

**Reshaping Suburbia:
A Comparative Study of Markham Centre and Vaughan
Metropolitan Centre**

by

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Abstract

The Greater Toronto Area is projected to become the fastest-growing region in the province of Ontario, surpassing a population threshold of 10 million by 2046. As a result, suburban municipalities are planning for the development of intensified, high-density, and mixed-use downtown centres to accommodate the forecasted growth. This study aims to uncover and understand the planning and development processes directing new metropolitan forms located in suburban cities. This research employs comparative case study methods to analyze the two emerging suburban downtowns of Markham Centre and Vaughan Metropolitan Centre that have been planned since the 1990s. Through the use of an in-depth review of existing literature of key themes, policy documents, and seven interviews with industry professionals, I examine the causes and purposes which form suburban downtowns. Herein, I argue that despite retaining both suburban and urban characteristics, suburban downtowns do represent an evolution from traditional suburban built form which duly redefine perceptions of suburbia.

Foreword

This major research paper has been submitted to the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University in order to satisfy the final requirement of the Master in Environmental Studies (MES) Planning Program. The paper explores the planning and development of growth centres in the Greater Toronto Area and their associated impacts. This major analysis correlates directly with my Plan of Study by incorporating the following learning objectives and components I sought to achieve.

1. **Urban Planning:** The first component of my Plan of Study relates to the process of urban planning. Throughout this study, I develop a strong understanding of planning theories and focus on the history behind the profession in North America. The component also involves obtaining insight into the planning and development processes from the perspectives of the government and land developers. Achieving the aforementioned objectives in the present paper will help me achieve the knowledge including the necessary skills to meet the program requirements of the Ontario Provincial Planners Institute (OPPI) for an eligible candidate membership.
2. **Suburbanization:** The second component is to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to comprehend the history and theories of suburbanization, new models of suburban development, as well as an understanding of suburban ways of life.
3. **Governance, Policies, and Growth Management:** The third component encompasses three important aspects directly tied to the political nature of the topic under study. These include understanding how the government is structured in relation to urban planning, how policies and regulations govern the process of suburbanization in the Greater Toronto Area, and how growth management policies truly impact suburban development.

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I would like to thank my family, friends and colleagues for their encouragement and support throughout the duration of this research project. The present study would not have been possible without the generosity and openness of my participants who kindly shared their knowledge, stories and opinions. I would also like to personally thank Professor Douglas Young for accepting to supervise my research and provide me invaluable guidance, advice and feedback throughout the extent of this project.

Key Words

MC - Markham Centre

VMC - Vaughan Metropolitan Centre

GTA - Greater Toronto Area

PPS - Provincial Policy Statement

CBD - Central Business District

OPA - Official Plan Amendment

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“At any moment, metropolitan form is the product of understandable processes put in motion and perpetuated by its key decision-makers” (Checkoway, 1980, 21).

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Context

The Canadian population is growing at an exponential rate. According to Ontario’s Ministry of Finance, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is projected to be the fastest-growing region in the province with a current population of 6.5 million growing to over 8.4 million by 2031 and more than 10 million by 2046 (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2019). Accordingly, beginning in the 1990s, suburban municipalities in the GTA have started implementing a new planning agenda oriented on intensified, nodal urban development. Contrary to the traditional North American suburban model of development typically characterized by the decentralization of housing and other uses, Ontario suburbs are directed to intensify, and mix land uses within built-up areas and designated growth centres (Ontario, 2019). As exemplified in the suburban cities of Markham and Vaughan, the built environment is rapidly transforming, and purpose-built downtowns are being developed. As a result, burgeoning residential and employment populations are emerging in high-density centres developed throughout the GTA. These higher concentrations and densities are providing suburban centres with “vitality and a population base able to support investments in transit, retailing, community and cultural facilities” (CUI, 2013, 38). Furthermore, the Province of Ontario has reinforced existing municipal plans through legislations directing the planning of strategic growth areas. The *Growth Plan* identifies growth and population targets for 25 growth centres situated throughout the Greater Toronto Area and Golden Horseshoe. These centres are now focused on intensification, densification, and the mixing of uses to generate efficient use of land and infrastructure to support transit (Ontario, 2006, 6). Many of these centres are becoming the focal point of development for communities.

The development of new downtown centres in existing suburban cities represents a shift from traditional suburbanization processes, a reorientation of centre-periphery

dynamics, and a reconceptualization of places once considered suburban in the GTA. Suburban downtowns such as Markham Centre (MC) and the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC) represent an evolution from traditional suburban built forms that embody both urban and suburban characteristics. These rapidly developing communities continue to blur the lines between what is considered urban and suburban. MC and the VMC are examined and compared because they reflect a tangible response to the current and future challenges facing the GTA.

1.2 Research Objective

This research paper concentrates on suburban downtowns and examines how they are conceptualized, planned, built, and experienced. As such, the foundational question guiding the present analysis is: *How are suburban downtown developments transforming traditional suburban built form and challenging the concepts of suburbia?* To begin, I analyze specific details pertaining to the two emerging suburban downtowns currently under construction in the GTA: Markham Centre and Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. While the two cases under study do have similarities and differences, the goal of this study is to examine the policies and external forces shaping suburban downtowns so as to deconstruct the processes guiding their planning and development. By doing so, I also uncover how suburban downtowns may be transforming everyday experiences of suburbanites and the ways in which this intensified built form may redefine the lived experience of many within the GTA suburbs. This study responds to the questions in hopes of contributing to the existing literature on new metropolitan forms in suburban cities. All things considered, the present research represents an in-depth examination of contemporary suburban development and an analysis of current efforts to create downtown-like environments in the GTA.

1.3 Outline

The structure of this research paper is divided into five sections. Section 2.0 begins by breaking down and explaining the methodology employed throughout this research. This includes an overview of the various methods utilized in this analysis. Section 3.0 involves an in-depth literature review of concepts concerning the history of

suburbanization, suburban downtowns, downtowns, as well as nodes and growth centres. Section 4.0 examines the current and future states of Markham Centre and the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Section 5.0 consists of an analysis founded on the research data, thus incorporating factual information related to the case studies and participant interview responses. Section 6.0 concludes the research by summarizing the findings and by providing future considerations related to the topics behind this research paper.

2.0 Research Methods

2.1 Overview of Research Methods and Research Design

In order to explore the phenomenon under study and to gather necessary information related to planning and development of emerging suburban downtowns, a thorough research methodology was adopted. As such, the methodology employed in this analysis involves a combination of five different approaches. A multiple-case design method was herein selected for the reason that the evidence brought forward is understood as being more compelling, more robust, and provides a stronger analytic benefit (Yin, 2009, 53). The evidence produced is based upon a thorough (1) literature review, an (2) examination of policy and planning documents, (3) site visits, and (4) seven semi-structured interviews with industry professionals in the public and private sectors.

2.2 Contents of Literature Review

A literature review focusing on suburban downtowns was conducted in order to provide the necessary contextual background required to adequately assess the phenomenon under study. The section draws from scholarly articles and books to help contextualize the history of the suburbs, new suburban forms, downtowns, and the emergence of new purpose-built downtowns located in suburbs. Also deconstructed and defined are the intrinsic concepts of suburbs, downtowns, and growth centres. These fundamental notions form the basis on which one can begin to understand suburban downtowns.

2.3 Comparative Case Study

A qualitative comparative approach was selected as the preferred method of analysis of the phenomenon under study. Specifically, comparative case study research “aims to infer causal relationships between factors by systematically comparing instances of a phenomenon, namely, cases conceived as different configurations of variables or factors” (Vannoni, 2014, 333). As explained by Vannoni (2014), “a case is a spatially and temporally bounded political and/or social instance” (Vannoni, 2014, 333). Through the

use of similar cases, Markham Centre and Vaughan Metropolitan Centre constitute the subjects in which I aim to infer causal relationships so as to further develop interrelated concepts. This comparative method exemplifies the differences and similarities in order to compare cases to infer causal relations as they relate to the planning and development of suburban downtowns in the GTA.

2.4 Policy Review

The second method involved a comprehensive review of relevant policy documents that were produced by different levels of government to guide the planning and development of these growth centres. I examine these documents in order to gather a better understanding of the planning and development processes from a policy and governmental perspective. Such documents include the provincial *Places to Grow Act*, and *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe: Urban Growth Centres*, and the municipalities' respective Official Plans, Secondary Plans, and Zoning By-laws. Additionally, I examine some of the first conceptual plans produced establishing the initial vision for these future downtowns providing a glimpse into the conceptualization process since the early 1990s.

2.5 Site Visits

Multiple site visits of Markham Centre and Vaughan Metropolitan Centre were carried out between the months of September 2018 to March 2020. The participant observation method of research allowed for the collection of supplemental information through tangible first-hand observations. The purpose of the multiple site visits was to achieve a better understanding of the area and to experience the evolution of an existing built form. By experiencing the present urban design features constituting the built form, I gained an acute perception of their roles in shaping the downtown environments under study. Experiencing these environments over 18 months and on different days of the week also contributed in achieving a holistic view of how these spaces are used by people and how developments progressed throughout the years. This method also assisted in realizing greater appreciation relating to the experiences of those who currently live and use these spaces daily, which could be indicative of future resident and visitor behaviours.

In addition, the site visits allowed for the collection of photographs utilized herein to showcase key characteristics of the sites.

2.6 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants responsible for the planning, design, and development of both emerging suburban centres to gain insight into the processes and experiences at play. The use of a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix 1) greatly assisted in the collection of pertinent information concerning the personal experiences, feelings and professional opinions with regards to the ins and outs of the issues at hand. This semi-structured interview guide consists of 12 open-ended questions, each with 1 to 5 specific sub-questions. In order to find and select interview participants, I elected to engage individuals with extensive knowledge of the topic under study who could provide varied insights and comments.

2.6.1 Participant Selection and Interview Process

I interviewed three City of Markham planners, former District Manager of the Markham's Central Planning District (Richard Kendall); a Senior Central District Planner (Scott Heaslip); and a Senior Markham Centre Urban Designer (Parvathi Nampoothiri) whom I am familiar with due to my employment with the City of Markham Planning and Development Services Commission. An interview was conducted with a former Senior City Planner for the Vaughan Metropolitan Area and current Markham Centre District Manager (Stephen Lue). I also interviewed an urban planning consultant with extensive experience within York Region (Sean Hertel). To gather a private development industry perspective on the topic, I spoke to the Vice President of Remington Group (Randy Peddigrew - involved in the Markham Centre development) and a development associate at SmartCentres REIT (Andrew McLeod - a developer involved in Vaughan Metropolitan Centre). All participants were initially contacted via email or in person. The interviews were conducted in person except for one (with SmartCentres REIT development associate) which was carried out over the phone. Dates and times were chosen according to the availability of the participants and the location was mutually agreed upon (interviewee's workplace). The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 90 minutes on

average and produced a significant amount of data touching upon a host of key topics and insightful comments. The semi-structured guide allowed for open-ended questions, which could let the participants pursue the discussion with anecdotal stories and semi-related remarks. Depending on the level of knowledge of specific aspects of the research, some participants chose not to answer some questions. In the form of a written consent agreement (Appendix 2) all contributors explicitly granted their permission to be audio recorded in order for the proceedings to later be transcribed into a text form. Interviews were conducted in accordance with a research ethics protocol approved by the Faculty. Once transcribed, the feedback was tabulated into an interview response matrix. In this table, I compiled the respondents' respective answers to each question. This concise table assisted in the analysis of the participants' responses.

3.0 Literature Review

3.1 Overview of the Literature Review

The present section on literature review establishes the background context surrounding suburban downtowns by focusing on four key components: a brief history of suburbs, the phenomena of suburban downtowns, the development of downtown areas, and the relevance of growth centres and nodal planning concepts. The examination of these concepts constitutes the basis for which I develop an informed evaluation of my research questions. The literature review draws from peer-reviewed journals and books written by experts in the field. The findings from the literature review assist in defining the key components and exploring their history and form the foundation for understanding suburban downtowns in the context of the Greater Toronto Area.

3.2 A Brief History of Suburbs

3.2.1 Pre-Industrial Era

Suburbs are not a modern concept. While there exists a common perception that suburban development is a post-war phenomenon, suburbs have existed for a very long time. They have and continue to be an inherent part of the greater urban structure and hold important roles and functions. The origin of suburbs may be traced back to ancient and medieval cities that had areas located outside fortified city walls in which noxious activities and disenfranchised citizens would reside (Perrot & Chipiez, 1884; Padilla, 2006). As populations grew in cities, so did their suburbs. The suburbs were often a form of “functional segregation, with the suburban poor being unable to afford urban taxes and without the benefit of urban facilities and the protection of fortifications” (Harris, 1999, 3). These spaces gradually prospered due to the importance of industrial trade among other economic, political and social factors.

3.2.2 Industrial Era

This review focuses on changes that occurred during the industrial revolution and the post-World War II period which have shaped modern suburbs in North America. Beginning in the late 1700s to early 1800s, the industrial revolution brought forth major economic, political, social, environmental, and geographical changes to cities in North America, Europe, and the rest of the industrializing world (Choldin, 1985). The shifting geographies and economies of industry and manufacturing held a profound impact on cities. Factories began to locate in downtown areas to gain greater access to cheap labour forces and utilize transportation infrastructure (Choldin, 1985, 113). The industrial uses that had been located in cities eventually resulted in a dramatic increase in pollution, noise, environmental ills, overcrowding, including poor working and living conditions. Suburban areas were seen as being much more appealing to people in comparison to the poor state of cities. Consequently, wealthy families began to move away from the city using railroads and established their primary residences on the peripheries of large cities.

As Fishman (1987) explains, the earliest forms of modern suburbs began in the 1790s around London and took a few more decades to popularize and become feasible in North America. By the early 1800s, this type of development emerged outside of cities like New York and Boston and was facilitated by the railways. The suburbs became the ideal semi-rural place for wealthy families to live while their men commuted to jobs in the city. This desirable arrangement of living represented the 'suburban ideal' as argued by some scholars (Marsh, 1990; Miller, 1995). The suburban ideal may be described as an encompassing view of "morally and physically healthful influences of rural living, and a concomitant view of the city as sinful and providing temptations that can lure individuals away from familial pursuits" (Miller, 1995, 397). The notion also echoes a desire for families to escape the dangers associated with city living. Miller (1995) explains that the suburban ideal was a home-centered lifestyle reinforcing a traditional household and creating an environment where families could limit the intrusiveness of urban life. As the North American middle-class grew, the suburban lifestyle became increasingly popular and reflected the new social and cultural value system of the time. Suburbs became the socially desirable place to live and provided the ideal blend of a town and countryside.

3.2.3 The Streetcar and Railroad Era (1880s to 1920s)

John Adams (1970) exemplified how aspects of North American suburban growth coincided with major innovations in urban transportation. I employ Adam's (1970) research of four eras of suburban development for the purpose of outlining this subsection of research. Growth and development patterns of the urban fabric were greatly shaped by different transport eras. Prior to the 1880s, transportation means such as horsecars and horse-drawn buses greatly accelerated cross-town travel and made it socially acceptable to commute for the general population. As Friedman (2002) recounts, the streetcar was the pivotal technological advancement in transportation which provided access to the suburbs for a large segment of the population. This mode of transportation was introduced in the United States in the late 1880s and dominated until the 1920s. This new and innovative method of transportation extended the commute to work, thereby multiplying the area which could be developed (Choldin, 1985). Adams (1970) explains how at its peak in 1905, the electric streetcar was responsible for the character of new residential areas that developed along streetcar lines away from the urban core. The morphology associated with streetcars and closely spaced stations resulted in corridors of mainly commercial and residential developments expanding outwards from the city. These well-situated developments connected middle-class suburban families to the central business district with a rapid and affordable mode of transportation (Choldin, 1985). At the time, the greater the distance from the city core, the lower land values were. Land speculators with significant influence began to purchase and develop residential homes wherever tracks were laid which subsequently increased land values of well-situated properties (Adams, 1970, 49). Freed from urban constraints, developers and builders alike could construct single-family detached homes on larger lots in grid-like patterns up to a few blocks away from the streetcar line (Muller, 1977, 4). Yet, residential sprawl remained restricted by factors linked to track proximity.

While the streetcar changed residential patterns in urban areas, it also brought forth a shift in suburban economic geography. Muller (1977) draws a connection between streetcar corridors and the beginning of urban manufacturing decentralization in a way that "gave rise to both reverse commuting and a growing number of satellite industrial mill

towns” (Muller, 1977, 5). These changes were partly attributed to a growing central business district in cities, increasing land values and taxes, along with regulations aimed at limiting the nuisances caused by less-desirable industrial uses. Combined, these forces would have been responsible for the relocation of industrial uses from city centres to the suburbs. With time, manufacturing in the suburbs became cheaper, efficient, and more attractive than in the city. Furthermore, office and retail uses began to locate in suburbs to answer new demand levels while serving their populations.

