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GTA

# Massive 37-tower project to be 'a real downtown for Mississauga,' developer says

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Developer Oxford Properties intends to turn the parking lots that ring the popular Square One shopping centre in the heart of Mississauga into a vibrant, walkable community with thousands of housing units.

Oxford has unveiled a plan for a major new mixed-use development featuring 37 towers and 18,000 residential units with room for 35,000 people.

The 130-acre, 18-million-square-foot project called Square One District, near Highway 403 and Hurontario Street, will also feature parks, office space and a pedestrian-friendly civic area called The Strand, a main boulevard.

One of the priorities is to have a walkable community "that will ultimately become a real downtown for Mississauga," said Eric Plesman, executive vice-president and head of North America for Oxford Properties.

"We've been very focused on making sure that sustainability is top of mind, that there is green space there, that it's not simply a concrete jungle. The intent here is to actually make it lively and exciting," he said.

At least half of the new units will be purpose-built rental apartments, Plesman said. They will be available at market rent, he added. There won't be any affordable housing.



Given the rental housing shortage in the GTA, Oxford is “trying to get supply into the market to address the demand that we ultimately have,” he said, noting about 40 per cent of the units in the first phase will be two- or three-bedroom units to make them attractive to families.

The new district will also be connected to the Hurontario LRT and Rapid Bus Transit, which will give people “the ability to ditch the car,” said Daniel O’Donnell, director of media with Oxford Properties Group.

The “multi-decade” project is in line with the City of Mississauga master plan, said Veronica Maggisano, director of development with Oxford, adding they are in the process of site plan approval with city planning staff.

City of Mississauga spokesperson Audrey Holt said the city has received two development applications from Oxford Properties for downtown, including for phase one of the project. They are both under review and have not been approved by the city but are “already permitted by the official plan and zoning.”

Brent Toderian, city planning consultant with Toderian UrbanWorks and former Vancouver chief planner, sees the planned Square One District as a “very positive thing” calling malls the “low-hanging fruit for suburban transformation.”

Mall mixed-use developments are a trend across North America, that’s not new but “hitting its stride,” he said.

It’s now “normal and a no brainier instead of something that a decade ago seemed a bit radical.”

There’s a 20-year vision for developers at Yorkdale mall, which includes a hotel and as many as 12 residential towers. At Scarborough Town Centre there’s a similar vision for as many as 36 highrise towers around the mall.

Canada can learn from the U.S., where developers have been transforming failing malls for longer, Toderian said. But the malls here aren’t failing in the same way, because of more government regulation on planning.

The project also marks another major housing development eyed for Mississauga.

M City, which calls for between eight and 10 highrise towers, is being built by Rogers Real Estate. Beyond downtown, there’s Lakeview Village, a multibillion-dollar mixed-use project planned for 177 acres. It’s slated for the former site of the decommissioned coal-fired Lakeview Generating Station, near Port Credit in Mississauga. This project promises 8,000 new units for up to 17,000 people.

In the first phase of housing for Square One District, Oxford and AIMco are partnering with the Daniels Corporation to build two residential towers with 420 rental units and 570 condos, 36 and 48 storeys respectively, at the southeast corner of Rathburn Road and Confederation Parkway. Oxford says ground breaking for the buildings would happen this summer.

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The new project includes plans for office units, and Oxford says it will start marketing the first office tower later this year.

Toderian urges the city to take a very proactive and strategic role with the developer to make sure the project becomes the urban space it's promising to be.

The key to the district's success will be making sure that it's a true mix of uses, scaled to people, and has a sense of place. "But what will really determine success or failure is if they're willing to really tame the car," he adds. And "they" means the City of Mississauga, not the developer.

"The real owner of the conversation about a real downtown is the city, the public," he said.

"No single developer creates a downtown."

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**May Warren** is a breaking news reporter based in Toronto. Follow her on Twitter: [@maywarren11](https://twitter.com/maywarren11)

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