

CONTENTIOUS PROPOSAL BECOMES A WALK IN THE PARK



Matt Durnan

A residential infill development project proposed for a tower-in-the-park apartment site in the Davisville Village neighbourhood would bring badly needed housing units to the area, which the community wants, but it would do so by removing a local parkette on the site. The prospect of losing the parkette and the green space it offers community members raised considerable concern among area residents and a local councillor, until some creative and collaborative thinking led to a proposed solution that would see the neighbourhood gain park space in the end, after removing the existing parkette to accommodate new housing.

Osmington Gerofsky Development Corp (OGFC) has submitted official plan and zoning by-law amendment applications to the **City of Toronto** for a site at 33 Davisville Avenue and 60 Balliol Street. Osmington Gerofsky is seeking to demolish a parkette on its tower-in-the-park apartment site to develop a 41-storey residential infill building on the site that

would accommodate 540 new dwelling units.

The official plan amendment application seeks to redesignate the area of the site occupied by Balliol Parkette from 'Parks' to 'Apartment Neighbourhood' to allow the additional residential use, while the zoning by-law amendment would permit the

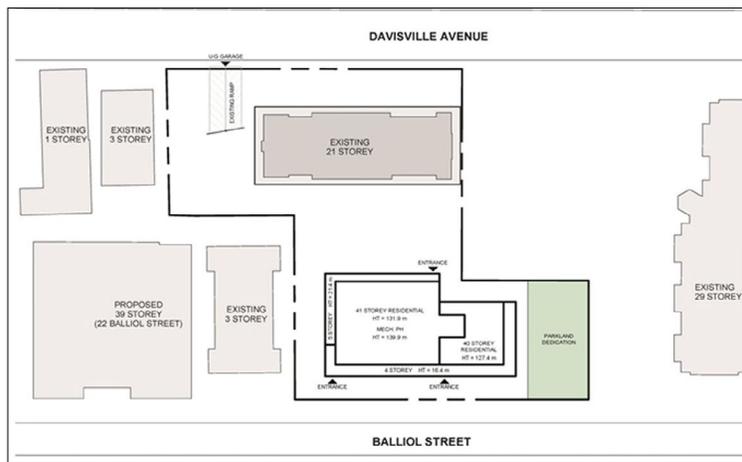
building height and density associated with the proposed tower.

The site at 33 Davisville Avenue currently accommodates a 20-storey purpose-built rental building containing 266 residential units, with around 850 square metres of outdoor amenity

space in the form of the Balliol Parkette, at the rear of the site.

The park is proposed for demolition as part of the site's

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Map showing the location of the site at 33 Davisville Avenue and 60 Balliol Drive where Osmington Gerofsky Development Corp (OGFC) is seeking to develop a 41-storey infill residential building containing 540 new dwelling units. Currently, the tower-in-the-park site accommodates a 21-storey purpose-built rental apartment building and the Balliol Parkette. The existing parkette would be demolished to accommodate the new residential tower, but new park space at the southeast corner of the site would be donated to the city.

SOURCE: GOOGLE

Site plan for the 33 Davisville/60 Balliol Street site. Osmington Gerofsky Development Corp is seeking to intensify the tower-in-the-park site with an infill development of a 41-storey residential tower fronting Balliol Street. The development also proposes a parkland dedication at the southwest corner of the site, which would connect with existing parkland on the adjacent site and with planned future park space at 141 Davisville Avenue, a site also owned by Osmington Gerofsky and proposed for redevelopment.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO

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redevelopment to develop a new residential tower in its place.

While the park has been a valuable community asset for a number of years and was a site that the City of Toronto itself had at one point considered acquiring, the price tag to purchase it may have been too steep for a park that is not necessarily the most ideal plot of parkland in the city.

“The City never made any

Rendering of Osmington Gerofsky’s proposed 41-storey residential tower for a site at 33 Davisville Avenue/60 Balliol Street. The new building would bring 540 new residential units to the site, and the developer would contribute almost 460 square metres of park space to the city of Toronto in conjunction with the proposal, to compensate for the removal of Balliol Parkette.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO
ARCHITECT: WALLMAN ARCHITECTS

Rendering of a proposed public park at the site of 33 Davisville Avenue/60 Balliol Street. Osmington Gerofsky Development Corp is proposing to develop a 41-storey residential tower where the Balliol Parkette currently sits on the site. A collaborative problem-solving effort between the planner, the developer, the landowner, city staff and the local councillor led to a net win for all parties, resulting in a parkland contribution on the site of nearly 460 square metres, which will tie into a larger network of parks serving the area for a total of almost 1,800 square metres of park space in the neighbourhood.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO
ARCHITECT: WALLMAN ARCHITECTS

moves to acquire this, and honestly, it’s quite expensive. It has a parking garage underneath and it’s not ideal parkland and it was never designed to be parkland in the way that we view public parks.”

