



MARKHAM, ON

an overview of development trends

prepared by
KATHERINE PERROTT for the suburbs project
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Markham: An Overview of Development Trends

The Town of Markham is located within the suburban ring of municipalities surrounding Toronto, in southern Ontario. Collectively, this region is referred to as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) (*See Maps 1 & 2*). Markham is a rapidly growing municipality that has long been an attractive place to live in the region, and has emerged as an important retail and employment area as well. The cost of land and housing in the GTA is generally high, and Markham ranks among those municipalities with the highest average housing cost. Nevertheless it remains a desirable place to live and has been particularly successful in attracting immigrants from Asia and South Asia. Markham stands out in the 2006 census results for having the highest proportion of visible minorities in all of Canada. Currently, infrastructure such as water and sewer cannot keep up with demand for new housing in Markham. New urbanism is an approach to planning and urban design that emphasizes “mixed use, mixed housing types, compact form, an attractive public realm, pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, defined centres and edges and varying transportation options” (Grant 2006: 8). Markham has incorporated many tenets of new urbanism into its planning policy; making it an important case study for how new urbanism is implemented in practice.

***The Suburbs Project** at Dalhousie University explores development trends in the Canadian suburbs. We are studying the trends and perceptions within the suburbs of Calgary as well as within Markham in the suburban area of Toronto, and in Surrey in the suburban region of Vancouver. In the summer of 2007 we assessed municipal policies, visually analysed new developments and conducted interviews with planners, councillors, and developers. More information about this project and reports on the other case study municipalities can be found at:*
<http://suburbs.planning.dal.ca>



Map 1: Markham is located in the Regional Municipality of York, highlighted in red on the suburban fringe of the City of Toronto, in southern Ontario. (Wikimedia Commons 2008)



Map 2: Suburban Municipalities surrounding the City of Toronto in southern Ontario. Markham, outlined in green, is located in the Regional Municipality of York. (Association of Ontario Land Economists 2008)

Development History

Markham was settled in the late 18th century by European agriculturalists. Agricultural industries developed throughout the century and by the turn of the 20th century Markham had a railway station and a number small manufacturing operations. The Town grew modestly and remained a largely agricultural district throughout the early 1900s (See *Figure 1*). The Town experienced a wave of growth after World War II, and again in the early 1970s following the opening of Highway 404, which linked the Town directly to the City of Toronto (Markham 2007a) (See *Figure 2*).

Over the years, expanded and improved road networks connected Toronto and surrounding municipalities, building the commutershed and strengthening the economic hubs in the GTA. Development in Markham through the 1970s and 1980s resembled conventional North American suburban development with separated land uses: low-density residential subdivisions where people lived (See *Figures 3, 4 & 5*), business and industrial parks where people worked (See *Figure 6*) and a large regional mall where everyone shopped (See *Figure 7*). Markham was successful at attracting high tech industries and became home to IBM's head office and its employees.



Figure 1: Main Street Markham circa 1900.
(Main Street Markham 2007)



Figure 2: Separated land uses linked by Highway 404 (Photo by: Mark Mirrlees Online: www.thekingshighway.ca/photos/hwy404photos.htm)



Figure 3: Single detached house built in the late 1970s in Markham
(Joe Perrott)



Figure 4: Typical house built in the 1980s in Markham
(Joe Perrott)

Development History continued...

The adoption of new urbanism principles in the 1990s marked a shift towards higher density housing forms and a desire to integrate land uses. Cornell was the first secondary planning area in Markham planned according to new urbanist principles. In the early 1990s, the Cornell area was provincially owned land and planned for a regional hospital and public affordable housing. Intense opposition to this plan by Markham residents led the town's planning commissioner to create a new master plan for the community with the assistance of Andre Duany's firm DPZ (Freeman 2004). Duany et al. (2000: 199) described their design as "a fairly pure application of the neighbourhood concept" advocated by new urbanist principles. There was no publicly funded or affordable housing in DPZ's master plan. The Cornell lands were sold to a private developer in 1995 and new urbanism set the tone for future planning in Markham.

While certain planning areas in Markham represent new urban ideals more "purely" than others, all of the secondary plans for the new development areas, referred to as the OPA-5 communities, incorporate policies and guidelines that reflect new urbanism principles.

A hierarchical street grid network with back lanes has become the preferred format over the cul-de-sacs and loops associated with conventional development. The new grid is meant to be "transit-ready" so that bus routes can be added as neighbourhoods grow. Because Markham adopted new urbanism into planning policy and its subdivision approval process, it has the largest concentration of new urbanist developments in North America (Steuteville 2002). The influence of new urbanism is evident in the new trends and described in further detail in subsequent sections of this report.



Figure 5: Conventionally designed subdivision of luxury homes creates a streetscape dominated by garages. (Joe Perrott)



Figure 6: Typical office in a Markham business park (monopolycommercialrealty.com)



Figure 7: Markville Mall: the regional shopping centre (Town of Markham 2007b)



Figure 8: Cornell: Markham's first development incorporating new urbanism planning and design principles (Katherine Perrott)

Census Snapshot

Markham's population has grown substantially in the past decades; becoming very culturally diverse. According to the 2006 census, Markham has a population of 262,573. Markham experienced a 25.4% growth rate between 2001 and 2006, which is more than three times higher than the provincial growth rate of 6.6%. Markham is part of the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), which is generally equivalent to what is commonly referred to as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Markham's growth rate is also much higher than the Toronto CMA as a whole at 9.2%.

