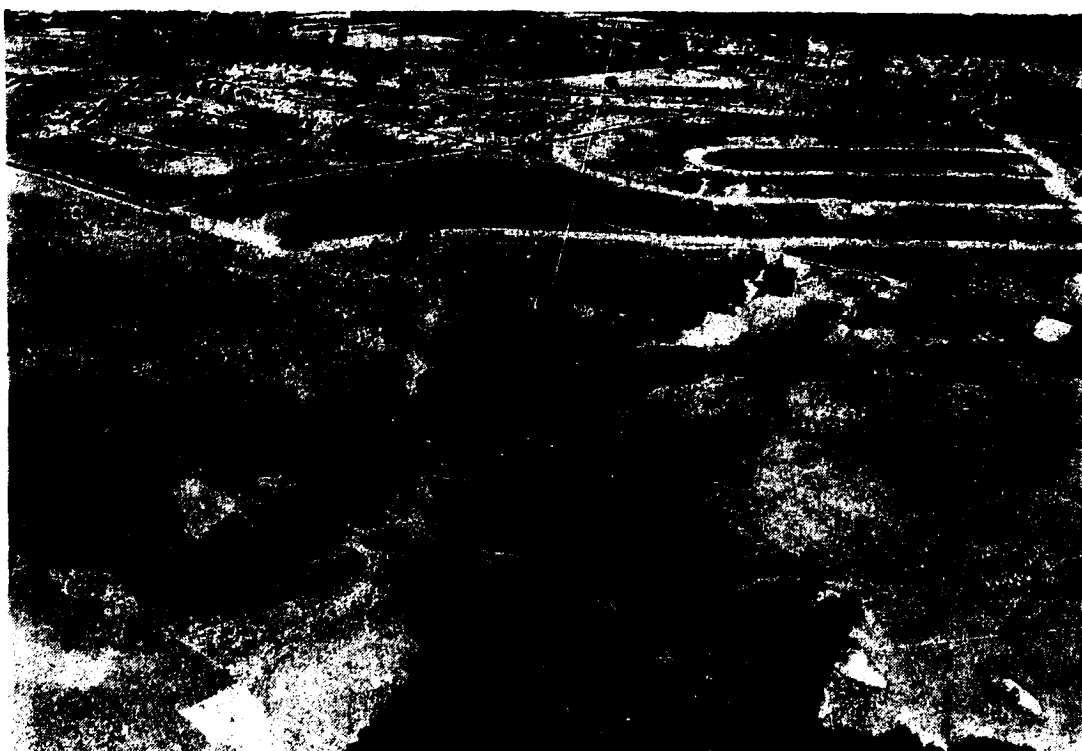


INSIGHT PAGE



A recurring transformation in Toronto: At left St. Andrew's Golf Course in North York in 1949, at right is the same land today at Highway 401 and Yonge St.

Saving York Downs golf club was a costly lesson

By IAN URQUHART
 Star staff writer

The 420 share-holding members of York Downs Golf Club recently bought the Unionville farm of Liberal MPP Donald Deacon, transformed it into a 27-hole golf course, built a new clubhouse, and paid themselves dividends that one source estimates at \$2,000 each.

It was possible because they sold their old 18-hole course in North York in developer Max Tanenbaum for \$6.47 million.

The residents of Metro almost lost the old course, a 163-acre expanse of green at Bathurst St. and Sheppard Ave. W., until Metro Council, the borough of North York, and the Ontario government agreed this month to buy the site from Tanenbaum for \$9 million.

That's a mark-up of \$2.53 million. The purchase gives Metro a scenic park in the valley of the Don River in the heart of a crowded city, but it has left politicians shaking their heads over the cost and the effect on the tax rolls. The borough alone must raise its taxes by \$7.50 on the average house for one year to pay for its share in the purchase of the old golf course, once considered one of the finest in Metro.

The York Downs sale is not the first time a golf course has fallen into the hands of a developer in Metro, just the most recent and dramatic case in what one Metro planner calls "an ancient pattern."

Many courses were bulldozed

In the last 15 to 20 years, the following privately owned golf courses have been bulldozed for housing as developers fought for space inside Metro's boundaries: St. Andrews, at Highway 401 and Yonge St.; Forest Hills, on Bathurst St. north of Finch Ave. W.; IBM, on Leslie St. north of Lawrence Ave. E.; Cliffside, at Midland Ave. and Kingston Rd.; Cedarbrae, at Lawrence Ave. E. and Markham Rd.; The Elms, on Albion Rd. north of Highway 401; and nine holes of the Hunt Club, on Kingston Rd. east of Victoria Park Ave.

