

**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE    DECEMBER 9, 2002**

**WOODLAND FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT STUDY (FOCUS RURAL AREA)**  
**GENERAL PLANNING FILE 15.86**

**Recommendation**

The Commissioner of Planning recommends:

THAT the final report entitled "Focus Rural Area Woodland Assessment Study" prepared by AMEC Earth and Environmental dated October 2002, BE RECEIVED and APPROVED by Council.

THAT the "Focus Rural Area Woodland Ecosystem Assessment" be used by the City of Vaughan as a basis for significance in the review of development applications in and adjacent to woodlands.

THAT staff report back to a future Committee of the Whole on options for Woodland protection in the rural area of OPA #600.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with the findings of the Woodland Functional Assessment Study, report on the study findings, detail how the study will be used, and set out future actions.

**Background - Analysis and Options**

On April 2, 2001, Council approved the amended Terms of Reference (originally approved April 17, 2000) and consultant selection for the Woodland Functional Assessment Study. The purpose of the study is to assess and evaluate the remaining woodlands of Vaughan which were not originally evaluated as part of the OPA #400 process. Woodlands within the communities of Carrville, Vellore, and Woodbridge Expansion Area were evaluated in the Background Report to OPA #400. Similarly, the woodlands in the Kleinburg-Nashville communities were evaluated in the Natural Environment Background Report for OPA #601 (Kleinburg Nashville Community Plan).

The Woodland Functional Assessment Study has completed the functional assessment evaluation required by OPA #600 and OPA #450 for the rural and employment areas which has focused on woodlands in the City's rural area and five woodlands within the existing urban area, referred to in the report as the focus area and the supplementary area. The five woodlands evaluated in the urban area are within the Woodbridge Community (OPA #240) and the Employment Area (OPA #450). These tableland woodlands were included in the study area as they are in private ownership and planning approvals have not been granted.

AMEC Earth and Environmental Limited was retained by the City to conduct the Woodland Functional Assessment Study. The study included consultation with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and the Region of York to obtain information and to provide input into the study process, following which, the consultant conducted the necessary field investigations and report. A community information meeting was held on September 18, 2002 to receive input on the study.

**Study Findings**

The Study evaluated 94 woodlands in the focus rural area and five woodlands within the supplementary area, being a total of 99 woodlands comprising approximately 676 hectares.

Woodlands under TRCA ownership, or designated as Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) by the TRCA or Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSIs) as identified by the Ministry of Natural Resources were not evaluated in the Study, as assessments by the TRCA and MNR have determined that these woodlands are significant.

Woodlands located in valleys and tableland areas, or a combination of both, were assessed and evaluated in the study. Woodlands were mapped and evaluated as high, moderate, or low functionality based on the evaluation criteria developed by AMEC Earth and Environmental. The report provides mapping of the vegetation communities within each woodland, and details on the size, functions and features of each woodland, in addition to potential linkage opportunities, where appropriate.

Of the 94 woodlands evaluated in the focus rural area, 18 were assessed as having high functionality, 39 as moderate functionality, and 37 as low functionality. In the supplementary area, of the five woodlands evaluated, two were assessed as having high functionality, one as moderate, and two as low functionality.

#### Official Plan Policies

OPA #600 and OPA #450 contain policies requiring that a woodlot functional assessment be completed to determine the environmental function of woodlands. Specifically, Policy 5.11.1 of OPA #600 states that those woodlands in the rural area shall be assessed through functional assessment methods. Similarly, Policy 2.3.2.8(a) (i) states that in areas where the boundaries of woodlands have not been identified, they shall be determined using functional assessment methods. Both OPA #600 and OPA #450 provide that woodlands of high or moderate functional significance are to be preserved, and woodlands of low functional significance are to be protected to the extent possible.

Where OPA #600 and OPA #450 require woodland functional assessments to be completed for applications adjacent to or within woodland areas, the Woodland Functional Assessment Study provides for a consistent application of a functional assessment methodology throughout Vaughan. The Study will therefore be used by staff to review development applications adjacent to or within woodlands.

The findings of the study could be utilized as the basis for the preparation of detailed woodland management plans for woodlands which may come into the ownership of the City. These plans address management issues such as conserving old growth features and forest interiors; public access and use; forest wealth; and silvicultural management.

The findings of the study could also provide the basis for future initiatives that the City may choose to implement, aimed at protecting significant woodlots. These initiatives could include amendments to the Official Plan and Zoning By-law, recognizing the significant woodlots in future secondary plans, and also to guide decisions regarding potential acquisition. At this time, the report will be used as input into the review of development applications within or adjacent to woodlots. Potential future actions which could possibly be undertaken by the City will be explored in a future report to Committee of the Whole.

