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■ 14-STORY BUILDING PROPOSED IN BATHURST-STEELES TOWER-IN-THE-PARK NEIGHBOURHOOD

## INFILLING THE GAPS

Marc Mitanis

A 14-storey residential infill development being proposed for a neighbourhood dominated by tower-in-the-park-style apartment buildings would contribute to the area's ongoing intensification and would introduce additional family-sized units to the high-rise apartment community just south of Bathurst Street and Steeles Avenue West. If approved, it will also add to the growing pattern of infill developments being planned and realized in the Bathurst and Steeles area.

A preliminary staff report received by the North York Community Council on April 20 details **Plaza Partners'** proposal for a 14-storey, 220-unit residential building at 6035 Bathurst Street. A zoning by-law amendment application to permit the redevelopment of the 2,170-square-metre property, which currently accommodates a single-storey **Canada Post** distribution centre, was submitted to the city in

December 2020. The building features a design from **BDP Quadrangle**.

The property is located in North York's Westminster-Branson neighbourhood, a predominantly residential community populated by multiple 1960s and 1970s tower-in-the-park developments—comprising modernist high-rise apartment buildings that are located far back from the street to

allow for perimeter lawns, landscaping, and surface parking lots. In recent years, the intense demand for housing in the city has pushed property owners of high-rise apartment communities to develop the open spaces around them with new infill residential buildings.

Plaza Partners' chief development officer **Ornella Richichi** said that the site at 6035 Bathurst Street is currently underutilized, located

within an important part of the urban fabric of the city, and offers an opportunity for intensification in keeping with the surrounding built form.

"I think our 14-storey building will very much complement and enhance what's there and almost give a refresh to the neighbourhood within the context today, along with some of the other developments that are happening in the immediate vicinity," Richichi told *NRU*. "I think it'll bring regeneration to a certain part of what's existing there today, [will] provide for intensification, and [will]

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Map showing the location (red outline) of the property at 6035 Bathurst Street, which is currently occupied by a single-storey Canada Post distribution centre, and has been targeted for redevelopment by Plaza Partners. A rezoning application submitted in December 2020 seeks permission to build a 14-storey, 220-unit residential building on the property.

SOURCE: GOLDBERG GROUP

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provide] additional housing.”

North York district community planning manager **Giulio Cescato** said that the city has reviewed and continues to review many applications for infill developments on large apartment neighbourhood sites, including several in the immediate vicinity of 6035 Bathurst.

Across the street at 6020 and 6030 Bathurst Street, the **Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (LPAT)** has approved in principle a 29-storey infill residential apartment building and townhouses to be built between existing 18- and 11-storey apartment buildings owned by **Hazelview Investments**. At 6040 Bathurst Street, the LPAT has approved a 16-storey rental apartment building, 29- and 26-storey condominium buildings, and three stacked townhouse blocks. The development by **Pinedale Properties** would significantly intensify a property currently occupied by a pair of 17-storey apartment buildings. An existing 18-storey apartment property at 25 Fisherville Road, located immediately west of the Pinedale proposal, will also undergo intensification. The LPAT has granted **Starlight Investments** approval for 24- and 12-storey infill apartment

buildings and townhomes on that site.

“In many cases, these [tower-in-the-park] sites have large open spaces and an existing context of apartment buildings that make them attractive for the legacy land owners and companies that own these sites to densify and maximize their investment,” Cescato told *NRU*. “The benefit to the city is that this leads to increased housing, and it is often purpose-built rental—

which the city needs.”

Cescato said that the multi-building redevelopments occurring in the area face a challenge with getting the site plan right. “Infill sites of [significant] size often require new public roads and public parks, as well as other community services and facilities to support the influx of new residents,” Cescato told *NRU*. “The Official Plan also requires that infill development in apartment neighbourhoods improve the living conditions of existing residents and these sites present an opportunity to reinvest in aging rental stock to improve amenities, safety, and in some cases, energy efficiency. In general, I think these types

of developments are beneficial to the city, but each application needs to be evaluated on a site-by-site basis, and these types of infill projects are unlikely to be appropriate everywhere.”

Although the site at 6035 Bathurst Street isn't a tower-in-the-park property accommodating an existing residential building, it embraces the neighbourhood trend of redeveloping and repurposing underutilized properties.

Director of **Ryerson University's** Centre for Urban Research and Land Development **David Amborski** said that it's important to have “sensitive infill” that takes the context of the existing neighbourhood into account.

“You have to look at each one of these cases in the context of the neighbourhood that they're in, and within the context of what services are available and the impact [the development] could have on the community,” Amborski told *NRU*. He added that vacant or underutilized properties represent ideal opportunities for sensitive residential infill intensification.

BDP Quadrangle principal

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Above: Rendering looking east from Bathurst Street at a proposed 14-storey residential building for 6035 Bathurst Street. Developer Plaza Partners submitted a rezoning application in December 2020 seeking redevelopment of the property, which currently accommodates a single-storey Canada Post distribution centre with accessory surface parking.

