

Richmond Hill Comprehensive Zoning By-law Consultation Summary Report Strategic Directions #1-#4



ZoneRH Open House and Consultation – June-July 2024

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1. Project Background

Aligning with the City of Richmond Hill Council's direction in 2017 and as part of the City's phased approach, this project aims to develop a Comprehensive Zoning By-law (CZBL) for the lands within the City of Richmond Hill. The City of Richmond (the City) currently has approximately 40 in-force 'parent' Zoning By-laws. The Zoning By-law is a legal document that implements the policies and vision of the Official Plan that regulates buildings, structures, and land use with specific standards of how development can occur on each property within the City. Section 26(9) of The Planning Act requires that municipalities update their zoning by-laws to implement and conform with their respective Official Plans. The Planning Act requires that City Council amend all Zoning By-laws no later than three years after the Official Plan comes into effect. The CZBL must also consider the Provincial Policy Statement, Provincial Plans (including the Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan), the Conservation Authorities Act, the Oak Ridges Moraine Act, and the Greenbelt Act when developing regulations. So far, City Council has approved some Official Plan Amendments and more are planned for the future as part of the Official Plan Review, with future updates planned to be brought forward to Council at a later date.

The objective of the City's review is to develop one Comprehensive Zoning By-law that is:

- User-friendly and easy to administer, enforce, and understand;
- Reflective of current and emerging planning and development practices and trends; and,
- Fully accessible online in an interactive format.

Reviewing the City's in-force Zoning By-laws and preparing a CZBL provides an opportunity to engage the public and key interest holders – a critical project component is the consultation program.

The CZBL Project is being completed in four phases:

- **Phase 1 - Background Research (Complete)** includes:
 - Review of the City's existing Zoning By-laws.
 - Preparation of technical papers on various zoning matters that identify potential options to consider for the new Comprehensive Zoning By-law.
 - Preparation of building typology studies to inform the new comprehensive Zoning By-law.
 - Interest holder and public consultation.
- **Phase 2 - Strategic Directions (In-Progress)** aims to provide key recommendations to guide the drafting of the Comprehensive Zoning By-law, which will be completed in phases. The key recommendations will be outlined in a series of Strategic Directions Reports (SDRs).
- **Phase 3 – Drafting of the New CZBL** includes drafting the new CZBL document in phases. The initial phase(s) of the CZBL will include:
 - Phase 1: Neighbourhoods Zoning and associated parking
 - The Village Local Centre, Oak Ridges Local Centre, Newkirk Local Centre and Yonge and 16th/Carrville and associated parking
 - Subject to change pending the outcome of appeals on OPAs.
 - Future Phases: TBD (pending update to the City's Official Plan).

- **Phase 4** – Appeals of the new CZBL.

The Strategic Directions provide key recommendations to guide the drafting of the CZBL. The key recommendations are outlined in a series of Strategic Directions Reports (SDRs). The first draft of the Strategic Directions Reports includes:

- **SDR 1: Framework, Design, Phasing, and Implementation** sets direction for the framework, design, phasing, and implementation of the new CZBL. It provides, amongst other things, the background and information on the existing zoning by-laws that regulate zoning in the City, how zoning is formulated under Provincial, Regional, and City policies, identifies timing and transition regulations, and how the CZBL will address properties with non-complying standards and non-conforming land uses.
- **SDR 2: Zoning for the City of Richmond Hill's Neighbourhoods** sets the direction for the zone structure and types of regulations for areas designated as "Neighbourhood" under the Official Plan. The report identifies existing land use planning objectives and policies and gives initial direction on implementation in the comprehensive zoning by-law.
- **SDR 3: Zoning for the Yonge St & Carrville/16th KDA, Village LC, Oak Ridges LC, & Newkirk LC** sets the strategic direction for the zone structure and types of regulations for specific areas designated as a Key Development Area and Local Centres under the Official Plan. The report identifies existing land use planning objectives and policies and gives initial direction on implementation for the identified areas in the CZBL.
- **SDR 4: Zoning for Parking and Loading** sets the direction for parking and loading. The SDR identifies the existing land use planning objectives, policies, and applicable recommendations from the City's draft Parking and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Strategy for Developments, which are proposed to inform the CZBL. It gives initial direction on how recommendations may be implemented in the CZBL. The draft Parking and TDM Strategy for Developments, prepared by HDR, was also consulted with the public as part of this ZoneRH Open House and phase of engagement.