3.2.4 The Recreational Automobile (1920s to 1945) and Freeway Era (1945 to the present)

Mass-scale suburbanization was heavily accentuated by the rise in the ownership of private automobiles, beginning in the 1920s. The growing suburban middle-class who owned cars now had increased flexibility in choosing where to live and how to commute to work. This meant that new suburban developments could be located even farther away from existing streetcar corridors and their respective cities. Settlements in suburbs remained economically dependent on the urban core of cities as their residents increasingly relied on automobiles for mobility (Adams, 1970). By the 1930s, new paved highways, bridges, and tunnels facilitated travel between the city and suburbs. The increased focus on constructing the necessary infrastructure to support the movement of cars inevitably resulted in disinvestment in public transportation. The prioritization of vehicles had a direct impact on the design of new residential neighbourhoods and commercial areas (Muller, 1977, 6). This change was reflected in the increasingly lower densities of newer suburban settlements. Furthermore, other land uses such as office and retail constructions were designed to be automobile-convenient by providing abundant parking spaces and auto-friendly layouts. Suburban communities could develop without a central commercial district due to the increased mobility that cars offered. Moreover, the 1950s brought the development of enclosed shopping malls which reduced the role of Main Streets and downtowns. In direct correlation with this rapidly changing suburban landscape, “the idea of a suburban downtown largely disappeared for more than 50 years” (Beske, 2018, 33). This period of growth represented the continuation and

development of the suburbs built in the past and the arrival of freeways brought forth the explosion of suburbanization in North America that continues to this day.

While the latest form of expansion was greatly based on the widespread ownership of the personal automobile, it was also spurred by major housing shortages in the mid-1940s. The Depression and World War II suspended most suburban development (Beske, 2018). Following World War II, there were extremely high demands and low supplies for family dwellings within North American cities. The housing shortages could in part be attributed to a number of political, economic, and social factors including wartime conditions and priorities, increased birth rates, post-war prosperity, a rising standard of living, a growing middle-class, and shortcomings of the construction industry (Checkoway, 1980). Combined, these factors generated an environment in which new middle-class families represented the perfect demographic for which large construction companies could build houses for. Traditionally, homes were constructed by small independent builders. This new wave of demand presented an opportunity for a select group of construction companies to rapidly expand in order to meet the growing demand on a much larger scale (Checkoway, 1980). These companies began to build large scale and mass-produced residential subdivisions primarily consisting of single-detached dwellings. A prominent example of this phenomenon was the 1950s Levittown communities constructed in the states of New York (Figure 1), Philadelphia, and New Jersey.



Figure 1 Levittown in the State of New York, CityLab.

3.3 The Mass Production of Suburbs

By the 1950s, a number of large-scale builders in North America began adopting new manufacturing techniques which revolutionized the housebuilding industry. Builders such as Levitt, responsible for the Levittown communities, adopted assembly line techniques to assist in the mass production of housing. This construction method was most efficient because the building system incorporated the delivery of pre-assembled and prefabricated materials on-site to be assembled by workers operating specialized machinery (Checkoway, 1980). The construction time was significantly reduced and the finished product was as affordable as attractive to consumers for its affordability and quality. At the time, Levitt was described by journalists as the 'Ford of Housing' (Harris, 2004). The communities were also built with neighbourhood parks and schools, and homes were sold with utilities, landscaping and appliances included. Builders began producing similar products outside of most major North American cities. Initiatives of the American Federal Government were crucial in the support of post-war suburban development. For instance, the Housing Act of 1949 authorized loans and capital grants for slum clearance and urban redevelopment, while at the same time, facilitating loans

and providing incentives for the manufacturing of houses and large-scale residential constructions (Checkoway, 1980). These “federal housing programmes operated as an economic instrument to stimulate production in the housing field and the entire economy” (Checkoway, 1980, 32). The technological advancements contributing to the mass production of suburbs combined with government incentives for the industry as well as homeowners, provided consumers with an affordable and attractive version of the suburban ideal. This phenomenon was replicated outside most North American cities. Checkoway (1980) argues that post-war American suburbanization prevailed because large operators and powerful economic institutions were subsidized by Federal Government programs which greatly impacted the development of suburbs. As a result of these forces, suburbs built after World War II were seen as uniform, ubiquitous and reflective of the new consumer lifestyle (Harris, 2004).

Policies surrounding the planning and construction of North American postwar suburbs were shaped by the United States government following the Great Depression. At the time of this major economic recession, society experienced a crisis of underconsumption. This led the government to develop strategies to avoid another economic downturn. In order to increase consumption, creating a society of home-owning families buying detached houses in low density suburbs ensured a new lifestyle relying heavily on consumerism. Families who bought into the suburban lifestyle, “moved into a culture of consumption and became dependent on cars” (Hayden, 2003, 147). Products such as home appliances were advertised through commercials on television and used the suburban detached house and nuclear family as the backdrop to the advertisement. While the speed at which postwar suburbs were constructed was rapid, “they were deliberately planned to maximize consumption of mass-produced goods and minimize the responsibility of the developers to create public space and public services” (Hayden, 2003, 128).

For a Canadian perspective on the topic, Harris (2004) demonstrates how the Don Mills community embodied the standardization of the suburban lifestyle and physical landscape. Don Mills is considered one of the most influential postwar suburban

developments in Canada. Similar to Levittown, Don Mills was the product of a single developer. However, the two communities differ in their design and planning. Don Mills incorporated a mix of housing types ranging from single detached dwellings, semi-detached, townhouses, and apartment buildings. The community was also planned in a way that included a mix of land uses carefully separated through design decisions. Harris (2004) argues that the Canadian suburbs were “collectively diverse but individually homogeneous” (Harris, 2004, 74). This refers to the ways in which suburban communities were often made up of segregated communities based on ethnicity, religion, or social class stature. As such, the author categorizes the twentieth century suburban methods of subdivisions into the following four types of physical appearance and class composition: the elite; unplanned, industrial, and middle-class suburbs. Each type held specific purposes and was occupied by different social classes of people. The two most prominent were the industrial and middle-class suburbs which were built in a homogenous and predictable manner but diverse in the classes of people who occupied them.

3.3.1 Contemporary Suburbs

By the end of the twentieth century, many suburbs had developed their own unique political, economic and social climates. On those points, Harris (1999) explains that most North American suburbs hold the following five general dimensions: “1) Peripheral location in relation to a dominant urban centre; 2) A partly (or wholly) residential character; 3) Low densities, often associated with decentralized patterns of settlement and high levels of owner-occupation; 4) A distinctive culture or way of life; 5) Separate community identities, often embodied in local governments” (Harris, 1999, 8).

Today’s suburbs have evolved and become much more nuanced from those general dimensions. In 1991, Joel Garreau popularized the term “Edge City” defining a new form of suburban concentration first observed in North America. Edge cities are “the product of urban processes (mainly decentralization) leading to parts of the suburbs becoming more city-like through the agglomeration of offices, factories and large shopping complexes at favoured, accessible locations” (Witherick et al., 2001, 84). Garreau (1991) argues that “edge cities represent the third wave of our lives pushing into

new frontiers” (Garreau, 1991, 4). The first wave is noted as being the suburbanization of America in which the population began to build their homes outside of what was considered the city. The second wave involved the decentralization of the marketplace in the form of major retail spaces of the 1960s located in the downtown core to large malls often constructed in the suburbs. Garreau (1991) describes this phenomenon as the “mallings” of America which also coincided with the decline of commercial main streets. Finally, the third wave, and the reason for which edge cities exist, was the relocation of “our means of creating wealth, the essence of urbanism - our jobs - out to where most of us have lived and shopped for two generations” (Garreau, 1991, 4). Edge cities do in fact represent the relocation of businesses, entertainment and residence in newly built and strategically located suburban areas.

The central areas of edge cities are often characterized as being owned and built by a single land developer. The centre is a high-density mixed-use district incorporating office, retail, residential, and entertainment uses that remain greatly auto-oriented. These edge cities are an attempt to outcompete nearby downtown cores as the centre of economic activity (Beske, 2018). Beske (2018) argues that this recent form of development represents “bold responses to changing office and retail markets, demonstrates ways to adapt to dramatic market changes and recognizes a yearning for a sense of intimate community that had inspired the first generation of American suburbs” (Beske, 2018, 38). Garreau (1991) defines edge cities as any place that: “have 5 million square feet or more of leasable office space; have 600,000 square feet or more of retail space; have more jobs than bedrooms; are perceived by the population as one place; and were nothing like a “city” as recently as thirty years ago” (Garreau, 1991, 6-7). The conception of edge cities is often linked to the lower land values in suburban areas and the economic opportunities that ensued. Today, there are over 200 edge cities in North America alone which have developed in various ways. Garreau (1991) identifies three different types of edge cities: Uptowns, Boomburbs, and Greenfields. Uptowns are Edge Cities built on top of pre-automobile settlements with remnants of older buildings. It is common for uptowns to have developed in a more timely fashion and through fragmented

land ownership. Uptowns tend to have a long history and share a relationship with traditional downtowns (Garreau, 1991, 114).



Figure 2 Example of Uptown edge city, City of Pasadena

Boomburbs are edge cities that are generally situated at the intersection of highways and nearby major regional malls. Buildings may not always be developed in ways that relate to each other for the reason that they were built before the planning concepts of edge cities were fully understood. As a result, Boomburbs can sometimes appear chaotic, less well-planned, and can take on the form of a node or strip.



Figure 3 Example of Boomburb edge city in Tysons, Virginia, Hoversolutions Imgur

The Greenfield form of edge city tends to be an entirely master-planned community located on acres of farmland typically owned by a singular land developer or equivalent conglomerate (Garreau, 1991). MC and VMC could both be considered Greenfields with some elements of a Boomburb edge city. The master-planned core of MC is built by very few land developers on what used to be farmland. Some of MC's early developments were not components initially included as part of today's master plan and as a result, appear less cohesive and may not blend in well with the rest of the cityscape. MC and VMC are situated at or near the intersections of major highways and arterial roads. The location of VMC used to be farmland which was partially developed as a suburban industrial and commercial district. The current development of the VMC's core is primarily situated on vacant land yet simultaneously surrounded by an existing suburban environment, including highways, retail and industrial areas.



Figure 4 Example of Greenfield edge city, Reston Town Center, Virginia, UrbanLand

Edge cities bring about the theme of polycentric urban regions and their relationship with other larger cities. It is important to understand the role of cities and their surrounding regions for the reason that all human settlements are interconnected through flows of “information, capital, goods, and persons” using infrastructures such as “roads,

railways, waterways, airlines and increasingly telecommunications” (Meijers, 2007, 3). This is no different in the case of new suburban agglomerations like edge cities. Places such as VMC and MC are, for the most part, politically independent from Toronto yet one another remains well connected through infrastructure, economy, and culture among other aspects. Cities located within such polycentric regions can be perceived as being part of a hierarchy. As it is the case for global cities, smaller or up-and-coming cities situated within greater metropolitan regions do compete for dominance. While there exists competitive behaviour amongst cities, they thrive and benefit from each other. Attracting new businesses and residents can lead to a synergy contributing to healthy and cooperative behaviours between cities (Meijers, 2007). It is important for cities and their suburbs to develop strong connections in order for each to grow and succeed.

3.4 Suburban Downtowns

The second component of this literature review is the examination of suburban downtowns. There exists an extensive amount of literature labelling new urban agglomerations and metropolitan forms. These spaces have been repeatedly rebranded with a myriad of terms in an attempt to distinguish one another using specific language and terminology. Most labels have remained neologisms and very few have entered the mainstream vocabulary such as the previously discussed concept of edge city. Lang (2003) notes that a 1992 Columbia University conference listed more than two hundred names to identify emerging elements of new metropolitan forms. Garreau (1991) and Lang (2003) have formed extensive lists of names including edge city, outer city, satellite sprawl, urban villages, technoburbs, suburban downtowns, suburban business centres, suburban city, suburban employment centre, suburban freeway corridor, major diversified centres, urban cores, galactic city, pepperoni pizza cities, superburbia, disurb, service cities, perimeter cities, and peripheral centres. While this list contains different terms representing nuanced notions of new urban agglomerations, they share a common meaning and goal of branding the restructuring of metropolitan areas and the spatial patterns of suburbanization that ensue. Lang (2003) explains how these terms and other attempts to label the phenomenon capture the micro and macro features of regional structures in a descriptive fashion. The terminology employs words to identify the regional

structure, location, function, and physical form. For example, edge cities describe a metropolitan form that is several square kilometres in scale, medium to low densities, office densities, located near highway interchanges and whose boundaries are not well delineated. The term Suburban Downtown, on the other hand, builds upon edge cities and attempts to define a concentration of diverse activities and uses in a manner that resembles and is advertised as a traditional high-density downtown yet situated in a primarily suburban setting.

Critics of suburban forms have long described how the rapid development and population increase in suburban areas have resulted in a lack of identity and a clear focus (Bunting et al, 2000). In fact, this notion is echoed by James Howard Kunstler (1993) who has written extensively about this issue along with what he considered the failures of suburbanization. Notably, residents and planners alike saw deficiencies in suburban living and working environments. These included the “large distances between the suburbs and specialized downtown services and cultural institutions, the quality and availability of services and cultural institutions, the quality and availability of public transit, and inadequate facilities for senior citizens” (Kunstler, 1993, p.261). As a result of these problems inherent to North American suburbs, planners began pushing for the development of better suburbs reflected in suburban downtowns.

The factors leading to the emergence of suburban downtowns are similar to those of edge cities. In 1978, Baerwald identified earlier forms of new metropolitan “downtowns” in close relation to what he called the suburban freeway corridor. Highway corridors connecting cities and their suburbs enabled a complete mix of uses which were traditionally located within central business districts. In fact, the importance of highway corridors is highlighted as being the “functional successor of the central business district” (Baerwald, 1978, 308). Originally, suburban freeway corridor developments were primarily the products of decisions made by private developers. Increasingly, government planning agencies enacted policies further influencing and shaping their development. Today, suburban downtowns could be understood as a compressed form of the suburban freeway corridor. They hold many of the same characteristics and their functions have

expanded. The suburban downtowns discussed within this study are strategically located near different highway interchanges and hold economic, entertainment, residential, cultural as well as other important societal functions.

Suburban downtowns can also be tied to a growing suburban population surpassing 100,000 residents. For example, Bunting et al. (2000) have used the suburban regions of Toronto and Vancouver to exemplify how existing suburbs in those areas have attempted to develop forms of suburban downtowns since the 1980s. At that time, municipal governments were determined to control and promote the development of the emerging subcentres all while incorporating the development of new city halls in the process. Accordingly, a civic presence was established early in the construction of once-suburban centres such as Mississauga, North York, and Scarborough. These three areas are examples of municipal attempts to create centres of intensification that paved the path for new suburban downtowns currently under construction. Many of the same guiding principles remain actively employed in current suburban downtown developments.

Traditional downtowns are developed over time and are constituted by many landowners with varying motivations which, in turn, is reflected in the architecture and patterns of development, and how they came to be. The circumstances surrounding suburban downtowns are complex and different in their own right. However, they can still be understood and dissected in the same manner as traditional downtowns. In this sense, the term morphogenesis of urban space may be employed to understand the process by which spaces are formed and transformed through a long period of time. Another way of understanding this phenomenon is by exploring the many different actors involved in the shaping and re-shaping of the space in question. The ownership and occupations of those individuals concerned in the process often hold different interests and motivations (Dovey, 2014). As such, these emerging downtowns can be understood as the logical evolution of a municipality in which the developments reflect the current market, socio-political, and consumer norms and cultural values. The model explored in this research is different in the sense that the lands under study are owned by one or a handful of different owners

and developers working closely with their respective city officials to develop a brand new downtown centre within suburbs.

Filion (2010) explains that suburban town centres are planned intensification nodes located in large suburbs on the periphery of major city regions. The author suggests that within this model, “local authorities attempt to mimic the dynamics of traditional downtowns, typically by including retail, office space, public-sector institutions and services, and housing uses” (Filion, 2010, 312). The author also points out the fact that suburban nodes suffer from the reliance on driving for shopping, and from poor access to public transit in suburban environments. However, Filion (2010) also expresses that it is unlikely and very difficult that a transit and pedestrian orientation can be fully achieved in suburban downtowns. Their research indicates that just as suburbs grow denser and intensify, they continue to function like lower-density areas (Filion, 2010).

In addition, it remains crucial for municipal governments to recognize that “a downtown is not merely a cluster of office buildings in an office park, nor is it a mall containing shopping, a few movie theatres, and some restaurants” (Bunting et Al, 2000, 268). Suburban downtowns are expected to face extreme challenges in community building and achieving a sense of place. As is the case with most suburban spaces, placelessness is a recurring sentiment felt by many suburbanites. Geographer Edward Relph (1976), stresses the importance of authenticity in the success of a place. He notes that an authentic place is “a direct and genuine experience of the entire complex of the identity of places—not mediated and distorted through a series of quite arbitrary social and intellectual fashions about how that experience should be, nor following stereotyped conventions” (Relph, 1976, 64). I believe this will be a key aspect for developers and city planners to focus on in the development of suburban downtowns. A strong partnership between developers and the City will be required to plan and organize cultural events that generate and contribute to a sense of place.

The current literature on the topic of suburban downtowns only covers some of the many other important aspects of the concept. The gaps are evident in the subject of

suburban downtowns as there is not much research or many case studies that have gone into great detail and exemplified this context-specific phenomenon. Therefore, suburban downtowns must be studied and compared in order to assess the ways in which they are transforming traditional suburban built form and challenging existing concepts of suburbia. Doing so inevitably leads to a greater understanding of suburban downtowns and their role within the broader discussion of urban planning trends in suburbs.

