

meetmidtown

Summary Report: Public Engagement Event #3

Prepared by Bespoke Collective / February 15, 2024



Background

Midtown is an underdeveloped area in Oakville that is centrally located around the Oakville GO Station. Plans are underway to make this area a livable, connected and mixed-use urban community that better serves the entire town.

With Oakville’s population expected to double by 2051, there is a need for the Town of Oakville to create more livable spaces for people of all ages and income levels and purposefully plan how our municipality grows. The Province of Ontario requires that the town create more livable spaces for people over the next 30 years. Midtown Oakville has the potential to offer more options for diverse and affordable housing, better connectivity to the rest of Oakville through pedestrian, cycling, and transit improvements, additional parks and open spaces, more community amenities and the enhanced servicing infrastructure that is needed to support growth.

The Town of Oakville is currently in the process of developing the final recommendations for the Midtown Official Plan Amendment (OPA). The purpose of the OPA is to update the land use policies for Midtown Oakville in the Livable Oakville Plan, and to create a framework that will guide the creation of a transit-supportive and complete community for people to live, work and play. As part of this process, the Town has hosted a series of public consultation events to gather public input at key junctures.

Project timeline





Overview

This report provides a summary of the Midtown public consultation event, Meet Midtown: Proposed Concept and Policy Approach, that was held on February 15, 2024 in the South Atrium of Oakville Town Hall. The objectives of the event were to (1) present the proposed concept and policy approach for the Midtown Oakville project, (2) to gather public feedback and (3) respond to questions.

PURPOSE OF THE PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

The Town is nearing the end of Phase Three (final) of the Official Plan Amendment (OPA) process with the goal of developing a Proposed Concept and Policy Directions. These are used to inform the final recommendation for the OPA submission.

The Proposed Concept presented reflects a balance of the interests and feedback of the public, landowners, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and other stakeholders to date. Public feedback on the proposed concept and policy direction is now needed to help the consultant team to further refine the proposed concept and policy directions. This input is important to the Town and Consultant team, and is taken into consideration as they work to finalize the OPA recommendations.

ORGANIZERS

The public consultation event was organized by Bespoke Collective, in collaboration with the Town of Oakville, Jacobs, Urban Strategies, R.J.Burnside & Associates Ltd. and GLPi Consulting. The presenters at the event were Gabe Charles, Director of Planning Services, Town of Oakville;

Jeff Qiao, Assistant Program Manager, Jacobs; Leigh McGrath, Lead Planner, Partner, Urban Strategies; and Mark Reid, Urban Design Lead, Partner, Urban Strategies. The event was hosted by Christina Bagatavicius, Founder and Principal of Bespoke Collective.

EVENT AGENDA

The in-person public engagement event was held on February 15, 2024, from 6:30-8:30 pm, in the South Atrium of Oakville Town Hall.

1. Presentation (45 min)

Members of the Project Team presented (1) OPA Process Update, (2) Midtown's Role in Oakville, (3) What We Heard (from past engagements), (4) Proposed Concept & Livability Strategies and (5) Next Steps.

2. Interactive Booths (75 min)

Members of the public were invited to visit six interactive booths hosted by Project Team members. Participants could look at informational panels, talk to Project Team members and provide feedback on activity sheets.

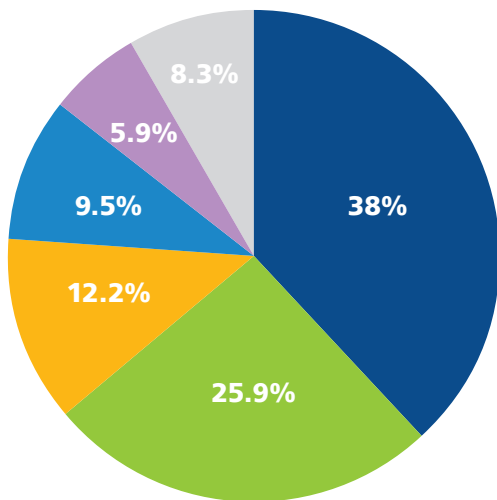
Overview

ATTENDANCE

A total of 160 people attended the public event, 43.8% of them were first-time participants to a Midtown event. Of those, 143 pre-registered on Eventbrite and the remaining 17 were walk-ups. In addition, 473 viewers tuned into the livestream as of February 16, 2024.