#### Public Consultation

Staff held a Public Information Meeting on September 18, 2002 in Council Chambers to present the findings of the Woodlot Functional Assessment Study, and gather comments from the public. Twenty people attended the meeting, where staff and David Simms of AMEC Earth and Environmental made presentations and provided an opportunity for questions and answers. The reaction of the public in attendance was generally positive and supportive of the City's thorough evaluation of its woodlands. Several comments suggested that the urban area woodlands should be subject to a less stringent assessment methodology, as these remnant woodlands, regardless

of their functionality, still provide heritage, aesthetic and recreational values within the urban environment. Several urged that the City uphold the policies of OPA #600 and OPA #450 which speak to protecting woodlands of moderate and high functional significance, and also expressed concern for preserving isolated woodlots.

A letter was received subsequent to the public meeting from the Don Watershed Council, which commended the City for conducting such a detailed functional assessment and identifying enhancement opportunities for woodlands. The Don Watershed Council also encouraged the City to adopt less stringent criteria for assessing woodlands within the urban area, thereby increasing their functional significance in the face of increasing pressures of urban development. Of particular concern to the Don Council is the fate and assessment of the woodlot at the southeast corner of Jane and Rutherford Roads, which is subject to a Zoning By-law application (File Z.02.007, Delisle Properties Limited). The Don Council recommends that this woodlot be given a "high" functional rating, and that this woodlot be protected through the development process.

In response to the comments that remnant urban woodlands be assessed differently than those in the rural area, Staff advise that the consistent application of the functional assessment methodology used in this study is important to maintaining continuity across the City, and in providing validity and defensibility to the methodology. Regarding the protection of individual woodlands through the development process, the study results will provide input into the review and decision-making for development applications and the protection of woodlands, where appropriate

#### Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan

A portion of the study area is on the Oak Ridges Moraine, and is therefore subject to the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan* (ORMCP). The ORMCP provides for the policy framework for protecting the lands and the natural features within the Oak Ridges Moraine Plan Area.

Woodlands are considered a Key Natural Heritage Feature on the Oak Ridges Moraine and are therefore afforded special protection under the ORMCP. The ORMCP establishes a level of significance for woodlands on the Moraine, which are detailed in technical manuals being prepared by the Ministry of Natural Resources to assist in the implementation of the Plan (Technical Manual 01-02 Key Natural Heritage Features). The draft of the technical manual has been released for peer review and defines significant woodlands on the Oak Ridges Moraine as any woodlands within the Oak Ridges Moraine land use designations of Natural Core Area and Natural Linkage Area being 0.5 ha and greater, and any woodlands within the land use designations of Countryside Area and Settlement Area being 4 ha and greater.

Lands within the Oak Ridges Moraine Plan Area which have been identified as Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSIs) are also afforded a level of protection by the ORMCP. ANSIs are also considered a Key Natural Heritage Feature. The draft technical manuals for Key Natural Heritage Features note that ANSIs will be mapped by the Ministry of Natural Resources for use in implementing the ORMCP. The Woodland Functional Assessment Study did not evaluate ANSIs as the MNR has already identified these woodlands as being significant. Although the Woodlot Functional Assessment Study establishes a different assessment of significance for woodlands than the Oak Ridges Moraine Plan, the information provided in the Woodland Functional Assessment Study provides relevant information on the woodland community structure. The Woodland Functional Assessment Study contains wording recognizing the pre-eminence of the ORMCP in determining woodland significance. Each of the schedules in the Study relating to woodlands on the Moraine contains wording detailing that the woodlands on the Oak Ridges Moraine are subject to the ORMCP and significance is determined therein.

## **Conclusion**

The Woodland Functional Assessment Study has been completed by AMEC Earth and Environmental Limited. The findings of the study provide an ecosystem functional assessment of the woodlands within the rural and employment areas of OPA #600 and OPA #450, and five woodlands within the urban area, in addition to mapping the location, woodland communities, and potential linkage opportunities. The study results will provide input into the review of development applications in or adjacent to woodlands, and into implementing the woodland policies of local official plans. The findings of the study can also provide a basis for future initiatives that the City may wish to undertake aimed at protecting woodlands, to be explored in a future report to Committee of the Whole.

