

# Funding still murky for park purchase

BY KATHLEEN GRIFFIN  
Staff Writer

Much is still shrouded in secrecy, but that didn't stop the Town of Markham from holding a press conference Thursday on the impending acquisition of a 1.8-acre piece of land fronting Thornhill's Settlers Park.

About two dozen residents milled around the front of the German Mills Community Centre as Deputy Mayor Frank Scarpitti announced council's Tuesday night decision to expropriate the parcel for parkland, effectively halting development plans.

His words were met with applause and cheers.

"What we are doing is the right thing and in the interest of the public," he said. "Settlers Park is protected, the forest is protected, access through German Mills is protected and the Don Mills ecosystem is protected," he said. "This is a great day for the German Mills community."

Lined up on the hastily-put-together dais, Thornhill MPP Tina Molinari, Councillors Scarpitti, Erin Shapero and Khalid Usman joined ratepayer and environmental group representatives to explain, sort of, about how the \$2-to-\$3 million purchase will be funded.

The Province of Ontario, thanks to the efforts of Ms Molinari and Markham MPP Dave Tsubouchi, has agreed to assist with the funding through an Ontario Realty Corporation land swap. In lieu of cash, the ORC will give the town between four and six acres of land, explained Deputy Mayor Scarpitti.

But the location of the land and how much it's actually worth remains confidential, at least for now.

The Region of York will chip in \$100,000. The Evergreen Foundation has agreed to raise up to \$500,000 and the Friends of Settlers Park will begin a fundraising campaign as well, he said.

The loudest cheers were reserved for Ward 2 Councillor Shapero who led the fight for the land's protection. She said the co-operation between three levels of government and the persistence of the community finally paid off.

The land is owned by the Bianchini family, who have paid taxes on the property for more than 40 years. It was only when they submitted a development application in 1999 that some councillors and residents realized the land wasn't part of the town-owned Settlers Park.

Agent for the family Tom Christoff attended Thursday's press conference as well, telling the crowd family members realize they will be paid for the land, but disagree with the town's plan.

"They don't want the taxpayers to pay millions of dollars for this little piece," he said.



**ERIN SHAPERO**  
Government co-operation helped.

"If they care to donate the money, we'll consider that," responded Deputy Mayor Scarpitti to laughs and applause.

Resident Louise Aimone, who has lived in Thornhill 38 years, also questioned Deputy Mayor Scarpitti.

"We have a lot of green space in this area," she said. "What is this going to cost and what is this going to do to my taxes?"

He replied the town has paid anywhere from \$335,000 an acre to \$1 million an acre for other town acquisitions, but "at this point in time the money will not have to be paid from property taxes at all."

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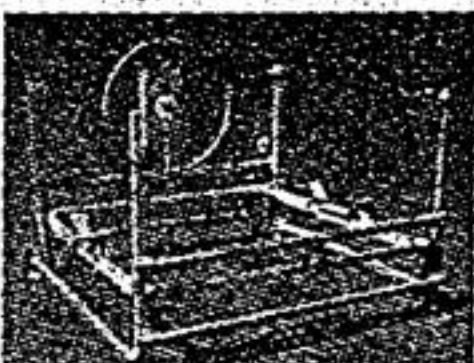
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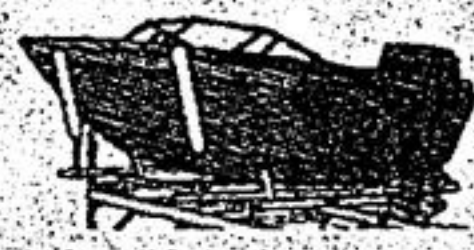
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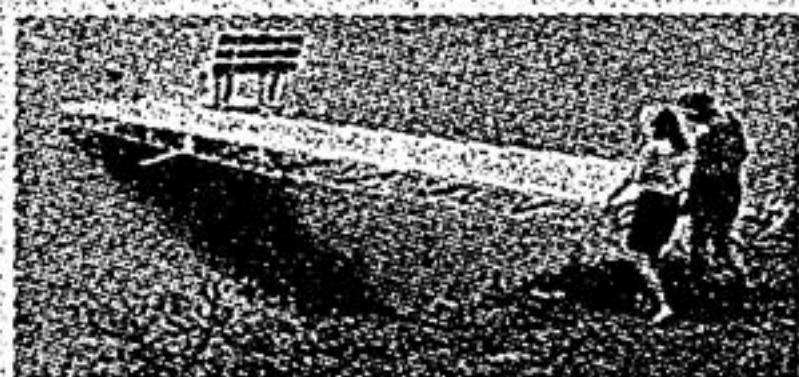
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