

Ajax joins GTA's condo explosion

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Special to QMI Agency

A mere 25 km east of downtown Toronto lies the suburban town of Ajax. With the ongoing condo boom in the GTA, Ajax has been somewhat of a late bloomer in terms of urban development. That is, until now.

Plans are underway for a new urban streetscape along Harwood Avenue that promises to be a catalyst in making downtown Ajax a true urban destination.

A new chapter in the transformation of Ajax Plaza has begun with the unveiling of Grand Harwood Place. The new, \$118.7 million urban-inspired development will include high quality residential, office and retail buildings, as well as public transit, cycling and pedestrian amenities.

The Ajax Plaza has been in existence since the early '50s and served as the commercial heart of the town, originally built to serve a community of 25,000 people. Now, with a population of 110,000, the town is no longer focused primarily around the plaza. As a result, the condition of the site has deteriorated, and redevelopment is necessary.

The first phase of the development will feature two, 10-storey condo buildings. A total of 268 apartment units are proposed, with private underground and decked parking. Also slated for construction is about 30,000 square feet of retail space on the ground floor and 25,000 square feet of office space on the two floors above facing Harwood Avenue.

'New housing form'

Project developer Windcorp Developments Limited was founded in 2005 by Laura Starr, whose legacy firm Starr Landscape, created the master site planning and landscape architectural designs for many major GTA developments.

"The mid-rise condominium is a new housing form

for the Town of Ajax and we expect it to be well received because of pent-up demand," says Starr.

Home buyers have shown en masse that they prefer the maintenance-free living that condos offer, so Grand Harwood Place will fill a void in the Ajax housing market. "Ajax has a population of roughly 110,000 people and there is not one condominium project," says Starr, adding she envisions a vibrant, dynamic, mixed-used downtown within the next three to five years.

Ajax didn't grow in an organic sense. Named after the Royal Navy cruiser HMS Ajax, the town was established in 1941 around a Second World War munitions plant. "So it never really had a real downtown and now with an adjacent, very vibrant community, this is probably the missing piece that people are looking for," says Starr.

Catalyst for growth

The Town of Ajax foresees significant boon in financial benefits and spin-offs during and after construction. They estimate the development will create over 200 jobs and generate approximately \$60.7 million in labour income and 1,100-person years of employment. Upon completion, the Town is expected to net approximately \$1.7 million in property tax revenue in the first 10 years.

"Grand Harwood Place will act as a catalyst for change, restoring economic growth and establishing a welcoming and vibrant environment once again in the centre of Downtown Ajax. We look forward to working with the community and our partners to make this development a reality," says Ajax mayor Steve Parish.

The site is well serviced by Durham Region Transit and is only a seven-minute bus ride to the Westney GO station. Timing of construction is directly tied to the speed of unit sales. Construction could commence in a one-to-two year timeframe.