

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Unionville : The Village Evolved

This book is the story of a village. It is a story told from a different perspective than a history book, though many historical facts are brought in to the narrative. Instead, this Community Vision Plan for Main Street Unionville aims to tell the story of this Ontario village's past through its present—because any village as beloved by its residents as Unionville is a true place—somewhere that has evolved over time, so that its past is inherent in its present. By examining present conditions on Main Street Unionville in a thorough way, the story will continue as a description of Main Street Unionville's evolution over the next thirty years.

What is a village? People seem to know one when they see one, and residents and visitors alike flock to Main Street Unionville for its heritage village character. The City of Markham, in which Unionville sits, proclaimed Main Street Unionville one of four Heritage Districts, with rigorous standards in place to protect the character that makes this place special¹. They, alongside the residents, business owners and admirers of Unionville realize that there is no other place quite like it in the GTA.

Main Street Unionville is distinctly different—the buildings, the street; the way we interact with them and with each other when visiting—from the predominately post-World War II development that surrounds it. As Markham and the GTA continue to see incredible growth and new, modern development, these distinctions have become ever more heightened. Again we must ask: What is a village? Is it merely a place that is a 'step back in time', a short departure on a Saturday from the modern world to take in a concert and shop for gifts, or is it something more? The term 'village' implies function as well as form, and as we have already established, it is a place that has evolved over time and will evolve into the future.

Perhaps we can find answers by looking to the English planner Thomas Sharp, who 70

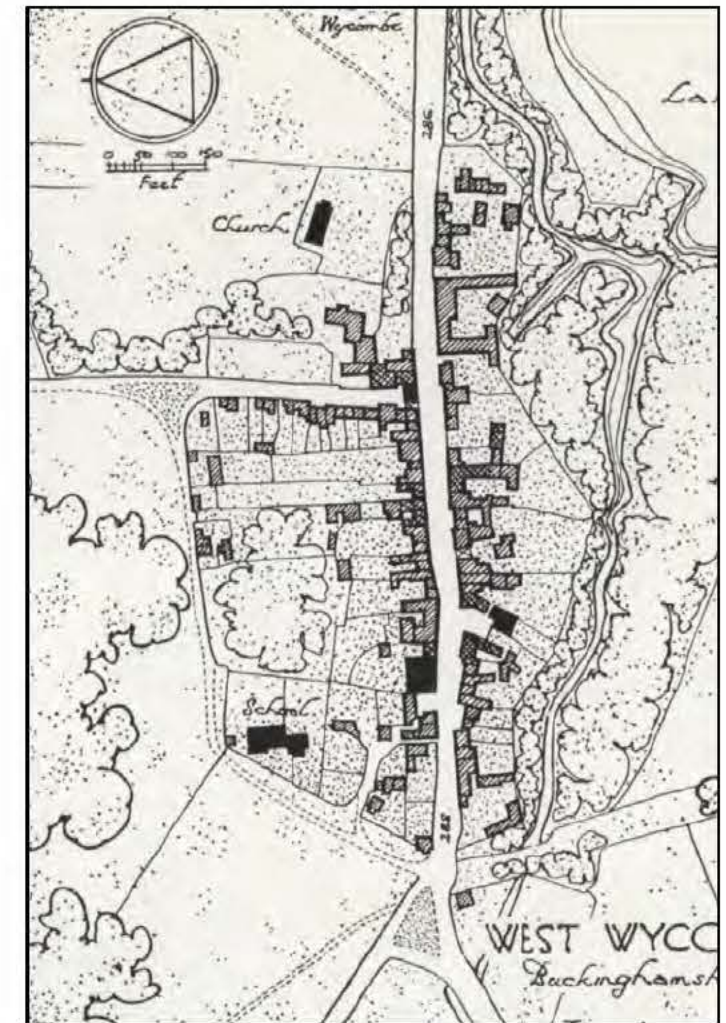
years ago studied the villages of his home country at the beginning of the post-World War II development boom². Of course, Main Street Unionville is a distinctly North American—a distinctly Canadian—type of village, but Sharp's assertions ring true nevertheless. According to him, there are three principal conditions that must be met in a village, and we will address them one-by-one.

Firstly is layout: Of the several types of villages Sharp classifies, Unionville is most definitely a roadside village, as it exists along one road: Main Street Unionville. Founded in 1794 to the north of its present location, by 1840 the founding of Union Mills prompted development of the modern settlement we know today. The road servicing this settlement, notably, deviated slightly west from the original north-south Concession Road connecting the wilderness to Lake Ontario: this was to take advantage of a slight rise over the Bruce Creek floodplain, protecting the nascent buildings³. Here is how Main Street Unionville got its slight bend—and fulfills aptly Sharp's description:

[M]ost... roadside villages seem somehow to contain their road rather than to be merely a string of buildings pushed aside by it. The road may curve gently away from the straight or it may take a sharp

and sudden turn; in either case the village is thereby transformed into a place; a place with a way in and a way out and not merely an incident on the roadside.⁴
(Emphases in original)

Second we must look at the buildings. Of the buildings themselves, Sharp notes: "A manor house, a group of almshouses, a tithe barn, a mill, an inn, a couple of shops, may by accident or design be so situated



West Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, UK
A Roadside Village typically has a slight bend about the middle of the street containing views inward.

as to give emphasis, a ‘punctuation,’ to one or more points in the plan.⁵” Do the Old Firehall, standing guard atop Main Street Unionville’s bend; the Stiver House, stoically overseeing the street’s northern climax; or the Congregational Church building, whose spire can be seen peeking over the treetops from that point, not all immediately come to mind—alongside many other examples?

These buildings were designed with specific functions—residential, retail, spiritual, and in the case of the since-recreated Planing Mill, industrial—which implies the third aspect of the village: the community itself⁶. “The village is the home of a community... A simple social structure produced a simple material form.”⁷ During the Mill Era of the 1840s and the Railroad Era that succeeded it, Unionville had the self-contained economic and social functions to act as a true village⁸. People lived, shopped and worked there; they socialized there; they worshipped there—and people from the surrounding farmlands came there whenever feasible to do these things as well⁹.

Thus Main Street Unionville is still perceived as a village, and it is the historic core from which the surrounding community grew throughout the 20th Century. In those intervening years, the functions that Unionville might have evolved to take on were satisfied elsewhere: the development

of multi-family housing throughout greater Markham; the supermarkets on Highway 7; the modern industrial parks ringing the GTA. It is not that Unionville could have—or should have—tried to replicate these fixtures of the modern suburban scene. Rather, in the absence of other economic functions, Unionville evolved from a self-contained community into a district predominantly used for retail and community purposes. While still seen as a village, still looking lovingly like a village... Unionville is not acting like a village.

