

Submission for City of Richmond Hill Council Meeting – February 25, 2025 re: Comprehensive Zoning By-Law Project (Centres and Corridors) – City File MZBA-23-0001

Submitted by: Michael Theodores – February 25, 2025

Opening comments:

This represents my latest submission to the city re: its ongoing review of proposed zoning amendments and potential developments, including those that could receive funding through the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF).

The discussion that follows includes comments on the staff report that was prepared for the meeting along with content that is on the city's website.

Comments re: staff report

I had an opportunity to review the staff report and here are comments on specific sections of the report.

Page 3 – Key Messages re: City's Centres and Corridors

On this page, I noticed a bullet that read: 'Among the City's Centres and Corridors, the drafting of the CZBL for the **Yonge and Carrville-16th Avenue KDA, Newkirk Local Centre** and **Village Local Centre** are deliverables included in the City's Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) Action Plan which aims to increase the supply of housing, including affordable housing across the city.'

My question is why the Newkirk Local Centre is included in the HAF deliverables since the other two are situated on Yonge Street with vastly superior transit – not to mention other MTSAs that are located on Yonge Street (including King in Oak Ridges).

As you read on, you will see additional discussion about transit as multiple HAF documents I came across – including [this best practices document](#) – cite rapid transit as one of the key considerations for HAF funding.

While rapid transit service exists at Yonge and Carrville-16th Avenue and the Village Local Centre – and Richmond Hill Centre too – it doesn't apply to the Newkirk Local Centre. which has limited GO Train and bus service weekdays and none on weekends or holidays along with infrequent YRT bus service running on Major Mackenzie Drive.

Page 4 – References to dated technical reports:

One of the concerns I shared at a Council meeting in 2024 – and which remain – are dated technical papers that are included in supplementary material for residents to review.

For example, I expressed a concern last year that Council's support of By-Right zoning in certain areas of the city – which were approved late last year – could result in an increase in short-term rental accommodations (STRAs).

At one of the meetings when this was raised, it was indicated by a member of the planning team that a further study could be done. **Yet, a dated report from 2022 remains on file on the [Zone Richmond Hill website page](#).**

During the segment of the February 25 meeting when members of Council have the opportunity, I hope one or more Council members ask for an update on the timeline for the updated STRAs study. This is important since the By-Right zoning amendment was approved and there remains the possibility that instead of creating valuable new housing, it could result instead in the

purchase of properties for the use of STRAs which is counter to what this amendment is trying to achieve.

Page 13: Reference to Newkirk LC/Connectivity to the City:

I continue to have issues with the 'vision' the city has for Newkirk Local Centre.

The stated vision is the creation of an **'affordable, livable, mixed-use community anchored by a transition station that connects commuters from across the City.'**

As a GO train rider for 30 years who lives in this neighbourhood, I find this vision to be out of touch with the service it has historically provided along with knowledge of any material improvement that is planned in the near future.

Once again, I've provided below a copy of the current GO train and bus service schedule for the Richmond Hill line – one that some Councillors have first-hand experience with. Unlike other GO corridors, there is no all-day, two-way service and it has never provided service on weekends or holidays.

This also applies to events like the recent winter snow storm we experienced, During a supper newscast, it was reported that GO service was resorting to 'Saturday Service.' While for some lines – including many of our York Region neighbours – this meant reduced frequency, this meant **no service** for Richmond Hill commuters since there is no service on this line on Saturday.

Monday to Friday (except holidays) Du lundi au vendredi (sauf les jours fériés)																				
SOUTHBOUND / EN DIRECTION SUD									NORTHBOUND / EN DIRECTION NORD											
Route Number Numéro du trajet	Zone→ Trips N° de parcours	Richmond Hill 98 Richmond Hill GO	Bloomington GO	Richmond Hill 78 Gormley GO	Richmond Hill 50 Richmond Hill GO	Thornhill 60 Langstaff GO	North York 5 Old Cummer GO	North York 5 Orloto GO	Toronto 2 Union Station	Ar	Route Number Numéro du trajet	Zone→ Trips N° de parcours	Toronto 2 Union Station	North York 5 Orloto GO	North York 5 Old Cummer GO	Thornhill 60 Langstaff GO	Richmond Hill 50 Richmond Hill GO	Richmond Hill 78 Richmond Hill GO	Gormley GO	Richmond Hill 98 Bloomington GO
61	61070	05 00	05 06	05 20	05 32	→	→	06 00			61	61261	09 40	→	→	10 10	10 28	10 42	10 55	
	5006	05 55	06 01	06 11	06 17	06 25	06 30	07 05			61	61341	11 40	→	→	12 13	12 31	12 45	13 00	
	5008	06 55	07 01	07 11	07 17	07 25	07 30	08 05			61	61381	12 40	→	→	13 18	13 36	13 50	14 05	
	5208	07 25	07 31	07 41	07 47	07 55	08 00	08 35			61	61421	13 40	→	→	14 23	14 41	14 55	15 10	
	5010	07 55	08 01	08 11	08 17	08 25	08 30	09 05			61	61441	14 45	→	→	15 40	16 00	16 17	16 35	
61	61280	09 05	09 13	09 28	09 46	→	→	10 30				5323	15 45	16 15	16 20	16 28	16 34	16 44	16 51	
61	61320	10 10	10 17	10 32	10 48	→	→	11 25				5325	16 45	17 15	17 20	17 28	17 34	17 44	17 51	
61	61370	11 10	11 17	11 32	11 48	→	→	12 25				5127	17 15	17 45	17 50	17 58	18 04	18 14	18 21	
61	61400	12 10	12 17	12 32	12 48	→	→	13 25				5327	17 45	18 15	18 20	18 28	18 34	18 44	18 51	
61	61440	13 15	13 22	13 37	13 53	→	→	14 30				5329	18 45	19 15	19 20	19 28	19 34	19 44	19 51	
61	61490	14 20	14 28	14 43	15 01	→	→	15 45			61	61721	19 40	→	→	20 15	20 33	20 47	21 00	
											61	61771	20 40	→	→	21 13	21 29	21 43	21 55	
											61	61811	21 40	→	→	22 13	22 29	22 43	22 55	
											61	61841	22 40	→	→	23 13	23 29	23 43	23 55	
											61	61901	00 40	→	→	01 07	01 20	01 33	01 45	
											61	61961	02 40	→	→	03 07	03 20	03 33	03 45	

