

# NOVÆ RES URBIS TORONTO

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No. 31

## HOLIDAY REMINDER

The NRU offices will be closed for summer holidays Monday, August 5 through Friday, August 9, reopening Monday, August 12. The next City of Toronto issue will be published Friday, August 16.

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Retrofits to Townhouse Complex Will Reduce Emissions, Costs
- 5 **TOWER CLEARED FOR TAKE-OFF**  
Purpose-built Rental Proposal to Retain Church-Granby Heritage

■ PROPOSED MIXED-USE WOULD ADD HEIGHT, AFFORDABLE HOUSING, MAINTAIN HISTORIC CHARACTER AT GRADE

## HONOURING HERITAGE, ADDING AFFORDABILITY

**Matt Durnan**

A mixed-use development proposed for a site in the Discovery District on College Street between Spadina Avenue and University Avenue would transform a site currently accommodating low-rise commercial uses with a high-rise mass timber building, bringing significant new purpose-built rental housing to an area just south of the **University of Toronto** campus.

At its June 26 meeting, Toronto city council adopted staff recommendations to approve **Unix Housing Group's** official plan and zoning by-law amendment applications (OPA and ZBA) for 191-199 College Street and 74-76 Henry Street. The approvals will permit the development of a 31-storey mixed-use building that will bring 490 new purpose-built

rental housing units to the site, 408 of which will be affordable rental units.

Currently, the site is occupied by four semi-detached house forms: three on College and one on Henry Street. In recent years, the houses have

been used for largely retail/commercial purposes. Each of these four buildings on the site is designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* and will be retained and enhanced as part of the proposed mixed-use development.

“There have been a number of taller building projects that have been occurring along College and around College and Spadina specifically, and that tall building context has been evolving and developing over the last 10 years or so,” **The Planning Partnership** principal **Bruce Hall** told *NRU*.

“With [this site] being within two major transit station areas [MTSAs] there's further

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Rendering of Unix Housing Group's proposed 32-storey mixed-use purpose-built rental building at 191-199 College Street and 74-76 Henry Street. This rendering depicts how the existing heritage buildings on the site would be retained and integrated into the new building, maintaining the historic retail character and built form that characterizes College Street at grade.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO  
ARCHITECT: ICON ARCHITECTS

## UPCOMING DATES

### AUGUST

- 19 Preservation Board, 9:30 a.m.
- 20 Etobicoke York Community Council (special – urgent planning & heritage), 9:30 a.m.  
North York Community Council (special – urgent planning & heritage), 9:30 a.m.
- 21 Scarborough Community Council (special – urgent planning & heritage), 9:30 a.m.  
Toronto & East York Community Council (special – urgent planning & heritage), 9:30 a.m.

### SEPTEMBER

- 5 City Council (special – community council reports, urgent planning & heritage), 9:30 a.m.
- 9 Board of Health, 9:30 a.m.
- 10 CreateTO, 1:30 p.m.
- 17 General Government Committee, 9:30 a.m.
- 18 Economic & Community Development Committee, 9:30 a.m.  
Design Review Panel, 12:45 p.m.
- 19 Scarborough Community Council, 9:30 a.m.
- 20 Preservation Board, 9:30 p.m.
- 23 Etobicoke York Community Council, 9:30 a.m.
- 24 North York Community Council, 9:30 a.m.  
TTC Board, 10:00 a.m.
- 25 Toronto & East York Community Council, 9:30 a.m.
- 26 Planning & Housing Committee, 9:30 a.m.

### OCTOBER

- 1 Executive Committee, 9:30 a.m.
- 9-11 City Council, 9:30 a.m.



■ RETROFITS TO TCHC TOWNHOUSE COMPLEX WILL REDUCE EMISSIONS, OPERATING COSTS

# MANAGING CARBON FOOTPRINT



Lana Hall

**T**he Atmospheric Fund (TAF) and Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) are partnering on the sustainable retrofit of a TCHC-owned townhouse complex in North York, a project designed to reduce energy use and carbon emissions in aging units. Sustainable building experts say adopting stronger City-wide policies regulating energy use in buildings could encourage more of these retrofits, an increasingly urgent action amid climate change concerns.

