



MEMORANDUM

TO: Heritage Markham Committee

FROM: Regan Hutcheson, Manager-Heritage Planning

DATE: October 11, 2023

SUBJECT: Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment, & Draft Plan of Subdivision
Cadillac Fairview- Redevelopment of Buttonville Airport Lands
2833 16th Avenue
PLAN 23 128636

Property/Building Description: Buttonville Airport

Use: Commercial- Aviation

Heritage Status: The subject property is not municipally-recognized as a heritage resource, although it is considered *adjacent*, as defined in the City of Markham Official Plan (2014), to the Buttonville Heritage Conservation District

Application/Proposal

- Proposal is to redevelop the Buttonville Airport lands for employment and industrial uses. The redevelopment concept and draft plan of subdivision proposes two (2) development blocks, a stormwater management block, a Highway 404 widening, and a network of public and private roads, including the proposed extension of Allstate Parkway north through the Subject Lands to 16th Avenue.

Background

- History of the Buttonville Airport (Markham Museum – City of Markham)

Buttonville Airport began in 1953 as a grass airstrip and became an official airport in 1962. It currently services corporate and other small passenger flights, and is home to over 300 flying clubs.



Photo: Air Traffic Control at Buttonville Airport, 1970. Gift of Toronto Airways M.2006.13.84.d

Marion Reesor was a trained pilot. The image below is from a series of photos taken for a 1947 article in an aviation magazine, however the woman in the picture is actually Marion's sister Dorothy. On this day Marion was not available and so Dorothy was asked to step in and pose as her.



Marion was one of several pilots in the Hood family. Gordon Hood, Dorothy and Marion's uncle, is considered an aviation pioneer, having built and flown his own airplane in 1913. Coincidentally, the sisters' family farmland was eventually where Buttonville Airport was built in 1953.

Photo: Gift of Dorothy Reesor M.2014.2.0.12



Airport in 1980 (looking west, 16th Ave on right and no Hwy 404) Source: Vividcomm
Author: [M.J. Martin](#) Comments

Buttonville Airport, located just 29 kilometres north of downtown Toronto has a rich aviation history. CYKZ as it is designated is a part of Toronto's history too, even if it is located in Markham, Ontario. It is a vital piece of Canadian aviation history. Its life as a business has been reported as dead many times before and reprieves have come to revive it. Sooner or later, its luck will likely run out. But, for now, life continues as usual. With that said, the Coronavirus lock-down has temporarily curtailed all of the fun flying activities for the members of the Buttonville Flying Club. So, with time to spare as we all miss our aviation pastime, it is good to consider the richness of the airport's past. Long live CYKZ!

- See additional History Article “the Little Airport that Grew”- Figure 5

Heritage Policy

- The subject property is located *adjacent* (within 60m of a *cultural heritage resource*), as defined within the 2014 Official Plan (OP), to the Buttonville Heritage Conserviaotn District - BHCD.
- While the BHCD Plan does not contain policies or guidelines concerning new construction adjacent to the District, Section 4.5.1.1 of the 2014 Official Plan directs Staff to review any application for development approval on lands adjacent to cultural heritage resources to maintain the integrity of those resources.
- Section 4.5.3.3 of the OP notes it is the policy of Council “to ensure that development that directly affects a *cultural heritage resource* itself and *adjacent lands*, is designed,

sited or regulated so as to protect and mitigate any negative visual or physical impact on the heritage attributes of the resource, including considerations such as scale, massing, height, building orientation and location relative to the resource”.

- Section 4.5.3.11 of the OP indicates that the municipality will review applications for *development approval* and *site alteration* on *adjacent lands* to an individually designated property or a heritage conservation district to require mitigative measures and/or alternative development approaches in order to conserve the *heritage attributes* affected. This review may include measures to ensure compatibility with the characteristics, context and appearance of the *heritage attributes* affected”.

Staff Comment

- The subject property, although considered *adjacent* to the BHCD as defined in the 2014 OP, is substantially separated from the Heritage District lands.
- No listed properties on Markham Register of Property of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest
- Heritage Section staff, therefore, do not believe that the proposed development plans/ applications have any negative visual or physical impact on the heritage attributes of the BHCD, and recommend that Heritage Markham provide no comment from a heritage perspective on the application other than to suggest that conditions of approval include a provision for the applicant to fund a Markham Remembered interpretive plaque to celebrate the former Buttonville Airport.

Suggested Recommendation for Heritage Markham

THAT Heritage Markham has no comment from a heritage perspective on the proposed development and associated applications, but does recommend that as a condition in the plan of subdivision agreement or other appropriate development agreement, a Markham Remembered interpretive plaque be required to commemorate and celebrate the former Buttonville Airport.

