

GREATER TORONTO



At left, the proposed rendering of Vaughan's new downtown, which will begin with condo community Expo City, including the 37-storey Expo-1, right.

Condo towers kickstart downtown above Toronto

Expo City development, Spadina subway extension spurring plans to create new core for Vaughan

PATTY WINSA
URBAN AFFAIRS REPORTER

Vaughan is a city without a downtown, but on Wednesday, its mayor will announce that a development deal has been struck to create one.

Mayor Maurizio Bevilacqua will unveil plans for a five-condo residential development just east of Jane St. on Highway 7, in the heart of what is envisioned as the city's new metropolitan centre.

The development is the first to be built as part of Vaughan's long-range master plan to transform 120 hectares of land along Highway 7 into a new mixed-use urban hub, formally referred to as the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.

After years of struggling to develop the area, the city is taking its first steps forward, largely due to the 8.6-kilometre Spadina subway extension, which will end here when it's finished in 2015.

"I think this is probably the first of a long number of redevelopment and intensification projects you're going to see there over the next 10 years," says urban planner Pino

DiMascio, who helped Vaughan create its new official plan, adopted by council in 2010.

"Once the subway comes, it will be like Sheppard in North York, where you see the continual redevelopment of buildings that are in line with subway densities," says DiMascio, a partner in Urban Strategies Inc.

Vaughan is already one of Canada's fastest-growing cities, and its population is expected to reach 420,000 by 2030. Plans for the new downtown call for the creation of 12,000 residential units and 11,500 jobs by 2031.

But it's one of the few areas identified for intensification by the city, which has long been criticized for encouraging urban sprawl.

A non-profit environmental group called Sustainable Vaughan has gone to the Ontario Municipal Board to appeal the city's plans to expand north on either side of Highway 400 near Teston Rd. to adapt to population growth.

"We knew that in the official plan there was enough population in the

Vaughan Metropolitan Centre



(existing) boundary because of things like the subway," said Sony Rai, a group member who lives in Woodbridge.

But DiMascio says the new centre is one of the few areas in Vaughan that has a real chance to intensify.

"Because there isn't an immediate surrounding residential community, what you don't get is a lot of the difficulty when you take on projects where there are residents who live around," says DiMascio. "Especially people who just recently bought a house in the suburbs who weren't expecting intensification."

Vaughan has planned to trans-

form this area, close to Highways 400 and 407, for 20 years. Originally, the idea was to build a corporate business centre. But after Metrolinx proposed extending the Spadina subway to Vaughan — a plan endorsed by Toronto city council in 2009 — Vaughan took the opportunity to create a secondary plan that called for a highrise mixed-use community, mostly residential.

"With the subway coming on line now, it made sense to push forward," said developer Peter Cortellucci, vice-president of the Cortel Group, which owns the land and had been working with the city for 15 years.

The 37-storey building — called Expo-1 and the first part of Expo City — will be finished by 2014 and will be minutes away from the northern terminus of the Spadina subway extension. Amenities include shops, trails and parks.

"This is the first time in the history of the GTA that a TTC subway has crossed the Toronto border," says Bevilacqua. It "speaks to the recognition that our downtown core is going to be the heartbeat of York Region. And it's very important from an infrastructure point of view."

Stranger's gift brings couple joy



JOE FIORITO

Aimé Lascelles stared at his new computer, fresh out of the box and firing up for the first time. His wife Jean smiled at him as she chewed a peppermint patty.

The computer? A gift from Ben Elling and several of his friends. The peppermint patties? A gift from Street Health nurse Anne Marie Batten.

The background?

Aimé and Jean live in community housing near Sherbourne and Dundas. They are of a certain age, and Jean has been ill, and they both need a bit of help to live on their own.

We met one day when Anne Marie took me with her on her rounds. She looks in on Aimé and Jean, checks their meds, tends to some of their needs.

During that visit, Aimé told me that he and Jean had had a problem with bedbugs, and they'd recently been forced to move, and during the move some of their possessions went missing, including a couple of photo albums and Aimé's computer.

Enter Ben.

He read about what happened to the computer and sent me a note. He wanted to help. We talked.

Ben said: "There are big problems and you think, 'What can I do?' You feel helpless. But this was a problem I could wrap my head around."

He decided to get a new computer for Aimé.

"There's an online fundraising tool. I figured I could leverage the power of my friends. I posted a notice. Within a few hours I had a couple of donations. In the end, I had 18 donations, amounts from a few dollars to \$50. I've never done this before.

"The money came from friends, from complete strangers, the friend of a friend in Texas, people on Twitter."

He collected enough money for a little personal computer.