OGFC executive vice president **Laurie Payne** told *NRU*.

“However, in most respects, it was no different than any other infill property in the Eglinton or Davisville area in that it was privately-owned land, and the City can’t take it without paying for it, for parkland. It wasn’t a particularly great piece of land for the City to invest in for a public park in its current form.”

The Davisville community

has been growing significantly in recent years, with several rental apartment buildings and condominium complexes going up in the neighbourhood, and more like the 33 Davisville proposal in the development pipeline.

As housing pressures mount and the City continues its push to build 285,000 new homes by 2031, infill developments like this will have an important

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role to play in maximizing the number of residential units that can be built per site.

Ward 12 Toronto-St. Paul's councillor **Josh Matlow** doesn't downplay the importance of bringing more housing to the city, but admits that he was somewhat taken aback when he first laid eyes on the proposal, as the demolition of the Balliol Parkette stood out as a point of contention.

Matlow explained that through the development of the Midtown in Focus study, which informed the updated Yonge-Eglinton Secondary Plan, it became quite clear that the area had a dearth of greenspace, and to see a proposal that wanted to demolish existing greenspace in favour of infill housing was something of a shock to the system.

"Initially, my tactic was to look under every stone at City Hall to find any way to legally prevent them from doing that. I was looking for any and every possible argument, but when it became clear that wasn't in the cards, we took a different approach to see what the definition of a win is here," Matlow told *NRU*.

"Is the win to stop the development? Or is the win to have park space? Because stopping the development was

about protecting park space."

Fortunately, Matlow and city planning were able to take a step back and look at the proposal through a wider lens, given the fortuitous timing of OGDG submitting a separate development proposal for the neighbouring property at 141 Davisville Avenue. Reviewing the proposals from the same developer for nearby properties almost simultaneously presented the opportunity for city staff to consider the proposals holistically and find a way to come up with a solution that would work for all parties.

"[For the 33 Davisville/60 Balliol property], we're going to be removing the old parking garage [beneath Balliol Parkette] and building a new infill development, which is obviously going to be providing housing for the area, and a portion of these lands is going to be given to the City for parkland," Payne said.

"We're going to remove that parking garage to create good conditions for parkland, and the parkland is going to be beside another green space on the adjacent property that is call the Al Green Sculpture Park. In this way, we're adding to the existing park network because we have the other development down the street

that will also include park land, and the City ends up with a bigger park without having to go out and buy land."

The Balliol Parkette measures roughly 850 square metres, and when all is said and done on the 33 and 141 Davisville sites, the City stands to end up with significantly more park space, with an expanded 1,800-square-metre park network for the entire community to enjoy.

Matlow says that the outcome of the proposed development serves as marker of what can be accomplished when there is a collaborative approach between the developer, the city and the local community that seeks to find wins for all, rather than pursuing a reactive approach to a development proposal that seeks to find compromises and concessions.

"I really have to give credit to my team and some really remarkable staff including **Oren Tamir** in the city planning division and other members of our city staff. We got together and decided that rather than just react, which is so typical with every single application in Toronto, to get ahead of it and look at 'How do we plan for a future which will include growth, and do it pragmatically?'" Matlow said.

The landowners also spoke highly of the process undertaken by the city and area residents to arrive at a plan that served everyone's best interests.

"The feedback that we receive through the application

process informs our choices and refines our decisions and the consultations with the Davisville residents, larger community and elected officials results in a space we can all be proud to call ours," **RPMS** [a **CAPREIT** subsidiary] chief investment officer **Julian Schonfeldt** told *NRU*.

"In particular, we have included park space that provides significant recreational area to the new network of green space in this community. We are ensuring that with this proposal, the green space promised moves from one that is privately-owned to public ownership, and it will be better programmed to serve the needs of the community."

At its January 24 meeting, Toronto and East York community council approved staff's recommendations to amend the zoning by-law and official plan for the 33 Davisville Avenue and 60 Balliol Street site to permit the new infill development. The item will be given final consideration by city council at its meeting on February 6. 🌱