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Good morning!

As someone who's lived in various parts of Ottawa, one of my biggest priorities when deciding where to live has always been walkability.

I want to be within 15 minutes of grocery stores, coffee shops, parks and the services I use every day. I want pathways nearby where I can go for a walk without having to jump in a car first. And increasingly, as Ottawa grows, many residents are looking for the same thing.

That's part of the thinking behind the massive redevelopment planned for Confederation Heights — the federal office campus near Mooney's Bay and Heron Road that most people currently only drive through on their way downtown or to the airport.

Over the next few decades, the area could transform into one of Ottawa's largest new urban neighbourhoods, bringing up to 30,000 residents to a district where virtually nobody lives today. The plans also include lots of parkland and space for amenities.

It's a big change, but a secondary plan that's in its final draft stage will help pave the way for how it will be built out in the future.

Let's get to it!

— Charlie Senack, Ottawa Lookout managing editor

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WEATHER

Friday: 12



2 |



Saturday: 17



4 |



Sunday: 14



6 |



Monday: 12



4 |



DEVELOPMENT

Over 16,000 housing units proposed on abandoned Confederation Heights office site



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By Charlie Senack. Read the story online [here](#).

Every day, thousands of people in cars or on light rail travel through Confederation Heights, passing by abandoned government buildings formerly full of life and vacant parking lots that government workers' vehicles once filled from nine to five. Now left

mostly abandoned, the grass grows high during the summer months, and flocks of geese and groundhogs have reclaimed the land.

There's so much potential; it's not every day such a large and prime piece of land opens for development — somewhere between 300 and 400 hectares.

As the city plans to grow by half between now and 2051, it's looking to seize that potential and build a new mixed-use community.

And despite its modern-day uses, the site has had many lives.

Long before it became a federal office campus, archaeological discoveries suggest Indigenous communities camped and travelled through the area for thousands of years. It's the traditional land of the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation, and archaeological findings continue to tell their stories.



Today, Confederation Heights is all parking lots and office complexes. Credit: Canada Lands Company

In the 1800s, the landscape evolved around farming, sawmills and transportation routes tied to the Rideau Canal and Hog's Back. Rail lines later crossed the site before the federal government transformed the district in the 1950s and 1960s into a sprawling employment hub under the Gréber Plan, bringing landmark buildings and Place de Ville-style modernist office towers.

Now, a sweeping redevelopment plan led by Canada Lands Company and federal partners could turn Confederation Heights into one of the city's largest new urban neighbourhoods

over the next 25 to 30 years, bringing an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 residents to an area where virtually nobody lives today.

The [draft secondary plan](#) envisions around 16,000 new units, new parks, community gathering spaces, shops, affordable housing, active transportation corridors and renewed recreation facilities built around one of the city's most transit-connected hubs.

Various public agencies, including the federal government, the National Capital Commission and the City of Ottawa, own the lands. Canada Lands Company has been leading the redevelopment planning process, alongside the city and other partners.

River Ward Coun. Riley Brockington said the exercise is similar to what's been undertaken at Tunney's Pasture, where [between 7,000 and 9,000 housing units](#) could one day be built.

He said Confederation Heights is also ideal for population growth, given its access to the Mooney's Bay light rail station and proximity to downtown.

"The Secondary Plan envisions creating a new neighbourhood, a mixed-use neighbourhood, that leverages its location, the arterial roads, the transportation corridors, public transportation corridors, and all the natural beauty around it," Brockington told the Lookout. "It's just a beautiful part of town. The goal is to have a mixture so people don't have to get in their car and leave the community for basic staples and necessities."



The office complexes at Confederation Heights have been vacant for years. Photo by Charlie Senack.

There are plans to preserve and repurpose several existing federal structures, particularly those tied to the district's mid-century modern architectural identity.

Among the buildings expected to remain are the Sir Charles Tupper Building, the Jeanne Mance Building and portions of the former CBC headquarters near Bronson Avenue.

Other structures could eventually be adapted into housing, offices, institutional space, or community uses as the area evolves over the coming decades.

At the same time, large portions of the campus built around surface parking lots and aging office infrastructure are expected to be redeveloped more extensively. Some buildings viewed as obsolete or difficult to retrofit could ultimately be demolished to make way for new mixed-use development, parks and public streets.

"If we're in a housing and homelessness emergency, which we are, and federal taxpayers from coast to coast to coast are not getting value from those lands, they should be repurposed," said Brockington.

The draft vision calls for a "complete, climate-resilient and well-connected community" rooted in the area's natural and recreational assets. The plan would keep federal

employment as part of the area's identity, but would also add housing, retail, commercial uses, parks, and public spaces.

Capital Coun. Shawn Menard said the plan is an opportunity to rethink a part of the city that has long been cut off from the surrounding communities.

"It would be great to see mixed-use housing with businesses intermingled. Obviously, a not-for-profit, affordable housing component is important," he said. "The type of community I want to see built is the ones that exist around that area, which are 15-minute neighbourhoods with access to amenities and services and park space and open green space and trees right there in that neighbourhood."

