

Town secures 'Henderson Forest' lands for \$2.5 million

A parcel of forest in southwest Aurora will be preserved for generations to come.

The Town of Aurora announced Tuesday it had acquired the so-called 'Henderson Forest' lands for \$2.5 million, funded through the Town's Parkland Reserve Fund.

The lands in question have been before Council for several years as a potential building site while residents and advocates from across Aurora have been fighting for its preservation.

In the statement, the Town said it was the latest 'important step' in addressing parkland deficit in the community.

'The land, situated at 672 and 684 Henderson Drive and acquired by the Town for \$2.5 million through its Parkland Reserve Fund, contains key natural heritage features, including sensitive woodland and a watercourse as part of the of the Oak Ridges Conservation Plan,' said the Town of Aurora in a statement.

'The Town's vision is to preserve the natural woodlot with a future potential trail connecting Henderson Drive and Willis Drive as outlined in the Trails Master Plan. The future trail would aim to enhance the natural heritage features of the property and could include a boardwalk, invasive species management and interpretive signage, highlighting the woodlot within the community. The properties are also entirely within the Oak Ridges Moraine Endangered, Rare and Threatened Species area designation, with snapping turtles and endangered bat species known to nest and exist in the vicinity.'

The Henderson Forest properties are just the latest acquisitions by the Town in the name of parks and green spaces.

Recent purchases include 16 acres just off Yonge Street just north of the Woodhaven community and the George Street Public School site, the latter of which will see a portion of the property developed into a community park with the George Street frontage proposed for housing for the Town to recoup some of the overall purchase price.

In a statement on social media, Mayor Tom Mrakas said he was 'absolutely thrilled' with the purchase.

'Acquiring these properties means that the Town can take a leadership role in protecting woodlands and endangered species, while also increasing our tree canopy in Aurora ' and providing our community with even greater access to green spaces,' he said.

The Town notes that with a commitment to reach 40 per cent total tree canopy by 2034, parkland expansion like this allows for the preservation of mature trees as well as the fostering of new young tree growth.

By Brock Weir