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# REYFIELD REDEVELOPMENT

## CASE STUDIES

### Built Project Initiatives

#### OLDE THORNHILL VILLAGE

#### Markham

### PROJECT SUMMARY

The Olde Thornhill Village project will redevelop the 6.1-hectare site of a failed shopping centre to create a large-scale infill project within an established community. The west part of the site, which currently contains an office building and an enclosed mall, will be renovated, re-clad and expanded as a commercial development. The east part of the mall will be demolished and replaced with 220 stacked townhomes and 224 apartments. A new urban roadway will be constructed to create a strong connection between the renovated commercial and new residential developments on the site. In addition, a north-south street will be added to the east half of the site.

### AREA CONTEXT

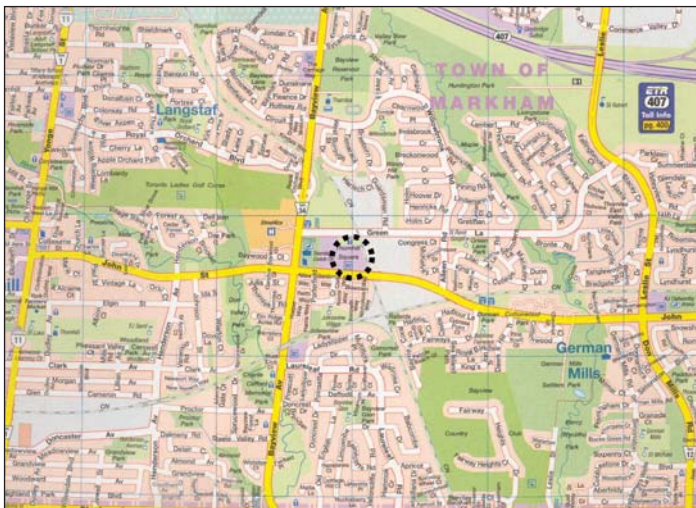


Figure 1: Map of the Olde Thornhill Village vicinity

Located immediately north of Toronto, Markham is the largest of nine municipalities in York Region, with a population of approximately 220,000. Comprised of four communities, Markham Village, Unionville, Milliken and Thornhill, Markham is a rapidly developing municipality, with a growth rate of 20.3 per cent between 1996 and 2001. The project is located in a mature suburb of Markham in the Thornhill community. The site is just east of the corner of Bayview Avenue and John Street.

The community centre beside the project will provide future residents with amenities—such as a library, ice arena, and fitness and recreational facilities—within easy walking distance. Other amenities, including a swimming pool and tennis courts, are located farther up the street from the community centre. An elementary school is located across the street from the project, on the south side of John Street.

An 11-hectare park and natural areas are within a short drive of the site to the north. An old industrial area lies east of the CN tracks. A higher-density, 15-storey residential building rises north of Green Lane, and a two-storey condominium townhouse development stands south of John Street. A hospital and senior's home are situated west of Bayview Avenue, and a church is adjacent to the site's northeast corner.

A bus route on John Street services the site, and the project will be within walking distance of Bayview Avenue, which provides both local, regional, and GO bus service. All public transportation congregates at one stop, about 200 metres from the project.

## SITE HISTORY

Prior to re-development, a 23,226-square metre mall, a six-storey office building, and surface and structured parking occupied the site. The mall, which was built in 1980, was never successful due to its awkward location in the middle of a large block, poor interior layout, and lack of access to Bayview Avenue. The mall has housed several uses including major department stores such as Zellers and Winners, and a flea market.

## PROJECT CHRONOLOGY



Figure 2: View of the townhomes from the courtyard

In 2000, the municipality received a redevelopment application to demolish a large portion of the mall and replace it with a large format (“big box”) home improvement store. This application was denied by the municipality because it considered a big box store to be incompatible with the existing land uses in the neighbourhood (that is, a mature neighbourhood with some higher density and mixed-use). The application was appealed by the developer to the OMB in January 2002. The OMB supported the municipality and denied the application for the big box store.

A large portion of the mall closed in 2001 and the present developer submitted a development application for the Townhomes of Thornhill Village at the end of 2003. The municipality approved the zoning amendment in 2003, but it was appealed to the OMB. The site plan was approved in July 2004, and construction started in the beginning of August 2004. The first phase of construction, 220 stacked townhome condominiums, is expected to be completed in Winter 2005-2006. The timing for the second phase, which consists of 224 apartment units, was not yet determined at the time of writing.

## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION



Figure 3: Site plan showing green space and location of buildings

The Olde Thornhill Village project will refurbish buildings on part of the 6.1-hectare site and redevelop the remaining part of the site. The west part of the site, which currently contains a four-storey office building and an enclosed mall, will be renovated, re-clad and expanded. This will result in a 5,725-square metre, six-storey office building and 11,070 square metres of retail space.

The rest of the shopping centre on the east part of the site will be demolished and replaced with 220 stacked townhomes in eight low-rise blocks and 224 apartment units divided between two linked mid-rise buildings: a nine-storey and a seven-storey building.

The townhouses will be all-brick, and some will feature terraces and rooftop decks. The apartments buildings will have brick central portions and unique circular wings with glass facades. Both the townhouses and apartments will be sold as condominium ownership units. The units will range in size from 46 to 110 square metres.

A new urban roadway, which features a grid layout pattern, will be constructed between John Street and Green Lane to create a strong connection among the commercial and residential components on the site.