Last month TAF and TCHC announced they would partner on the emissions-reducing retrofit project for Field and Tree Sparroway, a townhouse complex at Finch Avenue East and Leslie Street that is home to 175 families. The retrofit will involve the installation of new energy-efficient heat pumps and smart controls, improved

ventilation, LED lighting and water-saving measures. A later phase of the project will see existing gas-powered hot water heating converted to an electric system, which will allow water to be heated using less energy. Through the retrofits, the project team says, the townhouse complex could see a net reduction in energy consumption and carbon emissions of 50 per cent. According to a statement from TAF, the changes could save TCHC more than \$5 million in

utility costs over 20 years.

The project is funded in part by the **Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)** and the **Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO)**.

The measures being taken as part of the retrofit project were chosen specifically based on TCHC's emission reduction goals, as well as budget constraints, TAF director of low carbon buildings **Keith Burrows** told **NRU**. Burrows says tenant

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Having a building that can maintain its temperature for a fairly long period of time when the power's not on is really important ... Air conditioning is increasingly a necessity and a right, not a luxury. And housing providers that can't provide cool temperatures through either air conditioning or passive measures are potentially putting their tenants at risk.

- Brendan Haley

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# CARBON FOOTPRINT

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comfort and safety is also a priority, particularly as Toronto continues to see extreme temperatures.

“The impact on resilience and extreme heat mitigation and air quality is extremely important, and I think even more so for social housing.”

As some non-profit or community housing providers—many of whom manage an aging building stock—look to balance the needs of energy efficiency in their buildings with the need to make urgent capital repairs, proper planning for building modernization is essential, says **Canada Green Building Council** (CAGBC) director of project development and

research **Laurna Strikwerda**.

“With the right preparation, housing providers can effectively decarbonize these buildings when replacing equipment and systems at their end-of-life,” she says, adding that the benefits of these retrofits also include lower operating costs and reduced energy bills for tenants.

Many of the 1,347 buildings in TCHC’s housing portfolio will need some kind of retrofit over the next ten years. Ideally, says TCHC, these energy-efficient upgrades will be combined with scheduled building repair needs. While the TCHC might have a larger portfolio than some building operators, it is not the only

property owner in Toronto considering how best to ensure the physical structures under their care can withstand extreme temperatures, use energy efficiently, and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

According to **Efficiency Canada** senior director of policy strategy **Brendan Haley**, building operators will need to prioritize measures that mitigate extreme heat, poor air quality and function during power outages, all risks that are increasing with climate change.

“Having a building that can maintain its temperature for a fairly long period of time when the power’s not on is really important,” he says, adding that a recent influx of heatwaves across the country have drawn attention to the plight of buildings without the ability to cool units effectively.

Ideally, says Haley, those risks would be managed with

passive techniques, usually by leveraging shade or insulation to keep heat out of a building.

“Air conditioning is increasingly a necessity and a right, not a luxury. And housing providers that can’t provide cool temperatures through either air conditioning or passive measures are potentially putting their tenants at risk.”

But a bigger problem, says Haley, is that few municipalities in North America have City-wide energy performance standards for buildings that would mandate these types of

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Residents of the Field and Tree Sparroway townhouse complex in North York gather to review retrofit designs for their buildings. The retrofits are being funded in part by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and by the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO).

PHOTO: NHAN NG PRODUCTIONS  
SOURCE: TAF



# CARBON FOOTPRINT

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retrofits, like the one TCHC is undertaking in North York.

In recent years, the **City of New York** and the **City of Vancouver** have developed similar energy performance standards for buildings. For its part, the **City of Toronto** is also in the midst of developing a city-wide emissions performance standard for buildings. Last month the City's infrastructure and environment committee approved a set of

proposed design principles for development of the standards, which would set GHG emissions performance targets for existing buildings in Toronto and require building owners to report energy, water and natural gas use to the City annually. As part of the project, City staff also proposed creating supporting policies and resources to assist building owners with the upfront costs associated with meeting

such standards, including retrofits. However, a proposed set of building performance standards will not be presented to city council until at least the third quarter of 2025.