Markham attracts families with children, and 84.7% of families are married couple families, in comparison with the Toronto CMA with 74.3%. Single parent families only make up 11.8% of census families, which is lower than the Toronto CMA which has 16.9% overall. There are more multiple family households in Markham (7.8%) than in the Toronto CMA (4.2%). This is possibly due to the increase of immigrant households and arrangements that differ from the nuclear family. The median income for all households in 2005 was \$74,889. Married couple households have the highest median income at \$79,937. Markham has higher medium incomes compared with the Toronto CMA and for all Ontario.

Markham has the highest proportion of visible minority residents in all of Canada. 65.4% of the Town's population identify as a visible minority. Within Markham more than half of the visible minority population is of Chinese origin, one-quarter of South Asian origin, and 6% other Asians (*Table 1*).

Minority Identified (Ethnicity)	% of visible minority population	% of total population
Chinese	52.36%	34.24%
South Asian	26.38%	17.25%
Black	4.69%	3.07%
Filipino	4.32%	2.83%
Latin American	0.81 %	0.53%
Southeast Asian	1.15%	0.76%
Arab	1.48%	0.97%
West Asian	2.91%	1.91%
Korean	1.89%	1.24%
Japanese	0.49%	0.33%
Visible minority no identified ethnicity	1.11%	0.73%
Multiple visible minority	2.36%	1.54%

Table 1: Visible minority characteristics in Markham from total visible minority population (n=170,535) (Statistics Canada, 2008d).

“There’s two things in Markham: the numbers growth and then there is the culture shift. They are both interesting.”
Markham Planner Interview M02

“We’re growing more dramatically and more diversely than other parts [of Canada].”
Markham Councillor Interview M04

“Markham is booming constantly... [and] is on a steady growth because of immigration, they seem to be coming to the suburbs.”
Markham Property Agent Interview M07

Census Snapshot continued...

English is the language spoken at home by 55.8% of Markham's population. 39.8% speak non-official languages most often at home. The most commonly spoken non-official languages are Cantonese, Mandarin, Tamil, Urdu, Persian, and Punjabi (Statistics Canada 2006).

Most interview respondents characterized Markham as "extremely", "very" and "hugely" culturally diverse. While respondents recognized the increased number of immigrants and representatives from different ethnic groups, they also noted ethnic clusters throughout the town. The evidence of clustering based on ethnicity raises questions about how we characterize diversity in our municipalities. At what scale do we consider a place diverse? What level of mixing should occur before a municipality can be considered truly diverse?

Markham's booming growth and changes within the cultural milieu are presenting challenges for the planning system. Planners are sensitive to the difficulties in public engagement where many households speak English as a second language and may not feel comfortable participating at public meetings or other traditional means of engaging residents in planning processes. Increased diversity in resident populations is presenting new opportunities and challenges for municipalities across Canada. Markham represents the new diverse Canadian suburb; challenging assumptions about suburbia and pushing planning towards new directions.

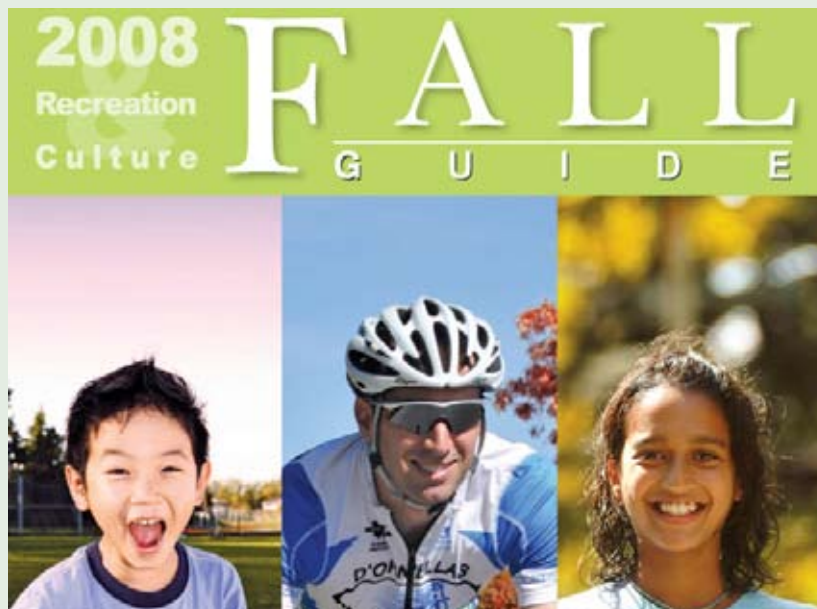


Figure 9: The Town of Markham intentionally incorporates people of different ages, genders and ethnicities in its publications (Town of Markham 2008)

"It's very diverse, and very great...you can travel the world just by crossing the street here."