The Village in the 21st Century

This Vision Plan tells a story of Main Street Unionville’s future evolution based on its existing assets, and how it can evolve into a place—a beautiful, walkable, sustainable place preserving of its history—that once again acts as a village. This requires that there be residents living in the core Main Street Unionville area; expanded opportunities for retail relevant to those residents, both within the immediate core area and those who currently live within

walking distance; community space and facilities that make the existing social and festival culture ever richer; and as the broadband-connected laptop has supplanted the old mill, a modern version of business and industry.

There are precedents. Notably, as we shall discuss in some depth, the English village of Poundbury (an appendage to the city of Dorchester, Dorset) is none other than Prince Charles’ gauntlet, thrown down nearly a quarter-century ago to prove that a traditional village could be built—and function—in the modern world¹⁰. These traditional principles of building, planning and design have been studied and refined in North America through the New Urbanism movement, though the movement’s litany of successes exist in a variety of built forms and contexts.

Main Street Unionville can evolve to be both in form and function a contemporary traditional village, but it will take great care; that is the central thesis of this Vision Plan, as reflected in all of its facets. Say one of the movements on a beautiful heirloom watch has stopped working—a jeweler will deftly insert new parts alongside old ones in the cramped space of the watchcase to produce a fully functioning timepiece.



View north on Main Street : The Queen's Hotel, the center of Village life is prominently featured at the bend in the road providing terminating views north and south.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

That is the level of thinking addressed herein—where new buildings appear, their very specific placement, their shape, their size, their height, their architecture—are fundamentally important to preserving and enhancing the existing character of the village.

That character is at the heart of Main Street Unionville, and to use a modern term, is the district's 'brand asset'. The wealth of marvelous new development in Markham and throughout the GTA cannot and will not replicate it. The Unionville community learned with the saga of a modern condominium project on Fred Varley Drive that a vision—reinforced by proper planning codes and guidelines—is essential to ensure that a single project never again threaten this character. But new projects—and new land uses—are in fact essential to prevent a place from becoming the equivalent of an object in a museum, preserved yet unchanging; so it must be ensured that they physically interact with and be responsive to the surrounding area.

About the Main Street Unionville Community Vision Plan Project

In 2013, the City of Markham, Ontario commissioned a team of urban planning and design experts, co-lead by Torti Gallas LLP and Michael Morrissey to develop a long-range master plan vision for the Main Street Unionville heritage district: this book is the result of a year long effort in the life of the Village. This Vision Plan is not, however,

a step-by-step guide—or an instruction manual—for building a conception pre-fixed in the minds of one or several of the authors. A Vision Plan such as this takes a high-level, long-range view of how to approach many interconnected issues in a cohesive way, and expresses a set of possible solutions specific to Main Street Unionville's unique context. The authors and design team have worked with the City, business owners, residents, and other interested stakeholders throughout the process to identify these

issues and explore solutions in light of their specific needs and desires. The City will develop a Secondary Plan based on this vision to implement the solutions discussed herein.

As the village itself is an organism, growing and changing as it does through a complex set of interconnections, the solutions proposed in this Vision Plan must also be interconnected: when implemented in isolation, though improvements will be seen, the problem will not be fully solved. The Vision Plan addresses the need to gently grow Unionville into a functioning, contemporary village by addressing the following problems:

- Providing space for enhanced retail opportunities, relevant to local residents' day-to-day lives as well as to visitors;
- Providing space within the core Main Street Unionville area for full-time residents;
- Developing enhanced public spaces, such as squares and plazas to augment the existing successful social and festival culture;
- Reimagining existing community and sports facilities while preserving their functions;
- Addressing the ongoing parking issues in the district in a workable, sustainable manner;



Unionville Station : The introduction of the railway in 1871 signals the greatest period of growth and prosperity in the Village. Half of the heritage buildings on Main Street were constructed at this time between 1871-1900.

- Revitalizing the streetscaping elements on Main Street Unionville itself;
- Augmenting the system of pedestrian movement through the district to extend the traditional walk along Main Street Unionville further north and south while providing new, interesting, and exciting walking routes;
- Establishing stronger connections to the Rouge River, Toogood Pond Park, and Crosby Park;
- Establishing a Gateway district along Highway 7 to the south.

In the short span of time during which the study was conducted, two transformative projects were successfully completed in Markham: the transformation of Unionville's Stiver Mill into a beautifully restored Cultural Centre, and the streetscaping of Main Street Markham, the city's other traditional Main Street retail district. Both projects should not only be considered successes, but serve as a constant reminder that Unionville—and the Markham community as a whole—is singularly capable of effecting meaningful and positive change.

The level of engagement displayed by the City of Markham throughout the study period—aside from having had the foresight and dedication to commission such a study—bodes well for the implementation potential of many solutions. The sophistication and dedication of City staff and leaders have been nothing less than incredible: their stewardship going forward is essential. There are other champions, too, taken from a wide variety of groups—business and landowners, area residents, local club membership. These are a unique and dedicated group of individuals.

Famed Philadelphia city planner Edmund Bacon understood great places as products of work and design over many generations, the so-called 'principle of the second person'¹¹. Main Street Unionville is no different—its past generations' contributions are contained in what we see at present. The current generation of leaders and stakeholders has shown the willingness to create a vision for the future, and must dedicate themselves to act. If they do, their mutual presence at this moment in Main Street Unionville's history will be seen by those who stand to inherit it as more than accidental—and they will then take up the challenge.



By 1870's, the population in Unionville was 250 persons and a prosperous main street had a complete rural Village program including : 7 shoemakers, 3 carriage works and blacksmiths, 3 hotels, 6 general stores, 1 butcher, 1 tailor, 2 cabinet makers, 3 coopers, 1 harness maker, 1 cheese factory, 1 tinsmith, 1 flour mill, 2 doctors and 2 ministers.