SOURCE: PLAZA PARTNERS AND BDP QUADRANGLE  
ARCHITECT: BDP QUADRANGLE

Left: Rendering looking west from Bathurst Lawn Memorial Park at a 14-storey residential building proposed by Plaza Partners for 6035 Bathurst Street. The development would contain a total of 220 residential units—most likely rental apartment units, although the final tenure of the building has not yet been determined.

SOURCE: PLAZA PARTNERS AND BDP QUADRANGLE  
ARCHITECT: BDP QUADRANGLE



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Les Klein said that the notion of urbanization is behind the thinking of infill development occurring in the neighbourhood, and that growth beyond the city's borders has produced an environment for intensification in the Bathurst and Steeles area.

"Even 25 years ago, we thought of Bathurst and Steeles as a suburb, and at the very fringes of the city," Klein told *NRU*. "When you see what is going on beyond it in Vaughan and Markham, that level of intensification puts this [site as] more in a midtown environment."

Klein explains that the urbanization of the area is being carried out through the built form of recent developments, the creation of new streets, the creation of open spaces and parks that are community-oriented, and the enhancement of connections to the rest of the community.

"This level of intensification, aside from doing the obvious things of addressing the desperate need for housing and a variety of housing options, is all about urbanization," Klein told *NRU*. "It's all about connecting this site to the rest of the community and to the rest of the city, and creating a sense of community, and using built

form to do that."

Klein said that the design for the 50.8-metre-tall building employs step backs to stay within a front 45-degree angular plane measured from the proposed podium height of 29.2 metres, which translates to 80 per cent of the width of the Bathurst Street right-of-way.

"We simply used the guidelines that the city has developed for mid-rise buildings. We took 80 per cent of the width of the right of way of Bathurst Street, and determined what the height of the podium should be," Klein told *NRU*. "And then

from that height, we drew a 45-degree angle, and we made sure that all of the upper floors are pushed back behind that line. That really does create an appropriately proportioned façade."

Instituting the step backs helps to achieve appropriate building massing in relation to the public realm, avoids building shadowing on sidewalks, and creates a scale that people feel connected to, Klein said. Klein added that the building isn't trying to scream "look at me," but rather, seeks to fit comfortably within the existing context of the community. He proposes that the use of brick masonry materials to help achieve that.

"As pedestrian traffic increases in the area, people walking by will really only see our podium, and

that's really an absolutely fundamental and basic way of building pedestrian-friendly environments," Klein told *NRU*. "In addition to that, we've made sure that our loading areas and access to parking is internalized in the building, and the areas that are at grade—like the amenity area and flexible event spaces—are really intended to create a community feel. We're not hiding ourselves from the outside, we're actually connecting to the outside."

Richichi said that the residential tenure of the proposed development has not yet been finalized, but Plaza Partners is "aiming for rental." Of the 220 residential units proposed, 24.1 per cent would be two-bedroom units and 10.5 per cent would be three-bedroom units. Richichi said these numbers exceed the minimum suggested targets for larger units in the city's Growing Up: Planning for Children in New Vertical Communities guidelines, which seek a minimum of 15 per cent two-bedroom units and 10 per cent three-bedroom units within new residential mid-rise and tall building developments.

"We feel that this area of

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Map showing the location (red outline) of a proposed 14-storey residential building at 6035 Bathurst Street relative to the height context of existing (yellow) and approved (orange) residential buildings in the area. A number of existing tower-in-the-park properties in the neighbourhood are undergoing infill intensification.

SOURCE: GOLDBERG GROUP

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the city is definitely geared to growing families, existing families, and extended families being together, and I think it's important to provide for that," Richichi told *NRU*. "Many moons ago, this was considered the outskirts [of the city], and having evolved from there, generations who are still in the neighbourhood want to stay in the neighbourhood, and newer families are wanting to move into this neighbourhood to enjoy the amenities that are

already there."

Amborski said that it's important for the city to encourage family-sized units in all areas, because the price of single-family homes with large lots is out of reach for many families. "The problem with high-density development is that the alternative of having a large suite with three bedrooms is very limited," Amborski told *NRU*. "Providing family-sized units, regardless of whether it's rental or condo, opens up more

opportunities for people who need three bedrooms."

Cescato noted that family-sized units provide a more affordable alternative to buying a single- or semi-detached house, and that it's important for the development industry to meet the demand of families wanting to stay in Toronto. But Cescato also explained that it's important to remain cognizant of the challenges that come with redevelopment—by ensuring that hard and soft infrastructure keeps pace with the growth of neighbourhoods, and that new infill development improves the living conditions for new residents and for those who already live in the community.

Klein said that the project isn't a "sell to investors and be gone" type of development. "This is a long view of how you build communities, and recognizing the desperate need for larger units, not only in response to COVID-19, but in response to families and this particular community," Klein told *NRU*.

*Ward 18 Willowdale councillor John Filion did not respond to an interview request in time for publication.* 🌸

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