

Engage High Tech Final Report



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2/18/2022

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Introduction

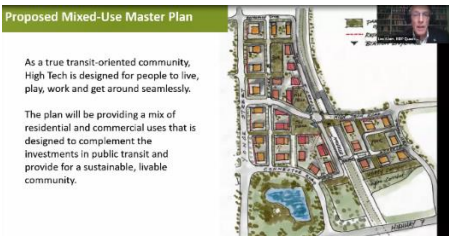
Transit-oriented communities (TOC) are part of the government’s plan to build new, sustainable transit. TOCs will enhance Ontario’s “New Subway Transit Plan for the GTA” by placing more housing and jobs near or at transit stations along the routes of the province’s four priority subway projects, including the Ontario Line, the Yonge North Subway Extension, the Scarborough Subway Extension, and the Eglinton Crosstown West Extension.

The TOC proposal at the future High Tech station will create a mixed-use community that is home to new residents and businesses, transit supportive and high density and makes effective use of the Province’s infrastructure investment. The project looks to increase transit ridership and housing supply, while building a complete community and stimulating the economy. The site will be developed by the Province of Ontario (the Province), in line with the stated objectives of the TOC program.

Engagement Activities



A total of 6,500 postcards were distributed to residences and businesses within a one-kilometre radius of the proposed development to make them aware of the website and an upcoming open house opportunity.



A virtual open house was held on December 9, 2021, with a live Q&A session. 116 people registered for the event and a video recording was posted on the website the following day.



An engagement website (www.engagehightech.ca) with details about the project and opportunities to provide feedback through a survey went live on November 23, 2021. The survey closed on January 31, 2022; 85 responses were received.

Presentation

On Thursday December 9, 2021, Infrastructure Ontario, Condor Properties Ltd. and Metrus Properties held a virtual public meeting for the High Tech TOC with a moderator from AECOM serving to facilitate the presentation and questions. The meeting began with a land acknowledgement, introductions, opening remarks from Wayne Emmerson, Chairman and CEO of York Region, and Michael Fedchyshyn, Senior Vice President, Transit Oriented Communities Program, Infrastructure Ontario, followed by a presentation on the High Tech TOC proposal by members of the development team: Peter Smith, Planning Consultant from Bousfields and Les Klein, Architect from BDP Quadrangle.

The facilitator explained that the focus of the open house session would be on the proposed TOC development, and questions regarding the subway alignment and other details should be redirected to the Yonge North Subway Extension team during their public engagement sessions on December 16, 2021, and January 5, 2022.

The presentation opened with Michael Fedchyshyn discussing the benefits and need for transit oriented communities and sharing the vision of establishing a community for mixed uses including housing, transit, and public spaces. The focus of the TOC Program is to create a vibrant community at transit stations along priority transit lines with the intention of saving taxpayer dollars, reducing pollution, creating jobs, and aiding in economic recovery. The program aims to increase transit ridership, increase housing supply, catalyze complete communities, offset the cost of station construction, and stimulate the economy.

Peter Smith continued by explaining the planning context including the station area, the history of the project, and the vision and objectives of the development. He discussed the anticipated growth in the area, and the need to use land effectively to accommodate the needs of a growing population. He also highlighted that the intent of the area is to establish the High Tech TOC as a walkable community that is connected to transit and easily accessible. The proposal would follow the TOC Guiding Principles and aim to provide affordable, accessible living.

Les Klein followed by describing the design of the buildings and the development. He highlighted key features of the development and provided an overview of the area to describe how the greenspace integrated with the transit infrastructure and anticipated residential and entertainment buildings. He also described how the area would develop to be an urban growth centre that was accessible for pedestrians and cyclists, and transit users.

The presentation concluded by examining the estimated timeline for the High Tech TOC with the various phases of development from 2021 to 2050.

TOC Guiding Principles

- ✓ Appropriate Mix of Uses
- ✓ Transit Supportive Density
- ✓ Integration with Surrounding Area
- ✓ Great Public Realm
- ✓ Transit Infrastructure Integration
- ✓ Natural, Built, and Cultural Heritage
- ✓ Housing Supply and Jobs
- ✓ Community Amenities and Infrastructure

Questions and Answers

Following the presentation, a live question-and-answer period was conducted. Participants were able to submit questions ahead of time and during the session via the Zoom webinar Q&A feature. Attendees were also encouraged to continue providing input after the session through a short survey posted on the Engage High Tech website. A summary of the discussion and the survey findings is presented below by theme: project logistics, height and density, design, traffic and parking, community involvement and development, and parks and open spaces.

Development Timing

One respondent asked about the timeline of the project and anticipated development and completion dates. Another respondent asked about the cost of the project, and the expense of developing and maintaining both the High Tech and Bridge station.

The development team noted that they are working on phased timeline and that the planning and development of the area would be taking place over a 25 – 30-year period.

