Mayor vows to learn from past mistakes

And 19-year resident Neville Cohen asked for a town-wide vision — one that includes a centre or downtown area — as expressed in the problem-plagued Markham Centre plan.

"We have all these separate communities that haven't been able to draw themselves together," he said.

About 50 residents showed up for the first public meeting at the Civic Centre, though councillors and staff did more talking than did the people.

The evening began with an unannounced year-in-review presentation by Deputy Mayor Frank Scarpitti. He called it an annual event, a way to let residents know what council has been doing during the last year.

But residents who may have been interested likely didn't know about it as the evening meeting was tagged Vision 2000; and those who were there to hear about development were subjected to the hour-long presentation highlighting the town's 1999 accomplishments and its goals for 2000.

The goal of Vision 2000 is to develop a shared community concept on the character and pace of development in Markham.

"It's a stake in the ground," Cousens told the crowd. "What have we done well as we build out ... and what hasn't gone so well. Can we learn from those mistakes to do a better job in future?"

Director of planning Jim Baird kicked off the meeting with a backgrounder on the town's official plan and urban boundary, pointing out Markham remains two-thirds urban and one-third rural/agricultural.

He said the 1993 official plan amendment (OPA 5) released another 6,000 acres for residential development, the bulk of which is north of 16th Avenue, and that should last until 2011.

"16th Avenue lasted more than 20 years as the boundary, we extended it in 1993 to last another 20 years," he said, adding expansion is done in blocks, logically and sequentially, to avoid urban sprawl.

The style of development has changed as well. Begun by the province with its 1989 policy statement on land use, the town has increased density on lots from three to five units an acre, as seen in the older communities of Markham and Unionville, to between three and nine units per acre.

Developments like Cornell and Angus Glen, which have incorporated townhouses in their plans, have increased the choice for buyers and follow the new urbanism trend that's all the rage.

"Small-town style planning, not suburban sprawl, are our priorities," said planning commissioner Mary Frances Turner.

She highlighted design mistakes made in Thornhill and Milliken developments, such as garage-dominated frontages, houses backing on to arterial roads resulting in bleak streetscapes, a lack of neighbourhood focus or centre and badly planned roads that discourage pedestrians.

She said good planning principles include diversity and choice; compact urban form and a mix of housing which can support transit infrastructure; protection of the environment and agricultural lands; and communities with a centre and an edge.

The task force will continue to obtain public input through surveys, focus groups and at least one more public meeting. Call 477-7000 for more information.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Markham is growing by leaps and bounds:

More than 5,800 homes have been built in Markham in the past three years, adding 20,000 residents to the town's population.

Types of houses currently selling well in Markham: traditional form at 68 per cent, wide-hallow lots at 21 per cent, rear lanes at 11 per cent.

Mattamy Homes is the top seller in Markham, as it is across the GTA.

Ethnicity plays a role in market demand. Asians buy in Markham and Italians buy in Vaughan.

York Region's share of GTA growth in the late '80s was about one-fifth, now it's closer to one-third, with Markham at 25 per cent of that.

Home buyers are evenly split among immigrants; movers from elsewhere in Markham and movers from the GTA. Only 2 per cent of new residents come from elsewhere in Canada.

Most home buyers are under age 45, but that number will rise as the population ages.

Peel and Durham are the strongest GTA housing markets. York Region is third, garnering 30 per cent of new home sales in the GTA.

From Vision 2000 presenters Peter Norman, vice president Clayton Research and Andy Brethour, PMA Brethour Consulting.

Primary care would improve health care: doctor

headed for bigger trouble down the road.

"There are a number of us who believe that, unless you do this, we won't be able to save our universal health-care system and I don't know if it can survive. I don't think people really know what it's like to live in a country without universal health care."

And Maclean is not alone. Dr. Duncan Sinclair, the man appointed to head up the Health Services Restructuring Commission and who recommended rostering be mandatory, was still advocating primary-care reform this week, saying it should happen "immediately".

But the Ontario Medical Association is opposed to mandatory enrolment in group practices, as is the majority of its member physicians.

The new structure, they say, would eliminate their right to bill for services or charge OHIP for each procedure.

However, for the system to continue to be viable, reform is needed now, says Maclean.

The current system allows patients to shop around for second opinions and have duplicate tests performed at additional cost to taxpayers.

"We still want to pursue primary-care reform and work with local physicians to do things to bring better care to people," Maclean said. "It's our belief at Markham Stouffville Hospital that primary care is the cornerstone of health care. I believe we have a good number of physicians in our community who believe primary care would significantly improve care for the public."

Maclean said rostering would give patients greater access to physicians and other health-care providers, as well as provide advice by telephone, making more efficient use of medical resources.