Haley says these types of jurisdictional policies for building energy standards are the best way for sustainable retrofits to have a more consistent impact on reducing a municipality's carbon footprint.

"The goal as society is to help tackle climate change, to provide buildings that are ready for how the climate is going to change," he says.

"So we really need to think in terms of not just building-

by-building, but how do we reshape the entire market for building performance so that retrofits are deep retrofits and high energy performance of buildings are the norm and not the exception?" 🌱

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# TOWER CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF



**Matt Durnan**

**A** mixed-use residential development project proposed for a site just north of **Toronto Metropolitan University** will transform a site currently accommodating a surface parking lot, a vacant heritage-designated commercial building and two vacant semi-detached homes with a purpose-built rental tower that will incorporate the existing heritage buildings into the new structure.

At its July 24 meeting, Toronto city council adopted staff recommendations to approve **Fitzrovia's** official plan and zoning by-law amendment applications for a site at 412-418 Church Street and 79-81 Granby Street. The approval permits the development of a 32-storey mixed-use building that would bring 310 purpose-built rental housing units to the neighbourhood, along with new retail uses at grade within the new building and a retained heritage building.

The proposal had been working its way through the City's development application pipeline for roughly a decade and was tweaked and revised

numerous times before culminating in this most recent iteration. The current proposal will see the demolition of a small surface parking lot on the southern portion of the site and the introduction of a tall building that will incorporate a three-storey commercial heritage building that occupies

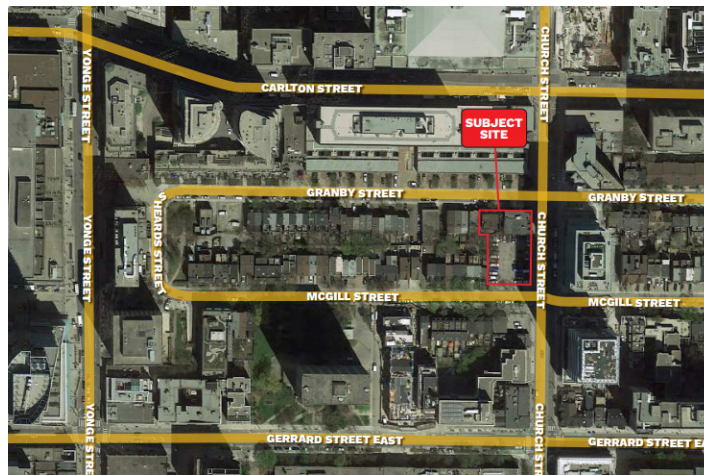
the corner of the lot at Church and Granby.

"This is a fairly shallow site from east to west, and it's not a huge site—it's only about 1,460 square metres. The parking lot is about two thirds of the site on its own, and the heritage building on the north side of the site takes up the remaining

third," **Bousfields** partner **Peter Smith** told *NRU*.

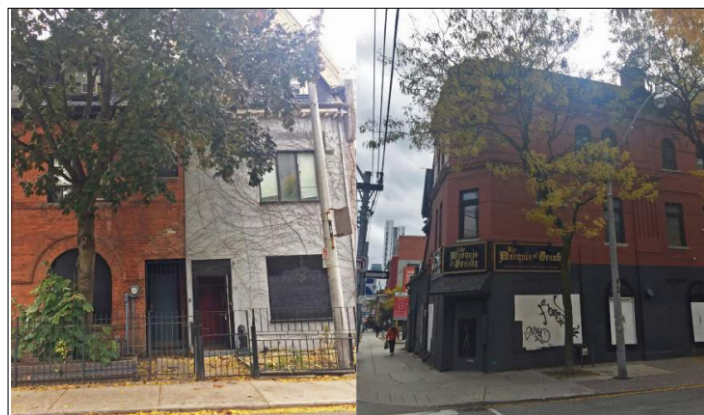
While the site is quite small, it was even smaller when the application was originally submitted to the City in 2014. At that time, it only included the parking lot at 412 Church Street, making it very unlikely