Q:\Development\Heritage\SUBJECT\Buttonville Airport\HM Oct 11 2023 Buttonville Airport redevelopment.doc

Attachments

Figure 1 – 60m Buffer

Figure 2 – Aerial Photos

Figure 3 – Site Plan

Figure 4 – Plan of Subdivision

Figure 5 – Article – “The Little Airport that Grew”

Figure 1: 60m buffer surrounding the BHCD.



Figure 2

A) Looking South at main buildings along 16th Avenue

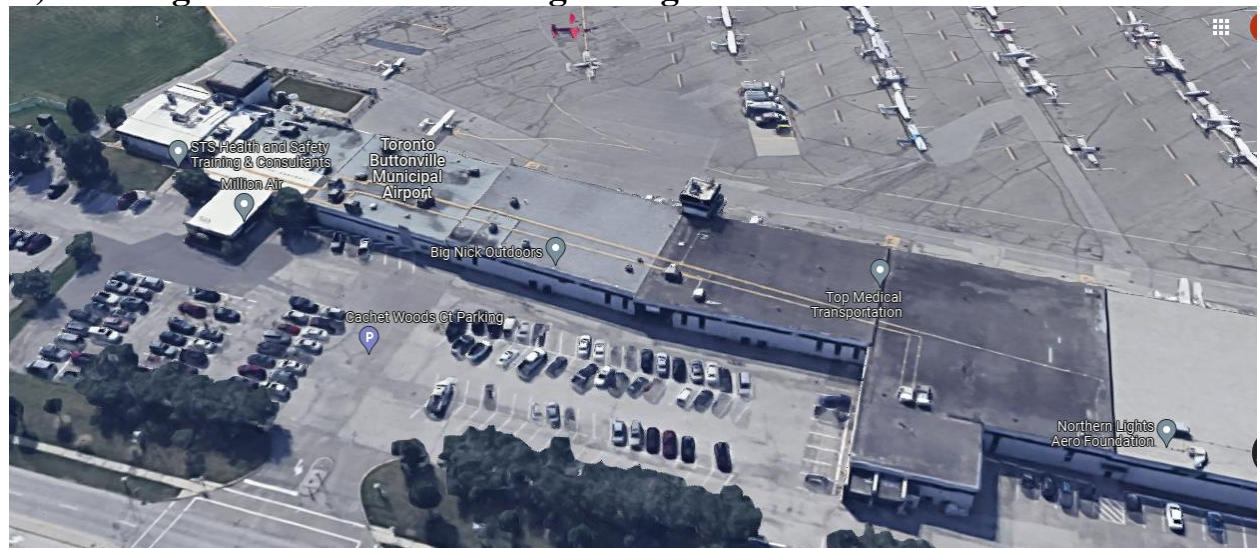


Figure 2

B) Looking south at main air field (Heritage District to left)



Figure 3
Site Plan – Phase 1 (near 16th Avenue)

