

Greenways are the key to repurposing Aurora's Highland Gate Golf Course

Greenways are the key to repurposing Aurora's Highland Gate Golf Course

People-oriented design of the infilling of the golf course's open space corridors is best achieved if one wide and one slightly narrower greenway flank those corridors, with infill housing in-between, and narrow streets, laneways, for the motorized traffic. Aurora's Trails Master Plan already contains provisions for an entirely off-road east-west trails corridor, a planning policy provision that must not be ignored.

Such off-road trails should be incorporated in the 12 meter wide greenways, in every subsection of the golf course development. Students who attend the two public and three high schools, which are mostly within 1.5km of the centre of the Highland Gate community, will be able to commute between home and school, via the very safe off-road trails, and north-south connectors between the greenways/trails/paths. That opportunity for healthy daily commuting does not exist now in the area centered on the Highland Gate community.

This is an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, to be able to create such a health and environment promoting community in downtown Aurora. And in tune with promoting the environment, the new homes could be built to LEED standards (Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design).

Apart from the above, this golf course repurposing should be viewed in the context of the intended Downtown Revitalization. Such revitalization will depend on pedestrian and transit traffic.

Anyone who has to get into an automobile to go shopping is not likely to choose Yonge Street as a destination, under current transportation and shopping conditions. They drive to east Aurora at best, and perhaps to Newmarket, because of traffic conditions, and better shopping choices.

That needs to change if Downtown Revitalization is going to be successful. So, the opportunity to walk or cycle downtown has to be made so attractive and inviting that Aurora's central west residents will want to leave their cars at home.

This is the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to achieve that end ? to meaningfully contribute to Downtown Revitalization, to advance that revitalization a significant milestone.

This is also a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get students to walk and cycle to school, to introduce a walk and cycle centric culture to them, at a formative stage of their lives. Walking and cycling will then become a natural part of their fabric of life, and will stay with them for the rest of their lives. The more off-road and direct those walking and cycling opportunities are, and the more they offer play opportunities along the way, the more the students will appreciate their time away from cars, TVs, and computer screens. So, the repurposing of the golf course is an extraordinary opportunity for the people of Aurora that reaches well beyond the immediate backyard of affected golf course abutting residents. The repurposing offers many positive results that cannot be achieved under normal circumstances.

It is the incorporation of generous greenways that will be the key to the greatest benefits that can be gained from the repurposing of the Highland Gate Golf Course.

The greenway incorporation will be the key to retaining, literally and figuratively, a million dollar neighbourhood.

Klaus Wehrenberg
Aurora