Registrants came from across all of Oakville, and beyond as follows:

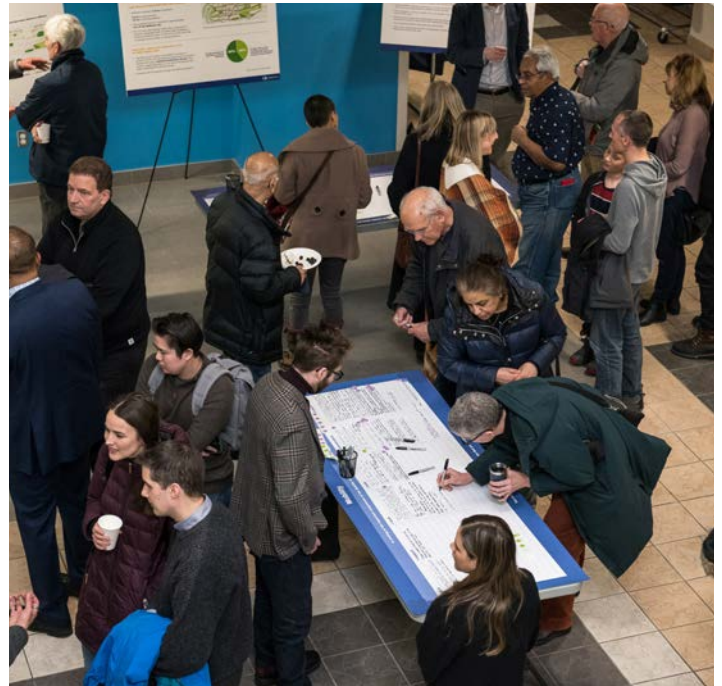
- Oakville North East (L6J): **38% (128)**
- Oakville North (L6H): **25.9% (87)**
- Oakville West (L6M): **12.2% (14)**
- Oakville East (L6K): **9.5% (32)**
- Oakville South (L6L): **5.9% (20)**
- Other postal codes/chose not to respond **8.3% (28)**



COMMUNICATIONS REACH & COMMUNITY AWARENESS

The event was promoted through a wide range of platforms, with the intention of reaching a diversity of people. The public consultations were promoted on the Town of Oakville website and the Town’s social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter) and LinkedIn. As well, the event was promoted in the Town’s newsletter and the Midtown project newsletter. Organic social media posts about the workshops reached 18k users and had 32k impressions.

The Eventbrite event pages received 1778 visits. A total of 336 individuals registered on Eventbrite, with 143 of them attending. The rate of attrition was approximately 56%.





Key Findings

The following key findings summarize the public input provided by attendees at the six interactive booths, following the presentation. Many attendees engaged in conversation, asked facilitators questions and provided input at the booths. The six topics were as follows: (1) Project, Process & Policies, (2) Height and Density, (3) Housing, (4) Precincts & Destinations, (5) Mobility, and (6) Open Spaces.

METHODOLOGY

Prompts were provided on table-sized activity sheets at each booth for the public to write down responses in a fill-in-the-blank format (see appendix). The “Project, Process & Policies” Booth served as a more overarching booth and the participants were invited to respond to two prompts on an activity sheet: (1) I would like to understand: _____, and (2) A key policy topic I think needs to be added is: _____.

For the other five booths focused on the Livability Strategies that were presented, participants were invited to respond to three prompts for each topic area: In looking at the important components around [specific Livability Strategy] (1) I support _____, (2) I wish _____ and (3) I am concerned about _____. Stickers were also available at each booth for participants to mark any written comments written that they agreed with.

All the input from the activity sheets was reviewed and summarized into common points (cluster analysis), prioritizing input by frequency and additional stickers. A high-level summary of what we heard is provided first, followed by more detailed summaries for each topic. Booth panels can be accessed digitally on the [Meet Midtown website](#).