3.5 Downtowns

The third concept of this literature review examines the origins and development of downtown areas. Current debates on the nature of downtowns are explored including the ways in which they are defined, their role, and the reasoning behind why this centralized pattern of development constitutes a normative choice. Defining a downtown is a complex task as these areas vary greatly with respect to their geographical locations, long histories, populations, political states, major economies, functions and built form among many other characteristics of centrality. In order to begin to understand and define a downtown, some common elements and characteristics that downtowns possess should be addressed.

Today's successful downtowns contain a wide range of uses which provide diverse opportunities for working, living, shopping, learning, and entertainment. Downtowns are highly accessible by diverse modes of mobility including public transportation, automobile, bicycle and remain easy to experience on foot. Garreau (1991) identifies that cities and their downtowns have historically been shaped by the seven following purposes: industry; governance; commerce; safety; culture; companionship; and religion (Garreau, 1991, 26). They are generally the areas with the greatest density of buildings and people in the region. Downtowns have traditionally been located within city centres and continue to be a centre for government functions, a gathering place for civic activities, including cultural, social, and sporting events (Bogart, 2006). The high concentration and mix of uses such as offices, entertainment, and residential, thrive on their proximity from one another. These aspects of downtowns have been demonstrated to be historically efficient in providing their residents with greater access to those uses along with increased mobility.

Furthermore, the increased concentration also signifies efficient funding in capital investments such as public works projects, water and sewer services, and mass transit augmenting the desirability to reside in such downtown areas.

3.5.1 Origins

The term downtown is thought to have North American origins which generally held a geographical meaning. In his book *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950*, Robert Fogelson (2001) argues that downtown in the late nineteenth century was primarily the business district of a city. He explains that at the time, downtowns were the heart of a city's economic and cultural life. Downtowns are generally found throughout older parts of metropolitan areas and are located in close proximity to major financial institutions, most of the professional offices, and many light industries (Fogelson, 2001, 14). Downtown is an American term for a central business district (CBD). By the 1920s, downtowns had experienced exponential growth in all aspects and were redefined by policymakers as the CBD. The CBD is defined as being "the commercial centre of a town or city in which central business is concentrated" (Witherick et Al., 2001, 36). In this sense, we may understand downtowns as being the primary centre for economic activities and employment which emphasizes a concentration of employment uses. On a geographical level, "the central business district lies at the centre of the region; it is the original site of significant commercial development" (Lang, 2003, 36). Understanding the importance of having a centre with a concentration of uses is also relevant to the question of downtowns.

3.5.2 Centrality

Central-place theory attempts to explain the size, number, and distribution of spatial human arrangements. The concentration of people and activities serves multiple purposes: to exercise control, to act as a centre for the exchange of goods, and to process resource materials (Morrill, 1970). Walter Christaller's 1933 central-place theory consisted of two main concepts: range and threshold. The range "represents the maximum distance that a person will be willing to travel to obtain some good or service" and threshold explains the "minimum number of people required to support some activity" (Hughes, 1972, 122). Combined, activities group for spatial and economic efficiency in a

centralized pattern. Central places aim to minimize the distance travelled by customers while maximizing the profitability of the activity. The further the activity from the customers, the greater the distance and transportation costs for those goods and services. This concept may be applied to the development of new urban centres in the suburbs fulfilling the need for a central place. It assists in explaining the reasoning behind why downtowns may still be desirable to construct today.

Sociologist and founder of the Chicago School of Sociology Ernest W. Burgess (1984), brought forth his concentric zonal theory in an attempt to explain how cities follow similar models of urban social structures. Burgess's (1984) monocentric model of the metropolis arranged the region as a series of "concentric zones". The hypothesis included the following five concentric circular zones: "1) Central Business District; 2) the Zone in Transition; 3) the Zone of Workingmen's Homes; 4) the Zone of Better Residences; and 5) the Commuter's Zone" (Quinn, 1940, 210). As such, he identified that the innermost zone was the downtown centre where the city's commercial, social, and civic life were mostly concentrated. Moving outwards from the central regional core, "each zone became successively less dense" (Lang, 2003, 20). Burgess interpreted this phenomenon as a natural process echoing the functioning of nature. Burgess's theory of urban social structures cannot be generally applied to all cities, as it is false to assume metropolitan areas are monocentric. In fact, many cities do not conform to an ideal circular spatial pattern and land uses are unequally dispersed throughout metropolitan regions. The theory could only apply to a city organized around a single point of dominance. Current metropolitan regions are complex in their organization and are almost always composed of different areas of concentration.

While Burgess' over-simplistic urban model has been critiqued by many scholars (Quinn, 1940), by the end of the 1920's it became common that major North American cities had developed more than one specialized business district and separated certain types of uses. However, the CBD remained the dominant one in cities (Fogelson, 2001). CBD's are defined as areas where "businesses are united for ready access to clients and employees as the CBD is characteristically the most accessible part of town or city and

its hinterland... this is reflected in the high pedestrian and vehicular traffic flow” (Witherick et al., 2001, 36). Fogelson (2001) also states that downtowns in North America have been on the decline due to deindustrialization as well as the decentralization of people and commerce. The phenomenon of decentralization coupled with suburbanization has accelerated the declining process within city centres. The construction of suburban office space in the past several decades has also represented a threat to downtowns. The decentralization of retail trade from the central business district to the periphery has reduced the degree of downtowns’ importance and relocated it to the suburbs (Fogelson, 2001, 223). While many North American metropolitan regions continue to grow in population and physical size, this begs us to question the relevance and necessity of downtowns and dense urban cores in the future. Lang (2003) argues that the future of cities and urban cores will be closely tied to their size, location, history, politics, and industry. Cities that remain successful will “play a critical role in the social and economic life of their nation” (Lang, 2003, 22). However, it may be argued that despite technological advancement in the manufacturing industry coupled with the effects of social media on day to day interactions, downtowns remain the predominant economic driver in terms of jobs and investment in their respective urban regions. In fact, new technologies could help alleviate the growing pains associated with living in downtowns by making them more physically and socially accessible. Many urban residents continue to be attracted to downtown areas for all of their beneficial aspects and recognize the importance of day to day social interactions that these spaces provide.

3.5.3 Importance of Downtowns

It appears that downtowns have retained significant importance within the greater context of cities and their surrounding regions and remain an attractive place to live, work, and visit for many. Successful downtowns are critical contributors to a variety of beneficial social and economic outcomes for cities and their respective urban regions. Downtowns are often the location of the most valuable land, economic prosperity, and social and cultural importance. Renowned urbanist Jane Jacobs denotes that there are two central characteristics that make downtowns special. Those are “individuality (drawn from the district’s particular history and natural resources) and people (attracted to the place by its

centrality and clustered activities)” (Fortune, 1958, 125). Jacobs also highlights how past downtown revitalization projects are susceptible to failure for the reason that they appear to lack any “hint of individuality or whim or surprise, no hint that here is a city with tradition and flavour all its own” (Fortune, 1958, 126). Jacob’s quote can be applied to the current development of suburban downtowns, especially those that are built from the ground up on vacant lands in the likes of MC and VMC. These emerging downtowns will face significant challenges hindering their success without those core elements of individuality and a diversity of people that are present in most established downtowns.

3.5.4 Downtown Characteristics

In order to understand the major functions and purpose of a downtown, we may look at the region’s largest downtown for guidance. According to the City of Toronto Official Plan, the Downtown is the most accessible business location and largest employment center in the regional economy. It is also the location of a myriad of other activities such as:

- government offices;
- arts and cultural venues;
- entertainment activities and sporting events;
- destination and specialty retailing;
- lively restaurants and food markets featuring Toronto’s diverse cuisines;
- major tourist attractions and convention facilities;
- concentration of print and broadcast media;
- higher education; and
- research and health services linked to the University of Toronto and the major hospitals.

The intense concentration of activities and the availability of connections are crucial to the creation of a successful downtown atmosphere. Similarly, the Toronto Official Plan highlights the importance of mixed use in a way that should create “accessibility through proximity” (City of Toronto, 2019, 2-8). The downtown is the location where all types of jobs are concentrated including government, education, and health

services. Higher learning campuses are significant to downtowns as they draw large amounts of educated people. The downtown is an important cluster of arts and culture establishments which contribute economically to the city. On the topic of housing, successful downtowns should be attractive places to live that accommodate a great degree of social and economic diversity. Downtowns benefit from a mix of housing types, tenures and affordability. On the issue of mobility and accessibility, downtowns should encourage alternative modes of transportation including walking, cycling, and public transit.

3.6 Nodes and Urban Growth Centres in a Polycentric Region

The final major component of this literature review focuses on nodes and urban growth centres including the guiding policies helping shape their development in Ontario, Canada. Nodal planning concepts of development have received significant attention and praise from planners, economists, and researchers. Nodes are planning strategies that encourage high-density and mixed-use centralized growth patterns facilitating a cluster of economies which in return stimulates further development and reduces land consumption and reliance on the automobile (Lewis, 1972; Filion, 2009). This development pattern has been implemented throughout the Greater Toronto Area for the last several decades and continues to have an impact on current developments. Researchers further explain that nodes are used in urban planning to encourage the concentration of activities in and around public transit and that they are often connected by corridors and surrounded by low-density developments and fields (Keil, 2013). Nodes take on several other labels such as: “mixed-use centre”, “regional centre”, “regional town centre”, “sub-centre”, and “urban-growth centre”. While different planning documents use various names to describe nodes, they all depict them as being “a high-density-development form, which combines jobs, housing, retailing and services, is well connected to different modes of transportation, and offers an environment that is conducive to walking and public-transit patronage” (Filion, 2009, 506). Nodes generally take on higher concentration of activities when compared to transit-oriented developments yet are distinguishable from market-driven polycentricity such as edge cities (Filion, 2009). Nodes and growth centres have already had a significant impact on

the urban structure of the GTA. Filion (2009) rightfully states that these strategies are meant to counter dispersion by transforming urban structures and dynamics through smart growth principles.

3.6.1 Concept Origins and Definitions

By the 1970s, the negative impacts of urban dispersion became apparent and accentuated by the 1973 energy crisis. As a result, alternative forms of development had to be thought of and implemented in a more sustainable manner (Filion, 2009). The origin of the nodal concept in Canada is explained by Filion (2007) in his report on urban growth centres within the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The idea of juxtaposing high-density residential development with retail was first materialized by local municipal planners in the late 1950s. As a result, high-density apartment buildings located in close proximity to commercial uses started to be developed near major intersections of arterial roads. This model was intended to “reduce residents’ reliance on driving for shopping, while making shopping more convenient for apartment residents and providing a nearby market for stores” (Filion, 2007, 6). Filion (2007) also notes that at the time, this form of development still failed to create a pedestrian-friendly environment due to prioritization of automobiles and their influence on every aspect of built form. Automobiles held a profound influence on this new form of development as their needs were placed at the forefront of plans. Filion (2007) describes how the 1981 Metro Toronto Official Plan incorporated subcentre policies identifying and creating the nodes in North York and Scarborough. The City of Mississauga situated west of Toronto also grew and developed its own core area which became the City’s primary location for civic, commercial, office employment, and cultural uses. These three cities exemplify some of the first large scale attempts in Toronto and the GTA of creating nodes through the application of nodal planning and design principles.



Figure 5 Mississauga City Centre, Urban Toronto.

The original planning policies and principles guiding these spaces have progressed in such a manner that reflects the continually changing urban landscape. For instance, Filion (2007) states that the notion and definition of nodes have significantly evolved since their inception in the mid-1960s where it was first mentioned and applied to the Meadowvale Development Plan. Since then, there have been dozens of new community development plans in the Greater Toronto Area that have explicitly adopted and added significant value to the nodal concept. For example, in the 1994 Central Area Planning District Secondary Plan, the Town of Markham emphasized the planning of “a mixed-use, intensive urban area incorporating housing, employment and retail facilities, recreational, cultural, major institutional and civic buildings to serve as a focus for Markham’s many communities” (Town of Markham, 1997, 15). This more recent definition of a node reflected an enhanced conceptualization of the idea as it incorporated more than just residential and retail uses. In fact, this nodal perspective was further expanded upon and intensified by various community development plans and official planning documents. These enhancements are now a key component of many contemporary suburban downtowns.

There is a distinction to be made between different forms of nodes. As such, Grant and Filion (2010) argue that the nodal concept may be divided into two distinct types of nodes. The first being the suburban node which aims to transpose the dynamics found in successful traditional downtowns which are characterized by intense pedestrian-based interaction between their diverse land uses. Recent examples of this type of node can be found in the development of MC and in VMC. The second type of node is the premier node of major metropolitan regions, the downtown area. In this model, density and diversity of the downtown are enhanced through the new large-scale redevelopment of abandoned or under-utilized industrial, commercial, or institutional sites. This research primarily focuses on new suburban nodes as embodied in MC and VMC. A number of provincial policies provide the legislative background for their development.

3.6.2 The Provincial Policy Statement

The Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing influences the policies that direct land use, the built environment, and management of land resources. Since 1996, the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) has been issued under the *Planning Act* to provide policy directions on matters of provincial interests. This includes the building of strong healthy communities through efficient land use and development patterns (Ontario, 2020, 1.0). Provincial plans, such as the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe build upon the policy foundation provided in the PPS. Furthermore, the PPS specifically states that planning conducted by municipalities must “identify areas where growth or development will be directed, including the identification of nodes and the corridors linking these nodes” (Ontario, 2020, 1.2.4.b). Planning authorities are also directed to “promote compact form and a structure of nodes and corridors” (Ontario, 2020, 1.8.1.a) to support energy conservation and efficiency, improved air quality, reduced greenhouse gas emissions so as to lessen the impact of climate change. New developments must now conform with the plans and lands within settlement areas are subject to intensification and redevelopment.

3.6.3 The Growth Plan

Urban growth centres and nodes are part of the provincial policies that mandated higher concentrated forms of development. In 2005, the Provincial Government of Ontario created the *Places to Grow Act*, which is a tool employed to achieve growth policy and implementation. As a result, the 2006 *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe: Urban Growth Centres* was created to better manage growth and guide decisions on a wide range of issues relating to transportation, land-use planning, and urban form amongst many others. Furthermore, the legislation is intended to guide policies that “direct growth to built-up areas where the capacity exists to best accommodate the expected population and employment growth” (Ontario, 2006, 8). As such, the Growth Plan identifies 25 Urban Growth Centres across the region, including those of VMC and MC, and sets achievable density targets for those areas. Many of the identified Growth Centres have consequently been named “downtowns” or “centres”.



Figure 6 Map of designated Growth Centres, Ontario, 2006

Identified under section 2.2.3 of the Growth Plan (2019), urban growth centres should be planned:

- a) “as focal areas for investment in regional public service facilities, as well as commercial, recreational, cultural, and entertainment uses;
- b) to accommodate and support the transit network at the regional scale and provide connection points for inter- and intra-regional transit;
- c) to serve as high-density major employment centres that will attract provincially, nationally, or internationally significant employment uses; and
- d) to accommodate significant population and employment growth” (Ontario, 2019)

As described in the guiding policies, future growth is directed within existing settlement areas thus leading to the intensification of urban growth centres. While several urban growth centres are situated within existing historic downtowns, some of the emerging suburban centres are situated in greenfields and/or industrial areas. The planning of new purpose-built downtowns located within suburban municipalities in the 1990s predates any form of provincial policies. In fact, it is incorrect to attribute their development to the Growth Plan because several Greater Toronto Area municipalities were already conceptualizing and planning for intensification and nodal developments as seen in their respective Official Plans. The urban growth centres in the Growth Plan reflect the policy framework for centres of the lower-tier and regional municipalities at the time. As such, it could be argued that the Growth Plan policies had been greatly informed by what suburban planners were already contemplating. In a way, the policies in the Growth Plan reinforced existing trends and added specificity to what had already been occurring in suburban areas.

3.7 Literature Review Conclusion

The concepts explored throughout the literature review have identified key aspects and have brought forward ideas relevant to understanding my research questions. By explaining the history of suburbs, I included many different perspectives and accounts of how the suburban forms of development became the norm in the North American context. Their growth was attributed to countless and complex economic, cultural, political, and

social factors. Suburbanites' culture and ideal way of life was greatly shaped by the environment in which they lived and the products they consumed. Changing economies and markets further contributed to the decentralization of the workplace. Modern suburbs began to include different land uses and evolved as a result. New manifestations of suburban development and metropolitan forms have dominated the recent history of suburbs. This trend continues in places such as the GTA through the development of urban growth centres in suburbs that are marketed and labeled as suburban downtowns. This development concept concentrates diverse activities and uses in a manner that resembles and is advertised as a traditional high-density downtown albeit situated in a primarily suburban setting. Suburban downtowns build upon the concept of edge cities to create a complete downtown from the ground up. They attempt to recreate the downtown environment in a carefully master-planned environment that incorporates all the ingredients of existing successful downtowns. This form of development began several decades before any provincial policies were in effect. With time, the concepts proved to be efficient and logical which then became mandated and encouraged through policies identified in the Growth Plan.