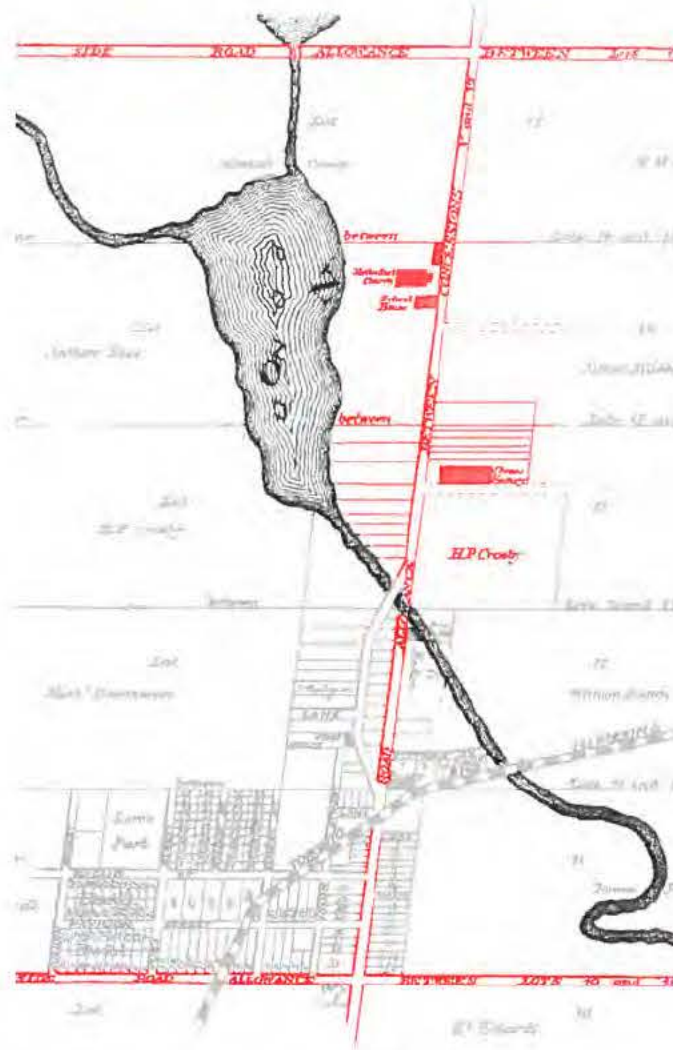
Footnotes and Endnotes

- 1 See, Town of Markham, ON, Development Services, Heritage Section. Unionville Heritage Conservation District Study. September, 1997.
- 2 Sharp, Thomas. *The Anatomy of the Village*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1946.
- 3 Unionville's history is detailed in: Champion, Isabel, and Mary B. Champion. *Markham Remembered: A Photographic History of Old Markham Township*. Markham, ON.: Markham District Historical Society, 1988.
- 4 Sharp, p. 9
- 5 Sharp, p. 10
- 6 Champion points out, "As a rule the hamlets and villages which appeared at so many crossroads of Markham owed their beginnings to an early mill or tavern and such subsidiary activities as a cooperage or distillery. Lack of transportation and the primitive roads persuaded shopkeepers to set up shop where this mill or tavern encouraged traffic." (p. 225)
- 7 Sharp, p. 12, 31
- 8 If light rail service comes to the Union-Stouffville Go Line in the future, Unionville Station would once again become a viable portal to the Main Street District.
- 9 Ross, Pat. *Remembering Main Street: An American Album*. New York: Viking Studio Books, 1994. p. xv would once again become a reality.
- 10 Rybczynski, Witold. "Behind the Façade." *Architect Magazine*, December 3, 2013. <http://www.architectmagazine.com/international-projects/behind-the-facade-of-prince-charles-poundbury.aspx>.
- 11 Bacon, Edmund N. *Design of Cities*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE VILLAGE