Key Findings

HIGHLIGHTS OF WHAT WE HEARD

Here are the main areas of feedback expressed across the six topics:

- Mixed-use, livable and complete communities as appealing
- Support and opposition to proposed height and density
- Transportation planning needs to accommodate larger population and reduce gridlock, supporting transit and active transportation
- Affordable and diverse housing options for all are important
- Appropriate amenities are essential (e.g. schools, community centres, retail, health care, children’s play areas, and dog parks)
- Vibrant, pedestrian-oriented places for all ages are desired
- Green and sustainable infrastructure and building standards are critical
- Amount and type of parkland and green space is good, but could be improved
- Environmental issues and impact —climate resiliency must be considered
- Safety for children, pedestrians and cyclists is key
- Potential negative impact on Oakville’s character and value
- Concerns about the planning process including growth targets, Midtown boundaries, development oversight and taxpayer costs

DETAILED SUMMARIES OF BOOTH FEEDBACK BY TOPIC:

PROJECT, PROCESS & POLICIES

This booth provided an overview of the Midtown Implementation Program, the Timeline and Process and additional OPA Policy Direction. It outlined the Provincial and Regional Policies impacting Midtown, while also answering key questions of “Why is Midtown so dense?” and “Why are we planning beyond 2051?”

Participants wrote that the following were areas they wanted to understand:

- Density and Growth Targets: Questions around the vision for growth and provincial targets, high density compared to other areas, and high Midtown allocation in Town context.
- Budget and Financial Aspects: Dissatisfaction with financing approach, potential taxpayer burden, and concerns about a lack of a budget in the plan at this stage.
- Transportation Planning: How will the plan address gridlock, pollution and environmental concerns, why transportation planning and traffic feasibility study come later, and what are the planned transit solutions?
- Participation: Concerns about no town hall-style Q&A and lack of mayoral presence
- Diversity: Who speaks for those who aren’t here (future residents, people priced out, best practice practitioners), and how to attract more economic, racial, cultural, and familial diversity to Midtown?
- Midtown Boundaries: Why does it stop at Chartwell — why not to Morrison or Maple Grove to spread density?
- Competitive Advantage of Midtown: Access to the GO train, bus hub and QEW were all

Key Findings

highlighted as strategic advantages of Midtown

- Consultant Selection Process: for the consulting firm with its high-rise specialty

Participants wrote that following key policy topics were ones they thought needed to be added:

- Green Building Standards: Modern and sustainable standards for buildings and infrastructure to lower GHGs and emissions, with suggestions of bird-friendly windows, rainwater collection and not doing retrofits of older buildings
- Alternative Proposals: Questions on why alternative proposals aren't shown (e.g. OMG)
- Transit & Transportation: Future-focused public transit with better access, affordability and concerns around induced demand with six lane Cross Ave, questions about timing of midblock connections, road widenings
- Pedestrian Safety: Desire that this is prioritized
- Affordable Housing: How to ensure affordable housing?
- Permitting: Community planning permit system
- Development Oversight: Clarity on how the Town will monitor and manage the project and developers in a responsive way
- Financial Concerns: Calls for transparency and options, and concerns about financial burden on taxpayers
- Family Focus: Ensure a family orientation with schools, playgrounds and community centres
- High Density: Concerns around high density planning targets
- Other Policies: Transitional policy permissions for developers to develop at their own pace, elimination of parking minimums, centralized urban planning knowledge

HEIGHT & DENSITY

This booth highlighted what was heard from past engagements and how height and density contribute to livability. It highlighted key policy directions related to organizing height and density to support land use complexity and transition, and illustrated built form typologies on the developable land base and people and jobs estimates and key assumptions.

HEIGHT

Participants wrote that they supported the following:

- A car-free lifestyle
- High-density housing for livability and affordability in Oakville now and for the next generation
- The Oakville Midtown Group (OMG) proposal
- Higher density options as opposed to alternative concepts that reduce the density
- Diversity in building heights versus monoculture
- Intensification with conditions for lower density than in proposal

Participants wrote that they wished for the following:

- Consideration by planning of lower heights and density to enhance livability — opinion that multi-story towers and small units don't offer a permanent housing solution
- Maximum height restrictions, not minimum, such as 28 stories.
- A presentation of alternatives to tall towers, with lower height buildings (e.g. Copenhagen) and lower density
- Openness to thinking outside the box and not equating height with crime
- Spreading density throughout Oakville, including north of QEW and Oakville Place

Key Findings

- A re-evaluation of Joint Best Planning Estimates (JPBE) for more “normal” density
- More clarity and consistency around numbers
- Pedestrian bridge across QEW for shoppers and students

Participants wrote that they were concerned about the following:

- Proposed heights, high-rise development and high population density
- Desirability, practicality and livability of proposed tall towers, including unit sizes
- Town councilors not supporting a positive plan
- Negative impact on Town’s current character
- The Town’s stance on growth and role in advancing it (vs. the Province)
- Negative traffic impacts, especially around limited exit points
- Becoming another Liberty Village or City Place or similar international project
- That JPBE estimates are inaccurate using outdated data — Planning Policy Update (PPU). Burlington cited at 2.2
- Environmental issues such as toxic land (Monsanto, Farro sites), impact on wildlife (e.g. 16 Mile Creek), heat island effect, wind tunnels

DENSITY

Participants wrote that they supported the following:

- Mixed-use development and density for people-first, diverse community
- Densification to enable younger generations to live and stay in Oakville
- Increased density while also avoiding excessive building heights
- Density as a way to reduce car dependency and promoting more sustainable living

- Retaining parkland and connectivity of green spaces
- Urban planning approaches such as single stair low-rise residential buildings (increase usable density), lots of space between buildings, even if it increase heights to avoid window-to-window designs

Participants wrote that they wished for the following:

- Expanding the area and plan beyond Midtown to reduce density (e.g. other parts of Oakville)
- Adequate amenities for all ages including enough schools (elementary and secondary) and playgrounds
- To clarify height and density through a comparison of scenarios regarding height and density, including 6-36 story options, not just up to 48 or beyond
- Changes to current estimates with a new JPBE (Joint Best Planning Estimates) or new provincial government who allows more stories
- Zoning changes in Oakville to permit higher density in single-family lands (e.g. duplexes)
- Learn from past mistakes around “warehousing” people in towers (St. Jamestown cited)

Participants wrote that they were concerned about the following:

- Density estimates (PPU/ people per unit) compared to other municipalities (e.g. 2.7 vs. 2.2 vs. 1.7)
- Negative traffic impacts including gridlock, parking and capacity especially around Go station
- Perceived lack of transparency and honesty in presented numbers, growth figures and the Town’s role in the JPBE

Key Findings

- Lack of parkland and potential negative impact on 16 Mile Creek (e.g. erosion)
- Building up existing areas instead of looking elsewhere (e.g. other parts of Oakville, northern Ontario)
- Lower quality of life in small units, tall towers, with not enough amenities
- Using “not yet available” concept to allow for additional height and density in development
- Too much influence of developers on planning
- Affordability
- Devaluation of Oakville into a high-density urban area
- Negative uses of spaces for AirBnB or “drug traps”
- Urban planning preferences including protected school sites in the plans, larger parks over more smaller ones, super blocks (closing some streets, community spaces)
- Safe communities, with a suggestion of using Community Crime Prevention Strategies (CCPS) for affordable housing
- Distributing density across all transit routes in Oakville

Participants wrote that they wished for the following:

- That the plan would be advanced quickly (or was already built) to make Oakville more livable
- There was more information about the future unit sizes/types by percentage and impact on populations
- Green infrastructure such as LEED certified buildings, district energy and more green spaces
- To be able to afford to live here
- A variety of housing options with more clarity about “Innovative Housing Solutions”
- Protected parking for bikes and other mobility devices, ensuring fire safety for e-devices
- Allowing single stair residential buildings
- Developers don’t push excessively tall towers and reduce quality of life (“warehousing”)

HOUSING

This booth highlighted what was heard from past engagements and how a base residential permission contributes to livability. It outlined key policy directions related to creating new housing opportunities throughout Midtown.

Participants wrote that they supported the following:

- Ensuring a variety of affordable housing options for buyers and renters,(e.g. market, non-market, co-op, public, private, tall, mid-rise), and possibly reserving a percentage for first time home buyers
- Great overall plan and increased density, supporting younger residents to stay in Oakville
- Mixed-use community approach including arts & culture, playgrounds, dog parks and natural spaces with trees for a vibrant atmosphere
- Easy access for all to schools, transit, parkland from all housing without driving, for complete community

Participants wrote that they were concerned about the following:

- The livability of tall towers (e.g. 48 story) and small units, especially for families
- Housing affordability and renters/future generations being pushed out of the area
- Developers focused on profits rather than creating livable spaces

Key Findings

- Insufficient schools nearby for families in projected population
- Midtown/Oakville becoming an unlivable concrete jungle
- That the plan won't be realized to create the high-density, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented vision they support
- Broken promises from developers without enforcement (e.g. promised green roof by Starlight never happened)
- Much higher density than Clarkson and Burlington (2.20/ha)
- Amenity concerns included significant dog waste and lack/cost of parking
- Displacement of current social service agencies like Grace House (serves people with mental health)
- Lack of lower-rise elements (e.g. townhouses) but potential high costs
- Institutional investors buying up housing supply for portfolio diversification
- Phasing of the development

PRECINCTS & DESTINATIONS

This booth highlighted what was heard from past engagements and described how precincts and destinations contribute to livability. Key policy directions to establish precincts and activate key destinations were described.

