

New in Homes

More than decade in planning

► **Markham** From N1

ban sprawl, released last week. The plan calls for intensification in urban areas (more people within existing areas), expanded public transit and for complete communities where people can live, work and play without dependence on a car.

It's a fortuitous coincidence, says Remington CEO Rudy Bratty, that the province's plan was released just a week before Downtown Markham was launched. Although the project has been in the planning stages for more than a decade, long before smart growth came into existence, it fits consistently with the new guidelines.

Downtown Markham will combine European-inspired streets with boutiques, squares, condominiums, townhouses, entertainment and commercial districts, all within walking distance of each other and easily accessible to the York Region Transit System and the Unionville GO Station. There will be more than 29 hectares of parks and green spaces bordered by the Rouge River Valley.

It's intended to be sustainable and environmentally responsible, with condo and office buildings that will be built to LEED standards —Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Green Building Rating System. (Currently, there is no LEED certification for townhouses or single family homes.)

The first components in the development will be 200 condominiums and 175 freehold townhouses. Heating and cooling will be supplied by Markham District Energy, an energy-efficient, environmentally sound system where hot or chilled water is produced at a central plant within the community and piped underground to buildings within an area.

"This is unique, not just in Ontario, but in North America," says Tony Wong, MPP for Markham. Wong also was a member of Markham and York Region council from 1998 to 2003 and involved in the planning process for Downtown Markham.

"This is a model that will be emulated by many municipalities, not just throughout the province, but across North America, as a solution to urban sprawl. This is so very exciting to all of us who were on council, as it's really consistent with the province's growth strategy," adds Wong.

"I think the most exciting thing is this will give us a central place



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Markham Mayor Don Cousens says the project "will give us a central place for people to gather and live."

for people to gather and live," says Markham mayor Don Cousens. "I live in Markham and I envied my son when he lived at Yonge and Eglinton in Toronto, where it's a hive of activity day and night. It was so vital, so fun and I see that type of atmosphere happening here."

Cousens and council travelled across North America during the planning process, looking at other developing communities to see how their downtowns were evolving.

"No one else is doing anything this grand or large," says Cou-

sens. Markham originally consisted of three villages: Thornhill, Unionville and east Markham, all of which had their own main streets; but the town has never had its own downtown since it was incorporated in 1971.

Downtown Markham will be within walking distance of the existing municipal offices, Markham Theatre, IBM and a newly built YMCA. A Hilton suites hotel is on the edge of the new downtown.

Bratty says although new urbanism and the principles of smart growth were fairly radical ideas more than a decade ago, he was receptive when approached by Markham Mayor Don Cousens to incorporate the principles into his future plans for the site.

"We've owned the property for a long time and in approximately 1994, the municipality retained a planner named Andres Duany, who showed how what is now known as smart growth was possible," says Bratty. "Though, it was not flavour of the month at the time. A lot of my competitor friends thought we were crazy, but we stuck with it."

(Duany, a Miami urban planner and architect, created the vision for Markham's Cornell community, which has been

built according to new urbanism principles. That means houses are built close to the street with large front porches, garages are at the rear and people can walk to stores, schools and parks, and public transit is easily accessible.)

"At the time, office buildings weren't selling outside of the city and there were no highrise condos in the suburbs," recalls Bratty. "But I said 'okay, I'd go

The first phase will consist of condos and townhouses, with the second phase to include more residences and retail

along with it' and I waited patiently. And lo and behold, office buildings began coming to the 905 from the 416 and highrise was no longer a bad word in the 905."

"I believe so strongly in it (new urbanism)," says Cousens. "It was a really hard switch for a person like Rudy who had built so many houses, but this is the most significant part of Markham to be developed and it needed a vision. Rudy was open to a progressive model. He went to work on it and went above and beyond what was called for."

The mayor says council was affirmed by what they saw happening as Cornell was built, "as it put people ahead of the car. People will also dominate Downtown Markham."

Council, municipal staff and Bratty worked together to create the plan for the downtown.

The vision got a boost from Markham's evolution into a high-tech centre, as head offices such as IBM, ATI, American Express, Motorola and more, located there. Many of these offices will be easily accessible from Downtown Markham and Bratty and Cousens predict many of the high-tech workers will buy homes there.

