

George Street PS site secured by Town for parkland, redevelopment

George Street Public School, and its surrounding property, have been secured by the Town of Aurora for parkland and redevelopment.

The Town announced the \$10,722,000 million, four-acre purchase, which will be funded through the Town of Aurora's Parkland Reserves, on April 11. The latest purchase comes just months after the Town acquired a further 16-acre site in Aurora's west end, just north of the Woodhaven subdivision, for \$3.23 million, funded by the same reserve.

Both purchases will go towards helping Aurora address a significant deficit in parkland to serve current and future population.

“The Town of Aurora is taking proactive steps to address its parkland deficit, ensuring that residents have ample green spaces to enjoy as the community continues to grow,” said the Town in a statement. “The Town recently purchased two properties; a 16-acre property on the west side of Yonge Street, just north of Woodhaven in December, 2023 and most recently, the Town acquired an approximately four-acre property on George Street from the York Region District School Board.

“The combined 20 acres were purchased for \$13,892,000 and funded through Parkland Reserve. Residents will soon have the opportunity to provide input into the development of park spaces in both locations, ensuring that it aligns with the needs and preferences of the community.”

In addition to reaching parkland targets, Mayor Tom Mrakas said the purchases will both protect mature trees and foster new plantings in Aurora's natural heritage systems and greenspaces. It is also, he said, “a significant step forward in our efforts to expand parkland in Aurora in a financially-responsible way.”

“I envision this property not only as a new 2.7-acre park for Ward 2 residents but also as an opportunity for compatible development along George Street on the remaining 1 acre,” said Mayor Mrakas in a statement. “This approach will enable the municipality to recoup funds, maximizing the value of taxpayers' dollars while enriching our community. Our next steps involve initiating the removal of the existing school building by Fall 2024, accompanied by a comprehensive public engagement initiative. This will include public planning meetings for zoning changes, ensuring that residents' needs and preferences are incorporated into the design.”

Public participation, he added, will be “crucial” in “enhancing the neighbourhood.”

The Auroran has asked the Town what a municipal role might be in guiding development on the remaining acre, including ensuring affordable housing units for the community.

In regards to park uses, Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland said residents within the ward have expressed an interest in parkland use children, their pets and pickleball, a sport which is growing by leaps and bounds within the community.

“Over the last four years there is a significant population of local residents in Ward 2 who are part of a dog owners group called, D.O.G., who would like to ‘walk’ to an enclosed open space to allow their pet to run around in a safe environment with fellow neighbours,” she said. “Our Parks and Recreation Master Plan has identified a severe deficit of pet exercise areas.

“With pickleball coming in as the number one growing sport, this has also been a hot topic of discussion. However, we are planning to expand this at Fleury Park by at least six courts. Some like the idea of an upgraded local playground. I believe it would be beneficial to host a Ward 2 community town hall to receive public consultation to best meet the needs of the community. I look forward to reaching out to the residents and hearing their thoughts.”

George Street Public School served the community from 1957 until its closure in 2015, when it served students in Kindergarten

through Grade 3. Upon closure, its student community was merged with Aurora Senior Public School as the rebranded Wellington Public School, which continues to serve students in Kindergarten through Grade 8.

Since its closure, the building has continued to see educational uses in various capacities.

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