Many questions remain unexplored on the topic of suburban downtowns. For some of them, their planning and development began decades ago and for others, they are in their primary beginning stages of creation. Developers are working closely with suburban municipalities to build vertical high-density developments that cater to the middle class who may not have the means to afford to live in downtowns. Beske (2018) notes that successful, suburban downtowns could become a “hybrid, reflecting some urban values, sensibilities, and preferences yet specific to its suburban milieu” (Beske, 2018, 103). These spaces will be faced with numerous challenges related to creating a mixed-use, dense, walkable downtown out of an automobile-oriented suburban context. According to Beske (2018), it will continue to be difficult to attract, retain and meet high numbers of retail and office occupancy. However, in order to become successful, suburban downtowns will require “destination-oriented retail for which consumers will be willing to drive longer distances and tolerate some level of parking-related inconvenience”. The limited availability of parking planned in suburban downtowns will also represent a

challenge for suburbanites in a way that it is a change from the wide availability of big box store parking lots. On the topic of retail, it may remain difficult for big box department stores to adapt to an urban format. As such, retail situated in suburban downtowns will need to differentiate themselves by “identifying and exploiting a particular niche in the broader competitive ecology that has yet to be filled or that is not served well” (Beske, 2018, 107). Suburban downtowns remain relevant not by striving to be “all things to all people”, but rather, “something to some people” (Beske, 2018, 107). Large scale placemaking initiatives on behalf of the developers in conjunction with cities will also be important in creating a sense of place and community. Although I only mentioned a handful of challenges specific to the success of suburban downtowns, there are many others that remain to be explored and understood. As such, it is important to study contemporary attempts to create suburban downtowns to begin understanding their planning, development, and impact on the suburbs and the greater metropolitan region.

4.0 Case Studies

4.1 Overview of Case Studies

The location and focus of this study revolves around two suburban downtowns located in the Greater Toronto Area: Markham Centre in the City of Markham, and Vaughan Metropolitan Centre in the City of Vaughan. These centres are situated within two neighbouring municipalities that are part of the Regional Municipality of York in Ontario, Canada. Both centres have been selected for this study because they meet the criteria of a suburban downtown classification as well as for their common, yet distinct characteristics. A driving distance of approximately 20 kilometres separates the two centres. In the following sections, I first examine the provincial and regional policies that have set the path for the development of these suburban downtowns. I then provide the geographical and historical background necessary to contextualize each of these centres. The respective municipal policies and planning documents guiding their development are also considered. The hierarchy of planning policies are displayed in Figure 7.

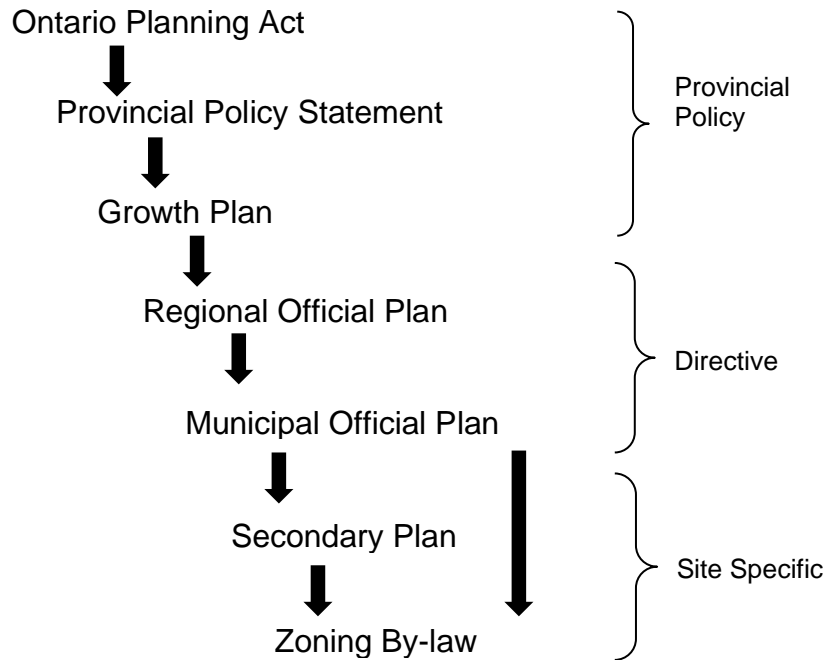


Figure 7 Hierarchy of planning policies, by author

4.1.1 Provincial and Regional Policy Framework

The policy context for Markham’s Central Area Planning District and Vaughan Metropolitan Centre can be analyzed from the perspective of the three entities that constitute the structural hierarchy through which MC and VMC are governed: the Provincial, Regional, and Municipal regulatory systems. A number of Provincial policies established in the 1990s provided a framework which planners and developers were required to adhere by. Within the Ontario Planning Act, the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) required that new land-use patterns be constructed in the form of densities that promote efficiency in land use, resources, infrastructure and public service facilities while supporting the use of public transit (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 1997, 1.1.2.b). The PPS, which is reviewed and updated every five years, directs how urban intensification should occur and establishes initial targets for densities and mix of uses that are favourable to support public transit infrastructure. To date, the PPS has remained consistent in that it promotes development patterns that support strong, livable and healthy communities by endorsing intensification as a means to accommodate growth and increase urban vitality. It also requires “the promotion of built form that is well

designed, encourages a sense of place and provides for public spaces that are high quality, safe, accessible, attractive and vibrant” (Planning Act, s.2). The Ontario Planning Act requires that Official Plans be consistent with the PPS. These high-level policies have guided the ways in which planning in Ontario occurs and the developments of these suburban downtowns.

In 2005, the Province of Ontario prepared the *Places to Grow Act* which established the 2006 *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*. This growth management strategy has the primary goal of curbing urban sprawl and its associated negative characteristics of traffic congestion, degradation of the natural environment, higher infrastructure costs and impeding transit. The document asserts that in order to prevent urban sprawl, new growth is required to be located within built-up areas through their intensification (Ontario, 2006, s.2.2.2). The Growth Plan stipulates that the 25 identified Urban Growth Centres are to achieve a density of between 150 and 400 people and jobs per hectare by 2031. MC and VMC have both been assigned a growth target of 200 people and jobs per hectare by 2031. Both boundaries of MC and VMC are displayed in the Urban Growth Centres maps below (Figures 8 & 9).

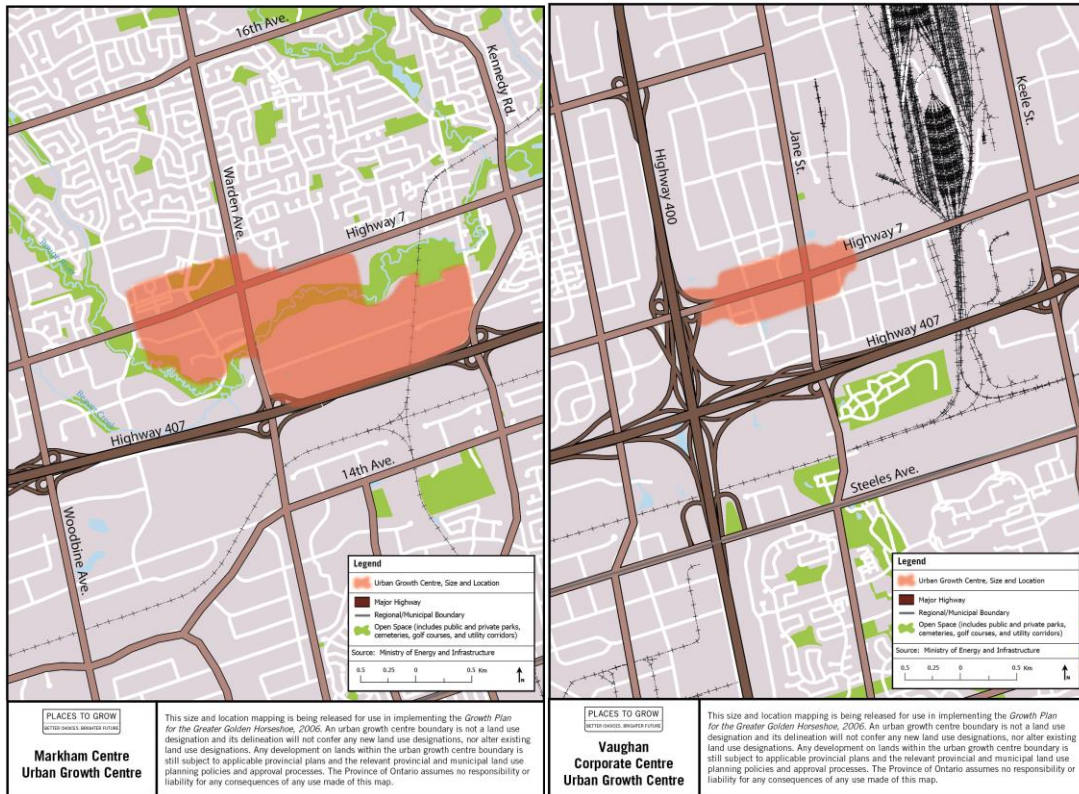


Figure 8 Boundaries of VMC Urban Growth Centres, Ontario, 2020

Figure 9 Boundaries of MC Urban Growth Centres, Ontario, 2020.

At a regional-scale, the York Region Official Plan identifies four Regional Centres located in the Town of Newmarket, City of Richmond Hill, City of Vaughan, and the City of Markham. In section 5.4 of the York Region Official Plan, Regional Centres and Corridors are identified as being the desirable planning approach for future city building (York Region, 2010). Regional Centres are envisioned to flourish into the most important and intense concentrations of development within the region. These urban spaces are planned in a manner that will retain a wide range of uses and activities for living, working, shopping, entertainment, cultural identity and human services (York Region, 2010). The Official Plan also states that as these Regional Centres mature, they will transform into exciting “downtowns” with a wide range of uses and mobility choices. Herein, the Region clearly states that these Regional Centres will become downtowns as they develop in the future.

The GTA is experiencing an ongoing crisis related to affordable housing and, at the same time, significant annual population growth. As a result, Provincial and Municipal governments are planning accordingly and developing appropriate housing policies to accommodate new residents. In the coming decades, MC and VMC will be the location of considerable population growth for the region. They and other suburban downtowns could be areas that could accommodate significant amounts of affordable through various regulatory mechanisms. For instance, the Region of York's Official Plan requires that both centres include a minimum of 35% affordable new housing units (York Region, 2010). York Region defines the term affordable "as a unit for which the rent does not exceed 30 per cent of gross annual household income for low- and moderate-income households; or, a unit for which the rent is at or below the average market rent of a unit in the regional market area" (York Region, 2010, 169). As such, Municipal Official Plans are also required to conform to the policies within the Region's Official Plan. Furthermore, the Region is also undertaking an Official Plan review to reconsider current provincial policies including changes in housing policy direction. In a 2019 Housing Study, the City of Markham identified MC as a candidate for the implementation of inclusionary zoning policies and additional financial incentives in direct response to innovate provincial and regional housing initiatives. Inclusionary zoning is employed as a tool to coerce private markets to subsidize affordable housing themselves. The policy either requires or incentivizes private developers to assign a certain percentage of the units in any given project as below current market pricing expectations. While the City of Markham has not yet implemented such a policy, it is taking steps forward to approve it, which is a necessary step to provide significant affordable housing in MC. The City of Vaughan is also developing policies to respond to growth and affordable housing conditions. The VMC Secondary Plan provides broad policy direction relating to diverse and affordable forms of housing in accordance with the York Region Official Plan policies. Nevertheless, the lack of affordable housing remains a point of contention affecting more than just MC, CMC and the GTA. As of yet, it does not appear as if MC and VMC have adequately planned to respond to the ever-growing cost of housing. Were the York Region policy of 35% affordable housing achieved in the two suburban downtowns, MC would see approximately 14,000 affordable units and VMC 8,500 affordable units built (based on

current development projections and targets). While both cities are preparing policy documents to address the issues of affordability within their respective downtowns, what remains to be seen is how housing in MC or VMC will become more affordable in the long run.

4.2 Markham Centre Planning Framework

Markham Centre is located in the City of Markham, in the Regional Municipality of York, in Ontario, Canada. Markham Centre, also known as the Central Area Planning District and Downtown Markham, is 430 hectares generally “bounded by the Ontario Hydro transmission line and the Rouge River on the west, Highway 7 on the north, Kennedy Road on the east and the northern boundary of the Highway 407 right-of-way on the south” (Figure 10) (Town of Markham, 1997, ii). With an anticipated population of approximately 41,000 residents and 39,000 jobs, it is the city’s long-term vision to create a complete and integrated community, containing a mix of uses suitable to a City Centre, including recreational, cultural and institutional facilities (Your Voice Markham, 2020).



Figure 10 Markham Centre boundary in OPA 21, Town of Markham.

In 1997, the Town of Markham approved Official Plan Amendment No. 21 which established “the vision for a mixed-use Town Centre development within a live/work

environment” (Town of Markham, 1997, 2). This Secondary Plan envisioned varying density levels of residential, commercial and industrial development supported by transit and designed in a pedestrian-friendly manner that also incorporates parks, open spaces and other institutional uses. The initial conceptualization of the plan began in 1992 in which the Town of Markham commissioned a study of the lands for the purpose of creating a Master Plan for MC’s future. As such, a number of consultants including Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk Architects were retained by the Town of Markham to conduct a complete study for MC’s Master Plan. As a result, the plan developed by the multidisciplinary team was heavily influenced by New Urbanist principles (Figure 11). Typically, within a suburban context, this approach to community development consists of a blend of architectural styles, anti-sprawl ‘smart growth’, and transit-oriented sustainable urban plans combining neo-traditional buildings, applications of heritage-style architecture and the use of zero-lot-line homes arranged in grid road systems and rear alleys to form relatively dense, walkable mixed-use neighbourhoods (Marshall, 2003, 189; Johannsen, 2000, 1).

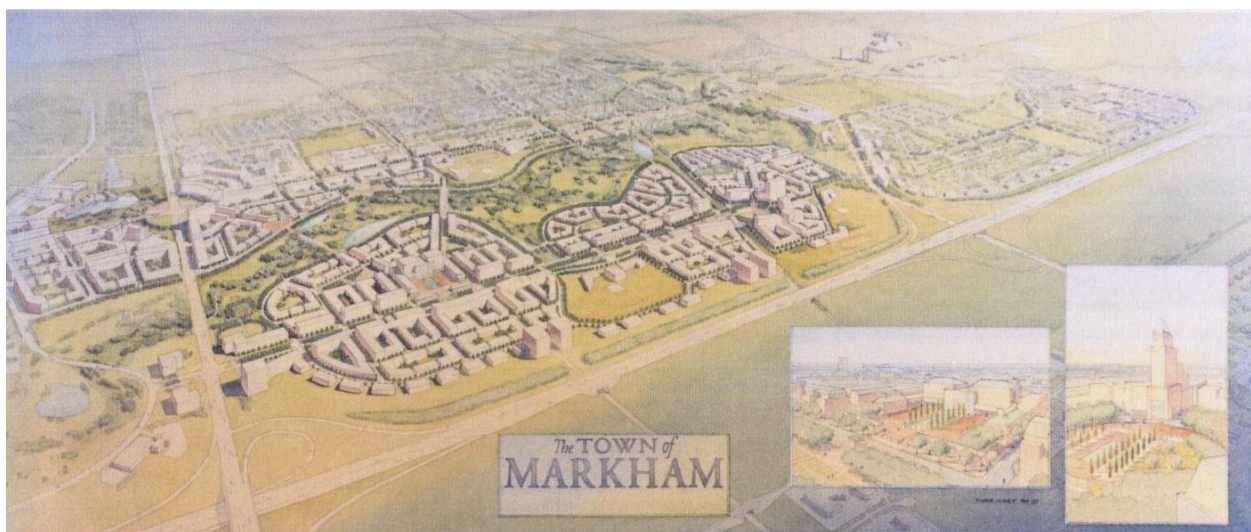


Figure 11 1992 Markham Centre conceptual master plan, Town of Markham.

In 2002, Remington Group, established its initial precinct plan for “Downtown Markham” along with the heavily new urbanist inspired concept plans (Figure 12). As pictured, the architecture and landscaping follow the New Urbanist approach. As a primary landowner of MC, Remington Group initiated a precinct plan in conjunction with

the City of Markham to establish detailed parameters for land use, physical character and form of future development for specific areas of MC. The objectives of the precinct plan included where and how land use and density should be distributed and setting development targets for the district. This plan would assist Markham in determining appropriate zoning controls as well as subdivision and infrastructure requirements.



Figure 12 2002 Markham Centre Remington Group precinct plan, Town of Markham.

In 2010, another precinct plan was endorsed by Markham City Council for the northern portion of MC primarily owned by Time Group Corporation. The plan (Figure 13) demonstrates the proposed built form, distribution of land uses and public realm. The lands known as “Uptown Markham” consist of mid-rise and high-rise developments with heights reaching up to 41 storeys, a large commercial plaza fronting on Highway 7 East and landscaped parkland providing a gateway to the Rouge River to the south. The MC

lands owned by Times Group Corporation and Remington Group are separated by the Rouge National Urban Park.



Figure 13 Times Group Corporation 2010 Uptown Markham precinct plan.

The Municipal Policies that enabled the development of MC are primarily based on Amendment No. 5 to the 1987 Official Plan that identified the site as “Future Urban Area” (City of Markham, 2014). As a result, studies were conducted to determine and establish objectives and policies relative to housing targets for future development. These studies also established the direction in which the development of the area would evolve as a new Town Centre while promoting a more compact urban form with a wide mix of housing types. Consequently, the Secondary Plan (Town of Markham, 1997) was created to incorporate the provisions necessary to implement the MC plan with general land-use guidelines. In 2011, a Community Improvement Plan for the Markham Centre Secondary Plan Area was adopted as a more detailed framework for achieving its objectives. The plan details specific infrastructure requirements and investment opportunities including municipal parking, streetscape improvements, servicing infrastructure, green infrastructure initiatives, road and pedestrian connections, amongst many others. One after the other, these studies and plans are built upon and contribute to each other, adding a heightened level of complexity to the overall MC vision.