Height and Density

Many of the responders questioned the height of the buildings and the number of anticipated units. Some respondents cited that the earlier plans for the area which contemplated 10,000 units in buildings of 50-storeys compared to the proposed 80-storey towers and up to 20,000 units in the revised plan. A respondent also asked why there is so much residential density planned. A respondent was concerned about the loss of light, based on the density of the development, and cited the “Right to Light” for all residents in the area. Some respondents were more supportive of the amount of density, and asked for housing in the area to be affordable to live in.

The development team discussed the growing housing crisis, and the need for an affordable supply in the GTA. The development team also noted that the Richmond Hill Centre has long been targeted for increased density because there will be 5 modes of higher order transit: Langstaff GO Station/GO Bus Service, VIVA Rapid Transit, York Region (Local) Transit, 2 future Subway Stations: Bridge and High Tech, and the Future 407 Transitway. The development team also reiterated the desire to build a complete community that would have amenities to support the new residents.

Design

Respondents questioned how the space would be used, and whether there would be supporting community space such as community centres, libraries, community gathering spaces, schools, etc.



for the proposed number of residents. Respondents also expressed the need for a well-designed station that would make the area more vibrant and useful. One respondent suggested that the area should have a good mix of community uses, and another added that the area should feel like a comfortable liveable community. A survey respondent asked about integration with existing infrastructure, such as the Home Depot.

A number of comments also mentioned the hydro corridor and the desire to have the space be converted to functional green space by burying the hydro lines. A respondent mentioned that the hydro cables would impede growth and reduce desire to live in the area.

The development team also noted the area would be a mix of uses including open spaces and parks to make the community lively. Although plans are still in very early stages, there would be consideration of existing infrastructure and a station that is well integrated in the community. The development team also acknowledged that the hydro lines were a challenging element to work around and that there would be consideration of how to program the green space in the hydro corridor to make it more usable.

Traffic and Parking

Many respondents asked about the traffic and congestion mitigation plan to address the increase in traffic to the already congested area. Respondents mentioned that there is already substantial traffic from the Highway 7 and Highway 407 interchange, and high traffic on Bayview Avenue and Yonge Street that would need to be considered and managed during the construction of the development. Respondents also spoke of parking both for residents of the development, and transit customers that would travel from the area. A survey respondent asked about noise from additional traffic. Respondents noted that separated bicycle lanes that would keep cyclist safe were needed and would encourage use.



The development team noted that the intent is to create a walkable community which also encourages the use of cycling paths and transit. Noise would be reduced within the community by limiting traffic volumes and speeds on interior connecting roads. With respect to parking, the development team mentioned that there would be limited parking available for residents and transit users but noted that the parking plan is still being developed.

Community Involvement and Development

Two respondents expressed that the station area and surrounding community should be an attractive destination -- more than just a transit interchange station.

A number of respondents also advocated for community officials to be involved, and for the developers to listen to and respect the values of the community. Several respondents also stated that development plans should consider current residents not just future residents.

There was also a question about why the employment numbers proposed were significantly lower than the initial estimate -- 9,000 instead of the original 19,000.

The development team explained that they are still in the process of finalizing the design and that the specific amenities and retail spaces would be updated later in the planning process but that the priority would be on creating an integrated, liveable community connected to transit. The development team also acknowledged that there had been a number of comments regarding community spaces for recreation programs for all ages, arts spaces, and community institutions and that the comments were being considered in the development of the area. Furthermore, the development team confirmed that they are committed to working with Richmond Hill municipal representatives, residents, and stakeholders as the project advances. With respect to employment, the development team discussed that 9,500 was the minimum number of jobs that would be created but that was only a minimum and the actual number would likely be higher over the 20-year lifespan of the project.



Parks and Open Spaces

Respondents submitted comments suggesting that the amount of park space is too little for the proposed amount of people. There was also a recommendation for various types of spaces including dog parks, walking trails, park facilities, raised garden bed, shaded areas, pedestrian and cycling paths and trees. There was also a lot of support for preserving the woodlot area at High Tech Road and Yonge Street.

The development team acknowledged the existence of the woodlot area and its importance of the community, and mentioned they are looking to balance the preservation of the area with the transit needs and development goals. The development team also confirmed that 27% of the development would be dedicated parkland.

The development team highlighted plans for large parks that would be complemented and connected by tree lined streets and large open spaces within the hydro corridor. In addition, the development team described how the area is designed to be pedestrian and cycle friendly.

Out of Scope Comments

A number of questions and comments discussed the location of the subway line. Respondents expressed that the subway line should remain on Yonge Street. Respondents also expressed their discontent at the prospect of tunneling under residences to build the subway lines.

Several individuals questioned the need to develop two stations that are so close to each other.

Comments regarding the Yonge North Subway Extension were referred to Metrolinx for response.

More Information

Please visit engagehightech.ca for more information about the High Tech TOC. Community input is an important part of the process, and we would like to thank everyone who has participated in the TOC engagement.