PRECINCTS

Participants wrote that they supported the following:

- Pedestrian-only shopping areas, at least part of the week
- Mixed-used plazas that enhance walkability

Participants wrote that they wished for the following:

- Diverse retail options, including smaller versions of big box retailers
- Flexibility and adaptability of precincts over time in response to changing needs
- Redefine the boundaries of Midtown further east to better support 50,000 people

Participants wrote that they were concerned about the following:

- Adding more roads and lanes (e.g. Cross Ave six lanes), causing induced demand (more gridlock) and conflicting with the Town's climate strategy
- Lack of clarity around existing/proposed parks plan and what is available, with a need for commitment to make them a reality (e.g. POP's)
- Proper spaces including fields, play areas for children, school parks and dog parks
- This area becoming a choice destination and empty retail spaces (e.g. like Oakville Place)
- Taxpayer costs for parks rather than developers

DESTINATIONS

Participants wrote that they supported the following:

- Unique, fun and vibrant destinations (e.g. Distillery District, downtown Oakville) that are inclusive and diverse for living, playing, eating, resting and kids, and not the "same old Oakville" (not only shopping)
- Open pedestrian streets (off hours deliveries)
- Accessibility and safety
- A signature destination that can't include 48-story buildings

Key Findings

Participants wrote that they wished for the following components in the Destinations Livability Strategy:

- Car-free destinations and streets (e.g. Argyle), with bike parking
- Accessibility for all ages and abilities
- Fun for 30-year olds
- Preservation of the small, distinctive Town characteristics

Participants wrote that they were concerned about the following components of the Destinations Livability Strategy:

- Car-free destinations and streets (e.g. Argyle), with bike parking
- Accessibility for all ages and abilities
- Fun for 30-year olds
- Preservation of the small, distinctive Town characteristics

MOBILITY

This booth highlighted what was heard from past engagements and highlighted key policy directions related to creating a fine-grain block structure to support multi-modal movement. Illustrations were provided to show aspects of multi-modal mobility.

Participants wrote that they supported the following:

- Active and sustainable transportation plan — including transit, walkability and cycling
- Transit access and priority including BRT/LRT Bus/Light Rapid Transit) and access to GO
- Improved active transportation infrastructure including safe (separated) routes, robust connections/grid, bike parking and expanded space at East end of Argus platform, which will attract users

- Reducing gridlock
- Anticipation of e-mobility devices like e-scooters and e-bikes
- Support for a car-free lifestyle (saving costs), rather than assuming all will drive
- Green space and parks

Participants wrote that they wished for the following:

- Dedicated bus lanes (express bus) as soon as possible from the Town to incentivize people to get out of cars and reduce gridlock (e.g. Speers Rd.)
- Improved active transportation access in and out of Mldtown from adjacent areas including west of 16 Mile Creek, NW of QEW, to Oakville Place and Oakville more broadly (e.g. pedestrian/cycle bridge across the creek by Kerr and 16th line bike path)
- Car and bike share opportunities, including in condos
- Increased public transportation overall to support increased population and reduce car reliance
- Pedestrian-only areas such as shopping, restaurants, tables to enhance active transportation (e.g. Argus — move parking access to side street)
- Improved accessibility for people with disabilities
- Reconsidering extension of development to Trafalgar, connecting to public transportation and Speers Road bike lanes
- More bikes in general

Participants wrote that they were concerned about the following:

- Current traffic congestion and gridlock and

Key Findings

future worsening of these conditions with added population. Specific problem areas mentioned were Cross Ave, Trafalgar Rd as a chokepoint and at Cornwall, only four exits (like Liberty Village), crossing over rail and QEW, no north/south throughlanes (only E/W)

- The transportation planning process with the traffic survey and plan following this current work
- Lack of safe cycling infrastructure on Argus and Davis to get people to the shopping area without cars (possible pedestrian mall)
- Impact on mobility and parking for non-residents such as people going to/from the GO station, and between Midtown and the rest of Oakville
- Too much focus on cars and congestion versus reducing climate impacts with (transit, walking, biking and smaller streets)
- Pedestrian safety from Trafalgar to/from the GO station, across 16 Mile creek (bridge) and at Trafalgar & Cornwall
- Kids getting bused to schools
- Impact on Oakville's fragile downtown

OPEN SPACES

This booth highlighted what was heard from past engagements and how Open Spaces contribute to livability. Key policy directions for Open Spaces were provided and explanations around future green space allocation and acquisition of new parkland were provided.