*Markham Councillor Interview
M04*

"It is hugely diverse. It is probably the most diverse large municipality in Canada."

*Markham Councillor Interview
M05*

"Markham is extremely diverse...It has changed dramatically. It is not like a lot of other suburbs... If someone compared the ethnic diversity between Markham and Collingwood - it's dramatic. It is like night and day."

*Markham Councillor Interview
M06*

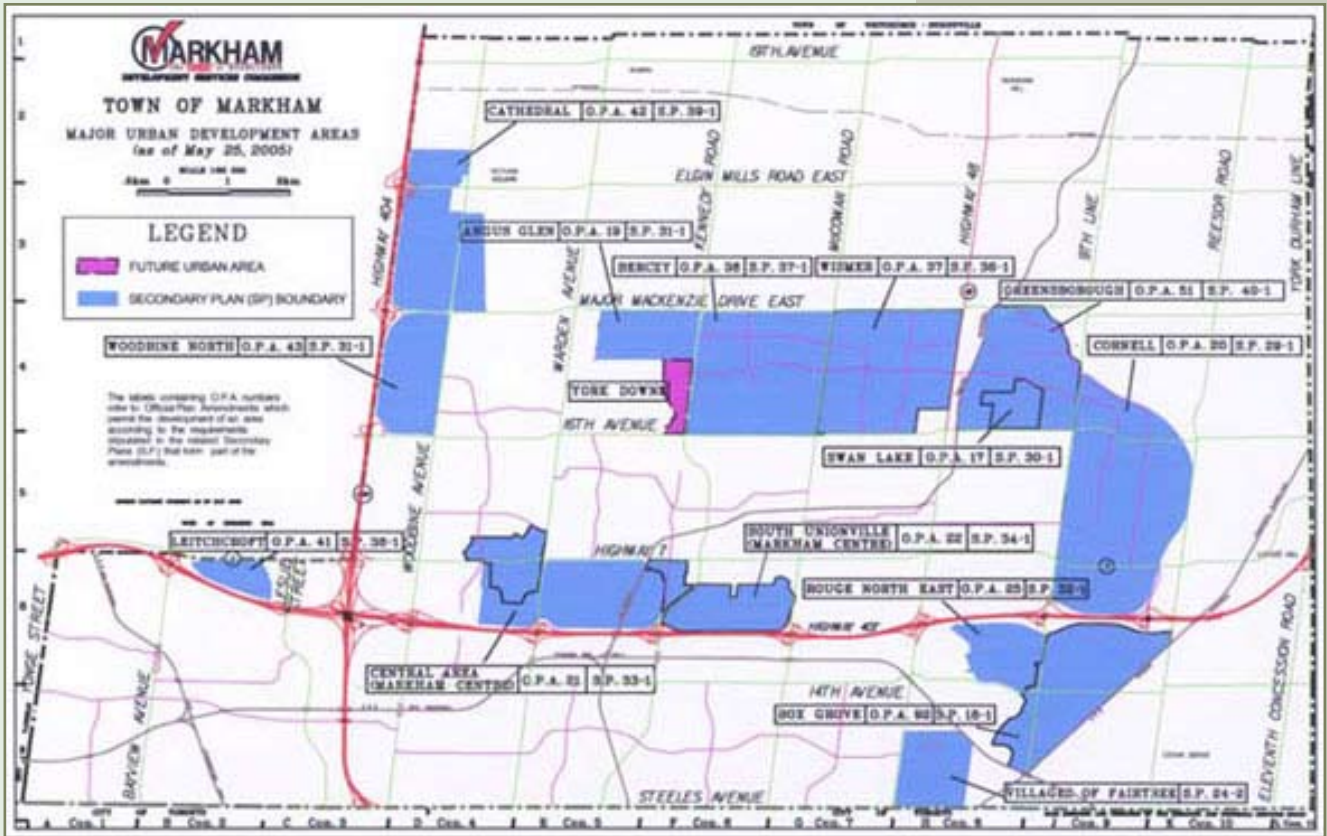
Planning Structure & Development Environment

Markham has an Official Plan and is also affected by the Regional Municipality of York's Official Plan. Additionally, Markham has secondary plans for specific development areas. Since the mid-1990s, Markham and York Region have adapted planning principles and policies to facilitate smart growth and new urbanist developments (Gordon & Vipond 2005; Grant 2006). As mentioned in the history section of this report, it is in these OPA-5 communities where the elements of new urbanism are most manifest (*See Map 3*). Many of these areas are still being built out and it was primarily within these areas that our visual analyses took place.

