



# TOWN OF RICHMOND HILL

## COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

November 16, 2009

SRCAO.09.40

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer  
Strategic Initiatives Division

**SUBJECT: Town Hall Relocation - Results of Community Consultation  
(SRCAO.09.40)**

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### PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a summary of the results of public consultation held to gather feedback from the community on the issue of relocating the municipal offices and building a new Town Hall on the municipally-owned land at the south west corner of Yonge Street and Major Mackenzie Drive.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) That the public input received during the community consultation process on the Town Hall relocation as summarized in SRCAO.09.40, be received;
- b) That staff be directed to undertake the following and report back to Committee of the Whole:
  - i) Consult with government agencies who have utilized partnership arrangements to construct multi-use capital facilities and analyze common success factors;
  - ii) Investigate potential partnership opportunities for a multi-use facility on the Town-owned lands at Yonge Street and Major Mackenzie Drive to include municipal offices and civic space;
  - iii) Retain real estate, planning and public financing experts to assist staff with identifying and exploring various design and financing options at a cost of no more than \$75,000, with the funds to be allocated from an appropriate Town Reserve on the recommendation of the Commissioner, Corporate and Financial Services.
  - iv) Investigate and provide analysis on ten projects in Canada of similar magnitude and significance to compare the initial and actual costs as well as the project success factors;
  - v) Provide analysis on recent Town capital projects to compare the initial and actual costs as well as the project success factors;

- vi) Determine the positioning of the potential Town Hall project against other significant Town priorities;
- vii) Investigate existing infrastructure funding programs that may support the Town Hall project.

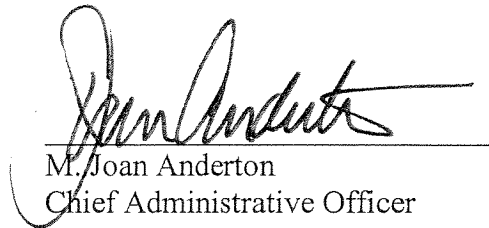
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Approved by:



M. Joan Anderton  
Chief Administrative Officer

## **BACKGROUND:**

In November 2008, Council received a study that concluded that relocating the municipal offices to a new Town Hall to be built on municipally-owned land at the south west corner of Yonge Street and Major Mackenzie Drive is feasible (SRCAO.08.39). In May 2009, Council directed staff to convene a community consultation process for the purpose of gathering public input on whether to build a new Town Hall on the proposed site in Downtown Richmond Hill. The formal consultation process is now complete and this report provides a summary of the consultation process, results and recommended actions.

No decision has been made on whether to proceed with this project.

## **DISCUSSION:**

### Public Consultation Process and Results

Two public meetings and one community roundtable were held in the Fall of 2009. In addition, an online survey was available from the Town's web site between September 3 and October 15. Hard copies of the survey were also available at the Town's libraries and community centres during this time. A total of 688 individuals participated in the meetings and roundtable and/or provided responses to the survey.

In order to publicize both the public meetings and the availability of the survey, the following methods of communication were used:

• A notice was placed in the Fall Leisure Guide delivered to residents and published on the Town's website in August;

- A notice was placed in the Town's Bulletin Board page of the Richmond Hill *Liberal* on successive Thursdays for six weeks between September 3 and October 8;
- A YLM (Your Local Marketplace) E-blast was sent to businesses in the YLM database on September 8;
- A message was sent to all People Plan participants who provided an email address on September 8;
- A notice was placed in the September 3 edition of Salaam (Farsi), the September 5 edition of Ming Pao (Chinese), and the September 9 edition of Nasha Canada (Russian) in an effort to reach the three most prevalent non-English language groups in Richmond Hill according to the 2006 census.

### *Public Meetings*

The first public meeting was held on September 16 at the McConaghy Seniors' Centre and the second on October 8 at the Lake Wilcox Community Centre. Turnout for both meetings was significant, with a total of 104 individuals signing in for both meetings.

Each meeting began with a short presentation from staff to provide background on the feasibility study and context for those in attendance. Community members were then invited to address the group, keeping in mind three key questions:

1. Do you support the relocation of the municipal government offices to a newly built facility at the Yonge Street and Major Mackenzie Drive site? Why or why not?
2. If a decision was made to build a new Town Hall how do you think it should be funded? What funding options, or combination of funding options, is appropriate?
  - Sale of assets
  - Reserves
  - Borrowing / Property tax increase
  - Public-Private Partnership
3. Is there anything else Council should know before making a decision?

At each public meeting, staff used flipcharts to record community comments, which are included in Appendix 1 of this report. The following is a brief summary of those comments.

The majority of attendees at the September 16 public meeting spoke in favour of relocation and building a new Town Hall, however, a number expressed concern about the cost of the project and how it could be funded. In contrast, attendees at the October 8 public meeting indicated a greater reservation for the project as well as concern for the cost and funding options. As a general comment, while some were strongly in favour or strongly opposed, most attendees were supportive of the concept of a new public space, but concerned at the cost impact a new Town Hall would have on their property taxes and whether now was the appropriate time to undertake such a large capital project given the space remaining for expansion within the existing municipal offices.