CONTINUED PAGE 6 ■



Top: Aerial image showing the location of the site at 412-418 Church Street and 79-81 Granby Street where **Fitzrovia** is proposing to develop a 32-storey mixed-use purpose-built rental building. Currently, the site accommodates a surface parking lot fronting Church Street, a commercial heritage building at the corner of Church and Granby and two semi-detached homes on Granby Street. The existing buildings would all be retained as part of the proposed development.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO



Bottom: Photos looking south from Granby Street at the existing buildings at 79-81 Granby Street (image on the left shows two semi-detached homes) and 414-418 College Street (image on the right shows existing commercial heritage building). These buildings would be retained as part of **Fitzrovia's** proposed redevelopment of the site that would bring a 32-storey mixed-use purpose-built rental tower to the neighbourhood.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO

# CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF

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that a tall building would be appropriate there.

The 2014 application was refused at the then **Ontario Municipal Board** (OMB, now known as the **Ontario Land Tribunal**), and in the wake of that refusal, the applicant was able to purchase and assemble the adjacent properties at 414-418 Church Street and 78-81 Granby.

“With that assembly, it made it a sufficient site that would be able to accommodate a tall building, but we’re still dealing with a site that is actually fairly narrow from east to west,” Smith said.

There was a lot of “push and pull” when it came to modifying the proposal, with the applicant team and **City of Toronto** planners going back and forth from a 2021 application that sought to develop a 39-storey building, up to considering a proposal for a 44-storey building in 2023, and finally down to the approved proposal for a 32-storey building in 2024.

What has remained fairly constant throughout the negotiations and deliberations however is the retention of a heritage-designated building located at the corner of Church and Granby, the **Stephen Murphy Houses and Store**, which was built in 1891 and most recently functioned as

a bar/nightclub, but has been vacant for some time. Two vacant semi-detached homes at 79-81 Granby Street will also be retained as part of the proposal.

“Throughout the re-zoning process, we worked with heritage and planning staff to preserve the house-form buildings along Granby Street

to aid in the transition of the massing to the existing low-rise neighbourhood to the west,” Fitzrovia vice president of planning **Greg Gilbert** told *NRU*.

“A true collaboration with city planners, this Class A rental project will honour the existing physical and social context through a full-length mural, hand-laid brick façade and retention of three designated buildings, while providing much needed rental housing supply in a growing part of Toronto’s Ward 13.”

While there was a strong element of collaboration on the heritage planning side of the proposal, there were some concessions that had to be made when it came to establishing the building’s height. Specifically, Fitzrovia’s 2023 proposal for a tower of 44 storeys, had to be reduced down to the 32-storey that was approved in the developer’s revised submission in 2024, resulting in a loss of 62 units, down from 372 to 310.

This “haircut” imposed on the proposed building was mandatory due to recently updated helicopter flight paths associated with nearby St. Michael’s Hospital and the Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) after a Minister’s Zoning Order was issued by the Minister of **Municipal Affairs and Housing** on January 26, 2024, reducing the potential

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Top: Photo looking west from Church Street at an existing surface parking lot at 412 Church Street. The parking lot will be demolished as part of Fitzrovia’s proposed redevelopment of the site that will bring a 32-storey mixed-use purpose-built rental building to it.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO



Bottom: Rendering of Fitzrovia’s proposed 32-storey mixed-used purpose-built rental building for 412-418 Church Street and 79-81 Granby Street. An existing heritage building would be retained and integrated into the new building (right side of rendering) at the corner of Church and Granby incorporating new retail uses, while the tower component would accommodate 310 new purpose-built rental units.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO  
ARCHITECT: BKL ARCHITECTURE

# CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

height of developments in the flight path.