In addition, Zoning By-law No. 2004-196 covers MC (City of Markham, 2004). The general purpose of this By-law is to facilitate the creation of a vibrant and dynamic downtown core in the City of Markham while further implementing the goals and objectives set in OPA No. 21. This Zoning By-law establishes the MC zoning designations and development standards. It did so by rezoning the MC lands originally designated as “Agricultural One (A1)” and “Open Space One (O1)” to “Markham Centre - Downtown (MC-D) Zone” and “Markham Centre - Public Space (MC-PS) Zone” (City of Markham, 2004). The By-law also establishes an additional eight sub-zone categories to provide further details and specify permitted uses on select properties. Furthermore, the City of Markham established a series of Holding provisions on parcels of land located within the MC Area intended to ensure that all aspects of development were adequately reviewed and considered by Council before development could occur. The By-law’s explanatory notes explains that it is “intended to be inherently flexible to allow for the evolution of a dynamic downtown core” (City of Markham, 2004). This is a positive aspect of the By-law for the reason that it is not overly prescriptive and it is fitting for the successful development of a downtown.

4.2.1 Markham Centre Today and Tomorrow

Today, the Remington Group owns the 98 hectares of land known as “Downtown Markham” set to become the focal point of the area. As of 2018, Downtown Markham is home to over 2,300 residents, 37,161 square metres of retail, and 78,967 square metres of office space (Remington Group, 2020). Existing Downtown Markham residential developments include the Benchmark Manor townhouse development (175 units) (Figure 14), Bijou Phase I (188 units), Bijou Phase II (244 units), Nexus (376 units), Verdale (450 units), and the Marriott Signature Condominiums (305 units) (Figure 15). Future approved and proposed Downtown Markham residential developments include Gallery Square HS-1 (454 units), Gallery Square HS-2 (552 units), York Residences (545 units), and K2 (276 units) (Your Voice Markham, 2020). Many proposed condominiums will include mixed-use retail components at ground level. Some existing developments, such as The Origin Complex, include two commercial buildings offering retail, restaurants, office space, and a fitness centre. In addition, several stand-alone office buildings have been occupied for

over a decade in Downtown Markham such as Honeywell Canada, and WorleyParsons Canada. Completed in 2017, Aviva Canada’s 12 storey head office is Downtown Markham’s newest and largest office building. Furthermore, Remington Group has invested over \$25 million in public art programs contributing to outdoor and indoor art pieces along with painted murals in underground parking lots (Remington Group, 2020). With a projected 29 hectares of green space, the developers of Downtown Markham will enhance the existing natural heritage features and build new landscaped parks for the community to enjoy.



Figure 14 Benchmark Manor townhouses, The Remington Group

Figure 15 The Origin Complex, Marriott Hotel & Signature Condominiums, The Remington Group

To the north of Downtown Markham, Times Group owns the 35 hectares fronting Highway 7 East called “Uptown Markham”. Uptown Markham is currently the home of over 2,500 residents and continues to grow rapidly. Existing Uptown Markham residential developments include River Park Phase I (606 units), River Park Phase II (503 units), Riverside (613 units) (Figure 16). Three Riverview Condominium towers containing a total of 1011 units are under construction, and future residential and office phases are planned for the lands located southeast of Highway 7 East and Verdale Gate. Today, Uptown Market, in addition to ground level retail and office components located within the aforementioned condominiums, also offer the community with a supermarket and a wide range of retail, restaurants, offices, and banks. The southeast corner of Highway 7 East and Warden Avenue is planned to become the site of future office buildings in addition to a school. The lands situated east of Uptown Markham, south of Highway 7 East, and west of the GO line are owned by a number of different owners. Notably, the Sheridan Nurseries property will be redeveloped for high-density towers accommodating 1,225

residential units, 4,900 square metres of retail use, and greenspace (Your Voice Markham, 2020). Proposals have not yet been submitted for the other parcels of land located east.



Figure 16 Rendering of Uptown Markham at full buildout, Times Group.

The southeastern portion of MC located between Kennedy Road and the GO line has also experienced growth in a variety of institutional uses. The Markham Pan Am Centre was constructed for the 2015 Pan Am Games and houses an olympic-size pool and fitness centre. Bill Crothers Secondary School was built in 2008 and holds a renowned athletics-focused program. First opened in 2006, the Markham YMCA Rudy Bratty Centre continues to provide a wide range of community services and amenities. The first phase of the Marleigh Retirement Residence was completed in 2013 and a second phase has been proposed. Applications for a 33 and 28 storey residential building have been submitted for the lands known as 28 Main Street Unionville. The development will have a total of 637 residential units and over 1,500 square metres of ground level retail (Your Voice Markham, 2020). Situated next to the Pan Am Centre, the first phase of the future York University MC campus has been approved. The 10 storey campus building will offer 20-degree programs to approximately 4,200 students in the first phase alone. A future second phase is planned in the coming years.



Figure 17 Future York University Markham Centre Campus, City of Markham

The portion of MC situated west of Warden Avenue is the site of recent residential, retail, and office developments. The Fontana (692 units), EKO (589 units), Majestic Court (532 units), and Circa (942 units) were built within the last decade. Furthermore, other mixed-use buildings have been proposed for the area including a three tower complex containing 500 units and 190 hotel suites, New World Centre (2,200 units), Vendome Markham (517 units), and Lifetime Developments Panda (2,200 units) (Your Voice Markham, 2020). The area is also the site of the Markham Civic Centre, Hilton Hotel, and IBM Canada Toronto Software Lab.

From a transportation perspective, MC is well connected by different modes of transportation. Automobiles are the dominant form of transportation in and around MC. The area is surrounded by highways, major regional roads, and collector roads that provide connectivity and fluidity to the area. Highway 7 East and local streets in Downtown Markham include bike lanes. Since 2011, updates to the regional transit network have been underway in York Region. Namely, the VIVA bus rapid transit right-of-way provides a transit connection between Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Markham along the Highway 7 corridor. A segment of the right-of-way extends within Downtown Markham and the Unionville GO Station. Unionville GO Station is part of the Stouffville GO line regional rail network which provides a connection between the northeast side of York Region and Toronto's Union Station. Metrolinx has begun construction to expand GO train services to provide two-way all-day service with a 15 minutes frequency. In order to support these

improvements, the Unionville GO Station is constructing a new island platform, a second track, pedestrian tunnels and paths, expanded parking lot, and bike storage room.

By 2031, Remington Group anticipates that Downtown Markham alone will be home to over 10,000 residents, offer over 2 million square metres of retail, 3.4 million square metres of office space, and 29 hectares of landscaped greenspace. According to the City's Growth Strategy projections, MC will have a population of 41,000 residents living in approximately 20,000 residential units, and 39,000 jobs. These estimates have significantly increased since the first Official Plan Amendment (Town of Markham, 1997) which projected 25,000 residents, 10,000 residential units, and 17,000 jobs. It is likely that residential projections will exceed 41,000 within a few years. The MC vision has evolved in many ways since the 1997 Secondary Plan, the availability of accurate statistics is limited and outdated.

MC is currently undertaking a major update to the original and outdated 1997 Secondary Plan. The Secondary Plan update will make sure that the vision is keeping pace with the current context and the community's desires for the area (Your Voice Markham, 2020). In order to take on this task, the City is collaborating with consultants and stakeholders throughout several project phases. The MC Secondary Plan update is a large-scale community engagement exercise which as of 2020, has reached over 2,300 participants (Your Voice Markham, 2020). The different project phases include analyzing existing conditions; creating a vision for the future; creating development options; drafting of development concepts; recommendation for a chosen development concept; and writing the new MC Secondary Plan (Your Voice Markham, 2020). As of early 2020, the process is still in the early stages of visioning the guiding principles for the future of MC.



Figure 18 Downtown Markham 2018 concept, Remington Group

4.3 Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Planning Framework

Vaughan Metropolitan Centre is located within the City of Vaughan, in Ontario, Canada. The primary centre of VMC is bounded by Portage Parkway to the north, Creditstone Road to the east, Highway 407 to the south, and Highway 400 to the west (Figure 19). VMC is planned to become an intense and dynamic downtown which will evolve into the centre of Vaughan’s economic and cultural life. The VMC is situated on 179 hectares of land and by 2031, it will house more than 25,000 residents in 12,000 residential units and include 1.4 million square metres of commercial office space, and 70,000 square metres of new retail space (MyVMC, 2020). As of 2017, VMC is the northern terminal station for the rapid transit Line 1 Yonge - University subway operated by the Toronto Transit Commission. Additionally, the area is served by the York Region Transit (YRT) bus rapid transit (BRT) line rendering it as one of the major mobility hubs in the region. VMC is located 3 kilometres away from York University and this emerging downtown is rapidly growing and attracting businesses, employment, and residents. City documents identify this future downtown as being “transit-oriented, walkable, accessible, diverse, vibrant, green, and beautiful” (City of Vaughan, 2017).

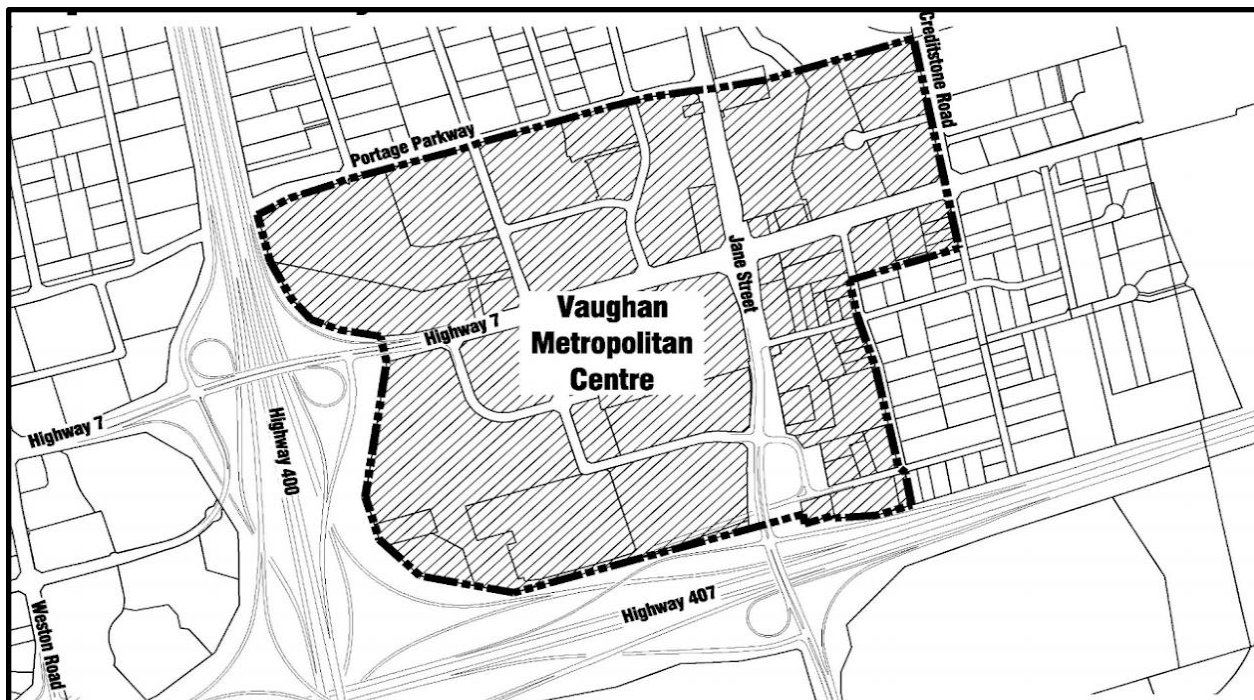


Figure 19 Vaughan Metropolitan Centre area map, City of Vaughan

Planning for VMC officially began in 1998 with the approval of the Secondary Plan for what was previously called the “Vaughan Corporate Centre”. The Secondary Plan Area was originally conceptually identified and designated in 1995 by Official Plan Amendment 400 which emerged from other City-based planning policies and studies of the early 1990s that recognized the future development potential for the lands. As a result, the 1998 plan was prepared as an Official Plan Amendment (City of Vaughan, 1998) which envisioned Vaughan Corporate Centre as the new central focus for higher intensity land uses and the focal point for business activity and major commercial development. Within, the established vision echoes the creation of a ‘downtown’ public realm in which the streets, sidewalks, promenades, squares, parks, gardens and greenways are the key to the image and physical quality of the community (Figure 20) (City of Vaughan, 1998, 5). The 1998 Secondary Plan identified two major land use designations for the node. The first being the Corporate Centre Node, focusing on uses such as offices, hotels, institutional, civic, cultural, retail and higher residential densities. The second being the Corporate Centre District characterized by lower density developments including industrial uses and major entertainment facilities while prohibiting residential uses. One

of the primary principles of this plan emphasizes the fact that it should permit a mix of land uses that can evolve over time, while adapting to market fluctuations. This reflects a controlled and highly planned development of a downtown that responds to external changes based on the market and tailored needs of its residents. The development of VMC was solidified in 2006 when the Government of Ontario committed to extending the Spadina subway line to Vaughan and the Growth Plan designated the area as an Urban Growth Centre. In 2012, the Vaughan Corporate Centre was rebranded to the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre by the City and the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC). The name was chosen for the new subway station along with creating consistency with the marketing and branding of the new downtown.



Figure 20 1998 Vaughan Corporate Centre concept in OPA 500

The Vaughan Official Plan also indicates that VMC is to be composed of distinct development precincts. This includes residential neighbourhoods, office districts, employment areas, and mixed-use areas. The Official Plan establishes the growth targets of 12,000 residential units and 6,500 jobs by 2031 (City of Vaughan, 2010). Presently, planning for VMC is largely guided by the VMC Secondary Plan prepared by Urban Strategies Inc. developed in 2010. The preparation for the Secondary Plan was initiated in 2008 and engaged a number of agencies as well as the many landowners in the area.

As part of their study, the Secondary Plan area was determined along with detailed objectives and strategies to achieve a downtown that would become transit-oriented, walkable, accessible, diverse, vibrant, green, and beautiful. The plan identifies clear objectives to achieve a complete and distinct downtown along with implementation guidelines. Additionally, a number of other plans and studies have been completed to guide development and ensure it is aligned with the overall vision. These studies provide a detailed framework to direct VMC's development and include: a Community Improvement Plan; Cultural Framework and Public Art Policy; Public Art Program; Edgely Pond and Park Study; Streetscape and Open Space Plan; Urban Design Guidelines; Utility Master Plan; Strategic Assessment Plan; Transportation Master Plan; and Servicing Strategy Master Plan (MyVMC, 2020). Future and in progress VMC studies include: Parking Strategy; Hydro Undergrounding; Park Master Plan and Implementation Strategy; and Black Creek Renewal. Once complete, these studies and plans will contribute in the solidification of policies which will define and direct VMC's forthcoming developmental stages.

The City of Vaughan's Zoning By-law 1-88 as amended provides the greatest level of detail regarding site-specific zoning designations. It controls how land is used as well as the development standards of how buildings can be situated and built. The by-law also contains additional definitions that apply specifically to VMC as well as vehicle and bicycle parking requirements specific to certain types of uses. The primary land uses in VMC are "Commercial Corporate Centre" and "Commercial District" zones, "Prestige Employment Area" zone, "Multiple Residential" zones, "Agricultural" zones, "Open Space Conservation" and "Open Space Park" zones (City of Vaughan, 2018). Holding provisions have been placed on select parcels of land with the intention of ensuring that all aspects of development are adequately reviewed and considered by Council before development can occur.

The Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Strategic Assessment (Vaughan, 2015) is a document developed by the City in conjunction with Live Work Learn Play Inc., a Canadian real estate development and advisory firm, to help guide the VMC vision

implementation. The document sheds light on what constitutes successful outcomes in terms of implementing and achieving the VMC's grandiose plan. It also addresses VMC's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The document breaks down VMC's existing conditions as well as district evolution and is especially helpful in understanding the different components making up the entirety of VMC. It is important to understand the existing conditions of the area in order to realize the VMC vision. The findings provided within the document are used in the final analysis of the VMC.

4.3.1 Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Today and Tomorrow

Prior to the existence of the VMC vision, the area had developed a number of different uses over several decades. Consequently, the majority of the land within the VMC boundaries is privately owned. The area is already the location of existing major developments owned by a multitude of landowners. Several properties within VMC's boundaries are currently occupied by industries and offices. Over time, the sites will be redeveloped in order to promote and facilitate fulfillment of the overall VMC vision. Existing businesses in the VMC which are not suitable for the planned downtown environment will likely require their relocation. For instance, the northern portion of VMC is primarily owned by SmartCentres and is currently occupied by big-box retail stores such as Wal-Mart and Lowes. SmartCentres owns the 100-acres of land known as SmartCentres Place which has its own detailed vision and Master Plan (Figure 21). Their Master Plan depicts the future infrastructure, buildings, and later phases of development. To date, VMC's largest residential projects are those developed by the partnership between SmartCentres and CentreCourt Developments which are in close proximity to subway and bus stations. Transit City 1, 2, and 3 are three 55-storey towers containing 1,741 units and 11 townhomes for approximately 3,500 residents. The second phase of development is called Transit City 4 and 5 which will be 45 and 50-storey towers consisting of 1,472 units for roughly 2,000 residents. In addition to the residential components of VMC, SmartCentres Place is the site of the KPMG office tower (Approximately 780 jobs) and the recently constructed PwC-YMCA tower which offers residents community services, public library gym and daycare facilities (MyVMC, 2020).