"To Remington's credit, they've demonstrated great flexibility and support of new urbanism," says Wong. "It's a win-win situation for the municipality, the province and Remington. It's also of benefit for Remington to embrace this concept because when it becomes the model for other North America cities, Remington will be the name associated with this."

The first phase in the development will consist of condos and townhouses, with the second phase to include more resi-

dences and some retail. "Retailers won't build stores until the people are there," explains Bratty.

The first building of the Rouge Bijou condominiums, which will be 10 storeys and have 105 units priced from the \$170,000s to the \$400,000s, will open for sales next month. Suites will range from 550-square-foot, one-bedroom designs to 1,735-square-foot two-storey villas. Standard finishes include nine-foot ceilings, stainless steel appliances, granite countertops, hardwood floors in main living areas and floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the Rouge Valley. Amenities will include a theatre, golf simulator, party room, demonstration kitchen and exercise facilities. A model suite by designer Bryon Patton will open soon. Registration is being taken now and first appointments for potential buyers will be held in early July.

"It's a very exciting project," says Barbara Lawlor, president of Baker Real Estate, which is handling the sales of the condominiums. "It will create a sense of place to live, where the car is not essential."

The luxury freehold townhouses will be launched this summer as well; starting from the high \$490,000s, ranging from 2,400 to 3,400 square feet. Bratty says the range of choice between the condos and the townhouses will offer diversity in housing choices.

The development will also eventually include:

► High St., a retail area where retail stores selling luxury and international brands will be located, as well as office space and condos. The north end of the street will be anchored by a boutique hotel and spa while the south end will lead to the Piazza, envisioned as a central square for entertainment and music, civic events, farmer's markets and more, lined by shops and restaurants.

► The Simcoe Promenade, which will provide pedestrian and transit access, linking Downtown Markham to the rest of the GTA. In the central area of the promenade will be the entertainment district, with cinemas, cafes and nightclubs.

► A range of parks which will inter-connect throughout the development. At the core will be a 4-hectare central urban park (still being designed) which will serve as the gateway to the Rouge River valley.

For information, click on www.downtownmarkham.ca.

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Home warranty coverage doubled

Total warranty coverage for new homes in Ontario will increase from \$150,000 to \$300,000 for buyers who take possession on or after July 1.

Tarion Warranty Corporation has announced that there will be no additional cost for consumers or builders associated with the coverage increase as the fee will remain the same to enrol a new home in the mandatory warranty program.

"This is a significant benefit to new home buyers and builders in Ontario that reflects the robust housing market and the increasing price of new homes,"

said Greg Gee, president and CEO of Tarion. "While most homeowners will never need this amount of coverage for warranty-related issues in their new homes, the increase to \$300,000 gives purchasers the added confidence of knowing that they are covered even if a major repair is required."

The average price for a new single-family home in Ontario during 2005 was \$306,000, with warranty enrolment fees ranging from \$325, for homes priced at \$100,000 or less, to \$750 for those worth \$500,000 or more. "This demonstrates Tarion's

continued commitment to improving protection" for buyers of new homes, said Ontario Minister of Government Services Gerry Phillips.

The increased coverage will apply to all purchasers with a date of possession on or after July 1, regardless of when they entered into their agreement of purchase and sale.

"For the past 30 years, new homeowners in Ontario have been protected by a statutory warranty that has evolved to become one of the most comprehensive of its kind in North America," said Gee.

Cambridge students helped build a house

This week students from Monsignor Doyle Catholic Secondary School in Cambridge celebrated their participation in the Community Home Build Program with Reid's Heritage Group.

Students in the construction co-op program offered through the experiential learning department of the Waterloo Catholic District School Board helped to build a house, with guidance from Reid's staff and

subtrades. Programs such as this one encourage young people to pursue skilled trades careers. The Conference Board of Canada predicts a shortfall of almost one million workers over the next 20 years.

REGISTER NOW!

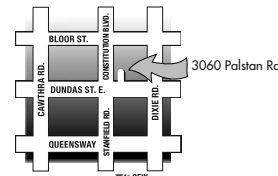


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