These flight paths serve to protect the airspace around the hospitals from encroachment by new development, as well as by construction cranes.

“Unfortunately there was a loss of some rental units that comes out of this, but there was also some pushing and pulling in flattening out the floor plate as partial compensation for the

loss of the 12 storeys to try and minimize the impact on the loss of units,” Smith said.

“This [MZO changing the flight path and reducing potential building heights] all came about fairly recently and was done without any advance notice. Losing units was kind of inevitable with this change, and there have been a bunch of other sites that have been hit pretty hard with this new flight

path.”

Despite the reduction to the number of rental units wrought by the changes to the hospital flight path, this proposal still addresses a significant housing need in an area that has been somewhat starved for rental housing for some time.

“As far as I know, the **Menkes** and **Tridel** buildings are condos, the **Tribute** building at Carleton and Church is condos, so this would certainly be the first new rental building in this area for some time,” said Smith.

“There are a few others coming along, but one of the things about Fitzrovia is they specialize in rental and have a

very specific program associated with it.”

The rental housing may be something of a new addition to the neighbourhood, but the preservation of the heritage buildings on the site, coupled with the project team’s efforts to retain the character of the area will make for a textured blending of the old with the new.

“Fitzrovia’s project here at 412-418 Church Street will be a relatively modest addition to the downtown. It checks many of the boxes we are looking for in development along Church Street: new retail, respect for existing heritage buildings, and with a transition to the McGill-Granby Neighbourhood behind,” Ward 13 Toronto Centre councillor **Chris Moise** told *NRU*.

“Significantly, Fitzrovia will be recognizing the queer history of the site and seeking to ensure a mural remains that will be visible from the street.” 🌈



Rendering looking south across Granby Street at Fitzrovia’s proposed 32-storey mixed-use purpose-built rental building at 412-418 Church Street and 79-81 Granby Street. This rendering shows the existing heritage building at the corner of Church and Granby at the left side of the rendering and the existing semi-detached house at 79-81 Granby in the middle of the rendering. The tower above would accommodate 310 purpose-built rental housing units.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO  
ARCHITECT: BKL ARCHITECTURE

# HONOURING HERITAGE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

incentive for redevelopment and intensification.”

The tower portion of the development will be designed and constructed using cross-laminated timber (CLT) in an effort to deliver more sustainable housing, more quickly, while the building’s core and podium will be constructed using a more traditional concrete construction, while also incorporating the existing heritage buildings into the base of the building.

The new building will also replace dwelling room space that will be removed from the heritage building at 76 Henry Street, which contains 13 dwelling rooms.

“It’s a bit of a unique situation—it’s more of a rooming house situation where you have private bedrooms and shared facilities for bathrooms and kitchens,” Planning Partnership planner **Brandon Simon** told *NRU*.

“They aren’t ‘units’ per se, but there are 13 dwelling rooms. The City has long had its dwelling units replacement requirements, but the dwelling room requirements are somewhat newer but they are enforced now, and it’s essentially a GFA (gross floor area)-based requirement. So we’re actually slightly exceeding

that [GFA requirement] in this proposal.”

The College Street corridor between Spadina and University has been seeing some rapid transformation, with a number of taller buildings proposed in the area and an emerging area context that could eventually see buildings as tall as 60 storeys along College.

In addition to the exciting

prospect of significant housing being brought to an area that is close to transit and within walking distance of the university, the fact that it will be rental housing is notable for ward 11 University-Rosedale councillor **Dianne Saxe**, who says this particular proposal at 191-199 College Street is one of very few rental housing proposals being brought forward in the area.

