



THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE DOMINION FOUNDRY SITE – ONE CONCEPT

Heritage + Affordable / Market Housing + Community Space = Vibrant Neighbourhood

153-185 Eastern Avenue, West Don Lands, Toronto

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The following pages offer some ideas of what's possible on the 100+ year-old Dominion Foundry site on Eastern Avenue in Toronto's West Don Lands.

This design concept offers one idea for how this site can help retain some of Toronto's few remaining industrial railway buildings while contributing significant and desperately needed new affordable and market housing and community space. This is in contrast to what we know of the Province's plan to demolish the site's heritage buildings and develop three tall residential towers.

These ideas set the stage for the beginning of a timely, meaningful, and inclusive public engagement strategy with the province and City of Toronto to collectively determine the site's future.

These pages include:

- A) Recent history of the award-winning West Don Lands by Joe Lobko, DTAH
- B) Demonstration Design Concept by Shirley Blumberg and Bruno Weber of KPMB Architects that accompanies the physical design illustrations
- C) Affordable Housing backgrounder by housing advisors Sean Gadon and Mark Guslits
- D) Imagining a vibrant Community Hub by Joe Lobko of DTAH and ideas from the Friends of the Foundry 'Re-Imagine Heritage Sites' social media campaign

A) The History of the West Don Lands by Joe Lobko, DTAH

Decades of effort, development and consultation have succeeded in making the West Don Lands one of Toronto's leading examples of successful brownfield revitalization and community building. The West Don Lands Precinct Plan has received many awards including the Urban Land Institute's Global Award of Excellence in 2017.

The work began in the late 1980s with an innovative collaboration and partnership between provincial and municipal officials, followed by expropriation of the 80-acre site. The two levels of government intended to extend the successful mixed income and affordable rental housing found in the St. Lawrence neighbourhood eastward to the edge of the Don River. It was part of their response to the crisis of affordable housing and homelessness.

The West Don Lands Plan was finalized in 2004, through the efforts of Waterfront Toronto. The plan established very ambitious objectives and principles for the type of the community that would be built there. It was guided by these principles:

- connection and compatibility with surrounding communities
- the development of a high-quality public realm and public spaces
- a substantial new community park along the Don River
- design excellence for all new buildings including their approach to sustainability.

The plan also placed high importance on incorporating the very few heritage resources remaining in the district, understanding that they provide a tangible link to what came before and a unique sense of place and character of immense value to the community as a whole. We now have a long history in this city and in the West Don Lands of successfully addressing environmental concerns while conserving the essential elements of our heritage which cannot be reproduced or reconstructed in the same way and with the same spirit.

The public engagement process behind the West Don Lands Plan set a new standard for involving existing communities to positively shape the values, priorities, and direction of the revitalization, particularly the use of publicly owned lands. That engagement process continues to provide immense value and wisdom as the plan continues to evolve.

The province’s plan for the total destruction of the Foundry buildings poses a great risk to the value and character of the existing community. The government’s development vision is inconsistent and incompatible with what has gone on before, the result of a process entirely devoid of the kind of public input that has been used to build successful communities.

B) Description of the Demonstration Design Concept by Shirley Blumberg & Bruno Weber, KPMB Architects: a companion to the design illustrations

City Context Plan Drawing

Over a short span of time, the West Don Lands has developed into a well-loved neighbourhood with a distinctive sense of place. Our demonstration design concept for the redevelopment of the Foundry site draws on the unique characteristics of this precinct, making it an exemplar for great city building.

Pedestrian and Public Realm Network, Site Plan Drawing

Building on the success of the Distillery District, West Don Lands has integrated heritage into new developments, maintained midrise density, and restricted higher density to the periphery. This concept extends a sophisticated network of pedestrian pathways, cycling routes and small public squares and parks, creating an intimate and continuous public realm that distinguishes the neighbourhood.

Our design concept retains the two most important heritage buildings on the site – the Foundry and the Machine Shop. We introduce three new residential buildings, in accordance with the Province’s proposal.

Bird's Eye View

The tallest building, a 30-storey tower, is located on the north-east corner of the site, closest to River City, similar in scale to an existing tower to the east. The heights of the buildings go down moving west to a 20-storey tower, then south to a 12-storey slab on the south-west, partially cantilevering over the Machine Shop. The three residential buildings have a mix of affordable rental and market housing. This design concept imagines approximately 688,400 square feet of gross floor area, contributing 870 residential units, of which a minimum of 30% are proposed to be affordable, and 120,000 square feet of community uses and retail.

The concept foregrounds both heritage buildings and celebrates their form and identity. A low podium building extends west from the north-east tower, and in combination with the two heritage buildings, delivers substantial capacity for future community uses.

The all-important pedestrian network extends through the site in every direction. Two public spaces welcome you: the south-west corner Foundry Square, and the mid-block Foundry Lane. The site is porous, connected to its neighbours, open and accessible to all.

South-west view Foundry Square

The low-rise building is clad in a similar brick to the Machine Shop, its facades referencing the industrial warehouse buildings of the precinct. The tallest tower and podium are clad in a white brick, and the lower tower in a light bronze metal.

