

OMB approves 10,000-unit plan for Downsview lands

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An artist's rendering of plans for combined residential and park development on the site of the former Downsview base.
SUPPLIED DRAWING

Chloé Fedio Staff Reporter

Longtime residents lost their bid to curb development in Downsview Park as the Ontario Municipal Board approved a plan for up to 10,000 new residential units on Wednesday.

The development will help fund the transformation of the 572-acre former military base into an urban park.

Residents concerned about traffic congestion and loss of green space requested that planners cut the previously approved 8,300 units by 830 in two particular areas. Instead, the board approved an amended city plan for an additional 1,700.

“We were willing to compromise,” said Albert Krivickas, who helped found the Downsview Lands Community Voice Association in 1994 after Ottawa announced the base would shut down.

The main traffic veins that surround the park will become even more clogged when the new Humber River hospital at Keele St. and Wilson Ave. is complete, Krivickas argued before the board.

“At rush hour, I’ve seen emergency vehicles use the sidewalk in order to get through. How can you increase density when there are already traffic capacity issues in our community?” he said.

However, city planners and developers argued the addition of a new subway station in the park adjacent to the Barrie GO train line would take enough traffic off the streets to mitigate the surge in population. The OMB agreed.

Young trees, rolling hills and an artificial lake have already begun to beautify the former industrial wasteland. The park is also home to a film studio, a flea market and soccer pitches. Margaret Giardino-Hargoe, who has been living near Downsview Park for more than 35 years, welcomed the new residential developments as long as they come with the necessary infrastructure and community resources, such as a library, daycare and a community centre.

The Downsview plan, drafted by city planning staff, was brought to the board after years of squabbling between the community and developers. Ward 9 Councillor Maria Augimeri has consistently opposed the plan and denounced the amendment as “a rubber stamp for developers.”

“Downsview Park lawyers cited extensive community consultation in their case to approve this plan. No one asked them, however, how much adjustment to the plan occurred as a result of community consultation. That’s because the answer is embarrassing — it’s zero,” she said. However, Downsview Park lawyer David Bronskill said community concerns had been “heard, reviewed and addressed” over the past three years. He added the decision was left to the OMB after the North York Community Council put off dealing with the issue.

Earlier this year, city planners shot down Build Toronto’s request for an additional 2,000 units in the housing development near Allen Rd. and Sheppard Ave. Instead, the amendment allows for 200 in that particular neighbourhood.

However, Krivickas is upset that planners ignored concerns about density in the proposed Stanley Greene and Williams Baker neighbourhood. He added that the amended proposal shrinks open spaces near the perimeter of the park, to the detriment of longtime area residents.