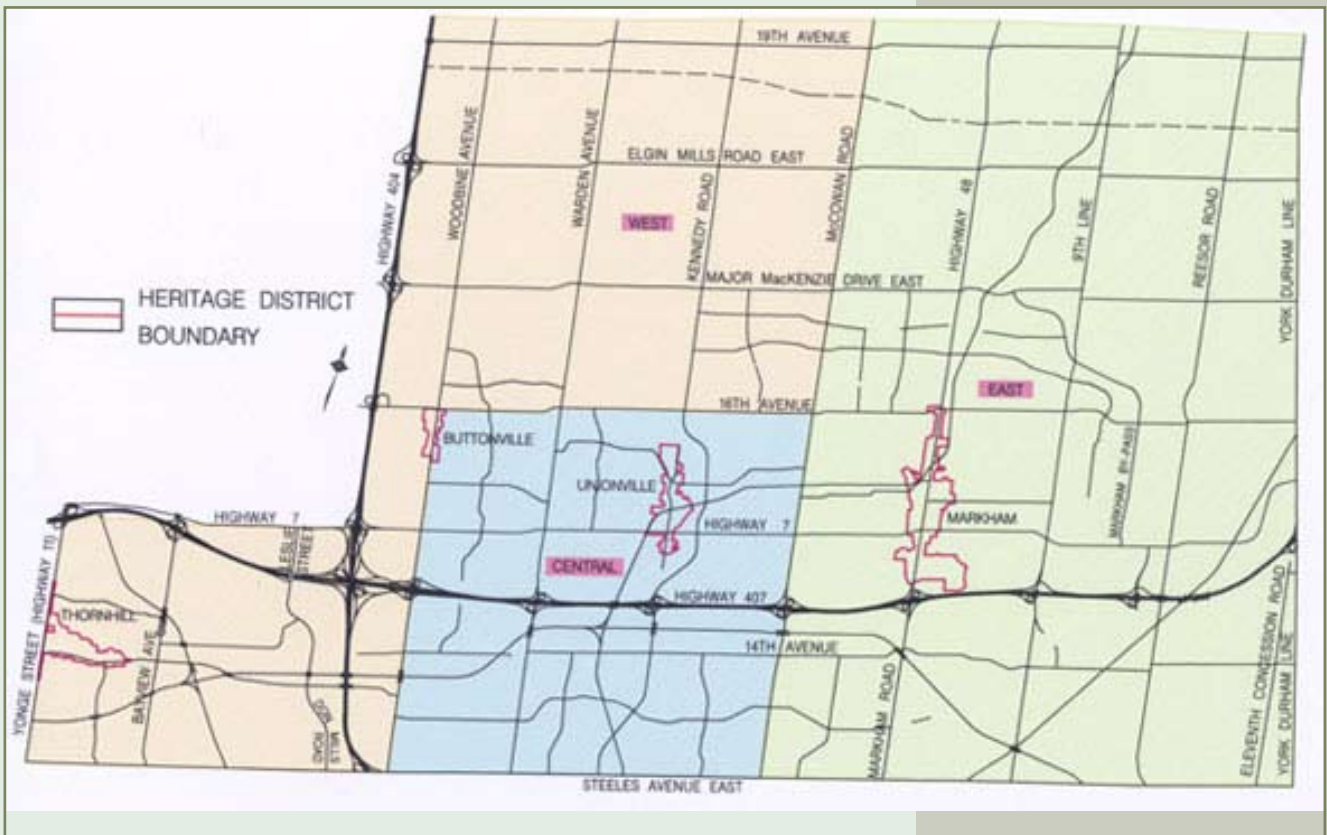
In addition to its main planning policies, Markham has Design Implementation Guidelines, which outline design expectations for new communities and are meant to bring about: “vibrant, pedestrian friendly neighbourhoods built on the foundation of a clearly articulated and thoughtfully rendered public realm” (Town of Markham 2005: 13). The Town approves a set of design guidelines for each new community and the developers work with a Town-approved architect to ensure that the guidelines are being met (Planner M02).

In 1996 Markham's Development Services Commission restructured from separate departments to integrated teams based on geographical development districts (*See Map 4*). Every team has a coordinator and at least one engineer, planner, urban design technician, zoning examiner and assistant. The town has found this to be a more efficient and effective structure for handling development applications and special projects because team members have a specialized and in depth knowledge of each district. Planners characterize Town Council as cohesive and able to implement innovative ideas for suburban intensification (Markham 2007c).

Markham planning staff meet with developers on a monthly basis at what is called the “Developers Roundtable”. These meetings provide a venue to air concerns and work out problems. Markham is a town in high demand for prospective homebuyers who are willing to pay top dollar for high quality houses and neighbourhoods. Developers and builders therefore want to be in the town and are willing to adapt to new planning policies and put in the extra amenities that planners ask for (Planner M02).



Map 3: Urban Development Areas in Markham, areas highlighted in blue are “OPA-5” communities that have all been influenced by new urbanism to some degree (Town of Markham 2008)



Map 4: Development Districts in Markham, a defining element of the Town’s organizational structure (Town of Markham 2008)

Results of the Field Research

The following section overviews the key trends and highlights that emerged from the visual analyses of new developments and interviews with planners, municipal councillors and developers. in the summer of 2007.

Planning & Development Trends

The planning, design and development trends in Markham reveal the influences of smart growth and new urbanism. The trends we observed in the summer of 2007 include: higher density subdivision housing, neotraditional architecture, an emphasis on streetscapes and a street grid, public transit, and mixed use.