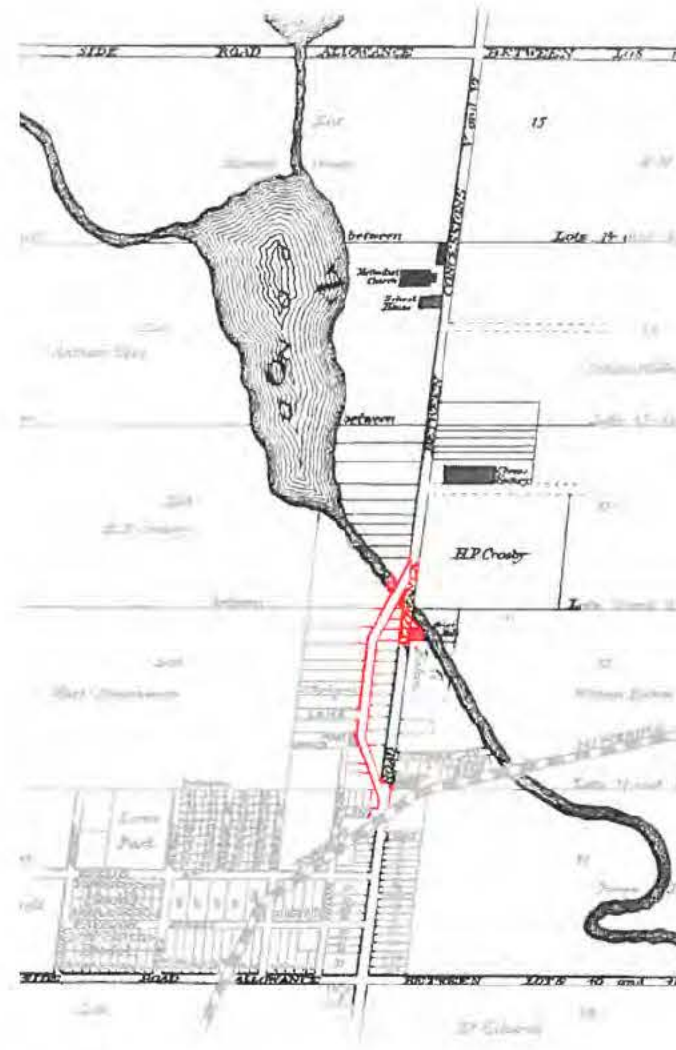


HAMLET



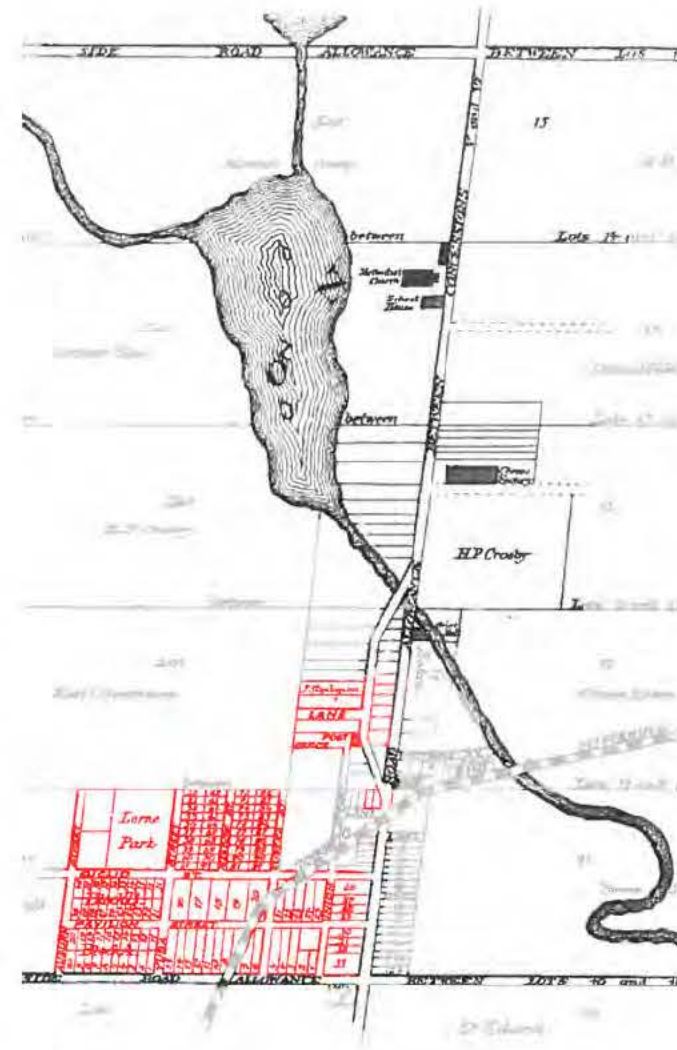
Early Settlement: 1794

The origins of Unionville can be traced to a Canadian Land Grant settled by a group of German-speaking settlers, led by William Berczy. The first settlements along the Sixth Line concession road were north of the crossing of the Bruce Creek, with farmland stretching down to what is now Highway 7.



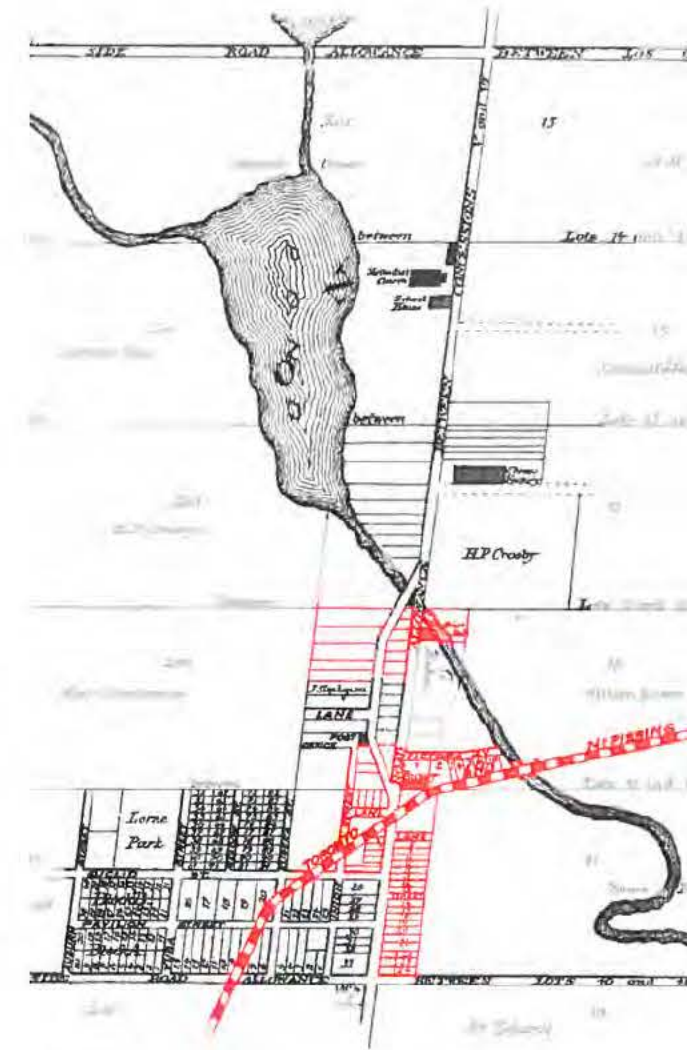
Mill Era: 1830-1850

As the settlement grew, it developed to the south. A flour mill, called "Union Mills" was built on the southwest bank of the Bruce Creek, a tributary of the Rouge River. The lane leading to the mill became the new main street. The original concession road was relocated out of the floodplain to its current alignment.



A Village Grows: 1850-1870

In 1851, the Village acquired a post office and was officially named "Unionville". The first residential subdivision was made in 1856, when William Eckardt divided his land to the west of Main Street, along Pavilion, Union, Eureka, and Euclid Streets. By 1870, the population had grown to 250 people.



Railway: 1871

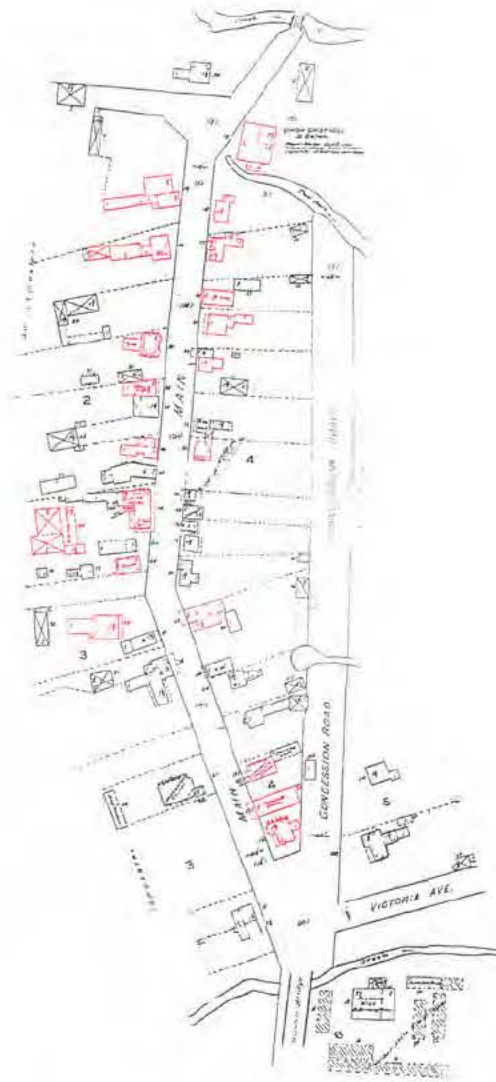
The arrival of the Toronto and Nippissing Railway started the greatest period of growth for the Village of Unionville. Along with the increased industry and commercial development, new residential subdivisions occurred, as well. A majority of existing heritage buildings were built during this expansion period.