Participants wrote that they supported the following:

- Increasing green space and ensuring enough for the projected population
- Connected/larger green spaces that aren't fragmented (e.g. Central Park)

- The overall concept seems amazing
- People-first spaces including pedestrian safety on bridge, car-free open spaces
- Climate resilient plantings including shade trees, native plants, grass only to keep spaces cool
- Community gardens (e.g. vegetables)
- Athletic and activity spaces (e.g. rinks, theatres)

Participants wrote that they wished for the following:

- More community garden spaces for connection to food sources (e.g. public fruit trees/shrubs)
- Implementation of green infrastructure best practices and principles including naturalization and connectivity for better "Open Spaces"
- Gardens for children to play in, not communal open spaces
- Fumes and noise pollution for the QEW is considered around parks and schools
- Developer requirements to include a % of property to be green space (e.g. mature trees, shrubs), not just the designated areas

Participants wrote that they were concerned about the following:

- Environmental impacts and issues including 16 Mile Creek erosion and pollution, Morrison creek headwaters, habitat destruction, bird collisions, animal corridors (animal crossings?), biodiversity, air quality, noise
- Not enough focus on the needs of children including more schools with designated (safe) space (not combined with parks), playgrounds, access to green space
- Car-centric development causing traffic, pollution and higher taxes

☀️☀️☀️ Key Findings

- Inadequate green space and parks for POP planned — not enough with paths dividing open spaces into spaces too small for athletic fields
- Heritage protection including heritage trees, pioneer cemeteries (graves along banks) and heritage listed buildings
- Costs for the parkland
- Possible wind tunnel effect (energy source?), shadowing and air shed
- That the parks will not actually happen without intentionality and serious commitment from the Town (purchase) and, condo developers
- Argus/David Road underpass and avoiding future MTO encumbrances and row



PUBLIC FEEDBACK ON THE EVENT

Attendees were invited to complete a short post-event survey. A total of 23.1% of the attendees completed the survey (37/160) with the following feedback:

1. “How satisfied were you with the level of information shared about Midtown Oakville?” (36 responses)

Extremely satisfied	16.7% (6/36)
Somewhat satisfied	52.8% (19/36)
Neutral	8.3% (3/36)
Somewhat dissatisfied	13.9% (5/36)
Not at all satisfied	8.3% (5/36)

2. “Did you feel that you were able to provide input on Midtown Oakville?” (37 responses)

Extremely	24.3% (9/37)
Very	18.9% (7/37)
Moderately	32.4% (12/37)
Slightly	13.5% (5/37)
Not at all	010.8% (4/37)

When it comes to the event, respondents liked the engagement booths with the chance to talk to the project team and other attendees; the opportunity to provide feedback and see/support others’ comments; and the clarity and level of information in the presentations and panels.

Key areas for improvement mentioned were the audio, visibility and overall accessibility; more space for interaction and writing, with better pens; opportunity for a town-hall style Q&A; and more clarity and detail about the plan and how the public’s input is being considered.



NEXT STEPS

The input from this public consultation is being taken into consideration as the Town and Consultant team work towards finalizing the Official Plan Amendment recommendations.

The Draft Official Plan Amendment will be posted on the Town's website by April 2, 2024, and presented to the public on April 22, 2024. Members of the public will be able to provide comments before and during the April 22 public meeting. Further refinements to the OPA will then be made and a recommendations report prepared for deliberation and a decision by council on June 24, 2024.

www.oakville.ca/midtown

During 2024, the Midtown Oakville Implementation program will be completing the Midtown Official Plan Amendment, a range of implementation studies covering community building topics, and working alongside the community at every phase. The redevelopment itself has a long timeline – we'll start to see some expansion by 2031 and continue through 2051 and beyond. The program will plan for a 2051 horizon year, when Midtown is forecasted to have **32,472 people and 17,268 jobs.**