View of Foundry Lane looking West

Foundry Lane is an intimate, active public space flanked by retail and community programs. It is at the heart of the concept.

With an enhanced public realm, material diversity, the integration of old and new and midrise density, the demonstration design concept seamlessly integrates into the distinctive character of the neighbourhood.

C) Delivering Affordable Housing by housing advisors Sean Gadon and Mark Guslits

One of our strengths in the GTA and beyond is our ability to create great neighbourhoods. Many “new” communities, like the Canary District & Regent Park in Toronto, Lawrence Heights in North York, and Lakeshore Village in Etobicoke, have grown up in Toronto in recent years. Communities throughout Ontario, such as Woodbridge, Gananoque, Owen Sound, and North Bay, have also created wonderful neighborhoods.

The common thread to these developments is an embracing of diversity, equity and affordability. We have long had a history of mixed income/mixed tenure/mixed use neighbourhoods and as our population became more diverse and multicultural, our neighbourhoods embraced and reinforced these traits.

But how does one do this in increasingly unaffordable cities like Toronto? How do we ensure that the values that made us such a great city will not be abandoned in favour of the financial calculus of “highest and best use”?

One answer is to use publicly held land to ensure the survival of diversity, equity, and affordability. “Interventions” on publicly held land have profoundly changed the city and produced positive examples of city building such as Regent Park, St. Lawrence, Bathurst Quay at Harbourfront, Alexandra Park, Lawrence Heights and the Canary District. In each instance a public entity created positive change (and affordability) on land it controlled. The same should be done with the Dominion Foundry lands.

The Foundry site presents an ideal opportunity to build a mixed income/mixed tenure/mixed use development which respects the rich industrial working past and integrates it into a vibrant new 21st century neighbourhood. This will require a creative partnership.

For its part, the federal government has committed \$55 billion to its 10-year National Housing Strategy. The Province, a funding partner, enacted the “More Homes, More Choice Act” in 2019 to increase the supply of housing for everyone in Ontario. The City of Toronto, through its Housing Now Initiative is using its surplus public lands for affordable housing with a target of 40,000 new affordable rental homes by 2030.

Despite the desperate need for new affordable rental housing in Toronto, the Province’s plan for the Foundry site ignores these options and opportunities. Nor has it provided a transparent competitive process to secure the best proposals possible from the non-profit and private sectors, or partnerships between and among them.

The Province’s plan provides 264 affordable rental homes (only 25% of the total – less than the 30% affordable requirement set for the Provincial Affordable Housing Land projects in the West Don Lands currently being developed by the Dream/Kilmer/Tricon consortium). The plan only provides 40 years of affordability, while affordability in perpetuity is the current best standard. The proposal also fails to take into account the City of Toronto’s legislative role as the housing and homelessness Service System Manager. As a result, it does not optimize the number of homes that will be affordable or determine who will actually live in the affordable homes, and who will oversee the long-term compliance and viability of the affordable rental homes.

Why mess with success?

We urge the Province to embrace a partnership like the successful model in the West Don Lands and draw on current best practices to achieve affordable rental housing.

Since the expropriation of land in the 1980s, the City of Toronto and the province have worked together to successfully support the creation of 1,184 new affordable rental homes in the West Don Lands. 496 of them are owned by two non-profit organizations. The remaining 688 units of affordable housing are in three mixed-income private sector rental developments. The affordable rents are set at 80% of the average CMHC rent for Toronto, with ten percent of the homes renting at 40% of the CMHC average.

The land is leased to the developers for 99 years with the affordable units secured for a similar 99 years. Key to the successful delivery of the 1,184 affordable rental units was the City’s pre-approval of the overall affordable housing program, funding from municipal sources, the selection of developer/operator and an agreement to oversee compliance during the long-term affordability period.

D) Imagining a Vibrant Community Hub by Joe Lobko, DTAH

Imagine the dynamics and uses a Community Hub could offer to the 25,000 people and businesses expected to live in the area. A social media campaign by the Friends of the Foundry drew a wide range of responses from the community:

- Music, Dance and Performance Space – (e.g., the International Resource Centre for Performing Artists and the proposal from Corktown Residents and Business Association for the site)
- Workspace, ranging in size – for not-for-profit organizations, both shared (like Centre for Social Innovation) and for individuals (e.g., artist studios)
- Multi-Purpose Space – community meetings, markets (indoor and outdoor), rental venues with associated support spaces including food facilities (e.g., Covered Street Wychwood)
- Gallery Space – for both not for profit and private operators (e.g., Gallery 1313 in Parkdale)
- Workshop and Maker Space – desperately needed workshop space to support the arts
- Child Care / Nursery
- Educational Uses – Alternative School, Space for Community Colleges (e.g., York University in Regent Park, George Brown College in Canary District)
- Community Centre Space – potentially a City of Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation facility to complement the existing Cooper-Koo Cherry Street YMCA around the corner. This could incorporate the multi-purpose space noted above plus several other meeting and community use spaces ranging in size.

For more ideas, visit the Friends of the Foundry pages at <http://www.friendsofthefoundry.ca/> or <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsoftheFoundry/>

Renderings and an information package on the exploratory concept can be found here: <https://www.respectlocalplanning.com/demonstration>