Pedestrian and bicycle paths will be provided throughout the development. The paths will not only adjoin residences to other land uses on the site, but will promote access to off-site destinations. Streets have been designed to facilitate pedestrian movement (for example, sidewalks, through streets/walkways, and street trees). Street-oriented commercial uses along the main north-south connecting road between John Street and Green Lane are being promoted to enhance the pedestrian environment.

The project will feature landscaped tree-lined streets, private gardens and parkettes. A larger park will be built in the new neighbourhood.

Markham's normal parking standards have been applied to the site: 592 underground parking spaces will be provided for the commercial development, and 555 parking spaces will be provided for the residential development.

## PROJECT PARTNERS

Rosebud Homes Development Corporation (a collaboration between Townhomes of Thornhill Village Inc. and Harry Kohn Architects) is heading up the residential project as project manager and as a partner in partnership with The Wynn Group. Rosebud Homes is responsible for the residential portion of the project (both technical and marketing aspects), while the Wynn Group owns all of the commercial and office components of the project.

## PLANNING PROCESS

The project is fully market-driven and will not receive financial incentives from the municipality. However, Town staff and Council have provided strong support for the project throughout the planning and approvals process. The Town worked with the applicant to refine the proposal in its initial phases. From the Town's perspective, the Thornhill Village project was a much more favourable option for the redevelopment of the site than was the initial application for a big-box store.

The Secondary Plan was amended in 2002 to incorporate a site-specific set of "urban design principles" to guide redevelopment of this part of the municipality. These principles established unambiguous ground rules relating to site design and layout, provision of open space, connectivity between uses, mixed-use character etc. Applying these guidelines to the site, Staff and Council have been able to promote features such as pedestrian connectivity and street-oriented commercial uses on John Street and Green Lane. The Thornhill Secondary Plan contains policies that support mixed-use development on the site (which is designated "Community Amenity Area"), including high- and medium-density residential, commercial and retail uses. Secondary Plan policies also support enhancing the variety of housing types in the Thornhill district. Broad-brush OP policies that encourage the higher density and mixed-use development, and building near transit routes also apply to the project. Because the project is compatible with

Secondary Plan policies for the site and the area, no OP amendment was required in order to proceed with this redevelopment project.

Site specific rezoning was required to accommodate the project. Site plan approval was also required for this project. A preliminary plan was approved in 2003 and the final site plan is currently being reviewed by the Town.

The approvals process has taken almost four years from the time the first development application was submitted on the site in 2000. This lengthy process is partly due to the rejection by the municipality of the first development application and the subsequent appeal of that decision by the proponent to the OMB.



Figure 4: View of on-street parking and mid-rise apartment building

The Town of Markham typically holds non-statutory public information meetings for rezonings involving projects of this size and complexity, giving residents ample opportunity to voice their concerns about the project. Residents were kept well informed of changes to the redevelopment plan, and given opportunities to provide input on the design of the project including building design and orientation, and the inclusion of green space. While residents generally supported the project (especially as an alternative to big-box development), some concern was expressed about the impact the density and height of the proposed mid-rise residential buildings would have on the character of surrounding low-density residential neighbourhoods. A series of public information meetings demonstrated to residents that the development would have minimal impact on surrounding residential areas. Public information meetings included design exercises that used graphics to communicate to residents the massing of the project and how it would not negatively impact their properties.

## MARKETING

The project marketing targets first-time homeowners. From the developer's perspective, the project will be profitable as there are few higher-density opportunities in Markham. In addition, the project features attributes such as new housing within an urban area, easy access to services, transit, and amenities, which add to its marketability. The units went on sale in May 2003, and at the time of writing, 97 of the 220 units have been sold.

## FINANCIAL ASPECTS

Development charges to be paid to the municipality are estimated to be \$5,950,000. The developer paid approximately \$13 million for the land and the development costs for the project as a whole will total \$48 million.

The project will require upgrades to the underground parking facility, the costs of which will be the responsibility of the developer.

Units will be condominium ownership with prices ranging from \$159,900 to \$300,000, offering future residents affordable homeownership opportunities. The average townhouse resale value in Markham is \$284,925, while the average condominium apartment resells at \$266,557.

Negotiations are currently taking place among the church adjacent to the site and the Town of Markham to explore the possibility of incorporating rent-assisted housing into the project. In this case, a block of approximately 20 units may be purchased by the non-profit sector if the funding can be secured.

## EVALUATION

Olde Thornhill Village will feature a unique mix of relatively affordable housing opportunities, retail activity, and office space within one redeveloped site. From the developer's point of view, the project is expected to be a financial success as there is strong demand for the type of higher-density, offered entry-level housing and few competing developments to meet that demand. The developer was however faced with some unanticipated costs such as upgrades to the parking structure.

The Olde Thornhill Village project highlights the importance of strong staff and council support in opposing incompatible development and moving a mixed-use, human-scale greyfield redevelopment project forward.

From a planning point of view, key objectives such as residential intensification, transit supportive development, and enhancement of the range of housing typologies in Thornhill were addressed and satisfied. The usefulness of design guidelines in this respect cannot be overemphasized—the unambiguous guidelines added to the Thornhill Secondary Plan established the municipality's redevelopment objectives for the site and helped set the stage for successful redevelopment.

The public consultation process was also successful in that it avoided the need for major changes to the design of the project by dispelling the unsubstantiated fears of local residents. In addition, the Town's use of design exercises during the public consultation process was a useful tool to communicate with the public and address community concerns regarding the design (for example, massing and density) of the project.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

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**OUR WEB SITE ADDRESS:** [www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca)

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