Influences of Smart Growth & New Urbanism

The similar smart growth and new urbanism approaches have evolved out of concern about “sprawl” and suburban design that has accompanied a car-dependent lifestyle. Land surrounding Toronto has historically been very productive farmland and over the past couple of decades, there has been growing concern about growth in the area. In 2005 Ontario established a greenbelt to protect farmland and environmentally significant areas surrounding the Greater Toronto Area from extending development. Markham’s shift towards higher density housing and new urbanism design has in part emerged from this new perspective about containing suburban growth.

We basically looked at options for taking that growth. The first option was keep doing what we’re doing, so building on the same model, and that would have resulted in that growth absorbing all of the remaining available farmland in Markham, we would have just built wall-to-wall. That did not go over very well. The second option was saying we’re going to hold the line... That would have resulted in Hwy 7, Yonge Street, and Bayview, and other streets lined with high-rises. A really significant change to the community’s vision of itself, from a suburban bedroom community to really urban. That’s wasn’t obviously the way we wanted to go. So we did the typical Canadian thing, which is we compromised. We said “Fine, we’ll grow out one concession, from 16th Ave to Major MacKenzie and from 9th Line over to Reesor Road. But we will do that growth at a higher density. That was because new urbanist principles we knew if we applied them to that development it would generate good communities at that density... I think our new communities are more attractive than our older communities. They really are. They live really well. The streets feel more compact, it feels more like home.

Markham Planner Interview M02



Figure 10: An old farm house makes way for new housing development along Markham’s ever-expanding borders (Katherine Perrott)



Figure 11: Markham’s new higher density form (Katherine Perrott)

Higher Density Housing

Higher density housing types are becoming increasingly common in Markham. Many new subdivision developments have a mix of housing types. A general pattern that we observed throughout Markham's new subdivisions had higher density townhouses face busy roads such as the new mid-block collector, Bur Oak. Semi-detached houses and duplexes line the next streets into the subdivision with single detached homes furthest in, and often facing parks and other desirable amenities. In several communities (such as Cornell and Angus Glen) however, high density, stately townhouses face the central park.

Live-work units are Markham's latest new housing form. While Markham's zoning policies in higher traffic areas have been permissive of developing ground floor commercial and upper floor residential, they did not see as much of it in the early phases of their new communities. Recently however, Mattamy developed a block of live-work units facing Bur Oak in Cornell. At the time of our visual field surveys about three quarters of the commercial units were occupied. Many of the uses were services, while there were several specialty shops and a convenience store. There are two storeys of residential above these commercial spaces. The commercial uses are considered a success by planning staff, who are now concerned about having enough parking. There is only on-street parking available on Bur Oak for customers and clients of these services and shops, and there is increased pressure on the adjacent streets to serve as parking for the live work units. Furthermore, it may deter customers from shopping at the retail locations if they cannot find convenient, close parking.

Generally speaking, apartment development is less common than townhouses in Markham's new neighbourhoods. A new development area however will reverse that trend. Markham Centre, is Markham's "new downtown". Because of infrastructure servicing challenges, there is a large area of undeveloped land between Markham and Toronto, within close proximity of major highways, retail power centres, city hall, the town theatre, and the regional high school. This has left what one interview respondent described as a "hole in the donut" of low-density development that characterized growth in the past. Currently this land is planned as a high density new centre for the town. The vision for Markham Centre is a mixed-use area where people can "live, work, and play" within a fairly small radius. It is one of the provinces designated growth areas and will be an interesting development to watch as it gets built out over the years and potentially transforms the suburban character of Markham.



Figure 12: Stately townhouse facing the park in Angus Glen (Katherine Perrott)



Figure 13: Live-work units on Bur Oak in Cornell (Katherine Perrott)

Markham Centre is a huge deal... there are things beginning to happen that are exciting to see. It's really exciting, very transit supportive, and very very new urbanist and smart growth oriented. It's going to be special.
Interview M01



Figure 14: High Rise condominium in Markham Centre (Katherine Perrott)

Streetscapes and Grid

New urbanism has resulted in a facelift for Markham's suburban streets. Whereas conventional suburban design in the 1970s and 1980s left the town's streets dominated by garages, the new urban suburban developments have brought the houses closer to the sidewalk and in many cases put the garage and the car on a back lane. Not every new street in Markham's new subdivisions have back lanes; however many developers are incorporating back lanes behind the townhouse units. Cornell, Cathedral and Angus Glen have the most back lanes, which could be due to a greater amount of townhouse and semi-detached housing products in comparison to other areas with more single detached.

Few would disagree that new urbanism has made Markham's streetscapes more visually attractive than conventional suburban housing development. Many interviewees referred positively to the improved streetscapes and visual appeal of the new developments. In other areas of the GTA where land and housing costs are high, a front-attached garage results in a "snout house" where the garage completely dominates the lot frontage and the house completely behind. Incorporating a street grid with detached garages on back lanes means that Markham has ensured a certain degree of aesthetic quality even while lot sizes have decreased and housing density has increased. Increasing the frequency of street trees, has also changed the look of the new urbanism communities; however in Angus Glen the trees have grown so well, in some stretches it is difficult to walk down the sidewalk for all the foliage.