If the Town were to go ahead with the project, community members who attended the public meetings indicated that sources of funding considered for the project should be the sale of assets

such as the existing Town Hall and the use of unallocated reserves, such as the proceeds from the sale of Richmond Hill Hydro (the Community Enhancement and Economic Vitality Reserve Fund). There was also discussion about pursuing partnerships with other public or private sector organizations but with a desire to ensure that the Town's interests are protected in any such arrangement.

### *Community Roundtable*

On September 24, staff convened a community roundtable, based on the model used during People Plan consultation to have a less formal discussion-based conversation. Sixty-eight individuals were invited to a community roundtable, held to elicit more discussion-based feedback on the project. These individuals were selected to represent a variety of wards and interests within the Town from among community members that participated in People Plan consultation in 2007-2009. The roundtable was attended by 12 individuals representing business, residents and a variety of wards.

As was the case with the public meetings, staff used a flipchart to record comments from the community which are included in Appendix 2 of this report. The following is a brief summary of these comments.

As with the public meetings, there was a brief staff presentation and then the three central questions were posed to initiate discussion. Again, the general feeling was support for the creation of civic space with reservations about cost and funding for the project. Community members discussed the meaning of "Town Hall" and how frequently one might need to visit now and in the future, and moved toward a discussion of other opportunities to facilitate the civic purposes proposed with this project that might have a less significant financial impact. There was discussion about how citizen engagement might or might not increase if the municipal offices, specifically the Council Chamber, were closer to the centre of the Town and more accessible for pedestrians or by transit. Community members further discussed how building a new Town Hall at the Yonge and Major Mackenzie intersection could spur new private and public developments, such as intensified residential housing and subway access.

### *Print Survey*

Copies of the print survey were made available to members of the public through Access Richmond Hill at 225 East Beaver Creek Road and at all community centres and libraries during the community consultation period. Copies of the survey were also available at both public meetings and the community roundtable. A copy of the survey is attached as Appendix 3 of this report. At the conclusion of the public consultation period, 98 completed surveys had been returned. A summary of the results of the print survey are included in Appendix 4 of this report.

The majority of respondents to the print survey were residents (91.84 per cent) and were in support of building a new Town Hall (69.39 per cent). Reasons for their support included the impact a new Town Hall at that site would have on Downtown revitalization efforts and the potential for increased accessibility at a more centrally located Town Hall.

Respondents to the print survey that did not support building a new Town Hall (24.49 per cent) cited the reasons for their opposition as the potential property tax impact and the overall cost of the project.

Should the Town move forward with building a new Town Hall, the majority of all respondents to the print survey favoured the sale of assets (such as the current municipal office building) and unallocated reserves as funding sources, with about one third of respondents supporting borrowing funds and a public-private partnership.

Additional comments were invited from print survey participants and are summarized as follows. Respondents echoed concerns raised in the specific survey questions and included the need to have the Town Hall in a more central location (among those that supported building a new Town Hall) and the assertion that such a large capital expenditure was unnecessary at this time (among those in opposition). Other comments articulated concerns about the impact to traffic at the Yonge Street and Major Mackenzie Drive intersection should an office building be located on the proposed site.

#### *Online Survey*

The online survey was available through the Town's website between September 3 and October 15. The survey was not administered in a scientific manner or with consideration of the random sampling process. Consequently, the results reflect only the opinions of those who voluntarily took part in the survey at that given time. A breakdown of data collected from the online survey is included in Appendix 5. The following is a brief summary of the results of the online survey.

A total of 486 individuals completed the survey, of which 91 per cent were residents, 3.2 per cent were the owner or operator of a business in Richmond Hill and 5.5 per cent "other" which included responses such as "resident and owner/operator of a business," "employee of the Town of Richmond Hill" and "occasional visitor/tourist."

The majority of residents and business owners were aware of the discussions about moving the municipal offices prior to initiating the survey. Of those residents who completed the survey, a slightly larger number were opposed to building a new Town Hall with 52 per cent opposing or strongly opposing the move. With only 17 respondents representing business, the results in this category, while demonstrating support for a new Town Hall, were not statistically significant.

When asked what factors influenced their opposition to the project, most residents cited the overall cost of the project, the potential property tax impact and the current economic conditions. Of those that supported the move, most residents said they did so as it could support Downtown Richmond Hill revitalization, make Town services more accessible and because the location of Town services mattered to them.

If the Town were to go ahead with the construction of new municipal offices, the top three funding options cited, in order, were the sale of assets (such as the current Town Hall), reserves and a public-private partnership.

As with the print survey, online survey participants were invited to include additional comments. Respondents spoke about the need to have the Town Hall in a more central location. However,