

Aurora on track for a population of 84,900 by 2051

Aurora is on track to reach a population of 84,500 by 2051 to meet growth targets put forward by the Province of Ontario.

With numbers allocated by the Region of York, Regional Officials presented growth forecasts to Council last week, leading some elected members to question what would happen if the Town stepped forward to say no.

Over the next 30 years, the community is expected to see a population increase of more than 21,000 people, a population target that will mean further growth on remaining greenfield lands and intensification of existing areas, particularly those close to Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs) such as the Aurora GO Station.

For community land needs, the Region's population growth of 800,000 people translates to a requirement of 276,000 new housing units and half of these units fall within the existing built-up area in the Region in order to reach the 50 per cent intensification target, said Paul Bottomley, Manager of Policy, Research and Forecasting for the Region of York, referencing targets for York as a whole. We have 78 MTSAs along corridors in York Region and there's other infill areas that can accommodate intensification. In Aurora, there is the Aurora GO Station MTSA, the Promenade Area, as well as smaller-scale infill.

Aurora also provides opportunities to accommodate a share of the Region's greenfield growth as the Town provides an ideal market for ground-related homes and Aurora's housing type forecast calls for 57 per cent ground-related homes and 43 per cent apartments. There is also 4,600 intensification units that are anticipated to be built within the Town's existing built-up area. The Town's intensification target is 45 per cent and that is an increase from the 29 per cent rate that was recorded between 2006 and 2019. The Aurora GO Station is well-placed to attract intensification and there is also additional opportunities assumed within the Promenade area as well as the broader Aurora community.

The Town's forecast calls for a fairly balanced growth between greenfield and intensification. Intensification will play a more prominent role in the latter part of the forecast as the greenfield land supply diminishes. Over a third or 37 per cent of Aurora's household growth is anticipated to be apartments and the Town is planning for more choice in the housing market moving forward with an increased role for intensification. There is also potential for intensification primarily within the Aurora GO MTSA, the Promenade area, and with smaller scale infill opportunities with the Town for example, the Highland Gate [development] and the development within the Aurora South community.

By the end of the forecast, the Town's total housing stock is anticipated to be 78 per cent ground-related with 22 per cent apartments by 2051. That compares to the current stats of 89 per cent ground-related and 11 per cent apartments today.

The growth plan also includes a density target of 55 people and jobs per hectare.

On the population front, however, Councillor John Gallo questioned what would happen if Aurora wanted less.

Mr. Bottomley said the Region has put forward a deadline of July 15 for York Region's nine municipalities to provide formal feedback on the Growth Plan.

I would like to continue this discussion at least from our own perspective and we'll have some other opportunities to provide input and do a proper job when it comes to a Made-in-Aurora solution, said Councillor Gallo.

Concerns were also raised by Mayor Tom Mrakas on the population growth and whether Aurora would be able to retain what has often been described as the Town's small-town feel.

Meeting the Provincial Policy, our 50 per cent intensification, 55 people and jobs per hectare can we meet all of these objectives in the Town of Aurora yet still retain the uniqueness of us and maintaining our height restrictions maintaining our density he asked.

?Can we continue to be that unique and have those restrictions in place yet meet those targets.?

The short answer, according to Regional officials, as yes.

?I am a firm believer that local Official Plans should determine the look and feel of what your community would like to see in the future in terms of where growth occurs, the type of intensification,? said the Region's Paul Freeman. ?Intensification happens in many forms, even a second suite in a home is intensification, and so is a 40-storey building and 60-storeys we are seeing in some areas?along our subway corridors in York Region.?

Concluded Mayor Mrakas: ?We can be a small hamlet in the Region of York where we have our own uniqueness.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter