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GREYFIELD REDEVELOPMENT

CASE STUDIES

Built Project Initiatives

THE ALDERSHOT PLAZA

Burlington

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Aldershot Plaza project will redevelop two adjacent parcels of commercial land in two phases. Phase One will redevelop the site of a former supermarket into rental apartment buildings and a large recreation area to be used by future residents of the project. Phase Two will redevelop a strip mall and junior department store into five or six apartment buildings with some ground floor commercial uses. The Aldershot Plaza project illustrates the importance of providing some commercial land uses in greyfield redevelopment projects, instead of redeveloping them as completely residential.

AREA CONTEXT

With a population of over 155,000, Burlington is one of four municipalities that make up the Regional Municipality of Halton, at the western end of the Greater Toronto area. The Aldershot Plaza project is located next to a mature suburb in the South Aldershot Community. The project is surrounded by low- and medium-density residential land uses to the south (10 to 50 dwelling units per hectare), while a high-density residential development abuts the site immediately to the west (over 50 dwelling units per hectare). Commercial (retail) land uses are also located to the west of the site, and a strip commercial development and a used-car dealership are situated to the north and east. A secondary school is located directly south east of the site.

The site fronts a five-lane arterial road (Plains Road West at Daryl Drive), which has frequent transit service. The site is a 20-minute walk from the Aldershot Go Train station, part of the regional transit system. The site also has easy access to Highway 403, a major link in the Provincial highway system.

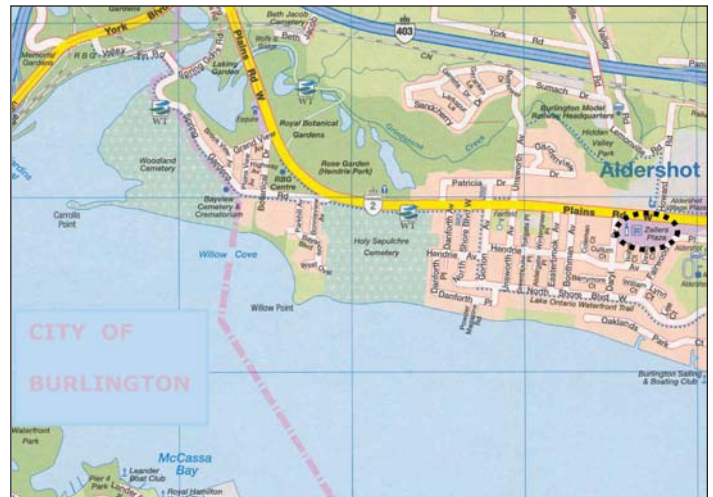


Figure 1: Vicinity map of the Aldershot Plaza

SITE HISTORY

Phase One of the Aldershot Plaza project is located on a former A&P supermarket site. Prior to being demolished to make way for the redevelopment project, the supermarket had been vacant for five years. A Zellers strip mall is located on the parcel of land adjacent to the former supermarket site. At the time of writing, the Zellers building has approximately two years left on its lease, after which it will be demolished and redeveloped. Reuse of the existing buildings was not considered because the form (e.g., interior height) of the structures is not conducive to the intended uses (residential and commercial). The supermarket and Zellers became uneconomic due mainly to the construction of a new regional mall, an Ikea super store, and a large-format supermarket located a few kilometres east of the site.



Figure 2: Before (orthographic) photograph of the Aldershot Plaza site

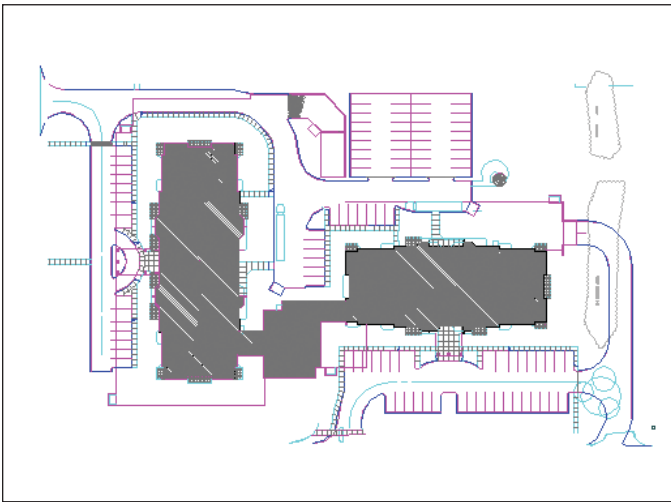


Figure 3: Site plan of Phase One

PROJECT CHRONOLOGY

The supermarket and Zellers were built in the late 1980s. The City received the site plan in May 2002, and approved it in February 2003. In 2002, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was carried out. Prior to the construction of Phase One of the project (fall of 2004), a full excavation took place to remove soil contaminated by the paving material used when the site was originally developed. The developer is expected to submit the site plan for Phase Two of the project in November 2004. Construction of Phase Two is expected to start in 2007, by which time Phase One will be completely rented out.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The entire site measures 6.2 hectares, with Phase One being 1.7 hectares and Phase Two being 4.5 hectares.

Phase One of the Aldershot project will include residential land uses. The residential development will take the form of two high-rise apartment buildings (one 11-storey building and one 12-storey building), for a total of 266 units (38 one-bedroom, 223 two-bedroom, and five three-bedroom). Most units will be rental, but some ownership units will be included. The apartments will range from 111.5 to 120.8 square metres.

The residential density of the project will be 149.6 units per hectare, which is considerably higher than the neighbourhood to the south. This adjacent area consists of detached, semi-detached, and townhouse units, and is zoned to allow a density of up to 50 dwelling units per hectare. The Aldershot project is similar in density to the high-density residential development to the immediate west of the project, an area zoned for over 50 dwelling units per hectare.

A pool and other recreation facilities will also be built as part of Phase One.

The standard parking requirements apply to the project: 1.25 spaces per one-bedroom unit, 1.5 spaces per two-bedroom unit, and 1.75 spaces for units with three or more bedrooms. 0.35 visitor spaces are also required per unit. A total of 502 parking spaces will be provided, of which 404 will be underground. As previously mentioned, the site fronts an arterial road, which has frequent transit service. The site is accessible by existing sidewalks, and walkways will be provided on the internal roads.

At the time of writing, one of the five or six buildings planned in Phase Two is expected to be mixed-use with commercial on the ground floor and residential units on the upper floors. The five or six residential and mixed-use buildings are expected to contain a total of 640 units.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The developer will build and own the buildings. There are no other major stakeholders in this project. The developer will remain the landowner of the site and be the landlord of the future apartments.

PLANNING PROCESS

Burlington has no programs or incentives specifically designed to facilitate greyfield redevelopment.

Burlington's Official Plan (1994) designates the Phase One site as a "Community Shopping Area". This designation requires that the area be developed mainly for retail and services, but permits office and residential uses, including medium- and high-density housing. Zoning for the site was consistent with the OP designation. Therefore, the site did not require an Official Plan Amendment or a rezoning in order to accommodate the redevelopment proposal; only site plan approval was necessary.

Site plan approval for a project of this kind usually takes about two months in Burlington. In the case of the Aldershot Plaza, however, approval for Phase One of the development took about one year. This delay was due largely to the extensive consultation with residents of the lower-density neighbourhood located to the south of the site. Another delay and expense was occasioned by the need to excavate the site in order to address hydrocarbon contamination from an off-site gas station.

The consultation revealed neighbourhood concerns over the height of the buildings and the fact that the entire site would be developed as high-rise residential, with no commercial uses remaining. The residents of the new senior's buildings to the west of the property were especially concerned about the lack of retail commercial space within walking distance from their homes.

Based on the outcomes of these meetings, the site plan was modified to move buildings closer to the road and farther from the lower-density residential area to the south of the site. These changes have helped address community concerns, but the neighbourhood is not by any means reconciled with the project.