A need for services and community space

For neighbouring Riverside Park, the plan could bring something residents have long lacked: basic neighbourhood amenities.

Riverside Park Community Association president David Coyle said the existing community grew up largely as a bedroom community for Confederation Heights when the federal campus was full of jobs.

There have been some improvements with a new student housing development that has brought services like a dentist's office, a convenience store, and a pizza shop, but there are still many gaps, he said.

"If you look at Riverside Park, we don't even have a coffee shop," said Coyle. "You have to cross the river to visit Tim Hortons on Prince of Wales. There's not too much shopping. People have to take their vehicle to South Keys or Bank Street instead.

"Some people argue that's the way they like it; they just want it to remain a bedroom community," he continued. "But I don't think that's practical."

Brockington raised similar issues, pointing to the lack of a library, grocery store, coffee shop and professional services in River Ward.



Concept drawings show new park space, shops, and residential.

“It would be great to see even a smaller, urban grocery store with like 10,000 square feet,” he said. “The goal is to have a mixture so people don’t have to get in their car and leave the community for basic staples and necessities.”

The draft secondary plan also identifies the need for new community amenities as the population grows. It calls for neighbourhood parks and parkettes in each district, a new community park with a community centre near the transit hub, consideration of a future Ottawa Public Library branch, and work with school boards on possible school sites. Beyond basic services, the concept drawings also imagine Confederation Heights as a place where community life could spill into plazas and public spaces. Renderings show a winter transit node plaza with fire pits, crowds gathered around a Christmas tree, and space that could support markets, food trucks, and seasonal events.

Menard said that it is an important distinction from simply building housing and hoping that the community follows.

“They’ve taken into account that recreation space, the business space, and the pieces that will make this enjoyable, where people want to live,” he said. “That’s so important, instead of just building a building and hoping people just drive in and out of it. They’ve taken into account that type of urban feel.”

Menard said he has also been pushing for truly affordable housing, not temporary or weak definitions that eventually revert to market rates.

One of the major community anchors could be a renewed RA Centre. Planning boards say the aging building is costly to maintain and could be replaced or redeveloped into a more compact, modern facility better connected to transit and the surrounding community.

The RA Centre currently supports more than 42 sports organizations, hosts the 360 Concussion Support Program, and offers fitness, wellness and recreation programs. The draft concept suggests stacked courts and uses, athlete housing, flexible gym space, wellness and rehab services, multi-purpose rooms for community groups, racket sports, and volleyball and basketball courts.

Menard called the RA Centre a “hidden gem” and said its future is one of the pieces he is watching closely.

“I think they’re looking to have more people be able to access their facilities and looking at some housing potentially that comes on and near the site,” he said.

Making greenspace more accessible

One tension in the Confederation Heights plan is that the area is already surrounded by green space, but much of it is disconnected or hard to access.

The planning vision proposes a “Heritage Greenway” — a network of parks and open spaces linking modernist federal buildings, existing landscapes and natural features. The boards show nine new municipal parks, including one large-scale park, three smaller neighbourhood parks, and five parkettes, along with 12.3 hectares of dedicated parkland. The plan also proposes stronger active transportation connections, including “The Line,” an exclusive active transportation corridor with a linear park character, and “The Arches,” a system of community connectors. A new pedestrian bridge over the Rideau River is also shown in the concept plans.

Menard said the current layout often blocks people from moving through the area naturally.

“There’s so much space in Confederation Heights that will be made much more accessible to a lot of other people, and certainly still keep a huge amount of green space. The tree-lined areas, the pathways that exist, will be kept in place while also developing some of the facilities there,” he said.

The current traffic loops to get onto the Airport Parkway would be removed. Planning boards show some existing interchanges being replaced with a more traditional urban street grid designed to support housing, shops, and active transportation connections.



The plan also proposes new local streets, expanded cycling infrastructure and stronger pedestrian links between transit stations, parks and surrounding communities.

Coyle said he's optimistic about talk of more green space and is pleased to see that many existing parking lots will be converted into parks. But he said some existing stretches that were going to be restored are now planned for development.

This includes at Hogs Back and Riverside, where drawings show a multi-storey high-rise being built.

He also said that nearby Mooney's Bay, Hog's Back, and Vincent Massey should be included in the plans, despite being located on the outside boundary, given the thousands of new residents who would use the outdoor spaces. Part of his fears circle the park.

"Today, anyone who's coming to the beach or to the parks from elsewhere has to park at the post office and walk," said Coyle. "In the new Confederation Heights plan, they have converted all of the parking spaces, including the parking garage, into parks. So in the longer-term vision, the only way you're really going to be able to get to this location would be through the LRT, buses or biking."

He said that may be a good direction, but only if the city actually plans for how families will visit the area.

"It's interesting to watch people struggle with their beach carts and their full day and all their families from the Mooney's station or the post office and getting to the beach," he said.

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