the GTA, and ultimately its success. We have one shot to make wise, forward-looking, and integrated, decisions.

My concerns with the RHCSP are two: (1) the transportation hub and its impact on local area traffic and livability and (2) the fact that the Secondary Plan does not consider the Langstaff Gateway, High Tech to Bayview, and South Richvale to the west of “West of Yonge”.

Here is an explanation of my concerns:

The Transportation Hub and It's Impact on Local Area Traffic and Livability

The RHCSP, in its current form, provides very little detail on the specifics of the transport hub such as the configuration of Bridge Station, commuter parking, bus terminals, Kiss'n Go drop-off/pick-up points, and on and off ramps from Hwy 407. This issue of connections needs to be carefully thought through. I already question how the station is going to accommodate CN Rail traffic plus an updated GO train schedule and a subway, all without an additional rail line. With the interaction of TTC, GO Trains, GO Buses, VIVA, YRT interchanges, Hwy 7 and Hwy 407, and a possible future 407 Transitway hub, this traffic interchange is set to become one of the most significant in the GTA, if not the country. It will rival Union Station and Pearson Airport. And because it will also be the termination of the Yonge Street Subway line, it will, inevitably, become a major commuter drop-off and parking point for York Region. The problem is there is nothing in the current plan that acknowledges the scale of what is coming. The idea of Bridge Station sandwiched between Hwy 7 and 407 is interesting but woefully naïve. It will be nowhere near large enough to accommodate what is required. The pictures in your October 7, 2021 report show access to Bridge Station from Hwy 7 and new streets from the north. This idea will not work. Commuters will want to access Bridge Station from Hwy 407. Short of that they will clog an already clogged set of streets between Hwy 407 and Hwy 7 via Bayview and Yonge Street. If this transport hub is not properly thought through, we are heading for a massive mess of even greater traffic gridlock.

I get the sense that planners think this traffic hub will be fully accommodated north of Hwy 7, but the reality is that something of this scale will quickly overwhelm the city centre itself. You need to make a choice – is Richmond Hill Centre a traffic interchange or a city centre. For one, you need to acknowledge that you are going to need a massive parking lot for all the regional commuters (a larger one than that at Finch St). You could put this massive parking lot along the length of the hydro cut, but in so doing, you will ruin the city centre. Cramming all of that into the current area of the RHCSP will have major negative implications for Richmond Hill, York Region, and the GTA.

A better approach is to consider two major adjoining hubs – a city centre to the north, and a traffic hub, with the bulk of its services, to the south. North of the highway, the focus should be on the creation of an urban city centre for living, working, and playing. The hydro cut and the stormwater pond should be reserved as a park with cycling trails and walking. To the south, in the Langstaff Gateway, the core of the traffic hub should be built, with commuter parking, a bus terminal, and on and off ramps to/from Hwy 407. It is fine to continue to have the RHC Station paired with a station called Bridge, but most of the transport infrastructure services and off ramps should be south of the highway.

The Current RHCSP Does Not Consider The Broader Community

The RHCSP has, as its scope, a relatively small area. The reality is that it needs to be broadened to consider a much larger framework including the Langstaff Gateway, the High Tech land over to Bayview, and a broader footprint of the South Richvale area west of Yonge St.

The Langstaff Gateway is perhaps the trickiest part of these three because it is in another jurisdiction, the City of Markham. It is therefore subject to a different planning process and a different set of political infighting. Markham will, no doubt, want to fully develop this strip of land for its own purposes and compete with Richmond Hill. If so, I cannot see the situation ending well. Unless there is a tight interlock between Richmond Hill and Markham, the whole city centre could end in a mess, with all of York Region and the GTA weaker for it.

One option is for the Province to set up an independent cross-jurisdictional body to consider the development of the Langstaff Gateway in coordination with the RHCSP. Another option is for the Province to bequeath this land to Richmond Hill to develop as part of the integrated RHCSP. In either case, you need strong leadership from Richmond Hill City Council, which may be challenging if the reports of dysfunctional infighting in council are true.

The High Tech land over to Bayview also needs to be considered as part of the RHCSP development. The current plan area is very small. You are trying to cram too much into a small space. Red Maple is already showing signs of being overbuilt. To develop a healthy balanced community, the plan needs to include the entire strip to Bayview.

Finally, a broader plan is required for the South Richvale area. The current “West of Yonge” plan is going to add a significant number of new residence into this community dramatically increasing traffic. The trouble with this area is that it has very few traffic entries and exits. For instance, there is currently no exit to Bathurst and only one to the north (Avenue Rd) and one to the south (Hunters Point). That leaves entrances from Yonge, many of which have lost their left turn exits because of the presence of the new VIVA bus lanes. With the dramatic increase in building West of Yonge, the effect is going to leave residents of South Richvale largely trapped. I note that the RHCSP calls for some small north-south link streets parallel to Yonge St, but in recent years, people

have been allowed to develop new properties where these link streets should be. Why? This will make it much harder to develop these streets later.

Of particular note for the West of Yonge area are the height restrictions. While the October 7, 2021 study report calls for height restrictions of 12-25 storeys, the City is already in possession of applications from developers for Zoning By-law Amendments for buildings in this area to be as high as 54 storeys. It is unacceptable that these applications are even being submitted.

I hope that my comments are taken in the spirit they were intended – as constructive criticism. Overall, I think the City has done a good job developing this RHCSP, but the scope needs to be extended and more things thought through. I am happy to continue to provide feedback as constructively as I can. We all want Richmond Hill to be a great city. Let's extend our vision a bit more and get it right.

Thank you.

Graham Churchill

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