In addition, the results of the Environmental Impact Assessment carried out in 2002 will require about 220,000 tonnes of contaminated soil to be removed before construction starts. The contamination originates from the oil-based asphalt that was laid down in the 1950s. The oil seeped into the soil and the level of petroleum hydrocarbons on this site is higher than the level permitted by provincial guidelines for residential development.

The original development proposal for Phase Two of the project did not retain commercial uses. As a result of the public consultation process employed in Phase One, Burlington Council has directed staff to work with the developer on Phase Two of the project to retain some commercial space on site. In order to give staff time to study the importance of retaining commercial uses on the site, Council enacted an interim control bylaw, which freezes development on the Phase Two site for one year.

At the time of writing, the draft site plan for Phase Two of the project included five or six apartment buildings for a total of 640 units. One building is planned to include commercial uses on the ground floor.

The consultation process for Phase Two was getting underway at the time of writing. Due to community opposition to the project, at the request of the City, the developer has held several neighbourhood meetings in addition to the statutory meetings required by the *Ontario Planning Act*. The developer is using visual tools, including three-dimensional models, to illustrate four scenarios concerning the massing of the project.

MARKETING

Marketing of the Phase One project will focus on attracting seniors from the surrounding lower-density residential neighbourhoods. This project will allow seniors for whom a detached dwelling is no longer practical, to stay in their neighbourhood. The apartments will be marketed as an affordable alternative to detached housing ownership and close to services (e.g., health care) which are typically needed by seniors. With a vacancy rate of 0.7 per cent, there is a shortage of rental apartments in Burlington. Smaller dwelling units, such as apartments, will be increasingly required to meet the housing needs of an aging population. Marketing for the Phase Two project has not been determined at the time of writing.

FINANCIAL ASPECTS

The municipality did not provide any incentives to the developer (for example, land donation, waiving of development charges), and there are no major infrastructure or other costs to the municipality associated with the project.

The removal of contaminated soil on the site will cost approximately \$88,000. The developer will pay about \$2,074,116 to the municipality in development charges. The increase in municipal tax revenues is estimated to be around \$662,178 per year.

The rents (that is, including heat and electricity) will vary from about \$900 for a one-bedroom apartment to \$1,400 for a two-bedroom unit with a walk out terrace. Three-bedroom units will rent at approximately \$1,600. These rents are above average for Burlington, where the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment is \$823, a two-bedroom apartment is \$924, and a three-bedroom apartment is \$1,106.

EVALUATION

With its low vacancy rate, Burlington needs the type of rental housing being provided by the Aldershot Plaza project. The development gives seniors in the surrounding low-density neighbourhoods an opportunity to stay in their neighbourhood, maintain their social support networks, and continue to use the local services they are familiar with. Residential development near local and regional transit service is also considered positive from a sustainable planning point of view.

The Aldershot Plaza project illustrates the importance of allocating some commercial use in greyfield residential redevelopment projects. Mixed-use projects ensure that some retail and service uses are retained to serve both existing residents in surrounding neighbourhoods and residents of the new development. Strictly residential projects may necessitate car travel to access more distant amenities and commercial areas.

Phase One of the Aldershot Plaza project was negatively received by the surrounding residential community (especially the low-density neighbourhood located to the south of the site) due to the loss of neighbourhood commercial uses and the height of the new buildings, thus complicating and lengthening the approvals processes. As a result of the Phase One project, the Official Plan (OP) will be amended to ensure the retention or provision of some commercial uses in the municipality's remaining designated "Community Shopping Areas". While these areas are currently thriving, the OP amendment is to ensure that "Community Shopping Areas" remain as such, especially given that intensification is expected to occur in some of these areas in the future.

In addition, the public consultation conducted in Phase One of the project has had a positive impact on Phase Two by encouraging both the City and developer to consider the retention of commercial uses on the site. The enactment of the interim control bylaw for Phase Two of the project has allowed all parties to pause and reconsider basic principles. The City considers the modelling exercises that show the massing of Phase Two of the project to be an effective means of involving the public and addressing concerns.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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