

# QUEEN-COXWELL REVITALIZATION

L. D. Orchard

A new public-private partnership will bring much-needed affordable housing to the city and revitalize Queen Street East at Coxwell Avenue using a participatory, community-oriented process.

Located on prime real estate midway between Leslieville and the Beaches, the Queen Coxwell Revitalization is a collaboration between the **City of Toronto**, **Toronto Community Housing Corporation** (TCHC) and **Context Development**, who have entered into an agreement to demolish the existing Don Summerville Apartments complex. The redevelopment involves replacing 120 TCHC units and a parking lot with 750 residential units and 16,000 square feet of new retail space.

The residential component will have 120 rent-geared-to-income apartments, 50 affordable rental units, 50 privately-owned affordable rental units and 180 market rental units, plus 350 condominium units. Context has partnered with **RioCan** to manage the rental units, while TCHC will operate its replacement units. Ward 14 Toronto-Danforth councillor and TCHC board member **Paula Fletcher** is hoping to bring in a local non-profit or co-op partner to help manage

the affordable rental units. “It’s a great project ... I feel very much that I can be a champion of this because it’s truly a mixed community, the first truly mixed TCH rebuilding anywhere,” she told *NRU*.

Fletcher was first introduced to the project last year, when her ward was expanded to include the site, situated between Queen Street East and Eastern Avenue, after the province restructured the city’s ward boundaries during last year’s municipal election. She worked to increase the share of affordable housing initially

proposed for the site shortly after.

“Affordable housing is really a critical element in the city,” she says. “Rents are skyrocketing and people are having a very hard time managing. Renovictions [are happening] in this part of the city, people with stable rents are being evicted, and there are not a lot of places for people to move ... so when you have the chance to redevelop a three-plus acre site ... affordable housing is something that has to be built in.”

While the area is already

well-served with transit, park lands and other community amenities, it will also see big changes with Context’s attention to the orientation of the new buildings on the site, many of which will overlook expansive

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Clockwise from top left:  
Rendering of proposed redevelopment at 1555-1575 Queen Street East. View from Queen Street East, north side.

SOURCE: QUEEN COXWELL REVITALIZATION

Aerial view of the existing six-storey buildings and parking lot of the Don Summerville apartment complex at 1555-1575 Queen Street East. The TCHC site will be redeveloped through a public-private partnership between the city, TCHC and Context Development.

SOURCE: TORONTO COMMUNITY HOUSING CORPORATION

Rendering of proposed redevelopment of TCHC’s Don Summerville apartment complex at 1555-1575 Queen Street East, looking north. View from the Eastern Avenue park lands.

SOURCE: QUEEN COXWELL REVITALIZATION



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green space and Ashbridges Bay.

“It [the revitalization] will be helpful in normalizing [Eastern Avenue],” says Fletcher, who has already passed a motion at council to provide additional recreation and community facilities on the approximately 15 acres of park lands south of the site currently associated with the sewage treatment plant.

Context president **Howard Cohen** told *NRU* “the [redevelopment] presents an opportunity to turn Eastern into more of an urban arterial with the appropriate scale and massing... and the scale and massing [also] reinforces Queen Street with a nine-story building with retail at grade ... that will provide retail services to residents [rather than big box stores].”

Creating an important precedent for the city, TCHC is using its land as leverage to create the affordable housing component of the redevelopment. “It’s through the land value that we’re able to do this,” explains Cohen. “Instead of paying [directly] for the land, we’re paying for it by creating affordable rental.”

TCHC tenants have been engaged in the redevelopment process and will be supported as they are relocated to other TCHC properties. Those tenants

who are in good standing will have the right to return once the revitalization is completed.

To facilitate the changes, multi-service agency **Applegrove Community Complex** has been directed by city council to take a leading role in tenant engagement.

Applegrove executive director **Susanne Burkhardt** told *NRU*, “What’s unique is that a community agency has been brought into the process at an earlier stage than would normally be the case ... it’s a bit more of a holistic approach...”

“In addition to the physical transformation, revitalization includes social and economic improvements to enhance quality of life for TCHC tenants and aims to build a stronger and healthier neighbourhood,” she says, and the organization will be working closely with TCHC, Context and the community to deliver.

Located two blocks from the site, Applegrove has worked for four decades in the community and will prioritize support to tenants during the transition. It will also work closely with partners to lead the community economic development (CED) component of the redevelopment, which includes a \$100,000 scholarship fund, a \$250,000 economic and social development fund,

and a minimum of \$500,000 in value for job creation for TCHC tenants, provided by Context.

“We understand that we’re not just funding a physical redevelopment but economic and social development as well,” says Cohen, building on their experience with the Lawrence Heights redevelopment.

The CED plan will be part of a broader community action plan. Burkhardt explains, “We will be working with a tenant advisory group to shape what their engagement looks like, and we will be engaging them in what the community development programming looks like, and how it rolls out... It’s really been catalyzed by the contribution from Context, but then it will continue to play out over the course of the whole redevelopment ... and then we will ideally have some legacy components in place.”

The redevelopment plan is the result of significant negotiation among the partners. After re-issuing an RFP in mid-2017, the TCHC board of directors [accepted](#) a proposed plan on the recommendation of its building investment, finance and audit committee in July 2018. Context was named as the developer and an initial proposal was [endorsed](#) by council in July 2019. While not formally a Housing Now initiative, the city’s plan to redevelop eleven city-owned sites, the Don Summerville project now includes affordable housing and will likely benefit from an expedited planning approvals process to make it

happen. Toronto council is expected to vote on the final project approvals in summer/fall 2020.

With the key partners on board, an announcement by councillor Fletcher and mayor **John Tory** October 28, and community open houses starting on Saturday, momentum is building behind the project. If all goes according to plan, the new units will be ready for occupancy by former tenants and new residents in late 2023. Notably, not all of the TCHC replacement units will be in a traditional TCHC building, but instead will be mixed with other types of rental.

Burkhardt says, “Part of the goal of having Applegrove [involved] is ... about building connections and support, and the social cohesion and inclusiveness of the community after it’s been revitalized. We’ll still be at the table ... facilitating community connection and cohesion at the site once it has been redeveloped.”

Community engagement on the Queen Coxwell Revitalization continues with two open houses at Duke of Connaught public school (60 Woodfield Road). The first will be held on Saturday, November 23 from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and the second on Tuesday, November 26<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 to 9:00 pm.

*L.D. Orchard wrote this story on assignment for NRU.* 