

**REDEVELOPING CANADIAN FORCES BASE DOWNSVIEW:  
Towards a Cultural Campus Development Model**

---

A report submitted to the School of Urban and Regional Planning  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Urban and Regional Planning

By

Zdana C. Komarnicky

Queen's University  
Kingston, Ontario  
September 2003

Copyright Zdana C. Komarnicky, 2003

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

This report evaluates the suitability of an 89 acre parcel at Downsview Park for redevelopment into a proposed Cultural Campus, and the agency's progress in gaining the necessary project support. The challenges in developing a decommissioned military base for recreational and cultural uses are highlighted, and recommendations are made for the successful redevelopment of the site.

The specific redevelopment site, referred to as the Cultural Campus, has been designated the cultural and recreational centre of Downsview Park (See Appendix 1). Downsview Park is a 644 acre site centrally located in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Downsview Park in Toronto



Source: FoTenn, 2002

The site is horseshoe-shaped and is bound by Keele Street on the west, Sheppard Avenue on the north, and Allen Road on the east. The inner boundary is formed by the de Havilland/Bombardier runway.

After the closure of Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Downsview in 1994, the Federal Government established a redevelopment agency, Parc Downsview Park Inc. (PDP), and gave it the mandate of redeveloping the former base into an urban park. Although the site currently has the appearance of an abandoned military base, the Cultural Campus block has enormous potential to become an internationally-renowned public space. Several buildings formerly used by the Department of National Defence (DND) currently stand on this development parcel, and are used primarily for storage. The properties immediately surrounding the Cultural Campus include the de Havilland runway, the Park, the designated commercial lands, and the DND training site.

PDP has spent the last eight years implementing the Downsview Land Use Plan (Appendix 1), which illustrates the various land uses intended for the Downsview Lands. The 644 acres have been subdivided into thirteen development parcels intended to accommodate residential, commercial, and recreational uses. Some parcels have also been designated for the Department of National Defence. Every component of the Downsview Lands has a development strategy in place with the exception of the Cultural Campus. Following a development strategy ensures that the project is not guided, or misguided by sporadic decisions based on monetary considerations which would unlikely flow into a cohesive final product. PDP must follow a development strategy to maintain

control over land uses and to fulfill its mandate. This report recommends a development strategy, without which the Park development cannot succeed.

To evaluate the redevelopment of the Cultural Campus, this study employs a checklist that considers factors which affect the success of the development. The criteria that form the checklist are based on the redevelopment agency's objectives for the proposal and on relevant literature about recreational and cultural development, tourism, and festival marketplaces. Based on the framework provided by PDP documents (PDP Corporate Plan, 2001; Park Competition Brief, 1999), more detailed criteria are derived from a comprehensive literature review.

The criteria are grouped into three categories: site conditions, built environment, and politics and project support. First, the site is evaluated based on its physical characteristics. The site's physical characteristics must be suitable for the intended development. Second, the existing built environment is evaluated to determine whether the site has any characteristics or buildings that can be retained in the new design. Finally, the redevelopment agency's progress in gaining project support is evaluated, since the agency requires this support to proceed with development.

The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 1, which demonstrates whether the criteria are satisfied (✓), not satisfied (✗), or partially satisfied (⋈).

**Table 1: Analysis Summary**

		<b>SITE CONDITIONS</b>	
Land Ownership		X	PDP has complete authority over decisions regarding the land
Site Access		~	Pedestrian
		✓	Local public transit
		~	Regional public transit
		✓	Auto/highway routes
Site Size		✓	Suitable site size
Physical Characteristics		✓	Varied topography
		✓	Stable soils
		✓	Lack of environmental contamination
		~	Varied vegetation; shaded and open spaces
		✓	Vista points
		X	Water bodies
		X	Geological features
		✓	Historical sites
		✓	No high cliffs
		X	No open mine shafts, quarries, old/run down buildings, or other man-made hazards
		X	No manufacturing plants
		✓	No hazards created by water that is unsuitable for swimming
		✓	No poisonous reptiles
		✓	No poisonous plants
		X	No biting insects or low lying swampy areas for breeding
		✓	No garbage or manure dumps
	X	No railroads, trolley, or bus lines	
	X	No junk piles	
	X	No noise	
Site Servicing		✓	Water
		✓	Public
		✓	Sewer
		✓	Other
Surrounding Area		✓	Surrounding uses compatible with recreation, culture, retail
Planning Policy		✓	Redevelopment plans coincide with Official Plan
		<b>BUILT ENVIRONMENT</b>	
Design Principles		~	Human Scale
		X	Landscaping
		X	Parking
		X	High Quality Design
Vision/Theme		X	PDP has developed a vision and theme for the Cultural Campus
Four Season Use		~	Site uses for all four seasons
Historic Preservation		~	Buildings can be renovated and reused
Public Space		X	Amenable public space
Special Needs		X	Site is accessible to people with special needs
		<b>POLITICS AND PROJECT SUPPORT</b>	
Local Support		~	Local community
		~	Local government
Sponsoring government		✓	The project is supported by the Federal Government
Marketing		X	Site is marketed effectively to developers and to the public
Employ Local Staff		X	Redevelopment agency has a policy to employ local community
Local Consultants		✓	Local consultants retained for redevelopment projects
Board of Directors		✓	Local community represented on the PDP Board

**Legend:** ✓ = satisfies evaluation criteria      ~ = partially satisfies evaluation criteria  
 X = does not satisfy evaluation criteria

The analysis demonstrates that, for the most part, the redevelopment of the Cultural Campus site is promising. The Cultural Campus site meets most of the basic physical requirements necessary for recreation site development. PDP has made significant progress in gaining project support. The initial site improvements, public consultation strategy and policy changes have resulted in positive support from stakeholders, including the public. However, PDP does not yet have an agreement with the Department of National Defence regarding land ownership, which is the largest obstacle to redevelopment. Without a land lease or ownership agreement, PDP cannot begin negotiations with developers to redevelop the site and cannot proceed with any development with surety of action.

Although the site does not meet all the criteria fully, the site has the potential to satisfy the criteria. Once PDP and DND resolve land ownership issues, the following recommendations can help PDP produce the intended Cultural Campus:

1. It is recommended that PDP resolve land ownership issues, since the agency cannot proceed with development and thus fulfill its mandate without absolute control over land decisions.
2. PDP should implement a development model and strategy to sustain a clear vision for the future development of the Downsview Lands.
3. Development should follow a vision and a theme so that PDP's objectives for the redevelopment project are met.
4. PDP should implement urban design principles to guide the development of the Cultural Campus to create a world-class product.
5. The site's internal location demands the establishment of a marketing strategy to market the lands to developers and to the public.

6. PDP should change the existing building inventory. Most existing buildings have been on the site since the early 1940s and 1950s. Although their previous industrial use may have expired, some buildings are architecturally distinct and have potential for reuse.
7. PDP may wish to form strategic alliances and partnerships with the public and private sectors to implement the Cultural Campus public uses.
8. PDP should continue to involve the public in the redevelopment process to maintain local project support.

The recommendations in this report should help PDP achieve its mandate to successfully develop Canada's first National Urban Park. Once the appropriate development strategy is implemented, the Cultural Campus has the potential to become a world-class cultural-recreational destination, which commemorates a significant element of Canadian history.