

Downtown Markham Backgrounder

For more information, call 905-761-8200

A decade ago, Markham Council realized that the town could no longer continue to accommodate growth by expanding further and further into the countryside.

Downtown Markham meets the town's goal for compact development
– and new provincial initiatives to curb urban sprawl –
by accommodating growth in an area that is that is already well served
by municipal infrastructure.

Life As It Should Be

For the first time in the suburban Greater Toronto Area, people will soon be able to live, work, shop and play in a single community. In Downtown Markham, they'll be able to meet all of their personal, family and employment needs without hopping into a car and fighting traffic to get to downtown Toronto or some distant regional centre.

Downtown Markham will be a vibrant people place where jobs, homes and entertainment are fully integrated and where people can use public transit or even walk or bicycle from place to place.

In keeping with the principles of Smart Growth development, Downtown Markham rejects the separation of housing, jobs and shops. There will be no strip plazas or internal shopping malls surrounded by a sea of surface parking.

A project of The Remington Group of Companies, a York Region developer with more than 50 years of residential, commercial and industrial experience in the GTA, Downtown Markham will transform the town into a true urban municipality over the next two decades.

Downtown Markham occupies 98 hectares (243 acres) in the heart of Markham Centre, a high-intensity area that will provide a focus for the town's many dispersed communities. It lies generally between Warden Avenue and the railway tracks near Kennedy Road, from Highway 407 to the Rouge River valley.

In time, Downtown Markham will be home to about 9,500 residents living in 3,900 new condominiums and townhouses, and employment for about 16,000 people in 362,750 m² (about 4.5 million sq. ft.) of employment floor space. The overall Markham Centre area will accommodate 25,000 residents and 17,000 employees.

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A people place

The entire project is designed to be an environmentally sensitive, pedestrian-oriented, transit-supportive people place.

Downtown Markham carefully addresses the town's desire to create an urban focus and the region's desire to concentrate future growth in subcentres that can be served by rapid transit. It is precisely the type of development the province needs to help it curb urban sprawl.

The focus of Downtown Markham is the downtown core, a mixed-use zone that is the true heart of the community. Here visitors will find a blend of houses, shops and offices, plus restaurants and entertainment and leisure venues in an animated urban setting.

Located just west of the central park (still being designed jointly by the town and Remington) lies several square blocks where specialty retail, leisure and entertainment amenities will be concentrated. Tied intimately to public facilities in the park, this area offers a radically different experience from the traditional monolithic and inward focused suburban shopping mall.

The Civic Mall, a tree-lined *grand allée* edged by many prominent buildings running east-west through the entire development connecting all of the districts, is another defining civic space in Downtown Markham. Its 860 m (2,821 ft.) length also provides a continuous pedestrian route and a location for a future transitway serving all of Markham Centre and leading to the Unionville GO station.

The Rouge valley forms the northern boundary of Downtown Markham. Its preservation is an overriding concern for the developers because it is the link to the rest of Markham and York Region and is a unique and invaluable amenity for the community.

The southern portion of Downtown Markham contains a business park with high visibility from Highway 407 and convenient access for auto or transit commuters. This area will be home to office buildings, including financial services, restaurants, hotels and convention facilities.

Two distinctive residential neighbourhoods are located east and west of the downtown core. All residences are in three- to eight-storey townhouses or condominiums in keeping with the urban nature of the community and to provide sufficient density to justify public transit and support high-level amenities and services.

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An urban place

An essential feature of Downtown Markham is its stimulating mix of residential, employment, retail and recreational activities that will result in a lively community and dynamic street life for a cosmopolitan population.

Placing buildings close to the street and ensuring a lively mix of building types will ensure that the built environment encourages social interaction. Building heights up to 13 storeys in the core area will create an urban ambiance, deliver variety and choice for housing and leisure activities, and provide sufficient density to justify public transit services.

The master plan locates uses where they will best benefit from their surroundings, such as the business park adjacent to Highway 407 and residential neighbourhoods overlooking the Rouge valley.

The site is effectively divided into quadrants by Birchmount Road and Enterprise Boulevard. The grid of local streets further organizes the project into distinct neighbourhoods or districts.

The street network is complemented by interconnected parks and open spaces that incorporate a pedestrian network leading to every area of Downtown Markham. The pedestrian network is meant to provide minimal walking distances to key locations.

Office and retail buildings will be friendly and inviting at street level with prominent and obvious entrances. The master plan provides several locations where signature buildings will distinguish the entire community. Driveways to buildings in the core will be designed with care to minimize disruption to pedestrians, and will normally be placed on rear laneways or secondary roads.

Great attention has been paid to the streetscape design throughout Downtown Markham to balance the needs of motorists with the needs of residents. For example, street parking is provided throughout the core in locations as close as possible to final destinations, a benefit to drivers and pedestrians. The focus is on safe, convenient pedestrian access.

