

Future of Bathurst-Bloor under study

## AREA WITH CHARACTER

By Edward LaRusic

One of eight Bathurst Street character areas, the intersection of Bathurst and Bloor is under study to elicit principles to guide development in advance of the submission of a major application for the Honest Ed's site.

Toronto and East York district west section manager **Lynda Macdonald** said staff is studying the Bloor-Bathurst intersection and surrounding neighbourhood—sometimes referred to as the four corners—to create some structure to evaluate development.

“[Staff] wanted to put together some structure, so it wasn't just looking at the one corner, but it could look at the whole intersection and its relationship to the whole neighbourhood,” said Macdonald. “In parallel, [**Westbank Projects Corp.**] is working on its ideas for the site, so staff wants to make sure it has some structure to fit that application into.”

As part of that process, planning staff asked the community to help establish a vision and principles for the Bathurst-Bloor area. City planner **Graig Uens** told NRU that while staff still needs to debrief two priorities clearly arose from the consultation: improving the public realm and protecting heritage resources.

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Adding to Toronto's residential stock

## IMPROVING HOUSING OPTIONS

By Leah Wong

Housing has earned its place on the agenda this term, with Mayor **John Tory** raising it as one of the major issues the city will be facing in his state of the city address in late November. To meet the needs of Toronto residents the city needs more housing options at a range of prices, which will require looking at housing in new ways.

The city needs more housing options as vacancy rates in the rental market decrease and the waiting list for subsidized housing increases. Between 2010 and 2013 the vacancy rate dropped from 2.2 per cent to 1.6 per cent, while between 2010 and 2014 the subsidized housing waiting list increased by 29 per cent.

“While I hesitate to overuse the word crisis, I don't think it's an exaggeration at all to say that we're in the midst of a housing crisis in this city,” said Tory. He added that the federal and provincial governments will need to come to the table to address the issue.

The need for more housing is only going to grow as the city's population increases. Between 2010

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# IMPROVING HOUSING OPTIONS

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and 2020 the city is expected to add 130,000 residents and reach a population of 2.8 million. Toronto affordable housing office spokesperson **Gil Hardy** said in an email to *NRU* in that time around 100,000 young people will enter the housing market and 80,000 people will become seniors. Additionally the city needs to ensure there are housing options for persons with disabilities, Aboriginal people and low-income workers and their families.

“These demographic pressures will require a wide spectrum of housing options, from small condos, to multi-bedroom apartments, houses, townhouses and other forms,” said Hardy. “The city will need to continue working with the federal and provincial governments, developers and non-profit groups to meet these needs.”

The city has several partnerships underway that will add different housing types to Toronto’s neighbourhoods. One recent example has developers **Sorbara Group**, **Diamondcorp** and **Great Gulf** working with the city and **Artscape** to create affordable residential opportunities for artists in two condominium developments currently under construction.

Sorbara Group and Diamondcorp’s 210 Simcoe development and Great Gulf’s PACE will both include Artscape lofts. PACE will have 14 lofts while 210 Simcoe will include five. For buyers, the units are brought to below-market prices by an Artscape mortgage, which is an interest-free and no-payment second mortgage. Units will be offered to renters at 80 per cent of the average **Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation** rate for the city.

Artscape has already completed one project with below-market priced homes for artists within a condo development. In 2010 the 70-unit Artscape Triangle Lofts opened in West Queen West through a partnership among Artscape, the city, **Urbancorp** and community group **Active 18**.

A number of stakeholders are also involved in the GTA Housing Action Lab, which is working on a housing action plan for the region. The action plan is expected to be released by spring 2015.

“There’s not a lot of diversity in form,” said GTA Housing Action Lab collective impact director **Robert Plitt**. “[We’re looking at] trying to better match what we build with what we need.”

Plitt said there is a lot of underutilized land in Toronto

that could better use the city’s assets. For example, there are opportunities through the Tower Renewal project to look at how to better leverage the city’s stock of purpose-built residential properties.

**Ryerson University’s** Centre for Urban Research and Land Development senior research fellow **Frank Clayton** has another idea about how underutilized lands could be repurposed. His policy commentary “Reusing Older Industrial Areas: An Effective Tool for Providing Affordable Market Housing for Families in the City of Toronto,” released by the centre December 8, says the city should be looking at reusing older industrial areas to create more affordable housing options.

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• Gil Hardy

In his commentary Clayton cites the case of the Warden Woods community, which was created on former industrial and commercial lands in Scarborough and added approximately 1,300 units to the community. The housing stock in this area comprises mostly owned-occupied townhouses and semi-detached housing. While high-rise units are permitted on a portion of the lands adjacent to the Warden subway station, to date no high-rise has been built.

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# SORTING THROUGH APPEALS

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As for when the five-year review will be completed, Bain has no estimates, although he does note that each group of policies will likely go through a lengthy hearing at the board.

“There’s no certainty of timelines under the current provincial *Planning Act*. It’s when the OMB has enough members ... to hear everything.”

Meanwhile, work on resolving the outstanding appeals of the city’s 2006 official plan continues. Strategic initiatives, policy and analysis director **Kerri Voumvakis** provided a brief update in an email to *NRU*.

“The majority of appeals to the [2006] official plan have been resolved. A few site- and area-specific matters [11] remain outstanding as they apply to a particular property. One policy appeal that remains to be resolved pertains to the special

policy area regarding flood-prone lands. This matter remains under discussion with the province in an effort to resolve this outstanding matter.”

On the zoning by-law front, Voumvakis said that staff continues to meet with appellants to try to resolve outstanding appeals of the 2013 comprehensive zoning by-law in advance of the scheduled January 20, 2015 board hearing.

“Some appeals have been withdrawn, some appeals have been addressed through technical amendments. We continue to meet and discuss solutions to the appeals with the appellants.”

Following the OMB’s resolution of appeals to the official plan policies that result from the five-year review, the city has three years to bring its zoning by-law into conformity with its official plan. **nru**

# IMPROVING HOUSING OPTIONS

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“From an economic perspective, if you want to create communities like Warden Woods, the lower density kind of community rather than high-rise, you have to make sure the land value stays low,” Clayton told *NRU*. “This is one of the attractions of older industrial areas. The prices are relatively low because there’s limited demand.”

Clayton said if you allow high-rise housing, or even the possibility of it, onto the site it will increase the land value so that it is no longer affordable. Having lower priced land in a prime location that the city made available through redesignation is why the Warden Woods development has been successful, Clayton explains. However, his report acknowledges that under current city policies it is unlikely to be replicated without a shift in thinking at the city.

“What the city has to do is say, ‘Yeah, we want to have land for employment, no question. But we also want to have land for affordable family kinds of housing,’” said Clayton. “Therefore there has to be a priority for housing over keeping [underutilized] employment lands.”

One of the reasons Clayton focuses on the potential for

reusing industrial areas is that there are opportunities to create lower density housing within Toronto. He said not everyone wants to live in high-rise developments, particularly when they have kids, and having a community comprised of townhouses and semi-detached houses could keep them from moving outside the city when they’re looking to buy a house. **nru**

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