MAIN STREET

VILLAGE



Main Street: 1891

Detailed drawing of Main Street Unionville during the post-Railway period showing the outline of buildings existing at that time.



Heritage Conservation District: 1997

In opposition to the potential for destructive changes to the Village of Unionville during the 1950s and 60s, local residents formed the Unionville Conservation and Development Society. A Heritage Conservation District Study Area was established in 1976 and the Heritage Conservation District Plan was adopted in 1997.



Vision Plan: 2014

The Vision Plan builds on the historic development of Unionville and creates a unified vision for a holistic village from Toogood Pond in the north to Highway 7 at the south.



Village of Unionville: 2050

The vision plan for the village centre provides an enhanced mix of uses, appropriately scaled, sustainable redevelopment, and provides an adequate "park once" facility for the uses of Main Street.

UNIONVILLE VISION PLAN - EXISTING CONDITIONS

1. Hwy 7 is a wide regional road engineered as a traffic thoroughfare. This area is not pedestrian friendly, nor is it evident that this is a part of the Unionville Heritage Conservation District.
2. Only a glimpse of Historic Main Street Unionville is visible from the intersection of Hwy 7 and Main Street. A sign board on posts is the only indication demarcating the entrance into the Village.
3. Crossing the rail corridor into the Main Street Core Area, this threshold area is a broad expanse of asphalt that is currently uneventful.
4. The Stiver Mill c.1900 is an Industrial Heritage landmark with a distinctive massing punctuated by iconic grain elevator structures. The Mill complex has been repurposed many times and is currently under restoration as a cultural facility.
5. Numerous vehicular alleys (Old Firehall Confectionery, c.1891 and the Queens Hotel c.1870) interrupt the retail Main Street and disrupt pedestrian movement and compromise safety.
6. Behind the west side of Main Street is a disorganized asphalt parking area, subdivided by ownership, with poor vehicular connectivity into and across the site.
7. The east side is an expansive asphalt parking area with a jumble of cars, dumpsters, a mish-mash of rear building elevations, poor accessibility and lighting.
8. The Stiver House, c.1829 is good example of a Regency cottage style building with a well detailed Neoclassical entry. The building has fallen into disrepair and is unoccupied. Despite their intrinsic historic character, vacant buildings detract energy and life from the retail street.
9. The grass area in front of the Crosby Arena has the Memorial Cenotaph, a Canadian flag, a single bench and a collection of pine trees. This space lacks an official name and is under purposed at the top of Main Street and Carlton Rd.
10. This view across Toogood Pond shows a rather drab and underutilized concession stand in the centre of Toogood Pond Park.



1. At the corner of Main Street and Hwy 7 a corner clock tower, and a pair of Village scaled lychgate portals frame the entrance to the Village of Unionville.
2. Hwy 7 is redeveloped as a 3.5 - 5 story gateway project between the GO rail tracks and the Rouge Valley. The scale and character of the street will conform with the historic Village with smaller building increments, pedestrian scaled streetscape elements, retail at grade with residential above, parking concealed behind the block and structured parking below grade. This area will feel like a natural southern extension of the village and thereby extend the walkability of Unionville.
3. The Market Square fronts onto Main Street. The Market Pavilion is an open air covered structure used for a variety of community related activities like the Farmers Market, a gateway to the rail walk and formally marks the southern end of the Main Street Commercial Area.
4. The newly restored Stiver Mill is now a major landmark on the south end of the Village. The original historic agrarian spine along the rail spur is reinforced by related buildings like a Green House, Market Pavilion and Artist Studios. The Stiver Mill area will entice pedestrians to walk further south on Main Street to explore this unique destination.
5. The Unionville Lanes concept on the west side of the core transforms vehicular alleys into pedestrian scaled passages and mews that lead to unique urban spaces deep into the block.
6. On the West Side a new residential quarter fronts onto Parkside Park with a pedestrian walk up to Crosby Community Centre.
7. The East Side piazza is at the mid-point or apex of the Main Street and is the logical place to locate public washrooms and an accessibility lift. A parking platform at the Main Street grade adds parking supply on the valley side along with a junior anchor for urban retail like a Village Grocer.
8. The west side of the core includes the conversion of the Stiver House into the formal lobby of a village scaled inn composed of a number of buildings framing a forecourt and enclave.
9. The Village Square establishes a larger urban space on the Main Street for larger events like Remembrance Day. The Unionville Festival and functions as the central gathering place in the Village. The Cenotaph will remain in its ceremonially important place on the Square.
10. The Toogood Amphitheatre reactivates the Park as a new destination in the trail system at the north end of the Village and creates a dramatic performance pavilion on the Pond.



THE GROUND WORK I





VISION PLAN OVERVIEW

Community Vision Plan Overview

This Community Vision Plan for Main Street Unionville envisions the sustainable growth, prosperity, and enrichment of the village over the next 30 years. It establishes a shared concept to give direction to future investments, development, and community building initiatives in the village and the area that surrounds it.

Development of this Vision Plan was prompted by two key events: In 2013, a mixed-use development proposal was approved by the Ontario Municipal Board for a site on Fred Varley Drive, immediately to the west of Main Street Unionville. Had an articulate community vision plan been in place, particular design elements in the proposal itself would have been obviated, preventing the contentious approval process that subsequently occurred. Second, a restaurant regulatory policy enacted in 2003, popularly known as the 50/50 Policy, required public reassessment. While initially a part of the study resulting in this Vision Plan, the retail and restaurant policy component was ultimately reconsidered independently.

Top Issues

- Guiding Growth
- Heritage Village
- Parking / Traffic
- Zoning Issues
- 365 Day Active Village
- Main Street Physical Design
- Regional Greenway Connections
- Conservancy & Sustainability
- Public Transit
- Focus Areas



A proud Village



The Millennium Pavilion - Performance Event



Old Congregation Church



Main Street Festival Parade

GOALS OF THE VISION PLAN

1. Open public process
2. Economic sustainability
3. Protect and expand heritage character
4. Expand walkability
5. Reinforce anchors
6. Add destinations
7. Extend the depth of main street
8. Optimize parking
9. Connect to open space systems
10. Preserve existing heritage assets

This Vision Plan generally represents a consensus vision of community stakeholders, providing a programmatic and architectural blueprint for future investment and sustainable growth. It is now crucial that a regulatory framework be studied by the City of Markham so as to implement and enforce the Vision Plan put forward here. Based on this work, a regulatory scope of work will need to be conducted by the City to implement, regulate, and enforce the Vision Plan put forward here. The unique layout and design of buildings and streetscapes will require review and approval of proposed plans by Community and Fire Services Commission Staff in the early stages of planning/design to ensure public services (such as waste collection, sewerage, snow ploughing and removal etc.) can be delivered, operated, maintained and accessed in an efficient and cost effective manner.

