

MIDTOWN OAKVILLE BEWARE

*The Writing Is on the Wall;
And It's in Vaughan*

**Vaughan's Metropolitan
Centre Growth Area
is Out of Control**

As residents across Oakville push back against tall-tower plans from Town staff and consultants for a Midtown that would house over 50,000 people in a single square kilometre of land, disturbing news on the City of Vaughan's growth centre is casting a long shadow.

Known as Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC), this Urban Growth Centre (UGC) was somewhat unique amongst Ontario's 25 designated urban growth centres. It was the least developed of all and one of only two UGCs outside of Toronto to be served by a subway; it possessed excellent highway access; and was not located adjacent to low-density residential development, to which intensification must be sensitive.

Between 2008 to 2010, Vaughan undertook a planning exercise, aided by Urban Strategies, one of the consultants now assisting the Town of Oakville in its preparation of a proposed Official Plan Amendment for Midtown Oakville. The VMC Secondary Plan established a population target of 25,000 residents and 11,500 jobs by 2031 with a maximum population of approximately 50,000 residents at full build-out.

That plan was appealed by developers resulting in a mediated settlement that increased the full build out forecast to 72,000 residents.

Fast forward to 2023 when a staff report to Vaughan's City Council brought forth a host of development issues. Initially billed as an ambitious project to give downtown Vaughan business credibility, the VMC was now endangering Council's ability to achieve its vision for a vibrant and balanced downtown.

The list of problems was a long one:

- Residential development activity was dramatically surpassing the population targets established in the VMC's Secondary Plan.
- The ratio of residential to non-residential uses continued to widen, raising concern for a lack of balance.
- Development intensification was trending at a rate that averaged 1.6 times greater than the maximum permissions afforded.
- Density aspirations in the marketplace continued to set new precedents.

- The exponential growth in residential intensity had not been anticipated nor planned for in the related engineering and community service master plans.
- The predominate form of development continued to be high-rise residential towers on podiums, with the delivery of other building typologies, such as low-rise townhouses and mid-rise buildings, lagging. The issue was further exacerbated by development applications for mid-rise buildings that were being revisited and revised for high rise development resulting in even bigger losses of “missing middle” building typologies.

Unprecedented Hyper Densities

The combined effect of issues brought even greater challenges.

- Based on approved development applications, 98% of the housing supply represented apartment units, worsened by an additional trend toward smaller units and less unit mix diversity. The vast majority of units were 1 and 2-bedroom configurations with only 2% of the units being 3-bedrooms.
- Residential growth continued to outpace office, retail, and other non-residential uses, meaning that the provision of parkland, schools, community services and facilities, had not kept pace with the residential population generated by new developments.

Staff's caution to Municipal leaders was and continued to be: *“Should this trend continue, Council's vision of a world class downtown, with a vibrant central business district and balanced community, may no longer be possible”.*

Just one year later, in February 2024, Vaughan's working group on VMC reported that the outcome of developments occupied, under construction or approved now represented more than 69,000 residents, not only greatly exceeding the 2031 forecast, but as well, surpassing the original full build out figure of 50,000. In fact, applications submitted for future construction reflected a population of 82,000 residents and when projected, the new build out population would equal 118,000 residents.

The group further reported:

- VMC would likely become the most densely populated area in Canada and one of the most densely populated areas in North America.
- If allowed to continue on its path of uncontrolled growth, the outcome would be diminished housing variety, unprecedented hyper densities and an area dominated by high rise buildings full of smaller units

thus resulting in the loss of families. In fact, the VMC alone could achieve the More Homes Built Faster target set for the entire City of Vaughan!

Forecasts clearly revealed that substantial public investment (taxes) would be required to balance service demands.

Vaughan has now embarked on creating a revised Secondary Plan. It is considering expanding the boundaries of VMC in an attempt to regulate type of construction and timing, while putting measures in place to help achieve badly needed parks and social amenities.

It's new vision for VMC is one of managed and gradual growth based on mixed built form reflecting lower densities and housing types that will serve families. Its overall role will be as a contributor to Vaughan's More Homes Built Faster Act targets, not a leading component.

Developers and land owner groups are already voicing their disapproval on Vaughan's intentions to limit building heights.

Vaughan's living example should stand as a jarring message and strident reminder for Oakville as it attempts to move forward with its tall tower approach to Midtown Oakville's renewal.

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VAUGHAN'S REPORTS AND
PRESENTATION ON VMC CAN
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