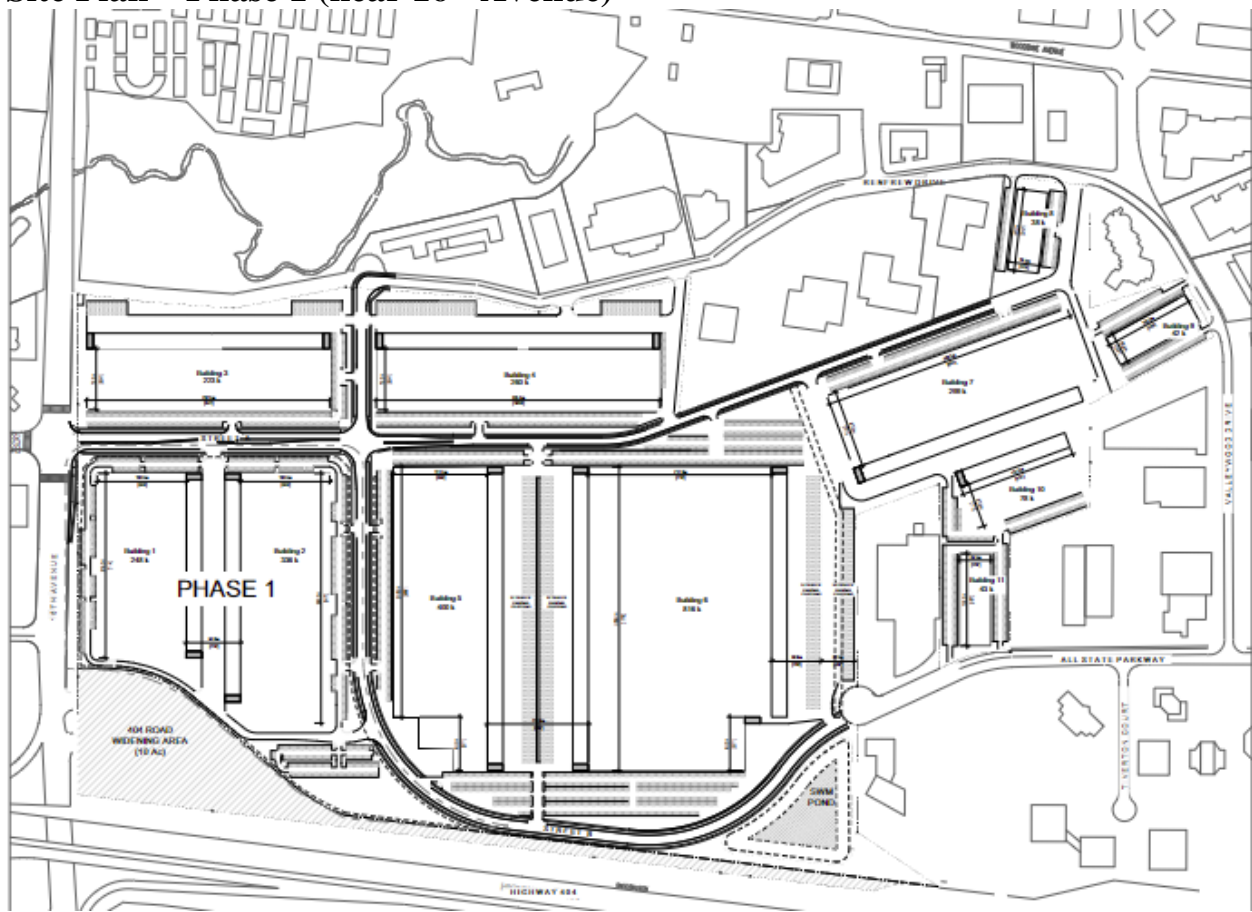
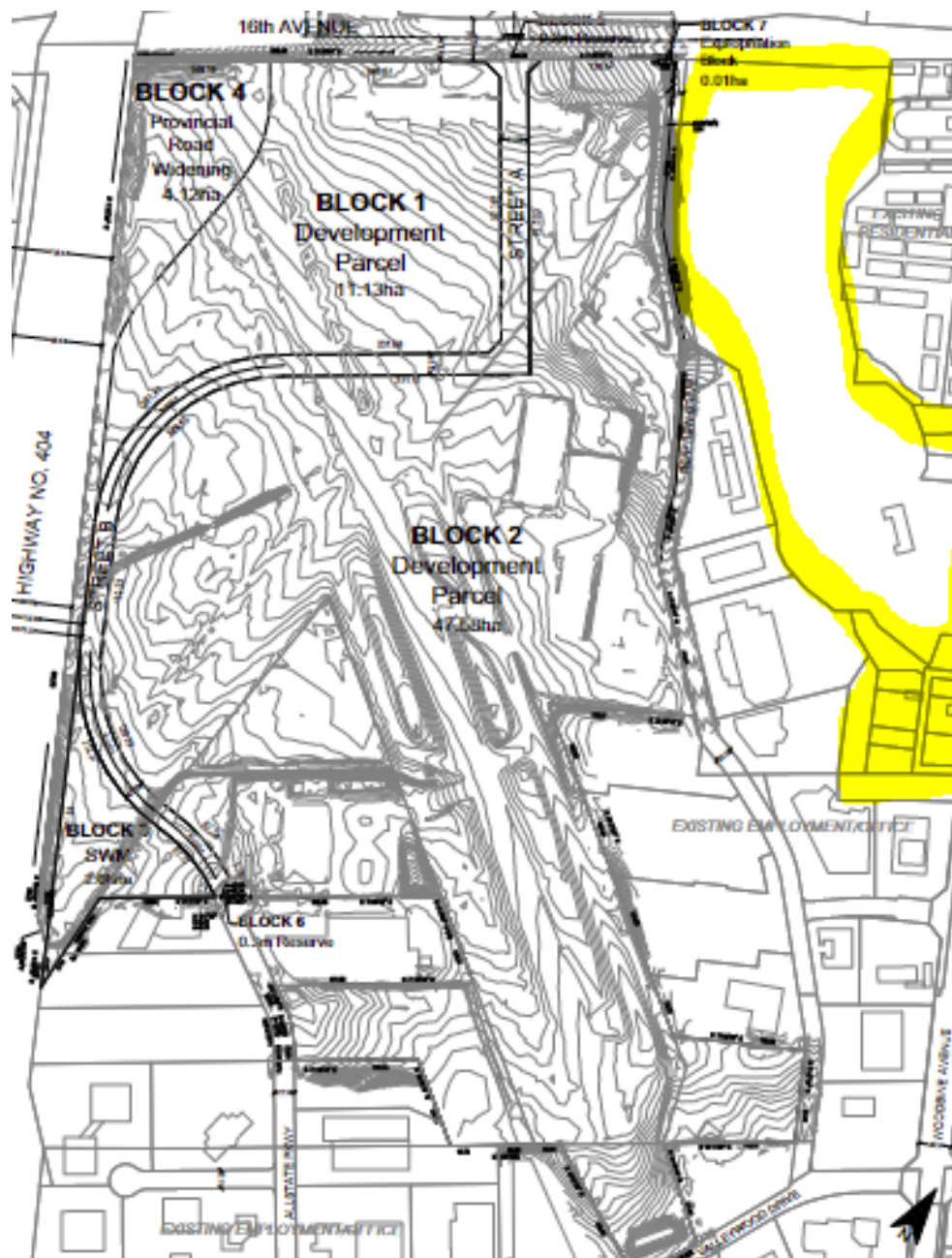


