

Construction constant sight across bustling region

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have been adopted by the region's planning department. They call for the creation of healthy communities; measures to assure economic vitality, preservation of the environment and the provision of much-needed human services.

One of the most effective ways to control growth and meet these criteria is to establish a system of centres, or nodes, in which the majority of development will occur, Mr. Tuckey said.

By far the highest level of growth will occur in the region's well-established southern municipalities — Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Markham. It is also destined to continue along Yonge Street in Aurora and Newmarket.

The region's goal is to establish acceptable density guidelines to fill the gaps in these existing urban areas and then implement the traffic and transit measures necessary to make them work.

The bulk of the southern development will occur along Hwy. 7 and Yonge, with major corridors in the west and east as well, linking Vaughan and Markham with Toronto.

The region's rapid transit plan, a multi-billion-dollar partnership with a consortium of private companies, will focus on these corridors.

The system, which is likely to evolve over years, will provide transportation for the growing number of people living and working within the region, as well

as establishing links with the Toronto Transit Commission and transit services in neighbouring Peel and Durham regions.

All of these elements, along with planning for upgraded roads, sewers, water delivery systems and other infrastructure, loom large as York rumbles inexorably toward an increasingly urban future.

"It is managing rapid growth rather than managing urban sprawl in the traditional sense," Mr. Tuckey said.

"We have compact community building policies, firm boundaries, very strong greenlands and agricultural and rural policies that are very solid."

Markham Deputy Mayor Frank Scarpitti, chairperson of the region's planning committee, agrees planning for the future requires a comprehensive approach.

"In the past, we used to build subdivisions," he said. "Now, we're building communities."

Along with growth on a scale such as has been evident in York Region over the past three decades — the population was 169,000 when the municipality was formed by the province in 1971 — comes a sense of inevitability among residents and even politicians.

It can seem as if construction is a constant condition and that sprawl is unstoppable. That, according to Peter Sibbald Brown of Sutton, is when growth must be put to the test of public scrutiny and opinion.

"The inevitability factor — that's just complacency," Mr. Brown said. "Of course, you're going to have inevitability, unless you're continually vigilant."

His comments are made in the dining room of a home overlooking Lake Simcoe. To the rear of the house, in the gathering darkness of an early winter evening, are 38 hectares of forested land that became a battleground when, several years ago, a developer announced



FRANK SCARPITTI: 'We used to build subdivisions. Now we're building communities.'

action by "the fact that a group of speculators whose only objective is ... to make as big a buck as possible could actually come up with something that destroyed the quality of life of so many families."

And don't kid yourself: even though it's now scaled down, it's still going to have a huge effect on the lives of all of us around here. And I'm talking about 300 families or more."

The opponents of Moatfield knew they stood little chance of defeating the plan outright. But they hoped to mitigate the impact of a proposal that had huge ramifications.

They fought to maintain the most significant environmental feature of the site, a forested wetland close to the lake.

Opponents contend large-scale development would have negative consequences for a water table that serves several hundred homes on wells.

A publicly-driven campaign helped fight a plan that was inappropriate for the area, Dr. Vandervelden said.

"Public pressure is legitimate," she said. "Sure, it's emotionalism, because people see their lifestyle threatened."

And that public pressure is becoming more important now, as growth barrels ahead, she said. The process can be skewed in favour of the development community, Dr. Vandervelden said.

"It's (a) development process that developed in a pro-growth climate," Dr. Vandervelden said.

She questions the objectivity of plans and environmental assessments that are funded by developers and used by municipalities as guidelines.

Mr. Brown credits the community's refusal to accept the inevitability of Moatfield for the strides that have been made in the fight against the proposal.

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