## **Attachments**

1. Study Area
2. Final Report Woodland Functional Assessment Study (Focus Rural Area) (***Councillors only***)

## **Report prepared by:**

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Respectfully submitted,

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Commissioner of Planning

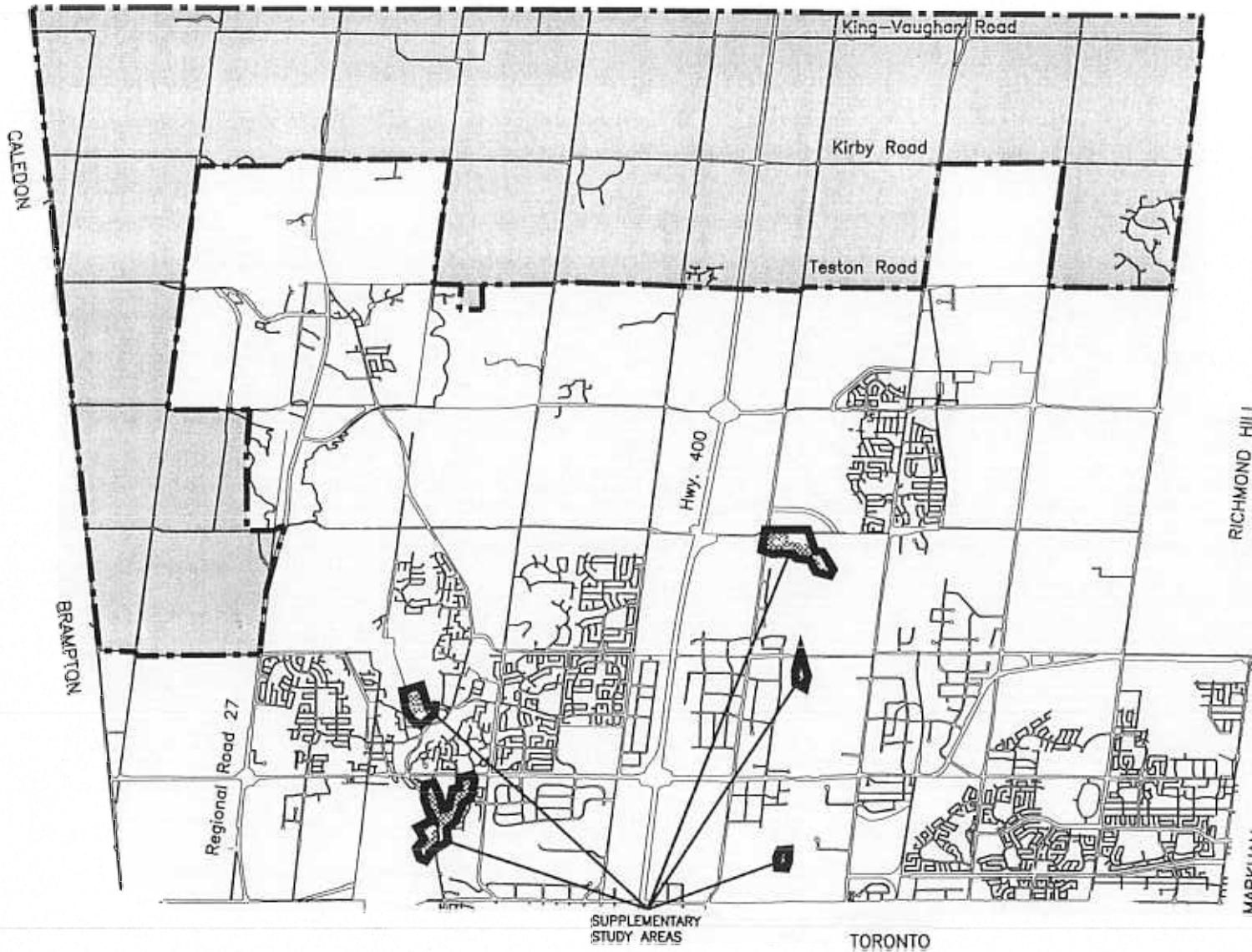
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# FUNCTIONAL WOODLOT ASSESSMENT STUDY



### STUDY BOUNDARIES

-  FOCUS RURAL STUDY AREA
-  SUPPLEMENTARY STUDY AREA



APPLICANT:

## ATTACHMENT '1' FUNCTIONAL WOODLOT ASSESSMENT STUDY

CITY OF VAUGHAN PLANNING DEPARTMENT

FILE #

15.86

REPORT #

LOCATION:

DATE: 08-20-2002

SCALE:

NOT TO SCALE