Figure 4
Plan of Subdivision – Heritage District in Yellow



The Little Airport That Grew



BY SARAH B. HOOD | DECEMBER 14, 2011

The planned closure of Toronto Buttonville Municipal Airport • one of Canada's busiest airports, and a general aviation gem • has left many hoping a nearby successor will soon be crowned.

You might call it the biggest little airport in the country. Privately owned Toronto Buttonville Municipal Airport (CYKZ) is one of Canada's busiest airports; however, the facility is set to close within a few years, with its land earmarked for redevelopment and its businesses facing relocation.

Situated in Markham, Ont., about 18 miles (some 30 kilometres) north of Toronto, Buttonville began its rise to prominence in 1963, when it was purchased by Michael C. Sifton (of the famed Sifton family, whose history in Canadian politics and business dates back to before Confederation). Sifton had started his career in newspaper publishing • his family Armadale Corp. owned two Saskatchewan dailies, the Regina Leader-Post and Saskatoon The StarPhoenix • but later also helped grow the Sifton business empire to include various other newspapers, television and radio stations, a record company, and real estate properties (including the lands surrounding Buttonville Airport). Sifton son Derek is currently in charge of Buttonville, as president of Toronto Airways Ltd., the company Michael formed in 1963 to run the airport and buy out his partners at the time.

Derek Sifton said that soon after it was formed, Toronto Airways was sold to his family Armadale holding company, and the larger growth and transformation of Buttonville, which had only become an official airport in 1962, began. Although now a major general and commercial aviation facility, in the very beginning, more than a decade before the Siftons, said Derek, it was basically a grass strip and a metal hangar, when 16th Avenue [one of Markham's main east-west routes] was a dirt road and Highway 404 didn't exist. As they say, the rest is history; we've basically built it into one of Canada's top 10 busiest airports. •

Unpaved Beginnings

The foundations of Buttonville Airport trace back to when Jim Leggat moved his burgeoning aircraft services company, Leggat Aviation Ltd., to that small grass airstrip in 1953. Other aviation businesses eventually followed, and the growth of the airport in turn affected the direction and growth of Leggat Aviation. As John Leggat, the company's current vice-president and director of maintenance, recalled, "As the airport has grown, [our] business has grown to accommodate the new types of airplanes that now come to Buttonville. •

As a high school student, Leggat first worked at Buttonville in 1965, moving into full-time work in 1975. He saw, first-hand, Michael Sifton's visionary nature, and how that contributed to the airport's success. One particular memory he shared involved Sifton erecting a sign in what was essentially • before the construction of Highway 404 • the middle of nowhere. When he put it up, the sign overlooked farmers' fields, and people said, "What are you doing?" But he knew that [if he waited until] after the highway went through, he would have no authority to erect a sign next to the 404. •

These days, Buttonville averages 160,000 to 170,000 aircraft movements annually, and serves a broad range of general aviation needs. We have a real mix here,• said Derek Sifton. We have several charter departments, private companies like Magna International that own their planes, and Seneca College, which has a thriving [flight training] program•

Toronto Airways also operates its own flight training program at Buttonville, and the airport hosts diverse organizations like the York Regional Police; Ontario Provincial Police; Toronto Police Service; the Canadian Traffic Network, which uses a helicopter for traffic reporting; and the Buttonville Flying Club, which accounts for about 70 of our 300 airplanes,• said Sifton. The airport also houses sales and maintenance facilities like Leggat, Air Partners Inc. and Aviation Unlimited Inc.