The detached garages are built along with the houses and have the same look and architectural "feel" to them. There were some problems initially as the town expected residents to make sure there were working lightbulbs on their garages so that the lane would be lit. This did not happen however, and the town has had to add street lights to the back lanes, substantially increasing their amenity and maintenance costs. As utility meters were also moved to the backlanes there were also difficulties with services providers accessing and repairing metres.

Markham allows the development of "coach houses", which are secondary suites built on top of the detached garages. The idea is that homeowners can house other family members there or rent them as apartments to supplement their income. While some people have taken advantage of this allowance, they are not common. Furthermore, it creates a hierarchy of housing ownership versus rental at a very fine grain that may function to further disadvantage and stigmatize coach house occupants.



Figure 15: New urbanism's back lanes allow for attractive house facades without garages, creating desirable streetscapes (Katherine Perrott)

It's the streetscape. I mean they're beautiful. It's the whole – takes the emphasis off the car and puts it where it should be, on the people. The sidewalks are walkable, comfortable, you don't have to worry about people backing out of their driveways, there's eyes on the street, so it's a safe feel. You feel like you're in a safer environment, and just it's – the streetscapes are lovely.
Markham Planner Interview M08



Figure 16: Coach House in Cornell (Katherine Perrott)

Neotraditional Architecture and Design

New urbanism is also interconnected with “neotraditional” architecture and urban design, which select elements from past eras and incorporate them into new housing and neighbourhood layout. In Markham, this has meant additional gingerbread and details on the housing facades, and sometimes some unexpected combinations of architectural features. Front porches have been a significant symbol of traditional neighbourhood design that new urbanism proponents champion. Front porches are not as prevalent as might be expected in a “pure” new urbanism community. The front porches that are built are often too small to fit more than a chair – turned on an angle, which makes them functionally obsolete, and merely symbolic decoration. All homeowners agree to the architectural controls of the neighbourhood, which restricts the renovations and alterations they can do to their houses in order to preserve a certain look.

New houses of all types have been brought much closer to the sidewalk in Markham’s new urbanism developments than in conventional developments. In some cases, the setback is only about 1”. Interviewees revealed that there were some problems getting the setbacks right in some developments, resulting in some front steps encroaching on municipal property.

The design guidelines are very useful and we were one of the first communities to use what we call architectural control, which is a very effective tool... You need that kind of experience and also the fact that that developer knows that if he tries to work around the architect that it’s not going to work. That’s really made a difference and again most things are win-win. We understand their interests.

Markham Planner Interview M02

Certainly Cornell is our purest expression of new urbanism. Fully lane-based, organized around neighbourhood centres, a centre and edge to the neighbourhood, mixed-use downtown, the spine, the pull park system, everything.

Markham Planner Interview M02



Figure 17: Architectural design referencing numerous past eras and styles (Katherine Perrott)



Figure 18: Neo-traditional architecture in Cornell (Katherine Perrott)

Traffic a Challenge, Transit an Opportunity

Traffic is a significant concern in Markham. There are several main roads that are incredibly backed up during commuting hours. There is bus service provided by the York Region, however it has not extended to all of the new communities yet. A GO train for residents commuting outside the town is also available and provides a good opportunity to create hubs around transit stations. Bringing in the grid street layout, as opposed to a series of collectors and cul-de-sacs, in their new urban communities is meant to facilitate the extension of public transit services in the future. One main new mid-block collector, Bur Oak, run through all of the OPA-5 communities and is becoming an important street for funnelling traffic as well as a site for retail, services, live-work units and high-density townhouses.

I like to call it transit ready. The whole package isn't there... communities like Cornell and all the other new communities in Markham, like Markham Centre that I'm working on now, are going to be in a very good position because people are going to be able to walk out their front door, have that nice little walk, a block or two short blocks to the bus stop.
Interview M02



Figure 19: Transit extended along the new mid-block collector, Bur Oak (Katherine Perrott)

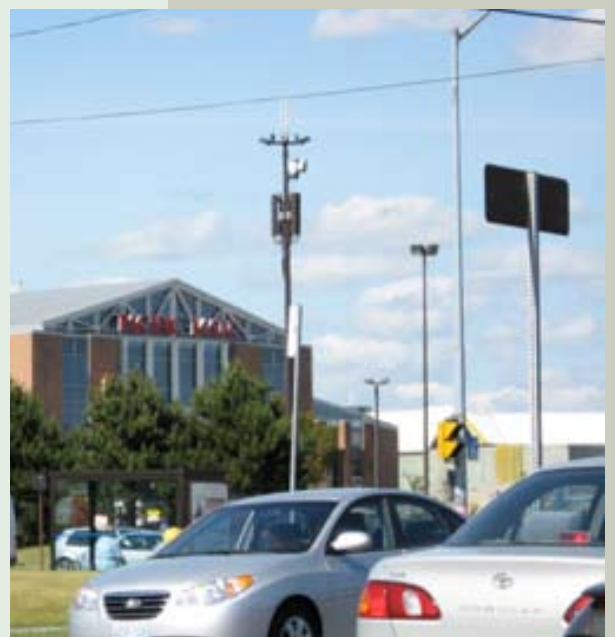


Figure 20: Traffic is a concern on Markham's highways (Katherine Perrott)



