

Whitby has green dreams for work-at-home project



Ecoplace Community in Whitby is depicted in this artists' rendition. The site will be home to 14,000 and employ 10,000 once it's completed in 10 years.

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It's big. Really big. The biggest development in Durham Region and one of the largest in Ontario. By the time Ecoplace Community by the Lake is completed, it's expected to provide homes for 14,000 and jobs for 10,000. That's huge for Whitby, says Mayor Pat Perkins.

"It's exactly what we've been looking for – an opportunity for living and working in one place." As the region's fastest-growing municipality, Whitby has homes but not jobs for new residents, Perkins explains.

"People are spending two to three hours on the highway every day" to get to work in Toronto. "The highlight of this development is the employment opportunities for residents." She stands on the 35-hectare swath of land north of Victoria St. in the southwest corner of Whitby where the development will be built. It's not much to look at now – empty fields dotted with a few small poplars; woods to the west, Sobeys and Highway 401 to the north.

It also has to go through the process of approvals and input from various levels of government. But Perkins can already envision phase one of the project, expected to be completed within two years. Preliminary plans for the first phase include a 20-storey office tower, 700 units in three condominium highrises and retail stores.

The entire development, to be built in four phases over about 10 years, will include a hotel, convention centre and multiple residential and commercial buildings.

"It gives us the opportunity to develop this parcel of land in exactly the way it's being prescribed by the province – to intensify and put in mixed-use with employment opportunities as well," says Perkins.

One of the best features is its location, she says. Less than two kilometres north of Lake Ontario, as the seagull flies, it's within walking distance of the GO station, Iroquois Park Sports Centre, the waterfront trail and Lynde Shores Conservation Area.

Residents on the west side will have ducks and swans for neighbours, Perkins says.

The development will not only have little environmental impact, she notes, but it will "take people out of their cars and help revitalize the waterfront."

"It's an opportunity you only get once in a very long time," she says of the project and partnership with Saverio Montemarano and Mario Cortellucci of Nordeagle Developments Inc.

"We want to set a new standard for a sustainable neighbourhood. ... We believe it's important for residents to feel as proud about how they live as where they live," says Montemarano.

Ecoplace is so named for its environmentally healthy features. The LEED buildings will be designed for high efficiency and will include terraces with trees and gardens, says Montemarano.

And with shops and amenities close at hand, "you almost don't need a car."

"You can wake up in the morning, take your child to daycare right there, get your coffee and walk to public transit."

Montemarano, whose other company, Melody Homes, has built communities all over Ontario, including Peterborough and Barrie, is as excited as Perkins. "It will be the place to be east of Toronto."

Initial response indicates others think so, too.

"The whole community supports it. We're hearing 'how soon can you do it?' " says Montemarano, who has "a host of major corporations ready to move in."

Perkins already has her shovel ready for the groundbreaking.