Many notable figures have flown in and out of Buttonville, too, including political figures, and actors like Tom Cruise of Top Gun fame, who reputedly took lessons there. More importantly, said Sifton, Our airport and Toronto Airways are really a training ground. We're training the pilots and aviation technicians of tomorrow.• The airport even has partnerships as far afield as Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics. That something we can be proud of over the past 40-odd years.•

But, these days the future of Buttonville is in flux. Within a few years after Michael Sifton death in 1995, rumours began circulating that the airport might close. In 2006, Nav Canada announced it would invest over \$2 million Cdn to build an air traffic control tower at Buttonville to replace the one that had been in use since 1967 • but it was designed as a modular structure that could be moved to a new facility. Then, in 2009 the Greater Toronto Airports Authority (GTAA) cancelled its \$1.5-million annual capacity maintenance □ subsidy, effectively forcing Toronto Airways' hand.

An Uncertain Future

On Oct. 26, 2010, Armadale and Cadillac Fairview announced a joint venture to redevelop the 170-acre site into a residential and commercial area. We intend to take the project through a redevelopment process,• said Derek Sifton. the same time, we hope to move our current business, ideally to the Pickering airport lands.•

However, the future of the Pickering lands, which were earmarked as a potential airport location about 40 years ago, is not certain. Whereas the GTAA 2010 Needs Assessment Study – Pickering Lands found a need for an airport on that site, Transport Canada said no additional airport will likely be needed until sometime between 2027 and 2037. And, a lobby group called VOCAL, Voters Organized to Cancel the Airport Lands, continues to oppose the Pickering alternative.

While some suggest air traffic, training and related businesses could be spread out among the growing Oshawa Municipal Airport (CYOO) and facilities in Peterborough, Barrie, Brampton, Kitchener, Hamilton and/or Burlington, others say the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) needs a closer option. When Buttonville closes, the ripple effect will be felt far and wide • much farther than most people, even in aviation, would like to think,• said Kevin Psutka, president and chief executive officer of the Canadian Owners and Pilots Association (COPA).

Psutka predicts a drop-off in big business travel to Toronto, a decline in aircraft parts and servicing business, and an impact on flight training. In my estimation, 79,000 to

80,000 of the movements will not be accommodated [by other airports].• In August 2011, COPA commissioned planning firm Malone Given Parsons to further examine the Pickering lands situation, and arm COPA with recommendations it can take to the federal government.

Current Buttonville users, meanwhile, continue to express hope that an alternate site will be located as close to Toronto as possible. We can relocate to any place; however, I don't think it good for the city,• said Solly Capua, president and owner of Aviation Unlimited. It would not be right for the whole city of Toronto not to have a general aviation airport. I'm passionate about it, not because of how it going to affect Aviation Unlimited, but because I'm concerned about business for Toronto.•

Sam Barone, president and CEO of the Canadian Business Aviation Association (CBAA), is equally passionate: Buttonville is a real gem; it a very important facility for corporate aviation. The FAA [United States Federal Aviation Administration] and U.S. government undertook a secondary airport plan' among large metropolitan areas. In Canada, we didn't have that.

Most of the CBAA members are among Canada top employers, and the economic impact of our members is in the billions. We're operating sophisticated jets that can go overseas. If you're the CEO of a mining or banking company, you don't want to be in Hamilton or Waterloo; you want to be close to where you're going. Once Buttonville closes, we would like to have other options that maintain our access to the GTA.•

For now, an official spokesperson for Transport Canada said only that, If the airport closes, current users have options in the Greater Toronto Area, and each will have to choose depending on their individual needs and circumstances.•

Said John Leggat, It will be a sad day, regardless of what down the road, when Buttonville closes. It a legacy, it an institution within Canada, and it a tribute to the gentleman who made it happen.•

Fortunately, Buttonville closure is still a few years away,• said Derek Sifton. And, until that time We are open for business and we're definitely not in shutdown mode. Any corporate traveller who wants to come to the GTA, we're more than happy to look after them.•

Sarah B. Hood is a Toronto author and journalist who has contributed to dozens of newsstand and trade publications. She has been shortlisted for both the National Magazine Awards and the Kenneth R. Wilson Awards for business writing.