

# City centre's birth brings new era

*To be built from scratch, Markham Centre will be first of its kind in the Toronto area*

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Staff Writer

It's been 10 years coming, but Markham Centre is finally on the move.

The massive downtown-core project, planned since the early 90s, has been kick-started with the arrival of two huge corporations and one residential development.

It's the beginning of an entire community featuring high-density residential, commercial and industrial lands, parks, libraries and schools. It will also include a large artificial lake and accessibility to the Rouge River in the area south of Hwy. 7 between Warden Avenue and McCowan Road.

The Remington Group, under developer Rudy Bratty, has submitted a plan to the town that includes 3,500 homes, condos and luxury apartments, four million square feet of office or other employment space and 55,000 square feet of upscale retail space. After refinements, the developer hopes to have all approvals in place by January.

"Lots of downtowns have been re-developed, but nobody's ever actually created a downtown, no one has had the opportunity," said Remington's Dave DeSilva.

"It's scary, it's never been done. We can't use a model of what's come before. But it does give us the opportunity to prevent mistakes other downtowns have made," DeSilva said. "It's probably the biggest thing we've ever worked on."

*It will also highlight the Rouge River in a way similar to San Antonio's famous Riverwalk.*

The Remington development will feature a Euro-Canadian look, using heritage architecture seen in Quebec City, DeSilva said. Homes will include upscale brownstone townhouses, walk-ups and luxury condos and apartments.

It will also highlight the Rouge River in a way similar to San Antonio's famous Riverwalk with open vistas to the valleylands.

"In Texas, they embrace the water, there's no fear. People, commerce and culture are right against the water, rather than a 30-metre buffer and miles of fence so no one uses it," he said. "And the retail won't be big box retail. There will be many, many restaurants, bake shops, ice cream parlours, cultural centres, boutiques and antique shops."

A major east-west roadway will run through the development, easing pressure on Hwy. 7 and connections will be in place to encourage public transit.

In taking the pulse of the community during the Vision 2000 surveys, many residents said they want to see a downtown core for Markham — one all residents can share. Currently, the town has four focal points, Markham Main Street, Unionville Main Street, Thornhill and Milliken.

"There are four communities in Markham which are all separate. There is no centre point where people feel they are in the town centre," resident Nigel Cohen said.

Cohen participated in the lengthy public consultation process for Markham Centre, which began in 1991. Public charettes were held, similar to those held in the early stages of the Cornell development. New urbanism designer Andres Duany offered a development-wide concept, something Cohen insists was necessary.

"If there wasn't a master plan of some sort, everybody would just build their own thing," he said. "At least everyone will be working toward the same concept and it won't be developed on an ad hoc basis."

IBM announced in April 1999 it would locate its new \$125-million research and development campus on an 80-acre parcel south of Embassy Suites



STAFF FILE PHOTO

Micheline Bouchard, president and chief executive officer of Motorola Canada Ltd., unveiled her company's plan to build its Canadian headquarters in Markham's new town centre. The corporation will be joined by IBM as a major corporate cornerstone of the town's new downtown.

on Warden Avenue. And Motorola, one of Canada's largest high-tech companies, announced in June it would open a seven-storey, 224,000-square-foot office on the east side of Warden, north of Hwy. 407.

That will be the gateway to Markham Centre.

"The whole project was moving very slowly for a number of reasons, one the result of the economy at that time," explained Town of Markham planner Lili Duoba. "Then IBM came on board and ka-boom."

Eventually, Markham Centre will encompass 16 city blocks, with targets of 10,000 residential units for 25,000 people, three elementary schools, two secondary schools, 55,000 square metres of retail space and 390,000 square metres of other office and employment lands that will create 17,000 jobs.

The goal is to connect the north side of Warden as well, to include pedestrian and vehicle access to the Civic Centre, the Markham Theatre and the five-acre park planned across the street on Cox Boulevard.

"The plan of the municipality is to provide high-density development in an area where it makes sense, as opposed to spreading it out over different locations," Duoba said. "We are making sure we continually keep the big picture in mind."

While there are dozens of landowners, including both developers and private citizens, the Remington plan represents the core of the site and is much further along in terms of the planning process than anyone else, Duoba added.

*No one else is trying to develop something of this scale. It's a rather daunting project.*

"Remington was instrumental in bringing those big head offices to the table," Duoba said. "No one else is trying to develop something of this scale. It's a rather daunting project."

Markham Mayor Don Cousens said the city centre will respect information gathered through Vision 2000, which includes citizen's comments.

"The dream has been there a long time," Cousens said. "It's the most exciting new project in the entire GTA. We're committed to what we learned from Vision 2000, better transportation, protection of the valleylands and a green concept, housing that is what people want and need, essentially a true town centre. It won't take away from the main streets, but it's a new and fresh opportunity for people to gather."

Ward 3 Councillor Joe Virgilio agrees.

"We want to make it a focal point, where people come to restaurants, bars, entertainment centres, stores and boutiques there, rather than in all different locations."

"We want to make sure it becomes a hub for transportation, with a GO station and more frequent service because the density can support it."

"We want to make the area user-friendly and walkable, with park benches and views. It will be a place people will be attracted to," he said.

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