In addition, the Pine Point course at Highway 401 and Islington Ave. became a cloverleaf.

In some cases, parts of the old courses were retained as public parks. But when you consider that golf courses are up to 200 acres in

size, a lot of green space has disappeared inside Metro.

The disappearance doesn't just mean that golfers must travel longer distances to reach the starting tees. Golf courses have become an asset to non-golfers as well—an oasis amid tall buildings and wide roads. Entrance is usually restricted, but the grass and trees remain in sight.

"Golf courses are a retreat for a whole spectrum of life in the city," said Metro Parks Commissioner Tommy Thompson, "even if it is just the birds and the bees and the flowers."

Good tobogganing in the winter

In the winter, he added, golf courses become playgrounds for children on sleds and skis. Some of the city's finest tobogganing hills are located in golf courses.

York Downs has become an expensive lesson that taught governments they must formulate some comprehensive policy for preserving these open spaces or pay exorbitant prices for the land to developers who are already petitioning the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) to let them exercise their rights to build, as Tanenbaum was doing.

If the governments do not buy the golf courses as they come on the market or prevent their sale in some way, developers will step in almost inevitably. With land becoming a scarce commodity inside Metro's 241 square miles, golf courses attract developers. They usually offer attractive surroundings for housing developments and there are no residents to relocate or fight at City Hall.

Tam O'Shanter Golf Club, on Kennedy Rd. north of Sheppard Ave. E., is the next course slated for redevelopment. The land is already designated for housing in the Scarborough official plan.

Even such venerable green landmarks as the Scarborough, Rosedale, and Lambton courses could be redeveloped in the future. Their members swear there is no thought of selling, but millions of dollars can be tempting. "If an offer were made, I'd be obliged to put it on the table," said Lambton president O. K. Smith, who does not want to move.

The Ontario government appointed a special 20-man committee in 1970 to investigate the golf course problem. The members included five

representatives of private golf courses and spokesmen for the municipalities. They reported earlier this year and made two recommendations now under consideration by the government.

First, they said, golf courses should simply be designated as such in municipal zoning regulations. This designation would not only prohibit redevelopment of the golf course but also have the effect of lowering taxes on the land by restricting the potential use. The latter effect is a goal sought by golf courses undergoing reassessment of their property in the province-wide program to make assessed values equal market values.

The assessed value of Toronto Golf Club in Mississauga was multiplied 43 times in the program, and other courses have seen their assessments rise by almost as much. Courses inside Metro have not yet been reassessed.

Second, the committee recommended golf clubs should pay municipal land taxes at an artificially fixed level below the real value and let the unpaid difference accumulate on paper.

The golf club would be required to pay the accumulated difference if the course were sold.

This tax deferral system is in effect now but only about 25 of the

475 golf courses in the province are using it. Others might have chosen to defer their taxes, but the municipalities are not required to co-operate. The committee recommended making it mandatory.

The present system is also weak because the amount of unpaid taxes that accumulates is often minimal compared to the potential sales price of the land. York Downs, for example, paid just \$180,954.28 in deferred taxes to the municipality when it sold for \$6.3 million. Markland Wood Country Club in Etobicoke owes only \$1,000 in deferred taxes. Most courses owe less than \$100,000.

The difference between paid taxes and amount owing would rise rapidly with reassessment, however, and the committee recommended placing a 10-year limit on the accumulation period. Afterwards a golf course could continue paying artificially low taxes but not be required to pay deferred taxes beyond the first 10 years if the land is sold.

The 10-year limitation would mean most golf courses in Metro would have to pay a little more than \$1 million in back taxes if the land were sold, not enough to discourage the sale of most sites.

Unlimited accumulation of deferred taxes "could rapidly erode an owner's equity in the land" and

make it nearly impossible to sell, the committee explained.

Some might argue that is the whole point of deferred taxation.

The committee had a dissenter—North York Controller Irving Paisley. He charged that the committee membership was "loaded" in favor of the golf course owners, although they made up only five of the 20 members. But they were an organized group within the committee, whereas the municipal representatives were less cohesive. Most of them came from rural townships or small cities where the problem of development's willow green space has not been severely felt.