Vision Statement

Main Street Unionville shall become a vibrant, thriving and successful heritage village that is a regional destination, but serves local needs.

This Vision was **achieved** through in an open and interactive Charrette process, by enhancing heritage character in design, and enriching existing facilities while adding new facilities appropriately and where necessary, and integrating place-based elements to ensure 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.'

The Vision is **captured** in this Community Vision Plan to guide physical development, changes to by-laws, and associated improvements.

VISION PLAN OVERVIEW

Goals and Objectives

The ten Goals of this Vision Plan are illustrated on Page 25. As the public process unfolded over 18 months, these Goals – and their associated Objectives – were constantly refined with each addition of public and stakeholder input.

There are, however, three Principal Goals of the Vision Plan, formed by the aspiration to sustain Main Street socially, economically, and environmentally:

Social Sustainability

- Improve walkability;
- Create a more vibrant gathering place on Main Street Unionville by enhancing the retail program, adding new residents, providing washrooms, convenient parking locations, and street beautification;
- Create a richer and more varied Main Street experience by providing additional pedestrian routes and destinations within the core area, and better connections to the Rouge Valley parkland.

Economic Sustainability

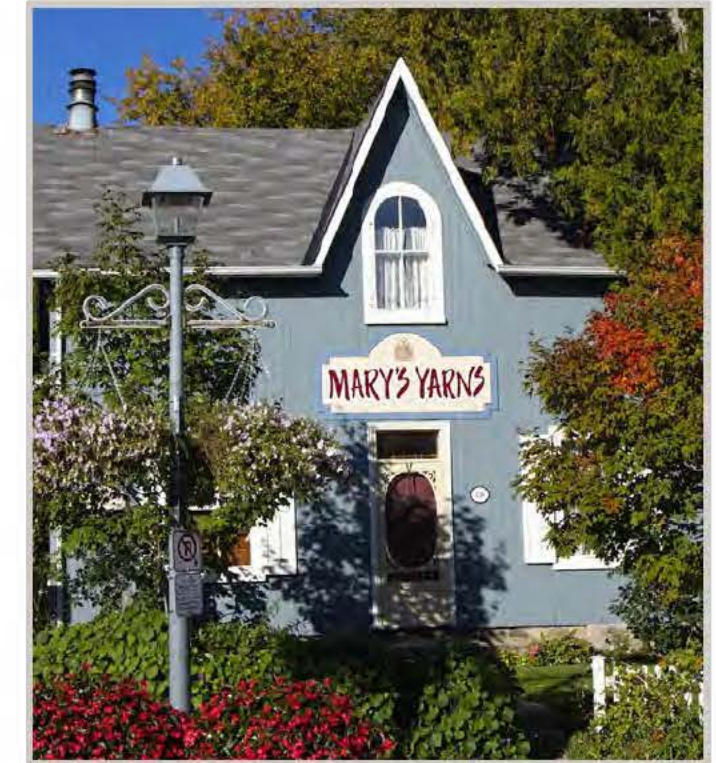
- Create value by making a more desirable and inviting place to live, work, and recreate;
- Create value by providing opportunities for a more successful and sustainable retail program;
- Create a more successful retail experience by providing a more convenient, legible, and accessible parking facility.

Environmental Sustainability

- Manage stormwater by improving treatment and storage of runoff, principally by utilizing previously developed parking areas;



Increase Main Street Vitality



Expand Reach of Walking-Loop



Grow Retail Opportunity - Anchor



Preserve Residential Character South of Train Station



Preserve Heritage Character and Resources



Restoring the tree canopy



Enhance Retail Display Opportunities

- Remove trips from area roadways for convenience and dining by improving pedestrian connectivity and character, and by augmenting a sustainable retail program;
- Improve air quality and mitigate the 'heat island' effect by augmenting the tree canopy;
- Generate 'green' electricity by covering the parking garage with photovoltaic solar cells.

Parking

A municipal parking solution that is consolidated in a central location is necessary for sustainable growth in the Main Street Unionville Core Area. Existing parking policy requires lots with retail uses to provide parking spaces on the lot itself; the aggregation of many small lots with tenuous connectivity to the existing street network precludes optimized parking today, and will therefore preclude retail growth in the future.

As a traditional village serving local everyday needs that is simultaneously a place of significance in the region, Main Street Unionville must become a mixed-use, 'park once' district: Those who choose to arrive by automobile will park, for the duration of their visit, in the most appropriate place depending on the occasion and length of their visit.

VISION PLAN OVERVIEW

Parking Issues

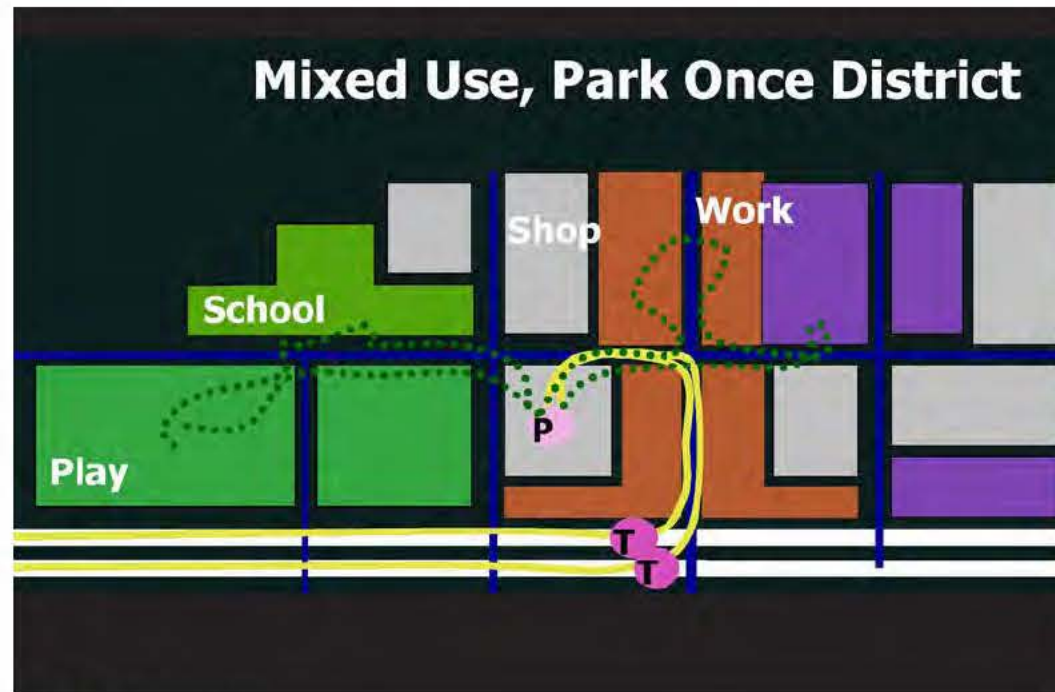
- Differentiate daily needs from event-day needs
 - Accommodate Festival needs with shuttles, trollies, heritage trains, etc.
- New development will displace surface parking
- New residential can park underground, commercial likely cannot park underground
- Maximize Current Facilities
 - East side
 - Carlton Road
 - Stiver Mill
 - Toogood Pond Park
- Locate Future Additional Facilities
 - Carlton Road West of Main - approx. 60 spaces
 - School Lot - 90 Spaces
 - Soccer Field Lot - 90 spaces
 - North anchor parking - 80 Spaces
 - Smiley Lot - 50 Spaces