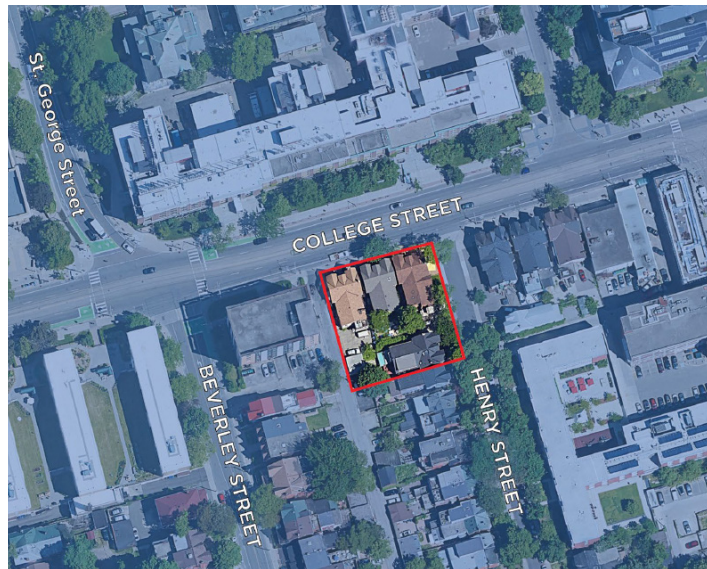
“College Street is in a period of rapid intensification and we have a desperate need to build more housing, especially close to transit and close to jobs. And this area around College and University Avenue is very close

to transit, both surface and subway,” Saxe told *NRU*.

“There’s an enormous need for rental housing in this area and the Province doesn’t allow us to control tenure, so we can’t compel a developer to build rental, which is something we’d really like because we have got a lot of condos. We need rental housing.”

While a transformation is certainly on the horizon, if not already in progress along College Street, the proponent team has taken special care to maintain the historic look and feel of this section of College Street, which has long

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Top: Aerial photo showing the location of the site at 191-199 College Street and 74-76 Henry Street where Unix Housing Group is proposing to develop a 31-storey mixed-use building accommodating 490 purpose-built rental units, 409 of which would be affordable housing units. The site is currently occupied by four semi-detached residential structures accommodating commercial uses that are designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. The four heritage structures would be retained as part of the proposed redevelopment.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO



Bottom: Photo of the site at 191-199 College Street where Unix Housing Group is proposing to develop a 31-storey mixed-use building. These three semi-detached residential structures currently accommodate commercial uses and are designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. These buildings will be retained and integrated into the proposed mixed-use building, along with a semi-detached home on 74-76 Henry Street that contains 13 dwelling rooms.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO



# HONOURING HERITAGE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

been characterized by large Victorian-style houses that have been converted for street front commercial uses at grade.

The four heritage designated buildings will be largely retained and maintained for commercial uses at grade while being integrated into the new building, keeping the same look and feel at street level that exists today.

“These properties were listed on the City’s heritage register when the application started [in 2022] and that was kind of a trigger for the City whether to designate them or not, which they have been,” said Simon.

“The overall approach to the conservation was approved at the same time as the OPA and ZBA applications earlier this summer, and I think from the beginning, this was always seen as a core element of this project. It’s a unique stretch of College Street where you see these semi-detached built forms as commercial buildings. The plan from the beginning has been to maintain that form and function at grade, and that’s exactly what we’re doing.”

In many cases of heritage preservation, little more than the building façade is preserved in a redevelopment proposal, but the 191-199 College proposal calls for a much more robust heritage preservation

strategy, maintaining the three-dimensional integrity of the existing buildings and the roofline, and sculpting the buildings into the floorplate of the tower podium.

“This is an example of where the beauty of those original buildings is being saved, with a new building being built on top,” Saxe said.

“There are a lot of negotiations that take place around how much of the original building can or should be preserved, and to

what extent. I do like to see the façades of these beautiful buildings preserved, but it’s always a trade-off because it adds to the cost of the building, which can reduce the likelihood of getting affordable housing. **HousingNowTO** has been campaigning on this for quite some time to find out that if you put millions of dollars into preserving an old façade, that’s money that’s not available for other things.”

The planning team and developer are looking to move this proposal along as expeditiously as possible and to take advantage of programs like the City’s Open Door affordable housing initiative, which provides capital funding and property tax relief to affordable

housing projects, while also fast-tracking planning approvals for affordable housing proposals like this one.