Paisley filed a minority report calling on the government to carry out a promise in the 1971 budget speech to form an Ontario Land Acquisition Corporation, which could buy golf courses when they came on the market.

The peppery North York controller, who always brings a folder of statistics to back his arguments, scorned the committee recommendation for a special zoning category for golf courses.

Zoning is just a camouflage," said Paisley. "It doesn't preclude change. Municipalities are always passing rezoning bylaws and they could do it on golf course land just as easily."

If the local council refuses to rezone golf course land, the OMB has shown that it will.

In 1960, for example, the OMB overthrew a Etobicoke decision to refuse rezoning of The Elms golf course on Albion Rd. north of Highway 401 and permitted a building project.

"It cannot be questioned that the owner of an operation such as a golf course has the right to cease operation at any time he may choose to do so," said the OMB in its decision. "Having decided to cease the golf club operation the owner has the right to put the land to any proper use which will not interfere with others in the neighborhood in the enjoyment of their lands."

Available for public enjoyment

"Undoubtedly it would be a benefit to the community and to the immediate area if the subject lands could be continued in a use which would make them available for enjoyment by the public. To achieve this it would be necessary, of course, for some public authority to acquire them."

Basically, the OMB is saying that municipalities should be prepared to buy golf courses if they want to guarantee their presence as green, open space. To simply prohibit development would be tantamount to expropriation without compensation. On the other hand, says Paisley, municipalities tax most golf courses at a ridiculously low rate. York Downs, for example, paid less than \$5,000 a year on its land before selling in 1968.

"That's a pretty cheap investment," said Paisley. "The golf club owners are really just as bad as speculators."

Mel Lastman, another North York controller, says the province should consider passing legislation that would prohibit the sale of a golf course to anyone who does not maintain the land as a golf course, except a municipality.

His proposal will be presented to the Metro Legislation and Planning Committee later this year.

Golf clubs owners are not entrapped by the suggestions of Paisley and Lastman.

"This is supposed to be a free country," protested Keith Nesbit, owner of Aurora's Westview course. "They want to take away the freedom to dispose of our land."

Warren Steiner, president of York

Downs, said Paisley and Lastman were implying that golf club members are rushing to sell their land and make a big profit.

"We didn't sell the course with the object of making money," said Steiner. "We were being closed in by the city, surrounded by high-rise apartments and wider streets. We wanted to be a country club again."

"It certainly wasn't any desire to get rich that motivated us," he continued. "Of course he (Tanenbaum) kept improving his offer until we sold."

F. W. Casserly, president of Scarborough Golf & Country Club, said his course has been vandalized in recent years and his members might want to move to a safer spot in the country. "It can be a pretty sick sort of society in the city and it might be obligatory for some people to get out," he said.

Jack Thompson, a Toronto Golf Club member and a spokesman for golf courses on the government committee, said: "Paisley is entitled to his own views, but he was only one of 20 people on that committee and some are a lot more intelligent than that guy."

But A. N. Mackay, a government official and chairman of the committee, said the committee was "damn biased" in favor of the golf course owners.

"There's no hope for support from the municipalities for the committee recommendations," he said.

"The committee never really got around to resolving the key point—do we want to maintain golf courses as permanent open spaces in the cities or give their owners some flexibility to sell them?"

He broke even says the developer

The controversy might have scared some developers away from the golf courses. Max Tanenbaum, who says he just broke even on the York Downs deal after taking into account the interest payments on the money he borrowed to buy the site from the members, will not try to acquire another golf course.

"I just want to forget about the whole thing," he told The Star. "I'm not going to buy any more golf courses or anything more that requires rezoning for development."

"But I'll lay you two-to-one odds on \$100,000 that there won't be more than 100 people a day on the average using York Downs when it opens as a park."



DEVELOPER MAX TANENBAUM
 Paid \$6 million, got \$9 million



PARKS BOSS THOMPSON
 "Golf courses are a retreat"



CONTROLLER IRVING PAISLEY
 Taxes are too low, he charges

To Ottawa it's integration, to the Indians it's assimilation

★ In 1971 Information Canada commissioned eight reports on the problem of communication between governments and residents of local communities. Here is an excerpt from the report on Schefferville, Quebec, a sub-Arctic community where 3,500 whites and 750 Montagnais and Naskapi Indians live.