Figure 21: Pedestrian pathway through a condominium development (Katherine Perrott)



Figure 22: New bike lanes in Markham (Katherine Perrott)

Challenges in Implementing a More Dense Built Form

Several challenges to developing the “new urbanism way” have been mentioned above. Convincing developers and builders that new urbanism was a financially feasible and marketable way to build Markham was a challenge initially. Poor building quality with the first phase of houses in Cornell hurt the town’s efforts to champion new urbanism. However, with assistance from town staff and new building companies, Cornell’s early phases were completed and became a market success. First time homebuyers were especially drawn to Cornell in the early phases, because it offered attractive townhouses and an affordable option. Now Cornell is a desired neighbourhood with high house prices. Once the first few new urbanism communities proved to be financially successful other developers and builders were willing to follow the town’s policies for higher density and design guidelines. Elements of new urbanism can now be seen in all of Markham’s new communities, whether it is the incorporation of back lanes, small setbacks or front porches.

One of the indicators that Cornell is very successful is that it’s no longer at all an affordable place to live.

Markham Urban Designer Interview M01

At first they had to buy into the concept and when they hit a little bump in the road they had to keep buying in and convincing themselves “We’re going to work our way through this.”... The live-work areas, the mixed use that we started on, at first there was push-back “Well, you’ve got to be kidding” They built some [snaps fingers], they sold, they built some more [snaps fingers], they’re now designing those in their other areas
Markham Councillor Interview M04



Figure 23: Elements of new urbanism, such as front porches are emphasized as selling features in many new Markham subdivisions (Katherine Perrott)



Figure 24: A detached house in Markham’s new urbanist communities costs over \$500,000 (Katherine Perrott)



Figure 25: A semi-detached house in one of Markham’s new urbanist communities is over \$300,000 (Katherine Perrott)



Figure 26: A townhouse in one of Markham’s communities selling for over \$500,000 (Katherine Perrott)

Challenges in Implementing a More Dense Built Form continued

Snow removal was another initial challenge in the early stages of the new urbanism communities. The dense design of subdivision lots in Cornell meant that many small open spaces or parkettes that were located in conventional subdivisions were replaced with one large centralized park. Winter demonstrated however that those parkettes were also used as places to pile snow, and without them snow has to be trucked off site at significant cost.

It seemed like a good idea until the first snow came and then we realized that “No, those parkettes were where we were supposed to pile the snow out of the back lanes because there’s no place to plough it. You can’t plough it, you have to go in with a front-end loader and dump it some place, so now we’re dumping it in trucks and driving it away because we let those little lots, those little areas for piling snow be used as a house. It was good planning, but it’s such a big thing that you don’t realize it until you’ve already done it. You say “How could we be so stupid?”
Markham Councillor Interview M04



Figure 27: Large park in Cornell replaced smaller parkettes, removing the location for snow piling (Katherine Perrott)



Figure 28: Plaza with the backs of the stores facing the street (Katherine Perrott)

It isn’t working yet because it isn’t all built, so there are growing pains
Markham Councillor Interview M04

Did you see the plaza up at Bur Oak, south of Angus Glen?... The fronts are supposed to be on the streets... now it’s the backs on the streets, so all you see are the backs of these stores, because the whole concept was that the front of the stores are on the streets so you walk to them, that was the concept. Go look at that plaza. You must, because it’s a dog’s breakfast. Because what’s happened is everyone realizes that my front has got to be where the parking is so their fronts are on the backside, where the parking is, so now the backs of the stores are all facing the streets, so it looks awful.
Markham Developer Interview M07

Challenges Remain in Achieving Mixed Use

Markham has taken risks in trying to make their town a more “liveable” place. This approach has been a rocky road at times and there are still significant challenges in mixing retail with residential, let alone mixing offices or industry into or closer to residential areas. Consumer preferences for privacy, residential neighbourhoods separate from workplaces, large lots and automobile assisted convenience shopping play a huge role in shaping the form of development in the suburban regions of Toronto and will continue to challenge Markham as it seeks new urban development.

The Private Resort Comes Home

Another significant development trend in Markham over the past couple of decades has been the increase in private development. Swan Lake is a seniors’ lifestyle gated community, which started development during the 1990s, and still has being built out now. Many planners feel uncomfortable about Swan Lake because it represents an insular way of living that runs contrary to the neighbourliness they strive to promote in their ideal new urbanism communities. Swan Lake is a resort style development with many private amenities and recreation facilities only open to residents. A gate and security guard monitors the entrance and controls access to the neighbourhood. Some of the interviewees compared gated communities to high-rise condominium buildings; they also have controlled access and private facilities. In that sense, they did not think that gated communities were much to worry about since it is a form that has been around for a long time. Most of the concern about gated communities was that they were larger, and therefore privatized more space.