Walking and cycling are encouraged through dedicated and attractive pedestrian and bicycle networks. While cycling is possible anywhere in Downtown Markham, exclusive routes or routes shared with cars are planned along the Civic Mall and most of the streets north of Enterprise Boulevard.

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A public place

Parks and open spaces are integrated into the Downtown Markham master plan, interconnected and serving to link the community to the Rouge valley. A variety of parks styles, ranging from soccer fields to ornamental gardens, provides a range of active and passive recreational opportunities.

Downtown Markham includes a total of 30 ha (more than 74 acres) of parks and open space.

The parks of Downtown Markham will accommodate informal or staged events; pick-up basketball games or lawn bowling; children's play structures or public art; programmed events or pedestrian and bike trails.

The Rouge valley and the parks that abut it are designated for passive recreational activities such as hiking, sitting and bird watching. The parks adjacent to the valley feature natural planting but are designed for more active uses, such as soccer or baseball.

Urban parks and the Civic Mall will provide more sophisticated design and will provide opportunities for walking, people watching or gathering. The main central park, still being designed, will attract visitors from throughout the GTA.

The Rouge valley and its floodplains will not be intruded upon and setbacks will further buffer the natural area from development. Transition zones, trails and stormwater management ponds provide additional buffers.

An accessible place

The underlying rationale of Markham Centre is to reduce traffic congestion throughout Markham, York Region and the GTA by supporting development that can be served by public transit and that allows people to live near where they work, thus reducing the overall need to travel.

A comprehensive transportation plan incorporates proposed road and transit improvements that have been announced or committed, including additional lanes on Highway 7, Warden Avenue and Kennedy Road, enhanced local and regional bus service, and additional GO rail service.

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The plan also considers that today only 10 per cent of Markham residents currently use public transit during rush hours and only 5 per cent of people who work in Markham use public transit during rush hours.

The road system throughout Downtown Markham is carefully planned to accommodate transit, pedestrians and cyclists and to meet the region's goal of 33 per cent transit usage by 2031.

At the heart of the road network is a four-lane east-west road called Enterprise Boulevard that will run between Warden Avenue and Kennedy Road. It is the widest and most prominent street in Downtown Markham.

Birchmount Road will be extended to connect with Highway 7. From 14th Avenue, it will pass under Highway 407, intersect with Enterprise Boulevard and cross the Rouge valley. It will be a tree-lined shopping street.

Verclair Gate will be extended south of Highway 7, connecting to the extension of Birchmount Road. Sciberras Road will be extended south of Highway 7. Large trees on a sodded boulevard soften these roads.

Because they follow the edge of the valley, East and West Valley Drives are the most picturesque in Downtown Markham. The northern sides of the streets are natural, with open views to the valley.

The proposed transit network is based on a number of improvements, including some that are already committed, including improved GO rail service, express bus service on Highway 407, all-day bus service on the major area roads, a high-occupancy vehicle lane on Highway 7, and local bus and shuttle bus service within Downtown Markham.

The Unionville GO Station will play a major role in Markham Centre. The road system throughout Downtown Markham will be designed so that local residents can walk, cycle or take transit to the station.

A parking strategy will encourage on-street parking, especially for short-term parking. The shared use of off-street parking lots (employee lots could be used by shoppers at night and on weekends, for instance) will be encouraged.

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A sustainable place

The Downtown Markham site is generally made up of former farmland – flat fields and meadows – and is surrounded by development. Basic municipal infrastructure is already in place or nearby.

No development will be allowed on the sides of streets that are adjacent to the river valley, because it forms an almost unbroken corridor to Lake Ontario, providing habitat linkages and a migration route for birds.

An existing tributary that flows from south of Highway 407 to the Rouge River will be upgraded as it flows through Downtown Markham, providing a touch of nature in the heart of the new downtown.

Development of the site envisions limited direct intrusions into existing natural areas, even during construction, save for the removal of isolated trees and hedgerows, the construction of the three river crossings and the stormwater management ponds.

The development and future stewardship of the site provides an opportunity to protect existing significant biological features and to enhance the habitat areas that are currently in decline.

The province, in its *Places To Grow* discussion paper on growth management in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, identified all of Markham Centre as an emerging urban centre where it would like to see future growth concentrated.

A different place

Downtown Markham represents a revolutionary change in direction for Markham and all suburban GTA communities throughout the province – away from urban sprawl and toward sustainable Smart Growth solutions.

It embodies the town's vision for a prosperous future and for a method of accommodating growth without contributing to urban sprawl. It satisfies the region's plan for investment in public transit by concentrating development in nodes.

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It offers precisely what the provincial government is calling for in the various initiatives it has launched in order to encourage healthy development for the future.

Downtown Markham represents life as it should be.

- 30 -

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