Additionally, while flashy new stations have been added north of the Richmond Hill station (Gormley and Bloomington), **the long-time Richmond Hill station has received no material upgrades.**

Nearby, YRT bus service up and down Major Mackenzie Drive fight the same traffic as cars; is less frequent compared to the Viva bus service on Yonge and also Highway 7; and often requires a transfer to travel south or north on Yonge Street.

I corresponded with Metrolinx several times last year and confirmed no material upgrades are planned in the near future as the new TTC subway service up to Richmond Hill is the key priority. In fact, Metrolinx's projections show a future decrease in ridership since there will be an overlap in south trips to Toronto through the new TTC service.

Similarly, I was in contact with the YRT last year and the same near-term forecast applies. They just noted that expansion is planned by 2051.

So, I'm unclear what transition is occurring from a transit perspective that could accommodate the very aggressive growth targets that Council endorsed and approved. A smaller level of future intensification – like the Rutherford GO station in Vaughan (100 people or jobs per hectare) – would have been more appropriate.

Map 2 provides the big picture

Of all the supplemental documents provided for the February 25 meeting, the most valuable in evaluating the potential for a seamless and connective city was Map 2 (see below).



Map 2

The north-south, south-north route on Yonge Street already provides a nice, seamless route to go from the northern part of the city to the south and from the south to north. There are a wealth of core retail businesses scattered within this route that are vital to everyday living (supermarkets, eateries, Hillcrest Mall, etc.) along with places of worship.

The Yonge core is served by **10** Viva stops between Jefferson and Highway 7 that feature dedicated bus lanes and as of November 2024, the YRT promises to provide six-minute frequency during the rush hour.

In the future, it will not only be a quick way to travel within the city to serve a growing population but also provide a seamless way to hop on a TTC train to travel further south or take a Viva bus to head east or west within the region.

It should be noted that creating the Viva rapid bus system came at great expense to the taxpayer (+\$1 billion). So, development of all kinds – including through the HAF – would help monetize this significant investment.

All the more reason to question why each of the Viva-MTSA stops on Yonge Street and Highway 7 aren't a bigger priority than the Richmond Hill GO station at Newkirk which features limited train service in the morning and evening on weekdays.

Additional discussion

Housing Accelerator Fund opportunities

I've found the whole Housing Accelerator Fund process to be disparate and disjointed. I've been informed there are nine – yes nine! – different initiatives involved and some may not even have to go before Council according to Lise Conde of the city.

The [Housing Accelerator Fund page](#) on the city's website should be a go-to place for the latest updates. Yet, it has very limited fresh content and doesn't link to more recent developments under this initiative.

A prime example is a pop-down about the topic of surplus land (see below) that doesn't provide an update on how this process is going.

Surplus and Underused Lands for Affordable Housing Program

Implementing a new program to repurpose City-owned land for affordable housing.

- An inventory of surplus and underused City property will identify sites well suited to affordable housing redevelopment, which will be tested with a pilot project site.
- The pilot will inform a long-term framework for partnerships with non-profit housing providers to redevelop City-owned sites.
- The City's land disposition and asset management policies will be updated to prioritize and promote affordable housing redevelopment opportunities.

This is important because surplus land has the opportunity to potentially trim the cost of a new development – an expense developers normally gripe about when offering to help solve the housing crisis.

In one of my submissions last year, I noted that a Metrolinx document ([Metrolinx's 2023 GO Rail Station Access](#)) indicated there were **343** surplus parking spaces at the Richmond Hill GO station and a Metrolinx representative confirmed Metrolinx owns the parking lot.

My suggestion was for the city to explore with Metrolinx either gifting or providing at a nominal cost some of the land where these excess parking spaces are located for a new development under the HAF. It would be a historic deal across three levels of government (municipal, provincial and federal).

I was disappointed to learn in a November 25, 2024 email from Phoebe Chow of the City **'We have not been approached by Metrolinx on potential partnership. Should the opportunity arise, City staff would explore it with the Province.'**

Since there is a timeline involved in putting the HAF funds to work, I would urge Council to explore this idea if it hasn't already since the update I received in November 2024.

Closing comments

In receiving a mailer about the February 25, 2025 Council meeting, the content largely focused on potential parking amendments. It was only through a review last week of the documents posted for the meeting that I realized a more involved discussion is taking place – including potential sites for the HAF.

It's vital that Council take a very measured approach to these funds as they are after all taxpayer dollars. Additionally, noting that a major investment was previously made for the Viva bus service while funding has been absent in vital infrastructure upgrades to improve Richmond Hill GO service, that should also be considered.

Going forward, I hope the city provides enhanced information about this process to ensure not only that these funds are well spent but also contribute to the connectivity the city is attempting to achieve.

-Michael Theodores