Figure 21 VMC Subcommittee SmartCentres lands presentation, City of Vaughan

The eastern portion of VMC located east of Jane Street and north of Highway 7 is the site of VMC’s first residential community called Expo City developed by Cortel Group. Expo City currently consists of two 37 storey towers with a podium including 704 units housing approximately 1,400 residents. Two additional Cortel Group towers called Nord East and Nord West consisting of 861 units with approximately 1,705 residents are approaching completion. The final building proposed by Cortel Group is the 60 storey CG Tower comprising 554 units (MyVMC, 2020). All buildings part of the Expo City development will have mixed-use podiums and offer residents access to shops, restaurants, and entertainment. Notably, in 2019, Niagara University opened a campus located in the podium which welcomes approximately 300 students in education programs. VMC officially has a post-secondary institution presence in its downtown.

Edgeley Pond and Park is the largest open space and City-owned piece of land in the VMC situated on the northeast corner of Jane Street and Highway 7. The vision for the redevelopment of Edgeley Pond and Park is for it to become a signature gateway piece and sustainable amenity for the future downtown that functions as a hybrid of vital stormwater management infrastructure and innovative public park and open space (MyVMC, 2020). Southeast of Highway 7 and Jane Street, South Black Creek is a continuation of the Edgeley Pond natural feature which will be renewed through a series

of promenades, plazas and parks. These valuable greenspaces will provide VMC residents and visitors spaces to enjoy the natural features.

The district directly located southwest of Highway 7 and Jane Street is planned to become mixed-use areas integrating office space, residential, retail services and entertainment. The South Community will have a stronger residential focus and include a school campus. The Business Enterprise Park and Corporate Innovation Corridor districts located northeast of Highway 400 and 407 ETR are designed to develop in a highly visible manner which will accommodate world-class offices and a large number of businesses. Currently, it is the site of three hotels, an IKEA, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority head office, several restaurants, an arcade, and the abandoned building of AMC theatre.

The centrepiece of VMC will be Central Park, an iconic 9-acre urban park that spans multiple city blocks. It will feature landscaping, playgrounds, walking trails, and a potential amphitheatre. Central Park North will primarily consist of a residential area with a mix of high-rise and mid-rise towers. Located at the northwest corner of the VMC boundaries will be the Entertainment District which will feature restaurants, regional sports bars, nightlife, theatre, and other cultural facilities.

Since 2017, VMC has quickly developed as a result of newly constructed higher-order transit. In 2017, the 8.6-kilometre subway extension for Line 1 was completed and included six new stations from Sheppard West to the VMC terminal located on Highway 7. This anchor Mobility Hub is the primary location for arrivals and departures in VMC. This transportation axis connects the subway, regional bus and the VIVA rapid way. The Mobility Hub comprises the VMC VIVA Station, VMC Subway Station (Figure 23), and SmartCentres Place Bus Terminal (Figure 22) which are all seamlessly connected via underground pedestrian walkways. The stations help connect riders to downtown Toronto in addition to the rest of York Region and beyond. All future neighbourhoods within the VMC will be situated within a maximum of a 10-minute walk from a transit stop.



Figure 22 SmartCentres Place bus terminal, City of Vaughan

Figure 23 VMC subway station, City of Vaughan

By 2031, VMC targets a minimum of 1.5 million square feet of office space development and 750,000 square feet of retail space employing 11,500 people, of which 5,000 would be engaged in office activities (MyVMC, 2020). Furthermore, 12,000 residential units will be constructed in which approximately 25,000 residents will live in. In 2011, a VMC Sub-Committee of Council and a VMC Implementation Team were formed to help facilitate projects related to VMC's development (City of Vaughan, 2019). The VMC Sub-Committee meets several times a year to discuss progress and make decisions on various issues that concern the VMC. A 2019 VMC Sub-Committee report reveals that the City has already met the 2031 residential and population targets within the VMC. At this current pace, VMC is projected to have 19,641 residential units built which represents an approximate population of 38,889. The report also states that by combining existing and proposed developments, retail space is at 53% while office space is at 66% of the 2031 target (City of Vaughan, 2019). Much work is still underway and planned with respect to infrastructure as well as upcoming developments. The City continues to work closely with stakeholders to ensure that the VMC vision is updated, competitive, and ultimately gets realized. The City and consultants are pursuing the completion of new studies which will ultimately guide future phases of development in the VMC.



Figure 24 Concept plan for SmartCentres lands, City of Vaughan

5.0 Analysis

5.1 Overview

In this chapter, I use interview data retrieved through discussions with key informants responsible for the planning, design, and development of emerging suburban centres to contribute to an overall understanding of the processes and experiences at play. I examine the seven participants' experiences and opinions concerning the various elements of Markham Centre and Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, in relation to the research questions at hand. This analysis draws on the literature under review and reflects on key themes and considerations related to the planning and development of MC and VMC. Herein, I first compare and contrast the two suburban downtowns based on factual data. Then, I shed light on the impact of the built form and the importance of planning policies to better understand why suburban municipalities in the GTA are building these downtown cores. Furthermore, I break down each of the study areas' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and future threats. Only then can informed conclusions be drawn from answers to the research questions, so as to better understand ways in which suburbs are changing, thus redefining economic, social and cultural environments.

5.2 Comparing the Facts

The following section assesses current data related to MC and VMC in order to deconstruct and make sense of their differences and similarities. Both MC and VMC represent a departure from the traditional built form manifested throughout their respective suburban environments. By using Garreau's (1991) definition of different edge cities, MC and VMC are what appears to be a mixture of Boomburb and Greenfield edge cities. MC and VMC are situated at or near the intersection of highways and some of the most heavily traveled roads in the GTA. These centres are entirely master-planned communities located on what used to be farmland. Prior to the realization of the VMC concept, a portion of the area had been developed with retail and industrial businesses in mind. Conversely, the majority of MC and Downtown Markham lands remain vacant.

The centres have been divided into a number of development precincts often based on land ownership. Their planned cores are owned by one land developer and they have been labelled and advertised as being new downtowns. With the construction of Downtown Markham, the Remington Group is building mixed-use high-rise communities as opposed to traditional single detached dwellings. In VMC, the SmartCentres Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) is now involved in the construction of residential and commercial high-rise developments instead of suburban format big box commercial plazas. The contrasting backgrounds of both primary developers are significant as this represents a change of direction outside of their usual comfort zone (Peddigrew, 2019; McLeod, 2019). The area in which VMC occupies is 179 hectares whereas MC is 430 hectares, roughly 2.4 times the size of its counterpart. According to the *Growth Plan*, VMC and MC are both targeted to have 200 people and jobs per hectare by 2031 (Ontario, 2006). The targeted population of MC is approximately 41,000 residents living in 20,000 residential units, and 39,000 jobs whereas targets in the VMC are 25,000 residents living in 12,000 residential units, and 11,500 jobs. Residential targets for both centres are projected to be exceeded while the creation of office space appears to be progressing at an appropriate pace in order to meet 2031 targets (VMC Sub-Committee, 2019; Kendall 2019).

5.3 Assessing the Impact of Built Form

The first theme that emerged from both my research and interviews is the influence of built form on the character of suburban downtowns. As previously mentioned, MC and VMC represent a departure from the traditional built form of their surrounding suburban environments. The density and typological differences attributed to developments that make up these focal centres are of greater importance when compared to existing conditions affecting lower density suburbs within the GTA. From a physical standpoint, the height of buildings provides a perceptible centre for the community. In the case of MC, the original 1992 concept plans envisioned a community primarily made up of mid-rise developments. These plans have changed in response to current market conditions elevating demand for the construction of mid- and high-rise residential structures. This explains why older buildings in MC are generally lower in height. This aspect is also

present in VMC's early development plans when comparing them to more recent ones. As such, we begin to observe how building heights have evolved into taller forms over time. However, the planning and construction of existing buildings in VMC began long after those of MC. Thus, developers updated plans to respond to market demands for tall towers (Peddigrew, 2019). By examining and analyzing other aspects of the MC and VMC current built forms, it is possible to assess their influence and impact in creating their own respective downtown environments.

From a built form perspective, MC includes a mix of low-rise, mid-rise and high-rise buildings in which most feature a variety of uses. Due to the fact that planning for MC began nearly a decade prior to that of VMC, MC has older residential, commercial and office developments. For example, some of the first developments to occur in MC were the Markham Civic Centre in 1989 and the Unionville GO Station in 1991. To this day, these two hubs continue to play an important role supporting our civic livelihoods and public transportation infrastructure. In 2001, IBM Canada Software Lab was established followed by the Circa Condominium complex in 2004, the first major residential high-rise development (Your Voice Markham, 2020).

Since then, MC has exploded with developments ranging in building heights, typologies, and uses. However, it is apparent that office and commercial buildings built prior to 2010 demonstrate strong suburban characteristics. Office buildings such as the IBM Software Lab is designed in a campus style layout removed from the street with large surface parking. While MC has the Markham Civic Centre located within its boundaries, it is still isolated from the surrounding built environment. Likewise, other public uses such as the Pan Am Centre, YMCA, Bill Crothers School, and the future York University Campus are generally located at the periphery of MC. Newly constructed buildings along with proposed developments in MC demonstrate strong urban characteristics. In general, the height of tall buildings is increasing in MC and is evident in almost every new development proposal. Newer mixed-use buildings continue to utilize strategically located ground floors for commercial and business-related uses. In some older developments, businesses located at grade are often facing inwards towards parking lots, thus reducing

visibility and attractiveness for pedestrians. The majority of businesses situated along high pedestrian traffic corridors do not provide animation on the street in the form of patios. Generally, the strong emphasis on urban design and built form in Downtown Markham and the rest of MC has been conducive to the planned downtown-like urban environment. This is evident in the scale and granularity in areas of Downtown Markham. The scale of some newer street blocks are pedestrian-friendly while blocks located in older areas of MC remain too large and not conducive to walkability. Planners have acknowledged some shortcomings of planning and how things could be done differently in retrospect (Kendall, 2019). It is important for planners to understand the shortfalls of previous developments in MC so as to learn from mistakes and improve future plans.



Figure 25 Aviva building in Downtown Markham, by author

To date, the built form and focus in the VMC has been greatly oriented around the mobility hub. This includes the VMC Subway Station, VIVA Station, and SmartCentres Place Bus Terminal. While the conceptualization of the Vaughan Corporate Centre began in the 1990s, the planning and development for VMC was solidified after the Province approved the subway extension in 2006. Until that point in time, the area had already been partially developed with a variety of uses in a typical suburban built form fashion. As a result of the plans for the subway extension materializing, one of the first developments in the VMC were the Expo City towers situated at the eastern periphery of the VMC boundaries completed in 2014. Transit City towers were developed in

conjunction with the opening of the subway in 2017 providing thousands of residential units located at the doorstep of the mobility hub. As such the development of the VMC has been primarily driven by transportation infrastructure providing connectivity to the greater surrounding region (Hertel, 2019). As development continues in the VMC, the focus is likely to remain around the mobility hub as it is the single most important feature of the area.

Based on existing developments in the VMC, the built form consists primarily of mixed-use high-rise towers reaching up to 55-storeys and office towers such as the 15-storey KPMG building. Additionally, the 2019 PwC-YMCA tower now provides a variety of uses for the community including the VMC Public Library and a performing arts studio. Altogether, the VMC skyline is rapidly forming and is becoming visible from far away creating a visual centre for the region. At a ground level, it remains difficult to judge how the built form has begun to contribute to the future downtown. Currently, developments feel somewhat disconnected and the distance surrounding them has not yet been completely landscaped. The site remains largely under construction and it is likely to continue being this way for the foreseeable future as it is only the beginning of the overall project. The infrastructure constituting the mobility hub is visually attractive and functional for pedestrians. The architecture of the stations is modern and iconic, ultimately contributing to a sense of place and setting the tone for the VMC.



Figure 26 View of VMC from Wal-Mart parking lot, by author

Much of VMC remains very suburban in nature due to the vast parking lots surrounding the existing Wal-Mart and Lowe's stores and undeveloped lots. However, surface level parking lots will remain important and lucrative in the VMC for the reason that they are used by thousands of commuters every day. Overtime, a VMC parking strategic initiative will help the City manage parking within the downtown core while new developments eventually reduce the overall number of ground level parking spaces. Combined with the future Central Park development, new buildings and streetscape improvements should contribute to the built form from a visual standpoint. Highway 7 and future planned streets located within the VMC are wide and not quite pedestrian-friendly. The surrounding area continues to be the site of industrial buildings which results in the movement of large transport trucks travelling through the VMC. The western and southern borders of the VMC are the intersection of Highways 407 and 400 which represent significant physical barriers to certain aspects of the community. The rehabilitation and development of greenspace such as Edgeley Pond and Black Creek has not yet commenced, meaning that current residents do not yet have immediate access to the natural features of the area as a significant portion of development has yet to be

constructed. The VMC is still in the early stages of its development and future plans will continue to fulfill and enhance all aspects of the overall downtown vision.

5.4 The Importance of Planning Policies

The second theme that emerged from my research and interviews is the importance of planning policies in creating suburban downtowns. MC and VMC have not always heavily relied on the presence and guidance of planning policies. In fact, municipalities have been planning for the development of their downtowns since the 1990s. Their conceptualization began long before any major policy legislations such as the *Growth Plan* were enacted. Several interview participants recognized the notion that Provincial policies were established as a result of what municipal planners had already been planning (Hertel, 2019; Kendall, 2019; Lue, 2019). The provincial policies in place today were built upon the initiatives and visions of planners in places like MC. Greater Toronto Area municipalities such as Markham, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, and Newmarket were naturally planning for intensification through corridor and nodal developments. These more intense development patterns emerged as a result of population and employment growth, and increasing land values in the suburbs. With time, higher levels of government started supporting and reinforcing what municipal planners had been doing. This reinforcement came in the form of provincial policies that added specificity and growth targets. A Senior MC Planner highlighted the importance of political will in realizing these policies (Heaslip, 2019). The development of MC and VMC does not occur in a political vacuum. Evidently, it requires a strong commitment from all levels of government including council as well as partnerships between City planners and developers (Lue, 2019). This commitment also directly ties into investments for large-scale infrastructure projects such as the higher order transit in the case of VMC. The policies are largely responsible for the development of the subway extension to VMC.

From a developer's perspective, provincial planning policies like the *Growth Plan* are greatly advantageous. The policies are used to the advantage of landowners and developers to proposed developments that are consistent with what the policies suggest (Peddigrew, 2019; McLeod, 2019). Furthermore, the limited extent to which policies guide

growth was highlighted by land developers. If policies do not facilitate a return in profit for private land developers, it would not be affordable for developers to plan and build these types of communities (Peddigrew, 2019). In contrast, Hertel (2019) suggested that the requirements within the *Growth Plan* could be counterintuitively slowing down development by adding triggers of analysis and studies related to targeted numbers, design guidelines, and employment conversions (Hertel, 2019). These factors could be slowing down growth by including additional layers of requirements to be addressed by current and future developments. The policies guiding these growth nodes have added a great amount of specificity and reinforcement to the development of MC and VMC. They continue to help create complete and connected communities backed up by the province and municipal plans. It requires proposals from land developers to conform with policies in order to ensure that the requirements and goals are met.

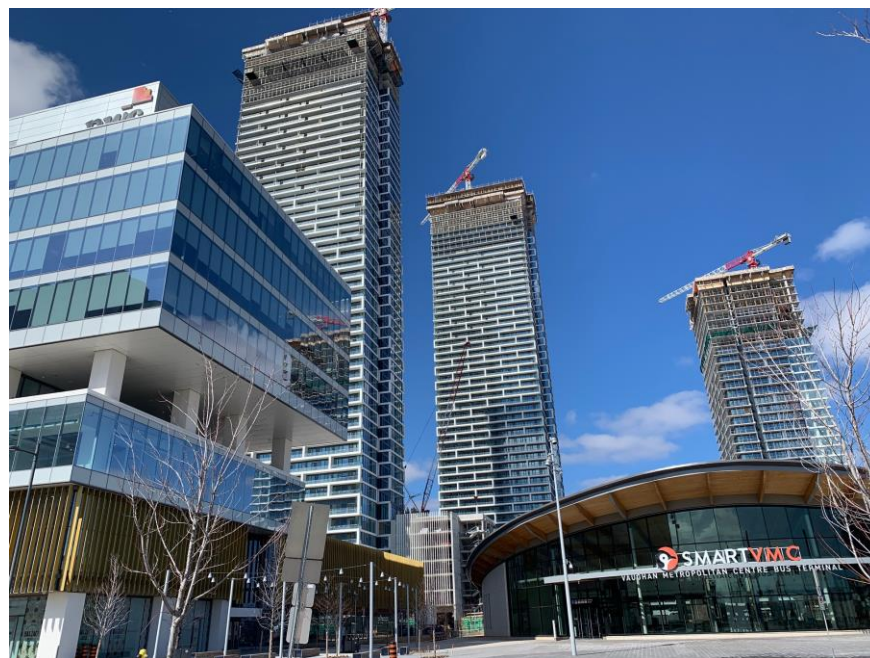


Figure 27 SmartCentre bus terminal, PwC YMCA, & Transit City buildings, by author

By examining the timely sequence of development in MC and VMC, it is possible to understand how policies influence the development of suburban downtowns. On one hand, MC is very much a policy-driven enterprise focused on design. On the other hand, VMC is much more infrastructure driven by the VMC subway station (Hertel, 2019). This idea is exemplified in VMC where high-rise developments in VMC were built in

conjunction with the opening of the subway. Developments within the VMC depended on the operation of the subway in order for digging to begin. As such, MC is primarily policy-driven while VMC is infrastructure-driven. Both Markham and Vaughan began with similar visions and concepts for their future downtowns. The initial planning and development of both downtowns started differently with MC focusing on establishing residential roots early on while VMC was focused on building transit infrastructure (Peddigrew, 2019).

