

Your Honourable Mayor, Chair, Councillors, and guests – both young and old.

My name is Meg Stokes and I am the President of the Angus Glen Ratepayers Association. Before you today, you have a recommendation from staff for a balanced approach to growth for the next 20 years. You have heard from countless groups – including ourselves, environmental organizations, landowners and farmers. You have read hundreds of reports, reviewed dozens of maps, and heard many opinions.

What you have not SEEN are the faces of Families in Markham whose lives you are affecting. Specifically families with children. Joining me today, are just a few of the children whose parents have made the choice to raise them in Markham. These kids here today, are growing up in homes with back yards. Your decision to stop expansion of Markham's urban boundaries will mean that MANY new families with children wanting to move to Markham will most likely have to raise their kids in an apartment building. By proposing 100% intensification, you are planning for 73% of all new units built in Markham over the next 20 years to be in the form of apartments. 300 new apartments buildings simply means – lots of kids will grow up in Markham without a backyard or families will simply choose to live elsewhere. We need a balanced and smart approach to future housing options in Markham.

These are the people that MAKE Markham what it is today. Not developers who build the structures and with all due respect, not the council, committee or staff that design or approve the plans, but people. People and families. Many of these young kids are still going to be here 20 years from now – what will our town look like then?

How many of you here on this committee have young families or have already raised your families in Markham? Some may even have grandchildren here in Markham today. Did your kids play in the backyard? Did you share BBQ's with friends and neighbours in your backyard? Did you or your partner or spouse ever prepare dinner in the kitchen overlooking the backyard while the kids played safely there?

How many of you would have packed up the hula hoops, hockey sticks and tricycles gone down an elevator everyday to a community park so that your kids could get some fresh air. Kids need backyards to play in!

You held the biggest public meeting in the Town's history and heard the opinions of residents and many outside organizations. The Pollara poll was not commissioned by the Town nor was the URA's survey. With all due respect to the URA, I question the legitimacy of their survey. How were they to stop anyone from going on to Canada 411.ca, looking up an address in Ward 3 and putting that name and postal code on the survey. Why was this all done 2 months after the public information session? The town staff have spent over 2 years studying this issue and making their recommendations and we, as Markham families across the town, elected you to make these tough decisions based on their recommendations in a timely manner!!! Please stop delaying, deferring, and prolonging your decision.

From this new report that you have seen from staff, there were 420 submissions from residents and interest groups on this issue of the growth plans – 74% came from Environmental Defence Canada. They are a powerful political environmental lobby group that boasts that they were the originators of the Greenbelt concept. 74% of the submissions - incredible! What about the Markham families – where are their voices? Many do not have the luxury of free time or million dollar lobby budgets to organize campaigns and control the messaging going to the media. When the public meetings and council meetings are being held, many of these parent's are at home putting kids to bed, doing homework or playing in their backyards. They have the confidence in you to sort through all of the shouts from lobbyist, outside interest groups, and ratepayers groups and make the smart decisions.

Working parents would probably like to get involved in how this town is planned but they are busy. They have jobs and are stuck in traffic trying to get home to have dinner with the kids and play out back with them. Would many of these working parents like to work closer to home and not have to deal with the traffic congestion on our roads? Of course – and that is why you need consider employment lands, in addition, to deciding to build 200 or 300 apartments.

What about the needs for new employment lands that seems to have fallen by the wayside in all of these discussions. The town staff recommend a portion of the land north of Major Mackenzie to be used for employment lands. Where are these lands going to be with 100 % intensification? – and yes I know there are lots of empty offices that need to be leased, but I am talking about big companies that want business parks or warehouses and be able to have their employees live close to work. Some of those employees will want to live in apartments and some will want houses with backyards. Some will use public transit and some will drive. We need to offer this range of housing options and transit systems to remain a town where people will want to work and live in. Where are these businesses going to go? Richmond Hill, Aurora, or Vaughan and so will their employees. These businesses can add great value to our town – just look at the impact Magna has had in Aurora and the facilities that they have developed. Markham should not be designed as a bedroom community – be they bedrooms in apartments or houses. We need the town to be competitive in attracting the right businesses to our community. When Honda approached you about relocating to Markham, could you have said to them – well we have some empty office space in East Markham, a few store fronts in Thornhill and a warehouse in Unionville – can't you make that work? We need a balanced Markham with a variety of housing and employment land options.

What about traffic? The message out there is that Urban Sprawl outward is bad. What about urban sprawl upward? What about the actual definition of sprawl and how there has been no development in Markham for a very long time that can be characterized as sprawl nor do any of the future growth plans fall under the definition of sprawl. But you can't expect Markham families to understand all of these details. That, unfortunately, once again, is your job. What Markham families do know are that our roads are busy. No one is talking about the traffic implications that will arise from 300 apartments being built in Markham without the subway expansion, in addition to our reduced capacity to attract businesses here. We do not want our population density per square kilometer to be that of Toronto's and that is what will happen if we do not accommodate for growth in a smart, balanced way.

Let's face it. We have a great town and people want to live here. That is not a bad thing. Let's embrace this and plan for it in a smart balanced way not totally turning the housing situation upside down in the hopes that all of a sudden families will want to raise their kids in apartments OR that once a resident turns 65, they will want to stop gardening and move into a high-rise.

When I speak with people about the food belt proposal, many think it is a good idea – we need to stop sprawl they say. When I tell them about the 300 apartments buildings they are shocked and quickly realize how our town will become congested and lose the attractiveness that brought them to Markham in the first place. When I tell them that we have a large Green Belt and Greenway system and that Rouge Park is the largest near urban park in North America – again they are shocked. Many have never been to Rouge Park aside from the Toronto Zoo. In this great environmentally conscious and active town, what are we doing with our current environmental treasures?

In the Markham Life magazine – which is a well-used resource in many Markham families- are there any mentions of this park or programs offered here? Where are the nature courses or orienteering classes for kids? Bird watching or Tai Chi clubs? Intro to organic farming? The only reference to this massive land area in the Markham Life guide, I could find, was for rental of the Cedar Grove Community Ctr that is listed as not wheelchair accessible, with no meeting rooms or fitness facilities. Going to the Rouge Valley website, I tried to find one trail located in Markham in Rouge Park? There aren't any listed. Why nor harness all of this energy and enthusiasm that we

are seeing and hearing and redirect it towards enhancing Markham residents' experience with Rouge Park. Promote this already dedicated Green space and incorporate it into Markham's leisure, cultural and tourism plans. Support the farmers in the Rouge Park that are still able to farm. Promote back yard gardens to those of us that have back yards. Don't ask for more lands to be protected to the detriment of families and farmers, based on the hopes that you can turn it into an agri-tourism destination. And please stop defining local food in terms of our North/South/ East/West boundaries in Markham because not only is it wrong, it is misleading to residents.

We need to ensure that our Markham remains a wonderful town that encourages families to raise their children here. We need a sensible, balanced, smart plan for growth and we have elected you to make these decisions for us. We need you to stop playing games with voters and make some decisions and move forward. Protect our backyards and open the doors for more families to come here and enjoy all this great town has to offer.