A member of Treasury Board has described an unofficial policy for Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

"Along with the objective of providing the Indians with a choice as to their way of life, I believe that it is also fair to say that there has been an unspoken desire on the part of the federal government to encourage—but not to force—the maximum degree of integration of Indians into Canadian communities."

It is difficult to reconcile "choice, as to their way of life" with the desire to encourage "maximum" integration but, to

Schefferville people who are familiar with Indian Affairs, there is little doubt that government considers integration of the Indians more important than their freedom of choice.

As one ex-member of the department stated: "Indian Affairs wants total assimilation, but they call it integration."

It is interesting to examine the reasoning behind certain proposals that Indian Affairs has put forward. A departmental brief on the Block 16 (housing) project, for instance, explained the importance of sanitary conditions for the Schefferville bands with the following three references to the advan-

tages of cleanliness among Indians:

1. Although electricity is available, there are no water or sewer services (at John Lake). It is impossible, therefore, for the Indians living in the John Lake settlement to maintain themselves and their clothing in a degree of cleanliness acceptable to the non-Indians at Schefferville with whom they have daily contact in respect of school attendance, employment and recreation.

2. "Almost from the commencement of the arrangement, however, complaints have been received from the local school boards concerning the lack of cleanliness of the children attending the schools. The concern expressed by the school boards includes complaints that many of the children are infested with lice."

3. "It is obvious, therefore, that the present difference in the living standards of the two groups (white and Indian) is so great that the

presence in the schools of Indian children who are not reasonably clean is most distasteful to the school boards and the general public whom they serve."

Not one of the observations expresses the slightest interest in the health risks to Indians that result from the lack of proper sanitation. The paramount concern is only the possibility that whites may reject unclean Indians. That is, the life style of the Indians could retard "maximum integration."

A counselling service, to be operated by Indian Affairs, reflects the same interest in getting Indians to accept white values to smooth the way towards integration. The chief counselling concerns (translated from French) were as follows:

1. Problems of family drinking.
2. Lack of cleanliness of children at school.
3. Hygiene, or lack of hygiene in general.
4. Employment.

5. Understanding of the need for discipline in order to live with non-Indians.

6. Acceptance of the Indians by the non-Indians.

7. Irresponsibility of parents vis-à-vis their children (drinking, education, etc.).

These points unquestionably underscore some serious problems; but why is it that, in point 2, the lack of cleanliness among the children becomes a problem only when they are at school? Hospital statistics, as we've seen, clearly indicate the prevalence of gastroenteritis among pre-school Indian children, and this malady is directly related to unsanitary conditions.

Why is it that, in point 5, counsellors would encourage discipline not because of any intrinsic value it may have but, again, "in order to live with non-Indians"?

Point 6 is self-explanatory, but who needs the counselling? If the problem is lack of acceptance of the Indians by the whites, then

why not give some counselling to the whites? Preferably by Indians.

Indian Affairs and Northern Development is one of the government's more popular scapegoats.

It is in the midst of an immensely complex problem, and it deals with the most fundamental human issues. If it does feel, however, that the only solution to "the Indian problem" is to encourage the Indians' speedy integration into the dominant white culture, then it should say so publicly and specifically.

Increasingly, the Indians of Schefferville feel they are living in a kind of vacuum world. They did not choose it; rather, they feel that some quasi-defined government policy has manipulated them into it. They merit the awareness of alternatives that an honest and complete flow of information would ensure.

A final pathetic example of the disintegration of a culture. In 1969, the Prime Minister visited Schefferville to take part in festivities marking the hundredth anniversary of the discovery of iron ore in the area. Among the local people who greeted him was the Montagnais chief, M. Mathieu Andre.

Andre is a living illustration of the nobility of leadership. He is a proud, gracious man, and he may be the last Montagnais who is still capable of living the way his forefathers lived. He spends much of his time in the bush, and he radiates the self-confidence of one who excels in his way of life. His name appears in many historical documents as the guide for exploration parties.

He represents the Montagnais culture as it was for centuries and yet, when he presented himself to the Prime Minister of Canada, he was wearing a feather headdress. Feather headdresses are utterly foreign to Andre's culture but, thanks perhaps to Hollywood, they mean "Indian chief" to most white people.