“Obviously, the incentives that the City has provided for are key to really being able to bring this significant supply of affordable housing, but there are also some CMHC (**Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation**) programs that our client is wanting to avail themselves of that have some timing constraints,” Hall said.

“The goal here is we’re trying to wrap this up as quickly as possible so we can get shovels in the ground as quickly as possible,” Simon said.

“There are agreements we’re going to be entering into with the City beyond the standard site plan agreement, for the affordable housing, dwelling rooms, heritage elements. Our hope is to kick off in the very near future and do what has always been the primary focus, and that’s bringing good new rental housing supply and a huge supply of affordable housing to the market as soon as possible.” 🌱



Rendering of Unix Housing Group’s proposed 32-storey mixed-use purpose-built rental building at 191-199 College Street and 74-76 Henry Street. This rendering depicts how the existing heritage buildings on the site would be retained and integrated into the new building, maintaining the historic retail character and built form that characterizes College Street at grade.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO  
ARCHITECT: ICON ARCHITECTS

# TLAB NEWS

## HEIGHT INCREASE APPROVED FOR ANNEX TOWER

In a July 29 decision, TLAB Member **Trevor Kezwer** allowed an appeal by **300 Bloor West JVCNB Inc.** (the Developer) against the **City of Toronto** Committee of Adjustment's refusal of its minor variance application for 300 Bloor Street West and 478 Huron Street.

In 2019, the Developer received rezoning approval to permit a 29-storey mixed-use development integrating two cultural heritage resources known as the Bloor Street United Church, and Pidgeon House. In 2023, the Developer applied for four minor variances to permit the development of five additional tower floors, with no change to the location of the existing tower or podium elements. The Committee of Adjustment denied the variances, and the Developer appealed.

The City appeared at the TLAB hearing having received direction from Toronto

city council to support the requested variances, subject to conditions of approval that would include a cash contribution of \$450,000 for each additional floor to be developed (for a total of \$2.25-million) towards local community benefits.

Local residents **Henry Wiercinski**, **Sue Dexter**, and **Reva Landau** appeared at the hearing in opposition to the proposal. In general, these objectors took issue with the Developer seeking additional height after obtaining a rezoning four years prior, alleging that inadequate notice of the change being sought was provided to the public, and that the additional height would have negative massing impacts on the building to the north of the site at 95 Prince Arthur Street.

Planner **Mike Dror (Bousfields)** provided evidence on behalf of the Developer in support of the requested variances. Dror opined that the requested variances meet the relevant *Planning Act* tests. He stated

that the Knox College View Corridor was amended after the 2019 rezoning, and that the proposed height increase of five additional floors would continue to comply with the restrictions pertaining to the view. He also stated that the height increase would reflect other more-recently approved developments in the Bloor-Spadina area.

The TLAB also heard evidence from transportation planner **Claudia Sanchez (BA Group)** that the 65 additional dwelling units that would be accommodated within the five additional floors would have negligible local traffic impacts.

While acknowledging the objectors' complaints, which revolved chiefly around process rather than the substance of the application, the TLAB found that the Developer had complied with the requirements under Section 45 of the *Planning Act* and it accepted Dror's planning evidence demonstrating that the four relevant tests are met.

The TLAB allowed the

appeal and approved the variances, subject to conditions requiring a payment of \$450,000 per additional tower floor to fund local community benefits.

Solicitors involved in this decision were **Sidonia Tomasella** and **Matthew Helfand (Aird & Berlis)** representing 300 Bloor West JVCNB Inc. and **Amrit Sandhu** representing the City of Toronto. 🌸

## PEOPLE

**University of Toronto** department of geography and planning associate professor **Steven Farber** has taken on the role of interim director of the U of T Mobility Network, a transportation research institute at the University of Toronto. Farber takes on the role from previous U of T Mobility Network director, U of T department of civil & mineral engineering professor **Eric Miller**.