



West Don Lands Backgrounder

History

Historically, the West Don Lands were part of the Old Town of York, established by John Graves Simcoe in 1793, and used as public open space until the 1830s when housing and industry replaced the parkland. Soil contamination and flood protection became significant issues in transforming the largely derelict brownfield site into a successful downtown neighbourhood like the ones Toronto is so well known for. The provincial government took title of the West Don Lands in 1996. In 2001, the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario and the City of Toronto established TWRC to oversee and lead the renewal of Toronto's central waterfront and the West Don Lands were identified as one of the priority areas for early action.

Partners

West Don Lands revitalization is the result of tri-government and interagency collaboration with the Ontario Realty Corporation (ORC), Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) and in phase one, the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC). In September 2005, the Province of Ontario signed the West Don Lands Memorandum of Understanding making TWRC the master developer, and setting out the important collaborative role with the province's land agency Ontario Realty Corporation. Ontario is the first jurisdiction to put together such an agreement with TWRC.

Community

The West Don Lands are surrounded by several established communities. The area is within walking distance of downtown, is right next to the Distillery District and has strong connections to the St. Lawrence and Corktown neighbourhoods. Community members have played an important role in the design and implementation of the West Don Lands, particularly in supporting high quality design, leading sustainability standards and making affordable housing an integral part of the new neighbourhood.

West Don Lands Precinct Plan

Toronto City Council approved the West Don Lands precinct plan in May 2005. The plan sets out the location, scale and character of all streets, buildings, parks and public spaces and includes strategies for developing community facilities like schools and daycares, and meeting affordable housing and sustainability targets. In 2005, the precinct plan won the Toronto Architecture & Urban Design Award of Excellence and in 2004, the Public Sector Quality Award for public consultation. Key elements include:

- 6000 new residences, including 1200 units of affordable rental housing
- 25% of community to be parks and public space including the eight-hectare Don River Park
- New transit line within a five-minute walk of all homes
- Two childcare centres
- Community centre and pool
- Elementary school

Flood Protection

Flood protection for the West Don Lands, and a significant part of the downtown, will be provided by a low-lying berm, which will become the 19-acre Don River Park, and by widening the river. The river widening also requires extending the existing CN rail bridge. ORC is now completing the detailed design for the berm and construction is scheduled to start in September 2006. The berm will require approximately 190,000 m³ of soil much of which will come from excavating the first development sites. Bridge construction will be underway this April.

Soil and Groundwater Remediation

ORC, in cooperation with TWRC and the City of Toronto, is in the process of finalizing a Risk Assessment/Risk Management Plan for soils and groundwater management in the West Don Lands. This work includes analyzing existing soil data, collecting new data and developing strategies to manage the risk of contaminants. The plan goes to Toronto City Council in April 2006. Following city approval it will be submitted to the province for Ministry of Environment approval.

Sustainable Development

Waterfront revitalization will position the city as a leader in creating sustainable communities. TWRC is targeting LEED Gold as a standard for waterfront development. LEED is an international third-party building assessment and certification tool that is administered in Canada by the Canada Green Building Council (CaGBC). TWRC is also developing a district energy system to provide heating and cooling to new waterfront neighbourhoods. This efficient thermal energy alternative will reduce construction and operational costs and reduce overall air emissions.

Public Transit

The West Don Lands will be serviced by a new transit line. An Environmental Assessment is now underway. Construction is scheduled to start in 2008 and will be complete in 2009. The existing King streetcar will serve the residents who will start moving into the first phase of development in 2008.

Affordable Housing

The West Don Lands precinct plan calls for a 25% of the new neighbourhood to be affordable housing, 20% of which will be affordable rental housing and at least 5% affordable ownership. Phase one development will have approximately 600 residential units with 470 ownership and 130 affordable rental units. The affordable and ownership units will be built by the same developer and have the same design and sustainability standards. The affordable housing built in phase one will be owned and operated by Toronto Community Housing Corporation.

Phase I Development

The first phase of West Don Lands development includes the bridge expansion, the berm, Don River Park and the North River Square neighbourhood also known as the McCord site. North River Square, runs from St. Lawrence Street east to the Don River and King south to the Richmond/Adelaide Ramps, and will have 600 residential units, including 130 units of affordable rental housing. A developer proposal call process will be launched this summer. TWRC will select a developer partner in the fall following approval of a Zoning By-Law Amendment and a Draft Plan of Subdivision. Residential construction will start in the spring of 2007 and the first residents will move into the West Don Lands starting in 2008.

Costs

Overall precinct development – estimated \$231 million over 15 to 20 years, including:

- Phase one infrastructure – \$4 million
- Berm – \$8 million
- Don River Park – \$17.6 million