Strolling



Dining



Park Once Concept

Results of a Mixed Use, Park Once District

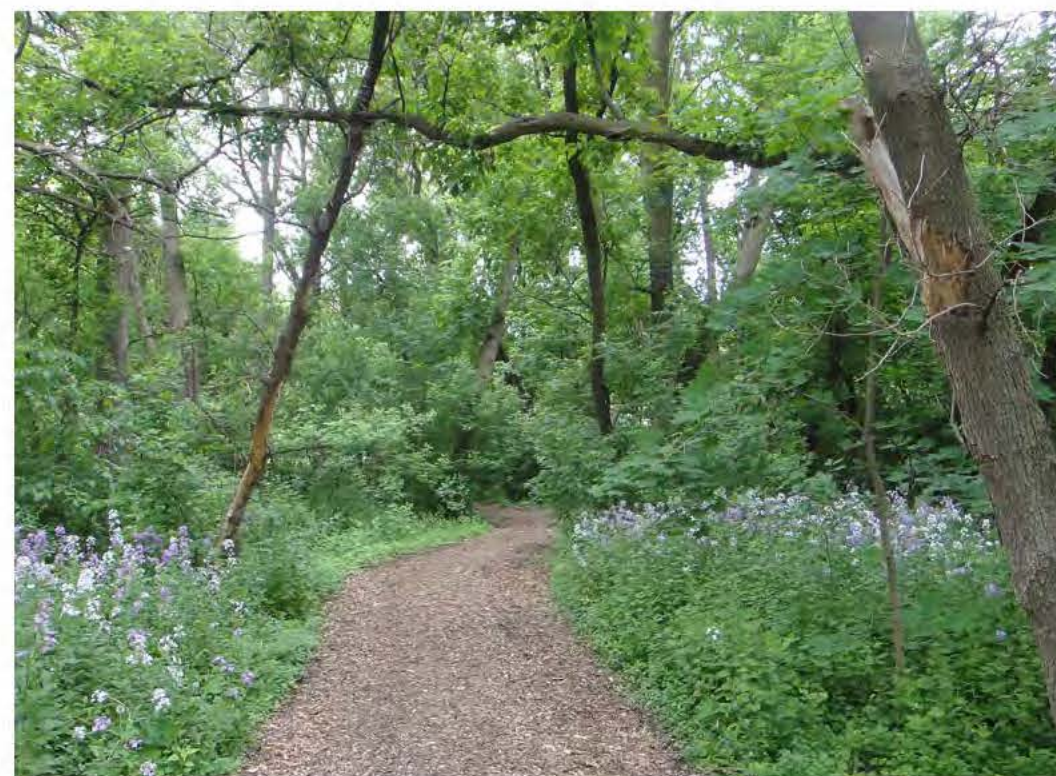
- < 1/2 the parking
- < 1/2 the land area
- 1/4 the arterial trips
- 1/6 the arterial turning movement
- < 1/4 the vehicle miles traveled



Shopping



Special Events Increase Demand for and Limit Access to Parking



Rouge Valley Trail



Pedestrian Safety is a Priority



Non-Accessible Pedestrian Way from East Side Parking Lot

Transportation Issues

- Visitors at weekends, local on weekdays and commuter through traffic at peak times
- Differentiate daily transportation needs from Festival days
- Bike/walking:
 - Poor links to trail systems
 - Strategic and local routes
- Bus/transit issues:
 - No clear access from regional transit network
 - No clear routes to/from transit stops
 - Heritage rail station is under-used
- Traffic issues include:
 - Delivery vehicles parking on Main Street
 - Queuing on westbound approach to Carlton/Main Street intersection
 - Speed and visibility an issue on bends
- Parking issues:
 - Very few cycle parking spaces
 - Very few motorcycle parking spaces
 - Difficult access to vehicle spaces

PUBLIC PROCESS

Open and Transparent Public Process

With such a cherished and valuable community come many opinions about how to plan for its future.

Throughout the development of this vision plan, it has been critical to seek the full range of stakeholder input and feedback, employing an open and transparent process. The process began with a public Charrette held in Crosby Memorial Arena June 5–9, 2013. In those five days, the project held: an initial public meeting and intake session open to all; a number of breakout sessions targeting specific topics; work sessions by the design team to incorporate real-time input and feedback, a midweek public presentation and intake session; and an end-of-the-week public presentation of draft plans, with feedback.

A series of public meetings followed: November 2013 in Markham Council Chambers to present an update on the focus areas outside the core; January 2014 in the Markham Civic Centre’s Canada Room to present the focus areas inside the core; and June 2014 again in Council Chambers to present the overall vision findings. As well, members of the team met with several community groups to answer questions and discuss options that would address concerns in specific areas of the plan.

During this process, the City of Markham has published interim development reports on its website. Citizens have had the opportunity to provide their feedback online; the design team has taken their many comments into consideration, including developing more than one concept in some cases to provide alternate choices as the plan is realized.



Tour of Village with Charrette Team conducted by George Duncan



Visual Inspection of Existing Conditions

Also the team was guided by the Main Street Unionville Committee, created by Council to provide community input and review study documents.

