

Markham Centre 'will set standards for Smart Growth,' town assures residents

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

When the Town of Markham first asked residents for opinions on Markham Centre — its long-sought, downtown-style community planned south of Hwy. 7, between Kennedy Road and Warden Avenue — it was 1991.

But what has become the most carefully arranged development the town has ever seen, and probably the most important, is still capable of scaring some people.

Their chief fear is traffic: People in Unionville worry cars will cut through their neighbourhood to reach Markham Centre's 988 acres, which will house 25,000 people and be the place of work for 17,000.

At a town workshop this week, however, Markham Planning Commissioner Mary Frances Turner assured 30 people the development "will set a standard for Smart Growth" and suggested it will have a road grid and transit service worthy of the world's great cities.

"In order to have a downtown, you have to be able to move people quickly and easily," she said.

"It's about having choices. If you don't have a car, you don't need a car."

Engineer Arup Mukherjee said Markham Centre's transportation plan aims to change the "car-first culture" long imbedded in suburban towns like Markham.

"Quite frankly, we can't afford not to do that," he said.

York Region signed a public-private partnership deal June 27 to build an as-yet-unknown form of rapid transit along the Hwy. 7 corridor, with Markham Centre providing a link south to the Sheppard Subway line.

The town will use Rodick Road and Birchmount Road extensions over Hwy. 407 and extensions of Sciberras Road, Enterprise Drive and Clegg Road, Yorktech Drive and Riverside Drive to give commuters a choice and disperse traffic.

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It may even build mid-block crossings over Hwy. 404 as ways around increasingly congested intersections on Hwy. 7 and 16th Avenue.

In smaller groups of workshop participants, Unionville resident David McBeth said he's not impressed.

"This is doing nothing to the north-south traffic problems that already exist on Kennedy Road and Warden Avenue," he said.

More intersections on Hwy. 7 mean more signals, which mean more traffic problems, Mr. McBeth argued.

But Basil Boutakis, who lives north of the proposed development, wasn't worried about traffic infiltration from the south. The new roads in Markham Centre will move cars in and out quickly, he said.

Mr. Boutakis said the rapid-transit line must go right into Markham Centre.

Once people know it will do that property values there will double, Mr. Boutakis predicted.

"Go and buy a house on Sheppard Avenue (along the new subway) now. Two years ago, you could've had it for \$300,000. Now, half a million."

Another group talking about Markham Centre's biking and walking paths said they wanted them to be well-lit, connected to other neighbourhoods and safe to use any time and in any weather.

The 6:30 p.m. sessions at the Civic Centre conclude Tuesday with a discussion on Markham Centre's public spaces and Wednesday on "green infrastructure," which covers the development's stormwater control, a man-made lake and the spaces that would serve to protect the Rouge River from polluted water runoff.

Town staff plan to host a one-day Markham Centre conference Sept. 28, an event they hope hundreds will attend.

For more details, or to post your own comments, go to www.markham-centre.com.



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