

# FROM THE DESK OF COUNCILLOR JAMES PASTERNAK

June 4, 2025

Dear Friends,

## **Re: Moving forward with the William Baker Seniors Village and Community**

I wanted to write you directly to better highlight where we are at and where can go with the William Baker development application subject to today's debate. Naturally, we all owe active community members like yourself a great deal of thanks for hours of contribution to the William Baker planning process. It has been a long journey for all of us and I don't want to lose the gains we have made.

In a reading of the staff report and conversations with the applicant (Canada Lands) and City of Toronto Planning Staff it is my view that the promises and commitments made over the years are and can be realized based on the conditions in this application. And the need is urgent. For the first time in history, there are now more Torontonians over the age of 65 than children 15 and below. According to the Toronto Seniors Strategy, by 2031 one quarter of the City's population will be over the age of 60.

At the same time, there is much work to do. This report puts a great onus on me and the community to shape the Seniors Village we are all seeking. A Seniors Village is not just bricks and mortar. It is trails, parks, recreational facilities, support services, affordability and active living. The nuts and bolts of going forward is here in the staff report before us. That being said, it's what we make of these divergent parts will make all the difference in the world. Much work remains and community building will be shaped and influenced by local residents.

As we all know countless hours of community work have been invested into developing the William Baker/Arbo development application. I owe a great deal of thanks to the York Centre Seniors' Collaboration Action Plan and the Downsview Lands Voice groups. Through strong community advocacy this parcel of land must be more than a condominium development. It must be a seniors-friendly, liveable, green and healthy community that can fit in with the vision for Downsview and surrounding established neighbourhoods. It must provide for a complete seniors and multi generational community with the supports and urban design that make it healthy and liveable. We don't know who will be living there in the future, but it is our responsibility to make sure it is a wonderful place to retire, start a family, or be an individual's first home. This will be a green, pedestrian friendly community that we must continue to influence and shape into a Seniors Village and community for all.

## FROM THE DESK OF COUNCILLOR JAMES PASTERNAK

I am writing to identify the pillars in the current staff report that are vital to establishing a Seniors Village and liveable and healthy community:

**Affordable housing.** Affordability is the essential cornerstone to a Seniors Village. Most seniors are on fixed incomes under the Canadian Pension and Old Age Security. Some may receive other benefits and other sources of income. Zoning By-law 1082-2022 secured housing equal to the greater of 220 units or 20% of the total residential units would be delivered as affordable units. Of these, at least 50% will be provided as affordable rental housing units. The proposed increase in the number of total residential units will result in a net increase in affordable housing units, with up to 340 affordable units being provided in total.

**Parkland dedication, park animation and senior friendly features.** Active living is a key value in the Toronto Seniors Strategy. No seniors village is complete without close proximity and nearby parkland and accessible trails. This is in addition to the on site historical woodlot which has been enjoyed for generations, which will be conveyed to the City. The conveyed parkland will be 15,476 square metres in Phase 1, Block 6 is proposed to be 4,467 and Block 23A will be 11,009 square meters. The design of the parks is a separate and intensive process. What goes into the parkland has not been decided. It is up to us. We will work so that these parks are senior-friendly and open to all. To be decided are the design features. Looking ahead the desire is to have accessible seating, a seniors' exercise track, a gathering space with a pergola, built in activities such as weather resistant table games, picnic tables and possibly shuffle board and Bocci. Pathways must follow all accessible requirements, including lighting and navigational grades. While parkland size is decided in this report, there are years of consultation ahead to ensure the parks meet the requirement of a seniors village.

**Accessible pedestrian crossing from William Baker to the Downsview Lands and Downsview subway Station.** This staff report requires the land owner to either construct a "new accessible public pedestrian and cycling bridge" or rehabilitate the existing bridge to fully accessible standards. This will be a vital and safe link between the Seniors Village and the Downsview Lands and the fully accessible Downsview Park and GO stations.

**Access to nearby Transit.** Seniors villages cannot function without easy access to affordable transit. The William Baker parcel is situated on two main bus routes, one running North and South on Keele Street and the other operating East and West along Sheppard Avenue. In addition, the Downsview Park subway and GO Stations, are within walking distance from William Baker across what will be a seniors friendly fully accessible pedestrian bridge. The subway station currently has a series of elevators and escalators and meets standards under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

## FROM THE DESK OF COUNCILLOR JAMES PASTERNAK

**Downsview Community Centre and Seniors programming.** Getting the Downsview Community centre off the ground has been a long journey. Since 1999 there have been numerous attempts to fund and build what will be the programming cornerstone of the William Baker Seniors Village. The City of Toronto recreation capital program has designated the Downsview Community Recreation Centre a capital priority. It is estimated that the cost of building the DCRC will cost in excess of \$100 million. Funds are pending from both the federal and provincial governments. Section 37 funds from the William Baker application are vital to move the project forward. These funds cannot be fully secured until the application moves forward. If all goes according to plan, design work should commence soon and ground should be broken in 2026.

The Downsview Community Recreation Centre is steps from the William Baker lands and provides a remarkable opportunity to provide extensive seniors programming and support services.

Naturally, extensive community input and consultation is needed to ensure the community centre meets the needs of the Seniors Village and the wider community. We will be consulting with the community starting this year. Most important, for active living and seniors engagement, the centre must have programming and multi purpose spaces for a wide range of activities and events. While City programming can play an important role, studies show that local groups of all ages like to organize their own activities and celebrations. The Aquatic Centre, for example, can provide aquafit among a wide range of other active living offerings. Third party groups delivering seniors programming in other parts of the city include Sunshine Centre for Seniors, Living Assistance Services and Family Service Toronto, among others. These are among the groups who might partner on the appropriate location for 465 square metres of community agency space for not-for-profits required in the in Downsview Secondary Plan.

**Commercial space for potential support services for seniors.** The application comes with a commitment of 5,000 square meters of commercial space, notably for retail. Such space could be occupied by a pharmacy, walk in clinic or other retail supports for residents of the development. While no guarantees can be made on what businesses will occupy this space, the opportunity exists that it will be businesses that support the local demographic.

## FROM THE DESK OF COUNCILLOR JAMES PASTERNAK

**A new library for Downsview.** Toronto has a treasured network of over 100 library branches across the city. A neighbourhood Library is multi generational with residents of all ages enjoying books, magazines, and other reading materials as well as digital information and e-books. The library is a place for relaxation, enjoyment, learning and fun. It has programming, presentations, speakers and the availability of multi purpose rooms. While the location has not been determined, it is believed that this would sit at the north end of the Downsview lands, in walking proximity to the William Baker neighbourhood. While not in the current application, this library is supported under the Downsview Secondary Plan.

I hope you will take these matters under consideration. Look at this stage of developing the William Baker lands as a start. This report is a framework so the community can shape the future. This positive staff report is giving us the statutory tools we need to build a successful and inspiring community. The work is only beginning. We look forward to working together to implement the Downsview Community Development Plan and the Downsview Secondary Plan. Very few emerging neighbourhoods will have this amount of affordable units, new parks and green space, walkability to high level public transit and the ability to access a new state of the art community centre with opportunities for seniors programming and gathering space. The future of the parks, the community centre programing and the very nature of the Seniors Village will be shaped by residents in surrounding neighbourhoods in the coming years.

Sincerely,

James Pasternak  
Councillor, Ward 6