Open House Format and Promotion

Community engagement is an important component of the CZBL process. The City of Richmond Hill hosted an open house at Bayview Hill Community Centre on June 24, 2024, from 6:30 to 8:30 pm. The purpose of the Open House and engagement was to present the draft recommendations from SDRs #1-#4 and to obtain feedback. City staff were present and supported by the consulting team, including R.E Millward + Associates, Hertel Planning, FUSL, HDR Inc., and LURA Consulting. The ZoneRH Open House featured a drop-in session and presentation.

The ZoneRH Open House was promoted through the following channels:

- Social media posts on the City's Twitter and Facebook accounts.
- The City homepage static and rotating banners for two weeks before the event.
- Email notification to those registered for Zone Richmond Hill notifications on June 11.
- E-news story and public service announcement on June 14.
- Posters, displays, and CurbEx signs at community centres.

Thirty-two (32) individuals attended the open house. OMNI TV featured highlights of the event. People shared their comments at the open house and via email following the event until July 5, 2024. [Zone Richmond Hill](#) includes an overview of the process, technical papers, background materials, the draft of the SDRs and open house materials.

2. Key Themes in What We Heard

The SDRs form the basis for key recommendations that will guide the drafting of the City's CZBL. Feedback was collected on the four SDRs noted above. The following summarizes the key themes heard, reflecting on the comments received during and after the ZoneRH Open House and organized under each of the SDRs.

Feedback on SDR 1: Framework, Design, Phasing, and Implementation

- No feedback was received during or following the open house relating specifically to SDR 1.

Feedback on SDR 2: Neighbourhoods

The following suggestions and feedback were received relating to neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood Character

- There is a concern about keeping the neighbourhood character.
- There was a discussion on the definition of neighbourhood character and how it is defined. A clarification was asked on how this would be enforced once the CBZL is developed.
- There is a need for a clear and consistent definition of neighbourhood character. It was suggested that the team consider a more descriptive direction for neighbourhood character when drafting the By-laws to ensure the quality and design of neighbourhoods as directed by the Official Plan.
- A concern was made that some established communities or neighbourhoods are not "complete."
- Ensure residents from different neighbourhoods can access amenities equally.
- There was a concern that Oak Ridges is very reliant on private vehicles and not well served by transit. There is concern that Oak Ridges does not have amenities for every day needs, except grocery stores. With many amenities farther away, residents need to drive as there are fewer bus stops with regular schedules or other means of transportation connecting to parts of Richmond Hill with more amenities. There is a need for public transit close to home to manage daily needs, particularly for seniors and youth.
- There was a suggestion to make existing communities more walkable.

Impacts of Infill

- There is a concern about the privacy of residents in the neighbourhoods that will experience infill development. There was interest in maintaining privacy while intensifying residential neighbourhoods.
- There was a suggestion to consider infill housing design that protects existing healthy trees.

- There was a suggestion to ensure waste from infill development is minimized and that the City encourage renovating existing homes rather than demolishing them.

Non-Residential Uses

- There was a suggestion on reducing ground floor residential on arterial roads and adding more businesses.
- There was a suggestion of adding local or small-scale commercial zoning to reduce car dependency in neighbourhood areas.

Additional Residential Units (ARUs)

- Ensure that the supply of Additional Residential Units, as required by Bill 23, meets people's different housing needs in Richmond Hill.
- There was interest in clarifying through the CZBL where Additional Residential Units are permitted in the municipality, particularly within the Oak Ridges area.

Short-Term Rental Accommodations

- There is a concern about short-term rentals. It was suggested disallowing short-term rentals, such as VRBO or Airbnb, in houses, apartments, or shared accommodation. Instead, they encourage long-term rentals, purchasing homes for families, and providing affordable housing options.
- It was suggested that the City consider requiring the establishment of short-term rentals to show written proof to the Condominium Board and confirm the allowance under the condo declaration, bylaws, and rules.