5.5 Why Suburbs are Building New Downtowns

The third theme that emerged from my research and interviews is the rationale behind the planning and development of suburban downtowns. In general, new developments in the suburbs are happening at a more compact rate, overall, than before (Hertel, 2019). Growth Centres in the GTA are designed and planned to intensify in a centralized pattern of development. While the *Growth Plan* identifies 25 Growth Centres in the region, planners suggest that only a few could actually succeed while the others could remain centres only on paper (Hertel, 2019; Kendall, 2019). The successful growth centres will have some form of a natural pull that attracts and gives people a reason to live, work, and play in these spaces. Currently in VMC, the pull could arguably be the subway linking Vaughan to Downtown Toronto. People are attracted to the VMC for the reason that this important piece of infrastructure, along with the bus rapidway, provides great connectivity. In MC, it may be more difficult to point to a single aspect of the development as the singular reason for its existence. In a way, this could be considered a positive aspect for the reason that it attracts people for different reasons including employment, entertainment, restaurants, and as a liveable residential community. The suburbs in question are building their new downtowns for the reason that they seek to create a sense of centrality amongst the suburban landscape. While this centrality is mainly viewed as a policy-driven exercise led by policy makers, planners, and land developers, centrality must originate from a supply and demand relationship between infrastructure and services (Hertel, 2019). This concept is tied to the notion that planners must prioritize where and how centrality should or should not occur.

According to some planners, the municipalities attempting to create these downtowns are ultimately creating a downtown environment to serve the broader needs of their current and future community (Kendall, 2019). They will be places where their residents live and members of the community can go for an enjoyable night out and find entertainment all within their downtown area. These suburban downtowns will offer the urban experience and many of the same amenities and services found in traditional larger city downtowns (Nampoothiri, 2019). This sentiment was echoed by developers while emphasizing the importance of employment in these spaces in order for the area to be populated during the day to support businesses (Peddigrew, 2019). These bedroom communities are developing their own downtown cores in an effort to keep housing, employment, and entertainment in their own districts (McLeod, 2019). As opposed to traditional suburbs, which are often less populated during the days, successful downtowns see large populations of people using and navigating throughout the core for different purposes. This is a key feature that suburban municipalities are hoping to create in their own downtown spaces.

Respective City officials and developers have branded MC and VMC as emerging downtowns representing a plan to transform them into complete communities operating seven days a week with little fluctuation in its population throughout the day. However, one planner expressed his doubts regarding whether or not these centres could indeed hold the functionality of being the centre of the larger community since the rest of the municipality remains suburban in character and function (Heaslip, 2019). Markham could be argued to already have one or more existing downtown areas in the historic Unionville or Markham Main Street heritage districts which have functioned as the cultural centre of the community for decades. In Vaughan, the same is true for the communities of Maple, Kleinburg, Thornhill, and Woodbridge. Furthermore, the evolution of suburban downtowns is forced through policy rather than in an unplanned fashion. The careful planning and development of these spaces is an attempt to get every aspect of the community correct the first time (Lue, 2019). Targets relating to almost every aspect have been set early in their conceptualization process and are likely to change as the communities continue to be built throughout the following decades. While these places

may not appeal to everyone right now, they may in the future for people who are perhaps looking to downsize from a single detached dwelling to a condominium located in a downtown environment (Nampoothiri, 2019). Currently, MC and VMC are built to attract different demographics. On one hand, the MC demographics appear to be primarily older and wealthier. On the other hand, the VMC demographic are generally upwardly mobile but younger (Hertel, 2019).

When asked about how the two suburban downtowns compare to existing downtowns such as downtown Toronto or previous attempts of this model of development, mixed reactions arose from participants. The issue of whether these places are authentic was brought up by several interviewees. Toronto is generally perceived as authentic and true to its history and context which evolved over time (Peddigrew, 2019). These aspects are reflected in its built form, architecture, and population. The diversity of neighbourhoods, office buildings, retail options are the result of many actors throughout a long duration of time. It was argued that with time, the neighbourhoods that are built in MC and VMC could hold their own distinct character and will evolve and undergo changes similar to that of downtown Toronto (Kendall, 2019). Places such as Scarborough Town Centre, North York Centre, and Mississauga City Centre could be classified as earlier attempts to create similar downtown environments within existing suburban settings. However, there are crucial differences in the ways they began their developments and how large indoor shopping malls have shaped their character (Heaslip, 2019). Comparatively, Scarborough Town Centre and Mississauga City Centre share similar challenges related to creating downtown environments around an indoor shopping mall. As a result, it appears that it may remain inescapable for these two centres to become true downtown environments. Hertel (2019) argued that we should not be comparing MC and VMC to places such as downtown Toronto, Scarborough Town Centre, or Mississauga City Centre as they are completely different. They are different in the ways that they reflect the current political and market and social norms of their time and place (Hertel, 2019). The authenticity of MC and VMC stems from the economic market and the consumers that are driving their creation. This is comparable to the ways in which downtown Toronto was genuine to its time and in the ways that growth occurred

throughout its history and current context (Hertel, 2019). The question of what is or is not authentic is an important one which is difficult to answer. Understanding the meaning of authenticity and how it is assigned could be an existential reflection for suburban downtowns. I believe that these important considerations are correct and that MC and VMC are unique and reflective of their time which has been repeatedly demonstrated in the ways that their visions have changed in the decades since their original conceptualization.

5.6 SWOT Analysis

A brief analysis of the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats affecting MC and VMC is undertaken so as to assess their current and future success as downtowns. The following assessment is not a complete analysis but a brief list further contributing to the current study by using my research findings and interview responses.

5.6.1 The Strengths

To date, MC has been successful in a variety of ways and for different reasons. The long and strong relationships between the City of Markham and land developers responsible for the development of MC has been beneficial in producing the downtown vision. Developers and stakeholders in MC have been committed to this vision of creating a downtown. Several key developments in Downtown Markham appear to be a piece of a larger puzzle to creating the desired community rather than just a standalone project (Peddigrew, 2019; Kendall, 2019). This aspect contributes to a more cohesive and continuous built form. Furthermore, MC has been successful in terms of creating a balanced and timely mix of employment and residential uses. This is also the case in the variety of large and independent businesses, public uses, and in the mix of building typologies. Existing residents of MC are benefiting from its strategic location within the GTA and the mix of residential unit types have attracted and accommodated different types of people. MC has successfully attracted office, tech, entertainment, educational, and transportation anchors within its boundaries. Major transportation infrastructure is existing and serving MC and future expansions will greatly enhance the mobility of its residents and entire community. MC has also begun to develop its own sense of place

and importance within Markham as well as the region at large. Existing and future developments, public art initiatives, and the natural features are contributing to the creation of the downtown. The City of Markham is one of the primary landowners of the natural environmental features and lands located west of the GO tracks. There is a lot of future potential for City-owned land. While public awareness remains relatively low, the ongoing MC Secondary Plan update study has been successful in engaging the Markham public (Nampoothiri, 2019). The response from the public has been positive with respects to the built form and urban design of buildings.

So far, the VMC has demonstrated success in transportation infrastructure and the enhanced connectivity it provides. The City of Vaughan has been successful in retaining major investments in transportation infrastructure to create the mobility hub. The subway extension has kickstarted development in the VMC and now functions as a gateway to downtown Toronto and for the entire region. While VMC is somewhat removed from the historically significant locations in Vaughan, it is strategically situated at the intersections of two major highways and it is situated about 3 kilometers away from York University. A number of high-rise developments are beginning to contribute to the downtown vision and providing a visual centre for the area. VMC has been moderately successful in attracting its first wave of office tenants located within the KPMG building. Furthermore, the PwC-YMCA is located directly in the core of the VMC which will be beneficial for years to come. The core of the VMC is owned by a developer committed to realizing the ultimate downtown vision in partnership with the City of Vaughan. Planners and developers have expressed a positive experience between politicians and developers (Lue, 2019; McLeod, 2019). Since the conceptualization of the VMC began over two decades ago, the plans have progressively become clearer with the added specificity of the Secondary Plan. The development potential in the VMC is high and the City has begun setting the tone for high quality and iconic designs. The City of Vaughan has already successfully completed a number of studies and policy documents which will guide its future development direction.

5.6.2 The Weaknesses

MC has been subject to a plethora of shortfalls and weaknesses related to a number of foreseeable and unforeseeable circumstances. From a built form standpoint, Highway 7 East acts as a major barrier that is not inviting nor pedestrian-friendly. The Markham Civic Centre is isolated and not centrally located in MC which reduces the impact of its civic presence. Similarly, there is a growing need and demand for community services and facilities that offer a greater range of programs for the community. The location of those public uses is currently disconnected from the larger residential population of MC. With a rapidly growing residential population, schools in MC are already at capacity. The rate at which schools are planned and built in MC is outpaced by other developments. MC is also in need of downtown-defining public amenities which could come in the form of urban plazas, public parks, playgrounds, or other community enhancing features. The large majority of future proposals are primarily residential with little or no office components. The City has been struggling to attract office developments and offering competitive incentives. Older existing developments in MC still have suburban qualities such as the Uptown Markham commercial plaza. This type of built form could hinder the overall realization of the downtown vision and create clear fractures in the cohesiveness of the built environment. Commercial uses will need to be contained in an urban format rather than a suburban one. There are currently a significant number of vacant retail storefronts for the reason that there is not enough density yet to encourage the mix of uses (Nampoothiri, 2019). Another crucial weakness of MC is the affordability of housing. To date, there are no affordable housing options or purpose-built rental units in MC. The unaffordability of living in MC affects the social and economic demographics of people who are able to live in the area. A better mix of housing types and stronger City policies to enforce affordability should be beneficial to the population makeup of MC. Finally, MC remains almost entirely car-oriented despite efforts to create an environment that is conducive to walking or cycling. The different precincts within MC are not well connected and it is apparent that there is not enough integration with the Unionville Go Station as of yet.

VMC is also susceptible to apparent deficiencies at this point in its development. Weaknesses inherent to its location are attributed to the physical barriers caused by the surrounding highways and the wideness of streets which hinder pedestrian accessibility and create a separation between the northern and southern portions of the VMC. The existing businesses such as Wal-Mart and Lowes along with the industrial buildings surrounding the VMC are not conducive to a friendly downtown environment. The large number of landowners and stakeholders within the VMC boundaries makes it difficult to organize and come to a consensus on important decisions (Lue, 2019). As a result, it may be likely that developments are not cohesive and appear to be disconnected from the rest and greater overall downtown vision. City-owned properties in the VMC currently only consist of Edgeley Pond. While this does present a great opportunity for the City to develop a park, it will not be enough of a civic presence in the downtown. This increases the City's reliance on developers to fulfil the downtown vision which could be viewed as a major weakness. Furthermore, the demand for parking in the VMC, especially around the mobility hub, is high and is likely to increase. Once completed, the City's Parking Strategy will help guide and regulate parking in VMC. Similarly to MC, VMC is not seeing equal demand for office space when compared to residential, and it will need to develop competitive incentives for attracting tenants. While the fact that major transportation infrastructure attracts and creates a demand for development, it did also attract proposals of lesser quality (Lue, 2019). Lue (2019) expressed how the subway may have inadvertently communicated to developers a sense of desperation on the City' end which generated a lot of cheap architectural styles. Overtime, the City's message to developers became clearer in that they only wanted iconic architectural designs to help define the downtown. Finally, other weaknesses affecting the VMC is the lack of public schools, public greenspace, and a general lack of awareness of the VMC on behalf of the Vaughan community.

5.6.3 The Opportunities

There are great opportunities in MC waiting to be addressed which could ultimately improve the downtown area and help accomplish the desired vision. The first opportunity would be to reorientate efforts and attention towards the mobility hub located around the

Unionville GO Station. This area could become the most important in MC with the future York University campus in addition to other public uses. A higher concentration of activities in that area would also be beneficial to future students and conducive to the downtown vision. The City's Civic Centre could consider having a satellite campus of their own in a more central location of MC to increase their civic presence. The creation of such a downtown-defining feature is also crucial to the success of MC. This feature could come in the form of a public urban square, enhanced streetscapes, parks, and open spaces which would help build a downtown identity for Markham and generate a sense of place. There remains a lot of opportunities regarding the Rouge River in order to make it accessible and enjoyable for the public. Combined, these features should make MC an inclusive destination for the entire Markham community.

VMC is still in its early stages of development relative to MC. Under those circumstances, VMC does have an advantage in responding to the previously discussed weaknesses in a timely manner. For instance, the City should continue to invest and enhance in the well-functioning of its transportation infrastructure as it is currently its greatest asset. The VMC has the opportunity to leverage its mobility hub and geographical location to become the dominant downtown outside of Toronto. VMC could also create a visually appealing public realm that functions as a place of recreation, congregation, and connectivity for the wider community. These aspects should entice developers and architects to create iconic developments that bring about place-making. The City and stakeholders should strengthen their collaboration to create a greater synergy that will facilitate the realization of the downtown and associated districts. In other words, it is important that the stakeholders remain motivated and united to resolve problems and provide consolidated input in the project. The existing and future planning policies and studies such as the Secondary Plan should be used at their fullest extent as they are inherently flexible and highly adaptive to changing market conditions. Policies should also continue to attract office tenants and additional economic development to the area so as to create a strong and impactful economic cluster for the region. The City must put effort in creating economic development and marketing initiatives that will bring about awareness of the VMC vision to the rest of the Vaughan community. Similarly to MC, the

VMC has the potential to release development pressure from other areas of the community. For the existing residents of the VMC, it is important to facilitate engagement in the wider discussion and learn from their own respective living experiences within VMC. Through that process, it will become apparent in which ways residents and employees identify the VMC as their downtown.

5.6.4 The Threats

There are several potential external factors that might hinder the future and orderly development of MC and VMC. In the case of MC, it is located within the Buttonville Municipal Airport's flight path. While this local airport is expected to close within the next few years, it has already held a profound impact on development in MC. It has imposed height restrictions on buildings constructed in the last couple decades. Height restrictions have recently changed as a result of the technology used by the airport. Consequently, development proposals are beginning to plan for greater heights. The majority of future planned developments are primarily residential in use. It will continue to be a difficult task for MC to attract additional major office employment uses. As it is the case for many municipalities, securing the necessary funding for infrastructure and amenities is crucial to the realization of the downtown vision. Regular internal debates amongst City departments and landowners are common and pose a threat to the proper development of MC in terms of breaking away from suburban standards of development. Similarly, fragmentation amongst developers and precincts could hinder the holistic and uniform vision of MC. It is also important to realize that there may be a disconnection between what residents of MC desire and how it is different from what the municipality's vision contemplates. For instance, residents in MC expect adequate availability of parking spots while the City is attempting to substantially reduce minimum and maximum parking requirements. Finally, a current and future factor affecting MC is the community's overall car-dependence and limited accessibility to the mobility hub. The development of residential components in MC has far outpaced those of transportation infrastructure. While the Highway 7 VIVA rapidway provides east and west connections, the capacity for the Unionville GO Station to serve north and south remains limited. This is already currently affecting the development of MC from a transportation standpoint.

A variety of similar issues threaten the successful development of VMC. Currently, the existing suburban format of businesses and industrial sites does not contribute to and hinders the creation of a downtown environment. On one hand, the geographical location of the VMC is central to the region. On the other hand, its surrounding environment is predominantly industrial in nature. In fact, the suburban industrial district of Concord located east of the VMC has a crucial role in the economic vitality of Vaughan. Highway 7, which divides the VMC, is the main arterial road connecting Concord to Highway 400. Consequently, it is likely that large and noisy shipping trucks will continue to make up a majority of the traffic in this corridor for the foreseeable future. Difficulties related to the subway are also present in the form of its associated easements as well as the noise and vibrations that it causes. The lack of civic presence poses economic and social threats to creating a healthy downtown. A working public/private partnership between the City and developers could be achieved with civic and public uses to help create buildings that contribute to a sense of place while also serving the public. A recurring theme for the VMC is the low level of public awareness related to understanding the clear and singular goals and vision on behalf of the City. Planning and development of the VMC must successfully integrate multiple small neighbourhoods spread out through different districts to avoid possible disconnections.