Figure 29: & 30: Advertisements for Swan Lake Seniors Gated Community (Katherine Perrott)

*It's been a bit of a ride to keep it from reverting back to conventional. What's happened in the interim is now the model has proved itself, and its proven itself to be really successful in the market and a money-maker for the developer. A lot of them are now seeing that it's not so bad.
Markham Planner Interview M02*

*It's the ultimate segregation. Our interaction with the Swan Lake community, with the residents of Swan Lake, just confirms everything you hear about segregation. I think the gates and the walls actually keep people in, not people out... there's a culture there that gets isolated. I don't think it's all that healthy.
Markham Planner Interview M02*

*In some ways it's an American culture. The United States is full of gated communities. It seems to be a reaction to fear... a completely unwarranted reaction to fear, we're safe than we've ever been if you really look at crime statistics, yet people fear crime more than they ever have.
Markham Planner Interview M02*

*I don't understand it myself. In Swan Lake's case I think the gated aspect is more – it's almost symbolic, it's a four-foot fence around that community, I mean anybody, you know, 14 years or older can just hop that fence without any difficulties, so I really don't believe there are any benefits to living in a gated community – real benefits – only that it provides some people with a sense of security.
Markham Urban Designer Interview M01*

The Private Resort Comes Home continued

Compared to Calgary and Surrey, Markham has been successful at making sure that privately maintained roads within non-gated, yet private condominium townhouse developments still “feel public”. They do this by ensuring that private roads are similar in width to public roads, have sidewalks and connect to the main public roads. They also try to ensure that parks and courtyards within the townhouse condominiums are not gated off from public access points. Markham does have a couple of extreme examples of privatized development, such as Swan Lake and some condominium developments. However, compared to other case study cities, Markham has maintained the public realm substantially despite increasing trends towards privatization, condominium type ownership and property management.



Figure 31: The gatehouse at one of Markham's townhouse condominium developments (Katherine Perrott)



Figure 32: A no entry sign in one of Markham's townhouse condominium developments (Katherine Perrott)

I obviously prefer a new urbanist community or any community to a gated community because – a gated community implies exclusivity ... Somehow it implies “you know what, we’re better than you and we don’t want you in here” and that’s not good community building. It’s just in my mind not good planning, that you want. Yes you want a variety of house forms and tenures in your community, but you want everybody open, and mixing together and everything accessible. Markham Planner Interview M08

You know the condominium developments you could argue that they are sort of on their own a small gated community, but even with those we’ve worked to make sure that their courtyards and open space are public, or at least publicly accessible. Markham Planner Interview M08

Markham: City or Suburb?

Markham does in many ways function as a suburb of Toronto. However, changing patterns of economic development and growing inter-dependency between the central city and all of its suburban municipalities are complicating traditional understandings of city and suburb. Journalists in the GTA have mused that more people seem to commute into the suburbs, rather than commute into the city. A more formalized study would be needed to demonstrate whether or not this is actually the case with Markham residents. The predominance of business and industrial parks in Markham and adjacent suburban municipalities would indicate that there is certainly merit to that observation.

The definition of “suburb” is becoming less clear as the relationship between suburban municipalities and the city becomes more complicated. Suburbia, as a cultural concept, has taken a beating every since their proliferation in the post war era. Cookie-cutter repetition in housing design, reliance on the personal automobile, and pressure on families to be Leave it to Beaver perfect has been scorned in pop music, and films like Pleasantville, and American Beauty. One respondent was almost offended that we were interested in Markham in its suburban context. Markham may indeed prove to be more of a city over time, particularly if Markham Centre is successful. What we are certain to see is an increase in density throughout the entire Greater Toronto Area commutershed, and new forms of economic, political and social relationships that emerge in the process. As Markham does become a larger municipality it will need to grapple with issues of housing affordability. Presently, Markham is out of reach for man potential homeowners and renters. If Markham is to have the balanced and diverse economy and social make up of a city, it will need to make housing affordability a priority. Social justice and fairness will also become increasingly important issues as they seek to implement affordability solutions that maintain a high quality of life for all residents.

Well I guess the only other thing I want you to know [laughs] is I don't consider Markham a suburb. I guess we are, but I like to think that we are city unto our own and building out as a city. I live in Scarborough and I would say yes, Scarborough is a suburb of Toronto, but then I guess Markham is not a heck of a lot different. I've just never thought of us as a suburb, that was only thing when you said that I thought, "well why is she talking to me, we're not a suburb," but I guess we are in the larger scheme of things. We'll come into our own in the next decade, and I don't think anyone could call us a suburb anymore. It takes a while getting there.

Markham Planner Interview M08



Figure 33: High rise in Markham Centre - Markham's new urban form? (Katherine Perrott)



Figure 34: Single Detached House in Cornell - Suburban new urbanism? (Katherine Perrott)

Conclusion

Current development trends in Markham clearly demonstrate the influence of new urbanism and smart growth. Markham has been successful in creating attractive suburbs and taking risks to push new forms of growth that are believed to be more sustainable. Their vision however, is proving difficult to implement in its entirety. Many people continue to favour peaceful, quiet, and low-traffic residential neighbourhoods, even if it means driving to work or the malls. In the current economic, political and cultural contexts that shape how people live, shop, work and play, Markham has significant challenges to face. It is certainly a municipality to watch over the years to see how it evolves, and how goals and policies will change to adapt to the ever changing contexts in which we plan Canadian suburbs.

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