

# LAND LOCKOUT

*Some municipalities are running out of business space. And that can mean more traffic headaches for you.*

BY PATRICK MANGION  
Staff Writer

With businesses beating a path to York Region's doors, things have been pretty rosy north of Steeles Avenue the past few years.

But that may change if demand exceeds supply.

Residential growth often outstrips commercial by a two-to-one margin.

That means many of York's municipalities need to tread lightly in the coming years if they are to strike a balance and have enough jobs to keep you off already clogged highways.

The last decade has shown Toronto's loss has been York's gain in many cases, as companies in search of lower taxes and a larger footprint put down roots in Vaughan, Markham, Richmond Hill, Newmarket and Aurora.

State Farm Insurance opened its Canadian headquarters in Aurora this year and Honda plans to do the same in Markham.

With developers pining for a piece of the lucrative residential housing boom, municipalities have been forced to become protective of what little employment lands remain, said Ana Bassios, Richmond Hill's commissioner of planning and development.

"The bedroom community could be in danger without a sustainable fiscal base," Ms Bassios said.

The town is embroiled in a dispute with developers over 270 acres between Leslie Street and Hwy. 404, north of Elgin Mills Road.

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While Richmond Hill envisions a sprawling commercial/industrial campus that would rival West Beaver Creek, some developers would rather build homes.

However, Richmond Hill is one of several southern municipalities earmarked for growth by the province.

The land use issue went to the Ontario Municipal Board earlier this year where a more diplomatic decision was handed down. Some of the land is reserved for businesses

and other portions zoned for retail and residential.

But that decision is being reviewed and could change, Ms Bassios said.

"Absorption of the town's employment lands has been much quicker than we anticipated. The Leslie lands are the last employment lands left. This is absolutely one of the highest priorities," she said.

*'If we can create two times as many jobs by going up, it means we don't have to build more roads or plow more sidewalks. It's optimum efficiency.'*

That is particularly true in Newmarket, where the region's smallest town (geographically) is nearly built out. Less than 100 acres are left for business, economic development officer Chris Kallio said.

It means the town finds itself in a unique situation.

While neighbouring towns such as East Gwillimbury and Aurora are undergoing unprecedented commercial growth, Newmarket is forced to turn business away, Mr. Kallio said.

"We can't promote ourselves as a manufacturing centre in the future because of land constraints," he said.

Plans are expected to take shape next year for an eight-acre office and commercial development. It will be a harbinger of things to come, Newmarket Mayor Tony Van Bynen said.

"The focus will be on creating the types of jobs that can be multi-storey," the mayor said.

That includes adding high-density office buildings in the town's existing corridors, such as Yonge and Davis Drive, a large portion of which can be centred around Southlake hospital, Mr. Van Bynen said.

"We're out of employment land. That takes the metal-stamping factory out of the equation."

"If we can create two times as many jobs by going up, it means we don't have to build more roads or plow more sidewalks. It's optimum efficiency," he said.

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