

TRANSFORMING A GOLF COURSE

In the case of a golf course, the community master plan has to be innovative

By Cheryl Shindruk, Geranium



According to Golf Canada, The PGA of Canada and the National Golf Foundation in their report entitled “Golf Facilities in Canada 2017,” there are 805 golf courses in Ontario. Declining interest in the sport over the past few years translates to fierce competition among these clubs to attract golfers. In some cases, including within the Greater Toronto Area, golf course owners have had to decide whether it makes more sense to continue operating or sell their properties. When circumstances allow, these lands make great new home communities, as they present an opportunity to build in an already established area.

An example of golf course redevelopment is Allegro, Geranium’s new neighbourhood on Golf Links Drive in Aurora, formerly the Highland Gate Golf Club, which became available for redevelopment. Many circumstances worked in favour of development. The golf course lies within the built-up area of the Town of Aurora’s urban boundaries, an area where the provincial and municipal governments are directing growth. The built-up areas are where provincial policy encourages infill and intensification.

From a planning and development perspective, the course had similar characteristics to many infill sites. Sometimes, existing owners, after many years of enjoying the views to open green space behind their homes, consider the golf course to be lands for

public use, yet residents must remember that these courses are private lands. In this type of situation, it’s important that the land developer liaise with the existing neighbours and explain carefully the development approach.

To inspire harmonious interaction, we conducted a very extensive communications process that involved one-on-one discussions with more than 400 households, as well as group meetings. First and foremost, we wanted to let them know that we are taking extensive steps to protect – and enhance – the natural components of the property. We have set aside nearly

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half of the re-envisioned Allegro land as public open green space with an extensive system of off-street trails that connect to the Oak Ridges Trail System. Where these public open green space areas were formerly private, once the site is developed, they will be placed in public ownership.

We also pointed out that in other golf course transformations of this type, the impact on existing homes from a resale perspective has been positive. Toward

this goal, Geranium has designed the community and the homes to maintain the character and cachet of their prestigious surroundings. Our Allegro community will introduce a new vitality to this neighbourhood, with a combination of single-family detached homes on 51- and 61-foot lots and, later on, a seven-storey condominium building closer to Yonge Street, near to transit and existing condos and shops. Another benefit is that adding new households to the area also positively impacts local businesses along Yonge Street.

New home developments have to meet the criteria, regulations, tests and approvals set out by all levels of government. In the case of a golf course, the master plan has to be innovative, as we may need to incorporate unusual shapes and sizes of individual lots. The installation of servicing and transportation must be done carefully, respecting the existing surrounding neighbourhood conditions. As with any new home community site, grading and ensuring appropriate soil conditions and water quality also affect development.

In all residential development, whether infill or not, developers must adhere to the stipulations set out by the various levels of government. In the end, we think long term to ensure a win-win situation, with homes and infrastructure that meet the needs of the existing community, governments and our future homeowners, today and in the many years to come.

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