Charrette Public Input Process

- 8 Focused Intake Sessions
 - Transportation, Traffic, & Roads
 - Protecting a Heritage Community
 - Programming a Village
 - Land Use/Heritage Planning
 - Urban Retail Strategies
 - Accessibility
 - School Board Initiatives
 - Environmental & Open Space
- 4 Public presentations with Q & A
 - Evenings - June 5,6,7
 - Sunday afternoon final presentation - June 9



Final Public Presentation in the Crosby Arena



Reviewing Charrette Drawings hung on the glass perimeter of the rink



Charrette Presentation to Stakeholder Group



Charrette Design Process - Study Design Team working in the Crosby Memorial Arena



Reviewing Charrette Drawings



Public Presentations - Michael Morrissey



Break Out Sessions - Robert Goodill

URBAN RETAIL

Sustainable Retail

As a commercial centre, sustainable retail is crucial to the success of Main Street Unionville—it is perhaps the greatest single challenge the district faces, and none of the solutions presented in this Vision Plan will fully solve the problems they are intended to address if retail issues are pushed to the background.

During the study period, members of the design team toured numerous Main Street retail districts throughout Ontario, and studied in-depth those including Niagara-on-the-Lake, Kleinberg, as well as nearby Main Street Markham. Also of note were two modern retail districts located in Toronto: Shops at Don Mills and the Distillery District.

While many may argue that Main Street Unionville faces stiff competition from the vast array of retail choices currently available in the GTA—not to mention those soon to come online—it cannot be overstated that Main Street Unionville is in fact ‘its own brand’ due to its unique heritage attributes and walkable, compact built form¹. New developments cannot fundamentally replicate this; though it is enlightening to note that in two of the modern developments mentioned above, the

key urban design principles on which Main Street Unionville has evolved, and which are the foundation of the design solutions proposed in this book, have been used to great effect.

Shoppes at Don Mills

Shoppes at Don Mills (SADM), a ground-up redevelopment of a traditional post-World War II enclosed regional shopping centre, SADM re-opened in 2009 as the GTA’s

first ‘lifestyle centre’. Developer Cadillac Fairview has even gone so far as to market the 500,000+ square foot complex of 72 shops, restaurants and condominiums as ‘Toronto’s first Urban Village’². Combining very upscale retail—including both a traditional supermarket and a gourmet food market owned by Chef Mark McEwan—with residential uses, SADM combines time-tested elements of urban design with admittedly very modern architecture: streets

are open to automobiles but focused on walkability and pedestrian primacy; ample free decked parking does not interfere with the pedestrian experience; a grand village square serves as community space; tactful use of bends and curves in the connected street network create a sense of excitement and entice shoppers to walk them in their entirety. In contrast to the traditional mall or strip centre, there is a very carefully developed mix of retail, dining, professional and personal services here: those living within walking distance of SADM have the great majority of their daily needs met.

Distillery District

The largest collection of Early Industrial-era buildings in Canada, this former distillery re-opened in 2003 as an upscale shopping district retrofitted into a heritage area. Over 200,000 square feet of retail, restaurant, gallery, and studio space exist between several buildings with an interconnected pedestrian street network between. The retail in Distillery District is both upscale and strays away from known national brand names, but repeat business appears to be driven by creative individual proprietors (shown in the breadth and display of their offerings: artisan Sake; organic baby clothes; vintage found items), mixed with those who specialize in the provision of everyday-type needs (gourmet olive oil; patisserie; the requisite coffee bar).



Shoppes at Don Mills - The design team toured this state-of-the-art retail district that is designed to support an outdoor shopping and dining experience. Developer, Cadillac Fairview, has created a very walkable retail area with a strategic mix of retail masterplanned as a mixed-use residential development

Thus a retail program for Main Street Unionville must involve enhancement of the district’s core design elements—adding additional retail spaces that are both keeping with the character of the existing buildings and flexible to meet modern retailing demands; ensuring the process of parking is always predictable and that the supply thereof is easily accessed; and providing an intimately-connected choice of pedestrian routes in the core area of the



Distillery District, Toronto - The design team was given a tour of this historic precinct by the Founder/Developer early in the study.

district to prevent ennui on the part of shoppers³. However it must also address the sophistication in tandem with the variety of retail, for a 21st Century village must have the selection of both daily and specialty goods to capture the needs of the local residents as well as those from around the region. This model has proven effective in area developments that have tried to emulate Main Street Unionville in various ways; though, as existing business owners, shoppers, and residents know, there is only one Main Street Unionville.

Background

Main Street Unionville retail faces significant challenges, though the business community and residents alike should be heartened by the fact that the ten-year-old ‘50/50 Policy’ was lifted in 2014. This policy, the subject of much debate and controversy, precluded new ‘restaurant uses’ from occurring on Main Street Unionville until retail floor space exceeded 50 percent of the total floor space in the Heritage Main Street commercial zone, and placed multiple restrictions on potential restaurant operators when retail floor space rose above 50 percent—something which never came to pass over the decade⁴.

Furthermore, five definitions of ‘restaurant’ types existed in the zoning by-law, which were quite inflexible; none would have allowed, for example, retail uses that involved the mere sale of food, either

incidentally or as a specialty, such as a small grocery store with a café, a bakery, or any type of business where on-site consumption of food might occur. Given the nature of modern urban retail—as well as the inherent function of a ‘traditional shopping precinct’⁵—this limitation on the breadth of businesses allowed to locate on Main Street Unionville, and on the flexibility concerning what existing businesses might offer for sale, proved to be a major barrier to retail development in the core area. To the immense credit of the City, business owners, and area stakeholders, this policy was lifted and replaced with new, more flexible zoning provisions less restrictive of retail uses.

Although policy restrictions were lifted, physical constraints on the development of successful and sustainable retail on Main Street Unionville remain. As is evidenced in greater detail throughout this Vision Plan, the core area suffers from small building and lot sizes, limits on available parking, and a lack of full-time residents in the immediate core area. While thoughtful solutions to these issues are presented in detail in the following sections of this book, a summary of concepts is presented in light of Main Street Unionville’s current retail challenges.

The Traditional Shopping Experience

To truly fulfill the stated vision of Main Street Unionville becoming, ‘a vibrant, thriving and successful heritage village that

is a regional destination, but serves local needs’, it is essential to restore to the core area the ability for residents and visitors to pursue a ‘traditional’ shopping experience—one where a combination of daily needs and specialty items can be purchased, with the added ability to dine in the district. For too long the desire to preserve the character of Main Street Unionville’s built form has been conflated with the need to restrict various retail uses in the district. However, from a retailing perspective, Main Street Unionville’s heritage character is in fact its brand image, and the nearby modern developments currently offering or planning to offer world-class retail will never directly compete. To offer successful retail opportunities relevant to visitors and residents will nevertheless require additions to the built form—though, as this Vision Plan shows, those additions will only enhance the existing character of the village.

Retail Anchor

Enhancing Main Street Unionville retail to put it on a sustainable footing will require a multi-faceted approach. Most notably, the absence of a retail anchor poses a challenge to expanding the customer base for existing retail