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MAYOR

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STATEMENT FROM MAYOR MRAKAS ON YORK REGIONAL COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING PLANNING FOR GROWTH 2051

"Last week at Regional Council we discussed intensification targets and engaged in a long debate about appropriate intensification. The staff recommendation was to start with 50% intensification and phase to 55% by 2051. During the discussion, a proposed amendment was made seeking a 60% target.

Intensification rates reflect the amount of new residential growth directed to existing built-up areas with the idea that "...directing a significant amount of new residential growth to existing built-up areas makes the best use of infrastructure, including transit, water and wastewater. It also minimizes outward growth into York Region's agricultural areas." While it sounds great on paper, a larger percentage of intensification would stop urban sprawl and this 'top-down' regional approach to planning may have negative impacts on individual communities. In this case, one size certainly does not fit all.

Region wide intensification targets impact each municipality differently. Thus, how each municipality intensifies should be the decision of each individual community, not a Region decision. By having the target at 50% it opens 'white-belt' lands for development. But what if those 'white-belt' lands are not needed to hit those targets? Shouldn't the municipality decide this as opposed to the Region? It may be a bit of a moot point in Aurora as we don't have any 'white-belt' lands. However, the larger issue of meeting regional intensification targets remains.

Intensification will occur, it is provincially mandated; but, the amount, the rate, how high we must go to accommodate this growth should be Aurora's decision. No town, no individual community should be required to overdevelop to meet region wide intensification targets.

This is the problem with setting the target too high. I believe that each municipality should have a greater say in what percentage they believe to be appropriate for their community. Some communities will see 80, 90 or even 100% intensification... But at the same time a few will struggle to even meet the 50% target.

As such, I was unable to support the proposed 60% intensification target. I don't think we in Aurora should tell our York Region neighbours how and what is appropriate for their community. Just as I am sure all of Aurora would agree they would not want those neighbours to make decisions affecting how our community should grow.

This brings me to my larger point – the need for a rethink of Regional Planning. I know the Region and the local municipalities are intertwined, so some aspects of planning need to be at the Region level. However, I do believe the scope of regional planning should be narrowed. Regional planning should be limited to regional issues – issues that require integrated planning decisions: policing, transit, major infrastructure like water/wastewater etc., which spans all 9 municipalities (and it should include regional fire as well but that's a discussion for another day). For planning matters which are not region wide or do not impact multiple municipalities, there should be more autonomy for local municipalities' planning processes.

I'm repeating myself, but a one size fits all approach to planning does not work.

Not everyone wants to live in a city.... The beauty of the Region is we are all different communities. That there is variety.... people choose where they want to live and raise a family not out of necessity... but because they fall in love with what the community has to offer. Top-down region wide planning decisions can have unintended, negative impacts on our communities; potentially eroding what makes each community unique, one decision at a time.

We need a conversation about what Regional planning should look like as we plan our community's futures – individually and collectively as a Region."