Landscape Requirements and Parking in Neighbourhoods

- A concern about using artificial turf and similar materials in neighbourhoods that will impact climate change was raised.
- There is a concern about homes being built up to lot lines, the destruction of mature trees, and minimal landscaping on front lawns.
- There was a discussion on hardscaping and softscaping. There was a suggestion for the CBZL to define hardscaping and softscaping clearly.
- There was a suggestion to consider delegating a percentage of the land for soft landscaping, including planting trees. For example, Toronto and Edmonton have better zoning by-laws for soft landscaping.

Urban Design

- There was a suggestion that urban design policies and guidelines are needed.

Parking and Driveways

- There is a concern about a recently approved reverse driveway. It noted that reverse driveways could lead to flooding and are a safety hazard when backing out of the driveway. Concerns about front lawns being used for parking and were interested in how the CBZL could address the issue.

Other Correspondence Relating to Neighbourhoods

- Adding a vacant home tax to empty homes to encourage home buyers/families who will live there.
- It is important to supply different housing types at various price levels to ensure sufficient affordable housing for the community.
- A clarification was asked for the definition of a porch. The current definition allows a porch to be built on a basement foundation and it is not considered coverage on the lot. That basement portion must be included in the lot coverage, and any porch/walkout on top of the porch must have fencing to protect neighbours' privacy.

Feedback on SDR 3: Key Development Area and Local Centres

The following suggestions and feedback were received relating to the Yonge & Carrville/16th Avenue Key Development Area (KDA), Village Local Centre (LC), Newkirk Local Centre, and Oak Ridges Local Centre:

General Comments

- There is a need for local corridors to get more attention.
- There is concern about traffic congestion in the KDA and LCs.

Oak Ridges Local Centre

- There is a concern about high-density development in the area, as it has had sewer issues. This highlighted that mitigation of sanitation and flooding issues should be considered when developing the CBZL.
- Clarification was sought on the impacts of re-development on existing amenities such as grocery stores. Specifically, they wanted to understand if a grocery store would stay in the area or move to a new location during re-development.
- There was interest in understanding the maximum permitted building height in Oak Ridges area.
- There is a concerns about the location and availability of gas stations within Oak Ridges. Specifically, if any existing gas stations in Richmond Hill especially along Yonge Street will be eliminated during re-development.

Stand-Alone Retail and Interim Development

- There is a concern about Recommendation 5 regarding stand-alone retail and Interim development as it pertains to Hillcrest Mall. It noted that regulations must support the Hillcrest mall's adaptability to retail market changes and allow for interim developments, expansions, and modifications to existing structures. Regulations for the Yonge/16th KDA should ensure the mall's current operations and permit reasonable modifications to secure its ongoing success.

Building Height/Built Form

- There is a concern about Recommendations 6 and 10 regarding built height/built form as it pertains to Hillcrest Mall. It was noted that adding OP policies as regulations in the zoning by-law may hinder area-specific design solutions that accommodate growth. Additionally, regulating all aspects of the built form will result in all buildings, whether mid-rise or high-rise, mirroring one

another. The outcome will be a loss of sense of place within any KDA and will likely create numerous and time-consuming zoning amendments to address overly rigid performance standards.

- It was suggested that Recommendations 2(a)(b), 7 and 10 (a) are like Recommendation 6, which states that these regulations are captured within the OP. Further refining these densities and heights within the Zoning By-law limits the ability to deploy density appropriately within a block and is redundant.
- There is support for Recommendation 9 and the 'expression' of the height of non-residential uses in metres rather than stories, as this will allow for greater flexibility in building design. Given that OPA 18.5 policies address matters such as step-backs and shadow impacts, it is unnecessary to further regulate these outcomes and requirements through zoning.