As demonstrated, MC and VMC are threatened by similar issues. Additionally, both areas are located above high water tables which, for instance, greatly restrict the depth of underground parking structures. Both communities are subject to foreign investment holdings in which investor-owned properties are contributing to rising condo prices and an affordable rental housing crisis. For those residents living in these communities, the majority is unlikely to work in their downtown. Therefore, MC and VMC are still susceptible to becoming bedroom communities. Lastly, in 2019, the provincial government introduced *Bill 108, More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019* (Ontario, 2019) which changes the administration of development charges and the timing of their payments among many others. The legislation will financially impact the ways in which municipalities in Ontario secure parkland, provide community facilities, limit opportunities for public engagement

related to proposed development applications, and provide less heritage resources. The impact on VMC and MC could be felt on several levels including on the amount of required funding for future parklands, community centres and libraries. This will increase the City's reliance on developers to provide amenities and cause a strain on the City's ability to fund the required services needed in their downtowns.

5.7 Are the Suburbs Changing and Redefining Suburban Ways of Life?

On many levels, suburban downtowns constitute an economic, social, and cultural change in the history of suburban development. Furthermore, suburban downtowns have already begun to redefine various inherent aspects of traditional suburbs and will likely continue to do so. Generally, the trend in the suburbs has been a decrease in the construction of traditional suburban low-rise subdivisions. Instead, higher densities are quickly becoming the norm which have taken the form of stacked townhomes and condominium towers (Lue, 2019). In a way, suburban downtowns could be viewed as an evolution of traditional low-rise communities built by suburban developers (Peddigrew, 2019). In contrast to the traditional suburban models of subdivisions, these types of communities require different forms of policies and approaches to realize the ultimate vision. This not only represents a change for planners, it is also a change of mindset for land developers (Nampoothiri, 2019). Traditionally, the common conception of the suburbs has been that they are bedroom communities for downtown commuters. However, suburban downtowns now propose to give their communities a pulse of life with a concentration of entertainment and employment (McLeod, 2019). In addition to an increased concentration of uses, suburban downtowns are attempting to successfully implement a wide range of housing choices and options to their residents. Developers are beginning to respond to demographic and market needs by building condominiums suitable for all types of household compositions (Peddigrew, 2019). These suburban downtowns are validating higher densities in suburban environments and giving a place for denser developments in their communities (Heaslip, 2019).

There are, however, different and valid disagreements and perspectives on these ideas. It could be argued that suburban downtowns do not represent a significant change in the built form of suburbs. While developers may argue that high-rise developments are a response to market demands, one planner believes that suburban downtowns may not alleviate the demand for prototypical suburban type grade related developments (Hertel, 2019). Another important counterpoint to consider when examining these suburban downtowns is the issue of transportation infrastructure. Hertel (2019) believes that unfortunately, cities are building transit in places where the people who are planned to live there likely have no interest in using and participating in the public transit commuting lifestyle. Equally to the history of mass-produced suburbs, suburban downtowns and their associated developments could be viewed as a form of the mechanized development machine. Developments within suburban downtowns remain master planned, mass-marketed, and mass-produced, by very few land developers. In a way, these centres are very much a corporate enterprise (Hertel, 2019).

The actors responsible for redefining the suburbs through suburban downtowns are the residents and the developers creating the necessary built form. If the market was not responsive to the types of developments in suburban downtowns, then developers would not be building them. The suburbanites are partly responsible for the ways in which suburbs are being redefined and built (Peddigrew, 2019). Suburban downtowns are responses to key economic and social changes in society as they are attempting to provide different forms of living in the suburbs. It is allowing suburbanites to reduce their reliance on cars while also providing them with the option to downsize from their single-detached homes all while staying within the larger community (Nampoothiri, 2019). In spite of those views, it is possible to incorporate alternative perspectives to examine the aspects of whether or not suburbs are being redefined. There still exists a pervasive lifestyle and suburban way of life and expectations associated with suburbs that emanate regardless of typology (Hertel, 2019). In other words, the built form may not predetermine whether individuals will live urban or suburban lifestyles. In fact, recent research suggests that urbanites and suburbanites are remarkably similar in how they spend their time and go on about their day-to-day life (Morris, 2019). Moreover, the type of built form that is

constructed in downtown Toronto is very similar to that of suburban downtowns. Hertel (2019) stresses the importance for developers and planners to consider the motives behind their planning activities. All actors involved should transcend morphology and suburban downtowns should be planned for people rather than for buildings (Hertel, 2019). That said, suburban downtowns still have the potential to become the economic, social, and cultural hubs of the wider community if thoughtfully executed.

5.8 Has the Concept of Suburbia Changed?

As a whole, the Greater Toronto Area suburbs have undergone significant changes since the 1990s. The line between what is considered urban and suburban continues to be blurred as our understanding of these places have become more nuanced. The ways in which suburbanites and urbanites live are virtually interchangeable and the built form which they inhabit cannot entirely dictate their lifestyle. Suburban downtowns are materializing these aspects and exposing them through intensified suburban nodes. As such, the suburbs have changed physically and psychologically. Suburban downtowns serve as the visual centre for the community which challenge the downtown skyline. They are also helping create focus, meaning, and sense of identity to those living in them (Heaslip, 2019). Moreover, the changes that suburbs are experiencing are occurring because they reflect the market, social, and consumer norms of today (Hertel, 2019). Younger generations continue to dictate how development occurs as their purchasing decisions impact developer's future income levels. With the current housing crisis in the GTA and inherent housing affordability, these cohorts of people have realized that the dream of owning a single detached home is no longer attainable for most (Lue, 2019). Consequently, suburban downtowns are also a response to what the market demands (Peddigrew, 2019).

In a beneficial way, MC and VMC are challenging the public's preconceptions of what a suburb should resemble. For many observers, it may be bringing to light a broader understanding regarding the concepts of centrality and what constitutes a downtown. The creation of suburban downtowns in the GTA is bringing about a certain level of awareness within the general public concerning planning and development in their suburban

municipalities. With more extensive education and engagement, suburbanites will progressively become more aware of these centres and come to understand their positive benefits to the community at large (Nampoothiri, 2019).

6.0 Conclusion

Suburbs in the Greater Toronto Area are changing dynamically at economic, social, cultural, and physical levels. These changes are manifested through the development of designated growth centres in the suburbs and in particular, suburban downtowns. MC and VMC are prime examples of suburban downtowns that embody urban and suburban characteristics, and both reflect the changes in contemporary consumer markets. To a certain degree, the development of suburban downtowns represents an evolution from traditional suburban built form. The types of developments built in MC and VMC are very similar to those currently being built in places like downtown Toronto. Higher densities and concentration of uses are typically found in large downtowns. However, these characteristics are now implemented and applied to the suburban context and often used as marketing tools by cities and developers alike. As demonstrated throughout this paper, growth levels tied to these rapidly developing communities continue to blur the lines between what is considered urban, and what is perceived as suburban. The residents of suburbs arguably live many of the same lifestyles as those living in large cities. The built form of suburban downtowns may not necessarily be used to dictate the lifestyle of its inhabitants. Nevertheless, suburban downtowns and their associated physical landscapes, promote a heightened urban lifestyle for their residents, with accessibility to amenities and services through a walkable landscape and public transportation. Hence, at full buildout, suburban downtowns should rival larger downtowns in their provisioning of similar amenities and services for their own community residents.

Since the early 1990s, municipal planners and private land developers have collaborated to conceptualize and build these emerging downtown environments. In the case of MC and VMC, the visions for these centres were developed well before the existence of provincial policies. Once higher levels of government began to take notice as to what municipal planners and land developers were planning for, policies were enacted to add targets and specificity. The *Growth Plan* is the policy document which currently exerts significant influence on developments within GTA suburbs. The planning and development for MC and VMC began differently, and so did their construction. MC's

planning was predominantly design and policy-driven focusing on residential and office developments. The development of VMC was propelled by transportation infrastructure. I believe that MC currently presents a stronger case for the successful creation of a complete suburban downtown community. MC already contains a diversity of existing uses and building types, and a steadily growing residential population. Public transportation is continually improving, and the enhancement of GO transit infrastructure will provide promising connectivity to Toronto's downtown core.

Up until recently, development in the VMC has been mostly transportation-based due to the construction of the subway line extension and bus stations. New office and commercial buildings are beginning to emerge in the VMC, although not at the same pace as residential developments. In this sense, I believe MC currently holds an advantage over VMC for the reason that it has had time to develop and grow in a manner which allows for more careful and thoughtful planning and development without added pressures that high order transit may generate. When compared to developments in VMC, MC is not as exposed to the added pressures that high order transit may generate. While this residential demand will surely accelerate the rate and potential overall population in the VMC, it may also reduce the attention placed on future office and commercial developments. A disproportionate ratio of residential population to daytime employment population could threaten the VMC in predominantly becoming another bedroom community, witnessing the passage of daily commuters, rather than a complete downtown-like community. Furthermore, these centres are likely to continue to operate as traditional suburbs from a transportation perspective. While MC and the VMC are well connected by different options of public transportation, their built forms still favour automobiles. The surrounding landscape remains entirely autocentric and as a result, suburban downtowns have already made concessions to vehicle infrastructure that emphasize parking amenities and overall street design.

As discussed earlier, both MC and VMC have common yet contrasting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. As developments continue to thrive in these emerging downtown settings, the existing suburban characteristics could gradually

become overpowered by the more urban and downtown-like features. MC and VMC have great future potential to realize their own visions, yet remain susceptible to fluctuating market demand and pressure for office, commercial, and residential developments. A wide range of residential unit types is also very important to the success of these suburban downtowns. In order to succeed from a residential population standpoint, a downtown should be diverse in the demographics, household compositions, and tenancy. New housing policies must be enacted to incentivize developers to build affordable housing and purpose-built rental to address the ever-increasing societal issues it currently faces. Planning studies and new policies are currently being produced to help cities and developers further respond to the growing pains that concern all aspects of these two suburban downtowns.

This research paper has uncovered a variety of planning and development processes responsible for the shaping of new downtown centres within the two suburbs under examination. I employed Markham Centre and Vaughan Metropolitan Centre as separate case studies to help compare and contrast the concept of suburban downtowns. They both reflect the changes that Greater Toronto Area suburbs have experienced since the 1990s. By researching these growth centres at this stage in their development, I have come to realize that MC and VMC find themselves at a familiar crossroad. Cities, developers, and other stakeholders must execute on crucial decisions that will have far-reaching “*hard to undo*” consequences. Striking a balance between the public good and special interest has long been a fundamental pillar of planning and development. These centres are built for various motives including providing a better lifestyle for the people who will inhabit them and generating profits for private land developers responsible for their construction. Municipal planners have the opportunity to shape and direct the growth of these downtowns so that they are designed for the people rather than for buildings. Although city planners are primarily concerned with physical aspects of buildings, it is ultimately the people themselves, who will inhabit the environments and create a symbolic sense of place, namely their downtown.

6.1 Future Thoughts

This research paper has asked important questions and has provided some answers related to the current and future state of suburban downtowns located in the Greater Toronto Area. The findings of this study were generated based on a combination of what has already been established in existing literature and my research of MC and the VMC's present-day conditions. Future research should continue to examine the planning and development trends of growth centres by studying the impact of policies, their built form, stakeholders, and market conditions. It remains questionable whether or not these suburban downtowns will continue to stay true to their original visions to create complete urban communities with downtown-like environments. In 2031, as projected in the *Growth Plan*, it will be interesting to find out if MC and the VMC have been successful in attaining the growth targets established decades ago. Their future role within the larger metropolitan region should also be assessed to understand how they have impacted other areas of the Greater Toronto Area from an economic, social, and cultural standpoint. Could these emerging downtowns eventually break free from their suburban roots and become entirely independent? Only time will tell how these spaces will continue to grow and develop. Future researchers will then be in an advantageous position, to better study and assess the successes and failures of suburban downtowns. They will also be able to recommend if the suburban downtown experiment should be replicated and adapted for the future.

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7.1 Interview Participants

- Heaslip, S. (2019, April 10). Former City of Markham Senior Central District Planner, Personal Interview.
- Hertel, S. (2019, April 2). Urban Planning Consultant, Personal Interview.
- Kendall, R. (2019, April 1). Former City of Markham Central District Manager, Personal Interview.

Lue, S (2019, June 12). Former City of Vaughan Senior Planner & Current City of Markham Central District Manager, Personal Interview.

McLeod, A. (2019, April 17). SmartCentres Planning Associate, Phone Interview.

Nampoothiri, N. (2019, April 16). City of Markham Senior Urban Designer, Personal Interview.

Peddigrew, R. (2019, April 4). Vice President of Remington Group, Personal Interview.

8.0 Appendix

Appendix 1

Interview Questions

1. Could you please introduce yourself and provide a brief explanation as to what has influenced you to work in your professional field?
 - a. How has your line of work exposed you to issues pertaining to suburban intensification?
 - b. Could you share some of your opinions regarding suburban intensification in general?
2. In the last couple of decades, suburbs in the GTA have shifted from a dispersed model of development towards the intensification of designated areas. Several of these areas are now being described as future downtowns. In your view, what is meant and communicated by the notion of suburban downtowns?
 - a. Due to the nature of the phenomenon of suburban downtown in question, I would like to know what your interpretation is of a “downtown” and the reasoning why this centralized pattern of development has been a normative choice throughout history and is still employed today?
 - b. Do you think that downtowns still retain the socio-economic importance at the same extent they may have previously held?
3. What are the major planning policies guiding the development of suburban downtowns?
 - a. How have the Places to Grow Act and subsequently the Growth Plan for the GTHA influenced and guided this form of development?
 - i. Transportation, land-use planning, and urban form.
 - b. In your opinion, are growth nodes the correct manner in which suburban municipalities in the GTA should plan for the future? Are there other patterns of development that you think would be better suited for the region?
 - c. Scholars have argued that the nodal concept may be divided into two distinct types of nodes. The first being the suburban node which aims to transpose the dynamics found in successful traditional downtowns, characterized by intense pedestrian-based interaction between their diverse land uses. The second being the premier node of major metropolitan regions, the downtown area. In this model, density and diversity of the downtown is enhanced through new large-scale redevelopment of abandoned or under-utilized industrial, commercial, or institutional sites. In which categories would you place Markham Centre and Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and why?
4. How do you feel about the planning and development of Markham Centre?
 - a. What are some aspects of this project that you think are positive?
 - b. What are some of the negatives?
 - c. What are some challenges facing the municipality, agencies, and developers and how are they being addressed?
 - d. Influence of major landowners?
 - e. Influence of the municipality?
 - f. Issues related to transportation, land-use planning, built form, urban design?
5. How do you feel about the planning and development of Vaughan Metropolitan Centre?
 - a. What are some aspects of this project that you think are positive?
 - b. What are some of the negatives?

- c. What are some challenges facing the municipality, agencies, and developers and how are they being addressed?
 - d. Influence of major landowners?
 - e. Influence of the municipality?
 - f. Issues related to transportation, land-use planning, built form, urban design?
6. In what ways does Markham Centre differ from Vaughan Metropolitan Centre? In what ways are they similar?
7. How would you compare these projects to traditional downtowns like downtown Toronto or previous attempts of Suburban Downtowns in the GTA?
8. How are these future suburban downtowns transforming traditional suburban built form?
 - a. How might these suburban downtowns be challenging the conventional concepts of suburbia?
 - b. How are suburban downtowns transforming everyday experiences of suburbanites?
 - c. How might this intensified built form redefine what it means to be living in the suburbs?
9. Do you have any suggestions of issues that I should further investigate?
10. Are there other knowledgeable individuals you would suggest speaking with?
11. Are there any aspects that I may have overlooked?
12. Do you have any closing general thoughts on the phenomenon as a whole that we may not have discussed?

Appendix 2

Human Participants Review Protocols Informed Consent Form

Date:

Name of Participant:

Research Name:

Researcher: François-Maxime Hémon-Morneau - francoismaximehm@gmail.com

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this research is to understand the planning process behind the development of suburban downtowns in the Greater Toronto Area and the ways in which this shift from traditional suburban built form is challenging the concepts of suburbia. The results of this research project will be published in YorkSpace, York University's institutional repository, and may be published on the FES website if nominated for the Outstanding Paper Series.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: If you agree to participate in this study, I will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your involvement in and/or your experiences of suburban downtowns and its associated development process. The interview will take between 30 and 60 minutes to complete.

Risks and Discomforts: We do not foresee any risks or discomfort resulting from your participation in the research. You have the right to not answer any particular questions.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of any relationship you may have with the researcher(s), study staff, or York University, either now or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. If you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: Unless you specifically give your permission by checking the boxes below, all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Your data will be collected with a digital audio recording device (iPhone) and handwritten notes. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only research staff will have access to this information. The data will be stored for a maximum of 2 years and will be destroyed/deleted after the study is complete. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact my Supervisor, Douglas G. Young either by telephone at (416) 736 2100 Ext: or by e-mail dogoyo@yorku.ca. This research has been reviewed

and approved by the FES Research Committee, on behalf of York University, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics, telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca.

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, _____, consent to participate in the research project conducted by François-Maxime Hémon-Morneau. I understand the nature of this study and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Moreover, I agree to the following permission(s):

I agree that my participation may be audio-recorded: Yes _____ No _____

I agree that my participation may be video-recorded: Yes _____ No _____

I agree to be identified by name: Yes _____ No _____

I agree to be quoted by name: Yes _____ No _____

I would like to receive a copy of the final research paper, at the following email address:

I agree to allow video and/or digital images or photographs in which I appear to be used in teaching, academic presentations and/or publications based on this research. I am aware that I may withdraw this consent at any time without penalty. Yes _____ No _____

Participant Signature Date _____

Researcher Signature Date _____