At Grade Commercial Gross Floor Area (GFA)

- There is a concern regarding Recommendation 4 regarding At Grade Commercial GFA as it pertains to Hillcrest Mall. It was noted that regulating GFA creates multiple implementation issues within the retail/commercial market. While there is a need to establish a minimum non-residential component, recognizing and respecting the existing context is imperative to ensure that any such minimums are achievable and do not compete with the viability of existing commercial uses and the function of the proposed buildings.
- Similarly, it was highlighted that Recommendation 8 specifically states that the property 'anticipates re-development of Hillcrest Mall' and that such re-development will reincorporate 90% of the existing retail and commercial floor area into new development. Like the above, it was noted regulating GFA of any permitted use creates implementation issues due to the attempt to 'design' buildings and streetscapes.

Bill 185 and Parking

- There is a concern with Recommendation 14 because Bill 185 received Royal Assent on June 6, 2024, and legislated that Official Plan policies and Zoning By-law regulations regarding parking provisions have 'no effect' for lands within any PMTSA.

Feedback on SDR 4: Parking and Loading

The following suggestions and feedback were received relating to parking and loading and the draft Parking and TDM Strategy for Developments:

- There is a need for more parking at Bethesda/Bayview and to keep the parking rates the same, as there are not enough shopping places close by and no access to transit.
- There is a concern about eliminating parking in certain areas of Richmond Hill, as many residents still rely on cars to meet their needs.
- A request to consider the preservation of parking minimums in car-dependent areas such as Oak Ridges.
- There is a suggestion that reducing parking would be good in MTSAs, but only after the public transit connection within and to Oak Ridges has been improved.

- There is a concern that public transit will not eliminate or reduce the need for car ownership and parking. It was suggested that the City examine transportation issues specific to each ward to understand the demand for public transportation.
- Concerns were raised about illegal parking, street parking, and front lawn parking occurring more if parking is removed.
- There is a suggestion that permitting three parking spots for single-family homes is too many.
- The Oak Ridges area still relies on private automobiles and is poorly served by transit.
- Concerns were raised if the strategic directions do not mention improving the transit system sooner.
- Concerns were raised on how the city administer traffic calming measures and reduce the number of accidents.

Other Feedback

The following feedback was received that relates to other areas of city planning. While they are not specific to the four SDRs reviewed at the open house, the comments will be shared with the respective City Departments and their staff for consideration in other initiatives or further phases of the CZBL.

Stormwater Management and Flooding

- There is a concern about flooding, poor drainage and climate change.
- There is a concern about the permitted location for downspouts when infill occurs. Improper downspout location can impact neighbouring properties and lead to basement flooding.
- There is a concern about how stormwater management will be enforced to minimize flooding. Has a 350-year storm assessment been done to address climate change impacts.

Environment and Sustainability

- There is an interest in how the CZBL will address environmental and sustainability-related topics.
- There is an interest in considering tree preservation by-laws to protect mature and healthy trees from being cut down to retrain the tree canopy as much as possible.
- There is a suggestion to use energy-efficient appliances to address sustainability.
- There is a concern if the new zoning help achieve zero vehicle emissions by 2035 in Canada or how CZBL will help alleviate vehicle emission-related concerns.

Aging in Place

- The City should follow the recommendations outlined in the Aging-In-Place [What We Heard Report](#) during Phase 1, the Technical Paper, to be implemented more thoroughly.

Site Specific Requirements

- There is a suggestion that the new CZBL acknowledges and expressly recognizes the site-specific zoning permissions in a few places. Some sites are subject to site-specific applications for an Official Plan Amendment and a Zoning By-law Amendment that were appealed to the Ontario Land Tribunal.

Safety

- Safety should be prioritized while creating a CZBL, such as safer ways to cross a road when it is the pedestrian's right-of-way at the signals and the oncoming traffic, especially left-turning vehicles.
- There was a location, financing and safety concern about EV charging. There is an interest in the City considering the impacts of EV charging stations inside or in underground garages, as some insurance companies deny condo insurance for any buildings with underground EV chargers due to electrical battery fire risk. There is interest in understanding who covers the costs of charging EVs.

3. Next Steps

The project team will review the feedback and consider it one of many inputs to inform the strategic directions for the CZBL. Various future engagement sessions will be held to help shape the CZBL.